

MARION RASTELLI

Perceiving God and Becoming Like Him: Yogic Perception and Its Implications in the Viṣṇuitic Tradition of Pāñcarātra¹

Yogic perception, even if not always understood in the same manner as in Buddhism, also holds its own position in the theistic traditions of India. This paper will examine yogic perception and its implications in the tradition of Pāñcarātra. The Pāñcarātra is a Hindu tradition that worships Viṣṇu as Supreme God. The earliest evidence of this tradition dates back to the pre-Christian era,² and the tradition is still present in certain aspects of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition in South India today. This paper is mainly based on texts from about the ninth to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.³

A follower of the Pāñcarātra has two religious goals, liberation (*mukti*, *mokṣa*) from transmigration on the one hand and worldly pleasure (*bhukti*, *bhoga*; literally: enjoyment) on the other. The Pāñcarātra teachings concerning liberation from transmigration describe, as in many other Indian religions, a continuous cycle of rebirths that are characterised by suffering. This suffering can only be stopped by the termination of transmigration. Worldly enjoyment is the fulfilment of all wishes one can imagine, as for example wealth, offspring, the fulfilment of sexual wishes, the death of an enemy, or the attainment of supernatural powers.

For the most part these two goals are striven for through the performance of rituals in which Viṣṇu or his spouse Lakṣmī, or still another subordinate deity, is worshipped. In these rituals, yogic practices

¹ I am grateful to Eli Franco for his helpful comments as well as to Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek for suggesting various stylistic corrections of the English manuscript.

² Cf. Härtel 1987.

³ For the dates of the JS, SS, AS and PārS, see Rastelli 2006: 49-54, on the date of the PādS *ibid.* 58f., on the date of the LT *ibid.* 274, n. 832.

are very often used. However, Yoga can also be independently practised as means for reaching these goals outside of the rituals.

First I will deal with Yoga as an autonomous practice. Here we can basically differentiate between two kinds of practices. One is a practice that usually consists of eight elements, which for the most part are to be practised one after the other. This practice is called *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, Yoga with eight constituents, and is similar to Classical Yoga.⁴ The other practice is called *layayoga*, “reabsorption Yoga”. In this yogic practice, several objects are meditated on in a particular order, each object being reabsorbed into the next. In the following, I will look at these practices in more detail.

The first two elements of the *aṣṭāṅgayoga*,⁵ restraint (*yama*) and observance (*niyama*), are prerequisites for this Yoga practice. They include ideal mental attitudes of the *yogin*, such as abstinence from causing injury, veracity, compassion and patience, and practical precepts for his daily life, such as moderate eating habits, ascetic exercises, worship of God and the study of holy texts.⁶ The third constituent is the correct posture (*āsana*) that the *yogin* is to assume during his Yoga practice. The fourth component is breath-control (*prāṇāyāma*), which helps the *yogin* to control his mind. The fifth element is called “withdrawal” (*pratyāhāra*). This means that the mind is withdrawn from the objects

⁴ Cf. Phillip Maas’ paper in this volume.

⁵ The following description of the *aṣṭāṅgayoga* is based on the *yogapāda* of the PādS and AS 31-32. The practice of the *aṣṭāṅgayoga* is also mentioned in LT 16.31a and 28.39d-48b. In this paper, I will not deal with all the Yoga descriptions in Pāñcarātra texts available to me, but primarily with those that explicitly speak about perception in the state of Yoga.

⁶ The full list of *yamas* and *niyamas* in the AS (31.18-30b) is as follows: *yamas*: truth (*satya*), compassion (*dayā*), steadiness (*dhṛti*), purity (*śauca*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*), patience (*kṣamā*), straightforwardness (*ārjava*), moderate food (*mitāhāra*), abstinence from theft (*asteya*) and from causing injury (*ahiṃsā*). *niyamas*: hearing (i.e., the study) of the settled doctrines (*siddhāntaśravaṇa*), munificence (*dāna*), resolution (*matī*), worship of God (*īśvarapūjana*), contentment (*saṃtoṣa*), mortification (*tapas*), faith (*āstikya*), shame (*hrī*), recitation (*japa*) of *mantras* and other texts, following observances (*vrata*). A similar list can be found in PādS *yp* 1.7-10b. For further lists of *yamas* and *niyamas* in Pāñcarātra texts as well as other texts, cf. Rastelli 1999: 179-182.

of the senses and is focussed on the object of meditation.⁷ The next, sixth, step is the fixation (*dhāraṇā*) of the mind on the object of meditation. The seventh element is the visualisation (*dhyāna*) of the object of meditation in a manner that is exactly prescribed. The eighth and final constituent is absorption (*samādhi*), the immersion in meditation. I will deal with its nature a bit later.

Some of the *aṣṭāṅgayoga* elements are also practised in the framework of the *layayoga*.⁸ The *yogin* here also has, of course, to sit in a particular posture, control his breath and withdraw his mind from the objects of the senses.⁹ And he is to visualise an object of meditation. In this visualisation, however, one finds a difference between the *aṣṭāṅgayoga* and the *layayoga*. While in the former a single, static object is meditated on, the object of the *layayoga* is dynamic.

In the *layayoga*, several objects are visualised in a particular order, namely in the “order of destruction.” What does this mean? According to the Pāñcarātra’s concept of creation there is a fixed sequence in which the various constituents of the world arise. The material constituents, which are considered to be manifestations of God,¹⁰ arise out of the primary matter, which also is considered to be a manifestation of God. The various divine manifestations of God arise out of the Supreme God Vāsudeva. In some texts the two series of creation are combined with one another.¹¹ At the time of the destruction of the world, its constituents are dissolved into each other in the reverse order of their creation, until only its ultimate source, primary matter and, finally, God, remains. The *layayoga* imitates this process of destruction. The *yogin* visualises object after object in their order of destruction until he finally reaches the Supreme God.

⁷ AS 32.56-57, PādS yp 4.8c-9b. PādS yp 4.9c-13b also gives an alternative definition of *pratyāhāra*: the drawing of the mind from one point of the body to another and in each case the subsequent fixation of the mind on these altogether eighteen points.

⁸ The following description of the *layayoga* is based on SS 6.194c-214, PārS 7.484-494, and LT 24.23c-32. For translations into German of the first two passages, see Rastelli 2006: 508-509 and 491-493.

⁹ These elements are explicitly mentioned in SS 6.198c-203b. They are also probably implied in the other descriptions.

¹⁰ Cf. Rastelli 1999: 98f.

¹¹ For the creation of the divine manifestations and of the material constituents of the world cf., e.g., Rastelli 1999: 45-60; for the combination of the two creations, see PārS 2.29ff. and Rastelli 2006: 354.

To illustrate such a process I will give a similar example from the Lakṣmītantra. In this meditation, three immaterial aspects of creation are traced back from their most immanent form to their most transcendent, namely, the states of consciousness, the Vyūhas, which are the most important divine manifestations of Viṣṇu, and the constituents of the *mantra om*. In doing so, the elements of the various levels are equated with each other.

state of consciousness	deity		constituents of <i>om</i>
waking (<i>jāgrat</i>)	Aniruddha	→	<i>a</i>
		↙	
dreaming (<i>svapna</i>)	Pradyumna	→	<i>u</i>
		↙	
deep sleep (<i>suṣupti</i>)	Śaṅkarṣaṇa		<i>m</i>
	↓		
fourth state (<i>turya</i>)	Vāsudeva		<i>ṃ</i>
	↓		
state beyond the fourth (<i>turyāṭīta</i>)	Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa		

The *yogin* begins with the visualisation of the deity Aniruddha, who is equated with the waking state. He then mentally dissolves Aniruddha into the first constituent of the *mantra om*, the letter *a*. *a* is then dissolved into the deity Pradyumna, equated with dreaming, and Pradyumna is again resorbed into the letter *u*. *u* is dissolved into the deity Śaṅkarṣaṇa, who is equated with deep sleep. The text then says that Śaṅkarṣaṇa is to be resorbed into the deity Vāsudeva without mention-

ing the intermediate step of the letter *m*.¹² Vāsudeva, who is equated with the “fourth state”¹³ and with the last constituent of the *mantra om*, the *anusvāra* (*ṁ*),¹⁴ is reabsorbed into the *brahman*, the most transcendent form of God, which is represented by the couple Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa in this context¹⁵ and which is equated with the state beyond the fourth (*turyāṭīta*) state.¹⁶ Through steps such as these, in the *layayoga* the *yogin* moves gradually from more immanent levels to the most transcendent.

Common to both kinds of Yoga is the mental visualisation of an object, be it a single object or a final object in a series of visualised objects. The object of meditation can be of various types and depends on the *yogin*’s aim. As mentioned above, very often the object is Viṣṇu or

¹² Saṃkarṣaṇa is equated with the letter *m* of the *mantra om*; cf. LT 24.8. There are two possible reasons why this intermediate step of Saṃkarṣaṇa’s dissolution into *m* is not mentioned. One possibility is that beginning from the level of Saṃkarṣaṇa upwards, deities and letters are no longer differentiated; cf. LT 24.30-31b, which says that Vāsudeva is the “half measure-unit” (*ardhamātraka*, i.e. the letter *ṁ*, the last constituent of the *mantra om*; cf. also LT 24.19-20) without differentiating between deity and letter. The other possibility is that from this point the intermediate steps with regard to the letters are implied but not explicitly mentioned.

¹³ The fourth state is a state of the soul that is beyond the three states of consciousness normally experienced in life. The concept of these four states of consciousness originally derives from the Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad. For the given context, cf. the LT’s definition of the four states of consciousness: “Waking is the manner of proceeding of the external senses. The activity of the internal organ, in which impressions (*saṃskāra*) remain, when the power of the external senses is overcome by darkness is to be known as dreaming. When this [activity] is not existent, [this] is deep sleep. When the activity of the external and internal senses of a wise one who is not overcome by darkness [and] adheres to *sattva* stops, the continuous flow of tranquillity of pure *sattva*, is called fourth state.” (LT 22.23b-26b: *jāgrad bāhyendriyakramah | bāhyendriyāṇām tamasābhibhūte vibhave sati || 23 antaḥkaraṇavṛttir yā saṃskāraparīśeṣiṇī | sāvapna iti vijñeyā tadabhāve susuptikā || 24 tamasābhibhūtasya sattvasthasya vipascitaḥ | bāhyāntaḥkaranasthāyā vṛtter uparame sati || 25 śuddhasattvaprasādasya samtatis turyasaṃjñitā |* Cf. also LT 7.19c-24b for another passage defining the four states of consciousness).

¹⁴ There are several concepts of how the *mantra om* is broken into elements. The number of units is often dependent on the number of entities that are equated with it (cf. Padoux 1990: 19ff.). Here, four constituents are needed in order to equate them with the four states of consciousness and the four Vyūhas. Thus, the *mantra om* is considered to be made up of the four units *a*, *u*, *m*, and *ṁ*.

¹⁵ Cf. LT 2.15c-16b.

¹⁶ LT 24.25c-32a.

Lakṣmī or a deity subordinate to Viṣṇu. How this object is visualised is prescribed by the texts exactly. Often the alternative is offered of visualising the God or the Goddess with or without a form; see again an example from the Lakṣmītantra: “Being well concentrated¹⁷, he is to visualise me¹⁸ as the unparalleled, inexplicable, unconceptualizable, spotless Lakṣmī, who is easily attainable everywhere, who is present in every cognition. Alternatively, the *yogin* [is to visualise me] with a form, as the Supreme Padmā, with hands [showing] the *vara*[*da*-] and the *abhaya*[*mudrā*]¹⁹, resembling the calyx of a lotus, with a lotus in the hand, endowed with auspicious marks. Or else [he is to visualise me as] the Goddess sitting on Nārāyaṇa’s lap, attaining the same essence [as He], consisting in consciousness and bliss, as well as Śrī’s husband who has the same nature [as I have].”²⁰

Prolonged visualisation in this or a similar manner leads to absorption (*samādhi*). It is usually in this state that the object of meditation is perceived, moreover, only this object and nothing else; cf. again the Lakṣmītantra: “Having effected the visualisation in the right manner, he is to resort to absorption, in which [all] three, [i.e.,] the visualising [person], the visualisation and the visualised [object] are dissolved. Then I alone appear, the eternal, complete I-ness. When I, the great ocean of consciousness, have reached singleness, then nothing else appears, I alone, the Supreme One.”²¹

¹⁷ Although derived from the same root (*samā √ dhā*) as the term *samādhi*, here *susamāhita* probably does not mean that the *yogin* is in the state of *samādhi* as he attains this state only later (cf. LT 28.46ab; see below). Rather it probably expresses the fact that the *yogin* needs more “power of concentration” to visualise the formless Goddess than for visualising her in a particular form.

¹⁸ I.e., Lakṣmī, who is giving this prescription.

¹⁹ The *mudrā* granting wishes (*varada*) consists in the right hand being raised with its palm turned away from the body; the *mudrā* for fearlessness (*abhaya*) consists in the left hand hanging down with its palm turned towards the body; cf., e.g., JS 8.104-105b.

²⁰ LT 28.41d-44: *māṃ dhyāyet susamāhitaḥ* || 41 *anaupamyām anirdeśyām avikalpāṃ nirañjanām* | *sarvatra sulabhāṃ lakṣmīṃ sarvapratyayatām gatām* || 42 *sākārām athavā yogī varābhayakarām parām* | *padmagarbhopamām padmām padmahastām sulakṣaṇām* || 43 *yad vā nārāyaṇāṅkashthām sāmārasyaṃ upāgatām* | *cidānandamayīṃ devīṃ tādṛśaṃ ca śrīyaḥ patim* || 44.

²¹ LT 28.46-48b: *samyāṃ nidhyānam utpādya samādhiṃ samupāśrayet* | *dhyātā dhyānaṃ tathā dhyeyaṃ trayaṃ yatra vilīyate* || 46 *ekaivāhaṃ tadā bhāse*

For a better understanding of this description of achieving the perception of the object of meditation, I would also like to quote a few definitions of the state of absorption: “Absorption is produced by the constituents [of Yoga] such as restraint, etc. [It is] persistence in the Supreme *brahman*, which is called ‘abode of Śrī’. [It is] indeed devoid of any activity. Indeed it consists in direct perception. [It is] the state of those who know the true *brahman*. [It] abides in the non-distinction of the visualising [person] and the visualised [object and] is produced by my grace.”²² “The third [method for attaining the ultimate goal], however, is the undeviating, steady perception that has the nature of absorption. It is an excess of grace indeed that is produced by excellent *sattva*.”²³ “The *yogins* know this [visualisation] that in this manner is gradually increased by a continuous flow of remembrance and that is the appearance of only the object as absorption.”²⁴

What do these passages tell us about the nature of *samādhi*? First of all, it is a continuous, persistent, steady state that is devoid of any activity. In this state, which starts with visualising an object, the visualising person and the visualised object become one. This is emphasized very often.²⁵ We will see that there are different ways to under-

*pūrṇāhamtā sanātānī | aikadhyam anusamprāpte mayi samvinmahodadhau || 47 nān-
yat prakāśate kiñcid aham eva tadā parā |*

²² LT 16.31-32: *yamādyāṅgasamudbhūtā samādhiḥ samsthitiḥ pare | brahmaṇi śrīnivā-
sākhye hy uthānaparivarjitā || 31 sākṣātkāramayī sā hi sthitiḥ sadbrahmavedinām |
dhyātrdhyeyāvibhāgasthā matprasādāsamudbhavā || 32.*

²³ LT 16.39: *trītyas tu samādhyātmā pratyakṣo ’vīplavo dr̥ḍhaḥ | prakṛṣṭasattvasam-
bhūtaḥ prasādātīśayo hi saḥ ||*

²⁴ AS 32.70c-71b: *tad evaṃ smrtisamānājanitokarṣaṇam kramāt || 70 arthamātrāva-
bhāsam tu samādhiṃ yogino viduḥ |* This definition could be influenced partly by Rāmānuja’s Śrībhāṣya, which describes meditation (*dhyāna*) as “having the form of a continuous flow of uninterrupted remembrance, like a stream of sesame oil” (Śrībh I 55.1-56.1: *dhyānaṃ ca tailadhārāvad avicchinnasmṛtisanānarūpam.*), and partly by the Yogasūtra’s definition of absorption (“Just this [visualisation] that is the appearance of only the object [and] that is, as it were, void of its own form is absorption.”; YSū 3.3: *tad evārthamātranirbhāsam svarūpaśūnyam iva samādhiḥ.*)

²⁵ See also SS 6.213c, PārS 7.493c, PādS yp 5.17 (see p. 309). Not all Pāñcarātrins, however, agree that the *yogin* achieves a complete non-difference with his object, as this is against the doctrine of the Viśiṣṭādvaitavedānta. Viśiṣṭādvaitavedānta is influential in the Pāñcarātra and teaches a “differentiated” (*viśiṣṭa*) and not a complete non-difference between the soul and the Supreme God; for a discussion of this, cf. Rastelli 2006: 511-516.

stand this statement. Here, we have to relate it to the statements that absorption consists in “direct perception”, that it is “undeveloping, steady perception”, that “only the object” appears and nothing else. This means that the *yogin* perceives only the object and loses his awareness of self.

Finally, two of the quoted passages state that the state of absorption is produced by grace. This means that the *yogin* must make an effort to achieve this state, but if the Goddess appears to him is still her own step. However, I would like to emphasize that both passages mentioning grace are from the Lakṣmītantra, and that I could not find similar passages in any other Pāñcarātra text to date. Thus, the necessity of grace to achieve the state of absorption is not a general Pāñcarātra view.

The *yogin* is now in the state of absorption and perceives his chosen object, for example, Viṣṇu or Lakṣmī. This perception is, however, not the end of the Yoga practice and not the ultimate goal of the *yogin*. Rather it brings about a state that is literally called the “state of consisting-in-Him/Her/it” (*tanmayatā*), depending on which object was chosen for meditation.²⁶

Let us look at a passage from the Sātvatasamhitā that describes this process. In this particular case, the process is preceded by mental visualisations of *mantras* of the four Vyūhas of Viṣṇu, which were already mentioned above, namely, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva. These visualisations are accompanied by recitations of the respective *mantras*, and both the mental visualisation and the recitation aim at the *yogin*’s identification with the *mantra*.²⁷ After describing

²⁶ The attainment of *tanmayatā* is also described in Śaiva texts; cf. Vasudeva 2004: 433-435.

²⁷ Cf. SS 6.206-210b: “And then, having mentally repeated the *mantra*-king Aniruddha, who is in the waking state (cf. p. 302 for the equation of Aniruddha with the waking state), a hundred [times] with an *ātman* that is not different from him, his (i.e., Aniruddha’s) majesty and knowledge arise for him (i.e., for the *yogin*) on account of the efficacy of the recitation of his *mantra*, which (efficacy) is connected with the persistence in the identity [with Aniruddha]. At the end of a year [the *yogin*] possesses non-duality with him on account of [this] repeated exercise. Having, however, then repeated the Pradyumnamantra two hundred [times], also continually with the [thought] characterised by non-duality: ‘I am he’ in exactly the same manner, he becomes wise [and] one whose doubts are dispelled by [this] exercise on account of its (the Pradyumnamantra’s) power in the course of this same time.” (*tato jāgratpadasthaṃ cāpy aniruddhaṃ ca mantrarāt* (*mantrarāt* can be used in the sense of an accusative in “tantric Sanskrit”. I am grateful to Harunaga Isaacson for this information.) | *parāvartya śataṃ buddhyā tadabhinnena cātmanā* ||

this meditation, the *Sātvatasamhitā* states: “By means of this method, which is accompanied by an increase [in the number] of recitations, he also is to make the whole group of *mantras* mentioned before the subject [of his meditation] till the Venerable One, whose manifestation is dissolved, who is spotless, infinite, a treasure of glowing splendour, compact consciousness and bliss, transcendent, unparalleled, [and] calm, appears at the place with the characteristics mentioned (?), till he (the *yogin*), concentrating his self on Him and giving up the performance of recitation, through the non-difference of the visualising [person] and the visualised [object] attains the state of consisting in Him. When he who is joined with the Venerable One attains stability in absorption that is free of a cognizable [entity] on account of repeated exercise, he then becomes²⁸ the *brahman*.”²⁹

The procedure here is described quite clearly. The *yogin* visualises and recites the *mantra* until Vāsudeva, i.e. Viṣṇu, appears to him. Then he, ending his recitation, concentrates on Vāsudeva until the difference between himself, the visualising person, and Vāsudeva, the visualised object, disappears and the *yogin* becomes “consisting in Vāsudeva”.³⁰

206 *tanmantrajapasāmarthyāt tādātmyasthitibandhanāt | mahimā tu savijñānas tadīyas tasya jāyate* || 207 *abhyāsād vatsarānte tu tadadvaitasamanvitaḥ* (v.l.) | *atha pradyumnamantram tu parāvartya śatadvayam* || 208 *yo 'yaṃ so 'ham anenaivāpy advaitena sadaiva hi | evam eva samabhyāsād matimāṃś chinnaśaṃśayaḥ* || 209 *tat-prabhāvāc ca tenaiva tathā kālena jāyate*).

²⁸ *sampadyate* can mean “he becomes” or “he attains”. Following Alaśiṅga Bhaṭṭa, who quotes MuṇḍU 3.2.9: *brahmaiva bhavati* to explain this expression (SSBh 120,12), I choose the first meaning. Cf. Rastelli 2006, nn. 1630 and 1640 for different possibilities of understanding the word *sampadyate* in this context .

²⁹ SS 6.210c-214: *anena kramayogena japavṛddhyānvitena tu* || 210 *nikhilam cāpy adhikuryād mantravṛndaṃ puroditam | yāvad ābhāti bhagavān sthāne pūrvokta-lakṣaṇe* || 211 *pralīnamūrtir amalā hy anantas tejasām nidhiḥ | cidānandaghanāḥ śānto hy anaupamyō hy anākulaḥ* || 212 *samādhāyātmanātmānam tatra tyaktvā japakriyām | dhyātrdhyeyāvibhāgena yāvat tanmayatām vrajet* || 213 *yadā śamvedya-nirmukte samādhau labhate sthitim | abhyāsād bhagavadyogī brahma sampadyate tadā* || 214.

³⁰ Cf. also the much shorter description of the AS: “Having then resorted to absorption, the one having attained the state of consisting in Him obtains the complete power of the one abounding in *śakti*.” (AS 32.71c-72b: *tataḥ samādhim āsthāya tanmayatvam upāgataḥ || tasya prabhāvam akhilaṃ āsnute śaktiśāliṇaḥ*).

What “consisting in God” means can be seen more clearly in other passages in the *Samhitās*.³¹ The following passage gives us an idea about the nature of the state of “consisting in God”, although it is not from a yogic context but that of a ritual: “By means of the visualisation that was taught before, he is then to visualise himself and [his] body in the form of Viṣṇu, which is abounding with the aggregate of the six [divine] qualities, in [his] own form, in all forms or in a form as desired. ‘I am the Venerable One; I am Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Hari. I am Vāsudeva indeed, the Pervader, the abode of beings, the Spotless One.’ Having effected a very firm self-awareness of such a form, O Sage, the best of the *sādhakas* soon becomes consisting in Him.”³² As in the SS (cf. n. 27), but here more clearly expressed, the devotee attains the state of consisting in God by means of a meditative reflection in which he forms his self-awareness in such a way that he conceives his I as being Viṣṇu, feeling himself as Viṣṇu in the sense of “I am Viṣṇu”. Consequently he “consists in Viṣṇu”.

We also find similar descriptions in other *Samhitās*. The LT says at the end of the prescriptions for the *layayoga* described above: “And having dissolved this fourth state into the state beyond the fourth state, which has the nature of [the couple] Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa, he himself is to assume the divine ‘I-ness’ of Viṣṇu. Having attained such a state of dissolution, the one consisting in this [I-ness] then gradually [is to ...]”³³. In a description of a yogic exercise for attaining the *brah-*

Becoming “consisting in Viṣṇu” in the context of yogic meditation is, however, not always connected to a visual perception. There are several descriptions of this process in which visual perception is not mentioned. Although in these cases *tanmayatā* is also a result of mental visualisation, immediate perception does not occur. It arises immediately after the visualisation (see SS 17.451c-452c ≈ PādS yp 5.24c-25c, PārS 7.493, LT 24.32, 38cd, 44.12.).

³¹ The following part of this paper, which discusses *tanmayatā*, is based on Rastelli 2006: 503-507.

³² JS 11.39c-42: *tatas savigrahaṃ dhyāyed ātmānaṃ viṣṇurūpinam* || 39 *pūrvoktadhyānayogena śāḍguṇyamahimāvṛtam* | *svarūpaṃ viśvarūpaṃ vā yathābhīmatarūpakam* || 40 *ahaṃ sa bhagavān viṣṇur ahaṃ nārāyaṇo hariḥ* | *vāsudevo hy ahaṃ vyāpī bhūtāvāso nirañjanaḥ* || 41 *evamrūpaṃ ahaṅkāraṃ āśāḍya sudṛḍhaṃ mune* | *tanmayas cācīreṇaiva jāyate sādhakottamaḥ* || 42.

³³ LT 24.31c-32: *turyātīte ca tat turyaṃ lakṣmīnārāyaṇātmani* || 31 *pravilāpya svayaṃ divyāṃ ahaṃtāṃ vaiṣṇavīm śrayet* | *tanmayas tādrśaṃ prāpya layasthānaṃ tataḥ kramāt* || 32.

man, the PādS gives: “... and, thinking of the eternal *brahman* that looks like a thousand lightning bolts [and] resembles the fire at the end of the *yuga* in the centre of the heart-lotus, having made his consciousness to consist in it ...”³⁴ In these two passages, the “I-ness of Viṣṇu” is assumed, or the individual consciousness is made to “consist in the *brahman*”. Thus these passages also indicate that the devotee feels himself to be Viṣṇu or the *brahman*.

As I mentioned above, the state of absorption, which is a precondition for attaining *tanmayatā*, in which the visualising person and the visualised object become one, can be understood in different ways, namely, the subject becoming one with the object or the object becoming one with the subject. If we look again at the end of the passage from the SS quoted above: “... till he, concentrating his self on Him and giving up the performance of recitation, through the non-difference of the visualising [person] and the visualised [object] becomes ‘consisting in Him’. When he who is joined with the Venerable One attains stability in absorption that is free of a cognizable [entity] on account of repeated exercise, he then becomes the *brahman*.”³⁵ it is rather the object that merges into the subject than vice versa. The devotee is in a state in which he identifies his I with Viṣṇu, i.e., his self-awareness is that of being Viṣṇu, and in a state that is “free of a cognizable entity”.

We also find other passages that describe the disappearance of the object of meditation in the state of absorption: “And he is to contemplate the object so long until he does not contemplate the object [anymore]. For if the existence [of the object] has become non-existent, his nature is declared as the Supreme One.”³⁶ “The oneness of both the personal soul and the Supreme One is to be known as [the state of] absorption, which accomplishes the goals of virtuous people. Performing the visualisation ‘I indeed am the Supreme *brahman*’, being constantly firm like a pillar, he does not perceive objects. Just as external water that enters the motionless ocean abandons [its] moving nature, in the same manner the personal soul of the *yogin* who is in absorption be-

³⁴ PādS *yp* 5.24c-25: *hr̥tpuṇḍarīkamadhyasthaṃ smaran brahma sanātanam* || 24 *vidyutsahasrasaṃkāśaṃ yugāntānilasannibham | tanmayaṃ ca svacaitanyaṃ kṛtvā (...)* || 25. PādS *yp* 5.24c-28 is based on SS 17.451c-456.

³⁵ SS 6.213c-214 (for the Sanskrit text see n. 29).

³⁶ JS 33.34c-35b: *tāvac ca bhāvayel lakṣyaṃ yāval lakṣyaṃ na bhāvayet* || 34 *bhāve hy abhāvam āpanne svasvabhāvaḥ paraḥ smṛtaḥ |*

comes dissolved into the Supreme *ātman* (*paramātman*) in Vai-kuṅṭha.³⁷

However, we have seen that there is also another perspective on this state. Let us look again at the passage from the AS quoted above: “The *yogins* know this [visualisation] that in this manner is gradually increased by a continuous flow of remembrance and that is the appearance of only the object as absorption. Having then resorted to absorption, the one having become consisting in Him obtains the complete power of the one abounding in *śakti*.”³⁸ In this description of becoming consisting in God, self-awareness is not mentioned. And the definition of absorption does not say that it is free of objects. On the contrary, this state consists in the appearance of an object. Subjectivity and thus self-awareness disappear.

This difference is, however, indeed only one of perspective, since the final result is the same, namely, the *yogin* becomes “consisting in God”. According to the one viewpoint, the subject, i.e., the *yogin*, and the object, e.g. Viṣṇu, become one. The subject becomes the object and the object disappears. This means the *yogin* becomes Viṣṇu; he is, in his self-awareness, Viṣṇu. According to the other perspective, the subjectivity of the *yogin* disappears and the object alone appears. This does not mean, however, that the *yogin* ceases to exist. He continues to exist, but in his self-perception he has become the object that he has meditated upon.

In the context of the AS, the object of meditation is Sudarśana,³⁹ Viṣṇu’s manifestation as a discus (*cakra*), a weapon used in battle. This means that in the state of absorption only Sudarśana appears for the *yogin* and the *yogin* becomes “consisting in Sudarśana”. Concretely this means that the *yogin* possesses all of Sudarśana’s abilities.⁴⁰ These abilities include, for example, superhuman powers such as becoming as

³⁷ PādS yp 5.17-20b: *jīvātmanaḥ parasyāpi yad aikyam ubhayor api | samādhiḥ sa tu vijñeyah sādhyarthānām prasādhakah || 17 aham eva param brahma tad iti dhyānam āsthitah | sthānubhūto dṛḍhaḥ śasvad viṣayān nāvabudhyate || 18 yathā bāhyajalam vārām praviṣṭam niścalam nidhim | calasvabhāvaṃ tyajati tathā jīvaḥ pralīyate || 19 paramātmāni vaikuṅṭhe samādhisthasya yoginaḥ |*

³⁸ AS 32.70c-72b (for the Sanskrit text see nn. 24 and 30).

³⁹ Cf. AS 32.59.

⁴⁰ Cf. AS 32.72ab: “He obtains the complete power of the one abounding in *śakti*.” (for the Sanskrit text see n. 30).

small as an atom, the ability to destroy many enemy armies single-handedly, the attainment of whatever one desires, the subjugation of all beings, and even omniscience and omnipotence.⁴¹ The possession of these abilities clearly shows that the *yogin* has subjectively become *Sudarśana*.

Thus, the final result is ultimately the same, independent of whether the subject has become the object, or whether only the object exists in the end. A passage from LT 44 even describes these two possibilities side by side: “Constantly thinking [of Tārikā’s *saṃjñāmantra*⁴²], the *yogin*, whose body has been made to consist in Her (i.e., Tārikā) by repeated exercise, having become consisting in myself, attains my state. Or I, being known by him, having come to [his] direct perception, fulfil every wish, whatever the *yogin* desires.”⁴³ This passage describes first a procedure by which the *yogin* becomes consisting in Tārikā by means of the meditation on her *saṃjñāmantra*. By this he becomes consisting in the Goddess of which Tārikā is a manifestation, and he reaches the state of being the Goddess. Alternatively, the passage describes a process in which the Goddess enters the *yogin*’s perception. The *yogin* is faced with the Goddess as an object, probably as the only object. This means that the *yogin* either becomes the object of meditation – he becomes consisting in it – or he faces the object, perceiving it exclusively.⁴⁴

“Consisting in him” (*tanmayatva*, *tanmayatā*) probably does not mean that the *yogin* and God are completely identical. One could explain the state of *tanmayatva* perhaps by the following analogy: An object made of wood “consists in wood”. It has all properties that wood has. Nevertheless the object is not identical with wood. In the same way the *yogin* “consists in Viṣṇu” and has all his properties, but he is not identical with Viṣṇu insofar as Viṣṇu cannot be reduced to the person of the *yogin*.

⁴¹ AS 32.72c-76.

⁴² *śrīṃ svāhā*; see LT 44.7ab, 9, and 11ab.

⁴³ LT 44.12-13: *smaran satatam abhyāsāt tanmayīkṛtavigrahaḥ | yogī manmayatām prāpya madbhāvaṃ pratipadyate || 12 ahaṃ vā bodhitā tena sāksātkāram upeyuṣī | vidadhe sakalam kāmam sa yogī yaṃ yaṃ icchati || 13.*

⁴⁴ The actual difference here could be that in the first alternative, the *yogin* attains liberation (*mokṣa*; indicated by the expression “he attains my state” [*madbhāvaṃ pratipadyate*]?) and in the second, enjoyment (*bhoga*).

The concrete consequences of *tanmayatva* are not the same in every case, but they are determined by the object of meditation, which in turn has been chosen according to the goal being striven for. If the goal is liberation from transmigration, an adequate object of meditation is the Supreme *brahman*. By means of the meditation on the *brahman*, the *yogin* becomes “consisting in *brahman*,” he achieves the state of *brahman*, which means liberation. If the goal of the *yogin* is supernatural powers, he is to meditate on a manifestation of Viṣṇu that is able to bestow them, such as his discus manifestation Sudarśana, as we have seen in the example from the AS. Through the meditation on Sudarśana, the *yogin* becomes “consisting in Sudarśana” and thereby attains the same powers as this divine manifestation.

Up to now I have described the achievement of the state of “consisting in God” by yogic means, i.e., by mental visualisation and absorption, which in some cases are accompanied by the perception of the object of meditation and in other cases are not. However, the perception of God and the state of “consisting in Him” can also be attained by other means.

I mentioned at the beginning that the religious goals of Pāñcarātrins are mainly reached by rituals. In some of these rituals, God can also be perceived and/or the state of *tanmayatā* can be attained. Such rituals are mainly for the purpose of the achievement of worldly pleasure (*bhukti*, *bhoga*).⁴⁵

These rituals are usually performed in an isolated place, where the devotee, following several observances, lives for a certain period. His main duty is to worship a particular manifestation of God, which he has chosen according to the aims he wants to achieve.⁴⁶

A general principle in Tantric ritual worship, to which Pāñcarātra worship also belongs, is that everything involved in the ritual, that is, the devotee, the implements and substances used in the ritual, the ritual place, etc., must be suitable for the deity being worshipped. What is

⁴⁵ *tanmayatā* can, however, also be attained in rituals for the purpose of liberation from transmigration and is actually a precondition for them; cf. the quotation from JS 11.39c-42 above (p. 308) or JS 13.8c-10b.

⁴⁶ In the following, I only give a very condensed description of this kind of ritual worship, including only the elements most important for understanding the achievement of *tanmayatā* and the perception of deities. For a detailed description, cf. Rastelli 2000.

adequate for a deity is only that which is like the deity. Nothing that is inferior to the deity is suitable for it. Thus the devotee must make everything involved in the ritual like the deity, including himself. There are several methods for making something like the deity. One is placing (*nyāsa*) *mantras* onto an object. Placing *mantras* means, for example, that the devotee places several *mantras* that represent various aspects of the deity onto his body.⁴⁷ Doing this, he makes these aspects of the deity present on his body and thus his body becomes “like the deity”. This effect is intensified by another method, namely, the devotee’s mental identification with the deity, as given in the passage quoted from the JS (p. 308).⁴⁸ A further method is assuming the outward appearance of the deity being worshipped. If the deity, for example, is usually considered to wear red garments and certain types of adornments, the devotee is to wear similar garments and adornments in order to have the same outward appearance as the deity. This method is also usually supported by the mental identification with the deity.⁴⁹ We see that the devotee has to become like the deity, “consisting in it” (*tanmaya*), already before its worship. However, “consisting in the deity” can also be the result of ritual worship.

There are two main means for worshipping a deity for the purpose of the fulfilment of worldly wishes. One is the repeated recitation (*japa*) of a *mantra* a huge number of times. A *mantra* is a manifestation of the deity. It has two forms, a language form, e.g., the words *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*, and a visual form, e.g., an anthropomorphic body.⁵⁰ By reciting the language form of the *mantra*, which is accompanied by the visualisation of the *mantra*’s visual form, the deity is made present in both aspects.

⁴⁷ For a detailed description of placing *mantras* on the devotee’s hands and body, cf. Rastelli 1999: 239-246.

⁴⁸ Cf. also JS 6.185c-187b: “Listen well, Divine ṛṣi. I tell you [the *upāṅgamantras*] along with their secret doctrine. On account of their placing, the *mantra* manifestation is mastered by the *sādhaka* wherever it be and it soon gives fruits to the one consisting in it. On account of their placing [and] on account of the meditation on [their] pervasion, the one who has mastered the *mantras* is equal to the Lord of the gods.” (*samyak śṛṇuṣva devarṣe sarahasyaṃ vadāmi te* || 185 *yadvinyāsāt sādhakasya siddho vai yatra kutracit | phalado mantramūrtis syād acirāt tanmayasya ca* || 186 *syād deveśasamo mantrī tannyāsād vyāptibhāvanāt*).

⁴⁹ Cf. Rastelli 2000: 329-331.

⁵⁰ For more details on the *mantra*, see Rastelli 1999: 119-140.

The other means is offering huge numbers of oblations (*homa*) to the fire in which the deity has been made present previously, although this is generally done fewer times than the recitations. These aim at satisfying the deity.⁵¹

By these two methods, making the deity present by reciting and visualising its *mantra* and satisfying it by fire oblations over a long period, the deity is forced to appear to the devotee. It then appears face to face with him and comes into his perception. It admits that it has been mastered by the devotee and will be at his disposal from that time on: “Then, Brahmin, the Venerable Jayā herself comes. ‘You have mastered me well, Son. Free of fear and affliction, perform the action that is desired with my *mantra*.’ Having so spoken, the Goddess, who has the nature of Nārāyaṇa, disappears.”⁵²

The devotee has now attained his goal. By means of the *mantra* he has mastered he can fulfil every wish that comes to his mind. Some passages mention that this ability is accompanied by *tanmayatā*: “He who has mastered the *mantra*, having attained the state of consisting in him, obtains all wishes.”; “Making Vāsudeva evident to his senses by means of many hundred recitations⁵³ [and] by the same number of offerings to the fire, he firmly becomes consisting in Him. What is the use of these many words? By means of worship rituals, a man attains whatever state is desired [by him].”⁵⁴

Obviously, the state of *tanmayatā* described as the result of worship has another quality than the *tanmayatā* that must be attained as a

⁵¹ For the *mantra* recitation and the oblations to the fire, see Rastelli 2000: 332-334 (referring to the JS). References from other Saṃhitās are, e.g., NārS 5.7 and PādS cp 24.83 (see below).

⁵² JS 27.118c-120b: *tato bhagavatī vipra samāyāti jayā svayam || 118 susiddhāsmi ca te putra manmantreṇa samācara | yad abhīṣṭam tu vai kāryam niśāṅko vigatajvaraḥ || 119 uktvety adarśanaṃ yāti devī nārāyaṇātmikā |* Cf. also Rastelli 2000: 334-336 (referring to the JS). For references from other Saṃhitās see, e.g., AS 44.21-22b, PādS cp 24.83 (see below), 169c-170, 25.266c-267, 28.77c-78b, 33.140c-141b.

⁵³ Literally: by a hundred recitations in very large numbers (*mahaughaiḥ*).

⁵⁴ NārS 5.35cd: *sarvān kāmān avāpnoti mantrī tanmayatām gataḥ || PādS cp 24.83-84: mahaughaiś satajāpena tāvadāhūtisaṃkhyayā | sāksātkurvan vāsudevam tanmayo bhavati dhruvam || 83 kim ebhir bahubhiḥ proktaiḥ padaṃ yad yad abhīpsitam | tat tad āpnoti puruṣaḥ samārāadhanakarmabhiḥ || 84.* Cf. also NārS 3.119-120b (see here especially the v.l. *advayatām* [“non-duality-ness] in the place of *tanmayatām*). NārS 3.55cd gives *tanmayatā* as the particular achievement after the *vāsudevamantra* has been recited 600,000 times.

precondition of ritual worship. By becoming “consisting in God” as a precondition of worship, the devotee becomes like God in order to be adequate for worshipping him. This state is, however, neither permanent nor does it mean that the devotee is able to fulfil all his wishes through it. *tanmayatā* as the result of successful worship, on the other hand, has these qualities: it is permanent and the devotee can obtain all his wishes.

We have seen that perception of God and the state of “consisting in Him” can be attained by different means: by yogic meditation on the one hand and by ritual worship on the other. At first view, these means seem to be very different, but in fact they have a lot in common. They use similar methods that, despite their different emphasis, aim at the same two goals, namely, making an object present and thus perceptible on the one hand, and identification with this object on the other.

Let us compare yogic meditation and ritual worship as described above. Yogic meditation starts with the visualisation (*dhyāna*) of an object, for example, Viṣṇu. This visualisation can be connected with the *yogin*’s conscious mental identification with his object and/or with the recitation of the *mantra* that represents the object.⁵⁵ Sometimes it is even preceded by placing *mantras* on the devotee’s body, as I have described in the ritual context.⁵⁶ Prolonged visualisation leads to absorption (*samādhi*). Here the visualisation is perfected to such a degree that the object of meditation appears to the *yogin* so realistically that he actually perceives it. He perceives it exclusively, leaving behind even his perception of himself. Or, from another point of view, the *yogin*’s identification with his object is perfected to such a degree that he actually feels he is this object. In both cases he may achieve *tanmayatā*, that is, become like the object.

Ritual worship done in order to master a *mantra* and thereby to achieve worldly pleasure is preceded by placing *mantras* on the devotee’s body and sometimes by assuming the outward appearance of the deity worshipped. These are the first steps of identification with the deity being worshipped. In this ritual practice, the repeated recitation (*japa*) of the *mantra*, many times and over a long period, is central. It is

⁵⁵ Cf. the example from the SS described above (p. 306), in which both identifying visualisation and recitation are applied. In the JS, recitation is also explicitly taught as an element of Yoga practice (JS 33.10d-12b; cf. also Rastelli 1999: 339f.).

⁵⁶ This is the case in the yogic meditation of the SS described above (p. 306); cf. SS 6.195-197b.

connected with the visualisation of the *mantra*, thus making both aspects of the *mantra* present, the linguistic and the visual. Fire offerings seem to be a purely physical activity. However, this physical activity, done with the purpose of satisfying the deity, makes the devotee aware of the presence of this deity and enables him to enter the right frame of mind for its presence. Through these methods that make the deity present and allow the devotee to identify himself with it, the presence of the deity becomes so real that on one hand it appears to the devotee in manifest perception, and on the other, he feels himself to be the deity and thus to possess all its powers.

To sum up, we have considered yogic perception and the perception of supernatural objects effected by other means, both of which are followed by the *yogin's* becoming like the object. The methods used to reach these states are different. Despite that, the various methods are similar in that they all make their object mentally present and let the adept identify with it.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AS Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā: *Ahirbudhnya-Saṃhitā of the Pāñcarātrā-gama*, ed. M.D. Ramanujacharya under the Supervision of F. O. Schrader. Revised by V. Krishnamacharya. 2 vols. Adyar 2nd ed. 1966 (repr. 1986).
- cp *caryāpāda*.
- Härtel 1987 H. Härtel, Archaeological Evidence on the Early Vāsudeva Worship. In: *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, ed. G. Gnoli et L. Lanciotti. Roma 1987, 573-587.
- JS Jayākhyasaṃhitā: *Jayākhyasaṃhitā*, ed. E. Krishnamacharya. Baroda 1931.
- LT Lakṣmītantra: *Lakṣmī-Tantra*. A Pāñcarātra Āgama, ed. V. Krishnamacharya. Madras 1959 (repr. 1975).
- MuṇḍU Muṇḍakopaniṣad: In: *Eighteen Principal Upaniṣads*. Vol. I. (Upaniṣadic Text with Parallels from extant Vedic Literature, Exegetical and Grammatical Notes), ed. V.P. Limaye and R.D. Vadekar. Poona 1958, 38-47.
- NārS Nāradyasaṃhitā: *Nāradya Saṃhitā*, ed. R.P. Chaudhary. Tirupati 1971.
- Padoux 1990 A. Padoux, *Vāc*. The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras. Translated by J. Gontier. Albany 1990.
- PādS Pādmasaṃhitā: *Padma Saṃhitā*, crit. ed. S. Padmanabhan and R.N. Sampath (part I), S. Padmanabhan and V. Varadachari (part II). Madras 1974, 1982.

- ParS Paramasaṃhitā: *Paramasaṃhitā [of the Pāñcharātra]*, ed. and translated into English by S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar. Baroda 1940.
- PārS Pārameśvarasaṃhitā: *Pārameśvarasaṃhitā*, ed. Govindācārya. Śrīraṅgam 1953.
- Rastelli 1999 M. Rastelli, *Philosophisch-theologische Grundanschauungen der Jayākhyasaṃhitā*. Mit einer Darstellung des täglichen Rituals. Wien 1999.
- Rastelli 2000 *id.*, The Religious Practice of the *Sādhaka* According to the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā*. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 43/4 (2000) 319-395.
- Rastelli 2006 *id.*, *Die Tradition des Pāñcarātra im Spiegel der Pārameśvarasaṃhitā*. Wien 2006.
- Śrībh Śrībhāṣya: *Śrībhāṣya*, ed. T. Vīrarāghavācārya. 2 vols. Madras 1967.
- SS Sātvatasāṃhitā: *Sātvata-Sāṃhitā*. With Commentary by Alaśīṅga Bhaṭṭa, ed. V.V. Dwivedi. Varanasi 1982.
- SSBh Sātvatasāṃhitābhāṣya: see SS.
- Vasudeva 2004 Somadeva Vasudeva, *The Yoga of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra*. Chapters 1-4, 7, 11-17. Critical Edition, Translation & Notes. Pondichéry 2004.
- yp *yogapāda*.
- YSū Yogasūtra: *Pātañjala-Yogasūtra-Bhāṣya-Vivaraṇam of Śaṅkara-Bhagavatpāda*, crit. ed. P.S.R. Sastri and S.R. Krishnamurthi Sastri. Madras 1952.

