

# The Intersection of Justice and Yoga

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What are you holding in your heart?

## The Intersection of Justice and Yoga

### Agenda

- Grounding-internal and external
- Bhagavad Gita
- Assumptions
- Suffering and Liberation
- Social Justice Work
- Contemplative Practice
- The Eight Limb Path of Yoga
- Spiritual Bypassing
- Social Location
- Integrating contemplative practice into justice work

“When one connects with their feelings as yoga teaches us to do, they can connect with their heart. If one is connected with their heart, they have the opportunity to be changed and to shift their perspective. They have the opportunity to feel the pain of living in a world that is designed to break the spirit through violence, oppression and injustice. Feeling the pain, individually and, more importantly, collectively allows for us to grieve, to acknowledge and truth tell and to aspire to be better than the legacy that white supremacy has left us.”

— Michelle Cassandra Johnson

## Assumptions

- There is NO neutral: We live in a toxic culture, the culture conditions us not to see the toxicity and instead to normalize the absurd.
- Intent does not equal impact.
- There is no way to talk about racism without replicating racism.
- Racism and white supremacy cause trauma.
- We must love ourselves into who we want to be.
- Non closure

## Context

## Suffering

In many religious or faith traditions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, understanding the afflictions that cause suffering inspires a deeper exploration of how we create a space of ultimate liberation and freedom. Given the historical legacy of war, violence, oppression, socially and politically constructed categories to minimize people and make them be seen as subhuman, and the privileging of groups of people at the expense of others, it is important to broaden the definition of suffering to move beyond the individual... Suffering is the experience of pain and distress psychically, emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually.

“Much of what is being taught is the acceptance of a “kinder, gentler suffering” that does not question the unwholesome roots of systemic suffering and the structures that hold it in place. What is required is a new Dharma, a radical Dharma that deconstructs rather than amplifies the systems of suffering, that starves rather than fertilizes the soil of the conditions that the deep roots of societal suffering grow in.”

— Angel Kyodo Williams

Williams, A.K. (2016) *Radical Dharma: Talking race, love, and liberation* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

## Liberation

As with definition of suffering, many religious and faith traditions including Buddhism and Hinduism focus on pathway to enlightenment coming through

- freeing ourselves of attachments to afflictions (our own suffering) &
- shifting consciousness such that we can be free regardless of circumstance.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankel discusses the space between what was happening to him and what was within his power to change. He describes the physical and psychological experience of being in a concentration camp and his response was, "**Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.**"

Liberation= understanding our humanity & being able to see humanity in others such that we understand our freedom is dependent upon others' freedom.

"Liberation is no small task – it is appropriately daunting for miraculous beings. it is a gift, to be given such undeniable purpose, such immense odds. hold each other tight, and let's do this work."

— Adrienne Maree Brown

adrienne maree brown. *Living through the unveiling*. February 3, 2017.

<http://adriennemareebrown.net/2017/02/03/living-through-the-unveiling/>

Where do you notice suffering?

Where do you notice ease/liberation?

### Eight Limb Path of Yoga



# Yamas

## Yama

The first limb, *yama*, deals with one's ethical standards and sense of integrity, focusing on our behavior and how we conduct ourselves in life. **Yamas** are universal practices that relate best to what we know as the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

## The five yamas are:

**Ahimsa:** nonviolence

**Satya:** truthfulness

**Asteya:** non stealing

**Brahmacharya:** continence, managing energy

**Aparigraha:** noncovetousness, greedlessness

## Niyamas

*Niyama*, the second limb, has to do with self-discipline and spiritual observances. Regularly attending temple or church services, saying grace before meals, developing your own personal **meditation** practices, or making a habit of taking contemplative walks alone are all examples of niyamas in practice.

**The five niyamas are:**

**Saucha:** cleanliness

**Santosha:** contentment

**Tapas:** heat; spiritual austerities

**Svadyaya:** study of the sacred scriptures and of one's self

**Ishvara Pranidhana:** self surrender



## Practice

Meditation/concentration on each limb of the eight limb path.

## Spiritual Bypassing

“Spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep personal, emotional ‘unfinished business,’ to shore up a shaky sense of self, or to belittle basic needs, feelings, and developmental tasks.”

— John Welwood

Welwood, J. (2000.) *Towards a psychology of awakening*. Boston: Shambhala Press, p.207

## Social Location

One's position in society based on their social group memberships that determines their proximity to power and privilege.

The original mindfulness teachings of the Buddha, as found in the *Satipatthana-sutta* (sutra) of the Pali tradition, were based on the body and feelings.

This means that the Buddha recognized that truth is found within our specific embodied experience, the touchstone of our sociocultural location. The practice is to honor the sensations and feelings of the body as direct perception, "both internally and externally," and "worldly and unworldly."

Nanamoli, B & B. Bodhi. (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya (The Teachings of the Buddha)*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

## Centering the Practice

- Remember our movements for social change are ceremony.
- Believe our movements are sacred.
- Center a practice and ritual in social justice space, gathering, meeting, organizing group etc.
- Balance the impatience and urgency with mindfulness and intention.

- Make it a ritual to begin with centering and breathing/meditation.
- Make it a practice to remember social location.
- Remember we aren't in a harm-free society and our practice can support us in creating systems of repair.

“If we do not begin to shift the conversation of yoga to center love, justice and truth-telling then, as a people, we will not survive. As a culture and collective of yogis we must go deeper, dig deeper and use the platform of yoga to create healing, justice and peace.”

—Michelle Cassandra Johnson

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