

2022 Patanjali Class 18 – Sutra I:2A

5/17/22

Yoga is the restraint of mental modifications (*citta vritti nirodha*)

Nitya’s commentary on this sutra requires us to divide it in thirds. The original class notes from 2008, where we did the same thing, provide a summation of each of the three sections, and may be found in Part II.

A primary element of Indian wisdom transmission is by the scrupulous use of Sanskrit terms, and *Living the Science of Harmonious Union* brims with them. They are perhaps necessary to make a book on this popular topic academically acceptable, and Nitya taught us that way, yet they can be a major stumbling block for the ordinary seeker merely interested in picking up some general principles. I suggested to the gathering that most of these terms can be ignored by most of us. There are a few brought in right at the beginning that will be very helpful to learn, otherwise not so much. Some, like the *gunas*, will already be familiar, if you’ve been around for a while.

The *antakarana*, the fourfold structure of consciousness, is indeed central, and is well described in the old class notes, down in Part II. Those of you who watched the Patanjali video shared by Jay last week will notice a significant difference in their arrangement from the Gurukula version. Comparing them reveals how different the impact is, when interrelated differently. For our purposes we should recognize the four stages, and how they occur sequentially. *Manas* is the questioning, seeking aspect that gets the ball rolling, as in “what’s going on?”; *citta* is the faculty of memory and recall, which is judged by *buddhi*, then made into an affective value judgment by the *ahamkara* or ego. Keeping this in mind, we can make sense of Nitya’s sentence: “As inquiry, judgment, and affectivity are all mainly based on the registration,

retention, and recall of memory, citta is considered to be the main body of consciousness.”

Whether we struggle to “make sense” or not, the lion’s share of this process takes place automatically and with lightning speed.

Our attunement with our environment is maintained with the help of restraints, *nirodha*, that screen out irrelevancies. This can be assisted by our intentions, but (fortunately) is not dependent on them. Speaking of the five branches of consciousness (illustrated by Charles in Part 1A): motion, distraction, stupor and restraint, and how they can lead to one-pointed attention, Nitya writes:

In the normal working of the mind, they all fall in their rightful place for consciousness to flow as a well-regulated stream. The five limbs of consciousness aid each other, especially arresting the flow of the stream meaningfully to make citta concenter in a specific value admission and appreciation.

Nitya adds, specific to restraint:

When the citta is deliberating on any given topic of interest, *nirodha* naturally occurs to hold back irrelevant urges and interests. When *nirodha* becomes pathological, it causes various kinds of inhibitions and generates phobia and fear complexes. But the same *nirodha* becomes an instrument to discipline the entire range of citta for the persistent experiencing of concentration or absorption.

By bringing clarity of awareness to these mental functions, we help them to stay healthy, avoiding their potential “pathological dysfunctions” enunciated in the text. Yoga is then a naturally occurring state, and a preliminary type of samadhi, or steadiness, takes place:

Such absorption normally happens when you feel an at-onement with the identity of an object of perception, the presenting of an idea, a sense of ecstasy, or the retrospective state of being absorbed in your ego consciousness, without slipping into unwholesome states of ego cathexis [Freud's term for emotional attachment]. When natural absorption leads the modification of consciousness into a wholesale appreciation of any of these four aspects—perception, ideation, ecstasy, or ego identity—that is considered cognitive or conditioned yoga or samadhi.

Deb marveled at how such a short sutra could spawn so much discussion. What struck her most of all was that *citta mimes* the world, which is similar to a mirror reflecting images of its surroundings. What we do, the modifications we undergo, is to mime or mimic our surroundings. That means if those modifications are held at bay, we can go deep within and experience the One. The gist is to not be overwhelmed by all the stuff going on, and to reside in that unity, without being pulled out by all the ambient stimulations.

Several of us have grandchildren now, and it's obvious that they are “growing up” through imitating and mimicking the people they are in contact with. While a crucial aspect of our early development, mimicry is nonetheless limited. We are much more than an imitation of others, as we will soon see. There is something essential in us; we're not merely a byproduct of our education. I'd say adulthood begins when our imitative development is adequate, and we can begin to rediscover our more essential nature, which is the domain of creativity and originality. We endure plenty of pressure to remain comprehensible in the social sense: following rules, mimicking “normal” behavior, thinking along acceptable lines, conforming to recent fads, yet our truest self has vastly more to offer, and is likely to chafe at the constraints. The point of this

yoga class is to access who we are beyond the cardboard cutouts timid people prefer to deal with.

Nancy has felt bombarded in the past few weeks, with so many duties, social events, grandkids, yet she is always able to maintain her equilibrium. She described it as “experiencing my existence,” She carries her sameness—her Nancy-ness—to all the places she goes, and the consistency is always amazing. She exults over the richness of her life.

Revisiting the nirodha theme, Deb recalled a time when she was with Nitya in Rishikesh, in 1971. They had been doing serious work as guru and disciple for some months. They were in a restaurant and in the background some rock music was playing, which was an integral part of those revolutionary times. Ubiquitous. She was unconsciously bopping to the beat, and Nitya got furious with her. He said it was a bad habit, that she was adding unnecessary *modifications* to her life, and this made her less than fully present. Though her initial reaction was to get irked, Deb eventually came to realize she, like all of us, carries around “meaningless enamorments.” All we can do about it is try to hold our mind to attention within all the excessive input.

Anita sat out on her patio on a beautiful day recently, feeling absorbed, watching the birds and squirrels, and drifting gently in her stream of consciousness. She’s been through some tough times lately, and now she felt great, relishing the feeling of LIFE. Its energy is beautiful, so moving and joyful. She could sense the springtime sap rising in the trees, the upswelling urge in her to LIVE. This is a perfect example of the at-one-ment or samadhi Nitya mentions, of total absorption in the objects of perception. It’s the kind of samadhi we can take with us everywhere, 24/7.

While enjoying her samadhi, Anita was also talking to herself, and asked us what’s that about?

The normal voice in our heads is simply our train of thought made comprehensible. It has various components, ranging from

garbage to treasure: from accumulated ideas mimicking our environment more or less well to deeply contemplative and unique insights. None of them will become conscious if we don't say them to ourself, at some level. Turning that narrative off for a while can subdue the noisier ones and make room for the still, small voice behind them, whispering profundities.

Deb thought the voice was like our our witnessing faculty. Nancy proudly admitted to a continuous conversation with herself, where she gives herself advice, predictions, encouragement, and much more. She even greets herself when she wakes up: "Good morning, Nancy. It's going to be a great day, and here's what's cooking." (Don't try this at home... but then again, where else could you try it?)

Karen sometimes takes herself to task with her inner voice, though she is normally Ms. Mellow, and gentle in all things. She might recognize she's a little grouchy today, and ask herself why. Bringing it up makes it easy for her to regain her usual samadhi/equipoise.

Anita is more forthright, and might shout Good Grief! at herself if she notices she's being grouchy. The result is the same: getting back to sweetness.

Here's a brief summary of mainstream thought at the moment: <https://www.scienceabc.com/humans/what-is-the-little-voice-inside-your-head.html> . There is a lot out there, as everyone talks to themselves, and scientists like to study it.

Deb just finished *Every Good Boy Does Fine* by pianist Jeremy Denk (New York: Random House, 2022). Reading right after class, she came upon this about voices, near the end:

I have a vivid memory of playing a recital in Philadelphia.... I lifted my arm confidently to play a passage. A flurry of wrong notes rang out. I had a moment of panic, a quick intake of breath, and was beginning a litany of self-blame when I heard a

voice in my head with a quaint Hungarian accent [Gyorgy Sebok, his adored graduate school piano teacher]: “The problem with you is that you’re a perfectionist.” I played more freely; there suddenly seemed to be more options. After the concert, trying to smile as people offered compliments, I was still in my head, comparing this Sebok moment to Bill Leland (another piano teacher), and all his nitpicky reminders in the black lesson notebook.

Leland had been right to remind me that there was no end to the details one could strive for, but Sebok was also right—the desire for perfection could be a deadly weakness. Living comfortably in that paradox, without even knowing it, is part of being a musician. There’s a labyrinth of voices inside your head, a counterpoint of self-awareness and the remembered sayings of your guides and mentors, who don’t always agree. Sometimes you wish you could go back to ask your teachers again to guide you; but up there onstage, exactly where they always wanted you to be, you must simply find your way. They have given all the help they can; the only person who can solve the labyrinth of yourself is you. (328-9)

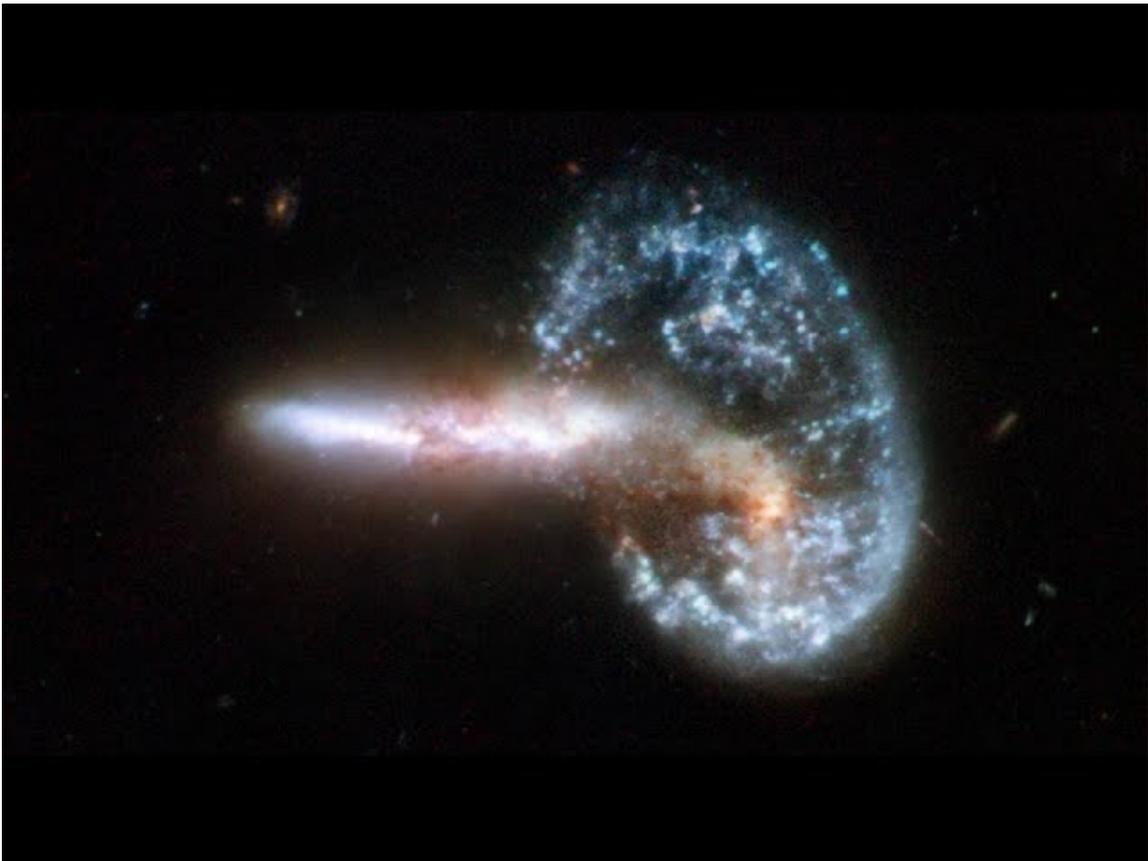
One thing Karen has been doing lately is looking at the images coming out from the James Webb Space Telescope. The mirror alignment is complete, and images should be out soon. For now, the Hubble Telescope images are mind-blowing enough. Current estimates are 100-200 *billion* galaxies in our universe, where even one is too huge to even begin to imagine. If you hold up a dime at arm’s length, the Hubble reveals around a thousand galaxies behind it. You can get high just thinking about it.

Paul is still vibrating from a TV show by Dr. Nina Lanza describing the process of nuclear fusion in stars producing the building block elements and then exploding, distributing them throughout space, where they coalesce into solar systems, life

emerges, develops sentience, and voila! here we are. According to Lanza (and others) we humans are how the Universe has evolved to contemplate itself, all our parts manufactured in star factories that exploded billions of years ago. In an awed voice, Karen added as individuals we're so infinitely tiny, less than grains of sand on this infinite beach, yet we are the ones who can take it all in.

We nirodhaed our citta vrittis and just sat with the amazement of it all. What a fantastic task has fallen to us: registering the universe. How do you beat that?

I'll toss in a pair of friendly galaxies, to seal the deal.



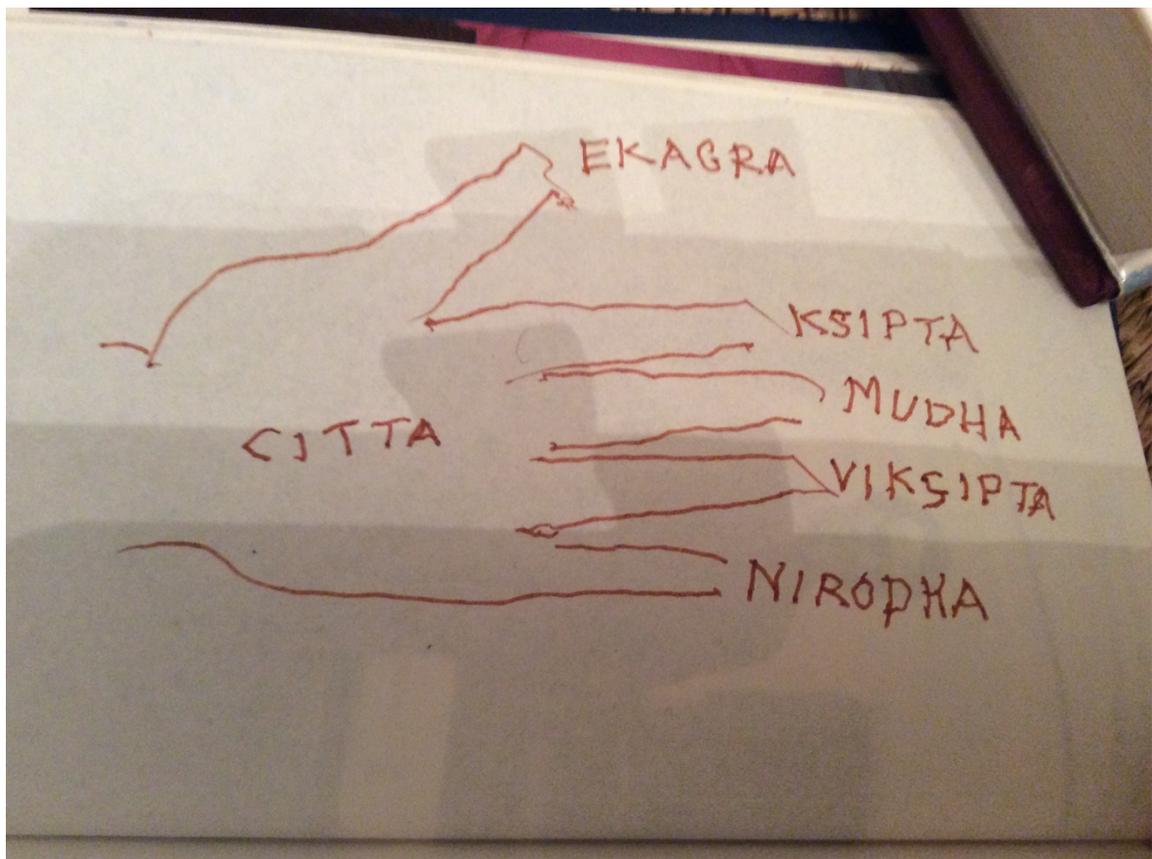
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Part IA

Thumbs up to Charles, who wrote:

A lot of words I haven't seen before. Got to start somewhere. These five are not clear to me as to what they mean, but my hope is, if I can just recall them with reference to the tactile hand, more will be said down the line. to connect the dots.

Something has already been said what I can study on. Nirodha, mudha and ekagra have an initial definiteness which is encouraging, but not so ksipta and viksipta.



Part II

Nataraja Guru's *Integrated Science of the Absolute* Vol. II has a very important clarification for us, referring to Patanjali's Yoga:

Besides the idea of peace, the most important single condition for Yoga is mentioned in the second verse of chapter I:

yogas-cittavritti-nirodhah

Yoga is restraining (the outgoing) activities of the mind.

This sutra is meant to define Yoga as a whole. The keyword is *nirodha* (to hinder, obstruct or control). Many people fall into the error of thinking that one must control all psychic activities, because *citta-vritti* means 'the activity of the mind'. Here a subtle distinction and a clarification have to be made. Narayana Guru makes this in the first verse of the Yoga-Darsanam. The verticalized activities of the mind should not be obstructed but instead must be allowed free scope, with *vitarka* (criticism) and *vichara* (inquiry) as functions. It is the outgoing tendencies or horizontal activities of the mind that produce dissipation of interest. It is only on the horizontal level that control is necessary. Mere brute unilateral control is not to be thought of either. One has to respect the reciprocity of counterparts, whereby an ascending effort to unite with the higher Self is reciprocally understood as being met by the descent of the soul, from the opposite pole of the total Yoga situation. This delicate distinction is also clarified by Narayana Guru in the Yoga-Darsanam. Yoga is a bilateral and not a unilateral process. (II.103)

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Excerpts from *That Alone*, verse 54, on word impediments:

In the previous verse Narayana Guru asked us to meditate on the supreme principle in order to get over the duality of maya. Here he is focusing attention on what we should meditate on. This is not an easy thing to do because we have taken refuge in word concepts. In India, most people do not know Sanskrit. If a Sanskrit word is used, it gives a sense of authority to the speaker. A person can thereby tyrannize others with it. When they say “I am now quoting from the Upanishads,” everybody bows their heads. It is a kind of slavery, linguistic servitude. The same is done in the West with Greek and Latin, since ordinary people do not know those languages either. In fact, when you don’t understand something, you say it is Greek to you. Scientists decided to give all their terms in Latin or Greek, just like the Indian Brahmin uses Sanskrit. If you use a word that no one can pronounce, everybody bows before you.

We have become victimized by such fancy language. The words sound impressive, but do we actually experience their meaning? No. We only think we do. It is just like saying “I believe in God.” “Oh, did you meet that fellow somewhere?” “No, but I know all about Him. I hear about Him all the time.” All this so-called familiarity with God is just having heard the word a hundred times, a million times even, from others. Is that God-experience? What do you mean by God-experience, anyway? Knowing the meaning of the word is only a dictionary experience.

Similarly, we have only a dictionary experience of consciousness and unconsciousness. If you want to go beyond that, try to place what you call consciousness and what you call unconsciousness together. If you can conceive them together and think of an all-embracing entity in which you can sit without contradiction, then you know what is being said.

This is difficult but not impossible. It’s not like thinking of a square circle; in fact, it’s not conceptual at all. When we try to

contemplate, the main mistake we commit is in replacing direct understanding with intellectual understanding. We tend to imagine the unconscious in terms of consciousness, timelessness in terms of time, spacelessness in terms of space. This is an injustice, squeezing the unconscious into the mold of the conscious in order to try to understand it. It is also partisan: you are in favor of consciousness.

[...]

We are not in any way referring to a hopelessly difficult attainment. The mystical depth in question is in no way an intellectual exercise to be scientifically gauged. This is why at the very beginning, in the opening verse, we were asked to approach the whole subject with a sense of surrender, a deep devotion, with absolute reverence to the unnamable that shines by its own light both as the known and the unknown. The Guru recommends a greater acceptance of the sense of awe and wonder. We must stand before this seeming impossibility with wonder, allowing ourselves not to do, but to be done with.

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From the first Yoga Shastra Study Group, which included a Vietnamese Buddhist, Vien Duc:

Sutra I: 2

Restraint of mental modifications is probably the essence of the whole study. Patanjali is weighing in on whether we can transform ourselves or whether enlightenment is strictly a matter of “divine intervention.” He (or they, if “Patanjali” is a collective effort) is definitively in the camp of those who believe in taking a

role in their own development. He doesn't ask us to merely wait until a bolt from the blue changes us into beings with stable minds, he insists we are responsible for stabilizing them ourselves. The whole point of yoga study is to stop frittering and get to work, and to do it intelligently.

We are prone to imagine that we only exist only because we make waves, vritti. We are afraid we are like the graph that Vien Duc drew for the 11th face in his self-portrait, a seismographic readout, the registry of a distant (or immanent) earthquake. We make ripples, and that proves we are someone. If we cease modulating, we will be nobody, nonexistent.

Ekagrah or one-pointedness converts our graph from chaos to a single symmetrical line, allowing for efficiency in action. But who dares to cease making ripples at all, as with Vien Duc's 12th face? He said his mind "stopped working" after 11. But he was still there.

Restraint of mental modifications must imply that if we stop making any waves at all, we not only continue to exist, but enter a state of heightened freedom. All those ripples constrain us to certain forms, but when they stop, so do the constraints. Formlessness is freedom.

Describing it doesn't really help, you just have to do it. Vien Duc didn't try to stop drawing himself, but his concentration on the exercise brought him naturally to a state where he stopped. What then? Advocacy, trying, not trying, and all the rest, even restraint itself, are forms of mental modifications. So this will be my shortest response in years. I am reminded of a cartoon drawing of Mr. Natural, walking around holding a sign reading "Don't Mouth Words!"

The key to the paradox is that we are not asked to *stop* making modifications, which is practically impossible, but to *restrain* them, which is relatively easy. As they say about mindfulness: it isn't hard to be mindful. It's *remembering* to be

mindful that's hard! Our first task is just to watch, and cool down.
It's eeeeasy!

Svasti, may it be well!

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In our first class at the Portland Gurukula, we did the same thing as now, breaking the dissertation into three parts:

11/11/8

Sutra 1:2 – beginning

Yoga is the restraint of mental modifications (citta vritti nirodha)

In our meditation after the reading, our group consciousness became very intense and peaceful, drawing us in easily to a dynamic stillness. For a time it was enough. Just right.

Anita said later that it felt like being back in the womb. With a cozy fire pushing the temperature toward 98.6, torrents of rain and wind pulsing outside, sunk in comfortable chairs, the silence was deafening. If our room was a womb, we were yet early in the gestation period, when there is still plenty of space in which to grow.

Nitya begins with reminding us of the fourfold process of mentation, manas, citta, buddhi and ahamkara. These are the questioning aspect, the dredging up of memory associations, the assessment of meaning, and the identification that produces our ego sense. Of these, citta is “considered to be the main body of consciousness,” being the “repository of all the colorations and conditionings that happen to a person during their lifetime. Hence all conditional reactions throughout life stem from this faculty.” When these memories are objectified by the vibratory process known as vritti, it produces our perception of the present, the here

and now. Underneath is the eternal omnipresence of consciousness, but it becomes focused on the pinhole of citta vritti, the process of creating the world out of our expectations and limited comprehension. Obviously, if we can step back from our mesmerization by the mental modifications, we are already in an unmodified state. This simple and simultaneously impossible practice is called yoga.

Vritti implies a cyclical or feedback system. It is wonderful when healthy: in fact it is the very basis of our existence. But it can also become static. Once it is cut off from what we call the Absolute, the imperishable source of renewal, it tends to become fixed and dead. We get caught in vicious cycles of habit. Trapped by our conditionings, we blame aspects of our projections for our oppression instead of turning the searchlight on our unquestioned habits of mind. With the Yoga Sutra classes, we initiate a strenuous effort to break out of this ubiquitous and self-reinforcing straitjacket.

We have divided the long commentary on this sutra into three parts. This first mainly continued last week's presentation of the five factors that produce one-pointed concentration. These are generally regarded negatively, but Nitya wants to emphasize that:

In spite of these four aspects of citta having a tendency in the long run to cause psychological dysfunctions, in the normal working of the mind, they all fall in their rightful place for consciousness to flow as a well-regulated stream. The five limbs of consciousness aid each other, especially arresting the flow of the stream meaningfully to make citta concenter in a specific value admission and appreciation. Patañjali wants us to know that this natural mechanism of consciousness is a rich phenomenon that can be employed to arrive at a supernatural glimpse of the noumenon.

We discussed how beneficial it is that the mind unconsciously screens out so much excess baggage, permitting us to concentrate on a subject of interest. Happily, we no longer have to struggle like a toddler in order to walk around, since the very complex coordinations it involves have become “second nature.” Likewise, driving a car is mostly automatic, leaving us free to gawk at the scenery or chat with our friends. I remember after spending some time in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter during a series of excellent psychedelic adventures, when I next drove a car I was overwhelmed with tons of unfamiliar sensory input. For the first hour I had to creep along at little more than a walking pace, reassessing a stream of unfamiliar stimuli, until gradually the nirodhas and mudhas restored me to “normalcy.” Luckily I was in the wilds of Wisconsin at the time, so no other humans were threatened by my condition.

At best, the natural limitations of our mind bring us to a clear-eyed state of focused awareness. Buddhists call this mindfulness, while Vedantins call it consciousness of pure existence, since mind is considered a superficial aspect of the total being. Either way the subject is the same: a state in which the noumenon is glimpsed, which leads progressively to states of samadhi or realization in which the noumenon is experienced.

Nancy wondered if all our talk and study weren't just mental modifications to be dismissed out of hand, and Anita wondered what exactly mind was, anyway. Certainly, modern science often takes a materialist approach to mind, treating it as an epiphenomenon of the brain. Many links have been established between our thinking and particular regions in our biocomputer. Yet consciousness per se remains a mystery that is too profound to be explained by material complexity alone. So too, the ancients distinguished consciousness from mental modifications or mental processes. The premise of the Yoga Sutras is that we can attain a

state or states of consciousness below or beyond the mind, and that these samadhis are particularly excellent places to hang out. The closer we get to unalloyed purity of consciousness, the closer we are to the fountain source of both thought and action, where transformation originates. So instead of wrestling with fully formed masses of consciousness and their endless ramifications, we can go to the nub of the situation, where a tiny amount of input creates vast effects as it snowballs into existence.

If we go into samadhi with any kind of fixed intentions, these being forms of mental modifications, they not only bar the door to samadhi, so to speak, they pollute the purity of any state that might be attained. Thus, in meditation—and optimally in our whole life—we continually let go of our expectations, prejudices, desires, hopes, dreams, all of it. We are buoyed by an inner conviction that the Void or the Absolute itself is Good Enough, so we don't need to cling to our provisional beliefs. We can let it all go. Only then can we pass through the eye of the needle, as the saying goes. This is the source of the instruction to give it all up in order to get it all. Or the myths about trying to enter the castle with something in your pocket and being caught and turned away—that kind of stuff. Even “Abandon hope all ye who enter” at Dante's doorway to hell, purgatory and paradise. We have to stand naked before the Lord, etc.

Because even our best thoughts get in the way. We want to save the world. We insist on keeping our hopes alive. We must be good in order to please God. We don't want to offend our neighbor. So many illusory footholds on this mountain! The true voidness beyond every one of our mental modifications is daunting and even terrifying. We instinctively recoil from it and grasp at our favorite straws. But for now we have barely begun to approach it. When we get serious, we'll probably lose everyone in the class. It's a solitary venture, when all is said and done....

The Patanjali study is not about getting the “right” mental modifications, like being holy or wise or kind or anything. It’s about taking a break from all of them, good, bad and indifferent. When we attain that state, other people can call us what they want, saintly or wise, but if we think of ourself in those terms we are simply a hypocrite and an egotist to boot.

Anita was reminded of a vision she once had during her first Gita class. She was high in the sky looking down on a solid layer of clouds. A bit of fluffy cloudstuff was lifted up and wrapped with string, and that was a person. More cloud, bound, became another person. Another handful was tied into a table. And so on, endlessly. The clouds stand for what Spinoza called Substance, the immaterial material essence from which everything is made, and into which everything returns at the end of its separate existence. We will be striving to untie the knots that bind us as our limited selves, to experience the freedom of unshaped substance in life. Death will do that automatically for us, but we don’t want to wait that long. Anita’s vision is much less terrifying than the empty dark void, and might make it easier to approach the reality beneath the image.

Here in the beginning we can at least abandon our attachment to the really heavy negative elements implied in kshipta, vikshipta, mudha and nirodha. Yet when I asked for examples, the class immediately veered away and stayed away. Perhaps we can think about it and get back to it later, since it is crucial to our study. This is not a Sunday School social. It’s about tearing away our mask to become real.

I offered one example to try to leaven the whole loaf, one fresh in the minds of Americans who have just been through an ugly election campaign in which mob mentality was blatantly exposed. People, even God-fearing religious people, have been taught to hate liberals and think of them as terrorists, deserving of torture. Once that belief is in place, any kind and gentle soul can be

instantly demonized, and no contradictory input that might lessen the hatred is allowed in. Paranoia explodes: the grandmother who wants to bring her child home from an unjust war is working with the devil! She hates our country! Her candidate is the devil himself! The hallucinatory beliefs feed off and reinforce each other, building to a paranoid psychosis. No matter what you say, you cannot disprove someone else's prejudice if they are determined to keep it. Facts are adroitly twisted to reconfirm the prejudice. There's no getting around it.

Flagrant examples like this can teach us a lot about ourselves. Probably we've all tried to explain something we are certain of to a doubting friend, and seen their resistance to a reasonable argument up close and personal. We have to use the example to examine how we cling to our habitual reactions and opinions and deflect outside input. Paul called these our defense mechanisms, and that's exactly what they are. First we have to be convinced we don't need them as badly as we imagine we do, and then we have to pry our minds open and find a way to keep them open. In this it helps greatly to at least acknowledge the existence of mental factors that wall out almost everything that doesn't jibe with our beliefs. Once we overcome our native reluctance to admit our failings, if only to ourselves, it actually becomes enjoyable to jettison our hangups.

Deb didn't like my use of the term 'jettison', because she remembered Nitya telling her how by simply attuning to the inner truth the citta vritti fell away of its own accord. Attacking it head on only increased its power. It came as a revelation to her that she could stop fiercely trying in the old head-butting fashion. But it doesn't do anything to simply stop trying, either. Both effort and non-effort have to be artfully employed. It takes effort to be effortless, because we are already addicted to efforts. Using the mind to transcend the mind is like using a thorn as a tool to remove a thorn from your foot. If we don't try, we will remain complacently following our habitual responses. If we become

addicted to trying, we will press forward with technique after technique, to no avail. Once again we have to mount the razor's edge to strike a happy medium.

If samadhi was simply a matter of not making any effort, we would expect to see millions of enlightened beings all around us. Since this doesn't seem to be the case, there is some work to be done. We concluded the class with another analogy to the current President-elect. The government is like a tamasicly hogtied human being writ large. Obama doesn't have to worry much about where to begin his efforts. His predecessors destroyed virtually everything and stole the rest, so everything needs fixing. He can start anywhere. We also can start with what we have right here and now. We don't have to search far away for an exotic path, it's already under our feet. Deferring our efforts until later is a particularly insidious defense mechanism.

Yet the effort involved is easy. You don't have to learn a bunch of obscure Sanskrit terms, or understand everything the teacher says. When you sit, you dismiss all the thoughts that distract you from simply being still. "No effort" here doesn't mean following your thoughts out the door. When you finally come to a moment of stillness, free of distracting thoughts, then you can be effortless. In the artistic state all efforts are distractions. If you attend to any thought in that state you reactivate the citta vritti, and you get evicted from "heaven". So it's really a very simple business.