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The illumined mind, lit by the power of unshakeable discernment (*viveka khayati*), recognizes the limitations and even the sorrow that inevitability unfolds when you are completely immersed in *prakriti*—the world of change and matter. Vyasa's commentary tells us that, "all experience [within *prakriti*] is pain to a person endowed with discernment."

Enmeshed in *prakriti*, the pain that you encounter adds to your *karmashaya*, further building your afflictions. The recognition of your suffering, however, can be a blessing because it can compel you to seek right knowledge (*vidya*). If you search into the nature of your suffering and approach understanding it in a balanced way, this can become the spark by which you search for a world beyond the influence of the *gunas*. This is the basis of free will and the crux of why Patanjali tells us that "future pain can be avoided (*"heya"*)"—*sutra* 2:16.

Consider your innate ability to "avoid future pain" for a moment, because it may be as compelling and relevant as any subject in the *Yoga Sutra*.

This is the perfect opportunity to step away from the teachings of the *Yoga Sutra* and dive into the process of *vichara*, one of the most powerful and practical tools for improving the quality of your life. Developed by Yogarupa with the blessing of his teacher, it is based on the wisdom of both yoga and *Vedanta*. In this context, *vichara* means to "self-reflect," "to examine," "to discriminate." The process of *vichara* that we use in ParaYoga® is intended to dismantle unconscious patterns and to transform old non-constructive *vasanas* into *vasanas* that lead to freedom and fulfillment.



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The methodology of *vichara* is based on these principles:

- desire is the seed of every thought and every action
- suffering (of all kinds—physical, mental, emotional, existential) is the result of unfulfilled desire
- every thought and feeling, at the root of suffering, can be traced to a desire

The process of *vichara* requires learning to isolate a particular emotion or thought you wish to transform and tracing it to its root desire. This is the desire that is the source of the negative or undesirable feeling or thought. For example, if you are angry at a co-worker, your process begins with reflecting on, and gradually discerning the unfulfilled desire that is the cause of those feelings you are experiencing about your co-worker, or for that matter, about yourself. The vital element in the process is learning to turn your attention (or blame) away from the person or circumstance that appears to be the cause of your suffering and instead, turning your attention to what is the cause—your unfulfilled desire, which may or may not be a positive or helpful desire. Remember: your feelings and thoughts are only symptoms; your desires (or *vasanas*) are the cause.

Throughout the process of *vichara* you will be relying on and sharpening your *buddhi*. Doing *vichara* consistently (at least once a month) will go a long way to attenuate those tendencies that compel you to act unconsciously. This will help you to realize that you can choose your future; it will help you develop more faith in yourself; it will empower you to take more positive action in your life.

In the early stages of doing *vichara*, it can be hard to find or isolate the *vasana* that is the cause of your feelings or negative emotions. In time, as your mind becomes clearer and more skilled in



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the exercise, you will become more capable of discerning those desires that are the root of your emotions or non-constructive thoughts.

Hint: invariably, root desires are existential in nature. Often they are woven into your deepest fears, false perceptions (either about yourself, the universe or God) or your core beliefs and attachments. The more often you do the practice, the more you will find yourself being less ruled by old patterns and instead being guided from your inner source of wisdom. *Vichara* empowers you to stop blaming the universe, your family, your karma, your relationships and even your fate, for your difficulties. You accept that they are here to teach you, to help you navigate the world skillfully and then ultimately, to help you achieve authentic self- understanding. In addition to helping you break old patterns, *vichara* will lighten your load of unconstructive *vasanas*, which will then set the stage for your mind to spin less when you are meditating.

Once you identify the particular *vasana* that is causing you pain, you discern how best to respond to it: do you simply do the work to let it go or, upon seeing it clearly, do you seek to understand how you need to “adjust” yourself and/or your life?

It is possible to go one step deeper by tracing the desire back to the original impression (*samskara*) that was the source of the desire. This additional step is not easily accessed; it requires a great deal of discernment and highly refined *buddhi*.



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Vichara's critical steps:

- find the root desire
- discern the nature of the desire—is it related to the lower mind or does it arise from your higher self—both lower mind (ego, memory and intellect) and higher mind (soul) compel you to act; both have desires
- use *buddhi* to decide how best to relate to the emotions/feelings now that you understand their origin; do you adjust (surrender your attachment to them) or do you act (according to the message of your higher self)?

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Vichara means to reflect, investigate, inquire. The following process of vichara was developed by Yogarupa Rod Stryker, applying core philosophical teachings of the yoga tradition, to facilitate transformation of unconscious patterning.

Vichara is a profound and potentially life-changing process of self-reflection. It is a vital tool to develop profound insight and wisdom, and can be applied whenever you are experiencing strong non-constructive emotions or thoughts. It can also be engaged, using any persistent thought (e.g. specific recurring thoughts) that arise during meditation practice.

It is recommended that you engage this process after meditation, when you are calm and reflective, so that you can access and take full advantage of your intuitive/discriminative mind.

Step 1

- Determine the specific emotion or thought you wish to reflect upon. Next, inquire into the root desire that is the source of that thought or emotion. The key is to discover the root desire by tracing more superficial desires to their cause. In most cases, the root desires, which are the source of all of your strong emotions and/or thoughts, are existential in nature: deep, essential and at the very core of your misunderstanding of yourself and your beliefs—*avidya*.

Remember: the source of every thought (and emotion) is a desire—often an unfulfilled one. This is true for every thought. For instance, even tangential distraction or “thoughts” about sensations can be traced to desire.

Step 2

- Once you have determined the root desire, inquire as to whether or not that desire is born from the lower mind (*chitta*, *manas* or *ahamkara*) or from your higher self—*jivatman/purusha*.



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Both lower and higher mind compel you to act, to think and to speak, because both generate desires. It is a vital element in both your healing and empowerment to be able to make this distinction between higher or lower mind desires.

Step 3

- Determine (using *buddhi*) how to best respond to this less than constructive thought or emotion. Do you “adjust” (e.g. modify or shift your expectations) or, upon recognizing that your suffering is a symptom of failing to respond to your higher self’s desires, do you to take new actions—or do you do a combination of both?

Step 4

- For those wanting to go deeper with the process: you can trace the desire back to the original *samskara*, experience or impression that first created it. This is a very deep application of self-reflection, requiring a high degree of discriminative awareness—a sharpened *buddhi*—and may not be accessible, at least in the earlier stages of practice.

In time and with the regular practice of inquiring into the root causes of your thoughts and feelings, unconscious tendencies become more and more conscious. As a result, old, non-constructive patterns become less and less potent—like burned seeds.

This makes it possible for you to not only suffer less, it also empowers you to be able to choose if or how much you will suffer at any given time. It will help you develop more faith in yourself and self-understanding; it will lead you to take more positive action in your life, and thus improve your overall quality of life.



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In *sutra* 2:17, Patanjali is referencing the union of consciousness and matter with a mind that has lost pristine clarity. In *sutra* 2:18, he tells us why this objective world exists, what it is made of, what its intrinsic qualities and attributes are and why we are here.

Consciousness wishes to experience its infinite joy and boundless freedom. In response to this intrinsic and spontaneous intention, nature is moved. Her three intrinsic attributes, *sattva*/light, *rajas*/action and *tamas*/stability/darkness, are spontaneously awakened. This spontaneous intention brings consciousness and nature together in their most pristine state. Such consciousness/*purusha* has access to nature's infinite bounty—limitless joy and freedom. Nature is moved in response to consciousness' desire to experience its infinite joy and freedom, and thus, the unmanifest becomes manifest, creating an environment where that consciousness can find fulfillment and freedom. The phrase that describes this is: *bhogapavargartham*, which means the objective world has a twofold purpose: providing fulfillment and ultimate freedom.

For a vigilant and self-motivated person, this world is not at all painful. This is a field of enjoyment. On the other hand, when consciousness becomes identified with the body, mind and senses so completely that it forgets that it is an integral part of the natural world, the world becomes a source of pain. On the other hand, a person endowed with the power of discrimination enjoys this objective world (*bhoga*) and at the same time, remains free from what he or she enjoys (*apavarga*). The next *sutra* describes how nature's three forces interact with each other and bring forth the objective world.



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Sutra 2:19 covers the entire range of creation. These are very subtle and complex concepts that cover the full range of the origin of the universe according to *Samkhya* philosophy. In short, effect is cause concealed and cause is effect revealed. Cause is itself transformed into effect.

The critical point is that some experiences cannot be traced to what is happening or has happened outside of us. They have a deeper source—*buddhi* (i.e. this is why *vichara* is so vital a practice—you must look inward for some of the causes of your suffering). *Buddhi* is infused with the pure knowledge of *purusha* (consciousness) and provides access to *Ishwara*, but it is also bound by nature's three intrinsic forces of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, that pervade all.

Buddhi is also "where *prakriti* assembles the unique recipe for *purusha*'s fulfillment and freedom. *Purusha* finds fulfillment by witnessing the patterns assembled by *prakriti*. But, only *buddhi* can see that. Fulfillment as well as freedom is achieved in gaining access to the field of *buddhi* and recognizing *purusha* and *prakriti* distinctively" (Pandit Rajmani Tigunait).



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The meditation practice described in *sutra* 1:36, Cave of the Heart, is rooted in the concept of *gyotismati*—complete absorption in the inner-luminosity of the heart (or soul) that is beyond all sorrow. Patanjali provides little in the way of detail, but it is clear that the practice is referenced from two texts that pre-date the sutras, the *Shvetashvatara* and *Katha* Upanishads. Both texts designate this light in the heart as the ultimate Reality. This light is the equivalent of *Ishwara*, the all-pervading, presiding force that is the source of all teachers and traditions. *Ishwara* is the fully expanded, most essential God that exists prior to any concepts or qualities that can be assigned to God.

The Cave of the Heart Meditation is one of the closed practices of ParaYoga®. Please, never teach it in open classes and only teach it after you have done it at least one hundred times. Seriously. Even one hundred times is not that much. It would only require you to do the practice everyday for little more than three months. The practice is not suitable for many students.

Depending on where one is with their practice and their associations or beliefs related to divinity, one may or may not feel comfortable doing the practice of offering love and devotion to the Divine. It could actually trigger strong resistance. While the practice helps endow one with the benefits of devotion (*bhakti*), it requires that one have a certain amount of comfort with *bhakti*, which in likelihood you will gain if you continue to do the practices presented thus far in the courses.

In the context of *sutra* 1:36, *Ishwara* refers to the luminous presence that is the seeing power of the seer. It is identical to your own essence. Therefore, although the technique is devotional



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in nature, its aim is to lead to the realization of the immortal light of pure intelligence that exists in your heart, as you.

There are other heart-centered practices that are more preliminary (i.e. the heart *kriya*), that nurture and help heal the heart and our emotions. The Cave of the Heart meditation, drawn from the revelations of the ancient tradition, is the ultimate cornerstone of the sutras, guiding one into the light of the heart, the seat of *Ishwara* and to the awareness of that in which no darkness (or pain) can enter. You access this light and ultimately become absorbed in it by increasing your surrender to it.

When the time is right, the practice is as meaningful and profound as any meditation practice. The founding principle of the Cave of the Heart Meditation is that the light of consciousness is identical to *Ishwara*, the Absolute.

This light has eight constituents:

- earth or *prithivi* (stability and grounding)
- water or *apa/jala* (rebirth and generative)
- fire or *agni* (assimilation and intelligence)
- wind or *vayu* (movement, life-force)
- space/ether or *akasha* (emptiness, the space in which all things happen)
- *purusha* or *jiva* (light of individual soul, that which organizes unique embodiment)
- moon or *chandra* (feminine, nurturance, harmony, compassion)
- sun or *surya* (masculine, the light of activation, will, intensity, intention)

The sum of these constituents is the light of the Self/*Ishwara*; knowing this light is knowing the full force and light of *Ishwara*.



Introduction

The Cave of the Heart meditation elaborates on *Sutra* 1:36, wherein Patanjali describes a method of meditating on a light beyond all sorrow and which guides us to overcome all obstacles to yoga. This practice anchors you to the light of the soul—*gyotir atma*, which is also the seat of *Ishwara*. This sublime practice requires steadiness, the capacity for sensory withdrawal, as well as a measure of faith or devotion. This is why it is designated as a “closed practice,” recommended for more experienced students only. For those who are properly prepared, it helps you overcome emotional imbalances, turmoil, confusion and despair. The practice centers you into the light of self-knowledge, preparing you to awaken the very best in both yourself and your life.

Practice

With your head, neck and trunk in a straight line, withdraw your attention. Become aware of your body and the space it occupies. For a few minutes breathe in and out gently and smoothly, resolving any unevenness or disturbance in your breath. After a few minutes, relax controlled breathing. Watch the natural flow of your breath, allowing it to lead you to the inner presence that resides at the *Guru Chakra*—between your sixth and seventh chakras. This center gives you access to the light of the eternal teacher, the light of all traditions. Sense a flame or inner light residing at this point. Offer your love, respect and gratitude.

Let the light of this flame at the *Guru Chakra* begin to lead you into your heart. The heart center is slightly (one finger's width) to the left of the physical heart. Stand at the door, which opens into the cave of the heart. Although the passage is dark, you walk into the cave, guided by the flame. At the end of the cave is a beautiful lake on which rests a blossoming lotus with eight petals. On each petal is a flame. At each flame, you will offer your prayers and devotion. The following are suggested prayers/offerings. In time, your own personal and unique prayers will emerge. Take your seat in front of the lotus.



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Mentally pray to the first flame, resting on the petal in front of you, which is the earth element. "Through this manifestation, Oh Lord, may I experience oneness with the earth element. May the earth element, the solid matter within me and outside me, be nurtured by your presence and your healing power."

Now move clockwise to the next petal and the flame shining on it. Here pray to this flame, "Oh Lord of Life, this flame is your manifestation of the water element. May I experience oneness with this flame. May the water element within and outside of me be guided and nurtured by the Divine healing power that flows from you."

Move to the third petal and the flame shining on it. This flame is the manifest form of the Divine Light or fire, assimilation and transformation. "May I experience oneness of the Divine with this flame, the fire element. May the fire element within me and outside me be nurtured and healed by that presence."

Move to the fourth petal and the flame shining on it, which is the manifest form of the air element, the pranic force, the force of animation. "This flame too is your manifestation, Oh Divine Being. May I experience oneness with this flame. May the air element within me and outside me be fully nurtured, guided and healed by thy intelligence and healing power."

Come to the fifth petal and the flame shining on it. I extend my love and gratitude to this flame that is the space element. "May I experience oneness with this flame. May the space within me and outside me be guided and nurtured by Thy intelligence and healing power."

The flame on the sixth petal is the sense of individuality, the individual soul, which is also Thy manifestation. "May I experience oneness with my individual self. May the wall of duality that separates me from you dissolve. May this flame of I-am-ness, of my individual self be guided and nurtured by Thy Intelligence and healing power."



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The seventh petal is the flame of lunar energy, the feminine force of tenderness and kindness. This is the forgiving, loving, embracing part of the Divine. "May I experience oneness with this aspect of the Divine. May this tender, kind, lunar energy within me be guided and nurtured by Thy intelligence and the healing force."

The eighth petal is the flame of solar energy, the masculine energy of strength, vitality, will power, determination, and the indomitable will to do, to become and to be. "May I experience oneness with this energy. May this form of yours within me and outside me be nurtured and guided by Thy intelligence and the healing force."

Finally, become aware of all eight flames merging at the center of the lotus, joining each other and merging into the brightest light you have ever experienced. This is the totality of our known world, the totality of our existence. It is also one with the pure absolute Divine Being. "May the totality of this, my existence composed of earth, water, fire, air, space, individuated consciousness, lunar and solar energy become one with you, Divine Being."

"May this central flame in the Cave of the Heart, the *jivatman*, the complete being within me and the Universal Being outside me be nourished, nurtured, and guided by Thy intelligence and healing force."

"It is you as the Divine Light that creates a bridge between individual soul and the Absolute Divine Being. Knowing this allows me to open to all and gives me strength and wisdom to embrace all and exclude none. May this Sacred Flame be experienced by all, connecting all aspects of reality within and outside us."

Now, using your *mantra*, nurture this flame so that you may walk in the Light, so that you may never tumble in the darkness. As you melt into your *mantra*, dissolve your self into the flame and the flame into yourself.