

Week 3: Meditation and Contemplation Homework

Please listen to this week's lecture at least twice altogether.

Basic Meditation

Please continue with the Daily Meditation Sequence, starting with *Nadi Shodana pranayama* and continuing with the *Central Channel/Three Centers/Om Shreem Hreem* meditation.

And of course, feel free to practice the *Letting Go* and the *Kalagni Rudra Fire* meditations. As many of you have shared, these practices are powerful methods of creating the experience of melting (*Laya*) into your subtle self. I've also found these practices to be very helpful in situations where you need to shift your state, like when you are feeling stuck in an emotional loop, suffering from body aches, or over-attached to an outcome. The practice of using divine fire to melt your body (imaginatively of course!) is a powerful way of dissolving your identification with the physical body, it also melts aspects of your ego-identity, and can subtly dissolve many forms of subtle blockage.

Additional Meditations

Meditation on Divinizing the Elements in the Body

This is the practice we did in this week's class. It's based on an *Elemental Laya Bhavana* practice from the *Svacchanda Bhairava Tantra*, which Kshemeraja cites in his commentary on Sutra 5. And as we have noted, it approaches the elements not through the more standard chakra points, but through focus points on the front of the physical body. The mantras are infused with the breath into each point, and as you do this practice the physical "spots" connect to an energetic flow between the points that is hard to describe, but which begins to feel like a softening and an opening through the body. Like the standard chakra focus practices, it eventually merges awareness in the *Sahasrara*, where you experience *Laya*, an expansion of consciousness and a subtle melting of your conceptual barriers to sensing your own spaciousness.

It is also a practice for cultivating control of the elements, and for changing your relationship to each element in the body. In last week's homework we described how you use each point for health and healing practice.

- Find the points on your body.
PLEASE NOTE: The air point is not in the heart, as I mistakenly said in class. (The heart is the location of the Air element in the more standard chakra sequence.)

In THIS process, the air element is reached through the right big toe, which as in the *Kalagni Rudra* meditation, is a gateway point for cultivating the pervasion of prana in the body.

- The Earth point is located at the base of the throat.
- Water is at back of the throat, centered in the little flap of skin that hangs from the soft palate.
- The fire point is at the navel.
- The meditation point for air is in the big toe on the right foot.
- The space (ether) point is at the top of the head.

After touching these points with your mind, allow your focus to flow out the crown, rising and dissolving into the space above the body.

If you are doing this as a *Laya Bhavana* practice, the classic protocol is to focus on each of them for a few breaths, and then focus on them in sequence, having the intention to cultivate the flow from grosser elements to subtle ones and finally letting your focus be on dissolving into the space above the crown.

However, they are also healing meditations, as we said in last week's homework, that can be used to harmonize imbalances, increase the power in each element. So, if you want to gain weight you would meditate on the earth element at the root of the throat. If you want to increase the heat in your body, you would meditate on the fire element in the navel. If you want to purify the gases in the body, and harmonize the flow of prana, you would focus in the right big toe. Yes, the right big toe! And in all this, you chant or silently repeat the mantras associated with that element, letting the sound resonate.

Meditation on the Elements in the Body

Find yourself a comfortable seated posture and make an intention to fully focus on the practice.

Focus in the base of the throat, inhaling and exhaling with *LAM*. As you get more centered here, you can begin to softly chant *LAM* (the “a” in all these seed sounds is pronounced like the “u” in cup, with a nasalized, resonating ending sound that is between “m” and “ng.”) The chant we played in class has the correct resonance. As you linger here for at least 9 breaths, have the sense of your own physical and psychological solidity, groundedness, and physical strength as it connects to your bones and flesh.

Bring your attention to the back of the soft palate, near the larynx. As you inhale and exhale into that point, silently repeat *VAM*, connecting the sound to the fluids in the body—your blood, saliva, and lymphatic, menstrual, and sexual fluids. As you connect here, begin to chant *VAM*, letting the sound resonate in the back of the throat.

Focus inside the navel, breathing in and out of the navel, as if the breath could come directly into that part of the body. As you silently inhale *RAM*, feel that the mantra is transforming the neural connections, the bile, the digestive fluids in your body, purifying and divinizing them. Begin to chant *RAM*, letting it resonate in the navel.

Bring your attention to the right big toe and as you inhale and exhale and chant *YAM*, let the sound *YAM* resonate, sense the way that air flows in your body, the pranas that carry energy through the body and power your movements, along with the other gases that are flowing in your body and feel that all the aspects of the prana are being purified

Bring your awareness to the top of the head, at the crown, and feel that your body dissolves into space with the sound *HAM*.

Focus on the space 8 finger widths above the crown, with the sound *OM*, feeling that your awareness rises into the region of higher consciousness beyond the body.

Focus sequentially with each point and mantra at least 9 times.

Then see if you can let the flow of your awareness cycle through these points from the Earth point to the Space point and beyond and notice the flow of energies as these sounds and breath open these points sequentially.

Journal about the practice and discuss it with your partner. You can also take turns leading your partner through the practice.

Commentaries and Related Contemplations

Do alone with your journal or discuss with your partner.

More Contemplations on Sutra 5

***Nadisamhara bhutajaya bhutakaivalya bhutaprithaktvani*: Dissolving the prana in the nadis, control over the elements in the body, withdrawing awareness from the external, should all be done by steady contemplation.**

If you haven't looked thoroughly at the contemplations on Sutra 5, from last week, I suggest you take some time to read through that section of last week's homework, and to play with the practices described. Reading and contemplating these descriptions of *different Laya Bhavanas* is a way of getting into a deeply experimental relationship with your practice! And it's one of the ways we deeply enact our *Anava Upaya* practice.

Contemplations on Sutra 6

***Mohaavaranaat siddhih*: Supernatural powers occur to one who is covered by the delusion of Maya.**

Moha means "delusion", and it refers to the normal state of someone under the sway of Maya.

Siddhi means "accomplishment", usually translated as super-normal gifts or abilities stemming from yogic practice.

Varanaat means "influenced by or covered by".

Commentary:

When we think about what the translator calls “supernatural powers”, we should also include all the yogic skills we acquire through practice, not just the flashy ones we might have read about in *Autobiography of a Yogis*. These might be psychic abilities, such as clairaudience and clairvoyance. They may be abilities like the power to draw others to you or to heal your own or someone else’s ailments. They might manifest, as they do for many of us, as a heightened intuitive awareness that guides you, like an internal GPS system. In some cases, certain “flashy” powers might occur, as in the case of yogis who can bring objects from one place to another through teleportation, creating a veil that makes you temporarily invisible, as well as many gifts and abilities that appear through yogic practice. For many of us, the yogic attainments we experience come naturally; it’s not that we’ve sought them out or deliberately trying to acquire them; they just occur as part of the unfolding path.

So even though the sutra seems to be referring to the “flashy” *siddhis* that are the result of mastering the subtle elements, such as in the practice of meditating on the elements as we’ve done this week, I’m broadening the way we understand *siddhi* so that we can examine our own experience with yogic skills that come in the course of practice.

Some of them can be useful, especially the healing *siddhis*. In tantra it’s not that you totally ignore these powers. You might even find yourself using them occasionally.

But it’s important to detach yourself from considering your yogic skills to be anything more than milestones on your deeper spiritual journey. In other words, if you have earned or been given healing abilities, or teaching abilities, or psychic abilities, it’s important to understand that these skills are not “yours” and not letting your ego identify with them. That’s when we are tempted to rest in the *siddhi*, and somehow let your journey stop there. It is very common for yogis to get distracted by the yogic gifts that appear in your life are enough, and to be unable to let go of them even when you realize that they are distracting.

What the sutra points out is that these are essentially worldly skills. Compare the phenomenon to the small gifts you can get in a credit card awards program. You know how when you have a lot of rewards points, you’ll be offered merchandise that uses up your points? Or, you can save them up for a free ticket to some exotic location? It’s really the same with *siddhis*. You can use them to enhance your mundane life, or you can store up your yogic powers to intensify your journey to liberation.

Most of us do a bit of both. It’s important to look at this from time to time, not to feel like you’re doing something right or wrong, but to get to know what it looks like to get excited over new abilities that have come to you through yoga.

If you decide not to get allured by *siddhis* and to keep aiming your awareness at recognizing your own higher consciousness, the powers that emerge through your practice get re-directed and absorbed in the Self, and thus the fruits of your practice are not spent, but accumulated for the arising of liberation!

Kshemeraja includes as *siddhis* the experiences of subtle visions, sounds, tastes that occur as we meditate more deeply. In other words, he suggests that even as we practice the different

techniques he unfolds, that we continually remember to identify with Awareness itself, which allows us to enjoy the different “attainments” along the way without getting caught in them.

Contemplation 1: Core practice for keeping your experience in perspective by aligning yourself with the highest Awareness:

Start by remembering the fundamental teaching of the Recognition School of Non-dual Tantra: What lives and acts through your mind and senses is the light of supreme awareness itself. Your process of perception is actually a microcosmic version of Shiva’s five acts of creation, maintenance, dissolution, concealment, and revelation through grace. In other words, when you perceive anything, internal or externally, it is actually being created for you by the supreme consciousness acting through your senses and nervous system. Your mind, senses, intellect, etc. are the instruments through which this supreme consciousness creates and dissolves the world you experience, moment by moment by moment.

Contemplation 2: Contemplating the experience of Consciousness as the microcosm of the Divine.

Focus on your own awareness.

Then imagine that what you think of as “my awareness” is actually the individualized version of Shiva-Shakti, which sees through your eyes, forms thoughts through the mechanisms of the psychic instruments, and is actually acting AS you.

Now, focus backward on the Awareness that is perceiving through your senses and mind, the experience of “knowing” that we sometimes call the Witness Consciousness or Pure Awareness.

Honor that as Shiva/Shakti.

Notice the effect of touching awareness of awareness with this understanding. Consider that your “garden variety” awareness, is capable of merging back and recognizing itself as an expression of the true Self—which is Shiva.

This awareness is not easy to sustain, and the reason it isn’t is because our *chitta* is so cluttered by the normal madness of being an individual human with karmic issues, traumas, etc.!

The *Anava Upaya* practices, which we will continue to explore, are utterly necessary to purify and uplift the *Chitta* so that it can eventually let go of thought constructs and become open enough to recognize our true identity as Awareness without an object. Normally this has to be done again and again—meaning every day!—until your *chitta* becomes strong enough to sustain meditation on Awareness itself. Kshemeraja says that because it’s so hard to sustain Awareness of Awareness, or meditation on the true Self, we again and again climb the ladder of these practices with the goal of allowing ourselves to merge in the spaciousness of the upper region above the crown, or of the unfolding of the Central Channel (*sushumna nadi*), or the still point between the breaths. All these practices we are doing are aimed at clearing the *chitta* and training it to sustain itself at subtler states of awareness.

So, one of the things Sutra 6 is doing is simply reminding us that anything we believe about our attainments in yoga is ephemeral—as long as our consciousness hasn't been lifted beyond the Maya of believing in our individuality. That's why he's reminding us to be suspicious of resting on our various yogic attainments, whether they are inner experiences or skills.

Contemplation 3: How you hold the yogic skills and powers that arise as a result of your practice?

Consider the skills and abilities that have enhanced or even given to you through your yogic practices.

Consider those moments when you've been excited by these skills or gifts, and sense into what that feels like. Notice the emotions that might come up.

Ask yourself, "How have I experienced egoic attachment to my acquired yogic skills?" Then, ask yourself, "How have I experienced letting all this flow while remaining aware that none of it is 'mine'?"

Discuss these questions with your partner. Then ask yourself, "How do I treat the yogic gifts that arise so that I can enjoy and learn from them (and even help others) yet not get stuck in depending on them for gratification." Come up with ways to discern this for yourself and discuss them with each other.