

# SKM YOGA

*Yoga Teacher Training Series*

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## ETHICS AND INTEGRITY OF A YOGA TEACHER

*A Complete Guide in 15 Lessons for Yoga Teacher Training*

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*Compiled by*

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Founder, SKM Yoga

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## Foreword

In the long and luminous history of yoga, the teacher -- the Guru -- has occupied a position of sacred trust. Not merely as an instructor of postures or breathing techniques, but as a guide, a guardian, and a living embodiment of the teachings. The ancient texts speak of the Guru-Shishya parampara -- the lineage of transmission from teacher to student -- as the very lifeblood of the yogic tradition. And at the heart of that tradition has always been one non-negotiable foundation: integrity.

We live in an era of yoga's global flowering. Millions of people across every continent have found healing, peace, strength, and meaning through this ancient science. Yet this very expansion has brought with it new challenges -- challenges of commercialization, misrepresentation, exploitation, and the erosion of the sacred relationship between teacher and student. Hardly a year passes without news of a celebrated yoga teacher whose conduct has betrayed the trust of students, damaged communities, and brought the practice into disrepute.

This is why the study of Ethics and Integrity is not a peripheral subject in our teacher training curriculum -- it is central to it. A yoga teacher who understands anatomy but lacks ethical grounding is not ready to teach. A yoga teacher who has mastered pranayama but exploits the vulnerability of students is not a yoga teacher at all -- they are a danger wearing the costume of one.

This book has been written to give you -- the yoga teacher in training -- a thorough, honest, and practically grounded education in the ethics and integrity that must form the bedrock of your teaching life. Drawing from the ancient Yamas and Niyamas of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, from classical Ayurvedic and Vedantic ethics, and from modern professional codes of conduct across the helping professions, these fifteen lessons map the entire ethical landscape that every conscientious yoga teacher must navigate.

Read these lessons slowly. Sit with them. Discuss them with your fellow students and with your teachers. Apply them to real situations -- to the difficult questions that arise in actual yoga classrooms, in student-teacher relationships, in business dealings, and in your own inner life. Ethics is not a set of rules to memorize; it is a way of being that must be lived, practiced, and continually refined.

The world needs yoga teachers of genuine integrity now more than ever. I trust that these pages will help you become one.

**-- Dr. Shivam Mishra**  
*Founder, SKM Yoga | Shimla, 2025*

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## Introduction: Why Ethics Matters for Yoga Teachers

Before we enter the fifteen lessons of this book, let us pause to ask the most fundamental question: why must a yoga teacher study ethics at all? Is it not enough to master the asanas, to know the pranayamas, to understand anatomy and alignment, to be able to sequence a beautiful class and speak eloquently about the philosophy of yoga?

The answer -- unequivocally -- is no. And the reason is simple: yoga teachers work with human beings in states of vulnerability. When a student enters a yoga class, they bring with them not just their body but their entire life -- their stress, their trauma history, their insecurities, their longings, their physical injuries, their emotional wounds, their spiritual questions. They place themselves - - quite literally -- in your hands. They trust you with their body, with their breath, with their innermost experience.

That trust is sacred. And sacred trust demands ethical responsibility.

Furthermore, the yoga teacher-student relationship is inherently unequal in terms of power. The teacher knows more, holds authority, controls the environment, and is perceived by many students as something of a spiritual guide or life expert. This power differential -- whether consciously acknowledged or not -- creates both the potential for profound positive influence and the potential for serious harm.

History has repeatedly shown that even revered teachers -- those with decades of practice, global followings, and genuine gifts -- have caused devastating harm when ethical grounding was absent. The harm takes many forms: physical injury from inappropriate adjustments, psychological damage from authoritarian or shaming teaching styles, sexual exploitation of students, financial manipulation, cultural appropriation, and the creation of cult-like dependency rather than authentic liberation.

Yoga is, above all, a practice of liberation -- Moksha, Mukti, freedom from the bondage of unconscious patterns. An unethical yoga teacher becomes, paradoxically, yet another agent of bondage -- creating dependency, fear, shame, or harm rather than freedom. An ethical yoga teacher, by contrast, supports students in becoming more free, more autonomous, more whole - - guiding them toward their own inner authority rather than dependence on the teacher.

*The true Guru does not create followers. The true Guru creates Gurus. -- Ancient Vedantic Teaching*

These fifteen lessons are not merely theoretical. Each lesson is rooted in the real world of yoga teaching -- in the situations you will actually encounter in your studio, your online classes, your personal interactions with students, and your own inner life as a practitioner. Each lesson includes ancient wisdom, modern professional ethics, practical guidelines, reflective exercises, and case studies drawn from the full spectrum of yoga teaching experience.

We begin where all genuine yoga begins: with the self. Because before you can act with integrity toward others, you must first cultivate integrity within.

# LESSON 1

## The Foundation: What Is Ethics and Why Yoga Teachers Need It

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*"Before you can teach yoga, you must live yoga." -- Sri T. Krishnamacharya*

# Lesson 1: The Foundation -- What Is Ethics and Why Yoga Teachers Need It

## 1.1 Defining Ethics

Ethics is the branch of knowledge and practice concerned with the question: how should we live and act in relation to others? It asks not merely 'what is legal?' or 'what can I get away with?' but the far deeper question: 'what is right?' Ethics is the systematic study and practice of moral principles -- the standards of conduct that distinguish right from wrong, harm from help, integrity from its absence.

For a yoga teacher, ethics is not an external rulebook imposed by a certification body or studio owner. Ethics is -- or must become -- an internal compass, a cultivated capacity for discernment that operates naturally in every interaction with students, colleagues, employers, and the wider community. Just as a skilled surgeon's ethics are inseparable from their surgical practice, a yoga teacher's ethics must be inseparable from their teaching.

## 1.2 Three Levels of Ethical Concern for Yoga Teachers

Level	Description	Examples
Personal Ethics	The values and principles that govern your inner life, your personal conduct, and your private relationships	Honesty in self-assessment, consistency between private and public behavior, ongoing personal practice
Professional Ethics	Standards governing your conduct as a yoga teacher -- your obligations to students, colleagues, and the broader yoga community	Informed consent, maintaining boundaries, competence within your scope, confidentiality
Institutional Ethics	Standards governing the organizations, schools, and systems within which yoga is taught and transmitted	Fair pricing, inclusive access, anti-discrimination policies, transparency in teacher training

## 1.3 The Unique Ethical Position of the Yoga Teacher

The yoga teacher occupies a role that is unlike almost any other in modern professional life. Unlike a fitness instructor who simply guides movement, or a counselor who maintains strict professional distance, or a priest who operates within the structure of an established religious institution, the yoga teacher is simultaneously:

- A physical trainer guiding the body

- A breathing coach working with the nervous system
- A mindfulness guide working with the mind
- A philosophical educator transmitting worldview and values
- A community builder creating belonging and connection
- Often perceived as a spiritual guide or mentor

This multi-dimensional role creates multi-dimensional ethical responsibilities. Because you work simultaneously with body, breath, mind, and spirit, your potential for both positive influence and harm is correspondingly profound. A physical therapist who gives poor advice affects the body. A yoga teacher who acts unethically can affect the body, the psyche, the spiritual life, and the social world of their students simultaneously.

### 1.4 Why Yoga's Own Tradition Demands Ethics First

It is no accident that in Patanjali's Ashtanga (eight-limbed) yoga, the very first two limbs are Yamas (ethical restraints) and Niyamas (personal observances) -- ethical practice -- before any mention of Asana (posture), Pranayama (breathwork), or the inner practices of meditation. This sequence is not arbitrary. Patanjali was explicit: without the ethical foundation, all further practice is built on sand.

*Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of the mind. But this cessation cannot be achieved without the purification that comes from ethical living. The Yamas and Niyamas are not merely moral rules -- they are the very soil in which the yogic mind can grow. -- Commentary on Yoga Sutras, 2.29*

The Bhagavad Gita similarly places Dharma -- righteous ethical duty -- at the very heart of the spiritual path. Lord Krishna's teaching to Arjuna is fundamentally an ethical teaching: act rightly, from your deepest nature, without attachment to personal gain. This is precisely the standard to which every yoga teacher must hold themselves.

### 1.5 Ethics vs. Law vs. Rules: Understanding the Differences

Concept	Meaning and Application in Yoga Teaching
Law	Legal requirements in your jurisdiction -- liability, health and safety, data protection, employment law. These are the minimum floor, not the ceiling of ethical conduct.
Professional Rules	Standards set by certification bodies (Yoga Alliance, BCCMA, etc.). These provide important baselines but may not cover all ethical situations you will encounter.
Organizational Policies	The specific rules of the studio, school, or

	organization where you teach. Important to know and follow, but again a floor rather than a ceiling.
Personal Ethics	Your own deepest values and principles -- these are the standard by which you must judge yourself when no external rule applies. Cultivating this internal compass is the central goal of ethical education.

## 1.6 The Cost of Ethical Failure

The consequences of ethical failure in yoga teaching are severe and far-reaching. Understanding these consequences -- honestly and without minimization -- is part of the ethical education of every yoga teacher.

### 1.6.1 Harm to Students

When a yoga teacher violates the trust of a student, the student is harmed. This harm may be physical (from inappropriate adjustments or pushing beyond safe limits), psychological (from shame, humiliation, exploitation, or confusion about the teacher-student relationship), financial (from deceptive business practices or manipulative upselling), or spiritual (from having one's genuine spiritual seeking exploited or mocked). Because students often come to yoga in states of vulnerability -- seeking healing from trauma, chronic illness, grief, anxiety, or existential confusion -- these harms can be especially devastating.

### 1.6.2 Harm to the Yoga Community

Ethical violations by individual teachers harm not just their direct victims but the entire yoga community. When a teacher is exposed for misconduct, the damage ripples outward: other students in their community may feel betrayed, confused, or ashamed of their association; the reputation of yoga as a healing practice is damaged; and other dedicated, ethical teachers suffer the consequences of guilt by association.

### 1.6.3 Harm to the Teacher

Unethical behavior ultimately harms the teacher themselves. The destruction of reputation, the loss of livelihood, the legal consequences, the severing of professional relationships, and -- most profoundly -- the damage to one's own sense of integrity and spiritual development are all consequences of ethical failure. Many teachers who have caused harm have done so not from pure malice but from a combination of poor training, unchecked power, unconscious biases, and the gradual erosion of ethical boundaries that happens when no one holds the teacher

accountable. This is precisely why ethical education must be thorough, ongoing, and deeply personal.

## 1.7 Reflection and Practice: The Ethical Self-Inventory

### Lesson 1 Reflective Practice: Your Ethical Self-Inventory

Take time with these questions. Write your responses in a dedicated journal. Be honest -- this exercise is for your own growth, not for assessment.

1. What values were you raised with regarding honesty, fairness, and care for others? How have these evolved through your own yoga and life experience?

2. Think of a time when you witnessed or experienced ethical misconduct in a yoga or fitness setting. What happened? What was its impact? What would you have done differently?

3. What aspects of the yoga teacher's ethical responsibility feel most challenging or unclear to you? Where do you anticipate your own temptations or blind spots?

4. Who are your ethical role models -- in yoga and in life? What specific qualities do they embody that you admire and aspire to?

5. Complete this sentence: 'As a yoga teacher, my deepest ethical commitment is to...' Return to this sentence at the end of this course to see how your answer has evolved.

# LESSON 2

## The Ancient Ethical Framework: Yamas and Niyamas

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*"Yoga is the journey of the self, through the self, to the self." -- Bhagavad Gita*

# Lesson 2: The Ancient Ethical Framework -- Yamas and Niyamas

## 2.1 Introduction to the Ethical Limbs of Yoga

More than two thousand years ago, the sage Patanjali codified the Yoga Sutras -- a masterwork of psychological and spiritual guidance that remains the most comprehensive and authoritative text of classical yoga. In the second chapter (Sadhana Pada), Patanjali describes the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga, and he places at their very foundation ten ethical principles: the five Yamas (social restraints) and the five Niyamas (personal observances).

These ten principles are not merely moral rules for monks or renunciates. They are -- as generations of yoga masters have confirmed -- the very foundation of genuine human flourishing and the prerequisite for all authentic yogic progress. For the yoga teacher, they constitute the most ancient and most enduring code of professional ethics available.

## 2.2 The Five Yamas -- Ethical Restraints in Social Life

### 2.2.1 Ahimsa -- Non-Harming

Ahimsa (Sanskrit: non-violence, non-harming) is universally considered the first and most fundamental of all yogic ethics. It encompasses not just the obvious prohibition of physical violence but the entire spectrum of potential harm: harm through words (verbal cruelty, shaming, belittling), harm through thoughts (contempt, prejudice, ill-will), harm through actions (inappropriate touch, pushing students beyond safe limits, exploitation), and harm through inaction (failing to speak up when a student is in danger, neglecting your duty of care).

For the yoga teacher, Ahimsa translates into an absolute commitment to the physical and psychological safety of every student. Before you adjust, before you correct, before you challenge, before you confront -- you must ask: could this cause harm? The question must be asked not only about dramatic situations but about the subtle, daily accumulations of how you speak to students, how you frame difficulty, whether you create an atmosphere of acceptance or judgment in your classroom.

#### Ahimsa in the Yoga Classroom -- Practical Applications

**PHYSICAL:** Never force a student deeper into a posture than their body freely allows. Always honor verbal and non-verbal signals of pain, discomfort, or resistance. Modifications are never signs of failure -- they are expressions of intelligent self-awareness.

**VERBAL:** Language matters enormously in the yoga classroom. Words like 'wrong,' 'bad,' 'you

should be able to do this by now,' and comparisons between students all constitute subtle verbal violence. Replace them with language of invitation, curiosity, and acceptance.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL:** Do not use the yoga class as a platform for your own unprocessed emotional material. Projecting your frustrations, insecurities, or judgments onto students -- even unconsciously -- is a form of psychological harm.

**ENVIRONMENTAL:** Ahimsa extends to the environment. Is your studio physically accessible? Is it economically accessible? Is it emotionally safe for students of diverse backgrounds, bodies, and abilities? Creating barriers to participation is a form of harm.

**TOWARD YOURSELF:** A yoga teacher who neglects their own wellbeing -- who teaches from a place of exhaustion, chronic stress, or unhealed trauma -- cannot sustainably practice Ahimsa toward others. Self-care is an ethical obligation, not a luxury.

### 2.2.2 Satya -- Truthfulness

Satya (Sanskrit: truth, truthfulness) requires that the yoga teacher speak and act truthfully in all situations. This is a more complex and nuanced obligation than it might initially appear. Truthfulness in yoga teaching means: being honest about your qualifications and the limits of your expertise; accurately representing what yoga can and cannot do for students with specific conditions; being honest in your marketing and pricing; being truthful in feedback to students (neither falsely flattering nor harshly critical); and maintaining congruence between what you teach and how you live.

Satya also demands that yoga teachers be honest with themselves -- practicing rigorous self-examination rather than the self-deception that often accompanies the inflation of the teacher's ego. When a student questions your instruction, Satya requires you to genuinely consider whether they might be right. When you make a mistake, Satya requires acknowledgment rather than defensiveness. When you lack knowledge, Satya requires the humility to say: I don't know -- but I will find out.

### 2.2.3 Asteya -- Non-Stealing

Asteya (Sanskrit: non-stealing) prohibits not only the obvious taking of material possessions but the full range of subtler forms of taking that which is not freely given. For yoga teachers, Asteya applies in several crucial areas. Intellectual theft -- presenting others' sequences, teachings, or creative work as your own -- is a common violation that must be carefully avoided. Attribution to lineage, teachers, and sources is not merely courtesy; it is ethical obligation.

Asteya also speaks to the misuse of the teacher's position to take emotional, psychological, or material advantage of students. Taking a student's admiration and converting it into personal gratification, using students as sources of validation for the teacher's ego, or accepting gifts and

special treatment in ways that create inappropriate dependency all violate the principle of Asteya. The teacher's role is to give -- not to take.

### **2.2.4 Brahmacharya -- Right Use of Vital Energy**

Brahmacharya (Sanskrit: moving toward the Divine; traditionally translated as celibacy or sexual restraint) is, in its deepest application, the principle of right use of vital energy -- using one's life force in ways that serve the highest good rather than in service of unconscious impulse, ego gratification, or exploitation of others. For yoga teachers, this principle has particularly critical applications regarding sexual ethics.

Sexual relationships between yoga teachers and current students are ethically prohibited -- not merely discouraged. The power differential inherent in the teacher-student relationship makes genuine, fully informed consent impossible. What appears to be mutual attraction in this context is almost always significantly shaped by the student's transference of trust, admiration, and often idealization onto the teacher. The teacher who pursues romantic or sexual relationship with a current student is violating Brahmacharya, exploiting their position of power, and causing harm regardless of the perceived mutuality of the connection.

### **2.2.5 Aparigraha -- Non-Possessiveness**

Aparigraha (Sanskrit: non-grasping, non-hoarding) calls the yoga teacher to release attachment -- to outcomes, to reputation, to the control of students, to financial accumulation beyond genuine need. In practice, this means: teaching for the student's growth rather than for the teacher's validation; releasing students when they outgrow you (or when a different teacher would serve them better) rather than fostering dependency; pricing your services fairly rather than maximizing extraction; and measuring success by the liberation of your students rather than by your own accumulation of followers, status, or income.

## **2.3 The Five Niyamas -- Personal Observances**

### **2.3.1 Saucha -- Purity and Cleanliness**

Saucha (Sanskrit: cleanliness, purity) applies at every level -- physical, mental, emotional, and environmental. Physically, it requires that the yoga teacher maintain impeccable personal hygiene and that their teaching environment is clean, safe, and properly maintained. Mentally and emotionally, Saucha calls for the ongoing purification of one's mind -- releasing prejudices, examining unconscious biases, processing one's own psychological material through therapy, supervision, or deep personal practice rather than inadvertently projecting it into the teaching space.

### 2.3.2 Santosha -- Contentment

Santosha (Sanskrit: contentment, satisfaction) is the quality of finding completeness in the present moment -- of teaching from fullness rather than from neediness. The yoga teacher who lacks Santosha teaches partly to fill their own emotional needs -- craving the approval, admiration, and dependency of students to compensate for inner emptiness. This creates a teaching relationship that is subtly (or overtly) about the teacher's needs rather than the student's wellbeing. Cultivating genuine Santosha through a rich personal practice, fulfilling relationships, and honest self-examination is one of the most important ethical preparations for teaching.

### 2.3.3 Tapas -- Disciplined Practice

Tapas (Sanskrit: heat, austerity, disciplined effort) is the commitment to ongoing practice and self-development. For the yoga teacher, Tapas is the ethical obligation to continually maintain and deepen your own practice, to pursue ongoing education, to seek supervision and mentorship, and to do the difficult inner work that teaching demands. A yoga teacher who has ceased to practice yoga seriously -- who teaches from memory and habit rather than from living experience -- is violating Tapas and, by extension, the trust of their students.

### 2.3.4 Svadhyaya -- Self-Study

Svadhyaya (Sanskrit: self-study, self-inquiry) requires the yoga teacher to engage in ongoing, honest examination of their own motivations, patterns, biases, and blind spots. This is the inner counterpart of professional development -- not just learning more about yoga externally, but continually examining the self that is doing the teaching. Svadhyaya might manifest as regular journaling, meditation focused on self-inquiry, working with a therapist or mentor, reading texts that challenge your assumptions, and seeking honest feedback from students and colleagues.

### 2.3.5 Ishvara Pranidhana -- Surrender to a Higher Purpose

Ishvara Pranidhana (Sanskrit: surrender to the Divine, dedication to a higher purpose) calls the yoga teacher to orient their teaching not toward personal aggrandizement but toward service of something greater than the self -- toward the wellbeing of students, the integrity of the tradition, the healing of the community. A teacher who teaches from Ishvara Pranidhana is not serving their own ego; they are serving the practice itself, the students, and the lineage. This orientation creates a natural ethical anchor that makes many of the more difficult ethical choices clearer and simpler.

## 2.4 The Yamas and Niyamas as Living Practice

Yama / Niyama	Core Application for Yoga Teachers
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Ahimsa (Non-harming)	Physical and psychological safety, inclusive language, honoring student limits
Satya (Truthfulness)	Honest marketing, accurate scope of practice, genuine feedback
Asteya (Non-stealing)	Proper attribution, no exploitation of student trust or resources
Brahmacharya (Right energy use)	Sexual ethics, appropriate boundaries, wise use of teaching energy
Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness)	Student autonomy, fair pricing, releasing attachment to outcomes
Saucha (Purity)	Hygiene, clean environment, psychological self-purification
Santosha (Contentment)	Teaching from wholeness, not from personal neediness
Tapas (Discipline)	Ongoing personal practice and professional development
Svadyaya (Self-study)	Regular self-examination, supervision, and reflective practice
Ishvara Pranidhana (Higher purpose)	Service orientation, ego-surrender, dedication to student welfare

## 2.5 Lesson 2 Practice: The Daily Ethical Examination

The Yoga Teacher's Evening Ethical Reflection
At the end of each teaching day, before sleep, take 10-15 minutes with these questions:
AHIMSA: Did I cause any harm today -- through action, word, or neglect? What could I do differently tomorrow?
SATYA: Was I truthful today -- with students, with myself, in how I represented my knowledge and capabilities?
ASTEYA: Did I take anything that was not freely given -- credit, emotional support, admiration, material things?
BRAHMACHARYA: Did I use my energy wisely today? Did I maintain appropriate professional boundaries in all interactions?
APARIGRAHA: Was I grasping -- at outcomes, at validation, at control of students? Where did I release and where did I hold too tightly?
SAUCHA: Was my teaching environment -- physical and emotional -- as clean and safe as I could make it?
SANTOSHA: Did I teach from a place of contentment and fullness, or was I seeking something from my students?
TAPAS: Did I maintain my own practice today? Did I invest in my own growth and development?

SVADHYAYA: Did I examine my own patterns honestly? Did I seek feedback and approach my limitations with courage?

ISHVARA PRANIDHANA: Was my teaching today oriented toward my students' liberation, or toward my own glory?

# LESSON 3

## Ahimsa in Teaching: The Practice of Non-Harming

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*"Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind." -- Mahatma Gandhi*

# Lesson 3: Ahimsa in Teaching -- The Practice of Non-Harming

## 3.1 Understanding Ahimsa in Depth

Ahimsa -- non-harming -- is considered by virtually every school of Indian philosophy to be the supreme ethical principle. The Yoga Sutras place it first among the Yamas; the Jain tradition elevates it to the status of the highest spiritual law; Gandhi demonstrated its world-changing power in political life. For the yoga teacher, Ahimsa is not merely the first ethical principle -- it is the lens through which every other ethical question must be seen.

What does it mean to practice Ahimsa as a yoga teacher? At its most basic, it means committing to do no harm -- to students, to the practice, to the tradition, to the environment. But true Ahimsa is not passive; it is profoundly active. It is not merely the absence of violence but the presence of compassion, care, and the active will to protect and support those in your charge.

## 3.2 Physical Ahimsa -- The Safety of the Body

### 3.2.1 Understanding Injury in Yoga

Yoga-related injuries are far more common than the popular image of yoga as a gentle, safe practice suggests. Research indicates that a significant proportion of regular yoga practitioners experience injury at some point, with the most common sites being the lower back, knee, shoulder, neck, and hamstring. Many of these injuries are not the result of students falling or overextending on their own -- they are the result of inappropriate teaching: pushing students beyond their limits, applying adjustments without adequate training, encouraging students to work through pain, or failing to offer appropriate modifications for specific conditions.

### 3.2.2 The Principle of Do No Harm in Physical Teaching

- NEVER override a student's expressed or non-expressed physical limits. Pain is a signal, not a challenge to overcome.
- ALWAYS offer modifications and use props as a standard part of teaching, not as a consolation for 'weaker' students.
- KNOW your anatomy. Insufficient anatomical knowledge is one of the most common causes of yoga-related injury facilitated by teachers.
- RESPECT individual differences. Bodies vary enormously in their structure, flexibility, and capacity. One instruction does not fit all.
- NEVER compete with or compare students. Competition introduces ego and pushes people beyond intelligent limits.
- SCREEN students appropriately. Know when to refer to medical professionals before a student begins or continues practice.

### 3.3 Verbal Ahimsa -- The Power of Words

Perhaps the most pervasive and underappreciated source of harm in yoga teaching is not the hand of the teacher but their mouth. Words shape reality. Words teach students how to relate to their bodies, their limitations, their progress. Words told to a student at a vulnerable moment can stay with them for years -- for better or for worse.

#### 3.3.1 Language That Harms

Harmful Language	The Harm It Causes
'You should be able to do this by now.'	Creates shame and self-comparison; suggests the student is failing rather than progressing at their own pace
'Just relax into it' (when a student is in pain)	Invalidates the pain signal; encourages students to override protective body responses
'Push through the discomfort'	Confuses discomfort with pain; can lead directly to injury; teaches students to distrust their own body
'Look at how X does it -- that's what we're aiming for'	Creates comparison and shame; everyone's body is different; this instruction undermines self-acceptance
'You're not really trying'	An attack on student effort and motivation; profoundly discouraging and often inaccurate
'This pose will fix your [problem]'	Medical overreach; yoga teachers cannot diagnose or guarantee therapeutic outcomes
'Don't be so afraid' or 'Stop being so tight'	Dismisses genuine physical and emotional experience; implies the student's response is a character failure

#### 3.3.2 Language That Heals

Ahimsa-Based Language	Why It Works
'Explore what feels available in your body today'	Invites curiosity rather than striving; honors that capacity changes daily
'If this feels like too much, here is an alternative...'	Normalizes modifications; removes the stigma of not doing the 'full' version
'Notice the difference between discomfort and pain -- back off if you feel pain'	Teaches intelligent self-observation; empowers students to protect themselves
'Every body is different -- find the version that works for your unique structure'	Celebrates diversity; removes comparison; builds self-trust
'You are exactly where you need to be in your	Offers genuine acceptance; reduces the anxiety

practice'	of perceived progress or lack of progress
'What do you notice in your body right now?'	Develops interoceptive awareness; validates the student's inner experience as the most important data

### 3.4 Psychological Ahimsa -- The Safety of the Mind

The yoga class creates an altered state for many students. Deep breathing, sustained physical effort, the cultivated inner attention of mindful movement -- all of these lower psychological defenses and can bring students into contact with emotions, memories, and experiences that they do not ordinarily encounter. This makes the yoga classroom a place of profound potential healing -- but also a place of potential psychological harm if the teacher is not equipped to hold the space responsibly.

#### 3.4.1 Recognizing and Responding to Emotional Release

It is relatively common for students to experience emotional release during yoga practice -- tears, trembling, laughter, sudden anxiety, or waves of grief or joy. This is not pathological; it is a natural consequence of releasing physical and emotional holding patterns stored in the body (what the psychologist Peter Levine and the yoga therapist Bessel van der Kolk have documented extensively). When a student experiences emotional release, the Ahimsa-based teacher:

1. Does not draw attention to the student in front of the class
2. Offers quiet reassurance and space: 'That's perfectly fine. Take your time. I'm here.'
3. Does not attempt to analyze or interpret the student's experience
4. Checks in privately after class to ensure the student is well
5. Refers to mental health support if the experience was intense or ongoing

### 3.5 Structural Ahimsa -- Harm Reduction at the Systems Level

Individual Ahimsa is essential, but a truly ethical yoga teacher also considers how harm operates at the structural and systemic level. Is your studio financially accessible to people of modest income? Does your advertising use unrealistic body images that reinforce harmful beauty standards? Is your teaching genuinely inclusive of people of all backgrounds, abilities, body types, genders, and cultural identities? Structural Ahimsa requires us to examine not just our individual actions but the systems and structures within which we operate.

### 3.6 Case Study for Discussion

### Case Study: The Persistent Adjuster

SCENARIO: Ananya is a yoga teacher who prides herself on hands-on adjustments. During a forward fold, a student named Ramesh winces and says 'I feel a pulling in my lower back.' Ananya responds: 'That's just tightness -- let me help you deepen it' and applies pressure to his back, pushing him deeper. The next day, Ramesh reports sharp lower back pain.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How many violations of Ahimsa can you identify in Ananya's conduct?
2. What should Ananya have done when Ramesh reported the sensation in his lower back?
3. How might Ananya's words ('That's just tightness') constitute a form of verbal harm?
4. What systemic change could a studio make to reduce the likelihood of this situation arising?
5. If you were Ramesh's classmate and witnessed this exchange, what is your ethical responsibility?

# LESSON 4

## Satya: Truthfulness, Honesty, and Transparency

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*"Truth is the first chapter in the book of wisdom." -- Thomas Jefferson*

# Lesson 4: Satya -- Truthfulness, Honesty, and Transparency

## 4.1 The Multidimensional Nature of Truth in Yoga Teaching

Satya -- truthfulness -- sounds simple. Tell the truth. Do not lie. But in the complex reality of yoga teaching, Satya demands a far more nuanced and multidimensional practice. The yoga teacher must be truthful about their qualifications, truthful about what yoga can and cannot do, truthful in marketing, truthful in feedback, truthful with themselves about their motivations and their limitations, and truthful in navigating the difficult situations that inevitably arise in teaching relationships.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras add a crucial qualification that distinguishes yogic Satya from blunt, unconsidered truth-telling: 'Satya should not become a cause of injury to others' (Sutra 2.36). In other words, truth must be tempered by Ahimsa. If the honest truth would cause unnecessary harm, then the skillful teacher must find a way to be truthful that is also compassionate -- what the Buddhist tradition calls 'right speech.'

## 4.2 Truthfulness About Qualifications and Scope of Practice

### 4.2.1 Representing Your Training and Expertise Honestly

One of the most common violations of Satya in the yoga industry is the misrepresentation of qualifications. This takes many forms: overstating the depth or breadth of one's training; claiming expertise in specialized areas (yoga therapy, prenatal yoga, trauma-informed yoga) without adequate specialized training; using titles (yoga therapist, yoga doctor) that imply clinical credentials one does not possess; and presenting oneself as a master or guru without the genuine depth of experience that such designations imply.

#### Truthful Representation of Qualifications: Guidelines

**STATE CLEARLY** what your certifications are, from which bodies, and how many hours of training they represent.

**DO NOT TEACH** specialized populations (prenatal, trauma survivors, cancer patients, people with serious medical conditions) without specific training in those areas. Referring to a more qualified colleague is an act of Satya and Ahimsa.

**DISTINGUISH** between your personal experience ('In my practice, I have found...') and established fact or clinical knowledge.

**ACKNOWLEDGE UNCERTAINTY.** 'I don't know, but I can find out' is one of the most powerful things a truthful teacher can say.

DO NOT CLAIM lineage or transmission from a teacher or tradition unless you have genuinely received it in the traditional sense.

REGULARLY UPDATE your qualifications through continuing education, and update how you represent yourself accordingly.

#### 4.2.2 Scope of Practice: The Boundary Between Yoga and Medicine

A critically important application of Satya for yoga teachers is maintaining honesty about the scope of yoga teaching versus the practice of medicine, psychology, or physical therapy. Yoga teachers work with the whole person and may facilitate remarkable improvements in health and wellbeing. But making specific claims about yoga's ability to cure, treat, or diagnose medical conditions without clinical evidence is a violation of Satya -- and potentially of the law.

What Yoga Teachers CAN Truthfully Say	What Yoga Teachers CANNOT Truthfully Say
'Many students report that this practice helps them feel calmer and more grounded.'	'This practice will cure your anxiety disorder.'
'Yoga practice may support overall wellbeing alongside medical treatment.'	'You don't need your medication if you practice yoga regularly.'
'This restorative practice is often recommended as complementary support for people managing chronic pain.'	'This posture will heal your herniated disc.'
'I am not a medical professional. For your specific condition, please work with your doctor alongside your yoga practice.'	'Yoga healed my illness and it will heal yours too.'
'Research suggests that mindfulness-based yoga practices may reduce stress hormones.'	'This pranayama technique cures depression.'

#### 4.3 Truthfulness in Marketing and Business

The yoga industry is, unfortunately, rife with marketing that violates the principle of Satya. Before-and-after body transformation images that use lighting, angles, and timing to create misleading impressions; testimonials that cherry-pick exceptional results and omit typical outcomes; promises of transformation that no program can guarantee; pricing structures that obscure true costs -- all of these are violations of Satya in the marketplace.

The ethical yoga teacher and yoga business commit to marketing that is accurate, transparent, and free from manipulative techniques. This means: describing your offerings clearly and honestly; using representative images of your actual students and classes; making pricing clear and accessible upfront; not using urgency or scarcity tactics that pressure people into decisions; and being honest about refund and cancellation policies.

## 4.4 Truthful Feedback and Communication with Students

One of the most delicate applications of Satya in yoga teaching is in the area of feedback. Students deserve honest feedback on their practice -- both encouragement when they are making genuine progress and honest guidance when there is something important to address. Flattery that is not grounded in truth serves neither the student's growth nor the teacher's integrity.

At the same time, Satya in feedback must be applied with great skill. Blunt or harsh critique -- even when technically accurate -- can damage a student's relationship with their body, with the practice, and with the teacher. The skill of truthful, compassionate feedback -- of finding the honest observation that serves the student's genuine growth -- is one of the highest arts of the yoga teacher.

## 4.5 Self-Honesty: The Inner Practice of Satya

Perhaps the most demanding dimension of Satya for the yoga teacher is the inner practice of honest self-examination. This requires the courage to look clearly at one's own motivations -- to ask not just 'what am I doing?' but 'why am I really doing this?' It requires acknowledging when you are teaching from ego rather than from service, when you are setting a boundary out of genuine care or out of personal convenience, when you are avoiding a difficult conversation out of Ahimsa or simply out of conflict-aversion.

Self-honesty also requires regular examination of what is commonly called confirmation bias -- the tendency to seek and accept information that confirms our existing beliefs while dismissing challenging information. A Satya-committed yoga teacher actively seeks perspectives that challenge their assumptions, solicits honest feedback from students and mentors, and reads and engages with voices that offer different views on yoga, health, and their own practice.

## 4.6 Lesson 4 Reflective Practice

### Satya Self-Examination Exercise

Spend at least 30 minutes with the following questions. Write your responses honestly.

1. **QUALIFICATIONS:** Write down every qualification you plan to list when marketing yourself as a yoga teacher. For each, honestly assess: Do you have the depth of training and experience to truly stand behind this claim?
2. **SCOPE:** Recall a time when you (or a teacher you observed) spoke about yoga's health benefits. Was the language accurate, or did it overstate yoga's clinical capabilities?
3. **FEEDBACK:** Think of a student whose practice you know well. If you were being completely honest, what one thing would you tell them that you have been avoiding saying? What has stopped you from saying it?

4. **MARKETING:** Review any social media posts, website content, or marketing materials you have created. Identify any claims or images that do not fully represent the truth of what you offer.

5. **SELF-HONESTY:** Complete this sentence honestly: 'The deepest truth about my motivations for teaching yoga that I find most difficult to acknowledge is...'

# LESSON 5

## The Sacred Boundary: Professional Limits in Yoga Teaching

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*"Good fences make good neighbors -- and good teachers." -- Adapted proverb*

# Lesson 5: The Sacred Boundary -- Professional Limits in Yoga Teaching

## 5.1 Understanding Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries are the limits that define the appropriate scope of the relationship between a yoga teacher and their students. They protect students from potential harm arising from the inherent power imbalance in the teacher-student relationship, they protect teachers from situations that compromise their professional integrity, and they create the clear, safe container within which genuine teaching and learning can occur.

Boundaries are not barriers to authentic connection -- they are what make authentic, safe connection possible. A student who trusts that their yoga teacher will not exploit their vulnerability, misuse their personal disclosures, or cross into inappropriate emotional or physical territory can open more fully to the practice. Clear professional boundaries, paradoxically, create more genuine intimacy -- the intimacy of trust -- than the false intimacy created by the erosion of appropriate limits.

## 5.2 Types of Professional Boundaries in Yoga Teaching

### 5.2.1 Physical Boundaries

Physical boundaries govern touch and physical space. In the yoga context, where physical adjustment is a core teaching tool, physical boundaries are particularly important and require particularly careful navigation. The fundamental principles of physical boundary ethics in yoga teaching are: consent is always required; the student's comfort and safety override the teacher's pedagogical preferences; and no adjustment should ever be performed that the teacher would not be comfortable performing in front of the entire class and their own supervisor.

### 5.2.2 Emotional Boundaries

Emotional boundaries govern the emotional content of the teacher-student relationship. The yoga teacher's role includes creating a warm, supportive, and emotionally safe environment for students. But this warmth and care must operate within the teacher's professional role -- it should not slide into the teacher becoming a student's primary emotional support person, closest confidant, or substitute therapist.

Students often share personal information with yoga teachers -- about their health, their relationships, their struggles, their spiritual experiences. Receiving this information with care,

respect, and appropriate confidentiality is part of the teacher's role. But it is equally the teacher's responsibility to gently maintain the boundary between yoga teacher and therapist, to refer students to appropriate professional support when emotional needs exceed the yoga teacher's scope, and to avoid creating situations where students become emotionally dependent on the teacher.

### 5.2.3 Sexual Boundaries

Sexual boundaries are absolute. There is no circumstance under which a romantic or sexual relationship between a yoga teacher and a current student is ethically permissible. This applies regardless of the student's age (assuming adulthood), regardless of the apparent mutuality of attraction, and regardless of the teacher's belief that the relationship is genuinely equal. The inherent power differential of the teacher-student relationship makes genuine, uncompromised consent in a sexual context impossible while the teaching relationship is active.

Beyond the prohibition of direct sexual relationships, yoga teachers must maintain sexual boundaries in the language, imagery, and energy of their teaching. Sexualized cues, inappropriate comments about students' bodies, suggestive touch, and the cultivation of 'devoted' student relationships that carry romantic undertones all violate sexual boundary ethics, even when they stop short of direct sexual relationship.

### 5.2.4 Financial Boundaries

Financial boundaries govern the monetary aspect of the teacher-student relationship. Accepting gifts of significant monetary value from students, creating situations where students feel financially obligated to the teacher, offering steep discounts to favored students in ways that create a sense of special relationship, or using the teaching relationship to sell products or services in which the teacher has a personal financial interest -- all of these can compromise the integrity of the teacher-student relationship.

## 5.3 Common Boundary Crossings and How to Recognize Them

Boundary Type	Warning Sign	Ethical Response
Emotional	A student calls or messages you at all hours expecting emotional support; you find yourself looking forward to their presence in ways that feel different from other students	Warmly acknowledge the student's need, explain your role, and provide referrals to appropriate professional support
Physical	A student seems uncomfortable with touch but does not speak up;	Always ask before touching; watch for non-verbal cues; examine your

	you find yourself adjusting certain students more than others for unclear reasons	own motivations for differential attention
Sexual	You notice attraction to a student and begin offering them special attention, staying late to talk, or finding reasons to be alone with them	Acknowledge the attraction to yourself, immediately increase professionalism, seek supervision, and if necessary recuse yourself from teaching that student
Financial	A student offers expensive gifts repeatedly; you begin waiving fees for some students while charging others full price for unclear reasons	Establish clear, consistent policies on gifts and fees; apply them uniformly; refuse gifts of significant value
Role	Students begin bringing emotional crises to you expecting you to resolve them; you find yourself giving life advice beyond yoga	Validate the student's experience, acknowledge your care for them, clearly name the limits of your role, and provide appropriate referrals

## 5.4 Dual Relationships: When the Teacher Knows the Student Outside Class

A dual relationship occurs when a yoga teacher has a relationship with a student that exists in a context beyond the yoga teaching relationship -- as a personal friend, a family member, a business partner, a neighbor, a romantic partner. Dual relationships are not automatically unethical, but they do require careful navigation because they can create conflicts of interest, complicate the exercise of professional judgment, and blur the boundaries that protect both teacher and student.

When a dual relationship exists, the yoga teacher must: be transparent about the relationship (to themselves and ideally to the student); examine whether the dual relationship is affecting how they teach, evaluate, or treat the student; consider whether another teacher might serve the student better precisely because they do not carry a pre-existing relationship; and be prepared to navigate the situation if tensions arise between the personal and professional dimensions of the relationship.

## 5.5 Lesson 5 Practice: Boundaries Self-Assessment

Boundaries Self-Assessment for Yoga Teachers	
Review each statement and rate yourself honestly: Always / Usually / Sometimes / Rarely / Never	
1. I obtain verbal or written consent before physically adjusting any student.	
2. I treat all students consistently in terms of attention, adjustment, and engagement.	

3. When students share personal information with me, I listen with care and maintain confidentiality without making myself their primary source of emotional support.

4. I refer students to appropriate professional support (medical, psychological, social) when their needs exceed my role.

5. I do not accept gifts of significant monetary value from students.

6. I have never pursued a romantic or sexual relationship with a current student.

7. I examine my motivations when I find myself particularly drawn to or repelled by individual students.

8. I maintain consistent professional behavior whether I am in a formal teaching context or a casual social setting with students.

9. I have a clear, written policy on fees, cancellations, and refunds that is communicated transparently to all students.

10. I regularly discuss boundary questions with a mentor, supervisor, or trusted peer.

REFLECTION: Where did you answer 'Sometimes', 'Rarely', or 'Never'? These are your growth edges. Choose one to work on actively in the next month.

# LESSON 6

## The Guru-Shishya Relationship: Power, Responsibility, and Trust

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*"Guru is the one who removes the darkness of ignorance." -- Guru Gita*

## Lesson 6: The Guru-Shishya Relationship -- Power, Responsibility, and Trust

### 6.1 The Traditional Guru-Shishya Parampara

In the ancient Indian tradition, the relationship between Guru (teacher) and Shishya (devoted student) was considered the most sacred of all human relationships -- the channel through which wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual transmission flowed from one generation to the next. The Guru was not merely an instructor but a guide, a liberator, and in many formulations a living embodiment of the Divine. The Shishya, in turn, surrendered their ordinary ego-preferences to the guidance of the Guru in the spirit of genuine learning.

This tradition has produced extraordinary wisdom and extraordinary beauty in the history of human culture. The great achievements of Indian classical music, dance, philosophy, yoga, and art were transmitted through the Guru-Shishya relationship over millennia. And it remains a living and precious tradition in authentic lineages today.

But this same tradition has also been the vehicle for some of the most serious abuses documented in modern spiritual history. The extreme power differential inherent in the traditional Guru-Shishya relationship -- combined with the Shishya's voluntary surrender of critical judgment and the absence of external accountability -- has created conditions in which exploitation, manipulation, and abuse have repeatedly flourished. A responsible yoga teacher training program must address this history honestly and help teachers navigate this terrain with clear eyes.

### 6.2 The Power Differential in the Yoga Teacher-Student Relationship

Even in the context of a modern yoga class -- far removed from the formal Guru-Shishya relationship -- a significant power differential exists between teacher and student. Understanding this power differential is essential to practicing ethical yoga teaching.

Source of Teacher Power	Ethical Implications
Expert power: The teacher has specialized knowledge and skill the student lacks	This creates vulnerability in the student; they may accept instruction without question. Teachers must never exploit this deference.
Positional power: The teacher controls the class environment, sequencing, and standards	Students adapt their behavior to what they perceive the teacher expects. Teachers must be conscious of the pressures they inadvertently create.
Charismatic power: Many yoga teachers are perceived as inspiring, spiritually advanced, or	Students may idealize teachers in ways that amplify the power differential. Teachers must not

<p>specially gifted</p>	<p>feed or exploit idealization.</p>
<p>Social power: The teacher may be central to a community that provides belonging and connection</p>	<p>Students who depend on the community for belonging are particularly vulnerable. Exclusion from the community is a powerful (and often misused) sanction.</p>
<p>Trust and vulnerability: Students often come to yoga in states of physical or emotional vulnerability</p>	<p>This vulnerability is a gift of trust that must never be exploited for the teacher's personal benefit.</p>

### 6.3 Transference and Countertransference in the Teaching Relationship

The concepts of transference (the student's unconscious projection of feelings, expectations, and relational patterns from past relationships onto the teacher) and countertransference (the teacher's unconscious reactions to students that are shaped by the teacher's own history) are not merely psychotherapeutic concepts -- they are living realities in the yoga teaching relationship that every teacher must understand.

Students frequently transfer onto their yoga teachers the hopes, fears, idealization, and grievances that belong to earlier formative relationships -- particularly with parents, early teachers, or authority figures. A student who gazes at you with adoration and treats you as a source of all wisdom is very likely expressing transference. So is the student who inexplicably resists everything you say, or who becomes extremely distressed when you are unavailable.

The ethical yoga teacher does not exploit positive transference for ego gratification, does not punish negative transference with retaliation, and does not make therapeutic interpretations of transference (that is the therapist's domain). Instead, the ethical teacher: maintains stable, consistent professional behavior; does not allow idealization to inflate their sense of their own importance; uses transference responses as information about what the student may need; and seeks supervision when transference dynamics become complex or disruptive.

### 6.4 The Ethics of Teacher Authority

Authority is not inherently unethical -- yoga teachers appropriately exercise authority in designing classes, setting standards, maintaining safety, and transmitting the practice. The ethical question is not whether to exercise authority but how. Ethical teacher authority is exercised in service of student growth and wellbeing. Unethical teacher authority is exercised in service of the teacher's ego, comfort, or personal benefit.

### 6.4.1 Signs of Ethical Authority

- Authority is transparent and explained: the teacher shares reasons for instructions and welcomes genuine questions
- Authority is developmental: as students develop, the teacher actively supports their growing independence and self-direction
- Authority is accountable: the teacher accepts feedback, acknowledges mistakes, and takes responsibility for errors
- Authority is boundaryed: the teacher's authority extends over yoga practice and the learning environment, not over students' personal lives, beliefs, relationships, or identity

### 6.4.2 Signs of Unethical Authority

- Authority demands unquestioning obedience and treats questioning as betrayal or spiritual weakness
- Authority expands beyond the teaching domain into students' personal decisions, relationships, diet, lifestyle, and beliefs
- Authority is enforced through emotional manipulation, guilt, shaming, or social ostracism
- Authority is immune to feedback; the teacher is presented as beyond correction or criticism
- Authority creates dependency rather than autonomy; students are kept in a state of needing the teacher rather than developing their own capacity

## 6.5 Recognizing and Preventing Cult Dynamics

Cult dynamics can emerge in yoga communities when teacher authority becomes unaccountable, when the community becomes an exclusive in-group that devalues outside relationships, when financial exploitation is normalized under spiritual framing, and when members are discouraged from questioning the leader or leaving. Every yoga teacher -- even one with genuinely good intentions -- must actively work to prevent these dynamics from developing in their community.

### Warning Signs of Cult Dynamics in Yoga Communities

**THE TEACHER IS INFALLIBLE:** Questioning the teacher is treated as a spiritual failing or a sign of an insufficiently developed student.

**EXCLUSIVE COMMUNITY:** Students are discouraged from practicing with other teachers, maintaining outside friendships, or respecting other yoga traditions.

**FINANCIAL PRESSURE:** Students feel obligated to attend expensive retreats, buy teacher-branded merchandise, or make donations beyond their means.

**LOVE BOMBING:** New students are overwhelmed with affection and special attention, creating a powerful sense of belonging that makes leaving feel devastating.

**US-AND-THEM:** The community maintains a strong sense of being specially chosen or spiritually superior to those outside.

**INFORMATION CONTROL:** The teacher or community leadership controls what information students receive about the tradition, about health, and about the world.

**SHUNNING:** Students who leave the community or question the teacher are ostracized, shamed, or subjected to reputational attacks.

# LESSON 7

## Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Student Privacy

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*"Consent is the cornerstone of all ethical teaching." -- Modern Yoga Ethics*

# Lesson 7: Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Student Privacy

## 7.1 What Is Informed Consent?

Informed consent is the process through which a student is provided with sufficient information about an activity, intervention, or relationship to make a genuinely free and knowledgeable decision about whether to participate. The concept derives from medical ethics, where it is a foundational principle: a patient cannot truly consent to a treatment unless they understand what it involves, what its risks and benefits are, and that they are free to refuse or withdraw at any time.

Informed consent is equally essential in the yoga teaching context. Whether you are about to physically adjust a student, introduce an unusual breathing technique, guide students through an intense emotional release practice, or simply begin a new class with a first-time student -- genuine consent requires that the student understands what they are agreeing to and that they are free to decline without negative consequence.

## 7.2 Elements of Informed Consent in Yoga Teaching

### 7.2.1 Consent for Physical Adjustments

Physical adjustment consent is perhaps the most urgent area where yoga teachers must practice explicit informed consent. The practice of offering physical adjustments -- hands-on guidance of students into deeper or more accurate expressions of postures -- is valuable and traditional, but it requires the student's genuine agreement. No adjustment should ever be made without this agreement.

#### Best Practice: The Adjustment Consent Process

**BEFORE THE CLASS:** Include in your intake form or class information a clear statement that physical adjustments may be offered, what they involve, and that students may decline at any time.

**AT THE START OF CLASS:** Verbally acknowledge that you offer hands-on adjustments and invite students to indicate if they prefer not to be touched. Many teachers offer consent cards: a green card indicates 'adjustments welcome' and a red card indicates 'no adjustments today.'

**BEFORE EACH ADJUSTMENT:** Even with general class consent, check in before each individual adjustment, especially if the student is new, appears distracted or in pain, or if the adjustment is to a sensitive area of the body.

**DURING THE ADJUSTMENT:** Explain what you are going to do before you do it. Brief verbal guidance ('I'm going to place my hands on your hips and gently rotate...') allows the student to consent or decline in the moment.

**AFTER THE ADJUSTMENT:** A brief 'How was that?' allows students to give feedback and helps you calibrate future adjustments.

**SPECIAL POPULATIONS:** Students who are pregnant, have injuries, are trauma survivors, or are practicing for the first time should receive more explicit and ongoing consent processes.

## 7.2.2 Consent for Specialized Practices

Certain yoga practices require more explicit informed consent than a standard asana class. These include: intense pranayama practices (such as Kapalabhati or Bhastrika) that can cause physical and psychological effects; yoga nidra and hypnagogic practices that alter consciousness; partner yoga practices that involve extended physical contact; advanced inversions and backbends that carry heightened injury risk; and practices explicitly intended to facilitate emotional release. Before introducing any such practice, the yoga teacher must explain what the practice involves, what students may experience, and confirm that students who do not wish to participate can opt out without judgment.

## 7.3 Confidentiality in the Yoga Teaching Relationship

Students frequently share personal, sensitive, and sometimes highly intimate information with their yoga teachers. This may happen explicitly -- in conversation before or after class, in a health intake form, or in private communication -- or implicitly, through the yoga teacher's observation of a student's body, breath, emotional reactions, and practice. All of this information must be treated with the highest standards of confidentiality.

### 7.3.1 What Confidentiality Means

- Student health information, personal disclosures, and observations of their practice are not shared with other students, with the general public, or on social media.
- Information shared in a private consultation is not discussed in a group class, even in anonymized form, without the student's explicit consent.
- When you need to consult with another professional (a more senior teacher, a medical professional, a supervisor) about a student's situation, you discuss only what is strictly necessary and protect identifying information where possible.
- Student photographs and videos are not shared publicly without explicit, written consent specifying how the images will be used.
- If a student's situation requires you to breach confidentiality (because there is a genuine risk to their safety or the safety of others), you inform the student of this necessity before you act wherever possible.

## 7.4 Student Privacy in the Digital Age

The digital environment creates new and complex privacy considerations for yoga teachers. Student data collected through registration forms, health questionnaires, payment records, and online class platforms must be stored securely and used only for the purposes for which it was collected. Sharing students' personal information with third parties without consent -- including marketing partners, other studios, or social media platforms -- is a serious violation of privacy ethics and, in many jurisdictions, of the law.

Social media has created particular complexity around privacy. Photographing and filming students in class and posting on social media without explicit consent is a violation of privacy regardless of how innocuous the content may appear. The background of a yoga class photo may inadvertently reveal information about health conditions (visible props for specific needs), relationships, or simply the student's attendance that they have not chosen to disclose publicly.

## **7.5 Health Intake and Medical Screening**

A comprehensive health intake process is both an ethical obligation and a practical safety measure. Before a new student begins practice, they should complete a health questionnaire that covers relevant medical history, current conditions, medications, pregnancy, recent surgeries or injuries, and any other factors that might affect their safe participation in yoga practice.

This information must be: reviewed by the teacher before the student's first class; stored securely with appropriate confidentiality protections; used to appropriately adapt instruction for the student's needs; and updated regularly, as health conditions can change significantly over time. A yoga teacher who proceeds to teach a student without conducting any health screening is operating without adequate information to ensure the student's safety -- an ethical failure in the domain of Ahimsa.

# LESSON 8

## Physical Adjustments and Touch Ethics in Yoga

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*"Hands that help are holier than lips that pray." -- Adapted from Sai Baba*

# Lesson 8: Physical Adjustments and Touch Ethics in Yoga

## 8.1 The Place of Touch in Yoga Teaching

Touch is one of the most powerful and most ethically complex tools available to the yoga teacher. When offered skillfully, consensually, and with genuine care, a well-timed physical adjustment can communicate what words cannot -- it can help a student access a new relationship with their body, release deeply held tension, refine their understanding of alignment, or simply feel seen and cared for. Touch is ancient. It is fundamental to the healing arts. It is woven into the history of yoga as a living transmission.

Yet touch is also the site of some of the most serious ethical violations in yoga teaching history. Inappropriate, non-consensual, or sexualized touch by yoga teachers has caused real and lasting harm to students across all cultures, traditions, and levels of the yoga world. This reality demands that we take the ethics of touch with the utmost seriousness -- not in a spirit of fear or prohibition, but in a spirit of genuine care for the students who place their bodies in our hands.

## 8.2 The Four Principles of Ethical Touch in Yoga

### 8.2.1 Consent

No physical contact of any kind should be initiated without the student's prior consent. Consent must be informed (the student understands what the touch will involve), voluntary (the student is genuinely free to decline without negative consequence), and ongoing (consent for one adjustment does not constitute consent for all future adjustments). The most robust approach to consent combines written consent in a class agreement, verbal consent established at the start of each class, and moment-by-moment verbal check-ins before adjustments.

### 8.2.2 Relevance

Touch in yoga teaching should be relevant to the pedagogical purpose -- to support alignment, safety, or the student's understanding of the practice. Touch that serves no clear pedagogical function -- that reflects the teacher's personal comfort, need for connection, or unconscious attraction -- is ethically unjustifiable regardless of whether the student appears to welcome it. Before every touch, ask yourself: what specific benefit does this adjustment offer this student's practice?

### 8.2.3 Competence

Physical adjustments require anatomical knowledge and skilled, confident hands. An adjustment delivered without genuine competence -- without thorough understanding of the relevant anatomy, of contraindications, of appropriate force and direction -- is a form of harm even when offered with good intentions. Yoga teachers must honestly assess their competence in offering adjustments and seek specific training in adjustment technique if this is an area of their teaching they wish to develop.

### 8.2.4 Respect

Every touch must communicate respect for the student -- for their bodily autonomy, for their individual experience, for their right to decline. Touch that communicates urgency, impatience, dominance, or sexualization -- regardless of the teacher's conscious intention -- violates this principle. The energy with which you touch a student is as important as the technical correctness of the adjustment.

## 8.3 Areas of Particular Sensitivity

Area of the Body	Special Considerations
Lower back and sacrum	Common site of injury and pain; adjustments here can cause significant harm if applied without care; always ask about lower back history before class
Hips and pelvis	Anatomically complex; enormous natural variation means what works for one student may injure another; major trauma release can occur with hip work
Neck and shoulders	Highly sensitive; cervical spine adjustments carry significant injury risk; only teach what you are truly confident in your anatomical knowledge to offer
Chest and abdomen	Psychologically and physically intimate areas; require special care and explicit consent; often sites of stored emotional material
Head and face	Intimate areas; require clear consent and particular sensitivity
Feet and hands	Generally less sensitive but still require consent; foot massage without consent can feel violating to some students

## 8.4 Trauma-Sensitive Touch

Many yoga students -- estimates in research suggest as many as 60-70% of the population -- have a history of trauma of some kind. Trauma history significantly affects how people experience

physical touch: what feels neutral or pleasant to one student may feel threatening, violating, or activating to another. A trauma-sensitive approach to touch does not mean avoiding all touch, but it does mean being attentive to the student's responses, always prioritizing their comfort over the pedagogical goal of the adjustment, and being prepared to adjust your approach -- or to stop -- when a student appears distressed.

Signs that a student may be experiencing distress in response to touch include: sudden tensing or pulling away, holding the breath, trembling, flushing, tears, an expression of fear or confusion, or becoming very still and dissociated. If you observe any of these responses, immediately and gently withdraw contact, offer reassurance, and give the student space. A simple: 'I'm going to step back. Take your time. You're safe.' is usually the appropriate response.

## 8.5 When NOT to Touch

- When the student has declined consent -- verbally, by body language, or through a consent card system
- When the student appears distressed, uncomfortable, or dissociated
- When you do not have sufficient anatomical knowledge to adjust this posture or area safely
- When the student is working through significant pain or injury in the area you would adjust
- When the touch would serve no clear pedagogical function
- When the student is pregnant and you lack prenatal yoga training
- When you feel any personal attraction, discomfort, or ambivalence about touching this student
- When you would feel uncomfortable performing this adjustment in front of a supervisor or colleague

## 8.6 Verbal Cueing as an Alternative to Touch

The most experienced and most ethical yoga teachers often rely primarily on verbal cueing rather than physical adjustment -- using precise, evocative language to guide students into deeper understanding of postures without physical contact. Developing your vocabulary of anatomical, sensory, and poetic cues is not just a teaching skill; it is an ethical practice. A teacher who can effectively guide students with words alone is less vulnerable to the ethical complexities of touch and more empowering to students, who develop their own bodily intelligence rather than becoming dependent on the teacher's hands.

# LESSON 9

## Inclusive and Equitable Teaching: Ethics of Diversity

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*"Yoga is for every body." -- Contemporary Inclusive Yoga Movement*

## Lesson 9: Inclusive and Equitable Teaching -- Ethics of Diversity

### 9.1 The Ethical Imperative of Inclusion

Yoga, in its origins, was a universal practice available to all -- not restricted by gender, caste (in the highest understanding of the tradition), physical ability, or social position. The image of yoga that many contemporary Westerners hold -- dominated by slim, flexible, affluent, young, predominantly female bodies -- is a historically recent and culturally specific distortion, not the tradition itself.

An ethical yoga teacher recognizes that every human being has a body, every body can practice yoga, and that the practice belongs to no single culture, body type, economic class, or demographic group. The ethical obligation of inclusion means actively working to make your teaching accessible, welcoming, and relevant to the full diversity of human experience -- including people of all body sizes, physical abilities, ages, genders, sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds, economic situations, and health conditions.

### 9.2 Body Diversity and Weight Neutrality

The yoga industry has a documented and serious problem with body image. Marketing materials typically feature a very narrow range of body types. Class environments can feel unwelcoming or even hostile to students whose bodies differ significantly from the implied norm. Language in classes -- cues that reference 'flat bellies,' 'slim waists,' or progress toward 'ideal' body proportions -- reinforces harmful messages about which bodies are acceptable and which are aspirational.

An ethical yoga teacher adopts a weight-neutral approach to teaching yoga. This means: using cues that are relevant to the experience of the practice rather than to the appearance of the body; offering authentic modifications for a genuine range of body sizes and proportions; using images in your marketing that include diverse body types; and actively examining your own unconscious biases about bodies and their relationship to health, discipline, and spiritual development.

### 9.3 Disability and Adaptive Yoga

The ethical yoga teacher seeks to make their teaching genuinely accessible to students with physical and cognitive disabilities. This requires: knowledge of appropriate adaptations for common conditions (mobility limitations, visual or hearing impairment, neurological conditions, mental health conditions affecting concentration and body awareness); willingness to invest in

continuing education in adaptive yoga; physical environments that are wheelchair accessible; and communication materials available in accessible formats.

Equally important is the attitudinal dimension of disability inclusion: approaching students with disabilities as complete human beings whose access to the benefits of yoga practice is as legitimate and as important as anyone else's -- not as charity cases to be accommodated, but as full participants in the community whose needs inform and enrich the practice for everyone.

## 9.4 Cultural Ethics and the Question of Appropriation

Yoga originated in the Indian subcontinent and is woven into the spiritual, philosophical, and cultural fabric of Indian civilization. As it has spread globally, profound questions have arisen about cultural respect, representation, and what is now widely discussed as cultural appropriation -- the adoption of elements of a marginalized culture by members of a more dominant culture in ways that fail to acknowledge or honor their origins, strip them of their meaning, or cause harm to members of the originating culture.

### 9.4.1 The Distinction Between Appropriation and Appreciation

Cultural Appropriation (Unethical)	Cultural Appreciation (Ethical)
Teaching yoga without acknowledging its Indian origins, philosophical foundations, or historical context	Regularly acknowledging the tradition's origins and situating your teaching within its lineage
Using Sanskrit terms decoratively without understanding their meaning or respecting their significance	Learning Sanskrit terminology with genuine care for its meaning and using it in ways that honor the tradition
Claiming lineage or mastery in a traditional school without genuine training in that tradition	Being transparent about the nature and limits of your training and the tradition from which it draws
Extracting physical techniques while dismissing or mocking the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of yoga	Teaching the whole practice -- physical, philosophical, ethical, and spiritual -- with respect and depth
Commercial exploitation of Hindu religious imagery or sacred texts for profit without genuine understanding	Learning deeply about the tradition and treating its sacred elements with reverence and care

## 9.5 Gender and Sexual Orientation in the Yoga Space

An ethical yoga teaching space is explicitly inclusive of all gender identities and sexual orientations. This means: using inclusive language ('everyone' rather than 'ladies and gentlemen'; 'partner' rather than 'husband/wife'; asking for preferred pronouns); ensuring that binary gendered facilities (changing rooms, bathrooms) are navigated sensitively; avoiding cues that reinforce

gender stereotypes (such as suggesting that certain poses are 'more masculine' or 'more feminine'); and addressing any transphobic or homophobic language or behavior in your studio or community clearly and promptly.

## **9.6 Economic Inclusion and Access**

The commercialization of yoga has, in many contexts, made it financially inaccessible to large portions of the population. Drop-in class rates at premium studios in major cities can cost as much as a day's minimum wage. Teacher trainings cost tens of thousands of rupees. Yoga retreats can be equivalent to a month's salary. This economic gatekeeping contradicts the universalist spirit of yoga and raises serious ethical questions about who yoga serves.

While yoga teachers must earn livelihood and yoga businesses must be financially sustainable, an ethical yoga teacher actively considers how to extend access beyond those who can afford premium pricing. Community classes, sliding scale pricing, online free content, corporate outreach to underserved communities, and partnerships with NGOs and social service organizations are all ways of honoring the ethical obligation of economic inclusion.

# LESSON 10

## Digital Ethics: Social Media, Online Teaching, and Representation

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*"Who you are offline is who you should be online." -- Digital Ethics Principle*

# Lesson 10: Digital Ethics -- Social Media, Online Teaching, and Representation

## 10.1 The Digital Landscape and the Yoga Teacher

The digital revolution has transformed yoga teaching in ways unimaginable a generation ago. Social media platforms have given individual teachers the ability to reach global audiences of millions. Online teaching platforms have made yoga accessible to people who cannot physically attend a studio. YouTube, Instagram, and other content platforms have democratized yoga education. These developments carry immense potential for good -- and equally significant potential for ethical problems.

Digital ethics for yoga teachers is not a minor or optional addition to the ethics curriculum -- it is central to contemporary professional practice. The same principles of Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, and Aparigraha that govern in-person teaching apply with equal force in the digital domain. But the specific challenges of the digital world require specific guidance.

## 10.2 Social Media Ethics

### 10.2.1 Authenticity and Honest Representation

One of the most pervasive ethical problems on yoga social media is the gap between the curated digital persona and the reality of the teacher's life and practice. Filters, lighting, and carefully chosen angles present bodies and practices in ways that are not representative of reality. The pressure to maintain an aspirational image leads many teachers to present a false version of themselves -- always physically perfect, always spiritually serene, always in a picturesque location -- that is dishonest and contributes to the harmful culture of comparison and inadequacy among students and aspiring teachers.

Satya demands digital honesty. This does not mean that yoga teachers must share every difficulty or vulnerability publicly -- that would be its own kind of performance. It means that what you do choose to share should be genuinely representative, that your marketing claims should be accurate, and that your digital persona should be congruent with who you actually are as a teacher and a human being.

### 10.2.2 Ahimsa in Digital Spaces

- Do not post photographs or videos of students without their explicit, informed written consent specifying the exact platforms and uses.

- Do not use before-and-after images that exploit students' insecurities or promote unrealistic body transformations.
- Do not use fear-based or shame-based marketing ('You'll never achieve your goals unless...'; 'Stop living in your limited body...').
- Do not speak disparagingly of other teachers, studios, or yoga traditions on social media -- this poisons the wider community.
- Do not use social media to pursue, flirt with, or cultivate inappropriate personal relationships with students.
- Be mindful of the content you amplify -- sharing posts that promote harmful body ideals, pseudoscience, or misleading health claims is a form of participatory harm.

### 10.2.3 Asteya in Digital Content

Intellectual property ethics in the digital yoga world are routinely and casually violated. Sequences developed by other teachers are presented without attribution. Images are used without permission or credit. Music is played without licensing. Teachings drawn from specific lineages or senior teachers are presented as original creations. These violations of Asteya are not merely discourteous -- they are often illegal and are always ethically problematic.

The ethical standard for digital content is simple: credit everything you have borrowed or been inspired by. Name your teachers and lineages. Obtain permission before using others' images, music, or written content. If you are uncertain whether something requires attribution or permission, err on the side of giving it.

### 10.3 Online Teaching Ethics

Online yoga teaching introduces specific ethical considerations that do not arise in the same way in the in-person context. The teacher cannot physically see students in adequate detail to monitor safety. The teacher cannot offer hands-on adjustments. Students may practice without appropriate equipment, in unsafe environments, or with health conditions the teacher is unaware of. The screen creates a psychological distance that can make students appear less present as full human beings, which can dull the teacher's ethical attentiveness.

Online Teaching Risk	Ethical Response
Teacher cannot observe student safety in detail	Invest in high-quality camera and lighting; sequence conservatively for unseen populations; provide detailed safety cues
Students may have undisclosed health conditions	Require health intake forms even for online students; include regular verbal reminders about contraindications
Student data collected through digital platforms	Use platforms with strong privacy policies; be transparent about data collection and storage; never

	sell student data
Screen-mediated distance reduces empathy	Actively cultivate the quality of attention and care online that you bring to in-person teaching; check in with students regularly
Content may be recorded and shared without consent	Be explicit about recording policies; if you record classes, obtain consent; address unauthorized sharing promptly

## 10.4 Managing Online Boundaries

The constant accessibility created by digital communication creates specific boundary challenges for yoga teachers. Students may message at any hour, expecting responses. The informal social media relationship blurs the line between professional and personal. The digital environment can make it feel normal to respond to students at midnight, to share personal life events publicly, or to engage in online relationships that would be considered inappropriate in person.

Ethical digital boundaries for yoga teachers include: establishing clear communication policies (response times, appropriate channels, hours during which you are accessible); maintaining a professional digital persona that does not share information that could compromise your professional relationship with students; and applying the same boundary principles online that you apply in person -- not pursuing personal relationships with students through private digital channels.

# LESSON 11

## Business Ethics for Yoga Teachers: Seva, Commerce, and Integrity

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*"Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize." -- Swami Sivananda*

# Lesson 11: Business Ethics for Yoga Teachers -- Seva, Commerce, and Integrity

## 11.1 The Tension Between Service and Commerce

One of the most common sources of ethical confusion for yoga teachers is the relationship between yoga as sacred service (Seva) and yoga as livelihood -- as a business that generates income. Many yoga teachers experience a genuine inner conflict between the traditional view of yoga as something that should be freely given and the practical reality that they must earn a living, pay rent, purchase training, and meet financial obligations in the modern world.

This tension is not only resolvable -- it is, when navigated with integrity, a powerful spiritual practice in itself. The Bhagavad Gita's teaching of nishkama karma -- action without attachment to personal reward -- does not mean working for free. It means working from a motivation of genuine service rather than from greed, ego inflation, or exploitation. A yoga teacher who charges fair, transparent, appropriate rates for genuine expertise and service is honoring both the practice and their own livelihood. A yoga teacher who uses manipulative pricing, false urgency, or spiritual guilt to extract maximum income from vulnerable students is violating business ethics and the spirit of seva simultaneously.

## 11.2 Ethical Pricing and Financial Transparency

### 11.2.1 Principles of Ethical Pricing

- Price your services based on the genuine value you provide, the costs of your operation, the fair compensation of your expertise, and the economic realities of your community -- not on what you can extract from students' vulnerability.
- Be transparent about pricing. All costs -- class fees, materials, additional services -- should be clearly stated upfront, before students commit.
- Avoid 'bait and switch' structures where a low introductory price escalates rapidly. Students should be able to understand the true cost of ongoing participation before they begin.
- Offer genuine options for students with limited financial means -- sliding scale, community classes, work-exchange, partial scholarships. Economic access is an expression of Ahimsa.
- Maintain consistent pricing. Charging different students different amounts for the same service without transparent, principled reasons is a form of discrimination.

### 11.2.2 Teacher Training Pricing Ethics

Teacher training programs are among the most significant financial commitments a yoga student can make. The cost of a comprehensive teacher training can represent many months of income

for an average student. This creates a significant ethical responsibility for teacher training providers to ensure that: the program delivers what it advertises; the cost is commensurate with the quality and depth of training offered; refund policies are clearly stated and fairly applied; and students are not pressured into purchasing add-on services, retreats, or advanced trainings as conditions of receiving their certification.

### 11.3 Ethical Marketing and Promotion

Marketing is not inherently unethical -- communicating clearly and honestly about the value you offer is a legitimate and necessary part of running a yoga business. What makes marketing unethical is when it distorts truth, exploits vulnerability, manipulates emotions, or creates false expectations.

Unethical Marketing Practice	Ethical Alternative
Before-and-after body transformation claims and images	Testimonials that speak to how students feel, what they have learned, and how their relationship with their body has changed
False urgency: 'Only 2 spots left!' when many are available	Accurate information about enrollment; transparent communication about genuine scarcity when it exists
Implied cure claims: 'Heal your [condition] with yoga'	Evidence-based language about potential benefits and appropriate references to research
Spiritual guilt: 'If you don't invest in this, you're not serious about your practice'	Honest description of what the program offers and who it is genuinely suited for
Misleading celebrity or authority endorsements	Genuine testimonials from actual students with accurate, verifiable claims

### 11.4 Financial Relationships with Students

The financial relationship between yoga teacher and student must be handled with the same care as all other dimensions of the professional relationship. Particular areas of concern include: accepting gifts of significant value from students (which can create feelings of obligation and complicate the professional relationship); offering steep discounts to favored students while charging others full price (which creates inequity and implicit favoritism); lending or borrowing money from students (which deeply entangles the financial and professional relationship); and using the teaching relationship to sell students products or services in which the teacher has a personal financial interest without full disclosure.

### 11.5 The Ethics of Teacher Training Programs

As the global yoga industry has expanded, the proliferation of teacher training programs has raised serious ethical questions. Programs that are inadequately long, insufficiently supervised, or that certify teachers in populations they are not equipped to serve (prenatal yoga, trauma survivors, people with serious medical conditions) without appropriate specialized training are causing harm in the wider yoga community. An ethical teacher training program is honest about: the level of expertise a graduate can genuinely claim; the additional training needed to work with specific populations; the limitations of what any training can provide; and the ongoing professional development that genuine competence requires.

# LESSON 12

## Mental Health Ethics: Recognizing, Responding, and Referring

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*"Know the limits of your role -- and know them with precision." -- Professional Ethics Maxim*

## Lesson 12: Mental Health Ethics -- Recognizing, Responding, and Referring

### 12.1 Yoga Teachers and Mental Health: Navigating the Boundary

Yoga teachers occupy a fascinating and ethically complex position in relation to mental health. Yoga practice has a significant and growing evidence base as a supportive practice for a range of mental health conditions -- anxiety, depression, PTSD, substance use disorders, eating disorders, and more. Students frequently come to yoga specifically seeking relief from mental health challenges. And the yoga class environment -- with its combination of movement, breath, mindfulness, and community -- can facilitate genuine mental health benefits.

At the same time, yoga teachers are not mental health professionals. They are not trained to diagnose mental health conditions, to provide psychotherapy, to manage psychiatric crises, or to make clinical judgments about the appropriateness of yoga for a specific individual's mental health needs. The ethical boundary between the yoga teacher's supportive role and the mental health clinician's professional role must be understood, respected, and maintained with clarity.

### 12.2 Common Mental Health Presentations in the Yoga Classroom

Every yoga teacher will, in the course of their career, encounter students experiencing significant mental health challenges. Being able to recognize these presentations -- without diagnosing -- is an important skill. Knowing how to respond supportively and when to refer to professional help is an ethical obligation.

Mental Health Presentation	What the Yoga Teacher Can Observe and Do
Depression: persistent low energy, withdrawal from community, visible sadness or emotional flatness	Maintain warm, consistent contact; do not push; offer modifications; gently inquire about wellbeing; provide referral information if symptoms persist or worsen
Anxiety: hyperventilation, restlessness, inability to close eyes, rigid and braced body patterns	Offer grounding practices; avoid intense pranayama; provide safety cues; check in privately; suggest appropriate professional support
Trauma activation: dissociation, freeze responses, panic during certain postures or in savasana	Stop any triggering practice; offer grounding; do not probe for history; maintain calm presence; refer to trauma-specialized support
Eating disorders: discussions of food restriction, excessive concern with body fat during practice	Do not comment on body appearance or weight; use body-neutral language; provide referrals to eating disorder specialists; avoid any weight-loss framing

Suicidal ideation: direct or indirect statements about wanting to die, hopelessness, giving things away	Take all such statements seriously; listen with care; do not promise absolute confidentiality; contact appropriate crisis support; follow emergency protocols
Psychosis: confusion about reality, paranoid ideation, grandiose claims, behavioral disorganization	Maintain calm and clear communication; do not engage with delusional content; contact emergency support if the student is a safety risk

## 12.3 The Ethics of Referral

Referring a student to appropriate mental health support is not a failure -- it is an act of genuine care and professional integrity. Many yoga teachers resist making referrals out of concern that the student will feel rejected, or out of an overestimation of what yoga can provide, or simply because they do not know how to have the conversation. Developing the skill and the confidence to make supportive referrals is one of the most important professional competencies a yoga teacher can cultivate.

### How to Make an Effective and Compassionate Mental Health Referral

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT MOMENT:** A private conversation after class is far better than addressing mental health concerns in front of other students.

**LEAD WITH CARE:** 'I've noticed you seem to be carrying something heavy lately. I care about your wellbeing and wanted to check in with you.'

**SHARE YOUR OBSERVATION:** Be specific but gentle. 'I've noticed you've seemed particularly down the last few weeks, and I wanted you to know I see you.'

**OFFER RATHER THAN PRESCRIBE:** 'Have you been able to talk to anyone -- a counselor or therapist -- about what's going on? I know some really good resources if that would be helpful.'

**AFFIRM THEIR CAPACITY:** 'Getting support when you need it is a sign of strength, not weakness -- it's exactly what someone who practices yoga should do.'

**FOLLOW UP:** After a referral conversation, follow up briefly in subsequent classes. Not intrusively -- simply maintaining warm, consistent contact shows that your care is genuine.

**KNOW YOUR RESOURCES:** Maintain an up-to-date list of mental health resources in your community, including crisis lines, to provide when needed.

## 12.4 Yoga Therapy vs. Yoga Teaching

Yoga therapy is a growing and increasingly formalized field in which yoga practices are applied in clinical or therapeutic settings to address specific health conditions under the guidance of trained yoga therapists working in coordination with medical professionals. Yoga therapy requires specialized training beyond standard yoga teacher training -- typically 800 hours or more of specialized study, with clinical supervision.

A yoga teacher who has not completed this specialized training is not a yoga therapist and should not present themselves as one. The ethical principle here is simple: represent what you are, deliver what you promise, and refer when the student's needs exceed your training. This is Satya and Ahimsa in practice.

# LESSON 13

## Self-Care as an Ethical Obligation: The Teacher's Own Practice

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*"You cannot pour from an empty vessel." -- Ancient Wisdom*

## Lesson 13: Self-Care as an Ethical Obligation -- The Teacher's Own Practice

### 13.1 The Ethical Case for Teacher Self-Care

In many spiritual traditions, the idea of prioritizing one's own needs can seem uncomfortably selfish -- at odds with the spirit of service and sacrifice that characterizes the dedicated teacher. Yet the yoga tradition is clear: a teacher who neglects their own wellbeing cannot genuinely care for others. Patanjali's Niyamas -- the personal observances that govern the teacher's relationship with themselves -- exist precisely because inner wellbeing is the prerequisite for outer service.

Self-care for the yoga teacher is therefore not an indulgence or a luxury -- it is an ethical obligation. A yoga teacher who teaches from a state of chronic exhaustion, unprocessed trauma, personal crisis, or spiritual emptiness is not able to hold the space that students deserve. They may teach technically correct classes while transmitting exhaustion, anxiety, or neediness rather than presence, care, and wisdom. Students are highly sensitive to the inner state of their teacher -- often more sensitive than the teacher realizes.

### 13.2 The Four Pillars of Teacher Self-Care

#### 13.2.1 Maintaining Your Own Practice

A yoga teacher who does not practice yoga is working against the most fundamental principle of authentic teaching: transmission from lived experience. Tapas -- the disciplined commitment to ongoing practice -- is not optional for the yoga teacher. It is the source of your authority, the wellspring of your teaching, and the maintenance of your own physical and psychological health.

This does not mean that your practice must look like your teaching. The yoga teacher's personal practice may be quite different from what they teach -- quieter, more internally focused, more exploratory. What matters is that it is genuine, regular, and nourishing. A teacher who practices only when they teach has confused performance with practice.

#### 13.2.2 Psychological Health and Personal Therapy

The yoga classroom is a container that holds students' most vulnerable experiences. Holding this container with skill and safety requires that the teacher have done -- and continues to do -- their own psychological work. This means engaging with their own unresolved trauma, examining their relational patterns and triggers, developing genuine emotional regulation capacity, and cultivating

the self-awareness that allows them to notice when their own material is being activated in the teaching context.

Personal therapy or counseling is a highly recommended practice for yoga teachers, particularly for those who work with vulnerable populations or who teach practices with significant psychological potential (deep pranayama, yoga nidra, trauma-sensitive yoga). The yoga teacher who has their own therapist is not admitting weakness -- they are modeling the same care for inner wellbeing that they invite in their students.

### 13.2.3 Professional Supervision and Mentorship

Professional supervision -- the regular practice of discussing one's teaching work with a more experienced mentor or peer group -- is standard practice in most helping professions (counseling, social work, medicine, teaching) and is equally valuable for yoga teachers. Supervision provides: an external perspective on difficult teaching situations; accountability for ethical conduct; ongoing professional development; emotional processing of the challenges that inevitably arise in teaching work; and a relationship of genuine mentorship that supports the teacher's long-term development.

### 13.2.4 Life Balance and Sustainable Practice

Yoga teachers are often drawn to their work by a deep passion that can make it difficult to maintain healthy limits around teaching hours, class size, and the energy they pour into each teaching engagement. This passion, unchecked, leads to burnout -- the progressive depletion of energy, enthusiasm, and care that affects even the most dedicated teachers.

Preventing burnout requires conscious attention to: the number of hours you teach per week (most sustainable yoga teachers teach no more than 15-20 contact hours weekly); the diversity of activities that nourish you beyond yoga (relationships, creative pursuits, time in nature, rest); the quality of rest and sleep; the social connections that provide genuine reciprocity rather than one-way support; and the regular evaluation of whether your teaching life is serving your own deepest values.

## 13.3 Teacher Self-Care: The Ethical Bottom Line

Teacher Wellbeing Issue	Ethical Risk to Students
Chronic exhaustion and burnout	Teaching becomes mechanical; teacher cannot be genuinely present; quality of care declines; risk of errors increases
Unprocessed personal trauma	Students' experiences can trigger the teacher;

	teacher may react rather than respond; traumatic material may be inadvertently transmitted or projected
Mental health challenges without support	Teacher may unconsciously use students as emotional support; professional judgment may be compromised; modeling of healthy coping is undermined
Absence of personal practice	Teaching lacks authentic lived authority; teacher cannot genuinely meet students in the experience of the practice; ethical compass may drift
Isolation and lack of supervision	Teacher has no external accountability; blind spots remain unexamined; ethical violations may go unnoticed and unchecked

### 13.4 The Teacher's Ongoing Commitment

The ethical yoga teacher makes an ongoing, renewable commitment to their own wellbeing -- not as a static achievement but as a continuing practice. Just as students are encouraged to show up to the mat again and again regardless of how they feel, the yoga teacher must show up to their own inner work again and again -- to their own practice, their own reflection, their own supervision, their own therapy. This is the practice that makes all other teaching possible.

# LESSON 14

## Ethical Leadership and Community Building in Yoga

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*"A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader; a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves." -- Eleanor Roosevelt*

# Lesson 14: Ethical Leadership and Community Building in Yoga

## 14.1 The Yoga Teacher as Community Leader

Whether you teach a single weekly community class of ten students or run a large yoga school with hundreds of practitioners, you are a community leader. The yoga class is not merely an exercise session -- it is a gathering of human beings in a shared practice of attention, presence, and growth. The teacher who holds this space is responsible not only for the individual wellbeing of each student but for the collective wellbeing of the community they are creating.

Ethical leadership in yoga communities draws on the same principles that govern all yoga ethics -- Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha -- but applies them to the particular challenges of group dynamics, institutional power, professional relationships, and the management of conflict and crisis.

## 14.2 Building a Healthy Community Culture

The culture of a yoga community is not accidental -- it is created, consciously or unconsciously, by the behavior and values of its leadership. A healthy yoga community culture has certain recognizable characteristics:

- **Safety:** every member feels physically and psychologically safe in the space
- **Welcome:** the community actively extends welcome to newcomers and to people who differ from the existing membership
- **Accountability:** when harm occurs, it is acknowledged and addressed, not minimized or covered up
- **Autonomy:** members are encouraged to develop their own practice, discernment, and judgment -- not to become dependent on the teacher or the community
- **Openness:** the community maintains genuine relationships with the wider world; members are not discouraged from practicing elsewhere, maintaining outside relationships, or questioning community practices
- **Fairness:** all members are treated with consistent respect regardless of their social status, level of practice, financial contribution, or relationship to the teacher

## 14.3 Ethical Decision-Making in Community Situations

Community leadership inevitably involves difficult decisions: how to respond when a student behaves in ways that harm other members; how to address allegations of misconduct by a teacher or staff member; how to handle conflict between students; how to make decisions about pricing,

programming, and access that affect the whole community fairly. The ethical leader approaches these decisions through a consistent framework.

The Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Yoga Leaders
STEP 1 - PAUSE: Before responding to a difficult situation, pause. Gather information. Resist the urge to act from the first emotion that arises.
STEP 2 - IDENTIFY: Identify all the stakeholders whose wellbeing is affected by this situation and decision.
STEP 3 - APPLY THE PRINCIPLES: Ask: what does Ahimsa require in this situation? What does Satya demand? What would Aparigraha mean here?
STEP 4 - CONSULT: For significant decisions, consult with trusted advisors -- mentors, supervisors, or peers -- before acting. Do not make major community decisions in isolation.
STEP 5 - DECIDE AND COMMUNICATE: Make the decision that best honors all stakeholders and the core principles. Communicate it clearly, honestly, and with care.
STEP 6 - REVIEW: After implementation, review the decision and its effects. Be willing to acknowledge if it was wrong and to make amends if harm resulted.

## 14.4 Responding to Misconduct: The Ethics of Accountability

One of the most difficult tests of ethical leadership is responding to misconduct -- whether by yourself, by a colleague, by a student, or by a more senior figure in the yoga world. The temptation to protect the community's reputation, to protect personal relationships, or simply to avoid the discomfort of confrontation can lead even well-intentioned leaders to minimize, cover up, or inadequately address misconduct. This is itself a significant ethical failure.

### 14.4.1 When You Are Aware of Misconduct

- Do not dismiss or minimize reports of misconduct. Take every report seriously and investigate thoroughly.
- Center the wellbeing of the person who has been harmed, not the reputation of the person accused.
- Follow your organization's grievance and investigation procedures consistently.
- Maintain confidentiality appropriately while ensuring that all relevant parties are informed.
- Be prepared to take decisive action, including termination of a teacher's role, if misconduct is substantiated.
- Provide support to those who have been harmed -- including referrals to appropriate professional support.
- Communicate transparently with the wider community when this is appropriate for their safety.

### **14.4.2 When the Misconduct Is Your Own**

Perhaps the most demanding ethical situation a yoga leader faces is acknowledging and responding appropriately to their own misconduct. The pressures of reputation, livelihood, and ego can make honest self-accountability feel impossible. Yet the yogic path demands it. A yoga leader who has caused harm and genuinely acknowledges it, makes amends, and changes their behavior embodies the practice far more fully than one who never acknowledges their failures.

Genuine accountability for your own misconduct includes: acknowledging what you did honestly and without minimization; acknowledging the harm caused; making genuine amends where possible; making the structural changes necessary to prevent recurrence; and accepting the consequences -- including to your professional standing -- that result from your actions.

### **14.5 Ethical Relationships with Colleagues and the Wider Yoga Community**

Ethical yoga leadership extends beyond the individual's relationship with their own students to encompass their relationships with fellow teachers, with other yoga traditions and lineages, and with the wider professional yoga community. The ethical principles of Ahimsa, Satya, and Asteya apply here with full force: speak respectfully of other teachers and traditions; give credit where it is due; do not compete through disparagement; and contribute to the elevation of the whole yoga community rather than positioning yourself at others' expense.

# LESSON 15

## Living Ethics: Integrating Integrity into Every Aspect of Teaching Life

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*"The way you do anything is the way you do everything." -- Zen Saying*

# Lesson 15: Living Ethics -- Integrating Integrity into Every Aspect of Teaching Life

## 15.1 From Learning Ethics to Living Ethics

Over the fourteen lessons that have preceded this one, you have engaged with the ethical principles that must govern the life of the yoga teacher: Ahimsa and the commitment to non-harming; Satya and the practice of truthfulness; the management of professional boundaries; the ethics of the teacher-student relationship; consent and confidentiality; the ethics of touch; inclusive and equitable teaching; digital ethics; business integrity; mental health responsibility; self-care as ethical practice; and the demands of ethical community leadership.

These lessons have given you a map. But a map is not the territory. The real ethical life of the yoga teacher is not lived in the classroom studying principles but in the full complexity of actual teaching -- in the moments of uncertainty, temptation, pressure, and confusion that every teacher faces. The purpose of this final lesson is to help you move from the study of ethics to the living of ethics: to make the principles we have explored not rules you apply from the outside but values you embody from the inside.

## 15.2 The Ethical Teacher's Inner Life

Genuine ethical integrity is not primarily a set of behaviors. It is a state of character -- a set of deeply cultivated inner qualities that naturally express themselves in ethical action across all circumstances. The ancient Greek philosophers called this state of developed virtue arete -- excellence of character. The yogic tradition calls it Dharma -- living in alignment with one's deepest nature and highest duty.

The qualities that characterize the genuinely ethical yoga teacher are cultivated not in the classroom but in the laboratory of daily life and inner practice:

### 15.2.1 Discernment (Viveka)

Viveka -- the Sanskrit term for discriminative awareness or discernment -- is the capacity to see clearly, to distinguish the real from the unreal, the helpful from the harmful, the ethical from the unethical in each specific situation. Viveka cannot be downloaded from a rulebook -- it develops through the combination of careful study (such as this course), regular reflective practice, honest self-examination, accumulated experience, and the quality of attention that genuine meditation practice cultivates.

A yoga teacher of developed Viveka does not need to consult a code of ethics before every decision -- they see clearly what is required in each moment. This does not mean impulsivity; it means that ethical perception has become so integrated that it operates naturally, continuously, and with the precision of lived wisdom rather than the bluntness of external rules.

### 15.2.2 Compassion (Karuna)

Karuna -- compassion, the genuine wish to alleviate suffering -- is the motivational heart of the ethical yoga teacher. When compassion is genuine, many ethical questions answer themselves: you do not exploit students because you genuinely wish them well; you do not shade the truth because you care too much about their welfare to deceive them; you do not violate boundaries because you understand the harm this would cause.

Developing genuine compassion -- not the performance of compassion, but the actual felt experience of caring for the wellbeing of those you teach -- is one of the most important lifelong practices of the yoga teacher. The loving-kindness meditation traditions of Buddhism and the Bhavana practices of Hinduism both offer explicit cultivation practices for developing Karuna that every yoga teacher would benefit from learning and applying.

### 15.2.3 Courage (Vira)

Ethical integrity requires courage -- the willingness to do what is right even when it is uncomfortable, professionally risky, or socially costly. The courage to decline an adjustment when you sense the student's discomfort, even if they have verbally consented. The courage to tell a student the truth about their practice when flattery would be easier. The courage to refer a student to professional help when their needs exceed your scope. The courage to speak up when you witness misconduct by a more senior teacher. The courage to acknowledge your own errors and make amends.

Ethical courage is not recklessness -- it is wise, considered, and proportionate action in the face of genuine difficulty. It is one of the rarest and most admirable qualities in a yoga teacher, and it requires cultivation through practice: beginning with small acts of integrity in low-stakes situations and building the capacity for larger acts of courage when higher stakes demand it.

## 15.3 Ethical Integration: Bringing It All Together

Domain of Teaching Life	Key Ethical Commitment
Physical Teaching	The safety and autonomy of every student's body is non-negotiable; adjustments require consent; modifications are always available and never

	stigmatized
Verbal Communication	Language creates reality; words must embody Ahimsa and Satya; feedback is honest, compassionate, and serves the student's genuine growth
Teacher-Student Relationship	Power is acknowledged, not denied; boundaries are clear and consistently maintained; the teacher's role is to liberate, not to retain
Consent and Privacy	Students' autonomy and privacy are sacred; informed consent governs all significant interventions; confidentiality is maintained with care
Inclusion and Equity	Every body is welcome; cultural heritage is honored; economic access is actively pursued; diversity enriches the practice
Digital Presence	Online conduct reflects the same integrity as in-person teaching; student privacy is protected; content is honest and properly attributed
Business Practice	Pricing is transparent and fair; marketing is honest; financial relationships with students are kept appropriately professional
Mental Health	The teacher knows their scope; referrals are made with care; the teacher tends to their own psychological health diligently
Self-Care	The teacher's ongoing practice, wellbeing, and professional development are ethical obligations, not optional extras
Community Leadership	Misconduct is addressed with courage; healthy culture is actively cultivated; the teacher's authority is used in service of student liberation

## 15.4 A Personal Ethics Commitment

As you conclude your study of these fifteen lessons, we invite you to compose your own Personal Ethics Commitment -- a living document that expresses your deepest understanding of what it means to be an ethical yoga teacher and your specific, personal commitments to embodying these principles in your teaching life.

### Your Personal Ethics Commitment: A Template

I, [your name], commit to teaching yoga with the following intentions and practices:

MY CORE VALUES as a yoga teacher are: [list 3-5 values that are most fundamental to you]

MY COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS: I commit to [specific practices regarding safety, consent,

confidentiality, inclusion]
MY COMMITMENT TO HONESTY: I commit to [specific practices regarding truthfulness in marketing, qualifications, and feedback]
MY COMMITMENT TO BOUNDARIES: I commit to [specific practices regarding professional limits]
MY COMMITMENT TO MY OWN PRACTICE: I commit to [specific practices for maintaining my own yoga practice and wellbeing]
MY COMMITMENT TO ONGOING GROWTH: I commit to [specific practices for continuing education, supervision, and ethical development]
WHEN I MAKE A MISTAKE -- and I will make mistakes -- I commit to [acknowledging honestly, making amends, and learning]
I will review this commitment annually and revise it as I grow and deepen in my understanding of what ethical yoga teaching requires.
Signed: _____ Date: _____

## 15.5 Closing Reflection: The Ethical Teacher's Path

The journey of becoming an ethical yoga teacher does not end with this course, this book, or any certification. It is a lifelong path of continuous learning, honest self-examination, humble acknowledgment of mistakes, and the gradual deepening of character that comes from sincere practice.

The ancient teachers of yoga were not perfect. They were human beings who made mistakes, who grew, who changed, who carried the same struggles and shadow material as all of us. What distinguished them as worthy teachers was not perfection but sincerity -- the genuine, ongoing commitment to truth, to non-harming, to the welfare of those they served, and to the liberation that is the deepest purpose of the practice.

May you carry that sincerity. May you carry it into every class, every adjustment, every word, every business decision, every digital post, every difficult conversation. May the principles of these fifteen lessons become not rules you apply but qualities you embody. And may the students who come to your mat find in you not a perfect teacher, but a genuine one -- one who has committed, with all your imperfect humanity, to the highest ethical calling of this ancient and beautiful practice.

*Sa vidya ya vimuktaye. That which liberates is true knowledge. May your teaching be true knowledge for all who receive it.*

# Appendix A: SKM Yoga Code of Ethics for Teachers

## Preamble

This Code of Ethics represents the collective commitment of SKM Yoga and all teachers trained in its programs to the highest standards of professional conduct, ethical integrity, and compassionate service. It is a living document, to be reviewed and updated regularly in light of evolving understanding and community needs.

## Section 1: Commitment to Students

6. I will treat all students with dignity, respect, and genuine care, regardless of their background, ability, body type, identity, or level of practice.
7. I will obtain informed consent before offering physical adjustments and will honor student autonomy in all aspects of the teaching relationship.
8. I will maintain appropriate professional limits in all teacher-student relationships and will not pursue romantic, sexual, or inappropriate personal relationships with current students.
9. I will respect student confidentiality and handle all personal information with appropriate discretion and security.
10. I will refer students to appropriate professional support when their needs exceed my scope of practice.
11. I will offer genuine modifications and alternatives that honor the full diversity of bodies and abilities in my classes.

## Section 2: Commitment to Truthfulness and Transparency

12. I will accurately represent my qualifications, training, and experience and will not claim expertise I do not possess.
13. I will be honest and transparent in my marketing, pricing, and business practices.
14. I will attribute ideas, sequences, and teachings to their sources and will not present others' work as my own.
15. I will maintain honesty in my communications with students, colleagues, and the public.

## Section 3: Commitment to Ongoing Development

16. I will maintain a genuine personal yoga practice as the foundation of my teaching.
17. I will pursue ongoing professional development, continuing education, and supervision.
18. I will engage in regular, honest self-examination and will actively seek to identify and address my own biases and limitations.

19. I will tend to my own psychological and physical wellbeing as an ethical obligation, not a personal luxury.

#### **Section 4: Commitment to the Community**

20. I will actively cultivate a teaching environment that is inclusive, equitable, and genuinely welcoming to all.
21. I will speak respectfully of other teachers, traditions, and lineages, even when I disagree with their approaches.
22. I will respond to misconduct -- my own and others' -- with honesty, courage, and appropriate accountability.
23. I will actively contribute to the integrity and health of the wider yoga community.

Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Ethical Dilemma Case Studies for Discussion

### How to Use These Case Studies

These case studies are designed for use in small group discussions during your teacher training. For each case, read it carefully, then discuss the questions provided. There are rarely simple right answers -- the purpose is to develop your ethical reasoning, not to arrive at a perfect solution. Pay attention to the different perspectives represented, the different values in tension, and the range of appropriate responses.

### Case Study 1: The Enthusiastic Adjuster

#### Case: The Enthusiastic Adjuster

**SITUATION:** Priya is a newly certified yoga teacher, passionate about hands-on adjustments. She has been trained in adjustment technique and believes deeply in their value. One of her students, a 35-year-old man named Karan, has never explicitly declined adjustments. One day, while Priya is adjusting his forward fold, she notices he holds his breath and his body becomes very rigid. She interprets this as resistance to the pose and applies slightly more pressure. After class, Karan does not return. Three weeks later, Priya discovers through a mutual friend that Karan is a childhood trauma survivor and that her adjustment triggered a significant trauma response.

**QUESTIONS:** 1. What signals did Priya miss, and why? 2. How should a robust consent process have changed this situation? 3. What is Priya's ethical responsibility now that she knows the impact of her adjustment? 4. What systemic changes should Priya make to her teaching going forward? 5. What does this case tell us about the limits of relying on explicit verbal consent alone?

### Case Study 2: The Celebrity Lineage

#### Case: The Celebrity Lineage

**SITUATION:** Arjun is a popular yoga teacher who studied for one workshop weekend with a world-famous yoga master. He now regularly describes himself in his marketing as 'trained in the lineage of [Master's name]' and implies a deep transmission relationship that does not exist. Students pay premium prices based on this implied connection. The master has never authorized this description and does not know Arjun.

**QUESTIONS:** 1. Which specific ethical principles does Arjun's marketing violate? 2. How might this situation harm students? How might it harm the master's actual students and lineage? 3. What is the accurate, ethical way for Arjun to represent his training? 4. If you were a colleague of Arjun's and were aware of this situation, what is your ethical responsibility? 5. How does this case relate to Asteya -- non-stealing?

### Case Study 3: The Vulnerable Student

### Case: The Vulnerable Student

**SITUATION:** Meera is a yoga teacher who has developed a warm relationship with a long-term student, Sunita, who has shared that she is going through a difficult divorce. Sunita begins attending classes five days a week and after class frequently asks Meera to have tea so she can 'talk through things.' The conversations have become increasingly like therapy sessions. Sunita has begun sending late-night messages to Meera asking for emotional support. Meera feels genuinely fond of Sunita and does not want to hurt her by 'withdrawing.'

**QUESTIONS:** 1. What boundary issues are present in this situation? 2. Why is the dynamic problematic even though Meera's intentions are kind? 3. How should Meera address this situation with Sunita? Draft an actual response she might give. 4. What professional resources should Meera offer Sunita? 5. How could this situation have been navigated differently from the beginning to prevent it from developing as it did?

## Case Study 4: The Conflicted Community

### Case: The Conflicted Community

**SITUATION:** Vikram runs a successful yoga school. One of his senior teachers, Deepa, is alleged by two students to have been making derogatory comments about certain students' body types and using shame-based language in her classes. Deepa is very popular, teaches the most well-attended classes, and generates significant revenue for the school. When Vikram raises the issue with Deepa, she dismisses the allegations as 'misunderstanding' and implies that the complaining students are 'too sensitive.' Several senior community members urge Vikram not to take any action that might damage the community's reputation.

**QUESTIONS:** 1. What are Vikram's ethical obligations to the students who reported harm? 2. What factors should NOT influence his decision? 3. How should the investigation proceed? 4. What outcomes, proportional to the severity of what is substantiated, would be appropriate? 5. How should Vikram communicate with the wider community about this situation?

## Appendix C: Recommended Reading and Resources

### Classical Texts

- Patanjali. (c. 400 CE). The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali -- especially Book II (Sadhana Pada) on the Yamas, Niyamas, and ethical practice. Recommended translation: Edwin Bryant (2009), North Point Press.
- Bhagavad Gita -- especially Chapters 3 (Karma Yoga), 4 (Jnana Yoga), and 17-18 on the ethics of action, duty, and character. Recommended translation: Swami Sivananda or Paramahansa Yogananda.
- Swami Sivananda. (1938). Practice of Brahmacharya. The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh. Classic treatment of ethical conduct for spiritual practitioners.

### Modern Ethics and Professional Conduct

- Remski, M. (2019). Practice and All Is Coming: Abuse, Cult Dynamics, and Healing in Yoga and Beyond. Embodied Wisdom Publishing. The most thorough modern investigation of ethical failures in the yoga world.
- Faulds, R. (2006). Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat. Bantam Books. Includes important reflections on the ethics of yoga community and teacher-student relationship.
- Forbes, B. (2011). Yoga for Emotional Balance. Shambhala. Includes important guidance on trauma-sensitive and mental-health-aware teaching.

### Mental Health, Trauma, and Body Ethics

- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma. Viking. Essential reading for any yoga teacher working with trauma survivors.
- Emerson, D. & Hopper, E. (2011). Overcoming Trauma Through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body. North Atlantic Books. Foundational text for trauma-sensitive yoga teaching.
- Levine, P. (2010). In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness. North Atlantic Books.
- Strings, S. (2019). Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia. NYU Press. Essential reading for yoga teachers committed to body-neutral, inclusive teaching.

### Inclusive and Equitable Teaching

- Williams, R. & Lisette, T. (2020). Yoga and Body Image. Llewellyn Publications. A collection of essays on body diversity in yoga.
- Accessibility in Yoga: The Accessible Yoga Association, [www.accessibleyoga.org](http://www.accessibleyoga.org). Resources for making yoga genuinely inclusive.

### Business Ethics and Professional Practice

- Cain, C. & Portillo, M. (2019). Yoga Business Academy. Resources for building an ethically grounded yoga business.

**~ Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu ~**

*May all beings everywhere be happy and free.  
And may the thoughts, words, and actions of our own lives contribute in some way to that  
happiness and to that freedom.*

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