

## Week 5: Contemplation & Study Questions

### What's Up for This Week

This week, we're exploring Sutras III-44-51 as well as some related practices.

Please listen one more time to the Lecture for this week (Class 5 of *The Inner Path of the Yoga Sutra*).

### Sutra III.44

स्थूलस्वरूपसूक्ष्मान्वयार्थवत्त्वसंयमाद भूतजयः ॥ ४४ ॥

**Sthoola-svaroopa—sookshmaanvayaarthavattva-samyamaad bhoota-jaya**

Sthoola—gross; svarooa—essential nature; sookshma—subtle; anvaya—constitution; arthavattva—purpose (of objects, one attains); samyamaat—from the performance of samyama; bhoota—elements; jaya—mastery

**By samyama on the gross nature, essential nature, subtle nature, constitution, and purpose (of objects, one attains) mastery over the elements.**

What do these terms mean in Patanjali? The gross nature of an object is understood to refer to the elemental properties of it, based on the yogic understanding of reality as consisting of different combinations of five elements, earthiness, fluidity, fieriness, airiness, and spaciousness or ethereality. The essential nature refers to the specific qualities that make up a particular object—like its color, shape, size, density, functionality (i.e., a cup can hold liquid, a flower attracts pollinators). The subtle aspect of the object relates to the tanmatras, the inner vibratory energies of solidity, fluidity, fieriness, airiness, and ethereality, along with their associated subtle senses of smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound that are prior to physical appearance but actually determine its form. The constitution of any object refers to the gunas that dominate it, meaning whether its nature is more sattvic, or harmonious, more rajasic, or active, or more tamasic or dense. And the word “purpose” refers to its ultimate function, which is to provide experience or liberation to the Purusha, the Self.

The idea behind it is to teach ourselves to go beyond our physical perception of objects, which is essentially superficial and trace our open-eyed experience back to its source. When you look at your own dense body, or your computer, or the floor and the walls as simply physical, they trap you in the physical dimension of existence, which is simply the outer shell of reality. When we see everything only as physical, we are limited in our ability to transform it. That's when we are purely at the effect of the physical universe. We can't see through the subatomic particles of a wall—it's too dense. We can't use our minds to fix a broken bone because our bones are subject to the laws of the physical

## Week 5: Study Guide & Additional Contemplation Exercises

universe. But what the sutras say is that when we really see into the subtler aspects of anything, we become able to literally change the molecules of its physical makeup because we see through the outer form to the energies within it. That doesn't mean we actually do it, by the way. A serious yogi doesn't normally waste his time changing the physical universe. But once you understand the nature of the physical world, you are free to play within it, rather than being fear-driven and rigid about your own possibilities. One obvious example would be something that many of us do, which is to hold space for a positive outcome in a difficult situation. When you consistently do that and act from the expectation for healing or a positive outcome, it very definitely affects the way things turn out in the physical world. Because we have a general understanding that energy underlies the physical world, we can do this to some extent. However, this becomes radically and powerfully possible only when one genuinely recognizes the subtle underpinnings of the physical world.

**Exercise:** Take a physical object such as a flower or a candle flame or your own hand (as we were doing in class) and analyze it, considering the progressively subtle aspects.

Say it's a candle flame. Its main element is fire, but since it is burning off a wick, it is earthy as well. It has a fragrance. It is also fueled by oxygen, so it contains air. It makes a sound, so it has space in it as well.

Its particular qualities are heat, light, the ability to consume something else, and movement.

Behind all this are the subtle precursors of the elements, known as the tanmatras—subtle fire (fire as an internal experience and principle), subtle earth, etc. They exist prior to the physical object.

Subtler than these are the gunas. The candle flame has rajas in it (it moves and is active) and also sattva (it is buoyant, transparent, and made of light)

Its local purpose is to give light and heat; its ultimate purpose is to provide experience.

Notice how taking this analytical view of the subtlety behind a physical object deepens your awareness of it.

**Question for Discussion and Contemplation:** Have you ever had the experience of being able to affect reality in a way that seemed miraculous or defied the ordinary laws of physical reality? How does that experience relate to the sutra above, as far as you can tell? Does this sutra help you to understand such experiences?

### Sutra III.45

ततोऽणिमादिप्रादुर्भावः कायसंपत्तद्धर्मानभिघातश्च ॥४५॥

tato'nimadi-praadurbhaavah kaaya-sampat-tad-dharmaanabhighaataash cha

tatah—from that; animaa—the mystic power of lightness; aadi—etc.; praadurbhaavah—the appearance of; kaaya—body; sampat—accomplishment; tat—their; dharma—essential nature; anabhighaatah—non-resistance, absence of limitation; cha—and

**As a result of this, there are no limitations on account of the body's natural abilities; mystic powers such as animaa, etc., manifest, and the body attains perfection.**

**The Eight Mystic Powers** (ashta siddhi) are, famously,

1. Animaa—the ability to become tiny enough to enter into anything
2. Laghimaa—lightness; the ability to make the body as light as cotton
3. Mahimaa—largeness; the ability to make the body heavy
4. Praapti—attainment: the ability to attain anything one desires. (Vyasa says that one may touch the moon with one's fingertips)
5. Praakaamyaa—freedom of will; the ability to make anything happen that you desire
6. Vashitva—Mastery; the ability to control the elements and other beings (as in the story of Jnaneshwar who commanded a wall to walk)
7. Ishitrtva—Lordship—the ability to control the outward appearance of an object and to rearrange its subatomic particles
8. Yatra kaamaavasaayitva—the ability to manipulate the elements according to one's desire.

Basically, one becomes omniscient and omnipotent.

It is said that these powers accrue automatically to an advanced yogi so that s/he doesn't need to do particular practices to attain them; they just happen. The Siddhas of Indian and Tibetan lore are known as Siddhas precisely because they have these powers. Jesus, according to the Gospels, displayed some of these abilities.

### Sutra III.46

रूपलावण्यबलवज्रसंहननत्वानि कायसंपत् ॥ ४६ ॥

**roopa-laavanya-bala-vajra-samhananatvaani kaaya-sampat**

roopa—beauty of form; laavanya—charm, grace; bala—strength; vajra—thunderbolt; samhananatvaani—being of a solid nature; kaaya—the body; sampat—perfection

**Perfection of the body consists of possessing beauty, charm, strength, and the power of a thunderbolt.**

This sutra points out that physical signs of mastery appear on the body. Enlightened beings are often fascinating to look at, even if they aren't conventionally beautiful, and are powerfully attractive. They may have unusual strength and a kind of physical invincibility. But even beginning and intermediate students of yoga and meditation start to show signs of inner beauty appearing on the body.

**Question:** Have you known anyone who had these qualities through yoga? Have you noticed any of them appearing in you? For instance, since you began practicing, have you noticed that friends tell you how good you look? These are beginning signs that yoga is giving you some of these abilities.

### Sutra III.47

ग्रहणस्वरूपास्मितान्वयार्थवत्त्वसंयमादिन्द्रियजयः ॥ ४७ ॥

**grahana-svaroopasmitaavayaarthavattva-samyamaad indriya-jaya**

grahana—the process of obtaining knowledge; svaroop—the essence; asmita—the ego; anvaya—inherent quality constitution; arthavatva—purposefulness; samyama—on; indriya—the senses; jayah—control or victory

**By performing samyama on the process of knowing, on the essence (of the sense organs) on ego, on the constitution (of the gunas), and on the purpose (of the gunas) comes control over the senses.**

This is a process of meditative analysis similar to the one in Sutra 44 but relating to the experience of perception, where you trace back your experience of perception to subtler and subtler levels. What we are aiming at here is to practice reversing the process of manifestation as the yogic texts describe it, in which the subtle (prakriti and the gunas) produces, first, subtle instruments, and then somewhat grosser ones. Sattva guna gives rise to buddhi. Buddhi gives rise to ahamkara, the I-former. Ahamkara gives rise to the

## **Week 5: Study Guide & Additional Contemplation Exercises**

tanmatras and to manas, the organ that collects sensory experience. From there, the physical body and senses are formed.

So, in this samyama, you would trace a perceptual experience back to the energies of the subtle senses, the tanmatras, recognize the tanmatras coming out of your sense of being a particular person wanting to attract experience, and then try to notice the operation of the ahamkara, the part of the mind that “claims” experience as “mine” and “not mine.” Focusing past the tendency to define experience through the ego, you would attempt to notice the screen of awareness behind all perception: the buddhi with its capacity to cognize both inner and outer reality. From there, always in meditation, you would start to examine the felt experience of your cognitive capacity, your core intelligence, and notice how awareness is constantly being colored by these different moods and energies—clarity, dynamic activity, and dullness, which actually charge the experience of the screen of buddhi and the three gunas which are the subtlest components of everything. Here, it becomes appropriate to ask what is the fundamental purpose of all this sensory activity. And if you are doing the contemplation fully, you receive the insight that the real purpose of all experience is to give experience and liberation to the Purusha, the deepest level of personal consciousness.

Even if you are not practiced enough to discern the difference between these functions, recognizing them and letting yourself become interested in sensing into them is going to deepen your awareness and let you become more and more able to accept the fundamental yogic truth that what you “see” on the outside is actually being projected from within—and how these projections are not personal, but arising from a source that flows through your senses but comes from beyond your senses,

Here’s how one of the commentators summarizes this: Vyasa, the commentator on the Yoga Sutra, deconstructs the senses themselves into their progressively more subtle constituents: their grossest aspect as their function of acquiring knowledge of the sense objects. But the physical senses are connected to the physical organs, which can be damaged or obstructed. What gives them power are the tanmatras, which actually are the energies behind any sensory experience because they hold your innate abilities to experience forms, to hear a sound, to smell the fragrance.

Contemporary neurophysiologists tell us that there are processes in the brain and nervous system which project shape, color, smell, and taste onto the energetic soup, which is the underlying reality of the physical world. According to cognitive scientist Donald Hoffman in *The Case Against Reality*, what we see as a physical object is actually an icon (like the icons on a computer) that gives form to the energy that is swirling and morphing, entering into form and moving out of form. It’s our own perceptive apparatus that gives them the perceptible form. The ancient yogis didn’t know about the physical nervous system, but they understood that the shapes and forms of the world are not actually fixed but are projections of the tanmatras, the subtle inner

## Week 5: Study Guide & Additional Contemplation Exercises

senses which are the real powers behind our sensory experience. As you immerse yourself in the tanmatras, you begin to see that the tanmatras arise from the individual ego-sense, the ahamkara, and that behind and beyond that is the buddhi, which can be experienced as the knowingness that behind their essential nature as evolutes arising out of ahamkara, their even more subtle nature as expressions of buddhi, which is itself a product of the gunas, and finally, their subtlest nature, their reason for existing, as the vehicle for providing experience and liberation to pure consciousness. This is all tremendously esoteric, and it only makes sense when it is approached not through the mind but by gradually deepening your samyama until these subtler components of experience are revealed.

### **Meditation/Inquiry Practice: Trace sensation backward to Awareness of Awareness**

This practice, which we did in our first class and which many of you are familiar with, helps kindle this ability to recognize the subtler components of your experience. It is an accessible way of tracing your perceptions back to their source.

Sit quietly, with your eyes closed. Be aware of sounds. Then notice the sensations in your body—the touch of the clothes against your skin, the feeling of wetness inside your mouth, the tickles and movements in the body, the touch of the breath in the nostrils. Notice the sensations of breath flowing through your nasal passages. Notice the thoughts that arise. Notice the mood you are in—is it happy, clear? Somewhat agitated or nervous or restless? A little dull or disinterested? Notice the part of you that is busily identifying with these experiences, silently claiming them as “mine.”

Now, notice the awareness that lets you notice all these things. Focus for a moment on awareness itself. Then cycle once again through these “layers” of experience.

The experience of awareness is buddhi. As you do this practice, you may notice the energetic qualities that affect the state of the buddhi, which is a glimpse of the presence of the gunas behind all experiences.

Open your eyes while keeping a part of your focus on awareness. Your senses will flow outwards through the eyes (which are the most compelling aspect of sensory awareness, in that the physical sense of sight seems to show you the world as outside your physical body).

But notice whether there is a difference in the feeling of separation from the world when you focus internally on awareness itself. Can you maintain the sense of awareness actually holding the whole experience of open-eyed perception?

*Journal about it and discuss with your partner.*

## Week 5: Study Guide & Additional Contemplation Exercises

As we said earlier, what you get from the analysis that the sutra describes (and can start to sense through the meditation practice above) is a recognition of the fundamental yogic principle that the world manifests from the inside out and that when we are inwardly focused, our relationship to it changes.

When we are unconscious of the fact that reality is being created from within us, we are always at the effect of what we perceive.

But when we have been able to uncover the deeper layers of our perceptual capacity, we gain the power to control it, change it, create within it, and ultimately transcend it. We become free within the world rather than being bound by it. This is what it means to be a master of the senses—not only to be able to control your own senses in meditation but also to fully empower the senses so that they can see through the illusion of the physical world to the underlying energies that create and maintain it. Again, this is the mastery that comes to advanced yogis. But we can cultivate it in our own way.

### Sutra III.48

ततो मनोजवित्वं विकरणभावः प्रधानजयश्च॥४८॥

**tato mano-javitvam vikarana-bhavah pradhaana-jayash cha**

tatah—from that; manah—of the mind; javitvam—quickness; vikarana—without instruments; bhaavah—existence; pradhaana—primordial matter; jayah—victory; cha—and

**As a result of this {realizing what lies behind your process of perception} comes speed like the speed of mind, activity independent of the bodily senses, and mastery over primordial matter.**

In Sutra 48, the Yoga Sutra gives three more siddhis that arise from the mastery of the senses:

1. The ability to move your body at the speed of the mind so that the yogi can appear instantly anywhere.
2. The ability to know and do anything (omniscience and omnipotence)
3. The ability to be master over the entire realm of manifestation.

These powers are described in Tibetan and Taoist lore as well as in the stories of Indian yogis. The mythological books, the texts of Vedanta like the *Yoga Vashista*, the Hassidic tales of wonder working rabbis, and the Christian lore around Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary's appearances in various times and places are all traceable to these powers.



## Week 5: Study Guide & Additional Contemplation Exercises

**Question:** Consider experiences you have had of encounters in dreams or in waking life of beings manifesting through these super-normal powers. If you are working with a partner, you might spend a few minutes recalling legends, personal experiences, or accounts you have read of such beings. It's quite an inspiring and exciting thing to share these miracle stories!

**Question:** Consider ways that you have experienced the world and your own body as more subtle than physical. Then consider whether this subtilization of your own perception has enhanced your ability to move through the seams of reality in more empowered ways. For instance, do you have the experience that things often work out with unusual smoothness when you are mindful of the subtlety behind the physical?

**Journal about this and/or Discuss with your Partner:** How have you noticed that the more subtly you are able to look at your circumstances, the more empowered you are in your day-to-day life? This may show up through your health, your ability to manifest financially, and in other ways. These are “normal” examples of mastery that accrues to a meditator when s/he acknowledges what lies behind physical sense experience.

### Sutra III.49

सत्त्वपुरुषान्यताख्यातिमात्रस्य सर्वभावाधिष्ठातृत्वं सर्वज्ञातृत्वं च॥४९॥

**sattva-purushaanyataa-khyaati-maatrasya sarva-bhaavaadhishthaatrtvam  
sarva-jnaatrtvam cha**

sattva-- intellect (buddhi); purusha—the Self; anyataa—difference; khyaati—discernment; maatrasya—of one, only; sarva—all; bhaava—state of existence; adhishthaatrtvam—state of supremacy over; sarva—all; jnaatrtvam—state of knowledge; cha—and

Edwin Bryant, one of the translators and commentators on the sutras, quotes two traditional commentators on this sutra, Vyasa and Vijnanabhikshu: Omniscience (sarva-jnaatrtva) according to Vyasa, simply means discriminate awareness of the three gunas. If one perceives the true nature of the gunas (which are always moving and changing in ways that an adept can see before the external effects manifest), one automatically understands any past, present, or future product emanating from them. Another commentator, Vijnanabhikshu, notes that in principle, all purushas (souls) are masters of the gunas, but because of the kleshas and the predominance of obstacles formed by intense rajas and tama guna, the gunas cannot be controlled by the normal person. But the yogi who has reached this stage can command the gunas.

The question that comes up here is whether the yogi has powers identical to God's (Ishwara's). Patanjali and the commentators say no...that the yogi can't create worlds like Ishwara can, though legends describe yogis who can create small worlds within the big one.



### Sutra III.50

तद्वैराग्यादपि दोषबीजक्षये कैवल्यम्॥ ५० ॥

**tad-vairaagyaad api dosha-beeja-kshaye kaivalyam**

tat—that (omniscience and omnipotence); vairaahyaat—from detachment; api—even; dosha—faults; beeja—seeds; kshaye—on

**By detachment even from this attainment and upon the destruction of the seeds of all impurities, kaivalya, the supreme liberation ensues.**

The entire text of the yoga sutra has been taking us to this point. Through repeated immersions in samadhi, through inquiry into the nature of the Self, through surrender, and above all, through profound vairagya, or detachment from everything that is not the Atman, you have become capable of being fully immersed in the unwavering light of the Atman, and in its blazing brilliance, dissolved the seeds of karma and the obstructions of the kleshas.

The senses have given up any desire for pleasures other than the bliss of the ultimate. The manas and its vrittis have become completely still. Ahamkara now only identifies with the pure light of consciousness.

Buddhi has made the decision to detach itself even from the pure and blissful states of sattva, knowing that even sattva is still one of the gunas and thus a part of prakriti. At this point, buddhi fully merges into Purusha so completely that there is no separation, no need for or consciousness of anything outside the Self.

This is the state that in Patanjali yoga is considered the ultimate. He calls it Kaivalya, which means complete independence, the complete uncoupling from Prakriti. It is a state of intense samadhi, the samadhi without any seeds of thought, called asamprajnata samadhi, samadhi with absolutely no disturbance. The Purusha, the atman sheds all the coverings—the kleshas, which are the seeds of suffering, the gunas, and certainly the seeds of samskaras and karmas that distort the reflection in buddhi and thus convince the Atman to identify with the body, mind, etc. and believe that it is limited and defined by its own instruments.

The purusha in the Kaivalya state has nothing to identify with except itself. It is aware of nothing else, meaning that it has realized itself as consciousness without any object. This is a meditative state, but when it is truly present, it colors the waking state as well. We can get a sense of what this must be like when we have been meditating for a long time, for instance, on a retreat, and become really immersed in the inner world, then open our eyes and see the outer world differently—perhaps filled with light and beauty and bliss, or perhaps less dense and different from ourselves.

## Week 5: Study Guide & Additional Contemplation Exercises

**Contemplation:** Take a few moments to touch into your own Awareness, rigorously looking backward at the pure knower, the one who is conscious of whatever goes on in your experience. Have you ever had the experience of Awareness as all there is? What do you think that would be like? Take some time to do a thought experiment on this question: Ask yourself, what would it be like to recognize that there is only Awareness, that I am awareness, and that all other sentient beings in this world are truly not individuals, but pure Awareness in bodies. Can you imagine what it would be like to experience yourself as truly independent and free of any attachment to the body, the mind, to your beliefs, to others?

Practice letting go of all that keeps you identified with your body/mind/individuality. How would you do this? Perhaps, close your eyes and, on the exhalation, have the thought, “Let go, let go.” Perhaps imagine the world being rolled up and dissolving into your awareness. Perhaps offering your entire waking state experience back to Awareness. Find a way to imagine a state of complete vairagya.

### **Journalling and/or Partner Discussion**

As you journal about this exercise and discuss it with your partner, you might notice that for most of us, Aloneness is not an attractive state—we would miss the world and our loved ones! It would feel scary! We feel unsupported! Notice these feelings and breathe them out. Then consider why a yogi would want to live at this level of freedom from differentiation. Why would this state bring blissfulness? Why would it conceivably be lit with love?

Journal or discuss with your partner how you experience vairagya—detachment from desiring anything other than the pure Self. What does detachment mean to you? Is it something you resist? Do you tend to use detachment as a refuge from emotion? What circumstances enhance your capacity for detachment? Why do you think detachment is such an important aspect of spiritual practice?

**Exercise:** Again, we can do an “as if” practice that can give a sense of this state. Spend a few minutes practicing awareness of awareness. Then open your eyes and sense the world. Imagine what it would be like to realize that the whole universe is arising and subsiding within your awareness?