

consciousness as he penetrates his true nature. The sudden eruption of this intuition (*pratibhā*) arouses in him a cry of amazement as he transcends all thought-constructs and, perfectly absorbed in his own nature, is liberated.

VII

The Path to Liberation

Essentially, Spanda doctrine is concerned with two matters. The first is to impart to those who are fit to receive the teachings a deeper understanding of the ultimate goal of life (*upeya*). When we have understood what truly benefits us and is worth attaining and what, on the contrary, is of no real value but stands in the way of this attainment, we can begin to make progress towards our goal. This is Spanda doctrine's second concern, namely, to show the way in which we can develop spiritually through Śiva's grace and the right application of the means to realisation that it teaches. When both these aspects of the teaching have been correctly understood and applied, the Spanda yogi achieves a clear and permanent realisation of his goal and is liberated, thus fulfilling the ultimate aim of the teaching. The Doctrine of Vibration is not meant for the spiritually dull. It is not for the worldly whose consciousness, clouded by ignorance, is as if dreaming, even during the waking state of daily life, the dream of its own thought-constructs.¹ The teachings are meant for those who are awake (*prabuddha*), those who, full of faith and reverence, are always alert and intent on discerning the true nature of ultimate reality.

This reality is understood in three basic ways. The first is purely transcendental. The *Stanzas* choose this aspect as the one which formally defines it most specifically. Ultimate reality transcends all the opposites, including subject and object. This does not mean, however, that it is an unconscious void,² a mere absence of all existence. In fact, this negative characterisation of reality (which includes also a denial of all that is unconscious) implies a positive immanence in which the opposites are

united in the oneness of pure consciousness that is equally Śiva and Spanda, His universal activity. These two seemingly contrasting aspects are reconciled in the third, namely, reality understood as the essential nature of all things. Although universal and everywhere the same, it is understood to be the essential and specific nature of each existent as its 'own nature' (*svabhāva*). In the case of the individual soul it is even more specific, more personal as his own 'own nature' (*svasvabhāva*). Belonging to none other than oneself it is the pure subjectivity who perceives, experiences, enjoys, reflects, thinks and senses as well as being the conscious agent who creates every possible form of experience in all the states of consciousness.³ The liberating knowledge of reality thus corresponds to our regaining possession of ourselves (*svātmagraha*). We must lay hold of ourselves and abide in our authentic nature. Reality coincides with our own most fundamental state of being (*svasthiti*), free of all contrasts and contradictions. Once we have overcome the negative forces that arise from our ignorance and prevent us from abiding in ourselves, we are liberated. To do this, we must penetrate through the pulsing fluctuations of objectively experienced states and perceptions at the surface level of consciousness and gain insight into the timeless rhythm of our own nature manifest in the universal arising and falling away of all things. We are not freed of the trammels of perpetual change by setting it aside; on the contrary, we must gain insight into the recurrent cycles of creation, persistence and destruction, or else be bound by our ignorance.⁴

This spiritual ignorance consists essentially of our contracted state of consciousness and so can only be effectively countered by expanding it⁵ to reveal our own authentic nature as this expanded state itself, which is the universal vibration (*sāmānyaspanda*) of consciousness. The Spanda-yogi treads the Path of Consciousness Expansion. The movement from the contracted to the expanded state marks the transition from ignorance to understanding, from the dispersion and incompleteness of a form of consciousness entirely centred on an objectively perceived and discursively represented reality to a direct, intuitive awareness of the unity and integral wholeness of our own absolute Spanda nature. Along the way to this supreme realisation consciousness develops, as veil after veil is lifted, until it becomes full and perfect in the absolute which encompasses within itself all possible formats of experience. As Abhinava says:

[This realisation] is the supreme limit of plenitude and as such there can be no higher attainment. Any [other] attainment [we can] conceive issues from a state that falls short of [this] perfection. Once [this] uncreated fullness has been attained, pray tell, what other fruit can there be [beyond it]?⁶

The fettered soul's contracted state of consciousness binds him because he is deprived thereby of the subtle, intuitive insight into the underlying unity of existence and his attention is focused instead on its gross, outer diversity easily apparent to everybody, however restricted his consciousness may be.⁷ However, although the fettered soul in this state is ignorant of this unity, this does not mean that his knowledge of diversity is false. Ignorance entails a form of knowledge which, although quite correct, is binding.⁸ We are not absolutely ignorant of reality for if we were we would be totally unconscious. Spiritual ignorance is always linked with some degree of consciousness. Those subject to the round of birth and death are not inert clods of earth.⁹ Thus, although ignorance obscures consciousness, it is wrong to think of it, as dualist Śaivites do, in terms of a defiling impurity that shrouds it like a cloth covering a jar.¹⁰ Spiritual ignorance can be nothing but consciousness itself, albeit in a limited state. Śiva, Who is universal consciousness, is the innate nature of both its contracted and expanded states,¹¹ both of which are forms of knowledge, namely:

1) Supreme Knowledge (*parajñāna*) defined as the revelation of one's own innate nature as the one reality which is the Being of all things.¹²

2) Inferior Knowledge (*aparajñāna*) which Jayaratha explains results from the mental activity (*vyāpāra*) of the individual subject whose consciousness is contracted. It consists of the mental representations (*vikalpa*) he forms of himself and his object, of the type 'I know this'.¹³ The lower knowledge obscures the higher and binds the soul by breaking up his direct, pervasive awareness of his own pure consciousness nature, free of mental representation.¹⁴ The *Stanzas on Vibration* teach:

Operating in the field of the subtle elements, the arising of mental representation marks the disappearance of the flavour of the supreme nectar of immortality; due to this [man] forfeits his freedom.¹⁵

As we have already seen,¹⁶ three factors are necessary for perception and thought to be possible, namely, the perceiving subject, the means of knowledge and the object perceived. Rājānaka Rāma, in his commentary on the *Stanza* cited above, explains at length that these three factors correspond to three major divisions in the lower thirty-one categories of existence, namely:

1) *The object*. This consists essentially of the five primary sensations which are the subtle elements (*tanmātra*) of smell, taste, sight, touch and sound along with the five gross elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—of which these sensations are the perceivable qualities.

2) *The means of knowledge.* This consists of the senses and the inner mental organ.

3) *The subject.* At this level, the subject is the individual soul (*puruṣa*) whose consciousness is contracted by the five obscuring coverings (*kañcukas*) of limited knowledge and action, attachment, natural law and time along with *Māyā*, their source.

All these categories belong to the Impure Creation (*asuddhasṛṣṭi*), which is the sphere of *Māyā* where the lower order of knowledge operates and subject and object are divided. Above them are five more categories which belong to the Pure Creation (*śuddhasṛṣṭi*) where subject and object are still united. The highest of those categories are *Śiva* and *Śakti*. Combined they represent the state of pure 'I' consciousness and its sentient subjectivity (*upalabdhr̥tā*), respectively. The next category is called *Sadāśiva*. Here faint traces of objectivity appear in the pervasive, undivided consciousness of *Śiva* and *Śakti*. Consciousness, now full of the power of knowledge (*jñānaśakti*), views the All in a state of withdrawal (*nimeṣa*), shining within, and at one with its own nature. 'I' consciousness predominates over 'this' consciousness which it encompasses in the awareness that: 'I am this [universe]' (*aham-idam*). Next comes the category '*Īśvara*' corresponding to the awareness: 'this (universe) is me' (*idam-aham*). 'This' consciousness takes the upperhand over 'I' consciousness and unfolds externally full of the creative power of action (*kriyāśakti*). The All now becomes more clearly manifest as an independent reality. It is still experienced as one with consciousness but is no longer fully merged within it. Finally, when both subjective and objective aspects share an equal status in the two-fold awareness that: 'I am this (universe) and this (universe) is me (*ahamidam-idamaham*)', Pure Knowledge (*śuddhavidyā*), the last of these categories, emerges.

The pure categories are the experience of the impure categories when they are recognised to be one with consciousness. They are experienced within the domain of the pure universal subject the enlightened yogi realises himself to be. Mental representations (*vikalpa*) emerge from this pure awareness and subside into it in consonance with the rhythm of the emanation and withdrawal of the lower categories. Impelled by the universal will, this movement is spontaneous and free. Free of all hopes and fears the enlightened yogi sees all things as part of this eternal cosmic game, played in harmony with the blissful rhythm of his own sportive nature at one with all things. *The Stanzas on Vibration* teach:

Everything arises [out of] the individual soul and he is all things.
Being aware of them, he perceives his identity [with them]. Therefore

there is no state in the thoughts of words or [their] meanings that is not *Śiva*. It is the enjoyer alone who always and everywhere abides as the object of enjoyment. Or, constantly attentive, and perceiving the entire universe as play, he who has this awareness (*samvitti*) is undoubtedly liberated in this very life.¹⁷

According to the Doctrine of Vibration, only liberation in this life (*jīvanmukti*) is authentic liberation.¹⁸ Liberation after death (*videha-mukti*) in some form of disembodied state free of all perceptions and notions of the world of diversity is not the ultimate goal. *Kṣemarāja* stresses that liberation is only possible by realising one's own identity with the whole universe, however difficult this may be.¹⁹ Similarly, he maintains that the suspension of all mental and sensory activity, which takes place in the introverted absorption of contemplation with the eyes closed (*nimilanasamādhi*) that leads to identification with transcendent consciousness is complemented and fulfilled by the cosmic vision had through the expansion of consciousness that takes place in contemplative absorption with the eyes open (*unmilanasamādhi*).²⁰ Consequently, *Kṣemarāja* explains that the first of the three sections, into which he divides the *Stanzas*, deals with the former mode of contemplation and the second section with the latter. Significantly, the last *Stanza* of the second section ends with the declaration that 'this is the initiation that bestows *Śiva*'s true nature'.²¹ In other words, this realisation, attained through the expanding consciousness of contemplation with the eyes open, initiates the yogi into the liberated state, which is identification with *Śiva* whose body is the universe.²²

In order to attain this expanded state of liberated consciousness, the yogi must find a spiritual guide because the Master (*guru*) is the means to realisation.²³ The Master is for his disciple *Śiva* Himself for it is he who through his initiation, teaching and grace, reveals the secret power of spiritual discipline.²⁴ Instructing in the purport of scripture he does more than simply explain its meaning: he transmits the realisation it can bestow. The Master is at one with *Śiva*'s divine power through which he enlightens his disciple. It is this power that matters and makes the Master a true spiritual guide,²⁵ just as it was this same power that led the disciple to him in his quest for the path that leads to the tranquility that can only be found 'in the abode beyond mind'.²⁶ The Master is the ferry that transports the disciple over the ocean of thought²⁷—if, that is, the disciple is ready. The disciple must be 'awake' (*prabuddha*),²⁸ attending carefully to the pulse of consciousness. This alert state of wakefulness is at once the keen sensitivity of insight as well as the receptivity of one who has no other goal to pursue except enlightenment.

The highest, most perfect relationship the disciple can have with his Master is such as it is with Śiva Himself: one of identity. The exchange that takes place between them is an internal dialogue within universal consciousness, their common identity (*svabhāva*). Limiting itself to a point source (*anu*) and obscured by the thought-constructs born of doubt and ignorance, consciousness assumes the guise of the disciple who seeks to attain the expanded fullness of his Master's consciousness.²⁹ The Master, on the other hand, embodies the aspect of consciousness which responds to the inquiring consciousness of his disciple.³⁰ Free of the notions of 'self' and 'other', when the disciple is liberated by his grace, it is the Master who in reality liberates himself.³¹

Although Kṣemarāja assures us that the Master can by himself enlighten his disciple by the initiation he imparts to him³² and the other means (*yukti*)³³ he adopts, even so, he is not the only guide on the path. Apart from the Master there is scripture and, above all, one's own personal experience,³⁴ because, as Abhinava says:

The knowledge [acquired] by gradually [coming to understand the meaning of] the scriptures and following the Master [who knows them] leads, [when] confirmed for oneself, to the realisation of one's own identity with Bhairava.³⁵

It is important to know the scriptures. God reveals Himself through them; they are one of the forms in which He is directly apparent in this world.³⁶ They teach man what is worth attaining and what should be avoided³⁷ and so like a boat convey him across the ocean of profane existence (*saṃsāra*) to the other shore where God's true nature is revealed to him.³⁸ However, the study of the scriptures is of value only if accompanied by the spiritual knowledge that results from personal experience. Maheśvarānanda writes:

Being well versed in the nature of Deity is one thing, but being well versed in the sacred scripture is another, just as the peace of that Abode is one thing and what worldly people experience is another.³⁹

Vasugupta, who found the *Śivasūtra*, knew the means to realisation (*yukti*) as well as the scriptures and had fully experienced the one ultimate reality. Therefore, Kṣemarāja declares him to be amongst the best of teachers.⁴⁰ The *Stanzas on Vibration* (that Kṣemarāja attributes to Vasugupta) accordingly transmit the secrets of the *Śivasūtra* in accord with scripture, sound reasoning and personal experience.⁴¹ The latter is

particularly important for the Spanda yogi: he is not interested in wasting his time in useless discussion about the experience of consciousness expansion and its fruits, for that can only be known for oneself.⁴² The yogi can achieve this experience either through faith in the Master or personal insight (*svapratyayatah*) acquired by unswerving devotion to God. Kṣemarāja accordingly quotes a passage from the *Bhagavadgītā* where Kṛṣṇa says:

Those I deem to be the best yogis who fix their thoughts on Me and serve Me, ever integrated [in themselves], filled with the highest faith.⁴³

But while the yogi's development depends on faith and personal experience of the higher states of consciousness, he can, and must, strengthen his conviction in the light of reason. When reason (*upapatti*) and direct insight (*upalabdhi*) work together, they serve as a means to liberation. Reason alone cannot help us, but when it is based on an intuitive insight of fundamental principles along with a direct experience of reality, error is eradicated and the yogi is freed.⁴⁴ In this way the Awakened yogi realizes his inherent spiritual power (*svabala*) with which he exerts himself to distinguish between the motions of individualised consciousness and the universal vibration (*sāmānyaspanḍa*) of the collective consciousness that is their ultimate ground and firm foundation.⁴⁵ Thus, although the doctrine taught in the *Stanzas on Vibration* accords with scripture,⁴⁶ it is supported by reason and above all by personal experience. Thus, for example, the seventeenth *Stanza* describes the difference in the manner in which the Well Awakened and the unawakened experience their own nature (*ātmopalambha*),⁴⁷ while the eighteenth describes the experience of the Well Awakened in the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep.⁴⁸ Indeed, Rājānaka Rāma, one of the commentators, explains that the first sixteen *Stanzas* establish on the basis of personal experience (*svānubhava*) that one's own true nature is independent of the body.⁴⁹ Similarly, the remaining *Stanzas* also discuss the direct experience of one's own nature, but this time as the unity of all things. This direct experience, in its diverse aspects, is both the means by which the yogi develops his consciousness as well as his ultimate goal.

Spanda practice is based solely on the processes inherent in the act of awareness and hence on the self-evident (*svataḥsiddha*) fact of being conscious. Even so, this does not mean that sound argument is useless. Right reasoning clears the understanding of false notions; it uproots, as it were, the tree of duality.⁵⁰ Leading the pilgrim on the path of truth along the right road of the highest doctrine, it protects him from falling to lower views. As such, it is the best limb of Yoga and, indeed, the only truly

effective one.⁵¹ Right reasoning is based on, and ultimately blossoms fully into, the Pure Knowledge (*śuddhavidyā*) that: 'I am this universe and this universe is me'.⁵² In this way argument not only sustains doctrine but also leads to the firm conviction that results in, and essentially is, the recognition of one's own authentic identity as Śiva.

All those who have commented on the *Stanzas on Vibration*, particularly Kṣemarāja, are concerned to establish on a sound logical basis that the intuitive awareness of one's own inherent existence is valid. The Doctrine of Vibration seeks to show the Awakened yogi the way in which he can make the experience of his own pure subjectivity, the pulse of consciousness, permanent. It therefore concerns the experiencing subject most intimately. This is true of the philosophy of Recognition of the Pratyabhijñā school as well. However, the liberating recognition of one's own authentic identity that it teaches allows for no intermediary between it and the lower states of consciousness. The yogi must grasp reality directly in an instant. This is only possible through a firm conviction of the Self's supreme identity, and argument in the philosophy of Recognition serves a key role to instil this conviction in him. The Doctrine of Vibration, on the other hand, chalks out a path to this recognition through the experience of Spanda based on practice (*abhyāsa*),⁵³ and so argument plays a secondary role. Thus, although Kṣemarāja insists that an understanding of the philosophy of Recognition is essential for the Spanda yogi, he excuses himself with the 'tender hearted' who prefer the intimacy of a personal experience of Śiva and His Spanda nature, rather than the intricacies of philosophy. Accordingly, when his discussion begins to seem too long and complex he refers his reader to the Pratyabhijñā to find there the arguments which establish the permanent existence of the Self.⁵⁴ His need to philosophise and refute possible objections is not however entirely his own. As he himself points out, the author of the *Stanzas on Vibration* similarly takes time, at least in one place, to do the same even though philosophy is clearly not his main concern.⁵⁵ Let us return now then to that which does concern Spanda doctrine directly, namely, practice.

The Means to Realisation

As a sequel to this book we will publish a translation of the *Stanzas on Vibration* along with a number of hitherto untranslated commentaries. In that work we will present an analysis of the practices and doctrines taught in the *Stanzas* to show how commentators have interpreted and extended them further by their own contributions drawn from various sources. Therefore, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, we conclude this

volume with a brief exposition of the basic principles underlying Spanda practice framed in the wider context of Kashmiri Śaivism as a whole. We are aided in this task by Abhinavagupta's brilliant synthesis of Śaiva Tantra into Trika doctrine presented by him in the *Light of the Tantras* (*Tantrāloka*). There, he divides all practice into four basic categories which he calls the 'Four-fold Knowledge' (*jñānacatuṣka*).⁵⁶ These four categories are exemplified by the many means to realisation presented in the course of his systematic exposition of the Śaiva ritual, cosmography, theology, metaphysics and Yoga that he incorporates into Trika.

Abhinavagupta himself realised the highest levels of consciousness through this 'Four-fold Knowledge' taught him by his Trika teacher, Śambhunātha.⁵⁷ This great yogi taught Abhinavagupta much about the rituals and practices of the Śaiva Tantras known in Kashmir, particularly the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* upon which the *Light of the Tantras* is avowedly based. Even so, Śambhunātha was not himself a native of Kashmir but, coming from outside, probably brought with him new interpretations of the Tantras which contributed to the further development of the Tantric schools of Kashmiri Śaivism.⁵⁸ Thus, although three of the four categories of practice are defined in the *Mālinīvijaya*, there is no evidence to suggest that they were known, or in any way extensively applied as categories of interpretation, by anyone before Abhinavagupta. They do, nonetheless, characterise remarkably well the forms of practice outlined in Kashmiri Śaiva works that precede him.⁵⁹ This is particularly true of the *Śivasūtra* and, consequently, of the *Stanzas on Vibration* which is closely related to it.⁶⁰ Significantly, only Kṣemarāja finds these categories of practice exemplified in these works. As he was a direct disciple of Abhinava, this should not surprise us. Again, that other writers do not do so indicates nothing more than the fact that they lived before Abhinava and so had no knowledge of them. It does not mean that they are not applicable to Spanda practice. Indeed, Kṣemarāja makes an important contribution to a deeper understanding of it by locating it in this wider context. Significantly, he calls the three sections of the *Śivasūtra* 'Expansions of Consciousness' (*unmeṣa*). Although this is one of many possible ways of naming sections or chapters of a Sanskrit work,⁶¹ clearly what Kṣemarāja is implying is that each section of the *Śivasūtra* deals with one of the three basic formats of practice that leads to consciousness expansion.⁶² Thus although the Spanda texts themselves do not attempt to present a universal typology of spiritual discipline, Spanda practice can be, and has been, characterised in terms of these basic types which we shall now outline.

Abhinavagupta calls each category of practice a 'means to realisation' (*upāya*). This does not imply that there is just one means to realisation

belonging to each category, but rather that all forms of spiritual discipline are based on one or other of these principles. Once we have understood clearly what these principles are, we can identify the categories to which any given practice belongs. Kashmiri Śaivism does not reject any form of spiritual discipline which genuinely elevates consciousness. It is, in a sense, a science of spirituality which allows for the possibility that any discipline may be effective, although some may be more so than others. While no limit is set on the number of possible means to realisation the yogi may adopt, he should dedicate himself to the means most proximate to the reality he seeks to know.⁶³ Accordingly, the Master first instructs in the highest means and then tries lower ones if he fails to liberate his disciple. Thus the first section of the *Śivasūtra*, according to Kṣemarāja, deals with the Divine Means (*śāmbhavopāya*), which is the highest of the three.⁶⁴ The second section is concerned with the Empowered Means (*śāktopāya*) and the last with the Individual Means (*āṇavopāya*), which is the lowest. Again, although the *Mālinīvijayatantra* defines the lowest means first, when Abhinava quotes from it, he starts from the highest. He also explains them individually in this order in separate chapters of his *Light of the Tantras*. Developing in different ways from differing initial states, the three types of practice lead to corresponding forms of mystical absorption (*samāveśa*) that, although fundamentally identical, are distinguished on this basis and defined accordingly as follows:

The Divine (*śāmbhava*) form of mystical absorption is said to be that which is born of an intense awakening of consciousness [brought about by the Master in the disciple]⁶⁵ free of all thought-constructs.

'Empowered' (*śākta*) is the name given here to the mystical absorption attained by pondering mindfully (*cetasā*) on reality [directly], unmediated [by other means, be it] the recitation of Mantra (*uccāra*) [or anything else].

The absorption attained by the recitation of Mantra, postures of the body (*karaṇa*), meditation, the mystical letters (*varṇa*) and the formation of supports (*sthānaprakalpanā*) is rightly called 'Individual' (*āṇava*).⁶⁶

Basically, these definitions characterise the three categories of practice in the following manner:

The Divine Means (*śāmbhavopāya*). This means functions within the undivided realm of Śiva's pure consciousness which, free of all thought-constructs, is the universal subject Who contains within Himself all objectivity. Practising this means the yogi is carried to the supreme level of consciousness by a powerful and direct awareness of reality awakened

in him by Śiva's grace through which he attains identity with Śiva without resorting to any form of meditation.⁶⁷

The Empowered Means (*śāktopāya*). The practices belonging to this means are all internal. They function within the mental sphere (*cetas*) by reconverting thought (*vikalpa*) back into the pure consciousness which is its source and essence. Practice here is centred on the flux of perception (*pramāṇa*) through which the cyclic activity of the powers of the senses and mind merge with the cycle of universal consciousness (*saṃviccakra*).

The Individual Means (*āṇavopāya*). This means operates in the individual soul's (*aṇu*) sphere of consciousness. Any spiritual discipline which involves the recitation of Mantras, posturing of the body, meditation on a particular divine or cosmic form and concentration on a fixed point, either within the body or outside it, belongs to this category. This Means, like the Empowered Means, is concerned with the purification of thought (*vikalpasamskāra*), which in this case is achieved through the contemplative absorption that results from a meditative awareness sustained by objective supports. These, ranging from subtle to gross, may be centred in the intellect, vital breath and body or external physical objects. Included, therefore, in this means are all forms of outer ritual.

It is in the sphere of Śiva's power that a distinction arises between Him as the goal and the means to attain to Him (*upeyopāyabhāva*). It is here also that Śiva freely chooses to create the many means to realisation⁶⁸ as aspects of His power which reveal the freedom of His universal consciousness. Thus, corresponding to the four basic categories of practice, there are four basic aspects of Śiva's power. Ranging from the highest to lowest, these are the powers of bliss, will, knowledge and action. Again, these means operate on the three levels of Śiva's universal manifestation while the fourth means—*Anupāya*—is transcendental. These levels are the Supreme (*para*), Middling (*parāpara*) and Inferior (*apara*), which correspond to the perception of unity (*abheda*), unity-in-diversity (*bhedābheda*) and multiplicity (*bheda*).⁶⁹ According to Trika doctrine these levels correspond to those of Śiva, Śakti and the individual soul (*nara*) respectively.

We can also distinguish between types of practice according to the manner in which they develop. Thus, some reach their goal instantly without any intervening stages (*akrama*) through an intense act of will. Other practices develop in parallel with the cognitive processes operating within consciousness which are, as we have seen, explicable only in terms

of a succession of simultaneously experienced metaphysical events. Based on a direct intuition of reality which, although immediate, matures progressively as the factors which obscure it are removed, these practices are both direct as well as successive (*kramākrama*). Finally, there are those practices that develop progressively as consciousness unfolds in successive stages (*krama*). The three categories of practice can be distinguished in this way because they are each related to different phases in the cognitive cycle. Each act of perception starts with a direct intuition of objectivity in its most generic form through the initial awareness the subject has of himself. He then defines his specific object by dividing it off from all others to analyse it part by part through a series of mental representations of a discursive order confined to the object previously determined⁷⁰ by the subject's direct intuitive awareness. This intuition, independent of thought and objectivity⁷¹ and hence free of all gradations (*tāratamya*), is the form of awareness the yogi who practices the Divine Means (*śāmbhavopāya*) exercises. It is the consciousness of the subject free of all thought-constructs (*avikalpa*), comparable to the initial certainty we have that two and two equals four without need of further analysis. Practising the Empowered Means (*śāktopāya*) the yogi links together the discrete parts with the whole, that is, himself as the subject with his object, through the flux of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) which flows between them. It is like adding two and two together. The Individual Means (*ānavopāya*) deals with the diversity and relative distinctions between particulars. It is like counting one to four to arrive at the answer we intuited originally. Thus although the means are diverse and correspond to different levels of consciousness, this does not affect their ultimate goal.⁷² By practising any one of these means we can achieve both liberation and all the yogic powers (*siddhi*) which issue from the perfection of practice.⁷³ Every means is, from this point of view, the supreme means. Abhinava explains:

Although the causes may be various, the result, that is, the destruction, disappearance and removal of impurity (*mala*) and the power which determines it, is nevertheless one, just as a jar can be destroyed [in various ways].⁷⁴

Although the principal categories of practice are three (not counting *anupāya*), these are again divisible into innumerable secondary varieties to suit the level of consciousness and capacity of each aspirant. If the yogi fails to achieve absorption by practising one means, he must appeal to others. Thus, for example, while practising the Empowered Means (*śāktopāya*) he may sometimes need to resort to practices belonging to the Individual Means (*ānavopāya*). Thus, the three means become six if we

add those mediated by others. This number is again multiplied by two according to whether they reach completion or not and again by two according to whether practice is blocked by extrinsic factors or progresses smoothly. The number of means thus becomes twenty-four. As the possible impediments to progress are countless, the means to overcome them are equally so; in actual fact there is no end to the number of means that may need to be applied by different people in various circumstances.⁷⁵ The means we adopt is not, however, a matter of personal choice. Reality reveals itself to the degree in which ignorance is removed and this, in a sense, takes place independently of our efforts. Śiva manifests His true nature as He chooses, whether in all its fullness at once, or successively, part by part.⁷⁶ The yogi, in order to make progress, must be empowered by the grace of Śiva's enlightened consciousness. When permeated by the power of Śiva's grace (*śaktipāta*), the powers of will, knowledge and action operating through the means to realisation are directed to a complete and unwavering insight into the true nature of reality. Then the yogi discovers that the pure knowledge (*pramitibhāva*) of universal consciousness inwardly manifests as every act of will and each perception, and outwardly as action. This realisation is consciousness free of all means (*anupāya-samvitti*). Although there is nothing more for the yogi to do at this level, the flow of awareness in this state is a sort of means—a 'No-means means'—a 'Pathless Path', to which we now turn our attention.

For a tabular arrangement of this material, see table 1.

No-Means (Anupāya)

It is possible to penetrate into supreme consciousness directly without the mediation of any means.⁷⁷ In fact, all means ultimately lead to the practice of 'No-means' for it is the direct experience reality has of itself as the uninterrupted awareness (*aviratānuttarajñāpti*)⁷⁸ the yogi acquires when he penetrates into his true nature. 'No practice' is the only practice which conforms fully to reality.⁷⁹ Consciousness is ever revealed; it cannot be sullied by anything outside it. Nothing can be added or subtracted from its fullness. Those who are ignorant of this fact fall to the lower levels of consciousness and so have to practice.⁸⁰ When the uninterrupted consciousness and bliss, the subtle inner nature of all things, are submerged below the horizon of awareness by the power of ignorance we lose sight of our own authentic identity and experience it as if it were distant from us, like a goal to be attained. But as Abhinava explains:

Table 1 The Means to Realisation

Means	Metaphysical Category	Format of Experience	Manner of Development	Mode of Perception	Phase of Perception	Existential Status	Power	Level
No-means (<i>Anupāya</i>)	Anuttara (the absolute)	Undefined	Beyond succession and non-succession (<i>Kramā-kramātīta</i>)	Pure Awareness	Pure Consciousness (<i>Pramiti</i>)	Beyond subject and object	Bliss (<i>Ānanda</i>)	Beyond transcendence and immanence (<i>Parātīta</i>)
The Divine Means (<i>Śāmbhavopāya</i>)	Śiva	Unity (<i>Abheda</i>)	Non-succession (<i>Akrama</i>)	Immediate Perception	Subject (<i>Pramāṇ</i>)	I	Will (<i>Ichā</i>)	Supreme (<i>Para</i>)
The Empowered Means (<i>Śāktopāya</i>)	Śakti	Unity-in-diversity (<i>Bhedā-bheda</i>)	Non-succession cum succession (<i>Kramā-krama</i>)	Synthetic Perception	Means of knowledge (<i>Prāmāṇa</i>)	You	Knowledge (<i>Jñāna</i>)	Middling (<i>Parāpara</i>)
The Individual Means (<i>Ānavopāya</i>)	Nara (the individual soul)	Diversity (<i>Bheda</i>)	Succession (<i>Krama</i>)	Analytic Perception	Object (<i>Prameya</i>)	He, She, It	Action (<i>Kriyā</i>)	Inferior (<i>Apara</i>)

Those who are purified by this supremely real consciousness firmly affirmed within them become well established on the path of the absolute (*anuttara*) and are not bound by practice.⁸¹

In fact, there is nothing we can do to free ourselves.⁸² All forms of practice, whether internal or external, depend on consciousness and so cannot serve as a means to realise it.⁸³ He who seeks to discover this reality by practice is like a man who tries to see the sun by the light of a firefly.⁸⁴ Those who are in the realms of 'No-means' (*anupāya*) recognise that the light of consciousness shines as all things. All the opposites merge and their seeming contradiction is resolved. Liberation and bondage become synonymous just as the words 'jar' and 'pot' indicate the same object.⁸⁵ No-means (*anupāya*) is the experience of the absolute (*anuttara*) beyond both transcendence and immanence (*Śiva* and *Śakti*). Undefinable and mysterious, it is neither existent (*sat*) nor non-existent (*asat*), neither is it both nor neither.⁸⁶

Not grounded in anything, this [Light] is not energy, the Great Goddess; nor is it God, the power-holder, because it is not the foundation of anything. It is not an object of meditation because there is none who meditates, nor is it he who meditates because there is nothing to meditate on. It is not an object of worship because there is none to worship it, nor is it the worshipper because there is nothing to worship. This all-pervasive [reality] is not Mantra, not that which is expressed by Mantra, nor he who utters it. This [reality], the Great God (*maheśvara*), is not initiation, the initiator or the initiated.⁸⁷

To all intents and purposes *Anupāya* is liberation itself. It is the eternal fullness of consciousness, which is already liberated before we even begin to practice (*ādimukta*). Those who reach this level of practice do not need to exert themselves at all to grasp reality everywhere constantly present.⁸⁸ *Anupāya* is the way of bliss (*ānandopāya*); it is the untroubled rest within one's own nature (*svātmaviśrānti*) experienced when the recognition dawns that it is this which appears as all things. At that instant the powers of will, knowledge and action merge into the bliss of consciousness:

In this way, even supreme knowledge, divested of all means, rests in the power of bliss said to be [the presence] of the absolute here [in every moment of experience].⁸⁹

Thus there are two levels of *Anupāya*. At the higher level nothing can be said about it. It is literally the reality which cannot be described in any way (*anākhyā*) or approached by any means. To this level belong those rare, highly spiritual souls who are born fully enlightened and come into the world to show others the way to attain their liberated state. For them *Anupāya* literally means that they do not need to practice at all. Most yogis, however, have to prepare themselves for this state and when they are ready achieve instant access to it through the practice of *Anupāya* as the most subtle means possible (*sūkṣmopāya*). The adept whose consciousness has been purified and made fully receptive to instruction needs to be taught this practice just once for it to mature in an instant to the fullness of perfect enlightenment. When the disciple is truly fit to receive the teachings and be liberated,⁹⁰ all the Master needs to do is to tell him that he shines by the light of Śiva's consciousness and that his true nature is the entire universe.⁹¹ Thus:

When the Master utters [his instructions] with words intent on the thoughtless, [the disciple] is liberated there and then, and all that remains [of his former state] is the machine [of the body].⁹²

When such a disciple sits before his Master, all he has to do is to gaze at him and be aware of his elevated state to feel the fragrance (*vāsanā*) of the Master's transcendental consciousness extending spontaneously within him. Abhinava explains:

So gracious is he that, by transferring his own nature to those whose consciousness is pure, they became one with him at his [mere] sight.⁹³

If the disciple does not possess the strength of awareness to allow the Master to infuse this consciousness into him directly in this way while his eyes are open, he is instructed to close them. The Master then bestows upon him a vision of former perfected yogis (*siddha*) while the disciple is in a state of contemplation with his eyes closed (*nimīlanasamādhi*). Through the vision of these perfected yogis (*siddhadarśana*)⁹⁴ he recognises their level of consciousness and so experiences it within himself. The disciple's consciousness thus suddenly expands within him like the violent and rapid spread of poison through the body (*bhujāṅgagaralavat*). He thus becomes one with his Master in the unifying bliss of universal consciousness and so, whether his eyes are open or closed, continues to enjoy the same state constantly.

Although it is possible to catch glimpses of the highest reality in

advanced states of contemplation before attaining perfect enlightenment, these states, however long they last, are transitory (*kādācitka*) and when they end the vision of the absolute ceases with them. The highest realisation, however, persists in all states of consciousness. It happens once and need never occur again. A passage from a lost Tantra declares: "the Self shines forth but once, it is full [of all things] and can nowhere be unmanifest."⁹⁵ All spiritual discipline culminates in this moment of realisation. Accordingly, Abhinava stresses that the goal of all the means to realisation, even the Individual Means, is this absolute consciousness.

Finally, it is worth noting that although Abhinava affirms that the teachings concerning *Anupāya* are found in the *Siddhayogeśvarimata* and the *Mālinīvijaya*, both of which, according to Abhinava, are major Tantras of the Trika school, it is in the theology of the school of Recognition that it is best exemplified. Abhinava himself refers to Somānanda, the founder of this school, as teaching it and alludes to the following passage in the *Vision of Śiva* to support his own exposition:

When Śiva, Who is everywhere present, is known just once through the firm insight born of right knowledge (*pramāṇa*), the scripture and the Master's words, no means [to realisation] serves any purpose and even contemplation (*bhāvanā*) [is of no further use].⁹⁶

Anupāya is therefore, according to Abhinavagupta, the recognition of one's own authentic Śiva-nature, which all the higher Tantric traditions teach is the ultimate realisation. This is also true of the Doctrine of Vibration whose precedents are clearly traceable to these same traditions. Thus, although the *Stanzas* themselves never refer directly to enlightenment as an experience of recognition, there can be little doubt that Spanda practice leads to this same realisation. Accordingly, commentators stress that we realise the vibration of consciousness by *recognising* its activity and that liberation depends on the recognition of this as one's own nature.⁹⁷ Kṣemarāja describes what happens in this moment of Recognition according to the Doctrine of Vibration thus:

At the end of countless rebirths, the yogi's [psycho-physical] activity [which issues from ignorance] is suddenly interrupted by the recognition of his own transcendent nature, full of a novel and supreme bliss. He is like one struck with awe and in this attitude of astonishment (*vismaya-mudrā*) achieves the Great Expansion [of consciousness] (*mahāvīkāśa*). Thus he, the best of yogis, whose true nature has been revealed [to him] is well established [at the highest level of consciousness], which he grasps firmly and his hold upon it never slackens. Thus he is no longer subject to

profane existence (*pravṛtti*), the abhorrent and continuing round of birth and death, which inspires fear in all living beings. because its cause, his own impurity, no longer exists.⁹⁸

The Divine Means (Śāmbhavopāya)

In *Anupāya* the yogi does not need to deal with the world of diversity at all; only Paramaśiva exists there. Beyond both immanence and transcendence, He has nothing to do with the world of practice and realisation. *Anupāya* is the experience of the undefinable (*anākhyā*) light of consciousness, which is the pure bliss beyond even the supreme state (*parāṭita*) of *Śivatattva*. At a slightly lower level, corresponding to the Divine Means, a subtle distinction emerges between the goal and the Path. The yogi now practises within the domain of the outpouring of the power of consciousness. From this level he penetrates directly into the universal egoity of pure consciousness by the subtle exertion (*udiyama*) of its freedom (*svātantrya*) and reflective awareness. The yogi who practises the Divine Means is not concerned with any partial aspect of reality but centers his attention directly on its abounding plenitude. Hence this means is based on Śiva's own state (*śāmbhavāvasthā*) in which only the power of freedom operates as the pure Being (*sattā*) or essence of all the other powers. This state is the light of consciousness which, free of all thought-forms, is the basis of all practice.⁹⁹ The yogi who recognises that pure consciousness, free of thought-constructs (*nirvikalpa*), is his basic state, can practice in any way he chooses; even the most common Mantra will lead him directly to the highest state. Thus the forms of contemplative absorption, empowered (*śākta*) and individual (*āṇava*), that are the fruits of the other means to realisation both attain maturity in this same undifferentiated awareness. This awareness is the pure ego manifest at the initial moment of perception (*prāthamikālocana*), when the power of the will to perceive is activated. It is the subtle state of consciousness that reveals the presence and nature of its object directly:

That which shines and is directly grasped in the first moment of perception while it is still free of differentiated representations and reflects upon itself is [the basis of the Divine Means] said to be the will. Just as an object appears directly to one whose eyes are open without the intervention of any mental cogitation (*anusamdhāna*), so, for some, does Śiva's nature.¹⁰⁰

The movement of awareness at this level of practice attains its goal quickly. While consciousness is heightened progressively in the other Means, here it expands freely to the higher levels, unconfined by any intruding thought-constructs. The Divine Means is a 'thoughtless thought', a 'processless process', that occurs at the juncture between Being and Becoming. Abhinava explains:

When the Heart [of consciousness] is pure and [free of thought-constructs], it harbours the light which illumines the radiant, primordial plane (*prāgrabhūmi*) together with all the categories of existence. [The yogi] then realises through it his identity with Śiva Who is pure consciousness.¹⁰¹

The yogi must catch the initial moment of awareness (*ādiparāmarśa*) just when perception begins. He must not move on from the first pure sensation of the object but return to its original source in his own 'I' consciousness. Observing in this way the objective field of consciousness without labouring to distinguish particulars, the yogi penetrates into his own subjectivity which, vacuous and divested of all outer supports (*nirālamba*), is not directed anywhere outside itself (*ananyamukha-prekṣin*). Here he can lay hold of the power inherent in his own consciousness through which he discerns the true nature of whatever appears before him. Thus the *Stanzas on Vibration* teach:

Just as an object, which is not seen clearly at first even when the mind attends to it carefully, becomes later fully evident when observed with the effort exerted through one's own [inherent] strength (*svabala*), in the same way, when [the yogi] lays hold of that same power, then whatever [he perceives manifests to him] quickly according to its true nature, whatever be its form, locus, time or state.¹⁰²

Thus, although the practice of this Divine Means starts by catching hold of the will in the first moment of awareness, it also concerns the second and third moments in which the means of knowledge and the object are made manifest. When practice at this level proceeds smoothly and without interruption, the three powers of will, knowledge and action fuse into the Trident (*trīśūla*) of power, which is the subject free of all obscurations (*nirāñjana*),¹⁰³ at one with the power of action in its most powerful and evident form. The Kaula schools call this state the stainless (*nirāñjanatattva*). Equated in the Spanda tradition with the dawning of the vibration of consciousness (*spandodaya*), it is the enlightenment the Spanda yogi seeks.

Many practices taught in the *Stanzas on Vibration* belong to the Divine Means. Spanda practice is based on the experience of Spanda which, as we have seen, is defined as the intent (*aunmukhya*) of consciousness, unrestricted to any specific object and hence free of thought-constructs.¹⁰⁴ Spanda can therefore be experienced directly when a powerful intention develops within consciousness, whatever be its ultimate goal or cause. We have already noted that intense anger, joy, grief or confusion are such occasions.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the yogi can make contact with the omnipotent will, which he as Śiva possesses, through intense prayer. Directing his entire attention to Śiva, the Benefactor of the world, entreating Him fervently and without break, his will merges with Śiva's universal will, which is the source of every impulse and perception. As he looks about him, the yogi realises that it is Śiva Himself, the universal consciousness and the yogi's authentic identity, Who ordains his every action, thought and perception. Thus the yogi's cognitive intent on his object coincides with the universal will to make that object known to him, whether the yogi be awake or dreaming. He is thus no longer like the worldly man who cannot dream as he wishes and is forced to experience whatever spontaneously happens in these states of consciousness.¹⁰⁶

Ultimately the yogi manages, by Śiva's grace, to maintain a constant awareness of his own pure perceptive consciousness (*upalabdhrīā*) divested of all obscuring thought-constructs in deep sleep as well as in the contemplative state (*turiya*) beyond it. When he rises to the higher levels of contemplation in which the breath is suspended and all sensory and mental activity ceases, the yogi who manages to sustain this pure, undifferentiated awareness does not succumb to sleep as do less developed yogis. Perfection in the practice of the Divine Means thus coincides with the goal of Spanda practice, namely, a constant, alert attention to the perceiving subjectivity which persists unchanged in every state of consciousness both as the perceiver and agent of all that it experiences.

Another important Spanda practice belonging to this means is Centering. The Spanda yogi seeks to find the Centre (*madhya*) between one cognition and the next, for it is there that he discovers the expansion (*unmeṣa*) of consciousness free of thought-constructs from whence all differentiated perceptions (*vikalpa*) emerge.¹⁰⁷ Abhinava explains that this pure awareness is called:

... the expansion (*unmeṣa*) of [consciousness] or the creative intuition (*pratibhā*) [experienced] in the interval which divides two [moments] of differentiated perception (*vikalpa*). It is here that they arise and disappear. The *Sāstras* and *Āgamas* proclaim with reasoned argument that it is free of thought-constructs (*nirvikalpa*) and precedes

all mental representations of any object. None can deny that a gap exists between perceptions insofar as two moments of thought are invariably divided. This [gap] is the undifferentiated unity of all the countless manifestations.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, in the outer more objective sphere, where change consists of the alterations in the configurations of manifest appearances (*ābhāsa*), the transition from one to another corresponds to a phase of pure luminosity that marks the beginning of one form and the end of another.¹⁰⁹ The world of manifestation and differentiated perceptions (*vikalpa*) thus extends from one Centre to the next. Although it is never in fact divorced from the subject who resides there, the ignorant fail to grasp this fact and so, cut off from the Centre, the world of objectivity becomes for them the sphere of *Māyā*.¹¹⁰ Bhagavatopala quotes the *Light of Consciousness* (*Samvitprakāśa*):

This ever pure experience (*śuddhānubhava*) is variegated by each form [revealed within it]; even so it remains unstained (*nirmala*) when moving to another. Just as a cloth which is naturally white, once dyed, cannot change colour without [first] becoming white again, similarly the pure power of awareness, (*cit*) once coloured by form, is pure [again] at the Centre where that form is abandoned and from whence it proceeds to another.¹¹¹

In his *Essence of Vibration* (*Spandasāṃdoha*), Kṣemarāja explains that the rise and fall of every individual perception in the field of awareness is a specific pulsation of consciousness. From the point of view of the object, the expansion (*unmeṣa*) of this pulse is represented by the initial desire to perceive (*didṛkṣā*) a particular object, while the contracted (*nimeṣa*) phase is the withdrawal of attention from the object previously perceived. From the point of view of the perceiving subjectivity, the phases are reversed, so that the initial desire to perceive marks the contraction (*nimeṣa*) of subjective consciousness while the falling away of the previous perception is its expansion (*unmeṣa*). At the higher level, where these two phases are experienced within consciousness, they represent the state of the categories of Īśvara ('this universe is me') and Sadāśiva ('I am this universe'). Utpaladeva says:

Expansion (*unmeṣa*), which is in the external manifestation [of objectivity], is Īśvaratattva while contraction (*nimeṣa*), which is in the internal manifestation [of subjectivity], is Sadāśiva.¹¹²

At this level all the powers of consciousness fuse and both phases are manifest as part of one reality. This unity is in fact apparent to everybody at each moment. However, within the domain of *Māyā*, which is the sphere of differentiated perceptions (*vikalpa*), it is clearly manifest only at the juncture (*madhya*) between two cognitions.¹¹³ In this Centre resides the void (*kha*) of consciousness (free of thought-constructs) which, divested of diversity, digests into itself all the psycho-physical processes that give life to the multiplicity of perceptions. The yogi moves from the particular vibrations of consciousness at its periphery to the universal throb of the Heart in the Centre. As Abhinava explains:

The self-reflective awareness in the Heart of pure consciousness, present at the beginning and end of each perception, within which the entire universe is dissolved away without residue, is called in the scriptures, the universal vibration of consciousness (*sāmānyaspanda*) and is the outpouring (*uccalana*) [of awareness] within one's own nature.¹¹⁴

All the categories of existence (*tattvas*) are united in the Heart of the Centre where the life-giving elixir of Śiva's consciousness floods one's own inner nature. To reside in the Centre is to abide by the law of totality (*grāmadharma*) in a state which transcends the workings of the mind (*unmanā*).

Consciousness (*jñāna*) with Light as its support, residing in the Centre between being and non-being is known as the act of abiding in one's own abode as the perceiving subjectivity (*draṣṭṛiva*) free of all obscuration. That which has been purified by pure awareness (*śuddhavijñāna*) is called the transcendent (*viviktavastu*), said to be the mode of being (*vytti*) of the law of totality (*grāmadharma*) through which everything is easily attainable.¹¹⁵

The power in the Centre (*madhyaśakti*) is the eternal Present. Beyond time it is the source of both past and future. To be established there is to abide without a break in Rāma, the supreme enjoyer, in every action of one's life.

Rāma is Śiva, the supreme cause Who pervades the fourteen aspects which embrace the entire universe of experience, namely, moving, standing, dreaming, waking, the opening and closing of the eyes, running, jumping, exertion, knowledge [born] of the power of the senses, the [three] aspects of the mind, living beings, names and all kinds of actions.¹¹⁶

By developing an awareness of the Centre, the yogi experiences the bliss of consciousness.¹¹⁷ Through this gap he plunges into introverted absorption (*nimīlanasamādhi*) and then emerges again to pervade the field of awareness between Centres and so experience the Cosmic Bliss (*jagadānanda*) of the universal vibration of consciousness.¹¹⁸ He then recognises that this state pervades every aspect of experience. In this way the yogi's consciousness is no longer afflicted by the power which obscures it, hemming the Centre in on both sides with thought-constructs that seemingly deprive it of its fullness. As he realises directly his pure conscious nature as the universal ego free of all mental representations, it expands out to embrace all things within itself. Thus the realisation the Divine Means leads to, and is directly based upon, is that this pure ego is in all things just as all things are within it.

In the Spanda tradition, as recorded in the *Stanzas on Vibration*, no such ego is recognised.¹¹⁹ Man's authentic nature is, however, understood in personal terms as every individual's own 'own nature' (*svasvabhāva*) which is Śiva, the universal vibration of pure subjectivity (*upalabdhiṛtā*). It is not surprising, therefore, that later commentators found these two conceptions to be essentially the same and accordingly identified one's own inner nature with the pure ego. This came as a natural development in Spanda doctrine not only for this reason but also because the universal ego is experienced as the inner dynamics of absolute consciousness. To conclude our summarial exposition of the Divine Means, which is centred on the direct experience of this pure ego (and hence on Spanda in this form), we turn now to a brief description of its inner, cyclic activity. We shall do this by examining Abhinava's esoteric exegesis of the symbolic significance of the word 'AHAM', which in Sanskrit means 'I', and symbolises by its form the ego's dynamic nature.

The objective world of perceptions is, as we have seen, essentially a chain of thought-constructs (*prapañca*) closely linked to one another and woven into the fabric of diversity (*vicīratā*). This thought (*vikalpa*) is a form of speech (*vāc*) uttered internally by the mind (*citta*), which is itself an outpouring of consciousness. Consciousness also, in its turn, resounds with the silent, supreme form of speech (*parā vāc*) which is the reflective awareness through which it expresses itself to itself. Consequently, the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, which are the smallest phonemic units into which speech can be analysed, are symbolic of the principal elements of the activity of consciousness. Letters come together to generate words and words go on to form sentences. In the same way the fifty phases in the cycle of consciousness represent, in the realms of denoted meaning (*vācya*), the sum total of its universal activity (*kriyā*) corresponding to the principal forces (*kalā*) which come together to form the metaphysical categories of

experience, which in their turn appear in the grossest, most explicitly 'articulate' form as the one hundred and eighteen world-systems (*bhuvana*).

'A', the first letter of both AHAM and the Sanskrit alphabet, is the point of departure or initial emergence of all the other letters and hence denotes *Anuttara*—the absolute. 'Ha', is the final letter of the alphabet and represents the point of completion when all the letters have emerged. It represents the state in which all the elements of experience, in the domains of both inner consciousness and outer unconsciousness, are fully displayed. It is also the generative, emission (*visarga*) which, like the breath, casts the inner into the outer, and draws what is outside inward. The two letters 'A' and 'Ha' thus represent Śiva, the transcendental source and Śakti, His cosmic outpouring that flows back into Him. The combined 'A-Ha' contains within itself all the letters of the alphabet—every phase of consciousness, both transcendental and universal. (For a graphic representation of this analysis, see figure 1.)

M, the final letter of AHAM, is written as a dot placed above the letter which precedes it. It comes at the end of the vowel series and before the consonants and so is called '*anuvāra*' (lit. 'that which follows the vowels') and also '*bindu*' (lit. 'dot,' 'drop,' 'point' or 'zero'). While the consonant 'M' symbolises the individual soul (*puruṣa*), '*bindu*' represents the subtle vibration of 'I', which is the life force (*jīvakalā*) and essence of the soul's subjectivity manifest at the transcendental, supra-mental level (*unmanā*).¹²⁰ It is the zero-point in the centre between the series of negative numbers, in this case the vowels which represent the processes happening internally within Śiva, and the series of positive numbers—the consonants which symbolise the processes happening externally within Śakti.

Bindu, as a point without area, symbolises the non-finite nature of the pure awareness (*pramītibhāva*) of AHAM. It is the pivot around which the cycle of energies from 'A' to 'Ha' rotates, the Void in the centre from which all the powers emanate and into which they collapse. As such, it is the supreme power of action which holds subject, object and means of knowledge together in a potential state in the one Light that shines as all three¹²¹ containing them in its repose¹²² (*viśrānti*). *Bindu* is the 'knower' (*jñātr*), who is essentially consciousness that, though omniscient, does not manifest its intelligence, like a man who knows the scriptures but having no occasion to explain them to others silently bears this knowledge within himself. As such, it symbolises the union of Śiva and Śakti (*śivaśakti-mithunapiṇḍa*)¹²³ in a state of heightened potency in which they have not yet divided to generate the world of diversity. It stands, in other words, at the threshold of differentiation in the stream of emanation still contained within Śiva.

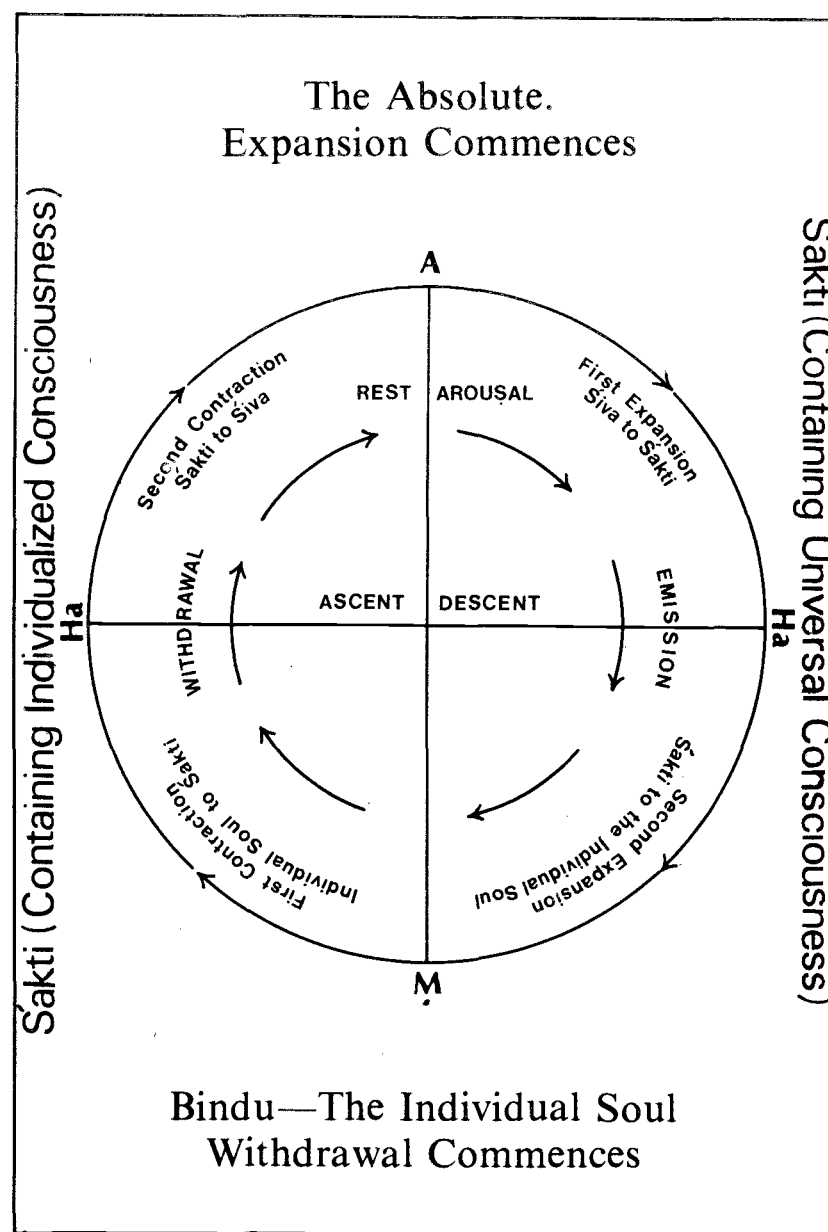


Figure 1

Then, to the degree in which that which is to be accomplished by the power of action residing within it [as a potential] penetrates into the absolute, it appears initially as *bindu*, which is the light of pure consciousness.¹²⁴

When outer objectivity is reabsorbed into its transcendent source, *bindu* is the point into which all the manifest powers of consciousness are gathered and fused together. The universal potency of all the letters is thus contained in *bindu* which, as the reflective awareness of supreme 'I' consciousness,¹²⁵ gives them all life. Thus *bindu* also marks the beginning of Śiva's internal movement back to the undifferentiated absolute and so stands at the threshold of both emission and absorption without being involved in either.

The three aspects of AHAM together constitute a movement from the undifferentiated source of transcendental consciousness—'A'—through the expansion or emission of its power—'Ha'—to the subject—'M'—which contains and makes manifest the entire universe of experience. The reverse of this movement, that of withdrawal (*saṃhāra*), is represented by M-Ha-A. AHAM and M-Ha-A alternate in the rotation (*ghūrṇana*) of the reflective awareness of 'I' consciousness as immanent Śakti emerges from transcendental Śiva to then merge back into Him. As Abhinava says:

The universe rests within Śakti and She on the plane of the absolute (*anuttara*) and this again within Śakti . . . for the universe shines within consciousness and [consciousness shines] there [within the universe by the power of] consciousness. These three poles, forming a couple and merging, make up the one supreme nature of Bhairava Whose essence is AHAM.¹²⁶

At the microcosmic level, 'A' represents the initial moment when the subject begins to rise out of himself to view the object. The movement from 'A' to 'Ha' marks the emergence of sensation within the field of awareness, which is represented by the fifty letters of the alphabet symbolic of the fifty aspects of the flux of consciousness leading to objectified perception. 'M' is the subject who, resting content within himself when he has perceived his object, merges through the inner flow of awareness into 'A', the absolute. Then from the absolute (A) its emission (Ha) flows back into the pure subject (M) set to perceive his object. Thus all the cycles of creation and destruction are contained within AHAM through which they are experienced simultaneously as the spontaneous play of the absolute. The yogi who recognises this recurrent pulse of awareness to be the movement of his own consciousness merges his limited ego with the

universal ego. Thus he realises that its power to create, sustain and destroy all things is his own inner strength (*svabala*) that he exerts effortlessly in the same state of mystical absorption (*turiya*) in universal consciousness that the absolute itself enjoys. In this way he shares in the three-fold awareness Śiva Himself has of His own nature which Abhinava describes as follows:

'I make the universe manifest within myself in the Sky of Consciousness. I, who am the universe, am its creator!'—this awareness is the way in which one becomes Bhairava. 'All of manifest creation (*śādhvan*) is reflected within me, I cause it to persist'—this awareness is the way in which one becomes the universe. 'The universe dissolves within me. I who am the flame of the [one] great and eternal fire of consciousness'—seeing thus one achieves peace.¹²⁷

The experience of the liberated thus coincides with the realisation of their own divine nature which, through its power, rules and guides the cosmic order. Thus this attainment (*siddhi*), which is liberation itself, is in the Doctrine of Vibration technically called 'Mastery over the Wheel of Energies' (*cakreśvarasiddhi*) because the liberated soul, identified with Śiva, now governs, as does Śiva, the cycle of the powers that bring about the creation and destruction of all things.¹²⁸

The Empowered Means (Śāktopāya)

All the practices taught in the *Stanzas on Vibration* are internal. Whenever ritual is mentioned, it is invariably interpreted in terms of the dynamics of the inner processes the yogi experiences and implements in the course of his yogic practice. The Doctrine of Vibration, Kṣemarāja affirms,¹²⁹ is concerned entirely with these inner disciplines centred, as it is, in one way or another, on consciousness or, at least, on the inner activity of the mind. Thus the Empowered Means which, like the other categories we have discussed, is entirely internal, includes an important part of Spanda practice. Spanda practice belonging to the Divine Means centres on one's own inherent nature (*svasvabhāva*) as Śiva, the universal perceiver and agent, that belonging to the Empowered Means on His power. Instead of arriving directly at the all-embracing emptiness of subjective consciousness, the yogi practising the Empowered Means realises his true nature through the fullness of its energy. Practising the Divine Means, the yogi plunges, as it were, straight into the fire of consciousness; practising the

Empowered Means he merges with its rays. Either way the yogi is centred equally on ultimate reality. The power of consciousness is no less absolute than its possessor. To make this point Abhinava quotes the *Mātāṅga-tantra*:

This reality consists of the rays of [Śiva's] power and is variously said to be the abode of the Lord's manifestation . . . That same [power] illumined [by Śiva] is itself also luminous, unshaken and unmoving. That very [power] is the supreme state, subtle, omnipresent, the nectar of immortality, free of obscurity, peaceful, yearning for pure Being alone (*vastumātra*) and devoid of beginning and end. Perfectly pure, it is said to be the body [of ultimate reality].¹³⁰

The yogi concentrates on the powers operating in all of life's activities as particular pulsations (*viśeṣaspanda*) in the universal rhythm (*sāmānyaspanda*) of the power of consciousness. In this way he rises progressively from the particular to the universal until he reaches pure Being (*sattā*), the greatest of all universals (*mahāsāmānya*) and the highest form of Śiva's power. Thus the creative power of Māyā, manifest through countless lesser powers, no longer causes the yogi to stray from Śiva's consciousness but becomes the means through which it can be realised¹³¹ in the illuminating brilliance (*sphurattā*) which is Śiva's pure Being. Thus by discovering the true nature of Śakti, the yogi realises himself to be Śiva, its possessor Who consists of all its countless powers. Thus practise belonging to this Means leads to the same pure consciousness free of thought-constructs realised through the Divine Means. Although the ultimate realisation is instantaneous, the yogi rises to it gradually by freeing his consciousness of the limitations imposed upon it by thought. Abhinava explains:

The same occurs in the Empowered Means [as does in the Divine]. At the discursive level of consciousness (*vaikalpikibhūmi*) [where the Empowered Means functions] knowledge and action, although evident, are, for the reasons explained previously, contracted. A blazing energy [is revealed within] the one who dedicates himself to removing the burden of this contraction. [This energy eventually] brings about the inner manifestation (*anirābhāsa*) of pure consciousness he seeks.¹³²

Consciousness is individualised and its power of knowledge and action contracted by the thought-constructs born of ignorance. The arising of these mental representations, as the *Stanzas on Vibration* say, deprives the soul of its freedom and immortal life.¹³³ The practise of the

Empowered Means is meant to free the fettered soul of this constriction on his consciousness. It operates within the mental sphere (*cetas*)¹³⁴ and is designed to purify thought (*vikalpasamkāra*) in order to reveal the pure consciousness which is its ground and ultimate source. Thus, the Empowered Means is concerned with the second instant of perception, during which the subject forms mental representations of his object. Thought functions on the basis of an awareness of relative distinctions between specific particulars, distinguishing them from one another and thus seemingly fragmenting the essential unity of reality.¹³⁵ The vibrant vitality of consciousness, universally manifest, is clouded like a mirror by a child's breath¹³⁶ and the soul is deprived of the liberating intuition of the one reality free of thought-constructs (*nirvikalpa*). Abhinava writes:

The [fettered soul] is like a dancing girl who although wishing to leave the dancehall is collared by the doorkeeper of thought and thrown back onto the stage of Māyā.¹³⁷

All thought is centred on objectivity and hence dislodges awareness from the plenitude of pure subjective consciousness. Thus, to regain the original state of rest (*viśrānti*) consciousness enjoys, the yogi must rid himself of thought. As thought-forms decrease, pure, thought-free awareness is strengthened¹³⁸ until the yogi is fully established in a state in which the relative distinctions (*bheda*) conceived between entities dissolve away. Everything appears to him as pure Being (*sattāmātra*)¹³⁹ and the entire universe shines before him pervaded by Śiva's radiance.¹⁴⁰ His intuitive faculty (*mati*) thus purified, the yogi gains both the perfections (*siddhi*) of yogic practice and liberation (*mukti*). His consciousness is now like a well-polished mirror which reflects everything he desires and grants it to him.¹⁴¹ Abhinava writes:

Just as a man who has been ill for a long time forgets his past pain completely when he regains his health, absorbed as he is in the ease of his present condition, so too those who are grounded in pure awareness free of thought-constructs are no longer conscious of their previous [fettered] state. Consciousness, the sole truly existent reality, free of thought-constructs is made fully and evidently manifest by eliminating these differentiated perceptions. The wise man should therefore exert himself to attend closely to this [state of awareness].¹⁴²

The thought-constructs generated within consciousness do not in reality affect it at all. They can neither break up nor add anything to the Light which shines as all things.¹⁴³ They are in fact nothing but

consciousness itself¹⁴⁴ which perceives, through its power of reflective awareness (*vimarśa*), the multitude of objects in diverse ways, and so assumes this form.¹⁴⁵ Although thought-constructs are mental representations of objects once seen or present, they are products of the power of consciousness and not of the objects they represent.¹⁴⁶ Thought is both analytic and synthetic;¹⁴⁷ it serves the useful purpose of separating individual elements of experience from others and linking together those that appear to be distinct from one another so that they can be better understood.¹⁴⁸ It does not consist merely of false mental constructs projected onto reality that need to be wholly rejected. Thought obscures consciousness and distracts it only when it appears in the form of doubt, vacillating between alternatives.¹⁴⁹ Once this conflicting duality (*dvaitādhivāsa*)¹⁵⁰ is eliminated, thought is purified and rests in itself as the 'thought-less thought' of pure consciousness.¹⁵¹ By gradually eliminating the multitude of conflicting notions that agitate him, the yogi ultimately achieves the certainty (*niścaya*) corresponding to a direct awareness of his own divine nature.¹⁵² Abhinava explains:

Thought is in reality none other than pure consciousness. Even so, it serves as a means to liberation for the individual soul (*ānu*) only when it takes the form of certainty (*niścaya*).¹⁵³

The yogi must eliminate every doubt and misguided notion that leads him to believe himself to be other than Śiva. By developing the thought: 'I am Śiva', it ultimately affirms itself directly as a pure awareness beyond thought without any intervening mental representations. Abhinava says:

Just as the man who thinks intensely that he is a sinner becomes such, just so one who thinks himself to be Śiva, and none other than He, becomes Śiva. This certainty (*dārdhya*), which penetrates and affirms itself in our thoughts, coincides with an awareness free of thought-constructs engendered by a series of differentiated mental representations, the object of which is our identity with Śiva.¹⁵⁴

As thought is gradually purified, it becomes progressively clearer until its object becomes maximally apparent (*sphuṭatama*).¹⁵⁵ The stream of perceptive consciousness (*pramāṇa*) progressively reveals each aspect of its object which, thus affirming itself with increasing clarity, reveals its ultimate nature. The yogi reflects repeatedly upon it as the object of his realisation and loving devotion, for all that is perceptible and need be known (*jñeya*) is Śiva alone. As Abhinava says:

What should we say of those who before they are satisfied have to see their beloved again and again, caress her and think about her for a long time?¹⁵⁶

The yogi practising the Empowered Means is initiated into the Great Sacrificial Rite (*mahāvāga*), eternally enacted at the interface between the inner and outer aspects of consciousness, by a direct infusion of awareness from his master who is the embodiment and outer symbol of the yogi's enlightened identity.¹⁵⁷ The rite begins with ritual bathing (*snāna*) which is in this case the immersion of the body of thought in the white ashes of the cosmic fuel of duality, burnt in the fire of consciousness.¹⁵⁸ The yogi then goes on to worship (*pūjā*) by uniting all that is pleasing to the senses in the oneness of consciousness.¹⁵⁹ The ritual formula (*mantra*) he recites is the eternal resonance of the awareness which is the pulsation of the Heart of his own consciousness.¹⁶⁰ Repetition (*japa*) of the formula is every activity, perception, breath or thought which arises within him while plunged in the universal awareness of his true nature.¹⁶¹ The mental image he visualises meditating (*dhyaṇa*) on the Deity in the course of the rite, is whatever the yogi spontaneously imagines and contemplates as the outpouring of the universal creativity of consciousness.¹⁶² Ritual gesture (*mudrā*) is whatever bodily posture the yogi may assume when, fully absorbed in consciousness, he moves, staggering about (*ghūrṇita*) as it were, drunk with the wine of self-realisation.¹⁶³ Oblation is performed by offering with devotion and awareness all the sensations which flow in through the channels of the senses to the fire of his subjectivity, which is thus inflamed (*uddipita*) and makes all things one with itself.¹⁶⁴

The outer ritual which commences in the sphere of the Individual Means thus leads naturally to the inner rite of the Empowered Means. When the yogi's practise (*abhyāsa*) reaches fruition, the rite merges with the spontaneous activity of consciousness. This is fullness (*pūrṇatā*), the completion and reunification of the forces within consciousness which, through the power of ignorance, were formerly dispersed and divided.

"Just as a horse driven here and there", writes Abhinava, "over plains, hills and dales follows the will of its rider, so also consciousness, driven by various expedients (*bhaṅgi*), quiescent or terrific, abandoning duality, becomes Bhairava. Just as by looking repeatedly at one's own face in a mirror one comes to know that it is the same [as the image reflected], so also, [one sees] in the mirror of mental representations of meditation (*dhyaṇa*), ritual (*pūjā*) and worship (*arcā*) one's own Self as Bhairava and so quickly identifies with Him. This identification is the realisation that takes place in the absolute (*anuttara*)."¹⁶⁵

By ridding himself of the relative distinctions engendered by thought, the yogi practising the Empowered Means, illumined by the power of self-awareness of Pure Knowledge (*śuddhavidyā*), transcends the distinction between right and wrong, purity and impurity. He is led to the conviction that the pure consciousness, which is his true nature, is unaffected by whatever action he may do, whether conventionally accepted as good or bad. Abhinava quotes the *Mālinīvijaya* as saying:

All here is enjoined and all prohibited. This alone, O Lord of the gods, is here prescribed as obligatory, namely that the mind be firmly applied to the true reality. It matters little how this is achieved. He whose mind is firmly established in [this] reality, even if he eats poison, is as little affected by it as are lotus petals by water.¹⁶⁶

Impurity is a state of seeming separation from consciousness.¹⁶⁷ The yogi who has freed himself of all false notions comes to realise that the true nature of consciousness can never be sullied or limited by any object appearing within it.¹⁶⁸ This is the realisation the ancient sages achieved through a direct intuition of reality free of intruding thought-constructs (*avikalpabhāva*), but kept secret in order not to confuse the worldly.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, in reality nobody is ever bound. It is ignorance to believe bondage exists and to contrast it with a conceived state of liberation.¹⁷⁰ If the Self is one with Śiva, how can it be either bound or released?¹⁷¹ Nothing essentially distinguishes those who are bound from those who are free.¹⁷² The difference between their states is merely conceptual.¹⁷³ Pure consciousness abides free of all such distinctions. Thus Bhagavatotpala, in his commentary on the *Stanzas*, repeatedly stresses that thought-constructs obscure consciousness and misguide the individual soul.¹⁷⁴ Those who are bound are convinced that they are dull witted, conditioned by *Karma*, sullied by their sin and helplessly impelled to action by some power beyond their control. He who manages to counter this conviction with its opposite achieves freedom.¹⁷⁵ He who considers himself to be free is free indeed, while he who thinks himself bound remains so. Thus at the highest level of realisation, as Abhinava says:

Nothing new is achieved nor is that which in reality is unmanifest, revealed—[only] the idea is eradicated that the luminous being shines not.¹⁷⁶

Nothing is impure, all is perfect, including *Māyā* and the diversity it engenders. To say that illusion exists and that ignorance must be

eradicated implies that it has a separate existence apart from consciousness. If this is so, it has as little reality as the shadow of a shadow, but if not, then it must be consciousness itself. Thus, as Kallāṭa says, bondage, the binder and the bound are in fact one.¹⁷⁷ It is Śiva Himself Who freely obscures His own nature. Śiva binds Himself by Himself.¹⁷⁸ Concealing and revealing Himself, Śiva plays His timeless game.

At the Divine (*śāmbhava*) level of pure Śiva-consciousness, the Spanda yogi directly lays hold of the power inherent in his own conscious nature (*svabala*) which gives life to the psycho-physical organism and impels the senses and mind to action.¹⁷⁹ In this way every thought-construct, and with it the ego, is instantly annulled in the immediacy of the pure subjectivity that remains unaltered throughout every perception and state of consciousness. The same takes place at the Empowered level by attending to the recurrent activity—Spanda—of the subject, that is, the flux of awareness through the cyclic movement of the powers of consciousness.¹⁸⁰ By attending (*avadhāna*) to this movement the thought-constructs that emerge and subside in the course of perception are seen to be part of this universal process, and, in this way purified, are no longer binding. Thus, Kṣemarāja says that the Spanda teachings are concerned most directly with the Empowered Means.¹⁸¹ The yogi who is always alert to discern the pulse of Spanda quickly realises his own authentic state of being (*nijaṃ bhāvam*).¹⁸² He is then truly awake, not only literally, but also in the deeper sense that he is awake to his authentic nature, its power and activity. When attention (*avadhāna*) slackens, this movement takes place unconsciously and so the thought-constructs and perceptions generated through it appear to take on an autonomous existence of their own, just as happens when we dream.¹⁸³ The spontaneity of the movement that travels between subject and object and holds them together in the pure awareness of the universal subject's identity with his cosmic object devolves into the creative activity of waking and dreaming. Mañ, in other words, becomes a victim of his states of consciousness and the contents that they, by their very nature, generate within themselves.¹⁸⁴

The Spanda teachings are not only concerned with the structure of thought and its functions, but also with the powers and properties of its vehicle, namely, speech. Speech issues out of consciousness, develops into thought to then become articulated sound. A focal point of Spanda doctrine is thus the role speech plays in the formation of thought-constructs and their purification. Although this takes place at all levels of practise below the Divine (*śāmbhava*), the Spanda teachings, meant as they are for advanced yogis, ignore the outer forms of spiritual discipline to concentrate on practise in the Empowered (*śākta*) psychic sphere (*cetas*) and what lies beyond it where speech is the pure inner awareness (*vimarśa*)

of the light of consciousness. The Doctrine of Vibration identifies this, the highest level of speech (*parā vāc*), with the universal pulse of consciousness that resounds spontaneously within it as the inner flow of its own undifferentiated awareness.¹⁸⁵ Beyond the realms of language, it is the transcendental consciousness in which all language is rooted and pervades all that language denotes as its essential being. Utpaladeva writes:

The Supreme Voice is consciousness. It is self-awareness spontaneously arisen, the highest freedom and sovereignty of the Supreme Lord. That pulsing radiance (*sphurati*) is pure Being, unqualified by time and space. As the essence [of all things] it is said to be the Heart of the Supreme Lord.¹⁸⁶

When the intention arises within consciousness to discern its own brilliance manifest in the world of denotations and denoted meanings, speech turns from the supreme transcendental level to that of immanence and assumes the form of a pure intuitive awareness (*pratibhā*) which perceives and comprehends its universal manifestation. This is the voice of intuition (*paśyanti*), which grasps the meaning inherent inwardly in all words and externally in all that they denote. Analogous to the non-discursive, instinctual knowledge animals possess, it is a pure generic perception not yet formed into language in which the act of denotation, its object and that which denotes it are indistinguishable. Illumined by the voice of intuition birds migrate in their due seasons, the cock crows at dawn and young mammals suck at the breast.¹⁸⁷ Infants similarly reflect and respond instinctively to their environment by virtue of this intuitive sense¹⁸⁸ and through it come to grasp the link between words and the objects they denote. As they learn to speak, they begin to form concepts and so the next two levels of speech develop. One is the outer corporeal speech (*vaikhari*) and the other the subtler, inner discourse (*antah-samjalpa*) of thought that forms at the intermediate level (*madhyama*) where the ratiocinating mind stands between the higher levels of intuition and its outer verbal expression. In this way the development of speech in infancy reflects its progressive actualisation in every spoken word. A hymn to the Goddess quoted by Bhagavatopala describes this process well:

Therefore, O Supreme Goddess, the highest form of speech should be worshipped as the [universal] cause that establishes the existence of all things by insight (*niscaya*) into their nature (*artha*) brought about by their manifestation through the superimposition [of verbal designations].
O Mother, insight into the true nature [of things] is nothing but the

act of intent of that [same speech], apart from which [speech itself and all that it expresses] could not attain to its own nature. Again, in that state [speech] is said to be the light of one's own nature. Free of division and succession it is attainable [only] by the yogi.

Then from the state of intent, O Śivā, speech [assumes] the nature of thought as the radiant pulse (*sphurana*) of desire to speak of that which is in the domain of words. Then consisting of words, it bears a clearly expressed meaning, for if [speech] were not such, meaning could not be understood.¹⁸⁹

Personal experience clearly proves that thought is invariably associated with speech.¹⁹⁰ Thought is a function of language. Through it we communicate to ourselves a mental image of the world about us and can construct complex ideas about ourselves. Language is the fabric from which our world of ideas is woven. Mental representation which orders the influx of sensation and presents us with a meaningful, picture of the world, memory, the elaboration of ideas and the shifting tides of emotion are all intimately connected with language and through it to the consciousness which underlies them. To think of language as nothing more than a system of denotation based on a commonly accepted convention (*saṅketa*) fails to fully account for its inherent power to convey meaning (*vācakaśakti*). In order to learn the convention we must be born with an innate ability to grasp meaning, and this ability is not itself learned nor found anywhere within the domain of convention. Lacking this ability we would be caught in an infinitely expanding system of denotation in which each element pointed to some other within it, without ever coming to rest anywhere. Unless we can couple the word 'jar' with the object it denotes, explaining that the word 'pot' is a synonym of the word 'jar' would leave us none the wiser.¹⁹¹ The connection between word and meaning is only explicable if we postulate that it is an inherent property of the power of awareness to link one with the other. Language must be grounded in the pure cognitive awareness (*pramā*) of consciousness which stands beyond, and yet illumines, the sphere of experience we define and understand through the medium of language. As Abhinava says:

Someone may hear another person speak, but if his awareness (*pramā*) is obscured, he is unable to rise, unconscious as he is, to the level of the experiencing subject [who understands] what has been said. He only grasps the outer successive (sound) of what the other person says and thus can only repeat it as would a parrot. An understanding of its meaning presupposes that he has caught hold of his own power of awareness (*pramā*) by attaining the autonomy [of the conscious, universal subject].¹⁹²

Outer, articulate speech consists of a series of ordered phonemic elements produced and combined by the vocal organs to form meaningful words. In order for this to be possible, these elements must also be grounded in consciousness (*pramā*). The articulated phonemes are merely outer, gross manifestations of the phonemic energies (*varṇagrāma*) held in a potential state within consciousness. This 'mass of sounds' (*śabdarāśi*) is the light of consciousness (*prakāśa*) which makes the universe manifest and contains all things within itself. In other words, it is the totality of consciousness expressed as the collective awareness symbolised by all the letters corresponding to the introverted subjectivity of Śiva Himself. The power through which this potential actualises itself into speech and the world of denotation is technically called '*Mātṛkā*'. It is the reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) and radiance (*sphurattā*) of the supreme subject—the 'mass of sounds' (*śabdarāśi*)—and the undivided wonder Śiva experiences when He contemplates the universe He gathers up into Himself in the form of countless words (*vācaka*) and their meanings (*vācya*).¹⁹³ *Mātṛkāśakti* is manifest in the second movement of consciousness after the primal vibration of the pure luminosity of the 'mass of sounds', as the state of pure potency which arises when its unsullied subjectivity begins to turn away from itself and is associated with faint traces of objectivity (*āmrśya-cchāyā*).¹⁹⁴ *Mātṛkā* contains within itself the various aspects of objectivity that, although not yet manifest, are ready to issue forth. Thus this power, at one with Śiva, is called '*Mātṛkā*' because she is the mother (*mātṛkā*) of the universe that she contains within herself as does a pregnant woman her child.¹⁹⁵

The circle of the powers of *Mātṛkā* (*mātṛkācakra*) consists of the phonemic energies contained in AHAM, the universal ego.¹⁹⁶ When grasped in its entirety at its source, these energies elevate the consciousness of the enlightened, but when split up and dispersed give rise to the obscuring forces (*kalā*) which lead the ignorant away from realisation. The fettered soul is ignorant of the pure egoity that is the source of speech and so it generates, through its powers, the many thought-constructs that deprive him of the awareness of unity and obscure Śiva's universal activity.¹⁹⁷ The *Stanzas on Vibration* declare:

He who is deprived of his power by the forces of obscuration (*kalā*) and a victim of the powers arising from the mass of sounds (*śabdarāśi*) is called the fettered soul.¹⁹⁸ The powers [of speech] are always ready to obscure his true nature as no mental representation can arise that is not penetrated by speech.¹⁹⁹

The rays of phonemic energies emanate from the light of Śiva, the

'mass of sounds' (*śabdarāśi*) in eight groups. They constitute the powers of the inner mental organ and the five senses, figuratively arranged in a circle around the sacred shrine (*pīṭha*) of *Mātṛkāśakti* who manifests externally as the body.²⁰⁰ The eight classes and the names of the deities presiding over them are as follows:²⁰¹

Gutturals	Brāhmaṇi	Intellect (<i>buddhi</i>)
Palatals	Māheśvarī	Ego (<i>ahankāra</i>)
Cerebrals	Kaumārī	Mind (<i>manas</i>)
Dentals	Nārāyaṇī	Hearing
Labials	Vārāhī	Touch
Semivowels	Aindrī	Sight
Sibilants	Cāmuṇḍā	Taste
Vowels	Mahālakṣmī	Smell

The yogi who grasps the true nature of the power of *Mātṛkā* and its phonemic forces is liberated²⁰² by recognising that the activity of the senses and the discursive representations of the mind are in fact emanations of universal consciousness. Conversely, when ignorant, he is affected by its power in its multiple negative aspects known as '*Mahāghora*' ('greatly terrible') and, unable to rest within himself free of the sense of diversity, he is constantly disturbed by the flux of extroverted perceptions.²⁰³ Abhinava explains:

When the [phonemic energies] are not known to be [emanations of the Lord] they conceal the wonder (*camatkāra*) of consciousness which is the one essential non-discursive awareness [present throughout perception] and even in discursive thought. They obscure it with thought-constructs constituted by the diverse configurations of phonemes and syllables which [although also] a form of the deity [are no longer benevolent but] most terrible. Inducing doubt and fear, they engender the fettered soul's state, bound by the shackles of transmigration. . . . But once their true nature is understood correctly in this way, they bestow freedom in this very life. . . . This knowledge of their intimate being [at one with the absolute] consists of this, namely, that even in the midst of all these fluctuations, free at their inception of discursive representations, thought-constructs do not conjoin [individualised consciousness] with the wheel of energies consisting of the totality of phonemes, even though [these constructs] are coloured by the many diverse words generated by the aggregate of phonemes.²⁰⁴

Language has a powerful effect on us. A few words we may hear or read can inspire us with joy, fear or sadness, and the constant inner

dialogue of thought arouses intense feelings within us. This power hidden in language, which binds us through the thought-constructs it generates, can also be used to free us of them by channeling it through Mantra. Mantric practice begins at the Individual (*ānava*) level where Mantras are recited in consonance with the rising and falling away of the breath. In this way they are charged with the vibration (*spanda*) of consciousness and, in their turn, make consciousness vibrate. Serving as a means to concentration, they free the mind of discursive representations.²⁰⁵ The word 'Mantra' is thus traditionally said to derive from the words '*manana*' and '*trāṇa*'. '*Manana*' literally means 'reflection'. In this context it denotes the continuous thought or awareness of Mantra which is universal, omniscient consciousness (*viśvavijñāna*). '*Trāṇam*' means to 'save' and Mantra 'saves' us by freeing the mind from the bondage of transmigration.²⁰⁶ Mantras thus serve to generate a higher level of consciousness by a process of '*manana*' which the texts describe as 'a progressive heightening of the reflective awareness which is the aesthetic rapture that threads through each state of being'.²⁰⁷ As Maheśvarānanda puts it:

Reflection (*manana*) on one's own omnipresent consciousness (*nijavibhava*) and protection from the fear of one's own limitations is the undefinable intuition (*anubhūti*) which has absorbed all dualistic thoughts and is the meaning of Mantra.²⁰⁸

Although Mantras may convey an intelligible meaning, they are not bound to a convention (*saṅketa*) as is common speech. The 'language' of Mantras is not concerned with external objects. It is language directed inward, deriving its energy from the supreme power of consciousness into which it ultimately involutes, transcending the outer and reverting to the inner. The Mantra, like the visualised image of a deity, is a symbol which, precisely because it has no assigned connotation as has the literal sign we use in propositions, is capable of being understood in more significant ways, so that its meanings are fraught with vital and sentient experience. The Mantra opens a new avenue of thought which becomes truer to itself than does any other type of thinking which has found its limits in devalued symbols or signs that can be used to signify anything without themselves being significant. "Mantras are pure," writes Rājānaka Rāma, "in the sense that they are not tainted by a conventionally accepted meaning (*vācya*) and transcend the usual form of awareness created by reflection on the phonemes [conjoined to form words]."²⁰⁹

The essence of Mantra is an experience entirely free of objective relations. It is the pure power of awareness directed at its own nature and thus free of objectivity and eternal.²¹⁰ It frees us of the desire to attend to

things temporal by redirecting attention to the heart of consciousness which thus assimilates thought back into itself and stills the agitation (*kṣobha*) occasioned by object-centred awareness.²¹¹ In this way the yogi rises from the partial perceptions individualised by thought, to the universal perception free of thought-constructs. By remembering (*smaraṇa*) and rightly enunciating the Mantra, he attains a level of reflective awareness in which all things are experienced as one with his own nature.²¹² Thus Mantra has meaning and serves a purpose (*artha*) to the degree in which it is possible to intuit through it the power of consciousness which gives it, and all things, being. The outer forms of the Mantra are expressions of the powers experienced inwardly.²¹³ At root, the Mantra represents the pure signification of all possible sentences and words relating to the world of particulars. It enshrines a form of undivided, non-discursive intuition necessarily represented in parts (as the phonemic body of the Mantra) but whose full significance is transcendental and includes all possible forms of verbal expression.²¹⁴ The yogi who repeats his Mantra undistractedly achieves the power to understand the ultimate significance of the formula he is repeating. Thus understood, it awakens in him a state of contemplative absorption at the Empowered (*śākta*) level in which he experiences the pulsing power of consciousness that emits from itself, in progressively grosser stages, thoughts and articulated words along with their meaning. Abhinava writes:

A waterwheel moves a series of machines connected to it and can set them into operation by the force of its unified impulse. In the same way, by the power of the one continuous act of awareness (*anusamdhāna*) which corresponds to the incessant arising of Mantra, the deities of all Mantras, at one with them, become automatically (*ayatnāt*) propitious.²¹⁵

The recitation of Mantra starts at the Individual level in consonance with the movement of the vital breath. To be effective, however, the Mantra and its component syllables and words must resonate with the force of awareness. They must be energised with the pulsation (*spanda*) of consciousness and so penetrate into the absorption of the Empowered level of practice. At that level the pure thought of the Mantra gradually takes over from the impure and dispersed thought of the world of objects, wrongly perceived to be severed from consciousness and so leads the adept to the Divine level where the ultimate source of its power resides.²¹⁶ This vitality is Spanda, the universal pulse (*sāmānyaspanda*) of awareness residing in the heart of consciousness at the supreme level of speech (*parāvāc*) as all-embracing 'I' consciousness.²¹⁷ 'I' consciousness (*AHAM*) is

the Great Mantra eternally manifest as the wonder inspired by the light of consciousness. The Mantra AHAM which gives life to every living being contains all the powers of the letters within itself; giving rise to the entire universe, it is present at the very beginning of manifestation where it is established in pure consciousness free of time and space.²¹⁸ Kṣemarāja explains:

All-embracing 'I-ness' (*pūrṇāhantā*) is the mistress of all the letters from [the first] 'A' to [the last] 'Kṣa' which, as the absolute (*anuttara*) power of unstruck sound (*anāhata*), it contains and encapsulates. Thus it is a pure immutable awareness even though it has absorbed into itself every cycle of creation and destruction in the play of the Wheel of Energies constituting the unfolding cosmic order (*śaḍadhvan*) of countless words and all they denote. It is the supreme level of speech, the great unspoken Mantra which, eternally manifest, is the life of all beings. Here [in the Spanda school] it is called the vibration of the Lord because it unfolds pulsating within one's own being as does the movement of this divine universe.²¹⁹

Mantric energy is not to be sought in the actual sound or form of the Mantra directly. The ordering of its phonemic constituents (*varṇa-sanniveśa*) is merely a channel through which the yogi can tap the energy of his own consciousness. The Mantra should be recited with the full force of awareness. It can only be effective when associated with the adept's consciousness.²²⁰ The Mantra and the reciter of Mantra must be rooted in the one conscious reality, otherwise the Mantra can bear no fruit.²²¹ As Rājānaka Rāma puts it, Mantras are a mere flux of phonemic sounds, powerless to bend even a blade of grass unless the adept makes contact with Śiva's plane of oneness.²²² The imperishable power of awareness he attains thus is the very life of Mantras; without it they are as fruitless as autumn clouds.²²³ Through this power consciousness emanates and withdraws the countless Mantras²²⁴ to gratify the wishes of each adept and bestow upon him the well-deserved fruits of his practice. Mantras are thus full of the knowledge and action²²⁵ they derive from the Spanda energy of universal consciousness through which they are empowered to perform their function.²²⁶ The vitality of Spanda is the ground of all Mantras. It is the power by which they emerge from the emptiness of consciousness and are drawn back into it, along with the adept's mind, when they cease to exist as articulate sound.²²⁷ They are Śiva Himself, one with the universal vibration of consciousness through which they are created and in which they lead the yogi to union with Śiva. The awakened realise that the power hidden in Mantras is the vibration of Śiva's pure subjectivity (*upalabdhytā-*

mātra) which is both the transcendental inner nature of all things and the immanent awareness that threads through (*anusyūta*) all the planes of consciousness.²²⁸ Rājānaka Rāma explains:

The vitality of Mantra (*mantravīrya*) is Śiva's power, the undivided reality of Mantra and mind (*cetas*) both when they arise and when they fall away. It emerges from Śiva both as Mantra and as the adept's mind (*citta*) in the form of phonemes and thought-constructs (*saṅkalpa*). The Mantric power manifest [this way] is capable of producing only limited (*niyata*) results for those yogis who have not come in contact with the power of their own nature. However, when the yogi achieves a firm insight into his authentic identity, all Mantras can do all things [for him] because he knows how they arise and fall away.²²⁹

So while Mantra at the Divine level of practice (*śāmbhavopāya*) is the silent consciousness of 'I', at the Empowered and Individual levels it serves as a means to purify thought.²³⁰ It leads the adept in stages along the rungs of the ladder of consciousness, ascending which he abandons the lower stages of conditioned awareness to reach the highest state of Śiva-hood, dense with the light of consciousness.²³¹ Thus the supreme form of Mantric energy destroys the obstacles to enlightenment set up by impure thought and establishes individual consciousness in the true universal thought of pure Being.²³² Filled with this energy Mantras are like rays that emanate from the all-consuming fire of consciousness, depriving thought-constructs of their essence.²³³

The aesthetic rapture (*camatkāra*) the yogi experiences increases to the degree in which the uncreated reality of this pure awareness (*pramā*) abounds²³⁴ and the power of his intuition is heightened as the conventions of the day to day, spoken language are immersed and absorbed in the supernal (*amāyīya*) energy of the phonemes of the Mantra.²³⁵ The mind of the adept is freed of the constraints imposed upon its attention (*abhisamdhayupādhi*) and so, free of thought-constructs, merges with the silence of consciousness together with the Mantra.²³⁶ The *Stanzas on Vibration* declare:

Seizing that strength (*bala*), Mantras, endowed with the power of omniscience, perform their functions, as do the senses of the embodied. It is there alone that they, quiescent and stainless, dissolve along with the adept's mind and so partake of Śiva's nature.²³⁷

At this stage any thought the yogi may conceive is vibrant and full of energy because, having thus absorbed all objectivity into itself, his mind is

one with Mantra.²³⁸ So although in the beginning individual Mantras may effectively correspond to distinct levels of consciousness and stages in the cosmic process, once the yogi has ascended through the planes of power by merging with the vibration of the Mantras at each level, he emerges into a state where he enjoys a direct awareness of his own nature. Śiva's power, which determines the nature and function of all things, (*niyatīśakti*) is transcended and the yogi's own mind, discovered to be the source and essence of all Mantras, can now implement any one of them to achieve anything he wishes, including liberation.²³⁹

The Individual Means (Āṇavopāya)

As Kṣemarāja points out, none of the practices taught in the *Stanzas on Vibration* belong to the Individual Means²⁴⁰ and so it does not, strictly speaking, concern Spanda doctrine, if that is, we consider the *Stanzas* to be the basic text of the Spanda school.²⁴¹ From Kṣemarāja's point of view, however, the third section of the *Aphorisms of Śiva (Śivasūtra)*, which is both the last and most extensive, is largely an exposition of this category of practice.²⁴² The *Stanzas* and *Aphorisms* have been traditionally linked together and so, even though we feel that they should be distinguished insofar as the *Stanzas* rather than the *Aphorisms* teach the Doctrine of Vibration as such, we are nonetheless justified in referring to the *Aphorisms* as its major source. Our exposition of the Individual Means will therefore be largely based on Kṣemarāja's interpretation of the third section of *Aphorisms* and we will present it, as he does, as an exposition of a possible mystical journey of individualised (*āṇava*) consciousness to realisation. We follow Kṣemarāja because he understood the practise taught in the *Aphorisms* in these terms, thereby not only illustrating for us how it fits into this scheme but also how he understood the basic categories of practice and their relationship to one another.

According to Kṣemarāja, the first *Aphorism* of each section of the *Śivasūtra* characterises the condition and nature of the Self at the corresponding three levels of practice. In other words, they indicate the yogi's basic state at each level in terms of his self-identification. This identification corresponds to his existential condition as a degree of self-realisation in the process leading to the authentic self-awareness of the liberated. The very first *Aphorism* starts directly with this, the highest state, by declaring that the Self is pure, dynamic and universal consciousness (*caitanya*).²⁴³ This is true for the yogi who has awakened to his authentic nature at the Divine (*śāmbhava*) level of being. At the

Individual (*āṇava*) level, however, the situation has changed. In this sphere of consciousness the intermediate processes of discernment, analysis and classification of perceptions, which bridge the gap in the flow of awareness from the universal subject to a specific object of knowledge, appear to take over the status of the perceiving subjectivity which underlies them. The universal Self recedes into the background as a pure, undefinable awareness, and the individual ego, consisting of the perceptions, thoughts and emotions generated by the contact between the universal perceiver and the perceived, emerges in the juncture between them. Thus at this level, as the *Aphorisms* say, the Self is the mind.²⁴⁴ This is the Self which moves (*atati*) from one state of being to another, from one body to the next carrying with it subtle traces left behind by its sensory and mental activity. Together these are said to constitute, and be caused by, the subtle body technically called the 'City of Eight' (*puryaṣṭaka*) with which consciousness is identified and due to which it is subject to the constant alterations of pleasure, pain and inertia. The *Stanzas* teach:

[The soul] is bound by the City of Eight (*puryaṣṭaka*) that resides in the mind, intellect and ego and consists of the arising of the [five] subtle elements [of sensory perception]. He helplessly suffers worldly pleasure and pain (*bhoga*) which consists of the arising of mental representations born of that [City of Eight] and so its existence subjects him to transmigration.²⁴⁵

Whereas consciousness itself is the subject who practises the Divine Means (*śāmbhavopāya*), the subject who practises the Individual Means is the mind. Unlike the Empowered Means, however, the mind is not directed inwards onto itself. At the Empowered level, enlivened by the direct intuition (*pratibhā*) consciousness has of its own nature, mind ceases to function merely in the paradigmatic, formative manner which gives rise to mental representations, but operates instead as the subtle introverted activity of reflective awareness (*vimarśa*), the power of consciousness (*śakti*).²⁴⁶ This activity, as we have seen, is the essence of Mantra²⁴⁷ which, independent of the senses, is no longer restricted in any way. At the Individual level, however, the creative powers of consciousness reflected through the extroverted mind are greatly attenuated. All that remains is the power to form thought-constructs and make determined resolutions (*sankalpa*) which go on to issue through the body into outer action to make the private creations of the mind apparent to others.²⁴⁸

The Individual Means, therefore, deals with the objectively perceived contents of consciousness and hence with the individual subject as a composite aggregate of objective elements, ranging from the subtle life

force (*prāṇa*) to the physical body²⁴⁹ and its outer environment. The practices belonging to this Means are thus of two types. One is concerned with the individual subject who resides in, and as, the psycho-physical organism; the other with external reality.²⁵⁰ What this implies essentially is that practice at this level is not concerned as much with the will or cognitive consciousness as are the other two Means, but with the power of action applied, in the context of the practice taught in the *Aphorisms*, to the spiritual activity of Yoga. According to Kṣemarāja, the Individual Means culminates in the Empowered state and hence leads to the levels of practice beyond it.²⁵¹ This is possible because, despite their differences, there is an essential similarity between them. The aim of both the Individual and Empowered Means is to purify the discursive representations of differentiated perceptions (*vikalpasamkāra*)²⁵² and so lead the yogi to the expanded (*vikasita*) consciousness of the Divine (*śāmbhava*) state. The other levels of practice therefore both sustain and complement it. The activity of individual consciousness can be fully perfected only when it operates through the flow of the conative and cognitive powers which together constitute the pure activity of universal consciousness beyond all means (*anupāya*).

In fact, according to Kṣemarāja, all three soteriological types function together in various ways, their corresponding states representing dimensions of the same experience. For example, the upsurge of consciousness (*udiyama*) which is the supreme, illuminating intuition (*parapratibhā*) of the Divine state (*śāmbhavāvastha*)²⁵³ is concomitant with the gathering together of all the powers of consciousness in the Empowered state.²⁵⁴ The Divine Means, in other words, leads to the experience of Power (*śakti*) which in its turn, when fully affirmed, marks the attainment of a permanent contemplative consciousness (*turiyātīta*) at the Divine level which persists unaltered in every state of consciousness. Consequently, Kṣemarāja concludes his exposition of the first section of the *Aphorisms* which exemplifies, according to him, the Divine Means, by saying:

Thus we have explained the first expansion which starts with [the Aphorism] 'the Self is pure dynamic consciousness' and expounds the nature of the realisation (*prathana*) attained through the Divine Means. It is the intuitive insight (*samāpatti*) of Bhairava's nature which is, as we have said, the upsurge of consciousness that quells all bondage, namely, the ignorance of that freedom which makes it manifest. Transforming all things into the nectar of one's own innate bliss, it bestows every yogic accomplishment (*siddhi*) including mystic absorption in the vitality of Mantra, the highest of them all. Accordingly, we have, in the course of this exposition, explained the nature of *Śakti* in order to show that the

Divine nature (*śāmbhavarūpa*) possesses [every] power.²⁵⁵

Another way in which the Means are related to one another is illustrated by the recurrence of the same Aphorism in different sections of the *Śivasūtra* which indicates, according to Kṣemarāja, that the same practice belongs to more than one Means. Both times this happens, the *Aphorism* appears first in the section dealing with the Divine Means and then recurs in that concerned with the Individual Means.²⁵⁶ In one case, Kṣemarāja tells us this is because practice at the Divine level requires no effort whereas at the Individual level, the yogi must exert himself to achieve the same state that at the Divine level dawns spontaneously.²⁵⁷ At the Empowered level also, as the *Śivasūtra* says, 'effort achieves the goal'.²⁵⁸ Here, however, because as the Empowered Means is, according to Kṣemarāja, predominantly concerned with the contemplation (*anusamdhī*) of the vitality of Mantra,²⁵⁹ the effort exerted is that required to bring the practice of Mantra to fulfillment. It is, as Kṣemarāja says, 'the spontaneous effort exerted to grasp the initial expansion of intention to apply oneself to the contemplation [of Mantra]. It is this exertion which wins the favour of the gods of Mantra and identifies the adept with them.'²⁶⁰

The second case of the same practice being taught in different sections of the *Aphorisms* concerns the realisation of the Fourth State of contemplative consciousness (*turiya*) in the other three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. At the Divine level this takes place by 'violently digesting' (*haṭhapāka*) the three states in the Fourth. At the Individual level the Fourth state is first experienced at the junctures between the other three states and then induced gradually to spread out from these Centres to pervade the other states like oil extending slowly through a piece of cloth.²⁶¹ The difference in this case between the level of practice is not only that at the Divine level it reaches fulfillment spontaneously, but it is also sudden and complete, leading directly to the liberated state of consciousness Beyond the Fourth (*turiyātīta*).²⁶² At the Individual level, however, practice is gradual and even when the yogi manages to rise to states of contemplation, he must take care not to fall to lower levels of consciousness. Indeed, until the yogi attains the sudden and direct realisation of perfect enlightenment, whatever be his state of consciousness or level of practice, he is bound to rise and fall because his contemplative state is necessarily transitory (*kadācīka*) however long it may last.

The yogi is more prone to these ups and downs the lower his basic state of consciousness. Consequently, the last section of the *Śivasūtra* repeatedly instructs the yogi not only how to rise to higher levels of

consciousness and maintain them, but also in what way he is liable to fall from them and how to regain them.²⁶³ Kṣemarāja stresses that the rise from one level of consciousness to another is marked by the transition from a lower Means to a higher. Conversely, a fall from the higher level to the lower entails practice of a lower Means. The measure of the yogi's level of consciousness, and that which sustains him in it allowing him to progress further, is his *attentiveness* (*avadhāna*) to the higher realities he experiences in the more elevated states. Thus the last *Aphorism* of the second section of the *Śivasūtra* warns the yogi that if his pure awareness (*suddhavidyā*) of his oneness with all things slackens, he will fall from his awakened state to dream the dream of thought-constructs.²⁶⁴ From Kṣemarāja's point of view this means that the negligent yogi must now resort to the Individual Means described in the next section to return to his former, higher Empowered practice in which he experiences this oneness.²⁶⁵

Kṣemarāja expounds practice at the Individual level, as he sees it in the *Aphorisms*, as extending from one Means to the next. For example, practice at the Individual level diverts the flow of the vital breath (*prāṇa*) from its more usual course and induces it to enter the Central Channel (*suṣumnā*) along which it rises as a pure conscious energy (technically called '*kuṇḍalini*'). This leads the yogi to the Empowered state in which he enjoys the pure awareness of unity. If he manages to make it truly his own and it becomes his basic state of being, he enters the Divine plane (*śāmbhavapada*) of identity with Śiva.²⁶⁶ The Individual Means is both a point of departure to higher levels of practice and the level to which the yogi returns if he falls. Thus although the practices taught in the last section of the *Aphorisms* may belong to any one of the three Means, they are collectively treated as part of the Individual Means because they start from it and because it is the yogi's abiding standby if he falls.²⁶⁷

Let us turn now to the basic practice at the Individual level, as Kṣemarāja understands it. This is essentially Yoga. According to the Classical Yoga system taught by Patañjali in the *Aphorisms of Yoga* (*Yogasūtra*), Yoga is defined as 'the quelling of the fluctuations of the mind' (*cittavṛttinirodha*).²⁶⁸ The aim is to sever the spiritual essence of the Person (*puruṣa*) from the defiling materiality of Nature (*prakṛti*), even though the word 'Yoga' means to 'unite' or 'yoke together.' Here, however, Yoga combines both union and cessation. It is the act (*kriyā*) of removing the latent traces (*vāsanā*) of differentiated perceptions (*vikalpa*) born of the impurities (*mala*) which contract consciousness.²⁶⁹ This is achieved by uniting all the elements of experience (*tattva*) together in the wholeness of the activity of consciousness. As Jayaratha explains:

'The [wise] consider Yoga to be the union of one thing with another,'²⁷⁰ thus, in accord with this dictum, Yoga is the [act] of uniting [all] the metaphysical principles together within consciousness. . . .²⁷¹

Kṣemarāja seeks initially to establish the best form of Yoga for the yogi to practice at the Individual level. His sources are two Tantras he knew well and considered to be amongst the most important, namely, *The Tantra of (Śiva's Third) Eye (Netratantra)* and *The Tantra of the Liberated Bhairava (Svacchandabhairavatantra)*. The basic model is that of the Eight-limbed Yoga (*aṣṭāṅga*) taught by Patañjali which consists of:

- 1) The five restraints (*yama*), namely, abstention from violence (*ahiṃsā*), falsehood (*satya*), dishonesty (*asteya*), sexual intercourse (*brahmacharya*) and desire for more than the essential (*aparigraha*).²⁷²
- 2) The five disciplines (*niyama*), namely, cleanliness (*śauca*), contentment (*santoṣa*), austerity (*tapas*), study (*svādhyāya*) and reverence for God (*Īśvarapraṇidhāna*).²⁷³
- 3) Posturing of the body (*āsana*) in a manner conducive to the practice of meditation and physical health.²⁷⁴
- 4) Regulation of the breath (*prāṇāyāma*).²⁷⁵
- 5) Withdrawal of the senses from their objects (*pratyāhāra*).²⁷⁶
- 6) Focusing of attention (*dhāraṇā*).²⁷⁷
- 7) Meditation (*dhyāna*), that is, steady, uninterrupted concentration.²⁷⁸
- 8) Contemplation (*samādhi*).

Kṣemarāja rejects Patañjali's system because he believes it to be a form of Yoga that can, at best, lead only to limited yogic attainments (*mītasiddhi*).²⁷⁹ In the *Netratantra*, however, Śiva teaches a different, higher form of the Eight Limbs of Yoga which lead to perfect penetration into the supreme, transcendental principle²⁸⁰ of which the *Netratantra* says:

Speech cannot express, nor the eye see, the ears hear, or the nose smell, the tongue taste, the skin touch or the mind conceive that which is eternal. Free of all colour and flavour, endowed with all colours and flavours, it is beyond the senses and cannot be objectively perceived. O goddess, those yogis who attain it become immortal gods! By great practice and supreme dispassion . . . one attains Śiva, the supreme imperishable, eternal and unchanging reality.²⁸¹

A necessary preliminary of all Tantric Yoga is a process technically

called the 'purification of the elements' (*bhūtaśuddhi*), through which the body is homologized with the macrocosm and so made a fit vessel for the pure, conscious presence of the Deity within it. Kṣemarāja equates this with the meditation (*dhyāna*) which, according to the *Mālinīvijayatantra*, characterises the Individual Means.²⁸² In order to practice this meditation the yogi must visualise the dissolving away of all the forces in the body.²⁸³ There are two ways in which this can be done. The first is called 'the contemplation of dissolution' (*layabhāvanā*). Through it the progressive differentiation of consciousness from its causal, pre-cosmic form to its phenomenal manifestation is reversed. As the *Vijñānabhairava* teaches: "One should meditate on the All in the form of the Paths of the world-orders etc. considered in their gross, subtle and supreme forms until, at the end, the mind dissolves away."²⁸⁴

Mediated by consciousness, the macrocosm rests in the microcosm which is emitted along with it successively in the emptiness of the individual subject, vital breaths, mind, psychic nerves (*nāḍī*), senses and external body.²⁸⁵ The yogi reproduces this process by visualising the totality of reality including the world-systems, metaphysical principles and cosmic forces along with the Mantras, letters and syllables which represent them, as arising successively throughout the psycho-physical body so as to constitute it. Deployed in this way they form the Cosmic Path along which the yogi ascends, absorbing as he does so, the lower elements into the higher, thus strengthening and extending his unifying awareness (*anusandhāna*) of the configuration of the Path. Thus, moving from the gross elements constituting the outer physical body, to pure sensations (*tanmātra*), then to the senses and mind back to their primordial source, the yogi rises from the embodied subjectivity of the waking state to the Fourth State (*turiya*) of contemplation where he is one with the pervasive intent which initiates the creative vision of consciousness. Abhinava writes:

Once [the yogi] has known [this] Path in its completeness, he must then dissolve it into the deities who sustain it and these successively into the body, breath, mind [and emptiness] as before, and all these into his own consciousness. Once this is full and an object of constant worship, it destroys, like the fire at the end of time, the ocean of transmigration.²⁸⁶

Thus, the second method Kṣemarāja teaches to dissolve away the diversity of sensory, mental and physical energies into the unity of consciousness is a meditation on the Fire of Consciousness (*dahacintā*) which the yogi visualises as burning away all division. At the Divine level

(*śāmbhavopāya*) the yogi witnesses the sudden and violent withdrawal of all objectivity into the pure ego (*aḥam*), like the pouring of fuel into a raging fire.²⁸⁷ He does not need to visualise this process but merely attend to it with a passive, receptive attitude. At the Individual level the yogi must exert his imagination to induce this process and so rise to the Divine level through the Empowered. The *Vijñānabhairava* teaches:

Visualise the fortress [of your body] burning with the Fire of Time (*kālāgni*) risen from the Abode of Time; then at the end peace manifests.²⁸⁸

The Fire of Time (*kālāgni*) resides underneath the hell worlds at the bottom of the Cosmic Egg (*brahmāṇḍa*). It issues from Ananta—a form of Śiva who presides over the lower regions. He floats on a boat in the causal waters supporting the Egg, his mind all the while fixed on Bhairava. The flames of the Fire of Time rise up to the hell-worlds heating them intensely²⁸⁹ and radiate its energy throughout the universe. At the end of each period of creation the flames rise higher and destroy the old cosmic order to make room for a new one.²⁹⁰ At the microcosmic level the yogi reproduces this process by mentally placing the letters of the alphabet, in the prescribed order, on the limbs of his body starting from the left toe to the top of the head. As his attention progresses upwards, he visualises the Fire of Time moving with it in such a way that his bodily consciousness, together with the universe of differentiated perceptions, is gradually burnt away leaving in its place the white ashes of the undivided light of consciousness.

Kṣemarāja considers this meditation (*dhyāna*) to be a limb of a programme of yogic practice at the Individual level²⁹¹ of which the remaining limbs are as follows:²⁹²

Posture (*Āsana*). The yogi fixes his attention on the centre between the inhaled and exhaled breath, absorbing in this way the flux of his awareness into the unfolding power of knowledge which rises initially as the upward flowing breath (*udānaprāṇa*) in the Central Channel (*suṣumnā*) between the other two breaths. The *Prāṇic* aspect of this flow disappears as it moves upward and the yogi experiences the spontaneous rise of the omniscience of consciousness within himself. The mind reverts back to its original, pervasive conscious nature and understands the infinite fact of Śiva's omnipresence. This is the firm seat (*āsana*) upon which the yogi sits to practice.

Regulation of the Breath (Prāṇāyāma). To regulate the movement of the breath, the yogi must first cleanse the right and left channels of the ascending and descending breath by blocking the left nostril while exhaling and the right while inhaling a few times. This ensures that the movement of the breath is firm and evenly distributed. Next, without attempting to control it in any way, he attends to the flow of his breathing. As the mind becomes steadier and in closer harmony with the rhythm of its movement, the duration of each inhalation and exhalation gradually alters until they become equal. At this stage they unite and merge in the upward flowing current of vitality in the Central Channel (*Suṣumnā*). This is when true Prāṇāyāma begins. The yogi's mind pure and tranquil, he returns, as it were, to a prenatal state and the external breathing cycle is internalised, so that it no longer moves through the lungs but passes directly to the universal source of vitality. The yogi, now at the Empowered level of practice, experiences this movement as travelling from the Heart centre upwards to a point distant twelve fingers above the head where it merges in the void of consciousness. Free of its outer gross form, the breath moves freely through the Central Channel and soon transcends even this subtle movement to become one with the supreme vibration of consciousness. In this way, the yogi's breathing becomes one with the spontaneous rise and fall of energy from the bosom of the absolute. Abhinava quotes the *Tantra of the Line of Heroes (Virāvalītantra)* as saying:

When, by constantly merging the mind in Śiva, Who is the pure conscious nature, the Sun and Moon [of the two breaths] have dissolved away and the Sun of Life, which is one's own consciousness, has reached the twelve-finger space, this is termed liberation. Breath control [at this stage] serves no useful purpose. Breath control which merely inflicts pain on the body is not to be practised. He who knows this secret is both himself liberated and liberates others.²⁹³

Focusing of Attention (Dhāraṇā). Attention is fixed on the psychic centres in the body corresponding to the five gross elements. In this way the vital breath is successively directed to these centres from the Heart of consciousness to refresh and stimulate their activity. First it moves to the Earth centre in the throat which regulates the firmness of the bones and flesh of the body; then to the Water centre in the glottis responsible for the balance of the bodily fluids. After this it travels to the navel which is the Fire centre dealing with digestion and anabolism and catabolism in general. It then moves to the Wind centre in the toe of the left foot which governs the movement of gases to and from the cells via the circulatory system. When the yogi has thus achieved control over these forces, the

breath rises from the Heart to the top of the head and he becomes master of the Ether element and so attains every yogic power.²⁹⁴

Meditation (Dhyāna). The highest form of meditation stills the flux of the qualities (*guṇa*) and induces the mind into a state of contemplative absorption. The object of this meditation is the supreme and pervasive divinity of the pure subject whose true nature is known to none but himself alone (*svasamvedya*). The yogi attains him by merging into the constant flow of awareness that streams into the Light which illumines his own nature.

Contemplation (Samādhi). The yogi rises to the level of contemplation when the awareness he has of himself and the things around him become one and he realises his own identity with Śiva, the sole reality.²⁹⁵

The aim of this Yoga in all its phases is to achieve the Fourth State of consciousness (*turiya*) beyond the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep and to then ultimately reach the liberated state Beyond the Fourth (*turiyātīta*). These five states correspond to: (a) Śiva's activity (*vyāpāra*), that is, His power of action; (b) Śiva's Lordship (*adhipātya*), which is His power of knowledge; (c) the absence of these two, which corresponds to Śiva's power of will; (d) His exertion (*prerakatva*), which contains all the cycles of creation and destruction and, (e) the rest Śiva enjoys in His own nature, which is His power of consciousness.²⁹⁶ The first three states, when divorced from the last two, belong to the sphere of transmigratory existence. The Fourth and Beyond the Fourth on the other hand are higher, supramundane (*alaukika*) states of consciousness in which the yogi enjoys bliss and repose (*viśrānti*) in his own nature by penetrating (*samāveśa*) into the universal consciousness of the Self, through which he ultimately becomes liberated (*jīvanmukta*). Beyond the Fourth is the state of awareness Paramaśiva Himself enjoys when duality has entirely disappeared and everything is realised to be one with consciousness. The Fourth is the state of awareness of the yogi who, catching hold of the pure subjectivity (*upalabdhr̥tā*) flowing through the lower three states, is still actively eliminating his sense of duality. While the former is the supreme subject as 'I' consciousness (*aḥam*), the latter is the pure awareness (*pramā*) or 'I-ness' (*ahantā*) of the subject which encompasses the lower states, giving them life and uniting them together.²⁹⁷ As such, the Fourth State is the reflective awareness of one's own nature shining in all three states at one with them.²⁹⁸ The fact that we recall that we slept well is proof that this state of consciousness persists

even in deep sleep. Indeed, if the flow of *Turiya* could somehow be brought to a halt, all the other states of consciousness would come to an end in the absence of the pure subjectivity which makes them, and their contents, manifest.²⁹⁹ The states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep correspond to the form of awareness consciousness assumes when it it predominantly manifest as the object, means of knowledge and individual subject, respectively. *Turiya* is the pure awareness (*pramā*) that both transcends them and merges them all into itself.³⁰⁰ As such, it appears as the triad of deed, means and agent in the pure act (*vyāpāra*) of consciousness unsullied by any outer reality.³⁰¹ Abhinava explains:

(*Turiya*) transcends the three aspects of 'form', 'sight' and 'I' consisting as it does of the pure act of 'seeing'; therefore any means [by which this state could be realised] has merely a [provisional] instrumental value. It is, in other words, pure subjectivity of the nature of absolute freedom, independent of all external means. This is the state of consciousness called *Turiya*, luminous with its own light.³⁰²

Turiya is thus not just a psychological state but the supreme creative power (*parā śakti*) of consciousness, the Goddess (*samviddevī*) Who generates and withdraws the entire universe of subject, object and means of knowledge. In the *Heart of Recognition* Kṣemarāja explains:

Whenever the extroverted [conscious] nature rests within itself, external objectivity is withdrawn [and consciousness] is established in the inner abode of peace which threads through the flux of awareness in every [externally] emanated [state]. Thus *Turiyā*, the Goddess of Consciousness, is the union of creation, persistence and destruction. She emanates every individual [cycle] of creation and withdraws it. Eternally full [of all things] and [yet] void [of diversity] She is both and yet neither, shining radiantly as non-successive [consciousness] alone.³⁰³

The yogi is fully absorbed in this state of consciousness and takes possession of its power when he is able to rise from contemplation (*samādhi*) carrying with him the abiding awareness of *Turiya* throughout his waking, dreaming and deep sleep. When he achieves this constantly, he continues to experience these states individually, but they no longer obscure the insight (*pratibhā*) he has acquired because he realises that they are all aspects of the bliss of *Turiya*. Thus, while the common man calls this state the 'Fourth' (*turiya*) because he cannot experience it directly and knows only that it is beyond the other three, the yogi calls it 'Beyond Form' (*rūpātīta*) because it transcends the detachment of the state of deep sleep

which, devoid of objective content, is the naked 'form' of the individual subject tending towards the fullness of consciousness. Those who are on the path of knowledge (*jñānin*) call it the 'Whole' (*pracaya*) because, in this state, they see the entire universe gathered together in one place.³⁰⁴ 'Supra-mental Awareness' (*manonmanā*) is the name given to the experience of *Turiya* in the waking state. The yogi in this state moves and lives in the world of waking experience free of all disturbing thoughts while abiding in the transcendental silence beyond the activities of the mind. 'Infinite' is the name of the experience of *Turiya* while dreaming because, free of the limitations imposed upon the body by time and space, the yogi enjoys the unlimited expanse of the Self. When *Turiya* is experienced in deep sleep, the yogi's state is called 'All things' (*sarvārtha*) because in it he discovers his freedom from limitations in this, the most contracted state of human consciousness. The yogi who manages to maintain *Turiya*-consciousness comes to experience the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep as the constant flow of the bliss of consciousness in which all traces of the relative distinction between these states and their contents is eradicated.³⁰⁵ Following the stream of *Turiya* to its highest level (*parā kāśhā*), he reaches the state Beyond the Fourth (*turiyātīta*), which is the universal consciousness (*caitanya*) of the Self. Here the yogi comes to rest within his own nature. Plunged in the vast, waveless ocean of the consciousness and bliss (*cidānanda*) of the state Beyond the Fourth, the yogi becomes Śiva,³⁰⁶ the Free One (*svacchanda*), and thus wanders freely, practising the Yoga of Freedom.³⁰⁷

Kṣemarāja equates the Fourth State with the pure (*śuddha*), innate (*sahaja*) knowledge that one's own conscious nature is all things. It is the Supra-mental State (*unmanā*) in which Śiva's pervasive presence is experienced³⁰⁸ once the Yoga practised at the Individual level attains fruition at the Empowered.³⁰⁹ What the yogi must do, once consciousness is elevated to grasp the Fourth State, is make it constant. He must forcefully lay hold of it within himself and not release his grip until it becomes permanent. Then he travels 'Beyond the Fourth' to enlightenment.³¹⁰ Before this ultimate attainment the yogi inevitably falls. The forces operating within consciousness that limit and obscure it throw him down whenever they possibly can. The only way the yogi can defend himself against them is to maintain a constant attentive awareness of the Fourth State.³¹¹ He falls when he is distracted but when he attends carefully to his pure conscious nature, he realises that every aspect of his state of being, including the forces that lead him astray, are one with the pulsing flux of his own consciousness and so cannot affect him.

These powers, which are the energies of *Māṭṛkā* we have already discussed, are not the only obstacles the yogi must overcome. He must,

for example, also resist the temptation to rest content with the miraculous yogic powers (*siddhi*) he acquires in the course of his spiritual development. Again to do this he must practice Yoga. Similarly, in order to pervade the Fourth State gradually through the other states in the manner proper to practice at the Individual level, the method is the same. He must practise the higher yoga of the Tantras which, turning his mind inwards and freeing it from discursive representations, allows him to penetrate into the Supreme Principle.³¹² Once the yogi has attained this contemplative state, his main problem is to make it permanent. In the introverted state the gross external movement of the breath is suspended and with it the activity of the intellect, mind, individualised consciousness, powers of the senses and the ego.³¹³ When the yogi rises out of this state, he is liable to fall again into the lower order of creation generated by *Māyā* if he does not maintain his awareness of the higher reality he has experienced and allows his awakened, illumined insight to be obscured by the dream-like vision of thought-constructs.³¹⁴ Naturally, the yogi must rise out of the introverted condition of suspension. It is inherent in the very nature of reality that it should move out of itself.³¹⁵ Pure, universal consciousness initially transforms itself into the vital breath³¹⁶ charged with the impression (*vāsanā*) of the power of awareness attained through introversion. By attending to the pulse (*spanda*) of the breath as it moves out of the absolute, the yogi can develop an intuitive sense of the inherent unity of all he will perceive in the mental and physical spheres created by the outpouring of consciousness. In this way he realises that his own nature is everywhere present in all he perceives and that all things thus reside within him. Blessed with this insight his consciousness remains free and unlimited even at the individual level where the breath, mind, senses and body are active.

If the yogi fails to do this, he finds himself once again beset by the strictures of his embodied existence and must, as before, try to pervade all his other states of consciousness with the aesthetic delight (*rasa*) and wonder (*camatkāra*) of the Fourth State he experienced in contemplation. Again this means that he must strengthen his pure, empowered awareness that his universal nature manifests as all things.³¹⁷ In this way he discovers Śiva's presence in every sphere of individualised consciousness ranging from the breath to outer objectivity. The yogi's mind then becomes tranquil and undistracted because wherever it may wander, the yogi perceives only Śiva, his authentic nature.³¹⁸ Consciousness is thus freed of all external referents and the yogi's subjectivity is purified of all identification with the body or anything else that belongs to the objective sphere. The yogi then becomes detached from the opposites of pleasure and pain and is transcendently free (*kevalin*).³¹⁹

The yogi is again, however, liable to fall if he allows himself to get entangled in the play of opposites. This fall is more serious than the others because, although he is caught by the confining restrictions of individualised consciousness as before, he is now also affected by karma. Fleeing from pain in the pursuit of pleasure he is bound to act (*karma*) to minimise one and maximise the other and so is thrown down to the lowest level of embodied subjectivity (*sakala*). In order to regain his lost state, he must ascend gradually, by Śiva's grace, from one order of subjectivity to the next and so free himself progressively of the limitations of the lower levels to gain the greater freedom and expansion of the higher. As he progresses, the objective sphere also evolves from the grossest perceptions of physical objects outside the lowest order to subjectivity, through to the subtler inner, mental perceptions to finally reach the order of subjectivity that contains objectivity within itself and is free to externalise it at will.³²⁰

The degree to which this process develops depends, as before, on the yogi's awareness of the Fourth State. In consonance with the general principle that the remedy should suit the defect, the yogi is instructed to seek this higher state of consciousness in the wonder (*camatkāra*) or delight (*ānanda*) he feels in moments of intense physical pleasure. At first he experiences this subtle consciousness for an instant in the subjective sphere. If he manages to catch hold of it, it becomes more intense as the cognitive and objective spheres are also gradually pervaded and vitalised by it. Occasions for this practice are, for example, the sense of satisfaction one feels after a good meal or the aesthetic delight one experiences when listening to good music or the pleasure of sexual union with the Tantric consort or even solitary sexual excitation. In these moments of delight the yogi can penetrate momentarily into his own authentic Śiva-nature (*śambhavāveśa*) through the empowered contact (*śāktasparśa*)³²¹ he makes with it in the freedom of the pure subjectivity of the Fourth State.³²² If the yogi develops his awareness of this higher level of consciousness and maintains it, he eventually experiences it constantly.³²³

Clearly, what prevents the yogi from attending to his state of consciousness rather than the circumstances which induce it is the craving for pleasure (*abhilāṣa*) born of ignorance—the source of every impurity which clouds consciousness. Craving directs the yogi's attention towards outer, worldly things and so he is caught in the net of thought-constructs.³²⁴ To free himself of his worldly desires and reverse this binding extroversion, the yogi must eradicate its cause. To be freed of all the ups and downs of the path and no longer be tormented by the possibility of a fall, the yogi must see reality perfectly and completely. This insight is itself liberation and the moment it dawns the yogi is instantly freed. This sudden realisation is the goal of Tantric Yoga.

Accordingly the Tantra declares: "He who perceives reality directly, even for the brief moment it takes to blink, is liberated that very instant and never reborn again."³²⁵

Although the yogi's body and mind continue to function as before, they are like mere outer coverings³²⁶ which contain, but do not obscure, the mighty, universal consciousness which operates through them. The yogi's body is the universe, the senses the energies that vitalise it, his mind Mantra, the rhythm of his breath the pulse of time and his inner nature pure, dynamic consciousness. Raised above all practice, and hence all possibility of falling to lower levels, the yogi realises that he has always been free³²⁷ and that his journey through the dark land of Māyā was nothing but a dream, a construct of his own imagination.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.P.S.	Ajaḍapramāṭṛsiddhi
Bh.G.	Bhagavadgītā
Bhā.	Bhāskari
B.P.	Bodhapañcadāśikā
Br.Sū.	Brahmasūtra
Br.Up.	Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad
C.G.C.	Cidgaganacandrikā
Chān.Up.	Chāndogyopaniṣad
I.P.	Īśvarapratyabhijñā
I.P.v.	Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī
I.P.V.V.	Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī
K.K.V.	Kāmakalāvilāsa
K.S.T.S.	Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies
K.J.N.	Kaulajñānanirṇaya
Kena Up.	Kenopaniṣad
K.N.P.	Kramanayapradīpikā
L.S.	Lalitāsahasranāmastotra
L.V.	Lallāvākyāni
L.Ā.S.	Luptāgamasamgraha
M.P.	Mahānayaprakāśa
M.M.	Mahārthamañjarī
M.U.V.	Mahopadeśavimśatikā
M.V.	Mālinīvijayatantra
M.V.V.	Mālinīvijayavārtika
Mā.Kā.	Māṇḍūkya-kārikā
Mu.Up.	Muṇḍakopaniṣad
N.A.	National Archives
N.T.	Netratantra