



## Peace & Sustainability Through Yoga

*Exploring Maitri & Karuna Through Yoga*

**International Online Yoga Festival**

**18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2020**

### **Concept Note**

The celebration of war has been dominating human history for the last few millennia. It has given us nuclear war. It has brought us to the brink of Climate disaster. It has created the COVID pandemic.

*It is time to celebrate peace.*

It is time to change the discourse about COVID to see how we make peace with the outbreak, and not how we win the war. The discourse of war exacerbates the panic, turns people against each other and sets the ground for a post-COVID that continues with the same, “I must live, and I must live well” idea of life. The underlying paradigm that energizes this idea of individualism also powers the use of natural resources for war, for nurturing a consumerist society and for fostering a world divided by narrow identifications.

The only hope for an equitable world is the discourse of peace. The tangible outcomes of a commitment to peace are obvious! More than 25% of world GDP serves the ‘military industrial complex’. Dismantling this and redirecting the money will mean that every person in the world can be fed, clothed, educated and housed free of charge! It will not harm the economy, since the stuff created by the complex is just sitting there waiting for a foolish leader to trigger a war, use the inventory to kill people and destroy the earth!

The only hope for a sustainable world is a discourse on peace. If the resources used to cater to valorize the individualistic and consumeristic world are turned towards nurturing meaningful and socially healthy ways of living, we will see a very different world. For example, we will need only public transport! We will build more spaces for play and collective enjoyment than to cater to exclusivity. These are not pipe dreams, there are towns where this has been experimented with great success.

To enable a discourse of peace, we need a personal practice that is grounded in human well-being, rational enquiry and collective harmony. Not one based on narrow belief that encourage the process of 'othering'.

The COVID crisis has shown how relevant the practice of a holistic Yoga can be. One can enable the celebration of peace by reiterating the individual practice of Yoga with a central focus on the basic foundations of Yoga, namely,

- o A deep and abiding concern for the suffering of mankind and the earth (*duHkha nivAraNa*)
- o A commitment to non-violence (*ahimsa*)
- o A commitment to truth (*satya*)

These are individual practices with an immediate impact on every social interaction. Therefore, they will initiate a movement where all the resources of mankind will be turned away from war, and away from wasteful commerce.

The COVID crisis offers us a sliver of hope, it opens a small window in human minds to these possibilities. A life of dignity, personal honour and peace is something all human beings dream of and aspire for. Yet they get drawn into the discourse of war and consumerism.

Can we use the shock that all the people of the world are facing due to the pandemic to reinforce the dialogue that has been all but drowned out by the din of battle?

This is the voice of the ancient Rishis, of Buddha, of Mahavira, of Guru Nanak and the stream flows all the way to Gandhiji, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, B.R. Ambedkar, Hansa Mehta, Dakshayini Velayudhan, and others.

Ritambhara, in collaboration with the Center for Soft Power, invites all yoga practitioners and seekers of peace to join us on this journey.



Ritambhara is a space for contemplative conversations fostered by a community of seekers, who are attempting to engage with the question of *'What does it mean to live meaningfully in today's times, along the path of Yoga?'* The members share a common concern for the current ecological, socio-cultural and political state of the world, and find deep wisdom and hope in the teachings and praxis of Yoga as a way forward from these crises. The activities of Ritambhara include active co-learning through inner work, group study and practice of the various aspects of the *Ashtanga Yoga*, exploratory dialogues on the different facets of the Indian tradition, and facilitating learning spaces and opportunities for others on a similar quest.



India Foundation's Center for Soft Power aims to give an impetus to the study of soft power, an area of increasing global significance. The Center seems to engage with practitioners, academics, policy makers and other stakeholders to study, promote and disseminate knowledge, with an emphasis on an India-centric view of soft power. The Center, apart from carrying out research, also proposes to map the various elements of India's soft power such as Ayurveda, cinema, cuisine, design, handicrafts, sports, literature, music, performing arts, spirituality, tourism, visual arts, and yoga.

