



COMMIT

The Yoga of Dis

Whatever your intention, commitment provides the foundation to achieve or to change. Nancy Jackson (Swami Dayananda) discusses how yoga as an ongoing practice is a rewarding commitment to yourself.

Accomplishing virtually anything requires commitment. It is a mindset to persevere because you value the experience or the potential outcome. In the process are setbacks, discouragements, triumphs, and countless challenges. You push through inertia, overcome obstacles, or override cravings to stay on track.

Yoga embraces commitment at any level. It can be as simple as showing up for a weekly class. If you do nothing else, you have locked yoga into your schedule. You've set aside time to focus on your body and mind.

In time, you broaden your commitment

to improve skills of awareness or to hold a pose with more balance. When you engage in yoga postures, you have the opportunity to survey your state of being. You can determine what's happening with your body, such as tensions, being stiff, knotted, or feeling lazy and dull. You also get to look at your mind. Is it busy or content? And your feelings. Are you fearful or sad? An ongoing practice allows you to accept and embrace your difficulties rather than fight them.

Yoga naturally leads to applying techniques of movements in your everyday life. You're stronger or hold yourself with more ease. You

find yourself practising breathing techniques. You savour quiet moments behind the mind's busy thinking. You intensify a sense of 'me-ness', or who you are in relation to your body, your environment and the people in it, your life and the pathway of your life.

What can you learn?

Yoga is known as a practice, or something you do repeatedly. Practice is always in motion; it is always today in practice. For example, if you are practising the piano, now is the experience. You



COMMITMENT

discovery

are playing the piano.

Any practice teaches you about yourself. Practice highlights the internal experience and the rhythm of fluctuations of endeavour or feeling. One moment something opens and you feel a surge of joy. Another moment and your mind fuels irritation or impatience. You can feel stuck for any length of time and likewise ride the bliss of flow. In practice you can examine the impulses of putting yourself down or building yourself up, reluctance, impatience, wanting to be better or wanting more, moving forward quickly or feeling like you're moving sideways.

Commitment to practice gives you permission to stumble. When commitment is the foundation, it is unwavering even if you wobble. With a clear commitment you aren't

in danger of succumbing to self-criticism or a tendency to quit. You have created a solid connection that you know you won't break. It creates the arena for more latitude. You can allow yourself to miss the mark or "fail" because you know you'll be back the next day or the next week.

When commitment is your foundation you don't give up because of energy, effort, and reward. It leads to depth of experience and stability. You learn to work with your temperament, your talents, tendencies, and foibles. You may need to adjust the time frame or adjust your speed to meet deadlines. You cling to perseverance. "Our greatest weakness lies in giving up," said the great inventor Thomas Edison. "The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."

As you continue, you gain experience, which allows you to handle problems calmly. If you're an artist, for example, you may need to mix a certain colour and are frustrated. When you've done it before you can draw on the knowledge that you can do it again. You've been here before and worked it through. You can do it again.

Setting intention

Most commitments begin with intention, whether you're making lunch or preparing for a marathon. And these intentions at first may be rock-solid or iffy. With goal-making you imagine a future. You might plan, take steps, organise, discipline yourself, and begin to achieve along

the direction you anticipate. You also imagine how you'll feel, either in the process or at the end of your commitment.

You might want to achieve something, such as completing a certification, or improving your golf game. You might want to heal an injury, such as back pain, strengthen core muscle groups, or gain flexibility and balance. More intangible intentions might be to invite new friends into your life, generate financial security, have fewer dramas, or simply feel better. Subtle internal intentions could be to be kinder, more forthright, more reliable, to have more stamina or to worry less.

Commitments are worthwhile. What if you only learn a few words of French instead of becoming fluent? Or can only strum a few chords of a guitar. You may never feel comfortable in a handstand or may never even be able to sit on the floor easily. It doesn't matter if you only make it so far in a commitment.

Sometimes, even, you hang on too long. In a classic story of the Sufis, a traveller came upon Sheik Nasruddin eating fiery chillies. As he took each one out of a bag he made a face, bit into the chilli and waved his hand in front of his mouth indicating how spicy it was. Then he'd drink water and take another chilli.

"Why are you eating those chillies?" the traveller asked. "They obviously are painfully hot."

"As hot as they come," Nasruddin



Commitment to a meditation practice

Naturally commitments are on many levels for many reasons. They can be as simple as committing to be on time to meet someone or as complex as getting yoga teachers' certification. As an example, let's say you are ready to make a commitment to meditation. You might be a beginner or already have a meditation practise that you want to establish more firmly into your routine. Here are some suggestions:

- Set realistic objectives. It's easy to be thwarted by being too ambitious. You might envision your own meditation spot, two 45-minute sessions daily, sitting in a lotus posture, and being able to clear your mind. That's a lot to ask for! How can you break it down into steps you know you can do?
- Begin with easy, comfortable tasks. What about two-minute meditations? Could you commit to one two-minute meditation a day? Perhaps before or after you've eaten your lunch you can close your eyes, sit up and turn your focus onto your mind itself. These can lead to many two-minute meditations throughout the day.
- Listen to yourself. Resistance comes easily. Notice when your mind protests and wants to do something more fun, relaxing or pleasurable. Bookmark the feeling of satisfaction when you've forged a pathway of routine.
- Create variety. One time you might focus on your breathing—inhale, exhale. Another time you could try to find the space between thoughts and open it wider. Yet another technique is to repeat a mantra.
- Make outside commitments cautiously. Sometimes it helps to share your commitment with someone to help keep you on track. But don't put yourself in a position of having to explain yourself. Be prepared to go it alone.
- Investigate new angles. As you explore the world of meditation you'll find many wonders. You can ask yourself questions such as: "What is my connection to conscious awareness?" "Where do thoughts come from?" "In what ways do some thoughts dissolve quickly and others grab my heart?"
- Stay alert. Meditation sharpens your awareness. You'll experience times of the mind drifting or trains of thought that seem to take you away. Whenever you can, bring your attention back to this moment.
- Let triumphs propel you. Whenever you've taken time to meditate, it helps establish a firm practice. Every meditation is important.
- Use hindsight to celebrate change. Commitment itself builds confidence.

said. “They are burning my mouth and giving me a terrible bellyache.”

“Then why do you keep eating them?”

“I thought they were lovely sweet fruit and now the market is closed. I bought them so I’m going to eat them.”

Be yourself — everyone else is taken

What about the ultimate commitment — to yourself? There’s a t-shirt slogan that says, “Be yourself — everyone else is taken.” It’s clever because it makes fun of the cliché “be yourself.” Obviously, you can’t be anyone else. The slogan also undermines personal unhappiness to want to be someone else. Contemporary culture constantly points to values that affect us and move us towards whatever is being sold, such as appearance, acquisitions, or pleasurable activities. If you look like this, or have this, or are enjoying this . . . then you will feel great.

Most commitments are about the outer world of doing. These arise in the normal course of life and are more or less intense. Commitments also can be about the inner world of thought and feeling. Here you can apply commitment to learn more about yourself, how you think and what triggers feelings.

There may come a time when a circumstance ignites a new look at your life. It might be a wake-up call, sparked from a momentous event that reverberates deeply, such as a diagnosis of a chronic condition or a loved one narrowly avoiding serious injury. Perhaps you’ve reached a significant birthday or need to quit your job. Or you have reached a breaking-point in your everyday life. You’ve lost your temper or agreed to do something you don’t want to do — yet again, one more time.

Here’s when symbolically the sky opens and an orchestra resounds. It’s your life and it’s up to you how you want to live it. You are ready to make a commitment to yourself. You may want a change or you may want to hold on to what you have. But it’s time to embrace your life as ultimately precious. By bringing awareness into your entire being you move towards lightness, acceptance, and joy.

Why is it challenging to be yourself? Because you can’t overlook, you can’t slide or hedge or fly under the radar. You have to be willing to forge through feelings of being uncomfortable or awkward or arrogant or wrong. To be yourself you have to face yourself honestly, accept yourself, and as it arises, tackle movement for change.

Commitment becomes the yoga of discovery. You burn through

resistance, accept setbacks, marvel at breakthroughs, and slow down so much that you can contemplate each moment as it opens to eternity.

A strong foundation

The yogi Patanjali teaches that commitment is the groundwork for yoga. This pertains not only to yoga postures, meditations and realisations. It also is about who you are in this moment as you and where you want to be next and after that. His classic text Yoga Sutras (I.14) says, “To achieve a strong foundation, practise regularly over a long period of time without interruption, with love and respect.” Although it pertains directly to the actual practice of yoga and introspection, the sutra is applicable to any commitment.

A strong foundation requires exploring where you want to ground yourself. You have to dig down, uncovering and examining what’s underneath the surface. Then build firmly block by block, choosing and balancing, creating strength and durability to build upwards.

Regular practice results in progressively more awareness of the process itself. It creates momentum, drives you to another level, transforms your skills, and brings

rewards. This steadiness keeps you on track and moves you forward. If you stop, you may have to start again, but you've already set a pattern. As it becomes routine, it's progressively easier to make it an integral part of your life.

A long period of time is generally required to attain virtually anything. Along the way you're confronted with your own patterns of behaviour that are no longer useful. Just as it's taken your whole life to get you where you are, it takes a while to unfurl these patterns and set new ones.

Love and respect pay tribute to your efforts as well as those of your teachers and those who help along the way. It also honours your intention and the process itself. If you find it's sensible to drop the commitment at some time, you know you have offered sincerity.

According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, you can choose your level of conviction (Sutras I.19-22) from mild to intense. This gives you the leeway you need to succeed. For example, if you are going down a river, you might paddle when you feel like it, take some time on the shore, float with the current and take refuge when it's stormy. Or you can find the strongest current and summon all your power to go quickly.

Commitment strengthens many personal attributes, including perseverance, stamina, acceptance, and intelligence. It draws heavily on patience, to persist regardless of what arises. Patience requires fortitude to withstand tendencies to hold on or to push away. The eighth-century Buddhist monk Shantideva said, "There is no merit like patience. Therefore, by various means dedicate your life to the practice of patience."

After some time, you can acknowledge the progress you've made in your journey, especially when you've had a set-back. In his book, *The Healing Power of Mind*, Tulku Thondup says, "Even when the feeling comes that we have taken a step backwards in our progress, this can be celebrated. Backward steps and detours, trial and error, are all part of the growing process."

Now's a good time

What commitments are on your horizon? You may be wrestling with a big project or many unfinished ones. Perhaps you've set your sights on something you've always wanted to do. Or haven't established an ongoing commitment to an activity you value.

Commitments can be mystical. As soon as you firm your intention, things happen. You have breakthroughs, blocks dissolve, or

people enter your life. You may not suddenly win a championship or a prize but tiny shifts of perception relocate you. Without moving the body you are in a different place with a new understanding.

The 18th-century German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness concerning all acts of initiative and creation." Once you are committed, he added, "A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no one would have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it."

Senior feature writer Nancy Jackson (Swami Dayananda) is the author of *Yoga Life: Understanding Your Thoughts and Feelings*, among others. She teaches yoga, meditation and self-inquiry in Adelaide and at the Lokananda Retreat Centre in country SA. www.meditationyoga.com.au