

Running head: PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ZEN BUDDHISM AND  
TAOISM FOR TAOS ED. VENTURES

Pedagogical Development of Zen Buddhism and Taoism for Taos Ed. Ventures

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Abstract

Taos Ed. Ventures is an outdoor guiding company that will be offering backpacking trips in Taos, New Mexico to high school and college students, with ages ranging from 16 – 29, starting the summer of 2015. Along with backpacking skills, the philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Taoism will be taught while on the trail. To teach these philosophies, a pedagogy was created, combining aspects of Sentipensante and Contemplative pedagogies that seeks to teach the daily applications of Zen Buddhism and Taoism through experiential and innovative learning methods, such as journaling, meditation, and mindfulness practices. The benefits of these alternative learning methods will also be discussed through the use of online articles and peer reviewed journals. The philosophies are expansive and only certain aspects will be taught to students for the sake of time and for a desire to keep it simple. Specifically, the aspects that seem most applicable and beneficial to the lives of young adults will be the focus. The goal is for students to exit the trip with a clear, if limited, view of Zen Buddhist and Taoist practices and, in doing so, examine and reflect on the way they perceive the world and themselves.

### Cultural and Recreational Pedagogical Development for Taos Ed. Ventures

Taos Ed. Ventures, founded in 2013 by Daniel Greenleaf, Taylor Calderon, and Kelsey Tyler (the author) is a Taos, New Mexico based company that will be offering weeklong backpacking and cultural trips for university credit at University of New Mexico, starting the summer of 2015. As this is a recently started company with a large component consisting of education, there is a need to develop the pedagogy behind it. The proposed pedagogy aims to include such subjects as outdoor recreational skills (specifically those needed for backpacking and wilderness survival), cultural exchange and education concerning the Native American lifestyles of New Mexico (specifically the Taos Pueblo Native Americans), teachings from Eastern philosophies, specifically Zen Buddhist and Taoist practices, and sustainable agricultural practices on an organic farm. For the sake of this paper, the focus will rely on the pedagogical development of Eastern philosophies. In order to build this pedagogy, I intend to research Zen Buddhism and Taoism using a variety of sources, including peer-reviewed articles in primary journals, published books, online articles, and first-hand interviews.

The mission of Taos Ed. Ventures is to introduce students to the beauty of Taos area wilderness while equipping them with the skills to survive in the backcountry, while challenging them to perceive the world and themselves differently through the introduction of Eastern philosophy practices. The importance of developing pedagogy for this company is paramount in order to establish organization, professionalism and credibility for instructors.

Zen Buddhism and Taoism may seem an unlikely lesson plan to be taught together on a weeklong backpacking trip. The connection of Zen and Taoism to the rest

of the subjects being taught is the common idea of going back to the basics – to the past and to nature. In modern society, technological innovation has accelerated at an unprecedented rate, along with the amounts of obesity and medication. Perhaps in reaction to these, people have begun to turn back to the intrinsic value of nature and the creation of Taos Ed. Ventures formed in order to facilitate this experience for young adults.

Since the class that will be offered the summer of 2015 primarily consists of backpacking and wilderness survival skills (5 days and 5 nights of backpacking of the week), there will be a section of teaching that will take place in the classroom, teaching such skills as meal preparation, gear choice, informal wilderness first aid, navigation skills, and Leave No Trace ethics. More skills will be taught in the field while backpacking. The philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Taoism will be briefly brought up while in the classroom and selected introductory readings will be handed out to students as material that can be read while on the trail. These philosophies will provide a unique perspective from a different culture concerning nature as well as relieving stress, which has been linked strongly to meditation. Students will be instructed to purchase small notebooks prior to the start of the trip that they will use to journal their experience. Both philosophies are best taught in an experiential learning environment and therefore, the majority of the pedagogy for Zen Buddhism and Taoism will be directed with the trail as the teaching environment, without formal lecturing.

From this pedagogical development, students should exit the trip having an understanding of the practical day-to-day use of Zen Buddhism and Taoism. There are not expectations that students will understand the history or tenets of either philosophies

but rather understand how they can apply aspects of the philosophies to their daily lives. This message is inherently subjective but I will strive to include scientifically acclaimed sources wherever possible. For example, when teaching meditation, I will cite journals that support the physical health benefits of meditation.

### Review of Literature

Although acknowledged as beneficial and practiced by many Asian countries for more than two thousand years, the United States is finally uncovering the benefits of mindfulness based practices and meditation and government organizations have been scientifically unfolding the benefits these past few decades. Mindfulness meditation, in which the participant is instructed to view one's own thoughts without judgment, but instead be aware of one's thoughts and let them pass, has been increasingly in use in the United States since the late 1970's, when the University of Massachusetts Medical Center established the Stress Reduction Clinic and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program. It involves practices that seek to develop the ability to focus all of one's attention on the present moment, with an open and curious attitude. Mindfulness-based techniques and meditation have become increasingly used to treat conditions ranging from post-traumatic stress to depression and significant health benefits have been repeatedly duplicated. The effects of meditation on stress relief have been studied many times. In one study, stress levels were measured in various ways, such as heart rate, cortisol levels as well as central nervous system functions, and it was found that those who meditated before the stress inducer (a computer game) were much more relaxed and able to perform better. Of those being tested, some had never meditated before. Interestingly enough, it was only the adverse effects of stress that were relieved from meditation, not the beneficial effects of stress, such as an improved memory (Mohan, Sharma, & Bijlani, 2011). In addition to helping health, meditation can cause positive, physical changes to your brain. Developing different ways to perceive the world can change your brain. In the essay "Buddhism Meets Western Science," author and psychologist Gay Watson talks about how repeated

cognitive practices can lead to physical changes in the brain, which consequently changes all resulting perceived experiences (2001). This means that by training yourself to think and perceive the world differently, your brain can undergo changes that will further change your thinking to fit into that pattern.

Nature also has health benefits that align with those of meditation, such as lessened depression, higher energy levels, and overall improved health. Depression and recurrence of depression have been found to significantly decrease when subjects were exposed to a natural setting in place of an urban setting. In the book *Sentipensante (sensing/thinking) pedagogy: Educating for wholeness, social justice and liberation*, a case showed the benefits of this in which a math teacher took a class out to the mountains to learn math. The student's perception of the effect of learning in the mountains was markedly contrasted with those who only learned in a classroom and they remarked that the environment was relaxing and beneficial for reflection. Overall scores were higher for the class that went on the mountain retreat versus the class that remained in the classroom. Indeed, the introduction of meditation and mindfulness practices can only be enhanced while in nature. Buddhism arose when Siddhartha (Buddha) became enlightened while under a fig tree. Taoism revolves around the natural world. The Tao, the main concept of Taoism that translates to the Way, is in harmony with all things and it is only when people are aligned with nature that they can be in harmony with the Tao. It would seem that there is no better environment to teach these philosophies and their practices than on a backpacking trip in the wilderness.

### Method

In order to gather data, I will primarily use online resources, such as newspaper and magazine articles, peer-reviewed articles, and electronic books. However I will also be using resources in print and will conduct personal correspondences, with others who have experience teaching this material in a wilderness setting. Since there will be a variety of methods and opinions on each subject, I will need to eliminate some in favor of others based on keeping lesson plans an adequate length. There will not be an equal amount of attention to Zen Buddhism and Taoism. This is due to the immensity of both philosophies as well as the ability to create practical, introductory exercises with each. Certain aspects of each philosophy may be overemphasized at the cost of another aspect. For example, meditation will be a large component of activities whereas existential debates about Buddhist concepts of non-mind will not be mentioned. Certain parts of Zen Buddhism and Taoism take many years to begin to understand and would be nearly impossible to teach to a class never exposed to these philosophies.

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- Watson, G. (2001). *Perspective: Buddhism Meets Western Science*. Retrieved November 5, 2013, from <http://www.parkridgecenter.org/Page483.html>

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Allison, M. T., Duda, J. L., & Beuter, A. (2011). Group Dynamics in the Himalayas.

*International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 26(175), 176 - 191. Retrieved from <http://irs.sagepub.com/content/26/3/175>

This article discusses and analyzes the six stages of group formation and development among nine women trekking in the Himalayas over a nineteen-day expedition. The six stages include: group formation, getting-to-know-you-stage, group comfort, group saturation, group confrontation, and group coasting. The researchers and authors of this journal were participants on the trip and work as sport scientists with training in sociology, exercise science, and psychology. They had group members document their perceptions of the group over the trip in addition to their own field notes. I plan on using this information and turning it into an activity. I'll instruct group members prior to the start of the trip about group dynamics and how they often change. During free time, they can journal about their perceptions of group dynamics and their role in the group. In essence, they can catalogue the emergence of group culture. This also relates to the concept of mindfulness in Buddhism. Participants will be forced to be mindful of their actions on the group and the group's on their own, and will be able to recognize which stage the group is falling into. As conflict is a stage of this process that they will be made aware of, it will be interesting to see if group members will try harder to maintain social harmony because of this knowledge. It can be an everyday goal to maintain and build group bonding.

Duct Tape Teambuilding (n.d.). Traffic Jam – Duct Tape Teambuilding Game

[Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQunc5T9B8>

This video shows a group of people performing a team building video in an activity called a 'traffic jam.' From the book *Duct Tape Teambuilding*, this activity involves cooperation and problem solving and requires very few props. The author of the book Tom Heck, who posted this video, serves as the president and founder of the International Association of Teamwork Facilitators. Team building, achieved in small steps through games like this, is essential for a good trip and it will also display the idea of collectivistic cooperation for survival and success.

Fisher, C. (n.d.). *Eastern Philosophy Basics*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Chiang Mai University.

*Eastern Philosophy Basics* aims to inform the reader with the four main 'Eastern' religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. It includes many excerpts from classical Eastern writings since the authors of these excerpts are the leading voices of the philosophies. It is not a comparative analysis of the four philosophies but rather an in depth scholastic summary of each. The author, Dr. Chris Fisher, was my Buddhist Philosophy teacher at Chiang Mai University in Chiang Mai, Thailand. He left the United States after high school and lived as a Buddhist monk in China for more than ten years, learning Chinese in the process. During his time as a monk, he studied medicine and received his M.D. in Asia and then returned to the U.S. for ten years, earning his M.D. at University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University in the United States and working as an E.R. doctor thereafter for his time in the U.S. He then moved to Thailand where he now resides. He holds a doctorate degree in Psychology and serves as a Buddhist

therapist as well as teaching at Chiang Mai University. He is a helpful and incredibly knowledgeable source, having multiple publications on Buddhist teachings that he has translated from Chinese. He understands the cultural barriers that exist in the transmission of Zen Buddhist and Eastern philosophy teachings between Asia and the United States and tries to present everything in a way that Westerners will understand. This book is a more exhaustive summary of Buddhism and Taoism than previous sources, and it will feature many more technical terms and historical information than the *Idiot's Guide* or *The Four Noble Truths*. However, it is better to know more than less when you are the teacher.

Hoelting, Kurt (personal communication, May 12, 2013).

Kurt Hoelting is a former commercial fisherman and wilderness guide in Alaska. In 1994, Kurt founded *Inside Passages*, a business that leads sea kayaking adventures while educating participants about “environmental activism and contemplative practice” (<http://insidepassages.com/aboutkurt/>). I personally contacted Kurt through his website and he gave me some great advice about how to teach meditation on the trail. For simplicity's sake, I will just include his email here:

A good tool for introducing meditation in a wild setting is to do some naturalist exercises. Don't call it "meditation". Call it the practice of listening and paying attention. Here are a couple exercises:

One is called the "Cone of silence". Explain that we humans make so much noise moving through the landscape that birds and other animals freeze and fall silent when they hear us coming, and don't resume activity until a

while after we've passed. So invite the students to go out and find a place to sit, and have them sit still and silent for fifteen or more minutes, paying close attention to what is going on around them, including the soundscape. Have them notice what happens after they've been still for a while, and see if the cone of silence begins to fill back up with sound and movement around them. You can instruct them to watch their own breathing if they get bored or distracted, and just watch and feel what emerges. You can also combine this with some writing exercises if you like, jotting down things they notice and what they are feeling inside as they settle into their place.

A second is to give them Lew Welches poem, and have them follow its instructions in a similar way:

*Step out onto the Planet*

*Draw a circle a hundred feet round.*

*Inside the circle are*

*300 things nobody understands, and, maybe*

*nobody's ever really seen.*

*How many can you find?*

*(Lew Welch, Ring of Bone)*

I believe that Kurt's advise is useful since he is leading trips very similar in topic to the ones I'm going to lead. I'm going to continue to find and contact organizations and sources to compile as much practical and tested advice as possible.

Honore, C. (2005). *In praise of slowness: Challenging the cult of speed*. San Francisco, United States: HarperSanFrancisco.

Slowing down is not a concept familiar or an idea encouraged in fast-paced American society. Almost everything is desired to be rushed— communication, transportation, work, exercise. There simply isn't enough time in the day. However, according to Carl Honore and a growing consensus around the world, by changing our view of time and slowing down, we can lead healthier and happier lives. Carl Honore is a traveling journalist that has featured his articles in such publications as the *Economist*, *Observer*, the *Miami Herald*, *Time*, and *The National Post* (in Canada). He has published three books, the first *In Praise of Slowness*, which received critical acclaim and helped fuel the growing 'Slow movement' worldwide. Although this book is not Taoist or Buddhist in any relation, it conveys a similar message about enjoying the present that both philosophies refer to in some aspect. It could be helpful in creating my lesson plans since it comes from a Western cultural perspective. Sometimes, the connotations of Taoism and Buddhism seem too foreign to many Americans, especially adolescents.

Human Knot – Description of Icebreaker, Name Game, and Team Building Activity.

(n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/HumanKnot.html>

The Human Knot is a simple activity that will help the group get to know each while causing them to work together. It's an entertaining activity and laughter often helps bond a group. Wilderdom.com is self-described as “a one-stop shop for professional gear, kits, curriculum resources and books for experiential learning and playing a wide variety of

group-based activities and exercises.” Finding games and activities for simple group bonding and there is a wide array on this website. Although I don’t plan on relying on too many of these activities since I find them a bit childish when overused, they are still good icebreakers for group bonding in the beginning of the trip.

Malkin, J., & Nhat Hanh, T. (2003, July). In Engaged Buddhism,

Peace Begins With You. *Shambhala Sun*. Retrieved from

<http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=1579&Itemid=0&limit=1&limitstart=0>

In this interview with leading Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, the view about social responsibility and focus on self-development are discussed. It also discusses the daily applications of Zen Buddhism, through mindfulness and informal meditation. This paper ties in well to the pedagogy in how it makes Zen Buddhism more applicable to the daily actions of a normal person. Thich Nhat Hanh has written over a hundred books on Buddhism and is a leading thinker in making Buddhism accessible to the West.

Rendón, L. I. (2009). *Sentipensante (sensing/thinking) pedagogy: Educating for*

*wholeness, social justice and liberation*. Sterling, Va: Stylus Pub.

In this book, an entire pedagogy is introduced. Called sentipensante, it means sensing and thinking, and is a pedagogy that focuses on educating students in a way that develops characters and leads to a brighter future. As described in the bio, “she [Rendon] offers a transformative vision of education that emphasizes the harmonic, complementary relationship between the *sentir* of intuition and the inner life, and the *pensar* of

intellectualism and the pursuit of scholarship; between teaching and learning; formal knowledge and wisdom; and between Western and non-Western ways of knowing.”

Laura Redon works as a professor of Higher Education in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Texas-San Antonio as well as the Co-Director of the Center for Research and Policy in Education. A large part of this book involves informing the reader of ways to use and develop their own pedagogy in this manner, which is exactly what I’m looking for. As mentioned above, she introduces “non-Western ways of knowing,” which is where Buddhism and Taoism relate. Since the material I’ll be teaching is primarily unconventional and non-Western, I find this book a valuable resource to learn ways, specifically using her “seven steps to unlocking the potential of teachers and their students.” Unfortunately, this book is checked out at the library currently so I’m in the process of trying to find a way to locate it.

Sumedho (n.d.). *The Four Noble Truths*. Hertfordshire, England: Amaravati Publications.

This electronic book (eBook), also available in print which is listed above, is a compilation of various lectures given by Venerable Ajahn Sumedho that focus on Buddha, the historical and spiritual founder of Buddhism. In 528 CE, Buddha gave one of his most famous teachings at Deer Park on the Four Noble Truths. They are, in summary: 1) There is suffering. 2) The origin of suffering is attachment to desire. 3) There is the cessation of suffering. 4) There is the Eightfold Path, the way out of suffering. In this book, Sumedho attempts to explain and make relatable the Four Noble Truths, to the everyday layperson of Buddhism or of any religion. The book is divided into four sections for each Truth. Ajahn means ‘teacher’ in the Thai language and the prefix Venerable shows he is a

venerated teacher in Thailand. He is a bhikkhu, a mendicant monk, of the Theravada tradition of Buddhism. Ordained in Thailand in 1966, he served as the abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Centre. An interesting aspect of this source is that it is written from an Eastern perspective and focuses on Buddhism more as a religion than as a philosophy. I chose to include this source for these reasons, since Buddhism developed in the East and has most likely been altered in its cross-cultural conveyance. Meaning can change greatly with culture. Also, Buddhism, including Zen Buddhism, is founded on the Four Noble Truths, and it is important to understand the tenets of a philosophy of religion before you can attempt to practice aspects of it.

Vanderbilt University (2013). *Teaching Activities* | *Center for Teaching* | *Vanderbilt University*. Retrieved May 10, 2013, from <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-guides/teaching-activities/>

Contemplative pedagogy, taught at Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching, involves an alternative teaching style that is resonant of Zen Buddhist teachings. It seeks to develop inner awareness, insight, and concentration through teaching methods that include guided meditation, reflection, silence, journals, dialogue, music, art, and poetry. The website also includes multiple guides for contemplative activities in the classroom, such as in-class contemplation, guided meditation on a raisin (or any other object), and highlighting and reading aloud excerpts from selected readings. It stresses a holistic model of teaching and learning. As defined on the website, "cooperative learning is a type of active learning that involves groups of three or more students working together on a task." The web page include numerous online articles and journals from such sources as

Stanford University, the National Institute of Science Education, and the University of Washington that explain the benefits of cooperative learning. Many articles also provide effective strategies and descriptions of how to form and manage cooperative learning. Vanderbilt University is a private research university located in Nashville, Tennessee. The contemplative pedagogy and cooperative learning resources come from the school's Center for Teaching division. These two subjects are relevant to my area of study in how they describe and instruct alternative ways to teach. Zen Buddhism goes hand in hand with the contemplative pedagogy. Cooperative learning is a must for experiential learning trips since on a trip like mine, group bonding is essential for an enjoyable and enriching experience.

**Outline**

ZEN BUDDHISM AND TAOISM PEDAGOGY DEVELOPMENT

- I. EXPLAIN TAOS ED. VENTURES
  - A. Describe need for pedagogy
  - B. Describe how Zen Buddhism and Taoism are relevant
- II. EXPLAIN ORIGIN AND PRACTICES OF ZEN BUDDHISM AND TAOISM
  - A. Explain activities of Zen Buddhism
  - B. Explain activities of Taoism
- III. EXPLAIN METHODS OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHIES
  - A. Describe sentipensante pedagogy
    1. Discuss the role of compassion
    2. Discuss compassion in relation to social justice
    3. Explain collectivistic vs. individualistic society
  - B. Describe contemplative pedagogy
    1. Discuss benefits of activities
- IV. APPLY PEDAGOGIES TO PHILOSOPHIES
  - A. Describe activities
    1. Include activities for group bonding
      - a. Games
    2. Include activities for personal development
      - a. Meditation
      - b. Solo-hike
      - c. Journaling
- V. CREATE A SURVEY FOR FEEDBACK
  - A. Write questions for feedback on activities
  - B. Conclude paper

## **Introduction**

Taos Ed. Ventures, founded in 2013 by Daniel Greenleaf, Taylor Calderon, and Kelsey Tyler (the author) is a Taos, New Mexico based company that will be offering week long backpacking and cultural trips for university credit at University of New Mexico, starting the summer of 2015. As this is a recently started company with a large component consisting of education, there is a need to develop the pedagogy behind it. Proposed pedagogy aims to include such subjects as outdoor recreational skills needed for backpacking and wilderness survival, cultural exchange and education concerning the Native American lifestyles of New Mexico, specifically the Taos Pueblo Native Americans, teachings from the Eastern philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Taoism, and sustainable agricultural practices on an organic farm. The scope of this paper will be focused on the development of pedagogy for Taoism and Zen Buddhism, which will be accomplished through the use of a variety of sources, including peer-reviewed articles in primary journals, published books, online articles, personal experiences, and first-hand interviews.

Imagine a classroom full of fourth grade students. The whiteboard is covered with shapes, neatly drawn in white and colored chalk, with shading and dashed lines to depict three dimensions. In front of each student, a paper scribbled with cylinders and cubes sits. Who would like to draw a cube on the board? the teacher asks. Instead of choosing the overly eager hands that shoot up near the front, the teacher chooses the child in the back, who avoided eye contact and whose paper doesn't have anything resembling a cube. The child obediently walks up to the front of the classroom and picking up the chalk, scrawls a few squares together that don't add up to a cube. The teacher asks the class if this is

correct and a chorus replies, “No!” The student erases the answers and begins again. This happens multiple times and finally the student draws a successful cube. This experience sounds like an embarrassing, confidence killing exercise for the student but we aren’t in an American classroom. We are in Japan. When the student finally draws the cube, his classmates clap and he walks back to his seat with a satisfied look on his face. This simple story depicts a large difference between the ‘East’ and the ‘West.’ Intellectual struggle is looked upon in the U.S. as reflective of failure or stupidity, something embarrassing. On the other hand, in many Eastern cultures, struggle is an assumed and predictable part of learning. This is not to say suffering is anticipated or regarded fondly but rather that it is an accepted part of life. It is how you view and react to suffering that matters. And now, moving from a fourth grade classroom in Japan, we have entered some of the basic tenets of Eastern philosophy.

The Eastern philosophies and religions of Buddhism and Taoism (pronounced Daoism) are often represented as foreign and exotic, depicted in popular media as inaccessible and secretive knowledge. With the advent of technology in the past twenty years as seen with smart phones, iPads, and ever accessible 4G wireless, life in the modern day United States is busier than ever and people are often having a hard time fitting everything into one day. There is a small but growing backlash movement “in praise of slowness,” towards relaxing and enjoying the moment (Honore, *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*, 2005). With this trend, Taos Ed. Ventures, an outdoor adventure backpacking guiding company was created, which aims to reconnect young people with nature and the present moment. The meditative and reflective lifestyles offered by Zen Buddhism and Taoism can be used with this company to help

send the message that slower can be happier. By studying and researching the basic beliefs, activities, and benefits of Zen Buddhism and Taoism, I plan to create pedagogy to be taught on a weeklong backpacking trip for young adults ranging from ages 16 – 29.

When I backpack, I often find that I start off the trail full of excitement and energy. Then as the miles continue, my mind will wander to the next meal or start planning on what I will do when I get back from the trip. Eventually, if the trail is long enough, I will finally run out of thoughts of the future or the past and finally just walk. Look at the trees and the trail ahead of me. Feel the wind on my face, the snugness of the hip belt from my backpack rubbing against my hipbones. Listen to the wildlife around me. My breathing falls into a rhythm and although eventually my ever wandering mind will resume plotting and planning, I have moments of peace. In these moments, I am not thinking about myself. I simply exist. Up until I learned about Buddhism and Taoism, I never gave much thought to how I felt in these moments, only that I felt refreshed from them. But after being exposed to Zen Buddhism while studying abroad in Thailand, I felt that some of the teachings aligned with the stillness I had felt in those moments of backpacking. So, when I began the creation of Taos Ed. Ventures this past year, I also began to plan ways to incorporate some practices of eastern philosophy.

Before the pedagogies used to teach Taoism and Buddhism can be presented, some brief background on the subjects is needed. As there is no concise summary of these two religions that go back thousands of years in time into one paper, there will be provided (through oral and written communication) a small amount of background information, basic tenets, practices, and benefits of each philosophy (for the purposes of this paper, Taoism and Zen Buddhism will be referred to as philosophies, as it is the

thought practices rather than the belief practices of each that will be emphasized). Zen purposefully discourages verbal summaries and descriptions and relates to finding truth through one's own direct experience. Taoism centers on the Tao, which is the ultimate principle of nature, the way or the path behind everything, including nature, individuals, and society. In the central book of Taoist teaching, the founder Lao Tzu states, "The Way that can be articulately described is not the Unchanging Way" (Laozi, Wilson Trans., 2013, p. 3). The Tao really can't be defined which will make this paper and pedagogy all the more challenging. Both philosophies deal with an experiential learning and knowing that is very confusing to many Westerners. One commonality between the two is the importance of self and direct experience. No one can tell you what or how to think in these manners but it is through practice and reflection that mindfulness and insight can be attained. Much more will be explained about these two philosophies that differ greatly from current Western ideologies.

The nature of the classroom, which being in outdoors on a weeklong backpacking trip, has a great impact that will both challenge the delivery of the material as well as enhance it. Before I can attempt to introduce Eastern philosophy, the basics of backpacking must be established, with group cohesion being an essential step in this process. Team building and cooperative learning exercises will be carried out through activities, such as games, in the beginning of the trip. From there, the introduction of material can begin. Using contemplative and sentipensante pedagogies along with cooperative learning strategies, I plan to lead and participate with the group in guided meditation, individual journaling, and reflective thinking practices. The introduction of group dynamics will be brought up in an informal conversational setting, in which the

stages of group development will be introduced and group members will be challenged on a daily basis to recognize which stage they are in as well as how to maintain harmony. For each of these activities and ideas mentioned, a detailed lesson plan and activity handout will be created in which the details of the setup are clearly spelled out for the coordinator as well as for the participant.

Unconventional types of pedagogies will be employed to teach the students not only about nature and Eastern philosophies, but how to think creatively and individually, while being fully aware of the present moment. Two particular pedagogies – sentipensante and contemplative – complement the style of Buddhism and Taoism. Sentipensante pedagogy, defined as sensing/thinking, aims to connect sentir (translating in Spanish to feel) with pensar (translating in Spanish to think), in other words, connecting intuition, such as the soul and wisdom, with intellect and knowledge. It specifically talks about connecting the Western and non-Western ways of knowing (Rendon, 2009). Contemplative pedagogy, taught at Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching, "involves teaching methods designed to cultivate deepened awareness, concentration, and insight...As Tobin Hart states, "Inviting the contemplative simply includes the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, looking inward, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of our consciousness...These approaches cultivate an inner technology of knowing (Vanderbilt University, n.p., 2013). These two pedagogies, which will be expounded upon in much greater detail, directly relate to many of the practices of Buddhism and Taoism, both emphasizing non-Western ways of knowing and experiencing life.

## **Background**

Buddhism originated in around 400 to 500 BCE in India, in the eastern region of the Ganges valley, and spread over the centuries to the rest of India, East Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Of course, as the adherents of Buddhism grew, so did the interpretations. Ranging in a broad period from 200 BCE and 100 CE, a split that continues to this day occurred which resulted in two sects of Buddhism, Mahayana and Theravada. Mahayana, meaning “big boat” or “large vehicle,” contrasts with Theravada, meaning “the way of the elders,” in their interpretation of how to reach enlightenment, whether as a group effort or by oneself, respectively (Fisher, n.d., p. 51). In addition, like many other philosophies and religions, there are debates over which sect follows Buddha’s true teachings. Zen Buddhism is within Mahayana Buddhism and arose through of a mixture of Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism. Although both Theravada and Mahayana are different ‘denominations,’ they share many teachings. Below, Buddhism as a whole and the tenets of Theravada and Mahayana will be described.

Before explaining the inner workings of Zen Buddhism, a little context concerning the origin of Buddhism as a whole is necessary, specifically the identity of Buddha himself. Buddha was a great teacher but he was and is not a god. Despite this, many point to him as the god of Buddhism and indeed, he is often worshipped like a god in many forms of Buddhism. In life, he was called Gautama Siddhartha. As the story goes, he was born in 563 BCE to a privileged family, as the son of a feudal lord, in the country of modern day Nepal. He was sheltered by his father (his mother passed away a week after his birth) and it was only when he was twenty-nine years old, that Siddhartha finally had a glimpse of the harsh world outside his palace. He saw an old man, a sick

man, and a dead body and finally knew what suffering was, in the forms of aging, sickness, or death. This changed the course of Siddhartha's life. He forsook his family and fortune and donned the cloak of a monk, as he had seen a Hindu monk in his first glimpses of the outside world. He wandered for six years, traveling from one spiritual teacher to the next, always in search of a way to end the suffering he had first witnessed six years earlier. In despair that he would never find a way out from suffering, he sat under a fig tree and vowed he would not leave until he knew the way, which quite literally dawned on him as he watched the morning star rise. This was his enlightenment, in which he discovered a way past the mortal confines of suffering, and his name was later changed to Buddha, meaning the enlightened one. From there, he reentered the world as a teacher and continued this for forty-five years until his untimely death from a poisonous mushroom.

The epiphanous teaching that Siddhartha had while sitting under a fig tree looking at the stars can be known simply as the Middle Way. In the main text of Theravada Buddhism, called the Pali Canon (based on the language Pali it was originally written), the most famous part for which Buddhism is known is presented in the form of the Four Noble Truths. Siddhartha delivered the message of the four truths shortly after his enlightenment under the fig tree to a group of his old friends. A quick summary of the truths goes something like this. First, there is suffering. This can be anything ranging from boredom to childbirth. It can be as simple as frustration as losing your car keys to the devastating grief of having someone you love die. Suffering is acknowledged as a universal experience of existence that all beings experience in some way or another. The second truth is the cause of suffering is desire. It is the expectations and decisions that

arise from being human and being shaped by desire that cause suffering. It is the craving for something that we think will satisfy our yearning, whether it is the next meal, success in the workplace, or happiness. Thirdly, the end of suffering results from eliminating desire. This is the way to reach Nirvana, the state of being in which there is no more suffering. This is when most people wonder why anyone would want to be Buddhist at all. Many misconstrue this truth and interpret it as a command to stop feeling and basically turn into a robot without emotions or desires. Should we not care for our family or our own body? There are bad desires, such as those to harm others or yourself, but should all desires be eliminated, the good intentioned as well as the bad? The fourth truth tackles this dilemma. In it, the way to eliminate suffering is laid out through a series of prescribed actions and perceptions called the eightfold path.

For the sake of brevity, the eight aspects of the eightfold path will be severely reduced in explanation to its core message, which is that of moderation. The Middle Way, as it is often called, recommends finding a “calm detachment achieved by avoiding the extremes of asceticism and self-indulgence” which will lead one to a mental state in which nirvana is attainable (Fisher, n.d., p.54). There’s not a much clearer way to explain this without writing a short novel and this relies on the fact that much of Buddhism lies in experience. The different components of the eightfold path focus on wisdom (through right view and intention), ethical conduct (through right speech, action, and livelihood), and concentration (through right effort, mindfulness, and meditation). The pedagogy will be focusing on the concentration aspect of the eightfold path, mainly through meditation and mindfulness practices. However, the compassionate side of Buddhism will also be brought up as the two, compassion and wisdom, go hand in hand.

The other main branch of Buddhism, in which Zen resides, is Mahayana. Mahayana followers do not refute the Pali Canon as a source of Buddha's teaching but instead label it as a beginner's lesson into Buddhism, not the central teaching. It is up for much interpretation. Nirvana is not some great enlightening but rather a readjustment of understanding for the enlightened in how he or she views it. Buddha is embodied with divine characteristics, rather than as a supreme teacher. In Theravada Buddhism, enlightenment can be attained either by joining a monastic community or by oneself, whereas in Mahayana Buddhism, one must become a bodhisattva to reach nirvana. A bodhisattva is one who will forgo enlightenment in order to help others reach enlightenment. However, although different, Mahayana Buddhists and Theravada Buddhists coexist peacefully. Mahayana followers still believe it is better that people follow Buddha's teachings in some forms than just in theirs. In this way, Mahayana Buddhism is more pluralist than most, recognizing that there might be other forms of truth out there to reach the same destination. A main concept of Mahayana Buddhism is emptiness. An illustration often used is that of an empty bottle. The emptiness and nothingness inside of the bottle is still reality. Does that mean reality is empty and characterless? Such ideas as these cause us to set aside how we normally perceive and characterize reality.

Mahayana Buddhism spread from India to China around the first century CE and spread greatly until 845 CE, when the Chinese government persecuted Buddhists, causing a large decline in growth and narrowing the types of Buddhism that would remain, such as Tendai, Zen, and Pureland Buddhism (Fisher, n.d). Zen, which developed in China around the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE was originally named "ch'an," which is a Chinese word for the

Hindu word “dhyana,” which means meditation, and its migration into Japan led to its modern name “zen,” which also translates to meditation in Japanese (Fisher, n.d., p. 87). As explained by the professor of Buddhist Philosophy at Chiang Mai University in Chiang Mai, Thailand and former monk Christopher Fisher, “Conceptually, Zen has its foundation in a discourse of the Buddha’s, known as the Flower Sermon, in which he simply held up a golden lotus. No one in the crowd understood Buddha’s cryptic meaning except his leading disciple, Mahakasyapa,” who was then instantly enlightened. “Zen Buddhism resists any verbal formula, and has no creeds. The focus of Zen is experience, and rational discourse and doctrine play no role in gaining enlightenment. In Zen, the experience of enlightenment is transmitted from the mind of a seasoned teacher to the student in training. It frequently is compared to a flame that is passed from candle to candle.” Zen focuses on “abandonment of thought, detachment from objects, and, ultimately, experiencing the Buddha-nature (Fisher, n.d., p. 87).” Even within Zen, there are divisions, which have resulted in the two schools called Rinsai and Soto. Both schools practice “zazen,” a seated meditation in which the eyes are half closed and the student sits in the lotus position (the position that looks like Indian style but with your feet on top of your knees) for countless hours (Fisher, n.d.). The Rinsai school uses koans, which are the most confusing things you might ever have to hear. What is the sound of one hand clapping? What was your face like before you were born? These seemingly ridiculous riddles are meant for you to lose attempt at logical reasoning and instead to “experience the emptiness of all things (Fisher, n.d., p.88).” This is an exercise that would be overseen by a master, who would pose the koan and periodically meet up with the student to assess their progress. The student will eventually solve the koan by oneself and this is

a form of enlightenment. The other school of Zen, the Soto school, does not practice with koans and instead believes enlightenment is attained in an ordinary way, through zazen.

For the purposes of the pedagogy, there will be only a small component concerning the origins and history of Buddhism and instead more of a focus on activities that incorporate Zen Buddhist practices, such as zazen and koans. I will talk about the four noble truths and the birth of Buddhism in order to give context but I don't want to confuse or bore students with the history and divisions of Buddhism. Continuing from Zen Buddhism, I will talk about Taoism, as the two are complementary in various ways.

Taoism arose in a period of war for China, in which people began to look towards nature for peace in order to get away from the chaotic violence. Like Buddhism, it split into two different forms over the centuries. Philosophical Taoism focuses on the Tao as the "ultimate ordering principle of nature which we should incorporate into our individual and social lives" (Fisher, n.d., p.127). Religious Taoism, on the other hand, is about reaching physical immortality in our life.

As there will be no pursuit towards physical immortality or teaching others about it on this trip, this paper will focus on Philosophical Taoism. The two main books for Taoism are the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Chuang-Tzu*, of which the former is the most famous. Between 450 and 300 BCE, Lao-Tzu, a contemporary of Confucius, wrote the *Tao Te Ching*. "Tao Te" translates to "the Way and its Power" with "Ching" simply denoting it as a classic (Fisher, n.d., p.128). Perhaps Eastern philosophies favor the number four as similar to the Four Noble Truths, there are four essential parts of Taoism: the Tao, return, non-action, and non-mind. The Tao is the "way" or "path" that encompasses the "fundamental ordering principle behind nature, society, and individual

people” (Fisher, n.d., p.129). The nature of the Tao is that it cannot be described or explained or it is no longer the Tao. In the opening passage to the *Tao Te Ching: An All-New Translation*, in a translation by Wilson (2013), Lao Tzu simply relates the Tao in the following passage:

The Way that can be articulately described is not the Unchanging Way. The name that can be said out loud is not the Unchanging Name. With your mouth unopened, and things left undefined, you stand at the beginning of the universe. Make definitions, and you are the measure of all creation. Thus, being forever without desire, you look deeply into the transcendent. By constantly harboring desire, your vision is beset by all the things around you. These two enter the world alike, but their names are different. Alike, they are called profound and remote. Profound and remote and again more so: This is the gate to all mysteries. (p.3)

In trying to understand the nature of the Tao, it cannot be perceived with our senses or logically deduced for meaning, as it has no tangible qualities. The *Tao Te Ching* states that it is the source of being and nourishment for everything that exists, yet another of its “mysterious qualities” (Fisher, n.d., p.129). Other passages also refer to the Tao as the “Mother of all things” (Lao Tzu & Lau, 2001, verse 25). This is interesting in how it is a feminine quality attributed to the creator of all things, juxtaposing with the idea of a male creator so often imagined, with everything coming from the being of a mother that already existed before heaven and earth.

The concept of return relates that “all things eventually decay and return to their ultimate source within the Tao” (Fisher, n.d., p.132). This concept is more familiar as it can be seen in the natural world. Species thrive and eventually fall into extinction. Of the billions of species that have existed since the beginning of earth, only fifty million were able to survive to the modern era. In fact, it is often described that 99.9 percent of all species that have existed are now extinct. Lao Tzu talks about the concept of return, translated by Lau (2001), in the following:

The state of vacancy should be brought to the utmost degree, and that of stillness guarded with unwearying vigor. All things alike go through their processes of activity, and then we see them return to their original state. When things in the vegetable world have displayed their luxuriant growth, we see each of them return to its root. This returning to their root is what we call the state of stillness; and that stillness may be called a reporting that they have fulfilled their appointed end. (verse 16).

Return is a concept we are more familiar with than much of what is written about the Tao. Simply looking at nature we have all seen cycles of life and death, growth and decay. Eventually, things reach such a level of decay that they are no longer in their original forms and return to the Tao, a state of nothingness.

Non-action sounds as it is. Don't force anything but go with the flow. It is about balance and patience. To illustrate this concept, the *Tao Te Ching* uses water. Although water seems weak, it will wear down stone over time, carving landscapes in its wake. Much of Taoism applies to how monarchs should govern and non-action is a large component. Instead of imposing his will onto the people, a good monarch should let things happen and let society develop independently. All in all, the form of governance that Taoism recommends is that of anarchy, with no laws governing the people. However, this idea of anarchy applies only on the small-scale and isn't feasible for the cities that exist today.

Lastly, non-mind is a concept that somewhat goes against the age of information that we live in today. It is the denial of excess knowledge in the hopes that without the jumble of information, we will be able to experience "spontaneous intuition" (Fisher, n.d., p. 134). The knowledge we need to know is within us. This seems rather anti-intellectual and backwards. However, according to the *Tao Te Ching*, through non-action and non-mind, we can grasp the Tao.

Leaving the conceptual basics of Taoism behind, the practical day-to-day practice consists of similar activities to Zen Buddhism, that of zazen or seated meditation.

Meditation exists in the present moment. There's more to it as well. To practice Taoism is to accept yourself and to be aware of yourself, others and nature. It also strives to remain in harmony with nature, which means that one must actually interact with nature. Non-action and non-mind mean being who you are, not trying to change it. To those who don't accept you, let them pass out of your life. Upkeep with your physical health is also a component that will help your life. Simply, smile and breathe, taking in the world. It all sounds very simple but that's the essence of it, in that it is a feasible and attainable.

In both Zen Buddhism and Taoism, releasing and letting go of expectations will help lead to enlightenment and peace. By letting go of this attachment to the desire to have things go how you want, you will no longer face (or at least lessen) frustration and disappointment when they do not turn out how you would have liked. It's about going with the flow of events surrounding one. A person is a stone in a stream and instead of fighting the current, one must let it wash over and eventually wear oneself down until he or she is part of the stream. It is when people try to impose their wills on other people and events that suffering often occurs. When one is at peace and aware of the present moment, the ability to perceive reality is altered in a way that is both the same and very different than the majority of time. There is no logical or rational knowing but instead an innate wisdom that can arise from mindfulness practices and training. In the following excerpt from *The Spirit of Human Rights: Dialogues*, authors Thompson and O'Dea (2001) discuss write about the difference between knowledge and wisdom:

Knowledge and wisdom are related yet different. Knowledge is the result of empirical observation and represents the consolidation of interpretations by

observers of whatever is observed. It has been the hallmark of the Western scientific paradigm and has served a useful purpose. Wisdom is borne of personal and communal reflection on life as it unfolds; on happiness, suffering and the causes of each. It requires a maturing process which incorporates courage, insight, and, at times, letting go of the need to know and resting in paradox. Unlike knowledge, wisdom is rooted in much deeper psychological and spiritual soil. It requires the cultivation of multiple intelligences. (p.6)

The “cultivation of multiple intelligences,” such as emotional and social intelligences, can lead to the path of enlightenment and help rid oneself of distraction, by letting go of the superfluous. For some, the questions of life after death and higher beings dominate their thoughts. When asked these questions, Buddha deflected them. He believed it was better to devote your life to end the suffering of the moment rather than theorize about things that could never be confirmed. This goes along with the concept of wisdom above, in which there needs to be “letting go of the need to know and resting in paradox.” There are many instances when you will simply not know, but there is no need to force an answer for the sake of an answer. This also goes along with the idea of non-mind. Emptying the mind of preconceived notions can lead to inner peace. The “cultivation of multiple intelligences” can be developed in alternative ways such as meditation and reflection, rather than just discourse and analysis.

## Methods

Since this pedagogy will be taught in an informal setting (on the trail, at the campsite) and the age range is targeted for young adults (the target age for participants around 16 – 29), the style and content of teaching and the curriculum will be delivered in an informal and innovative manner. The best way to convey the ideas and experiences of Zen Buddhism and Taoism rest in experiential ways, not through lecturing, as the nature of the philosophies are not to be intellectually deduced or rationalized. In this search, the pedagogies such as Sentipensante and contemplative that seek to teach in alternative methods other than standard methods of lecturing and testing. Such methods included meditation, art, journalism, and listening. In the book *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation*, Rendon (2009) discusses the divorce between intellectual rationalization and intuition in higher education is discussed in great detail, as seen in the following excerpts:

Our present dream of education privileges intellectual development, and social, emotional, and spiritual development are viewed as tangential to academic matters. Consequently, the harmonious rhythm of teaching and learning, which involves thinking as well as feeling, is absent in many of our classrooms. (p.3).

...In this vision very little, if any, space is left of *inner work*, time for reflection to examine the deeper meaning of what we are teaching and what we are learning. (p.2).

...Moreover, feeling and thinking do not have to be perceived as incompatible. Lorde viewed them as “a choice of way and combinations” (Lorde, 1984, p.101). The exploration of truth calls for a balance, and often a synthesis, between the inner and outer. (p.7).

Zen and Taoist practice focus on inner work. In meditation and mindfulness practices, a different way of knowing yourself, not in a logically self-analyzed way, can arise that leads to greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence. These practices are not cut off from other aspects of life but can be incorporated into every moment. Being mindful of

each moment will allow you to be mindful of your life, not wondering where the time has passed.

Compassion is an aspect of Zen Buddhism that should not be overlooked amongst the existential, experiential majority of what has been described and is also a large part of sentipensante pedagogy. Only when there is compassion in the practice as a Zen Buddhist can there be progress towards enlightenment. In many Eastern cultures where Zen Buddhism and Taoism are practiced, such as Japan, there is much more emphasis on interconnectedness and collectivistic responsibilities to one another within the society. While I studied in the city of Chiang Mai in Thailand (which has its state religion as Theravada Buddhism), I noted a lack of homeless people and asked a Thai friend of mine about it. She told me that there was a moral obligation to help others in need. Often, temples would help the homeless. The emphasis of family obligation to one another was great as well, with children taking care of their parents and living in the same house when their parents grew old. Monks, in fact, rely completely on the donations of others. They walk around the city in the morning to collect alms (small donations) of food and are not allowed to accept money. On the other hand, in the United States, the importance of the individual cannot be overstressed. There is a self-centered drive to succeed and success often comes at the expense of others. Instead of having multiple people succeed in the workplace, it is often a competition where one takes all. This individualistic outlook carries from the workplace to spiritual outlooks as well. A problem in today's spiritual environment is the lack of connectedness to others. Although there has been immense step forward in self-development and personal enlightenment, there has not been a

corresponding step in social consciousness and action. In the passage below, Rendon (2009) discusses this issue:

According to Carrette and King, today's view of spirituality with a focus on self-development and enlightenment is problematic and stems from the field of psychology, in particular from the work of William James, Gordon Allport, and Abraham Maslow. The problem is not so much focusing on the interior life of individuals but on closing off the individual from an awareness of interdependence and one's role in society. In the authors' view, today's spirituality, with a singular focus on self-development, is nothing more than another form of psychologized religion, privatized and commodified to serve modern corporate interests. When all we do is focus on our self-awareness without a concomitant emphasis on social consciousness and action, what remains is a self-serving, individual blindness to world needs....When perfumes are branded with "spiritual" names such as Zen, when corporations offer workshops on spiritual practice without acknowledging that certain business dealings are creating social injustice (low wages, limited worker benefits, and exploitation of land and resources, among many other examples), and when New Age products such as crystals and incense are sold for mass consumption and are designed to calm and make individuals feel good, this, according to Carrette and King (2005), allows people to disengage from the real social justice issues of the world and makes the individual function submissively and peacefully to advance the aims of a business-oriented ideology. "Religion is rebranded as 'spirituality' in order to support the ideology of capitalism" (Carrette & King, p.17), which is concerned with pure profits as opposed to real engagement, critical reflection, and action to address ethical and social issues. (p. 9).

Although it is beneficial for Americans to reflect and improve their own spiritual and emotional lives, it is still only the individual that is being helped. In order to develop wisdom, compassion must be practiced towards others. Otherwise, as discussed by Rendon above, spirituality will morph into yet another consumer product offering a skin-deep sensation of 'good-doing', without helping anything other than the pockets of the company selling it. This could be a topic of discussion while on the trip in which the question is posed whether an individual has a moral obligation to help others. Often, awareness is seen as an action, instead of an intellectual understanding. Being aware of an injustice is meaningless if the awareness does not lead to action. In relation to

Buddhism, being aware is not the same as being mindful. Being aware seems to be more of an intellectual grasping of an idea or concept whereas being mindful is a state of being in which all senses are immersed in the present experience. To be mindful of an injustice is to have an empathy for the suffering of the one suffering the injustice and to sincerely wish it to diminish as if it were one's own suffering. Compassion is the empathetic desire to aid someone in his or her suffering, with action accompanying the desire. With Taoism, the Tao is often regarded as neutral, not favoring the good or bad. In this way, compassion should be shown not only to those deserving of it but those that aren't deserving. In the *Tao Te Ching: An All-New Translation*, in a translation by Wilson (2013), Lao Tzu talks about how a Taoist is one who "is good to those who are good, and good to those who are not good" (p.87). It is easy to be compassionate to friends and loved ones but much more difficult to empathize and wish to help those who are mean and rude. However, to be in harmony with the Tao means to be neutral in our compassion, not selectively bestowing it.

Sentipensante pedagogy also focused on the need for social justice. Although empowering an individual is beneficial, it is even better to empower an individual to empower others. This goes into the view that there is a social obligation to help others. Similar to how many Asian communities are structured, it offers a more collectivistic view of life than the often self-oriented pattern of western society. A community is comprised of individuals and each individual's actions affect those within the community. If everyone practiced compassion along with wisdom and personal self-development, the community would be a much more loving environment.

The dilemma between personal, spiritual growth and the obligation to help others does not need to exist on opposite sides of a spectrum. In order to reach enlightenment in any of its stages, one must know suffering. To know suffering is to encounter people in the world. In an excerpt from an interview below, leading Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh (2003) responds to this dilemma of personal development and social change:

John Malkin: People often feel that they need to choose between being engaged in social change or working on personal and spiritual growth. What would you say to those people? □ □

Thich Nhat Hanh: I think that view is rather dualistic. The practice should address suffering: the suffering within yourself and the suffering around you. They are linked to each other. When you go to the mountain and practice alone, you don't have the chance to recognize the anger, jealousy and despair that's in you. That's why it's good that you encounter people—so you know these emotions. So that you can recognize them and try to look into their nature. If you don't know the roots of these afflictions, you cannot see the path leading to their cessation. That's why suffering is very important for our practice. □ (Malkin & Nhat Hanh, 2003, *Shambhalla*).

What use is there in reaching an enlightenment that is closed off from the troubles of the world? It is not applicable to the reality of daily life. When your attention comes back to the world, the suffering of others will be there. If one has only known the peace of a forest and felt enlightenment from that, how will he react when someone is yelling in his face or harming those he loves? We live in the world and are of it, for better or for worse. Buddha could have left the fig tree after enlightenment and never told anyone what he had discovered. He could have stayed in the palace for his whole life, with his wife and children, and perhaps become a good ruler. But the suffering would have remained for everyone else and his name would not be remembered today. It will be helpful to bring this idea of personal development and social change into discussion while on the trip, perhaps at a rest or during a meal, as the very environment in which these things are

being discussed is relevant. Group members will be able to meditate alone in nature but they will also be around other people, getting to experience the conflict that comes along with group dynamics. Buddhists sometimes get linked with the stereotypical image of an Asian monk, sitting in a temple high in the mountains, away from all civilization, deep in meditation. Solitary meditation is certainly an aspect of Buddhism. However, to be Buddhist is to transcend the suffering from the human condition that exists for everyone, in hopes that once this has been accomplished for one, it can then be accomplished by many. This is not by escaping others. Buddha first witnessed suffering in other people. Perhaps if he had never left his palace and seen the suffering in others, he might never have been set on the path to enlightenment to help end it.

Contemplative pedagogies focus on the importance of meditation and concentration activities in order to develop self-awareness. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (2007) defines contemplative pedagogy in the following passage:

Contemplative practices quiet the mind in order to cultivate a personal capacity for deep concentration and insight. Examples of contemplative practice include not only sitting in silence but also many forms of single-minded concentration, including meditation, contemplative prayer, mindful walking, focused experiences in nature, yoga, and other contemporary physical or artistic practices. We also consider various kinds of ritual and ceremony designed to create sacred space and increase insight and awareness to be forms of contemplative practice.

Through contemplative practice, such benefits as furthered self-awareness, “personal goodness and compassion, and an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life” can be developed, that can ultimately help people “develop greater empathy and communication skills, improve focus and concentration, reduce stress, and enhance creativity” (Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, 2007). Naropa University (2008) is another institute that

has adopted contemplative pedagogies and defines contemplative practice as the following:

Contemplative education is learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight, and compassion for oneself and others, honed through the practice of sitting meditation and other contemplative disciplines. The rigor of these disciplined practices prepares the mind to process information in new and perhaps unexpected ways. Contemplative practice unlocks the power of deep inward observation, enabling the learner to tap into a wellspring of knowledge about the nature of mind, self and other that has been largely overlooked by traditional, Western-oriented liberal education.

Developing these different ways to perceive the world can change your brain. In the essay “Buddhism Meets Western Science,” author and psychologist Gay Watson talks about how repeated cognitive practices can lead to physical changes in the brain, which consequently changes all resulting perceived experiences (2001). This means that by training yourself to think and perceive the world differently, your brain can undergo changes that will further change your thinking to fit into that pattern. An analogy often used is that of a garden. The brain is full of many thoughts such as a garden can have many plants. The decision lies with the individual in what plants to give attention to, whether the weeds or the beneficial plants. If one dwells on negative thoughts and practices, they will choke out the positive thoughts and practices, in the same way a weed can steal the life from a desired plant. Inversely, if much attention and care is given to the good plants, they will flourish. Most participants on this trip will most likely have never been exposed to eastern philosophy and the benefits of the thinking practices it offers and even if it is too foreign with them at the time, it might stay in their brain as a seed that they can grow later in life. Zen offers control by showing that the only thing in an individual’s control is how to think. The individual is the one with the power to change her life and how she perceives the world.

Now that the benefits and general activities of contemplative practices have been discussed, some examples and activities can further illustrate their practical use. Rendon (2009) interviewed several faculty members from different postsecondary schools about their experiences applying contemplative pedagogy. Practices ranged from stillness practices, in which meditation was used, movement practices, such as hiking in nature, and relational practices, such as storytelling and journaling. In one example, a math teacher takes a class out to the mountains to learn math. The student's perception of the effect of learning in the mountains was markedly contrasted with those who only learned in a classroom and they remarked that the environment was relaxing and beneficial for reflection. Another professor instructed students in meditation in order to help them "gain greater awareness of identity" (Rendon, 2009). A simple question was posed before the start of the meditation. Who am I? Students could sit or lounge however they liked and after an hour, they had fifteen minutes of free writing to reflect on their experience. Other questions were posed such as: "What do I love? How shall I live, knowing I will die? What is my gift to the family of this earth?" (Muller, 1997). This pedagogy will be employing similar practices such as different forms of meditation, with free journaling afterwards.

## Activities

### Activity 1:

#### Team Building Exercises

Team building exercises will be used in the beginning of the trip such as the human knot and traffic jam games (Duct Tape Teambuilding, n.d., Web). They're both pretty silly and will be judged accordingly for use but from experience as a co-leader on Poly Escapes, people are willing to do silly things for a laugh when on backpacking trips. Another fun bonding activity will be name introductions where you add an adjective before the name that starts with the same letter as the first letter of the name. For example, an adjective for Bob could be boring, brave, balderdash, ect. It helps people remember names as well as initiate group bonding.

### Activity 2:

#### Meditation and Self-Awareness

I plan on printing a page or two of different excerpts that I will then read to the group at different intervals, in which they can meditate or journal afterward by themselves, or in which they can break off into small groups and discuss. They can journal about it or we can openly discuss it among the group.

- 1) Talk about identity. Who am I? Am I a soul? Am I a mind? How should I live with the knowledge I will die?
- 2) The Four Noble Truths (as mentioned above in the background section)
- 3) Benefits of meditation:
  - a. Meditation has scientifically supported benefits, one of the foremost being stress reduction. In the *New York Times* article "Finding Happiness: Cajole

Your Brain to Lean to the Left,” author Daniel Goleman (2003) focused on the scientific experiments of Richard Davidson and Jon Kabat-Zinn “that document the benefits of mindfulness training in which the meditator views passing thoughts as an impartial and nonjudgmental observer. Meditation was found to affect brain activity in the left prefrontal cortex, which is associated with positive moods, such as being enthusiastic and energized, and low levels of anxiety” (Rendon, 2009, p. 30 – 31).

- b. From the website on *Contemplative education* of Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado:

Can meditation make you smarter?

Increasingly, the answer seems to be "yes."

- A 2005 study by a Harvard researcher showed that areas of the brain associated with attention, sensory awareness, and emotional processing were thicker in meditators.
- Research published in a 2009 edition of *The International Journal of Psychophysiology* demonstrated that college students who practiced transcendental meditation for ten weeks reported less sleepiness, anxiety, and irritability than the control group, plus they scored higher on a brain functioning test.
- Another study published in 2011 demonstrated similar findings: People trained in meditative techniques showed increased density in their brains, in regions associated with learning and memory, empathy, and compassion as compared to those in the control group. (Naropa University, 2013).

- 4) From the interview in magazine Shambhala with Thich Nhat Hanh (200):

John Malkin: In meditation practice, it is very common for us to feel that our minds are very busy and that we're not meditating very well. What do you have to say about this? □ □

Thich Nhat Hanh: Meditation is a matter of enjoyment. When you are offered a cup of tea, you have an opportunity to be happy. Drink your tea in such a way that you are truly present. Otherwise, how can you enjoy your tea? Or you are offered an orange—there must be a way to eat your orange that can bring you freedom and happiness. You can train yourself to eat an orange properly, so that happiness and freedom are possible. If you come to a mindfulness retreat, you will be offered that kind of practice so that you can be free and happy while eating your

orange or drinking your tea or out walking. □□ It is possible for you to enjoy every step that you make. These steps will be healing and refreshing, bringing you more freedom. If you have a friend who is well trained in the practice of walking, you will be supported by his or her practice. The practice can be done every moment. And not for the future, but for the present moment. If the present moment is good, then the future will be good because it's made only of the present. Suppose you are capable of making every step free and joyful. Then wherever you walk, it is the pure land of the Buddha. The pure land of the Buddha is not a matter of the future. (Malkin & Nhat Hanh, 2003, *Shambhalla*).

Below is a brief instruction on meditation.

- Find a comfortable position. Beware lying down as you may go to sleep.
- Focus on your breathing. In and out. In and out.
- Be an objective viewer of your thoughts. Don't tell yourself to NOT think because that does not work. Just watch your thoughts pass by and let them go.
- There is no such thing as failing at meditation.
- Let go of expectations.

“If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few.” (Suzuki, 1995).

All of these are different passages I will read at different meditation times so as to not overload the students and make meditation seem like some impossible or complicated feat.

### Activity 3:

#### Cone of Silence

During a break in the hiking or on a rest day once camp is set up, participants will be instructed to go in different directions and to find a place to observe nature. The cone of silence concept brought up by Kurt Hoelting, the owner of a company called Inside

Passages, which offers contemplative kayaking retreats, will be explained. This concept instructs on how to listen to the animal wildlife come back to an area one has disturbed.

Here is a paraphrase of the following advice from Kurt Hoelting (2013):

We humans make so much noise moving through the landscape that birds and other animals freeze and fall silent when they hear us coming, and don't resume activity until a while after we've passed.

Go out and find a place to sit, and sit still and silent for fifteen or more minutes, paying close attention to what is going on around you, including the soundscape.

Notice what happens after you've been still for a while, and see if the cone of silence begins to fill back up with sound and movement around them.

Focus on your own breathing if you get bored or distracted, and just watch and feel what emerges.

You can also combine this with some writing exercises if you like, jotting down things you notice and what you are feeling inside as you settle into your place.

#### Activity 4:

##### Walk alone

This is an activity that can be employed while hiking. From my experience of hiking in large groups, people tend to cluster together and socialize, which is positive as it helps group bonding. However, it also takes focus away from the environment in which you are hiking. Students will have a while to bond (this could be something to do on the way back or near the end of the first day) and then, after a sufficient time of bonding, they will be stopped and individually instructed to start walking, staggering them around 30 seconds to a minute apart from one another. This can go on for half a mile or so.

Afterwards, at a break, there can be talk about their reaction to walking alone versus in a group and how it relates to mindfulness. Below is a rough example of instructions for this exercise:

- We're going to break up the group and hike solo for the next half-mile or so.

- I'll stagger each of you about a minute apart. This will be an opportunity for each of you to see what it is like to hike alone.
- Be observant. Look around you. Don't get lost into your thoughts or if you have a busy mind, start to focus on your breathing.
- Use the same tactics as meditation. Be an objective viewer of your thoughts.
- I'll be going first so that I can decide when we should stop.

Activity 5:

Discussing group dynamics as a form of self-awareness/mindfulness

At the beginning of the trip, a discussion will be directed about the different stages of group formation as discussed in the article "Group Dynamics in the Himalayas." The five stages include: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Below are each of these stages in more depth:

1. Forming: "group members come to explore and understand the roles, goals, and task demands of the group."
  - a. Stage One: Group formation: the first time the group comes together and interacts, exchanging names.
  - b. Getting-to-know-you-stage: when group members start to spend time together and go through the small talk concerning their personal lives, with less formality and more joking.
2. Storming: "group members realize that their own expectations and those of the group do not coincide. A period of frustration and conflict develops."
  - a. Group confrontation: group conflict erupts. Earlier irritations coalesce and fights break out among group members.

3. Norming: a period of resolution in which “the group attempts to resolve problems, fortify emergent norms, and stabilize relationships within the group...group cooperation and group communication are prevalent.”
  - a. Group comfort: a routine is established and the group begins to be comfortable with one another, establishing roles for one another.
4. Performing: “the period when group energy focuses on the task at hand. There is a high level of work output and positive affect toward the group.”
  - a. Group saturation: an integral part of the trek is accomplished and the group celebrates. However, the newness has worn off and members of the group begin to think of home more often. Group spirits are still high but post-trek activities become more of a focus.
5. Adjourning: “occurs as the end of the group experience approaches.” The group members begin to focus on their accomplishment and focus on the return to normal life. Nostalgia and a sense of sadness concerning the end of the experience begin to set in.
  - a. Group coasting: although efforts are made to ease group tensions resulting from conflict, the near of the trip is ending and members put less effort into group cohesion and instead focus on the end of the trip.

As the group dynamics discussed in this article took almost twenty days to develop, there won't be enough time to perhaps see a full spectrum of the stages. However, what would be more interesting would be to have the group members know the stages and think of them as less sequential and more continuous. There can be multiple stages that occur in one day. Group members will be instructed prior to the start of the trip about group

dynamics and how they often change. During free time, they can journal about their perceptions of group dynamics and their role in the group. In essence, they can catalogue the emergence of group culture. This also relates to the concept of mindfulness in Buddhism. Participants will be forced to be mindful of their actions on the group and the group's on their own, and will be able to recognize which stage the group is falling into. As conflict is a stage of this process that they will be made aware of, it will be interesting to see if group members will try harder to maintain social harmony because of this knowledge. It can be an everyday goal to maintain and build group bonding. However, this exercise can go both ways and the instructors will need to judge the group beforehand concerning whether or not this activity should be employed. A more mature and cohesive group would be desired since it doesn't necessarily help knowing that conflict is a normal stage among groups when there is conflict. Expectations about group cohesion should not be expressed as a goal as that could create disappointment that the group didn't bond more.

#### Activity 6:

##### Compassion practices

The Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan Buddhist, spoke of compassion and happiness, saying "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Compassion can be defined in many ways but all definitions overlap in attributing it as an empathetic emotion that seeks to aid those who are suffering and to help eliminate/alleviate their suffering, as if it were your own suffering and not another's. In Buddhism, it takes wisdom and compassion to reach enlightenment. Each gives rise to the other. In order to better understand other people's suffering and feel compassion for

them, it can help to understand your own suffering. In this way, mediation and mindfulness practices are helpful as they help create self-awareness. However, there are also compassion-based practices. The list below is a few practices that can be very helpful to develop and practice compassion:

- 1) Wake up in the morning and meditate on thankfulness and positivity. It is hard to be grumpy when you are grateful. Grateful to have a bed to sleep in, food to eat, and people you love. Think about those you will encounter in your day and how you can be a positive force in their lives, whether it is just saying hello and smiling or listening to their problems.
- 2) Imagine the suffering of others. We all know what it is like to suffer. Take yourself out of the equation and visualize the suffering of those around you, such as a loved one close to you. Get detailed about this. After doing this for a few weeks, you can move on to people you don't even know, and eventually people you don't especially like. This is cultivating compassion without ego and without expectations of return.
- 3) Try to imagine you are someone else you've met and imagine his or her suffering. Reflect about how to end that suffering and how nice it would be if someone else wished for your suffering to end. This is cultivating a feeling that goes past empathy. This feeling that you want to end someone else's suffering is the beginning of ego-less compassion.
- 4) The Golden Rule: Practice being kind in small and big ways to those around you, in hopes of alleviating suffering in any way you can.

- 5) Evening meditation: Before going to sleep at night, think about the social interactions you had and how or if you helped ease suffering in any way during them. Reflect on what you have learned.

This is an activity that can be talked about while eating dinner together or taking a break where the group is together. This activity will also be best introduced after students are familiar with meditation, sometime around a few days into the trip.

**Conclusion**

Written surveys will be administered to each of the group members at the end of the trip.

The following is a tentative sample of the questions that will be asked.

- 1) Did you enjoy learning about Buddhism and Taoism on this trip?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Indifferent
  
- 2) What are your feelings about meditation? Do you feel like it was well presented?  
Was there any type of meditation that you preferred the most (sitting, walking, focused, mindfulness, compassion-based)?

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- 3) In your own words, how would you define mindfulness?

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- 4) What would you change about this trip?

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- 5) Of all the activities performed over this trip, which did you get the most out of and why?

END SURVEY

This paper serves as a framework for teaching the eastern philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Taoism on the trail. There are many different factors that go into a backpacking trip which determine dynamics and as such, this pedagogy will be followed as a guideline but it will ultimately be a continuous learning process for both the instructors and participants to see what resonates with each. With patience and mindfulness from the instructors, an introduction to Buddhism and Taoism can be very complimentary to the group dynamics and the wilderness environment in which it is being taught and can very well change the way participants view both themselves and the world.

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