

KUNDALINI RISING

BY SHAZIA OMAR
Writer, activist and yogini
www.shaziaomar.com



Tete-a-tete with Ellen Johannesen

How did you get interested in yoga?

I was always interested in spirituality and yoga felt like an extension of that. I grew up in Norway and I loved to dance. I loved to move.

At 19, I came to London to study contemporary dance. Later, when I was on tour in New York, a friend took me to Jivamukti Yoga Centre, a studio founded by two former performance artists. They offered exactly what I had been looking for: a challenging asana practice with a devotional, but undogmatic focus.

We would practice yoga to inspiring music, there was chanting in the evening, and the teachers would give a little philosophical talk before each class. It was the coolest place I had ever been and the classes were full of Lower-East-side dancers and actors.

Where did you learn yoga? What kind of yoga do you teach and where?

I learned yoga partly in New York, where I practically lived at Jivamukti for six weeks. After Jivamukti, I studied with Eddie Stern, who was the main New York ashtanga teacher at that time. I loved the ashtanga sequence for what it did to my body and mind. It was a very physical practice and also very meditative.

In 1997, I finally went to Mysore to study ashtanga with Guruji Pattabhi Jois. But my main teacher is John Scott, with whom, I did a two-year teacher training. In the old days, teacher training was very long.

I have been teaching ashtanga yoga for over 20 years. I like to integrate meditation since I'm also trained in Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy. I am based in Nepal at the moment, where I teach at the Dalai La Boutique Hotel. I also do teaching tours



to Norway, Iceland, India, Italy, Egypt, and wherever I am invited.

In what ways has yoga benefited you?

Yoga has given me grounding and physical strength. I was very "vata," spaced out, and all over the place. Yoga was a way to control my mind. I discovered that I was able to change my moods through yoga, and what used to seem like big trouble did not seem so stressful anymore. Yoga is a way to keep your mind sane and your body healthy.

Yoga has given me the best job in the world. I get to do something that truly helps people, and that makes me happy. When you teach ashtanga, ordinary people can get deeply in touch with their bodies

and learn to do amazing things with it. Ashtanga also lengthens your attention span, which is very important in a world increasingly filled with distractions.

Describe a typical day in your life.

There are no typical days! But while in Nepal, I wake up at 4AM, do my practice, cycle to class, teach a group of dedicated students. Then I hang out after class for breakfast with my students. In the afternoon I might undertake some Buddhist study, cook lunch and eat with my boyfriend, do some office work, read, have a snack for dinner and get to bed by 9PM.

What advice do you have for someone

who has never tried yoga?

There are many different styles of yoga. Find the yoga that suits you, and a teacher who knows what he or she is doing.

What advice do you have for yoga practitioners?

Breathe and pay attention to your body — you will get in touch with it through practice and your body starts to feel light and transparent. Then, if you do not practice, you will feel like your body is a heavy sleeping bag. But do not be satisfied with merely the feeling of wellbeing. Learn as many limbs of yoga as you can; stay inspired, keep exploring, and go deeper!

What are some of the things you do to take care of the world that you have learned along your journey? And to take care of yourself?

Practice compassion for yourself and others. Pay attention to your own practice, especially if you are teaching a lot. If you are injured, practice an alternative sequence, but keep practicing. Meditation is a natural progression from yoga practice.

You start to experience your breath and body in a subtler way. Meditation is a way to understand that we are really making up the world. Our world is nothing but our mind and body. If you learn to control the mind, you can handle the world, your emotions, your reality. We all have Buddha nature within us. We need to purify ourselves, break through our patterns and conditioning through meditation, and then we can see the light.

Ellen's website: www.ashtanganepal.com
Ellen's instagram: [ashtanganepal](https://www.instagram.com/ashtanganepal)



Photo courtesy: Shazia Omar

◆ HOROSCOPE ◆



ARIES (MAR. 21-APR. 20)

Show interest in children's accomplishments. Focus on self-care. You can't do everything on your own. Your lucky day this week is Saturday.



TAURUS (APR. 21-MAY 21)

Problems with peers is apparent. Avoid confrontations at all cost. You may be confused emotionally. Your lucky day this week is Sunday.



GEMINI (MAY 22-JUN. 21)

Overreacting could get you into trouble. Learn to stand up for your spouse. Travel will lead to fortunes. Your lucky day this week is Thursday.



CANCER (JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Present your ideas to superiors. Check-up on how loved ones are doing. Secret affairs will lead to misery. Your lucky day this week is Monday.



LEO (JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

Control your emotions at work. Schedule time to spend with your partner. Plan social events carefully. Your lucky day this week is Thursday.



VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Travelling will be beneficial. Keep your expenses in check. Extravagance is not a cure to feeling sorry for yourself. Your lucky day this week is Friday.



LIBRA (SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

Think carefully before making decisions. Get the job done. Socialising will lead to new romantic interests. Your lucky day this week is Saturday.



SCORPIO (OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Spend some quality time with your partner. Trouble is brewing at home. Impress others with your generous nature. Your lucky day this week is Sunday.



SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Don't expect others to live up to their promises. Spend time with family. Advancement at work is apparent. Your lucky day this week is Monday.



CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Oversharing will cause misery. Your intellectual wit will lead to popularity with peers. Check out your investments. Your lucky day this week is Monday.



AQUARIUS (JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

Re-think your plans. Make extra cash by moonlighting. Talk to experienced people about your intentions. Your lucky day this week is Thursday.



PISCES (FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Experiment with different clothing styles. Monitor your budget to avoid stress. Start your own business. Your lucky day this week is Sunday.