

THESIS

Hatha Yoga as a Practice of Embodiment

By

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Master of Arts in Dance

University of California, Los Angeles, 1997

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Few of us have lost our minds, but many of us have long ago lost our bodies.

Ken Wilber

*O friend, understand: the body
is like an ocean,
rich with hidden treasures.*

Open your inmost chamber and light its lamp.

*Within the body are gardens,
rare flowers, peacocks, the inner Music;
within the body a lake of bliss,
on it the white soul-swans take their joy.*

Mirabai

*This thesis is dedicated to my husband, James,
for his everlasting love and support;
and my mother, Vicki Rea, my first teacher of embodiment,
for letting me rest on her belly until I got too big.*

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Hatha Yoga as a Practice of Embodiment

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Currently, over six million Americans practice hatha yoga. Since the 1970's, various adaptations of hatha yoga have developed in the United States, including the recent limited view of hatha yoga within the popular media as the fitness trend of the 1990's. Within this thesis, the author, a professional yoga teacher, asserts that Americans need a framework for understanding the many dimensions of this ancient practice that is both grounded in the original philosophy of hatha yoga as developed in India, and yet reflects the context of Western culture.

This thesis presents an interpretation of hatha yoga as a bodily practice that may hold value for Americans as one means of becoming more embodied. The author explores the notion that most Americans are "not in their bodies" -that is, not fully integrating the bodily-felt level of their experience. The techniques of hatha yoga help students to be more present within their bodies, to observe their breath, to feel sensations, to transform places of tightness and weakness within the body, and to shift habitual patterns of movement. This process can be viewed as embodiment -the deepening of interior awareness, sensation, and kinesthetic consciousness as a way of knowing how all of the dimensions of the self -emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physical -intersect in their bodily expression.

In order to support this interpretation, embodiment is explored first from a yogic perspective through the worldview of Tantra, the philosophical basis of hatha yoga. The field of somatics is then considered as a Western perspective of embodiment that articulates why Americans need to reconnect with the soma, or the living body in its wholeness. The author then outlines the techniques of hatha yoga and illustrates, through the voice of American students, how the practice engenders a more embodied relationship with the self. Ultimately, embodiment through yoga leads to an experiential union, samadhi, when consciousness is unified throughout the body.

Introduction

On a Thursday night in Los Angeles, over twenty-five people are packed into a studio for a ninety-minute hatha yoga class. A sea of different bodies, different stories, and different intentions are gathered together for their practice. As the instructor, I am fascinated by the variety of the participants and the unconscious languages their bodies start to speak. I observe the markings of the urban world through the variations of slouching spines, eyes that roam in search of stimulus, lips that are pursed from clenched jaws, chests that have forgotten the movement of the breath, feet that have become as lifeless as shoes. These are bodies that have typically spent eight or more hours sitting that day, relieved only by brief stints of walking; and in Los Angeles, often, that walk is to the car.

To address this corporeal reality, the class begins with the students hanging upside down at the waist in a yoga posture, *uttanasana* (standing forward bend). As the instructor, my first words in class address the need for students to reconnect with their bodies:

Bring your attention back home to the interior landscape of your body. Begin to invite your breath to penetrate your body like a river. Gently rooting your feet into the floor, activate your thighs to support the surrender of the upper body. Feel your spine begin to elongate as you completely let go of the neck and shoulders. Let the mask of your face melt as the backs of the eyes soften and the jaw releases. Moving into a non-verbal state, begin to listen to the sensations of your body.

The yogic process has begun. The sound of the breath starts to fill the room. The whole energy of the class starts to change. For many Western students, this is an introduction to a new experience of themselves, an experience of their bodies that can be radically different from other movement or exercise systems they have encountered.

As a Western teacher immersed in an ancient bodily practice from India, have been searching for a framework to help students understand their encounter with this initially foreign practice. One of the areas of confusion that have observed in Americans learning hatha yoga concerns their relationship to their bodies and the aim of bodily practice. On the surface yoga has many similarities with other forms of exercise. The *asanas*, or postures, that form the basis of hatha yoga practice have many physiological benefits including strengthening, stretching, supporting and releasing various parts of the body. As many of the *asanas* focus on particular parts of the body, an American student could interpret the practice as a fitness class where specific exercises isolate the development of certain muscles. In forms of yoga that use a style of movement called *vinyasa* - in which one posture flows into the next - students may also perceive the class to be like aerobics where one sweats and gets a cardiovascular workout. As some of the poses in yoga can be challenging, it is also easy for American students to become goal oriented and focus on the attainment of a posture as an exterior measure of how well they perform.

As a teacher in one of the largest yoga studios in the country, I have observed students come to yoga from a fitness perspective as a way to feel good, be healthy, and get their bodies in shape. This view, however, fits hatha yoga only to a certain extent. It is very possible to do Western exercise without actually being attentive to what is happening in the body. In other words, it is possible to work out on a treadmill and watch television, or run and listen to a walkman. The techniques of hatha yoga, on the other hand, ask students to be present within their bodies: to observe their breath, to feel sensations, to

penetrate places of tightness or weakness and to transform habitual patterns. During my first year of coursework in Dance Movement Therapy, I encountered an article entitled "Some ways of disembodiment and re-embodiment" by somatic psychologist Sidney Jourad that helped me understand, from a Western perspective, what I was experiencing in my yoga classes. Jourad noted that:

... the average man in the West is not "in his body". If not in his body, then where is he? And who is he? To be embodied is to experience one's body as the center of one's existence, to feel alive, to perceive bodily states as they change from pleasure to pain, energy to fatigue, from vitality and excitement to calm and tranquillity. [R.D.] Laing and [Alexander] Lowen are arguing that such a state of embodiment is rare: more typically, people repress body-experience and find themselves anesthetic to their bodies.

Increasing numbers of people in the West have begun experimenting with healing techniques originating in Eastern philosophies and religions. All these techniques share one common feature: they entail an abrupt cessation of destructive, anesthesia-producing life-styles and they enliven consciousness in general and somatic perception [a person's awareness of the response of his body to the situation in which he finds himself] in particular (1973:4).

Jourad goes on to mention briefly the potential of hatha yoga as a practice of re-embodiment. I was stimulated by Jourad's perspective and found his notion of disembodiment to be an accurate reflection of the state of being that many students, myself included, bring to their hatha yoga practice. One student interviewed for this thesis echoed Jourad's perspective as he commented on his experience of hatha yoga:

I really had not given my body much thought before yoga. Any images I had of my body were usually negative. I existed in my head. [Now] I feel more complete, more alive. [Yoga] is movement re-education. It is like learning to walk again. During the day I am increasingly moving with sensitivity, moving with care and with attention to all parts of my body (Kevin, 1996).

Why is the average person in the West not in his/her body? How can hatha yoga serve as a practice of embodiment?

Through research, I began to explore these questions from three perspectives -Eastern, Western and my own experience. Within an Eastern tradition such as yoga, current ideas are often validated by reference to the historical roots of a practice that lives through texts which are recognized as the source. In returning to the roots of hatha yoga, I found an elaborate and rich understanding of embodiment within the literature of Tantra, as the philosophical basis of hatha yoga. From a Western perspective, the field of somatics articulated the need for embodiment within Western culture and developed a language and various modalities to address the question of how embodiment can occur. These two perspectives provided support for my own interpretation of hatha yoga as a practice of embodiment.

Chapter One:

A Yogic View of Embodiment

This chapter begins with a painted image of an Indian yogin as a doorway into exploration of a yogic vision of embodiment (Figure 1). In this painting, the rich and colorful inner world of the yogin's body is revealed within his outer form. This is the subtle body (sukshma rupa) that becomes awakened through yogic practices. From the yogin's gentle smile and relaxed gaze to the grace of his limbs, a quality of ease permeates the vibrance of his rich inner body. The yogin has embodied an unusual anatomy -abstract flowers of different colors, various animals, and deities -with a poise that invites the viewer to contemplate his form as a natural potential of the human body. In George Elder's words, "Here we get a glimpse of what only a yogin can see, an 'inner body' of extraordinary order and beauty" (1996:413). This image inspires a number of questions for discussion within this chapter: What is the yogic conception and experience of embodiment? How does knowledge of this vision of the body illuminate the techniques and process of hatha yoga? What are the underlying aims of hatha yoga practice? To explore these questions, I have focused on the Tantric cosmology of the body as support for interpreting hatha yoga as a practice of embodiment. Before examining Tantra and hatha yoga in greater detail, bodily practice in India and the development of hatha yoga will be discussed to provide a larger context.

Definition of Yoga and Hatha Yoga

The term yoga comes from the Sanskrit root yuj meaning "to yoke, to bind together", providing the most common translation of yoga as a state of union or the process of unifying the individual self (iiva-atman) with the transcendental self (parama-atman). On the broadest level,

yoga refers to that enormous body of spiritual values, attitudes, precepts and techniques that have been developed in India over three millennia that may be regarded as the very foundation of the ancient Indian civilization (Feuerstein, 1989: 15).

Yoga is often presented as a complex of different paths leading to a common goal of union. Some of these paths, or margas, include jnana yoga (scriptural knowledge), bhakti yoga (devotion), karma yoga (action or selfless work), raja yoga (meditation), mantra yoga (sound) and hatha yoga (purification of the body-mind).

For the purpose of this thesis, hatha yoga is used in the way it is understood in the West, as a general term to refer to any form of yoga that employs yoga asanas, or postures, as the foundation of the practice (Bodian and Feuerstein, 1993). The path of hatha yoga is widespread in America and varies according to the school and style of the teacher. Asanas are generally grouped into six different categories: standing poses, twisting poses, balance poses, forward bends, backbends and inversions (Mehta, 1990). Within these groupings, there are poses that are considered to be beginning, intermediate, and advanced, depending upon the experience of the practitioner. Various other yogic techniques may be combined with asana practice such as pranayama (breath extension),

bandhas (inner "locks or containment of energy within the body mind), dristi (gaze), kriyas (cleansing techniques), mantra (sound), dharana (concentration), and dhyana (meditation).

The rationale for doing hatha yoga varies according to the student, teacher, context, and understanding of the practice. Both in India and in the West, yoga asanas are sometimes used for a specific focus. They may be used therapeutically, for exercise, or for spiritual development. By exploring the Indian context for bodily practice, the origins of yoga asanas, and the development of hatha yoga as a form of Tantra, the formation of a yogic perspective towards embodiment can be better understood.

Indian Bodily Practice and the Cultural Context for Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga practice emerged within a cultural climate in India that has a very different approach to body-centered disciplines than the West. In India, hatha yoga is part of a culture in which other practices such as martial arts, wrestling, and the performing arts (e.g. Bharata Natayam and Kathakali¹) are viewed as means to cultivate the self through the body for spiritual evolution. These forms of bodily practice are considered not just as technique but as the practitioner's sadhana, defined as "a spiritual path which leads to perfectionn (Feuerstein, 1990:296). Through devotion to a technique that is infused with meaning, the practitioners of these different forms find a means to refine aspects of who they are physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually through their bodies. A Benares wrestler in devotion to the heroic monkey god, Hanuman, practices bejacks (specialized kicks) 1000 times to embody Hanuman's strength of body and character (Alter, 1993). A Kalarippayatu martial artist in Kerala cultivates his shakti, or life-force, through sustained awareness of nabhi mula (the root in the navel) while executing difficult moves (Zarilli, 1989). Within a highly refined dance, a Bharata Natayam dancer contemplates every movement as an offering to God (Bharucha,1995). A hatha yogin practices surya namaskar for the 10,000th time as part of the opening of his daily practice. In all of these examples, the cultivation of bodily technique over time begins to effect the whole person. This holistic orientation of Indian bodily practices has been recognized by Western scholars such as Frits Staal:

In India, many activities and powers of the body are cultivated with the intent to bring about changes or effects that should not be confined to what in the West are called "physical" but that are also misunderstood if they are interpreted exclusively in so-called mental or spiritual terms. (Staal, 1993:71)

In Indian bodily practices, the physical is the vehicle to transform the practitioner on multiple levels.

Philip Zarilli, performance studies scholar and student of the Indian martial art, Kalarippayatu, suggests that the holistic aim of bodily practice in India is not unique but is rather shared by other Asian forms which he describes as "Asian in-body disciplines of practice":

¹ Bharata Natayam is an Indian classical dance form and Kathakali is an interdisciplinary theatrical form.

Various "in-body" disciplines of Asian meditational, martial and performing arts. . . share many assumptions, principles, and details of practice. Primary is the fact that daily repetition of physical exercises and/or performance techniques encodes the techniques in the body. The goal of all such virtuosic systems is reaching a state of "accomplishment" in which the doer and done are one. Through such actualized practice comes both control and transcendence of "self" (Zarilli,1993: 131).

This experience of self-transcendence is not a transcendence of the body but of a sense of self perceived as separate from the body. This is what Zarilli refers to as "in-body" discipline versus "out of body." Indian bodily practices in general, and hatha yoga, in particular, cultivate an embodied awareness in which consciousness extends to every part of the body. As Frits Staal affirms, "In yoga, the body is developed in new directions What we arrive at is 'altered states', not 'of consciousness' but of the body" (Staal,1993:71).

Indian bodily practice is founded upon a worldview which regards the body as the temple of the ultimate consciousness which the practitioner seeks to experience within his/her self. The body becomes a symbolic structure upon which religious architecture, altars, perimeters of cities, musical scales and philosophical concepts are patterned:

The image of the human body is centrally important to Indian thought and plays a significant role in Hindu religion, philosophy, mythology, literature and in culture in general. It becomes a symbolic construct of great moment which serves to reproduce culture (Dissanayake, 1993:39).

The myriad ways in which the body is perceived and expressed through Indian culture is a rich and complex subject beyond the scope of this thesis. The salient point here is that hatha yoga both in its origins and as practiced in India today, is situated in an environment which considered diverse forms of bodily practice an integral part of cultivating human potential and ultimate self-knowledge.

A Brief History of the Evolution of Yoga Asanas and Hatha Yoga

This historical section will illustrate how the asanas were used for thousands of years as part of yogic meditational and ritual practice, but were interpreted and used differently when the body was viewed as a central instrument for self-realization during the Tantric revolution (800-1 500 A.D.).

The archaeological record for the evidence of yoga asanas as an aboriginal practice is traced back to the indigenous Harappan culture (2500-1 800 B.C.), an organization of city-states in present-day Pakistan (Feuerstein, 1 989, Eliade, 1 958, McEvilley, 1 981). A number of soapstone and terra cotta seals were found depicting figures seated in positions similar to yoga asanas. One of the seals has been accepted by many scholars to be the prototype of the Hindu God Shiva, the Mahayogin or Great yogi. Other seals and figurines found show a widespread worship of the goddess and the sexual union of the male and female, typical of an agricultural-based society (McEvilley, 1981 :45). The indigenous cultural practices that included these early origins of yoga were eventually submerged by the invading Aryan pastoralists, but continued to survive in the villages

through the Aryan caste system which made all indigenous peoples lower caste or *shudras* and thus not able to practice many elements of the new Aryan religion.

These Aryan tribes which gradually invaded the Indus valley civilization between 1800 and 1300 B.C. heralded the beginning of the historical roots of yoga². As the composers of the Vedas, the Aryans introduced Sanskrit in the form of both an oral and written tradition that became the basis for the sacred texts of yoga. Ritual sacrifice, or *yajna*, was the center of the Aryan religious practices which formed around the recitation of Sanskrit and offerings in order to connect the individual and the community with the cosmic order of the absolute creator, Brahman. Within this ritual structure, the earliest forms of meditation emerged.

Through the long ritual practice of the *yajna*, the beginnings of the use of bodily posture (*asana*), breath control (*pranayama*), and ritual hand posture (*mudras*) were suggested as a means to effect the concentration, and therefore the efficacy, of the practitioner. These sacrificial rituals are still performed today by priests known as Brahmins. In an interview, Shankara Narayanena, a contemporary Brahmanic priest, spoke of the link between *asana* and ritual:

In the Vedic³ practices, priests and householders are also using *asanas* to perform the sacrificial yoga. These *asanas* are simple but the most important for meditation: *padmasana* (lotus position) or *siddhasana* (simple cross-legged). The other *asanas* grew out of these positions. In this way, everyone is practicing *asanas* (Narayanena, 1995).

There are many other practices in Vedic times which can be traced forward to yoga today, including the first mentions of a non-Aryan sect of ascetics known as the *Vratyas*. Ascetic communities such as the *Vratyas* have been an experimental source of yoga for thousands of years, continuing up into the present. Lord Shiva is considered to be the original teacher of yoga *asanas*, and is depicted as a meditating yogi smeared in ashes with the long-flowing dread-locks typical of ascetics. For thousand of years sects of ascetics, or *sadhus*, have formed around particular teachers, developing the myriad yogic techniques and practices. The technology of yoga rose out of this living university of sages and practitioners often documented in Sanskrit literature. Many of the texts such as the *Upanishads*, composed around 800 B.C., were developed out of these forest schools which continue to exist to this day (Feuerstein, 1989).

The importance of yoga *asanas* during several thousand years of development, from the time of the Vedas to the emergence of hatha yoga texts in 1000 A.D., is difficult to assess. There are a number of texts within this period that contain the teachings of yogic masters who made contributions to the evolution of yoga and the use of yoga *asanas*. One of the most important of these is Patanjali (circa 200 A-D), author of the *Yoga Sutras*, the first text to codify the practice of yoga. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* outlines the eight limbs of yoga with "*asana*" as the third limb. Out of 212 sutras, only three deal directly with *asana*. It is

² The Aryans are considered to have come from Southern Russia through Persia and into Pakistan through the Khyber pass of Afghanistan. While the causes for their migration are unknown, they may have fled their homeland due to famine and drought. These Vedic invaders were semi- sedentary cattle herders whose horse-drawn chariots and bronze weaponry enabled them to conquer the indigenous population throughout the North of India into the fertile basins of the Ganges (Feuerstein, 1989).

³ "Vedic" is often used as an adjective to refer to the culture that grew out of the Vedas.

not until the Tantric period that the variety of yoga asanas, and their relationship to an elaborate and sophisticated cosmology of the body, are fully developed.

The Tantric period of Indian history, from 800 A.D. to 1500 A.D., marks the rise in the cultivation of the body as a spiritual center. The body became the hub of spiritual activity as Tantra began to spread throughout India. During that time, the practice of asana also flowered. According to Feuerstein,

Originally asanas were purely meditational postures and only with the Tantric revolution did they receive a completely new purpose; when the asana became an instrument for the perfection of the body. (Feuerstein, 1974:95)

Tantra was the beginning of a great cultural revolution that synthesized the philosophical ideas of classical yoga with the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the rural areas, where worship of the Mother Goddess, Shakti, remained prevalent (Eliade, 1969). With the resurgence of the feminine force through Tantra, the body -as the creation of the Mother Goddess -attained new importance. According to religious scholar, Mircea Eliade,

In Tantrism, the human body acquires an importance it had never before attained in the spiritual history of India. The Upanishadic and post-Upanishadic pessimism and asceticism are swept away. . . Tantrism carries to its furthest consequences the conception that sanctity can be realized only in a "divine body".

We do not know why and under what circumstances it came to designate a great philosophical and religious movement... For it was really a vogue; quite suddenly, Tantrism becomes immensely popular, not only among philosophers and theologians but also amongst active practitioners of the religious life (ascetics, yogins, etc.), and its prestige also reaches the "popular" strata. In a comparatively short time, Indian philosophy, mysticism, ritual, ethics, iconography and even literature are influenced by Tantrism (Eliade: 1969:228).

Out this renaissance, a new form of bodily practice, hatha yoga, emerged.

Hatha yoga grew out of Tantric practice. The founder of hatha yoga, Goraksha, was part of the Tantric Siddha movement also referred to as the Nathas which flourished between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Thirumoolar, a Siddha adept from Southern India, defined the Siddha as a spiritual alchemist who works on and transmutes impure matter, the human body-mind into pure gold. Hatha yoga was born out of this quest for bodily-based spiritual transformation, and thus asanas flourished as the instruments of the sadhana or spiritual practice.

In all of the previous literature on yoga before Tantra, asanas are briefly referred to as part of a yogic practice but are never explored in depth. The Tantric hatha yoga text, the Gherandha Samhita, claims that Lord Shiva taught as many 840,000 asanas, while the Hatha Yoaa Pradipika cites only eight-four, most of which are still in use today, as the most important (Feuerstein, 1989:289). In sources of literature which deal with the history of hatha yoga, the development of the practice usually stops with the mention of the Shiva Samhita, an important text written in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century

(Feuerstein, 1989, Eliade, 1969). There is a surprising lack of information as to how hatha yoga and yoga asana practice progressed into the 20th century. I will jump over this significant gap and continue the discussion with the next well-documented historical figure relevant to this thesis, Sri T. Krishnamacharya.

Sri T. Krishnamacharya, born in 1888, was one of our century's greatest exponents of yoga. Raised in a brahmin family which traced its lineage back to the yogic sage Nathamuni, Krishnamacharya spent the first 36 years of his life studying yoga, Sanskrit, philosophy and Ayurveda. In 1924, he was invited by the Maharaja of Mysore to open a school for yoga in the city center near the Maharajah's palace. From 1933 to 1955, Krishnamacharya spread the practice of yoga and yoga asanas throughout the region with extensive lecture demonstrations, accompanied by his now renowned students Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar. In 1976, Krishnamacharya's son and closest disciple, T.K.V. Desikachar, founded the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, which teaches yoga to this day to people of all ages and capabilities.

Part of the significance of Krishnamacharya to the development of hatha yoga was his role as the teacher of three of the most prominent Indian teachers, T.K.V. Desikachar, Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar, who all have incorporated yoga asanas as a fundamental part of their practice. Pattabhi Jois is the founder of the Ashtanga Yoga Nilyam in Mysore and B.K.S. Iyengar created his center, the Ramamani Memorial Yoga Institute, in Pune.

It is difficult to assess the role of yoga asanas and hatha yoga amongst the diverse population of over 800 million people in India today. The ascetic tradition of yoga in which asanas are held for extreme periods of time as a method of self-transcendence (from a few hours to days on end) is still alive (Hartsuiker, 1993). Many master teachers, some well-known and some obscure, retain and pass down traditions to their students. In addition, yoga asanas have been introduced in new ways in India: as part of physical education in elementary and secondary schools; as part of Yoga Olympiads, competitions for the performance of yoga asanas; and for therapeutic use in clinics and hospitals. Indian traditions of bodily practice which cultivate the body as sacred now exist alongside MTV videos and Indian cinema, which are popularising secular images of the body.

The Tantric Worldview: A Yogic Perspective of Embodiment

This section explores the general worldview and conception of the body within Tantra as the basis for viewing hatha yoga as more than just a system of health or fitness, but as a process of embodying consciousness -ultimately understood as embodying the Divine. Rather than viewing the body as a source of defilement as it is often portrayed in earlier pre-Tantric works, Tantra sought to recognize the integration of bodily existence with spiritual reality as exemplified in the following passage from the Tantric yogic text, the Tirumandiram:

When the body perishes, the life force (prana) departs and the light of truth cannot be attained. I learned the art of preserving my body and thus also the life force in it.

Once I despised the body. But then I saw the Divine within it and realized the body is a Temple of the Divine (deva-alaya). Thus I began to preserve it with great care (Thirumoolar,724-725 edited by Govidan, 1993).

With a view of the body as a temple of the Divine, Tantric practice emerged as a means "to preserve it with great care".

The following summary of some of the central concepts of Tantra (distilled through the scholarly interpretations of Ajit Mookerjee, Mircea Eliade and Sir John Woodroffe) will illustrate some of the themes of the Tantric worldview. The concepts to be discussed for their relationship to embodiment are: 1) the emergence of the Feminine or Shakti; 2) the union of polarities, Shiva and Shakti; and the 3) the body as microcosm of the macrocosm.

Emergence of the Feminine

With the rise of the Tantric movement around 200 A.D. came the emergence of the feminine principle, or Shakti There was a renewed focus on the body, as all of Creation was viewed as the manifestation of the Goddess. The worship of Shakti is the oldest of the Goddess-based religious cults of the indigenous Indian populations that gradually became syncretized with Aryan Brahmanism. According to Tantric scholar Ajit Mookerjee:

Tantrism is a system of 'the rediscovery of the mystery of woman'. . . the female principle (Shakti) is considered to be essentially the kinetic aspect of consciousness. In Tantric rituals, everyone is seen as a counterpart of the feminine principle and becomes a reincarnation of cosmic energy, symbolizing the ultimate essence of reality (1977:16).

The manifest world is none other than Shakti Thus, creation is no longer seen as a detriment to be transcended but as a source to be realized in its essence. This life-affirming worldview is a distinguishing characteristic of Tantra, as noted by Tantric teacher Chetananda:

In general, Tantrism is extraordinary in its acceptance of the world, and the events and experiences that happen therein, viewing these as complete and appropriate aspects of Life. . . Unlike many traditions which set up taboos and ritual prohibitions, the Tantric traditions recognize that no area of life is to be rejected (Chetananda,1990:247).

Thus, with the re-emergence of Shakti, the body was no longer rejected as a source of defilement and desires but viewed as the manifestation of the ultimate reality.

Union of Polarities

All of creation is a dynamic play of complementary polarities; from creation and dissolution to day and night to order and chaos, the examples are endless. Within Tantric philosophy,

everything in the universe is thought to be born out of a union of opposites, the interaction of the kinetic female consciousness (Shakti) with the formless male consciousness (Shiva). The universe is viewed as an expansion of the polar principles of Shiva-Shakti, which, like the Taoist symbol of yin/yang, are envisioned as mutually interdependent. As the Tantric text Saiva Purana poetically states: "Just as moonbeams cannot be separated from the moon nor the rays from the sun so Shakti cannot be distinguished from Shiva" (Khanna, 1979: 67). This union of Shiva and Shakti is an object of contemplation expressed through Tantric ritual art, meditation, and bodily-practice. The central Tantric symbol representing the union of Shiva-Shakti is Sri Yantra, depicted as the interpenetration of upwards and downwards triangles united at the center point or bindu. This is also expressed as the combined linga-yoni, where the male principle is represented as an abstract oblong phallus known as a linga, united at its base with a womb-shaped yoni symbolizing the feminine principle. From this symbolic and philosophical orientation, sexuality is seen as the consummate recreation of the union of Shiva and Shakti. Sexuality has both a symbolic and a ritual function within Tantra, although in the West, Tantra is often equated primarily with sacred sexual practices (Mookerjee, 1977).

Hatha yoga reveals the same conscious unity of the male-female polarity as Tantra: "ha" denotes "sun" or the masculine principle and "tha" the moon or feminine principle, with yoga meaning "union" (Arya, 1977). Within hatha yoga, the unification of the masculine and feminine occurs within the body, as the dormant kundalini representing Shakti (spiritual energy at the base of the spine) rises to unify with Shiva at the chakra (energy center) on the crown of the head. In terms of embodiment, the Tantric vision of masculine and feminine union envisions sexuality and body as the consummate expressions of Creation. The body becomes a microcosm of the essential principles governing the universe.

Body as a Microcosm of the Macrocosm

The theme of the human being as a microcosm of the macrocosm is a thread that reoccurs throughout the development of Indian spirituality. Tantra's contribution to this theme is an elaboration of the body as a metaphor and link to the universe, and the development of practices that are centered within the body as a source of spiritual union. Within Tantra, the spine is no longer just the spine but becomes the mythological Mt. Meru, the center of the universe. The flow of blood and the even subtler flows of energy become the sacred rivers that meander through India: the Ganges, the Saraswati and the Yamuna. The thousands of temples dedicated to various gods and Goddesses found on every corner in India are found throughout the body. Eliade describes this micro-macro relationship as it is embodied in Tantra:

In these disciplines sensory activities were magnified in staggering proportions as the result of countless identifications of organs and physiological functions with cosmic regions, stars and planets, gods, etc. Hatha yoga and Tantra transubstantiated the body by giving it macranthropic dimensions and assimilating it to various "mystical bodies" . . . Several "subtle bodies" are here superimposed: the sonorous (sound) body, the architectonic body, the cosmological body, the mystico-physiological body. This multilayered homologisation must be realized; but as a

result of the yogic experience, the physical body becomes "dilated," "cosmicized," and transubstantiated (1969:236).

The different subtle bodies that Eliade refers to are the association of elemental sound with centers of the body (sonoric body), the building of temples based upon the structure of the human form (architectonic body), the depiction of the universe as being the entire body of Shakti (cosmolgoical body), and an elaborate physiology of the human being that has awakened his/her subtle body through direct experience with the Divine (mystico-physiological body). Thus, through yoga, these macrocosmic bodies are discovered to be embodied within the microcosm.

The Conception of the Body within Tantra

From these principles, the body within Tantra is identified as a sacred part of creation (Shakti), the embodiment of the feminine and masculine principles, and as a reflection of the basic movements of the entire universe. If the absolute extends to the body, then what is the purpose of bodily practice? How is the Divine embodied? In this section, the Tantric conception of the body is explored to illustrate the intention within the roots of yoga to discover the innermost core of the body. The classical model of the koshas (layers of the body) is first described as a yogic vision of embodiment. The subtle physiology of yoga is then considered as the pathways of yogic transformation. While this vision of the body has some correlations with Western anatomy, it was discovered through a process of deep meditation within the body. Throughout the tradition of yoga, the yogin's own body has been the laboratory of discovery. Some past and present-day yogic explorers have spent years in solitude in intensive self-investigation. Thus, in place of anatomical description, this subtle physiology uses a metaphorical language that is experientially based and rooted within the symbolism of Indian spiritual culture. As Eliade notes:

Subtle physiology was probably elaborated on the basis of ascetic, ecstatic and contemplative experiences expressed in the same symbolic language as the traditional cosmology and ritual (Eliade, 1969:233).

This subtle physiology, however, is not considered to be specific to yogis or to Indians -it is to be awakened within all human beings.

The Koshas: A Yogic Model of Embodiment

In the Taittiririva-Upanishad, one of the oldest Upanishads (circa 800 B.C.), the body is presented as being composed of seven layers or sheaths known as koshas. This model of the koshas was incorporated into Tantra and Hatha yoga as a method of penetrating the core of the body. The seven koshas are from the outermost layer (annamaya kosha) to the innermost layer (atmamaya kosha). The annamaya kosha represents the gross body or anatomical layer, including the skin, muscle tissue, and bones. The next layer, the pranamaya kosha, is the beginning of the subtle body, and refers to the prana that circulates in the form of breath, blood, and cerebrospinal fluid. The manomaya kosha, the mental and emotional sheath that corresponds roughly to our nervous system, sends and

receives signals throughout the body to create our mental and emotional life. The last four layers in the kosha model are even more subtle. The vijanamaya kosha is the wisdom body where insight and illumination occur. The anandamaya kosha is the body of bliss, in which the body is experienced as liberated energy. The final two layers comprise the ciftamaya kosha, the layer of consciousness that is connected to ultimate consciousness (mahat), and the innermost core, atmamaya kosha, the individual soul.

Whether the kosha model is thought of as literal or metaphorical, it presents a model of different layers of embodiment and establishes the direction of yoga practice from the periphery to the core layers of the self. This model also implies an explanation of how awareness can become limited to a certain layer of the body while not necessarily negating the existence of the other layers. For instance, many people are aware of musculo-skeletal movements of their physical body (annamaya kosha) while having little awareness of their breath or circulation of blood or energy (pranamaya kosha) not to mention the subtler layers of the body. Within the subtle body however, Tantra yoga conceives of different pathways and energy centers which affect all layers of the body and all aspects of the human being.

The Core of Subtle Physiology: the Sushumna, Chakras, Nadis, and Prana

The core of subtle physiology can be visualized by returning to the depiction of the yogic inner body (Figure 1) illustrated at the beginning of this chapter. The core of the yogin's body is given central importance as a type of mystical spine. In Figure 1, instead of showing the vertebrae of the spine (which would be considered part of the gross body), the yogin reveals the seven chakras starting from the base and moving up to the crown of the head. Each chakra, literally meaning "wheel," is seen as a distinct energy center within the subtle body represented as a lotus flower of varied shape with its own unique sound (depicted as Sanskrit syllables), color, element, and deity which can be awakened through various yogic practices. Each chakra is also associated with certain psychological and physiological functions so that the entire system reflects the interdependence of psyche and soma. At the base of the spine is the muladhara chakra, associated with the issues of survival and security. The second chakra, svadhishtana is represented as a six-petal lotus associated both psychologically and physiologically with sexual development: it is the location of the reproductive organs. The third chakra, manipura, located at the navel, is associated with the solar plexus and the psychology of creating a self-identity within the world. The fourth chakra, anahata, is located at the center of the chest and is associated with feelings of love and devotion as well as the physiological functioning of the cardiac plexus. The fifth chakra, vishuddha, located at the throat, is associated with the ability to communicate and the functioning of the carotid plexus. Ajna, the sixth chakra, is located in the interior between the eyebrows, and is associated with the pineal gland and the awakening of self-realization. The culminating chakra, sahasrara, described as a thousand-petaled lotus, resides at the crown of the head.

The image of the chakras as flowers within the body is related to the understanding that within a human being the various chakras can open and close, awaken, or stagnate according to the physiological, psychological and spiritual state of the person. For example, a person who has difficulty communicating may experience restriction within the visuddha chakra located within the throat (a sensation that many people experience as

common when speaking in front of large groups). According to Harish Johari, who has written several books on the interior body of yoga:

Chakras are centers of interchange between physical and psychological energy within the physical dimension, and prana (life-energy) is the force that links the physical with the mental and the mental with the spiritual. In fact, the physical, the mental and the spiritual are the same and work together on all levels (Johari, 1987:20)

The yogic chakra model supports this thesis in that psychological and spiritual development are viewed as embodied, and not just associated with the mind.

Nadis: The Path ways of Life-force

The term nadi comes from the Sanskrit root nad meaning "movement" or "stream"; hence the concept of nadis is based on the understanding that they are channels through which something flows (Johari, 1987:18). The yogic concept of the nadis would encompass veins and arteries, the flow of the cardiovascular and lymphatic systems, as well as the nerves and the flow of stimuli through the nervous system (Smith, 1989). On another level, nadis refer to subtler channels for the flow of prana (Feuerstein, 1990:228). Prana is considered to be the underlying energy or mover of creation. Although it is often translated as breath, this is considered to be only one of its manifestations. Iyengar describes prana as "the energy permeating the universe at all levels. It is physical, mental, intellectual, sexual, spiritual and cosmic energy" (1995:12). Thus, when a thought occurs, the energy behind the thought is prana. When an emotion is released, prana is the mover. When the arm lifts, prana is the catalyst and nadis the carrier. From this perspective, many different systems within the body are seen to function fundamentally through forms of nadis and prana.

According to the Shiva Samhita, there are fourteen principal nadis, with three being the most important: ida, pingala, and sushumna⁴.

The sushumna corresponds somewhat with the cerebrospinal system and is recognized as the central channel for the flow of the life force. Through the sushumna, the nadis become linked with the chakras as a psychosomatic phenomenon occurring along the same route as the spine. The link of the chakras and the nadis is chakras.

As illustrated, the sushumna originates at the base of the spine at the muladhara chakra and runs up the body to pierce the palate of the base of the skull, joining the sahasrara chakra. The base of the spine is the meeting place of the ida, pingala, and sushumna also known together as kundalini. Their convergence is known as the Yukta Triveni, yukta meaning "involvement" and triveni the meeting of three streams (Johari, 1987). Ida is the left channel and considered to be the current of feminine energy in the body. It is said to be nourishing, and balancing, and is therefore named the Ganga after the River Ganges. The Pingala, the right channel, is thus the current of masculine and solar energy. Pingala is called the Yamuna as it is purifying like fire and considered to be verbal and rational in nature (Johari, 1987:27). From the base of the spine, ida and pingala move upward, alternating at each chakra until they reach ajna chakra in the center of the forehead. The

⁴ The Shiva Samhita claims the existence of 350,000 nadis, (11.13) while other sources affirm there are 72,000, and yet another states that the nadis are countless (Feuerstein, 1989).

meeting of these three streams is called Mukta Triveni (mukta meaning "liberated"), referring to the stage in yoga when these energetic forces are released as kundalini flowing through the spine and throughout the subtle body.

Within Tantra, the culmination of yoga is the release of the latent kundalini energy stored at the base of the sushumna upward through the spine so that all of the chakras are opened. Samadhi is the term used within Tantra to describe this experience of conscious union achieved as a culminating state after years of various practices. This ecstatic state is part of the human experience as noted by Feuerstein:

In view of the fact that the kundalini experience is claimed to depend on universal structures of the body, we must assume that it was encountered by mystics throughout the ages. However, it was only with the body-positive esotericism of the Tantras that this then served practitioners as a road map in their efforts to systematically awaken the kundalini power (Feuerstein: 1990:189).

This road map leads to a spiritual communion that occurs deep within the core of the subtle body.

Samskara: the Blocks that Make Practice Necessary

If the description of the body of Tantra is viewed as basic to all human beings, what would make a person unique and why would practice be necessary to embody the Divine? The yogic concept of samskara explains how psycho-physical patterns are formed within the bodymind through past experiences and are transformed through practice.

Samskara is defined as the imprints in the subconscious left behind by our daily experiences, whether conscious or unconscious, internal or external, desirable or undesirable. The term samskara suggests that these imprints are not merely passive vestiges of a person's actions but highly dynamic forces in his or her psychic life (Feuerstein, 1990:309).

Samskara is not reduced to either psychological or physical manifestations but is expressed interdependently. A description of how samskara manifests in the body can serve as a way to summarize how the instruments of subtle physiology can be perceived in typical human experiences and addressed in hatha yoga practice.

It is not uncommon for human beings to experience disappointments, rejection, or even abuse that can affect their capacity to feel, receive, and give love. According to the Tantric model, suffering of this nature would affect the "heart" chakra (anahata), impairing the flow of emotional and eventually physical energy in that region (both seen on an elemental level as prana). This samskara, as the body memory of a particular event, could create a pattern in a person's body resulting over time in a blockage in the chest region such as a sunken chest or tightness around the rib cage. This could start to effect the overall energy of the thoracic spine (heart region) leading to decreased mobility and flow. The accumulation of samskara in the region begins to reduce vitality and sensation. Gradually, the person's range of feeling is reduced to the gross or outer layer (annamaya kosha). Tantric yogic practices, from work with sound and visualization to the practice of pranayama and asanas, could gradually open the restriction in that area and assist in

restoring the expression of love and emotion. For instance, backbends are types of asanas which create openness through the chest allowing over time for the various residuals within the body to be released. One of the aims of Tantric practice is to free the manifestations of samskara in the body that affect the chakras and flow of prana in the nadis so that the individual can be free to embody the fullest dimension of his or her Self.

The Tantric Model of Embodiment and Its Relevance to Hatha Yoga

As hatha yoga was one of the methods to develop out of the Tantric period⁵, the Tantric conception of the body can be seen as the *raison d'être* for the techniques of hatha yoga. The emphasis on discovering the divine within the body gave new importance to asanas and the other techniques of yoga such as pranayama, mantra, and meditation. Thus, the underlying aims of hatha yoga practice as discussed here can be summarized as: 1) moving from the gross towards the subtle body (the kosha model), 2) awakening the subtle physiology of Tantra; 3) purifying samskara within the layers of the body; 4) releasing and containing life-force; and 5) experiencing an embodied union known as samadhi.

How is this achieved through hatha yoga? What does this imply for contemporary hatha yoga practice? The techniques of hatha yoga will be described fully within Chapter Three. In focusing just on the technique of asanas, the texts of hatha yoga cite many examples of how asanas affect the body outlined within Tantra. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradapika*, for instance, Svātama states that, "the nadis should be cleansed of their impurities [samskara] by performing mudras, asanas, and kumbhaka [retention of breath]" (1-58 cited in Sinh, 1980: 10). While today asanas are often just seen for the physiological benefits in promoting health, it is clear that in their origins, they were associated with the Tantric body. For example, matsyasana, named after the great yogi Sri Matsyanatha, is described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* as benefiting the gross and the subtle layers of the body:

It increases appetite and is an instrument for destroying the group of the most deadly diseases. Its practice awakens the kundalini and contains the nectar shedding from the moon [the feminine energy center located around the palate of the mouth] in people (1.28-29 cited in Sinh, 1980:5 with author's notes in brackets).

Asanas are thus identified not only with cultivating health but also with awakening the kundalini, or life-force of the body.

Whether contemporary practitioners actually experience the chakras or kundalini energy as fully as these original sages of hatha yoga is impossible to know. The Tantric model of the body does open up the potential of the techniques of hatha yoga to be directed towards a greater embodiment, from the gross to the subtle, samskara (restricted patterns) to samadhi (freedom).

⁵ Hatha yoga, however, did synthesize many important elements of early forms of yoga, primarily the ashtanga (eight limbs) of Patanjali that was discussed in the history section.

Summary of Chapter

To summarize, hatha yoga is viewed as a multi-dimensional bodily practice that emerged in a cultural continuum in India in which the body is perceived as both a symbolic and literal connection to the Ultimate Consciousness. The inclusion of the body as a field of spiritual refinement as well as the ground of existential truth gave birth to the rich philosophy and practice of hatha yoga. Within the base of Tantric philosophy, the realization of the Self is discovered within the different layers of the body as well as within the larger body of Creation (Shakti).

Interiorization of awareness has led to the development of an elaborate cosmology, mapping the subtle physiology as an intersection of the physical, emotional, intellectual, biological, and spiritual aspects of a person. Hatha yoga uses this corporeal cosmology to experience the body as a microcosm of the macrocosm. All yogic practices -whether seated meditation, chanting, dancing, or offering are designed to release conditioned patterns of the bodymind (samskara) and bring the practitioner into a state of unified consciousness samadhi, that is the ultimate form of embodiment.

Chapter Two:

Western Context for Hatha Yoga

This chapter explores the Western context for an interpretation of hatha yoga as a practice of embodiment by returning to some of the questions raised by Sidney Jourard in the Introduction: Why is the average man in the West not 'in his body'? What are some of the effects of disembodiment? How can practices of embodiment such as hatha yoga address this need for reconnection with the body?

To address these questions, both the contemporary field of somatics and the diverse approaches to hatha yoga in the United States will be considered. Within the field of somatics, I found a Western perspective of embodiment which articulated why Americans need practices that explore all of the dimensions of the soma or "the living body in its wholeness." Somatic practices have many parallels with hatha yoga; however, not all approaches to hatha yoga value a deep interior connection with the soma. Before considering somatics, I will provide a survey of the different approaches to hatha yoga in the United States to place the perspective of this thesis in context. In particular, I will critique the current fitness-based approach to hatha yoga as potentially reinforcing a disconnection with the soma that is present in Western culture rather than engaging with the yogic relationship to interior body described in Chapter One. Definitions of embodiment and principles of an embodied perspective of hatha yoga are also discussed.

Approaches to Hatha Yoga in the West

It has been estimated that over six million Americans are currently practicing yoga⁶ (Koomer, 1996). Within the myriad different forms of hatha yoga, several approaches can be identified: 1) an integrated approach based upon schools of yoga started by Indian teachers, such as Iyengar, Ashtanga, and Viniyoga, which view asanas as part of an integrated practice including other techniques of yoga; 2) a therapeutic approach in which asanas are used for various conditions such as sciatica, asthma, heart disease, and stress-reduction; and 3) a fitness approach in which the asanas are used for exercise. The integrated forms of yoga established by Indian teachers are the most widespread followed by the emerging trend of viewing yoga as a fitness system.

An Integrated Approach to Hatha Yoga: Traditional Schools Within the United States, the prominent forms of asana-based practices are Iyengar Yoga, Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, Viniyoga, Sivananda Yoga, and Kundalini Yoga⁷, all founded by Indian teachers. While each of these forms of yoga has its own emphasis within the practice, the approach can be viewed as "integrated" in that the practice is based upon yogic philosophy that views asanas as a means of integrating different aspects of the self. Many of these Indian teachers have written books or given interviews that express their perspectives. It has been my experience, however, that very few yoga students go out of their way to find or understand the philosophy of the practice. Following is a brief description of the primary forms of yoga in the West that take an integrated approach to yoga asanas. These different styles can be found in studios devoted exclusively to that form, such as the Iyengar Institute of Los Angeles, or within an eclectic yoga center which offers many different styles. While it is impossible to reduce these practices to a short description, a brief summary will provide some background to the style and range of practice in the United States.⁸

Iyengar yoga, founded by B.K.S. Iyengar, is one of the most widespread practices of hatha yoga in the United States. Iyengar yoga emphasizes alignment, precise instruction, and the use of props as an approach to awakening consciousness within the body. Ashtanga yoga refers to the system expounded by Patanjali over two thousand years ago, but also refers to a set of six series of asanas taught by Shri Pattabhi Jois of Mysore. Also called Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, this practice links postures together in a flowing sequence grounded by the techniques of ujjayi breathing, dristi (concentrated gaze) and the bandhas (internal containment of energy within the body). Under the guidance of a teacher, a student starts with the first series, gradually progressing to more advanced postures according to their level of ability and integration. Sivananda yoga, founded by Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, maintains an ashram-type setting for its hatha yoga classes. Other practices such as chanting and meditation play an integral part in the program. Kundalini yoga was established as a school of yoga in the United States by Yogi Bhajan, the leader of an American Sikh sect, and involves the use of mantra, rapid breathing known as "breath of fire," and visualization.

⁶ This estimate is based upon a survey by the Roper Institute in 1994.

⁷ Other prominent styles of yoga not covered within this thesis are Kripalu yoga founded by Amrit Desai, and Integral Yoga by Swami Satchitananda. These schools are widespread on the East coast with less national representation.

⁸ For a more detailed description of these forms and a history of yoga in America see Carol Rossi's master's thesis, *Crossing Borders: Yoga Practice in Los Angeles*, 1995.

Within an integrated approach to yoga asanas, bodily practice is pursued as a foundation not only for health but also for the integration of the whole person. B.K.S. Iyengar expresses the essence of this perspective well:

By performing asanas, the practitioner first gains health, which is not mere existence. It is a state of complete equilibrium of body, mind and spirit. The yogi realizes that his life and all its activities are part of the divine action of nature. His body is a temple which houses the Divine Spark. He feels that to neglect or to deny the needs of the body and to think of it as something not divine is to neglect and deny the universal life of which it is a part... Where does the body end and the mind begin: Where does the mind end and the spirit begin? They cannot be divided as they are inter-related and but different aspects of the same all-pervading divine consciousness. (Iyengar, 1966:41).

As a student of Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga for the past six years (with influences from Iyengar and Viniyoga), I have greatly benefited from the depth of these traditions. I am also part of a third generation of teachers who, influenced by the senior Western teachers of these systems, are creating a dialogue between tradition and innovation. For example, a senior Ashtanga teacher, Tim Miller, has taught workshops on "Awakening the Energy Body" as a way to explore the subtle body activated through Ashtanga practice. Another senior Iyengar teacher, Aadil Palikahva, has devised a method of working with props as tools for releasing emotions held within the body. There are endless examples of such innovation taking place at dedicated schools of yoga. These traditions are the heart of yoga practice in this country, maintaining a link to the tradition of yoga as well as creating a ground for experimentation.

A Therapeutic Approach: The Use of Hatha Yoga for Medical Problems and Stress Reduction

The benefits of yoga postures, yogic breathing, and meditation have been studied in the West since the 1920's and 30's when scientists, medical doctors, and psychiatrists began to examine the astounding physiological control demonstrated by yogis. These early studies produced the first examples of human beings' ability to affect their autonomic nervous system by documenting the ability of yogis to slow down their heart rate at will (Feuerstein, 1991 51). The therapeutic effects of yoga asanas have been recorded in yogic texts since the first reference in the Puranas (Varenne, 1976) and can be found in India today at Ayurvedic (Indian traditional medicine) clinics, and institutes dedicated to yoga therapy such as the Vivekananda Health Center outside of Bangalore or the Yoga Mandiram in Madras. Yoga asanas are prescribed for a host of ailments ranging from everyday problems (e-g. constipation or headaches) to recovery from injuries to curing and relieving diseases such as cancer or heart disease. In the United States, Viniyoga applies yoga therapeutically to assist in all types of physical and psychological ailments. A host of other organizations such as the International Association of Yoga Therapists and the training program, Integrative Yoga Therapy, have been created in the United States to support this approach.

In the Western medical and psychological community, yoga has been recognized as an excellent method of stress reduction. In this approach, a gentle or 'restorative" style of

movement is often used for its emphasis on relaxation. Dr. Dean Ornish is an example of a Western doctor who has popularised the use of yoga asanas for relaxation and body awareness in his book, *Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease* (1990). He describes the benefits of yoga asanas in helping heart patients relax and recognize signs of stress in their bodies through increased sensitivity to their physical, emotional, and spiritual states:

For most of us, the duality of our muscles --contracting and relaxing -is out of balance, for our muscles are chronically tensed and contracted. .-.The way to manage stress is to change how you react to a situation. The circumstances don't change, but you do (Ornish, 1990:146-147).

The therapeutic approach to yoga recognizes the benefits of the asanas at times as a form of physical therapy, and in other cases as a way to develop body awareness and relaxation to serve in the healing process or prevention of disease.

A Fitness-Based Approach to Yoga

In contrast to the image of yoga as gentle stretching practices for relaxation, there is a recent trend of viewing yoga as "one of the hottest fitness trends for the 90's" (Gordon, 1993:48). Hatha yoga can now be found offered in gyms across the United States as an exercise option next to aerobic classes. This approach was born out of the discovery of other styles of yoga, such as Ashtanga Vinyasa or Kundalini, that had a dimension of being physically challenging, strengthening and sweat-producing -qualities not previously associated with yoga. Hatha yoga has always included active, strengthening, purifying elements as part of self-cultivation, but not just for physique building. Without an understanding of the philosophy of the practice, yoga becomes merely another exercise system. The goals and ideals of the American fitness world shape the population's orientation to exercise, often supplanting the purpose of hatha yoga. A host of American celebrities and fitness experts now have instructional videos for hatha yoga such as the "New Yoga Workout" by exercise instructor Cathy Smith. The following text from the back cover of her video illustrates this fitness-oriented approach to yoga:

New Yoga is a dynamic workout that combines the best elements of many yoga styles. By improving overall muscle tone, flexibility and balance this workout will keep you in top physical form. It will also shape your legs, buns and thighs, strengthen your back and sculpt your upper body. The postures are great for relieving stress, tension and unleashing your hidden vitality. No matter what your age and fitness level, new yoga will help you look and feel your absolute best. (1995)

While hatha yoga has many physical benefits, its appropriation as a fitness system is reinforcing an external, result-oriented approach to the body that is characteristic of movement experiences many Western practitioners bring to yoga. Aerobics, weight-lifting, running, tennis, cycling, and to some extent forms of dance are all affected by this orientation. As Candace Norton writes:

Most physical educators rarely consider the body in any way but as a thing in the environment to be dissected, manipulated, treated, improved and utilized as an instrument for achievement . . . These conflicting conceptions of fitness and sport are an extension of the oldest cultural issue, the mind/body problem. This problem, at least 2,000 years old, has appeared in our time in two forms: body as adversary of mind and spirit and body as decorated and decorative object (Norton: 1986:40-41).

While every individual who practices hatha yoga has his or her own unique connection to his/her embodied self, the dominant American culture's relationship to the body can be seen as a reflection of this long history of ambiguity. In the following passage from *Meditations*, in which the existence of God and the real distinction between mind and body are demonstrated, Rene Descartes, the father of the Western mind/body dualism, articulates in philosophical terms the separation of mind and body:

I am only a thinking being and not an extended being and since on the other hand I have a distinct idea of a body in so far as it is only an extended being which does not think, it is certain that this "I" is entirely and distinct from my body and that it can exist without it (Descartes, 1642/1951 :74).

This type of dualistic thinking has been part of the Western psyche for centuries, intimately shaping how we relate to our bodies. Descartes' idea that the mind can have a separate life from the body has translated into the way we approach bodily practice. The body is often exercised while the mind is elsewhere. This experience is typified in the image of rows of Americans at their local gym exercising on treadmills while reading magazines with televisions above competing with the sound of background music. This "disembodied" approach found in some fitness experiences is a reflection of the enduring conflict between mind and flesh in the West (Bandy, 1986).

This fitness trend in yoga is a pendulum swing in the secular direction from the guru-associated yoga of the 1960's. Popular articles appearing in newspapers and magazines make yoga "safe" for the American public through descriptions such as this article in *Harper's Bazaar*:

Unless you live in L.A., admitting to the uninitiated that you're a yoga fanatic . . . is tantamount to professing life-long loyalty to a mysterious religious sect. But yoga-lovers should not despair. The 4,000 year-old discipline, so far associated with incense-burning, vegetarian gentlemen of Asian persuasion, the Beatles and granola-chomping 60's time warpees, is casting off its mystical, quasi-religious bonds and attempting to emerge as one of the safest, soundest, most rewarding exercise experiences of the 90's . . . 'People used to think that yoga was something middle-aged women did at the YMCA, but now they are realizing it's a serious way to become fit,' says Ravi Singh, a Kundalini yoga teacher in New York (Gaudoin, 1993:24).

While this type of article is reporting on a phenomenon that has brought thousands of new students to the practice of hatha yoga, it has fanned the fire of fitness-only approaches with little objective reporting on how many of these new forms are appropriations of traditional systems. For instance, Beryl Binder Birch, Wellness Director of the New York Road Runners Club, has directly taken the set sequences of Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga and renamed them 'Power Yoga' --with a trademark.

Indian teachers are taking note of this appropriation out of a concern for the transformation of the meaning of the practice. In a letter to the editor of Yoga Journal, Shri Pattabhi Jois writes:

I was disappointed to find that so many novice students have taken Ashtanga yoga and have turned it into a circus for their own fame and profit. The title 'power yoga' degrades the depth, purpose and method of the yoga system that I received from my guru, Sri T. Krishnamacharya. Power is the property of God. It is not something to be collected for one's ego (Jois, 1995:6).

An interesting aspect of this phenomenon is that the fitness approach to yoga is circulating back to India in popular Indian women's magazines. Asanas are suggested along with other Western exercises as methods of losing weight and tonifying the body. B.K.S. Iyengar asserts that it is impossible to make asanas purely physical, and comments on this reintroduction of asanas to India via the West:

The body cannot be separated from the mind, nor can the mind be separated from the soul. No one can define the boundaries between them. In India, asana was never considered to be a merely physical practice as it is in the West. But even in India nowadays many people are beginning to think this way because they have picked it up from people in the West whose ideas are reflected back to the East (Iyengar: 1989;46).

Obviously, there are many fitness experiences which encompass states of mind/body unity. In Michael Murphy's book, *The Future of the Body*, he describes extraordinary states of embodied consciousness experienced by athletes and dancers. The criticism of the fitness-based approach to hatha yoga is that it reduces the potential of the asanas to limited goals such as firmer thighs or sculpted arms. The underlying purpose of hatha yoga -the awakening of consciousness in the body -can easily be overlooked.

An Interpretation of Hatha Yoga as a Practice of Embodiment

In contrast to the fitness-oriented approach to hatha yoga, I am presenting a practice of embodiment which emphasizes the process of knowing oneself intimately and experientially through one's body. In this thesis, embodiment is understood as more than just a physical technique; to reiterate, it is defined as a deepening of interior awareness, sensation, feeling, and kinesthetic consciousness as a way of knowing how all of the dimensions of the self -physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual -are expressed through the body interdependently. While embodiment is also defined in the Random House Dictionary as "to provide with a body" or "to give a definite form to" (1983:293), as a general state affecting all living creatures, embodiment has an altogether different meaning in yogic practice and in contemporary Western body therapies. In hatha yoga, the practice leads to an embodied illumination that 'is not merely a mind-transcending state but illumines the body itself; the body is experienced as the body of the Divine" (Feuerstein, 1990;191). In this system, embodiment can be interpreted both as an evolved state of being and as the process of getting there.

This notion of embodiment has also been a focus in the development of Western body therapies from Bioenergetics to Rowing, which come under the rubric of somatics. The assumption is that disengaging from the bodily-felt level of experience is a learned behavior that is, in the West, often culturally supported. Methods of "re-embodiment" are the subject of many somatic modalities which view embodiment as "permeating the different regions of the body with consciousness" (Johnson, 1996). This view of embodiment is analogous to the yogic philosophy of bodily practice discussed in Chapter One. A key word here is "permeating," which may be defined as "penetrating through the pores or spaces" or "spreading throughout" (Random House Dictionary, 1983: 676). The concept of permeating is synonymous with the quality of deepening and implies that there is more to the experience of the body than muscular-skeletal sensations such as a feeling of tight hamstrings. Embodiment can be understood as the process of exploring what in the yogic model is considered as the koshas, or layers of embodied being. R is a movement from the periphery of one's awareness of bodily self to the core, which Jourard calls "the center of one's existence" (1973:4).

The process of embodiment is obviously not just the domain of yoga and somatics. Throughout this century, artists, dance movement therapists, ethnologists, and educators in the field of dance have been pioneering ways to assist individuals (and American culture as a whole) to value and develop their experience of the body as a living, moving and expressive aspect of their lives. The field of psychology has also considered the relationship of psyche and soma in human development.

The next chapter is devoted to describing how this process can occur within the bodily practice of hatha yoga. The focus in this section is to present the principles for interpreting hatha yoga as a practice of embodiment in the context of other approaches, including the field of somatics. These principles primarily address the perception of the experience of hatha yoga rather than a development of new yogic techniques. Two people may do the same asana; however, the difference in their experiences is shaped by how they perceive and conceive of what they are doing. An embodied approach to hatha yoga provides a context for understanding the underlying aims of the tradition for Westerners encountering a new form of bodily practice.

Principles for an Embodied Approach to Hatha Yoga

I. Hatha yoga as bodily practice can be viewed as a way of exploring, cultivating, observing, transforming, and knowing all aspects of oneself as expressed through the body.

II. The primary techniques of hatha yoga -asana (postures), pranayama (breath extension), dristi (focused gaze), bandhas (containment of internal energy), mantra (sound), and svadyaya (self-observation or study) -are the means for achieving the above.

III. Through the techniques of hatha yoga, there is a release of inhibiting patterns manifest in the bodymind and the development of awareness grounded in the changing sensations of the body.

IV. The techniques of hatha yoga enable the practitioner to naturally ease the dominance of verbal/mental activity to experience a non-verbal state of embodied awareness

V. The awareness developed through the techniques of hatha yoga extends throughout the body from the surface into the interior.

VI. The practice of hatha yoga can thus be seen as a practice of embodiment that permeates the body with consciousness.

VII. That embodied consciousness is cultivated during the practice as a tool for self-awareness in everyday life.

These principles are derived from my experience as a yoga teacher and practitioner, studies in yoga philosophy and the field of somatics. My own training, and an elaboration on the technique and process of hatha yoga as a practice of embodiment, will be discussed in Chapter Three. Underlying this approach is the recognition that hatha yoga can be an intensive exploration of the entire body to evoke change within the practitioner that can effect all aspects of the person. While this view is in accordance with the yogic conception of the bodily practice, this multi-dimensional approach is also a characteristic of the field of somatics.

A Western Perspective of Embodiment: Somatic Contributions

Somatics has emerged as an umbrella term for an emerging interdisciplinary field dedicated to the exploration in theory and practice of the "soma," the Greek word for "the living body in its wholeness" (Hanna, 1979:6). The field has been developed in the later part of this century by pioneers who have created a myriad of body-centered modalities based in movement education, hands-on bodywork, and body centered psychotherapy, has contributed to forming a contemporary understanding of embodiment.⁹

What is the common ground among the disciplines of somatics? In Don ! Hanlon Johnson's recently published work on the field's pioneers, *Bone, Breath and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* (1995), he finds an underlying focus not only within the techniques of somatics but also within the way somatics has supported a different view of bodily experience and practice. His perspective articulates the place of somatics within Western culture in this lengthy but important passage:

Underlying the various techniques and schools [of somatics], one finds a desire to regain an intimate connection with bodily processes: breath, movement impulses, balance and sensibility. In that shared impulse, this community is best understood

⁹ Some of the recognized somatic pioneers and the modalities they created are: Moshe Feldenkrais (Functional Integration and Awareness Through Movement); Ida Rolf (Structural Integration); F.M. Alexander (Alexander Method); Marion Rosen (Rosen Method); Alexander Lowen (Bioenergetics); Thomas Hanna (Hanna Somatics); Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (Body-Mind Centering); Emile Conrad Da'oud (Continuum); and Joseph Heller (Hellerwork). Dance Movement Therapy, with its emphasis on bodily-felt experience and movement, has contributed to the evolution of somatics. Other leaders focusing on shaping the theory and vision of somatics include Don Hanlon Johnson (Director of the Somatics program at the California Institute of Integral Studies), Michael Murphy (Esalen Institute) and Eleanor Criswell (Novato Institute and Editor of Somatics).

within a much broader movement of resistance to the West's long history of denigrating the value of the human body and the natural environment. The resistance comes from many quarters: psychoanalysis, poetry and literature, American pragmatism, European phenomenology, feminism, Marxism, tribal and non-western activists and intellectuals.

The unique contribution [of somatics] ... is the development of practical strategies for effecting a return to the healing intelligence of the body. Just as solar engineers and organic farmers have demonstrated alternatives to the energy and agricultural technologies that have alienated us from the earth, these somatic innovators have challenged the dominant models of exercise, manipulation and self-awareness that alienate people from their bodies. They have developed alternative ways of moving, touching and being aware that bring us closer to the wisdom inherent in the ancient structures of collagen, nerve fiber and cerebrospinal fluid (Johnson :l 995:xvi).

From Johnson's perspective, somatic practices are not isolated, self-enclosed healing arts but part of a larger recovery of the soma, our bodily intelligence. I am asserting that hatha yoga at its root responds to somatics' call for embodied practices within contemporary Western culture. There are three areas of somatics which are relevant to this thesis: 1) somatics' view of the soma and the need for revising our relationship to the body; 2) the development of sensory awareness and movement reeducation, as a response to the need for greater body awareness and mobility; and 3) the focus on releasing restrictive psycho-physical patterns in the body that affect an individual's quality of life. These will be explored and then brought into relationship to hatha yoga not as analytical tools, but as a supportive perspective.

Body as Soma: The View of the Body from Somatics

From the view of somatics, embodiment is our birthright, a natural fact of being alive. Life does not occur except in embodied form. What we see and experience in life is always through a living body and this living body is constantly changing and moving. This primary observation reaffirms the approach within many somatic practices to recover the soma through movement. From the perspective of Thomas Hanna:

Whatever life may be in abstraction, we know that the way life manifests itself in living bodies is through autonomous movement. The living body is a moving body - indeed, it is a constantly moving body. This is the prime trait by which we recognize life and distinguish the quick from the dead. (1979:viii).

For Hanna, a now-deceased educator and visionary within somatics, this living, moving body is best described as a soma -the body of life.

The history of the soma as a self-guiding body ranges from the simplest One-celled organisms to the complex central nervous system of mammals where each cell is communicating and changing. While being somatic may be a natural legacy of being alive, human beings in the West have not always perceived their bodies so organically. The way in which the body has been generally perceived in the dominant Western culture affects

both our collective and individual relationship to being embodied. Joseph Heller, founder of Hellerwork, notes that:

For most of us, a "body" is something an "I" owns like a car or a dog. Except when something goes wrong with the mechanism and we experience illness or disease, we rarely attempt to understand the relationship between our bodies and our selves. . . . As if in reaction to this divorce of body and soul, a few modern students of the body have redefined the identity of the first person singular. For instance, Ken Dychtwald "stopped 'having' a body and first began to realize I 'am' my body and that my body 'is' me." Similarly, Stanley Keleman "felt that I did not inhabit my body, I was my body" (1986:4-5).

This objectification of the body has led not only to a separation of the "I" and "body," but has also created misperceptions about the nature of the body as a static, machine-like object rather than a fluid, changing process. This misperception manifests in a number of ways within our culture: for example, the teaching of anatomy primarily through the use of charts and cadavers; the commercial use of the body to enhance products; and the development of performance-enhancing technology in athletics. By realigning our perception of our bodies with the feeling and sensory realm, somatics contends, a healthy experience of the bodily self is cultivated.

The Development of "Internal Literacy": the Need for Sensory Awareness and Movement in Facilitating Embodiment

The development of sensory awareness is integral to embodiment, for the soma is accessed through sensations experienced within the body. somatic's understanding of sensory awareness and movement is relevant to hatha yoga in that it helps to articulate the cultural environment which creates a general lack of internal body awareness in dominant Western culture. Thomas Hanna believed that because American society encourages what he called "exteroceptive" behavior: the general population is "internally illiterate" in that they barely sense anything inside themselves. According to Hanna, "for so many people, yoga is the introduction to what I call the somatic realm -experiencing the body from within" (cited in Knaster, 1992:74). Hanna and other somatic pioneers recognized the ability of movement to awaken this deficit of sensory awareness. Again, Thomas Hanna:

Most adult human beings have very little ability to sense the movements of their own bodies and consequently have little ability to move and control their bodies. The sensorimotor functions at the heart of the human central nervous system are in the typical adult atrophied. Except in rare instances, the contemporary, urbanized human being reaches adulthood with a sensorimotor system that is only minimally developed and then during the remainder of his life, he steadily loses the ability both to sense his body and to move it efficiently (Knaster, 1992:71).

Just as the visionaries of somatics returned to nature and the evolution of life to reveal the presence of the soma, the movement educators within somatics found an affirmation of the primacy of movement at this universal level as well. According to Dance Movement

Therapy pioneer Mary Whitehouse, all of life is moving inwards from the cosmos to the individual cell:

And man? Whoever he is, wherever he is, he too lives in movement. His body is a world of movement in itself. Breathing and circulation, digestion and reproduction are all unconscious movement processes, the wonderful motor pattern of his life. ... Most of all in our twentieth century civilization, he talks. Words have become his primary means of communication and realization. And slowly, slowly, without his knowing it almost, the words and the talking which are only one kind of movement linked to one kind of understanding, take the place of another quite different awareness of himself and others. (1995:241).

This different awareness is kinesthetic sense, which Whitehouse defines as 'the sensation which accompanies or informs us of bodily movement' (1995: 242). Kinesthetic awareness is the sense of the body in motion, for when the body moves, sensation is generated through the skin, muscle tissue, bones, organs, and blood sending messages through the neurons of the nervous system to the brain which then creates a feed-back loop and acts through the limbs. This sensory-motor loop for the formation of movement patterns can become inhibiting if too limited or habitual (Cohen, 1993, Juhan, 1987). Within the dominant American culture, most of the twenty-four hours of adult life is spent in a limited range of motion. It is no wonder that a state of "sensory-motor amnesia" (Hanna, 1995:349) develops in parts of the body where little movement or awareness has occurred -or, at the other extreme, where movement has been repeated so habitually and unconsciously that a loss of conscious sensing evolves (Hanna, 1995:349). To provide a simple example, one can imagine sitting at a desk all day as a computer programmer. Focused for hours upon the screen and involved in mental processes, the body soon develops a posture that responds to the programmer's weak lower back and shoulder tension due to the pace of the work. After several days, months, or years, a holding pattern emerges that results in restricted movement in the lower spine and/or inability to release in the shoulders. The development of habitual body patterns is described by bodyworker Deane Juhan:

No matter how much I move myself around my strongest tendency is to move in the same ways that I have always moved guided by the same deeply seated postural habits, sensory cues, and mental images of the body. . . If I can succeed to develop (new) movements. . . without my own system of cues and responses interfering, it is possible to treat my mind to a flood of new sensations (Juhan :1987:8).

Many somatic modalities focus upon exploring new sensations and movements as a means of releasing habitual patterns of the bodymind. For example, Body-Mind Centering (BMC) was developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen as 'a fundamental approach to embodiment through movement, touch, voice and mind' (Cohen in Somatics, 1996:59).

The BMC process includes focusing our minds into the body on a specific area or body system, giving information to the body through visual, verbal, proprioceptive and kinesthetic means. . . such processes help to integrate body and mind by aligning attention, intention and sensation as they inform the body tissues about movement potentials (Hartley:1995:121).

In a BMC workshop I attended, we spent time watching how a balloon filled with water rolled across the floor as a model of learning to move from the fluid content of the body. We then spent time initiating the same rolling movement from the organs of the body, feeling the difference between moving from a sensory experience of the interior of the body and from mechanical movements. In my experience of these different approaches, I gained insight into the importance of sensory awareness in assisting embodiment.

The Release of Inhibiting Patterns with the Bodymind: The Perspective of Somatic Psychology

Somatic psychology is an approach that focuses on how the body contains, reflects, and manifests psychological patterns. This field builds upon the Western psychological tradition, from Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich through Alexander Lowen and Stanley Keleman to develop theoretical and practical approaches to the psyche through the ground of the body. As stated earlier, hatha yoga provides a release in specific areas such as the hips, thoracic spine, and hamstrings that are often centers for holding patterns. Somatic psychology helps to articulate why yoga asanas are potent psycho-physical postures by providing insight into "emotional anatomy", a term developed by somatic psychologist Stanley Keleman to explain how different emotions are stored within the body. Focusing on releasing inhibiting patterns and stored emotions within the body is part of many of the modalities of somatics that are based in hands-on bodywork. These modalities, including Rolfing, Hellerwork, Rubenfield Synergy Method, and the Rosen Method, were developed out of the previous groundwork in psychoanalysis and a lineage of Freud's students who gradually moved towards direct work with inhibiting patterns at the bodily level.

According to psychoanalyst Weston LeBarre, "Psychoanalysis is the first psychology to take seriously the whole human body as a place to live in" (1968:18). Freud developed a theory of how basic drives and conflicts were played out in the body at each developmental stage. Freud maintained that the ongoing repression of opposing feelings and emotions creates pressure within the psyche which could sometimes manifest as in an overflowing of this repressed energy into certain areas of the body. Unable to fully receive and contain the overabundance of energy, the body zone becomes numbed, pained or diseased. In this way, the original emotional conflict is converted into a physical disorder (Le Barre, 1968).

Ironically, and partly due to the cultural values of the time, Freud's "talking cure" method of psychotherapy did not deal directly through the body but rather through the psyche and an analysis of language and imagery. The task of integrating the body into a psychotherapeutic process was taken on by one of Freud's most promising and favored students, Wilhelm Reich.

Reich posited the body as a primary focus in psychotherapy and self-healing. He viewed the body's natural, rhythmic flow of energy as the basis for health and happiness. Reich observed that the normal flow of energy through the body followed a four-beat pattern:

Tension -charge -discharge -relaxation

This pattern was seen most clearly in health, and in the human orgasm response (Lowen, 1975). When there is an incomplete discharge in the body as in illness or sexual dysfunction, the flow of energy becomes blocked and begins to distort natural feelings, emotions, and sexual fulfillment. These blocks in the body are formed around chronic or heightened contractions which Reich referred to as "armoring." Muscular contracting is a natural and temporary response to a stressful event. If our lives become filled with stressful events, these same muscular contractions become chronic and permanent. At first, the armoring of the musculature allows the person to repress immediate feelings and emotions in service to physical and psychological survival. When chronically armored, however, the blocked energy builds until it leads to psychosomatic disease, chronic pain, and emotional dysfunction (Manone, 1990). Reich developed bodywork and breathing-techniques that aimed at loosening armoring, particularly in the muscles of the chest, to enhance the breathing process. For Reich, breathing released repressed emotions, including the memory of the original traumatic event which led to the armoring in the first place (Reich, 1933:45).

Alexander Lowen, a student of Reich, developed Bioenergetics Analysis, a balanced approach to bodymind psychology which placed an equal emphasis on psychological, social, and bodily processes. Lowen, like Reich, viewed all organisms as energetic processes which take in and release energy (Lowen, 1978). The charging up of energy takes place primarily in the upper body: the chest, the arms, and the head, as breathing, eating, sensing, and thinking. The discharge of energy primarily involves the lower half of the body: the abdomen, pelvis, and legs, as digestion, sexual release, physical movement, and a sense of groundedness to the earth. For Lowen, energy in a human being moves through four layers: ego layer, muscular layer, emotional layer, and core (Lowen, 1978)¹⁰. Hatha yoga directly deals with such armoring through slow, sustained stretching of the muscle tissues, ligaments, and tendons which, when tensed, stifle the free flow of energy that Reich and Lowen address.

Stanley Keleman, the Neo-Reichian, who coined the term "emotional anatomy," further elaborated on Reich's method of character analysis and armoring by looking at the way in which emotions are embodied. Emotional anatomy is the structure of our emotional experience as reflected in the shape of our body (Keleman, 1985). Our skin, muscles, bones, organs, hormones, and brain all pulsate, change, and become patterned by our experience. Thus, the study of the shape of the human body reveals its genetic and emotional history. Within emotional anatomy, form and feeling are reflexive, interdependent aspects of the self. According to Keleman:

Anatomy is a kinetic morphology, the shapes of human process extended over time. It is a pattern of feeling, a state of tissue. This feeling pattern of tissue state is the feeling of ourselves as individuals capable of expansion and contraction, arousal and satiation. The feeling of ourselves is a by-product of cellular metabolism and tissue tone codified in the brain as the way we function. Thus the shape of the tissue plays a part in determining its

¹⁰ The ego layer contains the psychic defences of the personality (denial, projection, blaming, distrust, rationalizations). The muscular layer contains chronic muscular tensions that support and justify the ego defences and protect the person against expressing underlying suppressed feelings. The emotional layer includes suppressed feelings of rage, panic, terror, despair, sadness and pain. The core or heart contains the urge to love and be loved. For Lowen, all four layers must be accessed for a therapeutic process to occur.

own sensations and feelings (1985:58). To summarize, Ida Rolf describes the way in which emotional patterns form muscular patterns:

An individual experiencing temporary fear, grief or anger, all too often carries his body in an attitude which the world recognizes as the outward manifestation of that particular emotion. If he persists in this dramatization or consistently reestablishes it, thus forming what is ordinarily referred to as a "habit pattern," the muscular arrangement becomes set. Such a setting of a physical response also establishes an emotional pattern. Since it is not possible to establish a free flow through the physical flesh, the subjective tone becomes progressively more limited and tends to remain in a restricted, closely defined area. Now what the individual feels is no longer an emotion, a response to an immediate situation; henceforth he lives, moves and has his being in an attitude (1977:45).

My reading of somatic psychological literature has helped me understand how the range of yoga asanas are designed to release these habitual patterns in the body, and why long and sustained practice is needed to transform places of chronic holding. Keleman's theories of emotional anatomy also provide a way to comprehend the emotional intensity and release that students sometimes experience in asanas. In the next chapter, student experiences related to this process will be explored in greater detail. The use of hands-on adjustments by yoga teachers that have a similar intention to somatic bodywork will also be elaborated.

Summary

Somatic modalities are practices of embodiment. In this thesis, several areas of somatics have been explored for their parallels to hatha yoga philosophy. These areas include the view of the body within somatics, the development of internal awareness through movement and the senses, and the releasing of inhibiting patterns of the bodymind. Both somatics and hatha yoga perceive the body as a living intelligence reflecting emotional, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions. This view often challenges outdated experiences of the body as a solid object or as a mere encasement for the mind. Hatha yoga practice also focuses on developing internal awareness through sensations experienced during the asanas and conscious breathing. The asanas provide a wide range of motion for the practitioner to transform habitual movements in the body. Twisting postures, for instance, move and elongate the spine in new ways that can be therapeutic to the way the spine moves in most Americans' daily life. Gradually the asanas reeducate movement patterns - -such as the lengthening of the spine --that students can incorporate into their daily lives. In the process, emotional content stored in the body can be activated as the asanas affect the holding patterns in different parts of the body. Somatics and hatha yoga both view the process of embodiment as the development of a conscious body that is a foundation for well-being and personal development. The next chapter describes in greater detail how hatha yoga can assist students in becoming more embodied.

Chapter Three:

Yoga as a Practice of Embodiment:

Technique. Process. and Student Experiences

In this chapter, I present hatha yoga as a process of embodiment to emphasize the potential of yoga for deepening body awareness and knowledge. This chapter has two parts. In the first section, I describe the basic techniques of hatha yoga, and how through my own teaching style I emphasize an embodied approach. In the second part, I describe a process of embodiment from beginning students to more intermediate students. The material for this description is based upon interviews with students that have regularly taken my classes, and my own observations as a teacher. In my conclusion I address ways in which more formal research could be conducted. The purpose here is to support my thesis with a more detailed illustration of how hatha yoga leads to a deeper level of embodiment and how being more embodied affects the life of yoga students outside of the classroom.

The Basic Techniques of Hatha Yoga

The basic techniques of the practice -svadyaya (self-observation), asana (posture), pranayama (conscious breathing), vinyasa (synchronized movement), and shavasana (final relaxation pose) - are the core for developing embodiment. Some hatha yoga practices also draw upon other techniques such as dristi (focused gaze), mantra (sound), and bandhas (internal containment of energy). In the beginning, a practitioner learns dozens of asanas which move his/her body into new forms and patterns. A new way of breathing is introduced that brings in the element of self-observation and reflection. A style of moving, known as vinyasa, in which movement within and between the asanas is sequenced with the inhale (uplifting movements) and exhale (grounding or contracting movements), is learned. The following is a description of these basic techniques.

Svadyaya: Self-observation

Svadyaya ,translated as study of the sva, or self (Desikachar, 1996), can be understood as the practice of self-observation¹¹. Svadyaya is a thread that is utilized in all the different techniques of hatha yoga, whether the student is learning to observe changes in movement patterns or the breath. The practice of svadyaya is a basic foundation for embodiment as it provides a method for becoming aware of the interconnectedness of thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, feelings, images, and the insights that arise through the practice. There is no specific form of inquiry outlined but rather a quality of objective witnessing of what is happening internally while engaged in any of the below techniques. Svadyaya assists students in guiding themselves toward what they begin to recognize as an experience of embodied unity by noting the habits of the bodymind which

¹¹ Svadyaya is also often translated as the study of yogic texts (Feuerstein, 1990).

draw the awareness away from being present in the body. The ability to recognize how we create unnecessary tension in our bodies is an acquired skill that is invaluable in practice and in daily life. For example, students may encounter an asana that is difficult for them as it activates a part of their bodies where they experience restriction (such as tight hips or hamstrings). Through svadyaya, the student may observe changes in his or her breath, the agitation or frustration that may arise during difficult postures, or tension in a particular area. Through svadyaya, the student can consciously shift these reactions in order to move into a more subtle and transformative experience in the pose.

Asanas: the Keys that Unlock Body Consciousness

Asanas are the catalyst of hatha yoga practice, initiating change on the bodily level that begins the process of embodiment. There are literally hundreds of asanas -forms that have been crystallized over time, containing their own inherent dynamics which affect the individual practitioner. The different grouping of asanas, such as standing poses or forward bends, are general categories that describe the fundamental form and function of the poses. For instance, forward bends can be either seated or standing postures in which the spine extends towards the thighs (Photo 4), and backbends are poses in which the backward flexion of the spine is encouraged through the elongation of the back (Photo 5).

Within these broad categories, there are dozens of variations which evolve from foundation poses that are suitable for beginners but are profound enough in their effect that they are still part of an advanced practice.

Paschimottasana ,for example, is a forward bend that continues through all levels. In the beginning, the practitioner is learning the technique and alignment of the asana: i.e. how to extend through the spine and lengthen the hamstrings by flexing the feet and pressing the backs of the knees into the floor. Gradually the pose starts to engage other layers of the self, releasing emotions and energy as the hamstrings begin to open. As the practitioner begins to yield to what in the beginning can be very intense sensations in the back of the legs, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "surrender" unfolds as a practical technique for transforming resistance. Physical resistance is no longer purely in the hamstrings but is entirely interwoven with the psyche. Thus, as will be described, the asanas are keys which start to open the body of the practitioner to initiate a process in which every cell, from the surface to interior, is touched with awareness.

Pranayama: Conscious Breathing

The first step in learning to breathe in yoga is the process of becoming aware of the breath, in order to move from autonomic breathing (which is typically shallow) to conscious breathing (which is slower, deeper, and more even). The beginning student learns to feel the movement of the inhale and exhale in the body in order to breathe with a steady, slow, and deep rhythm. Some teachers (particularly those based in Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga) teach ujjayi breathing as the fundamental breath. In ujjayi, the breath is drawn through the back of the throat so that a subtle hissing sound is made with the rising and falling of the inhale and exhale. With ujjayi breathing, the student can listen and

observe the quality of the breath (such as smooth, coarse, thin, thick), duration, and rhythm (evenness of inhale and exhale). When applied to the asanas, the student can observe how the breath changes when doing difficult postures in contrast to poses in which there is ease. Ujjayi and other forms of deep breathing also increase the intake of oxygen, which contributes to physiological changes within yoga practice.

One of the primary functions of conscious breathing is to provide a focus for the distractions of the mind. From the beginning, the students are involved in trying to mend the separation of mind and body by learning to train their flow of thoughts so they are engaged at the bodily level. As outlined in the history of hatha yoga, asanas emerged out of the meditative tradition of yoga. Thus, the practice of breathing and the development of awareness in asana practice have some parallels with the foundations of meditation. Within hatha yoga, breathing becomes a way to focus awareness within the body, to curb the constant flow of unrelated thoughts which draw attention from what is happening in the present. A common metaphor compares the mind to a monkey that is constantly jumping from thought to thought. Giving the mind a focus such as deep breathing helps not only to harness the potential of concentration and awareness, but also to transform the tendency to avoid, deny, and detach from the reality of what is happening within the body. This type of training facilitates embodiment by developing the ability to stay with the experience of the soma rather than disembodied awareness by shifting into the world of the mind. When practicing the asanas, breathing helps students to gradually become more aware of what is going on inside themselves. As practice deepens, the breath becomes more integral to embodiment as a type of special consciousness that the yogis refer to as prana.

Vinyasa: Synchronizing Movement and Breath

The practice of vinyasa, or the synchronization of postures and breathing in a flowing sequence, is a technique that brings the element of movement into the practice of yoga asanas. While asanas could be perceived from the outside as being still, on the inside of the asanas the posture continues to grow, open and change through subtle movements. Vinyasa creates a flow between postures by following the natural structure that opens in an asana and connecting it with another related asana. Surya namaskar, or sun salutation, is one of the most fundamental examples of vinyasa. Beginning and ending with the basic standing position, *tadasana* or mountain pose, the sequence unfolds on an inhale with the arms reaching overhead and then follows on an exhale by extending the torso forward over the legs. In the first variation of *surya namaskar*, a practitioner follows those two movements with another seven asanas, with each posture corresponding to either an inhale and exhale (Figure 4). Both beginning and advanced students do *surya namaskar* as a way of warming up the body and centering the bodymind.

With vinyasa, movement becomes a more vital part of yoga asana practice. For beginning students, awareness is expanded to the body in motion. Like the cultivation of *ujjayi pranayama*, it can take many months of practice before the quality of moving in hatha yoga starts to become smooth and fluid. There is, however, no one way of moving. Vinyasa can become a microcosm of the self in action, revealing subconscious tensions around movement in the form of forcing, rushing, straining, or withholding.

Shavasana: Embodiment through Relaxation

Shavasana, or corpse pose, is an essential part of any hatha yoga practice, and is vital to understanding how hatha yoga deepens a student's quality of being embodied.

Sometimes translated as "basic relaxation pose" or "final relaxation pose," shavasana occurs at the end of a yoga practice for anywhere from five to twenty minutes, depending on the amount of time available and the needs of the class. With the limbs comfortably apart and eyes closed, students consciously release tension and effort in the body until they are able to completely rest without the disturbance of thought. Sometimes in a class setting, the teacher will talk the students through the relaxation by having them slowly scan their bodies from the forehead to the toes, briefly inhabiting specific areas (such as the backs of their eyes or each finger of their hand) and consciously releasing the tension in that area. While many movement systems have some period or method for "cooling down", shavasana is a unique method of completely ceasing all external movement to allow the central nervous system to rest without outside stimulation.

In an urban setting where such stimulation runs high, many students discover that it is difficult to release their nervous system or the tension held in the body. I believe that shavasana is a radical and essential pose for Western yoga practitioners, as it is the opposite of "doing" and processing constant stimulation. Shavasana helps students find the experience of "being" in the body without this predominant distraction of mentally processing the outside world. Shavasana is the opportunity for students to discover their interior landscapes by intimately inhabiting their bodies. Student experiences in shavasana in the beginning and intermediate stages will be discussed later.

Other Techniques

The other techniques which may be applied in hatha yoga practice are the use of dristi (focused gaze), mantra (sound), bandhas (internal containment of energy), meditation (dhyana), and kriyas (cleansing techniques). The practice of dristi is the focus of the eyes on a still point that changes according to the dynamics of an asana. Sometimes the gaze is directed at the body, such as the tip of the nose (nasagra dristr) for backbends or the navel (nabhi dristr) in the pose downward dog (adho mukta svanasana). The technique of dristi assists the practitioner in steadying his/her focus and attention. When the mind wanders, the movement of the eyes also follows. The bandhas, literally translated from the Sanskrit as "locks," are methods of containing internal energy through lifting or closing parts of the body. There are three primary bandhas: mula bandha (the subtle lifting of the muscles of the perineum), udiyana bandha (the lifting of the lower abdominals in and up towards the spine), and jalandhara bandha (drawing the chin towards the sternum). These bandhas are applied in certain postures and in meditation. The technique is not widespread except in the systems of Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga and Viniyoga. In Ashtanga, mula bandha and udiyana bandha are applied throughout the practice as methods of centering attention consciously within the body (it is impossible to maintain automatically), and as a means of providing support through the core (spine). The bandhas have relevance to the embodiment process in that awareness is being cultivated in very specific ways within the body. The use of sound (mantra) is more primary in some forms of asana practice such as Viniyoga, where the chanting of Sanskrit is combined with certain

asanas. In many hatha yoga classes, chanting may be done in the beginning (as in the Ashtanga opening chant) or at the end of practice; usually this involves the sounding of the consummate yogic mantra "om." Despite many stereotypical images surrounding the use of mantra in yogic practice, sound in the yogic view vibrates within the body and is used to awaken different energetic centers (see Chapter One's section on chakras). While many teachers view asana practice as a form of sustained meditation, other teachers also include seated meditation practice as part of hatha yoga class. Another more esoteric practice is the kriyas, various internal cleansing techniques using water, cloth, and string. In the practice of neti, a special cloth string is threaded through the nasal cavities and used like a gentle floss between one nostril and the other as a way of cleansing the passages for the flow of prana. All of these yogic techniques are profound methods which cannot be fully explored here, but are mentioned as other potent tools that can be integrated into an asana-based practice.

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