

# THE SHIVA-SÛTRA OF VASUGUPTA

Translated by Georg Feuerstein

**According to the Shaiva tradition of Kashmir, the Shiva-Sûtra was discovered by Vasugupta, who probably lived in the latter half of the eighth century A.D. There are different accounts of how the secrets of this Sûtra were revealed to Vasugupta, but they all mention that he was instructed in a dream. We know from Patanjali's Yoga-Sûtra (1.38) that yogins take their dreams seriously. The Shiva-Sûtra is the fountainhead of the sacred literature of Kashmiri Shaivism.**

## Book I

The Self (âtman) is [pure] Consciousness (caitanya). (1.1)

[Finite] knowledge is bondage. (1.2)

The source [of the manifest world together with its] collocation [of manifest effects] is embodied in [limited] activity (kalâ). (1.3)

Comments: Kalâ (to be carefully distinguished from the word kâla or "time") is finite or conditional activity, which is one of the five "coverings" or "jackets" (kancuka) of mâyâ, the power of world illusion. The others are vidyâ (limited knowledge), râga (attachment), kâla (time), and niyati (causality). By contrast to finite activity, the creativity of the Self is absolute and incomprehensible to the unenlightened mind.

The matrix [of sound] is the foundation of [conditional] knowledge. (1.4)

Comments: The Sanskrit word mâtrikâ ("matrix" or "little mother") refers to the Sanskrit alphabet with its fifty letters, which are thought to be primal sounds.

The [spontaneous] flashing-forth (udyama) [of the transcendental Consciousness] is Bhairava. (1.5)

Comments: Bhairava is God Shiva, here in the sense of the absolute Reality underlying phenomenal or conditional existence.

Upon [ecstatic] union with the "wheel" (cakra) of powers, [there comes about] the abolition of the universe [as a distinct object of consciousness]. (1.6)

[Even] during the differentiation [of consciousness into the three modes of] waking, dream sleep, and deep sleep, [there is continuous] emergence of enjoyment of the Fourth [i.e., absolute Reality]. (1.7)

The waking state (jâgrat) [consists in conditional or finite] knowledge (jnâna). (1.8)

Dream sleep (svapna) [consists in] imagination (vikalpa). (1.9)

Deep sleep (saushupta) [corresponding to] illusion (mâyâ) [consists in complete] unawareness (aviveka). (1.10)

The heroic lord [i.e., the enlightened being] is the [conscious] enjoyer of the triad [of waking, dream sleep, and deep sleep]. (1.11)

Comments: The Sanskrit commentaries explain the word vîra, here translated as “heroic,” as referring to the senses, so that the vîresha (vîra-îsha) is metaphorically the lord over the senses. Indeed, the enlightened being, who identifies with supreme Consciousness, is the master of the senses and the mind. This spiritual attainment is referred to as svacchanda-yoga or “union with the self-dependent [Reality].”

The stages of Yoga are a wonder (vismaya). (1.12)

The power of will (icchâ-shakti) [of the enlightened being] is Umâ [or] Kumârî. (1.13)

Comments: Umâ is the divine Consort, or transcendental Power, of the Absolute, Shiva. Kumârî, the “Virgin,” is the same Power in its playful aspect as the creatrix or destroyer of the universe. The meaning of this aphorism is that the enlightened adept's will coincides with the divine Will, wherefore he is capable of all kinds of extraordinary feats.

[In the state of ecstatic union] the world (drishya) [becomes the adept's] body. (1.14)

Through the confinement (samghâta) of the mind (citta) in the heart, [there comes about the transcendental] vision of the world [and its] sleep [i.e., the void]. (1.15)

Comments: The word svâpa, or “sleep,” stands here for the absence of all objects. Even this void becomes transcendently illumined or “animated” by the enlightened adept, as is made clear in aphorism 3.38.

Or through [conscious] union with the pure Principle (tattva), [the enlightened adept becomes] free from the power [that restricts] the “beast” (pashu) [i.e., the fettered personality]. (1.16)

Self-knowledge [consists in] awareness (vitarka). (1.17)

Comments: Here the term vitarka is a technical expression denoting the adept's transconceptual awareness. The word has a different meaning in Patanjali's Yoga-Sûtra.

[For the enlightened adept] worldly bliss is the delight of ecstasy (samâdhi). (1.18)

Upon [ecstatic] union with the [transcendental] Power [as explained in aphorism 1.13, the enlightened adept obtains the capacity for] the creation of [any kind of] body. (1.19)

[Other paranormal abilities that may spontaneously appear in the enlightened adept are:] combining the elements or separating the elements, and compacting the universe [as a whole]. (1.20)

Through the emergence of pure wisdom, [the adept acquires] the power of lordship over the "wheel" [of all other powers]. (1.21)

Through [ecstatic] union with the "great lake" [i.e., the transcendental Reality, the adept gains] the experience of the potency (vîrya) of mantras. (1.22)

## **Book II**

The mind [of the adept] is a mantra. (2.1)

Comments: The adept's mind is continuously potentized and polarized relative to the transcendental Reality, Shiva. Therefore it can be said to be analogous to a mantra, which esoterically is explained as "that which protects (tra) the mind (man)."

[Spontaneous] application is efficacious. (2.2)

Comments: Constant abidance in and as the Real is the means of realization, or enlightenment, just as the constant repetition of a mantra leads to success.

The secret [hidden in all] mantras is the Being (sattâ) embodied in wisdom. (2.3)

Expanding the mind relative to the "womb" (garbha) [i.e., the finite world, amounts to no more than] a dream lacking differentiated knowledge. (2.4)

Upon the [spontaneous] emergence of wisdom, [there occurs a great "seal" (mudrâ) known as] khecârî, [which is] the state of Shiva. (2.5)

Comments: The term khecârî means literally "she who moves in the space [of supreme Consciousness]."

The teacher (guru) is the means [of ultimate realization]. (2.6)

Insight into the "wheel" [i.e., spectrum] of matrices [of sound is obtained through the teacher's instruction]. (2.7)

[The adept's] body is an oblation [poured into the fire of the transcendental Reality]. (2.8)

[Finite] knowledge is [merely] food. (2.9)

Comments: The meaning of this aphorism is that finite knowledge is instrumental on the phenomenal plane but of no ultimate usefulness. Wisdom, however, guides adepts to enlightenment and they use their finite being—the body-mind—as an oblation that is offered up in a final gesture of self-transcendence.

Upon the recession of wisdom [in the case of an aspirant], the vision [of the world is like] a dream arising from that [wisdom]. (2.10)

Comments: Even after wisdom recedes, there is an afterglow that continues to inform the yogin's vision or experience of the world.

### **Book III**

The [phenomenal] self (âtman) is the mind (citta). (3.1)

[Finite] knowledge is bondage. (3.2)

Comments: This aphorism reiterates aphorism 1.2.

Mâyâ is nondifferentiation (aviveka) about the principles [of existence (tattva)], such as [limited] activity (kalâ). (3.3)

Dissolution of the parts (kalâ) [should be achieved] in the body. (3.4)

Comments: According to Kshemarâja's commentary, the kalâs in question are the various ontological principles or categories (tattvas), such as the elements, the subtle elements, and the mind.

Dissolution of the currents (nâdî) [of the life force], conquest of the elements, isolation from the elements, and separation from the elements [are accomplished through yogic contemplation]. (3.5)

[Paranormal] power (siddhi) [results] from a veil of delusion (moha). (3.6)

Through the conquest of delusion, through infinite enjoyment (âbhoga) [of the Real, there comes about] the conquest of spontaneous wisdom. (3.7)

[The enlightened adept is always] awake; [for him] the second one [i.e., the world of duality] is a ray-of-light. (3.8)

Comments: The world is a "ray-of-light" (kara) because the enlightened adept experiences it as identical with the divine Reality.

The self (âtman) [of the enlightened adept is like] a dancer. (3.9)

Comments: The meaning of this obscure aphorism is that enlightened adepts, though they may engage in all kinds of activities, are only play-acting so to speak. They are not really involved in their actions, because they have ceased to identify with the limited body-mind and its functions.

The inner self (antar-âtman) [of the enlightened adept is like] a stage. (3.10)

Comments: This aphorism, which continues with the dramatic metaphor of sûtra 3.8, emphasizes that the enlightened adept is pure witness. He is constantly and continuously aware of the contents of his own mind, which no longer has the power to delude him.

The senses are [like] spectators. (3.11)

Through the force of [transcendental] insight (dhî), power over sattva [is obtained]. (3.12)

Comments: The term sattva, or "realness," stands for the luminous aspect of Nature. It is one of the three primary constituents of phenomenal existence. The compound sattva-siddhi also can be understood in the sense of "perfection of luminosity." Both senses are applicable.

[Thus] the condition of independence (sva-tantra) [or liberation] is accomplished. (3.13)

As [the adept accomplishes transcendental independence, or liberation] in [regard to] this [body], so [does he accomplish perfect independence in regard to] all else. (3.14)

Attentiveness (avadhâna) to the “seed” (bīja) [i.e., the Source of the world, should be cultivated]. (3.15)

He who is established in the seat (âsana) [of the transcendental Consciousness] easily plunges into the “lake” [i.e., the ultimate Reality]. (3.16)

He effects creation by his own measure. (3.17)

Comments: Since the enlightened adept is one with the divine Reality, he or she also is the absolute creator of everything.

While wisdom prevails, the elimination of [future] birth [is certain]. (3.18)

Maheshvarî and so forth, [residing] in the classes [of letters of the alphabet] beginning with ka, are the mothers of “beasts” (pashu) [i.e., fettered beings, but they have no power over the enlightened adept in whom wisdom blossoms.] (3.19)

The Fourth [i.e., the ultimate Reality] should be poured like oil into the three [conditional modes of consciousness, namely waking, dream sleep, and deep sleep]. (3.20)

He should enter [into the Fourth] by immersing himself with his mind (citta). (3.21)

Upon the equalization of the life force (prâna), [there comes about] the vision of sameness. (3.22)

Comments: When the breath is no longer erratic and the body's energies are harmonized, the mind too is balanced. Then everything reveals itself as the same One.

In the interim, [there occurs] the generation of inferior [states of consciousness]. (3.23)

Comments: The yogin, who has not yet fully and stably realized the ultimate Reality, experiences intermittently lower states of consciousness, which lack full awareness of the fundamental sameness of all things.

Upon [ecstatic] union between the self-concept (sva-pratyaya) and objects (mâtra), [the yogin brings about] the reemergence of the vanished [vision of sameness]. (3.24)

He becomes like Shiva. (3.25)

[Retaining] the functioning of the body [for the sake of others is his only] vow. (3.26)

[His] conversation is recitation. (3.27)

Self-knowledge is [his] gift [to others]. (3.28)

And he who is established in Avipa is a cause of [higher] knowledge (jna). (3.29)

Comments: In Kshemarâja's tenth-century commentary, the difficult compound avipa-stha is explained as "established in the protector (pa) of animals (avi)," that is, "established in those who protect the finite beings." Thus, it is taken to refer to the Goddesses that preside over the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.

For him the universe is an extension of his [innate] power. (3.30)

The maintenance and absorption [of the universe are likewise an extension of his innate power]. (3.31)

Despite such activity [as the maintenance and absorption of the universe, there is] no discontinuity owing to [the enlightened adept's] condition as witness. (3.32)

[The adept] considers pleasure and pain as external. (3.33)

Free from these, he is indeed alone (kevalin). (3.34)

However, the dynamic [or karmic] self [i.e., the unenlightened personality] is afflicted by delusion. (3.35)

Upon the eclipse of differentiation [based on the unenlightened mind, the adept acquires] the capacity for [bringing forth] other creations. (3.36)

The power of creation [is well established] on account of one's own experience [in dreams and meditation, etc.]. (3.37)

[There should be] animation of the three states [of unenlightened consciousness] by the principal [State, which is Reality itself]. (3.38)

As with the [various] states of consciousness, [there should also be animation by the ultimate Reality] in regard to body, senses, and external [objects]. (3.39)

For the "confluent" (samvâhya) [unenlightened individual, there is constant] extroversion (bahir-gati) because of desire. (3.40)

Comments: Driven by desire, the consciousness of the unenlightened person habitually flows out toward the external world. This externalizing flux of attention is captured well in the rare word *samvâhya*, denoting the individual who “flows together” with objects.

For him who is in the condition of being rooted in that [Fourth, or ultimate Reality, there results] termination of individuality (*jîva*) owing to the ending of that [desire for contact with objects]. (3.41)

Then, he who has the elements for his covering is released, mighty, supreme, and the same as the Lord [i.e., Shiva]. (3.42)

The connection with the life force (*prâna*) is natural. (3.43)

Comments: The meaning of this aphorism appears to be that even though finite life depends on the connection of the life force with a particular consciousness, in the case of the enlightened adept, this is not an intrinsic limitation. In fact, *prâna* is a manifestation of the ultimate Reality. Ultimately, *prâna* is the universal Life itself.

Through constraint (*samyama*) [i.e., through ecstatic identification with] the innermost center of the nose, how [can the ultimate Reality not be realized] in the left, the right, and the central [channels of the life force]? (3.44)

Comments: This is another obscure aphorism carrying a wealth of esoteric information. The innermost center (*antar-madhya*) of the nose (*nâsikâ*) is really the core of the life force or consciousness. By practicing successively concentration, meditation, and ecstasy relative to that subtle central point, the adept is able to abide as the ultimate Reality, regardless of whether the life force flows through the left channel, the right channel, or the central channel. In Tantrism and Hatha-Yoga, these channels through which the life force circulates are respectively known as *idâ-nâdî*, *pingalâ-nâdî*, and *sushumnâ-nâdî*. The *Shiva-Sûtra* uses the word *saushumna* for the last, which is the most important, since it is the conduit for the awakened *kundalinî-shakti*, the psychospiritual power that brings about a total alchemical transmutation of the human body-mind.

[In the case of the yogin] let there be repeatedly the opening-and-closing [of the vision of sameness]. (3.45)

Comments: The phrase *pratimîlana* is a technical expression of Kashmiri Shaivism. Here rendered as “opening-and-closing,” it literally means “counter-closing.” It refers to the high yogic art of seeing the ultimate Reality, Shiva, both within oneself and in the outer world. This practice comprises both subjective ecstasy (as epitomized in the closing of the



eyes, or nimīlana) and objective ecstasy (as epitomized in the opening of the eyes, or unmīlana). This condition is otherwise known as spontaneous ecstasy, or sahaja-samādhi.

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