

## Week 5: Contemplation & Study Questions

### What's Up for This Week

#### General Contemplation on Your Meditation Experience

First, I want to encourage you to explore in your journal the effects of the meditation practices we have been doing, as well as of your ongoing experience of practicing the Four Positive Attitudes. This is also a great topic to explore with your partner.

#### Exploring the Kleshas

*(With a TON of questions and exercises! These are offered as inspirations for your contemplation, not as assignments you are required to complete!)*

In Teleclass 5 we began our exploration of the *Kleshas* (the afflictions that create suffering and all the obstacles discussed in Book I). These are described in Book Two, *Sadhana Pada*, the chapter on Practice, in Sutras 2:3-5, (which we worked with this week), and elaborated further in Sutras 2:6-9. This guide offers some commentary and contemplation questions on some of these sutras.

We've also included Pandit Rajmani's commentaries on Sutras 2:3-5 on the Student Page, for you to read if you don't have the book. As always, feel free to select the ones that feel most rich and juicy to you. This study guide will continue to be useful even after the course is done!

**AND:** It's important to remember that Patanjali does not see the *Kleshas* as evidence of "sin" on our part, but literally as obstacles that must be cleared through practice.

The main way that the sutras recommend for dealing with the *Kleshas* (other than meditation and self-realization!) is to consciously practice an opposite attitude. This practice is known as "*pratipaksha bhavana*"—literally, practicing the opposite thought or feeling.

You already do this in many ways. Next week, we'll be discussing this topic more specifically.

Once you've gone through some contemplation of the *Kleshas*, you should find that you have more interest in working with our main ***Walking-Around Practice for this week:***

**Remember to ask yourself, "Is what I am thinking, doing, or planning helping me get more free from the Kleshas, the obstacles to my enlightenment? Or is it increasing them?" If you decide that it isn't helping, can you drop the attitude? Substitute a different attitude?**

**I've found that this question is immensely helpful in moments of intense choice, emotional upheaval, or intention setting.**

## Contemplation Questions and Exercises for Sutras 2:3

### SUTRA 2:3

अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः क्लेशाः || ३ ||

avidyāsmītārāgadveṣābhiniveśāḥ kleśāḥ || 3 ||

*avidyā*, ignorance; *asmitā*, false sense of self-identity; *rāga*, attachment; *dveṣa*, aversion; *abhiniveśāḥ*, fear of death; *kleśāḥ*, afflictions

**Ignorance, false sense of self-identity, attachment, aversion, and fear of death are the afflictions.**

Ignorance is lack of awareness of our own real nature, the inability to realize that we are part of the wholeness, that our real nature is pure Spirit, and that we have total access to the powers of the primordial Awareness that lives as us. We disbelieve that Consciousness is real. We don't recognize that pure Awareness pervades everything and that we are powered by That. We assume that our identity as a limited, particular individual is our real self, that our thoughts, emotions and physical body and its energies belong to a "me" identified with the physical body, and that the world we experience is concrete, real, and outside us. As a result, we are deprived of connection with the vastness and beauty of the Atman, the true self. This is *avidya*.

This primal ignorance makes us feel like a separate self, isolated in a world that we must depend on for survival, love, and happiness. It leads us to identify ourselves as the body, the mind, the personal history, reputation, etc. This is known as egotism, or false identification of the Self with what are actually tools for experience (i.e., the mind, ego, intellect, sensory experience and body). Thus, we identify ourselves as "smart, dumb, successful, unsuccessful, male, female, fat, thin, happy unhappy" rather than recognizing that our true identity is free from these attributes despite the fact that we are experiencing ourselves through these.

Once we identify as a particular limited person, we become attached to anything that gives pleasure to the body/mind (*raga*) and averse (*dvesha*) to anything that causes discomfort to the body/mind. We now live in a world filled with friends and enemies, good and bad, things to be chased after and protected, and things to be avoided and protected against. And all this leads to fear of death—the death of the body, but also to the loss of whatever we believe is necessary to maintain our sense of identity and comfort.

As we'll see later in Book Two, Patanjali believes that these limiting conditions—which create apparent boundaries around our individual self and form a filter through which we view our lives and the life of this world—are a necessary learning tool. The Kleshas

allow the soul to journey through lifetimes of experience, acquiring skills and knowledge, receiving wounds and heartbreak, discovering human love, exploring different worldly identities, learning about the fruits of action (karmic consequences), and how to use the laws of karma for freedom rather than for creating more suffering.

In tantra, the limiting qualities are described slightly differently, but have the same effect of creating a sense of separation between the soul and its source.

From a tantric point of view, the Kleshas rob us of the full power of our innate Shakti, and our hidden super-powers (such as true intuitive wisdom, and other forms of knowing that do not depend on the mind or senses) and which cannot manifest as long as we feel disconnected from our Self. Yoga is, among its other benefits, the most direct way to enhance our Shakti and regain our innate power.

From ***How to Know God***:

**“We are all dimly aware of the presence of the Atman within us. We are all looking for the peace and security of perfect union with the Atman. We all long desperately to be happy. But ignorance misdirects us. It assures us that the Atman cannot really be within us, that we are nothing but individuals, separate egos. So we start to search for this dimly conceived eternal happiness amidst the limited and transient phenomena of the external world. Like the fabled musk deer, we search all over the earth for that haunting fragrance which is really exuded from ourselves. We stumble, we hurt ourselves, we endure endless hardships, but we never look in the right place.”**

**Question:** Ask yourself, “How have ignorance, false identification, attachment, aversion and fear influenced my choices in this life?” Was there a point where you saw through them and realized that there was a deeper truth? How did reaching that point affect your experience of the Kleshas?

**Question:** Can you consider and list some of the concrete ways each of these afflictions creates suffering in your life? For instance, avidya might affect your ability to have confidence in your own lovability and strength. It might make you believe that the concrete physical world is the true reality (and many of us do believe this at a gut level, even though we may intellectually know better) and distrust the subtle. It can make you cling to sources of meaning that no longer mean what they did, because change feels threatening, and our limited perspective keeps us from seeing a bigger picture or a larger perspective. Egotism might keep you nailed to outworn patterns, because they seem like who you are and therefore feel comfortable. (Did you ever hear yourself saying “That’s just how I am!”?). It might make you obsessed with superficial differences like skin color, cultural habits, or political views. And of course, egotism is

operating whenever you define yourself as Joan from Indiana, who is good at math and has her life under control, and looks down on Nancy who has never been able to hold a job for more than six months.

Attachment might make you feel you can't live without certain people or possessions. Aversion can make you behave cruelly or irritably to others, or even to reject certain qualities of your own. Fear of death and loss can cause you to limit risk and consequently deprive yourself of growth and adventure.

**Question:** How have you clung to the messages that the avidya and egotism give you? How do these Kleshas serve the person you think you are? What benefit is there in identifying yourself in limited ways?

**Question:** In your day to day life, what do you see as the primary ways these afflictions cause suffering?

**Exercise:** When a feeling of excitement, anxiety, fear or grief comes up, see if you can feel into it, and connect it to a specific kleshah. How does it change your reaction to that emotion to recognize it as being the result of an underlying affliction that is a part of human design? What happens when you say, "This feeling isn't mine, it's the result of a klesha."?

## Further Questions about Specific Kleshas

### **Egotism: (asmitaa)**

**Question:** Ask yourself, or have your partner ask, 'Who do you think you are?' Really consider the question. In other words, see if you can notice some of the components of your sense of personal identity.

**Question:** Have you ever felt a loss of identity because something you identified with was threatened or lost? (Consider subtle losses as well as obvious ones.) How does this relate to the Klesha of primal egotism?

### **Attachment: (raga)**

**Question:** Since humans are social creatures, dependent on each other to survive and thrive, attachment is obviously a significant aspect of human life, in many positive ways. How would you separate the normal attachment and interdependence that are so much part of our lives on this planet from the way yoga uses the idea of attachment?

**Question:** As an adult, have you ever tried to (or had to) give up a strong attachment? Recalling the experience, consider how that felt painful or even traumatic? How was it beneficial?

Below are a number of questions about attachment. Choose one or two to think about, journal about, and or discuss with your partner.

- Do you believe, or have you experienced, loving another person without attachment?
- When does a “good” or “necessary” attachment (for instance, the attachments between parents and children, between partners or co-workers) become ‘bad’ (i.e., a source of unnecessary suffering for yourself or other people)?
- How is it possible to preserve the necessary attachments (which create cohesion in families and societies) without becoming lost in the delusion that you can’t live without those things you are attached to? Obviously, this is a question for the ages! How would you answer it?
- Aside from obviously toxic attachments, are there attachments that you feel you need to let go of to make spiritual progress? Why?
- What are your primary attachments in this life? Of course, you are attached to your body—are there aspects of your body that you are particularly attached to? What skills or competencies are you particularly attached to? For instance, notice your reaction when you are criticized...does that threaten your sense of self?
- How do you react when something you feel attached to is threatened?
- How do you react when a friend distances themselves from you? When you lose income or are financially challenged?
- Do you associate attachment with love, commitment, obligation? How are they connected and how are they different? How does attachment feed co-dependence or addiction in your life?
- As you contemplate topic of attachment, what insights or feelings arise? Journal about them. Notice if there is anything surprising in your insights.

### **Aversion (*dvesha*)**

**Question:** What do you find particularly annoying in other people? In yourself?

**Question:** What effect does aversion have on your attitudes towards others? To yourself? How does aversion to aspects of yourself affect your happiness, and/or your ability to do sadhana?

**Question:** Identify a strong feeling of aversion to someone or something. Where does it sit in your body? How does it feel? What are the thoughts connected to it? In what circumstances is aversion something you automatically default to?

**Question:** Consider a person or situation or circumstance that you feel particularly averse to. What kind of actions are you likely to take when you're in the grip of that aversion? What would you be without it? (i.e., more tolerant, less anxious, less impatient or rigid?)

**Question:** In what ways does aversion help you on the path to enlightenment? What things do you feel you *should* be averse to, as a yogi?

### **Fear of Death or Loss (*abhinivesha*)**

**Question:** Find this fear in your body. Feel it.

**Question:** In what ways has your *abhinivesha* limited what you allow yourself to do, be, try? How does it affect your ability to expand your consciousness, to try new things, to take career risks?

**Question:** It's sometimes said that when death approaches, one of our chief regrets is for the things that we haven't done. How has *abhinivesha* been implicated as a reason for such regret?

**Question:** How do you feel that *abhinivesha* protects you? Consider this carefully. Then ask, does it really?

## **SUTRA 2-4**

अविद्या क्षेत्रमुत्तरेषां प्रसुप्ततनुविच्छिन्नोदाराणाम् || ४ ||

avidyā kṣetramuttareṣāṃ prasuptatanuvicchinnodārāṇām || 4 ||

*avidyā*, ignorance; false understanding; *kṣetram*, field; *uttareṣāṃ*, in regard to upcoming ones; *prasupta*, dormant; *tanu*, attenuated; *vicchinna*, disjointed; *udārāṇām*, in regard to those that are already active

**Ignorance is the ground for the remaining afflictions, whether they are dormant, attenuated, disjointed, or active.**

**Dormant:** In an enlightened being, the afflictions are inactive, due to the continued immersion in the reality that Spirit is all.

**Attenuated:** In a person who does serious practice over time, the afflictions become attenuated, meaning that they are not experienced except when there is a strong trigger. "A yogi whose afflictions are attenuated can clearly see their presence in their subtle form in her mind. She can also see that they have the potential to induce the mind and senses to conform to their demands. But through *sadhana*, the yogi has developed the capacity to subdue these attenuated afflictions and prevent them from influencing her mind and senses."



**Question:** Remember a time when you were able to do this—to notice and “subdue” an attachment, a fear, etc. How did you do this? What were the tools that were helpful?

**Disjoined:** When you are in the grip of a very strong Klesha, the others may not be so apparent. For instance, when you are angry, you may not feel obvious fear, and you probably won’t feel affectionate attachment (except maybe to your anger !). For a practitioner who is less advanced, the Kleshas may be easy to see through some of the time, and very intense at other times.

**Active:** This is the state of a person who is in the grip of the ‘normal’ human experience of being caught in the afflictions. If we are practitioners, one of the first things we begin to notice about ourselves (and hope to eliminate, even to the point of self-aversion!) is the disturbed mental and emotional environment that arises when we are ‘triggered’ by something.

As beginning and intermediate practitioners, we soon discover that we have a scattered and confused mind. “[As normal seekers] they know they are suffering from inertia, laziness, and procrastination. They are making an effort to subdue their disturbed, distracted or stupefied mind....They are sincerely trying to adopt a healthy...lifestyle, but as soon as external circumstances trigger one of the afflictions, they fall from the path of yoga sadhana.”

**Question:** Was there a point in your life when you became consciously aware of the Kleshas in yourself? (For instance, became aware of your own egoism and felt pained by it?)

Was there a point when you realized that the Kleshas were less active than they had once been?

**Question:** Can you give some examples of these different states of the Kleshas? Can you notice the circumstances in your life in which the Kleshas spring into action?

## SUTRA 2-5

अनित्याशुचिदुःखानात्मसु नित्यशुचिसुखात्मख्यातिरविद्या || ५ ||

anityāśuciduḥkhānātmasu nityaśucisukhātmakhyātiravidyā || 5 ||

*anitya*, short-lived; *śuci*, impure; *duḥkha*, suffering; *anātmasu*, different from soul; *nitya*, eternal; *śuci*, pure; *sukha*, happiness; *ātmakhyāti*, the experience of atman; *avidyā*, ignorance, false understanding

**Mistaking short-lived objects, impurity, suffering, and non-being for eternity, purity, happiness, and pure being is avidya.**

*The questions and contemplations below invite you to examine each of these aspects of Avidya as it manifests for you personally.*

**Contemplation:** Spend a few minutes contemplating the ways in which you have assumed that something impermanent (anything from a relationship to the earth itself) is going to last “forever”. What is the effect when you realize it isn’t?

**Contemplation:** Consider how the idea of “purity” has been used to support racism, xenophobia, etc. To what extent are you affected by your and society’s ideas about purity? (This is not meant to decry the work of government regulations about food, air and water!)

**Contemplation:** The yoga texts say that most of the things we think make us happy eventually cause suffering. What do they mean by this? How has this been true in your own life?

**Contemplation:** Having identified some of the components of your “personal” egotism, notice how it makes you see the world. In other words, what can you identify as the core samskaras that support your sense of limited identity? “Asmitaa leads us to experiences of success and failure, gain and loss, honor and insult, and burdens us with inferiority and superiority complexes. Our inner luminosity becomes dim, and our inner intelligence becomes blind.”

**Question:** How has your crystallized sense of identity trapped you? Have you noticed yourself clinging to that core identification of yourself with it even when you seek transformation?