

2022 Patanjali Class
3/22/22
11 – Yoga Letter Ten

As Deb astutely noticed, despite its complexities, this commentary follows from the previous Letter, with its being and becoming now shifted to knowing and doing. She said what Nitya describes in it is something we experience every moment as a continuous series. We are an essential part of both the stimulus and how we modulate it.

Without rereading the opening of Letter Nine we may be rather lost. Its key concepts are:

Watching your own consciousness is a game of staying with your beingness and going along with the process of becoming. Being is not a state that is either known or recognized. Experiencing knowledge is none other than experiencing the act of discrimination and affirming that which is discriminated.

This is a continuous operation. However keen we are in our observation, the act of discrimination does not remain for one moment without becoming fully identified with the ongoing impact of an affective dynamics....

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. Even this witnessing consciousness needs the help of discrimination to distinguish this role of witnessing the modulations of the mainstream of consciousness.

If you can stay on with the witnessing consciousness you can further notice its neutral quality. It can be present with a painful experience, and yet that part of consciousness remains detached from the pain that is affecting the organism or causing agitating modulations in your immediate experience. Thus there is a dual

registering of your experience, one of pain-pleasure affectivity and the other of neutral witnessing of your being pleased or pained.

Deb shared that this addresses being aware of how you move in the world, how you evaluate things, and how you balance them. We can easily see how it directly leads to the opening premises in Letter Ten, where the practical implications are more emphasized:

Your promptings are to know and to do. Your performances are knowing and doing. Your partial dysfunctions are doubting and hesitating. Your failures are your incapacity to know and your incapacity to do. The polemics between your knowing and doing result in your suppression. Where do the promptings to know come from? The promptings to know presuppose familiarity with a certain field of promise. The promise is of an information that can illuminate a potential happiness or a probable threat. Or it can be the desire to return to an unfulfilled experience of pain or pleasure.

We discussed the use of the terms *rationale* and *procreation* here, which Nitya adapts to his own purposes. I'd say Nitya's intent with the second term was that it be hyphenated: more like pro-creation or pro-creative. Leaning toward creation and creativity. This is from the old class notes, which are reproduced at length in Part II:

Nitya uses the term *rationale* uniquely in this Letter to mean the proclivity for knowing, and likewise the word *procreative* indicates the proclivity for doing. When our knowing falls short we encounter doubt, and when our doing is disrupted it is revealed as hesitation. Doubt and hesitation in this sense are serious impediments to a unified or yogic life. As Nitya puts it, "Just as doubt inhibits the full illumination of knowing,

hesitation inhibits actualization.” Paradoxically, extricating our psyches from being engrossed in “the drama” allows us to bring our best effort to both knowing and doing. We don’t turn our back to it and walk away, but get it in perspective, exactly as Krishna advises Arjuna when he wants to flee from the battlefield.

Neuroscience is coming to employ an equivalent of the ancient wisdom of being and becoming. The brain has two complementary aspects: the direct apprehension in our environment, and the ways we process, interpret, and make use of it. As “mature” adults, we tend toward exclusive emphasis on becoming, on practicality and interpretation, and have lost contact with pure being, despite its continual presence. We get trapped in our experiences and what to do about them, and have drowned out pure experience in our manipulations. By taking a break from the pro-creative aspect, we can reclaim that direct apprehension of knowledge. Whenever we *interpret* experience, it instantly becomes secondhand, abstracted.

We can think of *vritti*, the modulations that Patanjali will soon suggest we should cease, as distractions: whether pro or con, pleasurable or painful, with them we are interpreting rather than experiencing the underlying essence. Normally, we have learned to take being for granted and ignore it.

With yoga, we intend whatever we do to be harmonious, and the *vrittis* are the waves on the surface of the ocean of harmony that is our truest nature. For me, this is vividly revealed by the mental distractions that interfere with my piano performance. Every slight diversion from concentration, every modulation, causes a deviation from the optimal flow of the music. Yet underneath all my *vrittis* there is music happening, and if I can let go of them, not be pulled off-course by them, lovely music can happen. As genius pianist Art Tatum said, “You don’t play the piano, the piano plays itself!” The rare moments when I’m at my

best, it's just like that.

Pratibha commented that when you listen to the external, the internal gets covered up. True, but vice versa is also true, and our inner monologue is often much louder than the noise of our surroundings. It too cloaks our essence, and we believe in it all the more, because it seems like who we are.

Today I was shown (by divine intervention?) a most typical example of how this works. While writing these Notes (in my closely sequestered “sacred time”) I found soon after starting that I needed to take Deb to her PT appointment downtown, and run some errands while she was there. After getting back to work a couple of hours later, an issue came up I had to deal with online, and the site was utterly bedeviled by our lackadaisical internet. This ate up another hour, filled with provocations of the computer sort: I was in the digital nightmare zone (DNZ). I could have gotten enraged, or I could disaffiliate myself from the context of suffering, which I opted for. While waiting for the pages to load, I was occasionally able to perform some rudimentary work on the Notes, which helped. Then I realized it was a perfect demonstration of the topic: all day I've been “writing the Notes,” but it was unfolding as a mere trickle underneath the daily demands of life, which were continually interrupting it. Nitya's million-dollar sentence, “Yoga is attained only by extricating the discerning intelligence from the continuous drama of recurring modulations and their incentives,” basically invites us to spend more time attending to the underground flow, tuning out the demands and distractions of necessity whenever possible. Some idealists advocate total abstraction from necessity, but this approach is gentler, more realistic—simply make time during your busy day for spiritual refreshment, including your authentically creative projects. But don't get sidetracked to the extent you lose contact with what really matters.

When we embrace the other, where human or procedural, we can release our learned defensive behaviors, and reduce the demands of what Nitya calls the affective dynamics—the vrittis, if you will. We can withdraw from both the external and internal promptings, and open up the present. Letter Nine concludes: “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.”

Anita being ill and not attending, I recounted a bit of her lovely entry about this in the old notes, which you can read in Part II. This yoga really does open presence!

Deb spoke about how we know and experience something, but if we tell ourselves a story about it from our culture, it becomes different. We got to discussing how parents can dampen their child’s creativity by continually training them to associate fixed concepts and names with their raw experience. It’s practically an obsession in our culture, and it doesn’t take long before direct experience is snuffed out permanently, barring active resurrection efforts. Being is still within us, fully available, but we are strongly compelled by internalized society to look away.

Pratibha has heard that in India, parents didn’t concern themselves to teach children anything until after they are four years old. They figure children have their own intelligence and they learn by observing. It allows the innate confidence of the child to come out on its own—and, for that matter, to not be eroded and demeaned.

This is so valuable! As in Paul’s favorite example of the child lying in the grass having a blissful experience of its indescribable beauty, many parents believe in taking him out of his bliss and substituting the name and purpose of the grass, and then having him repeat it back to them. It can’t help but undermine his self-confidence, with immense repercussions. As adults we know a lot about grass, but rarely does it serve us as a doorway into bliss. As

Pratibha put it, adults usually see a flower, but they don't experience it any more.

Deb asked Kris how she sees this play out in the classroom. Kris didn't give a direct answer, but her example took us up an interesting side trail, which is one of the best things a real-time class can provide. And the side trail eventually led back to the main trail, farther down the road. In her career, Kris found that even with the very young, certain kids can really influence other kids to believe a story that isn't true. There are leaders and followers. She recalled a time when they were working on a science concept, and she asked all the kids for their interpretation. They all thought about it and expressed a variety of ideas, but then it got to the one student who was seen as a leader. He said what he believed was happening, which was way off base, but it changed the opinion of the rest of the kids, even though he was taking them down the wrong path. Another one knew the scientific principle, but he wasn't a leader, so he was ignored. Kris found that kids (and for that matter, adults) have to be careful who they listen to. She added, the sense of knowing, how that feels—when you really do know and you're not just being influenced—is special. Kris is well aware that babies know a lot, in their own way, and then we teach them labels about it. Is it possible they might learn better without the sales pitches?

Paul agreed with Kris how easy it is for a leader to lead followers away from truth, and it amazes him how weak the followers are. He learned about this as a child himself, when he would visit his grandpa's ranch, where he raised crops and sheep for a living. Paul loved watching the young lambs, who played by following a leader. The lead lamb would jump over something that wasn't there, and the all the other sheep in turn jumped over the same imaginary object. He compared this to his church, which was a major supporter of created insanities accepted on faith. If an idea was contradictory to good sense, you were simply supposed to

accept it on faith, which he took as a cop-out for discovering what was truly true. Paul agreed it takes real effort to extricate yourself from a collective agreement based on faith, which he takes as the belief in something without evidence. Without evidence, you take a leap of faith. Like a sheep.

I didn't get a chance to make the connection at the time, but children who are taught their experience is inadequate, by being taught labeling and other abstractions instead of being allowed to be joyful and modestly self-directed, naturally become obedient followers. They lose contact with an essential natural ability.

Parenthetically (no pun intended—is the root really *parent*?) our daughter Emily “accidentally” videoed (the same day) her son Jai's first sentences, while he was practicing walking at 14 months: “I see you. I love you!” What a fabulous fertilizer for growing a life!

Susan had an epiphany recently where her labeling and defining was suspended for an exquisite moment. She was crouching down weeding in her garden, and heard a hummingbird just over her head. She looked up cautiously to see it hovering next to her chimney, and sporadically poking its beak into the chimney mortar. She was amazed just watching it, how it would back up and flick its tongue in and out of its beak. Only after it flew away did she feel the urge to know why it was doing this off behavior.

It turns out hummingbirds use sand or mortar grains for grit in their digestive systems, as anything else is too big for them. Learning this was satisfying, but not ecstasy-inducing.

Karen requested a clarification of samskara, as Nitya associates it with action dynamics, at some length. Briefly samskaras are memories from the present life, including how they tend to condition us, and vasanas are their past-life counterparts, what we now attribute to genetic factors, much harder to work with. In both cases there are some worthwhile ones to promote, and some that are better to be decommissioned. As Deb described

samskaras, when you have an experience that gives you pain or pleasure, it makes a deep-seated memory with the potential to rise up again. She mentioned Joyce Harjo's exceptionally powerful memoir, *Crazy Brave*, detailing the effect on her ancestors of many generations since the arrival of Europeans and how it negatively impacted their lifestyles, and thus hers. The pain of those samskaras is not only personal, but tribal. On a personal level, Deb got burned on her foot by an iron when she was little, and will always have that somatic memory when she irons clothes, and is possibly connected to her lifetime of foot issues. Part of what Nitya writes about them is worth rereading:

The prompting to do comes from the incidental illumination of a field that belongs to any one of the several potentials that are mature to unfold.... After the incidence of an action you are no longer the same person. Something has perished, something has been created; something has been de-structured, something has been structured.

The re-creation of the system thus effected is called samskara.

Kris was moved by Harjo's sensitivity, and spoke of the value of touching the earth, and also the historical dimension. She feels it's essential to think of our ancestors, sorting out what was good in them and what wasn't, as we've inherited both parts. From birth your destiny is inside you like the pit of a plum, containing the future tree and leaves: every bit is in the seed and it's in you. We need to try to look beyond that, to what is ultimately true, while respecting where we came from. It's important to know how that has made you live your life, and if you don't, it's hard to be as mindful as you could be. Kris's dad used to say, "Mom is about unconditional love, but I'm trying to correct the mistakes in our DNA." Both aspects are crucial to our making progress, and it's a long, slow process.

Paul wondered if you have to strip away your whole history to be reborn as yourself: “If the bathwater is all dirty, can you just throw it away?” (Short answer: no.) Since our early experiences can distort, it’s hard for us to tell the difference between good and bad. Paul has learned to restrain the impulse to intervene so much in his parenting, counting to ten before his next outburst, and that interval is enough to see more of its potential effect and hold off.

Bill brought us to the last lap, same as the first: the idea of our being, and learning to balance that with our incessant nature. He assured us finding our way back to that being is part of what Patanjali will give us insight into as we go forward. Nitya highlights the same at the end of this Letter: freeing the discriminating consciousness from the continuous drama. He’s starting to tell us about how the becoming is structured, and how the discriminating consciousness takes that spark of our being and then shepherds it through our interactions in the world.

Bill spoke directly to Paul about his bathwater: what Nitya is talking about in the practice of yoga, realizing that as you go through this study and practice, you become more knowledgeable. Due to this, the world of becoming has less influence on you and how you interact with it. Do you think your equipoise is different than it was five years ago?

Paul responded he feels blessed by being exposed to this, where he can stop and discern a bit, and not pass on his dysfunctions to friends and family. Not being so attached to his early conditioning allows him more freedom, since he no longer views the strictures as coming from a God or Master, as he was raised. They are now there more as a servant or an assistant.

Deb empathized that it’s always a challenge to extricate ourselves from our conditioning, and this study gives us the opportunity to always be clearer, less thwarted. It enlarges who we are blessed to be.

While all this is true, it should be recognized as tinkering

with the world of becoming. Most of our study is to get over impediments and obstructions to being, since being is not the product of any procreative process. In that sense Yoga is not a cumulative program, not something you practice for a certain period every day for twenty years and then you become enlightened. It's there waiting for you to get your stuff out of the way right now. There is no time element in Nitya's last sentence, only the affirmation that we need to stop being so glued onto everything. Instead of being caught up in the drama, we can take a resolve to sit still for a moment and not do all those things we are put upon to do.

Like most everyone, Susan wondered if yoga isn't cumulative in the sense that if one makes time for our class, and practices noticing and confronting one's mental modifications, doesn't one generally start to feel better? Through the process of uncovering blockages and getting back to our true nature, she believes there is a cumulative positive effect.

That's certainly true, but we should also realize the progress is all happening within the world of becoming. Offloading garbage and replacing it with compost makes us feel better, makes life more satisfying and positively interactive, and it is something that can be taught to a significant extent. I'm not minimizing it, only putting it in proper perspective. When we imagine a distant goal we are taking steps toward, we are actually pushing the state of being away. We're manipulating our way of becoming, playing with it, making it more intelligent. Presuming that restores you to being—to samsara as Patanjali calls it—is a fallacy. It can become (pun intended) a way to remain content in exile.

There is no measurement for how much being we've attained; it just is. As Nitya assured us at the outset, "Being is not a state that is either known or recognized." That means, if you know it or recognize it, it isn't being. Yet he also added, "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.” Being doesn’t accumulate, though it is as if the obscuring clouds are being gently blown out of the way. Neutrality is being’s only quality.

Jan got the point, one we have struggled to get across for decades without much success. When she’s having a tough time in her day, she has learned to let it go for a while, telling herself she doesn’t need to suffer and be upset over it. It feels good to let it go and to fall into something a lot freer, and new. It gives her a fresh way of dealing with the situation.

The minute you stop and chill, that’s it right there. Just remind yourself to do it when you’re upset and can’t keep up with the magical drama erupting all around you, and it’s very refreshing and restorative. Do it any way you want, and however you are able. This study will help a lot. As Andy reminded us, Nitya, and Patanjali, are going to present the immediacy of truly knowing to us in many, many different guises. It’s a theme Nitya reworked endlessly.

There was method in his madness.

Part II

Notes from the previous sessions, 2008. I’m including most of it because this Letter is centrally critical. It includes really wonderful contributions from several of the old hands, such as Anita, Brenda, Charles and Deb:

8/12/8

Letter Ten

The tenth Letter is densely packed with ideas, several of which could easily take up a whole evening’s discussion. It’s also hard to read, because a lot of previous knowledge has to be

brought to bear on it. Happily, group contemplation opens up avenues that unveil unforeseen aspects and wind up being extremely helpful. Last night was one of those occasions when once we got started there was some beautiful and germane sharing and exploration.

We read the last paragraph first, because it reveals the gist, particularly the last two sentences: “We live with the ambivalence of identifying with the rationale at one time and then shifting the identity to the procreative at another. Yoga is attained only by extricating the discerning intelligence from the continuous drama of recurring modulations and their incentives.”

Nitya uses the term rationale uniquely in this Letter to mean the proclivity for knowing, and likewise the word procreative indicates the proclivity for doing. When our knowing falls short we encounter doubt, and when our doing is disrupted it is revealed as hesitation. Doubt and hesitation in this sense are serious impediments to a unified or yogic life. As Nitya puts it, “Just as doubt inhibits the full illumination of knowing, hesitation inhibits actualization.” Paradoxically, extricating our psyches from being engrossed in “the drama” allows us to bring our best effort to both knowing and doing. We don’t turn our back to it and walk away, but get it in perspective, exactly as Krishna advises Arjuna when he wants to flee from the battlefield.

Anita grokked the idea in terms of a recent conflict with her daughter, which we can think of in general terms. Her feelings were hurt, and in the past this would have led to a lengthy exchange of barbs and pleas, lots of semi-satisfactory back and forth, but this time she took into account her daughter’s side and was able to rise above her personal feelings to attain compassion, both for her daughter and wonderfully, herself too. It made it easy to forgive and let go—well, easier anyway. These things are seldom easy, but the improvement they bring validates the struggle

to extricate “the discerning intelligence from the continuous drama of recurring modulations and their incentives.”

Charles asked for illumination of why we fall short of unitive action and become mired in doubt and hesitation, so we used his fairly typical childhood as an example. He was expected by his social milieu to play football and go to church, but his inner promptings (samskaras and vasanas) longed for a far different path through life. Charles responded to the conflict more bravely than most, sticking doggedly to his own lights, so to speak. Most people become seriously confused at this point, and if they aren't confused yet pressure is applied until they are, as their inner light is overwhelmed by social directives. They learn to believe they should go to church and play football, and their odd feelings to be unique or unusual are buried, shut away in shame. Even if they are strong enough to wave their freak flag and be themselves, the social pressure provides ample fodder for doubt and hesitation that they may struggle with for many years or even decades.

Brenda said that one especially tragic outcome of this conflict is that the individual often has to push against the impinging social forces with all their might, and in the process becoming permanently established in rebellion. It's hard to regain one's balance in the midst of a game of tug of war. As a third party, she has had some success in healing this type of wound within her family, and it seems like this is a situation where a more detached person can be very helpful. She could see that at heart everyone wanted to love each other, but they had become entrenched and dogmatic about their differences. Again, the samskaras of familial love are being subverted by the contradictory demands of religion and social duties, and the result is tragic. It takes some form of guru, something to remove the darkness, to bridge the gap. Happily, Brenda overcame her hesitations long ago to fulfill just such a role.

Deb admitted that early in her work with Guru Nitya, he characterized her as having chronic hesitation, so she was a bit of an expert on the subject. She realized it was all those contrary voices, our superego as Freud would have it, that grab you just as you are about to act and hold you back. It took many years for her to gain confidence in her own beliefs and motivations. She is finding her new avocation as a singer a way to feel that empowerment in her core. She was always inhibited to sing, due to childhood traumas of the usual sort, but now she is trusting that her body knows how to do it and if she just lets go of the doubts, beautiful music emerges. She is fortunate to have a teacher who knows this too. Not all do. And presumably learning to let go and sing can be carried over into every corner of the arena of life.

The Gita concludes a discussion on doubt in IV, 42: “Therefore, sundering with the sword of Self-knowledge this ignorance-born doubt residing in the heart, stand firm in the unitive way, and stand up, Arjuna.” This is the call the Gurukula wants to echo, the call to be ourselves and live life to the fullest.

As we’ve noted before, the small classes tend to embolden the shier members to step up to the microphone. This time we looked directly at why people hold back even in a very supportive setting. Brenda related that she always resolves to sit quiet and just listen, because she doesn’t want to be humiliated in front of all the knowledgeable people in the class. Probably this is the dominant feeling with 4/5 of the attendees, and is precisely a kind of doubt Nitya is addressing here. We sit in a roomful of people who all believe that they are less worthy than everyone else. Heck, we live in a society where a large proportion feels that only other people matter, that they don’t measure up and so they should just stay out of the way. They don’t readily notice when they say something and all those supposedly “superior” others find what they say

enlightening. In fact, reality isn't the problem so much as negative samskaras that cause us to live in the past.

Several of us recalled sitting in early schoolrooms and being humiliated, laughed at, told we were wrong and so on. It doesn't take too much of that before we decide to hang back on the periphery more or less permanently. The smaller number of bossy kids learn they can pretty much push everyone else around, and they rise to the top in a structure that rewards aggression.

It's true that all of us have some degree of aggressiveness in our personality, but class is in part a training ground for how to interact on a respectful basis, with no need to fight whatsoever. With rare exceptions I think we do well in this respect. We take to heart Narayana Guru's admonition to share knowledge with the aim of uplifting everyone, rather than arguing to win. Those who harbor dark urges to hurt other people's feelings don't find the Gurukula enjoyable enough, and they move on.

Anyway, the Letter teaches us that full knowledge dispels doubt, and a full commitment to a well-conceived action program overcomes hesitation. We got to practice the preaching on site last night. Knowing that the doubts come from past hangovers and not present circumstances, allowed everyone to speak with confidence. The class ended with very good feelings of fellowship, exemplifying the ideal of yoga.

Part III

The most dramatic psychic attainment of all, better than ESP, teleportation, shrinking, expanding, and all the rest, is the ability to see things as they are. What with relativity, the uncertainty principle, and the findings of neuroscience and psychology that what we see is colored by what we believe, arriving at a clear understanding of a situation is a supreme achievement. Anything less leaves us wreathed in doubt. Nitya hints at this when he says,

“The partial dysfunction of the discerning intellect that results in doubt is caused by the non-apprehension of the distinguishing mark, *lakshana*. The fragmentation of the field can be caused by external as well as internal reasons.”

Yoga is not a ratification of naivete, but many of its adherents seem to believe it is. It is a way of transcending the drama so we can see clearly. The drama is partly our own hysterics, and these we have addressed repeatedly in our studies. However, a significant part of our confusion comes from the intentional disruption of the field by external forces. Followers of Machiavelli, Leo Strauss, and other pragmatic philosophers, not to mention ordinary advertisers and propagandists in general, have a stake in manipulating perceptions in their favor. All are aware that the typical human is very generous in giving the benefit of the doubt to others and trusting in their benign motives, and this very trust is their best friend in perpetrating swindles great and small. Tremendous energy and planning goes into disguising the ripoffs as being patriotic or even divinely approved. A true yogi can intuit the real intentions below the flimflam, and resist being taken in. Sometimes serious meditation and fact finding are required to get to the bottom of it. The facts about the use of propaganda are abundant, but many seekers of truth choose to ignore them as being causes, rather than solutions, to problems. Many dogs can be let lie, but anyone who is going to become fervent in a cause should carefully examine the motivations and vested interests of their leaders.

The childish ideal of “see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil,” allows people to be led into all sorts of heinous blind alleys, and produces an ugly form of insular attitude that is the opposite of compassion. We should be very careful to not go off half-cocked, based on half-baked thinking, but to hold off until the distinguishing marks, the *lakshana*, have been ascertained. This often requires being open to ideas that at first hearing appear to be

outside the range of acceptability, because that range is almost always the product of well-planned propaganda in the first place.

The most critical factor here is that matters often appear certain when we should still be in doubt. We only know a little bit, but presume the rest based on good faith and all that. If our certainty is a hallucination based on wishful thinking manipulated by composed imagery, we may charge off to war against everyone's best interests. As Thomas Merton warns in *Faith and Violence*, "Our idols are by no means dumb and powerless. The sardonic diatribes of the prophets against images of wood and stone do not apply to our images that live, and speak, and smile, and dance, and allure us and lead us off to kill." Doubt is an honest condition that keeps us reined in until all is known. We can't know everything, but it is relatively easy to know a lot more than we do. Until then, we should be glad to hesitate to act rashly.

* * *

From the first study group of Nancy's. This is my last essay before the brain injury of 2/20/10:

2/7/10

Yoga Letter Ten

Wow. The tenth Letter is one of those that "says it all"! Nitya's writings are filled with essays like this, where you think, "What else is there?" And then he himself answers the question for you by unveiling yet another perspective that throws light far and wide. Wow.

Doubt and hesitation epitomize the curtailed abilities of modern psychically castrated human beings. It would be hard NOT to find an example of them anywhere you look, or their flip side, foolhardy humans blustering full speed ahead without having taken

into account the full picture of the situation, oblivious of the reefs dead ahead.

Interestingly, early in our relationships, Nitya characterized my wife's weak point as Chronic Hesitation, and mine as Chronic Doubt. So we have been meditating on these for a long time. They easily become chronic because there is no readily apparent loss when you fail to act or fail to know, and instead spend a lot of time stewing about your shortcomings. No axe falls. The walls don't come tumbling down. It just means you've just become "normal." Which is too bad, because you are in the process of abandoning your life. We who are unhorsed by doubt and hesitation all too often see our only option as joining the slave parade trudging through the dust of the roadside. At least they know where they're going! Or do they?

Of course, we should doubt very sincerely all socially accepted paradigms and hesitate to participate in them. We are capable of so much better than that!

Arjuna's deeply felt doubts about warfare caused him to not just hesitate, but to refuse to participate. Then his guru Krishna taught him how to stand up straight and redirect his energies to more noble goals. This is the call that Nitya is making to us here, though somewhat more subtly. He wants us to figure it out for ourselves, so he holds back from blurting out the obvious conclusion we should be making. Krishna didn't want to leave any room for doubt. "Therefore, sundering with the sword of Self-knowledge this ignorance-born doubt residing in the heart, stand firm in the unitive way, and stand up, Arjuna," he said in IV, 42.

"Just as doubt inhibits the full illumination of knowing, hesitation inhibits actualization of what you know. Hesitation primarily shows the meagerness of the energy that is released to surface as an incentive." Wow again. Meager energy, half-baked thinking. That's us. Human beings reduced to shadows. The divine

beings who we are get routinely crushed by the demands of a cruel world keyed to exploit our weaknesses.

Well, we know all that now. It's good there is still a small voice in the wilderness calling us to wake up and live life to the full. Without the clarion call of Krishna's conch rousing us from our confusion, where would we be?

I guess I should give one concrete example from my own experience. My wife Deb has always been bothered by a lot of what I do and say. I frequently step on toes, usually unintentionally, and when I'm not doing that I'm jamming my foot in my mouth, as the saying goes. Often, when I have really hurt her feelings in the past, she hesitated to say anything to me about it. She comes from a family where they throw it right back in your face, so she is very cautious about rocking the boat. But then the hurt would be compounded, either by me continuing my bad behavior, or it just eating at her, unresolved from before. The more she hesitated, the bigger the barrier grew to telling me what was wrong with me. I would be blissfully ignorant, though sometimes I'd wonder what was the matter. Anyway, Deb's misery would build up like a smoldering volcano, until it would explode in irrational fury. The triggering problem would be lost in the welter of angry feelings.

Meanwhile, Mr. Chronic Doubt (me) would be feeling that my very existence was responsible for the whole problem. Of course I was at fault, because I was no good. The self-doubt would be tinged with self-pity, and so my own hurt feelings would exacerbate the problem, preventing me from dealing with the situation in a mature manner. So the storm would drive us apart, into our separate worlds, polarized against each other. It isn't so much that the original complaint was that grievous, and it might have been eminently solvable. But the habits of doubt and hesitation, which go together in everyone, are in fact quite grievous, and they made for explosive disasters between us. As

with so many of life's serious problems, we resist attending to them with sufficient time and energy, so we need to be tricked into confronting them by superficially trivial triggers. And if we only deal with the trigger, the underlying problem is never satisfactorily addressed. It's a way for our egos to avoid dealing with the real spiritual blockage.

This is a tough nut to crack and it takes a lot of hard work to overcome the resistance. Nitya gives us a hint here to remind us where we're going in this study, which implies one solution: "Yoga is attained only by extricating the discerning intelligence from the continuous drama of recurring modulations and their incentives." In this letter the technique used is to take enough time to fully understand the situation, and then gather enough energy to be able to live in it appropriately, not as a response, but on the cutting edge of our own awareness. What fun! But it won't be easy, say our doubts. Such unhelpful modulations have got to go. Furthur!

A footnote: in the last set of responses, Sashi talked about her meditation program being disrupted by a new puppy. Actually, there are few better meditations than a new puppy! They push the Cute button right in the center of your heart. We think we are supposed to sit there all solemn and worshipful, but a puppy is full of life. It is bursting with enthusiasm and can barely be restrained. Its high spirits are infectious. We should recognize that that is how WE should feel, if not all the time at least much more often than we do. At least sometimes we should feel our hearts brimming over with the blissful newness of existence. Puppies have no doubts or hesitations whatsoever, at least until we start to discipline them. So please don't feel like you're missing out on your "program" when you are called to be licked and loved, and maybe nipped and peed on into the bargain. It's God speaking to you directly through her agent! Live it up! Join in the play!