

2022 Patanjali Class 10

3/8/22

Yoga Letter Nine

After our invocation, I read out a recent discovery relating to the first chant, from Nitya's Gita video on chapter XII, Bhakti Yoga, which goes:

Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu,  
Guru Devo Maheshvarah  
Guru Sakshat Param Brahman  
Tasmai Sri Gurave namah.  
Aum shanti, shanti, shantih

This invocation ends by saying “I adore you.” Adoration, salutation. A person who gives adoration should feel small and what is adored is great. When there is a sense of identity in oneness, there is no one to adore and no one to be adored. What is that particular state of emotion which accompanies adoration? One’s love, admiration, sense of wonder. It’s so wonderful that you feel like praising it. There is great love, so you want to become one with it. There is an upsurge of an emotion, so you cannot restrain your words. You feel like expressing your love. Something is surging up within you and it is a pouring out. It is an expression that is deep within you that finally gets a chance to come out, to flow out. That is given here in the form of a hymn, an invocation, a praise. This is more a praise than an invocation because nothing is asked. It only says that the Guru is great. Guru is as great as the Creator, the Sustainer and the Dissolver. Then it says the Guru even transcends all this. A process is first described, and then this person who gives the adoration

goes beyond the idea of a process and says '*param brahman*'. Such an adoration is called *bhakti*. (Nitya Gita video XII, intro)

We then read out Letter Nine, with its dense and unusual ideas. The old notes, in Part II, are helpful in coming to grips with its subject matter.

The main theme is being and becoming, similar to the horizontal and vertical in Gurukula parlance. Deb spoke of our recent study of *In the Stream of Consciousness*, its title referring to the continual process of becoming, how we are constantly going in our mind from moment to moment, idea to idea. There is also a steady, never-changing thread within the stream, or something below the stream; a beingness which is timeless and isn't captured in our thoughts. We are looking for ways we can access that beingness rather than being immersed in the constant flow of becoming. She invited us to share any experiences of it we have had.

I added the caveat that what Nitya is inviting is witnessing our own consciousness, where "Being is not a state that is either known or recognized." It's presumed, theoretical. You can't put your finger on being, since if you did, you'd instantly convert it to becoming. Pratibha added, "the mind cannot know it, but that does not mean it does not exist."

Bill spoke of the witnessing consciousness as the place in us what can watch the goings on, the progress of the figure-eight movement of conscious awareness, thereby being able to look at the activity that happens in the transactional world dispassionately. The spark comes from our being and ignites our becoming. When we establish the witnessing consciousness, we can get brief moments of recognition of the spark. As Nitya puts it: "By constant

training and a cultivated discipline of dispassion, the presence of a witnessing consciousness of the process of mental modulation will become more and more felt.”

The really radical note in this Letter is the suggestion to use your memory linkage as a battering ram to make a dent in the present through which your being can be intuited—quite a unique concept. It rightfully raised some questions. Here’s the paragraph:

For all practical purposes it is as if our Being is a myth and we are always in the continuous movement of a figure-of-eight, which is being generated by the ceaseless movement of a single luminous spark. But if you continuously involve yourself in the careful scrutiny of changing consciousness, you will soon come to appreciate the feedback of a memory, which can give you the idea of a past that is regenerated again and again as the immediate present and the only experience that you ever have. The intuitive understanding of the myth of the past can cause a dent in the opaque screen of becoming through which you can visualize your Being.

While admitting to some perplexity about it, I suggested Nitya’s intent was that our memory linkage is our vertical tail going all the way back to the embryonic stage. The scrutiny is a way for us to tune into the vertical side and see how that is both constructing and passing through the horizontal present, which is what we are normally obsessed with. At the inception of yoga we are struggling to not be dragged away by our exteriorized obsessions. In the witnessing state, our attachment to becoming is reduced.

Bill added that becoming is the process of new thoughts arising in our mind. Seldom do you go back as far as the core of being, but if you do, you put a dent in the becoming part.

Nitya's reference to the figure eight movement touches on an extensive correlation that isn't elaborated here, since it was well-known to his audience in those days. Now isn't the time to go into it, except to note the spark is our conscious awareness, and it moves through cyclic patterns. The patterns may appear linear to us if we are identified only with the spark, but a witness standing apart from it can begin to observe its shape and limits.

Part of the confusion over this excerpt is the tendency of modern people to think of a myth as being false. Nitya's use of the term is grounded in Dr. Mees' teaching that myths reveal the meaning of what is outwardly taking place. This is nowhere better expressed than in the Introduction to Mees' *Revelation in the Wilderness*:

Modern ways of teaching are predominantly rational and both follow from and contribute to the fact that the people of the present age exist psychologically in a state of departments, in which the various functions carry on a semi-independent life and are often at loggerheads with one another. But ancient ways of teaching were synthetic and syncretic, and made a simultaneous appeal to all the functions. The ancient traditional way of teaching was by myth. Mythological stories dealt with psychological problems and their solution, and appealed to the emotions, the function of systematic thought, the moral man and the intuition. They were "inspiring", appealed to the function of faith and brought insight into the mystery of life. When they were recited to the letter or enacted, it was a good training for the perceptive function of the various physical senses. The purpose of myths was to bring all functions into play at the same time.

Modern man has so completely forgotten what a myth is, that the expression "it is a myth" is now being used to denote something of baseless imagination or nonsense.

This is the case—need it be said—because myths have been interpreted in a literalistic manner. Mythological personalities have been taken to be personified forces of nature, when, on the contrary, they represent aspects of the psyche which were clothed in natural attributes.

In Mees' understanding, the physical, emotional, rational and spiritual aspects of the psyche correspond to earth, water, fire and air. Mees' Introduction also has this:

A symbol by itself, that is, taken out of its context, has only a very vague inspirational value, largely depending on its connection with the unconscious. A symbol grouped intelligently with other symbols in a myth, a ritual or some other tradition remaining over from more enlightened times, contributes to a lesson in traditional psychology which may contain, literally, a world of meaning.

So, we are being asked not to dismiss but to discover a world of meaning contained in our memory essence—of being who we are at all times in our life, even as the details of the horizontal world flow past us. Doing so helps us to become more of a witness and less glued on to the unfoldment of our days. Our daze.

Deb asked, if we trace our memories of the past back, how does that make a dent in becoming? She mused that it shows us how we are making links all the time, and then all of a sudden we see how we're doing it, and then there is a moment of clarity and something shines through. She thought the opening of Nitya's *Psychology of Darsanamala* was addressing this:

Life is a continuous series of experiences. In the intervals between these experiences there arise, often unbidden, the links of memory. When the attention is not focused on some event in the external world, then one's attention is directed into the inner world of subjective reasoning and fancies. (41)

Although Nitya is referring to subject and object as a horizontally-linked pair, Deb felt it meant that retrospectively watching or being a witness was a way of giving yourself distance from the unstoppable flow. That is what the Letter addresses: the introduction of the vertical as a distraction or release from the horizontal.

It's important to remember that the breakthrough memories are not what you *did* when you were younger, but a way to reattain who you are in essence, in a kind of retrospective meditation.

Nancy got this right away, recalling her state of being as a four-year-old. It's something she's often watched, how her feeling at different ages was the same as what's in her now. She wonders how she can be this "elderly" lady and still feel as she did when she was 4 or 18. All these things that she thinks should define how she's experiencing her consciousness as an old person, from seeing herself in former spaces and how she felt at different times, and now she finds out "it's the same me that's been here all along the way. That hasn't been changed by anything that's occurred in my life."

Nancy has a four-year-old granddaughter, and we were all recently visiting outside. Clare was hiding in the grass, and I went on a make-believe search, always delicious for someone that age. When it was time for her to be found, I saw she had a most profound look on her face, one I recognized: she was revisiting that special, inside place of her

true being, and it was palpably profound. She has the typical busy, over-monitored life of a child of today, with not much alone time, and in this rare opportunity she was in touch with the vastness of who she really is. She was not being asked to shrink into others' expectations, she could just be there. As Nancy said, she was feeling something she'll feel over and over throughout her life. We might also admit that this special state gets so overgrown with habits and expectations, that for many people it is lost forever, the source of unnamed longings.

Seeing Clare's blissful reverie revived similar memories in me, and I suspect that's what Nitya intended to get across in this Letter. At about Clare's age, according to *Love and Blessings*, he would discard his pants and go alone into the jungle, exploring and pondering for long stretches.

The Letter asks us to retrieve the memory of our authentic nature by stepping aside from the compulsions of the programs we are caught up in. Nitya describes it as the *feedback of a memory*, arising spontaneously from a careful scrutiny of our changing consciousness. It's not that we trace our memories back, but that we are able to shed the exterior memories and make room for a kind of internal memory to arise. A cosmic or universal memory. Earlier in the Letter he had described the process in a complicated sentence that by now should make good sense:

An overall tendency of one who watches the subjective modulation of consciousness is to minimize the physical origin of the objective impact and [the way we] become preoccupied entirely with the changing modes and the very many associations that are hooked on to the sequential development of an on-going program.

In other words, as we closely observe the way our mind works, our obsession with immediate events relents. It makes room for a dent in the fabric of space-time, or name-form. Of course, much of the time we need to pay attention to what's happening in our lives. It's essential, yet there is much more to life, and this kind of contemplation is how we get back in touch with it. Nitya makes this clear a little later:

In this higher form of meditation the long and sustained association we have with the spatio-temporal and nominal-formal ways of discerning things comes as a major block that prevents us from seeing the exact mechanism or method by which the pure consciousness in us (Being) remains detached and also allows a full sway of being drenched with the entire process of becoming.

So yes, let's be drenched in becoming—it's fabulous! Live life to the hilt. But at the same time we can be grounded in being, and this adds a most valuable element to the drenching. We might call it coherence, and leave it at that.

Andy wanted us to remember that this advice doesn't just relate to the pleasurable side of life: you can have an unpleasant experience, and some part of you is registering it but does not get involved. You are just a watcher. He then spoke about the "inner instrument" in the yoga system we are rapidly approaching. You have a function in you that's always asking, what's this? Whatever 'this' is, you label it and the label is coming from your memory, and you assign the gestalt some sort of meaning. When there is a gap, when you're tired of continually answering that question the brain is always asking, there comes a moment where you have had enough. You give it up.

Andy figures it makes you realize the only point where you are actually existing is the present. What's mythic in this whole experience is a halo that has existed our whole life long, asking what's this? and liking it not. Nevertheless, it's an amazing construction of our selves. All of that big picture and the picture that you were once there and in future you will be there, the only thing that's real is this process that is right in front of you. Everything is a memory that you have identified and then liked or not. All is dreamlike except for that point, and this is what gives you the dent, how within that whole process and you can see knowledge taking forms.

Regarding what Nitya says about our spiritual dedication, Deb feels there comes a moment when you hit the mystery and bow your head in supplication, and that itself is a moment of beingness. It's not a choice, you're just opening yourself to what's there.

Nitya joined the discussion with another quote from his Bhakti Yoga video:

We are all part of a grand scheme and that grand scheme itself is the expression of the Divine. By knowing that, we find our place in the meaning of our life. Fulfilling the meaning of our life itself is the worship. If we do not obstruct it with our own thoughts, with our own personal pettiness, then the worship is going on. There is no need for a separate worship other than that. If you give yourself to what is happening with all sincerity and full devotion, then it is as if you have given the very flower of your mind as an offering to the Supreme. (Nitya Gita video XII.7)

Susan shared a recent lesson about how not to obstruct the worshipfulness of life, something she's been internally addressing a lot lately. She was at PSU's big Saturday

Farmer's Market, and ran into her sister-in-law Katherine, with her 5-year-old, Ace, and a younger friend, Sky. Sky and Ace got daffodils and were playing with them. When Sky's flower started to break, Susan was ready to jump in and "save" the situation, projecting that he would be very upset about it. Katherine stopped her from intervening, assuring her it wouldn't matter at all. And it didn't. When the flower finally dropped off its stem, Sky just picked it up and went on with his play, in a different way. By stepping back and just observing, Susan was allowing whatever was going to happen to happen.

Surely, there is no better worship than two kids fencing and tickling each other with flowers. No need to give thanks to God or anything. Just doing it is the worship. Fixing things that don't need fixing is a popular dualistic habit of humans. One we could easily relinquish, with a little forethought. Perhaps we should try to stop intervening in life so much. Let it be.

Jan has been enduring zoom meetings, trying to agree with her siblings about how to manage their family affairs. She's found it a ripe ground for witnessing witnessing consciousness, finding how liberating it is for her to be able to sink into letting the others carry on, and to allow them to chart courses of action. Until now she has been the primary instigator, and it feels great to simply bear witness.

This confirmation brought us to the last paragraph, with its witnessing the witness:

Usually you stay with the uninterrupted process of becoming. Witnessing the witness and witnessing the witnessing witness lowers the intensity of the affective dynamics and you come to stay with the uneventful "periods" of timelessness. This is the first glimpse that you can have of your true Being that is

liberated for a split second, as it were, from the programmer of your consciousness.

I passed along a bit of history: for Nitya, the programmer of your consciousness was taken from an outdated metaphor of the time, that the brain was a bio-computer. Dolphin researcher John Lilly had asked, then who is doing the programming? Nitya loved that, because if the brain were a computer, it would need to be programmed. Should we leave it to chance, or be a co-creator, a co-programmer? Here he correctly grasps that our inept programming is actually interfering with the smooth functioning of the device, whatever it is. The healthiest game for us is unprogramming.

This brought forth a reprise from Nancy: what she's recalling of herself is a sense of *presence*. There is a presence that isn't older or younger, or likes anything or dislikes anything, it's simply being present in the moment. She keeps thinking she should be seeing things a certain way because she's elderly, but a lot of what she experiences comes from the same feelings she's had as long as she can remember. The constant in all of it is that it's undefinable.

Jan summed up that the goal is not only liberation, but also to have your dharma come forth in your life unencumbered by all the crap that we carry around. Amen.

We count on Anita for a different take, and she didn't let us down. She feels that her experience of beingness has changed so much in her lifetime. Humans have plenty of choices to make, and her own point of view is that we are just beginning to open our eyes. She doesn't think humans are any different from animals, plants, or even minerals. We are just beginning to see beyond what we believe to be the case. For her, the concept of humanness or beingness has kept expanding and changing over her lifetime and she's looking

forward to more of the same. Deb agreed, and affirmed that beingness is present for the whole cosmos, whether you choose it or not.

Actually, there is always change in the *becoming* aspect of life, but there is also a unifying factor of *being*. That is, in fact, how to distinguish them. Susan put it a bit differently: her unmoving, true nature has always been there, but it has been obscured.

Moni has a meditation where memories come and then she processes them, and then other memories come and she witnesses them and processes them. Throughout, there comes a point when it all settles down, and because of the processing she gets more clarity about her questions, doubts, feelings, and so on, and finally her mind goes to a calmer place. Because she felt something, maybe only for a few seconds, she thinks it is a new present. But it's not really new. This Letter is helping her make a dent in the opaque screen and see the eternity behind it.

We approached the closing meditation with a reading of Ask Me, by William Stafford, which Deb felt beautifully expressed the calm, steady sense of the Ninth Letter:

Some time when the river is ice ask me  
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether  
what I have done is my life. Others  
have come in their slow way into  
my thought, and some have tried to help  
or to hurt: ask me what difference  
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.  
You and I can turn and look  
at the silent river and wait. We know

the current is there, hidden; and there  
are comings and goings from miles away  
that hold the stillness exactly before us.  
What the river says, that is what I say.

## Part II

7/29/8

Letter Nine, old notes, which address the topic quite well:

Being and becoming now take center stage. Being is the Absolute within us, the Self, our pure unmodulated consciousness, while becoming comprises all the modulations and our identification with them. As “mature” humans we have become enamored of the sequence of developments that we cumulatively call ‘I’. This is only natural. But yoga invites us to take a break and allow our being to shine forth for a time, which weakens the hold the torrent of becoming has on our psyche. As we are better able to witness our life from a step back, we can choose to discard at least some of our less healthy attachments and transfer that energy to projects more worthy of our efforts.

At first, being is like a myth. We’ve heard of it but it is simply conceived as one more aspect of our becoming. It is imagined as a goal to be reached, and humans love to put energy into pursuing goals, especially for self-improvement and/or to benefit the abstraction called the world. The main reason the Gurukula remains obscure is its unwillingness to present realization as a far off laurel wreath to be garnered through a series of stages, the pursuing of a path, by being good, being righteous, following eight steps, or five or twelve. It doesn’t have the appeal of the Three-Minute Manager or the Ten Habits of Highly Successful People. All such programs are forms of becoming, and

being is not the product of becoming. Quite the contrary, being is eternally obscured by becoming. As the Gita puts it, “The all-pervading One takes cognizance neither of the sinful nor the meritorious actions of anyone; wisdom is veiled by unwisdom; beings are deluded thereby.” (V, 15) Here, obviously, wisdom is equated with being and unwisdom with becoming. Becoming comprises knowledge, valuable enough in its own sphere, but wisdom is something that stems from being and is overcovered by knowledge as a tree is subsumed in clinging vines. As Narayana Guru tells us in Atmo verse 9, hell does not come to one dwelling in contemplation beneath this tree, only to those who are ensnared by the twining vine.

Speaking of hell, Anita has been thinking that it is a state in the present, not in some distant future, and it comes from having unresolved issues. Resolving issues is one way of allowing ourselves to simply be, and unresolved issues very much interfere with our enjoyment of life. They make up the bulk of becoming. The thing about becoming is it doesn’t quit, it keeps piling one thing on top of another until we’re quite overwhelmed. Like Giles Corey in The Crucible, a play about the Salem witch trials, our punishment sentences us to be pressed to death beneath heavy stones. Our stones are made of obligations and expectations, weighty matters of our past and future. And like the Hydra, when you resolve one issue by symbolically cutting off its head, two more spring up in its place. The notion that we can finish with our problems by taking care of them one by one only gets us more embroiled in them, as several class members have testified. Hey, we can all attest to this! We believe we’re being good citizens by taking care of all our obligations sequentially, but there is no end to them. They even proliferate. Somehow we have to permit ourselves to make a clean break.

Instead of wading deeper and deeper into becoming, the solution is to discover our hidden beingness. To accomplish this,

Nitya's recommendation in this Letter is to take a good hard look at who you imagine yourself to be. We have constructed ourselves out of nothingness, out of memories and imagination, hopes and desires. We believe we are the end product of everything that we've done and that's happened to us, but we are in reality so much more than that. We are in fact the Absolute. We have to admit that even our best friends know almost nothing about us. Indeed we ourselves know very little of who we are. We are walking myths, crazily reflecting our sense of continuity to the expectations of our surface persona and other people. But that isn't who we really are at all.

All of us have a sense of self, and that has remained unchanged for as long as we've been aware of ourself. This is why we imagine all our life that we're still only 23, or 14, or 6. Those numbers mark the moment we became fully aware of ourselves, and that self-awareness has persisted through thick and thin ever since. If we can accept that sense of self without definition, we will begin to know our being, and it is connected to and even identical with the total Self, the total Being. But both we and our friends pressure us to describe what that self is, to give it a name and a form or forms. We of course choose the best description we can manufacture, and assert that that's who we are. We may not be so generous with our fellows in our descriptions of them. The wise course would be to not call being anything, to not describe it at all. We are That, and that's that. That's It. But oh, my friend thinks I'm such and such. My enemy says I'm so and so. Fine, those are their projected mental images. I'm not going to put my energy into conforming to their expectations, I'm going to use it to relinquish all static notions, my own first of all.

The popular path of ignoring problems and fixations in hopes they will go away is fatally flawed. Both Deb and Anita talked about how appealing the idea is, but it doesn't work. Life—or Fate—keeps reinventing situations to present the unresolved

problem, and upping the ante each time. Like an unfriendly orgasm, there is a buildup to an explosion of anger or hatred, after which a temporary calm is restored. We read all the time in the news about the outbursts that result in the supreme calm of death or imprisonment.

Usually we won't attend to a problem until it causes us substantial pain, and by then it's built up some serious momentum. We don't act until we get a taste of the hellish mental states that samskaras and vasanas can produce when they are really frustrated. And then we may act poorly and under duress, warped by false imaginings. As far as problems go, you can run but you can't hide. The human species desperately needs a healthy solution to "static buildup" short of violence.

All that's required is for us to examine ourselves without favorable prejudice, in other words, without blaming other people for our problems. We want to shift the burden onto our handy friend or enemy and hope that will make us free. It's our favorite form of ignoring the problem: it isn't actually our problem, it's someone else's fault. So once we get over that, we have to watch how our mind works. We watch how memories shape our mental picture, and see how insubstantial and pliable they are. We watch the figure-eight movement as we cycle through optimism, reality check, pessimism, hope; optimism, reality check, pessimism, hope, over and over. The flowing form of becoming.

As we watch, we remember that we are much more than this game. We are the consciousness that sees it. We are even something undefined and undefinable. Definition sets limits; undefinition is unlimited, infinite. As Nitya puts it, "If you continuously involve yourself in the careful scrutiny of changing consciousness, you will soon come to appreciate the feedback of a memory, which can give you the idea of a past that is regenerated again and again as the immediate present and the only experience that you ever have. The intuitive understanding of the myth of the

past can cause a dent in the opaque screen of becoming through which you can visualize your Being.”

Part II, of the old notes:

Jean just sent a thoughtful response to the above. She wrote:

I may be getting caught up in semantics, or reading like a devil’s advocate, but some things didn’t seem to equate.

In “new physics,” you discuss the ideas of *causality* which, as you say, can also be called “directedness”, “a slightly positive pressure”, the will of God, or creative emergence. How about the word “intentionality”, too? It almost seems synonymous. Yet in 7/22/8 class notes, intentionality gets cut down to the quick, as coming from the ego-- “even the most salutary and sublime” of intentionality.

(To plug this in to my own personal experience, I came to Portland with a cause-- an intention-- primarily to exert a creative positive pressure, to get that apartment cleaned up. I also had intentions (plans) to visit Gayathri, Anita, Nancy, and your class. It took planning, energy, help (much help), but everything got accomplished according to the original vision. I’m not even going to ask where ego played into this! But I can see God working this way, too, having a plan, laying the pick-up sticks in a way they can all get picked up, even when they are lying in total logjams. I’ll bet that even random “randomness and chaos” is part of the great plan! It’s a comforting thought. It’s like Dalai Lama’s thought, that “sometimes not getting what you want is a great stroke of luck”.)

In the next paragraph of 7/22/8 notes, we read, “As Nitya puts it, ‘Paying attention to the ego or personal self is as much an objectivization as that provoked by objects.’“ Yet

in 7/29/8 class notes, you write, “We have to pay attention to become free.” I understand that better.

Let’s be clear: the only point made in those citations is that intentionality comes from the ego. This isn’t a terrible thing at all: the ego is the part of the mind that registers and energizes our conscious intentions. Vasanas and samskaras energize our unconscious and semiconscious intentions, respectively. When we pay attention to the ego we objectify it. We move from being random, haphazard egos lurching through the night to being cognizant of our actions, mindful of our actions. This can often redirect negative energy to positive ends, or at least de-energize our negativity. It’s not that randomness equals spiritual, or that intention equates to it either, but the latter opens the door to being if it’s open enough. The former? Well, true randomness is rare to the point of nonexistence. Mostly it’s a cover for negativity.

So yes, our intentions come from our egos. Whether our motivations are selfish or altruistic makes the difference between growing or shrinking. In the references to paying attention (a form of intention), we don’t allow ourselves to be deluded that our intentions come from divine inspiration, and so whatever we do is blessed by God. That’s the old rationale for bloodletting. We look and see where our motivations arise within our own self, and this frees us from being driven blindly by our immediate desires.

I agree that intentionality is problematic for humans. Hopefully not so problematic for the universe as a whole, whether operated intentionally by God or Nature or Accident. The primary difference is that the universe includes everything, while a person tends to be somewhat more limited. Therefore the latter has to make peace with the former somehow, or else endure a lot of extra conflict trying to squeeze the universe down to human conceivability. I suppose it *is* a matter of opinion whether we accept the universe’s intentionality or not. Maybe the whole thing

is a bad idea, full of birth and death and all kinds of sudden changes. It makes one giddy! But we're pretty much stuck with it, and we're not likely anytime soon to be able to reinvent its laws.

It cannot be repeated often enough that spirituality should not mean inhibiting or destroying the ego or ceasing activity or abstaining from intentions. This is a widely held belief, however, and I notice that however often we preach about healthy egos in class, people nod and smile and then consider how best to crush them. Selfishness and ego are not the same, though they may be bedfellows. The Gurukula teaches discarding selfishness and embracing the whole, and we embrace it with our ego. The ego includes what we glibly call our heart and our mind. The ego should not be crushed, it should be made healthy and expanded to include as much as humanly possible in its purview. We need to look to the total situation and take our cues from that, not just "what's in it for me." We know we are one valuable little smidgen of the whole, so selfish behaviors tend to separate us from who and what we are, ending in disasters great and small. Generous behaviors tend to enrich our environment, and therefore go well for ourselves and others. I don't think I need to quote Atmo 23 yet again, because you all know it by heart by now.

By this measure, Jean was acting "spiritually" by donating time and effort and even money to cleaning out and sprucing up her mother's living space. This would not have gotten done by someone who believes that spiritual life means withdrawing from participation in mundane matters. Those people sit in their cells and meditate on holiness, and that's fine, so long as they don't go mad. Many of us need activity to keep us sane, and actions provide just the proper field for spiritual growth. Real growth, not imaginary growth. The Gita is filled with urgings to act intentionally but dispassionately. For instance, it reminds us, in III, 8: "Do engage yourself in action that is necessary; activity is indeed better than non-activity, and even the bodily life of yours

would not progress satisfactorily through non-action.” And in III, 23 and 24: “If I should not remain active (in principle), never relaxing, men in every walk of life would take to my (inactive) way. These (various) worlds would fall into ruin should I refrain from activity, and I would become the agent of (evolutive) confusion, killing in effect the peoples.” In other words, if she doesn’t clean up the apartment, it’s going to “fall into ruin.” Her ego decided to do it, and it made a good decision that had many beneficial repercussions for a number of people. Moreover, it was a problem she didn’t have to go looking for, it was right there in front of her. Those are the right ones to attend to. If the ego has to go fishing for problems, it should suspect ulterior motives like proselytization or ego glorification. We have plenty of “stuff” in plain sight. If we accept the universe’s intentions, dealing with what it presents us is perfectly adequate.