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# Educating the Whole Being: Yoga & Mindfulness in Schools

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Educating the Whole Being:  
Yoga and Mindfulness in Schools

by

Trang Huynh

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## INTRODUCTION

It was a hot muggy night—the typical weather you would expect at the peak of summer in Vietnam—as I sat on the apartment balcony, with my legs between the railings, dangling off the edge. The power in the neighborhood had gone out again and being afraid of the dark, being outside under the moonlight was the safest place I felt I could be. Sitting there, I was praying with all my might to A-di-đà Phật, or the Amitābha Buddha, the popular Buddha in Vietnamese Buddhism, to send my family and I to the United States. I was only five, turning six at the time, but I remember this moment vividly because less than a few months later, we got the news that our paperwork had finally been approved. For me, as a little girl afraid of the dark, Vietnam was the darkness and America was the light. I was told that America was so advanced and full of wealth that blackouts didn't exist. I was told that America was the land of equality—in terms of wealth and opportunities. There was no poverty and everyone could afford to live a comfortable life. I was told that anything was possible, as long as you worked hard enough because the government will always be there to help you out.

It is only now that I can reflect back on my childhood years and realize that I had never experienced the America I had dreamed of. Having bought into the America dream, my dad had hoped to become a teacher again, but regardless of how hard he worked, time and effort only seemed to distance himself from achieving this goal. While simultaneously working a full-time job to support his family, my dad went back to school to earn his Bachelor's and then his Master's, but no one wanted to hire an inexperienced 40 year-old because being a university professor in Vietnam does not count for anything in America. So, my parents were stuck relying on their assembly-line jobs to provide for us—assembly line jobs that were directly tied to the

health of the economy. Inevitably, we were victims to the volatile economy, and having spent their life-savings to come to America, my parents were never able to dig us out of poverty for too long. When I graduated college with a starting salary higher than both of my parents' combined, I thought I had finally freed myself from the chains of poverty, but then I found myself tied with the golden handcuffs. The support and assistance that allowed me to succeed only wanted me to succeed so that I could then be a slave to corporate America. The establishment of the United States only preferred those who could help it in accumulating wealth and furthering its capitalistic goals. This has been notably exemplified in how the United States treat other nations who stand in the way of its economic endeavors. We simply need to ask ourselves why we find it necessary to colonize other countries or fight another country over *their* oil wells. I don't mean to sound dramatic or cynical, but I fear that we can no longer ignore this ugly truth about America. American citizens are afforded the freedom to participate in governmental elections and the freedom of religion, but while we have enjoyed certain individual freedoms such as those just mentioned, we have been simultaneously controlled and oppressed by those who run our economy. This is not inherently a negative thing, but somewhere along the way, we have lost our moral compass as a nation and our economic aspirations have led to an excess of greed and corruption.

Seeing how negative and destructive America was, and continues to be, made me feel ashamed to call myself an American. I wanted to run away again, to live somewhere else. I was upset with my country and embarrassed to be an American. Here we were, a country capable of so much greatness and capable of doing so much good for the world and yet we choose to invest our time and resources into terrorizing countries that didn't agree with our national viewpoints or

threatened to displace us as a world power. We destroy the world with our greed and consumption. I felt isolated in my frustrations because most of my peers were too busy and distracted to care. They were trapped in a cycle of working at a job they hated, complaining about their suffering, and then spending money on indulgences to drown their sorrows. And among those who shared my frustrations towards the status quo and a desire for social change, was also a shared feeling of overwhelm. So, I thought, it was time for me to leave and let America sort out its mess. But then I realized that my tendency to run away from problems is just another form of consumerism. To run away from something that seems broken towards something that is whole and new is the same as replacing an old but perfectly useable pair of shoes for a brand new one. Another moment of clarity led me to “the how I can help.” I realized that it was due to the failure in my early years of education that I had amassed my ignorance and it was only through yoga and mindfulness that I was able to remove the layers of ignorance, so it must be through yoga and mindfulness at the level of secondary education that I can offer a way for others to the same.

America’s education didn’t always look the way it does now. Two main factors, the emergence of modern science and technology and an appeal for a universal education led to a restructuring of the social, political, and economic framework in Europe and America. Universal education and scientific advancement seemed the best way to move a society forward, as echoed by Francis Bacon’s belief that “science would lead humankind into a promised land, a technological age of continuing progress” (Dawson xi). Unfortunately, even the best of intentions can lead to negative, unintended consequences. The shift towards a universal and science-based education led to the disappearance of the advantages of the traditional education system: a rich

education steeped in the arts and tradition with a moral and ethical basis. America, after the Civil War, also saw a massive economic boom, transitioning into an industrial society, and an influx of immigrants from all over the globe. This change to America's social, political, and economic structure helped realize the ideal of universal education out of a necessity. America needed a way to prepare young people to work in factories and they needed a defense against the great waves of immigrants arriving at the time. They needed workers who could do one task on the factory line for hours at a time, read and understand instructions, and comply with management without questions. For the new immigrants, the establishment saw education as a "vehicle for the efforts of one class to civilize another and thereby ensure that society would remain tolerable, orderly, and safe" (Leland & Kasten 84). This factory model education is still predominantly what we have today. John Dewey, one of the most influential modern American educationist, feared that socialization of education faced the danger of "the school becoming an instrument of social conformity and a means for the establishment of the mass mind" (Dawson 63). His fears have been realized. Conforming to the conditions of modernity and technology and the rigorous interpretation of separation of church and state, we have lost the classical teachings of moral subjects, the art of speech and persuasion, an exact knowledge of the value of words and an understanding of the laws of thought and the rules of logic.

I am not advocating for us to go back to the time of clerical education for a select few, but it is time for us to evaluate the flaws in our successes. In our distrust of religion and fervor for science, and idealism for a universal education, we have reduced the educational system to a factory-like model, cranking out students like "products" instead of taking our time to mold these young men and women into a human being. The strength of the traditional education, rooted in



religion and saved for the select few, is that it taught students the moral and ethical codes fundamental to all religious teachings, the laws of thought and logic, and the art of philosophy and contemplation. America's rigorous interpretation of separation of Church and State "has led to a banning of any kind of religious teachings, resulting in 'on the one hand, to the propagation of that kind of substitute religion ... as the established faith of the democratic state; and on the other hand, to the devaluation of traditional religion as unessential, non-vital, exceptional and perhaps even unsocial'" (Dawson 84). Without going back to a clerical education and without violating the separation of Church and State, we can use yoga and mindfulness as the bridge between secularism and religion. They are rooted in religious traditions, but they do not lose their significance or meaning when applied practically in day to day life, in a secular manner.

Furthermore, neither traditions profess a god, though god-like figures have been pasted on to them, and thus do not contradict the still heavily Judeo-Christian make-up of America. As a yoga and meditation teacher, I have seen for myself and experienced the countless benefits yoga and meditation can yield. The qualities and values a yoga and mindfulness meditation practice cultivates—wisdom, insight, compassion, and inner freedom—are what we need to temper the greed and corruption that is unavoidable in our modern capitalist society. We do not have to go back to our old ways, but to keep moving forward, we need to look back at the ancient wisdom for tools to help us along the way. Otherwise, we may destroy ourselves and our society on our path.

In the following chapters, I will first outline the problems of modern society, specifically in the United States. Then, I will come back to the issue of education and how fixing our education problem is necessary to fixing the problems of modern life. While some say that education

cannot change unless society changes, since education is “enculturation,” a reflection of the culture and traditions of that society, just as education was used during the Industrial Age to mold young people into factory workers, education can now be used to do the reverse. Following the chapter detailing the status of current American education, I will propose a sample for bringing yoga and mindfulness into schools. Finally, in the conclusions, I will address critiques and present similar work that is currently happening.

# CHAPTER 1: THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

## Introduction

For over 2 million years, humankind lived and cooperated within and around other animal and plant species. Humankind, like their cousins, the great apes, functioned as part of the ecosystem. But for whatever reason, yet to be fully substantiated, humankind made an extraordinary leap from the middle of the food chain to the top of the pyramid about 100,000 years ago. This rapid rise to the top had enormous consequences for us and the rest of the ecosystem. All other species at the top of the food chain only got there through the excruciatingly slow process of evolution, decade after decade, for over millions of years. This slow process allowed the ecosystem to develop checks and balances to prevent animals at the top of the pyramid from wreaking too much havoc and it allowed the animals themselves to adjust to their level of power (Harari). Humankind, on the hand, ascended to the top in a relatively short amount of time—approximately 100,000 years—thus giving the ecosystem zero time to create those checks and balances. “Moreover, humans themselves failed to adjust” (Harari ch.1). As Yuval Noah Harari argues in his book *Sapiens*, this quick jump the top, without any time to adjust physiologically and psychologically has resulted in many calamities, “from deadly wars to ecological catastrophes” (Harari ch.1). This is not an absurd assumption. Most, if not all, of humankind’s modern problems have been self-inflicted. Thanks to the cognitive revolution, our ability to reason and to be consciously self-aware has allowed us to innovate, to invent tools, and to modernize. Unfortunately, in our short rise to the top, we have not forgotten the prey mentality that was crucial for our ancestors’ survival. Thus, if left unchecked, we succumb to our more

primal fears and innate desires. What this translates to are physiological reactions to unfounded threats and irrational decisions. So even as we furiously try to progress humankind through modern science and technology, we are inadvertently also causing our own destruction. Each advancement comes with it more problems, each one more difficult to solve than the last. Francis Bacon believed that past generations “had wandered in error,” but now “science would lead humankind into a promised land, a technological age of continuing progress” and René Descartes took it one step further, proclaiming that science was the instrument by which men would become “the masters and possessors of nature” (Dawson xi; 40). But what this progress has led to in our recent history, is two world wars, nuclear destructions, countless civil wars, unspeakable genocides, the extinction of many species at the hand of mankind, and the physical destruction of our own habitat, Mother Earth. Unfortunately, as one of the technological leaders of the world and as the most powerful nation, America has also been at the forefront of this self-destruction.

The results of the 2016 presidential election speaks volume to volatility and deep systemic issues in America, but Trump is not the first crack in the foundation. Things have been headed this way for a long time now. Not to be misunderstood, I am in no way supportive or empathetic to Trump and his administration, but Trump is the quintessential embodiment of the dark side of the United States. His actions as an individual and now as the president exemplifies the behaviors that America, as a nation, has been guilty of. But for those who are protesting Trump and his policies, they must not forget the true source of the problem: the social, political, and economic foundations that have allowed individuals such as Trump to prosper. The problem will not go away simply by eliminating Trump. The problem is with the political structure and the

cultural foundation that has allowed for such destructive ways of operating for most of American history and which has bred the perfect environment of discontent for Trump to rise to such a stature of power. The responsibility of the federal government is to take care of its citizens, to protect their health and well-being and to create an environment in which each and every citizen can prosper. Instead, what American citizens have been given is a culture in which only a small percentage of American citizens prosper while the rest of the nation to live below poverty level. Those who need the most support and help to succeed are instead ignored or shamed while others are rewarded for the corruption and exploitation with fame and success. Worst of all, those who try to speak out and fight back against this cultural norm are painted as the enemy—creating divisions in an already weak and divisive public. As technologically advanced as we may be, we have not moved that far beyond our primitive survival nature. In fact, we may even have regressed in terms of how destructive and violent we have become. The solution then, is not to impeach Trump or to elect a new President. There will always be someone like Trump or worst. Much of the corruption and destruction have been devised by a minority of power elites. So for change to happen, we must come together as a community for social good in order to keep such destructive individuals few in numbers and isolated. Humans are essentially herd animals. We are stronger when we live and work as a community and we are weak and unsafe when we are isolated. When a virus is attacked by enough healthy antibodies, the virus dies. But if the virus is allowed to multiply in numbers, then it wins.

## How Did We Get Here?

Recently, during my trip to Germany, I was having a conversation with a local and without any agenda, in the most authentic and well-meaning way, my new friend asked me, “Capitalism is America’s ‘culture,’ isn’t it?” Unfortunately, I had to agree. We have reached a point in American history where capitalism is the driving force and number one priority behind policy and decision-making. Capitalism rules America. This is the case because there are no other competing networks—there is no one big church, no dominating military power, and no big government (Domhoff par.2). The one unifying interest is creating and maintaining wealth. My German friend was right. The thing that defines and unites Americans, culture, is capitalism. America was not always the big bad wolf and commercialism has not always been the reigning factor in decision-making. Once upon a time, America was the underdog, fighting for freedom from the imperial rule of the king and his British empire. Our forefathers were idealists who envisioned a free country where hard work would be rewarded in the form of wealth and comfort; where freedom and civil liberties were a given; and where one’s only obstacle to success was one’s own limited thinking. But, somewhere along the way, with changes to the economic infrastructure, as a society, we have sacrificed freedom and civil liberties for wealth and comfort, at least for a small minority of the population. I acknowledge that there have always been injustices since the founding of the American colonies, slavery being a big one, but even though slavery has been abolished and women can vote, there still exists so much discrimination and injustices towards a majority of the population. It is just much harder to see.

## **Economic Principles That Dominate American Thought**

One of the most influential work to have influenced American history from the beginning is Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. The most popular idea captured from Smith's manifesto is the concept of "the invisible hand," although though he only ever mentioned this phrase once in this manifesto and once in an earlier work. The idea behind this phrase is that self-interested behavior in a free marketplace leads to benefits for society more often than if an individual were to take actions directly intended to benefit society. Thomas Jefferson even "cited Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* as evidence that a robust economy could result from the strength of individual decisions rather than government policies" (Matthews par.7). This is a logical conclusion after the tyrannical rule of the British empire on the English colonies before independence. The idea has been used in countless arguments for policy that protect corporate interest over the public right. But what has been conveniently ignored in the same manifesto is Smith's urging to be wary of the "masters of mankind" who are the "principal architects" of government policy and who pursue their maxim of "All for ourselves and nothing for other people" (Smith). At the time of his writing, he was referring to the merchants and manufacturers of England who made sure their own interests were protected, no matter how grievous the effect on others, both abroad and at home (Chomsky ch.1). This is not far from the way things are now, especially as we seem to have forgotten the key point in Smith's argument: profit for the benefit of society, not just the factory owners and corporations.

The second part of Smith's argument, which has also been argued by many economists and philosophers is a free market. The argument for a free market economy relies on the assumption that market forces such as supply and demand are the best determinants for collective well-being

and that government intervention is inefficient and ineffective in making the optimal economic decision for all participants. This philosophy generally paints the government as a self-interested entity hoarding profits only for itself. What we are witnessing now is not the workings of an evil government dictating the actions of a business, but rather a government that is being controlled by corporations to carry out actions out of their own self-interest. Thus, instead of a truly free market relying on the forces of supply and demand, we have a market run by a few powerful corporate elites who also have their hands wrapped up in government, wielding the power of the government for their own benefits. So we see politicians and legislators pushing for policy that benefit the economic elite at the expense of the masses: “revised taxation and other fiscal policies, deregulation, changes in the rules of corporate governance allowing huge gains for executives, and so on” (Chomsky ch.6). These policy decisions have created a vicious cycle in which wealth have become highly concentrated, dramatically so in the top .1 percent of the American population. According to a recent CNN article, eight men now control as much wealth as the world's poorest 3.6 billion people (Kottasova). Those with the most money have the most power because they have the most access to resources. It is no longer a market determined by the forces of supply and demand, but rather a market of fabricated demand and excessive supply. Worst, as detailed later, corporate executives and government officials run in the same circle and hold the same seats. The problem is not a lack of government involvement in policing corporations; the problem is a government being dictated by corporations and their lobbyists. Regardless, the concept of a free market remains a stronghold for Americans, even though it only serves a select few. “While wealth and power have narrowly concentrated, for most of the population real incomes have stagnated and people have been getting by with increased work



hours, debt, and asset inflation, regularly destroyed by the financial crises that began as the regulatory apparatus was dismantled starting in the 1980s” (Chomsky ch.4).

## **How the Economic Elites Maintain Power**

The power brokers in America are made up of those in the upper socioeconomic class who are active participants in business and politics in America. The upper class only make up .5% to 1% of the population, and yet are grossly over-represented in leading roles in corporations, non-profit organizations, and the government (Domhoff sec. 2 par.9). They also own 35-40% of all privately held wealth in the United States and receive 12-15% of total yearly income (Domhoff sec. 2 par.9). Despite being part of such a minority group, the influence of the upper class extends far and wide. This is made possible through direct and indirect means of oppression.

### *Indirect Tactics of Oppression*

Indirect tactics of oppression are actions and behavior done on either end which make the inequality of power possible. I will refer to the two indirect tactics as: 1) union of the elites and 2) division of the masses.

The first tactic, union of the elites, refer to the fact that those who hold the most power work extremely hard to maintain power by sticking together with each other. It would be simplistic to think of the upper class as being fully homogenous in ideology and goals. Their policy opinions may differ depending on which sector of business they come from, some may be more conservative or religious than others, but the one thing they all have in common is the desire to make a profit and to maintain their wealth. And this goal is the number one priority that

tends to eclipse all other differences. The upper class have done a great job setting up systems that support a mixing and networking among their class. This ranges from living in exclusive suburban neighborhoods, children attending the same private schools and ivy league universities, belonging to the same country clubs, attending a variety of formal functions and balls, having the same top lawyers and accountants, etc. On the business side, several studies show that 15-20% of corporate directors sit on two or more boards, part of the “inner circle” of the corporate directorate, and thus “unite 80-90% of the largest corporations in the United States into a well-connected ‘corporate community’” (Domhoff sec. 2 par.12).

The majority of the population, on the other hand, while theoretically should be holding more power in a democracy, have very little ability to wield any sort of influence because they are unable to unite together on a common cause. Separately, each person holds very little financial or political power compared to the power elites so the only chance for success is through a unifying power. But recognizing this, the power brokers have worked tirelessly to make sure the populace stays divided and distracted over a number of issues and causes. This is the third tactic of indirect oppression: division of the masses. Historically, this was the division among free and slaves, then white and black, then various immigrant ethnic groups. And now, the public is even more divided than ever with identities of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. It is not that a few elite individuals have full control over the majority of the population. Rather, they have the unique ability to set the rules under which all other groups and classes must operate and tactics of resistance must still fall under these rules. And this is not to say there has never been any resistance. America has a long history of dissent and resistance, with three especially successful movements which have, in turn, had a positive effect on other

smaller movements. These three movements are the Labor Movement, the Women's Rights Movements, and the Civil Rights Movements. The momentum of these movements have ebbed and flowed, with overlapping successes. The many strikes of the Labor Movement have given us rights such as the 8 hour work day, the 40 hour work week, weekends, minimum wage, the right to unionize, and health care. The Women's Rights Movement, though it started with a broad spectrum of goals, focused in on solely securing women's right to vote. After the successful ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920, the women's voice in the political and public arena grew louder, and we began to see more legislation for equality. Such legislation includes the Equal Pay Act of 1963, requiring employers to give equal pay for men and women performing the same job duties; Title VII, barring employment discrimination by private employers, employment agencies, and unions; creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Title IX, requiring equal access to educational programs for men and women; Roe v. Wade, nullifying anti-abortion laws in 46 states. Finally, the successes of the American Civil Rights Movement ended the segregation laws, gave African Americans the right to vote, and required affirmative action to achieve integrated schools. The successes of the Civil Rights Movement was not only a major win for African Americans, but it galvanized other minority movements.

However, these movements only succeeded once they were able to maintain a united front. For example, the Labor Movement suffered many set backs, with many lines of division—race and ethnicity, skilled vs. unskilled workers, etc.. Workers were not even able to overcome the divisions enough to form their own political party, forcing a split between the Democrats and the Republicans. Similarly in 1869, disagreements over the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments and the relationship between women's suffrage and the movement for racial equality divided the

Women's Rights Movement between two organizations: NWSA and AWSA. It was only after they merged in 1890 that they were able to gain some success and momentum. And within the Civil Rights Movement, there was even division for a long time between methods of resistance. Though we can never really know for sure, I wonder if the movement could have had success sooner if Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. had a consensus on tactics earlier on in their movements. It has been noted that by the end of Malcolm X's life, he had come to agree with King's path. Furthermore, the individual rights that were won as a result of these historical movements have given the public a false sense of progress.

### *Direct Tactics of Oppression*

Direct tactics of oppression are actions of persuasion taken by the economic elites to maintain a desired narrative through mass media. While force and violence was initially used to curtail the resistance, as exemplified by the often bloody strikes of the labor movement, it soon became clear to those in charge that it "was necessary to devise more subtle means to ensure corporate rule, using a flood of sophisticated propaganda and 'scientific methods of strike breaking'" (Carey, 26-27). Major efforts have since been devoted to the development and growth of persuasion industries such as public relations, advertising, and marketing. These industries cleverly create a narrative that continues to promote the ideals of the founding fathers and the values so highly valued by Americans: freedom, liberty, and equal opportunity. Yet, whether these values are actually being practiced is up for debate. The promotion of ideals simply work to keep the public pacified, apathetic, and distracted. I categorize the two direct tactics of oppression as: 1) consumerism and 2) political involvement.

Consumerism has been the most successful means of oppression by keeping the public distracted from important issues. Gary Cross argues in his book, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in America*, that there has been a sharp increase in consumerism in the modern era due to many factors that have given corporations more legislative and marketing power. For example, during the Reagan administration, the FCC and FTC were headed by two individuals who, in the name of free market, rejected the notion that media had any duty to serve the public interests. Cross points out that by 1983, Mark Fowler, head of FCC, had abandoned the policy that radio and TV stations provide public service and news programming while limiting advertising (Cross 203-04). Similarly, the head of the FTC, James Miller “ended the requirement that admakers back their claims with research and left big companies alone” (Cross 204). Ironically, this led to a self-created dilemma for marketers: advertising was cluttering the airwaves, making it harder for their own product to stand out. The solution then, was to come up with more clever and subtle means of advertising, including disguising their promotions as news on consumer and health segments of TV shows, product-placements within television shows, or creating program-length cartoons (PLC) to advertise merchandise to children (Cross 222). On top of this, a popular sentiment in the 1980s and 1990s, partially as a response to the hedonistic youth counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, the conservative right saw spending of the affluent as their reward for hard work and viewed government support and protection for the poor as undeserved coddling of those who were undisciplined and uncompetitive (Cross 197). While a whole book can be devoted to the problem of consumerism, what is most relevant for this topic is that consumerism has been a powerful tool for the economic elite to stuff their own pockets with wealth while simultaneously keeping the American population distracted from the real issues at

hand. Advertising tells us we have a problem: we're sad, angry, fat, unattractive, etc. Then, we are told that the answer to our problems is this product or that product. And when that doesn't work, there's already another product on the market for us to try. This is an ongoing cycle that is extremely hard to escape once we have already bought into the idea. The great political economist Thorstein Veblen refers to this as the "fabrication of wants."

In addition to product consumption, technology has created another type of consumerism: information consumption. Technology has allowed for easy and immediate access to news articles, television shows, movies, social media platforms, and video games. This distraction not only refers to procrastination materials such as social media, YouTube videos, etc., but also things disguised as "important" such as thousands of news articles and endless micro-conflicts about many topic imaginable—just check any Reddit forum or Facebook status comment. Corporations in turn fight for our attention, creating what is now called the attention economy, or more appropriately, the distraction economy. Currently, at Stanford, there is even something called the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab, part of the Human Sciences and Technologies Advanced Research Institute. The Persuasive Technology Lab is headed by BJ Fogg, who has been named one of the ten "gurus" to look out for by Fortune Magazine for the work he has done in persuasive technology (Reingold & Tkaczyk). Fogg uses methods from experimental psychology to demonstrate how computers can change people's thoughts and behaviors in predictable ways. Many of the classes, seminars, and workshops taught at Stanford by Fogg teaches students and other attendees to design mobile applications that are addictive, to draw in users and keep them engaged. While such technology has the potential to be used for good, Fogg's most notable students thus far have been companies such as eBay, Google, Nike,

Amazon, Facebook, and Instagram. I can only guess as to how they are utilizing their knowledge, but I have a strong feeling that it most likely involves increasing revenues for the companies. In other words, getting users to buy more products.

The second tactic has been a direct attempt by the powerful elites to weaken the social collective power of the masses through political involvement. While the American public was looking the other way, the powerful elites fortified their defenses. Even if we are aware of the battle being waged on us and are lucky enough to pull ourselves away from such distraction, the obstacles against creating a successful movement in order to fight back are so much greater now. There is a group within the upper elite who have done a tremendous job entwining their network with government and public policy. According to Domhoff, there are three basic processes through which the power elite involve themselves in the federal government: special interest process, policy-making process, and candidate selection process (sec.6 par.2). The special interest process allows specific families, corporations, and industrial sectors to realize their narrow and short-run interests on taxes, subsidies, and regulations in their dealings with congressional committees, regulatory bodies, and executive departments. The policy-making process is one through which power elites research and discuss policy through different avenues and then present developed policies to the White House and Congress. This usually happens in an advisory or consulting manner. The candidate selection process is one through which members of the elite influence electoral campaigns by donating to political candidates who are favorable to their policies. This can happen with individuals or with a corporation. The form of political involvement that has wielded some of the most power is the revolving door. The revolving door of politics refers to the movement of personnel between federal government

positions, mostly top federal positions and private sector jobs, mostly in executive or board positions. Many top cabinet positions in both Republican and Democratic administrations are held by members of the upper class and corporate executives who are leaders in policy-discussion organizations. “The general picture that emerges from the findings on overrepresentation of members of the power elite in appointed governmental positions is that the highest levels of the executive branch are interlocked constantly with the upper class and corporate community through the movement of executives and lawyers in and out of government” (Domhoff sec. 6 par.5). These appointed officials will resign their corporate positions to work in government for a few years, but then return back to the private sector two to three years down the line with useful personal contact and information—becoming even more powerful and connected than before. Even despite Obama’s attempt to shut down the “revolving door” of government with his lobbying policy was weakened by major loopholes and “the current laws around lobbying, which the administration measures were built on, simply ignore many instances observers would regard as lobbying—and the White House never pressed for changes to those laws” (Gerstein). The Obama administration had the least percentage of private sector cabinet appointees, at roughly 30 percent, while most administrations dating back to Theodore Roosevelt have had between 40-50 percent. These high-level executives and government officials thus work together to ensure a sort of mutual benefit relationship.

With the power broker’s political involvement, they have been able to pass policies that further their agenda while weakening the public’s ability to fight back. One of the most egregious ways the economic elites have done this is with the rights of the corporations. The Fourteenth Amendment was passed in 1868 after Civil Rights to grant the rights of persons to former slaves,



but it has since been used by corporations to argue for corporate rights. The courts have since determined that these collectivist legal fictions have the full rights of persons of flesh and blood, and sometimes corporations have even far greater rights, due to their scale, immortality, and protections of limited liability (Chomsky ch.7). Noam Chomsky, in his book *Who Rules the World*, gives the example of the Free-Trade Agreements, which give the mining company Pacific Rim the right to “sue El Salvador for seeking to protect its environment; individuals cannot do the same. General Motors can claim national rights in Mexico” (Chomsky ch.7). The American public has gotten too comfortable for too long. So any attempt to organize and protest has been rather unsuccessful, leading to a loss of hope and apathy. It is no longer a democratic society that we live in—though perhaps it never was. In a true democracy, the populace—the group with the most number of people—would have control. Instead, power in America is in the hands of the wealthy. As a result of this capitalist mentality, we have seen numerous exploitations and corruptions due to unchecked capitalist greed. The two biggest financial crises in America, the Enron scandal of 2001 and the global financial collapse of 2008, has been a direct effect of this. And yet, young people have not been prepared by their formal education to think critically about such issues or to come up with a way to fight back or offer solutions. Occupy Wall Street was a heroic attempt to stand up against the financial institution, but without the proper education and tools to organize, it failed miserably. At the hands of capitalist greed unchecked by morality, the United States has also been responsible for endless wars across the globe fighting for resources and we have been one of the biggest offenders in global climate change.

## **Fighting Back Through Education**

This is not to say that the entirety of the American public is unaware or have not been resisting. There continues to be protests and legislative fights, but this is a minority group and extremely divided. And those who are speaking up and fighting back are doing so with such disadvantages. As a group that is playing under someone else's rule, our power comes from numbers so we must overcome our minor differences to have any hope of succeeding. The most effective way to fight back is to end this vicious cycle of consumerism, apathy, and passivity through educating ourselves so that we can be aware and prepared. The establishment and economic elite are relying on a passive public that is either too distracted and consumed with their own day-to-day life to question what's wrong—taking the easy route of being told what to believe—, or if they are aware, are surrounded by such passivity and divisiveness that any attempt to fight back is quickly destroyed by a lack of power. If we look back at the creation of the Republic of the United States, even our founding fathers hesitated to allow for a ruling by the majority. The original intent of the Constitution was to design a power structure where true democracy was checked, keeping power in the hands of the informed elites, “barring those who were not rich, well born, or prominent from exercising political power” (Chomsky ch.1). However, equally worst for humanity is the tyrannical ruling of a few wealthy elites, which is what we currently have in America. Perhaps a more sustainable approach is an informed population that have been taught how to be a decent human being, so that we can be each other's checks and balances, curbing those base instincts that bring out the worst in us as humankind. As a nation, we must become aware of the obstacles in front of us and the tactics being waged on us. And we need to arm ourselves with tools and values that will help us in our resistance. As

Reverend James Lawson, during a lecture on non-violence on February 2016, so shrewdly pointed out, the government arms themselves with PhD and degrees and spends countless hours strategizing and studying the battlefield (literal and metaphorical), while the most modern social activists work under the assumption that their morality will guide them to success.

The most effective means of education then, must start with young men and women, our future generations. It is during our developmental years that we pick up traits and behaviors, skills, and values that we carry with us for the rest of our lives. And for many of us, most of these are learned unconsciously, so while we may just attribute it to “our personality” or “who we are,” they are things that have been learned and taught to us. And here, we have the other component of oppression. Our schools have turned into a place where we mold subjects and products, not citizens and human beings. The current education system has been serving the needs of the corporations more than it has been serving our needs as a nation. We will explore this more in the following chapter, but the bottom line is that America’s current education system has been crafted to award those whose thinking conforms to the official narrative—not one that questions whether what is currently being done is the best way to do something or even the most moral. So it is only with education that we can begin to change the power dynamics in a meaningful and enduring way.

## CHAPTER 2: EDUCATION

### Western Education: Then and Now

Before we can use education as a tool to our advantage, we must first understand its weaknesses and how it works. Historically, formal education has always been clerical in nature and reserved for the privileged class and the clergy. There also existed an informal education of the masses, passed down orally from generation to generation. The ancient Greeks, from the time of Plato, saw the importance of education in preparing individuals to be engaged as citizens through the liberal arts: the art of speech and persuasion, an exact knowledge of the value of words and an understanding of the laws of thought and the rules of logic. In addition to this, they knew well the importance of preparing individuals “for the real business of higher education, which was to guide the mind by science and philosophy towards its final spiritual goal” (Dawson 6). The Roman Empire, though they also believed in the importance of civic education through the liberal arts, did not go beyond this preparation for higher education. Europe, throughout the early Middle Ages, followed the education standard that had been set by the Roman Empire; it was an education “based on Latin grammar, on the study of the Latin classics, the Latin Fathers and the Bible and the Liturgy. It was therefore a specifically clerical education which was normally confined to the monastic and cathedrals” (Dawson 11). This trend continued in the West all the way into the eighteenth century, and up until the French Revolution, the Church had control of educational institutions, which was still heavily for the elite or the clergy.

However, the rise of early modern science and technology began to change the European education system in a way that culture and religion was not able to do for more than a

millennium. The Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution facilitated a movement towards the distrust of the Church and inspired a call for a universal education throughout Europe. In *The Crisis of Western Education*, Dawson points to a few influential figures: Leonardo da Vinci, Francis Bacon, and Rene Descartes. Da Vinci had little formal education and felt that his true schools were nature and mathematics, putting his faith in studies such as anatomy and biology and skepticism and contempt towards Christianity. Bacon's message was that science "was a means of obtaining power over the world and transforming life," and "now science would lead humankind into a promised land, a technological age of continuing progress" (Dawson xi). Descartes was a French rationalist who saw a "single universal science of pure quantity from which nature could be totally deduced" (Dawson xii). Especially in France, science became the new creed and "the use of education was to make humans reasonable and enlightened, free from superstition and the tyranny of the priests" (Dawson xii). The Church and the influence of religion came to be regarded "as powers of darkness that were responsible for the backward condition of the masses, and consequently the movement for universal education was a crusade of enlightenment which was inevitably anticlerical in spirit" (Dawson 78).

In America, where the education system was largely derived from the dual system in Britain, the Church never had such a strong control of education, but education in colonial America was still largely a product of the Church. Dawson writes that in America, the Puritan curriculum was even more religious and practical than in Europe (Dawson x). But, just as science, technology and democratic values shaped European education, from the late nineteenth century on, a form of secularization took shape in America "in which education was largely placed in service to the formation of democratic moral values and patriotism" (Dawson xiv). By

the 1920s, America was extremely cosmopolitan and growing in wealth and industrial expansion. This new wealth flowed into the expansion of educational institutions, but for the most part, “Americans bought into the faith in science that had overwhelmed eighteenth century Europe, and faith in scientific progress and democracy tended to take the place of Christian orthodoxy” (Dawson xv). The American common school and high school, which educated the vast majority of Americans based their teachings “on democratic values and the ideals of national patriotism rather than on any religious doctrine or ethos” (Dawson 60). This movement paralleled with the growth of universal public education, or at the very least, in the very beginning, it was the promotion of this ideal. America’s new faith in science, which replaced theological orthodoxy, strengthened American faith in the possibilities of democratic education (Dawson 62). While America has been able to realize the goal of a universal public education, with other countries following in example, it has done so at the expense of the quality of education.

The monitorial style of teaching, created by Joseph Lancaster in 1798, allowed hundreds of children to be taught by one teacher, with the aid of a trained student monitor or assistant. “Lancaster’s curriculum consisted exclusively of reading, writing, arithmetic, morals or religion, and development of the memory. Talking was prohibited, and infractions of the rules met punishment of the most severe proportions” (Rayman 397). This model gained great acceptance in England, where Lancaster lived, and in the United States for two reasons. The first reason was that it provided the perfect solution for the ideal of a universal education. The Lancastrian model of teaching later provided the perfect set-up for a mass education during the Industrial boom. During this time, there was a great flood of immigrants to America and there was a high demand

for factory workers. This type of education could prepare young people to remain tolerable and orderly while teaching them how to read, comprehend and follow instructions. “When public education tacitly accepted the tasks of civilizing the immigrant masses and preparing future factory workers, it simultaneously assumed the role of maintaining the status quo” (Leland & Kasten 3). This status quo has been the ever expanding importance of capitalism and commercialism, at the expense of the individual and a democratic society. “We strive for academic proficiency while our public schools fail to nurture young men and women with the wisdom, insight, personal inspiration, creativity, compassion, and character required for a flourishing democratic society—qualities difficult to address meaningfully even in today’s best public schools” (Engelhardt xix-xx). Instead, we attempt to give young men and women the powers of science and technology without any moral or ethical groundings. Modern society has equated secularism with rationalism, but rationalism by definition, is based on reason and knowledge. Students are not given true knowledge and no longer taught how to think critically.

### **The Problems Facing Universal Education**

Although the United States has been able to technically provide education to all citizens, the quality of this education has been less than satisfactory. The two biggest issues facing America’s universal education are: 1) the policies and reforms through which policymakers and leaders hope to deliver universal education are misguided, aiming for equality, they have instead achieved sameness, otherwise known as standardization of education; 2) obsessed with academic proficiency and scientific progress, we have forgotten to build citizens.

## **Problem #1: Sameness is not Equity**

The official statement of policymakers and legislators is an effort to close the educational skill gap and bolster overall knowledge and skills of the American public. But what we have actually seen in practice is a skewed system that punishes those who are already struggling by taking away their resources while giving more resources and help to those already succeeding. Furthermore, the accountability system put in place is an inaccurate measure of student success. The reforms that have given rise to this trend began with Lyndon B. Johnson’s noble “War on Poverty” campaign and then have been continued by President Bush and President Obama with the *No Child Left Behind Act* and *Every Student Succeeds Act*, respectively.

### *The Department of Education*

As previously mentioned, education in America is decentralized, meaning that state and local government have authority over setting standards and creating curricula. However, the creation of the Department of Education (ED) in 1979 gave the Federal government a voice in this arena, though still not much power. The Department, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, is headed by a president-appointed U.S. Secretary of Education. It is a fully functioning and funded governmental organization, but is the smallest Cabinet-level department. The official function of the Department of Education is “to establish policy for, administer and coordinate most federal assistance to educational laws regarding privacy and civil rights (U.S. Department of Education). The Education Department has no authority to establish schools or colleges and is not involved in determining educational standards or curricula—though this has changed a great deal with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act. Furthermore, the Secretary of Education



does not have much authority. Regardless, Republicans have historically disapproved of the Department of Education since its creation, viewing it as a federal encroachment on local governing rights. And since its creation, Republicans have fought to reduce its power and function. As an example, the 1996 GOP platform stated:

Federal government has no constitutional authority to be involved in school curriculum or to control jobs in the market place. This is why we will abolish the Department of Education, end federal meddling in our schools, and promote family choice at all levels of learning.

And eventually, President Ronald Reagan was successful in significantly reducing the ED's budget. We may continue to see this trend or we may even see the full elimination of the Department with President Trump.

#### *The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965*

The beginning of this trend started in 1965 with President Lyndon B. Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), passed as part of the Johnson administration's "War on Poverty" campaign. Johnson was the son of a farmer and he saw the value and necessity of a proper education in order to get out of an unwanted socioeconomic situation. Thus, the original intent of the law was to improve educational equity for students from lower-income families and to close the skill gap in reading, writing, and mathematics between children from low-income households and middle to upper class students. This was mainly to be done by Title I of the act, viewed as the central component of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Title I targets more than \$1 billion a year to "meet the special educational needs of the educationally deprived children," providing financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families (McLaughlin 1; U.S. Department of Education). This was

viewed as a major success because it broke through the longstanding, traditional opposition to federal aid to education. As previously mentioned, because part of public school funding comes from local property taxes, schools serving low-income students generally receive less funding.

However, ESEA and Title I was not passed without concern or skepticism. Among those most concerned about how federal funds would be spent was Senator Robert Kennedy. He argued that the new federal aid in and of itself would not be enough to improve the quality of education for struggling and low income students—he feared lazy or disinterested school administrators would misuse the funds and argued for accountability measures to be put in place to insure schoolmen would do their jobs. His reasoning was that if parents, especially parents of struggling students, could see how their child’s school was stacking up against other schools and districts, that they could use the data as a “whip” or “spur” to force local school administrators and educators to reform their practices (Bissell & McLaughlin 4). And if schools saw their peers succeeding, the natural human inclination towards competition would kick in and motivate them to do better. While Kennedy feared that the Title I money might be wasted because of “disinterested or inefficient local school administrators,” others in Congress viewed Title I as an experiment so evaluation was necessary to determine what works and to identify the most effective compensatory strategies (Bissell & McLaughlin 6). With Senator Kennedy at the forefront of the accountability battle, he became the “midwife to the emerging notion of accountability” (Bissell & McLaughlin 4). From the beginning though, evaluation was greatly opposed by those in education and educational research. Educators (correctly) predicted that evaluation requirements would lead to coercion for the classroom teacher, “and thereby result in a loss of ‘ingenuity, flexibility and initiative,’ and possibly even lead to ‘teaching to the

test” (Bissell & McLaughlin 9). They were in almost complete agreement that standardized tests were insensitive and inappropriate measures of the effectiveness of a Title I program (Bissell & McLaughlin 10). While Kennedy’s and the government’s original intention for evaluation was honorable in theory, it was problematic in approach. Nevertheless, this did not stop the trend towards standardized testing for accountability.

### *No Child Left Behind*

Title I has been reauthorized every three years since its ratification, with minor changes that have increased accountability, but the greatest change to ESEA came in 2002 with President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB supported the standards-based education reform, based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals would improve individual outcomes in education. In order to receive federal funding, states were required to develop assessments in basic skills and to give these assessments to all students at select grade levels. NCLB expanded the role of the federal government in public education through further emphasis on annual testing, annual academic progress, school report cards, and teacher qualifications, as well as significant changes in funding. While the state and local school districts were still responsible for providing a curricula and establishing their own education standards, NCLB required that every child in the nation meet a specified proficiency level in reading and math by 2014—this level was to be measured by standardized tests.

The framework for Bush’s NCLB act came from the education reform and accountability framework he had implemented as governor in Texas. This was a framework relying heavily on punitive measures as a form of extrinsic motivation. Likewise, NCLB’s system of accountability

was one based on high stakes test scores and publicly shaming and embarrassing schools and districts that did not meet the mandated requirements, or Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (McMurrey 28). And the consequences for not meeting the AYP, an accountability measure used to determine whether students were making progress towards meeting state academic standards, could be economically devastating for both schools and their districts. According to a critical analysis of America's public education policies, the initial consequences for failing to meet the AYP include students being allowed to choose to go to a different school, or attend mandatory tutoring at no cost to them (McMurrey). This sounds harmless enough and perhaps an appropriate measure. However, if a school continues to fail to meet the AYP standards, further punitive measures include the "school having to provide and fund supplemental education services" and the third measure includes, but is not limited to "the school being taken over by the state and reconstituted or closed outright" (McMurrey 29).

As 2014 approached, it was evidently clear that many schools were not going to meet the proficiency goals originally set by NCLB. As a response to the failing schools, President Barack Obama granted state waivers from its requirements. Between 2011-2015, schools in all but a few states were given waivers, allowing them to show success through measures other than test scores—essentially nullifying the 2014 deadline for universal proficiency (Rich & Lewin). But this did not eliminate the move towards standardization. In exchange for the NCLB waivers, schools and districts had to promise to set new targets aimed at preparing students for colleges and careers (Rich). States must either adopt the Common Core State Standards into their curriculum or get their higher education institutions to certify that their standards were rigorous enough. They also had to implement placement assessments aligned to those standards. Finally,

states had to tether teacher and school evaluations, in part, to student achievement on standardized tests, which differed from NCLB, where test scores were used to rate schools and districts.

### *Every Student Succeeds Act*

When it came time to reauthorize ESSA in 2015, President Obama replaced NCLB with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA narrows the U.S. Federal government's role in primary and secondary education since the 1980s, but retains the annual standardized testing requirements put in place by NCLB. What is different is that states get wide discretion in setting goals, figuring out what to hold schools and districts accountable for, and deciding how to intervene in low-performing schools (Klein). While tests are still part of the state accountability systems, with ESSA, states must also incorporate other factors that get at students' opportunity, such as the overall school environment and teacher engagement, or access to and success in advanced coursework (Klein). States and districts must also use locally developed, evidence-based intervention in the bottom 5% of schools and in schools where less than two-thirds of students graduate. Another important shift away from full standardization is that up to seven states could apply to try out locally developed proficiency testing. More importantly, these local tests are not meant to be used forever—the point is for districts to experiment with new forms of assessment that could eventually go statewide and be used by everyone (Klein). States no longer have to do teacher evaluations tied to student outcomes, as they did under the waivers, and NCLB's highly qualified teacher requirements would be a thing of the past (Klein). Because ESSA is so new, it is yet unknown what the impact of this new act will be.

### *The Implications of Standardization*

The emphasis towards increasing nation-wide proficiency and creating equal opportunity for all students is a great intention, but to ensure its success using standardized proficiency levels and high-stakes testing for accountability is like giving a sick person poison to make them feel better. High stakes testing refers to the method of assessment based on the theory that assumes teachers, when faced with large incentives and threats of punishment, will work harder and become more effective, leading to increased student motivation and parental involvement (McMurrey). The problem itself is not so much that there are standards in place at any level—local, state, and federal—but the frequency of accountability testing in order to ensure standards are being met has produced the opposite results of the desired intentions. The frequent high stakes testing does not effectively track students' progress or depth of knowledge, but is an efficient way for legislators to quantify progress and for schools to comply with funding requirements.

The first problem of frequent high stakes testing is that it ignores developmental research. Frequent standardized testing, year after year, with outlined grade by grade proficiency assumes that all students must learn and develop at the same pace, which is in sharp contrast to all extant developmental research. The major problem across the standards and especially for the youngest grade is that there seems to be no evidence to suggest developmental stages were considered. “Anyone who has a cursory knowledge of development knows that it is not linear and that children do not all develop at the same rate — there is a span” (Carlsson-Paige et al. 2).

Secondly, frequent testing and using test scores to honor or punish teachers and schools create negative pressure for teachers to teach to the test and not to a rich curriculum that they have developed over time, or what is important as a society to know. For example, if teachers know that the test has multiple questions on the history of the American Industrial Revolution, but only one question on the impact the Industrial Revolution has had on American and foreign economics, then students will be taught to rote memorize dates and facts, rather than analyzing the short and long term effects of such a revolution. Testing to the test also discourages thoughtful discussions about current events because they won't be on the exam. On the other end is the anxiety and pressure it creates for the students. According to Kohn, a well-known critic of standardized testing in schools,

test anxiety has grown into a subfield of educational psychology, and its prevalence means that the tests producing this reaction are not giving us a good picture of what many students really know and can do. The more a test is made to “count”—in terms of being the basis for promoting or retaining students, for funding or closing down schools—the more that anxiety is likely to rise and the less valid the scores become. (Kohn 5).

Standardization also does not account for the different types of performances in school, focusing only on how well students do on reading and math tests. Schools that may be performing well in certain regards, but not meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in raising test scores were considered low performing. A *New York Times* article details a common story: Ginn Academy—the first and only public high school in Ohio for boys—experimented with small classes, tough discipline code, and life coaches around the clock and had a graduation rate close to 88% in 2014, but was consistently labeled low performing because it did not meet the required “adequate yearly progress” in raising test scores (Rich & Lewin).

This sort of testing also signals to students that what really matters is reciting facts—a superficial level of knowledge—confusing knowing a lot of stuff with real intelligence. And of course, standardized tests are excellent at measuring memorization skills and basic knowledge of how to do something, but it cannot measure “initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgement, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes” (Kohn 11).

But what is most dangerous about standardized testing and its frequency is that it promotes individual accomplishments and working alone over social cooperation and team building. As Alfie Kohn argues in his book against standardize testing, it is far more difficult for teachers to attend to children’s social and moral development—“holding class meetings, building a sense of community, allowing time for creative play, developing conflict-resolution skills, and so on—where the only thing that matters is scores on tests that, of course measure none of these things” (Kohn 20). And for the students, because tests are given to individuals and because helping one another is regarded as cheating, “not only is there no measure of the capacity to cooperate effectively, or even to assimilate other people’s ideas into your own, but precisely the opposite message is communicate: Only what you can do alone is of any value (Kohn 12).

The current methods of teaching to the test in order to boost test scores is a dangerous cycle that weakens he power of the public while strengthening those already in power. Teaching to the test and rewarding a knowledge based on rote memorization without critical thinking is creating a nation of middle-class workers who are discouraged to innovate and step outside of the norm. It is creating a nation where mindless obedience is rewarded and critical questioning, especially of authority abusing their power, is punished. Being informed is the most powerful



tool we, as the public, can have. Without it, we are subject to the will of the economic elites who may or may not be looking out for our best interests. Eliminating standardized testing fully may not be a likely action in the near future, but as educators and educational researchers work to discredit the arguments for high stakes testing and to reform the accountability systems, there needs to be a supplementary component within the curriculum that helps to bolster the skills standardize testing fails to teach.

## **Problem #2: The Loss of Morality in an Academics-Only Curriculum**

### *Common Core State Standards*

While America's education is technically decentralized, as a result of the accountability reforms and the education equality acts, public schools are pretty much required to follow a broad outline of curriculum, called the Common Core Standards. Officially launched in 2009, the Common Core State Standards are descriptions of skills each student should have at each grade level in English/Language Arts and Mathematics. The standards are not a detailed, day-to-day curriculum, but rather a broad outline of learning expectations from which teachers or district leaders craft a curriculum. For example, the math standards emphasize a deeper focus on fewer topics, a response to research that found U.S. Math curricula to be "a mile wide" and an inch deep" (Gewertz). The argument for the standards came about in part due to a nationwide decline in literacy and math skills exhibited by high school graduates. All but four states embraced the standards by 2011, but several states in 2015 reversed their adoptions of the standards and nearly half backed out of their initial promises to use tests designed to measure mastery of them (Gewertz). Again, the general opposition to the Common Core Standards came from those who

viewed the standards as encroachment on states' rights and many feared that it would undermine teachers' attempts to tailor instruction to students' and communities' needs.

### *Implications*

The focus of the Common Core Standards are solely academic. For each grade level, the Core Standards outline proficiency levels in subjects such as Language Arts and Literacy, Science, and Mathematics. Such a heavy emphasis and accompanying measures that punish schools and teachers for not meeting such standards do not give teachers much room to talk about much else in their classrooms. In effect, we give students the skills to do things, but we forget to teach them the qualities that make up the humanizing aspect of the human person—the qualities that motivates one person to do good for another person or their community. To make a house a home, you need the foundational core that holds the house up and gives it structure and you need the decorations and the furnitures that sends the message to the outsider, “This is my home. For the time being, these are my likes and dislikes.” While the former can still be a home without the latter, the latter will sooner or later crumble once it has been pushed hard enough. Similarly, to build a lasting nation, you need citizens who are made up of the core qualities that shape and guide who they are (morality, compassion, happiness, insight, etc.) as well as the exteriors decorations of science and technology, which is ever-changing and prescribes the societal makeup. Unfortunately, we have become so obsessed with proving our powers as a nation through measuring our knowledge in science, medicine, and technology that we are making ourselves foundational weaker by creating subjects who follow a prescribed way of living and doing things and not citizens. We have put so much faith in science that we have made

an enemy of religion and its inherent morality and code of ethics. Now, I'm not saying that we need religion to function as a society per se, but traditionally, religion has functioned largely as a means through which citizens would derive their moral values and ethical guidelines. In the modern West, the distrust in a religious education went hand in hand with the distrust of any sort of public religious association. This was especially true in the United States where a separation of Church and State was built explicitly into the founding of the country. Consequently, even morality and ethics eventually had to be secularized. Dr. Lee Yearley, a Stanford professor on comparative religious ethics and poetics, tells us that there are three dominant philosophical traditions in the West: individualism, perfectionism, and rationalism. He argues that while ethics is concerned with what is virtuous—what is right and good—virtue depends on one's philosophical perspective, so philosophy and ethics are entwined. The most distinctive philosophical position in the West is rationalism mixed with individualism. Rationalism is the belief that reason is the only proper ethical guide and reason is what allow people to think about abstract universals and individualism is the philosophical stance of figuring out what one's desires are and then acting to get it (Goleman 12). Goleman argues that it is nearly impossible to have a moral and ethical code without a basis in religion because there are few universal rules that reason can discover—much of what human life is about is not covered within rationalism—so one ends up using reason only to calculate how to best satisfy personal desires (15). So even though modern ethics in the West have attempted to still present “acceptable reasons why people should not commit unethical behavior...the crisis of ethics in the latter part of the twentieth century is that this position has left many kinds of action without any guidance whatsoever” (17). The lack of a strong moral and ethical presence in education and in society in general, mixed

with the power that scientific and technological innovations provide have led to an abuse of power. In higher education, there are now fields of research and sub-fields of research dedicated to exploring the ethical issues that arise alongside new advances in science, technology, and medicine, but this isn't enough. Such discussions need to start in primary and secondary school, and as part of a requirement for all.

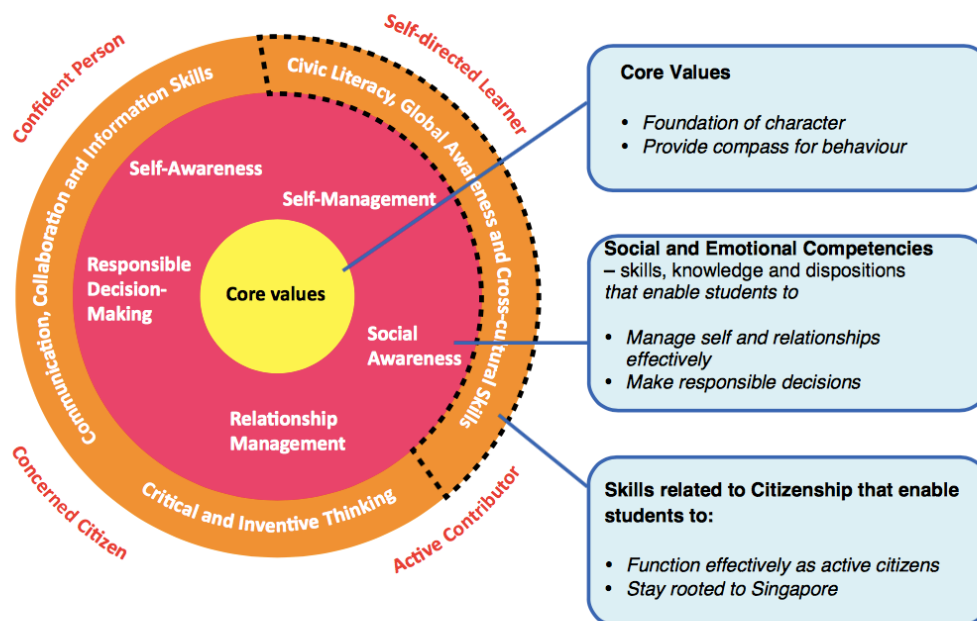
### *A Case Study: Singapore*

Singapore is an ethnically and religiously diverse, cosmopolitan sovereign city-state that has seen incredibly successful and stable economic growth since its independence in 1965. The population of Singapore is made up of Chinese, Javanese, Malaysians, Indians, Europeans, and other minority groups. They have four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil. Singapore also recognizes freedom of religion, with the main ones being Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. The only exception to this rule is that the government bans some religious sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses. Because Singapore is so diverse and multi-ethnic, their survival as a nation and their ability to remain competitive depend on their ability to cooperate and function as a single, united nation. One way the government has sought to maintain cooperation and unity is through mandatory civics and moral education lessons for all grade levels.

Since 1991, the government of Singapore has introduced a mandatory Civics and Moral Education curriculum from primary school up through secondary school. The civics and moral education program was meant to replace the compulsory religious knowledge lessons in schools and the goal of civics and moral education was to cultivate "individuals who could put society

before self, live harmoniously with one another and contribute effectively to Singapore’s multicultural society” (Singapore Government). In other words, it is designed to strengthen ethnic and religious tolerance, instill a deeper sense of civic and social responsibility, and promote a stronger commitment to the nation.

In the latest syllabus for primary and secondary schools, the student outcomes include core values, social and emotional competencies, and skills related to citizenship (Figure 1). The core values include respect, responsibility, integrity, harmony, care, and resilience. The social and emotional competencies cover self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. Skills related to citizenry discuss topics such as leading an active community life, global awareness, national and cultural identity, and socio-cultural sensitive and awareness.



**Figure 1:** Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes. “2014 Syllabus: Character and Citizenship Education, Secondary.” Ministry of Education Singapore, p.3.

The accompanying learning outcomes include: “acquire self-awareness and apply self-management skills to achieve personal well-being,” “act with integrity and make responsible decisions that uphold moral principles,” “promote social cohesion, and harmony,” and “reflect on and respond to community, national and global issues” (Figure 2). While there have not been many studies done on the impact of Singapore’s civics and moral education, one study has shown that as students advanced in their level of moral education, there would also be an increase in the percentage of students that exhibited moral reasoning which benefited others and adhered to societal rules and law (Koh). More research would have to be done to make any conclusive statements, and there is still room for improvement in Singapore’s CME program, but it is hard to imagine that there would be many negative consequences to a government-sponsored civics and moral education.

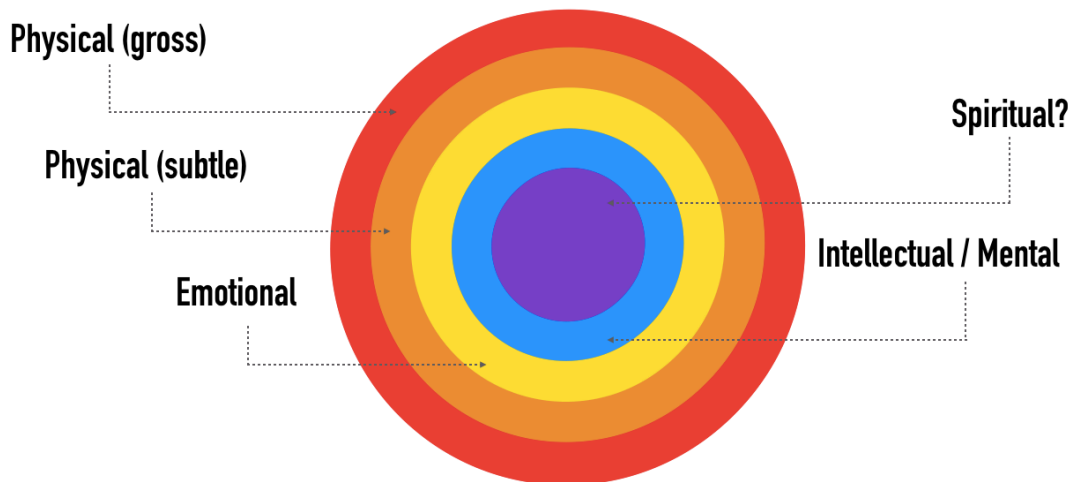


**Figure 2:** Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes. “2014 Syllabus: Character and Citizenship Education, Secondary.” Ministry of Education Singapore, p.5.

## The Yoga & Mindfulness Solution

For Western societies, the implementation of a yoga and mindfulness program into the current school curriculum can function as both civics and moral education and overall physical and mental health class. Yoga offers a comprehensive and systematized curriculum that addresses all aspects of the human being and addresses the insufficiencies in the current conventional

education system. Yoga and mindfulness is able to address the physical (gross and subtle), emotional, mental, and even spiritual aspect of each individual<sup>1</sup> (Figure 3). The moral and ethical philosophy offered in this program help support students' mental and emotional health. The physical portion of the program—physical postures and breath-work—help students take care of their gross and subtle physical body. Mindfulness practices help students get in touch with their inner wisdom and insight, as well as their compassionate side. All of this work together to create an environment for students that will positively support academic learning, cooperation, and understanding among one another. In turn, these will translate to qualities that are necessary for a healthy society.



**Figure 3:** Yoga and mindfulness for all aspects of the human being.

<sup>1</sup> This is a play on the *pañcakosha* model. This yogic philosophy, described in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, describes the human as being composed of five different layers: *annamaya* (physical body), *pranamaya* (subtle / energetic body), *manomaya* (emotional body), *vijñanamaya* (wisdom / intellectual body), and *anandamaya* (bliss / spiritual body).



### *The Morality and Ethics of Yoga*

Yoga offers is a methodic and structured code of ethics, that while may exist in various forms in our society, is not as clearly laid out and easy to understand or teach. In any form of education where we are giving people the power of knowledge and encouraging them to do something with this power, we must temper that power with an ethical code of conduct. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a whole lab at Stanford dedicated to creating tools of technological persuasion that corporations can use to control the population. On the one hand, this could be a wonderful way to get people to kick bad habits, such as smoking, overeating, drinking, etc. But at the same time, it is not hard to see how dangerous such tactics can be if that knowledge falls into the wrong hands or into the hands of someone who does not have a strong ethical framework—for me, this is the more likely outcome considering Stanford's close proximity to Silicon Valley and the capitalistic tendencies of our nation. Now, this is just one example and I don't know how much this class actually goes over ethics, but we are currently living in a time where ethical boundaries have been greatly blurred or fully crosses—you need simply to look at any of the financial crises of the 2000s to understand. The ethical code of conduct provide by Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, the *yamas* and *niyamas*, offer a clear and precise ethics without having to subscribe to a religious belief. Acting in accordance with moral and ethical guidelines not only lead to a healthy democratic society, but also results in healthy mental and emotional states for the individuals carrying out the action.

*Compassion and Wisdom*

Yoga and mindfulness meditation offers compassion to counteract the individualism and apathy that has kept us from speaking up when we see an injustice or helping others at fighting for things we may claim to care about and from going out of our way to help others. This is not a claim that Americans don't care about anything, but themselves—that would be too extreme and egotistical of a claim. However, as part of human nature and as implicitly promoted by various American ideals such as the notion of capitalism and self-dependence, Americans tend to empathize first for ourselves, our close family and friends, and then those who we identify as most like ourselves. Or, we may recognize our privilege, perhaps feel a sense of guilt about it, and engage in volunteer work or give a charitable donation to “help” those who are less fortunate than us. While there is nothing wrong with this, this is not a compassion that is sustainable or necessary for change. The compassion that is required is a compassion that is a feeling of equality, rather than that of a superior person looking at an inferior person because only when we can see everyone as equal to us can we really drive change that promotes this sense of equality. Secondly, because this compassion is a feeling of equality, it is not limited to those who we can identify with or those who are closest to us, but it is a compassion and love for all beings, no matter how different from us they may seem to be. Only when we can have this equal love and compassion for everyone can we start to truly care about the social injustices in America. “We don't have the numbers to move this country toward greater social justice if the only driving force is whether or not people are feeling the pain personally” (Salzberg & Williams 58).

Finally, the practice of yoga and mindfulness meditation also re-awakens our inner wisdom, which is already inherent within all of us, but has been quieted or kept asleep by how we have been taught to function with education. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the pressure for teachers to prepare students for standardized testing does not allow for a curriculum where lively discussions, probing questions, and problem solving can thrive. Such a format requires time for the student to sit with information, ask questions, discuss relevant current topics, and work with one another. Instead, because status and ranking are based on a multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank test with predetermined answers, the best way for students to learn is to memorize already agreed upon facts and information. This teaches students to not question anything they have been told so long as it comes from a seemingly authoritative source and it does not encourage them to question whether or not a different way of doing things is possible. For example, in my high school American Economics class, we learned about the theory of supply and demand, the different types of economy, and how capitalism—America’s economic system—is the best. We do not spend any time actually analyzing other economic systems or the problems of America’s economy. There was no critical thinking involved. It was not until eight years later that I began to see benefits in other types of economic systems and begin to see the problems with ours. True intelligence or wisdom is when the individual can see discern what is reality from what is not, to discern what has been socially constructed by man from truth. It is not about finding fault in every single thing, but when this discernment is properly paired with ethics and compassion, we can begin to see beyond the norms created by society and to improve upon it or change it completely.

### *Yoga for Physical Health*

Anyone who has suffered from chronic pain, poor sleeping habit, or any weight issue can testify to how much these issues can affect their social relationships and their ability to be kind or joyful. Unfortunately, our hormones greatly dictate how we think and how we behave, so if we are not at our best physiologically, we cannot control how we behave or think. This is why people in chronic pain for an extended period of time often lash out at their close friends and family. And this is why women, during that “time of the month,” may act irrationally even despite being fully aware of their irrationality. *Āsana*, physical postures, and *prāṇāyāma*, breathwork, are components in yoga that help us maintain optimum physical health. The hatha yogis are most well-known for their fascination with these two dimensions. For them, spiritual liberation could be attained through achieving the “adamantine body” (*vajra deha*) or “divine body” (*divya deha*). While we do not have to go this far, we can still use the wisdom of the ancient yogis to help us maintain a healthy mind and body.

As outlined above, yoga and mindfulness are comprehensive and systematic practices that bolsters the currently narrow curriculum and overburdened educators. The positive effects of yoga and mindfulness meditation—joyfulness, compassion, wisdom, understanding, etc.—can inspire future generations to care about and take actions against the social injustices within their immediate community and the broader community as a whole, while giving them the education and tools needed to do so. If we want to continue to be a nation that leads and inspires other nations, then we must build solid citizens. We must educate the mind *and* the heart. A mindfulness and heartfulness approach that enables them to authentically care about social and political issues in their immediate and broader community.

## CHAPTER 3: YOGA & MINDFULNESS IN SCHOOLS

### **How Would Yoga & Mindfulness Look in a School Setting?**

The actual implementation of a yoga and mindfulness program would look very different in each school, depending on the school's current structure, the support of the educators, staff and even parents, and most importantly, on funding.

#### *Age Group*

In the United States, education is divided into primary, secondary, and higher education. Primary and secondary school are compulsory for all children, which total twelve years. Primary school starts at age five with kindergarten and then first grade at six years old. Secondary school consists of middle school or junior high school and then high school. Higher education—undergraduate and graduate level studies—are optional, though the layout of the job market in recent years have made higher education necessary to be able to make a decent living. The sample curriculum and practices are meant for students in secondary school. While primary school children can still benefit from yoga and mindfulness, the layout of the curriculum, the type of practice, and the examples given will have to be drastically changed to meet the needs of the younger children. There would also have to be a bigger emphasis on movement since younger children will have more energy and more engaging meditative practices. Primary school children can also greatly benefit simply from free play and being in the outdoors, which any school teacher can provide. Furthermore, in my interview with Jocelyn Kay Levy, in the nine years since she founded Wee Yogis, most of her youth yoga teachers have only requested to work

with primary school students, so there is a real need for teachers to address the older children. The way an eight-grader thinks and the problems he or she must deal with will still differ from that of junior in high school, but the beauty of yoga and mindfulness is that it can be tailored to meet the needs of students from both parties because they are topics that are universal and relevant in every stage of life.

### *Types of Schools*

Parents have the option of putting their children in a variety of schools: private, public, magnet, alternative, and charter schools. Private schools are not administered by local, state, or federal governments, so they are fully independent. They have the right to select their students however they choose and are funded in whole or in part through student tuition. Some students may be able to attend a private school on scholarship, such as a sport scholarship, art scholarship, or academic scholarship. Private schools are exempt from most educational regulations at the federal level, but are highly regulated at the state level.

Public schooling is funded by the government at the local, state, and federal level. Because education is decentralized in the United States, the Federal government does not operate the public schools nor is there a mandated country-level education or curriculum. However, there are some general standards that have been put in place, which will be discussed later. Each state has their own Department of Education that sets guidelines for the schools within that state. The local districts have the most control of their schools. They are responsible for setting the standards and managing the day-to-day operations of each school. This is done through a school board—a small committee of people elected by the local community or appointed by the local

government. The school board is responsible for general policies and ensures that state guidelines are met.

Alternative schools are another form of public schools, but are focused on special student needs, which includes but is not limited to: credit deficiencies, poor attendance, drug users, and/or behavior issues. Alternative schools were created in the 1970s to address the needs of students who are at-risk of dropping out. They address instruction differently than traditional public schools, often providing individualized plans and include smaller settings, working with well-qualified teachers (Bailey sec.2). By law, alternative schools are required to provide classes for students for a minimum of fifteen hours per week, or 180 minutes per day. Each state will have different types of alternative education programs to address the needs of their students. For example, in California, there are four main types of alternative education programs. Continuation schools generally offer programs to help students who are behind in earning credits; community day schools serve students with serious disciplinary or behavioral issues; country-run community schools enroll adjudicated or expelled youth; and independent study programs, which operate as an educational option.

Magnet schools originated in the late 1960s and early 1970s as “a tool to further academic desegregation in large urban school districts” (Chen sec.2). Magnet schools are also part of the local public school system, but they usually have a special curricular focus. For example, common themes include STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), Fine and Performing Arts, Career and Technical Education, and many others. Unlike public schools, where students are placed into a school based on the district they fall into, magnet school students are pulled based on their interest in the school’s theme. Magnet school students still

complete the full range of subjects based on state or national standards, but they are taught within the school's theme. Today, many magnet schools have taken on a more competitive role in education, only admitting 10-20 percent of the students who apply, promoting academic opportunity and excellence beyond that which is usually offered at their regular public school counterparts (Chen sec.3).

Charter schools, while often mislabeled as an alternative school, operate differently from true alternative schools. Charter schools are a type of public school, but operate independently through a contract, or charter, developed between the state and community or school leaders (NAPCS). The contract lays out goals and metrics for which the school will be held accountable and in exchange for this accountability, charter schools have the freedom to operate with complete autonomy—exempted from most state and local regulations—, allowing the school and teachers to innovate and make decisions based on what works and what doesn't work for their students. They function as hybrids of public and private institutions, allowing for independent development and decision-making along with public financing and state accountability for performance. Each charter school has their own management structure, with over 80 percent operating as a non-profit and the rest running as for-profit companies.

This program can be brought into any types of schools, though more progressive schools, newer schools, or privately funded schools will tend to be more likely to adapt a yoga and mindfulness program because they have the means and space to do so. Most importantly, how much funding a school receives will greatly determine the feasibility of the program. Public, magnet, and alternative schools receive funding from individual states and from local property taxes. And because the schools receive funding from the property taxes, the district the school is



located in plays a huge role in determining how much funding they get. Wealthier areas with higher property value will receive more funding, which generally leads to higher paid staff and teachers, more resources, up-to-date textbooks and equipment, and more money to spend on extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs. As previously mentioned, charter schools are also funded by public financing, but they are able to operate independently from the standards set by the school district.

Each population can benefit from yoga and mindfulness in different ways. Children and young adult from all socioeconomic backgrounds face the same pains of growing up. The problems may look different on the surface, but how suffering affects each individual on the emotional level is all the same. On top of this though, the children from a higher socioeconomic background are the ones with the most access to and have the most powers to make a real change. And the students from a lower socioeconomic background can benefit from the extra support and attention that they get through a yoga and mindfulness program that they may not be able to get in their daily lives outside of school.

### *Class Structure*

In the most ideal situations, in schools where students have periods for each subject, this class should be offered as its own subject specific classes that students can take for the whole quarter, semester, or half a semester. This means that each class will last roughly around an hour in most schools and students will meet with their yoga teacher every day. Or, it can be an elective education class that meets at least once or twice a week for the duration of the semester. Some schools also have a zero period where extra classes are offered.

The second option is for the yoga teacher to come into a homeroom class, religion and cultural studies class, or other fitting subjects for twenty to thirty minutes a few times a week. Because of the shortened amount of time, it would be ideal if the yoga teacher is able to come in at least twice in order to maintain consistency and have enough time to get through material. The benefit of this second option is that it allows the class teacher to practice with the students as well. I will speak more on the importance of this later in the chapter, but this has the benefit of the teacher putting on a good example and it offers the teacher a way to cope and deal with her own difficulties as a teacher.

The third best case would be a mixed-grade after school program, with school credit offered to students. It is important that school credit is linked to the after school program to ensure that students will more likely take the class seriously. While there is the luxury of time with this option, making it an after school class will naturally limit the amount of students who are able to attend and could send the signal that this is supplementary to education, but not necessary. However, with so many programs with the potential to be slashed due to federal budget cuts for after school programs under the current administration, perhaps this will be a good replacement.

## An Introduction to Yoga & Mindfulness in Schools

### *Yoga*

The following overview of a yoga and mindfulness curriculum is a combination of yogic principles as systematized by Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtras* and the mindfulness practice of Thích Nhất Hạnh's Plum Village tradition. While there are many schools of yoga and many ways of practicing, I have chosen the yoga of Patañjali and his eight-limbed path, or *aṣṭāṅgayoga*<sup>2</sup>. Aside from being one of the most referenced yoga texts in the West, the *Yoga Sūtras* is also clearly organized into 95 succinct aphorisms (*sūtras*) that are easy to understand yet packed with depth and meaning. The brevity of the sutras mean that each word has been carefully and intentionally chosen, but they simultaneously offer many layers of interpretation and understanding that speaks to multiple levels of practitioner—a complete beginner can understand the teachings and a 20 year practitioner can still glean insights from it. Patañjalayoga is also one of the earliest texts that clearly lays out what yoga is with the least amount of religious entanglement, unlike books such as the *Vedas* or *Bhagavadgītā*, it does not have the esotericism of tantric books, and it offers an ethical philosophy directed towards others that is missing from hatha yoga books. Finally, Patañjali borrowed many Buddhist concepts to compile the *Yoga Sūtras*, so it is a more fluid union and overlap of the two traditions I will be discussing. For example the ethics of the *Yoga Sūtras* parallel with the teachings of the Buddha and therefore the teachings of the Thích Nhất Hạnh, but is laid out in a systematic way.

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<sup>2</sup> *aṣṭā* translates to “eight” and *aṅga* translates to “limb” or “auxiliary.”

## *Mindfulness*

Just as there are many schools of Buddhism from which the practice of mindfulness comes from, so too are there many different types of “mindfulness” practices within Buddhism. The Plum Village tradition as created and taught by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh, or Thầy by his students, was chosen for a variety of reasons, but the two primary reasons were for its applicability and emphasis on social change. My aim for this curriculum is for each student to rediscover his or her full human potential in order to inspire social change, so it was only fitting that I chose a Buddhist tradition that explicitly encourages the monastic community to be engaged in the world, coining the word “Engaged Buddhism” as well as a tradition that founded the first institute to teach Buddhist principles in a secular manner. Thích Nhất Hạnh came from a Vietnamese Buddhist tradition that has always been entrenched in government and politics—originally as political counselors to the dynasties, but then later as leaders of uprising against oppressive foreign rule. Nhất Hạnh believes that the true work of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are to be done within the world of suffering, thus he does not limit his teachings or practice to the traditional, contemplative monastic life. Believing in non-dogmatism and inclusiveness, his teachings is also that of a conglomerate of many different schools of Buddhism, using one tradition to complement another. As a young monk, Nhất Hạnh became very outspoken and active as he watched his homeland being torn into pieces by both outsiders and insiders. However, this was not a very popular attitude and he received criticism from the older monks and nuns who had a more traditional outlook. “We were accused of sowing seeds of dissent when we challenged anything traditional. We were considered rabble-rousers who only wanted to tear things down. The hierarchy didn’t know how to deal with us, so they silenced our voices” (Nhất

Hạnh 50). But this never deterred him and to this day, he continues to be engaged in many social issues, creating foundations that use his teachings for social good.

And because he believes in the work of the Buddha and Bodhisattva in the world of suffering, his teachings are extremely applicable. He offers concrete practices and zero theories on how to practice at home, in school, and in one's day-to-day life. This makes it the perfect complement to our yoga practice. It is a practical way of understanding many of the yogic principles. Thích Nhất Hạnh's mindfulness practices reinforces the benefits of yoga because it encourages us to do everything mindfully, including mindful *abhyasa* and *vairagya*. The component of mindfulness allows us to discern when our actions violate one of the *yamas* or *niyamas* and helps us bring our *yogāsana*<sup>3</sup> off the mat and into the world. Thích Nhất Hạnh has even created a whole school, the European Institute of Applied Buddhism, to teach Buddhist practices in a completely secular manner to individuals and families. While mindfulness technically also exists within yoga, it exists more as a byproduct of *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and the *yamas* and *niyamas*. The concentration and meditation techniques of Patañjalayoga are not aimed at cultivating mindfulness. They are practices of absorption; the ultimate goal of the meditative practices of Patañjalayoga is to identify oneself with the ultimate, eternal Self that is unaffected by external circumstances and to detach from the lower self. In doing so, one becomes mindful of the fact that one's true nature is not the physical body or even the mind—these things do not make you who you are. But, before we can become mindful of our higher, spiritual Self, we must become mindful of our present self and the present world we live in. The direct practice of

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<sup>3</sup> This term refers to yoga specifically as the physical practice, or *āsana*.

becoming aware of one's sensation, one's breath, becoming aware of each moment to moment is truly the Buddhist practice of mindfulness.

## **Beginning by Laying the Foundations**

The word *yoga* itself is translated as “to yolk,” “to unite,” or “to change,” and there are innumerable accompanying interpretations, depending on the school of thought. For our purposes, I take the definition of yoga as explained by Patañjali in his *Yoga Sutras: yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ* (1.2). Translated, this explains the practice of yoga and the goal of yoga as suspending the fluctuations of the thoughts of the mind. Within Patañjali's system, our past, present, and future circumstances determine the thoughts that we have—conscious and unconscious—, which in turn determine how we behave, which then goes back to affecting our circumstances. The immediate goal of yoga thus becoming to affect positive changes to our mental thoughts, creating less negative thought patterns and more positive ones. Once we can be in this positive mind space, we can then begin to separate our true nature from our external circumstances, and when we fully recognize this, we are no longer affected by those factors that would cause thoughts in our mind to arise. This leads us to the ultimate, long-term goal of yoga: to realize the separateness of our true self from our physical body which is constantly being morphed by external factors, fully eradicating all fluctuations of the mind. To begin to endeavor on such lofty goals, we must first understand and commit to a few guiding principles. Just as the key to building a house is first properly laying the foundation upon which the infrastructure and the rest of the home can be built upon, the foundational principles of yoga allow us to successfully build upon our practice.

*Abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* are the first two principles we must understand. *Abhyāsa* means practice and *vairāgya* means detachment. All of yoga is a practice and anything we do outside of yoga requires practice. Even those who are naturally gifted as an athlete, artist, businessman, etc., must still practice. She does not discover her innate talent by doing nothing—it must be discovered and honed through practice. But, practice alone is not enough. Practice without non-attachment can lead to an inflated sense of self and it can lead to an unhealthy yearning for results we think should be attaining. On the other hand, non-attachment is also a practice and a goal within yoga itself. Together, continuous *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* will allow the practitioner to be successful in the rest of her endeavors.

### *Rules & Consequences*

Teachers can use the concepts of *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* to begin their semester by introducing some ground rules for the class and their consequences. Rules and consequences are important to practice and non-attachment because they give students tangible guidelines to follow that will help them stay on course. Teachers should already have in mind a list of rules that definitely need to be agreed upon, but before sharing those rules with their students, they can first prompt students to spend 10-15 minutes to decide together as a group which rules they think are important to create a healthy learning environment. It is crucial for the students to work as a group to determine the set of rules because this allows them to get to know their classmates and to create a sense of community, which will in turn help them be more open and comfortable to the potentially uncomfortable and foreign experiences of yoga and mindfulness. Additionally, allowing the students to come up with the rules on their own, without initial input from the

teacher gives them a sense of ownership and responsibility over these rules. They will be more likely to follow rules they voluntarily came up with than rules that were forced upon them.

Once the students agree upon a list of rules—they can range anywhere from 3 to 10 rules, depending on the class—then the teacher with the students will review the list and the teacher can suggest any other rule that she feels is pertinent to the success of the classroom. Once the set of rules is complete, then as a group, the teacher with the students, will come up with corresponding consequences for each time the rule is broken. This will include the first offense, second offense, and third offense. The difference between these consequences and the usual punishments students receive is that these consequences should not keep the students from practicing yoga or mindfulness, but rather they should require the student to practice it more. For example, a consequence for the first offense may be practicing in the front next to the teacher, as her demo, or helping the teacher clean the mats after class. A consequence for the second offense could be holding *vrksāsana* or tree pose for a whole minute on each leg, or saying one nice thing about each person in the class. A consequence for the third offense could be teaching the whole class the sun salutation series, or leading the class through a short guided meditation. Of course, if there are real behavioral issues that cause major distractions to the rest of the class, then appropriate measures will have to be taken in accordance with the school rules.

Finally, the last part in setting the rules and consequences is that all students and the teacher will sign the paper with the stated rules and consequences and then the list of rules should be hung somewhere visibly during each class time so students can be reminded of their commitment.



## The First Set of Principles: How to Take Care of, and Treat Ourselves

Patañjali's yoga system is divided into eight parts, or *astanga*.<sup>1</sup> The first two limbs, the *yamas* and *niyamas* are considered the ethical principles and moral observances. In this section, we will first explore the *niyamas*, the self-restraint observances, or ethical practices directed towards our inner selves. In the *Yoga Sutras*, *niyama* comes after *yama*, but we cannot act ethically or compassionately towards others if we do not know how to take care of ourselves first and to nourish the qualities that are needed in order to treat others ethically and compassionately.

### *Śauca*

The first of the *niyama* is *śauca*, or purity, and it is the observance of cleanliness, purity, or clarity of mind, speech and body. For the ancient yogis, impurities in our bodies and in our minds keep us from practicing and from attaining our spiritual goals. For those of us in the modern world, impurities in our minds and bodies lead to diseases and illnesses. Science has already shown us how negative thoughts—which would be considered impure—can lead to physical injuries or illnesses. And impurities in our bodies such as viruses and bacteria can cause us to get sick.

*Śauca* offers the unique opportunity for teachers to discuss the topic of personal hygiene, such as regular bathing and brushing and flossing teeth, in a school setting that would otherwise ignore such topics or deem them inappropriate. Having worked with children from underserved communities, this topic of hygiene is often not talked about, yet so crucial to a child's health and can impact how often the student is sick and ends up missing school. Many children from the

underserved community may have parents who are too busy working or may be a part of the foster care system, so they often are not taught the importance of daily hygiene, or there is no one to watch over them and remind them. I personally know someone who, at the age of 23, has such bad body odor because he does not brush his teeth or shower every day. It was clear from his family life that he was neglected, but at this point, his friends do not know how to navigate such a topic. So, he is left continuing the same harmful habits.

Beyond daily hygienic routines, *śauca* also applies to how a student treats the rest of her physical body—what she eats, what she puts on her body, whether or not she exercises, etc. Again, healthy eating habits and physical exercise are not generally discussed in most classroom settings because it exists outside of the core standard curriculum, yet it is so crucial to the mental and physical health of each student which directly correlates to one’s ability to perform academically. *Śauca* of the mind asks the students to observe and become aware of disturbing thoughts, emotions, and habits that may pull him or her away from a balanced state of being. During the developmental years in middle school and high school, most teenage girls experience some form of insecurity or body-image issues. *Śauca* allows the teacher to talk about these negative thoughts as mental toxins that can rob the mind of its focus towards more positive goals, and incline it toward anger, jealousy, or even depression. We can then practice becoming aware of these negative thoughts and letting them go—the practice of *aparigraha*.

### *Santoṣa*

*Santoṣa*, the second *niyama*, is most often translated to mean contentment. In mainstream culture, contentment or happiness is often seen as the end goal—something to achieve—, as

exemplified by the thousands of books on “how to be happy.” But in the Eastern traditions from which these principles have been derived, *santoṣa* is an attitude and a constant, diligent practice. It is a practice of connecting with ourselves in such a way that we no longer seek happiness outwardly because we have found it inwardly. This can only be done though, if we are diligent with our practice of *śauca*, as well as with the other *yamas*. If *śauca* is spring cleaning for the mind and body, *santoṣa* is the contentment and clarity experienced after all the negative toxins have been rid of. Once rid of disturbing thoughts and negative behaviors that cloud our judgement, we practice accepting and appreciating things for what they are. However, it is not an attitude of positivity and passivity. We don’t just let things happen to us and we don’t have to remain stagnant. We can still try our best and strive for continual growth in our accomplishments, but as we do so, we simultaneously recognize and enjoy what we do have and who we are in the current moment, having patience with ourselves and circumstances. With the pressure of standardized test performance, grades and competition to get into a good college, many students experience jealousy or anger when their peers succeed and they do not, or they beat themselves up for their lack of progress. This constant comparison is amplified in today’s generation with social media. To stay connected with friends and family means to also be intimately connected to their successes or “haves.” The Buddhist tradition, from which mindfulness meditation comes from, teaches us that we can minimize this kind of suffering through decreasing our perception of separateness from one another by cultivating five types of thoughts. Patañjali also borrows these five thoughts, the *brahmavihāra*, and includes them in the *Yoga Sūtras*. The five are: cultivating friendliness towards those who are happy, cultivating compassion for those who are suffering, cultivating sympathetic joy towards those who are good,

and cultivating equanimity towards those who lack goodness. Teachers can encourage students to practice cultivating these thoughts toward everyone, regardless of how they feel about them. And when this is done students begin to stop feeling a need to compare themselves to others. She simply feels happy for someone else's successes and she begins to derive joy from someone else's joy, not jealousy or anger. Similarly, when the student begins to see the pain and suffering behind those who do harm or commit crime, she shifts her focus away from the actor and begins to see the systemic issues that have allowed the acts to be committed in the first place.

Another practice that can be done with the students is the practice of gratitude sharing or journaling. By abstaining from the compulsion to define our own happiness based on what's happening around us, we can avoid disappointment and learn to find joy in our own abundance. Instead of seeking more, or waiting to be happy, *santoṣa* teaches us to find happiness in all that we already have. Students may be asked to write one or two things they are thankful for on strips of paper, which is then placed into a jar. The teacher, when feeling like things are not going well, can have students dig out a few of the gratitude notes and read them aloud, and then continue adding to that jar of gratitude. Another way to practice is through asking students to keep a weekly or daily gratitude journal. As part of human nature, part of our survival instincts, we tend to focus on the negative so we often lose sight of all the good we have surrounding us. Actively writing down and making our gratitude explicit brings our attention back to everything we have to be thankful for.

## *Tapas*

The word *tapas* can mean a lot of different things, but within the context of the *Yoga Sūtras*, *tapas* is the *niyama* of discipline, deep concentration, or austerity. Traditionally, the ancient yogis would take this *niyama* as a way to engage in a lifestyle of simplicity and restraint.

*Tapas* is an applicable practice in all aspects of the student's life and an necessary ingredient for accomplishing any academic or athletic pursuits. When our progress is impeded by an obstacle, *tapas* reminds us to hold our ground. *Tapas* is also a reminder that temporary discomfort, difficulties, and pain are inevitable in life. In class, examples of this include doing assigned readings and homework, writing papers, studying for exams, getting over a fear of public speaking in order to do a presentation. In other words, *tapas* is the discipline for doing things we may not like because they may not be so fun or we may not see the benefit from doing them in the short run. Discipline is also a muscle that can be practiced on smaller, less important occasions so that it becomes easier to carry oneself with discipline when the stakes are higher. For example, the amount of discipline it takes to do the chores at home is minor, even though it may feel inconvenient or annoying at times, especially when everyone else gets to have fun. But practicing discipline on this small scale strengthens the *tapas* muscles so that when it comes time to help someone in need, even if it requires time and energy, it becomes a little easier to do.

A deeper understanding of *tapas* asks us to observe how we handle our emotions when things become difficult or do not go our way. Do we strike out and react out of fear or anger when we are faced with these tough moments? Or do we refrain, accepting that pain and discomfort can be our teacher? *Tapas* asks the students to do the latter. Understanding *tapas* in this way can be helpful for diffusing the countless conflicts that arise in middle school and high

school, where students at their most heightened hormonal states are asked to be around kids they don't understand or get along with for hours at a time. However, just as with *santoṣa*, *tapas* should not be confused with passivity or resignation. Rather, taken together, *tapas* and *santoṣa* is an active resistance to those things that may try to hold us down or steer us away from our path. Getting suspended or expelled because of a fight does not progress us along on our path and neither does the amount of energy that gets expended from harboring anger and hate.

### *Svādhyāya*

*Svādhyāya* is the *niyama* of self-study. There can be two ways of interpreting *svādhyāya*: it can be a self motivated study of the scriptural texts as well as a study of one's inner self to gain insight and wisdom into our own nature.

In school, the most obvious practice of *svādhyāya* would be to encourage students to read their books and do their assigned readings. However, this is not enough. Already, students are required to memorize or absorb so much academic information. In most cases, the individual is a passive recipient of information. We tend to think that reading is good for us because we are becoming smarter that way, but now, because of the format of standardized testing, students are rarely asked to think critically about a topic, or even if they are allowed to think critically, they can only think within an accepted framework or given answer. But more often than not, students become a regurgitating machine—simply reciting information they have memorized. Then, at home, they continue to absorb information in the form of entertainment. They may be watching television, playing games, on social media, or reading news. Even in the best case scenario, these students are still just absorbing things that have already been created or produced for them.

Rarely are they asked to pause and reflect on what they are experiencing in the moment, how they are feeling, their likes and dislikes, etc. *Svādhyāya*, when understood as the study of the self, gives them the opportunity to do that and encourages it. It encourages them to really find their inner voice and tap into that gut level intuition that is inherent in all of us, but often drowned out by the intellectual thoughts in our heads. Encouraging students to study their thoughts and feelings as they arise helps them become aware of what their triggers are and what causes them to react one way or another—whether positive or negative. One exercise is to ask the students to reflect on the last fight they had with a friend, asking questions such as, “What was it that made me upset?”, “What could my friend have said to make me feel better?”, “How did my reaction affect the situation?”, “Could I have reacted differently?”, and other questions that probe at the underlying causes of one’s reaction. Reflecting in this way helps students to better understand themselves, so rather than responding re-actively, they *act* out of a place of self-knowledge and wisdom. As alluded to in earlier sections, *svādhyāya* is also crucial to our ability to follow the other *yamas* and *niyamas*.

As we get into the physical practice of yoga, *svādhyāya* also encourages students to listen to their physical body, so that they can guide through their practice safely, without unknowingly inflicting pain on themselves.

### *Īśvara praṇidhāna*

Finally, the last *niyama* is *Īśvara praṇidhāna*. Patañjali urges us to surrender and have faith in something beyond ourselves, which becomes crucial when one encounters obstacles along the path of practice. Surrendering to something beyond oneself removes the ego, which can be a

great distraction and obstacle on the path because our ego likes to keep us safe and protected, always keeping us from being too vulnerable or taking risks. The need to surrender to something beyond oneself is hard to understand until we encounter a problem that we cannot immediately solve. It took me 23 years to learn to learn the importances of *Īśvara praṇidhāna*. I grew up in a very non-religious family. Being Vietnamese, we would go to Buddhist temple for the big holidays as part of the celebrations, but never for a religious reason. As an ardent believer in only things that could be proven scientifically, I had no connection to this idea of selfless love or surrender—especially not to something I could not see, feel, or touch. When I was in high school, my brother was arrested and sent to prison. Suddenly, my mom became the most Buddhist layperson I had ever seen—she took on the lay precepts and was at temple every free chance she got. I had a vague understanding that it had to do with the grief of my brother, but I couldn't fully comprehend the shift until I was in my mid twenties, when I hit a point in my life where I no longer had the answers to my problems. I didn't necessarily turn to Buddhism—though I dove deeper into yoga—but that is when I realized that sometimes life gives you problems and obstacles that cannot be solved right away. And to get through that time, you must have faith in something external to yourself, to trust that things will work themselves out.

*Īśvara praṇidhāna* is also a way of looking at love. True love comes from our ability to cultivate a selfless love that is not dependent on any external conditions. This is the love parents have for their children and the kind of love we strive for in friendships and romantic relationships. To be able to love in this way requires a willingness to be vulnerable. In this practice, we must also recognize that there are many things in life which we cannot control, which includes those we love. To love in a way that accepts things as they are, people as they



are, and conditions as they are and having faith that our surrender and selfless love will guide us requires us to push our egos aside.

An experiential way to bring this into the classroom is through the Buddhist concept of inter-being. This exercise can be done with any object, but let us take for example an apple. The teacher would first ask the student to slowly, mindfully (we will return later to this practice) eat a piece of the apple. Then, the students will deeply reflect on everything that has gone into this piece of apple: a seed, water, the sun's energy, the farm, the farmers, the truck drivers that brought the apple to the supermarket, etc. Through this simple exercise, we can very clearly show how connected we all are with one another and how one person's action, thousands of miles away, can directly affect us. This perception of something beyond our physical selves is crucial to bringing us together as a community. It is the idea of separateness and individualism that allows the economic elite to commit acts of injustice and what keeps the populace from uniting. So, when we surrender our ego and placing our faith in something beyond ourselves, we are not talking about a spiritual god, but rather the collective consciousness of all humanity and other beings on this Earth. Of course, *Īśvara praṇidhāna* can also always be directed towards any spiritual figure if you connect to that.

### **The Second Set of Principles: How to Take Care of, and Treat Others**

*Yama* can be thought of as universal moral observances, or a set of ethical actions directed towards one's external environment. They are guiding principles that prepare us for actions —“attitudes that bring clarity, focus, and objectivity to bear on all situations” (Carrera 137).

## *Ahiṃsā*

*Ahiṃsā*, the first *yama*, teaches us to abstain from committing acts of violence towards other human beings, non-human animals, and even non-sentient beings. The two most common examples given of *ahiṃsā* are not eating meat and not killing or hitting others. Becoming a vegetarian can be a great way to practice *ahiṃsā*, but stopping at this example may cause many to write off *ahiṃsā* as something they cannot practice because they think it will be impossible for them to give up meat, or they simply don't agree with a vegetarian diet. Conversely, if hitting or killing is the only other example given, then it leads to a false sense of completion by the majority of the population because as violent as the world may seem, most people are simply not going around and inflicting physical violence on others.

For *ahiṃsā* to be applicable and for it to make sense in a school setting, we must extend our understanding of non-violence beyond these two broad interpretations. A dedicated practice of *ahiṃsā* asks us to become aware of the more subtle and indirect acts of violence that have become commonplace in our society. One way to teach *ahiṃsā* in action is to ask students to reflect upon the last time they acted out towards their parents or teacher and ask them to reflect on all the reasons why they acted out and how their actions might have affected the other person. Through this exercise, we can explore the connection between how a single emotion or belief can result in actions that can be harmful. *Ahiṃsā* in words asks the students to reflect upon the last time they made up or repeated a rumor they heard to another person, asking questions such as “Would you want this rumor spread about you?” and “Would you still repeat this rumor if you had to say it directly to the person whose rumor is about?” In this way, *ahiṃsā* does not become a list of things one should or should not do, but rather, it becomes a way of thinking and

behaving that, when practiced with consistency, becomes instinctual, recognizing the impact of our words, thoughts, emotions, and actions. Exploring *ahimsā* in thoughts or beliefs, we can use a similar exercise to examine how certain thoughts or beliefs may be harmful to us or to those closest to us. Between the ages of middle school and high school, the bodies of teenagers are going through a great amount of hormonal changes, which can cause them to experience heightened stages of emotions, feelings of insecurity and low-self esteem, and/or body image issues. For example, teenage girls often struggle with their body image so thoughts such as “I’m not pretty enough” or “I’m fat” is not only harmful to their sense of well-being and their self-esteem, but can lead to harmful behaviors such as excessive dieting. The practice of *ahimsā* creates an open environment and safe space for teachers and students to discuss the consequences of self-harming behaviors such as eating disorders, cutting oneself, reckless use of drugs and alcohol, and even suicide. If we can discuss these examples within the context of *ahimsā*, in a public forum, it allows the individual who may be suffering from this to realize that he or she is not alone and it acts as a preventative measure. Currently, as there are no formal forums within the school environment to discuss such topics, it is usually only brought up on a one-to-one basis after a student has been suspected of or caught inflicting harm on his or herself. Or in my case when I was a student, it was something gossiped about, like a dirty little secret, and it was recognized as “common” and for some, they even became desensitized to it, but no one even thought there may have been an alternative solution. It was like a virus—if you were lucky enough to not catch it, great for you.

Going even deeper with *ahimsā*, students can even examine how commonly accepted social norms and cultural beliefs may be causing harm to others beyond their immediate

community. The most glaring example of this in our current society is the attitude of “me, myself, and I.” As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Western modernization has created a highly individualistic society and the attitude of self-dependency has been highly praised. One might say, well that sounds like *ahimsā* to me, because if I keep to myself, how can I hurt anyone? Actually, we can do even more harm with such an approach towards life. For example, if my attitude of independence has allowed me to succeed merely through hard work and perseverance, and I extend that same success to others, I would be less willing to give a part of my own wealth to provide support to those who are not as financially well-off. This attitude, then, is keeping you from lending a helping hand to someone in need, which is a form of inflicting harm. This is the danger of the “American Dream.” We work hard and are able to succeed, so we say everyone should be able to do that too, afraid that if we are too charitable, people will become dependent on us and not know how to take care of himself. But, we have erroneously applied this belief to all individuals—even those who are not even given the opportunity to work hard. Trevor Noah in his book, *Born a Crime*, gives the analogy of teaching a man to fish. They say to teach a man to fish is better than to give him fish, but if we show him how to fish without giving him the tools to fish, he may as well be useless. Actually, he is worst off because he knows he can do something, but has no means to actually do it.

### *Satya*

The second *yama* is *satya*, which can most easily be translated to “truth” or “truthfulness.” *Satya* is closely linked to our sense of personal integrity, asking us act, speak, and think from a place of honesty and authenticity. *Satya* in action requires our external behavior to align with our

inner beliefs and thoughts, which requires the diligent practice of *satya* in words and thoughts. *Satya* in speech means observing whether what we say out loud is in agreement with what we think to ourselves. *Satya* in thought requires a level of self-awareness and connection with one's true self. Sometimes this can be expressed as your intuition or gut feeling. We all have moments where we feel like we truly know what we want or how we think and many other moments where we feel a stranger to ourselves. The practice of *satya* in this case, helps us to reduce those moments of disconnect and increase those moments of self-awareness and self-connection.

One way to speak about *satya* in school is in the context of peer pressure. As teens and young adults try to figure who they are, it is often too easy to cave into the desires of the group majority and to ignore their own truth. It is easy to fall into the trap of doing what is “cool” or “acceptable,” not because it is the right thing to do or what we want to do, but because we fear judgment or rejection. For example, a student may know that doing drugs is bad for her, but if she finds herself in a situation where all her friends are smoking for the first time, she may feel the pressure to join the rest of the group. To practice *satya* in action here, she would ask herself if doing drugs with is what *she* want to do or is she simply doing it because she feels pressured to fit in, to belong, to not be judged? Or, in the context of bullying, to practice both *ahimsā* and *satya*, the student is encouraged to help the person being bullied in a way that will result in the least amount of violence for both parties. *Satya* in action also means doing things from a place of integrity: not cheating on a test, not stealing, not scamming others. *Satya* in thought is probably the most subtle and hardest of the three to practice. To practice truthfulness in thought requires us to understand our own nature and to listen to the voice within us. This may not fully come later on in our practice, but if we remain diligent with the other aspects of our practice and stay true to

the foundational principles of *abhyasa* and *vairagya*, as the other thoughts start to settle in mind, our voice will begin to sound clearer.

Finally, *satya* must always be tempered with *ahimsā*, as *ahimsā* is the first and most important of the five *yamas*. It is not always desirable to speak the truth, or act authentically, for it could unnecessarily harm someone else. If speaking the truth has negative consequences for another, then it is better to say nothing. One way to practice *satya* with *ahimsā* is when the students feel conflicted, they can ask themselves, “What is my intention for saying this or doing that?”, “Is this for my benefit or for the other person’s benefit?” Becoming clear of one’s intention will greatly inform whether or not words or behavior may cause harm. *Satya* should never come into conflict with *ahimsā*.

### *Asteya*

*Asteya* is the principle of non-stealing. The easiest and most general way to practice *asteya* is by being respectful of and not stealing someone else’s belongings. This also includes borrowing without asking, which is a less harmful form of non-stealing. *Asteya* in thought and speech requires a deeper understanding. A deeper understanding of *asteya* asks us to consider how we can practice non-stealing in other, more subtle ways. Some examples of this are stealing another person’s time by showing up late to a meeting or event, or hogging up all of a person’s thoughts and energy with one’s comments, questions, or stories.

In an academic setting, students can practice *asteya* by not taking credit for someone else’s words or ideas as our own—in other words, not plagiarizing someone’s writing or cheating off another person’s test or work. Teachers may also ask students to practice *asteya* by being on time

to class and not being disruptive in class. When everyone is on time and on their best behavior, the teacher does not have to waste precious class time waiting for students to arrive or disciplining. Most importantly, because school already operates on such limited time, it is important for both the students and the teachers to be fully present within the classroom. If the teacher is not fully present when she is teaching, then students miss out on the full potentiality of what the teacher has to offer. A huge part of the learning comes from the connection and relationship between student and teacher, which cannot be built when one person is absent-minded. Similarly, when the student is not fully paying attention, he is stealing the teacher's time because he is not actually absorbing what is being given to him. His distracted energy can also steal the attention and energy of other students around him.

Applying *asteya* to society, teachers can discuss the economic system and the topic of making a living. Money is a finite resource—when one person has it, that means someone else is losing out on it. It is okay to want to be financially secure and have a career that allows us to have a comfortable lifestyle, but when we take more than what we need, then we are doing so at someone else's expense. This is another form of stealing. This idea also extends to natural resources. As Americans, we consume far more natural resources than any other country, even the industrialized ones. Although Americans only make up 5 percent of the world's population, the U.S. is the per capita consumption leader for most resources (Nature America). We are literally stealing from every other being on this planet and future generations to come by our actions. Worst of all, as 5 percent of the world's population, we are creating half of the world's solid waste, ranking last out of 18 countries on National Geographic's Greendex, a survey regarding countries' sustainable behavior (National Geographic). If students can understand

sustainability in this context, perhaps the consequences of overconsumption can be more concrete.

### *Aparigraha*

*Aparigraha* is the principle of non-attachment, non-possessiveness, or non-covetousness.

We can understand this as not coveting what someone else has, whether that is material wealth, friends and relationships, or even certain personality traits or talent. We can also understand *aparigraha* as not being attached to our own possessions, both material and immaterial.

*Aparigraha* asks us to let go of our material possessions, but more importantly, to let go of our desire for material possessions. In the most extreme version of this, as practiced by many ancient yogis, it is the complete renunciation of worldly possessions and retreating away from society. But, it is entirely possible still to live happily in society and have material possessions without being controlled by or attached to them.

This is an important concept for young adults, as they are most susceptible to the consumerist tactics of corporations. But it is not necessary to talk about *aparigraha* as renouncing all worldly possessions to our students, rather we can encourage an attitude of detachment that invites students to value what they do have and not lust after what they don't have. It is okay to enjoy a new video game or the new pair of shoes. The problem comes from an excessiveness—wanting too much, thinking what we have is not enough. By practicing non-attachment and non-covetousness, the students learn that they do not need much to be happy. If we can be happy with just one new pair of shoes every six months to a year, then maybe we don't have to run so hard after wealth and profit. Like, *santoṣa*, practicing gratitude and keeping



a gratitude journal or sharing it with others often is a great way of cultivating non-attachment. But to make it more specific to *aparigraha*, teacher can ask the question, “What are the things in your life that you are thankful for an abundance of?” The feeling of not having enough is often linked to a feeling of scarcity, but when we practice seeing how abundant our lives are, we don’t have to be afraid to let go, because we know we will have enough to be okay. Ask the students to take the time to appreciate everything they have and to recognize the abundance in their lives. When cultivated, we will naturally not be as attached to material possessions and that excessive desire for more will wane on its own. This is especially true with money. America’s capitalist culture has drilled into our minds that we can never have enough money or that money is scarce, so we hold tightly to our money, we become greedy, and we definitely do not like to share our money with others. But what happens when we no longer let the golden handcuffs tie us down? A more concrete practice is to ask students to pick one thing they are really attached to and to give it up for an entire week, journal about their experiences. If they are successful, they realize that they are not defined by an object. If they are not successful, this is a great opportunity to explore the beliefs and circumstances that were keeping them from letting go.

Non-possessiveness is also necessary to build healthy relationships with friends, family, and loved ones. No one wants to feel like they are being possessed, or constantly told what to do. But for many of us, this can be an easy habit we pick up, especially when we are younger because we place a part of our identity in others. When our parents embarrass us with how they dress or what they say, it is because we believe that they are a reflection of us or that they are “ours” to be embarrassed by, when in fact they are their own persons. When we can let go of this possessiveness and we allow each person to be who they are, then they are happier with us and

want to be around us. Similarly, we become happier as well because trying to control people can be extremely exhausting and useless.

Finally, beyond material possessions and relationships, we can also practice *aparigraha* with ideas or expectations that do not serve us, or that are causing harm to us. For this practice, *aparigraha* must be paired with *svādhyāya*, *ahimsā*, and *satya*.

### *Brahmacharya*

*Brahmacharya*, the last of the *yama*, can be understood as “right conduct” or “right energy.” *Charya* means “path” or “conduct” and from the ancient scriptural texts of Hinduism, *Brahman* is the Ultimate Consciousness. And because one’s highest goal is to realize this Ultimate Consciousness, *brahmacharya* can be taken to mean the right way to conduct oneself in life, or the right way to expend one’s energy. Or, it is simply the practice of focusing our energy on activities that further progress us on this path and relinquishing those that needlessly expend our energy. The Indian tradition call this energy, *prāṇa* or life force. They equate it with our breath, which is important for regulating and cultivating our energy (more on that later). This energy is what keeps us moving and alive, but we only have so much of it in a day and in our lifetime, so we must not waste it by giving our energy, our attention, our time to things that will not bring us good.

In schools, as students are discovering their values, their beliefs, and what is important to them, *brahmacharya* is an easy way for them to guide their actions and direct their focus. A good question to come back to is, “In what way am I using my energy?” Are they spending their energy harboring anger towards someone or gossiping about a classmate? Are they spending

their energy enjoying the company of their friends? Are they spending their energy paying attention in class? To make *brahmacharya* even more applicable, students can explore some goals they have for the immediate future. For example, if the student's goal is to continue on to higher education after they graduate, then we may ask them to explore actions that may distract them away from this goal. Or perhaps they are playing a team sport in school. Behaviors such as partying, using drugs and alcohol, or even neglecting their academics can put their spot on the team sport in jeopardy. Thus, to practice *brahmacharya* in this way is to renounce such reckless behaviors.

Another way to look at *brahmacharya* is in conjunction with *asteya* and relationship boundaries. If *brahmacharya* is the practice of conserving our energy, then we must examine our relationship boundaries and help others to not steal time or energy from us, practicing *asteya* towards ourselves. This requires creating healthy boundaries in all relationships: familial, friends, and romantic. We cannot expect others to know how we are feeling, how much energy we have at any given moment, or how introverted/extroverted we are feeling. Some of this will be expressed through our body language and facial expressions, but we must be clear in order to help the other person out. This is a great practice to start at any age because it requires us to practice both *ahimsā* towards ourselves as well as *satya*. It also requires a lot of courage and practice to be able to establish those boundaries and speak up when we feel they are being violated, which only becomes easier with more practice. Healthy boundaries are especially important in young romantic relationships because young men and women don't have the same amount of experience and are still trying to figure themselves out, let alone how to be with another person. Thus, without clear limits, students can fall into an abusive relationship—

mentally, emotionally, or physically—without realizing it. And any infraction on their intimate boundaries steals their energy away from them. This brings me to the topic of sexual energy. Just as students are figuring out who they really are in middle school and high school, they are also figuring out who they are in a romantic capacity—even as adults, many of us are trying to figure this out. To practice right sexual energy is to not engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment. There is a difference between sexual desire and love. And while there is no concrete example or clear-cut answer to this question of love for anybody, students can learn to better discern their feelings and emotions through the other practices offered here.

### **The Physical Component: *Āsana* and *Prāṇāyāma***

*Āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* are the third and fourth limbs of Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅgayoga*. *Āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* are the physical practices used to cleanse and purify, as part of *śauca*, but also to keep our bodies healthy so that our minds can be healthy as well. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, also known as the “father of modern yoga,” was known as bringing Hatha Yoga<sup>2</sup> into the modern and western world. However, as attested to by various students such as the dedicated student and son, T.K.V. Desikachar, Krishnamacharya never saw yoga as primarily a physical practice. For him, he recognized that illness can be a distraction along the path of one’s highest goal, which demands a strong will, trust, and the ability to keep up one’s efforts constantly. Thus, healing the body and mind through *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* was an important first step for him. For students who spend most of their time sitting, and with physical education being cut completely in most schools or greatly reduced, the physical practice of *āsana* becomes extremely important to their physical and mental well-being. *Āsana*, as much of the Western world has discovered, just by

itself is a great way to be immediately reap the therapeutic effects of yoga. It can thus help students experience in their bodies some of the sensations we seek to achieve with the *yamas* and *niyamas*. The themes of the *yamas* and *niyamas* can also be woven into each *āsana* class. For example, using *ahiṃsā* to remind the students to not force themselves into a pose if it hurts, but reminding them that *tapas* tells us there is a difference between temporary discomfort and pain—the former helps us learn and grow.

For our purposes, the postures practiced will vary greatly depending on the group of students, their ability, and what they need at any given time. The best approach to take is to heed the advice of Krishnamacharya, who strongly advocated for a personalized practice for each person, to match their physical ability and to work within their own limits and needs. This was made especially clear during the latter half of Krishnamacharya’s career, teaching in Chennai at Vivekananda College. Here, the diversity of his students allowed him to showcase his diverse and extensive knowledge and ability to mold the practices. Krishnamacharya taught an adaptive and innovative *āsana* practice that changed to meet the needs of the time and the needs of each student, but his teachings of philosophy, insight, and the subtle body were also grounded in the ancient yoga texts. The physical practice of yoga can also go beyond the typical poses seen on yoga magazine covers and in yoga studios. For example, in a classroom setting where desks cannot be moved or yoga mats are not available, we can do a seated practice and include some standing postures. In a mixed classroom, we may also remove many poses that can feel uncomfortable for boys and girls to do together, or that can feel too “sexual,” such as a wide-legged forward fold, or happy baby. For students who seem low on energy, we would do an invigorating practice, but for students with too much energy, we would do something to calm and

get rid of their excess energy. To build a sense of community and a level of trust and comfort among the students and teacher, games should be included as part of the *āsana* portion, especially played at beginning of the course. There are a variety of ice-break games that can easily be adapted to have a yoga theme. Similarly, we may include a few theatrical or dance games to get students comfortable with the idea of putting their bodies into unfamiliar shapes.

*Prāṇāyāma* is a necessary component to the postural practice because if we just do the postures without any awareness of the breath or without practicing the breath in a mindful, meaningful way, then we miss a great deal of the benefits of yoga. Our breath is the one part of our autonomic system that we can consciously control to regulate our autonomic system. We can increase our breath, thereby increasing our heart rate and consequently putting our bodies into a stress-response mode. Alternately, we can slow down our breathing to a pace that calms and relaxes the body, the first part to helping the body heal. When breath is connected with movement, we can experience a moving meditation of sorts, which can ease students into seated meditation.

With *prāṇāyāma*, as all classes will be a mix of students, it is important to do easy and safe breath work that do not have many contraindications. This ensures students will receive the most benefit out of the practice. The first practice to be introduced should just be an extended exhale, making the out-breath longer than the in-breath. Then, as the students become comfortable with slowing down their breath, we can introduce the *ujjayi* breath, a common *prāṇāyāma* done during the *yogāsana* practice. As students advance, we can introduce the calming practice of alternate nostril breathing. This will be the foundation of the *prāṇāyāma* exercises, though more can be introduced at the discretion of the teacher.

## Mindfulness Practices

As briefly mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, mindfulness is a specific practice derived from the teachings of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh and his Plum Village tradition. We practice mindfulness because it puts us in the present moment and we can only be in the present moment when our mind is in the same place as our body. The breath is a powerful tool that can help us come back to the present moment because we do not breathe in the past nor do we breathe in the future—we can only breathe in the present. There are five mindfulness principles, referred to as “trainings” within the tradition that line up with the *yamas* and *niyamas* of yoga, and to help practitioners with the five mindfulness trainings, Thầy invites us to practice mindfulness in three main ways: seated meditation, walking meditation, and working meditation.

When students are fully aware of the present moment, they become better students because their whole attention is devoted to the teacher and the subject. Class time can be spent more efficiently when things do not have to be repeated because someone was not paying attention. Being fully in the present moment creates richer and more meaningful relationships. When students are fully present, they can really listen to their friend’s problems and understand their pain, but they can also more fully appreciate the funny stories and the good times. When students come back to themselves in the present moment, they are happier because they are not worrying about something embarrassing they might have done, fuming over a past argument, or worrying about an upcoming event. When the student is truly practicing mindfulness, each happy moment can be enjoyed and each difficult moment can be tackled with clarity and calmness.

Most of the mindfulness practices come from the *Ānāpānasatisutra*<sup>4</sup>. According to Nhất Hạnh, the *Ānāpānasatisutra* is divided into four parts. The first part is using the breath to be mindful of the body, the second is to be mindful of the feelings, the third is to be mindful of the mind, and the fourth is to be mindful of the objects of the mind (Nhất Hạnh 11). This paper will only detail the first part, mindfulness of the body because it is simple and applicable to all audiences, beneficial for beginning students as well as advanced practitioners. The last three parts are more specific and conditional and require a certain level of mastery of the first section. Teachers may choose to introduce the other sections when appropriate.

### *Mindful of the Body, Seated Meditation*

The first two lines tell the practitioner to first observe the in-breath and out-breath, without changing it in any way and then to follow each inhalation and exhalation, from beginning to end. Then, the practitioner is invited to become aware of the whole body and experience it—*feel* what is happening in the body. The following line then tells the practitioner to calm and relax the body. Unlike the breath work exercises, *prāṇāyāma*, during the seated meditation, one should not manipulate the breath in anyway. Rather, as the body becomes aware of the tensions, its own intelligence will gradually ease these tensions and the breath will naturally slow on its own as the body becomes calmer. These first four practices can be introduced gradually at the pace of the students. There are a variety of accompanying guided meditations for these practices. The below are two examples of guided meditations that can be used.

1. Breathing in, I calm my body. (Calm)

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<sup>4</sup> *Ānāpāna* refers to inhalation and exhalation, *sati* meaning awareness, and *sutra* refers to the text.



Breathing out, I smile. (Smile)

2. Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment. (Present moment)

Breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment. (Wonderful moment) (Nhất Hạnh 13)

This is an approachable practice for beginners. The students can continue to repeat the full sentences, like a mantra, or they can choose to repeat the shortened phrase in parentheses. The first part brings complete attention to calming the body; the in-breath reminds us to be calm and the smile on the out-breath cultivates a calmness. The second part brings the student into the present moment. “By dwelling in the present moment, we put an end to attachments to the past and anxieties about the future. Life is only available in the present” (Nhất Hạnh 14).

1. Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. (In)

Breathing out, I know I am breathing out. (Out)

2. Breathing in, my breath grows deep. (Deep)

Breathing out, my breath goes slowly. (Slow)

3. Breathing in, I feel calm. (Calm)

Breathing out, I feel ease. (Ease)

4. Breathing in, I smile. (Smile)

Breathing out, I release. (Release)

5. Dwelling in the present moment. (Present moment)

I know it is a wonderful moment. (Wonderful moment) (Nhất Hạnh 18)

This second example is a longer guided meditation. Like the first example, in the first two stages, the breath is the bridge that brings the mind to the body and the body to the mind. It is only in the present moment that we can be aware of the breath, and in this moment, our body and mind are in the same place. In the third stage, we quiet the mind and bring it to a place of tranquility. The smile in the fourth stage relaxes the facial muscles and the meditator can even “send the half

smile to the whole body, as if it were a fresh, cool stream of water” (Nhất Hạnh 16), and the out-breath lets us exhale away the tensions in our body. The final stage brings the meditator back into the present moment. These practices can be introduced during seated meditation, but practitioners can choose to use these phrases while doing other activities as well. These two practices are also simple enough for students to remember and use outside of the classroom setting by themselves.

### *Walking Meditation*

Walking meditation is a daily practice for practitioners of the Plum Village tradition. At first, it is practiced as an intentional meditation, but once it becomes habitual, practitioners can see this mindful walking manner bleed over into daily life. During walking meditation, we walk slowly, not to get anywhere, but simply to walk. It is about really enjoying the walking—aware of each step, each breath, and our surrounding. Students walk, and sometimes run, to class or break multiples time throughout the day, but it is always in a hurried or distracted manner. Especially now with cell phones, everyone is walking around with their heads down, eyes glued to the phone screen, trying to connect with people who aren’t there while we ignore all that is there with us in the present moment.

A proper walking meditation practice requires that one walks a little slower than your normal pace, coordinating the breathing with each step. For example, if it takes us three steps to breathe in and three steps to breathe out, then we can say to ourselves, “In, in, in. Out, out, out.” The lengths of the in-breath and out-breath do not have to be the same. We can also choose to repeat any of the seated meditation phrases. Nhất Hạnh’s only criteria is that if we feel happy,

peaceful, and joyful while we are walking, then we are practicing correctly. As we walk at this leisurely pace, become aware of the contact between your feet and the Earth. When we see something beautiful, we can stop to look at it—a tree, flower, children playing. As we look, we continue to follow our breathing. To introduce this practice, we can even start with just walking at the student's normal pace, but in silence and without any mobile devices. We invite the students simply to notice their surrounding and notice their breath. After some time, this purposeful walking meditation will slowly bleed into other aspects of one's life and the student may find that his or her sense of rushing place to place starts to diminish, or that he or she no longer feels compelled to check his or her phone all the time while walking. It is important to note that for Thích Nhất Hạnh, the intention behind the practice is more important than what the practice may look like. For example, one can even run to class, but if one can be fully there, with each step and each breath, then one is still practicing mindfulness.

### *Working Meditation*

Just as it sounds, working meditation is a meditation for all work activities. In other words, mindfulness in every we do. Not having enough time to sit down and meditate is not an excuse to not meditate. Thích Nhất Hạnh gives many examples of this: doing the dishes, gardening, taking out the trash, cleaning the toilet, driving a car, etc. Each act is to be enjoyed, not rushed through so we can get onto the next thing. For example, Thích Nhất Hạnh has this to say about washing the dishes.

While washing the dishes one should only be washing the dishes, which means that while washing the dishes, one should be completely aware of the fact that one is washing the

dishes. At first glance, that might seem a little silly: why put so much stress on a simple thing? But that's precisely the point. The fact that I am standing there and washing these bowls is a wondrous reality. I'm being completely myself, following my breath, conscious of my presence, and conscious of my thoughts and actions. There's no way I can be tossed around mindlessly like a bottle slapped here and there on the waves.

While washing dishes, you might be thinking about the tea you're going to drink afterwards, and so try to get them out of the way as quickly as possible in order to sit and drink tea. But that means that you are incapable of living during the time you are washing the dishes. When you are washing the dishes, washing the dishes must be the most important thing in your life. Just as when you're drinking tea, drinking tea must be the most important thing in your life (Nhật Hạnh 3).

For students, we can apply this same concept to doing their homework assignment, reading, doing their chores, driving, etc. This can be especially helpful with ensuring success with the practice of *tapas*. Approaching discipline in this way, we can find enjoyment in doing the tasks that are not easily enjoyable.

### *Eating Meditation*

Eating meditation is also a part of the daily Plum Village practice. In the classroom, teachers can introduce eating meditation with the fruit meditation exercise given above in the *Īsvara praṇidhāna* section. It is thus a great opportunity to talk both about eating mindfully as well as the idea of inter-being. Extending the practice outside of the classroom, teachers can encourage students to practice mindful eating with family members and friends. It doesn't have to be for every meal, but eating mindfully with friends and family is a great way to fully enjoy their presence and it creates a wonderfully joyous eating experience. If you have ever eaten a meal when angry or frustrated, you will recall that the food never seems to taste as good as when you are in a positive mood. To practice, each person at the dinner table takes the first few

moments before eating their food to look at each person, and smiling, taking a couple of in and out breaths in order to get in touch with oneself and everyone at the table. Then, we look at our food and take a few moments to contemplate. “Mindful eating can cultivate seeds of compassion and understanding that will strengthen us to do something to help hungry and lonely people be nourished” (Nhất Hạnh 37). To aid in mindful eating, practitioners can choose to eat the first few minutes of the meal in silence, giving one’s full attention to the food. As is the case for most yoga and mindfulness practices, this may feel uncomfortable at first, but after a little while, one will feel a sense of happiness and peace.

## **Role of the Teacher**

As important as yoga and mindfulness is for the student, it cannot be fully effective without the participation of the teachers as well. Teachers are not immune to the stressors and obstacles of daily life. In fact, most teachers not only have their own personal life to handle, but they encounter many stressful situations and excessive pressure from school administrators, fellow teachers, and of course, the students. They are also often under supported and underpaid. A 2015 review carried out the U.S. Department of Education found that over 78% of teachers interviewed felt overwhelming stress on the job and as a result, a high attrition rate of eight percent every year with less than a third of that leaving for retirement (U.S. Department of Education; Westervelt). In high-performing countries like Finland or Singapore, the attrition rate is usually 3 to 4 percent (Westervelt). And yet, teacher needs are often not attended to, which is problematic since teachers make up the other half of the puzzle in a classroom. Students also respond to how they are being treated by their teachers, so if a teacher is angry or under a lot of

stress, it may cause them to lash out at their students, resulting in a negative cycle of harmful reactions. For real change to take place in the classroom, teachers must also engage in the practice. Teachers are thus encouraged to either practice with the students, or on their own time. To outline a program for teachers would be beyond the scope of this paper, but Wake Up Schools is one organization that is specifically targeted towards educators. Wake Up Schools is part of the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation and their mission is to support educators and the work that they do through the Plum Village five mindfulness practices. These practices nourish joy while taking care of suffering so that they may be the best teachers they can be and avoid the common problems of teacher burnout, depression, and anger. At Wake Up Schools, teachers are invited to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings and to practice with an educator's community. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are Thích Nhất Hạnh's concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Nhất Hạnh stresses the importance of the word "training" here. They are not meant to be strict all-or-nothing vows, but rather a commitment to a training. Mistakes and mess-ups are fully welcomed and embraced.

The first training, Reverence for Life, echoes *ahimsā* and *aparigraha*.

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of inter-being and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

The training of True Happiness, reminds us of *asteya* and *santoṣa*.

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am

determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

The third training, True Love, is similar to *brahmacharya* as well as *Īśvara praṇidhāna*.

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

The fourth training, Loving Speech and Deep Listening combines *satya* with *ahimsā*.

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

Nourishment and Healing is the last training and touches on the subject of *śauca*, mindful of the toxins we put into our minds and bodies. This last training can also be an expression of *aparigraha* with regards to moderation in consumption.

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriment, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate inter-being and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.



## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

### Existing Programs

I am not the first to bring yoga and mindfulness into schools. In fact, the popularity of teaching yoga and mindfulness to children have been growing within the past decade. Below I will introduce a few programs that work with schools in California, and specifically Los Angeles. Because there is not a central association for yoga in schools and many teachers do not advertise their work online, my review will only be limited to a few of the bigger organizations that I am aware of, and it is in no way an exhaustive or comprehensive list. However, each of the organizations outlined below work with children with varying methods and approach.

#### *Wee Yogis*

Wee Yogis was founded by Jocelyn “Jyoti” Kay Levy. The mission of Wee Yogis is to bring yoga wellness to children through “transformational” media and entertainment, such as with original music, videos, concerts, classes, and even a yoga musical. As founder of Wee Yogis, Levy primarily does outreach to schools in the Bay Area to bring yoga teachers into their schools. She is responsible for setting up teaching accounts with various schools and handles all of the administrative tasks so that her teachers only have to worry about teaching. In order to teach under the Wee Yogis umbrella, all teachers must complete Levy’s Youth Yoga Teacher Training, a 95-hour Yoga Alliance Certified Training. The Wee Yogis Teacher Training program is broken up into four modules. Module One, “Wee Yogis Play,” is a general kids yoga teacher training, focusing on teaching kids ages two through twelve. Wee Yogis Connect is the second

module and it is a specialized module that focuses on anatomy, nutrition, the subtle body, and teaching children with special needs such as ADD/ADHD and autism. The third module, “Wee Yogis Grow,” houses on teen topics such and incorporates more yoga philosophy, behavior management techniques, bullying, Sanskrit, mantras, and even an introduction to Kirtan. Module Four, “Mentorship and Practicum,” offers hands on experience teaching kids and one-on-one training with a mentor. The type of yoga that Wee Yogis teaches is inspired by, and derived from the teachings of: Srivatsa Ramaswami, Ram Dass, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Trudy Goodman.

Before Levy sets up a teaching account with a school, she first offers a demo class. Then, based on the needs and financial ability of the school, she will design a specific yoga program just for them. One classroom can have just a 30-minute, in-class session of mindfulness games and then some seated yoga stretches, while another school is able to offer an hour-long period of *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and meditation. In my interview with Levy, she says that most of the time, the classes end up being just mindfulness practices and games (Levy). When asked about offering yogic principles in her curriculum, Levy answers that for the first couple of classes, she does not discuss yogic principles or values, especially with the younger ones. She prefers them to just experience it and then if appropriate, start to introduce it later on (Levy). However, yogic concepts or philosophy are never referred to by their Sanskrit terms.

The strongest aspect about Levy’s yoga in schools program is that she has been able to get her teachers paid. While funding still remains their biggest obstacle, they work with the school’s budget to offer at the very least, \$30 a class for the yoga teachers. More often than not, they are able to pay each teacher roughly \$60 a class. In Los Angeles, most of the yoga teachers I have

met and interviewed have not been able to get funding for the work they do in LAUSD. Being able to pay yoga teachers is important because it allows yoga in schools to be more sustainable. It alleviates the yoga teacher's stress to have to fund her teaching in another way, so that she can focus on the teaching itself. Additionally, when teachers are paid, it guarantees that they will be consistent and they will be there for a longer amount of time. This type of consistency is key to building trust and rapport with the students. The quality of the student-teacher relationship will affect the impact of the yoga and mindfulness program. Finally, what was most interesting in my interview with Levy is that she expressed to me, while her program offers training to work with teenagers and special needs children, all of her current teachers have only expressed interest in working with ages 7-12, or younger. For this reason, there are no Wee Yogis classes in middle school or high school, very little of philosophy is discussed, and the classes are mostly centered around yoga & mindfulness games, songs, and play. There is thus a need here that can be addressed with my offered curriculum.

### *Youth Yoga LA*

Youth Yoga LA is a non-profit organization founded by Diana Diaz, a professional dancer and actress, who was deeply touched by the practice of yoga and wanted to give back. The Director and Chief Instructor of the organization is Ivorie Jenkins, a 500-hour Yoga Alliance Certified instructor. The mission of Youth Yoga is to bring yoga and meditation to teens within the underserved communities of Los Angeles. Like Wee Yogis, they also tailor their curriculum to meet the needs of the schools, but to a lesser extent. All of their classes are either an hour or an hour and a half long, generally taking place during the Physical Education period. The general

structure of each class begins with a quote that relates to the topic of the week, then a brief introduction to the topic, followed by *āsana*, and eventually meditation. The bulk of the *āsana* sequence stays the same throughout the semester, with a few additional postures added in as the students advance. The topics throughout the semester build upon one another, with the first few weeks discussing the importance of integrating mind, body, and breath and then moving on to topics such as patience, acceptance, and confidence. The topics have their basis in yoga but they are not explicit yogic principles.

I partnered with Youth Yoga to help me bring yoga into Newmark High School, a continuation school in Los Angeles, so I am currently following their curriculum. However, having worked with their curriculum for over a year now, I can see that their curriculum would be strengthened by more directly introducing the *yamas* and *niyamas*. Concepts such as patience, acceptance, and confidence are wonderful to be reminded of, but they are too specific so they don't offer much room for interpretation and they are words that are too often thrown around to hold much significance. On the other hand, *tapas* or discipline, is a concept that allows one to practice both patience and acceptance, as well as a variety of other qualities. Furthermore, discipline can be more easily practiced than something such as patience or acceptance. Patience is often only a required trait to practice when something negative happens. For example, I can only practice patience when someone is driving really slowly in front of me, or I have had to give instructions to my students four times already. This can be extremely hard to do if I am already so used to being impatient. Discipline, however, can be practiced in neutral or even positive situations, allowing students to strengthen their discipline muscles before it is

challenged. Keeping a daily yoga practice is one way to practice discipline, even if it is just for 20 minutes a day. Over time, this discipline will bleed over to other aspects of life.

### *SCHOOL Kids Yoga & Mindfulness*

Smiling Calm Hearts Open Our Learn (SCHOOL) Kids Yoga & Mindfulness was founded by Kelly Wood in 2012, who has been working with yoga and children since 2002. Her Kids Yoga Teacher Training is accredited by Yoga Alliance and is called Hi Yoga. According to Wood, it is a non-profit organization that brings secular yoga-based mindfulness tools into the classroom to cultivate a positive environment. Wood only worked with younger children, between the ages of 4 through 11 so she emphasizes simplicity and authenticity.

She always starts with a personal story that articulates a certain philosophical concept, the same warm-up every time, one to two movement poses, and then a 45-90 second meditation. Her classes are always twenty minutes long and within the class period. This format is beneficial because it allows the teacher to also practice with the students and because it is only twenty minutes long, it allows schools to incorporate it into their school program more consistently.

### **Arguments Against Yoga and Mindfulness in School**

Two foreseeable hurdles in the implementation of a yoga and mindfulness program are the objections that yoga in school violates separation of Church and State and that limited school funding should be devoted to other vital programs.

### *Is Yoga Religious?*

Opponents of yoga's inclusion in public schools claim that it promotes Eastern religions and violates the national commitments of secularism in the public sphere. The common argument against this claim is to insist that yoga is a science or that yoga is "just exercise," dismissing yoga's opponents as religious fanatics (Douglass). This is exactly what happened in *Sedlock v. Encinitas*, a Southern California lawsuit brought on by parents who claimed that the yoga practice in their children's school was inherently religious and therefore unconstitutional. *Sedlock v. Encinitas* set the legal precedent of yoga as just exercise. However, as Carol Horton and Laura Douglass point out, to categorize yoga into either extreme dismisses the true holistic potential of the practice. Not only does it ignore yoga's true potential, but it reinforces the "impoverished understanding of education that dominates our public system" (Douglass). Yoga is thus stuck between a rock and a hard place. If we introduce yoga as simple stretching and strengthening routines with perhaps some breathing and mindfulness thrown in there to help students exercise and think more clearly, we ignore yoga's true potential. If we acknowledge its religious roots or leave the door open for potential spiritual connections, then we face the accusations of religious indoctrination or legal and ethical violations.

Being sensitive to this, I would offer yoga and mindfulness as a spiritual practice. In this context, spirituality is defined as a quality that is concerned with the human spirit or soul rather than the material or physical. In the modern Western world, because of the privatization of religion and religious practices, spirituality has come to denote a personal and interiorized experience of that which is beyond the natural world. Many Westerners may claim that they are "spiritual" and not "religious," referring to the fact that they may ascribe to certain spiritual

teachings or beliefs but do not identify with a religious institution. This is where a yoga and mindfulness curriculum can find its home. Practicing yoga and mindfulness does not require the individual to subscribe to a certain religious institution or any dogmatic beliefs. Yoga and mindfulness is a vehicle through which one's own spirituality can be explored on a spectrum. The spectrum allows the individual to practice yoga and mindfulness in a fully scientific and secular manner on one end or to full subscribe to a religious doctrine on the other—whether its Hinduism, Christianity, or even Judaism. As Thích Nhất Hạnh reminds us:

Spirituality doesn't mean a blind belief in a spiritual teaching. Spirituality is a practice that brings relief, communication, and transformation. Everyone needs a spiritual dimension in life. Without a spiritual dimension, it's very challenging to be with the daily difficulties we all encounter. (Nhất Hạnh loc. 101).

Through my own experiences teaching yoga at an educational institution, I have found that yoga and mindfulness has actually helped students with a strong religious tradition better understand their own religion. For example, a college student of mine at Loyola Marymount University is studying to become a rabbi. In his reflection journals and his final paper, he has expressed that concepts such as *śauca* and the *bandhas*<sup>5</sup> have actually helped him understanding certain Judaic teachings that he previously had a hard time relating to or making sense of.

Furthermore, framing yoga and mindfulness in this way aligns with how these practices are understood in Eastern traditions. In Western culture, since the time of the Cartesian split of mind and matter, Westerners have always had a hard time understanding concepts that cannot be easily divided into dualities. Furthermore, since the Scientific Revolution, there has been a strict

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<sup>5</sup> *Bandhas* are bodily energetic locks used in the physical practice of yoga to control the flow of energy within the body. They are related to the concept of *prāṇa* or life force in yoga.

division between science and religion. To be scientific means to speak about things in terms of the physical body, the natural world, and secularism. To be religious or spiritual means to speak in terms of the experiential, the soul, the transcendental world, and most importantly, it must be kept within one's private life. As Horton articulates, Western modernity has pitted science and physicality against religion and spirituality, but modern yoga and meditation emerged from an alternate framework that harmonizes the scientific and spiritual. "In this formulation, yoga and meditation were understood to be scientific in that their claims to efficacy were based on empirical experience, rather than religious belief" (Horton loc. 2552). Historically, in Indian culture, there has never been a separation between religion, philosophy, law, or every day life. The word *dharma* captures the concept of religion, but it also means "law" or "norm," along with many other meanings (Feuerstein 1998). And philosophy is an understanding of metaphysics that has moral implications, so philosophy is "always regarded as a way of life and is never pursued as merely an inconsequential exercise in rational thinking" (Feuerstein 1998). Thus, even though yoga is a soteriological practice, growing alongside and within the religions of the East—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sufism, etc.—it does not solely belong to the spiritual. As popularized by Swami Kuvalayananda, scientific methods can be used to test and understand the practice of yoga, even if it cannot provide a full scope of language with which to speak about yoga. But in this way, for the Eastern mind, modern science and modern yoga can easily be integrated and reconciled, making yoga both spiritual and secular.

In addition to offering yoga and mindfulness as a spiritual, and not religious, practice, I will be cognizant in using secular and practical language. In this context, secular means there will be no use of gods or deities, which are specific to religious traditions. Additionally, Sanskrit



will only be used in so far as they honor the fact that these teachings belong to a different culture with its own language and they acknowledge the complexity of translating a Sanskrit term into English. Thus, it will be more akin to learning a new language, such as learning a phrase in Spanish and the ways in which this phrase would be used by Spanish-speakers, but knowing that there is not a perfect equivalent meaning in English. This is different to chanting Om, which carries with it a mystical component that could be interpreted as religious indoctrination. Using secular language allows students to learn the valuable skill-sets and tools provided by yoga without feeling a need to subscribe to a religious belief; grounding the teachings in the physical and natural world gives the student a way to speak about yoga in a language they are already familiar with—science; and finally, weaving mindfulness into nature and our surrounding environment give students the tools to make their own connection and form meaning out of their own experiences, which may or may not be a spiritual one. “Many people have spiritual experiences in the natural realm: in woodlands, on mountains, through looking at flowers or being with animals,” but just as many can extract meaningful experiences out of the same environment simply by becoming aware of their surroundings without any spiritual revelation. So while the class will be taught in a secular manner, it will not be defined as purely scientific or secular, allowing the students to make meaning out of the practice for themselves. As Horton writes, “teaching yoga in ways that affirm its status as a mind-body integration practice (adapted as necessary to support secular educational values) offers a means of revitalizing the commitment to educating the “whole child” that once formed the bedrock of our now-marginalized tradition of progressive education” (Douglass).

### *Funding*

Another argument against the inclusion of yoga and mindfulness into the curriculum is the already limited availability of funding in schools, especially in public schools. Seemingly, there are better ways in which money could be spent: updated textbooks and facilities, higher compensation for teachers and administrators, healthier school lunches, more individual support for students, etc. While I advocate for the additional funding of all these efforts, I believe that the values learned through yoga and mindfulness can actually help to drive change from within the school system to address the aforementioned needs. This may be idealistic, but what would it look like if the students demanded healthier lunches, not just a few select parents? What would it look like if high-achieving students felt compassion for their struggling classmates and volunteered their time to help those students? What would it look like if the fight for better teacher wages was supported by the student-body, and not just by the teachers? In an ideal world, all issues could be addressed and resolved immediately, but because we do not live in such a world, the most effective method is to do one thing well that can ignite other positive changes and be the catalyst for other movements.

### **Conclusion**

# Addendum

The following sections still require work:

## **Chapter 2: Education**

- Singapore case study needs more information

## **Chapter 3: Yoga and Mindfulness in Schools**

- Further detail needed in “The Role of the Teacher” section

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

- Discussion on existing programs
- Detail funding argument
- Final summary of all chapters and concluding words

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