



We live in the age of information. Computers at their best just take in certain data and put out other. Our beautiful flat-screen TV's are simply receivers and projectors of visual and auditory information. So what is information anyway, and how does it relate to our yoga practice? While this topic might seem like theoretical information (sic), its application, like a yoga practice, yields tremendous power.

Information, according to Webster on-line, is "the communication or reception of knowledge or intelligence". So, information means the transfer of intelligence, like what happens on the internet, or between our brain and other parts of our body. Intelligence is "the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations". So, information is something that we send or receive that enables us to do better. Human offspring are dependent upon their parents longer than other species so survival information and skills can be conveyed.

Communication

Information exists to be sent and received, whether it's a book or the brain. Communication is that process. The first step involves putting the information into some sort of package, whether it is an email or a nerve impulse. This package is called a message. In that process, certain compromises have to be made. A photo attached to an email, if too large, will not pass certain filters. If overly compressed, it will be too fuzzy to be helpful.

The second step is the actual sending of the information along a pathway, which again subjects the information to distortions and other alterations. A noisy phone connection makes it hard to extract the necessary information. A broken wire or nerve will distort or cut out a part of the total information.

The third step is the reception of the message. The receiver must use the received message to re-constitute the information.

As a final step, the receiver must extract the intended knowledge from the information received.

These steps are dependent upon the hardware, software, and programming of the sender, receiver and information pathway, whether electronic or human.

The game of telephone where a phrase is whispered down a line of people illustrates humorously how much distortion can occur after just a few of these rounds of sending and receiving.

Quality and Access to Information

As illustrated in the diagram, the process of communicating subjects the information to several possible types of compromise. There are deletions,

additions and distortions. For example, a phone connection can have drop-outs, static or echoes, and frank distortion. Even if the information is perfectly communicated, the receiver may interpret the information differently than the sender.

Since we cannot process all available information at all times, a major purpose of the mind-brain-body is to process and select the critical information that is essential for survival decisions, and present it to conscious awareness. Like the channels of a radio or TV, we have a certain choice on what information (impressions) make it to consciousness; but it is an illusion that this information is a true reflection of "reality". For everything we perceive there are vast worlds of information that we do not. Certain trainings, such as biofeedback, yoga, and much of our education can help open and better interpret certain channels of information. A hallucination is an example of sensory information perceived that is not based on reality. Paranoia is an example of where information is misinterpreted as dangerous.

Digital vs. Analog

Information exists in both analog and digital forms. While we are currently in a digital age, certain aspects of our life, such as music and taste will always have analog features. The nervous system uses simultaneous analog and digital processing: the synapse (where two nerve cells communicate) is analog, while the firing of a single neuron is digital. Each paradigm detects different patterns from the same information.

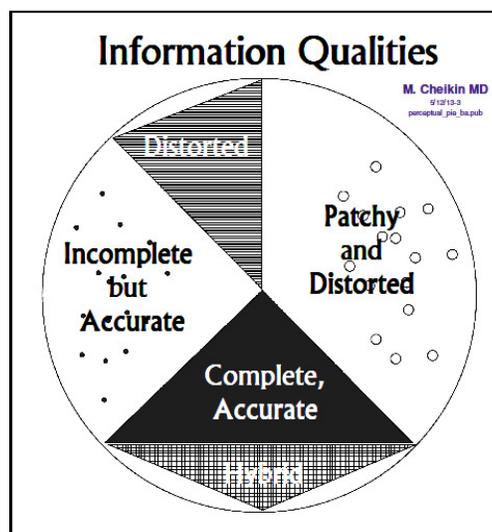
Information and Choice

Ultimately, information is about choice. When an animal sends out a signal, it is telling its species to go to the right rather than to the left, in order to promote survival. With humans, stock trading, war, dating and advertising are all about making decisions based on the information perceived from a situation. Like many of our animal functions, these choices may no longer be necessary for survival, but from an evolutionary point of view our sensory world, the smell and color of a fruit evolved not for pleasure itself, but to promote survival of the plant by attracting us to it.

Genes and epigenes² are essentially a database of information that enables the modulation of our biological machines.

Power

The word power has several similar meanings. In physics, power is defined as how much energy is



delivered or required per unit of time. A light bulb consumes certain wattage; a nuclear reactor is rated by the megawatts it can generate.

When used in human relations, power refers to the ability of one human, or group, to influence or force certain behaviors from another person or group. These definitions are linked in that both involve information and choice. Information allows the choice of a path that requires less energy. With sufficient information, the power of uranium or of an investment can be realized. The ability of a single man like Gandhi to change the course of two nations is an illustration of the use of such power at a supreme level.

The internet is a powerful force since it enables access to information. The future of our species will be determined in large part by what information is public vs. private. Politics is about the control of humans essentially through the control of information and choice.

Sensation vs. Perception

The purpose of the different sensory systems is that each gives us different survival information from our external and internal environments.

The difference between sensation and perception is that “sensation” is the raw data, usually based on the sensory organ, such as the eye. “Perception” is the information that is presented to consciousness, after being passed through multiple processes as discussed above. A classic example of this is by plugging up the nose and trying to distinguish an apple from an onion. While we perceive taste as separate from smell, by the time a taste is experienced it has been integrated in a highly complex fashion that even includes emotion and memory (that is why certain music and smells can elicit past events). Vision is dependent upon functioning of the middle ear—after spinning, or with certain medical conditions, visual perception becomes unstable.

It is an illusion (maya) that we can see the world as it is. Since each of us has different hardware, software, and programming, we each truly see the world differently, like the infinite variations on a snowflake.

Right and Left Brain

Furthermore, each sensory system is hard-wired to the two sides of the brain in different ways. The famous split brain experiments of the 1950’s (by Sperry) demonstrated that the brain has specialized ways of extracting and perceiving information from our sensory world. While over-simplistic, the Right Brain looks at the whole and perceives patterns, helpful for tasks like driving a car. The Left Brain differentiates the sensory world, enabling language and analytic function.

The most advanced human tasks, such as composing or playing music, hitting a baseball, and managing human relations require the Right and Left Brains to communicate optimally.

Information in Yoga Theory and Practice

In the digital age, information is conveyed by electrons, which are both particles and waves. In yoga theory, the material of information is energy and

consciousness, which is both corporeal and esoteric. A yoga practice enables the receipt of information from the mind-body and from other sources that is otherwise unavailable.

Meditation has several definitions and methods (based on the philosophical school). What is common among all schools is the role of meditation in refining the reception, utilization and transmission of information both within and outside the perceived boundaries of body, space and time. Whether still or active, silent or with sound, eyes closed or open, meditation enables receipt of non-sensory based information (such as “intuition” and “imagination”), as well as refining our circuits.

Classic yoga can increase health, intelligence and creativity by providing the user with information. Like an Olympic gymnast who can do a back-flip on a balance beam by fine-tuning the reception of information from her perceptual systems, yogis advanced in their practice become powerful by their ability to make choices based on information perceived from within and without.

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Footnotes and Reading Materials (Books followed by ISBN number)

1. See Dr. Cheikin's previous article(s), especially on “Pursuit of the Ultimate Neurotransmitter Fix” as well as articles on the Adrenal Fatigue and Cortisol. Dr. Cheikin’s website, www.cheikin.com, contains related articles and other materials.
2. Epigenes are molecules that modulate gene expression and are passed from generation to generation. The health and stressors of a parent affects their child, grandchild and later generations apart from the genes.
3. Rama, S, Ballentine, R, Ajaya, S: Yoga and Psycho-therapy: The Evolution of Consciousness, 1976. 0893-890-367.
4. Edwards, Betty: The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, 1999. 0874-774-241.

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