

Week 6: Homework—Meditations, Commentaries, and Contemplations

Please listen to this week's lecture at least twice. This makes it possible to catch the nuances that we not only miss, but also to listen to the transmission going on between the words.

Dear Ones,

As I read through last week's homework, I realized how much practice and contemplation there is in all the pages we've been sending out! And I know that most of you haven't had time to work with all of it, or perhaps even most of it. So, I suggest that you continue doing the contemplations from Week 5 (or from the previous week's homework!) for another week or two.

That said, I can't resist offering some contemplations, explanations, and practices based on our December 17th class, including a practice based on the sexual fantasy meditation we did during class. (This same practice can be applied to another emotional state, such as anger or grief.) You can also find an audio version of this meditation on my Sounds True program, *Doorways to the Infinite*, based on the *Vijnana Bhairava*.

I also can't resist suggesting some contemplations on the verses we covered last night. Scroll down to find this new material and do use it in your practice and discussion with your partner. But don't feel that you have to get through all of it.

My vision for the sangam, and for any of you who want to continue a long-term approach to this profound material over time, would be that you use the homework assignments from these classes as material for your continuing practice and discussion with each other.

For example, you could take one of these contemplations and work with it for a couple of hours during a personal retreat.

Even better, you could set aside an afternoon every week when you can immerse yourself in this material—doing a couple of contemplations, working with a study partner or a friend, and even creating your own meditations based on the material here.

Some of you already do this and have been doing it for years. For those who are fairly new to the non-dual tantra, I want to reiterate something that many of you have shared with me and with each other: this material is life-changing, and the more you engage with it, the more life-changing it is. You'll find yourself, as I have, coming back to it again and again, because life itself deepens your realization about the power of these teachings and the allied practices.

There is so much to read and study in this text, and in the *Shiva Sutras* in general, that we could go on with this study for months. So, I look forward to entering into this text again in 2020. In the next class, my intention is to focus on some of the central topics of Trika Yoga—doing a three-week course in *Matrika Shakti* and the *Shaiva* view of language,

another three week class in the *Shakta Upaya* mind-expansion practices, etcetera, and an in-depth class on working with emotions from a Tantric point of view. These classes will be practice-based but also draw from several of the core texts, including the *Spanda Karikas*, the *Vijnana Bhairava*, and the *Svacchanda Tantra*.

Meditations

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. You can also substitute the *Basic Ucchara* practice that we offered last week, or any of the practices from Week 5.

Basic Non-Dual Awareness Practice

(You could use this as a kind of call to your Self whenever you are about to begin a formal practice)

“Do the sadhana of Shiva. Remember, ‘I am Shiva. My practice is Shiva. All the techniques and instruments of my practice are Shiva. Being Shiva, I will become Shiva.’”

—From the *IshwaraPratyabhijna Karikas*

Of course, for the name Shiva, you can substitute Shakti, and though presencing Shakti in this way might have a different emotional tone for you than presencing Shiva, both forms of the divine are one. So, it’s your choice. And for some of you, it makes sense to alternate between Shiva-orientation and Shakti-orientation according to your mood and your state. In my experience, invoking Shiva is inherently calming, while invoking Shakti is inherently inclusive, in the sense that when you consider your life as an expression of Shakti, it helps remind you to find the sacred in the movements of life—emotions, chaotic situations, thought-storms and the crazy maelstrom of politics!

Sutras Commentaries and Questions

Sutra 24

***Maatraa-svapratyaya-samdhanē
Nashtasya punarootthānam***

“When a yogi, coming out from samadhi, also attempts to maintain awareness of God consciousness in the objective world, then even when his real nature as the Self is covered by the lower states of egoic consciousness, he again rises in that supreme nature of the Self.

—Translation by Lakshman Joo

Commentary: Obviously, the more deeply you are able to touch the *Turiya* state in meditation, the more powerful your post-meditation practice will be. But there is huge benefit in doing one of these post-meditation practices in the first moments after meditation, even after a more ‘ordinary’ meditation, and in turning back to this attitude through the day. Though practicing this awareness is, obviously, not the same thing as having it arise on its own, the practice is powerful and transformative in itself.

From the *Svacchanda Tantra*:

“Whatever is perceived through the eyes, whatever becomes an object of consciousness through speech, whatever the mind thinks of, including pleasure, profit, etc., whatever the intellect discerns, whatever is owned by the limited ego understood to be yourself, whatever exists as an object of consciousness, even that which is imagined, one should actively discern the divine presence in all this.”

Question: How do you practice discovering the divine in the mundane at different times in your life or during the course? What are your own “best practices” for holding this awareness? What works consistently?

Exercise: Consider using your own creativity to discover practices that allow you to see the sacred in the mundane. Some will be stronger for you than others, so give yourself permission to try several. *A caveat:* Often a practice doesn’t reveal its power until you have done it for some time—so don’t dismiss one of these too quickly!

Some suggested practices:

- The “practice of the presence of God”—letting yourself feel that divine presence accompanies you through the day. If you are imagining the divine as an “other”, remember to periodically draw the sense of sacred presence inside.
- Imagining yourself being hugged by the goddess through the sensations you feel in your body. Start by feeling the sensations at the edge of your body—the touch of your clothes, the feeling of the air—and feel them as the touch of Shakti. Let yourself feel embraced by Goddess as the sensations at the edges of your body.
- Feel Goddess entering your pores as you breathe.
- Name your body Shakti, your thoughts Shakti, name the furniture Shakti.
- Consider the scientific fact that an atom is only 1% matter and 99% space. Look around you with the awareness that everything that seems solid is actually mostly space. Consider that the space inside the atom is itself Shakti.
- Look at the words you speak and hear as emanations of the matrika Shaktis, the powers within words.
- And, make up your own contemplations!

Sutra 25

Shiva Tulyo Jayate: He becomes like Shiva.

Commentary: A yogi who successfully manages to stay poised in the inner Self, and keep that connection in the waking state, while seeing the world as an extension of his/her own Consciousness, experiences him/herself as not different than the Absolute.

This is an accessible experience for serious practitioners. Leah shared a moment of this realization on the listserv, and others of you have had this experience as well. Even when its experienced momentarily, it still “counts” and it still changes your life. However, the sutra is pointing out that this is the culmination of following the core practices in Sutras 21, 22, and 24.

Question: What does it mean to become like Shiva?

Here’s what the Shiva Sutras tells us: To become like Shiva means that no matter what happens, or what you do, you are always fully identified as Consciousness (3-32, 3-36), and you experience the world as arising and subsiding in your own consciousness. (3-30, 3-31)

You experience pleasure and pain (and your own body!) as objects of awareness rather than identifying with them (3-33). You can work with pain and discomfort without believing that the pain belongs to you or defines you.

And here are some of the gifts and qualities that the Sutras ascribe to a realized tantrik yogi: You have the power to create on a reality-shifting scale. In other words, you can do “miracles” on a regular basis. You can intervene in someone’s karma. You can bless (and curse) effectively. When you give a blessing, it comes true. You can “insert wisdom into another person” by a direct transmission (these are Lakshman Joo’s words, which describe the ability to pass on to another person a state of non-dual realization). You can give direct, powerful, fully transformative *shaktipat*, meaning the most intense levels of *shaktipat*, of the kind that totally changes someone’s life or even gives them direct realization of the Self. (3-39) Being a master of the Shakti Chakra, you can also control the shakti that you have transmitted to another person, meaning that if it is working too strongly you can cool it down, and if it’s not strong enough you can increase it (implied in 3-39).

Your conversation has the power of mantra (3-27) in that 1) you are so powerfully aligned with the divine that your words convey truth that penetrates into the hearts of those who hear; 2) because your every breath is consciously arising and subsiding as *ham-sa*, the sound that the breath makes which conveys the awareness of “I am That”. For the realized being, the inhalation (*ham*) takes her fully into indrawn immersion in the Self. The exhalation (*sa*) recreates the external world, including your body, and thus expresses the creative act of Shakti manifesting the world again and again. You naturally impart knowledge of the Self to others (3-28)

According to the commentary on this sutra, you are “like Shiva” as long as the body lasts, and when the body dissolves, you become one with Shiva and never have to return to embodied life.

Sutra 38

Tripad aadyanupraananam: The three states should be enlivened by the originator (the primordial Shakti, whose nature is bliss).

Kshemeraja's Interpretation: Though there are many different ways of feeling the presence of Shakti in daily life, Kshemeraja's commentary directly links this sutra to the practice of discovering Shakti in the midst of moments of heightened emotional or physical intensity—such as bliss, love, sexual arousal. When you plunge into the midst of these emotional states while recognizing that at the heart of all intense feelings is Shakti, you can enter the supreme bliss. This does not mean getting fixated on sensory experience itself. In finding Shakti in the midst of enjoyment, you start by letting go of your attachment to the stimulus (the person, the food, the fantasy) that seems to have caused the bliss, but instead 'entering' the felt sense of enjoyment itself, as a pure feeling of pleasure.

Moments of enjoyment are flashes of the natural exuberance of Shakti. Your intense experiences of pleasure are your individual forms of Shakti's innate bliss. In other words, your feelings of enjoyment and bliss are not actually the result of the particular person, the moment, the sound, the taste. If they were, then the same stimulus would give you bliss every time, which we know it doesn't! It's the actual *sensation* of enjoyment or love or intensity that is the direct link to Goddess, which means that if you meditate on the felt sense of your enjoyment, you are meditating directly on Shakti! This is very much a radical idea of the tantras. Tantra understands that bliss is your true nature, but that it is not only experienced in high states, but reveals itself in all experiences of enjoyment. If you practice with limited forms of bliss and learn to spread the feeling, the limited bliss expands and becomes ecstasy, revealing the presence of the divine form of bliss even in a simple state of human enjoyment.

This understanding is the heart of open-eyed tantric practice. Its motto is "Honor your pleasure! And as you do, connect that pleasure with the primordial freedom and bliss of Goddess!"

In the commentary, Kshemeraja quotes three verses from the *Vijnana Bhairava*, (verses 69-72) which many of you are probably familiar with.

- 1) When experiencing intense sexual arousal or orgasm, focus in the midst of the sensation and recognize it as Shakti herself.
- 2) Do the same thing during a memory or fantasy of such an experience.
- 3) Remembering a moment of joy, removing the thought of it, and focusing inside the energy of the joy.

Sexual Practice: Sitting in meditation or lying in *shavasana*, use a sexual fantasy or physical touch to kindle sexual arousal. Then fully enter the feeling, (letting go of the fantasy) and using the breath to inhale and exhale gently into the aroused feeling, letting go of tension, and holding the thought that the aroused feeling is itself Shakti. See if you can

spread that feeling through your body or around your body. If orgasm begins to occur, try to stay poised in the initial felt sense of it.

The same idea, of using sensory satisfaction to trigger the experience of Shakti, is described in two more Vijnana Bhairava verses, 72 and 73, which describe how the pleasure of food and the pleasure of music can become meditations on Shakti. The secret is to fully experience the enjoyment of the taste of, say, chocolate, and instead of taking another bite, turning your attention inward and feeling that enjoyment as Shakti's enjoyment.

You can do it with music, holding your attention in the felt sense of delight that occurs when a powerful piece of music touches your heart or flows rhythmically through your body.

As you listen, stay with the felt sense of receiving the rhythm, and treat it like a meditation, letting go of thoughts and "stories" about what is happening, staying present to the felt state of the music meeting your body.

These practices are not necessarily easy at first, because our natural tendency to associate satisfaction with the sensory stimulus that has triggered it will tend to keep us focused on the sensory stimulus itself (the sexy touch, the delicious chocolate, the beautiful song) rather than turning INTO the feeling. With practice, we get it, and then these instructions help us enjoy sensory life without craving and with an expansive awareness that profoundly heightens enjoyment and the sense of presence. As you do these techniques, consider it an experiment, and be aware of all your reactions, the blocks that come up, and the moments when freedom is experienced in the sensory enjoyment.

Sutra 39

Chitta sthitivacchareera karanabaahyeshu: The awareness of God consciousness should not only be infused in the state where the mind is focused inwardly, but should also be infused in the body, in his organic actions, and in the external objective world.

Commentary by Kshemeraja, paraphrased by Laksman Joo:

"You must infuse turiya—which gives life to the three states, waking, dreaming and deep sleep—in each and every action of the universe. When one is introverted and his mind is established in one-pointedness, that is the state of turiya. In the same way, when his consciousness is directed towards the objective world, when he is extraverted, then in the action of the body and in the action of the external objective world, he should hold the awareness of the internal consciousness. then in time he should also infuse the life of turiya into that state."

It is said in the *Vijnana Bhairava*:

"You must infuse your consciousness with the awareness that this whole universe or your own body have been simultaneously filled with your own state of bliss. Through this bliss you will become melted in supreme bliss."

"...In this way, in each and every state of life, the energy of absolute independence (svaatantrya shakti) which is filled with supreme bliss, gives you whatever you desire."

Question: How do you understand this sutra? How can you practice it?

Some suggestions:

- When you feel joy or love, for any reason, seize the opportunity to imagine the sensations of joy spreading through your body and spreading into the world around you.
- Welcome whatever arises in your body and in the world with an attitude of love, acceptance, or welcoming—which you can do as a mental act (Saying inwardly, “I welcome this.” “I accept this” or even “I accept this with love.” Then, focus on the positive feeling that such thoughts create, and spread the positive feeling through your body.
- As you become aware of awareness in meditation, imagine that your awareness spreads out through the world.
- You can do the same thing with essential emotions like gratitude, affections, appreciation—feeling them intensely and imagining they spread through your body and through the world.

Again, these are practices. Eventually, they become real!

Sutra 44

Naasikaantarmadhyasamyamaat kimatra, savyaapasavyasaushumneshu:
If his consciousness is established in the central channel, in that force (pranana) which is the energy of life, he remains always the same. For him, there is no difference no matter what state he is in.

Pranana is the subtle life force, sometimes called the “breath within the breath”. The pranana is kundalini; kundalini being the subtle prana that keeps life alive in the body during deep meditation, and that also moves through the body transforming it from within. Normally this subtle life force is invisible to us—it is the same life force that keeps the child alive in the mother’s womb, even before the child is able to breath. It is the power that grows plants out of the earth. Once you can feel that force of kundalini as your true-life energy (through grace!) you live in the flow of the life-force, guided by it in all situations, and never losing your connection to the Self.

Question and Contemplation: Have there been moments when you have been aware of being breathed, of being guided, of a force moving through your body and your life that has a power beyond your personal will. What was the difference between those moments and ordinary moments, when you feel that you are the breather, the doer, the thinker, the actor?

Sutra 45

***Bhuya Syat Pratimilinam*—The yogi continuously and repeatedly experiences the objective world revealing and concealing itself.**

This is considered the state of liberation in life—*jivanmukti*—in tantra. It is a continuous movement between indrawn samadhi, and experiencing the external world revealing itself as part of your consciousness. In meditation, the objective world is concealed and only the inner world is experienced. When you open your eyes and the breath begins to flow once again through the nostrils, the objective world appears. This is *pratimilinam*—which includes the prefix “pra” meaning “again”. It means that in this state you are not discovering something new. You are experiencing again what has always been true, but which has previously been concealed by Maya. When you open your eyes and connect to the environment, instead of seeming to be outside you, you experience it as part of your awareness. This happens again and again. So, your continuous experience is this flowing between internal awareness, and experiencing that internal state infused into the world. And you know that this is the actual reality: it is how things really are!

At this point, you no longer need to be reborn in the physical world, because you have fulfilled what the sages consider to both purpose of life: you have realized that everything is within the divine consciousness, and that divine consciousness is you.

May we all experience this state—not just once or twice, but as our constant reality.

Kshemeraja says in his epilogue that he has described these exalted states so that we can know they are possible, and in the hope that we will be inspired to aspire to them. And though he doesn't say this, I believe that many of us have experienced that working with the Shiva Sutras does indeed give us glimpses of what this could feel like—glimpses that in time, if we deeply desire this awakening, will indeed become our experience.

Exercise: When you come out of meditation, keep a part of your attention indrawn as you slowly breathe in and out, and open your eyes. Open and close your eyes a few times, and as you do, feel how the afterimage of the ‘world’ you see with open eyes is held within your mind when you close your eyes. Look at that image inwardly. Do this for a few minutes, noticing that it begins to seem more natural for you to sense the exterior as being held within your own mind, your own chitta.

This is a way of subtly accustoming yourself to a non-dual view. It's an act of imagination, an exercise, for sure, but it will eventually soften the sense of the world being outside your awareness.

Do this playfully and notice the effects. Then, as you go about your day, take opportunities to do this practice, opening your mind and awareness to feel that the “world” you see is held in your consciousness. See if you can feel how the awareness that experiences the world through your senses is not just an observer, but also holds and makes possible your experience, connecting your awareness to everything you see, smell and touch.

With so much love to you all,

Sally