

# Juniper

## Yoga

The word yoga is often translated as “union.” It is at the root of many spiritual traditions, Eastern and Western. Why? Because spiritual paths are a way to forge a union with something larger than ourselves, a reality or completeness that goes beyond the self. Whether it is the Upanishads of ancient India, the Middle Way of Buddhist philosophers, the poetry of the Christian, Kabbalah, or Sufi mystics, or even contemporary physicists examining the universe, we find this yearning for completeness.

Buddhist thinkers were among the first to examine where this yearning comes from. Their inquiry led them to the mind. They intuited that the mind creates its reality through a set of inner constructs, assumptions, and conventions. It literally builds a picture of the world that enables us to function within it. We see the sun revolve around the earth and the sky as blue. We see books and tables and blades of grass, not vibrating atoms and particles and photosynthetic reactions. We construct what we need to perceive, out of a reality that is infinitely more complicated than we experience.

One of these constructions is an experience of autonomy. We feel that we are separate, autonomous beings, making our own choices, doing our own thing. There is a me in here and a world out there. This may be vital in order to function, but it doesn't always leave us feeling great. Deep down, perhaps, we sense the incompleteness of it. We intuit that there is more going on than our small window suggests, and that there is something peculiarly false about our separateness.

So spiritual quests of all kinds are searches for completeness, a union or yoga with something deeper than the mind's illusions allow. Buddhist training is a form of yoga, one about which we will have much more to say.