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The Reinfusion of Mindful Roots into Power Yoga: A Mindfulness-Based Yogi Manual

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Mindfulness Studies, Lesley University

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Dr. Melissa Jean & Dr. Andrew Olendzki

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This work is dedicated to yogis, mindfulness meditation teachers, and all those seeking the spiritual path. I am grateful for the mindfulness experts and enthusiasts who have inspired me: Jon Kabat-Zinn, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Dan Harris, and so many more.

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Abstract

The practice of modern yoga emphasizes the physical aspect of what was originally a contemplative tradition. Power yoga is perceived as a fitness experience that lacks an explicit articulation between the physical body and the mind. Investigating the roots of contemplative yoga through the language of mindfulness can bridge the divide between an intense external practice and one that can ultimately calm the mind. This thesis focuses on the recovery of mindfulness underlying modern yoga and encourages yoga teachers to reinfuse their power classes with the ancestral wisdom rooted in the practice.

Keywords: Yoga, modern yoga, power yoga, mindfulness, yoga teacher, meditation, mindfulness-based

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The Reinfusion of Mindful Roots into Power Yoga: A Mindfulness-Based Yogi Manual

Yoga can lead to significant mind and body connection through regular practice, wise understanding, and skillful instructing. Often viewed as whether one can touch their toes or not, modern yoga, and specifically power yoga, can be overlooked as the mindfulness practice from which it originates at its core. Park et al. (2015) confirm that many people are drawn to yoga for physical reasons, but that they also continue to practice because of what they discover about themselves with consistent dedication to a practice.

This rationale paper conducts a brief overview of *yoga*, the ancient traditional practice, and the birth and evolution of the genre known as modern yoga, including power yoga. It illuminates the inherently mindful properties from the traditional roots of *yoga* that are experienced in the modern practice, its existence in a consumer culture, and the reality of teachers who have the passion for modern yoga and who pursue it as a lifestyle and career. This paper acknowledges the innate value of practicing and teaching modern yoga and suggests that mindfulness is the language that can be recovered and woven into the diluted version of yoga that is the modern practice.

Many studies demonstrate that practicing any form of modern yoga can lead to benefits including stress reduction, increased flexibility, generosity, overall well-being, and a quieted mind (Gaur, 2018; Gordon, 2013; Kishida, 2018; Marshall et al., 2020; Park et al., 2015; Schutz, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2017). Therefore, practicing varied styles of modern yoga, for example power yoga, may contribute to finding a more balanced lifestyle and better well-being. The creative project born of this rationale paper aims to empower power yoga teachers to investigate and cultivate a mindfulness meditation practice to experience the presence of a mind and body connection of a modern yoga practice and embed it in their teaching.

Brief History of *Yoga*

Yoga has an array of contextual meanings. As Eliasson (2013) captures from Hoyez, *yoga* is “more famous than it is understood” (p. 1). The most common meaning of the word *yoga* is ‘union’ (Schutz, 2013). This ‘union’ is taken from the root of the word, *yuj*, meaning ‘to join’ or ‘to yoke’ (Bharati, 2007; Lasater, 2000). Subjectively, this could refer to the connection of mind and body; a linking of postures together in a practice; a merger of external and internal awareness; or the awareness of being one with the moment.

According to Schutz (2013), *yuj* means that the worlds of objectivity and subjectivity can be boiled to one truth; that it represents the place where “you strip the world of layers of projection, free things from their fixed representations, and open yourself to what they might have to say or reflect” (p. 38). From Easwaran (2007): “‘Yoga is evenness of mind’: detachment from the dualities of pain and pleasure, success and failure” (p. 85). The notion of *yoga* may be understood as a practice meant to cultivate a balanced way of life. This balance suggests a liberation from the constructs learned in modern society and allows one to be present with whatever arises in the human experience, moment-by-moment. The practice is to be aware of this moment and accept it as it is while simultaneously having the choice for movement toward a path of transformation (Musial, 2011).

Jain (2014) concludes that “the quest for the essence of *yoga* is an impossible task” (p. 459). Jain is realistically doubtful of the ability to define a word aspiring to truly encapsulate the achievement of full freedom from the concepts that are a foundation for the modern world. It is no wonder a tradition as ancient as *yoga* would have a challenging time making itself fit into the current societal structure. Eliasson (2013) explains, “*Yoga* may be understood to represent a

physical component within the larger, encompassing spiritual system which is known as *Yoga*” (p. 2).

Early Yogi Civilization

The Indus Valley Civilization is the first known community of yogis dating from approximately 2500 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E (Dhyansky, 1987). There, in what is now known as the region of India and Pakistan, scientists found depictions of *yogic* art on seals that provide historians with evidence that *yoga* was a way of life, likely practiced and passed on through oral tradition. One example of the artworks found identified a *yoga* lord, *Shiva* or *Yogeshvara*. Building remnants are examples of impressive industrial design representing living conditions of a civilized, intelligent, sanitary community who not only physically excelled as a social group but are also thought to have existed mindfully with a regular spiritual practice (Dhyansky, 1987; Easwaran, 2007).

Yoga’s deeper spiritual and ancestral tradition has religious affiliations with Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism (De Michelis, 2005; Gaur, 2018; Gordon, 2013; Jain, 2014). Written scripture, such as the *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, affiliated with these religious traditions mention the physical and mental training aspects of a *yogic* path and are credited for introducing Sanskrit to the West, (Douglass, 2007).

Patañjali’s Yoga Sutras

The *Yoga Sutras* are credited to the ‘father’ of Classical Yoga, Patañjali. *Sutras* is a Sanskrit word for threads of teachings or insightful teachings (Bharati, 2007; Lasater, 2000). Patañjali is believed to have lived in India and may have scribed the texts around 400 - 200 B.C.E. (Eliasson, 2013; Lasater, 2000; Strauss, 2002; Whicher, 1998). He was believed to be a Sanskrit scholar, a *yogi*, and a physician, making the *sutras* a blend of scientific insight and

philosophical self-realization (Bharati, 2007; Lasater, 2000). In his *sutras*, the path of a *yogi* is explicitly described. This path includes both physical guidance and mindful wisdom which lead a *yogi* to the ultimate liberation.

The *Yoga Sutras* consist of 195 verses giving direct guidance toward this freedom and are broken into eight stages, or limbs, of a traditional *yoga* practice which will be discussed in detail later (Eliasson, 2013; Lasater 2000; Whicher, 1998). In the *Yoga Sutras*, the first two verses are direct and clear: first, that *yoga* begins, and second that *yoga* is free from the incessantly chatty mind (Bharati, 2007). This second *sutra*, where the mind can be quieted down, is thought by Whicher (1998) to be Patañjali's true definition of *yoga*: "the cessation of [the misidentification with] the modifications of the mind" (p. 273).

Yoga Goes West

Centuries after the birth of the classical *Yoga Sutras*, the coming of *yoga* from India to the West occurred, most notably in 1893 (De Michelis, 2005; Munir, Ansari & Brown, 2021; Strauss, 2002). Swami Vivekananda offered the spiritually rich practice of *yoga* in the Parliament of the World's Religions meeting held in Chicago in hopes of gaining assistance from the affluent West for the destitute of India. Vivekananda's *yoga* was considered a kind of modern psychosomatic *yoga*, merging a rebirth of Hindi roots of *yoga* to the modern mystic search for answers to life's unanswered questions; this included the physical practice and the mastery of postures (De Michelis, 2005).

Worthy to note is the introduction of the first known translation of the ancient Hindu text the *Bhagavad Gita* called the *Bhagvat-Geeta* by Charles Wilkins, dating to the early 1800s (Douglass, 2007). This work brought even more experience with *yoga*'s Sanskrit to the West. Hindu practices and traditions are passed down through this language of Sanskrit, as we have

seen through the *Yoga Sutras*, and it is believed by some to be the origin of all language, including Latin, and an Indo-European language known to some as the ‘mother tongue’ (Ashley-Farrand, 1999; Cardona & Luraghi, 2018). These introductions of *yoga* deemed it valuable to the Western intellect and the elite of society in the 19th century, perhaps setting the framework for *yoga* as an affluent practice for those privileged enough to participate.

With promise of great enlightenment, and post Vivekananda’s initiation in Chicago, Swami Sivananda brought more popularization of *yoga* West. He lived in Rishikesh, India – a *yoga* mecca of the East with Hindi roots – and by the first two decades of the 20th century had a following of English-speaking students wanting to learn and study what became known as a sacred way of life (De Michelis, 2005; Strauss, 2002). He started the Divine Life Society and spoke about and taught *yoga* as well as gave life advice (Strauss, 2002). The 1920s marked the beginning of a modern *yoga* practice, and according to De Michelis (2005) is what comes to mind when most people discuss *yoga* today.

Dilution of Yogic Roots

While *yoga* became popular with gurus like Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda, there is a belief that the true roots of the tradition have been lost in translation, or even intentionally left out. Schutz (2013) states that traveling Indian gurus bring “invaluable contemplative respite” (p. 41) to the West, but that their ultimate message of a widespread yogic way of life do not make their way into the hearts of *yoga* instructors and teachers who are not deeply embedded in the Indian and Hindi cultures. Kipnis (1994) posits an idea that Americans cannot fully embrace the profoundly rooted unifying qualities of *yoga* because of the omnipresent *ontological individualism*. Ontological individualism is essentially the idea that Americans cannot give up their sense of self for the greater good (Kipnis, 1994).

This begs the question of whether the West has enough depth to truly adopt the lifestyle of yoga and meditation. To this some historians such as Mark Singleton are confident to say that the Western evolution of yoga is more a homonym, not synonymous with the ancient *yogic* tradition (Laycock 2013). This ‘homonym’ of *yoga* represents the modern yoga we see today.

Modern Yoga

Pierre Bernard was an eccentric early 20th century Western yogi credited as one of the first to shift yoga in America from the pervasive religious practice some perceived it to be into the physical practice which many studios presently embody (Laycock, 2013). Considered a directly Hindu practice, *yoga*’s early assimilation into America worried Christians that it was taboo (Jain, 2014). Jain (2014) labels this fear-based notion of *yoga* as *yogaphobia* and illuminates misunderstood stereotyping over the practice of modern yoga.

Bernard’s public shift away from religious ties could be an explanation of why modern yoga and the power yoga fitness routine is what most think of now when they think of yoga (Laycock, 2013). He marketed the physical aspects of yoga as a way for men to become stronger and for women to be more graceful. Bernard made a living teaching this secularized and accessible yet challenging practice. Ironically, he led a double life on some accounts, indulging in underground esoteric and tantric rituals from the religious aspects of *yogic* tradition and simultaneously marketing yoga as a “wholesome system of fitness” to the elites of San Francisco and New York City (Laycock, 2013, p. 102).

Bernard is one example of a teacher who abused his authoritative power, although still had an impact on the way we think of yoga today. He had many romances with students and even spent time in prison. And yet the practice of the modern yoga he offered has been preserved in a resurgence of interest in the last half century. Popularity of the practice forces a deeper

examination of the elements of modern yoga untainted by the egos of teachers who introduced them (Laycock, 2013; McCartney, 2019; Mora, Balen, & Salen, 2018). The benefits from practicing modern yoga continue to endure; the value of the practice lies in the process of experiencing it, and not in just one person or teacher (Van Ness, 1999). The roots of the practice are bigger than any one person who might bring unpopularity from their own inappropriate behavior.

De Michelis (2005) highlights the near impossibility to uncover or even compare the traditional, ancient, and spiritual understanding origins of *yoga* to its modern relative. But the effects are known to the many who continue to embrace it for a myriad of practical beliefs. Yoga is even used for therapy and in other clinical settings aside from the popular fitness and movement (De Michelis, 2005; Douglass, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

What some see as a practical, clinical, or spiritual rather than religious way to achieve physical exercise with a side of aspirational mysticism (Kishida, 2018; Laycock, 2013), others fear in the so-called commodification of *yoga* and protest its secular modernization (Jain, 2014). In Westernized modern yoga it is common to leave out the language of Sanskrit altogether when instructing a class (Hemamalini, 2019). To this point, the question of the validity of what a modern practice is and whether ancient *yogis* would have any respect for it or those trained to teach it arises. Jain (2014) illuminates the conversation around consumerism and capitalism that some fear has depleted the modern yoga ritual of any real authenticity, most notably emphasizing the reality that many think of the practice as purely physical fitness and a privilege.

Consumer-Driven Yoga

According to Mora, Berry, and Salen (2018), yoga is now a luxury brand and can be compared to other products on the market which signify wealth, fitness regime, and the wellness-

trend. Logos on yoga clothing and marketing campaigns convey a symbol of status and imply a level of wealth needed to maintain the latest fitness standards. The business of modern yoga can undoubtedly overshadow the real meaning behind the experience of the practice itself.

Yoga as a product is like any commodity being marketed, inflated, and viewed through a lens of profitability and can mask its mindful roots. When yoga is advertised as a way for better health and well-being, the American way magnifies the self-judging, independent, and self-serving motives that inform unskillful ways of being (Goldstein, 2016). Indian monk Swami Prabhavananda views the trend of fitness yoga and the high-status gear that accompanies it as a “completely degenerate form, a cult of physical beauty, which has nothing to do with what *yoga* is” (Eliasson, 2013, p. 1). This extreme description is understandable from the perspective of a venerable leader who has dedicated themselves to the ancient texts and traditions.

And yet, from an experiential view, physical yoga is an inherently mindful practice. Even before acknowledging what mindfulness is, the *Yoga Sutras* refer to the practice that helps to calm the fluctuations of the mind (DiNardo & Pearce-Hayden, 2018). “Yoga practice is sometimes the only time of day someone truly unplugs, enters a state of calm, moves their body, and simply breathes” (Ippoliti & Smith, 2016, p. 3). For an entire hour, the physical practice of a yoga class and following guidance from a teacher demands active listening and paying attention to the movements of the body. Being aware of this is practicing mindfulness.

In the context of the mind working, it becomes necessary to engage in the being mode of what is happening in the unfolding moments of the class. Gordon (2013) theorized that yoga is a mindfulness skill, comparing three similarities that make yoga and mindfulness similar: the focus outward, the focus inward, and being fully present in the moment.

In the young history of the United States (U.S.), it is reasonable to suggest that the ancient roots and wisdom of *yogic* texts may be too large to digest in one century. While this may be a deterrence or even criticism of an attempt to practice at modern yoga studios, this could be more reason to take up the practice. Given that the tradition of *yoga* dates back thousands of years, it is possible that the Western practice and American yogis may get it wrong in its assimilation for the first few hundred years, of which we are still in the first hundred or so. The evolution of this country's understanding, still in infancy, cannot compare to the rich textural history and spiritual universe of the East. But it must begin somewhere.

From the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:40), translated from Easwaran (2007), "On this path effort never goes to waste, and there is no failure. Even a little effort toward spiritual awareness will protect you from the greatest fear" (p. 93). Given sociological studies and theories around the consumer culture and hyper-individualism in the U.S. it is no surprise that aspirations for well-being move beyond intrinsic value to an inflated external image that thrives on wanting more (Jain, 2014; Mora, Berry, & Salen, 2018). From a realist's perspective, Western yoga is a far cry from the original *yogic* path. But even with the dilution of *yoga* as a for-profit commodity, there is an undeniable wisdom experienced through a regularly committed practice.

Resurgence of the Roots of Yoga

The re-emergence of yoga in the last 50 years may stem from the deep desire for a universal and spiritual connection (Lasater, 2000). Judith Lasater, PH. D., P.T., R.Y.T., has been practicing and teaching yoga since the 1970s. She began leading workshops based in the experience of the mental aspects of the physical practice off the mat in 1988. She describes the new rise of yoga in the late 20th century as "a reflection of our urge to reconnect with the sacred" (Lasater, 2000, p. xvii). Whicher (1998) believes that the practice of yoga, both physically and

philosophically, is a great gift to assist the struggle of modern society to find a renewed sense of spiritual belonging away from individualism and disconnection and toward connection and loving kindness.

Emphasizing the Yoga-Sutras

Understanding the origins of *yoga* is complicated with layers of foundational teachings in the categories of religious, secular, traditional, and/or the practical. Traditions are important, and culture also influences how traditions evolve. Modern yoga teachers have at least one lifeline connected to the contemplative aspects of the practice, and that is its study and inclusion of the essential section of the *Yoga Sutras*, the eight-limbs of *yoga*.

Eight-Limbed Path. The most foundational teaching underlying modern yoga teacher trainings is the understanding of the eight-limbed yoga path of Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras*. The process for moral behavior, posture, and states of mind which anyone following the yogic lifestyle needs to know and practice are written in the entire second section of the *sutras* (Strauss, 2002). These limbs founded the *ashtanga*, the roots of the power yoga practice, and are the (1) *yamas* / morals, (2) *niyamas* / observances, (3) *asanas* / postures, (4) *pranayama* / breathwork, (5) *pratyahara* / mastery of the senses, (6) *dharana* / stillness of the mind, (7) *dhyana* / blissful awareness, and (8) *samadhi* / enlightenment (Bharati, 2007; DiNardo & Pearce-Hayden, 2018; Eliasson, 2013, p. 6). Modern yoga focuses on the third and fourth limbs, and largely ignores the first two and the last four.

The eight-limbed path provides a framework for balance in addition to the physical practice, which makes up only one limb, and encompasses the whole and complete yogic lifestyle. Aside from the third limb of the postures themselves, every other limb is in direct connection with the language of mindfulness. Each limb climbs closer to the final stage, which is

enlightenment, essentially awareness itself. And while the path need not necessarily be linear, the foundation builds upon the first two limbs, the *yamas* and the *niyamas*.

The first and second limbs each consist of five specific standards setting the moral and observational codes to live by if entering a contemplative yogic path. To follow the basic five morals, or public behavior, of the *yamas* are to acknowledge, *ahimsa* / nonharming, *satya* / truthfulness, *asteya* / nonstealing, *brachmacharya* / non excess, and *aparigraha* / nonattachment (Eliasson, 2013). These are simply stated ways to live with others and are to be held to self as well as to other. The *niyamas* deal mainly with the way the self is realized, held accountable, and cultivates space for awareness. These *niyama* factors are *saucha* / pure mind and body, *santosha* / contentment, *tapas* / self-discipline, *svadhyaya* / self-study, and *ishvara pranidhana* / surrender (Eliasson, 2013). Awareness around the *niyamas* ensures yoga teachers understand how to exist in the world with respect to the ancient wisdom of the practice *yoga*.

With the third limb, *asana*, the physical perspective of moving the body and finding calm in the mind through the movement is what may lead to gaining access to the inner phenomena of our minds. This limb is the basic understanding of what many think of as the modern practice, without much depth or realization, but the *asana* is only one eighth of the path.

The fourth and fifth limbs consider the practice of breathing, *pranayama*, and the focus of the senses being experienced in and around the body, *pratyhahara*. This directly relates to the awareness of breathing practices conducted in mindfulness, as well as a tuning into the sensations and feelings of the external and internal world. Although physical postures are what is seen as most modernly yogic, it is with internal awareness that the practice truly begins to shift to the present moment as meditative in process. As Bhante Gunaratana (2011) explains, “meditation is participatory observation: What you are looking at responds to the process of looking” (p. 33).

The relationship to mindfulness meditation in the yogic path is clear, especially in review of the next and final three limbs of the path: stillness of mind, *dharana*, observing awareness, *dhyana*, and pure awareness or enlightenment, *samadhi*. Judith Lasater (2000) states that being in this ultimate state of yoga, “you rest in your own true nature” (p. 5). In similarly following the Buddhist teachings and path, enlightenment is the ultimate result of mindfulness meditation: “total peace, total calm, total tranquility, total inexpressible happiness, while the mind and senses are, at the same time, 100 percent clear, pure, and energized” (Gunaratana, 2001, p. 250).

Yoga is, as we have seen, both a physical practice and one that is carefully laid out for the mind as an observational and reflective practice. And while the emphasis may be placed on a physical practice in modern yoga, it can be nurtured on a deeper level and trained with an understanding of all eight-limbs, and it can be experienced through power yoga. This path and philosophically yogic lifestyle are known and established in arguably every training approved by Yoga Alliance, and often become overlooked. Modern yoga has become largely about the body, and my creative project accompanying this research addresses the many ways to reinfuse the mental trainings.

Power Yoga

Trainings specific to power yoga were introduced most notably by Baron Baptiste with his book *Journey into Power* originally published in 2002. Owner of the Power Yoga Institute, Baptiste adapted trainings from *ashtanga* yoga into a faster practice, consisting of a set of physical postures meant to relearn and train in movement that our bodies naturally want to make (Baptiste, 2002). His stated intention was to help his clients shake up the typical fitness and exercise routines for students to achieve better flexibility and strength using only their bodies.

Baptiste described power yoga as “a powerful, nonstop flow of energetic postures woven together to provide a well-designed workout that provides harmony, flexibility and strength for the body as well as the mind” (Baptiste, 2000, p. 2). He listened and catered to a particular practical client, working to stabilize the physical body, enhance muscle movement, endurance, alignment, and to function and breathe efficiently. He also believed in the connection of mind and body, encouraging clients to feel they have the power to cultivate greater awareness around health and well-being (Baptiste, 2000; Gaur, 2018). Baptiste’s title work Journey into Power does discuss some aspect of mental trainings and mindfulness, but the emphasis on the power practice still overshadows these more subtle and less concrete teachings.

As the research has discussed, *yoga* can and has become commodified by some teachers and corporations and thereby lost in translation. Thus, the creative project informed by this literature review intends to explicitly incorporate mindfulness into the physical power practice. Anything done with authenticity, respect, and wise intention can be a door to discovery for the awareness of experience, and power yoga is one portal through which self-discovery and kindness can be realized.

It is true that the *yoga* of ancient civilizations has inevitably evolved from its origins since migrating to the West. Even if the version of *yoga* we have today is not as deep and thorough as the way that ancient *yogis* practiced, it is arguably better than no *yoga* at all. There is a value in the practice that speaks for itself when experienced. The practice can only be experienced by those truly willing to show up and continue the work. And for those showing up, there are teachers who greet them and aim to nurture the path by their own example.

The Business of Yoga

According to statistics in the last decade, there are more than 25,000 studios and at least 20 million people practicing yoga in America (Schrank, 2014; Schutz, 2013). In 2021, the yoga industry profited \$16 billion in the U.S., and approximately \$80 billion globally (Mora, Berry, & Salen, 2018; Munir, Ansari, & Brown, 2021). But who is the authoritative role maintaining balance and order in this global industry?

Yoga Alliance (YA) is the accredited yoga governing body through which teachers must be certified (Ippoliti & Smith, 2016). A minimum of a 200-hour program is required, followed by accredited continuing education. Yoga trainings have varying intentions, instructors, schools of thought, and methods of teaching. Elements guaranteed for exposure in most every YA certified program are teachings on the *asanas* (postures), and *pranayama* (breath), branches from the eight-limbed *yogic* path. Ideally, this path will be examined in its entirety, though at the very least *asana* and *pranayama* will be a focus for the teachers as they head into the workforce. According to YA's website and directory, there are currently 85,602 Registered Yoga Teachers (RYT) (Yoga Alliance, 2023). Of that, approximately 22,000 designate the yoga they teach as power, flow, or fitness related.

Entrepreneurs Amy Ippoliti and Taro Smith (2016) are two yogis who have been able to make a public career teaching yoga, teaching others to teach, and be business-minded about yoga. They speak of the modern mystery of *yoga* and the ways that it enhances lives through dedicated practice. They additionally acknowledge that the practice is more than just the physical elements and more about a yogi lifestyle (Ippoliti & Smith, 2016). While they chose to venture into the entrepreneurial aspect of yoga through the language of the postures and business, there is also a language of yoga that can be articulated through mindfulness.

Cultural success today tends to land on the idea of consumerism, making profit and gaining success by making money. Capitalism is a way of life, and in general the goal of a business or corporation is to make money. The business of yoga, while outwardly successful, does not provide the backbone from which the contemplative practice of yoga emerged. This backbone is the language, study, and roots embedded in and from mindfulness, and can bridge the gap between yoga as merely exercise, and yoga as a mind and body connection and contemplative tradition.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the underlying pillar sharing the infinite wisdom in the contemplative tradition of *yoga*. As Ippoliti and Smith (2016) demonstrate, “yoga has traditionally been seen as a path to heightened consciousness and mindfulness, though this aspect is increasingly less emphasized in the West” (p. 3). While many yoga teachers maintain this knowledge at the root of their instruction, it is sometimes the teachers themselves and the physical postures that gain the focus and attention within a modern yogi community. The gap lies in a lack of awareness around the effort to clearly communicate the experience and effects of the physical practice of yoga through the language of mindfulness. Mindfulness encapsulates the present moment awareness of what this practice is meant to evoke; mindfulness is paying attention to each moment of a yoga practice, whether teaching or practicing, and being aware of whatever experience is happening without judgement.

Yoga teachers possess mindful language innately, and yet may not fully realize it can be intentionally used to infuse more awareness into each moment of their class. Yoga instructor, academic professor, and feminist Musial (2011) states her approach to teaching in the studio and in her classroom with “*metta*, the Buddhist notion of loving-kindness” (p. 212). This kindness is

specifically seen and practiced similarly with wisdom of the *yamas*, the morals of living a yogic life. Mindfulness has already been inserted into modern life outside of a yoga lifestyle, for example in the simple way that most recognize and use the phrase ‘be mindful’ when living with awareness in daily situations. If a teacher approaches the structure of their class with mindfulness, it can be articulated explicitly throughout so that the experience is known in a way that one can say: ‘I know that I am experiencing this feeling now,’ and so forth in each moment.

Research demonstrates that a power yoga practice can benefit the body as we have seen, and quiet the mind by strengthening attention to each specific moment. Marshall et al. (2020) measured the impact different forms of yoga has on stress and anxiety. The participants in their study were all women and were required to take a physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) to rule out any conditions that would affect the results of cortisol measurements before and after 4 weeks of a power yoga program. Baseline psychological measurement was reported through self-assessment State-Trait-Anxiety Inventory (STAI) before and after the program. The results found that “acute engagement in power yoga has been shown to improve feelings of well-being and affect” and “to decrease state anxiety levels” (p. 2). While these results were promising, the researchers indicated that the beneficial mental relief from the intensity of a power practice are better over long periods of time versus a more explicitly meditative style of yoga which yields more conclusive results.

While more research is needed, the long-term effects of a power yoga practice could lead to a powerful mindful meditation practice. If this is the trend of power yogis who prefer a faster pace of moving to raise their energy and find a challenge physically, then the possibility to find results more conclusively could arise from the wisdom of mindfulness intentionally drawn upon by an instructor. The teacher who very clearly and authentically practices the language and

training of mindfulness can lead a group of yogis into a quiet mind state by articulating the experiences that may arise from being human and practicing power yoga.

The constant movement of power yoga is the door for some with less practiced awareness to begin to train the mind to pay attention. One of the foundations of power yoga is still breath, which in the context of mindfulness can be used to bring awareness to each present moment. A yoga teacher can directly apply the connection between awareness of breathing and the feeling of the body already breathing in the present moment, allowing the body to be as it is without expectation to always breathe because it is already breathing. This small awareness practice can lift the stress and pressure of a practicing yogi, reframing the narrative that instead of there always needing something to do and to introducing the concept of simply being.

Discussion

The process and demand of the physicality of modern yoga from students can take its toll, challenging teachers to keep the practice simultaneously profound and accessible (Ippoliti & Smith, 2016). Eliasson (2013) notes, becoming a yoga teacher is “a complex role which combines physical fitness and health with spiritual guidance” (p. 2). Teaching power yoga takes dedication and commitment to the practice and can be challenging. In my experience, it is often so demanding that the yoga teacher themselves may end up teaching too much and practicing too little. Due to power yoga’s physically intense practice, there are several factors why a teacher may not be inclined to stay in tune or in balance with their own physical practice.

It can be time consuming to travel from studio to studio teaching a sustainable power yoga schedule. The commute itself may be such that it creates the illusion that there is no time to squeeze in self-care. This is also a challenge if a yoga teacher has another job and must manage the responsibility of a career with the lifestyle of teaching yoga on the side. If a power teacher is

instructing full-time, it may be that they have no time to practice because they are teaching many of the classes on the schedule. When there is a class available to take, it may be that it is time to rest, recover, and nourish until it is time to teach again.

Aside from over teaching, the wear and tear of teaching a power class, especially a heated power class, can be exhausting and can lead to injury if the teacher demonstrates a posture without properly warming up. The pressure of instructing complicated power postures in front of a class can also invite the ego to push through any signals of pain to inauthentically show strength to students. After teaching 10-15 power classes a week, it may be both emotionally and physically draining on the body to step onto the mat for themselves.

Enter mindfulness practices. The power practice is an extraordinary and invigorating yoga movement practice meant to empower students to re-direct awareness, breath, and attention into the present moment to maintain and train the body through physical demands. At the end of every power class is the pose *savasana*, or corpse pose, where the students lay flat on the floor to rest and recover from their flow. It is this posture that may signify the physical practice ending to cultivate a true mindfulness meditation practice in stillness and a quiet mind. The ability to sit, or lay, may not come easily. However, after years of power yoga practice, one may begin to access the stillness more readily and without the physically intense yoga practice before it. This can come with practice, and guidance from a yoga instructor pointing out that there is nothing left to do here but rest in awareness. There is weight in stating the importance of letting the body process the physical practice without immediately going to do something else. Even if the mind continues to wander or chatter, one can simply note it, and then draw awareness back to the body breathing, simply being as it is in this moment, until the instructor calls to re-enter the day.

Yoga instructors do the best they can to continue to remind students to breathe and have awareness. They may have difficulties navigating a busy teaching schedule, work, and life schedule which can bleed into their yoga class. However, if they dedicate time off their mat to practice moment-to-moment mindfulness then they will teach their students from an authentic embodied presence, emphasizing the importance of making time and reminding their students that they have done just that by showing up to their mats. Because the instructor knows the dichotomy of power yoga as sometimes being another intense aspect of life *and* the calm stillness of a distraction-free practice, they can use the language of mindfulness to explicitly say what is often on many minds once hit with the cue to lie down and rest in stillness and silence: thoughts such as limiting beliefs that one cannot sit still, or that their mind is a busier mind than most minds. Mindfulness brings awareness and validity to busy minds, leading to an acceptance and foundation for relief.

It is this gap between the physical practice and mental awareness that demands a bridge for a more complete and realized yoga practice. This rationale concludes in the creation of a project, a Mindfulness-based Yogi Manual, for power yoga teachers to cultivate mindfulness practices in their own lives and to bring it explicitly to their classes.

Conclusion

The physical benefits of a rigorous modern yoga practice are easily seen and observed. The more nuanced effects are discoverable in those with a willing curiosity to share the practice, and an authentic teacher guiding the process. A teacher vetted in mindfulness may be better able to hold space for cultivating non-judgement, kindness, compassion, connection to self and others, and community. When teachers have a committed personal practice, there is more understanding and availability of the mindful roots of the contemplative practice of *yoga*.

Yoga teachers can cultivate a personal practice with the willingness to understand the traditional aspects of mindfulness to authentically experience, embody, and explore the benefits of mind and body wisdom. The result can implement engagement from the modern yoga students, or yogis, to also practice a lived version of the tradition in a relevant and mindful way. This paper demonstrates the explicit shift for modern yoga teachers to engage with the ancient principles of *yoga*, particularly regarding aspects of mindfulness which relate to the practice as it is felt and experienced. This is especially necessary in a cultural climate where the physical postures become the sole focus of a teacher's personal and teaching toolbox.

A yoga teacher with an engaged yoga practice is important; a yoga teacher with a personal mindfulness meditation practice will lead those with an openness for quieting the mind and living a more balance life by example. Judith Lasater (2000) wrote that as adults we are faced with unknowns, expected "to understand the mystery of life with our own hearts and own minds. With yoga, Indian sages have given us a way to understand the nature of reality" (p. xix). Mindfulness is a tool for yoga teachers to explicitly uncover, relate, experience, and communicate the mind and body aspects of the modern yoga practice to others. The creative project to follow is a suggested guide for yoga teachers to begin to understand traditional mindfulness and directly apply it to power yoga. The purpose is to reinfuse and recover the mindful roots that are inherently present and assign a deeper and more meaningful language to articulate, experience, and teach in power yoga classes.

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MINDFULNESS-BASED YOGI MANUAL

A Beginner's Guide for Power Yoga Teachers to Investigate the Language of

Mindfulness



Image from Microsoft Word 2023

Created by Sarah Fay Johnson

January 2024

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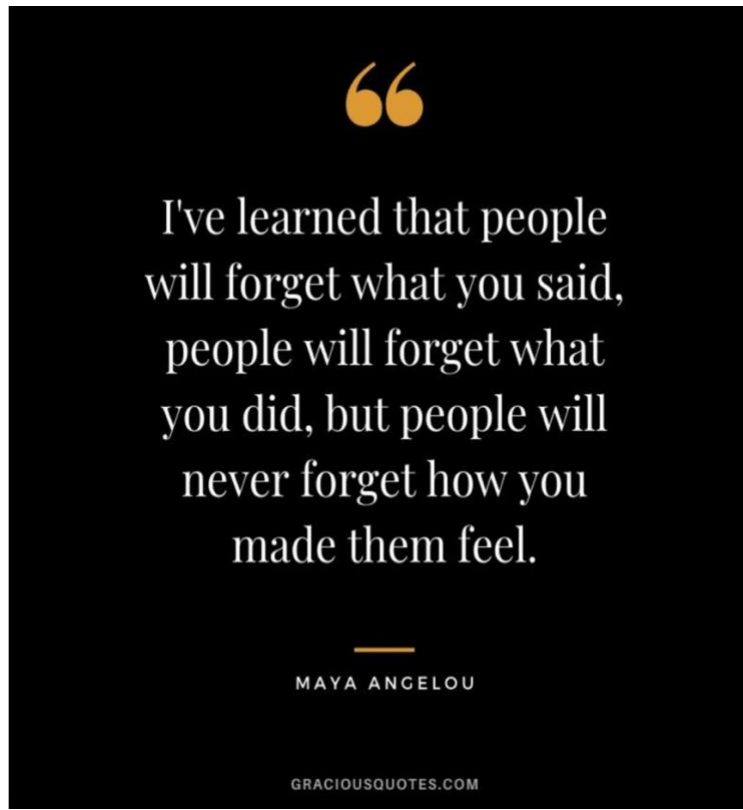


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Welcome

As a new yoga instructor, I was excited, nervous, and often intimidated. My focus was on the balancing act of leading the room through a safe and carefully constructed sequence of postures without feeling nervous or leaving something out! Over a decade of experience later, I have come to know that it is not *what* I teach that matters, but *how* I teach it. This guide is specifically geared toward power yoga teachers who have experienced a shift in the way they lead a power yoga class. If you have gone through the physical practice of teaching postures, headstands, arm-balances, and inversions and desire the tools to nurture a personal practice beyond the physical postures, keep reading.

An important mindset heading into this guide is that there is no *one* way to approach your journey on a yogic path, and that there are many successful ways to do so. A quiet mind and an open heart are essential. Take what works, and leave the rest; see what resonates now, and revisit other practices later if you want to. Remember that what you are doing matters and has an impact, no matter how small.

See if you can release expectations and attachments to an imposed linear path, and you will organically continue to grow into an embodied practitioner and teacher. Your powerful *asana practice* has led you here and has built a strong foundation. You already directly and indirectly inspire students who are open to receiving all that you have to offer. Let this be an invitation to uncover and explore a language and practice embedded in the relatable wisdom of mindfulness.

Why follow this guide?

Teaching power yoga can be physically and mentally demanding. This manual may provide a perspective shift from some of the practical stressors that arise with teaching or practicing too much of the physical side of power yoga while lacking in the deeper and meaningful connection of why you teach this ancient practice. A common misunderstanding may be that a *power* yoga teacher means always physically excelling in the practice, always feeling, and looking good, and always feeling connected and grounded through movement. But some days, and many moments, this is not possible.

My intention with this guide is offer tools to cultivate awareness for what is here now, and to honor the practice of uniting the body and the mind. This guide celebrates the ability to use the body to ground in the present moment and works to engage beyond the physical

practice and offer a foundation in mindfulness which can serve you during the other 23 hours of the day that you aren't teaching a yoga class. This guide is meant to explicitly insert mindfulness into the way you offer an intensely movement-based practice as a power yoga teacher and to open your curiosity, both for you and your students.

Who is this guide for?

I have intentionally created this guide for Registered Yoga Teachers who teach power yoga on a consistent basis as either a full or part time career. The mindfulness teachings, however, are widely applicable and I would encourage the sharing of any tools that are useful for you with someone you think would be open to them whether they practice a form of yoga or not.

Given the background of power yoga teacher trainings as alignment focused, heat-building, and posture heavy practice, this guide suggests revisiting ancient roots which rediscover more clearly introduce some of the contemplative understandings of a mind and body practice from the perspective and language of mindfulness. It is meant to help you begin an examination what mindfulness is and suggests self-study through the combination of both contemplative teachings and mindfulness training exercises. This guide brings mindfulness to the forefront of the conversation, and structures concrete ways to illuminate mindfulness within your teaching.



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Overview

For the scope of this guide, I focus only on a small sampling of mindfulness teachings and exercises that have opened the wisdom door to self-study for me and have aided in my ability to understand and embody this human experience through yoga. In turn this has enriched the way that I teach students yoga which I now make a priority to be infused with mindfulness. In the suggested reading section, I recommend several books from mindfulness teachers that informed this guide, as well as some practicing and published yoga teachers who I have found to be examples of speaking the language of mindfulness via power yoga. This guide is influenced heavily by Joseph Goldstein and Jon Kabat-Zinn, and I have summarized many of their interpretations and adaptations of mindfulness teachings. The content is purely original from studying Goldstein, Kabat-Zinn and many others, and my writing expresses these teachings as I have come to process and understand them. I hope it is helpful to you in some yet to be imagined way!

Setting Expectations

We will dive into the relationship of basic mindfulness practices through various exercises, shifting away from a sole focus on the physical strength of a yoga practice and more to strengthening the mind. My suggestion is to set aside any preconceived notions of mindfulness, wellness, or mainstream instantly gratifying trends, to simply experience and notice what arises for you as you go through this guide. Only you will experience this information in the way that you are experiencing it; trust the small voice deep inside that tells you to keep reading, to pause, or to practice.

The exercises I share aim to nurture an embodiment of our aim in a physically challenging yoga practice: to quiet the mind and strengthen awareness. As you begin to absorb and experience these exercises, you may notice they begin to make sense in your process for teaching your yoga classes. This is not a prescriptive manual, nor it is complete in its review of the contemplative teachings of mindfulness; rather it is an offering to practice with the wisdom of mindfulness to support you and your students.

My goal is ultimately to expose you, or perhaps re-introduce you, to a mindfulness meditation practice as a registered yoga teacher. These formal ideas rooted in mindfulness teachings may shift your perspective as you guide your classes, and may inevitably inform the way you teach yoga, and even the way you experience daily life.



Image from Microsoft Word, 2023.

What You Do Affects Others

As part of your yogi training, you undoubtedly visited the philosophy of yoga. This is true for all yoga teachers as we learn about Patanjali's 8-limbed path and the *Yoga Sutras*. We also tend to state respect but graze over the ancient traditional and religious connotation associated with yoga's contemplative roots. In my experience with power yoga, we sometimes pull away from the religious aspects for fear of indoctrination of beliefs or preaching to those not open to receiving. We well-meaningly want to make it 'accessible' which may result in a watered-down version of the real meaningful connection we seek. It is important to acknowledge a sense of cultural appreciation, rather than cultural appropriation, as we continue to be representatives of a young and growing Western yogi community. An awareness of cognitive biases may be helpful as you move forward.

Acknowledging the roots of yoga pays homage to the origin of the 2500-year-old practice, without culturally appropriating yoga to be what we want it to be and how we fit it

comfortably into our lives. I can only speak for myself and encourage you to explore the honor it is to participate in the offering and teaching of yoga, and I encourage anyone reading this guide to reflect on their own roles, language, and offerings in this regard. These roots in understanding yogic heritage are not only part of your own path in yoga, but bring authenticity and awareness to how we hold space and respectfully lead others into their own awareness and relationship to the experience of and connection to their practice.

Teaching a power yoga class comes with great responsibility and a wide range of energy. You are in the presence of it, and it is in everyone's power to share and conserve with others wisely. Being nonjudgmental and kind to yourself as you prepare to teach a class is essential. Being present and prepared to hold space is your job. Students will come in with their own mindsets and it is partly on you to stay open, inclusive, and grounded in the awareness of the moment. It is not up to you to figure out or enable issues, drama, or gossip for them. It is about holding an open space where all feel welcome. So, light some palo santo or cleanse the space in your own ritual way. Be decidedly present and show up for yourself and your students.

Teaching is not about ego or controlling your class, it is about knowing fully that you do not know what every person's experience of yoga is or is going to be, or what they have been through before they get to your class. You are here as a guide on a path to do no harm, and to arrive with openness and compassion at the entrance of the studio door. You are here together with your students on this journey, and you are as vulnerable as they are. This is shared humanity and community, and it is home. There's a sense of instilled humility as a yoga teacher that embraces the wisdom of the yogic path and teachings as a guide that far exceed any class

or guru or teacher we can be or find -- it is about each of our own offerings and collective experience.

Our current society often tempts us to believe that we need to find that perfect teacher or be that for others. We may fall into the narrative that we are too busy and too distracted to even look at ourselves through a lens of vulnerability and fear of being perceived as weak or not good enough. The teaching of yoga can benefit from teachings of mindfulness which offer inner knowing that we have the innate capacity to be present, pay attention, and release ourselves and others from judgement. Power yoga plays a welcome role to remind you and your students how to access a return to mental clarity through movement. With the intentional practice of mindfulness overtime, we can learn to nourish the same feelings we cultivate in a post intense power yoga class and access it in any part of our day. It is possible to step into the present moment and out of our own way; to see the wisdom within when we pay attention to it.

What You Already Know

Learning to teach yoga familiarized you as it did me with Patanjali's 8-limbed path. It is undoubtedly useful to revisit these limbs for every modern yoga teacher to re-establish connection when we get too caught up in the ego of teaching or practicing yoga. The 8 limbs are a wealth of inspiration and wisdom. But in the West, we spend a lot of time solely focused on the 3rd and 4th limbs of yoga¹without diving too deep into the other limbs.

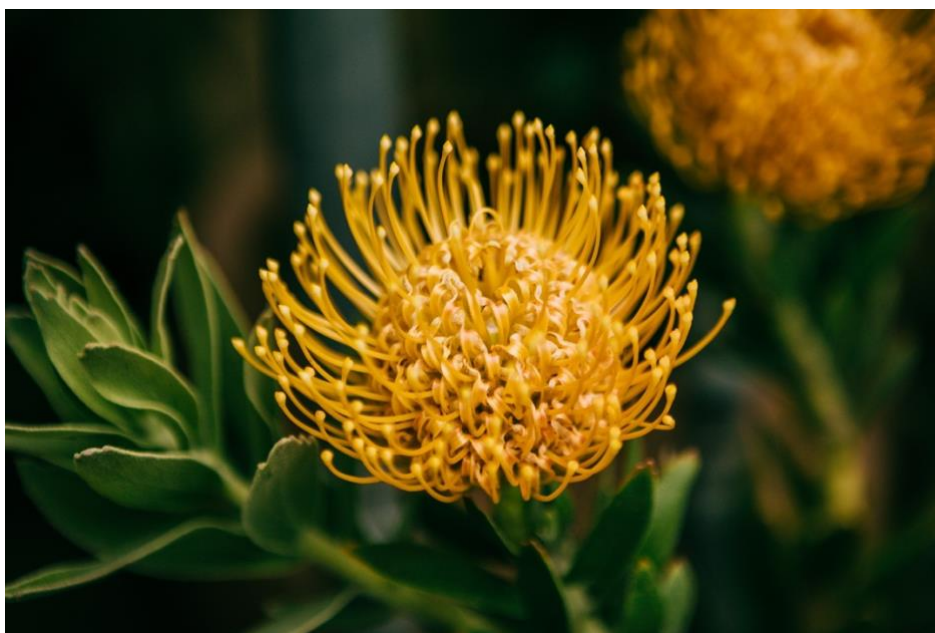
In union with *the* yogic path, the practice and study of mindfulness provides a clear foundational framework toward an aware and present state of mind which only enhances the

¹ Patangali's 3rd and 4th limbs of the path are posture, and breath. The order of the 8 limbs are the morals, observances, postures, breath, mastery of the senses, stillness of the mind, awareness, and enlightenment.

limbs of yoga. There are principles I have learned through studying mindfulness that have been impactful for my own understanding of the experience of being human on and off my yoga mat.

The 8-limbed path is not to be forgotten, rather the introduction to mindfulness simply makes sense to then reapply the yogic philosophy you already know, and connect to yourself, your students, and your community with awareness. It is with a deeper understanding of yoga's contemplative *and* mindful roots that I believe the language of mindfulness can be assigned deliberately to our teaching.

This guide leads you through what mindfulness is, paying attention, the four foundations of mindfulness, inserting mindfulness into your power yoga class, and how to continue experiencing a mindfulness practice beyond the postures that you teach. Please understand this is never to discredit the postural power practice, and with wise effort will deepen the importance and usefulness of the movements of the practice as another tool to emphasize the mind and body union.



What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an awareness of knowing what is happening in your life in any given moment. More specifically, mindfulness is paying attention, moment-to-moment, without judgement and with open awareness, (paraphrasing Jon Kabat-Zinn's classic definition). Paying attention is relative to teaching power yoga in navigating, *moment-to-moment*, the many changing aspects than can arise throughout your fast-paced classes. The temperature of the room, the brightness or dimming of the lights, the heat and music if each is being used, teaching or shifting the sequence that you planned based on the students in your class, not to mention if you are responsible for checking your students in, collecting payment, and taking care of any other needs of the business if you work for a studio.

Now is the only moment that we have. The present moment awareness, the feeling of being in tune with your own body and the needs of your students, the ability to concentrate, and to successfully teach a yoga flow are all examples of practices of awareness. And like any muscles that can be strengthened, you can flex and engage your ability to pay attention to what is happening in the moment with applied practice. Yoga teachers practice this every time we teach. Let's name it with the language of mindfulness and focus attention on it to understand and experience it explicitly for yourself.

Establishing Mindfulness

How do you know if you are present? How do you know when your attention is spread too thin? How about when you feel scattered or overwhelmed, how does that feel? And how do you ground yourself when these moments arise? How do you know any of this is happening to

you? How do you establish mindfulness for yourself? Do you ever find yourself answering these questions with extended versions of, 'It's just a feeling I get,' or, 'I just feel it in my body,' or telling others, 'You'll know it when it's happening.' There's a rationalizing that can happen. 'I didn't sleep well and that's why I feel like I can't pay attention today,' or blaming someone or something else for feeling scattered or unhinged. The language of mindfulness can be applied to many of these moments to articulate how we know what we are experiencing and by training ourselves to pay attention. We don't have to place blame, and we can clarify an experience in the moment we are experiencing it. We can train ourselves to understand our experiences by paying attention.

If you have forgotten, gently and kindly remind yourself to keep an open mind and attitude throughout this guide. Even if you are an expert yoga teacher, or mindfulness enthusiast or teacher, can you access this information from a heartfelt and nourished space. Allow yourself to metabolize it. Plant a seed as you experience and download these teachings, and you can discover how fruitful it can be to share in your own yoga classes and practice.

Paying Attention

Paying attention seems like a simple instruction and yet we were never taught to pay attention, only told. In a world that has named attention *deficit* as a disorder, it never hurts to reflect on where your own attention goes, without judgement, and if you can practice intentionally putting it in one place. Jon Kabat-Zinn, known as the father of clinical and secular mindfulness programs, reminds us that paying attention is indeed a skill that can be learned.

One way that Kabat-Zinn introduces training the mind to pay attention is through a practice mindfully eating a raisin. The intention is to take it very slowly, and to be attentive to

what you are doing and experiencing from moment to moment. That's it. This is not incredibly complicated nor is it even new! It is an ability that we all have, a skill that can be strengthened. If you have time now, try this for yourself with the instructions below, or set aside another time to do so.

EXERCISE: MINDFULLY EATING A RAISIN

This exercise is from Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Training website.²

“Place a few raisins in your hand. If you don't have raisins, any food will do. Imagine that you have just come to Earth from a distant planet without such food.

Now, with this food in hand, you can begin to explore it with all your senses.

Focus on one of the objects as if you've never seen anything like it before. Focus on seeing this object. Scan it, exploring every part of it, as if you've never seen such a thing before. Turn it around with your fingers and notice what color it is. Notice the folds and where the surface reflects light or becomes darker.

Next, explore the texture, feeling any softness, hardness, coarseness, or smoothness. While you're doing this. If thoughts arise such as “Why am I doing this weird exercise?” “How will this ever help me?”. “I hate these objects,”, Then just see if you can acknowledge these thoughts. Let them be. Then bring your awareness back to the object.

Take the object beneath your nose and carefully notice the smell of it.

Bring the object to one ear, squeeze it, roll it around, and hear if there is any sound coming from it.

Begin to slowly take the object to your mouth. Noticing how the arm knows exactly where to go. Perhaps becoming aware of your mouth-watering.

Gently place the object in your mouth. Place it on your tongue, without biting it. Simply explore the sensations of this object in your mouth.

² Click this link to experience the web page. There are options here to listen to this exercise as well. <https://mbsrtraining.com/mindfulness-exercises-by-jon-kabat-zinn/mindfully-eating-a-raisin-script/>

When you're ready. Intentionally bite down on the object. Maybe noticing how it automatically goes to one side of the mouth versus the other. Also, notice the tastes it releases.

Slowly chew this object. Be aware of the saliva in your mouth and how the object changes in consistency as you chew.

When you feel ready to swallow, consciously notice the *intention* to swallow. Then see if you can notice the sensations of swallowing the raisin. Sensing it moving down to your throat. Into your esophagus on its way to your stomach.

Take a moment to congratulate yourself. For taking this time to experience mindful eating.”

The challenge of paying attention for me, and you may relate, is that my mind often forges ahead automatically without considering what I really need in this moment or what is happening now. This could result in rushing through what's happening or worrying about what is going to happen next. Either that, or the mind gets stuck ruminating on old stories from the past, re-writing and wishing I could fix what has already happened and cannot be changed. If my mind is full of future worry, or stuck in the past, then it is not present, and it is not paying attention to what is here. It does not mean you have to like what is here, but paying attention to what is here *now* will inform the small moments of your life.

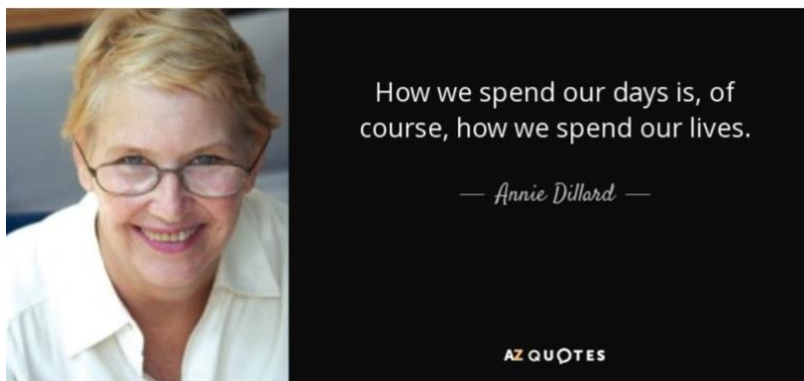


Image from Annie Dillard from AZQuotes.com, 2023.

Four Foundations of Mindfulness

According to the Satipatthana Sutta, a classical text with teachings of the Buddha, there are four foundations of mindfulness: **mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of the mental states**³. In this context, what follows is just a sampling and basic introduction to the potential depth and resources available on these extraordinarily rich teachings. Joseph Goldstein does an incredible job in my opinion of explaining each of the four foundations of mindfulness in their full understanding in *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* if you would like to learn even more than what is being offered here. I have hand-picked a general understanding what these teachings offer.

It is helpful to make these lists to stay organized in thought (that's what the Buddha did!) but by no means is there one specific way to process these foundations. They are all interconnected. Feel empowered to skip ahead to another section or to skim the sections as they resonate with you in the moment you are reading it. Welcome the process if you want to read from the back to the front or start somewhere in the middle. They all work together, and we will simply separate them for the sake of organization and experiential processes. They are all different learning doors and may surprise or ground you moment to moment.

Mindfulness of Body

In power yoga, you know the body! What a great place to practice present moment awareness. We experience the quieting down of the overthinking-mind *through* the intense physical movement of the body simply by having no choice but to pay attention to the physical

³ Joseph Goldstein's book *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* 2013, is my main resource for reference on the foundations of mindfulness.

placement and sensations here. You may have come to yoga initially for the physical benefits, which I will not focus on here, and continue to come because you noticed that you stopped worrying so much about work, or stopped fixating on things that could not be changed, on and off your mat. When you train your mind to pay attention to how you move your body, you discover direct awareness: a sense of a moving and knowing that you are moving, aware of the way your limbs are sliding from one posture to the next with ease, or some days with resistance, and having the concentration to stay focused.

With the commanding challenge of physical *asana*, it is nearly impossible not to be present. But what happens on the days you are unable to physically practice, maybe due to injury or simply lack of time to do so, or any other reason. What then? And how will you remain judgement free and kind to yourself for *not* practicing physical postures? This is the wisdom of the foundation of mindfulness of body can truly begin, especially if the only previous tool in your box was to get on the mat and move. According to the classical text, mindfulness of the body is inclusive of breath, posture, activity, and physical characteristics. For this guide, let's focus on what power yoga emphasizes from the branches of the 8-limbed path, breath and posture, from the perspective of mindfulness.

Breath

We have one universal thing in common: breath. If you are alive and reading this, you are breathing. Jon Kabat-Zinn says often in his meditations that in the context of mindfulness, if you are breathing, there is more right with you than wrong with you. The breath might be shallow, it could be long and relaxed. But you are breathing. This is a resounding presence in our yoga practice as much as it is the root of awareness in a mindfulness practice.

The Buddha specifically marks the breath in the Satipatthana Sutta . . . “ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out,” (Goldstein, 2013, p. 46). As Kabat-Zinn notes, it's impossible to go anywhere without it, and this makes it incredibly accessible. He writes so beautifully and in a way yoga teachers can relate “It immediately anchors our awareness in the body, in a fundamental, rhythmic, flowing life process,” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 41). Any breath awareness practice you have in your yogic experience validates this inner wisdom.

One useful breathing exercise to ground in both yogic and mindful contexts is by practicing diaphragmatic breath. I have experienced short, shallow breaths up in my chest, neck, and shoulders, causing me more stress than ease. It is possible to take your time to breathe with your diaphragm, engaging the muscles of the diaphragm feels like breathing all the way down into your belly because of its placement below the lungs and above the organs in the belly. It works involuntarily, and so paying attention to the continuous and rhythmic bellowing of this breath can bring a tremendous relaxation response.

EXERCISE: DIAPHRAGMATIC AWARENESS OF BREATHING

NOTE: If you feel that breathing is or begins to become a trigger for you, then try this with your eyes open. And if it begins to feel stressful or overwhelming, then stop. You may benefit from seeking the guidance of a trauma professional.

Find a place where you will not be disturbed and lie down comfortably on your back on a padded surface, or the floor, or on a bed. You might use a pillow under your head if that is comfortable for you.

Notice your legs and either straighten them out with a pillow for support beneath your knees or bend them and softly plant the soles of your feet on the surface you are lying on. If you choose to bend your knees, walk your feet wide to the width of your mat and gently knock your knees together.

Once you are comfortable, place your hands on your lower belly.

Close your eyes or, equally as good, keep your eyes open and find one spot above you to fix your gaze. If you feel tired, try keeping your eyes open to stay awake.

Tune into your body already breathing. Imagine this like joining into something that is already happening, without stopping the flow of it, like jumping rope, or sliding onto a chair lift at a ski mountain.

Now, empty your air out of your lungs, and then take a slow, deep breath all the way down into your abdomen. Once you are full to your limit, hold there and gently soften your shoulders.

When you are ready, breathe all the way out and hold an extra moment at the bottom. That is one cycle. Do this at least 10 times, or for just 1 minute, which ever feels right to you.

When you are finished, lie comfortably for a few more moments before moving on with your day. Notice how this feels, and any shifts in your awareness. Note that you can access this belly breathing any time you would like with a few moments of attention and time.

Because power yoga teachers tend to have experience with how to be in tune with the breath, this simple breathing exercise is merely a practice reminder. When you feel stuck in your head and do not have the time or bandwidth to practice yoga *asana*, you can practice diaphragmatic breathing wherever you are. One notable difference of breath according to yoga versus mindfulness is the practice of controlling the breath. We know as yoga teachers how to initiate breath control, and maintain a steady, rhythmic breath. But what mindfulness emphasizes is the awareness that the body is already breathing, and the ability to steadily turn your attention to it.

Aside from the diaphragmatic breath that can feel grounding in your body, I think it's important to know that it is as simple as: "I know I'm breathing in. I know I'm breathing out," (Goldstein, 2013, p. 50). We teach this already in our yoga classes as we assign breath and posture placement. Breath and yoga already move together, and being mindfully aware of

breath, you can elevate your students into a realm of subtle sensations that accompany paying attention to present moment experience. Teaching yoga from this mindfulness perspective, you can articulate the inner wisdom arising from an inner resource, rather than through an external practice.

Posture

“Your body is a tool for creating desired mental states,” (Bhante Gunaratana, 2011, p. 61). Using your body and posture as a pillar for focus in mindfulness is direct and tangible. There are many sensations of your body that can heighten the attention of the mind. Postures with explicit mindfulness drop you deeper into awareness what’s happening in the body in this moment, just like you may teach your yoga students to have awareness in their yoga postures throughout a class. In power yoga, the postures and alignment are a tool for linking breath and discovering efficient ways to move.

Most of us picture a meditation posture in a perfect cross-legged seat, eyes closed, and of course we see many beautiful depictions of this. Yes, and technically there are four traditional meditative postures: walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. This opens a realm of accessibility without watering down the value of the practice. Aside from the technical postures of meditation, mindfulness trainings also consist of resting in full awareness in *any* bodily posture. It is this resting in awareness that we can know in our practice that the body is breathing, or that the leg is lifting, or that we are in chair pose, etc. Mindful awareness of where the body is in a yoga practice can open your students into the simplicity of being present and knowing that you are present, and knowing when your mind may need a reminder to come back to present in sync with your body.

Since power yoga is a moving body practice you know well, you may want to experience small increments in one of the four traditional postures and notice how each one makes you feel. Focus on your breathing, rather than the external view of your position. Make yourself comfortable. Be kind and remember that you may need to start with a small amount of time in seated meditation to take care of your knees or low back. You may even choose to begin in a seat on a chair rather than on the floor. Meet yourself where you are; if you are not relaxed and comfortable, you won't want to practice it again. You may have excess energy some days, in which case you may choose to stand, or try a walking meditation.

EXERCISE: WALKING MEDITATION

This exercise is another from Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Training website.⁴

“When we practice walking meditation, we are not trying to get anywhere. It is sufficient to just be with each step, realizing that you are just where you are. The trick is to be there completely.

To reinforce this message, we walk in circles around the room or back and forth in lanes. This helps put the mind to rest because it literally has no place to go and nothing interesting happening to keep it entertained. Either you are going in circles, or you are going back and forth; under these circumstances, the mind just may grasp that there is no point in hurrying to get somewhere else and it may be willing to just be wherever you actually are in each moment and feel the sensations in your feet.

This doesn't mean that your mind will go along with your intention to just be with each step for very long without a concerted effort to keep it focused. You might soon find it condemning the whole exercise, calling it stupid, useless, idiotic. Or it might start to play games with the pace or with balancing or have you looking around or thinking of other things. But if your mindfulness is strong, you will quickly become aware of this activity and just return your attention to the feet, legs, and body. It's a good idea to start with awareness of the feet and legs and practice that for a while. Then, when your concentration is stronger, you can expand the field of awareness to include a sense of your whole-body walking.

⁴ Click this link for the full web page and more resources for walking meditations to practice with, including from Sharon Salzberg which I recommend: <https://mbsrtraining.com/mindfulness-exercises-by-jon-kabat-zinn/walking-meditation-by-jon-kabat/>.

To begin walking as a formal meditation practice, you should make the specific intention to do it for a period of time. Say ten minutes, in a place where you can walk slowly back and forth in a lane. To keep mindfulness strong. It's a good idea to focus your attention on one aspect of your walking. Rather than changing it all the time. So, if you have decided to pay attention to your feet. then you should stay with your feet for that entire walking period. Rather than changing to the breath or the legs or the full gait.

Since it looks weird to other people to walk back and forth without any apparent purpose, especially if you are doing it slowly, you should do it someplace where you will not be observed, such as in your bedroom or living room. Choose a pace that maximizes your ability to pay attention. This might differ from one time to another. But in general, it should be slower than your normal pace of walking.

Keeping walking meditation in mind, it is helpful to nurture a curiosity about the experience of noticing what it is like not to rush through such a habitual action we perform in our day and what it is like to truly slow it down. You might practice mindful walking on your way into a yoga studio, or as you walk around your yoga class. It can be a wonderful grounding practice.

Mindfulness of Feelings

You might think this section is going to be about being mindful of your feelings in the sense of an emotional experience, but *mindfulness of feelings* refers to the quality of sensations in your moment-to-moment experience. In the context of mindfulness, feeling, or *vedanas*, refers to three tones. Every single feeling tone that we have is one of these three. A practice with feeling tones means being aware of the underlying arising sensation and seeing it exactly as it is.

Knowing now referring to posture and mindfulness of the body, you can begin a meditation practice with walking, standing, sitting, or lying down and focusing on your breath.

As you do, what specific feeling tone arises? The specific feeling tones in mindfulness training are pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral and this information can be brought to our attention through sound, touch, smell, taste, sight, or mind.

What we call our five senses, mindfulness calls our sense doors; and there are six. Our sense doors are the ways we orient in the external world around us and how we receive information. The less discussed sixth sense is our mind's interpretation of the senses messaging a specific feeling tone and processing it, moment-to-moment. All our sense doors at every given moment are constantly communicating ways that we are experiencing the world.

You can experience the feeling tones of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral simply by attending to and noticing what arises and falls in the mind as you practice being where you are. The practice is not to change what is happening, or to control it, rather to see it for what it is, and then allow the next moment to arise.

EXERCISE: PLEASANT, UNPLEASANT, AND NEUTRAL FEELING TONES

Take a comfortable seated posture for you. This may be in a chair today, or on the floor on a cushion, or laying down. Either close your eyes or hood them with your eyelids to steady your gaze and minimize any distractions.

Bringing your awareness to your breath, notice that you are breathing in, and notice that you are breathing out.

After focusing on the breath for a few moments, bringing awareness to your feet and any sensations there. Is there a pleasant sensation? Unpleasant sensation? Or neutral or no sensation? Noting the quality of that sensation, allow your awareness to be directed to the next sensation that arises.

Perhaps you note the sound of a bird song outside your window, noting pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Allowing your awareness to let go of the bird song and notice the next sensation that arises, the tightness in your chest perhaps, and whether that sensation is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Try allowing whatever sensations are arising to be the object of your noting: everything as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. If you are feeling stuck, the senses can be a way to focus your attention: touch, taste, smell, sounds, sight, and in addition the thoughts you notice arising can also simply be labeled as one of the 3 feeling tones at any given moment, and without judgement.

Practice this for another 5-7 minutes and notice how you are feeling. Keeping in mind it is the nature of the mind to wander and get carried away, so kindly begin again any time your mind wanders.

Do this as an entire meditation session, or just a practice to bring your awareness back to the feeling tones as they are, and the top of your awareness.

As we connect deeper to the meaning of mindfulness of feelings, keep in mind that experience is not right or wrong. Some feeling that may seem pleasant to some may be or become unpleasant in another instant because of the true characteristic of impermanence (which I will discuss later). A feeling isn't necessarily good or bad, it is being with and know what it is in the moment that it is happening. For example, a healthy meal may be pleasant, but if you overeat those same healthy foods, it may become unpleasant. There is not one way, not one right feeling, only the feelings you are having now, and they are constantly in flux.

You can bring the practice of your experience with feeling tones into the yoga studio for your students. You might call to mind a specific feeling tone in chair pose as unpleasant (common humor with yogis that chair is unbearable at times), and specifically only in the mind! Someone new to the intensity of a power practice might be thinking about the mental difficulty of being here in this yoga pose. You can ask, how does this feel? Can you acknowledge if there is anything unpleasant, pleasant, or neutral going on here? And you receive nods, or even vocal agreeance, then good! Your students are aware, or becoming aware of how they are feeling

here, i.e. unpleasant. When you meet your students from this place of awareness, you can remind them to breathe and check in with the strength this pose fosters, the heat it generates to warm the body for more of the practice. Tell them to take breaks if the unpleasant sensation is too painful. Whatever arises after you help your students recognize that this is unpleasant, bring awareness back to the breath occurring in the body, and encourage them to stay open, the best that they can, one moment at a time. This language is explicitly mindful, and your students can recognize it overtime if you continue to use it.

You can experience both mindfulness of body *and* mindfulness of feelings as interconnected in a body scan. You can do your own at home, or guided, by simply moving up or down the body to practice awareness, paying attention and noting the feeling tones as you experience them.

EXERCISE: 15-20 MINUTE BODY SCAN

This body scan is an invitation to remain awake, so you may close your eyes but if you feel sleepy then perhaps open your eyes.

This is also an invitation to remain still, bringing awareness to the body without movement, and simply through sensations and breath.

Dropping into the body lying here as a whole, know that you are complete as you are.

It is natural for the mind to wander, so there is no question of *if* but *when* it does wander, softly draw your attention back to your breath, and back to your body breathing, practicing open hearted awareness and bringing your attention back gently and kindly to your breath, or back to the body part that we're focusing on, or any region where you can hold your awareness.

Starting with both feet, noticing the toes and the points of contact between the toes, the arches of your feet and any sensation there. Noticing the heels and the contact of your heels against the surface you are lying on, and the tops of the feet and the ankles. Noticing any

pulsing, vibrating, or tingling sensations. And whether these sensations are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, in the whole of your feet.

Moving up now to the lower legs, the fronts of the shins and the backs of the calves and the sides of your lower legs and the sensations, if any, that you are having there. Bringing your awareness to the knees, the sides, and backs of the knees, and then up to the thighs, and to the inner groins and the outside of the hips. Noticing any sensations and if they are pleasant, unpleasant, neutral.

Now bringing awareness to the whole of your pelvic region and the sacrum. Noticing here the heaviness of the bones in this area, and the hug of gravity holding and supporting you here.

Noticing the lower back next, where tension can reside, and observing if there is any tension there now, and paying attention to it without any desire for it to feel different than it is feeling, or perhaps there is no tension in this moment, and this is pleasant.

Bringing attention now to the torso, and the sides of the waist up to the bottom of the rib cage and the whole of the belly region. The rib cage housing important organs of your body, like the lungs and your heart, and noticing the beat of your heart in your chest, or noticing the breath rise and fall in your lungs. Noticing if the mind wanders, as is naturally does, and reminding your attention to gently come back to sensations of the torso and chest, experiencing the aliveness in any sensations you are noticing in this region.

Bringing awareness now to the shoulders, and the upper back, another region for you that may hold tension and just feeling what is residing here now, with awareness, and without judgement.

Drawing awareness next to the hands, both at the same time, the tips of the fingers, and any pulsing there, and the palms, and any temperature there, to the wrists and the forearms. Feeling the elbows and the upper arms connecting and resting attention back onto the shoulders. Holding awareness for whatever is here, on the bones and feelings of the arms and shoulders as they are all connected.

Noticing the neck and the throat now and the way the body is connected to the head here, and any sensations in the throat, any tightness, or clenching, just noticing and being okay with what is here, and knowing what you are feeling is just what you are feeling right now.

Bringing awareness up the throat to the chin, the jawline, and your cheeks, and out to your ears, hearing any sounds here, with awareness, perhaps noticing if the sounds are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Moving from the ears and sounds back into the center of your jaw to the mouth and the lips, and the teeth, and the tongue and any sensations of the mouth and tongue holding or releasing tension. Follow the top of the curve of your lip to the nose and the sensation of

breath through your nose or mouth, and the eyes, noticing what you see if eyes are open, and then to the eyelids and the eyebrows, noticing awareness here, being in awareness of this region of your face.

Moving from the lower face to the upper brow line, to the forehead and the temples and any pulsing or sensations here, then to the top of the head and the whole of the skull, resting on the mat, the whole of your face in awareness, just being, sensing, noting what is here to be, sense and note.

Taking the whole body into awareness now. Without judgement and resting from your toes all the way up to the top of your head as it is. Breathing, and noticing, seeing, and letting go, experiencing the body, just as it is.

Take your time to lie here, or patiently begin to find movement into your fingers and toes, your arms, and legs, and open your eyes slowly, taking in your surroundings, and carrying on with your day when you feel ready.

Mindfulness of Mind

Mindfulness of mind refers to an underlying quality of our mind which changes in each moment. In the absence of layers, stories, and limiting beliefs, our mind is present in wisdom and inner being in a present moment. We as a self are neither good nor bad, however our minds can create conditions for wholesome and unwholesome roots to arise and pass away, which is in their nature.

Wholesome + Unwholesome Roots

I have come to understand and accept that we all have these unwholesome roots of mind; it's just part of being human. And once we investigate and understand the conditions that either exacerbate or dim these qualities, we can learn how to bring ourselves into the more wholesome states of mind whenever we can. Unwholesome states in the context of mindfulness are:

- Greed

- Hatred
- Delusion

Understanding that these states are not who we are, rather they arise and pass away naturally as we know, is the difference between letting these states of mind take over or simply flow through us. We can strengthen an awareness of identifying with them versus simply identifying them and letting them be and eventually dissipate. It is important to note that these unwholesome states are either present or absent. If they are absent, it means that wholesome roots will inherently kick in. In the presence of these three qualities, you may experience the following:

Greed: Having awareness that you desire something you don't need but that you want. Once you recognize that you are not a greedy person for wanting something, that it is simply bringing about a desire for something to be different than it is, then you can see that greed is present and identify it as it is.

Hatred: Having a hatred toward something means having an aversion or resistance in the mind in that moment and doesn't make you a hateful person. It is not who you are, and you have the wisdom of knowing that when hatred is present, that you do not need to identify with it.

Delusion: Finally, delusion is simply a mind that is unaware. You may think you know that something is one way, and then it may be revealed to you that you were incorrect. This moment can be humbling and shatter the ignorance to something that is being shown to you or shatter your delusions.

These unwholesome states are also known as the three poisons, and while they have negative connotation due to the way they can hinder off into more deviant and unkind behaviors, the practice is again to simply bring awareness to them. You can know when they are present and know when they are absent. Once we know and see what is here, we can then also know that the next moment can bring something new. When we know our aversion arises, we can see without attachment and illuminate it for what it is. When we do, we find that its grip over us may fall away with a steady practice of seeing it. This may lead to a sort of relief from it, and we can note the absence of these poisons in that moment.

In their absence, our mind is inherently full of infinite generosity, love, and clear awareness. Have you ever noticed the way that a child, not even yet able to use words, watches and pay attention to everything that you do? Babies and young children tend to stare at you, and they are naturally taking it all in. They are learning by paying attention.

You can experience this paying attention to what is here through practice, aware of the presence or absence of the pulling in of greed, the pushing away of hatred, and the mind running in circles in delusion.

EXERCISE: NOTICING THE UNWHOLESOME ROOTS OF THE MIND

Find a seat, or a comfortable meditative posture for you. Take three deep breaths to settle into your body, to ground yourself into the present moment.

Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale.

Keep breathing on your own, noticing your body breathing. Noticing where your breath is present in your body, allowing your body to breathe you more than you are breathing it.

Now, noticing what's arising, can you be aware of your thought reactions to what arises. If you are uncomfortable, can you notice that you have a desire to be more comfortable. Can

you recognize that this is simply greed arising: a desire for things to be different than the way they are, or to have something you do not currently have, like a pillow or a bed instead of the chair you are in. And can you experience it beginning to dissipate as you acknowledge, with full awareness, the presence of the mind pulling in, seeing it for what it is, and experiencing that you are okay in this moment just as you are.

Next, noticing what's arising, perhaps a resistance to sitting still and practicing this exercise. Can you recognize wanting to be somewhere else, and the presence of aversion on your mind. Can you simply be aware of the presence of aversion, noticing that the mind seems to be pushing something away, and that this is just the mind in an arising moment, that also begins to pass away once you can see it for what it is.

Now, noticing what's arising, maybe there is a sensation that you are meditating so well right now, that you must have been sitting like this for 30 minutes already! The mind might be running in circles with the super-meditator you are and in such a short time! And opening your eyes and upon seeing the few moments that have passed, less than you thought, and realizing that it has only been a couple of minutes. And so, the presence of delusion is here and shattered in this moment. Noticing, with awareness, the arising illusion of clock time, and paying attention to the awareness placed on this delusion that you have set aside this time for your practice, and there is plenty of time to be here where you are without rushing ahead.

Lingering for another few moments, notice what it is like for the presence and absence of the unwholesome roots of mind, and that they come and go without having to do anything except noticing, and experiencing.

Noticing that in the absence of these poisons, the mind can cultivate generosity, loving-kindness, and clarity. And each time the mind wanders into the entanglement of the poisons, you may remind yourself to call to mind the infinite wisdom and sources of generosity, loving-kindness, and clarity.

Mindfulness of these attitudes (as they are known) of the mind can be useful to apply during a yoga practice. We may begin to resist a posture, or just as quickly our mind can arise in a desire for the posture to be or feel different than it is, and we can be unaware that we are forcing our body into the posture because our mind said to go there, lacking clarity and connection to the body and what is here.

In these moments we can recall the balance to these three unwholesome roots of the mind and notice how simple, once aware, it is to tap into an attitude of generosity and

abundance in our lives, or how wide and expansive our loving kindness is, and how far it can reach. Perhaps you experience a point of clarity and recognize a feeling of freedom from an old and limiting before and are aware of this sensation in your present moment. I highly recommend exploring more for yourself. Let's visit the last of the foundations, the mindfulness of the mental states.

Mindfulness of the Mental States

Although in lists, a friendly reminder that these teachings are not linear, and are all connected. There is no wrong way to experience and practice with this information if we continually practice the utmost respect and honor for its roots.

There are five categories of the mental states: the hindrances, the aggregates, the sense spheres, the factors of awakening, and the Four Noble Truths. This fourth foundation is quite complex, so I share here what I find to be relative currently to experiencing mindfulness in power yoga and introduce you to the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha used these Four Truths to make sense of the world in a very general and broad realization. As sense-making creatures I find the simple recognition and articulation around these to be grounding and supportive.

Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths outline an understanding and acceptance of the world just as it is. Up until this point, this guide focuses on specific foundations of mindfulness, but what about the overview of the human experience. Life isn't always idyllic and there is a lot of suffering that exists. The truth of this helps to organize and acknowledge how we view the world, and how we can accept and respond with kind, nonjudgmental awareness.

1. There is suffering.

2. There is a cause of the suffering.
3. There is a way to minimize suffering.
4. Follow the Noble Eightfold Path to minimize suffering and find awakening or enlightenment.⁵

To paraphrase Zen master teacher Bernie Glassman, author of *Bearing Witness*, our greatest problem in life is how to get rid of the *idea* that we're going to get rid of our problems. The only way we can truly be with what is here, is to acknowledge that there is pain and suffering here in the world. Once we can accept and allow ourselves to digest this, we can start to heal and nourish to the actual issues that can arise in our moment-to-moment experience.

Keep in mind, the contemplative teachings are much more texturally rich than what I am sharing here, and there are many resources to dive deeper into the categories of the mind which have many teachings to assist in understanding. The Four Noble Truths open a door to investigating for your experiences as they unfold from a basic level of understanding our reality, rather than imposing how we want our reality to be.

Stating these truths in a power yoga class and acknowledgement of pain and suffering in the practice that sometimes can occur even though it is "good" for us, can alleviate the pressure to constantly feel good. Of course, we are not left hanging as the Buddha delivers the path to freedom or at the very least, how to practice with awareness and acceptance. Sharon Salzberg has said that the healing is in the return to awareness, not the never having wandered off in the first place.

⁵ This is summarized from Joseph Goldstein's book, *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* 2013.



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The Three Characteristics

Paying attention and the four foundations of mindfulness can be explicitly discussed throughout your power yoga class. I'll take a moment here to come back to a bigger picture Buddhist concept of the Three Characteristics. In the context of mindfulness, there are three constants that can teach us about our perception of reality (Goldstein, 2013, p. 57).

- Impermanence
- Dissatisfaction
- Selflessness

You can articulate the three characteristics into the experience your yoga students are having. They may then begin to recognize when they are moving through the physical postures of power yoga with a constant reminder that everything is in changing awareness.

Impermanence: This is the understanding that nothing is permanent. In a yoga class, it can be helpful to remind your students that they will not be uncomfortably sitting in Utkatasana (Chair pose) forever, but only for small amount of time. This can be felt through the

subtle cues you may offer to deepen the posture, or more obviously in the major changes from one pose to the next. Sensations are different moment to moment, and life is in constant flux.

Dissatisfaction: This is a simple truth of our lives; we shift away from discomfort to find comfort whenever possible. Dissatisfaction may arise when we strive for perfection. We might think, 'Okay, try harder, do better' and so we move somewhere and continue experiencing this self-chatter in that new place. If we can recognize this chatter when it arises and think instead, 'I am okay here and I can breathe. I am aware that I am breathing here,' it allows space for potential. And in the moment, we may open to the experience of the posture as it is, and we may be able to hold and breathe with more ease. Allow yourself to fully experience discomfort, rather than trying to escape it whenever you feel safe and supported to do so.

Selflessness: This is a concept in the world of Buddhism, and a confusing one for modern society. For understanding this in our context, let's note that you are not breathing, your breath is occurring; and if we experience sensation rather than saying, I am feeling pain in my downward dog, we might say, there is an unpleasantness in my downward facing dog. Another way to think of this is that things may happen around you that have nothing to do with *you*, and that you can practice not taking life too personally.

When you begin to see and experience the world with an understanding of these three characteristics, you begin to embody a sense of ease and less attachment to the moments of your life. In this way you may begin to see that this experience is unfolding in front of you, and you can be aware of it, embrace, or sit with it, without being swept away by it. This language

can universally describe experiences of being human without having to communicate specifically. You can practice this in power yoga postures.

EXERCISE: IT'S NOT PERMANENT, IT'S NOT PERFECT, IT'S NOT PERSONAL.

Imagine you are sitting in your arch nemesis yoga posture, chair pose, and the teacher tells you to hold and breathe here for 5 more breaths. Your mind immediately and irrationally jumps to the fact that you are uncomfortable here. Pause. Know, this is not permanent. Breathe. After 5 breaths, you change and are reminded of the impermanent nature of the practice, a practice that you can physically experience in your body without rushing change.

Imagine that your yoga teacher tells you to move into downward facing dog and to press your heels to the floor. Even though you are trying so hard, your feet will not touch the ground and you think you are doing it wrong. Pause. Can you recognize that it is okay to not touch the ground with your feet, and can you breathe right where you are. Letting go of the expectation of the posture, and rather than being disappointed, note the physical feeling of your body as it is right now.

Imagine that you are in a full yoga class practicing with many other yoga students. At one point in class, you are facing one side of the room and the teacher, and all the other students are behind you, so you cannot see them. The teacher tells you to widen your stance and you feel like your stance is as wide as you can go. The teacher cues this again and you feel anger and heat rising. You think, can't they see that I am as wide as I can go? Pause. Breathe and when you switch directions, the teacher cues it again. You notice there is a student next to you whose stance is short and could benefit from going wider. The teacher is right next to that student guiding them. In this moment you realize the cue was not directed at you. It was not personal; they were not talking to you.

Although many of the mindfulness teachings are simple, there is a tendency to breeze over what we already think we know, limiting our range, and dishonoring our experience of what we are doing. It is only through practicing mindfulness and experiencing it that we may constantly return attention inward to what is happening. There is a saying that mindfulness itself isn't hard, but *remembering* to return our attention here is what is most difficult.

Cultivating Mindfulness

There are many teachings that are useful to experience, and the ones I have outlined above are just the very few that have made an impact to me and my teaching at this moment in time. Remembering to be mindful takes an experience of practice that resonates with you, and finding ways to incorporate mindfulness into your life that makes sense and feels authentic to you.

One practice that I hold with great love and that I use as a tool to cultivate mindfulness throughout my day is what's known as Metta Meditation. It will be helpful here to define another Buddhist teaching on what is known as the *Brahma Viharas*. These translate to the divine abodes and in my understanding are the qualities of our mind that are innately present when the other distractions can be quieted, and for which our capacity is infinite. There are four abodes: loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. For this guide, I only call upon the first quality, loving-kindness, which translates to *metta* in Pali; thus, the Metta Meditation practice.

I use this loving-kindness quality often as a theme in my power yoga teaching, reminding students to be kind not only to others, but also to themselves as they sometimes clumsily attend to their bodies (and I mean this without judgment)! It can be radical for some students to practice self-lovingkindness. When I do use this as explicit language in my teaching, it warms my heart and allows space and open-hearted being modes to take up residence in the yoga studio. Metta Meditation is a specific repetition of phrases being offered to our being, to a loved being, to a neutral being, to a difficult being, and to all beings. In addition to the more formal

offering, you can simply repeat these phrases in your day, even sending these well-wishes (silently) to your students in *savasana*, or as they take their leave from the studio.

EXERCISE: METTA MEDITATION PRACTICE

Settling into a comfortable meditative posture for you, close your eyes, or hood your eyes to minimize external distractions. Set aside about 20 minutes.

May I be safe.

May I be happy.

May I be healthy.

May I live with ease.

May you be safe.

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you live with ease.

May all beings be safe.

May all beings be happy.

May all beings be healthy.

May all beings live with ease.

Begin again and repeat each phrase as it is with I, you, and all beings. You may repeat these to yourself in your mind or say them out loud.

End with a few moments of silence to let these phrases resound and allow your practice to come to an end. Slowly open your eyes and head into the rest of your day or eve.



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Mindfulness Meditation Links

These are just a few of the meditations that have resonated and guided me through some of the early stages of mindfulness meditation practices. I encourage you to listen to your body and assume a variation of the four postures that works for you, keeping in mind that you can listen to a walking meditation and lay on your back, or stand, until you are ready to try it walking.

- 30 minutes Body Scan Meditation with Jon Kabat-Zinn
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15q-N- kkrU>
- 10 Minute walking meditation with Yuttadhammo bhikkhu
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IFvablc6EI

- RAIN meditation <https://www.tarabrach.com/meditation-the-rain-of-self-compassion/>
- Sharon Salzberg Practice Meditation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buTQP4Geabk>
- Ten Percent Happier Podcast (you can listen without a subscription on spotify)
- Dharma Seed with a plethora of lectures and guided meditations,
dharmaseed.org

As you begin to test different practices and process these teachings on mindfulness, give yourself permission and grace to be comfortable in the posture you choose for meditation.

Welcome that you are introducing your body to something that may be new, especially coming from a fast-paced, moving meditation practice like power yoga. Consider balancing what your body needs in your meditation exploration practice. Think of these resources as just the beginning for you to contemplate and add tools to your toolbox, to share nuggets of wisdom, and experience for yourself, a mindfulness-based yoga practice.



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Weaving Mindfulness into your Classes

Now that we have experienced some mindfulness teachings and training, let's find some tangible places to add them into your power yoga classes. You might reflect on what brought you here to this moment and reading this guide. How can a language of mindfulness begin to weave into the experience of being in a challenging power yoga practice?

All I can do is share my experience of mindfulness as a practice and self-study, and how these ideas resonate with my creative process of creating and offering a power yoga. I can't tell you exactly how to teach your class with more mindfulness, however, I have come up with 7 places in a 1-hour power yoga class which provide a platform for me to be more mindful and intentional with my yoga students.

Most power yoga classes are formed from the structure of Baron Baptiste's sequencing. My foundational teaching is no exception, and my goal is to always teach a well-balanced sequence. From start to finish, I think of building a 60-minute movement that includes the following aspects: an integration, *Surya namaskar A* (Sun A), *Surya namaskar B* (Sun B), a break

or core focus, a standing series with balancing and triangle poses, hips, spine strengthening, twist, and surrender. In addition to these concrete spaces, I always set a theme or intention for the class. You may relate to this formula or have other ways of doing it. There's no one right way, and for the purpose of sprinkling mindfulness into your class, I think it will be helpful to have some concrete examples of the moments in an hour where you can infuse your teaching with it. Repetition is useful and encouraged.

Start by setting a theme or intention for class that day and use that as your nugget of mindfulness. As an example, I use one of my favorite themes known as the three P's. The three Ps are a digestible teaching on the three characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction, and selflessness. During a lecture on Dharma Seed (a wonderful and free resource of lectures in the realm of mindfulness teachings) Ruth King discusses nothing in life is permanent, perfect, or personal. With the three P's as our intention for practice, you can, at minimum, directly integrate mindfulness into your at least 7 times. In 60 minutes, that's about every 8 minutes! These 7 places in order of sequence are: 1) in integration, 2) before you flow in sun B, 3) during a break, 4) in triangle pose, 5) in one or both sides of hips, 6) in surrendering twists, 7) and finally when you leave them in savasana, or final surrender.

Integration: The beginning of class is a time to nurture and acknowledge your students' arrival here. You may invite them to take a comfortable seat with a tall spine, or to lie down or begin in child's pose if that is best for their body that day. Once in a position and able to allow the energy in the room to settle, you can direct your students to draw awareness to their breath. Mindfulness can explicitly be connected here, especially in one phrase from Jon Kabat-Zinn in which he says that in the context of mindfulness if you are breathing

there's more right with you than wrong. The breath is a natural place for yoga teachers to acknowledge, and after learning about mindfulness and the senses we can introduce sensations for grounding in the body here. You can ask your students to bring awareness to their feet, or their seat, or low back, etc., something here in this moment to focus their attention on. This is also the place where you can introduce the specific intention of the three Ps of life: 'nothing is permanent, nothing is perfect, and nothing is personal.'

Pre Sun-B Flow: Sun B usually consists of larger muscle engagement and heat building postures such as chair pose and warrior II. These poses start to require more focus and reminders to breathe, but students should feel warm and some steady rhythmic breath from the integration and warm up of Sun A. I teach with constructive cues so I'll offer concrete setting up and reminders to breathe here, but I will also sprinkle a reminder of our intention: 'nothing is permanent, perfect, or personal.' Relate to your students that it can be easy to get rigid and super serious and become attached to a posture, or even try to take shape without messing anything up. I find students will reconnect to the bigger picture, and become more mindful of this moment now, and breathe with a little more confident ease.

Break and/or Core Focus: In my heated power classes, I teach flat out core series. After the steady movement of sun B, students welcome a break from down dog and intense breath to movement, and I tell them to lie on their back. If you do not teach core, just have them take a break here in child's pose, or perhaps a seated position with their eyes closed. This changes for me, but either before or after core work, I'll remind them of our intention for class. I'll work to expand this notion from my own experience. While they are resting and feeling more receptive this is an opportunity to share: 'notice if you think you could have

been better during core, or if a critical thought arises. Take a deep breath and allow yourself to be exactly as you are.' Cue back to deep, long inhales and exhales here to reinfuse the mindful connection of the body breathing, and the mind body awareness that is the goal of the practice of yoga. There is a direct experience of letting go of what just happened, and any thoughts of imperfection, to simply be here.

Triangle pose: Triangle pose is the peak of almost every single one of my classes. This posture demands the attention, warmth, and strength of the body in a way that can make five breaths seem like an eternity. Once safely in the posture and breathing, you can remind your students: 'nothing is permanent. This pose will not last forever!' I tend to get a smile or visibly see a relief around the room and a reconnection to breath that helps students focus on the posture and breathing there for a few seconds longer than they may have without this reminder and encouragement.

Half Pigeon: This is common and beloved hip opener (I am completely biased with very tight hips), and a place where your students tend to slow down and catch their breath, especially if the class has been new to them or just a challenge that day. I see heads hanging in relief, and bodies happy to be still here. But the mind can still wander, as it does. I try to impart the intention back in here but only on one side, typically the first side (we do half pigeon on both the right and left sides). This way I can recall and once again expand on the three P's: 'everything in life doesn't have to be taken so seriously. Many situations that we think are happening *to* us, may just be happening in our awareness and have nothing to do with us.' I like to leave silence on the second side here so that students may focus on their breath. I haven't mentioned that I do use music as well and I choose something soothing

here. Perhaps not completely mellow, and maybe something with intentional lyrics.

Although I will note the more years that I teach the more I enjoy using instrumental music.

Surrendering Twists: At this point in class, students' breathing has slowed way down, and they are tuning you in and out as they wrap up their own experience and conscious awareness of the practice that day. It may feel appropriate to make another reference here to our mindful intention. My recommendation once again is on the first side of the twist, and to cue to any awareness of sensations rising and falling. You may point out the change and impermanent nature of our bodies from the beginning of class to this moment now, without inundating with too many extra words.

Final Savasana: As the practice comes to its natural end, allow your words to resonate as you send your students into deep stillness and rest. Acknowledge perhaps the very reason they came to their mats in the first place: to find a quiet mind, resting in awareness now as the yoga postures settle and metabolize in the body. You can remind them softly as they drift off, or you may remind them as you bring your class to a complete close (for me, I like to let students rest in savasana and awaken at their own pace): 'nothing is permanent, perfect, or personal.'

Your yoga class can become a transformative space for someone who has never realized the impact of their practice infused with articulated awareness. And there are so many more intentions, themes, and specific teachings that you can offer and make your own as you discover more. One important note it to always give credit to your theme or intention, or to have the resource available in case someone asks you after class and wants to learn more (it happens, often)!

Create Ripples



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If we as yoga teachers practice mindful contemplation, our students will feel it. The point of this guide is to find a way that mindfulness authentically exists for you and to begin to share that with your students in an embodied way. Chances are, students will start to treat you with even more gratitude, because of the kindness, compassion, and nonjudgment that you exude. Taking the time to do this for yourself is essential. And when you begin to experience and know it, it will be palpable and shine through to your students.

Mindfulness is neither a linear nor perfect climb; it is a practice of being right where you are when you are there with acceptance and an open mind and heart. In the same way that a tiny drop which falls in a pond will eventually grow into larger and larger rings until the ripple reaches shores beyond the scope of what you even know is possible, let your practice effect you. And then you effect your students.

With kindness and love, and gratitude. The light in me acknowledges the light in you.
With deep respect for this offering of knowledge and wisdom, Namaste.

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