

Pandit Rajmani Tigunait's Commentaries on Sutras 2:40 to 2:45 from *The Practice of the Yoga Sutra*

SUTRA 2:40

शौचात्स्वाङ्गजुगुप्सा परैरसंसर्गः ॥४०॥

śaucāt svāṅgajugupsā parairasaṁsargaḥ | | 40 | |

From purity arises sensitivity to the unclean nature of one's own body; [that leads to] unmixing with others.

SUTRA 2:41

सत्त्वशुद्धिसौमनस्यैकाग्र्येन्द्रियजयात्मदर्शनयोग्यत्वानि च ॥४१॥

sattvaśuddhisaumanasyaikāgryendriyajayātmadarśanayogyatvāni ca | | 41 | |

[From purity arises] the purity of our essential being, a positive mind, one-pointedness, victory over the senses, and the qualification for having direct experience of our self.

Just as he did with the yamas, Patanjali dedicates one sutra to each of the niyamas, with one exception—shaucha, purity. His reason for dedicating two sutras to the first niyama becomes clear when we examine them together.

The literal translation of sutra 2:40 is: “From purity [comes] disgust toward one's own body as well as [a desire] not to associate with others.” This is confusing because disgust is itself a mental impurity. If that is the result of practicing purity, cultivation of mental purity has no place in the practice of yoga. Only by recalling Vyasa's commentary on sutra 2:32 can we understand how the practice of purity brings forward the feeling of disgust and how that feeling leads to achieving the lofty goals described in sutra 2:41.

The common meaning of shaucha is “cleanliness.” This covers a vast range of practices running the gamut from daily habits, such as washing our hands, rinsing our mouth, and wearing clean clothes, all the way to extreme practices of fasting, avoiding hearing foul words, and even self-immolation.

Commentators have taken the liberty of selecting a narrow definition of cleanliness and have usually neglected the context in which the concept of purity is introduced in the practice of yoga. Most of these commentators have derived their inspiration from the aspect of Hindu orthodoxy that considers human birth a punishment and the body a vehicle for that punishment. Religious literature that developed in the post-Vedic and Upanishadic period is replete with denigrating descriptions of the body: a lump of filth; a repository of feces, urine, mucus, and bile; a vessel of toxic gas; and so on. In this view, attachment to the body and craving physical pleasure are the grounds for endless misery, while indifference to the body and eventual disassociation from it are the path to salvation. This view is contrary to the very spirit of yoga.

We do not clean our house for the purpose of discovering how dirty it is so we can use this discovery to cultivate disgust for it, and, in turn, use that disgust to motivate us to abandon the house. Similarly, in yoga we do not embrace the principles of cleanliness and purity as a means of cultivating disgust for our body, and then use that disgust to sever our connection with ourselves and with others. Yet only when we begin to clean our house do we notice how pervasive and subtle the dirt is and how deeply ingrained it has become. When we remove the outer layer of dirt, we begin noticing the deeper, subtler layers and can no longer be comfortable living there until we have cleaned the house thoroughly. Similarly, when we begin to follow a regimen for detoxifying the body, we become aware of deeper and subtler levels of toxins and impurities. We become sensitive to the discomfort they cause, and in proportion to that sensitivity we are motivated to stay away from sources of contamination, both internal and external.

In sutra 2:32, Vyasa divides shaucha into two broad categories—bahya, external, and abhyantara, internal. In general, external purification includes bathing, wearing clean clothes, keeping our home clean and well organized, and infusing our life with sanctity. Internal purity consists of attenuating and eventually eliminating all our mental tendencies, a process that ultimately matures in transcending the five afflictions.

In the yoga tradition, both external and internal purifications are precisely defined and their course of practice clearly delineated. External purification consists of six cleansing techniques known as shat karma (see Appendix C). They are dhauti, upper wash; basti, enema; neti, nasal wash; trataka, cleansing the cortex with gazing; nauli, churning the navel center; and kapalabhati, fanning the fire in the head. These six cleansing techniques constitute a significant portion of hatha yoga and are a foundation for the internal cleansing techniques for purifying the mind. In the tantric tradition of Sri Vidya, these external techniques are further augmented with the ayurvedic method of cleansing popularly known as panchakarma.

Over the centuries, Sri Vidya masters of the Himalayan tradition continually refined these cleansing techniques. This culminated in a single master practice—agni sara. Agni sara means “the essence of fire.” With this practice we are able to awaken and capture the internal fire at the manipura chakra, the solar plexus (see Appendix D). We also access our pelvic and abdominal cavity and awaken, energize, and nourish our gut brain. The energy generated by agni sara enhances the function of our vagus nerve, which in turn enhances the harmonious function of all our visceral organs. We not only become aware of the toxins and impurities affecting our colon, kidneys, bladder, ovaries, testes, liver, heart, and lungs, but we also cleanse our bodies of those impurities.

Agni sara engenders such a high degree of physical and biochemical cleansing that the harmonious communication and interaction among the central nervous system, the endocrine gland system, the autonomic nervous system, and the internal organs connected to the autonomic nervous system are no longer obstructed by toxins and impurities. Most important, agni sara prepares the ground for practicing pranayama, which opens the door to abhyantara shaucha, internal cleansing.

According to chapter 2 of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, our health and longevity depend on the steady, smooth flow of prana shakti, the life force. When, with the help of

external cleansing techniques, toxins are removed and internal organs energized, the life force flows through the energy channels unobstructed.

The unobstructed flow of prana enables us to clearly observe our deeper states of mind. We know whether or not our mind is disturbed, stupefied, or distracted. We become aware of the factors that rob us of our one-pointedness. We begin to see how fear, doubt, anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, and confusion pollute our mind and motivate us to think, speak, and act irrationally. As Patanjali and Vyasa state in sutra 2:41, this realization motivates us to destroy the deeper causes of these mental pollutants—the five afflictions. As avidya, asmita, raga, dvesha, and abhinivesha are attenuated, we are rewarded with five gifts—the purity of our essential being, a positive mind, one-pointedness, victory over the senses, and the qualification for having direct experience of our true self. We will revisit this subject in our discussion of sutra 2:52.

SUTRA 2:42

सन्तोषादनुत्तमः सुखलाभः ॥४२॥

santoṣādanuttamaḥ sukhālābhaḥ | | 42 | |

From contentment comes happiness without equal.

Patanjali tells us that santosha, contentment, leads to happiness without equal. Elaborating on this sutra, Vyasa says, “All sensual pleasures in the world and the great happiness in heaven combined do not equal even one-sixteenth of the joy that arises from the elimination of craving.”

As Vyasa’s statement makes clear, practicing contentment means eliminating all craving. Craving is the mature state of desire. There are as many desires as grains of sand on the earth and stars in the sky. These infinite desires are always accompanied by an entourage of fear, doubt, worry, and anxiety. Transcending desires altogether is extremely difficult. As long as we are ignorant of our true identity, and as long as our desires and actions are propelled by deep-rooted mental impressions and tendencies, we are impelled to keep chasing our desires. But there is a way out—contentment.

The practice of contentment begins with a conscious decision not to fixate on the fruit of our actions. It requires a deep conviction that when we perform our actions, the forces governing the law of cause and effect will ensure they bear fruit. When our actions do not appear to bear fruit, we remind ourselves that unknown factors are far more powerful than known factors. When our actions bear desirable fruit, we acknowledge the higher reality that arranges unforeseen factors in our favor. When the fruit is undesirable, we accept it while acknowledging the benevolence of divine will. Thus we remain unperturbed by both the desirable and undesirable consequences of our actions.

In other words, the practice of contentment means recognizing that there is a higher reality, having faith in it, allowing our long-cherished tendencies to run their course, and performing our actions as an instrument of divine will. The more we are established in this practice, the freer we are from the entourage accompanying our desires—fear, doubt, worry, and anxiety. The freer we are from this entourage, the happier we will be.

SUTRA 2:43

कायेन्द्रियसिद्धिरशुद्धिक्षयात्तपसः ॥४३॥

kāyendriyasiddhiraśuddhikṣayāt tapasaḥ || 43 ||

Austerity destroys impurities. From that come yogic accomplishments pertaining to the body and senses.

The idea of tapas, loosely translated as “austerity,” has captured our attention since the beginning of religious history. In every culture, people committed to austerity are perceived as extraordinary and pious. Austerity has invariably been associated with mortifying the flesh for the purpose of subduing or deadening the appetites of the body and senses. This form of austerity includes prolonged fasting, sleep deprivation, self-flagellation, exposure to extreme temperatures, and other forms of self-inflicted pain. In the yoga tradition, practices of this type have nothing to do with austerity and, in fact, are forbidden (Bhagavad Gita 17:5–6).

Commenting on sutra 2:32, Vyasa clarifies that even when they are drawn from the scriptures, practices can be accepted as austerity only when they comply with the fundamental principles of yoga (yatha-yogam). Yoga means “union.” The yogic concept of union applies to every aspect of our being—from the union between mind and body, brain and heart, sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, all the way to the union between Ishvara and the individual self ensnared in the cycle of samsara. Any practice that accelerates the achievement of this union is tapas.

The literal meaning of tapas is “shining heat.” Tapas is the radiance of the life force—it makes us radiant and vibrant. From the standpoint of practice, gathering and imbibing this radiant force is tapas. To accomplish extraordinary tasks, spiritual luminaries, such as the seven sages, incarnated souls, and celestial beings, like Indra, Shiva, Brahma, and Vishnu, committed themselves to the intense practices of tapas. Only then, as the scriptures tell us, were they able to perform seemingly impossible tasks, such as reclaiming the knowledge unique to extinct races and bringing a century long drought to an end.

As we saw in sutra 2:18, each of us has the capacity to shine and make the world around us shine. However, most of this capacity has become dormant. Shaking off this dormancy and reclaiming our inherent effulgence is tapas. It has nothing in common with the religious concept of austerity.

In chapter 17 of the Bhagavad Gita, Vyasa divides tapas into three broad categories: shariram, physical austerity; vañmayam, austerity of speech; and manasam, mental austerity. Observing the principle of purity, practicing humility, observing the principles of continence and non-violence, and committing ourselves to practices that help us reconnect with the pure and transforming power of intuition is physical austerity. Austerity of speech includes speaking only words which are not irritating, are true, are good and useful to others, and, finally, that serve as a means of studying and examining our internal states. Mental austerity is measured by the clarity and joyfulness of our mind. Cultivating thoughts that contribute to the serenity of our mind and fill our heart with kindness fulfill the criteria for mental austerity. It is implemented by observing silence and by observing our thought processes during silence.

As Vyasa states, these three categories of tapas can be sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic. Sattvic tapas, the highest quality, is accompanied by faith. This faith is infused with the highest degree of purity. The practitioner knows the difference between pure faith and blind faith. Furthermore, the sattvic practice of tapas is not tainted by the desire for the fruit of the practice. When we practice tapas with the intention of gaining distinction and attracting attention, it is rajasic. It feeds the ego and its fruit is short-lived. The lowest-grade tapas is austerity carried out by a dull, dense, and stupefied mind. It causes pain and is undertaken out of foolish notions, in defiance of common sense.

This sutra tells us that a high-quality practice of tapas leads to kaya siddhi and indriya siddhi. Kaya siddhi means “bodily accomplishment.” According to sutra 3:46, beauty, charm, vitality, and self-healing power are bodily wealth. All of us are born with these four forms of wealth. When both gross and subtle toxins and impurities are removed, our body begins to reveal its inherent beauty, charm, vitality, and healing power. As our practice matures and we become fully established in tapas, a much higher level of bodily wealth—such as the power to become small, big, light, or heavy—manifests spontaneously. The dynamic forces leading to the manifestation of this exalted level of bodily wealth are described in sutras 3:44–46.

The practice of tapas also leads to indriya siddhi, perfection of the senses. Our capacity to know the objective world through the senses of hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling is enormous. But the damaging effect of impurities on our inner intelligence has so eroded the extraordinary powers of our senses that the knowledge we gain through them is limited. The senses regain their extraordinary powers when the impurities blocking the incessant flow of our inner intelligence are destroyed. Our senses then begin to operate in complete conformity with our inner intelligence.

Intuition is another name for inner intelligence. In the realm of intuition, time, space, and the law of cause and effect pose no barrier. Tapas is inner fire. It incinerates the impurities blocking the flow of our intuition. Once these impurities are gone, the power of our senses is unleashed and we begin to comprehend that which lies beyond the domain of our normal perception. In order to understand how this works, let us examine what these impurities are and how they are created.

Impurities fall into two categories: physical and mental. Physical impurities are either toxins created by malfunctioning organs and systems or toxins the body soaks up from outside. Mental impurities are karmic impurities. Patanjali calls them kleshas—afflictions—and has elaborated on them in sutras 2:3–11. These deep-rooted impurities churn our mind and manifest as negative vrittis—tendencies propelled by anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, and attachment. They pollute the mind, and the polluted mind, in turn, disrupts the natural functions of our body. Both physical and mental impurities disturb the body’s natural balance by disproportionately dominating one of the three humors—vata, pitta, and kapha.

Vata is the fundamental principle of pulsation, movement, and animation. Breath, heartbeat, and cellular respiration are manifestations of vata. Movement, circulation, neurological responses, intellectual processes, expressions of feelings, and creative imagination are a few of vata’s many functions. Pitta is the fundamental principle of fire,

the force behind transformation. Digestion; assimilation of nutrients; comprehension of information brought to the brain through sensory perception, inference, and postulation, or through revelation; clarity; focus; inspiration; and enthusiasm are a few of the manifestations of pitta. Kapha is the fundamental principle of solidity, the force behind stability and inertia. Kapha reintegrates what has been broken down by pitta.

When they are working in harmony, vata, pitta, and kapha keep us healthy, strong, and energetic. The degree to which their functions are balanced determines the health of our heart, lungs, liver, and other internal organs, as well as the health of our respiratory, circulatory, nervous, and endocrine gland systems.

Vatic disturbances disrupt the normal functions of our heart and lungs, for example, leading to irregularities in heartbeat and blood pressure. From there, a cascade of conditions emerges—congestive heart failure, declining lung capacity, shortness of breath, fluid retention, and a reduced supply of blood to the brain, among others. At the mental level, we become dissipated, erratic, and spacey. Pittic disturbances disrupt our digestive process, overburdening our liver, gall bladder, pancreas, and other organs. Pittic disturbances manifest in acid reflux, ulcers, inflammation of the colon, and skin eruptions. At the mental level, we become irritable, judgmental, fearful, and angry. Kaphic disturbances promote lethargy. We retain fluid and gain weight, and our elimination becomes sluggish. At the mental level, we become dense and dull, our comprehension declines, and we lapse into procrastination and sloth.

In their pristine, balanced state, these three forces sustain our existence. Hence, they are called dhatu, the force that holds us together and provides us with nourishment. When imbalanced, they are called dosha, defect. A defective body and mind are a burden—we cannot reach samadhi with such a body and mind. Patanjali tells us that cultivating a healthy and energetic body and reclaiming our clear, calm, focused, and intuitive mind is of utmost importance. We achieve this goal by practicing tapas.

Yogis in the Sri Vidya tradition view tapas as kaya kalpa. Kaya kalpa means “reclaiming the body as it was.” It is renewal of the body. Kaya kalpa is a specialty of the yogis belonging to the Sri Vidya tradition. This science derives its inspiration from Ayurveda, Siddha medicine, hatha yoga, and tantra. But the refinement comes from the knowledge of alchemy perfected down through the centuries by the yogis of the Natha tradition. This topic will be elaborated on in the commentaries on sutras 3:38, 3:45–48, 4:1, and 4:4, but a brief discussion of kaya kalpa in the context of tapas will be helpful here.

According to the philosophy and science behind the practice of kaya kalpa, the human body is endowed with extraordinary intelligence and healing power. Its capacity to adapt to the environment and conquer adverse circumstances is matchless. The speed and efficiency with which our endocrine and autonomic nervous systems respond to each other is evidence that our body is designed to defend itself from adverse conditions without burdening our mind with fear and anxiety. Our heart, liver, lungs, kidneys, digestive tract, and brain are centers of intelligence working together to achieve a common goal. This intelligence, which fills every cell and guides and governs the complex system of our body, brain, mind, and heart, is known as kundalini shakti.

Kundalini shakti is the primordial pool of power and intelligence. It is the power of all powers, the intrinsic nature of Ishvara. It manifests in us as prana shakti. When impurities block the incessant flow of prana, the extraordinary healing and renewing power inherent in our body declines. Communication among the various limbs and organs is disrupted, and the atmosphere inside our body becomes dense and dull. Then the body's systems become confused—they fail to perform their functions effectively, and communication and collaboration among them is disrupted. This unhealthy condition causes our strength, vitality, and stamina to decline. Our love for life erodes—life feels burdensome. Hopelessness sets in, causing the body's innate wisdom to plummet. The immune system becomes weak and dull and the body is susceptible to disease. Kaya kalpa reverses this process and restores the pristine condition of our body and mind.

Kaya kalpa has five main objectives: First, detoxify the five major cleansing organs—colon, kidneys, liver, lungs, and skin; second, strengthen the heart and lungs, so they function in a mutually supportive, harmonious manner; third, regulate the digestive system; fourth, energize the solar plexus, to awaken the dormant intelligence of the vagus nerve and to regulate the functions of the visceral and reproductive organs; and fifth, gain access to the space that fills our brain, to energize and strengthen the brain and nervous system.

Tantric alchemy is the core of kaya kalpa. This alchemy is a closely guarded secret. It is far more refined than the herbal formulas of Ayurveda, Siddha medicine, Chinese medicine, and the lost alchemical knowledge of medieval Europe. The tradition prohibits us from exposing the esoteric dimension of kaya kalpa, but permits us to share those portions of this science meant for reclaiming the elements of vibrant health—an elevated level of vitality, virility, stamina, and endurance, and the ability to relax, re-energize, and focus. This dimension of kaya kalpa perfectly blends ayurvedic herbs and nutrition with the asana and breathing techniques developed to accomplish kaya kalpa's five main objectives.

A wise person understands that nothing is more important than reclaiming and retaining vibrant health and so embraces kaya kalpa joyfully. But for a person conditioned by an unhealthy lifestyle, kaya kalpa is a hardship because it requires discipline. Most of us resist change, especially a change in our eating habits. It is equally hard to change habits associated with other sensory pleasures—drugs and alcohol, for example, or entertainment that takes a heavy toll on our body, mind, and senses. But once we get a taste of the vitality of a healthy body and the joy that abounds in a calm and clear mind, we joyfully embrace kaya kalpa as a pleasure and a privilege.

Patanjali and Vyasa tell us this joyful austerity leads to three distinct accomplishments: kaya siddhi, indriya siddhi, and sankalpa siddhi (YS 4:1). Kaya siddhi means “bodily perfection”; indriya siddhi means “perfection of the senses”; and sankalpa siddhi means “perfection of will and determination.”

The human body is naturally endowed with unique qualities and capacities, such as beauty, charm, vitality, and self-healing power (YS 3:46). These qualities are kaya sampat, the body's intrinsic wealth (YS 3:45). When the body is freed of impurities and replenished, its innate wisdom awakens spontaneously. Inner balance is restored—our

limbs and organs function harmoniously. Our heart, brain, and endocrine and autonomic nervous systems become acutely aware of our internal needs. The healing and nourishing process is accelerated. The internal organs are revitalized. The sense organs and the subtle power and intelligence that empower them with the capacity to comprehend, feel, and act are energized and responsive. This is *kaya siddhi*, the perfection of the body.

Kaya siddhi is the beginning of *indriya siddhi*, perfection of the senses. When the body is free of impurities, the power and intelligence of the senses flow freely through the sense organs. Although the sense organs are the instruments of seeing, tasting, touching, hearing, and smelling, the actual power to see, taste, touch, hear, and smell is contained in our brain, the physical manifestation of our mind. The power that enables the eyes to see, the tongue to taste, the skin to transmit the sensation of touch, the ears to hear, and the nostrils to smell is *prana shakti*. Once the impurities are removed, *prana shakti* flows throughout the body unobstructed, empowering our senses to function at the speed of our mind (YS 3:48). Our senses are able to comprehend our thoughts, feelings, concerns, decisions, and, most important, our intentions, and are able to translate them into action instantly. This ability is *indriya siddhi*.

Bodily perfection and perfection of the senses prepare the foundation for *sankalpa siddhi*, perfection of will and determination. Once we have regained the original purity of our body and senses and they are fully replenished, they begin to function at full capacity. Every cell, tissue, and organ in our body is lit by the inner luminosity of our mind. Our sense organs and the deeper intelligence that infuses them with special powers and privileges conform to the feelings and intentions of our mind. Our habits and cravings lose their grip on our senses, so our sensory activities and biological urges do not contaminate the decisions and resolutions made by our higher intelligence.

Furthermore, because our body and senses are purified, healed, and revitalized, our memory becomes sharp and stable—what we have decided to accomplish remains firmly in the forefront of our consciousness. Now that we know the capacity of our body, mind, and senses has no limit, we are confident we will be successful in anything we decide to do. Self-confidence and self-trust free us from fear and doubt, so we are able to invest ourselves fully in achieving our goals. This is *sankalpa siddhi*.

To ensure that the extraordinary accomplishments manifesting from *tapas* are used wisely for the furtherance of our inner growth, Patanjali next introduces *svadhyaya*.

SUTRA 2:44

स्वाध्यायादिष्टदेवतासम्प्रयोगः ॥४४॥

svādhyāyādiṣṭadevatāsamprayogaḥ | |44| |

From self-study comes the opportunity to be in the company of bright beings [of our choice].

In *sutra* 2:1, Patanjali selects the last three *niyamas*—*tapas*, *svadhyaya*, and *Ishvara pranidhana*—from the vast body of yoga and collectively assigns them an independent term, *kriya yoga*. This is clear evidence that these three *niyamas* play a key role in

enabling us to succeed in our practice. In the same sutra, Vyasa emphasizes tapas, telling us, “For those not committed to tapas, yoga does not bear fruit.” He does not emphasize svadhyaya, but simply describes what Patanjali means: “Japa of mantras with purifying capacity, such as the mantra om, and the study of scriptures is svadhyaya.” But here Vyasa addresses self-study in detail.

This sutra reads, “Self-study gives us the opportunity to be in the company of bright beings of our choice.” Vyasa adds, “Bright beings are the rishis and the siddhas. They visit those committed to svadhyaya and take part in their work.” Most commentators did not elaborate on this sutra, and the few who did simply repeated Vyasa’s statement. Scholars have taken pains to decipher which particular god Patanjali has in mind and, therefore, which god is most likely to visit the practitioner committed to self-study. These discussions and the underlying premise are contrary to the fundamental concept of Ishvara.

In sutras 1:24–29, Patanjali posits the concept of Ishvara. Patanjali’s Ishvara is radically different from the idea of God conceived by the various religions. Ishvara is not an individuated entity. It is all-pervading, omniscient being. It is beyond time, space, and the law of cause and effect. It does not fit into any category. Ishvara is absolute reality. It is beyond cognition—the mind and senses cannot comprehend it. This reality does not visit anyone, for it permeates all times, places, and entities. We may or may not see it, but Ishvara is always seeing us. For this reason, Patanjali and Vyasa avoid using Ishvara in this sutra and instead use ishta devata, which can be loosely translated as “deity of our preference.” Therefore, the most precise translation of this sutra is, “Self-study results in having darshana of the deity of our preference.” The literal translation of darshana is “seeing, comprehending.” Thus, according to Patanjali, self-study gives us the capacity to see and comprehend the deity of our choice.

It is important to note that this deity is not Ishvara exactly, for it carries a hint of individuatedness and Ishvara does not. As we will see in the following discussion, this ishta devata—a deity who, due to self-study, walks into our life—does two things: it pulls Ishvara toward us, and it pushes us toward Ishvara. This is when the highest samadhi dawns.

Let us see how the yoga tradition views the idea of deity and how self-study gives us the ability to see and be in the company of the deity of our choice. The term for deity used in this sutra is devata, and it is further qualified by the term ishta. Devata means “essence of deva, essential attribute of deva.” Deva means “shining being, bright being.” Thus devata means “the essential attribute that makes a bright being bright.” In other words, the intrinsic brilliance of shining beings is devata. The word ishta means “that which is chosen.” Thus ishta devata means “the essential brilliance of the bright beings we choose to imbibe.”

This sutra tells us that self-study empowers us to be in the company of devas, beings characterized by their inherent unalloyed luminosity. In yoga, these devas are the masters belonging to the category of videha and prakritilaya (YS 1:19, 1:48–50, 2:18, 3:54–55, and 4:29–34). During their lifetime, these masters are established in dharma megha samadhi. After death, they become an integral part of Ishvara’s intrinsic prakriti. At the behest of divine will, these accomplished beings emerge from prakriti. Because they are free of the five afflictions, their knowledge—the power of knowing—is absolutely pure and

unobstructed. They have the ability to see both the unmanifest and manifest spheres of reality. Because they are transcendent beings, time and space pose no barrier to their comprehension. This is why these self-luminous immortal beings are called rishis, seers.

Like the rishis, mantras are immortal beings. The only difference is that the body of rishis is made of pure light while the body of mantras is made of pure sound. In the tantric tradition, this is called nada, more precisely anahata nada, unstruck sound. Unlike sound in the empirical world, anahata nada is not dependent on physical matter or energy as its source or conduit. Like rishis, mantras emerge at the behest of divine will. In their purest form, they are not perceptible to our senses and ordinary mind. Someone who is as pure as the mantras can intuit them. Such pure beings are videha and prakritilaya yogis. Because these beings see the mantras as they are, they are called rishis, seers.

It is important to understand exactly what these seers see—the radiance of self-luminous beings, who, at the behest of Ishvara, use the purest form of unstruck sound as their locus. After being seen by the seer, this radiance is known by the name imparted by the seer. For the sake of communicating with others, that seer conceives a form with identifiable attributes. This is how a devata is “born.” This devata, in essence, is pure radiance, yet it has a name and a corresponding form.

As we saw in sutra 2:1, engaging in mantra japa and contemplating on the contents of scriptures dealing with subjects such as mantra, seer, devata, and our relationship with them is svadhyaya. When we do japa of a particular mantra for a long time, without interruption, and with reverence, we eventually reach a high level of mental absorption in the mantra. The technical term for this is mantra samapatti. In this state, the radiance of the mantra, along with the name and form conceived by the seer, begins to dawn on the horizon of our awareness. Furthermore, the essence of the seer—the power of seeing itself—occupies our awareness along with the seer’s name and form. This is what this sutra means by stating that svadhyaya results in a vision of the deity of our choice. Elaborating on this sutra, Vyasa states that bright beings, sages, and accomplished masters visit the practitioner of svadhyaya and take part in his work.

In other words, mantra japa gives us the ability to see the shakti inherent in the mantra. As mantra japa ripens, the rishi and devata belonging to that mantra rise on the horizon of our consciousness. Although we are in their full view and they in ours, our long-cherished samskaras, preferences, and mental conditioning cloud our vision. Yet just as we know the sun is shining even on a cloudy day, we feel the presence of these radiant beings—mantra devata and rishi—even when filtered through the clouds of our samskaras. However, we do not comprehend them exactly as they are. Our cultural, religious, and samskaric conditioning dim and often distort the purity of the experience. We comprehend the name and form of the radiant shakti in direct proportion to the quality and capacity of our mind. This is why the same divinity is seen as very beautiful, less beautiful, terrifying, fully human, or partially human, with one face, three faces, two arms, or even eight or ten arms.

In the beginning stages, experiences pertaining to the rishi and devata may be fleeting and occur only in dreams. These experiences may be so mingled with our mental tendencies we may not see any spiritual value in them. Due to the dense darkness of

tamas during sleep, we may not even remember these experiences on awakening. And yet if we sincerely and consistently engage ourselves in the practice of the yamas and niyamas—most importantly tapas—we purify and expand the quality and capacity of our mind and eventually receive a clearer, purer vision of the seer and the devata of the mantra. This vision will be free of anthropomorphic projections because it will not be obstructed by our mental conditioning. Even in our waking state we will be able to experience the subtle counterpart of the divine radiance—nada, unstruck sound, and bindu, self-luminous light.

Each time we gain these experiences, our capacity expands, until one day we are able to comprehend the essence of the divinity and the sage who embodies it. At this stage, our connection with the seer and the radiant being the seer sees is fully and firmly established.

Those who have reached this level of realization are called siddhas, the accomplished ones. The radiance illuminating them becomes the locus for their consciousness when they are in meditation, and that same radiance is available to them after they cast off their body. They continue living as luminous beings but are not absorbed in the intrinsic prakriti of Ishvara like the rishis, and therefore are not as omniscient and pervasive. But neither are they buried in the dense darkness of death. They are fully awake, and the matter and energy that constitute the empirical world pose no barrier. As sutra 3:32 tells us, the radiance of siddhas is not confined to the earthly plane.

Self-study enables us to see and live in the company of bright beings—rishis and siddhas—who are inherently imbued with brilliance. Here “brilliance” refers to the transforming power of their intrinsic luminosity. In the presence of this radiance, we not only see these luminous beings but we also begin to sense and eventually experience our own inherent radiance. Each time we come in touch with these bright beings, our consciousness is elevated to a new height. Their presence fills our consciousness with ever-greater purity, thus destroying the veil that hides our buddhi sattva, the essence of our inner intelligence. We comprehend reality as it is.

At the unveiling of our buddhi sattva, we are able to comprehend Ishvara and Ishvara’s intrinsic prakriti. Our fear of dissolving into Ishvara’s prakriti vanishes. We no longer see Ishvara outside us or ourselves outside Ishvara. We realize the guiding grace of Ishvara has always been with us, and that this divine grace grants us lasting fulfillment and ultimate freedom. With humility and gratitude, we spontaneously surrender to Ishvara. This opens the floodgate of the highest samadhi, the subject addressed in the next sutra.

SUTRA 2:45

समाधिसिद्धिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात् ॥४५॥

samādhisiddhirīśvarapraṇidhānāt || 45 ||

From trustful surrender to Ishvara comes samadhi.

Before we examine the idea of trustful surrender set forth in this sutra, it is important to remember that Patanjali dedicates seven sutras to this subject in “Samadhi Pada” (YS

1:23–29). Here he is repeating sutra 1:23 almost verbatim. This is significant because the tradition of sutra-style writing demands that the author avoid repetition and be absolutely succinct and precise. So let us see what Patanjali, one of the most notable pillars of the tradition, is communicating with this repetition.

Here Patanjali is quite precise in regarding trustful surrender as the doorway to the highest samadhi. Back in “Samadhi Pada,” immediately after introducing the idea of trustful surrender to Ishvara, Patanjali enters into a prolonged explanation of the nature of Ishvara (YS 1:24–26). Only then does he state that Ishvara is represented by mantra and explain how mantra japa turns our consciousness inward and removes obstacles (YS 1:27–29). As these seven sutras make clear, Ishvara is absolute being—beyond time, space, and the law of cause and effect. It has no form and no name and it is omniscient. In the world comprehensible to our senses and mind, there is nothing parallel to Ishvara’s distinctiveness. Thus it is indescribable. How can we surrender ourselves to something we do not and cannot know? Only when we read sutra 2:45 as a continuation of sutra 2:44 and augment it with the experiences of the yogis who have traveled this path do the concepts of trustful surrender to Ishvara and divine grace opening the door to samadhi become comprehensible.

For all intents and purposes, rishis, the seers, are Ishvara. The ordinary mind can only go this far. But as we continue our mantra sadhana, our mind becomes increasingly infused with the seeing power of the seer. Our ordinary mind is transformed into buddhi sattva, the extraordinary mind, for we have regained our unalloyed luminous intelligence. With this fully transformed mind we are able to see the seer in her fullness. We are able to see the seer’s oneness with Ishvara, for we too have become seers.

Our mind is no longer “our” mind—it is the mind of the seer. Now we see the totality of the truth through the eyes of the seer. This “seeing” is utterly different from any form of seeing and knowing familiar to us in the objective world. The understanding that dawns in this state is as unique as the seers themselves. The experience is all consuming. It annihilates all mental tendencies and deep-rooted afflictions—ignorance, distorted self-identity, attachment, aversion, and fear. All curiosity regarding who we are, where we came from, where we will go after we die, and how long we will stay in the company of the sage that blessed us with this unique experience vanishes. As we saw in sutra 1:51, this is how we reach the highest samadhi gracefully and spontaneously.

In the Sri Vidya tradition, the highest-caliber seer is called maha preta. Maha means “great”; preta means “gone forever” and refers to one who is dead. Maha preta is one so well dead there is no possibility of being reborn. Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rudra, and Ishana are maha pretas. They are depicted as the “couch” of the nameless, formless, indescribable, transcendent being. In his concluding sutra (YS 4:34), Patanjali calls this transcendent being chiti shakti, the power of consciousness.

In the Sri Vidya tradition, chiti shakti is known as the divine mother, Sri Vidya. The five maha pretas—the highest-caliber seers—are absorbed in her. There is no difference between chiti shakti and these enlightened beings—they are one and the same. From the standpoint of our practice and experience, they are the locus for the all-pervading absolute. They are so intrinsically one with the absolute that the notion of them as one or

many has no meaning. They are timeless and thus as unborn as the transcendental Ishvara, yet their appearance marks the beginning of time. That is why such a seer (rishi) or cluster of seers (rishi gana) is called sadyojata, born instantly. The seeing power is also known as vama deva, the bright being who makes the unmanifest manifest.

It is the seeing power of these divine beings that sees the mantras. In essence it is the seeing power of pure consciousness and as such there is only one seer, Ishvara. Figuratively speaking, rishis are the eyes of Ishvara. The attempt we make to see Ishvara through the eyes of these rishis is yoga sadhana. When we invest all our physical and mental resources in our practice—most importantly in the practice of tapas and svadhyaya—and become exhausted by our self-effort, we are automatically in a state of surrender.

According to the Bhakti Sutra of Narada, the state of surrender is not engendered by our self-effort (BS 1:7). Surrender is not dependent on our desire or plan—it dawns on its own. The only thing that precedes the experience of surrender is mahat kripa, the grace of the great souls—the seers (BS 3:38). The seers do not plan to confer their grace on us. Grace is absolutely unconditional. It is durlabha, hard to acquire, but once acquired its effect is amogha, unfailing. We receive and retain grace only through grace. Upon receiving it, we see grace everywhere—the gift of life is grace, living in the world is grace, and attaining freedom from the cycle of birth and death is grace. We are thrilled that we ourselves have become the eyes of the seers, and we know beyond doubt that the seers and what they see are one (BS 2:39–41 and 4:55). This realization frees us from all desires, including the desire to attain samadhi. That is when the door to samadhi opens.

It is important to remember that this extraordinary achievement, samadhi siddhi, is the result of an extraordinary level of trustful surrender. This is an experiential state, one we reach only when we commit ourselves to a methodical practice. Each of us has our own starting point. Where we start our practice of trustful surrender depends on how clearly we comprehend svadhyaya and how sincerely, fearlessly, and joyfully we embrace the guiding grace of the divine being. We comprehend the transforming power of this guiding grace in proportion to the purity and discerning power of our mind, which largely depends on the practice of tapas. Thus these three—tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana—go hand in hand and together breathe life into all the other limbs of yoga. Without these three, the yamas and niyamas remain confined to the realm of ethics and morality. Asana remains a set of exercises for enhancing physical health. Pranayama will improve our vitality, strength, and stamina, nothing more. Pratyahara is merely an excellent tool for relaxing our nervous system. And although dharana, dhyana, and samadhi will enhance our mental concentration, they will have little or no spiritual value. In the light of this understanding, Patanjali next explores the remaining limbs of yoga.