

Yoga, Trauma: Overcoming the Kleśas 2026



Yoga Philosophy
Institute

What, Who, Where, When

- 4 part 90 minute series hosted by the Yoga Philosophy Institute
- Your Course Director: Shyam Ranganathan, MA, MA, PhD, E-RYT (he/him/his)
- For more information, email: kriya@yogaphilosophy.com
- To signup: yogaphilosophy.com/courses
- Dates: Saturday and Sunday, February 22 and 23, 28 March 1 and 2, 2026
- Times: 12:00-1:30 pm EST/ 9:00 pm- 10:30 pm PST

Cost

- Community Pricing \$179 For students who need financial support.
- Sustainer Pricing \$249 For students who can afford to pay for their own enrollment.
- Supporter Pricing \$295 For attendees who would like to contribute to another student's

- enrollment.

Outline

1. Yoga: First Philosophy of Trauma

In this session, we will learn about the origins of Yoga as a South Asian criticism of earlier Indo-European ideas of the natural world, and how this origin provides a frame for the analysis of trauma. We next shift the focus to the Yoga Sūtra where we learn that trauma is the main topic of the Book 1. Students will be lead on a reflective investigation into the contrast between Yoga as the first philosophy of trauma, and contemporary discourse on yoga, as though yoga needs to be sensitive to trauma. We will also have an opportunity to contrast the Yoga account of trauma as the deprivation of personal space to be autonomous, from other approaches to suffering from ancient South Asia, including Buddhism. Students will also be introduced to the basic philosophical distinction between understanding on the basis of logic in contrast to understanding on the basis of belief, and how this distinction is present at the start of the *Yoga Sūtra*. Understanding by way of belief is understanding by way of ego, which is the identification of the self with contents of experience. This is the origin of trauma according to Yoga.

2 The Mechanisms of Trauma

In this lesson we follow in detail two flow charts from the Yoga Sutra depicting the creation of trauma---or kleśa to use its term. Students will learn how trauma is generated by ego, or an identification with experience, and how Yoga in contrast is a philosophy of self-allyship. We will explore the psychological mechanisms of traumatic experiences, according to Yoga. Participants will gain a clearer appreciation of the root cause of all trauma, and the ways in which non-yogic approaches to challenges create trauma, and how Yoga, the ancient philosophical practice, provides a principled approach to the question of trauma. Specifically, trauma is generated when we deviate from a logic-based approach to experience, and engage instead in a belief, or attitudinal approach to experience. Students will learn to distinguish the ancient and systematic approach to trauma from current, colonial approaches to trauma and yoga, which are not principled, and make no reference to Yoga.

3 The Alleviation of Trauma

In this session, students will be exposed to several approaches to the alleviation of trauma, with special concern and interest to identify the Buddhist approach, which treats duḥkha (trauma) as what is to be alleviated, Jainism, which treats trauma as a function of action,

from the Yoga analysis, which treats trauma (what it calls *kleśa*) as a *symptom* of personal injury. These approaches have importantly different outcomes. Students will learn how to identify the origins of trauma on a Yoga account, and alleviate trauma by depriving the root of trauma. This root of trauma is a personal injury. Students will explore strategies provided for in the Yoga tradition to regain personal space, that injury deprives us of.

4 The Ethics and Politics of Trauma

On a Yoga account, the root of trauma is personal injury. But personal injury is actually a *moral* or *ethical* injury, which inhibits the ability of the individual to have the space they need to thrive. And this

undermining of personal space is often political, being itself a function of wider social regularities. In this concluding session, we will look at the ways in which the Yoga tradition is *explicit* that the alleviation of *kleśas* is only possible through moral solutions. This wider political and moral analysis of trauma allows us to appreciate the ways in which trauma is *systemic*, and a function of wider social problems that go unchecked, as a result of trauma. Students will learn to identify the political and moral origins of trauma, and to contrast a Yoga based response to trauma from colonizing approaches in yoga spaces, which talk about Yoga as though there were some way to practice it without being sensitive to or cognizant of trauma. The moral and political, Yogic approach to trauma is contrasted with Western Colonial approaches, which seek to treat trauma as a purely medical issue. We conclude with some observations from the Yoga tradition as to why the mere pathologization of trauma is not an effective strategy.