


Swami Shantananda

with Peggy Bendet

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

The Splendor of Recognition

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SANSKRIT

1 *citiḥ svatantrā viśva-siddhi-betub*

2 *svecchayā svabhittau viśvam unmīlayati*

3 *tan nānā anurūpa-grāhya-grābaka-bbedāt*

4 *citi-saṃkocātmā cetano'pi saṃkucita-viśvamayaḥ*

5 *citir eva cetana-padād avarūḍhā cetya-saṃkocinī cittam*

6 *tanmayo māyā-pramātā*

7 *sa caiko dvirūpas trimayaś caturātmā
sapta-pañcaka-svabhāvaḥ*

8 *tad-bhūmikāḥ sarva-darśana-sthitayaḥ*

9 *cidvat tac chakti-saṃkocāt malāvṛtaḥ saṃsārī*

10 *tathāpi tadvat pañca-kṛtyāni karoti*

11 *ābbāsana-rakti-vimārsana-
bījāvasthāpana-vilāpanatas tāni*

ENGLISH

Consciousness, in her freedom, brings about the attainment of the universe.

By the power of her own will, she [Consciousness] unfolds the universe upon a part of herself.

That [Consciousness becomes] diverse because of the division of reciprocally adapted objects and subjects.

Even the individual, whose nature is Consciousness in a contracted state, embodies the universe in a contracted form.

Consciousness herself, having descended from the expanded state, becomes the mind, contracted by the objects of perception.

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

And so he is one, is of two forms, consists of three, is fourfold, and is of the nature of the seven groups of five.

The positions of all philosophical systems are stages of that [Consciousness].

That which is full of Consciousness, due to contraction of its powers, becomes a transmigratory soul, covered by impurities.

Even then, [the transmigratory soul] performs the five acts like [Śiva].

These [five acts take place in the form of] illuminating [the object], enjoying it, knowing it, planting a seed [of limiting memories], and dissolving [those limitations].

12

tad-aparijñāne svaśaktibhir-vyāmobitatā saṃsāritvam

13

*tat-parijñāne cittam-eva
antarmukhī-bhāvena cetana-padādhyārohāt citiḥ*

14

*citivahnir avarohapade channo'pi
mātrayā meyendhanam pluṣyati*

15

balalābhe viśvam ātmasāt karoti

16

*cidānanda-lābhe debādiṣu cetyamāneṣv api
cidaikātmya-pratipatti-dārdḥyam jīvanmuktiḥ*

17

madhya-vikāśac cidānanda-lābhaḥ

18

*vikalpakṣaya-śaktisaṃkocavikāsa-
vāhacchedādyanta-koṭinibhālanādaya ihopāyāḥ*

19

*samādhi-saṃskāravati-vyutthāne
bhūyo bhūyaś cid-aikyāmarśān nityodita-samādhi-lābhaḥ*

20

*tadā prakāśānanda-
sāra-mahāmantra-vīryātmaka-pūrṇābhantāveśāt sadā
sarva-sarga-sambhāra-kāri-nija-saṃvid
devatā-cakreśvaratā-prāptir bhavatīti śivam*

SANSKRIT

The condition of a transmigratory soul is delusion, [brought about] by his own powers when he is not fully aware of that [his authorship of the five acts].

[However,] when one is fully aware of that [authorship of the five acts], the mind itself becomes Consciousness by rising to the state of full expansion through inward-facing contemplation.

The fire of Consciousness, even though [it is] hidden when it has descended to the [lower] stage, partly burns the fuel of that which is knowable.

On attaining strength, one makes the universe one's own.

The state of liberation while living is the unwavering experience of oneness with Consciousness, even while one perceives the body and so on, [a state that ensues] on the attainment of the bliss of Consciousness.

The bliss of Consciousness is attained through expansion of the center.

In this regard, the means [for expansion of the center] are dissolution of thoughts, contraction and expansion of one's power, cessation of the flow [of the incoming and outgoing vital energy], awareness of the point at the beginning and the end, and so on.

The permanent attainment of *samādhi* [is established by] contemplating one's identity with Consciousness again and again in the state following meditation, which is full of the imprints of *samādhi*.

Then, by entering the perfect I-ness, whose nature is the potency of the great mantra and the essence of the bliss of the light of Consciousness, one attains lordship of the wheel of the deities of Consciousness that carry out all manifestation and reabsorption. This is Śiva.

ENGLISH

You are invited to entreat the great power with this mantra each time you open this book for contemplation. The translation follows.

*Om namo mangalamūrtaye
atha pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam*

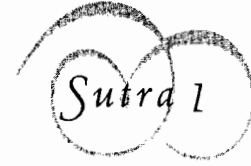
*namaḥ śivāya satatam
pañca-kṛtya-vidhāyine
cid-ānanda-ghana-svātmāḥ
paramārthāvabhāsine.
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

Om. Salutations to the embodiment of auspiciousness.
Now, the heart of recognition.

Salutations always to Śiva,
who performs the five acts,
makes the Highest Reality shine forth,
and illuminates the Supreme Goal:
one's own Self, a mass of bliss and Consciousness.
Om. Peace, peace, peace!^[10]

1

Consciousness: The Creative Power of the Universe



चितिः स्वतन्त्रा विश्व सिद्धि हेतुः

citih svatantrā viśva-siddhi-hetuḥ

Consciousness, in her freedom,
brings about the attainment of the universe.

citih: Consciousness

svatantrā: free, independent, self-reliant

viśva: the universe

siddhi: accomplishment, attainment

hetuḥ: cause

AS I EMBARK ON THIS COMMENTARY, a long-forgotten scene arises in my memory: I am about ten, standing on a balcony of my family's house, gazing with awe at the black chasm of the night sky. The house is in a valley of sugarcane fields on the eastern coast of Puerto Rico, and the stars shine with astonishing clarity, arrayed across the sky like a vast canopy of lights. The sight fills me with a sense of the immensity of all that lies before me, and I find myself wondering, *What is it that's out there? Is God looking at me from behind the sky?*

This ten-year-old's awed response to the luminosity of the universe is one that every human being has experienced at some time. It is the state from which the primordial questions of all philosophical traditions arise—the archetypal calls that come from deep within the human psyche. The finite mind glimpses infinity and, trying to encompass the experience with words, asks to know the nature of this numinous, mysterious Reality. The first sutra of the *Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam* deals with this very theme.

Sutra I discusses the creative force of the universe. From a devotional point of view, it addresses the heart's longing to know the nature of God. The sutra offers an explanation of Reality—the nature of Reality and its relation to the world and to us, as human beings.

We can consider the rest of the sutras to be expansions of the first. For this reason, I've covered a number of fundamental concepts in this first commentary—more than with any other single sutra. My suggestion to the reader is that you treat each of the five main sections that follow as separate units, pausing between them if necessary to consider the material that's just been presented. These are subtle matters, and there is no need to speed through them.

Citi: The Great Light of Consciousness

In the *Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam*, the highest Reality is most often designated by the term *citi*.^{*} Many Sanskrit words contain a rich collection of meanings that derive from their roots, and *citi* is no exception. *Citi* is one of the feminine forms of the root *cit*, which implies “to perceive, to observe, to appear, to understand,” and “to know.” That is to say, *citi* is that which is endowed with the power to know and to perceive; it is that which makes other things appear. And how does *citi* do this? *Citi* “makes” things appear in the sense that an object can only appear—or exist—in our experience when it is held in the field of our awareness. Each of these definitions of the term *citi* highlights capacities and activities associated with knowledge, with being conscious. For this reason, we usually translate the word *citi* as “consciousness.” Also, Śaivism assigns feminine attributes to this power and gives it the name Citi since, as the sutra implies, she is the highest Goddess, the mother of all creation. Like a caring mother, Citi lovingly nurtures and supports the universe. It is Citi, supreme Consciousness, that is the central theme of this text.

What do we mean by the term “consciousness?” We could say that consciousness is simply awareness, the same power of attention, of intelligent knowing that we use in every moment of our waking lives. Most of us have a deeply held belief that there must be more to it than this—the supreme Consciousness that creates the universe must be substantially different from our own individual awareness. But is it really so? The *Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam* says very clearly that if you want to understand

^{*} The word *citi* is pronounced chit-ee. Further guidance on pronunciation can be found in “A Note on the Sanskrit” on page 402.

the highest Reality, you must first understand yourself. You yourself are your doorway to Reality. It is through your own consciousness that you can know supreme Consciousness.

You can do this right now, simply by turning your attention inward, toward itself—by becoming *aware* of yourself. You may feel that you are already quite naturally aware of yourself. After all, you know that you exist. No one needs to say to you, “Have you noticed that you’re alive?” This is something that is so obvious that most people never even think about it. And yet now that you *are* thinking about it, how do you know that it’s true? You could ask yourself, *Who is asking the question?* If you conclude that the question is coming from your mind, then take it a step further and ask, *Who is experiencing the mind?* If, for instance, your mind stops for a moment, when it starts moving again, ask yourself, *Who is it that knew the mind was quiet?*

Anyone who is accustomed to contemplating along these lines will have had some experience of an identity beyond the mind, beyond the personality with its name and nationality and cultural biases. That deeper sense of “I,” which has never changed, which was with you in your childhood and has remained unaltered in every instance since, is pure Consciousness. It is *citi*.

There is a great deal of richness to be mined through this contemplation. Someone once asked Baba Muktananda which practices he recommended for spiritual development, and Baba told the person that self-discovery was the only place to begin:

For your spiritual development, all you need to know is your Self.
If you get to know your Self, you will get to know everything.
The first and foremost question is: “Who am I?” Everything else

comes later. Self-discovery is the root of all actions, all duties, all religious practices. First, know your own inner Self.^[11]

This contemplation, that Consciousness is our own inner nature, does not arise specifically until later in the sutras, and yet it is the foundation of sutra I, of all the sutras, and of spiritual practice. The discovery—or I should say, *rediscovery*—of our deepest nature is the entry point to our quest. What we are looking for, we find, is the Self.

Many people tell me that they find the term “Self” to be abstract. I’m often asked, “What is the Self? What does it look like? How can I know if I’m experiencing the Self?” The Śaiva sages have given us some ways to identify this divine power we know as the Goddess Citi and as the Self, and these are what we turn to now.

Light and the Awareness of Light

In his commentary on sutra I, Kshemaraja hints at two aspects of Consciousness that we can explore in order to gain a clearer vision of Citi’s nature: *prakāśa* (light) and *vimarśa* (awareness).*

Consciousness is light—not a light that can be seen with the eyes, but the light by which the eyes see. This light is the capacity of Consciousness to illumine and reveal, to make things appear and manifest. The term that designates this light is *prakāśa*. The word *prakāśa* derives from the Sanskrit prefix *pra*, which means “to go forth,” and from the root verb *kāś*, which means “to shine, to be brilliant,” and also “to be visible, to

* The concept that Consciousness has these two aspects is introduced by Utpaladeva in his *Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-kārikā* (1.5.2-3 and 1.5.11,13) to describe the nature of Reality and the means by which a human being obtains knowledge of that Reality. *Prakāśa* and *vimarśa* are notions so basic to the understanding of Kashmir Śaivism that Kshemaraja doesn’t address them directly in the *Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam* but assumes knowledge of them and builds from that.

appear, to see clearly." *Prakāśa*, then, is that which shines and radiates, illumines and reveals, that which brings objects forth, making them manifest.

The luminosity of *prakāśa* is what determines existence, the Śaiva philosophers tell us. The objects we perceive appear in their specific natures through the agency of the Great Light. *Prakāśa* is their source, that is, the ground from which they originate. This luminosity is, furthermore, the raw material of creation. What we perceive as fire or earth, metal, water, or any other material is nothing but a manifestation of the light of Citi, something we look at more closely in sutra 2.

This light of Consciousness is inextricably linked to the second aspect, *vimarśa*, awareness, which can be viewed as the reflection of that light on itself—the capacity of Consciousness to know herself.

Vimarśa is derived from the prefix *vi*, which means “apart” or “in two parts,” and the root verb *mṛś*, which implies “to touch, to be sensitive or aware” and also “to consider, to reflect, to examine.” *Vimarśa* is the capacity by which we can touch—that is, feel, know, examine—this miraculous universe that has been created, and we can then reflect on our perceptions and make them meaningful. In fact, perception isn’t even truly possible unless we reflect on the meaning of what we perceive. Without *vimarśa*, *prakāśa* would be nothing more than inert light.

For me, one vivid image of the interplay between *prakāśa* and *vimarśa* is the miracle that is taking place at some point in the world in every moment: the dawning of a new day. When I was young, I used to love to watch the day’s first traces of sunlight touch the valley where I lived. In the soft glow of the morning, I could begin to distinguish the contours of the distant hills, the silhouettes of the trees and rooftops, the wide expanse of the sugarcane fields that covered the valley like a carpet. Once the sun

itself appeared on the horizon, the light would brighten, clarifying the lines of the landscape and bringing forth its vivid tropical colors. It seems to me that the light of *prakāśa* performs this function within us.

Prakāśa is the initial flash of form, the moment of watching the dawn before the labeling and reactions begin. *Vimarśa*, whose emergence is virtually simultaneous, is the discernment and discrimination by which you recognize what you are seeing. It’s the knowledge, for instance, that one sweep of color or shadow is a tree, a specific kind of tree, a particular tree with which you have history, about which perhaps you have some feeling. *Vimarśa* is your awareness—even though you can’t perceive this with your physical eyes—that the tree is quivering with life in every moment, from the roots to the very last leaf. It is also your capacity to know that you are looking at the tree, your ability to watch the movement of your own mind as you do so.

About the exquisite play between light and awareness, Gurumayi writes:

The light of your awareness
is a glorious boon from God.
It is your protection, your guide,
your wealth, your liberation.
When you lose an object in the dark,
you can find it with a candle
or a flashlight. You can turn on a lamp.
But when you lose your thoughts,
ideas, intentions, and goals
in the dark field of your mind,
how will you regain them?
Only the light of your awareness
can illumine the field of your mind.^[12]

Awareness is, of course, just another word for consciousness—small “c” individual consciousness. It’s this capacity, which we all possess, that allows us to ponder the nature of supreme Consciousness, to ask ourselves: *How do I know Consciousness is real? What proof do I have that it even exists?* The answers don’t lie in logical argument or scientific justification. As I said earlier, we ourselves are the entry point to the re-discovery of our foundational nature. It is by the power of awareness that we know, *I am alive, I exist*. The evidence of this awareness stands by itself as clear as water.

Please observe that we aren’t discussing an abstract philosophical concept. We are simply giving a label—awareness, *vimarśa*—to an experience shared by all human beings.

This capacity for self-knowledge is, of course, vital to anyone on a spiritual quest. Anytime you ask yourself questions that take your awareness inside—*Who is seeing through my eyes? Who is experiencing the mind?* all the way to that ultimate question, *Who am I?*—you’re exploring your own being through the power of self-reflection. You are coming in touch with *prakāśa* through the agency of *vimarśa*. The capacity by which we know ourselves is the same power by which supreme Consciousness enfolds herself to know herself.

At this point, we’ve discussed two distinct potentials for *vimarśa*: the power of Consciousness to know herself and her power to discern and distinguish between the various forms of the universe. There is a third potential, just as significant as the other two and simultaneous in its appearance: the power to create a universe.^[13] Here, too, we can perhaps most easily understand how *vimarśa* operates on the cosmic level by examining what we already know about ourselves as individuals.

The sages of Śaivism tell us that we cannot truly perceive an object without discriminating and understanding what it is for us. Then our understanding itself so colors and flavors our experience of that perception that in the process of discerning what an object is, we have, for all intents and purposes, created it anew. Thus our very perception of the universe is, inevitably, an act of creation. This means that the world of our experience, the world in which we live and act and feel, is our own manifestation. We explore this extremely significant phenomenon further in the discussion of sutra 5.

Classically, *vimarśa* is compared to a mirror or a reflective pond, for it is in this metaphor that we can best distinguish all three functions of awareness. Like a mirror, *vimarśa* shows us ourselves and our creation. Each of us has a face—this is *prakāśa*, existence—but until we see that face reflected back to us through the capacity of *vimarśa*, we have no idea what our face looks like. Thus, the Śakta text *Kāma-kalā-vilāsa* says of *vimarśa*:

She, the primordial Śakti, who excels all and who in her own true nature is eternal, limitless bliss, is the seed of all the moving and motionless things which are to be, and is the pure mirror in which Śiva experiences himself.^[14]

Here *prakāśa*, which is pure illumination, is personified as Śiva, while *vimarśa*, the power of self-enfolding knowledge that both creates and knows its own creation, is personified as Śakti. A recurrent term in Śaivism, *śakti* is associated with power, energy, capability, strength, and might. It is this power of *vimarśa*, Śakti, that provides the mirror in which Śiva may see his own greatness reflected—and in which we, as well, may see ours.

As this passage indicates, there is yet another highly significant perspective from which we can view *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*.

The Primordial Couple

You'll recall that in the Introduction, the name we gave the ultimate Reality is Paramaśiva. The sages of Kashmir Śaivism tell us that as Paramaśiva begins to contemplate the creation of a universe—I like to imagine that Reality turns its face toward manifestation—there is an appearance of Śiva and his power Śakti, symbolizing the primordial couple. Together, never apart, Śiva and Śakti express the initial vibratory movement, the *spanda* of wanting to become the creation. In them there is the intention to manifest, though this intention is as yet unexpressed.

The attention of Paramaśiva as he turns toward his manifestation is a power, a vibrant yet extremely subtle resonance. This is why, in the texts of Śaivism, Śiva is represented through his *citśakti*,* the power to illumine, to give existence and form, to bestow an appearance to things—in short, *prakāśa*. Śakti is represented in her aspect as *ānandaśakti*, the power of bliss, for she not only experiences the immense satisfaction of being perfect, full, and ecstatic, but that very bliss has driven her to take the form of all created things. *Ānandaśakti* is pure Consciousness, aware of who she is, the power that imparts knowledge

* This is in spite of the fact that earlier we identified Citi, Consciousness (also known as Citiśakti), as the Goddess. As was also said in the Introduction, Reality is sometimes identified as *he*, sometimes as *she*, and also as *it*—and yet ultimately all represent the same principle. As the power of illumination, *citśakti*, which is feminine (as all *śaktis* are), is the power that constitutes Śiva's true nature. The power is feminine; the power holder masculine. The two are inseparable, in the same way that I am inseparable from my capacity to experience bliss.

in creation—*vimarśa*—and, at the same time, she is the kernel of our experience of love.

The intrinsic nature of Consciousness is *prakāśa-vimarśa*—a marriage of clear perception and right understanding, in short, Śiva and Śakti as one. These two aspects are ever united. We say they are two only so that we can describe them. When we speak of one, we know that it includes the essence of the other. Joined, *prakāśa-vimarśa* is the fullness of divine Consciousness. The entire universe emerges from Citi's splendor without altering her nature in the least, without her being dimmed in the slightest. This fullness makes Citi aware of the perfection of her contentment. If something were taken from her, she would remain perfect; if something were added to her, she would still remain perfect. Citi knows that she contains within herself all possible creations and that she alone is Reality. Being aware of this wholeness, she experiences an immense bliss: *ānanda*. It is for this reason that knowledge of the Self is always accompanied by immense happiness.

The Bliss of Consciousness

Since *prakāśa* gives rise to *cit*, the principle of conscious existence, and *vimarśa* results in *ānanda*, bliss, Reality can be known as *cidānanda*, the bliss of Consciousness. One of the boons of spiritual practice and study under the guidance of an enlightened Guru is that one discovers and rediscovers, experiences and re-experiences this truth at all stages of *sādhana*.

I recall a time at Gurudev Siddha Peeth when we had been chanting a mantra for three consecutive days. I was feeling very expanded, literally reeling with joy. While the chant continued in the temple, I went

out to the courtyard, where Baba was sitting with a group of his students gathered informally around him. I sat down at the back to meditate on the exquisite sensation of inner joy that I was experiencing. With no forewarning, this joy seemed to explode right out of my body, streaming from me in all directions. Then, wondrously, the objects I perceived through my five senses became imbued with vibrant luminosity.

There was an effervescence of sparkling bliss arising from my body, and when I looked up at Baba, I could see the same bliss pouring from him. Infinitesimal bubbles of ecstasy seemed to percolate from the floor of the courtyard, from the walls, from each person and tree and bird that I could see. For the time this awareness of ecstasy lasted, my sense of being a limited person dissolved into the expansiveness of *cidānanda*. I knew that I wasn't separate from God nor different from God's creation, nor were God's movements in any way distinct from my own. I experienced myself as one mass of radiant, blissful Consciousness, and the sensation was utterly delicious. In that moment, blissful within my own being like the Goddess Citi, I also experienced a sense of total freedom.* I was *svatantrā* in the midst of my own universe.

The Absolute Freedom to Create a Universe

Svatantrā means "free, independent, self-reliant." Or more precisely, following the meaning of the prefix *sva* (one's own) and the noun *tantra*

* It is important to remember that these various experiences of enlightenment that I am describing from my own *sādhana* occur for every seeker. During the time of our *sādhana*, such experiences seem to wax and wane, and they are often separated by periods of apparent dryness. The goal of *sādhana* is to reduce and then eliminate the interstices so that finally, like our Gurus, we experience uninterrupted *cidānanda*.

(depending on), we could say that in being *svatantrā*, Citi depends on only herself. Supreme Consciousness has *svātantrya*, complete freedom to do or not to do, to assume any form or not to assume a form at all. Citi can manifest herself as any finite form, and at the same time she can remain infinite; she can be beyond limitations, and she can become all limitations. She can do all of this alternately or simultaneously, as she wishes. Consciousness depends solely and exclusively on herself. Nothing hinders her freedom since there is no power apart from her. *Svātantrya* is the will set free. It is irrepressible volition. The definition of Reality as *svātantrya-śakti*, "the power of freedom," is one of the distinctive characteristics of Kashmir Śaivism, and it is a key to *sādhana* as well.

The implicit message of sutra I is this: Just as Citi is free and unencumbered in the expression of her will, we too are free from dependence on outer circumstance. As we look at our own lives, we may feel that we are not free. We may feel that we do not have sufficient freedom of will, that we cannot in fact determine the circumstances of our lives or even choose our own associates. This is because most of us think of freedom as the ability to have what we want. The Siddhas, on the other hand, are more likely to describe personal freedom as the capacity to want what we have — to experience joy in the face of any circumstance and, thus, to exercise our own will to choose what God has willed for us. There is, paradoxically, tremendous freedom in such a stance — and we know this not by thinking about it or speaking of it, but through our direct experience in such a moment. These experiences of autonomous joy, which can arise in even the most disagreeable circumstances, are often what inspire a person to commit to a spiritual quest. We want to understand this joy, to fathom its source, to experience it all the time. In her book *The Yoga of Discipline*, Gurumayi says:

The very fact that you are a seeker means you want to know the Power behind the universe. You want to unearth the mysterious laws behind events. You want to understand the independent joy that you come across every now and then. Think of a time when, all of a sudden, you were happy. You didn't do anything to make yourself happy, but you were happy. This happiness is called *svayambhū*, spontaneous. It is self-born joy. As a seeker you want to know what causes this.^[15]

Taking this still further, the Śaivites create no separation between supreme Will and the individual will. These sages say our own power of will is the divine Will in a contracted form. In other words, when we are able to cleanse this power of the mind, we can experience the full glory of *citiḥ svatantrā*. As our *sādhana* progresses and the mind is cleansed of egoistical motivations, we become increasingly aware when we are and are not aligned with divine Will. This process is described in greater detail in our exploration of destiny in sutra 9. For now, it's enough to say that when our will is clear and specific, it is possible for us to carry through our vision, to bring into being what we intend to do. Baba Muktananda says:

A human being has the freedom to become anything. By his own power he can make his life sublime or wretched. By his own power he can reach the heavens or descend to the depths. In fact, the power of a human being is so great that he can even transform himself into God. God lies hidden in the heart of every human being, and everyone has the power to realize that.^[16]

This is the essence of the *Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam*—the understanding that true Self-realization is to become fully *svatantrā*, fully free. It is not enough to have a glimpse of divine splendor in our lives from time to time. We must become that divine splendor.

Sutra I says that this *citiḥ svatantrā* is the cause (*hetu*) of the attainment (*siddhi*) of the universe (*viśva*). For Kshemaraja, the term *viśva*, with which he designates the universe, has a more specific and technical significance as well: *viśva* also refers to the entire array of *tattvas*.^[17] We discuss the *tattvas* in sutra 4; for now we can say that they are creative principles, encompassing all entities, manifest and unmanifest, and that together they constitute the universe. The word *siddhi* also indicates fulfillment or accomplishment, and refers to the actions by which Consciousness carries forward and accomplishes or attains her creative aims. *Citi* is *hetu*, “the cause,” of manifestation—which includes not only creation but also maintenance and reabsorption as well. These are the three main processes that occur in the universe: coming into being (*śṛṣṭi*), continuing existence (*sthiti*), and dissolving or retreating into repose (*saṁhāra*). Again, these are concepts we look at in greater detail later. In his commentary, Kshemaraja has this to say about the appearance, and disappearance, of the world:

It is only when *Citi*, the ultimate consciousness-power, comes into play [literally, she raises her eyelids] that the universe comes forth into being and continues as existent; when she withdraws its movement [when she lowers her eyelids], the universe also disappears from view. One's own experience bears witness to this fact.^[18]

I particularly cherish the sage's metaphor of the eyelids. For me it's a vivid reminder that our knowledge of Reality is based on our own day-by-day experience. The sage is saying that when we open our eyes and become aware of the world around us, we are creating our world. And

at night, as we close our eyes in sleep, we're dissolving that same world. Just as the Goddess Citi creates a universe, so do we create one every day in our own experience.

If you have ever undergone sensory deprivation for some time—and it doesn't have to be all of your senses, just one is enough—and then felt the bliss that comes when that sensory appetite is slaked, you may also have some glimmer of the bliss of Citi in her creation of the universe. Recall what it is like to eat food when you are truly hungry or the flavor that water can have—the delight you can take in its very wetness—when you have been thirsty for some time. This opening and closing of our senses is exactly what Citi does in the creation of the universe. This is never clearer than when you see the delight an infant takes in playing peek-a-boo. You hide and then you leap out, or possibly just hide your face behind your hands and then pull your hands down—and the child is enchanted! A world is hidden; it emerges; it is hidden again . . . What is most astonishing is that an infant almost never tires of this game. The hands can come up and go down, come up and go down almost indefinitely, and the child never stops being entranced. Why? In this simple game, the child is playing as God plays. The act of creation is simultaneously an act of perception. When I perceive something, I am creating it for myself. The creation exists as long as I retain it in my perception, and when I dissolve what I perceive, for me it ceases to exist. (And, since no one else perceives it in quite the same way, we can say that it has also ceased to exist as a fact.)

In his book *Mukteshwari*, Baba Muktananda refers to this fundamental truth of human life, addressing himself as if speaking to a seeker:

Because of your existence,
Creation exists.
If you do not exist,
nothing exists.
Muktananda, first know your Self.

What are you looking for
east and west,
north and south,
above and below?
Muktananda, the whole universe
you alone are, you alone are,
you alone are.^[19]

When I first read the words *you alone are*, I was seized by a feeling of immense loneliness. I thought, *I'm all by myself*. Later it occurred to me that this is not a message of emotional and psychological isolation. This *you* Baba refers to is the essence of creation in all its magnificence. The experience of union, the sense that we are all one, is precisely the kind of aloneness Baba is talking about. Simply stated, Baba is addressing the supreme Self in you, as you. He is saying that you and the universe are the same principle, and further, for this glorious creation to exist, you must be present. In other words, you—your inner being, the Self—can generate a universe out of your own Consciousness. This is precisely the message of sutra 1: Consciousness is the cause of the universe. Only Consciousness is capable of creating the cosmos, and only Consciousness can be the material from which that cosmos is made. Everything depends on Consciousness. The creative capacity of all individuals, of all of nature, has its source in Citi and derives its power from Citi. There is no manifested thing that, in and of itself, has the capacity to know Consciousness without engaging

its own power of Consciousness. Only Consciousness can know herself, as well as everything that takes form within her.*

Our Self and Our World

When we begin to understand and to perceive everything as Consciousness, as one Reality—or as a reality of One—an unsettling thing happens: the world itself seems unreal at first. Or, at least, it seems grounded in a strange reality. We think that if everything is *citiśakti*, then the universe does not exist, for what then is different from Consciousness? In other words, if God is the only Reality, then how could you or I exist, or our families, or the world we inhabit? But isn't that absurd! The world does exist. We know that. We're living in it. Yet if the world exists, as our senses tell us, and it is nothing but Consciousness, as the Śaivite sages suggest, then why is one thing different from another? Is every manifestation equally real? And how does Consciousness become the world?

To establish the causal connection between the Creator and the creation, Śaivism offers an explanation very much its own: Supreme Consciousness, through her own free will, contracts herself to assume the manifold forms and objects that make up creation. In Sanskrit, contraction or condensation is called *saṃkoca*. It operates on much the same principle as water freezing to become ice or vaporizing to become steam or humidity. Though these forms are different—one liquid, one solid,

* Kshemaraja alludes to this in his commentary on sutra 1: "Therefore space, time, and form, which have been brought into being and are vitalized by it [*cit*] are not capable of penetrating its real nature"; trans. Jaideva Singh, *The Doctrine of Recognition* (1990), p. 46.

one vaporous—in essence they are the same; their molecular composition is unchanged. If ice is melted or vapor condensed, the substance is water once again. In a similar metaphor, the sage Abhinavagupta seems to bring out the sweetness of *ānanda* in its free and purposeful gesture of condensing into the world we experience:

As a sweet watery juice will become thick and thicker still, lumpy sugar and refined sugar are all only sugarcane juice, so all phenomena are merely different states of Śiva, the Lord in his universal aspect.^[20]

The difference between this process and the condensation of Citi to create the solid forms of the universe is that the creative act of Consciousness happens outside of time and free from the limitations of space and form, within which the laws of cause and effect operate. As she exercises her *svātantrya-śakti*, her power of free will, the one Reality projects her light like an explosion of fireworks on a dark night, sending forth brilliant sparks that assume the countless forms that inhabit the cosmos. It is in these objects and worlds—in creation itself—that we encounter the parameters of time, space, and the natural laws of cause and effect. Prior to creation, the sages say, there is only the undifferentiated potential of the Goddess Citi. While there may be tremendous differences in the language and metaphors employed by science, many theoretical physicists appear to hold somewhat parallel views—particularly concerning the absence of natural laws at the point at which creation occurs.*

* The eminent physicist Stephen Hawking suggests that creation occurs as the "event horizon," on which all objects appear, emerging from what he calls "the singularity," that point when space and time are born. Beyond this singularity, Hawking says, the natural laws of the universe have no foundation. One source for Hawking's theories is his classic *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).

The act of manifestation is the coming forth of what is already contained in the undivided oneness of Consciousness. In a classic analogy, Kshemaraja clarifies this point:

The entire universe is already contained in Supreme Consciousness or the highest Self even as the variegated plumage of a peacock is already contained in the fluid of its egg. *Vimarśa* is the positioning of the Self that leads to manifestation.^[21]

A modern metaphor for the peacock's plumage is the way every aspect of one's genetic inheritance—stature, the color of the eyes and hair and skin—is contained in the DNA molecules. *The positioning of the Self* is a reference to a quality of Consciousness that we might call creative vibration. In its original, pure state, *vimarśa* (discernment) is a reflected brilliance that throbs with a movement of extreme subtlety.

The sage Vasugupta calls this primordial vibration *spanda*, the pulsation by which Consciousness becomes the source of all creation. This will come up again in the course of our study. For now, Kshemaraja is saying that the vibrations of *spanda* pulsate from the heart of *vimarśa*, which is Consciousness's awareness of herself. This movement is described with the adjective *kiñcit calanā*, which means “an infinitesimal stirring,” or “the very slightest and most tremulous movement.” Of course, with the term “movement,” we are usually referring to a motion at least as tangible as a pulsation, like an electric wave moving from socket to cable. The *kiñcit calanā* of Consciousness, which is beyond space and time, is a vibration so extraordinarily subtle that its motion is not at first externally directed. These vibrations occur without interruption, in a throbbing motion of contraction and expansion through which the cosmos appears and disappears. When you blink, your own universe appears and

disappears from sight—and we do this every six or seven seconds, so it happens thousands of times each day. It is through *spanda* that the cosmic eyes of Consciousness open (*unmeṣa*) and close (*nimeṣa*) and the universe unfolds and refolds itself in a rhythm of creation and dissolution. The universal pulsation of *spanda* happens at dizzying speed, ceaselessly renewing its manifestation.

As yogis, it is significant for us to know that the world in which we are living at this point in time is not the same as the world that existed just a moment ago. This cosmic process is not unlike what occurs within each of us, individually. This is why spiritual transformation is always possible for us, why it's a possibility for us all. Rather than holding on to notions that fossilize our lives into undesirable patterns—grudges, visceral fears, noxious habits, or even just the opinion that we can't change—we have the power to align our intentions and activities with the rhythms of the *spanda*, and thereby to tap the source of genuine contentment. For me this is the most significant message of this sutra: like unencumbered Consciousness, we as individuals possess the freedom to establish a universe in which we can live blissfully. Recognizing this gives us access to a part of our nature that is innate, though often forgotten.

The Triad of Knowledge

Citiśakti casts herself into creation. She becomes innumerable forms, and each of these forms is a world unto itself. In other words, each individual being in creation is the center of his or her—or its!—own world of experience. Each one is what is known in Śaivism as the knowing subject, the *pramātā*. And for each subject, everything else is

an object of knowledge, a *prameya*. Further, the relationship that each subject has to its world, to its “objects,” is established through the act of perception, *pramāna*. These three—the knower, the known, and the act of knowing—are seen as the triad of knowledge, and together they form the fundamental structure of any creation.

These three forms of knowledge arise out of the fragmentation of the natural attributes of *prakāśa-vimarśa* (illumination and creative awareness) in the contraction of Consciousness. The metaphor of light that we used earlier applies perfectly here. The subject is the light that illumines, the object is that which is illuminated, and the relation between them is a function of the illuminative power—knowledge. In the Āgamas, the revealed scriptures of this tradition, the subject or the knower is likened to fire, a luminous and illuminative element whose flames devour everything they touch. It is said that all forms, or objects, are fuel for fire and are reduced by fire to ash. In the same way, Citi reduces the perception of differences to a vision of unity.

When Brahmin priests make offerings to the fire in sacred rituals such as the *yajña*, this sacrifice and the accompanying mantras and prayers are consumed by Agni, the lord of fire, the light that bears witness to ritual actions. Agni carries these offerings to the deities, the powers of the cosmos who, thus propitiated, rest satisfied and are inclined to offer blessings. Likewise, an individual becomes tranquil and blissful in the Self after digesting the world of diversity. The blessing bestowed is immense joy. The Āgamas often identify knowledge, *pramāna*, with the sun, which derives its light from fire and illumines all things in the world, making them perceivable to the subject. The known, *prameya*, is like the moon, which becomes visible as it receives and reflects the sun-

light. Just as moonlight has a nectarean nature, the objects of perception can also give off nectar, which can lure us, binding us to the things of this world.

To the yogi, however, what is most important here is the knowing subject, for it is the subject that is both the origin and goal of all cognitive acts. In other words, if you, as the knower, are not present, there is no experience of the world. This is what Baba is referring to in the line *If you do not exist, nothing exists*. In any and every situation, both the object and the knowledge of that object depend on the perceiving subject. Abhinavagupta makes the same point in slightly different terms:

Nothing perceived is independent of perception, and perception differs not from the perceiver; therefore the [perceived] universe is nothing but the perceiver.^[22]

We might ask, just who is this perceiver on whom the entire universe rests?

The word *pramātā* means “one who understands, one who holds authority” and “one who measures.” That is to say, the Self. Enshrouded in the limiting conditions of a body and a mind, the supreme Self no longer perceives the total unity of free Consciousness, but perceives only separate measurable units. When we walk through the woods and see the trees, smell the fragrance of wildflowers, hear birdsong, and feel the cool water of a stream running over our feet, we are having fragmentary experiences of Consciousness; we are aware of what can be measured and classified. In spite of the limited nature of our ordinary perception, however, the perceiver never ceases to be Consciousness. Just as fire radiates light, the Self sends forth the modulated vibrations of *spanda* that

swiftly move to seize the experiences that we have of this world. As a center of untainted Consciousness, the subject is the true authority of knowledge, the one who understands what is truly happening, the one who makes sense of the world, within and without. This is only natural, since it is this same Consciousness that creates everything it perceives.

In my own experience, understanding the subject has been the most significant lesson of the spiritual journey. Until I became aware of my own awareness in meditation, I didn't know myself as a conscious being. Like most people, I took my own consciousness for granted, much as I took the presence of the material world for granted. Once I began to meditate, I began to experience my ability to perceive my own life. Then my awareness of that perception began to change my relationship with what I saw — with my reactions, for instance, and my own emotions. I became a witness of my life. I began to take things less personally, and so I could relate to the world around me in a more meaningful way.

So that you can either develop or strengthen your ability to witness your world from another perspective, I invite you to undertake a contemplative exercise. First take a few deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling fully. Then let your breathing return to normal. Now, without straining your attention, begin to perceive yourself in your surroundings. Try not to focus on particular details but on the sense of space itself. Ask yourself: *Is my consciousness in this space? Or is this space in my consciousness?*

We will revisit this contemplation further on, and so there is no need to complete our discussion of it here. Besides, it's very useful to sit with a question like this. As I found, the delicious *aha!* of experiencing the answer is much more edifying than just hearing it.

The Highest Reward of Life

Near the end of his commentary, Kshemaraja makes an expansive gesture that Sanskrit scholars often take great pleasure in: that is, he makes a semantic shift, putting forward secondary meanings for some of the words and thus, with great skill, altering and enhancing the interpretation of the sutra. It seems clear that his intention is to bring forward the ultimate purpose for having the recognition of Citi. In his new interpretation, the word *siddhi*, which was "attainment," now becomes "yogic attainment." Thus, sutra I becomes:

**Consciousness, in her freedom,
brings about the attainment
of [the true nature of] the universe.**

In this interpretation, Kshemaraja calls upon two subsidiary meanings of the word *siddhi* that evoke yogic attainment: bliss and liberation. Thus, the phrase *viśva-siddhi* of the sutra now signifies *bhoga*, the enjoyment of the universe in its true nature, which we now see as the blissful play of Citi. By extension, *viśva-siddhi* is transformed into the experience of *mokṣa*, liberation from the limitations assumed by Consciousness. When we speak of limitations, we refer to our identification with the sufferings of life and the feeling that makes us believe we are insignificant and bereft of happiness.

Here Citi plays the revealing role of grace by which we recognize our freedom and the incomparable joy of the Self. Citiśakti, of her own free will, irradiates the darkness in which we were engulfed and bathes us in her exquisite brilliance. The yogic attainment of both enjoyment of the

world (*bhoga*) and liberation (*mokṣa*) as unrestrained and joyful expressions shows us that Consciousness herself is the *summum bonum*, the goal of the greatest well-being and the highest reward of life. In this attainment, creation is respected as a sacred place, for it has helped us to reach the ultimate end and it continues to be the divine playground of Citi.

This may sound magnificent, but how do we get there? What do we have to do to reach the goal? In answer to this question, Kshemaraja gives another turn to the sutra; he takes the word *betu*, which was “the cause,” and reads it as “the means” — in this case, the means to recognition, to divine knowledge. The sutra now reads:

**The universe is the means
to attain the realization
of Consciousness in her freedom.**

Our individual universe is now seen as the indispensable instrument for yoga. The *siddhi*, or attainment, consists in merging all the perceptions that we experience as separate from us in the space of the knower and thereby identifying with all that we “know.” We will thus realize the true nature of our universe as the play of Consciousness in her full freedom. In this interpretation, sutra I is telling us that any experience is a potential means for gaining full knowledge of the supreme Self. Ordinary people get lost in the objects of the world, in wanting and not wanting various people and situations and all manner of things, both material and subtle. In the face of overwhelming distraction, they forget their own truth. Yogis, on the other hand, remain alert; they keep their attention on the union that is the fundamental relationship between themselves

and the world. We find the essential intention of this effort summarized in a verse of the *Vijñāna-bhairava*, one of the Āgamas Kshemaraja quotes in his commentary on this sutra:

The consciousness of object and subject is common to all the embodied ones. The yogis, however, have the distinction that they are mindful of this relationship [between them].^[23]

The majority of the greatest expounders of Śaivism in Kashmir were yogis who observed a regular domestic routine, with wives and children and the responsibilities of supporting their families. Their students, men and women alike, felt that the world did not interfere with their inner search for attaining God. By their example, we can see that whatever our role may be — and there are many in our world! — the journey of the spirit is undertaken in this body and in this life. This opportunity is a precious gift of the Goddess Citiśakti. The sages of Kashmir Śaivism encourage us to approach every moment as an opportunity to experience the bliss of Consciousness. Understanding that Citi has created this universe, we can take the view that life itself is the divinely offered means — the only means! — for the realization of the supreme goal.