

Sutra 6

तन्मयो मायाप्रमाता

tanmayo māyā-pramātā

One whose nature is that [the mind] experiences *māyā*.

tat: that

mayāḥ: whose nature is

māyā: power of illusion, limited perception

pramātā: one who experiences, an individual subject

THE ONE WHO EXPERIENCES MĀYĀ: These words take me back to a time in my youth when I had to stop what I was doing and ask myself, *What is this world all about? Where am I going in my life?* The conclusion I reached was that life made no sense and even death was a riddle. I didn't like this answer, and yet nothing else I found was particularly convincing. My paternal grandmother, who loved me dearly, was worried by this new agnosticism of mine and persuaded a Catholic priest to speak with me.

This priest was a Castilian intellectual with the bearing of an aristocrat, the face of a Velazquez portrait, and a black fringe of hair that formed a natural tonsure. He came to call one day and began by asking me why I wasn't practicing the faith in which I'd been reared.

I knew where he was going with that line of thought, so I cut to the chase: "Look, Father," I said, "we can continue this conversation only if you demonstrate three things to me first. Does God exist? And I don't want to hear theories and suppositions on this; I want evidence as tangible as you and I are in this moment. And then can you prove to me that I have a soul and that this soul is eternal?"

The poor priest, confronted in this brash and unexpected manner, could not, of course, give me what I asked for. He tried for a few minutes and then changed the subject. We spoke quite happily of Spanish art, which we both loved, and in the course of our conversation, we became great friends. My questions, however, remained for the time, unanswered.

Now I see these questions as the expression of a search, a yearning that arises from the depth of a soul frustrated with the emptiness of the world-illusion. This, for me, is the very essence of sutra 6, *tanmayo māyā-pramātā*. The word *tat* means "that," referring to the topic of the previous sutra: *citta*, the individual consciousness and, by extension, its

instrument, the mind. The suffix *mayo* is "consists of" or "of the nature of." The word *pramātā* refers to the subject, the one who perceives and experiences. Together, these terms imply that what we are discussing here is the experience of one whose nature is the mind, one who is identified with the mind. That experience is portrayed as *māyā*, which, as we know, is the power of illusion, the generative force of the created universe, and also the appearance of this realm. So, the sutra tells us that it is the nature of the mind to perceive and experience *māyā*.

Māyā is a term so rich with meaning that I prefer not to attempt a full translation. For now let us give it the flavor used by the Śaiva Siddhantins, South Indian dualists who worship Lord Śiva. In this tradition, *māyā* is *pāśa* (the bond) that ensnares *pati* (the Lord) and makes him a *pāśu* (a bound soul). The word *pāśu* also means "beast," which implies that the loss of divine knowledge leaves the human being in a condition no better than that of any other animal. The description is not flattering, but it reminds us that the purpose of our lives is to attain something higher. When the bond of *māyā* is loosened, the bound soul becomes free and returns to its condition as *paśupati*, the Lord of all creatures.

Sutra 5 describes the divine essence of the mind, then sutra 6 identifies what the mind does—the mind perceives *māyā*—and, by implication, what happens in our own lives as a result. In this sutra, Kshemaraja speaks of the human condition. As the Śaiva sage Vasugupta points out in *Spanda-kārikā*:

Operating in the field of the subtle elements, the arising of mental representation marks the disappearance of the flavor of the supreme nectar of immortality; due to this [a human being] forfeits his freedom.^[55]

The experiences born of perceptions (*vikalpas*) picked up by the senses generate innumerable desires in the mind, and these *vikalpas* rule our lives with impetuosity.

It might seem that we said so much about *vikalpas* and the workings of the mind in our discussion of the last sutra that there is nothing left to explore. In truth, we've only just scratched the surface. In sutra 6, Kshemaraja alludes to the mind's act of perception, *pramāṇa*, which in turn introduces the threefold psychic instrument by which most perception takes place, as well as the three qualities, the *guṇas*, that make up both the mind and all in *māyā* that is perceptible. Without understanding all of these, you are under the control of the mind, and, as Baba Muktananda once said in commenting on this sutra, "As long as you are under the control of your mind, you cannot know the Truth, you cannot become supremely happy, you cannot manifest your own divinity."^[56]

Perception and Individuality

Of the operations of the mind, the most important is perception, *pramāṇa*, the activity that makes it possible to know and to understand something. *Pramāṇa* is a process initiated by Citi to connect the subject with whatever it experiences. It is the perceptive movement that relates the one with the other. When I have an experience of any sort, I perceive it in my mind; this is how I know I'm having an experience. At the deepest level, *pramāṇa* is the reflection of an object in the light of the inner Self, which adopts the particulars of what it perceives and mirrors them in the screen of its light. This act of knowing makes the projections of

Reality, the *ābhāsas* that we discussed in sutra 3, present themselves afresh in every instant, taking on colors and various forms in accordance with our attitudes and desires. Etymologically, the term *pramāṇa* is associated with measurement. In perceiving objects, we take their measure, finding them different from other objects and different from ourselves. Thus, *pramāṇa*, the act of perceiving and knowing, is at the very root of our existence as individuals. The term "individual" means "a particular being"; here, we are referring to that which distinguishes each of us as a separate, experiencing entity. As sutra 5 indicates, our existence as individual subjects is the result of a decision whereby Consciousness leaves her state as the non-manifest Self and becomes a separate entity in accordance with the objects that entity perceives. That is, my perception of created things—such as my family and my gender, my role and my nationality—brings me, a conscious being, into constant relation with the world. The act of my "knowing" in this way is crucial in giving personal meaning to everything around me. Without this capacity, as I've said before, I wouldn't be an individual at all; I'd be in the Great Void.

In the act of becoming an individual (*pramātā*) and the objects that this individual perceives (*prameya*), Consciousness does not surrender her essential nature. She vibrates unceasingly as that individual, knowing that she is free and blissful. However, having taken the form of an individual, Consciousness chooses to forget, at least partially, her attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and rapturous fullness; of eternality, freedom, and all-pervasiveness. She now experiences that her creativity becomes confined to specific efforts; her knowledge is limited to measurable portions of information; she becomes dependent on emotions, desires, and her ideas of good and evil; she experiences the passing of

time in specific, well-defined intervals; and her will has to live within the sequential spaces of causes and their effects.*

The mind is the instrument that allows us — requires us! — to experience these limited conditions, and our perception is further qualified by our understanding and attitudes. This all involves not only our transactions in the world, but also, and more fundamentally, our *vāsanās*, our deep-seated predispositions to perceive life in one way as opposed to another. Rather than try to explain this further, I'll give you an example from my experience.

One day while I was meditating in the temple of Baba's Guru, Bhagawan Nityananda,** in Shree Muktananda Ashram, I felt my awareness sink to the center of my chest. There, I came across a dark cloud, like a veil of sadness, which seemed to hover at the core of my essential being. I know from speaking to many Siddha Yoga students over the years that it's easy to dismiss a feeling like this. We tend to tell ourselves that it's only our imagination, it's the mind playing tricks on us, it's the ego trying to upset us, or other things of that sort. I've learned, however, not to dismiss or ignore these feelings, but to go even more deeply into them. On this day, I prayed to Bhagawan Nityananda to help me understand why I had this sense of sadness, and I began to direct my attention into the cloud itself. As I went into it, the cloud began to open and disperse. At its core, I found — it surprised me enormously — that this sadness was only the outer froth of a profound and splendid sentiment: a longing for God! This longing pulsed with intensity, and as I

* This is a description of the five *kañcukas* (coverings), the principles that follow *māyā-tattva* in the great chain of being that we discussed in sutra 4.

** For more information about Bhagawan Nityananda (Bade Baba), please see Appendix A.

experienced it, I began to weep and to plead with Bade Baba, *How long is this separation going to last? Can my longing be fulfilled?* Inside myself, I heard a benevolent voice say, *Look into your heart.*

So, cutting right through that sense of longing, I directed my awareness to my heart. Just as my sadness had dissolved, so did my intense yearning. I entered a space of profound silence, a space in which I could see a tender, sparkling blue light. I felt a quiet, tremulous pulsation — and perfect serenity.

Coming out of this experience, I understood that the sadness I'd glimpsed, rooted as it was in my aspiration for God, stretched so deep into my subconscious mind that it affected the way I'd perceived everything in my life — particularly since I wasn't even aware that I had such a feeling. After the disappearance of that sadness, I felt lighter about everything; I was happier than I'd ever been.

A transformation like this works in two ways. One is that as we become conscious of a hitherto unconscious tendency, the very light of our awareness begins to attenuate that tendency; eventually it simply disappears into the light. The second way, which is what happened for me with this feeling of sadness, is that the tendency can simply dissolve on the spot. The point I wish to underscore is that *vāsanās* like the one I experienced are one of the ways *māyā* limits our freedom and promotes, as the *Spanda-kārikā* indicates, the disappearance of *the flavor of the supreme nectar of immortality*. In understanding this phenomenon of limitation, it's helpful to look closely at the way the mind works — just how we create the psychic representations of Reality by which we live. Gurumayi says:

Going through the scriptures and texts of many different traditions, it is always amazing to see how much emphasis there is on the pure heart and pure mind in all religions and cultures. In fact, if God dwells in the heart, the mind is the gateway to knowledge of Him. When you become aware of the way your mind thinks, the way your intellect judges, the way your ego parades around; when you become aware of how your subconscious mind retains all the impressions of your thoughts and actions, then you come to understand the necessity of spiritual practices. The effort it takes to cleanse the psychic instruments becomes very precious to you.^[57]

The Threefold Psychic Instrument

The term “mind” is far too general to cover all of our mental processes. The name I use for these functions is the threefold psychic instrument, the inner apparatus that encompasses the workings of *manas* (thinking faculty), *ahaṁkāra* (ego), and *buddhi* (intellect). Some commentators call these functions the three psychic instruments, but I prefer to think of them as one unit with three facets, each performing distinct functions. In sutra 5, we discussed how Consciousness descends from her expanded state and becomes the mind—our mind—by contracting in accordance with the objects of perception. Now we’re going to see just how this process takes place in each of us.*

* The discussion that follows describes the operation of the *tattvas* of perception previously mentioned in sutra 4. In the chain of *tattvas*, the *buddhi* (intellect) is the highest and most subtle aspect of the mind, and the *jñānendriyas* (senses of perception) are several steps lower in the hierarchy. However, the “order” of creation is not necessarily the order in which these functions operate.

First, the psychic instrument gathers perceptions through the senses, the *jñānendriyas*, which bring in impressions of a world that is seemingly “out there”—all of the things we see, hear, smell, and so on. For me, the fascinating part of perception is the way the great Śakti becomes the senses, adopting their capacities, as she works through them. One of the most renowned of the Śaivite sages, Maheshvarananda, describes how the light of Consciousness, our own awareness, emanates from the center of our being and flows in surges of delight through our senses to take hold of impressions of the world. This same awareness then brings these impressions inward and, through the agency of the psychic instrument, leaves them as offerings for the enjoyment of the Self. These impressions are offered on the screen of the *buddhi*, the intellect.^[58]

When they first come in, these impressions are simply a sweep of sensation: something we see is nothing more than a shape and a blur of color on the *buddhi*. Then the second form of perception comes in: discursive information pertinent to that blur of color. This the *buddhi* receives from an inner reservoir of memories held in the second aspect of the psychic apparatus, the thinking, word-forming faculty, *manas*. In the West, we most often consider these memories the province of the subconscious mind. Yogis know them as *saṁskāras*, subtle impressions that are left by all of one’s experiences from this and every other lifetime.* This vast store of memories is said to be held in an etheric body, which we discuss in the next sutra. The *manas* selects the appropriate information and presents it to the *buddhi*, classifying and explaining what is seen. In this way, the *buddhi* knows, for instance, that the figure

* Our subtle impressions (*saṁskāras*) combine to form our more deeply rooted tendencies (*vāsanās*).

appearing before you is a human being, a woman, and a particular person with such-and-such a name, place of origin, and profession.

Thus, the *buddhi* is a screen, but it isn't inert like a film or television screen; it's a living monitor, made of conscious energy. Remember in sutra 2 when we talked about *pratibimba*, the reflection in which all objects remain distinct and recognizable. Well, in individual beings like us this reflection takes place on the intellect. One of the main functions of the intellect is to discriminate among the various sense impressions that come into us and to recognize what they are. When you walk in the woods, you might hear the singing of crickets and several birds and, at the same time, a plane flies overhead and someone speaks to you. The intellect easily distinguishes between these sounds. Even though they're all coming in simultaneously, through the information provided by the *manas*, the *buddhi* recognizes what is what.

Up to this point, the mental operation is very straightforward, but now the third aspect of our threefold psychic instrument comes into play. This is the *ahaṁkāra*, the ego, which brings us into the picture. The ego is what connects you, the *pramātā*, to the world out there, the *prameya*, through the experience, the *pramāṇa*. It's the ego that says, *This is my experience. This is my friend*, or, the reverse, *This is not a person I know. He is not my friend*. The *ahaṁkāra* is a relational power, and there is something intrinsically beautiful about this: it shows that we aren't indifferent to the world around us, that we are in constant relation to our world in the same way that God is in relation to his creation.

However, this *ahaṁkāra* is significant in other ways. The term literally means "I-maker," a perfect description of the way the ego operates. It creates the notion of "I." It also functions as a surrogate Self,

telling us that our own individuality has created these thoughts and feelings and actions and results, when actually the real doer is the pure *aham*, the pure "I am" awareness that is not attached to anything at all.

In the operation of the psychic instrument, the *buddhi* acts as both witness and judge, the one who sees and the one who decides. The *buddhi* is not identified with the images it reflects. It is the *ahaṁkāra* that appropriates experiences as its own. The *ahaṁkāra* says, *That's mine. That's who I am. I don't want that*. The *ahaṁkāra* sends orders to the *manas* to gather more and more specific information. Thus, the thinking faculty, always alert to satisfy the ego's voracious appetite for experience, is constantly selecting and associating sensations to form a coherent picture.

This process of perception also applies to experiences that arise from our inner being without the participation of the senses. Besides the deposit of impressions stored in the memory, we have the system of psychic centers of the subtle body, the *cakras*. From the *cakras* arise energies that enable us to have emotions, flashes of intuition—even phenomena related to powers that we call extrasensorial—and all types of mental tendencies, both positive and negative. For us to be able to feel and express these experiences, they too must be mirrored in the intellect, classified by the mental faculty, and personalized by the ego.

It also takes the entire mental apparatus to understand the discussion we're having right now, to learn and master concepts—to think abstractly, to write poetry, to play the drum. Flashes of artistic inspiration arise as an impulse directly from the Self, and yet it is the psychic instrument that notices these insights and inventions, that remembers them and finds ways to give them expression.

The yogi looks at the complex operation of this threefold psychic

instrument in relation to *sādhana*, the spiritual path. In that respect, there is no difficulty with our perception of objects or having thoughts about those perceptions. The difficulty arises only in the way we relate to those thoughts, when we identify with them. Baba Muktananda had this to say to a man, a Hindi poet, who visited the Ganeshpuri ashram in 1964 to seek help with his meditation:

The mind is as restless as a monkey. Your mind is restless and you are aware of it. This very recognition will help you to make it concentrated. . . . You do not suffer any loss when a horse that is standing near you runs away and then returns; it is the same between you and your mind. Just watch the mind. Become the witness of the mind. I also passed through a state similar to yours. I am advising you to follow the *sādhana* that benefited me.^[59]

When we adopt the stance of a witness, we are identifying with the great Witness, the Self. *Vikalpas*, our differentiated perceptions, are a creation of *citiśakti* playing in the mind, and the Self witnesses these *vikalpas* without being affected by them in the slightest. On more than a few occasions, I've meditated while my mind was producing all sorts of events and conversations. In this situation, I find that a moment comes when somehow my attention dips under the maelstrom, and even if the activity doesn't then cease, I am uninvolved in it. I feel myself to be the witness of what is happening.

When we cannot witness our thoughts, the *ahamkāra* appropriates the perceptions of the intellect for itself, and a whole web of consequences arises in which we seek supportive information and further sensation and which, ultimately, inspires us to all sorts of motivated actions.

We may tell ourselves that we live in response to challenges of the

world, but in truth the operations of our psychic instrument are testimony to something completely different: we create that world. Think about this for a moment. What we perceive as being "out there" is actually a projection appearing on our inner screen, and the understandings we have about that projection come from our own memory. How can we say that we have nothing to do with the world when it's all taking place inside us!

Having said this, we must once again acknowledge that there are horrors—excruciatingly painful circumstances—in the universe. At some time or another every single one of us comes into contact with pain. When this happens, the intellectual understanding that the world is a play of *citiśakti* may not seem relevant, and the equanimity of our more balanced moments may not be immediately available to us, no matter how hard we try to access it. And yet I've seen again and again that, given time and the right kind of contemplation, the medicinal value of even our most painful experiences, either personal or in the world around us, will be revealed to us.

I'll never forget the time I invited a scriptural study group to contemplate and discuss their experiences of the message Gurumayi had given the Siddha Yoga *saṅgham* that particular year: "Everything happens for the best." Several people described how they had come to terms with extremely difficult circumstances in their lives. The last person to speak was an elegant woman in her early forties, who said, "The worst that ever happened to me was when my husband was murdered." This was an event of another order from the ones that had been shared, and the group became very still. The woman went on: "When it happened, I grieved deeply, and the anguish continued for years. In time, however,

I could see that it was this very pain that had brought me to God and to the spiritual path. I'm a much happier person now. So, in that sense, what happened was for the best."

She obviously left much unsaid, but her simple words were voiced with conviction and sincerity, and without a trace of lingering regret or pain. Her state of calm, which was evident in her voice and manner, had its foundation in her understanding. Through contemplation, she had come to the stance exemplified by the great souls who face any challenge with equanimity.

If you think about this woman's response to her life, the implications are tremendous. It seems clear that while we cannot control all the events of our lives, we can take responsibility for what we perceive, how we understand our perceptions, and what kind of behavior that understanding inspires.

I must also acknowledge here that the person who killed this woman's husband is himself the subject in his own universe—and that he is no less Śiva than anyone else. It seems, however, that he was operating from his instinctual needs and desires in such a violent manner that he was apparently, at least for that time, merged in the deepest ignorance.

Having said this, there are some additional factors that can influence what we take in and what we put out to the world in any given moment.

The Three Qualities

The psychic instrument, along with every object it perceives, is configured by three distinct qualities, known as the three *guṇas*. These are

purity (*sattva*), activity (*rajas*), and inertia (*tamas*). In the scheme of the *tattvas*, these three *guṇas* come into existence with *prakṛti*, nature. *Prakṛti*, you may recall from sutra 4, is the name given to the creative force that wraps herself, so to speak, around the *puruṣa*, the individual Self. In addition to the five limited powers of *māyā-tattva*, which we also discussed in sutra 4, *prakṛti* also contains these three qualities, and depending on which of them predominates in us, we perceive and relate to creation through that quality.* In culinary terms, if we were preparing a special dish, we could say that the psychic instrument would be the staple foods we put into it and the *guṇas* would be the herbs and spices—the flavoring. Our dish could be sweet or hot or totally indigestible, depending on what seasonings we added.

To begin with the densest, *tamas*, the quality of darkness, gives one the perception of inertia, of sluggishness, and of delusion. *Rajas* gives the perception of activity and dynamism and sometimes agitation and passion. Then there is *sattva*, which grants the perception of clarity and harmony, and is the closest to the truth of the *puruṣa*.

In the scheme of the *tattvas*, immediately after *prakṛti* comes *buddhi*, the intellect. So, even our conscious screen is colored by these three qualities of nature. This is why our perception itself can be deluded. We may be projecting onto a screen that is dismal and dour or, at another time,

* There is an explanation for the sudden appearance of these three forces in the panorama of creation. According to Utpaladeva, the *guṇas* are the condensation of the Lord's main powers: *jñāna-śakti*, the power of knowing, becomes *sattva*; *kriyā-śakti*, the power of action, becomes *rajas*; and *māyā-śakti*, the divine free will turned into the power of illusion, becomes *tamas*. In this way through the *guṇas*, these primordial capacities take form as the qualities through which individuals live as knowers and doers, like the Lord though on a smaller scale. (*Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-kārikā*, 4.1.4-6; trans. B. N. Pandit, *Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Kārikā of Utpaladeva*, publication forthcoming).

a screen that is tinged with passion and attachment. Of course, there are times when our screen is clear, and we easily view what is projected on it with equanimity.

Everything in creation under *prakṛti* is composed of the *guṇas*. These three qualities are also at play in the objects we perceive, and, in the case of other living beings, the *guṇas* are fluctuating in them just as they are in us. As Baba Muktananda points out in his commentary on this sutra, a person manifests whatever quality is predominant in his mind at any given time, and, if you look closely, you can actually see that quality in his face.^[60]

What matters most to us, however, is the effect the *guṇas* have on our own mental screen. Gurumayi says that for this we must observe and we must contemplate—truly contemplate:

To understand the workings of the three *guṇas* in your life, you have to pay very close attention to everything that happens to you. You have to perform true self-examination, self-inquiry. Most people tend to deny whatever they are feeling, good or bad. Also, they usually try to avoid taking responsibility for their feelings and the actions that produce them, either by defending their actions or by justifying their emotions. In this way, people keep themselves from recognizing the influence of these three qualities on their lives. And the cycle repeats, again and again, with no room for change.^[61]

This is why the sages of Śaivism speak about the need to purify the intellect. Imagine a mirror that is stained or covered with dust. It doesn't work well: images reflected in it can be distorted. We perform spiritual practice to clean the surface of the *buddhi* so that it becomes a perfect reflector. The *guṇas* still move in the yogi who has purified his mind,

but he isn't confused by them—he recognizes them for what they are—and in these fluctuations, *sattva* predominates.

The I-Feeling

If you're wondering how to purify the psychic instrument, you could follow a method offered by Utpaladeva. He calls it *ahaṁbhāva*, the "I-feeling," or awareness of the pure "I am." The sage is referring to the awareness of *pūrno'ham*, "I am complete" or "I am perfect," which is the experience of our highest Self. Kshemaraja, who considers this the most significant technique of the Pratyabhijñā School, threads it through the *Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam*. It appears repeatedly in the text. The thrust of the method is this: instead of identifying with the limited "I" of the ego, the source of most misconceptions, strive to identify with the supreme "I" of the Great Self. This is the pure "I am" feeling, the unalloyed *aham*, that we associated in sutra 4 with Paramaśiva. The limited "I," the *ahaṁkāra*, or ego, is the same sense of identification, except that it's limited by desires; feelings; notions of personality and character, of social position, and physical appearance—which, of course, are all nothing more than ideas.

What I find so tremendously exciting about *ahaṁbhāva* is that the feeling of I-ness that is its foundation is utterly natural to us all. It's our own ego, expanded and purified to total, ecstatic identification with Śiva. Abhinavagupta, commenting on this practice of Utpaladeva, describes it in this way:

Ahaṁbhāva has been declared to be the merging of the object in the subject. This is the resting-place, the perfect freedom, the

supreme causal agent, and the supreme creative power, because it involves the dissolution of all desires.^[62]

The practice of *abambhāva* is connected with the exercise we introduced with sutra 5, when we dissolved all mental fluctuations (*vikalpas*) in the serene space of the Witness. This is exactly what I was doing during the meditation in the Bhagawan Nityananda Temple that I described earlier. The way it works in practice is this: Every time a thought or fantasy or desire comes up—I want this, I hate that; he did this, she did that—allow the *vikalpa* to merge into your awareness, melt into the mind-stuff from which it came. This is the *merging of the object in the subject*. Continue to offer everything that arises, and as these mental constructs dissolve, watch the feeling of the pure “I am” spontaneously reveal itself. Rest your attention steadily on the perfect “I am.” Relish the way the inherent freedom of “I am” liberates you from your slavery to mental turmoil. This is *the resting-place*.

And if you’re feeling that this technique is nothing new, then I invite you to let go of that concern as well. It is enormously effective to return again and again to the same contemplation, the same technique of *sādhana*. With repetition, you can refine a practice and truly take it in. People who find repetition boring have not, I think, given themselves fully to it. Try being totally present for this particular repetition, and I think you’ll find yourself immersed in the experience of the delight and beauty of the *śakti*.

* IF ALL IS WITHIN THE FIELD OF MY AWARENESS, HOW
COULD I POSSIBLY DESIRE ANYTHING?

The Many

Facets

of the

One Reality

Swami Shantananda

with Peggy Bendet

An Exploration of the *Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam*,
a Text on the Ancient Science of the Soul

The Splendor of Recognition