



## Yoga Mandir Newsletter

In this third Edition of the newsletter, I am pleased to include a piece on testimony.

A colleague and I often debate the role of testimony in the practice of Yoga. Its an age-old debate formed around the question of whether yoga is a subject that we are learning about and bringing into our lives or whether yoga is about stripping away and coming back to an essential element within ourselves that needs no cognitive awareness.

The tension between Yoga as a subject to be studied and Yoga as a path of direct experience has deep historical roots in Indian tradition. While not always framed as an explicit debate, Indian philosophy consistently grapples with the interplay between intellectual understanding (jnana) and experiential knowledge (anubhava).

Texts like the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali present Yoga as a structured philosophical system. With its aphoristic sutras and the classical commentaries by Vyasa and others, the tradition invites study, reflection, and transmission through formal learning. The inclusion of Yoga among the six orthodox darshanas reflects this scholastic dimension.

Yet, alongside this, the Upanishads and later mystical traditions often affirm that true knowledge cannot be reached by intellect alone. The Katha Upanishad declares that the Self cannot be known through study or hearing but only realised through inner readiness. This theme recurs in Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna offers philosophical teaching, yet ultimately leads Arjuna to clarity beyond words. Hatha Yoga texts leaned further toward practice, focusing on bodily and breath-based disciplines. Still, these texts themselves are scholarly, acknowledging that guidance and framework are needed to ground experience.

In modern Yoga, figures like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and B.K.S. Iyengar combined both views—valuing intellectual inquiry while insisting on the primacy of practice. For Iyengar, Yoga began with precision and understanding but matures into intuitive practice.

best wishes  
Alan

Alan's commitment to writing continues. Each issue of this newsletter will feature new essays and articles aimed at stimulating thought and encouraging contemplation on the world of Yoga practice and teaching.

We invite all those who wish to stay connected with these writings and to be part of this ongoing conversation to subscribe to the newsletter.

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## Testimony in Yoga Practice

In the Indian philosophical tradition, the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired has always been a subject of rigorous debate. The concept of *pramaṇa*, or valid means of knowledge, is central to this discourse. Across systems such as Yoga, Nyaya, and Vedanta, three foundational *pramaṇas* are consistently acknowledged: *Pratyakṣa* (direct perception), *Anumāna* (inference), and *Āgama* (testimony). Each is understood not in isolation, but as part of a framework that shapes how we discern truth from illusion, how we know what we know, and how we come to trust the reality we engage with—both inwardly and outwardly.

These three *pramaṇas*—experience, inference, and testimony—do not function in opposition to each other. Rather, they can be seen as a matrix of enquiry, each one interacting with the others for refinement and completeness. *Pratyakṣa* is immediate and compelling. *Anumāna* extends our understanding by projecting knowledge from what is seen to what is unseen. *Āgama* absorbs the wisdom of others: what is passed down, spoken, recorded, and shared through language, culture and lineage.

In daily life, we constantly move between these forms of knowing. I see clouds gathering (*Pratyakṣa*) and infer that rain is likely (*Anumāna*). A friend tells me that the forecast predicts a thunderstorm (*Āgama*), and I factor that testimony into my understanding. This example may seem simple, but it takes on far deeper implications when we apply it to the domain of yogic practice and the pursuit of understanding.

In the context of Yoga, *Agama*—testimony—is not simply about accepting hearsay or popular opinion. It refers specifically to authoritative knowledge that has been transmitted through valid sources: sacred texts such as the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upaniṣads*, and the statements of teachers whose lives and practice are considered a testimony in themselves. But what does it mean to accept such testimony? And at what point does it become valid for a practitioner?

Richard King, in his writing on Indian philosophy, provides an illustrative example. He asks us to imagine someone returning from a journey into the desert. They describe having seen a camel—an odd and improbable creature with long legs, knobby knees, and a hump on its back. One might listen to the account with curiosity or even scepticism. But should we later travel to the same region and encounter this strange beast ourselves, our direct perception aligns with the earlier testimony. What was once hearsay becomes undeniable reality.

Testimony, then, is not the endpoint of knowledge but a bridge. It prepares us to recognise a truth should it arise in our own experience. It challenges us to listen, consider, to hold an idea with open hands—not to believe blindly, but to test its veracity in the realm of practice. This is especially useful in a tradition like Yoga, which is grounded not merely in intellectual debate, but in understanding through disciplined engagement with the body, breath, and mind.

*Pratyakṣa*, for the serious practitioner, is paramount. Experience—immediate, lived, and unmistakable—holds the highest authority. B.K.S. Iyengar expresses this eloquently in his reflections on practice.

‘Though I am rational, I am a man of sentiment and tradition bound. I trust the statements of others, follow their lines of explanation, and experiment with them to gain experience. If my experience tallies with their expressions, I accept their statements. Otherwise I discard them, live by my own experiments and experiences, and make my pupils feel the same as I felt in my experiments. If many agree, then I take it as a proven fact and impart it to others’.

This approach is not one of arrogance, nor of dismissing tradition, but of internalising and verifying it. As Iyengar himself emphasises, he then teaches only what he has come to know through practice, and if many students resonate with this knowledge, he trusts that his realisations are not unique to himself. They become, in a sense, collective—shared not through blind repetition but through the congruence of individual experiences.

This process offers a model of how *Agama* supports and is supported by *pratyakṣa*. Testimony provides the map; practice reveals the terrain. When the two align, knowledge is affirmed not as belief, but as embodied truth. Take, for instance, the yogic understanding of *citta*—the field of consciousness. The classical texts tell us that *citta* is composed of three aspects: *manas* (the sensory mind, which processes impressions), *ahamkara* (the

sense of 'I' or ego-identity), and *buddhi* (the faculty of discrimination and discernment). A student may read or be told this formulation, and at first, it may seem purely conceptual. But in practice—through sustained observation in asana, and in pranayama—the practitioner begins to notice these dimensions: the mind flitting from one sensation to the next, the strong identification that arises with effort or failure, and the quiet voice of insight that watches it all unfold. Slowly, what was once abstract testimony becomes internal knowledge.

This movement—from receiving testimony to confirming it through practice—is the hallmark of a mature Yoga practice. It guards against dogma, while also preventing the practitioner from reinventing the wheel at every stage. Without *Agama*, the path is too vast and scattered; without *Pratyakṣa*, it is too narrow and brittle. Each must support the other.

It is worth noting here that in traditional contexts, *Agama* was more than verbal instruction. It was oral, embodied, and situational. It was passed down from teacher to student not merely through statements, but through silence, example, correction, and presence. The authority of the teacher was not in their charisma or power, but in the depth of their practice and the clarity of their transmission. Testimony, in such a context, was not static. It lives.

In the contemporary world, however, the challenge lies in discerning what constitutes valid testimony. The proliferation of voices, styles, and philosophies can confuse the student who seeks something reliable. Here, the principle articulated by Iyengar becomes a guide: apply what is heard, test it in practice, remain open yet discerning, and hold experience as the touchstone.

To reject testimony outright is to assume that all knowledge must originate from oneself—a stance that may lead to arrogance or stagnation. To accept it without scrutiny is to abandon the very foundation of Yoga, which is enquiry. The middle path is the path of the practitioner, who listens deeply and then turns inward to verify. The goal is not to be right, but to be real. Ultimately, testimony is a gift. It offers us the wisdom of others, the distilled insight of centuries of enquiry, and the humility to acknowledge that we are not alone in our search for truth. But it is in *practice*—day after day, breath after breath—that we test this gift and discover whether it rings true. And when it does, it ceases to be someone else's testimony and becomes our own.

This article along with Alan's other writing, is available here: [Articles](#)

## Yoga Sadhana & Yoga Syllabus



Yoga Sadhana &amp; Syllabus

Yoga Mandir is guided by 2 significant documents.

Yoga Sadhana is our Student guide for each of the levels on the school and defines both practice and philosophy across 4 levels along with practice sequences, menstruation focus, restorative and Pranayama. It is an invaluable guide for students and teachers.

The Yoga Mandir Syllabus guides our teachers across 4 terms for each level of the school.

Yoga Sadhana can be purchased as a downloadable Pdf at [Yoga Vidya](#)

## Parampara-Lineage

### Interviews

The tradition of Parampara—the passing of knowledge from teacher to student—sits at the very heart of Yoga. More than a method of instruction, it is a transmission of understanding, grounded in direct experience and sustained by an enduring relationship. Unlike an academic syllabus or a procedural manual, Yoga is communicated through the living presence of a teacher who has themselves walked the path, refined their practice, and uncovered a way of seeing that cannot be captured through technique alone. It is in this context that the Guru-Sishya relationship arises: a dynamic exchange over time through which the student is drawn into the culture of practice and supported in the unfolding of their own enquiry.

As B.K.S. Iyengar often emphasised, we do not copy the teacher's form—we walk the path they reveal and come to our own insight through persistent practice. It is not the form of the practice that constitutes lineage, but the integrity of enquiry, the discipline of self-study (svadhyaya), and the transmission of subtle understanding from one generation to the next. To uphold Parampara is not merely to preserve a system but to enliven it—to engage fully with the process of becoming a practitioner.

In recognition of the centrality of lineage to our work, we will be conducting a series of interviews over the coming years with senior colleagues and long-standing practitioners from around the world. These conversations will explore how Parampara has been sustained in their own lives and practice, and how they transmit the values and disciplines of Iyengar Yoga within their communities. We hope these interviews will offer insight into the lived reality of lineage and the many forms it may take, while affirming the shared thread that connects us all.



A conversation with Christian Pisano (Nice, France) recorded on zoom in August 2025.

This excerpt from a longer interview in which Christian responds to his approach to teaching.

A repository of these conversations is located here: [Conversations on Yoga](#)

## Yoga Vidya

A living resource of practice-based learning

For more than 25 years, Yoga Mandir's Digital Research Library (DRL) has quietly evolved into one of the most significant and unique archives of Iyengar Yoga around. The DRL includes video extracts from conventions, audio extracts from class recordings at RIMYI, and articles from a range of sources to enable students to listen to the Iyengar's in their own voice wherever possible, and to broaden their understanding of Iyengar Yoga and of Yoga as a subject. This extensive body of work is the result of decades of inquiry by Alan Goode, a senior teacher and long-time student of B.K.S. Iyengar. Alan's personal collection of notes and recordings and his systematic approach to collecting, consolidating and digitizing materials throughout his life have allowed him to create insights into understanding empirical knowledge on a profound scale.

The DRL is rooted in the Iyengar tradition and underpins our study platform Yoga Vidya, which reflects not only a sustained commitment to the system taught by B.K.S. Iyengar but also an ongoing attempt to examine and articulate its principles and link to the Yoga Sutras. Alan's philosophical training, combined with his experiential approach to Yoga as a living practice, has shaped the way this archive functions.

Subjects on Yoga Vidya are not merely a collection of information but are structured into parts using **Learn/Study/Practice** framework, which is consistent with the experiential learning paradigm used by Alan in his practice and teaching. These three strands define a way of engaging with Yoga. **Learn** introduces each topic providing a definition that supports a student's conceptual understanding. **Study** invites deeper philosophical reflection, introducing other voices and perspectives on the topic through articles, video extracts and audio excerpts. **Practice** applies these principles within practice through class recordings that can be followed by students.

What sets Yoga Vidya apart is its refusal to separate knowledge from experience. Yoga Vidya is a resource not only for current students, but an asset

that is continually being developed and created for future generations of teachers and practitioners seeking to understand the profound intelligence embedded in Iyengar Yoga.

This 1-minute video excerpt taken from *P-01 Introducing Pranayama* where Geeta Iyengar speaks about how to get the freedom, movement of the breath, the movement of the skin ....



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