

yoga

JOURNAL

GUIDED MEDITATION
Strategies to
Train Your
Wandering Mind

Can You Trust the Teacher Within, or Do You Need a Guru?

By Victoria Moran

How Yoga Helps Kids
Become Better Learners

What You Need to Know
If You're Having Trouble
Getting Pregnant

Sarah Powers and
Tim Miller on
Developing an
Authentic Practice



Lost and Found

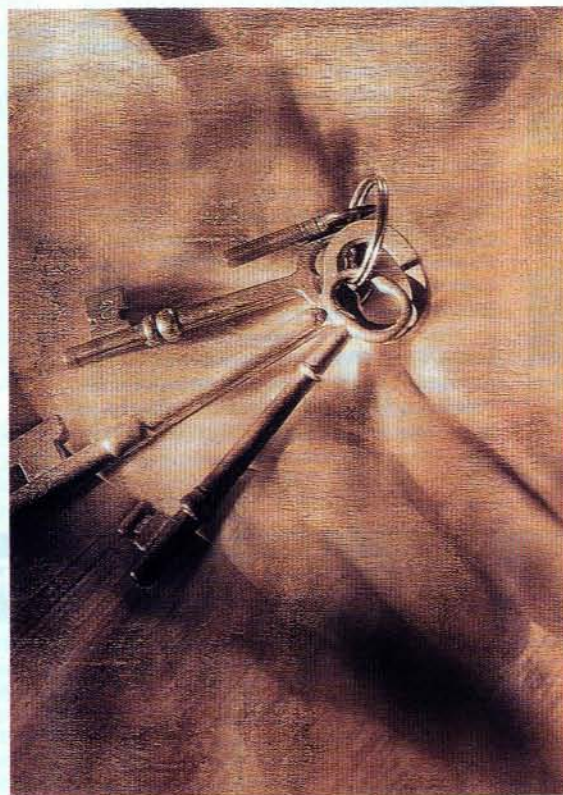
For the author, the anxiety of losing her keys led to the discovery of how strongly fear lived within her.

NOT LONG AGO, I lost my keys. At the time I lived in a remote coastal village half an hour from anywhere. My husband was away on business, and I was home alone. Of our few neighbors, many were reclusive, like me, and often didn't answer their doors. After a few hours of turning my house upside down and working myself into a near frenzy, I took a deep breath and sat down. I soon realized that, more than the missing keys (many of which I no longer used), the one thing I felt lost without was my can of Mace.

I grew up in 1970s Berkeley, a nerdy girl attending a tough inner-city elementary school. Almost all of the students had a street-savvy confidence I sorely lacked, and I was beaten up often. Later, in high school, I was attacked and mugged many times. In college, I fought off a rapist who threw me into bushes at the School for the Deaf—a terrible place to be attacked because no one can hear you scream. That was the final straw. I began to study martial arts, which led me to Zen, self-compassion, cultivating a sense of safety within, and ultimately to yoga. Even so, I still felt the need for that can of Mace and brought it with me everywhere. It was my weapon, my safety net. I had kept it on my key ring for 15 years, though I had never once used it.

On that day of the lost keys, I dug a little deeper into my panic. Assessing my situation rationally, I knew I was sheltered and warm. But if I left the house to walk the dog or get groceries, I would have to leave the door open. *Open*. That was my worst fear: being vulnerable, a potential target of attack.

Through the various disciplines I practiced, I came to realize that I had lived most of my adult life unknowingly



in fear. My chest was contracted; I hunched my shoulders and walked as if I were turning away from the world—which I was. I didn't trust most people. I still looked over my shoulder when I walked. And why was I so relieved to discover that my gentle Japanese husband was a third-degree black belt? Since I had not always been able to protect myself, I really wanted to be with someone who could. I wore my fear like a skin, keeping me one layer away from the world.

As I sat down and breathed through my panic, I had found where I'd buried my courage: right there in my heart—the place I'd shut down. A well of sadness opened inside; I cried and cried and cried. As afraid as I was of being harmed, I realized that in a very real way I had been more afraid of being fearless. Suddenly, I saw that

the Mace somehow anchored my fears to me, kept me tethered to my past, and I knew that it was time to let it go. And in that moment, I decided to move out of my remote village and back into the world.

When I gave up looking, I found my keys on a bookshelf in my study. Then I threw away the keys I didn't use and removed the Mace. I can't say for sure that nothing bad will ever happen to me again; the world can be an extremely dangerous place. But I had discovered I could no longer let fear live so strongly in me. I had to risk opening my heart, trusting that the world would be a safe place to be myself. It took a simple thing like losing my keys to help me unlock that door. ■

Leza Lowitz is a writer, translator, and yoga teacher. Her book, Yoga Poems: Lines to Unfold By (Stone Bridge Press, 2000), received the PEN Josephine Miles Award for Best Poetry Book.