

2022 Patanjali Class

4/26/22

15 – Yoga Letter Fourteen

Deb admitted when she reads admonishments like this in the Letter, it feels almost like Nitya is an army sergeant giving orders about keeping things clean and neat, and there is a kind of association that springs to her mind that there are certain outwardly clean habits we should have. At first she thought it was odd, but then she realized he is relating to previous Letters about our misinterpretations, all of the ways we cloud the world with our confusion. He is asking us to look at those clouds and let them go. Let our life be clean and open in that way. Nitya is speaking of something more intimate and more practical than neatness: what are the vasanas and projections that clog our lives? How is it that our physical and psychological life is mired with so much detritus and chaos?

Andy sympathized that holding onto those clogs demands a great deal of energy. On the other hand, when you are doing something interesting, it's surprising how energized you are, as you are not entertaining fantasies with emotional hooks that have nothing to do with the present moment. Deb agreed: if you get yourself tied up in old emotional stuff you get exhausted, though if you are doing something you are engaged about, you have plenty of energy.

Bill spoke of the similarity between Patanjali's Yoga and the Buddhist Noble Paths, and pointed out that Nitya is giving us a clear introduction to yoga by understanding how the mental modifications keep us from clarity, as well as taking responsibility for living a life that encourages it.

Deb noted one of the ways of doing that: we refrain from rejecting and fighting, but continue to immerse ourselves in what

we know is our true, luminous, beneficent Self. Our mental disturbances are eroded by that kind of continual immersion.

A paragraph in Part II that few will see, nested far down in the old notes, clearly delineates the topic:

Ah, Letter 14 is so great, an emphatic “kick in the pants” to get going with something that engages our enthusiasm. It’s really a mystery how we move from lethargy to directed action. If we wait as if it will be arriving from outside, it might be a long time in coming. Yet at the same time something in us resists forcing it arbitrarily. We have an inner sense of justice that demands that it rise up on its own, unbidden, so we wait where maybe we should take some initiative. Unfortunately, in doing so we may subtly suppress our legitimate interests and get caught up in looking out for them instead of simply letting them flow. We may wind up “stewing in our own juices” as my mother used to say. It is a razor’s edge to find the middle way between forcing (which is usually based on learned pressures) and allowing our natural and healthy inclinations to bubble up to the surface.

Nitya wants us to know that life is simpler than we make it out to be. We aren’t seeking a rare and inaccessible treasure, only our own true nature. He assured us many times that right in the midst of immanence is where we experience transcendence. Immanence means: what’s happening *now*.

I read out the ending of chapter 13 in *That Alone*, which elaborates on the idea of doing nothing and everything at the same time. It’s the opposite of the Western motivational sermon, “I’m not okay right now and I need to do something to become okay.” It’s about entraining the divine into ourselves. We aren’t mounting a war with our demons, we’re just becoming real:

So, at the very height of the excitement and joy of gaining something, you are asked instead to relate it to the very core, to spiritualize that experience. You are not asked to kill the joy, but only to look for its essence. You have to realize that it is not produced by objects, but is an essential part of your own divine nature. If the joy we see in a person, in a desirable thing, opens a window for us to see the Lord, the Absolute, the Divine, which is our own truest Self, then everything becomes a door for us to enter into our innermost sanctum. This critical process is described in the first two lines of the verse: “Gather your mind-modalities as flowers and make an offering of them to the Supreme, who transcends all the necessities of the world.”

You are not asked here to withdraw from everything, but to transcend everything. This is accomplished by spiritualizing, by seeing everything as divine. *Vananni*: a sense of reverence should come and fill your whole being. You are standing before a child, your own child, and thinking of it only as a child which has come from you. But when you look with this new vision, it is no more a child. You see the divine manifestation in it. You can see your union with the divine in that which makes your heart go to the child’s heart, and the feeling of trust the child has in you. When you see that union it is no longer a discomfort, it is a devotion. You are not bound. Otherwise you feel obligated and bound to everything to which your senses take you. Now it is glorious that you are given an opportunity to be with your own real being. With that reverence which comes and fills you, your work becomes a devotion. It is a service, an offering, a dedication.

Sakala mazhinnu means you are no more a person bound within the shell of this human mortal coil. You become expanded. Your expanded being fills everything, embraces everything. The spirit encompasses everything, and you are one with it. Now you are liberated; you have become free because the spirit is free.

When you become intoxicated with this oneness, you may become funny for some time. You want to declare this to everyone, and you run after them saying, “Do you see what I see? I have found the Way! I got it, and you want it!” In this way we become not helpful but a menace. Cool down. Cool it. There is nothing to be excited about: you are just becoming real. If you have found it, others will find it. They are already in the process. Let them take their own time and do it in their own way. Don’t get excited.

The world becomes much better. A demonic world is now transformed into a divine world. A bound person has become a free being. The worlds of interests just come and go like dreams. They are enjoyed, as dreams are enjoyed. You know that it is only a passing show. Even a passing show should have its merit, so you give it that much credit. Then you own the world, and along with it you become one with the Divine that is behind all that. Right in the world of immanence, you see transcendence.

This is the theme for today’s meditation. When we leave this place we will become involved in several worlds of interest. Each time a world of interest is created, watch how you come to it and what the central interest is. Then see how it wanes and you get into another one and another one. Each time you enter a world of interest, relate its central value to the Divine, to the one reality behind it all. This is your pilgrimage. In the evening, examine the pattern that flowed and unfolded through the whole day. The spirit of this is to become a continuous living reality. Call it back to mind again and again. (99-100)

Paul is grappling with his more Westernized understanding of transcendence, which requires fighting his way through things to get out of them. Like if you are drowning, you have to fight, and it’s more of a struggle if you have too many clothes on. He’s carried conditionings throughout his life that make him think you have to fight off what is wrong. Now he’s realizing that that which

we fight against gains more power. He mentioned Nitya's story about taming the demon, (posted in Part II), and he's coming to realize that transcendence isn't something you have to fight against to achieve, it's finding the thread to connect our experience to the Absolute, and Everything. When you have that kind of attention, a previous hell turns into heaven.

I might add that if you are drowning, the *less* you struggle the better off you are. After you take your clothes off, of course. Shoes first.

That's right: transcendence resides *within* immanence. It's not found somewhere else. You only find it in what is here now. So our journey is not a going away, it's a coming into. What makes it hard is how strictly we have been trained to do the opposite. It's crucial to realize you are not born a sinner, and don't need to transform into something that isn't yourself. The teaching is to come back to yourself, to restore you to yourself. Nothing here is saying what you should be "doing," because that would be pushing you out of yourself again.

For Karen, like most of us, it's been a struggle lately with all the news of wars. She uses a mantra to bring her back to the here and now right away. When she gets caught up in a conversation about all the misery, if she can just say her mantra over and over, it keeps her from getting caught up in the negativity that is out there in bucketsful right now. She is working on staying in tune with her own consciousness of yoga, being in her mantra.

Susan is feeling the same way, and she's been trying to not get so caught up in her thoughts and perseverations. These days she's going into her breath and her body. If she can do that, she is more in the present.

Deb lamented the layers upon layers of obscuring what is happening, and if we don't engage with them honestly we are just layering more projections on ourselves.

Anticipating Patanjali's opening salvo, the restraint of mental modifications, Paul feels that modifications seem to be things that cloud the present experience, and to say that we should withhold them, or else the effect of them, is to change what is in front of us. If that's true, then it is we who change or control them. I reminded him that we are not trying to restrain all modifications—a popular misunderstanding—just the unhelpful ones.

Bill read out the first part of the Letter:

Vyasa says, “Yoga cannot be achieved without burning away the dross and cultivating the finest intuitive ability to see and function with precision and harmony.” According to him, we stink with the prejudices and unwholesome habits that have been formed during our exposure to unexamined environments and recourse to blind reactions.

This definitely sounds like a Nitya quote dressed up as somebody else's, which he openly admitted to doing, often with Carl Jung. I couldn't find anything like it in the Gita. Regardless, the dross is the unhelpful modifications, and our finest intuitive abilities are the helpful ones. Bill wanted to emphasize that our studies help us function with harmony, and of course those features are nothing if not helpful mental modifications. In Deb's words, we are giving a good flushing to our old tarnished system of misunderstanding and getting ready for cultivating our finest intuitive abilities.

I suggested that we have all had long lifetimes of contemplation and observation, and many years of thinking deeply about the teachings of various masters, so we don't actually have to treat ourselves as know-nothings who are just starting out. That means we might be able to stop feeling sorry for our situation and go out and love life to the fullest, right now. Deb amplified the idea, saying if we are stuck in our head with inclinations and old habits, we are not connected to the moment. When we are in our

body we are in the present, like a flower unfolding. It's all part of that intuitive appreciation and energy.

According to Andy, we all have these moments when you return your self, that have a quality of remembrance. You return to your real self, return to a state of ease and pleasure and attention. We're all trying to touch that. He has that experience a number of times a day, when he remembers his real self. He likened it to what Karen was saying about her mantra, and Susan about getting back into her body. Andy told us about the Zen poet Gary Snyder, how he has a kind of presence and gravity that come from the attention that he has cultivated, and it makes his readings powerful: you can sense when you are presence of someone who spends most of their time in attention.

Bill summed up that operating from that place of harmony and insight is something we can all aspire to, because what comes of that is a clear vision instead of a muddled one. It's why you are doing tapas. It's an aspiration or a discipline or a practice, where living a clean life allows you to access that clarity. It's both an aspiration and a way of living.

Deb elaborated that this is a way to open yourself to who you are without all the shade and darkness and misunderstandings. We come back to who we are by letting go of superficial dead ends. She said, I can get up and futz around and read the news and get depressed, yet what I want to do is be who I am in a less clouded way. I have an aspiration to get rid of my distortions.

Paul felt that while we can accept transcendence as being within immanence, he still aspires to be there all the time. Deb concurred it's about touching home base. It's always present, and we come back and we operate from there, and then we get distracted and have to have an intention to return. Our abiding in it is not always consistent.

I figure the biggest chunk of dross is that we believe we are not the Absolute, so we cannot accept we *are* already the

Absolute. We keep envisioning ourselves as limited. All our misunderstandings can be catalogued under this heading. Deb agreed: our problem is that we conceive ourselves as separate individuals but the reality is that there is not a separate being anywhere.

Part II

The story Paul cited, from the end of chapter 46, in *That Alone*:

There is an Indian myth that a certain demon came and challenged Balarama, the brother of Sri Krishna. Balarama accepted the challenge. He went, raising his fist to smash its head. Then the demon became twice the size of Balarama. Seeing this, Balarama, who had psychic powers, grew double the size of the demon. The demon doubled in size again, and started lifting hills to throw at him. Then Balarama realized he could not overpower the demon. He turned to Sri Krishna and asked for help. Krishna smiled and said, "Brother, leave him to me. I'll deal with him."

The demon turned to Krishna and found that in his hand there was no weapon. Krishna stood with his hands open and smiled. Then the demon became the size of an average human being. Krishna still stood there with his bewitching smile and said, "Come on friend." He came close and became smaller than Krishna. Krishna patted him. He became very small. Then Krishna took him in his hand and stroked him. He became so tiny.

Then Balarama came and said, "Brother, I don't understand this. How did he become so small? How did you tame him?" He replied, "Brother, don't you know this demon's name?" "No." "This demon's name is Krodha, anger. When you become angry, you are only feeding him. He thrives on somebody else's anger. When you take away your anger, there is nothing to nourish him. He becomes less and less. So

when I give him love, there is nothing on which he can feed himself and he becomes very small.”

This is also the central teaching of Buddha: with hatred you never appease hatred, but with love you win all. (314-5)

* * *

This is one of the best old Notes I've come across:

9/9/8

Letter Fourteen

The shortest Letter of all has only two paragraphs, but they pack quite a punch. The first is:

Vyasa says, “Yoga cannot be achieved without burning away the dross and cultivating the finest intuitive ability to see and function with precision and harmony.” According to him, we stink with the prejudices and unwholesome habits that have been formed during our exposure to unexamined environments and recourse to blind reactions. Endless negative conditionings of karma have taken their deep-rooted seats in the series of interests that rise in our minds. To release the mind from them, cleansing is required. *Tapas* cleanses.

We've been doing just this in class for nearly forty years now, scouting for negative conditionings and getting over them. Endless is right! But pulling out poisoned arrows is way more fun than leaving them in. Plus, after awhile their residual poison gets flushed out of the system.

Deb dug out a perfect quote from our dear old friend That Alone, near the end of verse 13. She only read the first two

sentences, which sum up spiritual life about as neatly as it can be done. I want to add a little more:

You are not asked here to withdraw from everything, but to transcend everything. This is accomplished by spiritualizing, by seeing everything as divine. A sense of reverence should come and fill your whole being.... When you see that union it is no longer a discomfort, it is a devotion. You are not bound. Otherwise you feel obligated and bound to everything to which your senses take you. Now it is glorious that you are given an opportunity to be with your own real being. With that reverence which comes and fills you, your work becomes a devotion. It is a service, an offering, a dedication.

The class had a plethora of examples of meeting ordinarily hostile situations with a nonpolarized attitude as the way to “spiritualize” them. It’s very gratifying that the teachings have already had a positive impact on people’s lives. The upside is infinite.

One thing we didn't talk about was how when you put energy into a specific place, it builds up over time. This means if you meditate in one spot, or write, or read there, it becomes more and more conducive to the activity. That's why meditating in bed tends to become soporific, and is not usually recommended. That’s also why I can sit at the computer keyboard where I've been writing for twenty years and words start to flow with almost no effort.

Tapas means heating up. It isn't so much the habit of repetition, which can be deadening, but the cumulative energy expended that raises the psychic temperature. If you aren't very interested in something, we say you are lukewarm about it. If you aren't interested at all, we call it being cool or cold. Performing tapas means becoming hot for something. You do it because it matters to you, because you want to. This is the state where

positive transformation is not only possible, it is natural. You are drawn to learn and grow because it turns you on like nothing else.

Tapas is often thought of as forcing yourself to do what's "good" or what's "right" in opposition to your normal inclinations to laziness and selfishness and so on. I find this kind of a cheesy interpretation, though I suppose it has its place. But if force is required there's something missing that needs to be examined. It should be easy and fun to enter a spiritual state of mind. You are ready for it when mundane matters lose their grip on your imagination and the quest for truth becomes supremely attractive. For this reason, most people who are trying to spiritualize their lives have already shrugged off the obvious faults and are ready to expand their consciousness. They don't have to be bludgeoned into certain behavior patterns.

I hope the joy of a yogic attitude will eventually light a flame in each heart, so that it is not drudgery but a delight to work these teachings into daily experience. At the beginning, you need to set some time aside to review the meaning in your mind, and see how it applies to you specially. It doesn't take too long before it becomes ingrained—though this isn't instant pudding! We learn best alone, after getting some guidance from wherever it arrives from. This is private learning, the flight of the alone to the Alone.... But a soupçon of outside input helps a lot.

Several people have wondered, "What next? When do we get to the next level?" It's very simple: you get there when you put the teachings into practice.

Just like those who take music lessons and only "practice" during the lesson and not in between, some people come to the class and call it good for the week. A little like punching your card on Sunday at church and then "sinning away" the other six days. Sure you get something out of it, but progress is slow. Worse, it never gets the chance to permeate into your soul.

Digression: I can use the word soul unapologetically now, because Kurt Vonnegut rediscovered it around the time he was president of the Secular Humanist Society. He said that human awareness was a new thing in our part of the universe, a very special and unique thing. So special it could be called... soul. Near the end of *Timequake* he asserts that awareness travels at, “conservatively speaking, a million times the speed of light.” He goes on, “Your awareness... is a new quality in the Universe, which exists only because there are human beings. Physicists must from now on, when pondering the secrets of the Cosmos, factor in not only energy and matter and time, but something very new and beautiful, which is *human awareness*.” He pauses for a literary moment. “I have thought of a better word than *awareness*... Let us call it *soul*.”

Vonnegut was quoted in an LA Times book review around the same time as saying, “I’m free to do art, and presumably to keep my soul growing, by finding something else to do. Participation in the arts—drawing, dancing, and all that—makes the soul grow. That’s why you engage in it. That’s how you grow a soul.”

The ego is like the weather: everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it. Yet unlike the weather, the ego is eminently susceptible to our transformative efforts, and actually can be modified extensively.

As often noted, the aim is to expand the ego to be coextensive with the Absolute, not to destroy or damage it. To avoid the collateral problem of hyper-inflating the ego through such an association, it must be trained to know its humble place in the overall scheme of things. It must bow down in a sense to the greater reality, acknowledge its condition of absolute dependence, just as life on Earth is wholly dependent on the Sun. But life doesn't sit around kowtowing to the Sun. It uses its influence to

maximize life itself. By living fully it is offering the most perfect worship possible.

From the ego's perspective, yielding its control to a greater awareness is as threatening as being invaded by aliens. We take great pains in the class to revalue the apparently hostile forces as beneficent ones, to make the expansion easier to undergo. But this is the moment when the seeker has to take themselves in hand. The ego will never admit that it feels threatened; it is much more clever than that. Instead, it paints the teacher or the teaching as stupid, irrelevant, or even manipulative. Dissatisfaction sets in, at first in a vague way that is barely noticeable. Where once you imagined you saw the unalloyed light of truth, now you begin looking for faults. Little faults can be made into huge transgressions with a little cosmetic imagination. Very subtly, the ego convinces you to pack up and look elsewhere for your enlightenment, so you can go back to square one, introductory and unthreatening to it.

The ego is magnificently well defended, and love or harmony or wisdom dissolves its defensive barricades, which it views as the ultimate threat. It cannot fight these peaceful forces head on, so it finds an escape hatch out the back, in a manner of speaking.

This problem is why so many pass from one school to the next, drawn by lurid expectations, but essentially avoiding getting down to cases. There are plenty of charlatans out there peddling amusement park spirituality, and like hawkers at a carnival they are intriguing for a moment. Then the glow fades and it's time to visit the next freak show. It's one of the biggest industries on earth, mesmerizing the gullible with quasi-spiritual mumbo-jumbo while picking their pockets. So if you are lucky enough to find a sincere and dedicated teacher of a superb philosophy, you should hang on for all it's worth. Chances like this don't come very often.

A teacher has to walk a fine line between encouraging the seeker and letting them discover their independence. The seeker should be aware of the crucial role of an outside adviser to assist

them over the hurdle of superficiality, and must actively seek such help. The teacher is waiting for the invitation because, ego or no, the initiative has to come from the seeker. That way there is no possibility of developing an unhealthy dependency.

Nitya's second paragraph inspires us to stop being sloppy about our growth, frittering away our time on silly indulgences:

Ice does not melt unless it is heated. Steam is not generated unless water is boiled. Lethargy prevails until energy flows. Listlessness and disorientation hold the mind back until enthusiasm wells up. Enthusiasm comes only when initiative is taken. So you should buck up and get ready. You cannot spring to your feet when you are weak and feeble. All crutches and hang-ups should be thrown away and the old tarnished system should be given a good flushing. Let the day begin with a new resolve to live a clean life. Ask the incentives and urges to lay bare their cards before you. Pick up the healthy ones and tidy your habits.

The key sentence here is that "Enthusiasm comes only when initiative is taken." The well-disciplined child in us is waiting for a substitute mommy or daddy to tell us what to do and how to do it. We can wait for a whole lifetime, obediently. But we are adults now. It is up to us to jump start the old jalopy, and as the old fairy tales put it, set out to seek our fortune.

When I pulled the earlier quote of That Alone from my files, I couldn't help but read the final two paragraphs of the verse 13 commentary, which echo the message of tonight's Letter. When you spiritualize your life:

The world becomes much better. A demonic world is now transformed into a divine world. A bound person has become a free being. The worlds of interests just come and go like dreams. They

are enjoyed, as dreams are enjoyed. You know that it is only a passing show. Even a passing show should have its merit, so you give it that much credit. Then you own the world, and along with it you become one with the Divine that is behind all that. Right in the world of immanence, you see transcendence.

This is the theme for today's meditation. When we leave this place we will become involved in several worlds of interest. Each time a world of interest is created, watch how you come to it and what the central interest is. Then see how it wanes and you get into another one and another one. Each time you enter a world of interest, relate its central value to the Divine, to the one reality behind it all. This is your pilgrimage. In the evening, examine the pattern that flowed and unfolded through the whole day. The spirit of this is to become a continuous living reality. Call it back to mind again and again.

* * *

From the first Yoga Shastra class by Nancy Y, 2009, which featured exercises:

It should be admitted right off the bat that I'm no paragon of virtue, and (possibly for this very reason) I'm firmly convinced that virtue isn't necessarily a spiritual principle. I go along with Nitya's first guru, Dr. Mees: "In Europe and America there is a strong tendency to identify morality and spirituality. But anyone who has common sense and looks around, is aware that there are a great many people who are moral saints, but lack inner peace and do not know true happiness. In the East the identification of morality and spirituality is as a rule avoided." Of course, that last bit is a glib and false generalization. Mees is speaking only of the

wisest philosophers. Much of the East is almost as crazy as the West when it comes to moral issues and their spiritual import.

That being said, much of my useless and wasteful behavior of the past has been subsumed in a bevy of challenging and absorbing projects. Perhaps these aren't strictly spiritual in the traditional sense, but I like to think that they open doors to a kind of usefulness where some of my old behaviors held them shut. And I like the Gurukula attitude that practical matters are an integral part of spirituality, and not to be discarded in favor of inactivity.

As to doing the suggested exercises, I feel like I have been doing them for decades already. Right now I'm caught up with so much really enjoyable "devotion" that I can't imagine adding anything more. I'm overwhelmed. I guess that means if you follow this advice there is a vast universe of potential you wind up tapping into. I'm really happy I entered this path so many years back. Now walking it is effortless. Well, not effortless, but I love it, so no force is necessary to make me walk it.

Ah, Letter 14 is so great, an emphatic "kick in the pants" to get going with something that engages our enthusiasm. It's really a mystery how we move from lethargy to directed action. If we wait as if it will be arriving from outside, it might be a long time in coming. Yet at the same time something in us resists forcing it arbitrarily. We have an inner sense of justice that demands that it rise up on its own, unbidden, so we wait where maybe we should take some initiative. Unfortunately, in doing so we may subtly suppress our legitimate interests and get caught up in looking out for them instead of simply letting them flow. We may wind up "stewing in our own juices" as my mother used to say. It is a razor's edge to find the middle way between forcing (which is usually based on learned pressures) and allowing our natural and healthy inclinations to bubble up to the surface.

It's beginning to seem that there is a chemical component to enthusiasm. Our state of mind generates chemicals that push us either toward interest or malaise, and the chemicals we manufacture in their turn influence our state of mind. It's a vicious cycle, or else a self-augmenting, positive cycle. When we are depressed, it can be especially self-reinforcing, because we bathe in negative chemicals or emotions which take away even our desire to return to excitement and engagement. Here is where a good teacher or therapist who can jump-start us is a great blessing. Some kind of appropriate shock can switch our chemistry from stewing to brewing. Maybe adrenaline helps us to break out of our stuck places. Then once we get rolling it is much easier to stay on course.

A ridiculous fellow, now known as the [Laughing Guru](#), has organized laughing clubs all over the world, starting in India. He is so ridiculous you have to laugh at him! He first noticed how laughter seemed to promote a heightened sense of well-being, and then set out to do it on purpose. Initially he would get together with a few people and tell jokes, but they soon ran out of inoffensive ones. Then he realized that the body doesn't know the difference between real and fake laughter, and if you start out with a forced laugh, especially in a group of people, pretty quickly it becomes genuine laughter. (The difference between the two is distinguishable in fMRI, by the way.) Now he is famous, and laugh clubs and even ashrams are springing up all over the place.

Dialectically speaking, laughter is just the thing to neutralize depression. A yogi should be buzzing along feeling good all the time, but if it slips away we need something to bring us back to harmony. Simple quieting or meditation should be enough, but we "don't feel like it." When we're really down, laughter is the hardest thing of all to initiate. It seems totally wrong, totally out of place. Exercise also has a salubrious effect on depression, and it's easier to force yourself to take a long walk. But if you can get

yourself to laugh, that's a major accomplishment. It requires a lot of determination, with repeated attempts. If laughing is too hard, some studies have shown that just wearing a smile on your face produces beneficial chemicals. Depression doesn't want to be dissipated, so its perspective ridicules the whole process, whether it be smiling, laughing, working, talking to friends or exercising. Making something—anything—happen can produce the chemical boost we really need, though. It's well worth a try....