

EPISODE 6 - 200 HOURS KILLED YOGA

- Tejal Patel: Instructors rarely make a living on their salaries. Less than 30% of yoga teachers report yoga as their primary source of income. Mind blowing. Not really though.
- Jesal Parikh: I mean...
- Tejal Patel: True life.
- Tejal Patel: Hello everyone. I'm Tejal.
- Jesal Parikh: And I'm Jesal.
- Tejal Patel: And this is Yoga is Dead.
- Jesal Parikh: We're two Indian American yoga teachers navigating the weird and tricky world of yoga.
- Tejal Patel: Get ready to hear our personal stories, thoughts, and research on who killed yoga. Grab some chai, a tall comfortable seat. And let's go.
- Jesal Parikh: Final episode for now. 200 hours killed yoga.
- Tejal Patel: Hey, hey, hey. In this episode we're going to dive into what it means to be a yoga teacher, what past and present yoga education looks like, credentialing bodies, and of course the 200-hour yoga education standard. But, before we get to the episode content, we know a lot of you are wondering, is there going to be a season two?
- Tejal Patel: And the clear, concise answer to that is ...we're not exactly sure. So, you might know that we jumped into doing a podcast with little, no experience at all of doing anything like this. So we weren't sure our messages or our voices would really resonate with anyone.
- Tejal Patel: We did not plan to have an audience like you guys, so we actually didn't plan anything beyond these six episodes. We're super grateful for the support we've received from everyone and we just want to thank everyone for that. But, while we plan how to further our mission in 2020, we still want you guys to stay connected, and we still want to grow our community.
- Tejal Patel: So please follow us on Instagram, Facebook and Patreon. And if you haven't visited Patreon yet, it's a special members-only site where you'll get updates and messages from us as we work behind the scenes. So, in between episodes, in between events, you'll get special content that only Patreon members can receive. So, please check us out on Patreon.

Jesal Parikh: And for those of you who are in or near New York City, we'd love to celebrate the conclusion of this season with you. Humming Puppy in Chelsea has graciously agreed to host our wrap party on January 10th, starting at 7:00 PM. If you haven't RSVP'd yet, we'll be sending out another invite to our email list in a few days after this episode airs. So please go sign up for our email list and then you'll receive that invite.

Tejal Patel: Yeah, we'd love to party with all of you and celebrate what a crazy ride this has been. So, let's talk history of yoga teachers. What is a yoga teacher anyway? Is it different from a yoga master? Should it be?

Jesal Parikh: Well, I think in today's times, a yoga teacher is absolutely different from a yoga master.

Tejal Patel: And even traditionally, there was a distinction between a yoga teacher and a yoga master. I think the most prevalent example of this is someone who traditionally was a renunciate and took sannyasa in order to become a more serious student, and they would only go on to teach when their teacher deemed them ready. Typically, this could be a process that took several years, if not decades. This describes what we know of as the guru–shishya parampara, where there is knowledge from a certain lineage being passed down.

Jesal Parikh: I love the word, *parampara*. I feel like it's a very 80s and 90s Bollywood word. Every movie of that era was about conflict between modern times and parampara.

Tejal Patel: It's totally a great word to say in a dramatic, Amitabh Bachchan way

Jesal & Tejal: *Parampara*.

Tejal Patel: So there was this guru–shishya parampara, but from my understanding, it's not that every student would become a teacher necessarily. They could stay a student, but in the case of a yoga lineage, the students' main goal, at least in theory, is supposed to be moksha, or liberation, and becoming a teacher was likely incidental.

Tejal Patel: For example, if a teacher or a leader was old, and needed to groom a replacement, or they needed assistance to teach their beginners, or they needed folks to just go out and spread their message, then a student might be tapped or asked to step up and teach or lead.

Jesal Parikh: And then of course we think of gurus who are enlightened beings. We tend to use the word guru to denote a yoga teacher and a yoga master. But in truth, not every yoga teacher is a guru. We also have the word acharya. Acharya means someone who has learned in conduct.

- Jesal Parikh: Today, we largely consider the word acharya to be synonymous with “teacher” but it’s more accurately considered a person who has studied the Vedas, or in modern times, has academic knowledge, versus a guru who might be a person that has more experiential or experimental knowledge and might act more like a mentor than an acharya would.
- Jesal Parikh: An acharya has to have studied formally, a guru may or may not have formal academic or Vedic knowledge, though academic knowledge can be helpful to attain moksha, but it isn't really a requirement. Point being, a person can be a yoga acharya without that person being a guru that has attained self wisdom or moksha, and both acharyas and gurus are considered suitable teachers.
- Tejal Patel: That's good to point out. When I completed my teacher training in India, I was given a certificate stating that I was a yoga acharya. The exact language was, "By the grace of the universe we are pleased to bestill the title of yoga acharya to Ms. Tejal [Tejal’s middle name] Patel" Blah, blah, blah ...successfully completing the advanced yoga teacher's training course, RYT300. And, at the bottom it had all the logos for the Yoga Alliance and signature for the director of my program. So boom. acharya.
- Jesal Parikh: Wow. Just after a month you're an acharya, Tejal. How amazing is that?
- Tejal Patel: I mean, I took it all with a grain of salt. Acharya originally refers to someone who studies all of Vedanta and Vedanga, the auxiliary studies that would help you to study the Upanishads. And I definitely didn't do that.
- Jesal Parikh: Well, I find it weird that they would just throw out that title so willy-nilly.
- Tejal Patel: What I've realized since, is that this Ashram was in the business of providing teaching certificates to students, so it felt compulsory to receive the certificate with whatever language they chose to use.
- Tejal Patel: And of course, since this was an Indian Ashram located in Kerala, it makes sense to me that they used their translation of the word teacher. And I'm not entirely sure, but I think in the South, it's more common to use acharya versus the other types.
- Jesal Parikh: Well, let's come back around to obligatory certifications later, because this is one of our main sticking points when it comes to current yoga education. But back to the terminology, it seems like you can have an acharya that isn't a guru and a guru that isn't an acharya, but based on the fact that we have a lot of other words to describe enlightened beings or those who have attained moksha, it seems like we might have yoga masters who aren't teachers at all.
- Jesal Parikh: We have words like Sant, Jivanmukta, Atmanjnani, Brahmajnani and so on. The only reference I could find to see if these labels necessarily mean someone

becomes a guru is a video from Sadhguru that says that saints and sages often get recognized as having extraordinary perception, and therefore people may decide to follow them and try to learn from them, but it's not necessary that those who have attained that level of moksha will become teachers. It's sort of like if people recognize them, or if they choose to, but they don't have to.

Tejal Patel: So according to what we've laid out, it seems like most spiritual information was passed down in a type of formal way, either through a gurukul, or a math, or some other setting like ashram, etc..

Tejal Patel: And from what I know about that model of learning, it seems very selective. Who gets to be chosen in? For example, my mind immediately goes to the stories of Droṇāchārya and the Mahabharat, refusing to teach Eklavya and Karna because they don't have the right family background, class, or caste. Pretty selective.

Jesal Parikh: I wonder if the whole Ashram, sannyasa, guru thing is still influenced by caste, class or other family background traits, because I was reading, just 80 or so years ago, in Gandhi's time, it was controversial that he allowed Dalit people into the Ashram. So I wonder if these issues still exist today, but I'm just unaware of them.

Tejal Patel: Well, you know Gandhi was influenced by spiritual leaders before him, so the effort to be inclusive hasn't been the majority of people's practices, but there were luminaries attempting to include all people regardless of caste, gender or religion over the course of history.

Tejal Patel: But I'm going to go with these issues definitely still exist today, especially with the current fundamentalist themes we've been reading about coming from Modi's leadership.

Jesal Parikh: Yeah, definitely some things going on over there, but the selective path to leadership continues on. In contrast to the guru–shishya parampara and whatever politics we see play out in that model, we also have the stories of great enlightened leaders that became that way through their own renunciation and spontaneous enlightenment.

Jesal Parikh: The most obvious example of this, of course, is Siddhārtha Gautama becoming the Buddha. The key point here is renunciation as the most common practice on the spiritual path. But you and I are proof that things have changed along the way and that everyday people began to offer spiritual teachings and practice and offer yoga. So what about these masses, the householders? How and when did householders start practicing and teaching yoga?

Tejal Patel: Well, we don't really know the answer to that entirely. So let's reframe the question a bit. When it comes to different traditions that originated in the South Asian subcontinent, almost all of them deal with liberation, or moksha. From

karma and the birth, death and rebirth cycle. The goal is more or less similar, and if we think about it in that way, then we know that there have always been paths laid out for householders.

- Tejal Patel: In Hinduism, the paths often include fire rituals, and then later, the passing down of stories like the Ramayana Mahabharata as a means for contemplation. In those epic stories, we see householders looking to attain liberation. Most famously, we have the Bhagavad Gita in which Krishna talks about how a householder can also be a Yogi if they practice non-attachment, AKA karma yoga.
- Tejal Patel: It's Krishna who reframes the idea of a sannyasi as a person who has no desire and no hatred, and that the person doesn't have to renounce the material, worldly life, though doing so can help shift focus from material matters to more spiritual ones.
- Jesal Parikh: We also have Brahmins that act as teachers and perform ritual ceremonies. It's unclear if Brahmins started out as renunciates or householders. They may have held occupations other than being a priest, but clearly we know that as the caste system continues to develop into what it is today, that Brahmins did lead householder lives, and eventually priesthood became a vocation that they passed down the family line.
- Tejal Patel: Yeah. Fun fact, my sister's priest at her wedding was an accountant by profession, that was his day job, but yeah, he did wedding rituals on the weekends. So yes, somewhere down the timeline Brahmins did assume dual roles.
- Jesal Parikh: Yeah, it's pretty common to see that now. We also have other family lineages, and indigenous knowledge being passed down the line. For example, we have stories that differ from the major published works of the Ramayana Mahabharata that are regional variations, which are considered folk truths in their own right.
- Tejal Patel: Then we have the Agamas and the Tantric text that deal with the material world and how to set up, practice, and worship in modern day surroundings. So we can say much of this ancient knowledge was geared towards those living as householders, and how to practically incorporate religion into daily life.
- Jesal Parikh: And we know that ascetic knowledge eventually came to householders by teachers as far back as Buddha and Mahavira. They're usually considered contemporaries and some sources say that they lived around the same time and might have been in competition for followers.
- Tejal Patel: Now that seems a little contradictory to practicing non-attachment.
- Jesal Parikh: Well, I think spirituality is full of these little contradictions due to practicality.

- Tejal Patel: Right.
- Jesal Parikh: Either way, the stories say that both Buddha and Mahavira taught to lay people.
- Tejal Patel: So from what we've gathered, it seems like householder, and renunciate paths have always existed together, but possibly in some sort of tension. There's a story that highlights possible tension that existed, and well, maybe still exists between the two. It's a story from one of the famous ancient yoga lineages: the Nath tradition.
- Jesal Parikh: The story goes that the founder, Swami Matsyendranath, fell in with a yogini queen, and started living a lavish Royal life. This really upset his arguably more famous, notable student Gorakshanath or Gorakhnath, because the Nath path is one of renunciation and the master had obviously broken with that.
- Jesal Parikh: Also, yogis of the Nath tradition focused on acquiring siddhis and magical powers. So Gorakshanath had accumulated some very deep magical powers which he put to use to rectify the situation. He used his power to change his gender to female and essentially woo back his guru, out of the life of a householder and back to the ascetic, renunciant life of the Nath Yogi.
- Jesal Parikh: I have to say this story contains a lot of gems. First of all it acknowledges the existence of yoginis, which is rare, and secondly, it struck me as a great example of how gender non-binary has always been around.
- Tejal Patel: Yes. Yes, and in this case gender fluidity is highlighted. Let me quote writer Max Bearak from his article about India's third gender group: it's in The Washington Post, "People we might consider transgender have existed across societies for as long as they themselves have existed... But in South Asia they have formed distinct communities, with histories and mythologies that go back hundreds, if not thousands of years. Age old texts such as the Mahabharata, and the Kamasutra refer to eunuchs, and there are tales of gods, even the most powerful of them, who change genders on a whim.""
- Tejal Patel: Okay.
- Tejal Patel: I mean, that was an interesting detour from our main conversation, right?
- Jesal Parikh: It sure was. This is a topic I've been trying to learn more about, and if you, our listeners want to dig deeper into this history, we're going to link several resources in an additional resources page on our website.
- Tejal Patel: Going back to Gorakshanath, he ironically made the Nath yoga teachings accessible to the common person, by writing down knowledge that had previously only been orally transmitted in a sect that preferred oral over written

tradition. So, in addition to Gorakshanath, Buddha and Mahavira, let's meet Lahiri Mahasaya known for reviving Kriya yoga.

- Tejal Patel: Lahiri was unusual among Indian holy people in that he was a householder. He married, raised a family, and worked as an accountant for the Military Engineering Department of the British Indian government. Lahiri lived with his family in Varanasi rather than a temple or monastery. Lahiri was told by his master, Mahavatar Babaji, that the rest of his life was to be given to spreading the Kriya message.
- Tejal Patel: Soon after hearing that, Lahiri began initiating sincere seekers into the path of Kriya yoga. He organized many study groups, gave regular discourses on the Gita and he freely gave Kriya initiation to those of every faith at a time when caste bigotry was very strong. He encouraged his students to adhere to the tenants of their own faith, adding the Kriya techniques to what they were already practicing.
- Tejal Patel: He gave initiation to: gardeners, postmen, kings, maharajhs, sannyasis, householders; people considered to be lower castes, Christians and Muslims, and at that time it was super unusual for a strict Brahmin to associate so closely with people from all castes.
- Tejal Patel: Lahiri taught that if you're earning an honest living and practicing honesty, there was no need to alter your external life in any significant way in order to become aware of God's presence.
- Tejal Patel: This is similar to what we mentioned earlier, that Krishna advises in the Gita. It was extremely rare for Lahiri to advise sannyas or complete worldly renunciation by becoming a swami. Instead, he advised marriage for most of his disciples along with Kriya yoga practice, and he did this under the direction of his own teacher.
- Tejal Patel: Another important teacher who brought yoga to householders is Shri Yogendra. In 1919 after establishing a yoga school in Mumbai he came to the US to domesticate Hatha yoga; seeking scientific evidence for yoga's health benefits, which he used to help undo the negative image of yoga and Asana practice, and he pioneered teaching yoga to more women; his first female students were Mirabai, and his own wife.
- Jesal Parikh: I find this so revealing now because we're starting to touch on this point of history during colonization, and the need that spiritual teachers are feeling to have their work seen as legitimate by global dominant culture. He already had schools in Mumbai and he was treating the therapeutic needs of the folks coming to see him, but clearly he felt that the negative opinions in the US mattered, and that he needed to address them, even as early as 1919.

- Tejal Patel: That's so true, and Swami Vivekananda also felt that same thing in the 1900s. After he spoke to Chicago Parliament of Religions and saw the success of spreading the message that yoga was a respectable practice for the middle classes in America and Europe, then it motivated him to do the same back home.
- Tejal Patel: When he returned to India he changed his mission to restore Indian national pride under colonialism, and to use yoga as a practice to teach self-sufficiency to all householders. So we can say that throughout time householders were encouraged to practice yoga, but that there was an influx of gurus opening schools and teaching to the masses starting around the 1900s.
- Jesal Parikh: So when I think of where spiritual experts went to get their education, Ashrams obviously spring to mind, of course Ashrams weren't always open to all people, but you and I did receive yoga education at Ashrams that issued yoga certifications, and certification is a pretty new concept.
- Tejal Patel: Well, certification in yoga and spirituality seems to mostly be a reaction to colonialism and the need for white acceptance or white demand depending on how you look at it, and then white legitimacy. India already had higher learning institutions before colonialism, but Western education supplanted Indian systems under colonization, and the result was that long-standing indigenous practices, and passed down knowledge became inferior.
- Jesal Parikh: When we think about how so many of these teachers and masters went to the U.S., we can see that they had this deep desire to be deemed credible under the standards of Western academia and later certification programs. But when the first Western-style higher education institution emerged in India in the 1800s, only some of them offered courses in Sanskrit and Vedic philosophy. It took time for Indian knowledge to be valued under these Western systems.
- Tejal Patel: That feels like such an affront to the culture and practices already in place in India. Krishnamacharya did some university study, and in his biography it also says he passed the Samkhya yoga examination of Patna. I think this was the first examination of its kind, I couldn't find any resources for anything earlier, and I wonder if this exam was also a certification of sorts.
- Jesal Parikh: The first actual mention of a certification for yoga teacher training and the way we know it now at least, that I could find, only goes as far back as 1969. According to the Sivananda website, Swami Vishnudevananda was the first yoga master in the West to develop a training program for yoga teachers; which was the Sivananda Yoga Teacher's Training Course in Canada.
- Jesal Parikh: Shortly after there's a mention of David Williams learning all of the Ashtanga series in just a year and being issued a certification by Pattabhi Jois in 1974. In

his bio Williams says he was the first non-Indian to be certified, and that Jois only certified a small number of people himself.

- Jesal Parikh: So the wording makes it sound like there might have been a few previous certifications issued to Indians practicing the Ashtanga method, but the whole certification thing didn't go back much further than that. Iyengar also began teaching teacher training programs and issuing certifications in the 70s, and though I couldn't find an exact year, it was somewhere around 1974 to 1976.
- Tejal Patel: So the 60s and the 70s it seems, we start to get these official teacher training certifications, but I believe back then joining a TT program was a little different from what we see today, in that there might have been prerequisites to joining the teacher training programs.
- Tejal Patel: Maybe you had to be learning the method for a certain number of years, or had to have been far enough along according to the senior teachers in each organization before you were accepted as part of the training, kind of like an evaluation.
- Tejal Patel: In my case, that didn't happen, I joined my first 200 hour teacher training the day before it started with no previous relationship to the teachers or the studio. I had a meeting on a Thursday to chat with the program director and on Friday I was in training, and that wasn't an issue for anyone involved.
- Tejal Patel: Looking back, it seems a bit abrupt, given that I was essentially guaranteed a certificate to teach upon completion of these basic program requirements.
- Jesal Parikh: That's really sus if you ask me. But, in fairness my story is really similar too. In retrospect what the heck were they thinking giving us certifications to teach yoga to other people? They had no idea what our previous relationship to yoga was.
- Jesal Parikh: I can understand if we were given a certificate of completion of having learned something, but permission to just go out in the world and teach others something that we barely had scratched the surface on in the teacher training.
- Tejal Patel: It almost seems irresponsible, but it speaks to the market forces of the growing yoga industry: this is the monster the 200 hour guidelines have created.
- Tejal Patel: I think at the time the standards were issued, like I was saying, the Yoga Alliance thought it was obvious to admit only students who were longtime practitioners; or had relationships, or were really part of the school, into teacher trainings.
- Tejal Patel: And they took it for granted that things would continue into the way they are now. But obviously, that's not how capitalism works, and in both our cases we were essentially admitted into trainings overnight.

- Jesal Parikh: The one redeeming factor in our personal situations is that we had a relationship to yoga before going in, and that we had indigenous knowledge going into the trainings.
- Jesal Parikh: We knew the basics of karma, rebirth, Atman, non-duality, mantra, scriptures, bhajans, et cetera. Unlike Westerners who might come to yoga from a Abrahamic viewpoint, this is probably new information for those folks to consider.
- Jesal Parikh: And I'm specifying Westerners here because in India all this information co-exists along with Islam and Christianity. And it's very likely that South Asians who are Muslim and Christian already are familiar with this information too.
- Tejal Patel: And of course, we're not writing off anybody else that might have family history, or have a background of this knowledge, growing up, or from other ways and practices, before entering a yoga school. That's not just exclusive to Indian folks.
- Tejal Patel: But going back to the import of Western academic standards into India, we see again how the transfer of knowledge through lineage is deemed as not worthy of Western credentialing, reinforcing these oppressive colonial mindsets.
- Jesal Parikh: I think one way, and not the only way, but one way we could start to value indigenous knowledge and address the fact that teacher trainings might be a student's first interaction with yoga, would be to have a vetting process for students who are going into the trainings.
- Tejal Patel: Vetting, that sounds so dramatic.
- Jesal Parikh: Well, I think it sounds more dramatic than it is. In most cases it could probably just be a one on one conversation, or even part of the application process for the teacher trainings.
- Tejal Patel: It also wouldn't hurt to normalize immersion style education as a precursor or alternative to teacher trainings. That would help to promote the idea that yoga study exists as a lifelong journey and not just as Asana practice. So that said, our episode is called, 200 Hours Killed Yoga. So where the heck did 200 hour teacher trainings even come from?
- Jesal Parikh: According to Leslie Kaminoff, in his interview on the CHITHEADS podcast, the fitness industry actually set the stage a decade earlier for what would happen in the yoga industry.
- Jesal Parikh: He talked about how the fitness scene became industrialized in the early '80s, with group fitness taking off because of Jane Fonda, the running movement coming to a peak, the Nautilus equipment making gyms safer, and a host of other things.

- Jesal Parikh: And so there was a higher demand for fitness teachers and a rush to fill that demand. And eventually trade organizations sprang up to standardize the practices.
- Jesal Parikh: According to Leslie, the same thing happened in the yoga industry. Yoga really takes off in America in the 1980s and 90's, and at the time Kaminoff was a board member of a nonprofit called Unity in Yoga, which is founded by Rama Jyoti Vernon.
- Jesal Parikh: Unity in Yoga was the organization that later handed over its nonprofit status to the Yoga Alliance. And many of the people who worked with Unity in Yoga ended up being a part of the ad hoc Yoga Alliance. And then that became the Yoga Alliance. Unity in Yoga was primarily an organization that put on yoga conferences.
- Tejal Patel: Conferences that would later be taken over by the Yoga Journal.
- Jesal Parikh: That's right. Rama Jyoti Vernon also founded a newsletter that would later evolve into Yoga Journal. And Yoga Journal started taking over the conferences.
- Jesal Parikh: She's this amazing, fascinating figure, and she did this incredible interview with Jay Brown that everybody needs to listen to, in which she mentions that Unity in Yoga was started to shift focus away from Iyengar style of Asana focused yoga.
- Jesal Parikh: And she mentions this because she was partly responsible for bringing Iyengar to the West Coast, but then later she realized that yoga needed to be more balanced than just Asana focused.
- Tejal Patel: Yes. She mentioned that she was primarily pre Asana, a student of meditation and pranayama, under the tutelage of Bhagat Singh Thind, and her own mother, before ever finding or trying Asana.
- Tejal Patel: And she says that Iyengar told her, "The breath comes later after you achieve the posture." So she spent some time with the Iyengar method and realized that she lost all spiritual connection and was no longer talking yoga philosophy in class, all because she was spending this time immersed in the Iyengar method.
- Tejal Patel: It seems when the newness of the Iyengar method faded, she didn't necessarily like what she was left with. So she wanted to make sure that the spirituality didn't get lost in whatever method was being taught. And this was all before the Ashtanga method was well known in the US too.
- Tejal Patel: I found that conversation to be fascinating, given where we've gotten to now, with modern postural yoga and its various spin-offs.

- Jesal Parikh: Yeah, it's super interesting. It's also interesting because with the Unity in Yoga conferences, she didn't want to say, "Don't do Iyengar." Or take credit away from Iyengar she just wanted to represent other styles and a more fuller picture of what yoga could be.
- Jesal Parikh: So at these Yoga in Unity conferences, people were realizing that yoga was becoming very popular and with lots of other styles, lineages, and even brands popping up, the demand for yoga was growing.
- Jesal Parikh: Kaminoff describes folks at these conferences discussing the need or opportunity for a directory where folks could find other teachers, because at the time, they're mostly just listed in the back of Yoga Journal.
- Jesal Parikh: The standardization of yoga education also became a topic of focus at these conferences. Dr. Ornish had released a peer reviewed study on reversing heart disease that included yoga. And so yoga teachers needed a way to fit yoga into the medical model, which of course demands more "legitimacy" through licensing, regulation standards, certifications, et cetera.
- Tejal Patel: And we know now that legitimacy existed in India differently, through interpersonal relationships, consistent practice, and essentially a referral process once a student was deemed ready.
- Tejal Patel: But here in the States, those steps didn't transfer over, as evidenced by the immersion style yoga teacher trainings, or trainings led by yogalebrities, in which you have no contact with your high profile teacher after completion, or even by receiving training purely online sometimes.
- Tejal Patel: And in some ways, the authenticity and belief in the ancient practices didn't transfer as well. We've seen a total rebranding of the Eastern practices, complete with new names and new founders.
- Tejal Patel: A few examples of this, one Jon Kabat-Zinn founded Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, or MBSR, which was a rebranding of his studies at the Burmese School of Meditation. Zinn is quoted as saying, "I bent over backward to avoid being seen as Buddhist, New Age, or plain flaky."
- Jesal Parikh: Ugh.
- Tejal Patel: Yep.
- Tejal Patel: In his effort to be deemed credible scientifically, he co-opted a practice that was always used therapeutically and wiped out the Eastern roots in order to seem legitimate.

- Tejal Patel: And then two, there's the case of alternate nostril breathing, or anuloma viloma, a pranayama practice, which is now being pedaled as cardiac coherence breathing by the medical community. The renaming here is just utterly confusing because there's already an English alternative.
- Tejal Patel: The benefits of pranayama have always been touted by doctors in India. So the fact that in the West there seems to be a takeover of this practice feels a lot like gatekeeping and erasure to me.
- Jesal Parikh: I would agree with that. When they study yoga in India at research centers, they don't feel the need to change the name. But given the context, I can kind of see how maybe Jon Kabat-Zinn, in his time, felt he needed to disassociate from hippies. You know, the ones that went to India to find enlightenment, but came back doing drugs.
- Tejal Patel: (both laugh) Yeah.
- Jesal Parikh: But the cardiac coherence thing was recent. And yoga, and pranayama, and meditation are all very well a part of the mainstream, so that just feels unnecessarily hurtful.
- Jesal Parikh: Going back to credentialing though, the time was right for something like this to happen. In retrospect, it seems almost inevitable. What's interesting is that both Kaminoff and Jyoti Vernon described fear of outside governmental regulation as a motivating factor.
- Tejal Patel: The fear being that if the yoga industry didn't regulate itself in some way, then that regulation would be imposed from the outside, like through government. And that would shift the ownership of the process from people who practice yoga to people who didn't even know the practice.
- Jesal Parikh: Exactly. And there was another fear as well. That with the high demand of yoga, that some folks were rushing to turn group fitness instructors into yoga teachers.
- Tejal Patel: That doesn't sound too unfamiliar.
- Jesal Parikh: Yeah. Well, the example he gives is YogaFit, which was originally doing weekend trainings for fitness instructors so that they could immediately start teaching yoga as exercise classes in gym type settings.
- Tejal Patel: And the logic there being, that since fitness instructors already knew how to teach groups in class, that they could just transfer that skill into teaching Asana. But of course, no thought was given to the history, philosophy, or the many other limbs and parts of the yoga practice.

- Jesal Parikh: Obviously, to teachers who had spent years getting their training, the idea of a weekend training, devoid of any deeper meaning of yoga, seemed really distasteful. And so they wanted to make sure that the trainings being offered were longer than just a weekend.
- Tejal Patel: Right, so a bunch of people got together and decided on the 200-hour standards. Actually, let's back up. We know that Yoga Alliance is the one that issued these guidelines, but there is a lot of confusion about whether or not Yoga Alliance is actually an accrediting body, a certifying body, a credentialing body, or simply just a registry.
- Jesal Parikh: I've heard all of those different stories and words thrown around in sort of conflicting and confusing ways, so I'm going to read a line from their website. It says, "Yoga Alliance does not certify teachers or accredit schools."
- Jesal Parikh: Shannon Roach, the new president and CEO of Yoga Alliance recently did an interview on the Yogaland Podcast, and she clarified that Yoga Alliance is a credentialing body, and that a registry is just one type of credentialing body, that credentialing is a broad term and categories of credentialing can include licensure, certification, accreditation, et cetera, et cetera.
- Jesal Parikh: Accreditation is described as a voluntary process by which a nongovernmental entity grants a time-limited recognition to an organization after verifying that it has met predetermined and standardized criteria. The key points here being time-limited and verification.
- Jesal Parikh: Yoga Alliance would have to require schools to reapply, which they are now starting to implement. With the new standards that they've put out, they're going to ask schools to reapply every three years.
- Jesal Parikh: But they would also have to have a verification process with something like a site visit, which up until now they haven't provided. So far, they cannot yet say that they're an accrediting body.
- Tejal Patel: That said, the way they are attempting to verify compliance with standards is what they call social credentialing, which they started in 2013. This is kind of an interesting process, because it's offering up Yelp-style reviews on a school's listing on the Yoga Alliance website by students who've completed that training.
- Tejal Patel: So you can go look up a school, and you can see what other graduates have said about that school. The feedback can only be given by students who've completed the training fully. So if they've dropped out, any students for any reason, including feeling discriminated against or excluded in any way, no feedback allowed.

- Tejal Patel: Feedback is also not anonymous, which presents an issue with offering unbiased opinions. On the one hand, non-anonymous feedback means folks are held accountable for their words. On the other hand, folks who feel marginalized and subject to repercussions from their fellow TTs, the trainers, the school, are all unlikely to give their honest feedback.
- Tejal Patel: So in both cases, the feedback is likely to skew positive and not be a complete reflection of what is happening at a given training, especially from the angles of power dynamics, equity, and inclusion.
- Jesal Parikh: Yeah, the yoga community is really small. I know personally I wouldn't want to go on there giving negative feedback publicly. But that said, I know that anonymous feedback can be tricky, because there's no way to follow up on that feedback, right?
- Tejal Patel: Right, but I'm not sure if the Yoga Alliance has ever followed up on any individual feedback. They consistently mention how low on resources they are. Then there's the concern that all the feedback is very public, and anonymous feedback is not really built into their approach.
- Tejal Patel: They're using social credentialing as a way to offload the responsibility by saying, "We don't want to regulate the industry." But that means that they're also not taking responsibility or action when schools don't comply with the new ethical guidelines they've set up.
- Tejal Patel: We dug in a bit and the new guidelines don't engender much confidence from me. The policy on sexual misconduct clearly states that anonymity cannot be maintained. Therefore, the parties' names will be disclosed to each other during an investigation.
- Tejal Patel: Then the grievance policy states that if the grievance is about illegal or fraudulent behavior, it actually needs to be reported elsewhere, like to the Bureau of Consumer Protection or another similar agency. It just left me feeling like, how can the Yoga Alliance protect me?
- Jesal Parikh: It feels like the changes haven't really been thought through as well as they'd like us to think. Or maybe they haven't thought through, but the beneficiary of these policies are really the Alliance itself.
- Jesal Parikh: If those ethical guidelines are actually going to mean something, there needs to be a system in place that protects whistleblowers who are probably likely to be marginalized folks already. It's pretty depressing. So I think I'm going to move on to credentialing for teachers.
- Jesal Parikh: Registered schools supply the certification, but the word certification is also iffy, because the certification usually implies there's an assessment to receive the

certification. But there hasn't been an assessment done either by the school or the Alliance up until now.

Jesal Parikh: The Alliance is now requesting that schools have an assessment component near the end of the training, probably so they can make a stronger case that graduates from Yoga Alliance-approved schools are certified yoga teachers.

Jesal Parikh: But even then the certification is a weak one if the assessment isn't revisited every few years. For example, like when you get a CPR certification, you have to go back every couple of years.

Tejal Patel: And another issue with asking schools to carry out their assessments is that schools aren't incentivized to fail folks who have paid them for training. So once again, we see the Yoga Alliance offloading responsibility onto the schools, but the schools are the ones who are at risk of losing money.

Jesal Parikh: Well, I don't think Yoga Alliance really cares. From where they sit, they get paid by the school no matter what - even if the school makes less money.

Tejal Patel: So all of these changes seem to be a response to people who started deeply questioning the whole point of Yoga Alliance and the reason that they even deserve money from schools or us teachers.

Tejal Patel: The criticism didn't just stay or come from our country. There's a credentialing body across the pond in the UK called Yoga Alliance Professionals (Y-A-P), that has a scathing opinion of the Yoga Alliance U.S. as well.

Tejal Patel: They state on their website, "We believe Yoga Alliance USA plays a significant role in the reduction of standards and is the main reason we don't want the public to be confused with us and Yoga Alliance USA."

Jesal Parikh: Damn!

Tejal Patel: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So I'm wondering how they settled on the 200-hour program at all.

Jesal Parikh: Well, I was able to find two lines of reasoning on this. One version of the 200 hour story comes from Rama Jyoti Vernon who said she wrote a program as part of a larger graduate curriculum for the California Institute of Integral Studies and that the part that she wrote ended up being about 200 hours.

Jesal Parikh: She mentioned that she got some guidance from B.K.S. Iyengar while writing the curriculum, and then later the training became a part of the Iyengar Institute of San Francisco's first teacher training, an institute that she also helped to found.

Jesal Parikh: Another resource says that the 200-hour standard was influenced in part by the month-long ashram residency programs that had already been in place.

- Tejal Patel: So the ad hoc yoga Alliance folks felt that one month roughly translated to about 200 hours and of course in hindsight, we can see that a straight 200 hours with no prerequisites or assessments was a terrible idea.
- Jesal Parikh: Correct. But I think it's time to take a short break to hear about the host of our wrap party, Humming Puppy.
- Jesal Parikh: Humming Puppy yoga studios - a yoga experience originated from traditional practices in an intentional space that resonates with the perfect hum. Humming Puppy incorporates a sound bath into every class and is more than just a physical practice of yoga.
- Jesal Parikh: Your experience at Humming Puppy begins the moment you sign up online and book your mat. Complimentary tea and coconut water is always served in the lounge, and our spa-like showers will leave you feeling refreshed.
- Jesal Parikh: A sanctuary in the city, Humming Puppy encourages you to leave the outside world behind and to immerse yourself in good vibes. Listeners to our podcast can receive 10% off when you use our code [yogaisdead](https://yogaisdead.com) at hummingpuppy.com
- Tejal Patel: We're back guys, and we hope to see you at Humming Puppy for our wrap party on January 10th. Remember to sign up for our email to get an invite just a few days from now.
- Tejal Patel: So let's put this into context with what was already happening at the time. We mentioned that YogaFit was doing a weekend training to certify existing fitness instructors into teaching yoga classes.
- Tejal Patel: There were some other short trainings that we found; including the White Lotus Foundation, which was offering two-week trainings, and then the Shivananda training was a month-long immersion.
- Tejal Patel: Then trainings like those of Iyengar and Joyce took a minimum of one year to complete. Jyoti Vernon mentions her 200 hour eventually being adopted by Iyengar, but I believe at that time trainings might've had other prerequisites.
- Tejal Patel: Like you couldn't roll up to the method for the first time and take the training like we did. Bikram's original training was 12 weeks and Jivamukti, I believe, always had their 800 hour training offered in two parts.
- Tejal Patel: While I couldn't find the date from the '90s, the current transcendental meditation training takes place over six months. So there was a smattering of other major trainings, and some took a while to complete and the others didn't take as much time. It seems like the 200 hours might have been a way to find a compromise in there with what was already in place.

- Jesal Parikh: But to counterpoint that a little bit, the whole idea of Yoga Alliance was influenced by similar trade organizations from abroad, specifically the British Wheel of Yoga and the European Yoga Union. These are mentioned in an article in the July/August 1995 issue of Yoga Journal.
- Jesal Parikh: According to that article, the standards set by the British Wheel of Yoga, which was a government-approved organization, took on average four years to complete and there was a mention of a standard that took four and a half years to complete that was set by the European Yoga Union.
- Jesal Parikh: What peaked my attention though, is that Rama Jyoti Vernon went to the UK and saw how these standards were being implemented, and then she was horrified because what she saw was focused on physical ability.
- Jesal Parikh: So in a sense, I kind of feel like her seeing that and the whole YogaFit thing should have influenced the way the standards were created much more so than they did.
- Tejal Patel: Yeah. And to that point in 1990, the chairwoman of Unity in Yoga is quoted as saying, "Unity in Yoga attracts people who don't want to do the brand name yoga. They don't want the rigidity."
- Tejal Patel: So already the organization that ends up ceding their non profit 501 c3 status to the newly formed Yoga Alliance had already recognized that people didn't want to be a part of rigid lineages that probably also meant rigid standards and practices.
- Jesal Parikh: In retrospect, it feels like the writing was on the wall, in a way, with this whole yoga thing becoming industrialized; but hindsight is 20/20 and in the moment I can see that the difficulty of trying to please everyone and not alienate anyone in the group, they came up with this crappy compromise that didn't really please anybody.
- Tejal Patel: In that 1995 Yoga Journal article, Judith Lassiter is quoted saying, "Currently a lot of certification basically certifies mediocrity." And she does speak like that. I've been in her training, she's just like that and I think she said that in reference to what was already happening before the Yoga Alliance standards.
- Tejal Patel: But she's pretty much still right and the Yoga Alliance is definitely one of the biggest catalysts in the industrialization of yoga. There's a quote from Andrew Tanner who at least until 2018 is/was the chief ambassador for Yoga Alliance where he states plainly that the 200 hours standard essentially created an entire industry.
- Jesal Parikh: I want to back that up with a quote here from Jay Bram. He says, "One thing that needs mentioning is the deleterious effects of the Yoga Alliance 200 hour

teacher training standard. This is the monetary device that enabled both the standardization and exploitation of yoga teaching, which venture capitalists identified and pounced on. As a result, the industry now mainly supports only a few lead teachers, while the majority of grassroots teachers grinding out the drop-in classes every day receive demeaning compensation and treatment. Unfortunately, recent efforts to reform the standards amounts to essentially doubling down on the extractive and failing model at the root of teachers' dismay." I think part of what he means by doubling down is that they're still sticking with an hours-based model versus a competency-based model. But the outcome of the 200 hour training ended up being very different from what the intention was.

Jesal Parikh: So those involved might've had good intentions, at least that's what it seems like. I'm not going to question that, but the impact is that the 200 hour guideline enabled mass certification which resulted in businesses becoming dependent on these teacher trainings in order to attract students and the 200 hour program has inundated the yoga industry with teachers looking for jobs and not enough open institutional teaching positions for those teachers and has created a real financial disparity between yoga teachers and yoga businesses.

Jesal Parikh: On top of this, teachers get double-charged in this whole model. They have to pay for the training, which typically starts around \$1,200.00 and only goes up from there and they have to pay to be registered. I believe the current figure is that teachers have to pay \$115.00 for their first year, which includes an application fee and then \$65.00 annually after that. And then teachers are treated as pretty much expendable. If experienced teachers don't want to accept a pittance, they'll just be replaced by the latest 200 hour graduate.

Tejal Patel: Who probably won't get paid at all and get told that this is their Dharma. I'm reading a quote here from a Yoga Journal article, "Yoga Alliance asserts that it has helped pass laws in seven states, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri, that protect yoga from regulation. For instance, the Colorado State Legislature voted in the spring of 2015 to exempt yoga teacher training schools from DPOS oversight, arguing that teaching yoga could not be considered an occupation since instructors rarely make a living on their salaries. Less than 30% of yoga teachers report yoga as their primary source of income according to Yoga Alliance."

Jesal Parikh: That whole argument is just fricking mind-blowing. So the things preventing government oversight are the terrible working conditions and the inability to earn a living wage. That basically seems backwards. Something is wrong with that.

Tejal Patel: Absolutely. Though I guess it's worth mentioning that fighting off regulation might be the *only* single benefit of the Yoga Alliance for all of its member schools and teachers. And even so, I'm not sure how often they have to take up arms against regulation.

- Jesal Parikh: Well I guess that's a worthwhile benefit.
- Tejal Patel: Begrudgingly, right?
- Jesal Parikh: Yeah, I guess, I don't know. If the trade off is low wages and inability to earn an income. And on the other hand, the 200-hour program grew the industry so much that I wonder if it actually ended up driving these attempts at government regulation. Like, if there weren't suddenly so many teachers and studios popping up, would most of these states have even noticed that yoga was an industry that needed regulating?
- Tejal Patel: Yeah, it's who came first, right? I can relate to the reality of being one of the mass-produced yoga teachers though, being part of this cycle. Even after 500 hours of formal yoga training in Vinyasa and Hatha, yoga both in New York City and India, I wasn't having any luck finding teaching jobs.
- Tejal Patel: At least I thought I could get a weekly class or two at the studio that issued my first 200 hours certificate. But when I went in there for a meeting, I heard the same thing they had told me a year and a half earlier. They wanted me to gain experience at other studios first, before pursuing teaching there. They didn't even entertain the idea of building a pathway for me to teach there ...something like creating an internship or offering me community classes, or having me be an assistant in someone else's class or joining a sub list. I mean, any of those things weren't presented and I really didn't ask either, to be honest.
- Tejal Patel: I expected a professional and spiritual organization to be able to do that for their community members. So, it left me feeling that the relationship that I believed was meaningful and important with my home studio, was really only transactional, and that felt pretty deflating.
- Jesal Parikh: I totally get that feeling of being a little lost and wanting some community and guidance. After I completed my training in India, which was actually 300 hours of formal training, but really a very immersive month at the ashram, I got to Boston and started teaching at a studio where I was hoping to get some mentorship or a sense of community. Unfortunately, the studio that hired me, their lead teacher was on maternity leave. So a year later when I moved back to New York, I immediately started looking for next-level trainings, which is what we know as the 300-hour training program as established by the Yoga Alliance guidelines.
- Jesal Parikh: But, this is where things get a little disillusioning for me. I found that in New York, my certification didn't mean squat because the school I went to wasn't part of the Yoga Alliance. Mind you, at the time, S-VYASA, the school that I went to, was, I believe the only full-on yoga university in India, though I think there are a few others now.

- Tejal Patel: I see, because the yoga university didn't see the value in catering to and complying with these arbitrary guidelines set by an American yoga organization, you couldn't get an entry into an advanced training in the US.
- Jesal Parikh: That's essentially what was happening. I contacted practically every training program in the city. I eventually found one 300-hour program that would take me after their lead teacher conducted an interview with me and realized that I was more than qualified to continue on studying, and not start from scratch. But eventually, at the end of my 300-hour training, when I wanted to register with the Yoga Alliance, my teacher had to issue me a 200-hour certificate so that I could register my 300.
- Tejal Patel: It's wonderful though that you met someone willing to do that, considering how much weight yoga schools give to the Yoga Alliance registration. The ashram I studied at though, they couldn't care less about American standards for yoga.
- Tejal Patel: Of course, I only realized that once I got there and started speaking to the trainers, I noticed it in their attitude and opinion of the Yoga Alliance certification requirements, which of course didn't translate. None of the attitude translated from reading the website.
- Tejal Patel: I found it to be so surprising, which made me realize I was so American-centered in my thinking about yoga, in my teacher training, there were only three Americans out of 20 folks enrolled, only one resident Indian person and everyone else was from other parts of Europe.
- Tejal Patel: The training definitely attracted Europeans, but the website still only mentions that they are Yoga Alliance-approved, which I think is a little bit confusing.
- Tejal Patel: I don't even know if they meet the British Yoga Wheel or European Yoga Union requirements. So this is where we get into what a mess the Yoga Alliance is, and the stronghold they have on the industry. To the point that schools and lineages in India either have to comply with their arbitrary guidelines in order to attract students or risk that their students are not being seen as legitimate compared to those who have gone through any other American trainings - even if that American training is something like BUTI Yoga, the ultimate in cultural appropriation in the yoga industry.
- Jesal Parikh: Yeah, and the whole system is appropriation and it's a complete racket. And it's for that reason that I discontinued my membership with the Alliance.
- Jesal Parikh: Right now the only way to get certified in America is to go through an American training program. Programs like IAYT, which can cost upwards of \$6,000 and well beyond, chain studios, like CorePower, Jivamukti or Bikram, that are big enough to have a lot of teaching positions, or provide enough clout for you to be able to teach outside of their lineage.

- Jesal Parikh: And of course we all know that CorePower, Bikram and Jivamukti, have some serious issues like the ones we highlighted in Vinyasa Killed Yoga, Gurus Killed Yoga, and Vegans Killed Yoga.
- Jesal Parikh: And while the Alliance isn't solely responsible, it is the largest and most influential player on the global level. Yoga Alliance purportedly represents both teachers and training programs, many of which are also studios.
- Jesal Parikh: So, the Alliance represents employers and employees, their graduates and the schools, which is all sorts of unusual, and represents kind of a conflict of interest and the choice they've made is to prioritize money and power over the fair and full representation of teachers by deciding that they only represent teachers who train with Yoga Alliance paying schools.
- Tejal Patel: And we see a very different model with Yoga Alliance Professionals UK. They accept teachers into their registry that trained with teacher trainers and schools that are not part of their approved programs as long as these graduates still meet their minimum requirements.
- Tejal Patel: And they provide a pathway for teachers who have 10 years or more of experience to get grandfathered into their system. So if you have a spiritual teacher from India who never went to a training course, you, as their student or your teacher can become credentialed with 10 years of experience.
- Jesal Parikh: Yeah, I have an example of that. I have a family friend from Massachusetts who I grew up around and has been creating a yoga community and teaching yoga to that community for as long as I've known, so at least 30 plus years, and goes to India every year, is affiliated with the school that I went to, recommended that I go to the school that I went to. And, currently under the Yoga Alliance standards, they wouldn't be able to register as teachers.
- Tejal Patel: Yeah. I actually know of this couple through someone I met through [abcdyogi](#) and that community there. So this couple, who has an international presence because they're traveling from the U.S. to India every year and continuing to teach people, they don't have a pathway to be recognized by the Yoga Alliance.
- Tejal Patel: And it just seems like a shame and it seems like a miss on the Yoga Alliance's part, that all this indigenous knowledge that's being transferred to so many practitioners isn't even being recognized as valid by the Alliance.
- Jesal Parikh: Well, Yoga Alliance professionals clearly understand that there is valuable indigenous knowledge out there and they addressed this potential conflict of interest between its representations of schools and teachers by allowing a pathway for teachers to sign up in the registry and get credentialed even if they didn't go to one of their approved schools.

- Jesal Parikh: And essentially, under the Yoga Alliance professionals model, I could have also become a credentialed teacher that had a much easier time getting hired and finding further education. And what's more is that with the changes at Yoga Alliance U.S., none of this conflict of interest has been addressed and it leaves out a whole lot of people.
- Jesal Parikh: It leaves out those who have college degrees in yoga, those with degrees in kinesiology, physical therapy, etc., who have learned the historical, cultural and spiritual elements of yoga on their own through their own teachers, and who didn't attend a formal training program.
- Jesal Parikh: It leaves out folks who can't afford to pay for training but who are motivated enough to self study, and it leaves out folks who have learned through family lineages. It actually leaves out anyone who took sanyas and studied under a traditional Guru-shishya-based lineage if that lineage isn't registered with the Yoga Alliance.
- Jesal Parikh: And let's face it, with a lot of these people and these lineages taking vows of poverty, I don't think it would be feasible to expect them to pay \$640 for the initial fee, plus \$200 annually after that.
- Tejal Patel: It's definitely not feasible. The Alliance does extremely little to address financial access issues to education. Even with their fairly new nonprofit branch, they provide little financial assistance for the pathway that they have created to becoming a teacher.
- Tejal Patel: It appears that they've paused whatever scholarship assistance they did offer, since their website doesn't have an active application link and it hasn't listed any new recipients from 2018 or 2019. It feels like an incomplete attempt to bridge any systemic gaps in yoga teacher education.
- Jesal Parikh: In that same interview, Shannon Roche made a statement about how yoga Alliance doesn't want to be the determiner of what yoga is, but essentially they've made the determination of who can teach yoga by excluding Indigenous practitioners and folks who are poor, and then they've thrown their weight behind those who can afford to create and attend training programs to the exclusion of others.
- Jesal Parikh: And of course, until relatively recently, this has been white folks who have had access to capital and resources. This whole 200-hour model has disproportionately benefited white folks, and of course, churning out teachers at a rapid speed benefits the Alliance more than it benefits anybody else.
- Tejal Patel: Cha-ching! New teachers help pay those registration fees. Though their recent leadership is comprised of more folks of color, I think it's worth noting that every decision maker we could track down with regards to Unity in Yoga, the

ad-hoc Yoga Alliance, and the Yoga Alliance itself when it first formed, were white.

Tejal Patel: During the recent Brand Standards Review project, the Alliance created working groups in an attempt to incorporate more diverse voices. At first, I was skeptical of who was tapped to be an authority on yoga as many of our experiences in this podcast highlights how little diversity we see represented in the western yoga world, and how much of a problem that really is.

Tejal Patel: And this is all still mixed up with intersectional oppression, like cultural appropriation and social justice and race and equity issues.

Jesal Parikh: We reviewed the Brand Standards site, and spoke to a colleague who sat in on a few of the working groups, and we were pleased to see that the diverse representation seemed to matter when the Alliance created these groups.

Jesal Parikh: You can read about the groups and see who is in each one on their website yastandards.com. The group's focused on the following eight areas, scope of practice, code of conduct, inclusion, core curriculum, teacher qualifications, teacher trainer qualifications, integrity and online learning.

Jesal Parikh: So the working groups came together to make lists of recommendations for the Yoga Alliance and their attempt at new standards. And once the reports were completed by the working groups, it was left to the YA leadership on how to handle it. And of course we found that not all of the recommendations were factored into the new teaching standards.

Jesal Parikh: So even though huge diversity did exist within the working groups, that same level of diversity isn't reflected within the leadership who's implementing the recommendations, and there isn't anyone to hold Yoga Alliance accountable to continue to work on these recommendations.

Tejal Patel: Our colleague told us that the alliance has much more work to do to incorporate the recommendations put forth by these working groups. And I also want to talk about one working group in particular, the inclusion working group.

Tejal Patel: This seemed to be a massive catchall for ideas that are not all that similar to one another. In their words, the inclusion conversation focused on these questions, how can yoga reach every body and mind? Who is currently excluded from yoga in its current structure? Culturally, physically, financially, socially, and geographically? Why is that? And how can Yoga Alliance help foster greater inclusion in yoga?

Tejal Patel: Now, from my own work with inclusion in yoga, in order to affect change, the goals have to be pretty specific. And for Yoga Alliance to lump all these factors into one conversation pretty much guarantees that all these issues will be

looked at only superficially, which is exactly what ended up happening. The new standards don't reflect any of the points from this working group.

- Jesal Parikh: Yeah. And it's highlighted again in the way that they didn't create any pathways for teachers who don't go through their training programs.
- Tejal Patel: It doesn't feel very inclusive in their approach. And then I'm also surprised that Yoga Alliance didn't up their hour standards during the review project. That kind of blew me away.
- Jesal Parikh: Well didn't they? Because I thought before, the 200 hour program wasn't even really 200 hours. Not in the way an Ashram or graduate course is at least, because you didn't have to be there, there was a lot of non contact hours, right?
- Tejal Patel: Well, they used to have 20 hours of something called non contact hours. So the program was in actuality a 180 hour program. But now the non contact hours have increased from 20 to 40 hours. Let me just clarify what that means. It's just a reclassification by name.
- Tejal Patel: Now with the new standards, you can have 40 online learning hours, which are of course online, so they're not contact hours. I don't see that to be beneficial as the total hours of the program hasn't increased overall. So now we're talking 160 contact hours versus old program having 180 contact hours. You see what I'm saying?
- Jesal Parikh: Oh, you're right. I feel like this whole thing is actually really cheating the teachers who sign up for the teacher training programs because they aren't really getting what they paid for.
- Tejal Patel: Right? Like, why am I paying to be in a studio but really then paying to be in front of my computer?
- Jesal Parikh: Or in front of a screen.
- Tejal Patel: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Jesal Parikh: I know in my experience I really wanted to learn more about yoga and get deeper into the philosophy and learn directly with people who knew this stuff really well, like have it explained to me.
- Jesal Parikh: And if I had taken a 200 hour training that was only 160 hours of contact with teachers, I would feel really cheated. And that's really different from the 300 hours I spent at the Ashram, where the 300 hours consisted of contact hours and didn't even include homework and all the socialization and all the extra study time.

- Tejal Patel: You can learn online anytime. It's not like you're not going to go on the internet and learn more after your training is over. Why have me pay for it during the training? And another big loser in this whole scenario are the students attending classes because their teachers aren't going to have as much training as they used to.
- Tejal Patel: And the way the 200-hour breakout and study is set up, it's meant to bring a balance to all the parts of yoga, the philosophy, the asana, the energy mechanics, the biomechanics, but that doesn't actually match the current landscape of how classes are taught.
- Tejal Patel: For better or worse, and we're going to go with for worse, yoga is taught in most places as a fitness class. Sometimes it's even just a 45-minute express asana class, and sadly I don't think that's going away. And yet the guidelines don't reflect this reality. The requirement to learn about body mechanics, kinesiology and anatomy is a minimal 30 hours with no prerequisite of prior knowledge.
- Jesal Parikh: And that's up from what it used to be. It used to be 20 hours, 10 of which could be non contact. And I also believe it used to be that chakras and nadis were an option to study instead of anatomy or biomechanics.
- Tejal Patel: It's worse now because the overall hours have gone up to 30, but 20 of those 30 hours can be non-contact online learning.
- Jesal Parikh: I mean, that's just ridiculous. It's hard enough to learn anatomy when someone's teaching it to you, let alone on your own. But I think I know why they've increased a section of online learning, they themselves are offering online learning videos.
- Jesal Parikh: So either they're going to try and be a better service provider, which I hope that's what they do. Or they're hoping to get members engaged enough that they can eventually start asking for payment for those courses down the line.
- Tejal Patel: Yeah, I'm quickly realizing that I'm not a fan of online learning when you're signing up for your first teacher training and trying to build community and support and a knowledge base around yoga, likely for the first time ever.
- Tejal Patel: And it's so hard to learn biomechanics in person, let alone on a computer which isn't going to help you feel like a good teacher when you're starting to work with folks with injuries or probably freaking out if you have a pregnant person walking in the room for the group class you're offering.
- Tejal Patel: Or when you have someone with a body type of practice level, you aren't sure how to accommodate that shows up for your class, which are all likely scenarios if you start teaching immediately after a 200-hour training.

- Jesal Parikh: Absolutely, and going back to the students, students are way too trusting. They think teachers somehow know all of this information and have passed an exam that attested that knowledge. Most students have no idea how the whole teacher training program works and how little fitness knowledge teachers actually receive in most trainings.
- Tejal Patel: Doctors, physical therapists, chiropractors, they all tell patients that they should try yoga but aren't really recommending anything specific about why they should start a practice. So you maybe as a new 200 hour trained teacher might have someone with scoliosis or sciatica or other chronic pain come in for class because they were told to start practicing and there you are without a clue how to help them.
- Jesal Parikh: It's a lose-lose situation. Students overly trust teachers and expect teachers to have all the answers and teachers end up feeling inadequate and might even shy away from being honest about their lack of knowledge because they're made to feel that they ought to know.
- Tejal Patel: Yeah. You know, we're not the only ones to say that the baseline of 200 hours is inadequate. Before the Yoga Alliance even started, there was an IAYT, International Association of Yoga Therapists, founded in 1989. Now the IAYT has always been separate from the Yoga Alliance and has consistently championed yoga as a healing art and science.
- Tejal Patel: One of their members, Sudha Allitt writes that "teaching yoga and yoga therapy are not the same thing. Most practitioners understand that yoga is inherently therapeutic and I doubt that anyone would try to argue that point, but that does not mean that everybody should be applying yoga as therapy.
- Tejal Patel: Nowadays we have 200 hour trainings that do not even require 200 hours of instruction and we have loosely affiliated programs utilizing teachers that are fresh out of training as their "experienced instructors."
- Tejal Patel: In yoga therapy, we are addressing individuals who have special needs, definitely not an environment for the brand new un or under supervised teacher who has yet to understand that there is a significant difference between yoga as a therapeutic mindfulness practice and yoga as a psycho spiritual scientific therapy".
- Tejal Patel: So IAYT maintains that they are specialized and require the teacher to address pathology which results in a higher level of education than a mere 200 hours certificate as issued by the Yoga Alliance.
- Jesal Parikh: On the one hand, I really do appreciate all of that. On the other hand, I will say that there was a picture posted recently of the team that is coming up with the

assessment for IAYT and every single person in that photo was white. So, that is problematic.

Jesal Parikh: We were able to find some other organizations that provide certification. We already mentioned Yoga Alliance Professionals, which has a 200 hour program. There's an organization called Yoga-Next based out of California, founded by Arvind Chittumalla in 2012.

Jesal Parikh: Their entry level standard is called the basic level at 350 hours and then intermediate with 500 hours and five plus years of teaching and advanced with 750 hours and 10 plus years of teaching.

Tejal Patel: And we already just mentioned the IAYT, the standards vary by school, but one program I researched requires both the RYT 200 and 300 from the Yoga Alliance and then an additional 860 hours of education in their yoga therapy coursework.

Tejal Patel: There's also a Professional Yoga Therapy Institute, which requires 60 college credit hours, a college degree, and a professional medical license as prerequisites. The education program is a series of seven modules and elective credits administered both online and onsite.

Tejal Patel: And then there's the Canadian Yoga Alliance, which allows anyone to register with a minimum of 200 hours of training regardless of if the school is a CYA registered school or not.

Jesal Parikh: There's also a handful of other options including the International Yoga Federation and then there's a bunch of schools in India, like S-VYASA that I went to, the Jain Vishva Bharati Institute, which offers a three month program and the Bihar School of Yoga and a couple of others. And then there's programs that have opted out of the Yoga Alliance. So there's a few of those in America as well.

Tejal Patel: I think it could be beneficial for everyone listening to hear about all these other options for credentialing and to know that you can also just opt out.

Jesal Parikh: Yeah. You don't need a credential to teach yoga.

Tejal Patel: So let's close our episode by answering the question in the title and leaving you with our tips. Jesal, do you think 200 hours killed yoga?

Jesal Parikh: Oh definitely. I think the 200 hour program is one of the bigger monsters under the mat. And I think as an industry we need to think way beyond these standards because it has a far reaching impact on pay, equity, power, appropriation, and all the other stuff we talked about. What about you Tejal, do you think 200 hours killed yoga?

- Tejal Patel: I actually think 200 hours also did kill yoga, because it's left us with programs that aren't deep comprehensive study into what we believe makes confident and competent yoga teachers.
- Tejal Patel: Teachers are now contending with a nonsensical cycle of taking a 200 hour training, thinking it will prepare them to teach others, but realizing once they've received their certificate that they need and want so much more education.
- Tejal Patel: And then the reality to that is that they probably only budgeted for one training in the first place, leaving them feeling unprepared and deflated. So let's change the standard of what qualifies a person to teach yoga, and in doing so up-level yoga offerings from the teacher and for the student.
- Jesal Parikh: And I wanted to add that I think that the impact of the 200 hour program is that it destroyed what was good about the guru-shishya parampara, which was the sense of community, mentorship, and being in a constant relationship. Teaching yoga can feel incredibly isolating and the whole training program can feel so transactional, and the 200 hours has played no small role in all of this.
- Tejal Patel: Well, Jesal on that uplifting note (both laugh), let's get to our suggestions and tips and maybe that'll help shed some light on this whole thing. Because even though this is incredibly depressing, we can all try to make small changes to change the game.
- Jesal Parikh: Okay, so our tips for yoga studios in school is to consider opting out of Yoga Alliance for your training or consider going well beyond the recommended guidelines. More importantly, if you don't already, consider hiring teachers outside of Western certification systems and consider what that might look like for your training programs or if you're a studio for your staff roster.
- Jesal Parikh: Offer immersion courses for beginners students who are not appropriate candidates for teacher trainings, or for students whose main objective is just to go deeper into the practice.
- Jesal Parikh: Think about having prerequisites as an assessment for students before they join a teacher training. That way there's also a lesser chance that you'll have to fail a student who's already paid for the training. Examine your approach and attitude towards indigenous practices and lineages.
- Jesal Parikh: If you're a studio, be transparent and upfront about the requirements, work, experience and expectation for teachers looking to get paid spots on your schedule or community class after graduating. This is something you can provide upfront. Outline additional costs associated for mentorships and specialized training.

- Jesal Parikh: Consider your approach to alumni and if you can create space to honor the roots of yoga by creating a space for ongoing relationship with, and a community for your graduates. Take diversity and inclusion more seriously than the virtually nil Yoga Alliance guidelines.
- Jesal Parikh: Get anonymous feedback from your training graduates and create a plan of how you're going to act on that feedback. And then write to Yoga Alliance, letting them know that their new guidelines are not comprehensive enough and do not adequately address diversity and inclusion.
- Tejal Patel: For the yoga teachers, consider your continuing education journey as part of your ongoing yoga teaching. On that note, consider creating continuing education plans outside of the basics required by the Yoga Alliance.
- Tejal Patel: And if you do teach fitness style classes, pursue fitness style education as best you can. It can come in many forms, not just formal trainings, but mentorship, self-study, online, books, et cetera.
- Tejal Patel: Practice honesty with your students, especially when discussing knowledge of injury and other conditions that may require your care. Set up meetings with studios you want to teach at and ask about pathways to teaching there.
- Tejal Patel: When offering Eastern or indigenous practices, learn about the history and the roots in order to honor them while teaching. And again, write to Yoga Alliance, letting them know that their new guidelines are not comprehensive enough and do not adequately address diversity and inclusivity.
- Jesal Parikh: And for yoga students don't assume your yoga teacher has any special knowledge when it comes to fitness movement or injuries. Share your injury history or specific needs with the studio well in advance so that they can accommodate them, and then show up early to discuss your needs with the teachers so that they have time to adapt their plan to the best of their ability.
- Jesal Parikh: Don't confuse fancy poses with deep knowledge of yoga or spiritual practice. Learn about the roots, history and lineages of yoga so you can be a more informed consumer and yoga student, and find the right teacher and right yoga school for you.
- Jesal Parikh: If you're interested in deepening your yoga practice, consider an immersion program rather than a teacher training as a first step. Whatever program you sign up for, whether it's an immersion program or a teacher training, make sure to ask really specific questions as a follow-up on how that school handles its relationship with its alumni and teachers, et cetera.

Jesal Parikh: And then write to Yoga Alliance, letting them know that their new guidelines are not comprehensive enough and do not adequately address diversity and inclusion.

Tejal Patel: Now let us know what you think for our last episode of season one, do you think 200 hours killed yoga?

Jesal Parikh: Hit us up on our Instagram handle @yogaisdeadpodcast or email us at yogaisdadpodcast@gmail.com.

Tejal Patel: And as always, please support this work by subscribing and by becoming a Patron. Patrons get exclusive member only content like extra videos, live conversations, miss Yoga is Dead stickers and things. You can sign up for as little as \$2 per month and the benefits build from there. Check out www.patrion.com/yogaisdeadpodcast.

Jesal Parikh: Thanks for listening, I'm Jesal.

Tejal Patel: And I'm Tejal.

Jesal Parikh: And catch us next time on Yoga is Dead.