Citta – Consciousness

Light on Life by BKS Iyengar (excerpts page107)

The Mental Body (*Manas*)
You cannot hope to experience inner peace or freedom without understanding the workings of your mind and of human consciousness in general. All behaviour, both constructive and destructive, is dependent on our thoughts. By understanding how our thinking works, we discover nothing less than the very secrets of human psychology. With this right perception and understanding of our minds, the door opens to our liberation, as we go through the veil of illusion into the bright day of clarity and wisdom. The study of mind and consciousness, therefore, lies at the heart of yoga.

Obviously mind and consciousness are involved at every level of our being, but because of their subtlety they are considered to reside, as far as yoga's blueprint of humanity is concerned, in the third and fourth sheaths of being. The yogi makes a distinction between the mental body (manomaya kosa), where the incessant thoughts of human life occur, and the intellectual body (vijnanamaya kosa), where intelligence and discernment can be found. This chapter deals in detail with the mental body and how the thinking brain, memory, ego, and sensory perception work together, for good or for ill, in our lives. I will introduce the yogic definition of intelligence—making self-aware choices through informed discernment and the exercise of will—but I will return to intelligence and wisdom in the next chapter. It is through this intelligence that we initiate change and free ourselves from ingrained patterns of behavior and steer ourselves incrementally toward illumination and freedom. However, we can hope only to develop intelligence once we understand why we are so often prompted to act without it.

Patanjali, in his Yoga Sutras, chose to make the workings of mind and consciousness, both in success and in failure, the central theme of yoga philosophy and practice. In fact, from the yogi's standpoint, practice and philosophy are inseparable. Patanjali's first sutra says, "Now I'm going to present the disciplined code of ethical conduct, which is yoga." In other words, yoga is something you do. So what do you do? The second sutra tells us, "Yoga is the process of stilling the movements and fluctuations of mind that disturb our consciousness." Everything we do in yoga is concerned with achieving this incredibly difficult task. If we achieve it, Patanjali said, the goal and the fruit of yoga will be within our grasp.

My life's work has been to demonstrate that from one's very first Samastiti (standing still and straight) or Tadasana (mountain pose) in one's very first class, one is embarking on this task. If one perseveres and refines, gaining strength and clarity, always penetrating from the initial practice, then the techniques of body and breath that yoga offers will lead us to reach the great goal that Patanjali has set.

Yoga has precise definitions of mind and consciousness, and the English words we use do not always correspond well to the Sanskrit. I will explain them as I go along, but suffice to say that normal English usage often uses mind and consciousness synonymously. In the precision of the Sanskrit, mind is described as an aspect or part of consciousness. The mind forms the outer layer of consciousness (citta) in the same way as the skeletal and muscular body is the outer sheath that contains the inner body of vital organs and circulatory and respiratory systems. Consciousness means our capacity to be aware, both externally as well as internally, which we call self-awareness. One good image for consciousness is a lake. The pure waters of a lake reflect the beauty around it (external), and one can also see right

through the clear water to the bottom (internal). Similarly a pure mind can reflect the beauty in the world around it, and when the mind is still, the beauty of the Self, or soul, is seen reflected in it. But we all know what stagnation and pollution do to a lake. As one has to keep the water of a lake clean, so it is yoga's job to clean and calm the thought waves that disturb our awareness.
What then are the movements and fluctuations of the mind of which Patanjali wrote? In the image of the lake, they are ripples and waves on its surface and currents and movements in its depths. We all recognize how odd thoughts ruffle the surface of our minds, "Oh, I've forgotten to buy the carrots," or "My boss doesn't like me." We notice how outside disturbances create inner ones, "Their mindless chatter is making it impossible for me to concentrate." In yogic terms, mindless chatter, others' or our own, is a lot of distracting ripples. So also do our desires, dislikes, jealousies, doubts, and fears erupt to the surface out of the mind and consciousness. Thoughts arising from memory are considered as a type of wave, as is sleep, or daydreaming. Even ignorance is viewed as a type of movement in consciousness. We will look at these later, but the point here is that a great many forces are constantly troubling the lake, muddying the waters, and agitating the surface. We can see then that restoring our lakes to a state of limpid, crystalline purity and tranquillity is a huge undertaking. So we should first look carefully at our consciousness, see what elements combine to make it up, and analyse how they work together.

The Inner Workings of Consciousness
Yoga identifies three constituent parts to our consciousness (which it calls citta). They are mind (which is called manas), ego or self with a small "s" (which is called ahamkara), and intelligence (which is called buddhi). The mind, as I have said, is the outer layer of consciousness. Its nature is fickleness, unsteadiness, and inability to make productive choices. It cannot decide between good and bad, right or wrong, correct or incorrect. This is the role of the intelligence, which is the inner layer. Ahamkara, or ego, is the innermost layer of consciousness. Literally, ahamkara means "I-shape." It presents itself as our personalities and assumes the identity of the true Self. It is the part of us that hankers after anything that attracts. Whichever layer of consciousness is active expands, causing the others to retract. Yoga describes the relationship between these parts and their relative proportion to each other, and then yoga explains how they react when they encounter the world, which of course they do all the time. Yoga points out how we generally react to the outside world by forming entrenched patterns of behaviour that doom us to relive the same events endlessly, though in a superficial variety of forms and combinations. Anyone looks at history or listens to the litany of woe and war on the daily news will bear this out. Does mankind never learn anything, we ask in exasperation. The historical "change" from killing with stone clubs, to swords, to guns, to nuclear weapons is clearly no change at all, and it's certainly not evolution. The constant is killing, and the choice of means is merely a result of technological inventiveness or "cleverness" at its most self-defeating. The word cleverness implies a technical facility and dexterity that grows exponentially, whereas intelligence suggests clarity of vision, like pure lake waters that reflect without distortion. There is nevertheless a chance that we can break free from the imprisoning past and individually train ourselves to control this reactive mechanism in such a way that the old patterns are not repeated; new things truly can happen, and real changes can in fact take place. This dawning clarity is, in essence, the path of yoga.

The evolutionary process I have just described can be summed up individually as "Getting more of what I genuinely desire and less of what I don't." The trick is to recognize which is which and then act on it. The paradox arises in that to train ourselves to achieve this, we have to start by doing a fair bit of what we don't want to do, and rather less of what we think we do. Yoga calls this tapas, which I've translated as sustained courageous practice. The French philosopher Descartes said happiness does not consist in

acquiring the things we think will make us happy, but in learning to like doing the things we have to do anyway. Try this when you're waiting for a late train or doing the washing up.

Mind: The Human Computer

Mind (manas) in the yogic understanding is both physical and subtle. It covers the entire body, beginning from the brain and nervous systems of the spinal cortex linking outward to the five senses (sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste), from which it gets most of its information, and then to the five organs of action (hands, feet, tongue, and genital and excretory organs), which it controls and through which it acts. That is why mind is said to be the eleventh sense. Mind is both perceptive and active. The mind is a computer and information storer and sifter, analogous to the central processing unit (CPU) of the computer on your desk. The mind faces out to the external world and deals with the daily affairs of "My knee hurts," "I smell my dinner cooking," "That looks like an interesting film," or "I've forgotten to do my homework." Mind contains the apparatus that makes us outstanding at music, poor at maths, handy in the tool room, or gifted at drawing. These qualities are distributed unevenly between people, and though all faculties can be improved upon, no amount of practice will turn an average musician into a Yehudi Menuhin. There is a physical reality to these talents seated in the brain and senses that can be damaged in a physical way, by accidents such as blows to the head, illness, or general deterioration of health through aging or unhealthy living. What mind is and does dies with us. Through mind we engage with, experience, perceive, and interpret the world. Senses perceive, and mind conceives. According to their health and vitality, we enjoy the gift of life to a greater or lesser degree. Mind is above all clever; clever as they say, as a barrel of monkeys. Like monkeys jumping restlessly from one branch to another, so too the mind flickers from object to object and thought to thought. It is personal, active, outward-looking, and perishable. While the mind is good at sifting and sorting, it is not good at making choices.

Memory, without which we cannot function, is an aspect of mind. The imprints of experiences and sensations are stored by memory within the fabric of consciousness. This permits mind to propose selections such as, "I like the blue, mauve, orange, and pink shirts, but remember that blue suits me best." What we call consumer choice is not a choice but a selection. It offers only an illusion of freedom. The choice to consume has already been made. Mind alone cannot factor in questions like, "Can I afford the shirt?" or "Do I need yet another one?" Mind can select which one to buy but cannot of itself answer the binary problem, "Do I buy a new shirt or don't I?" Mind senses-understands—sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste, but mind is powerless without its storehouse of past imprints. Therefore when a child is asked to pick up red, he refers to the imprint of red in the cloth of consciousness.

There is a perfectly sensible historical reason for this. Mind, all minds, whether brilliant or dull, are equipped with a simple and instinctual survival tool that is, "Repeat pleasure and avoid pain." This enables us to avoid putting our hands in the fire twice or continually trying to quench our thirst with sea water. The converse of "nasty" implying danger is that "nice" or pleasurable implies the opposite, which is a survival advantage. You can see this most strongly in sexual reproduction. If the sexual act were unpleasant, it would hardly favour the propagation of either our individual genes or the species in general.

In other words, something programmed in our own brain, which worked very well in the far distant past, is no longer bringing us the benefits it once did. A possible reason for this is contained in the phrase "the context of our lives." Animals are constrained by "short termism." Their actions bear fruit, for good or ill, within short time spans.

In the case of man, the delay between action and consequence, or cause and effect, has gotten longer and longer. No animal has ever planted a field with grain in spring, waited six months for the harvest, and then stored and consumed it over the following year. This is a long span of time. When we tell a child to study hard to pass his exams, we know the consequences might radically alter the quality of his life till his dying day, seventy years later. But what the child is feeling is, "I hate maths, I want to watch TV instead." We are back to "nice" and "nasty" and the innate propensity of mind. This is the problem with "long termism," a problem yoga identified more than two thousand years ago. When life's rap on the knuckles is not immediate enough to act as a deterrent, or the reward does not come fast enough to act as a spur, we tend to feel and act like children. We seek immediate gratification. Take the case of disease. Until recently the greatest danger to health came from such diseases as cholera and typhoid. They operate within a small time scale. Drink contaminated water on Monday, sick on Tuesday, dead on Wednesday. Once the link between water and these diseases was established, we quickly learned through intelligence to purify the water supply. Rapid connections are relatively easy to identify and rectify. If you hit your thumb with a hammer, no one is going to convince you the pain comes from anywhere else. Next time you'll be more careful.

To state that the hereditary bias of mind and senses works often in our disfavour is in no way to condemn this miraculous apparatus that we possess. We must simply come to realize how fast, how powerful, and how tricky it is, impulsive as a wild stallion. The information it gives us—"Fire burns" or "Rice is good to eat"—has proved essential to our survival and still is. Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher, said, "Know yourself. Know what is good. Know when to stop." Yoga is concerned to help us reach these goals. Atomic energy is solar fire reproduced on earth. Adequate warmth is desirable. But when we look at the stampede toward the proliferation of nuclear weapons, we must wonder if we have any idea when to stop. A bowl of rice is good. A full belly is desirable. But should it be full twenty-four hours a day? Do we really want "More is better" to be the epitaph of the human race?

In our individual lives, we struggle most with two sorts of action. The first is: Do something "nice" now and at some unspecified time in the future a "nasty" will emerge. Repeat it often enough, and a "nasty" will appear with a compound interest we could well do without. You might call this "From first hangover to cirrhosis." The second is: Do something now that it would be easier not to do (e.g. maths homework instead of TV or get up an hour earlier for some Yogasana practice) and reap the benefit a bit later. Repeat it often enough and harvest the compound interest as the future unrolls. The longer the delay between the primary action/inaction and its secondary effect, the more tempted we are to prevaricate, lie to ourselves, refuse to jump our fences, and take the downhill path. So honesty is a key issue, for without it, "Know yourself" is an impossibility. Thus we deny what is good and never learn when to stop.

Let us now put to one side our mind/brain—gatherer and storer of information and experience and explorer of the world—and examine the second element of consciousness.

I-Shape: The Shape of the Small Self

This is our individual awareness and identification with self, with me, with my singularity and difference from you, my apartness, my feeling in some way of being at the center of everything, and that all that is not me partakes of a degree of otherness. This otherness is not fixed, nor is our I-shape. Indeed, one aspect of the self, which the Sanskrit (ahamkara) conveys, is the constantly changing—ever shrinking and expanding—shape of the self. The great night sky may make us feel small and lonely, but a beautiful sunrise can cause us to feel intimately part of a greater whole, cared for by a benevolent universe. On other occasions the sight of the stars and blackness might bring us to the edge of grasping infinity itself,

the source of all our hopes and terrors. So the relationship between self and nonself is fluid. Neither is a fixed quantity. Sometimes we are close and intimate with other people; at other times these same people might seem like our enemies. Yet every time we say the word "I," we feel something hard and monolithic inside us, like a great stone idol.
Whatever the shape of our "I," however defenceless and permeable we allow ourselves to become, a separation between self and other continues to exist in normal consciousness. Even in the rapture of nature's beauty, we know that we are not the glowing sunset. There is admiration, not fusion.

Early yoga philosophers identified a grey area between what is me and not me, something that can be either or both, an interface between "I"-ness and the outer world. It is my body. The great attention that yoga, and other practices too, pay to the body derives from its paradoxical position. In death we cannot take it with us, in life we cannot leave it behind. If I cannot take it with me, how can it truly be me? And why therefore should I trouble myself to look after it when in death it betrays me? But if I do not, I begin to decay in life and experience a slow premature death. Yoga calls the body the vehicle of the soul, but as the saying goes, no one ever washes a rented car. Yoga points out that it is in our highest interest to look after this poor conveyance, at every level, from health to mind to self to soul. The conundrum of body is the starting point in yoga from which to unravel the mystery of human existence. What is the point of having an individual I-shape? Could we, as with our appendix, live without it? Why is this evolutionary trait present to a greater or lesser extent in the whole animal kingdom? Why most of all in human beings?

The most natural answer is simply that singularity of body requires singularity of awareness. Imagine a car with two independent steering wheels and two drivers. It would never stay on the road. Self locomotion necessitates a single "I" awareness linked through mind, senses, and body to the environment that provides food, air, and water. Since each biological entity is subtly or grossly different, and recognizes that in itself, so it needs to recognize difference in others. At the most basic level, sexual reproduction demands we differentiate between male and female. Wind pollination does not. No two grains of sand may be the same, but as they do not move about of their own volition, forage for food, or reproduce, the last thing they need is a highly developed ego.

I have said that our I-shape is fluid. When we throw ourselves into a great ideal or cause, or even go along as fans to support our national sports team at the Olympics, we are subsumed in a larger identity, for the moment laying aside the burden of the individual self. But this collectivity is both partial and temporary. This is still I-consciousness. It is at best a poor substitute for primal unity.

Our "I-ness" is an identifier. We need to identify with a certain particularity in order to maintain biological and mental integrity. All this is to the good, so how is it that the words ego and egoistic carry such negative connotations?

It is because the surface of our I-shape is covered with super glue. Memories, possessions, desires, experiences, attachments, achievements, opinions, and prejudices stick to the "I" like barnacles to the hull of a ship. The I-shape's contact with the outer world is through mind and senses. All the treasure and glory and misery of that contact are passed back to ego, which accumulates them and declares, "This totality is me." My success, my wife, my car, my job, my woes, my wants, my, my, my. And the pure single identity succumbs to the disease of elephantiasis, in which our self becomes grossly enlarged, coarsened, and thickened.

In India there is a lovely name for girls—Asmita. It means "I-ness." Aham means "I." Asmi means "am." This I-am-ness is asmita. Aham means I and akara means shape. When I identify myself with my possessions and attributes, it is ahamkara. From this derives "me, my, mine." When I identify myself with "I", that is asmita—"I-ness." It reflects the beauty of the gift of singularity and uniqueness that all who live possess. It also, however, means pride. You can see the connection— overweening pride is the symptom of the diseased self. Our bodies can fall sick, likewise our minds. So also the self. The answer to our earlier question as to why mankind is so prone to this engorgement of the ego lies probably in our extraordinary mental capacities for speech and memory. Communication and memory permit the ego to feed incessantly off the experiences relayed to it by mind. Naturally it puts on weight and falls sick.

A long time ago, yogis examined this unsatisfactory state of affairs. They saw how the bias in mind of "repeat pleasure, avoid pain" for all its survival usefulness could lead to trouble. Where was the problem with "I-consciousness"? The benefit is clear—single awareness in a single biological entity. Is it possible, they asked, that the singularity of awareness, the I-ness, is not the same thing as my true Self, the essence of my being, but merely for practical day-to-day purposes impersonates it and, as it were, by force of habit has actually come to believe in that impersonation?

That is the nub of it. Ego has been compared to the filament in a light bulb, which, because it glows with light, proclaims itself to be the light's source, electricity. In reality the light that shines from I-consciousness devolves from another and deeper source, one un-knowable in daily life, but which mankind has always intuitively felt to exist. We connect it to our beginnings, to an original oneness out of which we have emerged. We connect it to our destination, to an ultimate whole to which we shall one day return. We connect it to the sky, our invisible gateway to infinity. What we cannot achieve, living as we do in a world of multiplicity, diversity, difference, and separation, of "getting and spending" as the poet says, is to perceive that source and ultimate unity within ourselves, and in the complexities of everyday living. We can perhaps sense its presence and dimly half remember it like the face of a long lost love or timidly apprehend it like the face of the lover we yearn for but have yet to meet.

The most common word we give to this is soul. If the "I" attaches itself to consciousness, it becomes ego (ahamkara). If the "I" can be erased, awareness of soul infuses the consciousness. This is not the true realization of the soul. The soul is a separate entity and should not be confused with any form of "I" consciousness. Nevertheless, when ego is quiescent, consciousness senses the reality of the soul, and the light of soul expresses itself through the translucent consciousness.

To an extent, we all sense the presence of soul in our origin and our end. Looking at the world around us, we are torn between feelings that "soul cannot be in this" and yet, "if soul exists at all, it must he in this also." We guess it to be unlimited by our notions of space and time. Its existence is not defined by or confined to the span of our years between the cradle and the grave. Those brief years are the province of the I-shape of consciousness, which is born, grows, flourishes, withers, and dies in the body that hears it. It is democratic: if in us then equally in others. It is not personal; if anything, it is we who belong to it. If we mistake this separate, necessary but temporary "I-awareness" for our true and abiding identity, if we confuse it with soul, we are in a cleft stick. What we all most desire is to live and to be a part of life.

By choosing to identify with a part of ourselves that MUST die, we condemn ourselves to death. By embracing a false identity, accepting the confusion at face value, man places himself in a position of

almost unbearable tension. Yoga calls this state "ignorance" and sees it as our fundamental affliction, the matrix of error from which all other misperceptions and errors flow. From our ignorant identification with our ego and its mortality arises man's creativity and his destructiveness, the glory of culture, the horror of his history.

We embark on great and wonderful projects to affirm that the egoic self will not die. What are the pyramids of Egypt but an attempt to cheat death? They are a marvel of organization, engineering, geometry, and astronomy, but the motivating force behind them was the Pharaohs' lust for personal immortality and vanity in believing there was a means for his human, kingly ego to cheat the grave.

A voice within us always whispers that this is a forlorn hope, yet still in innumerable ways we endeavour to perpetuate a part of ourselves whose days are numbered, or to comfort ourselves in advance for the coming loss. What is the attraction of great luxury except this? Consumerism cannot be the gateway to immortality. It is an ineffective and temporary balm against mortality.

To endure the fears of impermanence and to struggle against the inevitable is a tiring business, so at the same time we long equally for loss of self, for fusion, for submergence and transcendence, for release from the burden of ego. The egoic self is an exhausting travelling companion, forever demanding that his caprices be pandered to, that his whims be obeyed (though he is never satisfied), and his fears be calmed (though they never can be).

The lovely Asmita, single awareness in single body, is thus transformed into an insatiable, paranoid, vainglorious tyrant, although this is a phenomenon we normally notice more easily in other people. The reason for this sad transformation is ignorance, the misperception whereby a part of us is taken for the whole. Much of yoga practice and ethic is concerned with cutting the ego down to size and removing the veil of unknowing that obscures its vision. This can be done only with the intervention and assistance of the third constituent of consciousness.

Intelligence: The Source of Discernment

This is intelligence (buddhi). Yoga, once again, makes an important distinction between intelligence and mind (manas). The specific quality of mind is cleverness. All people are clever compared to other forms of life. Yoga states clearly that it is not the fact of being less clever than your neighbour that makes you stupid. Stupidity is the absence of intelligence. Stupidity can be behaving in a certain way or not learning from our mistakes. We are all stupid sometimes. Relatively speaking we are all clever all the time. A rocket scientist or professor of linguistics may be more stupid than a peasant in the fields or a worker in a factory. He may well be much cleverer but that does not necessarily make him more intelligent. Let me give you an example. Scientifically advanced nations invent many complex and terrible weapons. To do this they must be clever. Then they sell these weapons indiscriminately around the world, and the arms end up in the hands of their enemies. Is this clever or stupid? If stupid, did their stupidity consist of a sudden loss of cleverness or of an absence of intelligence? Mind is certainly highly inventive. But is that the same as being innovative? To innovate is to introduce the new, to engage in a process of change. To invent is to produce a different variation of the old. This is a subtle and important distinction, for we often mix the two up. For example, if someone always makes me angry, I may express my anger in a thousand different ways, inventing new words or actions to do so. The day I choose not to respond with anger, something new has taken place. This is innovation. There is change. Yoga tries to help us to truly innovate, to develop the intelligence that allows us to create a new relationship to our ego and our

world. This new relationship is dependent on perceiving the world objectively and truthfully and on making choices, discerning what is best.

Intelligence has two overriding characteristics. First, it is reflexive; it can stand outside the self and perceive objectively, not just subjectively. When I am being subjective, I say I hate my job. When I am being objective, I say I have the skills to get a better job. This first quality makes possible intelligence's second. It can choose. It can choose to perform an action that is new, that is innovative. It can imitate change. It can decide to jump out of the ruts in which we are all stuck and strike out on a path for its own evolution. Intelligence does not chat. It is the quiet, determined, clear-eyed revolutionary of our consciousness. Intelligence is the silent or sleeping partner in consciousness, but when it awakes it is the senior or dominant partner.

If we glance back at mind (manas) and I-shape (ahamkara), the two conservative stalwarts of consciousness, we will see that logically they are governed by mechanisms that resist change. Mind and the senses that inform it seek to repeat pleasure and avoid pain. We have seen the rationale behind this but at the same time must admit that it is essentially a holding pattern of behaviour, rooted in the experience of the past. It is in consequence likely to shy away from innovation and thus stifle the possibility of evolution. We saw that I-shape or ego defines itself as the totality of the experiences that have accrued to it in the past: my childhood, my university degree, my bank account.

I-Shape, or Ego, is the running total of all that has happened up until now. It is in love with the past. Why? What does ego fear most? Its own death. Where is that? In the future. So of course ego is happiest with endless variations on the past. It is comfortable rearranging the same old furniture in the same old room and standing back and saying, "Doesn't it look different?" Does it? Yes. Is it? No. What ego does not want to do is throw away the furniture and leave the room. That is the unknown. The unknown resuscitates all its panic fears of its own impermanence, the fear that one day its impersonation of the true self, the unknown soul, will be unmasked, at which point its existence, as it has hitherto known it, will terminate.

Early European travellers in India were often horrified to discover that the goal of religious practice was an end to the illusion of the lasting reality of the egoic self. They reacted to this as a sort of living suicide. Paradoxically they also respected it. Experience of samadhi reveals to us that ego is not the source of Self. We transcend ego identification. After samadhi we return to our ego but use it as a necessary tool for living, not a substitute for soul. Ego no longer limits us with its pettiness, fears, or cravings.

The Sanskrit word for philosophy, darsan, means vision or sight. This is the sight of ourselves, an objective vision, acting as a mirror to the self. This is the reflexive quality of intelligence. Plato said that it is not enough to know (which is subjective): We must know that we know. This is objective. It is the consciousness of being conscious that makes us human. Trees are conscious too; a clump of oaks harmoniously spreads its limbs for the benefit of each leaf, each individual tree in the group. But they are not consciously conscious. The consciousness of nature is unconscious. The history of humankind can be described as a journey from unconsciousness to conscious consciousness or self-awareness. If this is correct, then it must operate at the level of the individual, and of the species, as consciousness is permeable.

What is the advantage conferred by the mirror of intelligence? Simply that we can see ourselves as if from a distance. Suddenly the egoic self becomes an object. Normally it is the subject, incapable of

seeing things except from its own point of view. A real mirror permits us to see ourselves as if from outside, therefore to notice what we could not otherwise see, food stains on our ties for example. Thus we can make changes in our appearances if we are disturbed by the images we see. In fact, consciousness is a double mirror, able to reflect the objects of the world, or the soul within. We can choose to take off and clean our tie. We can choose to start asana practice and cleanse our bodies. "We can choose." That is the second aspect of intelligence. Based on objective information, we can choose to clean our ties or not to clean them. We can start asana practice or sleep longer in the morning. In Latin, intelligence means "to choose between." It does not mean simply to think, Have you ever noticed that when we have a problem we say, "Shh! Wait, let me think"? But what we really mean is "Shh! Wait, let me stop thinking." We want to see clearly, and so we need to freeze-frame the incessant flow of pulsating images, words, and their subliminal associations that are erupting from mind. Mind produces thought and image all the time, like a television with no off switch. Thought moves too fast to catch and never, of its own accord, stops. It is an unending analogue wave flowing from our brains out into the ether. It cannot reform itself. Thought cannot solve the problems caused by thought any more than a faulty engine can mend itself without the objective view and intervention of the mechanic. That is the role of intelligence: to stop, to discern, to discriminate, to intervene. Intelligence performs its task firstly by its ability to freeze-frame the flow of thought. This is what we call cognition. Cognition is the process of knowing and includes both awareness and judgment. Cognition allows us to perceive in the present moment that at the heart of a situation is a choice. With the image of thought no longer flickering, we see ourselves objectively in a position where we can ask, "Do I now do this or do I now do that?" Time pauses in a moment of awareness and reflection in which suddenly our destiny is ours to command. "Do I eat a second scoop of ice cream or do I stop now?"

The choice may be hard, but at least it is simple. We find ourselves at a parting of the ways that, however trivial in itself, is somehow momentous to us.

Imagine you wake up early one morning and ask yourself, "Shall I get up and do a bit of yogasana practice for once or shall I turn over and sleep for another hour?" In a way we desire both, but recognize that this is impossible. There is a choice, a fork in the road before us. Both paths have their attractions, but obviously one is easier than the other. Our cognitive intelligence has brought us to a clear perception of choice, but at the moment of decision we are still stuck, Is the harder path (getting out of bed) really an option? Thanks to the second aspect of intelligence, yes, it is. This is the property of will, or volition. This will is sometimes called "conation," which is why we say in yoga that intelligence is both "conative" and "cognitive." Will is what gets our feet out of bed and translates our awareness of choice into action. Will is what converts the harder option from hypothesis into reality. I have often described Hatha Yoga as the Yoga of Will.

Now you are out of bed. The battle is won but not the war. Would it not be nice now to make a coffee and read the morning paper for an hour? Getting up was an achievement, a step in the right direction. but was it enough? Another moment of cognition, of choice, of the exercise of will. Soon you are doing yoga practice at 6.30 a.m. This is new, a first, an initiation, an innovation. This is history being made, your personal history, thanks to the mirror and scissors of intelligence—see, choose, act. Afterward you will probably measure the benefit of the practice in terms of physical well-being as you set off for work, a certain vitality, and some satisfaction at your own activity and self-discipline. What you have also exercised, along with the components of body, is that too-often dormant component of consciousness, intelligence itself.

And tomorrow, when the alarm clock rings, it is all to do again. Or perhaps not quite all. If a well-toned body works better each day, surely the same is true for a well-honed intelligence. For our bodies, the fruit of our sustained, intelligent effort will be, in its widest sense, health. But at another level, what we are really gaining, (and this is the cause of our satisfaction) is self-control.

This is a point of huge significance. Logically, with health and self. control, we are increasingly able to direct our lives. We feel happy when we are directing our own lives because we are experiencing a growing freedom. We are exploring the possibilities of life on earth through the release and realization of our own potential. Freedom is the innermost desire of all our hearts. It is the only desire that leads us toward unity and not separation. It makes possible our aspirations to love and be loved, and on its farthest shore, touches that union with infinity that is the ground and the goal of yoga. If infinity seems a long way off, let us not forget that when, by an act of effortful intelligence, we remove our feet from the warm bed to the cold floor, we have taken our first step.

The diagram below can be understood, in part as a "map" of a significant area of study in the field of Yoga. The area circled in red is the focus for this term.

Table reference: BKS Iyengar Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali 2002 p.