

Week 2: Contemplation & Study Questions

Overview

Along with this guide, we've included the Study Guide to the Sutras on the Kleshas (2:3 to 2:9) that we worked with in Part I. That is now up on the Course Page. Those of you who took the first course will have had a chance to work with it, but there was so much material in it that I suspect many of you would like to revisit some of the questions and contemplations that you were not able to complete the first time.

What's Up for This Week

This week, we're exploring Sutras 2:6, 2:10, 2:12-16, as well as some related practices. Our commentaries and questions include some additional material on asmitaa, the ego-sense, that were not covered in the previous study guide.

A handout with all these sutras is available on the Student Page under Resources, which includes Pandit Rajmani's translation and transliteration, with full definitions of the Sanskrit, in case you didn't or couldn't purchase the book *The Practice of the Yoga Sutra*. We have also included his full commentary on some of these sutras on the course page. (My own commentaries are in the Class recording itself and are also included below as part of the study guide.) I'll include the transliterations of the first group of sutras and suggest that you refer to (or download or print) the document from the Student Page for reference.

My study guide (the present document!) contains questions and exercises for studying the sutras, including those we looked at during our first class, along with a word by word translation of the first two sutras. For each of these, I give a series of questions and exercises for contemplating them.

My suggestion is that you read through the whole document, then pick a sutra and focus your contemplation on it. I also invite you to create your own commentaries, based on your contemplation and discussion (if you're working with a partner).

In working with sutras, start by re-listening to the class lecture's audio.

Meta-Process for Studying a Sutra

Here is a five-part process for working with a question, which is particularly useful for sutra study:

1. As you begin your study of each sutra, say it in Sanskrit three or four times. Then say it in English. This allows the energy within the sutra (and there is a lot of energy in each one!) to penetrate your mind, and helps you experience it from a deeper, energetically transformative level.

2. Now, consider the meaning of each term or concept, and/or of the sutra as a whole. How do you understand it? Read the commentaries you have on it, including the ones I offer in this document, or in the books we've recommended. Some of you might also want to consult other commentaries, such as Georg Feuerstein's in *The Yoga Tradition*, I.K. Taimni's in *The Science of Yoga*, or some of the commentaries by contemporary teachers.
3. Then, consider how you apply the sutra to your own experience. These are very experience-oriented teachings. How is the sutra true for you (or not true!) How have you understood this idea and how does your experience reflect that? Write down your thoughts in your journal if so inclined or discuss them with your partner if you're working with a partner.
4. Finally, close your eyes and spend a couple of minutes following the breath. Ask for grace to give you any deeper understanding.
5. Then open your eyes and write without censoring whatever phrases, insights, images or experience come up. This should be considered an insight from the deeper mind, the intuitive faculty (*Prajna*) that we discussed in class.

Sutras 2:6 & 2:10

SUTRA 2:6

गदर्शनशक्त्योरेकात्मतेवास्मिता

dr̥gdarśanaśaktyorekātmatevāsmitā

Asmita arises from the apparent oneness of the power of the perceiver and the power of perception.

Asmita: the essence of I amness.

Arises when consciousness (the perceiver or seer) mistakenly identifies itself with the tool it uses to perceive objects—i.e., with the mind.

This leads to deeper identifications—i.e., with our thoughts, beliefs, conditioned memories, body, etc. All experiences now are identified as belonging to this separate individual “me”. Since this “I” feels alone, vulnerable and unsafe, it begins to accumulate worldly protections (skills, possessions, relationships, etc) , comes to believe in “success and failure” “approval and disapproval” as the keys to life, and identifies with every experience that happens and above all, with the emotions and thoughts that arise from them.

Asmita is an aspect of our individuality—it helps us function and keep boundaries in the mundane world.

In this process, the ego-driven self becomes more and more separate from the Great Self, and more and more afraid of losing its independence, which it identifies with loss of control.

From Rajmani's commentary: *"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."*

Below are a few questions that can jump-start your investigation of your egoism and the samskaras around it.

Contemplation Questions:

- 1) Consider a few times in your life when you experienced one side of these pairs of opposites. What was the feeling around the positive side? What about the negative side?
- 2) Did you ever denigrate yourself for having failed at something? How has the drive for success been a factor in your life?
- 3) Have you ever reacted to a perceived slight or insult with intense emotion? What did it feel like?
- 4) In what situations do you tend to compare yourself to others? How does that make you feel?
- 5) What does it mean to you to let go of ego? How do you practice it?

From Rajmani's Commentary: *"As humans, we have the privilege of disrupting the dynamic of asmitaa and extricating ourselves from the torrent of sorrow it brings. We have the power to discern, decide and act as well as the ability to distinguish the real from the unreal and the good from the bad. We also have the ability to disrupt, change, modify, or even completely nullify the chain of causes and engender a desirable effect....We can decide what our dharma is, the force that infuses our life with sustainability and leads us to our highest good. We have the freedom to purify our entire field of I-am-ness, which includes our mind, senses and the vast range of our mental impressions. By making use of our inner luminosity (prajna) which is not affected by avidya, we can assess ourselves properly...We have the capacity to stretch our shrunken asmitaa and begin to live in an expanded world, the world created by primordial nature (Shakti) and illumined by her intrinsic intelligence."*

Partner Practice

Discuss with your partner how you experience asmitaa and what you find to be effective and ineffective in dismantling it.

Here, you might discuss your understanding of humility and how it is practiced; self-inquiry (the Who Am I? practice); offering your actions, etc....whatever you come up with!

SUTRA 2:10

ते प्रतिप्रसवहेयाः सूक्ष्माः

te pratiprasavaheyāḥ sūkṣmāḥ

The afflictions are discarded at death only if they have become subtle.

Only if you've attenuated Kleshas through practice do they dissolve at death. Otherwise, they accompany you into your next life. Hence, the necessity of Kriya Yoga, which Patanjali believes is the key to attenuating the kleshas. Then meditation (as said in Sutra 11) dissolve them.

Sutras on Karma

These sutras are pretty straightforward, and were discussed in detail in the last class, so I didn't include much commentary under the sutras. Instead, in the next part of this document, I've included an outline of the main teachings on karma (in other words, the elaboration of the sutras themselves) and how it works. It's in the form of a brief overview, and it is a checklist of what we discussed in class.

SUTRA 2:12

क्लेशमूलः कर्माशयो दृष्टादृष्टजन्मवेदनीयः

kleśamūlaḥ karmāśayo dr̥ṣṭādr̥ṣṭajanmavedanīyaḥ

The reservoir of karma is rooted in afflictions and is to be experienced in seen and unseen lives.

The karmic backpack (*karmaashaya*) is located in the subtle and causal bodies, and manifests through the mind. Karmas are created when we are subject to the kleshas, which is pretty much all the time, since most people are at least partially under the sway of ignorance, egotism etcetera. When we believe that we are this separate person, the doer of actions, we also believe that thoughts and actions belong to us. Therefore they create impressions, *samskaras*. These impressions get stored in our subtle bodies and are experienced through the mind (which is the mediator and field of our experience).

SUTRA 2:13

सति मूले तद्विपाको जात्यायुर्भोगाः

sati mūle tadvipāko jātyāyurbhogāḥ

As long as the root cause [the five afflictions] persists, karmas must bear fruit, and that fruition determines our birth in a particular species, life span, and life experience.

SUTRA 2:14

ते ह्लादपरितापफलाः पुण्यापुण्यहेतुत्वात्

te hlādaparitāpaphalāḥ puṇyāpuṇyahetutvāt

They [karmas that result in rebirth, dictate how long we live in our body, and determine our general experience] are accompanied by pleasure and pain, for they are smeared with both virtue and vice.

Because we usually act under the impulsion of *avidya* and *asmitaa*, even our “good” actions usually have mixed motives, and thus lead to mixed fruits. The great antidote to this is fully offering your actions and their results to the divine or asking that all merit be offered to the benefit of humanity. The more you are identified as the Self, the less stickiness your actions have. In other words, it's your self-identification and your motives that determine the results of actions.

Basics on Karma & Samskaras

Below, you'll find my Cliff's Notes on Karma and Samskaras. Much of this was in the talk on Wednesday night, so this can serve as a check list/reminder!

Karma: (from the Sanskrit root *Kr*, meaning action)

- 1) **Any action you are performing.**
- 2) **The stored results and effects of past actions and thoughts, and their present and future effects.**

The root of Karma is:

Basic ignorance (avidya) of our true nature which leads 1) to the belief that we are separate individuals living in a world of separate beings and objects, and from there to 2) the belief that we are the doers of action.

When we perform activities under the assumption that we are individuals performing actions, we create samskaras, latent impressions in the subtle body and mind, which are stored in our subtle system and give rise to karmic fruits that are experienced in present and future lives.

The Karmic Process

The tree of Karma is rooted in Samskara (latent mental impressions) which are of two kinds:

- **Klesha (afflicted):** arising from ignorance of your true nature, and of desire, greed, delusion or anger
- **Aklesha (unafflicted)** (arising from true knowledge and spiritual practice)

From the **Afflicted** samskaras arise:

- **Karmaashaya** (your karmic storehouse, or accumulated latent impressions), and
- **Vasanas** (your subconscious implicit memories, based on the **feelings** that arise as the result of karmic experiences. These **feeling-based memories** are necessary in order for the karmaashaya to manifest.)

These can be **positive** (the result of positively motivated thoughts and actions, which produce happy consequences either in the present or a future life), **negative** (the result of harmfully motivated thoughts and actions, which produce unhappy consequences either in present or future), or **mixed** (the result of actions arising from mixed motives, which result in experiences that combine both pleasure and pain)

The nature of these stored karmas and vasanas results in:

- The type of birth you have (parents, life circumstances, etc.)
- Your span of life
- Your experience of pleasure and pain in life

Your positive karmic imprints produce two kinds of positive fruits:

- An inclination towards living a righteous worldly life, (*pravritti dharma*) and a propensity for worldly success.
- An inclination towards spiritual practices and/or Nivrti dharma.

Spiritual practices and acts of kindness, generosity, etcetera produce positive samskaras, which bear fruit most quickly when practice is done with strong motivation, longing, love, or devotion.

Your **negative karmic imprints** produce two kinds of negative fruits:

- An antagonism towards righteous living or a tendency towards worldly difficulties.
- An antagonism towards spiritual practice, or difficulties in spiritual practice.

Negative actions produce especially quick results when they are performed with intense hatred, greed, desire, etcetera towards beings who are frightened, diseased, dependent on you, or who are engaged in spiritual activity.

Types of Karma

Prarabdha (destined) Karma: The karmic situation that you are destined to live out in this lifetime. These may be modified by your attitudes and actions, but must bear fruit in some way.

Sanchita (stored) Karma: The residual karmas remaining in your subtle body, which unless dissolved, will bear fruit in future lifetimes.

Kriyaman (acting) Karma: The actions you are performing now. This is your area of choice.

Other Dimensions of Karma

Not everything that happens to us is the result of our own past or present actions but can be the result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or being part of a collective situation like war, natural disaster, or group persecution. We do, however, carry the residue of generational trauma in our DNA, so in that sense our ancestors' experience will often form part of the karmic backpack that your family or tribe carries in a particular lifetime.

Adhibhautika Karma: Actions of others that impact the life of a group or collective, especially arising from such events as war, stock market manipulations, government actions, movements in culture, discoveries in science and technology, laws, environmental factors etc. The collective karma of the country or region you live in will affect you simply because you happen to live there.

Adhidaivika Karma: Acts of nature, such as floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, drought, and other natural phenomena, as well as natural internal processes like aging.

Questions for Contemplation and Partner Discussion on Karma

I suggest that you set aside a couple of short periods—after meditation or at a separate time, to sit with your journal and contemplate these questions. You can do this entirely with yourself and later share with your partner or do the process with a partner.

I suggest that you begin the process by writing down what your mind and intellect reveal as you ask yourself the questions. Then follow the initial download from the mind by using the contemplation protocol from your Week I homework: going into meditation and holding the question in a space of quiet and writing whatever comes up. Then repeat the process a few times if you feel that you'd like to come to deeper insights. Sometimes the insights that arise can be surprising!)

- Looking at your current life, what are the karmic situations you see operating? What past issues do you feel they arise from?
- Arising from the first question, what do you see as the major karmic issues that have been up for you to deal with in your life in general? If you are over 40, you might see that some of these have been resolved or dissolved or lived through. Others might still be current. *(I suggest you take some time with this one. Some will be obvious; others might take more time to notice.)*
- Can you recall past karmic situations (such as relationships, money problems or health issues) that seemed to be karmically related?
- Have you ever been guided or impelled forcibly to do something, say something, take a direction that led you into a major life change? Do you see what might have been the karmic seeds of that?
- Can you recall actions or inner states in this life that might have created conditions that affected your life, either positively or negatively? Actions that set you on a new path? Experiences that may have seemed like the result of mistakes? In what way did these experiences help you advance on your path? In what ways did they then derail you?
- How have you practiced to dissolve your karmic imprints? How have you experienced a Karmic Imprint dissolving?

Practice for Resolving a Karmic Imprint

We did this in class on Wednesday night.

Bring to mind a situation or a samskara that you feel is karmic, and that obstructs your life or practice in some way. Feel into the emotions and thoughts associated with it. Let yourself fully experience the felt sense of this karmic issue.

Bring up the sense of the Divine Backrest, the Presence at your back. Breathe in and out of the back heart until you feel a definite connection with the Presence.

Now, inhale with the feeling that your breath offers the karmic issue into the loving Presence of the great Heart. Exhale feeling that blessings and freedom are coming to you from the Great Heart.

Additional Step: Do this practice with a similar karmic pattern that you see operating in another person. Only do this if you feel inspired or drawn to expanding the practice in this way.

Bring to mind one or more individuals (or groups) who might be experiencing the same karmic issue or tangle. Imagine that your breath draws their suffering and karma in through your heart and offering it into the Presence at your back. Exhale the love and blessing and clarity of the Great heart back through your heart and into the person or group that you have brought to mind. You can do this with someone you know personally, or in a more general way.

As many of you know, this is a version of the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Tonglen (“taking and sending”), which can help you to recognize how much you share with others. It is also very effective in helping resolve painful issues that are going on for others. It is a powerful form of spiritual activism.

Sutras 2:15 & 2:16

SUTRA 2:15

परिणामतापसंस्कारदुःखैर्गुणवृत्तिविरोधाच्च दुःखमेव सर्वं विवेकिनः

pariṇāmatāpasamskāraduḥkhaigūṇavṛttivirodhācca duḥkhaveva sarvam
vivekinaḥ

From the vantage point of a wise person, all is pain because everything is subject to change, distress, karmic impressions, and mutually contradicting forces of nature.

SUTRA 2:16

हेयं दुःखमनागतम्

heyam duḥkhamanāgatam

Pain that has not yet come can be abandoned.

These are, as Pandit Rajmani says, essential keys to understanding the teachings of the Yoga Sutra. Please read Pandit Rajmani's commentary on these two sutras, which is up on the Student page. He includes a contemplation on the four sources of pain that the sutra describes. It's useful (though painful!) to look at your life through this lens.

After you have read this, consider: How has your life shown you that even pleasurable experiences are painful at their root?

Here's the clues the text gives us:

Eventually, even the most joyful moments or relationships or conditions end.

Sometimes what feels good at the time leads to eventual difficult consequences (the obvious example being weight gain or injury, but there are many more).

Sometimes your personal samskaras create an undercover template of painful emotions such as anxiety or social distress or other feelings that infuse themselves even into pleasurable experiences.

And life itself will break down your body and rob you of energy, which cause their own distress.

This is a worthwhile—and very yogic contemplation. It's a major feature of Buddhist contemplation, because it motivates us to get serious about our yoga!

And, in regard to Sutra 16, the promise here is that your practice of Kriya Yoga and meditation will eliminate the causes of future pain, and give you access to joy!