

Premature Enlightenment
6 easy payments of

\$489.99

Doshic Aesthetics
Teeth Whitening System
3 easy payments of
\$129.99

Backward Bend
Chakra Support Bra
\$69.99

Monopoly Yoga
Eco-Mat
\$99.99

Full Sun Yoga
Vinyasa Pants
\$169.99

Backward Bend
Studio Shorts
\$89.99

Karma Essentials
Dharma Clipboard
\$39.99

Monopoly Yoga
Rubber Mat
\$89.99

LiLi Lime
Ashtanga Pants
\$149.99

Yoga, Money and Madness:

My Rant on Practising Wellness in the 21st Century
by Dr. Kim Graham

Tough questions about the
"business of yoga"



We are worth more than money. The practices we engage in, the therapies we use and how we treat each other are all more valuable than the almighty dollar. Yet, it can create conflict and war, cause pain, inflict anxiety and create obsession. It represents stuff, clutter and greed—all things in this life I loathe. However, money can also buy shelter, dryness and warmth, food and the freedom to make certain choices. Ironically, money was also the first word I learned to spell—before I even knew how to spell my name. This is the value our society puts on it.



Anyone who practises or teaches yoga from its “intended truths” no doubt struggles with what I refer to as “the business of yoga.” Balancing being able to live, loving what you do and honouring the practice as it was intended can be difficult.

Many studios offer yoga by donation, or “seva” or karma classes, once per week, while others offer free instruction to various charitable or non-profit organizations for marginalized populations. While I love these classes and everything they stand for, I am disheartened that they need to be offered to allow those not able to afford regular classes to attend.

When I was a kid, I frequently lost all my money playing monopoly. I remember the mad anxiety-provoking rush to buy every property and put houses and hotels on them faster than your opponent in hopes of being the first to collect all of their money. Winning meant you owned everything and had all the money. I lost because I didn’t like watching the sad, dejected faces of my friends when they were losing (which would result in me either giving them a break on rent or letting them take free money from the bank to catch up), or grow sickeningly happy when they were winning. I remember calculating dice rolls that would land me on the “Go To Jail” spot because it meant I wouldn’t have to round the board another time, spending money I didn’t have. As an adult looking back at this and on all the experiences I have had with my patients, friends and colleagues, I find it somewhat disturbing how eerily similar the game is to life.

As a yoga student, I try to access small individually owned studios, but inevitably end up going to the big Walmart studios because the small ones are going out of business. You know the ones: classes packed wall-to-wall with the latest Lululemon trends and a rainbow of bubble gum-coloured yoga mats. The kind where you have to reserve online or you won’t get a spot. The kind where classes cost more money than you want to spend. These studios are popping up everywhere and are open 24 hours, making it more convenient for you to practise. The kind that forces the smaller, individually owned studios to increase their prices to pay their rent because their class sizes are dwindling. The kind where the word monopoly starts to play on your lips. This super-sized yoga business model being marketed to the public makes me want to practise yoga less.

Undoubtedly, the western world has been awakened to the healing powers of yoga, but we need to work harder to preserve its truth and integrity. While I’m not saying that the Walmart yoga studios aren’t capable of providing quality yoga with some great instructors, I am saying I feel the message being

delivered is damaged. And it’s not only happening in the world of yoga. I see it happening in my own profession. As Traditional Chinese Medicine gains more credibility and acceptance here in the West, I see its practices, like acupuncture, being used separately by some health care professionals. Modified in its practice and applications, acupuncture has become the new marketing catchall in clinics and doctors’ offices nationwide. While this new level of acceptance and exposure to the medicine is incredibly exciting, it is also a double-edged sword. Like with yoga, is offering it in this way without the true understanding of the system from which it came—its history, theories and

practices—honouring its practice? Am I alone in thinking and feeling this way? Are we not talking about these things because we are too polite or afraid it will be perceived as negative? Clearly I am frustrated and discouraged by what I see as pseudo-spirituality and enlightenment being spoon fed to us by a sick culture.

It’s a sick system, and if we aren’t careful, we run the risk of delivering a sick practice as a result.

This is a difficult topic within yoga and other health communities. It saddens me, though, when those who practise yoga stop going because the system in which it is being delivered is ailing. The same applies to my own profession, for the same reasons. Your time and health are worth more than money and greed. Seek out practices that feed your spirit. Ask yourself and others the hard questions about the mind-body practices you engage in. Trust in the benefits you gain through learning things the long and hard way and not the quick-fix-you-need-to-buy-this-to-save-yourself-gimmicks of the 21st century.

Namaste.

Your time and health are worth more than money and greed. Seek out practices that feed your spirit.

