

*Ignition, car sets off, engine noise*

**Neena Pathak:** Every morning, at 8:30am, I put on bike shorts and an oversized T-shirt, then drive six to eight minutes, depending on traffic, to a hot, cavernous room lit like a nightclub.

*Car stops, ignition cuts off, keys jangle*

**Pathak:** I love a ritual, but have never been into coffee or prayer, so I opt for a sweatier form of morning constitutional.

*Car door slams*

*Walking, fade*

**Pathak:** Quick aside because I just looked it up: in British English, morning constitutional refers to taking a walk, like, doing something good for your body's *constitution*. And I know you're not supposed to define a word with the *same* word but it works if you get it. And I think you get it, right? Anyway, in American, morning constitutional means taking a dump.

**Crowd :** *USA! USA! USA!*

*Yoga studio lobby: bell over door, trickling fountain, muzak*

**Pathak:** In the corner is a wooden altar of sorts, with palo santo burning, a stone Buddha statue, and a chalkboard that reads, "Attention is the beginning of devotion. – Mary Oliver" I don't know what religion this is, but I'm here. Every morning. Attentive. Devoted.

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Good morning! Do you need a mat or a towel?

**Pathak:** Nope, I'm all set.

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Ok. Feel free to get set up—

**Pathak** (whispering): *Don't say it don't say it don't say it.*

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Namaste.

*Extremely distorted and stretched out "namaste"*

*Lobby sounds fade*

**Pathak:** My aunt Viju is a Sanskrit scholar.

**Vijaya Chitre:** Yes, Neena?

**Pathak:** : Hi Viju Mami.

**Chitre:** Kai mantay, bol.

**Pathak:** : Ok, so—

**Pathak:** I asked her about the etymology of "namaste."

**Chitre:** (*laughs*) Namaste, hm.

**Pathak:** She said, *namas* means "to bow" or "to bend," and *te* means "to you."

**Neena:** What about "The light in me honors and respects the light—"

**Chitre:** No. No. That light kind of thing is—

**Neena:** Yeah.

**Chitre:** I don't really agree.

**Neena:** Yeah, it's just something they say here in yoga classes sometimes, like, "The divine light in me honors and respects the divine light in you—"

**Chitre:** No. That is—that is exactly, divine and light and all that, I'm sorry, but I get exasperated nowadays by people talking as if they know all these things, and I don't agree!

**Pathak:** Los Angeles has a million yoga studios, and I have been trying all of their discounted first month offers. Kind of like serial monogamy, if you don't think too hard about that analogy.

*Yoga studio bell, people moving around on wooden floor*

**Yoga Teacher 2:** Close your eyes. Take a moment to allow your body to fully be in this space.

*Breathing*

**Pathak:** My body is in this space—

*Breathing starts to sound weirder*

**Pathak:** But my mind isn't quite...here.

*Bell and breathing starts to reverberate together*

**Pathak:** Am I my body? Or my mind? If I'm not really here, then where am I? What am I?

*Sounds get increasingly strange and eerie, then cut out*

**Pathak:** I'm minimally employed, with a lot of free time. Though free time feels less free when it's all the time. So what do I do when I'm free to do anything? I go somewhere to be told what to do. But like, not in a sexy way.

*Dance music*

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Deep breath in through your nose.

*Nose breathing*

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Deep breath out through your nose. This is your ujjayi breath. This will bring heat to your body throughout the class.

*Teacher and music muffle*

*Breathing*

**Pathak:** I'm trying to clear my mind, but now I'm wondering if this yoga studio supports genocide or right-wing Hindu nationalism, or white supremacists in disguise as wellness influencers.

*Music un-muffles*

**Pathak:** I am surrounded by *lu-LU-lemo*. I'm told this pronunciation is wrong.

*Breathing fades out*

*Music pans to other side*

**Yoga Teacher 3:** Yoga is about union of individual and universal consciousness, of inner and outer worlds, of mind and body.

*Music fades*

**Yoga Teacher 3:** In Patanjali's writings on yoga, he says you can't know life through your mind alone.

**Pathak:** Sometimes my mom texts me from my dad's cell phone. It always catches me off guard. Yesterday's text said, "What day do you come home?" I reminded her, and asked how she was feeling after the election. She said, "The worst thing that could happen to me already happened this year."

**Baba:** *(crunching)*

**Pathak:** I'm making a video of you chewing ice.

**Baba:** *(laughs)* Chomped ice feels so soothing.

**Pathak:** Mmm.

**Baba:** But it has to be chomped.

**Pathak:** Like you have to chew on it?

**Baba:** Hm?

**Pathak:** You have to chew on it?

**Baba:** No, I have to crush it on my own. Then it goes on my inner throat very soothingly.

**Pathak:** It can't be pre-crushed.

**Baba:** Yes. *(sound of chewing)*

**Pathak:** A friend who lost a parent the year before I did never wanted to talk about it. Another got really into high stakes sports betting.

*Music*

**Pathak:** And one started marathoning Top Chef, and stopped leaving the house. Everyone noticed, even if they didn't say anything about it. But yoga flies under the radar. It doesn't raise any red flags, even when I myself joke that I'm addicted to it. At most, friends say that it's healthy, aspirational. Virtuous, even.

*Music out*

**Pathak:** But anything can be a drug.

*Driving synth*

**Yoga Teacher 2:** Drop to your knees, chin, and chest. Inhale, chaturanga dandasana.

*Inhaling breath*

**Yoga Teacher 2:** Exhale, downward facing dog.

**Pathak:** In 16th century Europe, Christian scholars were encouraged to addict themselves to God. Addiction didn't really have a positive or negative connotation.

"To addict" just meant "to attach, or to give yourself over to a practice." For the time being, I guess I've given myself over to yoga.

**Yoga Teacher 4:** This isn't about what your neighbor is doing. This is about you and your breath. Deep breath in, downward facing dog.

**Pathak:** Showing up daily for my scheduled dissociation.

**Yoga Teacher 5:** Right foot forward, crescent lunge.

**Pathak:** Feeling a little dead inside, but alive enough to still feel extremely annoyed.

**Yoga Teacher 2:** Warrior two, exhale.

**Pathak:** Annoyed with the guy next to me for breathing loudly.

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Trikonasana, triangle pose.

**Pathak:** Annoyed that I'm homesick for a city I chose to leave.

**Yoga Teacher 3:** Step or hop back, chaturanga.

**Pathak:** Annoyed that my healthcare plan is "*don't get sick.*"

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Hands to your heart center, prayer twist.

**Pathak:** Annoyed that my love language is whichever one my partner isn't giving me.

**Yoga Teacher 4:** Tree pose.

**Pathak:** Annoyed that I brought up love languages. So embarrassing.

**Teachers (montage):** Down dog. Up dog.

**Pathak:** Annoyed that all I can really commit to are my little poses.

**Teachers (montage):** Upward facing dog. Three legged dog. Downward facing dog.

**Pathak:** Annoyed that he's still breathing so loud, my god.

**Teachers (montage):** Up dog, open up your heart. Flip your dog over into wild thing.

**Pathak:** Jesus Christ.

**Teachers:** Deep breath in, downward facing dog

**Pathak:** Annoyed that I'm being a petty bitch.

**Yoga Teacher 1:** Yes! Chair pose! Feel that burn in your glutes!

**Pathak:** Annoyed that I'm not even finding any pleasure in being a petty bitch.

*Music and breathing fade out*

**Yoga Teacher 5:** Baddha virabhadrasana, humble warrior pose.

*Class takes pose, floor creaks*

*Music*

**Pathak:** When my dad was declining, I started ending every day-to-day question with "When my dad is dying." Like, what song should I listen to when my dad is dying? Or, what's the right candy to buy at the drugstore when my dad is dying? The answer was a Canadian children's choir covering "Desperado" by The Eagles. And gummy worms.

**Neena:** What about just like, as an experiment, how would you say "The darkness in me honors the darkness in you?"

**Viju:** *(laughs)* It's so ridiculous, this is all wrong! *(laughs)*

**Yoga Teacher 2:** Deep breath in, child's pose. Whenever you need a break, there's always child's pose.

*Music ends*

**Utkarsh Sanjanwala:** So you know in yoga philosophy, basically, in yogic anatomy, it goes well beyond the physical body.

**Pathak:** My friend Utkarsh has been studying yoga for fifteen years. Almost as long as we've known each other.

**Sanjanwala:** So think about your physical body as a computer. Like an old style desktop computer with a monitor, the keyboard, the mouse and stuff. But the computer is useless unless you run some electrical energy through it, right? Otherwise it is just a box. So electricity that runs through the human hardware. In yoga, we call that "prana," which literally means "life force."

**Pathak:** So is the idea that you need to make sure your hardware is good enough so the electricity can run through it properly?

**Sanjanwala:** Yes, kind of, yeah. Everyone's hardware is really good enough, you know. It's not about how fit or able you are physically. It's about practicing whatever works with your hardware. And then your prana, your life energy, moves through that.

*"Desperado" (from The Langley School Music Project)*

**Pathak:** My dad's name was Jitendra. It's my middle name too. It means, "He who has conquered his senses."

**Langley School Music Project:** "...Desperado, why don't you come to your senses...?"

**Pathak:** I'm tired of always talking about my dad dying. But he keeps being dead, so...



**Langley School Music Project:** "... and freedom? Oh, freedom. That's just some people talking..."

**Pathak:** I'm still trying to live up to my name.

*Song becomes muffled*

*Breathing*

**Yoga Teacher 4:** Shavasana. Corpse pose.

**Pathak:** Why am I doing this?

*Breathing*

**Pathak:** It's something to do.

**Langley School Music Project:** "...you're losing all your highs and lows, ain't it funny how the feeling goes away..."

*Breathing, gradually slowing*

**Yoga Teacher 1 :** We're going to end class with an Om. *(deep breath in)*

**Baba:** Ommmmm. The universe is the om.

**Pathak:** Mhm.

**Baba:** Sarvasva.

**Pathak:** Mm.

**Baba:** Everything is Om.

**Pathak:** Does it feel nice to say?

**Baba:** Yes.

**Pathak:** Does it feel peaceful?

**Baba:** Yes.

**Pathak:** Do you feel peaceful?

**Baba:** Yes. Sometimes I do Om and I go to sleep.