

2022 Patanjali Class

1/4/22

1 – Introduction and Preface

My goodness, a month and a half off from class seems like an age. Yet its good feelings quickly returned, with a screen full of dear friends, and the addition of Miki Watson in Australia, who immediately contributed her good cheer and deep knowledge.

There are already extensive class notes from our first trip through *Living the Science of Harmonious Union*, 2008-2011, and during that time I also took Nancy Yeilding's first online class, and have my lesson responses to refer to. I will add the best of this material as Part II in the notes.

Nitya epitomizes the entire work in the few pages of his Preface. Bill, who, along with Andy, has just finished the book in Nancy Y's online class, was reminded what a wonderful overview the Preface provides for what is to come: Patanjali gives us all the tools to understand how our mind trips us up and shows us a path toward equipoise.

Patanjali will grab our attention right off, in the second sutra, with the famous dictum *citta vritti nirodha*, the cessation of mental modifications. It's often read as meaning the total cessation of mental functioning, but brain imaging has supported the more nuanced interpretation Nitya presents. The brain never ceases functioning, but certain surface interpretations and analyses come and go. Deb addressed this in her opening comments: cessation of modulations it doesn't mean total cessation, as we're always operating on some level—really, on many levels. The intent is not to achieve a static state, it's more about a change from distorted thinking into something smooth and conjoined, the basis of our experience.

Paul wondered, if our mental modifications are interpretations, is there a way of not modifying something, understanding something without interpreting? After all, even the recognition of shapes comes from comparisons in our memory, overlaying the past onto the present.

Deb added that modifications also include any way we explain a subject or frame it. We try to experience the thing as it truly is. What gets in the way is constantly telling ourselves a story.

Bill assured us that Nitya gives us a sense of the “other side” of modifications when he describes the bliss that comes when those modifications aren’t present. The work is about sorting out the multitude of influences that shape how we interpret things, including our cultural and genetic perspectives. Yoga is really about getting back to a place where you aren’t influenced by them.

While the cessation is sometimes read as drastic curtailment, this is largely due to our identification with our persona, which we’ve become more or less comfortably habituated to. Samadhi is what happens when we rejoin our true Self. An excerpt from the old class notes cuts to the chase:

The “goal” if you will of yoga is the cessation of mental modifications, the cessation of sequential imaginations about who we are and what we should be doing and so on. When we sit empty of self-descriptions for however briefly, we reconnect automatically with our true nature. Actually, we realize that we were always connected, so reconnection is a slight misnomer.

The hallmark of Nitya’s work for Andy is his sense that the eightfold path of yoga is one of *rest*. We can bring all those conditioned levels to rest, rather than struggling to battle them into silence. This shifted his whole view of the enterprise of yoga away from being an ascetic feat to a kind of state we often touch,

however briefly. We have all had tastes of it — it's something that we have all touched.

To Deb, yoga is not a conjunction of two unrelated or separate things, because there is only one, in essence. The experience of our real inner nature comes after we curtail discursive thoughts. As we are soaked into those moments, we become who we truly are.

Steven is dubious that yoga can be meaningful if we fail to achieve certain goals. Don't we have to put all our eggs in one basket? Are there any benefits from just walking as far as you can get on the path, even without arriving?

Andy responded that we can characterize yoga as stepping off a path and coming to a conclusion—you can read it that way, but his impression is that at every moment you make the discovery that you are already realized. It's a mystical thing. There is no struggle in real Zazen, this is the only moment. In this moment we know: we know because we have this marvelous world before us. Without that knowledge, this could not be. It may look like a path or technique, but there is a different sense that this is a moment we all share and we all have, and it's an illuminated moment.

Steven prefers to be more pragmatic. He gets the sense from Nitya's writing that there is a lot of preparation you could do in your life to make yourself more susceptible to that special experience. There are ways of nurturing so you are more capable of organizing your life around a central principle, so you don't get sidetracked, you don't do things you know won't be helpful. You get your act together, are more ethical, study, imbibe this wisdom. It's like taking a cold shower, or a new year's resolution. Nitya seems to say that by doing those things your life really changes, you have an inner glow, you have more certitude.

Steven continued: there are sets of practices that are spiritual. Any activity that is in harmony with your dharma, that is your spiritual practice. There is intention involved in finding what

resonates with our dharmic core, so you are living more consciously aligned with your true nature.

This morning Susan sent the following from one of the Gurukula rishis:

Gayathri sent a note out last night for her upcoming classes, one of which is a study of Living the Science of Harmonious Union. I'm copying the note because I like the way she talks about the very things we were discussing last night.

Often, we begin each new year with well-meaning resolutions to improve our lives and see them falling by the wayside within a few weeks, leading to feelings of disappointment, failure and self-bashing. Usually these feelings of badness further curb our motivation to see our resolutions through. Oh well. Sigh! Maybe next year :).

Setting an intention is different. It's like setting a long-term compass for your life. It's a process of checking in deeply within yourself to see what matters to you, what values you would like to nurture and cultivate, what you want to dedicate your life to. It sets a broad direction for your life, where setbacks simply become bumps along the way instead of derailing you from the overall vision for where you would like to take your life.

When you set a deep **intention** in this way, your **attention** gets streamlined and directed towards manifesting your intention. As they say, "where attention goes, **energy** flows". The creative process begins to unfold in the form of thoughts and **actions** that take you forward towards the realization of your intention. When these actions are performed with clarity and dedication, an inner sense

of **meaning** and **fulfillment** arises. Things may not always be easy on the path, but the strength of your commitment to your long-term intention will keep you going, offering fresh possibilities and opportunities along the way.

Intention -> Attention -> Energy -> Action -> Meaning -> Fulfillment! Give it a try this year and let me know how it goes!

Bill talked about how each of us develops a practice to fulfill our capabilities of getting closer to the Self. Later in the commentary, Nitya talks about how you will come to the point where you get a little glimpse of your true nature, and it's joyful. Joy is the perfect encouragement to continue on a course of study. Patanjali gives you the tools so you can understand where to adjust your understanding. it's inspirational to realize that continual contemplation of our true nature is a path we can all take and get greatly rewarded by.

Deb mentioned a paradox: every expression of each person's dharma requires a commitment to it, but when that is your spiritual unfolding, it's not a preordained practice, it's something you love and you unfold with as it goes on. So often when we think of the word *practice* we think of stages and rules, but there is no universal prescription for spiritual unfoldment. Being attentive to our own personal unfolding, pursuing that with care, love, and attention could be described as a practice, but that is too small a word for it.

Steven affirmed that ultimately each of us will interpret the text in a way that is meaningful for us. The first limbs of this path: the restraint from certain things and active cultivation of other things as a ground for developing character, seems an important insight. What it means to restrain and engage, that's open to interpretation. In terms of this text, that step seems to be central.

Without being specific, Steven admitted he allows himself too much slack.

Andy asked, from where is that discipline imposed? We can try to be good but there are faculties in us that we can open to, like a flower opening its petals. Discipline comes from the act of surrender to something that is undefinable but is infusing your life. Nitya was often raising that question. He told me you can't really discipline yourself, it has to arise from within.

Let me reprise a favorite paragraph from Mees' Introduction to *The Key to Genesis*. Mees was Nitya first guru:

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.

Anita addressed the idea of intentionality with her trademark compassion. She feels spiritual insight can be found anywhere and everywhere. She passes some of her time watching TV, and finds even the stupidest show can teach her something. She told us, "You can always learn if you are open to it and you can take it inside. All these opportunities are around us all the time." Moreover, Anita gets resistant if she has to follow something that is regimented. While she appreciates what Steven said about ethical living and intention, opportunities for spiritual development happen all the time, as long as we stay open.

Bill used to think of the third limb, asana, as meaning yoga postures, but he learned from the course that asana is Patanjali's way of directing us to gain a firm ground, a stable place to further our search. It's about establishing a strong base that enables you to be open, a space to look at the self from a different perspective.

Regarding Steven's question whether you have to be fully realized to make this effective, Bill pointed out Nitya doesn't even include Patanjali's last two chapters, about the accomplished yogi, as they can be dangerously deluding, as his Preface states. He assures us: "For people preferring to live the normal life style of an individuated person, the instruction in the discipline of Yoga is completed in the first two chapters." This yoga is for those of us who live in the world. We don't have to be totally realized. It's a process.

This is a very good point. We have been trained to think in terms of processes. By the numbers. If we have eight limbs, we think we have to pass the first limb before we go on to the second. You have to do everything in the book perfectly, before you're qualified for samadhi. This is one of our major impediments. A unitive attitude sees the eight limbs as more like a star shape, all limbs being aspects of one beautiful structure. It's not a sequence. There are no tests to pass before going on.

Steven does recognize the danger of rigidity and self-imposed discipline that can suffocate one's spirit. Yoga is about finding that delicate balance, that equipoise.

Jan has also been trying to discipline herself more, struggling with some things she wasn't doing as well as she might. She felt a part of the solution is honoring ourselves, and the resistance we feel is about something we need and aren't getting, that wants to be expressed.

Steven was taken by Nancy's statement in the Introduction that the purpose of yoga is to alleviate suffering: that suffering is what leads us to a search to free ourselves from suffering. He feels there is nothing shameful in embracing suffering, being attentive to it. You can find motivation to overcome suffering, and he sees no harm in being frank and honest about his suffering.

To Nitya, the purpose of yoga is samadhi, equipoise. He makes no mention of suffering. His Preface opens:

Yoga is the science of harmonious union with one's own self, the world, and the cosmic law that governs the entire universe, ranging from the cognizing of a sensation to the formation of a galaxy. From the title itself of the opening chapter, *Samadhi Pada*, it is evident that the purpose of Yoga is to arrive at *samadhi*, the ultimate state of equipoise in which all problems of life are resolved.

Miki suggested that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. That's why the Gita defines yoga as *disaffiliation* from the *context* of suffering. As to ethical behavior, it's the foundation for being *here*; for instance, coming here and participating in this study group. The intention is simply to be here, present. Discipline is not necessary. And letting go is another way.

Another of the impediments we are drenched in in our society is we are made to believe we are wrong, and that we need to fix something to be right. In yoga, we don't have to erase ourselves to make room for perfection. We don't have to build a god from scratch, we are one already.

In closing, I cited Tony Hoagland's poem *Misunderstandings*, which offers up some germane, modern, sometimes hilarious impediments, what Patanjali called *yamas*. Here are a couple:

I thought suffering had something to be said for it.

I thought someone was watching and keeping score.

The poem ends well:

All those years I kept trying and failing and trying
to find my one special talent in this life—

Why did it take me so long to figure out
that my special talent was trying?

<https://lunchboxpoems.tumblr.com/post/133826597610/misunderstandings>

Part II

First off, we got an appreciation from Paul, happy to be back after our six-week layoff:

Subject: The Blind Can See!

Quora [Quote.com](#):

"God sleeps in the rock, dreams in the plant, stirs in the animal, and awakens in the man"

~Sufi ??

Just heard that quote from a film entitled, "Three Magic Words". It reminded me of the preface in last night's class where Deb recounted "samadhi"... "it is incorrect to define Yoga as an act of conjunction of two disparate elements...it is more a transformation of an innate awareness experienced as an empirical awareness..."

To See:

**Me, as an "I Am" found in a simple uncluttered clarity
- or transcendence - of my 62 years of relentless conditioning
infecting the simple truth - I Am God**

...I love these classes!

* * *

The old class notes, from 2008, have a lot to add to our very interesting discussion:

Life turns into an endless treadmill of one program after another, with the imaginary goal of converting the inadequate to the adequate. But since we are already a spark of divinity, what we need is to realize our innate perfection and express it in our life. The “goal” if you will of yoga is the cessation of mental modifications, the cessation of sequential imaginations about who we are and what we should be doing and so on. When we sit empty of self-descriptions for however briefly, we reconnect automatically with our true nature. Actually, we realize that we were always connected, so reconnection is a slight misnomer.

In any case, we will be exploring this paradox extensively in the upcoming classes. If it still seems confusing, that’s all to the good. We want to “get” this in our core, not simply in our conceptualization.

The ego is deputized by our inner child to address perceptions of inadequacy, to try to convince the world that we are adequate. In this it will always fail, because it is properly one aspect of the total being, inadequate itself in isolation. It bemoans the divide between the inner beauty it knows and the seeming unimportance the outside world assigns it. The solution is to relieve our ego of this impossible task. Instead of convincing the world of our wonderfulness, its job becomes to convince *us* of our wonderfulness. This wonderfulness is found both within and without—in fact it permeates everything. Discovering it as the very

air we breathe and the ground we walk upon makes the journey a joy and a delight. Even our failings can be cherished, as manure for the garden we pass through.

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To affirm the Absolute within, we need to relinquish much of our intentionality and expectations. Narayana Guru was effective, unmoved mover as he was, because he activated a reservoir of dammed up energy in the populace for bringing light to life. So there is an intimate linkage between inspiration and expression, between knowing and doing, between thinking and implementing. Both aspects need to be present for there to be an impact.

It's a very interesting subject and a brain stretcher to boot!

By another coincidence I recently read an article in a medical magazine about dealing with angry outbursts in children. Studies have shown the popular authoritarian approach to have very limited success: kids reluctantly follow the rules, but as soon as they are out from under them, they revert to the chaotic behavior. This is basically suppression of traumatic material. A new model is being tried with much greater long term success, called CPS, short for creative problem solving. It essentially codifies a civilized dialogue, putting parent and child or caregiver and child on a par instead of the old fashioned top dog/underdog relation. It teaches kids how to solve their own problems intelligently, without recourse to fear of punishment, because it recognizes that they want to do well and be happy, they just don't know how. Although the parallel is subtle, I see this as also related to our central enigma in the yoga class. Following steps is the clumsy, dissociated path, relying on external or internal authority to force us to go the right way. It erects boundaries and forces its votaries to stay within them. Creative problem solving, on the other hand, means bringing our buddhi, our awakened intelligence, to bear in an amicable

setting of learning and sharing. This is the path we plan to take in the Patanjali study as well.

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From my study group response, 2008:

So, on to the Preface. Nitya is so great at epitomizing a vast subject in a few words. You almost feel like you could just skip the whole book, because it's all laid out right here, at the beginning. But then, it turns out there is so much more ahead!

Lately I've been pondering the wonder of the sense of 'I'—the impossible, astounding and imponderable state of being separate from the Absolute. How is this even possible? And what is it, even? Who am us, anyway? We take our sense of self wholly for granted, and yet it must be the most incredible accomplishment of the universe, that out of complex conglomerations of atoms and molecules, not only does a unique being arise, but it has a core inner certitude of itself. It knows that it exists. Too much!

These thoughts are actually related to Exercise 2, which calls for the envisioning of our pure, original nature. When I go there, the outside definitions all fall away, but the sense of self persists through and through. It is floating on the void. It is the first thing and the last. And there are billions of other beings on all sides with the same inner core. It's an amazing achievement of this universe, this "machine for making gods," that there are so many, many gods everywhere. Some of us have even joined together into a study group to share our wonder with each other. What a good trip this is!

I don't think I could ever get tired of contemplating the mystery of who or what we are. It is an eternal mystery, not solved by going into it, but heightened. The boredom and ennui come from ignoring the core and slogging through life as though it was a

meaningless charade. So thank heaven for Nitya and all these prompts to revel in our pure nature, over and over. Amen!

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If we wallow in the misery of what life hands us we will never be able to leave it behind, but having an unbiased ideal to measure ourselves against is like a Good Samaritan holding out a life preserver to someone floundering in a raging sea. When we pop up for a moment we can try to grab hold of it, and if we ever are successful we can use it to pull ourselves ashore. Then if we jump back into the maelstrom it is our own damn fault!

* * *

Religion in many forms has been used as a brainwashing system throughout history, and therefore we should start our approach to yoga with the determination that it is in no way a substitute for our own critical thinking and awareness. We are not trying to lose ourselves, we are trying to find ourselves, obscured as we are in our essence by a lot of flotsam and jetsam. Freedom means being unfettered, but not stripped of our individuality to mindlessly follow someone else's template of behavior, be it Jesus or Satan.

Patanjali is definitely teaching us to spend time without hitching our minds to our memory banks, but not forever. So yes, we should carefully edit and properly store our memories, but they are integral to who we are, to a degree we will never fully realize, so let's not hope for their deletion or erasure. We can keep them without being destroyed by them. But their negative impact can and should be mitigated.

Part III

Here's an exercise from Chapter IX of the Gita, in my lesson 28:

“The belief that we must become perfected before we can connect with our inner nature is a devastating one, indefinitely postponing our entering the unitive state. It forces us to focus on our faults and imperfections, in lieu of turning toward the perfection of the Absolute, and such an orientation breeds guilt and shame. It's of no avail to feel guilty and run yourself down, in fact such attitudes block the flow of participation in the present moment. We must let go of literally everything to be realized.” Are you making progress in ceasing habitual self-criticism, and why or why not?

* * *

“When mind, the bumble bee, sips the honey-like sweetness of one's own bliss, fluttering ceases and is drawn into union”.
After reading these lines in the Introduction, I felt the urge to share a few poetic images taken while contemplating the only blossoms of my lotus plants. So, I confess I am here also to share!

Cheers

Miki



