

2022 Patanjali Class 22

6/14/22

Sutra I:4A – At other times, the identification is with the modifications.

The “other times” are when we are not residing in our essential nature, per sutra I:3. This is evidence of the dualistic nature of Patanjali’s Yoga. In Advaita, there are no “other times.” We always reside in our essential nature, whether we are aware of it or not. Which is most fortunate, since we are so rarely aware of it. It is impossible to totally abandon ourselves, though we can bind our attention very, very strongly in superficial trivialities. We opened the evening with a longer than usual meditation on this concept, taking extra time to let go of our habitual ego definitions.

Deb led off the ensuing discussion with the idea that the self is everything, the basis of everything, coextensive with infinity, and our deepest consciousness. It becomes differentiated when we start to feel our self as separate from our body, and experience objects outside us, in the field of prakriti. The ego is drawn over the self like a protective blanket, but always at its core is that impossible-to-measure Self. What we’re dealing with here is how that is changed and manifested in the everyday world of sensual experiences and mental configurations, which is where we have our work cut out for us, of understanding the core of who we are.

Nitya’s commentary contrasts the outmoded scientific formula of isolated individual selves who are impinged on by sense impressions from distant objects, with the Vedantic one of consciousness as the central verity that radiates outward to embrace the objects it needs to make sense and function:

According to Vedanta, the light that shines within is the only light by which the entire world and all living minds are illuminated. That is the one and only Self. There is no special

cleavage anywhere in the universality of existence, knowledge, and the value of its beingness. The Vedantin therefore thinks that the time and space where a thing is experienced is exactly where such experiencing is happening. This is quite contrary to what modern scientists postulate. (20-1)

During our first meditation, I noticed that when you sit quietly with eyes closed, it is easy to see that the center of awareness is within you. Its source begins within us, and we are not just an isolated unit being interfered with, we are the whole story. With eyes closed, sense input minimized, we can observe how we radiate the room we're in, the people, the satellite link-up to our zooming friends, and all the rest of it. It's not coming into us, it's coming out of our understanding, our own being. And we're shaping it all in accord with our mental predilections.

Curiously, the outside-appearing world and this inner certitude work together seamlessly to make existence possible and even spectacular. And their harmony is good for our health.

In our chatter before class, we talked about ways to promote healing, and this sutra turned out to be an excellent elucidation of the principle. We likely have learned to think of ourselves as damaged goods that need to be repaired by an outside agency, and we believe in various plausible methodologies, including herbal potions, nutrition and exercises, to bring this about. Yet much healing is conducted from within, and uses these strategies mainly as assistants. Yet we don't trust it, because we don't truly believe in ourselves. When we focus mainly on the outer techniques, we are relying on peripheral aspects, which may not be up to the job. In consequence, we don't always bring that healing energy from our steady inner state, we bring it from a conglomeration of ideas, basically from the ego. Our being knows how to heal, and it knows when it's time to bring in outside help, and what sort.

Historically, people become fascinated by the cure of the day, or the herb of the week, and pin much hope on it, until a newer, better nostrum arrives. We love to plan and scheme and mount a campaign; we are impelled to figure out what to do and then carry it out. Actually, the hope, the belief, is at least as important as the chemical, or the game plan. The plans do play a role in drawing our forces to bear, if they are grounded in what we believe in and what logical experiment has verified. The suggestion here is not that we shouldn't do anything on purpose, but that we include an intellectual approach where we intentionally let go of our preconceptions, hopes and fears, so we can make room for the central verity of our life to guide us. Deb agreed that the thrust here is how to step back from all of those specifics, all those action-oriented outlooks, to rest in one's real self. Anyway, it can't hurt to give it a shot. ☺

In his most recent response in our online Gita class, Andy noted that Nataraja Guru frequently urged his disciples to “verticalize” their attitude. Andy could see that here Nitya is talking about being drawn away from the vertical by the horizontalizing tendency of mind, where we're wrapped up in the qualities of things. The horizontal is about motivation — not only do we work toward a clear perception, but that perception then becomes involved in motives. This causes a masking of purusha (or the vertical), where we're getting ever more densely engaged, due to our need to shore up our ego with specifying qualities.

That's right—horizontalizing means specifying, as well as delineating and crafting behavior into programs and plans of attack. The opposite is withdrawing into generality and neutrality, where our vertical unfoldment grows naturally, like a rose bush, so we don't have to make it happen. It *is* valuable to appreciate this. Vedanta is supposed to purify our relationship with the horizontal, enhance it, by giving us the opportunity to think more about its basis in our essential, vertical nature.

Deb asked us to give examples of the vertical in our lives, and for her own was reminded of when she was with Nataraja Guru in 1971, the period when he was expounding on Shankara's Saundaryalahari. He envisioned a perfect Gurukula: a pool in an exquisite jungle area, where there would be many women lounging around nibbling biscuits and cream. Everyone would be out in this beautiful place enjoying themselves, relaxed and open. The children would be running around, or swimming in the pool. Occasionally one of them would come up to the women and ask, where is my father? and they would say, don't worry about it, just go play. Deb felt he was advocating experiencing without rigid definitions, of moving from restricted visions to open fluidity. Despite being a somewhat radical American, she found this mind-blowing. By Indian standards, it was outrageous. As Nitya relates in *Love and Blessings*, there were times when he felt Nataraja Guru was "downright perverted." The Ideal Gurukula likely qualified.

Especially in India, where people have rigid ideas about gurukulas and ashrams and how they work: daily programs, fixed steps, sure paths to enlightenment—Nataraja Guru realized how deadening that could be. How mechanical. Verticalization meant allowing for serendipity and the unexpected. Verticalization of our intentionality means not spelling out specific goals, the way we did for years in school and other training programs, but opening ourselves to the natural expansion we undergo in all situations, whether they are intentionally selected or not.

From his own experience, Charles felt verticalization meant being more subjective, and perhaps vague. Being closer to dreams and impulses and the imagination. The practical mentality, with lists and schedules, was his idea of the horizontal. The vertical was epitomized by Narayana Guru or people like him: clearheaded, above the whirlpool of events. The vertical axis, going from bottom to top, begins in complete unconsciousness and rises higher and higher toward full consciousness, but it's subjective. As your

mind becomes more functional, you have more intuitive clarity. Nonetheless, you can be verticalized and be confused. Charles found being isolated from the horizontal very confusing at times. He and I agreed that in those halcyon times we all associated getting high on psychedelics with verticalization.

I suggested the confusion arises because the vertical state is not defined. It can't be spelled out, because that makes it a horizontal proposition. But we are compelled by our upbringing to try.

Part of the consoling aspect of our class is accepting that the undefined state can be healthy and positive. The detachment involved brings us into a more visionary place. We have all been trained to explain ourselves, explain what we're doing in well-defined terms. One of the Gurukula's charms, and one reason for our lack of commercial success, is that even after a half century, most Gurukula stalwarts still can't describe what it's about to a curious onlooker. Because, ideally, we're being, not doing.

We moved on to sharing personal accounts of verticalization. Deb has been drawn to the recent Japanese idea of forest bathing, where it's not that you go into the woods for a hike or to identify plants or map the territory, but just to be part of the forest, letting it bathe you. She finds time soaking in nature a much more generating and elevating experience than talking about it.

Karen (bless her heart!) said she has that refreshing experience in our class. She loves to come here, where it's so beautiful and we are together in a special place of mutual respect and love. Even driving up here is an exhilarating experience. She feels it's very vertical. Nourishing.

Susan shared a couple of examples, and it turns out she can miraculously take notes while she's talking. What a gal! She went to her cabin in the mountains, by the Metolius River, for the previous week, and when she took a break from cleaning and maintenance, she would lie out in a zero-gravity chair next to the

river. (It's fortunate she didn't float away! Those mountains must be really high to have zero gravity.) She listened to the rush of water, and the many birds chirping away, and all the trees rustling, and it was lovely, but seemed busy, somehow. Horizontal, you might say—everybody going somewhere else, or being blown around. Then she was visited by an eagle soaring high above, as if exemplifying zero gravity, and its serenity took her out of the busyness into peace.

Her other example was a change from her childhood, going from praying to God “out there” before going to sleep, to thinking of the divine in her and being connected to all, since she has been with the Gurukula the past 20+ years. Susan likes rules, and she likes structure, but she can see how the Christian idea is more structured and the Vedantic idea is about letting go of the structure, which appeals to her more now. She is able to feel and enjoy it and still feel guided, in a different way.

Deb was also raised to think of a paternal God sitting in heaven, but she loves Brian Doyle's term: the coherent mercy. It is so sweet to open yourself to that coherent mercy, and it doesn't look like anyone in particular.

I'd say there is structure underlying everything. Susan's natural need as a child was to be directed by a clear and simple structure, and as an adult she prefers to be guided by a more nuanced and open structure, in keeping with the life lessons she's learned and her stronger sense of self-reliance. This week I collected a couple of quotes that fit in right here:

You do not decide where to go, and then begin going there. In real life, while you're deciding where to go, you are already traveling. (107) Jeremy Denk, *Every Good Boy Does Fine*.

When we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work and when we no longer know which way to go, we have begun our real journey. Wendell Berry

Kris finds vertical centeredness sometimes when she's swimming in the ocean, the feeling you are not separate from the water. Another example happened when she went to India, in the 1970s. She wasn't planning to adopt a baby, but then something way beyond her kicked in, and she did it, and a huge blessing came permanently into her life. It's the kind of guidance you aren't asking for, but then it happens.

Kris's adoption is a perfect elucidation of Nitya's analogy in his comments, of a magnet attracting things to it, similar to our consciousness being the source of the light by which we see. He often taught how our inner being is rearranging and structuring the world according to our talents and incentives. Our course in life is by no means an arid, mechanical process. We all have had surprising things happen to us that turned out to be just the right event to initiate the next stage of our lives. I can still picture the minute Susan saw me packing around a freshly minted copy of *Love and Blessings* and asked me about it....

On magnets, Nitya selects a quote from the oceans of wise commentary inundating India, that we love to bathe in:

Vijnana Bhikshu, a sixteenth century Vedantic commentator of Yoga, gives the following analogy for the instrumentality of consciousness that ensues from itself: "As a magnet, by drawing to it a piece of iron, does some service to its owner and thus becomes, as it were, a treasured possession of the owner, so does the mind serve its master, the purusha, by drawing to itself the objects around it and presenting them to purusha and thereby becomes, as it were, the very self of the purusha."

My two examples were about how our vertical component can be the vanguard of our healing, and also weigh in on minor matters. I recently had a vivid dream, and when I woke up and recalled it, it revealed a mysterious illness I had contracted, in pictorial language, and even showed me searching for a pair of doctors to find a literal key, which galvanized me to take it seriously. The dream made it palpable that there is something in me that doesn't often speak English, but knows very well what I need. I'm getting better at listening to it, but I'm sure I appear utterly deaf from its perspective, most of the time. But it knows how to talk to me, and keeps trying.

Yesterday while I was getting the mail, I realized I needed to move our post box to the other side of the street, for safety reasons. Later I mentioned this to Deb, and resolved to get to work on it soon. Today our postal delivery person drove up to the house and handed us a notice from the postmaster that we had two weeks to move our post box, or have our service cut off. I had to laugh.

Instead of getting upset, as I might have done once upon a time, I called the postmaster and had a helpful conversation, and he was so happy to have a friendly phone call for once that he waived the deadline.

Some of you might be interested in this old article on [the universe as a hologram](#), which explains how every part might be in contact with every part.

Paul agreed that we are all becoming a larger identity. This philosophy helps him see meaningful things right in front of him that he otherwise might fail to notice. He knows now that sometimes when you are emotionally or physically in pain, you can look at yourself in a detached way and say, there is Paul and his stomach hurts. You look at yourself going through the ailment, and it doesn't have the teeth that it once did when you individualized yourself to death with self-pity. Right on!

Deb has experienced how when we are really upset about something or are sick, our world gets smaller. If your consciousness expands, you become so much more than that pain or sickness.

Fortunately for us hapless mortals, as manically fixed as our horizontalized attention can get, it's still weaker than the vertical, at least for the well-meaning types. We still make progress and grow, so long as we're supporting it in a moderate way. When you are aware of this inner intelligence, this coherent mercy, it helps you be more appreciative and less anxious.

This got Kris thinking about Trump, how his whole world is only about him. By contrast, the Dalai Lama makes it about everyone, and she suspects one of them might be living a much happier life than the other. I added that the people around the Dalai Lama are also living much happier lives than those competing for the affections of a madman. Deb pointed out that the Dalai Lama doesn't identify with power and respect.

Since external accolades or piles of filthy lucre are never enough to fill up the void of a displaced self, you have to go on begging and scheming for them. If other peoples' happiness helps make you happy, which it obviously does, Trump isn't adding anything to his core of misery, but the Dalai Lama surely is. Let's face it, though—you can freeze out your connection with the vertical if you try hard enough. The psyche can become an apocalyptic stormtrooper. A threatened child brings furious forces to bear for self-protection, blocking out all alternatives, potentially for a lifetime. Yoga study is meant to help us disidentify with our self-imposed prisons, heal the ego, and return to our natural equipoise. If we are still carrying heavy armor from earlier traumas and stresses, this study is an invitation to ask ourselves how am I still doing that, and why? How is it still persisting, and what am I protecting? Throwing light on the outdated sources of our inhibitions might convince us we don't need to be so bottled up

anymore. This is expanded on in Part III of Part II, below, a kind of Gurukula manifesto.

Part II

Our old Notes begin with an announcement about the book we're using being almost finished, and then continues in a serious vein. Included are another Part II, Anita's excellent revelation, and Part III, a statement of intent of the Gurukula classes; for me, our manifesto. Well worth rereading:

First off, word is that the book has gone to the printer today, so it won't be long before we can hold it in our hands. That's the kind of modification we really want to identify with!

With this verse we meet the lions guarding the gates, so to speak. There was some complaining and grouching from an unexpected source about all the verbiage and the excessive amount of Sanskrit terminology, and a general flagging of intent. Class size is already dwindling. The bottom line is, each person has to make a decision whether they are content to dither along or whether it's worthwhile to get serious. Better to settle that right off the bat. Nitya very subtly and gently challenges us to take a decision.

It's true that Nitya's Yoga Sutras is to some degree a reference text, presented in the traditional manner with lots of unfamiliar terms. We will have to struggle to extract the essential meaning from the forest of information. Happily, the group did exactly that. With a slow start, partly affected by the states of mind brought to the class, we homed in on the meaning and ended up considerably lighter in spirit. This is a beautiful process to witness. Unlike church or a guru darshan where your comprehension is handed to you already packaged, this is a living process of tender shoots pushing up through the cement pavement to grow into the light of day.

The I Ching commented on by Richard Wilhelm says of Difficulty at the Beginning (p. 16-17):

Times of growth are beset with difficulties. They resemble a first birth. But these difficulties arise from the very profusion of all that is struggling to attain form. Everything is in motion: therefore if one perseveres there is a prospect of great success, in spite of the existing danger.... It is important not to remain alone; in order to overcome the chaos he needs helpers. This is not to say, however, that he himself should look on passively at what is happening. He must lend his hand and participate with inspiration and guidance.

If a person encounters a hindrance at the beginning of an enterprise, he must not try to force advance but must pause and take thought. However, nothing should put him off his course; he must persevere and constantly keep the goal in sight.

“Perseverance furthers.” ‘Nuff said. There are a million mythological stories where the fool is questioned at the gate or has to prove herself worthy of a quest by overcoming obstacles. Our class is a non-mythological example. The good feelings at the end were in part a product of the effort we put in to grasp the Guru’s meaning.

Okay, enough of that. What was the meaning we had to grasp?

The Gurukula is very supportive of “being with the modifications.” They are what manifested life is all about. But there is a dark side to them, hinted at by two phrases in the commentary. Nitya tells us, “The Self hides behind its own light and projects its false identification with the ego.” Furthermore,

“Thus instrumental consciousness becomes by and large a defense measure of consciousness.” Moni asked us to explain this.

Deb related how we craft a persona, a social mask, to interact with the world, and become identified with it, forgetting our true self. We’ve heard these words before, but we have become complacent about them. Our egos are clever enough to adopt a “spiritual” guise about the social mask so that we will stop trying to tear it off. Then the spiritual search becomes a pretense and a charade. We are up to our necks in such games on all hands, to mix an anatomic metaphor. Putative spirituality is in fact the ideal guise for a persona mask: Look how good I am! I worship God and follow his every suggestion. Anyone who doubts me must then doubt God, so they deserve to be killed. They must be terrorists, because they terrify me. I’m terrified of being exposed as a faker, returned to my rejected state of the unloved child. So make those threats go away at all cost. Bomb them! Jail them! Annihilate them! No wonder humans love war.

It doesn't always get so violent, of course, only when there's a threat to our complacency. Mostly we've adjusted our lives to screen out the threats in advance. So we can dither instead of fighting tooth and nail. As Deb said, when we're sitting in meditation we have these strong urges to get up and do the dishes or vacuum the carpets or go run errands. Bill noted that our heads are so full of thoughts that we almost never get a break from them. That’s about as much of the titanic battle of life and death as we consciously perceive. Our egos have very effectively screened us off from knowing who we are.

If we are lucky, as children we lived an undisturbed period as emissaries of the Absolute. But without exception we came to a point quite early on when we were no longer acceptable as miniature yogis. Our love was rejected; we encountered painful situations; society demanded we “grow up.” With the best of intentions we set out to craft a being that would be lovable to the

world. We scavenged decaying parts from the morgues and graveyards around us. At first we remembered our inner nature as distinct from the “Frankenstein’s monster” we were cobbling together, but sooner or later we converted to thinking of it as “me” and even joined in the hostile attitude about our peaceful inner being. We became socialized in opposition to our very self, and in the process ended up totally conflicted about who we are. The monster took on a life of its own and ran amok. As adults, the false image has become true, and the truth has been nailed to a cross, bled to death, and thrown into a tomb with a huge stone placed over the entrance. We lie in the dark, dreaming we are free and parrying all assertions otherwise.

Our task is nothing less than our own resurrection. We must cast off our dreams and awaken. Is it worth the effort? You decide for yourself. If your answer is yes, be prepared to hold tight to your decision when "the devil" tempts you with frittering, the golden disc of your social mask reasserts its allure, or it simply seems like too much trouble to make that weekly support group meeting. Which it most definitely will!

Part II

Anita told me the other day that the previous week’s Part II was helpful to her, because she translated the terms to her personal life. There I wrote of the prejudiced attitude toward Muslims that is building tension and launching conflicts. In some quarters they are treated as unsullied evil that should be wiped out en masse. She thought, I have the same feelings towards my ex-husband, and I have been culturing them for many years. Just seeing that, she had already made a change of heart.

This is most excellent. We speak hypothetically about the relationship between the political and personal spheres, but we should really see how the attitude invested in one is not in any way different from the attitude invested in the other. They are the same

psychic trap, merely expressed on different levels. The solution is likewise the same: a unilateral reduction of hostilities, both overt and covert. The effect is immediate, even if substantive change takes a long time, and it must not be dependent on reciprocity. We begin the process and keep it up, because it is the right thing to do even in the midst of the storm. How other people respond is their problem, but they are more likely to follow suit if they are not being threatened or enticed in any way.

Narayana Guru addresses this issue particularly in Atmo 36-42, the section on sama and anya, but his whole life was an example of how curing your own ailments leavens the whole loaf. Thanks, Anita, for reminding us to bring the teachings home, every time!

Part III

A former class member who still reads the notes called this morning to offer some suggestions. He was concerned that my mention of “dwindling class size” was an indication of something amiss with the classes, and suggested doing hatha yoga beforehand as a curative. In the past he has complained about the Sanskrit terminology being a barrier.

I didn't mean anything drastic by that statement, though the purport of the notes was intense enough. Classes wax and wane, and this is a busy time of year. Plus, I'm waiting to see if the economic depression makes people more or less inclined to seek philosophical wisdom. Possibly it will seem like a luxury to many, and a necessity of life to even fewer than usual.

I appreciate my friend's sentiments, but we are not a commercial enterprise that needs to trade off authenticity for popularity. My guru prayed and strove to be unpopular, and it saved us a million headaches. We represent a rare but not quite unique perspective that we need to adhere to through thick or thin, or else we'll become something we're not. It will never be popular,

nor should it be. It exists for those few who wish to make a breakthrough from the ordinary state of human bondage, and not just adjust the bonds so they are a bit more comfortable. This being the case, it would be a sellout of our authenticity to compromise by coddling to the desire to be comfortable.

I am frequently amazed at how a very radical teaching often gets translated into a familiar adage and smilingly tucked away. Where does it go? In any case, it only occasionally has even a small part of the impact it would if it was completely taken to heart. This is a perennial situation. What it means is that there is plenty there if we are interested enough to take a peek.

Recently a number of Christian churches have encountered a similar challenge and are splitting in two in consequence. The rift is between those who favor the ordination or even simple acceptance of gays as a clear mandate of the Christian creed, and those who fear a loss of membership because of it. Should they do the right thing and lose their bigoted followers to evangelical churches, or hold off and retain that lucrative membership? In the end, no compromise seems possible. Gays have been ordained, and openly anti-gay factions have formed. Gayness is just downright terrifying to some who associate spirituality with a certain conservative morality, and they refuse to tolerate it.

Luckily, we don't have such decisions to make, because we are not in it for the money or to become a powerhouse of wisdom or anything. Morality is at best a secondary issue. We are in it because it is the best approximation of truth we have ever encountered. Coincidentally, we represent a vision of truth that comes from India and has foreign words and challenging ideals in it. All humans are free to take it or leave it, but we aren't going to alter it to capture anyone's attention. It has always been baffling to most observers, and suitable mainly to unusual types, to put it politely.

I tried to make it clear in the earlier notes that our egos are the real problem here, not the value of the classes per se. When what is learned is put into practice and starts to have an impact, it can be unsettling. Humans dislike change. You have to have a certain dedication or it is all too easy just to walk away. Nor is it the job of the teachers to force anyone to stick to it. This has to come from the seeker alone. If a firm decision is taken, then there will be plenty of support, but the decision itself is wholly personal.

There are many popular ways of presenting similar ideas to the Gurukula's. They are popular either because they suit people better or they are well advertised or because they don't actually challenge people on a fundamental level. They pay lip service to change, by rearranging the furniture so to speak, but don't rock the boat, not really. If that satisfies someone, fine. For others it isn't enough. Those who want to dig deeper are often grateful for the Gurukula's help in finding a happier state of mind to live with, but if it makes anyone uneasy, there is no compunction. It is worthwhile, though, to ask yourself why you're walking away, because there may be more to it than meets the eye.

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Here's what I wrote for Nancy Y's Patanjali study group, 1/8/10. It's fun, but not particularly relevant to the sutra:

Isha's question about meditating after exercise reminded me of something Nitya described once when I was visiting him in Fernhill. He had just had a visit from two disciples of Bhagavan Shree Rajneesh, who showed him one of Rajneesh's techniques for meditation. First they jumped up and down for awhile, really leapt into the air, working out the excess energy of their bodies. Then they sat down and became rapidly absorbed without any other technique. Nitya thought they were emitting very strong peaceful

vibrations, and he attributed it as much to the exercise as the meditation itself. He felt for extroverted people, or say energetic types, doing some strenuous exercise allowed the body to relax and slide out of the way for awhile. He further added that he had some familiarity with Rajneesh before he got caught up in the big movement, and he had been an excellent scholar and yogi. All the subsequent bizarre cartwheels the Rajneeshies went through only reinforced Nitya's resolve to minimize the codifying of aspects of wisdom through organizational necessity, and instead keep it simple.

So yeah, why not jog around the neighborhood prior to meditation?

Exercise 1, to deconstruct yourself and your world:

I have a motto that I think I've mentioned before: self-description is stultifying. It indicates a direction I want to go in rather than an accomplished realization. I try to downplay how I describe myself, but below my conscious intent is an area of certainty that is anything but certain: who I imagine myself to be.

I think of myself basically as a male, big, strong and somewhat overweight, moderately ugly and offensive, fairly smart and sassy, highly sympathetic, with an open heart and mind. I've been gradually replacing what I can of this imagery with being a semi-disembodied locus of consciousness floating in a world fashioned out of itself, but I have a hard time shaking this concretized picture, developed from years and years of interactions. Really, it doesn't matter if it is accurate or not. The very fact of having a static image is the problem. I'm blessed to have a wife/guru who regularly challenges all my assumptions and presumptions, so that I at least always suspect that all my coins have an obverse side. And I practice a yoga of trying to always imagine a flip side to my thoughts.

At the forefront of this baseline attitude is the desire to help and be of service to others. Not a terrible quality, certainly, but in the context of yoga it's possible that we are more tripped up by our admirable qualities than our faults. We are willing to relinquish our bad qualities, but we hold fast to the ones we consider angelic.

I have to suspect that beneath my very deeply engrained and seemingly natural enjoyment over lending a helping hand in appropriate situations, that this was somehow inculcated into me as part of my upbringing. I can't go so far back that this is not present, because I always remember being at least sensitive to the feelings of other people. But I know my mother harped on thoughtfulness a lot. She was the daughter of a very selfless doctor, and had undoubtedly had the same virtue cultivated in her from early on. She wanted me to always put myself in the place of the other, and it seemed easy to do so from around 5 years old anyway.

So, what's the drawback? When confronted with an opportunity for serious self-reflection I can slide into an easier path by engaging in some socially useful busywork. It's probably an escape in some sense, and as such it makes the whole business out to be a sham. I'm taking the easy way out and only pretending to be nice to release the pressure. As a default setting it's probably about as good as it gets, but I should never use it to mitigate self-criticism or as a social defense mechanism.

Exercise 2:

For the last 7 or 8 years I have been in a state where meditation is pretty much continuous. There is no time when I'm absent from self-examination and self-consciousness, and it has become comfortable enough I can participate in the world in real time, without needing any interpretive delay. The state is quite blissful, and doesn't require any self-description, either! "Scott," whoever that might be, is dissolving into the hypothesphere, and yet playing along with the ongoing games around, responding to

expectations without needing to manage the show. Mostly it works well, and it seems to leave everyone room for their own trips, too.