

## Pandit Rajmani Tigunait's Commentaries on Sutras 1-34 & 1-36 from *The Secret of the Yoga Sutra*

### SUTRA 1:34

प्रच्छर्दनविधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य ॥३४॥

pracchardanavidhāraṇābhyāṁ vā prāṇasya ॥ 34॥

**Transparency of mind also comes by practicing pranayama that involves forceful exhalation and breath retention.**

Transparency is the foundation of a stable mind. A mind drowning in the darkness of the five *kleshas*—ignorance, distorted self-identity, attachment, aversion, and fear—is bound to be anxious and fearful. Such a mind loses touch with its natural inner joy. The attitudes of friendliness, compassion, happiness, and non-judgment described in the previous sutra illumine the mind and shield it from ignorance. But this illumination is not powerful enough to dispel the principle of darkness itself. The practice described here picks up where sutra 1:33 left off, taking us directly to the brilliance inherent in us—the brilliance of our essential life force (*prana shakti*).

The body is the repository of the limitless wealth of Primordial Nature. Although the body's innate wisdom gives us complete access to this wealth, to a large extent this wisdom is buried under thick layers of darkness and so has become dormant. The pranayama technique referred to in this sutra peels those layers away, awakening the body's innate wisdom and illuminating our mind. It drives away stupefaction, instills the mind with clarity and tranquility, and reinfuses it with the ability to flow peacefully toward the center of Consciousness. To understand the unique potential of this pranayama, we need to examine the design of our body, the powers inherent in our organs, the privileges these powers grant us, and the sustaining role of *prana shakti*.

The human body is nature's finest creation. It is superior to the bodies of other creatures in that it contains the most highly evolved brain and nervous system and is endowed with the most expressive intelligence. Our limbs and sense organs have developed in response to the irresistible desire of our intrinsic intelligence to express itself and experience its vast grandeur. This irresistible desire caused the body to evolve in a manner that allows us to feel and respond to an extremely wide range of emotions, a phenomenon unique to humans. For example, every human being has a sensitive endocrine system—even a slight change in emotion alters our body chemistry, enabling us to recognize our feelings and respond to them in a tangible way. At various intersections of energy within us, the body assigns cells and tissues to monitor and guide the currents and crosscurrents of our thoughts and feelings. In yogic literature, the most prominent of these intersecting energies and the cells emerging from them are called *chakras*.

In addition to a powerful drive to feel and express itself, our intrinsic intelligence also has a limitless appetite to explore the external world; thus, our highly refined limbs and sense organs evolved. With their help, we perceive and experience objects in the world

around us. Were it not for our innate intelligence, neither the world outside us nor the world inside us would have come into existence. Every aspect of creation, including our mind, body, and senses, has evolved to satisfy the need of our intrinsic intelligence for fulfillment and freedom.

Prana shakti is the link between our inner intelligence and the tools—the mind and body—it uses to express itself. Prana is the direct manifestation of the Divine Will and its compassionate intention to awaken us from the timeless slumber of death. Prana is the life force itself, the very breath of Ishvara. It is the primordial principle of pulsation, the provider and enabler. It is the might of the Almighty breathing life into the aggregation of matter and energy that we know as the body and mind. Prana is infused with the intelligence of the Omniscient Being, an intelligence significantly superior to that of the individual soul, which has fallen into the cycle of samsara. Prana is the source of nourishment and inner guidance. By embracing its nurturance and guidance, we remove the veil of darkness hiding the innate wisdom of our body and the immense power of our mind.

This sutra refers to a unique practice for embracing our pranic force and using it to remove the veil of darkness. This practice is highly technical and Patanjali returns to it in sutras 2:49 through 2:53, then again in sutras 3:38 and 3:43. In the tradition of the ancient sages, this practice is taught step-by-step with several prerequisites and precautions. The primary prerequisite is the adoption of a sitting posture as defined in sutras 2:46 through 2:48. The primary precaution is to learn and practice this technique under the guidance of a competent teacher.

This is a highly specialized pranayama practice, characterized by forceful exhalation (*pracchardana*) and retention (*vidharana*)—hence the name *pracchardana vidharana pranayama*. It is important to observe the prerequisites and precautions, because even though this practice appears simple, it has a profound effect on the brain, the nervous and endocrine systems, and more precisely, on the pituitary gland and the function of the hypothalamus.

According to Vyasa, the core of this practice consists of the extremely specialized and forceful (*prayatna-vishesha*) exhalation and retention of breath. It is the final step in a series of pranayama practices, which begins with what is known in the hatha yoga tradition as *bhastrika pranayama*. In *bhastrika*, the exhalation and inhalation are brisk and forceful. This shows itself as a rapid contraction and expansion of the abdominal area, while the rib cage is suspended and remains relatively still. The breath is fast and short, somewhat similar to breathing that might lead to hyper-ventilation, although in *bhastrika* all movements are controlled and voluntary.

Following *bhastrika*, the next step leading to this special pranayama is the practice of *pratiloma pranayama*, also known as *surya bhedi*. This is the same as *bhastrika*, except that in *pratiloma pranayama* the practitioner exhales and inhales forcefully and rapidly through one nostril, then quickly switches to the other. One round of *pratiloma pranayama* may consist of a hundred to two hundred breaths, switching back and forth from one nostril to the other. To master this pranayama, it is important to conclude with

a specific form of breath retention (*kumbhaka*), which must be learned and practiced under the guidance of a qualified teacher.

Finally comes the practice that this sutra refers to: *pracchardana vidharana pranayama*. *Pracchardana* involves breathing through both nostrils forcefully and rapidly. The uniqueness of this breathing pattern is that, during exhalation, the breath is directed to strike the region of the soft palate, which lies near the floor of the brain. This makes the soft palate vibrate, while diffusing the intensity of the outgoing breath. Similarly, with each inhalation, the breath enters the nostrils with great force, striking the soft palate before reaching the trachea. In short, the forceful and rapid exhalations and inhalations are both directed at the soft palate.

The *vidharana* portion of the practice is introduced in the advanced stage. This highly specialized form of concentration involves retaining the breath. To emphasize the unique nature of the concentration induced by this *pranayama* practice, both Patanjali and Vyasa avoid using the term *kumbhaka*. In this practice, retention is introduced between the inhalation and the exhalation.

To do *pracchardana vidharana*, exhale and inhale forcefully and rapidly as just described. Then, just prior to introducing retention, extend the exhalation and make it forceful, emptying the lungs to the fullest capacity. During this extended and forceful exhalation, the breath is still brushing the soft palate. Without creating a pause, take an extended and forceful inhalation, directing it at the soft palate. There should be no jerk or shakiness in the breath.

After this long, forceful, smooth, and extended inhalation, retain the breath without using the fingers to block the nostrils. Concentrate (*dharana*) in the specialized area (*vi*) in the region of the soft palate. During the long, extended, and smooth exhalation and inhalation, the mind is fully engaged in the area around the soft palate. This mental engagement is now further intensified because the mind is no longer involved in attending to the process of inhaling and exhaling, but is suspended in the mental space surrounding the soft palate. Concentrating while retaining the breath allows the mind to consciously recognize and imbibe the energy generated by the forceful exhalation and inhalation.

After holding the breath to your comfortable capacity, exhale gently and smoothly, take a few normal breaths, and then repeat the process. Do not practice the *vidharana* portion of this practice more than three times in one session.

The vibratory movement induced by *pracchardana* at the soft palate awakens and energizes the brain, in general, and the limbic system, the hypothalamus, and the pituitary gland, in particular. The limbic system, located on top of the brain stem and under the cortex, is directly involved in regulating powerful emotions, such as fear and anger. It also regulates sexual behavior. Thus, feelings of pleasure and the urge for survival are important facets of our limbic system. The limbic system is also responsible for storing and retrieving memories, and plays an important role in regulating a variety of hormones, our sense of exhilaration, and a broad range of activities vital for survival.

In the tantric scheme of the chakras, this part of the brain corresponds to the *talū chakra*, which is subsumed in the “command” center (*ajna chakra*). The *ajna chakra* is

located in the center of the brain—inward from, and just above, the level of the space between the eyebrows. There is no practice as effective as *prachardana vidharana pranayama* for awakening the inherent power of this important part of the brain.

Shortly after beginning this practice, the power lying dormant in the region of the *ajna chakra* is roused. This awakening emerges in the form of light experienced in the region of the *ajna chakra*. With this light comes a sense of joy so compelling that the scattered mind coalesces and rushes toward it. The causes of disturbance vanish and the mind becomes stable and tranquil. With prolonged practice, the mind becomes one-pointed and inwardly flowing, gradually reaching the state of *samadhi*. Remember, however, that the practice described in this commentary is not for beginners but presupposes that the student has mastered the fundamentals of breath training and *pranayama*.

Commentators and scholars have long debated whether or not the practice referred to in this sutra is an alternative to the practice set forth in sutra 1:33. According to the tradition of the Himalayan masters, such arguments are misplaced. Just as the trustful surrender to *Ishvara* described in sutra 1:23 is not an alternative to *abhyasa* and *vairagya*, the practice of this special *pranayama* is not an alternative to cultivating the attitudes of friendliness, compassion, happiness, and non-judgment described in sutra 1:33. These four attitudes help us protect our mind from the subtle contaminations of animosity, cruelty, jealousy, and self-righteousness, and cleanse them from our mind. But the practice of *pranayama* referred to in this sutra goes further—it peels away the layers of these contaminants, burns them in the brilliant light of the wisdom buried deep within us, and infuses our mind with vitality, clarity, and one-pointedness. In other words, this *pranayama* transforms and energizes our mind, and impels it to flow peacefully toward our core being.

As we will see in the second chapter of the *Yoga Sutra*, *pranayama* is the only practice with the capacity to remove the veil that hides the light. It is the only practice that helps the mind fulfill all the criteria for practicing concentration (*dharana*). But if we do not make an effort to cultivate the fourfold virtues described in sutra 1:33, we leave our mind unprotected. The *pranayama* practice described here provides further protection and enables the mind to discover and embrace the inner light. Practically speaking, just as *abhyasa* and *vairagya* (YS 1:12) form a complete practice, so do the fourfold virtues and the methodical practice of *prachardana vidharana pranayama*. Together, they form the foundation for the techniques described in the following sutras, none of which will yield satisfactory fruit unless they are carried out by a mind which is to some degree already calm, clear, one-pointed, and trained to flow inward.

## SUTRA 1:36

विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती ॥३६॥

viśokā vā jyotiṣmatī ॥ 36॥

**The state of consciousness free from sorrow and anguish and infused with inner light also anchors the mind to *sthiti*, the peaceful flow free from all thought constructs.**

This appears to be one of the simplest sutras but it is actually the most cryptic and profound. To a casual reader, this sutra seems to tell us only that a mind free of worry and grief and infused with inner light automatically flows peacefully inward. But in the Sri Vidya tradition, this sutra is considered the core of the entire text. Here, Patanjali prescribes a course of sadhana—a comprehensive, well-defined practice—for the first time.

In the first thirty-three sutras, he created a context for introducing a system of practice by describing the general qualities and properties of practice. He explained how to assess whether or not a practice is of high quality, but he did not tell us exactly which practice to do. In this sutra, Patanjali identifies a precise practice—one with a clearly defined goal—but he does so in highly cryptic language. Only when Vyasa deciphers this sutra does the content begin to reveal itself.

Vyasa unravels this sutra by adding the phrases *hrdayapun-darika dharayato* at the beginning and *pravrittirutpannamanasah sthiti-nibandhini* at the end. This latter phrase is carried over from the previous sutra. Thus, the sutra now reads: *hrdaya-pundarika dharayato vishoka va jyotishmati pravrittirutpanna manasah sthiti-nibandhini*. This can be translated: “By concentrating on the lotus of the heart, there arises a state of sorrowless joy [*vishoka*], which is infused with inner light [*jyotishmati*]; upon its emergence, such a state anchors the mind to a peaceful flow free from all thought constructs [*sthiti*].” Vyasa writes his commentary on this expanded version, but it is almost as cryptic as Patanjali’s original sutra. It can be fully understood only when interpreted by a living tradition.

Vyasa explains what he means by concentrating on the lotus of the heart. He offers an important clue by telling us briefly of the limitless possibilities that come into view when we concentrate on the lotus of the heart. And he also provides a sense of how concentrating on the lotus of the heart looks and feels. But a clear understanding of the practice requires that we decipher Vyasa’s commentary accurately. The reason masters like Patanjali and Vyasa are so secretive about their most profound and advanced teachings will become clear as we learn about the highly sought, extraordinary fruits of this practice.

Vyasa tells us that meditation on the lotus of the heart leads us to two unique states: *vishoka* and *jyotishmati*. *Vishoka* is a state in which there is no trace of sorrow and anguish (*shoka*). In this state, we are free from doubt, fear, anger, grief, guilt, regret, and shame. We are absolutely certain of who we are and of our relationship both with the higher reality within us and with the external world. The mind is so clear that we see our



deeply rooted samskaras without being perturbed by them. We can distinguish unalloyed Consciousness from the consciousness fully entangled with our deeply rooted subtle karmic impressions. We know the truth about ourselves: we are the creator of our personal world. We also know we have the ability to transform and redesign that world. This realization frees us from the fear of losing ourselves by becoming entangled in our personal world. We live in the world while remaining above it.

The state of *vishoka* brings the realization that life is not confined to the material world nor to the loss and gain, failure and success, insult and honor integral to it. We see that our life stretches to a realm where fear, old age, death, hunger, and thirst do not exist—a realm where we are not dependent on anything for our sustenance. We know we exist beyond the confines of our body, senses, and mind (*videha*). Perennial joy itself is our locus—it goes wherever we go. In other words, our inherent joy has manifested fully. Riding that wave of joy, the mind moves freely within the space of Consciousness. Our emotional injuries have been healed so completely that no trace of sorrow remains. This inner healing nullifies our understanding of the world as full of sorrow, and therefore also nullifies our desire to attain freedom from the world. There is no need to disconnect ourselves from life for we are at peace. Inner healing and joyfulness are the defining characteristics of *vishoka*, the state of sorrowless joy.

The second state identified in this sutra, *vyotishmati*, is a condition of inner luminosity. In this state, our sense of I-am-ness (*asmita*) is fully illuminated by the light of Pure Consciousness. We, the little self, begin to see the Special Purusha, whereupon our notion of ourselves as an isolated individual consciousness dissolves (YS 4:25). We are filled with the realization that all the subtle impressions of the mind and the roaming tendencies arising from them are fully known to the all-pervading Seer (YS 4:18). This realization leads to trustful surrender to our eternal companion. We are naturally inclined to embrace our true essence and turn away from the objective world (YS 4:26). This unique state, which is characterized by inner healing, sorrowless joy (*vishoka*), and inner luminosity (*vyotishmati*), dawns on the horizon of our consciousness when we meditate on the lotus of the heart.

But what does Vyasa mean by “the lotus of the heart”? The lotus is the most pervasive esoteric symbol in Eastern spirituality. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Tantrism all employ the symbol of the lotus to express their deepest doctrines and esoteric experiences. In Hinduism, the deities of creation, protection, and dissolution are linked to this icon. Brahma, the creator, is said to emerge from a lotus that blossoms from the navel of Lord Vishnu, the protector of the universe. It is the creative power (*shakti*) of the lotus that infuses Brahma with creativity. In that sense, Brahma is fused with the image of the lotus, which, in one version of the story, is said to be the essence of the universe. The lotus is Brahma’s origin and his permanent abode—he is eternally connected to its primordial and ever-blossoming realm.

Vishnu, the all-pervading provider and protector of the universe, is also characterized by his relationship with the lotus. He is the lotus-eyed one. During the cosmic dissolution, when the universe is reabsorbed into Primordial Nature, Vishnu resorts to his yogic sleep,

awakening only when the lotus of the navel opens. As the lotus blossoms, Vishnu opens his eyes, and the seed of worldly existence begins to germinate.

In many traditions, a lotus blossom is used as the seat or base for images of the Divine. As the conqueror of death (*Mrityunjaya*), Shiva sits on a lotus growing in an ocean of ambrosia. Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu, is often depicted standing or sitting on a lotus, representing the blossoming of wealth and potency. Similarly, Sarasvati, Tara, Buddha, Padmasambhava, the Chinese goddess Quan Yin, and the Japanese goddess Dainichi Nyorai are all associated with the lotus. And in the tantric system of philosophy and metaphysics, the centers of energy and consciousness in the human body are all described as lotuses, centers of blossoming energy.

As we navigate through the rest of Patanjali's text, particularly sutras 2:19, 2:20, 3:34, 3:49, 3:54, 4:18, 4:22, and 4:25, it becomes clear that "the lotus of the heart" refers to the state of consciousness in which the individual soul and God (*Ishvara*) are united in a common being. Sutra 3:34 states, "By meditating on the heart, one gains complete knowledge of one's mind." Commenting on that sutra, Vyasa writes, "In this city of Brahman [the human body] there is a space. In that space is the lotus shrine. In the lotus shrine, there is unique wisdom (*vijnana*). By practicing meditation (*samyama*) on that unique wisdom, one gains complete understanding of one's mind." This unique intuitive wisdom is known as *pratibha jnana*. According to sutra 3:33, it is the precursor to the power of discernment and to the highest samadhi. This intuitive wisdom is the deliverer (*taraka*), for it grants us freedom from the binding forces of the objective world, including the binding forces of our mind. This freedom-granting intuitive wisdom subsumes the experiences of the entire objective world and is not bound by the linearity of cognition. In other words, this knowledge is unconfined by notions of past, present, and future, or by any other form of sequence (YS 3:54).

This sorrowless and luminous state, says Vyasa, is the very essence of our own mind (*buddhi sattva*). It is the highest level of inner purity. Here Purusha (the Seer) and Prakriti (the Primordial Cause of the Universe) are face-to-face. In this field of intelligence, the Seer and the Seen are completely in each other's view. According to Vyasa's commentary on sutra 2:19, this state refers to both collective intelligence (*mahat*) and the field of individual intelligence (*buddhi*). It is the locus for our mind, senses, and body, and for all the karmas—the subtle impressions lying within us—including those lying dormant (*sanchita*), those awakened and manifesting in the form of destiny (*prarabhdha*), and those yet to be encoded (*kriyamana*). This state is so subtle and thus so incomprehensible that Vyasa calls it "the existence of non-existence" (*nihsattasattam*). Here, Consciousness and mind are so close and so reflective of each other that they appear neither similar nor dissimilar (YS 2:20). Lit by the light of Pure Consciousness, the mind loses its long-cherished illusion of I-am-ness. Its lust for preserving a sense of personal identity vanishes. Its fear of merging into higher reality is destroyed. The mind is grateful that this inner light (*vyotishmati*) has swept away any sense of spiritual darkness. It is a state of purest joy (*vishoka*) for it has gone beyond the conditioning of the body, senses, and mind (*videha*).

Two key questions remain: What is the lotus of the heart? How do we meditate on it? In sutra 4:22, Vyasa tells us, "It is all-pervading, eternal intelligence. It is neither in the

netherworld nor in a mountain cave nor in the darkness of the deepest ocean. It is contained in the depths of Brahman. It is eternal and the very cognition of intelligence itself (*buddhi vritti*).”

The lotus of the heart refers to a unique space—the space in the city of Brahman (YS 3:34). It is the space of Consciousness (*chidakasha*) as well as the epicenter of Consciousness. It is the seat of Ishvara, the Special Purusha, and the seat of the individual soul, the ordinary individual purusha. The lotus of the heart is our own very essence—our true abode. While residing here in the lotus of the heart, we seek our fulfillment (*bhoga*) and ultimate freedom (*apavarga*). Our primordial guru, Ishvara, is seated next to us. Out of sheer compassion and unconditional love, she dispenses protection and guidance as we strive for fulfillment and freedom. In other words, this lotus embodies the intelligence of both Ishvara and ourselves—the Enlightened Being and the one seeking enlightenment; the One Who Is Ever-Full and the one seeking fulfillment; the One Who Is Ever-Free and the one seeking freedom.

At the center of this lotus lies its essence, primordial desire (*kama*). Our primordial desire is to experience lasting fulfillment and attain ultimate freedom. Ishvara’s primordial desire is to help us find that fulfillment and freedom. Our timeless intention is to be fulfilled and free. Ishvara’s timeless intention is to help us find what we have been seeking for eternity. This primordial desire, this infallible intention, is the nectar of the lotus of the heart. It is intrinsically imbued with the power to manifest its limitless potential. From deep within the lotus, this primordial desire (*kama*) exerts its self-propelled influence, causing the petals to open, whereupon both Ishvara and the individual soul are drawn to drink its nectar. Inebriated by the nectar’s sweetness, they sing and dance in complete accord (*Saundaryalahari* 38).

This is a state of supernal bliss. In this state, we no longer resist the love, protection, and guidance of Ishvara. Our *asmita*—our petty I-am-ness—is filled with gratitude that it has been embraced by the pure and perfect Consciousness. We are overcome by joy at seeing our circumscribed individuality melting away and dissolving into the higher reality. This joy transports us directly to a state of samadhi known as *ananda anugata samadhi*, the samadhi induced or preceded by joy. The result is *videha*, a state of realization in which we are no longer confined by the limitations of our body, senses, and mind. We are free from the fear of losing our individuality, and we delight in the prospect of expanding to a higher reality.

Inner illumination (*jyotishmati*) is closely related to sorrowless, joyful *vishoka*. In the discerning light of Consciousness we know who we are and what the building blocks of our individuality are. This clear understanding of ourselves transports us to a state of samadhi known as *asmita anugata samadhi*, the samadhi induced or preceded by a pure and fully expanded I-am-ness (*asmita*). The result is *prakritilaya*, the realization that we are resting in Prakriti. We know we are not losing our individuality, but are gaining access to the vast kingdom of Primordial Nature and expanding into it. Thus, we are free of all vestiges of sorrow and anguish. This realization demolishes our confusion about who we are, why we have come to this world, our relationship with higher reality, and what



happens to us when we die. This perfect clarity is described as inner luminosity (*vyotishmati*).

The state of sorrowless joy and the state of inner luminosity are two facets of the same experience—the experience arising from meditation on the lotus of the heart. It is difficult to predict which will emerge first. We are all unique. Some of us are primarily driven by faith and devotion (*bhakti*), while others use logic and reason to verify our faith before we embrace it. Many of us are convinced of the effectiveness of our meditative techniques; for us, faith and devotion are secondary. In the case of meditators primarily driven by faith and devotion, the experience of *vishoka* comes into view first and *vyotishmati* follows. In the case of meditators primarily driven by logic and reason, *vyotishmati* dawns first. In most people, however, faith, devotion, logic, reason, and respect for technique are well balanced. Therefore, in most cases the experiences of *vishoka* and *vyotishmati* emerge almost simultaneously.

Regardless of which experience dawns first, the end result is the same— absolute clarity. We know our mind well. We are aware of its binding and releasing properties. We are no longer burdened by subtle impressions of the past for we have the power and wisdom to preside over them. We are aware of our karmic impressions but they no longer influence us. Doubt and fear vanish. We have confidence in the healing and guiding embrace of Inner Divinity. We trust and respect our own discerning power. Our desire to prove ourselves vanishes. We are free. We enjoy this freedom while in meditation and while going about our daily lives. We are established in *vishoka* and *vyotishmati*. The result? Our mind is with us and we are with our mind. Our inner guide is with us and we are with our inner guide.

This is the most crucial stage in our spiritual development. Once we reach this level of realization there is no possibility of ever falling backward. Even if we attain this experience only while drawing our last breaths, it remains with us forever. Death has no power to nullify it. The experience of *vishoka* and *vyotishmati* infuses our mind with unwavering retentive power. We return to this world with our wisdom and power intact. We remember that our inner guide, protector, and provider is within us. Because this indelible memory protects us from doubt and fear, our life is joyful and luminous from the outset. As soon as our body and mind are fully mature, we resume our spiritual quest exactly where we left it. In other words, after attaining *vishoka* and *vyotishmati*, we are able to live in the world and yet remain above it. We are free.

In sutra 1:19, both Patanjali and Vyasa tell us that one who has attained this level of experience will be born as an extraordinary yogi (*bhava pratyaya yogi*). To underscore the radical nature of the freedom brought by *vishoka* and *vyotishmati*, Vyasa does not list the yogis of extraordinary caliber (*videha* and *prakritilaya*) in his scheme of the planes of existence (*loka*) (YS 3:26). According to him, yogis of this caliber are established in their own unique world, the world made of freedom. They may live in the world but they are not part of it. They are born free, live free, and die free. After they attain the state of *vishoka* and *vyotishmati*, the purpose of their birth and death is simply to complete their remaining journey while established in their sorrowless, luminous Consciousness. At every stage in their life—both here and hereafter—they are joyful and lucid.

This raises a question of enormous importance for our practice: How do we meditate on the lotus of the heart? Here it will be helpful to remember that we were able to decipher the meaning of sutra 1:35 only by carrying over a portion of sutra 1:34. Similarly, in order to delineate the precise steps of the practice of meditation on the lotus of the heart, we have to carry over the practice described in sutra 1:35.

The unique system of meditation I have described in the commentary on sutra 1:35 enables us to experience a luminous field of energy throughout the subtle space within and around our forehead. As we continue to practice, this luminosity intensifies and expands. Eventually, both the space occupied by our body and the space immediately surrounding it is infused with luminosity. Experientially, it is as if this luminous field of consciousness has replaced our body. It becomes the locus for our self-awareness—we exist in it. As implied in sutra 1:14, if we continue our practice for a prolonged period, without interruption, and with reverence, this self-luminous field becomes stable and well defined.

Just as we feel the presence of our self-existence in our physical body, as we meditate with this awareness we feel the presence of our self-existence in this luminous space. This luminous space is the locus of our awareness. We are in it, and this awareness is in us. While residing in this awareness, we feel that we are breathing. When we inhale, we feel our awareness traveling upward, and when we exhale, we feel our awareness traveling downward. In general, we are aware of our entire locus—the entire luminous field—but we are particularly aware of the pathway within this field that our awareness is using to move up and down. We are breathing in the space corresponding to the region between the tip of the nose and the eyebrow center. Each time we breathe, we feel a sense of self-awareness traveling up and down. At the peak of our meditation, we are aware of only this feeling of self-awareness moving up and down. This is where the meditation described in sutra 1:35 culminates. The meditation described in this sutra picks up from here.

As part of the meditation on the lotus of the heart, we stretch this feeling, allowing ourselves to become aware of the breath moving between our heart and the eyebrow center. We are generally aware of the entire locus of radiant light—the luminous space itself—but we are particularly aware of the space covered by the movement of our breath. We are breathing in the space corresponding to the space between our heart center and the eyebrow center. As we immerse ourselves in meditation, all that remains is the sense of self-existence—an awareness of pure being—moving up and down. And this awareness is in the luminous space that has replaced our physical body as the locus of our self-existence.

The difference between this and the meditation described in sutras 1:34 and 1:35 is subtle but potent. The methods described in those two sutras are stages of a single meditative practice. In sutra 1:34, the emphasis is on meditating on the light filling the space corresponding to the center of our forehead, the *ajna chakra*. As we meditate there, the light intensifies and becomes well defined. The luminous energy engendered by this meditation pulls our consciousness toward the higher reaches of our head and beyond, awakening and energizing areas of the brain associated with conscious awareness; the meditation described in sutra 1:35 further enhances and intensifies that

experience. As part of the meditation described there, we meditate on the luminous space corresponding to the region of the forehead. If done properly, this meditation pulls our energy upward. This upward pull is felt most noticeably in our eyes. Meditative vibrations fill the space in the region of our brain. These vibrations are extremely peaceful and yet very active. If we exceed our capacity, we feel lightheaded.

Meditation on the chakras above the ajna chakra is highly technical. According to the Sri Vidya tradition, it is dangerous to force our awareness to move from the region of the ajna chakra to the crown or to force ourselves to meditate at the crown without proper preparation and without fulfilling the prerequisites. Masters belonging to the *samaya* school of Sri Vidya meditate on the crown chakra, but theirs is the path of perfection, pursued in complete isolation from worldly existence. Sutra 1:36 advises us to meditate on the lotus of the heart; this particular form of meditation is the specialty of the *mishra* school of Sri Vidya.

While learning to meditate on the lotus of the heart, it is important to understand that we are concentrating neither on the image of a lotus nor on the heart muscle. Rather, we are meditating on the luminous space in the region of our spiritual heart. Furthermore, this luminosity is not the product of our imagination. As our practice of meditation on the luminous space in the area of the ajna chakra matures, the inner luminosity intensifies and expands. Although this expanded field of luminosity has no border, there is a sense of it occupying a discrete body of space—our mental space. Even though this field is not physical—it is purely a field of awareness—it surrounds our body; at the level of feeling, it subsumes our body. Our sense of self-existence is transported from our physical body to this field of awareness. It is in this field of awareness we have to locate our spiritual heart.

Just as our physical heart is located in the center of the body, our spiritual heart is located in the center of the luminous body of our Pure Being. The center of our inner luminosity is our core. This is where the awareness of our self-existence is felt most strongly. It is the resting ground of our Consciousness, the most prized space within us, because our sense of self-identification, along with all its karmic possessions, is concentrated here. Our numberless samskaras and vasanas are buried here. This is the home of our primal desire—the desire to preserve our self-identity—and the home of our sense of belongingness. Life after life, this space is where we have been holding on to our loved ones and struggling to get rid of what we hate and those we hate.

Our spiritual heart is also the abode of the Lord of Life, Ishvara. No matter how thick the veil of ignorance and how oblivious we are of our attachment, aversion, and fear of losing what we value the most, the Lord of Life is fully aware of us and the world in which we have buried ourselves (YS 4:18). The lotus of the heart is our personal world; we are at its center. The Lord of Life is next to us. Sankhya Yoga calls the spiritual heart *linga sharira*, the body made of endless samskaras and vasanas. At the time of death, our spiritual heart leaves the physical body; it then descends into a new body as we awaken from the slumber of death.

How do we locate the lotus of the heart? As stated before, the practice of meditation described in sutra 1:35 intensifies and expands the field of self-awareness. Even though

this field of awareness does not have shape, size, or color comparable to anything in the objective world, it does have a quality identifiable by the mind. It is lucid, transparent, and infused with the sense of self-existence. This luminous field of self-awareness appears to have lower and upper limits, and a unique dimension. We can see it and feel it with our inner eyes. If we are sitting cross-legged on the floor, the luminous space, which has subsumed and replaced our body consciousness, is almost as big as the space from the floor to the crown of the head. The area of the perineum is the lowest limit, and the crown is the highest limit. At its center is the luminous space corresponding to the region of our physical heart. This is the lotus of the heart.

The ajna chakra, the luminous space corresponding to the region of our forehead, is the gateway to the lotus of the heart. This is how the human body has been designed, which is why, before delving into the lotus of the heart, the sages in our tradition emphasize meditation at the ajna chakra. A consistent and prolonged practice of meditation at the ajna chakra results in the manifestation of inner luminosity filling the space in the region of the forehead. With the help of an unwavering, one-pointed mind, devotion, and the strength gained through Yoga sadhana, we can intensify this luminous field.

By using a yogic technique unique to the samaya school of Sri Vidya, we can lift our pranic force and make it penetrate this luminous field. In scriptures, such as the *Saundaryalahari*, this technique is known as *bindu bhedana*. It is used to lift our consciousness to the upper limit of this luminous field. Yogis are advised to do bindu bhedana in the last phase of their life, and more precisely, at the time of final departure from this world (BG 8:10). This technique, which is expounded by Lakshmidhara in *Saundaryalahari* 14, 32, 41, 92, and 99, is not the subject of this sutra.

The process of meditating on the lotus of the heart under discussion here involves allowing our consciousness to descend from the ajna chakra to the center of the luminous field, the spiritual heart. To help us comprehend the phenomenon of consciousness descending from the ajna chakra to the heart, the tradition advises applying a technique that leads us in the opposite direction. By virtue of the contrast, it helps us understand where our heart is located and how it feels to reach there.

This technique is as follows: First become established in the luminous field of the ajna chakra. With practice, let this field intensify and expand. Let this expanded luminosity replace your bodily consciousness. Now mentally observe its lower and upper limits. Come to the space corresponding to the area of the ajna chakra and stay there for three breaths. Then let the feeling of self-awareness move from the ajna chakra to the crown by combining your awareness with the movement of your breath. When you inhale, feel as though your inhalation begins from the ajna chakra; as you continue inhaling, feel the flow of your awareness moving up until it reaches the crown. Then, without creating a pause, exhale as you descend from your crown to the ajna chakra. During the exhalation, feel the descent of your self-awareness. Repeat this process three times.

While doing this practice, you will notice an upward pull in your eyes as you inhale and mentally move your awareness toward the crown. Even though you are not using your

eyes to see anything at the crown, the combined forces of self-awareness and breath subtly pull your eyes upward, and at a deep level, you feel it. By the time you reach the crown, there is noticeable tension in your eyes. As you descend, the level of tension drops. This allows you to sense a correlation between a part of the physical body and its corresponding part in the luminous field.

Note that this practice of lifting your awareness and moving it from the ajna chakra to the crown is only an experiment. The purpose is to gain a direct experience of the effort involved in reaching the crown center, the neuro-energetic exertion it creates, and the quality of one-pointedness it induces. Keep this experience in your memory and retrieve it to compare with the experience you gain from the following practice, which brings you to the lotus of the heart.

Begin this practice after you are already established at your ajna chakra. The field of luminosity and self-awareness has expanded and has enveloped your entire field of self-awareness. You are already aware of the upper and lower limit of the luminous field and of its center. Now take a deep breath. Begin exhaling from the ajna chakra to the center of this luminous field. As you exhale, feel your self-awareness descending from the ajna chakra to your spiritual heart. The movement of breath and self-awareness are fully coordinated. Upon completing your exhalation, begin inhaling. Your inhalation begins from your heart center and, accompanied by your self-awareness, goes all the way to the ajna chakra. Repeat this three times.

You will notice the journey between the ajna chakra and the lotus of the heart is accompanied by a totally different kind of feeling than what you experienced when moving between the ajna chakra and the crown. The upward movement of awareness from the ajna chakra to the crown causes a sensation of upward movement and a noticeable tension in your eyes. But during the downward movement of awareness to your spiritual heart, the tension in your eyes melts away. The slight upward movement in your eyes when you are inhaling from your heart center to the ajna chakra is gentle and does not create tension in your eyes. While exhaling from the ajna chakra to the heart, you feel a slight downward pull in your eyes and a profound sense of relaxation in the entire region of the ajna chakra. As you continue breathing between the heart and the ajna chakra, a natural rhythm of movement arises that restricts the pranic flow and the awareness accompanying it to the area between the lotus of the heart and the base of the ajna chakra.

Within a week or two of uninterrupted practice, your innate wisdom and inner guide will transport you to a state of understanding where you will no longer feel a need to travel from the heart center to the ajna chakra. You are now naturally inclined to stay at the heart center. All you want is to mentally observe the feeling of your self-existence at the lotus of the heart. The pull of your self-presence is so strong that your interest in coordinating your awareness with the movement of your breath fades. You are oblivious of the physiological dimension of breathing, which continues of its own accord. You do not need to make any effort to focus your mind on the lotus of the heart, for in the presence of this inner luminosity, the mind is naturally one-pointed. There is no ground



for disturbance, stupefaction, or distraction. The lotus emits a unique joy, and the mind, fully engaged in experiencing it, loses all interest in entertaining its roaming tendencies.

As the center of our inner luminosity, the lotus of the heart is our true abode. This is our core, where we reside along with all our samskaras. This is where we are caught in a seemingly unending war of duality—good and bad, success and failure, life and death. For an ordinary soul, this is an impenetrable, inescapable reality the mind has been creating since the dawn of time. But this is also the home of our conscience, our power of discernment. It is also the center of intuitive wisdom. As soon as we enter this luminous field, we begin to realize that our mind is as pure and luminous as Consciousness itself. The mind is transparent and perfectly reflective of the reality within. It is capable of knowing itself and the samskaras it has stored. The mind is also capable of observing its own functions and the influence the samskaras exert on our thoughts, speech, and actions.

We see that we have been searching for lasting happiness in a complex world run by the fivefold affliction: ignorance, distorted sense of self-identity, attachment, aversion, and fear. We have been seeking freedom while clinging to our likes and dislikes. We have been trying to find fulfillment while complying with our cravings. This newly discovered inner luminosity at the lotus of the heart enables us to see reality in a different light. We realize we have been running away from ourselves. We have been trying to hold someone or something—God, karma, destiny, friends, family—responsible for our failure, sorrow, and misfortune. We have been keeping ourselves busy to avoid seeing within. This understanding dissolves our misperception of ourselves, of others, and of the world around us.

This understanding does not dawn during our meditation on the lotus of the heart, however. While we are meditating, the intrinsic luminosity of our spiritual heart infuses our mind with unaccustomed joy—joy untainted by sensory or mental conditions. It is pure and sorrowless joy. Vishoka is deeply nurturing. It instills the mind with strength to face and accept reality. Every time we meditate, we become clearer and stronger. The experience of sorrowless joy arising from meditation infuses our mind with the understanding that the world within us is much more predictable and reliable than the external world. Our inner reality is ever present and unaffected by the changing conditions of the external world—there is an extraordinary feeling of protection and safety. We are clear about who we are and have no interest in knowing what we are not. This state is self-luminous, and sorrowless joy is intrinsic to it. Meditation on the lotus of the heart leads to this state. During meditation we are in it, and it is in us.

Meditation on vishoka and jyotishmati transforms our mind. Our perception of life becomes clearer and our discerning power sharper. The mind begins to understand itself (*buddhi samvit*) and to comprehend its own essence (*buddhi sattva*). Enlightenment dawns in installments. We become aware of an ever-present truth: we are not alone. We realize the Lord of Life has always been with us and is always there for us. Her own unique law—pure unconditional love—binds her to us as our eternal friend, guru, guide, protector, and provider. She has never—and will never—abandon us. This supremely reassuring and nurturing realization drives away our primordial feeling of loneliness. We

feel complete. When we return to our day-to-day world after meditation, the gift of this realization comes with us. Regardless of how outward-oriented our awareness and how hectic our life, this realization continues to nurture our mind and brighten our consciousness.

The most noticeable change brought by this meditation on the lotus of the heart is that we are able to face ourselves. The numberless labels we have been carrying are replaced with one: child of Divinity. Our essential nature is pure and divine. All other identities are acquired and transitory and we have no fear of losing them. We are grateful that the Inner Divinity never judges us. He bestows his love and guidance without counting our merits and demerits. This knowledge-driven gratitude gives us the courage to surrender to the Lord of Life. To many, the Supreme Being is merely a concept and a source of doubt, fear, and conflict. But for us, the Supreme Being is more alive and more present than we ourselves. He is imperishable (*akshara*), yet he accompanies us, the perishable beings (*kshara*). He is with us in both birth and death. He is omniscient and knows our habit of running away from him, yet always keeps us in his embrace. This realization fills us with unconditional love and devotion. We become loving, kind, and trusting. Our suspicious nature is replaced with simplicity and innocence—our purity is restored.

With sustained practice our meditation matures. It takes less time to enter the state of *vyoma* and *vishoka*. The longer we stay in this self-luminous, joyful state, the more refined and subtle our experience becomes. As we will see in sutra 1:43, this refinement purifies our memory field. The memory pertaining to our quest for fulfillment and ultimate freedom, and our memory pertaining to the love, guidance, and protection flowing from Ishvara, become clear and firm. We no longer need to remind ourselves of our perennial quest or of our relationship with the Supreme Being—it is now an integral part of our understanding. As we progress in our meditation, this understanding is transformed into feeling. Both during meditation and at other times, this feeling fills our consciousness. Even when we are not aware of it, this feeling is aware of us. We have entered *nirvichara*, the state of *samadhi* that arises when the mind is absorbed in an object that transcends the thought process (YS 1:44).

When this absorption matures, we enter the realm of *prajna*, the field of intuition (YS 1:47). In the bright light of intuition, we distinctly see both the trivial nature of our limited self-identity and the Special Being (*Purusha Vishesh*). We understand what we are and what we are not. The desire to know anything further vanishes (YS 4:25). We are free and we see the Seer within. The purity of our mind at this stage is equal to the purity of Pure Consciousness (YS 3:55). The mind now sees and conquers its long-cherished *samskaras*; it rises above its self-created karmic vortex. It dwells joyfully in the lotus of the heart (YS 3:34). There is no cognition of the mind seeing *Purusha*, the Inner Being. Instead, *Purusha* sees the mind within itself (Vyasa on sutra 3:35). Both Vyasa and Patanjali call this realization *taraka*, the knowledge that empowers us to transcend the cycle of *samsara* (YS 3:54). This state of realization is the furthest frontier of lower *samadhi*.

From this point on, we make no effort to push ourselves further. If we do make an effort, the *samskara* created becomes an obstacle to higher *samadhi*. Effort no longer has

a role; our consciousness is lifted by the grace of the Divine. This is a transitional state from the furthest frontier of lower samadhi to perfect *nirbija samadhi*. This transitional state is known as *dharma megha samadhi*. Here the agitating and dulling forces of *rajas* and *tamas* no longer dominate the mind, which is infused with the inner luminosity of Consciousness. It is clear, peaceful, and flows effortlessly inward (Vyasa on sutra 1:47).

At this stage, practice is simply “being there.” It is practice only in the sense that we make an effortless effort to stay in this joyful state. The longer we stay there, the brighter, more stable, and more spontaneous our intuition becomes. In our day-to-day life we operate in the light of this intuition. We perform our actions without identifying ourselves with them or their results. Our thoughts, speech, and actions are no longer motivated by ignorance, I-am-ness, attachment, aversion, or fear. Our actions no longer yield karmic fruit (YS 4:26– 4:30). Every action—physical, verbal, and mental—carries the benevolence of the Inner Divinity. The quality of our actions is conducive to our meditation, and meditation enhances the quality of our actions. All our actions are good and auspicious. That is why this transitional state is called *dharma megha samadhi*, samadhi of the cloud of virtues.

Dharma megha merges into nirbija samadhi. Because this highest state is beyond mental cognition, it is called *asamprajnata*, samadhi beyond mental cognition. After reaching this state of realization, we are no longer part of the worldly cycle. We do not die an ordinary death, but are absorbed in the luminosity of the Divine Being, who resides in the lotus of our heart. We live neither in hell nor in heaven, but in the realm of freedom (Vyasa on sutra 3:26). Inspired by Divine Will, when the lotus blossoms again, we return. We are born with our memory and knowledge intact. We are not born to find life’s purpose— fulfillment and freedom—for we have already found it; rather, we reincarnate in response to Divine Will. While living the life of a mortal, deep within we remain aware of our immortal, self-luminous nature. We live in the world and perform our actions only as an extension of Divine Will. Our actions, including our spiritual practices, no longer bind us to the world governed by time, space, and the law of cause and effect. We are free from both worldly and spiritual karmic consequences (YS 4:29–4:33).

In the next three sutras, Patanjali describes three distinct practices, which, according to our tradition, are heavily dependent on the practice described here in sutra 1:36.