

# How to use *Spilt Milk Yoga*

**S** *Spilt Milk Yoga* is written for you. If you have little children, cannot keep your tired eyes open at night, or are too busy getting through your day to read and process a whole book, just dip in and out. Open at the chapter that most speaks to your situation at the time and take what you need. Each *Spilt Milk Yoga* chapter has 4 parts:

- a quick grab quote
- an account from my spilt milk experience of mothering
- a sustaining *Spilt Milk Yoga* practice to carry through your day
- and a page of guided self-inquiry for you to contemplate, answer and record your practice. I recommend a 2B pencil for this job.

*Spilt Milk Yoga* is a companion to the conversation you have with yourself, and foregrounds the importance of that conversation. Through the process of guided self-inquiry, naming concerns, asking questions of ourselves, and contemplating our behaviours, assumptions and choices we develop understanding, purpose and wisdom. When you appreciate the value and learning in your mothering journey, self-knowledge can unfold as you cook, clean, carry, cuddle, and curfew. The things you are wrestling with become the things you are awakening to: forgiveness, anger, judgment, maintaining inner peace.

Use *Spilt Milk Yoga* like a journal; write your self-inquiry responses in it, underline sentences that resonate, fold the corners of pages, add it to the nappy bag, stick markers in it, notes from your kids, images that uplift you. Having said that, use this book as it works for you. After all, it is your journey.

# Chapters

To help you navigate *Spilt Milk Yoga*, I've used the 5 core niyama, the core actions of yoga to organize the chapters. Translated as Self-Inquiry, Contentment, Intention, Acknowledgement of the spiritual nature of being, and Purity of being, the niyama are interrelated and so are the chapters. You'll find relevance and connections in whichever order you read them.

## SWADHYAYA : SELF - INQUIRY

Cultivating self-awareness, coming to know yourself honestly, inquiring as to why you do what you do and reflecting on what moves you forward or holds you back.

1. *What am I doing, and why?* / Self-inquiry
2. *Will motherhood ruin my life?* / Your inner approach
3. *The shock of birth* / Embracing the learning
4. *I'm a mother! What do I do now?* / Spontaneity
5. *How do I get there from here?* / Intention
6. *Motherhood and a spiritual life?* / Working with what you've got
7. *Don't interrupt me, I'm trying to be spiritual* / Contemplation, accessing the wisdom inside you
8. *Making mistakes* / Compassionate Learning
9. *Overload* / Assessing what matters

## SANTOSHA : CONTENTMENT

Cultivating acceptance of what is, of yourself and of others, being at peace with who you are right now and finding contentment in any moment.

10. *Running getting nowhere fast* / Slowing down
11. *Mindless busyness* / Mindfulness
12. *Where is there space for ME in my life?* / Meditating while life continues
13. *Hateful housework* / Seeking joy and purpose in mundane tasks
14. *Smooth plans and bad behavior* / Adjusting expectations
15. *When will it end?* / Having the time of your life while you're having it
16. *Invisible work* / Valuing your choice
17. *I used to be successful. Work and worth.* / Recognizing success
18. *How do I achieve anything?* / Achievement satisfaction
19. *Relentless wonderfulness* / Patience with the journey

## TAPAS : INTENTION

Cultivating your capacity to direct your energy and persevere with clear purpose even when things get hot.

20. *Bad mothering moments* / The worthy journey
21. *Being more than myself* / Love and accept your humanity
22. *Blame* / Taking responsibility
23. *Anxiety, Worry, Fear and Overwhelm* / Honor your self
24. *Resentment* / Holding on and letting go
25. *When it's someone else's fault* / Forgiveness of others
26. *Being your own worst enemy* / Being your own best friend
27. *Guilt, regret and hopelessness* / The next step
28. *Anger* / Listening to anger
29. *My anger habit* / Taking care of anger
30. *Losing it in the fire of motherhood* / Finding it again using the signs
31. *Whose anger is this?* / Steadfastness

## SHAUCHA: PURITY OF BEING

Cultivating purity in mind, speech and body. Decluttering your life and focusing on the good things that uplift and nurture your journey.

32. *Bushwhacking and garbage meditation* / 1-minute meditation
33. *Tell-tale breathing signs* / Mindful breath
34. *Old labels and nasty thoughts* / Conscious language
35. *That's ruined my whole day!* / And now... refreshing the page
36. *Practicing habits is a hard habit to practice* / Choosing your habits
37. *I don't have enough time!* / Making friends with time
38. *Comparison* / Conscious criteria
39. *Judgment* / Discernment
40. *C+ Enlightenment* / Making progress, marking progress
41. *Self-centred, self-indulgent, selfish!* / Self-care
42. *Birth and sex. What happened to my body?* / Honor your body.

## ISHVARAPRANIDHANA: ACKNOWLEDGING THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF BEING

Being alive to the wonder of life, recognizing that in any small moment we are part of something larger. How we live is what makes our lives meaningful. We can cultivate attitudes and behaviors that celebrate and uphold our appreciation of being.

43. *Anywhere but here* / Being where you are right now
44. *Plod, plod, plod. Is an ordinary life enough?* / Getting extra in your ordinary
45. *Am I doing life right?* / Valuing your own journey
46. *If only I had more \_\_\_\_\_ I'd be happy* / Strengthening Joy

47. *Surviving or thriving?* / Gratitude
48. *I'll meditate, after I've done everything else* / Making time by taking time
49. *The complaints department* / Choosing happiness now
50. *Struggling with being where I am* / Ease with the moment to moment
51. *Going it alone with loneliness* / Reaching out to build connection
52. *What to do when things go well* / Growing goodness

## Mindless busyness



# MINDFULNESS

*Mindfulness is noticing where you are, how you are, and simply that you are, in this moment.*

I thought I knew what busy was. Now I have a child and I know busyness in a whole new dimension. Early motherhood is a blur of tiredness, newness, keeping up with day by day developments and changes in my child and her needs. It's so task-oriented.

Now looking back, even significant events I thought would be indelibly imprinted on my memory are hard to recall beneath the subsequent layers that followed.

Toddlerhood is another frantic level of adventure. My focus is so outward, keeping up with managing the logistics of the day. Keeping up with, and just ahead of, my adventure mouse, keeping her safe, yet allowing her to stretch her capability as she wobbles along the concrete seawall at our local beach. I'm anticipating the next job, rushing, rushing, chasing the unending list just to make it through the day. It's all at such a pace that in my exhaustion and lack of breathing space I feel like a sleepwalker, zoned out on tiredness, moving through my day on autopilot.

At times, the moments stretch on, the battles go around and around and I feel as if we'll be in potty-training mishap land, in hair-washing refusal land, in sticker charts and stuffed toy land forever. In the foreverness of it I take it for granted, even complain that the day is too this or too that. I get through a whole day, feeling like I'm just coping, and then slump onto the couch with a sigh and say "Phewf! Thank goodness the kids are in bed. Perhaps now I can have a moment to myself." Am I missing something as it all rushes slowly by?

## PRACTICE

### Mindfulness

**I**t can be a challenge to find peace in the busyness of Motherhood. Whatever you are doing, it is beneficial to practice connecting in with yourself and developing awareness of your being amongst the thoughts and multiple responsibilities of your day.

*The practice here is mindfulness.* Mindfulness is an awareness of your being in any moment, an act of being present with what is. In an ashram or monastery, the bells may ring, or the gong may sound to call us to mindfulness. As a mother you can set up your own mindfulness reminders to stop, breathe, notice where you are, the sensations in your body, your feeling state, and turn your mind towards your experience of being now.

It is easy to get lost in the busyness of your day. A reminder on your phone for an appointment with yourself can act as a gong, or small coloured dots placed randomly around the house can be a prompt to practice mindfulness. Playing a chant or relaxing music in the evening may help you focus on your inner state as you shepherd your children to bed. An inspiring quote or photo on the fridge may remind you of your daily intention. There are many ways to bring yourself to mindfulness in your journey, as you stand, dutiful audience to slide reruns at the park, sit in traffic, cuddle, console, sit alongside and listen. Your day will supply other less gentle reminders; the stomp, stomp, stomp of an angry child heading for time out because she won't empty the dishwasher. Play with using these moments as prompts to mindfulness. Irritation, reactivity, or frustration may arise. Simply notice them arise and subside, let them bring you into the moment, as it is, where you are, as you are, here and now.

## INQUIRY

Practice a moment of mindfulness now. Turn your attention to your awareness. Feel your breath. Notice sensations in your body. Notice your thoughts without judgement, let them arise and subside.

Describe the effect of this moment of mindfulness on you.

When would you most like to practice mindfulness in your mothering day?

What "gong" could you use to remind you to practice in these moments?

Set up a "gong" for yourself in your mothering day today. Note below how you go with practicing mindfulness and its effect.



## ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS

*Mothering requires learning on the job. What do we expect of ourselves? We will mess up and plans will go sideways. What do we expect of ourselves then?*

## Smooth Plans and Bad Behaviour

If it was at all challenging managing my own life and behaviour, that was mere training for motherhood! Life with kids has been a festival of comic errors and horror stories. Kids throw a wrench in smooth plans all the time; they fill and spill a nappy as I leave the house for that one event that matters, pick prize blooms from a sacred garden, melt down dramatically at their own birthday parties, especially when Mother-in-law attends.

I hope someone laughs when they read that last line because that just happened to me, so badly. My husband is away and his mother and sister have come to stay for our daughters 7th birthday. We slave over labour-intensive party food, plan, cook, clean and line up the events of the day. I wrangle the gaggle of eight-year-olds as we musical-chair, balloon-game and pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey. I work my ass off to give my wee girl the best birthday ever. But does she express appreciation? No. Does she behave? Well, yes, spectacularly! But not the way I want her to.

When her spur-of-the-moment call to the trampoline right on food time fails to draw a crowd of followers she totally derails. She tantrums to new heights and runs away screaming “This is the worst birthday party EVER!” It is the best demonstration of “ungrateful child” behaviour we could have supplied. It feels like my worst birthday party ever too.

Have I not brought her up to appreciate the efforts of others? What does it say about me that I cannot control her behaviour? I feel hurt, angry, embarrassed, fearful of judgement. How swiftly I jump to my child’s actions being a reflection of my own worth.

## PRACTICE

### Adjusting expectations

Smooth plans and mothering often don't go together. You may not meet every challenge as well as you wish. In fact, you definitely will not. Motherhood is a training in flexibility and detachment. As a mother you are responsible for many things, getting people places on time, fed, dressed, prepared for life. It just so happens life will not comply no matter how well you prepare. It's not just seven-year-olds who have a fantasy in their head of a what a successful party is, and who believe everyone should also have that picture and act accordingly, mothers do too!

You will get plenty of opportunities to practice accepting reality and letting go of trying to control life. It's not your fault that you cannot change the weather, or mind control others, so don't go there. Blame and shame will only suck you deeper into the swamp of delusion that it is up to you to keep everyone happy.

*The practice here is adjusting expectations.* Notice what is, accept that you are doing your best and cannot control the universe, then adjust your expectations to a more generous understanding. Expectations are tricky in the first place; they cut across the reality of what is unfolding.

Some realities here are: parties are high pressure events, real life does not comply with perfect pictures of what will happen, mothers' pictures often don't include an ungrateful child, seven-year-olds aren't renowned for seeing or appreciating the work that their mothers and others do making life happen well for them, that can hurt, you are all doing your best.

## INQUIRY

What smooth plans have you had go sideways recently? What happened?

How did you respond?

What were your expectations?

What were the realities of the situation?

What understanding would you like to cultivate in such a moment?

What adjustment might you make to your expectations today?

## I'm So Over This



15

## HAVING THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE WHILE YOU'RE HAVING IT

*How you respond to each situation, each moment, moves you toward or away from living your life as you want to. This is the moment you are living now. There is no other time, there is no better time.*

**I**t's not all hard yards, but perseverance is big in my life at the moment. I have many moments of wonderment; dancing with the girls, wonderment at their language, seeing their wonderment at the world, and being amazed at their being, and mine. But I am so 'in' it, there is a lack of time to reflect, a lack of time to stock-take, to progress, to feel and develop a sense of attainment. I find myself trying to get out of where I am, to get to the next place, the next task, the next conversation, the next room, the next time, trying to get time to do something else. I am not living the preciousness of each moment.

Early motherhood is a total immersion experience. I am climbed on at every moment, demanded of, picked at, fiddled with, dribbled on, tapped for attention, scratched, sucked and pulled. Someone always needs to be carried, cuddled, held or breastfed. I walk for back-aching weeks crouched like a gibbon, a human Zimmer-frame overhanging my on-the-cusp-of-walking toddler. At times it drives me crazy, I want to shout "leave me alone!" Looking back 10 years later I wonder at the irony of it: now I'm lucky if I get a cuddle without asking.

My 10-year-old still wants me to walk her to school. I have tried all sorts of tactics to encourage her to do it alone. Surely at 10 she should be doing this independently and happily like other kids? But she isn't. My brother-in-law says "Oh I miss it! Make the most of it! It'll pass. Walk her to school for as long as she wants." What a liberating approach, to just do it and love what it is while I can. So today I just do it and really enjoy it. I feel this time as a gift.

## PRACTICE

# Having the time of your life while you're having it

**I**n mother-time, the days can be long and the years short. Time measures differently from a working day or project cycle, there are no set hours, no crisp start and finish, no “motherhood - done”, tick! The infant and toddler years are so consuming and the developments so incremental that it can be hard to see changes without time-lapse. When you can't feel change and the experience is total immersion day in, day out, it is hard to be mindful that things won't always be like this.

The saying “you don't know what you've got til it's gone” is testimony to the tendency to take the blessings of the moment for granted. If you find yourself wishing time away or looking forward to “the time when...” or “being on the other side of...” know that that time will come. This time will most definitely melt away, but look closely or you could miss it in the intensity. This is the only time to have the experience in front of you. This is the time of your life and you are in it now.

*The practice is having the time of your life, while you're having it.* This practice is an antidote to wishful thinking and regret, and a foothold for satisfaction. To celebrate the experience of where you are, is to embrace what may feel repetitive but know it to be a unique moment, to feel this cuddle, this walk, what is alive and new in this moment, this day. Yes, there will be challenges, but don't wish time away. This is the time of your life. The present is not to be tolerated, it is to be loved as it is, valued for what it is. There is joy and liberation in living the life you have, while you have it. Embrace the life you have. It will pass.

## INQUIRY

What aspects of your life as a mother are you treasuring today?

What aspects of your life as a mother are you struggling with today?

How do you respond to these treasures and struggles?

If you consider having the time of your life while you are having it how might you respond differently to this?

What could assist you having the time of your life today?

What might prevent you having the time of your life today?

When you come across a moment of treasure or struggle in your day today, practice being exactly where you are in your life. Breathe, bring your awareness to this moment. It is enough. Note down what occurs when you practice having the time of your life.



## EMBRACING THE LIGHT AND THE DARK

*We have to journey through  
the light and the dark. There  
is no way around it.*

### SPILT MILK

## Mad, bad and sad mothering moments

**I**n a moment of frustration about cleaning the rabbit hutch, I snatch the scrubbing brush from my daughter. I burst and snatch. I do the thing I say not to. Immediately I feel bad. I feel childish. I don't feel equipped to be a mother at all. It is a bad mothering moment. This is not how I want to be as a mother. Perhaps I can get some value from this moment and use it to investigate and learn from. I sit and contemplate. I feel disturbed, ashamed, bad and guilty. Guilt is knowing I did wrong and feeling powerless to change it. Shame is embarrassment that others will see and judge me as my faults. I feel a dent in my heart.

So what happened? I said "No DVD until you've cleaned the rabbit hutch," but I didn't hold the line. I undermined my own boundary. Then I blamed her and deferred responsibility by nagging "I've been asking you to clean the rabbit hutch all morning . . .". Then I felt powerless so I tried to reassert my authority by snatching. Being a mother is requiring me to practice being clearer. It is my job to be the adult, to set boundaries and stick to them.

What a piece of work it is to drop guilt and move forward! I don't want to be stuck here going over my failures and faults. I have to apply my will and learn what to do differently. This moment is a very clear example of how I undermine a boundary, blame someone else and then snap. I want to do better than this.

I rehearse a clearer script; "I've asked you to clean the rabbit hutch. If you haven't started in 5 mins there will be no DVD today. I will set the timer starting now." Now both of our jobs are clear, the consequence is clear, I know what line to hold.

## PRACTICE

### Embracing the light and the dark

**Y**our relationship with your children is a mirror of your relationship to yourself. You will not always be the self you want the world to see. Mothering will challenge every aspect of your behavior. Everything you thought you had a grip on or had smoothed over will be tilled to the surface. You will meet the light and the dark: fear of not belonging, desire to control others, to keep everyone happy at your own expense. The list of challenges to your sense of self will be boundless. This is tapas: the purifying fire. You can use it to burn off the dross.

*The practice here is embracing the light and the dark.* Everyone has their own journey, their own discomforts, anxieties and celebrations. This is yours. You will respond as you do. You will do something old or something new, something clumsy, upsetting, or less than perfect. The lessons are tailor made for you. Your journey is your responsibility, your gift, your opportunity. That old soil freshly turned is fertile ground for what you want to cultivate. Motherhood is illuminating, a worthy journey of personal and spiritual development. Embrace it.

You are doing your best as you revel in the light and stumble in the dark, seeking and cultivating self-knowledge. Damning judgment is not conducive to learning. No matter how old or squirmy the discomfort of a bad mothering moment, embrace yourself and the learning. Apply your conscious mind to your learning. Ask “What do I learn from this?” “What could I do differently next time?” Be compassionate and encouraging. Tell yourself “I am doing my best at learning to do something new. I will keep going!”

## INQUIRY

Describe a recent mad, sad or bad mothering moment you experienced.

What was your intention in this moment?

What did you doubt or fear in this moment?

What learning is available to you from this?

What could you do differently next time?

What encouragement can you give yourself that acknowledges the value of embracing the light and the dark in your mothering journey?