

Week 1 Additional Homework: Contemplations, Partner Questions, and Commentary

Please make sure you listen to the lecture at least one time and if possible, a second time. And please do read through the sutras that have been translated for you and are on the class page in the Resources section.

The first three *Sutras* of *Book III* are deliberately designed to point out the state that Indian philosophy calls “bondage”. So let yourself feel the weight of it for a little while, because realizing the nature of the fix we’re in actually helps motivate us to change it!

There’s a lot of information and a number of exercises and questions in this document. Please feel free to select which ones you want to engage. My suggestion is that you read through it and notice what catches your attention, what you would like to explore more fully. If you’re working with a partner, decide together what you want to do.

I recommend dialoging with the “Who are you as an individual?” inquiry questions, which can be especially revelatory if you’re working with another person. I also suggest that that you take time for a discussion of the shifts that you notice in yourself (meaning, in how your chitta works!) after a few years of practice.

When you work with a partner, remember to station yourself in your heart, and to become aware of your partner’s heart. And as you discuss keep remembering to re-locate yourself in the heart.

Brief Explanation, Contemplations, and Questions for *Sutra III-I*

***Atma cittam*—The individual self is the mind.**

As we said in the earlier Homework document, *Sutra I* in each book of the *Shiva Sutras* encapsulates the position of the Self at each level of consciousness as it descends and ascends from the fullness of pure free Awareness/Love to the state of the contracted personal self.

By “mind” (*citta*) we mean the contracted consciousness that experiences “me” through the mechanism of the three instruments of perception (known as the *antahkarana*, or inner psychic instrument—the *manas* (sense-mind), *buddhi* (discerning intelligence), *ahamkara* (the mechanism the forms the experience of being a particular self))

By *aatmaa* (self), in this context we mean the *anu*, the atomized consciousness surrounded by the subtle instruments. It’s this soul that wanders (*atata*) from mind-state to mind-state, then from body to body, and life to life.

In the contracted state, Pure Awareness (Shiva) recedes to the background of your experience, where it remains as a dim, vague sense of being present to experience, but is not seen or felt. This is why it’s so difficult to discern the underlying consciousness even when

you try. Shakti pervades your experience, but is particularly present in the breath. Thus we could say that in the human, Shiva lives in us as the background awareness, and Shakti as the breath. Hence the emphasis in yoga and tantra on *prana dharana*, concentration of the prana, which is the most direct way that you and I can get in touch with pure Shakti.

(**Contemplation:** Try right now to look backward and discern the knowing consciousness behind your mind and senses. Try to keep a part of your awareness on awareness as you read.)

That's a very simple assignment, right? No complicated breathing or mantra. Just being aware of the subtle blissful knowingness that is awake to your life. But is it easy? For most of us, not so easy. That's because of the outward-going, obsessively self-defining and categorizing activity of the psychic instruments, the *antahkarana*.

As Pure Awareness recedes into the deep background, limited awareness arises and divides itself into these three psychic instruments, all wired to see reality as outside the self, and to receive and interact with the sensory input from "out there." The self defines itself by identifying with some aspects of the flow of experience, which are actually being filtered through the *manas*, which draws in information from the senses, the *buddhi*, which discriminates and makes patterns out of the sensory input, and the "ego", the *ahamkara* (I-former) which creates a false sense of being an individual by identifying the process of perception and thought as "me" and "mine," and defining "me" as being limited by the body. Everything that appears to be outside the body is seen as "not me" and "not mine."

From this initial misidentification arises the flow of reactive thoughts and desires that constitute your inner world, and that draw towards you the experiences that mirror your inner beliefs and attitudes. Since you believe the self to be this experiencing subject, you attach to the ideas and stories that arise in the field of the *citta*, react to them, and draw conclusions about yourself and others based on whatever is arising in the field. Then your reality shapes itself accordingly. Since there is actually only one field of consciousness here, the inside and the outside are constantly affecting each other, first on a subtle level, then on a physical.

These ideas, insights and perceptions form *samskaras* (impressions based on memory, both muscle memory and subtle memory, which surface as ideas and emotions and especially as tensions that block the flow of shakti). At a deeper level, they become *vasanas* (tendencies, such as kindness, anger, jealousy, aggression, cheerfulness, depression, as well as racism, gender bias, shame, you name it). All these further contract consciousness, binding you to the self-definitions that arise from your conditioning and the effects of your interactions with what you believe are the "others" in the world. Moreover they become the screen through which you and everyone else looks at the world.

As you know, the inner work that most of us practice is very much based on purifying and transforming these *samskaras* and *vasanas*. For example, contemporary "woke" consciousness involves a *sadhana*, a set of practices designed to change, or "raise" the individual's consciousness. You look at your unconscious racial and gender bias, bring it to consciousness and try to transform it. Psychotherapy involves a *sadhana* of seeing through your unconscious tendencies and trying to transform them. Most spiritual practice—

mindfulness meditation, the eight-fold path of yoga, the four noble truths of Buddhism, and the practices of buddha dharma—are also rooted in our identification with the limited self and the desire to improve the experience of the self.

This is appropriate at the early and middle stages of *sadhana*, because these methods help expand and purify the *citta*. And this must happen in order for the *citta* to recognize its true nature. But the classical practices of *Anava Upaya* aim not at improving the experience of your individual self, but of transforming and redirecting your self-identity at the most basic level.

As we'll see, most classical tantric practices are *Anava Upaya* practices. And this is important—the classical tantric practices are aimed at the subtle body. Though posture and mudra (hand positions that change the energy in the body) are key *Anava Upaya* practices, they are secondary to the practices aimed at opening the Centers and drawing the life energy upwards.

Question for Discussion and Contemplation

We've agreed that if the individual self is the *citta*, then your identity at any given moment is based on the state of your mind.

So, here's the question:

Take a moment to tune into some of the familiar mental-emotional states you experience. What is the felt experience *citta* when it is filled with angry thoughts? With grief? Can you feel when a passing emotion becomes an underlying mood?

Have this discussion, based on this contemplation and the inquiry in the first part of the homework and describe from your experience the “self” you are when your *citta* is filled with angry *samskaras* or grieving ones. Can you see how “you” wander as the *citta* identifies with these different states?

Based on this contemplation, what interventions would you (or do you) work with to shift your state “upward” to a more expanded experience?

Practices and Contemplations for Sutra III-2

Jnanam bandah—The lower, limited knowledge of the embodied individual becomes the cause of their bondage, because it is always the knowledge of differentiation.

(**Yoga 101 fact:** True knowledge—which is always knowledge of your identity with all that is—cannot be known through the senses or the limited organs of perception, as long as the veil of Maya is in operation!)

What makes our knowledge limited?

First, in practical life we focus on particulars—meaning the details of life—physical, social, familial, political etcetera. These so fill up consciousness that we believe that these particular physical forms, relationship clusters and cultural memes are reality, and that mastering these particulars is the mastery of life. Thus, in Rabindranath Tagore’s words, we miss the “life that vibrates in every atom, the love that shines in every creature and embraces everything in oneness. And are unable to flow with the current of life.”

A *second reason* why the sutra says that all knowledge is differentiated and thus binding is because all our ideas are derived from either our sensory motor perceptions, from the images we hold in our mind, from thought—constructs, often factually inaccurate or based on imagination, and even more from our conditioned ideas—from the mass of words we have been conditioned to believe are true. Because of this, it hard to recognize either the flow of Shakti as it manifests, or the pure Awareness that is our true Self. Our home-base becomes our body and personality.

Third, when we consider the mind-body complex to be the self, we are inevitably driven by the forces of attraction and aversion. Good is what feels pleasurable to the mind-body. Bad is what feels unpleasant. The more complex and sophisticated the mechanisms of our limited knowledge become, the more subtle and even perverse the experience of pleasure or pain can be. (As in the case of people who do austere yogic body practices like fasting in order to get high or feel good about themselves.)

The false knowledge by which we believe ourselves to be the limited self leads to the play of attachment and aversion, which are the basis of most of our actions and reactions

Exercises for partner work and/or personal journaling, based on these three points about differentiating knowledge:

Who Are You? Dialogue with Your Partner

Practice dialoguing with the Inquiry question we described in Part I of this homework. But do it as a Q&A, using the question “Who are you as an individual?”, sharing out loud the answers that come up.

Partner A asks, “As a person, who are you? What are you like?”

Partner B answers from the point of view of her individual self.

(The answers might be “I am female” or “I am German” or “Athletic” or “Smart” or “a parent” or a teacher” or “a happy person” or “nice” or “sharp-tongued” Notice how many ways the mind identifies with the different aspects of your experience.)

Then, Partner A asks:

Partner A: Which of these ideas of yourself do you really depend on for a sense of identity. Choose one that is particularly important for you.

Partner B chooses one, and shares it.

Partner A says, “Can you let go of it for a few seconds?” Then,

Partner A asks: Who are you if you let go of that belief about yourself? (Thank you, Byron Katie!)

Partner B answers.

Partner A asks: Can you see a deeper belief about yourself that is core to your sense of identity?

Partner B nods when he/she/they has found one.

Partner A asks: Who would you be without that belief?

At some point, there should be a sense of opening in the field of your consciousness by asking these questions.

Now switch off and repeat the same process with Partner B becoming the Questioner.

Dialoguing on Attachment and Aversion

Question: What are your driving attachments and aversions? How do they limit your ability to expand your consciousness? How have your attractions and aversions shifted over the years of your maturity and your practice? Which forms of attachment and aversion still tend to grab you? To what extent do you feel defined by these attachments and aversions?

Take turns asking each other these questions, then ask, “Can you imagine letting go of the attachment? What arises when you let it go?”

(The answer might be fear, blankness, ecstasy, love, confusion—there is no right answer, just a noticing!)

Now, ask yourself, what would be the highest octave of your strongest attachment and your strongest aversion?

Contemplate, journal, and discuss with your partner.

A Walking-Around Practice for Shifting Out of the Intense Contraction of Focusing on Particulars

Look at the situation you currently find yourself in, in all its particularity—where you live, who you know, what you do, the state of your health, the appearance of your body, your skills and abilities, the number and quality of your relationships. What are the main causes of satisfaction? What are the main causes of dissatisfaction? Find the felt sense of satisfaction. Feel it. Then find the felt sense of dissatisfaction. Feel it.

Now step back from all these particulars and find a thought that temporarily dissolves your feeling of being subject to the conditions that create attachment and aversion. For example, “Whatever arises in my life is here for my growth” or “Whatever arises, I am ready to love it!” (Thanks, Matt Kahn!) or “All this is a projection of my own state of mind” or “The same consciousness is in those other people as in me.” Find a thought-form that draws you to a more non-dual attitude and notice what holding that thought does to your *citta*.

Then, as you go through the day, apply one of these enlightened thoughts (as appropriate!) to any situation in which you feel either a positive or negative charge.

Bonus Reading: Sutra III-3

Sutra III-3 is kind of a tough read, hard to understand without the commentary. But it reminds us of a crucial piece of the Shaiva analysis of reality, bondage, and enlightenment.

So below we include the commentary on *Sutra III-3*, which makes it easier to grasp. This sutra describes what constitutes binding knowledge. The commentary is based on Lakshman Joo’s book *Shiva Sutras: The Supreme Awakening*, pages 133-135. It references the *tattvas* (*tattva* means “thatness”), the essential suchness of each level of the soul’s experience. A *tattva* is like a meme—it’s the entire complex of reality as experienced at a certain stage of consciousness. At the heart of the Tantric view is that once consciousness passes through the prism of Maya *Tattva*, its ability to see its true nature is veiled. Remember, since Maya is the concealing power of Shakti, you as an individual cannot remove it. Shakti herself has to remove it. Once she has done that, the senses and mind no longer give you a contracted experience, but start to reveal oneness. If you’ve ever had this experience, you know that it is both mind-blowing and completely natural...it literally feels as if your psychic cataracts have been removed. Otherwise, if you want to review the *tattvas*, you might take a look at the talk on the process of manifestation through the *tattvas* that appears on the course web page. Or you can look at the *tattva* explanation on Wikipedia, which is pretty accurate and makes a good Cliff’s Notes.

Sutra III-3: *Kaladinam tattvanamviveko maya*

Being unable to possess the undifferentiated knowledge of the 31 elements (tattva-s), you live in those elements, from kalaa (the limitation of action) to prithvee (physical reality), which are the expansion of the energy of illusion, Maya Shakti.

The system of the 36 tattvas, or elements of reality, is a map of how consciousness experiences itself at successive levels of awakesness. At the enlightened levels—tattvas 1-5—consciousness knows itself as eternal, all pervading, omnipotent, omniscient, etc., and experiences *all of reality as a part of itself*. This knowledge—“Everything is part of my Self”—is the definition of enlightened knowledge in tantra. No other form of wisdom is considered enlightened. Once the fundamental contraction of consciousness known as Maya happens, consciousness no longer feels one with the world that appears within it. Reality appears to be outside, and therefore what we know, and experience is entirely based on the assumption of “I” and “this” as separate. As long as the knower (you) and what is known (the objects of knowledge) are different, you are in a state of delusion, no matter how intellectually or spiritually sophisticated you are. Anything you think or understand about reality—including the information that comes through your beautiful meditation visions and insights—are binding, because as long as you feel that “I” am one thing and “experience” is something that happens to me, you are in a state of Maya. Any understanding based on the assumption of separation and difference is always false.

This is the reason why spiritual adepts can lose their state—it happens when we identify with their spiritual experience rather than recognizing that both “spiritual” and “mundane” are arising and subsiding within the field of your own consciousness.

If you remember the sequence of tattvas, you’ll remember that in the 6th tattva below Shiva, consciousness enters the Zone of Contraction, known as the level of Maya and the five coverings, or cloaks, (Tattvas 6-11) which veil the magnificence of the Self from itself.

The five cloaks (*kanchukas*) are limitations that Shakti places on her own powers. Maya is essentially the shakti that creates separation, shrinking the capacities of the Self. Then the soul becomes capable of only limited creativity, limited ability to know, limited capacity to love. She is constricted by time and by space, which appear only after Maya has kicked in. From these constrictions, we develop our identification with the psychic instrument.

In the tantric text *Tantrasadbhaava*, this is memorably stated, as follows:

“The results of your God-consciousness (chaitanya) being fenced in by the five coverings is that you act in a limited way, know in a limited way, love in a limited way, live in a limited way, and possess in a limited way. Being attached to this (way of being) with your organs of knowledge (senses of sight, smell, touch etc) and organs of action (grasping, locomotion, ingestion, excretion, and procreation) you are guided to walk the spiritual path in a limited way. Your attachment to the path is such that even if you meet an elevated soul who desires to show you the correct path, you will not accept his guidance.

Consequently, in your world of illusion, where you remain filled with insecurity and fear, these limitations are bondage. Here, being completely dependent on that illusive energy of limited knowledge, and being without real knowledge, you are continuously doing right or wrong. So, being completely entangled in that fence you become just like a beast.”

Contemplation

If you have time, I suggest that you really take some time to notice what contracted consciousness feels like. We take for granted that this is a world of separate people and objects, because that's how our senses are wired. But instead of taking this for granted, see if you can notice what the effect is of feeling separate from the world around you. Notice how you react to other people, to your own mistakes, to those whose politics you disagree with. Notice how fear and desire automatically arise when you are seeing the world as other. See if you can step back from what seems like "how things really are" and be aware of the effects of duality on your ability to discern what is really real, what is really important, and who you really are!

Then, for a moment or two, station yourself in the heart, and imagine that your body is completely open to the surrounding space. For 30 seconds, peel off the carapace of your physical structure, and imagine that you are looking through your physical body from behind, and that whatever you see is part of your body. keep noticing, and if you like, discuss with your partner, how it feels. For some of you it will feel scary, and that's ok. Just notice the effect of a moment of seeing. Discuss it with your partner. Be each other's witnesses as you experiment with what I consider the highest form of "Fake it Till You Make It"—trying on a non-dual perspective. Who knows—it might trigger a deeper awakening! And at least it might get you to stop worrying about all the things you're normally worried about, at least for a few minutes!

In the next sutra, which we'll examine next week, the text lays out the fundamental *sadhana* of Tantra, which is the process called "*Laya Bhavana*", in which the seeker consciously dissolves the physical body into the subtle body, and the subtle body into pure consciousness. Most of the techniques of *Anava Upaya* are based on this intention to surrender the gross into the subtle at deeper and deeper levels.