

Yoga Ethics & Therapeutics

Eastside Yoga, Windsor, Ontario
Sunday, January 5, 2012, 1-6 PM

The Guest House

**This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.**

**A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.**

**Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.**

**The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond. ~ Rumi**

Om saha Na-vava-tu

May we, teacher and student be protected together.

Saha nau bhunaktu

May we enjoy the fruits of our actions together.

Saha vir-yam kara-va-vahai

May we achieve strength together.

Teja-svi na-va-dhitam astu

May our knowledge be full of light.

Ma vidvi-sah-vahai

May there never be discord between us

Om shantih, shantih, shanti

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To be ethical is to realize our complete interdependence with all beings and all living things. It is to know – in the deepest sense that it is possible to know – that everything we think, say, or do has an effect, both on ourselves and on others. If we had already achieved this level of self-realization or unitive state (which is in essence the true meaning of yoga), the issue of ethics would be moot. But because few of us have achieved this kind of absolute clarity, and because Yoga is a lifelong apprenticeship in which our own life is the laboratory of inquiry, the desire to be ethical requires an ongoing practice of reflection.

Donna Farhi

A yoga teacher is responsible for clear and concise communication which supports the safest, most productive environment.

A yoga student is responsible for implementing the practice in a manner that maintains the highest respect for self.

“Ethical behavior is reverence for life demonstrated by right relationship to another” *The Ethics of Caring: Honoring the Web of Life in our professional Healing Relationships* by Kylea Taylor

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Ethics in Action

First do no harm:

As teachers, we should:

- have the skills of observation and appropriate knowledge to maximize safety.
- never intimidate or encourage anybody to do something with which they are truly not comfortable.
- have knowledge of and provide a range of alternatives for each posture to suit a variety of needs.
- err on the side of caution when unsure about anything
- facilitate development mindfully based on the principles of yoga.

Promote inclusivity:

As teachers we should employ inclusive language and not treat people in a discriminatory manner based on their “being”. *Being* refers to:

- gender,
- ethnicity,
- body size and shape,
- sexual orientation,
- age,
- mental or physical ability.

Promote equality:

As teachers we must not treat people in a discriminatory manner based on their circumstances. *Circumstances* refers to:

- financial resources,
- occupation,
- level of education,

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- 4• personal presentation,
- lifestyle choices.

Employ the highest standards of professionalism:

This includes the following:

- Start and finish sessions/classes on time.
- Avoid using inappropriate language.
- Adapt your personal presentation to the situation.
- Use self disclosure should only to elucidate a teaching point and to increase empathy between student and teacher.
- Abstain from sexual innuendo, sexual jokes, or sexual behavior.
- With awareness of the tendency for transference and counter-transference in a teacher-student relationship, the highest awareness and sensitivity must be maintained at all times and acted upon appropriately.

The yoga teacher offers encouragement and faith in a student's capacity to heal and flourish. There is an obligation to make it clear that it is the student's connection with his/her own inner wisdom that is the ultimate goal. Never promoting the notion that we are the dispensers of healing, only guides, our role is to facilitate the journey of the student in gaining mastery of their own healing and growth.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN THE DETERMINATION OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

*Am I treating this student as I would want to be treated? How would I feel if I was the receiver of the treatment?

*After class, after the session, after the conversation how will I feel? Am I comfortable with my words, actions, directions, and the information imparted?

*Are my actions or words causing suffering for me or anyone else?

*If I have spoken, guided or taught in this manner in the past, have I been comfortable afterward. Did I have to cover-up or explain away what I did?

*If I was a student in this class, how might I perceive my actions, words, directions, etc?

*Do I feel a discrepancy between what I am offering, guiding, doing and what I believe?

ETHICAL TOUCH IN THE YOGA CLASSROOM

*Set the stage.

*Ask permission.

*Breathe with the student.

*Consider the age, physical condition and gender of the student.

*Touch bone-to-bone i.e., a firm touch. *A more gentle touch may be advised if the student is elderly or has a disability or injury.*

*Adjust if there is a reason, not by a formula.

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*Touch should guide the student to deepen their practice; to go more fully into the asana.

*Be aware that the student who was comfortable being adjusted yesterday may feel differently today.

*Watch the student's breath during the adjustment.

*Intuit the student's openness to adjustments today by first entering their space, standing nearby and breathing with them, observing them when you begin to touch, sensing through the physical contact whether they are ready and willing to flow with you, maintaining and continuing to breathe with them when their body signals that the body has opened to its fullest extent – today.

*Apologize if you happen to touch a more intimate part of the anatomy - *it will happen*.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING MEDICAL ISSUES

* Prior to the beginning of class, ask whether students have any injuries or health concerns.

*Ask them whether they have spoken with their health practitioner and what had been advised.

*Encourage them to follow their health practitioner's advice (even if you do not agree) and *to listen to their own innate intelligence!*

*Acknowledge the limitations of yoga teaching.

*Refer the student to another teacher if you feel out of your depth of knowledge.

*Emphasize the role of licensed health professionals in dispensing health advice.

*Beware of nutritional recommendations.

*Appropriately acknowledge student's health concerns.

*Let the proof be through the practice: students will draw their own conclusions when they experience improvement or resolution of a health condition.

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Yoga is Therapy Yoga as Therapy

If you change the angle of any joint in the body, every other joint in the body compensates for this. Thus, change the angle at the ankle, and the sacrum, pelvis, and every vertebra and joint in the body compensates to sustain the harmonic of wholeness.

Berger, Esoteric Anatomy

Setting the classroom stage to enhance healing, wellness and growth is an art. The following are but a few points to take into consideration when taking your yoga teaching to a deeper, more therapeutic level.

*The foundation of the practice is the breath. The greatest support and guidance a teacher can offer is to elaborate on and emphasize the breath.

*With an understanding of anatomy and alignment develop, a collection of ways and means to describe and illustrate the poses.

*As often as possible when approaching a student emphasize the beauty in the pose. Only then offer guidance to make the pose safer, a modification to make the pose more accessible or a suggestion that might enable the practitioner to deepen even more.

*Modifications support students to become more aware of their physical selves and enable them to delve more deeply into their practice. Offer them options but also encourage the students to discover their own.

*Modify gross misalignments first. Do not worry about the minor misalignments that may easily be corrected later.

*Take into consideration the age and physical condition of the student.

*Emphasize the infrastructure and the actions of the body, not the outer form.

*When offering props, modifications or adjustments make sure that the student is aware that you are nearby. Ask permission to touch or offer props.

*Ask for feedback and listen to the student's answer.

*Get a feel for the student...whether they are willing to accept direction or want to be left alone. If you sense you are unwelcome, only offer verbal feedback on a gross misalignment.

*Avoid overcorrection. Direction is good, but over-direction can leave the student feeling like a failure or frustrated.

Yoga is a practice - there is no perfection.

Yoga is a journey - there is no destination.

Open to the possibilities...your life may not change but how you experience it will most certainly be altered.