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Communication as Yoga

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Communication *as* Yoga

by

Kristen C. Blinne

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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DEDICATION

With the deepest gratitude and love, I take no ownership for what is contained herein as every word, gesture, act, moment, interaction, and experience has shaped all that I am and all that I know. I am compelled to see this work as the expression of and honor to life as it pulses through me, but also to every teacher, family member, friend, partner, stranger, and being who has walked before me, with me, towards me, away from me, or near me, even if only briefly, as well as all that will walk after me towards futures unknown. If, for a moment, you see yourself in me or even *as* me, then I have done what I set out to do and thus have accomplished the world, and for that I thank you with everything that I have been, am, and will someday be.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I am in conversation with the following questions: How can individuals and communities teach and learn to engage more peacefully, nonviolently, and compassionately with each other? Further, how can one practice a style of communication that helps at least one person suffer less each day? In asking these questions, my goal has been to imagine as well as attempt to actualize a world where individuals and communities work together to create less suffering in each other's lives by first developing compassionate awareness of our interconnectedness, then "waking up" not only to our own divinity but also to that place in all of us where the entire universe dwells. In this dissertation, communication is situated as both a spiritual practice and as a practice of yoga.

To illuminate this notion, I have sequenced this text as a yoga practice in and of itself, employing Shiva Rea's "wave methodology" to introduce and support the peak purpose of this text –*communication as yoga* – via *svadhyaya*, or self-study, as a path to expand relational awareness through everyday small acts or micropractices. Communication, thus, becomes an emergent process based in yoga philosophy and practice wherein one learns to acknowledge and take responsibility for one's *interactions* with others and other realities by recognizing one's shared vulnerability. To heighten this awareness, this text includes 108 *asanas* or micropractices, which serve to explore my guiding questions as well as exemplify communication as yoga - as an everyday practice.

INVOCATION

The way of experience begins with a breath

Such as the breath you are breathing now.

Awakening into luminous reality

May dawn in the momentary throb

Between any two breaths.

The breath flows in and just as it turns

To flow out, there is a flash of pure joy –

Life is renewed.

Awaken into that.

As the breath is released and flows out,

There is a pulse as it turns to flow in.

In that turn, you are empty.

Enter that emptiness as the source of all life.

- Lorin Roche, *The Radiance Sutras*¹

For the first time in years, I feel my feet connecting to the earth beneath me. Shifting my weight forward then backwards, balancing in the space between, I embrace each step as a place of possibility. My awareness does not stop at my feet; it moves up my legs and torso to my arms

and neck, extending beyond the boundaries of my skin to the world around me, enveloping the soft breeze, the warmth of the sun, the smell of flowers, the sound of birds chirping in the distance. Deeply inhaling, I pause at the top of my breath, inviting my lungs to fill and expand, and then relax as I exhale, pulling my stomach towards my spine. I study my breath as I breathe in and out with awareness, still noticing my feet. It is through our feet that we become grounded in life, learning how to rise or reach for the sky. Opening myself to my breath via yoga practice continues to expand my boundaries in more ways than I ever thought would be possible. Finding small moments of pure flow and surrendering to the divinity of the present moment brings me back to my yoga mat again and again. In a sense, these moments blur the boundaries between myself and others, but also between living yoga “on the mat” and “off.” Once you realize that there is “no mat,” or that the whole world is your yoga mat, you can start practicing yoga in every part of your life. I continue to be excited about the lifelong learning process that this understanding inspires.

Looking back, I started my journey with yoga in my early twenties. At that point in my life, I was fully immersed in holistic healing traditions, and I was regularly teaching aromatherapy and herbology classes, with yoga becoming a natural extension of my love of dance and other physical activities. After practicing yoga for some time, I shifted my focus towards martial arts, specifically Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Converging paths carried me to Thailand to study traditional Thai bodywork, learning most extensively with Pichest Boothumme, and also with Lek Chaiya, Jack Chaiya, Hironori Ikeda, and Arno Le’Hermitte. I received certifications from Wat Pho, The School of Thai Massage Shivagakomarpaj - Old Medicine Hospital, The Sunshine Massage School, among others. With over 1500 hours of training in Thai bodywork, I deepened my studies in bodywork, energy cultivation practices, and Asian medical theories by

attending acupuncture school, which culminated in my certification as a Diplomat in Asian Bodywork by the National Certification Commission of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. My interests in holistic healing have also hugely shaped my spirituality. Studying yoga, tai chi, and acupuncture provided opportunities to explore Taoist and Tantric philosophies, all incorporated into my current spiritual practices, with love being the main tenet of my spirituality and permeating all of the activities in my life – my relationships, teaching, and research.

I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to live in eight U.S. states and four countries across three continents and this has allowed me to see the world through a variety of lenses, showing me repeatedly that there is not “one way” but many ways to live life. It is said that it is not the destination, but the journey that shapes our lives. In my case, my journey has involved experiencing a diversity of educational settings, ranging from dropping out of high school and taking the G.E.D. to pursuing visual art studies, followed by the study and practice of complementary and alternative therapies, including bodywork training, studying martial arts, dance, and yoga, and becoming a licensed skin care therapist. During my undergraduate studies, I taught classes and wrote for trade publications in the holistic health field, which complemented my research on how scent impacts creativity and artistic processes, resulting in a BA in Health Arts and Sciences from Goddard College.

After completing my Asian bodywork training, I was inspired to pursue a Master's degree program in Medical Anthropology at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. Having long been an advocate of feminism, with a strong interest in gender and sexuality studies, my interests in cultural theories related to body studies, sexuality, and relationships, which merged with my previous spa therapy work as a licensed skin care therapist, culminating in an MA thesis examining how partner preferences impact decisions regarding body hair removal or retention.

After completing my mixed methods research, involving ethnography, survey research, and focus group research, I graduated *cum laude* and moved to Tampa, Florida, to pursue a Ph.D. in Communication at the University of South Florida. Spiritual communication is the pathway interweaving my interests in health and relationships, examining specifically how Eastern and Western theories of communication constitute, inform, and maintain understandings of embodiment, identity, and relationality, all of which shape people's understandings of wellness and/or *disease*.

Ultimately, I came to the study of communication because I wanted to be a better communicator, wanting to enhance my everyday communication and improve my relationships to be more compassionate in my life. As a result, each day I ask myself how I can practice a style of communication that helps at least one person suffer less – myself included. This cycle of *inspiration* pulls together breath and body, self and other, theory and practice to explore this question more fully. While studying communication offered many vistas to help me improve the quality of my life, I still felt like something was missing. For me, communication theory did not fully offer the practical everyday tools I was seeking to radically shift my relationships. It was not until I returned to the study of yoga that I found what I was looking for: namely, everyday skills that I could cultivate and practice that had the potential to greatly impact the lives of those around me. It was in this space between my communication studies and my yoga practice that this dissertation was conceived. Since that time, I have sought to deepen my practice and better understand the theory and philosophy of flow, completing a 200-hour teacher-training program at Om Time in Boulder, Colorado, with Shannon Paige, Gina Caputo, and Nancy Kate Williams. Most recently, I am advancing my yoga studies with Yogarupa, Rod Stryker. My yoga practice and training helped me rediscover what it means to love more fully. For me, love is what makes

our relationships sustainable, as it is our ultimate renewable (re)source. Each time we practice loving more deeply, we honor our selves and others. Consider the words of Jackson Kiddard,

Today I affirm that there is nothing in me but love. This love comes from total acceptance of myself and the understanding that I am a perfectly imperfect human being. I will walk through today and allow myself to fully express my perfection. I realize that all my 'faults' are actually the Universe's unique way of expressing itself through me. I let go of self judgment and any projected judgments of others that I have chosen to believe and finally allow myself to just be what I truly am: infinite. As this is true for me, so it is true for all other beings on the planet. I will choose to accept everyone in my life with the same radical acceptance I have for myself knowing that we are all perfectly imperfect human beings simply doing the best we can. And so it is.²

In seeking to create a more loving communication studies, my intention is to invite you to explore the present moment and your world through self-study, starting first by honoring your teachers and past experiences. I invite you to start now: Closing your eyes, visualize your day thus far as a moving picture. Start by rewinding to when you first awoke and then fast-forward through your day, briefly stopping to observe your interactions, movements, conversations, and sensory awareness until you arrive in the current moment, sitting with this book. When you are finished, I invite you to take a moment and reflect on the paths you have taken in your life thus far that have led you here. What is your intention for your journey? Placing one hand on your heart and inhaling deeply, hold this intention, allowing it to sink in deeply. Exhale, releasing all that you no longer need to move forward. By radically accepting our perfectly imperfect selves, as Kiddard states, we can open spaces of possibility, or as Ganga White queries:

What if our religion was each other
If our practice was our life
If prayer, our words
What if the temple was the Earth
If forests were our church
If holy water - the rivers, lakes, and ocean
What if meditation was our relationships
If the teacher was life
If wisdom was self-knowledge
If love was the center of our being.³

What then? What if you challenged yourself to participate more fully in your life? To ask yourself each day, Just how good can I feel?⁴ and How can I bring yoga into my relationships so I may develop a greater intimacy with life?

Feeling my feet and returning my awareness to my breath, I know I am asking you to take a chance and travel with me into the mystery, complexity, and uncertainty that comes with unlearning who we think we are through the practice of communication *as* yoga, remembering, “Yoga does not remove us from the reality or responsibilities of everyday life but rather places our feet firmly and resolutely on the practical ground of experience. We don’t transcend our lives; we return to the life we left behind in the hopes of something better”; in doing so, “We may notice that while life has been living itself through us, we have been absent from the experience. Where did we go, and how can we come home to the larger life that is possible for us?”⁵

By inviting you to take a journey with me through this text, it is my greatest hope that by the end of our time together in this shared space, you will come to better understand yourself, inspiring you to continue the conversation and aid others in their journey to do the same. Vital to this exploration is the willingness to bear witness to oneself as a communicator, but also to be open to moving beyond these pages to experiment with the exercises contained within. I want to live in a world of questions, not answers; thus, I do not seek to propose or provide a set of answers. Instead, I hope to open space for on-going contemplation and conversation regarding yoga and its role in our everyday lives. In an often over-stimulating and individualized world, it is easy to fail to see how humans and non-humans are connected and that the ways we *interact* have real, everyday social consequences; thus, embracing yoga is much more than just learning to “pay attention.” Yoga can help us better understand how people can learn and teach to engage

nonviolently with each other through a recognition of our interconnectedness - but also by being able to choose many different peaceful paths of action.

Lunar Pause:

If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you do today?

What is most meaningful to you in your life right now?

If you only had one minute left to speak, what would you say to the world?

Figure 1. What matters most to you right now?

Invocation Notes

¹ Lorin Roche, *The Radiance Sutras: 112 Tantra Yoga Teachings for Opening to the Divine in Everyday Life* (Marina del Rey, CA: Syzygy Creations, Inc., 2008), 1.

² Mastin Kipp, "Today's Quotes: There is Nothing in Me But Love," *The Daily Love*, August, 3, 2013, <http://thedailylove.com/todays-quotes-there-is-nothing-in-me-but-love-2/>.

³ Ganga White, *Yoga Beyond Belief: Insights to Awaken and Deepen Your Practice* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2007).

⁴ Deborah Adele, *The Yamas & Niyamas: Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice* (Duluth, MD: One-Word Bound Books, Inc., 2009), 176.

⁵ Donna Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life: The Everyday Practice of Enlightened Living* (New York: HarperOne, 2004).

NAMASTE⁶

The divine in me bows to the divine in you

I have come to see communication as a spiritual practice or, as I will present in this dissertation, a practice of yoga. When I say spiritual practice, I consider spirituality to be a daily practice and process of “waking up,” as Anthony De Mello suggests.⁷ “Waking up,” to me, means developing awareness of the interconnectedness of all life - embodied and transcendent. From a yogic perspective, it also illustrates a “waking up” to our own divinity or that place in us where the entire universe dwells. Yoga teacher, Michael Stone, beautifully illustrates this notion by saying, “Yoga teaches us that everything is connected to everything else in the ongoing flux and flow of reality, beginning with the microcosm of the mind and extending all the way through the myriad forms of life.”⁸ For him, “waking up” occurs when we begin to see ourselves as completely entangled in - and not separate from - the shared reality we call life, so we might ask ourselves, “How is our awakening going to contribute to the world at large?”⁹

Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, often considered the greatest innovator and founder of contemporary postural yoga most often practiced in the West, claims that “Yoga is India’s greatest gift to the world.” Though there is no one definition or interpretation of yoga, nor is there an agreed upon date of its origin, the term *yoga* is applied to many varying lineages, systems, and categories and is considered one of the six systems of Indian philosophy (*Nyaya*, *Sankhya*, *Vaishesika*, *Vedanta*, *Mimamsa*, and *Yoga*). What I refer to as *yoga* in this text is comprised of numerous schools and philosophies of yoga, all of which are interrelated and

employ each other's methodologies for understanding the nature of reality in varying proportions. Each of these systems has its own history and complexity; however, what connects these philosophies and practices is a desire to experience the present moment as a path to Self-realization or union with the divine. I thus draw on the philosophies of Vedanta, Sankhya, and Tantra while remaining focused on the *Yoga Sutras* as an entry point into these complex traditions.¹⁰

Though the dates of origination are contested, scholars generally refer to the *Yoga Sutras* as the primary text of classical yoga philosophy,¹¹ containing a series of aphorisms (or sutras) in four chapters, written by Patanjali (said to be a pen name), who codified the practice of yoga as a method to transform how we think, communicate, and act in our everyday lives. A central focus of the *sutras* is calming the fluctuations of the “mind” through various practices that bring about a state of unsurpassed calm (achieved through spiritual discipline and non-attachment). Thus, a key component of this system is to experience an awareness beyond ourselves, a merging of consciousness wherein we no longer recognize a separation between us and the divine.

Patanjali, whose name means to “fall into an offering of the heart,” offers a variety of yoga paths, part of a rich, historical oral tradition, involving the passing of knowledge from teacher to student over a period of thousands of years. Within this dissertation, I shall focus on one of the paths, namely the eight-fold path or eight limbs of yoga, and more specifically, the first two limbs – the *yamas* and *niyamas* – which offer ethical guidelines for living a yogic life, studying one's relationships and communication at the heart of this endeavor. These teachings are built on the notion that each person is a teacher, the teaching itself, and a student. The *Yoga Sutras* start with the concept of *atha*, which means the present moment or now, the highest teaching of the text. According to yoga teacher, Richard Freeman, the term *atha* can also be

interpreted to mean, “we have come to a point in our lives where we are ready to wake up from our conditioned existence and our habitual ways”; further,

Patanjali’s use of the word *now* implies that we have most likely tried many, many other things in order to wake up and find happiness. We have probably pursued all different kinds of pleasures, and perhaps we have explored various philosophical teachings and disciplines and maybe even religious practices in order to give life meaning. But still, something is not quite right. When all of our attempts to find meaning are seen to have been inadequate for the job, then we come into our present situation and *this* is where the practice of yoga truly begins – right here, right now.¹²

As a starting point, it is important to note that while I agree with Freeman, I, too, came to yoga searching for a way to change my own life. However, by situating communication *as* yoga, I am by no means suggesting that there is a “right” or “wrong” way to communicate; instead, I offer you an approach to communication grounded within varying streams of yoga philosophy, built from a foundation of everyday ethical guidelines as Patanjali outlines in the *Yoga Sutras*. These guidelines are deeply rooted within Indian culture and history, yet they are still applicable to contemporary life in the West as they offer specific tools to bring awareness to the habitual patterns that shape our lives. By engaging with communication *as* yoga, I hope to inspire you to critically, compassionately, and contemplatively reflect on the role your communicating plays in your life by practicing a range of yoga-based exercises.

My teacher, Rod Stryker, always concludes his courses saying that once we leave, he hopes that we will continue to practice whatever it is that helps us to find peace and brings joy into our lives. In my own experience, I practice yoga because it makes my life better in more ways than I can express, and I immediately notice the difference when I stop practicing. Even so, I recognize that this may not be the same result for others, as yoga is not a path that everyone will walk. Therefore, in the course of this text, my greatest hope is that you will depart from the yoga I offer here to create your own “yoga,” continuing to practice what is beneficial to your

journey and letting go of what is not. Returning to *Yoga Sutras*, which end with the concept *iti*, the reader is asked to refer to the first teaching and begin again. Between these two concepts is a whole world of knowing that teaches seekers to unpack these ideas. A wise friend I met in Thailand used to say to me, “You Americans are always trying to find yourselves. You are not lost; you are right here, right now.” In keeping with her words, I am also not suggesting that you are lost, but that there are parts of you (and your relationships) that might be worth contemplating and re-discovering through the practice of yoga – starting now.

The word *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit¹³ root *yuj*, which loosely translates as “to yoke” or “bind together,” referring to a state of union (with the divine), which one attempts to achieve through various yogic paths such as *jnana yoga* (the study of texts and scriptural knowledge); *bhakti yoga* (devotional practice such as prayers and rituals); *karma yoga* (action and selfless service or *seva*); *raja yoga* (meditation); *mantra yoga* (the use of sound); and *hatha yoga* (purifying the body and mind through various practices). Thus, there are many philosophies and practices all operating with the same term - *yoga* - but employing different theories and methods aimed at spiritual transformation. Even so, each of these various practices of yoga sprang forth from the same source, containing similar principles and practices. Most importantly, perhaps, is the notion that in yoga there is no separation between practice and philosophy. For this reason, yoga scholar, Georg Feuerstein, refers to yoga as a “unitive discipline” or a “discipline of integration.”¹⁴ As a result, yoga is a unique spiritual practice because it is not only a state of unitive awareness, but it is also a path or discipline to achieve this state. In other words, you must do yoga to reach yoga. Even so, yoga is not a religion, but it is a wisdom tradition of India. While yoga as a practice can complement any belief system or faith tradition, it is intimately tied and contextually bound to Indian history and culture despite yoga’s becoming a

billion dollar business in the West.

At its core, yoga traditions recognize that all beings are different forms of the same divine source (the many in the one and the one in the many), and through everyday practice and spiritual discipline, one can sacralize the mundane, interweaving the spiritual and the material realms of human existence and experience and recognizing everything as a manifestation of the divine in each other, as their term *namaste* invites. Gina Caputo, one of my yoga teachers, describes this source as an ocean of awareness wherein all beings are like bottles floating in the water – each filled with parts of the sea. As we float through our lives, we carry this source within us until we transcend our bodies (or bottles), returning back into the flow of this ocean. Regardless of whether one views the divine as within or outside of oneself, the yogic path works to illuminate the interconnectedness of these energies, recognizing that there are many manifestations of one reality or source. Yoga scholar, Douglas Brooks, states this in another manner as, “we are the point the universe is trying to make,” or we are the means for which divinity shows itself uniquely through each individual.

Therefore, yoga is a practice of *atma vidya*, or a science of the self, which illuminates the divinity within us by teaching us that there is no distinction or separation between you and divinity, which the words *Tat Tvam Asi* or “Thou Art That” illustrate.¹⁵ Through yoga daily practice, the boundaries that separate us from this source of our own divinity or connection to divinity soften towards integration or “union” with the flow of all life. Knowing that the self is divine involves a dance between the material, embodied self and the transcendent, interconnected world, which yoga practice seeks to discover through the lifelong study of the traditions of the self via *svadhyaya* or self-study. As a discipline of self-study, yoga teaches us to experience ourselves in relationship with the world around us, transforming our sense of separation by

extending our circles of compassion. Spoken another way, “When we open to to a greater world, we open to the greater good; spiritual awakening then becomes a process of cultural and ecological awakening,” so we can move beyond a world of “me” and “mine” to a world where we better understand the impact of our actions by developing practical skills, especially communication skills, that can inspire new ways of understanding how we *relate* to each other and understand both personal and social change.¹⁶ In the end, however, it is only through stillness and silence or a moving beyond our conditioned and habitual communication that we come to fully “yoke” with this source, thus, “waking up” to all that is beyond our “selves,” which we discuss more fully as we move forward.

If spiritual practices such as yoga ask us to “wake up” to a new relational paradigm, an understanding of our interconnectedness, then what does the notion of *practice* when applied to spirituality and communication actually entail? To consider communication as a spiritual practice or as a practice of yoga, it is imperative to transform the relationship between practical communication theories and the everyday applications of yoga so that a new way of being in the world together is possible. What might this look like in practice? Consider starting from the intention, “I want to make a difference in the world.” Through your everyday actions of doing so, you begin to connect to and unite with an increased awareness of and sensitivity to how your everyday choices affect individuals and events around you so you might transform your life and the lives of others via small acts of compassion. When we begin to live and embody our intentions, we not only start to “wake up” to a new world, but we also come to see that we are not different from the world around us - *we are the world* - and our everyday actions have a huge impact on all life.

We know that communication involves a wide range of activities such as talking, listening, reading, writing, performing, witnessing, and a whole host of other doings that could be easily recognizable as communicating, but in order to consider communication a practice, or more specifically, a spiritual practice, we must better define what this means in relationship to yoga. Robert Craig, describing communication as a practice, suggests that the term *practice* denotes a set of activities, commonly engaged in and made meaningful in particular ways, encouraging both engagement with these activities but also reflecting and talking about these experiences.¹⁷ While he contends this involves both a theoretical or conceptual knowledge to aid the learning of a practice, he also suggests that theory must accompany direct experience to put this learning into action. Craig provides the example of breathing to illustrate this point. Just as everyone breathes, everyone also communicates, and he offers yoga as an example of a practice that teaches individuals to control, expand, or extend their breathing, thus moving breathing from an involuntary process to a conscious practice. Likewise, communication, once practiced from a similar frame, has the capacity to move from being an everyday taken-for-granted part of our lives to become a space of growth and transformation.

As Craig illustrates, simply communicating does not imply a practice, for it is only in the transformation of this practice into something meaningful to us in particular ways that we can focus our attention on the details of our communicative interactions in such a manner that new understandings and layers of experiences emerge. In other words, for communication to be a practice, it must cultivate new ways of being together that reveal connections through our everyday choices and how they impact others. Only then can communication create opportunities for reflecting on our lives so we might transform our relationships and grow as people through

the cultivation of new skills resulting from a serious attention to and engagement with the “practice of communication.”

Similarly, the terms *abhyasa* and *sadhana* are “practice,” both referring to the manner in which yoga transforms our relationship to ourselves, each other, and the divine. *Sadhana* is said to be a daily spiritual practice and could be considered the foundation of any spiritual endeavor or discipline that helps you actualize your life purpose. *Abhyasa* is a type of focused, repeated practice that one performs with contemplation that contributes to achieving a better understanding of your spiritual self. One cultivates *abhyasa* through one’s lifestyle, actions, and communication, attempting to transform negative or destructive patterns. *Abhyasa* goes hand in hand with *vairagya*, or the practice of letting go or nonattachment to parts of ourselves that carry us further away from our spiritual goals. Thus, *sadhana* is the sacred path we walk to recognize the divinity within ourselves and *abhyasa* is the daily processes and disciplined practices we engage to make this path possible. In both cases, communication is a vital part of discovering one’s spiritual purpose and potential.

Building on these ideas, I turn to John Shotter’s work to articulate how I visualize communication as a spiritual practice and how this intersects with yoga to become something new - both theoretically and practically. Leaning heavily on Wittgenstein, Shotter discusses the new relational paradigm I am seeking in this dissertation by providing a powerful communication lens for renewing our sense of relatedness and connectedness with each other and the world.¹⁸ In doing so, he proposes a radical revision of relating by placing the emphasis on the spaces we collaboratively create in the continuous flow of everyday communication that occurs *between* us. This allows us to refocus our understanding of communication as an always-changing process and practice of connection, seeking differing ways of being with one another in

our interactions, creating our identities, relationships, and realities in our moment-to-moment encounters, which he describes in more depth below:

Turning now to this paradigm, the task of constructing meaningful and worthwhile relationships between us, seems to consist in the task of making connections between things that might, at first sight, seem to have no connection at all: new connections and relations between ourselves and different kinds of others (or Otherness); between us and our past or future; between us and what we talk of as merely the imaginary, or the transcendental; and so on.¹⁹

Based on this understanding, I seek to build a bridge between yoga as a process of self-study or *svadhyaya* and as a practice inspiring connection through enhancing our everyday relationships via our attention to how our words and actions impact others, which is quite apparent in Shotter's communication paradigm. In both instances, the goal is to foster connection so we might better relate. Even more so, the focus is situated in the present moment as the interaction is happening, which is exactly what the practice of yoga attempts to do – call attention to life as it is currently unfolding around us so we might experience it more fully. First, however, we must “wake up” to the present moment. So I must ask you: Are you awake? Asleep? Dreaming? How do you know if you are awake or not?

Don Miguel Ruiz argues that most of us are living in a dream - a fog we mistake as reality - which we construct as the dream of our life, including all we believe and think we know about who we are in relation to ourselves, others, the world around us, and that which we consider to be divine.²⁰ This dream is what separates us from each other and contains all of our learning, programming, and concepts that shape us, such as our culture, language, religions, and histories – all of which have taught us how to behave, what to believe, and what is good and bad and right and wrong. For Ruiz, “waking up” from this dream requires us to stop searching for answers outside of ourselves and to start observing ourselves without judgment. Only then can

we can wake up to the awareness that “we” are a part of all beings and things so we might develop a reverence for all life.

Similarly, for De Mello, “waking up” is a type of self-observation that involves watching your interactions as if they were happening to someone else. In yogic philosophy, this occurs by developing a witness consciousness that teaches you to watch your life without identifying with your experiences or personalizing all that happens to you. For instance, instead of declaring, “I am frustrated,” you might instead witness the frustration you are experiencing in that moment and remind yourself, “I am temporarily identifying with the feeling, which I am labeling - frustration.” This frustration is not me. While I am perceiving frustration right now, I am going to bear witness to my experience of it without letting it define me. In this example, self-observation or witnessing oneself in the moment is at the center of “waking up” because, as De Mello asserts, it is only when you start examining “Who is living in you,” and what you identify as “you” will you be able to see yourself in each unfolding interaction. Or alternatively, as he queries, “would you rather act and not be aware of your actions, talk and not be aware of your words? Would you rather listen to people and not be aware of what you’re hearing, or see things and not be aware of what you’re looking at?”²¹

Imagine for a moment the power this self-awareness might bring to your life. If we take seriously the notion that “Yoga also claims freedom from suffering as its primary objective,” as Stone contends, and that suffering exists in “me” as I identify myself with something within or outside of me, then it is indeed, “the entanglement in our stories of ‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘mine’ that keep us alienated from the flow of life, from ease, from intimacy.”²² If yoga claims freedom from suffering as a primary objective, we must first better understand what it means to *suffer*. While suffering can be defined in myriad ways, I situate suffering as an experience of

discomfort, pain, aversion, unpleasantness, or unsatisfactoriness, resulting from our embodied experiences (aging, illness, and so on); our perception of harm or threats of harm; our constructed understandings of change and certainty; contradictory impulses and desires; and need to control our realities (via our beliefs, projections, and discrepancies between what we desire and how we live). As such, we suffer when, “We wrongly imagine that life as we reorchestrate it is more worthy of being lived. Hence we lose considerable energy wanting to transform reality so that it corresponds to our plans, ideals, and beliefs.”²³ By learning to focus our attention on how we respond, react, and entangle ourselves with each other communicatively, via spiritual practices that open us to the world beyond “me,” we can develop new and particular ways of relating so we might “reach out” and learn to “move” in a coordinated manner. In doing so, we can work together to cause each other less suffering.

Developing awareness alone is not enough to effect this change, which is where yoga enters this conversation. Yoga provides extremely specific guidelines, namely the *yamas* and *niyamas* or ethical guidelines, to “move” communication and spirituality into a space where one can actually “wake up” and attend to life as it is versus how it has been in the past or how it will be in the future, enabling us to move together in the moment. By moving together, we learn subtle and nuanced ways of witnessing both our selves and others so we might “sensibly follow each other and intertwine our activities” as they occur. Shotter suggests new methods must be invented to highlight this emergent communicative process, focusing on whom we become together so we can study how we communicate in the moment - rather than after it has already happened.²⁴ Instead of working to create “new methods,” as Shotter suggests, I have found yoga helps illuminate the spaces between us.

In this sense, the concern is not on what is hidden or unknown between us: the purpose is to study and practice new ways of understanding our differences that enhance our understandings of each other so we can “go on” or go with the flow of the interaction. Going on together requires a commitment to continuing our connection. It also asks us to be self-aware enough to be both responsible and accountable for our impact. To do so, we must first recognize that our words and actions are not our own, but they are spontaneously and simultaneously created between us. Moreover, to study interconnectedness, communication must become a *practice* that has the ability to change our ways of being in the world through our speaking, listening, witnessing, reacting, and responding. Thus, to situate communication as a spiritual practice involving yoga, the path people must walk to achieve enhanced awareness of and attention to these dynamics must be possible for ordinary people to be affected by and to participate with these methods. Additionally, Shotter contends that we must seek “ideal” connections of an impossible kind, these being realistically possible within our everyday lives. In order for communication to become a practice of yoga and type of everyday spirituality, we must be able to first recognize our relatedness as this new relational paradigm suggests before we can even begin to develop awareness as to how best to create change in our everyday communication.

First and foremost, I position communication as a connecting process with both yoga and communication sharing the same divine purpose - to bring us together. While communication has the power to both connect us and separate us from each other, as a practice of yoga, communication can become a spiritual practice whence we come to recognize the divine in each other. My interest in the relationship between yoga and communication emerged from discussions about metacommunication and meditation in my Interpersonal Communication courses. Over many conversations with my classes and many years of practicing yoga, I was

inspired to explore the intersections between communication theory and yoga philosophy in greater depth, later bridging these worlds to situate communication *as yoga*,²⁵ which I describe as an emergent process wherein one develops awareness of how one communicates and how one's communication impacts others. In collaboration with my classes, I witnessed how the study of yoga, as a process of awakening or awareness to our interconnectedness, positively impacted my students' understanding of themselves and their relationships.

Moreover, I engage with both Eastern and Western philosophies of spirituality to consider how yoga practices can improve health and wellbeing, shape relationships and understandings of identity, as well as improve communication, and, as a result, an individual's quality of life. In doing so, I suggest that the practicality of studying communication theory through the lens of yoga philosophy and practice lies in its combined power to change people's ways of being in the world, which, in turn, can greatly impact how individuals respond and react to their surroundings and each other. After studying relational communication and teaching Interpersonal Communication, Family Communication, and Women and Communication, I began to see a gap in my students' understanding regarding the everyday application of communication theory to their lives. Most expressed a deep desire to be better communicators, but the majority also did not feel confident that the theories alone would make this possible, which resulted in the various in-class activities and exercises we explored together to create this applied theory workbook so it could become a supplement to a variety of communication classes.

Daily, I see endless possibilities for developing more compassionate and peaceful modes of communication, bringing together theories and applied understandings from relational communication, including interpersonal relationships and group organizing, but also communication ethics and conflict studies. I do not seek to continue to carve up communication

into these sub-disciplines, believing scholars should move towards a more holistic approach to the interconnectedness of each of these areas of inquiry. To better understand this interrelationship between communication theory, yoga, and everyday life, I am always in conversation with the following questions: *How can individuals and communities teach and learn to engage more peacefully, nonviolently, and compassionately with each other?* Moreover, *How can one practice a style of communication that helps at least one person suffer less each day?* In asking these questions, I seek to understand how individuals can become less violent and more peaceful or compassionate communicators, working to create less suffering in the lives of others through more loving words and actions. By studying the intersections between yoga and communication, or rather *communication as yoga*, it is my greatest hope that individuals can move towards developing a more compassionate, just, and humane world by learning how to bear witness to their communicative interactions with others.

Ultimately, I will illustrate that the awareness cultivated through yoga practice is not a solitary process of the “mind” or turning inward but is firmly grounded in relationships, which when explored through a communication framework, can create new ways to understand our interactions through the cultivation of John Shotter’s “witnessable knowing along with others.”²⁶ By embracing this concept, we begin to unlearn old, tired, habitual, or destructive communication patterns as a tool to improve one’s relationship with oneself, others, and the world. This unlearning and undoing of who we think we are as communicators and how we think we communicate is at the core of this inquiry.

In agreement with communication scholar Amardo Rodriguez, "I continue to be struck by the absence of love, compassion, tenderness, and forgiveness in communication studies," and, as in his tradition, I aim to tell a new story of communication, drawing on the eight limbs or eight-

fold path of yoga as a new framework for communication studies.²⁷ This text, however, does not serve to contribute to discussions surrounding yoga's extensive history. There are many wonderful books that examine these ideas in great depth, but my approach to yoga philosophy centers primarily on contemporary understandings that have emerged from the modern *hatha yoga* movement, starting with Krishnamacharya, and then flowing through a variety of teachers.

In this dissertation, I take seriously the notion that yoga is a spiritual path, but my interest is in cultivating a “householder” tradition wherein yoga techniques are made accessible for people's modern lives with an emphasis on improving one's life in the here and now so we might *practice* falling in love with our humanity in order to tackle real-world, everyday problems, such as mounting inequalities and ecological crises, occurring all over the world. Utilizing yoga as a tool to realize this goal, this text strives to serve as a self-study guide grounded in an everyday, contemplative spirituality, offering experiential activities aimed at creating more loving, peaceful, and nonviolent modes of communication.

Further, I see spiritual communication as a vibrant sub-discipline that has yet to be fully explored by communication scholars²⁸; thus, this text contributes to the growing field of contemplative communication studies and spiritual communication and also extends to non-academic contexts, serving as an introductory communication theory text for yoga teachers and enthusiasts as well as everyday readers. Similarly to Bud Goodall, I believe that communication is “*the spiritual pathway* capable of uniting diverse communities.”²⁹ I further situate my project as contributing to sacred activism and everyday activist movements, with social transformation resulting from the everyday practices and actions of individuals helping to change the world one conversation at a time.

In previous work on spirituality and communication, Goodall has posed the following question: “*What would a theory of communication include if we took seriously the idea that humans are first and foremost spiritual beings?*”³⁰ In like manner, I believe creating a better understanding of spiritual communication must start with the notion that first and foremost humans *are* spiritual beings; or, in the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”³¹ From this perspective, we can begin to reshape our understanding regarding what it means to communicate as well as what it means to be human. As Amardo Rodriguez asserts, this, in turn, has the ability to open up conversations about the interconnectedness of communication and spirituality, further extending discussions about the potential for both to create a better world.³²

Beyond the notion of “waking up,” yoga involves a “transcendent sense of interconnection that moves beyond the knowable, visible material world.”³³ As a way of life, yoga teaches that this sense of interconnection is an expression of the divine or what some may call “the sacred, “the spirit,” “the universe or cosmos,” among other names, which is both within and beyond ourselves. As such, I see spirituality, sustainability, and social change as interwoven concepts. By recognizing the divine in each other, we have an opportunity to work towards building a more sustainable world.

In so many ways, I fully believe as Krishnamurti suggests, “We are the result of all kinds of influences and there is nothing new in us, nothing original, pristine, clear,” but at the same time, I also believe as he does that, “What is important is not a philosophy of life but to observe what is actually taking place in our daily life.”³⁴ Therefore, to know ourselves fully in the present requires us to step out of the past and future and to bring awareness to what each moment has to teach us. In keeping with this notion, I do not seek to provide a formula or serve as an authority

asking you to accept or follow my proposed ideology. While I write from my own stories and experiences, I hope to inspire questions in the space between us through my writing and your reading.

My goal is that you set out to learn about yourself and see what you discover, and in Krishnamurti's words, consider this text as an opportunity to "investigate ourselves together- not one person explaining while you read, agreeing or disagreeing with him [me] as you follow the words on the page, but taking a journey together, a journey of discovery"; he continues, "Let us start on our journey together with all the remembrance of yesterday left behind – and begin to understand ourselves for the first time."³⁵ Thus, like him, I hope that in your reading of this text, you will come to see yourself as your own teacher and student at the same time, knowing, "To understand anything you must live with it, you must observe it, you must know all its content, its nature, its structure, its movement. Have you ever tried living with yourself? If so, you begin to see that yourself is not a static state, it is a fresh living thing."³⁶ Becoming present to (y)our presence in the world is, I hope, at the heart of (y)our journey through this text and (y)our life. Thus, as you read this text, I urge you to pay attention to how you respond (or react) to my words as this, too, is important to observe as it provides a window into your relational process. Also worth noting is that I am not recommending a particular outcome in this text. Instead, I hope that you will focus on your journey and view this text as a field guide to yourself.

In my own journeying, late one night, years ago, I arrived in snowy Plainfield, Vermont, to begin my undergraduate education. The cold, crisp air chilled my exposed skin. My breath formed soft clouds in the dark air. Walking down the main road toward the dining hall, I could feel and hear the ice crunch beneath my feet. After settling into the old hall, my fellow students and I were told, "Beginning one's learning journey is like taking a trek through uncharted

territory with no map or guidebook.” Asked to close our eyes, we were instructed to imagine this adventure by considering two examples: a train trip through the mountains and a backpacking-hiking trip through similar terrain. On the train journey, you sit back and watch the passing landscape as you travel down a pre-laid path that stops at specific times and locations. To make this trip, all you have to do is board the train and let life happen to you.

On your walking journey through the mountains, you have numerous choices on how to travel the landscape. You can take the trails already carved out by those before you or you can create new paths, side routes, or explore alternative trails to investigate the wilder, less-discovered places. With no clearly defined destination, you are able to explore a variety of routes to get to the other side. Unlike in taking the train, the walker is open to finding new places that the train rider may not have the chance to visit because of sticking to the main route. This text invites you to embrace the walking path to become more than a traveler - to become a self-explorer - hence, this text is designed to cultivate a sense of adventure in you by opening yourself to contemplating what you believe, how you feel, when you suffer, and how you relate to yourself, others, and the world. By doing so, your story is written alongside mine, for I wrote this text to re-discover and to remind myself what I believed about the world and my place within it. In essence, this text is a conversation that I have long been having with myself about communication and yoga and communication *as* yoga. Thus, it not only serves as a field guide to my learning and teaching, but it is also a conversation about how to make the world a better place.

When director Tom Shadyac set out to talk with people about what was wrong with the world and what could be done about it in his documentary, *I am*, he ultimately found out more about what was right about the world, focusing on the power of connection and compassion.³⁷

Similarly, I, too, set out to learn how I could be a more loving communicator, and through this exploration, discovered that not only did I need to unlearn much of the habitual patterns I had created for myself, but also through self-observation, I had the power to greatly transform my life for the better or worse, depending on my practices.

You will notice that I lean heavily on the words of others, frequently eschewing the academic convention of paraphrasing to create a more polyvocal text, seeking to honor those who have inspired my learning, and to further illustrate the notion that we are always in conversation with the world around us. I also liberally employ the pronoun “we,” both as an invitational “we,” but also to pay tribute to our interconnectedness. Yoga is a practice of “we,” built in relationships; thus, by taking a “we-first” stance, I hope to move beyond the first person plural as a reflexive position to one of communion through contemplative communication as it unfolds in the present moment. If I approached this text from an “I” position as my primary orientation, I would be moving in opposition to my entire purpose, which is to teach, learn, and practice communication as an emergent process of yoga wherein we learn to acknowledge and take responsibility for our *interactions* with others and other realities by recognizing our shared vulnerability.

Finally, my goal in suggesting that communication *is* and *can be* a spiritual practice is to offer you, the reader, daily, repeatable micropractices and experiential exercises so you can breathe new life into your everyday communication. In doing so, not only do you have the opportunity to change the quality of your own communication and life - but also the lives of those around you. In so many ways, yoga pushes back, asking us to unlearn what we think we know about our lives so we can breathe with ease during the moments that take our breath away. Moreover, the practice of yoga is an invitation to live differently, asking us to explore what is

meaningful to us right now by pulling us towards our center through an awareness and integration of reciprocal actions or dynamic tensions. Approaching communication in a similar manner offers us an opportunity to transform our relationships by cultivating compassionate awareness within our everyday interactions.

Employing yogini Shiva Rea’s “wave methodology,”³⁸ this text follows a ritual arc or wave format, which gains momentum and intensity as it moves towards a “peak” purpose before descending back into the stillness and calmness of the sea. Thus far, we started our journey with an *invocation* or introduction, setting an intention for our journey, and hopefully cultivating a space of gratitude and curiosity. Next, we perform a *namaskar*, or purposeful and devotional action, bowing, honoring, and building heat, or *tapas*, which helps burn away obstacles, creating space for change. Within the *namaskar*, I introduce key actions or concepts that set the stage for later discussions, including an introduction to contemporary *hatha yoga* philosophy and its relationship to emerging definitions of communication.

Following this, I introduce the *asana – tadasana*, or mountain pose, as well as the fourth *niyama* (ethical guideline) – *svadhyaya*, or self-study. We then engage our core, or the center of our body/being, so we can prepare ourselves for three waves, moving towards our peak idea. In *Core Integration*, I introduce and offer three communication *sutras* or threads, which move us closer to our peak purpose: Communication Energetically Stories Us; Communication is Ecologically Interdependent; and Communication is Spiritually Transformative. Thereafter, I introduce the first two *yamas* – *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *satya* (truthfulness or honesty). Concluding Part One, I integrate a narrative exemplar or *vinyasa* that links the previous material with our discussions in Part Two. The purpose of each *vinyasa* is to connect ideas from the previous chapter with the next via a story, highlighting some of the main points.

Moving from our core to the first of three waves, we explore yoga as a method of living in the flow and its importance in cultivating compassionate awareness within our everyday interactions. Between waves one and two, I have included a connecting *vinyasa*, which serves as a narrative exemplar linking the waves. In Wave Two, *Cultivating Compassionate Awareness*, we explore the notion of compassion and its role within yoga, communication, and diversity studies. Wave Two also introduces the concept of presence or awareness and sets the stage for our discussions on the remaining *niyamas*, which form the basis for Wave Three. Immediately preceding Wave Two, I present the last three *yamas* – *asteya* (nonstealing), *brahmacharya* (nonexcess), and *aparigraha* (nonpossessiveness).

Wave Three explores the *Niyamas*, or ethical self-care guidelines, including: *saucha* (purity); *santosa* (gratitude and contentment); *tapas* (spiritual effort); and, *ishvara pranidhana* (surrender). The *yamas* and *niyamas* are guidelines for the study of our selves and our relationships, which I present within a communication studies framework. Up to this point, each part of the sequence works to introduce and support the peak purpose – *communication as yoga* – by engaging with our central theme of *svadhyaya*, or self-study, as a path to expand relational awareness through everyday small acts or micropractices. After our final connecting *vinyasa*, we begin our regression or counter-poses. In this case, the practice of yoga is itself the ultimate counter-pose to our lives. Thus, once we reach the height of our discussion before the wave breaks and returns to stillness, I offer 108³⁹ *asanas* as daily practices to put our discussions into motion in your life. The term *asana*, as I am defining it, simply means to “sit in one’s skin.” These exercises thus serve as tools of self-study to help you rediscover your world.

Because I view communication as a practice of yoga, I invite you to rediscover your world over a 108 day period, engaging fully with these exercises, as shifting communication

patterns and developing new skills requires a great amount of commitment and practice. Finally, we move into the last stage of our sequence – *savasana*, or corpse pose. *Savasana* teaches us to recognize the benefits of our practice, much like the mythical phoenix, burning away old communication patterns to rise from the ashes reborn. Thus, I close the dissertation with this *asana*, the text actually closing with the final chapter – *Namaste* - which you, the reader, create, based on your 108-day self-study - *sadhana* (practice).

By utilizing Shiva’s “wave methodology,” the relationship between yoga and communication unfolds gradually. I contend by moving from more simple to complex concepts, repeating ideas and building on new information in each stage, readers will be more prepared to fully place these ideas into practice by the end of this text. Because this methodology is designed to enhance the flow of understanding, I have purposefully eschewed the traditional chapter format present in many dissertations and books. Instead, I will incorporate lunar pauses, which are included to offer breaking points for reflection and further engagement with the material. As with any effort or spiritual discipline, these pauses are stopping points for you to catch your breath, serving as important cues within the sequence for you to further embody (y)our story. Thus, I urge you to give yourself the time and space to fully engage with these pauses before proceeding with the text. I also encourage you not to concern yourself with the outcome of these micropractices as many, if not all, could be practiced over a lifetime. Therefore, what is difficult today may not be several weeks from now.

Moreover, key to this process is (un)learning about how you respond or react to yourself and others - in this case, to me and these words. If you find yourself becoming uncomfortable along the way, I ask that you attempt to sit with your discomfort and observe it, treating it like a friend with whom you have not spoken in a great while. Over time, it is my greatest hope that

you return to these practices again and again as tools and teaching moments within your own life journey. You will notice I do not include many examples within this text and I omit these intentionally as my hope is that you, the reader, will collaborate with me on this story by integrating your own story into this work via the lunar pauses. As with any yoga practice, there are an infinite number of possible sequences; thus, in the end (which is really the beginning), this is just one story within an endless universe of stories and possibilities.

Namaste Notes

⁶ In texts such as the *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, among others, the highest teaching is presented first so you need not continue if you understand and embody that one concept. Similarly, these texts also end by redirecting seekers back to the beginning of the text to start again until they understand the first word or idea. I introduce this text in a similar manner as the heart of this dissertation is to embody the spirit of *Namaste*, which could also be translated to mean *the divine in me honors the divine in you* or *the light in me bows to the light in you*.

⁷ Anthony De Mello, *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5.

⁸ Michael Stone, *Yoga for a World out of Balance: Teachings on Ethics and Social Action* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2009), 1-2.

⁹ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 1-2.

¹⁰ For instance, in each of these systems, one seeks to know our divine source through direct experience or reality beyond the world of words and forms, inasmuch that yoga offers practical guidelines (codified in the *Yoga Sutras*); Vedanta teaches tools of self-inquiry as well as the functions of the “mind”; and Tantra offers numerous practices for exploring the sacred in everyday life as tools of energy transformation and spiritual awakening. The differences among these streams of knowledge are outside of the scope of this project as are discussions surrounding dualism and nondualism within these systems. What is important, however, is that in each case, self-study is an integral part of moving into deeper practices of the self-realization of divine consciousness as it unfolds in the present moment.

¹¹ To learn more about the *Yoga Sutras*, I recommend the following texts: *The Path of the Yoga Sutras: A Practical Guide to the Core of Yoga* by Nicolai Bachman; *The Heart of Yoga* by T. K. S. Desikchar; *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom: The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali* by Patanjali and Barbara Stoler Miller; *Core of the Yoga Sutras: The Definitive Guide to the Philosophy of Yoga* by B. K. S. Iyengar. I also highly recommend Georg Feuerstein’s book, *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice*.

¹² Richard Freeman, *The Mirror of Yoga: Awakening the Intelligence of Body and Mind* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2010), ix.

¹³ Throughout the text, I include Sanskrit terms, which emanate from a long tradition of interpretive etymologies; therefore, these definitions are merely one possible understanding of any of these concepts, scholars highly contesting the various translations and meanings attributed to these terms.

¹⁴ Georg Feuerstein, *Yoga Morality: Ancient Teachings at a Time of Global Crisis* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Eknath Easwaran, trans., *The Upanishads* (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 8-9.

¹⁷ Robert Craig, "Communication as a Practice," in *Communication As...Perspectives on Theory*, ed. Gregory J. Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 38-47.

¹⁸ John Shotter, "Wittgenstein in Practice: From 'The Way of Theory' to a 'Social Poetics,'" in *Problems of Theoretical Psychology*, ed. Charles W. Tolman, Frances Cherry, Rene van Hezewijk, and Ian Lubek (North York, Ontario: Captus Pres, 1996), 3-13.

¹⁹ Shotter, "Wittgenstein in Practice," 5.

²⁰ Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements: A Toltec Wisdom Book* (San Rafael, CA: Amber-Allen Publishing, 1997).

²¹ DeMello, "Awareness," 39.

²² Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 20.

²³ Daniel Odier, *The Tantric Path to Awakening*, trans., Clare Marie Frock (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2001), 82.

²⁴ Arlene M. Katz and John Shotter, "Social Poetics as a Relational Practice: Creating Resourceful Communities." Accessed December 21, 2012, <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jds/js.ak.SOCPOENTS.htm>.

²⁵ The title of this dissertation and the core concept of this book is inspired by the text, *Communication as...Perspectives on Theory*, which examines communication through a variety of scholars' stances, including: relationality, ritual, practice, vision, embodiment, dialogue, storytelling, organizing, translation, failure, among others. The editors, Shepherd, St. John, and Striphas (2006), asked communication theorists and practitioners to reappraise "what is at stake when we think and write and talk and argue about our subject" (p. xi), further instructing them to

take a stand that articulates how their position is important to the study and practice of communication, utilizing a "My metaphor, my analogy, my model. *This, not those, and for these reasons. Here is what I believe and why I believe it, and here is the difference it makes*" (p. xii) orientation. In this spirit of this book, I seek to respond to the editors' mission by constructing my own *communication as...stance* within this dissertation, namely *communication as yoga*. Following their lead, I, too do not work to defend the relevance of communication nor the discipline as a whole nor do I argue for a "right way" to study, theorize, or practice communication.

²⁶ John Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness as *Con-Scientia*, as Witnessable Knowing Along with Others," *Theory and Psychology* 16, no. 1, (2006): 13-36.

²⁷ Amardo Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity in Communication Studies* (Leicester, UK: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2010), 13.

²⁸ A quick survey of the discipline will only turn up a handful of contributions, which seek to address the spiritual consequences of communication; rather, most texts examine communication about spirituality. Some examples of work focusing on the former, include: William Kirkland's essay, "Studying Communication about Spirituality and the Spiritual Consequences of Communication"; Bud Goodall's essay, "Mysteries of the Future Told: Communication as the Material Manifestation of Spirituality" and his book, *Divine Signs: Connecting Spirit to Community*; Amardo Rodriguez's edited collection, *Essays on Communication & Spirituality*; and Diana Denton and Will Aston's anthology, which grew out of a National Communication Association panel, *Spirituality, Action, and Pedagogy*.

²⁹ Harold L. Goodall, Jr., *Divine Signs: Connecting Spirit to Community* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 21.

³⁰ Harold L. Goodall, Jr., "Mysteries of the Future Told: Communication as the Material Manifestation of Spirituality," *World Communication*, 22 (1993): 41.

³¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, Perennial, 2002).

³² Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*.

³³ Leela Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice: Social Justice and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2003), 10.

³⁴ J. Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known*, ed. Mary Lutyens (San Francisco: Harper, 1969), 16.

³⁵ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 20.

³⁶ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 20.

³⁷ *I Am*. Directed by Tom Shadyac. Produced by Jennifer Abbott and Dagan Handy. Shady Acres Films /Flying Eye Productions, 2010. Documentary, 76:00.

³⁸ 200-Hour Yoga Teacher Training, Tillai University, Om Time, Boulder, Colorado, August 2013.

³⁹ Why 108 days, you ask? It is said that 108 symbolizes the 12 houses and 9 planets of astrology; the average number of breaths per day (21,600, of which 10,800 are solar energy, and 10,800 are lunar energy); the relationship among the sun, moon, and earth (based on diameters); and, finally, the 108 energy lines that converge to form the heart chakra or heart center of the body. Moreover, I am inspired by prayer beads or *malas*, which are composed of 108 beads.

NAMASKAR

To bow or honor

Standing strong, I am mountain
My palms meet at my heart,
connecting to the fire within.
My hands reach towards the sun,
folding forward, I bow to this moment.

When you hear the term *yoga*, you may visualize people contorting like pretzels into various shapes. Yoga, as a physical and postural-based practice in its various forms, has firmly rooted itself in American culture. As a result, there are numerous classes and an ever-growing marketplace of yoga clothing, mats, props, and other accessories. Yoga studios abound nationwide with competing styles of practice, insomuch that yoga sequences and styles have become branded and have been subject to legal battles dealing with issues related to copyright, patents, and franchising rights. In the United States alone, yoga's popularity continues to rise, touted as a cure-all for almost every spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional ailment. Recently, the *Yoga Journal's* 2012 American Market Study reported that nearly 20.4 million Americans practice yoga, spending around \$10.3 billion a year on classes and products with the five top motivations for practice notably citing improved flexibility, conditioning, stress relief, overall health enhancement, and fitness.⁴⁰ Based on these statistics, you might be tempted to ask: *What is yoga, how does it work, and why has it become so popular in America?*

Lunar Pause

What words, images, or ideas do you associate with the word – yoga? How might you define this concept or practice?

Figure 2. Yoga is...?

Perhaps you have experienced yoga and can already attest to how it works for you, or maybe you are new to yoga or have no experience with yoga at all. In America, most often people first encounter *hatha yoga*, also referred to as postural or physical yoga, which utilizes the body as a vehicle via *asana* practice. Interestingly, in early yoga texts, the term *asana* is translated as “seat,” referring to physical postures that prepare the body for seated meditation versus the modern posture practice we know today. Though many Westerners practice hatha yoga for health and fitness-related benefits such as increased flexibility, relaxation, or stress relief, the original goal of hatha yoga has been to utilize the body as a tool to realize higher states of consciousness, which is really a heightened awareness of our interconnectedness - a process of seeing the divine in yourself and others.

The term *hatha* refers to an integration of solar and lunar energies with *ha* meaning sun and *tha* referring to the moon. These energies co-mingle to become one in the body, flowing through energy channels or *nadis* as well within the *chakras*, considered energy centers or wheels.⁴¹ While hatha yoga practices vary considerably based on the teacher, school, or style, generally, yoga *asanas* or postures include poses that involve standing, twisting, bending forward and/or backwards, balancing, and inverting. Not only are there numerous styles of *hatha yoga*, with names like yin yoga, vinyasa yoga, jivamukti yoga, anusara yoga, among hundreds of others, there are also many different levels of practice (beginner to advanced). Regardless of hatha yoga’s attention to the body, it is still very much a spiritual practice despite many Western

teachers who have stripped their form or style of hatha yoga of its spiritual orientation, focusing on the physical body or the fitness aspect of yoga.

In addition to *asana*, hatha yoga also includes practices such as *pranayama* (breath control), *bandhas* (energy locks), *mudras* (gestures), *kriyas* (cleansing and purifying techniques), and various meditation techniques and yogic philosophies. While in America the term *yoga* has become virtually synonymous with hatha yoga, in India, the term refers to a much wider range of rituals, philosophies, and practices that may include no *asana* practice at all. *Asana* practices could easily be considered an invitation to become more aware of the subtle energy of one's body through movement, stillness, and breath, including stretching and releasing of habitual movement and postural patterns that keep people stuck in these shapes. For example, if you sit at a desk while working on the computer all day, it is likely that your shoulders have begun to roll forward, causing pain or weakness in your back.

Practicing yoga *asanas* can help your balance by opening and expanding your chest, by rolling your shoulders back, and strengthening your back. It could also be said that *asana* teaches people to become comfortable sitting in their own body or skin. Moreover, yoga *asanas* teach people to bring their breath and movement together, aligning their bodies with a dynamic tension between relaxation and engagement. In this way, postural yoga is also an extremely powerful practice of meditation that helps people carry these practices beyond their yoga mats and into their everyday lives. So, for example, when you stop at a red light while driving and become aware of your breath and focus your full attention on breathing, you are practicing yoga.

Though *hatha yoga* is considered a system in and of itself, many yoga scholars attribute its roots to *Raja yoga* and Patanjali, due to the importance of *asana* in this system. With *raja yoga*, we are introduced to the eight-limbed path of yoga. In the *Yoga Sutras*, only three *sutras*,

meaning “thread,” discuss the role of *asana*, instead focusing more heavily on sitting meditation practices aimed at calming the mind and outlining a theory for understanding the mind. Based on our discussion thus far, we have already established that *hatha yoga* practices work with the breath and employs the body as a vehicle to cultivate, observe, and transform subtle energy by learning to witness sensations and reactions as they are occurring in the present moment. In doing so, over time, one begins to “wake up” to and merge with life as it is currently unfolding within our everyday interactions. This, in turn, cultivates a type of awareness that has the capacity to liberate us from patterns of separation. Richard Freeman describes yoga as teaching us about the nature of “meta-patterns,” which structure our realities. Offering the example of a wave, he suggests that initially we see the wave as a separate thing from the ocean; however, once we remove our definition of the boundaries between the ocean and the wave, we begin to see that reality is a web of connections or meta-patterns.⁴²

Building on this notion of meta-patterns, in yoga, our body is the starting point to understand this world of separation, insomuch that it is through our body that we can become aware of the world beyond our boundaries of our body. Thus, yoga works to expand our notion of self, via self-observation, as a tool to open more fully to the world around us. By learning to experience and expand our notion of separation (subject/object, self/other, material/spiritual), we open ourselves to observing these meta-patterns, developing the ability to see the spaces between independence and interdependence. The breath serves as a powerful mediator, connector, and expander of these symbolic modes of separation.

As a result, *asana* is only one small part of the practice of yoga, which contains seven additional limbs of practice referred to as *astanga*, with *asta* meaning eight and *anga* referring to the limbs or path of yoga practice. B. K. S. Iyengar, in his book *The Tree of Yoga*, discusses the

eight limbs stating,

Yoga can also be seen as having three tiers: external, internal and innermost, or physical, mental and spiritual. Thus the eight limbs of yoga can be divided into three groups. Yama and niyama are the social and individual ethical disciplines; asana, pranayama and pratyahara lead to evolution of the individual, to the understanding of the self; dharana, dhyana, and Samadhi are the effects of yoga which bring the experience of the sight of the soul, but they are not as much a part of its practice.⁴³

As you can see from Iyengar's statement, yoga has many components beyond the *asana* or postures; furthermore, to define *asana* as postures serves to oversimplify the power of the practice. Instead, I prefer to think of *asanas* as tools of embodied awareness.

Iyengar encourages us to think of the eight limbs like a tree of yoga, composed of the *yamas* - nonviolence, truthfulness, nonstealing, nonexcess, and nonpossesiveness - forming the roots of the tree, which firmly ground one in ethical practices of everyday life. The *niyamas* form the trunk of the tree and include the principles of purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study, and surrender. From the trunk, branches or *asanas* grow in all directions, highlighting the many physical postures of yoga.

Growing off the branches are leaves, which correspond to the fourth limb – *pranayama*, or the science of breath. As Shannon Paige states, *pranayama* is a practice of breathing with that which is breathing you.⁴⁴ Additionally, *pranayama* practices soften the boundaries between self/other as well as self/divine. By learning to link body and breath, one becomes ready to practice and understand *pratyahara*, the bark of the tree, referring to the development of sensual awareness in order to learn not to be attached to the many distractions that one encounters. In this manner, *pratyahara* mediates our understanding of what is internal/external, personal/social, and self/world.

Moving into the sap of the tree, or *dharana*, one develops a more single-pointed or focused concentration, which results from tuning into the flow of life. As such, you develop a

type of *witness consciousness*, so you can learn to observe your thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they occur, not placing judgment on the experience. The flowers of the tree represent *dhyana* or meditation, which leads to *samadhi*, the flower transformed into fruit, representing the merging or union of individual consciousness with divine consciousness. With *dhyana*, one learns to focus fully on that which one seeks to understand. For instance, communication as a spiritual practice seeks to cultivate all of the limbs, especially *dhyana*, because it is within this awareness, we come to experience our interconnectedness. Finally, *samadhi* is an unfolding or complete integration of and dissolution of the boundaries, which separate all beings. Looking back, you see that the eight limbs are first built with an ethical framework that sets the foundation for the other limbs. The next two limbs prepare the path for moving closer to the more meditative limbs.

By no means do you need to remember these eight limbs of yoga at this stage in our journey. For now, I simply want you to understand that yoga *asanas* are only one small part of what *yoga* practice involves. Even though the *sutras* are often considered the basis of postural yoga, *raja yoga* focuses almost primarily on sitting meditation; thus, contemporary approaches to hatha yoga draw more heavily on other philosophies. Even one of the earliest and most well-known texts of hatha yoga – the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* - centers on purification and energy cultivation versus *asana* practice. Each of these examples of yoga - bhakti, jnana, karma, raja, and tantra - highlight different aspects of yoga beyond postural practice or contemporary *hatha yoga*. Considered through the metaphor of a bird,

Raja yoga is the tail, steering, steadying, and guiding the bird with control. Karma is the yoga of action; it is the wings propelling the bird onward. Bhakti is the heart, guiding with love and compassion. And Jnana is the head, piloting the bird toward the light with perception and vision.⁴⁵

Though much of today's yoga practice focuses primarily on *asana*, leaving out much of the

spiritual depth and richness of these other yoga traditions, there is definitely a movement of teachers who practice, teach, and honor yoga's spiritual legacy, blending bhakti, jnana, karma, raja, and tantric approaches to yoga.

What we do know as “yoga” today in America is a mostly modern invention, dating back to the late 19th century with a short but extremely important lineage of teachers who imported yoga to the West, including Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Krishnamacharya, among many others.⁴⁶ Yoga's popularity in the United States grew exponentially in the 1960's and 70's with major contributions from Yogi Bhajan, Swami Sivananda, Swami Satchidananda, Swami Rama, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, B.K.S. Iyengar, T.K.V. Desikachar, Pattabhi Jois, Indra Devi, and other influences. This lineage of teachers revolutionized yoga by democratizing *asana* and meditation by making these practices accessible to all, further highlighting the complementary relationships between the sciences and spirituality.

While this idea that yoga as practiced in America is a largely modern invention may be contested by practitioners and scholars, Carol Horton, author of *Yoga PhD*, suggests that not only is yoga a product of a particular time and context, it is also a constantly changing practice that is quite paradoxical in nature.⁴⁷ A paradox is something that is a kind of both/and phenomena. For example, yoga is a modern invention with ancient roots, so it is *both* modern *and* ancient. Yoga is *both* a science *and* an art. Yoga is *both* a spiritual practice *and* a fitness fad. Yoga, as practiced in America, is *both* a multi-million dollar industry with considerable branding and products *and* a system of thought that incorporates non-materialistic values. As such, yoga exists in the in-between spaces where the transition between then (the past) and when (the future) occurs; therefore, at its core, yoga is a practice that helps people experience the present moment more fully.

As a result, yoga is a hybrid practice that fuses ideas from East and West, though its contemporary origin is generally traced to the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago where Swami Vivekananda introduced yoga to the American public for the first time, resulting in a national speaking tour and a series of books. Even so, Swami Vivekananda's approach to yoga was not based in contemporary *asana* practice; rather, it focused on sitting meditation within the raja yoga tradition of Patanjali. What is remarkable about Swami Vivekananda's influence on American yoga is his transforming what was traditionally a closely guarded initiation-based process, involving a guru-discipline relationship, into a spiritual technology open to anyone, moving yoga into a new dawn of practice.

As I previously mentioned and most evident, Sri Krishnamacharya is cited as the greatest exponent of modern *hatha yoga*, revolutionizing yoga traditions by continuing to democratize the practice through radical inclusion. Not only did he open up space for women to practice yoga (a position he did not initially support), but he also tailored yoga to special-needs populations, insisting that yoga could benefit all people. Krishnamacharya's primary students, who carried his teaching to thousands of Westerners, include his son, T. K. V. Desikachar, who continues his work today; B. K. S. Iyengar, the founder of Iyengar yoga; Pattabhi Jois, the father of Ashtanga yoga; and Indra Devi, the first woman and foreigner to study with Krishnamacharya.

During Krishnamacharya's life, he researched and innovated a wide range of vigorously physical *asanas* linked with the breath in repetitive sequences. In Mark Singleton's book, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Postural Practice*,⁴⁸ Singleton contends that hatha yoga in the Krishnamacharya tradition is an amalgam of practices, blending wrestling, gymnastics, aerobic activities, and a variety of movement arts that merged alongside a growing renaissance in physical activity in India wherein ancient traditions were revived with more physically active

asanas. So not only is modern yoga a product of hybridity, resulting from many cultural contexts and streams of influence, but it is also an extremely varied philosophical system with many different historical periods.

In a nutshell, there is no such thing as one type or practice of yoga nor just one theory or history of yoga. Instead, there are many styles, theories, practices, and ideas – all of which could be called yoga. These yoga practices can and do exist together - even when the theories and practices appear to be diverse and contradictory. Thus, when I employ the term *yoga*, I do so with broad strokes, describing something that has no standardized measure nor unified theories or practices, as the term “yoga” is applied to both commercial or corporate and esoteric or spiritual lifestyles. I might even argue that for Americans, yoga has become part of a new landscape of spiritual capitalism, commodifying spirituality and turning it into another product to market. An example of this might include the rise of the celebrity yoga teacher, or the blending of yoga and consumer culture.

Regardless, even when yoga enthusiasts and practitioners cannot explain why and how yoga works for them, many still contend that yoga offers some form of life enhancement, be it physical (fitness and/or increased body awareness); mental or emotional (reduced anxiety and/or stress and enhanced relaxation and/or calm); or spiritual (a greater recognition of interconnectedness or divinity and/or heightened awareness or consciousness). The rise in yoga’s popularity and the flexibility in its meaning illustrates that people from all walks of life can benefit from yoga, regardless of age, body size, gender, or belief system. However, with this flexibility in defining yoga, we encounter a smorgasbord of meanings and practices, ranging from Christian yoga to dog yoga or *doga*, which suggests that yoga can mean anything to anyone. In doing so, yoga becomes uncoupled from its *source* or origin, becoming just another

lifestyle practice, losing much of its magic and mystery.

Clearly, people come to yoga for different reasons, having extremely varied experiences. This, in turn, sometimes creates a divide between practitioners who attempt to trace their lineage of yoga to a distant, ancient origin, suggesting that their form of yoga is more “pure,” as opposed to those who fully embrace yoga as a contemporary invention that has been radically refigured, once blended with American cultural values. Speaking of contemporary yoga traditions, political scientist Horton contends,

Rather, the point is that whether we connect the 5,000-year old Pashupati Seal to the *Yoga Sutras* or medieval Hatha yoga, there is no direct connection to yoga as we know it today. These pre-modern precursors of contemporary yoga were not concerned with health, fitness, stress reduction, self-improvement, psychological well-being, and the spirituality of everyday life. Rather, they were dedicated to transcending the karmic cycle of death and rebirth, and/or cultivating extraordinary powers of fertility and magic.⁴⁹

Therefore, much of contemporary yoga practice endeavors to make our daily lives more livable versus transcending our human existence through reincarnation. Because the emphasis has shifted to improving one’s life now, yoga can complement many different religious and/or spiritual belief systems. Most significantly perhaps, yoga offers individuals an opportunity to reconnect with the body. In a plethora of ways, yoga also offers people a practice to connect to something beyond themselves, whatever that may be for each person. For some, yoga will be highly spiritual. For others, the practice may remain mostly physical.

While yoga is defined differently by various scholars and practitioners, certain defining commonalities exist amongst their explanations. For example, Shiva Rea suggests, “Yoga is both a verb, and a state of being. Meaning any activity, any path that unifies.”⁵⁰ Alternatively, Donna Farhi refers to yoga as “an ongoing participatory experiment in which the world and every part of our life becomes our laboratory.”⁵¹ In both of these examples, yoga is situated as a process, one engaging in actions that encourage discovery through heightened attention and awareness.

Building on Shiva Rea and Donna Farhi, I find T. K. V. Desikachar's discussion of yoga to be extremely helpful in translating the concept of *yoga* for a contemporary audience.

As Desikachar suggests, *yoga* is part of the fundamental systems of Indian thought known as *darsana*, which means "to see." Like a mirror, *yoga* helps people "see" their worlds differently through the practice of the eight limbs of yoga. Desikachar builds on this by stating that yoga also refers to action, as yoga also means to act "in such a way that all our attention is directed toward the activity in which we are currently engaged."⁵² Many practitioners also refer to yoga as a practice that moves us closer to extraordinary consciousness, or the divine. In that sense, yoga becomes an acknowledgment and celebration of our interconnectedness. Take a moment to reflect on your own understanding of "the divine." How, if at all, do you experience or conceptualize a higher power? Holding that image, consider yoga as a method to tap into or connect with this energy or source. Looking at yoga through these various definitions, one can see right away that each person will experience yoga in a unique manner. As such,

The actual practice of yoga takes each person in a different direction. It is not necessary to subscribe to any particular ideas of God in order to follow the yoga path. The practice of yoga only requires us to act and be attentive to our actions. Each of us is required to pay careful attention to the direction we are taking so that we know where we are going and how we are going to get there; this careful observation will enable us to discover something new. Whether this discovery leads to a better understanding of God, to greater contentment, or to a new goal is a completely personal matter.⁵³

For the purpose of this text, I will focus heavily on yoga's spiritual dimension, situating yoga as a way of living. Yoga teacher, Beryl Bender Birch, addresses how yoga works when she discusses the transformative potential of "practicing" yoga as not only a way to develop awareness but also as a process that expands one's circle of compassion until it begins to encompass all beings everywhere, "realizing that if one of us is hungry, all of us are hungry. Once you get that, you realize what truly makes you happy is making other people happy."⁵⁴

This is important in aiding our understanding of spiritual communication because it sets the groundwork for how we interact with others. This, in turn, has the ability to contribute to our understandings of diversity, exploring the ecological dimensions of this more fully as we move through this text. In moving forward with our discussion on yoga, I want to spend some time discussing spirituality in more depth because it will help us better understand how yoga works and its potentiality in shifting our communication patterns.

Lunar Pause

What does spirituality mean to you? What if any spiritual traditions or practices are you drawn to and why? How do you integrate this into your everyday life?

Figure 3. Spirituality is...?

Spirituality, as a term like yoga, has come to be defined in a wide range of ways, depending on one’s worldview. It is not uncommon to hear people refer to themselves as “spiritual, but not religious” or say that they are both religious and spiritual. Often these terms get mixed up and are used to describe contradictory ideas. If we first look at what spirituality *does*, we can start to get a better grasp on what it might mean. Spirituality, at its core, is a tool to help individuals and groups make sense of the uncertainties and mysteries of everyday life, and spiritual communication functions similarly to highlight our relatedness. As Kathy Long states, “A spiritual perspective grounds our understanding in connection, and compels us to keep a communal perspective. This view of communication strives to reaffirm our interrelatedness, and

this sharing of the world gives us all something in common.”⁵⁵ Put another way, spirituality also helps us to ask questions about the nature of our existence, including: *What is the meaning of life? What does it mean to be human? How do humans relate to other beings and nature? What happens when we die? What does it mean to live ethically and/or morally? What does it mean to live a good and meaningful life? What is the value of life? Why is there so much suffering and what is the nature of suffering?*

Spirituality also inspires questions about inclusion and exclusion as well as individualism and interconnectedness, asking us to reflect upon who we are and how we know what we know about our place in the world, shaping how we respond to the many uncertainties we encounter in our lives. Generally speaking, while both religion and spirituality have similar aims, spirituality differs from religion in that spirituality is meant to be broadly inclusive and non-dogmatic, focusing on the sacredness and interconnectedness of all life. It is most often nondenominational, unstructured, and non-organized.

Spirituality is extremely difficult to define, and even if one defines it, others will highly contest the definition. As Roger Gottlieb states, “In its broadest terms, spirituality is an understanding of how life should be lived and an attempt to live that way.”⁵⁶ He also suggests that regardless of which term is employed - *spirituality, spiritual teachings, spiritual perspectives* - each generally refers to “an understanding of life, the attempt to live by that understanding, and the experiences to which that attempt gives rise.”⁵⁷ Some common features of spiritual systems include an: “acceptance of reality rather than resistance to it, gratitude rather than greed for more, compassionate connection to other people rather than isolation, and a profound joyous, nongrasping enjoyment of life.”⁵⁸ This thinking suggests that spirituality denotes

various practices, traditions, and prescriptions that aim to provide answers to many of life's more existential questions.

When we refer to spiritual traditions, what we are talking about might include a group of people who share a similar historical lineage or set of goals, employing similar teachings to reach or achieve these aims. As such, spirituality does not denote a specific belief system or tradition; instead, it is a range of beliefs that occur across cultures and time periods. Perhaps most pertinent to our discussion is deepening our understanding of the interconnection between spirituality and communication. At the base of our experiences, humans are constantly searching for and creating meanings about our world, which is why I first and foremost begin from the notion that humans *are* spiritual beings. In suggesting this, I see spirituality as a kind of connective tissue that can inspire an enhanced awareness of our responsibility to others. By seeing beyond the boundaries of ourselves, we can move towards a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness by recognizing our relatedness.

In this sense, I see spirituality as Bud Goodall discusses, as a heightened sense of our unity or multiplicity.⁵⁹ Thus, communication becomes an act that not only involves the negotiation of meaning in interaction but is also an investigation into the nature of our communicatively constructed realities. Goodall extends this idea by suggesting that through communication, we create order, measure worth, accomplish goals, establish boundaries, tell stories, and maintain beliefs.⁶⁰ In other words, communication is the connecting life force to all that is spiritual and vice versa. Long similarly contends that communication and spirituality can act almost interchangeably in definitions of one or the other as both attempt to make sense of connection while dealing with ideas of community, understanding, ritual, interaction, tradition, culture, and so on.⁶¹ Returning to my initial description of spirituality as a process of “waking

up,” communication is the spiritual pathway that helps us develop awareness of how we communicate and how our communication impacts others.

Similarly, yoga is both a practice of self-love but also a lifelong process of self-observation or study. Hence, yoga becomes a path or process to enhance and transform how we communicate. Through self-study, we can reflect on our habitual communication patterns, learning new skills. Like yoga teacher, Donna Farhi, I believe that yoga is a powerful practice to shift negative patterns, and I find her descriptions of yoga as a way of life extremely helpful in fully positioning yoga as a practice of relating, vital to our discussion about yoga and communication.⁶² Farhi further describes yoga as a practice that helps us rediscover and experience connectedness to others by becoming more fully present with our selves and others. As such, the heart of yoga is learning to live in a unitive state wherein we come to recognize our basic sameness, communicating by “observing clearly, listening acutely, and skillfully responding to the moment with all the compassion we can muster.”⁶³ In doing so, we come to practice “what is” in each moment, understanding that life is messy and complex and

That we may have come to see ourselves as separate and shut off from others is the central dilemma that we methodologically dismantle in our Yoga practice because it is from this false sense of separation that we create so much of our own suffering and contribute to the suffering around us.⁶⁴

As you will see, these descriptions of yoga mirror our conversation of what communication is and why it is important. Yoga, then, helps us position communication not only as a spiritual practice but also as a process of interconnection or relating. While it may seem obvious that through our communication we interact with others, it is more about the quality and the care of the interaction on which we will focus in this dissertation. Before moving forward with some basic communication propositions, I turn to communication scholar, Amardo Rodriguez, to help me further establish the relationship between spirituality and communication.

In Rodriguez's book, *Revisioning Diversity in Communication Studies*, he sets forth to answer the following questions: How can communication theory speak better to what it means to be human? How can communication theory offer new vistas of what being human means? How can communication theory make for a world with less misery and suffering?⁶⁵ It could be said that communication, ultimately, is a "quest for communion," inasmuch that one strives for something more together.⁶⁶ By contesting the forces that seek to separate us from each other, we can unite across diverse worldviews, practices, experiences, and ways of being in the world.⁶⁷ In doing so, we enlarge our understanding of what is possible. Rodriguez offers an emergent definition of communication, which he defines as a process of being vulnerable to the humanity of others.

As he suggests, in this vulnerability, we come to know that our humanity is bound to the humanity of others and that being vulnerable means being open to mystery, complexity, and ambiguity, thereby offering new ways of seeing and being in the world.⁶⁸ To do so means we must become aware of the suffering we cause as well as the suffering we experience. While vulnerability might be considered as a sign of weakness by many, vulnerability is our greatest strength. But what does it mean to be vulnerable? *Vulnerability*, as a term, suggests that we are capable of being wounded or hurt. Based on this definition, how then can vulnerability be harnessed for good? By situating communication as a practice of vulnerability, as Rodriguez contends, we enlarge "our moral and ecological obligation to each other by highlighting our own capacity to influence the condition of the world by how we engage the humanity of others."⁶⁹ If we take seriously the notion that communication is a process wherein we can become vulnerable to others, then communication becomes something more than something *we do to each other*. Instead, it becomes something *we are to one another*. It is in this space between *you* and *me* that

we can harness our capacity for compassion, tolerance, and understanding. Again, vulnerability as Rodriguez suggests, “means being open to the interpretations, experiences, understandings, and even confusions and frustrations of others.”⁷⁰ Opening ourselves to this also means that we are capable or susceptible to getting hurt or wounded in our interactions.

Rodriguez’s definition of communication has important implications for better understanding diversity: by recognizing each other’s vulnerability, we might be required to abandon or reinvent our ways of seeing and being in the world. Stated another way, “Diversity is about communication, finding new ways to understand each other especially when such understanding seems impossible”; therefore, the “success of communication depends on how constructively we manage and negotiate our differences.”⁷¹ Ideally, by attending to each other in a more vulnerable manner, we can move towards developing more just and humane worlds.

We must come to recognize that our understandings and interpretations are nothing more than a lens that we project onto the world around us, and even with the best intentions, we are still limited by our views. This is where yoga enters the conversation. While we can begin yoga from many starting points – chanting, postures, studying texts, meditating – we will eventually learn along the way that yoga seeks to bring people together through the quality of attention and actions aimed at causing less suffering. In that sense, yoga helps us to experience life “as it is,” but also offers us an opportunity to change negative patterns. It is both a movement towards and the arrival at the point of something more, enabling us to pay attention to the quality of our steps as we make our journey. “Ideally, when we take up the practice of yoga we begin a process that offers us a way of stopping what is harmful to us. We do not have to stop doing something deliberately. We do not have to do anything ourselves, but rather whatever it is simply fades out because we have redirected ourselves toward something positive.”⁷²

For me, this positive recognition comes from seeing our basic sameness in the midst of our varying degrees of difference. Being vulnerable to our sameness or shared humanity *is* a quest for communion or connection. As Donna Farhi suggests, “Which viewpoint we adopt – seeing the world from the perspective of connection or separation – will determine all our interactions and how we interpret and give meaning to even the most ordinary moments.”⁷³ Communication occurs in these ordinary moments and shapes our worlds in powerful ways. Yoga shines a light on the words we choose, the actions we take, and the stories we tell, helping us to observe ourselves or bear *witness* to our interactions.

Lunar Pause

In what specific ways could you be more loving or compassionate in your communication with others? What, if anything, about the way you communicate would you like to change so that you could enhance your relationships with loved ones, family members, co-workers, classmates, acquaintances, or ever strangers?

Figure 4. Compassionate communication

Moreover, it is through these practices that we can come to better understand the spiritual dimensions of communication, as well as being able to further situate communication as a practice that cultivates vulnerability within our moment-to-moment interactions. It is in this relating that yoga and communication theory intersect. I employ the term *relating* versus *relationship* here to signify an on-going process of interaction that requires continuous work, whereas relationship feels more finished or complete. Anyone in relationship knows that we are always negotiating and relating in the spaces between ourselves and others. Moreover, I contend, as many yoga teachers do, that the only requirement for practicing yoga is the ability to breathe. As the saying goes, “If you can breathe, you can do yoga.”⁷⁴

The connective potential of yoga is not a melting into another but the simultaneous experience of self and other – a leaning in and away – so that we can become something more together than we are individually. With this comes all of the messiness, complexity, and uncertainties of life. As a result, the path of yoga is not an easy one, as it requires a great deal of practice for changes to materialize in one’s daily life. Developing a heightened awareness of our own communication patterns is the first step in transforming them. In doing so, communication becomes much like Desikachar describes yoga: as a mirror that reflects back and teaches us to transform or change our lives. Yoga as a path of action calls for us to direct our attention towards the activity in which we are engaged, which in this dissertation illustrates action as our communicative interactions. Further, if we take seriously the idea that “every change is yoga,” as Desikachar suggests, then we can come to see the changes we make in our communication *as* yoga.

TADASANA

This dissertation, therefore, will only focus on two yoga *asanas* – *tadasana* or mountain pose and *savasana* or corpse pose – instead considering our verbal and non-verbal communication as its own *asana* practice. *Tadasana* and *savasana* are generally the starting and ending poses of most individual’s *asana* practice, and everything in the middle is just a rift of one of these poses. *Tadasana* lives in every yoga *asana* and creates a strong foundation for the body, preparing you for other postures. *Savasana* teaches us to rise from our practice renewed. In a sense, *tadasana* is much like the idea of *Atha*, wherein we recognize that now begins our practice of yoga, and *savasana* reminds us that at the end of one journey, we rise to begin again, because it is only through practice that transformation happens. Practicing both of these *asanas*, in addition to bringing awareness to how you communicate, has the potential to greatly change how you view and experience your world. To better highlight this, I invite you to explore the sensation of *Tadasana*. Before doing so, I would also like to introduce the concept of *samasthiti*, meaning “equal standing,” which unfolds from *tadasana* and refers to a state of being wherein you stand in balanced stillness, fully aware, and ready to invite the spirit of yoga into your practice. In this sense, I see *samasthiti* as a practice of reverence for and acknowledgement of one’s commitment to practice yoga with an open heart.

As part of your practice, I invite you to stand in *tadasana*, or mountain pose, for five or more minutes each day. While standing in *tadasana*, bring awareness to your body, scanning it for tension while trying to maintain your attention to the various engagements in the posture. Over time, not only will you find that your posture improves, but you will also see that this pose radically shifts how you carry yourself and stand in the world.

Lunar Pause

Stand comfortably in front of a mirror and take note of your posture. Where is the weight in your feet? How do you hold your hips (forward or backwards)? Is your chest expanded or contracted? How is your breathing? Do your shoulders hunch forward or roll backward? What about your neck and head? Just bring awareness to how you stand, not applying any judgment. Next, bring awareness to anywhere you feel tension. Are you clenching your jaw? Tensing muscles in your stomach or legs or back? Once complete, we will begin to explore tadasana or mountain pose. Begin with bare feet.

Step One: *Bring awareness to your feet. Place your feet hips width apart. To measure this, make a fist and hold your hand together between your feet. Imagine you are standing in mud. Take a moment to gently rock forward and backwards and then right and left, really feeling your feet sink into the mud. Begin to notice the four corners or connecting points of your feet and how they touch the ground. Try to find a balanced place where you feel your weight equally in both sides of your heels and on your big toe and pinky toe sides of your feet. Push your weight down, grounding more deeply. You might need to very softly and subtly rotate your lower leg inwards and your upper leg outwards so that you rise out of the arches of your feet.*

Step Two: *Gently lifting your kneecaps, you engage the muscles of your leg, which creates more strength in your foundation. Create a soft bend in your knees, keeping the engagement of the muscles. Again, rock forwards and backwards finding the space where you feel grounded and strong like a mountain.*

Step Three: *Placing your hands just below your navel, pull your lower abdominal muscles towards your spine, engaging your core. Notice how this action causes your tailbone and pubic bone to tuck slightly. This step is extremely important because you do not want to curve your lower back. Instead, you want to create a straight line with your torso so that your spine is aligned. With your knees still bent and your feet still grounded on the four corners of your feet, check to see if you are still engaging the muscles of your legs. If not, gently squeeze the in seam of your legs towards the midline, re-engaging these muscles. You should be able to gently lift your toes off the floor as you are placing your weight in the heels and balls of your feet.*

Step Four: *Gently lift your ribcage upwards, not outwards or forward, keeping your chest in line with your engaged, lower core. Open or widen your upper chest or collarbone to allow the smooth flow of breath. Next, roll your shoulders up and back, feeling your shoulder blades on your back. This movement opens the chest to counteract shoulder hunching. With your shoulders rolled back, allow your hands to come to your sides, palms facing forward. Again, check to see where you might be experiencing tension in your body and attempt to relax this. Also, check in to see if you are still grounding your feet, engaging the muscles of your legs and core, and if you are still lifting your ribcage but not pushing it forward. Your shoulders may attempt to create up towards your ears and forward, but continue to roll them back. Lift the crown or top of your head so that you straighten your neck in line with your spine. Breathe.*

Figure 5. Practicing tadasana

During each practice session, focus your gaze on one point or close or soften your eyes. Next, be sure to pay attention to your breathing. If possible, begin to try to extend and deepen both your inhalation and exhalation. You might begin by counting your breath to keep your focus. I recommend you start by inhaling deeply to a count of 2-4, depending on the depth of your breath and then exhaling for the same duration of time. Do your best to feel your breath in your lower belly, your diaphragm or mid-belly, and your upper chest, smoothing out your breathing in these various compartments. With practice, you will see that you are able to extend your inhalation and exhalation. Once you feel comfortable with your breathing, consider adding some brief pauses or breath retention into your cycle. Inhale, counting to four, and retain your breath for two counts. Next, exhale for four counts, pausing or holding your breath for two counts, and then inhaling for four counts and so on. As you become more comfortable and confident with this, you can do each step on four counts, smoothing out the breathing process between steps so that your breath flows like waves.

How you stand in the world is the first step in our journey of awareness as it is through our bodies that we communicate our stories. Our bodies also tell stories to others about who we are and how we relate to those with whom we interact each day. Do we lean in or away? Do we contract or expand? Are we tense or relaxed? As Victoria Castle suggests, “Our Stories live in our muscles and in our nervous system until they become automatic. We shape ourselves around them, we embody their messages, and what we embody is who we are.”⁷⁵ To change our stories means that we must first bring attention to our bodies. In doing so, do not initially try to change anything. Just observe.

As you move through your day, begin to pay attention to places in your body that you hold tension. Perhaps it is your neck or your back. By bringing awareness to these areas of tension, you can begin to consciously relax by breathing into these spaces. Just observe yourself. Your posture. How you sleep. How your feet feel on the ground as you walk. Notice how your breathing changes when you are excited, nervous, angry, or sad. Begin also to bring attention to how you hold yourself when you interact with others. What type of personal space do you need? What are you doing with your arms or legs? Do you gesture a lot? Do you touch others often? How does your voice sound? Do you talk quickly? Slowly? Loudly? Quietly? Does your pitch change as you interact with different people? Noticing how you breathe is a major component of shifting our body-stories, which we will continue to discuss.

For now, just try to pay attention to moments when you find yourself holding your breath. What is happening in those moments? Where else are you tensing? How can you breathe into the tension and find relaxation for your breath and body? Starting with *tadasana* is the first step in unlearning the many body stories we have been carrying throughout our lives. Even if you only attempt this *asana* for a few minutes each day, reshaping your posture through heightened attention will begin to make subtle changes in how you stand, walk, and communicate with and through your body. As Tantric yoga teacher, Daniel Odier, asserts, “The more we learn to trust our body totally, the more we will discover that it naturally guides us to a joyous spontaneity.”⁷⁶ This joyous spontaneity is the opposite of remaining in an “autopilot” mode. Instead, we embrace awareness as a space of possibility, becoming *response-able* for our interactions in new and interesting ways.

Lunar Pause

In your own words, describe what communication means to you. What qualities of communication do you value most? Generally speaking, what type of communicator are you?

Based on our discussions thus far, how might you describe or define yoga now? At this point, what connections do you make between yoga and how you communicate?

Figure 6. Points for reflection

⁴⁰ “Yoga in America Study 2012,” *Yoga Journal*, accessed August 4, 2013, http://www.yogajournal.com/press/yoga_in_america.

⁴¹ It is outside of the scope of this dissertation to focus on the role of the *chakras* and *nadis*. For more information, I recommend Cyndi Dale’s book, *The Subtle Body: An Encyclopedia of Your Energetic Anatomy* or Judith Anodea’s books such as *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self*.

⁴² Freeman, *The Mirror of Yoga*.

⁴³ B. K. S. Iyengar, *The Tree of Yoga: Timeless Yoga Wisdom for Your Daily Life*, trans., Daniel Rivers-Moore (London: Thorsons), 5.

⁴⁴ Shannon Paige, face to face communication to author, July 23, 2013.

⁴⁵ White, *Yoga Beyond Belief*, 21.

⁴⁶ To learn more about these influential yogis, I recommend the following texts: *The Yoga of the Yogi: The Legacy of T. Krishnamacharya* by Kausthub Desikachar; *Krishnamacharya: His Life and Teachings* by A.G. Mohan and Ganesh Mohan; *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda; and *Swami Vivekananda on Himself* by Vivekananda.

⁴⁷ Carol Hortan, *Yoga Ph.D: Integrating the Life of the Mind and the Wisdom of the Body* (Chicago: Kleio Books, 2012).

⁴⁸ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁹ Horton, *Yoga Ph.D*, 29

⁵⁰ Shiva Rea Bailey, “Hatha Yoga as a Practice of Embodiment” (Master’s thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1997), 4.

⁵¹ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 36

⁵² Desikchar, *The Heart of Yoga*, 6.

⁵³ Desikchar, *The Heart of Yoga*, 6.

⁵⁴ Bender Birch, Beryl, “Transformation Happens,” *The Omega Institute*, October 6, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FKXFupO1qo>.

⁵⁵ Kathy Long, “Sparring with Spirituality: Issues of Entangling Spirituality and Communication,” in *Essays on Communication & Spirituality*, ed. Amardo Rodriguez (Lanham,

MD: University Press of America, 2001) 43.

⁵⁶ Roger Gottlieb, *Spirituality: What it is and Why it Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.

⁵⁷ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 5-6.

⁵⁸ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 13.

⁵⁹ Goodall, "Mysteries of the Future."

⁶⁰ Goodall, "Mysteries of the Future."

⁶¹ Long, "Sparring with Spirituality."

⁶² Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*.

⁶³ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 4.

⁶⁴ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 5.

⁶⁵ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*.

⁶⁶ Amardo Rodriguez, *Communication, Space, & Design: The Integral Relation Between Communication and Design* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2005).

⁶⁷ Rodriguez, *Communication, Space, & Design*, 35.

⁶⁸ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*.

⁶⁹ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, xi.

⁷⁰ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 14.

⁷¹ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, xii.

⁷² Desikchar, *The Heart of Yoga*, 89-90.

⁷³ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 28.

⁷⁵ Victoria Castle, *The Trace of Scarcity: Stop Holding Your Breath and Start Living Your Life* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2007), 51.

⁷⁶ Daniel Odier, *Desire*, 34.

SVADHYAYA

Self-Study for Relational-Awareness

We begin our journey with the notion that in order to change the world, we must start with ourselves. In the previous exercise, I invited you to experience standing like a mountain in *tadasana*. Practices such as this are designed to bring forward awareness to areas within the background of our perception so that we can re-experience them. Thus, in *tadasana*, you might come to experience the feel of your feet on the ground, the balance in the four corners of your feet, or an awareness of your posture in stillness. Practicing yoga, as Donna Farhi suggests, asks us, “What don’t you know about yourself,” and then creates a space to discover this as knowing as it unfolds in the present moment.⁷⁷

Through *svadhyaya*, the fourth of five *niyamas* (observances or principles that guide self-awareness and observation), or self-study, we learn to cultivate witness consciousness or as Shotter suggests, “witnessable knowing along with others,” so that we can observe ourselves in the midst of interaction – in relationship, not in abstraction as the following quote suggests:

I can observe myself only in relationships because all of life is relationship. It is no use sitting in a corner meditating about myself. I cannot exist by myself. I exist only in relationship to people, things and ideas, and in studying myself in relationship to outwards things and people, as well as to inward things, I begin to understand myself. Every other form of understanding is merely an abstraction and I cannot study myself in abstraction; I am not an abstract entity; therefore I have to study myself in actuality – as *I am*, not as I wish to be.⁷⁸

Author Deborah Adele states, the *niyamas* are not only an “invitation into a radical exploration of possibility,” but they also “point us in the direction of something better than we are now aware

of.”⁷⁹ Thus, I invite you to consider the *niyamas* as seeds you plant that help you purify and cleanse your body, speech, and actions (*saucha*); experience gratitude and contentment so that you fall in love with your life (*santosa*); find a space of self-discipline that invites transformation and growth (*tapas*); better understand who you are (*svadhyaya*); and ultimately, recognize your divinity and interconnectedness by cultivating presence and flow within your daily life (*ishvara pranidhana*).

Even though the *niyamas* are the second step in the eight-fold path of yoga and contain five observances, I start with the fourth principle *svadhaya* because in order to fully embody the other practices, we must learn to first observe ourselves in action. This means looking deeply at who we are as a tool to move towards learning about both our strengths and weaknesses so that we can let go of that which we no longer need. In doing so, we can begin to question our beliefs and challenge our assumptions and reactions, asking: How often are my reactions habitual and derived from distraction? How much of my day do I spend in autopilot? What patterns of interaction do I return to again and again, and are they helping me learn more about myself and others? Are my ways of interacting bringing about greater connection or are they disconnecting or isolating me from others? Furthermore, in what situations and interactions do I react negatively, and why? And, how do my reactions impact others – both negatively and positively?

Before diving into this further, let’s start with the question, What patterns in my life need to be transformed, and what are some ways I might approach acting to change these patterns? Beginning an active practice of *svadhyaya* is the key to transforming your daily communication. Thus, for me, self-study is not only a sacred discipline or lifelong *sadhana*, but also a concentrated, everyday *abhyasa*, or persistent effort to learn and actively let go of all of the labels and identities that we impose on ourselves (or *vairagya*) that cloud our connection to our

own divinity. Through *svadhyaya*, we come to remember that at our core, we are divine consciousness or divinity manifested and interconnected with all beings, so much so that when someone says *namaste*, what they are really stating is that they honor the divine in you, which is the same as the divine in them.

From a yogic perspective, much of our suffering comes from forgetting our divine origin, or rather our *purusha*, which is difficult to describe, but in simple terms is an inner, divine light of awareness that becomes brighter as we realize our divinity through practices such as yoga and meditation, aiming to make the unconscious –conscious by bringing this inner light out of the darkness. In this case, the darkness is the dream of which Don Miguel Ruiz speaks, involving the many layers of social conditioning and learning as well as the labels, categories, and identities that we place upon ourselves. *Purusha* is the individual spirit or light that is part of the greater universal spirit, mediated by the *citta* or heart-mind, which negotiates between the outside world and this inner light. If our *citta* becomes “a dream where a thousand people talk at the same time, and nobody understands each other,” then our ability to connect to our *purusha* becomes greatly diminished. In the end, yoga is not only something you *do* via daily practice, but it is also a state of being or awareness.

Therefore, self-awareness is the at the heart of any yoga practice because it teaches us to return to a space of *atma vidya* or a knowing that the self is divine, which is why my teacher Shannon Paige states that “enlightenment is always a collective endeavor,” involving waking up to the world and seeing yourself as only one part and the “world” is you. In other words, by acknowledging that we share the same inner fire, we can learn to act towards others as if they are ourselves; moreover, “seeing all beings as manifestations of the same light of awareness allows us to detach from outer labels, opinions, and judgments and to act in a kinder and more

compassionate way.” First, however, we must tune into the present moment. Take a moment and ask yourself – Where are you? Here. What time is it? Now. Who are you? This Moment. Said differently, “How many thoughts have you had today? How many feelings have you had this week? How many sensations have you felt this hour? And where do they go? Where do thoughts and feelings come from?”⁸⁰ Once you direct this awareness to look more deeply at yourself, you may even begin to ask, who is the “I” that is doing the observation and who is the “I” that is being observed? In the meantime, I invite you to consider this further by taking a brief lunar pause.

Lunar Pause

Briefly sketch out the various words you might use to describe yourself.

Now, also jot down a series of observations about the world as you see and experience it.

Figure 7. Wording yourself and the world

In reviewing your responses, what categories, preferences, labels, beliefs, or identity markers did you call upon to describe yourself and the world? What observations can you make about what these descriptions say about who you are? In many ways, these answers say a great deal about us and can act as mirrors to help us start studying ourselves. It is extremely important to realize, however, that these mirrors do not reflect reality; instead, they show us our own

projections of the reality we create. As such, “Each comment you make about the world, about another person, about an event, about life, is a projection of yourself and a clue to your interior landscape,” insomuch that, “We cannot love or hate something about another person or the world unless it is inside of us first.”⁸¹

Lunar Pause

1. Begin experiencing where you are, using all of your senses. Start with the ground and your feet. Move upwards and outwards.
2. Always bring a pen, paper, or digital recording device to record your observations.
3. No moment is ordinary. Everything around you is alive and extraordinary.
4. Start paying attention to the stories you tell yourself and others about yourself.
5. Do not forget to breathe. Check-in and bring awareness to the breath as often as you can, focusing fully on three full breaths before returning to what you are doing.
6. Just observe, avoiding judgment and labels. Try to see things as they are, not as you are.
7. Tune into to the flow of life around you. What patterns or connections do you make?
8. Embody your explorer spirit, embracing the mission to document and observe yourself and the world around you as if you were experiencing each passing moment for the first time.
9. Remember – your body is always present, it is your thoughts, habits, and patterns that pull you out of the present and into the past and future. When this happens: stop, drop, and roll to re-ignite a spirit of playfulness and presence in the moment.
10. Record, visually document, and reflect on your findings.

Figure 8. Tips for self-study

Therefore, *svadhyaya* helps us to “wake up” to these worlds we create so we can more easily “see” that not only do we create and maintain our own worlds, but through our daily communication, we realize that the the majority of what bothers us about others is really about us and that the majority of what bothers others has very little to do with us. We will pick up this

thread further as we progress and discuss contemplative communication in more depth. For now, I ask you to ponder Krishnamurti's words, "Each of us has an image of what we think we are or what we should be, and that image, that picture, entirely prevents us from seeing ourselves as we actually are," and in studying yourself, "Forget all that you know about yourself" and start fresh as if you know nothing and are rediscovering yourself and your world.⁸²

Svadyaya Notes

⁷⁷ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 184.

⁷⁸ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 22.

⁷⁹ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 176.

⁸⁰ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 20.

⁸¹ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 150-151.

⁸² Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 21-24.

CORE INTEGRATION

The space where vital energies meet

Each day we move through life communicating with others, possessing the ability to impact another person's day in a positive or negative manner. Reflect on this for a moment, remembering something someone has said to or about you that brightened your day or perhaps cast a negative result, causing you to feel hurt, angry or disappointed. How might you have done the same to someone else? By studying communication from a yoga-perspective, you will be better able to recognize and attend to those you encounter with care, but you will also learn to recognize your communication patterns and to disidentify the impact other's hurtful words or actions may have on you. Observing yourself in the process of communicating is being in a boat, watching the wake or ripples in the water as you row or anchor. These communicative ripples can be quiet and calm, encouraging stillness and reflection, but they can also be harsh and demanding, inspiring apathy and disconnection. Employing another metaphor, Yogi Bhaajan tells us that we should "be a forklift" in our interactions – always lifting people up.⁸³ Engaging with this idea further, you might ask yourself next time you talk with someone if you have enhanced the person's day or created more tension or stress.

First, however, to better understand spiritual and contemplative communication and how we can become more loving communicators, we must ask: *What is communication?* and *Why is being aware of one's communication important?* While communication scholars have created a variety of definitions to explain what communication is and how it functions in people's day-to-

day lives, I find Barnett Pearce's idea that communication is everything people say and do together, which he relates to the content and quality of the conversations as well as their "afterlives" as a great starting point for this discussion. Considering the afterlife of a conversation means that we take into account the effects our words and actions have on each other "as the afterlives from many such conversations extend and intertwine, they comprise the social worlds in which the people involved in those conversations – you and I – live."⁸⁴ By considering communication in this way, Pearce asks us to look at communication rather than through it via paying attention to the critical moments whence we make and manage meanings and coordinate our actions.

Humans constantly manage and make our worlds of meaning together - meanings about culture, language, time, relationships, identities, environments and space, politics, belief systems, and so on - but each of our worlds is distinct to us. In order to connect to each other, we have to first be aware of the meanings we construct about the nature of our own realities as well as trying to find common ground with the realities and meaning-worlds that others are also making. The way we make sense of our lives is an ever-changing, meaning-making process, and often miscommunication is a response to how closely our worlds of meaning *relate*. Throughout our lives, we learn meanings, which shape the very social worlds we live in by what we do together. Because we all experience social worlds differently, we are called upon to try to understand each other's vantage points. In other words, because we are making these worlds together, none of us controls the outcomes of our interaction, but we have the power to continue or end the conversation - build relationships or dissolve them. Pearce examines these ideas through a framework of coordination, looking at the ebbs and flows of our conversations or instead how our interactions are put together and the meaning-making we apply to understand these

encounters.⁸⁵ He considers the following four questions: What are we making together? How are we making it? What are we becoming in the making? and How can we make better social worlds? He contends we can begin to construct richer stories together so we might better understand ourselves and others, moving beyond frameworks of “us” and “them” to “we.”

In examining the roles “we” play within our interactions, we can begin to move beyond a fault-blame paradigm to one built on self-responsibility for the roles we play in making and shaping the patterns we co-create. He discusses this further by asking,

But what if the things we take as important are not so much the *objects* that we perceive but the *meanings* we make of them, and the *actions* we take on the basis of these perspectives? If we *act* on the basis of how we perceive things, those actions are things in the universe and they have an afterlife.⁸⁶

In other words, what we define as real becomes our reality through our worlds and actions, continuously and collaboratively coordinated through meaning-making practices within our interconnected social worlds. It is within the experiencing of our diverse social worlds that we come to understand our differences and how we handle them, which relates to Rodriguez’s assertion that how we negotiate our differences has a direct impact on the quality of our communication.⁸⁷ Or as Pearce similarly contends,

Things get more interesting when we are open to the possibility that our social worlds differ not just because we think differently about the same things, but also because we think similarly about different things. That is, people in different social worlds may be honorable, but each may deem honorable that which the other finds dishonorable or simply incoherent. It may be impossible to translate one social reality into another; or, better said, to understand someone else, it may be necessary for us to adjust our horizons. In a sense, engaging and understanding another social world means becoming, to some extent, another person.⁸⁸

Maria Lugones beautifully articulates this notion further by employing the metaphor of world-travel.⁸⁹ In describing what she means by “worlds,” she suggests that each world is inhabited by embodied beings as well as imaginary ones and that worlds are only ever partially constructed in

that these worlds may construct us socially in ways we may not understand, and at the same time, we may still embody and perform these constructions. Moreover, we often inhabit multiple worlds, share worlds, and travel between worlds at the same time. As such, our worlds offer a description of our experiences as well as opportunities to “travel” among worlds, thus making us “world-travellers.” Traveling among each other’s worlds may be conscious or unconscious; hence, she advocates for developing a sense of playful travel and being at ease in the world so one can cultivate a loving attitude in order to experience an opening to uncertainty and mystery. As we enter each other’s worlds, we begin to identify with “others” through a playful curiosity so we might understand what the world looks like through someone else’s eyes/experience. By doing so, we move away from a communication framework positioning our world as right, good, moral, and so on, and others’ worlds as wrong, evil, or amoral. We instead attend to the in-between, recognizing the potential for creating new worlds together.

In discussing the spiritual implications of her father’s work, Kimberly Pearce describes our experience of humanness as consisting of three interlocking realities: our need to tell stories to counter and illustrate our suffering and struggles so we know how to move forward (coherence); our coordination with others within our everyday actions (coordination); and how we make and manage meanings through our experiences of mystery. In this case, mystery is described as a quality of our experience measured by our willingness to celebrate and embrace uncertainty, cultivate open-mindedness, and embrace a sense of awe and wonder, recognizing and acknowledging the limits of the stories we tell and expanding our capacity for tolerance, forgiveness, and compassion.⁹⁰ Because our social worlds are complex, always-changing, and multilayered, we must start to bring awareness to our stories – the judgments and assumptions we make about ourselves and others as well as the contexts within which these arise. Once we

are able to bring awareness to these reactions and our responses to them, it is imperative we also contemplate the context and consequences in order to discern what actions to take so we might see these “critical moments” from a place of compassionate engagement. Doing so highlights our ability to care deeply about others’ lives, experiences, and worlds, recognizing that our interactions are journeys together to something better versus a set destination.

Through self-observation or *svadhyaya*, we can begin to critically reflect on the field of consciousness containing all of our processes, desires, pleasures, motives, hopes, and longings, better understanding what Krishnamurti refers to as our “extraordinary complexity,” which we must discover by examining every reaction with our complete and total attention. This helps us move from a “me” centered way of being in the world so that,

If you want to understand the beauty of a bird, a fly, or a leaf, or a person with all his complexities, you have to give your whole attention which is awareness. And you can give your whole attention only when you care, which means that you really love or understand- then you give your whole heart and mind to find out.⁹¹

This awareness asks us not to be afraid of moving into the unknown. It also asks us to examine who we are in relationship to our fears as our fears are always in relation to something or someone. To embrace uncertainty means to ask ourselves continuously what are our fears and when do they arise. To proceed fearlessly requires us to un-learn how we approach each other and construct difference, recognizing first and foremost,

I lead a certain kind of life; I think in a certain pattern; I have certain beliefs and dogmas and I don’t want those patterns of existence to be disturbed because the disturbance produces a state of unknowing and I dislike that. If I am torn away from everything I know and believe, I want to be reasonably certain of the state of things to which I am going.⁹²

Or, as Rodriguez also contends, through our communication, we must nurture a feeling of doubt so we are willing to see our most sacred truths as fallible - so we recognize that certainty puts us in conflict with each other by convincing us that our differences are the cause of conflict versus

our lack of willingness to catalyze communication by embracing uncertainty. Without uncertainty, he contends, we would have no reason to or need to try to understand anything. This is why De Mello contends that we need to “wake up”; at the same time, most of us really do not want to do so because waking up is often unpleasant.

To “wake up” is a willingness to dive into the unknown, to be ready to understand, listen, observe, and question and challenge your whole belief system. In other words, he asks us to lose what we know of ourselves to find ourselves, so much so that, “To lose the self is to suddenly realize that you are something other than what you thought you were. You thought you were at the center; now you experience yourself as a satellite. You thought you were the dancer; you now experience yourself as the dance.”⁹³ Thus, in waking up, you become different, and as a result, everyone around you does, too.

In studying ourselves in interaction, we begin to explore our world, which brings about multiple perspectives, which moves us from our individual views to a more complex and inter-related space, paying attention to the judgments we make, how we present ourselves, the stories we tell, how we account for our actions, the afterlives of our conversations, and our coordinated actions – who is doing what to whom and why. From here, we can question and unlearn what we think we know, where our knowing originates, by becoming more aware of what makes us able to live together in harmony or in disharmony. This requires us to look at the bigger picture by examining the social worlds we create, inhabit, and travel among, noticing the contexts we co-create so we might adapt and coordinate with other worlds, imagine new possibilities for interaction, and respond compassionately to the expectations and actions of others. In other words, “Being mindful of how our actions affect others’ experiences of joy and suffering ought to encourage feelings of care. And being mindful of how human action creates the world ought

to give us hope that we can make the world a better place.”⁹⁴ Only when we see the patterns we live within, occurring between us, will we be able to disrupt and change the impact they have on our lives. From here, much larger connections and questions can emerge such as “How can I be the change I want to see in the world?” in the spirit of Gandhi.

Lunar Pause

In Andrew Harvey’s book, *The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism*, he offers ten things you can do right now to connect to yourself more deeply so you can begin to express the compassion and joy necessary to inspire action, adapted below:⁹⁵

1. Record one thing that makes you feel grateful to be alive.
2. Now list ten things you consider sacred.
3. Imagine someone who has recently hurt you and reflect on forgiving them.
4. Read and contemplate an inspirational quote, sentence, idea in relation to your life.
5. Based on your reading, set an intention to manifest this concept in your life.
6. What can you practice that will spiritually enhance your life and then commit to doing so.
7. Take a moment to connect with someone you care about, asking them what you can do to make their life easier and more joyful.
8. In the next 24 hours, donate your money or time to a cause you support.
9. Consider how you and those in your life can create a community to aid this cause and work together to act.
10. Consider donating a percentage of your money or time to helping this cause.

Figure 9. Ten things you can do now

Before reflecting upon a few basic communication propositions, referred to as *communication sutras*, helping to guide us to our own definition of spiritual communication, I invite you to list a few of your most positive communication qualities in the margins, additionally reflecting on ways in which you might improve your interactions by “being a forklift” and lifting people up. Later, I will ask you to take note of one or more instances where you became aware of your communicative impact on others as well as on yourself.

If we agree that through communication we come to see that our humanity is bound up in the humanity of others, as Amardo Rodriguez contends, how best do we fully understand this idea? To help us better conceptualize this idea, I am drawn to Gregory Shepherd's description of communication as the "*simultaneous experience of self and other*," or rather, "a particular occasion of experience, one which happens when you experience, in all the fullness of life, yourself and someone else."⁹⁶ What does Gregory Shepherd really mean when he makes this statement? Recognizing our shared experience has the ability to foster deeper connections as well as helping to better understand these connections through sense-making practices. Better understanding this communicative reciprocity – or giving and receiving - opens up space for us to take responsibility for our interactions. Viewing communication as the simultaneous experience of self and other, we lean in and away from others, as Ronald Pelias so beautifully states:

When bodies tilt toward each other, they begin to move in the same rhythm, with the same pulse. They may sense themselves in an empathic encounter, each understanding and feeling with the other. They may warm by the presence of the other. Sometimes, however, when they lean in, they discover differences, points of tension. They may struggle to find places of connection and agreement. They may become aware of the work that bending requires; they may feel its pull, its weight. They may resent it. Yet, they often continue, particularly in long term relationships, because they sense its promise, trust in its possibilities. They want to remain leaning in. They know that when they slant in, they thrive in each other's sense of self and acknowledgement of the other. And when they are there, leaning in, present, they know they are participating in an ethic of care.⁹⁷

Take a moment and reflect on a recent conversation you have had with someone you do not know well. Were you leaning in or away? Did you feel the pull to connect or the pull to separate? Consider your body language or non-verbal communication in this conversation: Were you relaxed and at ease? How was your eye contact? What were your arms or feet doing during this interaction? What were you willing to share about yourself? What did you learn about the person

with whom you were speaking?

If we consider communication as a process of leaning, simultaneously experiencing our selves and others, then communication as a process becomes a type of collaborative meaning-making between us. It is “co-labor-ative,” as John Stewart suggests, because we are engaging in the experience together.⁹⁸ As a result, neither person is more responsible for the conversation than the other because it is happening between the two of you. Each of you brings something unique to the moment; the conversation takes on a new meaning based on each person’s contribution. It is this moment between us whence we come to be who we are in relationship to each other. In other words, we become who we are in relationship to others. As a result, communication is always a process that constitutes and maintains relationships. Moving through this text, we will unpack this further in our discussions of identity; for the time being, I would like you to consider Stewart’s metaphor with breathing as a way to build on Shepherd and Pelias’ concepts of communication.

Lunar Pause

Pause for a second and just notice your breath. How are you breathing right now? Is your breath slow? Quick? Do you breathe into your stomach or is your breath primarily in your chest or shoulders? Do not try to change or control your breath – just notice. Are you breathing through your nose? Your mouth? A combination of the two? Is your exhale longer than your inhale or vice versa?

Figure 10. Noticing your breath

Our breath is our life – from our first breath at birth to our final breath at death – we breathe through life. Have you ever noticed your breath quickening when you get angry or anxious or slowing when you feel calm? Your breath affects every part of your body as it rises and falls like waves of an ocean. The act of breathing is even built into our everyday

communication about relationships. For instance, have you ever heard yourself say that someone “takes your breath away” or that someone is “waiting to exhale”? Maybe you have referred to something as “breathtaking” when viewing that which you consider beautiful or pleasant. More so, it is how we communicate when life takes our breath away, leaving us gasping for air, that merits the most exploration. While we shall spend considerable time in this text playing with our breath and its relationship to our relationships, for now I want us to focus on the most basic aspect of our breathing – inhaling and exhaling - as a metaphor for how we communicate with others.

When air enters our lungs during inhalation, it moves through our bodies nourishing our cells and blood with oxygen. Similarly, when we communicate with others, we breathe in words, information, stories, and meanings about each other. We then process and interpret this information and create meaning around our interaction, based on our own worldviews and life experiences. Returning to De Mello’s concept of spirituality as a process of “waking up,” when we awaken to our own awareness of our interpretation of our communication and interactions, we come to see that what we “inhale” about others is really a process wherein “We see people and things not as they are, but as we are.”⁹⁹

Consider this example: You are standing in the checkout line at the grocery store and a person in the line next to you appears to wink at you. How might you interpret this? Do you interpret this person’s action as a friendly gesture or as an intrusion into your moment or day? Or maybe you think the person is expressing his or her attraction to you? Maybe the person is not winking at you at all. Maybe he or she is winking at the person standing next to you? In a split second, a whole cascade of possible interpretations present, based on where you are standing in your life in this moment. What if I were to tell you that this person is not winking at all and that

he or she just felt an eyelash in his or her eye. How many times per day do we encounter this type of nonverbal communication? So many! And, in each instance, we assign meaning to the experience based on ourselves and our relationship to that encounter.

In keeping with the breathing metaphor, we also constantly exhale information about ourselves. Maybe you were the winker to someone else when in reality you are the one with the eyelash in your eye. As you can see (and regularly experience), communication is always an act of giving and receiving – inhaling and exhaling. Sometimes we breathe in and lean in to others. Conversely, we lean away, exhaling only minimal information about who we are. This process occurs in a wide spectrum of leaning in or exhaling more of ourselves, or leaning away and exhaling less. Regardless, in each instance, we are engaging in a simultaneous experience of self and other, as Gregory Shepherd suggests. It is in this space between us that we build our identities together in our communicative *interactions* and are "always-becoming," simultaneously experiencing each other's presence through "being-together," or rather, our "becomingness" or "being-ness."¹⁰⁰ This provides us with an opportunity for possibility, the idea being that we meet each other by recognizing who we are becoming in the experience of our communication versus who we are via our intersecting identities, a concept that is very similar in theory to how Shotter conceptualizes communication. In other words,

Perhaps another way of getting at the special nature of this simultaneity is to say that communication is the desirable (even if sometimes unhappy) experience of attending not just to me, at the ignorance of you, nor just to you, at the loss of me, but the sympathetic awareness of and attendance to both you and me in simultaneous regard.¹⁰¹

During this cycle of breath/communication, we stand grounded in our own experiences, interpretations, and understandings while also cultivating attention to the stories that exist between us. Looking at this concept another way, the term responsibility captures exactly what this reciprocity entails: It is our *ability to respond* to others in a manner that holds us accountable

for our words or actions. Why might this be important to you? If you rewind and then fast forward through the many conversations you have engaged in today or yesterday, you will quickly see how often you are called to account by others for your words or actions. An account is simply an explanation of why you said or did what you did and why. As you move through the rest of your day, I urge you to focus on the many ways that you and the people you interact with *account* for your day-to-day choices. It is not enough to focus here, however, as you need to focus equally on how you call for others to account for their words and actions, too. We will pick up this thread of *accountability* when we move into deeper discussions about developing our awareness of how we communicate in the coming waves.

The boundaries between self and other soften as we relax into the communicative space that we share as we become equally responsible or *response-able* for the interaction. This will become even more apparent when we discuss communication and conflict. Building on this, we can begin to create a series of spiritually-grounded communication *sutras* to carry forward. Each *sutra* (or thread) weaves together a series of ideas and is merely an offering or an invitation that you might consider adopting or accepting. For the purpose of our discussion, these *sutras* create a base for better understanding how communication constitutes our identities, relationships, cultures, and, ultimately, our everyday realities, starting from a position of recognition that humans are spiritual beings, and that communication helps us understand what being human means, further opening up space for us to create a more loving world.

Returning to Shepherd, he tells us that we become something more than self or other in our simultaneity – in this place we create the possibility of community,¹⁰² insomuch that, “Community offers the promise of belonging and calls for us to acknowledge our interdependence. To belong is to act as an investor, owner, and creator of this place. To be

welcome even if we are strangers. As if we came to the right place and are affirmed for that choice.”¹⁰³ Peter Block further suggests that this need to belong is a result of our ever-growing isolation that prizes a collective narrative of individuality and independence versus a celebration of our interdependence. To transform our understandings of community, he argues, we must expand our conversations to recognize a shared sense of belonging that highlights possibilities over problems, explores communal and collective transformation over individual transformation, reinforces the wellbeing of the whole through care and connection, while acknowledging the power of small steps that change the social fabric of relationships with each invitation, conversation, and interaction. By moving beyond every day talk to considering how we inhabit space as we come together, we can engage in new conversations about what it means to be a community. In doing so, community is constructed through conversation, and our connections serve as both an end and a means to transformation.

Sutra 1- Communication Energetically Stories Us

We are *always* communicating, inasmuch that it is impossible not to communicate. You communicate through your body (posture, movement, gestures), voice (pitch, rate, volume, vocal variation), use of space (distances between people and relationship to your environment), through materials (clothing, possessions, appearance, and so on), and through bodily emanations or energetic vibes. Our communication is *verbal*, *nonverbal*, and *energetic*. Verbal communication refers to our spoken and written communication, whereas nonverbal communication is all of our communication, neither spoken nor written. Energetic communication occurs as we vibrationally respond to one another in ways that move beyond words and gestures to something felt, transmitted, and evoked between us. There are infinite

numbers of ways we communicate. For example, how you use time (are you always late? punctual?); the type of music you enjoy; your favorite colors; your facial expressions or use of eye contact, body movement and stance; and the various communicative gestures you employ. Take a moment and try not to communicate and you will see this in action. Even when alone, you are still communicating through words, actions, and vibes. Every word, gesture, and movement communicates something, regardless of whether you have an audience or not.

Simply put, “*one cannot not communicate,*”¹⁰⁴ as you are still communicating even if the conversation is unspoken. When you are asleep and dreaming, you are still communicating on multiple levels. Communication becomes more and more like yoga in this manner as we take on various spoken, unspoken, and energetic postures when we communicate. Because there are many texts that focus on the role of our verbal and non-verbal communication practices, I want to turn my attention to energetic communication as this is an important and mostly overlooked aspect of our daily interactions. Jason Del Gandio describes energetic communication as a bodily, communicative phenomenon or a felt energy between people, which he refers to as “the vibe.”¹⁰⁵ As he describes, energetic vibrations are actual, tangible feelings that bodies solicit from each other, not just by transmitting or radiating vibes, but also evoking them both intentionally and unintentionally.

Del Gandio provides a series of notions related to the vibe that I find extremely helpful for articulating my understanding of energetic communication. First, he contends that “vibes” have a gravitational pull as well as a navigational guidance that push and pull us towards and away from one another. While we can wakefully attend to the energetic vibes we give off as well as the vibes others transmit, we can also intentionally direct a vibe for a specific purpose. Beyond this, we also emanate vibes even when we are unaware or are not fully attending to

others. As an energetic exchange, vibes are definitely part of our communicative landscape, not only in our face-to-face encounters, but also in groups and crowds as people's vibes come together to form a collective vibe or energy. Del Gandio employs the following features to describe vibes in more depth, including: magnitude of the vibe (amount and quality of the feeling, involving bodily force, energy, and presence); intensity (the strength of energetic connection between bodies and the degrees of this felt connection); and temperament (distinguishing traits among differing vibes, such as the vibe's characteristics that allow us to identify and differentiate vibes and the vibe's disposition or felt-personality of the vibe that helps us recognize each other and call on previous experiences of our shared vibes).

Thus, energetically-speaking, we give off vibes such as come closer - stay away - depending on how we intend to connect or disconnect with others. These vibes also tell stories about who we think we are, especially in relationship to those with whom we interact. Energetic communication happens both intentionally and unintentionally in the spaces beyond what is recognizable as words or gestures. By attuning to our own energy and the energy of others, we access a space that exists outside of our ability to explain and describe to a place of awareness towards how we speak and what we say so we might develop the ability to witness ourselves without taking sides. To position communication as a practice of yoga means while we are speaking, we learn to become aware of our bodies energetically – where we hold tension, when we relax, how our gestures, posture, and breath expand and contract - our ability to connect with others. Over time, this energy is retrained away from old, tired habitual communication patterns to heightened awareness of ourselves as responders.

Thus, communication is living and pulsing with energy. How you communicate has the power to shape the quality of your relationships, and, as a result, your life. Communication not

only creates and constitutes our relationships, but also has the power to dissolve them as well. Moreover, energetically communicating with others can leave us feeling refreshed and alive or drained and numb, depending on the interaction, as the energy you bring to each encounter has the ability to shape the interaction in a profound manner. In yoga practice, energy or *prana* is what animates and connects all of life. It is in the air we breathe, the food we consume, and the blood that pumps through our veins. At birth, *prana* enters our body and at death, it leaves. *Prana* is not something that can be seen or measured; it is something one feels and experiences through practices like yoga *asana*, *pranayama* (breathing exercises), or meditation. Even without these practices, you can start to attune to the vibes you evoke. Similarly, you likely already recognize the energy or vibes of people you encounter. This happens when you experience a feeling of discomfort or attraction, among so many other energetic states. In fact, what we call “emotions” or “feelings” are really just this energy or vibe – in motion. Considering an emotion as energy in motion (from herein “e-motion”), then you quickly come to realize that any feeling state can become another by redirecting your energy towards a different purpose. For instance, in a study conducted Finland recently attempted to energetically map emotions through words, creating this bodily chart, which highlights various energetic states evoked by these feeling-categories.

The following chart highlights the various ways that energy moves when we hear words related to these e-motions or *prana*. As the saying goes, where your intention goes, *prana* flows; we can thus learn and unlearn communication patterns by paying attention to ourselves interacting in the moment as it unfolds. I contend that individuals can learn to purposefully move *prana* to shift and alter our e-motional experience as well as to nourish one’s system to promote healing, aid sleep, bring relaxation, and to enhance awareness of the body via the breath,

movement, and interactions with others. *Prana*, as a concept, is similar to the notion of *qi* or *chi* in Chinese Medicine as practiced in acupuncture and tai chi exercises. Yoga practices bring awareness to the many ways that we leak *prana* in our daily lives, helping individuals learn to store and protect this vital energy. Similarly, throughout our days and our life, we constantly leak information about our views of communication through our energetic patterns of interaction.

Your spoken, written, and embodied vibrational communication takes on a life of its own, impacting others' lives, too. It is the quality of your awareness that will move others. In a sense, communication exists in the spaces between people, but also beyond, as people carry others' words with them, passing them on. Just so, communication mirrors and relates to the process of breathing, an embodied manifestation of *prana*. If we relate communication to a tree or other plant, I invite you to consider within each interaction, you are planting seeds you hope will grow. Further, how you care for those seeds will greatly impact the quality of the plant's life. How in tune are you to the plant's needs? Do you provide enough water, light, and space for it to flourish? What if we applied this same metaphor to our interactions? How might we best nurture the growth of others through our words and actions? Similar to the plant, even when we die, our words and actions continue to live on through others. Again, communication is as vital to us as the air we breathe. Without communication, we are like wilted plants deprived of sunlight and water. Communication is energy that we expend daily, having the ability to nourish us, expanding our awareness of ourselves and others, or depleting our resources when we engage in unbalanced cycles of giving and receiving in our relationships.

Much of the daily communicative energy we expend involves the stories we tell about ourselves, our understandings of the world, and each other. Humans are storytellers. We story our lives, casting ourselves as the central characters in our novel, movie, or play, creating various

plot lines around who we think we are, where we come from, and where we hope our future carries us. Our stories are our history, our present and our future, containing the power to bring forth connection with the world or separation from it.

We live in storied worlds or worlds filled with stories. These stories are always in progress, partially constructed, and open to change. The stories we tell ourselves and others become our realities: by shedding light on our stories, we have the power to rewrite and re-story ourselves. This is no easy task. Take a moment and reflect on some of the stories you tell yourself about yourself: What qualities or characteristics do you assign yourself? How do you communicate who you are to others? What words might you employ to discuss who you are or are not? Our stories shape and maintain our identities in both practical and profound ways. To better understand this, we must first discuss what “identity” might mean to us in relationship to our stories.

It is easy to look at identity as a series of qualities or characteristics, relating to our social roles, including our age, gender, occupation, religious or spiritual beliefs, and so on, but foremost, I want you to consider identity as something that you “do” in relationship to others versus something you “are.” In this sense, identity is not fixed but fluid and changing in our interactions. Of course, there are limitations to this identity-flexibility, which we will discuss shortly. What is important for now is that we are always sharing information about who we are or are not whenever we communicate. Our identities are quite complex and are not singular, meaning that we do not have one identity but many different (and sometimes contradictory) identities. Our identities are shaped and maintained within specific cultural contexts as well as by our past and they represent relationships. We may not agree with identity labels that others place on us, suggesting that we have a story about who we are that others may or may not agree with

or see, but regardless and as discussed previously, like breathing, we inhale and exhale – give and receive- energetic communication, which is intentionally and unintentionally negotiated in our relationships.

These relationships may be more or less impersonal, meaning the person with whom we are communicating is not someone with whom we share much about ourselves in our interaction. In that regard, impersonal communication casts the person with whom you are talking as more of an object or interchangeable part - versus a subject that you seek to recognize in their humanness. Philosopher Martin Buber¹⁰⁶ speaks of this as a kind of “I-It” relationship: individuals meet in a subject-object capacity, viewing each other as separate or detached, isolated parts versus an interconnected whole. Conversely, he describes an “I-Thou” or “I-You” relationship as one that is built on unity or a subject-subject interaction, consisting of reciprocity and interconnectivity. In either case, interactions can transform and become I-It or I-Thou, depending on the encounter.

Buber further talks about the power of these interactions in shaping our reality, suggesting that the I-Thou relationship is an ideal one, meaning that I and Thou share a reality, whereas I and It are detached and separated from each other. Buber’s theory is helpful in constructing a better understanding of spiritual communication as he also suggests that the I-Thou relationship also relates to our experience of union with our understanding of a higher power. Buber’s ideas will become even more important when we discuss identity from a yogic perspective. For now I turn to Eric Eisenberg, who suggests that a primary challenge for humans is living in the present with the awareness of an uncertain future for which he contends, “How we respond to the fundamental uncertainty of life shapes everything we do and is driven in part by how we think about our place in the world, our sense of identity.”¹⁰⁷ For some, this might

mean that identity is a “kind of answer, an ideal or end-state, achieved progressively through an on-going examination of qualities,” whereas for others, identity is more of a “question, an open-ended journey that is always shifting and changing.”¹⁰⁸

In this sutra, I believe that our identity is always shifting, conferred, and constituted through communication, which we “do” with others, thereby creating our identities together. This idea varies considerably from the notion that identity is fixed or stable and that we “do” our identity individually, communication serving only to conceal and reveal aspects of our identity to others. Eisenberg defines this as a theory of communication and identity that, “connects a person’s communicative choices with their personal narratives, their personal narratives with their bodily experience of emotionality and mood, and each of the above with the environmental resources available for the creation and sustenance of particular identities.”¹⁰⁹

These ideas become vitally important when we start to look more deeply into the roles stories play in shaping our communication and impacting the quality of our lives. Victoria Castle, author of the *Trance of Scarcity*, presents a convincingly cogent argument regarding the many ways people story themselves as living in a world of “lack” or “not-enough-ness,” which in turn keeps them from actualizing their own greatness or abundance in life. To set the stage for her text, Castle begins by describing a trance as a type of “semi-conscious state, a daze, a predisposition: under its spell we accept what we’re told without question.”¹¹⁰ While people’s individual trances may be different, the result is the same: oppression, isolation, exclusion, and/or consumerism, among other options. To counter this claim, Castle offers three ways to help readers break free from the trances that may be holding them back in their lives, including:

1. The idea of scarcity is a made-up story line that keeps us in a materialistic cycle.
2. By reshaping our stories and how we embody them, we have the ability and opportunity to change

our personal realities. 3. The cycle of abundance is a powerful tool and series of practices to keep abundance flowing in one's life. In short, the book centers on the idea that "What we believe and what we embody becomes our reality."¹¹¹ As a result, we must address the stories we tell ourselves (and others) about who we are in relation to those around us.

Employing the metaphor of a circle, Castle asks us to explore our sense of belonging by creating a metaphorical space of inclusion for ourselves. By looking more deeply into how stories shape our worlds, she presents compelling examples to support the idea that humans are storytellers and that many of the stories or social/cultural scripts that operate in our lives are a result of fear and/or anxiety, serving only to keep us searching for "more" outside of ourselves. Moreover, throughout the text, Castle focuses on the importance of bringing the body back into our lives as it is through our *soma* that we inhabit our stories, our lives, and our realities. She contends that by attending and adjusting our stories and bodies, we can relax and ease into the everyday flow of energy and aliveness that comes from being open versus contracted. In the second part of the book, she presents the "cycle of abundance" in great depth, highlighting the six phases of flow.

These phases are circular in nature, flowing like breath through inhalation and exhalation, further operating with a kind of dialectic tension. For example, forcing is the opposite of aligning; grasping is the opposite of attracting; numbing is the opposite of receiving; arrogance is the opposite of gratitude; hoarding is the opposite of generosity; and, finally, stagnation is the opposite of giving. In closing, she suggests that it is our inner state that determines our experience of abundance versus our outer circumstances. Our story and soma not only produce this state, but also our reality. By exposing the trances operating within our lives, we can begin practicing the cycle of abundance to create change in our lives. Key to this process is recognizing

the interconnectedness of all life, which creates and deepens our sense of belonging, as well as the important role pleasure plays in helping us relax into the present moment. With the help of this book, we can all begin the journey towards being “ambassadors of abundance.”

All of these examples highlight the importance our stories have in shaping our identities and, as a result, our personal realities. How we embody our stories greatly impacts who we are and who we become. Consider for an instant the stories you tell yourself that involve your not being good enough, strong enough, and rich enough and how these stories continue to create the world within which you reside. These stories affect our bodies, causing stress and tension, which in turn block the flow of energy and breath. This becomes extremely apparent when you are sad or angry and your body tenses and contracts. The flip side is when you feel joy, which encourages the flow of energy, resulting in relaxation and ease. What is e-motion other than energy in motion? Remember, your body is always present. It is our stories of the past and future that wander, carrying us away from the present moment. As Castle asks, “What must we do to feel, at long last, that we’re *enough* as we are?”¹¹² This is the heart of our exploration into spiritual communication by way of yoga. Moving through life in a trance keeps us bound to wanting more, more, more. Life becomes a story that is filled with never-enoughs, if onllys, and why-me moments.

We live in a surround of stories, an ethnosphere, an ecologically-communicative world, for which we are always interpreting and assigning meaning to every interaction. Often this occurs in a split second (a sound in the dark); other stories we interpret over a lifetime (the meaning of life). By recognizing that communication stories us, we can start to ask ourselves if the stories we are telling are useful. Do they make our lives better? Do they bring us joy? Or, as Castle asks, do my stories about myself and others contribute to what I care about or take away

from what matters to me most? Maybe you have heard yourself telling yourself some of these stories: Life is unfair. It does not matter. It is too late. I am not good at this or that. If I get a, b, c, then I will be x, y, z. Communication flows energetically; thus, these stories contract this flow, causing us to breathe more shallowly. Worry more. Want more. We then become trapped in this space of not-enoughness. The first step in creating and re-storying our lives is to become aware of the power communication has in creating our realities through the stories we tell. Moving beyond our individual stories also requires that we start to question the collective stories we have been told so we can begin to look at our lives through new eyes. Thus, communication and its role in shaping and maintaining our identities, via our stories, means that we have considerable power in re-shaping ourselves by bringing awareness to how we communicate, asking ourselves again and again – is this story useful? Does this story support diversity, bringing forth new ideas and understandings or does this story limit my interactions, creating more fragmentation and division in my interactions.

Sutra 2- Communication is Ecologically Interdependent

Communication helps us live our lives because it is relational, meaning that it is “done” with others, making it imperative that you start turning your attention to the quality of your communication. As John Stewart so aptly states, “Communication is where humanness happens”: focusing on the quality of your communication has the potential to greatly impact the quality of your relationships, and as a result, your life.¹¹³ We are not individuals moving through an isolated life. Most often, we seek to move towards connection or communion versus separation and isolation. Like Rodriguez , I believe that human beings are not only spiritual beings but we are always questing for communion through our communication. In doing so, we

exist in and are always moving, growing, and expanding in relation to each other. As Shepherd suggests, through our communication, we are always giving and receiving – the simultaneous experience of self and other.

We communicate on both a contextual and relational level, meaning that communication occurs in a specific context and that context (e.g. parent talking to a child at home) shapes how you interpret the interaction. The communication *context* is the who, where, and when of your interaction, which relates to the *content* (what you are communicating about and why). Because you are always communicating in any given encounter, what you are communicating may or may not be intentional. You may be completely aware or completely unaware of the body language of what you are saying to someone. Generally speaking, however, we are more likely to believe what someone is communicating nonverbally or energetically, especially if it is in conflict with one's words.

Consider the saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” As long as you just say you are going to do something and do not do it, your words do not mean much. It is only when you act that your words become more credible. This saying also relates to the idea of conflicting verbal and non-verbal communication in that if your face is turning red and you are shaking your fists while shouting that you are completely calm, likely the person to whom you are speaking may not take your words at “face value”; further, the medium of our communication greatly impacts how we are received. For example, what are the differences in communicating with someone via phone, text, email, letter, or through a social networking site? If you were planning to end a romantic relationship, what would your intention for communication be via these different mediums?

Communication happens in a specific context involving a relationship level, too. Each

person with whom you communicate has a different relationship to you, and we call on our relationship history in our interactions. Not only do you respond to the *content* of the conversation, but you also respond to the *context* of your relationship to each other. How you feel about each other and your relationship directly impacts how you will communicate. It is easy to see this illustrated in a conversation between close friends. Because they know each other well, they can call on intimate, personal details about each other based on their shared histories. You have likely encountered this many times in conversations when people employ “inside jokes” or tell stories that require you to “be there” to understand why everyone is laughing about the joke. Over time, people in close relationships develop patterns of communication that have the potential to enhance or dissolve the relationship. I firmly believe that we become who we are in relationship to others; thus, communication not only creates but also maintains, having the ability to change our relationships.

In a sense, what we know of ourselves is really a collection of everything that has ever been communicated to us – all that we have learned, taught, and experienced. Moreover, every person, with whom we have interacted, has shaped us through our communication with them. When we begin to think of ourselves as a collection of stories told to us and about us by ourselves and others, we can begin to truly comprehend the power communication has to shape and constitute our everyday realities. As you move through your life, ask yourself how you have impacted others and how others have impacted you? Who are your greatest teachers? How do you value your relationships? Are you supportive and encouraging? Do you spend quality time with those you love? In the scheme of things, our lives are short, and what we do with them matters. At the heart of this journey is communication.

Through communication, we build our world. As a process, communication is energy -

constantly in motion, always changing, and is not only learned, but also rule-governed. You are born into a world of communication, or as Kenneth Burke would say, an “unending conversation”:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.¹¹⁴

Not only do you enter a conversation already in progress, but you also contribute to it during your lifetime. Like a fish in water, you may not be aware that you are swimming in water. Similarly, when you are born, you enter into a collective conversation wherein you learn and have learned to be the communicator you are today.

Each culture has its own ideas about what is considered “good” or “appropriate” versus “bad” or “inappropriate” ways of communicating. As children, parents often reward or punish communication interactions based on the communication rules of the given social context. It is not often that you see someone giving a full address or public speech in a restaurant because within this context, this would be considered inappropriate socially. That said, rules are simply guidelines and are always changing and shifting historically. Moreover, rules can be and are often broken, the breaking of social rules often resulting in social consequences. The power of this proposition is that because communication is learned and communication rules can be adapted and changed, you can always unlearn and/or relearn new communication skills as you move through your life. With enhanced awareness of how you communicate, you quickly come to see that the quality of your communication directly impacts the quality of your relationships

and your life as a whole.

Our world - daily lives, cultures, identities, and relationships - is constituted through communication as we collectively create meanings surrounding our languages, use of time and space, belief systems, traditions and rituals, social structures, and so on. Communicating within these worlds is generally learned through the cultures within which we are born. These cultures provide the lens that shape how we see and experience our world. Anthropologist Wade Davis speaks of culture as a web of life, or an *ethnosphere*, he defines as the “sum total of all thoughts, dreams, myths, ideas, and inspirations brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness,” further suggesting that it is humanity’s greatest legacy, or rather a symbol of all that we are and can be.¹¹⁵

Davis refers to this as the *ethnosphere* and Eisenberg calls this the “surround,” referring to the sum total of our social world, which is always already in motion, including our spiritual beliefs, values, and cosmological concepts; our ideas and behaviors regarding material resources and economies; our cultural assumptions, rituals, traditions, and values; our social rules, roles, and laws; our approaches to intimate, familial, and interpersonal relationships, and the meaning we attribute to human development within the study of biology, genetics, chemistry and physiology. Within each of these realms are stories that shape our understandings of who we are together.

This does not exist in some absolute sense; instead, each culture is simply one model of reality built upon a set of adaptive choices or ways of speaking, thinking, acting, and orienting our lives. Universally, humans share similar adaptive imperatives such as the need for food, shelter, and connection as well as being born and eventually dying; however, each culture places very different meanings on how relationships are established and maintained and how

communication functions, creating a unique cadence of each culture, further evidenced through language, arts and beliefs, making up the web of spiritual and cultural life that envelopes the world. Focusing on language and communication, Davis refers to this as the “flash of the human spirit or the vehicle for which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world,” further stating that “Every language is an old growth forest of the mind, a watershed of thought, and a spiritual system of possibilities.”¹¹⁶

Contrasting this with the idea of the biological web of life or biosphere, he contends that the *ethnosphere* is being lost at a much greater rate, employing the example of language loss, arguing that this loss of cultural diversity through language is evidenced by the fact that of nearly 6,000 languages that were spoken on this planet, nearly half have disappeared. He asks us to consider what it would be like to be the last person to speak our language, unable to communicate about our world with others. Similarly, Rodriguez refers to communication as constituting a “naturally-occurring ecology,” which promotes life by encouraging new and different interpretations of the world.¹¹⁷ Our communication not only shapes the quality of our life, but it also creates and reflects our cultural realities. Looking at communication through the lens of ecology offers us opportunities to see the relationships or interconnectedness of all life.

Communication scholars think of communication in varying ways, applying models that are sometimes referred to as linear, interactional, or transactional, depending on their interest and disciplinary orientation. A more linear model speaks to communication as a transmission process, focused on sending messages through a channel and involving a message source, message, channel, and receiver of the message. Looking at communication in this way is considered overly simplistic by many as communication functions as a sort of one-way street, leaving out the response or feedback of the receiver of the “message.” The interactional model

builds on this and includes feedback from the receiver, highlighting the notion that communication is a two-way street or a process of giving *and* receiving. With a translational model, communication is situated as a simultaneous process of giving and receiving, wherein both communications engage with both roles at the same time. How communication is defined is part of an always-present debate among communication scholars and is part of a rich history of the discipline itself, which has interdisciplinary roots. As a result, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to communication theory. Moreover, there are many metaphors that theorists have employed to describe communication, including a container, conduit, war, ritual/dance, control, or transmission.¹¹⁸ However, I choose to embrace an ecological model of communication as a way to highlight our interconnectedness.

Like Davis, Rodriguez contends that the loss of our communicative ecology not only causes division, fragmentation, and isolation, but also it leaves little to new space for new ecologies to flourish. As such, diversity is the key to a flourishing communicative ecology because it highlights the abundance that springs forth from spaces of possibility. This is only possible when we come to see our interconnectedness or shared responsibility for our world. Considering communication through an ecological framework is vital as it helps us move beyond merely tolerating and accommodating our differences to recognizing that our relationships occur within a shared environment, which either promotes or undermines life. Only with this understanding can we create enough space for new communication ecologies or ways of interpreting and experiencing the world via shifting understandings of ways of making sense of the world.

Cultures not only provide us with frames and languages to make sense of our world, they also limit our experiences of our world, often binding or blinding us from understanding the

world as a whole, creating limited communicative ecologies built on concepts like ethnocentrism (my culture is superior to yours) as well as some forms of nationalism or patriotism. Once we come to experience just how interwoven culture and communication are, we can begin to shed light on how our cultural understandings of gender, ethnicity, age, social class, ability, and sexuality serve to separate, classify, stereotype, and divide us, learned, taught, constructed, and experienced across various cultures, communicatively creating our worlds. Building on this, Rodriguez places diversity with the frame of ecology, positioning diversity as the order of the world but also as a process that makes life possible, contending:

To look at diversity from an ecological perspective is to define diversity in terms of life rather than differences. *Diversity constitutes the evolution of new ways of experiencing and understanding the world that affirms life.* It is a process of becoming, unfolding, and evolving...In other words, ecologies achieve diversity by cultivating the resources and conditions that create and generate new perspectives that affirm life rather than merely accommodating and tolerating arbitrary differences.¹¹⁹

As a result, embracing our diversity creates space for us to develop new ways of seeing and being in our shared and interconnected worlds. To better understand this, we must first bring awareness to the many stories we tell ourselves and others about who we are, individually and collectively.

In discussing an ecological approach to intercultural communication, Amardo Rodriguez and Devika Chawla, identify four ecological axioms that highlight this perspective.¹²⁰ The first is *permeability*, which they summarize as a willingness to share resources among separate but interconnected ecological systems. By doing so, these ecologies are not separated by rigid boundaries but instead maintain permeable ones so that relationships can not only survive but thrive through cross-pollination of ideas and resources. They also describe this as an orientation to the world, involving the willingness and openness to being seduced by other ecologies. I interpret this as inviting an intimate participation with life. Next, they focus on *diversity* and the

celebration of difference as the measure of all successful ecologies, linked to the preceding axiom - *embeddedness*. For them, embeddedness illustrates that all ecologies are embodied within other ecologies such as the trees in the forest. Thus, ecologies are always influencing and being influenced by their radical relatedness. Not only are ecologies products of specific places, histories, and contexts, but they are also dependent on each other; through interacting, they can either be polluted/contaminated or nourished/nurtured in ways that cause thriving and flourishing or decaying and dying. Considering our embeddedness means that we are willing to be inspired by sources outside of ourselves so that we might enlarge our sense of humanity.

Finally, as we have previously discussed, they describe the vital importance of *vulnerability* as the final ecological axiom, the idea being that every community is laden with diversity members and capabilities and we are all ecologically obligated to nurture our most vulnerable members and parts, our survival depending on how we compassionately attend to each other. In many ways, this idea is quite kindred with the yogic idea of *karma*, so much so that we are and become the daily choices we make. *Karma*, as I am employing here, is understanding the law of cause and effect in regard to becoming aware of the relationship between our actions and their effects. As a result, “ecological awareness begins in one’s own body and extends through community in all directions. Community grows deep roots when we help each other thrive...Everything I encounter supports, sustains, and creates me.”¹²¹ And, I, in turn, do the same for everything and every one I encounter.

Sutra 3- Communication is Spiritually Transformative

As we can see in our previous sutras, communication has the power to constitute, maintain, and dissolve relationships. Moreover, communication as an energetic force, which not

only shapes who we are and how we story our identities, but also constructs cultures, ecologies, and our everyday realities. As a result, communication is highly transformative, part of all that we do and are, and as a product and process, it is constantly in flux, open to change, always historically and culturally situated. How we communicate now is a product of our current historical and cultural time and location, evidenced by following how language changes through the use of slang terms as well as the growing vocabulary of technology.

I prefer to view communication as both an ecological process and a spiritually transformational one, employing a model that is circular or spiral in orientation, highlighting the role communication plays in collaborative meaning-making. In this manner, communication is always collaborative and negotiated *between* us; as a process, it is not just a tool, channel, message, or mode of transfer, but that which produces, constructs, and constitutes us. Viewing communication as a process, which creates possibilities and effects change in our lives, means that through our communicating, we actively alter each other's ways of seeing, being, and knowing. Important to this notion is that communicating always serves someone, so questioning how our interactions benefit or harm others is vital to bringing awareness to our own communication processes.

Thus, through communication, we become something more together than we were individually. As a process of transformation, communication has the ability to teach us about who we are in relationship to the world around us. This requires us to critically reflect on our assumptions and beliefs, forging new paths and ways of defining our world. Yoga, as a practice, aids this process through employing self-study or *svadhyaya*, which asks us to learn about ourselves and our relationships, by observing ourselves in action. Central to this exploration, however, is the willingness to explore new communication ecologies that question the status quo.

In doing so, we can expand our understanding, create new meanings, and open spaces that support change.

To consider this further, I turn to William Wilmot's idea of communication spirals to better articulate the energetic movement and transformative possibilities of communication.¹²² Starting from the notion that communication is a relational, co-laborative process, energetically speaking, we have the power and ability to positively or negatively amplify each others actions, which Wilmot defines as a "spiral." As our worlds collide in our interactions, we energetically pick up and amplify each other's energetic momentum, building in a negative or positive direction, and then responding to the encounter in both productive and generative and degenerative and destructive ways. In this manner, generative spirals encourage relating and connection whereas degenerative spirals create the opposite effect. Thus, anger has the potential to create more anger and so on.

In either case, Wilmot defines seven features of both kinds of spirals, suggesting that regardless of the outcome, people's meanings become intertwined, accelerating the dynamic. Further, each person contributes to the overall dynamic in either symmetrical (responding in a similar manner – e.g. more of the same) or in a complementary (more of the opposite). As such, spirals are either contributing in generative or degenerative ways and will continue to accelerate accordingly. Even so, spirals can change, and when they do, relationships expand or contract – flourish or dissolve. In order to transform degenerative spirals, Wilmot recommends the following: do what comes unnaturally (alter your usual response); seek assistance from third parties (to offer a differing perspective); reaffirm relational goals (focus on what is good between you); metacommunicate (reflect and communicate about your communication); shift your interaction by spending more or less time together; and, finally, change the environment and

space of interaction. In all of these examples, the overarching goal is to bring awareness to the spiral itself; by changing the direction or pattern, you also change the spiral.

Wilmot contends that by sensitizing yourself to these relational ebbs and flows, you can more compassionately coordinate and find spaces of shared meaning. It is first important that we understand that often we want contradictory things (e.g. connection versus independence). Further, even in observing ourselves in relationships, we encounter challenges as our meanings may not coordinate or be fully understood. As a result, maintaining relationships requires a great deal of work, bringing us both joy and suffering. Because who we are is produced relationally, our acts of relating offer great potential for self-transformation and growth. Even when relationships dissolve, our relationships do not really end - they simply change. Thus, we continue to learn about ourselves and others before, during, and after every relational encounter, which is why self-awareness and study is so vital to changing our lives and the world around us.

As a communicative process, self-study or observation is about developing awareness of how we communicate so we can *transform* negative patterns causing us and those around us to suffer. This requires one to heighten one's skills of attention and awareness and to begin a life-long journey of practice, likely why the *Yoga Sutras* start with the term *Atha*, referring to our readiness and willingness to commit or take the steps forward to begin the practice of yoga, studying who we are so that we can begin to transform our lives. This process also speaks to the notion of *abhyasa*, which as discussed, means diligent or focused practice. In other words, as Castle states, "What we embody becomes our *way of being*; it influences every part of us. Our *way of being* in the world is a result of what we practice; whether or not it is intentional."¹²³ Any progress or transformation comes with time, effort, experience, and commitment. It requires much trial and error to acquire a new skill, and this is especially true of shifting communication

patterns. Furthermore, the term, *abhyasa*, also suggests that through practice, we learn to better understand others, a central component of developing into more attentive, aware, or loving communicators. As such, communication itself can become a lifelong spiritual practice or *sadhana*.

Most importantly, we must unlearn many habitual ways of being in the world. To help with this, I have often turned to Krishnamurti's book, *Freedom from the Known*, which sets forth a beautiful framework for self-study as a transformation process, communication being at its heart. Drawing first from Mark Whitwell, I also contend that yoga is a practice that not only functions as a form of devotion or connection with the divine, but also as a direct experience of, participation with, or an intimacy with life.¹²⁴ As such, there is no "one" yoga; rather, yoga must be adapted to each individual's needs. He states, "There is only yoga, and the only relevant yoga is 'your yoga', that which works for you."¹²⁵ Therefore, even though I see yoga as a practice of relationship or connection with something beyond our selves, this is my yoga. Moreover, for me, yoga teaches about where I hold tension, but also what my intentions are for living a more present and loving life. Your yoga might mean something else entirely.

Enter Krishnamurti, who teaches that "The primary cause of disorder in ourselves is seeking of reality promised by another; we mechanically follow someone who will assure us a comfortable spiritual life," for which he also states, "Nobody and nothing can answer the question but you and yourself and this is why you must know yourself."¹²⁶ Krishnamurti suggests that we are always seeking and that most spiritual practices aim to answer questions about the meaning and purpose of life; as a result of this seeking, we have become "second-hand people" who are spoon fed by teachers and authorities who tell us what rituals and rites to perform and prayers or chants to recite so we can suppress desire, know the divine, control our

bodies or thoughts, and so on, which he links to violence. Thus, his first advice is to stop seeking answers outside of yourself, coming to recognize that “ individuals, as human beings, in whatever part of the world we happen to live or whatever culture we happen to belong to, are totally responsible for the whole state of the world.”¹²⁷ In other words, as in Gandhi’s famous statement, “We must be the change we wish to see in the world,” this idea starts with our first transforming our understandings of ourselves.

Krishnamurti captures the heart of what I mean when I suggest that communication is transformational. He states, “There *is* no guide, no teacher, no authority. This is only you - your relationship with others and with the world – there is nothing else”; thus, he urges us to stop and try living with ourselves so we become our own teacher and disciple.¹²⁸ This requires a radical transformation of how we act in the world because it asks us to forget all that we have come to believe about ourselves so that we can start fresh as if we knew nothing, re-learning to investigate and observe ourselves together. Again, this is built on the notion of practice, letting go of the fear of failure (or certainty) so we can embrace the messiness, ambiguity, and complexity of life. As such, he encourages us to consider the following notion,

I see that I must change completely from the roots of my being; I can no longer depend on any tradition because tradition has brought about this colossal laziness, acceptance, and obedience; I cannot possibly look to another to help me change, not to any teacher, any God, any belief, any system, any outside pressure or influence.¹²⁹

To question our conditioning is to look at life with new eyes, not agreeing or disagreeing, but attempting to understand our selves in interaction with the world. Examining ourselves, Krishnamurti asserts that “Each of us has an image of what we think we are or what we should be, and that image, that picture, entirely prevents us from seeing ourselves as we actually are”; thus,

Most of us walk through life inattentively, reacting unthinkingly according to the environment in which we have been brought, and such reactions create only further bondage, further conditioning, but the moment you give your total attention to your conditioning you will see you are free from the past completely, that it falls away from you naturally.¹³⁰

He offers the example of this by discussing an oak tree, suggesting that when we look at the tree, we immediately label it a “tree,” perhaps even an “oak tree.” In doing so, we call on our learning, in this case botanical, to name and categorize the tree. As a result, Krishnamurti contends that we never actually see the tree; we only see our interpretation of the tree.

De Mello, whom we previously discussed and who has urged us to look at spirituality as a process of “waking up,” believes that because no theory adequately describes reality, we can never come to understand or agree on notions of “truth,” and we must challenge ourselves to question our most deeply held beliefs and assumptions about life. In his words, “That’s what learning is all about where spirituality is concerned: unlearning, unlearning, almost everything you’ve been taught. A willingness to unlearn, to listen.”¹³¹ In listening, what might this tree have to tell us about life? Ourselves? Our interconnectedness? This requires us to look at life as an adventure, but also as a process of discovery, or again, as De Mello queries, “Would you rather act and not be aware of your actions, talk and not be aware of your words? Would you rather listen to people and not be aware of what you’re hearing, or see things and not be aware of what you’re looking at?”¹³² This is why De Mello refers to spirituality, and in this case, spiritual communication as a process of waking up. By “waking up,” we move out of habitual modes of being that mostly function on “autopilot” and become aware of what is happening to us by observing ourselves – our words and actions. In other words,

What you are aware of you are in control of; what you are not aware of is in control of you. You are always a slave to what you’re not aware of. When you’re aware of it, you’re free from it. It’s there, but you’re not affected by it. You’re not controlled by it; you’re not enslaved by it. That’s the difference.¹³³

Like Castle suggests in the *Trance of Scarcity*, we often cling to things that make us chronically unhappy and this mentality of not-enoughness takes us away from experiencing life “as is” because we are too busy trying to solve problems, fix things, and search for happiness in material possessions, relationships, and belief systems.

This is exactly the point that yoga teacher Whitwell is trying to make in his book, *Yoga of Heart*, when he urges readers to stop seeking. He contends it not only denies our individual, creative life force, but that it is also an instrument of social control that creates hierarchies of knowledge, especially in the realm of spiritual awakening, for which he argues, “The pursuit of happiness, the uninspected axiom society is built on, is creating the opposite effect. It reinforces unhappiness.”¹³⁴ De Mello speaks to this when he refers to awareness, love, spirituality, freedom, and awakening as the same concepts, which result from the recognition that by waking up, we transform ourselves, and in doing so, everything in our world changes. Similarly, Whitwell contends, “You don’t have to find yourself, because you never lost yourself, and all the power and intelligence of life is appearing in you, as you,” which means that for him, yoga helps us move out of the problem-solution model and teaches us to relax into our own aliveness so that we may relax and participate fully in the present world.¹³⁵

I reflect that communication, for me, is spiritually transformative because we can learn to “wake up” to our habitual patterns of relating by questioning and challenging what we know about our selves, others, and the world around us, starting with a path of self-observation: what I call the *yoga of communication*. Starting with our bodies and breath and then extending to how we communicate and interact with others, we can come to observe and better understand our relationship to live. This is a lifelong process, requiring practice, and as Whitwell queries, “What does it take to actually be a yogi, really? Not spiritual attainment or *asana* performance, but the

beautiful embrace of your own reality”; as such, “Yoga, to be successful, needs to be unhooked from the limiting agendas of religious and commercial institutions and returned to the real pastimes of sincere people who care for each other.”¹³⁶ Thus, the transformation or waking up begins when we come to see communication as an emergent process, wherein we recognize that our own humanity is bound up with the humanity of others. In doing so, we embrace vulnerability, questioning the cultural and historical webs of significance in which we are suspended and which we ourselves have spun. In doing so, we can come to know, as Krishnamurti states,

We are each responsible for every war because of the aggressiveness in our own lives, because of our nationalism, our selfishness, our gods, our prejudices, our ideals, all of which divide us. And only when we realise, not intellectually but actually, as actually as we could recognise that we are hungry or in pain, that you and I are responsible for all this existing chaos, for all misery throughout the entire world because we have contributed to it in our daily lives and are part of this monstrous society with its wars, divisions, its ugliness, brutality and greed- only then will we act.¹³⁷

When we act, we begin the journey of transformation, which is why the *Yoga Sutras* begin with the word, *Atha*, suggesting “now the teaching of yoga,” and ending with the concept *Iti*, which refers us back to *atha*, asking us to return to the beginning and to start our practice again. This self-study of our communication through yoga is ultimately a spiritual path and process of “waking up” to ourselves so that we may transform our relationships, and, as a result, our worlds. Once we begin to see that communication is part of everything we say and do – together we can start to focus our awareness on the impact or “afterlives” of our communication. It is in these emergent spaces of in-betweenness that we are able to simultaneously experience ourselves and someone else. This always-becoming together is where “critical moments” emerge via the stories we tell, the meanings we apply to them, and the ways that we work together or coordinate our actions as we inhabit them.

When our social worlds collide within these conversations, we always have the opportunity to decide what comes next between us. To do so, we must first recognize the energetic vibes we are evoking from each other. Because our uniquely created worlds often feel like independent, “self”-contained universes, we are called upon not only to embrace a spirit of curiosity, but also a state of wonder and awe. With this spirit, we are better able to see each interaction as an adventure into the unknown, so we can delight in the mystery of those we encounter and the uncertainty that comes along with our relating.

To be a world traveler, however, is to first know yourself, your desires and longings, your wants and needs, your stories and emotions (energetic motions), your judgments, assumptions, and expectations, and when you are reacting (“me”) versus responding (“we”). Only then can we become *account-able* to and *response-able* for one another. We live in an ever-changing, ecological world. To flourish in this space, we have to learn to share resources and embed ourselves in the diversity of both our interconnected biosphere and our ethnosphere. Unfortunately, many, if not a large majority, live out their lives asleep – in a trance – never fully understanding that we are an extension of each other. Our lives depend on this recognition as do our communities and the planet in general. From what we consume to how we speak and act, we make daily choices that ripple with visible short-term and long-term impacts. For example, as more consumers feel pressured to purchase the next, new electronic device, we have an increasingly dangerous e-waste situation forming with countries like America often shipping this highly toxic waste to Asia, Africa, and Latin America where it may be disposed of improperly, creating a great deal of fatal health complications for residents stuck dealing with our trash. This is just one of many examples that highlight how a quick click consumer purchase has a lasting impact on future generations.

Lunar Pause

What stories have shaped or affected your understanding of yourself, your family, your cultures, or your place in the world? Of these, what stories about yourself do you return to again and again? What words or actions support these stories? What are some alternative ways that these stories could be rewritten?

How have others constructed your identity (via appearance, group membership, relational status, or other identity markers) through communication? What, if any, stereotypes (or easy conclusions or generalizations based on a person's group membership or other characteristics) have you experienced based on these constructions and how does this affect how you view yourself? Further, what role might you play in stereotyping others?

In what ways does your body communicate in your daily life? Through temperature, sounds, tingling, or ability? For instance, you may feel cold easily, yawn often, experience hunger pains, or a whole host of other sensations. Building on this, what have others communicated to you about your body or bodily ability? What, if any, consequences has this had on how you perceive and/or experience your body and how might this relate to others who might share a similar experience?

Often people are measured by a mythical notion of "normal," which automatically creates a category of "abnormal." This is quite easily evidenced in our daily lives when someone violates a "norm," acting against or counter to what is considered socially acceptable. In what ways do you feel like you fit into normative categories and how might you deviate from these and be considered by others as "abnormal"?

Figure 11. How do you see me?

To start moving in a different direction means we first need to understand, as Castle states, “What we believe and what we embody becomes our reality.” In this manner, knowing starts in our bodies and radiates outwards, tuning into where you are relaxed and where you hold tension. Also, building awareness about your breathing, noticing how various e-motions have different cycles of breath. Next time you identify with a feeling of frustration, notice how you breathe. When you feel joy – notice your breath. Your body, as hatha yoga practices have long taught, is a vehicle for realizing higher consciousness. From here, you can start building awareness around the stories you tell yourself.

Once we are able to stop seeing our stories as some overarching truth, and instead begin to see them as only one part of a larger ecology, then they have less power over us. I am not my frustration, yet I often identify with it in a manner where I claim it and make it me, feeling – I am frustrated! Examining the various interpretations we apply to our lives allows space for us to re-write ourselves, always asking – does this story help me love more? Is this story good for me? How useful is this story in helping me actualize my higher purpose in life? Moving towards your greater purpose should invite a feeling of openness and expansion, not restriction or contraction. Thus, as Castle aptly contends, there are two main components that create our reality – how we orient and navigate through life via our stories and how we inhabit and embody them; in both cases, we design our stories based on our experiences while simultaneously shaping ourselves around them.

In summary, these three communication sutras create a foundation from which we will continue to explore the relationship between yoga and communication. Based on these sutras, I believe that communication is the movement of energy that exists between people, pulling them together and apart. Additionally, it is ecological in nature as it is always living, growing, and

changing the worlds in which we live and storying and restorying our lives. As a result, communication is also transformational, having the power to inspire new understandings that arrive from self-observation. By knowing ourselves, we come to know each other.

Lunar Pause

What is your “core message” for the world? What, if any, is the story that fuels this message?

Figure 12. My “core” message

Core Integration Notes

⁸³ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 62.

⁸⁴ W. Barnett Pearce, *Making Social Worlds: A Communication Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 30.

⁸⁵ While I am introducing Pearce’s communication perspective, I am not employing, nor fully discussing, the intricacies of his CMM or *Coordinated Management of Meaning* approach. There are many wonderful books that explain this philosophy and practice in depth; namely, his book, *Making Social Worlds*, referenced above.

⁸⁶ Pearce, *Making Social Worlds*, 43.

⁸⁷ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, xii.

⁸⁸ Pearce, *Making Social Worlds*, 44.

⁸⁹ Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving," in *The Woman that I am: The Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color*, ed. D. Soyini Madison (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 626-638.

⁹⁰ Kimberly Pearce, "Living into Very Bad News: The Use of CMM as Spiritual Practice," in *The Reflective, Facilitative, and Interpretive Practices of the Coordinated Management of Meaning: Making Lives, Making Meaning*, ed. Catherine Creede, Beth Fisher-Yoshida, and Placida V. Gallegos (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 277-295.

⁹¹ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 32.

⁹² Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 42.

⁹³ De Mello, *Awareness*, 106.

⁹⁴ Michael Schwalbe, *The Sociologically Examined Life: Pieces of the Conversation* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 205.

⁹⁵ Andrew Harvey, *The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism* (Carlsbad: Hay House, 2009).

⁹⁶ Gregory Shepherd, "Communication as Transcendence," in *Communication as...Perspectives on Theory*, ed. Gregory Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 22-30.

⁹⁷ Ronald J. Pelias, *Leaning: A Poetics of Personal Relations* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2011), 10.

⁹⁸ John Stewart, "Communicating and Interpersonal Communicating," in *Bridges Not Walls: A Book Interpersonal Communication*, 11th ed., ed. John Stewart (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 14-41.

⁹⁹ DeMello, *Awareness*.

¹⁰⁰ Shepherd, "Communication as," 24-25.

¹⁰¹ Shepherd, "Communication as," 25.

¹⁰² Shepherd, Gregory, "Community as the Interpersonal Accomplishment of Communication," in *Communication and Community*, eds. Gregory Shepherd and Eric Rothenbuhler (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 33.

¹⁰³ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 3.

¹⁰⁴ Block, "Community," 51.

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- ¹⁰⁵ Jason Del Gandio, "From Affectivity to Bodily Emanation: An Introduction to the Human Vibe." *PhaenEx* 7, no. 2 (fall/winter 2012): 28-58.
- ¹⁰⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1970).
- ¹⁰⁷ Eric Eisenberg, "Building a Mystery: Toward a New Theory of Communication and Identity." *Journal of Communication* 51, no. 3 (2001): 534-552.
- ¹⁰⁸ Eisenberg, "Building a Mystery," 534.
- ¹⁰⁹ Eisenberg, "Building a Mystery," 542.
- ¹¹⁰ Castle, *The Trace of Scarcity*, 1.
- ¹¹¹ Castle, *The Trace of Scarcity*, 6.
- ¹¹² Castle, *The Trace of Scarcity*, 23.
- ¹¹³ John Stewart, Karen E. Zediker, and Saskia Witteborn, *Together: Communicating Interpersonally. A Social Construction Approach*, 6th ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- ¹¹⁴ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 110-111.
- ¹¹⁵ Wade Davis. "Wade Davis: Dreams from Endangered Cultures." Filmed February 2003. TED video, 22:01. Posted January 2007.
http://www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_on_endangered_cultures.html
- ¹¹⁶ Davis, "Dreams from Endangered Cultures."
- ¹¹⁷ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 70-71.
- ¹¹⁸ Klaus Krippendorff, "Major Metaphors of Communication and some Constructivist Reflections on their Use." *Cybernetics & Human Knowing* 2, no. 1 (1993): 3-25. Accessed January 11, 2013, <http://www.asc.upenn.edu/usr/krippendorff/METAPHOR.htm>.
- ¹¹⁹ Krippendorff, "Major Metaphors."
- ¹²⁰ Amardo Rodriguez and Devika Chawla, *Intercultural Communication: An Ecological Approach* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt).
- ¹²¹ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 63.

¹²² William Wilmot, "Communication Spirals, Paradoxes, and Conundrums," in *Bridges Not Walls: A Book Interpersonal Communication*, 11th ed., ed. John Stewart (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 399-414.

¹²³ Castle, *The Trace of Scarcity*, 4.

¹²⁴ Mark Whitwell, *Yoga of Heart: The Healing Power of Intimate Connection* (New York: Lantern Books, 2004).

¹²⁵ Whitwell, *Yoga of Heart*, 74.

¹²⁶ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 10-12.

¹²⁷ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 14.

¹²⁸ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 14.

¹²⁹ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 18

¹³⁰ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 28.

¹³¹ De Mello, *Awareness*, 18

¹³² De Mello, *Awareness*, 39.

¹³³ De Mello, *Awareness*, 71.

¹³⁴ Whitwell, *Yoga of Heart*, 47.

¹³⁵ Whitwell, *Yoga of Heart*, 52.

¹³⁶ Whitwell, *Yoga of Heart*, 66-152.

¹³⁷ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 14.

AHIMSA AND SATYA

Practicing Nonviolent Honesty

Ahimsa is the first of the *yamas* or ethical guidelines for interacting with others. Based on the eight-fold path outlined by Patanjali, the *yamas* are the first part of one's journey with yoga, and *ahimsa*, translated as "non-harming," "non-killing," or "nonviolence," is what begins this journey. Without *ahimsa*, one cannot proceed to *satya* (truthfulness or honesty), *asteya* (nonstealing), *brahmacharya* (nonexcess), and *aparigraha* (nonpossessiveness). Thus, the *yamas* serve as guidelines for life that teach us to avoid harming others and ourselves, resulting from dishonestly, theft, greed, and attachment so we can move into a place of truthfulness, new skills, pleasure without excess, and intimacy without possession. Adele refers to the *yamas* as our personal GPS as they function to tell you when your actions or speech become misguided and provide direction when you might feel lost. In this manner, the *yamas* carve out a path towards compassion and kindness by cultivating vulnerability in your everyday interactions. As opposed to the *niyamas*, the *yamas* guide us socially whereas the *niyamas* organize our individual efforts to manifest change in our lives.

I began my discussion of the *yamas* and *niyamas* by introducing the notion of *svadhyaya*, or self-observation, as the foundation for relational awareness. I now turn back to *ahimsa* to build on this concept of self-study as our ability to be non-violent to ourselves is crucial to being able to cultivate nonviolence with others. Without self-awareness through self-observation, we are blinded to the idea that harming others actually harms us, too. With *satya*, often translated as

truthfulness or also as honesty, one learns to “tell the truth with love,” so that violence is minimized in our daily lives. By practicing *ahimsa*, you learn to avoid intentionally inflicting pain or suffering on others as well as to practice nonjudgmental forgiveness. In other words, the idea of *ahimsa* is an attitude that we carry into our thoughts, words, and deeds striving to reduce harm. By calling for nonviolence, though, we must first define what violence is in relationship to communication. Rodriguez argues that, “*Violence constitutes any human ecology that systematically forecloses on the possibility to experience the world in ways that enlarge our sense of what is possible.*”¹³⁸ Opposing violence, in his view, involves opposing our own processes that undermine ambiguity, but is also any way of being in the world that imposes a set of fixed meanings, experiences, and understandings. Alternatively, Mariaelena Bartesaghi describes violence as a link in a communicative chain, or rather a dynamic of embodied constraints on communication, which limits social action. Based on this, violence can only be understood when we look closely at the dynamic as it cannot be abstracted from an interaction and its social context. Even with violence against oneself, the words and actions of others are always present.¹³⁹

Every time we compare ourselves, apply judgments, deny responsibility, or act unconsciously, we open up space for violence. Marshall Rosenberg states about violence, “At the root of much, if not all, violence – is a kind of thinking that attributes the cause of conflict to wrongness in one’s adversaries and a corresponding inability to think of oneself or others in terms of vulnerability- that is, what one might be feeling, fearing, yearning for, missing, etc.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, placing people (and their words and actions) into categories of normal/abnormal, good/bad, right/wrong, and appropriate/inappropriate in an of itself is violence. In each of these binaries, the quickest route to seeing the power they have in our daily lives is to violate a social

rule or “norm,” which almost immediately places you and/or your words or actions into one of these categories – all of which have real, social consequences.

In this manner, violence is absolutely a relational experience that can be both intentional and unintentional, depending also on what is said or done and how serious the experience (or perception of the experience) of harm or injury is as a result of the interaction. Relating this to communication, you can see violence in what Anita Vangelisti refers to as ten kinds of hurtful messages related to a person or their words or actions, including: accusations or charges of fault, blame, or offense; evaluations that describe the value, worth or quality; directives or orders, directions, or commands; advice focusing on suggestions for courses of action; expressions of preference or desire; disclosure of hurtful information; questions, inquiries, or interrogations; threats involving an intention to inflict harm or punishment; jokes or pranks; and deceptive statements aimed at manipulating or exploiting others.¹⁴¹ In all of these examples, hurtful messages can function as a form of violence, which is why *ahimsa* or practicing nonviolence is key to cultivating compassionate communication.

Both Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. outlined the following principles of nonviolence as key components of practicing *ahimsa* in your daily life, which have been summarized by the Gandhi Institute in the following statements worth paraphrasing at length: Nonviolence means to honor the inherent worth of every human being (and I would add non-human beings, too). In nonviolence, we naturally seek to understand each other, building friendships and community. Nonviolence also means we believe our lives are interconnected and what we do impacts the lives of those we encounter. In other words, we are responsible to and for each other, insomuch that we also need to learn to trust each other and work towards a common good. To do so, we must dedicate ourselves to the fundamental rights of all beings, courageously choosing to

practice compassion with our adversaries. Finally, nonviolence as a way of life asks us to recognize the power of love to triumph over injustice, inequity, and suffering, and in doing so, paves the way for peace via personal and social change.

To seek peace is to embrace uncertainty and surrender to mystery, always asking ourselves, “Is this problem of violence out there or here? Do you want to solve the problem in the outside world or are you questioning violence itself as it is in you?”¹⁴² The first step in this process, as the above quote suggests, is learning to identify the violence or negative feelings in you, and, in doing so, recognize that they are in you and not in the world. In doing so, the next step is to learn to dis-identify with the negativity, acknowledging that these e-motions are not “you” and are always changing. Finally, when you transform these negative or violent feelings, everything, including yourself and your world, also changes. To look at your shadow self requires courage - this does not mean that you are not afraid - but that you can be afraid without its cultivating more violence or negativity in your life. We act violently when we think we know what is best and how the world works and then impose our perceptions and understandings on others. Embracing *ahimsa* requires support, not fixing. As a path of peace, it also involves a commitment to working through conflicts, which are inevitable, and spaces for growth, with a compassionate and nonviolent willingness to see the world through someone else’s eyes. This is peacemaking, and yoga, ultimately, is a path of peacemaking.

In order to develop more sustainable relationships and communities, we need new strategies for approaching conflict nonviolently. These strategies should aim to prevent or greatly reduce the potential for destroying life on earth, while vitally enhancing the potential for improved coexistence, also fostering a greater respect for human and ecological diversity.¹⁴³ By situating communication via *ahimsa* as an everyday peacemaking practice, we must embrace

diversity as an essential condition necessary for life to flourish. In our second communication *sutra*, I, like Rodriguez and Chawla, suggested that our diverse ecologies are only as strong as our most vulnerable members; to protect life, we need to cultivate a “we consciousness,” continuously asking: Who gets valued and who does not? Who has authority to make decisions and act and who does not? Who controls (and shares or does not) local and global resources? Who gets to live (a livable life) and who does not? Even though conflict will always be an inevitable outcome of human interaction, how we approach conflict determines our potential for celebrating different ways of knowing and serving as a catalyst for change or whether it becomes a source for creating further violence.¹⁴⁴

Ultimately, then, diversity also occurs around us and in the spaces between us, shaping how we make decisions, who we include in them, and how we maintain relationships. If we begin to make decisions from a place that values our difference, while recognizing our basic goodness and interconnectedness, then we come to know that what we say and do on a daily basis matters greatly. For me, practicing *ahimsa* is the first step in actualizing this. In the book, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*, Vandana Shiva outlines the following principles that for me form the basis of *ahimsa*: All species, people, and cultures have intrinsic worth (no species has the right to own or exploit another); The earth community is a democracy of all life (we are all part of the same interconnected, earth family); Diversity in nature and culture must be defended (both are needed for sustainability and peace); All beings have a natural right to sustenance (access to food, water, and shelter is a basic right for all beings); Earth democracy is based on living economies and economic democracy (highlighting there are no disposable people or dispensable species or cultures); Living economics are built on local economies (consumption and production should make the smallest ecological impact possible);

Earth democracy is a living democracy (based on shared responsibility and inclusion); Earth democracy is based on living cultures (finding spaces to support our common humanity); Living cultures are life nourishing (based on dignity for all beings, recognizing multiplicity, and working to end life-destroying lifestyles); and, finally, Earth democracy globalizes peace, care, and compassion (through connection, cooperation, and ethical consumption).¹⁴⁵

When I consider how I can better work towards these principles of an earth democracy, via practicing *ahimsa*, I start to focus on my daily routines and patterns, including what I consume and how my consumption choices add up. I also often reflect on the ways that I include and exclude as well as the value I place on my own life and the life of other beings. Embracing *ahimsa* in my daily words, actions, and relationships requires *satya*, or a certain truthfulness and honesty about my part in this interconnected world. Thus, as my teacher Rod Stryker says, to practice yoga completely, we must find a balance between knowledge and power. By learning about ourselves and the world, we work towards knowledge. How we apply this learning in our lives requires wisdom. Yoga, as a path towards self-knowledge, is one method to aid the development of our divine capacity to evoke and instigate positive change in the world. Imagine for a moment the balance between knowledge and power. Without power or the ability to work towards change, knowledge cannot act. Without knowledge, power cannot be harnessed for a greater good. Thus, *ahimsa* brings these worlds together because it teaches us to have knowledge of our impact on the world - because we are the world - and to harness the power to act nonviolently to defend its diversity.

Lunar Pause

I invite you to take a moment and reflect on how you define and/or experience violence?

Figure 13. Violence is...?

Now that you have considered how you define and/or experience violence, I would like you to consider how violence and nonviolence inform your understanding of how you communicate. Though words are certainly not the only manner in which we communicate, our words have a great power to shape and create our world. I believe that it is our words that manifest everything in our lives. Don Miguel Ruiz paints this picture powerfully by stating, “The word is a force; it is the power you have to express and communicate, to think, and thereby to create the events in your life”; continuing, he states, “Regardless of what language you speak, your intent manifests through the word. What you dream, what you feel, and what you really are, will be manifested through the word.”¹⁴⁶ By looking at words in this way, we can see they not only have the power for good, but they can also be extremely destructive.

Take a moment and reflect on words that you have spoken or heard that have negatively impacted you. Perhaps someone told you that you were not good enough or could not do something. I always remember a moment when I was in the seventh grade and desperately wanted to play the oboe. One evening, when students were at a band open house, I expressed this desire to the music teacher who told me that my lips were too large for me to be successful playing the oboe. With those words, my oboe dreams died. This example, among many I could have provided, illustrates the violence words can create in the lives of others. Not only do our words change our ideas and opinions about ourselves and our lives, but they also have the power to manifest love and transformation in our lives when manifested nonviolently. To do so, we have to consider the violence of our negative words employed in our own self-talk as well as in our relationships. In other words,

So can you – can you and I – live with what we actually are, knowing ourselves to be dull, envious, fearful, believing we have tremendous affection when we have not, getting easily hurt, easily flattered and bored – can we live with all that, neither accepting it nor denying it, but just observing it without becoming morbid, depressed, or elated?¹⁴⁷

This is where the second *yama* – *satya* becomes vitally important. *Satya* encourages us to take an honest appraisal of our lives – the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful – and to recognize the attachment we have to patterns that sustain feelings of not-enoughness. As Stone asks, “Why is our capacity to be flexible, to see all living beings as equal, and to act out of that insight and honesty and intimacy with all things so rarely exercised?”¹⁴⁸ I believe this is because we continuously turn away from suffering, categorizing our experiences from a perspective of separation. In doing so, we become numb to the many injustices of the world. This numbness perpetuates a state of non-doing wherein we continue to support daily practices that reaffirm a “me” first versus “we” first and an us/them mentality. Embracing *satya* requires us to turn to - not away from - the many atrocities and inequalities that are ever-present and to develop our own truth of how to make a difference in the face of so much intolerance and cruelty.

The first step is an honest appraisal of the relationships in our lives. Whom do we include? Whom do we exclude? How do we employ our knowledge and power for the greater good? What types of suffering do we avoid or deny? In asking these questions, practicing *satya* means that we stop making everything in our lives about us. For me, it is also a path that asks to fall in love with ourselves to cultivate a playfulness and intimacy with life, feeling like you are making love to the world. But how is this possible in a world filled with so much violence? How can we *honestly* practice love and nonviolence while still being true to ourselves? And what would being true to ourselves mean in practice? To transform our understanding of our world is to first understand the beliefs and patterns that we commit to daily and then work to unlearn them. In this way, we must find the courage to do what comes unnaturally to us, embracing the unfamiliar and working to rid ourselves of the boxes and categories we keep placing our selves

within. Why is this important? I believe that when we stop labeling ourselves, we start to also unlearn the patterns associated with labeling others.

The next step is one that we have been discussing throughout this text – learning to observe and witness your reactions. If we take seriously the yogic notion that, at our core, we are divine consciousness surrounded by many, many layers of social conditioning that obscure this self awareness or inner fire (*purusha*), then by developing a type of witness consciousness, we will quickly discover that many of our “truths” are actually lies that we keep telling ourselves. In fact, truth and lies are merely more categories imposed on communication to organize our stories. By labeling our beliefs and words as one or the other, we draw sharp boundaries and construct very real and sometimes dangerous realities.

Thus, the e-motions that we experience originate in our own self-created reality; therefore, it is only when we no longer take the stories we keep telling ourselves personally, can we begin to see that most of our problems with the world are actually problems with us. In this grand story of our lives, we are the director, producer, and leading role; however, in most cases, we are also playing all of the supporting roles. As a result, almost every conversation we have with ourselves is based on conflicting and contradictory wants and needs. Which needs and wants are real? Crucial to our survival? Keeping us from loving more? In essence, we are surrounded by suffering and addicted to it at the same time, constantly seeking to end our own suffering through material possessions and relationships, searching for meaning.

What would happen if you awoke tomorrow and vowed to radically reduce your own suffering as well as that of others? For me, the first step would be learning to experience life as it is versus how I think it should be. My next goal would be to stop comparing myself to others. If I stopped these comparisons, I might be able to finally see myself as I am in this moment. I would

not be chasing some ideal. I also would not have to struggle to be something or someone I am not. Maybe I could even find pleasure in my contradictory desires. What if I met you in a similar place so that,

When I say I know you, I mean I knew you yesterday. I do not know you actually *now*. All I know is my image of you. That image is put together by what you have said in praise of me or to insult me, what you have done to me – it is put together by memories I have of you- and your image of me is put together in the same way, and it is those images which have a relationship and which prevent us from really communing with each other.

In this space, I know *satya* for a moment. I know that in each moment, I become who I am in relationship to you and this who I think I am is always changing. I know that I desire independence from you, yet I also long to connect. I know that my image of you is not you, even though I sometimes think it is you. Most importantly, I know that, “When we really see other people as they are without taking it personally, we can never be hurt by what they say or do. Even if others lie to you, it is okay. They are lying to you because they are afraid. They are afraid you will discover that they are not perfect.”¹⁴⁹ As a perfectly flawed and imperfect being, in Kiddard’s terms, I do not want to be afraid to admit that the parts of myself that I reject and fight just give them power and make them stronger. Yet, I know it to be true. Only when I stop fighting myself – getting out of my own way – can I awaken to the many “measure-up” lists I make about how I can be better and who can be better with me.

Satya teaches me that I have the capacity to observe myself honestly. I can be an observer of my life while still participating actively and intimately with it. The way I experience the world results from my own ability to observe myself. For example, if I break a glass, what happens? The glass, which no longer has the same form or function, has changed and become something else. Yet, I might get angry that I knocked it off the table. Maybe the glass was a gift and I am now sad for having lost this sentimental object. In either case, the glass is not sad for having been

broken. The glass is not angry. The glass “just is” within this reality – broken or not. Instead, I make this accident a problem by the energy I put into motion. The moment I identify with this energetic reaction, I become it. To change the reaction requires me to change myself. Thus, I “wake up” to my own problematic constructions, shining the light of awareness that I am changing and adding my own fears, doubts, and worries to reality. In the case of the glass - anger. Any negative value I add only serves to make me more unhappy. By examining my own reactions – what stories are useful to me and which are not - I almost always find some expectation or attachment. In this way, each of these reactions offers a teaching moment. I can unlearn how I experience my world, not by fighting or denying negative reactions, but by bearing witness to them as they unfold and trying to understand what purpose they serve. In this way,

Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves. All people live in their own dream, in their own mind; they are in a completely different world from the one we live in. When we take something personally, we make the assumption that they know what is in our world, and we try to impose our world on their world.¹⁵⁰

By practicing *ahimsa* and *satya*, we are better able to observe that all violence and conflict starts with us. When we defend what we consider our “truths,” we are less able to understand and connect with others’ “truths.” If we were to cast ourselves as the villains in our own stories, how would our lives be different? How might we cultivate spaces of greater compassion and understanding? Instead of casting ourselves on a hero’s journey, we might instead look at the many ways we actively support and create violence. Admitting this takes courage. Building spaces of inclusion versus exclusion requires us to embrace diversity and not fear those that have different beliefs and ways of being in the world. It also asks us to return love, even in the face of hate and violence. To do so calls on us to radically reappraise our own capacity for violence and nonviolence as well as our own ability to be honest about our reactions,

responding from a place of compassion. Reactions disconnect and responses connect. By cultivating a witness consciousness, we can relax and stop taking things so personally, moving beyond the “me” and “I” to a space of “we.”

Lunar Pause

Practice *ahimsa* by reflecting on a moment or encounter with someone who hurt you deeply. In contemplating this experience, notice your body tension and breath. Now externalize this experience by attempting not to identify with this e-motion. Go over the exchange again, but this time do so as a witness not involved in the experience. How does your body feel now? What did you witness about yourself? The other person? What did you see happen in the space between you? Once you feel complete with this, take a moment and energetically cultivate a positive response to this person, sending them feelings of warmth, comfort, inclusion, and support. Imagine them feeling loved and happy. How, if at all, did this shift your own experience of this encounter? Were you able to experience a moment of *ahimsa*, both for your part in this experience and towards the other person?

Now practice *satya* by engaging in an experiment with your own ability to be honest with yourself regarding your reactions. Ask someone to speak to you in a manner (or focusing on a topic) that almost always causes a negative reaction. Pause and witness how your body and breath feel within this conversation. Expand your breath by deepening your inhale – say, breathe in for 3 counts and out for 6, noticing your reaction. Were you able to witness your feelings and to positively dis-identify with them? If not, why? How might you do so in the future?

Figure 14. Practicing *ahimsa* and *satya*

There is no doubt that our shared words and actions have power to greatly impact each other; however, how much power we ascribe them is totally up to us. Or, in other words, we suffer when we try to be someone we are not and ask others to do the same. *Ahimsa* and *satya* are two streams that carry us forward, reminding us that we can find joy by relaxing into our own aliveness, participating more fully in each experience. Doing so moves us from operating in a problem/solution and us/them mode of being in the world to seeing new ways to act nonviolently and honestly to support radical relatedness, asking ourselves: How much provocation can we experience without becoming identified with it; by not identifying with and as it, how much of

this provocation can we catalyze as teaching moments that help us create positive transformation in our lives and the lives of others?

Ahimsa & Satya Notes

¹³⁸ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 70.

¹³⁹ Mariaelena Bartesaghi, face to face communication to author, January 13, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 2nd ed. (Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer Press, 2003), 18.

¹⁴¹ Anita L. Vangelisti, "Messages that Hurt," in *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, 11th ed., ed. John Stewart (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 340-352.

¹⁴² Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 50.

¹⁴³ Rebecca A. Martusewicz, Jeff Edmundson, and John Lupinacci, *Ecojustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic and Sustainable Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴⁴ Rodriguez and Chawla, "Intercultural Communication."

¹⁴⁵ Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ Ruiz, *Four Agreements*, 26.

¹⁴⁷ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 70.

¹⁴⁸ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 87.

¹⁴⁹ Ruiz, *Four Agreements*, 57-58.

¹⁵⁰ Ruiz, *Four Agreements*, 48.

VINYASA¹⁵¹

To place in a special way

The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do
They're really saying I love you.

- Louis Armstrong, *What a Wonderful World*¹⁵²

Brown sugar dust powders my car along with hearts and words etched onto the window, declaring- *We Love You*. Positioned in the ditch with no tires touching the road, this metal mass balances tenuously between the road and a hard place – a woody, rock-centered tangle of wilderness. Cars from around the country surround me on all sides in puzzle-like configurations. Down the winding road, a car is being excavated from its trench-grave by a team of five. It rocks and rolls, tires spinning as a smoky cloud forms, engulfing the scene into a dirty blur.

I sit on the ground near my car, furiously scribbling in my journal. Where is Danny? I have been waiting for him for over an hour. Aren't we meeting here? Am I supposed to return to the main gate? Sweat streaming, I can feel my impatience and anger rising. Why me? Why now? It's time to go- damn! Sadly, I realize I, too, need an automotive intervention to set sail on the dusty river, calling me home. *If arriving at a Rainbow gathering¹⁵³ is "coming home," then what happens when I go home to my other home? Am I both leaving home and coming home at the same time? What is home anyway?* I am spinning in circles. Doodling a circle on the page, I am

approached by a long, blue car, clouds also circling it like a light incense stick carrying it away from the gathering. The car brakes at the sight of me, the grimy windows revealing the lone driver. Motor still running, the driver, a bespectacled older woman with long, brown curly hair, rolls down her window as she shuts off the engine. Once the sediment settles, she smiles and coughs out the words,

“Hello, sister. I have a message for you from the Great Mother.”

I smile, remaining silent and trying not to inhale the dust.

Squinting, she continues confidently, relaying news as if she has been waiting to tell me this all day,

“For years, women have been oppressed - forced to live in fear in this patriarchal world. I can see the strength in your spirit, sister. You are beautiful.”

“Thank you, sister.”

“Do you know it takes generations to undo these cycles of violence?”

Listening intently, I wait for words to pour from her mouth.

“All we need is love. Love for ourselves, our families, our friends, even strangers.” Leaning in and staring with great intensity, she continues, “Most of all, we need to love the Great Mother.” Switching conversational streams, she states, “You are perfect just the way you are. Your energy is strong, compassionate, and healing – be who you are now. You don’t need to change anything. I love you.”

“I love you, too, sister. Thank you for being you and for sharing this moment with me. I am honored by your presence.”

Starting her car, she bends over to the passenger’s side to grab something and re-emerges at the window, clutching a piece of paper that she thrusts in my direction.

“This is for you.”

Rising to meet her, I grab the folded paper and hold her hand in mine for a moment. “It is wonderful to meet you. May our paths meet again.”

“Blessed be,” she replies, smiling, and drives away, clouds of dust forming as she floats down the road.

The paper, once unfolded, reveals the poem, “Let Love Draw the Line” by visionary artist, Alex Grey, handwritten on the backside of a map. Returning to the shade and feeling much calmer now, I ease onto the ground by my car and read his words, letting them enter me as I wait...

Let Love Draw the Line¹⁵⁴

Drawing the line,
The Boundary line
Between this form and that
Is what the mind does.

Our minds are artists,
always drawing lines.
Making decisions, differentiating
One thing from another,
Calling it something.

This is the way we know.
This is how we think.

We define
by drawing the line.

And by drawing the line
The artist inside is making a work of art.

A magnificent Illusion
of distinct and various forms,
Nicely separated by boundary lines.

But is this picture of reality drawn by the
mind a picture of truth?

Because when we draw the line
We can't help but notice differences.

We separate.
We oppose.
We dramatize.
We exaggerate.
We add colors.
We make it beautiful.
We make it ugly.
We separate.
We oppose,
When we draw boundary lines.
Let us return to the blank page again.
Prior to all the lines.
The Uncreated blankness
Could be the Ultimate Ground.

Indeed, prior to all the lines,
The stainless ground,
The infinite Vastness is perfect
Just as it is.

Yet how can we know it,
How can we see it,
How can we share it,
Unless we draw a line around it?

The soul interjects itself as the bounding line
Or the bonding line
Between the Vastness of the ground
and the limits of the body.
The Soul is the aura
Welding figure to ground.
The ground is boundless,
We are framing the boundless.

The skin surrounds and binds the ground,
The holy ground that knows no bounds.

How can the ground that knows no bounds
Be bound within a skin surround?

Behold, Just Behold.

To speechlessly and artlessly

Behold the Infinite One,
The inseparable ground
from whence all forms are drawn,
Dissolves the tyranny of separation,
The war of opposites,
Caused by drawing lines.
Recognize the still serene
Hub of the turning cosmos
As the deathless light of love
In your own heart,
The lines this light draws, include everything,
Creating patterns which connect.
The lines it draws weave the world together
And always arise from the boundless ground.
All Beings and Things are radiances interweaving,
Seamlessly welded to the boundless ground.

Between our fear of failure
And our ultimate potential
We are called to action,
A line must be drawn.

Commit to Realization
And experimentation,
Stay centered in the Uncreated
Source of Creation,
Leave the critics behind.

Let Love draw the line.

I sit in tears, angry with myself for being angry, for not loving the moment more. I experience an extreme sense of gratitude for the brief connection I have shared with this woman. How could I not love her? In a moment of frustration, she has saved me from myself and my anger by reminding me to *be who I am right now*. Who am I in this moment? Who are you? Who are we together? Separately? What lines are drawn between us? In our interactions, how can we find spaces to let love draw the line?

Lunar Pause

In what ways might you relate this experience to your own life?

How, if at all, does this story illustrate the *yamas* - *ahimsa* or *satya*?

How, if at all, does this story relate to our discussions about communication?

What role, if any, does yoga play in this story?

What communication themes are present (energy, story, ecology, interdependence, spirituality, or transformation, others)?

Figure 15. Discussion questions

Vinyasa Notes

¹⁵¹ *Vinyasa* means to “place in a special way,” and generally refers to a sequence of movement that not only connects body and breath, but also adjoins movements in a flowing manner. *Karma* refers to a kind of ideal sequencing where there is a succession of movements placed together to guide you to greater awareness.

¹⁵² Louis Armstrong, vocal performance of “What a Wonderful World,” by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss, recorded 1967, ABC 10982, HMV.

¹⁵³ Each year the Rainbow Family of Living Light hosts a national gathering on public land free to all who attend, created as a non-commercial event, charging no entry fees into the gathering nor for any service (e.g. food or medicine) provided on-site. Rainbow is a type of leaderless, nonhierarchical organization, arriving at many decisions via consensus in council meetings. Further, Rainbow celebrates a diversity of cultural traditions, spiritual belief systems, and a rich array of political parties and activist stances. By embracing both the individual and the collective, Rainbow is an assembly for all who gather to practice peaceful respect, one of the only rules Rainbow has for gathering.

¹⁵⁴ Alex Grey, “Let Love Draw the Line,” accessed July 10, 2012, <http://alexgrey.com/media/writing/art-psalms/let-love-draw-the-line/>

WAVE ONE – LIVING IN THE FLOW

Communication Energetically Stories Us

We have all, at times, felt the movement of this energy: moments when tears silently well in our eyes with the stirring of overwhelming love; moments when beauty stops us and captures us in wonder; moments when contentment and well-being ooze from our pores; moments when the life force pulses through us like electricity making us vibrant and young; moments when deep wisdom battles light on our unknowing; moments when awareness comes to us in technicolor.¹⁵⁵

Because I fully believe that communication energetically stories us as the above quote illustrates, I want to situate this concept within our larger discussion surrounding the yogic perspective of “living in the flow.” The process of communicating is indeed an energetic one as we engage vibrationally with each other, evoking energy exchanges (intentionally and unintentionally) between us. Much of the energy we expend centers around how we story ourselves in regard to our personal and social identities. Our bodies are central to the stories we tell, inhabit, and experience and what is “felt” between us strongly relates to the e-motions or the energy in motion we cultivate together. These spirals of energy become amplified as we relate, regardless of whether we do so from a space of connection or disconnection.

Drawing boundary lines between us only serves to separate and dehumanize; letting love draw the line, as Alex Grey’s poem suggests, is really a practice of not having lines at all. What would our worlds look like if we began to look at our interactions as an opportunity to see the divine in each other? To embody the spirit of *namaste*, the divine in me bows to the divine in you. By treating each other as sacred beings, we begin to create space for our vulnerability to

each other to emerge. Cultivating vulnerability, then, becomes an everyday peacemaking practice, committing to trying again and again to connect to each other, recognizing that meaning is always fluid and changing and it resides within us, not the world. As such, we have the power to radically shift how we relate to one another. Because each person's world is comprised of differing meanings, we must be willing to meet people where they are, not where we are or want them to be, so we can support spaces of solidarity. In doing so, I am not suggesting you take risks the people you are interacting with do not; instead, like Che Guevara, I believe that "solidarity means running the same risks"¹⁵⁶ or rather - being vulnerable to trying again and again to connect - even in the face of disagreement or misunderstanding. Stated another way,

Solidarity is identifying with one another without feeling like you have to agree on every issue. It's unity, not uniformity. It's listening without rushing to fix the problem. It's going deeper than typical ways of talking and sharing – going down to the place where souls meet and love comes, where separateness drops away...¹⁵⁷

In your daily life, how connected do you feel to the world around you? More and more, I believe “we” need a heightened awareness of our “we-consciousness,” which recognizes the sacredness of lives via our interconnectedness. Once we come to see our selves as part of everything around us, then we can act from this awareness, relating to each other from a space of connection. Sue Monk Kidd describes this beautifully when she states,

For a long time we've lived under the illusion of separateness. We've lived as detached egos, unaware that we're part of a vast fabric of being, a divine and communitarian oneness. Now we're learning from the new sciences that the universe has actually been constructed as We. Everything in creation – oceans, whales, mountains, humans, eagles, roses, giraffes, and viruses – is a dance of subatomic particles. Fields of energy flow and mingle together. They are all stitched into the cosmic quilt, which underlies and gives rise to everything.¹⁵⁸

Yogis have long recognized this interconnection, a central theme in many ancient yoga texts being the recognition of the Self as part of the divine. The purpose of this understanding is to

begin to enlarge our understanding of what is possible within our *we*-ness. In other words, we come to see ourselves as part of something bigger than ourselves. As such, what we know as our “self,” which appears to be bounded by our bodies, skin, names, ideas, dreams, and so on, expands to include a greater “Self,” built on this *interconnection* with the divine.

From a yogic perspective, however, once we come to understand the oneness of all things, separation disappears and we come to see that at the heart of our being, we are connected to everything. As we have previously discussed, much yoga philosophy focuses on the notion that our alienation or sense of separateness arises when we identify with the “me” in my body, which is separate from the world outside of my body, creating a dichotomy of me/you, us/them, in/out. As a result, our “self,” with a small s, is the part of us we form in our interactions, which is never stable but is always ebbing and flowing, making our worlds and shaping our humanity. It is from our “self,” we can ask ourselves each day what is possible. How can our world be different? Starting from this point, we can begin to see the power communication contributes to our humanity, recognizing it as sacred or not, and enabling or destroying life based on our worldviews.

Conversely, our “Self,” in much yogic theory, is the divine fire or *purusha* that burns within us, unchanging in our interactions. Think of the big s “Self” as a seed planted in our hearts and shared amongst all beings. Each being contains that seed, and in so doing, it is what binds us to each other. This inner fire or seed is a manifestation of the divine or something larger than ourselves, connecting us to each other. Thus, when we meet from a perspective of enlarging our *we*-consciousness, we do so knowing we are all part of the same divine pulsation of life - not from the differences made manifest in the “self” that we construct and perform in our daily lives. This distinction is crucial to recognizing the sacredness in each other. *Namaste*. Not only does

the divine in me bow to the divine in you, but *I honor the place in you, in which the entire universe dwells. I honor the place in you, which is love, light, and peace. When you are in that place in you and I am in that place in me, we are one.* By doing so, we “wake up” to a new world. This awakening illuminates our “we” consciousness, carrying us into the flow of life and away from our constructed self-centered realities.

Yoga is a system of knowing, grounded in the spirituality of everyday life, involving the interweaving of spiritual experiences and practices which seek to break down the barriers between what is embodied and transcendent, material and spiritual, sacred and mundane. As Daniel Odier suggests, most people are seeking a spiritual path unopposed to our daily lives – one that integrates and is accessible to our contemporary, cultural contexts.¹⁵⁹ Yoga helps individuals re-weave their lives so they can experience the full flow or sensory awareness life has to offer. In this way, yoga is a philosophy of self-study whence you come to learn your own unique way of being in the world. Because our worlds reflect ourselves, it is imperative that we look at our world to better know ourselves. At the core of this exploration, we must begin to ask ourselves what we are seeking and why we are seeking the things we do.

Yoga is also a system built on energy transformation. In this communication *sutra*, I suggest that communication is energy. We come to see that our lives – breath, movement, and interactions – all flow within an energetic landscape. Within this world of life force energy or *prana*, yoga practitioners come to see we are not separate from the divine - rather, we are a manifestation of it; thus, the energy within us is part of the world around us and vice versa, so we can live in balance with the world around us. In this way, “the mind” is really just another form of energetic activity not bound to your brain or head but to your whole being. In numerous meditation traditions, the goal is to quiet the mind’s chatter so you do not identify with it as this

energetically blocks you from recognizing your “self” as part of the source or “Self.” In other words, it is the space and place where one transcends language and communication - where the sacred fire or *purusha* (also called *atman* or *inner teacher*) burns most brightly, dissolving boundaries and merging with divine consciousness (*samandhi*).

Lunar Pause

I invite you to engage in a brief candle or fire meditation as a way to illuminate your inner fire or *purusha*. Sitting comfortably, gaze at a candle flame with a soft, blurring focus. Try to minimize blinking, bringing your full awareness to the flame itself, breathing naturally. Once you feel complete with this experience, gently close your eyes and visualize the flame in your heart center, creating your *ishta devata* or personal connection with the divine fire of consciousness within you.

Figure 16. *Trataka* “gazing” meditation

From a yogic perspective, you have likely already experienced a wide range of meditative awareness in your life: if you have ever felt a wave of electricity, energy, or tingling in your body; experienced a moment of complete stillness or silence; merged so deeply with an activity or experience that your self of sense disappeared for a moment; engaged fully without distraction with single-pointed focus or awareness of the object, person, or activity; delighted in a state between wakefulness and sleep; or experienced that which involved a sense of connection to something greater than yourself such as being with or being a tree. As such, yoga involves exploring both our inner and outer worlds, and as a philosophy, is radically inclusive and generally non-dogmatic in its approach. At the same time, it does not draw lines between what is inside (my body) and outside (the world). In essence, yoga encourages us not to cut ourselves off from that which makes us human; thus, as Odier suggests, it is neither a process of negation nor transcendence but an opportunity to learn to experience and accept our humanity fully. He also states, “Without the body, we would be nothing. With it, we can be everything.”¹⁶⁰ The key to

better understanding yoga is recognizing that “the universe is the play of our conscience,” and from this divine pulsation or flow, we come to know that “unity is already present within us.”¹⁶¹ Or as Donna Farhi states, “The same forces that move the tides, opens a flower, or creates lightning in a storm animates our bodies. This life force moves the breath, the fluids, and the current flowing through our nerves as well as the inner workings of each and every cell.”¹⁶² It could be stated, then, that yoga helps us meet the life force within us, fully integrating it into our daily lives.

Lunar Pause

Throughout the day, we breathe many thousands of times, which is likened to mantra *hamsa*. Depending on the tradition, the sound *ha* is the sound of our breath as we exhale and *sa* occurs with each inhale. In other instances, teachers reverse this so that *ha* or *haamm* occurs in the inhale and *saaa* on the exhale. For the purpose of this exercise, I believe that both sounds occur with each breath we take. Thus, without even practicing anything specific, we already engage in the mantra *hamsa*. I invite you to bring awareness to the rising and falling of your breath. As you inhale, give a verbal marker (*ham, sa, rising, breathing in*, or perhaps a number). On your exhale, do the same (*ham sa, falling, breathing out*, or a counting). Repeat with each rising inhale and descending exhale for three rounds of breath. This mantra (or sound) meditation cultivates a sense of aliveness, *hamsa*, or “I am.”

Figure 17. *Hamsa* breathing

Moreover, it urges us to find pleasure in the present moment in our presence with the world around us so we might intimately participate in our lives. In this way, yoga is about living within the ceaseless flow and divine tremoring or pulsation known as *spanda*, vibrating around us. By expanding our awareness to this divine pulsation or flow, we immerse ourselves or weave ourselves within the fabric of we-consciousness. Thus, life becomes a question of finding how we resonate or become “in tune” with everything around us, creating a path of liberation grounded in the ordinariness of everyday life, or our unfolding presence within each passing moment. Yoga, thus, is a practice aimed at embodying and surrendering to the divine flow of

consciousness within all beings. This pulsation flows with each rising inhale and falling exhale, with the beat of our heart, and with the cycles of life (day/night, winter/summer, fall/spring, sun/moon, birth/death).¹⁶³ From this view, what makes us individually unique is how this divine consciousness or *spanda* vibrates in and as us.

Yogic philosophy looks at the “self,” much like a *matryoshka* or Russian doll, each containing layers upon layers, or as Walt Whitman proclaims, “I am large, I contain multitudes.”¹⁶⁴ These multitudes refer to a type of transcendence of our limited or conditioned notions of our-*self* and its identities (that with which we identify) to cultivate a practice and path of unification with the *source* of all life. Starting from our physical bodies, yoga considers five energetic “sheaths” or *koshas*, which surround this divine source within (and without) us. As such, each *kosha* is a layer of consciousness or awareness of our own and others’ divinity.

In the first layer, or *annamaya kosha*, we encounter the gross, physical body or our “food body,” which we know as our “body.” This outermost sheath includes our skin, tissues, bones, fluid and all that nourishes us as *anna* is often translated as food or grain. It is through our *annamaya kosha* that we experience our senses as well as the physical benefits of *hatha yoga* practices. Through daily self-care, we can keep this sheath nourished, strong, and healthy via exercise, diet/nutrition, sleep, and other practices. Additionally, in our body layer, our identity becomes defined by our physicality. With this layer, we identify with the “I am” statements based in the experience of dualities and comparisons such as beautiful/ugly, young/old, thin/fat, among many other variations based on our self-perception and social locations. In this way, identifying with the surface obscures the other layers. When our *annamaya kosha* is out of balance, it is more difficult to perceive the other more subtle *koshas*. As Christopher Wallis presents,

regarding these layers, “The body is the only layer of the self where *all* the layers can be experienced simultaneously,” which is why this layer is so important in yogic philosophy.¹⁶⁵

The next layer, *pranayama kosha*, is the beginning of our more subtle energy field or layer, and refers to our “breath” or prana-based energy body. While we have previously discussed *prana*, it is worth mentioning again that prana not only refers to the breath but also to the divine pulsation and vibration of life itself. In this manner, prana is what breathes us and animates all beings. Thus, this is a layer we share with all beings as it the vital force that animates our aliveness and is intimately connected to the breath. The *pranic* layer is an important mediator between our physical body (*annamaya kosha*) and the mind-heart (*citta*), which is why *pranayama* (breathing practices) are so powerful in bringing these two layers into tune. When we identify with *prana*, we do so with statements about our energy, especially in regard to sleeping patterns, eating, exercise and activity, and experiences of stress. Thus, this layer is a powerful indicator of our energetic state, directly related to the “vibes” we receive, transmit, and evoke. Movements of *prana* are often broken down into five varieties or *vayus* (wind), including: *prana-vayu*, *apana-vayu*, *samana-vayu*, *udana-vayu*, and *vyana-vayu*.

Prana-vayu is an upward rising energy; *apana-vayu* is a downward rooting energy; *samana-viyu* is linked to the core and brings the in and out-breath to one’s center and is considered an equalizing force; *udana-viyu* rises and moves outward and can be likened to sneezing and speech; and, finally, *vyana-vayu* expands in all directions in the body. Not only do we experience these flows of *prana*, but also a continuously renewing merging of polarities (sun and moon, *siva-shakti*, sympathetic and parasympathetic energy), which can be experienced by engaging with the following lunar pause.

Lunar Pause

I invite you to close your eyes and visualize your entire inhalation as entering through your left nostril and fully visualizing your exhalation as exiting through your right nostril. Next, visualize your full inhalation as entering through your right nostril and exiting through your left. Now practice this with two more rounds of breath. If you are working to calm your energy, I encourage you to extend your exhale (breathing in for 3 counts and exhaling for 6 or whatever is most comfortable). This practice bridges polarities in the body by balancing and calming your energy.

Figure 18. *Nadi shodhana*

These movements of *prana* can be seen in the way we carry our bodies and express our energy. For example, slumping or curving the spine expresses contraction towards the center or too much *samana* energy. To balance *samana*, in this case, one needs *vyana* to straighten the spine and expand the chest to counter and balance this energy, creating space for openness. Too much *vyana* energy, however, over expands the chest, creating a kind of “what the fuck?” stance, wherein you approach the world wondering “why does this keep happening to me?” Thus, in all of these examples, the goal is to find a balance among the *vayus*, which can be practiced and fully experienced in the *asana – tadasana* or mountain pose, presented earlier in this text. In regard to our *pranic* layer, based on the *vayus*, I hope it is becoming more clear that daily practices that disrupt and weaken this layer of self include: holding the breath, multitasking, irregular rhythms of sleep, food, rest, and activity, excess or overdoing (work, school, etc.), as well as words and actions that are not in alignment.

Manomaya kosha, the third layer, refers to the mind or *mana* and is a sheath that processes our energy in motion or e-motions within our heart-mind or *citta* and is consciousness expressed through words and actions and is identified with “I” statements related to e-motions. The “mind” in this view is more related to our heart than our head. Our heart-mind vibrates much more quickly than our physical body; thus, it is much easier to become identified with this realm

of energy as it forms the basis for how we create, maintain, and understand our reality. In yoga philosophy, both of these layers represent sources of awareness that contribute to but do not define the whole of our being. This *kosha*, with the help of prana, organizes the functions of our bodies and mind as well as our senses. Most of all, this layer relates to what we know of as our “self,” containing all of our patterns, identities, preferences, prejudices, and other forms of social conditioning.

Conversely, the next sheath, *vijnanamaya kosha*, is the seat of our deeper awareness or consciousness, which exists beyond our sensory perception. While most people do not identify with this layer, it is possible via yoga and meditation to move into this flow of nothingness, not identifying with our mind or body. Because yoga practitioners move to realize the divine in all layers of being, the final layer or core of our conscious awareness is the most difficult to realize and perceive because it is the root of perception and all non-dual knowing. This sheath, *anandamaya kosha*, also called our “bliss sheath,” is a state of bliss that extends beyond our awareness of our mind as a place of stillness and silence, wherein we dissolve the boundaries between ourselves and divine consciousness. As Wallis states,

It is all-embracing, present in all forms of awareness, including even the most contracted forms of self-identification with any of the previous layers. Because this core consciousness is by definition simultaneously transcendent and imminent, when you are identified with it, we can experience any state as divine, not just the ones that are radically elevated from our ordinary experience.¹⁶⁶

Wallis defines the divine as an “autonomous blissful awareness,” which has both transcendent (*siva*) and imminent (*shakti*) aspects. In other words, we are the point the universe is trying to make, as Douglas Brooks contends.¹⁶⁷ This interweaving of divine consciousness (*Siva*) and flowing energy (*Shakti*) form the wave-like pulsation or *spanda* of the entire universe, which

flows with the tides, breath, pulse, and energy as embodiments of divinity made manifest in our daily lives.

Initially, I had great difficulty separating my understanding of the yogic Self and the conditioned or communicative “self,” which I believe is constituted in our daily interactions and is an always relational, ever-changing, fluid dynamic. When I encountered the yogic notion of the Self, or that which is contained within and connected to the divine, I experienced a great deal of tension because I saw this as running counter to my beliefs about the nature of the self and reality as socially constructed. In many ways, the yogic notion of self seemed too related to philosophies that fix the self as a stable, individual being, who conceals or reveals aspects of the self in interactions. What I have come to learn over the course of my own *sadhana* (spiritual practice) is that constitutive approaches to communication and yogic philosophies actually complement each other in ways I had not previously imagined. I now see my communicative self – the sum total of all of my interactions, always imagined and made relationally - as that which makes me uniquely me. This self is my layered, conditioned, learned, and performed self that separates me from others and identifies with my body, my breath, my thoughts, and my emotions. It is the self that I make daily through my words, actions, relationships, and choices. My communicative self is mediated by my breath or *prana* - both in how I breathe in and out information about who I am and who others are in relationship to me. Thus, when I die, so does this part of me. This self utilizes all aspects of the yogic “mind” – *manas* (sensory perception); *ahamkara* (self-image or “I”-identity);¹⁶⁸ *citta* (memory); and *buddhi* (discernment)- in addition to the interplay among the *koshas* (body, prana, and mind).

In order to better examine this yogic notion, I want to address my understanding of the self/Self as well as the role of the “mind” within yoga in relationship to its importance for

communication studies. Drawing on Swami Rama's description of the "four functions of the mind," I shall discuss the relationship among the following: *manas*, *ahamkara*, *citta*, and *buddhi*.¹⁶⁹ In this case, *manas* is positioned as our "lower mind," or that which reacts to the surrounding world via our sensory impressions. It is our organizer of perception, selecting and filtering information from our surroundings. For instance, if you hear a siren blaring, you immediately begin to filter this information and name this sound to determine where it is coming from and what its relationship is to you and the moment.

Next, *ahamkara* refers to our sense of "I" or individual self (as separate from others). It is our unique identity that not only orients us in time and space, but also helps us navigate our sense of preference and preserve our self-image. In other words, it is our "I-maker," which stories our changing identities as we move through our lives. It is here that we "see" ourselves as different from others and uniquely us. *Ahamkara* establishes categories and crafts difference and is socially constructed through our communication and language. When *ahamkara* is constructed as porous, the focus of communication is on what is unfolding between us as our interactions occur. When it is constructed as "fixed," as in most psychological discourse, the self becomes bounded to a state of individualism (and our relational interconnection becomes obscured).

Our *citta* serves as our memory, or well, that stores our previous experiences and impressions. It is a storehouse of information that guides our daily choices, based on our past and present experiences. Within our *citta*, we recycle and loop familiar stories, maintain patterns of interaction, and engage in habitual modes of being built from these impressions. Finally, *buddhi* is considered our "higher mind" and doorway to wisdom. Our *buddhi* is the ultimate decider, or "context maker," which judges, discriminates, and differentiates between and among our courses of action. *Buddhi* takes in all of the information and shapes our life direction. It frames how we

see and experience the world, receiving input from *manas*, *citta*, and *ahamkara*. To “wake-up” to these functions of the “mind” requires us to engage in a process of continuous evaluation of our “frames” for viewing ourselves and each other. Thus, through yoga, we can unlearn and retrain ourselves via developing our *buddhi* via practices of keen discernment of each moment as it unfolds.

In regard to beliefs, dogmatism is all too common in systems of meaning and knowledge, even yoga, which is why a yogic approach to living in the flow aims to redirect us towards finding wonder and awe in the mystery of life - not in rigid belief systems. Embracing uncertainty and ambiguity is an uncomfortable endeavor for many. The push and pull of being inside a system that provides answers (What is the meaning of life? What happens when we die?) brings a certain level of comfort and security, which makes the unknowable known. Falling into various traps or being entrapped in systems of knowing is beautifully explained by Gabriel Stolzenberg as a process wherein by acts of acceptance, an individual enters a system and learns to “think” like a member of that system, which thereby confers conventions of knowing through present tense talk about the “truth or falsity of unproven statements.”¹⁷⁰ In other words,

To sum up, a belief system is a system in which all acts of observation and judgment are made solely from within and in which all other considerations are subordinated to the maintenance of the system itself. When an outside observer is in a position to see that such a system contains incorrect belief and also that no proof of its incorrectness can be given on the terms of the system itself, then he is in a position to say that this system has become a trap. In such a situation, the outside observer will see those within as being dogmatic while those on the inside will see the observer as someone who refuses to accept what is ‘obviously so’. And, in fact, both will be right.¹⁷¹

Instead of reflecting on how we come to know what we know, as Stolzenberg suggests, the individual then treats this knowing as “evidence of certain inherent limitations to human understanding.” It is through these “acts of acceptance” that these beliefs become fantasies and illusions, orienting our everyday realities, including language and interaction. Thus, at the core of

this inquiry is questioning and challenging your own beliefs to understand the “acts of acceptance” you may be engaging in on a daily basis. By doing so, you are better able to discern what is harmful or helpful to you.

To understand the yogic idea of the “mind,” one must first be able to observe or watch its functioning via our words and action and also to be able to simultaneously witness who is doing the observing. To do so is to coordinate the functioning of these various parts of the whole, linked by our breath and prana to the center of our consciousness or Self, which is the source from which all consciousness flows. To look at communication from a yogic perspective involves asking ourselves how our communication practices change our everyday lives. In doing so, it also asks us to gradually begin to integrate yoga into our processes to move away from automatism towards compassionate attentiveness or awareness of how we contribute to creating a more peaceful world. Experiencing the world through the eyes of a child is one way to enter a deeper resonance with this vibration or *spanda*. In regard to our self/Self, yoga teaches that an object (something that can be known) and subject (the knower) are both facets of the same interconnectedness expressed in our interactions. Key to this understanding is the role of self-reflection and awareness (*svadhyaya*) as it illuminates our ability to “see” ourselves in each other and vice versa, thereby expanding our “i-identity.” In this way, the “I am” statements we make about the membership categories to which we belong begin to fade into the flow of life. Or, as Michael Stone queries, “If my body is made primarily of water and animated by the breath, is it possible to call the water in my body ‘mine’ and the air outside of my lungs ‘the world’?”¹⁷² He further states, “If we *are* our own lives – expressions of the natural world breathing itself- there is no need to think of transcendence as taking us anywhere other than here.”¹⁷³ In other words, there is nowhere else to go so being here, now, in this moment - is our home.

Conversely, what I have come to know about my larger yogic Self is that which binds me to the world around me. I visualize this Self as an inner fire that burns brightly in my heart. It is the energy I radiate when I feel loved, connected, and part of a greater whole. It does not change in the way my communicative self does but burns more brightly or dimly depending on how I acknowledge its presence. Thus, this Self is divinity manifested and intimately connected with the flow and pulse of life. However, I can only know this Self when I am able to bear witness to my communicative self, observing what I believe about my life, reality, and world. In this manner, I am both the observer and the observed, the teacher and the student, the divine and the devoted. On a daily basis, these selves collide only when I am fully present, not focusing on the past or future, nor seeking to separate, categorize, label, or exclude. The yogic Self is what binds us to each other. It moves beyond the seer and the seen to a state of oneness, wherein *purusha* is known and divisions between myself and the divine completely dissolve. Thus, once you harness the ability to see the “mind” or how we perceive, remember, separate, and decide, you are resting in *buddhi*, or the communicative self. For example, imagine someone you find bothersome or irritating. Instead of viewing them through the parts that annoy you, consider looking at the divinity within them – or the fire of connection that we all might share. What then? How do you see them now? What if your story depended on theirs? How would this change your view of them? Only when you become no longer you and rest in silence or stillness, which is completely void of any notion of “you,” then you have entered *purusha*.

I stated early on that yoga pushes back and helps us unlearn all that we know about ourselves, in that yoga reverses the flow, transforming our ability to rebuild a sense of self that is sustainable via the following steps: 1. Calming our *manas*, or reactive mind, so we become a master of our own reactions; 2. Dissolving *ahamkara* by not taking our-“self” too seriously,

recognizing our relatedness and bringing awareness to that which we identify with and as; 3. Unlearning our *citta* as a tool to deactivate and reprogram our habitual patterns by learning to forgive, letting go, and exploring the boundaries of our hearts via love and compassion; and, finally, 4. Strengthening our *buddhi*, or our courage of conviction, wherein we understand the differences among the types of decisions we make, such as those based on immediate gratification, collective or socially-based rules and norms, and those based on our connection to our *purusha*. Thus, through yogic self-study, we can come to truly “see” ourselves, first by *practicing* the yamas and niyamas, and then by slowly integrating yogic micropractices into our daily lives. By doing so, we begin to cultivate an awareness grounded in single-pointed attention or *dharana*, which serves as a doorway towards deeper states of meditation, or *dhyana*, and ultimately, *samandi*, or a state of integration and silence/stillness, existing outside of the fluctuations of our “minds.”

To be clear, what I am suggesting, in regard to our embodied experience, involves tuning into and bringing awareness to your communicative self and the many images and layers which shape how you culturally, historically, and contextually construct your everyday realities or worlds. I am also asking you to be open to experiencing your yogic Self or *purusha* (inner fire connected to divine consciousness) in your daily life by surrendering to the sensations of the divine pulse or *spanda*, consciously returning to your breath, pulse, places of tension, and embodied sensations, such as feeling your feet on the ground when you walk. If you start from the notion that you are the point the universe is trying to make, then it is easier to bring divine consciousness into your daily encounters via your communicative self. Viewing each being you encounter as also sharing this divine, inner fire or Self binds them to you, creating a space of

shared vulnerability between you. Breathing life into these in-between spaces has the ability to make this fire of interconnectedness burn more brightly.

Thus, when you find a home in your breath, or the *pranic* layer, you enter into resonance with the world around you, feeling the world in you – as you - “By entering into profound communication with the reality of your life as it is.”¹⁷⁴ In this state, you awaken from autopilot mode into an experience of awareness where a great deal of pleasure emerges from being present. Thus, all at once, within and beyond your body, you become the divine, the temple, and the worshipper, as Odier suggests.¹⁷⁵ This meditative awareness, cultivated by “waking up” to the world, creates an experience of calm so we can give our full attention to exploring a range of experiences as we sit, walk, stand, and move together. Allowing yourself to experience life as it unfolds is yoga, or as Krishnamurti contends, “When you learn about yourself, watch yourself, watch the way you walk, how you eat, what you say, the gossip, the hate, the jealousy – if you are aware of that in yourself, without any choice, that is part of meditation,” further querying, “Can you be negative and still passionately alive,” living life without wanting or seeking and acting honestly in accord with your own principles?¹⁷⁶

We have previously discussed the idea that we are born into a world of meaning and that we are taught the nature of reality through various belief systems, languages, cultures, and histories. What Wade Davis calls the *ethnosphere* is the dream of our planet – a manifestation of everything as divinely interconnected. In this world, we are taught to dream, speak, act, and move through our lives. We create elaborate systems of reward and punishment to keep people within certain dreams, insomuch that, “We make a mistake, we judge ourselves, we find ourselves guilty, and we punish ourselves. If justice exists, then that was enough; we don’t need to do it again, but every time we remember, we judge ourselves again, we are guilty again, and

we punish ourselves again, and again, and again.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, all that we have come to know about ourselves is a product of our particular moment in history, shaped by our culture and positionality within these communicatively constructed realities. By looking at our “mind” as a product of every conversation and relationship in which we have ever been a part, we can more easily see that who we are is primarily shaped by other people. This, in turn, shapes how we feel, what we believe, and how we act.

As Odier further states, “You are what you seek” in life.¹⁷⁸ The more we can connect with the divine pulsation of life that unites us, by finding our own paths to what we consider divine or sacred in life, unity is already present within us. He continues, “Everything starts by the examination of what is – that is, our trouble, our difficulty, in perceiving all things in the moment. Presence to agitation is the opening toward peacefulness. We never try to change, to adopt a new way of behaving; instead, we try only to allow our awareness to descend toward what is really happening within us.”¹⁷⁹ Opening to this presence encourages us to continue to ask ourselves: *What are we most passionate about? What do we desire, really? What is our life purpose?* The answers to these questions evolve as we move through our lives; however, I encourage you to begin to fully explore how the present moment unfolds in your life, experiencing the ordinariness of everything as well as the extraordinariness of the world around you. It is here that we see communication and community intersect in the coming *unity* that emerges from expanding our circle of compassion so our relationships become our spirituality – our connection – our sustainable ways of belonging to one another.

When we instead come home to our path, we come home to *what is*. You are where you are. So be there. Stop trying to protect yourself from the harshness of right now, fleeing into a long fabrication about how it’s going to be one day. That’s avoiding the here and now truth of our lives.¹⁸⁰

Embracing the here and now – in all of its loveliness and suffering - is *yoga*. By embracing *yoga*, as a communicative stance, you can begin to create a communication model that *models* personal and social transformation via tolerance, love, benevolence, and nonviolence, understanding that what happens in your life affects others’ lives. I view a *yogic* stance as not only better illuminating radical relatedness or our communicative unity, but it also helps us to embrace the vast part of ourselves that stems from learning to fall in love with ourselves either again or for the first time. Only from here, can we open ourselves to love others.

Lunar Pause

Write yourself a love letter, telling yourself (either your past to present or present to future) what you love most about who you are. With words, practice falling in love with yourself. Next, list ten things you feel you need from others to feel loved in one column and then ten things or ways you show love to others in another. Finally, write up to ten things that capture what the absence of love feels like for you and up to ten ways you could be more loving in your life.

Figure 19. Love letter to self

Thus, each day I hope to better understand how I can communicate in a way that helps at least one person suffer less. In other words, I must consider how to become a more compassionate, peaceful, and nonviolent communicator, making this a lifelong, everyday practice. To practice *communication as yoga* is to recognize how our *interactions* impact others. Thus, we can begin to seek communication spaces that celebrate relationality, recognize embodiment, embrace and explore contemplative practices, acknowledge the sacred, inspire play and wonder, create opportunities for social change, while supporting multiple identities and shifting contexts.

Lunar Pause

To start practicing communication as yoga in your daily life, consider incorporating the following into your experience:

Devote time each day to self-care or kindness to yourself by resting, eating well, or finding a pleasurable balance.

Reflect on a moment when you were treated unkindly by someone, considering the consequences of this for you (and them) and then reflect on a time when you have done the same to someone.

In your next interaction, give your full attention and presence by listening and supporting versus intervening or helping.

The next time you are out, devote a kind moment of attention to a stranger by imagining what they are experiencing in their day or life.

Before your next meal, take a moment and pause to reflect on all of the beings involved in providing this nourishment to you.

Practice *yoga* by being the being you wish to meet, offering a generosity of your spirit through smiling, well-wishing, or engaging in any small act of kindness within the moment.

The next time you encounter conflict, ask yourself: what does this moment or person need from me right now?

Figure 20. Practicing communication *as yoga*

To better expand our discussions surrounding yoga and compassion in our every day lives, as well as the role *communication as yoga* plays in shifting our interaction patterns from a “me-first” stance to a “we-first” stance, I turn to John Shotter’s work on social poetics - a process of understanding how people do things together, even when they have very different interests and live in differing worlds, so they can come together as a community to create a shared social world built on mutual benefit. This concept is highly relevant to our discussions about cultivating compassion and recognizing diversity as processes of communication. Shotter contends we live and are embedded in a ceaseless flow of what he calls “relationally-responsive activity,” which occurs between us and the others around us. He describes this in-depth as follows:

As soon as I begin an interchange of looks with another person, and I sense them as looking toward me in a certain way (as they see me looking toward them in a particular way too), a little ethical and political world is created between us. We look toward each other expectantly, *with anticipations*, some shared some not, arising from what we have already lived through so far in our lives with all the others around us. Indeed, to put the point more generally, in any living contact between any two or more human beings, in the *meetings* between us, at least two things of importance occur: (1) Yet another form of life emerges between us, a collective or shared form of life with *its own unique character* and *its own unique world*, in whose terms, for the duration of our meeting, we can *mean* things to each other. But also, within this world, (2) we are 'present' to each other *as who are*, at least to a minimal extent, we can 'see into' each others 'inner lives' - hence, if it is a stranger with whom we have become involved, we quickly look away again, lest we reveal too much of ourselves unnecessarily.¹⁸¹

In other words, in this stream of life, we participate in this spontaneously responsive flow of communication, which creates a sort of “third realm” or world. This space between us happens as soon as we respond to someone or when someone responds to us, creating an interaction built wholly from the parties involved. Thus, our actions and responses are shaped by each other’s; as a result, we create a complex mixing zone between us, which he refers to as dialogical spaces, containing the invisible whole of our un-separated multiplicity. You might notice how this relates to yoga philosophy as a practice and process of interweaving or flowing with our experiences of our world. In this space between us, we meet at the boundary between our own consciousness and someone else’s, insomuch that this intermingling, as Shotter would say, creates a space of possibility in which all can participate and in which all are a part. These moments, or third realm activities, where we encounter each other, occur as our responses and senses get mixed together in a unique and new manner.

When we enter each other’s worlds, in these energetic mixing zones, we create momentary relational encounters, which call on us to navigate the boundaries between us so we can create a shared sense of space.

Ethically, then, if we and our interlocutors are to communicate readily and easily, we must all rely on each other to sustain the sense of a collective-we, a shared reality between us and around us, that is *our* reality. For, it is only within such an intimately shared reality that we cannot only express to each other *who* we are, the nature of our unique 'inner lives' to each other. But, to go further, it is only within such richly textured realities that we can sense ourselves as *free agents* in our intra-actions, and not feel 'dictated' by the others around us in what we say and do. For, it is just *in the gaps* they offer us, in between their talk and our responses to it, that we can have the opportunity to act completely in terms of our own judgments and skills, to adjust our actions as we perform them to fit *our* sense of *our* circumstances.¹⁸²

As we move through our day, we often take for granted the many ways we spontaneously respond to each other, based on our shared, familiar ways of communicating within our given cultural and historical contexts. By attending to that which we take for granted in these communicative *interactions*, we can start to shift our awareness towards how our words, gestures, and emotions (energy in motion), move us to see, sense, act, and relate to each other in particular ways. Understanding the social poetics of how we connect and relate is really a process of coming to notice or observe ourselves flowing within the flow of our experience. In doing so, we pause, look, listen, observe, and work to shine light on the small, everyday details or aspects of our interactions that most often go unnoticed. It is this reactional, relational nature of our social practices that occurs in the momentary gaps between people as they respond to each other. As Shotter suggests, "Besides responding to spontaneously occurring events in our surroundings, we can be 'called' to respond in new ways by events that we find re-markable-events presented to us by others. One could say we are called to account, to acknowledge what matters to them (and to us)."¹⁸³ This occurs in an embodied manner. We are always acting in a world of others' actions; therefore, our actions will always ever be shaped by the world around us. Because we are constantly called to respond intelligibly to one another, we learn to respond in a bodily way that requires little effort.

Lunar Pause

In this exercise, I invite you to bring awareness to your senses by observing your sensory field. To start, find a comfortable body position and gently become aware of your breath. Do not try to change the flow of your breath, just observe yourself breathing for 1-2 breaths. Closing your eyes or employing a soft, relaxed blurry focus, notice what you “see,” saying to yourself, “I *see* and then name the image. Repeat this until you feel complete and then move on to what you are hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, to sensations of movement, balance, or breath. In each instance, verbalize your experience by stating, “I hear [insert sound],” “I smell [insert smell],” and so on.

Figure 21. Making “sense” of your experience

Because yoga practice is grounded in the body, we must also consider the role the body plays in creating difference and separation in our interactions. The human body in all of its variations is a source of much scrutiny and awe, which occupies what Mike Featherstone refers to as its “double character”: “we are a body and we have a body; we see and are seen: our body is the platform from which we see the world and also an object in that world which is seen by others.”¹⁸⁴ The consideration of how bodies are experienced, theorized, disciplined, and classified as material, symbolic, social, and political is a common theme in social science research. As Anthony Synnott suggests,

Bodies may be caressed or indeed killed, they may be loved or hated, and thought beautiful or ugly, sacred or profane. Ideas about what the body is, what it means, its moral value and the values of its constituent parts, the limits of the body, its social utility and symbolic value, in sum, how the body is defined both physically and socially, vary widely from person to person, and have changed dramatically over time. The one word, body, may therefore signify very different realities and perceptions of reality.¹⁸⁵

How do we come to understand and know our bodies? What does it mean to have, be, or live in one's body? To engage in embodied communication? These are not easy questions to answer, and even if it were possible, the answers would vary from the individual to the collective and

from culture to sub-culture, as well as within the historically situated moment the questions were posed.

Lunar Pause

Finding a comfortable seat or lying down, gently close your eyes, and begin to awaken to various parts of your body. Do not concentrate your focus, just visit each aspect of yourself for a second, observing and feeling and then moving on to the next area. While you can start anywhere, I suggest the following sequence: lips, upper teeth, lower teeth, tongue, tip of nose, nose, right cheek, left cheek, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, right eye, left eye, whole forehead, right ear, left ear, and chin. Moving awareness down the right side of your body, starting with the right: throat, shoulder, underarm, upper arm, elbow, lower arm, wrist, outer hand, palm, thumb, index finger, middle finger, ring finger, little finger, ribs, waist, hips, groin, upper leg, knee, lower leg, ankle, top of foot, heel, bottom of foot, and each toe. Now, repeat this sequence on the other side.

Once complete, move your awareness to your chest, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, both legs, whole trunk, both arms, and head. Do the same with your back body, gently becoming aware of your whole body. When complete, imagine you are very heavy, almost melting into the ground. Notice all of your points of contact (head, back, hips, lower leg) with the floor. Next, imagine the space between you and the ground, allowing yourself to feel extremely light as if almost floating. Returning to the space between floating and being extremely heavy, imagine your body is extremely cold and feel this coldness. Next, imagine your body is extremely hot - like a fire burning throughout your whole system. Gently reintroduce subtle movement, returning to awareness of your breath.

Figure 22. Embodied awareness

How we come to know our bodies is informed through sensory experience and perception and can be considered a form of “embodied consciousness” that vacillates between the “twin roles of the active agent of perception and the passive object of perception by others.”¹⁸⁶ In the practice of yoga, how a person inhabits the body is of primary importance. Thus, I turn to Marcel Mauss's concept of *body techniques*, simplistically defined as the ways in which people “know how to use their bodies.”¹⁸⁷ This focus on body techniques is intended to explore the “embodiment of action,” or rather, “purposive human activity.” Each society has different ideals surrounding the modification and maintenance of the body, played out in everyday practices through a variety of *body techniques*, rooted in our perceptions of the world and in our relation to others.

Lunar Pause

Take a moment and consider all of the things you “know” how to do without necessarily being able to explain the steps. Throughout your day, you engage in a wide range of these experiences such as driving a car, going shopping, and cooking as well as “knowing” what modes of interaction are considered socially acceptable at work, school, home, or at special events like weddings, funerals, or parties. In all of these examples, for the most part, social life flows smoothly because we have shared frames of knowing regarding our everyday social scripts. As such, we have learned to do routine things together without needing constant instructions about how to move through our day. Thus, we operate with all kinds of spoken and unspoken rules (e.g. most people do not jump on a restaurant table and squawk like a chicken, nor do most students come to the front of a classroom and take over teaching). Issues of intelligibility and conflict may arise when these rules are unclear or when people disregard or disagree with them.

For example, imagine that you are explaining how to buy a book at a store to a visitor to this planet. First you have to explain what a *book* and a *store* is and then you would have to provide detailed information about what it means to *buy* and what types of currency and processes are involved. Then you would have to narrow which book and where, giving directions and explaining various modes of transportation and retail establishments. You would also want to include instructions about getting there, entering the store, finding the book in the store, where purchases happen, and about leaving the store. More so, what to do with the book once it is acquired. Now, you are dealing with an ever-growing list of instructions. Or imagine trying to explain all of the seemingly simple and mundane tasks such as this that you do in a day, week, month, or year’s time. Likewise, regarding how we interact with others, over time we have learned thousands (if not more) of cues of interaction, which is why it is so imperative to start paying attention to how people respond and coordinate their actions and words. It is equally important that we start to deconstruct the various modes of autopilot in which we regularly engage so we can see ourselves in the moment as it unfolds. Being able to do so creates space for considering the other person’s perspective so we might cultivate greater empathy (feeling *with*). Therefore, living in the flow is a type of awareness not only to yourself but to how interactions unfold socially.

Figure 23. Embodied knowing

If we start from the notion that our bodies are always present, even though they may sometimes disappear from our awareness, it is still important to realize that, "My experience is embodied but it is *not an experience of my body*. It is an embodied experience of the world around me. And for the world to be perceived by me it is necessary that my body, as a site of experience, sinks into the background and does not become the object of its own experience."¹⁸⁸ Thus, the body as the subject of experience, sensation, and perception of the world is an

"instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated."¹⁸⁹

Thus, one is paying attention *with* one's body. Understanding the role of the sensation and perception and how this contributes to a person's bodily awareness in relation to each other will further shape our understandings of our interactions.

Lunar Pause

I invite you to experience the sensation of touching and being touched through *anjali mudra*, by bringing your hands together at your heart, palms pressing a gesture of devotion or gratitude. Gently soften or close your eyes, directing your attention to your hands. As you feel the surface of your palms and fingertips touching, ask yourself: Which hand is touching and which hand is being touched, exploring the dynamic interplay between sensing and being sensed, touching and being touched.

Next, vigorously rub your hands together creating heat or warmth and gently separate them about an inch apart and observe the sensation. Do you feel heat? Tingling? Something else? As you tune into the sensation between your hands, explore the push and pull sensation without touching that occurs as your hands move in relation to each other. Play with this by compressing and expanding the air between your hands like you are molding clay, changing its size, texture, and shape. You may notice a great deal of sensation between your hands or none at all. Either way, I invite you to come back to this experience again with a spirit of curiosity and exploration to see what you might discover.

Figure 24. Touching and being touched

This experience of sensing and being sensed, touching and being touched, collapses subject and object positions of the body. The dual nature of being a body and having a body further illustrates the subject – object reversibility of the body; it could easily be said that our experience of our bodies and the world begins in our everyday activities and social interactions. It is through these inter-experiences and the relationships that result from the co-mingling of my experiences of myself and my relation to others, that, "How we act in situations affects our conscious experience of them, thus further affecting our subsequent actions. And body

techniques, which structure the way we act, thus play a crucial role in rendering the world meaningful for us."¹⁹⁰

Mauss describes the body as the "original tool with which with human beings shape their world, and the original substance of which the world is shaped,"; evidenced by the growing popularity of the more fitness-based yoga in American culture, we can see that more and more, the body has become a "project" worked on and created as part of an individual's self-identity.¹⁹¹ By engaging in a variety of body projects or self-care regimes like much of the West's approach to postural yoga focusing solely on *asana*, individuals are constantly evaluating their appearance and state of bodily health. Thus, a plethora of products and services, especially in the realm of exercise or fitness, are available to help people achieve the desired bodily state. This investment in the body becomes a form of self-expression in which ideals are engaged to create and maintain an individual's body image.

I am reminded of Cooley's notion of the *looking-glass self*, the process articulated as developing our self-concept by imagining our appearance in the perception of another person. By conceiving of others' judgment of our appearance, our body image is created and influences the body-related projects in which we engage.¹⁹² In this instance, I am using the term *appearance* to describe the way an individual sees his/her body, the sense of being a body, and how the person comes to think and talk about his or her body. If we explore body image as being a synonymous concept with my definition of appearance, then it becomes quite clear that appearance and body image are relational constructs. The term *body image* can be defined in a multiplicity of ways; however, it often is related to perception of one's attractiveness, body size, body boundaries, or bodily sensations. This understanding cannot be separated from the cultural or social influences,

and though it is open to change with new information, often remains fixed within dominant body ideals and norms.

How best can we practice this compassionate awareness in our daily lives? We must first start with the idea that we have the potential to learn from every interaction and conversation that we experience. If, at the heart of our interactions, we are truly seeking to connect with another being, then we must shift our “me-first” patterns of interacting so they will become “we-first.” At the core of this endeavor is yoga, which helps us move out of automated ways of engaging so we can communicate in the space-between us, or rather, the dynamic energetic mixing zone of interdependence.¹⁹³ Susan Gillis Chapman, author of *Mindful Communication*, suggests that “me-first” thinking is “supported by a culture of mistrust, the message that it is not safe to be vulnerable. We unintentionally communicate these fears to each other in our conversations by not paying attention to the impact our words and gestures have on each other.”¹⁹⁴

Employing the metaphor of a traffic light, she contends we can begin to unlearn and call attention to our communication patterns so we can come to see people as they are versus how we are. In doing so, relationships become a path of self-discovery as we gradually shed old, familiar habits moving towards enhanced ease that comes from really listening to ourselves, others, and the world around us. If we think of our communication patterns as a traffic light, then it is perhaps easy to see that the red light means “stop,” suggesting that when this light comes on, our communication closes down. In closing down, red light communication exists on the “me-first” spectrum as we move away from connection towards self-protection, often ignoring the impact our words and actions have on others.

Conversely, the green light symbolizes “go” and relates to our ability to remain open so that communication slows between us, highlighting the “we-first” nature of our interaction.

Moreover, the green light suggests that we are present and able to pay attention, empathize with others, and to be open and curious in our interactions. When the yellow light flashes, we must proceed with caution as yellow exists in the spectrum between red and green, “me-first” and “we-first”; therefore, working with the yellow light is the most important part of shifting our communication patterns. As Chapman suggests, often the yellow light comes on just before turning red, or in other words, just before communication shuts down. The yellow light is the space where we are caught off guard, become irritated or disappointed, or when fears or doubt arises between us, whereas the red light comes on when one person is no longer listening or is no longer open to moving the conversation forward.

Take a moment and reflect on a conversation you have engaged in today. In reviewing the interaction, can you apply the traffic light metaphor to this conversation? If not, think of the last conversation you experienced where you or the person you were talking with shut down. How did you respond? How did they respond? Next, consider the last conversation you had where the green light was on and the conversation flowed smoothly and openly between you. By observing ourselves in this manner, we can begin to see how we open and close ourselves to others in small ways. The goal is to tune into the yellow light so we can take a closer look at how we react or respond in the face of uncertainty. In other words, how do we breathe when life takes our breath away? What causes us to shut down or stay open in the face of difference or disagreement? At its core, recognizing this idea helps us to identify with the relationship versus our individuality, also moving us away from mindlessness to a space of mindfulness. In this way, we act to ease suffering versus creating it in our interactions.

Chapman offers five keys to help us stop when the light turns red to refrain from harming others: exercise caution when the light turns yellow so we can learn about ourselves and our reactions and meet in a space where the green light can bring us closer together. She contends that the five keys involve mindful presence, which tunes us into a new flow. Mindful presence is about paying attention to our body and how we communicate nonverbally. Are we relaxed or tense? Do we lean in or away? Are we present with the person or distracted? By rooting ourselves in our bodies, we can remain present, focusing on our breath so we can relax into our process with each other. In this sense, we practice focusing completely on one conversation at a time, not allowing our thoughts to drift. Mindful presence asks us to bear witness to how we story ourselves and others but also to how these stories shape our interactions. By meeting people where they are, we can begin to develop a fluid awareness of each other, remaining open to new ideas and being curious about who we become as a result of our interaction.

This, in turn, shapes how we listen, speak, relate, and respond to each other so we can cultivate playfulness, as well as an enhanced intimacy with our lives. By refraining from communication that causes suffering or harm, by paying attention to how we move from green to red, we can truly listen to each other in a manner that disrupts negative patterns that serve to create conflict. The first step in this process is to begin paying attention to the effects your conversations have on you. Next, begin to ask questions about the stories you defend about yourself and your beliefs. By beginning to notice these patterns, you give them less power by disidentifying with them. Through self-observation, you can start to reconnect to the present moment, attending to what you seek in your relationships.

Lunar Pause

Odier teaches that “micropractices” are small acts of conscious awareness and connection, which are completed for 5, 10, 15, or 30 seconds and then followed by a conscious return to your regular activity (involuntary, automatic). Thus, the idea is that you gradually, and only for very short periods of time, replace automatic patterns with conscious ones. To start, I invite you to experiment with the following micropractices:

1. Being with the breath – For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with the breath in various points throughout your day. At first, you might incorporate this into easily established patterns of activity (upon waking, before eating, sleeping, or exercising, while driving, and so on.) As you find more pleasure in this practice, you might integrate it during other points such as conversation, when crossing through doorways or thresholds, and so on. Over time, you will find great joy in this practice, returning to it again and again. These practices add up to more and more of your experience being aligned with the flow of life. Also, you will begin to bring awareness to how different e-motions inspire different cycles of breath.
2. Being with the rhythm of your heart - For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with your pulse in various points throughout your day. Check-in with your pulse on your wrist or neck (or other locations) and be with the beat, aligning your breath with its rhythm in a non-forced manner. You might enjoy experimenting with how your pulse changes as your e-motions change, but also as you interact with various people, places, and things. For example, you might check your pulse when picking out fruit at the grocery store. From one fruit to another fruit, how does your energy respond, if at all?
3. Being with your tension - For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with any tension you are carrying or holding, checking-in at various points throughout your day. Tune into patterns of contraction, balance and stability, grasping or holding of your breath, or clenching or holding in your muscles. In doing so, consciously relax into each space, breathing into whatever is tense.
4. Being with your senses - For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with any of your senses, checking-in at various points throughout your day. For example, when drinking a glass of water, surrender to the experience as if the water desires you, feeling the sensation in your mouth and body as it travels through you. Upon waking, bring awareness to your skin and the sensation of various textures, temperature, touching, and being touched. You can apply this to being with a specific scent or smell as well as to music. With scent, tune into the sensation fully coming into and out of awareness. When listening to music, bring awareness to the individual parts (instruments or beats) one by one and then listen to the whole.

Figure 25. Living in the flow through micropractices

In each of the above micropractice examples, you not only enliven and savor your sensory experience simultaneously, but you also “place” yourself within the vibration of divine consciousness or *spanda*. Placing yourself as an active part of the flow of life gently begins to

replace distracted moments of automatism with conscious experience, the goal being to awaken to sensation by experiencing pleasure in presence. More than any other micropractice, tuning into the breath offers the most growth as the breath is directly aligned with *spanda* as an expression of *prana*. Each day, we cycle through nearly 22,000 inhalations and exhalations; thus, we have a wonderful opportunity to experience new aliveness, openness, and expansion with each in-breath and relaxation, letting go, and surrendering with each out-breath. As such, life is not only one long conversation, but it is also an on-going *vinyasa*, wherein we have the power to place ourselves in a special way through conscious breathing. By doing so, we open to *abdhuta rasa* (wonder, awe, and mystery).

Lunar Pause

In essence, any experience that involves resting and relaxation with attention can cultivate meditative awareness such as doing nothing, enjoying tea, lounging on the couch with a book, or a dynamic conversation; therefore, it is imperative that you do not try to control your experience, but instead follow your own rhythm and flow, welcoming whatever experiences arise.

Second, do not judge what you experience or force an experience on yourself. Also, try to avoid labeling your experience as “this” or “that.” Instead, give yourself permission to get excited, talk to yourself, be busy with thoughts or quiet with silence, fall asleep, and shift or move to find comfort. Likewise, do not worry about what you are doing, how you are doing it, or focus on being in this practice longer than is comfortable.

Third, while you are bringing conscious awareness to your experience, it is not a matter of concentrating; rather, just be with what is as it is happening. Breathe. Observe yourself. Do not try to clear your mind and go blank or focus on every single detail. Instead, move with your experience by expanding your attention. If you are enjoying yourself, you are practicing in a way that is enhancing your experience; thus, do not suffer but allow an openness to wonder, awe, mystery and play.

Figure 26. Micropractice tips

Over time, you may find that through these daily practices, you experience a much greater sense of relaxation but also are filled with energy. For me, these micropractices are not part of some quest for a future result built into a daily struggle or discipline. Instead, it is a

process of being with what you already are and do, especially in regard to the breath. Hence, just by devoting a few minutes per day to conscious breathing, you have already arrived. More and more, you will experience your yoga, learning “What is living in you, breathing you, and pulsing your heart,” as Mark Whitwell contends.¹⁹⁵ Once we learn to actively practice a style of communication that seeks to call attention to the shared details that emerge as we respond to each other, we are more able to be aware of the impact our words and actions have in shaping our realities, identities, and relationships. Organizational scholar Anne Cunliffe provides the following example to highlight this notion: “Just as individual brush strokes gain meaning within a whole painting, individual words create an impression of something more when seen within the particular circumstance and flow of writing or conversation.”¹⁹⁶

These movements of conversation shape our realities and it is in these spaces that we create ourselves –together – through the connective possibilities that flow from our interactions. As such, we learn to resonate with each other’s ways of relating so our worlds become partially shared, even if only for a moment. We create unique cultures of partially shared words built on what matters to us most, adopting a particular stance or identity that comes from how we act together as a *collective-we*.¹⁹⁷ To make space for these types of “we-first” interactions, we must also recognize that each of us lives a life of our own making, creating our worlds of meaning; as a result, we must regard how we can come to understand another’s life in their terms, not ours.

Building on Vygotsky’s work, Shotter suggests, “In other words, it is through the words, the utterances, of others, that we can come to act in a voluntary, conscious manner, in a way in which we ourselves are responsible, or ‘answerable’, for our own conduct.”¹⁹⁸ By emphasizing the social nature of consciousness or *con-scientia*, he describes this as a “witnessable knowing along with others,” which would mean that we are “*conscious* in our acting, that we *know* what

we are doing in our acting,” as well as being able to offer a verbal account of our actions should we be called to do so.¹⁹⁹ This calls for us to be accountably conscious of our mental processes while also being able to account to others socially. Both Vygotsky and Shotter present compelling ideas akin to how I visualize yogic awareness to function - as a type of conscious witnessing of one’s own actions in relation to interactions with others (in their presence or not).

Ultimately, Shotter suggests that our “*spontaneously responsive, living, bodily reactions*” to others and othernesses around us can be seen as the source of all later, ‘higher’, more conscious (*con-scientia*) mental functions – the source of our ‘minds’.²⁰⁰ By describing the “mind” in this manner, yogic awareness is not about a metaphorical space in our heads – a place where we can catch, change, or limit thought – instead, it is a response to our interactions with one another. I have long considered my yoga practice as a type of witnessing. By being able to both deliberately and voluntarily control our reactions as they occur, we can learn to *master our own reactions*, giving more attention to some versus others by being aware of our own responses. “In short, we can act in an ‘accountable’ manner; that is, we can account to others around us, in verbal terms, for our actions if so required; thus, to demonstrate that others can be witnesses to our claims to know *what* we are doing.”²⁰¹ Being accountable is yoga, especially in cases where people do not recognize the impact of their words or actions.

Shotter also contends that we “internalize” our outer, more public activities into “inner” modes that we project forward skillfully, which appear to be spontaneous and therefore “unconscious.” Better understanding this, Shotter argues, helps us understand what is unconscious in our interactions with others. Like any other skill we learn, becoming aware of this requires a great deal of practice. Moreover, each conversation in which we engage has a life of its own, in that

We cannot, ahead of time, know precisely what it is we need to say in expressing our needs and desires to others. We need their expressive-responsive listening as we are speaking, if we are to continue our speaking with them, otherwise, we have to re-trace our steps and try to express them in other words.²⁰²

Relating this to yoga, we can see that it is within the flow of life between us that teaches us the meaning of our encounter.

By paying attention to this flow, we can begin to see where we create boundaries and gaps and work to bridge them. Thus, communication *as* yoga can occur in the space that happens when we simultaneously experience each other in a vulnerable way, meaning that we continuously allow for vulnerability and uncertainty to emerge in our moment-to-moment encounters. It is here that we determine what matters to us most and what that means to us. Only once we understand this can we begin to recognize the divinity or sacredness in each other, allowing the unique nature of our own lives to unfold. Because communication is always energetic and interdependent, what we create together is never solely up to us. Instead, as Shotter suggests, our thinking and talking emerges from our actual and imagined ways of relating to ourselves and others. As such, "Unless we are allowed to offer our *own sense* for our expressions, and can trust those around us to 'take up' our offers, we cannot, so to speak, 'live our lives'."²⁰³

Returning to Chapman's traffic light metaphor, we can tune into our experience by paying attention to when our light is green (open, fluid, responsive, present and nonviolent) and flowing smoothly, paying particular attention to our yellow light when we move into a space of uncertainty, this inspiring fear, doubt, disappointment, frustration or whatever e-motion we are experiencing and possibly identifying with at the time. Finally, we must also bring awareness to when the light has turned red, which blocks the flow of communication and energy and is

experienced when we feel stress, tension, and have shifted back into a state of automatism. In this way, green is about being the moment as it unfolds; yellow is when we are unsure of our words, actions, sensations, or experiences – thus it vacillates between green and red, making it the most important light to illuminate. To shift a red light back to green, we must first be aware of the red light signals which move us from we-first communication to me-first.

Chapman describes four stages of heartlessness that can become blind spots, if awareness is not present, including: complaint/criticism, divisiveness, blame, and retaliation. In each of these stages, interaction becomes stagnant due to me-first story lines that work to great either/or thinking based in me/you awareness. In order to disrupt these patterns, new stories have to be constructed that humanize, refraining from labels, absolutes, and generalizations to find commonalities, as well as letting go of dualistic frames that keep people in the categories of good/bad and right/wrong. Thus, she ultimately advises that first and foremost the key to shifting communication patterns is to notice the effects your conversations have on you. Next, the goal is to start observing your stories, instead of defending and becoming attached to them. Only then can you begin to notice the energetic patterns in which you frequently engage so you can start to disidentify with them. This awareness also has the power to illuminate the gaps, pauses, and spaces you fill with mindlessness, distraction, or automatism to reconnect you with the present moment. In this way, pauses are excellent interruptions to the flow, allowing space for you to consciously find new modes of understanding so you might cultivate compassionate uncertainty and still feel unsurpassed calm in the midst of this experience.

Communication, as a process and spiritual practice, is not only rooted in developing compassionate awareness of our ecological diversity grounded in our interdependence, but also in coming to flow with and appreciate the idea that we owe the possibilities of living a peaceful

and just life to the responsiveness of everyone we encounter. For me, this is not only powerful but extremely profound, as each day we can recognize ourselves within the flow of a world always in the making. In the midst of this constantly renewing change, which is always in flux, we interweave ourselves into the flow of life. In doing so, we have the ability to affirm or deny the lives of others. Thus, yogic philosophy, as well as Shotter's work, calls for us to see ourselves as many different flowing strands, interwoven and entangled with each other, so much so that how much we connect and create spaces of possibility for new relations between us directly affects new forms of life, or the ecologies we create, as Amardo Rodriguez states. In the end, by practicing communication as yoga, we can begin to re-story our lives, thereby compassionately re-organizing and creating a new world.

Lunar Pause

I invite you to reflect on a moment when you experienced your or someone else's communication shutting down and becoming closed off. Looking at this experience, from a we-centered stance, how could each participant have acted or responded differently? If you were to experience the same situation again, would you be able to cultivate a compassionate presence without reacting or shutting down? Why or why not? What micropractices could you employ to inspire more loving communication in the face of any future conflicts?

Figure 27. Closed communication

By going with the flow, we enter into a process of finding joy and creativity through a total involvement with life. Flow is an optimal experience built from deep concentration wherein “self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of ties become distorted.”²⁰⁴ We then embrace flow to view our communication thusly: “an activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they get out of it, even when it is difficult, or dangerous.”²⁰⁵ In other words, one person's *flow* might be another's tragedy. Therefore, by embracing a yogic perspective of flow, we encourage

compassionate awareness as a guiding force for our communication action.

In order to situate your daily communication as a spiritual practice that is transformative to your life, I encourage you to see each interaction as an opportunity to play with micropractices. By no means am I suggesting that you should spend every moment observing and dissecting your interactions and reactions. Instead, I am suggesting that you tune into your interactions in small increments throughout your day, checking in with yourself to see where you are tense or relaxed; how your reactions alter your breathing patterns; what shape your body takes in conversation (are you leaning in or away); if you are present or in autopilot mode; what energy are you giving off and receiving; and, finally, in what ways do your words or actions inspire me-first or we-first encounters? By contemplating these questions, you bring greater awareness to how you respond to others, which is made manifest in your communicative choices. Thus, in each instance, you have the power to decide what happens next; however, this varies considerably depending on your level of self-awareness. As such, I strongly believe that how we communicate is directly linked to our quality of life.

I asked earlier in this text what it would mean to learn to live together harmoniously, and I fully believe that the answer is presence. Attending to the moment keeps us living in the flow, even so, “Life is extremely inventive; it always finds the means to prove to you that you are still a little rigid and tense, still projecting somewhat, still expecting a little, still somewhat vulnerable, and it is this constant dialogue with reality that keeps you from mistaking yourself for a master.”²⁰⁶ If we take this notion seriously, then communication itself becomes a lifelong spiritual practice. In order to “wake up” to its transformative potential, I invite you to visualize your world as if you were seeing it through someone else’s eyes. What if all you could see was love and there were no dividing lines. What then?

Lunar Pause

I invite you to experiment and play with the following:

Consider the idea that nothing is hidden in your interactions with others
Bring awareness to your reactions to cultivate a new sense of *response-ability*.
Ask questions that invite discussion and continue the conversation.
Be willing and open to vulnerability as a space of possibility and uncertainty.
Start with self-acceptance and self-love and expand outward, cultivating compassion.
Go outside and explore new spaces and places to re-discover your world.
Celebrate relational awareness by opening to sensory, embodied awareness and knowing.
Contemplate your part in the creation of all life, thereby acknowledging the sacred.
Support multiple identities, shifting contexts, and spaces for transformation.
Inspire play and childlike wonder in yourself in others by cultivating a spirit of curiosity.

Figure 28. Communication micropractices

Why are these micropractices important for spiritually transforming your communication, and as a result, the quality of your life? Because we need more love in the world, not less. Because being present extends your embodied potential, allowing you to experience the divine pulse of consciousness. Because we can make more together than we can apart. Because learning about each other and all beings is a gesture of respect and devotion to the sacredness of life. Because believing in each other's basic goodness is the first step to creating more peace, celebration, and laughter, and reverence for all life. Because, if for no other reason, now is all there is.

Wave One Notes

¹⁵⁵ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 106-107.

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¹⁵⁷ Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Women's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (New York: HarperOne), 173.

¹⁵⁸ Monk Kidd, *The Dance*, 154.

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- ¹⁵⁹ Odier, *Desire*.
- ¹⁶⁰ Odier, *Desire*, 13.
- ¹⁶¹ Odier, *Desire*, 15.
- ¹⁶² Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 83.
- ¹⁶³ Shiva Rea, *Tending the Heart Fire: Living in Flow with the Pulse of Life*. (Boulder: Sounds True, 2014).
- ¹⁶⁴ Christopher Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated: The Philosophy, History, and Practice of a Timeless Tradition* (Woodlands, TX: Anusara Press, 2012), and lines from Walt Whitman's poem, *Song of Myself*.
- ¹⁶⁵ Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*.
- ¹⁶⁶ Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 99.
- ¹⁶⁷ Shannon Paige, face to face communication to author, July 15, 2013.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ahamkara* is also sometimes referred to as *asmita* (or our "I-am-ness").
- ¹⁶⁹ Swami Rama, *Samandi: The Highest State of Wisdom* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 2002).
- ¹⁷⁰ Gabriele Stolzenberg, "Can an Inquiry into the Foundations of Mathematics Tell Us Anything Interesting about Mind?" in *The Psychology and Biology of Language and Thought: Essays in Honor of Eric Lenneberg*, G. Miller and E. Lenneberg (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 258-259.
- ¹⁷¹ Stolzenberg, "Can an inquiry," 236.
- ¹⁷² Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 4.
- ¹⁷³ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 7.
- ¹⁷⁴ Odier, *Desire*, 157.
- ¹⁷⁵ Odier, *Desire*, 42.
- ¹⁷⁶ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 116.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ruiz, *Four Agreements*, 12.
- ¹⁷⁸ Odier, *Desire*, 22-23.

¹⁷⁹ Odier, *Desire*, 54.

¹⁸⁰ Monk Kidd, *The Dance*, 96.

¹⁸¹ John Shotter, "Language, Joint Action, and the Ethical Domain: The Importance of the Relations Between Our Living Bodies and Their Surroundings," accessed May 6, 2013, <http://www.johnshotter.com/mypapers/Language,%20Joint%20Action,%20and%20the%20Ethical%20Domain.pdf>.

¹⁸² Shotter, "Language, Joint Action," 5.

¹⁸³ Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness," 4.

¹⁸⁴ Mike Featherstone, "Body Image/Body Without Image," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2-3(2006): 233.

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 7.

¹⁸⁶ James Morley, "Inspiration and Expiration: Yoga Practice Through Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body," *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 1 (2001): 75.

¹⁸⁷ Marcel Mauss, "Body Techniques." *Sociology and Psychology*. London: RKP, (1979): 97.

¹⁸⁸ Nick Crossley, "Researching Embodiment by Way of 'Body Techniques,'" *The Sociological Review* 55, no. 1 (2007): 82.

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 87.

¹⁹⁰ Crossley, "Researching Embodiment," 90.

¹⁹¹ Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2003), 4.

¹⁹² Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Schoken Books), 1964.

¹⁹³ Susan Gillis Chapman, *The Five Keys to Mindful Communication: Using Deep Listening and Mindful Speech to Strengthen Relationships, Heal Conflicts & Accomplish Your Goals* (Boston: Shambhala, 2012), xii.

¹⁹⁴ Chapman, *Five Keys*, xiv.

¹⁹⁵ Whitwell, *Yoga of Heart*, 101.

¹⁹⁶ Ann Cunliffe, "Social Poetics as Management Inquiry." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (2002): 130.

¹⁹⁷ Shotter, "Language, Joint Action," 2.

¹⁹⁸ Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness," 3.

¹⁹⁹ Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness," 4.

²⁰⁰ Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness," 8-9.

²⁰¹ Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness," 13.

²⁰² Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness," 4.

²⁰³ Shotter, "Vygotsky and Consciousness," 5.

²⁰⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), xi.

²⁰⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 71.

²⁰⁶ Odier, *Desire*, 147.

VINYASA

Linking body and breath

Scanning the flyers haphazardly posted on the cluttered wall, my eyes zero in on the words – *Awakening to Life*. At the same time I am staring at these words, questions are constantly intruding into my awareness: *Did I turn off the stove before leaving the house? Where did I put that book? Do I have a meeting later?* I am frequently stressed due to my long work hours, lack of sleep, and sometimes unbalanced eating habits, and adding no-time-to-exercise to this list, I feel scattered a great percentage of the time. Rushing through each day, I phone, text, email, work, eat, and try to find spaces to rest and sleep. In this chaos, it is easy to go into an “autopilot” mode, tuning in and out of my surroundings, never fully present in the moment, multitasking as I go. *I am doing this again*. Returning to the words before me, I continue reading the *Awakening to Life* brochure,

When talking with a friend, cooking for family, participating in a meeting at work, or simply driving in traffic, are we really "here," focused on this moment and experience? Do we eat, shop, and otherwise consume in a mindful and healthy manner? Practicing mindfulness will help us to "show up" for life, make deliberate and healthy choices, and more fully enjoy the rich experience of the present moment.

Have I not been showing up for life? Am I not awake to all that life has offered me –now? Going over my ever-growing, school-related “things to do list” has made me realize *again* how easy it is to become unfocused in my day-to-day activities. *I know, I know, here I am again wandering away from the moment*. Standing quietly, I contemplate this idea. Minutes pass. My watch

blinks: 4:50 p.m. Shit. If I do not hurry, I will be late. Sprinting across campus, I find myself quantifying my semester... *feedback on 900 pages of student work... 120 hours of class...*

My shoe becomes untied as my bag slides off my shoulder, I hop while I attempt to retie the laces. Sweat pools on my forehead and back. Wait. Stop. Breathe. Take a moment. I tie my shoe and reposition my bag. *Go.* Breathing in as I step, breathing out as I step, the calculation continues... *answered at least 1000 emails.* Catching myself holding my breath again, I arrive at my classroom *on time.* Barely.

Later that day, sitting in the meditation hall with thirty or so other participants, I attempt to relax my body and clear my mind. The teacher begins:

The class is intended for those new to the practice of mindfulness, as well as those seeking to establish a more consistent daily mindfulness practice. Each class will focus on experiencing the basic practices for establishing mindfulness, while leaving time for discussion and sharing. Participants will experience sitting and walking meditation, mindful movements, deep relaxation, loving kindness meditation, and practicing mindfulness in everyday life.

I had enthusiastically signed up for this course with the intention of reintegrating contemplative practices into my everyday routine. Several weeks into the course, it became apparent to me that a large percentage of the participants were also teachers. Like me, I wondered whether they were drawn to meditation due to their busy schedules, frequent stress, compassion fatigue, burnout, or some other reason.

Before we begin, I would like us to set our intention for our meditation, the teacher continued. My thoughts are cluttered – in...tension. Surely the teacher did not just say “in tension.” I am tense. What am I hearing? It has been another long and stressful day. *Your body is always present,* she reminds us. *It is your mind that wanders, dancing in the past, projecting to the future, and not focusing on the present. Our intention in this moment is to let go of the stresses and worries so we can arrive in the now and focus on our breath.* She intones,

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.

Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.

As the in-breath grows deep, the out-breath grows slow.

Breathing in makes me calm. Breathing out brings me ease.

With the in-breath, I smile. With the out-breath, I release.

Breathing in, there is only the present moment.

Breathing out, it is a wonderful moment.

Focusing on my breath, I am overwhelmed by words. Silent layers and layers of words strung together to form sentences and thoughts criss-cross above and below my breath. This paper.....
.....contemplation...teaching...students...writing...learning...hungry...tired...My lower back hurts.....Is my foot asleep?...How much time has passed?...I stare down at my interpersonal communication class binder positioned in front of me, which reads:

- M- moment to moment attention
 - I- in the here and now
 - N- non-judgmental attitude
 - D- detach from unhelpful thoughts
 - F- forgive and be grateful
 - U- unconditional acceptance
 - L- learn with beginner's mind
- Zhen Phang

Trying to meditate, I realize just how difficult it is to focus my attention on a single object – my breath. Words immediately overtake my awareness. Even marking my breath with words, “breathing in, breathing out,” has no impact on my intruding thoughts. Pay attention to your breath! Breathe, breathe, breathe. Thought. What is thinking or thought if not words, relationally patterning our understanding and perception. *La la la la la la la la. Stop. Quiet.*

Breathe. No escape.

Struggling to keep my focus on my breath, I shift my weight forward then back. Rolling my shoulders and neck, I lengthen my spine and situate my gaze on the colorful, patterned fabric near my feet. My eyes attempt soft focus, which renders the cloth a dull blur of color and texture. I blink. *Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.* Blink. Blink. Blink. Shift. *Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.* Blink. I close my eyes. Darkness. Muddy space. Breath. Thoughts race by like a train. I stand outside and watch them pass. I want to be on the train. No, I want to be the train. *Ding, ding.* The bell calls us away from our meditation to discuss our experience. How much time has passed? Opening my eyes, I feel calm. I am making some progress but cannot help but feel this is another failed attempt. Who knew paying attention was so difficult. I become lost in self-evaluation only to arrive back in the moment to hear the teacher quoting Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994),

It doesn't take long in meditation to discover that part of our mind is constantly evaluating our experiences, comparing them with other experiences or holding them up against expectations and standards that we create, often out of fear. Fear that I'm not good enough, that bad things will happen, that good things won't last, that other people might hurt me, that I won't get my way, that only I know anything, that I'm the only one who doesn't know anything.²⁰⁷

Our teacher then asks us to partner with the person sitting next to us to share our deepest fear as a way to practice deep, compassionate listening. Fearful of this activity, I volunteer to go first. *Ding, Ding.* We switch. My partner talks about teaching, also. The stress. Long work hours. Her inability to do all that she wants to do. Not being able to balance work and life. Not having enough time to care for everyone. Her students with special needs. Trying to help but feeling she is failing to make a difference. *Ding, Ding.* We pause and stare at each other in gratitude. A moment of recognition of our shared fears feels comforting. I was never alone.

²⁰⁷ Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Where Ever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1994), 55.

WAVE TWO – CULTIVATING COMPASSIONATE AWARENESS

Communication is Ecologically Interdependent

In “Core Integration,” I began with the questions: *What is communication?* and *Why is being aware of one’s communication important?* By asking these questions, my goal has been to better understand how spiritual and contemplative communication can cultivate more loving communicators. While we explored what communication is through three communication *sutras*, our task now is to consider why yoga matters for communication studies in more depth. Building on the notion that communication is ecologically interdependent, I also approach yoga from an ecological frame. Doing so allows me to move yoga theory out of the realm of psychology (where it most often becomes located in the West) into a relational, communication-centered perspective (based in social construction). Taking a social construction approach highlights the importance of language and communication in creating our identities, situating this first and foremost as a relational process, made and negotiated in interaction.

Not only does this approach pave the way for acknowledging our interconnectedness, but it also illustrates the importance of recognizing our constructed boundaries (nature/culture, male/female, and so on) as purely symbolic. Even as symbols, however, these dividing lines are made “real” through our daily words and actions. Therefore, taking an ecological approach offers a powerful alternative to how we create our worlds. If we do indeed create our realities and universes, as I believe we do, we do so always in relationship *with* the world around us. In fact, every part of our day is in relationship, which is why the *yamas* (social observances) and

niyamas (personal practices) serve as reminders that our lives are about shared meaning and that the most vital element of our humanness centers around creating and maintaining harmony in our relating. In other words, “Yoga itself is the conduct of a person who moves with and of the world, resisting nothing through pure acceptance and acting swiftly out of the recognition that we are one family.”²⁰⁸ To see the world as one family or *kula* requires us to “wake up” to our interconnectedness so we can move from our self-centered worlds to places where we discover the nonseparation of self and other. Yoga, as a practice, is the first step in realizing this as it returns us to the present moment so we become an observer and active participant fully immersed in the flow of life.

What might it mean to be contemplative? And how is this important to our discussion of yoga and communication? As a starting point, yoga is one of many spiritual systems considered contemplative practices, and as such, yoga has the ability to expand our “we-consciousness.” Ask yourself – How big is your “we”?²⁰⁹ By flexing our awareness ability, we not only expand our “we,” but we also expand our circle of compassion, as yoga teacher Beryl Bender Birch contends, through enhanced awareness of our interconnectedness. To consider this further, we must first examine what “awareness” is and how it functions. For example, when one focuses on breathing during meditation or moves from yoga posture to posture, the goal is to bring mind and body and breath together into a state of heightened awareness,²¹⁰ a process of cultivating a single-pointed focus - at the heart of any contemplative practice.

I invite you to experiment with this same type of awareness during an everyday activity such as washing dishes. Close your eyes and visualize the last time you washed a dish.²¹¹ Focus solely on the activity. Become aware of the dish, paying attention to the act of washing it. Focus on the moment- – the feel of the water, its pressure and temperature, the shape and texture of the

dish, the smell and feeling of the soap, the experience of gripping a sponge and moving it around a plate or cup. Opening your eyes, imagine how applying this type of attention to other areas of your life might shift your experiences of those moments.

Lunar Pause

I invite you to go outside and practice being a tree. At first glance, this request might appear strange, but what I am really asking is for you to experiment with your subject-object awareness. First, find a comfortable seat in front a tree and focus your awareness fully on it, noticing both its visible characteristics (size, shape, texture, colors, or other sensory details) and what it is communicating energetically (if you feel nothing, this is perfectly fine, too). Now, pan out your awareness like a camera from the tree, slowly moving away towards yourself, noticing the sensations of your body touching the ground, your breath, temperature, tensions, or conversational chatter.

Practice shifting your awareness back and forth from the tree and then back to you. After you have completed several rounds of this, center your awareness on the space between the tree and you. Spend some time observing this space, living in the moment between. Can you observe this space with all of your being? Were you able to see the tree (and yourself) without imposing names, labels, judgments, associations, or other knowledge you have acquired about it, thereby actually preventing you from seeing it as it actually is? At first, you may have noticed you were both observing and being observed (by yourself and the tree).

As your awareness of the space between is transformed, this experience of observation may have shifted to a space of complete attention. It is in this space that we stop comparing or drawing lines of difference between us, surrendering to the moment completely. Perhaps you were able to experience a brief moment where you were no longer translating your observation into words and thoughts, but instead felt a sense of integration with the tree such that you became it and it become you. In yoga, this is *samandhi* – a space of complete, limitless energetic integration wherein everything you are becomes what is as it unfolds, and in this space, there is no observer at all.

Figure 29. Be a tree

Bringing awareness to moments when you are tuning in and out of your surroundings or the space between can help you become more attuned to a variety of social realities, hopefully inspiring you to become more aware of what you value and how you think, communicate, feel, and act in your everyday lives. As Haight contends, “It could be said that the only activity one’s

attention is not on is the actual activity in which one is engaged.”²¹² In short, we live in an automated world. We tune in and out of our surroundings, experiencing brief moments of presence before slipping back into autopilot mode.

These ideas have been previously planted in our conversations about communication as the “simultaneous experience of self and other,” our humanity bound up in the humanity of others, as Shepherd and Rodriguez suggest. To become aware of this is to learn to think critically about the present moment by countering the mindlessness, resulting from engaging uncritically or moving through one’s day or life on “autopilot.”²¹³ By moving out of “autopilot,” you create opportunities to question the tension between ideas of individualism and interdependence, reminding us there is a world outside of our own self-centeredness.

To fully observe oneself in interaction requires a great deal of self-knowledge, inasmuch that “It is only by looking deeply into one’s ‘self’ that one can see the ‘other’ and recognize how one’s own past, present, and future are linked to those of different others and *vice versa*.”²¹⁴ Returning to the idea that communication can be a spiritual practice or a mode of everyday peacemaking, we can remind ourselves to recognize our shared humanity with others by considering how we each suffer, love, live, and die together as interdependent individuals living in a collective world. Together we share the power to shape and change our interwoven realities.

Shining a light on our interconnectedness opens space for the “possibilities of spiritualized social transformation of this world, one that seeks to challenge all forms of injustice, hierarchy and abuse from the most intimate daily practices in our lives to the larger structures of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation.”²¹⁵ In advocating for a spiritual approach to communication, I am not asserting any specific spiritual or religious beliefs; rather, I am trying to model a stance that encourages recognition of our interconnectedness through

nonviolent communication and action. To embrace this notion is to come to understand our radical relatedness. Thus, when we are

Overflowing with understanding and compassion, we can appreciate the wonders of life, and, at the same time, act with the firm resolve to alleviate suffering. Too many people distinguish between the inner world of the mind and the world outside, but the worlds are not separate. They belong to the same reality.²¹⁶

To do so requires my surrender to the "*dailiness* of practices" because I cannot expect to change my life if I do not actively experience these practices within my daily life.²¹⁷ To situate communication as a spiritual practice is to acknowledge its potential to inspire compassion, harmony, tolerance, transcendence, and awareness with a deeply rooted concern for others via *interactions* that first seek to do no harm and then attempt to tend to the suffering of others, linking daily activities of one's personal life with selfless service. In other words, personal and social transformation becomes inseparable.

When I speak of daily practices, I am referring to communication as yoga, whereby we work to change our communicative interactions by skillfully developing enhanced or heightened awareness via yoga. Both yoga and contemplation employ focused awareness, but contemplation is generally preferred as a broader term that includes practices ranging from the creative arts to peacemaking circles. The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education describes these ideas in the following manner:

Contemplative practices are methods incorporated into your daily life as a reminder to slow down, focus, and feel more connected to your self, your work, and your environment. Contemplative practices allow us to develop a capacity for deep concentration, usually in silence, to quiet the mind in the midst of the action and distraction that fills everyday life. This state of calm centeredness provides effective stress reduction and can also help address issues of meaning, values, and spirit. Contemplative practices can help people develop greater empathy and communication skills, improve focus and concentration, reduce stress and enhance creativity. In time, with sustained commitment, they cultivate insight, wise discernment, and a loving and compassionate approach to life.²¹⁸

Thus, *contemplation* – the “act of attending with nonjudgmental awareness or being open to things just as they are”²¹⁹ - is another way of saying that contemplative practices are exercises in meditative reflection,²²⁰ or focusing attention on an element of conscious experience such as meditation, breathing, visualization, or relaxation.

Equally important to our understanding of yoga is the idea of non-judgment. There is no doubt that we live in a world of evaluation. Separation. Critique. Measurement. Inclusion and exclusion. We are taught to separate, label, and deconstruct. In embracing yoga, the goal is to move towards connection versus separation. For instance, “When we contemplate something, the boundary between ourselves and whatever we are contemplating disappears.”²²¹ It is in between these two spaces that we can come to recognize our interdependence. Through contemplation, we bring awareness to that which separates us but also to the actions in which we are engaging in the moment, gradually overcoming others’ sense of separateness. As a result, any activity can become contemplative if you create an intention to focus your awareness on the object of study, such as a sound, text, image, claim, person, or moment.

To engage fully in the spirit of this wave and hoping to enhance your reading experience, I humbly invite you to take several moments to try conscious breathing, perhaps watching Thich Nhat Hanh, featured in the short video, “Peace is the Way,”²²² as an opportunity to focus your intention. Next, find a comfortable sitting position, lengthen your spine, softly focus your eyes on an object in front of you, and then concentrate your attention on your breath. Both inhale and then exhale through your nose. You might wish to include a verbal marker with each breath, such as, “breathing in, breathing out” or “rising, falling,” paying close attention to any thoughts, emotions, or sensations that arise. Acknowledge these and return your focus to your breath. Take a minute or two for this activity and upon completion, consider:

Were you able to focus solely on your breath? What, if any, distractions challenged your attention? How long were you able to engage in this activity? Contemplating your experience further, might there be a benefit in incorporating yoga practices such as conscious breathing into your daily life? In a broader context - what does yoga mean to you and how might this relate to your understanding of yoga? Before delving into these questions, however, we should be reminded that to breathe is to inspire, inspiration simply being a matter of breathing life into your intentions, stimulating energy, showing reverence, and cultivating new ideas. My intention is to contemplate these questions and hopefully *inspire* you.

Lunar Pause

The more I practice P.E.A.C.E. by bringing awareness back to my body and breath in difficult and stressful situations, the more peace I have. We could all do with a little more peace in the world, right? *P-* is for pausing when difficulties arise. *E-* exhale, sigh, or groan and then inhale to keep breathing. *A-* reminds us to acknowledge, accept, allow the situation as it is, whether you are happy about it or not, accept your reaction to the situation, and allow your experience to occur. *C-* is for choosing how you will respond, being clear about what you want and your limits, finding courage to take action or not, extending compassion, and searching for the comedic aspect of the occurrence. Finally, *E-* is for engaging with others, the situation, and life.²²³

Figure 30. Practicing P.E.A.C.E.

As a result of yoga practice, I ask myself each day: How can I make a difference? How can I be more compassionate? How can I listen more deeply? What does the world need from me...right now? In asking myself these questions, I set my intention for how I move through my day. I may fail to reach these ideals, but I continue to ask questions, hoping that the more I practice tolerance and compassion as yoga, the more able I will be to engage compassionately and understand how to approach my learning, writing, teaching, and researching as sacred endeavors. Asking these questions builds on Amardo Rodriguez 's discussion of emerging definitions and understandings related to diversity in numerous ways. As he argues, rethinking

diversity means that we must first be willing to abandon or unlearn our current ways of being in the world as well as find new ways of understanding each other. What this means for our discussion is that even in our most difficult interactions, we still work to understand and connect versus judge and separate, or as he states, “Without a willingness to do so, those who seem most different will always remain beyond our understanding and forever subject to prejudice.”²²⁴

If we take seriously the idea that through our communication we can work to create less suffering or *duhkha* in the world, then the first step in this process is to create awareness around the many ways that we separate ourselves from others. This is not to say that difference is not important, as it is through difference that we remain unique; it is the meaning, however, that we apply to these differences that actually makes the *difference*. Do we celebrate difference? If not, then what does difference *do* but divide, stereotype, and categorize? In the end, as Rodriguez posits, “The success of communication depends on how constructively we manage and negotiate our differences.”²²⁵ Looking at communication from this standpoint, we come to see that communication is not something we *do* to one another, but rather something we *are* to one another.

Thus, diversity is part of an emergent ecology that affirms and creates life, supporting a wide range of identities and categories. We must come to study and examine the ways we individually create difference and limit diversity in our words and actions and consider how these actions move us further away from embracing communication and its relationship to vulnerability. As our discussion of communication spirals illustrates, divisive communication equals more division, whereas communication centered in spaces of openness and curiosity creates spaces of sharing and allows for more relatedness. In this sense, communication is transformative in that it has both the power to create and destroy our world, which Rodriguez

describes as follows:

Through our capacity to create, negotiate, and share meanings we have the means to create and recreate our worlds. We can create worlds with less misery and suffering. We can also create worlds with more opportunities and possibilities. The inextricable relation between communication and the human condition also reveals how the condition of our humanity is bound up with each other. We need each other to be human, and the condition of our humanity depends on how much we are ready and willing to give of ourselves to each other.²²⁶

Therefore, developing awareness is more than simply paying attention to what makes us different and how we understand and interact with that difference. It is also a practice which teaches us to find the spaces of relatedness (our shared humanity) and to appreciate each person's unique qualities. As you have probably noticed by now, this process is not just part of our everyday, one-on-one interactions, but it is also of enormous importance in helping us question and challenge our whole realities. Casting this wider net helps us to see ourselves as part of a whole so that we can fully experience our interdependence with all other beings. In examining this in more depth, we can become more aware of how our communication creates division and perpetuates inequalities, labels, and prejudices. What life do you wish for yourself? For your loved ones? Take a moment and imagine what that world looks and feels like? What steps must you take in order to live your life to actualize this vision? When visualizing this world, do you imagine a place and space filled with hatred, suffering, and violence? Or do you imagine a world that is more tolerant and loving?

Fast forward and visualize yourself at the end of your life. Looking back, what might you regret? Will you wish that you loved more? Hugged, laughed, smiled, or kissed more? Perhaps you might wish that you were more able to forgive or be forgiven or that you could have been more kind and generous. Returning to the moment, what do you want to contribute to this world? Will you leave it better than when you arrived - or worse? Will your actions and words ease

suffering or cause it? The more you are able to see that our lives are intertwined, the more you will gain awareness of just how much your words and actions impact others, in both subtle and profound ways. In doing so, you may come to experience the suffering of others as never before. Through this, you have an opportunity to learn that we are all in this together and that our circumstances, though different, are all connected.

The more you embrace your individualism, the more you create separation and lack of recognition to the world's interdependence. Take for instance, the clothing that you are wearing now. Someone, somewhere in the world, pieced the fabric together. Someone else packaged and shipped this to the store where you purchased these items. Someone else gave you money, whether through your own work or as a gift to make this acquisition possible. Through our actions, we are all connected, whether we initially recognize it or not. By becoming increasingly aware of this, you begin to unlearn your habituated individualization. Our social world is built on connections, which involve people doing things together, creating patterns of activity, interwoven like invisible threads creating the fabric of lives. We are born into these worlds, learning first how to act appropriately within them through our language and communication, which, in turn, shapes our identities and relationships.

More and more our world is divided by growing inequalities and disparities, which continue to separate us into categories of "us" and "them." A quick review of world news easily illustrates the unequal distribution of resources, including basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, medical supplies, care, and so much more. To help make sense of this, I turn to Ken Plummer's work on "intimacies," or more specifically, intimate citizenship, which focuses on the role intimacies or how we "do" our personal lives (via bodywork, gender, relationships, identity work) are impacted by inequalities related to divisions or processes of exclusion and inclusion

due to our social locations (class, gender, health, age, race/ethnicity, spirituality).²²⁷ As he suggests, these inequalities pattern how we do our intimate lives by structuring our worlds, impacting how we form families, care for loved ones, approach our bodies, experience genders and sexualities. Because the emphasis here is on what we “do” together, it is something we actively achieve; however, not everyone has the same capacity to participate in the creation of shared social meaning, nor does everyone have equal access to resources. Thus, for Plummer, the question is: Can we have intimate citizenship in an unjust world?

In asking this question, it is quite apparent that there is a huge gap between those who have a great deal of choice in their lives regarding how they “do” intimacies and others who have little to no choice. An example of this would be the current debates surrounding LGBT marriage and adoption in America, when in other parts of the world, homosexuality is criminalized and in some cases punishable by death. No matter what your privileges are, one thing is certain – for most people, intimate life and the choices that revolve around it is a problem. Regardless of one’s social locations, all beings should have the right to a livable life. Thus, our humanity should be predicated on this basic feature. Further, in addition to experiencing our humanity as bound up in the humanity of others through a recognition of our shared vulnerability and radical relatedness, we can start moving towards developing more harmonious relationships by looking at how our everyday lives and choices impact everyone else’s. To be vulnerable to how choices are given or restricted based on social divisions surrounding how we “do” our personal lives is to also acknowledge, as Plummer illustrates, that not every one has control over their bodies, feelings, or relationships or access to how they are represented in both their public and private lives. In fact, it is worth quoting at length just how different these experiences of intimacies are. Plummer states:²²⁸

- If, in some parts of the world, people have choices about whom to marry, when to divorce, and whether to have gay partnerships, in other parts of the world, the choice may be restricted to arranged marriage, forced marriage, child marriage, and mail order brides, which offer no choices at all.
- If, in some parts of the world, people have choices over keeping their bodies fit, buying cosmetic surgery and accessing drugs that enable their bodies to remain well, in other parts of the world, the choice may be restricted to selling their body parts to eke out a meager existence and merely subsist - or die - with a frail body.
- If, in some parts of the world, people have choices over the work-life balance and ways to maintain a high standard of living, in other parts of the world, people are driven to sell their own labor, looking after other people's children and families, sending the money home to help their own families survive.
- If, in some parts of the world, people have choices over fertility and reproductive problems to purchase or gain access to new reproductive technologies, in other parts of the world, the choice may be restricted to selling their wombs, sperm, or babies to others while also finding their own children going to war or dying at early ages.
- If, in some parts of the world, people have choices over their sexualities - being able to afford to buy it if necessary- in other parts of the world, the choice may be limited to the need to sell sex and engage in sex trafficking.
- If, in some parts of the world, people have choices over their mobilities - jet setting across the world, becoming tourists in resort hotels, opting for sex tourism - others have little such choice. If they move, it may be part of the new slave trade, the migration of refugees, or those fleeing genocide.
- If, for some, there is an opening up of access to all kinds of new communication technologies - from mobile phones to cyberspace and the net, for most people, there is no choice of access at all.
- If, in some parts of the world, women have choices over their agency, in other parts of the world, their choices may be restricted.
- And if, in some parts of the world, people may find their identities to be stabilized, uncertain, fluid and open to change, in other parts of the world, the issue of identity may hardly present itself.

In myriad ways, we become conditioned to things as they are - rarely questioning who is doing what to whom and how and why things happen as they do. It becomes increasingly easier to forget that through communication, we can situate and resituate our worlds by remaking and

challenging categories and divisions. An example of this would be how you understand all of the above social locations that shape our daily choices as offered by Plummer – all boxes that socially limit who we are, who we can and cannot connect with, and how we can and cannot act. Even though these boxes are merely symbolic, they operate socially as if they are facts or rules that orient our words and actions. These categories appear to us as if they are “real,” becoming part of our habituated patterns of interaction. By challenging and studying our ways of interacting with the world via how we “do” our intimate, relational lives, we move towards participating more fully in our own lives as well as developing a much greater compassion and awareness of others’ lives, too. In doing so, our task is to continuously ask ourselves as I initially suggested, *How can individuals and communities teach and learn to engage more peacefully, nonviolently, and compassionately with each other?* Moreover, *How can each of us practice a style of communication that helps at least one person suffer less each day?*

Lunar Pause

Begin this activity by reading all of the listed privileges on the following table. Next, chart the basic human rights and privileges you believe you currently have in the column, “I have.” If you do not have one of the listed privileges, you cannot claim access to this. For instance, it is well established that in many industries, women do not receive equal pay; therefore, if there are women in your group, your group should not claim the “Ability to receive equal pay regardless of my gender.”

For the second part of this activity, you are allotted 40 points to purchase privileges from the list. Based on the privileges you currently “have,” you will determine what privileges you will keep, add, or let go of in the column, “I want.” Please note: Different privileges have different costs, and you cannot exceed your point limit. Instead, you must decide which privileges and rights are most important to you. Once you have completed this activity, briefly summarize what your world looks like with your allotted privileges.

Figure 31. “The Cost of a Livable Life” Instructions

Table 1. “The Cost of a Livable Life” Activity²²⁹

<i>Privilege</i>	<i>Points Cost</i>	<i>We Have</i>	<i>We Want</i>
Ability to make decisions on my own behalf	5 points		
Access to clean potable water	5 points		
Access to clean, nutritious foods	5 points		
Access to shelter, home, or temporary/permanent dwelling	5 points		
Ability to see, hear, or move my body without obstacle	5 points		
Ability not to be sold, traded, or treated as property	5 points		
Ability to assemble and speak freely	4 points		
Ability to have a say in my reproductive choices	4 points		
Access to education or ability to learn a trade	4 points		
Ability to live in relatively safe community	4 points		
Ability to give birth to, raise, and/or rear children	4 points		
Ability to speak my language or have everyday business or basic needs conducted in my written or spoken language	3 points		
Access to transportation (driving, public transport, flying)	3 points		
Ability to serve (or not serve) in the military, if I choose	3 points		
Ability to practice my spirituality or religion without persecution	3 points		
Ability to receive medical care and/or health insurance coverage	3 points		
Ability not to be bullied or harassed because of my age, religion, race/ethnicity/nationality, ability, class, gender, or sexual identity	3 points		
Ability to relocate or migrate to another country without persecution or prejudice	3 points		
Ability to stay in my home country without persecution	3 points		
Access to the internet, mobile phone technology, or other forms of mediated communication	3 points		
Ability to avoid physical violence because of who I am or whom I love	3 points		
Ability to avoid discrimination, incarceration, or segregation due to my race/ethnicity/nationality	2 points		
Ability to choose to work inside or outside of the home	2 points		
Ability to avoid discrimination due to my appearance, body type, or disability	2 points		
Ability to keep my job regardless of my age, religion, race/ethnicity/nationality, ability, class, gender, or sexual identity	2 points		
Ability to receive equal pay regardless of my gender	2 points		
Ability to avoid sexual harassment in my work place	2 points		
Ability to be with my partner if he or she is hospitalized or in critical condition	2 points		
Ability to marry whom I love and have it federally recognized	2 points		
Ability to adopt a child with my spouse or without, if single	2 points		
Access to legal help if my rights are violated	2 points		
Insert unlisted privileges or wants here (2-5 points)			
<i>Total Privilege Costs</i>	100 points		40 points

In religious scholar Karen Armstrong's book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, she presents a compelling argument for compassion, a topic that we hear little about these days but need more than ever, our world growing increasingly unbalanced and polarized. Compassion, as a concept, is present in almost every religious, spiritual, and ethical tradition in the world, and, for me, is at the center of my approach to spirituality. But, what is compassion? The term derives from the Latin *patiri* and the Greek *pathein*, meaning "to suffer, undergo, or experience." So, in short, compassion means to "endure something *with* another person" or rather, to put ourselves in others' shoes.²³⁰ This is quite similar to Rodriguez's notion that by recognizing communication and its relationship to vulnerability, we come to see that our humanity is interconnected.

In 1999, when Peter Frost wrote an article that exclaimed, "Why Compassion Counts!" in the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, he passionately called for readers to see the importance of compassion in helping us to better understand organizational life, suggesting that compassion should be an integral part of our theory building and research investigations. He situated compassion as "a connection to the human spirit and to the human condition."²³¹ Not only did he suggest that compassion involves creativity, awareness, and spontaneity, but he further suggests that by tapping into the experiences of compassion, bearing witness to acts of compassion, and storying compassion, we could create compassionate ripples in a sea of suffering. In acknowledging suffering, I contend we open ourselves to the possibility of community.

In a recent article, revisiting Frost's call for "Why Compassion Counts," Dutton and Workman present compassion as a generative force that "propels and motivates action" through small gestures and acts that foster belonging when one approaches work in a more heart-centered way that responds to the suffering of others and humanity in general.²³² To embrace compassion's transformative potential in interactions, they state, "compassion beckons

researchers to look toward, as opposed to away from, human pain and grief, which is an everyday and pervasive experience for people inside organizations.”²³³ This concept, however, is much larger than just researchers and can dramatically shift individuals and communities as well. Put another way, you are a researcher of your life and world, thus, you, too, can embrace the transformative potential of practicing compassion in your daily life.

In discussing the healing potential of compassion, as well as the role compassion can play in everyday life, Frost et al. consider how our most heartfelt, emotional, and relational elements of life can be illuminated by attending to the suffering of others (including, noticing or attending to another; imagining or feeling empathetic concern; and acting to ease suffering); coordinating organizational resources for compassionate action; and finally, engaging or organizing collective action to end suffering, stating:

Within every organizational system are human beings, like ourselves, who want happiness and who do not want suffering – human beings who suffer and who respond to one another’s suffering with compassion.²³⁴

In order to illustrate this concept, Frost et al. explored three compassion lenses: interpersonal work, or helping others through open listening and creating spaces for expressing suffering; narratives that highlight how experiences are storied and made sense of, shaping individual and organizational identities; and, organizing, which presents compassion as a process or social accomplishment that requires collective co-ordination. These lenses become evident in everyday practices, such as sharing vulnerability and giving encouragement, in addition to the exposure to acts and stories of compassion, among other avenues. Starting from the proposition that members’ identities are constructed in part by these stories and encounters of suffering in organizational settings, the authors contend that this offers a window into the discursive constructions of compassion and how this shapes compassionate interactions, also having the

ability to constrain them as well. While most of these authors focus on the role of compassion in organizations and organizing, I include their work here because ultimately, when we start working towards living in harmony, we do so in an organized manner. Thus, for me, organizing is a more collective undertaking involving both shared meaning-making and coordinated action.

Dutton et al. suggests that the first step to this transformation is through a daily expression of compassion that seeks to recognize our shared humanity via experiences of pain, healing, and the social forces that bring us together and recognize our interconnectedness.²³⁵ We may not care about the same things or have the same goals, but we are all on a similar path – and this path almost always involves the three pillars of academic life: research, teaching, and service. All three of these areas can be organized for the greater good, or they can narrowly attend one’s individual goals.

These small acts of encouragement and support have the ability to alter our felt connections with each other through the expression and experience of gratitude wherein compassion transforms our everyday contexts, affirms the common good in our diverse worldviews, and situates us within an organizational narrative that aspires for something greater than sustaining itself. Imagine for a moment collective spaces that actively create a culture of recognition, valuing our individual passions, collectively and compassionately; supports difference while seeking to find a common thread, creating more spaces for communication versus critique and analysis - versus being intolerant of each other’s ideas - and, as a result, becoming caught in a vicious cycle invalidating and delegitimizing each other’s contributions to a great conversation from which we have much to gain. In other words, not only does communication energetically story us, but it is also ecologically interdependent, these two ideas interwoven and experienced in an embodied and relational manner.

As Adler and Hansen ask, what stories do we have to tell ourselves about each other to make compassion possible?²³⁶ I would also question: how do we move away from toxic interactions which foster inequity and competitiveness, instead focusing on compassion as a collective process central to daily life that calls for each of us to find the courage to be aware of each other's suffering. This further calls for us to be aware of the suffering our communication causes in the lives of others, as well as how our work can serve to alleviate suffering. How can we move beyond recognizing our daily suffering, which includes physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial stresses that occur as relationships dissolve, losing friends and family members, experiencing mistreatment among peers and those in power, feeling rejected and receiving rejections of our work, and undergoing constant scrutiny about the value of our contributions, among many other struggles and obstacles.

We cannot suffer together – if we continue to suffer these struggles alone. I believe the first step is *awareness*, which calls for us to “see” and make spaces for communication about suffering. Doing so creates opportunities for disruption. To see suffering and not act is to accept your role in its creation and maintenance. To be aware and act to disrupt dispassionate systems is to strive for something beyond ourselves. In doing so, I am not suggesting that compassion, too, should be institutionalized as processes of legitimation only serve to create boundaries that separate by suggesting that this action is “appropriate” and that action is not. The idea, instead, is to co-ordinate compassionately as a community so we can unite in a shared struggle, valuing each others' contributions even when we disagree with them versus simply critiquing their worth. For me, awareness is the first step in disrupting the status quo and creating a crack in the cement large enough for compassion to bloom.

Karen Armstrong's twelve steps to a more compassionate life and world include learning

about compassion, not only from reading and teachers, but also through experiencing it in your everyday life. She asks readers to consider this a lifelong learning process and urges us to begin to make room in our hearts for exploring spiritual beliefs and traditions that are very different from our own. By expanding our knowledge of compassion, we begin to learn about our world so we can step outside of ourselves and walk a mile in another's shoes. In her second step, she asks us to take inventory of our lives and to consider how compassion functions within our relationships with loved ones, family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and strangers, further noticing how we contribute to our communities. To do so, she encourages us to consider the daily choices we make about what we consume and purchase, the work we do, and our ability to forgive and expand our circle of connection.

The third step is to begin to develop compassion, more gently and kindly, for ourselves. In a sense, she wants readers not only to look at the patterns of suffering in which we keep ourselves, but also to cultivate a strong sense of self-love and acceptance in order to break free from these negative patterns. Only then can we move into the fourth step, which asks us to be empathetic and to recognize the suffering of others, linking to the fifth and sixth steps, focusing on mindfulness and action. What small acts of kindness can we offer? How can we become more conscious of our impact? We first need to admit just how little we know, which is the seventh step. The idea here is that the more you learn about yourself and the world, the less you know. To embrace this idea is to no longer cling to certainty but to surrender to all of the messiness, complexity, and ambiguity of life. It is here that we learn to be more open-minded, moving further and further away from our "truths" as the "truth" - to spaces that encourage and allow for multiple and contradictory "truths."

The eighth and ninth steps interrelate and focus on how we communicate and understand

that which is unfamiliar or uncertain so we can expand our horizons and be conscious of how our choices impact the world around us as well as future generations. Once this is possible, we begin to practice and develop the ability to see how our interpretations of the world are coloring our experiences of it, both limiting our understandings, but also serving as a springboard for new learning. Finally, in the eleventh and twelfth steps, we learn that we must bring ourselves to “see” and acknowledge suffering. Continuing to deny it will only perpetuate things as they already are. Once we are able to see, experience, and communicate about suffering, we open ourselves to being able to more easily forgive, express gratitude, cultivate nonviolence, and “love our enemy” because we come to understand we are all connected.

Engaging these steps requires courage. Compassion requires courage. As such, “Finding the courage to be vulnerable is also about finding the courage to act, to learn, to trust, to believe, to imagine, to live, to love. Through courage we recognize our humanity in each other by being unafraid – regardless of our differences – to engage each other.”²³⁷ Moreover, Rodriguez contends,

Communication practices that embody affirmation and compassion make us less afraid of ambiguity, mystery, and complexity that come with being human, promote the formation of relations that lessen our aggression and hostility toward each other, foster community by encouraging us to understand our realities and perspectives of others, and push us outward (public) and toward each other.²³⁸

Not only does compassion undermine separation, but it also has the power to create new and different stories about our world. If we take seriously the idea that our ability allows us to be vulnerable to the humanity of others, via the practice of compassion, then we can begin to imagine the potential for change in the world. In the end, compassion does not translate to tolerance because tolerance suggests that we maintain difference through separation. Instead, we

need to cultivate a spirit of openness and curiosity, allowing others to be who they are without imposing who they are or whom we think they should be on them.

In our communication *sutras*, we discussed the idea that communication is always relational or interdependent as everything we know about ourselves and our lives occurs in relationship to other people. Again, what is important in understanding this concept in relationship to compassion is asking the question, *What is it that allows us to live together harmoniously?* Because the choices we make in our lives are also always interdependent, we can begin to explore our connections to the past (and our shared histories) as well as examining larger points, questioning the various traditions, customs, and social rules, networks, and arrangements in which we are engaged, paying specific attention to how we affect and are affected by others. In doing so, you can begin to see the spaces between your interactions. For example, in a conversation, is the person with whom you are speaking spending most of the time in silence? If so, what does this mean? Are you perhaps dominating the conversation? Or does this mean the person is not listening or they have little to contribute or is this something else entirely?

In every interaction, multiple contexts are always in play, and in more cases than not, we have become so accustomed to spontaneously reacting, based on our knowledge of the rules of interaction learned over a lifetime, that we develop a great degree of “un-awareness” about what is happening between us. It is much easier to see this occurring when you step outside of your culture; i.e., when you are traveling to another country and are unversed in that culture’s rules of interaction. Thus, to be aware is to question the boundaries we create between oneself and others; further, whom do we include and exclude from our lives and why?

Even in asking these questions, it can be easy to forget that we also make these boxes or

divisions real by giving them meaning, and as such, we often become complicit in our own suffering as well as the suffering of others. Rodriguez speaks to this by contending that all these boxes do is situate our differences within these concepts, thereby promoting stereotypes that fail to recognize the complexities, tensions, and conflicts with these categories. Further, defining difference by these kinds of social locations (age, gender, etc.) is problematic because it starts with the assumption that these categories themselves are stable and representative of these divisions; thus,

Before we can change how we relate and communicate to something or someone, we must change how we perceive that something or someone, and many forces shape how we perceive something and someone. Such forces include our exposure and experience with compassion, forgiveness, mercy, grace, and love.²³⁹

Practicing yoga is one method of many for paying attention to how we label and categorize others. Thus, as you move through your day, start to notice the many labels you hear yourself and others employ in conversations, as well as in other media such as television, the Internet, or on the radio. Also, begin to question what creating these boxes does socially. What do these difference claims do? This becomes especially apparent in many mainstream research studies that purport to have unlocked the key to gender or sexuality or race or any number of other social issues. Ask yourself: What is the research claim being made and who is making the research claim? What evidence is provided to support this claim? Why is the claim being made and what are the everyday interactional consequences of this claim? These questions are quite similar to Rodriguez's questions about the role communication plays in creating a more humane world that enlarges our sense of what is possible.

For example, as Plummer's discussion of intimate citizenship highlights, mainstream definitions of gender, sex, and sexuality most often bind women to reproductive function, making socially-constructed gender roles and biology inseparably bound to each other,

ultimately creating dichotomies and hierarchies of difference/power. As categories of identity, communicated, performed, created, and reinforced socially, what do these categories “do” interactionally. For instance, a person’s gender identity, assignment, (expected) role, and attribution may not conform at all to mainstream norms or expectations; however, deviating from “the norm” can have extreme, even fatal consequences. As a result, gender is just one type of identity marker that intersects with others. Thus, if one looks for difference, one will find it everywhere.

Again ask: What does creating difference do? The question is not whether this is a case of nature or nurture or biology or culture, nor is it either/or or both/and: the question is: Why would we need these categories if difference did not exist to include and exclude, to render some more powerful, and to create systems of privilege? How do these ways of viewing the world create ideas as fact, which are then perceived as natural? Further, men and women are not born “men” and “women” - but rather become “men” and “women” through mimicking others and through learned understandings of cultural ideas associated with masculinity and femininity, which varies hugely globally. How much one chooses to invest in the performance of or the “doing” of masculinity and femininity will vary from person to person and context to context.

Thus, I suggest that we all, in some way or another, act as oppressors (unknowingly, much of the time), as well as experience oppression (ageism, sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, etc.). Simply and directly put, we all oppress and are oppressed. No one is free from this dynamic; we must continuously ask ourselves – What does it mean to live a life? How can we act more compassionately to allow others to live a livable life, too? How can we show more tolerance and less hate in our thoughts, actions, and speech? This is our challenge as the personal is *always* political, as feminists have long asserted. By becoming aware of these

connections, we start to see how actions, in one part of our lives, not only affect us individually - but have consequences for others' lives, too.

Remember, in most, if not all instances, “We perceive the world how *we are* rather than how the *word is*”; therefore, “Communication requires a willingness to suspend our truths so that one person can genuinely experience and understand the position of the world from the position of another person.”²⁴⁰ Before doing so, however, I must ask you: How do you want to live *your* life? What kind of impact do you want to have on *your* world? Do you strive to merely survive or do you work purposefully to thrive? As you move through your life, will you do so in the service of others, attempting to enrich others' lives, or will you focus more on you- your needs, wants, and desires? Finally, in what ways will you work to leave the world better off than when you entered it? In regard to diversity, how can we pay greater attention to our words and actions so we can better see how we impact others and how they impact us?

The first step is to develop awareness in how we categorize people, and then begin to challenge and disrupt the cultural scripts that seek to keep people in frames that support separation and individualism versus connection and communalism. Also, start to pay attention to the disputes that arise from these labels and categories, while continuing to observe how people are continuously placed in these boxes in everyday talk as well as in the media. Equally important is watching the claims people make about aspects of the social world being “real,” and in doing so, invalidate or discredit alternative realities as the meanings we apply to what we believe to be “real” has “real” everyday social consequences. Through our everyday talk, we produce and enact our beliefs about these realities; thus, it is imperative that we start paying attention to how and why we do this, considering what aspects of these realities are learned, taught, and passed on so we can better recognize the parts of our worlds that we support and

ethically oppose. Moreover, it is in the small acts or micropractices, which create our little universes, so knowing that it is always possible to choose not to engage in harmful or unjust actions is a key element to living more harmoniously together. Or, as Amardo Rodriguez states, “We make ourselves by how we relate and communicate to each other.”²⁴¹

We must always ask ourselves whence do these stories of exclusion come and who wants them to be believed and why? In other words, who benefits from these stories and who is harmed? If we take seriously the notion that diversity affirms life, as Rodriguez contends, than it is essential to recognize that difference is very *different* than inequality. Inequality occurs when one group benefits over another as a result of their difference. Moving through your day, I wager that you will encounter many examples that illustrate this concept. To explore this more fully, consider the disparities you witness in regard to income, housing, nourishment, travel, education, occupations, political power or resources, safety, health, and access to information as well as basic human rights, such as the right to marry whom you choose or to make decisions on your own behalf or for your family or even to be able to make choices about your body.

All of these examples shape our realities, histories, and abilities to move freely (or not) in this world. Your mobility is greatly determined by the amount of privilege you have. Privilege is an invisible resource that impacts your life options, depending on your social status and where you fall within your mainstream culture (sadly, most often based on age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, spirituality, etc.). Thus, our ability to disrupt these scripts starts and ends with how much awareness we have in how we communicate. I have often heard people state that the study of communication is actually the study of miscommunication because it is in this space of misunderstanding that we come to learn about our selves and others. Conflict is an inevitable part of being human, but it is how we communicate within the conflict that determines whether

relationships will continue or dissolve. In this sense, yoga, then, is really a practice of stepping outside of ourselves so we can come to witness our selves, our words, and our interactions with others. The more we begin to realize the suffering we cause, the more we are able to counter its effects. It is in this space that we can begin to cultivate the spirit of non-violence.

Krishnamurti captures this idea beautifully when he asks if it is possible to live an ordinary, everyday life in the midst of all the violence and cruelty in the world? His answer to this question is to revolutionize our relationships, beginning with ourselves, coming to see our relationship with the world and then actively working to bring about a change built on a foundation of compassionate awareness of our actions. He describes this further, stating

Seeing everything that goes on in your daily life, your daily activities – when you pick up a pen, when you talk, when you go out for a drive or when you are walking alone in the woods – can you with one breath, with one look know yourself simply as you are? When you know yourself as you are, then you understand the whole structure of man's endeavor.²⁴²

In other words, you observe yourself so you can learn where you stand in the world and how you move within this understanding. What is it that you want or desire most? What, if anything, are you seeking? What holds you back from actualizing your dreams? Are you honest with yourself about what matters to you most? Are you able to share this with those around you? Asking these questions hopefully inspires reflection so you can begin to watch yourself. Do not judge, just observe. While Krishnamurti describes meditation as a type of understanding that teaches individuals to surrender to the totality of life, dissolving all forms of fragmentation, I liken this idea more generally to everyday yoga practices, which we will discuss more fully in the next chapter; for now, I suggest, as he also states, “When you learn about yourself, watch yourself, watch the way you walk, how you eat, what you say, the gossip, the hate, the jealousy – if you are aware of all that in yourself, without any choice, that is part of meditation.”²⁴³ For me, that is

yoga. Taking this a step further, what you really come to see is that we are not different, but the same. Only then, will non-violence flourish.

By embracing a spirit of non-violence or *ahimsa*, in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi, we learn to honor the worth of every human being, seeing our lives as linked. This recognition is where the seed of compassion can bloom inasmuch that not only do we see our interdependence, we can then respect the interconnectedness of all life. As MLK Jr. teaches, nonviolence is a path of courage that seeks friendship and understanding, love instead of hate. Moreover, nonviolence works against injustice and sees suffering as a point of connection. Peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh's discussion of the five mindfulness trainings is also helpful here as an ethical orientation that complements the *yamas* and *niyamas* as additional tools from which to fully embrace compassion. The trainings include the following:²⁴⁴

- *Reverence for Life*: Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals.
- *Generosity*: Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals.
- *Intimate Responsibility*: Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society.
- *Deep Listening and Loving Speech*: Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability or unwillingness to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and to be with others in their suffering.
- *Mindful Consumption*: Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health and wellbeing, for myself, my family, my community, and the planet by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming.

In these guidelines, Thich Nhat Hanh is calling for individuals to be aware of the suffering they cause, resulting from imposing beliefs on others, instead working to respect our differences while working to eliminate suffering. This asks us to avoid the suffering that we create when we invalidate others' experiences and beliefs, especially when they differ from our own, instead working to be open-minded by being willing to learn about the source of the other person's belief and why their experience is unique and valid. By treating people as less than ourselves, we act violently; thus, it is only when we recognize our basic sameness that we create space for shared vulnerability. This requires that we develop awareness of the many ways that we intentionally and unintentionally exclude others who are different from us, instead seeking spaces of inclusion. To do so also requires us to become aware of our privileges, instead practicing generosity and gratitude as a means not to exploit others nor engage in violent, hateful, or hurtful speech, as well as cultivating the desire and openness to listen. Building on the fourteen mindfulness trainings of Thich Nhat Hanh, social worker, Larry Young created six additional trainings, which I have adapted below to highlight the importance of intercultural awareness and diversity-centered ecological communication practices, including:²⁴⁵

- Aware of the suffering caused by imposing one's own opinions or cultural beliefs upon another being, I am committed to refraining from forcing others, in any way – through authority, threat, financial incentive, or education – to adopt my own belief system. I commit to respecting every human beings' right to be different, while working towards the elimination of suffering of all beings.
- Aware of the suffering caused by invalidating or denying another person's experience, I am committed to refraining from making assumptions, or judging harshly any beliefs or attitudes that are different from my own. I commit to being open-minded towards other points of view, and I commit to meeting each perceived difference in another person with the willingness to learn more about their worldview and individual circumstances.
- Aware of the suffering caused by the violence of treating someone as inferior or superior, I am committed to refraining from diminishing or idealizing the worth, integrity, and happiness of any human being. Recognizing our interconnectedness, I commit to treating

each being I encounter, with the same loving kindness that I would bestow upon a loved one or friend.

- Aware of the suffering caused by intentional and unintentional acts of rejection, exclusion, avoidance, or indifference towards people who are culturally, physically, sexually, or economically different from me, I am committed to refraining from isolating myself to connecting with only likeminded individuals and communities. I commit to diversifying my relationships to increase my connectedness towards people of different cultures, ethnicities, sexual orientations, ages, physical abilities, genders, and economic means.
- Aware of the suffering caused by the often invisible and/or taken for granted nature of privilege, and the ability of privilege to benefit some over others, I am committed to refraining from exploiting any person or group. I further commit to bringing awareness to my own privilege in order to discern skillful ways of using privilege for the benefit of all beings.
- Aware of the suffering caused to myself and others during conflict or disagreement, I am committed to refraining from reacting defensively, using harmful speech because I feel injured, or communicating merely to justify my sense of rightness. I commit to communicating mindfully, speaking honestly, and practicing compassionate awareness through deep listening.

In considering these concepts, what is missing for me in our conversation thus far is discussing the potentially playful nature of communication as a tool to bring more love, laughter, and lightheartedness to our everyday lives. Drawing on Gregory Bateson's pivotal work on play, I see play as a tool of possibility, allowing us to experience our everyday lives from multiple opposing angles.²⁴⁶ Existing in the in-between, play inspires multidimensional modes of paradoxical being, becoming, doing, and experiencing. By playing with various modes of communication, I realize that as with Shepherd's ideas about communication as the simultaneous experience of self and other, I continue to be drawn to communicative frames that play with the boundaries between *me* and *you*, *body* and *mind*, *theory* and *practice*, ultimately seeking to be in the world in a way that is grounded in compassionate words and action.

In contemplating communication as play, I refer to Nachmanovitch, who states, "Play is the way of combinatorial flexibility - the ability to see things from many angles and to change our habits."²⁴⁷ Play, while difficult (possibly impossible) to define, provides a frame for action- it is a type of exploration, practice, and context for our actions and words. Based on my understandings of these readings, for me to take a one-dimensional or literal-minded space would be the opposite of play, which exemplifies layering, complex circular patterns, and fantasy. As such, play could be conceptualized as everything and nothing at the same time. Communication as play reminds me to be creative, to embrace uncertainty, to explore metacommunication, to have fun, and to look at the world paradoxically and multidimensionally.

In doing so, however, we must begin to recognize and embrace the spiritual potential of compassion as a tool for recognizing our interdependence. By interdependence, I mean "the dynamic of being mutually responsible to and dependent on others; participating in a network of relationships in which the members rely on and support each other," embracing and working to better understand the connections among diversity, democracy, and sustainability.²⁴⁸ It is within these moments that we can fully embody "everyday peacemaking" as a tool to reduce inequality, promote understanding, and cultivate new directions for collaboration. When we start integrating yogic awareness into our daily lives via practices, or small acts of compassion, we start to see more and more our part in the interconnected web of life. In this knowing, spirituality becomes something more than some type of mystical, supernatural, or transcendent experience. Instead, we see that the spiritual and the material realms are actually not separated as many philosophies suggest.

Lunar Pause – A Compassionate Communication Manifesto

I must attempt to celebrate diversity and cultivate safe spaces with others, remembering that we both give and receive together, shaping each other's lives.

I must not be afraid to be creative, to embrace uncertainty, to attempt to better understand metacommunication, to have fun, and to look at the world paradoxically and multidimensionally.

I must not forget the collectivity of life, which inspires me to work harder to build compassionate alliances with others while trying to make the world a better place for everyone.

I must attempt to make all of my encounters sacred endeavors, reminded that we are all interconnected no matter how separate we feel sometimes.

I must continue to ask questions, fight injustice, and challenge the status quo.

I must always remember the importance of engaging with causes about which I am passionate, to be aware of my ethical stances, remaining open to others' beliefs and values.

I must attempt to actively participate with the world through joyful commitment to what matters to me most, seeking solidarity with others and working to eliminate suffering.

I must always question what I care about, finding space to play, be creative, and make trouble, while acting compassionately and seeking spaces of peaceful engagement in my everyday life and beyond.

Figure 32. A Compassionate Communication Manifesto

As the lines of separation begin to blur, one comes to also know that the self we have constructed is a fiction – an ongoing, ever-made notion that is part of a larger story (for which we play only a small part). Yoga practice reminds us that *we* are the world, unfolding in the present moment, and only when we attempt to split from it by “i-identifying” with this separation does the separation actually occur. If we were to realize instead our inner fire or *purusha* is part of greater divine consciousness, then we would experience divinity in all things – the tree, each other, each moment. Thus, the *yamas* and *niyamas* serve as reminders that through our

communication, we are ecologically interdependent, but also that our path is not to *act* compassionately but to *become* compassion.

Wave Two Notes

²⁰⁸ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 153.

²⁰⁹ Beatrice Bruteau in Monk Kidd, *The Dance*, 154.

²¹⁰ Edward Sarath, "Meditation in Higher Education: The Next Wave?" *Innovative Higher Education* 27, no. 4 (2003): 215-33.

²¹¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999) 3.

²¹² Robert Haight, "The Classroom is a Sangha: Contemplative Education in the Community College," *New Directions for Community Colleges* 151 (2010): 29-38.

²¹³ Ellen Langer, *Mindfulness* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1989), 79.

²¹⁴ Nina Asher, "Engaging Difference: Towards a Pedagogy of Interbeing," *Teaching Education*, 14 no. 3 (2003): 238.

²¹⁵ Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice*.

²¹⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987), 4.

²¹⁷ Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice*.

²¹⁸ Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, n.d., <http://www.contemplativemind.org/>

²¹⁹ Richard Brady, "Learning to Stop, Stopping to Learn: Discovering the Contemplative Dimension in Education," *Journal of Transformative Education* 5, no. 4 (2007): 372-394.

²²⁰ Rick Repetti, "The Case for a Contemplative Philosophy of Education," *New Directions for Community Colleges* 151 (2010): 5-15.

²²¹ John Miller, *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion: Creating Conditions for Timeless Learning* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006), 76.

²²² "Peace is the Way," a short video featuring Thich Nhat Hanh, produced by the Plum Village Meditation Center: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzuxdemlxbw>.

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- ²²³ Amy Saltzman, A. (n.d.). Mindfulness: A guide for teachers. *The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*. http://www.contemplativemind.org/Mindfulness-A_Teachers_Guide.pdf.
- ²²⁴ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, xii.
- ²²⁵ Rodrigeuz, *Revisioning Diversity*, xii.
- ²²⁶ Rodrigeuz, *Revisioning Diversity*, 34.
- ²²⁷ Ken Plummer, "Intimate Citizenship in an Unjust World," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*, ed. Mary Romero and Eric Margolis (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 75-99.
- ²²⁸ Plummer, "Intimate Citizenship," 93.
- ²²⁹ Inspired by and adapted from Safe Zone Trainer, Megan Pugh's LGBT "Points of Privilege" activity.
- ²³⁰ Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010).
- ²³¹ Peter J. Frost, "Why Compassion Counts!" *Journal of Management Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1999): 131.
- ²³² Jane E. Dutton and Kristina Workman, "Commentary on 'Why Compassion Counts!': Compassion as a Generative Force," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (2011): 402-406.
- ²³³ Dutton and Workman, "Commentary," 404.
- ²³⁴ Peter Frost, Jane Dutton, S. Maitlis, Jacoba Lilius, Jason Kanov, and Monica Worline, "Seeing Organizations Differently: Three Lenses of Compassion," in *The SAGE Handbook of Organization Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, and W. Noord (London: Sage, 2006), 862.
- ²³⁵ Jane Dutton, Jacoba Lilius, and Jason Kanov, "The Transformative Potential of Compassion at Work," in *Handbook of Transformative Cooperation: New Designs and Dynamics*, eds. S. Piderit, E. Fry, and D. L. Cooperrider (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 108-126.
- ²³⁶ Nancy J. Adler and Hans Hansen, "Daring to Care: Scholarship that Supports the Courage of Our Convictions," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (2012): 128-139.
- ²³⁷ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 141.
- ²³⁸ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 79.
- ²³⁹ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 35.

²⁴⁰ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 58.

²⁴¹ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 64.

²⁴² Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 121-122.

²⁴³ Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 116.

²⁴⁴ Adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh, *For a Future to Be Possible* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007) and Peggy Rowe Ward and Larry Ward, *Love's Garden: A Guide to Mindful Relationships* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2008).

²⁴⁵ Larry Young, "Directing the Mind Towards Practices in Diversity," accessed July 16, 2013, http://larryyang.org/images/training_the_mind.3.pdf

²⁴⁶ Gregory Bateson, *A Theory of Play and Fantasy: A Report on Theoretical Aspects of the Project for the Study of the Role of the Paradoxes of Abstraction in Communication* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1995).

²⁴⁷ Stephen Nachmanovitch, "This is play," *New Literary History* 40, no. 1 (2009): 12.

²⁴⁸ Martusewicz et al, *Ecojustice*, 45.

ASTEYA, BRAHMACHARYA AND APARIGRAHA

Practicing non-stealing, non-excess, and non-possessiveness

Happiness is not something you acquire; love is not something you produce; love is not something you have; love is something that *has* you. You do not have the wind, the stars, and the rain. You don't possess these things; you surrender to them. And surrender comes when you are aware of your illusions, when you are aware of your addictions, when you are aware of your desires and fears.²⁴⁹

This quote paves the way for where we are going in this sequence as it summarizes much of what *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, and *aparigraha* aim to teach us. Returning to the *yamas* or guidelines for living a compassionate life, we add these additional practices to the first two introduced in part one (*ahimsa* or nonviolence and *satya* or truthfulness and honesty), having also already reviewed the *niyamas* or personal practices for living with peaceful awareness, including: *saucha* (purity); *santosha* (contentment and gratitude); *tapas* (spiritual effort); *svadhyaya* (self-study); and *isvara-pranidhana* (surrender). *Asteya*, *brahmacharya*, and *aparigraha* not only link all of our discussions thus far regarding cultivating compassionate awareness, but they also build the foundation for where our discussion is going as we move into living in the flow.

Most significantly, *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, and *aparigraha* continue to sharpen our awareness of our daily patterns, purposefully heightening our understanding of our intentions behind our words and actions. Furthermore, both the *yamas* and *niyamas* are tools, or rather suggestions, for how we might undergo spiritual transformation both individually and socially. In each of these examples, we will continue to see the ecological implications of our everyday

choices as well as how the energy we invest in various parts of our storied lives is all a matter of perception. Thus, yoga ultimately is a practice that enlivens us to how we perceive and experience the world.

Starting with *asteya* or non-stealing, this *yama* centers on not taking what is not given freely to us. In other words, we often take more than we need in life in a variety of ways. We steal from ourselves, other people and beings, the future and past, and the planet. Our daily choices are filled with opportunities to practice *asteya* by not overbuying or overconsuming as a way to reduce our carbon footprint. *Asteya* teaches us to learn to give and receive, living with both integrity and reciprocity. As a practice, it seeks to cultivate a feeling of abundance versus lack or scarcity. Thus, *asteya* aims to counter the sense that something is “missing” (money, romance, materials, status, and so on) in our lives. When we feel like something is missing, we continue to search for resources to fill these gaps and this is where *duhkha* or suffering thrives. *Duhkha* separates us from seeing each moment as already providing everything we need because it so often ties us to the *then* (past) and *when* (future). It also keeps us focused on an attitude of “my,” “me,” and “mine.”

For me, *asteya* is a teaching that illustrates the importance of turning the focus away from oneself towards others, attending to their suffering and hardships to see spaces of connection. *Asteya* asks us to ask each other— what are we offering each other? How do we share ownership of our lives? If we start with the notion people are connected and do things in an orderly way via patterns of activity (or coordinated action) built of shared meaning, we come to see that communication is what makes this possible. It is through our communication that we hold our social worlds together, connecting and disconnecting, inventing categories, and organizing experience – all of which tell us who we are and how we should be treated. We filter, interpret,

and select information about what is true and false - truth and lies, so how do we ever know which version of reality is really real? How do we illuminate these patterns, write stories with alternate endings, question our constructed realities, and keep the conversation going at the same time? In the midst of this often invisible web of interaction, we encounter a realness and a force, which becomes quite visible when you attempt to a break a pattern. On a social level, you see this play out in various forms of protest and activist efforts that challenge the status quo. In our day-to-day lives, this might surface in numerous ways such as someone who gets divorced and then is no longer invited to couple-centered gatherings with friends. Take a moment and consider patterns in your life you have attempted to change and what your personal and social experience has been as a result.

Moreover, in regard to how people interact, how do we know which social rules we should follow and which we should not? Because every story, or rule, in this case, is born out of a particular place, time, and context, and is taught and learned over generations, how “do” we act ethically and compassionately and still live together harmoniously when our meanings related to what is ethical, compassionate, and harmonious often vary so greatly amongst us? Reflecting on these questions helps us make sense of how people solve conflicts and crises together, who benefits from doing things a certain way, how our social locations and group memberships impact our choices, and how the past shapes the present in myriad ways. Thus, to see the consequences of our actions, we must first see how we are connected and dependent on our relating. Because what we know is always incomplete and partial, as all of our knowledge is relationally constructed, I believe it is crucial to start unlearning what we have decided is true about life as well as what we truly believe. In doing so, we shine a new light of awareness on

what we have decided is real, and as a result, the boundaries we draw between real and unreal, truth and fiction, subject and object, and a whole host of other dualities that orient our lives.

In yoga practice, it is of prime importance that we question our understanding of ourselves first, which is why *svadhyaya* is such an integral part of any yoga practice. Throughout our lives, we carry with us images of the world and its inhabitants – all of which are based on our histories, experiences, and preferences. These images that we project onto ourselves and other beings form dividing lines among us, casting each other into subject-object positions as the “Be a tree” exercise hopefully illustrated. By turning our attention to the spaces between us with our full and present attention, we, even if only for a second, may be able to experience a moment where the lines blur or disappear completely. Practicing *asteya* goes beyond seeing the dividing lines between you and tree, to not just seeing, but being the tree. In this practice, the first step is learning to *observe* and see the difference between the *observer* and *observed*, while the next step is experiencing the two as one.

As long as we are still observing ourselves, we are still “i”-dentifying with our socially conditioned selves, processing the layers of layers of images and projects we have of the world around us from a central organizing image of “I,” “me,” and “mine.” *Asteya* works to open us to a world beyond this image, teaching us to continue to know the “self” in a different way. Krishnamurti suggests that once you say, “I know myself,” you have effectively stopped learning about your world. He suggests that learning to look simply at what we think we “know” is the only way to truly experience “freedom from the known.” Because we carry these images and stories of the past and future into the present, we are able to recognize and know our experiences of reality. From here, we impose our categories, labels, and preferences regarding how we experience this experience. In other words,

We also create the humanity of others in communication. To relate to a person as an object is to reduce a person to an object. We have a responsibility for nurturing and shaping each other's humanity. We also have a responsibility for the condition of the world as what becomes of our humanity becomes our world.²⁵⁰

As the above quote suggests, I see communication as the simultaneous experience of self and other, but I also believe in most cases, what emerges in any interaction is a moment of relating between two projections or images of who we "think" each other is in relationship to one another.

What I am trying to convey is that we are not these labels and projections, and in the end, relating what Buber refers to as an I-It relationship contributes to forming this illusion. Going back to the tree, the minute we learn to see a "tree," we likely never actually see it again until we start looking at it with new eyes, unlearning all of the images and categories that limit its expression. We live in an ever-changing reality, yet we continue to apply concepts to our experience as tools to make our lives more manageable. While I am not arguing for us to move towards some state that exists without language or fragmentation, I instead hope to highlight that not all reality can be captured with words (or at all). Mostly, I wish to call for a return to our embodied knowing, experiencing our lives through every pore of our being, receiving feedback through our sensuous participation in the intimacy of daily life.

Even in the midst of this, we will continue to organize and filter this information, but continuing to question how we are taught to see and experience life as well as *who* is doing the filtering helps us move closer to understanding *asteya*. *Asteya* teaches us to build our world out of our attachment to these constructed images of reality to realize that life makes more sense as a mystery and our constant attempt to make sense of it inspires a great deal of suffering. Yoga, then, becomes a process to help us see that we cannot ask the world to change without our changing first. *Asteya* teaches us to work with less and to enjoy it more, asking ourselves: Who

and what do we give the power to make ourselves happy, sad, miserable? In reflecting on our answers, we can observe the obstacles we place in our own paths, also noticing that our sense of fulfillment cannot exist in others as we see others through our impressions of them, which is ultimately us. Thus, happiness, contentment, tolerance is already us, if we choose to see this. To embrace this notion is to “wake up” to love, and with “love we come to recognize that who we are can never be separate from what others allow us to become. Our identity is never outside of each other’s identity. Who we allow others to become is much about who we are ready and willing to become.”²⁵¹

Understanding *asteya* as non-stealing means that we steal from each other when we place each other into hierarchical categories of competition and comparison. We steal from ourselves when we continue to think that we are “not enough” as we already are. In every encounter where we make the exchange about us, we steal. Through our words and actions, we steal from others when we do not listen, when we invalidate, or disconfirm someone’s existence. When we intentionally cause harm, we take and separate. By imposing images on everything, we steal from each being’s emerging uniqueness in the divine flow of things. Every time we let something other than love draw the line, we steal from our ability to connect and see our shared humanity. When we build walls around our belongings and beliefs, we make the world about us. Demands, expectations, judgments, and prejudices steal from our potential as well as others. Living in the past or future steals from the present.

To practice *asteya*, we must learn to pay attention to the many ways we steal time, attention, resources, relationships, power, affection, support, and energy. Seeing the world from a lens of lack or searching for what is missing only makes others’ worlds appear better, creating more searching and more lack. *Asteya* teaches abundance based on acknowledging our own

desires and containing them so we do not cause suffering when they go unfulfilled. This practice calls attention to how we are connected via what membership categories we reside within so that we might better know the ways in which we include and exclude, asking: Who is doing what to whom, when, where, how, and under what circumstances? *Asteya* asks us to practice deep gratitude for all those that have come before us, paving the way for our lives to be what they are, and at the same time, doing the same for the generations that will follow us.

Lunar Pause

Are you more of a giver or a receiver? How might you give more and take less? In what ways are you taking more than you need (in time, money, resources, love, support)? Who are your giving role models? Think of someone you know who gives greatly to others and do something generous for them. Also, consider the give and take of conversation, and either take a step up or a step down. If find yourself talking more, practice listening. If you find you are always in the role of listener, give more time to sharing by talking. Finally, reflect on the labels and images you *give* to others and what this *takes* away from their ability to be who they are in relationship to you.

Figure 33. Being with *asteya*

Brahmacharya means to “dwell in Brahma” or “walk with God” and is a type of code of conduct involving the wise use of vital energy, particularly sexual energy. *Brahmacharya* further teaches nonattachment and overindulgence stemming from a space of self-centeredness. Thus, this practice teaches us to direct our energy towards service. With *brahmacharya*, the idea is not that we should repress our energy, as doing so only gives it more power; instead, it is about letting our energy move through us without being attached to specific outcomes or the fruits of our actions. When we find ourselves overdoing work, food, exercise, sleep, sex, and so on, we are offered an opportunity to practice *brahmacharya* as a path to directing our energy back to a balanced state.

Brahmacharya is often interpreted as a practice of celibacy or abstinence, focusing only on its sexual implications, but I choose to interpret *brahmacharya* as an invitation to walk through life in a sacred manner, leaving behind all of the desires that lead to excess. Translated differently, *brahmacharya* simply refers to a practice of non-excess, allowing ourselves to see the world through the eyes of child. In doing so, we remember our curiosity through play, inspiring wonder and awe. Like *asteya*, *brahmacharya* calls for a practice of voluntary simplicity so we might see the sacredness in small acts of kindness. In other words, practicing *brahmacharya* is a practice of balance, teaching us to shift our weight forward and backwards to find the space of comfort between “too much” and “not enough.” Thus, it forms the edge between boredom and overexcitement by teaching us to recognize “enough.” *Brahmacharya* does not ask us to live in a world without pleasure or desire; instead, it teaches us to surrender to the ordinariness of everyday life so we might fully embody the plentitude of what already is.

Desire, then, becomes a vitally important life force to shape our experiences, as it is through desire that the world moves and pulses with life. We might ponder how our life would be different if we no longer desired control, power, or possessions and instead allowed ourselves to desire more simply through breath awareness or our heartbeat or even the smell of a flower or the touch of the wind. But throughout our lives, we desire so much – love, knowledge, belonging, among so many other desires. Rod Stryker discusses four distinct desires as outlined by the *Vedas*, including: *dharma*, or the desire to be who we are meant to be; *artha*, or the desire for resources or means to fulfill our *dharma*; *kama*, or the desire for pleasure in any and all forms; and, *moksha*, or the desire for spiritual realization and liberation.²⁵² Not only is desire ever-present, as he contends, but it is also

With you at every step and with every breath you take. Desire precedes your every action, since before you can *do*, you first have to *want*. I can't lift my arm, reach for a drink of water, or do anything else without first wanting to; thus every action you have done or will do – is preceded by desire.²⁵³

Desire propels us forward, most often towards what we find pleasurable, but desire also has the potential to cause great suffering, but pursued compassionately, Stryker contends, these desires also offer a path of spiritual transformation.

Lunar Pause

What do you do in excess? In other words, what aspects of your life require more balance?

What aspects of your life feel the most draining energetically? The most enlivening? How might you integrate more or less of each to bring greater balance?

How do you find magic in the mundane? What inspires feelings of awe and wonder for you?

Figure 34. Experiencing *brahmacharya*

Through practices such as *brahmacharya*, we can experience desire as a great teacher for how to find balance between embracing pleasure and enjoyment and being consumed by it through excess and attachment. *Brahmacharya*, thus, teaches us to avoid extremes by inviting us to see the divine and find pleasure in all aspects of life, including the sacredness in ourselves. In essence, it is an invitation to experience wonderment in mundane moments so we might experience delight for the sake of delight. In this way, *brahmacharya* “turns us on” to the pleasure of the moment, asking us to start noticing what makes us feel alive, awakening into aliveness. Finding pleasure in the present is a practice of living with abundance and meeting each moment as an opportunity to develop a greater intimacy with ourselves. Embracing what brings us pleasure (in a balanced manner), has the potential to also awaken a spirit of gratitude, enabling

us to stop measuring our experiences and demanding for them to be this way or that way. Instead, we can let our desire inspire creative action not by grasping, straining, overindulging, hoarding, or harming. *Brahmacharya* helps us find the space between relaxation and tension so we can let go of the desires that limit our potential and cultivate and direct us towards our divine purpose.

In visiting the last and fifth *yama*, *aparigraha* or non-possessiveness, I am reminded of a statement my acupuncture teacher, James Philips, used to say: “Let go of the rope.” For each person, the rope represents something different; in any case, the rope is something that binds us and constricts our ability to move freely and with ease. For me, this rope presents itself as different things as different times, but the lesson is always same. I need to let go of something to which I have become attached - in most cases, it is an outcome, a relationship, a way of being that limits me in some capacity. Unfortunately, the rope provides some level of comfort, even as it creates instability in my life, which is why it is often so hard to allow myself to let go. We cling to our ropes because they represent certainty, allowing us to hold onto our (sometimes rigid) beliefs and ideas. Letting go is scary because we might fall into the abyss of uncertainty, and as we have already established, can be unpleasant because it forces us to see our lives differently. My goal in this text is to let go of the rope to see myself more clearly – *atma vidya* – not as I want myself to be but as I am. Adele sums this up nicely by stating first, “What we try to possess, possesses us,” and or alternatively, “What we hold, begins to hold us.”²⁵⁴ This is the teaching of *aparigraha*.

To practice *aparigraha* is to ask ourselves each day: What desires live in us and how do they possess or hold us? Do they flow through us without attachment, propelling us to act in a balanced manner or do they bind enslave us, controlling and limiting our movement? *Aparigraha*

teaches us to embody *vairagya*, which is related to our sense of attachment. Reaching *vairagya* occurs when we feel content regardless of whether or not our desires are actualized. This occurs by observing how we react when we do not get what we want. If the reaction is negative, then likely attachment is present. Over time, the less power we give our attachment the weaker it becomes. Attachments and suffering come in many forms, but for the sake of this discussion, I will focus on the five *klesa-s* or negative reactions that may result.

The first is *avidya*, meaning a lack of awareness, which is the opposite of *vidya* “seeing clearly” or an light of knowledge. *Avidya* functions like a dirty window for which you can longer see through, in that the layers and layers of dust are formed by rigid beliefs, harmful experiences, and all forms of suffering that cloud our perception. Next, *asmita* functions similarly by creating a distorted sense of self, seeing ourselves as being less than or better than others. *Raga* involves clinging to pleasure. As one of the strongest *klesa-s*, *raga* keeps us clinging to a past no longer present, driving us towards a future that seeks to repeat the same pleasurable sensation again and again. *Dvesa* involves clinging to past suffering - we work diligently to avoid repeating a painful experience, creating and sustaining fear. Anger, revenge, and jealousy are all examples of *dvesa*. Finally, *abhinivesa*, or the fear of death, keeps us trapped in a cycle of duality – mind/body, spirit/matter, pleasure/pain, and so on. This is why so much of yoga teaches that our fear of death actually keeps us from living.

By bringing awareness to our attachments, we move towards a state of expansion versus contraction by letting go of some of the power these attachments hold on our lives. The fewer attachments you carry, the more freely you can move through life. I am by no means suggesting you should live a life without any attachments; what I am suggesting is that you seek to limit their power by not competing, being greedy, grasping, or clinging to that which does not make

your life better. To let go of the rope means we have to know there is a rope we are holding onto in the first place. Past moments that haunt you and keep you from acting or feelings of inferiority or superiority further fog the mirror from which you can see yourself.

Aparigraha asks us to look at these ropes in a new way. Instead of holding a rope or being bound by one, why not practice swinging or climbing the rope in an act of play? Further, *aparigraha* teaches us, in the end, nothing really belongs to us and very little functions in the way we expect; thus, we should approach each moment as an opportunity for learning to see that which holds us to our expectations, opinions, disappointments, and other forms of suffering. As a journey in and of itself, *aparigraha* teaches us to lighten our load so what we really possess is a sense of awe and wonder, or as Adele states, “Mending the split between what we see as important or not, and who we see as important or not, puts us on the path to cherishing all people and all tasks.”²⁵⁵

Lunar Pause

If you knew you could only pack three things to carry with you for the rest of your life journey, what would you bring and why?

If someone told you that you need to “let go of the rope,” what attachments might they be referring to in your life right now?

If you were to look at your past as a piece of luggage, what are you carrying with you that you no longer need?

What pleasurable objects, experiences, or sensations do you chase and/or cling to again and again?

Figure 35. Letting go with *aparigraha*

In summary, the *yamas* are not just values to live by but a set of commitments for cultivating compassionate awareness. This awareness arises out of our own self-study but also

forms the foundation for our relational awareness. As Michael Stone contends, “It is not *what* we see, yoga reminds us, but *how* we see.”²⁵⁶ The *yamas* are tools for seeing the world differently with new eyes, meeting each moment with presence, discerning what the moment means to us, and then acting compassionately and ethically within it, as in the end, what we practice and seek is what we become. Thus, how we shape ourselves and deal with crisis and tension greatly impacts how we interpret ourselves, others, and life itself. To embrace and practice the *yamas* is to choose compassion, honesty, gratitude, tolerance, and intimacy. Thus, the *yamas* answer:

Does Yoga practice change who you are? We remain the same except for one extraordinary difference. We see ourselves and the world differently, for we see ourselves *as* the world, and in doing so we find we have less need to barricade ourselves from a perceived other. In dismantling these barriers of separation, we develop fearlessness in relation to the largeness that allows us to step forward where we once held back. We see the same things, but now we actually notice what we see. We hear the same things, but now we notice what we hear. We feel, taste, and touch the same things but through an intensified register.²⁵⁷

Will we still have blind spots? Yes. Will we still seek separation. Yes. Will we still draw boundary lines? Yes. Even so, the goal is to do so with awareness of the choices you are making and the impact these choices have. Doing so from this lens opens up space for moving into living in the flow.

As a lifelong practice, the *yamas* and *niyamas* provide a path (actually multiple paths) for actualizing change in your life. Not only do they teach us to reflect on our words and actions, but they also aim to inspire a sense of relaxation, embracing the present versus focusing on the past or future. In our relationships, this awareness extends to the flow of the spaces between us – how we give and take, come and go, relax and tense, and connect and disconnect. Perhaps more than any of this, the *yamas* and *niyamas* invite a return to embodied knowing through the breath. By reacquainting ourselves with our breath, we inhale to open to new experiences and exhale to let

go of our tension and that which we no longer need. In this way, we let life breathe us – not forcing, controlling, or grasping – but just breathing. The breath, then, becomes a reminder of our aliveness, and we can return to it again and again as a metronome of our experiences, checking in and out with each rising and falling inhale and exhale.

Lunar Pause

Yamas – How you treat others

Ahimsa – avoid harm by being kind and developing sensitivity towards all living beings

Satya – cultivate honest communication and compassion by telling the truth with love

Asteya – be generous and give more and take less, not taking what does not belong to you

Brahmacharya- be intimate with life and cultivate respectful and reverent relationships

Aparigraha- share what you have with the world as change begins with you

Niyamas – How you treat yourself

Saucha – purify your intentions and life purpose by cleansing your words and actions

Santosha – practice and become gratitude, contentment, and acceptance

Tapas – transform requiring passion, practice, and spiritual effort to burn obstacles

Svadhyaya – reflect, observe, and study yourself

Ishvara-pranidhana –honor divinity in yourself through humbleness and humility

Figure 36. The *yamas* and *niyamas* in practice

Asteya, Brahmacharya, and Aparigraha Notes

²⁴⁹ De Mello, *Awareness*, 176.

²⁵⁰ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 64.

²⁵¹ Rodriguez, *Revisioning Diversity*, 125.

²⁵² Stryker, *Four Desires*, xiv.

²⁵³ Stryker, *Four Desires*, 7.

²⁵⁴ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 91-94.

²⁵⁵ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 82.

²⁵⁶ Stone, *Yoga for a World*, 54.

²⁵⁷ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 230.

WAVE THREE – THE NIYAMAS

Communication is Spiritually Transformative

Integrating the *yamas* and *niyamas* into our lives is one of many paths to bearing witness to our shared suffering, expanding our circles of compassion. Thus, the *yamas* provide a mirror or way of seeing our radical relatedness and the *niyamas* offer a door to self-perception. Through the *yamas*, we protect others from harm by engaging nonviolently, working towards creating ecological balance and wellbeing. This commitment to sustainability derives from cultivating love as our most plentiful (re)source, inviting integration through relating. Looking at the impact of our daily words and actions provides ongoing feedback about the flow of our experience so we can not only bear witness to our experience but also recognize the many ways we work so separately versus integratively.

By cultivating presence, we open the door to our hearts, which allows others to come into us via our shared intimate participation with the flow of life. In this manner, we are entangled in the messiness of daily life. Yoga highlights this messy entanglement as part of the paradox of life. We are both/and, desiring contradictory things, moving through life without certainty. From this lens, no one knows what happens next, which situates life not as a problem to be solved, but as a mystery to be lived and made manifest through our daily words and actions. Yoga, as a practice of transformation, is really just a conversation about reality, starting with our own perception as a tool to cultivate relational awareness.

In this manner, yoga develops the practice of *viveka* or keen discernment. *Viveka* asks us to look at the daily choices we make from a variety of angles to discern what is helpful and harmful to us. In other words, *viveka* is quite similar to the often quoted serenity prayer, “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.” By contemplating what we really want and/or need both in the short term and in the long term, *viveka* results from being able to bear witness to our own practices so we might observe what works for us and what does not in our daily lives.

To better understand our perception of belonging requires participation and commitment to supporting each other through both an awareness of the whole and the individual, unique parts vibrating together to form an overarching divine consciousness. Thus, yoga intentionally loosens habitual patterns through practices, which help us become conscious of our interdependence, thereby moving us closer towards compassionate awareness. Through daily micropractices, we study and witness how our experiences are woven together by paying attention to our breath, body, pulse, sensations, and interactions. As Odier also suggests, “What will happen if you decide to practice this yoga sixty times a day for fifteen seconds? You will spend fifteen minutes a day ‘being’, he continues, “Even if, in the beginning, this last only three minutes a day, it will change your life to an extent that you cannot imagine.”²⁵⁸ By awakening and living in the flow, we open ourselves to the wonderment and awe of the aliveness of which we are a part. In this manner, awareness of our interdependence results from our fullest presence, and in these moments of integration, no matter how brief they are, the boundaries between that separation dissolve. Hence, developing compassionate awareness serves as a kind of self-reflexive feedback loop, which moves us from self-centered stories to cultivating our we-consciousness. When we live in the past or the afterlives of our conversations, we disassociate from the present moment.

Thus, through the fourth *niyama*, *svadhyaya* (self-observation), we can begin to spiritually transform our lives by practicing *pratipaksa-bhavana* or “cultivating the opposite.”

Lunar Pause

What would you do and how would you feel if you woke up tomorrow and you were the opposite gender? Or much, much older or younger? A different race/ethnicity/nationality? In another social class? Consider what you would do for the day in each of these instances. How does this compare to your life now?

Figure 37. Cultivating the opposite

Pratipaksa-bhavana asks us to investigate and witness the world through another person’s eyes, or in our own case, as a witness to ourself, but it also means that we begin to look at many sides of a story in a nonjudgmental manner so we better understand how to act when we encounter actions we discern as unethical or hurtful. For me, *pratipaksa-bhavana* is related to metacommunication as it asks us to look at all angles of an interaction, including the projections, stereotypes, and assumptions we might be making about a person, place, or thing. Like metacommunication, not only does *pratipaksa-bhavana* ask us to cultivate the multiple views of the world, it also asks us to ethically examine our own communicating. By opening up conversations with ourselves and others regarding the communication between us, we can start to better see the energy we give and receive as well as through the stories we share.

Lunar Pause

Metacommunication, coined by Gregory Bateson, is described in the following ways:

Communication about communication or communication which refers to communication, often involving shared, unstated, and/or taken for granted assumptions about the communication itself.

Communication which conveys something about the communicator (or about the relationship between communicators) and/or the communication itself.

Involves the nonverbal or energetic cues that carry meanings that support or deny what we say and/or do. In other words, multiple levels of conversation (verbal, nonverbal, and energetic) are happening at one time in any given interaction.

Attending and reading the in-between spaces wherein you are interpreting and coordinating meaning within an interaction, insomuch that you may refer to the interaction itself, check-in about your interaction, work to move the interaction forward, clarify understanding, act jointly to control who can interact with whom, how much, about what, and for how long.

Communication that involves different things at different levels (direct and indirect) about how the communication itself should be interpreted. Thus, the same words may mean something very different, perhaps even opposite of what is said, depending on the metacommunication. For example, consider a moment when what you said and how you acted diverged.

Figure 38. Understanding metacommunication

The first key to cultivating *pratipaksa-bhavana* is to avoid making assumptions as expectations and assumptions will almost always lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. As we story our lives, we do so in partial ways, making it easy for us to create “truths” about what we “think” is hidden from our view. What if we started from the notion that nothing is hidden between us? What then? What if we stopped worrying about what we think others are thinking and instead only focused on what is emerging between us in the present moment as it unfolds? By asking these questions, I draw on Harvey Sack’s call for us to learn to come to terms with how our interactions “come off,” which is quite similar to Pearce asking us to attune to how we “make” things together via our shared meanings and coordinated action.²⁵⁹

In moving away from our thought-scapes that assume we understand what others “mean” and why we do what we do, we open ourselves to a space of emergent uncertainty. This mystery that we cultivate between us can be supported by a position of compassionate curiosity, wherein we stop believing that our stories, judgments, and assumptions about others are true. Thus, as Don Miguel Ruiz states, often “We make the assumption that everyone sees life the way *we* do. We assume that others think the way we think, feel the way we feel, judge the way we judge, and abuse the way we abuse,” and by doing so, “When we believe something, we assume we are right about it to the point that we will destroy relationships in order to defend our position.”²⁶⁰ Put differently, Brenda Allen suggests, “When we interact with people, we often draw on what we expect and assume about the groups they represent to form our attitudes and to direct our behaviors.”²⁶¹ In doing so, we call upon the many categories, stereotypes, labels, generalizations, and layers that form social identities and locations. Sadly, these categories limit the stories we can tell about ourselves based on identity markers related to the group-based categories for which we become placed. Even though these identities are always relationally constructed within and through our communicating, we are limited by these social categories (race/ethnicity/nationality, social class, gender/sexuality, ability, age) as they greatly impact how we experience the world and how others interact with us.

Lunar Pause

Employing your non-dominant hand, write a short story or draw a picture about a moment where you felt discriminated against based on some aspect of your appearance, words, actions, or other social locations or dominant group categories related to social identity.

Figure 39. Storying or drawing discrimination

The above activity is designed to illustrate privilege as well as oppression. For me, these two concepts are interwoven as both involve either enhanced access to resources or a denial of access based on one's group memberships. As we have previously discussed, situating communication first and foremost as ecological assists diversity to thrive when resources are shared. When resources are unavailable, ecologies have difficulty surviving. In regard to the above activity, how this functions communicatively is via how people with differing worldviews and social locations interact. By considering the various ways in which you have experienced discrimination, it is my hope that this also sheds light on the various privileges you may have regarding your own social position. For me, these social locations are also energetically storied but on a larger, social, global level. As discourses, or grand narratives about what it means to be white, black, male, female, young, elderly, able-bodied, these stories produce, shape, and maintain dominant ideas in both private and public talk. These same discourses that we produce also continue to produce us simultaneously. So how do we break free from these stories?

Lunar Pause

In this exercise, I invite you to engage in a playful gibberish meditation developed by Osho as a tool to briefly move into a space beyond language.²⁶²

To start, find a comfortable sitting position and begin making nonsense sounds or words – aloud (not based in any known language). Do not try to limit your expression; instead, allow whatever sounds to emerge with a sense of playfulness. When you feel complete with this, surrender into a space of silence and stillness, experiencing the sound of your breath, the beating of your heart, or the sensation of energy pulsing through your body. Do not try to control anything – just be, observing what sensations you are experiencing (tasting, feeling, hearing, smelling, and so on). If you feel moved to do so, allow yourself to lie down, further relaxing into this stillness. Allow yourself to feel heavy, letting go of any strain or tension. When you feel complete with this, return to seeing and gently bring your awareness back to yourself, the room, and the present moment (if you have wandered away).

Figure 40. Gibberish meditation

When Victoria Castle asks, “What stops us short from being as creative, caring, and resilient as we are,” she contends by fully embodying the stories – “I am not enough” or “there is not enough,” we become ensnared in this pattern of not-enoughness.²⁶³ In other words, “Many of us spend our time lamenting the way things are, justifying all the reasons why they can’t be different, and preparing for the worst. Whether we act as the oppressed or the oppressor, we are caught in a web our own making.”²⁶⁴ Hence, we devote considerable time and energy maintaining our not-enoughness, and sadly, this often results from issues related to belonging, or in other words, “we spend all our time either auditioning for others’ approval, hoping we’ll be included, or pretending not to care whether we’re in or out.”²⁶⁵ Unfortunately, in this striving to belong, we tend to cast boundary lines of inclusion and exclusion based on these varying social locations. In many ways, being separate feels safer, right? Why so? How can we share resources and create thriving ecologies, while recognizing that we live in a social story based on scarcity (or lack of resources)?

By continuing to search for what is missing in our lives as well as how our difference disconnects us, we give great power to these long-held beliefs and stories. Knowing we can change our stories is the first step to changing our world. Once you discover what stories you have inherited or go to as “default” stories, you can work to bring your actions and intentions into crafting alternative plots. Or in other words, “Our habits – which result from the Stories we tell ourselves – don’t remain confined in our thoughts. Our Stories live in our muscles and in our nervous systems until they become automatic. We shape ourselves around them, we embody their messages, and what we embody is who we are.”²⁶⁶ Imagine for a moment that you have been told your whole life that you are not good enough, that your voice does not matter, or that others are better than you based on their social locations. How does this story feel? How might

you embody it, or rather, what are the social consequences of such a story?

Like Allen, I believe “difference matters,” and we must start to lovingly attend to the lines we draw between “us” and “them.” Allen refers to this as “Thinking under the Influence” or TUI, which she describes as noticing her reactions when she feels surprised by someone’s “difference.”²⁶⁷ In this moment, she reflects on what prejudices, stereotypes, and/or dominant ideologies about group-categories of social identities are at work in her reaction. This process also requires that one tunes into and identifies what privileges, based on one’s social identity, are operating.

Lunar Pause

Before reading ahead, I encourage you to explore any or all of the following privilege checklists, starting with Peggy McIntosh’s, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” A quick web search will reveal a wide variety of other checklists, including: male privilege, female privilege, black male privilege, cisgender privilege, social class privilege, able-bodied privilege, monogamous privilege, among others. You may find that you agree with many points these lists make and others not as much. Hopefully, reviewing these lists will inspire you to consider what privileges you experience, based on your varying social locations.

Figure 41. Privilege checklists

Because privilege is difficult to recognize, which she contends is like a fish not knowing it is in water, it can be helpful to ask oneself the following questions: What preconceived notions do I have about this person based on social identity characteristics (differences or similarities)? What might be the sources of those preconceptions? Are those notions positive, negative, or neutral? Am I open to learning about this person *and* myself during this interaction? Why or why not? Am I willing to be changed as a result of this interaction or experience? What communication tools can I use to try to create genuine communication?²⁶⁸ These questions serve as an excellent starting point for devoting your attention towards how you might be projecting

your beliefs about the world onto someone else, also becoming aware that others are likely doing the same to you. Once you are better able to recognize this, you can work together to embody *pratipaksa-bhavana* in your interactions.

By tuning into our practices of self-observation and care via the *niyamas*, we can begin to examine the energy we expend, constructing the patterns we do, so we develop a sense of greater relational awareness. Starting with the first *niyama* – *saucha*, translated as “purity” or “cleanliness,” we discover a dual meaning, involving the purity of our bodies, words, and actions, as well as how we relationally meet each other so we might do so in a lighter and brighter manner. Thus, *saucha* cleanses and purifies one’s vibrational emanations and energy by lightening our load. Employing a backpack metaphor, in our journeys, we carry with us a pack filled with our own personal history, education, experience, values, beliefs, cultural worldviews, theoretical orientations, and so on. This is an unavoidable aspect of being a human being interacting in the world with others. In order to lighten the load and surrender to uncertainty and possibility, we do not have to leave the backpack behind but pack lighter, when possible. For instance, what items can you let go or make less heavy? How can you plan better to lighten the load? What tools are required to take care of one’s basic needs while traveling? What can one pack to share? For me, asking these questions captures the heart of *saucha*, working to move through life feeling less weighed down by feelings of I am, you are, or there is “not enough,” to a place which acknowledges the present moment by slowing down, packing less, and participating fully with one thing/person/moment at a time.

Another way of practicing *saucha* is to engage in practices of self-care related to sleeping more restfully, exercising, healthy eating, drinking more water, and breathing more consciously and deeply as well as practicing forgiveness, tolerance, and letting go of the patterns that keep us

trapped in self-limiting stories. As Castle suggests, “These old patterns are like a cat that likes to sleep on your head but isn’t the least bit interested in the fact that you are allergic to it. It’s time to move the cat.”²⁶⁹ To move the cat, ask yourself: What is weighing you down or keeping you from changing old patterns that are no longer useful for you? What can you let go of so you can meet each moment purely as it unfolds, not imposing what should be or could be but what is? Returning to the backpack metaphor, *saucha* is a practice of unpacking our expectations for something more inasmuch that it asks us to experience each interaction as if nothing were hidden so we no longer suffer the disappointment and disillusionment that comes from wanting our interactions to “come off” or happen in a specific manner.

Moreover, what expectations or ideals do we impose on ourselves that continue to weigh us down? Can we get out of our own way long enough so we can “catch up” with ourselves? In asking this question, I am reminded of a story a teacher once told me:

A traveler from the city goes to the mountains and comes across a group of nomads. The traveler asks if he could wander with them for a while. Shortly thereafter, the nomads stop to talk and relax. The traveler asks, ‘Why are we stopping?’ The traveler becomes restless because he can sense that a storm is coming but the nomads keep telling him to relax and that they will be off soon. After much time goes by and the sky has darkened, the nomads begin walking again. Just as they begin, it starts raining. The traveler becomes very angry about the situation and confronts the leader, demanding to know why they waited so long. The leader replies, ‘We were waiting for our spirits to catch up with us’.

In a similar manner, Adele queries, “Rather than planning ourselves, what if we practiced ‘unplanning’ ourselves? Instead of striving to become someone lovable, what if we loved ourselves fiercely as we are?”²⁷⁰ Thus, *saucha*, as a practice, aims to align your energy with the moment so you can lighten your load or let your spirit catch up. More so, I see *saucha* as helping us cleanse and purify the stories we tell so we can move into a new *state* of being. Is your state open or closed? Expansive or contractive? When we function in an autopilot state, our stories

continuously loop, living in our bodies and informing our actions, words, and reactions. This is how our communication *shapes* who we are as we embody tension and relaxation. By building awareness of your body first as your communication unfolds, you will be better able to unpack the stories you are telling and hearing and the energy you are giving off and receiving in your interactions. Thus, with the practice of *saucha*, purity refers to living a life with awareness. Removing as much of your distraction as possible will help you become more fully present, paving the way for the next *niyama* – *santosa*.

Lunar Pause

What are some practices that you regularly engage in that are centered on self-care?

What practices of self-care might you begin incorporating into your daily life?

Finally, consider frequent practices you engage in that might support self-harm versus self-care and then consider how you might “cultivate the opposite” by storying and embodying new practices. For example, reflect on one food that you know is “bad” for you, but you continue to eat anyway.

Figure 42. Self-care...is?

Santosa, often translated as gratitude and/or contentment, builds on the energetic practices of *saucha*, teaching that in addition to nothing being hidden, there is also nothing missing, the idea being that life is complete as it is in each unfolding moment. To experience gratitude in practice is to find contentment in who we are and what we have in life, moving completely away from feelings centered on not-enoughness to fully embrace enoughness. It also moves us to stop planning ourselves so we can stop searching for what is missing in our lives. As De Mello states, “Life is a banquet. And the tragedy is that most people are starving to death,” further contending that the question is not what happens after we die but is there a life before

death that is worth living?²⁷¹ In other words, if we are always getting ready to live...if only....are we ever really living?

Santosa is a practice of not seeking. It is about living in the flow of life without becoming trapped in a cycle of lack. By imagining only what you do not have, you continue to search and search and search, maintaining a desire and longing for those people and possessions that we believe will fulfill us. Thus, *santosa* is an energetic state we can practice to bring us closer to recognizing the pleasure and abundance of our everyday lives. Because we spend a great deal of energy engaging in activities moving us towards what feels good - and an equal if not greater amount of energy moving away from that which we do not like - we must seek balance between our attachments and our aversions. To truly experience the hold this has on our lives, practice cultivating the opposite in your life for a day. Eat only foods you dislike. Communicate in an opposite manner than you normally do. Sleep late if you get up early. Be lazy if you are generally productive and just notice: How does moving away from your pleasurable attachments towards things causing you aversions feel in your body? Your breath? Your words and actions? Does this experience cultivate a sense of discontent?

Central to the concept of *santosa* is learning to be content with our progress in life - not judging or becoming attached to the results of our actions. In purifying your life experiences via practicing *saucha*, can you move into a space of gratitude whence you can be happy without getting what you want? Can you be content and show gratitude in the face of praise or criticism? Can you participate fully in your life – just for the joy of it and “to care as if you would for a tree or a plant, watering it, studying its needs, the best soil for it, looking after it with gentleness and tenderness”²⁷² To cultivate gratitude requires an understanding of what makes you feel most alive. What calls or moves you? What do you resist or avoid? Once you reflect and understand

these commitments, you will be better able to attend and adjust the messiness of daily life or what happens when life knocks you off balance or takes your breath away.

Santosa is also a practice of letting go of our need to control and plan our lives so we can wake up not only to our connectedness, but also to those things about which we most care. In the end, *santosa* teaches you to embrace the pleasure of the moment, not forcing or trying to change what already is as it is, so you can be fully present and open to giving and receiving as a tool to cultivate the sharing of our resources. In other words, it is “Like a tree so rooted in the earth that great winds cannot topple it.”²⁷³ Rooting like a tree, *Santosa* asks, Can you fall in love with your life – today, right now! Do you appreciate the possessions, privileges, and power you already have? If not, how can you practice gratitude and contentment in new and nurturing ways?

Lunar Pause

Without spending much time concentrating on your answers, quickly list 108 things (people, places, objects, moments, experiences, and so on) for which you are grateful.

Next, write a short list of 2-5 things about yourself about which you feel perfectly content. Place this list in a visible location in your home, office, and/or car and revisit it throughout the week, devoting nurturing energy towards these parts of yourself.

Figure 43. Practicing gratitude and contentment

To review, *saucha*, the first *niyama*, is a practice of purifying or cleansing the stories you tell yourself and others so you can live more fully in the present moment, creating space for *santosa*, or gratitude and contentment, to blossom. In this way, these two practices are interwoven, creating a dynamic tension between letting go of attachments and aversions so you can recognize what you already have and let go of that which you no longer need. From here, the third *niyama* – *tapas* - enters the conversation. *Tapas* means “heat” but is most often translated as a kind of spiritual effort, self-discipline, or type of catharsis or transformation. In other words,

tapas refers to our actions to burn away obstacles so we might arise from the ashes transformed – much like the mighty phoenix. Regarding the other *niyamas* (personal practices), *tapas* is the energy cultivated to implement change in our lives. When combined with self-study (*svadhyaya*), *tapas* teaches us to burn away the habitual patterns in our lives that cause stagnation. Thus, practicing *pratipaksa-bhavana* is a key element as it asks us to do what comes unnaturally or cultivate the opposite as a tool for transformation.

Like the other *yamas* and *niyamas*, practicing *tapas* is an invitation to live differently. The power of *tapas* to instigate change is born out of the dailiness of practice, and it is only through sustained effort, real change will occur. If you do not practice, nothing changes. For instance, if I am attempting to sleep better, I must practice doing those things which aim for this change. To continue to do things as I have always done them will not re-pattern my sleep. Instead, it will just set me up for failure. Only when I engage concrete and actualizable steps that I put into daily practice, will I see my sleep change. Therefore, *tapas* gives a great depth to a spiritual practice as it asks us to continuously ask ourselves - what are we practicing, why is it important, and what is the higher purpose of this practice for our life? When we determine those practices which do not support this goal, we can begin to shift these patterns to be more aligned with our life purpose.

As a practice, *tapas* also teaches us about who we are and what needs to change when we encounter conflict and obstacles. Thus, not only do our relationships have an energy, but perhaps they also have a temperature. I see *tapas* as the thermometer or rather the emotional weather barometer that instructs us how to proceed when we feel like we have hit the bottom. Do we climb out? Start digging? Realize that the bottom is not real? Regardless of our perspective, *tapas* invites action in the present moment. By doing so, “Tapas is our growing ability to stay in

the unknown and the unpleasantness, rather than run in fear. It is the willingness to be both burned and blessed.”²⁷⁴ When challenged, can you harness the power of change to either break down or break open that which limits your growth? Imagine *tapas* is this way: “Real change occurs by inviting people into the most compelling and vital conversation they can image, the one they hunger for. The more inclusive the conversation, the richer the results, and the more invigorated and revitalized the participants.”²⁷⁵

More than anything, *tapas* invites us into a larger conversation about life itself, asking us - how might we change our understanding of the world so we can see ourselves as an interconnected part of it - not as a separate entity. In this manner, *tapas* shows us we can burn away the symbolic boundaries we construct, most often starting with our skin and proceeding to our inner world and outer life to “me” and “you” to “us” and “them.” Thus, *tapas* relates to our inner fire or *purusha* – that energy that connects us to divine consciousness, existing before we became named, labeled, and identified socially. *Tapas* is the practice of our humanness, in other words, how we become human. By attending to your communication as a type of spiritual practice, through *tapas*, you come to deepen your aliveness through discipline, effort, and devotion. As Donna Farhi so beautifully articulates about practice,

It is an active inquiry that will gradually change our point of view. We will undoubtedly discover that what we take to be our ‘normal’ state of being, and what we defend and tenaciously cling to, is the very source of our misery. This suffering is self-generated, and by the same logic, we are the ones who generate our own inner freedom.²⁷⁶

Put differently, through practice, we can come to know and perceive our radical relatedness, applying our learning to every aspect of our daily lives. With each breath, we change. Our thoughts or conversations with ourselves come and go. Our bodies are said to completely change after seven years so much so that we are comprised of completely new cells. With this knowing,

you come to realize that that which you “I-identify” as “I,” is really an ever-changing reality in constant motion with the pulsing energy of life. Thus, the greatest obstacle to change is learning to dis-“I”-identify with our created stories and realities. When you are better able to do so via practice, you will gain greater control over your energy so you can integrate pauses in order to shift from reacting to responding. In doing so, *tapas* relates to “the movement of the life current (that is already in us, as us) into its inherent relationships, the body, the breath and perceptions, our experience. To merge, to be with our experience rather than react to our experience, is yoga.”²⁷⁷

Lunar Pause

I invite you to reflect on your e-motional weather map over the last week, describing each day using the language of weather. What patterns or flows do you notice? What storms or sunny days did you experience? Alternatively or additionally, I invite you to take the temperature of your relationships. Which are hot? Burning? Cold? In all of the above instances, how might you harness *tapas* to burn away that which you no longer need to make space for growth and transformation – emotionally, energetically, and relationally?

Figure 44. Playing with *tapas*

Because the fourth *niyama*, *svadhyaya* or self-study, is the overall theme of this dissertation, which I have previously introduced and which we will continue to unpack moving forward, I now turn to the fifth practice- *ishvara pranidhana*. At its core, *ishvara* refers to a universal awareness of divine consciousness, connected to our inner fire or *purusha*. Thus, *ishvara* is itself a type of *purusha* also commonly known as the “divine,” the “universe,” or “cosmos.” As Bachman states, “*Isvara* is in a sense the meaning of *Om*, and by saying or chanting *Om*, we are able to connect to this divine source of knowledge.” He further describes *ishvara* as a teacher that brings about transformation; believing in *ishvara* is a practice of believing in something beyond and greater than ourselves. By doing so, we cultivate both

humility and faith. As such, *ishvara* also teaches us to see the divine inside ourselves as well as in others and to perceive no difference between the individual boundaries we draw to realize our greater connectedness.

Lunar Pause

I invite you to experience the power of the vibration “OM,” or for the purpose of this exercise, “AUM.” OM is often described as the humming sound of vibrating, cosmic energy, which is said to be sound or *mantra* from which the entire universe was made manifest. Thus, it is believed that by chanting “AUM,” you connect with the vibrating pulse of existence. After taking a complete breath, on your next exhale, begin forming the *A* sound with the back of your throat and upper chest/heart center, spending the least amount of time with this sound. Moving to the *U* vibration occurs in the center of your mouth and energetically vibrates in your throat. Finally, create the *M* sound at your lips, moving the vibration towards the center of your head. Experiment with both a verbal expression of this sound as well as energetically visualizing but not vocalizing the sound upon exhalation.

Figure 45. Becoming “OM”

By acknowledging a divine consciousness that links us, we are invited to surrender to the uncertainty and mystery present in our lives. In doing so, we can slowly begin to live in the flow, opening us to a whole new world of possibilities. Like water, “Surrender asks us to be strong enough to engage each moment with integrity while being soft enough to flow with the current of life.”²⁷⁸ Thus, practicing *ishvara pranidhana* is a devotional action based in the other *niyamas*, wherein we, “begin to understand that there is something greater which is ‘doing’ us, and we begin to give all of our actions, as well as the fruits of our actions, into the arms of the Divine.”²⁷⁹ Farhi speaks to this by stating, “When we are wedded to life it will seem ridiculous to use our energies for anything but strengthening that marriage. When we make a commitment to this inner relationship, life chooses us and we become instruments for fulfilling its purpose.”²⁸⁰ Like the rest of the *niyamas*, which Farhi refers to as “codes for living soulfully,” we must

continue to ask ourselves with each practice, “Am I becoming the world in which I wish to live?” In asking this, we get closer to *ishvara pranidhana*.

Ultimately, however, I see the *niyamas* as practices that help us embrace uncertainty so we can compassionately explore our mysterious and shared worlds. In this way, the *niyamas* are both personal practices and an invitation to transform our lives by continuously asking ourselves: What can I let go so I can be more present (*saucha*)? How can I fall more in love with my life (*santosa*)? How do I transform my obstacles into teaching moments (*tapas*)? How can I rediscover my own divinity? (*svadhyaya*)? What do I gain from realizing my interconnectedness and surrendering to it (*ishvara pranidhana*)? Each of these questions highlights that the *niyamas* are essentially practices which aim to bring us back to ourselves. In other words,

Every day we have choices about who we are becoming. Every interaction contains the possibility of renewing or destroying our faith in the basic goodness of human nature. Maintaining a life practice that tethers us to our core values may not seem such a noble attainment, but in a world raked with violence, divisiveness, and inequity, our life practice, however small, however seemingly insignificant, affords us the possibility of seeing ourselves in others and others in an utterly new way. One day we wake up and realize this terrible and wonderful world we live in *is us*.²⁸¹

Unless we are willing to embark upon the journey of self-exploration and discovery, we may never come to see that in the end, life is our greatest resource and teacher. By intimately observing ourselves, we can come to better know who we are in relationship to others, knowing fully that our actions and words have a ripple effect.

Thus, the *niyamas* teach us that through daily practice, we have the power to energetically story and re-story our lives. If we start from the notion that we are whole and complete as we are, we can stop searching for something outside of ourselves. This invites a spirit of adventure and exploration into the unknown so we might live in a world of compassionate questions. As such, our lives are like one long conversation wherein we can learn

to delight in and enjoy the messiness of our interactions as a space of living and growth. Energetically, we need to start flexing our “letting go” muscles more than our “holding on” reflexes. This requires us to begin to peel back the layers of our conditioning by challenging our stories, expectations, assumptions, labels, categories, and social locations so we can embrace both/and ways of being together versus remaining trapped in either/or models of reality.

To this end, we must ask ourselves if our way of being in the world creates and supports the world in which we wish to live. If not, we need to slow down, pause, relax, breathe, and take the time needed to evaluate what practices (eating better, sleeping more or less, loving unconditionally) are important to our wellbeing. Communication then becomes a practice of yoga when we can develop the ability to watch ourselves as we experience life. In doing so, we are still active travelers and participants in each other’s worlds, but it is also a practice of learning to live in a state of “unsurpassed calm,” as Rod Stryker states, or, as Donna Farhi describes, “our ability to remain steadfast in the calmness of one’s center while being passionately engaged in the world.”²⁸²

Wave Three Notes

²⁵⁸ Odier, *Desire*, 63.

²⁵⁹ Harvey Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), 11.

²⁶⁰ Ruiz, *Four Agreements*, 68-69.

²⁶¹ Brenda Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press), 2.

²⁶² “Osho Gibberish,” accessed December 21, 2013, <http://osho-honduras.net/site/index.php/en/meditaciones-activas/osho-gibberish>

²⁶³ Castle, *Trance of Scarcity*, 1.

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- ²⁶⁴ Castle, *Trance of Scarcity*, 2.
- ²⁶⁵ Castle, *Trance of Scarcity*, 11.
- ²⁶⁶ Castle, *Trance of Scarcity*, 51.
- ²⁶⁷ Allen, *Difference Matters*, 186.
- ²⁶⁸ Allen, *Difference Matters*, 189.
- ²⁶⁹ Castle, *Trance of Scarcity*, 2.
- ²⁷⁰ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 111.
- ²⁷¹ De Mello, *Awareness*, 26.
- ²⁷² Krishnamurti, *Freedom*, 83.
- ²⁷³ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 129.
- ²⁷⁴ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 142.
- ²⁷⁵ Castle, *Trance of Scarcity*, 187.
- ²⁷⁶ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 36.
- ²⁷⁷ Whitwell, *Yoga of Heart*, 69.
- ²⁷⁸ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 172.
- ²⁷⁹ Adele, *Yamas and Niyamas*, 173.
- ²⁸⁰ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 174.
- ²⁸¹ Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 236.
- ²⁸² Rod Stryker, face to face communication to author, December 14, 2013 and Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, 191.

VINYASA

To unfold into the present

Class Begins...

Good evening, everyone. I hope you are well. Before we begin, do you have any questions, comments, concerns, songs, dances, shout-outs, or other comments you would like to share?

I am greeted with *silence*.

Moving on... how are you doing today?

Hungry?

A choir of sighs and several varieties of “yes” emerge.

Angry?

A few hands go up. I see a fist.

Lonely?

No responses.

Tired?

A collective wave erupts into a sea of chatter. I hear snippets of talk about jobs, kids, roommates, tests, and other stresses. I pause, waiting for the class to return their focus.

Today our class is going to explore the role of mindfulness in interpersonal relationships.

Hearing a few groans, I proceed undaunted.

Throughout the semester we have questioned “How to live a life” and “How can we act in the world to ease our own and others’ suffering?” In asking ourselves these questions, I hope we can strive to be less violent and more compassionate communicators, always questioning what happens when we begin to render other beings as invisible, silent, or unworthy of living a happy, healthy, or safe life, including non-human animals, plants, insects, and other beings. We are all interconnected, but how do we become aware of this?

Pausing, I grab the canvas grocery bag on the table and begin to hand out small, individual boxes of raisins, hearing students whisper:

“Um. Raisins?”

“I love raisins!”

“Gross. This reminds me of kindergarten.”

I remind them: Please try to be open to this activity. I have not even given you the directions yet, I say, smiling. Please refrain from opening the boxes for a moment, I state, as several students work to make their boxes look closed again.

In order to better understand mindful eating,²⁸³ however, we must first consider what mindfulness is, right? What do you think?

A student in the front of the class blurts out, “Paying attention?”

Thank you, that’s a great start.

From the center of the room, “Being present?”

Absolutely. Both paying attention and being present are important components of mindfulness. Often we forget to breathe deeply, take breaks, and drink water. We skip meals. Rushing through each day, we phone, text, email, work, eat, and try to find spaces to rest and sleep. In this chaos, it is easy to go into an “autopilot” mode, tuning in and out of my surroundings, never fully

present in the moment, multitasking as we go. Apply this to our relationships: When talking with a friend, cooking for family, participating in a meeting at work, or simply driving in traffic, are we really "here," focused on our shared experience? Are we mindful of how our full attention or lack of attention impacts how we relate to each other? If not, I argue that by practicing mindfulness, you can better learn to “show up” in your life. Can you think of other activities that could benefit from this type of attention? A few hands go up:

“Driving!”

“Listening to someone talk.”

“Brushing your teeth.”

Someone whispers, “sex.”

Great examples. What if we add complexity to our understanding of mindfulness by considering what it might mean to be contemplative or engage in contemplative practices, too? Moving to the board, I write *contemplation* – the act and process of being open to things as they are in the present moment. Do any of you do yoga?

About ten students raise their hands.

What about meditation? Mindful breathing?

A few hands stay raised.

All of these practices, including mindfulness, are types of contemplative practice. When one focuses on breathing during meditation or moves from yoga posture to posture, the goal is to bring mind and body together into a state of heightened awareness, only focusing on one thing at a time. I’d like us to experiment with this now. Please close your eyes, visualizing your day thus far as a moving picture. Start by rewinding to when you first awoke and then fast-forward through your day, briefly stopping to observe your interactions, movements, conversations, and

sensory perceptions until you arrive in the current moment, sitting in the classroom. When you have “arrived in class,” explore, “Where are you now?” relaxing for a few minutes, taking some deep breaths, and then tuning into your experience in the current moment. When finished, take a moment to discuss your experience with a partner.

10 minutes pass. Are you ready to give mindful eating a try?

Pick out one raisin and hold it in the palm of your hand. Take the time to really observe and be with the raisin, looking at it and examining its shape, color, texture, size, and other visible features. Take a moment to notice your breathing as you bear witness to the raisin.

Do not change your breathing, but become aware of it as you become present with the raisin. Giving your full presence to the raisin, you are here and the raisin is here, existing together in this moment. If you are not present with the raisin, it is not here with you.

Take a moment to consider the following: by observing the raisin, you can see that the raisin is nothing more than a grape that has been harvested and then dried.

Imagine the time and energy required to make this possible and to get this raisin to you. In all of its vibrancy, the raisin contains the earth, rain, and sunshine, starting as a seed, which becomes a vine, and then a grape.

A farmer invested energy to water and care for this raisin, watching it grow, and then harvesting and later drying it so it could be processed and packaged for your consumption.

The packaged raisin, placed on a truck and transported many miles to a warehouse, arrives at a grocery store and is placed on a shelf by an employee. I then purchased this raisin for you, drove it to school, carried it to our classroom in my bag, and passed out the boxes to you. Now, with this raisin in your hand, you can see what a journey this raisin has undertaken. You might even consider smiling at the raisin in understanding.

Closing your eyes, I invite you to further observe the raisin by first smelling it. How would you describe its aroma? Is it earthy? Sweet? Does it smell like the package in which it was stored? Still smelling the raisin, feel its texture, squeezing it gently. Can you sense its juiciness? Feel the skin that protects its interior?

I now invite you to slowly place the raisin in your mouth without biting it. Imagine that you have never had another raisin in your mouth until this moment. Consider how it feels on your tongue, remembering its shape, texture, size, and smell. What do you taste? The package? Grapes? Something else? Bite the raisin ever so gently to release its flavor.

Chewing gently, become aware that you are chewing. Only focus on chewing. Do not shift your awareness to what others are doing. Do not worry about how you might be perceived doing this activity. Leave your worries, fears, or wandering thoughts out of this moment. Be present with the raisin. Listen to its story. Once you finish chewing the raisin, swallow it with gratitude, opening your eyes when finished.

I invite you to take a moment to reflect on this activity before sharing your experience with a partner, I instruct. My goal in asking you mindfully to eat a raisin is to show the difficulties of maintaining single-focused attention and also to highlight the interconnection among beings - in this case, the food that sustains us and the many people involved in making these processes possible. How was your experience with the raisin? Going around the room, some responses include:

“I don’t like raisins, but I didn’t mind the taste in this exercise.”

“I never realized how easy it is for my mind to wander. I had a lot of trouble staying focused on the raisin.”

“I felt silly doing this exercise. Why is it important to care about a raisin?”

Paying attention to the raisin is just an example. Imagine giving this same focus and presence to a person in your life, especially someone you love and care about. Then, imagine extending this presence and awareness to other activities in your life. Through contemplation, we bring awareness to that which separates us but also to the actions in which we are engaging in the moment. Not only can we focus on the moment – we are here together in this classroom discussing and practicing mindfulness – but we can also contemplate our connections to this raisin’s past but also its future. For example, how do we relate to this raisin as a living being? What about all of the people who helped to make this raisin possible? How does the raisin become part of you – your body- your life?

In order to first ask these questions, we must stop multitasking and center our focus on *one* object of our attention at a time - the raisin. Next, we can begin to apply this same attention and awareness to other objects of our focus: daily activities, interactions with others, what we consume and purchase, and so on. By more compassionately attending to the moment as well as the journey, we can become more aware of the choices we make and why, allowing us to be less reactive and more reflexive. Remember: these practices require lots of *practice* but ultimately it is about cultivating presence. Giving compassionate presence to another being is a *present* or gift. Our discussion winds down as we close our class with the Kabat-Zinn youtube video, *Life is Right Now*.²⁸⁴

Lunar Pause

How, if at all, does this story illustrate the *niyamas*:

Cleansing or purifying words or actions (*saucha*)?

Cultivating gratitude and contentment? (*santosha*)?

Transforming obstacles into teaching moments (*tapas*)?

Observing oneself in the present moment (*svadhyaya*)?

Realizing interconnectedness and surrendering to it (*ishvara pranidhana*)?

What, if anything, about this story resonates with your own experience?

In what ways might you start to “awaken to life” by limiting some of your distraction or multitasking so you might more fully enjoy the present moment?

Figure 46. Discussion questions

Vinyasa Notes

²⁸³ This exercise has been adapted from the *Awakening to Life* course, Kabat-Zinn’s (2005) raisin exercise, and Nhat Hanh and Cheung’s (2010) teachings about mindful eating.

²⁸⁴ Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Life is Right Now,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU7vKitN4Ro>

108 ASANAS

With Wave Three, we have reached the peak purpose of our process thus far, which centers on situating communication not only as a spiritual practice but also as a practice of yoga via daily attention to the *niyamas*, considered personal commitments, guidelines, or practices of self-study and self-care. Moving from our peak purpose, we can now progress into a series of counter-poses aimed at bringing further awareness to our everyday patterns via *svadhyaya*, or self-observation. For me, yoga is itself the ultimate counter-pose to our lives as it functions like a mirror to reflect back our worlds so we might see them differently. This practice of *atma vidya*, or seeing the self, is a lifelong process of transformation that comes from being with “what is” as it unfolds in our experience. Yoga, then, is every change we experience as a result of our expanding awareness. Thus, I offer 108 *asanas* as daily micropractices to put our discussions into motion in your life. The term *asana*, as I am defining it, means to simply “sit in one’s skin.” These exercises, therefore, serve as tools of self-study to help you rediscover your world.

Each micropractice is complete in itself and could easily be extended over a number of days or weeks; however, I have organized each practice as a daily prompt for self-study and observation. There is no set order for how you might approach these practices; thus, you might follow the path in the sequence that is provided or pick up at any point that calls to you. As you travel through these *asanas*, I suggest you record your observations in whatever manner works best for you. By doing so, you will have a record of your process and reflections, which you can return to at a later time. It is my greatest hope that you will approach each *asana* as an adventure,

seeing each as a learning opportunity, a playful delight, and a journey into uncertainty and mystery, wherein you open your awareness to your senses and breath while treading lightly on the earth. Practice what is pleasurable to you, but do not be afraid to dwell in that which brings you discomfort as this is where the greatest insight often emerges. If every step were easy and effortless, what would you gain from the experience?

Like Daniel Odier, I believe we are what we seek. Not only are we what we seek, but we are also what we learn, what we love, how we breathe, how we relate, what we eat, and how we communicate, or in Anthony de Mello's words, "We see people and things not as they are, but as we are." To better understand our world, we need to bring awareness to who we are first. As you journey through these 108 *asanas*, instead of asking, "who am I," I hope you will be inspired to reframe this question to, "Who are we together?" Our relationships are made and maintained through our everyday communication; thus, through these simple micropractices, we have the ability and the power to become agents of change, transforming our lives and our world one conversation at a time.

Through self-study, we learn to watch experience unfold, opening our hearts to who we are together in each passing moment. As such, conscious breathing alone becomes an act of devotion as well as experience of spaciousness and joy, wherein *samandhi* becomes available within the landscape of our everyday intimate participation with life, as we move towards harmonious connectedness. In other words, presence results from our relaxed, sensual engagement with each moment. Thus, there is no need to dwell in the past or prepare for the future when we are fully immersed in our experience.

The 108 *asanas* serve to re-associate us with the present moment, honor our radical relatedness, and move us way from knowing divinity as separate from us. When we view

divinity as separate, we come close to divinity but never interpenetrate, keeping our lives situated as a problem that needs to be solved. Viewing ourselves as divine entangles us in the web of life, whence we are divinity manifested in the pulsing of each breath, heartbeat, and life cycle in rhythm with and as the world. If we were to view each day as an opportunity to express unconditional love via our communication, we might come to see that, “Love is a state of consciousness when you are joyous, when there is a dance in your being. Something starts vibrating, radiating, from your center; stomaching starts pulsating around you.”²⁸⁵ To know this is to live in a world of questions, not answers, so we might observe ourselves in the spaces between the simultaneous experience of self and other, to find strength in our vulnerability, to bring awareness to what we are making together, to embrace and celebrate ecological and cultural diversity, to cultivate compassionate awareness, to live in the flow, finding pleasure in our embodied awareness, and to “wake up” to our interconnectedness.

By embarking upon a journey of self-study via a 108-day *sadhana* (spiritual practice), each *asana* works to support the peak purpose of this text – communication as yoga – via *svadhyaya*, or self-observation, as a path to expand relational awareness through everyday small acts or micropractices.

108 *Asanas*

1. Do nothing for at least ten minutes today. Just relax and “do nothing.” Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down and let your attention wander without trying to control or force anything. Can you get out of your own way and find comfort with yourself when not actively doing anything? Spend the rest of the day doing at least 10% less than you normally would, finding space to rest and pause.

2. Today, practice and experience the mantra “*nothing is missing.*” Write this on a piece of paper and carry it with you, reminding yourself throughout the day.
3. Contemplate your name(s). What names have you been called throughout your life (both positive and negative)? What is the history of your name(s)? What is its meaning? How do you write your name(s)? How do your names shape your understanding of who you are? As you move through your day, pay attention to the power of names. Address people by name and notice how names are employed in conversation. Reflect on how objects, places, and people come to be “named” and how this impacts their experience of the world.
4. Create a turning points or key events timeline of your life by age or year, marking important or critical moments that have shaped who you are now. Pick a critical event in your life and briefly tell the story about what happened, who was involved, and what the consequences of this happening were for your life. Now rewrite this story from the perspective of an observer who did not experience it, focusing on what lessons could be gleaned from such an experience.
5. Create a photo narrative of yourself by locating and organizing photographs of yourself in chronological order, starting with your earliest photo to your most recent. Display these photographs in some manner, giving each a caption that highlights who you were at that time in your life up to who you are now. You might also consider what was most meaningful to you at each stage, contemplating how this has changed throughout your

life, but also influenced who are you today. For the rest of the day, be with everything that has mattered most to you, reflecting on your divine life purpose.

6. Describe your home in rich detail as if you were speaking to a stranger. Draw a floor plan or map and describe the rooms, colors and décor, furniture, flow, organization, clutter (or lack of), and any impressions you want to include, which tell a story about who lives here. Next, create a visual narrative (photographic story) or map that chronicles the houses you have lived in or the places you have called “home.” You might also wish to map the places you have lived and/or traveled.
7. First, I invite you to explore Annie Leonard’s “The Story of Stuff Project.”²⁸⁶ Next, take inventory of your material possessions. Do you possess “stuff” or does your “stuff” possess you? Try to list all of your possessions as if you were giving a detailed record to your insurance agent. Does some of your stuff belong to someone else? What stuff could you donate or give as gifts? Explore the hidden spaces in your home, taking inventory of what is in your refrigerator, freezer, drawers, cabinets, car (glove box), storage bins, or other spaces. Discover your garbage. What type of waste do you produce? What do you regularly throw away? Moreover, take inventory of objects or items that you keep but no longer use or that no longer work, and let them go, if possible. What does this story tell about you or your stuff?
8. Consider the power of objects or artifacts in your life. What would you grab if your house were on fire? Make a list of three things you cannot live without, describing why this is

so and how these objects shape, impact, or help you function. Next, explore what you carry with you, including what you never leave home without, examining what is in your wallet, purse, backpack, satchel, or briefcase. What items or objects do you hide when people visit your house and why? Take inventory of the objects/items that hold sentimental value to you by remembering their significance.

9. Explore your neighborhood. Dedicate time to walking around the spaces and places near your home. In the process of doing so, record up to 50 things you observe during this adventure. Allow yourself to wander, not following any predetermined path. Next, visit your favorite place and observe its qualities by mapping or taking notes of any buildings or structures, streets, signs, advertisements, interactions among people, or other details you observe, examining sensory impressions you might take for granted.

10. Today, take inventory of your spirituality, examining your beliefs, practices, traditions, and rituals. Start by taking the “Belief-O-Matic” quiz²⁸⁷ and then reflect on the following questions: What does it mean to be spiritual? How and when were you first introduced to spirituality/religion? Growing up, what was your experience of spirituality/spiritual practice? How has your spirituality changed over your life? How does your approach to spirituality shape your core values, especially in regard to the body, gender, sexuality and reproduction; medicine, health and wellbeing; relationships and family forms; politics; philosophy and ethics; death and the afterlife; food, consumption, and ecology; and mystery and magic. Also, explore what festivals, observances, practices, ritual objects, sacred texts, or spiritual leaders shape your understanding and experience of spirituality.

11. Over the course of one day, chart all of the various advertisements you encounter (online, billboard, print and so on), reflecting on “brand” choices you make via your purchases. Then, draw a map/diagram of the main media that you employ in your daily life (e.g. phone, internet, television, books, magazines, radio, etc.). Next, draw a map or list the social media you regularly employ, asking yourself: What if I did not have access to the internet? Reflect and record how this might impact your life.
12. Putting on your researcher’s hat, go to a public space for 30 minutes and observe others’ use of media (laptops, phones, etc.). Briefly describe the setting, time of day, number of people, types of media, and the various interactions surrounding you. Do you notice any trends or patterns? Over the next 24 hours, create a chart that lists your media usage (e.g. Facebook, cell phone call or texting, internet use, etc.), the time and place of the usage, the time spent (e.g. texting - 5 minutes), and any other notes that relate to your media usage. Inevitably, you will forget to record some entries or be unable to do so but try to record as much as possible. Having a record of your media usage is a great way to “check in” with your daily habits and patterns. Once completed, reflect on any patterns you noticed, including anything you learned about yourself or how media influences your life, also examining how different media impacts how you communicate. For example, you might record your usage in the following manner:

Monday:

8:00 am - Woke up, checked email - 10 minutes (my house)

8:15 am - Received text & replied - 2 minutes (my house)

9:00 am - Posted a status update on FB - 30 seconds (in class)

13. How would you describe yourself to a stranger picking you up at the airport? What information would you employ to help them find you? Next, write a letter to a stranger introducing yourself, including a brief summary of your life history as well as information about your interests, hobbies, preferences, occupation, education, or other information you feel is important.
14. Draw a portrait of how you see yourself and ask someone to draw a picture of how they see you. Alternatively, visualize yourself as an abstract work of art and create a collage employing the colors, lines, symbols, and mediums that illustrate this. Ask someone else to do the same. Contemplate the similarities and differences between these images.
15. Focus today on the micropractice “being with the breath.” For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with the breath in various points throughout your day. At first you might incorporate this into easily established patterns of activity (upon waking, before eating, sleeping, or exercising, while driving, and so on.) As you find more pleasure in this practice, you might integrate it during other times such as conversation, when crossing through doorways or thresholds, and so on.
16. As we have previously discussed, we become who we are in relationship to others; thus, our identities are fluid and responsive and are revealed everyday in our interactions. Create an identity map that highlights your various identities, including key words or aspects that describe each of these identities. For example, you might identify as a student and a keyword or aspect of this might be the type of student you feel you are. Map the

many identities or roles you play in your relationships. Based on your identity chart, give each identity a character and tell a brief story about how this part of you interacts with others. For example, one of your identities may be an expert, a know-it all, a bully, a saint, and so on.

17. Over the next 24 hours, notice how you listen. How much of your day do you spend talking? Listening? When you are listening, under what circumstances do you find yourself distracted? For example, are you tuning in and out, criticizing or judging what you are hearing or the person (based on identity markers, etc.), interrupting, physically distracted (sounds, temperatures, sensations), thinking of what you are going to say next? Practice listening by giving your full presence through eye contact, leaning in and working to connect, and by allowing yourself to learn something from those with whom you are conversing. Listen to each person's story as if you were watching an engaging movie, focusing fully on the characters, the plot, and the interaction to create connection and presence.

18. Create a musical playlist (list the song title, artist, and album) as if you were making an identity mix. The songs should tell a story about who you are. Why did you choose the songs you did? If you had to pick one song as a theme song, which would it be and why? Do this with all of your senses. If you were a smell, what would it be and why? If you were a taste, what would it be and why? If you were a texture, what would it be and why? If you were a movement, what would it be and why?

19. Create a diagram of the most important beings in your life, including friends, family, pets, and so on. How do you define family as well as who comprises your family (legal, biological, social, chosen, etc.)? Who are you to your family, friends, classmates, and/or co-workers? Create a visual representation of your family tree, doing research related to your family's history. In lieu of a family tree, you could also create a collage, drawing, or list of family photographs, artifacts, or heirlooms to create some kind of visual representation of your family.
20. How do you learn best? Are you a visual (what you see), auditory (what you hear), kinesthetic/tactile (what you feel or do), or other learner? Describe how you learn, providing as much detail as possible. What skills do you have, hobbies, interests, areas of knowledge or expertise, experience, or achievements? How do you express yourself creatively? I invite you to watch Ken Robinson's videos, "Changing Educational Paradigms,"²⁸⁸ and his TED talks, "Do Schools Kill Creativity?"²⁸⁹ and "Bring on the Learning Revolution."²⁹⁰
21. Interview your family members, asking them to tell you about what each of them knows about your family. In addition to your immediate family, consider interviewing your oldest living relative as well as your youngest family member. You might consider asking them about your family history, ancestors, or heritage; family stories; family geographies (related to living, travel, immigration); family culture (rituals, traditions, secrets, and/or networks); and/or family communication practices related to conflict or other areas of interest.

22. What does the community mean to you? What words, images, or symbols would you employ to describe community? List or map the communities in which you live, work, play, or learn. Do you feel more connected with some communities versus others? Reflect on who is included and excluded from these communities. Next, list or map communities to which you feel connected but are not actively a part. Consider how diversity shapes all of the above communities, examining which communities are the most or least diverse.

23. Practice “seeing” your world with ‘new eyes’. Go somewhere and explore texture, depth, closeness, and colors, looking at something from a variety of angles. First, scan your field of vision, looking left and right, forward and back, and up and down, noticing as many details as possible. Now, focus on the whole picture including all of the details and individuals parts. How do these ways of seeing differ? Now refocus on one part of the picture (such as a building wall) and tune in to all of its observable characteristics (shape, dimension, size, width, height, texture, taste, smell, color, etc.). Next, consider what story it may have to tell. What meaning does it give this space? What does it see and how does it interact with the world around it, including with you? Finally, consider what it is named, how it is labeled, and how it functions socially. How might it be categorized historically, culturally, artistically, scientifically, politically, spiritually, morally, metaphorically, and so on.

24. Watch *Life in a Day*, produced by Ridley Scott and directed by Ken Macdonald, which features thousands of crowdsourced video vignettes from around the world that show the

flow of life over a single day- July 24, 2010 - highlighting what it means to be alive as a way to cultivate “we-consciousness.”²⁹¹

25. Take inventory of your relationships, considering your friends, family, partners, and co-workers. Because our lives are like one long conversation, and each relationship is made of these conversations, our relationships, thus, succeed or fail one conversation at a time. In reflecting on your relationships today, consider how you communicate in the relationships you consider the most successful and loving. Write a list of five ways to improve communication in relationships and put these into practice with everyone you encounter.

26. Throughout the day, notice how questions function in conversation (as inquiries, clarifications, interrogations, or as ways to continue the conversation), which emerge in your own self-talk, within the media, or in conversations you hear or are a part of, considering how questions negatively or positively shape relationships or interactions, focusing on personal or social consequences of being questioned by others.

27. Be with silence. Do your best to be silent for a 24-hour period, contemplating the power of silence as a form of communication. In doing so, contemplate what makes you feel heard? When and how do you feel when you are truly listened to by others? What does this teach you about how to be a better listener?

28. Today, tune into your self-talk, charting how often you evaluate your experience as good/bad or right/wrong. In what ways do you negatively measure, label, or construct yourself? Each time you experience an example of negative self-talk, pause and construct an alternative story line, which highlights your uniqueness and value.
29. Let stress be your teacher today. What triggers a stress response? Where do you feel stress in your body? Draw a body map of common places of tension and work, soften, relax, and breathe into these spaces. In stressful moments, practice extending your exhalation to create a sense of calm. You might also consider doing a body scan, actively tensing your muscles one by one and then releasing and relaxing them to bring greater awareness to patterns of stress or holding. Pay attention to any tension you are carrying or holding, checking-in at various points throughout your day. Tune into patterns of contraction, balance and stability, grasping or holding of your breath, or clenching or holding in your muscles. In doing so, consciously relax into each space, breathing into whatever is tense.
30. With each person you encounter today, focus on the space between you. What are you making together? How do you simultaneously experience each other? Consider your communication as a process of breathing, inhaling and exhaling energy from each other in a circular and seamless manner. What energy are you giving and what energy are you receiving. Work to intentionally send lovingkindness from your heart center in each interaction, noticing how this energy is received and how, if at all, this shifts your communication. For inspiration, I invite you to watch the HeartMath Institute's short

video, “The Heart’s Intuitive Intelligence: A path to personal, social, and global coherence.”²⁹²

31. For an hour today, pick a location to sit and listen to the sounds around you. Record everything you hear, how many things you hear, where the sounds come from, and what sounds you, too, create in this space. Next, spend some time listening to the conversational snippets you hear over the course of a half hour or hour, jotting down what you hear. The goal is not to precisely capture anything but to hear words passing through space, time, and relationships so you might create a verbal collage of this moment. Alternatively, you might consider jotting down words or phrases you see written in public spaces like bathrooms, creating a verbal collage of these, too.
32. Throughout the day, notice how advice functions in conversations (suggestions for courses of action), which emerge in your own-self talk, within the media, or in conversations you hear or are a part of, considering how giving advice negatively or positively shapes relationships or interactions. Focus on the personal or social consequences advice plays in your everyday life.
33. Record everything you put in your mouth today, such as food items, cigarettes, food/drinks, toothbrush, fingers, noting the time and place, in addition to e-motions, conversation, and interactions; also, everything you consume that does not go into your mouth or body, including hand soap, electricity, gasoline, and toilet paper, charting everything you use for a 24 hour period.

34. Perform a language experiment, becoming more aware of oppressive language you encounter in a day, whether it's sexist ("bitch"), racist ("black sheep"), classist ("white trash"), heterosexist ("faggot"), ableist ("retarded"), and so on. Beyond noting the language you and others use and your experience of and personal response to it, contemplate to whom and how the language is oppressive.
35. For a 24 hour period, go on a "Media Fast," "un-plugging" from all of your regular media usage patterns (phoning, texting, internet surfing, watching television, listening to the radio, reading books, magazines, and comics, social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)). Reflect on the experience, detailing how easy or difficult it was for you to be without media, especially in regard to your previous media usage charting.
36. Conflict is a normal part of everyday life that happens between and among people, manifested in conversations. Whether you approach it as an opportunity for growth or as a destructive force depends on the importance or significance of the issue or resource in question, each person's goals, and the relationship among conflicting people, along with each person's conflict style. How do you typically approach conflict? Do you avoid or try to dodge conflict by ignoring the issue, leaving the conversation, or changing the subject? Do you place other people's needs above your own to please them? Do you treat conflict as a battlefield or game, working to get your point across to show that your opinion is right or correct? Do you find yourself compromising or do you expect others to compromise? Do you approach conflict as a collaboration, sharing responsibility as a tool to gain understanding? When relationships encounter conflict, there are always two (or

more) sides to the story. Reflect on a recent relationship conflict you or two people close that you know have experienced. Now create a script that expresses each person's side of the story (in their voice through your writing). Give equal space to each character by putting these two parties into conversation with each other, exploring conflict through conflicting narratives. You can also showcase an internal conflict you are having between two or more of your own identities.

37. Today contemplate what you spend a lot of time worrying about. List ten things that help you feel respected and/or valued. How do you show others that you value or respect them? Practice worrying less and showing respect today in your interactions. Moving through your day, pay attention to communication spirals. How do your actions and words energetically amplify others and vice versa? Are you able to see when a spiral is functioning in a generative flow versus a degenerative one?

38. Track your time. Pay particular attention to how you divide your day, charting how much time you spend doing each activity, such as work, exercising, leisure, sleep, eating, driving. After reviewing your charts, notice what you prioritize and contemplate why. How do you give meaning to time? Do you find yourself postponing, procrastinating, waiting, rushing or running late? What are your daily and weekly routines? What, if anything, might be worth devoting more time and energy towards? How do you give meaning to your routines and coordinate actions with others in your life, based on your use of time?

39. How do you define happiness? Who is the happiest or most joyful person you know? What has been the happiest period of your life and why? What are you happy about today? Also, contemplate what causes you suffering and what you are currently struggling with in your life. By situating suffering as an opportunity for learning, practice suffering *with* others today by acknowledging that each person has her/his own struggles and hardships. In doing so, practice being a joyful presence in another's day.
40. Today, pay attention to physical appearances. How much time do you spend on your appearance? What appearance-related products or practices do you routinely employ? Also, notice the number of times you hear appearance emerge in your own and others' conversations today, including what labels, stereotypes, and judgments are applied. As you move through your day, repeat the mantra, *I am a perfectly imperfect being, filled with love and radiating beauty.*
41. Throughout the day, notice the role of directive statements (orders, commands, or sets of directions), which emerge in your own-self talk or in conversations you hear or of which you are a part, considering how directives negatively or positively shape the relationship or interaction, focusing on personal or social consequences of being directed by others to act in a certain manner.
42. Throughout your day, look at every interaction as an important lesson. What does each conversation and person have to teach you? Pay attention to people's stories today, noticing the stories you tell as well, asking yourself what importance these stories serve

relationally, how we account for the choices we make in our stories, and the membership categories (brother, student, parent, teacher) called on in the telling of these stories. Notice how these stories conform to or breach social norms. Honor each person's story, asking yourself: What did I learn about myself and my life today?

43. Right now, where are you? What time of day is it? What season? Who else is present?

Stop what you are doing and just notice your posture, points of tension, and breathing, describing but not changing. Pick a micropractice (being with the breath, senses, tension, or other) and *practice* this activity 10-20 times (for 10-30) seconds throughout your day.

44. Today, tune into any hurtful messages you give or receive or encounter regarding relationships, appearance, abilities/intelligence, or other diversity markers (age, gender, race/ethnicity/nationality, class, ability, spirituality, sexuality). As you move through your day, pay attention to the diversity of beings you cross paths with, remembering that life is ecological and interdependent; thus, ecologies thrive when diversity is present. Next, also be aware of prejudice today, first admitting that you contribute to this, and then commit to reducing prejudice in your life (and the lives of others) by cultivating compassionate awareness as well as identifying stereotypes and actions that reflect prejudice in any of the above areas.

45. Today, go with the flow of the day, practicing patience by not rushing. Slow down your actions and pause to enjoy moments of stillness and breath. Throughout the day, notice if your actions come from a place of kindness. If not, what e-motions drive your actions

today? Bring awareness to the intention behind each of your actions, observing what you are doing and why.

46. Today, focus on doing tasks you do not enjoy. Ease into the discomfort by applying love to each activity. In doing so, contemplate what makes you feel welcome and at home. Consider how you can inspire others to feel welcome and at home in your world. What are five ways you can increase your sense of connection with yourself, others, and tasks you do not enjoy. Practice putting these into practice as you move through your day.
47. Practice random acts of kindness today. Begin by reflecting on what small acts of goodness you have given or received as well as the various ways your life has been touched by basic goodness. With each encounter, look for and be open to the basic goodness in each being you encounter. Moreover, focus on what makes each being you encounter unique. Honor their uniqueness by addressing each being with eye contact, a smile, or by name.
48. Perform a pleasure check, paying attention to what brings you pleasure. Throughout the day let pleasure discover you, noticing how this feels. Be with delight in your body, words, actions, and sensations. Practice pleasure without excess or overindulgence.
49. Explore how you see stories or accusations related to fault/blame emerge today, noticing the effects of this on everyone involved. Also, observe the difference between responding

and reacting. In each of these scenarios, what could someone do next to radically transform the encounter to move towards we-first communication?

50. Be present with simple moments today, cultivating presence when you brush your teeth, shower, use the toilet, get dressed, drive, or engage in other parts of your daily routine. What, if anything, did you learn from tuning into these experiences?

51. On a piece of paper, make four columns with the following titles: I feel powerful when...I feel healthy when...I feel loved when... Next, list up to ten things in each category. In the fourth column, list up to ten things that block or limit your feeling of being powerful, healthy, or loved. Today, practice what makes you feel powerful, loved, and healthy.

52. Throughout the day, notice the role of evaluative statements (descriptions of value, worth, or quality), which emerge in your own-self talk, within the media, or in conversations you hear or of which you are a part, considering how evaluations negatively or positively shape the relationship or interaction, focusing on personal or social consequences of being evaluated by others.

53. For the rest of the day, practice courage by doing something you have been avoiding, are afraid of, or find difficult to do. What would you do if fear were not present? Can you be present and embrace uncertainty? In doing so, be with laughter today. What makes you

laugh? What brings you comfort? What do you enjoy doing alone? With others? How can you cultivate a spirit of curiosity and play today?

54. Throughout the day, notice how jokes or pranks (at your expense or others') function in conversation, paying particular attention to jokes as they occur in the media and within everyday talk. Consider how jokes or pranks negatively or positively shape relationships or interactions, further focusing on the personal or social consequences of laughing *at* versus laughing *with* others.
55. Throughout the day, notice oversharing or what you might consider too much information or harmful disclosures, paying particular attention to occurrences of this in the media and within everyday talk. Consider how this negatively or positively shapes relationships or interactions, further focusing on the personal or social consequences of sharing information. With each example, ask yourself: Is it helpful, hurtful, inspiring, necessary, kind, or "true."
56. Pay attention to your energy today, charting it as if you were creating an e-motional weather map. Using the weather as your guide, observe and note how your energy shifts in your conversations, actions, and with your intentions. For example, pay attention to temperature, movement, and flow, noticing when you feel hot, sluggish, cloudy, clear, sunny, and so on.

57. As you move through your day, ask yourself: What, if anything, do you love about being human? What is humanity's greatest gift to the world? What are your greatest gifts to humanity?
58. Contemplate Joe Rogan's statement. It's very possible that everybody is exactly the same at the core, but we're just living these different existences through different biologies, personalities, sexual needs and wants and life experiences. One of the best ways to treat people is to treat them as if they were you living another life. Every person you run into is literally you living another life. If you lived my life, you would be me. If I lived your life, I would be you. I would have your experiences and your genes. Treating others as you would like them to treat you is too abstract. I'm saying treat them as if they 'were' you. If we really are one, then I am you and you are me." Imagine someone else walking in your shoes for the day. What story of your reality would they tell? Now imagine walking in someone's shoes, reflecting on what story of their reality you would tell.
59. For the rest of today, treat each conversation as if it were a prayer, offering a silent namaste (the divine in me, honors the divine in you) to everyone you talk with or encounter, treating each interaction as an act of devotion.
60. Do love research, asking yourself and others: What is love? What does the word love mean to you? Who taught you love? Have you ever fallen in love? Describe the process. Also, what is the biggest risk, if any, you have ever taken for love? Where did you see love today? Who are your love role models? How does one prepare for love? Do you

think you have the potential to love more deeply? What would that require? Do you think love is increasing or decreasing in the world? What images, ideas, songs, or gifts represent love to you? If I were to summarize your love story, how would it go...?²⁹³

61. Today, practice making the familiar strange. Start by reading Horice Miner's essay, "The Nacirema," as well as Pat Hughes, "The Sacred Rac." Then, choose an everyday activity, practice, routine, or ritual, which you consider "normal," mundane, or even taken-for-granted; for example, wearing heels, going out to eat, brushing your teeth, doing laundry, setting the table, playing football, or specific happenings such as music concerts, birthdays, shopping, cooking, or specific holidays. Do this as if you were a "researcher," "traveler," "visitor," or other identity as a way to observe this with new eyes. Reflect on your chosen ritual as if you are unfamiliar with it or are learning about it for the first time in the same way you might view outside cultural traditions. In constructing the "familiar" as "strange," problematize the processes, traditions, philosophies, and instruments or equipment, creating a story as if you have no background knowledge of these rituals. In doing so, re-language the practice as you do it. For instance, if a story is focusing on football, then instead of referring to the actual object as a football, pigskin, or sports equipment, create a new label for it such as "magical egg." How does making an everyday practice strange help you see and experience it with new eyes?

62. Throughout the day, notice how statements of preference or statements of desire emerge in your own-self talk, within the media, or in conversations you hear or of which you are a part, considering how these preferences negatively or positively shape relationships or

interactions. Focus on personal or social consequences of preference in your own life as well as others.

63. Over the next 24 hours, notice when you are interacting with or from a spirit of competition or collaboration, reflecting on the consequences of each. Chart both and place them in two columns, examining the experiences and outcomes of each perspective or mode of acting in the world.

64. Tune into how you account for your words and actions as well as how you hold others accountable for theirs. Moving through your day, ask yourself how or if your actions or words would change if you knew every moment of your day were recorded for the world to see or hear. Reflect on the ways in which you thought one thing and said another; said one thing and did something else; did or said something you wished you had not; or did or said something that you said you did not do.

65. Today, ask big, abstract questions and ponder the mysteries of life by considering: What is the past, where is it located, and what is it made of? Is an experience something you have or something that has you? How do you recognize something? How are images formed? What is the difference between perception and imagination? What is the difference between being awake and being asleep? What is the difference between truth and lies - good and bad – right and wrong - fact and fiction – real and unreal? What makes something meaningful? What are thoughts: what are they made of, where do they

come from, and where do they go? What is attachment and how does it happen? What other questions might you ponder today?

66. Pay attention to how you relate to everyone you encounter today through your body, focusing on your posture, proximity/distance, balance/weight, use of touch, breath, and gestures. How, if at all, are your words and embodied actions aligned or out of step? Attend to your body language in each encounter, noticing the similarities and differences among your interactions.

67. Explore various spiritual traditions and practices by first studying different spiritualities and then by visiting local temples, synagogues, churches, places of worship, sacred sites, or natural spaces. Consider researching spiritual traditions of other cultures and visit local centers dedicated to those beliefs, doing so with a spirit of openness and curiosity.

68. Create a small book that contains any myths, stories, poems, or relevant verses associated with your experience of the divine. In addition, include any photographs, symbols, or other artwork related to these passages as well as any pictures or collages of symbols or deities related to your spiritual beliefs. You may also wish to include prayers, songs, or chants that are meaningful to you and your experience of spirituality.

69. As you move through your day, pick an issue or series of questions and survey a variety of people, reflecting on their answers as well as your own. You might wish to ask questions like: How did the universe come to be? What is the purpose of human life?

What is reality and how is it manifested in our everyday lives? What is wrong or right with the world?

70. Today, focus on what you are grateful for in your life, recording as many people, places, or things as possible, revisiting this practice and list often. Alternatively, consider recording one thing you are grateful for each day for the next thirty days by writing this on a small piece of paper and placing this in a box or jar, then revisiting these responses and reflecting on the power of practicing gratitude.

71. Focus today on the micropractice “being with the rhythm of your heart.” For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with your pulse in various points throughout your day. Check-in with your pulse on your wrist or neck (or other locations) and be with the beat, aligning your breath with its rhythm in a non-forced manner. You might enjoy experimenting with how your pulse changes as your e-motions change, but also as you interact with various people, places, and things.

72. Reflect on the cycle of life, specifically exploring your ideas about death and the afterlife. Timothy Leary once stated, “Death is the most important thing you do with your life.” Ponder this statement or other quote that you resonate with about death and reflect on or work towards preparing for your own passing. You might consider creating a living will or advanced directive, designing your funeral or researching options such as burial, resomation, cremation, or other sustainable practices. You might also wish to explore the death and dying practices and rituals of other cultures.

73. Today, draft your personal code of ethics in the spirit of NPR's "This I Believe Project," reflecting on how your personal ethics shape your relationships, beliefs, and interactions. Next, consider how your ethics shape the daily choices you make in regard to the world at large, including the causes you support, the purchases you make, and so on.
74. Allow yourself to fully experience nourishment today, paying particular attention to what you consume. Focus on eating nutritious healthy food and consuming enough water to stay hydrated. With each meal or drink, pause and offer gratitude for this opportunity to be nourished, giving thanks to all beings that have helped make this possible for you to enjoy this item. As a micropractice, today, just be with your food and drink, not multitasking, but allowing yourself to experience each bite or sip fully with your entire being.
75. Shift your sensory awareness today by playing with your balance, moving unconventionally by altering your gait or stride, use of weight, or bodily orientation. Allow yourself to be firm and loose or soft and hard. Also, explore other modes of sensing by wearing colored glasses, closing one eye, wearing a blindfold or ear plugs, or holding your nose while eating. Reflect on how this shifts your experience of each moment.
76. Today, fill your day with new experiences. Go places you have never been, eat food you have never tried before, try an activity you have never attempted, and delight in the

newness of each experience. Moving forward, how can you find this spirit of newness everyday?

77. Today, pay attention to where you see agreement and disagreement happening (among people or among other beings). With each occurrence, remind yourself that beings can and do disagree; thus, cultivating tolerance and patience is an essential part of allowing all beings to “just be as they are.” As such, let all beings happen to you while still standing on your own ground, noticing how your worlds collide and intersect regardless of your varying preferences, beliefs, stories, and/or opinions. Your reality is just one point of view. Honor your beliefs but understand that the world you create is not a “true” reflection of reality, just another version.

78. Notice what your projections are today, remembering that most, if not all, of what bothers you about others is really about you. Take ownership and responsibility for this, observing and recording what you find bothersome today and then reflecting on its relationship to your life right now.

79. Today, make a list of expectations you have for yourself and/or others, also listing what expectations others have for you. For the rest of your day, observe how these expectations propel or limit your choices and actions and how this impacts your relationships.

80. Watch the documentary *I am*, directed by Tom Shadyac, and reflect on the film's core message.²⁹⁴ Notice how this film shapes your words and actions as you move through your day. If you watch the film at the end of your day, reflect on how this might inspire how you approach tomorrow.
81. Today, hunt for examples of defensiveness in conversation. Reflect on why defensiveness happens, observing what you perceive to be the what, when, where, why, and how of each defensive encounter. Often defensiveness arises when people feel they are being evaluated or judged and controlled or criticized as well as when they feel like someone is acting out an agenda, a lack of concern, playing games, or treating the person as inferior to them. Reflect on how applying empathy, openness, and tolerance, acting from a space of collaboration, might shift these moments.
82. Watch Brene Brown's short video, "The Power of Empathy,"²⁹⁵ and practice being *with* others today by practicing empathy versus sympathy. In reflecting on the power of empathy, also consider what vulnerability means to you and in what ways you express your vulnerability so you might connect more compassionately with yourself and others. Also consider watching her TED talk, "The Power of Vulnerability,"²⁹⁶ as a way to reflect on these ideas further.
83. Today, have a conversation with those who are close to you as well as those who are not, asking them to answer these questions about you: *Three things I cannot live without. What I am doing with my life. The first things people usually notice about me. What I do*

for pleasure or enjoyment. What causes me stress or tension. What I care most about.

Answer these questions about yourself, too, and compare and reflect on your answers in relationship to everyone else's answers. What similarities or differences exist?

84. For the entire day, "unplan" your life and see where the flow carries you, undoing any "normal" daily routines, routes, or rituals.

85. Reflect on the commitments you have made in your life thus far that have brought fulfillment. Honor these commitments today as well as those who have helped make them possible. Also consider what commitments need to be revisited, rewritten, or revisioned. What new commitments might you make to enhance your wellbeing?

86. Dedicate a space in your house you revere as a "sacred space," visiting daily to honor yourself and your divinity. Consider creating an altar housing sacred objects or images reminding you of your sacredness. You might add candles, scents, plants, or other items reminding you of what you experience as divine within yourself and the world.

87. Today, pack a bag and go on a pilgrimage, starting at a site you consider sacred. Spend time in this place, honoring its power. What does this place have to teach you about yourself? Listen to the lessons of this place and carry them with you as you journey to the next sacred site. Experience your day as one connected spiritual journey as you move from place to place, focusing on your experience as it unfolds, not the destination.

88. Focus today on the micropractice, “being with all of your senses.” For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with any of your senses, checking-in at various points throughout your day. For example, when drinking a glass of water, surrender to the experience as if the water desires you, feeling the sensation in your mouth and body as it travels through you. Upon waking, bring awareness to your skin and the sensation of various textures, temperature, touching, and being touched. You can apply this to being with a specific scent or smell as well as to music. With scent, tune into the sensation fully, coming into and out of awareness. When listening to music, bring awareness to the individual parts (instruments or beats) one by one and then listen to the whole.
89. Spend today reflecting on and respecting all forms of life, treating this awareness as a sacred act, and practicing nonharming, nonkilling, and nonviolence. At the end of your day, contemplate the power of protecting life and valuing each being’s right to a livable life, free from harm, suffering, and pain. In the process, pay particular attention to how you interact with non-human beings, such as insects, plants, and all animals.
90. At the end of your day, contemplate your relationship with money by examining your purchases, monthly expenses, monthly pay, debt, and other expenditures. How does your relationship to money shape your life, including what you believe, value, and how you relate to the world around you? What would happen if you started looking at money as a type of “green energy,” having the power to create a more sustainable world by how you invest this energy in yourself and your community. What if your approach to money were fueled by the idea of donation, insomuch that you practiced unconditional generosity via

heart-centered exchange? Viewing each cost as a donation highlights this exchange by calling attention to what is being shared versus looking at what you purchase as “yours.” Situating money as “green energy” invites commitment, appreciation, and responsibility as well as recognizing the value of what is received. What you donate in regard to “green energy” reflects your contentment as well as your appreciation for what is exchanged; thus, express your generosity and interdependence through the donations you make.

91. Today, practice a simple version of an Ayurvedic practice called *dincharya* as a way to enliven and awaken your energy. Begin by waking up before the sun rises, and before opening your eyes and getting up, awaken to the energy of the day. Connect with your breath, paying tribute to all of your teachers, offering a moment of gratitude. Tune into which nostril is more open or dominant and step out of bed with the same foot. As needed, evacuate your bladder, and then splash your face and eyes with cool water. Brush your teeth and tongue, and then drink a glass of warm (not hot) water with fresh lemon juice. Engage in around 10 minutes of gentle movement, followed by three rounds of conscious breathing. Once this is completed, perform a self-massage using oil (after dry brushing your skin) and allow the oil to absorb as long as possible. Next, enjoy a shower followed by a warm and substantial breakfast (with tea, not coffee). After this ritual is complete, devote the rest of your day to connecting with your highest purpose.

92. Focus today on the micropractice “being with pauses.” For 10-30 seconds, practice being present with pauses between breaths, words, or movements as you move from place to place, noticing how you transition between moments. Are your transitions smooth,

disjointed, hurried, on autopilot? Practice presence in the spaces between words and actions to highlight the connectedness and flow of everyday life.

93. For the rest of the day, notice when you refer to people, places, or things as “beautiful,” “ugly,” “large,” “small,” and any number of other labels. By paying attention to the ways we label and create dualities (when someone is beautiful, it creates the opposite – ugliness as a measure), we can gradually work to transcend these categories so we might notice a much greater range of sensation and connection as a practice of compassionate awareness.

94. Today, work on clearing the clutter in your life, starting with your home and moving to your workplace, car, or other space to enhance the flow of energy in the places you inhabit. If you live with others, involve them in the process, building collective energy towards a common goal, setting an intention and “placing” yourselves together.

95. Devote today to tuning into the natural rhythm and flow of nature. Contemplate the seasons, life cycles, moon cycles, and pulse of life, considering how you honor the ever-changing flow of day to night, summer to fall, and so on. What, if any, daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly festivals, traditions, rites of passages, or rituals do you do to celebrate these cycles? Create a calendar or book of these flows and cycles, including any practices you engage in to honor these moments. To inspire this discovery, I invite you to engage in a five-part universal meditation²⁹⁷ that celebrates the energetic heart as part of divine consciousness. First, bring your palms to your heart center, keeping them open in a

gesture of holding the energy of gratitude, contentment, and unconditional love. Next, bring awareness to your pulse on your wrist or neck, tuning in to the rhythm of your heart. Releasing your pulse, close your eyes and focus your awareness from the backs of your eyes or center of your forehead to your heart center. Feel the warmth of your inner fire glowing. Now, bring your awareness to your breath, placing your hands on your heart, slowing and lengthening your exhalation to release any tension. Tune in to this energy, noticing any sensations or e-motions that arise. Finally, let your hands slowly move away from your heart center, keeping the energetic connection intact. Spend some time in this space, radiating your heart energy outward towards your hands and beyond. Carry this heart-centered energy with you throughout your day, feeling the aliveness and pulse of life as it flows through you.

96. As you move through your day, pack a camera and either go on an adventure or engage in your everyday routine, taking pictures as you go. At the end of the day, create a visual narrative that chronicles a day in your life, reflecting on the various moments. As you look through the pictures, try to return to that moment and relive it via your sensations, conversations, intentions, and so on. Did photographing your day bring about more awareness or presence?

97. Return to the love letter you wrote to yourself, contemplating what you wrote and how you experience self-love now. Reflect on how you show love (service, words of affirmation, affection, quality time, gifts, or through other relational currencies²⁹⁸). Either write yourself a new letter or craft a letter to someone you love, telling them what they

mean to you. Deliver or read the letter to the person, asking them to do the same for someone else. You might also consider writing a letter to your future self, family, or partner relaying any important information you feel compelled to share now.

98. Do nothing. For at least ten minutes today just relax and “do nothing.” Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down and let your attention wander without trying to control or force anything. Can you get out of your own way and find comfort with yourself when not actively doing anything? Spend the rest of the day doing at least 10% less than you normally would, finding space to rest and pause. How does your experience of doing nothing compare to the first experience?

99. Start your day by attending a public yoga or meditation class or completing a home practice. After completion, approach the rest of your day as if the whole world is a yoga mat. How can you bring the lessons you learned on the mat (and in this text) to all that you experience today? First and foremost, cultivate the spirit of forgiveness, reflecting on what this means to you and how you can forgive those that have harmed you. Practice forgiveness and love as a powerful, moving force in your day.

100. Watch the documentary, *Internet Rising*, and contemplate the role of technology in your life, especially in regard to your own use of technology and its role in society.²⁹⁹ What is the core message of this film and how does it relate to the stories told by the films, *Life in a Day* and *I am*? Also, consider the role technology plays in enhancing connection but also causing disconnection. To reflect on this further, you might also watch Sherry

Turkle's TED talk, "Connected, but Alone?"³⁰⁰ Based on these reflections, make a plan for how you might harness technology to enhance your wellbeing and connection to others.

101. Today, explore your notion of culture, contemplating what cultures you belong to as well as those in which you also feel connected. What traditions, practices, and/or rituals are important to your culture? How many cultures do you call home? To expand your awareness of the ethnosphere, I encourage you to watch Wade Davis' TED talk, "Dreams from Endangered Cultures."³⁰¹ After doing so, reflect on the relationship between the ethnosphere and biosphere, considering your role in helping maintain ecological and cultural diversity through sustainable daily practices. Next, dedicate time today to exploring a culture outside of or different than your own. Allow space to take a trip into another world, visiting a cultural center, restaurant, religious site, or other place. In lieu of this, you might spend a day in a subcultural world of which you are not a part. In either case, enter each cultural domain with a spirit of openness, tolerance, and compassion, letting the experience teach you something new about another culture.

102. Throughout your day, practice not taking things personally. Do not allow yourself to be affected by criticism or praise, noticing how this changes your way of being in the world and interacting with others. Record your observations and let go of any desire or need to be fulfilled, reassured, or propped up by others. In doing so, be like bamboo, finding balance between personal strength and softness. Moreover, cultivate peace and

ease within yourself by fully practicing and embracing flexibility within all your experiences today.

103. Today, take seriously the notion that what you do today greatly impacts future generations. With this everyday activist spirit, create a sustainable action plan for yourself, noting what practices you currently engage in that may stress the planet and your wellbeing. In what ways can you tread more lightly on the earth? Consider integrating the following sustainability practices into your daily life: reusable grocery bags, water bottle and/or take-out containers; shop second hand; unplug appliances when not in use, turn down the thermostat and monitor your water use; switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs, use candles, or solar lamps; switch to green cleaning products or use vinegar, baking soda, and lemon juice; take public transportation or bike, when possible; shop locally and seasonally, supporting farmers markets and organic produce farmers; recycle as many products as possible, especially paper, glass, and plastic; donate what you no longer need, buy less, use less, waste less. Devote time today to researching local sustainable resources. Through your daily choices, your small acts can change the world.

104. Today, notice what you give and receive, take and accept, accept and expect, expect and reject, paying attention to the ebb and flow and push and pull of contradictory desires. Explore the dialectical tension between your desire for independence and interdependence (to connect and separate); openness and closedness (to share or withhold); certainty and uncertainty (novelty and predictability); equality and inequality

(to be equal or greater than); include and exclude; competition and collaboration (be the best or work together best). Explore and discover other dialectical tensions in your life such as work/life balance, pleasure/pain, love/hate, or in yoga, your conditioned self and your divine Self, and so on. As you contemplate these tensions, begin to look beyond either/or or black/white to fully explore the complexity of both/and as well as the gradations of experience between these tensions.

105. What do you believe without equivocation? Today, contemplate the major beliefs that orient your life. Based on your beliefs, pick one social issue you would like to examine and understand better. First, explore this issue through your belief structure. Next, consider the complexity of the issue by studying a variety of conflicting or opposing beliefs related to the issue. In doing so, compile at least five different perspectives on the topic. For example, if you chose *veganism* as your social issue, you could study varying perspectives related to this topic by studying the varieties of reasons people choose to be vegan as well as the multiple stakeholders involved in this issue such as *PETA* (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), factory meat and dairy farmers, animals, religious leaders, nutritionists, and so on. Consider doing this exercise with a variety of your beliefs, looking at the complexity of each social issue and how your belief is similar or dissimilar to other stakeholders.

106. Today, focus on who and what is living in and acting through you. We are born into a world of learning and connecting, starting out completely dependent upon others. As we grow up, all that we come to know, experience, and learn is shaped by our

relationships. As a result, not only are we a product of our interactions, but we are also always in progress as we continue to become who we are in the process of our relating. Thus, as you explore your day, continuously ask yourself: who and what is living in and acting through me? Do I hear my mother reminding me to grab a coat before I go? Did I avoid going to the restaurant I chose for lunch because a co-worker gave it a bad review? Try to observe without judging what you discover.

107. At Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village Sangha, the community has a practice which they call, "Beginning Anew,"³⁰² involving a four-part process to compassionately resolve conflict. The first stage is called "flower watering." In this step, you share appreciation for the person, mentioning specific instances where the person did or said something that you admire. The goal is to shed light on the other person's strengths and contributions to your life. The next stage is called "sharing regrets," wherein you mention any regrets or insensitivities in which you have engaged through your actions or words and for which you have not yet had an opportunity to apologize. The third part, "expressing a hurt," focuses on sharing how you feel hurt by an interaction with another, due to his or her words or actions. To express a hurt, one should first water the other person's flowers by sharing two or more positive qualities that one has observed. Finally, the last stage is called, "sharing a long-term difficulty and asking for support." In this step, you share an issue you are dealing with so the person has the opportunity to understand you better and offer the support you might need. Consider a critical moment or conflict you have witnessed or experienced recently and reflect on how this process might have escalated or enhanced the conflict situation. Moving through your day,

cultivate the spirit of this activity in your interactions by “flower watering,” while asking for support and help from others when you need it.

108. Now that you have completed your 107-day *svadhyaya –sadhana*, or self-observation practice, spend the day reflecting on your journey by reviewing your notes, images, projects, lists, and charts as whole. After exploring what you learned about yourself, your life, or others, and write about your process, which will form the conclusion of this text.

108 *Asanas* Notes

²⁸⁵ Osho, *Intimacy: Trusting Oneself and Others* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin), 47.

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²⁸⁷ “Belief-O-Matic Quiz,” accessed October 23, 2013, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/Quizzes/BeliefOMatic.aspx>

²⁸⁸ Robinson, Ken. “Ken Robinson: Changing Educational Paradigms.” Filmed October 2010. RSA Animate, 11:41. Posted December 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>.

²⁸⁹ Robinson, Ken. “Ken Robinson: Do Schools Kill Creativity?” Filmed February 2006. TED video, 19:25. Posted June 2006. http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

²⁹⁰ Robinson, Ken. “Ken Robinson: Bring on the Learning Revolution.” Filmed February 2010. TED video, 17:58. Posted May 2010. http://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_bring_on_the_revolution.html

²⁹¹ *Life in a Day*. Produced by Ridley Scott and directed by Kevin Macdonald. Feature film, 1:34:56. Filmed July 24, 2010. Posted January 11, 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFVr_cJJIY

²⁹² “The Heart’s Intuitive Intelligence: A Path to Personal, Social, and Global Coherence,” *HeartMathInstitute* video, 7:20. Posted April 22, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdneZ4fIIHE>

²⁹³ In honor of Karen Porter Sorensen’s performance-based loved research, featured in her book: Karen Porter Sorensen, *love (luv) n.* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2010).

²⁹⁴ *I Am*. Directed by Tom Shadyac. Produced by Jennifer Abbott and Dagan Handy. Shady Acres Films /Flying Eye Productions, 2010. Documentary, 76:00.

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²⁹⁶ Brown, Brené. “Brené Brown: The Power of Vulnerability.” Filmed June 2010. TED video, 20:16. Posted December 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzLF7o>

²⁹⁷ Adapted from Shiva Rea, *Tending the Heart Fire*,. 68.

²⁹⁸ Chapman, Gary. “The 5 Love Languages.” Accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/>.

²⁹⁹ *Internet Rising*. Created by Andrew Kenneth Martin, Marina Elsen, and Alex Elsen. Digi-documentary, 53:03. <http://www.internetrising.net/>.

³⁰⁰ Turkle, Sherry. “Sherry Turkle: Connected, but Alone?” Filmed February 2012. TED video, 19:48. Posted April 2012. http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together.html

³⁰¹ Davis, Wade. “Wade Davis: Dreams from Endangered Cultures.” Filmed February 2003. TED video, 22:01. Posted January 2007. http://www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_on_endangered_cultures.html

³⁰² “Beginning Anew,” *Plum Village: Mindfulness Practice Center*, Accessed September 5, 2013, <http://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/beginning-anew/>.

SAVASANA

As a child, I treasured storytelling both in my school and at bedtime each night, the stories improvised by my mother. Listening to the adventures of Tom Cat, a bigger than life hero cat who traveled by boat to different places, dropping in just long enough to save each individual island world, was a huge favorite. I also adored witches and their cats, broomsticks, primeval forests, and exploring mythical stairs down into the sea, choosing among three doors as to which would produce either treasure or a fearsome monster. How did the sea part like that so miraculously? Why three doors? Then again, how on earth did my mother come up with something different every night: unicorns with rainbow-hued horns in bubbles and other fanciful and fearsome creatures. Mainly, I just remember how spontaneous my world was. I was a dragonfly, dancing with the wind. I was a fairy, sliding down rainbows, or I was a witch, riding on a broom, alongside my friend *Catwitch*.³⁰³

I believe these stories set the stage for my own spiritual explorations and understandings. During 3rd and 4th grades, I attended a Catholic school, undergoing both Baptism and First Communion and Confirmation; these events did not deter me, however, from remaining drawn to the supernatural, the magical and mystical realms of everyday life. Though my family did not claim a religious position on either my mother's or my father's side of the family, I felt a deep sense of family and reverence for nature, encouraged to develop a peaceful co-existence with people as well as with plants and animals. I spent considerable time outside. On my mother's side, I was told that one of my great grandfathers was a Baptist minister and had a small church,

which is now ironically owned by a close high school friend of mine who has made this his house. When my grandmother on my mother's side died, we found tarot cards and runes in her house though I do not remember ever talking about these things with her.

When I was around 12 or 13, on a trip to New Orleans, I found a little book, *The Spiritual Workers' Handbook*, now out of print, in a dusty little shop in the French Quarter. This book radically altered my thinking at that time, suggesting that there was a world surrounding me that was not exclusively Judeo-Christian but which offered earth-centered spiritual alternatives. The chapters contained information about herbs and spells, a magical topic for me, opening my eyes to possibilities. I immediately turned to researching books on Wicca and alternative spiritualities and healing practices. Reading the words of Scott Cunningham, Laurie Cabot, and Starhawk filled me with excitement, and I became consumed with studying herbs, essential oils, and holistic healing. By age 15, I had undergone a self-initiation ritual, dedicating myself to the Wiccan path.

For most of my young adult life, I classified myself as a pagan or Wiccan, which shaped a number of life paths I began to follow, including studying aromatherapy and herbology. In 1994, I attended the national Rainbow Gathering in Taos, New Mexico, where I experienced outdoor living in this intentional community, radically shifting my worldview and inspiring me to continue to explore the intersections between environmentalism, activism, and spirituality. Becoming a vegetarian in 1995, I dedicated myself to living a more compassionate, eco-friendly lifestyle. Having always been open to exploring various spiritual practices and traditions, I have been inspired by practices from a variety of wisdom traditions. I believe very strongly in the importance of interfaith dialogue and tolerance and feel fortunate to have so many friends who come from diverse religious /spiritual systems as I feel quite passionate about

spirituality as a life-long learning process. I have experienced numerous spiritual phases in my life, from more regular community participation with other pagan practitioners to solitary practice. Where I once more readily embraced tradition, I now find myself open to a diversity of viewpoints, hoping to continue my spiritual growth and path.

I no longer feel bound to any type of dogma or required spiritual practices as some faith systems dictate. Between the ages of 25-30, I went through a period of spiritual cynicism and questioning, inwardly labeling myself an atheist, completely closing myself off to anything spiritual. When I turned 30, I started participating in a women's temple group while living in Thailand and studying Thai massage. This was an amazing opportunity for me as it helped me re-embodiment my love of spiritual seeking and desire to connect with the world around me on a deeper level. Studying Thai massage also shifted my spiritual views considerably as my main teacher was an extremely devout Buddhist, who often shared his views of the Dharma in our studies. I found that I enjoyed the ritual aspects of Buddhism while living in Asia, finding immense comfort in going to temples and participating in prayer. In many ways, I felt more at home in this spiritual system than I ever had in my pagan beginnings, but I could understand how paganism had represented an opportunity for me to embrace the divine feminine in a way that other systems had not provided for me at that point in my life (in rural Missouri).

Buddhism, though too patriarchal for my complete comfort, provided an outlet to renew my interests in continuing to reflect on my beliefs. While in Thailand, I also experienced multiple spiritual happenings, including visiting a local wise woman or "Egg Lady" as she was called. All of my massage classmates went to her for black magic clearings. I went on the insistence of Pichest, my massage teacher, and was pleasantly surprised when she returned my duck egg, money, incense, and flowers to me, stating, "You do not have any black magic in

you.” Of course, Pichest could not have been happier about this as I was the first student who had ever encountered this response from her. Several years later, my mother and I were accidentally initiated into the Tien Tao religious sect while traveling in Laos, which I recount in my essay, “The House of Glass Noodles,” in *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies*.

My interest in holistic healing has also hugely shaped my spirituality. Studying yoga, tai chi, and acupuncture provided opportunities to explore Taoism, Hinduism, and Tantric philosophies, all of which are incorporated into my current spiritual practices. At the base, I would say that love is the main tenet of my spirituality and this permeates all of the activities in my life – my relationships, teaching, and learning. In reflecting on the various ways spirituality affects my views on gender, sexuality, relationships, health, politics, the environment, and communication, I definitely embrace the idea that I am spiritual but not religious, only in that I do not practice within any fixed faith tradition. My goal is simply to strive for a more loving, tolerant, interconnected world.

I started this journey by asking myself: How can individuals and communities teach and learn to engage more peacefully, nonviolently, and compassionately with each other? Further, how can one practice a style of communication that helps at least one person suffer less each day? In asking these questions, my goal has been to imagine as well as actively attempt to actualize a world where individuals and communities work together to create less suffering in each other’s lives by first developing compassionate awareness of our interconnectedness, and, as a result, “waking up” to not only our own divinity but also that place in all of us where the entire universe dwells.

By employing Shiva Rea’s “wave methodology” as a sequencing tool, I approached the writing of this text as yoga. Utilizing a wave-like structure, I first determined my peak purpose,

and then the key actions or concepts needed to support my ideas and the overall theme emerged. From the opening progression (*namaste*, invocation, and *namaskar*) to the core integration through the three waves, which served to grant integrity to my peak purpose, to the three waves focusing on my three communication *sutras* (communication energetically stories us; communication is ecologically interdependent; communication is spiritually transformative), I centered each part of this sequence on the philosophy and practice of presence.

In the end, it is my greatest hope that you will see this not as the conclusion of our journey together, but as just another step in the divine unfolding of our interconnected lives. From the very first page of this text, you have been practicing communication as yoga. Thus, before you even began any of the micropractices contained herein, change was already in progress. Similarly, I do not leave this text the same as when I began writing it some months ago. In the spirit of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, I started this project because I wanted to bring together the various streams of learning that have most inspired who I am today and also to honor those who have shaped this journey. Thus, this work is a culmination of my love of communication studies and the many philosophies of yoga and how they have intersected in my life. Contained within this text are questions I have asked myself and the practices I have attempted to integrate within my daily life to improve my relationships. All of these conversations and exercises were born out of my own struggles as a communicator - as a person trying to unlearn the habitual patterns I no longer find useful for cultivating the compassionate and tolerant world in which I want to live. Writing, for me, has always been a contemplative method, which helps me make sense of my life. Thus, it is my hope that these micropractices, as tools of contemplation, plant seeds in your heart so you might similarly be inspired to create your own questions and practices.

You may have noticed that I repeated certain phrases throughout the text, treating these statements as a kind of *mantra* or sacred utterance designed to plant seeds of awareness as well as serving as a practice to manifest change in my own life, and hopefully in yours as well. In the end, this text, for me, is really an “unending conversation,” in Burke’s terms, which I know will continue far after “I” am gone. Like yoga, this dissertation is both a process as well as a product, which has taught me that I am not only sitting at the feet of my teachers, but that through my own self-study, I am also a teacher, the teaching, and a student as well as the temple, the worshipper, and the divine all at once.

For me, viewing each being we encounter as a teacher situates enlightenment as a collective endeavor, gradually replacing patterns of disconnection with something more - love. “Ideally, when we take up the practice of yoga we begin a process that offers us a way of stopping what is harmful to us. We do not have to stop doing something deliberately. We do not have to do anything to ourselves, but rather whatever it is simply fades out because we have redirected ourselves towards something positive.”³⁰⁴ In this manner, I have come to locate the mind and yogic awareness, not in our heads or even our bodies necessarily, but in the space between our hearts and in our choices and intentions as well as in the habitual patterns we unlearn, in each small act of kindness, and each conscious breath. In doing so, for me, awareness, love, spirituality, and awakening - all become part of the same endeavor to live in the flow. In keeping with the paradox that is yoga, as I have previously stated, in this process I have also learned that:

I am not a teacher. I am not a mystic. I am not a scholar. I am not seeking. I am not the boxes I check nor the labels applied to me. I am not myself, nor am I who I think I am or who you think I might be. I am alive. I am light and love and breath. I am body and bone and energy. I am forgiveness and gratitude. I am struggle, manifested daily in action and appreciation for all that has been, IS, and will be. I am this moment - only partially formed between each passing... inhale and exhale.

With this discovery, it occurred to me that what I have really been asking you, the reader, to do is to move beyond transforming your communication to transcending communication itself. While this might seem like a radical notion at first glance, I do not mean to suggest that you should permanently transcend all communication, but instead to find spaces in your life that move beyond boundaries built by language so you might explore a world without words, becoming fully part of the world and not at all separate from it - even if only for a brief moment. It is within this spacelessness that the potential of communication as a spiritual practice emerges - or rather merges and integrates with the ever-vibrating *spanda* or divine pulsation of all life.

For me, there are three main streams that have most shaped my worldview, which include studying spirituality, women's and gender studies, and communication. From these, my yoga practice blossomed and transformed into this project. It has been a daunting task to bring together my learning from all of these areas, especially due to the many divergent systems of philosophy contained within each culture of inquiry. Thus, this project is part adventure, part theoretical commentary, part homage to my teachers, part celebration of my lifelong learning, and part field guide to rediscovering my world. Contained within are many tensions and contradictions, which speak to the paradox that is yoga. My goal has been to weave my understandings of communication and yoga into a practical self-study guide, which bridges communicative theories which position the self as relationally made and negotiated with yoga philosophies that illustrate a Self that is divinely interconnected to all beings. To bridge these divergent modes of knowing in one's everyday life is the practice of yoga through small acts of loving kindness, cultivated through short, daily micropractices.

Hence, for me, the path of peaceful communication, or yoga, helps us pack more lightly for our journey and is thus a methodology of heart that cultivates vulnerability and recognizes

“The higher expression of anything becomes weaker. The roots are very strong, but the flower cannot be so strong. Its beauty is because of it is not being strong. In the morning it opens its petals to welcome the sun, dances the whole day in the wind, in the rain, in the sun, and by the evening its petals have started falling; it is gone.”³⁰⁵ This is the meaning of the practice of – *savasana* or “corpse pose.” To “wake up” is to die in our previous ways of being in the world so we can awaken to a new world, which we all share.

Lunar Pause

Savasana is considered the most important *asana* as it assists in eliminating tension through deep relaxation by slowing the heart rate, deepening the breath, and balancing energy, or *prana*, among other benefits.

To practice *savasana*, lie on a comfortable mat or surface in a neutral position face up. Soften and release both legs, allowing your feet to turn out equally. Gently lift the base of your skull away from your back to release your neck towards your tailbone. Next, reach your arms towards the ceiling or sky, rocking from the side to open your back and shoulder blade. Lower your arms to the floor, placing them at your sides with the back of your hands touching the floor- palms oriented towards the ceiling or sky. Soften your jaw and relax your face, closing your eyes.

Let your body become heavy as if melting into the earth. Let go of any tension or holding, letting your breath flow naturally or involuntarily. Just observe and surrender to the moment, not trying to do anything but be present. Cultivating a relaxed awareness, imagine you are lying at the bottom of the ocean, letting all of your words, e-motions, and sensations drift by as you watch them pass one by one. After 5-15 minutes, gently roll to your right side and pause for two-three breaths. On your next exhalation, press your hand into the floor and lift your body, returning to a seated position.

Figure 47. Practicing *savasana*

In this final resting pose, or *asana*, the final movement of our sequence, we contemplate this symbolic death as the ultimate wake up call, asking ourselves if we are going through life asleep or dead and how we can wake up from this automatism, knowing, “You are not closed. Even if you were, you would be closed *against* something, closed *within* something, closed *in*

*relation to something. Whatever you are closed against is holding you, and waiting for dialogue.*³⁰⁶ By paying attention to the life we are living, we have an opportunity to open to the awareness of the journey – the steps taken – versus the destination or the results of our traveling. Your life is your adventure. Will you ride the train or take the walking path? Retracing my steps, I return to where I started – *atha* – right here, right now.

Savasana Notes

³⁰³ Lisa Tuttle and Una Woodruff, *Catwitch* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

³⁰⁴ Desichar, *The Heart of Yoga*, 89-90.

³⁰⁵ Osho, *Intimacy*, x.

³⁰⁶ Matthew Remski, *Threads of Yoga: A Remix of Patanjali-s Sutras with Commentary and Reverie* (2012), 116.