

Week 6: Contemplation & Study Questions

What's Up for This Week

General Contemplation on Class Highlights and Practices Experienced over Last Six Weeks

What has most impacted you? How do you feel challenged/changed/confirmed by these teachings and practices? What insights do you want to carry forward? You can do this as a private journaling contemplation, or discuss it with your partner.

Going Deeper into the Contemplations from the Last Six Weeks.

Whether it's the Kleshas, the understanding of Abhyasa and Vairagya, the teachings the four objects of meditation (*Vitarka*, *Vichara*, *Ananda*, and *Asmita*, both as focal points and as signposts on the journey of moving deeper), the instructions about the Soft Palate and Heart Lotus meditations, the types of mental states that we experience in our practice, most of you have felt that there was much more to contemplate than we had time for in our schedule!

Suggestion for the Next Week

Take some time to revisit some of the questions and topics that you wished you'd had more time to explore. Pick one or two, and turn your attention to them, using the four-part contemplation process we offered you in Week One homework.

You and your partner might want to keep your conversation going during the next few weeks and inspire each other to discuss some of these topics as deeply as you're drawn to do.

And of course, do use these contemplations with your journal.

Contemplation on Sutras 1:42-51

If possible, read the whole sequence over once, to get a sense of the flow. However, I have picked out a couple of these sutras for you to look at more closely, since they connect to the subjects of our last class. The intention of these sutras is to give us a sense of what occurs as our experience of meditation deepens and becomes more subtle. Obviously, the descriptions here are very "high", and some of them may seem beyond your experience. But hopefully, reading these commentaries will help you realize that you do indeed move through progressively subtler states as you go deeper into meditation. And hopefully, you can connect your own experience with the experience

that these sages are describing. We may be lion cubs looking at a full-grown lion and feeling small by comparison, but the entire premise of these sutras is that these states and stages are within us, and our path will in time take us through them.

The core of what Patanjali is saying in these sutras is that as we become progressively absorbed in an object, the normal experience of separation between ourselves (the meditator), the object of meditation, and our own shifting experience of the process of meditating begins to dissolve. Normally when we are starting the process of focus, a part of our mind is in touch with the object, a part of it is fielding thoughts, considering the technique and how to do it (i.e., remembering to offer the mantra into the heart, or to notice how the end point of the mantra slips the mind into a brief state of stillness, and trying to lengthen that, judging our level of focus, etc.). This stage of mental absorption is called *Sa Vitarka Sama Patti*.

As the process deepens, the mind zeroes in on the target (for example, a mantra, which is the example we're using here), and it more and more fills the mind. Eventually we aren't thinking about anything except the energetic resonance of the sound in the mind.

SUTRA 1:43

स्मृतिपरिशुद्धौ स्वरूपशून्येवार्थमात्रनिर्भासा निर्वितर्का ॥४३॥

smṛtipariśuddhau svarūpaśūnyevārthamātranirbhāsā nirvitarkā ॥ 43॥

Upon the refinement of memory, there arises mental absorption named *nirvitarka samapatti*, in which the object of meditation seems devoid of its own form and is expressive only of its meaning.

To refine the memory means that through your practice of meditation, samskaras (which are lodged in our deep memory bank) are gradually burned away. At this point, you begin to be able to discard the automatic association of descriptive words and the object they describe (such as “This is a mantra and I’m using it for meditation.”). In short, you can hold the object in the mind without thinking about it.

This is a subtle state that we often don't notice, but it is the second stage of absorption. Now, you are able to hold the object of meditation as a subtle pulsation or an idea accompanied by intuitive feeling. (*Nirvitarka* means “no form”, meaning that you are no longer conscious of the boundaries of the object as a particular form in space, or of the various ways the object is described.) In mantra practice, this might mean that the syllables have begun to melt, and you are mostly conscious of the mantra as an energy pulsation. When you go even deeper, you may be aware of the essence of the mantra as a sound form of your goal: the Self or the deity you are invoking through it. (The mantra *Ham Sa*, for example, begins to feel like an ongoing reminder that you at your essential level are not different than the divine—but not

because you are thinking about it. instead, the sounds are opening your inner field to a sense of the unity between the sounds and your own being.)

The wisdom about the inner meaning of the mantra has been stored in your memory field (your prajna, or intuitive intelligence) but your ability to fully grasp that wisdom depends on the refinement of your chitta, which is the result of repeated meditation. The more we can meditate on subtle objects (breath, mantra, inner light or feeling), the more the mind absorbs their subtlety and the more meditation subtilizes and refines your mental field, including your memory bank.

Question: Looking over your history as a practitioner, what do you notice about the changes that have taken place in your thinking patterns? Have you noticed that certain obsessions, resentments, desires, and memories—including traumatic ones—have lost some of their charge? Spend a few minutes with your journal recollecting how your overall mental-emotional state has changed through meditation. That does not necessarily mean that you never lose it or get depressed or emotional. It means that these states don't last as long, or that you are able to drop them more easily.

In short, how do you see the purification of your memory (your samskaras) as having happened over the years?

SUTRA 1:44

एतयैव सविचारा निर्विचारा च सूक्ष्मविषया व्याख्याता ॥४४॥

etayaiva savicārā nirvicārā ca sūkṣmaviṣayā vyākhyātā ॥ 44॥

Accordingly, the *savichara* and *nirvichara* levels of mental absorption, which have extremely subtle objects as their focus, are explained.

Savichara means “that which is accompanied by thought”. Nirvichara means that which is beyond thinking. When you are (even very subtly) remembering such qualities of the mantra as its linear meaning, the correct pronunciation etc, your meditation has thought in it. When you are fully immersed in the energetic sense of the mantra, or the flow of breath, or the light of the Ajna, or the velvety darkness of a “dark” meditation, there are no extra verbal thought forms involved in your focus. Next time you come out of a deep meditation, notice whether there was a point where your mind was filled with a formless sense of the object, when even if there were stray thoughts arising, there was just a pulsing energetic felt-sense of the mantra or the breath or the inner field. Perhaps you can begin to notice that when you meditate regularly, there are these stages of progressive absorption that get more and more refined.

Question: Consider a moment when you have been really inside meditation. Can you remember a moment when you were just *in it*, with no thinking needed to keep the object in the mind? Even a moment like that is major progress!

SUTRA 1:45

सूक्ष्मविषयत्वं चालिङ्गपर्यवसानम् ॥४५॥

sūkṣmaviṣayatvaṁ cālīṅgaparyavasānam ॥ 45॥

That which ultimately dissolves into irreferable Prakriti is the subtlest of all objects.

As we discussed in class, the field of the mind is the subtlest object of meditation. When you are able to meditate directly on the field of the mind, you will eventually find that your mind dissolves into the field of its own energy, which is the field of Prakriti. (She is called irreferable because she is beyond all references and cannot be compared to anything else!)

Full meditation on the mind itself is a very advanced state, but certain techniques can help jump start it. These are advanced practices, (like our “cutting a hole in the field of closed eyed perception” practice, or the Tibetan practice of Mahamudra, where you look directly into the mind, or Awareness of Awareness) but they are very much worth exploring even if you feel you don’t fully succeed at them, because the process of focusing on awareness or on the mind field can give you a sense of what it feels like to directly sense the mind-stuff behind thoughts.

In the Yoga Sutra-s, that “most subtle object” is actually the part of the mental field called “buddhi sattva”, or the clarified buddhi. This is the subtlest part of the mind, which is sometimes compared to the TV screen on which the pictures appear. Buddhi is like a screen that holds thoughts and perceptions, which normally keep us from seeing the screen itself. But buddhi, unlike a tv screen, is not inert—it pulsates with intelligence and mirrors the creativity of Prakriti, because buddhi is the closest part of us to the vast field of Prakriti herself. Buddhi is normally colored by thoughts and perceptions. In deep meditation, especially the deep meditations that happen when we’ve been practicing for some time, those vrittis are naturally cleared away by the process of resting inside, and the buddhi appears as a luminous field that can both see and be seen by the meditating intelligence. When we speak of “Awareness of Awareness”, we are actually referring to this very subtle state of being able to “see” buddhi through the activity of buddhi; it is a skill that isn’t normally available to us until we’ve cleared off part of the mental thicket. Once that clarification of the buddhi goes deeper, the field of intuition—prajna—becomes available, and begins to be more and more the basis of our inner experience.

And the recognition of, and ability to be guided by prajna (intuitive intelligence) is one of the signs that your consciousness is expanding and evolving.

Question: Can you recognize any experiences of being aware of the underlying energy of the mind? For instance, in doing an exercise on Awareness of Awareness, has there been a glimpse or even a prolonged connection with your own mind-field as something you could meditate on?

Maybe this happened when you practiced dropping thoughts, or when you focused on the space where thoughts arise and subside, or on the space between breaths.

Question: Have you experienced heightened clarity or intelligence arising after or during a meditation session? This is a glimpse of your innate prajna, your inborn intuitive intelligence.

Hint: the practice of focusing on the space where the mantra dissolves that we did in class can start to give you a sense of that.

SUTRA 1:47

निर्विचारवैशारद्येऽध्यात्मप्रसादः ॥४७॥

nirvicāravaiśāradye'dhyātmaprasādaḥ ॥ 47॥

Spiritual transparency and joy come from the continued purification of *nirvichara samapatti*.

The more we are able to come back again and again to the state of absorption in the subtle “object”—including absorption in awareness (*buddhi*) itself,—the more we are able to comprehend and witness the rising and subsiding of our samskaras, our karmic patterns, etc. **without identifying with them.** And this is a very big deal—often called the development of the witness consciousness, which allows you to see your own patterns without rejecting yourself for your imperfections! This seeing occurs through the prajna, the subtle intuitive wisdom that is the highest form of intelligence, the intelligence that is beyond thinking or ideas, and whose fundamental quality is truth and clarity and a kind of natural goodness and love.

SUTRA 1:48

ऋतम्भरा तत्र प्रज्ञा ॥४८॥

ṛtambharā tatra prajñā ॥ 48॥

There that self-luminous field of Consciousness is laden with truth.

Prajna is the name of the wisdom that arises when we become absorbed in the buddhi. This wisdom comes online even before we have experienced samadhi. It's the wisdom that we see in experienced meditators who are able to understand difficult situations and problems at a level that is not available to those with more cluttered minds. And many of you are quite familiar with it in your own lives.

Some questions to help you become aware of the workings of prajna:

Question: Have you noticed a higher level of intuition arising in you during times when you are meditating regularly?

Question: Have you ever gone into meditation with a question or a problem, and received an answer arising spontaneously? Have you learned to trust this wisdom over time? (If not, why not?)

SUTRA 1:49

श्रुतानुमानप्रज्ञाभ्यामन्यविषया विशेषार्थत्वात् ॥४९॥

śrutānumānaprajñābhyāmanyaviṣayā viśeṣārthatvāt ॥ 49॥

Because intuitive wisdom contains the meaning (or essence) of “the Unique,” it has a different scope than the knowledge gained from scriptures and from inference.

This sutra was discussed at some length in class, so I hope that you can listen to that section as you work with this question. Pandit Rajmani's commentary also explains this.

The main point is that prajna, intuitive wisdom carries truth, and is always in harmony with the cosmic law. Once it is established in us, it also guides our activities quite naturally, so we know what to do without having to overthink things. Unlike our “gut feelings” or the hunches that we sometimes claim as intuition, prajna carries a certainty that is unmistakable. It is holistic—prajna gets the entire picture, the entire pattern at issue. It is non-linear, arriving in an instant as a kind of download. The brilliant insights of scientists, creative inspiration in art and literature, brilliant athletic or musical or theatrical performances, the sudden solution to a problem that arrives full-blown—these are examples of the kind of knowledge we call prajna.

It is called “unique” because it is knowledge that arises from the Source, from pure consciousness itself. “Prajna is the light of consciousness itself; it is Chiti Shakti,” says Pandit Rajmani. It is free from samskaras. **It is, in short, knowledge as revelation.**

Question: How have you experienced prajna as a guiding force at moments in your life?

Question: How do you know that an intuition is true?

Question: How has your prajna grown as your meditation has matured? How do you experience prajna outside of meditation?

(For those of you working with partners—this is a fascinating topic to discuss!)

SUTRA 1:50

तज्जः संस्कारोऽन्यसंस्कारप्रतिबन्धी ॥५०॥

tajjahḥ saṃskāro'nyasaṃskārapratibandhī ॥ 50॥

Samskaras born of intuitive wisdom cancel all other samskaras.

Ok, here is the essence of meditation’s power to transform us. The states that arise when your intuitive wisdom is online are clear, peaceful, free of worry and fear and grasping. So the thoughts and actions born of those states don’t leave traces.

Like clear water poured into a muddy glass, the meditative samskaras gradually wipe out more and more of the ordinary patterns of reactivity. Even when they continue to arise from time to time, they gradually lose their charge. Over time, the growth of these meditative samskaras shift your priorities and your world view. You are no longer bent out of shape by every event. You can take larger perspectives. Your consciousness literally evolves to higher and higher stages of empathy and intellectual precision through the development of these samskaras.

Question: How have you noticed this over the years?

Question: How have you noticed this during our course?

Question: For many of us, intense mantra repetition during a period of agitation or mental discomfort can change the state of your mind quite dramatically. This is an example of how the cancelling of samskaras works.

Remember sometimes when meditation or mantra repetition helped you let go of some difficult stuff that you wouldn’t have been able to deal with so easily otherwise.

SUTRA 1:51

तस्यापि निरोधे सर्वनिरोधान्निर्बीजः समाधिः ॥५१॥

tasyāpi nirodhe sarvanirodhānnirbījaḥ samādhiḥ ॥ 51॥

Upon cancellation of even (the meditative samskaras), everything else is cancelled. This is *nirbija samadhi*: the samadhi that contains no karmic seeds at all.

Two great quotes on this state:

“My mind, like a hailstone, melted into the ocean of bliss. Now I cannot even remember where my bondage came from.”

—VivekaChudamani (*The Jewel of Discrimination*)

“Like a salt doll in the ocean, your separation melts into pure consciousness.”

—Ramakrishna

We’ll be working with this idea in much more detail in the second course, when we discuss the teachings on karma. In the meantime, I suggest that you take some time to read Pandit Rajmani’s commentary on this sutra in *The Secret of the Yoga Sutra*. We will put this commentary up on the student page, for those of you who don’t have a copy of the book. It describes that experience known as the sorrowless state, the culmination of meditative sadhana from the yogic perspective. Of course, you come out of that state. My Guru was once asked, “Can you describe the state you are in?” He said, “The state I am in is this: I go beyond the mind and senses and swim in the ocean of bliss. Of course, sometimes I come out of it. But I know how to get back.”

And that is the promise of this path. Sooner or later, if we just keep walking on the journey, that experience—which is our natural state—arises.