

Week 4: Contemplation & Study Guide

Please listen to this week's class audio one more time.

What's Up for This Week

This week, we're exploring Sutras 2:28-30 as well as some related practices.

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 Sutra 30 on the course page under this week. (My own commentaries are in the Class recording itself and are also included below as part of the study guide.)

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.

Working with the Five Yamas

The Assignment: Take one Yama each day and spend half-an-hour—either during your normal meditation time, or at a separate time—contemplating your own understanding and experience of this practice.

Make an intention that you will practice this Yama consciously for the entire day.

Then spend the day consciously practicing with it—noticing how it operates in challenging situations, noticing your own reactions, and doing something to counteract the tendency.

The specific definitions, questions, and practices begin on page 3.

The Sutras

SUTRA 2:28

योगाङ्गानुष्ठानादशुद्धिक्षये ज्ञानदीप्तिराविवेकख्याते: ॥२८॥

yogāṅgānuṣṭhānādaśuddhikṣaye jñānadīptirāvivekakhyāteḥ | | 28 | |

The practice of the limbs of yoga destroys impurities; thereafter, knowledge continues to brighten all the way to viveka khyati , the domain of unshakeable discernment.

Sally's Commentary: This sutra details the aspects of yoga, making it clear that yoga is a whole, and that liberation from ignorance is only possible if you are practicing all the aspects.

It describes the gradual path to liberation, in which through these practices, the residue of Kleshas, including the samskaras and vasanas, are dissolved. Each one of these practices targets all the Kleshas, but in particular, the yamas and niyamas allow you to take your practice off the mat.

SUTRA 2:29

यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाधयोऽष्टावङ्गानि ॥२९॥

yamaniyamāsanaprāṇāyāmapratyāhāradhāraṇādhyānasamādhayo'ṣṭāvaṅgāni | | 29 | |

Restraint, observance, physical posture, mastery of the pranic force, recalling the senses, concentration, meditation, and spiritual absorption are the eight components of yoga.

SUTRA 2:30

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः ॥३०॥

ahimsāsātyāsteyabrahmacaryāparigrahā yamāḥ | | 30 | |

Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-possessiveness are the restraints.

Sally's Commentary: Non-violence means not harming anyone or anything (including yourself!) in thought, word, or action. Truthfulness (satya) means 1) not telling lies; 2) standing in your authenticity; non-stealing (asteya) means not taking what doesn't belong to you; continence (brahmacharya) means not wasting your physical or mental energy, moderation in eating, drinking, talking, thinking and sexuality; non-possessiveness (aparigraha) means not accumulating or hoarding possessions.

Working with the Yamas—Questions, Contemplations, and Practices

During your meditation period, set aside half an hour to work with the Yama of the Day.

- 1) Start by doing the preliminary practices, then spend 5 minutes doing the vertical meditation with Ham Sa.
- 2) Next, offer your practice with the Yama to grace—or to the aspect of Goddess that you most love!
- 3) Next, repeat the affirmation connected with the Yama out loud three times.
- 4) Then, practice with one of the contemplations below.
- 5) At the end, offer the practice to grace, to Goddess, or simply for the benefit of all beings.

To help your contemplation, I've suggested some questions and practices. Feel free to be as intuitive and creative as you want to be in exploring all this.

Journal about it and discuss it with your partner. You and your partner might decide you want to work with one of the Yamas together.

Ahimsa

“Today I will practice bringing no harm to any being in thought, word or action, including myself.” (Repeat 3 times)

Ahimsa at its core is a radical reverence for all life. Its opposite is animosity towards some, including the belief that some beings, ideas, situations are not deserving of honor, reverence or even life.

Sitting with your journal, contemplate the ways you disregard the principle of reverence for life. Contemplate the ways you consciously practice non-violence in your relationships, your speech, and your interactions with the world.

Consider your diet. Decide that for today, you will consume no animal products. If you are not normally vegetarian, consider why not. Consider reducing your consumption of animals or saving meat-eating for special occasions. If you eat animals for health reasons, see if you can cut down the amount of animals you consume without harming your health.

Consider what it means to “walk lightly on the earth.” Though most of you are already environmentally conscious, consider how you can increase your conscious protection of the earth through less driving, reusing, and recycling, etc.

Consider the situations in which you let animosity take over your mind. How do you let impatience, judgement, self-criticism or criticism of others capture your attention? How do

you speak or act when you are in the grip of animosity? Spend some time noticing the feeling states that arise when you let yourself hold animosity. Notice the triggers that produce animosity.

Each time you notice one of the animus driven feelings, see if you can find a way to reverse it. Explore methods for changing your antagonism to another person, or a situation.

Examples:

- Consider the “enemy’s” perspective—what might they be feeling that drives them to this behavior?
- Consider that they too seek happiness
- Offer them a blessing. Consider “What may this person need?” and imagine yourself offering it to them.
- Spend time today consciously noticing and blessing everyone you see.

If it’s your own actions or character that you are critiquing, try offering your “mistake” to the Source. Make an intention to change the behavior. Ask yourself, “Can I forgive myself?” Usually the answer will be “Yes”. If not, ask, “When will I be able to forgive myself?” Then, find the feeling of forgiveness or letting go, and let it fill your mind.

Looking over the past week, how have you used harmful gossip, slander or mean speech in conversation? How have you allowed cynicism or jealousy to arise and affect your mind?

Practices for Looking into any Internal Violence you may be Holding

Notice the critical self-talk you automatically engage in. (You might also ask yourself, “Where did this inner voice come from?” Usually it’s from a parent or other childhood authority figure.) Notice how your self-criticism affects your mood, your confidence, your relationships. Make a decision that when you feel critical towards yourself, you will correct what you can or should correct, and then let it go. Ask the Source or essence for help.

Offer any negative feeling into the Source, by whatever means feels powerful. You might feel the presence of grace in the air around you or sense the presence of the invisible Witness gazing at you compassionately, or feel space extending you’re your heart. Then, breathe in spacious blessing from that compassionate presence, and breathe out your animosity.

Write down the angry or violent thoughts that arise. Then, do a simple ritual for letting them go, such as offer them to a fire, or crumpling up the paper and throwing it away. Both these practices are effective in removing the feelings from your body!

Spend a few minutes practicing Tonglen (Sending and Taking with the Breath) with a person or quality that you feel strongly averse to. Imagine that person sitting in front of you.

Imagine that person’s feelings, the feelings that lead to the behavior or attitudes you dislike. Breathe in the negative thing you see in them. Breathe out love and blessing to them.

Then imagine yourself in their place and do the same thing with your own inner version of that quality you feel averse to.

Then imagine a group of people whom you would like to eliminate from the planet (just kidding!) or transform in some way. Sense their feelings and breathe in the qualities that seem particularly negative or harmful. Breathe out tenderness and blessing to that group. Notice any resistance you have to blessing them, and breathe out tenderness to your own resistance, asking to let it go. Notice the effect.

Ask that grace dissolve your negativity.

Ask to forgive anyone you hold grudges against.

You might say out loud:

I forgive you.

Please forgive me.

Let's forgive ourselves

The fruit of non-violence (harmlessness) is that others no longer feel enmity in your presence.

Satya

"Today, I practice refraining from false speech, justifications, slander, and self-deception." (Repeat out loud three times)

Truthfulness is at its core alignment with reality (sat). Untruthfulness will subtly and overtly take you out of alignment with your authentic being.

Question: How and why are you tempted to lie, dissimulate, pretend to feel one thing when you feel another? Possible reasons: to avoid judgement, to impress someone, to bond with someone, because you think the truth would be hurtful.

Question: Remember the last time you lied or concealed the truth. What was the feeling immediately preceding the lie? Did it just pop out? Was it planned? Why were you afraid to tell the truth?

Question: In what ways have you sold out your authentic self by concealing aspects of yourself that you feel are unacceptable, or hiding your feelings from people close to you, or been silent about things that should have been spoken? (This last is different from remaining silent because you believe there would be harm in telling the truth)

Question: What do you do when you are afraid the naked truth will cause harm?

Question: Consider the consequences in your own life of lying or concealing the truth.

Practices:

Make an intention to tell the truth in every way for the rest of the day, unless telling the truth will cause harm. In that case, can you remain silent? Or find a creative way not to lie?

Notice when you are tempted to spread a piece of 'juicy' gossip, or an internet story, or a conspiracy theory or speculation that is probably not true. Notice the effect it has on your mind. Decide not to do it.

Practice the four gates of speech:

- Is what I'm about to say true?
- Is it kind?
- Is it necessary?
- Is this the right time to say it?

Close by asking for grace to help you live in truth.

The fruit of truthfulness is that your words become true and allow your intentions and blessings to bear fruit.

Asteya: Non-Stealing

"Today, I practice refraining from stealing or taking what is not mine."

(Repeat three times)

Question: Looking over your life, how have you taken or used things or ideas or opportunities that did not belong to you? How have you misused resources?

Question: Look at the motives that impel you to do this, when it happens. Is it a feeling of lack? A feeling of neediness? A feeling of entitlement? A fear of losing or failing? Be honest with yourself.

Practice:

Create an intention to make amends, directly where possible, otherwise indirectly.

Give something away. A donation to charity. Money to a homeless person. Do a favor for a friend or neighbor. Cook food and bring it to a friend or an elderly person.

Question: Consider all the ways that you are supported by the labor and creativity of others. Look at your clothing, the food you eat, the room you are in, the roads you travel on, the trees you sit under, the laws that protect you. Recognize how much you benefit from the gifts of nature and other people. Make a point, throughout the day, of offering gratitude every time you realize another way you are supported.

Question: Consider the unconscious ways that you have benefited from opportunities that were in a sense “stolen” from others. Are there opportunities and privileges that have come to you at someone else’s expense? Are there ways in which you could offer opportunities to others? If there are, notice what may be stopping you from doing this, and make an intention to do it anyway.

The fruit of non-stealing is that abundance comes to you—either in the form of actual wealth, or in the inner feeling of abundance.

Brahmacharya: Sexual discipline, including Continenence, and Discipline of the Senses

“Today I exercise discipline in eating, drinking, use of intoxicants, sexuality, and take time to be aware of sensory cravings and addictions.” (Repeat three times)

Brahmacharya essentially means not using up the energy of your senses, so that it becomes available for spiritual practice.

Contemplation: Consider your own sexuality. How often have you used sex to relieve tension, loneliness, aggression? How often do you use sexual fantasy as a form of escape or distraction?

Practice: Make an intention to be conscious in your use of sexual energy in all its forms. This does not have to mean total celibacy, nor should it make you feel guilty or doubtful about having appropriate sex (or fantasy). It’s really about using your consciousness to look into your motivation and how it affects your energy.

Contemplation: Ask yourself, “How does recreational eating, tv watching, social media engagement diminish my physical and mental energy? How do I use up energy in craving?”

Practice: Without being draconian about rules, practice moderation in those areas where you tend to overindulge. Create an intentional discipline that also allows pleasure. If you daily discipline is in place, you can indulge or overdo at times without harm.

Contemplation: How can I use my senses to expand my awareness through seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching the world (and others) in ways that enhance harmony, beauty, truth and goodness?

The fruit of brahmacharya is spiritual power (virya), and the ability to transmit teachings in such a way that they impact others.

Aparigraha: Non-Grasping or Non-Possessiveness

“Today, I will practice letting go of whatever I do not need, and practice offering generously to either to a charity or to someone I perceive to be in need.” (Repeat three times)

Using restraint so as not to use more than you need, consume excessively, or hold onto possessions when it is time to let them go.

Contemplation: What am I particularly attached to? See how this applies to physical possessions as well as to people, ideas etcetera.

Which among these attachments creates conflict, fear of loss, or actual feelings of possessiveness or jealousy?

What would it mean in my life right now to give up being attached to these things or people? What am I afraid would happen if I give up these attachments? (Remind yourself that giving up attachment to another person does not mean giving up love or giving up the relationship!)

Practice: In meditation, offer these attachments into the hands of the divine. You don't have to ask for them to be taken away. Simply place them in the space of the divine.

Contemplation: In what ways and in what areas do I accumulate more than I need? What can I give away, or use in service of others?

Practice: Make a decision to declutter your closet, your house, your storage area, and do a little bit every day.

Practice: Give away a possession that you really like. Notice the attachment as you do it. Then notice whether or not you really miss it! Notice the feeling of freedom or pleasure that arises.

Practice: Next time you have an urge to buy something, ask yourself if you really need it.

Practice: Start a practice of giving a percentage of your income to charities or good causes. Consider how to do this so that it has the most impact.

The fruit of non-attachment is knowledge of your entire karmic journey!