

Pandit Rajmani Tigunait's Commentaries on Sutras 2:18 & 2:19 from *The Practice of the Yoga Sutra*

SUTRA 2:18

प्रकाशक्रियास्थितिशीलं भूतेन्द्रियात्मकं भोगापवर्गार्थं दृश्यम्

prakāśakriyāsthitiśīlaṁ bhūtendriyātmakaṁ bhogāpavargārthaṁ dṛśyam

prakāśakriyāsthitiśīlaṁ, having the nature of illumination, activity, and stability; bhūtendriyātmakaṁ, composed of elements and senses; bhogāpavargārthaṁ, the purpose of fulfillment and freedom; dṛśyam, objective world

The objective world, composed of elements and senses and having the inherent properties of illumination, action, and stability, has a twofold purpose: fulfillment and freedom.

We are citizens of two worlds: the world created by primordial prakriti and the world created by us. According to *satkaryavada*, the cardinal doctrine of Sankhya Yoga (which holds that the cause remains present in the effect), the world created by primordial prakriti is imbued with all the qualities, characteristics, powers, and privileges intrinsic to primordial prakriti. Primordial prakriti is Ishvara's intrinsic shakti—it is divine and almighty. In the Sri Vidya tradition, primordial prakriti is known as *svatantrya shakti*, absolutely autonomous divine will.

Following that same cardinal doctrine, the world created by us is imbued with the inherent properties of our prakriti. Our prakriti is composed of our numberless samskaras and is as limited as we are. Each of us is characterized by our unique strengths and weaknesses and so is our prakriti. Because our consciousness is fragmented and our knowledge is conditioned by time, space, and the law of cause and effect, our prakriti is also fragmented and conditioned. Our prakriti has limited freedom of will—it is made of the binding qualities of our samskaras, and so the world emerging from it is characterized by bondage.

In this sutra, Patanjali describes the nature of the world evolving from primordial prakriti, while Vyasa explains how the resources available in the world of Ishvara can help us free ourselves from the afflictions inherent in the world we have created.

The phenomenal world is the creation of primordial prakriti, the intrinsic shakti of Ishvara. Everything—from waves of energy to subatomic particles, all the way to unimaginably vast galaxies and the senses that enable us to perceive them—has evolved from primordial prakriti. To convey the idea that this shakti is Ishvara's own power of creativity, philosophers use the term *prakriti*, literally "the supreme creative force." To convey that there is nothing beyond this power, philosophers use *pradhana*, literally "main"—the highest. Primordial prakriti is *aishvarya*, Ishvara's own essence. It is whatever Ishvara is, and Ishvara is whatever prakriti is.

The world perceptible to our senses and the mind through which we perceive it are the manifest form of unmanifest prakriti. It is imbued with all the divine properties of Ishvara. It contains everything prakriti contains—nothing less, nothing more. From a practical standpoint, Ishvara’s intrinsic shakti consists of three mutually supportive powers: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. In the tantric tradition, these powers are known as *jnana shakti*, unrestricted power of knowledge; *iccha shakti*, unrestricted power of will; and *kriya shakti*, unrestricted power of action. At a deeper, esoteric level, these powers are known as *aghora*, *ghora*, and *ghora-ghora-tara*. Like wetness in water and heat in fire, these powers are inherent in every aspect of the phenomenal world. Thus every object and experience is imbued with the powers of *prakasha*, revelation; *kriya*, activity; and *sthiti*, stability.

The human body is made of five gross elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. These elements are not our creation but have evolved from primordial prakriti. We are made of the mind and the senses—all of which have evolved from prakriti. Our mind and senses are imbued with inner luminosity, which is not our creation but comes from primordial prakriti. Similarly, the world composed of matter and energy has evolved from primordial prakriti. Thus our body, mind, senses, and the phenomenal world are infused with the limitless creativity of primordial prakriti. To be born as a human and to live in the world of primordial prakriti is a blessing and a privilege, for it offers an opportunity to attenuate and eventually eliminate the world filled with afflictions, which are our own creation.

We have created our own little world parallel to the world of primordial prakriti. This self-created world is made of our *samskaras*, which are nourished by *avidya*, *asmita*, *raga*, *dvesha*, and *abhinivesha*. Sorrow is the underlying theme. The more confined our consciousness is to our self-created world, the more miserable we are. Birth in a human body gives us the opportunity to gather tools and means from the phenomenal world created by prakriti, which is untainted by our karmic impressions. By using these tools we can purify our self-created world and correct our distorted understanding of ourselves, the phenomenal world, its creator, and our relationship with the creator. This equips us to see that every object and experience belonging to the phenomenal world is meant for us. If used properly, everything in the world has the capacity to grant us *bhoga*, fulfillment, and *apavarga*, ultimate freedom.

Yogis in the Sri Vidya tradition explain why everything—from the minutest particle to the mightiest star—is capable of granting us fulfillment and freedom. Following the doctrine of *satkaryavada*, the infinitely vast range of powers intrinsic to Ishvara is passed on to everything in creation. Transformative power is the defining attribute of the phenomenal world—everything has the inherent capacity to transform itself and transform others. This manifests in countless ways. For example, *anima*, the capacity to be small, *mahima*, the capacity to be big, *garima*, the capacity to be heavy, *laghima*, the capacity to be light, and *vashitva*, the capacity to control, are inherent in every aspect of creation. The fundamental power of transformation confers the ability to be big, small, heavy, light, thick, thin, high, and low. It confers the ability to attract, repulse, react, unite, and disintegrate.

Because the transformative power of the divine pervades every aspect of the phenomenal world, it infuses our body, mind, and senses. Seeds sprout and unveil their inherent qualities and minerals unfold their medicinal properties because of this power. The science of medicine operates on the ground of the transformative power contained in both the medicine and the patient. The nuclear reaction at the core of the sun produces heat and light because the sun is endowed with the power of transformation. The laws of physics and the formulas of chemistry work because all matter and energy is infused with this power. Sacred rituals and spiritual practices arise from humankind's timeless experience that the space surrounding us is filled with the intelligent power of transformation. Transformative power is omniscient, eternal, and omnipresent.

While presenting the *Sri Chakra model* of yoga sadhana, the yogis of the Sri Vidya tradition made a comprehensive list of the shaktis continually engaged in bringing about transformation for the sake of our bhoga, fulfillment, and *apavarga*, freedom. The concept of bhoga and *apavarga* presupposes that every aspect of the universe is derived from the fundamental forces of sattva, rajas, and tamas, and is constantly propelled by them. As we have seen, these forces are the intrinsic properties of prakriti. They are prakriti—the divine shakti of Ishvara. Sattva, the force of illumination, rajas, the force of activity, and tamas, the force of stability, are at work simultaneously. In the scriptures, these shaktis are known as *aghora*, *ghora*, and *ghora-ghora-tara*. The yogis address them as “divine mother.”

Numberless shaktis emerge through the mutually supportive interaction of sattva, rajas, and tamas, and are infused with their power. The yogis call these shaktis *matrikas*, mothers, for everything in the universe manifests from them. Thus all entities—sentient and insentient, small and large—are their children.

As her children we contain the revealing, pulsating, and grounding properties of our primordial mother, prakriti. However, in the long journey of life, we have accumulated a thick layer of karmic dust around our consciousness that impels us to perpetuate our self-created misery. As a result, we are unable to see and benefit fully from our inherent self-revealing, pulsating, and grounding attributes. Through tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana we become more aligned with sattva and expand our inner luminosity. Eventually, we attain the revelation of our essential nature and become established in the divinity who pulsates as life.

The basic impetus behind the manifestation of primordial prakriti is the desire to awaken us—the individual souls—from the timeless slumber of death and put us on the path of fulfillment and freedom. This impetus is divine and pure. It is infused with unconditional love and compassion, which is why the world evolving from primordial prakriti arranges itself in a manner that leaves us no alternative but to attenuate and eventually demolish the self-created world of our afflictions. In his commentary on this sutra, Vyasa describes the process whereby prakriti empowers us to find our life's purpose—bhoga and *apavarga*, fulfillment and freedom. Because this topic is so crucial for our inner quest, both Patanjali and Vyasa return to it repeatedly (YS 1:19, 1:36, 1:47, 1:50–1:51, 2:4, 3:54–55, 4:25, and 4:32–34).

In essence, these sutras tell us that when we commit ourselves to the methodical practice of yoga sadhana we begin to see the deeper causes of the roaming tendencies of our mind. We realize that, while living in the world of primordial prakriti, we have created our own little world made of our likes and dislikes, attachments and aversions, fears and temptations, and have unwittingly become prisoners of our own creation.

Through yoga sadhana we discover the brighter and self-revealing part of ourselves. As our practice unfolds, both the binding forces of the subtle impressions deposited in our mind and the actions propelled by them become weaker. We become stronger in direct proportion to our mastery over our mind and samskaras. Eventually, we reach the point in our inner quest where the charms and temptations of sensory objects and the subtle impressions that feed them have little or no effect on us. Sutra 2:4 tells us that at this point our samskaras are *tanu*, attenuated. For the most part, we are free from avidya, asmita, raga, dvesha, and abhinivesha. Our mind is clear and we see our own inner luminosity.

As this stage matures, our samskaras become *prasupta*, dormant. Now we are free from all samskaras, including avidya. The purity of our mind is equal to the purity of our inner being, which is supreme consciousness. Our discerning power is unshakeable. We are still under the influence of the fully mature karmas fueling our physical existence, but at the spiritual level we are *jivan-mukta*, free from further karmic consequences. The karmas fueling our physical existence evaporate when we die (YS 2:10) and are absorbed into primordial prakriti without a trace of samskaras. The intrinsic prakriti of Ishvara becomes our locus and we reside there as *videha* or *prakritilaya* (YS 1:19). *Videhas* and *prakritilayas* are not established in the prakriti made of their samskaras but in their essential nature, which is *chiti shakti*, the intrinsic power of Ishvara. The rest of us are *ordinary souls*, and the karmashaya composed of our samskaras remains our locus after death.

The forces of sattva, rajas, and tamas manifest differently in these extraordinary souls than they do in us. These two modes of manifestation are known as *tulya jatiya* and *atulya jatiya*. *Tulya jatiya* means “manifestation mirroring its cause,” and *atulya jatiya* means “manifestation somewhat dissimilar from its cause.” *Tulya jatiya* manifestation occurs in the case of *extraordinary souls*—*videhas* and *prakritilayas*—while *atulya jatiya* manifestation applies to the rest of us.

Understanding the force behind these two modes of manifestation requires deeper analysis. Let us start with extraordinary souls and examine how the forces of sattva, rajas, and tamas manifest for them as they begin their world-bound journey. These souls have already completed their spiritual quest—they have reached a state where their kleshas, karmas, and karmashayas are so purified that no trace of samskaras remains. Their personal prakriti has been nullified. Their absolutely pure mind is no longer a mind in any worldly sense. Using this supremely purified mind as a locus, these souls dissolve into Ishvara’s prakriti.

As sutra 4:32 tells us, such yogis are *kritartha*, souls whose purpose for being in the world has been fulfilled. In their case, sattva, rajas, and tamas, the intrinsic forces of prakriti, do not follow the ordinary laws of nature, which hold that cause and effect must

remain connected to each other in a linear fashion. Manifestation is linear by definition—non-linear manifestation is outside the domain of the phenomenal world. As sutras 4:32–4:34 tell us, in the final stage of *samadhi*, extraordinary souls transcend the linearity of time, space, and the law of cause and effect. At death, they are absorbed into Ishvara’s transcendental prakriti and emerge at the dawn of creation, bypassing ordinary laws of time, space, and the phenomenon of cause and effect. Sattva, rajas, and tamas do not interact with each other the way they interact in the case of ordinary souls. As Vyasa tells us in sutra 2:27, *videhas* and *prakritilayas* have attained *chitta vimukti*, freedom from the mind itself. They are *amala*, devoid of impurities. They are *kevali*, just that. And they are *svarupa matra jyoti*, the light of their own essence. Because they no longer have *asmita*, their essence is Ishvara itself. Their return to the world is as unique as they are.

Echoing the experiences of the long line of sages, Vyasa describes how *videha* and *prakritilaya* yogis manifest at *pradhana vela*, the dawn of creation. The dawn of creation is one of the most intriguing concepts in the spiritual literature of India. The word for dawn in Sanskrit is *prabhata*, “the phenomenon of unique illumination.” Just as dawn in our familiar world illumines the horizon before the sun appears, *videhas* and *prakritilayas* illuminate the horizon of *pradhana*, primordial prakriti, before the phenomenal world appears. They are inseparable from Ishvara’s self-nature. The instant Ishvara becomes aware of his intention to bring about creation, these unique souls are also aware of it and emerge instantly.

The scriptures are full of stories of sages who emerged from the mind of Ishvara. Because time has not yet come into the view of consciousness at the point of their emergence, these souls are called primordial sages. Another name for them is *sadyojata*, “born instantly.” As accomplished yogis in the previous creation, they were absorbed in *jyotishmati*, divine light. When they reappear at the dawn of the next cycle of creation, they reacquire a body of divine light. In this body, they shine on the horizon of Ishvara’s consciousness. *Tulya jatiya*, the manifestation mirroring its cause, applies to this category of souls.

Here, in sutra 2:18, Vyasa explains how *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* operate to form a body fit for these special souls. As described in sutras 4:32 and 4:33, in the case of these unique souls there is no interaction among the three *gunas* because the intrinsic forces of primordial prakriti are in a state of perfect equilibrium. At the dawn of creation, driven by the sheer intention of Ishvara, one of these forces—*sattva* for example—comes forward to form the body of these special souls. Because the two other forces—*rajas* and *tamas*—are intrinsically present, they come forward to support the force of *sattva*, but for all intents and purposes, *sattva* alone manifests. It is in this context the scriptures tell us the body of *Vishnu*, for example, is made of pure *sattva*, as are the bodies of other great souls, such as *Sanaka*, *Sanandana*, *Sanatkumara*, *Sanatsujata*, and the *seven sages*.

This unique category of creation opens the door to understanding the most esoteric dimension of spiritual experience. According to the science of *tantra*, the manifestation of mantras belongs to this unique category. Mantras are living beings, and like the great sages, they emerge directly from the primordial prakriti of Ishvara. The body of the high-caliber sages is made of the subtle essence of light, whereas the body of mantra is made of

the subtle essence of sound. The subtle essence of sound is pure and sattvic. The forces of rajas and tamas accompany sattva, but are relegated to the background. Mantras are as illuminating as the primordial sages and as immortal and beginningless. The forces of the phenomenal world have no power to influence mantras. Neither the seeing power of the sages nor the revealing power of the mantras can be obstructed. Because mantras are free from avidya, asmita, raga, dvesha, and abhinivesha, these afflictions melt away in their presence. As ordinary souls, we have no capacity to see these afflictions but we experience them; similarly, we have no capacity to see the mantras, but if they have made our mind their abode we experience them.

The manifestation of the primordial sages and mantras is *tulya jatiya* because their defining attributes (*jatiya*) are similar (*tulya*) to their origin—Ishvara's prakriti. Their body is as pervasive as Ishvara's body. Their knowledge is as limitless as Ishvara's knowledge. They are as untouched by karmas, karmashayas, and the five afflictions as Ishvara. Their virtues are as immaculate as Ishvara's and their divine effulgence is unobstructed. Their actions, like Ishvara's, are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous. During their manifestation, the forces of sattva, rajas, and tamas are not in a state of agitation. The sheer joy emerging from Ishvara's intention gently awakens them. The particular force needed to constitute the body of these unique beings takes the lead, supported by the other two forces.

How the three gunas relate to each other in the manifestation of these special beings is easy to understand if we recall how these forces function when a yogi reaches the highest state of samadhi. As sutra 4:32 tells us, in the highest state of samadhi the linear transformation of the attributes of prakriti comes to an end. In this state of absolute equanimity the forces of sattva, rajas, and tamas flow peacefully and do not commingle. For example, the flow of sattva is not influenced by the flow of rajas and tamas. When these high-caliber yogis re-emerge from primordial prakriti at the dawn of a new creation, the forces of sattva, rajas, and tamas function exactly as they functioned when the yogi was established in samadhi. The same purity of sattva, rajas, and tamas that characterizes samadhi characterizes their manifestation. Their manifest form is *tulya*, identical to their unmanifest form, and the manifestation of such beings is called *tulya jatiya*.

Those who are unfamiliar with the divine dimension of the gunas often associate sattva with spirituality and denigrate rajas and tamas. According to the sages, this error arises from ignorance. Ishvara's prakriti is as divine as Ishvara. The *Bhagavad Gita* calls it *daivi prakriti* as opposed to *manushi*, our terrestrial prakriti (BG 9:13). In the realm of primordial prakriti, all three forces—sattva, rajas, and tamas—are equally divine. That is why in tantric mythology, the goddess *Sarasvati* is equated with sattva, the goddess *Lakshmi* with rajas, and the goddess *Kali* with tamas. Vishnu's body is composed of sattva, whereas the bodies of *Brahma* and *Shiva* are composed of rajas and tamas, respectively.

At the dawn of creation, driven by divine will, an extraordinary soul may assume a body primarily composed of rajas or tamas. The primordial snakes, such as *Vasuki*, *Shesha*, and *Karkotaka*, are as pure and divine as their origin—Ishvara's prakriti—even though their bodies are primarily composed of rajas. Similarly, the prakriti of the

primordial *daityas* (translated as “demon,” for lack of an appropriate English word), such as *Madhu*, *Kaitabha*, and *Vrishaparva*, is as pure as Ishvara’s prakriti, even though their bodies are principally composed of tamas. For this reason, scriptures refer to these beings as *divya naga*, celestial snakes, and *divya daitya*, celestial demons. Due to the lack of interaction between the intrinsic forces of nature, they carry an unyielding personality. A sattvic being of this stature cannot stop emitting sattvic energy. Similarly, extraordinary souls who primarily use rajasic or tamasic attributes of primordial prakriti as their locus emit rajasic or tamasic energy. The phenomenal world and the ordinary souls residing in it benefit from the sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic energies emitting from these special beings.

In our case, nature’s forces—sattva, rajas, and tamas—interact with each other differently because they are contaminated by our samskaras. As we have seen, our samskaras are of a mixed nature. Even our most sattvic samskaras are invariably blended with a good measure of rajasic and tamasic impressions. As described in sutras 2:5–2:9, if left unchecked, our samskaras keep getting stronger. That is why samskaras churn our mind more violently during old age than they did when we were young. In Sankhya Yoga, this process is known as *guna-vaishamya-vimardana*, kneading the chaotic conditions of the gunas (Sankhya Karika 46). It accelerates our inner agitation—we become restless and frustrated. This internal churning and tossing drains the natural strength and acuity of our mind and senses. It also destroys the nine *tushtis*, satisfactions, and eight *siddhis*, extraordinary powers, which are our birthright. This process culminates in a state known as *ashakti*, disempowerment. This subject is discussed in detail in sutra 2:24.

Ashakti counteracts and eventually overpowers our life force, but before it does, samskaras storm our mind from every direction. The prospect of death causes panic, which destroys linear thinking. It breaks the link between the cortex and the limbic system and blocks the awareness of our self-identity. Finally, we drown in lack of awareness—we die. When we re-emerge, we pass through the same condition that clouded our mind when we were dying. There is the same churning and tossing of our samskaras, the same kneading of the chaotic conditions of the gunas. Unlike extraordinary souls who emerge on the horizon of Ishvara’s prakriti, we emerge on the horizon of death. This is characterized by the relentless churning and tossing of our samskaras and gunas. Every samskara is supported in part and opposed in part by another samskara. We are as powerless as we were when we were dying. This is when the guiding grace of Ishvara descends. Prakriti breathes life into us. We rise above our disempowerment. Ishvara’s guiding grace gently pulls us out of the event horizon of our death and helps us reclaim our memory and knowledge (BG 15:15). It transports us from the abstract world of our samskaras to the phenomenal world. *Atulya jatiya*, manifestation somewhat dissimilar from its cause, begins here.

In our journey from death to birth, we are brought into the phenomenal world at the time and place most conducive to finding the fulfillment and freedom we were seeking in previous lives. Conception unites us with the world of primordial prakriti. Although nature allows us to borrow the energetic and biophysical properties of our parents, our strong self-identity modifies these genetic properties. This is why the manifestation of our physical and psychological traits may be vastly different from that of our parents. All of us are primarily made of *tattvas*, the fundamental substances that have evolved from

primordial prakriti, yet each of us is a distinct individual. Unlike extraordinary souls, we are more dissimilar from our origin than similar to it.

Atulya jatiya is always *shakti-bheda-anupati*, proportional to the power we have retained. The more disempowered we are, the more dissimilar we will be from our origin. As sutra 4:34 tells us, *chiti shakti*, unalloyed power of consciousness, is our essential nature. Because our avidya-driven samskaras contaminate and distort our essential power of consciousness, our personal prakriti—composed as it is of our samskaras—is quite different from Ishvara’s prakriti.

In sutra 2:3, Vyasa describes a four-step process of waking from the slumber of death. As soon as the guiding grace of Ishvara casts its glance on us, the gunas—the intrinsic attributes of our personal prakriti—begin to pulsate and exert their influence on each other. This is the first step. The mutual interaction of these forces lays the foundation for change. This is the second step. In response, the currents of cause and effect are pulled together. This is the third step. Because the currents and crosscurrents of the forces of our prakriti are deeply entangled, their functions are heavily dependent on each other. In this environment of mutual dependency they bring our karmas to fruition. This is the fourth step. As sutra 2:13 tells us, karmic fructification determines *jati*, the general condition of our birth and the body into which we are born, *ayu*, our life span, and *bhoga*, the general course of our life experience. In regard to our jati, ayu, and bhoga, we are different from our parents.

We may die in a state of disempowerment, we may be conceived in a state of disempowerment, we may grow in the womb in a state of disempowerment, but as soon as we are born, much of this disempowerment is removed by nature. This is the beauty of a human birth. After we are born, our body, mind, senses, and nervous system develop in an astonishing way. Higher intelligence, which has been accompanying us throughout our long transmigration, fills us with a curiosity to discover the richness in which this world abounds, enabling us to absorb a vast amount of information relatively quickly.

The innate wisdom of our body and the immense power of our mind and senses are evidence that we are meant to understand the subtleties of the infinitely rich phenomenal world. We are meant to gather the tools and means to complete our unfinished task of finding fulfillment and freedom. Despite the limitations engendered by our samskaras, the primordial nature of Ishvara has given us the power to see and experience the phenomenal world correctly. Because everything in the universe is within the range of our understanding, the phenomenal world is described as *drishya*, perceivable, and we have the capacity to be *drastha*, the perceiver. The clearer our perception, the greater our chances of experiencing the fullness of our being. The world created by primordial nature is infinite, yet as Vyasa tells us in sutra 3:26, all of it is within the range of our comprehension. The human body, more precisely the *chakras*—the vortices of consciousness in the body—are the gateway to discovering the mystery of the universe and our life in it.

The vastness of Ishvara’s prakriti, the vastness of the universe manifesting from it, and the extent to which we can comprehend this universe through perception, inference, or purely through intuition is the subject of the next sutra.

SUTRA 2:19

विशेषाविशेषलिङ्गमात्रालिङ्गानि गुणपर्वणि

viśeṣāviśeṣaliṅgamātrāliṅgāni guṇaparvāṇi

viśeṣa, specific; aviśeṣa, unspecific; liṅgamātra, barely describable; aliṅgāni, absolutely indescribable; guṇaparvāṇi, categories of gunas

The total range of the gunas is divided into four categories: specific, unspecific, barely describable, and absolutely indescribable.

This sutra serves as the foundation for yogic *cosmology*. Here Patanjali provides a succinct description of the range of primordial prakriti and the world manifesting from it. This manifestation has its source in the primordial prakriti of Ishvara and is known as *bhautika sarga*, creation consisting of matter and energy and the mental and sensory faculties of cognition. Another form of creation, *buddhi sarga*, evolves from our own mind. Because this second form of creation is composed of the personal cognitions and re-cognitions of our own mental material, it is also known as *pratyaya sarga*, creation consisting of cognitions. A student of yoga must take care not to conflate these two distinct forms of creation.

For centuries commentators and translators have used the terms *purusha* and *prakriti* somewhat loosely. This imprecision has caused confusion in discussions pertaining to yoga *cosmology* and eschatology. The confusion begins with the oversimplification of verse 21 of the *Sankhya Karika*: “Like a lame person and a blind person, purusha and prakriti unite. Attaining right understanding and liberation is the intention behind this union. This union is the cause of creation.” A shallow interpretation of Sankhya philosophy and metaphysics has arisen from misreading this and similar passages.

According to this shallow interpretation, purusha and prakriti are both absolute and eternal and yet are completely different: purusha is intelligent and prakriti is unintelligent. Purusha is like a lame person and prakriti is like a blind person—they need each other’s help to envision and execute a plan to extricate themselves from the cycle of creation, for, according to this interpretation, creation is full of sorrow. Thus purusha and prakriti unite with the intention of attaining freedom, and the very creation they are trying to avoid emerges from their union. Down through the centuries, scholars have mounted various arguments to justify this union as the cause both of creation and of freedom from creation, but none of these arguments stand up under reasoned scrutiny.

Yogis like Kapila, Patanjali, Vyasa, and other masters of the tradition offer a clear, crisp metaphysics and *cosmology* of yoga simply by defining the context in which the terms *purusha* and *prakriti* are used. As we will see, these two terms are used in two quite different contexts. There is a special purusha, and its prakriti is as special as that purusha. There is an ordinary purusha, and its prakriti is ordinary. Ishvara is a special purusha, and her prakriti is primordial prakriti. We are ordinary purushas and our samskaras are our prakriti. From the union of the special purusha and her prakriti, this

beautiful and unimaginably vast universe ensues. From the union of ordinary purushas and their prakritis a personal world filled with afflictions manifests.

The “union” of the special purusha and its prakriti takes place outside the realm of time and space. It is not actually a union at all, for Ishvara’s prakriti is inseparable from Ishvara. Like heat in fire and wetness in water, they are one. The analogy of a lame and a blind person does not apply to Ishvara and her prakriti. Ishvara is intelligent and intelligence is his prakriti. In the non-linear realm, the universe always exists as the essential nature of Ishvara. Through the sheer intention of Ishvara, the non-linear universe becomes linear. This is what is meant by “the manifestation of the universe from the union of special purusha and prakriti.” Interpreting this union in finite terms is a profound mistake.

We are ordinary purushas. Our samskaras are our prakriti. As with Ishvara and her prakriti, union with our prakriti is also somewhat beginningless—it does not occur in the realm of time and space. Our samskaras are rooted in avidya and are constantly fed by it. Avidya is ignorance regarding our essential nature. We are ignorant about our ignorance. We do not know exactly when we became ignorant—thus practically speaking, our avidya is beginningless. Each time we die, the world made of our cognitions, along with our ignorance regarding ourselves, dissolves into the infinite prakriti of Ishvara.

As explained in the previous sutra, high-caliber souls—*videhas* and *prakritilayas*—dissolve into the intrinsic prakriti of Ishvara with full awareness, while ordinary souls dissolve into the same source without awareness. As detailed in sutra 2:24, avidya engenders twenty-eight ashaktis, twenty-eight forms of disempowerment. As a result, we sink into the slumber of death as a disempowered soul. Lying dormant in the layers of death, we have neither the capacity to see ourselves nor the capacity to move. Thus figuratively speaking, ordinary purushas and their prakritis are blind and lame. A unique world manifests from the union of these disempowered entities. Following the doctrine of *satkaryavada*, this world invariably contains all the elements of disempowerment lying dormant in these entities. Remember, the word *union* must not be taken literally, because in every respect we are intermingled with our prakriti. In fact, this intermingling is why we have fallen into the category of ordinary souls.

As disempowered souls, we have neither the capacity to know that we are dead nor the capacity to decide whether or not we should be born. The capacity to become aware of ourselves and our prakriti is granted to us through the sheer compassion and intention of Ishvara. This intention breathes new life into us—a degree of knowledge and memory returns. We become aware of our mental world, and a desire arises to see and experience our world vividly. The same compassion-driven intention plants us in the world that has evolved from Ishvara’s primordial prakriti. From here we gather the materials necessary for the formation of our body and sense organs. Using these tools we experience the world of our samskaras, our unfulfilled desires, and our endless cravings. This is *pratyaya sarga*, the manifestation of our cognitions. It is not the subject of this sutra.

The subject of this sutra is *bhautika sarga*, the entire range of the universe manifesting from primordial prakriti. In this scheme of evolution there are twenty-four *tattvas*. *Tattva* is derived from *tat*, that. Throughout the spiritual literature of India, *tat* is used to indicate the ultimate reality. The *Upanishads* call this ultimate reality *brahman*. The *Bhagavad Gita*

calls it *paramatman*. In the *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali calls it *Ishvara*. Following the grammatical rules of Sanskrit, when combined with the suffix *tva*, the word *tattva* means “the essence of that.” Primordial prakriti is the subtlest essence of “that,” *Ishvara*. It is beyond our comprehension and thus indescribable. In the Sankhya scheme of the evolution of creation, primordial prakriti is the first and foremost *tattva*, the essence of *Ishvara*.

Because there is no English equivalent that will convey the entire meaning of *tattva*, it is usually translated as “element.” But *tattva* is not “element” as understood in the fields of chemistry or physics. Rather, *tattva* conveys the powerful yogic doctrine that everything in the universe, beginning with the most subtle, indescribable, primordial prakriti all the way through the gross and tangible aspects of creation—such as earth and water—is a stage of the manifestation of *Ishvara*’s essence. Every aspect of creation is divine and imbued with the power to dispel our primeval avidya. That is why in the previous sutra Patanjali states that everything in the world is meant to help us find lasting fulfillment and ultimate freedom.

Patanjali divides the twenty-four *tattvas* in the Sankhya scheme of evolution into four categories and lists them in order, from the grossest to the subtlest: *vishesha*, *avishesha*, *lingamatra*, and *alinga*.

The Four Broad Categories of Manifestation

Alinga

Primordial prakriti (beyond any point of reference)

Lingamatra (all-pervading subtle intelligence which can only be indicated)

Mahat/buddhi

Avishesha (6 “unspecific” *tattvas*)

Asmita

the pure sense of I-am-ness

5 tanmatras

the essence of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell

Vishesha (16 “specific” *tattvas*)

Manas

5 senses of cognition, which enable us to:

smell, taste, see, touch, and hear

5 senses of action, which enable us to:

grasp, move, speak, procreate, and eliminate

5 distinct categories of elements:

earth, water, fire, air, and space

Vishesha, “specific, unique, or distinct,” is a technical term referring to a group of sixteen tattvas: the five distinct elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space); the five distinct powers of action (the power to grasp, move, speak, procreate, and eliminate); the five distinct sensory powers of cognition (the power to smell, taste, see, touch, and hear); and the power to think (the mind). These sixteen tattvas are *vishesha*, specific or unique, because they are the final stages of the creation manifesting from primordial *prakriti*. Nothing further evolves from them—they are the effect of more subtle tattvas but are not the cause of other tattvas. Any change or transformation we observe in them is actually a transformation in their *dharma*, attribute, their *lakshana*, sign, and their *avastha*, state—a subject elaborated on in sutra 3:13.

Furthermore, these sixteen tattvas are unique because they are infused with the powers of the *aghora*, *ghora*, and *ghoraghora-tara* shaktis of Ishvara. As the *Shiva Sutra* states, “From the concentration of shaktis comes the birth of the body” (SS 1:19). These shaktis are the purest essence of Ishvara—they are Ishvara’s *prakriti*. They breathe life into the distinct elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space; thus matter becomes animate and begins to pulsate. When these shaktis breathe life into our mind, the mind begins to sense its own existence and the existence of the unique properties of earth, water, fire, air, and space. The mind begins to feel its own inherent cravings and, in response, begins arranging the animate particles of the *five elements* to create limbs and sensory organs. Using these limbs and sensory organs, the mind attempts to explore the vast universe of primordial *prakriti*.

Avishesha, “unspecific,” refers to a group of six tattvas: the five *tanmatras* and *asmita*. The five *tanmatras* are sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. They are far more subtle than what we understand of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. They are *matra*, the pure and pristine potential shakti of *tat*, Ishvara. The *aghora*, *ghora*, and *ghora-ghora-tara* shaktis are in their unmanifest form in the five *tanmatras*. While they remain unmanifest, they do not serve the purpose of fulfillment and freedom for ordinary *purushas*, but as soon as these shaktis awaken, the five *tanmatras* are transformed into space, air, fire, water, and earth. In other words, the five *tanmatras* are the cause of their material counterparts.

The sixth unspecific tattva, *asmita*, is the pure sense of I-am-ness. In this pure state of I-am-ness, particularities pertaining to our self-awareness are not yet manifest. Unless these particularities manifest, *asmita* does not serve the purpose of fulfillment and freedom. As soon as the inherent particularities of the sense of I-am-ness awaken, the mind and the forces of the ten senses manifest. In other words, *asmita* is transformed into the mind and the senses.

The five *tanmatras* and *asmita* are the cause of the *visheshas*—the group of sixteen tattvas—but they are themselves effects of an even subtler tattva, known as *mahat tattva*, which, in Patanjali’s terminology, is known as *lingamatra*. *Lingamatra* means “that which can be understood only through a sign.” It is the subtlest aspect of the manifest form of unmanifest primordial *prakriti*. It is beyond the reach of our ordinary mind and senses, and so can be understood only through inference and scripture.

Two other terms used interchangeably describe the core content and dynamics of this subtle category of manifestation: *sattamatra* and *mahat*. *Sattamatra* is a composite of *satta* and *matra*. *Satta* means “existence,” more precisely “the essence of *sat*, being”; *matra* means “only.” As Vyasa explains, *lingamatra* is *atmanah sattamatram*, only the existence of *atma*, Ishvara. It is Ishvara’s own field of awareness, which he identifies with himself. In other words, *lingamatra* is a field of unalloyed consciousness charged with Ishvara’s self-identity. The second term, *mahat*, adds another perspective to the description of this level of manifestation. The literal meaning of *mahat* is “great.” Nothing in the manifest world is greater than this reality. The pervasive nature of *mahat tattva* cannot be quantified. It is the first stage of manifestation emerging from Ishvara’s *prakriti*. Scriptures describe this stage of manifestation with various terms: *mahat*, *buddhi*, *mati*, *prajna*, *samvitti*, *khyati*, *chiti*, *smriti*, *asuri*, *hari*, *hara*, and *hiranyagarbha* (Mathara’s commentary on Sankhya Karika 22).

In the state of *mahat*, the primordial forces of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are pulsating with Ishvara’s intention of manifesting her *svabhava*, her own unmanifest self-nature. This intention makes the unknowable knowable. This is the point at which the perceiving power of the perceiver becomes somewhat perceptible; the indescribable becomes somewhat describable. The purity of the manifestation at this stage is equal to the purity of its source, Ishvara. Thus, according to yoga, *mahat tattva* is what is being indicated by the term *God*.

Describing the nature of *mahat tattva*, the Vedic sage *Narayana* proclaims his experience: “I know this *mahat purusha*. It is as luminous as the sun and is beyond darkness. One transcends death only after knowing him. There is no other path. *Prajapati*, the lord or father of ordinary beings, moves in the womb [of *mahat tattva*]. Upon being conceived in this womb, he manifests manifold. The highest-caliber yogis see the *yonis*, the origin of that *purusha*, completely. The entire world is established in him. He shines for all celestial beings. He is in the forefront of the gods. He is born before any of the gods. I bow to the brilliance of that pure essence of inner intelligence” (Yajur Veda 31:18–20).

In Indian mythology we read about many *prajapatis*, primordial fathers. These primordial fathers are sometimes said to manifest directly from *Brahma*, the creator. They are also said to assume the role of *Brahma*, and all of them are said to be *rishis*, seers. Furthermore, the scriptures that enumerate these *prajapatis* and *rishis* emphasize that they are not separate entities but are one and the same. This leaves us embroiled in an endless debate about whether the sages posit *polytheism* or *monotheism*.

According to Sankhya Yoga, *videha* and *prakritilaya* yogis are what are known by the terms *Prajapati*, *Brahma*, and *deva*. They have transcended the entire realm of *avidya* and *asmita*. Thus they are not individual beings in any sense of the word. They have transcended time and space; therefore, the idea that they are born from someone or something is null and void. They are established in themselves. They emerge from themselves, abide in themselves, and are reabsorbed in themselves. They are one with the *prakriti* of Ishvara. Because our experience of that *prakriti* can reach only as far as *mahat tattva*, from our standpoint (as we saw in the passage from the Yajur Veda), they are

mahat tattva. Videha and prakritilaya yogis reside in the womb of mahat tattva. They are eternally aware of the essential nature of mahat tattva. While remaining above time, space, and the law of cause and effect, they rise from mahat tattva, illuminate the infinitely vast womb of mahat tattva, and thus facilitate the manifestation of the material world.

As the *Bhagavad Gita* tells us, mahat tattva is where the phenomenal world is conceived. Ordinary souls have a chance to be born only after the phenomenal world is conceived in mahat tattva. This is where clusters of individual souls are conceived and where they are reabsorbed at death (BG 9:4, 9:8, 8:19). Mahat tattva is as fecund as Ishvara's prakriti. As soon as ordinary souls are planted in it, so to speak, they become animate, begin to pulsate, and instantly become aware of their own existence—that is how *asmita*, the sense of I-am-ness, is born. *Asmita* is the essence of *jiva*, the individual soul. In fact, *asmita* is the individual soul. The innate tendency of *asmita* to explore and find itself results in identifying itself with the *tanmatras*. As we have seen, the *tanmatras* are extremely subtle and thus intangible; therefore, the inner intelligence of mahat tattva spontaneously guides the *tanmatras* to manifest as the five distinct elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space. That is how *asmita* and the five *tanmatras* evolve from mahat tattva. From this group of six, the remaining sixteen *tattvas* manifest.

Beyond mahat tattva lies purest prakriti. It is *alinga*, beyond any sign or symbol. Nothing is subtler than primordial prakriti (YS 1:45). It is Ishvara's own intrinsic self-awareness—her *svabhava*—and so is as intelligent as Ishvara. It is as primordial as Ishvara and as omniscient. Like Ishvara, prakriti is untouched by time and does not fit in any category. Strictly speaking, it is not even existent. In order to emphasize its “absolutely” absolute state of being, Vyasa coins another term, *nihsatta*, devoid of existence. What we understand by “existence” begins with mahat tattva, for which Vyasa coins the term *nihsatta-sattam*, the existence of non-existence. Thus, in the language of philosophers, primordial prakriti is indescribable. The describability of prakriti begins to emerge only at the level of mahat tattva. As Vyasa writes, the highest-caliber yogis place themselves in mahat tattva, and upon establishing themselves fully in this level of reality, they begin to comprehend prakriti (*alingam pradhanam pratiyanti*) and eventually become established in it. Becoming established in prakriti means dissolving into Ishvara's own essence.

To reiterate, prakriti and Ishvara are one and the same. The evolution of the phenomenal world refers to the world evolving from Ishvara's own essence. The terms *prakriti* and *Ishvara* refer to a reality beyond time and space and the law of cause and effect. The relationship between the “two” is *avinabhava*, one cannot be without the other. From different vantage points, these two can be described as the body and soul of each other (Saundaryalahari 34). From here evolves mahat tattva, the creative matrix of the universe. This evolution is as spontaneous and timeless as Ishvara's intention. Mahat tattva is as grand as Ishvara's intrinsic prakriti in every respect, and is infused with pure intelligence. Scriptures refer to this as *hiranyagarbha*, the golden womb. The *Vedas* call it *jatavedas*, the fire that knows everything about everything ever born. Puranic texts call it *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, or *Shiva*. Tantric texts call it *yonis*, the creative matrix.

The totality of existence, including all liberated and unliberated souls, rests in this undifferentiated field of intelligence. Fully enlightened, liberated souls know the mystery of

this existence; unliberated souls do not. *Avishesha* (the group of six unspecific tattvas) and *vishesha* (the group of sixteen specific tattvas) manifest from mahat tattva for the sake of the infinite number of unliberated beings. The universe consisting of twenty-two tattvas and all liberated and unliberated beings springs from *mahat tattva* and returns to mahat tattva at the time of dissolution. For all intents and purposes, the intrinsic forces of prakriti—known as sattva, rajas, and tamas, or as aghora, ghora, and ghora-ghora-tara—pulsate in the realm of mahat tattva, whereas in Ishvara’s intrinsic prakriti, these forces remain in their absolutely equanimous state.

The world made of twenty-two tattvas is infused with everything that exists in mahat tattva. As Vyasa explains, the highest-caliber souls, such as videha and prakritilaya yogis, use their body, mind, and senses and the world around them to experience *vivridhi-kashtha*, the furthest frontier of divine grandeur. Ordinary souls are also seeking the same divine grandeur, but without knowing what they are seeking. Videha and prakritilaya yogis see and embrace this grandeur; ordinary souls do not. Why these high-caliber souls see this truth and ordinary souls do not is the subject of the next sutra.