

**Book Review**  
**by Donalee Campbell**

In the introduction to *Light on Yoga*, B.K.S. Iyengar shows us the way to the beauty of the Self. By the inner light that dispels all misconception and pain, one comes to union with the Universal Spirit, and the ultimate realization; that we too are divinity. The ultimate goal of life then, is to reflect that divine light within. Through the disciplined efforts of thought, word and deed, one develops the focus required of the channel. By constant study, one conquers each obstacle through counter measures, and the equipoise of yoga is attained.

Yoga is not a religion, but a science of religions, wherein all sacred texts are studied. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes yoga as a communion with the Universal Spirit, “which is ever one,” brought about through the focus of mind and energy. One of four paths to this communion: action (karma), devotion (bhakti), knowledge (jnana), and meditation (yoga), Iyengar claims yoga is the fountain for the other three. “It brings calmness, tranquility and prepares the mind for absolute unqualified self-surrender to God, in which all these four paths merge into one (p. 23). “When the waters of bhakti (adoration) are made to flow through the turbines of the mind, the result is mental power and spiritual illumination” (p. 39).

Iyengar explains Patanjali’s yoga sutras as outlining the path of raja yoga, a royal union with the Universal Spirit, and described his eight-fold path as both a science and an art. The first two paths, ethics (yama) and discipline (niyama) bring us into harmony with mankind. Yama includes non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya), non-stealing (asteya), continence or self-restraint (brahmacharya), and non-coveting (aparigraha). Niyama includes purity (saucha), contentment (santosa), ardour or austerity (tapas), study of the Self (svadhyaya), and dedication to the Lord (Isvara pranidhana). “Love begets courage, moderation creates abundance and humility generates power” (p. 29). The third stage, posture (asana) keeps us strong and healthy and in harmony with nature. Many asanas resemble plant, animal, and human forms, and teach us that the same Universal Spirit flows through all the creatures and works through the process of evolution. Freeing us from identification with the body, we become fit to reflect the true Self within. The fourth and fifth stages, breath control and extension (pranayama) and sense withdrawal (pratyahara), free us from identification with the mind and the senses. Being the source of vitality or life in the body, a yogi generates power and extends his life by extending his breath. Freeing us from preoccupation with the senses, we are able to turn our gaze to see the divine light within. The last three stages, concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and divine communion (samadhi), take us into “the innermost recesses of the soul”, and bring us into harmony with ourselves and with our Creator. Chaotic movements of energy in the mind (chitta vritti) create both pain and pleasure. By conquering the waves of distortion, the calm mind then becomes a mirror; we see the true reality and reflect that divinity back, through the body, to world we live in. The body becomes a vehicle, or channel, for the true Self.

The remainder of *Light on Yoga* gives detailed descriptions of more than 200 asanas. On the emphasis on hatha yoga, (hatha = force or determined effort), Iyengar believes that it tempers the body, and gives us the knowledge and discipline needed for raja yoga. It prepares us for what is our only true destiny; reunion with Source. This does not happen automatically upon the death of the body, but rather within it, in the eternal moment, which is here and now. The body is an instrument for the attainment of enlightenment. But one must prepare the body, mind and spirit, making it a “fit vehicle for the soul”. Only then can one be united with God, the Universal Spirit, and have inner light. By polishing the facets of the body and mind, each surface reflects the divine light within. Iyengar claims that though Patanjali offers many remedies, none can be effective until the mind is quiet, and the way to this is through determined effort on asana and pranayama. “To reach the goal one needs well developed and coordinated functioning of his body, senses, mind, reason and Self” (p. 30). The aim is to conquer the obstacles of ill health, languor, indecision, indifference, laziness, sensuality, illusion, lack of focus, inability to concentrate, and overcome the distractions of pain, despair, unsteadiness of body and respiration. To this end, one needs to exercise for physical and mental health, constancy of flow, faith, humility, enthusiasm, contentedness, wisdom, stamina and perseverance. Exercising every muscle, nerve and gland in the body, asanas keep the body strong, elastic and free from disease. They calm the nerves, reduce fatigue and improve sleep. Most importantly, they train and discipline the mind to illuminate the divine spirit within, which then acts through the vehicle of the body. Health is an asset gained through hard work, not to be purchased as a commodity. “It is a state of complete equilibrium of body, mind and spirit” (p. 41). The channels of energy (nadis) open up to allow the flow of divine energy, and the vehicle is enlightened.

Iyengar says that a teacher’s role is to remove darkness and bring enlightenment. The guru shows the path to God, inspiring, “confidence, devotion, discipline, deep understanding and illumination through love,” encouraging questioning and analysis to bring the receiver (sisya) to know the truth. In turn, we need to bring a hunger for knowledge, humility, perseverance, tenacity and tremendous patience. Iyengar affirms that through constant practice our minds can become tranquil, our bodies can reflect the light of the divine flame within, and we can come to the ultimate truth, that the soul and the Supreme Spirit are One.