

2022 Patanjali Class 21

6/7/22

Sutra I:3 – Then the seer remains in its own essential nature.

This sutra throws light on the previous, so together they make the most sense: when we cease frittering away on all our extraneous “stuff,” what remains is our true, essential nature. Which is what we can’t cease, anyway. It is eternal, at least for the moment. Author Philip K Dick came to a similar conclusion: “Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.”

Nitya calls this sutra “The finale of Yoga discipline.” For Deb it sounds so simple: with no thought or memory being attended to, we are already in our own being. But she’s well aware that memories and thoughts come up in a continuous stream. Is that also our essential nature, or not? It seemed to her Patanjali is saying that even as you sit quietly within, every out-going light is included in the effulgence.

Bill read out a related bit from the last sutra: “Just as water is the flowing current of a river, psychic or spiritual energy (*citishakti*) is the transforming medium of consciousness. However, like the constancy of the basic structure of water, *citishakti* by itself never loses its nature at any time.” Purusha sparks this whole process, and even though the river is never absent, returning to it again and again deepens your connection.

Deb affirmed that in that returning to it by the dropping off of modulations, we can penetrate the veil we have made, and that reinforces our experience of who we really are. The Self never goes anywhere, but we cover it up. These experiences come to us often throughout the day, but they are fleeting, due to the attractions of the coverup. The practice is meant to increase both the depth and the scope of the experience.

I recently ran across an insightful allusion of Nataraja Guru’s

addressing how to uncover our true nature. The simplistic way of the novice is to imagine if we erase all this, what's left is the Absolute. It's a process of subtraction that leads to zero. Emptiness. The dialectic approach of Yoga is to equalize all aspects, the polarities, of the situation, which makes it a division problem, like a fraction, and the outcome is oneness.

Nataraja Guru culled a lot of insight out of the relation between the numerator and denominator of a fraction, where the denominator represents the whole and the numerator the part taken under consideration. By attempting to not add or subtract but equalize the relationship, we arrive at wholeness, which is one. All oneness, or as nowadays spelled, aloneness. Yes, it's a "practice," you work at it, and there is the same amount of effort in either case. But one is effective, and the other not so much. Here's how Nataraja Guru explains it in his Gita:

The word *sat* as employed in this verse has... some connotation of its own as reality understood in neutral terms as between existence and non-existence. While the cancelling-out of existence with non-existence might lead to *shunya* or emptiness, the *sat* of the Vedanta of the Gita is meant to represent the Absolute. The difference will perhaps become clear if explained in mathematical terms; if we subtract two equal quantities, the answer is zero. But in the case of the operation in the form of a fraction the result is not a zero but a one ( $10 \text{ minus } 10 = 0$ ;  $10/10 = 1$ ). The unitive Absolute is similarly to be understood as different from the mere nothingness which results from a mechanistic form of reasoning. Unitive reasoning is based upon an intuitive or dialectical awareness. (Gita, II.16)

After some amusing banter about animals, I read out How Enlightened Are You? from the last notes, and the first few paragraphs from Part II here, which continue the theme. Read them if you're interested. Due to the confluence of Letter Nine with Sutra 3 in my writeup for Nancy Y's class, it illustrates the expansion of evolving consciousness: we are not trying to achieve non-existence, but fulfill it, yet there are both active and inactive ways to proceed.

Andy was invited to tell us about his experience in the Buddhist retreats he attends. His goals are not devoid of content, and he feels that hasn't been their aim. He has found in them a deep exposure to associative thinking, which is a real immersion in actuality. For him it's not about nothingness at all, it includes daydreams and emotions of all kinds, some coming from deep within. The witnessing quality he comes to is interfused with all of that. What emerges isn't the product of any intentional subduing of thought or a zombie-like vacuity. It's more that the content is seen in a different way, brought about by the continuing presence of conscious awareness.

For Andy, a main reason for the retreat is to examine his associative thinking. He finds it very paradoxical, something you're doing all the time, yet you rarely get down to the ground of it. When you do, it can be an aha! moment. Andy maintained the perspective is that nothing has an independent existence, nothing can exist unless it is plugged into whole of reality. That's a big part of the presentation of *shunyata*, or *shunya*. It's not so much pure emptiness: you're really immersed, and the profoundest moments are the realization of being here. It's a moment of pure honesty, like, "Oh, *this* is your mind space! You can see that, because your sensitivity to pure awareness has been heightened. It made me wonder if the Buddhist concept of dependent origin wasn't closely related to *bhava*, where subject and object arise together in a kind of electrical fluttering vibration.

My Nitya-editing this week unearthed a brilliant passage on sattva. It's from the Gita, where liberation from all three gunas is emphasized, yet it's relevant here because sattva is so often mistakenly conflated with real detachment:

The first thing is, even sattva binds you. Sattva binds you with two things: with knowledge, and with bliss. You find a state blissful, so you don't want to leave it. You find a state giving you a lot of insight into things, and that gives you a qualitative difference from the rest of the community. So you want to hold on to that situation. This is a position that is accepted by the Zen Buddhists also, where some Zen masters, as soon as they see that they are getting into a peaceful state and becoming addicted to it, they leave it. They say, even this is binding. Sattva is as binding as the rest, although it is considered to be one where you have a very clear perception of what is presented to the senses and the mind, where the intellect still has the power to discriminate between right and wrong and is not enslaved by your passions and your desires, and there are no motivational urges that cause compulsive inhibitions or obsessions. So it's fairly superior, but it still belongs to prakriti. (Nitya Gita video, XIV.6)

Deb mentioned her major revelation from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: the ultimate cause of the universe is hunger. She wrestled with it at first, but now it makes amazing sense. Hunger calls us to arise from our quiescent state and take action. Andy added it's not only physical hunger, it's also how psychologically we need to make sense of things. There is a function inside us, always asking what's this, what's this? and that is a form of hunger also.

That questioning drive is the first of the four stages of the development of the psyche, according to Vedanta: *manas*. The

questioning is followed by memory association, *citta*, which combines to make a comprehensible registry of what This is: the intellect, of *buddhi*. Deciding what the result means to us gives us the I-sense, the *ahamkara* or ego. It's a very handy general scheme for understanding how and why we think, and what we could do about it. Anita talked about how much of our psyche is tied to survival instincts. Some of our confusion as a species comes from bringing our survival mentality to bear on matters that are not dangerous. The only seem dangerous, but that leads us to react with hostility.

Nancy thought this was, in part, how we complicate our lives so much, as well as why we get unexpected results from our actions. We need to cultivate our ability to be really concise, and she doesn't think we make enough effort to grasp what the outcome of our actions is going to be. So many of the results are based on greed, fear, and selfishness.

Andy noted how a lot of energy is used up in over-reacting to what we don't understand. This includes the triggering of emotional memories, and that can be so subtle we hardly notice. If the associative reflex is lowered down, as he does in his retreats, you are left with a super abundance of energy. Nitya had this—if you spent time around him, he was never in good health but he was a powerhouse. It might have been because he wasn't called out continually by habits of association, the way we are.

I put it that Nitya had Self-confidence, so it wasn't necessary for him to try to establish who he was. That's where we hapless mortals put an excess of our energy, instead of simply accepting ourselves.

Anita has realized that idea: how much time she spends being concerned with how she comes across to other people. It's not a pleasant revelation, how pervasive that can be. It makes everyday interchanges so exhausting! She wondered why we're so caught up in this, which made for a meaningful conversation.

Most of us endure a lot of criticism during our development, and suggestions of all sorts, even really good ones, can feel like criticism, because we are expected to change ourselves from what we are to what others want us to be. All of that was more or less necessary in order to participate in the social world. Now we're past the early development stage (most of us!), so we can try to reconnect with the river that endures, that doesn't have to be forced to flow by a hungry soul: the citishakti, always flowing with endless energy.

## Part II

The last part of the 2008 notes, below these, has an interesting take on current events of the time, for those with war on their minds these days.

From the 2009 study group, with Nancy Y:

I hadn't realized that Nancy's study group mixed Letters and Sutras, so the old notes I've included haven't always been exactly the right ones. Fortunately, it's all the same topic, more or less. These notes include Letter Nine with Sutra I:3, but they dovetail nicely, on a perennially crucial issue. Plus, they segue from How Enlightened Are You? from the last set of Notes:

Hanging out with dogs makes you wonder about consciousness, in that they supposedly preceded us on the evolutionary scale of development. Dogs are very conscious beings, and yet they don't appear to be self-aware. They take things as they come, which is refreshing and even therapeutic. They retain plenty of imprints of past habits, but they don't ever spend conscious time living in the past, as far as we can tell. Yet unconsciously the past impacts them a lot. All "creatures of habit"

are powerfully controlled by their previous experiences and the expectations based on them, though mainly at a preconscious level.

Then I think of a worm, a simple creature that seems to have a much more limited ambit of awareness, but still more than a bacterium. It looks like evolution is extending the arena of our conscious awareness, and one of the most important extensions is into the past. Early in development, the challenge is to evolve awareness of the surroundings, to build senses to read the environment and permit responses to it. Once an animal becomes sufficiently conscious of its present surroundings, its space, the next purview for expansion is time. We begin to retrospect about the past and wonder about the future, and our sphere of consciousness enlarges.

Knowing this, it is intriguing that Nitya says, near the end of Letter Nine: “The intuitive understanding of the myth of the past can cause a dent in the opaque screen of becoming through which you can visualize your Being.” Normally we believe that living in the past undermines our spiritual presence, but here we learn just how valuable that ability to include events that are over and done with is to our ability to witness intelligently. Comprehending the past is an advance, not a retreat. As highly complex beings, we are not meant to mimic worms and only digest the soil that bumps into our noses. It’s okay to try to visualize what that soil is in its entirety and imagine our journey through it as a coherent and meaningful transition.

By the time we have become adults, if we are normally inquisitive and unrepressed, we will be quite familiar with the witnessing aspect of our mind. Hopefully, when we become embroiled in events our initial thrust is to recover our lost witness, which is closely related to the balance yogis seek. Regaining the witness or the balance can be done both actively and passively. For myself, I’m like Isha and prefer the active mode. Vien Duc prefers the passive, and he is off to the caves for yet another round of self-

restraint and intentional inaction. The route you choose depends mainly on your personal preference, because both are efficacious when taken far enough.

Exercise One includes “Try to discover some of the myriad past experiences that are coloring your understanding of and reaction to the present.” This is a way of putting into practice the sentence of Nitya’s I copied earlier, to dent the opaque screen. As it happens, I have a good example from immediately before I sat down to pen this response, as they used to say.

I called up my friend Bill and in the course of conversation I mentioned that I hadn’t reminded him of an important job he was going to do for me because I didn’t want to pester him. He laughed and said it wouldn’t have been pestering, it would have been helpful to be reminded. Then I remembered one of the things my witnessing has taught me this year, that I was raised to always believe I was bothering people. As a child, when I would run up to family members filled with love or excitement, they would sometimes—not always—rebuff me and send me away chastened. A favorite phrase was “Children should be seen and not heard,” meaning we should keep our distance and leave adults alone. In striving faithfully to honor these requests I learned to self-censor my impulses for connection with my loved ones. In time the inhibitions became an invisible part of my makeup, no longer noticed. It was natural for me to always assume I was unwelcome and leave it at that.

As I recalled some of the rather painful memories that went into creating this complex, I could begin to see how they played out in the present. Once you have the mindset in place, all rejections reinforce it, and all contrary occurrences of being welcomed are dismissed as anomalies. In this way a quirk of mind rapidly becomes an entrenched barrier to uninhibited communication. This is but one of the many poisoned arrows that protrude from our flesh as we stagger through life. Yet thanks to

our resilience as divine beings, we become accustomed to the pain and pretty soon accept it as the normal state of affairs.

I will probably always assume I'm unwelcome wherever I go, and it's not such a bad opening gambit, because many people really do not easily welcome outsiders into their personal universes. But now with what I've learned I can consciously suppress that inhibiting assumption and tentatively reach out to people. If they respond positively, I am able to drop the caution and interact more or less normally, or what passes for normal in my case.

So on the phone with Bill I relinquished my ongoing sense of being an unwelcome pest that regularly inhibits or at least colors my relationships, and was able to be more my true self with him. We had a nice friendly conversation. It's clear to the inner witness that these quirks of conditioning are impediments to living freely, and if we can just access that clarity of consciousness we can let them go as we begin to be aware of them. They are all over the place, and they always get in the way, trip you up. Taking corrective action is a lot like being caught in a vat of molasses and trying to extricate yourself. But the alternative is to stay stuck, and that's just not acceptable.

As a kid, whenever humans rejected me, my dog would always be warm and friendly. They well know what it's like to live at the behest of adults who are almost always oblivious of their affections! I suppose that's one reason I'm such a "dog person" and even go so far as to claim that dogs are good gurus. Where humans reject, dogs are always open to affection in the present.

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From the 2008 Notes:

When the mental modifications cease, we may be afraid that we are gone, dead, or otherwise absent. Patanjali wants to assure us that it is our own essence we reenter when we sink into our core. We do not have to fear that there is a loss of soul involved.

Nitya's commentary recalls the image of a movie theater, where light passing through a colored film throws images on a screen. Our essential nature is the light (consciousness), our activities along with our samskaras and vasanas (memories and genetic predilections) provide the film, and the world is the screen. We have become completely mesmerized by the action being played out in the movie 24/7, and have forgotten the complex apparatus that makes it happen. We want to have an impact on the movie, but find it almost impossible to alter the set patterns on the screen. That's because the film is not being addressed; it is "behind" us in a manner of speaking, and what's in front of us is foreordained, predestined. If we can sink into our light source, we can see that the more essential cause of action is our mental film unreeling.

This aspect of ourselves is available for us to work on. We can wipe away some of the darkness of the film so that more light can shine through. We can see how certain conditionings are warping how the light passes through them. And we can become humble that we are a small part of a magnificent situation so that we don't strut around on screen like a peacock.

Brain imaging studies demonstrate the Vedantic wisdom that our conscious awareness comes at the tail end of a long process. In an article about the placebo effect, which has recently been demonstrated to produce real chemical and physiological changes, the Utne Reader reports: "Our brains are up and running even before we're consciously aware of the activity, according to Science-NOW Daily News (April 14, 2008). Ten seconds before you think you've made a choice, your brain already has the answer."

The Yoga Sutra study is all about reestablishing ourselves in our core by restraining our projections. From there we can clean up our film so that the maximum of light floods the theater of our consciousness.

Paul wondered if it wasn't tragic that we aren't content to remain grounded in ourselves, but seek to relate to the world through its vibrations. Shouldn't there be only light and not darkness or coloration?

For some people, leaving the world and disappearing is a very appealing option. But most of us in the class want to live our lives to the fullest possible measure. We seek the light of our essential nature to enrich ourselves and those we come in contact with, by adding depth to the two-dimensional play on the surface. Looking at a brightly lit blank screen gets boring pretty quickly. We want to see a plot with some action and wise insights emerging on it. We union projectionists will be gone from this place for a long time after we die, so let's do what we can to make it a beautiful and delightful experience for everyone who passes through by running great films.

We want to emphasize again that this isn't a question of choosing between on or off, we want to know both on and off together. Because we have gotten so caught up in the vibrational aspect of the world, we have forgotten our true nature as "emptiness" beyond vibrations. Oddly, remembering our core makes relating to the vibrations better in any number of ways. In social interactions, for example, people are more likely to listen to us if we aren't trying to tinker with their world by giving unsolicited advice. Outwardly forcing the issue is therefore counterproductive. It tends to strike people as phony, because it is.

Another way of looking at the on/off question is that our core reality is the Void or the Absolute, a reality of Nothingness. It is rare and difficult to dispense with everything that is Something in order to gain entry to the Void. And as Narayana Guru said, we

shouldn't waste time trying to wash the lather out of soap. You can wash it forever and it will still produce lather. Yoga instead seeks to balance our exaggerated aspects, by intelligently juxtaposing and demystifying them. Once things are in balance a perception of the void emerges as an integral part of the total situation. This lends an intellectual aspect to our comprehension without erasing us from existence. Nature is filled with galaxies, each with billions of complex star systems rotating around a hub that is suspected to be a black hole or holes. This is our personal vision as well: the Absolute as the theoretical hub of a rotating galaxy of wondrous expressions of actualized potential.

So we gather together to get real. We sat quietly and concentrated on feeling who we actually are. What do we experience as us? With eyes closed, the visible boundary of our skin disappears. We can sense something that we identify as ourselves radiating out some distance. Within it are all our perceptions and conceptions. They are not outside. There is no outside. All of us are included in the awareness of each one. It is amazing we feel as separate as we do, since our essences overlap like a roomful of electromagnets. When we stop holding ourselves apart, we can expand that feeling much more.

Jan and I talked the day before about body language, how it often reflects the blocks we put up to keep others at a distance. We cross our arms to hold in our feelings and resist those of others. Or we tense up, twist or otherwise throw up psychic barriers. It can be very freeing to notice the tensions and awkward body language and make simple adjustments to relax ourselves. In most cases we don't need to wall out the other, it's a habitual response and unhelpful. Remember Frost: "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know / What I was walling in or walling out." When we build a fortress to keep out intruders we are shutting ourselves in. The so-called intruders are free to go their own way, but we are stuck inside.

Both at the beginning and the end of class, we had some very sweet group meditations where we discarded everything to sit in our own nature. Somehow there is an invisible resonance that draws us all into an intense peace. We will foster that more in the weeks to come.

## Part II

Here's one way citta vrtti can work. There has just been an attack on Americans in Mumbai, India. The "talking heads" are busy spinning it for all it's worth: Pakistan is attacking India, Muslims are murderers, we have to build up our armies and wipe them out, etc. Very one-sided and specious. If you only listen to the propaganda, you will be drawn into some very dangerous attitudes, full of fear and hostility, where it becomes easy to think of genocidal solutions. But if you step back and look at the overarching situation, you get a whole different take. First of all, India isn't being attacked, it is the Americans and their allies in their war of crusade against Islam. They are being attacked wherever they may be found. It isn't very far-fetched to imagine that whatever country or religion was under concerted attack, including annihilating wedding parties regularly to symbolize the genocidal intent, they would be justified in mounting a counter-offensive of their own. It's all very logical. Therefore, the spiritual thinker supports reducing offensive hostilities rather than an all-out effort to squelch a large portion of the globe. When people are left in peace they are much less likely to resort to organized violence. Narayana Guru underlined this idea in *Atmopadesa Satakam*, verse 46:

By fighting it is impossible to win;  
by fighting one another no faith is destroyed;  
one who argues against another's faith, not recognizing  
this,

fights in vain and perishes; this should be understood.

Another way of putting it is expressed in a quote by Nitya provided by Nancy Yeilding, found on page 30 of Gurukulam Magazine (1987 first quarter), part of a terrific series entitled *Wonder Journey with a Wandering Guru*:

Do not look into the social mirror and then think that is what you are. You should have an inner estimation of yourself and the value of what you are doing. Of course, it is possible to be self-deluded and make mistaken judgments. In order to avoid that, you need a confidante who is detached. If you learn to strike a root in the universal order, that gives you stability.... When you sit firm on your own truthfulness, your own trust, you can face any encounter.