

# Trust the yoga

by Denise Benitez

*For the ignorant person, this body is the source of endless suffering, but to the wise person, this body is the source of infinite delight.*

*Even though the body exposes one to a whole string of painful and joyous activities, the omniscient sage can patiently bear all experiences.*

*For the wise person, the body serves as a vehicle that can transport her swiftly in this world, and it is known as a chariot for attaining liberation and unending enjoyment.*

—From the Yoga-Vashishta

**T**he practice of yoga creates transformation of body, mind, spirit, and emotions. Consider the enormity of this statement and the audaciousness of me when I make it! However, I can say this with confidence, because it has been my personal experience and the experience of so many of my students, that this is so. After all these years of practicing and teaching, I have learned to trust the yoga itself. I have learned that the spirit of yoga is wanting to move through me when I practice and when I teach, and that it wants to move through my students as well.

What is this mysterious essence of yoga? I have often asked myself, why is my yoga practice so much more transformative than, say, vacuuming, which is another physical endeavor? Or strength training with weights, which, even though I try to perform with a yogic attitude, does not yield the same energy shifting results?

There is something magical that happens on the yoga mat when we turn toward our heart's wisdom in our practice. In the style of yoga I teach, Anusara yoga, we are encouraged to create an intentional softening of our attitude at the beginning of a practice. We learn to remember what inspired us to set foot on the yoga path, and to turn toward our heart's deepest and most life-affirming desire. We ask that our practice help us to evolve in such a way that we can benefit our own life and those of the people around us. And then we give the practice away, essentially trusting that the practice itself will assist us, guide us, and challenge us in a way that is positive. We attempt to walk the fine line of being totally and absolutely committed to this practice, and at the same time not dependent on the outcome. This attitude seems to free up some kind of boundless energy that is lying dormant in most of us, and in that vibrant balance between effort and softness, a new way of living appears.

I love what Satprem, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, says in his book, *The Adventure of Consciousness*. He states, "We might think that these yogic experiences are all very nice and interesting, but that they are far beyond our ordinary human grasp; how could we, such as we are, ever get there? By the simple fact of setting out on the path, the yoga automatically awakens a whole range of latent faculties and invisible forces that far exceed the possibilities of our outer being and can do for us things that we are normally incapable of doing. One has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being, for the yoga consciousness and its powers are already there within you."

For me, one of the great joys of the practice is that it is physical. Asana practice is not abstract. You clearly feel the life force in your hamstrings (sometimes experienced as tightness!), in your shoulders, in your abdominals when you practice. This brings us down to earth, down to the realities of being embodied.

And yet the experience of being embodied carries with it the realization that we are more than just a collection of parts. Recent science has shown that each individual cell in our bodies has its own innate intelligence. Somehow, in their ability to sense so deeply, the yogis knew this long ago. They describe the subtle energies of the body in great detail. I believe they were able to access this wisdom because of the depth of their meditative practices, because of that clear connection Satprem speaks of between the outer mind and inner being.

These early yogis realized that through a physical practice of asana, one could affect and regulate the prana, the essential life force of the body. Modern science tells us that each organ system in our bodies vibrates at a slightly different frequency. Yoga science (*The Hatha Yoga Pradipika*) tells us that asanas divert prana from one area of the body to another, increasing or reducing the vibratory level or charging specific areas. Yoga asana not only minimizes the pain and suffering of the body, but tunes our inner frequencies to a more optimal vibration. As Swami Vishu-devananada says in his commentary on the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, "When you perform asanas, you are not just performing physical exercise. Asanas also act on the vibratory system (just as acupuncture affects the various meridians) by stimulating the prana."

It's reassuring to know that we are not alone in our yoga practice, that there is an energy of life itself that desires powerfully to live in us in the most expansive way possible. We can trust this energy; it will meet us in our practice.