

Overview

Like last week's guide, this one has a variety of materials, including commentaries, contemplation questions like the ones we worked with during class, and study suggestions for those of you who want to use this class as an opportunity to go deeper into your personal exploration of the sutras, through study. All these questions and exercises can be done alone and are also powerful to do with a partner.

If you're doing it alone, and feel very busy, know that just spending a few minutes reading a sutra before or after meditation will be very fruitful. If you have more time, you might want to devote more time to looking at the words and considering how to apply them right now.

For those who have the time, we've included some contemplation exercises and questions that work with the meaning behind some of these sutras and let you apply them. The more time you spend on this kind of study, the more it can surprise you, change the nature of your inner dialogue, and give depth to your self-cultivation. As many of you know, study of a text like this is one of the time-honored methods for "curing" the painful tendencies of the mind.

So, I would ask each of you to read through this document and look at how working with one or more of these contemplations can add more depth to your practice of meditation and your comprehension of the lectures.

What's Up for This Week

This week, we're exploring Sutras III-4, 5, 10, 13, 16, 18, 23, 24. as well as some related practices.

We are exploring and discussing **samyama**—the practice for going deeper into any subject that puts together dharana, dhyana, and samadhi, and gives rise to prajna (direct intuitive knowledge) and mastery of whatever you focus on.

Please listen one more time to the Lecture for this week (Class 2 of *The Inner Path of the Yoga Sutra*), especially the sections on samyama and the siddhis, or supernatural powers.

Most of Book III is concerned with the sutras on applying samyama for the purpose of acquiring powers. That said, the sutras we are working with in this course all involve practices that directly enhance our sadhana rather than giving us distracting superpowers. (The capacity to penetrate to your own essence is itself a true superpower and is actually necessary for progress in sadhana!) That said, the subject of superpowers

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is fascinating, and the texts of yoga and tantra take for granted that yogic superpowers are innate in everyone and can be brought forth naturally through practice or grace.

We will be working with several of these over the next two weeks. I'd suggest that you read through the sutras on the handout, and if you have one of the commentaries I recommended, read through the Sutras up to Sutra 23. (The Prabhavananda/Isherwood commentary is less detailed but easier to read, as you've probably discovered.)

After reading through the sutras and the commentaries, there are one or two exercises to practice.

A handout with all these sutras is available on the Student Page under Resources, which includes several translations and transliterations. (My own commentaries are in the Class recording itself, and some are also included below as part of the study guide.) I'll include the transliterations of the first group of sutras and suggest that you refer to the document from the Student Page for reference.

My study guide (the present document!) contains questions and exercises for studying some of these sutras, including those we looked at during our first class, along with a word-by-word translation of the first two sutras. For each of these, I give a series of questions and exercises for contemplating them.

My suggestion is that you read through the whole document, then pick a sutra and focus your contemplation on it. I also invite you to create your own commentaries based on your contemplation and discussion (if you're working with a partner).

In working with sutras, start by re-listening to the class lecture's audio.

This week, the most important sutras to focus on are 4, 5, 10, 18, and 23. The other two sutras we discuss (III-6 and III-9) are more technical, and if you have limited time, you can skip them.

Meta-Process for Studying a Sutra

Here is a five-part process for working with a question, which is particularly useful for sutra study:

1. As you begin your study of each sutra, say it in Sanskrit three or four times. Then say it in English. This allows the energy within the sutra (and there is a lot of energy in each one!) to penetrate your mind and helps you experience it from a deeper, energetically transformative level.
2. Now, consider the meaning of each term or concept and/or of the sutra as a whole. How do you understand it? Read the commentaries you have on it, including the ones I offer in this document or in the books we've recommended.

Some of you might also want to consult other commentaries, such as Georg Feuerstein's in *The Yoga Tradition*, I.K. Taimni's in *The Science of Yoga*, or some of the commentaries by contemporary teachers.

3. Then, consider how you apply the sutra to your own experience. (There are questions below to help you with this!) These are very experience-oriented teachings. How is the sutra true for you (or not true!)? How have you understood this idea, and how does your experience reflect that? Write down your thoughts in your journal if so inclined, or discuss them with your partner if you're working with a partner.
4. Finally, close your eyes and spend a couple of minutes following the breath. Ask for grace to give you any deeper understanding.
5. Then open your eyes and write without censoring whatever phrases, insights, images, or experiences come up. This should be considered an insight from the deeper mind, the intuitive faculty (*Prajna*) that we discussed in our previous classes.

The Sutras

Sutra III.4

त्रयमेकत्र संयमः ॥४॥

trayam-ekatra samyamah ॥4॥

These three (trayam) taken together (ekatra) constitute samyama (samyamah).

Say the sutra over to yourself several times, feeling the energy in it and its resonance.

Commentary: When Patanjali speaks of samyama, he is describing the experience of total directed absorption when dharana/dhyana/samadhi have come together.

Remember, these are all different phases of the same process, which happens naturally as your meditation deepens. Samyama is the fourth stage of this process, which, when it comes online, can allow you to explore your own consciousness with great subtlety, but which can also be applied to get to the essence of any object.

Focus on an object (many are listed in this section of Book III) can be done with eyes open or by contemplating it internally with closed eyes. As you sink into your own consciousness in closed-eyed meditation, you begin to master the practice and can apply it open-eyed.

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Samyama occurs spontaneously for people who are so absorbed in a task that they are able to get into a flow state. Familiar to musicians and athletes, artists, and scientists who have developed the capacity to passionately engage in a task, the appearance of open-eyed samyama is a gift that comes with full absorption and can lead to extraordinary creative breakthroughs or inspired performance. Few people can call on it regularly unless they are yogis. Most people who do work where inspiration is important to remember moments when they have been intuitively guided to insights beyond what their ordinary body/mind can normally come up with.

Question: Have you had the experience of becoming so absorbed in a task that you felt spontaneous guidance, insight, or action arising? What were the circumstances? Was it accompanied by a feeling of awe and certainty?

Question: Ask to be shown how you experience samyama in meditation or contemplation. Then write about your experience of samyama and how an experience of samyama helps you understand and experience your inner world more deeply. Realize as you do this that there are levels of samyama. Your absorption may not be equal to that of an enlightened being, but you do experience samyama, and the more you can identify it, the easier it is for you to drop into it.

Sutra III.5

तज्जयात्प्रज्ञालोकः ॥ ५ ॥

tajjyāt prajñālokaḥ ॥ 5 ॥

Tajjayaat (by mastering it) prajnaa (the higher consciousness) lokaha (realm or plane of existence; light)

By mastering (samyama) comes prajnaa—higher knowledge experienced as illumination.

Commentary: Prajna is higher consciousness, the higher mind, the interface between the ordinary chitta and the direct light that comes as Self-realization. It is the substratum of the ordinary mind, which emerges as thoughts die down, and we sink inward. It is the inner source where you ‘know’ intuitively what is true; prajna is the zone where insight is true and not colored by your conditioning. (However, the ordinary ego-mind can seize those insights and distort them, especially if you have been conditioned by a teaching that is only partially true. For instance, someone might have an insight—true—that the government or the administration might be concealing some facts from the public. But then, your conditioning, or reading online conspiracy sites, might hijack that intuitive insight with a narrative. Or, to give an example from spiritual practice: when the light of

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prajna dawns, we can be filled with numinous realization, like “There is nothing but love,” “God is inside me,” “Light is pouring into me.” If we are wedded to a particular interpretation, especially one based on a religious indoctrination, we will interpret it according to our religion. In short, what to a Christian might be seen as the light of Christ, might be seen by a Hindu devotee as the blessing of Krishna, or by a Shakta as the light of Goddess. A non-dualist might see it as the light of the Atman, the inner Self. In fact, it is a natural aspect of your own higher consciousness, the inner realm where wisdom from the deepest realms of consciousness becomes available, often as an instant download of deeper awareness.

Question: Recall a time when you have received wisdom from the zone of prajna. How did it arrive? Consider the quality of such a download. Did it have words? A visual? Was it a pure feeling or realization? Did you have a feeling of truth about it, or were you skeptical?

Question: Do you have ways of cultivating this kind of higher awareness? Are there signs that you are receiving information that is truly intuitive? What is the difference for you between genuine prajna and a ‘hunch’?

Sutra III.6

तस्य भूमिषु विनियोगः ॥ ६ ॥

tasya bhūmiṣu viniyogaḥ ॥ 6 ॥

It is (samyama’s) application by stages

Tasya (It) bhoomishu (stages) viniyoga (application, how to use it)

This sutra can be read on several levels. First, meditative absorption in an object can happen at the gross level, in which only the physical properties of an object (meaning, its cellular and molecular structure, its dan, et) are examined. For instance, a tennis player in the ‘Zone’ may lose all awareness of anything except the ball and could be said to be in a samyama state in relationship to the ball. Much of the research we do in the ordinary physical world—science, medicine, and other modalities—simply involves contemplation on the physical properties of an object. Other methods, like psychology or different kinds of art or philosophy, contemplate subtler qualities and attempt to feel into the underlying conditions that make the physical, or that cannot be perceived on the surface. Yogic samyama aims at discovering the substratum of the object in the mind—understanding it on the subtlest possible level. For instance, samyama on the rising and falling of thoughts might lead to a recognition of the deepest substratum of

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the mind and contemplating that could help you realize that the mind emerges from the vast Big Mind of Shakti or Prakriti.

Practicing samyama happens in stages, as the mind focuses and becomes more subtle. Generally, you segue from the focus on something concrete (for example, the soft palate) to a subtler, more energetic experience of the focal point (for example, as the mind follows the breath through the soft palate and into the center of the head, the soft palate begins to dissolve into sensation which dissolves into energy, even though you may still be aware of the physical form. Perhaps a light appears, or a feeling state, or a sense of expansion. Eventually, it may dissolve into the feeling of relaxation and peace, focused on this center. Eventually, there is only the state of pure being or I-ness. We covered this last week in the discussion on the four types of samadhi, Vitarka (meditation on a concrete object like the soft palate), vichara (meditation on a subtle object like a chakra or an inner light), Ananda (meditation on peace and bliss) and Asmita (meditation on the sense of I, or sense of being). Each is subtler than the last, and as we sink deeper in meditation, we pass through these states. Internal samyama is practiced at each of these levels, as the quality of the chitta transforms according to the intensity of absorption. This is one reason why it usually takes some time and practice to sink into the deepest level. However, we can learn to monitor our meditation by noting the change that occurs in the feeling of density or transparency that we experience as these shifts take place.

Yoga philosophy would describe the underlying shifts as movements in the gunas as they play in the mind. The thought filled outgoing mind is rajasic in quality, while the tamasic state is stuporous and sleepy. In dhyana and samadhi, the transparent clarity of sattva emerges. When we meditate seriously, the quality of the chitta actually transforms from the relatively dense and distracted state we normally occupy to a softer and clearer state where thoughts dissolve, and the mind field is experienced as an undulating field of energy within which thoughts and images rise and fall. Internalized states of consciousness are experienced as softer, subtler, quieter, more blissful than outgoing states, and have more power.

Question: Next time you sit, notice how the mind field softens and literally changes its quality as you go deeper. Let yourself experience your meditation as an internal process that actually transforms the quality of the mind.

Exercise: Sit quietly, close your eyes, and be the observer of the mind. Notice how the mind is dynamic, always throbbing, moving, even if no thoughts are coming up. Can you identify the gunas as they play in the mind? What does rajas look like in your mind? How about tamas? Can you tell the difference between the stuporous quiet of tamas and

the peaceful one-pointed flow that is sattvic? Without pushing thoughts away, what can you do to quiet the rajasic movement of outgoing thoughts? How can you wake the mind up from a tamasic state? Consider how you normally work with an exploding thought-filled mind or a sleepy one. What works for cultivating sattva? Experiment with this and journal about it or discuss it with your partner. (This kind of exercise helps develop an awake witness who can watch the mind. The trick is not to be critical of your mind, but to observe the movement and play of the gunas.)

Sutra III.9

व्युत्थाननिरोधसंस्कारयोरभिभवप्रादुर्भावौ निरोधक्षणचित्तान्वयो निरोधपरिणामः ॥९॥

**vyutthāna-nirodha-saṁskārayoḥ abhibhava-prādurbhāvau nirodhakṣaṇa
cittānvayo nirodha-pariṇāmaḥ ॥9॥**

**Vyutthaana (outgoing) nirodha (suppression or restraint) saṁskārayor
(pertaining to the subliminal impressions in the mind) abhibhava
(overpowering, disappearance)-praadurbhaavau (manifestation, appearance)
nirodha-kṣhana (instant of stillness) chitta-anvayo (connected to mind)
nirodha (suppression)-parinaamah (evolution, transformation)**

The state of restraint, nirodha, is when there is disappearance of outgoing (distracting) saṁskaras and the appearance of restraining saṁskaras. These emerge in the mind at the moment of restraint.

Because the mind is always flowing, never completely still, something is always emerging within the ocean of the chitta, just as swells appear in the physical ocean. So, what we call stillness, restraint, or nirodha is actually the moment when the indrawn or restraining saṁskaras overpower the outgoing worldly ones. A classic example is a meditation described in the Vijnana Bhairava, which some of you have practiced with me. This is the meditation on the space between breaths. As you meditate on the flow of breath, if you focus on the tiny pause between inhalation and exhalation, that pause lengthens and reveals itself to be thought-free. This thought-free experience of the pause is called ‘Madhya’ or center, meaning the middle point between breaths, or the space between one thought and another. This is a natural samadhi state—every time you immerse yourself in the quiet space between inhalation and exhalation, you are in samadhi! When the breath rises again, saṁskaras are also activated.

The same process occurs whenever the mind starts to turn inside, so the mediation experience always includes an inner tussle between the restrained saṁskaras and the saṁskaras that want to pull you out of meditation. In all the meditations we are doing in

this class, you can learn to recognize the movement from dharana into dhyana when either your focus on the object becomes continuous or when there is a shift of state where you sense yourself having dropped into a softer, less differentiated state in which thoughts become less and less.

Sutra III.10

तस्य प्रशान्तवाहिता संस्कारात् ॥ १० ॥

tasya prasānta-vāhitā saṁskārat ॥ 10 ॥

The mind's peaceful flow is due to samskaras.

Meditation lasts as long as the peaceful samskaras are not overcome by the outgoing samskaras. This may happen several times during a meditation session. We can notice this happening and counteract it by returning to the one thought or image we are focusing on. Remember, the mind is always flowing, changing. What makes dhyana and samadhi is the fact that the flow of samskaras begins to be only of peaceful ones, the outgoing or distracting ones being restrained. This happens naturally as the mind focuses and sinks inside. This is what is described in Sutra 11, which says that samadhi is the elimination of the mind's wandering and the rise of one-pointedness. Sutra 12 explains that what this means is that the same samskara keeps coming up in an unbroken flow. So, the mind is never really fixed or restrained. We call it 'fixed' when every samskara (thought, feeling, or image) that arises is the same as the one before.

In our overall life and long-term practice, as we have been saying in class, the more you cultivate indrawn samskaras by regular meditation, the more easily the mind becomes stable in meditation and starts to flow inside.

Question: Journal or discuss with your partner you understand this process. How do you experience peaceful samskaras becoming stronger and overcoming outgoing samskaras? (The sinking inward that occurs during mantra practice is a good example!)

Exercise: Close your eyes and look into your mind. Be the observer and notice the flow of the mind. Can you direct it? Notice how some of the mind's flows take you into more painful and some into more expanded states. Pay attention to this for long enough to sense the samskaras that might be at play in both types of experience.

Sutra III.13

एतेन भूतेन्द्रियेषु धर्मलक्षणावस्थापरिणामा व्याख्याताः ॥ १३ ॥

etena bhūtendriyeṣu dharma-lakṣaṇa-avasthā pariṇāmā vyākhyātāḥ ॥ 13 ॥

In this way (i.e., in the previous three sutras) the change in the characteristics, state, and conditions of objects and senses is explained.

This is quite a technical sutra, which needs the commentary to be understood. I've given you a brief commentary on it, based on Vyasa's very elaborate traditional commentary on this verse.

The point of this verse is to point out one thing: that all the changes in the nature, characteristics, and states of everything in the world are due to the changes in the gunas and that the substratum of all of it is the subtle field called prakriti. The three core words here are 'dharma', 'lakshana', and 'avastha'. The word 'dharma' means the nature and purpose of the object. (remember, in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes 'your own dharma' as that which suits your nature). For instance, a clay pot has a particular nature and purpose, which is to act as a vessel. The word 'lakshanaa' means 'sign'—that is, the qualities that make it recognizable as what it is, such as its shape and color. (Note: the goddess Lakshmi's name comes from the word 'lakshana'—we could say that her form is the sign or recognizable form of auspiciousness!) The word avastha means state and refers to time; the pot may exist now, have existed in the past, or may potentially exist in the future. Patanjali teaches that these three things define any object—it has a purpose and function, it is recognizable by certain qualities, and it changes according to time. However, every object has a substratum. The substratum of the pot in all its forms is clay. If the pot is broken, the shards of it are still clay. If the pot is being created by the potter, it is clay, even though the clay is not in its final form. The substratum of a gold bracelet is gold. In the same way, a woman may sometimes fulfill the function of mothering, at other times function as a friend, at other times in a professional role. These change during different moments in time, but the substratum of all these roles is the same woman. The different roles are always potential in her.

These analogies are meant to point to the fact that everything rests on its own substratum (clay for the pot, gold for a bracelet). But the true substratum of whatever exists in any form, now, or in the past, or in a potential form in the future, is Prakriti. Prakriti is the source of all objects, including the mind itself. That means, if you can get subtle and focused enough to merge your mind in Prakriti, you have the power to create transformations both in the inner and outer world because Prakriti is the source of it all.

This brings us to Sutra 14:

Sutra III.14

शान्तोदिताव्यपदेश्यधर्मानुपाती धर्मो ॥ १४ ॥

śān-odita-avyapadeśya-dharmānupātī dharmī ॥ 14 ॥

The substratum (dharmin) is that which underpins past, present, and future (shaanta, uditā, and avapadeshya)

Dharmin, in this sutra, is that which produces dharmas. It is the substratum from which specific things evolve. So, in the example of the clay pot, though the clay is the substratum (dharmin) of the pot, the clay itself comes from something more primordial—prakriti or shakti.

Below, in quotes, is a passage from Edwin Bryant's commentary in his book *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. I've added a few commentaries of my own.

“The gross physical elemental makeup and qualities of any object, in reality, are essentially a transformation of the tanmatras (the subtle of form (see-ability)), sound (hearability), touch (touchability), etc., which in turn are a transformation of the gunas. {Cosmically, the tanmatras are the precursors to the physical world. In our spiritual journey, they are experienced when we experience forms and sounds in meditation and dreams.) They are experienced by buddhi and ahamkara—the awake knower and the self-creating ego, which are aspects of chitta. Buddhi and ahamkara (chitta) are the immediate substratum of the tanmatras.

By focus, an accomplished yogi can penetrate the subtle substructure of any material object of meditation, experiencing it (when in samadhi) as raw tanmatra energy that transcends the limits of time and space. In other words, we can experience external reality in its essential form, as pure energy. This is an experience of the object, not just a perception, since in this state, distinctions like subject, object, and process of knowing dissolve, and the object alone is seen.

The yogi can penetrate even this tanmatra substratum and experience the subtler aspects of herself, the ahamkara and the buddhi, and finally of its ultimate nature as prakriti. (Some of you have experienced these aspects of your subtle self in meditation.)

The yogi can experience the entirety of prakriti.

The practices in the Yoga Sutra culminate in omniscience”, as we'll see in III.49. The chitta, in samadhi, can expand to permeate all of prakriti, which allows him or her to know directly whatever is within prakriti.”

To summarize:

Here's the point of these sutras: The reason that we can develop siddhis, superpowers, is that as outgoing samskaras drop away and the mind flows peacefully inward, our limited mind merges into prakriti (Shakti!) Once we are in touch with prakriti, we are in touch with the essence and source of all change and all forms of manifest reality. This is why through samyama, we can develop special powers and accomplishments. ALL CHANGE AND ALL POWER ARISES FROM OUR CONTACT WITH THE SUBSTRATUM—the underlying reality, Prakriti, of which our own expanded mind is an aspect. Thus, when the mind is in touch with the source, it can discover anything. Learn anything and change anything. Obviously, this is most possible for highly accomplished yogis!

Question: Since you began meditating and touching into the deeper substratum of the mind, have you gained abilities that were beyond what you believe you are capable of? Maybe you intuited truths you normally didn't know or were able to heal someone or change a situation through prayer. Consider the circumstances where the experience of enhanced power occurred. Do you have an intuition of why it happened? Where were you? What were you doing? What state of mind were you in? Were you more focused or engaged than usual? See if you can discern patterns in your experience of unusual abilities, even very subtle ones, coming online for you. What do they have to do with your meditation practice?

Exercise: Walk around today practicing a 'God's eye view.' In other words, look at the objects around you with the understanding that beneath the surface, they are made of swirling particles of energy that permeates everything and is filled with sacred intelligence, creativity, and love. This is one way of reminding yourself of the energetic substratum behind all of our experience-- becoming aware of Prakriti (or, as we tantrikas would say, becoming aware of Shakti, which is the substratum of Prakriti!

Journal about this and discuss it with your study partner.

Sutra III.18

संस्कारसाक्षत्करणात् पूर्वजातिज्ञानम् ॥ १८ ॥

samskāra-sākṣātkaraṇāt pūrva-jāti-jñānam ॥ 18 ॥

By bringing previous samskaaras into direct perception comes the knowledge of previous births.

Our thoughts and actions create samskaras, the deep 'wounds' in consciousness that determine our memories, which are the cause of the afflictions (ignorance, egotism,

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attachment, aversion, fear of death) that cause our suffering. Samskaras are recorded in their original context. It is possible to reactivate them as memories, which carry with them the details of previous births. This is how a yogi can intuit a past life through examining samskaras.

Exercise: (to be done with your journal and discussed with your partner)

If you have a partner whom you deeply trust, you might want to let your partner guide the process, ask the questions, and let you write down the answers in your journal. Then, afterward, you can share what came up.

However, in general, I recommend doing the process by yourself, journaling extensively, and sharing it when you and your partner meet.

1. Sit quietly with your journal. Light a candle.
2. Write down some of your major samskaras.

Not just stray thoughts, but deep-seated ideas like “I must excel” or “I’m unlovable” or “People are untrustworthy” or “I’m intelligent” or “I have to be good, or people won’t like me.”

These deep samskaras are usually experienced as a gestalt of feeling-states, bedrock assumptions about reality and yourself, and thoughts that arise from the samskara. It is they that determine your characteristic patterns of thought and behavior and influence every part of your life.

3. Choose one to work with.
4. Ask yourself:
 - “How old was I when I first began feeling or thinking this way? (Often, in childhood, the samskara is particularly strong)
 - Did anyone teach me to feel this way?
 - Did this samskaric pattern seem to arise in reaction to circumstances?
 - How do I feel when I’m in touch with this samskara? When it overwhelms me? Who am I at such moments?
 - Write down the answers that come up. These are how the samskara manifests in your present lifetime. Of course, there are many other manifestations of this core samskara
5. Now, feel deeply into the felt sense of the samskara. Turn it into a sentence and feel into the energy of the sentence.
 - Ask, “When and in what lifetime did I first begin to experience this samskara?” You are asking for an insight. The insight may come as an image, or a feeling, or

a voice.

- If appropriate, ask some further questions such as “What country and time period are you in?” If possible, consider the clothes you’re wearing, the place you are in. What is it? What do these things tell you?
- Who are you? What do you sense about your personhood in that life? Meaning, what do you sense was your gender, your socioeconomic circumstances, your connections to others, your work?
- What happened to create the samskara you are contemplating? What were the circumstances? What did you do? What did others do? What are your feelings around it?

You can also do this contemplation about a significant relationship, as with a parent, a child, a romantic partner.

If what you are working with is finding the source of a painful or negative samskara, be aware that once you have discovered it, you can actually transform the memory, if memory is involved, or simply reframe the samskara right there at the source. For instance, if the feeling is ‘I am unlovable,’ this is the place to transform the samskara. See if you can find a sentence that kindles the feeling of your fundamental lovability and hold it while you are in the meditative state around the samskara.

Though the contemplation of reframing the memory may seem like fantasy, it works on a deep level and changes things in extraordinary ways. The power of reframing comes from the level you are able to reach in meditation—from the power of your samyama!

Discuss this and the insights you drew from it in this life with your partner.

Sutra III.23

मैत्र्यादिषु बलानि ॥ २३ ॥

maitry-adiṣu balāni ॥ 23 ॥

By (samyama) on friendliness and such things, strengths are acquired.

This sutra, as we saw in class, references the four noble qualities that a yogi is asked to cultivate: Friendliness towards the happy, compassion towards the suffering, joy for those who are experiencing spiritual success, and equanimity towards the wicked. We covered this sutra in Book I.

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Samyama on these practices can transform the mind, ultimately eliminating aversion and hatred, so that your mind and heart become so permeated with these qualities that they flow out from you and affect others. The power in samyama, remember, is its ability to draw out innate abilities, and the power of friendliness and compassion and joy are innate in your chitta, innate in prakriti, and of course, profoundly helpful not only to you but to other people in your life. There's an old Japanese movie about a group of very poor people living together in a room at the end of the second world war. They hate each other. They quarrel constantly. Then a young monk comes to stay there. He is open and friendly to everyone, but he spends most of his time sweeping the floor of the room. Over time, everyone living there begins to be affected by his joyful equanimity. They stop fighting, they start helping each other, and in the end, they have become a kind of loving family.

You can do this samyama on any one of the four positive qualities or on any positive quality you want to bring in. (The following sutra, III.24, says that by meditating on the strength of an elephant, you can increase your strength. There are qi gong meditations where you contemplate the sun and bringing healing light into the body—the same principle. Doing samyama on desirable qualities is part of every religious practice. As one Christian writer says, “Make progress in goodness not by trying to combat your flaws but by meditating on virtue.”

As we did in class, we'll do samyama on compassion. One of the participants in this sangam wrote me privately this week to ask about an experience she had of feeling such empathy towards the illness of one of her family members that she inadvertently drew the illness out of the other person's body. They were healed instantly. She, however, was sick for two weeks. She wrote to ask how to keep this from happening.

As we said in class, the way to help people who are suffering without hurting yourself is by focusing on compassion rather than empathy. Empathy is connected to emotions, and like all emotions, affects the body. Empathy arises when you personally identify with another person's pain. Most of us believe that to help someone, we need to feel their pain. But the yogis would say that no, quite the contrary.

The way you are able to help people who are suffering without hurting yourself is by focusing on compassion rather than empathy. Empathy is an emotion, and it arises when you personally identify with another person's pain. Most of us believe that to help someone, we need to feel their pain. But the yogis would say that no, quite the contrary. What we need to feel is compassion.

In class, I shared a process that I have found helps generate compassion by focusing on the outer heart, the zone that extends outward from about 12 inches from the body. In this zone, you are outside what Eckhart Tolle describes as the ‘pain body’, which is the web of accumulated painful samskaras that, when triggered, give you the experience of emotional pain. Normally, when we come across a suffering person, it calls us into our pain body. By stationing yourself in this region of the outer heart, you can hold space for the suffering person without triggering your own pain.

Meditation on Compassion

1. Begin by stationing your attention about 12 inches in front of the body, opposite the heart center. Let yourself settle into the space, inhaling with the feeling that your breath is entering the body from this area in front of the heart. As you exhale, feel that the breath dissolves into that space.
2. As you follow the breath, become more and more present in the space itself, outside the heart.
3. You are in your subtle body, in the heart center, but outside the physical body and its emotions.
4. Breathing in and out of the outer heart, begin to contemplate the quality of compassion.

Compassion is a feeling of immense openness, where you allow your consciousness to hold the totality of another person’s energy, including their pain, but with the sense that it is being held in spacious Presence. You might want to bring in some examples of compassion—the expression in the eyes of the Dalai Lama or remember the basic tenderness that comes when you remember that all beings want to be happy. Notice when that tenderness becomes the sharp edge of pity, which is painful, and which also keeps you at a distance from the other person.

Feel how compassion contains a very quiet, loving energy, a feeling of equality with the other, and a desire to help that doesn’t contain any striving to fix things immediately.

5. As you breathe into the outer heart space, use your imagination to contemplate, “How does contemplation walk? How does compassion talk to people? How does compassion eat?” This is bhavana, creative contemplation, meaning that you are using thoughts to kindle the feeling. But this practice allows you to keep your mind moving in the subtle feeling state of compassion so that you can become more and more present with it. Imagine yourself filled with the quality of compassion.
6. Now, choose a person whom you feel connected to, who is suffering in some way.

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7. Turn your attention fully to that person. If you like, you can imagine them sitting in front of you.
8. Find the feeling of compassion in yourself. (Not pity, which is more of a sharp feeling that involves an unspoken, “Thank god this isn’t me.”)
9. Imagine that feeling becoming a cloud of loving energy that surrounds you and the person (or persons) you are focusing on. If it feels appropriate, use words, as in Metta Meditation practice:

“May this person’s health improve.” “May they find satisfying work soon.” “May their sadness (or worry, fear of the future, grief) be healed.” “May they find the path through their sorrows.” “May they recover.”
10. Notice feelings of grief, anger, superiority, judgment—and practice compassion for yourself for being human.
11. Spend some time being present with the feeling.
12. Expand your compassion to another person if you like. Or turn it to yourself.
13. Notice the emotions that arise—sorrow, fear, frustration, resentment, superiority, and consciously hold space for them. Include them in your compassion.

What is happening as you do this is that you are seeding the samskaras of compassion inside your being, and over time, as many of you have experienced, it will permeate your mind such that you’ll be able to send loving thoughts even to people you don’t normally sympathize with. Any quality you want to cultivate gets stronger when you absorb yourself in contemplating it!

Do this practice with your partner if possible, perhaps even using your partner as the object of compassion. (It is truly an amazing way to deepen your connection to that person!)

Open-Eyed Practices

1. Becoming Compassion

During the day, ask yourself, “How would compassion speak to this person? How would compassion walk? How would compassion do this task? As you do, drop inside, and feel yourself walking or speaking, or doing something AS compassion. This is a form of samyama, in which you let yourself embody compassion—literally!

2. My mind is the divine mind. My senses are divine senses. I see as the divine sees.

This is a core practice of Enlightened Awareness from the tantric tradition of Non-Dual Shaivism. As Michelle shared on the discussion list, it is also a practice of several religious traditions.

Michelle's share from her morning reading from mystic Father Richard Rohr:

German theologian Dorothee Sölle (1929–2003) describes how seeing with God's eyes, hearing with God's ears, and acting with God's passion for justice is a truly liberating experience that benefits the entire community. Sölle writes:

In the sense of theology that liberates, the soul that is united with God sees the world with God's eyes. That soul, like God, sees what otherwise is rendered invisible and irrelevant. It hears the whimpering of starving children and does not let itself be diverted from real misery, becoming one with God in perceiving and understanding as well as in acting. For people in the slums, redemption does not consist of some great and far-removed actor ending the misery of the oppressed. Rather, incoming so very close, that far-near one acts in and through those who have become one with that actor. In liberating movements, the mystical eye sees God at work: seeing, hearing, acting, even in forms that are utterly secular. In the contingency of literacy programs or collaboration in building a school, God's action is manifest. It is a mysticism of wide-open eyes. . . .

What happens really in the soul's union with God in terms of liberation and of healing? It is an exercise in seeing how God sees, the perception of what is little and unimportant; it is listening to the cry of God's children who are in slavery in Egypt. God calls upon the soul to give away its own ears and eyes and to let itself be given those of God. Only they who hear with other ears can speak with the mouth of God. God sees what elsewhere is rendered invisible and is of no relevance. Who other than God sees the poor and hears their cry? To use "God's senses" does not mean simply turning inward but becoming free for a different way of living life: See what God sees! Hear what God hears! Laugh where God laughs! Cry where God cries!

Allowing God to fully inhabit our senses does not mean we close ourselves off from the world but open ourselves more fully to it. We are free to be fully ourselves but not to exist only for ourselves. We are free to become Christ in the world to the same extent that we recognize the Christ in others, especially the last and the least.