

# Chapter 4. EXPRESSION

“What’s Tinder?” I ask.

“Where have you been?” My roommate stares at me. “It’s, you know, the swiping thing,” she says, making a slashing finger gesture. “You swipe right for ‘yes,’ or left for ‘no.’”

“The swiping thing?”

My roommate sighs, “Yes, you know, you swipe right or left on their profile pic. If you both swipe right, then it’s a match and then you can chat.”

“You base it on a picture?” I wrinkle my nose, “Wow, that sounds superficial.”

My roommate rolls her eyes, “Welcome to this century, Lava Life<sup>1</sup>. You start by making an online profile. C’mon, pull out your phone.”

“Now?” I hedge.

“You said you wanted something to be different. So now you have to do something different. She grabs my phone. “First stop: Tinder.”

“Oh God.”

## Consciousness

What could Tinder possibly have to do with yoga? Hold onto your hats, my friends, because you are about to find out. In fact, you’re going to see how Tinder is actually a powerful vessel for evolving your personal human potential.

It’s just cleverly disguised as a dating app.

While your fundamental nature is pure, unchanging awareness (your Big Self, as discussed in chapter three), you also have the opportunity to be embodied in a human form (your Little Self) that is living in the material world (Prakriti). Like Neo from the *Matrix*, you are in a virtual reality game called, “Being a human being on planet Earth.” And within your little human suit, your soul is having a grand adventure, filled with drama, emotions, victories, and defeats.

While it may be a game, it is a serious game. And it matters how you play.<sup>2</sup>

We – humans - have a rare quality on this planet: consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> An ancient form of online dating from the 90’s. It was not considered cool.

<sup>2</sup> While some schools of yoga do encourage practitioners to abstain from the world to stay only in the Big Self, modern yoga is influenced by the lineage of Tantra. In Tantra, playing the game is part of our soul’s experience. More on this in chapter eleven, when we talk about sex, wheeee!

By consciousness, I am referring to your remarkable ability to be mindful and reflective. Unlike your cat, your dog, or your favourite hamster, you have the ability to stop, take a breath, and decide what you want to do. And with every choice that you make, you create and reveal who you are.

Let's take that again. Read it slowly:

With every choice that you make, you create and reveal who you are.

Lila

Lila, "divine play," describes the ultimate play of the Universe, which has been set into motion so that the universe can express and reveal itself in all of its diversity. Think of the singularity before the big bang: everything in the Universe was encapsulated in a pure point of energy-matter-consciousness. As soon as the Big Bang happened, the Universe expanded and began to cool. As the Universe cooled, the myriad potential forms within that original singularity began to be expressed. The material world is actually the fabric of Universal Consciousness, expressing itself through divine play. And that includes you.

We are creating the world – and the collective identity of humanity – with every *single action that we take*. And through our actions, we decide which qualities we want to see expressed and upheld in the world. Are you lamenting the lack of compassion in the world? Act more compassionately! Do you want to see more bravery in the world? Step into your own fear. Do you want the world to have more love? Be more loving.

"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." – Anonymous

You are not separate from the seething, glorious world: you are an intrinsic part of it. You *are* the very fabric of the Universe. Every thing that you do – large or small – creates the world as you go. Each positive step that you take forward propels humanity towards a better version of itself.

"If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change." – Gandhi's statement invites us to follow our highest vision and embody our best self – regardless of circumstance.

However, we often forget that we are mighty architects of creation. We get tired, cranky, distracted, and it's easy to be reactive. We feel irrelevant and fall into the trap of thinking, "What's the point?" Remaining mindful takes vigilance.

"Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it". - Gandhi

Small daily acts matter. We usually know that we are going astray when we hear a little voice chirp in our ear: "You don't need the donut," "Call your mother," or "Don't get

mad; it's not the Starbucks barista's fault." Sometimes we act out, and feel our consciences twinge with regret.

We don't need to blame ourselves for our habits or reactive tendencies. We are not always capable of keeping our Big Self in the driver's seat. However, our work is to do our best to stay awake and remember our capacity for mindful self-creation.

Which is why we have to practice.

### Iccha shakti

Iccha is the divine creative urge for self-expression. Everything in the universe is in a state of expressing itself and its nature. Because we are a part of the universe, we can participate in this dance by consciously choosing our own self-expression, simply for the joy of being who we really are.

You can start with your online dating profile.

When you write your profile description or upload a photo, you are expressing who you are in the world. Through words and images, you are creating (and it is a creative act!) your identity. So why not choose to put up a profile that shares your authentic, best self?

There are two parts to this process: authenticity and elevation.

The first part of this process involves *authenticity*. I am definitely not saying that you need to change your age, height and weight because you think that you need to be younger, taller, or thinner. On the contrary. Being your best self means being *you*. If you are passionate about Star Trek or get giddy over LEGO, then say so. Love animals and the environment? Put it in. Family-focused? Bam. Your profile is the time to share who you really are.

Now, not everyone will agree with this. They'll say, "No, Greta, don't post a picture of your trip to LEGOLAND because you may turn some guys off. Post that photo where you look sexy and amazing in that cocktail dress."

I say bullshit. Don't post a photo of yourself in a cocktail dress unless you get giddy over Vera Wang. Sharing your authentic self will feel vulnerable. But hiding does not serve you. Not everyone likes LEGO, and that's okay. And someone who doesn't appreciate your LEGO passion isn't going to be your person, anyway, right?

Dig deep, friends. It's time to let go of shame and fear! It's time to stop editing and start sharing. When you are *your* best, you are not conforming to an artificial standard of what you think other people will like, but rather you are acting from a place of integrity that reflects your wonderful, unique self.

The second part of this process is *elevation*.

Creating an online profile is a chance to *practice the pause* and consider how you want to be in the world.

What does “being your *best self*” mean to you? What values do you want to express in the world? Who do you aspire to be?

- Kind
- Patient
- Adventurous
- Fun
- Courageous
- Loyal...?

Your “best self” is your inner vision for who you are, a north star that can guide and govern your behaviour and your choices. It is a vision that will evolve over time.

Creating your profile is not a casual endeavour. This is an opportunity to choose how you want to show up in the world and in your relationships. In taking the time to reflect upon your “best self,” you will begin to get a richer and more integrated sense of your own personal values. You will be choosing how you want to participate in the world, and in the great Divine play of universal creation.

Creating your online profile is just the start. Once you’ve set your vision, then it’s time to *live your best self*.

## Objectification

“OMG, can you believe this one?” I say to my roommate, “His only picture was clearly taken at his wedding and his wife’s face is blacked out.”

“God! Ew!” she exclaims, swiping left on Tinder, “Don’t they know anything?”

“Seriously!” I say, “And this one has a picture of his boat and his house, but no picture of him. Where is his self-respect?” I continue swiping, “This one has the spelling of a fifth grader...” Swipe. “And this one, oh my god, the only picture is taken from about sixty feet, and he wants to have his first date ‘at his house?’ How does that not sound like a serial killer?”

I pause and stop.

“Ummmm.” My forehead crinkles, “Wait a minute. Have I become too...judgmental?”

“God, no.” She waves her hand, “I scan the height, the job, the location. If those don’t match up, I swipe left.”

“But seriously,” I tug her attention off her IPad, “Is doing this making us more, well, callous?”

She pauses, suddenly thoughtful.

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” she finally sighs. “But who has time to give everyone a chance?”

Correspondence on dating sites can be overwhelming. It’s a freaking full time job. On Tinder you may blast through fifty profiles in three minutes. On sites like OK Cupid, E-Harmony, Match, and Plenty of Fish, you could get upwards of ten connections per day. To cope with all the information, it’s easy to become desensitized to the fact that there is a human being on the other end of the wifi. It is all too easy to ignore messages in the inbox.

Delete, delete, delete. Block. Delete.

“They’ll get the message,” we think.

And yes, they probably will. After a few days, or a week.

The conversation with my girlfriend was a wake up call: I was starting to treat other people like video game characters.

“About one in ten,” wrote one of the men with whom I’d corresponded.  
“That’s about how often I get a response from a woman I’ve written to.”

One of the qualities that I want to embody is compassion. And I certainly wasn’t being compassionate when I was treating other people like video game avatars.

I made a resolution: I would respond to every email and message I received, even when the email was from “MrMeatTube101,” “SirBeerGogglesU,” and “AgedStallion779.”

“Thanks for getting in touch. I enjoyed reading your profile. While I don’t think that we are a great match, I appreciate your time and interest. Good luck in your search.”

Small acts matter.

If I wanted to uphold the value of compassion, then I needed to treat each person who reached out to me with respect. Even when the only thing they wrote was, “hey gurrri!”

Who do you want to be? And how can your online interactions reflect your values?

Yoga philosophy offers guidelines for interacting with the world with integrity. The first guideline, *ahimsa*, is non-violence, or compassion. All subsequent guidelines are built on its benevolent and powerful foundation.

### Yama

The Yamas are one of the eight “limbs” of yoga as described by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutra. The five yamas are guidelines for interacting ethically with the external world. They are non-violence, truthfulness, non-grasping, non-stealing, and celibacy. (We’ll talk about the truth in chapter eight, and celibacy in chapter eleven.) These five guidelines are considered “great vows” that need to be upheld regardless of circumstance. In other words, no excuses. Adhering to these principles helps you keep your Big Self in the driver’s seat.

### Ahimsa

The first guideline for conduct, *ahimsa* means non-violence or non-harming. However, *ahimsa* is not necessarily passive or complacent. Non-violence may be fierce and active.

If you also value compassion, try on this challenge: respond to every communication that you receive. Your response doesn’t have to be lengthy; even a brief exchange can acknowledge someone else as a person. Make it easy on yourself and use copy / paste. Responding may seem like a small gesture, but small gestures form the fabric of human interaction.

**Most importantly, making a practice of responding to these inquiries will shift the way that you feel.**

When we take the time to see the humanity in each person and to treat them with care and respect, then we become more sensitive to our connection to all of the people around us – whether we’re connecting with them through email, text, on the phone, or even face to face.

We are upholding the values of our Big Self.

## Practice the Pause

While our photos and texts reveal who we are in the digital world, our *actions and speech* create and reveal who we are *in the real world*. How you choose to act everyday in your relationships—with your family, at your jobs, or with strangers on a coffee

date—is a direct expression of who you are and *who you want to be*. In short, every interaction that you have is an opportunity to uphold and embody your values in the world, in real time.

### Ahamkara

"Ego." Ahamkara is the "I-maker," that helps us to distinguish ourselves from the world around us. ("I am happy, I am sad, I am a good person, I am an architect, I am a yogi, I am a mother," etc.) We need our ego to make our way through the world. The question is, who do we want this "I" to be?

In your online profiles, you are defaulting to habit when you post the photos that only make you look hot or are easy to access in your camera roll.

**In life, you default when you let the *habit of who you have been* dictate who you are becoming.**

Our first step in elevating our own expression is to *practice the pause so that we can choose who we want to be*. While creating your online profile was an opportunity to create a vision for who you are in the world, arriving at your date is an opportunity to *practice* bringing that vision to life.

"Mindfulness practice means that we commit fully in each moment to be present; inviting ourselves to interface with this moment in full awareness, with the intention to embody as best we can an orientation of calmness, mindfulness, and equanimity right here and right now." - Jon Kabat Zinn "Wherever you go, there you are."

## My First Plenty of Fish Date

My first date was pretty much an autopilot disaster.

"Oh God, oh God," I'm thinking. "Please let me recognize him from his picture. Just please let me recognize him. Please don't let me be staring at him awkwardly right now, or make an overture to the wrong person. Pleeeeease."

I'm sandwiched into the foyer of a crowded and trendy brunch spot, waiting for my first ever-online date to show up. I've dressed in jeans (which feels positively formal since I usually live in my Dharmabums leggings) and I've even combed my hair. Big effort. My stomach is churning.

Ethan walks in the door. I recognize him. Thank God. He actually looks like his picture. I've heard people don't usually look like their pictures. But he does.

“Uh, hey,” he says and smiles. He’s tall and has a cute gap between his two front teeth.

“Hi, uh. Nice to...uh, hey!” Awkward hug. I bite my tongue from saying, “Nice to meet you,” advertising “FIRST DATE” in neon letters to the lounging hipsters who no doubt smell Plenty of Fish all over this.

The hostess is perky, “Come this way, I can seat you now that you’re both here.”

We get ourselves sorted, take control of the menus (I’m clumsy with mine; it feels like an ungainly, fluttering bird), and manage to order.

“So, um, where are you from?” I venture.

He speaks and eats slowly, as if he’s taking the measure of everything in his mouth. I’ll find out later that this is how Ethan moves in the world: slowly, carefully and with deliberate intent. He swallows. “Folks live back east. Sister, too. You?”

“Oh wow. East, uh, me too. Born in good ‘ol New Hampshire, you know the uh, live free or die state! Yep, we’ve got some fight.” My face feels weird, I realize I’m smiling really widely. I try to stop it, but I can’t. It’s alarming. Kind of like the Joker in Batman. Maybe talking will fix this problem.

“Then I was in New York City for about a decade, oh goodness!” (Goodness?) “A decade, whoa! That makes me sound old, ha ha, well, San Francisco for a few years, too, at school, then New York again, but you know, I counted that in the decade there already, not thirteen years, but ten all told...”

I start to have an out of body experience. Where was this horrific, vomitus chattiness coming from? Poor Ethan, barely a word out and here I was submerging him in a horrible torrent of small talk. I try to stop talking, but it’s as if a dam has been released and the water just won’t stop. Apparently I become a rabidly chipper one-sided conversationalist when I get uncomfortable.

Who knew?

## The gift of self-consciousness

During a date, we are painfully aware and pinned to the present moment. And in our discomfort, we can either fall back onto our protective habits, or we can *practice the pause*, take a breath, and make a choice about how we want to act. Another word for practicing the pause is mindfulness.



While I'd experienced "awareness" before on the yoga mat, dating became an opportunity to put this pause into practice in the good company of others. Dating is the perfect place to practice mindfulness because we're usually a little freaked out. The world becomes more vivid. Time slows down.

And in this slightly freaked out space, we have a choice. We can either run on autopilot by defaulting back to all our comfortable control strategies, or we can *practice the pause* and choose how we want to show up, moment by moment.

When you start to put yourself out there on Tinder or Plenty of Fish, you may have a lot of first dates. Each one is an opportunity to put yourself back in the fire of not-knowing. To start with a blank canvas and see what you will create.

After Ethan, I went on a lot of first dates.

While I still wanted to fill the silence with my babbling, I started practicing the pause and waiting. At first, allowing for silence felt interminable! I squirmed, I blushed, I literally had to bite my tongue. But as I practiced, I become more comfortable staying in the void. And when I did, often my date would find something interesting to say that would take the conversation in a marvellous and unexpected direction.

By practicing the pause, I came one step closer to being the good listener that I want to be. Not just in dating, but in all my relationships.

By questioning our default patterns, we become artists of self-creation. Our actions become the colors that we use to create the masterpiece of our lives.

"Practice does not make **perfect**. Only **perfect practice makes perfect**." - Vince Lombardi

Because dating usually makes us self-consciousness, it's the perfect time to both witness and transform our habits. Each and every time we show up for a coffee date, we can take a breath and treat it as a twenty-minute practice. Do we want to practice compassion, honesty, good listening – even when we feel like our feet are in the fire? Here is an opportunity to step up our game and consciously embody our best vision for ourselves.

Here's the thing:

We are not showing up as our best selves to make a great impression or to wow our dates. We're showing up as our best selves *for us*. Because we have a vision for who we want to be, and how we want to uphold ourselves in the world.

Return, moment by moment, to the extraordinary power of your own ability to choose who you want to be. Your small daily acts will change the world. You will inspire others. We will all shine more brightly.

And most importantly, you'll be empowered to be the person you want to be.

## Practices

### **Journal Practice: Expression**

Brainstorm who you are, and who you aspire to be.

- During which activities do you feel your most alive, most vibrant, the most “you?”
- Write down ten adjectives that describe who you are now.
- Write down ten adjectives that describe how your friends see you.
- Write down ten adjectives that describe who you *want* to be.
- What kind of beauty / handsome devil are you (circle as many as apply):

Women: Statuesque / elegant / athletic / cute / lovely / attractive / luscious / firebolt / rebel / hippy / earth mother / quirky / elvin / Botticelli / sensual / vibrant / quiet / subtle / vivacious / delicate / create your own

Men: handsome / cute / athletic / attractive / strong / robust / wiry / passionate / generous / energetic / powerful / mystical / sensitive / mellow / considerate / solid / papa bear / earthy / create your own

### **Journal Practice: Mission**

Start to craft a personal mission statement for your life. A mission statement is an anchor that helps us stay rooted when the winds of life blow. It doesn't have to be grandiose; it can be very simple. Don't worry: your first draft does not have to be perfect. In fact, your mission will change and evolve over time.

- Try a free-writing exercise where you do a stream of consciousness and see what comes out. “My life's purpose is....”
- Ask your trusted friends what they see as your best qualities and most poignant challenges.
- Reflect on what activities and interests have always called to you.<sup>3</sup>

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• <sup>3</sup> A great source for reflections on your life's purpose is Stephen Cope's, “The Great Work of your Life: A Guide for the Journey to your True Calling.”

### **Dating Practice: Expression**

- Set aside time to consciously choose how you want to express yourself on social media and online dating sites. Choose photos that express who you really are when you are doing something you love, rather than photos that you think “look good.”
- On your dates, how do you arrive? Which part of yourself are you bringing forward?
  - Consider the tangible: what do you want to wear? What clothing represents you? Do you love using makeup, perfume, cologne?
  - Consider the less tangible: what kind of energy do you want to arrive with? Can you schedule your day to give yourself the time to transition to this state? For example, if you want to feel grounded, consider doing something for yourself before you arrive on the date that helps you feel connected and solid (yoga, perhaps?).

### **Dating Practice: Compassion**

- First Response: respond to every message rather than ignore communication. Even if it's just to say, “Thanks for your interest, I don't think we're a good match,” take the time to acknowledge the other person as someone worthy of respect.

### **Yoga Practice: Self-expression**

- Sun salutations

Sun Salutations are infinitely varied! Each sun salutation can be different. As you practice, explore all the ways that you can express your feelings in these movements. Take your arms wide, take your arms forward, move quickly, move deliciously slowly. What feels good in each moment?

In your practice this week, express your best self.

What this means:

- Be honest with yourself in your practice: is this your personal best expression of the pose in this moment?
- Continually return to mindfulness during the practice. Our mind will naturally slip away. When you find yourself admiring your pedicure, return to the feeling of your body and your breath.
- Keep in mind that your highest expression may not be the most “advanced” variation, but rather the variation that gives you the most opportunity for integration and expression.
- Doing your best in Savasana (and fully resting) is just as important as doing your best in a big backbend or challenging arm balance.

## **Meditation Practice: Practice the Pause**

- Find your meditation seat (see chapter two for more detailed instructions if needed).
- Begin to observe the movement of your breath.
- Count your inhalations (1, 2, 3...)
- When your mind wanders off the numbers, then restart at 1.
- When you fall off course, compassionately bring yourself back to attention without judgment.