

Manifest Transpersonal Experiences: *Aṇimām and Laghimā Siddhis*

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Abstract: This article recalls with vivid awareness the Alex Gray like vision of infinitely small pulsating structures within my own body, and of bodily sensations of levitation I recalled when I read in Michael Murphy's *Future of the Body* the references to Haridas Chaudhuri's unpublished *Yogic Potentials or Siddhis in Hindu-Buddhist Parapsychology*. Along with Murphy's section of *Extraordinary Somatic Awareness Mediated by Internal Clairvoyance*, and within the framework of Ramamurti S. Mishra's *Textbook of Yoga Psychology* that provides context for Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, one sees as Chaudhuri explicates, how *aṇimām siddhi* of infinitely small somatic perception, and how *laghimā siddhi* of levitation are manifested. This article provides the notions, context and details of how such yogic potentials operate as transpersonal experiences of the body, mind and psyche.

Keywords: chittam, cryptesthesia, clairvoyance, extrasomatic, levitation, parapsychology, psi-gamma, psi-kappa, psychokinesis, sankhya yoga, siddhis, telekinesis, telergy, yoga sutras, yogic contemplation.

Introduction

Based on several extraordinary experiences, Murphy (1992) confirms in *Future of the Body* what I intuited: "that body awareness has extrasomatic as well as purely physical components" (p. 91). I have had several other experiences, but elaborate on the following two, *aṇimām siddhi* and *laghimā siddhi*, because they have had a most profound and transformative impact on my psyche. Haridas Chaudhuri in his unpublished paper: *Yogic Potentials or Siddhis in Hindu-Buddhist Parapsychology* defines siddhis as:

Supernatural powers inherent in the human psyche... They are extraordinary aspects of the human potential. Perceived as revelations of ultimate truth or reality, they are termed Vibhutes (that are manifestation of Divine powers). Perceived as fully actualized abilities or dynamic capacities, they are known in their totality as Aśvarya, i.e. spiritual wealth. (Chaudhuri, n.d., p.1)

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I have had direct experience of two of these *siddhis* that I discuss and examine below. Briefly, in the presence of my Guru, Sri Brahmananda Sarasvati, I experienced myself as a field of energy wherein I perceived every aspect of my body at the atomic level. Precisely, I experienced the pre-quantum vibrating strings level of my existence. I experienced the second while attending Mass as a Trinitarian Friar where I was overcome by powerful sensations of levitation. My monastic training prepared me for a mature encounter with these paranormal experiences so that I neither got lost in them, nor did I lose sight of the Self that was the focus of my seeking. In my monastic studies I was cautioned not to place emphasis on *siddhis*. Like my Spiritual Master, Fr. Damon, Huston Smith gives similar advice that I discuss later. I begin with an examination of the first experience.

Eastern Perspective: *Aṇimām Siddhi*

After reading Murphy's explication of *anudrishti siddhi*, *antara drishti siddhi*, and *aṇimām siddhi*, I referred to his reference to sutra 26 in chapter III, the *Vibhūti Pādah* in Ramamurti S. Mishra's (1963) *Textbook of Yoga Psychology* where he makes commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. Mishra's commentaries that follow also refer to the following *siddhis*, or paranormal experiences that Murphy (1992, P. 91) defines:

1. *Anudrishti siddhi*—a term derived from *anu*, atom, and *drishti*, insight—refers to a yogic apprehension of small, hidden, or remote things, including somatic structures.
2. *Antara drishti siddhi* is said to produce an X-ray look into our bodily parts.
3. *Animam siddhi*, one of the eight famous powers referred to in several yoga sutras, also involves such capacity.

These terms apply to an experience I had in 1992 at a *satsaṅg* and meditation led by Dr. Mishra, then known by his *sannyās*, or monastic name, Sri Brahmananda Sarasvati, of what Murphy (1992, p. 91) categorizes as an *Extraordinary Somatic Awareness Mediated by Internal Clairvoyance: aṇimām siddhi*.

Haridas Chaudhuri's (n.d.) catalog of *siddhis* brought the three *siddhis* mentioned above to Murphy's attention. According to Murphy's (1992) footnote he states "Chaudhuri believed that the *aṇimām siddhi* has various aspects, among them internal clairvoyance by which we can perceive our body's cells, molecules, and atomic patterns" (p. 91). Murphy (1992) further elaborates:

All our capacities, whether normal or metanormal, somatic or extrasomatic, are subject to the limitations and distortions produced by our inherited and socially conditioned nature. And it follows, then, that some internally clairvoyant perceptions would be more accurate than others, less filtered by half-conscious or unconscious psychological processes, and could be improved by transformative discipline, as Sutra 26 of Book Three in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* suggests. Some, or perhaps all, of us might perceive our own body parts through occasional psi, but through a glass darkly, while with practice we might see them more clearly. (p. 92)

In the *Frequently Used Terms* section, Murphy (1992) defines *psi* as:

A term proposed by B.P. Wiesner and R.H. Thouless, which can be used as either a noun or adjective, to signify paranormal processes and causation. *Psi-gamma* stands for paranormal cognition, *psi-kappa* for paranormal action. *Expressive psi*, a term used by David Griffin is synonymous with psi-kappa, *receptive psi* with psi-gamma. The term *psi* is meant to suggest that various paranormal phenomena are aspects of a single process, which in its active or expressive (psi-kappa) mode is called psychokinesis, telekinesis, or telegergy, and in its receptive or cognitive (psi-gamma) mode is called telepathy, clairvoyance, or extrasensory perception (ESP). (pg. 588-589)

At a *satsaṅg* with Dr. Mishra, I had an immediate and total, sensory and mental awareness of the *kāraṇa śarīra* or causal body, and of the *sūkṣma śarīra* or subtle body. Muni (1994) delineates the three *śarīra* bodies into five major *kośa* sheaths that cover the psyche or *ātman*. According to Grimes (1996) one definition of *Ātman* is “The Reality which is the substrate of the individual and identical with the Absolute (Self), according to Advaita Vedanta” (p. 68). Of these five I became intensely aware of two: the “*prāṇamaya kośa*, sheath of vital airs” (Muni, 1994, p. 196) and the *ānandamaya kośa*, or “sheath of bliss; first sheath or covering of the Ātman (individual soul) in Vedantic metaphysics; causal body” (Muni, 1994, p. 188). I was totally aware, saw, felt and perceived every atom of my body. This, I now relate to as a personal experience of *aṇimām siddhi*.

Siddhis are powerful and there is danger we may misperceive or misunderstand the experience, this is why Murphy refers to sutra 26 of the *Vibhūti Pāda* as a means of improving the unconscious psychological process of *aṇimām siddhi*. Because of its importance I am including Mishra’s (1963) full commentary:

Pravṛittyāloka-nyasāt sukshma-vyavahita-viprakrishta-jnānam

By *samyama* (the practices and three higher states of yogic contemplation: *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*) on the shining and radiating, effulgent light (I:30) one manifests intuitive knowledge of the subtle, the veiled, and the remote. The inner light, the effulgent light has been explained (I:36). It is the light of *sattva* (harmonious) substance, the principle of consciousness, which is clear, shining, radiating, and all-penetrating. When the light is perceived by a yogin, he sees things, which are very subtle and minute, such as elements and atoms. He sees things, which are veiled and concealed. He sees things, which are very remote, things, which are happening in a distant place. By performing *samyama* on this light, inner consciousness is revealed. It is beyond time and space and is all-inclusive. Hence a yogin obtains cryptesthesia. (p. 257)

George (1995) defines cryptesthesia as:

... literally, (a) ‘hidden sensation.’ Cryptesthesia refers to information gathered by the senses that enters conscious awareness by some other form.

The waking awareness generates a narrative based on the sensory input it receives. Input deemed irrelevant is frequently ignored or stored for later within the mind. Sometimes, however, the mind recognizes the need for that information, typically for the survival of

the individual. In order to bring that information to the forefront of consciousness, the mind will transmit that material through sensory hallucinations (e.g. tactile, visual, aural) in an attempt to redirect and refocus the efforts of the individual. (pg. 57-58)

My experience of the *aṇimām siddhi* was not due to any yogic effort on my part. I was simply meditating, with approximately 80 students, in the presence of Sri Brahmananda Sarasvati. For me the experience was gratuitous, perhaps due to my attention on the Guru, but I do not recall any effort whatsoever. I was just sitting quietly. During the experience of *aṇimām siddhi*, when I checked in with myself, to affirm I was still in-the-body, I opened my eyes and noticed auras around other meditators, who I knew beyond a doubt, were having the same experience I was having. Actually the feeling of pulsations and vibrations around them were resonating with my own. I was feeling this gentle awareness of resonance and was absorbed in intense pulsations and vibrations, to the point of visualizing every atomic detail of my being; it was much more pronounced than awareness of the auras.

This was one of the most powerful transformative experiences in my life. It left me understanding without a doubt, that accounts of the essence and radiance of the Self emanating from other spiritual masters such as the Buddha and the Christ are true and verifiable in the presence of contemporary masters. This experience marks the culmination of the initial stage of my seeking. It affirms the reality of what I was seeking, and that the sought for was in me and I was in it too; however, I also understood that I still had and have more work ahead of me. Now, I see with greater clarity: the work that is happening by and thru me. I can feel it and confirm it by its gentle overwhelming sense of peace, tranquility, silence and love. At times though, I feel, there is nothing left to do. However, this feeling does not impede my participation in life.

Mindstuff is used synonymously as *cittam* by Mishra (1963), as a partial model of psyche based on the *Sāṅkhyā darśan*:

The total individual personality consists of three major systems. These are called *manah*, mind consciousness; *ahamkara*, ego consciousness; and *buddhi*, superconsciousness. The three systems form a unified and harmonious organization technically termed in Yoga, *chittam*. *Chittam* means the psychic mechanism which manifests *Chiti*, Consciousness. *Chittam* is the seat of consciousness. Consciousness is manifested in accordance with *chittam*. The whole world is *chittam* and the world is perceived according to *chittam*. From childhood to old age, *chittam* changes, so our experiences regarding the world also changes. Man is as his *chittam* is. This is the secret of all secrets. (p. 114)

Muni (1994) refers to what Mishra terms *chittam* as *antah karaṇa*, the “Internal Instrument of cognition composed of Chitta consciousness, Buddhi intellect, Ahankara ego, and Manas mind; *the core of an individual’s personality, the psyche*” (p. 188, *emphasis mine*).

In the Vibhūti Pāda, Chapter III, Sutra 26 above, Mishra (1963) refers to sutra 30, concerning purification and removal of obstacles occurring in the unconscious psychological processes of *aṇimām siddhi*:

I:30 Vyadhi-styana-samshaya-pramada-alasya-avirati-bhranti-darshana - alabdha-bumikatva-anavasthitatvani chitta viksepa-te-antarayah.

These are nine obstacles, distraction of mindstuff. These appear with fluctuations of mindstuff. A breach in concentration would result in retrogression even from that stage. An effort should be made therefore in such a way that when a yogin has reached samadhi, highest concentration, mindstuff should be stabilized there.

Concentration is a process of purification. It cleanses body and mind. During this cleansing process physical diseases, psychosomatic diseases, and mental diseases may appear if they are hidden in the unconscious or subconscious state of chittam. Concentration does not create mental or physical disease but if disease is latent and or dormant, it will be discarded by supra-electronic, tanmatric, concentration. One should not worry if one receives signs of disease because it is passing out of body and mind. If in the process of cleaning house one should discover a snake, one should not worry but should dispose of the snake and make the house clean and peaceful. Otherwise, if it were to remain undiscovered, sometime later it might attack one. If any disease symptoms show, one should not worry but should overcome disease and be rid of it forever.

Not all obstacles come simultaneously. Any of them may come according to one's mental and physical constitution. They will never come if they are not dormant in one. Practice of meditation does not produce any disease. On the contrary, it destroys diseases. (pg. 146 – 147)

After his review of obstacles above, Mishra (1963) states in sutra I. 36 that “ the mind becomes calm, serene, and free from sorrow by meditating on the effulgent light at the third eye center, and it experiences the explosion of the light of consciousness” (p. 396). Mishra (1963) further elaborates in his detailed commentary on the all penetrating effulgent light that is the radiating source of the *añimām siddhi*:

I:36 Vishoka va jyotishmatee

By meditation on the transcendental and effulgent light of Purusha, Brahman, which is beyond all sorrow, self-confidence is positively produced, and mind becomes firmly grounded in Reality.

By meditation on the effulgent light of the Supreme, chittam goes into higher changes. This personality change brings stability of mind and absolute confidence in Self.

When a yogin fixes his attention on the ajna chakram, center of the head, thalamic region, or on sahasraram, seventh chakra, comprising the entire cortex, an effulgent light originates. Gradually it becomes resplendent and radiating, filling every part of the universe like akasha, ether. Skillfully holding chittam on this effulgent light, one has extraordinary change in mindstuff. It is transformed into that effulgent light which shines like the sun. The sattva quality of mind stuff is purified. It comes to a state of balance in

Cosmic Consciousness with feeling of Cosmic Personality and becomes like a motionless ocean.

Pondering the immanent, transcendent, and subtle Self one comes into direct realization of this light with the same surety one feels about oneself when saying, "I am." This transcendent and effulgent state of chittam is of two kinds:

Vishoka Visayavatee, enlightening all the products of objective nature, prakriti.

Vishoka Jyotismatee asmita matra, feeling of cosmic personality and enlightening Purusa by means of which the mindstuff of a yogin gains a state of stability and self-confidence.

This effulgent light cannot be perceived by beginners. Hence they are advised to imagine this light either in the heart or the center of the head.

Imagination can be a creative or destructive force. Imagination which is creative force is helpful in any branch of knowledge. So beginners should imagine that effulgent light in the heart or head until they perceive it naturally. (pg. 152–153)

Western Perspective: Levitation

Levitation is also known to yogis as *laghimā siddhi* that Grimes (1996) describes as “one of the eight powers which enables one to rise up in the air (on the rays of the sun)” (p. 173). The following is a personal account of such an experience:

During the novitiate we learned techniques of meditation, and how to meditate with an open and healthy attitude—Meditation without pretense or expectations. Once, as we gathered around the altar during mass, I began to levitate; no one noticed. I begged God, ‘Please, not here; you’ll embarrass me in front of all my friends.’ Reflecting on the experience, I actually did not *see* my feet lift up off the ground, but ascribed to the experience a sense of *kundalini* rising up the spine. Also, novices were admonished not to pay too much attention to sensory manifestations of meditation including visions and other extraordinary phenomenon (siddhis). We acknowledged them, but did not dwell on them. The manifestations are not the goal, we had been told that they can detract us from our goal of unity with the divine.

Houston Smith (2003) confirms this in a dialog with Mishlove:

Mishlove: *So would you say there are some religious traditions that encourage the development and the cultivation of the psychic side of human beings more than others?*

Smith: It’s interesting. I’ll put it the other way, slightly differently. That is to say that most of them believe that these powers are there and that they do increase as spiritual advancement occurs. However, they also warn against it, and say if you make this the goal, why, you’re settling for too little. And also there are some dangers; for one thing, this is treacherous water where one is not totally benign, but also there’s a strong temptation, as these siddhis, as the Indians call them—

Mishlove: *Powers.*

Smith: Powers, yes. As powers become available to you, people's heads get turned, and they become egotistic in their abilities. And so in derive, that way it can be counterproductive to the spiritual quest. So the greatest teachers are quite unanimous in saying they come but pay no attention to them.

Mishlove: *But aren't there traditions— the shamanistic tradition, the Tantric tradition— which really emphasize these powers?*

Smith: That is certainly so. Now, I guess I tipped my hand a little bit in excluding them from the most profound spiritual masters.

Mishlove: *Perhaps you do have some preferences.*

Smith: Shamanism is immensely fascinating, and extremely important in the history of religion. But sanctity one does not associate with shamans. They have immense power, and it can be misused as well as used. I think on balance it's been used. So I value them, but they're neither— what shall I say?—saints nor philosophers.

Mishlove: *Well, perhaps we might liken the psychic abilities in this sense to musical ability, or to any other natural talent that could be used in different ways. And some religions cultivate music, I suppose, more than others.*

Smith: That's right, that's right. Most shamans are very much linked with the people, in helping them with practical problems of life. But the aspect of religion that has to do with virtues and compassion and loving-kindness, now, this kind of thing is when I speak of profundity, getting into those waters. The shamans, that's not their forte. They have a different role. (pp. 219 – 220)

I am grateful for the specific readings assigned in Murphy's work because it has capped off my understanding of direct experiences of the Self that included phenomenological responses. While I find such experiences comforting and assuring, I do not seek them. I maintain a steady practice of performing the Vedic Fire weekly at Brahmananda Ashram in San Francisco, and bring the teachings of Nisargadatta Maharaj, Ramana Maharshi and other Advaitins and nondualist masters to those who attend. It is the power and grace of this millennia old ritual of Lord Agni's that attracts seekers, and Guruji said that when one reads from a Master's work, this Master's presence is "required." To me it is like the encounter of the kerygma, the Self in the logos. This encounter is the terminating juncture of relative consciousness and cosmic consciousness. It is encountered in deep silence wherein one experiences wholeness and peace. This is my experience. My practice of *Ātma Vicāra*, feeling and being the 'I am' in every moment is the active meditation I carry throughout my waking state. Any deviation and I am instantly reminded to return and abide in the Self.

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