

Week 4: Contemplation & Study Questions

Overview

Like last week's guide, this one has a variety of materials, including commentaries, contemplation questions like the ones we worked with during class, and study suggestions for those of you who want to use this class as an opportunity to go deeper into your personal exploration of the sutras, through study. All of these questions and exercises can be done alone and are also powerful to do with a partner.

If you're doing it alone, and feel very busy, know that just spending a few minutes reading a sutra before or after meditation will be very fruitful. If you have more time, you might want to devote more time to looking at the words and considering how to apply them right now.

For those who have the time, we've included some contemplation exercises and questions that work with the meaning behind some of these sutras and let you apply them. The more time you spend on this kind of study, the more it can surprise you, change the nature of your inner dialogue, and give depth to your self-cultivation. As many of you know, a study of a text like this is one of the time-honored methods for "curing" the painful tendencies of the mind.

So, I would ask each of you to read through this document and look at how working with one or more of these contemplations can add more depth to your practice of meditation and your comprehension of the lectures.

What's Up for This Week

This week, we're exploring Sutras III-35, 36, 37, 38, and 43, as well as some related practices.

Please listen one more time to the lecture for this week (Class 4 of *The Inner Path of the Yoga Sutra*).

After reading through the sutras and the commentaries, there are one or two exercises to practice.

A handout with all these sutras is available on the Student Page under Resources, which includes several translations and transliterations, (My own commentaries are in the Class recording itself, and some 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 (download or print) the document from the Student Page for further reference.

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My study guide (the present document!) contains questions and exercises for studying some of these 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. (There are questions below to help you with this!) 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 experiences come up. This should be considered an insight from the deeper mind, the intuitive faculty (*Prajna*) that we discussed in our previous classes.

The Sutras

Sutra III.35

सत्त्वपुरुषयोरत्यन्तासंकीर्णयोः प्रत्ययाविशेषो भोगः परार्थत्वात् स्वार्थसंयमात् पुरुषज्ञानम्
**Sattva purushayor atyantaasankeernayoh pratyayaavishesho bogaha
paraarthatvaat svaartha-samyamaat purusha jnaanam**

sattva—the purified buddhi; *purushayor*—of the purusha; *atyanta*—complete; *asankieernayoh*—distinct; *pratyaya*—idea, image; *avisheshah*—nondistinction; *bhogaha*—experience; *paraarthatvaat*—because of having the nature of existing for another; *svaartha*—for itself; *samyamaat*—from samyama; *purusha*—the true Self; *jnaanam*—knowledge

Worldly experience consists of the notion that there is no distinction between the Purusha self and pure intelligence, the buddhi, although these two are completely distinct. Worldly experience exists for another (i.e., for purusha) by samyama on that which exists for itself (i.e., for purusha) comes knowledge of purusha.

One of the important points in this sutra is the statement, “Worldly experience exists for another.” The commentators say that the purpose of worldly experience—indeed of our entire personal identity—is to be a vehicle for giving Purusha a vehicle for experiencing the play of the world. ***But the Self, purusha, has no other purpose than to be. It exists purely as Being, without action.***

The sutra is giving us straightforward instruction about what Self-realization really is and how we get there. By samyama on that which exists for itself—the purusha, utterly untouched by anything that occurs through its instruments of perception—we liberate the Self from being colored by or identifying with anything else, so that “the seer can rest in itself” as Sutra I.4 says right in the beginning of the Yoga Sutra. This is what the Sanskrit word *jnana* means in this context. Knowledge of the Self in yogic terms is not an intellectual understanding, which most of us have. It’s a direct experience of the absolute independence of the Atman, the recognition that comes in deep meditation when the entire world of experience dissolves into the Atman. It is ecstatic beyond anything in the ordinary world.

The question is: *How do you do samyama on Purusha before you have experienced the distinction between the true Self and the innate intelligence?*

One issue here is that we are subject to the very problem that the sutra speaks of: The Self is mixed up with Buddhi in our psyche!

So, the first stage in disentangling the Buddhi from the Self is to understand and identify Buddhi as it is.

What is Buddhi?

Pure intelligence. Naturally sattvic. The highest state available to our personal self. Our executive function. Faculty of judgment, discernment, knowledge, will power (the will to turn inwards in sadhana comes from buddhi), virtuous qualities. When you are functioning from a purified buddhi, you are clear, peaceful, aware, happy, and capable of discerning and making distinctions.

It's the primary instrument that Purusha uses for experiencing the world. The state of Buddhi determines how the Atman (meaning, the Real You or True Self!) experiences reality. When outward-facing, Buddhi gives an objective lens on the world. When inward-facing, it reflects the Self, Purusha.

However, Buddhi's clarity is distorted by the samskaric distortions that cover it, as well as by rajas and tamas gunas with their tendencies towards desire and anger, or dullness. It's also distorted by the projections of Ahamkara (the ego-I), which identifies with the body/mind/personality and colors buddhi with those tendencies. It's colored by manas, the part of chitta that collects data through the senses—data which constantly fills the mind-field and further distorts the lens through which we perceive, with data, and by the tanmatras, the vibratory energies behind the sensory experience.

Therefore, Purusha is reflected back to itself colored by all these factors and believes itself to be the empirical self.

Most of our sadhana, therefore, is for purifying Buddhi, along with Ahamkara and Manas. (Since Purusha is already completely pure and changeless, it doesn't need sadhana).

First, we purify buddhi so that her capacity for discernment is freed from the distortions of ahamkara and manas. Meditation, mantra,

The more we purify buddhi, the more clarity she has to accurately reflect both the world of experience and the underlying Self.

Questions for Journaling and Discussion: Can you identify the difference between the ego-I (ahamkara) and pure intelligence? Consider the ways you have for telling the difference between who you are when ahamkara is foremost and who you are when you are functioning from buddhi. See if you can identify the other aspects of your experience—manas as well as the tanmatras. (The accompanying information sheet, which will be available on the course page, offers a short description of the characteristics and functioning of the inner instruments in case you are unfamiliar with or need a refresher on the way your inner instruments function.)

Journal about this and discuss it with your partner. What has helped each of you to distinguish between these instruments of experience. Distinguishing between them doesn't mean you don't use them all! We need them in order to perceive and experience.

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In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes what he considers the highest “reward” of devotion to God: *“To one who loves me, I give buddhiyoga, the ability to discern what is eternal from what is passing. It is through this that you come to union.”*

A practice hint from Abhinavagupta, 10th century sage of Kashmir Shaivism:

He says that discernment (tarka) is the highest of all practices of yoga, the one that leads directly to liberation. The most important form of discernment is distinguishing between what is to be held close and what is to be discarded.

Question for Contemplation

Do the following practice at least once this week.

Sit with your journal. Take a few moments to work with the self-inquiry practice from the Homework.

As you start to have a sense of the presence of the witness, ask the question:

“What is important for me? What do I need to take seriously and cultivate in my practice, my associations, my personal understanding about myself and the world? What can I let go of?”

Notice where your sense of self is (inwardly) when you do this contemplation and notice what your ahamkara does with it. True intellectual clarity may be accompanied by different emotions (for example, sometimes we feel excited about the information that comes, and sometimes we resist it for emotional reasons), but nearly always, there’s a knowing that this

This is one of the most important contemplation we can do for creating a life that leads to love and freedom. Working with this question can also give you a sense of how to appropriately use your personal discrimination both in life and practice. It’s worthwhile doing periodically or even weekly.

The first stages of self-inquiry (as in the “Where is the Witness?” or meditation on Awareness) effectively disentangle buddhi from identifying with the personal ego and the experiences of the body. At this point, the buddhi reflects Purusha—which for most practitioners is our initial experience of the clarity of pure awareness. This is in itself a powerful state, but it is not the full experience of Purusha. At some point, through deep meditation or dedicated self-inquiry, Purusha will reveal itself, and you will be plunged into the experiential realization of yourself as the luminous Presence and Awareness that is Purusha. This can be experienced as an immersion in pure Consciousness, in which body and mind, and world dissolve. It can also be experienced as a widening of awareness such that you spontaneously experience the world as alive with consciousness or as being part of your own awareness.

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Such experiences occur through Self-revelation or grace. We practice to coax Purusha to reveal itself. Because of buddhi's reflective capacity, the preliminary stages of inquiry and meditation will give you glimpses of Purusha, and these can and usually do transform your sense of Who You Really Are. This experience is sometimes described as Waking Up because, in it, we see that our real identity is not tied to our physical body or even our mind and personal history, but that the most permanent and "real" part of our identity, the one that doesn't change when the body and mind change, is awareness. We can have many such glimpses and then revert back to ordinary identification with the body/mind. But each glimpse helps dissolve the coverings of samskaras. And the more we can free the buddhi from its coverings (the more sattvic our buddhi can be at any given moment), the more our discernment will open us to the presence of Atman as the true source of our experience.

Questions for Journaling and Partner Discussion

Have you experienced the reflection of Atman in Buddhi? Under what circumstances? How did it affect you? What insights arose from that experience?

Have you experienced full immersion in Atman, such that the identification with the body and mind simply fell away? How did it happen? How long did it last? What was the effect on your self-understanding? How did it change your life? Did it come in meditation or open-eyed?

These two questions are a great topic for discussion with your partner, as the two of you can really help each other discern both what Buddhi is for you and how you know the difference between Buddhi and the Atman.

Inquiry Exercise for Partners

As many of you know, there's a lot of power when two people do this inquiry together. For the person receiving the question, having a partner and a witness helps keep your attention focused. For the person asking, taking responsibility for helping your partner focus inspires you to stay focused yourself.

Each of you takes a turn asking each other the inquiry question—it could be "Where is the Witness?" or "What knows you are hearing me?" One person would ask the question at intervals, with a real intention to have the question taken seriously, for at least 3 minutes. The other partner turns their attention backward to sense what felt space or "knowingness" is triggered by the question. It's fine to answer the questions verbally if the words that come up actually describe your felt experience rather than being an intellectual understanding. (You can discuss your intellectual understanding later, after the exercise!) The person being queried should also feel free to remain silent.

Sutra III.36

ततः प्रातिभश्रावणवेदनादर्शास्वादवार्ता जायन्ते ॥ ३६ ॥

tatah praatibha-shraavana-vedanaadarshaaaasvaada-vaartaa jaayante

tatah—from this; *praatibha*—intuition; *shraavana*—hearing; *vedanaa*—touch; *aadarsha*—vision; *aasvaada*—taste; *vaartaah*—smell; *jaayante*—are born

From this, intuition as well as higher hearing, touch, vision, taste, and smell are born.

The capacities that emerge when the buddhi has been purified begin to arise as soon as we are relatively clear of identification with the belief “I am this body.” They are natural subtle abilities that can be important in meditation as long as you don’t get stuck there. Among these capacities are intuitive wisdom and insight, as well as the subtle experiences of inner lights, visions, internal sounds, and even fragrances and tastes. These can become focal points for meditation and take you farther, as long as you remember and cultivate the art of concentration within a subtle “object” rather than starting to think, wonder, about it or grasp at it.

Many seekers have such experiences spontaneously, either as a result of a transmission from a teacher or as a result of past life practice. But what it means is that your buddhi has become relatively sattvic, meaning that many of the coverings have dissolved. In my experience, these experiences can be crucial in helping a seeker dis-identify with the body and personality because they show you the other possibilities within the human psyche.

Question: Consider your experiences of subtle sensory manifestations arising during practice. Include experiences of insight that may come up in meditation. How do you hold them when or if they arise? Have you had the experience of being taken deeper into meditation by one of these? Journal about one or two of these experiences or describe them to your partner and notice how they might have affected you—either by giving you faith or by serving as an avenue for depth.

Sutra III.37

ते समाधावुपसर्गा व्युत्थाने सिद्धयः ॥ ३७ ॥

te samaadhaav upsargaa vyutthaane siddhayah

te—they (the powers); *samaadhau*—in samaadhi; *upasargaah*—obstacles; *vyutthaane*—rising up, outgoing; *siddhaya*—accomplishments, perfections, powers.

These powers are accomplishments for the mind that is outgoing but obstacles to samadhi.

Most of the commentators on this sutra warn us that we should not get distracted by these and forget that the goal is liberation or true samadhi. (And in Zen, such experiences are supposed to be ignored as passing phenomena).

That said, the commentators (and Patanjali himself) agree that these inner experiences can be powerful focal points for meditation and contemplation, as long as you don't use them as the be-all-end-all of your practice. For someone whose mind is still outgoing, these tastes of the inner world can give powerful impetus to practice (my guru wrote that when he began having these experiences, he looked forward to meditation almost obsessively!) but only as long as you don't let them make you proud or smug or lazy or attached.

One of the most important truths about the process of Self-realization is that we can't leapfrog over the subtle aspects of prakriti. In order to experience full enlightenment, a yogi needs to get to know the subtle worlds—the powers, the realms, the possibilities that exist in the farther reaches of prakriti. This is one of the ways we exhaust our karmas—in this case, our meditation karmas! So, in the process of moving towards enlightenment, these experiences are signposts, as well as being part of the geography of the inner world and sources of skills that become useful even after self-realization.

But all traditions agree that this demands navigation. In higher and subtler states, there are subtle traps and temptations that can sidetrack us. These abilities are among the most alluring. The art here is to keep going deeper into the vision, insight, etc. rather than considering it an attainment or possession or letting the ahamkara get so allured by them that it creates pride or comparison or any of the other aspects of spiritual materialism. I told the story in the last class of a friend who had very visual meditations and who began to do an inquiry where when they came up, he would ask “Where is the Self in all this?” and that prompt would activate the witness, so his meditation would go deeper through that inquiry. But you can also, as we said, use the experiences that come up as subtle focal points for meditation.

Question: What has been your attitude about subtle experiences? Do you crave them? Feel that you should be having them and feeling disappointed if you don't? Doubtful or been afraid of them? If you have a lot of these experiences, how have you avoided getting attached to them?

Sutra III.38

बन्धकारणशैथिल्यात्प्रचारसंवेदनाच्च चित्तस्य परशरीरावेशः ॥ ३८ ॥

bandha-kaarana-shaithilyaat prachaara-samvedanaach cha chittasya para-shareeraaveshah

bandha—of bondage; *kaarana*—cause; *shaithilyaat*—from the loosening; *prachaara*—conduct, working, passageway; *samvedanaat*—from knowledge; *cha*—and; *chittasya*—of the mind; *para*—others; *shareera*—body; *aaveshah*—settle in, entering

By loosening the cause of bondage and by knowledge of the passageways of the mind, the mind can enter into the bodies of others.

There are two points here, you'll notice. First, the cause of bondage (the Kleshas and karmic samskaras) has to have become attenuated through repeated practice of samadhi. Second, you have to know the technique.

The mind naturally has the capacity to move anywhere and pervade everything. Because of the karmic samskaras, it identifies with this body and thus is limited by it and can't experience what it is like to experience other bodies. Through samadhi, these samskaras are weakened, and we also get to know the actual nature of the chitta. You can also practice samyama on the stock of karmas, which loosens them. (Those of you who did the contemplation on your samskaras two weeks ago should know that you have succeeded in loosening them through this process, which as you know, helps remove the stickiness of these samskaras!) Deep meditation and inquiry loosen them more, and once you no longer identify with the body, you become largely free of it.

However, you also need to know how to leave and enter the body safely, which apparently is done through a passageway (nadi or pranic channel) in the head. This channel may be the sushumna, but there are several other nadis in this region that have particular functions. The area above and just behind the crown connects to the sahasrara, but it also connects to a channel that rises from the brain stem. Obviously, one who wants to do this practice should have instruction in how to do it correctly and safely.

That said, this is such a well-known, and apparently, much-practiced siddhi, that one modern commentator, David Gordon White, called it "the sine qua none of a yogi's practice." There are many stories in the hagiographical accounts of the lives of Indian

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and Tibetan, and Taoist yogis in which the adept enters the body of another person or simply journeys out of the body. And, of course, this is also a shamanic practice.

Topic for Partner Practice

Consider and discuss your understanding of such experiences. Have you ever had this happen to you—that someone else came into your body? or found yourself entering another person's body? If so, what did it show you? How did you feel about it? What issues did it bring up for you—positive or negative?