

Week 2: Contemplation & Study Questions

What's Up for This Week

In Teleclass 2 we explored Sutras 1:15-18 and Sutras 1:23-29. This guide offers some commentary and contemplation questions on some of these sutras.

Even if you don't have much time, it will be very fruitful if you can spend a few minutes this week reading these sutras (handout available on the Student Page). We've also put a handout on the Student Page with extracts from Pandit Rajmani's commentary on Sutra-s 17, 18, 23, and 26. Even if you don't do a full-court-press study of them, I encourage you to read through the sutras and as much of the commentary as possible.

This Study Guide is for you to enjoy and use. You don't have to complete it all this week. Several of you have said that you would like more time to continue your study of last week's sutras, since there were so many questions and contemplations given! I fully encourage you to stay with last week's study questions and save the new ones for another time. In fact, it's actually a deeper practice to really delve into just one or two of the study questions, rather than feeling you have to cover them all.

In support of those who wish to take more time with last week's assignment, I did consider not giving any study homework for this week. I just couldn't resist, because these sutras are so delicious, and because I know some of you will want to work with them.

However, I've included only a few questions and commentaries on these new sutras. We'll study them in more depth as we continue, because they come up again in the course of the text.

And please feel free to simply read through these questions and suggestions. As we said last week, the study guide is here to serve you. It's not compulsory.

I do want to suggest that if you are a practiced meditator and are working with a partner, that you spend some time discussing your own experience of the categories of meditation practice described in Sutra 1-17.

I have personally found it quite revelatory to hold this sutra up to my own meditation experience. If you're a meditation teacher, or if you have practiced different approaches to meditation, this is particularly interesting, but any experienced meditator should find it helpful for understanding your own practice.

I'll offer a couple of question/prompts for anyone who wants to do this.

Sutra I:17

Vitarkacichaaraanda asmitaa roopaanugamaat samprajnaatah

Absorption supported by (forms, such as) 1) concrete object, 2) a subtle object, 3) a blissful feeling, or 4) the I-sense is *Samprajnata Samadhi*.

As we said in class, this sutra can be read either as a pointer to the different ‘objects’ of concentration that a meditator uses, OR as a map of the stages one moves through as one sinks deeper into meditation.

Vitarka: A concrete object—can be any physical object that helps concentrate and ease the mind, such as a candle flame, a flower, a picture or an icon, a yantra (mandala painting), the ocean, etc.

Normally, the concrete object we use is the body itself—as in mindfulness practice—i.e., the touch of the breath in the nostrils, sensations within the body, points of classical body-scanning as in *Shavasana* guided relaxation, etc.

Vichara: A subtle object. As a stage, when you meditate on a candle, a flower, or a part of the body, there comes a point where the object loses its concreteness and we begin to feel its energy. This can happen in a very simple way (for instance, if you’re looking at a candle and you close your eyes and meditate on the afterimage of the flame). It can also be experienced as a subtle segue from feeling the body as a dense, concrete object into a subtle felt sense of the body as a collection of sensations and energies. Since the physical body is actually a denser layer of the subtle body, this is a natural process that happens as your mindfulness of body and breath deepens.

The subtle object can also be (as it is for many of you) a mantra, a chakra, a mental image of a deity or a mandala, the central channel of the body, an inner light or flame, the heart center, the hara center in the core of the belly. Such a subtle object, to be effective, should be one that is associated with higher realities, or that can lead you into stillness. As you meditate with a mantra, a yantra, a deity form, it will eventually dissolve into a subtler state and a deeper absorption, often characterized by feelings of blissfulness, sweetness, peacefulness, or a simple sense of being in contact with your own Shakti. Each chakra, and other subtle centers, have their own subtle quality—peace, heightened energy, groundedness, etc., which begin to arise and become anchors for meditation.

Ananda: A state of subtle joy, contentment, peace, sweetness, energy. This state will eventually arise as you flow deeper into meditation. Certain subtle objects (mantra, for instance, or concentration on a deity form) have a natural tendency to

open into an experience of *Ananda*. Meditation on *Ananda* is a doorway into the love-aspect of the Self. Initially, *Ananda* can also be experienced as a simple feeling of simple relaxation and contentment.

Asmitaa: The I-sense, the feeling of I AM, the sense of being a self, the pure sense that “I exist” or “I am alive.” Again, this state can be a natural awareness that arises as you flow deeper in meditation. It can also be chosen as an object of meditation, as in meditation on awareness, or meditation on the feeling that arises when you hold the thought, I Am without identifying with the body or other aspects of your ordinary identity. This is considered the deepest stage of meditation on an object. Some people experience it through a teacher’s pointing out instructions, which helps us know how to recognize it. Otherwise, it’s so subtle that we need to have made the mind more subtle (through the other three types of concentration) in order to experience it.

At some point, the object—including the I AM sense—should dissolve, and there should be pure absorption in the Self. This is *asamprajnata samadhi*—where there are no thoughts, and where you are absorbed in pure being.

Two possible contemplations on Sutra 17, to do alone or with partner:

Consider your experience of meditation over time. Which “objects” of meditation do you find most compelling? Which ones are easier for you to focus on? Which ones seem to arise as you go deep? Can you trace your normal daily experience of meditation through one or two (or all four) of these stages?

Deliberately, for about half an hour, experiment with these four types of practice, and then journal or discuss them with your partner. If you’re doing it with a partner, I suggest that you meditate together on one, then discuss it, then practice with the next one. Here’s a suggestion about how to work with this sequence:

- Spend some time focusing on a concrete object, which can be the tip of the nostrils as in the breathing practice we’re doing. Notice the sensations and see if you can feel the “concreteness” becoming more subtle.
- Focus on the mantra *HamSa* (or your usual mantra, if it’s different). Notice the moments when the mantra “sinks” into your consciousness. Is there feeling that accompanies the settling in of the mind to the mantra? What does it feel like?
- Inhale with the feeling that you are inhaling relaxation, or happiness, or peace into the heart. Can you become present to the felt sense of relaxation? Or happiness? see if you can stay present with that feeling and notice what happens. Does it spread through your body? Does it create a trance-like state? Meditate on the feeling of relaxation or peace.

- Focus on the pure feeling of I Am. You might start with the words “I am”, resisting the tendency to associate I am with your name or your state. As you repeat the words, begin to focus on the space that arises in the mind after you’ve said the words. The felt sense of I am, the felt sense of beingness.
- Journal about these experiences or discuss them with your partner.

Sutra I:18

Viraamapratyayaabhyasapoorvah samskaarashesho’nyah

The other (unsupported or object-free samadhi), is preceded by abhyasa, which brought all cognitions to a halt. What remains is the samskara of abhyasa itself.

Please read Pandit Rajmani’s commentary on this sutra. (Available on the course Student Page.) He points out that the so called “lower *samadhi*”—*samprajnata* absorption where we retain a sense of being the meditator, and of the object we are focusing on—creates samskaras. These meditative samskaras are valuable, because they eventually come to replace or nullify the ordinary perceptions and thoughts that we carry. This is one reason why meditation is so important as a way of dissolving samskaras.

When the mind, through *abhyasa*, becomes free of thoughts, etc., there remains only the samskara of effort itself. This is a very subtle tendency that blocks complete stillness. (We discussed this in class.) At this point, we can practice *vairagya*, consciously reminding ourselves to let go of effort. For most of us, even to get to this point requires that we sit for quite a while, even for a couple of hours. This is one reason why retreat practice is so important for someone who wants to break through into deeper meditation. In retreat, we are able to meditate without distraction for long enough to come to the point where we can sense the block that the effort to “do meditation” creates. That’s when we can practice the subtle skill of letting go of effort.

If you’re someone who likes to meditate for a long time, and if you have time and space to do that this week, try practicing as we did in class. See if as you get deeper into meditation, you can notice the presence of the thoughts and samskaras, including especially the sense of “I am meditating” or “I am trying to stay focused.” These are samskaras of *abhyasa*! Gently breathe them out with the thought “Let go” and just notice the moments of stillness that arise. Or say the words “Let go” or “I am” to yourself and linger for a few seconds in the space that arises in the mind at the end of the words.

This moment is sometimes called “the gap”—meaning, the gap between thoughts, or the space where the breath stops for a moment. Meditating on the gap, we can get a

sense of what *asamprajnata samadhi* feels like. As we become familiar with it through these momentary glimpses, we can begin to open up to it on a regular basis, and gradually, the moments of stillness become longer. Even a few seconds of connecting with stillness brings great peace. In fact, this state is the most powerful field for eliminating samskaras.

In his commentary, Pandit Rajmani points out:

“In lower samadhi, the mind is relatively active, its habit of goal-driven action remains intact, and it is still influenced by its samskaras. In other words, the mind is clinging to its karmic impressions and finds pleasure in consuming them. In higher samadhi, the mind is perfectly still. The samskaras have lost their motivating power. The mind is fully lit by the light of pure Consciousness....”

CONTEMPLATION or DISCUSSION: Have you had an experience of stillness in meditation where it felt as if a negative or agitated state dissolved? Tune into that and consider what it felt like. What was it like to come out of that state and notice your own mind?

Sutra I:23

Ishwarapranidhaanaadvaa

From trustful surrender to God (Ishwara), *samadhi* also comes.

In the Meditation Homework, we offered you some specific contemplative practices for accessing the sense of surrender.

The questions and prompts in this section of the Study Guide are meant to inspire you to contemplate what this sutra seems to be saying, how it applies to you, and also to encourage each of us to keep opening and broadening our sense of what it is that we are surrendering to. The sutra does seem to be pointing towards personal deity, as you see if you look at Sutras 23, 24, and 25, which describe Ishwara as a unique Being free of karmas, who is omniscient. So, this sutra points to the God-image that most religious traditions describe. It's a hint that the Yoga Sutra is not simply a work of scientific yoga, but actually recognizes the importance of mystical connection with a divine Presence.

However, if you broaden your perspective, especially if you take a tantric view of Ishwara, you recognize that feeling the presence of God does not have to connect you to any specific personal being. In the broad sense, God is everywhere, and can be felt formlessly, as a connection to grace, to the energy of help, protection, insight, and

love that can bring forth your highest state of awareness and love. In that sense, Ishwara is more than a specific personal form. Ishwara is the experience of grace, that can be invoked through a connection to deity or teacher or saint, but which is actually within you and within everything.

CONTEMPLATION: For those of you who are working with a partner, this is a hugely fruitful topic to discuss. Here are some questions to discuss or journal about.

QUESTION: What do you understand about surrender as a spiritual process? Why do you think Patanjali describes it as a practice that leads to samadhi?

QUESTION: When have you felt trustful surrender? Under what circumstances? What is the feeling of being in trusting surrender?

QUESTION: What blocks you from surrendering to the divine? What feels uncomfortable about the practice of trusting the higher will? Notice the feelings that contribute to those blocks. We all have them, and they point us to some of our deepest samskaras.

QUESTION: How does surrender relate to vairagya, non-attachment? Have you ever used a loss or difficulty as the occasion for surrender? How is surrendering in a moment of loss, grief or difficulty different from giving up? Was there a positive result or feeling that arose from practicing surrender in that situation?

Sutra I:26

Sa esha poorveshaamapi guru kaalenaanavacchedaat

(S)he (Ishwara) is the one who has been the teacher of all previous teachers, for (s)he is not limited by time.

This is an extremely important sutra, because it points us towards the inner Guru, who in the yoga tradition is generally identified with Shiva—not Shiva as the Hindu deity, but Shiva as primordial consciousness, the underlying Truth of reality. (A traditional Sanskrit verse says, “God, teacher and Self are one.”) Read superficially, this sutra could seem to be saying that there is some universal Guru, who maybe lives in the Himalayas or the Andes or in a high heaven. However, for a yogi on the non-dual path, it points to the truth that the one we are surrendering to is actually the ever-present Self, which is our own inner consciousness as well as the Consciousness that is present throughout this universe.

So, spend a few minutes contemplating Ishwara as the inner teacher—the intuitive guidance who shows up as an inner knowing that teaches, protects, leads and embraces

us at deeper and deeper levels as our practice progresses. That knowing can manifest in many ways—as a voice, a dream, an image that flashes forth. Since Consciousness is everywhere that sense of guiding Presence can also come through an intuitive recognition brought about by someone else’s words, or a book or a song or even a billboard! The oracular texts like the I Ching or the Tarot cards can function this way for people who are attuned to these modalities. However, if you use supports like this, see them not as the source of guidance, but as methods for concretizing the wisdom that is coming from within, from the inner Source, from Ishwara. The clearer your own mind is, the more reliable such guidance will be and the easier it is to discern it.

So, a very powerful way of identifying Ishwara is as the power of grace that permeates the universe, and which is classically found by tuning into your own heart. In tantra, it is said that the true teacher is the Anugrahika Shakti—the power of grace itself. So, when we are really practicing surrender to Ishwara, we are actually surrendering to the underlying Power of grace and guidance that is always present. In a later class, we’ll be specifically practicing to discover God in the cave of the heart, that inner energetic realm that is connected with the Heart Chakra. This is one of the ‘stations’ in the subtle body where we can tune ourselves to the guidance we receive from within. In the yoga of devotion, the heart is considered the seat of the deity. We’ll be working with discovering grace through a specific heart practice later in the course.

From a tantric perspective, since grace is layered into every particle of reality, Ishwara can be found in any moment, in any place. At this point, Ishwara is discovered to be your own Self, your own higher mind.

QUESTION: How do you access inner guidance? How have you experienced guidance that turned out to be true?

QUESTION: Practice the meditation of “I place my mind in the peaceful mind of God” (using whatever language triggers a sense of the greater power for you).

Notice whether this practice, even if you do it for a minute or two, shifts your state. What happens when you do it?

Journal and discuss these questions with your partner.