Integrated Holistic Adaptive Yoga:
Theory and Practice of Making Yoga Accessible and Tailored

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“Most of our pain is due to a lack of a deeper truth. The opposite of pain is not pleasure, but clarity.”

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There is no soul, no thing, no concept independent of its context; all things are devoid of absolute reality and exist only relative to conditions.

Ancient yoga and modern interpersonal neurobiology and psychology agree – we are complex and complicated creatures with incredible potential and creativity. We have many facets and manifestations and are constantly changing and evolving. We are forever emerging and changing – all within the context of an interpersonal matrix, our web of relationships. In that context, as Heraclitus states – *Change is the Only Constant.*

Why is this? Why are we never the same from moment to moment? And yet why do we feel as though we are the same person – whether we think of ourselves as being age 5 or age 50? There is no single answer to this question; however, ancient yoga and modern psychology have some compelling answers that draw upon our innate existential imperative to grow, change, evolve, and contribute to the greater good. These questions and answers from yoga and neuroscience are closely related to our way of being in the world, especially including our physical, affective and energetic, emotional and mental, and behavioral and relational wellbeing, resilience, fortitude, flexibility, and adaptability.

**Integrated Holistic Adaptive Yoga** explores how to use yoga psychology, as informed by modern research and neuroscience, to understand how humans develop and evolve and how to draw on and tailor yoga strategies to optimize the human capacity to deal with a variety of life challenges to thrive and grow – always in relationship. (Re)Gaining resilience starts with exploring contextual and personal contributors to physical, affective, mental, emotional, behavioral, and relational unease and suffering. Based on the understanding of how difficulties arise, strategies for self-care and healthcare can then be developed based on the many aspects of yoga and its modern psychological and neuroscientific foundations and manifestations. Movement, breath, mindfulness, meditation, and guided imagery are applied in ways that can be adapted to the specific physical, affective, emotional, mental, behavioral, and relational needs of individuals, creating highly personalized self-care or wellness plans for emotional resilience and cognitive flexibility. The ultimate goal of integrated holistic adaptive yoga is to support resilience (the necessary foundation of all therapeutic work), to invite deeper healing (the process of (re)gaining wellbeing), and ultimately to promote thriving (the final hope for all practitioners).

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*Accessible yoga offers a yoga that honors human variation and invites all humans into the practice of yoga. Adaptive yoga honors human uniqueness and invites everyone into the practice from this person-centered recognition of human diversity and resilience.*

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**Defining and Committing to Integrated Holistic Yoga**

The postural practice of modern Western yoga has brought keen media attention to yoga along with a certain amount of notoriety. In fact, *yoga* has become a bit of a loaded word these days. Modern postural yoga elicits visions of sweaty bodies in large rooms, full of people who are working hard to build a healthy physique. It may also bring up images of young, healthy people – often well-to-do and often female – who are able to move their body in ways that most humans cannot and who wear tight clothes and fancy accessories. However, yoga as an integrated holistic practice or life philosophy goes far beyond posture (or physical) practice alone. Integrated holistic yoga brings us a different vision – a vision focused on physical, behavioral, mental, emotional, and relational health; on centeredness in mind, breath, emotions, and body; and on the therapeutics of wellness and resilience.
Integrated holistic yoga offers a vision that honors the deep cultural tradition that dates yoga back thousands of years. It integrates modern neuroscience with ancient practices to demonstrate the profound wisdoms in the original teachings that we are relearning and rediscovering every day. Integrated holistic yoga embraces inclusiveness, access, diversity, health, wellbeing, and resilience for all. It is a practice of and for community; it honors interdependence and co-regulation. Integrated holistic yoga represents a return to yoga as it was traditionally practiced – a therapeutic lifestyle that lead to insight grounded in wisdom, compassion infused with lovingkindness, and calmness marked by resilience. Ancient yoga was physical to prepare practitioners for the more important interior practices (such as concentration and meditation) and interpersonal applications of a thoughtful and deliberate code of life and discipline (Brems, Colgan, Freeman, Freitas, Justice, Shean, & Sulenes, 2016; Freeman et al., 2017).

Relying deeply on ancient wisdoms from Vedic, Tantric, and Buddhist traditions, modern integrated holistic yoga (as defined by Brems, 2022) is a therapeutic practice that combines body, emotion, mind, spirit, and community through a comprehensive lifestyle with profound implications for individual and collective wellbeing (Feuerstein, 2013; Iyengar, 2005; White, 2007). It promotes self-compassion, introspection, and community that lead to insights that alter human physiology and anatomy, and – perhaps more importantly – emotions, cognitions, behaviors, and relationships. Integrated holistic yoga can be practiced by anyone who can breathe without assistance, almost anywhere, for little to no cost. It invites practitioners to adhere to the heart and soul of the practice rather than to a unidimensional posture practice and, as such, is freed from Western media stereotypes that tend to limit who seeks access to yoga (Dittman & Freedman, 2009; Ross et al., 2013).

Integrated holistic yoga draws heavily on the ancient or traditional yoga that consists of eight sets of ancient practices – namely, the limbs of yoga – elucidated in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (sample translations: Hartranft, 2003; Iyengar, 2005). These eight practices can be grouped into four categories based on modern research (Gard et al., 2014; Ward et al., 2014). Values and Lifestyle Practices of yoga direct practitioners toward ethical (yama) and intentional (niyama) living informed by purposeful values and meaningful life goals. Physical Practices (asana) transform the practitioner’s anatomy and physiology, and support accurate sensory perception of the body from the inside out and of the environment from the outside in. Breathing Practices (pranayama) stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, allowing access to a calm, relaxed state from which to become adaptively responsive to inner and outer life demands, achieving systemic homeostasis in body and mind. Interior Practices (pratyahara, dharana, and dhyana) draw the practitioner into self-exploration, personal insight, and interpersonal transformation, leading to the shedding of maladaptive habits, reactivity, and stereotypes while opening space for new choices, adaptive responsiveness, and resilience in body, emotions, mind, and relationships. These practices are enormously beneficial to the practitioner – and have been so for millennia. Modern sciences are finally catching up to this recognition that yoga – as an integrated holistic practice, not a single-minded postural practice – has profound impacts on human wellbeing, as explored in detail below.

Integrated holistic yoga (Brems, 2015; 2022) yoga teachers and yoga clinicians are committed to:

- inviting practitioners to begin to understand their own complexity as well as their deep grounding in relationships and communities;
- blending ancient wisdoms and modern science, integrating a multitude of practices;
- inviting everyone into the practice, creating accessibility, equity, and engagement;
- inviting practitioners to make a whole-hearted and open-minded commitment to a practice that reflects intentional lifestyle choices; and
- creating therapeutic yoga experiences that help practitioners realize many of the documented benefits that an integrated and holistic practice has to offer.
### Integrated Holistic Yoga – A Definition and Commitment

- **A commitment to wholeness** – layers of self or consciousness, biopsychosociocultural context, interconnection, and community in all their complexity
- **A commitment to integration** – four noble truths, eight traditional practices (aka limbs) of yoga, science and soul, and their interdependence and coordination
- **A therapeutic lifestyle and practice for everyone** – accessibility, inclusion, equity, engaged action, and personal as well collective empowerment
- **A commitment to intentional lifestyle choices** – commitment to making the world a better place; living with intention and purpose
- **An invitation of profound benefits** – understanding yoga’s health benefits, mental health benefits, and functional benefits – via several mechanisms of change

Let’s dive more deeply into these important components and benefits of the type of integrated and holistic yoga practice that is the foundation for the practices represented in this manual.

### Integrated Holistic Yoga: Commitment to Wholism

Integrated holistic yoga – the type of yoga that facilitates maximum physical and mental benefits – is a yoga of wholism that honors mind as much as body, breath as much as calming of the nervous system, individuals as much as the collective, stillness as much as movement, and effort as much as ease. It looks at and addresses the needs and resources of **whole people at all their layers** (or koshas, in Sanskrit): body, breath, mind, heart, and spirit – grounded in community and a complex interpersonal setting (or matrix) of biological, psychological, social, and cultural influences. It is particularly well-suited to applications in healthcare settings.

Integrated holistic yoga teachers always remember that the physical practice is only the tiniest tip of the iceberg – the real work happens energetically, emotionally, and mentally. We understand and are in the physical world first and hence we grow and evolve from there. Yoga teaches us to understand, acknowledge and inhabit our bodies – not deny, repress, or dissociate from them. We learn to understand the physical and how to rest in equanimity regardless of what happens in the body. Alongside the work with the body, we work with breath and energy, mind and emotions, and ultimately, we move toward community, connection, and compassion, awakening to a new and decentered level of consciousness.

**Wholism Avoids Reductionism and Embraces Complexity**

Working from an integrated holistic paradigm of teaching yoga allows us to avoid reductionism and invites us to embrace wholism. It embraces the complexity of human life and growth while resting in the simplicity of a well-designed practice. Just like a spiderweb, a yoga class is the weaving together of many intricate strands with great attention and purpose. The result is a complex structure that is beautiful to behold in its seeming simplicity and genuine clarity.

What does reductionism look like? Reductionism hones in on a single or a couple of aspects of the individual who is coming to the practice of yoga without honoring their full history, experience, and complexity. It may hone in on the physical aspect of the individual or the practice, treating a single symptom or using a single intervention. It may hone in on perceptions of people as unidimensional or stereotypes that fail to see each person’s unique expressions, needs, or contexts. Likewise, yoga practices (or other interventions, such as healthcare, educational approaches, recommended physical activities, endorsed nutritional styles, and more)
used with or prescribed for individual are based on generalizations that make it, often are actually exclusive to certain populations, restricting access to and utility of the ‘standard of care’ or universal approach. Reductionism tends to exclude and frighten as opposed to include and invite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is Wholism?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic systems consider the interaction of all living beings to create an environment for the maximum benefit of all. They do not focus on specific components or features, instead being dedicated to the understanding, wellbeing, and support of the entire system in all its multidimensional complexities. Nothing is ignored; nothing is left out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning approaches that embrace holism integrate all human traits, attending to the physical, energetic, mental, emotional, behavioral, relational, and psychological aspects of all who are coming together for the purpose of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic approaches to healthcare, education, politics, environmental policy, gardening, and so on encourage personal and collective responsibility, accountability, duty, wellbeing, welfare, security, health, and happiness.</td>
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The opposite of reductionism is wholism, the honoring of complexity, of critical analysis and thinking as guides to teaching, education, healthcare, and other human interactions. From a holistic paradigm, teachers or care providers teach and support based on principles applied and tailored to the specific students or clients, as well as their circumstances and context, with deep caring and wisdom, informed by the intention for the work and for each component of the work. A holistic paradigm that avoids reductionism is the perfect approach for yoga in healthcare settings. It can help transform challenges faced in modern healthcare by treating the whole person, rather than symptoms.

**Wholism Honors all Human Layers of Consciousness**

Wholism makes a point of seeing the entirety of each individual regardless of presenting concern, context, or relationship. The practitioner or client is seen in all layers or koshas – body, vitality and energy, mind and emotion, heart and relationship, and context and belongingness. Ancient yoga was very clear that humans have multiple ways of being conscious of themselves as they live and interact in the real world of daily life. In modern language, we refer to this complexity as the many layers of human experience and consciousness. Ancient yogis conceived of the self as layered – composed of several aspects or components that make up our consciousness (a consciousness to which we refer as our self). In Sanskrit, these layers are called koshas, which can be loosely translated as “sheaths”.

The word koshas is used in this text because no English translation can quite capture the complexity of the concept. *Each kosha has a separate and distinct function while also being completely integrated and interdependent with all others.* All layers of consciousness are with us (if only as seeds) from birth to death – yet each takes on particular significance and reaches maturation during different stages of our lives and development. In other words, they develop and become important neurosequentially. The specific meanings and expressions of each kosha depend on the circumstances we face as we move through life and relationships. We will cover the koshas in the next section in great detail. Following is a summary of the five layers of consciousness as a brief preview of that is to come.
Koshas or Layers of Consciousness

The word “kosha” is translated as layer or sheath of the self in most western yoga translations. However, the koshas are perhaps better understood as layers or stages of consciousness, awareness, or experience. The word “maya” is translated as illusion. This gives us the first hint that the layers of “self” are merely a construction of the mind, a way of experiencing ourselves in the tangible world. In reality, each layer of self is an illusion – a construct to be transcended. There are five koshas – each defined in more detail below:

- **Annamaya kosha** – embodied self or body consciousness (“anna” = food)
- **Pranamaya kosha** – affective or vital self or affect consciousness (“prana” = breath; “prana” = life force)
- **Manomaya kosha** – verbal and social self or mind consciousness (“mano” = mind)
- **Vijnanamaya kosha** – decentered, wisely intuitive self or wisdom consciousness (“vijnana” = wisdom)
- **Anandamaya kosha** – joyful integrated self or unity/universal consciousness (“Ananda” = bliss, joy)

**Wholism Recognizes Interdependence and Embeddedness in Community**

Human development, which can be considered synonymous with development along the lines of the koshas, is profoundly influenced by and dependent upon a multitude of individual, relational, and contextual factors that are utterly interpersonal and interdependent. Human development depends on being solidly and supportively anchored in a greater web of life, especially a web of loving, joyful, kind, and compassionate humans. Human newborns cannot survive outside of a caretaking human matrix of relationships that support their physical survival, emotional needs, and mental growth (Cozolino, 2015; Cozolino, 2017). This interpersonal matrix (Stern, 1985) and its influence has been thoroughly documented in the developmental psychology literature and is unquestioned in the importance of its influence.

In the integrated holistic yoga model (Brems, 2022), development is viewed as a lifelong process of refinement and emergence, shaped by individuals’ experiences in and interactions with their context and environment. Development thus defined resembles evolution (Wilber, 2000) and results in the acquisition of behaviors, useful skills, shaping of new responses, un- and relearning habits, and expansion of awareness (Grant, 2021; Wimbarti & Self, 1992). In this model, development is utterly dependent on the context in which it occurs. How our bodies, energy and vitality, mind and emotions, and ways of being relationship develop, grow, and transform is strongly affected by the context that surrounds us: the relationships we experience, the environments in which we grow up and grow old, the cultural forces that bring us advantages or disadvantages, the social and sociopolitical pressures we feel, and the educational and career or job opportunities that emerge or fail to emerge. All have profound and long-lasting effects on how we grow, emerge, and evolve in all layers of self, in our relationships, in our families, and in our communities.

The integrated holistic yoga model of understanding human development and human existence/experience is premised on continual change, emergence, and evolution that optimizes and integrates learning and experience over time, constantly transcending and improving upon prior learning and conditioning (Badenoch, 2011a; Badenoch, 2011b; Cozolino, 2015; Cozolino, 2017; Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2012). The empowering premise that humans are subject to and agents in their own lifelong growth is consistent with findings from modern neuroscience and psychology as well as yogic perspectives on human development. The following table provides an overview of the modern science perspective on human development, integrated with the ancient kosha model.
**Panchamaya Kosha Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Developmental Concepts</th>
<th>Intervention Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annamaya Kosha</strong> = embodied self or body consciousness (“anna” = food)</td>
<td>anatomy and physiology; development and maintenance of physical health and allostasis; recovery from illness/disease, embodiment; recognition of physical habits and preoccupations</td>
<td>emphasize how body senses, metabolizes, moves and functions; physical inputs and outputs are autonomically managed via the brain stem; movement is strongly linked to the dopamine system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pranamaya Kosha</strong> = affective and vital self or affect consciousness (“prana” = breath; “Prana” = life force)</td>
<td>breath, energy, vitality, affect, blood flow, electrical impulses, neurochemical transmissions, and more; energetic and physical layers inseparably/jointly process signals from inside (neuroception, interoception, proprioception) and outside (exteroception) of the body</td>
<td>Explore how we feel energetically and affectively; link to the kleshas; link to shared experience of connection, codependent arising, co-regulation, and interdependence; work with shared vibration, communal affect and arousal, shared tranquility and peace; prana vayus come into play and are explored to regulate energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manomaya Kosha</strong> = verbal and social self or mind consciousness (“mano” = mind)</td>
<td>perceptions, thoughts, labels, emotions arise from mental interpretations, and expressions of acquired personality; encompasses (emerging and always evolving) perceptual and cognitive understanding of the world, including perceived roles in communities and relationships</td>
<td>gain clarity about habitual reactivity and can transform habit into conscious choice; recognize mental biases and cognitive habits (vrittis, especially as flavored by the gunas and kleshas); explore and transcend physical, affective, cognitive, emotional, and relational samskaras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vijnanamaya Kosha</strong> = decentered, wisely intuitive self or wisdom/heart consciousness (“vijnana” = wisdom)</td>
<td>innate intelligence, talents, traits, and natural inclinations (or innate temperament) meet emerging/growing wisdom and deeper understanding (\rightarrow) conscious recognition of interdependence, that there is no solo self, no self at all – but only a relative self that helps us navigate life</td>
<td>perceive roles and responsibilities with more clarity; recognize human responsibility to invite joy, lovingkindness, compassion, and equanimity; apply ethics and morality with discernment and a lens that includes complexities and contexts that might easily be missed; live our highest intentions for the collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anandamaya Kosha</strong> = joyful integrated self or universal/connected consciousness (“Ananda” = bliss, joy)</td>
<td>A joyful and connected self emerges and leads to the realization of co-regulation and interdependence, as well as deep inner, unconditional joy and awakened living</td>
<td>understand deeply that there is a greater connection and coexistence that transcends each of us individually; brahma viharas guide intention, thought, speech, and action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ancient traditions and modern sciences recognize that humans change, emerge, and grow in the context of their embeddedness in an interpersonal matrix and need to be understood from the unique developmental and contextual embeddedness at any moment in time. All are equally optimistic and hopeful, by virtue of their developmental focus, that there is an inherent capacity of humans to transcend their current state, to improve with experience and discipline, and to evolve continually, and ultimately to embrace their human interconnection, interrelation, and interdependence – along with the responsibilities that emerge from this recognition of connection. The context in which development and healing happens is relational, collective, and biopsychosociocultural in nature.

**The BioPsychoSocioCultural (BPSC) Paradigm**

The biopsychosociocultural paradigm invites yoga clinicians to gain in-depth understanding of clients’ or students’ (or their own) webs of life, webs of relationships, and greater connection. It reminds us that sources of challenges, difficulties, and presenting concerns, even overall life experience are always relational and embedded in a greater context. It leads to recognition of the importance of having an understanding of biopsychosociocultural contexts that have had and continue to have a bearing on the development and
experience of human beings. Four dimensions are defined and understood with complexity from a holistic and integrated lens. They are biological, psychological, socioeconomic/sociological, and cultural/familial – or biopsychosociocultural – in nature (cf., (Brems, C. & Rasmussen, 2019). Biopsychosociocultural context are in and of themselves ever-emerging, always changing, and in flux. This adds complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and volatility to our understanding of ourselves and our clients. In other words, our human experience is always grounded in a world that has been said to be marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA; defined further in the Box that follows).

Currently (though probably only more notably so…), we live in a VUCA world.

\[
\begin{align*}
V &= \text{volatility} \\
U &= \text{uncertainty} \\
C &= \text{complexity} \\
A &= \text{ambiguity}
\end{align*}
\]

Such conditions are inherently more stressful and more likely to create difficulty and helplessness. However, understanding these characteristics of life and knowing how to manage them can prevent excessive suffering and distress, while enhancing resilience in body, mind, behavior, and relationships. In fact, being prepared for and open to VUCA can lead to thriving and success.

Integrated holistic yoga is one pathway for finding grounding and accessing strategic abilities in the context of human connection and co-regulation during times of VUCA. It increases our window of tolerance for VUCA and gives us the capacity to respond to it with empowerment, agency, and efficacy – recognizing our deep grounding in community and a supportive web of life. Our very interdependence (which we so often deny, especially in the Western world) is the solution to thriving in a VUCA world. It invites us into collaborative, compassionate, kind, and create relationships that support collective health and wellbeing.

Two figures below detail the four biopsychosociocultural factors individually; however, it is important to understand that this is simply for ease of communication. In actuality, these factors co-exist, influence each other, co-arise, and interact deeply and profoundly – they are connected. They weave a complex and whole web of relationships and interactions that deeply shape and affect who we become and how we develop and influence others. Our relationship with our biopsychosociocultural context is entirely reciprocal – our biopsychosociocultural context deeply influences and shapes us; in turn, we can greatly influence and shape it, becoming agents for change and betterment – not just on behalf of ourselves, but for our communities and our world.
### Figure 4: The Four Quadrants of the BioPsychoSocioCultural Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological Factors</th>
<th>Psychological Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o genetics</td>
<td>o temperament</td>
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<tr>
<td>o physical disabilities</td>
<td>o personality</td>
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<tr>
<td>o developmental and health issues</td>
<td>o self-identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>o accidents and injuries</td>
<td>o resilience and coping</td>
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<tr>
<td>o illness and disease</td>
<td>o affect</td>
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<tr>
<td>o nutrition</td>
<td>o emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o sleep hygiene</td>
<td>o cognitive style and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o medications and substances</td>
<td>o intellectual capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td>o medical family history</td>
<td>o executive functioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>.... and more</td>
<td>.... and more</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social, Societal, Socioeconomic Factors</th>
<th>Cultural and Familial Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o education</td>
<td>o group memberships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o employment and career</td>
<td>o values, ethics, and morals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o socioeconomics</td>
<td>o prejudice and stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o social support</td>
<td>o choices and options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o sociopolitical circumstances</td>
<td>o language and speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o legal and law enforcement structures</td>
<td>o religion and spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o oppression or bias</td>
<td>o family structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>o discrimination</td>
<td>o family process/communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>o privilege</td>
<td>o family competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o political climate</td>
<td>o historical/other trauma</td>
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<tr>
<td>.... and more</td>
<td>.... and more</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The next figure offers the same content, adding overlapping dimensions between the basic biological, psychological, social and cultural aspects of our environment and experience. The following intersections are proposed and outlined:

- biological and psychological context (behavioral health)
- biological and social context (public health)
- psychological and cultural context (family health and functioning) and
- cultural and social contexts (sociocultural health)
### Figure 5: The Expanded Model of the BioPsychoSocioCultural Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>Intersection of Bio-Psycho</th>
<th>PSYCHO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological Factors</td>
<td>Behavioral Health</td>
<td>Psychological Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- genetics</td>
<td>- nutritional choices</td>
<td>- temperament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- physical disabilities</td>
<td>- exercise</td>
<td>- personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- developmental issues</td>
<td>- sleep hygiene</td>
<td>- self-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- health issues</td>
<td>- hydration</td>
<td>- resilience and coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- accidents and injuries</td>
<td>- addiction</td>
<td>- affect and emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- nutritional status</td>
<td>- time in nature</td>
<td>- cognitive style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- sleep quality</td>
<td></td>
<td>- learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- medications</td>
<td></td>
<td>- intellectual capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- medical family history</td>
<td></td>
<td>- executive functioning</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Health</th>
<th>Familial Health</th>
<th>Intersection of Socio-Cultural</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- access to healthcare</td>
<td>- family dynamics</td>
<td>- group memberships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- access to health education</td>
<td>- family structure</td>
<td>- values, ethics, and morals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- access to insurance</td>
<td>- family process</td>
<td>- prejudice, stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- food insecurity and quality</td>
<td>- family communication</td>
<td>- choices and options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- air and noise pollution</td>
<td>- family competence</td>
<td>- religion and spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- access to nature</td>
<td>- family affect</td>
<td>- language, speech, symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- environmental safety</td>
<td></td>
<td>- historical trauma</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and Societal Factors</th>
<th>Socio-Cultural</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intersection of Socio-Cultural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- affordable, safe housing</td>
<td>- oppression or bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- neighborhood safety</td>
<td>- discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- educational access/quality</td>
<td>- microaggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- educational opportunity</td>
<td>- intergenerational trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- employment, career, work</td>
<td>- privilege, supremacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- socioeconomic equity</td>
<td>- gentrification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- political systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- social support networks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- legal structures/equity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- crime exposure/definition</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>CULTURAL</td>
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<tr>
<td>- group memberships</td>
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<tr>
<td>- values, ethics, and morals</td>
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<tr>
<td>- prejudice, stereotypes</td>
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<tr>
<td>- choices and options</td>
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<tr>
<td>- religion and spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<td>- language, speech, symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- historical trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- customs, rituals, standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- dress, style, appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- expectations and openness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Integrated Holistic Yoga: Commitment to Integration

Integrated holistic yoga integrates all eight traditional limbs of yoga practice equally, not raising physical performance or practice above the rest. It begins with the understanding that therapeutic yoga is first and foremost a lifestyle of mindfulness in all the many layers of our modern and ancient conceptions of self (or consciousness). Mindfulness begins with a commitment to be nonjudgmental, aware, compassionate, committed to an ethical life that is grounded in values, and dedicated to this lifestyle with disciplined ease and intentional effort. A mindful life continues in the body, as we tune into personal needs, tailor our physical practice, attune to inner sensation, and develop interoceptive awareness of how our body responds to different demands and actions. Mindfulness also encompasses the breath, to help us find attunement to how we move energy through our body, how the breath enlivens the body, and how affects and arousal arise, are experienced, and dissipate. Mindfulness moves with greater challenge toward cultivating awareness of the fluctuations in the mind to help us transcend and transform mental and emotional habits that impair our psychological growth and transformation, affect our relationships and communities, and flavor our understanding of how life unfolds and interconnects.

From mindfulness of body (sensation), breath (affect), and mind (perceptions, cognition, memory, thoughts, emotions, interpretations, attitudes, opinions, and more), slowly wisdom emerges and guides us toward an appreciation of life as a journey of connection, transformation, growth, and perpetual change. We move toward an understanding that when we find the gap between stimulus and response, we give ourselves the gift of conscious choice, novel ways of being, reshaping our lives and relationships. Of course, we do not practice yoga with a particular goal in mind – we simply commit ourselves very intentionally to its potential and open ourselves to the journey toward perhaps becoming wiser, more equanimous, compassionate, and joyful. We engage in the practice altruistically, for the benefit of our greater community and world.

The Eight-Limbed Path or Royal Road

The integrated journey that is yoga (as elaborated in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali) guides us along a varied path of practices that begins with a commitment to and grounding in ethical practices (Limb 1: yama) that encourage us to strive to live peacefully, truthfully, and with a sense of abundance, joy in moderation, and non-possessiveness. It includes a commitment to purposeful living that embraces simplicity, contentment, impassioned practice, self-reflection, and dedication to a greater purpose. On the foundation of these ethics and life-choices (Limb 2: niyama), we build a physical practice (Limb 3: asana) that is mindful, easeful, passionate, and committed to enhancing our capacity to perceive ourselves accurately. Adding mindful breathing (Limb 4: pranayama) to the physical practice adds feedback mechanisms that calm our nervous systems, help us regulate physiological arousal and emotional reactivity, and enhance emotional and psychological resilience.

As we get to know our body and emotions with greater accuracy and honor our physical needs with compassion, we turn our yoga practice inward. We allow time for our mind to become quiet – we settle into the inner practices (Limbs 5 [pratyahara], 6 [dharana], and 7 [dhyana]) of yoga. Drawing our senses away from constant (over)stimulation, we develop the capacity to recognize how our mind works, how we can transform its fluctuations, and how we can become more peaceful and rest in stillness. We develop the capacity to become concentrated and achieve a single point of focus, and ultimately, we move into a spacious awareness that forges new neural pathways, creating neuroplasticity, increased decisional control, spaciousness, peacefulness, and loving responsiveness to ourselves and others. An overview of the integrated practice based in the limbs of yoga is provided in the table that follows.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limb</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Therapeutic Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Yama         | Life choices for ethical living      | • creating safety in the therapeutic relationship and environment  
• inviting self-compassion  
• committing to ethical and empathic intentions, speech, thoughts, and actions |
| Niyama       | Life choices for purposeful living   | • values clarification  
• developing motivation for change  
• developing discipline and commitment  
• setting intentions and finding purpose |
| Asana        | Physical postures (‘taking a seat’)  | • attunement (e.g., body scan) and mindful movement practices to invite somatic and somatosensory awareness  
• physical practices for strength, mobility, and/or stability  
• asana that are balanced and balancing  
• asana that revitalize, tonify, and energize  
• asana that calm, ground, and bring peace or calm  
• practices that invite recognition of physical samskaras  
• physical rasayanas – e.g., healthful nutrition, mindful eating, proper hydration, physical activity in nature (hiking, swimming), dancing, referral to medical care |
| Pranayama    | Breathing exercises (‘freeing the breath’) | • breath observation and mindfulness practices to invite affective and vital awareness  
• optimal functional breathing practices  
• balancing or stabilizing breathing practices  
• vitalizing or uplifting breathing practices  
• calming or grounding breathing practices  
• practices to nourish vitality (e.g., restorative practices)  
• practices that invite recognition of breath, arousal or affect-related samskaras  
• energetic rasayanas – e.g., sleep hygiene, rest and recuperation, music, chanting or singing, referral to mental healthcare |
| Pratyahara   | Drawing inward (‘guarding the senses’) | • practices to cultivate awareness of mind states and emotional predispositions (e.g., guided imagery) |
| Dharana      | Concentration and attention          | • practices that reduce sensory stimulation (e.g., breaks from watching news; creating a quiet and calm environment, decluttering the home)  
• practices to cultivate awareness of mental and emotional samskaras  
• practices that explore action and relationship patterns  
• practices that cultivate mental resilience and enhance coping  
• practices for working with emotional, behavioral, and relational reactivity  
• mental and emotional rasayanas – e.g., journaling, puzzles for cognitive flexibility, changing up routines like taking a different route to work, time in nature, referral to talk psychotherapy |
| Dhyana       | Meditation and awareness             | • cultivation of compassion, lovingkindness, and joy (e.g., maitri meditation)  
• practices for the cultivation of wisdom and insight (e.g., journaling)  
• practices that invite taking responsibility for own and others’ health, resilience, and thriving (e.g., random acts of kindness) |
What emerges perhaps spontaneously along the path of integration is a sense of being grounded (integrated!) in community, a sense of belonging to the earth, a desire to connect and preserve, and a joyful connection (Limb 8) to something greater, a transformation of suffering. We emerge with a sense of compassion, joy, equanimity, and lovingkindness. We emerge with a sense of integration and of being whole again.

**The Path of the Four Noble Truths**

Since integrated holistic yoga has at its essence a therapeutic application, it also integrates a careful framework for conceptualizing students’ or clients’ challenges and general presentation, whether they come to a therapeutic yoga class or seek yoga therapy. Even therapeutic yoga teachers who teach yoga classes in clinical settings need to have a basic understanding of this conceptual model to work effectively and safely with their particular clientele. Having a clear conceptual framework legitimizes therapeutic yoga work and, as importantly, provides the basis for common language with healthcare providers from different disciplines.

Integrated holistic yoga is thus committed to a comprehensive paradigm for conceptualizing therapeutic yoga and yoga therapy that is rooted in Ayurvedic and Buddhist ways of understanding health, the panchamaya kosha model of the yoga tradition (first described in the Taattiriya Upanishad), integral psychology broadly (re)interpreted (Wilber, 2000), and modern healthcare. Four steps form the basis of the conceptualization model and are overviewed in Table 1, in modern and ancient terminology. In Buddhism, the four steps parallel the four noble truths (cf., catvāri ārya satyā); in Ayurveda, they derive from the systems model of the body (cf., vyuha model; sutra 3.28 in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali). True to its ancient origins and modern understanding, the model is developmental in nature and premised on the fact that humans evolve and change throughout their lifespan within a web of relationships that supports or hinders health and thriving.

**Four-Step Model for Therapeutic Yoga and Yoga Therapy Conceptualization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Terminology</th>
<th>Ancient Wisdom Terminologies*</th>
<th>Translation of Sanskrit Terminology</th>
<th>Proposed Yoga Therapy Terminology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diagnosis</strong></td>
<td>Dukkha</td>
<td>unsatisfactoriness, suffering, pain, stress, dysfunction</td>
<td>defining presenting concerns, challenges, or symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heya (2.16)</td>
<td>that which is to be discarded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Etiology</strong></td>
<td>Samudaya</td>
<td>cause, arising, coming into existence, roots of suffering</td>
<td>identifying primary and secondary causes (or roots) of suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hetu (4.11)</td>
<td>that which causes the false impressions of identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prognosis &amp; Goal Setting</strong></td>
<td>Nirodha</td>
<td>cessation, releasing, removal, letting go, quieting</td>
<td>kindling hope and planning the path of transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hana (2.25)</td>
<td>that which is to be removed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment or Intervention</strong></td>
<td>Marga</td>
<td>path, steps, strategies, practice, discipline</td>
<td>embarking on the healing path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upaya/Hanopaya (2.26)</td>
<td>the means for removal of suffering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* the first term refers to the Buddhist conceptualization; the second derives from Ayurvedic practice (with reference to the relevant sutra in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali; though these sutras do not really speak to therapy, but to spiritual practice)

The healing path that is described in this table is deeply grounded in the eight limbs and yet moves beyond that paradigm to include behavioral health, coaching, and Ayurvedic rasayanas practices. The integrated practice of therapeutic yoga is a journey inward so that, ultimately, we can journey outward – a journey of getting to know ourselves so that we may become a positive force in our communities, in the lives of others. We move inward to move outward. We get to know ourselves to understand all. We become motivated to share the joy of yoga and to create a therapeutic practice that can be accessible and meaningful for everyone.
Integrated Holistic Yoga: Commitment to Accessibility and Equity

Yoga is a practice that is meant to be shared; a practice that is for everyone; a practice centered on the practitioner. Unfortunately, scientific inquiry has demonstrated that many individuals feel specifically excluded from the practice, discouraged by perception of yoga perpetuated in modern media, especially social media. Typical concerns expressed by individuals who could greatly benefit may include, but are not limited to statements such as “yoga is not for guys”, “Yoga is not for women my age”; “I am too old… too big… too stiff … too lazy … too whatever …”; “I am not fit enough”; “I don’t fit in”; “Yoga conflicts with my religion...”

The misleading and stereotypic images of postural yoga create barriers to access to integrated yoga for the very individuals who could benefit most – those with health challenges or who are subjected to chronic stress (Brems, et al., 2015; Justice, Brems, & Jacova, 2016; Sulenes et al., 2015). For the most part, media depictions imply that yoga is only for those who are already physically adept, slender, White, female, well to-do, educated, flexible, strong, balanced, and healthy (Birdee et al., 2008; Brems, et al., 2016; Park et al., 2015; Razmjou et al., 2017).

Some have tried yoga and gave up – they stopped going to class when they felt like an outsider, the only one who could not keep up, the only one who did not seem to know what to do, the only one in their demographic. Some gave up because they had pain or physical challenges and did not know how to work within their limitations; some did not know how to move into and out of a pose safely; some were afraid that they would be the only ones left lying on the mat at the end of a pose or class because they could not hear the teacher. Some gave up because they were hurt in class or by a teacher, had strong emotions emerge without support, or were upset about something that was said or done in class.

Among those who do yoga, some have confided that they have encountered teachers whom they perceived as having pushed too hard, made painful adjustments, failed to offer props, been too demanding, had no understanding of their own unique social and cultural circumstances, and had no experience with older people, men, individuals with physical limitations, people with emotional or mental challenges, and on goes the list. Some talk about being bothered by having to look at themselves in a mirror, feeling uncomfortable about their clothes or body, or feeling left out when they cannot access a pose that everyone else in the room seems to do with ease.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Integrated holistic posture practice is carefully adapted to individual practitioner’s needs by being taught holistically with yoga blocks, straps, bolsters, blankets, pillows, and chairs to invite human beings of all shapes, ages, sizes, states of health and mobility, and experiences to participate fully and reap the benefits of mindful self-expression and self-exploration (Vladagina et al., 2016). Properly varied and adapted, nearly all students, clients, or patients, even individuals with physical challenges and limits, can experience the benefits of yoga.

As yoga teachers, we need to understand, appreciate, and address concerns of access and equity. Most of us are well-intended and thoughtful about prepping classes. That said, we likely all have left students behind in our classes. We can all do better; we can all become more mindful to make yoga more accessible, especially in the settings where people are already served who could benefit from the practice (including in healthcare settings).

As integrated holistic yoga teachers, we can use many tools to make this happen:

- We can accurately label our classes to invite the students who will most benefit from what we have to offer.
- We can offer classes that are focused less on form or posture practice and more on breathing, mindfulness, or meditation.
• We can offer classes that expose students to the psychology and philosophy of yoga, integrating emotional supports and mental coping strategies in a context of physical practice that is easeful and accessible to most, if not all.
• We can offer physical practices that honor varying levels of skill, physicality, emotionality, and psychological needs.
• We can learn to demonstrate multiple expressions of the same pose, giving our students opportunity and permission to choose what is right for their body in any given moment.
• We can adapt, modify, and show variety in all poses, modeling mindful awareness of the range of needs in our classroom.
• We can develop gentler, more accessible physical and breathing practices that are adapted, inviting, and realistic for the average, non-stereotypic practitioner.
• We can use props for every pose – demonstrating all poses with props, encouraging the use of props, and inviting our students to be advanced practitioners by honoring their body and using the proper supports for a safe practice.
• Our language can become clearer, our voice crisper. Our words can be chosen to be more inclusive and inviting.
• We can invite humor and lightness into the practice without making fun of anyone.

As a yoga community that embraces integrated holistic values, we can remember to work on changing the face of yoga:

• We can develop classes that are specifically geared to non-stereotypic practitioners
  o We can offer appealing and beautiful practices that attract seniors, individuals of all genders, individuals with physical challenges, people who have struggled emotionally, persons who are searching for community, students who want more than exercise, people from all walks of life, all cultures and backgrounds.
  o We can offer classes that are on a sliding fee scale or free to those who cannot afford them (using the honor system – no questions asked).
  o We can offer classes in community centers, museums, classrooms, and libraries – places that are not associated with the glamor of yoga.
• We can show more diversity in pictures that demonstrate yoga poses
  o We can show props, modifications, adaptations, restoratives.
  o We can show people – teachers and students – of all ages, shapes, sizes, and more.
• We can resist the temptation to succumb to the materialism of the practice
  o We can show images of yoga without fancy clothes.
  o We can show fun home-made props.
  o We can offer scholarships and free classes.
  o We can not make our yoga setting a platform for selling stuff.

Integrated holistic yoga clinicians work on solutions for bringing yoga to everyone. We collaborate with as many people as possible to transcend current notions about who can practice yoga and who is welcome. We create the change that will carry yoga into more lives. We make efforts to understand and honor the biopsychosociocultural contexts of our students and to offer cues of safety and understanding for all. This means that integrated holistic yoga can become political and has to challenge institutionalized, systemic, and structural racism, white supremacy, and the fantasy that we are all one and the same. As integrated holistic yoga clinicians, we understand that there is indeed diversity and that there is indeed a huge difference in how all of experience and feel safe (or not) in the world. A yoga of inclusion, accessibility, and equity is a yoga that is political, open-hearted, and open-minded. It is a yoga of values, engaged action, and a commitment to make the world a better place for everyone. It is this commitment that fuels the intentionality of our practice, our teaching, our clinical work, and our daily life.
Integrated Holistic Yoga: Commitment to Intentionality

The basis of any dedicated yoga practice grounded in the eight limbs and five koshas is the setting of an intention for this practice, sankalpa in Sanskrit. The Sanskrit word kalpa means vow; the Sanskrit root word san refers to the highest truth. Setting a sankalpa thus means that we vow to orient our practice to the search for truth; we resolve to search for the deeper meaning of our individual and collective lives; we commit ourselves to a deep search for purpose.

Intentions signal commitment and dedication; they anchor us to a deeper meaning so that we can stay with our practice when it becomes challenging – which it will. Intentions infuse our actions with volition and motivation. They set in motion thought, speech, and action that will infuse the outcomes and impacts of our actions (though intention and impact must not be confused – we can have a positive conscious intention [that may be flavored inauspiciously by other unconscious processes] and yet set off a negative impact).

Intent setting is best woven into yoga practice, psychology, and philosophy from beginning to end. It is a bit like values clarification in that we have to figure out where we want to place our intention, what we truly desire, and to what we want to dedicate ourselves. We can set an intention for an individual practice; we can set an intention for our practice across a lifetime; we can set an intention for a particular timeframe; we can set intentions in many different ways. Intentions are – in a way – a drishti for life – a focal point for our attention and concentration that orients our thoughts, speech, behaviors, and relationships.

Intentions are useful as tools that hone out attention on a particular goal – a goal that we hold loosely while enjoying the journey and what unfolds, rather than clinging to a particular outcome (more about this below). Intentions are not like New Year’s resolutions that we set to fix something that is broken or to correct the error of our ways. Intentions are orienting principles that help us stay the course of our practice even when things get tough, when we are tempted to give up, when doubt rears its head.

Intentions are closely linked to motivation, which in turn may help us recognize our primary layer of self or consciousness (i.e., our kosha):

- If intentions are driven by fear (or the avoidance of danger), they may arise from annamaya kosha (our physical body).
- If intentions reflect desire or aversion (wanting or not wanting something), they may arise from pranamaya koshas (our energy, breath, life force).
- If intentions arise from duty or want to do the right or moral thing (to help ensure that we are perceived as a good person), they may arise from manomaya kosha (our mind).
- If intentions reflect love, compassion, kindness, the desire to be of selfless service, they may have arisen from vijnanamaya kosha (our intellect and wisdom).

Intentions are an important step or stage in committing to a spiritual practice and in aspiring to a more enlightened and compassionate way of being in the world. Intentions in this sense are aspirations – a very different type of commitment than concrete goal-setting. They are central to the first and second limb of yoga, the personal life commitments toward living an ethical and inspired life (more about this in the Limbs of Yoga section). They contain within them a commitment to do no harm, to be gentle and kind, and to be of service; they encourage us to live with an open heart. As explored below, research provides evidence that yoga is an amazingly beneficial practice for physical, emotional, mental, and relational wellbeing and resilience. It would be simple to stop right there. It is certainly enough of an incentive to start a practice. But nothing is ever that simple. It would be reductive to practice yoga because western research has tested and documented its effectiveness. For one thing, ancient yoga has been known as healthful and transformative for millennia – we did not need Western researchers to tell us this (though it does convey a legitimacy to yoga that now allows us to integrate the practice into modern healthcare and mental healthcare settings – a boon to holistic health).
If we want to be serious about our intentions, we may choose to start and end each day with a review of our open-hearted commitment to them.

- We may start each day with one of the following (as examples):
  - a gratitude practice for our life
  - a heart-opening practice
  - a conscious vow to live the day with awareness, compassion, and/or insight
  - a recommitment to our intention as we move into our day

- We may end each day with one of the following (as examples):
  - a review of the day to assess if we were true to our intentions
  - a review of our commitment to awareness, compassion, and insight
  - a recommitment to our intention for the next day
  - a gratitude practice for the gifts of the day

The view of yoga as being worthy of practice because it is a healthcare strategy is reductive because yoga is so much more. Yoga is a lifestyle; it is a commitment to ourselves, our loved ones, our communities, our world of sentient beings, our environment, and our planet. Yoga brings to our lives clarity of purpose that is larger than our own small world and selfish perspectives. It instills a passion for making the world a better place, for being engaged and feeling responsible for the betterment of society and the earth. Yoga creates growth and change on and off the mat. In fact, yoga is not meant to be limited to the mat (for one thing, there did not even used to be a mat). It is meant to be a lifestyle, a way of reaching clarity and wisdom, a way of living that is of value and about service, a way to move beyond habit into discernment, a way of creating awareness.

Yoga based on its ancient roots draws us inside to make us better people on the outside. It is a practice of mindfulness and insight that invites us to transcend narrow and reactive views; that challenges us to take broad and less biased perspectives; that prompts us to be loving, kind, compassionate, joyful, equanimous, and generous; and that reminds us that there is a greater connection and interdependence than we may even be able to fathom.

In Buddhism, intention is the foundational step in cultivating the five strengths or energizing factors that support any type of practice, new routine, or commitment:

- **Determination**: setting an intention and working on or toward it with determination
- **Familiarization**: getting to know ourselves in the midst of the business of life and committing to living with mindfulness to become more familiar with our layers of self and impacts on others
- **Virtue**: living in accordance with values of open-heartedness and open-mindedness as opposed to acting from fear desire or ego; this is the commitment in all layers of self or consciousness (body, breath, mind, wisdom, bliss – the koshas)
- **Reproachment of habit**: letting go of ego, of firmly held habits and patterns in service of freeing ourselves from being locked into some calcified opinions about who, what, how we are - freeing ourselves from habit
- **Aspiration**: aspiring to be of benefit and service of others, even all; awakening our heart and creating connection
Integrated Holistic Yoga: Documented Benefits

The research evidence is clear: many individuals with mental or physical health challenges can benefit from a tailored and person-centered yoga practice. Sadly, under-referral to the practice as a healthcare intervention is typical as most healthcare professionals do not understand the wide applicability of yoga (Sulenes et al., 2015). However, given the variety of yoga strategies, almost anyone can benefit from practicing yoga. Lifestyle, breathing, and interior practices are accessible to all bodies; postures come in many forms and can be practiced by nearly everyone, especially with openheartedness about using variations that are individually tailored and compassionate. While Western postural practice is often (and counter to traditional yoga) forceful, energetic, and focused on physical beauty and fitness, yoga’s physical practices can be easily modified and adapted to fit the individual practitioner. Widespread stereotypes about yoga postures suggest falsely that yoga is for the fit, the young, the slim, the flexible.

Integrated yoga practices (Payne, Gold, & Goldman, 2015) and comprehensive, burgeoning research (Jeter et al., 2015; Khalsa et al., 2016; McCall, 2014) have begun to demonstrate that individuals – if invited into the practice on their own terms (Justice, et al., 2016) – can derive substantial benefits. In contrast to Western stereotypes about who practices yoga (Justice, L. et al., 2016; Razmjou et al., 2017), this includes (but is not limited to) individuals with physical, emotional, and mental challenges; with significant life stress and trauma histories (Carter et al., 2013; Justice, Lauren & Brems, 2019); with aging bodies; in prisons and jails; in hospitals and other healthcare settings; in schools and universities; and more (Elwy et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2019; Hayes & Chase, 2010; Khalsa et al., 2016). Positive effects have been documented for a range of physiological, musculoskeletal, and mental health symptoms. Beneficial effects have been demonstrated through clinical trials – carefully controlled experiments – as well as case studies, surveys, and other means of establishing the utility of interventions for human health and wellbeing.

Changes that Emerge from an Integrated Yoga Practice

Research evidence that yoga, in its many manifestations, is helpful for a variety of challenges and with many types of individuals begs the question how this change is facilitated (McCall, 2013; Riley & Park, 2015) In fact, the synergy of the multitude of practices within yoga has a profound impact on several human systems that greatly affect day-to-day functioning, wellness, and resilience in times of stress, busyness, challenge, and demand (Sullivan, , Moonaz, Weber, Taylor, & Schmalzl, 2018). Yoga optimizes autonomic control, regulates endocrine (e.g., decreases cortisol and increases gamma-aminobutyric acid) and immune function, shapes adaptive emotional and behavioral responses, and lessens reactivity (as evidenced by less widespread arousal, enhanced vagal tone, improved relaxation response, and increased cardiac variability).

Besides facilitating optimal physiological conditions (Taylor et al., 2010), yoga enhances executive functioning and working memory, increases pain tolerance, and enables adaptive emotions and behaviors by helping yoga practitioners hold a positive attitude, find new ways of dealing with old inputs, and make accurate discernments in times of stress and challenge (Schmalzl et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2010). Yoga increases resilience in body, emotion, and mind and brings about self-regulation that supports adaptive responsiveness to meet the needs of the environment, body, emotions, and mind. These benefits arise because yoga affects and integrates both top-down and bottom-up pathways in the human brain for coping with internal and external demands, while it recalibrates the nervous system and maintains homeostasis in body and mind.

Top-Down Pathways

Top-down mechanisms or pathways are those that arise from the cerebral cortex of the brain and as such are conscious and intentional. They promote self-regulation through a variety of mechanisms, including cognitive appraisal, reframing, goal-setting and follow-through, attention, intentionality, and planning (Sullivan, Erb, Schmalzl, Moonaz, Taylor, & Porges, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2010). Top-down pathways
decrease level of engagement of the sympathetic nervous system; decrease habitual emotional, mental and behavioral reactivity; enhance working memory and attentional stability; improve executive functioning; and make stress perception more accurate (Field, 2011; Gard et al., 2014; Gard et al., 2015). They can modulate neuroendocrine output, vagal tone, and sympathetic nervous system output. As changes take effect, even immunity and inflammation are improved (Sullivan et al., 2018).

Yoga integrates many practices that strengthen top-down processing and regulation, not the least of which include the exercising of attention, intention, and mindfulness and the ongoing conscious monitoring of the internal states of body, breath, and mind (Brown et al., 2007). Further, yoga’s first and second limbs (i.e., ethical values and lifestyle commitments) as well as other aspects of deeper yoga philosophy (Feuerstein, 2013) help practitioners explore motivations, habits, patterns, and predilections (Sullivan et al., 2018); engage in metacognition that allows for decentering and perspective-taking to result in less rigid world views and greater behavioral flexibility (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012); and step out of habits to make conscious choices based on clear intentions and deliberate preparatory plans (Payne et al., 2015; Payne & Crane-Gondreau, 2015; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

Yoga’s values clarification practices encourage practitioners to engage in ethical inquiry that supports intentional decision-making and discernment (Sullivan et al., 2018). Yoga’s interior practice of drawing awareness inward supports the development of selective attention and response inhibition, facilitating self-regulation and conscious decision-making (Gard et al., 2015) Concentration practices, as interior or posture practices (via gaze points or mindful attention of a particular part or state of the body), contribute to strengthening downward self-regulatory control and behavioral flexibility. In fact, all interior practices encourage practitioners to reappraise and reframe their lived experience (e.g., reconceptualizing ‘discomfort’ as ‘sensation’; (Schmalzl et al., 2015)). Finally, even posture practices in and of themselves can demonstrate positive effects on top-down pathways through requiring planning, problem-solving, set-shifting, and decision-making skills (Schmalzl et al., 2015).

**Bottom-Up Pathways**

Bottom-up mechanisms modulate activity in the lower regions of the brain, via ascending pathways that reach from the brain stem, through the limbic system, to the cerebral cortex, including the anterior cingulate and insula (Taylor et al., 2010). Inputs into the bottom-up circuits arise from somatic, sensory, visceral, cardiovascular, and immune receptors in the body and affect immunity, psychological health, and physical wellbeing. Bottom-up inputs also arise from the autonomic nervous system (sympathetic and parasympathetic) and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. Bottom-up mechanisms can contribute to self-regulation; however, they do so not through conscious and intentional cognitive processes (as is the case with top-down processing), but rather through unconscious responsivity to the perceived demand characteristics of a particular input. Symptoms of illness and injury arise from the bottom-up pathways.

Many yoga practices facilitate accurate perception of sensory inputs through careful attention to bodily states, especially as mediated by mindful breath and posture practice (Able et al., 2013; Sengupta, 2012). Breathing practices induce calmness in the nervous system with subsequent relaxing responses in the neuroendocrine system via release of oxytocin and prolactin (Nivethitha et al., 2016; Schmalzl et al., 2015). Successful autonomic nervous system control and decreased endocrine release in turn results in enhanced social bonding and decreased emotional reactivity (Porges, 2011). Posture practices help practitioners learn to maintain a balanced nervous system in the face of challenge, as physical and sympathetic arousal from movement is effectively managed by the teacher through careful postural sequencing and processing of exposure, extinction, and adaptive responsiveness (Gard et al., 2014). Finally, while not a limb of yoga, chanting or intoning a mantra such as the word ‘om’ are additional yogic practices that assert positive autonomic control (Sullivan et al., 2018).
A crucial player in top-down and bottom-up functions is the vagus (10th cranial) nerve or polyvagal system (Porges, 2011). The vagus nerve is the primary conduit for communication about the internal state as perceived through various sensory systems to the brain. It relays physical, mental, and environmental sensory input (from the bottom) via the anterior cingulate cortex and the insula to the prefrontal cortex (to the top). It integrates emotion, cognition, and conscious deliberation about sensory input from the top to the bottom, creating a network and integration across brain structures for an integration/collaboration of the top-down and bottom-up pathways. Top-down bottom-up integration facilitates balance in the vagal system, allowing for a calm, integrated, and resilient response (Gard et al., 2014; Schmalzl et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2018).

The smooth and adaptive integration of bottom-up and top-down pathways is not ingrained, since humans may develop habitual patterns wherein responses are driven reactively by one or the other system (Payne & Crane-Gondreau, 2015). The polyvagal system is the human threat detection system that is unconscious and arises at the sensory receptor level via a process called neuroception. Neuroception of the environment or internal state can result in three possible perceptions: safety, danger, or life threat (terror). Neuroception of safety activates the ventral vagal complex (VVC) of the polyvagal system. The VVC supports physiological recovery, emotional processing or interoception, mental regulation, and prosocial behavior (Porges, 2017; Taylor et al., 2010). The VVC facilitates social engagement and connection through release of oxytocin and prolactin, prosocial behavior, engaging voice and facial expressions, and relaxed posture.

Neuroception of danger activates the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, readying the organism for fight or flight, mobilizing a response that increases the likelihood of survival in light of the perceived threat or peril. It results in increased muscle tone, redirection of blood flow from the periphery to the core, inhibition of the gastrointestinal system, dilation of the bronchi, and increase in heart rate and respiration (among other physiological responses). Neuroception of life threat activates the dorsal vagal complex and results in behavioral and physiological immobilization, along with emotional and mental collapse. Humans in this situation shut down, freeze, or “play dead”. An organism in a state of life threat exhibits decreased muscle tone, decreased cardiac output, and reflexive defecation and urination (among other physiological responses) to reduce life functions to the least amount needed for survival.

Humans tend to have habitual or preferred autonomic nervous system styles (mediated by the vagus) that develop through experience and learning histories over the developmental span (Brems, 2022; Payne & Crane-Gondreau, 2015; Porges, 2011; Porges, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2018). Some individuals have greater likelihood to perceive safety (living more commonly in their relaxed, engaging and restorative ventral vagal space); others have an autonomic nervous system primed for danger (living in a near-constant state of sympathetic arousal, isolation, and physiological overload or break-down); and some expect life threat and develop a habitual pattern of shrinking back from life, withdrawing – even dissociating – from human experiences. Top-down and bottom-up mechanisms are set in place that perpetuate these nervous system styles and thus can also become the mechanism for change.

As described above, yoga offers many strategies for top-down and bottom-up processing, most of which work in tandem with each other for a natural integration of these pathways through the synergistic combination of several limbs of yoga. Additionally, yoga facilitates the change of habitual autonomic nervous system styles by making practitioners more behaviorally flexible, emotionally resilient, socially available, and cognitively complex to deal responsively with each input in the moment as it unfolds, rather than reactively based on learning history and experience. Through various integrative practices, yoga facilitates top-down bottom-up integration, ushering in greater response flexibility, enhanced impulse inhibition, and decreased reactivity.

Yoga, especially the breathing and interior practices, creates bi-directional feedback and feedforward loops in the brain that result in greater accuracy of input detection and interpretation and in greater resilience and self-regulation in emotional, mental, relational, and behavioral responses (Gard et al., 2014; Sullivan et al., 2018).
Yoga stimulates the basal ganglia cortico-thalamic circuits that help humans unlearn maladaptive behaviors and allow for extinction learning. Simultaneously, yoga (especially through mindfulness practices, often using the breath as a mindful focus) creates greater connectivity of the caudate with other (higher and lower) brain regions, facilitating new, goal-directed, flexible learning and behavior (Gard et al., 2015; Schmalzl et al., 2015). Yoga employs breathing strategies that restore balance to the nervous system through supporting autonomic nervous system styles (and, commensurately, unconscious cognitive expectations or predictions) that place the organism into the ventral vagal (i.e., calm, relaxed, interpersonally engaged) space. This effect is important as the polyvagal system regulates allostatic load.

Allostasis and Accurate Sensory Processing

Allostasis is the “ability of an organism to maintain stability/homeostasis through change by actively adjusting to both predictable and unpredictable events” (Schmalzl et al., 2015, p. 13). Yoga offers many tools that decrease allostatic load by offering behavioral choices, emotional flexibility, and cognitive reappraisal and restructuring. Resilience in body, emotion, mind, and behavior facilitates a ventral vagal response and promotes successful, integrated (bottom-up and top-down) self-regulation. Allostasis is dependent on the capacity to take self-regulatory action based on accurate internal (Craig, 2014) and external (Witkiewitz et al., 2017) sensory pathways to bring the organism back into balance. Much of what yoga facilitates is exactly that – it prepares the practitioner to take appropriate and adaptive action in response to accurately perceived demands and needs.

Mindfulness (embedded in all yogic practices and central to many breathing practices) encourages accurate perception of sensory input from internal bodily systems and environmental stimuli through conscious awareness of neuroceptive, interoceptive, exteroceptive, and proprioceptive stimuli. In other words, yoga encourages conscious and accurate processing of sensory input from inside and outside the body to support self-regulation, bidirectional feedback, and adaptive behavior in support of successful allostasis (ongoing change in the service of stability). Yoga facilitates meta-awareness and in-the-moment lived experience of interoceptive, neuroceptive, exteroceptive, and proprioceptive inputs and thus helps integrate information across top-down and bottom-up systems, a process that is largely coordinated by the insula (Gard et al., 2014; Gard et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2010; Tsakiris et al., 2016).

These inputs and the capacity to recognize their ebbing and flowing (i.e., their impermanence) are crucial to psychological wellbeing, via accurate cognitive appraisal of what is perceived (Craig, 2014) and physical health, via supporting physiological homeostasis (Gu et al., 2015) as well as to feeling present, effective, and proactive in the world. They become useful – and are applied in the context of yoga – when they are interwoven with mindful and accurate appraisal of the environment or context to result in adaptive behaviors (Farb et al., 2015) and to break reflexive and reactive cycles of responses. Practitioners of yoga learn to live in a ventral vagal state and to allow for and successfully manage a sympathetic nervous system response during danger. This sense of preparedness allows the individual to maintain or re-achieve ease while being ready to take action when environmental demands arise. In moments of terror or life threat, a sense of surrender may be triggered, wherein the practitioner moves from the ventral vagal to the dorsal vagal space to allow for momentary submission or freezing if the environmental demand is best met by this response. The resultant level of resilient and adaptive self-regulation reduces allostatic load and brings homeostasis or stability to body, energy and breath, emotion, and mind – equanimity in yoga’s language.
How does yoga contribute to emotional resilience and mental fortitude?

- Mindfulness of body, affect, mind, emotion, behavior, and relationship
- Embrace of our interconnection, interdependence, and co-regulation
- Restoration of physical balance, strength, and flexibility
- Enhanced physical health, including greater stress tolerance, improved immunity, better heart health, less inflammation, and longer telomeres that lead to healthy again
- Transformation of hypo- or hyperarousal into grounded, resilient, and open social engagement
- Liberation of vitality and healthful energy
- Development of attention and awareness with reduction of distraction
- Creation of new healthful mental, behavioral, and relational habits and grooves
- Reduction of physical, effective, mental, and emotional reactivity
- Embrace of an optimistic outlook on life without toxic positivity
- Growth of compassion, lovingkindness, and appreciative joy
Successful yoga service delivery is predicated on knowledge of and a commitment to the legal, ethical, and professional practices of any profession, including the profession of yoga. Following are a few guidelines that help assure that a yoga services provider adheres to the ethical and lifestyle principles on which integrated holistic yoga practice and teaching are based.

Most importantly, it is necessary to understand the different scopes of practice within the realm of yoga service provision. Based on the desired scope of practice, different educational requirements need to be met and different types of credentials or licensed may be required.

**Scope of Practice Definitions**

As yoga teachers and yoga clinicians become more knowledgeable about health and mental health issues, it is important to continue to track and stay within an appropriate scope of practice. It helps to keep in mind the differentiations with the profession of yoga outlined below to adhere to the type of yoga services for which the teacher or clinician has been trained. For teachers and clinicians, it is important to clarify the role(s) agreed upon with a given client or student. If the relationship was based on a pre-existing therapeutic contract, adding yoga needs to be clearly discussed and needs to fit within the scope of practice of the healthcare provider/yoga teacher. If the relationship was originally a yoga teacher-yoga student relationship, learning more about mental health issues will not be sufficient in and of itself to shift the work to a therapeutic interaction (unless this is commensurate with the teacher’s healthcare-related scope of practice, explicitly negotiated with the student, and appropriate shifts in the relationship are made).

Three broad categories of yoga services can be delineated:

**Yoga Classes**

Yoga classes take place in studios, gyms, and even online and range widely from being strictly exercise-based to including accessible practices from all yoga limbs. Classes vary greatly in size and exposure to other students, and may be so large that they do not support an individual relationship between yoga teacher and student. Classes are not specifically tailored to individual needs, though they may promote self-agency through encouraging the use of props, adaptations, and variations. Yoga classes are not offered for specific therapeutic reasons; however, they may offer yoga practices that can have benefits for physical and emotional wellness overall.

It is highly recommended that yoga teachers minimally complete a 200-hour yoga teacher certification. Additionally, yoga teachers are best registered with Yoga Alliance to reassure the public that they have been trained to a minimum standard of teaching practice. Specialty teaching (such as for children or pregnancy) may require additional training focused on the relevant topic or population. Commensurate supplemental Yoga Alliance registration is recommended.

**Therapeutic Yoga**

Therapeutic yoga is an integrated intervention that is offered for individuals with a particular characteristic, concern, or diagnosis. While it may happen in the same venues as yoga classes, it is most appropriately offered in healthcare, allied healthcare, and/or mental healthcare setting. Therapeutic yoga is provided and practiced in small groups, often has more than one teacher (and/or assistants), identifies a health or mental health-related presenting concern (e.g., yoga for back pain; yoga for cancer survivors; yoga as stress reduction), and makes
demonstrated use of props, adaptations, and variations. In this context, a direct relationship between student and teacher is possible, even encouraged. Teachers and assistants pay more attention to individual students and offer specific directions and interventions that tailor the practice uniquely to each individual in the group. Therapeutic yoga, because of its shared and clearly-defined focus on a common physical or mental health concern, creates more student-student relationships because of shared therapeutic topic, goals, or presenting concerns of all participants.

It is highly recommended that yoga teachers who want to provide therapeutic yoga minimally complete a 200-hour yoga teacher certification with specific focus on yoga in healthcare (as opposed to fitness) settings. Ideally, teachers who want to offer therapeutic yoga, especially if in a healthcare setting, are certified at the 500-hour level of teacher training. Additionally, yoga teachers are best registered at the appropriate level (i.e., 200-hour or 500-hour) with Yoga Alliance to reassure the public that they have been trained to a minimum standard of teaching practice. Specialty training is indicated if therapeutic yoga services are offered to specific clinical or age-related populations (e.g., yoga for children or seniors; yoga for specific healthcare topics, such as cancer, mental health, pregnancy, and more).

Yoga Therapy

Yoga therapy is offered one-on-one (at most one-on-two if a yoga professional has two clients with similar clinical presentations) and specifically tailored to the needs and presenting health or mental health diagnoses of the client. Client or patient and clinician create a clear understanding of the patient’s goals for the work together; explore the patient’s needs and resources together; journey into a greater understanding of the patient over time; and have a clear set of goals that guide the healing journey. To honor the identified needs and resources of the patient, tailored and individualized applications of props, variations, adaptations, and interventions are a requirement. Yoga therapy often occurs in collaboration with a referring clinician and generally presumes a working relationship of the client with a medical provider or mental healthcare provider (depending on referral).

It is incumbent on yoga teachers who want to become yoga therapists to complete a formal yoga therapist training program. Ideally, any teacher who wants to offer yoga therapy will complete a yoga therapy program that is accredited by the International Association for Yoga Therapists. Specialty training is indicated if yoga therapy services are to be offered to specific clinical or age-related populations (e.g., yoga for children or seniors; yoga for specific healthcare topics, such as cancer, mental health, pregnancy, and more).

Details about Yoga Teaching and Yoga Therapy Credentialing

Yoga Teaching – Certification Preparation and Credentials

The yoga profession at the teaching level of scope of practice is not well regulated. The term ‘yoga teacher’ is unregulated and anyone can choose to call themselves a yoga teacher, regardless of training or qualification. What they cannot do is call themselves a ‘certified’ or ‘registered’ yoga teacher, unless they have the commensurate training (see below).

Certification of yoga teachers (so that they may call themselves ‘certified yoga teacher’) can be accomplished via any yoga teacher training that offers a certificate program in yoga. Such programs are not regulated and competencies taught may range widely from program to program. Registration of a yoga teacher (so that they may call themselves ‘registered yoga teacher’) depends on the completion of a yoga teacher training program that is registered with Yoga Alliance.
Yoga Teaching – Registration Preparation and Credentials

Yoga Alliance (YA) is the organization that has taken charge worldwide of defining basic competencies and setting foundational standard for yoga teacher training to ensure the basic skills necessary for teachers to provide yoga classes to the public. Teacher training programs that meet the YA requirements for these basic competencies and standards (including ethics and scope of practice commitments) can apply to become a Registered Yoga School. Once a yoga school is registered by Yoga Alliance, it can advertise itself as such (using a Yoga Alliance-provided logo), signaling to applicants and trainees that – upon graduation – they will be eligible to apply to Yoga Alliance to become a registered yoga teacher.

Only graduates from registered yoga schools are eligible to apply to Yoga Alliance to become ‘registered yoga teachers’. Registration as a Registered Yoga School by YA simply means that the school’s program has met the minimum standards set for a particular level of yoga teacher training; registration alone does not guarantee high-quality instruction or content as there are currently no checks and balances to investigate ongoing compliance by an RYS once it is registered.

Registration for schools and teachers happens at two levels of education (200-hour and 500-hour). At the teacher level, there is also an experience-based designation defined by yoga teachers exceeding a certain minimum number of direct teaching hours. Specialty registrations are also defined. At different levels of registration, different requirements exist for ongoing continuing education. Ideally, CE is obtained from a Yoga Alliance Continuing Education Provider (YACEP), a teacher who meets minimum hours of experience with yoga teaching.

The following details summarize the current state of affairs related to registered yoga teaching credentialing:

- RYS200 – This designation identifies a Yoga Alliance-registered yoga school that provides 200-hour yoga teacher training that meets the basic standards set by Yoga Alliance.
- RYS300 – This designation identifies a Yoga Alliance-registered yoga school that provides 300-hour yoga teacher training (beyond the 200-hour teaching level) that meets the basic standards for a 300-hour training program by Yoga Alliance.
- RYT – This designation identifies a registered yoga teacher who successfully graduated from a teacher training program that is registered with Yoga Alliance. Such teachers must complete 30 hours of Continuing Education plus 45 hours of direct teaching every 3 years to maintain registration.
  - There are two levels of education:
    - RYT200 = These registered yoga teachers have completed a minimum of a 200-hour yoga teacher training program registered with YA.
    - RYT500 = These registered yoga teachers have completed a minimum of a 500-hour yoga teacher training program via programs registered with YA.
  - There are two levels of experience:
    - E-RYT200 = Experienced registered yoga teacher at the level of 200-hour yoga teacher training have completed a minimum of 1,000 hours of direct yoga teaching experience.
    - E-RYT500 = Experienced registered yoga teacher at the level of 500-hour yoga teacher training have completed a minimum of 2,000 hours of direct yoga teaching experience.
  - There are two specialty registrations:
    - RCYT = Successful graduates of a 200-hour teacher training plus at least 85 hours of additional child-specific training, both from an RYS, may call themselves registered children’s yoga teachers.
    - RPCT = Successful graduates of a 200-hour teacher training plus at least 95 hours of additional pregnancy-specific training, both from an RYS, may call themselves registered prenatal/postnatal yoga teachers.
Yoga Therapy Preparation and Credentials

The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) is the regulating body for yoga therapy programs in the US and worldwide. IAYT certifies programs and teachers who want to move from yoga teaching to providing yoga therapy services. Yoga therapy is defined by IAYT as the “professional application of the principles and practices of yoga to promote health and well-being within a therapeutic relationship that includes personalized assessment, goal setting, lifestyle management, and yoga practices for individuals or small groups” (retrieved 7.31.2023 https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iayt.org/resource/resmgr/strategic_plan_2021/Strategic_Plan_2021-2024_Mem.pdf).

To become a yoga therapist certified by IAYT (designated as a C-IAYT) requires successful graduation from an IAYT-accredited yoga therapy program. IAYT-approved yoga therapy programs must require a minimum of 800 hours of yoga therapy training (i.e., at least 300 hours above and beyond a CYT500 or RTY500), with a current national effort toward augmenting this requirement to 1,000 hours of training. Maintenance of certification as a C-IAYT requires a minimum of 24 CEs every three years as well as successful completion of an ethics exam. Efforts are underway to develop a worldwide competency exam for C-IAYT applicants that needs to be passed before certification is granted, even if the applicant graduated from an IAYT-accredited yoga therapy program.

IAYT has expressed a preference that CEs be obtained from IAYT approved continuing education providers (APDs [which stands for Advanced Professional Development provider]) to assure that trainers (even of ongoing education) meet minimum therapy training requirements. IAYT provides many resources to its membership, including a quarterly newsletter, The Yoga Therapist, and a PubMed-indexed professional journal that is published annually, the International Journal of Yoga Therapy. IAYT sponsors two annual conferences, one geared to the entirety of its membership and one focused on research in yoga therapy. IAYT is in the process of developing a specialized educational pathway for individuals who have existing healthcare license and who desire to add a yoga therapy credential to their professional education and practice.

### Summary and Definition of Relevant Acronyms Related to Yoga Services

#### Yoga Teaching - Certification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CYT</td>
<td>certified yoga teacher; any yoga program can offer certification of yoga teachers – regardless of whether the school is registered with Yoga Alliance or not and regardless of the number of hours required for graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYT200</td>
<td>certified yoga teacher at the level of 200-hour yoga teacher training (no experience level is recognized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYT500</td>
<td>certified yoga teacher at the level of 500-hour yoga teacher training (no experience level is recognized)</td>
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#### Yoga Teaching - Registration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YA</td>
<td>Yoga Alliance – the only formal group that sets standards across the US and the rest of the world for the registration of yoga teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYS200</td>
<td>registered yoga school by Yoga Alliance with registration for providing 200-hour yoga teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYS300</td>
<td>registered yoga school by Yoga Alliance with registration for providing advanced 300-hour yoga teacher training (beyond the 200-hour teaching level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYT</td>
<td>registered yoga teacher; only teachers who successfully graduated from a teacher training program that is registered with Yoga Alliance can become registered yoga teachers; 30 hours of Continuing Education plus 45 hours of direct teaching are required every 3 years to maintain registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYT200</td>
<td>registered yoga teacher at the level of 200-hour yoga teacher training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary and Definition of Relevant Acronyms Related to Yoga Services

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>E-RYT200</td>
<td>Experienced registered yoga teacher at the level of 200-hour yoga teacher training with a minimum of 1,000 hours of direct yoga teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYT500</td>
<td>Registered yoga teacher at the level of 500-hour yoga teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-RYT500</td>
<td>Experienced registered yoga teacher at the level of 500-hour yoga teacher training with a minimum of 2,000 hours of direct yoga teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCYT</td>
<td>Registered children’s yoga teacher; a successful graduate of a 200-hour teacher training plus at least 85 hours of additional child-specific training, both from an RYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPCT</td>
<td>Registered prenatal yoga teacher; a successful graduate of a 200-hour teacher training plus at least 95 hours of additional pregnancy-specific training, both from an RYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YACEP</td>
<td>Yoga Alliance Continuing Education Provider; must be an E-RYT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yoga Therapy

IAYT = International Association of Yoga Therapists, the regulating body for yoga therapy programs in the US and worldwide
C-IAYT = Certified yoga therapist by the IAYT; requires successful graduation from an accredited yoga therapy program; the program must require a minimum of 800 hours of yoga teacher/therapist training – i.e., at least 300 beyond a CYT500 or RTY500; the movement currently is to augment this requirement to 1,000 of training as the minimum requirement; maintenance of certification requires a minimum of 24 CEs every three years as well as successful completion of an ethics exam
APD = approved professional development – preferred CE for C-IAYTs; also the abbreviation for yoga therapists approved to provide APD
IJYT = International Journal of Yoga Therapy, the PubMed-indexed research journal operated by IAYT; a free subscription comes with IAYT membership
TYT = The Yoga Therapist, the IAYT quarterly newsletter; a free subscription comes with IAYT membership
SYTAR = Symposium on Yoga Therapy and Research – offered annually by IAYT
SYR = Symposium on Yoga Research – offered annually by IAYT

Ethics and Professionalism in the Context of Adaptive Yoga

Ethical aspects of the business of yoga are covered here; general ethical conduct is covered in the Yoga Humanities module. Focus is on assuring that trainees/teachers remain clearly aware of the ethical codes of conducts of their profession, practice within their proper scope of practice, and commit to practices that reflect utmost professionalism. Additionally, trainees/teacher commit to actions and teaching strategies that foster equality, social justice, inclusion, and accessibility.

- Secure proper credentialing, training, and maintenance of skills
- Collect informed consents from students (differences between legal and ethical issues in studio- versus clinic or hospital settings)
- Maintain professional, compassionate, and safe personal and physical boundaries
- Use referral sources when a student health or mental health issue is outside the teacher’s scope of practice
- Integrate the yamas and niyamas in all teaching-related work and day-to-day life
- Create a teaching space where students may offer feedback
- Remain committed to the YA Code of Conduct, Scope of Practice, and commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility
• Remain committed to the YTT Code of Conduct, Scope of Practice, and commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility
• Review the detailed relevant information in Yoga Humanities and the information above regarding timeliness, consistency, and cleanliness in the environment, interactions with students, and relationships with colleagues

Create boundaries, not barriers. 😊

Legal Commitments in the Context of Adaptive Yoga

Legal aspects of the business of yoga are covered with focus on assuring that trainees/teachers remain clearly aware of local laws that apply to their yoga business, marketing and promotion, including proper scope of practice. Additionally, trainees/teacher commit to actions and business strategies that foster equality, social justice, inclusion, and accessibility.

• Understand liability issues and obtain all necessary insurance, permits, informed consents, and licenses
• Collect informed consents from students (differences between legal and ethical issues in studio- versus clinic or hospital settings)
• Collect liability waivers form students as appropriate to the local legal environment
• Use ethical and legal practices for invoicing
• Refer to the YTT Code of Conduct manual for additional information about legal and ethical business practices as related to marketing, promotion, and other business and legal-related practices.

A Few Final Recommendations

• Be clear about personal scope of practice, given acquired registration, certifications, and other professional/healthcare licenses
• If scope of practice augmentation is desired, be sure to obtain all commensurate education and commit to securing relevant certifications, registrations, and licensure
• Develop a detailed yoga resume – tracking hours, describing experiences; developing spreadsheets to document work experience, educational attainments, teaching hours, types of clients served and more
• Understand how to build contextually appropriate relationships in your community
• Understand how to connect with other yoga schools, clinics, and hospitals
• Build a referral list with other physical, allied, and mental healthcare professionals who may facilitate networking opportunities within your community
• Develop a website to market services and display credentials
• Decide on the role of social media in your practice and marketing (Yoga in America 2016 study found that the majority of yoga teachers promote themselves on social media)

Health requires awareness and balance in body, breath, and mind:

If the body is not healthy, the mind is preoccupied as life force does not flow freely.
If the mind is not healthy, the breath is affected and in turn the physical body suffers.
If the breath is not healthy, both body and mind will suffer.
Understanding Conceptualization in Adaptive Yoga

A Paradigm for Yoga Case Conceptualization

Yoga has found a firm footing not simply as a self-care system, but as a powerful practice in healthcare, allied healthcare, and mental healthcare. As yoga is evolving, so are practice principles, ethics, and guidelines. A crucial aspect of any healing art or science – whether mental health, occupational, physical, medical, or yoga – is a system for conceptualizing or understanding clients’ challenges and general presentation. This manual offers a comprehensive paradigm for conceptualization (i.e., for understanding ourselves and others) rooted in:

- Ayurvedic ways of approaching the cultivation of health and wellbeing
- the panchamaya kosha model of the yoga tradition (first described in the Taittiriya Upanishad)
- integral psychology broadly (re)interpreted (Wilber, 2000) in an expanded biopsychosociocultural matrix,
- honoring humans’ profound interconnection with others, their co-regulation and interdependence, and
- etiological considerations that explore predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating, and protective factors (Brems, 1999; Brems & Rasmussen, 2018).

The offered paradigm for conceptualizing mental healthcare and mental and emotional selfcare is deeply informed by ancient yogic texts as well as modern neuroscience and interpersonal biology, psychological research, and social science. The paradigm is developmental in nature and premised on the fact that all humans evolve and grow throughout the lifespan, not just during childhood. Humans’ continuous growth and transformation throughout the lifespan is deeply grounded in personal experiences; and perhaps more importantly, collective, communal, or shared experiences; and the deep impacts of all the contextual factors that surround all human beings all the time.

If successful, humans begin their developmental journey based on the biological imperative of ensuring physical survival; they end their developmental journey having shifted to an existential imperative of transcending the self and living a meaningful life dedicated to a greater good, to service for all in the greater web of life. This transformation from the biological need for personal survival to the existential need to contribute to the survival and betterment of all sentient beings and the planet is crucial to health and wellbeing, which depend on a life of meaning, connection, and purpose. They are driven by the attainment of awareness, compassion, and insight – skills humans need to develop to develop a sense of fulfillment, mental wellness, and emotional resilience. All of this unfolding and transformation happens in relationship, in shared experience, and in co-regulation with others.

This manual offers a comprehensive paradigm for conceptualizing yoga therapy rooted in Ayurvedic and Buddhist ways of understanding health, the panchamaya kosha model of the yoga tradition (first described in the Taittiriya Upanishad), modern healthcare, and integral psychology broadly (re)interpreted (Wilber, 2016; 2000). Four steps form the basis of the conceptualization model and are overviewed in Table 1, in modern and ancient terminology. In Buddhism, the four steps parallel the four noble truths (cf., catvāri āryasatyānī; Boccio, 1993; Mingyur, 2009) in Ayurveda, they derive from the systems model of the body (cf., vyuha model; sutra 3.28 in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali). True to its ancient origins and modern understanding, the model is developmental in nature and premised on the fact that humans evolve and change throughout their lifespan within a web of relationships that supports or hinders health and thriving. These four steps, in modern terminology, are:

- diagnosis
- etiology
- prognosis and setting goals
- healing pathways
The Four Noble Truths or Catvāri Āryaṣatyāṁ (Sanskrit; note the root word “satya”)

Dukkha = unsatisfactoriness, incompleteness, shortcoming, inadequacy, pain, suffering, stress, dysfunction → symptoms, challenges, presenting concern
Samudaya = cause, reason, arising together, coming into existence → etiologies, primary and secondary causes, roots of suffering
Nirodha = cessation, releasing, removal, letting go → hoping and planning for cessation or transformation of suffering
Marga = path, steps, strategies → treatment, intervention, practice, discipline

An Overview of Yoga Case Conceptualization

A quick overview of the four steps in conceptualization is provided here. More detail follows below, as each individual step is explored and defined in depth and breadth.

First Noble Truth or Dukkha – Diagnosis or Recognizing Challenge

It is important to understand the challenges (or suffering), problems, stress, pressure, struggle, sorrow, or friction with which an individual is presenting to a given practitioner. In modern medicine or psychology, we might refer to this as the presenting concern or a diagnosis, depending on context and setting. In yoga, presenting concern or challenge may be a logical choice of words as students or clients may seek out a yoga teacher or yoga therapist for wellness, prevention, or resilience – not for a specific medical or mental health diagnosis (though the latter may be present and may even have triggered a referral to a yoga teacher or yoga therapist by another care provider).

Second Noble Truth or Samudaya – Etiology or Recognizing the Sources (or Roots) of Challenge

It is crucial to ground the presenting concern in a greater context that considers the many potential influences that contribute to how humans show up in life and to their continued wellness and life dynamics. This larger context can be explored most comprehensively in terms of four factors of influence, namely, biological, psychological, social/sociological, and cultural/familial influences. These four factors of influence affect clients’ approach to life, perception of self, and personal medical history as well as reflecting clients’ greater collective grounding in cultural, familial, and social matrix that has helped shaped their way of being in the world and in relationship. This greater context can be expressed very objectively and measurably or are experienced very subjectively and internally (i.e., hard to observe and dependent on discovery through conversation).

Third Noble Truth or Nirodha – Prognosis or Kindling Hope and Planning for Change

Once the presenting concern and its four-factor context have been explored, a determination of possible outcomes is essential. As Buddhism and yoga assure us, while there will always be pain and challenge in a human being’s life, suffering can be ended and transformed. This transformation can be facilitated in yoga classes, therapeutic yoga, and yoga therapy. However, what each of these modalities has to offer differs; it is important to the student or client and the clinician or teacher to be clear about the progress that can be made and to define the desired aims or goals for any given student. In medicine or mental health, this process of discernment may be referred to as prognosis and involves the clear setting of treatment goals. In yoga classes, this understanding between student and teacher may be best referred to as clarity for the aims of the shared class; for therapeutic yoga this may include a specific mental health-related goal for which the student was
specifically referred to a yoga class. For yoga therapy, this may involve a collaborative step between a yoga therapist and yoga client of setting specific goals for the yoga therapy upon which clinician and client are about to embark.

**Fourth Noble Truth or Marga – Committing to Pathways into Healing and Transformation**

After yoga student and yoga teacher clarify the aims (intentions) of the yoga or therapeutic yoga class or after yoga client and yoga therapist have reached mutual or shared clarity about presenting concerns, contributing influences, and desired goals for the joint work, a plan for creating thriving or healing, that is, a therapeutic path or journey, can be identified. This healing pathway will not always be straight – it will need to adapt and blend with the developments and evolutions that emerge as the work progresses. And yet, this pathway does offer a direction that decreases the possibility that students and their teachers, or clients and their clinicians, work without a roadmap.

*We transcend our suffering to the degree that we are able to passionately employ our gifts in the service of others.*


**Four-Step Model for Yoga Therapy Conceptualization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Terminology</th>
<th>Ancient Wisdom Terminologies*</th>
<th>Translation of Sanskrit Terminology</th>
<th>Proposed Yoga Therapy Terminology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>Dukkha</td>
<td>unsatisfactoriness, suffering, pain, stress, dysfunction</td>
<td>defining presenting concerns, challenges, or symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heya (2.16)</td>
<td>that which is to be discarded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etiology</td>
<td>Samudaya</td>
<td>cause, arising, coming into existence, roots of suffering</td>
<td>identifying primary and secondary causes (or roots) of suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hetu (4.11)</td>
<td>that which causes the false impressions of identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prognosis &amp; Goal Setting</td>
<td>Nirodha</td>
<td>cessation, releasing, removal, letting go, quieting</td>
<td>kindling hope and planning the path of transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hana (2.25)</td>
<td>that which is to be removed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment or Intervention</td>
<td>Marga</td>
<td>path, steps, strategies, practice, discipline</td>
<td>embarking on the healing path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upaya/Hanopaya (2.26)</td>
<td>the means for removal of suffering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* the first term refers to the Buddhist conceptualization; the second derives from Ayurvedic practice (with reference to the relevant sutra in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali; though these sutras do not really speak to therapy, but to spiritual practice)
Recognizing Challenge and Suffering – First Noble Truth

The first noble truth, or step on the healing journey, invites us to attune very open-heartedly and open-mindedly to the reality that humans experience stress, pain, and challenge. Challenges can manifest in many ways, including as problems, stress, change, loss, grief, pressure, friction, pain, worry, diagnosable illness – the list is nearly endless. Challenges can occur in any or all of the koshas – our body, our energy (affect, vitality, arousal), our mind, our emotions and all the downstream parts of our life, such as our actions, relationships, and ways of being in community. We are human; hence, by definition, we are prone to physical and mental or emotional illness, injury, disease, aging, and – yes, death.

Defining Dukkha

Due to having a human brain, we tend to compound our painful or challenging experiences with thoughts of aversion, craving and clinging, confusion, and fears for our lives, identity, or survival. We meet our challenges with minds that can become agitated and disorganized, distracted and unattentive, tired and hopeless. Our emotions can take us from the deepest lows of depression, despair, and shame, to the depths of anxiety or panic, to the out-of-control feelings of anger or rage, to a sense of hurt, grief, or betrayal. When physical, mental, or emotional challenge or pain reaches significant dimensions of suffering, it may begin to interfere with our day-to-day functioning, our relationships, our resilience and ability to cope, and more. All of these human experiences of challenge, dissatisfaction, discomfort, and pain are captured by the word *dukkha*, which has no clear and definitive single translation into English.

What Is Dukkha?

Most sources trace the word back to the Pali language, namely to the root words “du” (translated into English as ‘bad’ or ‘difficult’) and “kha” (translated as ‘empty’). This translation harkens back to the original use of the word in the context of describing the ride in an ox cart with a poorly-fitting (or ‘empty’) axle hole that results in a rough or ‘difficult’ ride. According to Joseph Goldstein, a premier American Buddhist teacher, this translation is fitting as it recapitulates the Buddha’s idea that our ride through life (or more specifically our habitual way of being in the world and in relationships) can be pretty rough, painful, and unsatisfying, especially when we embark on it with limited awareness, compassion, and insight into ourselves and others.

Opposite of Dukkha Is Sukkha

Sukkha refers to an axle hole that is the perfect size for the axle – no emptiness, no bumps in the ride. An ox cart with a perfectly-fitting axle hole runs smoothly and easily, minimizing the jostling and pain we might have to endure during the ride. We can settle into the ease of the ride and enjoy it while it lasts.

Sukkha in its true sense is not translated as happiness (in other words, the opposite of challenge [or dukkha] is not happiness!). Instead, sukkha is a smooth ride – a ride that brings contentment, ease, and satisfaction. The transformation of dukkha is not a transformation into happiness; it is a transformation into the capacity to find joy in living – joy in the little things, joy in smiplly being there for the ride.

This joy is not hedonistic (not like the short-lived pleasure or happiness that may come from eating a tasy piece of chocolate or getting a big award or even winning the lottery) – instead this is a joy that is grounded in appreciation and gratitude. This joy is a mature emotion (a brahma vihara) that takes in the miracle of life and the interconnectedness in a web of relationships that made the present-moment experience a reality. It is a joy of feeling connected and supported, or being free of wanting or wavering. It is a joy of knowing in one’s heart that there is a greater purpose and meaning in life. It is the enjoyment of the ride without striving for the destination.
Identifying and Naming Types of Dukkha

Recognizing and defining the presence of challenge, pain, or sorrow (as well as their varied manifestations in day-to-day life, relationships, body, mind, and energy) as suffering in the sense of dukkha is the first step in the process toward healing and thriving. It is important to remember that the word dukkha is meant to describe human unease, unsatisfactoriness, and discomfort as applicable to all tangible layers of self or conscious: body, energy and affect, mind and emotion. As such, suffering as defined by the word dukkha does not have a single translation in English. Pain may mostly refer to dukkha manifested in the body; sorrow and distress may reference dukkha in the mind; struggle or pressure may best describe dukkha in our vital layer of being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Human Suffering – An Incomplete Listing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong>, trials, tribulations, concerns, ordeals, hardships, misery, distress, afflictions, unsatisfactoriness, displeasure, dissatisfaction, dysfunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problems</strong>, harms, hindrances, setbacks, difficulties, obstacles, adversity, complications, complexities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pain</strong>, hurt, agony, ache, headache, woundedness, discomfort, anguish, woe, illness, tightness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressure</strong>, difficulty, burden, strain, tension, weightiness, heaviness, force, troubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Struggle</strong>, friction, conflict, tension, discord, strife, conflict, disharmony, imbalance, dissension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distress</strong>, worry, anxiety, apprehension, dread, unease, hassle, disquiet, nervousness, discomfort, disturbance, angst, stickiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sorrow</strong>, grief, mourning, sadness, distress, torment, trouble, unhappiness, worry, woe, despondency, misery, dejection, anguish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Suffering cannot only take these specific forms but also comes at two levels – natural suffering and self-created (or optional) suffering (Mingyur Rinpoche, 2009). Natural suffering is unavoidable and arises from the simple fact that we have a human form, with all of its complex layers. Natural suffering is related to the reality that as humans we face birth, illness, aging, and death. We have no choices about having to face these occurrences and to a degree we have no choice when it comes to these. Relatedly, suffering arises also from the basic burdens of life. Simply trying to survive is difficult and challenging work – quite literally as we need to work to meet our meet basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing, to sustain our life. However, as noted above, in the end disorder will arrive anyway and we remain subject to death, illness, and aging.

Another form of natural suffering is linked to our interconnection and embeddedness in a greater context. It is most commonly collective or shared dukkha – suffering for entire neighborhoods, communities, families, tribes, groups, or other gatherings of humans. Such external forms of suffering that are unavoidable in our shared human experience include realities such as war, violence, natural disaster, oppression, injustice, and similar collective experiences over which we, as an individual, do not have control. When they arise in or are perpetrated against our collective, we have little choice about being subjected to them, though we may find purpose in helping ourselves and others reduce their occurrence and heal their impacts.

Self-created suffering, however, is just that: suffering that can be avoided because we create it to begin with. This suffering arises from our thoughts, emotions, concepts, beliefs, and the many stories we tell about our moment-to-moment experiences. Self-created suffering often emerges in the context of natural suffering – it is the worsening of natural suffering because of the feeling tones, beliefs, mind stories, and emotions we add to the experience of aging, illness, and the prospect or process of dying. Many mind stories and attitudes that contribute to self-created or optional suffering are deeply grounded in the social, political, economic, cultural, and familial contexts in which we grow up and grow old – but more of this later. Self-created suffering is just as painful, uncomfortable, distressing, and sorrowful as natural suffering. However, it can be addressed or ameliorated via the four noble truth because it is grounded in our denial of the realities of impermanence,
transitoriness of experience, and perpetual change, as well as denial of our profound interdependence, shared experience, co-regulation, and interconnection. We fight for permanence and individuality – goals that we can never achieve.

**Dukkha in the Layers of Consciousness**

Suffering in general, and self-created suffering in particular, can manifest in all layers of consciousness (or *koshas*, in Sanskrit). It can be very helpful as we clarify what is happening, as we name our challenge, our sorrow, and our pain, to notice which layers of self or consciousness (body; energy, affect, or vitality; mind, thinking, or emotions; relationships or communal actions) are affected. This is true even if students only identify a specific single issue in a seemingly single layer of self. As discussed below, the koshas or layers of self are interdependent and co-arising; they are an integrated and dynamic system of mutuality. Therefore, challenges or well-being in any particular layer of self reverberate into the other layers. To tune into the manifestation of dukkha in all our layers of consciousness, we can ask ourselves any or all of the following questions (and, of course, many others):

- **What are the most notable (or presented) immediate concerns or worries?**
  - Which layers of self/consciousness are affected
  - How do these worries manifest differently in each layer?
- **What are life’s current and past broader challenges?**
  - In which layers of self/consciousness do they show up
  - How do they manifest differently in the various affected layers of self?
- **What feels out of balance in the experience of self, relationships, and life overall?**
  - Which layers of self/consciousness seem affected and off kilter?
  - How does lack of balance manifest within and across the layers?
- **Where is there discomfort, displeasure, dissatisfaction, pain, sadness with in relationships or interpersonal experiences?**
  - In which layers of self/consciousness does pain or suffering emerge
  - How does suffering manifest in each affected layer?
- **Which situations or contexts (e.g., education or academics, work, leisure, friendships, family dynamics, experience of social and political systems) are (more or less) painful, challenging, unsatisfying, or worrisome?**
  - Which layers of self/consciousness are affected most?
  - Which types of situations cause which types of difficulties?
- **Which collective external realities (e.g., institutionalized racism, oppressive political systems, tribal warfare) are creating distress, challenge, or struggle?**
  - Which layers of self/consciousness are affected most?
  - How does suffering manifest in each layer?

It is not always easy for us or our clients or students to answer these questions right away. Part of the healing journey is the becoming aware of how suffering manifests. Yoga offers many pathways toward greater awareness and self-compassion. Finding specific labels may not be as important in this process of discovery as feeling heard, supported, and emotionally held during the exploration. It is helpful to recognize – within a safe setting – that challenge, dissatisfaction, or difficulty exists, that it takes a particular shape, that it shows up in different forms in different layers of self/conscious, and that it affects the entire experience of our life and relationships. Concern, pain, difficulty, or challenge named and identified in a healing relationship is pain and worry shared; often the simple process of voicing our difficulties with another being (or in relationship with many others; i.e., even the other students in a yoga class) begins to rekindle hope in a better future and faith that there may be a degree of resolution and relief.
Developing mindfulness and awareness is one of multiple possible pathways toward recognizing dukkha, toward identifying that challenge, concern, or lack of balance is present in our experience of life, self, and relationship. A caring interpersonal relationship that conveys compassion, kindness, and non-judgment and that creates an open-hearted listening space is another pathway toward beginning to define the personal or collective pain that is present. Mindfulness and relationship (social engagement) work to together to help students or clients identify, and perhaps name, their difficulties.

*Mindfulness, awareness, and relationships* that are conducive to the exploration and identification of pain and suffering encourage the following processes:

- coming to experience with a beginner’s mind and an open heart
- paying attention with curiosity and patience – without judgment or expectation
- being fully present with kindness and compassion
- developing awareness of all the koshas without condemnation, disapproval, or shame
- remembering to remember – being present with what is while being open to remembrance
- attending to body, breath, mind, emotions, behaviors, and relationships

Once an understanding has emerged of the pain and unsatisfactoriness that is present – once the challenges or concerns have been identified in experience and perhaps even voiced in words – we are ready for the next step in the healing and thriving process: figuring out what is contributing to and maintaining the identified pain and suffering (i.e., what are the proximal and distal causes). This process invites us to dive more deeply into awareness of our self *within our collective context*. It invites us to take a look at where we have been, where we are, and where we are headed within the context of our embeddedness in a greater interpersonal matrix (i.e., in a web of relationships) and within the biopsychosociocultural circumstances of our life.

The first truth will repeat itself over and over as the path to healing is entered. As old challenges transform, new ones may emerge. The path to healing itself builds and maintains the awareness and relational trust that support an ongoing review of life’s challenges and our response to them. Thus, while Truth 1 is the first step in the healing process, it is not a discrete process that ends at a specific time. Nevertheless, having begun to identify challenges for ourselves or our clients/students is a prerequisite for the second noble truth of exploring the roots (or causes) of suffering and challenge across all aspects of our life.

Observation and assessment of dukkha in the layers of self are covered in detail in the Assessment and Observation Section of this manual.
Understanding the Causes of Challenge and Suffering – Second Noble Truth

The second noble truth, or step in the healing path, reminds us that suffering (or *dukkha*) does not emerge in a vacuum but instead comes about in the greater context of our very interpersonal and interdependent lives. Suffering, especially self-created and pervasive suffering, is not driven by any one experience; it typically has multiple causes and contributors. To begin to identify the possible proximate and distal causes in our own lives or in the lives of students or clients, we explore several contributors to the development and maintenance of suffering or challenge, factors that ultimately can also be engaged to move toward healing and thriving.

Underlying factors that contribute to the development of suffering, pressure, friction, stress, problems, diagnoses, sorrows, or challenge, and that get in the way of resilience, capability, and coping, typically are multifold: they are individual, contextual, and relational. They develop in the biopsychosociocultural context and interpersonal matrix of our students or clients and influence their development, life trajectory, and health as well as the unfolding of their koshas. They are often buried in implicit memories and unconscious affective, emotional, mental, and relational patterns and habits.

**Contextual Development of Dukkha**

Human development, which can be considered synonymous with development along the lines of the koshas, is profoundly influenced by and dependent upon a multitude of individual, relational, and contextual factors that are utterly interpersonal and interdependent. Human development depends on being solidly and supportively anchored in a greater web of life, especially a web of loving, joyful, kind, and compassionate humans. Human newborns cannot survive outside of a caretaking human matrix of relationships that support their physical survival, emotional needs, and mental growth (Cozolino, 2015, 2017). This interpersonal matrix (Stern, 1985) and its influence has been thoroughly documented in the developmental psychology literature and is unquestioned in the importance of its influence.

In the integrated holistic yoga model (Brems, 2022; https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/what-is-yoga-anyway), development is viewed as a lifelong process of refinement and emergence, shaped by individuals’ experiences in and interactions with their context and environment. Development thus defined resembles evolution (Wilber, 2000) and results in the acquisition of behaviors, useful skills, shaping of new responses, un- and relearning habits, and expansion of awareness (Grant, 2021; Wimbarti & Self, 1992). In this model, development is utterly dependent on the context in which it occurs. How our bodies, energy, mind, emotions, and ways of being relationship develop, grow, and transform is strongly affected by the context that surrounds us: the relationships we experience, the environments in which we grow up and grow old, the cultural forces that bring us advantages or disadvantages, the social and sociopolitical pressures we feel, the educational and career or job opportunities that emerge or fail to emerge. All have profound and long-lasting effects on how we grow, emerge, and evolve in all layers of self, in our relationships, in our families, and in our communities.

The integrated holistic yoga model of understanding human development and human existence/experience is premised on continual change, emergence, and evolution that optimizes and integrates learning and experience over time, constantly transcending and improving upon prior learning and conditioning (Badenoch, 2011a, 2011b; Cozolino, 2015, 2017; Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2012). The empowering premise that humans are subject to and agents in their own lifelong growth is consistent with findings from modern neuroscience and psychology as well as yogic perspectives on human development.

Ancient traditions and modern sciences recognize that humans change, emerge, and grow in the context of their embeddedness in an interpersonal matrix and need to be understood from the unique developmental and contextual embeddedness at any moment in time. All are equally optimistic and hopeful, by virtue of their developmental focus, that there is an inherent capacity of humans to transcend their current state, to improve with experience and discipline, and to evolve continually, and ultimately to embrace their human
interconnection, interrelation, and interdependence – along with the responsibilities that emerge from this recognition of connection. The context in which development and healing happens is relational, collective, and biopsychosociocultural in nature.

**BioPsychoSocioCultural (BPSC) Paradigm**

The biopsychosociocultural paradigm invites yoga clinicians to gain in-depth understanding of clients’ or students’ (or their own) webs of life, webs of relationships, and greater connection. It reminds us that sources of challenges, difficulties, and presenting concerns, even overall life experience are always relational and embedded in a greater context. It leads to recognition of the importance of having an understanding of biopsychosociocultural contexts that have had and continue to have a bearing on the development and experience of human beings. Four dimensions are defined and understood with complexity from a holistic and integrated lens. They are biological, psychological, socioeconomic/sociological, and cultural/familial – or biopsychosociocultural – in nature (cf., Brems & Rasmussen, 2018). Biopsychosociocultural context are in and of themselves ever-emerging, always changing, and in flux. This adds complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and volatility to our understanding of ourselves and our clients. In other words, our human experience is always grounded in a VUCA world.

Figure 1 below details the four biopsychosociocultural factors individually; however, it is important to understand that this is simply for ease of communication. In actuality, these factors co-exist, influence each other, co-arise, and interact deeply and profoundly – they are connected.

*Figure 1: The BioPsychoSocioCultural Context Model (BPSC)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological Factors</th>
<th>Psychological Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>genetics</td>
<td>temperament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical disabilities</td>
<td>personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developmental and health issues</td>
<td>self-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accidents and injuries</td>
<td>resilience and coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illness and disease</td>
<td>affect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nutrition</td>
<td>emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleep hygiene</td>
<td>cognitive style and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medications and substances</td>
<td>intellectual capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medical family history</td>
<td>executive functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…. and more</td>
<td>…. and more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social, Societal, Socioeconomic Factors</th>
<th>Cultural and Familial Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>group memberships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment and career</td>
<td>values, ethics, and morals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socioeconomics</td>
<td>prejudice and stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social support</td>
<td>choices and options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sociopolitical circumstances</td>
<td>language and speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legal and law enforcement structures</td>
<td>religion and spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oppression or bias</td>
<td>family structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td>family process/communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>privilege</td>
<td>family competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political climate</td>
<td>historical/other trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…. and more</td>
<td>…. and more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Figure 2 (same content offered in two graphic versions), some of these overlapping dimensions are explored as well, such as the intersections between:

- biological and psychological context (behavioral health)
- biological and social context (public health)
- psychological and cultural context (family health and functioning) and
- cultural and social contexts (sociocultural health)

**Figure 2: Expanded BioPsychoSocioCultural Context Model (E-BPSC) GRAPHIC VERSION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>Biological Factors</th>
<th>Intersection of Bio-Psycho</th>
<th>PSYCHO</th>
<th>Psychological Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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Figure 2: Expanded BioPsychoSocioCultural Context Model (E-BPSC)

The B in BPSC: Influences of Biology

The first set of influences, on development in general and on resilience in particular, arises from individual genetic and biological endowments and can be objectively explored. Biological influences can be predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating, or protective; they can even precipitate action. For example, inheritance of certain genes may predispose an individual toward particular mental health concerns (e.g., depression [Birmaher et al., 1996]; other mood disorders [Zalsman et al., 2006]; or schizophrenia [Robertson, Hori, and Powell, 2006]), physical challenges (e.g., REFS), or behavioral risks (e.g., attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder; Bradley and Golden, 2001). Congenital conditions, physical disabilities, and other biological inheritances may contribute to ways of being in the world that require more interpersonal support, collaborative wellness, or resilience. Developmental and health issues (e.g., hormonal changes, illnesses, chronic and acute disease) can precipitate personal crises, changes in self-perception, and challenges in relationships. Accidents and injuries can be acute stressors that lead to temporary readjustments and needs for support. Nutritional practices and sleep hygiene may predispose the individual toward greater (becoming a protective factor) or lesser health and may have interpersonal reverberations. Medications and substance use may lead to virtuous or vicious cycles as they interact with other personal factors, such as alcohol intake perhaps lowering inhibitions and creating or maintaining challenges in relationships. Medical family histories can provide insight into risk factors faced by an individual or may precipitate lifestyle changes in an effort at prevention.

The P in BPSC: Influences of Psychology

The second set of influences, on development in general and on resilience in particular, that is explored for its relationship with the presenting concerns is psychological in nature. Psychological factors are individual and subjective in nature; they are best explored through conversation. Psychological factors can be protective, predisposing, precipitating, or perpetuating in relation to the presenting concern. Temperament may be a predisposing factor for how an individual adapts and functions (Seifer, 2000; Bates, Schermerhorn, & Petersen, 2014), especially in relationships. Resilience, coping skills, problem-solving style, and self-efficacy can contribute to challenge (if compromised) or can be protective (if well-developed). Emotional style and maturity precipitate interpersonal challenges and can interfere with interventions thus perpetuating other challenges that
are noted. Intellectual capacity may be a protective factor if it aids the individual in understanding the plan toward healing and contributes to greater insight and behavior change. Neuropsychological deficits or impaired executive functioning, on the other hand, may predispose the individual toward challenge and may perpetuate concerns. Much more about the P in the BPSC will be discussed below in the context of yoga psychology, which is a beautiful elaboration on this very aspect of the biopsychosociocultural context and a majaro avenue for healing, self-care, and healthcare.

**The S in BPSC: Influences of Socioeconomics and Sociology**

The third set of influences, on development in general and on resilience in particular, that may interact with presenting concerns is broad, observable, and collective in nature. It refers to influences that arise from educational opportunities, social circumstances, and sociopolitical and socioeconomic backgrounds of the individual, the individual’s family, extended family, and community. They can perpetuate presenting concerns, predispose clients for particular challenges, precipitate crises, or function protectively. For example, social and socioeconomic challenges (e.g., neglect, living situation, socioeconomic status, and more) can be important predisposing factors in the development of substance use, depression, and suicide risk, even in children (Reinherz, Giaconia, Paradis, Wasserman, & Hauf, 2000; Hanson & Venturelli, 2014; Choi, et al. 2017). Employment challenges (e.g., being laid off suddenly) can become important precipitating events in the development of physical or emotional concerns. Food insecurity, homeless, or poor housing can predispose or perpetuate challenges. On the other hand, supportive socioeconomic and sociological circumstances can be highly protective and can contribute to resilience and recovery. Sociopolitical or legal circumstances (e.g., immigration concerns, criminal activity, and victimization) can have a strong bearing on how the individual deals with relationships, holds up under stress, or responds to healing plans. Experiences of bias and oppression can enter the therapeutic relationship, adding challenges or protective features to the expression of the presenting concern or its resolution.

**The C in BPSC: Influences of Culture and Family**

The fourth set of influences, on development in general and on resilience in particular, arise from the cultural and familial matrix in which the client is situated. By definition, this set of factors in highly collectively-based and subjectively experienced. These factors can be best understood through conversations about the person’s family, community, and their collective felt-sense, explicit and implicit values, and subjectively experienced role in a greater cultural context. Cultural (including spiritual) and familial factors can be predisposing for challenge or resilience, protective, precipitating, or perpetuating. Familial examples of predisposing factors include intergenerational conflicts, emotional absence of a parent during childhood, domestic violence, and other family processes that affect the client’s mental health, contributing to phobic reactions, depression, conduct disorders, reactive attachment disorders, and even suicidal ideation (Abela & Hankin, 2007; Beidel & Turner, 2007; Choi, et al, 2017; Duft, Stafford, & Zeanah, 2017).

Communally-shared values, beliefs, ethics, and morals are important factors that shape behaviors – becoming either predisposing for challenge or protective. Spiritual and religious strictures may precipitate crises or serve as supportive communal structures that provide resilience and coping. Connection and engagement versus isolation or disconnection may predispose versus protect the client and interfere with or support the healing path. Family dynamics, including discipline strategies, parental family histories, extended family issues, and engagement with community/ies can predispose the client for resilience or struggle. Family structure (including stability, cohesiveness, divisiveness, closeness, distance, and boundaries) can be protective or predisposing and can have long-lasting interpersonal reverberations into relationships, including the therapeutic relationship. Interpersonal trauma (including rejection, stigma, and ostracism), historical cultural events (including historical and intergenerationally-transmitted trauma) may have contributed to the development of the current presenting concern and may serve to perpetuate it via interpersonal caution that creates challenges in developing trust in the therapeutic relationship.
The development of the koshas occurs, as was outlined above, in the biopsychosociocultural context and interpersonal matrix (or web of relationships) of each human being. Our context and relational web provides the backdrop for development and influences how we live in the world in all our layers. Our context also shapes affects, energies, mind states, beliefs, attitudes, and stories that contribute to suffering in general and self-created suffering in particular. This process starts not just at birth, but even before we are born as we accumulate experiences in utero that arrive through our developing sense doors and through the hormones we share with our mothers.

At the earliest point in development, we develop a nervous system style (physiologically, affectively, mentally, emotionally, behavioral, and relationally) that reflects whether we entered the world in a context of safety, danger, or even (perceived) life threat. In the yogic world, this way of being in the world, our basic nature or temperament, refers to the **gunas**. Its development starts in annamaya kosha and continues through pranamaya and manomaya kosha; we transcend the gunas when we become fully grounded in vijnanamaya koshas. In modern neuroscience, this style of reacting and relating to our circumstances is best captured by polyvagal theory.

As our self expands from annamaya kosha to include pranamaya koshas, we develop an affective style of being in the world. This reflects our affective predilections that result in particular ways of interpreting sensations and particular ways of responding to outer and inner stimuli. In the yoga world, this is the realm of the **kleshas** – our attachments, aversion, ego identities, fears, and confusions. The kleshas start to develop very early on in life and continue to evolve through the koshas and our life span. They resolve in moments when we are fully grounded in vijnanamaya koshas. Following the our affective development is our mental and emotional development – this is a long developmental period that starts with the emergence of manomaya koshas and continues throughout most of our life. Yogic psychology relevant to this aspect of our adjustment and ways of knowing and being is related to the **vrittis** (especially as favored by the gunas and kleshas), our samskaras (or pattern locks, and our capacity for discerning choices and non-reactive decision-making (karma).

**Gunas: Fundamental Nature of Being in the World**

The gunas are the fundamental qualities or expressions of nature that manifest in all sentient beings. In the ancient yogic traditions, they are the natural expressions and manifestations of spirit in nature (as compared to purusha and ishvara). In western science that are very much akin to our nervous system states that develop and are conditioned in the context of our experiences and relationships as we grow and grow old. They are akin to the polyvagal states as conceptualized by Porges (2012) and currently being researched and implemented in many health and mental health contexts and fields. They reflect humans’ fundamental ways of being in the world as well as the fundamental nature of all things, including weather, climate, activities, food, animals, plants, music, movies, water … everything.


The gunas are the basis of vigilance to be prepared for life’s challenges:

- scanning the environment for threat, danger, and safety
- tuning into the need for mobilizing self-protective strategies

The gunas understood from a modern neuroscience perspective are mediated by the branches of the autonomic nervous system or polyvagal system (cf., Steven Porges) for meeting the world and as such are tied into our threat, self-protection, and defense circuits through amygdala activation and reactivity. They may present our habitual or preferred/conditioned self-protective strategies. These strategies or styles manifest as tendencies from birth and reflect the past and the future in the present moment.
The gunas may begin to develop in utero, but certainly begin to be notable by age 3 months (by which time response styles of the infant begin to mirror those of the primary caretakers). They refine and continue to evolve through interactions, experience, and learning histories over the entire developmental span. Top-down and bottom-up mechanisms are set in place that perpetuate these defensive and self-protective styles and thus can also become the mechanism for change. The gunas manifest in each of the tangible koshas; they begin to fade in vijnanamaya and are transcended in anandamaya.

Tamas = Mass

This guna refers to grounding or stability versus lethargy or withdrawal:
• property of persistence, facilitating steadiness and stillness; unhealthy expression may be couch-potato syndrome or indecisiveness
• a self-protective style in which the individual tends to expect life threat and develop a habitual pattern of shrinking back from life, withdrawing – even dissociating – from human experiences
• linked to the dorsal vagal aspect of the parasympathetic branch of the ANS (DV PSNS) – can be associated with trauma events or complex trauma experiences if this is the predominant response style of the individual
• dorsal innervation pathways include the heart, diaphragm, and viscera (to bring us input from the inside about our state of alertness and to activate only those body areas that are necessary for immediate survival)
• associated with hypoarousal of the nervous system and with physical immobilization
• the stress response associated with this nervous system defense or nature is shut-down or collapse (freeze and submit)
• useful manifestations are the capacity to pause to restore, the ability to feel grounded and steady, a willingness to persist
• possible challenging manifestations may include emotional numbness, mental spaciness, depression, dissociation, derealization

Rajas = Motion

This guna refers to passion or energy versus drivenness or greed:
• kinetic quality, facilitating change, evolution, and enthusiasm; unhealthy expression may be craving or hyperactivity
• a self-protective style in which the individual tends to expect danger, living in a near-constant state of sympathetic arousal, isolation, and physiological overload or break-down; linked to the sympathetic branch of the ANS (SNS)
• sympathetic innervation pathways are distributed along the spinal cord (to activate all muscles necessary for fight or flight)
• associated with hyperarousal of the nervous system and with mobilization or activation (readiness for action)
• the stress response associated with this nervous system style or nature is fight or flight
• useful manifestations are the capacity to act in response to threat, the capacity to respond to life challenges
• possible challenging manifestations may include phobia, worry, anxiety, mania, addiction

Sattva = Luminosity

This guna refers to radiance or harmony versus flightiness:
• integrated quality that facilitates self-knowledge, purity, peace, and balance; unhealthy expression may be fantasy or spaciness
• sattva integrates the best of both tamas and rajas to result in wise action
• an interactive self-protective style in which the individual tends to perceive safety, living more commonly in a relaxed, socially engaged, and restorative ventral vagal space (VV PSNS); linked to the ventral vagal aspect of the parasympathetic branch of the ANS
ventral innervation pathways include the face, throat, and upper chest (to activate muscles of social connection and engagement)

- associated with adaptive regulation of the nervous system and allostasis and homeostasis
- the stress response associated with this nervous system style or nature is social connection, non-alarm state, and maintaining a sense of security and calmness
- useful manifestations are the capacity to be socially engaged, to grow and restore, and adapt, grow and evolve
- possible challenging manifestations may include flightiness or spiritual bypassing (pretending to be fine when one is not – see more about this below)
- yoga helps us recognize when we have moved out of sattva, out of our ventral vagal space, into rajas or tamas → then we learn how to reregulate from hypo- or hyperarousal to a steady state of non-alarm and regulation
- we find the balance between heroic effort and defeated surrender

**Gunas, PVT, and Attachment Styles**

- **safety (sattvic orientation):** most likely to develop when there is access to caring adults who themselves have healthy, secure attachment styles; sattvic individuals have greater likelihood to perceive safety, live in the socially engaged parasympathetic nervous system and are more commonly in their relaxed, engaging and restorative (myelinated) ventral vagal space—SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT – they can develop **healthy, secure attachment styles**
  - e.g., baby spontaneously reacts positively to caretaker; shows appropriate fear of strangers
  - e.g., toddler plays nice with other children if they feel safe; or leave the play situation if it feels unsafe

- **danger/risk (rajasic orientation):** most likely to develop when surrounded by primary caretakers who themselves have insecure-resistant or anxious-ambivalent attachment styles; rajasic individuals are prepared for danger, live in a near-constant state of sympathetic arousal, isolation, and physiological overload or break-down – mobilization of the of the sympathetic NS – fight or flight/MOBILIZATION – they **might develop insecure-resistant, or anxious-ambivalent attachment styles**

- **life threat (tamasic orientation):** most likely to develop when surrounded by primary caretakers who themselves have disorganized or anxious-avoidant attachment styles; tamasic individuals develop a habitual pattern of shrinking back from life, withdraw – even dissociate – from human experiences; they are in their parasympathetic NS in an extreme state of withdrawal – freeze or submit/IMMOBILIZATION – they **might develop anxious-avoidant (fearful) or disorganized attachment styles**

Favorite YouTube Video re Polyvagal Theory: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovirbFJOArw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovirbFJOArw)
Kleshas: Roots of Suffering

The yogic concept of the kleshas has oh-so-many translations and meanings, all juxtaposing these potential challenges to the concept of vidya, or clear understanding. Here are some of the interpretations of the word kleshas:

- hindrances, causes, or roots of suffering
- affective or energetic sources of confusion from which suffering, pressure, friction, problems, and stress (i.e., dukkha) arise
- emotional conditioning or predilections that flavor (or tint) experience and understanding of life in combination with the gunas (and ultimately in combination with our vrittis)
- fetters that get attached to experience – rather than experiencing what is, we start to have preference for what we would like to experience instead, for something different than what we have – we live an idea world rather than the real world, in clouded mind, rather than clear mind
- distractions that prevent us from being with life as it is – from being present for what is

→ the kleshas stand in opposition to vidya, which is being with/seeing what is and being present with what is, being liberated from clinging, grasping, wanting, not wanting, worrying and more
→ there are four kleshas (defined in detail below): attachment, aversion, ego, fear of death and change, and confusion and misunderstanding

The kleshas may find their origin very early in life with the simple sensation of affect and arousal. They emerge as we move from simply perceiving our physiological (arousal) and affective (valence) state to developing preferences for particular affects or types of arousal. Simply being with or noting things are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral is hardwired into our being; the interpretation of these affects (vedana in Sanskrit), on the other hand, is a developmental process that starts in relationship with caring others.

The development of the kleshas begins in pranamaya kosha with the experience of something (an object, a relationship, an interaction, a circumstance) as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (valence) along with a sense of arousal (hyperarousal, hypoarousal, natural arousal) – if there is no value judgment about this, the experience in and of itself is neither problematic nor reactive. It is simply the affective tone (or flavoring) of our experience (vedana) – a reality that is always with us. When we notice vedana (i.e., affect and arousal) and understand that this is all it is, often the experience will arise and fall away; it will come and go without reactivity or consequence. We can simply enjoy what is enjoyable and move on when it is over. We can simply be with what is unpleasant, trusting that this too shall pass. We can endure the neutral without getting bored or confused. However, if we experience displeasure and want to move away from it and perceive it as problematic or if we experience pleasure and we want more of it and perceive as meaningful, important, or even essential, the kleshas have been born.

When we recognize our affective state or level of arousal and develop a preference about how we would like to feel, we begin to cling to or grasp for affective experiences of pleasure and to push away the experience of displeasure or neutrality. The development of preferences for particular affective experiences can arise in all the sense portals: We might develop preferences for what arises visually, auditorily, gustatorily, olfactorily, tactile, perceptually, and so on, including preferences for mind states and relationships (though the latter two come later developmentally). Following are some examples of the kleshas in the various sensory portals – obviously these lists could be endless:

- **Visual:** hating or being proud of how we look, liking some types of art but not appreciating others, judging some people as ugly or unattractive and others as gorgeous, judging a scenery as magnificent or unimpressive, looking for beauty or seeing ugliness …
• **Auditory**: hating certain sounds, loving particular types of music but not others, judging people by the sound of their voice, being bothered by certain noises and unencumbered by others …

• **Olfactory**: loving particular perfumes or scents, being grossed out by particular smells, judging people for body odor, having bad or good memories in response to certain aromas

• **Gustatory**: loving certain foods – perhaps to the point of addiction, hating the taste of particular drinks, judging a food by its taste or lack of taste

• **Tactile**: seeking certain sensations of pleasure, rejecting certain types of touch, judging items by how they feel

*The second arrow*: If we fail to notice the sensation for what it is (impermanent and empty), it will lead us to the second dart, the kleshas: we either fight the sensation (with aversion or fear) or get attached to it (with clinging, craving, pride, ego) and/or we blame the object, circumstance, or relationship that gave rise to the sensation. We want the noise, the smell, the rudeness to stop; we get mad at the people making the noise, the smell, the rude comments; we want to leave the situation. Or we get attached to pleasure, do not want it to stop and begin to seek it out over and over. We begin to want, to cling, to grasp, to desire. We may also begin to fear the loss of pleasure, the loss of relationships, the loss of our identity, and begin to feel existential fears and anxiety, even death anxiety.

In other words, the experience of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations (affects and arousal, or vedana), is natural and in Buddhism is called the first dart. It does not have to harm us as long as we are aware of the sensation, as well it arising and dropping away. If the experience is transformed via conditioning into craving (in the form of attachment, wanting more) or aversion (wanting something different), the second dart has been launched and it is this dart that makes the kleshas and binds us into a cycle of suffering. It is only if we recognize that it is simply a sensation arising in us (impermanent and empty), that we can let go of that second dart, of the kleshas.

The kleshas may be linked to our dopamine-driven reward, pleasure, and emotion circuits of the ventral striatum which activate when we seek pleasure or want to avoid pain – they can be like a gas pedal for the activation of motivation. Thus, not surprisingly, once cravings or desires flavor our perceptions, we begin to impose our perspective on reality instead of seeing life as it really is – we begin to misunderstand ourselves and our world. In other words, once they awaken, the kleshas are the energy and affect that we carry into everything. They become the energy and affect that tint out motivations, intentions, thoughts, speech, actions, and relationships. This happens unconsciously, at a habit-driven level, until we notice this predilection and how it unfolds in a way that happens mindfully and discerningly (this topic will be revisited later below, in Truth #4, when we dive into the transcendence of habit). The pull of wanting and craving can ruin our lives – in yoga and Buddhist traditions the overcoming of craving, the **liberation from clinging (and its flip side of aversion) is enough to bring us enlightenment!**

The kleshas manifest in each of the tangible koshas, begin to fade in vijnanamaya koshas, and are transcended in anandamaya kosha. Early in development we give into sense pleasures (via conditioning and then perpetuated by our biology, e.g., dopamine). Later in development we learn to be with sensation without being pulled into our conditioning.

Developmentally, the first kleshas we are likely to experience are the developmentally more ‘primitive’ forms of raga and dvesha. The sutras list them more in the order in which they still manifest for most adults – but for tiny humans, as soon as they get a taste of something good, they want more of it (food, relationship, calm environment, etc.) because these good things happen to fuel our survival. **We are, in a way, hard-wired for the kleshas. Clinging ensures embeddedness in relationship; aversion might keep us safe. That is how the field of cravings, of clinging gets started.** The kleshas may be necessary in early life to support social affinity – connection to others through affection, attachment, and wanting.
In later development, we become more able to realize that there are also affects and energies that are pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral that are not rooted in or lead to the kleshas. Instead, these affects or experiences of pleasantness or unpleasantness are based in renunciation of sense pleasures. For example, generosity is a pleasant affect arising from the renunciation of greed. Quietude arises from embracing simplicity, renouncing excess. All the yamas, niyamas, brahma viharas, and generosity (if felt purely and without clinging) can fall into the categories of pleasant or unpleasant sensations that are not confounded by the kleshas, by clinging, aversion, ego, or confusion.

In a way, the kleshas can be understood as affective extensions of the gunas (physical survival now linked to affective survival):

- Tamas – most likely to translate into intense survival fear (the more developmentally basic form of abhinivesha)
- Rajas – most likely to translate into aversion; also likely related to avoidance-related fear; less likely to relate to clinging to sense pleasures; but possibly related to clinging to certain ego identifications
- Sattva – most like linked to clinging, especially to relationships, protection, and connection; can also be related to clinging to certain ego identification
- All contribute to asmita as all are going to lead to the self-protection of a particular aspect of self/ego (tamas – physical and affective self; rajas – physical, affective, and verbal self; sattva – verbal, social, relational self-identity)
- All contribute to avidya

Raga or Craving and Grasping

This kleshas refers to clinging, grasping, or wanting → seeking sense pleasures; attachment to a thing because of misidentification of that thing as the source, requirement, or catalyst for happiness; the root is greed/wanting, passion

- The first wanting will likely be for sense pleasures – craving for or clinging to food, being held, being comforted, being in relationship
- Craving taps into our dopamine reward system and becomes self-sustaining
- Then there comes the desire or craving for certain occurrences or outcomes (I cry because I am in pain and I want someone to do something to that there is less pain; I cry because I am hungry and I want food to arrive, etc.)
- As we age, wanting gets more complex – sense pleasures include all kinds of desires – even addictions, expectations to have things and relationships a certain way, greed for getting what we want when we want it – what we crave or cling to may be flavored by the primary koshas we inhabit or the kosha we aspire to
- Raga can even show up in the form of hope – we mistake hope for wanting a particular outcome or clinging to a way this were... true hope, however, is like faith: it is a remembering of our strength and resilience; it is a trusting in the process and patiently learning from it; it is a recognizing of opportunity for growth
- There is a subtle nuance worth mentioning that differentiates craving from clinging:
  - Craving is thirsting or reaching for something you want and do not (yet) have.
  - Clinging is hanging on to something you already have and feel attached to.
  - We even cling to craving itself when we look for things to want… (Joseph Goldstein calls this catalog consciousness)
  - Not all craving and clinging is bad! Concentration and other yoga practices are a skillful form of clinging – we hang on to them to move toward deeper wisdom. We do not give them up until we have arrived at enlightenment.
  - There many parables for this: we cling to the boat (of the dharma or the sutras) until we have reached the other shore of the river; we keep the banana in the peel (hang on to the peel) until we are ready to eat the banana (T. Bikkhu).
Dvesha or Aversion and Hatred

This kleshas refers to the flip side of the same coin as raga that breeds wanting or craving for sense pleasure; wanting for something not to be or not to happen; aversion to a thing because of misidentification of that thing as the source or catalyst of suffering; the root here hatred; can manifest as jealousy

- anything that takes us out of our comfort zone becomes a target for dvesa
- this is a state of resistance, rejection, even destruction – it its core is hatred (dislike, if you prefer) of something, someone, an experience, a state of mind, a physical sensation, an energy or aura …
- we can flip flop from carving/wanting to aversion, if we are disappointed – we’ve all had people we liked, and then hated … we’ve all eaten a food till we couldn’t stand it anymore …
- the pull of aversion to pain, hatred, enmity, and so on can be incredibly strong and can easily sweep us away
- what we resist or resent may be defined in part by the primary kosha we inhabit
- of course, at times aversion can helpful such as pulling our hand away from a flame
- we crave for an “out” – we want to get away from:
  - a particular way of experiencing the body (pain, thirst, hunger, effort, the way I feel in handstand or plank…), or
  - from a particular way of feeling (e.g., bored, uncomfortable, challenged, even excited… ), or
  - a particular way of being (e.g., alone, around too many people, overstimulated, under-stimulated), or
  - from a particular way of being in a relationship (e.g., having to confront someone and want to avoid the confrontation, wanting to break up with someone but not want to face their pain)

Asmita or Clinging to Ego

This kleshas refers to wanting an identifiable, separate self; misidentification of our self with our roles, our mind, our body … not seeing our basic essence and connection as codependently arising collectives/communities; resisting the reality of who we are as human beings; asmita can carry with it a certain amount of conceit and is mired in the false perception of past versus present versus future: there is attachment (with conceit) to I was…, I am…, I will be ….

- This is a klesha of raga and dvesa, tied to ego (ahamkara) – we identify and want to be loved for certain roles we play, for certain self-identities we have, for self-definitions we are wedded to
- We feel very threatened when we do not feel validated in those roles or identities (by others or by ourselves) – it feels like a little death each time we are threatened in our self-identity
- The more threatened we feel, the more separate we feel – there is a strong tie-in with gunas and attachment styles here (see boxes)!
  - if our basic worth and essence is not interpersonally validated, our attachment style can become insecure or disorganized and we cannot see ourselves (or others for that matter) as worthy or part of a collective (rajas, SNS arousal) or we may give up (tamas, dorsal vagal state)
- Asmita is the home of egoism, ego-absorbed individualism, identification with a rigid way of being in the world – with a particular role or roles
- Asmita combined with dvesa (or fear) may kindle our many -isms (racism, sexism, agism, oppression, white supremacy) → hatred of the “other” by clinging to the “self”

Abhinivesha or Fear and Anxiety

This kleshas refers to fear of change; misidentification of impermanence as the source of suffering; not coming to terms with impermanence, clinging to the past or waiting for the future, craving for permanence; wanting a future/permanence
• thinking that impermanent brings happiness leads us to cling to things as they are right now – we have FOMO
• Not coming to terms with impermanence leads to holding on to life, holding on to roles, holding on to relationships – holding on to many things that are in actuality ephemeral and unreliable
• Loss of what we perceive as crucial to our survival leads to fear of change because of fear/anxiety about the new or unknown
• Having certain desires for the future creates or allows for (false) sense of permanence – leads to craving (raga in a way) for certain goals or outcomes…
• This fear can be viewed as a craving for becoming – for wanting a tomorrow, for wanting the next thing as a way of denying impermanence and death
• Fear in this way has a grip on us (and thus essentially overlaps with the kleshas of raga or dvesa) – whatever we fear, we in essence perpetuate:
  o if we fear death, we die 1000 deaths
  o if we fear poverty, money will forever have a grip on us
  o if we fear the loss of others, we will forever worry about being left out or behind

• when fear grips us, one way to release it is to practice metta (lovingkindness)
• NOTE – there is also the more developmentally primitive form of abhinivesha that is all about physical survival and linked, or perhaps even identical, to the most profound expression of the dorsal vagal state of tamas, collapse

Avidya or Non-Seeing and Confusion

This kleshas refers to not seeing reality as it is; lack of clarity; ignorance, failing to investigate thoroughly; forgetting; can manifest as prejudice; misidentification of what is real and what is truth; seeking pleasure and release of suffering from the wrong sources; delusion; or simply not being present with what is happening in the moment

• Avidya is at the root of all the other kleshas. It means that we are mistaking various aspects of the self (various layers) as reality (identification with that layers as the subject, instead of the object). In early development this makes sense, of course – we simply begin to gain awareness of our self and its unfolding layers. As we mature and age, however, clearer understanding has to emerge – from here the kleshas work hand-in-hand with the vrittis (avidya rears up in all the mental vrittis…)
• Avidya is tough to see in ourselves, but we can so easily see it in others…
• It is a lack of wisdom – we cling to our thoughts (or our way of thinking -- e.g., western versus native ways of knowing!) and ideas as if they were truth, not realizing their subjectivity, their impermanence, and their context
• It manifests as limited understanding – we misinterpret our opinions as truths; often the more unexamined an opinion is, the more we cling to it…
• It shows up as misinterpretation – don’t believe everything you feel; don’t belief everything you think; don’t believe everything you think you need in relationship
• Avidya means we are likely losing out on the mystery of life by not having a sense of the present moment – not being in the present; we miss out on a sense of awe for each moment
• Patanjali highlights (in sutra 2.5) four particular forms of avidya (that are also central to Buddhist philosophy where they are sometimes called the four great hallucinations). Understanding these four forms of avidya helps carefully differentiate between relative truth and ultimate truth:

Confusing the Impermanent with the Permanent

We think things, relationships, emotions, thoughts, and other experiences will last forever and define reality. The denial of temporariness leads us to denying our own mortality and a longing for the future as if there were always another tomorrow to be had. Not living consciously with the ephemeral nature of everything takes us out of the present moment, forgetting that it may be the only moment left to us (this truth is also recapped in abhinivesha – wanting, taking for granted, a future). We forget that everything arises and everything dissolves. Through this forgetting, we get caught up in wanting (raga) and aversion (dvesha), escaping the present moment instead of either savoring it (if it happens to be pleasant) or being in it (if it is neutral) or accepting or being inspired by it (if it is unpleasant).

Confusing the Story with the Truth

In this form of avidya, we would rather believe an illusion than search for reality. We believe in illusions of everlasting pleasantness and positivity that lead us into clinging and craving. We get lost in illusions of eternal unpleasantness that move us toward aversion, hatred, anger, and loathing. This form of avidya can take the shape of stories immobilizing ourselves:
• We rationalize staying in bad situations by telling ourselves that this is just how it is.
• We stick with ideas, beliefs, and opinion, telling ourselves we know what is right.

Our conviction in our own story takes us away from seeing things as they are or even might be. We confuse relative reality with ultimate reality. Sure, we need to live in our relative reality – it is our human nature to respond to our circumstances and to have stories and beliefs about them. However, we greatly increase our suffering by believing that our story is the only true one or even that our current story is the best one (losing track that our stories and our perceptions of what is good and what is true have evolved and changed across time – sometimes radically so).

This form of avidya can also manifest as mistaking our story as the only possible story, either disregarding the stories of others or twisting reality on its head. We misinterpret (without noticing) what is not beautiful or not attractive to be beautiful or attractive or vice versa – we get up in exterior definitions and fail to see the deeper truth or reality. Often, but not always, these mistaken stories are fed to us by our environment, by media, and other influences. This can lead to shared delusions at a societal level, where we construct stories (e.g., history) based on the perceptions or experiences of the few, rather than the whole.

Confusing Pleasure with Pain

In this form of avidya, we mistake what is suffering, lack of satisfaction, or even unhappiness for nonsuffering, satisfaction, or happiness. Conversely, we may mistake something as happiness that is actually causing harm to us, others, or the greater community. For example, we might believe that material things can make us happy; we might believe that everything that feels good in the short-term must also be good in the long; we might believe that what feels good to us is also good for others.

We overlook the challenge in positive experiences for the temporary pleasure they bring (at the personal level, this might be overlooking the longterm effect from eating too many processed, sugary foods; at the communal level, this might be ignoring the consequences for the planet of overconsumption and pollution). We might overlook the benefit of tough situations for the temporary challenges they present (at the personal level, we might overlook the positive effects of a higher education because of the shorter-term stress it may create; at the collective level, we might ignore the long-term payoff for the planet and all beings from enduring the short-term challenges that arise as we switch to an alternative energy economy). This form of avidya put blinders on us and wraps us up in decision-making at a level that fails to consider all perspectives. It takes us away from discerning consciously what is or is not of benefit to each and every one of us and the ecosystem as a whole.
Confusing Roles and Superficial Identities with Who We Really Are

In this form of avidya, we mistake what is not self to be self—signaled by our belief that we are our body, our affect, our thoughts, our feelings. For example, when we feel fear, we turn this into “I am a fearful person” (fear=selfận) or when we forget something we turn this into “I am an idiot” (forgetting=selfERN). We mistake mind states for reality and build a story of self around them. In fact, we cling so much to how we define ourselves in any given moment that we lose track of the fact that there is a deeper reality underneath that is begging for our attention. We get lost in our bodies, our emotions, our roles, our relationships and mistake them for truths about us and let them define who we think we are. We create an idea of ourselves or of the identities of others and then cling to them even if they do not really fit what we are experiencing or observing. This form of misunderstanding takes us away from our deeper inner truth, from our truth as connected and co- arising beings (this truth is also recapped in asmita—clinging to an identifiable, separate self).

Constructs of “I” and “you” become fixed and lose flexibility and pliability. By identifying with these false identities, we create suffering when we or others do not conform to these ideas. In reality, we are constantly changing and transforming:

- We are not our bodies (because our bodies constantly change anyway…). If we were our bodies, what would we be? Our leg? Our head or chest? Our neurotransmitters or blood cells? A cancer cell or a macrophage? We do not own any part of our body; it responds to each moment. We get hungry then we feel full. We are warm, then hot, then cold. We are healthy; then we are ill. We have an injury, then we heal. We grow old and then we die.
- We are not our minds (because our minds constantly change anyway…). If we were our minds, what would we be? Our remembrances of yesterday? Our planning for tomorrow? Our worries or fears? Our perceptions of having been hurt or loved? Our ideas about politics or history? We do not control our mind. We have one thought only to note it being replaced by another. We hold a belief as holy only to have implode. We develop a certain understanding of something only to see it fall apart. We are angry, then scared, then relieved. We feel sad, distraught, and then joyful. From moment to moment, thoughts and emotions come and go; beliefs and opinions evolve and change.
- We are temporary constellations of experiences. We can be patient or healer; student or teacher; daughter or mother; father or son; lover or hater. When we realize this changeability in ourselves and others, we can let go of the suffering that comes from holding on to preconceived notions of who and how we and others should be. No—it does not hold us harmless of our actions and their consequences! But that’s a story for another moment!

Three personality types (or habitual ways of being in the world and in relationship) can emerge from the kleshas (and will be revisited in the section on samskaras—which is what they essentially are…):

- **Greedy, desirous**: we go through life, the world, our relationship mostly paying attention to and seeing what we like and what we want; we are mired in wanting, grasping, and clinging
  
  → this can be transformed into faith and devotion

- **Averse, angry**: we go through life, the world, our relationship mostly paying attention to and seeing all the things we do not like or do not want; we are mired in aversion, hatred, anger
  
  → this can be transformed into discerning intelligence

- **Confused, deluded**: we go through life, the world, our relationship mostly confused and not clearly seeing what is happening; we are mired in misunderstanding and tend to be oblivious
  
  → this can be transformed into profound equanimity
The Five Remembrances (as translated by Thich Nhat Hanh)

1. I am of the nature to grow old, I cannot escape old age.
2. I am of the nature to get sick, I cannot escape sickness.
3. I am of the nature to die, I cannot escape death.
4. All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.
5. I inherit the results of my actions of body, speech, and mind. My actions are my continuation.

Evening Gatha
(a Zen Buddhist verse)
Let me respectfully remind you,
Life and death are of supreme importance.
Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost.
Each of us should strive to awaken...
Awaken... take heed!
Do not squander your life!

Vrittis: Expressions of Mind

The word vrittis means revolution or revolving and refers to the fluctuations or fabrications of the mind (or of consciousness). The first encounter with this word in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali occurs in 1.2 yogas citta vritti nirodha, which defines the very practice of yoga as the stilling of these fluctuations of mind or consciousness.

How do the vrittis come about developmentally? With wanting, a sense of affective self emerges and we consciously begin to experience ourselves as separate. The mind layer, and all it encompasses, begins to emerge – the main actions of the mind layer are perception and recognition of external stimuli, as well as storage of learned information in memory. The mind layer beyond perception, recognition, and memory storage (which are the first developmental step) encompasses the development of volition, motivation, emotions, and defense in the service of the ego (remember the kleshas…). Language develops and is helpful in terms of communication with others and in creating shared experience. However, we may begin to mistake our labels, thoughts, valuations, and emotions (i.e., our vrittis) as reality. We begin to construct a representational verbal and social self.

Here is how – the development of the vrittis:

As the rudiments of language begin to develop and as we learn to label emotions, sensations, perceptions, and thoughts, a representational self (i.e., mind) emerges. Labels and concepts become important to how we perceive and interpret the world and we begin to add valuation (even judgment) to our experiences.

As memory consolidation becomes increasingly language-bound, time-linked (or time-stamped), and place-stamped, explicit memory emerges and is added to the implicit memory of the gunas and kleshas further creating stories of self, increasingly calcified narratives of who we are, how we are, and what we are.
As stories of self and our life develop, things get tricky. We might come to believe all of our narratives as the truth rather than seeing the possible misperceptions and biases that are contained in them. Anytime we believe there is only one single narrative (or way of understanding our perceptions and experiences), we need to get suspicious of our own mind and need to remember that typically there are multiple viewpoints.

Also, as stories of self develop, so do our emotions and our interpretations of thoughts and physiological responses as emotions, influenced by the other mental formations and the kleshas. To protect ourselves from emotional overwhelm and perceived threats to existence (i.e., threats to ego), we develop strategies of self-defense – ranging from denial, repression, compartmentalization to projection, projective identification and more. We can draw heavily on psychology to understand these self-protective mechanisms.

Our default mode network kicks in – we get lost in the vrittis when our attention or concentration is not honed and we get lost in our selfish perspective on the world (mediated by the posterior cingulate cortex). As connections to the prefrontal cortex slowly come online and become increasingly complex and dispersed, our emerging cognitive complexity allows for increasing executive, cognitive, or top-down control. We begin to gain an understanding of the need to decontextualize and reconceptualize our reactive (impulsive) narratives and stories. We begin to see the bigger picture and take a wider perspective on what is transpiring in our and others’ lives. We become increasingly capable of shifting perspectives and stepping outside of our own story and narrative to include those of others.

Buddhism says there are many stories, many viewpoints. Which stage do you inhabit: Stage 1 – I am right, you are wrong; Stage 2 – you are right, I am wrong; Stage 3 – we are both right; Stage 4 – we both just simply are

The vrittis lead to self-identification with mind (moving beyond physical and affective self-identification and survival instincts). There are three layers of mind that emerge in a predictable developmental sequence:

- in manas, we identify with our thoughts and labels – we are what we think, label, imagine, and feel; we consolidate language and episodic (procedural) memory
- in ahamkara, we identify with our habit powers and ego, mistaking them for a self, a personality – especially in combination with kleshas flavoring, we can become powerfully attached to this way of self-identification and can get stuck here for much of our life; we begin to consolidate a narrative self; we begin to tell the stories of “I”
- in buddhi, we begin to transcend our identification with individual labels, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and ideas, even with our individual personalities or egos – we begin to glimpse a greater wisdom (still tied to mind but beginning to be more expansive); we stop resisting what is by letting go of ego and embracing the reality of human life – with all it challenges and limitations; we begin to consolidate an autobiographic self that slowly can expand in terms of what it considers part of the autobiography, part of the self - the more decentered the definition, the more movement toward vijnanamaya koshas and the brahma viharas

Further, we begin to attach emotions and identities to simple labels – we ascribe inherent nature to something based on how we have labeled or conceptualized it. The label or concept becomes the identity of the object or subject and we lose the connection to the reality of it. For example, dirty = bad; when we define ourselves with a particular role, we lose all other aspects of ourselves – we are a “mother” at the exclusion of every other role we have (confusing role with identity); if we label someone as belonging to the category of “other”, we become frightened or biased or ascribe traits (e.g., “all Germans are antisemitic”); if you think of yourself as Lazy, you might not even try to be proactive; if you think of someone as “the perfectionist” that may be all you see when you interact with them – our labels become sticky and they begin to entangle us in rigid beliefs and unexplored opinions and attitudes

The vrittis are influenced by the kleshas and gunas. Vrittis, in fact, can be helpful or unhelpful, skillful or unskillful, auspicious or inauspicious depending on their flavoring by or (relative) freedom from the kleshas and
gunas. A large aspect of working with the vrittis is to use careful and attentive discernment (viveka in Sanskrit) to notice if our mental productions are tinted or flavored by the kleshas and/or gunas.

- Tamas and rajas can greatly affect the how the vrittis manifest and influence our mind states. When they predominate (over sattva) they may interfere with viveka (or clear seeing), obscuring our ability to exercise calm discernment about our choices.

- As mind emerges, thoughts, desires, clingings, and cravings become more profound, verbal, and shared→ the vrittis emerge, influenced by (afflicted, tinted, or flavored) by the wantings (the kleshas) and our perceptions of safety (the gunas, PVT), especially if we are not conscious of our hindrances and their capacity to flavor our mind. For example -
  - Memory may be tinted by past pleasures (raga), leading to longing or nostalgia; memory may be controlled by self-identifications (asmita), leading to narrow definitions of how we are or can be
  - Fantasy may be flavored by the future and becoming (abhinivesha) or wanting pleasure (raga) or avoiding pain (dvesa)
  - Misperception may be colored by opinions, values, and ideas (avidya) or self-identifications (asmita)
  - Sleep may reflect our gunas or linked to escape or avoidance of what causes displeasure

• See handout of vrittis/kleshas interactions

The vrittis are the way we perceive and mentally process reality – as flavored or influenced by the gunas and kleshas:

- They are a tangible manifestation of past conditioning as it is projected on our current experiences. Past learning influences how we think about and emotionally respond (or react) to current events and experiences.
- In other words, everything in the present has the potential to be flavored by the past – if we are not aware of this very subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) influence of prior learning and conditioning.
- When we are not aware of the influence of the past (via the gunas and kleshas) on our thoughts and emotions, activity in the present is triggered by ingrained reactive patterns rather than being responsive to the reality of the present moment. We always bring our context, our developmental interpersonal matrix and learning, with us to the present moment.
- Much of the inner limbs of yoga is about becoming aware of these influences of the past and beginning to make more conscious decisions about how to respond in the present.

Perception is the interpretation of sense experiences by recognizing and labeling their distinctive features – as noted above, generally in the context of or via the baggage from past conditioning. The way we perceive things is thus conditioned by our BPSC background and experiences. All perceptions are conditioned and flavored by past experience, by our biopsychosociocultural context along with the commensurate gunas and kleshas that have developed. This means, perception is heavily biased and conditioned, including by our cultural predispositions, social circumstances, biological variables, familial experiences, and so on. Because of this perceptions are full of imputed meaning and do not (perhaps even cannot) reflect any inherent truth – and yet we mistake them as truths. We cling to our viewpoints and confuse them with reality.

What this implies is that we do not simply experience – we impute meaning. We layer on top of the experience additional meaning that creates a new reality about the experience or the object. We no longer just see an object or have a sensation – we imbue it with meaning. If I feel pain in my back, it means I am getting old. If I have certain level of comfort in my home, it means security. If a friend does not call me, it means abandonment. If a get a new car, it means status. In other words, things and experiences take on meaning way beyond their inherent nature. Additionally, we create overlays of meaning – we add connotations based on our circumstances (think BPSC) and preferences (think learning histories). As we do this, we are totally unaware that we doing it. In each moment of judgment, we think this is the truth, this is reality. Fortunately, once we begin to notice this, we can get better and better at spying our self-referenced interpretations and possible distortions. For example:
If we live in Oregon, rain means “bad weather”. If you live in Southern California, rain means “life-saving weather”.

If I love old cars, I may think of a 1990s VW bug as “vintage”; if I prefer new cars, I may think of it as a “piece of junk”.

If I have liberal politics, I may think of government as an institution in the public service; if I am at the right wing of politics, all I may see is bureaucrats.

If I had experiences of trauma in childhood, using a strap in yoga class may feel terrifying; if I have had experience of a strap as supporting my asana, I may perceive it as liberating.

If I live in an inner city, I may think of a group of young people as a “gang”; if I live in a small town, I may see a group of young people and rejoice in their camaraderie. …

Vrittis and kleshas result in samskaras, habitual ways of responding, experience-based distorted cognitions, conditioned powerful emotions, and harmful habits. These patterns and structures in our mental and emotional landscape self-perpetuate and may or may not be useful depending on the degree of conditioning, the degree of awareness, the degree of coloring by the kleshas and gunas.

Just as with the kleshas, the key to working with the vrittis is to recognize and to learn to recognize them and then to let go of our identification with them – more about this below. When vidya (as opposed to avidya or all the other kleshas) is brought to the vrittis, they can become vehicles for growth and change – more about this in these sections on samskaras and karma. We practice mindfulness and concentration so that we can ultimately deconstruct the self as defined by the vrittis and kleshas. We recognize the impermanence of everything (physical sensation, affect, thoughts, emotions); we begin to notice that all there is, is arising, being, and releasing. We work with the vrittis by finding their root causes as the mind can only become still if we recognize why it is uneasy to begin with. Thus, yoga – in its definition as the calming of the fluctuations of the mind – in essence asks us to determine the causes of fluctuations so that we might remove them and find peace (in healthcare this means that we have a commitment to identifying and treating etiology, not symptoms).

“It is not that something different is seen but that one sees differently.”

Carl Jung

In Buddhism, the importance of the vrittis, when flavored by the kleshas (i.e., when made sticky…), lies in the fact that they precede suffering.

From this perspective, human suffering starts before anything happens outside of us. Suffering precedes sensations because of the burden of preconceived notions, fixed values, and other mental fabrications or preoccupations that we carry around with us. Sensations and how we perceive or interpret them, both emotionally and mentally, are flavored by the vrittis and the kleshas in a complex interplay of expectations, calcified opinions, and old knowledge.

The trick to relieving suffering is to let go of imputed meaning, that is, to let go of preconceived assumptions, calcified values, fixations on the past or the future, reactive emotions, and the stories and narratives created; to recognize where these thoughts came from (i.e., to identify the root causes); to see them in their context and to recognize that the context has changed; and thus, ultimately to transform them so that we can see reality more accurately as it really is.

Five vrittis are defined in the yoga tradition. Although discussed separately, all vrittis (and associated brain wave activity) are intermixed and can co-occur at the same time. They generally do not occur as one distinct vritti (or brain wave activity) at a time, though this is theoretically possible. The five vrittis are detailed below. For each one, we can assess whether the manifestation of that particular vritti is flavored by the kleshas and
gunas, or unflavored (i.e., unaffected) by our affective style, arousal level, attachments (clinging and grasping), aversions (anger, hatred), fears, ego, and confusion.

Unflavored vrittis can be very helpful and can support our journey through the material reality of human life or of life as a sentient being. Unflavored vrittis help us cogitate, make decisions, and ponder the past and the future. In other words, the vrittis in and of themselves are a useful human tool to process our immediate life experiences and circumstances, to deal with the world in a tangible and informed way, to engage with our biopsychosociocultural context. Flavored vrittis, in the other hand, can lead us astray into reactivity, bias, confusion, misunderstanding, and pain (that we inflict on ourselves and others…).

**Pramana →** right perception, verifiable knowledge
- **Unflavored pramana:**
  - clear perception is where we want to be – we need to see reality as it is (see box above)
  - we construct our reality without flavoring via direct experience, via inference, via testimony
  - we discern or spot our misidentifications as they arise and do not get sucked into them
  - we penetrate our mental constructions to recognize when they have become neither truth nor reality
  - we practice the Buddhist joke/principle of “Don’t believe everything you think”
- **Flavored pramana:** (essentially see viparyaya below)
- **related to beta brain waves:**
  - 15 to 40 cycles per second – the fastest of the brain waves
  - predominant when fully awake and alert; active engagement with the outer world; engaged thought and conversation
  - associated with attention and salience networks
  - associated with arousal; associated with engaged conversations or debate
  - at the extreme beta is associated with anxiety
  - present during intense cognitive engagement and flow – beta then may give way to gamma brain waves (the neural signature of adept meditators or yogis) when true flow and meta-awareness are accessed

**Viparyaya →** misperception, faulty or illogical thinking; cognitive distortion
- **Unflavored viparyaya:** the helpfulness of not knowing sometimes lets us dive into situations that we might otherwise not try 😊
- **Flavored viparyaya:**
  - getting trapped in opinions, values, ideas, getting lost in rigid perceptions of roles and relationships; imposing our view and skewing reality into the direction of our preferences
  - psychological protective mechanisms kick in (e.g., projecting emotions and thoughts)
  - we forget that our thoughts are just constructions, not reality – we get lost in thinking that our beliefs and identifications are truths
- **related to beta brain waves**
  - 15 to 40 cycles per second – the fastest of the brain waves
  - predominant when fully awake and alert; active engagement with the outer world; engaged thought and conversation
  - associated with attention and salience networks
  - associated with arousal; associated with engaged conversations or debate
  - at the extreme beta is associated with anxiety
  - present during intense cognitive engagement and flow

**Vikalpa →** fantasy, imagination, creative thinking, future thinking, day dreaming (kalpa means imagination; vikalpa means crooked or distorted imagination).
- **Unflavored vikalpa:**
  - creativity, dreams for the future, impetus for trying new things, creation of change, emergence of new ideas, development of new solutions to old problems
The power of imagination gives us wings: 

- It is the mental capacity of humans to imagine the future and to learn from the past.
- It is the mental skills that supports our ability to be altruistic, to take the mental and emotional perspective of another being, to sense into the experience of another being (i.e., vicarious introspection).
- It is through imagination that we can decenter from our own experience and take a vaster perspective.

**Flavored vikalpa:**
- getting trapped in the future
- getting lost in day dreams and then not acting
- clinging to wishes and desires for particular outcomes of developments
- we forget that the future is not yet real – that our future as we construct it in the mind, is simply a thought in the present moment

**related to alpha brain waves**
- 9 to 14 cycles per second
- predominant when in a state of rest, relaxation, or meditation
- associated with deep relaxation accompanied by deep focus
- associated with non-arousal; with a sense of comfort, harmony, and happiness
- arises with day dreaming, the default mode network, and free association → invites creativity
- habit begins to melt away; creativity emerges during alpha
- flow happens at the intersection of alpha and beta – a combination of alert creativity and open receptivity; an openness to novelty and unpredictability

**Smriti → memory, recollection, remembrance**

**Unflavored smriti:**
- remembrance and mindfulness to allow us to reflect on the past and be in the present
- time-stamped and place-stamped memory that is explicit (as opposed to implicit)
- the ability to reflect on past experiences to create change and growth
- memory as a helpful guide in the present and as we plan the future

**Flavored smriti:**
- getting trapped in the past, getting lost or stuck in old stories and narratives
- getting attached to old identities, memory as a habit or rut – as a narrowing of possibilities
- we forget that the past is no longer real – that our past as we recollect it, is simply a thought in the present moment

**related to theta brain waves (and interestingly, theta waves are related to emotional regulation; Ertl, Hildebrandt, Ourina, Leicht, & Mulert, 2013)**
- 5 to 8 cycles per second
- predominant during deep meditation or trance states, as well as during automatic behaviors that have been deeply ingrained and learned so as to unfold routinely
- associated with being lost in a daydream or a routine (e.g., the state you are in when you drive home on automatic pilot and can’t remember the drive when you get home)
- also associated with intuition and lucid dreaming; can help memories rise to the surface → can produce creativity and connection or openness toward others; can support problem-solving skills
- briefly experienced upon falling asleep and upon waking [the state when insights pop into your head when you wake up]

**Nidra → deep dreamless sleep, absence of thought, emptiness, absence of the other four vrttis**

**Unflavored nidra:**
rejuvenation through deep, dreamless sleep (perhaps associated with the new discovery of the **glymphatic** system: the space between neurons expands during NREM sleep, allowing cerebrospinal fluid to enter these spaces and flush out and carry away toxic metabolites [e.g., amyloid plaque] that accumulate during waking hours)
- consolidation of memory during deep sleep (triaging short-term memories accumulated in the hippocampus during the day, connecting some to lasting neural pathways and rejecting or letting go of unnecessary ones)
- creativity may emerge during deep sleep leading us to waking up with a new idea
- sleep is a crucial aspect of life, allowing rest and rejuvenation in the body and improving brain function
- the nature of our sleep may also give us hints about the nature of mind, or our mind states → see below

- Flavored nidra:
  - getting trapped in escapism or avoidance
  - getting lost in spaciness
  - sleeping (or sleepwalking) through our lives

- sleep is greatly affected by the gunas and can help us discern which of the gunas may be primary in our lives:
  - tamas: heavy, dull sleep that leaves us feeling tired and worn out upon awakening
  - rajas: agitated, disturbed, restless sleep that leaves us feeling unrested and perhaps anxiety or agitated upon awakening
  - sattva: deep restful, undisturbed sleep that leaves us feeling bright, light, and refreshed upon awakening

- related to **delta** brain waves
  - 1.5 to 4 cycles per second
  - predominant during deepest meditation and dreamless sleep
  - Note: active dreaming involves theta brain waves!
  - essential to renewal and healing
  - linked to the unconscious mind and the consolidation of memory
  - perceived as highly beneficial to health via the connection to deep and restful sleep
  - may be associated with the successful unfolding of the glymphatic system that cleanses the brain during sleep each night

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*Every time we encounter new information, we have choice. We can attach our opinions to our identities and stand our ground in the stubbornness of preaching or prosecuting. Or we can operate more like the scientist, defining ourselves as people committed to the pursuit of truth — even if it means proving our own views wrong.*

Adam Grant, *Think Again*, 2021, p. 76

*The tanha (craving) that we all experience and that serves as the main culprit in human suffering is a natural but ruinous tendency to reify impermanent realities, be they pleasures, or future goals, or even idealized versions of ourselves or our lovers. For Americans, one of the major lessons of Buddhist sati (mindfulness) and panna (wisdom) is that we must stop seeing ourselves as incomplete and in need of completion by external realities, like that ideal soul mate, that coveted promotion, that audience applause, that new car, and all the other things and “extreme experiences” that mass media is selling us.*

Prognosis or Planning for Change – The Third Noble Truth

Kindling of Hope and Motivation for Change

The central feature of the third noble truth, or the third step in the healing path, is the profound realization that there is hope, that suffering and challenge can be transformed. It is in this process that students commit themselves to taking steps to move away from suffering and into presence, mindfulness, equanimity, and wellbeing. Students realize, often via the briefest of glimpses into alternative ways of experiencing and interpreting reality, that health and happiness are possibilities and that challenges can present opportunities. From hope emerges planning for new possibilities in all layers of self and the motivation to change.

The emergence of hope and positivity is not to be confused with denial, rationalization, or spiritual bypassing. Quite the opposite: students become more fully present with their suffering and have moved into motivation to change, into a refusal to accept suffering as their sole mode of being. Hope happens when we realize that through the same processes that create stories and attitudes that promote suffering, we can create stories of growth, change, transformation, and opportunity. We realize we have the capacity to transform any suffering that we ourselves created to begin with. We can change our perspective; we can transform our conditions; we can move into resilience and capability. We realize “that we’re endowed with capacities that we frequently fail to recognize until they’re pointed out to us. These reminders are … opportunities to wake up, so to speak, from the dream of conditioned awareness” (Mingyur Rinpoche, 2009, p. 95) and they help us recollect that “deep within us lies the capacity for boundless wisdom, capability, and compassion” (p. 96)

Healing Factors of Yoga

The yoga tradition has identified several healing factors that are very helpful if kindled at this point in the healing path. These factors invite us to commit to healing with our whole heart and mind and to bring an auspicious attitude toward the journey. The healing factors help us embark on a journey into healing that engages our full passion, commitment, and energy; that is persistent and ongoing, yet without striving, grasping, over-efforting, or clinging. The healing factors invite us to trust in the worthwhileness of the journey into healing with discernment, wisdom, and good judgment. They remind that how we look at the world is how the world looks back at us; that how we shout into the canyon is how the echo return.

The Five Healing Factors of Yoga

shraddha-virya-smruti-samadhi-prajna-purvakah itaresham =

For all others, faith [conviction], energy [persistence, passion], mindfulness, integration [focus, alertness], and wisdom [discernment] form the path to realization

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra 1:20; Hartranft translation [and other translational options]

The healing factors are five commitments that lead to hope for a better or different future and experience of life. They are as follows:

- **conviction** and faith in the path, being fully alive with all our strength and embracing all limbs of yoga
- **persistence**, passion, energy, and dedication, returning to the practice over and over even during challenging times
• **remembrance** and mindfulness, remembering to be awake to each moment in the full context of our lives
• **focus**, concentration, and quietude, with full and unequivocal, yet soft and easeful, attention to the practice in all layers of consciousness
• **wisdom** and deep discernment, exercising wise judgment based in the yamas, niyamas, and brahma viharas

The five healing factors remind us that the limiting and limited ideas that we created about ourselves and others are restricting and curtailing our opportunities and that if we release our limiting conditioning, we open ourselves up to new possibilities and visions for our lives and ourselves. The five healing factors and the kindling of hope are supported by two helpful explorations that happen – generally collaboratively and more or less explicitly between teacher/clinician and student/client – in this third step on the healing path:

• Understanding the contributing or causative factors (predisposing, precipiating, perpetuating, and protective factors), as well as mediating and moderating factors, to suffering and being present with suffering
• Setting goals to plan for changes and transformations in all koshas, from a place of hope to transcend pain and suffering into health and resilience

**The Four Ps: Defining What and How To Change**

First, student and teacher or client and clinician explore how the various causes of suffering that emerge from the biopsychosociocultural context, gunas, kleshas, and vrittis contribute to suffering, difficulty, and challenge. They explore how forces and context in students’ lives *predispose* them to suffering, what *triggers* pain or challenge, and what *keeps them stuck* in unhelpful and unhealthful ways of being in the world. They are also looking for influences in their lives that contribute to (mediate or moderate) wellbeing and health, to resilience and equanimity. Student and teach see these influences in the specific manifestations of the koshas and begin to identify which koshas need support for greater awareness, compassion, and insight. Second, they use this and all prior understandings to set goals that embody their hopes for change.

*When we face suffering, ours and others’, happiness becomes possible.*

The factors that arise from biopsychosociocultural contexts, experiences, and exposures and the factors that are embedded in or emerge from an individual’s level of kosha development can serve as predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating, or protective influences (the four Ps) in a person’s life. These factors interact with one another and with influences that can either further mediate or moderate experiences, perceptions, and sufferings of the individual and his or her collective.

**Predisposing Factors**

When we explore predisposing factors, we ask the question “What are the vulnerabilities that contribute to suffering?” Factors that predispose are those that increase the likelihood that an individual may experience the world in a particular manner, may have a specific personal style, or may have a certain way of being in relationship. Predisposing factors can be societal, environmental, social, familial, personal, biological, and genetic – in other words, they arise from our biopsychosociocultural context and or may be inherent in our interpersonal matrix (i.e., our relationships). Often predisposing factors are quite obvious, but sometimes they are not so easily assessed. Rarely is there just one vulnerability that can account for all symptoms or challenges in a student’s or client’s life. Any single predisposing factor does not provide a definitive cause of a difficulty or presenting challenge (though they are sometimes confusingly called ‘distal causes’); rather they encourage us to review all possible life circumstances that have contributed to the development of difficulties and continue to add to ongoing suffering.

Predisposing factors that may contribute to students’ or clients’ suffering can range widely. They may arise from long-term difficult relationships such as ongoing domestic violence, abuse, or neglect – even simply long-term fighting and hostility in significant relationships. They may be developmental in nature, as is the case with
adverse childhood experiences, or based in complex trauma (e.g., abuse, neglect, long-term exposure to a war zone). They may be due to cultural and racial discrimination, oppression, and hatred or due to stressful economic living situations (e.g., poverty, dangerous neighborhoods, food insecurity, lack of access to education or healthcare). They may be work-related long-term stressors, such as overwork, excessive expectations, poor work relationships, unhealthy work environments; they can arise from environment challenges (such as exposure to toxins, effects of the climate crisis, long-term natural disasters). The list of possible life and relationship circumstances that can create vulnerability and add to suffering is likely almost endless.

Precipitating Factors

When we explore precipitating factors, we ask the question “What are the triggers for suffering or seeking help?“. Precipitants can take two forms: they may trigger acute suffering or they may impel the individual to take an action – including an action such as seeking help via yoga, medical care, therapy, or simply taking to a friend. Precipitants of suffering may be sudden life changes, like being unexpectedly fired from a job, having an accident, being diagnosed with a severe illness, a sudden family move, an acute trauma (such as a rape or natural disaster), or any other unexpected event or significant life stressor that exceeds our coping resources. When this stressor or sudden change leads worry, sorrow, grief, fear, panic, depression, or other difficulties, it may become a proximal (most recent) cause for acute suffering.

Precipitants to take action may be as simple as a big fight that made us aware that we or loved ones need help. Sometimes, it is a friend honesty with us about a concern over our behaviors or life decisions that leads us to the recognition that we may need to create change and seek support. Sometimes, the precipitant that brings us to yoga is the motivation to improve our lives. Precipitants are helpful in understanding why a student came to yoga or a client sought therapy when they did, especially when it appears that their challenge or difficult has existed for some time.

Perpetuating Factors

When we explore perpetuating factors, we ask the question “What keeps the cycle of suffering going?“. Perpetuating factors are those that maintain challenges or positive traits – manifesting as vicious or virtuous cycles. We all have patterns that keep our behaviors, emotions, reactions, and relationships mired in routine and ruts. Not uncommonly, our patterns started because they helped us cope with a difficult situation. They served a useful, often self-protective or coping, purpose. However, over time, that utility has paled in comparison to the suffering it maintains and create more and more pain and reactivity (in yoga language, such patterns are samskaras). For instance, if somatic concerns (such as frighteningly severe headaches or severe digestive issues) in a relationship partner stop vicious fighting, the symptom may be maintained because it is less painful for the individual to be in the patient role than to endure the open hostility or strive in the relationship. Thus, a symptom, although being uncomfortable or even painful, may have a larger self-protective purpose (in the medical world this may be called secondary gain) that keeps it going. It is helpful to become aware of possible reinforcing factors that maintain our suffering. This helps everyone better understanding the presenting concerns and has implications for goal setting.

Protective Factors

When we explore protective factors, we ask the question “What resources are available already that support healing and thriving?“. Protective factors are those that bolster the individual against stress, contributing to resilience, coping, healing, and thriving. It is helpful to be cognizant of the strengths students or clients can bring to bear on their suffering. We often overlook our available resources and supports when we are in the middle of a difficulty. We forget to draw on coping resources that have helped us in the past. Protective factors, like predisposing factors can arise from our biopsychosociocultural context, from inner resources, and from relationship resources and connections to our interpersonal web.
Simply recognizing that these resources exist and can be activated can enhance thriving and support healing. Thus, it can be very auspicious to help students or clients remember that they have strengths and resources that can facilitate their mental health and that can support their journey into healing. Noting these strengths and mobilizing these resources in the process of healing is tremendously empowering and engenders self-agency. Empowerment and self-agency, in turn, become virtuous cycles of resilience that help students and clients take the healing work off the mat and out of the therapy room, assisting with generalization of behavior change, insight, and transfer of learning into everyday life.

Without understanding the four Ps, goal-setting and planning a healing path may not be optimal as the underlying root causes for a particular presenting concern may fail to be understood and hence never be properly addressed (cf., Brems & Rasmussen, 2018; Brems, 1999). Exploration of biopsychosociocultural factors and level of development in the koshas leads to a greater understanding of the factors that are important to address on the path toward thriving and healing. They help student and teacher or client and clinician understand what may be driving and perpetuating the presenting concerns, what suffering can be ameliorated, and how best to plan a healing path.

A couple of examples may highlight why this is so. Two students/clients in a yoga class in a mental health setting, presenting with very similar symptoms of depression, may need completely different yogic practices depending on the influencing factors that are present in their lives and that are contributing either to perpetuating the concern or having a protective force in the individual’s life. For one student, depression perhaps is related to profound experiences of complex childhood trauma. This student will require different relationship building and more individualized intervention planning, as compared to a student with a depression that seems to be acutely precipitated by a recent job loss. To take this example further, a third student may have a nutritionally-based depression that is best ameliorated and supported by developing behavioral and lifestyle supports toward a healthier diet. A fourth student may have struggled with long-standing issues of self-esteem that result in occasional but temporary bouts of self-doubt and increased depressed mood. Using the same yogic healing pathway for all of these students would result in less-than-optimal (less-than-auspicious) outcomes for all. This is not to say that there are not overlapping concerns and causes that can be addressed in a single group class. However, the class would need to offer adequate variations and all-inclusive cuing to address the underlying concerns of all students.

In a similar vein, students presenting with frequent or chronic neck pain may have similar needs for individually tailored interventions. In one student, the neck pain may emerge most frequently and chronically after long hours of sitting at a computer; for another, neck pain may be acute after a distinct injury; for a third, neck pain may be related to psychological stress that reverberates in poor posture and neck strain; for a fourth student, neck pain may have had its onset after an argument with a domestic partner. While some yogic strategies will be useful for all of these expressions of neck pain, additional individual tailoring of the healing path will auspiciously consider the root cause – if nothing else to prevent recurrence of the presenting challenge.

**Setting Goals and Making a Plan**

In all of the above examples, suffering can be ameliorated. However, the issues (or causes) that need to be addressed may differ profoundly. Different students have different needs, experience different life circumstances, are embedded in unique webs of relationships, exist in idiosyncratic biopsychosociocultural contexts, define different goals, and desire different outcomes. For each student or client, the first thing to explore is what changes are possible to support enhanced mental health given their unique interpersonal matrix and background. Once areas of possible change, thriving, and healing are identified, goals and objectives can be defined that move the student or client toward transformation and away from suffering.
It may be auspicious to start the goal-setting process with the following questions:

- Is the student motivated toward transformation and healing? Did they access yoga for this reason?
- What kind of change and growth can happen in the context in which the student or client is seeking care?
- How can change happen in the biopsychosociocultural context?
- How can development in the koshas be facilitated? How can consciousness expand?
- Which habits/patterns (physical, emotional, mental, relational) can transform?
- What are the possible entry ways for change?
  - What can change in annamaya kosha? What are related goals?
  - What can change in pranamaya kosha? What are related goals?
  - What can change in manomaya kosha? What are related goals?

Understanding the student’s or client’s four Ps helps dramatically in answering these questions. The four Ps help the student and teacher or client and clinician understand why and how behaviors, affects, relationships, and life patterns developed, are maintained, and can evolve. Perhaps most importantly, the third noble truth reminds students why they came to yoga in the first place: to transcend and transform suffering; to find health and resilience; to turn illness into wellness; to live with optimism, confidence, positivity, courage, and faith.

Once these questions have been answered, the groundwork has been laid to develop goals for the student’s work in yoga – on the mat and off the mat. Once goals have been set and hope has been (re)kindled, growth and transformation in the koshas becomes possible and an intentional path toward change and resilience can be chosen or emerges naturally for the student. This path can be found in the tailored and skillful application of the eight limbs of yoga. However, even once a healing journey or path has been planned, it is not written in stone. Throughout the work, student and teacher will learn new information, gain new insights, and are encouraged to update their understanding and goals as appropriate to emerging and revised understandings.

The path or healing journey is grounded in the eight limbs of yoga. The ancient tradition and modern science of yoga provides the toolbox and strategies that can be drawn upon to support students or clients as they seek to build resilience and move toward physical and mental health. The healing path addresses all the koshas – specifically to the challenges that were outlined in the first noble truth in each layer of consciousness. It honors and addresses the causes of suffering that were identified in the second noble truth. It moves the student or client toward the goals for wellness and resilience enumerated in the third noble truth.
Committing to a Path of Healing and Transformation –Fourth Noble Truth

The information from the biopsychosociocultural context of the student/client guides yoga teachers or clinicians toward a deeper understanding of clients or students with regard to their developmental level (koshas) and the biopsychosociocultural factors that have contributed to this developmental presentation and trajectory. With the information gathered, clients or students can be understood in the context of habitual neurological platforms sets (based on polyvagal theory: perception of life as safe, dangerous, or threatening), affective predilections (inclined toward attachment, aversion, fear, or confusion), and mental preoccupations (e.g., with the past, the future, relationships, circumstances, and more).

The fourth noble truth invites us to fully immerse in the notion that yoga practice will support the conscious recognition and discerning choices necessary to transform patterns that no longer serve us in our body, in our nervous system, in our affect and energy, in our emotionality, in our thoughts and cognitions, opinions and beliefs, in our actions and behaviors, and in our relationships.

In other words, the path to thriving, healing, and freedom from suffering draws heavily on the strategies and practices inherent in the eight limbs of yoga. Once the context has been understood (biopsychosociocultural factors and kosha development), contributing factors (the four Ps) to suffering have been clarified, and goals for change have been set, an action plan for healing and thriving emerges. This action plan might be an intentional collaboration between student and teacher or between clinician and client. It is tailored to individual needs and utilizes the many strategies yoga – as a healing art and science – has to offer via its eight limbs. The action plan, especially in mental healthcare settings, includes not just planning for the yoga interventions to be implemented with the yoga teacher or therapist, but also includes appropriate referrals and collaborations with other healthcare professionals to assure that the yoga teacher or clinician remains within a professional Scope of Practice and Code of Ethics. The action plan is directed toward all koshas (i.e., is holistic) and utilizes all eight limbs of yoga (i.e., is integrated). It often utilizes the very suffering we experience as a springboard for health, healing, and the creation of resilience and capability.

- Limb 1 – **Yama** = Life Choices for Ethical Living
- Limb 2 – **Niyama** = Life Choices for Purposeful Living
- Limb 3 – **Asana** = Physical Postures (‘taking a seat’)
- Limb 4 – **Pranayama** = Breathing exercises (‘freeing the breath’)
- Limb 5 – **Pratyahara** = Drawing inward (‘guarding the senses’)
- Limb 6 – **Dharana** = Concentration and attention
- Limb 7 – **Dhyana** = Meditation and awareness
- Limb 8 – **Samadhi** = Absorption (‘awakening to a new level of consciousness’)

Each limb of yoga has specific contributions that it can make toward the healing journey. Limbs 1 and 2 are particularly helpful to setting the stage for the work – allowing us to create relationships and spaces (or environments) that optimize the possibility of safety and collaboration. They also remind each and every one of us to base our life and healing in a solid foundation of ethics and lifestyle commitments (e.g., quietude and simplicity). Limb 3 directs client and clinician or student and teacher toward working with the body, with somatic awareness, and with sensing into our physical being. Limb 4 invites us to move into a conscious relationship with our vitality and energy. Limbs 5 to 7 invite work with mind and emotions to transcend unhelpful thought patterns and to transform beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. The contributions to healing and wellbeing of each limb are explored in the next section of this manual. The following table provides an overview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limb</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Therapeutic Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yama</strong></td>
<td>Life choices for ethical living</td>
<td>• creating safety in the therapeutic relationship and environment</td>
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<td>• inviting self-compassion</td>
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<td>• committing to ethical and empathic intentions, speech, thoughts, and actions</td>
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<td><strong>Niyama</strong></td>
<td>Life choices for purposeful living</td>
<td>• values clarification</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• developing motivation for change</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• developing discipline and commitment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• setting intentions and finding purpose</td>
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<td><strong>Asana</strong></td>
<td>Physical postures (‘taking a seat’)</td>
<td>• attunement (e.g., body scan) and mindful movement practices to invite somatic and somatosensory awareness</td>
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<td>• physical practices for strength, mobility, and/or stability</td>
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<td>• asana that are balanced and balancing</td>
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<td>• asana that revitalize, tonify, and energize</td>
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<td>• asana that calm, ground, and bring peace or calm</td>
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<td>• practices that invite recognition of physical samskaras</td>
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<td>• physical rasayanas – e.g., healthful nutrition, mindful eating, proper hydration, physical activity in nature (hiking, swimming), dancing, referral to medical care</td>
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<td><strong>Pranayama</strong></td>
<td>Breathing exercises (‘freeing the breath’)</td>
<td>• breath observation and mindfulness practices to invite affective and vital awareness</td>
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<td>• optimal functional breathing practices</td>
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<td>• balancing or stabilizing breathing practices</td>
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<td>• vitalizing or uplifting breathing practices</td>
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<td>• calming or grounding breathing practices</td>
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<td>• practices to nourish vitality (e.g., restorative practices)</td>
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<td>• practices that invite recognition of breath, arousal or affect-related samskaras</td>
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<td>• energetic rasayanas – e.g., sleep hygiene, rest and recuperation, music, chanting or singing, referral to mental healthcare</td>
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<td><strong>Pratyahara</strong></td>
<td>Drawing inward (‘guarding the senses’)</td>
<td>• practices to cultivate awareness of mind states and emotional predispositions (e.g., guided imagery)</td>
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<td>• practices that reduce sensory stimulation (e.g., breaks from watching news; creating a quiet and calm environment, decluttering the home)</td>
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<td><strong>Dharana</strong></td>
<td>Concentration and attention</td>
<td>• practices to cultivate awareness of mental and emotional samskaras</td>
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<td>• practices that explore action and relationship patterns</td>
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<td>• practices that cultivate mental resilience and enhance coping</td>
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<td>• practices for working with emotional, behavioral, and relational reactivity</td>
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<td>• mental and emotional rasayanas – e.g., journaling, puzzles for cognitive flexibility, changing up routines like taking a different route to work, time in nature, referral to talk psychotherapy</td>
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<td><strong>Dhyana</strong></td>
<td>Meditation and awareness</td>
<td>• cultivation of compassion, lovingkindness, and joy (e.g., maitri meditation)</td>
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<td>• practices for the cultivation of wisdom and insight (e.g., journaling)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• practices that invite taking responsibility for own and others’ health, resilience, and thriving (e.g., random acts of kindness)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Samadhi</strong></td>
<td>Awakening to joy and connection</td>
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Healing and Thriving with the Yamas and Niyamas

Limbs One and Two are well conceptualized as the lifestyle limbs of yoga. The practices in these two limbs guide the life choices we make every moment of every day. The principles and practices contained in these two limbs of yoga are considered foundational to all others. They require commitment, ongoing mindfulness, and daily practice. They are the limbs that ground us in community and ethical ways of being, ensuring that as adults we nourish our communities and ourselves with clarity, altruism, and joy. It is through these two limbs that we establish human communities of collaboration that create the biopsychosociocultural backdrop of our lives. They reflect our collective and individual values and ground us in a way of being with one another that has the potential for creating safety, connection, opportunity for growth and development, at the individual and collective level.

Limbs 1 and 2 offer pathways toward change and healing mind and emotions that are applied in the biopsychosociocultural context of student and teacher. They honor the biopsychosociocultural experiences of the student by taking them into account in all cuing and applications of the others limbs, as well as in understanding students’ or clients’ unique presentations of suffering. The first two limbs can honor the biopsychosociocultural context of the teacher by helping the teacher or clinician create relationships and environments that maximize the opportunities for students to move into experiences of feeling heard, supported, and safe.

Through the first two limbs, teachers can help students create a healing context that invites purpose, engaged action, and motivation for change. Firstly, this happens through creating a biopsychosociocultural context and experience in the yoga or therapy room that incorporates environmental cues of safety; a commitment to teacher qualities and traits that invite, honor, and respect autonomy, agency, and empowerment of students; prioritization of creating a practice that is accessible, invites diversity, and honors differences; and clear cultivation of intentions and commitment to the healing journey (especially through the kriya yoga principles of tapas, svadhyaya, and ishvara pranidhana). Secondly, Limbs 1 and 2 can support healing by helping students and clients to explore how they themselves can find ethical grounding and a committed yogic lifestyle – both of which will ultimately help the individual to find ways to contribute to their biopsychosociocultural context in thoughtful and compassionate ways.

Quick Review Limb 1: Yamas

**Limb 1, Life Choices for Ethical Living** is a set of aspirations that encourage us to engage in values clarification that guides our moment-to-moment choices in thought, speech, actions, and relationships. This limb helps us with decision-making about how to balance the ethical aspirations with one another and within our greater biopsychosociocultural context, weighting in each moment how values and context interact and which principle(s) may need to be prioritized.

**Life Choices of Ethical Living**, as a set of aspirations, incorporates practices of first-person ethics that invite choices based on discernment and mindfulness to result in values-based and justice-oriented thought, speech, and action. This limb of yoga contains five central aspirations (or principles), each of which has clear and definite applications in day-to-day life for our many layers of the self. Each principle applies to each kosha – our body, emotions, mind, and wisdom as applied in relationships and communities. Each aspiration affects our capacity to access joy and a sense of being part of a greater meaningful whole. Each principle reminds us of the interconnectedness of all things – that what we send into the world ripples through everything. Each aspiration underscores the need for each one of us to be ethically and socially responsible and to make choices that cultivate conscious, loving, and compassionate communities. The various ethical aspirations interdepend and are always applied contextually and interactively. They are applied intrapersonally and interpersonally and can help create balance and integration within ourselves as well as in our relationships.
It should be noted that this limb outlines a set of aspirational first-person ethics principles. They are neither prescriptions nor proscriptions – they are a life-long practice of refinement and growth. The emphasis on the word “aspirational” means that this limb offers us guidelines for ethnical living to which we aspire and that we know we will fail to heed … Yes, you read that correctly. We know that no matter how hard we will try to follow these guidelines, we will not always do so. There will be moments of failure – and that is perfectly fine. We are human and we are not infallible. The best we can do is to set an intention to do our best to bring these principles into our relationship with ourselves and with others.

Another important note about these principles that will guide our ethics and values is that they interact with each other. As you read their definitions below, you will realize that sometimes these practices and principles may lead us in different directions – following one, may result in compromising another. When we encounter such situations, we make conscious choices about which principle to prioritize. For example, if you are struggling with telling someone the truth versus being kind and non-violent, which way will you go? Of course, there is no single answer to this conundrum. Each individual occasion may require a different answer to this question. So, it is important to realize that yogic ethics are not a simple prescription for how to behave. Instead, they are a way of inviting conscious inquiry about how to live our life ethically in each moment. They are a way of teaching us how to weigh the consequences of each intention, thought, decision, action, and relationship. Only once we have weighed the consequences, can we make a fully informed, optimal choice for any given moment in a manner that strengthens relationships and engages communities. We must not misunderstand this considered choice-making as a way to give us permission to let ethics fall to the wayside. That is not at all what weighing these principles suggests. It simply means that when we prioritize one principle over another, we do so consciously and with full willingness to bear the consequences.

The Five Aspirations

- **Nonharming (ahimsa)** – Following the principles of nonviolence and **peacefulness** toward self, other, and everything, this aspirational ethical guideline invites us to live in a manner that seeks not to cause deliberate pain or harm. It is behaviorally expressed as kindness and compassion toward ourselves – in all koshas – and toward others. It is behaviorally expressed as being kind and peaceful in our intentions, thoughts, actions, and relationships. Ahimsa truly does start with our intentions (though it does not end there) – violent intentions lead to harm even if we try to suppress violent action or aggressive speech. If we start from a place of negativity, hostility, or anger, we will likely do harm to ourselves and ultimately to our communities. Even challenging situations will unfold more auspiciously if we can approach them from a place of peaceful intention, a place of genuine and authentic desire of nonviolence for all involved. Ahimsa means choosing wise actions that generate and maintain peaceful interactions, relationships (inner and outer), communities, and systems. Collectively, ahimsa relates to having compassion, caring, and lovingkindness for everyone equally. This means that we support equal human rights and equal access to collective services and goods that support health, wellbeing, food and shelter, and opportunity. Nonharming extends beyond sentient beings to include nonviolence to nature, the world, the universe. Nonviolence is balanced with the other aspirations and always needs to be viewed contextually.

Yoga Sutra 2.35

Ahimsa pratishthayam tat vaira-tyagah

When we are firmly grounded in nonharming, those we come in contact with naturally lose any feelings of hostility.

→ Ahimsa begets peace

- **Truthfulness (satya)** – Following the principle of honesty with oneself and in all relationships and befitting to the context creates **authenticity** and integrity in day-to-day life. This aspirational ethic invites us to live
in a manner that is true to our real and ideal self. It is behaviorally expressed as truthfulness, non-defensiveness (i.e., defenselessness), and all-revealing openness with ourselves – in all koshas – and with others. Honesty also includes moving into relationship with the entirety of our Self and consciousness, as expressed in present and in the past. It means opening our heart to our shadow side and meeting ourselves with truthfulness – the good, the bad, the ugly. Authenticity requires us to move into an open relationship with ourselves where we hold nothing back – no matter how unpleasant or difficult. Satya is exercised in balance with the other ethical aspirations and always contextualized may be truthful and safe in one context may not be non-harmful in another – either to oneself or to another person. While your truth is not relative, it may at time not be safe to express it. Balancing truth with a practice of peacefulness will support discernment of how to apply these aspirations in balance with one another. Applied collectively, satya means that we must be truthful about all human behaviors – past, present, and future – and must make reparations for abuses of the past, sins in the present, and harmful intentions for the future. Satya at the collective level may mean facing up to own our personal and collective contributions to societal harm such as individual, collective, institutions, and systemic racism, sexism, agism, genderism, and more. It means facing abuses as perpetrated through colonialism, war, genocide, slaughter, theft, and imperialism.

Yoga Sutra 2.36
satya pratisthayam kriya phala ashrayatvam
As we are firmly grounded in truthfulness, our actions will naturally accrue positive results.

→ Satya cultivates a natural flow of goodness

• **Non-stealing** (asteya) – Following the principle of not taking what is not freely offered, this aspirational ethical guideline invites us to embrace a sense of **abundance**, generosity, and reciprocity that eliminates the desires to take or steal from others or to have more than others. It is behaviorally expressed as appreciating abundance, cultivating contentment, and joyfully recognizing what we already have. It is behaviorally expressed as only taking what is ours to take from ourselves and from others – in all koshas – and in relationship with others. Of course, this aspiration has to be balanced with the other aspirational ethics. If harm may arise from not taking something that is needed, though perhaps not freely offered, need may outweigh this aspiration. Not everyone has equal access to abundance – thus, nonstealing may not be judged from the outside but needs to be understood from within the biopsychosociocultural context in which it occurs. Collectively, asteya means creating equal access to resources of all types. It also means making reparations and restitution for past misappropriation, theft, and imperialist occupations of lands and resources.

Yoga Sutra 2.37
Asteya pratisthayam sarva ratna upasthanam
When we are grounded in non-stealing,

→ Asteya brings abundance

• **Balance or Harmony** (brahmacharya) – Following the principle of wise use of personal life energy, this aspirational ethical guideline invites us to be neither indulgent nor excessively restrictive when it comes to habits and desires. It is behaviorally expressed as **preserving vitality or energy** for what is important in life so that we can honor the true needs of ourselves – in all koshas – and the true needs of others. It is behaviorally expressed as not overdoing, overcommitting, overworking, oversleeping, overplaying, overtexting, overeating – you get the idea! This aspiration interfaces with the other aspirations. Overindulgence may well also create harm; it may also be a sign of not living our truth – trying to hide some aspect of our existence behind a veil of excess. Balance or harmonizing our desires is also an
aspiration that is firmly grounded in the context in which it arises. What may be considered moderate or balanced in one circumstance may be excessive in another situation or ascetic in yet another context. Staying attuned to truthfulness and nonharming may help with discerning what defines balance or harmony. Collectively brahmacharya relates to the preservation of collective resources, that is to the protection of the earth for all future generations. It means stopping the exploitation of the planet and institutionalizing moderate use of precious earth resources, abandoning the plundering of the planet (which will also end the stealing of resource from future generations and other beings).

\[
\text{Yoga Sutra 2:38}
\]

Brahmacharya pratisthayam virya labhah
When we are grounded in harmony and energetic balance,
we attain vitality, strength, courage, and vigor.
→ Brahmacharya balances vital energy

- **Non-possessiveness** (aparigraha) – Following the principle of not being greedy about possessions, relationships, actions, and other aspects of life, this aspirational ethical guideline invites us to mindfully cultivate gratitude for what life has already provided and to thoughtfully relinquish or releasing grasping, desire, and jealousy. It is behaviorally expressed as **generosity** toward ourselves – in all koshas – and toward others. It is behaviorally expressed by resisting the cultivation of jealousy in relationships, by resisting the urge to hoard possessions, by resisting the need to do, have, want, need … more and more and more. Non-possessiveness is situated in the biopsychosociocultural context of the individual and may be hard to judge from the outside looking in. Balancing it with harmonizing our desires, truthfulness, non-stealing, and non-harming may bring some clarity to this aspiration and how to define it functionally. Collectively aparigraha means setting up socioeconomic and sociopolitical systems that ensure the sharing resources and power, that do not hoard or centralize access to wealth, wellbeing, health, education, employment, and other human rights among certain classes or castes of humans. It even means sharing with all beings on the planet and perhaps even more importantly preserving the plant for future generations.

\[
\text{Yoga Sutra 2:39}
\]

Aparigraha sthairye janma kathanta sambodhah
When we are stable in non-possessiveness and steady in non-grasping, we rest in the knowledge of a greater reality.
→ Aparigraha nurtures generosity

**Quick Review of Limb 2: Niyamas**

**Limb 2, Life Choices for Purposeful Living**, is a discipline-focused practice of yoga that encourages us to engage in insightful and clear goal-setting and purposeful action. Discipline, as embraced in the commitments of Limb Two, helps us create a cohesive change-embracing motivational set that inspires our life plans and trajectories. These principles influence the direction of our personal development in all koshas, including the capacity to access joy and bliss. They move us, ultimately, toward making lasting contributions to the world – hopefully in a manner that adds to the greater good. These principles in their fullest essence inspire us to engage in practices or lifestyles of mindful self-discipline, conscientiousness, curiosity, and intentionality that create a meaningful and purposeful life.

The mindful self-discipline and intentionality of this limb is embedded in the greater biopsychosociocultural context of our life, contributing to it as well as being influenced by it. When we create a meaningful and purposeful life, we do so not solely or simply for ourselves. Instead, we do so to create meaning and purpose for
our entire community. Not surprisingly, the very essence of this limb of yoga is engaged action (which consists of the final three of the five central commitments). These commitments lead us to a conscious and discerning practice of self-care from a place of self-love and altruism to transcend self-hate and aversion. When we engage in these practices we tend to our needs and vulnerabilities; we do not beat ourselves up for our failings. Persistence in practice is key and supports healing and meaning for each of us individual as well as for all of us collectively. Our biopsychosociocultural context helps define the content of our commitments and, in turn, is influenced by what we return to this interpersonal matrix.

An important note about the discipline cultivated by Limb Two is that it is a balanced discipline. These principles of discipline are deeply grounded in the ideal of finding the middle way in all we do, especially if we are “householders” – humans who live in the real world, not in a cave or on a mountain top. The middle way balances effort with ease, softness with strength, firmness with freedom, commitment with contentment, intent with openness, the personal with the collective …. The list could go on. For each principle, there are two extreme poles of its expression that we seek to avoid; instead, we seek to find an expression of the principle that is balanced, realistic, self-compassionate, altruistic, adapted to our biopsychosociocultural context, and appropriate for the real world and the real relationships in which we are embedded.

The Five Commitments

- **Purity (saucha)** – This principle embraces simplicity, cleanliness, positive energy, and authenticity in action, speech, thought, and relationships. As a disciplined practice, it invites us to find balance in consumption, clutter, toxins, distractions, and overload in all aspects of life, including food, drink, relationships, body care, media use, work, and play. It encourages us neither to seek excessive fastidiousness (preoccupation with germs, compulsive cleaning) nor excessive sloppiness. Instead, we seek purity that is easeful, yet boundaried and committed. When we find balanced simplicity and purity, we find peace and ease.

  - *Yoga Sutra 2.40*
  - Sauchat sva-anga jugupsa paraíh asamsargah
  - Purity of mind (including emotion) and body brings us closer to the deeper truth within.
  - → *Saucha invites the natural flow of goodness*

- **Contentment (santosha)** – This principle embraces meeting every moment from a peaceful center that allows for discernment about how to take calm and appropriate action. As a disciplined practice, it invites us to accept life fully and calmly and to respond to the world rather than be reactive to it. It encourages us to be neither hyper-excitable nor indifferent. This is an important understanding: Contentment (or equanimity) neither means not caring nor approving of horrible things in life. It simply means recognizing the circumstances and not becoming reactive! It means taking a step back; taking a moment to become calm and centered and then move forward from this place of clarity. Contentment thus defined lets us take principled action – calmly and collectedly – when this is indicated and it lets us step back and watch and observe attentively when we are not sure how to respond quite yet. It helps us patiently weigh the options and move forward with discernment and conviction when we are ready.

  - *Yoga Sutra 2.42*
  - Santosha anuttamah sukha labhah
  - An attitude of contentment brings us close to unmatched happiness, mental comfort, joy, and satisfaction.
  - → *Santosha leads to true happiness*
• **Discipline** (tapas) – This principle embraces leading an impassioned life of determined effort, accountability, and engaged practice. As a disciplined, yet nurturing, practice, it leads to the transformation of the self in all its layers, as well as of others and our environment. It does so by inviting a commitment to disciplined and conscious – not habitual or disengaged – choices in every moment. This principle encourages us neither to seek asceticism that is removed from the real world (i.e., we don’t have to live in a cave or on a mountain top) nor does it condone sloth or laziness. It means that we persevere in our practice, we apply ourselves with passion, we stick to what we do and finish what we start, and we make our best and ongoing effort to engage with ourselves and the world. We engage in this discipline with truth, nonharming, balance, non-stealing, and non-possessiveness (sound familiar?). That is, we are disciplined in a manner that reliably and consistently reflects our commitment to living our life ethically and with consideration for a greater purpose. We are disciplined in a manner that supports our wellbeing, our evolution and growth, and our compassion for ourselves and others. We are disciplined in a manner that reflects our recognition that our actions reverberate into our biopsychosociocultural context, affect others, and have the potential to change our world.

![Yoga Sutra 2.43](image)

Kaya indriya siddhi ashuddhi kshayat tapasah

Training the senses with discipline or conscientiousness burns away impurities in and enhances the functions of mind and body.

→ Tapas transforms inauspicious habits and patterns

“When mind and body have been corrupted by pleasure, nothing seems bearable – not because the things which you suffer are hard, but because you are soft” Seneca

“When experiencing too much comfort will reduce your capacity for experiencing pleasure” William Irving (2019, p. 149) -- on toughness training as prescribed by the ancient Stoics

**Related News from the Research World**

A large sample of 2,359 participants in generally good health at time of baseline assessment were followed for almost five decades to look at personality predictors of longevity. Findings lend terrific support to the healthfulness of a yoga practice. Specifically, the researchers found that individuals who were assessed to be conscientious, emotionally stable, and active lived significantly longer than their age peers.


• **Self-reflection** (svadhyaya) – This principle embraces exploring personal reactions, habits, motivations, and intentions to guide us toward self-knowledge, insight, and growth. As a disciplined practice of self-inquiry, it invites us to open up to new learning from outer sources (like books and teachers) and inner wisdom through quiet introspection. This principle does not endorse self-absorbed, narcissistic self-exploration at the expense of pondering other matters. However, it also does not condone never looking at our own motivations, intentions, needs, and inner life. When practiced in a balanced manner, this principle guides us to deeper self-understanding in the context of greater wisdom and guidance from the outside. When we arrive at this greater inner wisdom, we become clearer about our intentions and impacts on others and on the world as a whole. We begin to see our place in the world with the greater clarity of taking responsibility for
a greater good, for improving the relationships and the interpersonal contexts in which we operate. We recognize the intentions for and consequences of our thoughts, speech, actions, and relationships.

Yoga Sutra 2.44

svadhyayat ishta devata samprayogah
Self-study and self-reflection bring us into contact and alignment with a deeper reality, with spirit.
→ Svadhyaya nurtures genuine spirituality

- **Devotion to a greater good** (ishvara pranidhana) – This principle embraces creating meaning and purpose for self and others through wise discernment. As a disciplined practice, it invites us to surrender ego-driven intentions and committing to positive altruistically-oriented intentions and actions. Devotion in this sense is neither to be confused with infatuation, unquestioning loyalty, or blind obedience – nor with disconnection or lack of caring for a greater good, a larger purpose, a bigger meaning. This principle invites informed, discerning devotion that will improve all our koshas as well as the world in which we live. We do not blindly follow a guru or preacher or other idol or icon; we explore their teachings and intentions and then make discerning choices about where to place our own devotion. This devotion is not blind – it is the epitome of clarity and commitment to a higher cause. It reflects all the other principles in this category, integrating them to create commitment that is wise, content, pure, disciplined, informed, and balanced.

Yoga Sutra 2.45

samadhi siddhih ishvara pranidhana
Through contacting our collective consciousness and devotion, we move into a state of deep connection and absorption.
→ Ishavara Pranidhana nurtures purpose and union

**Healing and Thriving with Asana or Form and Movement**

The physical practices of yoga support our physical development and refinement, our nervous system responses and reactivity, and our affective presence. They also reverberate into the mind and emotions, supporting awareness and wisdom based on enhanced understanding of the body and its expressions of our life experiences. The practice of asana aligns closely with the first two koshas: annamaya kosha, our physical body, and pranamaya koshas, our breath and affective or vital presence. It also continues to express the commitment to the first two limbs and therefore integrated ethics and lifestyle commitments into the physical practice. Asana in this sense always reflects a deeper commitment to an integrated practice that never abandons any of the other limbs of yoga.

In other words, asana as practiced in integrated holistic yoga is always embedded in the greater context of all eight limbs and the biopsychosociocultural circumstances of students and teachers or clients and clinicians. It is important for teachers to understand that they are not simply teaching students how to attain an outer form, but instead, that they are teaching students how to become wise practitioners who can make informed, empowered, and self-efficacious, knowledgeable personal choices about the practice of yoga. It invites awareness in all layers of self (or consciousness) and great attention to neuroception, interoception, proprioception, and exteroception. A wholesome yoga session includes not just instruction about how to move into and out of a pose, but empowers students to listen to feedback from their body, breath, and mind and to respect this information with truthfulness and non-violence. Successful teaching is more focused on inner experience than
on attaining an outer shape or form. Teaching is focused more on inviting action and experimenting with movement than on embodying a pre-defined shape. This teaching focus invites agency and empowers students to discover their inner teacher. It invites the use of variations, props, and self-determination. It always is focused on the inner experience rather than the outer expression of form and movement.

The most common asana practices are form and movement (see box). The important thing that differentiates embodied movement as a yogic practice is the application and conscious experience of the principles outlined above. We can be in a posture simply as exercise; or we can be in a posture experiencing our energetic flow, sensing our emotional reactions, and understanding our body from the inside. We can be in a posture simply to get strong muscles; or we can recognize whether we feel safe, balanced, and peaceful, or whether we are connected to a deeper experience of the shape that reaches beyond its physical manifestation.

Typical Asana Practices

**Form** – posture practices include, but are not limited to:
- arm standing shapes (e.g., plank, downward facing dog, table top)
- backbends (e.g., cobra, camel, bridge, wheel)
- balances (e.g., tree, eagle, crow)
- forward folds (e.g., downward dog, head-to-knee, chair)
- inversions (e.g., headstand, handstand, elbow balance)
- restorative shapes (e.g., relaxation pose, meadow brook, legs-up-the-wall)
- seated shapes (e.g., staff, hero, lotus, easy seat)
- standing shapes (e.g., mountain, warrior, triangle, side angle)
- twists (e.g., lord of the fishes, supine legs around the belly)

**Movement** – movement practices include, but are not limited to:
- sun and moon salutations
- yoga kriyas
- vinyasa

The applications of asana in the context of mental health settings and for the cultivation of emotional health and resilience are numerous. Asana practices can support the development of self-awareness, enhancement of self-regulation, and cultivation of physical and energetic/affective resilience.

**Quick Review of Limb 3: Asana**

The physical practice of yoga, called *Asana* in Sanskrit, is what most people in the Western world identify as yoga. In the holistic or integrated study of yoga, posture and movement practices represent but one of eight limbs. Nevertheless, the third limb of yoga is essential due to its power to reconnect us to our bodies and to prepare our bodies for the inner practices of yoga (such as meditation, concentration, and sense withdrawal, covered in part 4 of the eight-limbs series). Through mindfulness-based embodied movement, we hone insight into the physical and emotional layers of self. We create physical, emotional, and mental health and fitness, including balance, strength, stamina, flexibility, coordination, and power. Even more importantly, we come to understand physical habits, challenges, and strength; we get (back) in touch with our bodies. We learn about emotional reactions, needs, and preferences; we (re)attune to our inner world at a level that is often unconscious and thus unconsidered in day-to-day life.

Modern science has echoed the importance of embodied movement. All of our experiences and perceptions enter through the body. How we experience ourselves begins and ends with our physical experience of the world – be it our experience of pain, heat, fear, love, embarrassment, joy, or pleasure. Our brain is not the only
part of us that responds, thinks, interprets, and understands. We produce neurotransmitters in our gut; we have neurons in our hearts. Trauma embeds itself in our tissues where it can live – ignored – for years, affecting reactions and comfort levels in our bodies, emotions, and relationships. Injuries or illnesses may heal, yet their reverberations stay encoded in the body forever unless directly addressed. Mindful, consciously embodied movements – and breath – bring us back into the body. They reconnect us, reground us, and recomplete us.

For physical practices to reach their most powerful impact, a few yogic principles apply that awaken our capacity to feel our bodies and to understand our physical sensations and emotional perceptions or reactions. Physical practice relinks us to neuroception, proprioception, interoception, even exteroception. Neuroception is our (often unconscious) interpretation of the world in which we move as safe, dangerous, or threatening. Proprioception is our ability to understand where our bodies are in space. Interoception is the capacity to feel our bodies from the inside out – being aware of the importance of inner sensation rather than focusing on outer forms. Exteroception is our sensory experience of the outside world, the environment in which we operate. Limb Three of yoga is a powerful practice that awakens and brings to consciousness all of these ways of perceiving and experiencing ourselves.

**A Few Central Principles**

- **Balance of effort and ease** – This most central traditional principle of yoga posture practice asserts the need to combine effort and ease in all physical practices. This combination of easeful steadiness allows for restful awareness combined with optimal exertion of effort, such as finding strength within flexibility and flexibility within strength, maintaining strength without gripping, finding softness without lapsing onto lethargy, find balance in the middle between extremes, being firm and strong in the core and free and soft at the edges, or finding union in opposing forces.

- **Synergy** – This principle embraces integrated form and movement practices that link to all other limbs of yoga, clarifying that physical practices are not an end in and of themselves, meaning that asana practices is not just about achieving physical shapes and fitness. Limb Three is a component within a greater yogic lifestyle commitment to all eight limbs of yoga. It is always connected to all other limbs, be they ethical and disciplined lifestyle choices or concentrated and meditative inner work.

- **Completeness** – This principle suggests that every form or movement needs grounding, expansion, and stability in all layers of self. Feeling grounded comes from establishing a firm foundation physically, energetically, and mentally. Feeling stable comes from establishing and attending to the core, or center, of each pose physically, energetically, and mentally. Feeling expansive comes from a clear line of energy that supports movement and invites radiance physically, energetically, and mentally.

> Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.  
> If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed.  
> Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding.  
> The two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as birdwings.  
> *Rumi*
Yoga Sutras about Asana 2.46 to 2.48

2.46: sthira sukham asanam
The two essential characteristics of the sitting posture for meditation are that it must be: steady, stable, and motionless as well as comfortable and filled with ease.

2.47: prayatna shaithilya ananta samapattibhyam
Steady and comfortable posture comes through two means: the loosening of tension or effort to sit in the posture and allowing attention to become spacious (merging with the infinite).

2.48: tatah dvandva anabhighata
From the attainment of a perfected posture, there arises an unassailable, unimpeded freedom from suffering due to the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold, good and bad, or pain and pleasure.

• Integration and attuned (or mindful) applications of form and movement – This principle invites mindful attention to healthful alignment, awareness of the body in space (proprioception), awareness of how the physical body collaborates with breath and mind (interoception and neuroception), and awareness of the body’s response to environmental stimuli (exteroception). It creates coordination of breath with movement into, out of, and within each posture. It creates a beautiful energetic flow through well-sequenced movement through multiple postures with careful attention to the energetic state of the body.

Don’t try too hard… and don’t give up…

Healing and Thriving with Pranayama or Freeing the Breath

Pranayama is often presented as breath control. In integrated holistic yoga the emphasis, however, is more on freeing and balancing the breath. This is not contradictory with the Yoga Sutras. In fact, a tracing of the linguistic roots of pranayama suggests that both freeing and controlling the breath are valid interpretations of the practice of pranayama. Specifically, the word pran(a)yama can be traced to the following roots:

- prana=breath or life force depending on context
- yama=control or restraint
- a in front of a Sanskrit word=the opposite of the word

This view of the linguistic roots of the word leads to a definition of pran(a)yama as the freedom of the breath (cf., Maki, 2013), a variation on other translations, which interpret the word to mean breath control (interpreting the a in the middle as being the ending of the prana as opposed to contributing its own meaning). We cannot know for certain if the ancients preferred one meaning over the other or if perhaps both meanings are implied; however, in the lineage of integrated holistic yoga, both meanings are embraced and sequenced by starting with freeing the breath in beginning practices and adding control of the breath in advanced practices.
Breath work, almost by definition, is a practice of stress management, self-regulation, and resilience training. If we can affect the rate, the rhythm, and cadence of the breath, we can affect emotions, mind, sleep, and stress perception. We can shift out of and into the various states of the autonomic nervous system (e.g., SNS, VVC, DVC) by how we choose to breath. This reality makes pranayama a superb practice to support mental health and emotional resilience.

**Quick Review of Limb 4: Pranayama**

The biofeedback practice of yogic breathing, called Pranayama in Sanskrit, addresses a more subtle physical energy than movement as practiced in Limb Three. Breathing practices, whether breath observation, breathing awareness, or advanced breath control, invites us to become mindful and conscious of links between the breath and our emotional and physical wellbeing or experience. Yogic breathing practices help us become aware of physiological arousal and emotional reactivity; they invite us to gain an understanding of our autonomic nervous system responses. They connect us to inner sensations, recruit the parasympathetic nervous system, reduce allostatic load, and improve vagal tone. They are beautiful and inspiring ways to cultivate deeper awareness of breath that supports mindfulness, balance, and efficiency in body, breath, mind, and relationships.

Breathing practices invite awareness of how and where we breathe into the body. They help us understand that how we breathe affects and reflects our emotional and physical wellness. Breath is often an obvious indicator whether the breathing individual is at ease, in pain, tense, sad, anxious, worried, panicked, angry, and so on. Breath manifests in different ways depending on what is happening in the body. Pain may cause a shallow breath that in turn may worsen the pain. Anxiety may move the breath high into the chest – away from abdominal breathing – which in turn is likely to increase anxiety into panic. Ease moves the chest into the belly inviting a spiral of increasing calm and wellness.

Modern science has revealed that breath and physical or emotional experience are reciprocal. Just as our physical or emotional state can be read in the breath, our breath can be altered to change our sense of wellbeing. If we learn how to breathe deeply into the belly when we are anxious, we can nudge ourselves toward a greater sense of ease. If we can learn to take a long and deep inhalation and exhalation when we feel challenged, we can transform angry reactivity into thoughtful responsiveness.

Central principles for Limb Four explore the nature of breath as it manifests physiologically, anatomically, and energetically. The breath is explored from a multitude of dimensions, including the considerations related to optimal functional breathing, breath observation (including attending to timing, volume, texture, location, and resting pauses), and breath regulation (as grounded in the gunas and polyvagal theory attending to balancing, calming and vitalizing breathing).

Central practices within Limb Four start with breath observation and breath awareness (including mindful natural breathing). These are safe and readily accessible practices that, once taught, can be practiced alone in any situation or circumstance. Once observation and awareness skills are established, breathing practices can expand to include breath regulation. Breath regulation can proceed informed by the gunas or polyvagal neural platforms of students or clients and can thus be individually tailored to be optimally therapeutic.

**Breath Observation and Awareness**

- **Breath timing** – To create breath awareness, attention is given to the number of breaths per minutes and the balance between inhalation and exhalation. Breath control includes lengthening (slowing down) or shortening (speeding up) the inhalation, exhalation, or both, which in turn may affect physical or emotional states.
• **Breath volume** – In observing the breath, awareness is expanded about how much air is moved in and out of the body with each breath. Breath control may purposefully change volume to influence physical or emotional states.

• **Breath texture** – Breath awareness is cultivated to recognize the texture or smoothness of breath, noticing if it is choppy, interrupted, soft, smooth, or gentle. Breath control may be used to consciously smooth a choppy breath, reduce hitches and glitches in the breath, and move toward a smooth flow of air.

• **Breath space or location** – Attention is given to where breath is sensed and directed in the body, with awareness whether breath is balanced between the right and left side of the body, between front and back, and across the lower, middle, and upper thirds of the torso. Breath control may direct breath into certain body parts, sometimes via changing physical position.

• **Breath resting pauses** – Attention is given to exploring the top (between inhalation and exhalation) and bottom (between exhalation and inhalation) of the breath, creating increasing gaps or rest breaks. Rest breaks at top and bottom may be calibrated to calm the nervous system and mind.

**Optimally Functional Breathing**

• **Nasal**: silent breathing in and out through the nose at all times (including at night and during exertion; mouth breathing in emergencies only)

• **Biasing the Diaphragm**: breathing is diaphragmatic in the sense that the primary movements notable are abdominal and low rib basket movement; upper chest, shoulder, and neck muscles stay relaxed and passive (unless purposefully or intentionally engaged)

• **Slow**: 5.5 to 10 breaths per minutes

• **Light and subtle**: inhalation is neither shallow nor forced but tailored to move just the right amount of air given respiratory rate → leading to a normal minute volume of 5-6 liters per breath; exhalation is easeful and quiet

• **Rhythmic**: breath oscillates with a soft texture and rhythm that is neither rigid nor too relaxed – there is a balance of ease and effort; resting pauses at the top and bottom of breath may be notable but their length is adapted to the individual – there is no gasping or grasping

Optimal functional breathing optimizes all physiological systems in the body, including the respiratory, cardiovascular, immune, endocrine, and digestive systems. It invites autonomic balance with a bias toward a ventral vagal parasympathetic state and preparedness for activation of the sympathetic nervous system as needed. It maintains optimal O2 and CO2 levels in the blood and as such maintains the body’s pH balance and optimal tissue oxygenation, energy production, and cellular function, including in all organs, tissues, and the brain. It supports a calm state of mind, resilient emotionality, and well-functioning cognition with good concentration and memory. It supports movement of lymph, healthy dilation of smooth muscle, maintenance of posture and spinal stability, and much more.

**Virtuous cycle of functional breathing:**

Decreased minute ventilation: more efficient use of less air; fewer breaths per minute

Slow, light, rhythmic diaphragmatic breathing through the nose

Mild air hunger after emphasis on exhalation and soft suspension at bottom of breath

Increased CO2 tolerance in medulla and less air hunger over time
Breathing as Informed by Polyvagal Theory and the Gunas

- **Balancing breathing** is functional breathing that supports the stabilization of the autonomic nervous system, anatomy (biomechanically), physiology (biochemically), breath (energetically), and mind (mentally and emotionally). As a bottom-up process of enhanced and accurate self-awareness and top-down emotional self-regulation, it focuses on balanced and stable inhalations and exhalations, gentle breath retention, balanced speed and vigor of breath, awareness of breath location (including interoceptive awareness of nasal versus mouth and diaphragmatic versus chest breathing), attention to breath texture, and clarity about the four parts of the breath – inhalation, pause at the top, exhalation, and pause at the bottom. It invites a parasympathetic shift in the nervous system to a ventral vagal (or sattvic) way of being present.

- **Calming breathing**, as a bottom-up process of awareness and top-down process of nervous system down-regulation to access emotional and physical balance, focuses on the exhalation, decreased speed or vigor of breath, and combining breath and resting. It recalibrates a sympathetically aroused nervous system, down-regulates mood, energy, and physical activation, provides opportunity for exploring the kleshas and vrittis, and invites gentle curiosity, calming, and relaxation. It counteracts a rajasic breath that tends to be fast, panting, high in the chest, and through the mouth. It can also be used targetedly for a specific purpose, such as helping with inducing sleep.

- **Vitalizing breathing**, as a bottom-up process of awareness and top-down process up-regulation of the nervous system to access emotional and physical balance, focuses on the inhalation, increased speed or vigor of breath, and the combination of breath and movement. It recalibrates an immobilized or collapsed nervous system, up-regulates mood, energy, and physical vitality, provides opportunity for exploring kleshas and vrittis, and invites engagement, action, and initiative. It counteracts a tamasic breath that tends to be slowed, ineffective, high in the chest, and through the mouth.

Healing and Thriving with Interior Practices or Moving Inward

Patanjali’s yoga sutras’ definition of yoga is multifold. However, a central point about yoga’s essence is made in the second sutra which roughly translates as “Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind.” Patanjali suggests that if we can still the mind, we have found refuge in our true being and our practice is complete. He then basically chuckles (if you can chuckle in writing…) and lets us know that if we cannot just sit down and still the mind (and who can?), we need to follow a slightly longer path to enlightenment. Enter the eight limbs. The first four limbs are the outward practices of yoga; the final four limbs are the inward journey of yoga. The inner practices are what we have been preparing for and what we embark on – knowingly or unknowingly – as we practice yoga ethics, discipline, movement, and breath. The inner journey begins with drawing inward, then invites deep concentration and meditation, and finally leads us to a sense of connection and absorption in a greater community and purpose.

Quick Review of Limb 5: Pratyahara

The first inwardly-focused practice of yoga (called “pratyahara” in Sanskrit) sharpens self-awareness of automatic or habitual thoughts, speech, actions, and relational patterns. It prepares the mind for concentration and meditation by halting or consciously attuning us to the constant flow of sensory stimulation that leads to stimulus overload, poor concentration, and scattered attention. It is a practice of disconnecting from the simultaneous steady flow of sensory input through eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, and other sense receptors (e.g., touch, pain, temperature, texture). It is a practice of honing mindfulness of what is happening in each of our senses, including the inner sense of interoception, proprioception, and neuroception.
Pratyahara is an absolutely crucial step in the yoga journey toward stilling the fluctuations of the mind. The only way to begin to still the impact of our constantly emerging thoughts is to become aware that we have them. To do this, we have to cut through the noise of day-to-day life. How can we attend to what is on our mind, if we are distracted by the TV blaring all day? How can we attend to what is on our mind, if we keep fiddling with our phones or computers, allowing noise and distraction to enter into our life almost non-stop? How can we attend to what is on our mind, if we are walking through crowded streets, overwhelmed by sounds, sights, smells, and other sensory enticements?

The fifth limb of yoga encourages us to take a break from constant outer and inner distraction. It invites us to draw our senses inward – either by being fully captivated by one sensory experience at a time or by witnessing what is happening in the mind, without being distracted into sensory overload. Our outer practices have prepared us for this step – we have cultivated neuroception (understanding how we achieve a sense of safety and community), proprioception (understanding our body in the physical plane of being), interoception (gaining insight into how we feel physically, energetically, and emotionally from the inside out), and exteroception (having become aware of the constant stream of outer sensory stimulation).

Central principles within the fifth limb of yoga explore the nature of moving inward with intention. It is a crucial step toward deeper levels of calming the nervous system, reducing emotional reactivity, and resting in a ventral vagal space of safety and peace.

- **Working with sensory inputs, stimuli, and impressions** – This process starts with becoming more familiar with the way sensory information arrives in or is processed outside of our consciousness. All humans tend to have patterns in their sensory processing and preferences. Some sensory information is more accessible; some is partially, selectively, or even completely overlooked. Physical challenges (e.g., hearing or vision loss) and psychological processes can influence which senses are attuned to and which are attenuated, inaccessible, or ignored. Contextual factors can play a role as well, in that specific external circumstances may condition us to ignore particular inputs to support perceived needs for particular levels of performance (e.g., nurses’ bladder; tuning to the need for food when stressed at work). In other words, how we manage impressions may be context-dependent and situation-specific.

- **Working with abhyasa and vairagyam** – Pratyahara relies on the capacity to practice with the commitment and persistent effort of abhyasa as well as the non-attachment of vairagyam. It depends on our ability to note stimuli without becoming attached, averse, or afraid of them, in other words, without activating the kleshas. This is attunement to sensory information without attachment, without reactivity, with balance and ease. We simply note stimuli for what they are, without attributions, interpretations, biases, or reactivities. As the mind begins to quiet, life force is freed up to feed and replenish the koshas.

- **Working with the kleshas** – When practitioners’ attention is focused inward, the mind becomes known, affect and arousal patterns come to the forefront, and bodily sensation (including polyvagal states) are accessed. Sometimes this inward attention leads to stillness; sometimes it leads to greater awareness of inner unrest (or noise). This inner noise is often initiated by the kleshas that arise (as reactivity) in response to the sensory stimulation that enter the sense doors. As impressions arrive in our awareness, our brain begins to make predictions about how they will affect us in all our koshas. This can trigger the kleshas, our affective predilections, as well as being mediated by our gunas and polyvagal states. In turn, the gunas and kleshas flavor our subsequent mind stories (i.e., vrittis) and emotions. The impact of the kleshas is directly explored in pratyahara.

- **Enhancing awareness of habitual reactivity and its effects** – As we recognize our habits in response to sensory inputs, we also begin to appreciate the effects of these habits. We see how they affect our way of being in the world and in relationship with ourselves and others. We see the impacts on our capacity to...
cope, to access wellbeing, to maintain physical, emotional, and mental health. As we see the consequences of reactivity, we begin to hone our ability to transform habits and impulses into discernment and wise choice. Pratyahara is essential to yoga as a practice of growth and transformation, moving us beyond simply noticing into feeling empowered and inspired to create change within ourselves, our families, our communities, and our larger society. We move inward in service to the betterment of all.

Treat yourself gently, kindly, and honestly.

Quick Review of Limb 6: Dharana

Once we have cultivated the capacity to calm the influence of outer and inner distractions, we can begin to steady the mind through concentration, the sixth limb of yoga (called “dharana” in Sanskrit). This self-regulation practice of yoga integrates top-down and bottom-up processing to allow the mind to become honed and clear, like a still mountain lake.

Concentration is a practice of surrendering thought in exchange for deep inner, yet soft attention on a single point of focus to achieve gentle mental one-pointedness. Concentration helps us transcend mental states that are disturbing, upsetting, distracting, discouraging, lethargic, heavy, agitated, or restless. Through practiced awareness of our inner states, we receive input from within – sitting with sensations from our body or emotions (i.e., bottom-up input) without the need to react. Through being able to sit with inner signals without reacting, we cultivate the capacity to formulate deliberate responses and discerning choices, instead of reactions. We hone the capacity to delay our response to a stimulus, inviting wisdom, intuition, and the ability to use reasoning (i.e., top-down processing).

Central principles of the sixth limb help us move into clarity, focus, even luminosity. They invite us into a space of lucidity and concentration. They encourage attention, discernment, one-pointedness, and single-tasking.

- **Creating single-pointed focus and sustained attention** – The most central aspect of dharana is the creation of a single point of focus, the refinement of the mind to move it away from distraction, interruption, fragmentation, and dysregulation. This focus can be on an internal or external object or subject; this object or subject can be simple or complex, tangible or conceptual. It is an object or subject that holds interest to the practitioner to increase the chances that the focus can remain unwavering, steady, unfragmented, and stable. The mindfulness the practice engenders engages our attention – in its various forms – to draw us away from the default mode network.

- **Inviting concentrated and luminous mind states** – through concentration, we begin to realize that we neither have to fight nor flee nor obey our disorganized, distracted, confused, or lethargic mind states. Instead, we can choose simply to become aware of them, to notice what the mind is doing. In other words, we can remain attuned to our mind states through our attention practices and use them as an anchor to come back from fragmentation, distraction, or dullness. The mind states in and of themselves can become an anchor, an attentional focus that can propel us back into the present moment of soft attention and presence.

- **Disarming the default mode network and moving into wholeness** – Engaging and reengaging (however often is necessary) focused attention is an excellent way of disarming our default mode network (DMN) and releasing us from the perpetual planning and problem-solving of the executive control network (ECN) that keeps us stuck in past and future and that has the potential to move us into judgment, fragmentation, and negativity. The DMN and ECN continuously shift our attention and pull us out of the present moment. They are the networks that create suffering by never being fully satisfied, by being mired in habit and opinion, by being defined by wanting more and more and better and better. They are the reflection of vrittis flavored by gunas and kleshas – a mind divided, pre-occupied, and suffering. They are the networks of doing as opposed to being.
• **Working with the inner obstacles to practice** – This principle invites us to begin to deal with the inner obstacles that are under our immediate attentional ‘control’ – to which we have access. They are the obstacles that we can do something about immediately simply by becoming focused, attentive, and committed to the practice. The inner obstacles are, in other words, not a problem in and of themselves (unlike the outer obstacles of social injustice, oppression, racism, inequity, and so forth). The problems related to the inner obstacles come from us being distracted or drawn into judgment and habit by them – into doing rather than being. As we become distracted by doubt, by the stories our mind constantly spins for us, by wanting pleasure, by trying avoid things we do not like, we lose our focus – we distract ourselves from what is meaningful and derail from the path.

• **Working with non-attachment to an outcome** – Like pratyahara, dharana relies on the capacity to practice with the commitment and persistent effort as well as the non-attachment to an outcome. Concentration practices are free from striving, expectation, desire, fear, or ego. They are accomplished – as is true for all yogic practices – through balanced effort, not stressful striving or overdoing. They are free of attachment to a particular outcome. Freedom from attachment to an outcome allows for a relaxed and easeful, though committed and engaged practice. Concentration is best accomplished by flowing with the inputs from mind and body; neither holding on too tight, nor holding on too loosely. It is a constant, yet softly-focused attentive practice to increase attunement to or inner mind states and our mind’s tendency to shun concentration by wandering into distraction and dysregulation. It is self-compassionate and kind, not self-judgmental and harsh

**Quick Review of Limb 7: Dhyana**

Meditation, the seventh limb of yoga (called “dhyana” in Sanskrit) is practice in which the skills of all prior limbs come to their full flowering. The prior limbs have built the platform upon which the meditator can rest – body, breath, and mind are prepared; intuition is honed. As a spaciousness practice, meditation helps us forge new neural pathways, encouraging neuroplasticity and increasing gray matter volume in certain parts of the brain. Meditation facilitates new learning and augments the number of synaptic pathways in the brain. It is a practice of achieving an effortless state of awareness that transcends even a single point of focus. Although is not the only yogic strategy to do so, it is the most effective of the yoga strategies in facilitating new learning and synaptic pathways in the brain.

Through preparation for sitting or reclining meditation, we are able to move into spacious awareness and deep concentration that transcends even a single point of focus. The body is at ease, the breath is calm, and the mind is tuned inward; good posture supports the body; rhythmic breathing supports the calming of emotions; the mind is still and no longer serves as the constant interpreter and evaluator of experience.

From a place of preparedness, we come to understand the central principles of this limb of yoga. Through their practice, meditation invites us into deep awareness of all layers of consciousness, compassion and lovingkindness, as well as insight and wisdom.

• **Cultivation of awareness** – Meditation re trains attention via cultivating meta-awareness. It is the ability to attend to our own attention; to track where our attention is landing in any given moment. Meta-awareness means mindfully, nonjudgmentally, compassionately catching ourselves doing what we are doing, feeling what we are feeling, thinking what we are thinking, acting how we are acting. Meta-awareness is a background awareness that allows us to be fully present for our life at all levels (or koshas): behaviorally, energetically, mentally, cognitively, emotionally, and relationally without getting swept away (or hijacked by our amygdala).
• **Cultivation of compassion, lovingkindness, and altruistic joy** – The inner practices in general and meditation in particular, along with the values expressed in the yamas and the commitments expressed in the niyamas, call on us to acknowledge and truly sense into our generosity, our kind-heartedness, our social connection (and dependence!), our profound grounding in and responsibility for community, our deep need to love and be loved, our complete dependence on other humans to live, thrive, grow, evolve, and be happy. The inner practices cultivate our interpersonal warmth, our positive emotions, and our recognition that all humans share the need for connection, seek happiness, and want to relinquish suffering.

• **Cultivation of insight** – The wisdom that arises from meditation is based in awareness and compassion and reflects clear knowing, a deep appreciation for our true nature, and a deep intimacy with our inner and outer world and the contributions of all of these factors to our day-to-day functioning.

• **Cultivating purpose** – The final principle of meditation is our engagement in skillful, auspicious action marked by altruism and service. Once awareness and compassionate insight have developed, the next logical step in our journey of self-realization and liberation becomes engaged action. It is this wisdom that guides us into wise and skillful action that arises out of conscious choice after discernment. It is the transformation of reactivity into responsiveness. It is engaged action, guided by all the brahma viharas and vidya, that leads to inheriting positive karma.

**Experiencing Samadhi or Accessing Enlightenment**

Samadhi has many definitions and is not a practice per se despite being one of the eight limbs of yoga. Samadhi is a recognition of oneness, of connection. It is an experience, not a practice. Given this reality, samadhi is not a limb that presents us with access to techniques or strategies for healing. Instead, accessing the experience of samadhi is perhaps a barometer of progress in healing, of movement toward emotional resilience and mental fortitude. Some of the most common translations of samadhi are as follows:

- Enlightenment (as opposed to freedom = moksha)
- Freedom from desire and discontent
- Joyful and embodied presence
- Bliss and oneness
- Unraveling mental, emotional, and physical knots

**Quick Review of Limb 8**

Once a practitioner has a regular and committed integrated yoga practice, the spontaneous experience of the eighth limb of yoga can arise – absorption (called “samadhi” in Sanskrit). Absorption is not a practice but an experience; it is the spontaneous arising of a felt sense of integration or oneness that is beyond an ordinary state of consciousness. Purpose and interconnection arise in absorption. Practitioners gain a clear recognition of the interconnectedness of all sentient beings and a profound connection to a greater whole. Typically, a feeling of being complete, whole, or integrated arises along with the experience of interdependence or co-arising with everything. In absorption, practitioners experience mindful and joyful connection to a greater purpose and a sense of community or belonging.

Samadhi can also be interpreted as being free of desire and discontent – a definition that derives from strongly from the Buddhist traditions. Joseph Goldstein shares this translation in one of his YouTube talks (Satti patthana Sutta Session 3): “Samadhi is the careful collecting of oneself into the present moment”. It is the receipt and experience of joy and embodied presence, an unraveling of mental, emotional, and physical knots so that we are left with bliss and an understanding of our oneness. Absorption is like coming home to ourselves and our loved ones. Absorption is unique to each one of us and defies definition.
Case Study to Exemplify the Four-Step Conceptualization Model

A very brief case example may serve to summarize the essence of the four-step model. The client for this sample is a retired White woman in her 70s. The sample is provided in summary, rather than narrative, form (unlike what one may more typically see in an intake report/treatment plan).

**Step 1 – Diagnosis or Presenting Concern**

- **client-identified:** severe and debilitating neck pain for which she had received repeated steroid injections at a risky section on the cervical spine that had previously successfully resolved the pain – if only temporarily (annamaya kosha)
- **clinician-identified:**
  - strong mental inclination toward pain catastrophizing (manomaya kosha)
  - tendency toward sympathetic neural platform (rajas) and with commensurate hyperventilation and agitation (pranamaya and annamaya kosha)
  - moderate social isolation with a proclivity toward aversion and anger in relationships

**Step 2 - Etiology and Biopsychosociocultural Factors**

The following figure provides an overview of the most relevant biopsychosociocultural factors identified for this client.

**Etiology and Biopsychosociocultural Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>PSYCHO</th>
<th>SOCIO</th>
<th>CULTURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chronic neck pain</td>
<td>strong pain catastrophizing mind set</td>
<td>high-level management position in a male-dominated branch of engineering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pace maker</td>
<td>slight rigidity in mental set (pessimism)</td>
<td>encountered strong bias as a woman manager in a male-dominated field (e.g., not allowed pregnancy leave; underpaid; shunted into difficult-to-manage projects)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>history of sacroiliac joint pain</td>
<td>very intelligent</td>
<td>strong culturally Italian roots and identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>osteopenia</td>
<td>excellent executive functioning</td>
<td>family-of-origin history marked by difficult relationships, with parents who did not approve of her life/career choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor sleep</td>
<td>strong professional self-identity</td>
<td>stressful relationship with three children secondary to parenting challenges while maintaining employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily exercise (asana and walking) with focus on performance more than joy</td>
<td>self-judgment and lack of self-compassion</td>
<td>strong ethics of liberalism and equity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Four Ps are reflected as follows: red = precipitating factor; orange = perpetuating factor; blue = predisposing factor; purple = perpetuating & precipitating factor; green = protective factor
These biopsychosociocultural experiences contributed to:

- notable physical samskaras of overactivation of upper trapezius and neck musculature
- notable energetic samskaras of hyperventilation and chest breathing
- strongly rajasic guna that manifests as a neural platform of default sympathetic arousal with strong arousal and affect
- primary kleshas of aversion, followed by ego identity tied to career, accomplishments, and productivity; third are worry and anticipatory anxiety
- predominant vrittis are memory and planning; klesha of aversion gives all mental activity a tinge of negativity and pessimism
- strong mental samskaras of related to beliefs about the need for high performance, productivity, personal value as dependent on achievement – highly action-oriented
- strong relational samskaras of wanting to be in charge; yet also strong feelings of not having received adequate emotional support and nurturance
- highly stressed by interactions perceived as threatening to her kleshas (especially related to ego identity) and vrittis

**Step 3 – Prognosis (Hope) and Goal Setting**

Note: Four Ps derived from the biopsychosociocultural context are marked in the figure above. Prognosis for significant improvement in physical wellbeing is strong given many protective factors in the client’s life.

Primary Goals:

- **client-identified**: reduce neck pain and eliminate need for more injections into the cervical spine; increase stress resilience; maintain physical strength and flexibility
- **clinician-identified**: soften the strongly rajasic guna to move toward a more ventral vagal (sattvic) neural platform; investigate and transform the kleshas of aversion and ego; reduce pain catastrophizing and related anticipatory anxiety about physical debility; increase resilience via reduction of emotional reactivity and enhancement of top-down control upon activation; resolve self-judgment and enhance self-compassion; transform physical samskaras that create stress in musculature around the neck and lead to debilitating pain

**Step 4 – Strategies for Healing**

- **Limbs 1&2**: establish safe environment and relationship of respect, compassion, and caring; help client develop self-compassion and non-harming to help transform self-judgment; support development of a joyful and intentional practice of yoga that begins to reach beyond the exercise focus of her current asana practice and focuses on non-harming
- **Limb 3**: mindful and gentle asana with focus on increasing somatic and affective awareness and the integration of the yama in her relationship with herself; gentle kriya practices with focus on recognizing neural platforms and the capacity to regulate nervous system arousal via physical practices; physical practices that disarm the upper traps and neck muscles – creating new samskaras to better manage physical manifestations of stress
- **Limb 4**: cultivation of optimal functional breathing; introduction of calming and balancing breathing techniques (e.g., nadi shodhana, brahmari, extended exhalation); breath as a strategy of developing affective and arousal self-awareness with skills to re-regulate her vital self when rajas sets in
- **Limbs 5-7**: body scans and guided imagery for stress management to counteract muscular bracing; support in helping transform mental samskaras that perpetuate stressful and negative mind sets, emotional and social isolation
- **Limb 8**: creating connection to joyful activities and recognition of positive/supportive aspects of extant interpersonal relationships
Assessment and Observation

Formal Intake Assessment

While formal intake assessments are not standard operating procedure in yoga teaching, therapeutic yoga in healthcare settings may greatly benefit from standardized and clearly operationalized gathering of information about the students, clients, or patients who will be served in the context of therapeutic yoga classes or services. In healthcare contexts, research data have suggested that both clinicians and clients are in support of incorporating a standardized intake to initiate treatment to help build a strong basis for better understanding the needs of the patient (from a diagnostic and etiological perspective) and for building more person-centered and relevant goals and objectives as well as intervention plans. In fact, thorough intake assessment has been an invaluable tool in psychotherapy to guide case conceptualization and treatment planning (Ackerman et al., 2000; Shoai, 2014).

For example, in the context of integrated mental healthcare, Brems, Johnson and Namyniuk (2002) created a comprehensive intake protocol to assess for physical, substance use, and mental health-related concerns to meet the need of addressing the oft-disregarded overlap of the various layers of self that leads to the detrimental compartmentalization of care (the Cartesian split of body versus mind that predominates modern Western medicine). The researchers emphasized that gathering information in multiple domains to inform treatment aids with continuity of care. Evidence showed that clinicians see the value in gathering more information about additional domains such as culture, spirituality, trauma, legal issues, financial, and education to gain a more holistic understanding of their clients. Additionally, clinicians stated that with more information about clients they were able to communicate more efficiently between providers and across agencies leading to a heighten ability to communicate inter-disciplinarily (Brems, Johnson & Namyniuk, 2002). Similarly, utilizing a pretreatment intake process that took both a broad and depth-oriented approach was found to be useful by both clinicians and clients (Hilsenroth & Cromer, 2007). It appeared to help cultivate a positive alliance between clinician and client and was associated with clinicians collecting more comprehensive information to inform treatment (Meyer & Melchert, 2011).

In the past 25 years, the interest in adopting a biopsychosocial model across various healthcare fields has become more normative but there is still some distance to go (Meyer & Melchert, 2011). Especially important is the more recent augmentation of the biopsychosocial model to a biopsychosociocultural paradigm that promotes the integration of biological, psychological, social/socioeconomic/sociopolitical, and cultural/familial factors that are involved in the development and maintenance of physical and mental health and illness (cf, Brems & Rasmussen, 2019). Utilizing a biopsychosocioculturally-sensitive intake that emphasizes multiple domains acknowledges that many contextual factors contribute to the etiology and progression of physical and mental health concerns and can inform more holistic and integrated case conceptualizations and treatment plans (Meyer & Melchert, 2011; Suls & Rothman, 2004).

Intake Protocol for Therapeutic Yoga and Yoga Therapy Services

As the field of therapeutic yoga and yoga therapy grows, the International Association of Yoga Therapists has established guidelines and standards to promote integrity and comparability of practices across the diverse professionals who engage in yoga therapy. One way to create person-centered and tailored care is to complete a meaningful, multi-dimensional assessment of clients to ensure that they are deeply understood and that treatment can be uniquely tailored to individual needs.

To address the possible advantages of utilizing standardized, semi-structured integrated holistic intake paradigms into therapeutic yoga and yoga therapy, a group of clinical researchers (at the time at Pacific University Oregon) created a thorough intake protocol for use in yoga settings within healthcare contexts
(Brems, 2019; Razmjou, Justice, Freeman, Colgan, Hidalgo, Vladagina, & Brems, 2017). This intake protocol represents a multi-dimensional assessment with utility for clinical assessment as well as outcomes tracking. As such:

- It provides data to build targeted and tailored intervention plans, along with measurable contents with utility for tracking the efficacy of the yoga intervention.
- It standardizes the intake process for yoga therapy clients and clinicians and provides an opportunity for accurate understanding, clarity about treatment goals, and means for assessing outcomes.
- It yields information that helps specify treatment outcomes through collaboration between therapist and client, linking to outcome data that can be used to promote the scientific development of evidence-based yoga practices.

**Overview of the Intake Protocol**

The assessment tool allows yoga therapists to gain an in-depth understanding of the client’s presenting concerns, along with detailed information about biopsychosociocultural dimensions that have had and continue to have a bearing on the development of the presenting concerns as well as on the intervention plan. Beyond data collection regarding the client’s current presentation, information is also obtained about:

- biological and medical influences on wellbeing, such as
  - current and past illnesses
  - relationships with healthcare providers
  - current medications and supplements
  - chronic and acute pain
  - sleep hygiene
  - nutritional preferences and practices
  - movement or exercise habits

- mental and emotional health factors, such as
  - mental health or emotional concerns
  - history of psychological challenges or trauma
  - affect and mood
  - temperament or personality style
  - chronic and acute stressors

- socioeconomic and educational opportunity impacts, such as
  - educational and employment history
  - work-life balance
  - socioeconomic challenges
  - home environment
  - neighborhood characteristics

- familial and cultural backgrounds, such as
  - nature of family life and emotional ties
  - cultural and communal belonging
  - values and beliefs
  - spiritual or religious practices or affiliations
  - group memberships
  - (shared) hobbies and interests
  - experience of prejudice, bias, stigma, rejection, and ostracism
Additional Recommended Measures

In addition to completing the structured intake interview, several relevant standardized measures can be administered to gain increased understanding of the client and to optimize outcomes tracking. The addition of these measures and their regular readministration allows the yoga clinician to track the efficacy of the intervention. The following measures are recommended; individual yoga clinicians may choose which of these instruments are most relevant to their clientele, practice characteristics, or therapeutic foci.

- **Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale** (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004)
- **Elements of Yoga Practice Survey** (Brems et al., 2015; Sulenes et al., 2015; Freeman, Brems, Michael, & Marsh, 2019)
- **Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire** (FFMQ-SF; Baer et al., 2006; Bohlmeijer, Looster, Fledderus, Veehof & Baer, 2011)
- **Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System Alcohol Use, Short Form 7a** (PROMIS; Cella, et al., 2010)
- **Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System-29 Profile v2.0** (PROMIS; Cella, et al., 2010)
- **Perceived Stress Scale** (PSS; Cohen, Kamarack, & Mermelstein, 1983)
- **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist** (PCL-5; Weathers et al., 2013)
- **Psychological and Physical Stress Indicator** (PPSI; Brems, 2015)
- **Scale of Body Connection** (SBS; Cynthia Price, PhD LMP)
- **Self-Compassion Scale** (SCS-SF; Raes, Pommier, Neff & Van Gucht, 2011)

The intake tool is completed via a collaborative process between client and clinician and has added value as a means to build therapeutic rapport. The protocol is laid out in such a manner that the client can be asked to complete the standardized measures and intake form to the best of their ability prior to the first session with the yoga therapist. The intake form is then collaboratively reviewed and details are completed that were omitted by the client. The intake form also prompts the yoga clinician to make specific additional inquiries that help round out the understanding of the client and that may contribute to rapport-building and intervention planning. In experience with the protocol to date, it has appeared helpful for most clients to plan approximately 20 to 30 minutes for completing the measures and intake form prior to the first session; the remainder of the work can be accomplished in approximately 30 to 60 minutes depending on the completeness of the intake form and the complexity of the client’s presentation.

Once completed, the data from the assessment tool guide the yoga clinician toward a deeper understanding of the client with regard to the client’s developmental level and the biopsychosocioculutral factors that have contributed to this developmental presentation and trajectory. With the information gathered, the client can be understood in the context of preferred mental sets as related to the gunas (based on either on a perception of life as safe, dangerous, or threatening), emotional predilections (inclined toward attachment, aversion, fear, or confusion), and mental preoccupations (e.g., with the past, the future, relationships, circumstances, and more). Once a client is understood holistically, an intervention plan can be made that includes not just planning for the yoga interventions to be implemented with the yoga therapist, but also appropriate referrals to remain within IAYT’s Scope of Practice and Code of Ethics. Reassessment with the recommended standardized clinical tools listed above provides and excellent means of tracking outcomes.
### Yoga Therapy Intake Form

#### BASIC PERSONAL INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Gender (circle):</th>
<th>Who referred you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female Male Trans Other</td>
<td>□ Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Name:</th>
<th>Clinician Name who referred:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### YOGA PRACTICE BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How long have you practiced?</th>
<th>How often do you practice?</th>
<th>How long is each session on average?</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ No experience – 0 years</td>
<td>□ Not applicable</td>
<td>□ Not applicable</td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ &lt; 1 year</td>
<td>□ 1-2x per week</td>
<td>□ 15-30 minutes</td>
<td>□ 31 to 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 1-3 years</td>
<td>□ 3-4x per week</td>
<td>□ 46 to 60 minutes</td>
<td>□ 61 to 90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 4-5 years</td>
<td>□ &gt;5x per week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ &gt;10 years</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your favorite kind of yoga?</th>
<th>Where do you practice most?</th>
<th>Do you have other mind-body practices?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Vinyasa/power/athletic</td>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>□ Tai chi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yin/restorative/meditative</td>
<td>Yoga studio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Hatha</td>
<td>Home on my own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Iyengar</td>
<td>Home via internet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other:</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### PHYSICAL HEALTH INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is your primary care provider:</th>
<th>If you do not have a PCP, would you like us to make a referral?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>□ Yes, please</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address:</th>
<th>Contact Information:</th>
<th>Make PCP referral OR Obtain release of information as needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you experienced any of the following:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Addiction: alcohol / drugs/nicotine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Adrenal fatigue / illness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Allergies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Arthritis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Autoimmune disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Cancer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Chronic Pain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Dementia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Depression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Diabetes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Digestive/gastrointestinal illness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Eating disorder / anorexia / bulimia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Head injury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Heart disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  High blood pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  High cholesterol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  HIV/AIDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Kidney disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Liver disease / hepatitis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Lung disease / Asthma / COPD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Menopause</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Musculoskeletal concern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Movement Disorder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Neurological disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Osteoporosis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Schizophrenia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Sciatica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Skin problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Sleep problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Stroke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Thyroid issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Vision problems / eye disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Weight concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you had past surgeries?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If yes, please describe and tell us when:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  □  □  □  □  □  □  □  □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What medications are you currently taking:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(please list all; if possible give reason and dosage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  □  □  □  □  □  □  □  □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you been hospitalized?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If yes, please describe the reason and tell us when and how long:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  □  □  □  □  □  □  □  □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What supplements (e.g., vitamins, minerals, herbs) are you currently taking:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(please list all; if possible give reason and dosage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  □  □  □  □  □  □  □  □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When was your last (approximately):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□  Physical exam:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Vision exam:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Dental check-up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Hearing test:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  Other:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you had any injuries or accidents?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please list and provide details:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□  □  □  □  □  □  □  □  □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Follow up on all endorsed items:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If no or few items are checked, probe a bit to be certain nothing essential is missed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore if movement aggravates or relieves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have limitations in physical activity level? If yes, please describe.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Physical Health

**Please mark where you currently experience ACUTE pain**

**Please mark where you experience CHRONIC pain**

**How is your sleep?**
- Wake-up time: _______________________
- Do you use an alarm to wake: yes no
- Bedtime: _________________________
- Do you fall asleep easily: yes no
- Hours of uninterrupted sleep per night: _______________________
- Do you feel tired upon waking: yes no

**How much do you move every day?**
- How many hours do you sit each day (at work plus at home): _______________________
- Can you move as well as you would like: yes no
- What types of exercise do you do:
  - Type: _______________________
  - Number of minutes each time: _______________________
  - Type: _______________________
  - Number of minutes each time: _______________________
  - Type: _______________________
  - Number of minutes each time: _______________________

**How is your nutrition (food and drink)?**
- Typical breakfast: _______________________
- Typical lunch: _______________________
- Typical dinner: _______________________
- Typical snacks (including when): _______________________
- How much do you drink of each of the following per day:
  - Water: _______________________
  - Regular soda: _______________________
  - Diet soda: _______________________
  - Coffee or black/green tea: _______________________
  - Herbal tea: _______________________
  - Juice: _______________________
  - Alcohol: _______________________
  - Other: _______________________

**Ask for pain rating from 1 to 10 for each indicated area:**
- Explore if movement aggravates or relieves:

### Psychological and Emotional Information

**How would you describe your temperament (e.g., introverted, extroverted, outgoing, sociable, loner, intense, easy going, etc.)?**

**Do you have any mental health concerns, symptoms, or diagnoses?** Please describe

**Have you received mental health therapy or counseling?** Where, when, how long, how often?

**Have you ever attempted or thought about suicide?** Yes no

**Have you ever attempted or thought about harming someone else?** Yes no

**Do you have a history of mistreatment or abuse?** Yes no

**Please explain to the degree comfortable:**

**Please check the best answer for each of the following items for the PAST 7 DAYS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found it hard to focus on anything other than my anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My worries overwhelmed me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt uneasy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt worthless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt helpless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt depressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conduct Mini MSE**

**Mood:**
- Affect:
  - Thought process:
    - Orientation = 3:
    - Other:

**Are you experiencing stress in any of the following areas?** Please check all that apply:

- Chronic pain / illness / health
- Caretaking a child or an elder
- Discrimination / Bias
- Divorce / Separation
- Economics / Money
- Family
- Grief / Death
- Identity
- Loss (e.g., job, home)
- Nutrition / Food

**How well are you able to cope with stress?**
- What do you typically do when stressed?
- What do you do that helps you cope?
- What do you do that gets in the way?

**Clinician Only**

**Follow up on diagnoses and symptoms – including onset, frequency, duration, severity**

**Assess duties (protect, warn, report)**

**Explore if mental health treatment has been received at PCH**

**From PROMIS-29 v2.0**

**Note strengths in this realm**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL, SOCIETAL, and SOCIOECONOMIC INFORMATION</th>
<th>CLINICIAN ONLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your highest educational level?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Less than high school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ High school / GED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Some college no degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Associate degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Baccalaureate degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Masters degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Doctoral degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your degree major:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Unemployed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Employed – answer questions below:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job title:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per day:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedentary or mobile:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is your work-life balance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you work too much?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite a bit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you enjoy your work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite a bit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How stressful is your work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite a bit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does work leave enough family time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite a bit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore impact on physical and mental health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describe your social support network: Do you have:  
□ Close friends; how many:  
□ Casual friends /social friendships  
□ Work / peer relationships  
□ Positive immediate family relationships  
□ Meaningful extended family relationships  
□ Community supports (e.g., via church, clubs)  

Describe your home environment:  
□ Do you rent or own?  
□ How many people live with you in your home?  
□ What is the quality of your home?  

Describe your neighborhood:  
□ Describe your neighborhood:  

Have you ever experienced any of the following socioeconomic challenges?  
□ Yes, at current  
□ Yes, in the past  
□ No, never  

No income  
□ Poverty level income  
□ Homelessness  
□ Food insecurity  
□ Economic / financial deprivation  
□ Unsafe neighborhood  
□ Oppression because of your socioeconomic status  
□ Other:  
□ Have you ever experienced any of the following sociopolitical or legal circumstances?  
□ Yes, at current  
□ Yes, in the past  
□ No, never  

Immigration concerns  
□ Exposure to a polluted environment /toxins  
□ Engaged in political activism  
□ Engaged in criminal activity  
□ Been a victim of criminal activity  
□ Other:  

Note strengths in this realm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CULTURAL and FAMILIAL INFORMATION</th>
<th>CLINICIAN ONLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please check the best answer for each of the following cultural and family experiences based on the present moment:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Often</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up on all endorsed items; in none, inquire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I feel a strong sense of cultural or community belonging based on common beliefs and values  
I embrace important spiritual/religious beliefs, ethics, and morals  
I feel strong emotional ties to a cultural or community group  
I have experienced prejudice, bias, or oppression because of my cultural or community group memberships  
I have experienced rejection, stigma, or ostracism  
I experience intergenerationally transmitted / historical trauma  
I experience strong emotional ties to a significant other  
I experience strong emotional ties to my immediate family  
I experience strong emotional ties to my extended family  
I experience conflict in some of my family relationships  
My family holds strong shared values and beliefs  
What are your most important life values?  
Where did you learn or develop these?  
What are your spiritual or religious beliefs?  
Where did you learn or develop these?  
What is your most important community or cultural group?  
How engaged in or isolated from this group are you?  

Explore family dynamics (relationships across generations, behavioral patterns, shared values, attachment styles)  
Explore family structure (stability, cohesiveness, divisiveness, closeness, distance, and boundaries)  
Explore family communication styles  
Explore childhood and current family members, birth order, current and past family living arrangements:  

What are your hobbies, interests, and typical recreational activities?  
What do you like most about the community or cultural groups to which you belong?  
Who is your family (e.g., parents, siblings, partners, children, extended family)?  
With whom – if anyone – do you share your home (if applicable)?  
What else should we know about you?


Detailed instructions for use of the intake protocol can be requested from Chris Brems if the reader is inclined to utilize the intake form.
Assessing Annamaya Kosha

The art of yoga extends beyond the mere execution of yoga postures; it encompasses a holistic understanding of an individual’s physical capabilities and limitations. By observing and assessing annamaya kosha, yoga teachers can create a safe and effective practice that aligns with each student's unique body and goals. Such body assessment is the intricate process of assessing the physical needs and skills of yoga students, encompassing posture, alignment, range of motion, strength, mobility, and endurance. By employing a multifaceted approach that combines observation, communication, and personalized guidance, yoga teachers can tailor their instruction to enhance the student's yoga practice. This section explores various assessment strategies, discusses key observations to make, and provides insights into how these assessments can inform the teaching of yoga.

Gathering Physical Information

Physical information about students can be gleaned from the comprehensive intake assessment as well as additional conversation with the student to become knowledgeable about their medical history, injuries, concerns, and aspirations, to explore their previous yoga experience, lifestyle, and any specific intentions for practicing yoga; and to understand their current state of physical fitness and wellbeing. A few possible assessments are covered below. It is important to stay within scope of practice and to know when to refer to other healthcare providers – either to gather and understand the collected information or to make sure the students receives the type of physical care that is necessary for their particular physical presentation. When in doubt, minimally consult or optimally refer to a relevant physical healthcare provider (e.g., physical therapist, chiropractor, osteopath, naturopath, or allopathic physician).

Observing Strength, Stability, and Endurance

Strength and endurance analysis in yoga practice can greatly assist yoga teachers in tailoring their instruction and interventions to meet the individual needs of their students. Understanding students' capabilities in terms of strength and endurance can help teachers create safe and effective asana (posture) sequences and provide appropriate modifications. Following is a listing of possible strength and endurance analysis techniques, along with potential outcomes, and intervention implications.

Isometric Strength Testing

Assessment: hold static poses (e.g., plank, boat pose) for a specific duration and observe shaking, tremors, and alignment issues.
Outcome: identify muscle groups that need strengthening.
Intervention: incorporate poses that target specific muscle groups, gradually increasing hold times or intensity.
Dynamic strength testing:

Dynamic Strength Testing:

Assessment: observe students performing dynamic movements (e.g., chaturanga, push-ups) and note controlled movement, alignment, and range of motion.
Outcome: determine the ability to perform controlled and safe transitions.
Intervention: include progressive strength-building poses and variations to build muscle control.

Stability Testing

Assessment: observe how well students maintain balance in one-legged poses (e.g., tree pose) and note stability and control.
Outcome: identify areas of weakness affecting balance.
Intervention: focus on poses that challenge balance and incorporate strengthening poses for the legs and core.
Endurance Analysis: Holding Poses

Assessment: observe students holding poses for an extended period and note their ability to maintain form, breathing patterns, and signs of fatigue.
Outcome: determine muscular and cardiovascular endurance.
Intervention: design sequences with longer holds and encourage steady breathing. Gradually increase hold times as endurance improves.

Endurance Analysis: Flowing Through Poses

Assessment: observe how well students maintain proper alignment and form during flowing sequences (e.g., sun salutations) without compromising breath control.
Outcome: assess overall stamina and endurance.
Intervention: include dynamic sequences to challenge endurance, gradually increasing complexity as students progress.

Endurance Analysis: Breath Control

Assessment: observe students' ability to maintain smooth and controlled breath throughout the practice, especially in physically demanding poses.
Outcome: evaluate respiratory endurance and ability to manage energy efficiently.
Intervention: incorporate pranayama (breath control) practices to improve breath awareness and stamina.

Lack of Endurance: Intervention

• gradually increase practice duration and intensity to build stamina over time.
• focus on consistent and mindful breathing during poses.
• integrate cardiovascular exercises (e.g., brisk walking, cycling) to improve overall endurance.
• emphasize poses that challenge muscular and cardiovascular endurance, like warrior sequences or dynamic flows.
• offer modifications and props to help students maintain poses without straining excessively.

Lack of Strength: Intervention

• incorporate poses that target specific muscle groups needing improvement.
• use props (blocks, straps) to assist students in achieving proper alignment and holding poses.
• gradually introduce variations and progressions of poses to build strength progressively.
• include resistance training (e.g., using resistance bands) in the practice to enhance muscular strength.
• focus on proper engagement and alignment to prevent injury while building strength.

Combining Strength and Endurance: Intervention

• design sequences that alternate between strength-focused poses and endurance-building flows.
• integrate interval training, combining short bursts of high-intensity poses with periods of active recovery.
• offer options for rest or child's pose during the practice to manage fatigue.
• emphasize alignment and proper form to ensure safety during strength and endurance-focused poses.

Remember that individual students’ needs may vary and that a personalized approach is essential. Regular communication with students about their goals, challenges, and progress will help refine intervention plans over time. As students progress, analysis and interventions can be adjusted accordingly to support ongoing growth in strength and endurance within their yoga practice.
Observing Range of Motion

Noting students’ range of motion (ROM), muscle or fascial tightness, and ease of movement is useful for teachers’ better understanding their students’ bodies, identifying potential challenges or imbalances, and tailoring instruction to individual needs. Understanding ROM helps in creating safe and effective yoga practices that promote flexibility, strength, and overall well-being. Yoga teachers can use observation or active and passive range of motion tests to note joint mobility and flexibility in various muscle groups. Through observation, teachers can begin to appreciate students’ ability to move fluidly through different planes of movement and to notice any restrictions. Once teachers understand students’ ROM, they can strategically employ static and dynamic stretches to address flexibility and joint mobility in key areas, such as hips, hamstrings, and shoulders. Guidance for understanding ROM is offered below, with the caveat that yoga teachers who considering using these techniques need to work within their scope of practice and skill.

Observing Range of Motion in the Neck

- Flexion: have the student gently lower their chin towards the chest, observing the angle achieved.
- Extension: ask the student to tilt their head back, noting the extent of movement.
- Lateral flexion: have the student bring their ear towards each shoulder.
- Rotation: instruct the student to turn their head side to side, observing the range.

Possible Outcomes:
- Limited range: May indicate muscular tension, poor posture, or past injuries.
- Excessive range: Could suggest instability or hypermobility.

Possible Intervention:
- Limited ROM: Focus on gentle neck stretches and relaxation techniques. Encourage awareness of posture.

Observing Range of Motion in the Shoulders

- Flexion: Have the student raise their arms forward, observing if they can bring them overhead.
- Extension: Instruct the student to extend their arms behind them, noting the angle achieved.
- Abduction: Ask the student to raise their arms to the sides, observing shoulder height.
- External/Internal Rotation: Have the student rotate their arms outward and inward, noting the range.

Possible Outcomes:
- Limited range: Could indicate tightness in shoulder muscles, chest, or upper back.
- Excessive range: Might suggest instability or laxity in the shoulder joint.

Intervention:
- Limited ROM: Incorporate shoulder-opening stretches, chest openers, and strengthening of upper back muscles.
- Excessive ROM: Focus on building strength and stability through yoga poses that engage the shoulder girdle.

Observing Range of Motion in the Spine

- Flexion: Instruct the student to round their spine forward, reaching towards the feet.
- Extension: Have the student arch their spine backward, observing the curve.
- Lateral Flexion: Ask the student to bend their spine sideways to the left and right.
- Rotation: Instruct the student to twist their spine to the left and right.

Possible Outcomes:
- Limited range: May indicate spinal stiffness, muscular imbalances, or lack of flexibility.
- Excessive range: Could suggest hypermobility or instability in the spine.
Intervention:
- Limited ROM: Incorporate spine-lengthening poses, gentle twists, and core-strengthening exercises.
- Excessive ROM: Focus on strengthening the core muscles and emphasizing alignment in yoga poses.

*Note:* The spine is addressed in more detail below

**Observing Range of Motion in the Hips**
- Flexion: Have the student lift their knee towards their chest, observing the angle achieved.
- Extension: Instruct the student to extend their leg backward, noting the range.
- Abduction/Adduction: Ask the student to move their leg outward and inward, noting the range.
- External/Internal Rotation: Have the student rotate their hip outward and inward, noting the range.

Possible Outcomes:
- Limited range: Could indicate hip tightness, muscle imbalances, or past injuries.
- Excessive range: Might suggest hip instability or hypermobility.

Intervention:
- Limited ROM: Incorporate hip-opening poses, gentle stretches, and hip-strengthening exercises.
- Excessive ROM: Focus on building stability in the hip joints through strengthening and alignment-based cues.

**Observing Range of Motion in the Knees**
- Flexion: Instruct the student to bend their knee, bringing their heel towards their glutes.
- Extension: Have the student straighten their knee fully, noting any restrictions.
- Rotation: Ask the student to slightly rotate their lower leg while keeping their upper leg stable.

Possible Outcomes
- Limited range: May indicate tight quadriceps, hamstrings, or calf muscles.
- Excessive range: Could suggest hyperextension or ligament laxity.

Possible Intervention:
- Limited ROM: Incorporate knee-friendly stretches and poses that promote balanced quadriceps and hamstring strength.
- Excessive ROM: Focus on alignment cues to prevent hyperextension and include strengthening poses.

**Observing Range of Motion in the Ankles**
- Dorsiflexion: Have the student flex their foot upward, noting the angle achieved.
- Plantarflexion: Instruct the student to point their toes downward, observing the range.
- Inversion/Eversion: Ask the student to move their foot inward and outward, noting the range.

Possible Outcomes:
- Limited range: May indicate tight calf muscles, Achilles tendon, or ankle joint restrictions.
- Excessive range: Could suggest instability or hypermobility in the ankle joint.

Intervention:
- Limited ROM: Incorporate calf stretches and ankle mobility exercises, focusing on flexibility and gentle strengthening.
- Excessive ROM: Emphasize stability exercises and alignment cues to prevent overstretching.
Observing Postural Patterns and Habits

Postural analysis can be engaged in formally or incidentally. Formal assessment is often static assessment: the student is asked to take a particular shape and the body is assessed with regard to vertical, horizontal, and spinal alignment. Incidental assessment is dynamic and involves the observation of the student while actively engaged in the yoga practice as well as while engaged in other movement (e.g., such as entering or leaving class). In both cases, the teacher notes postural deviations, namely alignments or positions of various body parts in relation to what would be expected of the average human being. Clearly, this is a huge challenge in that we know that there is not really such a thing as an average human being. Therefore, while we engage in postural assessment and can glean valuable information, we take care not to overinterpret deviations from the “standard”.

Postural observation and assessment can occur in different planes, primarily the frontal plane (from a front or back view) and the sagittal plane (from a side view). Again, it is crucial to remember that there is no such thing as universal, standard, or perfect posture. Posture varies among individuals due to factors such as anatomy, body type, activity levels, and more. However, body patterns that vary significantly from what may be expected can lead to discomfort, pain, and potential health issues over time. Thus, it is helpful for yoga teachers to have some understanding about what to expect and how to interpret what is observed.

Seeing and Understanding Posture, Curves of the Spine, and Rotation of Pelvis from Frontal Plane

Porter (2013) conceptualizes collapse, bracing, and resilience in her own lovely way, referring to sad, tense, and happy dog postures. The pictures below are taken (no permission yet!) from her book *Natural Posture* (2013, pp. 93-95). They truly *embody* the concepts of collapsing, contracting, and yielding – despite the different use of language. These pictures help us appreciate how these concepts infiltrate how we hold our body and move through our world. While they are, of course, focused on annamaya kosha, it is clearly visible how they affect the breath and energy in pranamaya koshas, and the mind and emotions in manomaya kosha. We are integrated beings – any predilection in one kosha shows up – in some way, shape, or form – in the other koshas.

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### Alignment of head, pelvis, and rib basket in collapse (sad dog), bracing (tense dog), and resilience (happy dog)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Collapsing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Bracing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Resilience</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head and pelvis are rotated posteriorly; rib basket is rotated anteriorly; slouched, hyperkyphotic.</td>
<td>Head, rib basket, and pelvis are rotated posteriorly; often mistaken as 'good posture'.</td>
<td>Head, rib basket, and pelvis are rotated anteriorly; spine is long and resilient; breath is free and natural.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We can explore related concepts about posture, the spine, and pelvic alignment in several ways. First, we can look at center line of the frontal plane (i.e., *look at the person from the side*) to see if there is imbalance front to back – you can suspend a plumb line or strap to get a better gauge for increased accuracy of reading.

Ponder the following questions or dimensions:

1. How is the plumb line alignment? The line should pass:
   - through the center of the ear
   - through the center of the shoulder
   - through the center of the waist
   - through the center of the hip joint
   - slightly anterior of the knee joint
   - slightly anterior of the ankle and heel

2. Are the knees hyperextended?
   - Is there excessive posterior angulation beyond the neutral position?
   - Is there clear strain on knee ligaments and joint structures?
   - Is there knee discomfort and instability?

3. Is there bowing in the spine and pelvic region forward or back (beyond the natural curves!)? Ponder the following questions or dimensions:
   - Is it distributed across the whole length of the body? Or are there opposing bows forward or back in the upper versus lower portions of the body or in other portions?
   - Is the top of ear slightly higher than eyebrow (as opposed to chin jutting forward moving eyes higher than ears)?
   - Is the center of gravity of the head above the shoulders? Is the head forward of the body with neck in too little extension at the upper cervicals?
   - Is the center of gravity of the shoulders above the hips?
   - Is the pelvis tilted anteriorly or tucked posteriorly?
   - Is the sacrum at its proper 30° angle (i.e., *not* vertical)?

4. Is there bowing elsewhere in the body forward or back? Ponder the following questions or dimensions:
   - Are the hips above the knees?
   - Are the knees above the ankles?
   - Is there hyperextension in the knees?
   - Is there excessive plantar or dorsiflexion in the ankle?
**Potentially Problematic Patterns in the Spinal Curves**

- **Hyperkyphosis in thoracic spine** = rounded thorax with flattened lumbar and posterior pelvic tilt (tuck) → **possible implications**:
  - shortened chest muscles (pectoralis minor, major, and fascia around them) and lax back muscles (rhomboids, mid traps)
  - tight external hip rotators, weak adductors, tight hamstrings
  - may have coexisting sciatica or disc herniations

- **Forward head** = head is forward of shoulders and neck is likely hyperextended at C1 and C2 to keep gaze on horizon; likely posterior tilt of pelvis → **possible implications**:
  - tight chest muscles
  - restricted blood flow and nerve impingement in cervical spine

- **Hyperlordosis in lumbar spine** = lumbar spine is too concave; thorax may be too flat; likely anterior tilt of pelvis → **possible implications**:
  - sway back posture has hips pushed forward and middle thoracic goes into kyphosis
  - tight hip flexors
  - external rotation of hip joints and legs

- **Overly tucked tailbone or sacrum** = sacrum is not at its proper 30° angle which results in destabilization of the spine and SI joint → **possible implications**:
  - Puts weight on the vertebral body and the discs, instead of on the whole tripod – creates compression of the discs
  - Over the long term this is very bad for the spine as it affects discs, nerves, fascia, muscles, and more
  - Over-tucking puts the weight of the organs onto the pelvic floor; normally, the visceral column and lumbar spine are in a mutually beneficial relationship: the viscera rest on L4 and L5, which distributes their weight well and protects the lumbar discs from excessive forward movement; when the weight of the organs is on the pelvic floor, it weakens the pelvic floor muscles, puts pressure on the bladder, uterus, and prostate and may cause malfunction (e.g., incontinence) and/or prolapse
  - Over-tucking can reverberate all the way up the spine, including causing neck pain as the whole organization of the spine is thrown off

- **Lack of natural curves in spine aka flat back** = no natural lordosis in cervical and lumbar spine with no natural kyphosis in thorax and sacrum → **possible implications**:
  - look for flat back – lumbar and thoracic curves are lost; cervical spine tends to be overly lordotic at the base and overly extended at the head
  - could be due to over-tucking that has resonated all the way up the spine (see above)
  - joints compress and weight distributes poorly (often associated with excessive time spent seated; sitting is very hard on the discs as it exerts more pressure on them – this is true especially if they are bucket seats without lumbar support)
  - short hamstrings can contribute to this (e.g., from sitting too much) and contribute to pelvis being tilted posteriorly (could be the other way around – too much tucking leading to shortened hamstrings) pushed posteriorly → weight is distributed unevenly and again the body has to fight with muscle power to stay upright
  - often accompanied by excessively externally rotated feet and knees and possible loss of height (functional loss, not structural)
  - can lead to chronic pain, tension in neck and cervical spine, pain in low back
  - loss of natural curves anywhere above the sacrum means excessive weight/pressure on L4-L5! This may lead to herniated or bulging discs at this junction
Seeing and Understanding Posture and the Curves of the Spine from the Sagittal Plane

We can also begin to appreciate posture and spinal alignment by looking at midline of the sagittal plane (i.e., look at the person from the front and the back) to see if there is imbalance right to left. The view from the back is most helpful in a yoga position such as down dog. Here too we begin to glean more information about our students’ propensities for collapsing, contracting, or yielding.

1. From the front notice all of the following:
   - Is there even openness in the front body?
   - Are the shoulders rolled forward (medial rotation of the scapula)?
   - Look at knees and feet – are the knees aligned or rotated internally or externally?
   - Is there excess inversion or eversion in the ankles?
   - Is the distance of one side flank shorter than the other? Which muscles seem to be involved in any notable one-sided shortening: quadratus lumborum, psoas, other?
   - Are the hips level to one another?

2. From the front, notice the knees:
   - Is there genu valgum (aka knock knees)?
     - Inward angulation of the knee joint, leading to a separation of the ankles and placing undue stress on the medial knee structures, potentially resulting in pain and instability. Treatment encompasses muscle strengthening, orthotic support, and biomechanical analysis.
   - Is there genu varum (aka bow legs)?
     - Outward angulation of the knee joint, causing a gap between the knees, altering joint mechanics, potentially contributing to hip and knee discomfort.

3. From the front, notice the feet:
   - Is there pes planus (aka flat feet)?
     - Reduced or absent arches in the feet, leading to altered foot biomechanics, gait abnormalities, and overuse injuries.

4. From the back, notice scapular and shoulder asymmetry:
   - Is there uneven shoulder heights?
   - Is there uneven shoulder prominence and uneven muscular development in the shoulders?

5. From the back notice if there is any deviation side-to-side in the spine:
   - Is there a side-to-side curvature in the spine?
   - Where is the curve – thoracic, lumbar?
   - Where is/are the convex parts and concave of the curve? (NOTE: scoliosis is named for the convexity: e.g., right scoliosis has the convexity on the right side)
     - Can you notice that the muscles are shorter and tighter on the concave side?
     - Can you notice that the muscles are longer and weaker on the convex side (i.e., the side of the apex of the curve)?
   - Is the curve C-shaped (usually has some compensation in the other part of the spine, but less than in the S shape) or S shaped (more significant compensation for the primary curve)?

6. Whenever you see a sideways bow (in the most extreme case, scoliosis) in people, look for the tightness across from it – lengthen the short side and strengthen the long side!
Assessing Pranamaya Kosha

The art of yoga extends beyond the rote teaching of specific breathing techniques; it encompasses a holistic understanding of an individual's needs and capacities related to respiration. By observing and assessing pranamaya kosha, yoga teachers can create a safe and effective breathing practice that aligns with each student's unique breathing patterns and energetic goals. Such breath assessment is the intricate process of assessing the energetic needs and breathing skills of yoga students, encompassing physical features affecting breath, breathing characteristics, typical breathing patterns, and presence or absence of optimal functional breathing. By employing a multifaceted approach that combines observation, communication, and personalized guidance, yoga teachers can tailor their instruction to enhance the student's breathing practice on the mat as well as their breathing in daily life. This section explores various assessment strategies, discusses key observations to make, and provides insights into how breath-related assessments can inform the teaching of pranayama.

Assessment for breathing practices can begin with a formal intake form, an interview with the client or students, or a brief self-report questionnaire. Of interest in the assessment process are breath characteristics (such as breath rate and volume, breath texture and sound, breath location, and breath phases). Additionally, it can be helpful to explore breathing-related symptoms (such as frequent sighing, gasping, snoring, yawning, labored breathing). Some physical measurements can include the comfortable breath pause assessment and simple assessment of nasal obstruction and/or momentary nostril dominance – all defined in detail below. Standardized questionnaires related to breathing and breathing-related wellbeing exist as well and are referenced below in the relevant sections.

Assessment of the Characteristics of the Breath

Breath Rate and Volume

Breath rate can be assessed easily by measuring how many times we breathe a complete breath per minute (BPM). Breath volume can be objectively assessed but generally not in a yoga context as it requires equipment that is not typically available. We can use proxy measures of volume by subjectively evaluating the amount of breath that is traveling in and out with each complete breath cycle. We can try to categorize the breath at the two extremes (not at all voluminous versus very voluminous) with descriptors such as light, shallow, minimized, limited, restricted, paltry on the non-voluminous end and descriptors such as full, deep, massive, heavy, expansive, maximized, at the more voluminous end.

The following instructions might be helpful for measuring breath rate:

- Take a few moments tuning into your breath, becoming familiar with sensing the breath to be able to count how often it moves through you in a given time period. You might do this by counting the number of inhalations, OR the number of exhalations, OR the number of times you feel your abdomen rise or fall.
- Once you can reliably locate or identify a breath cycle, start a timer set for 1 minute.
- Count the number of breaths while the timer is running.
- Total count of complete inhalations or exhalations when the timer runs out, is your rate of breaths per minute.

For assessment and practice purposes, we can plot breath rate and volume graphically, a practice that can be very helpful for students to begin grasping the nature of the breath and the unfolding of particular pranayama exercises. To create a visual representation of the breath, volume of the breath (how much air we are breathing in or out) can be plotted on the vertical/left (or Y-axis or ordinate) of the graph; rate (or the number of times we breathe in a minute) can be plotted on the horizontal/bottom (or X-axis or abscissa) of the graph. The resulting line or wave is a map or metaphor for the breath or breathing practice. A few examples will explain this process.
Examples of Visual Representations of the Breath and Breathing Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breath Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Breath</td>
<td>This wave shows a natural breath with a breath rate of 6 BPMs and a volume of ~ 500 ml per breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panicked Breath</td>
<td>This wave shows a panicked breath of up to 1000 ml of volume per breath and a BPM of 20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing Exercise</td>
<td>This wave shows a breathing exercise of natural breathing with a short breath hold after each breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Pause Measurement</td>
<td>This shows a control pause measurement for a person with a fast BPM and moderate volume.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breath Texture and Sound

Texture and sound are explored by directing students’ and clients’ attention to these features of the breath and by teachers making observations about how the breath texture of students shows up and how the breath sounds. It does not require any sophisticated apparatus or deep knowledge to begin to attune to whether the breath is smooth, gentle, free-flowing versus choppy, jerky, or erratic. Similarly, sound of breath becomes easily self-evident. Part of the sound assessment can be not just to listen to how the breath sounds or whether it is silent; it also includes a realization whether we have intentionally created sound with our breath because we were told that the breath should have a certain sound or resonance. Much of the exploration and assessment about the texture and sound characteristics of the breath is about creating more self-understanding about breathing, about breath habits, and pattern lock, and about preconceived notions about how breath should unfold or sound. Students and clients, and even yoga teachers, are often very surprised to learn that a natural breath is smooth and feathery, gentle, and completely silent.

Examples of Sound- and Texture-Related Assessment Questions

- **How often does your breath sound:**
  - Noisy and probably audible to others
  - Relatively quiet
  - Completely silent – inaudible to you and others
- **How often do you make other breath-related sounds:**
  - Gasping, snuffling, panting, or sounding winded
  - Sighing, yawning, or otherwise audibly heaving the breath
  - Clearing the throat, coughing, hoarse voice, or breathy speech
- **How often does your breath feel:**
  - Rapid, erratic, agitated, strong, quick
  - Very slow, tight, barely notable, weak, timid
  - Restful, silent, smooth, rhythmic, easeful
  - Full (lots of air moving in and out)
  - Shallow (little air moving in and out)
  - Urgent (with a sense of hungering for air or a mild fear of suffocating)
Sleep sounds and textures can be noted in this section as well. It is helpful to have another person observe sleep to note if there are breathing-related sounds and textures during sleep. Snoring, gasping, choppy breathing, and other issues can be noted. In a general yoga practice, it is not typical to make a specific assessment of sleep sounds and textures. However, if these are already known, it is helpful to make a note of them.

Breath Locations and Space

Assessment of breath locations can by highly varied. Often the process begins by attuning to how the breath moves through the body while seated. The breath is consciously traced from the nose into the throat into the abdomen and into the low rib basket. We begin to have an increasingly subtle awareness of the many places in which the breath can show up in a tangible way in our bodies while at rest. We become highly attuned through continuous assessment and curiosity to whether we are breathing nasally or through the mouth, and whether we are breathing diaphragmatically, into the abdomen, or into the thorax. Differentiating nose versus mouth breathing and diaphragmatic versus chest breathing is a crucial aspect of the assessment of breath location and space. This will start with assessment on the yoga mat at rest and during asana practice. From there, we move to assessment off the mat and into our daily waking hours to notice if we are breathing through the nose or mouth, with the diaphragm, or high into the chest during moments of calm and rest, moments of exercise or exertion, moments of difficulty or challenge, moments of anger or conflict, and moments of fear and worry. Finally, we begin to attune to whether we are breathing with the nose and diaphragm during sleep.

Once we have clarity about nasal and diaphragmatic breathing in all different types of situations, we increase awareness to begin to explore how the location and space of breathing changes in our bodies as we alter positions, shapes, and movement. We begin to recognize that the body can expand in many directions and the breath can become palpable in various physical locations, even those not directly anatomically or physiologically connected the breath. As we increase our awareness of the subtle energies in the breath, we may begin to feel the energy, vibration, or pulsation of the breath in our toes or fingertips, in our third eye, or in the pit of our stomach. We may begin to feel the breath, the pulsing of aliveness, the energy beyond breath in our heartbeat, or in the expansion of our compassion for ourselves or others. The locations and spaces in which we locate prana can become increasingly subtle and meaningful; they can begin to give us feedback about the fluctuation of the mind and experience of emotion and affect.

Breath Phases

Assessment with regard to breath phases is interested in the relative proportions of the four phases of the breath to each other. It assesses the relative length of the inhalation as compared to the exhalation, with consideration of the reality that the inhalation is linked to the sympathetic nervous system and the exhalation to the parasympathetic nervous system. This assessment is also interested in the length of the natural pre-existing pauses that occur at the top of the breath and the bottom of the breath. This observation is not an attempt to increase these pauses as we are simply assessing what is naturally present. Pauses are assessed also in the context of noting apneas, especially daytime apneas, such as stress apnea. Stress apnea occurs in a good proportion of the human population in response to stressful events. It refers to a sudden holding of the breath, often at the top of the breath and sometimes in the form of a paradoxical breath, in response to a particular emotional cue. For example, this has been noted in the research literature as related to opening email. It has been observed that workers hold their breath as soon as they open their email account in clear anticipation of a stressful event. This breath-holding as a response to stress can become conditioned; it can become habitual and pattern-locked. Habitual breath holding is of great interest in the context of assessing the breath not just on the mat (where it can happen during difficult postures or instructions) but especially off the mat.

If we know that we stop breathing during our sleep in the form of sleep apnea, this too can be noted under this assessment. However, in a general yoga practice, the primary focus is on daytime breath holding and daytime
distribution of the four phases across each breath cycle. Sleep apnea assessment typically requires specialized laboratory conditions and the involvement of a healthcare provider.

**Assessment of Breathing-Related Symptoms**

Breathing-related symptoms can be explored via an intake form, and intake interview, or a brief questionnaire that is either self-constructed or extant in the clinical literature. It is important in assessing breathing-related symptoms and signs to stay within our own scope of practice. In a yoga setting, it is likely most appropriate to ask clients or students about known breathing related issues using a brief questionnaire. If significant breathing issues exist, it is essential to collaborate with a primary healthcare provider who can guide the work through pranayama. However, not inquiring about breathing-related symptoms would be a significant omission in working with students and clients. It is also an omission in our own breathing practices. It is helpful to know which symptoms are pre-existing, which symptoms may arise during pranayama practice, and which symptoms may be ameliorated by the practice.

The table below lists a few symptoms that can be explored explicitly. It is followed by a description of a few questionnaires that can be used in the yoga context as they have been used for that purpose in the research literature. These breathing-related symptoms are important for ourselves, and for our clients and students to know, so that they can be tracked to assess how breathing affects us in the moment and across time. Breathing-related symptom assessment is also helpful in that it draws our attention to the reality that some things that we may consider general health challenges may actually be related to our breathing practices. Knowing that such signs and symptoms may actually find relief through a breathing practice may become powerful motivators to keep us coming to the mat to practice breathing very formally and to keep us motivated to keep assessing and observing our breathing off the mat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breathing-Related Symptoms Assessment Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How often do you experience the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Shortness of breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Breath moving in and out freely and smoothly, without hitches or glitches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Holding the breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Stiffness or blockages in the nose and/or sinus cavities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Congestion in the lungs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Tightness in the chest or rib basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Tightness in the jaw or neck, especially on awakening or after exertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Forward head or rounded shoulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How often are the following true for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o I need to drink water during the night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o I snore during sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o I have been diagnosed sleep apnea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o I wake up with a dry mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o I wake up with a sore or dry throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o I have stress apnea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How often do you make other breath-related sounds:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Gasping, snuffling, panting, or sounding winded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Sighing, yawning, or otherwise audibly heaving the breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Clearing the throat, coughing, hoarse voice, or breathy speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extant formal questionnaires of breathing-related symptoms often also include symptoms that are associated with the various characteristics of breath, such as signs and symptom we explored above related to breathing rate, volume, texture, sound, and phases of breath. The symptoms related to these aspects of breath, as well as the additional breathing-related symptom listed here are all of interest – in combination – to better understand our own or our clients’ and students’ breathing. The Breathing Assessment sample at the end of this section is
an example of a useful addendum to an overall intake and assessment process that can be used by practitioners and teachers, always being careful to stay within one’s scope of practice. As previously noted, and yet important to mention again in this specific context, yoga teachers always stay faithful to their defined role with a client or student, not overstepping their area of expertise and skillfulness.

One example of an extant questionnaire that includes all of these dimensions is the Self-Evaluation Breathing Questionnaire, a quick and easy standardized and self-administered scale of functional versus dysfunctional breathing (Courtney & Greenwood, 2009). The instrument has 25 items assessing various breathing-related symptoms, each of which is rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = Never or not true at all, 1 = occasionally, a bit true, 2 = frequently, mostly true, to 3 = very frequently, very true. Endorsement of symptom presence on 11 items is considered indicative of breathing challenges. Sample symptoms include items about sighing, yawning, irregular breathing, fast breathing, breath holding, breathlessness, mouth breathing, effortful breathing, and more. The scale reportedly is reliable and valid with good utility for ongoing assessment and reassessment to evaluate treatment outcomes (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Ongoing assessment is key not just with regard to breathing related symptoms, of course, but with regard to all of the assessments that are described in this section. Assessments can be repeated regularly as they are often very unobtrusive and make great outcome or impact measures of a breathing practice on our anatomy, physiology, and the rhythm of our breathing. For example, we can ask ourselves, or our clients and students, the following questions after a pranayama practice to assess its immediate impact:

- Do you feel a change in body temperature? Do you feel warmer? Do you feel colder?
- Do you feel a greater sense of ease? Where in the body? Where in your energy? In the mind or emotions?
- Is the nose less or more blocked? Do the sinuses fell clearer?
- Is there more or less saliva in mouth?
- How do you feel now? More alert? Less tired?
- Is sustaining speech, chanting, and/or singing easier?

**Assessment of Nasal Congestion and Obstructions As Well As Nostril Dominance**

The Nasal Obstruction Symptom Evaluation Instrument (NOSE; (Lipan & Most, 2013; Stewart et al., 2004)) provides a quick and easy measure of nasal congestion and obstruction via five questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The questions inquire about nasal congestion or stuffiness, nasal blockage or construction, trouble breathing through the nose, trouble sleeping, and inability to get air through the nose during exercise or exertion. Individuals endorse each item on scale ranging from 0 (not a problem) to 5 (severe problem). A total score above 30 is clearly indicative of nasal obstruction, with rating of moderate for 30-50, severe for 55-75, and extreme for 80-100. The scale is in the public domain and can be retrieved online (https://o2vent.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/resources/Nose%20Questionaire%20(OM179US%20).pdf, retrieved 1.12.2023).

This simple assessment can be made with the help of a small hand-held mirror or a smart phone (turned off). The task is simply to exhale onto the mirror or screen of the turned-off cell phone to get a moisture ring (a footprint of the breath). The way to use this assessment is to exhale onto the mirror via the mouth and to make note of the size of the moisture ring. Then we again exhale onto the mirror, but breathe out via the nose. We can now compare the size of the moisture rings obtained via mouth versus nasal breathing to get a visual representation of just how much more moisture is lost via the mouth than the nose.

The second way to use this assessment is to compare moisture rings for the two nostrils. We exhale onto the mirror via the nose again, but only via the right nostril (using a finger to block the left side of the nose). We note the circles of moisture and let it dissipate (or wide it away). Then we repeat via only the left nostril. We then compare if one nostril is more blocked than the other. It is important to know that there are normal hourly variations in nostril dominance. Sometimes one side is more blocked; than the other. To glean more specific
information about possible more permanent nostril blockages or preferences, this assessment is repeated several times a day for several days. If there is natural variation, this is not a notable result. However, if one nostril always produces a smaller moisture ring than the other, then there is a likely blockage in that nostril.

The third way this assessment can also be used as an outcomes measurement. We measure our overall or nostril-specific moisture rings before we engage in our breathing practice. We make note of the size(s) and then move into our breathing practice. After completing a particular breathing exercise or the entire pranayama session, we remeasure to note whether the nostrils have cleared (look for a larger moisture ring post-pranayama than pre-pranayama). We can also compare side-to-side differences. For example, after a practice of only right nostril breathing, we may expect to see a larger moisture circle on the right than the left after the practice. Similarly, after a nasal clearing exercise we can expect to have larger moisture circles overall, including on both sides of the nose. Such immediate physical feedback can be very empowering and motivating to maintain our breathing practice over time.

**Assessment of the Comfortable Breath Pause**

The comfortable breath pause, or control pause (CP), in the Buteyko System (e.g., McKeown, P., 2021), is a comfortable pause among some yoga teachers (e.g., Rothenberg, 2020), also called the body oxygen level test (BOLT) score by the Oxygen Advantage system (McKeown, Patrick, 2015), are two ways to measure our ability to hold the breath comfortably at the end of a natural breath cycle. They provides a measure of breathlessness, functional breathing, and exercise readiness, as well as a proxy variable for chemosensitivity of the medulla oblongata to CO2 levels in the blood. Actual partial pressure measurement of CO2 is complex and requires expensive equipment (called a capnometer). The CP gives highly correlated information that is easy to gather anywhere, anytime, and under any circumstance. It gives us and our clients or students access to a quick and easy self-assessment of the state of health in our respiratory system (and thus beyond). The CP can be measured regularly and repeatedly and represents a great outcomes assessment for pranayama teachers who want to help students assess whether their breathing practices have an impact on their physiology. CP can be measured right before, several times during, and 5 to 10 minutes after a pranayama session for immediate biofeedback about how breathwork may alter the breath. Notable changes in CP can thus become powerful motivators to practice. It is important to remember and to remind our clients and students that the comfortable breath pause is an assessment tool and not a practice. Measuring the control pause does not change its length – the practice of pranayama does. The CP only serves to measure our progress. It can be easy, especially for perfectionists or performance-driven humans, to strive for an ideal CP and to become a bit obsessed with results. That is not the point of this assessment. It is a means of biofeedback that gives us a proxy measure for the healthfulness of our breath and breathing biochemistry.

**Comfortable Breath Pause Measurement Instructions**

The comfortable breath pause is most reliably measured in the morning, but can be taken anytime, and is especially usefully right before and after breathwork. It can be taken repeatedly throughout the day to get feedback about respiratory changes over time and in response to possible activities and triggers. It is always important to remember that there will be variations in CP length across the day; it is generally higher in the evening than in the morning. CP is a great outcomes measurement for pranayama across the weeks and months. The control pause can also be used to make decisions about the types of breathwork that may be or not be inappropriate.

In measuring the comfortable pause, it is important not to create any strain or stress while holding the breath at the bottom of the exhalation. The measurement is based on a mild air hunger – right when the urge to breath takes hold (when there is a notable contraction in the diaphragm). It is really a measurement of how long the breath can be held and still return to normal breathing when the breath hold is released. If neck or abdominal muscles begin to spasm, the hold was too long. The comfortable pause is not based on willpower or force; it is
exactly that, comfortable. If there is a gasping or spasming after the breath hold is released, the hold was too long and the measurement needs to be repeated after a reasonable break for breath recovery.

To measure the comfortable breath pause, it is best to rest for 10 minutes before taking the measurement. Ideally, no heavy meal was consumed right before the measurement.

*Once ready, the following steps are taken:*  
- After the rest period, be prepared with a stopwatch.  
- Inhale gently through the nose  
- Exhale lightly through the nose  
- Pinch the nose shut (optional but preferable) and start a stopwatch at the same time  
- Suspend the breath after the exhale *until the first sign of air hunger* (desire to inhale, perhaps signaled by a gentle contraction of the diaphragm); do not wait too long and do not stop too soon  
- On the first sign of air hunger, check the stopwatch, noting the duration of the breath hold in seconds; the time registered on the stopwatch in that moment represents the length of the comfortable breath pause  
- Now open the nose, inviting an inhalation and monitor the quality of the inhalation:  
  - if the inhalation is normal (i.e., not labored or gasping), the CP measurement is likely reliable  
  - if the inhalation is a gasp, the breath hold was too long; in this case, wait a few minutes (allowing the breath to resettle) and repeat the measurement to reach a lesser level of desire to breathe

**Comfortable Breath Pause Interpretation**

CP assessment is a measure of CO2 tolerance in the medulla; higher CPs indicate that the body is tolerant of higher levels of CO2 in the blood. Lower levels are indicative of CO2 sensitivity, the likely consequence of chronic hyperventilation and commensurately chronic hypocapnia (low CO2 levels in the blood). Generally, as control pause decreases, breath rate and/or volume increase. According to McKeown’s Buteyko Instructor Training Manual (n.d.), breath-related symptoms are strong with low CPs and ease as CP rises, with notable improvement for every increment of 5 to 10 seconds. For individuals who start with a control pause below 10 seconds, it can take weeks to get to a CP of 20 seconds and thus symptom relief. Once individuals reach a CP of 20 seconds, they often hit a plateau with little change for a few weeks. To reach a CP above 30 seconds requires physical exercise. Interpretations of exact scores vary a bit by source; however, the following guidelines will be useful.

- <=10 seconds: very low CO2 levels with likely CO2 hypersensitivity and commiserate dysregulated breathing patterns (hyperventilation, chest breathing)  
- >10 to 15: low CO2 with likely vulnerability to CO2 hypersensitivity and the tendency to be triggered into reactivity in breathing patterns  
- >15 to 20: healthy CO2 levels and a stable and resilient respiratory system  
- >20 to 30: good vitality and health with near optimal tolerance and levels of CO2  
- >30: mild to no breathlessness during exercise; excellent vitality and CO2 tolerance

Lower comfortable pauses are strongly correlated with faster breathing, irregular sighing, mouth breathing, upper chest breathing, and a breath that is very noticeable, either because it is highly visible (e.g., a heaving chest) or audible (noisy and accompanied by gasps, yawns, coughs, throat clearing or similar sounds). High comfortable pauses, on the other hand, are associated with slow, regular, soft, light nasal and diaphragmatic breathing that is hardly noticeable. For those who want more detail about the larger meanings and implications of the control pause, a table follows the general guidelines with more interpretive information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associated Features</th>
<th>CP &lt; 10</th>
<th>CP = 10 – 15</th>
<th>CP = 15 – 20</th>
<th>CP = 20 – 30</th>
<th>CP &gt; 30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CO2 Levels and Chemosensitivity</strong></td>
<td>low CO2 levels with likely vulnerability to CO2 hypersensitivity</td>
<td>healthy CO2 levels</td>
<td>near optimal tolerance and levels of CO2</td>
<td>excellent vitality and CO2 tolerance</td>
<td>very low CO2 levels with likely CO2 hypersensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breath Rate</strong></td>
<td>~ 20-25 BPM</td>
<td>~ 16-20 BPM</td>
<td>~ 14-16 BPM</td>
<td>~ 12-14 BPM</td>
<td>~ &lt; 12 BPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breath Volume</strong></td>
<td>Higher or lower than typical</td>
<td>Higher than typical</td>
<td>Higher than typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breath Texture</strong></td>
<td>Highly irregular, rough, and choppy</td>
<td>Irregular and not smooth</td>
<td>Mostly regular and smooth</td>
<td>Smooth and regular</td>
<td>Smooth, calm and regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breath Sound</strong></td>
<td>Noisy, labored, noticeable, gasping; yawning, sighing</td>
<td>Noisy and noticeable; yawning, sighing</td>
<td>Less noisy and less noticeable; some sighing</td>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>Quiet and inaudible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breath Location</strong></td>
<td>Mouth and upper chest breathing; paradoxical breath</td>
<td>Mouth and chest breathing</td>
<td>Could be any</td>
<td>Could be any</td>
<td>Most likely nasal and diaphragmatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural Pause Post-Exhale</strong></td>
<td>Impossible due to extreme air hunger; breath stacking (inhalation starts before exhalation is complete)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Starting to be possible; ~ 1 seconds</td>
<td>Likely; ~ 1-2 seconds</td>
<td>Present; ~ 2-3 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breathlessness at Rest</strong></td>
<td>Moderate to severe; effortful, erratic breath</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breathlessness with Exercise</strong></td>
<td>Severe; fighting for air</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Likely none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Breath-Related Symptoms</strong></td>
<td>Blocked nose, coughing, fatigue, insomnia, snoring, asthma, panic, anxiety</td>
<td>Blocked nose, coughing, fatigue, insomnia, snoring, asthma, anxiety – symptoms are easing</td>
<td>Symptoms are easing significantly</td>
<td>Symptoms are mostly gone but may come back with triggers</td>
<td>Symptoms are gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breathwork Contraindication</strong></td>
<td>No long breath holds</td>
<td>Observe closely for possible challenges</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comfortable Breath Pause Cautions**

CO2 sensitivity and, thus, the comfortable pause can be affected by many lifestyle and other factors, including but not limited to trauma, high stress environments or relationships, hormonal variations (e.g., progesterone can increase breath rate), and genetic predispositions for certain disorders with breath-related symptoms (e.g., asthma, panic disorder). Similarly, making progress with CP based on breathwork may be slowed by these factors, as well as the following:

- obesity
- inability to handle stress resiliently
- chronic infection, including tonsilitis, rhinitis
- food sensitivities
- disturbed sleep
- ongoing mouth and chest breathing
- chronic long-term illness (for each decade of illness, CP change takes a year)
- severe illness

Increasing the comfortable pause reflects the alteration of our physiology in response to our breathing practice. If CP changes quickly that means our biochemistry is changing rapidly as well. It is possible to develop
(temporary) detoxification symptoms. These symptoms will resolve on their own, usually in a short period of time. However, it can also be helpful to drink a glass of water a day with a teaspoon of saltwater to help ameliorate this reaction should it occur (McKeown, workshop presentation; 12.10.2022). It is helpful to be aware of this possibility and to debrief it with clients or students. However, this is best done in a way that does not suggest fragility or scare clients or students away from increasing their comfortable pause. Detoxification can include the following symptoms, though they may vary significantly in number and intensity given our human bioindividuality:

- insomnia
- fatigue
- headache
- feeling like having a head cold
- loss of appetite
- runny nose
- increased urine output
- light headedness
- emotional upset
- yawning
- metallic taste in mouth

**Implications for Breathwork Sequencing**

Depending on what insights are gained via the breath assessment, teachers can plan breathing interventions, sequencing auspiciously, as shown in the table that follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview of Wholesome Breath Work Sequencing Across Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breathing practices can be presented as a way to help students or clients become connoisseurs of their breath, able to begin to use discernment about how to breathe and how to adjust the breath for an auspicious way of being in their body, in their relationships, and in their world. Across time, as we move from being beginners to more advanced breathers, breathwork ideally proceeds through the following stages:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preliminary Steps</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Assessment – knowing from where we start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Psychoeducation – knowing the reasons for what we do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Preparation in all koshas – feeling ready to engage with the practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interoception and Awareness on the Mat and in Daily Life</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Development of breath observation skills: learning to read our breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Development of breath awareness: learning to read our subtle energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultivation of Healthy General Daily Breathing Practices</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Optimal functional breathing – slowly, lightly, nasally, and diaphragmatically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Avoidance of stress apnea (including email apnea): noticing when our breath stops and when over-breathing starts while under challenge and using more wholesome breathing strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Attention to nighttime breathing patterns – learn about how we breathe while asleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Avoidance of sleep problems: using strategies for improved night-time breathing consider mouth taping to support nasal breath and to prevent or heal sleep apnea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Breathing Exercises</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Practice of targeted pranayama strategies: engaging in functional and balancing breathing exercises with intention and clarity; for example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Subtle breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Breathing with mindfulness of the phases of the breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Alternate nostril breathing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Breathing with sound
- Breathing with force
- Coordination of breath with form and movement: committing to uniting breath and movement on and off the mat for wholesome functional breathing

- **Advanced and Tailored Breathing Exercises**
  - Application of breathing exercises tailored to specific intentions and needs: choosing breathwork wisely to access calming, energizing, or balancing, to maintain optimal autonomic nervous system function that allows for rest, digest, and other parasympathetic activities while facilitating resilience in the form of the smooth transitioning through all nervous system states as needed
Wisdom of Observation: Holistic Seeing and Integrated Understanding

Yoga teachers tend to rely heavily on observation to understand their students and to offer the most auspicious cuing during a yoga practice. Thus, in addition to utilizing formal assessment tools or mechanisms, yoga teachers and clinicians also need to be skillful in the use of observation to refine their teaching and therapeutic yoga services. Such observation is focuses on all koshas.

Seeing and Understanding Students as an Integrated Whole of All Koshas

Seeing and understanding students’ bodies (anatomy and physiology), energy (arousal and affect), and mind (thoughts and emotions) guides our cuing, demonstration, and intervention – whether verbal or tactile. Seeing and understanding students’ inner bodies, energy, and mind has nothing to do with judgment or evaluation. It is not a searching for outer manifestations, especially in the body, but rather an observation of inner experience as notable from the outside or energetically. We do not look for outer shapes; we look for the inner body, the inner energy, the mind stories, and emotions. We for health and wellbeing, not for superficial alignment or outer “looks”. Observation thus is not a process of criticizing or finding what is wrong with students. We are actually trying to understand the structure and movement of students’ anatomy, energy, and mind to best facilitate a tailored and individualized practice that serves them auspiciously and optimally. We are assessing the energy and emotion they bring to their experiences, especially as related to their typical level of arousal (gunas), habitual affect or feeling tone (vedana), and kleshas and samskaras across all koshas. Regardless of what we observe in students’ inner bodies, energies, and mind, the power about how to move, breath, act, relate, and self-express and whether to follow our guidance remains with each student. They are in charge of their body, breath, mind, emotions, actions, and relationships. We can make offerings, but we do not force a direction; we do not demand compliance; we do not expect to direct or command specific actions. We invite exploration, openness, and curiosity.

As we observe students, we must be especially careful in how to approach body reading (or assessment) and subsequent feedback to make sure that we do not reinforce body hatred or engage in body shaming, however subtly. If or when we give feedback to students (or to each other as teachers or fellow students), we take care to start and end with noting the beauty and resilience we observe. We resist focusing on or highlighting anything we observe as ‘negative’ or ‘abnormal’; we are simply recording open-hearted and open-minded observations of individual physical and energetic expressions of body and energy. We keep in mind that for many students receiving body feedback can feel like a judgment or confrontation; thus, we make our comments with compassion, lovingkindness, curiosity, and in an investigative and supportive spirit.

Equally important as not creating shame, defensiveness, or a sense of being judged, we make sure that we do not instill worry or anxiety about a students’ anatomy, energy, or psychology. We observe not to create fear, but to support the body, its inherent energies, and its relationship to mind and emotion to help students access their natural resilience and the recognition that homeostasis and adaptability will develop naturally through the practice. Unless we witness an extreme risk or imminent danger, we take care not to overreact to what we observe. Each body and mind is resilient in its own way and creative in overcoming challenges via useful physical, energetic, and emotional adaptations that may seem out of the norm but are actually auspicious or useful in action. This also means that we are patient. We do not jump to conclusions because we observed something one time; we do not notice something and immediately jump to cuing, assisting, much less adjusting. We patiently watch and learn; when we believe we have truly detected something of importance that can lead to cuing that will create an auspicious and meaningful change in the student’s experience, then we cue, assist, and maybe even adjust.

A rule of threes can be helpful. The first time, we as teachers notice something interesting, we make a mental note. If we witness the same thing again, we become increasingly curious and begin to hypothesize the meaning or importance of what we are witnessing. If we see the same thing a third time, we can allow
ourselves some cuing to see if there is resonance and more auspiciousness in the student or students to whom we are directing the cues. Assisting and adjusting may (or may not) follow from there. The rule of threes can be applied in multiple ways:

seeing the same thing in the same students three times (e.g., a particular alignment in one type of asana; a particular breath pattern in one type of situation; emergence of a particular nervous system style or polyvagal state)
• seeing the same pattern in three different contexts in the same student (e.g., seeing a particular alignment in standing shapes, forward folds, and twists; noticing a particular style of breathing during the opening centering, during asana, and in savasana; observing a particular mental reactivity in three different sessions or settings)
• seeing the same uniqueness in three more students in our classroom (e.g., students all adjust themselves in the same way; all students engage in a similar breathing pattern – this may say more about our cuing than about the students’ anatomy or energy!)

A Few Helpful Hints for Observation

- cultivate understanding and curiosity, not judgment
- use tailored cues and practices (including alignment, percent of effort, breath, mind, emotions) to what is observed reliably and consistently
- make sure the student always retains autonomy and power – invite, offer; never force, never direct – cultivate exploration and interest
- do not engage in body shaming or reinforce body hatred
- do not instill fear, worry, or anxiety
- do not create – however inadvertently – a vulnerability mind state
- place the emphasis of observation-based feedback or cuing on resilience, agency, empowerment, and intentionality, health and wellbeing – not outer shapes or alignment
- be supportive and exploratory, inviting students into new ways of being, experiencing, and exploring
- cue to direct students toward health and resilience based on what we see in all koshas
- offer an “oreo” of beauty and resilience: start with a positive and supportive observation; then make the offering of exploring a change; reconnect with the students around an observation of resilience, wellbeing, clarity, or skill
- exercise patience – do not jump to conclusions; wait to see something at least three times before making an invitation for change or exploration
- put the student and their inner experience in charge

In observing students, it can be helpful to have additional context. It can be useful for us as teachers to know a few key things about the students whose bodies, energies, and mind we observe. If we engage in this level of tailored instruction – especially of we incorporate tactile guidance, it might be helpful to find out if the student has received a physician’s or other clinician’s (e.g., psychologist’s) clearance to practice yoga without limitations or special considerations. If there are physical, energetic, mental, or emotional challenges, it might be helpful to have some basic information from the student, if they are willing to share. A few questions, the answers to which may provide helpful context, include, but are not limited to:

- Are there medical or psychological restrictions or contraindications (or a statement from the person that they have none)?
- Is there any hardware in the body (e.g., rods, joint replacements, pace makers)?
- Are there any spinal fusions? Other spinal issues? Osteopenia or osteoporosis?
- Is there a history or recent experience of accidents, surgeries, or other physical trauma?
- Is there any emotional/psychological trauma may be a contributing challenge in the practice? (be very discerning about whether and how to ask about this – again, consider your context!)
Basic Principles of Seeing and Understanding Students’ Koshas

As we observe our students, it is helpful to stay attuned to all of their koshas. It is easy to be distracted by the obvious nature of the body. However, breath – along with arousal (think gunas) and affect (think vedana) – can speak volumes not just about pranamaya kosha, but also about the relationship between annamaya and manomaya kosha. Indirect observations of mind and emotions are also useful in that mind and body are connected – body influencing the experience and expression of mind and emotions, and mind influencing the experience and expression in body and breath.

The more connected we can stay to our students, the more accurate our reading of all of their koshas. This connection between us as teachers and our students also maintains an environment of safety, a psychological container of clear boundaries and security, and a relationship of co-regulation and mutuality. It is in the context of secure connection and skillful co-regulation, that we, the teachers, look for the following aspects of our students’ experiences and expressions in all koshas during their time on the mat with us. As we look at our students, we note patterns and habits, effort and ease, abhyasa and vairagyam, lines of energy, evidence of awareness and attention (or their absence) across all koshas and all practices.

Annamaya Kosha Observations

- **physical traits reflecting the inner body** (i.e., not getting distracted by the aspects of the outer body that are often the focus of our western society, such as beauty, symmetry, or even outer alignment or ‘classic’ shapes of particular asanas), including but not limited to:
  - hypermobility versus restricted mobility (tensile and compressive resistance
  - tension or excessive strain versus laxity, collapse, or disengagement
  - strength versus weakness and their distribution across different parts of the body
  - comfort versus discomfort of students in their own skin
  - stress or strain in the body
  - evidence of acute or chronic pain, injury, or physical guarding
  - and more …

Pranamaya Kosha Observations

- **energetic traits**, including but not limited to:
  - hypervigilance versus spaciness or being tuned out
  - breath patterns, textures, and rhythms; sound of the breath
  - hyper- versus hypoventilation; dysregulation in the breath
  - nasal versus mouth breathing; belly versus chest versus clavicular breathing
  - comfort versus discomfort with the energetic and affective demands of the practice
  - stress or strain in energy
  - and more …

- **hints about arousal level**, including but not limited to:
  - hyperarousal, hypoarousal, or stable movement through various levels of arousal
  - physical and energetic expressions of the gunas (tamas, rajas, sattva)
  - polyvagal states (dorsal collapse, sympathetic activation, or ventral vagal equanimity)

- **hints about affect**, including but not limited to:
  - feeling tones (vedanas of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral)
activation of kleshas subsequent to the experience of a vedana → looking for grasping, clinging; aversion, hatred; fear, worry, anxiety, hesitation; ego investment and role expectations; confusion or misunderstanding

Annamaya and Pranamaya Kosha Observations

- **experiences and expressions of effort and ease in body and energy**, including but not limited to:
  - balance versus imbalance of the two concepts
  - overefforting versus underefforting
  - lack of ease versus excessive ease or lack of engagement

- **experiences and expressions of abhyasa** (integrated practice reflecting relaxation and engagement) and **vairagyam** (non-attachment to results or particular outcomes), perhaps as juxtaposed to ego investment in particular shapes, abilities, or expressions of the practice – in all koshas and actions

- **grounding** and/or rooting, **expansion** and/or lengthening, and **stability** and/or balance in all koshas, that is, not just in the body but also in energy, arousal, affect, mind, mind states, thoughts, and emotions

Manomaya Kosha Observations

- **emotional states and traits**, including but not limited to:
  - stress or strain in emotions
  - emotional distress versus equanimity
  - evidence of the kleshas – emotional expressions of attachment (e.g., clinging, grasping), aversion (e.g., hatred, anger, annoyance, impatience), ego (e.g., striving, being self-identified with an outer shape, being upset when personal expectations cannot be met), fear (e.g., worry, reluctance, shrinking back from new experience, anticipatory anxiety), or confusion (e.g., feeling lost, being unsure, being upset by not quite knowing what to do)
  - impact of the kleshas on actions and relationships in the present moment as well as off the mat (if the latter can be gleaned indirectly)

- **mental states and traits**, including but not limited to:
  - mind states of disorganization, dullness, distraction, concentration and focus, or lucidity and clarity
  - stress or strain in the mind in its narratives or stories
  - presence of attention versus spaciness and distraction
  - evidence of the vrittis – preoccupation with memory, misperception, or planning
  - mental impacts of the kleshas – mental stories or narratives of greed, wanting, and attachment; of aversion and opposition; of ego with narrow role definitions for self and others (e.g., the teacher, other students); mental shrinking back in worry and anticipation of difficulty or challenge; or mental confusion about instructions with inattention to the teacher

Vijnanamaya and Anandamaya Kosha Observations

- **evidence of wisdom and discernment**, including but not limited to:
  - use of props, adaptation, and personal tailoring of the practice
  - willingness to assert personal needs and to be self-compassionate and self-loving while holding the self accountable
  - understanding of personal impact on other students in the class, including compassion and lovingkindness toward others
  - appreciative and altruistic joy
  - equanimity in the face of challenge
- clarity in problem-solving
- openness to new experiences
- and more …

• evidence of joy, including but not limited to:
  - sense of humor, ability to have fun with the practice
  - light-hearted exploration, open-heartedness and light-heartedness
  - connection to sangha
  - appreciative and altruistic joy

**Seeing and Understanding Collapsing, Contracting, and Yielding in All Koshas**

Observation of collapse, contraction, and resilience is in a way a summary of all other observations and always addressed by the type of cuing that has been discussed thus far. These ways of holding the body, expressing, the breath, manifesting the mind and emotions integrate aspects of grounding, expansion, and stability. They reflect lines of energy and speak of all koshas. They may reflect histories of trauma, polyvagal defaults, and current autonomic nervous system states and patterns, including arousal or energy. This way of looking at students (or ourselves) – observing whether they are collapses, gripped, or resilient – gives information about all koshas, reflects the gunas, gives evidence to vedana and kleshas, reveals the vrittis and samskaras – especially as flavored by the kleshas and gunas, and can provide profound hints about behavioral and relational patterns of our students.

Noticing collapse, bracing, and yielding allows us to begin to notice, appreciate, even understand our students’ habits, conditioning, reactive styles, and unconscious responses to life in general and on the mat in particular. We can note if our students make conscious choices with discernment or react out of habit; we can see if they express and embrace a sense of agency, self-empowerment, and curiosity. We can appreciate whether our students perceive possibilities or limits, openness, or boundaries. Observation of these concepts is the culmination of our understanding and subsequently tailored and adaptive cuing for our students. It is truly seeing students with an open heart and open mind to better teach and guide them in their practice on the mat and in their life.

Both teaching and practicing forms follow a logical progression from:

- first experiencing or teaching the form with beginner’s mind
- second to refine the form based on increasing experience with and internal awareness of the form
- third to find integration across the koshas in the form, and
- finally to transcend the form – moving beyond the physical toward stilling the mind and transcendence

To attend to the first, second, and third intention, it is helpful to attend to how students *embody a given form*. Are they collapsed and resigned, gripped and tense, or adaptable and resilient (cf., Farhi, 2000; Mitchell, 2019; Porter, 2013; Schiffmann, 1996)? Once the embodiment of asana is seen and understood, it is helpful to understand how collapse, contraction, or resilience manifest or fail to manifest in students’ energy (arousal and affect) and mind (mental fluctuations as flavored by the kleshas, as well as emotions).

As teachers, we attend to collapse/resignation and contraction/tension versus resilience/yielding in students’ expression across all koshas to notice how to issue invitations or cues for physical, energetic, mental, and emotional adjustments to create a practice that is honest, healthful, and reflective of students’ current needs and resources. As teachers, we can observe students’ physical, energetic, even mental or emotional presence to begin to get a sense of whether students have a tendency (or habitual way) to give up, resign, collapse, and buckle; grip, tense, over-effort, and grind; or respond, adapt, adjust flexibly, and yield to the demands of the practice (or life, for that matter). Patterns, habits, or ruts (samskaras in any kosha) can close down choice, shut
down openness, and limit possibilities for practitioners. They tend to shut down agency, disempower, and short-circuit discernment and choice. Noticing tendencies and habits related to collapsing, gripping, or yielding invites us and our students back into beginner’s mind, to a place of unlimited possibility, a place of exploration and options. It supports new self-awareness that can lead to greater agency, resilience, and self-efficacy.

As we observe our students (or ourselves) in these ways and get to know them (and us) more intimately, we can begin to integrate cuing that is individualized and tailored, inviting our students into a more intimate practice that is adapted to their needs. We invite students into beginner’s mind; we offer them opportunities to start over and reassemble a shape or breath in a new way, from a new foundation; we continuously encourage them to attend to grounding, stabilization, and expansion; we cue them into the experience of process, not the attachment to or seeking of particular outcomes, goals, or results. If we see their collapse, we can invite them into a rallying of resources, a deeper engagement, an experience of joy or pleasantness. If we see their bracing, we can offer them a pathway into ease, sweetness, softness, and gentleness; we can encourage them to release expectations, loosen their grip, free their straining. We help our students open up to new possibilities and new experiences. We invite them to surrender habit, stress, and expectations.

Teachers’ observational skills of collapse, contraction, and resilience in students are honed over time. Once refined, the ability to observe these physical, energetic, mental, and emotional manifestations of students becomes an invaluable guide for cuing. When students are observed to collapse, they may be invited to reengage, to rally resources to bring more energy into a form. On the other hand, when students are observed to brace, clench, or grip, they may be invited to find more ease, to access a softer approach and embodiment of the shape, to ease up on mental expectations about their performance, or to let go of excessive attachment to an outer form. Such invitations help students open up their bodies, hearts, and minds; they help students learn, unlearn, and relearn.

Of course, as teachers we also note these tendencies in our own practice and life and remind ourselves to maintain vigilance about falling into physical, energetic, mental, or emotional habits, routines or ruts, or patterns that create reverberations in the practice on the mat, in our personal lives, and in our teaching.

Collapsing or Buckling

The practice of students who are collapsing or giving up tends to be on the disengaged end of the spectrum, perhaps unintegrated and lethargic. It may be marked by sagging, slackness, lack of engagement, and under-efforting in body or energy and may be accompanied by limited mental presence and emotions of despair, helplessness, depression, or giving up. Buckling may show up as a collapsed resignation or crumpling into a shape, rather than a resilient and engaged yielding to it. There is neither much effort, nor true ease. The engagement and presence of abhyasa is minimal and lines of energy seem collapsed or non-existent.

Collapse can arise from excessive grounding or it may signal that the student is confusing relaxation with laxity or nonattachment with giving up. It may also signal a lack of stability and lack of engagement in key musculature leading to unprotected, loose joints and shapes or movements that lacks vigor and strength emanating from the center. Collapse may also reflect a lack of expansiveness, purpose, or direction – showing up as a haphazard or half-hearted embodiment of a shape or movement.

Collapse may be a sign of lack of integration, disconnection from the body, apathy, or resignation. Anatomically and energetically, collapse is often accompanied by a deeply tucked pelvis (rolled posteriorly) with a rounded upper spine (arching forward) and head rolled up and back, with the throat hyperextended in front and the neck compressed in back. This may look like severe slouching, where all effort in the body has evaporated, and there is no joyful sense of ease. The back musculature is lengthened and the chest musculature is shortened pulling the chest and head forward while creating a rounded back. This anatomical embodiment of withdrawal or disheartenment can result in hyperkyphosis. This is alignment of the pelvis, rib basket, and head misaligns the spine and narrows the lower chest cavity, often interfering with a free and natural flow of breath.
It typically results in shortened psoas and hamstring muscles (interfering with the natural relationship of the muscles with one another), often leading to hip and low back pain. Since shortened psoas muscles are a hallmark of a (reactive) self-protective stance, it is strongly linked to chronic sympathetic arousal that can lead to burnout. Finally, shortened psoas muscles interfere with the free movement of the diaphragm, further impeding natural breathing.

Buckling or collapsing tends to be linked to a more tamasic nature and may – in extreme cases – signal dorsal collapse. It can also be related to burnt out chronic sympathetic arousal that has resulted in physical, energetic, and mental exhaustion. Collapse as a response to excessive challenge in one particular situation (e.g., type of pose) may simply situational (a temporary state of being). Collapse as a general pattern (or trait) may reflect a more samskaric habit that may also manifest in life off the mat.

Possible manifestations of collapse across the koshas might be as follows (these are just a few examples):

- In annamaya kosha collapse may manifest as under-exerting, inadequate use of force or strength, lack of sufficient engagement or stretching in the muscles
- In pranamaya kosha collapse may manifest as shallow breathing, breathing weakly, collapse of the breath or energy, under-control of breath or energy; laxity in energy; absence of engaged emotion; lack of resilience and recovery in the breath; hypoarousal and unpleasant feeling tones
- In manomaya kosha collapse may manifest as sluggishness, depressive thoughts, not caring about what is happening, being hopeless, or giving up; the kleshas of fear and confusion may move into the foreground and may flavor thoughts and emotions and, in turn, physical and energetic expressions of the practice

**Contracting or Bracing**

Contracting is marked by gripping, tension, and over-efforting, as well as a certain physical, emotional and/or mental rigidity or constriction. It can manifest as a fighting against or an active and stressful retreat from the present moment’s demands, rather than a yielding to the demands of the practice (or life in general). There may be an aspect of stubbornness and over-control in bracing that reflects a mind set of needing to be on alert, over-prepared, or simply over-ambitious about an inner state or outer form. Self-judgment and a chronic and pervasive sense of tension may emanate from the student who contracts into such tightness. There is an overabundance of effort, untampered by the sweetness of ease or delight. The joy has been sucked out of the practice. The engagement and presence of abhyasa errrs on the side of effort and vairagya is often minimal to absent as attachment of outcomes overrides the joy and delight of the process. Lines of energy are forced and lack a sense of freedom or excitement. Everything looks like work; there is little to no play in the practice.

Contraction can arise from excessive grounding in the sense of trying too hard to find support and create a sense of connection. Bracing may signal that the student is confusing intensity with tension, commitment with obsession, persistence with perseveration. However, excessive grounding is not always part of this type of gripping. More often bracing signals an excessive attempt at creating stability or safety to the point of rigidity, forcing, clenching, or overcontrol. Contraction may include a lack of expansiveness, purpose, or direction – all force is directed inward or toward gaining a sense of control (often for self-protection of some sort). There is an inner tension and over-control that inhibits the way of the joy and embrace of lightness that comes from expansiveness.

Bracing may be a sign of gripping and overcontrolling the body, forcing or muscling into shapes or movements in a way that creates tension, not joy or resilience. Anatomically and energetically, bracing is often accompanied by a slightly tucked pelvis (rolled a bit posteriorly, but close to neutral) with a lifted chest (rolled posteriorly), a head that is rolled up and back (with a hyperextended throat and compressed neck), and excessively depressed and retracted shoulder; at times, the belly is sucked in with an overreliance for stability on the rectus abdominus and an under-reliance on the more resilient and freeing transverse abdominis. This
may look like good posture but on closer inspection, the body is held with excessive effort and tension; ease and joy are absent. The back musculature is shortened, compressing the spine in the low back and neck, muscles are tense around joints, and the chest musculature is lengthened, pulling the chest upward so the low ribs jut out. This anatomical embodiment of over-engagement and overcontrol can result in chronic muscle tension. Further, as noted above, posterior alignment of the pelvis results in shortened psoas and hamstring muscles leading to hip and low back pain and interfering with free movement of the diaphragm, impeding natural breathing. It also leads to a braced core (rather than a resilient or strong core) that does not yield to load but is always overefforting and overengaged, contributing further to low back pain. This bracing is largely due to an over-engagement of the rectus abdominis in pelvic tucking and a disabling of the transverse abdominis. All in all, the anatomic alignment that accompanies bracing interferes with spinal health, impedes natural breathing, and activates the sympathetic nervous system.

Contracting, bracing, or tensing is linked to a more rajasic nature and may – in extreme cases – signal sympathetic arousal. This SNS arousal can mean engagement at a level of fight, resulting in defensive or self-protective action that is overly engaged, aggressive, confrontational, or controlling in an attempt to gain control of a difficult situation. Alternatively, this SNS arousal can mean engagement at a level of flight, resulting in defensive or self-protective action that is in the service of extracting the students actively from a challenging situation via over-efforting in an attempt to avoid harm or to escape a potential threat. Like, collapse, contraction can be situational (a temporary, even one-time state) or habitual (a lasting and deeply-patterned trait), the latter reflecting deeply ingrained samskaras or nervous system conditioning.

Possible manifestations of bracing across the koshas might be as follows (these are just a few examples):

- In annamaya kosha it may manifest as over-muscling, excessive use of force or strength, creation of traction (stickiness in the muscles), excessive tension (too much pulling or stretching) in the muscles; it may also show up as gripping in places irrelevant to the pose: e.g., gripping in the jaws or tongue; grimacing; or holding the breath
- In pranamaya kosha it may manifest as holding the breath, breathing too hard, freezing, over-control of breath or energy; stickiness in breath or energy; intensely unpleasant feeling tones; excessive arousal and possible hyperreactivity
- In manomaya kosha it may manifest as agitated thoughts, forcing a rigid story or expectation about the pose or the practice, being more attached to the outer expression of the pose than the inner experience, being driven toward achievement in the practice; the kleshas of clinging, grasping, aversion, or ego can show up forcefully

**Resilience or Yielding**

Resilience or yielding in the practice means that the practice is well-balanced in all koshas. There is neither observable over- nor under-controlling; the student practices neither with reactivity nor resignation. There is neither laxity nor excess effort or tension. The students is clearly responsive to the necessary aspects of the practice – finding strength or engagement where it is needed and finding softness or gentleness where it is indicated. The balance of effort and ease is visible in all actions; there is engagement and interest without striving for a particular outcome – an abundance of abhyasa and vairagya. The student combines grounding, expansion, and stability in just the right proportions, truly finding the middle way in all koshas. There are clear lines of energy and clarity as well as pliability in mind and emotions. All koshas are present in the practice with (self-)compassion, (self-)care, joy, and equanimity. There is evidence of awareness, attention, and mindfulness and students have access to all ‘ceptions. Their window of tolerance in all koshas is optimal and wide, with an accompanying experience of agency and self-empowerment, embedded in compassion and lovingkindness.

Resilience arises from **stable and responsive grounding** that connects the student to an unwavering commitment to be present, engaged, and involved. It also signals a **coherent sense of stability and integration** in key
musculature, breath and energy, and mind and emotion. This stability is buoyant, resilient, steady, and adaptable. Resilience also reflects a *purposeful expansiveness* – a joyful embrace of lightness, sense of humor, self-acceptance, and non-attachment to an outcome accompanied by clarity of purpose, direction, and meaning.

Resilience combines effort and ease; integrates all koshas; accesses grounding, expansion, and stability; combines all aspects of being human into holistic presence. Anatomically and energetically, resilience is often accompanied by a slightly tilted pelvis (rolled a bit anteriorly [~5°], but close to neutral) that allows for the natural resilient alignment of the spine along the vertical axis. The spine is elongated and open; it is flexibility and responsive; bones are aligned natural in such a way as to minimize tension in muscle and connective tissue. The pelvis moves as a single unit and serves as the foundation for spinal movement and stability in all types of movements – whether sitting, bending, walking, standing, rotation. The rib basket is slightly anterior with the low ribs drawing toward the ASIS without shortening the front of the body. The head, too, is slightly anterior and rests well balanced on top of the spine at the atlas. This anatomical embodiment of resilience, of rolling with the punches, of adapting and responding, supports spine health, connective tissue cohesiveness, and muscular integrity and responsiveness. It frees the breath to move naturally and deeply into the body through resilient and dynamic movement of the diaphragm. The psoas and hamstring muscles are relaxed, elastic, and supportive of an upright position. They coordinate effectively (with each other, the core muscles, and the diaphragm) to create ideal balance. The core musculature is engaged but not tense, biased toward the use of the deep rather than the superficial abdominal muscles. Resilience fully integrates and embodies sthira and sukha; it actively combines and expresses abhyasa and vairagya.

Resilience or yielding is linked to a more sattvic nature and tends to be associated with a ventral vagal nervous system response. The student rests in personal agency, expresses a sense of personal power, is available to (as recipient) and for (as provider) co-regulation, and can access adaptive responses to most if not all demands. Resilience shows up as an open-heartedness about the practice and about life that embraces and accepts with the ability to take action, confront challenge, access personal power, and be a free and compassionate agent.

Possible manifestations of resilience across the koshas might be as follows (these are just a few examples):

- In annamaya kosha it may manifest as softness in strength and strength in softness; as stillness in movement and movement in stillness; as healthy muscle tone that supports the pose with easeful effort; as finding the physical middle way that integrates effort and ease and while expressing abhyasa and vairagya
- In pranamaya kosha it may manifest as an easeful breath that is adaptive to respiratory needs; a smooth breath that is not dysregulated by increasing or decreasing demands; a balanced breath (or lengthened exhalation) that reflects a ventral vagal nervous system state; appropriate affective engagement with the practice and the community; balanced or easily rebalancing (i.e., adaptive and allostatic) levels of arousal; pleasant feeling tones or the capacity to easily reregulated in the presence of pleasant or unpleasant feeling tones
- In manomaya kosha it may manifest as clarity in thoughts, willingness to surrender habitual ways of viewing the practice; insight into the need for openness to using props and modifications; inspired ways of analyzing what is happening; clarity and presence; accurate appraisal of physical and emotional needs; willingness to explore something new

Following is a table with synonyms of these three concepts that can be applied across the koshas. These synonyms can guide observation – allowing teachers to better frame what they observe in the context of these three categories of practice experience and expression. These synonyms can also be used in cuing to help students transform the extremes of buckling or grasping toward resilience and yielding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too Loosely - collapsed</th>
<th>Too tightly – contracted</th>
<th>Just right – resilient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>collapsing</td>
<td>contracted</td>
<td>yielding</td>
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<td>buckling</td>
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<td>over-efforting</td>
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<td>rajasic</td>
<td>sattvic</td>
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<td>sympathetic (arousal)</td>
<td>ventral vagal (engaged)</td>
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Understanding Students’ Gunas, Kleshas, Mind States, Vrittis, and Samskaras

The findings, results, and conclusions from assessing and observing students help yoga teachers and yoga clinicians gain a clearer understanding of students’ gunas or polyvagal states, affects and kleshas, mind states and vrittis, as well as the samskaras in all koshic realms. As case conceptualization has as its second step the understanding of the etiology of presenting concerns, this clarity about these (yoga) psychological ways of being provides a clearer picture of the path forward with regards to goal-setting and intervention.

Reading the Gunas and Polyvagal States

The gunas are the fundamental qualities or expressions of nature that manifest in all sentient beings. They are the natural expressions and manifestations of spirit in nature (as compared to purusha and ishvara). They reflect humans’ fundamental ways of being in the world as well as the fundamental nature of all things, including weather, climate, activities, food, animals, plants, music, movies, water … everything. The gunas are manifest from the moment of birth and express themselves first in annamaya kosha, as we are born as embodied selves. They then quickly also express themselves in pranamaya kosha as our energy and vitality is almost immediately linked to our greater web of life that sustains and cares for us.

In ancient yoga psychology, there are three expressions of nature that are inherent in us: sattva (or lucidity and clarity), rajas (or motion, enthusiasm, action, and activation), and tamas (or groundedness, quietude, and inertia). Sattva refers to equilibrium or clarity. It is a way of being in the world that allows us to connect to others, to feel safe, to be in a state of trust, and to cope with resilience and stamina. It involves a state of harmony, balanced responsiveness, resilient arousal, and healthful engagement with the world. Tamas, on the other hand, refers to a state of lethargy, inertia, or exhaustion, that may bring with it bluntedness in emotional responsiveness, withdrawal, and a stance of distrustfulness toward the world and others. However, tamas can also be a grounding force that allows us to settle into the moment with solidity, when it invites us to rest and restore with clarity and intention. Rajas refers to a state of energy and activation; it can bring with it enthusiasm or hyperactivity. Generally speaking, it is associated with readiness for action, especially in the service of self-protection and self-defense. Rajas is useful when it ignites passion and enthusiasm, encouraging us to engage vigorously with the world. It may show up at work, in play, and in sports.

For many of us in the Western world, we pivot between the extremes of rajas and tamas, rather than finding our sweet settled and balanced state in sattva or even engaging with rajas and tamas in auspicious ways. We over-engage and over-activate at work, in sports, in our hobbies and our relationships – or we collapse into exhaustion, lethargy, and dullness when we feel tired and worn out. Ideally, we find our balance in sattva – in a state of clarity and openness that allows us to be in the world in an engaged and balanced way, finding a bit of rajasic energy to get up and get going when we need to and releasing in a bit of rest, stability, and solidity when we need to recover and ground.

The gunas align with the polyvagal state and thus reading PVS or energy can be equally helpful and mutually informative. Following are tables that describe both the gunas and polyvagal states. Observing students or clients with these features and traits in mind can help the teacher better understand the presentation of the client. If this information is new to the reader, please be sure to read the following two additional resources:


You might also want to watch the following YouTube video about polyvagal theory:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CM7GNeX42tc

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### Overview of the Gunas – Fundamental Human Ways of Being in the World

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<th><strong>Tamas</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sattva</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Translation</strong></td>
<td>MOTION → passion or energy versus drivenness or greed</td>
<td>MASS → grounding or stability versus lethargy or dullness</td>
<td>LUMINOSITY → knowledge, radiance and harmony versus flightiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>passion or creation experience of excess</td>
<td>darkness or destruction experience of lack</td>
<td>beingness or preservation experience of harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>→ activity, driving force → a kinetic tendency, underlying change, that refers to movement versus freneticism, to creation versus greediness</td>
<td>→ groundedness, entropy → a property of solidity, a tendency of resistance to change, that refers to stability versus inertia, to grounding versus entropy</td>
<td>→ knowledge, happiness → an awareness-supporting quality is transparent or reflective; a way of being that is healthful, pure, open, and enlightened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Manifestation</strong></td>
<td>hyperactivity hyperarousal hyper-engagement</td>
<td>hypoactivity hypoarousal hypo-engagement</td>
<td>balanced response resilient arousal healthful engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Expressions</strong></td>
<td>enthusiasm, action, vitality, alertness, movement, striving, problem-solving, inventiveness, decisiveness, openness to change</td>
<td>stability, reliability, persistence, loyalty, steadfastness, constancy, commitment, sleep, ease, patience, restfulness, stillness</td>
<td>purity, peace, intelligence, enthusiasm, discernment, insightfulness, openness, clarity, happiness, compassion, wisdom, goodness, balance, resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate Expressions</strong></td>
<td>activism, passion, ambition, arrogance, competitiveness, agitation, obsession, struggle</td>
<td>indecisiveness, confusion, fear, irrationality, apathy, grief, decept, procrastination, depression</td>
<td>order, cleanliness, health, self-restraint, contentment, humility, fearlessness, happiness, intellect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Expressions</strong></td>
<td>craving, hoarding, anger, desire, contempt, proneness to variable emotions/moods, greed, mania, phobia, worry, anxiety, non-reflection, impulsivity, aggression, ruthlessness</td>
<td>inertia, obliviousness, lethargy, dullness, idleness, disease or unease, sluggishness, quiet anger, harshness, violence, depression, resistance, torpor, lack of initiative</td>
<td>self-satisfaction, conceit, complacency - these are limited in negativity, as all actions are motivated by spiritual awareness and basic goodness; flightiness, spiritual bypassing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Gunas Expressed in the Koshas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Rajas</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tamas</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sattva</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annamaya Kosha</strong></td>
<td>restlessness, hyperactivity, speed, high energy, fast metabolism, fast reactions, burnout, drivenness</td>
<td>lethargy, sluggishness, weakness, inflexibility, lack of endurance, slow metabolism, slow reaction</td>
<td>Ease, flexibility, strength, balance, endurance, health, balanced metabolism, balanced reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pranamaya Kosha</strong></td>
<td>energy that seeks to accomplish, achieve, and create; energy that exudes passion or agitation</td>
<td>energy that expresses inertia, slowness, and decay; energy that is dull, dark, and depressive</td>
<td>Energy that reflects and creates balance and purity; energy that is meditative, peaceful, and serene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manomaya Kosha</strong></td>
<td>good general knowledge, skepticism; a restless but creative mind; a mind that is preoccupied with desire and wanting</td>
<td>ignorance, illusion; a dull, lazy, uninformed, and fickle mind; a mind that is preoccupied with rejection and resistance</td>
<td>discerning knowledge, illumination; a peaceful, serene, stable mind; an open mind that is accepting and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vijnanamaya Kosha</strong></td>
<td>Naturally passionate, pleasure-seeking, and engaged; guided by a basic fondness for goal-oriented and productive activity</td>
<td>Naturally inclined toward idle pursuits and pessimism; guided by a basic fondness for idleness and rest</td>
<td>Naturally compassionate, devoted, loving, calm, and spiritual; guided by a basic fondness for wisdom, compassion, and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anandamaya Kosha</strong></td>
<td>Creativity and vitality as expressions of joy and compassion</td>
<td>Loyalty and patience as expressions of love and connection</td>
<td>connection, love, joy, bliss, compassion, equanimity, spirituality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Gunas Expressed in Nature and the Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rajas</th>
<th>Tamas</th>
<th>Sattva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foods</strong></td>
<td>Stimulating, energizing, excitatory foods, including such foods as onions, garlic, and hot peppers; pungent spices; spicy, bitter, sour, acidic, hot, dry, or fried food; caffeinated food or drink; fast food; prescription drugs; sugary food or drink</td>
<td>Heavy and enervating foods such as meats, dairy, and junk foods; alcohol; stale, over-ripe, decaying, or spoiled food; overcooked food; Processed, packaged, canned, or reheated food; food laden with pesticides or preservatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eating Style</strong></td>
<td>eating too fast; eating without attention; eating at one’s desk, while working</td>
<td>overeating; eating to self-soothe or self-medicate; unconsciously overeating or constant snacking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home Environments</strong></td>
<td>Noisy, lots of artificial light, constant activity and a sense of hectic, 'loud' colors, constant running of TVs or radios; no time for shared meals or joint activities; disorganization</td>
<td>Dark colors, clutter or hoarding, lack of natural light; stale air, high humidity, or hot dry air; ; lifeless; no common space for family togetherness; closed windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colors and Light</strong></td>
<td>Red; bright or loud colors; neon colors; bright lights; perpetual or very bright sunlight</td>
<td>Black; dark or dull colors; dreary colors or lights; arctic &quot;day&quot;light in winter; lack of sunlight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Animals and Pets</strong></td>
<td>Monkeys, cats, dogs, lions, bears</td>
<td>Spiders, bats, snakes, snails, lizards, sloths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hobbies or Activities</strong></td>
<td>High-speed or high-violence sports; heavy exercise or hot exercise; frantic or noisy video games; shopping; loud music; noisy restaurants or bars that interfere with conversation</td>
<td>Sitting in front of the television without purpose or attention; drinking or taking drugs; frequent napping or sleeping late; watching violent movies or soaps; activities that tune out or turn off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Distrustful, confrontational, conflictual, argumentative, belligerent, superficial, transactional, demanding</td>
<td>Symbiotic, co-dependent, controlling, manipulative, oppressive, judgmental, habitual or unchanging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighborhoods</strong></td>
<td>Inner cities with lots of noise and activity where there are always lights and sounds that distract or arouse or even frighten</td>
<td>Neighborhoods that are dark, dirty, and dank with high rates of crime where people are disconnected and fearful; threat of crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Environment</strong></td>
<td>Hectic, full of deadlines, driven, competitive, angry or hostile, dangerous, cut-throat, actively harmful, controlled or controlling with lots of stress and overpowering responsibility</td>
<td>Boring, dull, senseless, violent, dealing with death, isolating, passively harmful to self or others, lots of stress without agency or control over the situation, paralyzing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Gunas Expressed in Nature and the Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weather or Climate</th>
<th>Rajas</th>
<th>Tamas</th>
<th>Sattva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High and turbulent wind; hurricanes or tornadoes; thunderstorms; rainstorms with flooding; hail storms; arctic summers with endless daylight; cool, windy island climates with constant ocean breezes; river ice breaking up at spring time</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rainy, damp, humid weather; very still (maybe even stale) air; snow and ice; arctic winter climates with perpetual ice and snow; very hot summer days; climates with oppressive heat and humidity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Warm sunlight with adequate humidity; bright, warm days with mild airflow; temperate or balanced climates with natural cool-warm cycles; warm spring days with returning sun and moist air; perfect fall days with sunshine and morning dew</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nature**

| All expressions of fire; volcanoes, raging rivers, waterfalls, hot springs, craggy rocks, towering mountains, choppy ocean waves or high surf, spiny cacti | All expressions of darkness; deep forests, dark canyons, stagnant ponds, damp caves, decaying leaves, dying vegetation, barren fields, dry meadows or creek beds | All expressions of light; open meadows, clear rivers, blue lakes with clear water, new spring growth, blossoming trees, gentle mountains, beautiful sunsets, tranquil oceans |

How clients or students related to these natural phenomena of the gunas can help the teacher understand clients’ or students’ personal gunas. Some students will seek out experience that align with their guna – often creating even more imbalance. Others will seek to balance their predominate guna by choosing experiences that are counter to their primary guna. These students achieve balance via such choices. In teaching, this information can inform how to present information and how to engage students in their practice.

**Example: Guna Guiding Asana**

For example, students with run-down (perhaps tamasic or worn out rajasic) bodies, an inability to find motivation or energy for taking action, and tendencies to give up and feel hopeless (arising from a dorsal vagal or spent sympathetic nervous system platform) may need rejuvenating and nourishing practices that help them rebuild physical strength and resources. Students with excitable, (hyper)active (overly rajasic) bodies, habits reflecting chronic activation of the sympathetic nervous system, and tendencies to overdo (whether through excessive exercise, workaholism, competitiveness, striving, too much socializing or other overconsumption) may benefit from routines and new habits that are calming and soothing. The challenge with either group is often that moving directly to the very opposite of what students are bringing with them may be too aversive, too foreign, and may lead to a rejection of the offerings. Moving to balancing practices first may be helpful for both groups.

Asana can range with regard to level of effort and ease. It can be specifically tailored to the individual needs of students to help attain or maintain homeostasis. It is an ideal approach for supporting students in the development of allostasis, or the ability to adapt to physical changes with resilience and the capacity to meet physical challenges without losing a sense of balance or vitality, without losing the capacity to remain grounded, expansive, and stable. It teaches students to (re)establish stability and equilibrium. Sometimes, balance or allostasis requires asana practice to support tonification, revitalization, or energizing of the physical body; at other times, it requires asana practice to help students down-regulate, calm, and nourish their physical body. Balanced practice, neither specifically energizing (tonifying) nor calming (reducing) – yet integrating both, is helpful for everyone and useful in general yoga classes or with new students whose needs have not yet been assessed or established.

All types of asana practices – activating, calming, or balancing – may be offered in the context of an overall integrated holistic asana class or integrated selectively within the context of extant mental health treatment or
even medical treatment. For all asana practices, there are three important considerations, with the first two being far more important than the third:

- **the acute and chronic condition of the student** – based on their presenting challenge, etiology as currently understood, prognostic considerations, and specific goals or intentions (covered already in the four noble truths)
- **the manner in which the practice is offered by the teacher and carried out by the student** – based on deliberate intentions and goals, conscious co-regulation, ongoing empowerment and self-agency, and integrated ongoing psychoeducation → MOST IMPORTANT to therapeutic applications
- **the types of asanas, movements, or kriyas chosen** – based on their inherent nature and energy

**Example: Guna Guiding Pranayama**

For students who tend to live in sympathetic arousal (or rajas), calming, grounding breathing may be most indicated; for students who tend toward a dorsal vagal state, energizing, expansive breathing may be helpful. For all students, starting with balancing, stabilizing breathing, especially using breath awareness and observation, is a great entrée into the practice if it is not yet clear which guna or nervous system state predominates.

Just as we offer variations to students in a particular form (asana) or movement (vinyasa, kriya), variations can be offered with regard to the same breathing practice. Variations of the same pranayama practice can be taught in a group class by offering choices about how to engage with a particular breathing practice (e.g., giving choice about attending more to the inhalation versus the exhalation). Thus, the same breathing practice (e.g., four-part breathing) may also be adapted to students’ energetic needs via slightly different emphases or intentions in the cuing.

**Balancing or Stabilizing Breathing Practices**

Balancing breathing is functional breathing that supports the stabilization of the autonomic nervous system, anatomy (biomechanically), physiology (biochemically), breath (energetically), and mind (mentally and emotionally). As a bottom-up process of enhanced and accurate self-awareness and top-down emotional self-regulation, it focuses on balanced and stable inhalations and exhalations, gentle breath retention, balanced speed and vigor of breath, awareness of breath location (including interoceptive awareness of nasal versus mouth and diaphragmatic versus chest breathing), attention to breath texture, and clarity about the four parts of the breath – inhalation, pause at the top, exhalation, and pause at the bottom. It invites a parasympathetic shift in the nervous system to a ventral vagal (or sattvic) way of being present; balances mood, energy, and physical arousal; provides opportunity for exploring the kleshas and vrittis; and invites social engagement, a sense of safety, and equilibrium.

Balancing or stabilizing breathing can be adjusted to be more or less active or calming, depending on the beginning state of the students’ experience and presence. However, its central feature is the cultivation of physical, energetic, affective, mental, and emotional balance. Balancing breathing is nasal, diaphragmatic, slow, and light; it is rhythmic and easeful (balancing effort and ease). It is cued with intention to create a sense of ease, subtlety, and lightness in the student’s energy while still actively engaging the with breath – either through breath awareness or breath control. Stabilizing breathing is centered in the abdomen and relies primarily on the diaphragm with regard to the biomechanics of the breath. It is slowed to achieve a balanced breath rate for no more than 10 breaths per minutes, while keeping breath volume at a light load without being either shallow or forced. This combination of breathing – nasal, slow, light, and diaphragmatic – will stabilize the biochemistry of the breath, achieving CO2 levels in an ideal range of comfort, to maintain an optimal cadence of breath.
Balancing or stabilizing breath works well for rajasic students if action is emphasized in cuing at the beginning and then calming becomes the predominant cuing toward the end. It is auspicious with tamasic students if cued with ease and calm at first, slowly adding small increments of increasing effort. Sattvic students resonate well with all of the stabilizing breathing practices and activation versus calming might be adjusted depending upon external variables (such as time of day, demand characteristics in the student’s life, and so on).

Examples include:

- breath awareness of natural breathing
- breath observation of natural breathing
- four-part breath (awareness focus; without control)
- equal breathing (sama vritti)
- alternate nostril breathing (nadhi shodana)
- sun breath
- connection breath
- breath of joy (toward energizing – use with discernment)

**Vitalizing or Expansive Breathing Practices**

Energizing breathing, as a bottom-up process of awareness and top-down process up-regulation of the nervous system to access emotional and physical balance, focuses on the inhalation, intentional speed or vigor of breath, and the combination of breath and movement. It recalibrates an immobilized or collapsed nervous system, up-regulates mood, energy, and physical vitality, provides opportunity for exploring kleshas and vrittis, and invites engagement, action, and initiative. It counteracts a tamasic breath that tends to be slowed, ineffective, high in the chest, and through the mouth.

Energizing breathing practices are applied with the intention of activating the nervous system and shifting arousal from the dorsal vagal parasympathetic to the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, with an ultimate goal of achieving a ventral vagal state. Their central feature is the cultivation of increased arousal and upregulated affect. Energizing breathing is slightly more active, faster, diaphragmatic, and measured with regard to volume of breath inhaled – with focus on inhalation over exhalation and on the right nostril over the left nostril. It still prefers nasal over mouth breathing.

Energizing breathing is cued with the intention to create a sense of engagement and expansion in the student’s energy and nervous system. Energizing breathing can initially be activated via chest breathing, but ultimately becomes is centered in the abdomen and relies primarily on the diaphragm with regard to the biomechanics of the breath. It initially speeds up the breath rate to more than 10 breaths per minutes and/or increases breath volume. This combination of breathing – nasal, faster, more intense (or deep), diaphragmatic, and geared to the sympathetic branch of the ANS – may initially destabilize and then will restabilize the biochemistry of the breath, achieving CO₂ levels in an ideal range of comfort, to maintain an optimal cadence of breath.

Examples include:

- extended inhalation
- ujjayi with extended inhalation
- viloma with segmented inhalation/long exhalation
- surya bedha
- breath of joy
- breath with movement (kriyas) – with clear intention and instruction
- kapalabhati and/or bastrika – with caution
Cuing suggestions for energizing breathing

- invite a(n) energetic, strong, robust, active, spirited, brave, decisive, lively, dynamic, determined, vigorous, resilient, buoyant breath
- moving the breath into the belly with intention, resolve, commitment, determination
- enlivening, strengthening, invigorating, stimulating, refreshing, revitalizing the breath
- creating strength, determination, fortitude, willpower, resolve, courage in the breath
- attending closely to the inhalation, encouraging the inhalation to lengthen
- easing up on the exhalation, letting the exhalation move naturally
- lengthening each breath with determination yet without creating a sense of gasping for air
- breathing to create a sturdy rhythm and volume without forcing or chest breathing
- let ease be balanced by effort
- invite effort to balance ease
- use a mantra such as: “exhaling, I cultivate a sense of aliveness; exhaling, I cultivate an open heart”

Calming or Grounding Breathing Practices

Calming breathing, as a bottom-up process of awareness and top-down process of nervous system down-regulation to access emotional and physical balance, focuses on the exhalation, decreased speed or vigor of breath, and combining breath and resting. It recalibrates a sympathetically aroused nervous system, down-regulates mood, energy, and physical activation, provides opportunity for exploring the kleshas and vrittis, and invites gentle curiosity, calming, and relaxation. It counteracts a rajasic breath that tends to be fast, panting, high in the chest, and through the mouth. It can also be used targetedly for a specific purpose, such as helping with inducing sleep.

Calming breathing practices are applied with the intention of (re)grounding the nervous system and shifting arousal from the sympathetic to the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. Their central feature is the cultivation of reducing arousal and downregulating affect. Calming breathing is nasal, slow, diaphragmatic, and light – with focus on exhalation over inhalation and on the left nostril over right nostril.

Calming breathing is cued with the intention to create a sense of ease and relaxation in the student’s energy and nervous system. Calming breathing is centered in the abdomen and relies primarily on the diaphragm with regard to the biomechanics of the breath. It is slowed across time to achieve a balanced breath rate for fewer than 10 breaths per minutes, while keeping breath volume at a light load without being shallow. This combination of breathing – nasal, slow, light, diaphragmatic, and geared to the parasympathetic branch of the ANS – will stabilize the biochemistry of the breath, achieving CO2 levels in an ideal range of comfort, to maintain an optimal cadence of breath.

Examples include:

- natural breath awareness and observation
- subtle breathing
- bhramari (bumble bee breath)
- gentle, short breath retention after exhalation
- chandra bedha
- connection breath and sun breath with easeful rhythm
Cuing suggestions for calming breathing

- invite a(n) soft, calm, calming, sweet, gentle, tender, light, easeful, loving, feathery, compassionate, kind breath
- dropping the breath into the belly
- softening, lightening, relaxing, easing the breath
- creating ease, peace, lightness, comfort, effortlessness in the breath
- attending closely to the exhalation, gently inviting the exhalation to lengthen
- easing up on the inhalation, letting the inhalation move naturally
- slowing, lengthening the breath without creating a sense of gasping for air
- breathing increasingly slowly at a rhythm and volume that stays easeful
- invite ease to balance effort
- use a mantra such as: “inhaling, I cultivate calm; exhaling, I cultivate grounding”
### Overview of the Gunas – Relationship to Polyvagal Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rajas</th>
<th>Tamas</th>
<th>Satvva</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stress Response</strong></td>
<td>Associated with sympathetic nervous system arousal; a self-protective style in which the individual tends to expect danger, living in a near-constant state of sympathetic arousal, isolation, and physiological overload or break-down</td>
<td>IMMOBILIZATION: the stress response associated with this nervous system defense or nature is shut-down or collapse (freeze and submit) in self-protection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Relationship to Polyvagal Theory | Stress Response associated with sympathetic nervous system arousal; a self-protective style in which the individual tends to expect danger, living in a near-constant state of sympathetic arousal, isolation, and physiological overload or break-down | Relationship to Polyvagal Theory | Relationship to Polyvagal Theory associated with the dorsal vagal branch of the parasympathetic nervous system; a self-protective style in which individuals expect life threat and develop a habitual pattern of shrinking back from life; associated with trauma events or complex trauma experiences if predominant | Relationship to Polyvagal Theory associated with the ventral branch of the parasympathetic nervous system; a stance of perceived safety leading to social engagement, resilience, ability to downregulate, and action commensurate with need and context; puts the brakes on sympathetic arousal |

| Nervous System Regulation | Nervous System Regulation sympathetic innervation pathways are distributed along the spinal cord (to activate all muscles necessary for fight or flight); associated with hyperarousal of the nervous system and with mobilization or activation (readiness for action); useful manifestations are the capacity to act in response to threat, the capacity to respond to life challenges | Nervous System Regulation dorsal innervation pathways include the heart, diaphragm, and viscera (to bring neuroceptive and activate only body areas necessary for immediate survival); associated with hypoarousal of the nervous system and immobilization; useful manifestations are the capacity to pause to restore, the ability to feel grounded and steady, a willingness to persist | Nervous System Regulation ventral innervation pathways include the face, throat, and upper chest (to activate muscles of social connection and engagement); associated with adaptive regulation of the nervous system and allostasis and homeostasis; capacity to be socially engaged, to grow and restore, and adapt, grow and evolve – the embodiment of resilience |
The Many Polyvagal States – Our Physiology of Safety
(with gratitude to Stephen Porges as experienced in workshop environments)

- **Pure VVC** ⇒ **Perception of safety**: live in a socially engaged parasympathetic nervous system; relaxed, engaging, and restorative (myelinated) ventral vagal space – **SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

- (VVC + SNS) ⇒ **Perception of the need for safe and interpersonally engaged action with mobilization** in the service of personal or collective growth, health, competition, and play (especially play involving physical movement); sympathetic arousal that is slightly downregulated and accompanied by the desire or need for social engagement; assertiveness (as opposed to aggressiveness) that leaves open a door for collaboration – **PREPAREDNESS, PLAY**

- (SNS + VVC) ⇒ **Perception of the need for safe and interpersonally engaged action with mobilization** in the service of assertive (as opposed to aggressive) self-defense, self-protection, or defense and protection of loved ones or one’s community; this assertiveness leaves open a door for collaboration and negotiation; emotions stay regulated and manageable; opportunity remain for finding peaceful solutions and social reconnection outside of tribe – **ASSERTIVENESS**

- **Pure SNS** ⇒ **Perception of danger**: prepared for danger, live in a near-constant state of sympathetic arousal, isolation, and physiological overload or break-down; mobilized sympathetic NS state of fight or flight – **MOBILIZATION**

- (SNS + DVC) ⇒ **Perception of the need to survive by ceasing mobilization** in service of survival in the face of being overcome; a collapse into a dorsal state with echoes or traces of the urge to flight or flee; an inadvertent effort to ensure physical and psychological survival – **FREEZE, SUBMIT**

- (DVC + SNS) ⇒ **Perception of the need to survive by increasing mobilization** in service of bringing physical, energetic, mental, emotional, and social engagement functions back on line; an active effort to rally resources of the SNS to reemerge from dorsal collapse – **RALLYING, HOPE**

- **Pure DVC** ⇒ **Perception of life threat**: develop a habitual pattern of shrinking back from life, withdrawing, disengaging – even dissociating – from human experiences and relationships; parasympathetic NS is at an extreme state of withdrawal, of surrender and hopelessness – **IMMOBILIZATION**

- (DVC + VVC) ⇒ **Perception of the need for safe immobilization without significant active interpersonal engagement** in the service of rejuvenation (e.g., healing from an injury, supporting growth or immunity, regeneration of physical or energetic resources); a dorsal state of calm and of letting go, a state of deep relaxation or surrender as might be experienced in yoga or meditation, a state of concentrated mind with physical immobilization; this nervous system state may be accessed in a solitary or communal setting – **RELAXATION, TRANCE**

- (VVC + DVC) ⇒ **Perception of the need for safe, trusting and interpersonally engaged immobilization** in the service of prosocial activities (e.g., child birth, nursing, sadness, collapse in laughter); a dorsal state of surrender or relinquishment of control and effort, accompanied by strong human connection and engagement – **INTIMACY, SHARED STILLNESS**
Reading Affect and Kleshas

Affect: Affective Tone (or Vedana) Plus Arousal

*Vitality*, in the yogic sense, can be understood as the energetic and affective resources at hand at any given moment in life. In modern science terms, it is our body budget of available versus needed body resources. Body budgeting is based on the brain’s predictions of energy resources needed and expended (as registered via the interoceptive cortical network – including the insula and anterior cingulate cortex; Feldman Barrett, 2017) to keep the body alive, able to function, heal, repair, move, digest, fight infection, pump blood, breathe, talk, relate — in other words to be and remain a living and breathing human.

Energy is expended for all these functions and if we expend more energy than we nourish, our vitality wanes; when we nourish ourselves adequately, our vitality flourishes. Resources and energy are recharged through proper nutrition, sleep, and movement. However, they also nourished or depleted through relationships with other people, other sentient beings (yes, even a loving relationship with a pet can recharge your vitality). Our energy budget or vitality are accompanied by affect to combine to help us predict our own needs and from there to predict the world, navigate relationships, plan our future, understand our past, and live in the present moment.

What is this *affect* that combines with vitality to guide our predictions, decisions, and understanding of the world? It is a combination of arousal and affective tone (or valence), sensed via neuroceptive and interoceptive feedback from the body to the brain stem, medulla, and interoceptive cortical network. *Arousal* can be explored as a continuum anchored by hypoarousal (tired, sluggish, exhausted, lacking energy) at one end and hyperarousal (pumped, active, driven, full of energy) at the other. *Affective tone*, or *vedana* – the flavoring of all experiences (an important Buddhist concept), can be anchored by the descriptors pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. Each affective tone can vary in intensity. Unpleasantness may be a very mild sensation or it may be a sensation of extremely disagreeableness and dysregulation (perhaps leading to aversion or fear). The same goes for pleasantness, which may manifest as a slight preference or sense of liking something to intense pleasure or enjoyment (perhaps leading to clinging or grasping). Neutrality may mean mild confusion or a lack of affect tone or lack or preference. At the other extreme it may trigger a sense of extreme confusion or disorientation, disinterest, indifference, even apathy.

*Arousal and affective tone always combine to create affect* – a general sense of feeling (not emotion, which is granular and more definable) that accompanies us (in varying ways, of course) throughout our entire day and lifetime. Affect feeds into how we view and interpret (or predict) the world – what we see, hear, taste, smell, touch; how we relate to other people, circumstances, events; how we predict, behave, and make decisions. And yet affect is often hidden from conscious awareness. This means that *much of what we do in life may be unconsciously driven by what we predict will happen to us based on the underlying affect with which we approach the present moment*.

As vital and affective awareness deepen, students awaken to a deeper appreciation and understanding of their baseline of vitality in the context of their energetic resources (state of arousal), their affective tone, the resultant affect and associated reactivity. This new-found depth and nuance in sensing into their state of arousal, affective presence, and affective predilections (kleshas) may mean that, at times, students discover new challenges, may realize that a previously-perceived difficulty is not as they thought it was, may discover the variability (or impermanence) of their affective and energetic experience, or may move into a new relationship with their sensations. They may also begin to realize circumstances that deepen or lighten their suffering, beginning to understand possible predisposing or perpetuating factors that trigger and maintain energetic reactivity or unpleasantness of affect.
A Visual of Affect as a Combination of Affective Tone and Arousal  
(with sample adjective for possible resultant sensations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affect</th>
<th>Affective Tone (Vedana)</th>
<th>Associated Guna/PVT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Pleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g., upset, anxious, distraught, panicked, terrified, agitated</td>
<td>e.g., elated, high, thrilled, enthusiastic, pumped, passionate, ardent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rajas, rajas w/ sattva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SNS, SNS-VVC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>e.g., disoriented, unsettled, bewildered, baffled, disconcerted, flustered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sattva, sattva w/ rajas, sattva w/ tamas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VVC; VVC-SNS, VVC-DVC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>e.g., confused, muddled, disinterested, uncertain, puzzled, bemused</td>
<td>e.g., gratified, pleased, contented, satisfied, comfortable, relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tamas, tamas w/ sattva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DVC; DVC-VVC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>e.g., apathetic, sluggish, lethargic, unmotivated, shiftless, uninterested</td>
<td>e.g., serene, calm, still, peaceful, tranquil, at peace, unruffled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Outcome: Vrittis and Samskaras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aversion (dvesa)</td>
<td>Clinging, grasping (raga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear (abhinivesa)</td>
<td>Ego attachment (asmita)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confusion (avidya)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attuning to affective and energetic sensation and their pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral nature is also a helpful way for students to begin to realize the impacts of a sustained practice, tracking changes and transformations in their vital experience – and, over time, perhaps tuning into changes that signal progress, an easing of suffering, and greater wellbeing overall. In other words, the cultivation of affective awareness – which is part and parcel of yoga practice – supports all of the noble truths.

Kleshas: Emotional Predispositions

In yoga terms, affect ushers in the arising of the kleshas – attachment, aversion, ego, fear, and confusion (or misunderstanding). The kleshas – along with the gunas (or our polyvagal neural default) – have an impact on our entire experience of and interaction with the world. The kleshas (i.e., interoception of vitality and affect and subsequent reactivity) and gunas (i.e., neuroception of safety, danger, or threat and subsequent defaults of VVC, SNS, or DVC) flavor our thought processes and decision-making – our vrittis – and our mind states. The mind states and vrittis of perception, misperception, planning, memory, and sleep are explored in more detail in a later section.

The yogic concept of the kleshas has many translations and meanings, all juxtaposing these potential challenges to the concept of vidya, or clear understanding. They can be seen as hindrances, causes, or roots of suffering; affective or energetic sources of confusion from which suffering, pressure, friction, problems, and stress (i.e., dukkha) arise; emotional conditioning or predilections that flavor (or tint) experience and understanding of life in combination with the gunas (and ultimately in combination with our vrittis); fetters that get attached to experience – rather than experiencing what is, we start to have preference for what we would like to experience instead, for something different than what we have – we live an idea world rather than the real world, in clouded mind, rather than clear mind; or distractions that prevent us from being with life as it is – from being present for what is.
In the yogic tradition, five kleshas are enumerated (defined in detail below), namely, attachment, aversion, ego, fear of death and change, and confusion and misunderstanding. In various Buddhist traditions, sometime list three primary root kleshas and some list as many as seven kleshas. Given the yogic context, the five kleshas model is presented here. Regardless of ancient tradition, the kleshas stand in opposition to \textit{vidya}, the capacity to accurately see, understand, and be present the reality of each moment. When we transcend the kleshas and move into vidya we are liberated clinging, grasping, wanting, not wanting, worrying, and more.

The kleshas may find their origin very early in life with the simple sensation of affect and arousal. As noted above, they emerge as we move from simply perceiving our physiological (arousal) and affective (valence) state to developing preferences for particular affects or types of arousal. Simply being with or noting things are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral is hardwired into our being; the interpretation of these affects (vedana in Sanskrit), on the other hand, is a developmental process that starts in relationship with caring others.

The development of the kleshas begins in pranamaya kosha with the experience of something (an object, a relationship, an interaction, a circumstance) as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (valence) along with a sense of arousal (hyperarousal, hypoarousal, natural arousal). If there is no value judgment about it, the experience in and of itself is neither problematic nor reactive - it is simply the affective tone (or flavoring) of our experience (vedana) – a reality that is always with us. When we notice vedana (i.e., affect and arousal) and understand that this is all it is, often the experience will arise and fall away; it will come and go without reactivity or consequence. We can simply enjoy what is enjoyable and move on when it is over. We can simply be with what is unpleasant, trusting that this too shall pass. We can endure the neutral without getting bored or confused. However, if we experience displeasure and want to move away from it and perceive it as problematic or if we experience pleasure and we want more of it and perceive as meaningful, important, or even essential, the kleshas have been born.

When we recognize our affective state or level of arousal and develop a preference about how we would like to feel, we begin to cling to or grasp for affective experiences of pleasure and to push away the experience of displeasure or neutrality. The development of preferences for particular affective experiences can arise in all sense portals: We might develop preferences for what arises visually, auditorily, gustatorily, olfactorily, tactile, perceptually, and so on, including preferences for mind states and relationships (though the latter two come later developmentally). Following are some examples of the kleshas in the various sensory portals – obviously these lists could be endless:

- **Visual**: hating or being proud of how we look, liking some types of art but not appreciating others, judging some people as ugly or unattractive and others as gorgeous, judging a scenery as magnificent or unimpressive, looking for beauty or seeing ugliness …
- **Auditory**: hating certain sounds, loving particular types of music but not others, judging people by the sound of their voice, being bothered by certain noises and unencumbered by others …
- **Olfactory**: loving particular perfumes or scents, being grossed out by particular smells, judging people for body odor, having bad or good memories in response to certain aromas
- **Gustatory**: loving certain foods – perhaps to the point of addiction, hating the taste of particular drinks, judging a food by its taste or lack of taste
- **Tactile**: seeking certain sensations of pleasure, rejecting certain types of touch, judging items by how they feel

The second arrow: If we fail to notice the sensation for what it is (impermanent and empty), it will lead us to the second dart, the kleshas. We either fight the sensation (with aversion or fear) or get attached to it (with clinging, craving, pride, ego) and/or we blame the object, circumstance, or relationship that gave rise to the sensation. We want the noise, the smell, the rudeness to stop; we get mad at the people making the noise, the smell, the rude comments; we want to leave the situation. Or we get attached to pleasure, do not want it to stop
and begin to seek it out over and over. We begin to want, to cling, to grasp, to desire. We may also begin to fear the loss of pleasure, the loss of relationships, the loss of our identity, and begin to feel existential fears and anxiety, even death anxiety.

In other words, the experience of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations (affects and arousal, or vedana), is natural and in Buddhism is called the first arrow. It does not have to harm us as long as we are aware of the sensation, as well as it arising and dropping away. If the experience is transformed via conditioning into craving (in the form of attachment, wanting more) or aversion (wanting something different), the second arrow has been launched and it is this dart that makes the kleshas and binds us into a cycle of suffering. It is only if we recognize that it is simply a sensation arising in us (impermanent and empty), that we can let go of that second dart, of the kleshas.

| Overview of the Kleshas – Emotional Predilections or Roots of Suffering |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| **Raga**     | **Dvesa**     | **Asmita**     | **Abhinivesha**     | **Avidya**     |
| **Translation** | Attachment, greed, desire | Aversion, enmity, hatred | Egoism, ego-attachment | Fear of death or change | Confusion, delusion, ignorance |
| **Definition** | Wanting pleasure, desiring positive outcomes; attached to having what we want | Intolerant of pain or discomfort; wanting things differently than they are; anger as default response | Ego-absorbed individualism and self-absorption; worried about losing one’s identity | Holding on to how things are; not accepting impermanence of things and experiences | Lack of wisdom, incomplete understanding, misinterpretation, limiting views |
| **Basic Manifestation** | Expectations to have things and relationships a certain way | Rejecting attitude, lack of satisfaction, trapped in anger and aversion in daily life | Identification with roles for self and others; upset if role expectations are not met | Anxiety about the new or unknown, worrying about change, ambiguity, uncertainty | Inability to see impermanence, to recognize suffering + interdependence; misunderstanding |
| **Attitude** | We go through life, the world, our relationship mostly paying attention to and seeing what we like and what we want | We go through life, the world, our relationship mostly paying attention to and seeing all the things we do not like or do not want | We go through life, our relationships mostly based on our concepts of who we and others should be and the roles that define us | We go through life, our relationships adhering to the old and familiar, ever afraid of what might be, of anything new | We go through life, the world, our relationship mostly confused and not clearly seeing what is happening |
| **Transcendence** | Faith and devotion | Discerning intelligence | Fluidity in and non-attachment to identity | Openness to change and ambiguity | Equanimity |

The kleshas may be linked to our dopamine-driven reward, pleasure, and emotion circuits of the ventral striatum which activate when we seek pleasure or want to avoid pain – they can be like a gas pedal for the activation of motivation. Thus, not surprisingly, once cravings or desires flavor our perceptions, we begin to impose our perspective on reality instead of seeing life as it really is – we begin to misunderstand ourselves and our world. In other words, once they awaken, the kleshas are the energy and affect that we carry into everything. They become the energy and affect that tint out motivations, intentions, thoughts, speech, actions, and relationships. This happens unconsciously, at a habit-driven level, until we notice this predilection and how it unfolds in a way that happens mindfully and discerningly. The pull of wanting and craving can ruin our lives – in yoga and Buddhist traditions the overcoming of craving, the liberation from clinging (and its flip side of aversion) is enough to bring us enlightenment.

Understanding students’ or clients’ affect and kleshas can help teachers adapt cuing and practice variations to support students in becoming more aware of their emotional predilections, recognize their impact, and begin to develop executive control over the resulting emotional, behavioral, and relational reactivity. In all yoga
practices, teachers or yoga clinicians can help students tune into their state of arousal, affective tone or vedana (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral) and their emotional predispositions. When working one-on-one or in small groups, teachers can begin to cue specific students to draw their attention to how their affects or kleshas are showing up in their physical, energetic, mental, or emotional responses in any given moment. Understanding these important yoga psychological concepts will help teachers or clinicians guide students toward more self-understanding, self-compassion, and behavior change. Students can begin to learn how their affects and kleshas may sap their vitality and compromise their energy. They can also begin to understand how they may flavor and distort their mental state, thoughts, and emotions.

Cuing Examples to Increase Awareness of Affect and Kleshas

Vedana-related cuing can simply draw attention to the feeling tone of the experience accompanying the focus on breathing (whether in breath observation, awareness, or the pranayamas that are balancing, vitalizing, or calming). It can include gentle questions or prompts related to the perception of experience that emerges related to breathing as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Kleshas-related cuing may draw mindful attention the emergence of attachment (grasping, clinging, wanting, desiring), aversion (hatred, dislike, rejection, annoyance, anger), ego (wanting this “my” way), fear (dreading change, worry, panic, anxiety), and avidya (confusion, misunderstanding, muddledness, surprise) that are emerging as breath is explored. This type of cuing can also invoke noticing of reactivity in response to the emergence of the kleshas and their power to flavor our thought processes and action. Examples of kleshas-related cues that may be added to the general instructions of either breath awareness or breath observation are as follows, but can, of course, take many other shapes and forms:

- as you notice your breathing, are you aware of any of your kleshas being activated?
- what does the extended in/exhalation bring with it? is there any sense of trying to hold on, to hold back? a sense of clinging or grasping?
- does extending the gap at the top of the breath have a particular affective tone? is it pleasant? unpleasant? uninteresting? confusing?
- does exploring the gap at the top/bottom of the breath raise any of the kleshas? fear? aversion? a desire to cling or grasp? maybe confusion?
- is any part of the breath cycle associated with a particular feeling tone? is there pleasantness? no affect at all? unpleasantness?
- does any part of the breath cycle raise a particular kleshas? is there clinging or grasping? confusion or indifference?
- what emerges for you as you breathe in only through one nostril? is there the unpleasantness of straining for air? the pleasantness of ease?
- what kleshas show up as you breathe only through the left/right nostril? is there a letting go? or perhaps a sense of dislike or aversion? or perhaps fear or desire for the next breath?

As teachers cue these invitations into vedana and kleshas, it is helpful to remember to cue non-judgment, open-heartedness, open-mindedness, and self-compassion. These explorations are about increasing personal awareness of affective tone, proclivities, and reactivity and its effects. They are not meant to invite judgment or self-reproach. If students respond to the practice in a self-judgmental way, they may not be ready to explore affect and kleshas in this particular context.

More readings:
Recognizing Vrittis and Mind States

The Five Contents or Fluctuations of the Mind

The five vrittis (mental contents or fluctuations) are perception (pramana), misperception (viparyaya), imagination (vikalpa), memory (smriti), and sleep (nidra). Accurate perception is unflavored by the kleshas and gunas and can result in helpful vrittis – vrittis concerned with dedication to the practice, to the cultivation of compassion, and in the service of insight. The vrittis of imagination, memory, and sleep can have wonderful consequence, such as being able to be creative, to plan the future, to learn from the past, to consolidate and use time- and place-stamped memory, and to consolidate new learning while cleansing the brain at night. In other words, not all mental ideation is unhelpful, inappropriate, or flavored by the kleshas and gunas.

The trick in noticing or becoming aware of the vrittis is to notice which vritti shows up when there is distraction or lack of focus (i.e., when the default mode network kicks in) and how the mental states in these moments guide or affect decision-making and actions. It is the unconscious unfolding of the vrittis that can get humans in trouble – that, when intention, thought, speech, actions, behaviors, and relational patterns become habitual and rigid, then bias, prejudice, reactivity, rigidity of belief and attitudes, and troublesome thinking will appear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vritti</th>
<th>Possible Translations</th>
<th>Unflavored → possibly useful</th>
<th>Flavored → likely to lead to samskaras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pramana</td>
<td>• right perception</td>
<td>• clear perception is where we want to be – we need to see reality as it is</td>
<td>essentially see viparyaya below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• verifiable knowledge</td>
<td>• we construct our reality without flavoring via direct experience, via inference, via testimony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• we discern or spot our misidentifications as they arise and do not get sucked into them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• we penetrate our mental constructions to recognize when they have become neither truth nor reality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viparyaya</td>
<td>• misperception</td>
<td>• the helpfulness of not knowing (or misperceiving) sometimes lets us dive into situations that we might otherwise not try</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• faulty thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td>• getting trapped in opinions, values, ideas, getting lost in rigid perceptions of roles and relationships; imposing our view and skewing reality into the direction of our preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• illogical thought</td>
<td></td>
<td>• psychological protective mechanisms kick in (e.g., projecting emotions and thoughts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• cognitive distortion</td>
<td></td>
<td>• we forget that thoughts are just constructions, not reality – we get lost in thinking that our beliefs and identifications are truths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• rigid beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vikalpa</td>
<td>• fantasy</td>
<td>• creativity, dreams for the future, impetus for trying new things, creation of change, emergence of new ideas, development of new solutions to old problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• imagination, creative thinking</td>
<td>• the mental capacity to imagine the future and to learn from the past</td>
<td>• getting trapped in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• future thinking</td>
<td>• mental skills that supports our ability to be altruistic, to take the mental and emotional perspective of another</td>
<td>• getting lost in day dreams and then not acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• day dreaming</td>
<td></td>
<td>• clinging to wishes and desires for particular outcomes of developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• we forget that the future is not yet real – that our future as we construct it in the mind, is simply a thought in the present moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vrittis</td>
<td>Possible Translations</td>
<td>Unflavored (\rightarrow) possibly useful</td>
<td>Flavored (\rightarrow) likely to lead to samskaras</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smriti</td>
<td>• memory</td>
<td>• remembrance, mindfulness, time-stamped and place-stamped memory</td>
<td>• getting trapped in the past, getting lost or stuck in old stories and narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recollection</td>
<td>• the ability to reflect on past experiences to create change and growth</td>
<td>• getting attached to old identities, memory as a habit or rut – as a narrowing of possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• remembrance</td>
<td>• memory as a helpful guide in the present and as we plan the future</td>
<td>• we forget that the past is no longer real – that our past as we recollect it, is simply a thought in the present moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nidra</td>
<td>• deep dreamless sleep</td>
<td>• rejuvenation through deep, dreamless sleep (perhaps associated with the new discovery of the glymphatic system)</td>
<td>• getting trapped in escapism or avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• absence of thought</td>
<td>• consolidation of memory during deep sleep (triaging short-term memories accumulated in the hippocampus during the day, connecting some to lasting neural pathways and rejecting or letting go of unnecessary ones)</td>
<td>• getting lost in spaciness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• emptiness</td>
<td>• creativity may emerge during deep sleep leading us to waking up with a new idea</td>
<td>• sleeping (or sleepwalking) through our lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• absence of the other four vrittis</td>
<td>• sleep is a crucial aspect of life, allowing rest and rejuvenation in the body and improving brain function</td>
<td>• the nature of our sleep may also give us hints about the nature of mind, or our mind states</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Whatever you frequently think and ponder upon, that will become the inclination of your mind’*

The Buddha

**Noticing the Five Contents of the Mind**

Observation of the vrittis can be woven into body scans, sensory scans, and mindfulness of the natural breath. In fact, all of the strategies discussed so far lend themselves to an exploration of the vrittis. Asana and pranayama practices are also wonderful opportunity to notice and cue students’ minds and their fluctuations, as well as departures into distraction, inattention, and misperception driven by the default mode network. Observation of the contents of the mind can also be noted as something that can be fostered in daily life.

It is enormously helpful to begin to notice which station of the mind students dial into habitually. We can invite students simply take a moment’s time-out to tune in to become aware of what the mind is creating:

- Are we stuck in the past?
- Are we distracted with planning, fear, or anticipation of the future?
- Are we escaping into daydreams or fantasies about what might be or should be?
- Are we rigid in our response to some?
- Are we defensively holding on to a belief in the absence of sound data to back it up?
- Do we get trapped into wanting things our way?
Each momentary awareness of what the mind is dishing up can become a profound invitation to shift how the response – to question if we can believe what we are thinking. A few examples of common mental misperceptions that teachers might notice in students (and themselves) are shown below. As teacher begin to notice these mental and emotional patterns in their students, they can help students draw attention and awareness to these habits through gentle cuing. Having these concrete examples might support awareness though noticing the vrittis can also be as simple as noting “memory”, “fantasy”, “future thinking”, “planning” or other representations of the what is happening in the mind when moves away from attention or task-orientation into automatic pilot, distraction, or default thinking.

### Examples of Mental Misperceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Misperception</th>
<th>Associated Thought, Speech, or Action</th>
<th>Resultant Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embracing false dichotomies</td>
<td>Attitudes of us versus them, right versus wrong, good versus bad</td>
<td>Creates polarization, can result in dehumanization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating rankings</td>
<td>Creating hierarchies based on arbitrary external variables, such religion, race, culture, educational level, skin color, etc.</td>
<td>Means not seeing others or ourselves as we really are, arrogance, feeling better or worse than... entitlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with pretension</td>
<td>Trying to impress, trying to hide certain aspects of ourselves, not being honest</td>
<td>Creates distance and dishonesty, creates separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulging in judgment</td>
<td>Making ourselves feel better by tearing others down and being overly critical</td>
<td>Results in projection, creates separation and dishonesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being all-knowing</td>
<td>Having the attitude of already knowing, of knowing better than others</td>
<td>Results in being closed to new learning, alienates others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing up with defensiveness</td>
<td>Feeling the need to protect ourselves, feeling attacked or under siege and then reacting from that place</td>
<td>Creates distance, perpetuates hurt by lashing out against others, prevents open communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-upping</td>
<td>Needing to feel or be better than other, putting others down to feel better or more secure</td>
<td>Results in hurt feelings, perpetuates emotional distance, creates false hierarchies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misreading cues</td>
<td>Imposing expectations on experience and interactions that distort what really happened</td>
<td>Leads to misunderstandings, creates interpersonal distance, perpetuates loneliness and isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposing viewpoints</td>
<td>Interpreting events and relationship from one’s own perspective, attitudes, stereotypes, and biases</td>
<td>Leads to misunderstandings, perpetuates lack of mutuality, perpetuates conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being on autopilot</td>
<td>Being inattentive to details, ignoring or not noticing cues in environments or relationships, lacking mindfulness</td>
<td>Leads to misreading situations and people, creates misunderstandings and false recollections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing everything we think</td>
<td>Taking our own side in arguments or disagreements, not being able to shift set or viewpoints, insisting on being right</td>
<td>Leads to rifts in relationships, keeps conflict alive and well, limits our capacity to see others realistically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistaking memory for reality</td>
<td>Believing that we remember our experiences accurately, living in the past with righteousness</td>
<td>Creates lack of forgiveness, may perpetuate emotional distance, can lead to victimhood or victimization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting trapped in roles</td>
<td>Shoe-horning oneself or others into certain roles, requiring self or others to play out particular identities in relationships or society</td>
<td>Creates a lack of authenticity for self and others, leads to rigidity in relationships, perpetuates interpersonal patterns and beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting stuck in habit</td>
<td>Mistaking ruts as routines, not being able to explore new ways of being, sticking with behavior despite lack of utility</td>
<td>Leads to calcified relationships, creates inattention and mindlessness, keeps us stuck and non-creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being mired in various psychological defenses</td>
<td>Getting caught in denial, repression, projection, compartmentalization, dissociation, and more</td>
<td>Distorts self-perception and relationship dynamics, impedes wisdom and insight, gets in the way of compassion, kindness, joy, and equanimity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Mind States as Reflections of the Vrittis, Kleshas, and Gunas

Mind states are created from the impacts of the afflictions (kleshas) and fluctuations (vrittis) of the mind; *they are the vrittis and kleshas made visible*. They are also influenced by and may reflect the gunas – our assessment and response to the environment with regard to safety. Yoga defines five mind states (kshipta, mudha, vikshipta, ekagra, and niruddha, described below) in the order of degree to which they are affected or tinted by the vrittis, kleshas, and gunas. It is very helpful for teacher to recognize students’ mind states as it helps tailor cuing and the drawing of students’ attention to the most auspicious places to find greater peace and calm.

It is important to understand that all of us – teachers and students – experience all the mind states and that it is supremely helpful to learn to identify, understand, and transform each one. In fact, becoming aware of mind states helps humans recognize the importance of investigating what underlies them: the gunas, the kleshas, and the vrittis. In other words, the mind states are a direct pathway into awareness and a step on the path toward enhanced self-understanding. What then, are the mind states?

**Kshipta:** monkey mind; disturbed mind
- agitated, restless, troubled; chaotic or fickle; mentally scattered; behaviorally frenetic; relationally unpredictable
- dominated by rajas and cycling between extreme states
- heavily affected by the kleshas and vrittis
- no access to ease or calm – anxiety, panicked, even delusional
- confusion reigns and decision-making is impaired

**Mudha:** cow, donkey, sloth, or slug mind; dull mind or sinking mind
- lethargic, heavy, forgetful, sleepy, sluggish; mentally fatigued, tired; emotionally frozen or shut-down
- dominated by tamas and lacking vitality; shrinking away from challenge (perhaps due to aversion or fear)
- heavily affected by the kleshas and vrittis
- no access to productivity or contentment – sad, depressed, despondent, sinking
- lack of energy reins and motivation is impaired
- cow mind might predominate your mind during the dying process; if we were able to recognize and transform cow mind earlier in life, we might be able to do so during death …

**Vikshipta:** butterfly mind; restless mind
- distracted, with attention easily diverted to this or that; partially focused
- occasional sattva arises; until the mind gets distracted and retracts back to tamas or rajas; still prone to the kleshas and vrittis
- sometimes there is access to stability, but it is easily lost
- confusion creeps in and concentration can be lost

**Ekagra:** pointer dog or bird dog mind, bear mind; one-pointed mind
- focused, fully concentrated, fully attentive – not prone to distraction
- sattva is accessible more regularly and consistently; kleshas and vrittis can be transcended temporarily
- there is access to peacefulness, awareness, and clear perceptions
- intuition awakens and buddhi is accessed

**Niruddha:** luminous mind
- lucid, fully absorbed, stable mind; thoughts are still
- fluctuations and afflictions have been stilled; sattva is present; kleshas and vrittis are still
- grace reins
- ego is transcended and liberation/awakening can occur (moksha)
When teachers and students recognize mind states and begin to understand their roots in the gunas, kleshas, and vrittis, transformation becomes possible. For example:

- if there is cow or sloth mind, alertness can be cultivated – students can be encouraged to engage with challenge rather than avoiding it; we can help students reward and seek out interactions and actions through which they can rise to a challenge
- if there is butterfly mind, mindfulness and concentration can be cultivated – students can be encouraged to uni-tasking and stop multi-tasking; they can be invited to engage more fully with the present moment
- if there is monkey mind, access to calm and equanimity can be cultivated – students can be encouraged to slow down and focus, to find the calming presence of the exhalation; students can create a focal point for the mind during their practice (such as creating a strong drishti in asana)

In other words, it is enormously helpful to begin to notice the state of mind during any activity and in any relationship. Simply taking a moment’s time-out to tune in, to become aware of how the mind is presenting can help transform focus, concentration, and presence. If we notice monkey mind, cow, mind, or butterfly mind, we realize that we are not in the present moment. We are not truly engaged with what we are doing. This momentary awareness of the present mind state can become a profound invitation to shift how we place our attention and concentration. A few questions are helpful to assessing mind states – for both teachers and students:

- Is the mind dysregulated and jumpy?
- Is the mind dull, confused, and unable to track what is happening?
- Is the mind distracted, drawn away from the matter at hand, not fully present with the momentary demand?

**Defining Samskaras**

Awareness of the gunas, kleshas, vrittis, and mind states supports noticing when certain mental fluctuations have turned into unhelpful samskaras – trains of thought that either lead nowhere or that lead us astray. Simply beginning to tune into what body, vitality, and mind are offering up during asana, pranayama, pratyahara, and dharana can be superbly helpful in supporting awareness of how mental fabrications affect perceptions of what is happening, interpretations of situations, the flavor and granularity of emotions, and the misunderstandings in relationships.

The gunas, kleshas, and vrittis are the root causes that lead to patterns, habits, ruts, grooves, routines, and reactive styles in all the koshas. They create samskaras, pattern locks that include our habitual and recursive ways of responding, distorted cognitions, and cognitive harmful habits (e.g., biases, prejudices), emotional predilections and reactivity, and behavioral and relationship patterns.

Samskaras occur, and thus can be observed by teachers in their students, in all the tangible koshas:

- Samskaras occur in the embodied self (physical sensation, physical form, materialism) ➔
  - These may manifest as attachment to or misidentification with physical habits, ways of moving, ways of pushing through or ignoring pain, ways of over-identifying with physical illness or challenge.
- Samskaras occur in the affective and energetic self (affective states, energetic states, preferences, cravings) ➔
  - These may manifest as attachment to or misidentification with affective reactions and states of arousal as if these were the only ways to react/respond to a situation.
  - It is as if our only affective response is the one that is driven by a particular coping style (guna) or kleshas.
Samskaras occur in the verbal and social self (perceptions, mental sensations and formations, emotions) ➔
- These show up as attachment to or misidentification with manomaya koshas at the levels of manas (opinions, labels, attitudes) and ahamkara (ego identity), with a visceral amygdala response when these core beliefs or identities are challenged.
- The stuck viewpoints that we fail to shift even in light of new data that suggest that our view is incorrect, partial (noting or hanging on to only a piece of the whole story), or distorted by calcified opinions or misperceptions.
- There is a vicious cycle here wherein samskaras can affect perceptions and perceptions (or misperceptions) can reinforce samskaras.

Samskaras can also happen on a societal or collective level ➔
- They are collective, unquestioned beliefs that can be so strong as to be brainwashing. Current day examples of societal samskaras are white supremacy, oppression, internalized oppression, and similar calcified patterns of belief and behavior that are systemic and institutionalized to such a degree that they rarely questioned.
- To counter societal samskaras, we need to commit to developing social justice habits.

Other collective samskaras may manifest in various ways that are collective or individual ➔
- Generational traumas may be passed down through families or communities.
- Familial samskaras may include particular roles we play in our families regardless of age.
- Family habits and routines that persist despite being no longer functional or logical or age appropriate may have become samskaras.

These ruts and habits develop in the brain according to the principle of what fires together, wires together. Everything we experience, think, say, and do leaves an imprint in our brain – either perpetuating old habits or forging new neural pathways. As we transcend samskaras, we promote neuroplasticity. As we indulge in habit and reactivity, we perpetuate neural stagnation and narrowing of our perspective and capacity. The more often or repetitively we think a thought or feel an emotion, the more likely it is to arise again and again. The more we engage in certain patterns of behaviors or relationships, the more likely they are to recur. This is habit conditioning that at times even creates morphic resonance – where we spread our habits and patterns to others. Clearly, samskaras are more than simple habits.

Samskaras are recursive and self-perpetuating patterns of intention, thought, perception, emotion, and action.

Samskaras are in essence pattern locks and hence require a pattern interrupt, a pattern reset to create new neural and cellular pathways. Restraint or release of samskaric pattern locks is honed via mindfulness, interoception, and the inner limbs of yoga – it is the practice of discernment about which inner and outer stimuli, experiences, relationships, and so on are allowed access into our minds (as opposed to arriving at our senses, but not being allowed to infect the mind) to create habitual reactivity or knee jerk reactions. We do not have to let every stimulus past the gates of the senses. We need to remember that whatever we do allow in has the potential to reverberate in the mind (and hence in our world and relationships) for a long time, afflicting us with suffering, with unhelpful or unskillful emotions and thoughts. Awareness, attention, concentration, alertness, and meditation (all the interior limbs – more later) serve as a pattern interrupt.

Interestingly, neuroscience has shown that when our opinions, attachments, or core beliefs are challenged, this can trigger the amygdala and undermines rational exploration and open-mindedness. We react viscerally and from implicit (self-protective) memory to suggestions that we might be wrong or should change (Grant, 2021). This potential reactivity has implications for how we, as yoga teachers, talk about samskaras and about transcending ideas, opinions, beliefs, and habits in our yoga classes. We do not criticize or attack – instead, we encourage introspection, open-mindedness, and open-heartedness. We cultivate awareness with deep curiosity and without judgment. Only then do we move toward motivation to change and pathways to accomplish this transformation.
Concluding Thoughts about Assessment and Observation

Once yoga teachers or clinicians have a better etiological and prognostic understanding of their students, they can more accurately define goals (explicitly or implicitly, depending on context) and begin to tailor their teachings. Teaching or yoga services at point become person-centered and adaptive. They are no longer rote or routinized but instead honor the in-the-moment reality of the students. Clearly such practice of teaching or offering yoga is not realistic in large group settings. This sets adaptive yoga apart from accessible yoga. Accessible yoga offers a yoga that honors human variation and invites all humans into the practice of yoga. Adaptive yoga honors human uniqueness and invites everyone into the practice from this person-centered recognition of human diversity and resilience.

Meeting your self without a story = Awareness
Meeting others without a story = Compassion
Meeting life as-is without a story = Enlightenment
Adaptations, Variations, and Alternatives

There is no yoga practice for which there is a single, peak, or final expression. All forms, movements, breathing, and inward practices have a range of expressions (or variations) that are idiosyncratic and unique to each yogi who engages in them. Our yoga practice reflects our individuality, our unique way of moving, reacting or responding, our nervous system adaptations, our mind states, our unique ways of thinking and believing, our emotions and hearts, and our behavioral and relational tendencies.

Given this assumption of a unique expression of yoga for each practitioner, teachers learn to make discerning choices about how to cue and verbally guide students adaptively, how to demonstrate the practices, and how to choose variations and adaptations. The default is to offer choices and options in every practice, teaching students from the very beginning that they are in charge of the chosen expression of any practice. All options, whether variations, adaptations, or alternatives rely on ample use of yoga props, introducing these props as expressions of personal choices of ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha toward oneself.

Planning for Variations, Adaptations, and Alternatives

Teaching Variations, Responsiveness, and Agency

Skilled teachers teach with variations and responsiveness (adaptation) to students’ extant (observable) traits, in all koshas, including any known physical, energetic, mental, or emotional challenges, illnesses, or conditions. Skilled teachers embrace the notion for all asanas and breathing practices that out of the basic (average) shape or action of a particular asana or pranayama an infinite number of variations can arise – there is no single expression of a form or a breath and there certainly is no “full expression” of a form or breath that is noted externally. Full expressions (if we even choose to use this concept) are internal experiences of having found a variation of a form or breath in one’s body that feels integrated, whole, and healthful.

To be sure to embrace and teach with the idea that variations, adaptations, and personalization of all yoga practices is the most auspicious way to teach yoga, teachers can engage in the following preparations for teaching:

a. Preplan variations and adaptations from the beginning; then re-plan variations on the spot based on the students who arrive in your classroom – be creative in inviting personalized expressions of all shapes
b. Keenly observe students to glean needs from non-verbal communication – some students may not realize their own need for variations, may not be able to disclose needs or potential areas of injury, or may not even realize that they have an injury or vulnerable condition – find ways of inviting them into variation without targeting them or stigmatizing them
c. Verbally address – to the class as a whole – potential risks or challenges of particular forms, alignments, or breathing practices (perhaps as you observe alignment or breathing issues in the classroom) and provide suggestions/invitations for their mitigation via adaptations, responsiveness, variations, and props as class progresses
d. Be knowledgeable about student resources, strengths, needs, and presentations with attention that goes beyond the physical self, integrating as many koshas as possible
   • Physical needs and resources (annamaya kosha)
     o Use props and clarify that poses can actually be harder with props (demo example – e.g., warrior 2 with chair)
     o Demonstrate accessible pose variations – don’t show off
     o Be clear that variations and adaptations are not “less” but actually often are actually “more” – encourage students to find their truth, moderation, and peacefulness in each form
     o Work with the gunas whether you name them or not; for example:
- don’t increase preexisting rajas – don’t use an upregulating practice with already hyperactive or upregulated students
- don’t overly encourage preexisting tamas – don’t use exclusively restorative poses with individuals who are lethargic, hypomobile, depressed, and so on
- balance rajas with tamas and/or sattva
- balance tamas with rajas and/or sattva
- if not sure about the student’s presentation or if you have a very mixed class, teach a sattvic practice and empower students to self-regulate and co-regulate

- Emotional and energetic needs and resources (pranamaya kosha)
  - Continue to work with the gunas – with energetic/emotional (rather than physical) focus now
  - Pay attention to the kleshas whether you name them or not; for example:
    - recognize attachment to outer manifestations of a pose – raga (attachment to pleasure and outcome, greed, desire, expectation to have things and relationships a certain way)
    - recognize misalignment due to lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of instruction – avidya (lack of wisdom, limited understanding, misinterpretation)
    - recognize aversion in the form of not wanting to engage in certain practice – dvesa (aversion to pain, hatred, enmity)
    - recognize ego in persisting with unhealthful expressions of poses or competitiveness with others or self – asmita (Egoism, ego-absorbed individualism, identification with roles)
    - recognize fear or anxiety – abhinivesha (Holding on to life, fear of change, anxiety about the new or unknown)

- Mental and cognitive needs and resources (manomaya kosha)
  - Continue to recognize the gunas but now on a cognitive or mental level
  - Continue to see the impact of the kleshas in the context of how they flavor cognition and mental fluctuations
  - Work with the vrittis whether you name them or not; for example:
    - reinforce expressions of accurate perception, such as successful self-correction in a pose – pramana (right perception, verifiable knowledge)
    - invite exploration of misperceptions, such as helping students see misalignment or recognize loss of breath – viparyaya (misperception, faulty or illogical thinking; cognitive distortion)
    - invite the exploration of positive uses of imagery, such as guided meditations or imagining a version of a pose that is currently not accessible – vikalpa (fantasy, imagination, creative thinking, day dreaming)
    - support the development of sleep hygiene, such as guiding sleep-supporting asana or meditation practices and talking about sleep hygiene (e.g., food, stimulation, lighting, circadian rhythms, etc.) – nidra (sleep, absence of thought, absence of the other four vrittis)
    - explore use of memory and recollection as a positive guide for practice (e.g., remembering how to move into a posture mindfully) versus as a negative habit (e.g., having become habituated to a particular alignment that is less than healthful) – smruti (memory, recollection, remembrance)
    - discuss in the context of all vrittis → SAMSKRAS = habitual ways of responding, distorted cognitions and harmful habits; what fires together, wires together
Preplanning and Revising on the Fly

While it is most auspicious and helpful to have a clear plan for teaching methods and sequences before stepping into a classroom, it is equally important to make refined and **discerning choices and revisions once class has started**. In other words, as teachers we need to be prepared to abandon our plans and revise flexibly depending on the students who actually show up and depending on the state of their collective koshas in a given moment. This ability to improvise and give up on premade plans whenever necessary may seem scary for new teachers but will become second nature with experience and practice. It makes the difference between a yoga class that is responsive to students needs and a yoga class that serves the practice plan more than the practitioner.

A responsive teaching style will include the following commitments:
- Demonstrating responsive and beginning postures rather than advanced postures based on what you see in the moment in the majority of your students
- Making ample use of props, with narrated reasons for use, in all forms and movements, basing some selections on what is noticeable in the classroom as universal needs
- If addressing an individual need, asking students to use discernment about whether they might want or need a particular prop
- Adding or eliminating preplanned poses depending on needs presented by students who are present – always having an outline that allows for flexibility to upgrade or downgrade plans based on what is observed in class
- Always allowing sufficient time for resting/recovery postures and closing meditations at the end of class

Wise Choices about Yoga Props

**Creating access with props**: Props can create access to yoga practice in a variety of ways, including through providing support, limb extension, resistance, therapeutics, balance, introspection, joy, empowerment, extra load, decreased load, strength building, binding, warmth, comfort, ease, added effort, tethering, cushioning, lifting, safety, alignment enhancement, breath enhancement, meditative focus, sense withdrawal, concentration, calming, tension release, and more. Through all of these functions, yoga props often are used increasingly often as students’ practice advances. They are not affectations, items to make up for inability, or shameful implements that show up what we cannot do. They are items of personal choice, tools to express compassion for personal needs and preferences, avenues of access to different aspects of a pose or breath, expressions of personal agency and empowerment, and investments into personal wellbeing.

**Preventing access because of props**: Props can also be presented and used in ways that inauspiciously or unconsciously hinder access to the yoga practice.

- **Capitalism**: Western materialism and capitalism have created a usury yoga prop industry that suggests that yoga can only be available to those who can afford the expensive stuff that we see in conventional media, from $100 leggings to $70 folding chairs or $30 foam blocks. The appropriation of yoga and socioeconomic discrimination within western yoga due to capitalism must be named but does not have to rule our relationship with props. There are many alternatives to expensive yoga props that are affordable; many fancy yoga props can be substituted with things most people already own; quite a few props can be made from scratch through creativity. Additionally, not everyone needs to have all props that exist in the yoga world. Yogis can decide for themselves which props will enhance their practice and feel important or even essential and put their resources into the acquisition or personal manufacture of those items (or their substitutes).
- **Cumbersomeness**: Use of yoga props can be cumbersome and hence yoga teachers need to use structure and discernment in how they demonstrate, introduce, and sequence with props.
**Recommended Yoga Props**

Yoga props come in many shapes, sizes, variations, and forms – just like people. They have a wide range of functions and students have diverse relationships with yoga props. Some students have a relationship of shame with props, having had the experience of being introduced to props as ways of making up for perceived deficits or lack of ability in their body. Other students have a relationship of empowerment with props, having experienced props as supporting their practice compassionately, inviting creativity into the practice, and tailoring the practice to personal needs and resources. It is helpful to invite students to explore if they have a particular relationship with (or bias toward) yoga props in general or certain props in particular. Personal histories, especially trauma histories, may alter the relationship students have to certain items and may need to be considered when and how props are offered.

1. **Mats**
   - *Sample uses:* the obvious use 👍; also rolled up as a block or bolster substitute or as a support under the back when supine
   - *Notes:* select size to match student dimensions; choose ecofriendly material to prevent toxic or allergic reactions
   - *Alternatives:* large towel, blanket, carpet

2. **Foam and Sturdy Blocks or Bricks**
   - *Sample uses:* arm extenders in forward folds to reach the floor, lifts under feel, supports under various body part (e.g., under sacrum in bridge pose), supports during restoratives, implements for balance challenge (e.g., standing on a block in tree pose)
   - *Notes:* blocks come in various sizes; the most versatile is 3*4*6 (double-check dimension); narrower blocks can be helpful for smaller people or certain body locations; egg shaped blocks are also offered; shoulder stand blocks are also useful; best to calculate at least 2 blocks per student; bamboo, wood, or cork blocks can be useful for some uses that involve significant weight-bearing or balancing
   - *Alternatives:* stack of phonebooks taped together; small foot stools; stack of blankets (e.g., for shoulder stand), chairs, upside-down cooking pots, bricks, logs (beware of splinters…)

3. **Blankets**
   - *Sample uses:* cushioning for select body parts or full body, lifts (e.g., under sitz bones), covers for warmth or privacy
   - *Notes:* they come in cotton or wool; wool is sturdier but more prone to trigger allergic reactions in some students; cotton is preferred – these come with or without tassels – we recommend the blankets without tassels; wash blankets regularly (cotton needs more washings than wool as wool sheds dirt better)
   - *Alternatives:* any regular blanket, large beach towel, rolled up mat (depending on use)

4. **Straps**
   - *Sample uses:* arm or leg extenders to reach other body parts, supports to hold body parts together in restoratives, tethering for safety, to create traction across body parts, to create isometric actions
   - *Notes:* straps may be contraindicated for some individuals with complex trauma history – explore carefully with each individual client before use; straps come in various sizes; it is best to have an assortment; the most versatile length is 8 feet
   - *Alternatives:* tie, scarf, towel, TheraBand, blanket, soft belt from a robe

5. **Bolsters**
   - *Sample uses:* cushioning, supports, lifts, restorative supports
   - *Notes:* various shapes and sizes exist and need to be matched to function; e.g., pranayama bolsters are skinnier and longer; cheap bolsters tend to be less soft and don’t have handles
   - *Alternatives:* large pillows or small sofa cushions
6. Towels
- **Sample uses:** hygiene (e.g., to cover bolsters, blankets, etc.), supports under ankles, sweat removal; can substitute for straps in TIY, eye covers, supports under various body parts
- **Notes:** we recommend one large and one small towel per student; many studios do not provide these as they have to be washed after each use; if not provided, ask students to bring them
- **Alternatives:** blankets, items of clothing

7. Walls and door jambs
- **Sample uses:** leaning against, support, safety, alignment checks, balance, resistance
- **Notes:** freely available in most studios (there should be no mirror or window) and yet very underused; completely available at home
- **Alternatives:** the teacher’s body (obviously there is risk associated with this…), chairs, doors

8. Chair(s)
- **Sample uses:** supports, assists for individuals who cannot access the floor, alternate seat for meditation, balance, resting place
- **Notes:** the best chair is a metal folding chair, possible with no back panel in the frame for more space for body parts; chairs typically are best used on top of a sticky mat to prevent sliding, especially when used with inversions or half-inversions
- **Alternatives:** headstander, stacked blocks, blankets, regular chairs, yoga ball, wall – all depending on purpose

9. Balls
- **Sample uses:** seats, can substitute for chair, tension release method (e.g., foot rolls), strength-building, balancing, stretching, opening, dexterity (especially in the toes), therapeutics
- **Notes:** these come in different sizes (large enough to sit on; medium to squeeze between the knees; small enough to roll under the feet; tiny – like marbles to mobilize the toes); they come in various densities (from very hard to squishy); it is best to have multiple sizes and densities available to accommodate different purposes
- **Alternatives:** chair; tennis or squash balls, anything round that won’t burst

10. Wedges
- **Sample uses:** lift under wrists or heels, lift under sitz bones, support under other props whenever an angled support is needed, therapeutics
- **Notes:** these are not often made available in yoga studios but have incredible utility; they come in various shapes and size and function dictates chosen form
- **Alternatives:** blanket, towel, small foam block, books, small pieces of wood, shims

11. Foam rollers
- **Sample uses:** lifts, supports, massage apparatus for tight muscles, therapeutics
- **Notes:** these come in various lengths and it is useful to have short and long rollers; use of the soft foam rollers maybe preferable to hard (Pilates) rollers
- **Alternatives:** rolled up mat or blanket, bolster, balls, and more depending on use

12. TheraBand's
- **Sample uses:** can substitute for straps, strengthening methods, breath sensitivity, resistance, binding body parts, therapeutics
- **Notes:** these come in different tensions (yellow – easiest; red – medium; blue – tough; black – toughest); best to have all tensions available to accommodate needs of students; best to calculate 2 per student;
some come with handles or loops; some are bands and some are tubes – choose form based on function to be served
- **Alternatives:** yoga strap, soft scarf, tie, soft belt from a robe (however, none of these substitutes provides the flex and variable tension of a TheraBand …)

13. Headstander
- **Sample uses:** headless headstand, support for down dog or forward folds with tight hamstrings
- **Notes:** these are the best investment for teachers who want to teach headstand – they reduce the highest risks from headstand (cervical spine injuries); this prop needs instruction for use by the teacher and is best used by a wall, not in the middle of the room, especially with students who are not yet advanced in their practice
- **Alternatives:** two yoga chairs or two regular chairs padded with sticky mats and placed on a sticky mat

14. Eye pillows and weighted bags
- **Sample uses:** calming the nervous system, aroma therapy, sensory withdrawal, grounding, support, guarding the senses
- **Notes:** for eye pillows, choose the lightest weight as these can cause problems with regular use if heavy and placed directly on the eyes; place bulk of weight on forehead and let the fabric cover the eyes; for weighted bags you can try filling your own bags with sand, rice, beans, or other items, including scented materials (e.g., lavender blossoms); be mindful of scent allergies and always ask permission to use scented materials with students
- **Alternatives:** wash cloth, sock, small towel, homemade bags of any shape and size with a variety of fillings (for eye pillows, flaxseed is ideal); 5-lb bags of rice or beans

**Other Considerations**

*The Importance of Variations*

Most poses have excellent variations that make the pose available to most students. Decisions have to be made about which modification is shown by the instructor or assistants in class and the choice is most auspiciously calibrated to the class level. Variations are terribly underused by teachers who tend to demonstrate the version of the form that is in yoga magazines or books. We encourage teachers to think outside the box and to model more accessible versions of many forms. Here are some ideas:

- Wall versions
- Chair versions
- Multi-propped versions
- Simple-propped versions
- Accessible versions for students who are new to yoga (may overlap with simple-propped version)
- Accessible and adapted versions for students with particular needs

*The Importance of Adaptations and Propping*

At times it is helpful to adapt a form to the specific needs of a student. This may occur, for example, for students with an injury, a physical challenge, a missing limb, or similar circumstances. A few sample ideas follow (and can be gleaned above from the use of props). Clearly the possibilities are truly unlimited and can create wonderful accessibility, empowerment, and agency in our students if offered freely and with the understanding that this is a great way to individualize and tailor a practice for ahimsa, satya, aparigraha, brahmacharya, and asteya.
• A strap as arm extender in supine poses for individuals with tight hamstrings
• Blocks under hands in forward fold with individuals with low back problems or tight hamstrings
• Blanket or wedge under the seat if knees are too high (due to tight hips) in seated postures
• Blocks under hands in lunge posture to maintain open heart
• Chair under hands in down dog for tight muscles in back of legs or low back pain
• Sloped platform (made out of blocks, bolsters and blankets) for supine poses with individuals with low back problems or during pregnancy
• Chair under forward leg in warrior for individuals with balance issues or weakness
• Balancing postures with back at the wall for individuals with balancing issues
• Plank on forearms for individuals with carpal tunnel
• Blocks under an elbow or shoulder in case of a missing limb

Knowledgeability about Alternatives

Some poses may not be appropriate or accessible for some students or sometimes (e.g., full inversion for individuals with glaucoma, deep backbend during pregnancy). When such forms are taught in a general class, alternatives can easily be offered. A few samples follow, but only the teacher’s creativity limits the options here. Clearly the possibilities are truly unlimited!!!!

• Child or puppy instead of down dog
• Legs-up-the-wall instead of headstand
• Handless small cobra instead of up dog
• Side-lying posture instead of supine posture
• Half lift instead of forward fold
• Windshield wiper instead of supine full twist
• Wide-legged forward fold instead of tripod headstand
• Bridge instead of shoulderstand (if shoulderstand is taught at all…)
• Half frog instead of bow
• Sweet seat instead of hero pose
Supporting or Guiding Students: Cuing, Adjusting, Assisting, and Modifying

Safety in teaching arises not only from keen observation skills, proper demonstration, and the offering of variations, adaptations, and props. It also arises from the appropriate choice of student supports or guidance, including cuing, adjusting, assisting, and modifying. Such supports may be verbal or physical/tactile, with the safest default being verbal supports offered to the entire student body based on in-the-moment observation.

Supports – instructions beyond the initial cuing – are not offered routinely or randomly, but rather address a specific need in the moment either by an individual student or several students. Thus, supports are predicated on the teacher’s observational skills, student needs, and informed choices about the least intrusive or directive level of intervention to support and guide a student toward increasingly healthful alignment, balanced breath, less dysregulated presentation, and emotional balance.

Supports have a clear purpose and are used with intention. Some are appropriate for the entire student body; some need to be individualized by voicing to whom they may apply (e.g., special cuing about contraindications or risks \[ \rightarrow \] e.g., “if you have glaucoma, stay in a half lift rather than releasing into a forward fold”). Students may need to discern if a particular support is relevant to them and thus it needs to be clear from offered supports to whom and when they apply. All supports offer safe biomechanics, clear intentions, enhanced healthfulness of the embodied practice, and increased stability in body, breath, and mind.

Supports are offered in the spirit of increasing students’ sense of agency and autonomy, giving power of choice to students, and inviting students to exercise their right to adapt the practice of yoga to their unique circumstances and needs. An occasion when this ‘rule’ might be broken is if a student is in imminent danger of harm unless the teacher intervenes.

Definitions of Cuing, Assisting, Adjusting, and Modifying

Cuing

Cuing is a general verbal guidance to help students engage in an action that moves them toward their personal embodiment of a form or movement, a breathing practice, or an interior practice. Generally speaking, cues can be explanatory or re-directive. A verbal follow-up or deepening of the initial cue can help facilitate further refinement of a form or movement, breath, mental focus or state, emotional or energetic experience, or attunement to intuition and interoception. Cuing and follow-up cuing tends to be directed to the whole class.

Adjusting

Adjusting provides additional verbal (possibly physical/tactile) support or guidance (beyond initial cuing) to help a particular student or several students achieve a small movement, subtle shift in any layer of self (physical body, energy or breath, mind or emotion, intuitive sense), minor positional change, or different type of muscle engagement (more relaxed versus more engaged). Adjusting is typically offered in response to observations of students to help deepen their experience, find interoceptive awareness, or empower and invite personal choice. Adjustments are typically directed to the whole class though perhaps more relevant to some of the students than others. If this is the case, the teacher verbalizes the conditions to which the cue is most relevant to invite students to make their own empowered choice.
Assisting

Assisting integrates verbal or physical supports or guidance that help students achieve a different depth of experience based on an intervention that is more significant than an adjustment. Assists are more likely to be physical than verbal and less commonly used than an adjustment. They are typically used to enhance ease, decrease risk, or invite personal choice for a change in alignment or breath because of an observation by the teacher. Assists are offered when a teacher discerns that a student could benefit very specifically from a particular change. Assists tend to be directed to specific students without necessarily calling them out individually, but by clarifying to what conditions or presentations the assist applies most directly.

Modifying

Modifications are directive interventions to create a necessary change in light of a potentially dangerous or risky expression of a form, movement, or breath. They are typically used because of a student’s known contraindication or potential risk that emerges from the student’s embodiment of an instruction or modeling of a demonstration (e.g., asking a pregnant woman very directly no longer to lie in her back in savasana). Modifications can be verbal or physical. They are most likely directed to a specific student or for a specific condition that is present in more than one student in the room.

Applications of Cuing, Assisting, Adjusting, and Modifying

Following are examples of types of demonstration, cuing, adjustments, assisting, and modifications – sequenced from least to most intrusive or directive. In each instance of using this succession, teachers proceed with caution and discernment tailored to the particular moment in time. In using these strategies, it helps to choose language that is supportive, invites agency, and empowers – as opposed to using language that suggests vulnerability or lack of resilience; much less lack of choice! Even when using these types of strategies, it is useful to offer choices and options when available so that accessibility of the practice is always at the forefront. All offerings are made in the spirit of imitating curiosity and exploration, yielding agency and power to the student as much as possible and reasonable.

It is also helpful to explain anatomically or energetically why certain safety cues or physical assists are offered and how they are helpful, especially in particular cases. In other words, the teacher’s intention in offering one of these cues or assists is shared with the students. Such explanations are educational for students and are more likely to help the student generalize the learning to their personal practice at home. Additionally, explanation invites autonomy and empowers students in the moment. Risk of harm is directly addressed when it drives the intention behind a particular cue, assist, or adjustment.

1. **Demonstration** (see above) – demonstrate most relevant variations and prop uses for the particular students representing in a given class; always remember that demonstrations are for the benefit of the students who are present and need to seem relevant and accessible to them; demonstrations are not there for teachers to show off their practice or skill

2. **Explanatory alignment or safety cues** are offered to entire class based on form, movement, or breathing practice being taught; in giving explanatory cues, it is helpful to favor the cuing of actions rather than outer shapes; this preference also underscores that the practice is engaged in from the inside out, not the outside in – that shapes are brought and adapted to the student, not the other way around (i.e., we never force students to assume particular outer shape or alignment, always remembering and prioritizing the bioindividuality of students’ anatomy, energy and nervous system, and mental and emotional needs
3. **Corrective cues** to the entire class based on in-the-moment observations of misunderstandings, common challenges, or struggles; over time teachers learn what to look for in a classroom and begin to note which types of corrections seem to be most commonly needed and useful; corrective cues are generally offered to the whole class, without singling out an individual student or subgroup of students; corrective cues based on a teacher’s experience of common challenges in particular shapes or breathing exercises can be particularly helpful in online class settings when it is hard or even impossible to see individual students.

4. **Verbal adjustments** can be offered to specific students or particular groups of students in light of in-the-moment observation; these adjustments are just that: verbal; they are not tactile or touch-based; nevertheless, they are more specific than corrective cues in that they are most relevant to one or a few of the students and not as generically expected as corrective cues.

5. **Physical cues** that are less invasive potentially tactile contacts with students; rather than the teacher touching the student, these cues invite the student to bring a body part to or toward the teacher; the teacher using her or his body as a prop in a way that invites the students to find an adjustment or alignment with a physical assist over which the student has complete control – in fact, the student can simply move toward the offered body part of the teacher without ever actually reaching or touching it; the student is in charge of the potential physical contact every step of the way; examples of such physical cues are as follows, with many, many more possibilities:
   - “what would happen if you brought your hand toward mine?” (e.g., teacher standing in front of a student in Warrior 2 to invite movement of the shoulder girdle forward to align above the pelvis)
   - “would you like to try what happens if you met my hand with your knee?” (e.g., teacher hovering a hand to the outside of a knee when the student is in a lunge with the knee collapsed toward the midline)
   - “notice how it might feel if you were to bring the back of your head toward my hand” (e.g., teacher’s hand behind the student’s head in downward facing dog)
   - “might there be more ease if you allow the weight of your arms to rest on my hands?” (e.g., teacher standing behind a student in Warrior 2 inviting the shoulder blades to release downward to ease excess effort or tension)

6. **Physical assists** involve the teacher putting hands on the student. This is done gently, never forcefully or directive; preferably teachers do not move a student’s body part but trace a location on the body where a change to alignment may auspicious (e.g., tracing a V on the student’s back to suggest retraction and depression of the scapulae); they guide the student toward a more healthful experience of the practice – see cautions and guidelines below for touch.

7. **RARE USE: Physical adjustment** tend to be longer physical contacts that encourage safe deepening or are offered as a support in a restorative or therapeutic form; they are gentle physical interventions that are never forceful or overpowering – see cautions and guidelines below for touch.

8. **SUPER RARE USE: Physical corrective actions in light of imminent risk or danger** is approached gently, with the least invasive and non-forceful touch; it is typically used after a verbal corrective cue was not successful in remedying a risk or contraindicated expression of a practice – see cautions and guidelines below for touch.

*Developmental and Respectful Approaches*

- Understand the student’s skill level in offering supports – never push students beyond their safe developmental skill level or form expression, either verbally or physically.
- Encourage students to make clear choices about supports (e.g., offer flip cards that indicate whether a student is okay with physical touch; even if yes, always ask permission for informed, explicit, enthusiastic, and ongoing informed consent).
• Support student autonomy balanced with safety; empower students decision-making and agency; educate, don’t placate
• Assume students are smart and capable – provide information and education; then invite students to self-adjust from there

Safety Considerations in Choices for Supporting or Guiding Students

• Address or support safety issues (e.g., potentially harmful misalignments) before offering refinements
• Use verbal adjustments first; graduate to physical cues (inviting the student to bring a body part toward the teacher’s hand) and then to light touch adjustment offered only with permission, with clear consent that is freely given and revokable
• Be precise in language when offering verbal supports
• If verbal redirects are not effective and it seems therapeutic or necessary to redirect the student for a very specific reason and in a very purposeful way, then a physical assist may be indicated; physical assists may also be offered in some settings in which students desire such intervention and are well-known to the teacher; regardless of reason, the following cautions are offered:

Supportive Guidelines Related to Physical or Tactile Assists and the Use of Touch

Touch reverberates into and best serves a purpose for all koshas. Touch may be tactile and physical in nature (directed most obviously to annamaya koshas), but it deeply affects and reverberates into all other koshas, including energy, arousal, and affect in pranamaya koshas, thoughts and emotions in manomaya koshas, and relationship factors in vijnanamaya koshas.

Touch – however purposeful, consensual, and intentional – can be triggering. Always be prepared to discontinue touch when you get the sense that the student is becoming reactive, uncomfortable, unsure, or otherwise uneasy in any kosha. You may be very well-intentioned, the student may have consented, and yet something feels off. Listen to your intuition and co-regulation. If you become uncomfortable, this may be a signal that the student is uncomfortable. If this happens, gently discontinue the tactile contact while staying energetically and emotionally supportive and connected to the student.

The following guidelines are offered in the spirit of creating the greatest opportunity and likelihood for continued safety and wellbeing for student and teacher. They are not guarantees that everything will go smoothly. Learn to apologize if something goes wrong; learn to shift gears if something feels inappropriate. Always listen to the student; always observe and stay connected to all of their (and your own) koshas.

Explicit and Ongoing Informed Consent

Always ask for and receive explicit verbal or otherwise clearly communicated permission that is freely, even enthusiastically, given and never coerced (however implicitly) for each episode of physical touch.

• Become skillful in asking for consent to touch; it may not be as simple as saying “may I touch …” or “is it okay to place my hand …”. Students may answer such a yes/no question with yes simply because they do not want to offend the teacher by declining the offer of support; instead consider asking permission in a way that offers choices; for example, you might state several options:
  o “I might be able to help you find greater ease in this shape. Would you like me to explain how you may adjust your stance, or would you like me to demonstrate how you could adjust by demonstrating it in my own body, or would you like me to use my hands on … to help you move …” → with this invitation the student can choose a verbal adjust, a demonstration, or a tactile contact
• Become skilled at reading non-verbal communication when you ask for consent – there are students who may give verbal consent because they tend to yield to authority figures; however, they may give non-verbal indications that they are actually uncomfortable with being touched

• If you are doubtful about a student’s authenticity and deeply felt sense of giving permission, choose not to touch and find an alternate means of working with the student to find a more auspicious embodiment of the offered practice

• If the student has given verbal consent and tactile contact has been initiated and results in a student’s shrinking back or retracting from the touch, discontinue the touch and find a gentle, loving, and compassionate way to extract yourself from the tactile episode – not giving the student a startle and definitely not embarrassing the student for having become reactive

• If you sense a physical pulling back or tensing in the student while they give verbal consent, refrain from touch – give verbal adjustment another chance or cue the student out and back into the shape in a new way

• If you are unsure about how the verbal and nonverbal communication alignment, ask again and then if you move ahead, monitor the student’s reactions and be prepared to stop or even ask again while touching to give them opportunity to retract permission

• If in serious doubt, err on the side of caution and do not touch – just say that you changed your mind and give more verbal assists

Be clear that consent is given only for this specific episode of touch and that even within this episode, consent can be retracted at any time if students change their minds, at which time touch will be withdrawn immediately as requested by the student

• explicitly check in with the student during the touch episode to offer opportunity to the student to retract consent

• end the touch immediately but respectfully, compassionately, and cautiously if the student shrinks back from it or seems clearly uncomfortable – consider this a nonverbal retraction of permission

Clear Intention with Explicit Verbalization of Purpose and Planned Action

Verbalize a Clear Intention

Have a clear purpose or intention for any request to provide physical adjustments or assists (Hansen-Lasater, 2021; Pappas, 2006; Stephens, 2014) and name the purpose explicitly (time permitting in high-risk situations) when asking for permission/consent to touch a student. Do not touch randomly, without clear intention and purpose! Not all purposes have to be specifically about alignment in a particular asana. The intention or purpose may also be connected to energy, breathing, or mental and emotional comfort or engagement.

Sample purposes may be as follows:

• Deal with an imminent risk, threat to safety, or specific danger

• Support greater healthfulness of alignment for a specific body part/region or for the movement of breath

• Clarify a verbal adjustment that was not understood but is necessary for the safety of the shape or breath

• Emphasize or direct attention to a particular region of the body where more ease or effort could be helpful to the shape, energy, breath, or level of comfort (including emotionally)

• Support the grounding or releasing of a body part/region, energy, breath, or emotional tension

• Invite greater comfort or ease into the experience of a shape, movement, energetic expression, or breath

• Support expansion or expansiveness in body, breath, or energy

• Stabilize or steady a body part/region, shape, or breath, emotion, or mental fluctuation

• Invite co-regulation of breath, energy, or arousal

• Help clarify directions, movements, or other actions that appear so confusing to a student that they cannot figure out what to do
Provide Specifics

Be specific about what you are offering in terms of physical contact with the student; in other words, provide the what, where, why, when, and how of the touch or physical assist that is being offered. Physical or tactile assists offered for energetic, mental, or emotional reasons need to be detailed in this manner as well, explaining both the type of tactile contact and its purpose.

Several issues are attended to, including, but not limited to the following:
• give detail about the kind of touch you will use (are defined in more detail with explicit examples below):
  o student-initiated touch whereby the student is moving toward a body part (often the hand) of the teacher
  o guiding touch of the student by the teacher of the student to identify a particular body region or to suggest activation of a particular muscle or set of muscles
  o directional touch that guides a student’s body region, limb, or the body overall in a particular direction without the teacher exerting any active force or effort
  o supportive touch in which the student gains an insight about or greater comfort in a body region, energetic movement, or emotional response to an asana or breathing practice
  o stabilizing touch in which the student may be supported by the teacher’s body (typically the hands or arms) to gain greater ease in balancing a particular body region of the body overall
  o auspicious touch of the student that invites a settling of a particular body region or the body overall
• be explicit about the exact body part/region you are asking to touch, using appropriate anatomical (but clearly understandable) language:
  o students need to be clear exactly which part of their body will be touched and how
  o students also need to be clear which body part of the teacher will be involved in the touch (e.g., hand, arm, leg)
  o do not touch sensitive or private body parts – even if the students implies that it is okay; never be invasive!
• give a timeframe for the touch:
  o clarify if the touch will be fleeting or lasting a few second
  o do not linger in a touch beyond what the student consented to
  o let the student know when you are about to initiate the touch
  o let the student know when the touch is about to end to avoid destabilizing or surprising the students when the touch episode ends

Be Patient and Take Enough Time

Being specific about the details of what a physical contact means the teacher has to take the necessary amount of time to be very clear about the interaction with the student – before, during, and after:
• make sure there is enough time:
  o to get permission – i.e., to gather and reaffirm consent
  o to inform – i.e., to make sure the student understands the purpose and specifics of the tactile contact
  o to attune – i.e., to stay relationally and emotionally connected to the student during the contact, and
  o to debrief – i.e., to answer questions during or after the contact
• if you do not have time to be deliberate and compassionate in collecting consent (e.g., in a very large or fast-paced class), do not touch unless there is an imminent threat or risk that must be addressed in a tactile manner
• if insufficient time is available to engage in consent and deliberate empowerment of the student, if a student is in a potentially harmful position, cue the entire class group to come out of the position rather than trying to offer a modification
• if there is insufficient time to complete the tactile contact in a manner that makes it truly helpful, do not engage in it
Continuous Yielding of Power and Agency to the Student

Ensuring Privacy

When you talk to a student about the offer of a physical assist, realize that other students will be aware and may hear what you say. It is virtually impossible to guarantee privacy, much less confidentiality, in a group class and as the teacher, you need to stay aware of this reality.

Consider the following issues related to privacy and transparency:

- the advantage of other students bearing witness to the episode of touch is that you can role-model for others in the class how you handle touch and this may add to a sense of safety for everyone
- the challenge is that you have to remain mindful of how you handle anything that may feel private or even confidential to the student to whom you offer the physical assist

Choosing Least Restrictive and Least Intrusive Interventions

**Do always** yield the power during a physical assist or touch to the student to the greatest degree possible.

Attempt to follow these guidelines of *least restrictive and least intrusive intervention*:

- encourage student to move toward the teacher rather than teacher moving toward the student (e.g., “bring your head to my hand”; “reach your fingertips toward my palm”)
- encourage backing away more so than deepening
- use the least amount of physical contact that is needed to achieve the stated intention – the smallest possible area, shortest possible duration, and the Goldilocks amount of pressure (not too soft, not to hard – enough to be effective)
- check-in with the student to invite the option to retract consent
- check in with the student to see if the touch is “landing” appropriately
- check in with the student to see how they perceive the touch and continue or discontinue commensurately

**Do not** deliberately or intentionally use physical touch that is intrusive or disempowering in any way. Try to make sure that you avoid touch that is or may be perceived as:

- forceful, pushy, harsh, punitive, or aggressive
- creepy, frightening, or suggestive
- destabilizing or ungrounding physically
- destabilizing or potentially perceived as threatening or intimidating emotionally
- inappropriate (e.g., sexual, intrusive, interfering with student autonomy and self-determination)
- random or not clearly intentioned/purposeful
- unconscious or inadvertent – again without clear purpose
- surprising, sudden, or unexpected

**Do not** touch or invade the following body parts (cf., Hansen-Lasater, 2021) as they are very sensitive, private, and potentially triggering – resist touching these areas of the body even if the student gives permission to do so!

- face
- chest, especially breasts
- belly
- buttocks
- genital regions
- inner thighs
Recognizing the Teacher’s Personal Impact

Notice and assess the protentional physical, energetic, and emotional impact of your intervention and stance on the student, especially as related to how the student’s body or energy may move unexpectedly and how your own body is positioned vis-à-vis the student during the touch – beware of unexpected interactions:

- **empower, don’t disempower:**
  - notice the power impact of standing over student who is in a position lower to the ground – lower yourself to an appropriate level
  - do not straddle a student, especially when the student is lying down
  - do not inadvertently touch the student with one of your body parts that was not named in the touch for which you received permission
  - do not put your body weight on a student
  - do not push or exert inappropriate levels of pressure
  - touch where you said you would and do not let your hands wander off from there

- **use proximal, not distal, touch for physical safety:**
  - do not encourage movement from the edges of the students’ body by touching too far away from the joints and muscles that you are inviting to activate
  - touch as closely to where the actual movement or adjustment needs to happen to prevent torquing
  - beware of maintaining appropriate energetic and emotional boundaries in touching at the proximal body parts
  - if the proximal body part happens to be a very private body part, do not touch – use verbal intervention or demonstration instead

- **encourage active joint movement by the students rather than passively moving students whenever possible:**
  - use touch to invite the student to initiate the movement from the inside out
  - do not move the student from the outside in with your own muscle power
  - never move a student forcefully – be gentle and minimal in the amount of effort
  - invite action from the inside out rather than inviting the attainment of a particular outer shape
  - invite active decision-making by the students about how to actualize or operationalize the invited motion
  - beware of maintaining respect of energetic and emotional boundaries by yielding to student discomfort, resistance, or hesitation

- **stabilize, rather than fostering reliance on the teacher:**
  - offer physical stability without taking on the student’s body weight
  - do not destabilize students physically with quick movements or sudden movements
  - give notice of how touch will evolve as it does in the moment so the student is not startled, destabilized, or surprised
  - also be aware of stabilizing the student’s energy via co-regulation and coordination of breath rhythms (following the student’s lead OR retraining a student’s dysregulated breath)
Protections for the Teacher While Using Tactile Assists

Just as it is important to attend to students’ physical, energetic, and emotional wellbeing during an episode of physical touch or tactile contact, it is important to maintain awareness of our own, the teacher’s, personal body mechanics and safety when offering a physical assist. The type of physical assists that are endorsed here do not generally represent a threat to the physical integrity of the teacher’s body as all touch is light and stabilizing. In other words, in most if not all situations when physical touch is offered, the teacher does not bear the student’s body weight in any way. Nevertheless, it is important to stay mindful of personal posture and alignment as student assists are provided. If there is any weight-bearing, it is auspicious to make sure that we do not overly challenge or stress our lower back and that we use the strength of our legs to support any lifting or bracing.

It is helpful for teacher and student, to make sure that the teacher has no loose pieces of jewelry or clothing that can get caught or get in the way. It will also be helpful to remain mindful of direct skin contact with the student as opposed to clothing on clothing. Direct skin contact may be more triggering to the students or may be misunderstood. As teachers we can protect ourselves from being misunderstood if we can maintain a physical boundary between us and our student (other than our hands) when we make physical contact. This is not a hard and fast rule as this may not always be realistic given room temperatures. Yet, it is helpful to keep in mind that there is an extra challenge the greater the area of skin-to-skin contact between teacher and student.
Types of Tactile Contact Defined With Examples

A few types of touch are outlined here to demonstrate the vast range of possibilities for making tactile contact with students. The order is roughly in the order of least intrusive or directive to most profound with regard to the size of touched area and degree of strength exerted by the teacher in the physical contact. In all of these options, the teacher fully honors all of the rules of engagement outlined above, from gathering continuous consent, to a full description of what is involved in the tactile episode, to having clarity of intention, while always yielding the power and agency to the student. The teacher remains fully attentive to the student during the episode, remaining responsive to verbal and nonverbal signals from the students. The teacher’s actions are guided by the student’s response to the physical contact.

Student-Initiated Touch

Student-initiated touch is defined as touch whereby the student is moving toward a body part (often the hand) of the teacher. The student is completely in charge of the degree of touch, the strength of the contact, and the length of the touch episode. If desired, the student does not even need to touch the teacher’s proffered body but can simply move in this direction without ever making full tactile contact. This may well be the least intrusive and most student-empowered form of physical touch. This form of touch is the essence of the physical cuing that was presented above in the context of listing intervention with students from least to most intrusive or directive.

Examples:

- **Shoulder girdle alignment from past to present in Warrior 2** – the teacher stands forward of a student in Warrior 2 with her or his arm stretched toward the student – just ahead to the student’s forwardly-stretched arm and hand – to invite movement of the student’s shoulder girdle forward to align the shoulders above the pelvis; the teacher asks the student to move her or his fingertips to or toward the teacher’s proffered hand or fingers
- **Shoulder girdle alignment from past to present in Warrior 2** – the teacher stands just back of a student in Warrior 2 with her or his arm stretched toward the student – just behind the student’s backwardly-stretched arm and hand – to invite movement of the student’s shoulder girdle backward to align the shoulders above the pelvis; the teachers asks the student to move her or his fingertips to or toward the teacher’s proffered hand or fingers
- **Knee alignment in warriors or lunges** – the teacher kneels next to the student, holding her or his hand with the palm facing toward the outside of the student’s knee while the student is in a lunge or warrior shape with the knee collapsed toward the midline; teacher asks the student to move the knee to or toward the teacher’s hand; if the student chooses to touch the teacher’s hand with the knee, some pressure between the two body parts can be added with the student’s permission
- **Engagement of scapulae in downward facing dog** – the teacher hovers her or his hand behind the student’s thoracic spine in downward facing dog; the teacher then asks the student to move her or his rib basket to or toward the teacher’s hand to create core engagement and remove the collapse from the thoracic spine, also engaging the core muscles while drawing the low ribs toward the hips
- **Engagement of head and neck into healthful posture in downward facing dog** – the teacher hovers her or his hand behind the student’s head in downward facing dog; the teacher then asks the student to move her or his head toward the teacher’s hand to create muscular engagement in the neck, emphasizing a chin tuck before the chin moves toward the back plan of the body to come into a more natural postural head alignment
- **Releasing effort in the shoulder girdle during Warrior 2** – the teacher stands behind a student in Warrior 2, with her or his arms out to side just under the student’s arms; the teacher invites the student to release her or his shoulder blades downward to or toward the teacher’s arms to create more ease and eliminate excess effort or tension in the shoulder girdle
Guiding Touch

Guiding touch of the student by the teacher is a gentle and typically light, never forceful or heavy, tactile contact through which the teacher identifies a particular body region of the student with a discerning touch by the teacher’s hand or hands (most typically). Guiding touch can be offered simply to help a student become more aware of where a targeted body region is (e.g., identifying a bicep muscle or a peroneal muscle). It can also be offered to guide the student into activation in areas that are collapsed or into release of a particular muscle or set of muscles that are braced. The touch is guiding without exerting force; it is simply a placement of the teacher’s hand on a body part that the student has trouble locating, releasing, or engaging on her or his own. It is accompanied with a gentle verbal instruction about the intention: noticing, releasing, or engaging.

Examples:
• Encouraging hand engagement in downward facing dog – very gently placing the teacher’s hand on the index finger and thumb of a student who is in downward facing dog to encourage the engagement of pada bandha in the hand with internal rotation of the humeri to gain more lightness in the wrist
• Encouraging release of a braced area – gently and lightly placing the teacher’s hand on a braced area (always avoiding the sacred areas named above) to encourage the student to find more ease in the muscles around this body region
• Encouraging engagement of a collapsed areas – gently and lightly touching a collapsed area to help the student identify a muscle that can support greater engagement and health in a particular muscle (e.g., touching the mid trapezius of a student who collapses while holding a plank even if activation of the shoulder blades has been verbally cued)

Directional Touch

Directional touch involves a hands-on or fingers-on touch by the teacher that guides a student’s body region, limb(s), or the body overall in a particular direction without the teacher exerting any active force or effort. The touch guides the student in a direction that she or he was not able to access through verbal cuing alone. Through this directional touch the student better understands the healthful alignment of the body region and its muscles in question. The touch is very light and yet has a discrete directionality to it that guides the student toward a specific movement (as opposed to light touch which is not directional but simple invites attention to, release or, or engagement of the are being touched).

Examples:
• Shoulder blade stabilization – very gently, with two light fingers, tracing a V down the student’s upper back to encourage the retraction and depression of the shoulder blades on the thoracic spine
• External rotation of upper arm bones – gently touch in a way that suggests external rotation of the humeri in extended mountain pose – the teacher’s hands are gentle placed on the student’s arms near the shoulder joint (above the elbow joint) to guide the student toward the type of external rotation that brings greater ease to shoulder (glenohumeral) flexion
• Scapula retraction in plank – gentle touch at the outside of a student’s elbows, encouraging a movement toward the center of the body (i.e., medially) while the student is in plank pose to help guide the elbows toward each other to prevent the splaying out of the arms which – over time and with repetition – can be harmful for the shoulder joint
• Deepening of spinal rotation – gentle placement of the teacher’s hands on the shoulders of a student who is moving into a seated twist; on the side same side of the twist (i.e., the right shoulder, if twisting to the right), the teacher places the hand on top of the shoulder with fingers wrapping to front of the shoulder; on the side away from the twist, the teacher places the hand on the shoulder blade; there is a directional hint into the direction of the twist but the teacher exerts no force at all; the student will be in charge of the degree of additional rotation in the spine that feels auspicious
Supportive Touch

Through supportive touch, a teacher helps a student gain an insight about or greater comfort in a body region, energetic movement, or emotional response to an asana or breathing practice. Supportive touch invites a deliberate action by the student to find either greater ease or greater engagement in a body part that is clearly either over- or under-efforting, either braced or collapsed. Supportive touch is more substantial than light touch; however, its safety comes from the fact that the student remains in charge of the degree of engagement inherent in the touch and the length of the tactile contact with the teacher, being able to release from the tactile contact at any time without risk of destabilization.

Examples:

- **Human stretching rack with student gripping teacher’s ankles** – the teacher stands above behind the supine student’s head and invites the student to grip the teacher’s ankles; the teacher starts with knees in flexion and tension increases on the student’s spine as the teacher straightens the knees
- **Side plank with hip support** – the teacher’s hand is supportively placed under the student’s lower hip in side plank to invite a lifting of the pelvic girdle toward the sky – eliminates collapse of the core muscles in side plank that often shows up as hips sagging toward the floor
- **Palm-on-palm lift-up for spinal extension in pigeon pose** – while teacher is kneeling or squatting directly in front of the student who is in pigeon preparation, teacher and student place their palms (teacher’s right on student’s left; and left in right) together providing support for the student as she or he lifts up into spinal extension
- **Back and leg support in boat pose** – the teacher squats at the side of the student who is preparing to rise into boat pose; as the student lifts the legs off the ground, the teacher provides a supportive arm behind the student’s back and possibly a supportive arm under the thighs, just above the backs of the knees; all along the teacher encourages the student to engage the core and to find the strength to hold her or his own legs
- **Lifting-up support in headstand** – the teacher stands to the side of the student; as the student reaches up from a tight downward dog to move toward headstand, the teacher supports the swing leg to help the student reach the inversion; from here the student is asked to self-stabilize and the teacher takes her or his hand away when the student is self-sufficed in the up-side-down shape; this assist can also be used for handstand

(sorry no picture 😞)
Stabilizing Touch

Stabilizing touch involves the teacher using a body part (most typically a hand or arm) to stabilize the student to gain greater ease in balancing or stabilizing a particular body region or the body overall. Stabilization is most commonly used in standing balances to help the student access the shape without the need to concentrate overly hard to staying upright. Once the student has accessed the shape with more ease and stability, the teacher can slowly and gently encourage the student to disengage contact from the teacher to move into a free balance, if desired. It is the student’s choice to disengage from stabilizing touch; the teacher takes great care never to remove tactile contact with a student while the student’s stability is still linked to the presence of the teacher’s touch. The teacher makes sure not to destabilize the student.

Examples:
- **Stability in tree pose** – the teacher offers a hand or finger to the student (on the side of the student’s lifted leg) to stabilize the pose; the student is in charge of grasping or touching the proffered hand or finger with her or his hand or finger
- **Stability in dancer pose** – the teacher offers a supportive hand or outstretched palm to the student’s forward hand to stabilize, and possible deepen, the balancing backbend; the student is in charge of grasping or touching the proffered hand or palm with her or his hand or palm
- **Stability in half moon** – the teacher can stand behind the student so that the student may choose to lean into the teacher (in lieu of being stabilized by wall); the teacher does not carry the weight of the student but simply serves as a stabilizer to give the student more security in this open-hearted balance
- **Stability in Warrior 3** – standing in front of the student with the student’s hands reaching toward the teacher as the student folds forward into the share, the teacher offers supportive hands with upwardly-faced palms onto which the student can choose (or not choose) to place her or his downwardly-faced palms for stabilizing support
- **Hands-under-shoulder support in crow pose** – while teacher is kneeling directly in front of the student, the teacher’s hands are placed under the student’s shoulders as the student moves forward into crow pose; this support helps the student feel less afraid of falling head-forward onto the mat as an attempt is made to lift the feet off the ground; the addition of a bolster in front of the student is also very helpful (no picture 😊)
Auspicious Alignment Touch

Touch to support auspicious alignment involves the greatest amount of active physical engagement between teacher and students. Alignment touch offers the student access to changing placements in a particular body region or the body overall to gain more ease or healthful engagement in a particular shape. The teacher has a more active role and may actually move certain body parts of the students, always taking care to work closely to the joints that need to increase range of motion to access the alignment. Alignment generally brings more healthful assembly or stable engagement into a student’s body, breath, or even her or his mind.

Examples:

- **Grounding through the back foot in warrior and related wide-legged standing shapes** – the teacher places her or his foot next the back-facing foot in the standing warrior or related shape; this allows the student to release weight into the foot in a grounded way; the contact between student and teacher is strong and relies on the power of the teacher to stabilize her or his own foot

- **Hip alignment in lunges and warriors** (asymmetrical standing shapes) – the teacher stands to the side of a student who is in a lunge or warrior, with a pelvis that is not properly aligned side-to-side; the teacher – with permission, of course – uses her or his hands to pivot the student’s pelvis into proper side-to-side alignment supporting the moving backward of the hip connected to the forward leg and the moving forward of the hip connected to the back leg; the mobilization of the pelvic girdle is provided by the teacher ad the student is then encouraged to try to maintain that hip alignment as the teacher withdraws her or his hands

- **Knee alignment with a TheraBand** – there is no actual physical contact between student and teacher here; however, the teacher will exert significant force on the TheraBand that connects from her or his hands to the leg of the student; the TheraBand is wrapped either directly above or below the student’s knee to support the proper alignment of the knee in the same line as the foot and the hip (i.e., side-to-side, NOT forward of or behind the ankle) (sorry no picture 😞)

- **Anterior rotation of pelvic girdle in standing or seated forward folds** – the teacher stands to the side of a student who is in a forward fold (e.g., downward facing dog at the wall) and whose low back is rounded (i.e., the pelvis has posterior tuck); the teacher uses her or his hands – one at the outside of each of the student’s hips – to rotate the pelvis into a more anterior tilt to bring the natural lordotic curve into the student’s lumbar spine; the teacher attends to any strain by the student and cues bending the knees as needed
Another Perspective on Touch…

There are (at least) two situations in which touch may be integrated into the theme of the class and explicitly planned.

Partner Yoga –

In partnered yoga, by definition, students will touch each other and/or the teacher. Often partnered classes are taught to actual partners, but not always. Sometimes students pair up in class with a classmate they may or may not already know. Students who attend partnered classes give explicit consent to this form of touch and physical interaction; they know to expect it. If they have an unexpected reaction to the physicality of the class, they will need to decide what they want to do – they can choose to leave the class or they can get the essence of the shapes that are taught while doing them on their own.

Yoga Classes with Explicit Class Descriptions that Touch Will Be Offered

These are yoga classes where it is part of the therapeutic intention of the class to give physical assists and supports. Students who attend classes with such explicit touch-will-be-used classes will know to expect that physical assist and touch will be offered by the teacher and any teaching assistants in the class (however, not by other students in the class). Nevertheless, students can – at any time – decide that they do not want to be touched and communicate this to the teacher and/or assistants. Even in these classes, ongoing consent is used, though after a few episodes of touch with the same student, such collection of consent may be abbreviated. All cautions and guidelines about touch still apply in these classes – the main difference is that the default is that touch is going to be explicitly offered and integrated into the teaching.

To do anything well you must have the humility to bumble around a bit, to follow your nose, to get lost, to goof.

Have the courage to try an undertaking possibly doing it poorly.

Unremarkable lives are marked by the fear of not looking capable when trying something new.

Epictetus

😊😊
Partnered Touch

Another form of auspicious alignment touch can occur in the context of partnered poses – either between student and teacher or students partnered with other students. Lots of wonderful partner poses exist that support healthful alignment in both partners. In these shapes, the partners often rely on each other to find good alignment and even to stay balanced. The body weights of the two partners literally become counter weights for one another and each partner depends on the other person to be stable and aligned. These poses are wonderful interoception, proprioception, trust, and empathy builders.

Rather than describing partnered touch via written examples, let the following pictures speak for themselves.
Bibliography


Wilber, K. (2016). *Integral meditation: Mindfulness as a path to grow up, wake up, and show up in your life*. Boston: Shambala.

