



**MAXIMIZE YOUR
HUMAN POTENTIAL
AND DEVELOP
THE SPIRIT OF
A WARRIOR**

AN M4 AND A YOGA MAT

My path to a complete warrior art

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are very few.

— SHUNRYU SUZUKI

INTO THE BREACH

IN 1991 I WAS A NAVY OFFICER, RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM SEAL TRAINING (BUD/S) AS THE HONOR MAN IN MY CLASS, EARNING THE COVETED NAVY SEAL TRIDENT. SOON I WAS ASSIGNED TO SEAL TEAM 3, TASKED TO GO TO IRAQ TO FIGHT IN OPERATION DESERT STORM. FORTUNATELY FOR MANY, THAT WAR ENDED BEFORE WE DEPLOYED,

and at SEAL Team 3 I would complete 6 more years of active duty in a relatively peaceful period of our history. Although I would visit the Middle East a number of times from 1991 to 1997, I wouldn't get the call to go to another turbulent Iraq until 2004, when I was serving as a reserve officer.

Like most in the reserves during that time, it wasn't a surprise for me to get mobilized for duty during what was being called the war on terror. I knew it was coming but was not sure when.

At 41, my days as a gun-slinging operator were behind me. It didn't make sense for me to go back to a shooting SEAL task unit. So it was cool that my mission would be to lead a fairly complicated study for the U.S. Navy, involving the integration of the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) into the special ops community (also known as SOCOM). I was to shadow a detachment of 100 handpicked U.S. Marines, intelligence and recon guys called SOCOM Detachment 1 who were to conduct a proof-of-concept deployment under the watchful eyes of SEAL Team 1.

It was a big deal. Twenty years earlier, the Marines had declined to be a part of the joint program to form the Special Operations Command, which included the Navy's SEAL teams, the Army's special forces and a Ranger battalion, and the Air Force's special ops teams such as Pararescue. But after 9/11, as the Marine Corps watched particularly hot missions—and the money to support them—flow to SOCOM, they started to rethink their position. The secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, put the brakes on an effort to fast-track the process. He didn't want to mess around with the 20 years of intricate and complicated coordination work that had already happened between the initial units of SOCOM. A thorough study and evaluation was deemed important to make sure that they didn't screw up what had taken years to get to work well. Though the USMC was ready to throw the 100-man team into combat, validation was a good idea before sending a newly formed concept team from a conventional-minded military service into the murky SOF (Special Operations Forces) world. And as you might imagine, there were a lot of charged convictions and emotions when it came to who was taking orders from whom between the SEALs and Marines. The call I got for the job was from Commander Mike Lumpkin, who was then the Naval Special Warfare Group 1 operations officer and had just rolled out of the position as deputy commander of Special Operations Forces, overseeing the 2,000 special operators in Baghdad. (In 2013, Mike Lumpkin became the assistant secretary of defense for SOLIC.)

Prior to deployment to the combat zone with SEAL Team 1, I would lead the organization of the predeployment training certification for SEAL Team 1 with the 100 U.S. Marines from

SOCOM Det 1 in tow. This was a good project for me. For one thing, I was intrigued with the underlying matrix of leadership that would need to be worked out between the SEALs and the Marines. Since my years on SEAL Team 3, I had expanded my views and beliefs regarding the definition of a “warrior,” leaving behind most parochial and tribal viewpoints on who is the best branch of the military, or who is the best special operator. Even though I was a SEAL, through and through, I would be able to offer an impartial viewpoint in conducting the exercise and ensuing study. My job was made easy by the fact that the Marines were great guys and solid operators

The certification exercise was a big success, and the time finally came for me to deploy to Baghdad to continue part two of my job, the study of the Marine team in SOF combat. Things happened fast. I paid a visit to the supply depot in Coronado, California, to get my weapon and gear, said good-bye to my family, and before I knew it I was on a flight to Bahrain—with a bunch of polished new gear and an M4 rifle that I hadn’t had time to take to the range. As an active-duty SEAL, shooting “my” weapon seemed to be a constant. I got real intimate with my primary and secondary weapons. But in the reserves we did not get issued our own weapons, so I literally had to check one out of the armory before I left. Any military member will understand how important it is to sight in your weapon and get comfortable with its idiosyncrasies. In addition, the life of the active-duty SEAL involves around-the-clock training and sharpening skills as an individual and as part of a team. It is a day-in, day-out, year-round affair. As an officer in the SEAL reserves, however, we didn’t get to shoot nearly as much, nor did we get issued our own weapon to sleep with.

That was a big concern of mine, along with the web gear I was to use. I had brand-new web gear that wasn’t broken in and customized to fit my frame. I needed to “run and gun” with the gear to ensure I would know where the ammo pouches would be in a pinch, and to make sure they wouldn’t fly off in a firefight. On active duty, I got really comfortable with my equipment and knew I could rely on it. We had a saying: “Take care of your gear, and it will take care of you!” But here I was, about to deploy into a war zone, and I was looking at a bunch of plastic bags encasing brand-new, untouched equipment and a weapon I hadn’t even shot yet. My pucker factor—military jargon for adrenalin—was rising.

Ratcheting up the stress was the news coming out of Iraq. On March 31, 2004, a friend of mine, Stephen “Scott” Helvenston, was one of four Blackwater military contractors that were in a convoy ambushed by insurgents in Fallujah. Scott and the others were killed in a horrifying manner, made worse for me by the fact that I saw him the day before he deployed weeks earlier. This was to be his last deployment with Blackwater. The graphic imagery

startled me, knowing that I would soon be stepping into that same area where I could easily be the next target.

To make matters even worse, in mid-May, days before my deployment, a militant group posted a video of the decapitation of Nick Berg, an American radio-tower repairman from Pennsylvania. The video, which I immediately regretted watching, made me sick to my stomach. The stark reminder that we were fighting an enemy who seemed nuts, believing they were in the right to perform such deranged and hideous acts, steeled me as I stepped onto the C-130.

On my way to Baghdad, I stopped in Bahrain for a couple of days while awaiting final transport to the war zone. There I met up with a civilian analyst, from the Center for Naval Analysis, assigned to write the USMC side of the same report I was working on. He was to go to the Green Zone (the so-called secure area in Baghdad that the American military worked) with me. We discussed the project and our approaches as we waited for our ride.

The C-130 was scheduled to depart at 0500 hours. As I waited for the analyst to share a ride to the airfield, he approached me and said, “Mark, I won’t be going. I have a bad feeling about this.” Great, I thought, . . . Wonder if he knows something I don’t!

Well, I was going anyhow. I couldn’t lose face with my teammates and I was a tough SEAL officer, right? Climbing aboard the turboprop transport workhorse, the C-130, which the U.S. military uses to transport troops and equipment, I was never more nervous in my life. Keenly aware that anything could happen I felt on high alert. As the windowless C-130 roared into the air, I considered how things were stacking up. My civilian counterpart may have been spooked by another story in the press of how an Australian soldier had caught a bullet through his ass while on an aircraft leaving Baghdad. It was just someone shooting from the ground. A bullet had ripped through the fuselage and killed him. The ominous signs were getting the best of me.

Sitting across from me was a one-star Marine general working feverishly on a presentation with an aide. It was a 2-hour flight. After we lifted off, I couldn’t bear sitting so I looked around the plane and spotted an open space by some cargo netting in the ramp area. My thoughts were set to full speed and I needed to do something to calm down. Remembering how calm I felt after my yoga sessions back home, I went to the open space near a stack of pallets and started doing a deep-breathing exercise and a few forward folds and backbends. This led to a full-blown yoga session in the middle of the bumpy ride in the C-130. (Later in my reserve career, I made it a point to practice yoga on military transports whenever I could. Often I had other members of my SEAL team or other military passengers join me, but I am

pretty sure this was a first in military history!) The one-star Marine general must have been thinking: That SEAL officer is obviously green to combat and scared shitless. I didn't care. The yoga began to calm my mind and helped me regain control of my emotions. I felt much better as we turned our nose toward the Iraqi desert.

By the time we landed in Baghdad, I wasn't in a perfect Zen state by any means—we were in a combat zone after all—but I was far more calm, present, and centered, and ready for what came next.

That was a good thing. I hadn't been on the ground more than 15 minutes when I heard someone shout, "Incoming!," followed by the unmistakable whistle of a mortar flying toward us. I had only heard mortars while in training, not combat, and in training they are whistling away from you. Trust me when I say it sounds very different when it is coming full bore at you! It exploded about a quarter mile away. Okay, I said to myself. Welcome to combat.

Later, a couple of SEAL team guys drove up to retrieve me—loaded for bear for the 45-minute ride through bad-guy land—they gave me a sign to lock and load my M4 (I didn't have the guts to tell them I hadn't even sighted it in yet) and off we went to the SEAL compound at one of Saddam Hussein's former palace grounds.

That yoga session on the C-130 was my first official session of what I called Warrior Yoga (I later changed the name to Kokoro Yoga to avoid a trademark infringement). I realized in that moment that yoga presented a powerful toolkit for my own warrior development.

SEIDO: THE BEGINNING OF MY JOURNEY

So there I was, breathing slowly and deeply into a Sun Salutation in the cargo area of a C-130 on my way to a combat zone. I was too focused on the moment to ask the obvious question: How did I get here?

As random and seemingly out of place my initial session of Kokoro Yoga might sound, it was a significant point of arrival in a long and steady search I had been conducting both during my active-duty time with the SEALs and after.

The search was in some ways a circular one, trying to reconnect with the kind of integrated warrior training that had initially infused me with the awareness and courage to let go of a big-money CPA career I had taking shape on Wall Street for the rigorous challenge of becoming and being a Navy SEAL. It started with what had been a growing sense of inner doubt about what I was setting out to do with my life, a voice I largely ignored as I began to

climb the corporate ladder. I was in it for the money, in other words. The prospects for my success were bright. One of the chief rewards came from my family who appreciated that I was conforming to an ideal they had for me. Although I wasn't acknowledging it at the time, my career was incongruent with my ideal. There was a growing weight on my shoulders as my future in high finance stretched out before me. I was walking home one night from work when my train of thought was disrupted by a series of shouts coming from a second-floor window of a seven-story building on West 23rd Street. Intrigued, I walked up a flight of stairs and into what would become a truly disruptive force in my life: the Seido Karate dojo run by Grandmaster Tadashi Nakamura.

Nakamura had formerly been deployed to the United States from Japan to lead a style of karate known for tournament fighting, Kyokushinkai. Nakamura had become disenchanted with the lack of dimension in the training and left despite intense pressure from Japan. Nakamura went about creating Seido Karate with the intent of focusing on human development rather than sheer fighting prowess. The word *seido* is Japanese for "sincere way." This was my first exposure to the martial arts, and I soon found that Seido was a practice that truly integrated body, mind, and spirit training. Unlike other martial arts I would become acquainted with over the years, Seido was unique in that it didn't just talk about the mental and spiritual aspects—it was actually part of the training. Meditation and spiritual talks and discussions on mental development were part of the routine, along with the fighting practice. It was through this work that I was able to connect with the sincere voice within my being and understand that I was meant for something different than taking a place in the family business, as was expected.

Seido not only unlatched access to an inner wisdom that led me to join the Navy and become a SEAL, it also prepared me in a foundational way for what is considered the most arduous and demanding military training program in the world.

The five guiding principles of Seido Karate training are as follows:

1. **ETHICAL FOUNDATION.** The ethical foundation of Seido is based upon what's called "bushido," also known as the Way of the Warrior, a series of moral standards embraced by samurai warriors, like honor, frugality, and loyalty. As you read the next chapter in this book, you'll note that the first two levels of yoga, or limbs, are also staked in an ethical foundation.
2. **INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT.** As mentioned, Seido didn't just pay lip service to the concept of integrating mental and spiritual training into the daily practice,

Nakamura emphasized this fusion: “My purpose in founding Seido Karate was to show what I feel is the true essence, the kernel of true karate: the training of body, mind, and spirit together in order to realize the fullness of human potential.”

3. **SPIRITUAL AWARENESS.** Zen meditation is core to the Seido practice. As esoteric as this may sound, the meditation and spiritual lectures helped me develop the awareness and humility to thrive through the ego-busting stress of BUD/S and Hell Week.
4. **CRUCIBLE TRAINING.** Frequent tests and challenges are part of the Seido program and work to help push students to new levels of performance and to comprehend the magnitude of the potential lying within. For example, an annual crucible session at the dojo might include thousands of kicks and punches. Another common crucible session was conducted over the course of days at a monastery, where we would fill our days endlessly cycling back and forth from meditation to karate work.
5. **FORGING MENTAL TOUGHNESS.** In Seido, we were worked hard and steadily toward developing resiliency and a mentally tough attitude where we never backed down. As Nakamura explained: “Seido seeks to develop in each student a ‘non-quitting’ spirit. No matter what the obstacle or difficulty—emotional, physical, financial—we want students to feel that, though there may be setbacks, they will never be overcome by any of these problems.”

The unified training of Seido proved to be invaluable the day I stepped onto the path to become a Navy SEAL. Because of the relentless difficulty of BUD/S, of having to go 100 mph for the better part of a year, from Hell Week to drownproofing to SEAL Qualification Training, I survived the staggeringly high failure rate. Actually it was because of the integrated warrior training, which I took so seriously, that I did more than just survive. I was able to thrive, finishing as honor man, # 1 graduate, of my class.

SEARCH FOR A COMPLETE WARRIOR ART

In joining the Navy SEALs, I was leaving Wall Street behind—a good thing for me. A sacrifice, however, was leaving behind my training at the Seido World Headquarters on West 23rd Street in Manhattan. In departing for the SEALs, I took with me a desire to find another

practice that had a similar comprehensive approach to human development that Seido did. Being on a SEAL team was all that I had imagined, of course. But as an operator you get very focused, for obvious reasons, on shooting, fighting, and mission success. You won't find time dedicated to a spiritual practice on the schedule. So my search for something similar to Seido put me on a quest.

SCARS (Special Combat Aggressive Reactionary System) was my first stop. SCARS was developed by a Vietnam vet named Jerry Peterson from a lethal hand-to-hand combat system called Kung Fu San Soo. Peterson had stripped away all of the cultural elements into what you might call a clear science of how to offensively fight to win. The training was brutal—a 30-day, 10-hour-day program to become certified to teach SCARS. I loved the techniques and the training was fun, but whereas Seido was about developing moral character and spirit, SCARS was about fighting and surviving. In fact, SCARS training came with a warning: Do not use unless someone must die. In the end, I had more than 1,000 hours of training in SCARS when I left the active-duty SEAL teams. In a story that illuminates why I was motivated to continue my search for another Seido-like program, my wife, Sandy, had become a therapist for the Navy. One assignment sent her to a U.S. Navy vessel in Australia that would soon be returning home. Her job was to help the sailors prepare for the jarring realities of returning to civilian life after months at sea. At a dinner in the officers' cabin, the commander of the ship was asking about Sandy's background, and it came up that she was married to someone also in the Navy.

"Who are you married to?" she was asked.

"Lieutenant Commander Mark Divine," Sandy answered.

One of the junior officers went off: "Mark Divine! Mark Divine. I know him . . . he's a SEAL and SCARS master. He could kill us all with his pinky finger!"

After I finished laughing when Sandy told me this story, I began to think about it. As much as I didn't want to be known as some sort of CPA to be feared in a corporate audit, I also didn't find it appealing to be known as a master of the science of killing. I knew that humble warriors are the last to pick up a weapon. I was becoming a more peaceful warrior, even as a SEAL officer.

In transitioning from active duty to the SEAL reserve force, I started training in a Goju-Ryu karate dojo, which had similar roots to Seido. I earned my black belt quickly, in part because I already knew most of the physical moves. But there was no meditation or spiritual training, and when I was recalled in 1999 back to active duty for a stint in Egypt and the Middle East, I never returned to Goju-Ryu.

After the 1-year tour of duty, Sandy and I adopted our son, Devon, and moved to North County, San Diego, about a 40-minute drive up the coast from the SEAL base in Coronado. My search continued. I began to study with Sensei Shane Phelps, a ninjutsu master. Sensei Phelps was trying to get his ninjutsu studio, Temple of the Full Autumn Moon, off the ground when I started training with him. I helped him write a business plan, in fact. He had one of the most sensational backgrounds you're ever going to find. He fought in the Vietnam War and then went on to serve 7 years as a Navy SEAL. He worked for the United Nations as a peacekeeper in places like Syria and Lebanon, and also as an antiterrorism agent of the CIA. He got his BA at Stanford went on to earn a masters degree in comparative religion at Harvard and a Master of Divinity at Yale. Before his Western schooling in the Ivy League, however, he spent 2 years studying Tai Chi and meditating at a Buddhist monastery in China. Shane has long been an awesome example of what I call the 20x factor.

To this day I love the art of ninjutsu. It is an incredible combination of some 40 different types of martial arts, with a variety of weapons and both internally (oriented toward the psychological and spiritual) and externally oriented arts (the more physical-leaning of the martial arts). In the negative column, I found the training frustratingly slow-going and fragmented. I was working toward my black belt when Shane's school suddenly ran out of money and closed its doors. He began working with only private clients, and so my search continued for the complete warrior workout.

It was during this phase of my journey when I discovered yoga.

THE WAY OF THE PEACEFUL WARRIOR

Yoga in the West is viewed through a variety of lenses . . . for most it is a form of exercise. Pilates, Power Yoga, Core Yoga, and Hot Yoga are good examples of this movement. Others may consider it a mystical practice bound to Hinduism, or as a place to train Cirque du Soleil athletes. Since the late 1990s there has been a boom of yoga studios around the country giving rise to millions walking to and from group classes with mats jutting out of their backpacks in a quest to stretch, bend, sweat, and look great naked. I was soon to learn that yoga offered much more.

My introduction to yoga came through reading a classic titled *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramahansa Yogananda. I figured anyone with the word "Yoga" in his name must know what he was talking about. Funny thing, the book had nothing to do with stretching and twisting your body into a pretzel. What Yogananda brought to life was a powerful philosophy of living

and developing oneself spiritually. I was intrigued, as I had just left ninjutsu and couldn't find another program near my home that inspired me. So the thought that perhaps yoga could fill that void popped into my head after reading the book. The spiritual component was something that I was seeking, even though I was not drawn toward the Hindu mythology glued to the yoga programs I had seen to date. I consider myself a Christian and wondered if there would be a conflict. However, I recalled training at the Zen Mountain Monastery with my karate team back in 1989. The head monk, Daido, said that Buddhism as a philosophy was in complete alignment with Christianity. From what I had read, yoga was similar in that it was not a religion, but a philosophy of living as well and a science of personal development. I thought it could be in complete alignment with any religious conviction. Armed with that theory, my journey into yoga began.

Five years before my deployment to Baghdad I mustered the courage to walk into a Hot Yoga studio in Encinitas, California. In Hot Yoga they crank the temperature up to 105 degrees as you twist and boil your way through 26 poses. The first thing I noticed walking out of the yoga class, dripping wet, was how good I felt. The 90 minutes of standing and seated poses in the sauna-like studio yielded some incredible detoxification and deep-stretching benefits.

Not being one to shy from a gut check, I immediately signed up for their challenge of a Hot Yoga class every day for 60 days. The challenge for me was not so much the discipline, but rather that the classes were chock-full of very attractive women bending and twisting in spandex. Not only was it hard to concentrate, but also my preconditioned notion of what men do and what women do for fitness, was put to the test. I had to trust my intuition that this was a worthy pursuit and shift my attention inward to keep focused on the training effect. I found that this inward focus developed greater awareness and deepened my intuition. It was an experience quite different from my years studying martial arts. In fighting and the martial arts, the focus is mostly outward, except when meditating before and after class. In yoga, it is meant to be inward. Rather than scanning the room or my opponent for opportunities and threats, I was attending to my breathing and the nuances of moving into and staying in the pose. I began to notice that if I went into a session with a scattered mind, the practice settled my mind and connected me to a deeper part of my character.

But Hot Yoga was just a launching pad into this amazing new world. Though a fine introduction to yoga, the precise repeating of the same 26 poses each session, in the same sequence, with the instructors uttering the exact same words each class—became mind-numbing to me. I felt a need for variety and silence in my practice, and I could not get it there. I soon began to wonder if I needed a studio at all. The movements were familiar enough to

me after 15 years of martial arts that I thought I would be able to train on my own.

I found two yoga DVDs to use at home. One was by Baron Baptiste, called *Power Yoga* emphasizing core strength and balance, and another by Shiva Rea, emphasizing a fluid, dancelike sequence and breathing. I really enjoyed both as they expanded my repertoire and deepened my knowledge. I would rotate them and add an occasional visit to the Hot Yoga studio to get my sweat on. This went on for 2 years before I stumbled into Ashtanga Yoga, which blew my mind open. Discovering Ashtanga Yoga was a turning point in my yoga studies.

I am lucky to live and work in a town that virtually screams health and fitness. Encinitas, California, brims with world-class endurance athletes, and well-known surfers and skateboarders. Guess what else may be found in Encinitas? Some of the most-qualified yoga teachers in the world. In a conversation with a friend I was asked if I trained with Ashtanga Yoga legend Tim Miller. She said the name with such reverence, she might as well have called him “Master Tim Miller.” Tim is the first American to be certified in Ashtanga Yoga by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois. Tim had to train for many years and make several long trips to India, virtually begging Jois for the honor. It was clearly not given out lightly, especially to an American. I found Tim’s studio literally across the street from my office. He was the “real deal,” and he became my next sensei.

Ashtanga Yoga was derived from the teachings of the famed yoga master Krishnamacharya. He taught Sri K. Pattabhi Jois a progressive system of increasingly challenging series of poses, six series in total, designed for young athletes and military groups. It had a rigid structure that the young men were not to deviate from. After all, good order and discipline are required in the training of new warriors. Jois named it Ashtanga, borrowing the term from Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras (more on that in chapter 2). I was drawn to the Ashtanga system because it seemed to share a developmental ladder similar to a martial art belt-ranking system. Though you don’t test and get promoted in Ashtanga, you do work progressively through the series of poses over the years. I first approached it with my Western goal-oriented mind, thinking I had found my new martial art and that I was going to “get my black belt in Ashtanga.”

My first session of Ashtanga kicked my ass and rekindled the warrior flame within me. It took me—an elite athlete, martial artist, and yoga practitioner—1 hour and 45 minutes to get through, and the session was so demanding I almost lost all bodily functions. I’ve found the true yoga, I thought with elation, as I crawled off the mat. Later, I would attend two 100-hour teacher trainings in the first and second series with Tim. But as the Iraq War heated up in 2004, duty came knocking again and I replaced my yoga attire with the uniform of the Navy SEALs for the third time.

Welcome to Yoga Saddam

In Baghdad, my yoga session aboard the C-130 stayed with me as I settled into life in the combat zone. My work routine mirrored the “battle rhythm” of the Navy SEAL task group where I set up shop. I would awake around 9:00 a.m. and work till 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. Sleep was a luxury few enjoy in combat.

Exercise was another challenge. SEALs will always improvise to find a way to train, even when operating on combat missions that go late into the night. In my situation it was largely impractical to go to the gym, which was located at Camp Victory and required a combat drive in an armored humvee to get to. It was not worth the risk or time. So I began running around the compound, a 3-mile loop, and doing body weight PT (physical training). Soon I felt the itch for yoga, but there were certainly no yoga classes (that I was aware of) being held anywhere in Baghdad, or Iraq. Another nonstarter. So I again decided to follow my intuition and just go it alone based upon what I had learned from Hot Yoga, Power Yoga, and Ashtanga Yoga.

Finding a small patch near one of Saddam Hussein’s former palaces, next to a lake, I set up shop. It wasn’t as picturesque as this might sound—for starters, the pool and house were blanketed with pockmarks from a firefight—but it had some trees to provide shade in the desert heat and was removed enough that I wouldn’t get awkward stares from the other warriors on base. I skipped breakfast every morning and found refuge at my new training spot. Equipped with a mat, my M4 (now sighted in), and a kettlebell, I started playing with different combinations of yoga poses, functional interval workouts, self-defense moves, and breathing and visualization exercises. The visualization was always of me at home with my family after leaving Baghdad (a version of the “future me” visualization I teach in this book). I would listen closely to my body and train from 45 to 90 minutes depending on what my intuition told me I needed. When I was finished with the practice I felt amazingly clear and calm.

As the weeks progressed this practice became my center post in the storm of combat. One day, CDR Wilson, the commanding officer of SEAL Team 1 stopped by to observe my training. Though he was intrigued, I couldn’t get him to join me . . . the demands on his time were simply too much for him to make that leap. Or perhaps he thought what I was doing was a little bit odd, and he didn’t want to risk his men thinking I had converted him! I could only explain what it felt like, but a new “initiate” must experience the practice for him or herself to truly understand the vast benefits of yoga. Now, years later, I realize how valuable

this practice would be for warriors in the field to manage stress, win in their minds, and avoid the devastating effects of PTSD.

While at the height of the Iraq War, I started each workday feeling calm, energized, in control of my emotions, present, and ready for the mission. My mental facilities were sharp, as were my skills in dealing with the stressful environment. These benefits were, in my opinion, a direct result of the daily yoga practice.

Fast-Forward

My experience in Baghdad was profound and propelled me into taking my life in an entirely new direction. When I returned home I amped up my Ashtanga Yoga practice, and launched US CrossFit and the SEALFIT integrated training program. By 2013 I had a worldwide reputation for success in training SEAL and special ops candidates and other elite athletes through SEALFIT and a mental toughness program called Unbeatable Mind. Based on the training program I wrote three books, two of which became bestsellers. A 20,000-square-foot training center in Encinitas, California, became my laboratory. I could be heard saying, “I eat my own dog food,” because I endeavored to train for 2 to 3 hours a day doing a combination of SEALFIT and Kokoro Yoga (and still do to this day).

In 2014, I turned 51 and my body was telling me that I needed to rebalance my training. The combination of the hard-hitting SEALFIT program, with hard-core Ashtanga Yoga, worked well—until I turned 50! Now, it was leading to small injuries and burnout. I needed to find balance in my personal practice, not just for my own comfort, but also so that I could teach athletes and warriors of all ages, not just the younger set. Though I love the Ashtanga practice and community, the rigidity of the routines and difficulty of the poses made me concerned that I would get seriously injured and sidelined as I got older. The warrior’s way is to train every day that you are alive, and I planned to be training until 150—then drop dead on the training floor in Savasana (corpse pose!). Thus as I evolved, I wanted my yoga to work for all stages of life, for differing intentions, and for different types of people. A new approach was in order.

I found my next mentor in Gary Kraftsow, founder of American Viniyoga—also adapted from Krishnamacharya’s teaching. (Krishnamacharya taught a third application of yoga to B. K. S. Iyengar, which is popular in the West.) These three systems (Ashtanga, Viniyoga, and Iyengar) all seem very different to the observer, but to Krishnamacharya they were just “yoga” taught for different applications and different phases of life. This made sense to me:

In the SEALs we used what worked, discarded what didn't, and strove to adapt our training to our situation, environment, and age. I adopted some Viniyoga training methods so that Kokoro Yoga could be more flexible and balanced.

When asked by my athletes to put my method yoga into a fixed form that could be trained at home or in the field, I was hesitant at first. I always molded it to the audience. And who was I to write a book about yoga in the shadow of such incredible teachers and mentors? But one of my students, a former Marine, asked how his Marines and other military members could train in Kokoro Yoga. He implied that they would be open to try yoga if it came from a warrior like myself, who they trusted to give them practical training to improve their survivability and ability to manage combat-related stress. I received a similar message from my CrossFit "fire-breathing" friend Greg Amundson. He felt that the athletic community needed a yoga that could complement their athleticism through durability, spinal health, and breathing. Finally, I got the blessing from Gary, who felt that this community of warriors desperately needed yoga. I agreed, and this book is my humble attempt to serve.

Whether you are a Navy SEAL running toward the sounds of gunfire or an athlete seeking maximum performance in your sport, a dedicated daily practice of Kokoro Yoga will help you to perform at your peak. If you are suffering from combat (or any shock) related stress, it will allow you to recover your peace of body and mind.

As I found during my time in Baghdad, and have continued to discover to this day, there is incredible value to be absorbed from integrated, full-spectrum training. Do you desire to be more flexible, gain core strength, and be more durable? Yoga will absolutely bring it. Do you want to gain composure under pressure and a calm mind? Yoga will bring it. But that's just the beginning. For the athlete, the military operator, the corporate executive, the artist, the auto mechanic, the firefighter, the student, the homemaker, the parent, I believe Kokoro Yoga is a Trojan horse ready to unleash a host of unforeseen benefits, ultimately leading to the highest levels of consciousness. I know, it sounds too good to be true, but if you stay with me and begin a daily routine that meets your practical needs, body type, and goals, then you will be planting the seeds for a powerful future.

Ultimately, this book is about mastering yourself at all levels so that you can become all you were meant to be. Someone who is willing to say yes to the right mission, and say no to the status quo. Someone who can transcend the various strains of neuroses, which today's media would love to have you feed on, and be "sheepdog strong," so you can serve and protect others. Someone who accelerates their development to the highest, integrated stages of consciousness—and become a world-centric warrior and servant to all of humanity.