

Yoga Praxis

by Godfrey Devereux

Can Physical Postures Constitute a Yoga or Spiritual Practice?

In order for our answer to this question to be free from prejudice, we must ask a number of questions, and answer them on the basis of experience as best we can:

What is Spirituality?

If there is any validity to the popular 'trinity' of body, mind and spirit this allows us to make sense of what spirituality can be. It would refer to a part of our nature as human beings, and not to something outside or alien to us, something innate rather than cultural, which would of course be experienced in different ways according to its cultural context. Spirit, if there is such a thing, is to be found within our experience of body and mind, or it is not to be found at all. Spirituality would then be what allows us to access, within our experience of body and mind, the aspect of our human nature that is perhaps not only the most subtle but even perhaps the most significant.

What is Yoga?

The most common use of the word Yoga is in relation to practice. Yet Yoga also refers to the result or purpose of practice. While our practice may be a process of (re)union the result will be a state of unity. This unity will apply equally to mind, body and spirit, as well as finite and infinite, self and other if it is to fulfill the promise of Yoga propaganda. It is the magnificence of this promise that leads many to doubt that the body is a valid vehicle for spiritual experience or Yoga. This may only be because in focusing on the limitations and abilities of the body they are blind to its nature and significance.

What is the Body?

The human body is not simply a sophisticated, organic machine. It is a mobile capsule of multidimensional intelligence. The tissues of our body are direct biological expressions of the human genome inside each individual cell. It is the intelligence inside our DNA, that is the result of billions of years of research and development, and that lies at the root of our form, abilities and experiences. This genetic intelligence also binds the apparently separate parts and activities of our body into a functional singularity that expresses its intrinsic nature as an indivisible wholeness, even when divided

perceptually and conceptually by the mind. The body is no less intelligent than the mind it generates.

What is Intelligence?

Intelligence is the ability to accurately discriminate. In the human mind it is the ability to know. In cells it is the ability to survive. Intelligence is the basis of life. The cellular intelligence that underlies our creativity and cognition, no less than our perception and action, is not a sophisticated by-product of the body. The ability to discriminate is an expression of consciousness long before it becomes self-conscious awareness. The human body is packed with the intelligence of consciousness, the ability to discriminate and know from a cellular to a cerebral level. Its very existence depended upon the prior existence and cohesive power of consciousness in order for the cellular integrity upon which the body is based to have been possible in the first place.

Can a Somatic Practice be Spiritual?

The human body is by nature intelligent, conscious and self aware. While the human forebrain uses the fundamental power of intelligence to discriminate conceptually, its discriminations, potent and often necessary as they may be, are not so much expressions of the nature of reality as they are of its own nature. The intelligence of mind divides the singularity of existence, extracting apparently separate parts from its intrinsically indivisible wholeness, in order for the body to be able to act within it effectively. The seamless singularity of Totality is reflected in the unity (Yoga) of body, mind and spirit which is a multidimensional formal singularity of intelligence that is nothing other than formless consciousness in limited, local self-expression. Obviously, then, a somatic practice can be a spiritual practice, but only if it is able to consciously access and honour that singularity.

How Can Yoga Posture Practice be Spiritual?

Yoga posture practice can be a spiritual practice if it uses the intelligence of mind to navigate the intelligence of body so as to access the intelligence of consciousness. It must begin by honouring and expressing the overt, biomechanical nature of the body. This can only take place through sensitivity to the sensations the intelligence of the body continually generates in response to its own activity. By becoming intimate with these sensations it becomes possible for mind to support body in a gradual, gentle and comprehensive neuromuscular recalibration. This is much more than simply exercising and releasing the body through movement and stillness. In articulating and recalibrating the body on the basis of somatic intelligence, mind must let go of its insistence on treating the body as if made up of

separate parts and activities. It must find its way through their functional interconnectedness to the indivisible wholeness that the body is to itself. In doing so the non-duality of body and mind becomes clear: there can be no experience of body without the intelligence and experience of mind. Eventually it may even become equally clear that there can be no experience of body or mind without the intelligence of consciousness. Recalibrating the body, then, naturally re-orientates and recalibrates mind. If mind does not re-evaluate its assumptions and prejudices about the body it will continue to impose the aggressive ambitions of its unacknowledged anxieties and remain snared in its own divisiveness, not least the divisions it makes between body, mind and spirit. If, on the other hand, mind is able to trust somatic intelligence enough to surrender to its imperatives it will soon recognize the divisions with which it had interpreted the presence of the body as conceptual and perceptual extractions from a deeper unbroken, and intrinsically unbreakable, wholeness. As the intelligence of mind becomes intimate enough with the presence of the body, as subtle sensation to encounter its subtle nature as the intelligent presence of consciousness, it may let go completely of its ability to discriminate and come to rest in the indivisible wholeness of conscious awareness itself. This will allow it to be nourished and further recalibrated by the intelligence of consciousness so that it functions more fully from its integrity. As the indivisibility of wholeness becomes more familiar, the divisive dualities of body and mind, matter and spirit, finite and infinite, self and other may become less and less able to sustain themselves and the magnificent claims of Yoga propaganda turn out to be true after all, without any effort, skill or knowledge having been required.

To enquire into the possibility that this might be so, please visit

www.windfireYoga.com, www.dynamicYoga.com

Godfrey Devereux