

Resource Paper

Self-Care for Asian American Studies Faculty

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ABSTRACT

Academic life has always been challenging enough, but new challenges continue presenting themselves to Asian American Studies faculty. During the first pandemic of our lifetimes, we have witnessed increasing anti-Asian hate and violence, calls for greater activism around racial and economic injustice, and greater attention to the needs of underrepresented and underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander students on our campuses. Emotional stress and overwork are centered in increasingly common complaints from Asian American Studies faculty across the nation. This article focuses deliberately on the need for Asian American Studies faculty to practice mindfulness and self-care to reduce stress, avoid burnout, and help maintain overall health and wellbeing. Practicing mindfulness and self-care helps individuals better adapt to changes, build strong personal and professional relationships, and recover from setbacks. This article will provide helpful strategies to better manage academic pressures, tricky interpersonal relationships, and uncertain future plans. Mindfulness and self-care encourage maintaining a healthy relationship with oneself, translating into a more focused, attentive approach to the multiple demands of academic life.

OPENING MEDITATION

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.

Audre Lorde

Whether it is through breathing exercises, yoga, meditation, or simply taking moments in the day to be with yourself with care, these quiet moments can become the antidote to life stresses. They can serve as a much-needed space to pause and reset throughout the day. It starts with just one breath. We invite you to give this a try:

1. Take a deep breath in and let it out slowly.
2. Keep breathing with awareness of your breath. What sensations do you notice? Maybe you notice the air entering your nostrils, or your belly expanding.
3. When a thought arises, simply acknowledge it (no need to judge it).
4. Come back to the sensations of your breath.

You just meditated. It can be this simple and can take just thirty seconds. Yet in its simplicity is a *radical* act. In this act, we are saying to ourselves, “I matter. My well-being is important. No matter how stressed I am, I deserve to experience some peace and happiness. I am taking charge to give this to myself. This act will not only benefit me but will positively affect all those around me.”

INTRODUCTION

Articles throughout this Special Issue of *AAPI Nexus* focus on the opportunities that have come about because of Assembly Bill 1460 (AB 1460), the challenges and successes of implementing the policy, as well as steps to expand Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies requirements both inside and outside of the California State University (CSU) system. Articles in this volume consciously highlight the fact that institutional change in all levels of education takes heroic individual and collective effort. At the same time, these efforts take tremendous tolls on the physical and emotional wellbeing of dedicated people at the forefront of the struggle. We must remember much of the dedicated work featured in this volume was concurrent with the COVID-19 pandemic, the heightened attention on racial and social inequality, and the rise of anti-Asian violence (Fong, Maramba and Nguyen, 2022).

This article focuses on the need for self-care for those of us who have done and continue to do the work we do as Asian American Studies scholars and activists. It begins with Timothy Fong’s story on why this topic is so important and is included in this special volume. Hannah Moon’s story provides background and context on who she is and the work she does as a Mindfulness and Meditation teacher. The

rest of this article focuses on Hannah's approach to self-compassion and mindfulness together with Tim's experience as an Ethnic Studies faculty member who was fully engaged with implementing AB 1460 on his campus, California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State). We hope this may be helpful to others who are working to overcome institutional racism, sexism, and bureaucratic barriers.

Tim's Story

The last few years have likely been the most stressful and chaotic period in our personal and professional lives. I know so many Asian American Studies faculty who put in extraordinary number of hours organizing, planning, and attending meetings to successfully implement AB 1460 in our respective institutions. At times, we often felt trapped in a highly toxic and hostile work environment. While we pride ourselves as critical scholar/activist/change agents and valorize collective struggles, we often give much less attention to what we need to do to take care of ourselves so we can continue fighting the good fight. It was precisely during this time when I, and other colleagues, were directly involved in the volatile issues of the day that I also started reading works on self-care. These included *The Inner Work of Social Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness* by Rhonda McGee (2019), *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out* by Ruth King (2018), *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* by Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah (2016), and *Do Better: Spiritual Activism for Fighting and Healing from White Supremacy* by Rachel Ricketts (2021).

While the literature in this area is large, there are relatively few Asian Americans engaged either in print or in practice within this space. One notable exception is *Awakening Together: The Spiritual Practice of Inclusivity and Community* by Larry Yang (2017). Yang is an ordained Buddhist monk and trained psychotherapist who has taught meditation retreats nationally and has a special interest in creating access for diverse multicultural communities. I also came upon Hannah Moon's website, "Soul in Training." I was drawn to the fact that she openly shared her experiences as an immigrant, confronting racism and sexism, and her struggles with self-doubt, blame, and anger. I reached out to let her know that I read her story and that I appreciated her efforts. Surprisingly, she responded to my message and later shared with me a recording of a webinar on "Healing and

Thriving: A Mindfulness Workshop for the AAPI Community” done shortly after the March 21, 2021 mass shooting in Atlanta, Georgia that killed eight people, including six Asian American women. The webinar focused on practices that deepen connections to one’s body and taking care of strong emotions (Moon, 2021a).

I asked Hannah to share her insights and practices because I wanted to close this volume with how we can move forward, positively, utilizing her approach on mindfulness and heart-centered practices. Several of Hannah’s audio files and videos are cited in the text and links are provided in the references.

Hannah’s Story

I will always remember the initial shock of being in a new land when I immigrated to the United States at the age of five. In my neighborhood of Northeast Philadelphia, Pennsylvania I could not find a single face that resembled mine, and I quickly grasped the feeling of being the “other.” Only on Sundays, while attending my mother’s Korean church, did I experience a sense of comfort being around other Korean friends my age. But as Mondays approached, I would once again put on my emotional armor and protective gear, ready to brace myself for the challenges I faced as an Asian American girl in a predominantly white school. I knew what to expect: racial slurs, exclusion, and feeling invisible and not belonging.

I also dealt with many challenges growing up in a strict Korean immigrant home as the eldest daughter. Financial stress was a major struggle. I remember the defeated look on my parents’ faces when there were mounds of bills to be paid on the table at end of each month. I absorbed this energy as a child and to this day still have to confront it. We lived over our fish and fruit store, and from five in the morning to eight at night, my parents worked tirelessly. I also worked many hours there at the register or wrapping vegetables, and there were many times when I felt angry and resentful that I could not be with my friends having fun instead.

We were all in survival mode. Every day felt like a fight, a fight to not get overwhelmed by financial stress, fatigue, physical pains, and even depression. The fight continues every day because I am human. But something shifted when I realized that truly taking care of myself means learning how to *befriend* myself, to stop abandoning my feelings and my needs, and instead, to turn *towards* them with care. I know from many years of experience that pushing down my feelings and

forging on regardless of personal consequences is harmful. It does not work. It does more damage in the long run and is not sustainable. It disconnects me from myself, it clouds my thinking, and it blocks my heart. This is not the way I wanted to live.

Many may think you have no time or energy to engage in self-care, that there is no room to rest or that it is too self-indulgent to do such things. This is understandable. My thinking used to be the same—I needed to be tough and push through at all costs in order for things to not fall apart. If you currently believe this to be true, I pose this question: How is it going for you when you ignore your needs and plow forward? What I am proposing is to try something different that can help you get out of your head and expand your awareness. See it from a new perspective that is beneficial and healing. This may be a far leap for some of us having lived in survival mode for so long, but if we wish for things to be different, we need to *do* something different—even something a bit radical. We can do this by practicing compassion and mindfulness.

SELF-COMPASSION

The following sections are reflections from both Tim and Hannah. As demonstrated at the beginning of this essay, it is essential to take moments to practice being with ourselves as it is such a profound way to learn how to be our own friend. It is never too late to start, and it is always a good time to begin. Whether it is at the end of the day or at the end of our lives, we are ultimately with just ourselves. We do not speak to anyone else more than to ourselves, so why not learn to be kind and cultivate the most important relationship we could ever have?

We start with compassion for ourselves. We must acknowledge there is a high level of stress on faculty members because of the many expectations of our profession. Faculty are evaluated based on our performance in four areas: teaching effectiveness, scholarly achievement, service to the institution, and service to the community. The competing expectations offers us little time for reflection, self-care, and self-compassion.

Compassion can be defined as feeling the pain of another (or ourselves) and having a desire to alleviate it. For most of us, it might be easier to feel compassion for someone whom we love and the communities we represent, rather than for ourselves. If someone close to us is suffering from grief or depression, we feel their pain and want to remove their suffering. Yet, when we *ourselves* are suffering, we often

turn a blind eye to what we think and say negative things to ourselves that we dare not repeat to anyone else. Ethnic Studies faculty are scholar/activists who fully understand Ethnic Studies grew out of student protests that sought specifically to challenge institutions of higher education. As Ethnic Studies faculty, we entered the academy to oppose traditional disciplines, to provide community-focused research, and to expand perspectives that are based on our lived experiences. Because of this context, we often do not practice self-compassion because it can feel self-indulgent given the mission of our lives and profession. We do not want to look weak or vulnerable to ourselves and others. This is why many of us keep piling on more and more distractions, trying to suppress what wants to be seen within us.

We do this for so long that we eventually feel quite disconnected from our feelings and who we really are. For those who feel skeptical in practicing self-compassion, ask yourself which is more desirable: staying up at night with self-doubt and fear, or taking a moment to pause, breathe and offer kindness? Here are some strategies we can use to practice.

When you find yourself having a hard time receiving love for yourself, it may help to think of someone in your life, living or passed, who has demonstrated love and care towards you. It could be a grandparent, a friend, a teacher, or even a pet. You can call up the energy of this love that was given to you and practice receiving it. Practicing this can help open up your heart to accept the love for yourself, the love that you deserve (Moon, 2023a). It may also be helpful to practice a loving kindness meditation where you invite loving intentions towards yourself (Moon 2023b). We can do this by repeating specific loving kindness phrases (or any phrase that resonates with you) and allowing the energy behind the words to land in your heart. Once you get comfortable practicing them toward yourself, you can slowly begin directing the phrases to others like someone you love, someone you do not know very well, and then (this is the most challenging) someone one you do not like. Start with yourself first, and only add in others when you are ready. Studies have shown that people practicing loving kindness meditation experienced an increased sense of well-being and social connections while curbing self-criticism (Zeng et.al., 2015).

By practicing self-compassion, we can stop running away. We can stop abandoning ourselves when we are hurting. We can develop the capacity to acknowledge the pain in our hearts and feel the desire to alleviate it. We can take small actions to do this with kindness,

nourishment, and love. When we begin to fill our own cup, we can learn how to spread compassion towards others—the kind of compassion that does not rob us of energy, but fills us with life-giving, life-sustaining energy. Self-compassion is an essential tool in our toolbox for self-care. Whenever we feel self-judgmental and start to spiral into negativity, practicing self-compassion can help catch us from succumbing to those forces, along with practicing mindfulness.

THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness has its roots in the Buddhist tradition, and we can think of it as a practical way to learn how to be with one's thoughts and emotions in the present moment with intention (Shaw, 2020; Mulligan, 2017; Purser and Milillo, 2015). With consistent practice, one can start to gain insight and ease to help overcome everyday obstacles. Mindfulness, as a quality of awareness, is generated by *choosing* to pay attention to what is happening in the present moment of our direct experience—without judgment, but with a sense of curiosity. It is a choice. Mindfulness is something we can practice and cultivate, and it is within our power to harness it. We can choose to use it when we feel overwhelmed and need a way to manage our emotions. Instead of feeling stuck and powerless facing our adversities, we can take action. The “PACE Yourself” method can help us work through the steps of mindfulness. The acronym PACE stands for Present Moment, Attention, Curiosity, and Embrace (Moon, 2020).

Present Moment

We can bring ourselves into the present moment by engaging our body and our senses. What are my feet touching? What do I hear around me? Can I feel my breath? Most of us live in the past, ruminating about something that happened before, or in the future, worrying about things that have not happened yet, catastrophizing what could happen, overthinking everything. When we turn to our body and our senses, we can redirect ourselves from slipping away into worries about how something will turn out in the future or obsessing about something that happened in the past. This is especially helpful when it comes to negative self-talk.

Attention

We can allow our attention to rest in our present felt experience. Our attention can expand to encompass sensations as well as thoughts

and feelings that are both desirable and undesirable. We know it is easy to be with happy thoughts, but not so much with difficult ones. When we feel restlessness, anger, or fear, we tend to automatically push it away with distractions, or by suppressing or numbing it away. What would happen if we allowed our attention to stay with all of it, simply as an observer, holding it all? For example, you may notice that there is a pleasant breeze brushing against your cheek, but then you may also notice some unpleasant sensations like your chest feeling tight, your breath feeling shallow, and you notice a sensation of *anger* arising. Without running away or trying to fix it immediately, can we name it? Can we let it be seen by our inner observer? Something tremendous happens in that little moment of naming an emotion. As soon as you say, “I’m feeling anger,” for that split second, you are on the outside looking in as an *observer*. The *awareness* of the anger is not “being in anger” itself. Being able to catch ourselves in that magic moment can be the doorway to making different choices than the same ones we have been making our whole lives. We can begin to live *out* of autopilot. Instead of immediately reacting to situations without thinking, that important blip of awareness can give us a chance to pivot by responding with mindfulness.

Curiosity

We can have an attitude of curiosity rather than judgment. Why curiosity? Curiosity diminishes judgment and the negative narrative running through our head. It keeps an openhearted awareness that is essential to our wellbeing. Try it out for yourself—see if you can notice that when you become curious about something, your mind becomes open and expansive, rather than contracted and judgmental. Take fear for instance: instead of reacting to it, we can get curious about it. What does fear feel like in the body as an observer? Our body and our emotions are intrinsically linked. What do we notice? Maybe we feel a tightness in our neck, or tension in our jaw. We can be curious about our sensations and our emotions instead of calling ourselves names. Instead of saying, “I don’t have what it takes” or “I’m unlovable,” we can try to create the space of awareness to hold the sensations and emotions by keeping an openhearted sense of curiosity. This certainly takes practice, but if we keep showing up with this intention, we can slowly develop the eye of the non-judging observer, which is so powerful. Imagine how liberated you could feel if you are less bogged down by negative self-talk. There would

be more spaciousness, more capacity to stay in the present moment with kindness towards ourselves. This practice is truly a revelation when you consider how it can radically shift how you relate to yourself over time.

Embrace

We can hold the totality of our experience—whatever may be arising in the present moment, including the desirable and the undesirable—with an attitude of acceptance and compassion. It is very natural to want to hold onto the things we like and push away the things we do not like. It is easy to embrace feelings of satisfaction or joy, but it is a lot harder to embrace feelings of shame, frustration, and anger. Many of us tend to push those down or create distractions in order to avoid them, and many of us also know from experience that that only makes it worse. We give power to those parts that we choose to ignore. Embracing is about not discriminating against any part of our experience, but to be with ourselves just as we are, with the kind of care and compassion that you would have for someone you love.

To help remember the PACE Yourself Method succinctly, you can simply try to remember these steps as you practice:

P: Come to the *Present* moment by engaging your felt senses, like touch, hearing, tasting, seeing, smelling.

A: As an observer, pay *Attention* to what is happening around you and within you.

C: Take an attitude of *Curiosity* and non-judgement.

E: Allow whatever arises to be *Embraced* with kindness and compassion.

PACE Yourself is a guide to help cultivate mindfulness practice. By breaking it down into these four core components, it can be easier to remember and practice them. But it is only a guide. The process is not linear and will continually evolve as we morph and change. Some days we may only have the capacity to briefly touch the present moment; on other days, we might be very judgmental of ourselves or others and get swallowed up by our emotions. Yet on other days, we might be able to open up our curiosity and allow our direct experience to be what it is with kindness. No matter how we are when we show up, the intention of *wanting to show up* matters. This is when self-compassion is crucial, as it allows us grace and space to be how we are, exactly as we are.

The power of mindfulness cannot be underestimated. With continued practice, we can be in the driver's seat of our life. We can reach our goals while maintaining a sense of wellbeing. When we are more attuned to the present moment, we are more engaged and alive—not just sitting in the passenger's seat passively reacting to whatever happens to us. It means we can redirect ourselves from our unhelpful habits and conditioned patterns. This is a rewiring of the brain, and mindfulness can give us this power.

However, this does not mean life will be perfect. We will still have to deal with unpleasant coworkers, supervisors, and traffic jams. Mindfulness does not get rid of unfortunate events that are out of our control. Curveballs will still be thrown, as such is life. Buddha described it like an arrow that hits you out of nowhere: you did not ask for it, but it happened to you. As fallible humans, we are often prone to making the pain even worse by poking a second arrow into the same painful wound, prolonging and deepening the suffering. We like to complain and scheme, insult others or ourselves, or isolate ourselves in shame. This second arrow is up to us. With mindfulness, we can get better and better at opting out of additional suffering and replacing it with more freedom and ease when strong emotions arise—especially in the context of Ethnic Studies teaching, scholarship, and activism as acts of social responsibility and social justice.

WORKING WITH STRONG EMOTIONS

You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Strong emotions are like big waves in the ocean: they can get quite forceful, and it feels like there is nothing we can do when they come crashing down on us. We get pulled into the undertow stricken with panic, or we might shut down and disengage with life. This is because when we see an imminent threat, our fight-flight-freeze response kicks into gear and we replay the same survival tactics that we learned since we were children. This is not so useful as adults because it keeps us stuck in the same old patterns of reactivity, repeating the same unhelpful behaviors whenever we feel triggered. But there is a way out—the following five-step exercise may help you when encountering strong emotions. These steps also incorporate some of PACE Yourself (Moon, 2021b). If you suffer from PTSD or trauma that causes you to be overly distressed, please seek the guidance of a trauma counselor before doing this exercise.

1. Don't run away from it, acknowledge your feelings.

This may feel quite counterintuitive, like running into a burning building. It might feel uncomfortable, but if we are to learn how to manage our emotions so that they do not manage *us*, we must be able to *acknowledge* them first. Notice your impulse to avoid and run away, and see if you can instead lean in *towards* what you are experiencing.

2. Get curious, not judgmental.

Label what emotion you are feeling. Can you do this without bashing yourself? Can you become an observer of what you are experiencing? Even if you do judge yourself, you can include that in your awareness. We do not need to judge ourselves for judging. We can simply notice what we are experiencing and then investigate it further with a sense of openness and curiosity.

3. Meet it with compassion.

As you observe the emotion you are experiencing, bring a sense of understanding and compassion for yourself. Can you see your own suffering and how it is hurting you? Bring a sense of care and tenderness towards yourself that you would call up for a child or a dear friend.

4. Ground yourself in body awareness.

Bring your attention to your body. How is it feeling? See if you can locate where you are holding this emotion in your body. Do you feel tightness in your chest or throat? Contraction in your belly? How are you breathing? Then, like a wave in the ocean, take a deep breath and allow it to pass through you.

5. Cool down by shifting to a neutral place.

Finish this exercise by gently guiding your awareness to a neutral spot on your body that is not associated with your emotion. This could be your hands, feet, or another part of your body that feels neutral. You can also direct your attention to the sounds in your environment. Doing this is helpful so that we have a place to cool down in a neutral space with mindful awareness.

By working through strong emotions, we can regroup and be ready to carry on with the important transformative Ethnic Studies work that needs to be done over the long-term. Activism is inextricably a part of Ethnic Studies and it is crucial we keep this legacy in the

forefront as we confront the challenges of our current era. This means being proactive with our programs, with ourselves, and with others.

WHEN OTHERS PROJECT STRONG EMOTIONS TOWARDS US

There are times when strong emotions are felt by someone else, and we are the recipient of their stress. It could be our coworker, a family member, our partners, the list goes on. Even though it can be quite challenging not to get sucked into their energy, we can remember the five-step exercise and try to apply it to them.

To the best of our ability, instead of reacting to them right away, we can practice acknowledging the strong emotion they are experiencing. Get curious about them. What can you observe about this person? Can we empathize with their situation? Then acknowledge how you are feeling and how your body is responding in the moment. See if you can meet it with kindness. Take a deep breath and let it pass through you like a wave. Finally, take care of yourself by bringing your awareness to a neutral spot either on your body or environment to further ground you and comfort you.

This work is not easy, so we can practice a lot of self-compassion as we stumble, fall, and grow. Given the contentiousness from the emergence of Ethnic Studies and the implementation of AB 1460 seen throughout this Special Issue of *AAPI Nexus*, we often encounter someone else who is experiencing strong emotions. It is essential to keep showing up to practice so that we do not have to succumb to their energetic state and escalate the situation. This practice also gives us the room to exercise compassion for not only ourselves, but the other person. It helps us to see that dealing with difficult emotions and fragility are painful for them too. This, of course, does not condone harmful actions done to us. As we keep practicing, we can start to develop an inner strength that can help ground us and to see more clearly. It can help take care of our emotions in difficult situations.

Remember, this is a practice. Some days will be harder than others, and it is important that we honor that desire in us to *want to show up*. The seed of intention is more powerful than we think. We can give ourselves understanding and compassion as we navigate through our emotions and reactivity. We can always give ourselves permission to begin again, every single day.

Larry Yang (2017, 151) shares a reflection that we can consider when we are caught in the throes of reactivity:

May I be loving, open, and aware in this moment.
 If I cannot be loving, open, and aware in this moment,
 may I be kind;
 If I cannot be kind, may I be nonjudgmental;
 If I cannot be nonjudgmental, may I not cause harm;
 And if I cannot not cause harm, may I cause the least
 harm possible.

KNOWING YOUR INNER CRITIC

Since we were little children, we have been getting a lot of messages about who we should be from a variety of sources. It is no wonder then that we are constantly “should-ing” ourselves. We do not feel good enough because our inner critic keeps reminding us of how we are falling short in some way. On the flip side, some people might think that they *need* their inner critic to keep them motivated and actually succeed in doing things. They believe that if they stop “cracking the whip” they will not accomplish their goals. This is not only incorrect; it is not sustainable.

“Cracking the whip” or “tough love” are not the answer because the inner critic’s voice often provokes anxiety and shame. If we keep relying on those messages to motivate us, we eventually begin to believe those negative aspects as a part of who we are, which in turn can severely limit our potential and damage our sense of worth. It is tricky to catch the inner critic because it is so insidious. Take a moment to think about any beliefs and thought patterns you have adopted about yourself that is not helpful. Maybe it has pushed you to accomplish some things, but how has it left your heart? How has it affected your body? Are there any residual feelings of shame or unworthiness? This is the mark of the inner critic disguising itself as a motivator and protector, but in the long run, the damage that it causes is not worth it. Anything that costs you your peace and wellbeing is not worth it.

With mindfulness, we step into the shoes of the observer. We become aware of our thoughts, and we can see them as just thoughts. We do not need to identify with them. We do not have to believe them. In meditation (which is a tool for mindfulness), it is particularly useful to notice our thoughts come and go without getting attached to them. The point of meditation is *not* to empty our thoughts, because our mind is designed to think. To ask our mind to stop thinking is like asking the heart to stop beating. We cannot get rid of our thoughts, but instead, we can simply allow them to arise and pass through our

awareness. We are not trying to control our thoughts either, because again that is a futile task. Rather, we are creating a container to hold any and all thoughts, positive or negative, in our awareness so that we can strengthen our muscles to observe them without creating a story about ourselves. Practicing mindfulness helps us see that we are not defined by our thoughts, even the good ones, and certainly not the bad ones. It helps us realize that thoughts are not the issue, but it is really about our relationship to them that matters.

One guided meditation called “Rising Above Your Thoughts & Your Inner Critic” (Moon, 2023c) is crucial to developing an awareness of our thoughts. The more we can see them as an observer, the less we can be swept away by them. When we continue to show up to pause and PACE ourselves, we are creating a healthier relationship with our thoughts and to our inner critic. When we feel more in balance, it affects everything we do, how we move through the world, how we find gratitude even in difficult times, and leads to owning our own power.

GRATITUDE AND OWNING YOUR OWN POWER

It is easy to feel gratitude when things are going well. But when we are struggling, it can be much harder to see the good in our lives. Since our energy goes towards what we pay attention to, when we feel gratitude, it is virtually impossible to feel any toxic feelings. Gratitude can give us the sense like we are being looked after or helped in some way, and we can see the good things in our life again. We do not have to wait around for the feeling of gratitude to come—we can make it an active practice. The more we show up to build the muscle of gratitude, the more our lives will be filled with it. Studies have shown that people who practice gratitude consistently report having stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, better sleep, and an increased sense of well-being (Khoury et al., 2015; Vonderlin et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2019).

What thoughts and emotions arise when it is hard to feel gratitude? We can examine this with mindfulness and compassion. We can be with ourselves quietly for a moment and observe without judgment to the best of our ability what we are experiencing in our body, in our mind, and in our heart. We can allow it and acknowledge it, be curious about it, and embrace whatever is present with an attitude of understanding and compassion. This is the PACE Yourself Method in a nutshell.

The practice of gratitude meditation can be an extremely powerful way of shifting your energy, clearing your path, and opening up the channel for thankfulness. When we feel lost, we can take care of ourselves in this way and are guided back to the goodness of gratitude. The benefits are cumulative. Like an interest-bearing account, it takes time to build, and if you do it consistently, your padded reserve will help you be resilient during the tougher times and deepen your joy in immeasurable ways during the happy times (Moon, 2023d).

Gratitude is foundational to owning our own power to take responsibility for our own needs and our own happiness. When our needs are not being met, we can get resentful, upset, and feel powerless. If we blame something or someone else for our discontent, we are giving them permission to hold the keys to our happiness. Instead of giving away our power by playing the blame game, we can ask ourselves *what we need*. What would it look like if we took ownership of our own happiness? What are the obstacles that are keeping us from this? Because we are human beings with a body, a mind, and a heart, we can ask ourselves, with mindfulness and compassion, what we need on those three levels:

Body: How does my body feel? Does it need to move, or does it need to rest? What parts feel good or not so good? Does it need to stretch, create more spaciousness?

Mind: What is the quality of my mind? Is it cluttered? What does it need? Does it need more focus, calm, or balance?

Heart: How is my heart feeling? What does it need? Connection with others? To feel part of something? To feel loved?

With mindful awareness and self-compassion, we can allow ourselves to be seen in the present moment exactly as we are. We can get clarity on what we need physically, mentally, and heart-wise. Tending to ourselves in this way helps us become resilient because our practice is always there to serve us. Setbacks are guaranteed and we will mess up. This is just a fact. No matter how many setbacks we experience in our journey, mindfulness can steer us towards the present moment, allowing ourselves to be just as we are without judgment, giving us the capacity to get curious about our experiences, and to be compassionate with how we are feeling.

When we take ownership for our own needs and happiness, we can also have the clarity to say no to people and things that are toxic for us. We do not have to work ourselves to the ground, neglect our needs, and burn out. Even in situations where it may be a tough call

to say no to certain things because it may put something at risk, like our job for example, we can still practice asking ourselves what we need for our wellbeing. Maybe we need to seek out a support system or find small moments in the day to go for a walk or do a short-guided meditation. Maybe it means putting down our phone deliberately for a few minutes to breathe and reset, or speaking out and addressing the point of conflict to the right people. Ask yourself what you can possibly do to shift the situation. If nothing, what other options can you consider? We can investigate these questions with compassion. When we look deeply with mindful awareness, we can find something we can do, even if it is just carving out the time to breathe.

The more we can get in touch with our gratitude and meeting our needs, the more we can own our power and our happiness. We can have more agency over our lives and have a better chance at meeting our goals without compromising our well-being and the quality of our lives.

CONCLUSION

So, transform yourself first. . . Keep expanding your horizon, decolonize your mind, and cross borders.

Yuri Kochiyama

This Special Issue honors the scholars and advocates fighting the most recent good fight for Ethnic Studies. In doing this, we also give gratitude to the pioneers who came before us and fought their own good fight. Ethnic Studies formations on campuses across the nation have been evolving for over fifty years. The history of Ethnic Studies underscores the determination of faculty, students, and a few enlightened administrators to create and maintain a foundational framework within higher education—and now, primary education as well.

Otis L. Scott, former Chair of the Department of Ethnic Studies and Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies at Sacramento State, has written on the features of Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline that have held us together in the past and must continue to be elevated as we move boldly into the future. First, Ethnic Studies has a transformative mission that serves to change what has been taught about the social, historical, and cultural experiences of racialized groups. Second, Ethnic Studies is a corrective and redemptive project that fills the gaps in knowledge and advances new comparative, relational, and intersectional paradigmatic approaches to our research and teaching of race and ethnicity from national and global contexts. Third, Ethnic Studies has generative capacities that

describe, explain, analyze, and more accurately represent the diverse peoples and communities of color (Scott, 2008).

At the same time, as humans, we naturally seek connection, happiness, ease, and purpose. When we are deprived of feeling alive, we usually look to things outside of us to help us feel less anxiety. However, looking to the outside is unreliable since external conditions are always changing and fleeting. So, what can we rely on that is steady, ever-present, and ever-giving? The answer is our practice of inner self care—to develop a willingness and openness to be with ourselves, like a caring friend. This requires holding space for us to be seen, exactly as we are, wherever we are, and whatever we are going through. It requires a genuine concern for our own wellbeing. It requires not running away from our discomfort, but rather looking towards it with presence and compassion.

This kind of response to life is not what we are used to because we live in a culture that demands instant gratification, and we want to see results right away. But this practice goes at the pace of nature, like a seed that is sprouting and growing underneath the soil every day that it gets watered. You cannot see the sprout above the soil, until one day, you can.

Our lives can feel so chaotic at times, like a hurricane. No matter what challenges we are going through, no matter what external conditions are swirling around us—with our practice, we can learn to be at the eye of the storm where it is calm and aware. We can learn to breathe and observe the chaos without getting sucked into the high winds. Our practice is always there, always reliable, and always inviting us to take care of ourselves without judgment. In a world where we may feel unsafe a lot of times, our practice can be our refuge.

We can also find a community to build our practice with and share our journey. Mindfulness does not have to be all self-care, and in fact, it should not be. Larry Yang (2017, 178) writes: “The creation of community is an act of consciousness and an actualized awareness of the fact. . .that not only are we not supposed to do this alone but actually we can’t do this alone. We can only awaken the compassionate arms of our community together, in solidarity.”

We can find support, comfort, and resilience as we uplift one another, be mirrors for each other, and create more ease in ourselves and in the world. This is totally possible for you. By taking steps to learn how to pause and PACE yourself in this busy world, you can gain essential skills to rise above your daily challenges. Your thoughts, emotions, and experiences become a beautiful kaleidoscope for your observation, where you can develop an awareness that you are more

than whatever has happened to you, more than your thoughts. That is when we realize we are home, the place we all want to be.

*The ache for Home lives in all of us,
The safe place where we can go as we are, and not be questioned.*

Maya Angelou

Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

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