



Making Practice Matter

by Michael Stone

Making Practice Matter is a compilation of two *dharma* talks by Michael Stone. Together they address the theme of how practice can bring us more fully into this contemporary time and place. Sometimes we use practice to help us rise above the world, or become an island of calm within ourselves. In these provocative lectures, Michael Stone argues that this isn't necessarily what the Buddha intended, and it isn't what our world needs of us now.

Instead, Michael makes the case for an *activist* practice—a mode of contemplation that brings us into intimate connection with the world as it is and inspires us to act within it. When our compassion engages with the world around us, it can move us to work for social justice. When the self dissolves into this very world, we arrive at an ecological awareness. *Making Practice Matter* challenges us to look squarely at what we are most committed to—whether to our own self-perfection through an ideal practice, or to the welfare of all living things, through an active one.



ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

In popular magazines, yoga and Buddhism are celebrated, but I don't always recognize what's being celebrated. Are they the same practices that I've learned and that I teach? In popular culture, yoga is reduced to a body practice, and Buddhism is presented as aerobics for your mind. This captures neither the mental and emotional aspects of yoga, nor the embodied aspects of Buddhist *dharma*. And crucially, it leaves out the deep grounding both practices have—that they must have—in *ethics*.

It's helpful for us as practitioners to return periodically to the basics, so we can refresh our vision of what our practice is all about, and hold space for it to really enter our lives.

The word *Buddhism* is only about a hundred and sixty years old. It was coined by a German academic trying to encapsulate the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha never used the word "Buddhism." What the Buddha talked about was the *dharma*. He didn't teach any *-ism* or set of beliefs, just a toolkit for seeing things as they are. The word he often used in his teachings is *tana*. *Tana* means the *ground* or the *foundation*. This is why you often see the Buddha pointing to the ground: the ground of impermanence and change, the ground of conditioned existence, and the ground of awakening.

As for yoga, the word comes from the Sanskrit word *yug*, which means to *unite* or to *yoke*. *Yoga* doesn't mean to unite one thing with another, but that one thing and another are *already* inherently united. Everything is already intimately connected with everything else. This is why I like to translate the word *yoga* as *intimacy*. *Yoga* is the intimacy that is always present when we are not caught up in self-centred views. In fact, in the *Aripariyesana Sutta*, one of the Buddha's earliest sermons, he says that the reason we don't wake up to the reality of our lives—or the reason we are not intimate with how our lives really are—is because we love having a viewpoint. We love having a story. We prefer our opinion to the way life really happens.

From this simple introduction to the two traditions, we see already how they run much deeper than what is shown in the magazines. But truthfully, I pay less and less attention to what happens in mainstream conversations about practice so that I can stay focused on my own study, research and community. Suffice to say, yoga and Buddhist practices offer so much more than flexibility training for the body and mind. They are not just trying to help us get along in this world—they are trying to help us transform the way we see this world, and the way we exist in it.

The teachings are trying to help us move out of our own story, and toward direct intimacy with reality. In Sanskrit, there is a word, *ahamkara*, which is usually—incorrectly—translated as *the ego*. The word *ahamkara* literally means the *I-maker*, the mechanism in the mind that is constantly superimposing a *me* onto everything that we experience. Under the influence of *ahamkara*, we only see the world through a self-centred lens, and we make sure that what we do fits into the viewpoint or narrative of how our lives are supposed to go.

Guess what? It just doesn't work. And so then there is a gap between the story of how we want our lives to be, and how our lives actually are. Between what we think of as the body, and what the Buddha calls the body in the body—your body as it really is. Or your marriage as it is, rather than your marriage as you want it to be. Or your life in your life, rather than your life in your mind. The gap between how we want things to be and how things really are is called *dukkha*. It's usually translated as *suffering*, but I prefer to translate it as the *inability to be content*, or to be intimately connected. To say it another way, *dukkha* is not trusting ourselves.

My good friend David Loy, a Buddhist writer, has translated *dukkha* as *lack*. And I would say that of all the translations, this one touches me the most. *Dukkha* is the experience of lacking something and then looking outside of us to fill it in. We look to romantic love, to gaining as much wealth as possible, or to trying to get famous—all these different ways we try and ground ourselves. Sometimes we even try to become more spiritual to cover up the lack, and then we're doing yoga the way the magazines show it. But it doesn't work. No amount of becoming something else will help us with our sense of lack. *Ahamkara*, the storyteller, can't ever be grounded, and it can't ever be enlightened. Because it's just a storyteller.

We all know this from our own experience. When you're meditating and you sit still, even if you're just a beginner, eventually you'll have a moment of stillness. And then anxiety in the I-maker arises, because it's realizing that if things are going along better without it, it's going to be unemployed, so it comes in and says, *I was just still. That was really still. That's what Roshi was talking about. I'm spiritual. I'm advanced in my practice now.* And then you have *dukkha* for three years because every time you sit you're trying to get that experience again.

The I-maker, the self, is *dukkha*. And it will never stop. Sometimes when we are meditating, there are stages where thoughts stop temporarily, and then they start again. But what happens is that when they stop and start again, you see how they're empty, how they're not really *me*. So that's how I translate *dukkha*: *Dukkha* is the self that doesn't see that it has no ontological ground.

In this room, all the years and time that people put into sitting still, what are they doing? They're trying to reach or realize or awaken to an unmediated experience of anger, of jealousy, of envy, of pain, of greed, of confusion, of peace, of joy, to know what it's like to feel feelings without plugging them into a habitual story. To experience grief, or apathy. In other words, to get close, so close, that we become one with how our lives really are. This is yoga. Yoga is intimacy. Not just feeling lighter or more spiritual. Not just being less angry with your spouse. Not just having a yoga butt. Becoming intimate with how life really is. That is yoga. When we become awake to how things are, we wake up to everything being interconnected, as a felt, visceral sense of how our actions matter in this web of life. Then we also begin to see that practice and awakening are themselves intimately bound up. There is no awakening without practice and conversely the forms of practice are actually original enlightenment. Practice and realization are a dynamic whole.



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What the popular-culture version of these traditions misses most of all, though, is their *ethics*. We've lost something vital in the rush to "modernize" the practices, stripping them of their ancient religious "baggage" for a secular world. Traditionally, the practices that transform our inner world are tied to insights about the outer world, so that self-transformation takes place in ways that benefit the whole community. When that outer-world insight is stripped away, it's not the same practice anymore.

To counter this, I teach meditation with eyes open. I don't want people to go anywhere. With eyes open, we don't let the eyes move around. We turn inwards and we don't go outwards. We are not attached to inner or outer.

A physical practice without a stillness practice is imbalanced, and a stillness practice without a physical practice is imbalanced, but having both practices without a foundation in ethics is *useless*. We need a vision of what we're practicing *for*.

The word *mindfulness* has entered secular and even medical language, but it has been reduced to *paying attention*. Is that what mindfulness means when it's embedded within its ethical tradition? No. Mindfulness is actually the cultivation of generosity. The cultivation of compassion. It's being attentive in a way that recognizes intimacy. That's what I mean by ethics. The early teachings of the Buddha and the first teachings of Patanjali are grounded in ethics. When mindfulness is used to further the work of transnational corporations and the military, it's not an ethical practice anymore. It's not benefitting the community. We need to draw the circle wide. Imagine drawing a circle you call "me." How wide would you draw it? Does it include your breath? Trees? Ill rivers?

If you really want to positively change your life, consider what you're committed to. First, you must accept that your actions make a difference, in the mind, in the body, and in the body politic. Second, you must look at your life through the lens of non-harming, which is the first foundation of yoga, the first limb in Patanjali's eight-limbed model.

Let's look at this question of practice ethics through an example. Let's look at how we relate to the body, which is such a focal point when we begin a yoga practice. When we first start to pay attention to the body, what we

see is our story about the body. The body in relationship to advertising. The body in relationship to money. The body in relationship to all the bodies we've seen, the ones we want and the ones we dread becoming. What is our commitment at this starting moment? We are committed to a story of what our body should be like. That commitment doesn't make a positive difference for us or for anyone else. It isn't it an approach that avoids harm.

When we have a body that we're relating to through an image, then we're suffering, because we're split. There's a gap between our body and the body we want. And when we're split, we feel inadequate. *Dukkha* also means inadequacy, the feeling that things are not okay as they are. And that dovetails perfectly into consumer culture. By idealizing a different body, what we're committing to is a form of self-harm, and we're reinforcing those pernicious influences in the body politic.

The popular-culture version of yoga tells us to start practice so that we can get a better body than the one we have now, and so that we can get a better mind. An ethics-bound practice begins instead by helping us to catch sight of the harmful ways we look at bodies, at the ways we split ourselves between what we are and what we wish we were. The more you heal that split in yourself, the more your practice becomes a form of social action, because you're no longer feeding into the institutionalized patterns of shame and greed so prevalent in our culture.

Let's keep following the example. How does practice progress from those foundations? In a practice divorced from ethics, we increase the intensity of our training in order to keep strengthening our bodies and clearing our minds. We do more advanced poses; we sit for longer. It's like a more holistic version of going to the gym. We increase the resistance, just like adding weights. In an ethics-bound practice, our practice evolves by changing our understanding of the world.

How do we do that? In the ethics-bound practice, our goal is to stop idealizing the body we wish we had. We learn the Buddhist teaching that you cannot experience your life independently from the body. In traditional Indian psychological terms, especially with the Buddha, there wasn't a lot of talk about the mind and the body as separate. A person was characterized as having six senses and six sense organs. The mind was just considered a regular sense organ. Virtually anywhere we find mind-body dualism in Buddhist teachings, it's a colonialist reinterpretation of those original teachings.

We learn that you cannot *enter the body*, because you have never been outside of it. The *you* in your mind is as much a part of your body as your sense of smell or your arm. It's not like there's a *me* over here and a *body* over there. In fact, there isn't even a *world* over there and a *body* over here. *Everything* is interconnected. When we say, "I want to be *that* body, not *this* one," the tradition responds that you cannot really be *either* of them—that you're everything, and there is no *you*. The advertising industry is invested in there being a *you*, because then there is a *you* who isn't good enough and needs to buy things. The yoga magazines won't tell you about this—how backwards it

all is—because they need to sell advertisements.

In an ethics-bound practice, the meditative techniques we use are tied to these understandings. We are guided through practice toward healthier understandings. We aren't asked to take them on faith, like dogma. Instead, we can see for ourselves. The practice demonstrates it. But the practice is framed in the wisdom of the tradition, so that we can make sense of what we are seeing. With that wisdom stripped away, we don't have a *neutral* practice; the frame of wisdom has instead been replaced by the frame of consumerism. There are always meta-concepts running beneath what we do. When we follow an ethical tradition, we are making a decision to choose meta-concepts that are ethical.

Let's watch how this occurs through practice. Most of the techniques are the same ones you see in the magazines—the *hatha yoga* postures, breathing techniques, sitting meditation. But we frame them differently. If you look in the traditional texts, there aren't many descriptions of sweating, or the right clothes to wear, or rubber yoga mats. What the texts do talk about is *mula bandha*: it's in every description of movement patterns with the body. The word *mula* means root, and the word *bandha* means bond. *Mula bandha* is a physical phenomenon that happens when you exhale. As you finish your exhale, you notice that your abdominal wall turns on, but if you keep following the feeling of the breath, it goes a little bit lower than the abdominal wall, and it ends somewhere in front of your sacrum, which is the pelvic floor. And it creates some feeling, some tone, in the pelvic floor, some sense that at the end of the exhale there is a deep feeling in the core of the body.

At the end of the exhale, there's a pause, and in that pause, there's also a little bit of anxiety. I once asked one of my teachers, Pattahbi Jois, *Why do people get so anxious at the end of the exhale?* and he said, *Mula bandha*. And I asked, *What's that?* and he said, *Little-bit dying*. When you exhale, when you finish your exhale, it's a visceral experience of mourning the end of that moment. Kind of like at a garage sale. I had a garage sale recently and my son helped me put things out. As soon as people started coming, I saw the things that I was kind of attached to, and I wanted to put them back inside. *Don't let anyone touch that!* We see this a lot when we really haven't grieved a loss we've experienced. When we can't fully say, *Oh, I've let go of that*. And then in our dreams, in our projections on other people, we see that we're still acting out old losses. Staying with the breath all the way through to the end, we allow ourselves to observe what it means to let something finish and pass away so that new life can begin.

Most of us don't want to feel the end of the exhale. That's because it actually makes us feel something in the core of the body, and for most of us, our habit patterns of thought and story don't want to be in feeling. Feeling what's really happening takes us out of our storytelling. To really feel the end of your exhale is not possible if there are discursive thoughts and images taking place in the mind—if you're distracted. You can't actually feel the end of your exhale, that pause there, and be wandering off at the same time. The core of all those *hatha yoga* movement patterns is to wake up to *mula bandha*.

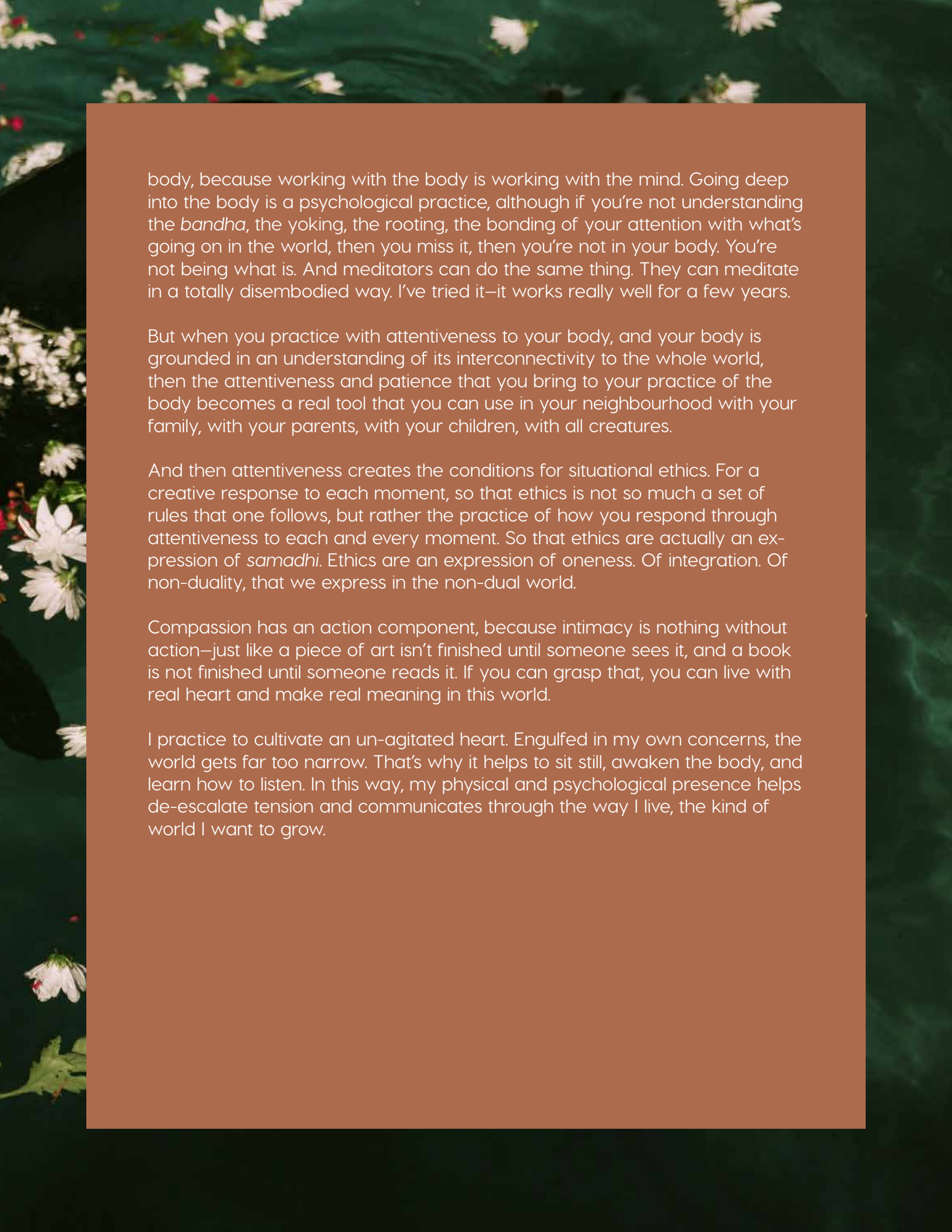
The sensation of *mula bandha* is the opposite of the storytelling self. The storytelling self says, *if I just had a body like that one, then I would feel good. Then everything would be okay.* Activating *mula bandha* means the storytelling is silenced. The question of how to get into the body is moot—you are already there. The body just is, and it is breathing, in a circle, exchanging air with all of the plants in the world. You see that you're connected to everything. Without ethical principles, all this is just a trick for hacking your body and mind, so you can be amazing at your job and not get worried about anything. Neither of those are necessarily any good for the community. Maybe your job harms the planet, and maybe you should feel concern about climate change and racism. The ethics-bound practice gives you the experience of interdependence. You can't take techniques out of this ethical context and still have the same depth of experience.

Our culture is criticized for being materialistic, but it's not true. We don't really love the material world. To love something is to really appreciate it, to be deeply engaged in it, and to be able to let it go. And this is not how we relate to the material world in popular culture. Craving a different body means that we have no loving relationship with the material that we are. We are more committed to an idea and a story than to material reality. When we engage the breath in the way we've seen in our example, we are being deeply materialistic—we are cultivating loving connection with everything we can feel. It's profound. Consumer culture treats the material world as disposable. Popular-culture spiritual practice tries to help us be calmer and more productive within capitalist culture, but it doesn't help us wake up to how much more there is in life.

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In a deep, self-transformative, ethics-bound practice, what is it that we wake up to? *This.* We wake up to *this*. Isn't that the punch line of every dharma teaching and koan and yoga posture? To see that what obscures waking up is the idea that something outside of you is going to complete you, or that becoming more of an individual is going to make you whole? What do we wake up to? *This.* This *sangha*—this community—in its widest sense. The *sangha* of the intestine. You have a garden in there.

Yoga postures are designed to wake up the body, the intelligence of the body, to see where the *prana* is flowing too much, and where it's not flowing much at all. And to start to balance the patterns of that energy flow in the

The background of the page is a photograph of a pond. The water is a deep, dark green color. Scattered across the surface are several white flowers, likely water lilies, with some showing red centers. In the lower-left corner, a black fish is partially visible, swimming towards the right. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

body, because working with the body is working with the mind. Going deep into the body is a psychological practice, although if you're not understanding the *bandha*, the yoking, the rooting, the bonding of your attention with what's going on in the world, then you miss it, then you're not in your body. You're not being what is. And meditators can do the same thing. They can meditate in a totally disembodied way. I've tried it—it works really well for a few years.

But when you practice with attentiveness to your body, and your body is grounded in an understanding of its interconnectivity to the whole world, then the attentiveness and patience that you bring to your practice of the body becomes a real tool that you can use in your neighbourhood with your family, with your parents, with your children, with all creatures.

And then attentiveness creates the conditions for situational ethics. For a creative response to each moment, so that ethics is not so much a set of rules that one follows, but rather the practice of how you respond through attentiveness to each and every moment. So that ethics are actually an expression of *samadhi*. Ethics are an expression of oneness. Of integration. Of non-duality, that we express in the non-dual world.

Compassion has an action component, because intimacy is nothing without action—just like a piece of art isn't finished until someone sees it, and a book is not finished until someone reads it. If you can grasp that, you can live with real heart and make real meaning in this world.

I practice to cultivate an un-agitated heart. Engulfed in my own concerns, the world gets far too narrow. That's why it helps to sit still, awaken the body, and learn how to listen. In this way, my physical and psychological presence helps de-escalate tension and communicates through the way I live, the kind of world I want to grow.

TO WHAT DO YOU ENTRUST YOURSELF?

What I want to talk about tonight is commitment. I think I'll start with a quotation. I've been spending some time lately reading Thomas Merton, the American Christian mystic. He's been helping me to move through one of the things I've been thinking about a lot, which is what ancient contemplative traditions like Buddhism and yoga are becoming as they express themselves in this very culture.

Sometimes we call these ancient techniques "timeless," but that shouldn't make us think they are unaffected by place and time. They were created in a particular age. If they resonate still, then they have touched something enduring in the human condition, but they were each also responding to the needs of their own place and time. Whenever they express themselves in new times and new places, they necessarily change.

This is a good thing. This is how ideas evolve, and how they become most relevant to our lives.

To think that there's some pure yoga outside of culture gets us into dangerous territory. It leads us to import ideas from other cultures and other times without recognizing their roots. That's a form of disrespect to the people whose cultures the ideas come from and a disservice to the ideas themselves. Buddhism began in India. It looked different when it arrived in China. It was different again when it came to Japan, and then again in Tibet. Now, Buddhism is planting roots in the West. I don't think that there's any such thing as a pure yoga that's unchanged or untouched. And that's actually a good thing.

Just as we want our lives to be grounded in practice, we also want our practice to be grounded in our real lives. Then we can understand the teachings from the ground up—from *this* ground, upward to the infinite and the universal themes that practice contemplates. We can start to wrestle with the teachings so they come to life in *this* life, in *this* body, in *this* gender, in *this* culture. What is *this* practice for? What are *this* culture's needs? We can answer these questions for ourselves, as an ongoing practice. We can begin our practice from there, instead of simply transplanting techniques that were designed for somewhere else.

When we start from the ground, then our social analysis—our understanding of our world—becomes a kind of "seat" for practice, just as a good cushion or a comfortable posture is a "seat" for practice. Comprehensive social understanding provides a solid foundation for our practice to exist upon. It forges a link between our practice and this ground upon which we sit, and upon which we stand. It renders our practice more able to help us *take* a stand.

I think sometimes we think of yoga as a kind of baby mobile. When you touch a mobile, what happens? The whole thing moves. And sometimes I think we get worried that if we touch yoga, it's going to break. Or it's going to become impure. But that's not actually what happens. It doesn't happen to the mobile, and it doesn't happen to

our contemplative traditions either. When you touch yoga, all of the different pieces of yoga move, and yoga doesn't fall apart. We can be intelligent when we go about touching our traditions and studying whether our practice is actually working. These traditions are made of interconnected parts that can move.

So how do we do begin to do this intelligently? One approach we can take is to ask ourselves which aspects of the practice we feel most personally committed to. This is a very accessible route into thinking about how practice is meeting our real lives. It's a simple way to give our actual lives a voice in the conversation about practice, instead of letting our ideas about practice dictate terms.

Asking this question immediately raises a second question: When we start to decide for ourselves what we are committed to, how does this change our relationship to commitment in general? In practice traditions, we often think of commitment as a willingness to submit to ancient teachings, or as a discipline to wake up early in the morning to meditate. The very idea of commitment changes for us when we stop treating it as a way of moulding ourselves around the ways of old, and start seeing it instead as a lens for looking at who we are in this time and place. What if commitments were something we observed in ourselves and sat with, rather than something we invoked upon ourselves by force of will?

If this newer approach to commitment sounds more like yoga, that's because it probably is. Sometimes we only get access to the depths of things when we allow them space to change.

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Here is what I am most committed to: yoga means *intimacy*. The word yoga literally means that everything is intimately connected with every other thing, because there is no such thing as an independent thing. Everything permeates everything else. Before the mind gets hold of "things" and situates them in opposition or connection with one another, there is an inherent intimacy of everything. This is called non-dualism. This is called yoga. This is called *njrodeha*. This is called *samadhi*. Integration. The complete integration of everything, before our preferences catch hold of reality and chop things up. And this is the teaching of yoga. The teaching of yoga is a series of techniques to help orient us back towards this fundamental integration. That integration is *our* fundamental nature too: when I am complete in and of myself, my *self* is seen to be everything, without beginning and without end.

But most of the time, what we're committed to are habits of perception that split things up into *I, me, mine; you, yours, enemy*. And we measure forests in terms of board feet, and we measure land in terms of real estate, and we measure other people in terms of what they can or can't do for me. And then what are we committed to?

When I look to re-investigate my practice, this is the question I begin with: what am I committed to? More and more spectacular back bends? Perfect calm and detach-

ment in every moment? If these are my commitments, I'm splitting the world up. It's my practice, my clarity that I'm seeking. It's not integration with the world. It's me wanting to be the best person I can be within—or against—a chaotic world. I'm committed to my idea of what a perfect practice would look like, perhaps drawn in part from my idea of practice in the ancient world. I've set that idea *against* the real world, as a protection from it. I'm committed then to my practices, but not to yoga, which is integration. For my practices to be yoga practices, they have to bring me into the world.

What are you committed to? Another way of phrasing this idea would be, *to what do you entrust yourself?* Do you entrust yourself to this world?

We have to choose to entrust ourselves to this world. We might feel alienated from this world; our alienation might even be what drove us to practice in the first place. But when we entrust ourselves to our practice and don't entrust ourselves to the world, practice becomes part of the way we judge the world and separate ourselves from it.

When you cut up the pie of your day, how much time are you spending being addicted to your own theories about reality, about other people, and ultimately, about yourself? How much time, by contrast, is taken up by those small moments where you feel complete and then suddenly the world is complete? Because our intent—whether to merge with the world or to buffer ourselves against it—transforms the world we're perceiving. When you're angry, everybody's irritable. When you're in a rush, everyone's going too slow. And it's *them*. Waiting around for them to change. *When is he going to change?* And when you say, *When are they going to change?*, what are you committed to in that moment? To your idea of how the world should be? Or to your integration with how it is? To the perfection of your practices and your self, or to the people you're in relationships with?

This brings us, at last, to the Thomas Merton quotation I said I wanted to start with:

The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.



Let's draw a parallel between that statement, which seems to be about human love in human relationship, with Walt Whitman's enlightenment experience:

I swear the Earth shall be complete to him or her who shall be complete. The Earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken.

When we allow the world to be as it is, we reach yoga. We reach integration. Once we accept how the world is, using our spiritual practice, then we can begin to see what our role in the world is as well, and this becomes our activist practice. When we don't want to accept the world as it is, and we use our practice instead as an attempt to be living in some other time and place, then we have taken ourselves out of the world. We cannot see our place in it. And so we lose access to activist practice, to an understanding of our role in the world. I am committed to a spiritual practice that delivers me into an activist one.

The Buddha had this understanding. He wanted his followers to have this understanding. He was teaching at a time when spirituality was controlled by a priestly class that charged everyone else money to perform sacrifices on their behalf. This priestly class enforced a rigid caste system by which some classes of people were subject to social exclusion by divine will. When the Buddha taught mastery of the self, he was simultaneously teaching spiritual practice and performing a radical act of social justice and social integration: he declared that everyone was equally worthy of access to spiritual knowledge.

What divisions and separations exist in our own time and place? We are still divided from one another by race and by class, by gender and by ability. Some of us face debilitating oppressions along these lines. We are divided from the natural world, and we damage it daily, enduringly, as though it were not a part of us. We can use the tools of yoga—of integration—to show us how these harmful separations are places where we need healing. Healing comes from education, understanding, and the kind of learning that trains us to drop our views. I'm changing my views about sexuality and gender all the time these days, as I learn and listen and get educated. Meditation helps me see where I am rigid. So I think clearing spaces in the mind and heart allows room for deeper forms of education. By "deeper," I mean letting in perspectives or cultures that we've never paid attention to because they scare us, and put our privilege into jeopardy. I feel this when I learn about class and supremacy. At first, I feel shame. Then I feel that somehow, even though I've been moving forward, I'm behind where I originally started. Then I see how much that fear drives me. And then I soften and open and can take in new perspectives. The process always unfolds like that. Someone points something out about ways in which I use power and it takes a while at first to even open to the pointer. Training in community is so good for that. We wake each other up. As community becomes more diverse, that awakening becomes more difficult, more important and more prosocial. After all, we are awakening together. We can't just make the Buddha into a white guy at the front of the room.

We can think of our practice as a practice of ecology, of unity. It can prepare us for our active role in the world.

As contemporary contemplative practitioners, what we do is this: We say, here we are in a room tonight. Let's raise this room up so that it becomes an object of meditation. Or we raise the body, where we say, *this body*, which is always present, which is the instrument through which we can know reality, *is something worth paying attention to*. The breath is always present, even though it's impermanent. The body is always present, even though it's impermanent. Here's something to pay attention to. We take what is present, in this world, in front of us.

And then you go home and you have a bath and you wash your body, and when you wash your body you're suddenly watching the entire universe, because that's what's presenting, that's what's materializing in that moment. And then there's a kind of completeness in that, as opposed to being committed to—which is basically just a softer way of saying *clinging to*—the momentum of our habits that keep us enclosed in a narrative about reality, a story about other people. Chapter after chapter about *me*, projected out into relationships. (Although that's not actually being in relationship—that kind of storytelling takes us right out of the experience of intimacy.) Our practice can actually, paradoxically, reinforce our clinging to our own habits and our own narrative, if we are more committed to its abstract perfection than we are to the world it should be helping us to enter.





About Michael Stone

Shôken Michael Stone is a renowned Yoga teacher, Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist. He brings together traditional practices and lineages with the insights of western psychology, philosophy and medicine. He is the voice of a new generation of practitioners articulating a spiritual practice that focuses both on personal healing and social awakening. He teaches internationally and lives with his family in B.C.

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