

Discovering Our Borderlessness Through Yoga

In the West, yoga is usually taken to mean *hatha yoga*, and is regarded as a form of physical exercise. But yoga has its origins in a spiritual tradition. The word 'yoga' means 'connection', and this gives us a clue to its use on the spiritual path. Non-duality is the understanding that there is only one reality. 'I' – whatever I really am – is not separate from world. There is no 'inside me' and 'outside me'. No separation, no border between me and the world.

This is part of Francis's response to a question about *hatha yoga* in which he explains how to practise it in a way that helps us discover that borderlessness experientially:

FL: What is the goal of the yoga? The yoga acts on the mind and on the body. And the goal is to make the way we experience the mind and the body consistent with the universality of consciousness. And that is consistent with what we call here the truth. If consciousness is universal and not a feature of a physical body, if consciousness is universal and real, then it follows that the body of consciousness, meaning our body as consciousness, is the universe.

And the physical aspect of the yoga revolves around the question: is it my experience that my immediate surroundings are as much my body as my arms and feet and legs? That's the question. Or is there a barrier that separates? If the answer is 'there is a barrier that seems to separate', can this barrier disappear, dissolve?

Everything which is undertaken in the process has to be undertaken in the light of this ultimate goal. In other words, the *asana*, the *kriya*, the *bandha*, the *pranayama*, etc. has to be undertaken with intelligence. We have to know what we are doing. It's not like applying a recipe with blind eyes. It doesn't work. We have to know *why* we are doing it if we are taking an *asana*. We have to know what to do. And what to do is to check out the barrier. Is there really a barrier that separates this body from its surroundings? If so, how is this barrier experienced?

We'll discover that if we stick to the reality of our experience, by which I mean if we don't use concepts, by which I mean if we don't go to what we know already intellectually about the body and the world. If we remain in this not-knowing openness of the newborn child who knows nothing about the world he or she just came into, there is no separation. In our direct experience of the body and of the world, there is no such separation. That has to be understood. Not just intellectually as I speak, but experientially.

And we have to come back to it in the *asanas*. The goal is not to stretch the body more and more. That is useful if you want to be a ballerina, but not to dissolve the barrier. The body has to be respected, accepted, welcomed, and loved. So the attitude is one of respect and one of openness. ...

The breathing and the *pranayama* is emphasized for the following reason. One of the types of bodily sensations we identify with easily is the breath. Because for a bodily sensation, or a set of bodily sensations, to be a good candidate to represent what we are, it has to be a quasi-permanent experience of us. For instance, a toothache that happens once every three years cannot be a good element for us to identify with, because what am I when the toothache is not present? The toothache obviously is not me. But the breath is always present. So the breath is a good candidate for identification. And the way we identify with the breath is via a subtle contraction that disrupts the natural flow of the breath. So in the *pranayama*, we gently slow down the breathing process to look at it with a microscope, and to go back to a smooth flow

without jerkiness, without contraction. When we eliminate these contractions, the psychological charge or identification that was hiding in these contractions disappears, dissolves.

There are many more aspects to the technique of the yoga. But what is important is to keep in mind the goal, which is a dissolution of the apparent separation between our human body and its surroundings. ... When you take a posture, you should minimize, you shouldn't impose a strain to the body. ... It is not the 'what' which matters, the 'what we are doing'. It is *how* we are doing the 'what'.

So once we are more intimate with the 'how', then every movement in our life becomes yoga. We can play a musical instrument, it's yoga, we can play tennis or swim or ski, it's yoga. You see, because we do it differently. We do it without anticipation. For instance, in tennis, it's all about timing. If you anticipate, it's not good. If you're late, it's not good. Same thing in skiing; if you want to force your turn – aaaih – you have to allow for the skis to turn and to take you with them. In the martial arts, in the Eastern traditions, you have to go with the flow, with the chi.

[Francis Lucille, 26/5/2024, [What is the purpose of Yoga?](#)]

As Francis explains in that quote, if we enjoy *hatha yoga* that is just one way in which we can explore our borderlessness. But that's not the only form of yoga. In his retreats, he describes simpler yoga exercises that anyone can do. Here is one example:

FL: Thoughts, bodily sensations, sounds and images appear in the same space, which I call mind-space. So when we make a distinction between these two spaces [*inside space and outside space*], a separation between these two spaces, it is not the direct experience of these spaces, because in fact you experience only one space. It is some mind processes that go on automatically, that we have acquired through learning, that separate these two spaces.

But this mental process of separation is kind of an effort, and it is not [*always*] necessary. There are circumstances in which it is necessary. If I need to grab an object out there, things like that. But there are many cases when it is not necessary. In fact, we are not aware of it, but even when we are in ignorance, there are many cases in our life when we don't make this distinction.

So it is interesting to try to be more often in this condition of no separation. In other words, the idea should be that unless it is necessary to have this separation, our default state will be one in which the two spaces are not separate. It requires some kind of retraining of the mind, of the brain, if you will.

And we can conduct exercises closing the eyes, feeling that everything is inside, as we open the eyes, making sure that everything remains inside. Or ask yourself, what has happened that seems to introduce a separation between these two spaces?

So you close your eyes, and then you open them. You close your eyes, and you feel that everything is in the same space, including the sounds. And then you open your eyes, and you make sure that nothing changes. If something has changed, you close your eyes, you go back to the feeling that everything is inside, and then as you open your eyes, you make sure everything remains inside. And what helps you is the intellectual understanding that it is correct, that it corresponds to a more direct perception of the world and of the mind. In other words, a more effortless perception. Since the separating process is added to the raw experience in which there is no separation.

[Francis Lucille 25/7/2024 Retreat at Weyarn]

While *hatha yoga* involves exploring all parts of the body, the yoga that Francis teaches focuses on areas of the body that we identify with, and which seem to constitute a border between 'me' and 'the world':

FL: In our raw experience of the body and of the world, on the level of bodily sensations, there is no border. In other words, our raw experience of the body, without the memories of past experience coming into play, is one in which I am not separate from the rest. That's the experience of the new-born child. The borders are the product of past experience and memory.

....

In a more direct approach [*than hatha yoga*] we simply observe whatever bodily sensations are there that make us feel I am this and not that. In other words, and by noticing them, we have an inventory, a catalogue of all the usual thoughts and concepts and bodily sensations with which we identify. And having memorized this catalogue, we can debunk them as soon as we identify with them.

That doesn't require more thorough exploration of the body, its nooks and crannies, which is the goal of *hatha yoga*. So *hatha yoga* is more ambitious, in the sense that it is not as surgical. It doesn't go directly to the specific points of identification, but it explores the body as a whole, bringing transparency everywhere, and by the same token, all the points of identification are removed.

Talking about that, the more aware we are of a certain part of the body, the less likely we are to identify with it. For instance, observe that if you ask yourself, 'which part of my body is a good candidate for "me"?' you'll see locations like here [*forehead*], or like here [*throat*], or like here [*heart*], or like here [*stomach*], but never your hands. Never the hands. Why? Because we use them.

We have such a refined knowledge of our hands. Because of the little tasks we do with them, such as playing a musical instrument, or writing, painting. There is no twilight in our hands. We know them. We know them in all their details. There are other areas of the body that are more in the twilight, and these are the places where, in this confusion, we can believe to be that.

So *hatha yoga* is like looking everywhere. The direct path is more looking where there is a problem, and debunking it.

[Francis Lucille, 6/6/2024 June Retreat]

In the following dialogue, Francis first explains how the mind imposes an interpretation of distance and borders on our sense perceptions and bodily sensations. He goes on to describe a yoga exercise we can do to retrain the mind to allow flexibility in the interpretation of our experience:

Q: Definitely in my experience it feels like the bodily sensations, for example, are closer to me, whatever that me is, closer than, say, the sound of the birds. I'm not sure if that's something I can investigate, if that's an indication of an identification with a locality?

FL: What you're talking about is not your direct perception. It's an interpretation of your direct perception. ...

The feeling that my bodily sensations are closer than the image I see, is something which was not built into our DNA. But it's something that has been acquired through our existence after birth. A young newborn child doesn't have this notion of distance, for instance. And moreover, she doesn't have the identification with the body here.

So when you say, I feel that my bodily sensations are closer to me than what I see out there, first understand that that's a result of an interpretation. Because what you see out there, you don't see it. We see nothing out there. Everything we see is in here. Because what we see is not the world out there, but it's our perception of the world from in here. Your perception and my perception are different. Even if we look at the same thing. Which means that we don't see the thing. The thing is out there. Our perception of the thing is in here. We don't see the thing in itself out there. We see our perception of the thing. And our perception happens in exactly the same space where the thoughts appear and the bodily sensations appear.

So then in order for you to have this impression, I am closer to my perception than I am to the thing out there, two steps are required. The first step is the one we learn during our early childhood of distance between this body here, that bumped into things. And of this hand here that can grasp some objects, but other objects are beyond grasp. The distance between the body and the objects out there. And we learn it by bumping into them, trying to grab etc., matching them with the sense of sight and depth. And this process is normal. There is nothing wrong about it. There is nothing that needs to be changed about it in fact.

But the second step that is required is that somehow I have chosen to be 'this here' rather than 'that out there'. So I am this here – we have to investigate the evidence of that. This kind of label we have put to some things as being me here and other things as not being me, being other than me. And in the case in point, what we identify as being 'me here' is bodily sensations. And also as being thoughts. So there are two kinds of perceptions we identify with, bodily sensations and thoughts.

So what I am saying here is the theory of it. Normally it is easy to find out what it is that we identify with on the level of the body. Because one way to do this is to ask ourselves: I, this word I, what is it referring to experientially in this moment? So if we conduct this experiment, we have the sound 'I'. And perhaps we see the letter 'I'. So we think 'I', and we see the resonance of it on all levels of our experience. And especially what it points at on the level of bodily sensation. We go through all that. And knowing that it is only thoughts and bodily sensations, we can discover them. If I think 'I', I hear the sound, I see the letter 'I', I can feel my voice making the sound and then these are bodily sensations. And then there is something here [*in the chest*]. Sometimes if I say 'I' as a thought, I feel something here [*in the head*]. What is important is just to see it, to experience it, knowing these perceptions for what they truly are. They are perceptions. In other words, they are perceived, they are never me, because I am perceiving.

So that which seems in this investigation like a failure is in fact a success. The success is to find that I am nothing that is perceived. Because in this observation, everything that I perceived is automatically dismissed from being me because I am the invisible perceiver of all of that. And besides, everything that pretends to be me and that presents itself when I ask the question, 'what am I?', is something which is evolving. There is not one single thing, there's not one stable thing. The only stable thing in this experience is the space, the invisible perceiving space in which it unfolds.

There are other tricks that you can use. For example, the one of moving with your eyes closed. We are going to do it, you close your eyes and you move your right first finger, you oscillate it left to right, right to left, slowly. And the feeling is, the finger is moving, but I am not moving. Then gradually you add the arm, we do the same thing, left and right, right and left. And the feeling is, well, the arm is moving, I am not moving. And then at the same time you add the head moving from left to right. Is there still the belief, the feeling, I am not moving? Or does the fact

that you have added the head to the mix suddenly change your interpretation of what was going on from I am not moving, the arm is moving, the finger is moving, to now I am moving. Then if that has happened, we have caught the identification. It's when the head started moving that my feeling changed from the finger is moving, the arm is moving, to now I am moving. It shows identification with the head.

Now, let's assume we still have the feeling, OK, I am not moving, now the arm and the head are moving, and I move the torso at the same time. I ask myself the question, am I moving, yes or no? And then if the answer is no, I am not moving, the body is moving, I am not moving, it's all moving in me. But if there is a change when I add the body to the mix, it's surely because there are bodily sensations perhaps in the solar plexus area with which I identify.

So it's a very smart tool because we never identify with the finger. Nobody thinks 'I am my finger', because after all, if I lose my finger, I don't die: it's unfortunate, but it's not the end. And if you find this exercise too dangerous, you can start with the little finger. And then progressively you add stuff and you see when it changes. The beauty is that when you stop at some point, it doesn't take too long doing this exercise test regularly, to debunk all this identification in you.

[Francis Lucille 2/8/2024 Retreat at Weyarn]

We don't need to get rid of all the mind's conditioning. Most of it has a useful purpose and is not a problem. As Francis explains, it is only the sense of being separate from the world that needs to be addressed. This starts to happen naturally after a liberating glimpse of our true nature. But the yoga exercises he suggests can help with this realignment:

FL: The body-mind has all kinds of patterns. Some are acquired through the genes, developed through the physical development, but also patterns acquired through experience, education. Most of these patterns are not problematic. Quite the opposite. The ability to speak, to speak a language, for instance. The ability to walk. The ability to have a profession, a field of expertise. The ability to go about the chores and the necessary tasks of our daily lives. Getting dressed, sitting, etc.

However, there is a certain subset of patterns that are not natural to the body and to the mind, that have been acquired through ignorance, and are predicated upon ignorance, and which are somehow detrimental to happiness. The goal of yoga is to change these patterns, in order to realign the way we think, and the way we perceive the body and the world. To make this thinking and this perceiving consistent with the universality of consciousness. If consciousness is universal, my body, our body as consciousness is the universe. So the question is, are we perceiving the world out there as being my body? If yes, no problem, carry on. If no, there is a realignment job to be done there.

After having a glimpse, this realignment is already in process. But this realignment can be greatly facilitated if the body-mind cooperates with it. In other words, the body-mind was previously the slave of ignorance. After the glimpse, it becomes a servant of the glimpse. The instrument body-mind is put at the service of the glimpse, so that it can heal itself, spiritually. So that it can realign itself.

And for instance, the kind of exercise I was suggesting is part of it. We do it, we open and close the eyes, we work on the transition, we do that. There is nobody doing it. It is just our good will to be a servant of the glimpse. So in a sense it is the body-mind itself, liberating itself from these patterns in a conscious manner.

[Francis Lucille 25/7/2024 Retreat at Weyarn]

Contemplation

Just sit on the sofa of consciousness and contemplate the painting, the totality of your experience in this moment. It has no inside, no outside, no frame, no borders. However, it has a title. The title is "Now". In this contemplation, let the painting lose itself in you and lose yourself in the painting.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence*]