

Follow your dharma



Melissa Ghattas left Australia to free herself from self-sabotage and discovered her true calling in **the birthplace of yoga**



WORDS: MELISSA GHATTAS. IMAGES: ROSE VALENZISI

I woke to the summer solstice, meditating on the volcanic island of Santorini in the Greek Islands with the divine yogi, Shiva Rea. In a state of complete oneness and peace as the sun rose over the Aegean waters with gratitude, I dedicated my practice to the power and radiance of the sun – the sun, which has guided me to this moment. Summer solstice – the longest day of the year – is the day we receive greatest light.

My journey has been a continuous dance of light and darkness. Just as the moon circles the earth and the earth circles the sun, I likened my own journey to the perpetual cycle of trying to find oneself.

For many years I have often found myself sun gazing and enquiring into this extraordinary force of solar power.

As I reflect from this place of light, I see how far I have come.

In 2003, I was in my darkest phase, lost, confused and disconnected from the world. I needed to free myself from my own self-sabotage. Leaving Australia seemed like the only answer and I remember as clear as the endless blue skies that phone call from Dubai: “You’ve got the job.”

I was on my way to travel the world with Emirates Airline. I was moving to the UAE, the Middle East, to the desert. I didn’t even know Dubai existed.

Was moving far from my family and friends the answer? Would I find my inner light again? Would I find moksha (freedom), santosha (contentment), shanti (peace) and prema (love)?

My first four years working with Emirates was nonetheless extraordinary and I was constantly meeting interesting souls, travellers of the world. Having the opportunity to visit new destinations every week, experiencing new cultures and cuisines, establishing lifetime friendships, nothing seemed boring.

Deep within my core, my darkness travelled with me. My heart and mind were still very much disconnected and in the midst of all these adventures, I was spiritually ungrounded.

I knew I was not living my highest truth, I was still trying to find my dharma (life’s purpose).

Mother India has been one of my greatest inspirations, the birthplace of yoga.

Since 2001 I have been exploring the magic of this country, however it never occurred to me that I would fall in love with an ancient tradition that would fill my heart with all that was missing.

Yoga then became my greatest love affair. I began to practise every chance I had. Integrating and uniting all the fragmented parts of myself, opening from within, freeing my spirit. I finally felt connected.

My flexibility has been an ongoing journey as I faced my own challenges in letting go, to find openness in my mind and body. »

In 2010 I found the courage to follow my dreams and left for India again. Leaving behind all the securities of my job to pursue what I loved most – yoga.

During my time in India, I met my teacher Julie Martin, who gave me the opportunity to teach at Brahmani yoga studio in Goa. It was then that I understood that everything is possible when we release our inner struggle.

Just three years ago I was using two bolsters while attempting Hanumanasana. Only recently I took my leap, just as the story of Hanuman, and for the first time I have found myself in Hanumansana, the splits.

Hanumanasana is dedicated to Hanuman and celebrates his amazing leaps.

Hanuman, the powerful monkey-faced deity and devoted friend and servant of Rama, is known for his extraordinary strength and devotion, which is told in one of the greatest Hindu epics, *The Ramayana*.

Just like Hanuman, we too can take a leap of faith, finding freedom and beauty within ourselves. Whether or not we are in the full posture or half, it doesn't matter.

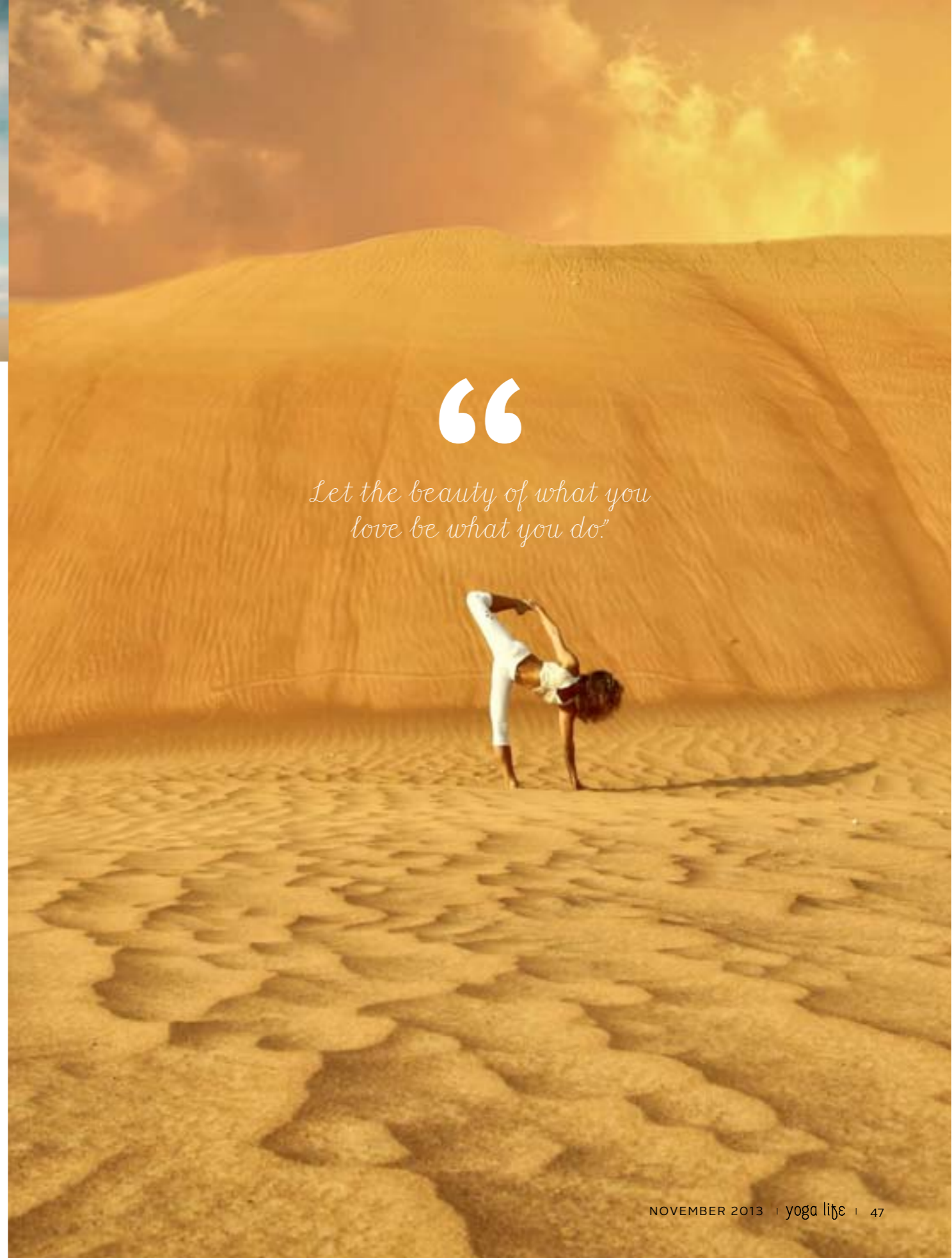
My practice as a student and teacher has taught me if we can breathe with awareness, trust in the moment without holding on or resisting, we connect to our inner strength, just like Hanuman.

As we practise, resistance begins to dissolve and the posture begins to blossom, opening our emotional and physical body.



We all have our own purpose (dharma) to live by. Whether that is in the workplace, our family life, or our self, it requires commitment and strength to succeed. In the words of Rumi: "Let the beauty of what you love be what you do." ✨

Melissa Ghattas is a dedicated student of ashtanga and vinyasa flow yoga, and a 500-hour Yoga Alliance-certified teacher who splits her time teaching between Dubai and Goa. She guides her students with a unique blend of strength, detail and compassion. You can take a class – or several – with Melissa at Zen Yoga in Dubai (www.yoga.ae), The Studio in Dubai (www.thestudiodxb.com) and Brahmani Yoga in Goa, India (www.brahmaniyoga.com).



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