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Brahmacharya, Vairagya, Kaivalya[1*]

I. Brahmacharya and Vairagya

One of the great revelations I experienced upon becoming a brahmacharin in 1985 was how much easier this practice in turn made the practice of vairagya, the gradual process of letting go of the many entanglements that bind us to the world of name, form and suffering. I don't claim that it became easy; just easi*er*. Before, I obsessed constantly about things, situations, people, relationships and objectives that did not develop in accordance with my plans. I also expended an enormous amount of energy in actively managing, guiding and trying to control them accordingly. Since of course none of these states of affairs were in fact under my control, their fulfillment or frustration of my plans, desires and managerial manipulations caused constant psychological and emotional turbulence that my *sadhana* just barely contained. Basically I was the poster girl – or rather, the mug shot – for the *Bhagavad Gita*'s warning:

> Thinking about sense-objects
> Will attach you to sense objects;
> Grow attached, and you become addicted;
> Thwart your addiction, it turns to anger;
> Be angry, and you confuse your mind;
> Confuse your mind, you forget the lesson of experience;
> Forget experience, you lose discernment;
> Lose discernment, and you miss life's only purpose. (II)[2]

After settling into brahmacharya, by contrast, I found myself expending far less time and energy than before in attempting to direct external conditions and the fruits of my actions toward their intended objectives. I was more ready – sometimes eager – to drop such campaigns, without hesitation or regret, upon the discovery that my strategies had been ineffective. After awhile I even began to give up the manipulative strategies themselves. Increasingly, they came to seem just too much trouble, too boring, not a fun way to interact with others or spend my limited time on the planet.

In these reactions I did not feel hopeless, disappointed, or fatalistically content to toss my future to the winds. For example, this attitudinal change did not prevent me from setting objectives, nor did it lessen my drive to do my work or meet my personal, social or professional obligations or build meaningful relationships with others. Nor did it reduce the energy or attention or commitment I brought to any of these tasks. Rather, my energy and attention gravitated toward the actions constitutive of these tasks – actions that had meaning in themselves, independently of their more distant consequences. The locus of meaning began to recede from the external results of my action to my internal experience of it. Formerly, I sought satisfaction in the world's compliance with my personal agendas, and so exerted myself in various ways to force that compliance. Now I began to seek insight and peace of mind in the quality of my own actions and the state of my own awareness, whether the world complied or not. In practice this meant that I became a complete nightmare to work with: stubborn, unyielding, insensitive to the personal benefits of compromise.

As external results receded in importance, circumstances as they were, whatever they were, both internal and external, began to gain in value, interest, and clarity, as opportunities for deepening my understanding of reality. Once the urge to

contemplate and comprehend reality began to outweigh the drive to bring it into line with my desires and expectations, those desires and expectations themselves dwindled even further. Since reality is always a teacher, the desire to investigate and learn from it can never be frustrated. So beginning the practice of brahmacharya marked a turning point in my sadhana, after which the practice of detachment seemed much easier, and a corresponding sense of self-sufficiency or completeness more accessible.

Frankly I was mystified as to why the practice of brahmacharya should have this effect. The Yoga Sutras do not mention it, and the connection is not obvious: celibacy is a practice ostensibly aimed at a very specific human drive. Why should it facilitate a sense of internal completeness and external detachment that generalizes to all similar drives, and may even outcompete them? Why should abstaining from sex make it easier to let go of professional game-plans, a troubled relationship, expectations about others' moral rectitude, the desire for wealth or longevity, and indeed the too-often grim struggle for survival itself? In this discussion I seek an answer in a playful but decidedly deflationary look at what it is a brahmacharin abstains from.

II. The Twinge

The practice of brahmacharya does not necessarily require abstaining from hugging or shaking hands or walking arm in arm, or other small physical signs of affection – although it might require this for some individuals under some circumstances. Whether it does or not depends on whether such actions in turn tend to awaken sexual desire either in the giver or the receiver of such gestures. Any action that does, in either giver or receiver, is to be avoided. For in the last analysis, brahmacharya means abstaining from sexual orgasm – that momentary twinge of

sensory pleasure that obliterates thought and slackens muscular tension, and from any action or experience that might encourage or promote it.

This means, for one thing, that brahmacharya excludes self-stimulation. In the second-wave feminism of the 1960s, we briefly tried valorizing self-stimulation as an expression and celebration of self-sufficiency, independence and freedom from inhibition. There was much discussion of technique and technology, and many scholarly essays on the subject. But it didn't come to much and didn't last. Self-stimulation was too obviously an expression of *in*sufficiency, of lack; literally, of wanting something. Thoughtful individuals disagree about how to identify the lack or want that self-stimulation expresses. But none can deny that *at the very least*, it expresses a want of that particular experience that one at that moment does not have, but hopes and expects, through sufficient exertion, to obtain in the near future – namely, the twinge. For the minute the desire for the twinge appears, one is in a state of dissatisfaction and neediness that lasts until the minute that desire is satisfied.

It may seem to some that self-stimulation expresses an even deeper lack of wholeness than this; that the real neediness and insufficiency that self-stimulation reveals is to be found in its solitary and "anti-social" nature. The view would be that the self-stimulator is compelled by loneliness to engage in this practice; and that the deeper need that self-stimulation expresses is the desire for a loving relationship with another. On this view, it is the fact that the self-stimulator is so lonely or unfulfilled as to have to resort to this activity as a substitute for a satisfying relationship with another person that elicits our pity.

However, this view is problematic on at least two counts. First, there is the assumed connection between desiring the twinge and desiring love. There is no necessary connection between these two. Second, there is the assumed connection

between desiring the twinge and desiring a relationship with another. This assumption seems even more problematic. Combining these two questionable assumptions into an assumed connection between desiring the twinge and desiring another's loving companionship merely compounds the confusion.

Certainly a person may be taught to *associate* the twinge with love, and with companionship. She may expect that they will occur together, and therefore have emotional reactions to the twinge (or lack thereof) that are in fact caused by the relationship; as, for example, when someone's desire for the twinge is frustrated by her anxiety about her partner's unfaithfulness. Conversely, a person may have emotional reactions to a relationship that are in fact caused by the twinge (or lack thereof). For example, someone may experience obsessive attachment to his partner based on his craving for the twinge, which turns into indifference toward his partner when that craving is satisfied elsewhere. Many different kinds of confusions, misunderstandings and disappointments can arise from an unreflective conflation of desiring the twinge and desiring a loving relationship. The desire for the twinge and the desire for loving companionship with another are different, and have no necessary interconnection. Brahmacharya is strictly incompatible only with the first.

First suppose one *in fact* seeks the twinge, independent of what one believes one is seeking. Then whether the exertions necessary to obtain it are performed by oneself or by another is in fact relevant only to the convenience, ease and speed with which the twinge can be obtained. We would not suppose the sex addict, constantly on the prowl for serial participants through whom to obtain the twinge, to be any less needy or incomplete than the self-stimulator. Indeed we may think of the sex addict as a compulsive self-stimulator who seeks the twinge not only through her own agency, but also through the agency and participation of others; who must

therefore orchestrate, manipulate, and often damage particularly complex props, namely other people, in order to obtain it.

On the other hand, suppose one in fact seeks another's loving companionship, again independent of what one believes one is seeking. In this case, conventional social practice obscures this fact, by dictating that supplying and receiving the twinge are necessary prerequisites. Thus conjoining the desire for the twinge with the need for companionship is the acceptable social remedy for both insufficiencies. By forging a meaningful psychological connection with a single, long-term sexual partner, we enter into an agreement – whether implicit or explicit – to satisfy many different kinds of needs and desires – including our shared desire for the twinge. Some might argue that it is that deep and long-term interpersonal connection that gives the twinge meaning; that can, after all, transform it into an expression of love.

But it is hard to see how the twinge *itself* can be an expression of love. It can certainly inspire gratitude, appreciation, loyalty and affection – or even obsession – toward its supplier. But we can't claim to love a person merely because he satisfies our needs, and we can't claim to express that love merely by experiencing the satisfaction itself. The twinge itself is just what it is, and nothing more: a moment of intense, private pleasure that floods the senses, shuts down the mind and relieves muscular tension. Even if both partners feel the twinge at the same moment, each is feeling his or her own private twinge. They may be sharing the moment, but they are not sharing the twinge. Strictly speaking, the twinge is not the kind of pleasure two people *can* share – the way they can share, for example, a concert or book or sunset.

A better candidate for the expression of love that is supposed to give the twinge meaning and value within a committed sexual relationship is the amount of *work* one is willing to do on behalf of facilitating the twinge for one's partner. This

may require quite a sizable expenditure of industry indeed: acrobatics, props, massage techniques, dramatic coaching, isometrics, weight training, aerobics, a special diet or medical regimen, extended psychotherapy, and a personal shopper being only a few among the relevant resources. Patience, stamina, and a spirit of self-sacrifice also may be required. In this, the industry and resourcefulness involved in supplying the twinge for one's partner may be no different in kind or quality from that involved in supplying personal care for a toddler, physical therapy for the incapacitated, or food for the hungry. It may indeed count as selfless service, and similarly hasten one's progress on the path to sainthood.

At this point we may wish to reconsider the importance of the twinge in a committed relationship between life partners; and scrutinize the function of the twinge in maintaining it. We may wish to interrogate the quality of the commitment that requires the twinge to maintain it. Conventional social practice pressures us to infer, if the twinge is not willingly supplied or received, that the relationship itself must be defective. If failure to supply the twinge signals the end or deterioration of a long-term, committed relationship, then regardless of the other complex dimensions such a relationship may comprise, essentially it is organized around production and supply of the twinge; and subordinate in importance to it. In this case, the human life's worth of intelligence, experience, character, and personality one contributes to such a relationship is similarly subordinate in importance to the ease and alacrity with which one can supply the twinge for one's partner.

But to thus devalue the person for the sake of the twinge she is assigned to supply is merely one troubling expression of the extraordinary, and often dangerous, ridiculous or tragic lengths to which we are prepared to go in order to obtain the twinge. Just as conventional social practice diminishes correspondingly the value of other aspects of a life partnership when the twinge is absent, we are

similarly inclined to multiply exponentially the resources we are willing to invest – and risk – in order to obtain it. Thought, time, energy, money, power, family, identity, self-definition, friendship, colleagues, career, social status, connections, public reputation, and even life itself are among the social goods human beings willingly risk in pursuit of the twinge. Lab rats, in whose tiny skulls electrodes have been implanted that stimulate the pleasure centers of the brain when a lever is pressed, will press the lever repeatedly and persistently, to the exclusion of all else, foregoing food, sleep and ultimately survival itself in order to prolong the twinge.

We may try to distance ourselves from the sex addict as from an isolated case, a psychologically damaged human being who for that reason alone is disposed to make a comparable trade-off. But to the extent that we are willing to prioritize our lives or activities or relationships, or risk our reputation or physical or mental wellbeing for the same end, we are similarly vulnerable to that description. The success of the marketing strategy that associates sex with consumption in determining our actual patterns of consumption and mobility strongly suggests that the shoe fits. Sex addiction fuels our economy and our society, as well as saturating our culture.

Thus the face value of the twinge is directly proportional to the resources we are willing to invest in order to obtain it. The greater the lengths to which we are prepared to go – that is, the more we are willing to invest, risk or sacrifice in order to obtain the twinge, the greater the importance and value it has for us. What the lab rat experiment suggests, and what the widespread social phenomenon of sex addiction suggests, is that our attachment to the twinge is so great that we may be willing to risk or sacrifice literally *anything* in order to obtain it. That human beings repeatedly demonstrate their readiness to risk or sacrifice any or all that is of human

value in order to obtain the twinge is a reliable indicator that it very often outweighs the value and importance of anything and everything else.

III. The Chakras

So far I have treated our pursuit of the twinge as a psychological, social and biological given, an innate drive whose force we are helpless to withstand. There is a lot of truth to such a conception of human sexuality, and it would be a very great mistake to underestimate the overwhelming force of this drive. That it so often makes intelligent and reflective people do stupid, dangerous or ridiculous things attests to its power. Yet the fact that the twinge has such overriding power for us does not explain *why* it does. Is it the inherent power of the twinge that drives us to seek it at all costs? Or is it our drive to seek the twinge at all costs that confers power on it?

Obviously there are many individual psychological and social factors that enter into a person's ascription of ultimate and incomparable power to the twinge: age, biochemistry, personal history, peer pressure, cultural norms among them. Our global "advertainment industry" underwrites such factors. It operates on the assumption that we are essentially like the lab rat; i.e. that we can be conditioned to do and buy and wear and consume everything that brings us closer to obtaining the twinge. This social programming is remarkably successful in convincing us of the power and intrinsic value of the twinge; and so that we are justified in arranging all aspects of our lives in order to maximize it. It conditions us to be self-stimulators writ large, and to measure and evaluate all aspects of our lives and relationships in its terms. We can measure the success of this campaign by our unreflective compliance with its edicts.

However, by so complying, we in fact confirm the converse principle: that it is rather our drive to obtain the twinge at all costs that confers on it its special power and significance. Were we *not* to organize our most important relationships, social and material resources, self-definition, time, energy, and thought around obtaining the twinge, but rather around, say, obtaining justice for the disadvantaged, the power and importance of the twinge in our eyes would be considerably reduced, and the value of justice for the disadvantaged correspondingly increased. Of course this would not prevent some individuals from performing stupid or ridiculous actions, or taking dangerous or self-destructive risks, in order to obtain the twinge. But it might prevent us from investing in possessions and connections and schemes and relationships and social identities specifically designed to facilitate it. And it might prevent us from automatically evaluating as deficient a loving life partnership that failed to supply it. This is only one example of a more general principle: that we assign power and importance to a state of affairs to the extent that we give it our attention. And we determine what *is* powerful and important by allocating our attention accordingly.

According to Freudian psychology, this principle is false. The sexual drive, on Freud's view, is a basic, biologically instilled fact of life. Our ingenious attempts to control and guide sexual energy furnish the underpinnings of social organization as well as the personal challenge of self-governance. To accord it less of our attention would be, effectively, to repress it; to drive our sexual urges underground, where they would determine our behavior beyond the reach of consciousness. The Freudian model predicts that we would ventilate this repressed sexual energy in even more self-destructive and self-defeating ways than we already do.

However, yoga psychology sees the matter differently. On this model, there is no energy that can be identified as specifically and essentially sexual, and hence

no necessity underlying the contingent fact that in this society our behavior is, by and large, determined by our obsession with sex. Yoga psychology of course does not deny the social fact that most of our behavior is determined in this way. But it explains this fact differently. Yoga psychology postulates a pervasive life energy, called *prana*, which we absorb through the breath and which can take different forms and find different outlets – depending on the physical, psychological and spiritual condition of the agent. For example, whereas the Freudian would speak of the "sublimation" of sexual energy into work, politics or creativity, yoga psychology states more simply that life energy can be channeled into work, politics or creativity as well as or instead of into sex. Yoga psychology states, further, that the advanced practices of yoga enable us to control and channel this energy into whichever outlets we choose.

In this tradition, there are seven, qualitatively different nerve centers in the body, called *chakras* [please refer to **Figure 1**]:

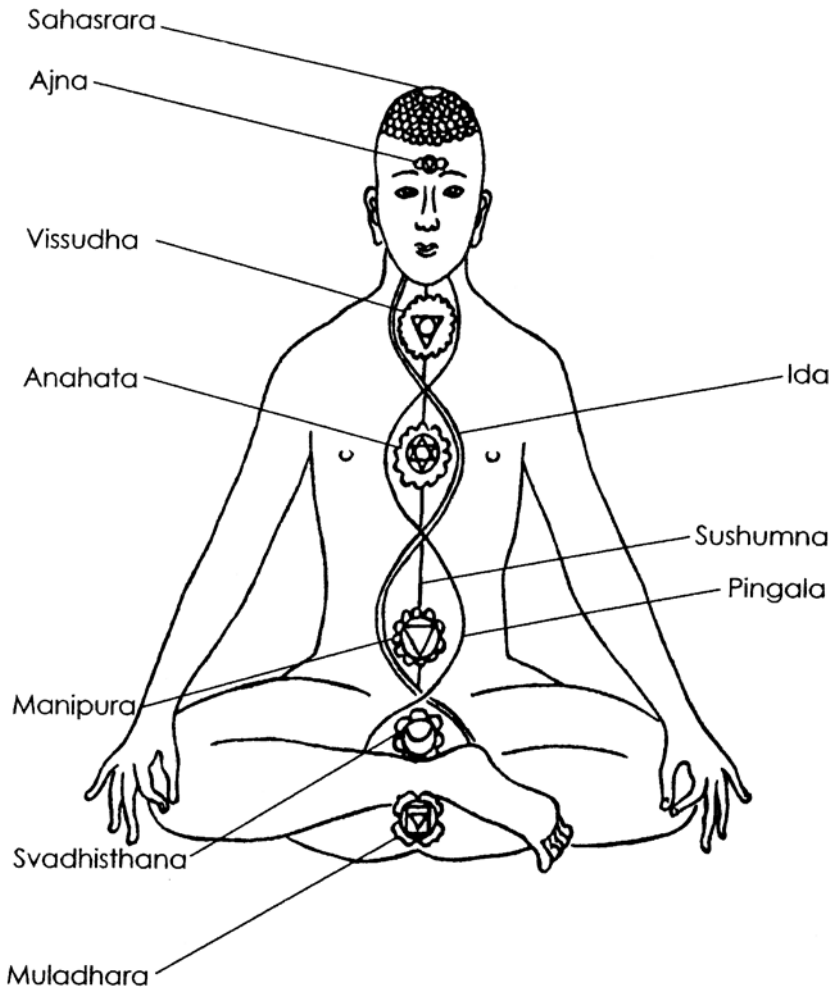

Figure 1. The Chakra System

[Illustration adapted from Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*]

These centers are anatomically identified with specific points along the inner canal of the central nervous system (or *sushumna*) at which the interconnections of nerve pathways (or *nadis*) extending to all parts of the rest of the body are particularly numerous, dense and complex. There are several million such pathways in the human body. A concentration of energy at any of these centers stimulates the connected complex of nerves, and these in turn activate a particular, qualitatively

distinct set of physical and mental dispositions. These, in turn, govern our experiences, attitudes, preoccupations, and behavioral inclinations.

The first, the *Muladhara Chakra*, directs our energy toward survival; toward obtaining security, groundedness, and equilibrium in the circumstances of our lives. The second, the *Svadhisthana Chakra*, directs prana towards sexual congress and procreation. The third, the *Manipura Chakra*, directs our energy toward the acquisition and use of power. The fourth, the *Anahata Chakra* or heart chakra, releases our emotions and pours our energy into feelings of compassion and sympathy for others, and into service on their behalf. This is the first chakra at which our energy, attention, and actions may find transpersonal or non-egocentric expression. The fifth, the *Vissudha Chakra* or throat chakra, awakens our creativity; it is here that we "find our voice" and channel our subjective experience into objective form through artistic expression. The sixth, the *Ajna Chakra,* awakens our capacity for wisdom, for insight into reality. When prana is able to reach the seventh and final chakra, the *Sahasrara Chakra*, we experience complete spiritual illumination, i.e. union with ultimate reality and freedom from the limitations of the ego, the physical body, causality, and spatiotemporal location.

Compared to the experience of spiritual illumination – described in the Upanishads as bliss or *ananda*, the twinge isn't even in the running. There is simply no contest. As the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* tells us,

> When a man has realized the Self, the pure, the immortal, the blissful, what craving can be left in him that he should take to himself another body, full of suffering, to satisfy it?[3]

Spiritual illumination does not satisfy all cravings; it eliminates them, by turning our interest and attention away from their objects and toward something infinitely more compelling that transfixes and completes us, namely the ultimate reality of pure

consciousness itself, beyond the world of name and form. Once we have experienced this true Self, everything else dwindles into insignificance and nothing else can hold our attention or interest for long. Thus a *sadhaka* who has experienced *ananda* is not even tempted to expend energy in pursuit of the twinge. From the perspective of the Sahasrara Chakra, the ascription of ultimate power and importance to the twinge, and the sacrifice of *any* energy or time or resources in its pursuit, is not simply misguided. It is positively mystifying.

In a fully illumined yogi, or *jivanmukta*, prana circulates freely throughout the entire central nervous system, stimulating all of the chakras into mutual equilibrium. The sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are under conscious control. The corresponding nadis are clear, balanced and fully sensitized. Consciousness at all seven levels is alert, all-encompassing and fully integrated. Restrictive and coercive social conditioning is absent. The yogini's all-encompassing hyper-awareness, unclouded by preconceptions or compulsive inclinational tendencies, gives her the freedom, flexibility and clarity of vision to respond appropriately to the circumstantial demands of the moment. And she sees into the deep reality of that moment, beyond the biases and distortions of superficial appearance.

In the majority of the world's population, by contrast, life energy is of necessity devoted to bare subsistence, and so largely confined to the Muladhara Chakra. Often the only available respite from the struggle for survival is the twinge, in which energy is directed toward the Svadhisthana Chakra. And the demands of survival and procreation in turn direct energy toward the accumulation of power and resources, i.e. toward the Manipura Chakra, in order to protect them. Power, in turn, both facilitates and increases sexual gratification, and also threatens as well as buttresses stability and security – which in turn require further accumulations of power to protect them. Thus the incessant demands and consequences of survival,

sex, and power create a vicious cycle in which life energy is continually rerouted from one to another, in order to manage the endlessly proliferating demands and consequences of each. The result is that life energy is confined largely to the basic needs and preoccupations of the ego-self. The four higher centers of consciousness, and the physical and mental transformations that occur there, remain inaccessible.

These are matters of basic necessity, determined by circumstance, for most of the impoverished of the world. However, they are not matters of basic necessity for the advantaged mainstream populations of any industrially developed society. External conditions in these societies do not compel the expenditure of life energy on survival, sex and power with the same inexorability. Hence they do not necessarily predetermine the level or quality of spiritual evolution of American society in particular. Its values, history, and operative social norms nevertheless guide our energies and preoccupations toward these three lower levels of consciousness, and enmesh us in this same vicious cycle. Thus yoga psychology explains our sociocultural obsession with the twinge as a largely unnecessary blockage of life energy at the sexual level – an obsession that it is within our power to transcend. And it implicitly criticizes the Freudian model as an ideological rationalization that turns a contingent matter of choice into a biological necessity.

IV. Attachment

So far I have argued that our obsession with pursuit of the twinge is not a matter of biological necessity, but rather a contingent and reversible effect of our social conditioning and societal values. Therefore our tendency to subordinate our relationships and our lives to it, and to risk or sacrifice everything in order to obtain it is not explained by the inherent power or importance of the twinge. Rather, it is explained by the power and importance we assign it. We make the twinge

important and interesting to the extent that we invest our thought, energy and psychological and material resources in it. And if we choose, we can reduce its importance and interest by divesting and redirecting our resources accordingly.

This principle sheds light on the structure of attachment more generally. On good days we may think of attachment as something like principled commitment – to a person, an enterprise, or an ideal: We consciously resolve to devote ourselves to a person (for example, by taking marriage vows), or an enterprise (for example, by signing a contract), or an ideal (for example, by joining a club or ashram or political party). On bad days, on the other hand, we may think of attachment more in accord with the metaphor of imprisonment: as being unwillingly shackled to that person, or having our hands tied by that enterprise, or feeling compelled or browbeaten by that ideal.

Both views of attachment are incomplete in so far as they neglect the importance of *personal investment*. Personal investment is about the relation between capital expenditure and net income. The more of ourselves we pour into a desire, the more attached we are to satisfying it, because the more we expect to obtain through our sacrifice. The more time, energy, and resources we invest in obtaining that satisfaction, the more important and urgent it becomes that we obtain it. Its pull on us – and its power over us – increases with the psychological and material price we pay to obtain it, and the expectations of obtaining it we thereby raise in ourselves.

On this analysis, the defining characteristics of attachment are two: First, *investment*: we expend considerable time, energy and resources on the object of attachment. Second, *return*: we then expect our expenditure to yield us corresponding rewards in happiness, pleasure or self-esteem. Attachment is a function of both the psychological output we offer up and the input in satisfaction we expect from it. As Vivekananda tells us,

> If you invariably take the position of a giver, in which everything given by you is a free offering to the world, without any thought of return, then your work will bring you no attachment. Attachment comes only where we expect a return.[4]

And when the *Bhagavad Gita* condemns one who acts "in the hour of delusion without count of cost, squandering strength and treasure, heedless of harm to another;" and one who "follows the object of his desire, or seeks wealth, or does a duty, looking for reward and personal advantage," (XVIII)[5], it is condemning action that proceeds from the delusory belief that there is a causal relationship between our ritual exertions in the service of desire and the rewards we will obtain from satisfying it.

This is part of the sense in which, as Patanjali reminds us (II.4), attachment proceeds from ignorance. Attachment to a desired object mistakenly presupposes a systematic and rule-governed connection between the magnitude and content of our personal investment in it and the magnitude and content of the returns it will bring us. Once we rid ourselves of this mistaken assumption, we can jettison the corresponding expectation of reward. Then we are free to examine, dissect and dismantle those personal investments themselves. We are also free to love another disinterestedly, for himself, independently of the needs or desires he satisfies in us. "If we really knew and loved the Atman within others," Prabhavananda observes, "the sexual act would seem utterly meaningless to us. When the Atman is known to be everywhere and always a unity, why should two outer coverings embrace?"[6]

Now apply these ruminations to our pursuit of the twinge. We make it important, powerful and expensive to the extent that we are willing to invest ourselves in obtaining it. We make this investment willingly, but not merely because our sex-obsessed society encourages us to do so. We make the investment because

we falsely believe the rewards will be worth it. Now of course the twinge is fun; really quite a lot of fun. But is it worth the social machinations, the intrigue, the diplomacy, the high-stakes negotiations, the planning, the scheduling, the expensive new outfits, the killer high-protein diet, the liposuction, the facial peel, the weight training class, the performance anxiety, the revitalizing drugs, the morning-after hangover? If your answer is: yes, it was worth it, then you must go for it, and learn the deep life lessons the twinge has to teach.

But if not, then all that was a waste. This terrifying possibility leads us to react by valorizing the twinge even more, by weaving a celebratory tribute to its importance. The more the twinge disappoints our expectations of reward, the more we must inflate it in order to justify the lengths to which we went to obtain it. To the extent that we thus convince ourselves to organize virtually everything – our social identities, beliefs, preoccupations, activities, our lives, our relationships, our social rolls, and our work around the project of obtaining and supplying the twinge, we valorize it as the most important, powerful and priceless thing there is. And this, of course, instills our addiction to it even more deeply.

But it then follows naturally that once we succeed in detaching ourselves from the twinge – i.e. from that for the sake of which we were willing to sacrifice everything, then *detaching from any of those other, subordinate things we were willing to sacrifice becomes much easier.* For example, if one was willing to risk society's disapproval in pursuit of the twinge – say, though downloading pornography on one's office computer, then once one chooses brahmacharya, detaching from the need for society's approval becomes easier. If one was prepared to sacrifice the rewards and perks of professional power in pursuit of the twinge – say, through an adulterous affair in the workplace, then once one chooses brahmacharya, detaching from the rewards and perks of professional power becomes easier. And if one was

prepared to risk life itself in pursuit of the twinge – say, by having unprotected sex with a stranger, or cuckolding a murderous spouse, then the importance of survival at any cost dwindles to manageable proportions once one chooses brahmacharya.

The general principle would be this: In a sex-addicted society that subordinates everything to pursuit of the twinge, we potentially already have a leg up in detaching ourselves from all those things we willingly subordinate. Once we choose to abstain from sex, this enables us to detach more easily from anything we might have sacrificed in pursuit of it. Thus our obsessive attachment to the twinge teaches us what means to it we in fact regard as dispensable. Once we divert our attention elsewhere, we can put that lesson to work.

V. Kaivalya

I said earlier that once we rid ourselves of the mistaken assumption that there is a systematic relationship between the psychological and material resources we invest in something and the returns it brings us, we can then banish our expectations about such returns; and are then free to examine, dissect and dismantle those personal investments themselves. So the process of detachment occurs in stages: first we free ourselves from false assumptions about cause and effect; then we free ourselves from expectations of reward; then we gradually free ourselves from identification with and personal investment in the many things, events, and ties on which we depended for such rewards. This process leads us toward the ultimate self-sufficiency that is the final goal of yoga.

Yoga is based in part on a dualistic philosophy called *Samkhya* [please refer to **Figure 2**]:

	BODY	MIND	PURUSHA
European Dualism	Material Nature Unconscious Causally determined Unintelligent Transient Inanimate Instrument Personal Object of Consciousness	Non-material Spirit Conscious Free Intelligent Enduring Animating Agent Personal Subject of Consciousness	
Samkhyan Dualism	*Bhûtas, Tanmâtras:* Material Nature Unconscious Causally determined Unintelligent Transient Inanimate Instrument Personal Object of Consciousness	*Ahamkâra, Buddhi:* Material Nature Unconscious Causally determined Unintelligent Transient thoughts + Persisting tendencies Inanimate Instrument Personal Object of Consciousness	Non-material Spirit Conscious Free Intelligent Eternal Animating Agent Impersonal Subject of Consciousness

Figure 2. European vs. Samkhyan Dualism

In the European philosophical tradition, a dualistic philosophy draws a sharp distinction between the body and the mind. The mind is nonmaterial, spiritual, conscious, intelligent and free; whereas the body is material, natural, unconscious, and causally determined. The body is regarded as the vessel or vehicle that contains the mind as its animating principle. Both body and mind are conjointly definitive of the individual, and the mind that endures after death as the immortal soul retains the stamp of the individual's character and personality, but in a purer form.

Samkhya draws a similar contrast between the material and the nonmaterial, nature and spirit, conscious and animate versus unconscious and inanimate. The difference is that Samkhya classifies both the body and the mind as inanimate and unconscious matter that provides a mere vehicle for consciousness, i.e. *Purusha* (or *Atman* in Vedanta). The role of Purusha in Samkhya is similar in some respects to the role of mind in European dualism: it is nonmaterial, spiritual, pure, conscious, free, immortal, and animates matter. However, it is different from the European

conception of mind in lying beyond it; in providing the animating principle of mind, and in merely illuminating the mind with the consciousness that we mistakenly identify with it.

Perhaps the most significant contrast between the European conception of mind and the Samkhyan conception of Purusha is that Purusha is impersonal and objective rather than personal and subjective. It retains no stamp of individual character or personality, for these are viewed as constraints, not unlike physical constraints, that imprison consciousness in matter. Instead, Purusha or consciousness in Samkhya is ultimate reality, beyond the limitations of the body, mind, or ego-self. Ignorance is that state in which we confuse consciousness with the material vehicles – the mind, body, and external physical objects – which consciousness in fact merely illuminates and animates. So the relationship between Purusha and the mind is something like the relationship between you and your computer.

The ultimate goal of yoga is to detach our consciousness from its enmeshment in these material vehicles, so that it can re-establish itself in its own free, independent and transcendent nature. We achieve this through sadhana, by practicing those yogic disciplines that gradually disentangle our sense of wholeness from dependence on external material conditions. Through sadhana we come to differentiate between our expectations and the facts; and so gradually come to detach ourselves from those facts we recognize as extrinsic to our true nature, and therefore unimportant [please refer to **Figure 3**].

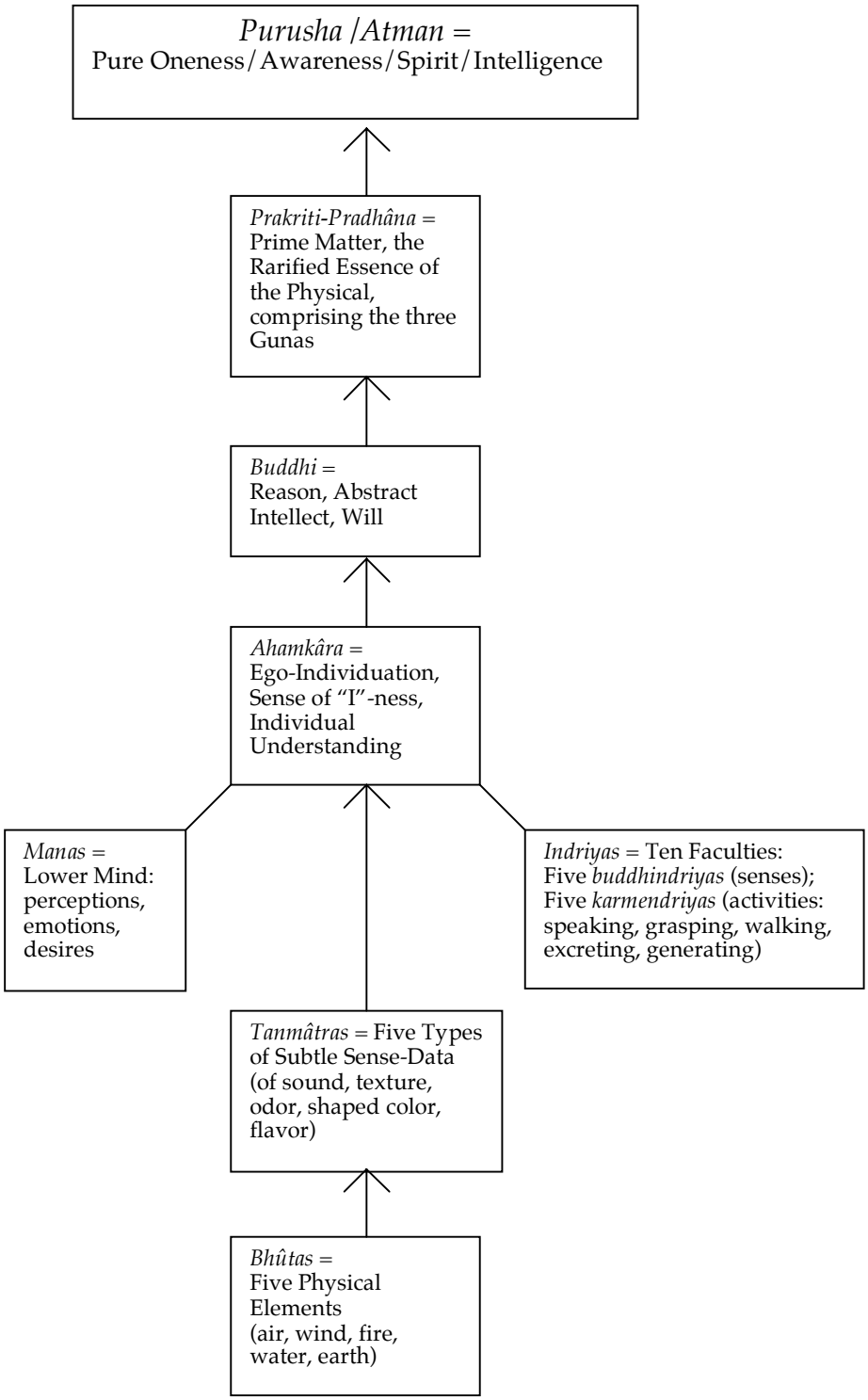

Figure 3. The Twenty-Five Tattvas

As we progress in sadhana, we progressively withdraw our attention and interest, first from macroscopic physical objects, including the body (the *Bhûtas*); then from the microscopic material properties by which we identify them (the *Tanmâtras*); then from sensory interaction with them (the *Indriyas*), and so on. At

each stage we discern our distinctness and independence from something with which, at an earlier stage, we fully identified and in which we were psychologically invested; and our sense of wholeness and self-sufficiency grows stronger and deeper. The process of detachment begins with the physical properties we recognize, on reflection, as external to our true selves: our possessions, our connections, our worldly ambitions. But it proceeds by dismantling our identification with psychological properties from which it may be harder to disentangle our awareness: from recognizing that we are not identical with our minds (*Manas*), but rather may witness and dissect its operations from a distance; to the recognition that we are not even our ego-self (*Ahamkâra*), but rather may view it, too – its needs, struggles, and conflicts – from a reflective and compassionate distance; to the realization that we are even greater and more than our intellect (*Buddhi*), with its enormous scope and power to transport us in thought to anywhere, any time, and to encompass any level of abstraction or generality. Now we see from a perspective beyond the limitations of our "pet human" just how confining those limitations were. To finally realize what we are – namely Purusha – is to see that our imprisonment was self-imposed by our erroneous attachment to all of the foregoing material constraints – on which we are not at all dependent. To free ourselves from that attachment is to turn our attention and interest to our awareness itself; i.e. to situate ourselves in consciousness alone, independent of any of its objects. In Samkhya, the term *kaivalya* refers to this state of ultimate spiritual self-sufficiency. The relative ease of detachment that brahmacharya brings is merely a preview of things to come. I'll close with Vivekananda's advice:

> So get this experience of husbands and wives and friends and little loves; you will pass through them safely if you never forget what you really are. Never forget that this is only a momentary state and that you have to pass through

> it. Experience [of pleasure and pain] is the one great teacher …. It leads step by step to that state where all things become small, and the Purusha so great that the whole universe seems as a drop in the ocean and falls off by its own nothingness.[7]

Endnotes

[1] This paper was delivered at the "Sacred Celibacy" Conference at Loyola Marymount University in April 2004.

[2] *Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Los Angeles: The Vedanta Society of Southern California, 1987), 46.

[3] *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (New York: Mentor, 1964), 110.

[4] Swami Vivekananda, "The Secret of Work," in *Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, 1982), 40-41.

[5] *Op. cit.* Note 2, 155 and 157.

[6] Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (New York: Mentor, 1969), 105.

[7] Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1955), 160.