

CONTEMPLATING MODERN ECOLOGICAL YOGA: WILD PRACTICES FOR THE  
PRESERVATION OF THE WORLD

By

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To all practitioners of yoga

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES.....	8
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	9
ABSTRACT.....	10
CHAPTER	
1 PROLOGUE.....	12
2 INTRODUCTION.....	15
What is Yoga?.....	16
History and Meaning in India.....	17
Yoga in the West.....	20
Development of Modern Yoga.....	22
The Evolution of Modern Yoga in the United States.....	23
The Watershed of Haṭha Yoga in the West.....	24
Transnational Yoga.....	26
Transcendentalists, Theosophists, Beats, and Beatles.....	27
The Bricolage of Modern Ecological Yoga.....	30
Ecology, Ecosystems, and the Environment.....	32
The Influence of Cultic, New Age, and Environmental Milieus.....	35
The Expansion of Modern Ecological Yoga.....	37
3 LIVED ETHICAL PRACTICES OF MODERN ECOLOGICAL YOGA.....	40
The Influence of Transcendentalism on Yoga and Ecology.....	41
The “Greening” of Yoga Praxis.....	44
Modern Ecological Yoga and Environmental Ethics.....	47
Modern Ecological Yoga and Lived Religion.....	49
Modern Ecological Yoga’s Wild Practices for the Preservation of the World.....	53
4 THEORY IN ACTION, TWO PERSPECTIVES: JIVAMUKTI YOGA AND OFF THE MAT, INTO THE WORLD.....	61
The Role of the <i>Jīvan-mukta</i> in Modern Ecological Yoga.....	62
The Jivamukti Yoga School.....	66
Focus of the Month.....	69
Jivamukti Yoga and Animal Rights.....	70

“ <i>Āsana</i> —Our Connection to the Earth and All Beings” .....	75
“ <i>Ahiṃsā</i> —Non-harming” .....	76
“ <i>Satya</i> —Telling the Truth” .....	78
“ <i>Asteya</i> —Non-Stealing” .....	79
“ <i>Brahmacarya</i> —Good Sex” .....	80
“ <i>Aparigraha</i> —Greed, Excess, and Poverty” .....	82
Off the Mat, Into the World.....	82
Yoga and Activism.....	83
Global Seva Challenge.....	86
Innovations of Yoga and Activism.....	87
Yoga as Therapeutic Tool .....	89
5 CONCLUSION.....	92
Contemplating Modern Ecological Yoga.....	92
The Peril and Promise of Modern Ecological Yoga.....	95
6 EMIC EPILOGUE .....	101
APPENDIX	
A JIVAMUKTI YOGA SCHOOL’S FOCUS OF THE MONTH CHART .....	104
B SANSKRIT GLOSSARY .....	112
C INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	115
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	117
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	122

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>page</u>
4-1	Seva Challenge Results (2008-2013).....	87

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
4-1 Jivamukti Yoga Logo.....	66
4-2 Jivamukti Yoga 2013 Tribe Gathering Logo .....	70
4-3 Off the Mat, Into the World Logo.....	82
4-4 YOGAVOTES Logo.....	84
4-5 Off the Mat, Into the World 2012 Global Seva Challenge Logo .....	86

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FOTM	Focus of the Month. A thematic tool used for teaching in the Jivamukti Yoga School
JYS	Jivamukti Yoga School. A method of Modern Postural Yoga, co-founded in 1984 by Sharon Gannon and David Life. One of the two focus groups under study
MEY	Modern Ecological Yoga. An expansion of Elizabeth De Michelis' heuristic typology of Modern Yoga, which situates traditional yoga philosophy and praxis through the lens of environmental activism
OTM	Off the Mat, Into the World. A program branch of the nonprofit, The Engage Network, focused on bridging yoga and social activism. OTM was founded in 2007 by Seane Corn, Suzanne Sterling, and Hala Khouri. Second focus group under study
YOGA/ YOGA	The word "Yoga" with a capital "Y" is used to denote a particular system of yoga, or when referenced in a direct quote. Otherwise, "yoga" with a lower case "y" is used to denote yoga practices
YS	<i>Yoga Sūtra</i> . Foundational Sanskrit text for the philosophical school of Yoga in the lineage of attributed author, Patañjali. Compiled roughly during 350-450 CE

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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For the last century and a half a great deal of scholarship has emerged in the Western academy on the ancient Indian practice of yoga. Today, it is a significant and dynamic field of study worldwide. Yoga practices and philosophies have been examined at length, bringing to light continuities and discontinuities between traditional practices in India and their modern adaptations in the United States. In the last few decades, there has been extensive scholarship on contemporary yoga theory and practice, with prominent scholars such as Joseph Alter, Elizabeth De Michelis, Steward Ray Sarbacker, Mark Singleton, Sarah Strauss, and David Gordon White. These academics have made significant contributions to the study of the history and practice of yoga, both in India and abroad. With the emergence and growth of environmental ethics, the connections between yoga and ecology have advanced rapidly, as demonstrated by the works of—Christopher Key Chapple, Laura Cornell, and Michael Stone, among others. However, to date, few scholars have linked the multifaceted practices of yoga and environmental stewardship with social activism.

Today, activism, both social and ecological, within the modern American yoga community has expanded substantially, making the community of yoga activists a new group worthy of further study. I argue there is an emergent *kula* (family or intentional community) within modern yoga practitioners that are turning to its rich textual and philosophical heritage for guidance in responding to the social and environmental plights of the twenty-first century. This thesis examines the important links between yoga's ethical structure and engaged social activism through the lens of environmental stewardship, by introducing the heuristic device "Modern Ecological Yoga." It focuses on, but not limited to, the moral foundations of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* as it applies to twenty-first century yoga praxis. Relying on interviews, the study focuses particularly on the founders of the Jivamukti Yoga School (Sharon Gannon and David Life) and *Off the Mat, Into the World* (Seane Corn, Hala Khouri, and Suzanne Sterling), to argue that through the practices of yoga—rooted in traditional Indian philosophical systems—practitioners are provided with a means to connect with the world around them. Further, I suggest that this newly found interconnectedness fosters mindful behaviors that have the potential to help alleviate personal suffering, as well as contributes to addressing specific environmental crises of the planet at large.

## CHAPTER 1 PROLOGUE

For the last fifteen years the phenomenon of yoga has been a fascination of mine both on and off the yoga mat. My sister, ten years my senior, introduced me to yoga when I was in grade school, and my personal practice has blossomed out of that first exposure many years ago. I underwent my initial yoga teacher training in 2005, and have had numerous yoga-oriented trainings in the years that followed. Countless times throughout my life, yoga has been the tool for personal healing and self-inquiry that has fueled my purpose as a practitioner and a scholar. As a dedicated insider within the tribe of contemporary yoga in the United States, I have ardently attempted to provide an objective presentation of the modern yoga community, leaving my personal opinions and biases to the prologue and epilogue of this thesis.

During my undergraduate career at the University of Vermont, I had the opportunity to bridge my two personal and academic passions in the execution of the course “Yogic Environmental Philosophy,” which studied the intersection of yoga and environmental stewardship. For “Contemplating Modern Ecological Yoga,” I relied on Sanskrit textual studies, with the primary text of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra*, extensive secondary scholarship with prominent contemporary scholars in interdisciplinary fields, and a qualitative dimension of research including interviews with five prominent teachers of contemporary yoga schools. Therefore, this master’s thesis is a further examination of yoga praxis, ecology, and social activism.

I situate my query of Modern Ecological Yoga (henceforth MEY) in the context of the growing interest in the academy regarding yoga and its intersection with the ecology. The title of this thesis “Contemplating Modern Ecological Yoga: Wild Practices

for the Preservation of the World” was chosen based upon three criteria. First, all concepts presented throughout these pages are to be *contemplated*, in order to spark further dialogue within scholarly spheres, as well as in modern yoga circles. In contemplative studies, an opportunity to explore meaning, purpose, and value is based, in part, upon personal introspection, which is integral to many yoga practices—both traditional and contemporary. Second, I developed “Modern Ecological Yoga” as an expansion to Elizabeth De Michelis’ heuristic typology of Modern Yoga, detailed in *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (2004). In this preexisting typology, De Michelis highlighted particular trends within Modern Yoga, each demarcated by particular key attributes. Thus, De Michelis’ work was chosen to build on previously situated research detailing Modern Yoga, in order to further examine an already existing platform of analytic data. I propose MEY as a new dynamic field, integrating yoga praxis with the milieus of ecological and social activism, therefore expanding the tapestry of Modern Yoga.

Third, “Wild Practices for the Preservation of the World” was chosen as an adaptation to Henry David Thoreau’s now famously quoted phrase—“In Wildness is the preservation of the world.”<sup>1</sup> As an early New England Transcendentalist, Thoreau was pivotal in introducing his understandings and interpretations of Eastern philosophy for audiences in the United States. The “practices” presented within the framework of Modern Ecological Yoga are “wild” and “radical.” The Oxford Dictionary defined “wild,” when pertaining to an animal or plant, as something “living or growing in the natural environment; not domesticated or cultivated.” “Radical,” in turn, was defined as

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<sup>1</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. “Walking,” *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1862): 657-74.

something “relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something.” Thus, the *wild* practices that Thoreau may have referred to in “Walking,” and I am referring to presently, be activities that exist in our natural state, prior to human domestication. These practices go to the “rad” or “root,” of contemporary crises and are meant to challenge the social conditioning of society in ways that question the status quo. Perhaps the suggestions within these pages will not be implemented by the majority, but rather will be contemplated by individuals yearning to establish alternative and more sustainable ways of living.

I conclude with one perspective of what a study concerning Modern Ecological Yoga has to contribute to the worlds of yoga, ecology, and social activism both in academia and the lay community. As religion scholar David Haberman declared in *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India* (2006), “in part, my inquiries were motivated by an interest in finding ways to appreciate the wonder of the world in a manner that neither denies nor is defeated by the serious problems we face today” (2006: 2). This research was sparked by a paramount interest in yoga philosophy and the various avenues in which I believe the praxis of yoga can alleviate global ecological crises through engaged environmental and social activism.

## CHAPTER 2 INTRODUCTION

For the last century and a half a great deal of scholarship has emerged in the Western academy on the ancient Indian practice of yoga. Today, it is a significant and dynamic field of study worldwide. Yoga practices and philosophies have been examined at length, bringing to light continuities and discontinuities between traditional practices in India and their modern adaptations in the United States both in India and abroad. In the last few decades, there has been extensive scholarship on contemporary yoga theory and practice, with prominent scholars such as Joseph Alter, Elizabeth De Michelis, Steward Ray Sarbacker, Mark Singleton, Sarah Strauss, and David Gordon White, making significant contributions to the study of the history and practice of yoga. With the emergence and growth of environmental ethics, the connections between yoga and ecology have advanced rapidly, as demonstrated in the works of—Christopher Key Chapple, Laura Cornell, and Michael Stone, among others. However, to date, few scholars have linked the multifaceted practices of yoga and environmental stewardship with social activism.

Today, activism, both social and ecological, within the modern American yoga community has expanded substantially, making the community of yoga activists a new group worthy of further study. This thesis examines the important links between yoga's ethical structure and engaged social activism through the lens of environmental stewardship, by introducing the heuristic device MEY. It focuses on, but is not limited to, the moral foundations of Patañjali's<sup>1</sup> *Yoga Sūtra*<sup>2</sup> (henceforth YS) as it applies to

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<sup>1</sup> Second-third century CE. Considered to be the authoritative figure in the Classical Yoga School (*darśana*) of Hinduism.

twenty-first century yoga praxis. The YS was chosen, in particular, due to the text's undeniable influence on both traditional and contemporary yoga schools and practices. Relying on interviews, the study focuses particularly on the founders of the Jivamukti Yoga School (Sharon Gannon and David Life) and *Off the Mat, Into the World* (Seane Corn, Hala Khouri, and Suzanne Sterling), to argue that through the practices of yoga—rooted in traditional Indian philosophical systems—practitioners are provided with a means to connect with the world around them. Further, I suggest that this newly found interconnectedness fosters mindful behaviors that have the potential to help alleviate personal suffering, as well as to addressing specific environmental crises of the planet at large.

### **What is Yoga?**

A study of Yoga's richly textured history, its traditional goals and purposes, reveals that Yoga cannot be properly conceived as a monolithic system but rather as a tradition that has been burgeoning since its incipience in ancient times. In its long complex evolution Yoga can be seen as a vast tradition (or rather, as server traditions within a tradition) that has incorporated a diverse and rich body of teachings within Hinduism and indeed other religious traditions over a period of many centuries. What does become clear is that Yoga achieved a philosophical maturity in the classical period (ca. 150-800 CE) when the appearance of the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali (ca. second-third century CE) provided a foundational text on the formal philosophical system of Yoga (*yoga-darśana*) (Whicher 1998: 38-9).

As religion scholar Ian Whicher highlighted in the paragraph above, yoga is a complex and dynamic field of study. The practices and trends of yoga in the United States have evolved from a barely noticeable phenomenon, to an unavoidable multi-billion dollar industry in twenty-first century popular culture. In a 2003 poll commissioned for *Yoga Journal*, "the world's most popular yoga magazine,"

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<sup>2</sup> Foundational Sanskrit text for the philosophical school of Yoga in the lineage of attributed author, Patañjali. Compiled roughly during 350-450 CE.

approximately “25.5 million Americans” (twelve percent of the population) “were ‘very interested’ in yoga. A further 35.3 million people (sixteen percent) intended to try yoga within the next year, and 109.7 million (more than half the population) had at least a ‘casual interest’ in yoga” (Singleton and Byrne 2008: 1). Comparative religions scholar David Gordon White contended, as “arguably India’s greatest cultural export, yoga has morphed into a mass culture phenomenon” (2012: 2). Even with these increasing numbers, the debatable question remains, “What precisely is yoga?” And then, an even more contentious question arises, “Is yoga Hindu?” This thesis aims to situate yoga within the complex religious history, cultural, and international from which it has grown.

### **History and Meaning in India**

In *Yoga in Practice* (2012), White declared, the term “yoga,” “has a wider range of meanings than nearly any other word in the entire Sanskrit lexicon” (2012: 2). Religion professor Gerald James Larson explained, “yoga is as old or older than recorded history, its origins for the most part lost in the antiquity of Central, Western, and South Asia” (2000: xiii). Although in recent scholarly debate, Whicher suggested that scholars trace yoga “as far back as the Indus Valley Civilization between about 2500 and 1800 BCE” (1998: 7). The first appearances of the word “yoga” are found in the *Vedas*, “India’s earliest scriptures” (White 2012: 3). Etymologically speaking, “yoga” is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *yuj*, meaning “to yoke,” or “to join.” One of the original meanings of yoga, found in the *R̥g Veda*, around the fifteenth-century BCE, was “the yoke one placed on a draft animal—a bullock or warhorse—to yoke it to a plow or chariot” (White 2012: 3). Religion scholar Stephen Phillips contested, the *Upaniṣads* “are the oldest texts in which the word *yoga* is used in our sense, our anglicized ‘yoga’” (2009: 2). “The earliest extant systematic account of yoga” can be found in “the Hindu

*Kaṭhaka* [or *Kaṭha*] *Upaniṣad*, a scripture dating from about the third century BCE,” that “introduces a sort of yogic physiology” (White 2012: 4). In this way, yoga “means the condition of inner steadfastness or equilibrium that depends on one’s one-pointedness of attention” (Whicher 1998: 19). These two definitions mark a stark difference in the terminology of yoga—“from referring to the yoking of external objects... to an internal ‘joining’ or ‘harnessing’” of one’s senses (Whicher 1998: 8). Larson warned that, “it must be admitted that the precise historical development of yoga traditions in India is still being debated in contemporary scholarship” (2012: 73). Thus, from the earliest recorded history of yoga, the meanings have varied extensively depending upon interpretation and application of the term.

According to the historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, yoga is “a pan-Indian corpus of spiritual techniques” (1958: 359). Further, Eliade suggested, “classic Yoga occupies a place of its own, one that is difficult to define. It represents a living fossil, a modality of archaic spirituality” (1958: 361). Following the classical period’s textual presence from the third century BCE, “references to yoga multiply rapidly in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist sources” (White 2012: 5). As well, many texts within each of these religious traditions were being formulated during the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. White stated, “it is during this initial burst that most of the perennial principles of yoga theory—as well as many elements of yoga practice—were originally formulated.” Toward the latter end of this period, “one sees the emergence of the earliest yoga systems, in the *Yoga Sūtra*” (White 2012: 5). The YS, while compiled roughly between 350-450 CE, was predated by various religious scriptures in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism (Larson 2012: 73). The YS are a “tightly ordered series of aphorisms... so remarkable and comprehensive

for its time that it is often referred to as ‘classical yoga.’ It is also known as *pātañjala yoga* (“Patañjalian yoga”), in recognition of its putative compiler, Patañjali” (White 2012: 5). Patañjali’s *YS*, (*sūtra*, literally meaning “thread”), “is a compilation of 195 brief sūtras or aphorisms in four sections or chapters” (Larson 2012: 74). These chapters or “*pādas*,” literally meaning “foot,” in Sanskrit, contain respectively, “51, 55, 55, and 34 sūtras” (2012: 74). Whicher argued,

Historically speaking, the most significant of all the schools of Yoga is the system of Yoga as propounded by Patañjali. It is also known as the “perspective of Yoga” (*yoga-darśana*) and is classified among the so-called six darśanas or philosophical traditions of orthodox Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, the other five being: Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta (Uttara Mīmāṃsā) (1998: 7).

While there may be various theories explaining the history and meaning of yoga, White contended, “at bottom, India’s many yoga traditions”—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Yoga, etc.—are “*soteriologies*, doctrines of salvation, concerning the attainment of release from suffering existence and the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*)” (2012: 6). Be this as it may, White argued that a primary misconceived notion is that “all yogas are one,” and that “one Yoga tradition has remained unchanged since its origins in the mists of antiquity” (2012: 24). He further underscored, “that there are as many discontinuities as there are continuities in the history of yoga, and that there are nearly as many yoga systems as there are texts on yoga” (2012: 25). To summarize White’s contention, Larson suggested, even with the many variations of yoga traditions “in India and elsewhere, both sectarian and non-sectarian,” there are “primarily two systematic forms of South Asian yoga that are especially salient for understanding Yoga in its many permutations”—Pātañjala Yoga and Haṭha Yoga (2012: 73). The many different streams of thought regarding what is and is not considered yoga provide fertile

ground for multiple adaptations, appropriations, and interpretations of the practice within the United States.

Around “the beginning of the fifth century... the core principles of yoga were more or less in place” (White 2012: 6). White outlined the core principles of yoga as:

1. An analysis of perception and cognition
2. The raising and expansion of consciousness
3. A path to omniscience
4. A technique for entering into other bodies, generating multiple bodies, and the attainment of other supernatural accomplishments (2012: 6-10).

White surmised, “these four sets of concepts and practices form the core and foundational vocabulary of nearly every yoga tradition, school, or system, with all that follow the fourth- to seventh-century watershed” (2012: 12). The majority of these characteristics can be found in modern adaptations of yoga, however the path to attainment may have changed—more drastically in some appropriations than others—the baseline of the first three principles have remained relatively unchanged.

### **Yoga in the West**

Names of physical postures, popular Sanskrit terminology, and multi-billion dollar yoga companies have become common twenty-first century parlance in the globalization and commercialization of yoga in the United States. *New York Times* journalist William Broad, in *The Science of Yoga: The Risks and the Rewards* (2012), suggested that the “bending, stretching, and deep breathing have become a kind of oxygen for the modern soul” (2012: 1). When a practitioner wants to attend a yoga class, they have a plethora of options to choose from, and may need to educate themselves as to the differences between the numerous styles and schools available.

For example there are classes in Ashtanga Yoga, Anusara Yoga, Bikram Yoga, Baptise Yoga, Flow Yoga, Forrest Yoga, Ishta Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Kripalu Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Jivamukti Yoga, and Power Vinyasa Flow, with new brands appearing by the minute. Yoga is now offered as an aid for various states of mental and physical health: yoga for addiction, yoga for anxiety, yoga for depression, yoga for trauma, prenatal yoga, postnatal yoga, chair yoga, even dog yoga, so you can practice yoga with your pet. Yoga classes in the United States can be found in studios, gyms, schools, and even church basements. As Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne conveyed in *Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary Perspectives* (2008), “yoga has taken the world by storm” (2008: 1).

Since the 1990s, contemporary scholars have examined yoga and its modern manifestations that have appeared throughout the world (Chapple 2003; De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Strauss 2005; Phillips 2009; White 2009; Singleton 2010; Broad 2012). Singleton and Byrne stated, “yoga has undergone radical transformation in response to the differing world views, logical predispositions, and aspirations of modern audiences” (2008: 4). Within the study of modern yoga scholarship, it is critical “to appreciate the fact that there has been a long, if not by any means continuous or systematically developmental, history of yoga scholarship and textual redaction” (Alter 2004: 4). History and religion scholar Elizabeth De Michelis suggested,

When we reflect that yoga as a fairly systematized discipline has been in existence for at least 2,500 years, it will become apparent that many of the variations of this discipline must have been created through interaction with yet other world views and practices, adaptation to different times and geographical locations, and elaboration by different individuals (2008: 17).

Further, South Asian religion scholar Christopher Key Chapple underscored, “because Yoga emphasizes practices for mystical religious experience without

specifying a fixed theological perspective, it has been appropriated in one form or another by nearly all religions found in India, including Christianity” (2008: 2). This long history indicates how yoga “has been a subject to the inevitable process of interpretation,” and therefore it becomes “all the more important to situate it in history as a product of human imagination” (Alter 2004: 5). This “imagination” or social construction of yoga varies greatly, which is expressed at different times, in different ways, based in part, on societal needs for those times.

### **Development of Modern Yoga**

The expression ‘Modern Yoga’ is used as a technical term to refer to certain types of yoga that evolved mainly through the interaction of Western individuals interested in Indian religions and a number of more or less Westernized Indians over the last 150 years. It may therefore be defined as the graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga (De Michelis 2004: 2).

De Michelis’ historical study of yoga in India and abroad provided a typology of Modern Yoga—including Modern Psychosomatic Yoga, Modern Denominational Yoga, Modern Postural Yoga, and Modern Meditational Yoga (2004: 188). De Michelis clearly stated that this delineation of yoga was intended as a “theoretical device, useful only for general orientation in the field,” highlighting differences between schools of thought and practice (2008: 18). Detailing the demarcations of Modern Yoga, De Michelis further explained:

After Vivekananda’s 1896 formulation [of the text *Rāja Yoga*], Modern Yoga developed into various schools dedicated to body-mind-spirit ‘training’, which we shall call Modern Psychosomatic Yoga (MPsY)... Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) developed a stronger focus on the performance of *āsana* (yogic postures) and *prāṇāyāma* (yogic breathing), while Modern Meditational Yoga (MMY) mainly relied on techniques of concentration and meditation... Modern Denominational Yoga (MDY), on the other hand, was a later development... during the 1960s with the appearance of more ideologically engaged Neo-Hindu *gurus* and groups that incorporated elements of Modern Yoga teachings (2004: 187-9).

However helpful such a typology may be, Singleton expressed concern with such a model: “I am skeptical of the typological application of the term *Modern Yoga* and its subdivisions—conceptual entities that did not exist prior to De Michelis’s work but that have already become the predominant nomenclature among scholars of contemporary, transnational yoga” (2010: 18). As an alternative option, Broad suggested the use of the term “yogas,” “denoting the evolution of many styles over the centuries” (2012: 49). However oversimplified De Michelis’ typology or Broad’s “yogas” may be, Singleton maintained, De Michelis’ demarcations “have proven invaluable in delineating a field of inquiry” (Singleton 2008: 6). These constructs are to be used as “provisional and workable constructs (as intended by their deviser) providing one entry point to the study of yogas of the recent past” (2008: 6). This “entry point” of Modern Yoga provides the theoretical framework from which to generalize and compartmentalize, with intention, the phenomenon of yoga found throughout contemporary practice in the United States.

### **The Evolution of Modern Yoga in the United States**

A critical moment in the transnational appearance of yoga was in 1893, when Swami Vivekananda, “the Indian founder of ‘modern yoga’” (White 2012: 20), spoke to Western audiences at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Vivekananda suggested that his dream of a “Universal Religion,” was to be experienced through the practices found within various spiritual disciplines, or *yogas*. In Vivekananda’s Chicago Address, speaking of the unity of religions, he declared:

It is imperative that all these various yogas should be carried out in practice... First we have to hear about them; then we have to think about them. We have to reason the thoughts out, impress them on our minds, and meditate on them, realize them, until at last they become our whole life. No longer will religion remain a bundle of ideas or theories, or an intellectual assent; it will enter into our very self... Religion is realization... It is being

and becoming... It is the whole soul's becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion (in Adiswarananda 2006: 67).

De Michelis stated, "Vivekananda carried out a major revisitation of yoga history, structures, beliefs and practices and then proceeded to operate a translation... of this 'reformed' yoga into something quite different from classical Hindu approaches" (2004: 3). Strauss similarly underscored, "Vivekananda's presentation of yoga to the Western public... marks a turning point in the way this ancient system of ideas and practices has been understood" (2005: 8). White declared that Swami Vivekananda "was instrumentalizing this ancient yoga tradition in his own way." Further, Vivekananda was advocating his "Universal Religion," based upon his interpretation of the YS "as the theoretical foundation for all authentic yoga practice" (2012: 27). Singleton argued, "it is clear that Vivekananda's project was the latest in a series of attempts to render Patañjali user-friendly to esoterically minded Westerns and to present 'his' yoga to the West as India's exemplary cultural" artifact (2008: 85). For these scholars, Vivekananda's appearance in Chicago was a paramount "turning point" in the evolution of Modern Yoga, followed by the work of a few other India-born *yogins* (practitioners of yoga), who helped spread their new interpretations of yoga practices to the Western world.

### **The Watershed of Haṭha Yoga in the West**

While the other leading yoga gurus of the first half of the twentieth century had no reform or political agenda, they left their mark by carrying the gospel of modern yoga to the west. These include Paramahansa Yogananda, the author of the perennial best-selling 1946 publication, *Autobiography of a Yogi*; Sivananda, who was for a short time the guru of the pioneering yoga scholar and historian of religions Mircea Eliade; Kavalayananda, who focused on the modern scientific and medical benefits of yoga practice...; Hariharananda Aranya, the founder of the Kapila Matha...; and Krishnamacharya,... the guru of the three *haṭha yoga* masters most

responsible for popularizing postural yoga throughout the world in the late twentieth century (White 2012: 20).

As White highlighted in the paragraph above, Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) and his three primary disciples, B. K. S. Iyengar (1918-), K. Pattabhi Jois (1915-2009), and T. K. V. Desikachar (1938-), were critical in the expansion of Modern Postural Yoga in the West. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, these three men would begin to “introduce their own variations on his techniques and so define the postural yoga” predominately found in yoga practices of the twenty-first century (White 2012: 21). Singleton suggested that Modern Yoga’s focus on *āsana* (physical posture) is a relationship based upon “radical innovation and experimentation. It is the result of adaptation to new discourse of the body that resulted from India’s encounter with modernity” (2010: 33). Chapple maintained that, “many modern-day practitioners find in Yoga an integrated spiritual practice that serves as an antidote to the cynical, sedentary, and often opulent lifestyle that has developed in the postmodern world” (2008: 2). Modern Yoga in the United States has extended the range of application within these practical models, by comprising “processes of psychological transformation complementing physical development and maintenance of good health,” which incorporates the health of body, mind, and spirit (Phillips 2009: 3). The evolution of yoga, and the powerful persistence of *āsana*, based upon the passing of knowledge between country lines, over generations is a crucial element to the tapestry of yoga’s diverse history.

White argued that yoga has changed more vastly in the last thirty years, than it has since the beginning presence of *haṭha-yoga*, whose “greatest legacy is to be found in the combination of fixed postures (*āsanas*), breath control techniques (*prāṇāyāma*),

locks (*bandhas*), and seals (*mudrās*)” (2012: 17). *Haṭha yoga* is one of six primary forms of yoga in India, the other five are: *rāja-yoga* or classical yoga, the “royal” yoga “often used to refer to Patañjali’s school of Yoga in order to contrast it with *haṭha-yoga*” (Whicher 1998: 6); *jñāna-yoga*, the path of “knowledge;” *karma-yoga*, the path of “action” or selfless service; *bhakti-yoga*, the path of “devotion;” and *mantra-yoga*, the path of “recitation of sound.” *Haṭha-yoga*, in contemporary vernacular, “can be interpreted to indicate the union of the internal sun (*ha*) and moon (*ṭha*), which symbolically indicates the goal of the system” (Singleton 2010: 27). However, as Singleton, Broad, and Whicher underscored, the term *haṭha* itself means “forceful” (Singleton 2010: 27; Broad 2012: 49; Whicher 1998: 6), a definition rarely addressed in modern yoga teachings outside scholarly circles.

White highlighted, that Patañjali’s *YS* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, “the two most widely cited textual sources for ‘classical yoga,’ virtually ignore postures and breath control, each devoting a total of fewer than ten verses to these practices” (2012: 3). Therefore, the contemporary turn away from a “forceful” practice, and the baseline assumption that yoga is solely a form of physical movements (*āsanas*), in relationship with the breath (*prāṇāyāma*), are modern appropriations of traditional practices. Much of these adaptations are largely due to the teachings of Krishnamacharya and his disciples.

### **Transnational Yoga**

Modern Yoga owes a great debt to the process of transnational distribution of information. In *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (2008), Sarah Strauss conveyed that the sharing of knowledge back and forth, between borders, displayed characteristics of what Aghananda Bharati (1923-1991) coined in 1970, and Arjun Appadurai detailed, as the “pizza effect.” This concept referred to ideas or practices,

typically identified with one culture, for example—pizza from Italy—that were actually further developed by individuals outside the country of origin. Strauss argued, “in India, yoga’s popularity has followed on the heels of its Western dissemination; in some sense, though it had not actually ‘left’ India, yoga was nevertheless ‘re-Oriented’.” Thus, “modern yoga, as represented in the writings of Swami Vivekananda at the end of the nineteenth century, is a transnational cultural product” (Strauss 2005: 8-9). Therefore, Modern Yoga has been filtering into and out of American scholarship since the late nineteenth century, continually evolving with each society who adopts and transforms its practices.

### **Transcendentalists, Theosophists, Beats, and Beatles**

The blending of Eastern philosophy with Western audiences, while indebted to the Indian gurus, saints, and mystics that traveled to the United States, also was influenced greatly by popular culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Intellectual and artistic groups provided avenues for exposure through lyrics and literature inspired by early translations of Hindu texts. According to the religion scholars Thomas Tweed and Stephen Prothero, the New England Transcendentalists were the “first group of American intellectuals to imagine the meeting of East and West,” and “was without question the first American movement to grapple seriously with Asian religious traditions” (1999: 92-3).

In 1785, an employee of the East India Company, Sir Charles Wilkins, translated the *Bhagavadgītā* into English. This first translation inspired the lives and writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Fifty years after that first publication, in Concord, Massachusetts, Emerson founded the Transcendental Club. In 1837, at age thirty-four, “Emerson delivered a lecture to

Harvard seniors, one of whom was Henry David Thoreau” (Goldberg 2010: 32). In *Emerson and the Light of India* (2007), Robert Gordon extolled that Emerson’s brilliance and influence “was to adapt central Vedantic teachings ‘to the modern humanistic culture of the West, thereby creating the most cosmically optimistic faith the world has ever known” (in Goldberg 2010: 35). Diana Eck has similarly averred, “in Emerson himself the perspectives of the ancient Indian Upanishads and the nineteenth-century Transcendentalists came together, directing our human vision toward the oneness of spirit underlying the whole universe” (in Goldberg 2010: 37). Phillip Goldberg poetically suggested that “if, as has been said, Emerson was the mind of America, then perhaps Walt Whitman was its heart and Henry David Thoreau its soul” (2010: 38). It can be argued, therefore, that Emerson was one of the first Western thinkers to adopt and transform Eastern philosophies for Western audiences. It was through Emerson’s exposure to Eastern thought, “which he blended with a range of other sources and his own fecund musings to produce an unrivaled body of work” which developed and expanded, in turn informing and inspiring countless individuals over the years in the art of Indian philosophies and traditions of old (Goldberg 2010: 26).

The Theosophical Society was another transnational movement that influenced and brought Indian philosophy to Western audiences. While the Theosophical Society’s focus was not on yoga per se, they were influential in incorporating yoga into their philosophical tenets. In 1875, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) created the Theosophical Society, which aimed to:

Form the nucleus of a Universal brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color; to promote the study of... the world’s religions and sciences, and vindicate the importance of old Asiatic literature...; and to investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature... and the

physical and spiritual powers latent in man especially (in Goldberg 2010: 50).

The focus of universality was not limited to the philosophy of the Transcendentalists or Theosophical Society. Poets and musicians during the mid-twentieth century are of paramount importance in the proliferation of Eastern philosophy to rest of the Western world. Some of the post-World War II writers, known as the Beat poets—Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), Gary Snyder (1930-), Michael McClure (1932-), and Philip Whalen (1923-2002)—were influenced by the American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS), which was led by Alan Watts (1915-1973), Frederic Spiegelberg (1897-1994), and Haridas Chaudhuri (1913-1975) (Goldberg 2010: 137-8). While not directly associated with AAAS, Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) and William Burroughs (1914-1997) were also pioneers of the Beat generation. According to Goldberg, “the Beats were called poets of revolt, but as Ginsberg would later remark, theirs was a revolt of consciousness, not just of politics and social mores” (2010: 138).

Beyond the poetry of books, lies the power of musical lyrics. In February 1968, John Lennon (1940-1980), Paul McCartney (1942-), George Harrison (1943-2001), and Ringo Starr (1940-) of “The Beatles” went to India to study Transcendental Meditation with their new spiritual teacher, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison met Maharishi in August 1967, after the yogi gave a public lecture in London (Goldberg 2010: 151). As Goldberg stated, the world’s “understanding and practice of spirituality would never be the same” after the Fab Four’s direct exposure to India, for the “tectonic plates of Western culture shifted” at that time (Goldberg 2010: 7).

Throughout the transnational dance between East and West, there has been much cross-inspiration from generation to generation, as displayed by Bharati’s “pizza

effect.” For example, Emerson and Thoreau’s work traveled around the world and back again encouraging many, who in turn influenced the rest of the world with their life and work. Mohandas Gandhi while in prison, once wrote to and advised a follower to read the works of Emerson, “the essays to my mind contain the teachings of Indian wisdom in a Western garb” (in Goldberg 2010: 45). Gandhi, was also inspired by Thoreau’s “Resistance to Civil Government,” which “profoundly shaped [his] theory of nonviolent civil disobedience” (Tweed and Prothero 1999: 95). Gandhi, in turn, inspired great peace seekers such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who’s sermons influenced Rosa Parks, who’s brave act of not giving up her bus seat helped spark the civil rights movement here in the United States. As Goldberg summarized, “in a neat cross-cultural volley, India inspired Thoreau; Thoreau inspired Mohandas K. Gandhi; and Gandhi tossed the ball back to Martin Luther King Jr.” (2010: 44). These trends of inspiration again highlight the transnational influence of Eastern and Western dialogue, and provide a context for these ideas to have traveled across country borders for generations.

### **The Bricolage of Modern Ecological Yoga**

For years scholars have been researching the avenues in which religious ideas can heal or influence humanity’s relationship to the natural world. Although many studies highlight the prevalence of environmentally focused thought in Asian religions, few scholars have detailed the relationship between yoga and ecology (Burke 2012; Chapple 2007; Cornell 2006; Feuerstein and Feuerstein 2007; Gannon 2008; Skolimowski 1994; and Stone 2009). While the practices of MEY presented in this study are by no means all inclusive or engaged by all contemporary *yogins*, there is a growing presence of ecologically mindful practitioners that are connecting yoga

philosophy with environmental and social activism. I want to underscore that *not* all yoga practitioners in the United States are ecologically mindful. However, there is a widely growing *kula* (family or intentional community) of yoga practitioners (further examined in Chapter 4) engaging in environmental activism under the tapestry of yoga philosophy and praxis. This study is an attempt to explore those examples of yoga schools and organizations engaging in various eco-toned and socially conscious practices.

MEY is one contemporary expression of how the graft of Western yoga from the Indian tree of yoga has grown over time. De Michelis warned, however, “as with all typologies,” the compartmentalization of Modern Yoga, and therefore MEY, “fails to mirror the complexities of real-life situations and must therefore be understood as a heuristic device” (2004: 189). MEY, intended as such a device, is used to explore the range of appearances of ecologically mindful yoga practices in the twenty-first century United States. White declared, “every group in every age has created its own version and vision of yoga. One reason this has been possible is that its semantic field—the range of meanings of the term ‘yoga’—is so broad and the concept of yoga so malleable, that it has been possible to morph it into nearly any practice or process one chooses” (2012: 2). Through the “ever-evolving nature of yoga... its essence has stayed” relatively the same, affording yoga the opportunity of “meeting the demands of each evolving time period” (Munyer 2012: 7). Based upon this cultural and societal adaptability MEY is further explored.

Though yoga has a richly complex and diverse history, “essentially, Yoga is technique” (Chapple 2008: 4). White declared that the practice of yoga, more or less,

“denotes a program of mind-training and meditation issuing in the realization of enlightenment” (White 2012: 11). Interpretations of such “programs of mind-training” in MEY, weave together many threads of theories, concepts, and devices, which inform contemporary practices in order to address social and ecological challenges of the twenty-first century. This uniting of various information results in an “eclectic bricolage” (Taylor 2010: 14). Religion and nature scholar, Bron Taylor defined such an “eclectic bricolage,” as “an amalgamation of bits and pieces of a wide array of ideas and practices, drawn from diverse cultural systems, religious traditions, and political ideologies” (2010: 14). These additional heuristic devices and concepts highlight the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary and traditional practices, in order to “function as windows onto the multifaceted, ever-evolving architecture of contemporary yoga” (Singleton and Byrne 2008: Prefatory Note). In order to appropriately convey the social construction of MEY, there are specific threads in need of further examination.

### **Ecology, Ecosystems, and the Environment**

The “ecological” component within the tapestry of MEY can be further explored with three additional threads—ecology, ecosystems, and the environment. The term “ecology” is derived from the Greek work *oikos*, meaning “house, household, or family.” “Ecology” was coined in 1866, by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), who defined it as “a science to study organisms in relationship with their living and nonliving environments” (in Bauman et al. 2011: 51). Therefore, ecology is the study of organisms in relation to their immediate and surrounding biotic communities. In the edited volume *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology* (2011), Whitney Bauman, Richard Bohannon II, and Kevin O’Brien explained that “ecology calls particular attention to systems of interconnection, to the energy and

material exchange between organisms, and to the relationships between the living and non-living worlds” (2011: 5). Further, Haeckel argued, that the study of ecology could “reveal the ‘order of nature’ and the ‘virtues’ by which human beings could live harmoniously with it” (2011: 49). With this affirmation, the study of ecology can denote an “ethical lesson: Because all things are interconnected, we should strive to nurture and support connections, to coexists with all that is” (2011: 53). While it may be argued that values cannot be achieved through facts, moral norms can be adopted individually from the vantage point of ecology and the study of interconnections between “living and nonliving organisms.” The science of ecology thus highlights “interconnection,” which provides a thread for MEY to weave individuals together with one another, including the surrounding ecosystems, other-than-human animals, and global communities in an ethical extension of care.

Likewise, as ecology underscores a dynamic interconnection between self and other, ecosystems emphasizes community and surrounding landscapes. In *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (1998), the American environmentalist and philosopher Paul Shepard (1926-1996) described an ecosystem as:

The structure of the natural community, the ecosystem, is... an independent whole composed of distinct populations of species in their niches. The biotic community is a composite of linked and yet separable parts, the whole being neither the sum of those parts nor independent of any of them (1998: 153).

Ecosystems are literal and metaphoric communities that integrate the interconnections of ecology between living and non-living organisms with the land. The American ecologist Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) suggested that the expansion of the biotic community simultaneously could extend the boundaries of ethics. In Leopold’s now famous “land ethic,” he stated “the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the

community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (1949: 239). This broadening of borders of community to include biotic landscapes provides another opportunity to thread moral consideration with other arenas, including the elemental world.

In order to weave together the dynamic interconnections of ecology with the expansion of community of ecosystems in yoga practices, the environment within and surrounding the practitioner becomes one foundation of application. Environment, for the purpose of this study, includes natural, built, and social environments. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defined “environment,” as the “objects or the region surrounding anything.” As philosopher Dale Jamieson noted, the word “environment” is traced to an Old French term, “*environner*,” which means, “to encircle” (Jamieson 2008: 2). Therefore, the practices of MEY emphasize an intimate relationship with the practitioner’s internal and external surroundings. In an environmentally conscious yoga practice, attention is drawn to the way air moves into and out of the body, the fires of digestion and passion are explored, and the water and earth that sustains us is further examined through the food we eat and water we drink. The internal and external environments, therefore, become reflections of, as well as are influenced by one another. Thus, the relationships between the two are brought into consideration. MEY suggests that based upon this relationships, the practitioner has the opportunity to broaden moral care to the surrounding environment, which is none other than an extension of self. This vantage point would therefore lend to the belief that if practitioners want to cultivate a healthy, non-toxic internal environment, they would want to consume and surround themselves with as pollutant-free an external environment as

possible. Overall, the three threads of ecology, ecosystems, and the environment provide a foundation from which individual environmental ethics and activism can be weaved together with a contemporary yoga practice, embodied both on and off the yoga mat.

### **The Influence of Cultic, New Age, and Environmental Milieus**

My expectation is that this study of MEY will demonstrate that there is a milieu of environmental and social activism within the contemporary yoga *kula*. This is displayed by new interpretations of traditional and/ or mystical expressions of yoga philosophy and praxis as a response to physical, environmental, and social degradation pervasive in the twenty-first century. In 1972, British sociologist, Colin Campbell coined the term “cultic milieu,” to describe, “a milieu... defined as the sum of unorthodox and deviant belief systems together with their practices, institutions and personnel” (2002: 23). While historically the term “cult” has been used in reference to variations of the German philosopher, Ernst Troeltsch’s “tripartite division of religious phenomenon into church religion, sect religion, and mysticism,” the cultic milieu “includes all deviant belief systems and their associated practices” (Campbell 2002: 12, 14). Campbell declared,

The most prominent part of the deviant religious component of the cultic world is mysticism... concentrating solely on the individuals’ relationship with the divine and through an emphasis on first-hand experience... The basic beliefs compromising the mystical position are that the religious ideal is a state of unity with the divine; this ideal is potentially attainable by all; there is an underlying unity of all consciousness and life, and that no matter how diverse or how many versions of truth there are, all can lead to the same all-encompassing truth (2002: 16).

The tapestry of MEY shares affinities with the understanding of “unity of all consciousness and life” and an “emphasis on first-hand experience,” that is associated with Campbell’s description of cultic milieus. In fact, Campbell argued, “certain

teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism... like reincarnation and the prohibition on the taking of animal life, are almost hallmarks by which the cultic religious groups identify themselves” (2002: 17). The particular notion of non-harming sentient life (*ahimsā*) is of paramount importance in many expressions of classical and modern yoga, and becomes a foundational theme in MEY.

The universal and spiritual approach to life, as described by Campbell above, is a cornerstone component to the New Age milieu as well. “New Age” is an umbrella concept, which includes multiple belief systems and practices, usually focused on bridging the gap between traditional or “exotic” practices and modernity. Religion scholar Lola Williamson, in *Transcendent America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (2010), stated, “New Age is eclectic in its approach, seeking spiritual guidance wherever it is possible” (2010: 50). Beginning with the “nineteenth-century formation of New Age *religions*,” the birth of the “self-aware New Age *movement*” arrived “in the mid-1970s” (De Michelis 2004: 35). De Michelis reiterated the work of Wouter Hanegraaf, who highlighted “five main trends of New Age religion,” one of which is “healing and personal growth” (in De Michelis 2004: 184). Hanegraaf explained that “personal growth” could provide “deliverance from human suffering,” which “will be reached by developing our human potential” (in De Michelis 2004: 186). Religion scholar Sarah Pike underscored, in *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (2004), that “New Agers are committed to the transformation of both self and society through a host of practices” (2004: 22). This “deliverance from human suffering,” achieved through a “host of practices,” is a key attribute in yoga

philosophy, evolved over time, which is to be experienced and attained through the “healing and personal growth” techniques outlined in yogic texts.

While MEY is influenced by the eclectic bricolage and milieu of deviant and New Age practices, it is equally informed by the “environmental milieu.” Taylor adapted Campbell’s “cultic milieu,” to describe the “environmental/ environmentalist milieu.” Taylor stated that such a milieu involves “environmentally concerned officials, scientists, activists, and other citizens” who “connect with and reciprocally influence one another” (2010: 14-5). I suggest, that the MEY *kula* is a new addition to this conversation of environmentally and socially concerned citizens, and this thesis is an attempt to examine that voice.

### **The Expansion of Modern Ecological Yoga**

Rooted in tradition, developed over the centuries as a transnational product, focused on alleviation from suffering in the form of personal transformation, adapted to the twenty-first century, MEY was born. I developed MEY to be utilized as an analytical tool expanding from De Michelis’ typology of Modern Yoga—a preexisting platform for critical examination. The term “Modern” was intended to delineate contemporary (last 150 years) versus traditional yoga practices. While the term “ecological” was used to highlight the ecology of interdependence within various surrounding communities, thus engendering the practices of environmental and social activism.

As White explained, “yoga practice is the practical application of the theoretical precepts of the various yogic soteriologies, epistemologies, and gnoseologies presented in *analytical works*” (2012: 11). Highlighting White’s attention to “practical application” is a critical ingredient to any Modern Yoga practice, for according to Pātañjala Yoga, yoga

is a state of mind where the fluctuations of the mind cease.<sup>3</sup> When the mind becomes still—through practice—the opportunity for salvation arises when we are no longer afflicted by or attached to the suffering of the physical world. MEY, as I developed, suggests a primary focus on the role of the ecological *jīvan-mukta*, or the “living liberated” being who actively chooses to apply mindfully conscious life practices in order to help alleviate unnecessary suffering in the world. This attention to escaping suffering, pain, and death of the physical world, however, poses a conundrum (which will be further explored in Chapter 3) for many environmentalists, who profess that suffering is in fact a biological reality of evolutionary sentient life, and that desiring liberation from suffering is a form of escaping the reality of the physical world. MEY does not deny the inherent suffering present in the circle of life, rather there is the cultivation of a biocentric and ecocentric mindset that views all life and ecosystems to be intrinsically valuable, which underscores an inherent interconnectivity between all forms of life. Hence, one may choose to act accordingly in order to minimize the suffering inflicted—intentionally or not—to other life forms that share this world.

While the presence of Modern Yoga has been growing exponentially in the last forty years, MEY is a relatively new phenomenon, explored in writing for the first time in 1994, with the poetic work of Henryk Skolimowski’s *EcoYoga: Practice & Meditation for walking in beauty on the Earth*. The links between yoga and ecology have been acknowledged through the work of multiple scholars (Chapple 2005, 2007, Cornell 2006, 2007, and Stone 2009) and in their ecological interpretations of ancient Hindu texts, as well as the witnessing the mutually dependent relationships between humans

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<sup>3</sup> *yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ* (YS 1.2)

and the natural world. Chapple contended that, “India holds a rich classical literature that glorifies the natural world” (2011: 295). For example, Chapple underscored that the *Pṛthivī Sūkta* or “stanzas pertaining to the Earth” in the *Atharva Veda*, “urges humans to protect the earth” (2007: 23). Particularly, in verse 27, Chapple highlighted a “proto-environmentalism” critic:

We venerate Mother Earth,  
the sustainer and preserver of forests, vegetation,  
and all things that are held together firmly.  
She is the source of a stable environment (Chapple 2007: 29).

MEY, therefore, is intended as a construct, designed to analyze the presence of environmentally focused themed yoga philosophy, practices, and texts. Chapple argued, “the Yoga tradition... includes within its disciplines several resources that can, at minimum, increase environmental awareness” (1998: 29-30). Further, “the ultimate goal of Yoga... involves the cultivation of higher awareness, which, from an environmental perspective, might be seen as an ability to rise above the sorts of consumptive material concerns that can be harmful to the ecosystem” (1998: 30). This eco-consciousness, embedded in yoga praxis is the foundation from which MEY grows its roots and expands into the scholarly field under scrutiny today.

### CHAPTER 3 LIVED ETHICAL PRACTICES OF MODERN ECOLOGICAL YOGA

Historically speaking, within the academy and displayed in the daily lives of the devout, religious and philosophical traditions have informed moral guidelines designed to inspire relationships with surrounding environs. In recent decades, the scholarly interest of yoga philosophy has been of paramount interest to many, including activists, ethicists, philosophers, and therapists. A pressing area of focus in current expositions of yoga is the application of ecological wisdom, based in part, upon the philosophical literary works found in the tradition. This contention however, is not suggesting that all (or even the majority of) contemporary practitioners of yoga in the United States are engaging its practices through an ecological framework. Throughout this Chapter, I argue there is an emergent *kula* within modern yoga practitioners that are turning to its rich textual heritage for guidance in responding to the social and environmental plights of the twenty-first century. I present examples of how romantic interpretations of Asian traditions in general, and yoga philosophies in particular, have influenced Western environmental thinkers since the early nineteenth century. In turn, this evidence demonstrates how the contemporary environmental movement has influenced the modern applications of yoga practices through the art of lived ethical activism.

One reason the academic study of yoga has been a problematic field is that there are countless interpretations of the texts and praxis, which are based upon profoundly different religious and philosophical traditions. Chapter 2, highlighted yoga's cultural and historical roots, which provided a foundation to perceive the evolution of Modern Yoga in the United States. An underlying theme presented throughout the amalgamation of yoga traditions is that the alleviation of suffering is possible "through

the adoption of a specific way of life, defined by ethics, movement, and meditation” (Chapple 2008: 1). Due to the many pluralistic and dynamic definitions of the term “yoga,” the praxis of yoga has been provided the means to be adopted and re-invented over the years.

### **The Influence of Transcendentalism on Yoga and Ecology**

Based upon current research, there is no direct mention of ecological stewardship originally found in Patañjali’s *YS*, however numerous scholars and contemporary yoga teachers in the United States are applying eco-toned renditions of many classical Indian texts—such as Patañjali’s *YS*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Upaniṣads*, and the *Vedas*. The connection between environmental interpretations of Asian texts and philosophies, however, is not a new phenomenon. The New England Transcendentalists—“a Romantic effort to grasp through unmediated intuition the divinity in nature and in all human beings”—were among the first to contemplate the intersection of these two arenas (Tweed and Prothero 1999: 92). Environmental philosopher, J. Baird Callicott argued, “the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau—who were among the first American thinkers to look on nature as something more than an obstacle to progress and a pool of natural resources—was inspired by Hindu thought” (1994: 11). Chapple similarly averred, the “American experience of nature appreciation has deep roots in New England’s Transcendentalist movement. In turn, this profound part of the American identity owes a debt to Yoga” (2011: 295). The influence of Hindu thought and yoga by these two men in particular, became a foundational catalyst for the yoking of Eastern philosophy and ecological appreciation in America. While the romantic appreciation of nature does not necessarily equate eco-friendly motivation and action, the seed of nature worship

has now been planted in association with Asian philosophy. Goldberg declared Emerson as the “first public thinker to openly embrace Eastern religious and philosophical precepts” and therefore, his friends and fellow writers—Thoreau and Walt Whitman, for example—were all partly responsible for the “millions of educated Americans [who] have been touched by India since the mid-nineteenth century” (2010: 26).

Emerson’s famous poem, which was clearly influenced by Hindu scripture, was “Brahma.” In it, he contemplated the deeper meaning within the *Bhagavadgītā*’s distinction between the knower and known. Similar to some Indian philosophies, Emerson believed that every individual possessed, “apart from the conscious intellect, an inner faculty for becoming receptive to a higher power or Over-Soul” (De Michelis 2004: 115). “Emerson meditates on the ways in which contact with and contemplation of nature will enable the ‘poet-seer’ to develop divine capacities to see the spiritual lessons inscribed in the world” (Gould 2005: 118). Since there were no yoga studios to speak of during Emerson’s time, Goldberg surmised, “his primary *sadhana* (spiritual practice) was solitary communion with nature” (2010: 35). These “spiritual lessons” and practices within the natural world, inspired and informed by various Hindu texts, helped lay the foundation for Emerson’s influential Transcendentalism, and in turn, has inspired contemporary ecological interpretations of yoga. Gordon argued that the primary message Emerson drew from Hindu studies, “was that ‘the purpose of life was spiritual transformation and direct experience of divine power, here and now on earth’” (in Goldberg 2010: 33). This message and focus on “here and now on earth” is of primary concern for Modern Ecological Yogins.

De Michelis underscored, “of all non-Christian religions... [American Transcendentalists] admired Hinduism most.” More importantly however, “it will be remembered that one of them, Thoreau, was the first recorded Westerner to claim in 1849, to be practicing yoga” (2004: 81). In a letter to a friend, Thoreau wrote, “I would fain practice the yoga faithfully. To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogin” (in Chapple 1993: 115; cf. De Michelis 2004: 2-3). Based on current research, it is unknown what Thoreau meant by “practicing yoga.” However, prior to this time, many individuals in the West perceived yoga only as an observable phenomenon, to be witnessed through the experiences of other practitioners from the East. “In Thoreau’s case yoga was taken up by a Westerner while remaining a Westerner.” Therefore, “Westerners were starting to perceive ‘yoga’ as something they could engage in, not just as something ‘out there’” (De Michelis 2004: 81). This turn of engagement—practicing “exotic” traditions while retaining one’s cultural and spiritual heritage—is of paramount significance for the expansion of the milieu of Modern Yoga practices throughout the United States. Until yoga could be appropriated and practiced in America without having to renounce the luxuries of the industrialized world, yoga would remain a tradition beyond the grasp of contemporary society. This turn of events provided the opportunity for the Western world to embrace the practices of yoga.

Thoreau, like Emerson, read many of the early translations of Asian scriptures, which were still heavily influenced by the Romantic interpretations of sacred texts from the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In his 1849, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau wrote of the power and reverence he felt toward Hindu and Buddhist literature, and his respect for the power contained in

those religious texts. “It would be worthy of the age to print together the collected Scriptures or Sacred Writings of the several nations, the Chinese, the Hindoos, the Persians, the Hebrews, and others, as the Scripture of mankind” (Thoreau 1849: 116). This openness to experience teachings of truth from various religious denominations is an important characteristic yoga can offer to the multi-national cultures of the Western world.

### **The “Greening” of Yoga Praxis**

During the latter half of the twentieth century, there has been a burgeoning scholarly discipline concentrating on the relationships between religion and the natural world. This was sparked, at least in part, by Lynn White, Jr.’s (1907-1987) attack on Christianity’s negative impact on the environment, in his 1967 article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” which highlighted the intensification of global ecological plights. In it, White argued, that Abrahamic monotheistic traditions, particularly Christianity, were responsible for present ecological plights. White also, however, contended that since the environmental crises were largely due to religious practices, the solution, therefore, must also be of a religious nature. White’s accusation, triggered various reactions, which helped to spur ecological activism and nature religion in subsequent years.

With raised awareness surrounding the health of our planet, academics turned to various religious and philosophical systems for guidance of how to alleviate personal and universal suffering. Creative interpretations of various religious myths, narratives, and texts provide tools of insight when combining religious worldviews and social morality. Within the academy, this area of scholarly interest is known as, “religion and ecology,” or “religion and nature.” Religion and ecology scholars John Grim and Mary

Evelyn Tucker stated, “the field of religion and ecology has emerged as an effort to understand the roles of the human both in the despoliation of Earth and in nurturing life” (2011: 81). By uniting “theory and practice” and “ideas and action,” scholars of this field are applying the knowledge from the ivory tower of academia and applying practical steps toward “lasting change” for the betterment of both social and ecological worlds (2011: 82).

Grim and Tucker claimed, “while religions have their problematic dimensions, including intolerance, dogmatism, and fundamentalism, they have also served as wellsprings of wisdom, as sources of moral inspiration, and as containers of transforming ritual practices” (2011: 91). Further, they declared, “a central challenge of our present moment is to bring the depths of the world’s religious traditions into meaningful dialogue with modernity” (2011: 91). From these standpoints, in an attempt to explore the dialogue between religious traditions and the relationships with the natural world, scholars have turned to the “greening” of religions, in attempts pull ecological keystones from the world’s religion to inspire more contemporary environmentally sound practices.

An underlying theme in “green” religious/ spiritual circles is an “‘earth-centered’ values and loyalty,” hinting “at the possibility that what is emerging here is a kind of earth nationalism or civic earth religion” (Taylor 2010: 187). Taylor named such earth-centered traditions, *dark green religions*, which he defined as a “religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care” (2010: ix). Dark green religion, along with other “earth-centered” belief systems, such as Daniel Deudney’s *terrapolitan earth religion*, are rooted in an ecocentric or biocentric mindset,

where all aspects of the ecosystem or biotic community are viewed to be intrinsically worthy of respect.

The terms “civic” or “civil,” are important tools for activism and social unity for they “denote a kind of nationalism in which a nation is invested with transcendent meaning and sacred purpose, and group identity and loyalty are forged through such shared perceptions” (2010: 196). Further, Taylor maintained, “an important aspect of civic religion, especially in religiously diverse nations, consists of references to the divine that are generic—not specific to just one tradition” (2010: 196). Shepard underscored Claude Lévi-Strauss’ suggestion for an “ecological civicism,” that could restore “the organic bonds of community” (Shepard 1998: 155). While Taylor highlighted there may be critics of any variation of civic religion, Deudney optimistically believes that earth-centered civic religions are less problematic than other religious systems, “given its basis in environmental science and its recognition of ecological interdependence,” eroding “nationalism by replacing it with loyalty to the planet” (in Taylor 2010: 197). As Taylor argued that a baseline focus of dark green religion, and I argue as a foundation for MEY, there involves “a stress on ecological interdependence, an affective connection to the earth as home and to nonhuman organisms as kin” (2010: 197). Based upon these ecologically and civically mindful characteristics, MEY attempts to educate practitioners about the interconnectivity of all life through eco-toned readings of classical text, in order to inspire an earth-centered societal engagement through a bio/ ecocentric worldview.

*Dark green religion, terrapolitan earth religion, civic earth religion, and MEY, are all “grounded in a spirituality of belonging and connection to an earth and universe*

considered sacred” (Taylor 2010: 188). Addressing yoga’s ability to tangibly connect individuals with their body through breath and movement, Chapple suggested that, “to the extent that the development of environmental consciousness and conscience requires awareness of one’s body in relation to the physical world, Yoga provides a potent, non-ideological tool” (1998: 30). Therefore yoga in general, and MEY in particular, supplies a framework of application for such environmental activism that is rooted in spirituality, yet generally devoid of dogmatic religiosity.

Philosopher Henryk Skolimowski, in the preface of *EcoYoga: Practice & Meditations for Walking in the Beauty of the Earth* (1994), stated, a “yoga for our time must be uniquely relevant to our current situation... the ideas and practices of EcoYoga, or the Yoga of Being, have gradually evolved out of years of reflection about the spiritual nature of the human” (1994: 9). Skolimowski here, is non-directly, attributing “EcoYoga” to all the nature writers who have come before, inspiring generations of individuals to reflect on the powerful presence of the natural world. MEY—as the heuristic umbrella involving both “EcoYoga,” and/ or “Green Yoga”—is an avenue for connecting one’s physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual yoga practice on the yoga mat with social and ecological activism off the mat. Applying environmental themes to traditional yoga theoretical systems, such as Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system, is one such example of how MEY is “greening” preexisting philosophical discourse.

### **Modern Ecological Yoga and Environmental Ethics**

By connecting with our bodies physically, we are able to connect tangibly with the world around us. This sensory driven connection becomes “a path of knowledge” where we can expand our caring capacity to the world around us, creating a new lived

environmental ethic of the twenty-first century (Chidester 2005: 80). With particular attention to environmental ethics, David Abram asserted,

The “new environmental ethic” toward which so many environmentalists aspire... will not come through the logical elucidation of new philosophical principles and legislative structures, but through a renewed attentiveness to this perceptual dimension that underlies all our logics, through a rejuvenation of our carnal, sensorial empathy with the living land that sustains us (1996: 69).

The environmental moral foundation involving a “renewed attentiveness” of MEY can be perceived as, but not limited to, an adaptation to Leopold’s influential “land ethic” which extended the ethical boundaries of community to include all biotic attributes of an ecosystem. According to Leopold, “all ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts” (1949: 239). As Leopold conveyed, “a land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land” (1949: 258). He summarized his land ethic in these now famous words, “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (1949: 262). Leopold clearly defined individual action and responsibility in the “land ethic,” which has become a personal and academic watershed for the field of environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics, according to Taylor, are “efforts to articulate, systematize, and defend systems of value guiding human treatment of and behavior in the natural world” (2005: 597). For Callicott, “*an environmental ethic would impose limitations on human freedom of action in relationship to non-human natural entities and to nature as a whole*” (1994: 1, original italics). David Kinsley summed up not only environmental ethics, but the land ethic as “an attitude of moral responsibility and ethical obligation to a

community of life that goes beyond the human community and encompasses the entire environment” (1995: 155). This principle of personal action through moral responsibility is at the root of MEY’s attempt of extending care from the individual out into the world, making MEY an environmentally and socially active practice, appropriate for the growing needs of diverse contemporary dilemmas. Yoga practices provide opportunities for self-inquiry, accessing knowledge about one’s internal environment. When these practices are applied to external communities, they become avenues for applying theory to daily life practice.

### **Modern Ecological Yoga and Lived Religion**

Systems of belief—religious, philosophical, or secular—help formulate connections to one’s surroundings, as well as inform individuals how to morally interact with the natural world. For this analysis, the practices of lived religion and practice will be perceived as “the constant movement, contestation, and hybridity involved in what has been called popular religion—religion as it is lived in the streets, workplaces, and schools” (Vasquez 2011: 1). For this study, MEY is not to be considered a religion, though the practices can be perceived in a similar light to those engaged in religious systems. Religion scholar Robert Orsi claimed, “religions provide men and women with existential vocabularies with which they may construe fundamental matters, such as the meaning and the boundaries of the self... It is through these various religious idioms that the necessary material realities of existence—pain, death, hunger, sexuality—are experienced, transformed, and endured, for better or worse” (2005: 168-9).

Through interviews and participant observation involving devout practitioners, scholars are provided insight into how religious metaphors, idioms, and teachings are applied directly to daily lives of religious individuals. Within religion and ecology, one of

the primary methodological foundations “is a synthesis of scholarly attention to religious worldviews and to lived religion... In other words, this field studies both the broad intellectual traditions of religions (the attitudes and views of religious leaders, sacred texts, and traditions) and the everyday reality of religion on the ground (the practices and actions of religious people in their day-to-day lives)” (Bauman, Bohmann, O’Brien 2011: 6). Orsi who referenced the work of the anthropologist Michael Jackson, stated “to investigate beliefs or ‘belief systems’ apart from actual human activity is absurd” (in Orsi 1997: 7-8). “For what is religion, but what we resonate with most deeply, and try to manifest consciously?” (Pike 2004: 153). I argue, therefore, that no study of MEY would be conclusive without the study of human activity within the community of practitioners.

Modern yoga and its array of practices in the twenty-first century have evolved into an amalgamation of concepts and teachings. A key facet in studying MEY will be to highlight the lived and embodied practices of yoga. As K. Pattabhi Jois, founder of the *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* Research Institute in Mysore, India, has been infamously quoted for: Yoga is “99 percent practice, 1 percent theory.” An underlying intention of Jois’ for this statement is that the tradition of yoga continues to grow and develop through the passions and engaged actions of its participants—the indisputable importance lies in *practice*. The engagement of MEY in contemporary society has become a lifestyle, “it’s the reality of life lived in harmony within the entire web of reality” (Stone 2009: 185), and therefore becomes a living practice, or lived religion. Scholars of lived religion define the milieu as a study of “daily life” or “lived experiences.” David Hall argued, “though it is surely the case that no single key unlocks the door to lived religion, one term—‘practice’—does have particular importance” (1997: xi).

In this light, with focus on practice, yoga has the ability to become available to all walks of life—from any religious denomination, political stance, age, gender, sexual orientation, or physical condition. Even though religious fundamentalists from many traditions would object, most religious traditions can accommodate the non-denominational attributes of yoga practitioners.<sup>1</sup> As contemporary yoga teacher and co-founder of the Jivamukti Yoga School, Sharon Gannon, claimed, “Yoga is available to everyone, but yoga is not for everyone.”<sup>2</sup> Gannon is referring to the notion that the teachings of yoga are available to anyone willing to explore them with an open mind, but not all individuals are interested in experiencing the practices based solely upon preconceived notions of the longstanding religious history of Hinduism that yoga is affiliated with.

Orsi argued, within “lived religion” there is an embrace of the “spontaneity of practice” (2005: 164). This fluidity of practice is especially expressed during *Haṭha Yoga* through *āsana* and various movements that are linked with breath and intention. By listening to the body’s needs—kinks, tensions, and tightness—the practitioner allows the physical practices of yoga *āsana* to become a means of connecting to the body through the necessary movements required in the moment. Orsi contended that lived religion is “playfulness in action, as it does its transformative work on the self and the world” (1997: 10)—such as the expressions of lived practice in MEY. These ethical and physical practices then become metaphors for daily life—how one can live every day with ease and grace in relation to one’s internal and external environments. These

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to “Praise Moves: The Christian Alternative to Yoga” <http://praisemoves.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication held on April 22, 2005.

embodied experiences support Orsi's statement that "religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday" (1997: 7)—the realities that involve not only physical engagement, but morality as well. Stone poetically reiterated this notion, "what we need is a spirituality focused on waking up in this lifetime and expressing the process through benevolent action" (2009: 184). The ethics of yoga philosophy provide one avenue for expressing such "benevolent action."

Bauman, Bohmann, and O'Brien maintained that "human cultures matter greatly to how the very concept of 'nature' gets constructed, and the natural world itself matters in how the concept of 'religion' is constructed" (2011: 2). These constructed ideas of "religion," "nature," and "yoga" as defined in the pages of this thesis, adapt and change with their environment, therefore their fields develop "as the world itself changes" (2011: 4). Orsi, addressing lived religion, similarly argued that individuals "working on the world do so always in the context of the world's working on them" (2005: 170). In order to learn about the life of an ecosystem, or the daily life of a devout practitioner, we must construct and construe that knowledge within the certain setting they are situated and emplaced in. Therefore, lived religion and the holistic and dynamic qualities of yoga practices, provide the opportunity to explore the daily lives of dedicated *yogins*. Examples of MEY's lived practices can be found resonating with the Jivamukti Yoga School, a modern branch of yoga that strictly adheres to an ethical vegetarian lifestyle. Social activism projects can also be found through Off the Mat, Into the World, an organization rooted in bridging yoga and social activism within local and global communities, further examined in Chapter 4.

Georg Feuerstein, in *Yoga Morality: Ancient Teachings at a Time of Global Crisis* (2007), focused on introducing “the yogic moral teachings in their cultural context,” while displaying, “the relevance of Yoga’s moral teachings for contemporary humanity, particularly in light of today’s global crisis” (2007: xiii). By connecting the yoga milieu to contemporary environmental challenges, Feuerstein argued that yoga is a belief system that can be adaptable to the lived experiences of the twenty-first century American culture.

### **Modern Ecological Yoga’s Wild Practices for the Preservation of the World**

Psychology and spirituality as well as social and ecological action are all intertwined. Our yogic goals may be inner quietude and stillness, but they need to be put to work on contemporary forms of suffering both ecologically and socially. The organism that is yoga is being restimulated by its move westward, and as it grows roots in this new soil, we must help create the conditions for its emergency by offering to it the reality of our personal, cultural, sexual, ecological, and economic lives. Only then will yoga have something real to offer us (Stone 2009: 185).

In the seminal 1862 essay, “Walking,” Thoreau famously wrote “in Wildness is the preservation of the World.”<sup>3</sup> Thoreau’s unequivocal importance in the transmission of Eastern philosophy and its yoking to environmental thought, has inspired much environmentalism to date. The wild practices Thoreau outlined are baseline suggestions that challenge the status quo. Holmes Rolston declared, “wildness does not merely lie behind, it remains the generating matrix” (in Shepard 1998: 143). Further, Shepard maintained that we as a society “may be deformed by our circumstances... but as a species we have in us the call of the wild” (1998: 143). As Thoreau, Rolston, Shepard, and Stone underscored above, the contemporary practices of MEY are extensions of wild opportunities that engaged citizens can implement for the

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<sup>3</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. “Walking,” *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1862): 657-74.

preservation of the world, returning to that biological wildness that lies within our species. These practices are *radical* and *wild*, in the sense they go to the “*rad*” or “*root*” of suffering in this world—personally, ecologically, and socially—with the intention of alleviating needless suffering inflicted on communities of plants, animals, and earth. Or as Shepard argued, the root of our species’ wildness lies inside our biology, our genome, and the challenge of contemporary society is to access that ancestral root in the modern world. Chapple declared an underlying purpose of yoga philosophy, “places great value on feeling the connection between one’s self and the larger world of nature” (2007: 97). As Shepard argued, “wildness and the nature of the self are inextricably joined” (1998: 143).

In order to extend yoga’s ethical system into the milieu of New Age lived practices and environmental ethics, it is important to underscore the role of moral practice as a foundational component in the historical tradition of yoga. As Chapple explained, “Yoga emphasizes ethical behavior” (2008: 7). Patañjali, in the *YS*, outlined various ethics and principles that one should adhere to when engaging in this particular form of yoga’s philosophical practice. The framework of Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* (“eight-limbs”) system is one avenue of uniting yoga and environmental ethics. By adopting the MEY worldview, one can interpret Earth stewardship and social activism through stages of progression on the path of yoga, in order to experience unification (by yoking and joining) with the internal/ personal and external/ global communities.

Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system is as follows:

1. *yama*: restraint: a) *ahimsā*: non-violence, b) *satya*: truthfulness, c) *asteya*: non-stealing; d) *brahmacharya*: sexual restraint; e) *aparigraha*: greedlessness
2. *niyama*: observances: a) *śauca*: purity, cleanliness; b) *santoṣa*: contentment; c) *tapah*: austerity; d) *svādhyāya*: self-study; e) *īśvara praṇidhāna*: devotion to God

3. *āsana*: posture
4. *prāṇāyāma*: breath control
5. *pratyāhāra*: sense withdrawal
6. *dhāraṇā*: concentration
7. *dhyāna*: meditation
8. *samādhi*: enlightenment, bliss

While acknowledging the unequivocal importance of Patañjali's *YS* in their entirety, Chapple and Laura Cornell, among others, focus particular attention to the *sūtras* describing Patañjali's eight-limbed path of *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga* in order to apply ecologically themed practices. Singleton highlighted that the *YS* is "often taken as the quintessential expression of 'Classical Yoga.'" Further, the *YS* "has come to symbolize, among other things, the ancient authenticity of modern aspirations and the fidelity of contemporary practices to the 'yoga tradition'" (2008: 77). Chapple and Cornell suggested practical ecological applications of these philosophical and ethical steps, which will be the foundational groundwork from which I extend the branch of MEY's environmental ethics.

Patañjali's *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga* system can be metaphorically perceived as an ethical ladder that begins with gross attributes practitioners adhere to in relation to oneself and one's physical surroundings. The MEY practitioner will be provided the opportunity of connecting the body with the land, the air we breathe with the wind, the water we drink with blood that runs through our veins, and the fire within our digestive system and passions for action in this world. The first step of Patañjali's *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga* system begins with five ethical restraints (*yama*)—non-violence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*),

non-stealing (*asteya*), sexual restraint (*brahmacarya*), and non-possessiveness (*aparigraha*).

According to Stone, through an ecological worldview, one can perceive the act of non-harming as a cornerstone of a sound environmental yoga ethic. “Nonviolence can be taught and it can be learned, thereby taking the next great step in human evolution to the place where humans can take in multiple perspectives and become more flexible, tolerant, patient, and motivated to act for the welfare of ecology as a whole” (Stone 2009: 63). The term *ahimsā* is comprised of two separate words: a referring to a negative prefix, “non” or “without,” and *himsā* meaning “violence” or “injury” (Goldman 2004: 435, 495). In *The Textbook of Yoga Psychology* (1987), Rammuriti S. Mishra stated, *himsā* can be classified into three subsections: physical harm, vocal harm “including psychological warfare,” and mental harm (1987: 205). In regard to Patañjali’s *YS*, *ahimsā* is intended to be applied through the realm of social ethics, focusing on human relationships with oneself, other humans, and other-than-human animals. The conscious application of *ahimsā* within society has the means to provide an “ongoing point of conscience when making decisions that have environmental impacts” (Chapple 2007: 98)—which may include accounting for consumption, diet, waste, and overall ecological footprint. This adaptation of *ahimsā* does not, however, deny many forms of *himsā* that are present throughout our biologically diverse planet—predator versus prey scenarios for example. It is suggesting, however, that in order to experience less suffering in this world—an underlying goal within yoga and other Indian traditions—a *yogin* should minimize the suffering they inflict on others. As Chapple averred, “Yoga is predicated on the supposition that humankind is plagued with discomfort and

suffering (*duḥkha*) and that this suffering can be alleviated,” through the adoption of yoga practices (2008: 4).

Foundational to MEY, Chapple and Cornell have previously proposed examples suggesting how these *yama* can be applied to an ecological framework. For example, *satya* holds oneself accountable in honesty within thought, word, and action. It therefore becomes a matter of great importance to speak your truth, and share knowledge about global injustices. *Asteya* can refer to consuming only the necessary resources for survival without stealing excess resources from others in need. *Asteya* can also be linked to consumption within society and can supply practices to alleviate the America’s ferocious greed. Cornell poetically maintained that by applying an eco-toned perception to the *yama*: “One recognizes that consuming more than is needed is a form of stealing from the earth. To avoid stealing trees from the forests, a person may choose to use less paper; to avoid stealing habitat and life-giving liquid from the rivers, one chooses to use less water” (2007: 158-9).

*Brahmacarya*, as an ecological principle, implies *conscious* use of the creative sexual power that can be used as a form of population control. Living in an excessively passion driven society, Chapple argued, the restricted use of sexual desire could also lead to less commercialization and consumerism, which depletes the earth of vital natural resources. This *yama* is not suggesting that all individuals halt reproductivity in general, but it could be perceived to mean limiting the number of unwanted children that are brought into this world due to individuals unconsciously focusing their energy on unprotected sexual activity.

The final topic of Patañjali's *yama* system is *aparigraha*. Non-possessiveness therefore, can remind practitioners to live simply, while minimizing greed and hoarding, which are pervasive in contemporary American society. Through simplicity, the potential for greater distribution of resources becomes a possibility. Chapple concluded that "these five practices entail holding back, disciplining oneself, saying no to such behaviors as violence, lying, stealing, lust and possessiveness" (2007: 99).

Other environmentally themed practices can be perceived as the seven other steps or "functional units" of Patañjali's *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga* system. *Niyama* (observances), the next phase of this system, are also five in number—cleanliness (*śauca*), contentment (*santoṣa*), austerity (*tapaḥ*), self-study (*svādhyāya*), and devotion to God (*īśvara praṇidhāna*). To follow are the physical postures (*āsanas*) and breathing exercises (*prāṇāyāma*), which in turn help the physical form relate to the surrounding environment by either mimicking and embodying animals in their associated *āsanas*—cow-faced pose, downward-facing dog pose, eagle pose, firefly pose, locust pose, scorpion pose, etc.—or connecting with the vital life force that tangibly links human beings with other-than-human-animals through the breath. After ascending the first four steps of this philosophical ladder, the individual begins to move inward toward subtle practices to help remove any obstacles (*kleśas*) from the path of realizing the interconnection between oneself and the rest of world. The fifth stage, drawing the senses inward (*pratyāhāra*) allows the practitioner to transition to the "inner" practices of yoga—concentration (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and a deep meditative state (*samādhi*)—or collectively known as *saṁyama*.

Cornell also offered a tangible model for the application of “Green Yoga” by describing eight forms of yoga that can be applied as extensions of the great tree of this ancient system. While Cornell expounded upon six traditional trajectories of yoga, she offered two new systems of thought:

1. *Jñāna Yoga*: “Yoga of Knowledge”
2. *Bhakti Yoga*: “Yoga of Devotion”
3. *Haṭha Yoga*: “Yoga of Sacred Embodiment”
4. *Rāja Yoga*: “Yoga of Conscious Evolution”
5. *Karma Yoga*: “Yoga of Action”
6. *Tantra Yoga*: “Yoga of Unity”
7. *Āraṇyaka Yoga*: “Yoga of Going into the Forest”
8. *Saṅgha Yoga*: “Yoga of Sacred Community”

Through these eight systems of yoga, Cornell emphasized that the Green Yoga model “provides a comprehensive framework for envisioning an ecologically-attuned Yoga and shows how Green Yoga grows out of the depth of Yoga’s classical paths while also opening new avenues for spiritual practice aimed at healing our relationship with the world” (2007: 151). Cornell contended that Green Yoga is “one cohesive framework” in which the philosophy of yoga can be engaged ecologically in today’s society. This new framework is a practical step for “living” yoga, in order to “consciously shift our cultural patterns” of egoism, greed, and over-consumption, which plague our world (Cornell 2007: 167). She extolled that through ecological insight, the

Knowledge of interconnection (*Jñāna Yoga*) and a reverential mindset (*Bhakti Yoga*) forms the foundational entry point from which to move into the other Yogas. As the process of self-transformation becomes well established through going into the forest (*Āraṇyaka Yoga*), sacred embodiment (*Haṭha Yoga*), and transformation of mind-states (*Rāja Yoga*), action to heal the world (*Karma Yoga*) becomes a natural and joyful out-flowing... Finally, realization of unity consciousness (*Tantra Yoga*) grows out of the sum of all the other practices (2007: 167).

Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga* system can be applied as a form of environmental ethics by reinforcing an individual’s connection (microcosm) with the surrounding

ecosystems (macrocosm). “Construed through an ecological prism, the inner work from controlling the breath to *Samādhi* can be seen as enhancing one’s sensitivity to nature, an increase in empathy, and a willingness to stand to protect the beauty of the earth” (Chapple 2007: 101). Cornell expounded upon this contention by idealistically stating, “the evolution of individuals practicing Yoga supports the evolution of the human species” (2007: 160). By cultivating a sustaining nature of our own species, we can extend our caring capacity to the entirety of other-than-human species that share this world.

Modern environmental interpretations of *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga* found within the YS believe that each step along the path of yoga not only helps the individual become more socially and ecologically conscious, but also inspires practitioners to become more in-tune with the cycles of the earth. In turn, these yogins may willingly choose a path that will have less destructive consequences on a local and global scale. Through the path of Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga* system one has the potential to develop clarity of mind and openness in the heart, which can lead to a more discriminating awareness. This particular awareness is what nature writers, scholars, and Modern Ecological Yogins are addressing when they argue that self-healing has the potential to inspire ethical planetary healing. This trend is not a firmly established system within all contemporary yoga practices in the United States. However, this thesis draws light to the importance of this growing field by studying the practices of yoga, which are being embodied both on and off the mat.

## CHAPTER 4 THEORY IN ACTION, TWO PERSPECTIVES: JIVAMUKTI YOGA AND OFF THE MAT, INTO THE WORLD

In order to properly contemplate the applicability of Modern Ecological Yoga, it will be necessary to examine where these eco-toned theories and principles are being implemented. As of yet, no conclusive studies have explored yoga and environmental activism in the United States. While there is a growing source of literature connecting yoga philosophy and the environment, no one has yet studied *how* these ecological underpinnings manifest in the yoga community. Interviews with five prominent contemporary yoga teachers were used to clarify and expand on ecologically and socially themed yoga practices, which when used, offer tools for engaged activism. Starting with the existing platform of an extensive social network, the yoga communities of the Jivamukti Yoga School and Off the Mat, Into the World were chosen to further explore such activism.

The interviews for this thesis were done to analyze the intentionality behind five specific yoga teachers in the United States and their methodologies, who incorporate ecological and social activism. This project extends previous research that began in 2005, which focused on the parallels between yoga philosophy and environmental stewardship, and culminated in an undergraduate course “Yogic Environmental Philosophy” executed at the University of Vermont in 2006. I relied on interviews and extensive research on two activism-focused modern yoga schools and organizations. I discovered a correlation between yoga teachers in the United States whom were taught in a more activist framed manner, which has led to an ever-growing presence of “eco” or “green” yoga practices amongst individuals within these two subsets of modern yoga.

The two case studies examined include the Jivamukti Yoga School with co-founders Sharon Gannon and David Life, and Off the Mat, Into the World with founders Seane Corn, Suzanne Sterling, and Hala Khouri. These case studies were chosen based upon three criteria: 1) Presence of ecological and/ or social activism within core teachings; 2) Considered to be currently “popular” and “mainstream” among yoga community—offering numerous teacher trainings, immersions, and workshops annually; and 3) I have previously studied with the aforementioned schools and have direct contact with the founders of these particular branches of modern yoga. Throughout this Chapter, all quotations are directly sourced from personal interviews I had with each of the founders, unless otherwise cited.<sup>1</sup> These five individuals and two schools contribute the tribe of contemporary yoga in distinctly unique ways, educating millions of yoga practitioners about the environmental and social degradation prevalent in our world today.

### **The Role of the *Jīvan-mukta* in Modern Ecological Yoga**

When addressing the complicated nature of a historically renunciate tradition, such as yoga, within the realm of environmental or social activism, a conundrum is immediately presented. Why would individuals striving for liberation (*mokṣa*, or *mukti*) or aloneness (*kaivalyam*) from this physical world of suffering desire to preserve it? Interpretations of classical yoga philosophy define such an individual as a *jīvan-mukta*. *Jīvan-mukta* is derived from two Sanskrit terms: *jīvan*, “individual soul,” and *mukti* “liberation,” or “freedom from sorrows” (Āraṇya 1983: 399). Definitions of *jīvan-mukta*

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Suzanne Sterling was held on July 18, 2012; interview with Sharon Gannon and David Life was held on August 8, 2012; interview with Seane Corn was held on August 13, 2012; and interview with Hala Khouri was held on October 25, 2012.

include but are not limited to: “liberated while alive,” “free while living,” “free in lifetime,” “liberated though alive,” “liberated while living” (1983: 119, 202, 399, 475). The *jīvan-mukta* is an ideal state of the yogin. Whicher argued, that such an individual “who embodies that enlightened perspective,” displays “the ultimate ‘human’ potentiality for the transformation of consciousness and identity of all aspirants of Patañjali’s Yoga” (1998: 54).

Chapple suggested the “earliest extant account of the notion of *jīvan-mukta* in the classical Yoga tradition,” occurred in the seventh-century commentary of the YS (4.30) by Vyāsa, which stated “when afflicted action ceases, that wise person is liberated, even while living”<sup>2</sup> (Chapple 2008: 92). According to Swāmi Hariharānanda Āraṇya’s translation of the *Vyāsa-bhāṣya* on YS 4.30, “a Jīvanmukta is one who has attained the highest stage of devotional practice.” One who has “detached himself from his knowing faculty,” and “is not touched by the miseries which exist only in the mind” (1983: 399). Chapple underscored, that Patañjali described the state of *Īśvara* or God,<sup>3</sup> as being “untouched by afflicted action, fruitions, or their residue” (2008: 92). Further, “the state of liberation is achieved when the generation and identification of the false self mired in afflicted activities ceases and one enters into association with the highest... purity” (2008: 92). The goal of the *jīvan-mukta*, therefore, is to undo afflictions of action, or work toward perfected, pure action, “free from sorrow,” in the present life, resembling the state of *Īśvara* while in physical form. Whicher explained, “the modifications of the mind [*vṛttis*] may continue in day-to-day life but they no longer enslave the yogin, no

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<sup>2</sup> *kleśa-karma-nivṛttau jīvanneva vidvan vimukto bhavati* (YS Vyāsa-bhāṣya 4.30)

<sup>3</sup> *kleśa-karma-vipākāśayair aparāmr̥ṣṭaḥ puruṣa-viśeṣa īśvaraḥ* (YS 1:24)

longer divert the yogin's attention away from authentic identity.” Further, the *jīvan-mukta* “can use the body and mind out of benevolence and compassion for the spiritual benefit of others” (1998: 167). Therefore, the *jīvan-mukta* provides an avenue for an enlightened being to bestow wisdom upon the world, through an ecological standpoint—offering wildly radical practices for the preservation of the planet.

The physical world holds many challenges for practicing yogins. The YS highlighted five afflictions (*kleśas*)—ignorance (*avidyā*), egoism (*asmitā*), attachment (*rāga*), revulsion (*dveṣa*), and fear of death (*abhiniveśa*)—which are “the root causes of bondage that must be overcome in order for living liberation to take place” (Chapple 2008: 89). Patañjali's eight-fold path of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* “outlines a more detailed program for the attainment of liberation through overcoming the influences of afflicted past action (*kliṣṭa-karma*)” (Chapple 2008: 90). Similarly, Gannon and Life surmised that these eight limbs “represents a purifying yoga practice,” which attempts to release oneself from the attachment of the fluctuations of the mind in order to transcend thought, to “a higher state of consciousness” (2002: 24, 26).

According to Chapple, Vyāsa declared, “the person freed of afflicted action (*kliṣṭa-karma*) is liberated while living” (2008: 94). Which requires the practitioner to “overthrow... impure, afflicted activities, as advocated by the practices presented by Patañjali.” Furthermore, yoga “places additional emphasis on several practices designed to reverse the influence of afflicted tendencies, replacing them with purified modes of behavior,” such as the practices detailed in the eight-fold method of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* (Chapple 2008: 94). Chapple declared, “this process starts with the arising of knowledge (*jñāna*) or discriminative discernment (*viveka khyāti*), accompanied by the

performance of purified action” (2008: 94). Chapple suggested that based upon the YS, “yoga appears to be... rigorous in its definition of the liberated state, demanding its adherents to follow any, one of a number of paths of purification and asserting that only unafflicted action can remain for the truly liberated” (2008: 94). An essential component in the liberated state of the *jīvan-mukta*, “involves the cultivation of virtue and the elimination of deleterious activity.” Thus, the yoga practices, as outlined by Patañjali, provide programs and opportunities “for ongoing purification” (2008: 95).

In the Yoga tradition, *samādhi* comprises the conversion moment. In Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra*, this is defined as a state where “one’s thoughts diminish and one becomes like a clear jewel, assuming the color of any near object, with unity among grasper, grasping, and grasped.”<sup>4</sup> In other words... such a person becomes liberated from the influences of past karma and can dwell moment by moment, adapting to circumstances and situation. From this experience, one feels a connectedness between oneself and other beings, which can bring a heightened sense of responsibility and accountability. As a result, a desire to cultivate and abide by a higher moral standard... may ensue (Chapple 2008: 33).

Throughout the YS, Patañjali described multiple examples of how to purify the mind, in order to “cultivate and abide by a higher moral standard,” and thus experience yoga—the state in which the fluctuations of the mind ceases.<sup>5</sup> In YS 1.33, Patañjali declared, “clarification of the mind [results] from the cultivation of friendliness toward the happy, compassion for those who suffer, sympathetic joy for the good, and equanimity toward those who lack goodness”<sup>6</sup> (Chapple 2008: 155). Chapple suggested that, “this shows a process of active engagement whereby ‘clarification of mind’ becomes an epithet for the applied and active insight undertaken on the part of the accomplished

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<sup>4</sup> *kṣīṇa-vṛtter abhijātasya-iva mañer grahīṭṛ-grahaṇa-grāhyeṣu tat-stha-tad-añjanatā samāpattiḥ* (YS 1.41)

<sup>5</sup> *yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ* (YS 1.1)

<sup>6</sup> *maitrī-karuṇā-muditā-upekṣāṇāṃ sukha-duḥka-puṇya-apuṇya-viṣayāṇāṃ bhāvanātaś citta prasādanam* (YS 1.33)

yogin in daily affairs” (2008: 73). The daily practices of yogins provide one vantage point in order to perceive how these tenets are being applied in the twenty-first century. Chapple asserted, “this insight as described in Yoga can lead one to restructure and purify one’s actions through the application of various yogic ethical disciplines designed to bring about the progressive elimination of residual karmic influences” (2008: 100). Thus the radical restructuring of one’s life as “the *jīvan-mukta*,” “provides inspiration for one to seek knowledge” (2008: 100). Within the framework of MEY, this wisdom is not limited to yoga philosophy, but also encompasses knowledge about the ecological and social consequences of individual and collective *karma*, or action. This proclamation of seeking knowledge—spiritual, ecological, and social—is precisely the activist attitude Sharon Gannon and David Life aim to inspire through their modern interpretations of classical yoga in the Jivamukti Yoga School.

### The Jivamukti Yoga School



Figure 4-1. Jivamukti Yoga Logo.

In 1984, Sharon Gannon and David Life co-founded the Jivamukti Yoga School (henceforth JYS) in New York City. Today, Gannon and Life offer national and international teacher trainings and workshops, as well as hundreds of classes and immersions led by certified Jivamukti teachers. When Gannon and Life first opened their studio door in 1984, they only offered two classes a week, but now at the NYC studio, there are over one hundred yoga classes, attended by approximately two thousand students weekly. Jivamukti Yoga has been practiced by various celebrities including—Christy Turlington, Diane Keaton, Madonna, Michael Franti, Mike D., Russell Simmons, Sting, Uma Thurman, and Willem Dafoe, among others. In addition to the headquarters in NYC, there are nine other Jivamukti Yoga Schools and affiliated centers across North America and Europe.<sup>7</sup>

Gannon and Life organize their curriculum around five primary tenets. These precepts are—scripture (*śāstra*)<sup>8</sup>, devotion (*bhakti*)<sup>9</sup>, non-violence (*ahimsā*), music or sound (*nāda-yoga*), and meditation (*dhyāna*). While each tenet is of great importance, the unequivocal significance of *ahimsā* is paramount to the Jivamukti method. The JYS encouraged the strict adherence of a vegan and/ or ethical vegetarian diet, while educating students and instructors on the ecological hardships that follow a primarily unconscious carnivorous diet dependent upon industrial agriculture. In this way, I argue that the JYS, in particular, has the tools necessary to help educate their students about

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<sup>7</sup> Charleston, South Carolina; Washington, DC; Toronto, Canada; London, United Kingdom; Munich, Germany; Berlin, Germany; Moscow, Russia; Sydney, Australia; and Stavanger, Norway.

<sup>8</sup> The primary Sanskrit *śāstra* the JYS addresses are: *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra*, *Haṛhayogapradīpikā*, *Bhagavadgītā*, and *Upaniṣads*.

<sup>9</sup> Gannon and Life “recognize that God-realization is the goal of all yoga practices” (2002: 14).

environmental degradation in relation to the suffering of animals and the pollution of this planet that is a direct result from industrial agriculture and factory farming.

Gannon and Life acknowledge their unique perception and modern interpretations of traditional practices and texts. For example, Gannon explained that in all her studies of yoga philosophy and ancient texts, she had never come across a translation of *sthira sukham āsanam* (YS 2.46), precisely the same way as the JYS translated it. Chapple, in *Yoga and the Luminous: Patañjali's Spiritual Path to Freedom* (2008), translated the *sūtra* as, “*Āsana* [posture] is steadiness and ease” (2008: 178). Āraṇya translated the aphorism to mean “Motionless and agreeable form (of staying) is *Āsana* (Yogic posture)” (1983: 450). However, Gannon and Life translated this *sūtra* from an ecological standpoint—“The connection to the Earth should be steady and joyful” (Gannon 2008: 32). Through posture, individuals connect to the earth, which ideally should be rooted in grace and joy. The JYS advocated, “through the deeply therapeutic practice of asana, we begin to purify our karmas, thereby healing our past relationships with others and reestablishing a steady and joyful connection with the Earth, which means all of life” (2008: 33). Gannon proclaimed, “our happiness is actually dependent upon the happiness of others. Others include not just human beings, but all members of the society, the environment, the ecological system.”<sup>10</sup> Through the application of their contemporary ecological teachings, steeped in classical yoga training, Gannon and Life provide one vantage point from which yoga and activism merge.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Sharon Gannon and David Life. August 8, 2012. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from Gannon and Life are from this interview.

## Focus of the Month

One component of every Jivamukti Yoga class is a “dharma talk,” or discussion on inspirational teachings. Each class is weaved together around a specific topic, or “Focus of the Month,” (henceforth FOTM), that generally changes every month.<sup>11</sup> The FOTM is an opportunity for Jivamukti Yoga teachers to talk about ecological and social matters in the yoga classroom setting. While every month may not have a direct environmental or social theme, individual teachers may thread such topics in the class throughout the various foci.

Particular FOTM that have an obvious ecologically or socially active theme are as follows: *Ahiṃsā* (November 2000-01, 2003-05, 2007, September 2002); Speciesism (September 2001); The War Against Mother Nature (February 2004, December 2005); Political Activism/ Spiritual Activation (October 2004); Planting a Sound Garden (July 2006); Beyond Civilization (August 2007); Prayer for Universal Peace (September 2007); We are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For (October 2007); Compassion, Diet, Strength, and Happiness (November 2008); *Satya* and Veganism (February 2009); *Ahiṃsā* and Veganism (November 2009); *Lokaḥ Samastāḥ Sukhino Bhavantu* (April 2010); *Asteya* and Veganism (November 2010); Living Wild (August 2011); *Brahmacharya* and Veganism (November 2011); and *Aparigraha* and Veganism (November 2012).

An annual theme for the JYS is to discuss diet and *ahiṃsā* during the month of November. For the past five years, the FOTM for November has included one of the five *yamas* and veganism—linking traditional yoga philosophy with ecological and social

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<sup>11</sup> For a full list (2000-2013) of the various “Focus of the Month” topics, refer to the “Focus of the Month” chart in Appendix A.

practices. Therefore, during the month of Thanksgiving, which in the United States involves the slaughter of millions of turkeys, individuals who attend Jivamukti Yoga classes will be invited to re-examine their diet and consumptive habits.

### **Jivamukti Yoga and Animal Rights**

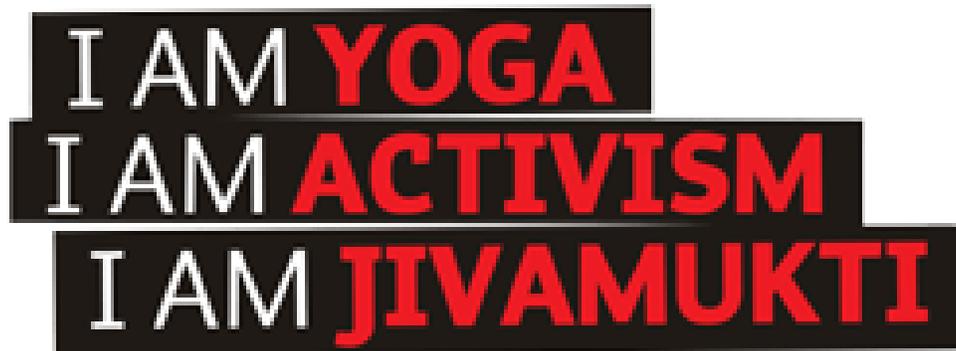


Figure 4-2. Jivamukti Yoga 2013 Tribe Gathering Logo

The JYS defined activism as a form of “political action,” where “politic” refers to “the greater body” or “community.” The ethical framework of the JYS could be considered an important step toward a biocentric worldview, or an extension of Leopold’s land ethic. However, the JYS’s interpretation of activism most accurately represents an animal liberationist standpoint. Scholar Mary Anne Warren declared that “the fundamental message of Leopold’s land ethic” is that “humanity is a part of that natural order, wholly dependent upon it and morally responsible for maintaining its integrity” (1992: 201). Callicott suggested,

The animal liberation movement *could* be construed as partitioning Leopold’s perhaps undigestable and totally inclusive environmental ethic into a series of more assimilable stages: today animal rights, tomorrow equal rights for plants, and after that full moral standing for rocks, soil, and other earthly compounds, and perhaps sometime in the still more remote future, liberty and equality for water and other elemental bodies (1992: 38).

Defending complementary perspectives of environmental ethics and animal liberation, Warren argued in “The Rights of the Nonhuman World” (1992), “the claim that

animals have certain rights, by virtue of their sentience, does not negate the fact that ecosystems are complexly unified whole, in which one element generally cannot be damaged without causing repercussions elsewhere in the system” (1992: 206). Thus, “as we learn to extend our moral concern beyond the boundaries of our own species we shall have to take account of both the rights of individual animals *and* the value of those elements of the natural world which are not themselves sentient” (1992: 205). Warren declared, “only by *combining* the environmentalist and animal rights perspectives can we take account of the full range of moral considerations which ought to guide our interactions with the nonhuman world” (1992: 206). However an appeal for reconciliation may be highlighted, Callicott challenged such an ideal attempt. According to Callicott, in order to achieve “a lasting alliance,” between “animal welfare ethics and ecocentric environmental ethics,” a moral theory will need to be developed “that embraces both programs *and* that provides a framework for the adjudication of the very real conflicts between human welfare, animal welfare, and ecological integrity” (1992: 251). Further, Callicott argued,

Animal liberation and environmental ethics may thus be united under a common theoretical umbrella—even though... they may occasionally come into conflict. But since they may be embraced by a common theoretical structure, we are provided a means, in principle, to assign priorities and relative weights and thus to resolve such conflicts in a systematic way (Callicott 1992: 259).

The MEY’s ethical foundation, an animal liberationist model, and Leopold’s land ethic place paramount focus on “the extension of ethics of *direct* ethical considerability from people to nonhuman natural entities” (Callicott 1992: 37-8). Gannon and Life, undeniably extend the ethics of care to include the welfare of other-than-human animals, by shifting and expanding the boundaries of community “from a place of self-

centeredness to a place of other-centeredness.” Gannon suggested, “a shift in consciousness is occurring. We are beginning to see our self in other, and the ‘other’ includes other animals.” While the JYS referred to this perception of “other-centeredness” as healing the “dis-ease of disconnection,” Shepard dubbed the challenge as the “perennial problem of the other” (1997: 143). Shepard paralleled this “perennial problem,” or as Julia Kristeva declared, the “deepest problem of civilized life,” that contemporary society has forgotten that ecologically speaking, human beings were once prey in the great circle of life (in Shepard 1997: 143). While Shepard is harkening on an ecological vantage point when addressing the problem of self and other, yoga philosophy, on the other hand, would consider the denial of our role in the predator-prey chain as *abhiniveśa*, or fear of death. Shepard suggested,

Wildness, pushed to the perimeters of human settlement during most of the ten millennia since the Pleistocene, has now begun to disappear from the earth, taking the world’s otherness of free plants and animals with it. The loss is usually spoken of in terms of ecosystems or the beauty of the world, but for humans, spiritually and psychologically, the true loss is internal. It is our own otherness within (1997: 143).

Describing how one lives in such an “other-centered” existence, Gannon stated, “you care about the happiness and the well-being of the others who inhabit the space you share,” which “means that your actions are examined.” Therefore, the practices of yoga provide steps—*Patañjali’s Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system—where to self-reflect on individual actions, as well as provides tools to harness one’s concentration for such personal self-reflection and inquiry.

The teachings of the JYS come from a direct line of *guru shishya sampradāyam* (the tradition and lineage of knowledge passed from *guru* to disciple). Gannon emphasized the term “school” when addressing the Jivamukti Yoga method in order to

describe the JYS as an education center based upon these *guru shishya sampradāyam* teachings. Gannon and Life's primary teachers were K. Pattabhi Jois (disciple of T. Krishnamacharya), Brahmananda Sarasvati (also known as Dr. Ramamurti S. Mishra), and Swāmi Nirmalananda (disciple of Ramakrishna). In an August 2012 interview with Gannon and Life, they further explained the intersection of the JYS and activism. They maintained, "we want to dismantle the present culture," and yoga provides an avenue for discovering "the know-how to build a new way of life" (Gannon 2008: 42). Further, Life stated, "Jivamukti is organized around what we feel is a life worth living, and we're activists... Our teachers were like that... we are following their tradition. They were vegans, animal activists, political activists." Gannon argued, that "to be political means that you care about the others who are the community with you." Thus, "you examine your actions against the question, 'will this action enhance the lives of the community... all others who live in that community?'" These questions of self-inquiry challenge the boundaries of communities of care, helping to heal the "perennial problem of the other" or the "dis-ease of disconnect."

Gannon and Life declared, "cultural heroes risk their own happiness by defying what the culture tells them they must do to be happy. They choose instead to do what they believe is just" (2002: 57). Strictly adhering to, teaching about, and advocating what they perceive is "just" is one particular reason they are viewed as a distinct contribution to Modern Yoga, for they argued, "awareness is the first step toward choosing to walk a different path" (2002: 65). Gannon and Life's guru, Nirmalananda, also known as the "anarchist swami," defined anarchy as "Self-rule," thus liberating ourselves from the "tyranny of the thinking mind" (Gannon and Life 2002: 75).

Nirmalananda declared, “enlightened anarchism is the need of the hour. For an unenlightened person, even when their heart tells them to do good, their mind may make them do evil. It is only through enlightenment that one is able to live as a free and intelligent person” (1993: 19). Gannon maintained, “Yoga serves to awaken and remind us that we do know how to live in harmony with life. When we rediscover our own wildness, the shackles of our present culture will fall away, and we will find ourselves liberated” (2008: 38). The JYS displayed this “enlightened anarchy” with their strict adherence to ethical vegetarianism. Will Tuttle, in *The World Peace Diet: Eating for Spiritual Health and Social Harmony* (2005), professed,

The contemporary vegan movement is founded on loving-kindness and mindfulness of our effects on others. It is revolutionary because it transcends and renounces the violent core of the herding culture in which we live. It is founded on living the truth of interconnectedness and thereby consciously minimizing the suffering we impose on animals, humans, and biosystems; it frees us *all* from the slavery of becoming mere commodities. It signifies the birth of a new consciousness, the resurrection of intelligence and compassion, and the basic rejection of cruelty and domination (2005: 28).

For many animal liberationists ethics are first put into practice by becoming ethical vegetarians, focusing on contributing to the least amount of harm to other-than-human animals and the planet at large, by avoiding factory farming and industrial agriculture. Shepard declared, “if there is a single complex of events responsible for the deterioration of human health and ecology, agricultural civilization is it.” Further, “at its worst, agriculture is industrial and corporate, poisoning the whole planet with chemical compounds not found in nature” (1997: 103). A foundational theory of the JYS, as well as the personal lives of the co-founders, it is understood that “a very potent political act is how you choose to participate in the food system.” Permeating through their teachings and daily life activities is the suggestion “to eat a diet that’s the *least* obtrusive

on the environment and the ecosystem.” Gannon and Life argued, “to choose to be aware of how one’s actions may affect others is to become politically active” (2008: 33). This notion is underscored in Gannon’s book *Yoga and Vegetarianism* (2008) that focused on environmental and animal activist practices organized around posture (*āsana*) and Patañjali’s five ethical restraints (*yamas*). Chapple and Cornell studied yoga and ecology through Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system, previously explored in Chapter 3. Here, Gannon and Life approach environmentalism through posture and the first step of this eight-limbed tree of yoga, which become another model to explore the intersection of yoga philosophy and ecological activism.

### “*Āsana*—Our Connection to the Earth and All Beings”<sup>12</sup>

Gannon highlighted that in the YS, Patañjali only mentioned *āsana* twice throughout the entire compilation of *sūtras*.<sup>13</sup> However, when it is mentioned, “he provides us with a powerful means to purify our relationships with others”—by connecting to the Earth through pose, posture, and seat (Gannon 2008: 32). Gannon interpreted the YS 2.46 (*sthira sukham āsanam*) as a means of achieving *samādhi*—“in order to achieve enlightenment, [one’s] connection (or relationship) to the Earth—which refers to all beings and things—must be both steady and joyful” (2008: 32). Further, Gannon conveyed:

For one who desires enlightenment, asana practice is especially valuable, because it provides an opportunity to purify one’s karmas. Because our bodies are storehouses for all of our past karmas, and our physical bodies are made from the food that we eat, imbalances show up as tightness, uptightness, discomfort, and even disease. Through the deeply therapeutic practice of asana, we begin to purify our karmas, thereby healing our past

<sup>12</sup> The following six sub-headings are direct chapter titles (with the addition of diacritical marks) from Gannon’s *Yoga and Vegetarianism* (2008).

<sup>13</sup> *yama niyamāsana prāṇāyāma pratyāhāra dhāraṇā dhyāna samādhayo ‘ṣṭāv aṅgāni* (YS 2.29) and *sthira sukham āsanam* (YS 2.46)

relationships with others and reestablishing a steady and joyful connection with the Earth, which means all life (2008: 32-33).

A cornerstone prayer or *mantra* for the JYS is *lokaḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu*, which they poetically translated as “May all beings everywhere be happy and free. May the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life help contribute, in some way, to that happiness, and to that freedom for all.” This invocation encompasses the JYS focus of compassionate action through thought, word, and deed. Gannon professed, the *āsana* “practice we do on and off the mat provides us with profound opportunities to heal the planet and evolve our human consciousness” (2008: 41). Thus, “when we feel physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually connected to nature and all other beings, the greater global healing can begin” (2008: 42). Therefore, the tangible physical practices of yoga *āsana* provide an opportunity to heal the relationship between self and other within various communities—internal/ personal, external/ social, as well as ecological.

### **“*Ahiṃsā*—Non-harming”**

As a *guru shishya sampradāyam* method, the JYS follows a similar path of their teachers. K. Pattabhi Jois, when asked, “What is the most important yogic practice in this time?” Answered, a “vegetarian diet is the most important practice for yoga,” for it is a diet that ideally causes the least amount of harm to other-than-human animals and the planet at large (in Gannon and Life 2002: 83). Gannon explained, “ethical vegetarians eat only plant-based food in order to show compassion toward animals and other humans and to benefit the planet.” In particular, “vegans are ethical vegetarians who seek to extend their ethics to include not just what they eat but everything they consume: food, clothing, medicine, fuel, and entertainment, to name a few” (2008: 24).

For Gannon and Life, “the aim of yoga is to realize that we are all connected. Yoga’s method is to provide us with experiences that help us grasp this” (2002: 69).

Leopold’s extension of community, while did not suggest avoid hunting or eating animals, stated, “we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, and otherwise have faith in” (1949: 251). For MEY, that love and faith resides in our interconnectedness with all of life, and therefore yogins will take actions to alleviate the unnecessary suffering of other-than-human beings—sentient or not. Leopold also underscored the importance and challenge humanity is faced with in “the extension of social conscious from people to the land” (1949: 246). Further, Leopold argued, “the extension of ethics” is “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity” (1949: 239). Callicott suggested, if “any genuine ethic is possible, if it possible to value *people* for the sake of themselves, then it is equally possible to value *land* in the same way” (1992: 49). Thus, according to animal liberationists, it should then similarly possible to value *animals* in the same way.

Gannon and Life argued that when a practitioner realizes the interconnection between the lives of all animals, humans as well as other-than-human animals, they might live a more holistic lifestyle, where our unity becomes the center of value. Animals and the environment no longer remain a “means to an end,” but rather are intrinsically appreciated as ends in and of themselves. Niramalananda advocated, “one of the cardinal principles of life should be not to cause any harm to others, not to exploit or enslave anyone on any account” (1993: 19). Further, “we have come into this world to bring peace unto all beings. To achieve this goal it is necessary to adopt peaceful ways of harmless living and non-interference in all our endeavors” (1993: 147). Gannon

plead, “we must take responsibility for our behavior by looking into the possible outcome of our every exhaled breath, word spoken, and action taken, asking ourselves, ‘Is this contributing to the happiness and well-being of the greater community?’” (2008: 44).

Gannon argued that much environmental and social degradation is due to disconnection between humans and the rest of the environment. This disconnection began “around 10,000 years ago... when our present culture took root. That culture being a way of life founded upon the enslavement and exploitation of animals, farming, intensive agriculture.” Thus, from these agricultural practices, “a sedentary lifestyle arose.” Shepard similarly stated,

We face a decrepitude of body and spirit caused by sedentism, the psychoses of overdense populations, failed ontogenies, and cosmologies that yield havoc because they demand control over, rather than compliance with, the wild world—cosmologies based on the centralized model of the barnyard (1997: 137).

The JYS is offering “a completely different way of relating to the world.” Life suggested that, “the reason yoga is a threat is because it says that what you do as an individual is the most important.” Therefore, the practices of yoga, which re-connect the individual to the interrelatedness of all life, provide a foundation from where to reach out in the community to offer support in alleviating the suffering of others through the “process of self-examination and living an examined life.” Life argued, “that’s what makes yoga different... It gives you the experience of self-empowerment.”

### **“Satya—Telling the Truth”**

The next step in ascending the ladder of ethical restraint is *satya*, or truthfulness. Practicing integrity in speech becomes an important tool for any yoga activist. Gannon argued, “part of the process of transitioning into living more honestly is to hold yourself accountable for the things you do” (2008: 58). Accountability is a necessary practice

when reflecting on one's actions. Gannon contested, that one way a yogin can determine the progress of their practice is through "observing your own voice... you will be able to say what you mean and mean what you say. When this happens, it is an indication that the disease of disconnection is beginning to be healed." Thus, "you will be increasingly able to articulate with integrity from a place of deep universal connectedness rather than isolation" (2008: 62). Therefore, yoga teachers and practitioners may feel compelled to discuss environmental and social plights, speaking truths about the various devastations that abound this planet.

### **"Asteya—Non-Stealing"**

In conjunction with Cornell's contention about not stealing earth's resources through greed and selfish desires, the JYS also advocated for limiting one's consumption. Simply put, Gannon argued, "to confine an animal for its entire life is to steal its life. To kill and eat animals is to steal their lives from them" (2008: 70). Gannon and Life are proponents of strict ethical practices—particularly focused around diet. With primary attention on industrial agriculture and factory farms, they argued, "when someone eats meat, it affects all of us because of the terrible environmental impact of the meat and dairy industries on the planet." Further connecting an animal-derived diet to ecological and social destruction, they argued, "by eating meat, we are not only stealing the lives and happiness of billions of animals, we are also stealing fresh water and clean air from future generations who will be born into this world" (Gannon 2008: 75). The JYS believed in implementing a precautionary principle, which is to avoid any action that has no scientific proof indicating if said action is not harmful to society or the environment. This vantage point is important when addressing future generations, due to the massive consumption pervasive in the industrialized world,

which could be considered stealing resources and opportunity from individuals for generations to come.

### **“*Brahmacarya*—Good Sex”**

Classical interpretations of *brahmacarya* refer to “sexual restraint,” and “continence.” Gannon however suggested, “to practice brahmacharya is to understand the potential of sexual energy.” Therefore, “when sexual energy is directed wisely, it becomes a means to transcend separation, or otherness. When sexual energy is used to exploit, manipulate, or humiliate another, however, it propels us into deeper separation and ignorance (*avidya*).” Underscoring industrial agriculture and food production, Gannon contested, “the sexual abuse of animals is ingrained in our culture, and it expresses itself in the practice of breeding, genetic manipulation, castration, artificial insemination, forced pregnancy, routine rape, and child abuse, which all fall under the category of ‘animal husbandry’” (2008: 78). According to Gannon’s interpretation of Patanjali’s YS 2.38,<sup>14</sup> it is clear that “health and vitality will come to one who is established in brahmacharya; to one who treats sexuality with reverence.” Thus, “if we want to be healthy, we must consider the suffering, disease, and ill health we are causing to the animals we eat” (2008: 86).

Gannon acknowledged, “when we are talking about veganism and the practice of brahmacharya, we are definitely talking about a radical sexual revolution” (2008: 86). Early feminist Carol Adams and Gannon have declared this form of animal husbandry and meat eating, not only a social and ecological atrocity, but also a feminist issue as well. Adams claimed “the oppression of women and the other animals” are

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<sup>14</sup> *bramacarya-pratiṣṭhāyām vīrya-lābhaḥ* “When one does not misuse sexual energy, one obtains enduring vitality resulting in good health” (YS 2.38) (in Gannon 2008: 77).

“interdependent.” Therefore, “meat is a symbol for what is not seen but is always there—patriarchal control of animals” (Adams 1990: 16). Adams argued, that feminist theory has long gone unperceived within the vegetarian critique, “just as vegetarianism covertly challenges a patriarchal society” (1990: 17). Further, “our dietary choices reflect and reinforce our cosmology, our politics” (1990: 190). Thus,

Eating animals acts as mirror and representation of patriarchal values. Meat eating is the re-inscription of male power at every meal. The patriarchal gaze sees not the fragmented flesh of dead animals but appetizing food. If our appetites re-inscribe patriarchy, our actions regarding eating animals will either reify or challenge this received culture. If meat is a symbol of male dominance than the presence of meat proclaims the disempowering of women (Adams 1990: 187).

For Gannon, “if we believe in women’s rights, we cannot condone and support the way female animals are exploited for milk, eggs, and babies” (2008: 79). Adams described such meat consumption as “both animalized *and* masculinized” (1990: 187). Gannon stated, “if we feel that women should be treated fairly, then we must extend our desire for women’s liberation to all women regardless of race, religion, or *species*” (2008: 79). In 1970, Richard Ryder, coined the term *speciesism*, “to refer to the prejudice that allows us to treat animals in ways in which we would never treat humans” (Jamieson 2008: 106). Peter Singer further popularized the term with *Animal Liberation* (1975), defining it as “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species” (1975: 6). Ryder, Singer, Adams, and Gannon all contended that a new ethical framework to address how humanity treats other-than-human animals is needed, even though the avenue for such an ethical guideline is starkly different for each. Yoga philosophy provides one such model.

## **“Aparigraha—Greed, Excess, and Poverty”**

According to the JYS, “greed” is the action a person takes in the pursuit of individual happiness “at the expense of others” (Gannon 2008: 87). Therefore, *aparigraha*, “non-possessiveness,” or “greedlessness,” is an evaluation and contemplation of karmic affects of each action taken in thought, word, and deed. Gannon and Life argued that, through the holistic practices of yoga, “we discover that concern for the happiness and well-being of others, including other animals, must be an essential part of our own quest for happiness and well-being” (2008: 94). Therefore, “we begin to see that it could be possible to create peace on Earth while living a liberated life—the life of the *jivanmukta*.” Thus Gannon declared, by “adopting a compassionate, vegetarian way of eating, we take the first big step toward becoming established in *aparigraha*, and with that, we step into a bright enlightened future for ourselves, for the animals, and for the planet” (2008: 95). The practices as outlined by Patañjali, while re-interpreted through an ecological and social lens, provide wild and radical opportunities to unite yoga and activism.

### **Off the Mat, Into the World**



Figure 4-3. Off the Mat, Into the World Logo.

In 2007, Seane Corn, Suzanne Sterling, and Hala Khouri founded Off the Mat, Into the World (henceforth OTM). OTM is a program branch of the nonprofit organization—The Engage Network—that bridges yoga and activism. According to their

motto, “OTM uses the power of yoga to inspire conscious, sustainable activism, and ignite grassroots social change. We do this by facilitating personal empowerment through leadership trainings, fostering community collaboration, and initiating local and global service projects.”<sup>15</sup> Through trainings, OTM bridged the gap between community and conscious activism—applying a root definition of yoga (union) and literally taking the practices of yoga “off the mat and into the world.” OTM’s goal is to mobilize “the entire yoga community in transformation, collaboration and activation to create real change in the world.”<sup>16</sup> OTM trainings are focused on “empowerment and growth” in order to facilitate global, youth, or local activism projects. In this light, OTM inspired individuals to explore personal and social responsibility, how they are interdependent, and how that correlation can be applied into making a difference in the world.

### **Yoga and Activism**

The combination of yoga and activism provides one vantage point from which to interweave yoga theory and daily action. Sterling claimed, “yoga is process of awakening to my true nature. Activism is living that nature fully, and assisting other people in living that true nature fully in their own unique way.” The grassroots philosophy of the OTM movement is reliant upon the network of leaders and activists who collaborate for change on local and global levels. This bottom-up technique empowers individuals to work together in their own communities, with their political and social leaders, in order to inspire tangible and attainable change in the world. One

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/about_us.html)

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/about_us.html)

recent example was a 2012 campaign bridging yoga and political activism that was labeled: YOGAVOTES.

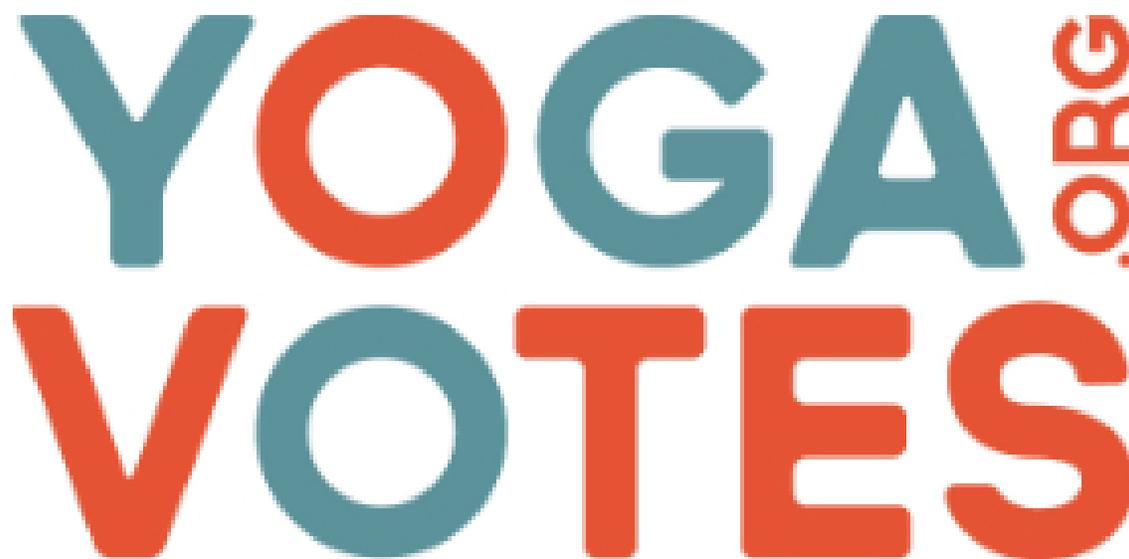


Figure 4-4. YOGAVOTES Logo.

YOGAVOTES is a nonpartisan campaign to engage the yoga community in politics. It is an opportunity for the yoga community to become a constituency of conscious voters, a block of voters engaging in the political process in a new way and asking to be heard. By sheer number, we can have an impact, as millions of yogis show up to vote using the values and principles of yoga. We have a chance to create real change in the political process simply by taking part in it.<sup>17</sup>

Activism, Corn suggested, is to act, to engage, to move toward. It is the willingness to “create an action and to be willing to step into that action.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, “an activist carries the desire to create change, to make something happen, to shift an ideology.” Corn suggested that in yoga activism, “the thoughts, actions, and deeds that I, in my own individual life make today, impact the world from the food that I eat, to the way that I vote, to my purchasing power.” If these actions are done unconsciously, then

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/otm-projects.html>

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Seane Corn. August 13, 2012. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from Corn are from this interview.

activism is limited to personal gains and needs. To Corn, yoga is about the coming together to make whole—union. “It’s about the interdependency of all things—Heaven and Earth, mind and body, male and female, matter and consciousness.” Therefore, the activism of yoga, or “spiritual activism,” “is seeing the bigger picture, that we’re all connected, that we’re all interdependent.”

Khouri also perceived yoga to be a tool for “seeing the bigger picture.” Khouri stated, “social activism is engaging in our communities, from a place of recognizing our interdependence with other people in a way that aims to uplift all of us.”<sup>19</sup> Khouri suggested that “conscious activism,” “comes from humility, self-awareness, and having your own personal process so that you’re not projecting your own stuff onto those that you think you want to serve.” Through this humility and self-awareness, Sterling stated, yoga becomes “a lens through which to look at the world... a lens that can encompass how I do everything in my life.”<sup>20</sup> More specifically, yoga is a “practice.” One that “may start through the study of sacred books or it may start through a devotional practice... it’s a daily practice, and then slowly becomes a life practice.” Therefore, “it’s a practice that over and over again, just brings me back to connectedness to the web of life, that I’m not separate from all living things.” Social activism for Sterling, from a human perspective, is an “attempt at alleviating the suffering of others, including myself, and recognizing the sanctity of all life.” Thus, “if I recognize that sacredness and the sanctity of all life, my responsibility, my opportunity is to engender that,” as a form of “seva” or “service.”

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Hala Khouri. October 25, 2012. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from Khouri are from this interview.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Suzanne Sterling. July 18, 2012. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from Sterling are from this interview.



Figure 4-5. Off the Mat, Into the World 2012 Global Seva Challenge Logo

### **Global Seva Challenge**

Initiated in 2008, OTM's Global Seva Challenge has become one opportunity for individuals to implement yoga theory and activism. The word *seva* in Sanskrit means, "service." Every year, OTM sponsors a grassroots fundraising, leadership building, international service project. According to OTM, the "Seva Challenge is a transformational journey that builds community, provokes awareness and action around global issues, and raises significant funds to support communities in crisis."<sup>21</sup>

Participants who raise at least \$20,000 are invited to join Corn, Sterling, and Khouri in order to spend two weeks working with the international organizations the funds have helped support. Short-term results address the immediate needs of the selected area, while identifying long-term solutions for the underserved communities. After the two

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/global-seva-challenge.html>

weeks, OTM “selects an ambassador who continues to work in support of [the] Seva Challenge partners and projects in that country.”<sup>22</sup>

Over the past five years, OTM participants have raised over three million dollars for various projects in Cambodia, Uganda, South Africa, Haiti, and India. The chart below indicates what the project(s) or benefactor(s) for each country was for each given year, as well as the numerical value for money raised that year.

Table 4-1. Seva Challenge Results (2008-2013).<sup>23</sup>

YEAR	COUNTRY	MONEY RAISED	PROJECT(S)
2008	Cambodia	\$524,000	Support Cambodian Children’s Fund
2009	Uganda	\$577,000	Fund four NGOs: Shanti Uganda, Building Tomorrow, PSI/ YouthAIDS
2010	South Africa	\$550,000	Fund and build health and education programs to provide tools and resources for the prevention of HIV/ AIDS
2011	Haiti	\$376,000	Support select few humanitarian efforts in Haiti
2012	India	\$1,000,000	Raise awareness surrounding the global sex trafficking industry, and support organizations in India providing refuge, rehabilitation and economic opportunities for survivors
2013	Amazon	\$?	Support partners in Ecuador who defend rainforest ecosystems, stand for environmental justice, and reclaim indigenous rights

### Innovations of Yoga and Activism

While the focus of this Chapter has been to explore the two different modern yoga organizations—the Jivamukti Yoga School and Off the Mat, Into the World—these teachings and practices are not isolated phenomena. According to Sterling, “the whole

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/global-seva-challenge.html>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/global-seva-challenge.html>

premise of Off the Mat is to unify the yoga community, the resources of the yoga community,” in order “to create change.” Thus, “we have to allow for those differences and celebrate those differences and learn how to work together.” Therefore, “building coalitions is an important piece” for the future of yoga, such as being displayed with YOGAVOTES—“a nonpartisan campaign to awaken a new demographic of mindful voters.”<sup>24</sup> Understanding the importance of each organization in the evolution of Modern Yoga, much of JYS and OTM’s work can be seen as overlapping and interdisciplinary. For example, Corn celebrated Gannon’s text *Yoga and Vegetarianism* (2008), by stating:

Sharon Gannon’s commitment to animal rights has been evident in every aspect of her life. She recognizes that the continued murder and slavery of animals affects all levels of consciousness, as well as our health, environment, and global famine, and that it will only be through individual shifts of mindfulness that this suffering can finally end. A modern, compassionate, and well-informed voice for Self-realization and planetary change, she has been unwavering in her quest to educate humankind that our animal brothers and sisters are experiencing a mass level of intolerable abuse that must be addressed if we believe in creating a world that is sustainable, harmonious, and peaceful for all (in *Yoga and Vegetarianism* 2008).

The JYS and OTM underscored differences between traditional activists and yoga or “spiritual” activists. Many times, not universally speaking, traditional activists perceive the world as fundamentally broken, in need of change from the outside structure. Through the discerning knowledge gained in conjunction with a yogic philosophical point of view, “we begin this activation process from the inside, correcting our own actions, asking the important questions, delving deeply into it.”<sup>25</sup> Life asserted,

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<sup>24</sup> <http://yogavotes.org/>

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Sharon Gannon and David Life. August 8, 2012. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from Gannon and Life are from this interview.

“you become a hub of that change you were looking for in the world.” Similarly, Gannon declared, “that takes a lot of courage. I think many times people that are following the path of activism, they’re being fueled by anger and blame.” Further, Gannon suggested, that the only way of achieving goals in a lasting way is to be that “change in yourself. What you don’t like in the other, you’ve got to be willing to let go of it in yourself, see if it is possible.”

Corn also explained, “my activism isn’t just in some of the more radical choices that I’ve made, but it’s in my day-to-day decisions. Everything that I’m doing has to be in consideration for the planet and the people that exist upon this planet.” Similarly, Sterling advocated, “one of the biggest forms of activism that we have at our fingertips is how we spend our money.” All five yogins interviewed professed, this is where the practices of yoga come into play, to help maintain that broader picture of wholeness, of unity, how every action we take affects the whole web of life.

### **Yoga as Therapeutic Tool**

Sterling suggested that yoga has the potential to “eventually... change people’s lives from the inside out. That change and that transformation is activism.” This transformation within the internal environment parallels Khouri’s definition of yoga—as a “tool for self-regulation,” “a tool for embodiment, for working through trauma and tension in the body.” Khouri declared, “there’s nothing more empowering than offering somebody that has trauma something that they can do that begins to help them feel good inside their own self, inside their own body, and that also starts to release and change some of those traumatic patterns and tensions that are within the body.” Similarly, Gannon and Life stated, “yoga practices are psychotherapeutic tools... The

psychotherapeutic aspect of yoga comes from how it begins to integrate and purify the body, the emotions, and the mind by infusing them with spirit” (2002: 24).

Sterling echoed Khouri’s insights, by stating that through yoga practices, we “allow ourselves to detoxify and purify.” Eventually this leads to the “experience of real pleasure that’s more long lasting, and it’s not attached to any particular substance or experience... besides perhaps the daily practice. There is a natural progression towards health.” This transformative change provides opportunity of self-reflection—inquiring how we spend money, what type of food we eat, “you change how you relate to the world... who you are in the world is a huge part of your activism.” Further, Sterling declared, “to me, the evolution of yoga is going to be more and more into activism. It’s going to be more and more into changing the world concurrently with how we’re changing and shifting and waking to our true nature and awakening to the simple fact that we are all in the web of life.”

These various practitioners are challenging the status quo of both the yoga community, as well as the activist community. Julia Butterfly Hill, for example, is a contemporary environmental activist who lived in 600-year old California redwood tree, “Luna,” for 738 days in order to prevent the logging company Pacific Lumber/ Maxxam Corporation from clear-cutting the forest. In a New York City lecture at the Jivamukti Yoga Tribe Gathering in January 2013, Hill said, “every moment of every day, we are giving our lives to something,” and she was advocating the cultivation of a “radically profound authentic and unconditional love” that is necessary for the path of the spiritual activist. Hill continued that, every action has an impact on our surroundings—“we are

either acting in the co-production of the world around us every moment of every day, or we are acting in the destruction of the world we want to live in.”

The recognition that the yoga community is evolving toward a more activism-based engagement is a unifying factor in the JYS and OTM. When addressing the modern interpretations of classical yoga text and practices, Corn suggested that “as you get more involved with yoga, you can’t help but look and interpret these ancient texts to serve the ideology of the time... to serve some of the most contemporary challenges.” Life concluded, “I think the yoga movement is important in terms of how it could inspire... so it doesn’t just all fall flat as another commodified, bogus, empty trend.” Sterling declared, by “honoring the traditions” from which yoga praxis originated, and “evolving them forward,” can cultivate an opportunity to see where the newly evolved trends are moving. Thus, the adaptations of Modern Yoga, as displayed by the JYS and OTM, provide a platform from where to see where theory and action can meet, and “how we can bridge the modern technological age and the culture that we live in and the work of this time with this ancient tradition.”

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

### **Contemplating Modern Ecological Yoga**

The primary question as I approached this study was *do* the practices of yoga, while remaining rooted in traditional philosophical systems, provide opportunities for individuals to connect to their personal and global environments in an ecologically conscious manner. Previous scholarly research on environmental constructions of yoga philosophy was highlighted, in conjunction with a particular focus on the founders of the Jivamukti Yoga School (Sharon Gannon and David Life) and *Off the Mat, Into the World* (Seane Corn, Hala Khouri, and Suzanne Sterling). Throughout these pages, I argued the philosophies and practices of yoga *do*, in fact, provide such a model. In turn, I have displayed examples of *how* these practices translate from theory into action—beyond the academic and yoga classrooms, into the daily life of these charismatic leaders.

In Chapter 2, I supplied a brief overview of the history and meaning of yoga in India and the United States to provide a context of where the complexity of yoga was born. From its inception, yoga has been applied to numerous avenues of thought and practice. This foundation accommodated the varying needs and desires of the twenty-first century society—both secular and religious. Elizabeth De Michelis' typology of Modern Yoga was used as a heuristic device when deciphering the demarcations between streams of contemporary yoga found in the United States. Modern Ecological Yoga (MEY) is an expansion of such a device. Chapter 2 also referenced the eclectic bricolage that informs the tapestry of MEY. Therefore, MEY was placed within a particular context that emphasizes *practice*, implemented in the daily lives of its practitioners. However, evidence of MEY can be found under the headings of “green”

or “eco” yoga, as displayed by the work of Henryk Skolimowski’s *EcoYoga: Practice & Meditation for walking in beauty on the Earth* (1994) and Laura Cornell’s “Green Yoga: Contemporary Activism and Ancient Practices: A Model for Eight Paths of Green Yoga” (2007). Thus, MEY is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather an additional theoretical tool intended to highlight trends of eco-conscious thought and practice in the contemporary yoga community of the United States.

In Chapter 3, I introduced the relationship of environmental ethics and yoga philosophy, of which owes a great debt to the New England Transcendentalists. The work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau helped spark the romantic appreciation of nature in the United States through the lens of Asian philosophy. This “greening” of religious and philosophical praxis was instigated, in part, by Lynn White Jr.’s attack on the implication of religion’s negative effect on the environment, and has seeped its way into academia as the burgeoning field of religion and nature/ ecology ever since. Bron Taylor’s *dark green religion* and Daniel Deudney’s *terrapolitan earth religion* underscored the presence of biocentric and ecocentric systems, represented by viewing all life and global ecosystems as sacred and intrinsically worthy of reverent care, within traditional and contemporary religious and philosophical practices.

Chapter 3 also detailed how the ethical system of Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system can be viewed through an ecological lens, providing a framework for environmental ethics. The wild practices of MEY, executed for the preservation of the world, fundamentally challenge contemporary society’s constructed boundaries of comfort. Generally speaking, consumption and mass reproduction of products have

become the cultural norms of the United States. The radical practices suggested in this thesis are designed to curtail such ingrained belief systems. As Paul Shepard argued:

The corporate world has drawn our attention away from wildness with parcels of wilderness that restrict the random play of genes, establish a dichotomy of places, and banish wild forms to enclaves where they may be encountered by audiences while the business of domesticating and denuding the planet proceeds... The ecological relationships and religious insights of wild cultures, whose social organization represents exotic or vestigial stages in “our history” or “our evolution,” are translated into museum dioramas. My wildness, according to this agenda, can be experienced only on reservations called wilderness, but cannot be lived daily in ordinary life (1997: 145).

In Chapter 4, I highlighted key themes from interviews with the founders of the Jivamukti Yoga School (Sharon Gannon and David Life) and Off the Mat, Into the World (Seane Corn, Suzanne Sterling, and Hala Khouri). This qualitative dimension of my research was executed to supply examples of *how* specific wild practices are being implemented outside the boundaries of “reservations called wilderness” in the daily lives of these five yogins. In the search for how practitioners applied traditional yoga philosophy in such a way as to alleviate personal and global suffering, I found the majority of these leaders and scholars of the field adapted Patañjali’s ethical framework, based upon the *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system, either in full, or in part, with particular attention to the restraints (*yamas*). Academics and practitioners have used this model as a framework for interweaving yoga and ecology. Laura Cornell demonstrated this in “Green Yoga: Contemporary Activism and Ancient Practices: A Model for Eight Paths of Green Yoga” (2007), the Jivamukti Yoga School in Gannon’s *Yoga and Vegetarianism* (2008), and Michael Stone in *Yoga for a World out of Balance: Teachings on Ethics and Social Activism* (2009).

Gannon and Life displayed how to integrate *ahimsā* (non-harming) from an ecological standpoint to one's daily actions. Further applying Patañjali's *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system, Gannon and Life provided tangible examples of how to apply traditional yoga philosophy and practices toward a yoga-inspired environmental ethic through the teachings of the "Focus of the Month." Corn, Sterling, and Khouri offered yoga as a tool for self-healing and global unity, displayed through such programs as YOGAVOTES and the Global Seva Challenge. The therapeutic nature of yoga provides individuals with an opportunity to become inspired, extending the healing engendered in daily practice to the global community, providing yoga as platform for social activism.

As founder of the Modern Postural Yoga system *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, K. Pattabhi Jois, professed in his teachings, yoga is "99 percent practice, 1 percent theory." With such unwavering emphasis on *practice* the contemporary yoga *kula* of ecologically engaged individuals can fall under the umbrella of a lived spirituality or lived religion—"the way in which religion and religious practices manifest in the daily lives of practitioners" (Bauman, Bohannon, and O'Brien 2011: 232). Robert Orsi contended, religion, spirituality, and thus, MEY, "cannot be understood apart from its place in the everyday lives, preoccupations, and commonsense orientations of men and women" (2005: 167). Therefore in order to study the trends of MEY, the daily lives and activities of practitioners must be a primary theme studied.

### **The Peril and Promise of Modern Ecological Yoga**

For too long, without carefully examining the text, Yoga has been characterized as a form of world-rejecting asceticism. Yoga does not reject the reality of the world, nor does it condemn the world, only the human propensity to misidentify with the more base aspects of the world. The path of Yoga... seeks not to deny the beauty of nature but seeks to purify our relationship with it by correcting mistaken notions and usurping damaging attachments. Rather than seeking to condemn the world to as state of

irredeemable darkness, Yoga seeks to bring the world and, most importantly, the seers of the world, to a state of luminosity (Chapple 2008: 82).

Moral theories do not occur in a vacuum, fixed and unchanging. There are advantages and disadvantages to all ethical guidelines. While this thesis has been optimistic toward the promise Modern Ecological Yoga can provide the fields of Modern Yoga, environmental stewardship, and social activism, there are particular conundrums worthy of further exploration. First, there has been much discrepancy between scholars and practitioners as the following two questions: Who owns yoga? Is yoga Hindu? The eclectic milieu of Modern Ecological Yoga has many tributaries of inspiration that flow into its theoretical base. As De Michelis suggested, Modern Yoga may be “defined as the graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga (2004: 2). However, perhaps a more accurate image is to envision Modern Yoga as a graft onto the *global* tree of yoga.

The trends of Modern Yoga unequivocally have roots in Indian praxis, although contemporary manifestations incorporate a bricolage of many different theories from cultures across the planet due to the transnational nature of the twenty-first century. Various “cultural elements are borrowed or transported by the migrations of peoples” (Shepard 1998: 154). Further, Shepard argued, that our ancestors provide examples of where to “recover some social principles, metaphysical insights, and spiritual qualities from their way of life by reconstructing it in our own milieux” (1998: 164). The traditional philosophy and praxis of yoga supplies one such access point of “reconstructing” the practices of our ancestors into the social and ecological requirements of the modern world.

The elements of yoga therefore are not practices to be “owned” or patented by India, the United States, or any other nation. Chapple contested, “due to the globalization of Yoga, it can no longer be ‘owned’ by a single culture or national identity” (2008: 252). These teachings are to be witnessed, experienced, and lived; and therefore, should be open and available to all interested individuals. This freedom of practice ideally should avoid cultural appropriation and be done with respect to the roots from which the tradition was born, while being incorporated into daily life activities. However, not all adaptations of yoga practices are executed with such reverence. White stated that, “in 2001, the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) was founded in India as a tool for preventing foreign entrepreneurs from appropriating and patenting Indian traditions as their own intellectual properties.” The TKDL has recently turned to yoga, which was “spurred by the 2004 granting of a U.S. patent on a sequence of twenty-six *āsanas* to the Indian-American yoga celebrity Bikram Chaudhury” (White 2012: 22). White’s contention highlighted one possible shadow side to contemporary adaptations to traditional practices.

Another point of contention, from an ecological standpoint, may reside with the JYS’s heavy advocacy of animal rights. Particular questions arise in this regard. Does an evolutionary standpoint support an ethical vegetarian diet? Can yoga be ultimately ecological if it doesn't understand the human animal is a predator? Shepard while obviously anti-industrial agriculture, stated, “vegetarianism... simply reinvents human biology to suit an ideology” (1998: 101). The ideology of animal rights is a vast terrain of theoretical thought. Individuals adopt a vegetarian diet for multiple reasons—physical, mental, emotional, and/ or spiritual. Despite these various intentions, the

expanding the community of care is foundational. The philosophy behind MEY does not deny the role of the human being as a predator, rather, it chooses to restrain individual action in order to alleviate the needless suffering of other animals and the environment as a whole—with particular attention to industrial agriculture and factory farming.

Though the environmental activist and yogin may have different theoretical vantage points, both may agree on the scientific evidence that industrial agriculture is detrimental to human and environmental health on a local and global scale. Therefore, the environmental activist and yogin are provided an opportunity to work together, by not contributing to agri-businesses through social activism (supporting local and organic farming) and education (distributing information regarding ecological devastation directly caused by factory farming). If the end goal is to protect animals, biological diversity, and biotic ecosystems—the environmental activist and yogin can access different social groups in order to reach as many communities as possible, and therefore contribute more widely to alleviate the suffering of the planet at large.

Yoga has a long history on the world stage, and interest in Yoga shows no sign of abatement. Yoga offers a felt, visceral experience, simultaneously physical and emotional. Yoga emphasizes movement and breath more than words and urges its practitioners to adopt a comprehensive ethical lifestyle. Yoga has been applied in different ways by different communities, whether Vedantin, Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, secularist, Jewish, or Christian. In the challenging world of postnationalism and postmodernism, Yoga may provide some practices needed to move one from disequilibrium to person, social, and ecological balance (Chapple 2008: 259).

Individuals have become increasingly more attracted to the practices of yoga that calm the mind, uplift the spirit, and lend to ecological expressions of ethical norms in attempt to contribute to welfare of other beings. One of the many reasons individuals practice the art of yoga—from Indian holy men to modern day Westerners—is to attempt “to shape their lives in the light of the highest ethical principles” (De Michelis

2004: 5). Many Modern Ecological Yogins believe that in order to help save the planet, one must first begin with radical self-healing. Sarah Pike proposed, “a change of consciousness is not only to bring about self-growth but also to ensure planetary survival” (2004: 149). Chapple stated that, “the ultimate goal of Yoga... involves the cultivation of higher awareness, which from an environmental perspective, might be seen as an ability to rise above the sorts of consumptive material concerns that can be harmful to the ecosystem” (1998: 30). Chapple further asserted that, “without requiring a fixed belief system, Yoga offers a pragmatic course to change one’s behavior and cultivate inner health. In turn, this heightened awareness can lead one to adopt an environmentally responsible and mindful lifestyle” (2008: 259). Yoga therefore, becomes one avenue for social and ecological activism.

Through the construction of a sound historical background and theoretical foundation from which the eclectic milieu Modern Ecological Yoga was born, I hoped to offer an alternative approach in the study of contemporary yoga praxis in the United States. Exploring the previous research regarding the dynamic and complex nature of yoga, MEY became one interpretation of the contemporary culture of yoga, rooted “personal and planetary healing and self-transformation” (Pike 2004: 67; Williamson 2010: 49). Gannon supported the practitioners of yoga by stating, “the fact that you have begun a yoga practice is evidence that you have the courage to embark on a deep self-reflective quest” (2008: 68). Many MEY practitioners believe that yoga is more than a practice, but rather a way of life, and a tool for ecological and social activism. By contemplating the ideas presented in this thesis, I hoped to ignite a dialogue between and among academics and practitioners, who are willing to examine the philosophy of

yoga, and the role it's practices can play in the ecological and social crises of the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER 6 EMIC EPILOGUE

The academic study of a subject of which I am a dedicated insider has been an exciting and challenging experience. I began studying yoga and ecology during my undergraduate career at the University of Vermont, and have been expanding that curiosity ever since. The practices of yoga have been an indispensable tool in my personal healing and growth over the years. Initially, I was motivated to study yoga praxis extensively in order to share with others the opportunity to engage in radical self-reflection and transformation. Naively, I underestimated the challenges I would face problematizing a tradition I profoundly cherished.

Scholars are trained to research the facts in order to argue any angle. Thus, my idealistic perception of yoga would have to be poked and prodded to withstand varying disputes. As uncomfortable and internally conflicting as this process has been, I am confident of the end result. This thesis does not claim the practices of yoga to be the “cure-all” method to world peace and ecological harmony. Nor does it suggest all individuals in the twenty-first century engaging in yoga practices of diverse degrees care about the environment, animals, or other human beings across the globe. However, I agree with Sharon Gannon when she declared, “I believe that the teachings and practices of yoga are very important, perhaps even crucial, for the survival of life on Earth” (2008: 28). I surmise that through education and joining together in *kula* (family or intentional community) humanity can access tools to *alleviate* some of the suffering inflicted on the planet due to those practices. The alleviation of suffering will come to fruition only when “the dis-ease of disconnect” begins to be addressed. When scholars, practitioners, and healers come together demanding interdisciplinary studies—they are

provided an opportunity to work together, despite theoretical differences, in order to accomplish a tangible goal for the betterment of this world.

A spiritual practice exclusively concerned with *my* enlightenment, *my* transcendence, or *my* emancipation from this life, this body, or this earth is not a spiritual practice tuned in to *these* times of ecological, social, physical, and psychological imbalance. We must begin *now* to articulate and reenvision a yoga that is responsive to present circumstances—rooted in tradition yet adaptable and alive in contemporary times (Stone 2009: 1-2).

I maintain that there is an ever-growing presence of environmental and social activism burgeoning within contemporary yoga circles in the United States.

Practitioners today are no longer choosing the strictly renunciate route of traditional yoga praxis. While *kaivalyam* (aloneness) or *mokṣa/ mukti* (liberation) may be an eventual end goal, the role of the *jīvan-mukta* (living liberated) is being activated in daily life practices. As Michael Stone underscored above, these modern adaptations of yoga provide one avenue to embrace traditional praxis, in such a way as to accommodate the environmental and social needs of the twenty-first century. Humanity must learn from the traditions and cultures of the past in order to implement practices to help perpetuate the health of the planet and society at large. Paul Shepard declared,

What we can do is single out those many things, large and small, that characterized the social and cultural life of our ancestors... incorporate them as best we can by creating a modern life around them. We take our cues from primal cultures... We humans are instinctive culture makers; given the pieces, the culture will reshape itself (Shepard 1997: 173).

The primal and traditional cultures of India have provided the seeds from which the tree of yoga has grown and expanded over the ages to bend, twist, invert, and fold in various ways to support the transitioning personal, social, and ecological crises of our time. In a globalized world, concepts of cultures are accepted, rejected, and retained in order to create a “new synthesis preparing its own opportunities for further change,

retention, or innovation” (Glacken 1990: 707). Yoga’s rich history has provided fertile ground for the evolution of Modern Ecological Yoga, which incorporates the activism of the *jīvan-mukta*, both on and off the mat. As Bron Taylor concluded when referring to dark green religion, “what matters is whether people are moved and inspired when they encounter.” Further, “what matters is whether they find meaning and value in its beliefs and practices” (Taylor 2010: 220). If the praxis of Modern Ecological Yoga sparks curiosity and inspiration within those who contemplate and engage its practices, then yoga will continue to be adopted to meet society’s changing interdisciplinary needs for years to come.

APPENDIX A  
JIVAMUKTI YOGA SCHOOL'S FOCUS OF THE MONTH CHART

	<u>2000</u>		<u>2001</u>
JANUARY		JANUARY	<b>Niyamas</b>
FEBRUARY		FEBRUARY	<b>Teachings from the Bhagavad Gita</b>
MARCH		MARCH	<b>Hindu Gods and Goddesses</b>
APRIL		APRIL	<b>Yoga and Buddhism</b>
MAY	<b>Buddhism and Yoga</b>	MAY	<b>The Hatha Yoga Pradipika</b>
JUNE	<b>Yoga Sutras First Book— Samadhi Pada</b>	JUNE	<b>Teachings of Swami Satchidananda</b>
JULY	<b>Yoga Sutras Second Book— Sadhana Pada</b>	JULY	<b>I am That</b>
AUGUST	<b>Yoga Sutras Third Book— Vibhuti Pada</b>	AUGUST	<b>Krishna: The Attractive One</b>
SEPTEMBER	<b>Yoga Sutras Fourth Book— Kaivalya Pada</b>	SEPTEMBER	<b>Speciesism</b>
OCTOBER	<b>Yoga and Ayurveda</b>	OCTOBER	<b>Chakras</b>
NOVEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā</b>	NOVEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā</b>
DECEMBER	<b>The Other Yamas</b>	DECEMBER	<b>Meditation</b>

	<u>2002</u>		<u>2003</u>
JANUARY	<b>Meditation</b>	JANUARY	<b>Prana</b>
FEBRUARY	<b>The Sound of Yoga</b>	FEBRUARY	<b>Asana</b>
MARCH	<b>Shri Brahmananda Sarasvati</b>	MARCH	<b>Vinyasa Krama: The Forgotten Language of Sequencing Postures</b>
APRIL	<b>Warrior Poses</b>	APRIL	<b>Kriya</b>
MAY	<b>Introduction to the book: Jivamukti Yoga</b>	MAY	<b>Meditation</b>
JUNE	<b>Yoga in the West</b>	JUNE	<b>Nadam: Listening for the Unstruck Sound</b>
JULY	<b>The Roots of Yoga</b>	JULY	<b>Bhakti</b>
AUGUST	<b>Karma: What Yoga Think, Say, and Do</b>	AUGUST	<b>Yoga in the West</b>
SEPTEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā</b>	SEPTEMBER	<b>The Roots of Yoga: Back to the Source</b>
OCTOBER	<b>The Guru</b>	OCTOBER	<b>Karma</b>
NOVEMBER	<b>The Art of Yoga</b>	NOVEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā</b>
DECEMBER	<b>The Art of Yoga</b>	DECEMBER	<b>The Guru</b>

	<u>2004</u>		<u>2005</u>
JANUARY	<b>Daily Asana Practice</b>	JANUARY	<b>Nadam: Listening for the Unstruck Sound</b>
FEBRUARY	<b>The War Against Mother Nature</b>	FEBRUARY	<b>Bhakti</b>
MARCH	<b>Gossip</b>	MARCH	<b>Chakras</b>
APRIL	<b>Prana</b>	APRIL	<b>The Hatha Yoga Pradipika</b>
MAY	<b>Asana</b>	MAY	<b>I Am That</b>
JUNE	<b>Vinyasa Krama: The Forgotten Language of Sequencing Postures</b>	JUNE	<b>Teachings from the Bhagavad Gita</b>
JULY	<b>Kriya</b>	JULY	<b>Teachings from the Bhagavad Gita</b>
AUGUST	<b>Sadhana Pada</b>	AUGUST	<b>Teachings from the Bhagavad Gita</b>
SEPTEMBER	<b>Sadhana Pada</b>	SEPTEMBER	<b>Shri Brahmananda Sarasvati</b>
OCTOBER	<b>Political Activism/ Spiritual Activation</b>	OCTOBER	<b>Nadam: Listening for the Unstruck Sound</b>
NOVEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā</b>	NOVEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā</b>
DECEMBER	<b>Meditation</b>	DECEMBER	<b>The War Against Mother Nature</b>

	<u>2006</u>		<u>2007</u>
JANUARY	<b>Meditation</b>	JANUARY	<b>Ajna Chakra: Level Six</b>
FEBRUARY	<b>The Hatha Yoga Pradipika</b>	FEBRUARY	<b>Sahasrara Chakra: Level Seven</b>
MARCH	<b>The Hatha Yoga Pradipika</b>	MARCH	<b>Life is Like Sailing</b>
APRIL	<b>The Unfolding Life</b>	APRIL	<b>Trataka</b>
MAY	<b>Taking Yoga to the Next Level</b>	MAY	<b>Kapalabhati</b>
JUNE	<b>Blossoming Lotus</b>	JUNE	<b>Compass</b>
JULY	<b>Planting a Sound Garden</b>	JULY	<b>The Practice of Meditation</b>
AUGUST	<b>Muladhara Chakra: Level One</b>	AUGUST	<b>Beyond Civilization</b>
SEPTEMBER	<b>Swadhisthana Chakra: Level Two</b>	SEPTEMBER	<b>Prayer for Universal Peace</b>
OCTOBER	<b>Manipura Chakra: Level Three</b>	OCTOBER	<b>We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For</b>
NOVEMBER	<b>Anahata Chakra: Level Four</b>	NOVEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā: The Foundation of the Yoga Practice</b>
DECEMBER	<b>Vishuddha Chakra: Level Five</b>	DECEMBER	<b>Presence</b>

	<u>2008</u>		<u>2009</u>
JANUARY	<b>Secret Prayer</b>	JANUARY	<b>Laughter as a Yogic Practice</b>
FEBRUARY	<b>Ishvara Pranidhana: The Power of Surrender</b>	FEBRUARY	<b>Satya and Veganism</b>
MARCH	<b>Everyone Deserves Music</b>	MARCH	<b>Guru Mantra</b>
APRIL	<b>We Must Listen to Our Own Voice</b>	APRIL	<b>The Seat of Isis</b>
MAY	<b>Dialogue with Shri Anandamayee Ma</b>	MAY	<b>Man of Peace</b>
JUNE	<b>Swami Satchidananda: Apostle of Peace</b>	JUNE	<b>Addiction</b>
JULY	<b>How to Become a Master</b>	JULY	<b>The Path of Yoga</b>
AUGUST	<b>Devotion to Shri Krishna</b>	AUGUST	<b>Panoramic World</b>
SEPTEMBER	<b>Nadi Shodhana</b>	SEPTEMBER	<b>Amma</b>
OCTOBER	<b>Halloween and All Saints Day</b>	OCTOBER	<b>Non-Violent Communication</b>
NOVEMBER	<b>Compassion, Diet, Strength, &amp; Happiness</b>	NOVEMBER	<b>Ahiṃsā and Veganism</b>
DECEMBER	<b>Yoga Nidra and Shavasana</b>	DECEMBER	<b>Stories</b>

	<u>2010</u>		<u>2011</u>
JANUARY	<b>Om</b>	JANUARY	<b>Three Steps</b>
FEBRUARY	<b>Vinyasa Krama</b>	FEBRUARY	<b>The Sheltering Roof</b>
MARCH	<b>Radha-Krishna-Satsanga</b>	MARCH	<b>What is Yoga?</b>
APRIL	<b>Lokaḥ Samastāḥ Sukhino Bhavantu</b>	APRIL	<b>Music: The Language of the Universe</b>
MAY	<b>Fear</b>	MAY	<b>Yogic Detox</b>
JUNE	<b>Standing Asanas</b>	JUNE	<b>Practice and Non-Attachment</b>
JULY	<b>Forward into the Past</b>	JULY	<b>The Guru as Mirror</b>
AUGUST	<b>The Magical Power of Giving Blessings</b>	AUGUST	<b>Living Wild</b>
SEPTEMBER	<b>Daily Asana Practice</b>	SEPTEMBER	<b>One Job</b>
OCTOBER	<b>Valmiki</b>	OCTOBER	<b>2012—Making the Matrix</b>
NOVEMBER	<b>Asteya and Veganism</b>	NOVEMBER	<b>Brahmacharya and Veganism</b>
DECEMBER	<b>Sweeping the Dust</b>	DECEMBER	<b>Where Does She Go at Night?</b>

	<u>2012</u>		<u>2013</u>
JANUARY	<b>Kirtan</b>	JANUARY	<b>Vibhuti—The Way of Power</b>
FEBRUARY	<b>Comfort in the City</b>	FEBRUARY	<b>Shake it Up Baby</b>
MARCH	<b>Closing the Gates: Te Practice of Dying</b>	MARCH	<b>Sickness, Disease, and Death</b>
APRIL	<b>Say Om While Dying (or Die to OM)</b>	APRIL	<b>To Bury or to Burn?</b>
MAY	<b>Renaissnace</b>	MAY	<b>Back Into the Future</b>
JUNE	<b>Being at Ease with Mantra</b>	JUNE	<b>That's It</b>
JULY	<b>Yoga and Sexuality</b>	JULY	<b>Overcoming Negative Emotions</b>
AUGUST	<b>Love Everybody and Tell the Truth</b>	AUGUST	<b>Gopal</b>
SEPTEMBER	<b>Atha Yoga-anushasanam</b>	SEPTEMBER	<b>Asana and Bhakti—What Does Love Have to Do With It?</b>
OCTOBER	<b>Sacred Geometry</b>	OCTOBER	<b>With That Moon Language</b>
NOVEMBER	<b>Aparigraha and Veganism</b>	NOVEMBER	<b>Progressing Toward Kindness</b>
DECEMBER	<b>Satsang</b>	DECEMBER	<b>Time Management</b>

APPENDIX B  
SANSKRIT GLOSSARY

*abhiniveśa*: one of the five *kleśa*; fear of death, clinging to life

*ahiṃsā*: first *yama*; non-violence, non-injury

*Āraṇyaka Yoga*: Yoga of Going into the Forest; category formulated by Laura Cornell

*aparigraha*: one of the *yama*; non-hoarding, greedlessness, non-covetousness

*āsana*: posture, pose, seat; third step of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*

*asmitā*: one of the five *kleśa*; egoism

*asteya*: one of the *yama*; non-stealing

*Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*: eight-limbed path of yoga as outlined in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali;  
Modern Postural Yoga system of K. Pattabhi Jois

*avidyā*: ignorance

*Bhagavadgītā*: section of the famous Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*.

*bhakti*: devotion

*bhakti-yoga*: yoga of devotion

*brahmacarya*: one of the *niyama*; self-restraint, celibacy, continence

*citta-vṛtti*: fluctuations of the mind

*darśana*: philosophical tradition

*dhāraṇā*: concentration; sixth step of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*

*dhyāna*: meditation; seventh step of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*

*duḥkha*: suffering

*dveṣa*: one of the *kleśa*; aversion or dislike

*guru shishya sampradāyam*: tradition and lineage of knowledge passed from *guru*  
(teacher) to disciple

*haṭha*: forceful; yokes sun (*ha*) and moon (*ṭha*)

*haṭha-yoga*: one of six primary methods of yoga in India; combines poses (*āsanas*), breath control techniques (*prāṇāyāma*), locks (*bandhas*), and seals (*mudrās*)

*īśvara praṇidhāna*: one of the *niyama*; dedication to God

*jīvan*: individual soul

*jīvan-mukta*: living liberated

*jñāna-yoga*: yoga of knowledge

*karma*: action; law of cause and effect

*karma-yoga*: yoga of action, selfless service

*kleśa*: affliction; five in number—ignorance (*avidyā*), egoism (*asmitā*), attachment (*rāga*), revulsion (*dveṣa*), and fear of death (*abhiniveśa*)

*kośa*: sheath or body

*kula*: family or intentional community

*lokaḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu*: cornerstone mantra of the Jivamukti Yoga School; “May all beings everywhere be happy and free”

*Mahābhārata*: Indian epic literature; 200 BCE—400CE

*mantra*: mental device; subtle sound vibration; repetition of sound or word

*mokṣa/ mukti*: liberation from the cycles of birth and death

*nāda-yoga*: yoga of sound

*niyama*: observances, five in number—cleanliness (*śauca*), contentment (*santoṣa*), austerity (*tapah*), self-study (*svādhyāya*), and devotion to God (*īśvara praṇidhāna*)

*Patañjali*: attributed compiler of the *Yoga-Sūtra*

*prāṇāyāma*: breath restraint; technique of breathing and breath retention; fourth step of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*

*pratyāhāra*: sense withdrawal; fifth step of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*

*rāja-yoga*: royal yoga; classical yoga

*rāga*: one of the *kleśa*; attachment

*sādhana*: practice

*samādhi*: culmination of meditation; enlightenment; eighth step of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*

*saṃsāra*: cycle of birth and death

*saṃyama*: same restraint; threefold process of concentration, meditation, and enlightenment

*Saṅgha Yoga*: Yoga of Sacred Community; category formulated by Laura Cornell

*santoṣa*: one of the *yama*; contentment

*satya*: one of the *yama*; truthfulness

*śāstra*: scripture

*śauca*: one of the *niyama*; purity, cleanliness

*sūtra*: thread; aphorism

*svādhyāya*: one of the *niyama*; self-study and study of the texts regarding realization of the self

*tapah*: one of *niyama*; austerity

*Upaniṣad*: books of the *Vedas*, containing knowledge revealed by guru to disciple. These are the realizations of the sages concerning reality and real identity and the nature of individual consciousness

*Yoga Sūtra*: Foundational Sanskrit text for the philosophical school of Yoga in the lineage of attributed author, Patañjali. Compiled roughly during 350-450 CE

*Yogin*: practitioner of yoga

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Informed Consent Form**

**Protocol Title:** The Cultural Evolution of Modern Ecological Yoga

**\*Please read this consent document carefully before deciding to participate\***

**Purpose of the research study:**

The purpose of this study is to discover the inherent connections (if any) between traditional Yoga philosophy in general, and the Jivamukti Yoga School and Off the Mat, Into the World in particular, and environmental activism.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:**

During this study you will be asked a number of questions during a one-on-one interview, performed by myself, Keri Johnson. These questions will range from your previous exposure to yoga, specific yoga traditions you practice, why you practice yoga, whether or not you have experienced any benefits (in body and/or mind) since you first began practicing yoga, and what are (if any) connections between the Jivamukti Yoga School and Off the Mat, Into the World and environmental activism.

**Time required:**

1 hour

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2012-U-0125  
For Use Through 02-06-2013

**Risks and Benefits:**

There are no risks or benefits for being involved with this study.

**Compensation:**

There is no compensation for being involved with this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. With your prior consent, your name and associated school or organization will be used in my Master's Thesis at the University of Florida.

**Voluntary participation:**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

**Right to withdraw from the study:**

You have the right to withdraw from this study at anytime.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:**

Professor Whitney Sanford  
(352) 392-1625  
or Keri Johnson  
(201) 317-5894  
keriljohnson@ufl.edu  
107 Anderson Hall  
P. O. Box 117410  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611-7410

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2012-U-0125  
For Use Through 02-06-2013

**Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:**

IRB02 Office  
Box 112250  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250  
(352) 392-0433

**Agreement:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and I have received a copy of this description for my records.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Prior to attending the University of Florida for her graduate studies, Keri Johnson completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Vermont, with a BA in Environmental Studies and Plant and Soil Science. For her undergraduate honors thesis, she co-created and co-taught a course entitled, "Yogic Environmental Philosophy" executed at the University. Johnson will further her graduate studies at the University of Florida's Counselor Education department, where she will focus on bridging the philosophy and praxis of Modern Ecological Yoga with mental health counseling. Johnson has been whole-heartedly devoted to and fascinated by the dynamic and therapeutic practices of yoga since the late nineties.