

The yoga of posture practice, Hatha Yoga, is a remarkable activity. Rich in possibilities, potent in effects, it has the power to satisfy many desires, to fulfil many needs. It can keep our joints mobile and free. It can regulate our metabolic processes. It can enhance our immune system. It can energise and relax us. It can make us flexible, strong and fit. In combination all these things can make us feel and look years younger. It can satisfy our vanity in many ways. At the same time it can also satisfy our genuine needs: for mobility, vitality, health, confidence and tranquility. It can be a genuine panacea, adaptable to almost any need, compliant to almost any motive.

Remarkable though this is, it is not without its hidden dangers. The human body is much more than a tool, capable as it is of building computers, space rockets and cities. It is more than the most mobile form life has ever taken, capable as it is of building a watch, dancing Swan Lake and climbing Mount Everest. It is more than the most advanced neurology life has ever generated, capable of outstanding feats of perception, cognition and creativity. It is more, even, than the most sophisticated form that life has created to express itself through as art, technology, culture.

That more is the body's best kept secret. A secret that has been encountered only by a bold and relentless few. An encounter that has revealed, in the most satisfying way, the true nature and possibilities of the human body, and of being human. Hatha Yoga is one of the most profound expressions of that encounter. Yet, in its long, slow history Hatha Yoga has followed many, divergent possibilities. Many leading nowhere, many only to frustration, some even to despair.

Long ago Hatha Yoga lost track of the secret of the human body. Just as long ago Yoga became shrouded in the metaphysical mysteries favoured by those unable to bear the sharp and harsh textures of life and death. Most of us who enjoy the delights of yoga posture practice are only skimming the surface of its possibilities. It is undoubtedly satisfying to enjoy a lithe, strong body. It is equally satisfying to be so easily able to transform our mood, our energy. Yet there is much, much more to Hatha Yoga than that.

Enquiry is the fundamental expression of consciousness embodied in the sophistication of human neurology. It organises our experience into navigable proportions through the agency of the brain. This takes place first and foremost through the brain's ability to

recognise: to distinguish, identify, label and name. That which is identified is then categorised, analysed and integrated on the basis of memory into the brains simulations of the external world so that we can do more than merely survive. The depths of being human, the subtleties of the human body, can only be encountered if we undertake yoga posture practice as enquiry, and nothing else.

Even though enquiry is the natural and fundamental expression of consciousness as our natural intelligence, enquiring is not actually so easy to do as we have been powerfully educated to believe rather than think, to accept rather than to challenge. At the same time we have been taught to approach life as something difficult and dangerous that we need to bend to our will with effort, skill and knowledge. For genuine enquiry to take place we need to be able to relinquish our need, our desire to get something from our practice: no matter what it might be. We must not be caught by any ambition or intention, no matter how noble and righteous it may take itself to be. For the time we are on our mat we must surrender the awesome but wayward intelligence of mind to the simple and reliable intelligence of the body. We must surrender our ambitions to our capability.

For yoga posture practice to fully reveal the depths and subtleties of being human we need only enquire into that which is actually happening in and as the body. We need to channel the unconscious process of enquiry constantly taking place in the nervous system into a conscious exploration of the significance of the sensations that the body generates in the mind. By becoming intimate with the flow and nature of physical sensations we not only become able to respond to and nourish the body, but we simultaneously encounter the function and nature of both mind and consciousness. As we consciously encounter the experiential nonduality of body and mind we simultaneously encounter their nonduality with spirit¹. We do not need any special knowledge or skill for this to happen: we can not even make this happen. It happens necessarily and inevitably if and as we surrender our efforts and intentions into the natural inquisitiveness of our own intelligence within the context of our own body.

If yoga posture practice is not undertaken as enquiry it can only too easily turn against us and deepen the insecurity that upholds and expresses itself through vanity, ambition

¹ consciousness

and accomplishment. We are distracted from this enquiry by each and every other purpose or intention that motivates us to or on our mat. Letting go of these is not so easy, yet it must happen. As it will to the extent that we relax and settle down into that which is actually happening in and as our bodimind, rather than imposing on it sophisticated and seductive cultural ideals, ideologies and myths.

Enquiry as the spontaneous expression of our natural intelligence focusses itself through five active principles or lenses. These five principles are expressions of the fundamental consciousness without which life would be unable to distinguish between safe and dangerous stimuli. They are therefore at the root of our existence and need to become the foundation of our practice, if it is not to be hijacked by the anxieties, ambitions and assumptions of the disembodied mind. These five principles are yama, the first limb of yoga: sensitivity, honesty, openness, intimacy and acceptance².

Even though it is only in human beings that life is capable of self-consciousness and that consciousness is capable of knowing itself, all life is conscious, and expresses that consciousness through its ability to discriminate between the pleasures that it moves towards and the pains that it moves away from. This fundamental mechanism by which life found its way out of the primeval swamp is nothing other than sensitivity to sensation. A sensitivity which is an expression of consciousness as accurate discrimination. This discrimination is an implicit expression of honesty: cellular life can not afford to deceive itself about the nature of the chemicals, pressures and textures it is exposed to. In order to adapt to and be nourished by its environment an organism must not only be completely open to it but totally intimate with it. At the same time life must be, and is, completely generous in extending itself: have you ever awoken to find it wasn't here?

Yoga posture practice is based on action. For it to bear its deepest fruits these actions must be taken on the basis of their effects, without regard to any preconceived ideal or goal. We need to evaluate, respond to and refine our actions on the basis of our immediate experience, of what we are feeling. This depends not only on our being intimate with what is actually happening by being sensitive to sensation, but also being open and generous enough to be honest about what we are experiencing.

²ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, aparigraha

Sensitivity is the root by which the other qualities of consciousness, life and yama are revealed and nurtured. To the extent that sensitivity is available to us, in life as much as in practice, we become freed from the crippling dependency on information and knowledge that has drowned the legacy of yoga in so much meaninglessness and frustration.

Yama then is not a culturally derived behavioural or moral code: though it can easily be distorted into one by a mind that has lost touch with its implicitness in life and consciousness. The power of yama, on and off the mat, lies in treating it as a multifaceted lens to clarify what is actually happening and actually possible. Without it we are left stranded and struggling in the rumours and hearsay of those who came before us.

A lens is a very special kind of tool. We use it to clarify and reveal, not to create or change. It is designed and used to show us more clearly what is already actually present: yet this clarity naturally brings about wholesome change through the intrinsic power of conscious awareness to initiate integration. In yoga posture practice we need to feel more clearly what is happening in and as our body. By feeling more clearly what is happening in our body we become simultaneously intimate with what is happening as our mind, recognising what is happening as our body. At the same time we are also becoming intimate with the intelligence of consciousness as the light of awareness by which the sensations of the body and the interpretations of mind are revealed.

Yoga posture practice then becomes an enquiry that leads not only to intimacy with the intrinsic unity of body, mind and spirit, but also to the inherent nonduality of finite and infinite, individual and universal, self and other. This intimacy depends on the ability of our actions to bring about integration; which itself depends on the balance of action in the whole body.

Yoga posture practice takes place in and through the body. By deliberately changing the relationships between our body parts and then experiencing what happens as we maintain them, profound and potent changes take place. These changes can be muscular, structural, physiological, neurological, energetic, emotional, psychological and or spiritual. Yet all of these changes result from what we have done with our bodies. This means that the fundamental, practical context of our practice is the nature of the human body. Whatever benefits our practice can offer, they depend on the design of the

body to do so. The human design is the fruit of three million five hundred thousand years of life on this planet. Three million five hundred thousand years of trial and error, research and development that constitute a remarkable legacy of success. Life has wriggled, crawled, walked, skipped, run and danced its way to the human form over a very long time. The fruits of that incredibly long process are encoded into every cell of our body as our DNA.

There are and have been billions of human beings, and each one unique. Yet each one is a particular variation of the remarkable genetic code of the human species. Our genetic legacy as human beings is not only different from all others, but offers far more possibilities of almost every kind. As a species we have a greater potential range of movement, action perception, cognition, conceptualisation, imagination, and creativity than any other species.

Yet at the same time we each one of us access that potential differently, and in a limited way. None of us are individually able to embody the full spectrum of human potential. Too much learning would be required, as our capabilities are limited as much by our experience as they are by the unique variant of human DNA that exists in our own cells. The human DNA that we each bear provides individual limits to our possibilities alongside the collective limitations that genetically define our species. Yet what we actually become able to do is based also on our personal experience.

Genetics and experience set limits on the possibilities of our practice. We can not know exactly what they are, nor do we need to. We are never going to be able to fly, though we may be able to float into a handstand and glide back down into an arm balance. Yet we do have an incredible potential for movement. More so by far than any other species. As a species we can dance the tango, tie shoelaces, break dance, play cricket, make a watch and climb mountains. As an individual we will never do more than one or two of these things with virtuosity.

However not all of the movements we can make are equal. Some entertain us, some challenge us, some weaken us, some energise us, some nourish us. Most human activities have a specific and limited cultural end. Yoga posture practice can be used to achieve some of those cultural goals. Achieving them may give us satisfaction, acceptance, admiration, fame, pride, wealth or power. In doing so however they may

well compromise our mobility, humility, health and well being. Yet yoga posture practice has much more to offer us even than that.

Human verticality takes us into a unique relationship with gravity. By raising us further from the ground than our forebears it extends our sensory possibilities while increasing our vulnerability. This vulnerability is compensated for by motor nerve loops between muscles and the spine that do not involve the brain, and therefore do not require conscious control. All our motor and structural muscles and joints are highly sensitive to gravity. This sensitivity allows them to 'know' where they are in relationship to each other as well as to the ground. It also allows them to respond to changes in those relationships without the help of the brain. The lengthening of the spine, palate, arms, legs and feet and the broadening of the feet and hands develops neuromuscular pathways that can and do activate without requiring conscious intent.

When we lift and open the ribcage our centre of gravity rises. This makes us more vulnerable to gravity. As a direct, organic response unconscious, involuntary muscular activity lowers our centre again. This diminishes our vulnerability. If we are standing this response takes place in any or all of the available muscles of feet, legs, and abdomen. If the legs and feet are not available it takes place only in the abdomen. When the abdominal response is subtle and deep it is nothing other than Mulabandha. Keeping the ribcage away from the pelvis, if it does not compromise the lower back, is Merubandha, and it naturally includes Uddyanabandha, Mulabandha and Jalandharabandha.

Despite their significance to yoga posture practice, the bandhas are not cultural phenomenon. They have not been invented, but discovered. When you reach up to change a light bulb the raising of your centre of gravity will activate the musculature of mulabandha and padabandha, while the musculature of uddyanabandha and hastabandha will more directly take care of what you are doing. As expressions of the somatic intelligence of the human body they can be most simply described as life's response to active verticality. These responses take place in the whole body, not only the trunk. However they may be described, the bandhas can be experienced as structural and energetic supports resulting from muscular activity. After all muscular contraction is the only active process available to the human body. Anything else is either a direct or indirect impact of muscular activity, a passive chemical reaction or imaginary.

Bandha means support or harness because that is what they do. The use of the arch in ancient Greece and Rome was not an expression of aesthetic taste. Without the use of reinforced steel girders it is the only way to build tall structures with openings in them. The arch is in effect nature's bandha, the curve allowing load not only to spread but to become an expression of strength rather than weakness. It is most obviously in the hands and feet when they bear the full weight of the body that we can feel and see the bandhas as arches and supports. Yet we can also feel the same curved lifting in the pelvic floor and solar plexus, and more subtly in the throat.

The first limb of yoga practice is the sensitivity, honesty, openness, intimacy and acceptance of yama. If we are able to bring these qualities to our practice it can take us to the deep heart of being human, and thereby provide a satisfaction that no amount of worldly achievement can compare with. This depends entirely on our honouring the unique potential designed into our genetic code. To access and be nourished by that potential we must learn to hear and respond to the wisdom of the body speaking as it does through sensation. Our practice must be a somatic enquiry into the action and movement potential of our body as it actually is, moment by moment. This potential may have little or nothing to do with what we would like to be able to do. It may even be quite different to what we could do yesterday: especially if we have been drunk, threatened, sleepless or worried in between, our potential for movement may well be less today than it was yesterday.

Our mind may well be where we process some of the data revealed by the experience of our body. Yet it is the potential of the body for action that we are using in and as yoga posture practice. This potential is accessed and expressed only through muscular contraction: nothing else. We have hundreds of muscles. Each of which can contract in association with many others. This gives us almost endless possibilities of action. Each one of which is based always and only on muscular contraction. The evaluation of distance by the brain is based on the amount of muscular activity in the eyes. As muscles contract they establish vectors of force and heat into the connective tissue, organs and skin. Many of these forces can be felt. They are felt always and only as sensations.

It is by sensations that you know something is happening, that something is changing in your body. Sensation is the language of the body through which it expresses itself continuously, immediately, directly and uncompromisingly. Even though most of these

sensations are unconscious and never felt, our body is not talking only to itself through them, but to the mind also. For your body to be heard by your mind you need to be listening. This means you need to be giving priority to feeling not thinking. In yoga posture practice thinking must always and only be at the service of feeling, action, movement and sensation. Otherwise the body will be imposed on by the different interests and agendas of the mind, and our habituated fragmentation will be deepened.

The body speaks a very simple language that in its simplicity is remarkably powerful. It is a binary language, like that of a computer, based on only two inputs: pain and pleasure. The body knows no 'ifs, buts or maybes'. This single polarity of only two elements is enough to drive the power of evolution all the way to the awesome sophistication and creative virtuosity of your body: just as it is all that is required to send a rocket to the moon. The power of this simplicity can easily be overlooked and overrun by the sophisticated virtuosities of the mind. As a result of this tendency we have become collectively alienated from the intelligence, power and nature of our bodies. This must change if our yoga posture practice is not to fall foul of the compelling ambitions and hidden insecurities of the mind.

This can only happen if our practice is given over to the wisdom of the body, by way of the sensations being generated in the nervous system through the agency of the pain-pleasure mechanism. This cellular mechanism is the engine of biological survival and the fundamental intelligence of the body. It is continuously distinguishing between stimuli in every cell of your body. Without it you would die. Any cell or tissue that loses this ability is already dying. It distinguishes between oxygen and nitrogen, between oxygen and carbon dioxide. It distinguishes between pressure and release, between hot and cold, between hard and soft, between dull and sharp, between motion and stillness. It allows the mind to distinguish between up and down, in and out, forwards and backwards. All of which are particularised expressions of the fundamental pain pleasure polarity.

The body as a whole and in all of its parts navigates from a cellular level through the pain pleasure mechanism. We naturally and necessarily move and close away from pain, while we move and open towards pleasure. This is an organic imperative that has ensured biological survival since the origins of life that still functions within all of our movements and actions. At the heart of which are the sensory-motor nerves that form

a single circuit connecting motor and sensory neurons in the body and brain. Sensations of motion, pressure, temperature travel the nerve pathways that simultaneously guide our movements. Most of this happens unconsciously. Yet its overall effects become conscious and involve the mind and its decision making process.

It is here, where the mind has access to this mechanism, that our problems begin. The body never lies. It always knows exactly what it is experiencing, what it needs and how to most effectively go about it given its current resources and capabilities. This intelligence is our genetic legacy and is infallible, except in the case of cells that are corrupt or dying. It is a direct, continuous expression of the wisdom of life with its three million five hundred thousand year track record. Neither the intelligence of our body, nor the wisdom of life that it expresses through the pain pleasure mechanism, can ever be excelled, or even equalled, by the mind: no matter how many books it has read and remembered.

Yet our mind is at least as sophisticated as our body. It is endowed with a remarkable intelligence that has a scope that goes far beyond the needs and abilities of the body. It is able to recognise, compare, analyse, categorise, associate, evaluate anything it encounters. It is able to do this consciously and unconsciously. It is able to do this continuously, even when we are asleep. It can know about the structure of the lungs, it can understand the universal gravitational force, it can understand how to build a space rocket, it can name all the bones in the human body.

Yet this incredible intelligence is limited when it comes to the body. Your mind can never know how much oxygen there is in your blood, nor its implications in terms of muscular contraction. It can never know how much water there is in your cells. Yet your body knows this all the time, and much, much more. The intelligence of the body may well be more limited in scope than that of the mind. Yet when it comes to itself it is infallible and unsurpassable. When it comes to the body the mind must function as observer, learner and enjoyer. In that capacity it has two fundamental options: to help or hinder the body. It must never be used to direct nor control the needs or capabilities of the body, as this will only maintain the sense of alienation and separation that is at the heart of human suffering.

In the pursuit of our cultural imperatives we have been unconsciously but systematically damaging our bodies. We have been damaging the ligaments of our

knees by driving cars. We have been distorting our shoulder and pelvic girdles by carrying bags over one shoulder. We have been weakening our lower backs by wearing high heels. We have been weakening our thoracic spine by over developing our pectoral muscles in the gym. We have been weakening our core muscles by sitting in chairs.

In order to do this we have had to override the inherent intelligence of the body. We have been ignoring, suppressing and losing touch with its sensations. We have become deaf and blind to the wisdom of life speaking to us through its simple, binary language. We are no longer able to accurately and effectively interpret sensations. When we are lonely or sad we tell ourselves we are hungry. When we are tired we keep on watching the movie. When we are dehydrated we reach for another coke. We have become alienated from the wisdom of our bodies.

Given that our body is not just a material vehicle, this is an incalculable loss. In becoming alienated from the wisdom of our body, we have also lost touch with its deepest, most fruitful possibilities and gifts. We have forgotten who we are, and lost touch with the means to remember. We are left alienated from the intelligence upon which we depend, that of life functioning in and as our body. Within this alienation we flounder in the hyperactivity of mind easy prey to any promise of a better beyond. Masking our alienations as deeply as we can, we reach out for the flimsiest metaphysical straw to cling to. It doesn't work. What we need is to return to what we already have, what we already are. We must open the door of the body. This is what the bandhas are for.

No matter where we look, we are looking at life. When we look into space we see its roots. When we look at a silicon chip we see its fruits. Life is only possible on this planet because our solar system formed exactly the way that it did within this spiral galaxy in its particular universe over billions of years. This is a significant legacy for us to inherit. We are not here by our own power, but as an agent of life. The most sophisticated, promising, dangerous agent life has so far produced.

Issuing from the slow and patient womb of life, being human partakes directly of her qualities. While the most obvious of these may be the diversity and complexity of life, they mask a more fundamental and significant simplicity and unity. At heart life, and being human, is an indivisible wholeness from which nothing can be taken away, and to which nothing can or need be added. The indivisibility of this wholeness does not

reveal itself easily to the fragmenting tendency of the human mind. Nonetheless it is present and continuously expressing itself.

As human beings it expresses itself through the human body, which is the finest fruit of more than three thousand million years of evolution. Your body is more than the tool you use it as. It is also the most intelligent and creative expression of the indivisible wholeness of life through which it most potently and consciously expresses itself. It is only through the human mind that life has become clearly enough aware of itself to be troubled by the dualities of life and death. We are the mind of life reflecting upon itself through the sophisticated neural circuitry of our bodies. Body, mind and consciousness meet in us, and only in us can their inherent unity be revealed.

This revelation is yoga, and it is to this underlying unity that the word yoga itself most directly and deeply points. For it is only from the sense of separation that union is necessary or possible. The experience of our separateness dissolving is one of reunification with something bigger and deeper. Yet this is a momentary experience that brings us back to the ground overlooked within the sense of separateness.

What we are brought back to is no sense of self or other, better or worse, differentiation or separation. This is unity, within which all oppositions are resolved, all dualities dissolved. This unity is yoga and is always present, though overlooked, even within our sense of separation. It does not have to be achieved or accomplished, only found and recognised. There is perhaps no more powerful way to find and recognise this than the application of the bandhas to yoga posture practice.

The unity³ of life is expressed and mirrored in the intrinsic unity of being human: the inherent identity of body, mind and spirit. The human body is the outer sheath within and through which the unity of life expresses itself as the awesome potential of being human. It is here, in the body, that yoga uncovers and honours the inherent unity of being human. There is no escape from this. Even the deepest meditation of the most accomplished mystic takes place in the human body. The separations that we can make between mind, body and spirit, between impulse and reason, between desire and intent are made in the mind, by way of the brain. They do not actually exist anywhere else.

³ the singularity of its indivisible wholeness

It took Einstein to show us that matter and energy differ only in degree, it takes the bandhas to show us that energy and consciousness differ in exactly the same way. If the human body, in its indivisible wholeness, cannot be seen to be a natural, organic temple, mosque, synagogue, cathedral yoga will elude us and be replaced by twisted mythologies of hope, frustration and despair. There is no more potent recipe for despair than to separate body from mind, to set the physical against the spiritual. Within the unity of life, body and mind, matter and spirit are the front and back, the indivisible cover and content of being human.

Despite its enormous success the human body still remains a mystery to those who have no key to unlock its secret. Yet to those who have there is no mystery about the relationship between body, mind and spirit. To clarify the relationship between body, mind and spirit we must plunge into the depths of our body. We do this by becoming as sensitive and responsive as possible to the sensations being generated by our practice. As specific sensations become familiar we become less fascinated by them and tend to notice them less. Then, if we are still interested in what is actually happening inside us, our attention is taken deeper and deeper. We start to notice, identify and recognise the implications of deeper and more subtle sensations. Eventually we find ourselves absorbed in a depth of perception, in a realm of experience, that seems to have very little to do with our recognised senses. We find ourselves in the depths of the 'subtle body' encountering qualities and energies that rarely participate in conscious human experience.

As we become more intimate with the sensations actually taking place in and as our body, we begin to feel them more clearly, more directly. As we follow the flow of sensation inwards we soon begin to recognise that we are simultaneously following the contours of mind. We begin to realise that the conscious sensations being generated in and as the body are being interpreted in and as mind. As our experience of sensation becomes more direct, more immediate, more intimate these interpretations become more simple and concrete. The more intimate we become with sensation, with the body, the more accurate and direct mind becomes in its interpretations. In doing so it becomes more focussed, more present, more quiet. The activity of mind begins to reflect more directly, and more consistently the activity of the body, and the intelligence of consciousness. As we recognise this we are actually becoming intimate with mental activity, with mind. Intimacy with body as sensation necessitates and generates

intimacy with mind as perception. A conscious sensation is always a perception, an event taking place as and in both body and mind.

We begin to see that any experience of sensation always involves interpretation. We recognise that mind must participate in the recognised presence of the body. We realise that mind and body are synchronous in our experience of sensation, in our experience in general. We begin to experience and realise body as a function of mind. This is not a matter of definition, but of how we experience it. We cannot experience our finger without mind imposing its interpretation on the sensations we are experiencing at the end of our hand.

In our conscious experience of the body, mind and body are one. Yet they are not alone in this unity. Something else is showing the way. We can not feel, think, know anything without awareness. Awareness is the light of consciousness, necessary to all conscious experience. By becoming intimate with sensation we are not only becoming intimate with mind. We also become intimate with consciousness itself.

In yoga posture practice we are dealing primarily with the flow of changing sensations and their ongoing interpretations. As our attention internalises specific sensations begin to become more and more clear. They stand out from others more and reveal their inherent, differentiating characteristics more clearly. They take on their own definite, particular qualities. Then, as we become even more intimate with them, they begin to lose their definiteness, their distinctiveness.

This happens to all sensations. As we approach them they begin to stand out, but as we get even closer they begin to fade. When the gap between observer and observed is as close as it can be while the two remain, all sensations reveal the same inherent, subtle qualities. These qualities are those of sensation itself encountered so deeply that the limits of differentiation have been reached and we are left in the soft, warm, spacious delight of nothing in particular. This is the ground of sensation itself, which is nothing other than the recognised presence of consciousness itself.

Within this intimacy it becomes delightfully clear that just as body is not separate from mind, it is not separate from consciousness either. We realise that the distinctions between body, mind and consciousness are functional conventions necessary to deliberate navigation, but not defining the way things actually are.

Consciousness is the context within which all existence takes place, as well as the context within which all awareness takes pace. It is consciousness that we finally encounter when we become so intimate with particular sensations that we encounter sensation itself. Within this encounter we are experiencing the inherent unity of body, mind and spirit. A unity, or wholeness, which is fundamental to any and all of the functional differences that the mind can, and must, make in order for it to learn to navigate the world.

Our experience of life, of the world is one of unique events and discrete actions involving individual objects. It is one of fragmentation, separateness, individuality, autonomy. Yet this is actually only the surface appearance. Every event and action is actually a unique node in an indivisible wholeness⁴ of actions and events binding every object into a seamless unity. Locked in to our sense of separation on the surface of life as we are by effort, tension and habit we lose sight of the indivisible wholeness of this totality. We think and act as if fragmentation is the nature of reality, and causation is as local as our awareness is superficial⁵. We have only incoherent notions about how things actually happen.

As we become intimate with body, mind and consciousness we start to feel the support of everything around us, even the things we don't understand or enjoy. Within the trust that this generates we clearly recognise the totally conditioned nature and universal origin of all our thoughts, feelings and actions. This allows us to see through the illusion of local origination and limited causation. We feel and see clearly the inextricable, irreplaceable nature of every element of the matrix of wholeness: object, action and perception. Independence, autonomy and volition reveal their illusory nature. We become able to see that nothing happens by chance or accident: that everything is in its rightful place necessitated by the indivisible wholeness of all that exists. Eventually, perhaps, we see clearly the singular source of every action, and the singular power⁶ functioning through every object. We recognise and become absorbed into the

⁴ classically known in India as Indra's net

⁵ for an incisive take on this see the works of Spinoza

⁶ known by some as the Will of God

indivisibility of wholeness⁷, no longer insisting on our independent autonomy, feeling fully supported by the flow of life just as it is.

In yoga posture practice we are navigating only a very small, though to us very significant, part of the matrix of wholeness. We are learning to navigate our body so that it can play its part in our life more fully, more satisfyingly. This is not simply a matter of recovering and releasing its potential for movement and action. The body is more than a tool and a vehicle. The human body is the fruit of the long journey of life. The wisdom of life, accumulated during that journey, is encoded into your body at a cellular level. This wisdom is guiding your body, your actions your movements. Life, as your body, knows how to take care of itself: it knows how to use gravity; it knows how to navigate space. You do not need to teach it. What you need do is access, recognise and honour the inherent intelligence and integrity of your body. The most simple, direct and fruitful way to do this is to activate the bandhas in the whole of your body.

Nature has left human beings an impressive legacy: three thousand five hundred million years of trial and error lie behind the human design. The human body works the way that it does because the way that it does works. The basic situation in which it has to do this work is physical space. Within space all objects must respond to the inescapable presence of gravity. The essence of this response is resistance. The structure, shape, materials and motions of the human body function together to resist, and thereby use, the captive power of gravity as a force of support and source of stability.

Human verticality is inherently vulnerable to the pull of gravity. A pull which must be continuously resisted. When we lie asleep most of this resistance comes from the constituency and arrangements of the different body tissues. When we sit up, muscular contraction begins to play a more significant role. When we stand up and move even more so. The need to resist gravity is taken care of automatically, mainly through feedback loops that do not involve the brain.

Nevertheless we are born only with the potential to move, not with specific neuromuscular pathways determining particular movements. We have to learn how to move through practice. Much of what we have learned, even in yoga posture practice, is

⁷ ishvarapranidanah

stressful, weakening or even directly harmful. These habits of movement can be unlearned, their neuromuscular pathways can be dissolved. At the same time we can learn new, skilful, nourishing ways to move on the basis of neuromuscular pathways of integrity. We do not have to have any anatomical, physiological or neurological knowledge to develop neuromuscular pathways of integrity. The human body already has its inherent integrity, which is the result of three thousand five hundred million years of research and development. This integrity acts through and as a remarkable somatic intelligence that is encoded into every cell as DNA. This intelligence not only continuously takes care of our need for oxygen, but also of all our other physiological requirements.

The way that we move and act is not only determined genetically, but by experience as well. The way in which we have moved shapes the way that we will move by way of neuromuscular pathways that we have developed over a lifetime. Underlying them all is the intelligence of our genetic design. Yet this intelligence has been challenged by the demands of our socialisation into the unique gestures, habits and capabilities that define us. The demands of our socialisation have very little to do with the needs of our body to act from its inherent integrity, and so the exact shape and capabilities of our body rarely reflect the inherent integrity of our design. Instead we are each equipped with a vast range of learned neuromuscular pathways that vary considerably in both their efficiency and integrity.

We can all develop new neuromuscular pathways of integrity simply by learning patterns of action and movement that directly express the inherent integrity of our genetic design. We can do this by letting go of external, cultural intention and giving simple movements to the inherent intelligence of our body. We do this by feeling and responding to the physical sensations generated by conscious, sensitive actions and movements. This is the essence of yoga posture practice, within which movement and action can become more and more sophisticated and complex as we develop new neuromuscular pathways of integrity for the whole of our body and its full potential for movement.

By feeling clearly and responding directly to sensations we can allow the inherent intelligence of our body to establish action and movement on the basis of its inherent integrity. Thereby we invite and allow our body to move and act in the way that most directly expresses its intrinsic design. This invitation can be deeply supported by our

recognising the integrity and intelligence of that design. Only then can our yoga posture practice bring about genuine and deep integration. This integration begins somatically as the substitution of old neuromuscular pathways and their underlying engrams for new ones.

Our muscles and nerves need to be re-educated, but this education must be based on the inherent integrity and intelligence of our design, which expresses themselves through sensation. It must not be captured by the limited knowledge and inadequate intelligence of the mind. This process of re-education is one in which we access the functional and structural dynamics of the human design. The application of these dynamics to the actions and movements that constitute yoga postures releases old dysfunctional neuromuscular habits, and replaces them with new integrated ones. This brings about functional and structural reintegration. This takes time and requires the continuous application of sensitive effort. This re-education then comes off our mat and into our daily life.

By the time we are young children our posture and movements are primarily taken care of through the autonomic nerves. As we deliberately move our bodies our bones are continuously re-established in the most stable possible relationship with gravity that our actions and current muscular capacity permits. This autonomic process always uses the least possible effort, which is determined by the limitations of habit as much as the efficiency of genetic design. The necessary interplay of muscular contraction and release is taken care of below the threshold of our awareness. We would not have the time to do it all deliberately and consciously. Muscles that we can activate voluntarily are continuously being activated automatically in response to the changing impact of gravity and the changing relationships between our body parts.

Of course, when we are learning new movements this is not the case. Both as an infant learning the basics of movement and action, and as an adult acquiring specialised cultural skills, including yoga posture practice, we need to be both deliberate about our actions and conscious of their impacts. As we repeat the desired actions and movements more efficient neuromuscular pathways are created. This allows the movements to become unconscious and automatic.

Once a movement has been learned it always uses the minimum effort, glucose and oxygen possible. Even so, the actual efficiency of our effort is not only determined by the

muscular and energetic condition of the moment. It is also deeply determined by the efficiency of the learning process by which it was established. If that process has been one of struggle and imposition then our effort will be wasteful of energy, oxygen and glucose, and our movements troublesome, while our practice will not be nourishing.

Our bodies, and no less our minds, have become deeply distorted and fragmented by cultural pursuits: whether this is mastering the art of tennis, or spending hours seated at a computer or sewing machine. We have applied the motion potential of the human design to so many actions and movements that are not, and cannot be, nourishing or integrating. The reality is that we have all accumulated numerous habituated, unconscious movement patterns that are inherently inefficient. Yet their unconscious activation through well established neuromuscular pathways is always automatic, and as efficient as its learned habits permit.

Yet the inherent integrity and intelligence of the human design and body is active and available as long as we remain alive. Effective yoga posture practice must access that intelligence and integrity, that are in fact functioning all the time, but only as effectively as our intentions and habits permit. It is only as a result of learned habit that the inherent intelligence of the body turns against itself. Yet this does not have to remain the case. We can establish new patterns of movement and action based on intelligent and efficient neuromuscular pathways. These neuromuscular pathways must be expressions of the natural intelligence and integrity of the human body. They cannot be based on culturally conceived ideals of quantified geometrical relationships based on measurements of distances and angles. They must be based on the dynamics of life itself.

The organic expression of these dynamics can easily be recognised by direct observation of animals moving, not least human beings. While our functional design is unique in its verticality, it has a structural design in common with all quadrupeds. Having four points of contact with the ground they are intrinsically more stable in their movements and actions than we are. Nevertheless they respond to gravity in fundamentally the same way that we do. The dynamics of structural and functional integrity are common to all animals, even though our functional verticality gives them unique implications for us as human beings.

It is muscular contraction that moves our bones through space. It is muscular contraction that holds us still when we are not on the floor. It is muscular contraction that articulates our foundation into the ground to keep us stable. It is muscular contraction that articulates our joints to mobilise us. Muscular contraction is in continuous resistance to the pull of gravity, whether we are in motion or at rest. This resistance can be seen to be doing two fundamental things, simultaneously and continuously. It is grounding our foundation to make us stable, while it is mobilising our joints to allow us to move.

If we pay attention to this process, in yoga posture practice, or daily life, we can extract a few very simple, universal principles of action governing our movements, and no less our stillness. These are the inherent dynamics of functional integrity upon which deeper structural integrity depends. These functional dynamics can be expressed, assisted and reinforced through their deliberate application to the relationships between our bodyparts as we act and move: especially during yoga posture practice.

These dynamics express themselves through the following five principles:

- *Ground what needs to be grounded*
- *Broaden what can be broadened*
- *Lengthen what can be lengthened*
- *Use the minimum possible effort necessary to do so*
- *So that the body is as stable and comfortable as possible*

All life forms depend in their own way on these principles: they do not belong to the human body, let alone yoga posture practice. We can even see this grounding in the roots of a tree or a rose bush. We can equally see the broadening and lengthening in the branches and foliage of the same tree, or the stem and petals of a rose. They are no less active and visible in the motions of an elephant or a leopard, than they are in any human being. While grounding is the basis of our stability, broadening and lengthening provide the release that is the heart of physical comfort. Our bodies always ground what needs to be grounded, broaden what can be broadened and lengthen what can be lengthened as efficiently as possible. However this efficiency has been severely limited by cultural habits that have locked us into limiting neuromuscular pathways of movement and action.

Yet our efficiency in the moment also depends on the quality of effort underlying our movements and actions. The fact is that we have become deeply habituated to aggression. Not only in our intentions but also in our everyday actions, such as opening or closing a door. We are almost continuously over contracting our muscles and generating unnecessary tightness and hardness. Letting go of this habit is at the heart of effective yoga posture practice and the Dynamics of Integrity. We must retrain the body to act as efficiently as possible by always applying the minimum possible muscular effort necessary in our practice.

*This does not mean the minimum possible muscular effort, which is always nothing, and would lead to structural collapse. The amount of effort required is defined by the movement or action being made. Only that amount **necessary** to bring it, and its impacts, about is required: no more and no less. The minimum necessary muscular effort then is the precise middle path between over exertion and under exertion. It brings about the required effect with the minimum effort and oxygen requirement, making no unnecessary demands on the muscles involved, not least the diaphragm. Only this allows our nervous system and attention to internalise deeply enough for our practice to bear its ripest fruits, as overexertion increases our oxygen debt while decreasing our sensitivity, so that as our breathing becomes deeper and heavier, our awareness becomes correspondingly externalised with our diminishing sensitivity. This can only hinder our practice.*

In order to use only the minimum possible muscular effort necessary we must feel sensations clearly. We must be able to feel the quality of our grounding, broadening and lengthening and their impacts. This is the first principle of the Dynamics of Integrity: be sensitive to your actions and their impacts. Feel where you need to ground, broaden and lengthen; feel what happens as you do so. For sensitivity (ahimsa) is the fundamental intelligence and foundation of life. We must be able to feel clearly what the body is saying in response to our actions, in order to be able to refine our activity. Otherwise we will be imposing new, superficial, habits on old, deeper ones. Only by being sensitive to the intelligence of the body, by feeling sensation clearly and deeply, can yoga take place.

Our breathing is perhaps the most habitually inefficient muscular process in the body. Beginning from the first slap used to kick start our respiration under the glare of hospital lights, our respiratory muscles carry the imprint of a lifetime's shock and pain.

Locked into unconscious patterns of tension and defensiveness our respiratory muscles can sometimes consume almost as much energy as they provide.

Because our respiratory muscles are simultaneously structural muscles they can be released and recalibrated by establishing the bandhas in the whole body. As they are we can leave them to the inherent intelligence of the body. We do not need to control our breathing. We do not, and can not, have enough information or knowledge to do so effectively. The body always does, and will use the knowledge it has as much as we let it. We let it do so by leaving our breathing alone.

This gives us seven principles to guide our practice in the Dynamics of Integrity:

- *Be sensitive to your actions and their impacts*
- *so that you are as stable and comfortable as possible*
- *by using the minimum necessary muscular effort possible*
- *to softly broaden whatever can be broadened*
- *and softly lengthen whatever can be lengthened*
- *and softly ground what needs to be grounded*
- *while allowing your breath to flow freely*

To the extent that we use these Dynamics of Integrity, we will simultaneously release unskilful movements and actions, while developing new, skilful ones. This can only happen if we are not using our practice to satisfy psychological or cultural drives that bear no relationship to the actual needs and capabilities of our body. In effect yoga practice can only nourish and enrich us if it is directed to establishing functional and structural integrity. This can only happen if we use the Dynamics of Integrity as our compass for navigating the functional and structural subtleties of yoga postures.