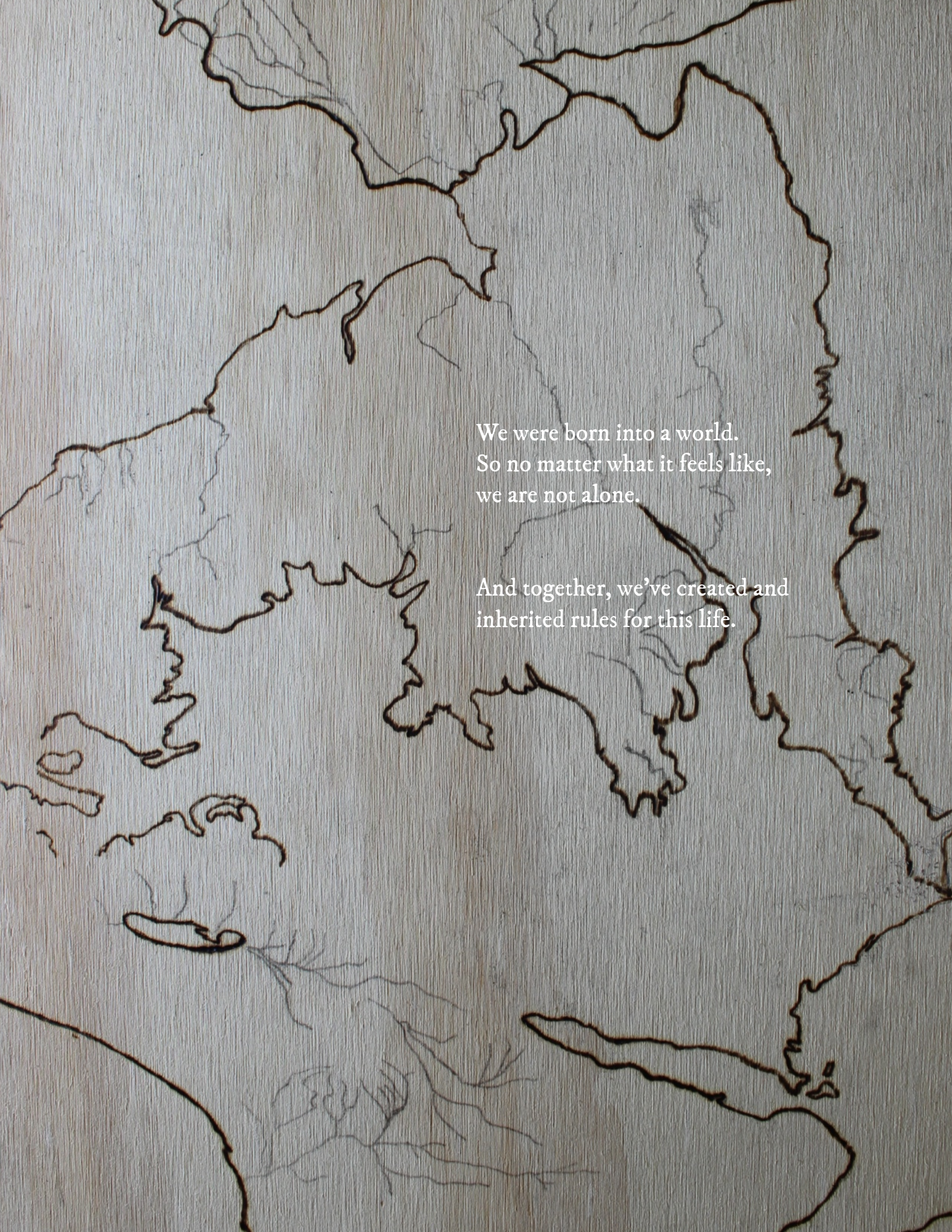


April 2015

www.summercushman.com/magazine

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We were born into a world.
So no matter what it feels like,
we are not alone.

And together, we've created and
inherited rules for this life.

Commandment:

n.

a divine command.

Testimony:

n.

1. an oral or written statement under oath or affirmation.
2. declaration or statement of fact.
3. evidence, demonstration

Abstention:

n.


the act or an instance of abstaining.

(Abstain: v. restrain oneself; refrain from indulging in.)

Observance:

n.

1. the act or process of keeping or performing a law,
duty, custom, ritual, etc.
2. an act of a religious or ceremonial character;
a customary rite.
3. the rule of a religious order.



We have multiple sets of rules. We have rules for this group and that community. For this place and that situation. For this individual and that country. It isn't always clear who decided these rules or determined whether or not they are fair.

Do you feel like you helped create them?

Can you articulate them?

We follow unspoken and unwritten rules. But we're also influenced by carefully codified lists of ethics.

Have you ever stopped to notice which lists have shaped your behavior?

In my own life, I know of three.

Then God
spoke all
these words:

I am
the Lord your
God, who brought you
out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery;
you shall have no other gods
before me.

Remember the
sabbath day,
and keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor
and do all your work.
But the seventh day is a
sabbath to the Lord your God;
you shall not do any work—
you, your son or your daughter,
your male or female slave, your
livestock, or the alien resident
in your towns. For in six days
the Lord made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
but rested the seventh day;
therefore the Lord blessed
the sabbath day and
consecrated it.

You shall
not murder.

You shall not
make for yourself
an idol, whether in the
form of anything that is
in heaven above, or that is
on the earth beneath, or
that is in the water under
the earth. You shall not bow
down to them or worship them,
for I the Lord your God am a
jealous God, punishing
children for the iniquity
of parents, to the third
and the fourth generation of
those who reject me,
but showing steadfast love
to the thousandth generation
of those who love me
and keep my
commandments.

You shall not
commit adultery.

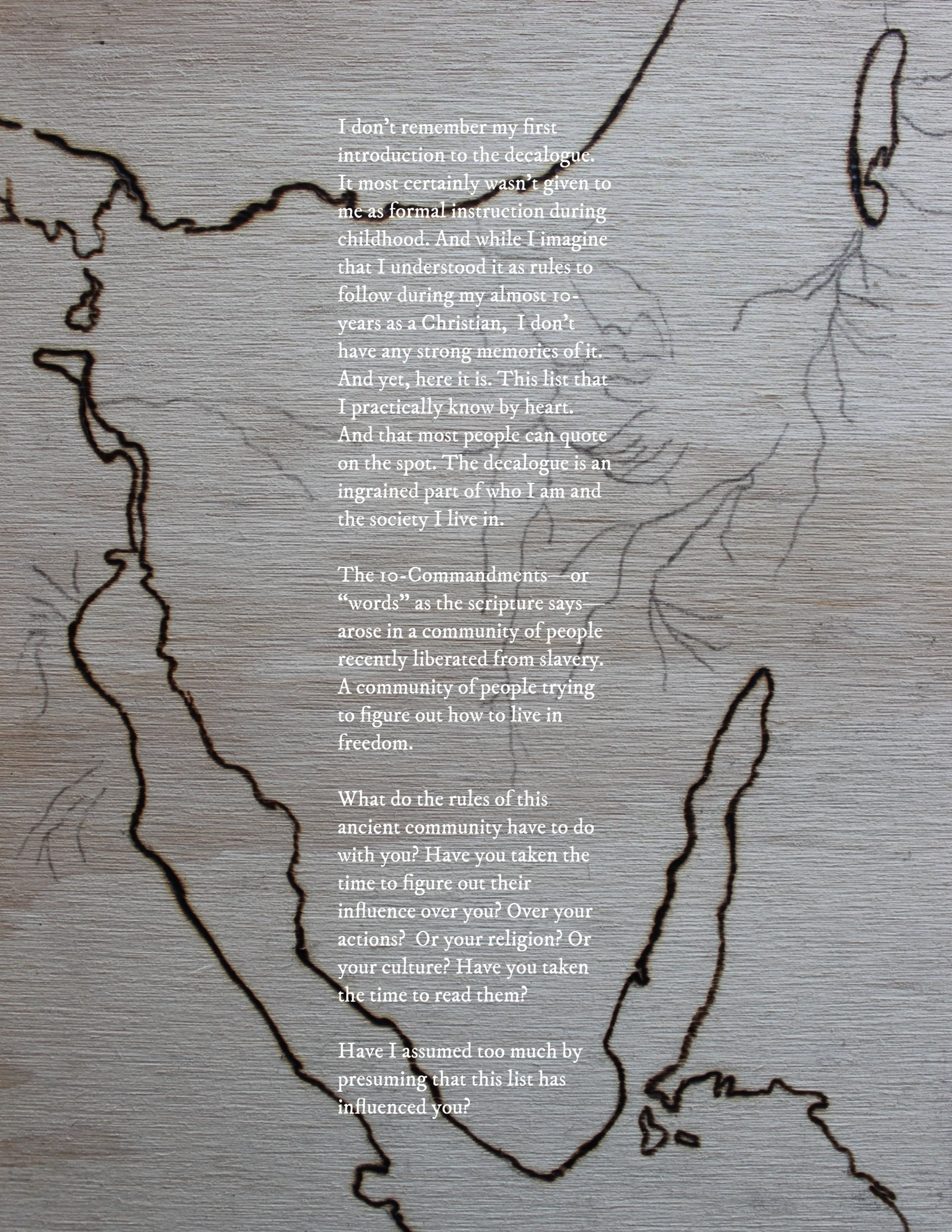
You shall not
bear false witness
against your neighbor.

You shall
not make wrongful
use of the name of the
Lord your God, for the
Lord will not acquit
anyone
who misuses
his name.

Honor your father
and your mother,
so that your days
may be long
in the land
that the Lord
your God is
giving you.

You shall not steal.

You shall not
covet your neighbor's
house, you shall not
covet your neighbor's
wife, or male or
female slave,
or ox, or donkey,
or anything that
belongs to
your neighbor.



I don't remember my first introduction to the decalogue. It most certainly wasn't given to me as formal instruction during childhood. And while I imagine that I understood it as rules to follow during my almost 10-years as a Christian, I don't have any strong memories of it. And yet, here it is. This list that I practically know by heart. And that most people can quote on the spot. The decalogue is an ingrained part of who I am and the society I live in.

The 10-Commandments—or “words” as the scripture says—arose in a community of people recently liberated from slavery. A community of people trying to figure out how to live in freedom.

What do the rules of this ancient community have to do with you? Have you taken the time to figure out their influence over you? Over your actions? Or your religion? Or your culture? Have you taken the time to read them?

Have I assumed too much by presuming that this list has influenced you?

from the Faith & Practice of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends:

For more than three hundred years, Friends have acted upon shared concerns through practices which historically have been distinctive and definitive. While the specifics of Friends' practice have varied as times have changed, Friends today continue to have concerns and underlying beliefs similar to those of past generations. The word testimonies is used to refer to this common set of deeply held, historically rooted attitudes and modes of living in the world.

Testimonies bear witness to the truth as Friends in community perceive it—truth known through relationship with God. The testimonies are expressions of lives turned toward the Light, outward expressions reflective of the inward experience of divine leading, differently described by various Friends and in changing eras. Often in the past they were defined specifically, such as the testimony against taking oaths; recently it has become customary to speak of them more generally, as in the testimony of simplicity. Through the testimonies, with that measure of the Light that is granted, Friends strive for unity and integrity of inner and outer life, both in living with ourselves and others and in living in the world.

Testimony: A guiding principle of conduct that bears witness to the presence of God in the world and in our lives. Though there is no official list of such testimonies, Friends have traditionally identified peace and nonviolence, equality, simplicity, stewardship, community, and integrity as their practical principles.

Queries: A set of questions, based on Friends' practices and testimonies, which are considered by Meetings and individuals as a way of both guiding and examining individual and corporate lives and actions. As such, they are a means of self examination. Queries to be considered regularly are included in Faith and Practice; others may be formulated by a committee or Meeting that seeks to clarify for itself an issue it needs to address.


simplicity

peace

integrity

community

equality



As I was moving
away from
fundamentalist
Christianity, I
discovered the
Quakers. A sect
of people with
questions rather
than creeds.

What does it
mean to live in
community
without a creed?
Without a set of
imposed rules?
Or is the
commitment to
questioning the
rule?

And even
without written
rules, are there
unspoken
expectations?
Acceptable
answers?

What questions
do you regularly
ponder?

Upon the destruction of impurities as a result of the practice of yoga, the lamp of knowledge arises. This culminates in discriminative discernment.

The eight limbs are abstentions, observances, posture, breath control, disengagement of the senses, concentration, mediation, and absorption.

The yamas are nonviolence, truthfulness, refrainment from stealing, celibacy, and renunciation of [unnecessary] possessions.

[These yamas] are considered the great vow. They are not exempted by one's class, place, time, or circumstance. They are universal.

The observances are cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study [of scripture], and devotion to God.

Upon being harassed by negative thoughts, one should cultivate counteracting thoughts.

Negative thoughts are violence, etc. They may be [personally] performed, performed on one's behalf by another, or authorized by oneself; they may be triggered by greed, anger, or delusion; and they may be slight, moderate, or extreme in intensity. One should cultivate counteracting thoughts, namely, that the end results [of negative thoughts] are ongoing suffering and ignorance.

ahimsa -In the presence of one who is established in nonviolence, enmity is abandoned.

satya -When one is established in truthfulness, one ensures the fruition of actions.

āsteya -When one is established in refrainment from stealing, all jewels manifest.

brahmacarya -Upon the establishment of celibacy, power is attained.

aparigrāha -When refrainment from covetousness becomes firmly established, knowledge of the whys and wherefores of births manifests.

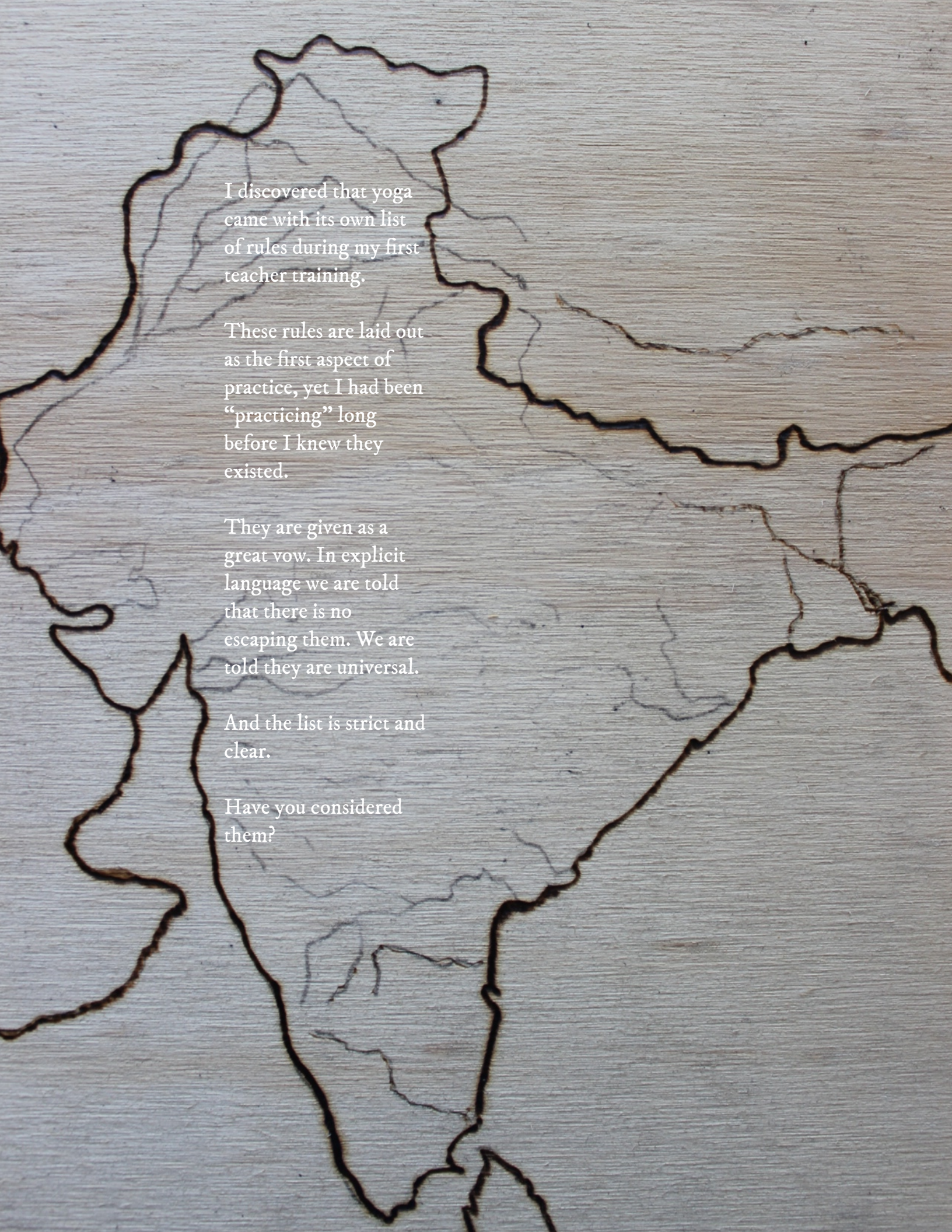
saucha -By cleanliness, one [develops] distaste for one's body and the cessation of contact with others.

santosa -Upon the purification of the mind, [one attains] cheerfulness, one-pointedness, sense control, and fitness to perceive the self. From contentment, the highest happiness is attained.

tāpas -From austerity, on account of the removal of impurities, the perfection of the senses and body manifests.

svadhyaya -From study [of scripture], a connection with one's deity of choice is established.

Isvarapranidhana -From submission to God comes the perfection of samadhi.



I discovered that yoga
came with its own list
of rules during my first
teacher training.

These rules are laid out
as the first aspect of
practice, yet I had been
“practicing” long
before I knew they
existed.

They are given as a
great vow. In explicit
language we are told
that there is no
escaping them. We are
told they are universal.

And the list is strict and
clear.

Have you considered
them?






Nothing is static (not even a divine command). Our rules—like everything else—are constantly changing. They are slowly, yet continuously, being reshaped in response to our living of them.

There is no “one right thing” that can always be called upon.

No perfect moral.

It doesn't matter how nostalgic we are, the nature of our universe (the nature of constant change) won't allow for one.



No system of ethics will ever matter unless you have authentically “digested” it.
But what counts as authentic digestion? Is it authentic when we follow a rule we’ve never thought about?
When the rules are enacted out of sheer habit? Our consistent action indicates digestion. But what kind?
Can we call something authentic if it happened without awareness?

What rules do you follow?
What ethics do you hold with intention?
What list of ethics do you live by?
How often do you stop to reflect on them?
To measure your life against them?