

## Week 3: Contemplation & Study Questions

### What's Up for This Week

In Teleclass 3 we explored Sutras I:30-33. 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 30-33. 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.

My recommendation is that if you don't have much time, you read through the sutras on obstacles, but spend most of your available time focusing on the four attitudes in Sutra I:33.

These are particularly valuable as daily life antidotes to our tendencies to criticize or feel negatively towards successful people, to dismiss or even push away those who are suffering, to envy or compare yourself negatively to people who are obviously good or spiritually advanced, and our tendency to make harsh judgements of people of whose actions we disapprove. In my experience, these qualities are extremely valuable to contemplate and practice right now!

### Contemplation Questions and Exercises for Sutras 30-33.

#### Sutra I:30

**Vyaadhi styaana samshayakpramaadaa lasya avirati viratibhraana  
tidarshanaalabdha bhoomikat vaanavasthitatvaani chittaa  
vikshepaaste'ntaraayaah**

**1) Disease, 2)mental inertia, 3) doubt, 4) carelessness, 5) sloth, 6) inability to withdraw from sense cravings, 7) clinging to misunderstanding, 8) inability to reach the goal, and 9)inability to retain it throw our mind outwards; they are obstacles**

This sutra and the following one can be used as the basis of self-inquiry that lets you recognize the way these obstacles show up in your life. The secret is to look squarely at the way you experience these, but also not to let the sutra activate your inner critic so that they become a stick to beat yourself up with!

Please listen to the commentary in Tuesday's class, and read over Pandit Rajmani's commentary.

Then, from your own perspective, do some inquiry into your own life and your own "favorite" obstacles. Everyone encounters these; everyone suffers from them. But obstacles stop being obstacles when we are able to look directly at them, and work with one of the antidotes.

Below, I've given some suggestions for questions you might use for self-inquiry.

### **1. Disease**

It is probably obvious how physical disease makes it hard to practice. Consider how you are currently helping keep your own immune system strong, what you do when you feel imbalances, and above all, how you tune into the body's wisdom to find out what you need at a given moment.

**Exercise:** Ask yourself, when you feel out of sorts, "What does my body need right now? (Rest, exercise, water, food, less food?)"

**Exercise:** Try asking your body, before eating, "What does my body really want to eat right now?"

**Exercise:** What do you need to do at this point in your life to take charge of your health such that your body really can support your practice? Is there a practitioner who can help support you in this? What changes would you make in your diet, your exercise regime, the emotional "food" you give yourself? This is a big contemplation, but now might be a good time to start making a workable, sustainable plan.

### **2. Mental Inertia**

**Question:** How do you experience this? What are the symptoms of mental inertia for you? (i.e., boredom, the feeling of your mind being sludgy or stuck, disinterest or unwillingness to focus) What do you find helps you successfully overcome it?

### **3. Doubt**

**Question:** What are the doubts that come up again and again for you? For instance, you might doubt the approach that you are being taught, doubt the teacher or the teachings, doubt grace, doubt your own capacities or character, .

**Question:** What do you do when doubts come up for you?

**Question:** How do you distinguish between useful questioning (which can be clarifying and keep you from blind obedience), and nagging doubt, which unnecessarily destroys your ability to commit yourself to your practice?

#### **4. Carelessness**

**Question:** In what ways do I cut corners in my practice?

**Question:** In what ways am I careless about looking into my own inner state, and practicing keeping it clear and uplifted? (Keeping your state clear includes practicing acceptance when it's hard to change your state—as we said in class, accepting what is at this moment is often the first step towards freeing yourself of a bad mood or feeling).

#### **5. Sloth**

**Question:** How do you tell the difference between the necessary desire for rest or to take a break after you've gone through a period of intense practice, and real sloth?

**Consider this:** In yoga, the definition of laziness is not based on how hard you work in life, but in how willing you are to make the effort to turn your attention inward, to examine your motives and thoughts, and to practice uplifting your own state by cultivating awareness or the sense of sacredness, or positive feelings like gratitude or compassion.

**Exercise:** See if you can notice those moments when you face a choice whether or not to practice. Notice what you do to put off practicing. In such situations, what helps you make the choice to practice?

#### **6. Inability to Withdraw from Sense Cravings**

This sutra is not asking us to live without pleasure! That's a common misinterpretation that has caused a lot of damage over the years. Instead, it's pointing us to look at our tendencies to various addictions, and to the way we use food, intoxicants, tv, even reading to distract or medicate ourselves. At a more basic level, this points us to examine the pull we feel to prioritize our mundane desires over our practice.

**Question:** What are your go-to self-medication strategies and/or addictions? Notice next time you feel a pull towards it and see if you can, just this once, intervene.

#### **7. Clinging to Misunderstanding**

Our misunderstandings often affect the way we set our priorities. All of us have competing responsibilities, and often our practice is the first thing to get thrown under the bus when life becomes busy or fraught.

This would be an example of a core misunderstanding about what your true long-term interests.

**Question:** What do you see as the personal misunderstandings that are hard for you to shake, and that can obstruct your practice?

These might include a) believing that external conditions are solely responsible for your suffering, and not realizing how much power you have when you attend to keeping your power inner state strong; b) The opposite misunderstanding might be a tendency to magical thinking—i.e., believing that you can control outer circumstances solely by the way you think or by mantra practice. Or the misunderstanding might come from fundamental distrust of the teachings, or from confusion about why scriptures and teachers sometimes disagree or describe the path differently.

## **8. Inability to reach the goal**

**Question:** At times when you feel that you aren't making enough progress, or that you aren't succeeding in your practice, what feelings and thoughts come up? What assumptions about the goal or yourself might lie behind that feeling of not making progress? For instance, you may have beliefs about what "attainment" looks like. You might think that it means having dramatic experiences, or having your limited ego fully dissolve, or having a completely quiet mind. You may be comparing yourself to others or to the scriptures and feeling that you come up short. Or, you may have been careless or lackadaisical about practice, or gotten so busy with daily tasks that you are now practicing fitfully or without real focus, and thus feel discouraged by yourself. What are your thoughts and moods around the feeling that you're not reaching the goal? What do you think are the issues around it for you? What do you think would be a helpful response?

## **9. Inability to Retain a State**

This obstacle arises both on the mat and off the mat. On the mat, we often have the experience that we start to go deep in meditation, or actually enter a deep meditative state, and then let ourselves get distracted by thoughts, by fear, by excitement. The antidote to that is just to keep returning to your focus. But if we continue to give in to distraction, we eventually feel discouraged by the evanescence of our meditative experience.

The other way this obstacle arises is post-meditation. This happens when you get up from meditation and let go of your attempts to control your mind or uplift your state. And as a result, you find yourself unable to translate your meditative peace or joy into the day to day. This is a major issue in sadhana, because it's in our willingness to keep revisiting the clarity of meditation that we integrate meditative awareness into daily life. Eventually, it becomes seamless, and this is what leads to advanced stages of "natural" samadhi, or

the ability to walk around in a non-dual awareness, or in a more or less constant state of calm and joy and wisdom.

**Question:** How do you “retain a state” in daily life, without trying to rigidly hold on to a meditative state even when the needs of the waking state demand attention? In other words, how do you maintain a degree of inner focus while acting skillfully in your daily life? What has been your experience of carrying the residue of meditation into your day? How does that improve your life?

### Sutra I:31

**Duhka daurmanasyaangame jayatva shwaasaprashvaasaa vikshepasahavhuvah**

**Pain, mental agitation, unsteadiness or trembling of the limbs, disturbed inhalation and exhalation all arise with the obstacles**

This week, notice when you feel physical pain, or mental upset, etc., and see if it is actually connected to one of the above obstacles. (Remember that physical pain isn't always the result of a physical disease, though it's always good to medically check out pain that persists.)

Uneven or disturbed breathing (such as unconsciously holding your breath when you're stressed) is one of the most immediate symptoms that can show you that one of these obstacles is at play.

As you take notice of something on this list, consider it a dharma bell, reminding you to turn to one of the antidotes.

### Sutra I:32

**Tat pratishedha artham ekatattva abhasyah**

**Practice of (remembering) one single reality is the way to overcome the obstacles.**

After reading Pandit Rajmani's commentary, which stresses mantra as the main practice for overcoming these obstacles, spend some time working with mantra OFF the mat. Notice the effect.

**Questions:** Which practices and attitudes are particularly effective for you in remembering one single reality? (These could include affirmations like “Everything is Shakti” or “I am That.” It could also include inquiry practices like “Who am I really?” or being aware of awareness, or thinking about a great being or a deity, or reading a powerful teaching.) Which are your favorite go-to practices for reminding yourself of the one reality? Can you identify instances when they have helped you move past obstacles?

## Sutra I:33

**Maitree karunaa muditopekshaanaam sukhaduhka punya-apunya  
vishayaanaam bhaavanaatash chittaprasaadam**

**Transparency of mind (or, an auspicious state of mind) comes by embracing an attitude of friendliness, compassion, happiness, and non-judgement towards those who are, respectively, happy, miserable, virtuous, and non-virtuous.**

Whenever I contemplate these attitudes, I realize that they are actually qualities of an enlightened mind. So, by practicing them, we are doing a kind of reverse engineering—cultivating the qualities that naturally arise in our expanded or enlightened states, so that through cultivation they begin to pervade our mind.

Please listen to the final section of the talk, which discusses Sutra 33, and read Pandit Rajmani's commentary or another commentary that you might be working with.

Choose one or two of these four attitudes and do a contemplation on it, using the steps from the Week I contemplation homework. Notice particularly the felt sense that arises as you bring this positive attitude into your mind and hold it for a while. Then see if you can apply it to a situation where you would normally feel animosity, dismissive aversion or cruelty, envy, or judgmentalness.

Notice how working with one or more of these enlightened qualities, even provisionally, has changed your state during a moment of being caught in animosity, cruelty or dismissiveness towards your own or someone's pain, etc.?

If you're working with a partner, share your insight and experience of how contemplating and practicing these qualities impacts both your meditation and your day to day experience.

## Insights and Suggestions for Working with Compassion and Non-judgement

These are great fodder for partner discussion or journaling.

### **The Challenge of Directing Compassion to Your Own Suffering and Shortcomings**

For most of us, as we said in class, it is particularly challenging to direct real compassion towards ourselves when we are messing up or feeling acute suffering. Normally, we react to our own mistakes by making excuses or critiquing ourselves harshly. Similarly, when we can't immediately transcend our own suffering, we will often subtly reject ourselves, try to push our own suffering away, or suppress it. This not only makes it hard to heal our own suffering, but also makes us intolerant or indifferent to the suffering of others.

As we said in class, compassion begins with accepting that this suffering is there, stopping our attempts to push it away, and sitting with it, being fully present with the feeling of suffering, yet letting go of the thoughts or judgements we have about it.

**Exercise:** Scan your body and notice any uncomfortable or stressful feeling.

### ***A Meditation for Self-Compassion***

Sit with your eyes closed and imagine that a small child is sitting in front of you.

Notice that the child is upset—sad, angry, or afraid.

Imagine that you send a wave of love from your heart and wrap it around the child. Feel that your love wraps the child like a bandage.

Now, let the child morph until it is you—either you as a young child, or you as you are now. Sense the presence of any suffering emotion that you are currently feeling, or that you have felt in the past. Imagine a wave of love, perhaps in the form of a beam of white or golden light, flowing from your heart into the figure of yourself.

Alternatively, feel the presence of a divine being behind you—a Goddess, a great saint, a form of the divine masculine, or even a loving friend or relative. Feel that the love that flows into your suffering self is coming from the very divine essence of that being, and that it flows into you, opening your heart and washing you clean of the pain.

### ***The Challenge of Being Non-judgmental***

The second most challenging negative state for most of us has to do with processing our judgements about people whose actions we feel are wrong. Indignation is not only natural in such a situation; it can also feel empowering and morally correct. And we often use our judgements to stimulate ourselves into taking action, to make us feel morally superior, or even to feel like we are acting to change a situation when in fact we're simply judging it, or at most posting our indignation on social media.

**Question:** How can you keep a non-judgmental mind while acknowledging and working to change a situation that seems to need correcting? Have you ever acted to correct wrongdoing without first having judged it harshly? Did you find yourself acting with more clarity, or did neutrality seem to make you less effective?

**Exercise:** Observe the judgements that arise in your mind during the pandemic. Judgements about the way your government is handling it, or about the way people are handling themselves during the pandemic, or about the way your family members are using their time. What can you do to be non-judgmental without being a passive wimp?

### ***Contemplation of a Person You Feel is Morally or Ethically Flawed***

Imagine that person sitting in front of you.

Allow yourself to fully feel your judgements of them, allowing yourself to feel totally righteous about your judgement.

Notice how it feels to hold that self-righteous judgement. Notice the stimulating, addictive quality of self-righteousness. Notice how your mind, heart, and third chakra feel during that state. What is the positive payoff for you of self-righteousness? How does self-righteousness hurt the fabric of your consciousness?

Focus within the part of your mind that can simply observe without emotionally charged judgement. (In yoga, this is known as the buddhi—the clear intellect, or inner witness-observer) Hold that person in witnessing awareness. Notice how you can discern and be aware of the negative effects of that person's behavior or character, but as a neutral observer.

Notice how it feels to neutrally observe someone's negative behavior without letting your mind fall into anger or self-righteousness. If appropriate, consider an action you might take to deal with them. From the position of a witness, decide whether such an action or speech is necessary and if so, whether you can do it skillfully. Then either act or refrain from action based on that discernment.

If you're working with a partner, do the exercises together and discuss the results.

Otherwise, do these as journaling exercises.