

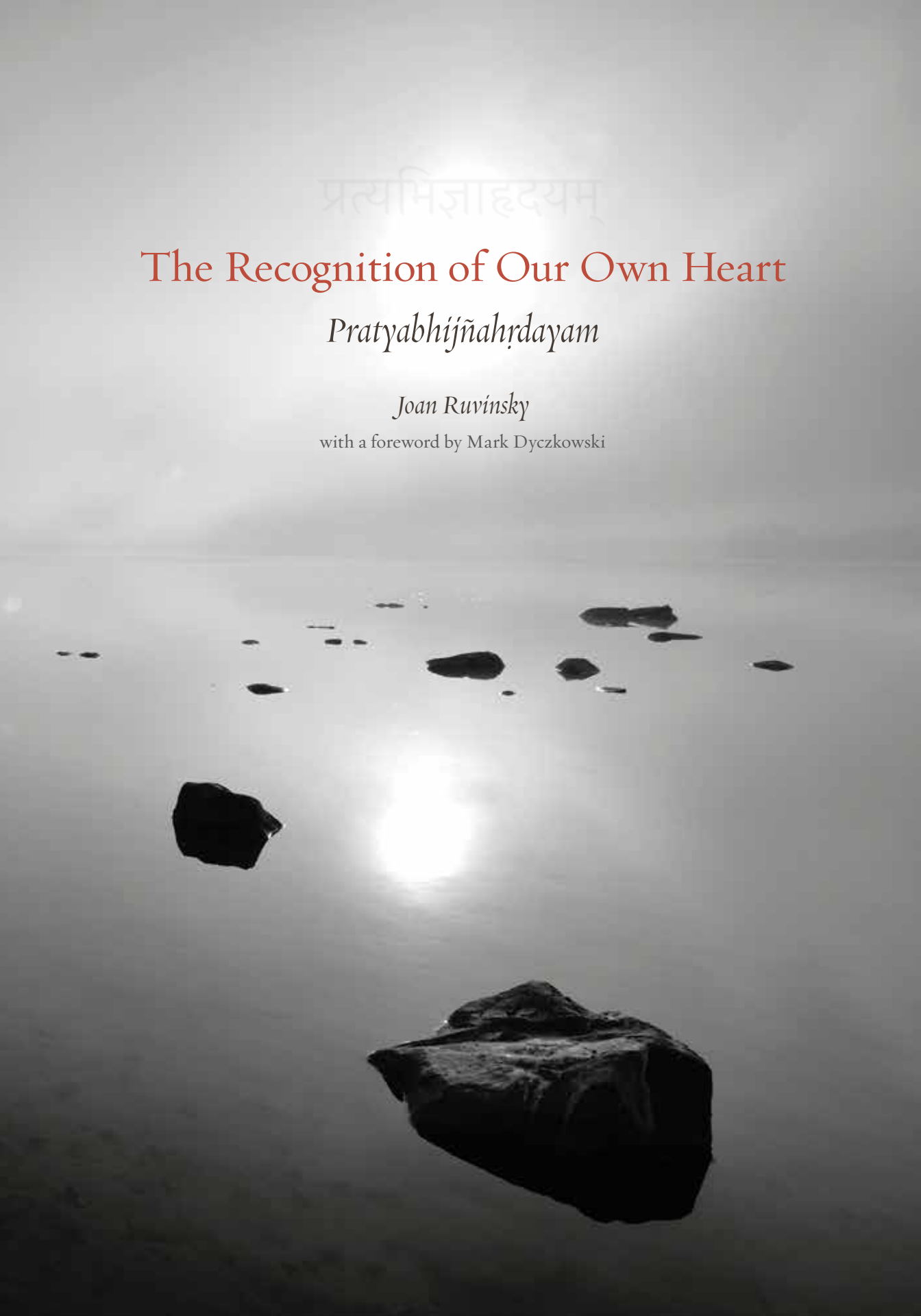
प्रत्यभिज्ञाहृदयम्

The Recognition of Our Own Heart

Pratyabhijñahṛdayam

Joan Ruvinsky

with a foreword by Mark Dyczkowski





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Ponderings on the
Pratyabhijñahṛdayam

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Preface

I FIRST CAME UPON the *Pratyabhijñahṛdayam* after an extended period of gazing with the infinite. Call it what you will — meditation, retreat, contemplation, catatonia — it was as if I had been inadvertently seized beyond my volition, like a deer frozen in the glare of the headlights. As the slow resurgence of the mind took place, I did what I often had done in the past, in order to make some sense out of it, to give it a name, to make it manageable. I turned to the ancient texts. This time I picked up *Pratyabhijñahṛdayam: The Secret of Self-Recognition*, a translation by Jaideva Singh (student of Swami Lakshmanjoo) of this 11th century text and commentary by Kshemaraja, and *The Splendor of Recognition* by Swami Shantananda (student of Muktananda), another, more contemporary commentary on the same text. Human interaction was still too complex at that time, so I sat with these books as my *sangha* (spiritual community), going back and forth between them, aphorism by aphorism, marking each of the twenty verses with little blue stickies for easier comparison in a state of undisturbed absorption.

After a month of this dialogue between me and the two books and the two books with each other, I returned to the world and the general busyness of responses, appointments, teaching and the fulfillment of self-made commitments and expectations.

It was not until ten years later that the return to the *Pratyabhijñahṛdayam* took place, this time with companions. For three years, Kathleen, Susheela, Tina and I met one morning a week, Tina sitting with us from a distant location in the frame of an iPad propped up on a chair in our circle surrounding a pile of books of every translation and commentary we could get our hands on that would help us unravel or at least steep in the

Unfathomable. After the first time through, and a summer's break, we asked ourselves what we had remembered or gleaned from our study. Clearly, we had but a mere felt-sense of the text but not yet the integration.

So we started again from the beginning, each session opening with the recitation (as best we could) of Kshemaraja's mantra in Sanskrit to ask the highest power to help us in our desire to understand more deeply the essence of what the text seeks to impart. Then we patiently stumbled our way through the recitation of each Sanskrit verse at the prompting of a recording whose voice had a native fluency in the language, with all the correct pronunciation of the retroflex consonants, the aspirated consonants, the unfamiliar, tongue-twisting consonant clusters and the vowels of variable length. Eventually, when we came to be able to recite the verses on our own, we began to hear the poetry of the original language, the internal rhyme, the staccato rhythm of the passages on contraction and the broad sweeping lyricism of the passages extolling the bliss of the heart.

We never imagined that what we would end up with was our own translation of the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*. We were only attempting to put it into our own words. Being neither Sanskrit scholars nor experts in Kashmiri Śaivism, we were simply long-term, serious practitioners of non-dual yoga who became passionately interested in the foundational texts. Over the course of our process in finding our own expression of the text, there were times of great joy in sudden revelation; there were times of great discomfort in conflict. Often the four of us did not agree on individual words or phrases, and it was somehow understood that we would not leave an aphorism until there was consensus among us. Tina typed as we altered and amended our wording. Then we'd ask, "Tina, what have we got now?" And she would read the latest version and we would listen for that yes-moment, a moment of silent fullness, a moment of ahhhhh, or simply, "Okay, I think that's the best we can do for now."

We wanted to preserve the richness, the effervescence and incandescence, the passionate *tremoring* so characteristic of Kashmiri Śaivism without losing the rigor and rectitude of the 400 years of philosophical inquiry, spiritual revelation and scholarship from the 9th to the 12th century. As we had learned over the course of our previous years comparing translations of some earlier yoga texts, namely the *Vijñāna Bhairava* and the *Spandakārikā*, and of course, the *Yogasutra* of Patañjali and the *Bhagavad Gīta*, all translation is interpretative. At one point, Kathleen dreamed she was



3

She births Herself as the many who interchangeably play
the roles of objects and subjects, reciprocally adapting,



4

each of the many, even in their individual forms, embodying the One,

Ponderings on the Verses

THE FOLLOWING PONDERINGS ON THE VERSES of the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* are not intended as commentaries, nor as interpretations. Here, no attempt is being made to decode the verses, to ascribe some kind of meaning to each one, wrapping it into an interpretative box and packing it away, and then off to the next. These ponderings are offered not so much in order to answer the question, “What does it mean?” but rather to explore, “How does it feel? What does it remind me of?” Each paragraph is its own unit, intended as a further take-off point to stir the curious into a deeper inquiry, rather than as a steppingstone in a larger, logical discourse leading to a unique conclusion. These associations are not meant as a final word but more as a thread inviting the reader to participate in an inner reflection that might meander in any direction. All contemplations are valid. There are no right answers, no dead ends, only pathways in the infinite.

VERSE I

चत्तिः स्वतन्त्रा वश्वसद्धिहेतुः॥१॥
citiḥ svatantrā viśva-siddhi-hetuh

Jaw-dropping wonder...in unfettered freedom,
the cause of the universe is
This.

Every tradition has its own explanation of how it all came to be. At the end of the day, when food and shelter have been taken care of, we begin to wonder. And we wonder who am I? What is all of this? Where did it come from? Where did I come from? How come?

Out of this deep curiosity, creation stories are born. Every tradition has an answer. It's resting on the back of a turtle. God did it. There was a Big Bang. There are tiny resonant strings. Many explanations, one conclusion: Manifestation exists.

The *R̥g Veda*, "The Hymn of Creation," one of the oldest texts in any Indo-European language, dating from somewhere between 4000 and 2000 BC, describes it like this:

Then even nothingness was not, nor existence.
There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it.
What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfathomed?

Then there was neither death nor immortality,
nor was there then the torch of night and day.
The One breathed windlessly and self-sustaining.
There was that One then, and there was no other.

At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness.
All this was only unilluminated water.
That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing,
arose at last, born of the power of heat...

VERSE 17

मध्यवकिसाच्चदिनन्दलाभः॥१७॥
madhya-vikasāc cidānanda-labhaḥ

Blossoming forth from Her own Heart – Bliss,

At some point, all the words point to the same thing, their meanings becoming indistinguishable. Here we are reaching the synonymy of the unspeakable:

Self, This, Bliss, Śiva, Heart, Consciousness, Supreme, Center, Reality, Absolute, Ultimate, God/dess. Pick a word. Expand it into a paragraph, even a volume. Investigate all the implications, the history, the nuances, and all their elucidations and implications. Then boil it back down to a phrase, or maybe even a word as an acronym for the totality.

At some point, likewise, each of the verses of the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, seem to be saying the same thing, and yet we know that they have been condensed from very long, complex volumes of logic and dialectics that represented the best 10th century understanding of the philosophy of the *Pratyabhijñā* School of Kashmiri Śaivism.

So whether as condensation or elaboration, the words, the verses or the tomes all point to This.

The title of the text in Sanskrit contains two words, *pratyabhijñā*, recognition, and *hṛdayam*, heart — the recognition of the heart. This is the “Heart” that surpasses the individual, localizable heart chakra, *anahata*, although it includes it. This Heart is of the middle, *madhya*, that which is between all opposites and yet includes them, the omnipresent center, the interior, the ultimate reality, pure consciousness, infinite light, spontaneity and freedom.

Beginning with Verse 17, the question of how one comes to recognize and live as the heart, our true home, is addressed. How does one come to this bliss at the heart of all things, this invisible bliss, or peace, or equanimity, or emptiness, or fullness or any of the other contradictory synonyms that refer to the same experience of the unspeakable?

Practices

PRACTICE PERFORMS MANY FUNCTIONS, the most common being to smooth out the *prana* (life force), which gets ruffled over the course of our identification with daily life. When the *prana* settles, the mind settles. When the mind settles, clarity and calm ensue. This might be called the band-aid approach to meditation, but it works. Perhaps all that may be achieved is a quiet mind, but that's not a bad thing. Certainly a quiet mind has physiological and behavioural repercussions that enhance health and happiness.

Another function that practice may perform is to optimize the conditions for revelation. A terminal disease or a car wreck may do the same thing, but they are more risky. When the mind is quiet, that which animates the mind, consciousness, shines through. Then, perhaps, consciousness will perceive itself, or perhaps not, but that is not up to the mind or personal will. In any case, it is not the mind that perceives consciousness. It is consciousness that animates the mind and makes perception through the senses possible. "It knows itself" or "consciousness knows itself." This is perception beyond the senses. It is pure, unfiltered perceiving.

At some point, the function of practice shifts. Practice becomes celebration — the source celebrating itself in form, the celebration of all that is, the celebration of being allowed to be, the celebration of being allowed to celebrate.

In general, the process of practice creates a kind of refinement where more and more subtle layers of the continuum make themselves known as objects in awareness and drop away. Then, the continuum itself dissolves fully into the ground of Being. So the practice of practice is a kind of inverse creation, returning or offering back the objects of creation to their source. Conversely, the practice of the ground of Being is the world. In other words, the practice is the recognition that all objects of perception

VERSE 13

Testing Inward and Outward

Close your eyes. Turn within. Is there a sense of expansion? Open your eyes. Is there a sense of contraction? Close your eyes. Is there an experience of the world as within us? Open the eyes. Is there the experience of us being in the world? Can you sense this presence that is present with both the eyes closed and the eyes open? Can you sense this presence whether in inward-turning of the mind or in outward-turning of the mind? What is behind even this presence?

VERSE 14

A Fire Practice

On a small piece of paper, write the words, “the world,” or your name, or both. Hold the edge of the paper with a pliers and light the paper on fire over an aluminum plate or a cookie sheet.

What is left? Pass your hand through what remains.

VERSE 15

Experiencing Everything as Consciousness

For one day, or a significant portion of a day, experience whatever comes up on the screen of awareness as none other than Consciousness. For example, “Consciousness is getting on the bus.” Or, “This donut is God.” Or, “Consciousness is manifesting as bad news.” Or, “God is arguing with God.” Or, “This is Śiva, this is Śiva, this is Śiva.” All day, note whatever is being experienced or observed as Consciousness.

VERSE 16

Listening

If you happen to enjoy chanting, take a moment, just as the chant ends and recedes back into silence. Listen. Just before thought begins to re-emerge, rather than getting involved with the thoughts, keep sensing This. Stay with the feeling-sense of This.

In fact, after any activity or practice that gives a sense of peace or equanimity, just stop. Allow yourself to be taken, before thought, before the next activity. Listen. Allow yourself to be reabsorbed. Be available to This.

“A gift of poetry and musings by an authentic teacher.
Ruvinsky is a teacher’s teacher.”

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