



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Insight into Sutras #1

You Just Know

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Your own inner knowing is yoga's goal. This is a knowing beyond thought, beyond logic, beyond explanation or causation. You just know.

Yoga's inner knowing is different than the intuitive feeling that most people seek. Yoga's knowing is not about externals, not about problems or other people. It is the Knower knowing the Knower. Your own Self knows your own Self.

The astonishing thing about this is that it is so easy. Even more amazing, you actually already know. It's only your mind that tells you something different. Thus, all of yoga's practices are for your mind.

But the practices are not so you can convince your mind of anything. Yoga's practices pacify your mind, so it gets out of the way. Your mind becomes peaceful and happy. It is like a dog laying down and rolling over for a belly rub. Your mind loves the experience of your own Self.

Since your mind doesn't know how to get there on its own, it needs help. The mantra and other practices are not enough on their own. You need an intervention. One who knows can give you the knowing. This is Shaktipat. It is the greatest gift of all.

I have just summarized the first few sutras of the Shiva Sutras. They assert you are Consciousness, the Self-Knowing Essence of Beingness that is being all while being you. But you don't know. And you want to know. So you look for someone who can awaken your own knowing of your own Self. That's why you're here now.

I'll go through these sutras in Sanskrit as well, thus beginning my theme for the year — Insight into Sutras. These ancient aphorisms explain how life works as well as how to make spiritual progress. Additionally I describe them more fully in my twice-weekly meditation programs. Here we begin with the first sutra of the first text of Kashmiri Shaivism.

Your own Self is Consciousness.

Chaitanyam atma.¹ — Shiva Sutras 1.1

Atma means Self, your Divine Essence. This Self that you are is Consciousness. Another way of saying this is — Consciousness is being you. Sutras are read forward and backward, especially here because there is no verb.

Grammatically, it is constructed like a mathematical formula: Self = Consciousness. It is like saying: ocean = water. There is no difference between your own Self and Consciousness. But what is Consciousness? It is the One being aware of its own Beingness.

One Divine Reality existed before this universe existed, exists within the universe as well as beyond, and will exist beyond the end of the universe. The One is eternal, omnipotent, all-pervading and all-knowing. This means that the One knows it is the One.

As yogis, we call the One by the name Shiva. The syllable shi- means "in whom all things lie," with -va meaning "embodiment of grace." Shiva is the source and substance of all, hiding himself within the universe. Shiva is also the revealer, the bestower of liberation. All this is possible because Shiva knows that he is Shiva. This is called Consciousness, also called Self-Knowingness.

It's easy to conceive of this as being out-there-somewhere. But this sutra says that YOU are Consciousness. YOU are Shiva, the One Divine Reality. Your Beingness is the one Beingness that is being all, while being you.

While you are Shiva, you don't know your own Shiva-ness. That's because, in order to become you, to be an individualized and unique form of Consciousness, Shiva took on forgetfulness, called anava²

¹ Caitanyam aatmaa.

² Anava

mala, meaning “full of negation.” This is how Shiva hides himself within himself, in the cloud of unknowingness.

Bondage is due to not-Knowingness.

Jnaanam bandhah.³ — Shiva Sutras 1.2

Since Shiva is hidden deep within, you don't know who you really are. So you look for a sense of identity, purpose and meaning. Since you can't see inward, you look outside, which makes you get lost outside. Just like someone who can't remember where they live, you wander all over, looking for home. But your true home is found inside. Spiritual growth is a process of coming home to your own Self, oh Shiva.

The most astonishing thing is that Shiva, who is all-knowing, can hide himself from himself. If you try to hide, like behind the couch or inside a Halloween mask, you still know who you are. But Shiva can forget who he really is, all in order to be you. Yet, inside, Shiva still knows. You still know. You have a deep inner sense of your own Self, of a greater essence, the greater reality within. Yes!

You yearn to know. You look for experiences that give you a hint, a taste, a glimpse of your own Divine light. This is what fueled my journey as a seeker. It kept me on the prowl, from one religion to another, from one tradition to another, until I found something that works. That's why I'm here. I freely confess, if I found something that worked better, I'd be there in a minute.

Yoga is the science of Self-discovery, the uncovering of what has been hidden within you for so long. The point is to recognize your own Self, which is re-cognizing what you already know, though you have forgotten for so long. Thus this is called the path of recognition, pratyabhij~na, one of the branches of Kashmiri Shaivism.

It's all about your inner experience. When you experience your own Self, you feel whole, a completeness of being, a sense of depth, expansion and ease. You settle into Self. You know who you are. You just know.

It can happen in a yoga pose, in a chant or discourse, in the reading of an article or book, or (best of all) in meditation. Your experience is sublime. It is full-filling, it's all you ever really wanted.

Udyamo bhairava.h — Shiva Sutras 1.5

An inner flash of I-Consciousness, bestowed by the Guru, shatters the not-knowingness, setting you free.

It is an inner awakening. This empowerment enlivens you. You are more alive, more present, with more clarity and compassion. You are more present within your own body, being you in a whole new way. Grace gets you there, which is to say, Grace gets you *here*. You become — you.

When I received Shaktipat from my Baba, I was instantly changed. I didn't understand it in the beginning, but I was different. I liked myself better. I was less reactive, which was very freeing. It was the beginning of yoga's promise — freedom. The opposite of the bondage described in Shiva Sutras 1.2, yoga guarantees you liberation. I took that promise seriously. It meant a lot to me. It still does, for I can promise you that freedom is attainable.

What do you become free from? Freedom from bondage and the other limitations described in the sutras I skipped, creating false identities and the compulsion to action. This is called freedom-from, meaning free from the human condition. Freedom is also freedom-to, meaning you are empowered at a new level. You are free to laugh, free to love, free to give, free to create, free to care and share. This is your human capacity, a Divine capacity.

You were born to know your own Self. This is why you are doing yoga and meditation. This is why you find ways to do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, “INSIGHT INTO SUTRAS”

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³ Aj~naana.m bandha.h. In the text, the first two sutras are combined. Grammatically, the last word of sutra 1 ends with an a, which leads into the first word of this sutra, turning j~naanam (knowing) into aj~naanam (not knowing).