

2022 Patanjali Class

4/19/22

14 – Yoga Letter Thirteen

Deb opened with a reminder that Nitya often described us as co-creators of the universe, an appellation both poetic and actual. Many impressions come to us continuously, while from inside they are matched with memories and reactions that interact with them. He called this a confection. Deb framed our challenge as trying to see through the confection to the core of being. The world we live in being our personal river that is ideally flowing in that direction, equipoise comes from trying to understand this complex interpretive process. It's a large assignment.

The special Narayana Gurukula use of 'confection' is nice, since while its first definition is the process of making something out of parts, it also describes a candy or other sweet, which most of us hope to be perceived as. Curiously, the word follows (in my Random House dictionary, remember how you could look at similarly spelled words while you were perusing one?) *confabulation*, "replacement of a gap in memory by a falsification that the subject accepts as correct." Definitely one of the major weaknesses in relying heavily on memory to fill in the details of our world.... Our confections are substantially confabulated.

Deb continued that how we participate as co-creators is critical, as we are not passive recipients or mere victims: we contribute to what is going on, and have options that can be either helpful or not. Any two people will have different experiences and explanation in any situation, and it isn't that one is right and the other wrong. She invited examples of when this happened, that we were aware of. Part II has an informative batch we came up with in 2008.

Charles thought of this as triggers: we're going along fine, and suddenly a word or a look is all it takes to set you off, and

suddenly you're five years old again. Your infantile reaction produces a countereffect, and it becomes like a game of ping pong.

Because we believe so strongly in the truth of our own position, we tend toward overreaction.

Charles laughingly added that it happens so fast, it's there before you know it. I suggested that if we took time to reflect, while accepting the reality of the other's position to them, at least, we might not get so ensnarled. Plus, we could make repairs.

A sweet example of Deb's premise appeared like magic. Charles denigrated himself as being filled with fantasies and misunderstandings, easily caught in delusions, and holding up Andy as a paragon of measured thought and reasoned responses. Andy assured him his faith is misplaced. He realizes we imagine we are just parachuting into a world that already exists, but we are truly co-creators, and we should realize this.

Anita offered an example for Deb's request that still makes her laugh, decades later. When her daughter was in high school, she was a single parent, hyper-vigilant about protecting her in every way imaginable. One night, near bedtime, she heard strange noises outside, and panicked. She flung the door open and yelled at the top of her lungs. She could vaguely see people running away in the dark. Feeling as though she had saved the day, she was shocked that her daughter was mortified at what she's done. It turned out those were her daughter's friends, doing a teenage prank of TP-ing the yard: throwing toilet paper into the trees and bushes, as inexpensive festoons. Her daughter was mad at her for yelling at her friends who were doing such a nice thing for her.

Deb's example was how the memory of our favorite music has such an ability to lift our mood, by evoking the love we associate with it.

Letter Thirteen has a very important paragraph relating to Patanjali's opening salvo, *citta vritti nirodha*—yoga is the restraint or inhibition of mental modifications. Usually this is taken to mean

making Herculean efforts to cease all modifications, but here we are directed to do away with unhelpful ones and enjoy the vast number of delightful and interesting ones left, after the excess baggage has been discarded. Nitya uses a sunset for his example:

The element of happiness that permeates both a situation and its witness sometimes becomes manifested as a time-transcending presence that has the quality of a beatitude or non-eventuality. Take for example, the situation where you are surrounded by a beautiful panorama and your eyes are focused on the changing colors of the setting Sun. The pale blue sky, blushing clouds, gentle breeze, your rhythmic breath, and unidentified thoughts that gently pass in your head are all one with your inner state of peace. Although technically there are modulations of consciousness, they are like the alpha waves of a relaxed brain. Hence, that can be qualified as a natural cessation of *citta vritti* (mental modulation). (YS, 367)

Deb read out a complementary section of the Letter:

In spite of the vast dimension of the subjective realm involved, the happenings of the external world are not to be overlooked and minimized; becoming overly preoccupied with the interiorization of the whole phenomenon is likely to alienate you from the ongoing process of the perennial flow of life in which your greater reality lies.

What we're trying to bring about is a delicious confection of subject and object, where they enjoy mutual participation. This should not be dismissed as "only the horizontal," which is alienating. Deb averred that giving equable emphasis to both poles of the equation is how we achieve balance. We don't just retreat from the world, because it is truly our "greater reality." Attuning

our inner and outer worlds is healthy and brings “clarity of awareness.” (She admitted to trying to find substitute terms for her favorite, *transparency*.)

Paul is coming to realize that learning a new concept or skill actually makes us better in many ways. There’s always going to be coloring present. We can’t prevent this, so maybe we should accept it? He’s beginning to suspect that striving for perfection actually *denies* existence. When Nitya talks about our life’s purpose, he figures feeling itself is part of that purpose. Hooray! That means we can make mistakes, and it’s okay.

This is so important! Perfection means you handle mistakes well, not that you don’t have any. The fear of imperfection comes from being punished as children for our natural curiosity—we learn we are supposed to follow orders or else, and we shrivel inside. We should welcome mistakes as learning opportunities instead of shrinking from them as inviting suffering. Verse 95 in *That Alone* has a wonderful section on mistakes that I’ve quoted often, including this paragraph:

This verse is for all people to become light-hearted. We should see the light side of life rather than becoming so grumpy about everything. If you make a mistake it’s because Mother Nature wants you to make it. So don’t have any sense of guilt, make your mistakes gladly. If you don’t make little mistakes, God will call out to you: “Fool! I gave you a chance. I sent you to the world, and you didn’t make any mistake. Stupid! Get out!” If you are here in this world, make some mistakes. Maya is sitting there and asking us to do all these things. Nataraja Guru used to tell us in the Gurukula that we should make interesting mistakes, not stupid or clumsy ones. Whatever mistakes you make should be very clever and interesting.

Well, our mistakes when examined give us plenty to work with, and ideally they turn out to be clever and interesting, rather than confining and degrading.

All it requires is being truly open to what's going on. When we make a mistake the first impulse is to cringe and tighten up, like we're about to be struck. We want to hide the evidence. Even thinking of it as a mistake is poor framing. We're simply living. One person's mistake is another's star performance.

Bill's takeaway from the study so far is that transcendence naturally comes when we are quiet and absorbed. You are just *being*. Just watching. The goings-on are secondary. They are the *becoming* part. And learning to watch without involvement gets better with practice. Deb reiterated: don't fight—be open.

Nancy spoke in favor of positive triggers, like the music Deb mentioned, or smells, which are closely associated with fond memories. It's possible to cultivate good memories from our world, leading to beautiful states we can reach on our own accord.

That is, if it isn't clear, a major intent of the class.

Deb has one of those positive triggers she taps into often—sitting under a mango tree with Edda Walker in Varkala. Bringing it up reactivates the bliss of that most wonderful of times.

Paul regretted that more often his reaction to triggers is to go berserk, due to his fear of pain and difficulties. He is really bothered when he doesn't live up to someone else's expectations. He's now getting to be okay with having good intentions, yet failing to meet the demands made on him, some of which are his own. Which is huge, frankly. We live in a time when the only acceptable pose is "I'm perfect, and you're not. So get it together. My way." It's easy for gentle, caring souls to endlessly grieve their failings in the eyes of judgmental types, including deceased authority figures. Such types will never fail to find fault with us, so we have to supply our own forgiveness. This is another skill that

gets better with practice. Or maybe it's the same skill, in a different setting....

Charles lamented how as an artist he is always dramatizing, proving that he is negative and delusional. Again, he nodded to Andy as a paragon of virtue, always so measured and thoughtful. Andy's art was in replicating Narayana Guru's highest teachings, while his (Charles's) was chaotic and personal.

Again, proving our theme, Andy assured him that he felt exactly the opposite: He envies Charles. Charles's art is spontaneous, while his is imitative, relying on someone's else's ideas. Terrific ideas, but still, not coming from true creativity. He remembers a phone call from Tyagi Swami, who asked him what he was doing. "I'm illustrating Narayana Guru's Atmopadesa Satakam." Tyagi commented, "Oh! Your crime." (This might not have been Tyagi's intent.)

From my perspective, both artists—all artists, really—rely on ideas they are aware of, and interpret them in unique and readily identifiable ways as being their own. All the "who's better? Who's more creative?" business is impedimentary. Andy and Charles are both creative, and love doing what they do. How do you beat that? It's the history of harsh judgment and competitiveness that takes the fun out of it, and they've both learned to judge their own work unfairly. A little of that fosters improvement, but too much is too bad. That's where the craving for perfection comes from—the only unassailable position is perfection, all else risks judgment under God, as some religious-types put it. So nothing you do is ever good enough.

We got into a long discussion of *vikalpa*, unsubstantiated imagination. It doesn't relate directly to creativity, by the way, it's about misplaced ideas related to our experiences, where, as Nitya says, "The result is getting caught again and again in situations that spell contradiction and drawing conclusions that are absolutely baseless." We can see that artists have a coherent style because of

the memory substantiation within their imagination. They have reasons for what they do, and they are communicating those reasons in various ways: visual, audible, even verbal. Charles aptly described it as improvising on a theme, from memory.

Deb related being with our grandson Jai over the weekend. He was entranced by koi in a pond, and kept saying, “Oh, wow!” She had to hold him back from jumping in the water with them. It’s surely a kind of samadhi. Interestingly, two weeks earlier (he’s now 15 months old) he wouldn’t have noticed the fish at all. A vast amount of development has gone into making him aware of his world, and it will continue to develop, hopefully forever. Without it, he would remain a baby. Right now he has more neurons than any adult, and in a few months they will start to get paired back, as he reinforces certain pathways and ignores others. It’s totally natural and necessary. He’s honing his awareness, coming from a healthy grounding of immense bliss.

Deb read a most relevant poem that asked to come to class:

Forget  
by Czeslaw Milosz

English version by Robert Hass  
Original Language Polish

Forget the suffering  
You caused others.  
Forget the suffering  
Others caused you.  
The waters run and run,  
Springs sparkle and are done,  
You walk the earth you are forgetting.

Sometimes you hear a distant refrain.

What does it mean, you ask, who is singing?  
A childlike sun grows warm.  
A grandson and a great-grandson are born.  
You are led by the hand once again.

The names of the rivers remain with you.  
How endless those rivers seem!  
Your fields lie fallow,  
The city towers are not as they were.  
You stand at the threshold mute.

I accessed this [here](#). The appended comments are so germane, I'm including them:

Commentary by Ivan M. Granger

There's something so healing about this poem. It's strange to speak of the healing power of forgetting, but there's something here for us to consider.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I can forgive, but I can't forget"? That is a person who hasn't yet learned to forgive. Perhaps that person isn't yet ready to forgive but doesn't want to admit it. For some hurts, forgiveness cannot be rushed. But it must, on some level, remain the goal. And to achieve forgiveness, one must forget in a certain sense.

No one truly forgets any experience. But we can mean different things when we speak of forgetting. There is willful blindness, which should never be a goal. This is what the person who says he won't forget is trying to avoid, but usually what they are choosing to do is to nurse old hurts in secret, deriving a sense of purpose in continued suffering.

There is another kind of forgetting that isn't forgetting, that is to let go of the repeating cycle of internal dialog and its associated hot, binding emotions. To do so is an affront to the ego's sense of self-importance. It requires humility, perhaps even weariness. To let go in this way makes us feel temporarily vulnerable. We usually carry our wounds like shields, imagining that surrounding ourselves with past hurts fortifies us against future injury. The truth is less direct and more elegant: Those shield walls built of past pains trap us. They limit our movement and limit our interaction with the rich drama of life. Letting go of those hurts frees us to more dynamically experience life, while simultaneously allowing us to better recognize and avoid those future hurts. Put simply, the more shielded the heart is with remembered hurts, the less it feels and knows and experiences joy.

A good reminder to myself as much as anyone: No one makes it through this life without acquiring some hurts. The well-lived life is not one that has avoided pain; it is one that has integrated that pain along with its delights and discoveries, and in that rich mixture sees the lineaments of its own face.

Of course, seeing this, we see something much bigger than we imagined ourselves to be. Approaching this immense vision of Self, we fall silent.

You stand at the threshold mute.

Andy summed up the message of the Thirteenth Yoga Letter: it's about radical acceptance and openness.

For the closing meditation, we referenced the opening thoughts of the letter, starting with "Your seat is concrete." The old

Class Notes mention two parallel meditations in *That Alone*, well worth a visit: pages 70-72, and 339-40. Nitya led us in those kinds of explorations fairly often, to dim down our false certainties about our experience. They demonstrate how much we are projecting, all the time. We used the second, shorter excerpt to end the class. It's found in verse 50, which I recommend rereading in toto. Nitya at his very best.

You are sitting here firmly. Close your eyes. What is that firmness underneath that you experience? It becomes very strange as soon as you try to look at it. You take the firmness of the ground for granted, but when you isolate it as an experience and try to understand it, it becomes quite vague. Just what is that firmness? You can borrow clichés from the scientists and say it is a gravitational pull you are experiencing, but with equal plausibility you could say that in the middle of the earth is a great green demon that is pulling you down with invisible claws. If you were to make a tunnel to the center of the earth you could see he is a very big, monstrous green demon. Who really knows? It may be the demon or it may be the force of gravity, but for us it is merely a strange experience. All you are sure of is your own knowledge. You know that there is a firmness. The firmness is your knowledge. Can you draw a line between the knowledge of the firmness and the one who is experiencing firmness? Can you say, "Up to this point is the knower of firmness and from here on firmness itself begins?" Not really. This is why I said that all the facts are put together by a fiction. They are all held together by what's called mind.

It is true, though, that you do experience a quality called firmness. When you turn on the faucet and water flows out of it, you know that this is very different from the solid spout of the pipe which just sits there and never moves. The water is flowing, and if you're not careful your cup or your sink will overflow. This is quite a different experience from firmness. Yet with all the difference, is it any different from your knowledge of the flow? Just what is this thing called flow, anyway?

Forgive me, I have to put in the last paragraph of verse 50:

You cannot get rid of all the waves and just have a pure ocean. That is what everybody is trying to do—sit firm and close the eyes so that you get rid of all thoughts and ideas, and then finally you are left with the pure, pure ocean of the Self. Narayana Guru says this is like someone taking a cake of soap to the washtub and trying to wash all the lather out of it. No matter how much you wash, it cannot be done. The more water you pour and the more you rub, the more the lather comes. Trying to get rid of all the thoughts and ideas in the mind in order to come to pure consciousness is like that. It is in and through all this that you have to see pure consciousness. It is not that you kill everyone in the world and then find peace. Let your good neighbors be there. Their dog may bark, but you can still be peaceful. See how it works for you today.

## Part II

The old Class Notes of 9/2/8 are exceptional for this Letter:

Nitya opens with a meditation that he expanded on many times, that of sorting out exactly what you experience while sitting from what you imagine is happening. You start off thinking, “I am sitting down for a meditation on a chair in Scott and Deb’s house.” But as you look closer, what you imagine as ‘you’ dissolves into a vast emptiness, and what you imagine as ‘chair’ and ‘house’ become fictitious as well. All you feel is a tiny bit of pressure in your derriere, almost nothing. Yoga meditation to reduce the vast panoply of projected images to their origin helps us to sort out the false from the real. Life being tough enough without adding to our burdens, we can free ourselves from toting the same old stuff around as our personal albatross.

I looked up the version of this meditation that appears in *That Alone* in greater detail. The one on 339-40 is worth revisiting, and a slightly different version without the seat appears on 70-72. The spit bug reference on 197 humorously portrays our urge to pad the ego with projections or ejections.

Nitya concludes the Letter with a summary of the various states of samadhi or equipoise, in his inimitable vernacular that demystifies the whole business. We will study these in depth in the upcoming Yoga Sutra classes. The most valuable part of today's lesson is to distinguish the false from the real, which automatically brings release from bondage and thus leads to samadhi. There is a virtually infinite field in which to use our insight and our friends' perspectives to pry off these chains, and that's what the class spent time doing. One person's foibles can easily be extrapolated to the next person's, so the sharing here can be especially valuable. The only problem is that the most valuable examples are rather personal and possibly embarrassing, though I find that most folks are relieved to find out that they are not alone in being tricked by their samskaras.

To keep the class from becoming too fearful, I gave a couple of lighthearted examples. "Chance" provided a perfect, neutral example. As we finished the chanting, someone saw a flash of headlights outside and said "Oh, Scotty and Eugene are here." We rearranged the room and put two more chairs, and then sat expectantly waiting for them to appear. They never did. Whether or not there was a car outside, everything else was imaginary. We live largely imaginary lives, constantly rearranging our furniture to suit our expectations, and being disappointed when they don't pan out. A lot of that effort is unnecessary.

Then a silly example. A friend I was staying with let me use her computer. We went into her office to see how it worked, and I hit a random key to bring it out of sleep mode. She was horrified, and gave me a stern lecture to *never* do that again! I could break

her valuable computer! Somehow she had come to believe that the only way to wake a computer safely was by tapping the space bar. When I tried to explain that it didn't matter in the least what key you hit, she got angry. She *knew* I was wrong, and no explanation or evidence was going to change her mind.

One of the class participants even defended her. Maybe she was right, and I was wrong. It's true that in many cases it is less obvious where truth lies, though in this case it was pretty easy to establish the facts. The point is that we often become doctrinaire about false beliefs, and self-examination means taking an honest and assisted look at those very things. Admitting we might be wrong opens the door to the process.

Lots of people also *know* that other races, castes, sexes, religions, and so on are stupid, inferior, dirty, ridiculous, dangerous—you name it. No amount of facts are going to dispel these beliefs if the belief-owner is bent on retaining them. When we mix up the actual and the imagined, as we so often do, Nitya reminds us “the result is getting caught again and again in situations that spell contradiction and drawing conclusions that are absolutely baseless.”

As children we unconsciously adopt our parents' prejudices, and it may take a profound event to break us loose from them. Jan gave the most poignant example of the evening. Growing up, she was led to believe that disabled people were no good, the dregs of society, hateful. Now she has a disabled son, she sees the human side of the equation, and her compassion easily extends to others also. Disabled people are just as precious as any of us. She has taken this further to realize that the hopes she may have harbored for what her son might accomplish are precisely that: her own hopes. Her son has different hopes and dreams, more in keeping with his capabilities in many respects. She knows to let him deal with those and not add her own worries and disappointments to his already heavy load. He is fortunate to not be burdened with at least

one of the prejudices laid on Jan when she was in her formative years.

Our discussion about this brought Susan to say how she realized that her children conceived of the world very differently than she did. Adults often have a powerful urge to enforce their personal vision on their kids, but sometimes the kids are right in having a different perspective. We might well wonder what tortures we put our kids through in the name of socializing or taming them “for their own good.”

Fred related a time when he was around ten or twelve years old. He was taking guitar lessons, and his teacher wanted him to learn to read music. He kept making excuses for why he couldn't or wouldn't, until one day she told him, “If you keep making a case for your limitations, you'll never get over them.” He thought it over for a couple of weeks, then went back to her and agreed to go ahead with his learning. He also told us he has a sign in the room where he gives guitar lessons now. It reads, “Never start a sentence by saying ‘I can't’ unless you end it with the word ‘yet’.” As in, “I can't do that hard thing... yet.” After class we were talking about his own struggles and he said in no uncertain terms, “I know I'll never get over that.” I was obliged to use his own logic and insist that he rephrased it to end with ‘yet’. Better to leave the door open than nail it shut.

Vyasa and I had talked earlier of the nearly universal feeling in the Gurukula class that everyone else is very wise and we are just a dummy. It keeps people on the sidelines or makes them go away without even tasting the bliss of class participation. In truth, we are all wise and have much to offer, even if we don't yet know the specific semantics of a particular milieu. We should dispense with the false beliefs that set others above (or below) us and participate as equals. All of us have led rich lives and thought about many things. “It is evident that everyone has truly experienced,” as Narayana Guru puts it in Atmo 48.

Yoga in one sense is thinking things through so the false notions attached to them are dispelled. So simple, yet often totally impossible. Often the breakthroughs come as an act of grace, but we have to make the effort. There are many techniques, but nothing so efficacious as joining in a group examination where there is mutual respect and circumspection in letting everyone have their say. We look forward to more examples being emailed as they occur to you out there in the hypotesphere.

We needn't remind everyone these simple examples are the tip of icebergs that can sink titanic ships. Wars, politics, injustices of all kinds, are rooted in socially sanctioned falsehoods. It would be a lot simpler to find the few examples where we *don't* project.... But that's a totally different meditation.

Nitya offers us an important caveat to all this self-examination:

In spite of the vast dimension of the subjective realm involved, the happenings of the external world are not to be overlooked and minimized; becoming overly preoccupied with the interiorization of the whole phenomenon is likely to alienate you from the ongoing process of the perennial flow of life in which your greater reality lies.

In other words, this is not about transcending the world and our participation in it, it's about living life to the fullest. Our environment teaches us, sustains us, and gives us opportunities to practice what we preach. It corrects our false projections and ratifies our true insights. It helps us to stay centered.

Anne's earlier example of the boy with a fatal cancer is apt here. He had every reason to descend into a nightmare world of self-pity and resentment of his fate. Instead, he engaged with people and situations around him, blessing their lives and his in the process, and serving as an inspiration and helpmate to everyone.

We aren't so different as Anne's friend. We all have a fatal prognosis, and it is up to us whether we embrace life or dither away our time in meaningless preoccupations.

Yoga means the harmonization of objective and subjective states, which reveals the numinous. The numinous is not revealed by endlessly scrubbing to erase all subjectivity, or worse still, by trying to disregard all objective elements. Ignoring actuality is an all-too-common fault of spiritual persuasions, and it is madness-making. As an antidote, we are struggling to link a beautiful value-vision with the real-life world in which we can express it. This is the route to samadhi laid out by yoga.

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My musings from the first Yoga Sutras study group, 8/8/10, are a self-examination, per Nancy's lesson:

There is definitely a relationship between our attitudes and what happens to us, seemingly the product of outside forces, but perhaps not. Those outside forces may well be inner archetypes projected like shadows onto the wall of our mental cave. The connection is very mysterious, however, between the imagery we perceive and its source. What is seen appears "through a glass darkly" rather than being straightforward and obvious.

One thing I've noticed in my life is that what we want to have happen acts like a shy deer. If we boldly try to catch hold of it, it runs away, but if we sit quietly and pretend to not notice, it just might come up and nuzzle your hand. At that point, if you try to grab it and hang on, it dissolves once again into nothingness. You have to maintain a studied disinterest for it to stick around.

Possibly this is why detachment is recommended, because without it the shy deer spirit always keeps its distance. We have to

let go to have any chance of gathering it in. Paradoxical, but there is no way around it.

To continue to mull over Plato's cave analogy, say we are sitting in front of a fire, looking at the wall. We see some shadow shape we like, so we get up and walk toward it. As we move away from the fire (the light source) the shadow rapidly shrinks and changes shape. By the time we reach the wall it no longer resembles what we were excited about.

In order to magnify what we are seeing, we need to move away from it, back toward the light source. If we do that, the shadow gets really big really fast.

Of course, we are still only toying with shadows. Plato counsels us to leave the cave and go out into the sunlight. Patanjali and Nitya want us to cease entertaining mental modifications, which might well be the same thing. Mental modifications are very much like the flickering of shadows on the walls of our confinement. What we (I) tend to do instead of following their advice is tinker with the details of the shadow, trying to pretty it up so it becomes a really beautiful display. The rishis are probably right that this is only an indulgence and a waste of time.

I haven't been able to think of a good recent illustration of how this works from my life, but I have noticed something interesting with other people. Occasionally someone comes to me for advice, and we have a good conversation. Often it's about a problem, a stuck place in the flow of their lives, or a need that is unfulfilled. My advice, based on Nitya's teachings and my own experience, is probably not too toxic, but I think the real benefit for someone is that they have an opportunity to dig into themselves and verbalize the situation. I do help them slightly to make the problem more clear and to expand their awareness of it. When they go, I feel like a mirror by the side of the road, with nothing to reflect anymore.

This sounds pretty ordinary, certainly. The interesting part is that later on I often notice that these people wind up with exactly what they need. There is usually a long time delay, and no one ever associates the resolution with our conversation. Well I have my suspicions, but I keep my mouth shut, not the least because I had nothing to do with it in any real sense. I didn't pull any strings or intervene with God or anything. Somehow the ball got rolling because attention was paid by the person in need. Something mysterious in the self-examination that the person was having fertilized the seed that they needed to begin to grow in their lives. It happened as they were complaining to me that it wasn't happening.

This tells me that the same thing must have happened when I used to consult Nitya about my own life. I always believed he was "fixing things" behind the scenes, but he was more likely standing as an open invitation for me to bare my soul—to myself. His advice supported where the spirit was already going, but the real dynamic was within me. He didn't need to change, but I did.

I haven't the slightest doubt that if someone came to me with a request and expected me to enable it, nothing at all would come of it. Even less would transpire if I promoted myself as having such an ability. But I can secretly enjoy the magic that I see taking place. Someone cries out to the universe, and the universe responds: not in the way they expect, and not with any noticeable connection to their desires, but in a very appropriate and (you might say) spiritually excellent manner.

It isn't too hard for me to take these observations to heart. I do my best to understand the conundrums I find myself in, and I inwardly offer a kind of prayer to the universe to help me learn and act with honor. I don't expect a direct response, but I often find my path becomes a little easier to follow. I have learned a kind of faith in the "rightness of things" that helps me to have confidence in dark as well as bright times.

In this Letter Thirteen, Nitya is talking about the curious intermixing of the concrete and the ideal, and what I've written are some observations of the complex relation they bear with each other. Whatever you think of what I've said, rest assured that a simplistic one-to-one correspondence between the actual and the virtual, a.k.a. the horizontal and the vertical, doesn't exist, but an inscrutably mysterious connection is definitely there.

I'd like to add some timeless words of wisdom from Lao Tzu that strike me as related. From the Tao Te Ching, (v. 38), Gia-fu Feng's translation:

A truly good man is not aware of his goodness,  
And is therefore good.  
A foolish man tries to be good,  
And is therefore not good.

A truly good man does nothing,  
Yet leaves nothing undone.  
A foolish man is always doing,  
Yet much remains to be done.

When a truly kind man does something, he leaves nothing undone.  
When a just man does something, he leaves a great deal to be done.  
When a disciplinarian does something and no one responds,  
He rolls up his sleeves in an attempt to enforce order.

Therefore when Tao is lost, there is goodness.  
When goodness is lost, there is kindness.  
When kindness is lost, there is justice.  
When justice is lost, there is ritual.  
Now ritual is the husk of faith and loyalty, the beginning of confusion.

Knowledge of the future is only a flowery trapping of Tao.  
It is the beginning of folly.

Therefore the truly great man dwells on what is real and not what  
is on the surface,  
On the fruit and not the flower.  
Therefore accept the one and reject the other.

(What is awkwardly called here “knowledge of the future,” in the  
next-to-last verse, Ursula Le Guin translates as opinion. Yoga  
students might prefer the word ‘expectation’.)