

# ***Tattvas* in the Material World**

## **An invaluable tool for creating a life of well-being**

### **I. Introduction:**

We defined a life of well-being as a life rich in positive emotions, engagement (being in flow), meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships. The purpose of this course is to explore how yoga helps us attain such a life.

As part of our study we've been discussing the *Tattvas*, the categories in which God exists in the world. While classical yoga views the material world as separate and distinct from God, certain non-dual Tantric traditions teach that God, or Supreme Consciousness, lives as each of these categories; as every material object on the planet. Thus, the *Tattvas* are a guidebook for where to look to connect with God. This connection with God is in fact the ultimate definition of yoga.

Even if our goal is not to find the Divine, but rather, to focus on making this life as complete as we can, the *Tattvas* are a guidebook for helping us reach that goal. We can use the lessons of the *Tattvas* to create engagement with family, friends, strangers, the community, and even the planet. They teach us to fully engage in each moment and each worthwhile opportunity that presents itself. It is through this engagement that we create our life of well-being.

So far we've seen how Supreme Consciousness, *Paramshiva*, through the energies of *Shiva* and *Shakti*, forms an intention to create the universe. We've seen how that intention evolves from a vague, blurry image or object appearing in a flash (*Abhasa*) to a clearly defined and specific object ready to be manifested.

That specific, clearly discernable object is then subjected to the influence of *Maya*, the process of limitation in which Supreme Consciousness deliberately limits itself and its powers. This limiting process occurs through the *Kanchukas* and contracting energies of the *Malas*.

As each object of *Paramshiva's* intention becomes manifest, the differentiating energy of *Maya* allows the objects to become part of our physical world, with each manifested object different from every other, but never separate. It is this intentional diversity that makes each object different. They are not separate from each other because of their common connection to *Paramshiva*, with each object simply a deliberately different expression of the one Supreme Consciousness.

The necessary by-product of manifestation is that because of the differences we suffer from the illusion of separation, forgetting that we are all simply a diverse manifestation of the Divine. The *Tattvas* offer us a vehicle to remember this Divine connection. Yoga practices explored in this course help us use this and other tools for connecting. These same tools are also "tailor-made" for helping us better connect to life's richness.

Now we turn our attention to objects after they are manifested in the “Relative” or material world.

## II. The Physical *Tattvas* of the Relative or material world: *Purusha*, *Prakriti*, and the *Gunas*.

Each object manifests in some sort of physical form in what we call the Relative or material world. Human beings, of course, manifest as human beings, each with their own particular bodies and minds.

According to *Sankhya* philosophy, represented in the *Sankhya Karika* by Isvarakrsna, written somewhere around 400 BCE to 500 BCE, the material world is made of two categories, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. These categories are adopted by the yoga tradition.<sup>1</sup>

The two categories of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* sit at the top of the *Sankhya Tattva* list, with *Purusha* constituting the innumerable souls or individual selves of the world, and *Prakriti* constituting the material out of which the world is made.<sup>2</sup> In the extended Kashmir Shaivite list of *Tattvas*, *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are the first two *Tattvas* we encounter in the physical or material world—the first layer, so to speak, of manifestation after the limiting action of *Maya*.

### A. *Purusha*.

*Purusha* is our individual soul. The word “*Purusha*” means “the one who dwells in the castle.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Many yoga traditions, from classical to non-dual Tantra, view each of us as having an individual and transcendent soul, our “innermost conscious self.” This individual soul is called *Purusha*. The material world is full of these souls, or individual *Purushas*.<sup>4</sup>
  - a. In classical yoga, as represented by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*, all of our cognitive functions, i.e., thoughts, feelings, and memories, are part of the material world, *Prakriti*, as opposed to the soul, *Purusha*. In contrast, *Purusha* is pure awareness. This is different from certain Western viewpoints, which attribute thoughts, feelings, and emotions to the “self,” or soul.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, Dr. Edwin (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. New York, NY: North Point Press, at xlviii.

<sup>2</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlviii.

<sup>3</sup> Shantanada, Swami (2003). *The Splendor of Recognition*. South Fallsburg, NY: SYDA Association, at 99.

<sup>4</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlvii–viii.

<sup>5</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlvi.

- b. Pertinent to our study of creating a life of well-being, Dr. Edwin Bryant, author and Professor of Hinduism at Rutgers University, suggests the idea that thoughts, feelings, and memories are part of the physical body seems to correlate with current work in neurology involving brain functioning.<sup>6</sup> Recalling the subject of building emotional resilience, we build that resilience by creating new patterns of thoughts and, by extension, behavior resulting from those thoughts. This work very clearly involves the creation of new neural circuitry and connections, all part of the physical brain/body.<sup>7</sup>
2. The goal of classical yoga is connection with or “realization” of that soul, with, eventually, attainment of the kingdom of God (*Isvara*).<sup>8</sup> This eventual and complete union with God, which sounds very much like “Heaven” in the Christian world, requires evolution of the soul resulting in liberation from the material world.
3. Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* are yoga’s manual of practices for reaching union with *Isvara*, or God.<sup>9</sup> We will discuss these practices in later talks, linking each with methods for achieving a life of well-being.
4. The principal focus of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* (and the principal method for reaching connection of any type) is meditative absorption (meditation), leading to liberation and connection with *Purusha*. Patanjali discusses the methods and levels of that absorption, *Samadhi*.
  - a. Dr. Edwin Bryant, author and Professor of Hinduism at Rutgers University, writes that while Patanjali is silent as to what ultimate connection or interaction with God (*Isvara*) looks like, other texts offer suggestions. These suggestions include reincarnation so that, as mentioned above, the soul can evolve, with a view that at some point it is possible for the soul to realize an eternal existence residing with God in a pure form; i.e., without a material body.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlvi.

<sup>7</sup> See posted outline in this course: “What is Success?” Dorigan, William (2014).

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<sup>8</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 473–474.

<sup>9</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlvii.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 472–474; citing Bryant, Edwin, Editor (2007). *Krishna: A Source Book*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, at xxxvii–viii, discussing the *Bhagavata Purana*’s reference to the realm of Vaikuntha in which souls who have transcended the material world reside with *Isvara* in a state of love and devotion.

- b. Reincarnation is a favored view in yoga traditions with respect to what happens to an individual *Purusha* after the physical body dies.<sup>11</sup>
  - c. The soul's immortality is not limited to the yoga traditions. For example, Plato discussed the immortality of the soul in his works *The Republic* and *Phaedo*.<sup>12</sup>
  - d. There are some in the yoga tradition who suggest that there is no reincarnation; that our time on earth is the only time we have to experience life in any form, physical or ethereal. They propose that there is no "hereafter" of any type, other than what might be explained by quantum physics.
  - e. It isn't a purpose of this course to offer any definitive answer to this question, beyond: "who knows?" In fact, how could I possibly "know" the answer in order to try to foist it onto you? Each student has to consider this question based on his or her particular faith and perspective.
5. In non-dual tantric systems such as Kashmir Shaivism, God resides in the material world, so the notion of liberation of the soul from the material world would be counterproductive if the goal is total absorption with God. The *Tattvas* become a roadmap for finding God in the world by pointing out every category of life where Universal Consciousness can be found if we choose to look.
- a. Sutra 4 of the *Pratyabhijna-hrdayam* provides: "Even the individual, whose nature is Consciousness in a contracted state, embodies the universe in a contracted form."<sup>13</sup>
  - b. In discussing this Sutra, Swami Shantananda of the Siddha Yoga tradition reminds us that every individual being is a "perfect

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<sup>11</sup> There is debate as to whether *Purusha* is an active agent of willpower, or simply a passive witness to choices made by the mind and executed by the body. Dr. Bryant suggests that the various behavioral choices of right or wrong identified in the *Yoga Sutras* support a conclusion that these souls, *Purushas*, are not only transcendent beings of consciousness and knowledge, but also are vested with the free will necessary to make such choices. See Dr. Bryant's analysis in his "Concluding Reflections" contained in *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 462–466. Given this point, it seems that the *Purusha* must be involved with choices; otherwise why is it "punished" for the deeds of the body/mind by deferring its ultimate union with *Ishvara*?

<sup>12</sup> See, generally, Grube, G.M.A., revised by Reeve, C.D.C (1992). *Republic*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.; *Plato's Phaedo* (2010). New York, NY: Classic Books International.

<sup>13</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 89.

replica” of Supreme Consciousness. As a result of *Maya*, however, each individual exists in the contracted form mentioned in this sutra.<sup>14</sup>

- c. The term used to identify an individual in such a contracted state is *Cidanu*, a divine particle or atom (*anu*) created through the energy of *Anava Mala*. This *mala* (not genuine) creates the sense of separation resulting from the diversity of forms caused by Supreme Consciousness choosing to limit itself in order to manifest in the material world. Each *cidanu* is a seed of that choice that becomes an individual being.<sup>15</sup>
6. We can consider our own soul, or *Purusha*, as our own *Paramshiva*, cloaked by *Anava Mala* and *Maya*, so that we view the world as being separate from us, instead of part of an interconnected Supreme Consciousness in manifested form.<sup>16</sup>
7. However, what is crucial to understand is that we aren’t mandated by our condition of birth to view the world as separate. Through knowledge and practice we can become “liberated” from that viewpoint.
  - a. A key focus of non-dual tantric yoga, such as that of Kashmir Shaivism, through texts such as the *Pratyabhijna-hridayam*, is that we are able, through practice, reading, contemplation, and, perhaps, guidance from teachers, to lift the veil of ignorance that causes us to see the world as separate. Then, interconnectedness with Supreme Consciousness is revealed.
  - b. The *Tattvas* are considered in Kashmir Shaivism to be the “map of the spiritual journey,” and the “means” to locate the Divine within the world and recognize our Divine connection. Finding God in the world is the Kashmir Shaivite form of liberation.<sup>17</sup>
8. Just as *Paramshiva* is the all-knowing subject, we become our own individual subject, with the seed of Consciousness, the “I AM” residing in the castle of the soul, our *Purusha*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 90, 98.

<sup>15</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 98.

<sup>16</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 98.

<sup>17</sup> See, generally, *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 93.

<sup>18</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 99–100; see also, posted outline in this course: “The Creation Story and *Maya*.” Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

- a. Whereas *Paramshiva* views the flash of a subject, the *Abhasa*, to simply be a reflection of itself, here the individual soul interprets perceptions or flashes, *Abhasa*, of others to be separate from himself or herself.<sup>19</sup>
  - b. Dr. Kamalakar Mishra, author and retired Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Banaras Hind University in Varanasi, India, compares the innumerable *Purushas* in the world to the many rays of light coming from one bright light; each ray is a different manifestation of the one light, different but not separate from that light.<sup>20</sup>
  - c. Dr. Mishra also points out that in Kashmir Shaivism *Purusha* is not simply part of the material world, *Prakriti*, but also the material world is the *Shakti* or power of the soul; the “manifestation” of the soul or *Purusha*.<sup>21</sup> This is a powerful point: we don’t try to become liberated from the world; we use the world to gain greater connection.
9. The implications of Dr. Mishra’s points are significant for us in this course. Regardless of our particular spiritual beliefs, we can remember that we each exist as a unique human being, each with a special combination of strengths and experiences.
- a. By stating to ourselves: “I am,” we can teach ourselves to return to this vital recognition of our own specialness and connection to others.
  - b. Through this recognition we then are reminded that each moment offers an invitation to be meaningful, to serve something bigger than ourselves.
  - c. We remember to slow down and allow ourselves to experience, and possibly share, positive emotion. Maybe we are the ones initiating the potential for positivity resonance, as, for example, when we point out the wonder of the sunset, the interesting display

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<sup>19</sup> Mishra, Kamalakar (1993). *Kashmir Shaivism The Central Philosophy of Tantrism*. Portland, OR: Rudra Press, at 177–179. For a discussion of the concept of *Abhasa*, please see posted outline in this course: “The Creation Story and *Maya*.” Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

<sup>20</sup> *Kashmir Shaivism* (Misra), at 178.

<sup>21</sup> *Kashmir Shaivism* (Misra), at 179.

in a store window, the joy of a song, or the opportunity for another to experience pride.<sup>22</sup>

- d. When we remember we are a unique person with our own preferences, we allow ourselves to choose tasks to accomplish for their own sake just because we feel enriched by the task, and we save time to engage in projects that bring us into flow, the feeling of engagement.
  - e. By remembering we have something to offer and by actively seeking to connect with others out of service or just for the sake of it, we better situate ourselves to develop and maintain nurturing relationships. We become better at connection when we see the unique “I am” of others as something to be explored and cultivated as opposed to something to fear. Recall the wisdom of Dr. Viktor Frankl who, when describing how to be meaningful in the world, suggested we get to know somebody so well that we see the greatness in them that they fail to see. We don’t stop there: we then find a way to coax that greatness into being.<sup>23</sup> This type of attitude will truly build nurturing relationships.
10. *Purusha*, then, is our soul. Regardless of what becomes of our soul when our body says goodbye to the material world, we have the opportunity to enrich our soul and our life while we are here. We do so in many ways, such as searching for and connecting to those people and experiences that nurture our experience and by offering our own particular strengths to better situate others to do the same.

We now turn to a discussion of the material world, *Prakriti*, the power or *Shakti* with which we create our life of well-being.

## B. *Prakriti*.

*Prakriti* is everything in the material world, including the “raw stuff” out of which the world is formed.<sup>24</sup>

- 1. Patanjali refers to *Prakriti* in Yoga Sutra 1.45 as the subtlest cause of everything.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of positive emotions and positivity resonance, see posted outline in this course: “What is Success?” Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

<sup>23</sup> See posted outline in this course: “What is Success?” Dorigan, William (2014).

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<sup>24</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 571.

<sup>25</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 155–156; Dr. Bryant explains why the word “*alinga*,” that which has no sign, refers to *Prakriti* in this case.



2. *Prakriti* is the name Kashmir Shaivites give to the “creative force” that enwraps the *Purushas*.<sup>26</sup> As we discussed, we create our life of well-being through our interaction with the material world, not by avoiding it.
3. From a Kashmir Shaivite perspective, the very reason for manifestation of these objects by *Paramshiva* (through the interaction of *Shiva* and *Shakti*) is for the creative joy of experiencing itself, the play (*Lila*) of it. As individual manifestations, we, too, have the opportunity to experience that creative joy (*Ananda*).
4. For this experience to occur, there necessarily must be objects for *Paramshiva* to experience through the innumerable individual *Purushas*. Therefore, arising simultaneously with *Purusha* is *Prakriti*, the beginning or natural creation; the “She who affects the *Purusha*.”<sup>27</sup>
5. The individual *Purushas*, like *Paramshiva*, first sense “I am” and then perceives objects. However, unlike *Paramshiva* the individual *Purushas* perceive the objects as separate, as “others,” because of the influence of *Maya*.
6. We don’t have to succumb to this limiting viewpoint. *Prakriti*, is our “creative force,” the “raw stuff” out of which we can create whatever world we choose to make for ourselves. It is the material from which we forge a life rich in positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships.
7. In both classical yoga and in non-dual Tantra, the material world, *Prakriti*, is made through the interaction of three qualities or attributes of matter, called *Gunas*,<sup>28</sup> to which we now direct our attention.

### C. The *Gunas*.

There are three *Gunas* (“threads” or “strands” as of a rope, “features,”<sup>29</sup> or “qualities.”<sup>30</sup>). They are the substance from which everything in the world, mental

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<sup>26</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 143.

<sup>27</sup> Chatterji, Dr. J.C. (1986). *Kashmir Shaivism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, at 10; 48–49.

<sup>28</sup> Iyengar, B.K.S. (1979 ed.). *Light on Yoga*. New York, NY: Shoken Books, at 46.

<sup>29</sup> *Kashmir Shaivism* (Chaterji), at 51; *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlviii.

<sup>30</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 142.



and physical, is made. The comparison is made to the strands of a rope because ropes are combinations of threads or strands.<sup>31</sup> Swami Gurumayi Chidvilasananda of the Siddha Yoga tradition writes that the *Gunas* are the “three strands [making up] the rope of material existence.”<sup>32</sup> Everything in the Relative or material world, consists of some combination of the *Gunas*.<sup>33</sup>

The three *Gunas* are *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*.

1. *Sattva Guna* is the quality of lucidity, tranquility, wisdom, detachment, peace, and mental clarity, leading us to serenity.<sup>34</sup> *Sattva Guna* is purity and light and, as such, is the closest to *Purusha* and can lead to harmony.<sup>35</sup> It is through the quality of *Sattva*, that we make choices resulting in connection.
2. *Rajas Guna* is the quality of mobility or action, which makes us tend to be energetic, tense, or willful.<sup>36</sup> It can lead to passion.<sup>37</sup> The influence of *Rajas* can cause yearning, attachment, restlessness, and a feeling of power, but can also result in creativity.<sup>38</sup>
3. *Tamas Guna* is the quality of darkness and restraint, which can operate to counteract our tendency for action or prevent clarity.<sup>39</sup> It represents inertia.<sup>40</sup> It can lead to sluggishness, delusion, and impurity.<sup>41</sup> The influence of *Tamas* can result in ignorance, disinterest, and lethargy.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlviii.

<sup>32</sup> Chidvilasananda, Swami (1996). *The Yoga of Discipline*. South Fallsburg, NY: SYDA Foundation, at 9.

<sup>33</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 57–58; Iyengar, B.K.S. (1979 ed.). *Light on Yoga*, at 46.

<sup>34</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlviii; 573; *Light on Yoga*, at 46.

<sup>35</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 143; *The Yoga of Discipline*, at 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Light on Yoga*, at 46.

<sup>37</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 143; *The Yoga of Discipline*, at 9.

<sup>38</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 572.

<sup>39</sup> *Light on Yoga*, at 46.

<sup>40</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlviii.

<sup>41</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 143; *The Yoga of Discipline*, at 9.

<sup>42</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 574.

The *Gunas* “stir” *Prakriti* in order to create all forms or objects. They are always in flux. Although a particular *Guna* might be dominant in its influence at any particular moment, no single *Guna* is ever present without at least the influence of another at play.<sup>43</sup>

The entire universe evolves out of this interaction. Dr. Bryant gives examples of how stones evolved based on the sluggishness of the *Tamasic* element, whereas air has the buoyancy of *Sattva*. He says that the *Gunas* allow for “infinite plasticity” of *Prakriti* as it forms and reforms the entire material world.<sup>44</sup>

Our bodies are made of the *Gunas*. A very common yoga view is, while *Purusha* never dies, the constant interaction of the *Gunas* with each other results in death of our body and rebirth in a different body to “house” our *Purusha*, or soul.<sup>45</sup> Patanjali discusses how the soul evolves in his *Yoga Sutras*, and is the subject of later talks.

Thus, the *Gunas* represent general tendencies of how we act.<sup>46</sup> Depending on a person’s particular psychological makeup that person might exhibit a general predisposition, yet might act differently depending upon which *Guna* is predominant at that moment.<sup>47</sup>

1. In classical yoga the goal is to strive for the lucidity of *Sattva*, avoiding the influences of *Rajas* and *Tamas*, which can distract us from *Purusha* by bringing our attention back into the material world.<sup>48</sup>
2. While viewing the world with the clarity of *Sattva* is a goal of non-dual Tantra as well, we must remember the viewpoint that God resides in the world as each manifestation or object in that world. Therefore, focusing on the material world is not a problem, but, instead, is part of our mystical quest for connection to Supreme Consciousness.
3. Swami Shantananda refers to the *Gunas* as the “herbs and spices,” the “flavoring” of us. We might be sweet, hot, or some other flavor depending on how the seasonings are mixed.<sup>49</sup> Just as a seasoned chef learns to use

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<sup>43</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 57–58; 209.

<sup>44</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlix.

<sup>45</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 220.

<sup>46</sup> Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC., at 138.

<sup>47</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at xlviii–xlix.

<sup>48</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 58; 211.

<sup>49</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 143.

herbs and spices to create a delicacy; so, too, we can learn to use our knowledge of these tendencies or qualities of thought to enrich our lives.

4. Gurumayi writes about how the influences of the *Gunās* can lead us away from a life of well-being.
  - a. When we are under the influence of *Tamas*, we live in delusion as to what is important. Rather than building loving relationships, for example, we thrive in competition and trying to outdo everyone else. Instead of seeking ways to be engaged in meaningful activities, we lie, cheat, and cause harm. We are guided by our darkest impulses.<sup>50</sup>
  - b. *Rajasic* influence drives us to attachment to results and worldly pleasure, distracting us from evaluating our choices from the perspective of whether they serve a greater purpose than just our own self-indulgence.<sup>51</sup>
  - c. *Sattvic* influence allows us to view our decisions without the hot but confusing passion of competition and without attachment to sensory pleasures or results.<sup>52</sup> We perceive each moment from the clarifying light of our highest self, that part of the self closest to our soul. We consider the implications of our choices and how they might serve or detract from meaning.
5. In Chapter 40 of *Finding the Midline* I point out how the seemingly negative aspects of *Rajas* and *Tamas* can also operate to enrich our lives. For example, we might need the more active, fiery energy of *Rajas* when we wake up tired but have to be “on our toes” for a meeting. We need it to spur action in others, as perhaps in a political season or in opposition to hostile behavior. Conversely, when we need to rest, we benefit from quiet and a settled feeling of *Tamas*.<sup>53</sup>
6. To create a life of well-being, we must be aware of the *Gunās* and how they operate. Gurumayi suggests we pay attention to the different feelings we experience and engage in self-study, not taking the easy route of denial and rationalization in the face of challenges.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *The Yoga of Discipline*, at 9–11.

<sup>51</sup> *The Yoga of Discipline*, at 11–13.

<sup>52</sup> *The Yoga of Discipline*, at 14–15.

<sup>53</sup> *Finding the Midline*, at 137–139.

<sup>54</sup> *Spendor of Recognition*, at 144, fn 61, citing an unpublished transcript at page 11 of a talk given by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda on February 23, 1991.

- a. This is consistent with our goal of creating emotional resilience, ridding us of patterns of thought and behavior that hinder our efforts towards creating a life of well-being. If we are aware that we tend to be too quick to jump to conclusions or perhaps too passive, we can watch these tendencies and learn when they are getting in our way.
- b. The *Gunās* have the power to distort our experiences by affecting our moods, so we need to be sensitive to whether we are reacting based on the particular herb or spice of the moment.<sup>55</sup>

### III. The Physical *Tattvas* of the Relative or material world: *Buddhi*, *Ahamkara*, and *Manas*.

The *Tattvas* divide our mind, our thinking system, into three components: *Buddhi*, *Manas*, and *Ahamkara*, each with its own functions.

#### A. *Buddhi*.

*Buddhi* is that part of our self closest to *Purusha*. It is our intellect and the way we perceive experiences and figure out what they mean.<sup>56</sup> The *Buddhi* is where we discriminate and make choices.<sup>57</sup> It is the seat of our will, virtue, and ability to detach.<sup>58</sup>

The senses (*Jnanendriyas*), our ears, eyes, nose, tongue, and skin, gather impressions and present them as objects of perception to the *Buddhi*.<sup>59</sup>

Being closest to *Purusha*, it is the location of our Spiritual intelligence and ultimately where we discriminate and make choices that either serve something bigger than us or are self-indulgent.<sup>60</sup> As such, *Buddhi* is the highest and most subtle aspect of the mind.

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<sup>55</sup> *Finding the Midline*, at 139.

<sup>56</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 100.

<sup>57</sup> *Light on Yoga*, at 20.

<sup>58</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 566.

<sup>59</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 136–138.

<sup>60</sup> See, generally, Feuerstein, Dr. Georg (1998). *Tantra The Path of Ecstasy*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., at 64.

Gurumayi offers suggestions that can aid *Buddhi* in making virtuous choices. She suggests we practice reading scriptures and sacred texts that teach connection and purity of thought and behavior. By doing so, our mind becomes so full of virtue that a wandering mind is less likely to land on thoughts or emotions that are problematic. She also suggests meditation, seeking a thought-free state.<sup>61</sup> In addition to sacred texts, there are numerous other books and other resources to keep handy for help in prompting our discriminatory mind in the proper direction.

B. *Manas*.

The part of the mind that does our thinking, organizing, and labeling is called *Manas*. It is here that our mind stores information, turns them into images and concepts, and then makes memories (*Samskaras*).<sup>62</sup> When the *Buddhi* receives information from the senses, the *Manas* searches its memory bank and provides the *Buddhi* with information classifying and explaining that object.<sup>63</sup>

C. *Ahamkara*.

*Ahamkara* (also, *Ahankara*) is our ego. The word translates as “I-maker”<sup>64</sup> or “I am the doer.”<sup>65</sup> Whereas the *Buddhi* does not identify with the images it sees, the ego creates a sense of “I” and can become a “surrogate Self” which tells us we are the author of everything.<sup>66</sup>

When this happens we individualize our experience: How does this affect me? What’s in it for me? We look at everything from the perspective of our being the focal point. If we allow it to, the ego will continually demand more and more information from *Manas* in response to whatever experience we encounter.<sup>67</sup> This process can become more and more frenetic. Our “mind races.” Totally forgotten is the *Aham* “I AM” of *Purusha*.

When this occurs, the psychic instrument of the mind (*Buddhi*, *Manas*, and *Ahamkara*) is taken over by ego.

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<sup>61</sup> *The Yoga of Discipline*, at 34.

<sup>62</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 136–139; *Tantra The Path of Ecstasy*, at 64–65; see, generally *Finding the Midline*. at 141–142.

<sup>63</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 137.

<sup>64</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 138; *Tantra The Path of Ecstasy*, at 64.

<sup>65</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 563.

<sup>66</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 138–139.

<sup>67</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 139.

On the other hand, *Ahamkara* is “a relational power,” helping us to build connection with others.<sup>68</sup> As it identifies experiences in terms of how they relate to us, the *Buddhi* receives this information. Because *Buddhi* has powers of discernment, virtue, and detachment, and sits closest to *Purusha*, the ego can aid us in making choices that foster connection rather than create separation.

Also, even when ego is prodding us to compete, that can have positive results as well. I read that basketball star Seth Curry practices his jump shot religiously, thousands of shots in practice, repeated over years and years. While I don’t know him, I suspect his ego, his drive to be the best, plays a role in that effort. Look at the huge number of little kids that he has inspired. These kids aren’t running around getting in trouble. They’re playing basketball, dreaming of the day they can play in the NBA. Some of them, I imagine, will end up in college for no other reason than they became good enough players to get a scholarship.

Think about how you were inspired to do whatever thing you do that rewards your heart. Quite possibly you saw somebody else doing that thing (dancing, playing the piano, drawing, singing, writing, sports, etc.) and they did it well. Probably they performed well because they practiced. Ego likely played at least some role in keeping them at it in the early days of learning and perfecting their skill. Your life is richer because they had an ego. The goal is to keep things in harmony, not to let ego run amuck, although I suspect in some of these cases ego did take over.

It is easy to see that if we allow ego to control the interaction of the three components of the mind we will have a very difficult time creating a life of well-being.

1. How do we experience much by way of positive emotion when we constantly compare ourselves with others? This comparison can easily result in our being upset, either with them or with ourselves. The mind becomes tied up processing useless information, leaving no room to experience joy, pride, curiosity, wonder, or love.
2. When we are busy doing things in order to prove we are better than the next person we don’t have time to choose those activities we would otherwise wish to engage in. It is difficult to contemplate a meaningful use of our time and energy if we feel we must compete with whomever triggered our envy.
3. Choosing a task to accomplish for its own sake, because we feel like it, becomes far more difficult when our time is spent responding to the challenges we perceive others present to us.

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<sup>68</sup> *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 138.

4. Creating and maintaining nurturing relationships requires that we view others from a perspective of appreciation and interest, attitudes that are difficult to hold when we are judging everybody.

In Chapters 42 and 43 of *Finding the Midline* I discuss the value of meditation as a way of developing capacity to allow the three levels of the mind to work in harmony and skillfully interact. I write: “Meditation buys our psychic processing center some much needed space and time so we can make the best choices.”<sup>69</sup>

#### **IV. The Physical *Tattvas* of the Relative or material world: *Jnanendriyas* (sense organs), *Karmendriyas* (action organs), *Tanmatras* (subtle elements), and the *Mahabhutas* (gross elements).**

As we move down the *Tattva* chart, we move from the mind to physical body, which includes the sensory organs and the action organs.

##### A. The sense organs (*Jnanendriyas*).

The sense organs allow us to sense Supreme Consciousness in everything. Practices such as meditation cultivate the capacity to pay attention to life going on around us. Steeping ourselves in worthwhile reading and conversation create a wellspring of memory, as Gurumayi suggests, for helping direct our experiences in a positive direction.

The sense organs are the vehicles by which we tune in to life, seeking opportunities or invitations (Midlines) for experiencing positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships. Becoming skillful at their use builds the discernment we need to allow *Buddhi* to make choices that serve our greater purposes.

The five sense organs are:

1. Ears. The ears are for listening. To create a life of well-being we must learn to listen. For example, we learn to listen for the sounds of joy and excitement. We also learn to hear what is being communicated in the sound: a cry for help, a need for our special skills, or a tone of displeasure with how we are treating someone. We begin to sense in our hearing the underlying message from others: perhaps that they respect us and are grateful to us.

Listening this way might call for an attitude adjustment. We can always appreciate a gurgling brook we encounter at a retreat, but can we find the sound of a child’s laughter in a crowded shopping mall? Can we hear the plea for attention from our little children or our partner? Can we hear the opportunities in what somebody else is saying to us?

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<sup>69</sup> *Finding the Midline*, at 143–146.



In yoga we study *Mantra*, a sacred chant and *Japa*, repetition of a sound, repeated verbally, whispered, or mentally. These practices are used to help us connect to the soul and thus to Supreme Consciousness. Non-dual Tantra teaches that we tap into our Divine energy through the vibratory activity of the Divine to which we can attune through such practices.<sup>70</sup>

2. Eyes. The eyes are for seeing. Can we find the beauty in nature? How about finding the Divine in the creativity of a building's design or the way somebody decorated his or her home?

When we teach ourselves to use our eyes this way we begin to see invitations for connection. We see the hurt on somebody's face, the confusion or fear that we can perhaps help assuage, or the happiness in somebody's smile, offering us a chance to share.

Yoga practices include meditation on *Yantras*, sacred instruments or diagrams holding the power of the particular divinity depicted.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the best known is the sacred symbol of the Shrividya tradition, the *Shri-yantra*, or *Shri-cakra*, representing and in fact believed to contain the Goddess Shri. Its geometry, which includes combinations of triangles, circles, lines, lotus symbols, and intersections, is full of sacred power and evocative energy. Three resources that discuss this powerful *Yantra* and contain a diagram are listed below in this footnote.<sup>72</sup> Of course, to gain a far greater understanding of this *Yantra*, consider reading Dr. Douglas Brooks' *Auspicious Wisdom*, his thorough analysis devoted to the texts and traditions of Shrividya. Also, watch for workshops teaching this or other *Yantras*.

Hopefully, it is obvious how becoming skilled in *Yantra* practice cultivates one's skill in identifying and pursuing the Midlines of life, when life offers an invitation to a potentially rich experience.

3. Nose. The nose is for smelling. We can develop our powers of discernment by learning to appreciate the many fragrances that exist: the smell of fresh hot bread or cookies, the aroma of a nice perfume or the different smells of

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<sup>70</sup> See, generally, *Tantra The Path of Ecstasy*, at 184–200. See, also, Dyczkowski, Dr. Mark (1987). *The Doctrine of Vibration*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, at 197–200; Brooks, Dr. Douglas (1992). *Auspicious Wisdom*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, at 128–129; 143–144; Muller-Ortega, Dr. Paul (1989). *The Triad Heart of Siva*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, at 143; *The Splendor of Recognition*, at 235–253; 366–367; and see throughout: Wallis, Dr. Christopher (2012). *Tantra Illuminated*. The Woodlands, TX: Anusara Press. See, also, Swami Lakshmanjoo, Edited by John Hughes (2003). *Kashmir Shaivism. The Secret Supreme*. Culver City, CA: Universal Shaiva Fellowship, at 15–28 (Chapter Three: *The Theory of the Alphabet Matrikacakra*); 41–46 (Chapter Six: *The Theory of Speech Vak*); and see also, generally *Finding the Midline*, at 196–198;

<sup>71</sup> See *Auspicious Wisdom*, at 116–117; *Tantra The Path of Ecstasy*, at 217–218.

<sup>72</sup> *Tantra The Path of Ecstasy*; at 219–220; *Auspicious Wisdom*, generally, diagram at 189, and Wallis, Dr. Christopher (2012). *Tantra Illuminated*. The Woodlands, TX: Anusara Press, at 277–283.

flowers. This type of practice helps us learn to find the potency of life's offerings to us, whether in the form of laughter, wonder, or pride, in the chance to be engaged in something meaningful, or the prospect of making a new friend or deepen an existing relationship. It also helps us find the best bakery in town!

4. Tongue. The tongue is for tasting. We can practice distinguishing the many tastes in foods and drink, appreciating the contrast. This is a great practice for learning how to make distinctions, to find the potential for meaning and relationships in our everyday encounters.
5. Skin. The skin is for feeling. We can, with practice, learn not only to feel a cool breeze on our face on a hot day, but also the tenderness of a loving touch. One way to practice becoming sensitive to touch is by taking our time in a clothing store or even in our own closet to distinguish the different textures. Again, this builds our discriminatory awareness, helping us find potential in situations and with persons we meet. It also operates, on its own, to help infuse our life with more simple pleasure.

Consider doing this practice. Walk in to the fruit/vegetable and flower section at a grocery store, a Whole Foods, the local co-op, or any similar store. Spend at least ten minutes wandering with your only agenda being to appreciate how many different fruits, vegetables and flowers there are. Then take time to note how there are so many things you like even though they are all different from each other. Now, go to the cookie or "chips" sections and again notice how many different types of treats you like. (Or, go to the olive or sushi section if you don't eat "junk" – whatever works here).

Now, pause and notice that when it comes to fruit, vegetables, flowers, cookies, or bags of salty stuff how much we love diversity. Isn't it sad that when it comes to diversity in people we suddenly don't feel so openhearted? What we're trying to do here is notice this and then make a shift in our attitude. That shift will change our life.

As a reward for doing this practice, take home one each of three different types of apples and spend some time tasting how a Jonathan is different from a Fuji and a Honeycrisp is different yet again. Or, try three different types of Oreos or ice cream. If this practice made you stop and think, you've earned it.

B. The action organs (*Karmendriyas*).

We have five action organs. These organs are how we implement our thoughts by action.

1. Arms/Hands. The hands are how we touch and manipulate objects. Through touch we can communicate emotions such as love. We create things with our hands; we offer comfort with our hands.
2. Legs/Feet. The feet are another tool for putting into action our intentions. The feet are used for exploring, or simply as a way to help us relax. They are a way to help us get the exercise we need to optimize our health. They take us where we choose to go.
3. Mouth. The mouth is for speaking. We speak our thoughts and, by doing so, create, maintain, or even destroy connection. *Matrika* (*Matrka*) (“little Mother”) is the energy of names, labels, and words. We think in names, labels, and words. What we think is how we create our world, our future.<sup>73</sup>
4. Genitals. The genitals contain the power of procreation and opportunity to receive and give pleasure.
5. Excretory system. This system is for elimination, helping us to a healthy enjoyment of our embodiment.

C. The subtle elements (*Tanmatras*).

The five subtle elements are the energies that allow us to experience through the sense organs, the *Jnanendriyas*, the sensations coming from the world.<sup>74</sup>

1. Smell. We learn how to become more sensitive to opportunities by cultivating our sense of smell, practicing how to distinguish and even appreciate various aromas. This teaches us the discrimination we need to find Supreme Consciousness in every object of manifestation. It also helps train our mind to slow down and not be controlled by the autopilot that allows our bias, prejudice, judgments, fears, anger, and other emotions to take over.
2. Taste. Similarly, we practice distinguishing each diverse taste because that teaches us to savor life in its diverse splendor.
3. Sight. As with the other subtle elements, we can use our sight to find potential. We practice by checking out the sunsets, the northern lights, the brilliant play of lights and colors. There are lightning storms, sunrises and sunsets that are spectacular and change in a moment. We learn to enjoy Supreme Consciousness by observing it at play through nature. This helps remind us that we foster connection with others when we can bring play or meaning into the everyday interactions with others. It is this type of attitude that breeds positive emotion and nurturing relationships.

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<sup>73</sup> See the resources cited above regarding the discussion of the ear sense organ.

<sup>74</sup> *Splendor of Recognition*, at 101.

4. Touch. We develop the capacity to truly experience each moment by working with our sense of touch. We can feel what it is like when something touches our skin and see if we can feel the love transmitted by another's touch. We then apply that lesson when we touch others.
5. Sound. Can we learn to tell the difference in the tone of a loved one's voice; learning to sense if they are upset, for example? Can we appreciate the various sounds of voices, animals, birds, even the wind, and the rain? Can we lie quietly some night and enjoy the sound of rain on the roof? Our discussion about the ear sense organ applies here as well.

D. The gross elements (*Mahabhutas*).

The five gross elements are contained in some way in all matter.

1. Earth element. The earth element is our foundation, representing traits of being steadfast, stable and with integrity. People with these traits attract nurturing relationships. By being rooted, these people are better able to retain focus on what is important to them. This helps create habits of perseverance and patience, traits that lead to attaining goals.
2. Water element. The water element has characteristics of adaptability. To develop and maintain positive relationships we must be flexible and understanding with each other. To experience positive emotions we must learn to flow with the give and take of life.
3. Fire element. The fire element has characteristics of passion, commitment, decisiveness and intention. These are traits by which we transform ourselves, burning away fears, bias, judgments, and prejudices that hold us back. Fire element is transformative because it provides light for illumination as well as heat, which is necessary to burn away patterns of thought and behavior that don't serve us. People with an active fire element are able, through their insight and passion, to pierce through habits of thinking and non-productive behavior that limit engagement and meaningful accomplishments. Sometimes somebody else needs to provide the friction to light the spark necessary to start that fire of self-study.
4. Air element. The air element represents our ability to sense our own feelings, as well as the feelings of others. This leads to potential for deeper relationships.
5. Sky element (Space). This element reminds us that we are part of something bigger, all connected, different but not separate. Sky carries sound and by listening we increase our mental clarity, enhance our creativity, become more perceptive. We feel unlimited potential.

The *Tattvas* teach us to become far more sensitive to everything going on around us, better able to recognize the Divine imprint within others, even strangers; the special qualities each person offers if we look deeply enough. We are invited by the *Tattvas* to use our curiosity and imagination not only to find greater enjoyment in life but also to find Supreme Consciousness as expressed in the vast diversity of the planet.

## **VII. Conclusion.**

By searching for Supreme Consciousness in the world, or simply by turning our mindfulness to what life offers, we necessarily create a greater capacity for experiencing more positive emotions, such as joy, awe, curiosity, and gratitude. We become more attuned to chances for meaningful engagement and more selective in those tasks we undertake. We become the type of person more likely to attract nurturing relationships. In short, we construct a life of well-being.

## The 36 Tattvas of Tantric Cosmology Chart

