



# YOGA AND BENEDICTINE MINDFULNESS: AN ALTERNATIVE PHYSIO-SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION TOWARDS RESTORATION OF GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE ACADEME

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*Many factors are essentially affecting the quality of work and studies in the academe. Deficiency in those factors is inimical to good health and well-being. It includes not just physical injury or disease, but also depression, stress, loneliness, anxieties, and even loss of meaning and purpose in life, which are considered detrimental to working and learning ability. All interventions must be considered just to restore the good health and well-being of workers and students. Using the digital archival method, in-hand data analysis revealed that Yoga and Benedictine mindfulness can become alternative physio-spiritual interventions according to their respective unique traditions. It revealed as well that both disciplinary practices in relevant areas like ethical imperatives, external and internal expressions, focus, aim, time allotment, and benefits, shared elements that can contribute efficaciously to the restoration of good health and well-being of students and workers in the academe. Though, as an intervention, it requires further scientific revelation, at least by yogic and Benedictine tradition, if the practices are done consistently, their assumed benefits are not just temporal but lifelong.*

Keywords: Yoga, Benedictine Mindfulness, Physio-spiritual Maladies, Well-being

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## INTRODUCTION

Work and studies are both strenuous activities in life. Anyone who works or studies has a life that becomes more challenging and complicated because of the many factors attached to work and study. Some of these factors are physiological in nature, such as fatigue and boredom, age and maturation, emotional condition, food and drink, and atmospheric conditions.<sup>1</sup> Others are social environmental factors like those related to safety, peace, and social order in general, quality and stability of social connections, including social participation, social cohesion, and neighborhood environment.<sup>2</sup> All these factors are seen as having essential effects on work and studies. Any degree of deficiency in those factors mentioned can cause ill health and adverse to well-being that include not just physical injury or disease, but also depression, stress, loneliness, anxieties, and even loss of meaning and purpose in life which are considered detrimental to working and learning ability. Good health and well-being are important for the people in the Academe. It includes mental and physical health, emotional safety, and a feeling of belongingness, having a sense of purpose, achievement, and success. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) explains that good health concerns the care of the human body and everything that can be done to protect it from sickness and intoxication and enable access to care. It defines well-being as a feeling of satisfaction with life, a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity. These are all considered essential elements to transform lives, build peace, eradicate poverty, and drive sustainable development. It is a human right throughout life.<sup>3</sup> Studies show there is a direct link between good health and well-being and work or academic achievement and vice versa.

<sup>1</sup> Smirti, "Factor."

<sup>2</sup> National Research Council (US), "US Health."

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, "SDG Resources."

Excellence in physical activity is associated with improved learning and the ability to concentrate. Strong, supportive relationships provide both workers and learners with the emotional resources to step out of their comfort zone and explore new ideas and ways of thinking, which is fundamental to work and educational achievement.<sup>4</sup> With the present situation in the academe, some workers and students are found suffering from sickness, depression, stress, loneliness, anxiety, and even loss of meaning and purpose in life which are damaging to working and learning capacity. There is a crucial need for interventions that will contribute to the restoration of good health and well-being of the workers and learners. If no intervention of any sort is done, anyone may continue to suffer from physio-spiritual maladies that will hamper the growth and success of the people in the academe.

This descriptive and qualitative study aimed to discover an alternative intervention that can help restore the good health and well-being of people in the academic world. Since the researchers were fascinated with the discipline of yoga and Benedictine mindfulness, they explored how yoga and Benedictine mindfulness can be an alternative physio-spiritual intervention that can contribute to the restoration of good health and well-being of the workers and learners in the academe and with their historical and philosophical underpinnings. Specifically, they have looked at elements in yoga exercises and the Benedictine practice of mindfulness that can help restore good health and well-being of the people. They also arrived at a comparative presentation of yoga with Benedictine mindfulness, emphasizing the elements they held in common as relevant physio-spiritual exercises that address good health and well-being issues. All these were achieved using the archival digital data research approach where

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe, "Improving."



data was collected using digital tools, such as computers, tablets, smartphones, and video cameras, in scholarly research endeavors.<sup>5</sup> The archival digital data research approach is departing from the traditional paper-based collection of data to digital data collection using handheld or manipulated electronic devices with all possible online applications available as data sources.<sup>6</sup> The researchers purposely spent much time looking for literature, articles, journals, books, and blogs about yoga, including relevant images or videos, created, written by, or modified by yoga enthusiasts. As for the data about Benedictine mindfulness, they must be produced by people who either belonged to the Benedictine communities or people who are into spirituality studies. Specifically, the researchers analyzed data in hand. Data in hand refers to the data that the researchers have accessed through community partnerships, work files, or previous work samples that are available online.<sup>7</sup> All collected online data about yoga were analyzed according to their suitability to the restoration of good health and well-being of people working or studying in the academe. Specific yoga exercises were identified as essential elements of physiological and spiritual intervention. These elements must be able to address common physio-spiritual maladies existing in the academic world, such as stress, anxieties, short span of attention, poor energy and performance, low self-awareness, and others. Also, all the identified elements were comparatively analyzed with the Benedictine practice and principle of mindfulness to discover the relatedness of the two as spiritual exercises that can address good health and well-being issues being experienced by the workers and learners in the academic world.

<sup>5</sup> Eriksson and Kovalainen, "Qualitative Methods."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Mckoy, "Archival Research."

## FINDINGS

Using the digital data collection (DDC) method and performing analysis of in-hand data, the researchers arrived at the following results based on the aims of this study:

### THE BEGINNING AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF YOGA

The word "yoga" first appeared in *Rig Veda*, a collection of over a thousand hymns and mantras in ten chapters known as mandalas used by Vedic age priests,<sup>8</sup> and one of the four *Vedas*. The *Vedas* are the religious texts which inform the religion of Hinduism. The term *Veda* means "knowledge." They are considered among the oldest, if not the oldest, religious works in the world. They are commonly referred to as scripture, a holy writ concerning the nature of the Divine. The *Vedas* first existed in oral form and were passed down from master to student for generations until they were committed to writing between c. 1500 - c. 500 BCE in India.<sup>9</sup> The four *Vedas* are *Rigveda* (the earliest form of Vedic Sanskrit text), *Samaveda* (the earliest reference for singing), *Yajurveda* (also called the book of prayers), and *Atharvaveda* (the book of magic and charms).<sup>10</sup> Out of India Theory (OIT) claims that the Harappan Civilization had already developed the Vedic wisdom and exported it from India to Central Asia from whence it then returned between c. 2000-1500 BCE with the migration of free and noble class of people, the Indo-Aryans.<sup>11</sup> A yogic lore provides more Vedic religion-based accounts about the origin and the spread of yoga in the world. So, Lord Shiva is seen as the first yogi or *Adiyogi*. Thousand years ago, on the banks of Lake

<sup>8</sup> Google Arts & Culture, "Explore the Ancient Roots."

<sup>9</sup> Mark, "The Vedas."

<sup>10</sup> Byju's, "Types of Vedas."

<sup>11</sup> Mark, "The Vedas."



Kantisarovar or Chorabari Tal (black lake) at the foot of Mount Kedarnath in the Himalayas, *Adiyogi* poured his profound yogic knowledge into the mythical Saptarishis or “seven sages.” The sages carried this powerful yogic science to various parts of the world, including Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa, and South America. However, it was in India that the yogic system found its fullest expression. Agastya, one of the Saptarishi who traveled across the Indian subcontinent, crafted this culture around a core yogic way of life.<sup>12</sup> It was claimed that Indian yogi monks spread the knowledge of yoga in the West during the late 1890s and became widely popular in Western countries by the 1970s.

The word “yoga” comes from the Sanskrit word “*yuj*,” which means “union” or “to join.”<sup>13</sup> It may also mean “to yoke.” In the Sanskrit language, yoga or *yogah* means an act, process, or result of joining or connecting one entity to another, merging one entity into another, applying one entity to another, or implementing an entity or idea, or person.<sup>14</sup> As per *Rig Veda*, yoga was mentioned several times. Some of these were as follows: “*sa dhīnām yogam invati*” (he promotes the yoga of thoughts); “*yoge yoge tavastaram vāje vāje havāmahe*” (in each yoga, we invoke the Strong, in each struggle); “*kaś chandasām yogam ā veda dhīrah ko dhiṣṇyām prati vācam papādakam ṛtvijām aṣṭamam sūram āhur hari indrasya ni cikāya kaḥ svit*” (who knows the yoga of the meters here, who has gained the “word” the subject and object of thoughts? Who is called the eighth Hero among the conductors of order? Who has perhaps controlled the bay horses of Indra!).<sup>15</sup> These metaphorical mentions of yoga in *Rig Veda*, implied yoga as spiritual yoking, the synchronizing of divine thoughts or speech with the spiritual vehicle of mind to start the spiritual

journey.<sup>16</sup> It was clear that yoga was conceived earlier by poetic seers or sages as a mental and spiritual exercise more than a physical exercise.

The philosophy of Yoga centers on the idea of union. But this union has multiple layers. First, it is the union within the self – mind, body, and spirit. It is why in Yoga practice, there is a synchronized movement with breath and focus on the present moment. The second layer of the meaning is a union between the self as an individual and the world, everyone in it, and the universal consciousness. This union is guaranteed by observing the eight-fold path of Yoga or eight limbs of Yoga formulated by Patanjali who lived sometime between the fourth and second century BC through his Yoga Sutras, a book which is at the center of Yoga. The eight-fold path of Yoga or eight limbs of Yoga is meant to guide anyone on his or her journey toward well-being. The first four limbs accordingly are about practical and relevant ways to achieve self-development. The second four are more about spiritual development, meditation, and reaching an elevated state.<sup>17</sup> They are the core of yoga philosophy.

**1. Restraints (Yama)** – A code of conduct on how one should behave with others and the world around. Sometimes called the ‘don’ts of Yoga’:

**Non-Violence (Ahimsa)** – Nonviolence in one’s actions, thoughts, and consequences of one’s choices. This is a wide concept covering diet, how to deal with emotions, bodies, people around, and the environment. It is about causing the least amount of harm in any situation.

**Truthfulness (Satya)** – Truthfulness in speech and actions. Speaking the truth, not lying, no dishonesty to others and yourself, no skewing or disguising the truth to gain popularity.

<sup>12</sup> Basavaraddi, “Yoga.”

<sup>13</sup> Nichols, “How Does Yoga Works.”

<sup>14</sup> Abloh, “What Does.”

<sup>15</sup> Krishnan, “Veda: Yoga.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Charvátová, “Yoga Philosophy.”





**Non-Stealing (*Asteya*)** – No taking someone else’s property and time, ideas, or attention. Whatever it is that does not belong to self, leave it.

**Celibacy (*Brahmacharya*)** – It is about self-control. One can enjoy life’s pleasures but should not overindulge and get greedy. It means moderation and discipline for sensory pleasures.

**Non-Coveting (*Aparigraha*)** – It concerns non-grasping, not being greedy whether it is material greed, or disregarding the body’s limits and needs. It is against jealousy and envy.

2. **Observances (*Niyama*)** – A set of guidelines for how we should conduct ourselves. They are inward practices to improve the self, sometimes called the ‘dos of Yoga’:

**Purification (*Saucha*)** – It is the cleanliness of body, speech, and mind. It teaches one to avoid toxic thoughts and behaviors. It is a necessary step in detaching from the physical world in preparation for meditation.

**Contentment (*Santosha*)** – It is about appreciating what one has and how far one has achieved and become.

**Asceticism (*Tapas*)** – This is about self-development and pushing ourselves further. It is about developing self-discipline, setting a goal, and constant practice.

**Study (*Svadhyaya*)** – Continuing to study both yoga philosophy and self-introspection. It encourages the self to go deeper, continue learning, and try to understand oneself.

**Dedication to God/Master (*Ishvara Pranidhana*)** – It is surrendering the self to a higher principle, letting go of one’s ego. This makes yoga a spiritual practice.

3. **Posture (*Asana*)** – It refers to the physical practice of Yoga poses. By practicing the postures, one does not just look with concern to the body but also quiet the mind. Considered to be the point of entry for people into yoga.
4. **Breath Control (*Pranayama*)** – It is a breathing technique. This makes one feel

better. It rejuvenates the body and assumes can help to extend your life.

5. **Withdrawal of the Senses (*Pratyahara*)** – It isolates consciousness from the distractions offered by the senses or external stimulation in preparation for meditation practices. This can be a form of ‘mindfulness in which sensory input such as sounds, sights, or smells are noticed as external and then allowed to pass without capturing our attention.

6. **Concentration (*Dharana*)** – This is sustained attention and concentration on a single point of focus like an object, body part, imagined picture, or sound. This is preparation for meditation – being fully focused.

7. **Meditation (*Dhyana*)** – This is actual meditation where one’s attention is found in a depth focused on a single object to the exclusion of all others. One has cleared the mind of all thoughts and images. One is still very much aware of oneself, and the object being focused on. The mind seems everywhere but nowhere in particular.

8. **Pure Contemplation (*Samadhi*)** – The practitioner enters a state in which one merges with the object of meditation. It is said one transcends oneself and experiences bliss, freedom, peace, and the feeling of being at one with the Universe.

Yoga practitioners claim that mastering the eight limbs of yoga will eventually lead to the separation of the human spirit from the matter of the world. This means that the spirit has now the ability to expand infinitely and possibly can perform supernatural acts.<sup>18</sup>

Yoga philosophy is Indian in origin. Aside from the eight limbs of Yoga which are found in *Yoga sutras* of Patanjali, yoga essential doctrines or teachings are found in other Indian sacred texts like *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. *Upanishads* are a collection of texts received by the ancient mystic sages of India (700 - 500 B.C.E.) that

<sup>18</sup> Pizer, “Yoga Sutras.”





have personal and practical teachings like the concept of *Atman* as an internal soul, as it connects to *Brahman*, the God of the entire universe. According to *Upanishads*, *Atman* is eternal, reincarnated throughout the life cycles of birth, death, and rebirth, known as *samsara*. A soul that reaches supreme enlightenment through the right action can escape the endless cycle of death and rebirth. This is the ultimate philosophy of yoga. *Upanishads* also teach that meditation, recitation of *mantras* (chanted Sanskrit syllables), cultivation of *prana* (the energetic life force), and discrimination of the mind are the paths to enlightenment. It explains that chanting mantras create sound vibrations in the body and is believed to help cleanse and purify the body, mind, and spirit.<sup>19</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita* (1st or 2nd century C.E.), is an epic and another revered Indian-Hindu text. It discusses yoga as the secret to serenity, equanimity of mind, and liberation from suffering. The Gita outlines three paths that one can take to reach higher consciousness and understanding of the Divine (God). The first path is called *Karma yoga* or the yoga of action. It is devoted to freeing oneself from the bondage of karma through selfless action. The second path is *Jnana yoga* or the yoga of intellect and wisdom. It is dedicated to the rational pursuit of the path of knowledge through the study of scripture. The third path is *Bhakti yoga* also known as the yoga of devotion. It is devoted to inner purification, faith, prayer, and devotion to a personal god.<sup>20</sup> Other paths of yoga contribute to the attainment of well-being. There is *Hatha yoga* which focuses on priming the body and mind; *Raja yoga*, which involves meditation and strict adherence to the eight limbs of yoga; and there is *Tantra yoga*, a pathway of ritual, ceremony, or consummation of a relationship.<sup>21</sup>

Yoga also concerns different energy centers or *chakras* (Sanskrit for spinning wheels). *Chakras* decide how people experience reality through emotional reactions, desires or aversions, levels of confidence or fear, and even physical symptoms and effects. In yoga, *chakras* are center points of energy, thoughts, feelings, and the physical body. When energy becomes blocked in a *chakra*, it triggers physical, mental, or emotional imbalances that manifest in symptoms such as anxiety, lethargy, or poor digestion. With yoga, blocked or depleted energy in different chakras is cleansed and replenished with energy called *prana* that is accessible in the environment. Through yoga discipline energy in the human body is balanced.

There are seven major *chakras*, each with its own focus and color manifestation in meditation: (1) *Sahasrara* (Crown chakra, Violet or white), found at the crown of the head, symbolizes spiritual connection. (2) *Ajna* (Third eye chakra, Indigo, or Purple), found between the eyebrows and has to do with intuition. (3) *Vishuddha*: (Throat chakra, Blue), corresponds to immunity and verbal communication. (4) *Anahata* (Heart chakra, Green), It is in the center of the chest and influences professional and personal relationships and emotions or feelings. (5) *Manipura* (Solar plexus chakra, Yellow), found in the stomach area. It corresponds to self-confidence, wisdom, and self-discipline. (6) *Svadhishthana* (Sacral chakra, Orange), is found beneath the belly button and connects pleasure, well-being, and vitality. (7) *Muladhara* (Root chakra, Red), found at the base of the spine, connects the mind and body to the earth to keep a person grounded. It controls the sciatic nerves and the parasympathetic nervous system.<sup>22</sup>

Each of the seven major chakras corresponds not only to the physical body but most especially

<sup>19</sup> Klein, "Yoga Philosophy."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Nichols, "How Does Yoga Works."

<sup>22</sup> Nichols, "How Does Yoga Works."



to daily life issues. Life issues will affect the amount of energy entering the chakras. As a result, over a period, the energy coming into the chakras will become inadequate. This will affect the physical body and cause problems, either in the chest, lungs, heart, or shoulders.<sup>23</sup> In this case, the health and well-being of a person is compromised.

## YOGA AS A PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Yoga as a physical and spiritual discipline began around 5,000 years ago in India. This ancient discipline is about cultivating mental focus and expanding spiritual energy through fitness involving physical poses, concentration, and deep breathing. Yoga postures are designed to stimulate inner peace and physical energy. It can help support a balanced, active lifestyle. Nowadays, there are distinct types of yoga available. The type of yoga a person chooses will depend on their expectations and level of physical agility.<sup>24</sup> Yoga is conceived as a discipline because it is repeatedly practiced, and one keeps coming back to it. As a discipline, it takes one beyond one's immediate subjective desires, so there is an element of self-overcoming. Discipline allows us to overcome a limited way and mode of being, to become or discover the bigger, more objective picture or reality, and to embrace a bigger more spacious mode of being.<sup>25</sup> Approaching yoga as just another form of physical fitness, only exercise, and movement is not honoring the roots of yoga. It is a form of cultural appropriation of the practice.<sup>26</sup> Yoga is more than postures (*asana*) or physical movements. It is a spiritual practice, a discipline, and a way of life. *Samadhi* which is the heart of yoga, a very deep state of focus and meditation, grants yoga practitioners

the freedom from everything that would prevent them from connecting with their true nature and communing with God. Others consider being aware of oneself or awareness of oneself as the spiritual dimension of yoga. Being awake will transform the mind, abandoning the unskillful states of greed, hatred, ignorance, or unawareness and cultivating those of love, generosity, and wisdom. Without awareness, yoga is simply stretch exercise, a system of techniques of mental and physical discipline.<sup>27</sup>

Yoga, through the years, has evolved into different forms and expressions. Yoga is known to have a calming effect on the body, and many of these poses have a relieving effect. The balance and strength of the body combined with the focus on calming and clearing the mind reflect mind and body unity, so it is not surprising that many people turn to this alternative therapy for healing. It is all about making space to connect with God, us now, and even others. Here are the ten *asanas* or yoga postures that are considered as an alternative physio-spiritual therapy for people in the academe. They were chosen based on the simplicity of the postures that they can be practiced even in a school setting, and the claimed effects on the physiological and spiritual condition of persons.



Image 1. Mountain Pose

**Mountain Pose (*Tadasana*).** This pose is considered the 'mother of all asanas' as it is the base from which all other yoga poses emerge. It is done by standing on a mat with big toes touching

<sup>23</sup> Santander, "Integrating Psi."

<sup>24</sup> Nichols, "How Does Yoga Works."

<sup>25</sup> Sudaka, "Yoga as Art."

<sup>26</sup> Maclellan, "What is Yoga?"

<sup>27</sup> Sudaka, "Yoga as Art."



and heels slightly apart. Lift the toes with control and slowly place them back on the mat. Firm the thighs, lift the kneecaps, tuck the tailbone slightly, and keep the hips directly in line with the ankles. Keep the core slightly engaged by drawing the lower belly into the spine. Focus on pressing the crown of your head toward the ceiling while inhaling and then drop the shoulders and reach the fingers toward the mat while exhaling.<sup>28</sup> This pose enables one to bring full awareness to one's breath as one begins to strengthen one's nervous system and center one's focus. It will improve posture, help steady breathing, and strengthen the ankles, knees, and thighs.

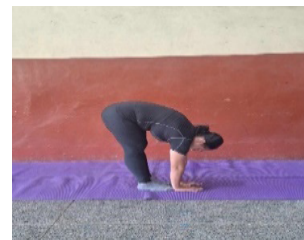


**Image 2.** *Tree Pose*

**Tree Pose (Vrikshasana).** To do this, take a moment to feel both feet root into the floor, body weight distributed equally on all four corners of each foot. Shift your weight into your right foot, lifting the left foot off the floor. Keep the right leg straight but do not lock the knee. Bend the left knee and bring the sole of the left foot high onto the inner right thigh. Press the foot into the thigh and the thigh back into the foot with equal pressure. This will help keep both hips squared toward the front, so the right hip does not jut out. Take 5 to 10 breaths, then lower the left foot to the floor and do the other side. With this yoga pose, one can learn how to ground oneself and build strong roots to face any difficulty.<sup>29</sup> To access inner power, it is essential first to have a stable foundation for the body and mind.

<sup>28</sup> Richburg, "7 Yoga Poses."

<sup>29</sup> Pizer, "How to Do Tree."



**Image 3.** *Standing Forward Bend Pose*

**Standing Forward Bend Pose (Uttanasana).** Doing this pose requires reaching tall and exhaling forward, then bending knees enough to be able to place the palms on the floor, with the head pressed against one's legs. Pull your head down and in. For a deeper stretch, try to straighten the legs. Hold this pose for 6-8 breaths, then whilst inhaling, stretch arms outwards and raise them and the torso back to the standing position. Stretches hamstrings, thighs, and hips, effective for stress relief, fatigue, and mild depression.<sup>30</sup>



**Image 4.** *Chair's Pose*

**Chair Pose (Utkatasana).** Start this pose with a Mountain pose / *Tadasana*. Exhale while bending knees and moving one's hips back, as if sitting down on a chair. Draw the lower abdomen in and up to support the lower back. Send hips back rather than the knees forward, so that one can still see the toes. Inhale as raising one's arms and soften your shoulders. Keep reaching higher, while sitting lower for 5 to 10 breaths. To come back into *Tadasana*, exhale, pressing the feet down to straighten the legs and then bring the arms down to the sides. This

<sup>30</sup> Palladium, "7 Calming Yoga."





core-strengthening yoga pose roots oneself into the ground while reaching upwards both physically and mentally to embody the growth one can achieve. By strengthening the physical core, it strengthens the mental core simultaneously, building a fountain of power from the inside out.<sup>31</sup> (Latterly, 2021).



Image 5. *Warrior Pose*

**Warrior Pose (*Virabhadrasana*).** Begin standing, then step the right foot forward about four feet. With the foot parallel and toes pointing to the top of the mat, bend the knee into a lunge. Keep the left leg straight behind and turn the left heel in at approximately 45 degrees. Raise the arms straight above the head, keeping the shoulders pressed down. Squeeze the shoulder blades together and downward and lift one's chin to gaze at hands overhead. Hold the pose and then repeat on the left side.<sup>32</sup> This pose symbolizes the inner ability to overcome ego and ignorance. It brings strength, focus, confidence, and courage.

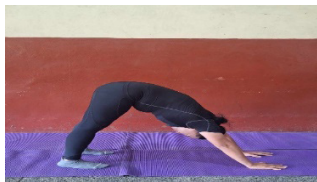


Image 6. *Downward Facing Dog Pose*

**Downward Facing Dog Pose (*Adho Mukha Svanasana*).** One of the most widely recognized yoga poses. Start on the floor with hands shoulder-width apart, with shoulders above the wrists. Align the inner shoulders with the index

fingers. The hips should be above or slightly before the knees. Next, tuck one's toes against the mat or ground, using that to extend the legs and lift both knees into the air. The body should now resemble an upside-down "V" shape. Then, extend and lengthen one's spine, simultaneously pressing through the palms of hands and balls of the feet. Pull the pelvis up toward the ceiling, using the triceps in the upper arms to help stabilize the form. Hold one's body in position, making sure to breathe properly. Slowly bring one's knees back to the floor to release this asana or use it to transition into another pose.<sup>33</sup> This pose gives an overall, rejuvenating stretch that improves brain function and cognition. With increased blood flow to the top of the body, a down-dog gives an energy boost and clears the mind. And finally, this posture also releases any tension in the neck and spine to prevent headaches and manage stress!

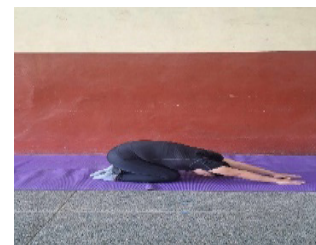


Image 7. *Child's Pose*

**Child's Pose (*Balāsana*).** In this pose, kneel and sit on one's knees. Lean forward, keeping the buttocks on one's heels, and rest the forehead on the floor. Move one's arms so they are next to one's legs, palms facing up. Inhale and exhale, slowly and deeply, for at least eight breaths. This yoga pose relaxes your nervous system and allows you to restore from within, giving you the ultimate power that only true rest can provide.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Latterly, "7 Yoga Power"

<sup>32</sup> Yoga Loft Marblehead, "Virabhadrasana I"

<sup>33</sup> MasterClass, "How to Do Downward Dog."

<sup>34</sup> Latterly, "7 Yoga Power"

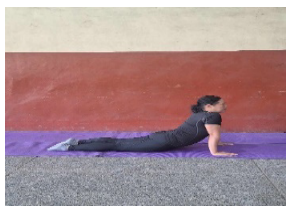


Image 8. *Cobra Pose*

**Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*).** As an extremely easy pose, start by placing one's palms flat on the ground directly under the shoulders. Bend the elbows straight back and hug them into one's sides. Pause for a moment looking straight down at the mat with one's neck in a neutral position. Anchor the pubic bone to the floor. Inhale to lift one's chest off the floor. Roll the shoulders back and keep low ribs on the floor. Make sure the elbows continue hugging the sides. Do not let them wing out to either side. Keep one's neck neutral. Do not crank it up. One's gaze should stay on the floor.<sup>35</sup> The cobra pose harmonizes and balances, cleanses, and purifies activities, and arouses the heart chakra. The emotional state becomes more refined and divine in nature, and one can experience pure emotions such as compassion, universal love, contentment, gratitude, and forgiveness. This pose helps heal a broken heart recover from loss or emotional trauma, cut a bad temper, manage irritation and anger, cultivate compassion or forgiveness, discover joy and happiness, and emanate unconditional love.<sup>36</sup>

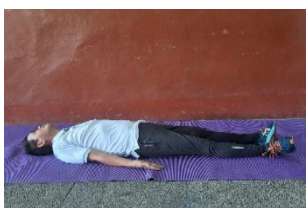


Image 9. *Corpse Pose*

**Corpse Pose (*Shavasana*).** Begin lying flat on the back with legs close together but without

touching, arms at the sides with palms facing up. Let the eyes and face soften and close the eyes, while breathing deeply. Starting at the top of the head, pay attention to each part of one's body until reaching the toes. Hold this position for 4-5 minutes. Full body relaxation puts the body at ease, slows breathing, lowers blood pressure, and quietens the nervous system.<sup>37</sup>



Image 10. *Easy Pose*

**Easy Pose (*Sukhasana*).** This is another simple pose. Start by sitting up straight, then extend one's legs in front of the body, then with knees wide, place each foot beneath the opposite knee and cross one's legs in toward one's torso. With palms down, place the palms on the knees. Align one's head, neck, and spine together and sit with one's weight balanced. Lengthen the spine but soften one's neck and gently relax the feet and thighs. Stay in this position for about a minute, then gently release and change the cross of one's legs. Among the benefits of doing this pose, it opens hips, lengthens the spine, and promotes serenity, relieves physical and mental exhaustion, cuts anxiety.<sup>38</sup>

## ON MINDFULNESS IN BENEDICTINE TRADITION

Physiological and spiritual issues, at times, brought us problems clearing our minds and focusing on something. It hinders us from conducting something good. This condition calls for mindfulness. Mindfulness, or *sampajañña* in Pali, an Indic language, means clear comprehension.

<sup>35</sup> Pizer, "How to Do Cobra Pose."

<sup>36</sup> Bridges. "Control Your Emotions!"

<sup>37</sup> Palladium, "7 Calming Yoga."

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.





Mindfulness helps us see more clearly, respond more effectively to what life throws at us, and make wiser choices.<sup>39</sup> It suggests a state of mind, one of calmness, gratitude, and compassion that can have a profound effect on oneself. To be mindful is to enter a state, practicing a way of being, a moment-by-moment gentle and nurturing awareness of our emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations.<sup>40</sup> A Buddhist Pali word ‘*sati*,’ often translated as ‘mindfulness, has at its root ‘remembering’. Mindfulness, in this case, is about not forgetting the things of God but remembering them. This is like what the letter of James 1:23-25 of the New Testament is saying about actively remembering.<sup>41</sup>

*Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.*

Some people think that mindfulness is being added to the self, gotten from somewhere, not knowing that it is innate to human beings. It is something natural in us. Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us.<sup>42</sup> Many practitioners of mindfulness, have concluded that it reduces stress, enhances performance, gains insight and awareness through observing our minds, and increases our attention to others’ well-being. This is reached through constant formal meditation. Another way of achieving mindfulness is by living life as if it mattered, moment by moment. One must pay close attention to breathing, especially when feeling an intense emotion, sense in each moment

the sights, sounds, and smells that ordinarily slip by without reaching conscious awareness, tune into one’s body’s physical sensations, recognize one’s thoughts and emotions, and find “micro-moments” of mindfulness throughout the day to reset your focus and sense of purpose.<sup>43</sup> Studies on mindfulness claim that mindfulness typically suggests a state of mind: one of calmness, gratitude, and compassion that can have a profound effect on us. It points to entering that state, practicing a way of being, moment-by-moment gentle and nurturing awareness of our emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Mindfulness can lead to a happier and more productive life.<sup>44</sup> Mindfulness can be used as well in treating some psychological issues. Mindfulness is used in several therapeutic interventions, such as mindfulness-based cognitive behavior therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and mindfulness meditation.<sup>45</sup>

Living in a post-modern world one finds it incredibly challenging to quiet a busy mind to become more aware of the present moment and the presence of God. Benedictine mindfulness delivers anyone to this state. The Benedictine practice of mindfulness, like all the Benedictine practices, is lifelong observance. The practice of mindfulness, which centers on the presence of God, is not something one learns in a few hours or even a few years. Mindfulness within a Benedictine understanding is an awareness of the presence of God and remembering to translate into action what God wants the people to do.<sup>46</sup> This understanding of mindfulness is embedded in the Holy Rule of St. Benedict that says,

*Humility, the central monastic virtue, begins in ‘fear of the Lord,’ which simply means acknowledging the divine omnipresence and acting accordingly. The corresponding vice is forgetting that one stands before God. One must*

<sup>39</sup> Shapiro, “Rewire your mind.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Lambert, “Mindfulness with a Christian.”

<sup>42</sup> Mindful Staff, “What is mindfulness?”

<sup>43</sup> Greater Good Science Center, “Mindfulness, How Do I.”

<sup>44</sup> Williams & Penman, “Mindfulness: A practical guide.”

<sup>45</sup> American Psychological Association, “Mindfulness.”

<sup>46</sup> Lambert, “Mindfulness with a Christian.”





*'flee forgetfulness and always be mindful of what God has commanded' (RB 7:10-11).*

Benedictine mindfulness, in this case, also means sacramental awareness, A special appreciation of the sacred (God) in the world, which leads people to regard all resources, including the self as sacred vessels of the altar. This requires respect for all God's creation, our common home, and humanity, their just use, preservation, and their propagation. It means good stewardship. St. Benedict exhorted all his followers in his Holy Rule 10:31, "regard all the tools and goods of the monastery as the sacred vessels of the altar."

Benedictine mindfulness also connotes fidelity to the monastic way of life, which is about taking up the cross and following Christ. It is about fixing all the love and attention of the heart on Christ alone,<sup>47</sup> as the gospel according to Mark 8:34-38 narrates:

*Then he called the crowd to him, along with his disciples, and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me, and the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

Benedictine mindfulness commands anyone to attentively listen to the Word of God and to the living Word, which is Christ himself, and it underlies repentance. That as a person is to leave behind old habitual ways of thinking, shaped in the patterns of this world, and allow the strange newness of the kingdom to emerge.<sup>48</sup> As it is mentioned in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The Benedictine practices

of doing *Lectio Divina*, Divine Office, and the regular liturgical celebrations help the people in monastic communities to be constantly exposed and have personal encounters with the Word of God.

## ANALOGY OF YOGA AND BENEDICTINE MINDFULNESS

It seems difficult to find the equivalence between Yoga and Benedictine mindfulness, for the two belong to diverse cultural origins. Yoga has been identified with Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Sikhism. The Benedictine mindfulness has found its roots in a Catholic Christian tradition of faith. But with serious scrutiny of the two ancient religious practices, one may find similarities in the areas of ethical imperatives, external, and internal expressions, focus, aim, time allotment, and assumed benefits (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Yoga and Benedictine Analogy*

Relevant Areas of Concern	Essential Elements	
	Yoga	Benedictine Mindfulness
Ethical Imperatives	Restraints (Yama) Don'ts Observances (Niyama) Do's	Repentance Sobriety Moderation Mercy Stewardship Discipline Seeking God Fidelity to God
External Expressions	Posture (Asana) Breath control (Pranayama) Withdrawal of the senses (Pratyahara)	Observing silence Listen with the ear of the heart Encounter with the Word of God through <i>Lectio Divina</i> , Divine Office, and the regular liturgical celebrations
Internal Expressions	Concentration (Dharana) Meditation (Dhyana) Contemplation (Samadhi)	Reflectio Meditatio Oratio Contemplatio
Focus	Awareness of Self, Reality, and Divine	Awareness of Self, Reality, and Divine

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.





Aim	Union of Body, Mind, and Spirit Union with the Ultimate Source	Balanced life Oneness with the Divine
Time allotment	Several minutes Life-long practice	Every minute seconds Life-long practice
Assumed benefits	Physiological and spiritual well-being	Total well-being

Yoga and Benedictine mindfulness may have come from different religious traditions, but both are seen sharing a lot of elements in several areas of concern like ethical imperatives, external, and internal expressions, focus, aim, condition, and valuable benefits. Ethical imperatives are conduct requirements composed of moral values and virtues in observing Yoga and Benedictine mindfulness. Both disciplines have ethical considerations to fully aid someone in practicing yoga and Benedictine mindfulness and help achieve their disciplinal aims. External expressions are the outward manifestations consisting of actuations that upon observance may usher anyone to the efficacious reality of either yoga or Benedictine mindfulness. However, in this concern, yoga considers more unique physical actions because of *asanas* compared to Benedictine mindfulness, which usually requires usual acts of sitting, kneeling, and standing. Internal expressions pertain to internal dynamics whenever performing yoga or Benedictine mindfulness. In this case, each discipline seems identical, the inner or spiritual mind is at work to concentrate, reflect, meditate, pray, and contemplate. In the area of the disciplinal focus, yoga and Benedictine mindfulness share great similarities. Both make a person aware of the self, others, reality, and God. The practice of the two disciplines requires life-long observance. It simply means that yoga and Benedictine mindfulness are not to be seen based only on the whims of the practitioner. To fully receive help from the two disciplines, one must consistently perform them. In the aspect of the benefits of practicing yoga and Benedictine

mindfulness, one can assume in both disciplines, people will achieve good health and well-being.

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of physiological and spiritual maladies is something inevitable because of so many factors that may result in it. People who are found in the academe are not excluded. Students, faculty, and staff, by circumstances, may suffer from some of these physio-spiritual maladies. In turn, they were not able to perform at the greatest level and therefore, hindered from achieving their goals easily. Indeed, there is a need for the authorities in the academe to create and apply an intervention so that the people in the academe will be helped. The practices of yoga and Benedictine mindfulness are seen as alternative physio-spiritual remedy. Although more scientific studies must be done to prove their efficacy as an alternative remedy to some physio-spiritual maladies, at least by yogic and Benedictine traditions, they are perceived as vital alternatives with all their identified essential elements that can help restore a person's good health and well-being. These disciplines can be appropriated in the case of the people in the academe. They are simple practices that can be done in limited space and time and do not demand a lot of resources.





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