

## Relationship, a Path of Fire

*by Carolyn Reynolds*

Being in relationship with another is sometimes called a path of fire in yoga psychology. Now, this is not to salve your ego in agreeing with you that the stinker you are living with is so difficult that you must endure his/her stupid behaviors that cause that burning sensation in your gut. No, it is called a path of fire because that person you are living with is a mirror, a relentless mirror, of your own behavior. Know thyself. Knowing the self is a gem of the practice of yoga.

Yoga offers some excellent tools for understanding your behaviors and who you really are. One concept is called the four functions of mind: Chitta, Ahamkara, Buddhi, and Manas.

Chitta is the storehouse of all your life experiences. Think of it as a big stew pot. Into the pot goes the experience of your first kiss, the wrath of your father's heavy hand, the exhilaration of making the winning home run or humiliation of not making it, the square root of 144, a bout with food poisoning, etc., etc. The pot is flavored with emotions. An emotional event occurs and all of the things in the pot can take on that flavoring, just like when you put oregano in the spaghetti sauce. For example, when you were a young teen and had an extraordinarily great time with your friends while drinking beer, the thought of beer is flavored with the great emotions of the event. Chitta holds all the experiences, flavoring events with an array of emotions that can result in attachments and aversions.

Ahamkara, or the I-maker, can make a mistake here: "I am a beer-drinking social genius." There is a false alliance between the stuff in the stew pot and the wave of consciousness that declares, "I am."

Buddhi, the discriminator, although not actually part of the brain physiologically, is the yogic correlate to the prefrontal lobes. The frontal lobes are where judgment and reasoning are housed in our brains. Buddhi can be accessed and strengthened during meditation or the process of observing the goings-on in Chitta, Ahamkara and Manas.

Manas is the correlate to the sensory-motor area of the brain. Manas is the part of the mind that supervises our sensory information; or, in absence of Buddhi, can actually be a servant to the information that is calling out to be expressed. Through the function of Manas, we perceive sound, sight, taste, smells, and touch. We eliminate, reproduce, move, grasp, and speak. In other words, Manas puts the stew on the table. The stew will be infinitely tastier if Buddhi is consulted first.

To carry the beer-drinking analogy a little further into the discussion of this path of fire, it is fact that alcohol anesthetizes the outer layer of the brain. Sensory motor mind is affected and speech is slurred, movement is impaired, and even more importantly, the prefrontal lobes and are not functioning. Buddhi is asleep. What is left is the core of the brain, the part that deals with the four fountains of survival: food, sleep, sex and self-

preservation (fight/flight). What is left functioning is called the reptilian brain. Your partner stands before you as a mirror and tells you that you are essentially acting like a reptile. And furthermore, it's scary and he/she does not want to live with a reptile. Now you are faced with giving up your identity as a social genius (which in your mind requires alcohol) or your relationship. If you are willing to access Buddhi, you will know there is a mirror in front of you in the form of the other person's observations. Buddhi knows that there aren't any social skills in alcohol. There aren't any emotions in alcohol. The social skills and the emotions come from you, not alcohol. They are accessible at any time through your will, through your decision-making ability. In meditation you can explore the functions of your mind. Ask, "Is that who I really am?" And then you can ask, "Is this habit pattern beneficial or not?" If it is not, the habit pattern can be attenuated by giving it less and less of your attention. If you fight it, it will grow. What you pay attention to, you get more of. Rather than being controlled by the mind, yoga teaches us how to observe the four functions of the mind, to be master of the mind and to know our true nature. And our true nature is not stew. Then you can say, "Thank you, Honey, for reflecting back to me my false identifications."