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The word yoga shares the same root as the English word yoke, and is usually translated as meaning union. This refers to a state in the human being in which body and mind are fully integrated, forming one indivisible whole whose many facets function in harmony with each other.

The very definition of the word yoga—and indeed the increasing prevalence of the practice in contemporary society—implies that our habitual state is something *other* than integration. Just a superficial glance at the shape of contemporary life confirms this, for what is most apparent is the deep and pervasive sense of anxiety that underlies the various projects geared toward achieving security, whether through the acquisition of material possessions or through the attainment of status or power. That these attempts to eradicate insecurity through external means are failing us is evidenced by the fact that in the midst of unprecedented material wealth and technological power, we have only become less secure, less internally fulfilled, less connected to the natural environment, less trusting of each other, and further fragmented within ourselves.

At the source of this rampant insecurity lies an unconscious belief in the fundamental separateness of body and mind. A powerful inheritance from the Age of Enlightenment, this belief has persisted not only in imposing a division on our experience of self, but also in our over-identification with the mind and our devaluation of the body. Because of our fascination with the uniquely human—and undoubtedly great—capacity for objective reasoning, symbolizing, and abstract thought, we seem to have lost sight of the fact that we are also embodied, and that being embodied is the key to our connection with physical reality. Unless we can learn to truly dwell in the body, we will be relegated to the vicious circle of dissatisfaction perpetuated by our obsession with the future and past to the exclusion of the present, and we will continue to ascribe more value to symbols than we do to the tangible things which they actually represent.

The practice of yoga is essentially about coming back home to the body. Far from being about attaining, acquiring, or achieving things we do not yet have, yoga is, in the simplest and most profound sense, about remembering. With the physical practice of the Hatha yoga poses, we are reminded *experientially* that we are inseparable from both the ground of the earth and the larger ground of being. By re-inhabiting those parts of the body that we have unconsciously abandoned, the illusion of being separate both from ourselves and the natural environment dissolves.

Yoga is not an esoteric practice involving higher states of consciousness or the perfection of one's body or soul. Rather, if there is something to be attained by the practice, it is the sense of wholeness, groundedness, and fulfillment that arise from the coming back to a direct connection with the world through the senses. With this sense of inner security, which we might call one's native intelligence, one is poised to encounter the challenges of daily life with a renewed sense of self-trust, spontaneity, and ease of being that together constitute not the means to another end but the end itself.