

2022 Patanjali Class 25

8/16/22

Sutra I: 7A – Direct perception, inference, and authoritative verbal testimony are the valid means of real cognition.

In sutra 6, Patanjali lists the five categories of mental modifications as real cognition, unreal cognition, imaginary cognition, deep sleep, and memory. This sutra is the first of the five epitomizing them, one at a time.

Deb's opening monologue included that our world is formed by relationships, based on the place we stand and look out from. In Nitya's elucidation, Patanjali is not saying that everything is unknowable, but that we are equipped with ways of perceiving that it helps to let go of if we are really going to see the neutral ground of witnessing. Understanding the modifications is part of that process. The most straightforward of the three valid means to real cognition, direct perception, is clearly affected by our interpretations, and. This section is one more take on how to disassemble our way of constructing the world so that we can get at something that is not a projection or distortion.

There is some surprising evidence of how the brain generates perception covered in Part II, including the McGurk Effect.

Deb cited an essay by Nikhil Krishnan, in the August 8, 2022 New Yorker magazine, reviewing the book *Between Us: How Cultures Create Emotions*, by the Dutch psychologist Batja Mesquita. While Krishnan finds the author's arguments overblown, it's an interesting analysis, and touches on our topic quite nicely (how does this keep happening?). These lines stand out:

Instead of treating emotions as mental and “inner,” perhaps we should conceive of them “as acts happening between people:

acts that are being adjusted to the situation at hand,” rather than “as mental states within an individual.” Instead of seeing emotions as bequeathed by biology, we might see them as learned: “instilled in us by our parents and other cultural agents,” or “conditioned by recurrent experiences within our cultures.”

Not even our deepest feelings turn out to be free of the shaping hand of language and convention.

Once we start trading in examples rather than in abstractions, we come closer to learning what we really think. And what we learn is that our language for talking about emotions is already “situated,” already “relational,” already involves a judgment about the world “outside” our minds.

The last bit is *precisely* why I keep begging for personal examples as we forge ahead!

Nitya’s wide-ranging essay is a lot to take in, so I suggested we go straight to the subject of the sutra, asking ourselves what is real cognition, how do we have any idea what it is, and how might we relate to it?

In the ensuing silence you could almost hear the mental wheels spinning—I’m sure if we were actually in a room together, we would have. I proposed that the two models Nitya distinguishes here as Indian and Western are two complementary sides of real cognition, and they are moving toward each other. The so-called Western, where we are primarily products of external stimulation, has been extensively modified in the neural-imaging era. The Indian interpretation, where life flows more from the inside out, is really about genetics — we emerge into the world packing massive programming, which makes us humans and not zebras or elephants, bursting with urges, drives, and an army of potentials

that determine the lion's share of our life. As if by magic, the world roughly conforms to those possibilities, allowing us to accomplish so much, enjoying an unbelievably rich and coherent panoply of experience.

Deb admitted she is not able to define real cognition, and I'm sure we all felt the same way. The very idea of knowing someone or knowing a situation is circumscribed and multifaceted. Recently we attended the memorial for Andy's wife, Bushra, and although Deb felt she knew her in many ways, what so many people shared about her revealed a depth that Deb had not come in contact with before. By taking in so many perspectives, they have now been added to her understanding.

Andy acknowledged the limits of our knowledge, marveling that despite it we regularly come to some kind of shared agreement. When we say there is valid cognition, we have the example of a guy like Trump who is creating a fantastic world for his followers, but there is another slice of the population that agrees with a common perception of stuff, where we are verifying each other's take on conventional reality.

The rub is that "conventional reality" is almost always at variance with "reality," which is famously hard to pin down. In the Western model, this is considered an affliction, while in the Indian, or Eastern, model, partial awareness is simply an inevitable result of being confined within a body, to be understood and corrected for, but not regretted. Knowing we don't have entrée into reality as such, we make do with plausible metaphors, and these serve us more or less well. It surely doesn't do any good to wring our hands over our ignorance. We should be making the most of what we do know, and always be open for more input.

Deb focused on true absorption, where you are grounded in an all-pervasive, neutral consciousness. In dissecting mistakes on the surface, we may forget that ground. As an example, over the two days leading up to Harmony having her baby, a cat came and

sat at the glass front door. This had never happened before, thanks to the big dogs inside. When that cat left, another cat took its place. They were bearing witness. This could only be because of the immanent birth. Deb marveled how animals often operate more fluidly on an intuitive level than we humans allow ourselves to.

Another “coincidence” is that Emily just loaned us the new book by Ed Yong, *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us*. The last few decades have enabled an explosion of fascinating studies of the animal sensorium. These studies uncover the many different ways creatures perceive through their senses, and so encountering vastly different worlds. This is from the Introduction:

Senses that seem paranormal to us only appear this way because we are so limited and so painfully unaware of our limitations. Philosophers have long pitied the goldfish in its bowl, unaware of what lies beyond, but our senses create a bowl around us too—one that we generally fail to penetrate.

The idea is wonderfully expansive. It tells us that all is not as it seems and that everything we experience is but a filtered version of everything that we *could* experience. It reminds us that there is light in darkness, noise in silence, richness in nothingness. It hints at flickers of the unfamiliar in the familiar, of the extraordinary in the everyday, of magnificence in mundanity. (14-15)

The small slice of the world that we perceive feels like a complete whole to us, despite the fact that another type of animal registers a totally different whole world. All of us are perfectly fitted to our environment; we are able to live and thrive despite the fact that we are only perceiving a smidgen of what’s going on. One of the most important, recent upgrades in the scientific perspective is that humanity isn’t top dog over all other creatures: everything out

there is amazingly talented. We have all evolved for the same incredibly long time, producing a world brimming with potential for life, love—and dinner.

Although each animal's perception-perspectives are radically different, we all have a ferocious necessity to attend to reality. What occurred to me on my first visit to the baby (the youngest person I had been with since 1987, when Harmony was born), was that it was absolutely REAL. It was not a cognition that could be modified, or tuned out, without consequence. He was like the berry in the palm of our hand that in the Upanishads symbolizes certitude.

Paul's takeaway was how effectively conditioning colors our perception. It isn't that seeing is believing. Believing is seeing. What we don't believe to be true, we just don't see. Paul finds these classes important because when he understands certain new concepts, he can see examples in nature that he would not otherwise have noticed. Addressing the human distortion of reality, he said, "If I know I have a tendency toward distortion, I question myself, take in the margin of error, and then I can get a little closer to reality."

I put in that the distortions are what gives us "Paul," so we are happy about them. They are not a fault, but merely an inevitable situation, and one we should celebrate.

After another quiet interlude, I asked the class about the meaning of this sentence, near the end of our reading:

The most difficult part is to find in the neutral witnessing consciousness a negative streak that accounts for the furtherance of the causal, the imaginative, and the actualizing propensities of a living organism. (35)

What are these negative streaks?

It might help to translate the terms. In the above sentence, the neutral witnessing consciousness is the *turiya* or transcendental; the causal is the unconscious; the imaginative, the dream state; and the actualizing propensities, the wakeful. We Westerners tend to think of these stages backwards from the wakeful to the Ground, but they are all simultaneously existent. The Indian model honors the pure state of Totality at the core, which is disturbed by a negative streak that projects the elements of the universe. Meaning, the “negative” streak is powerfully positive in creating universes. Susan related this to Covid testing, where a negative result is positive, and vice versa. Oh, God!

Nitya brings these same categories into his earlier description of the Indian model:

The four alternating foci are: the world-generating consciousness (*vishvatma*), creative subjectivity (*taijasatma*), causally retentive de-structured consciousness (*karanatma*), and all-witnessing omniscience (*turiya*). They proceed from the gross and physical to the transcendental. (33)

You can see this also goes in the opposite direction: waking, dreaming, deep sleep/unconscious, and the ultimate.

For her negative streak example, Deb was reminded of Nitya’s instruction to Peter O, asking him when you are sitting quietly and calmly in meditation, what is it that makes you get up and do things? Deb rephrased it: when you are in the neutral witnessing consciousness, what makes you leave? She referred to the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, where hunger is the universal cause. The world is created by hunger, by some desire or dissatisfaction or need, and that is the negative impulse.

Deb once read a piece of advice to writers: stop getting up from your desk to clean your house. Andy laughed, because he has an ideal house for writing: “It’s a circle, so I get up and walk and

soon come back to where I started.” Deb mused that we always want something we don’t have.

Andy felt Nitya’s sentence was a metaphysical statement about manifestation in general, since all our experiences are in a sense God getting up and walking around the house. He cited Atmopadesa Satakam, verse 33:

Knowledge, to know its own nature here,
has become earth and the other elements;
spiraling up, back and turning round,
like a glowing twig it is ever turning.

The burning spark, the self, to know itself has become all of this. It’s the little point making the world, and for Andy, the negative streak is like maya.

Susan thought of the Shoulds, all the directives seething in her mind that interrupt her concentration. Good boys and girls always do what they Should. They don’t have to know what *they* are good at, or what *they* need. They can just do what they should.

Susan has always been bugged by the Biblical story of Martha and Mary with Jesus, where Martha is sitting at his feet listening to his wisdom discourse and Mary is bustling around cleaning the house. It’s not fair! Mary is the one doing what she should, and Martha gets the reward.

Anita believes the story is about the priority to hear the words that Jesus was saying to them, and taking care of the minutiae wasn’t as important. If we aren’t careful, we can be busy all our lives, and never stop to ponder the meaning of life, which is much more than doing the dishes, though that is also part of it. The parable addresses the third aspect of real cognition in sutra 7: authoritative verbal testimony, where, as Nitya puts it, “a second opinion is sought in the records of authentic wise people.”

This makes it a good time to copy in one of the greatest of poems, one Nitya especially loved, especially the first four lines:

The World Is Too Much With Us

By William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Obviously Wordsworth didn't like to do the dishes!

Jan was thinking of the negative streak as being the formative parts of everyone's childhood that really shape how you are going to live your life. This sutra seems to be asking us to look into our neutral witnessing, to see how it informs our life and other's lives so we can understand them better. She's been listening to an audiobook of *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone*, by Olivia Laing. It's about artists, and how their background of trauma or not fitting in totally shaped their lives. Jungian Jan feels that by looking at those negative events, one could have choices about how to manage it.

I also suggested we could allow the negative to manage us.

Over-management stifles creative impulses. All little “out of control” can be a good thing. And here, too, a negative is also a positive. Both pain and pleasure condition us. Our existence is negative only in the sense that the totality of the Source is reduced to bring about a necessarily limited form. So it’s the most wonderful negative there is!

On that note, Bill said you could call the negative streak an itch. He read out the paragraph where Nitya answered my prompt in advance. It’s worth reprinting in its entirety, as it recapitulates the whole process of externalization. So-called conscious selection only takes place at the very end of this process:

The transcendental state has reference to pure, total absorption. The first stir in that is to be imagined as the nucleus of individuation whereby a vortex is formed in the otherwise calm and serene indivisible consciousness. In the continuation of individuation, the first major principle that comes into vogue is the time factor, the sequential movement that can be progressive or regressive. Ideas arise in a sequential manner, not with words as such, but as configurations in which the essence of all the five faculties of perception are blended in a holistic occurrence. This is the causal consciousness entering into the subjective realms of a self-created world of images. Pain/pleasure conditionings of these images act as incentives to look for the pleasurable and avoid the painful. From there on a more horizontalized actualization of consciousness arises to relate the subtle inner organs to their corresponding organs of physical perception. Now our psychophysical equipment is ready to select external stimuli to structure a world of interest with positive, negative, or indifferent value significance. The result is the registration of a perception at a physical level.

I felt Bill’s thinking of the negative streak as a creative itch was a

stroke of genius. The original need, the hunger, creates everything else. We are not demeaning creation, as if God made a terrible mistake in initiating a universe. We merely want to incorporate that calm, unblemished state in our awareness. It has never been lost. It waits within, with infinite patience, for us to be restored to it.

Anita related to the hunger: she too has held a newborn in her arms quite recently, and they come “trailing clouds of glory.” (This is from another fabulous Wordsworth poem, in tune with this study. Look it up!) They have energy like nothing else. The baby wants to be fed, but first it has to have air. Breath is first thing, though it’s been experiencing things in the womb. Anita has always wondered if God is all of us and if God is wanting experience. Could it be that each of us is a hunger of the Absolute, of God?

An ancient Indian belief is that life begins with the first breath, as prana enters the body. That idea could resolve a lot of present conflict if it were more widely adopted....

My immediate reaction to our firstborn, Emily, was that she arrived fully loaded with programs and potentials. She had much to accomplish, and all I needed to do was keep her safe and nourished until she could take over for herself. She already felt like a gigantic person in that tiny body! Babies come out of a need-free state, and then needs start happening. Who they are to be takes time and engagement to manifest.

Bill quoted another important section in the reading, reminding us it all comes from that source, that quiet:

The certitude of what is experienced is not limited to the physical or physiochemical source of the energy that is highlighted in an act of perception. It always has reference to the total need of the person, which is a historical summation of all the evolutionary processes involved in the formation of each

individual. That is why a return to the source is the most important theme to study in Yoga.

I read out a splendid paragraph from Nataraja Guru's Gita, with reference to some previous discussions, from the chapter on the *gunas*, XIV, 5:

The three *gunas* (nature-modalities) should be viewed dynamically and not statically, as a triple-stranded regulative necessary principle which interferes with the flux of becoming and above all as something that still pertains to the relative side of life only, without having anything to do with spirituality properly understood. They are normative and not experimentally fixed in character. Above all they have to be understood only in conjunction with the objective counterparts belonging to each, without which they are absurd in themselves. (578)

For emphasis, I repeated that the *gunas* are merely a principle that "pertains to the relative side of life only, without having anything to do with spirituality properly understood." We are not setting out to become "more sattvic," we're just learning about it.

Andy concluded aptly that the challenge is to embrace the All and let it be at the same time. We live on a razor's edge of loving it and not getting pulled into it.

In mind of Andy's circular house and the theme of the class, here's the end of Little Gidding, by T.S. Eliot:

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown,
unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to
discover
Is that which was the
beginning;
At the source of the longest
river
The voice of the hidden
waterfall
And the children in the apple-
tree



Not known, because not looked
for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always--
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

Deb read us Mary Oliver's justly famous poem for our
closing meditation:

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting —
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Part II

Old Notes:

1/13/9

Sutras 1:6 and 1:7

They [the modifications] are: real cognition, unreal cognition,
imaginary cognition, deep sleep, and memory.

Direct perception, inference, and authoritative verbal testimony are
the valid means of real cognition.

Patanjali now examines each of the five main categories of
vritti one at a time.

First off is real cognition. Cognition means to perceive or know, and comes from the same root as know or gnosis. Recognition is when we have a previously established image in our mind and what we perceive roughly matches it, permitting identification. We are cognizing again, or re-cognizing. It's the primary function of mind.

We have wrestled before with the vagaries of cognition, of how we can find certitude amidst a welter of chaotic input. The Western model is to work hard to pin down the facts “out there” and then adjust our ideas to fit. The Indian notion is that our ideas or even our pre-ideas are central. They determine what we comprehend of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Modern science is tilting strongly toward the latter model, though centuries of prejudice coupled with the lure of appearances make acceptance problematic. MRI brain imaging demonstrates that there is a significant lead time before a thought surfaces and then the corresponding words are spoken, pointing to action. The outmoded rational paradigm imagines it is making up the thoughts and directing the actions. What is really going on is that deep-seated urges—very intelligent urges—are bubbling up from the unconscious depths and passing through our conscious awareness into actuality. We are cognizant of only a late stage of the sequence, but mistake it for the whole ballgame. Instead of chest-poundingly taking credit for what we do, we could instead be grateful to the invisible fountain source that we are so fortunate to be drenched in.

Anita reminded us that what we perceive is often not accurate cognition at all. Coincidentally I had just discovered the so-called McGurk phenomenon on the internet this week, and sent an example to the class members (<http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~rosenblu/VSMcGurk.html>). In it, a brief video shows a man distinctly saying ba, da, va, tha. However, when you close your eyes, you hear only ba, ba, ba, ba. The shape

of the mouth has caused you to actually hear the sounds differently. Even knowing this, you cannot prevent yourself from hearing different sounds while watching the mouth.

A myriad of similar psychological experiments have clearly demonstrated the precedence of mindset to perception. This tells us that when we want to change the world we should change our mind, and yet we persist in tilting at windmills of sensory input. We see our faults projected out into the environment and attack them there, superimposed on more or less innocent bystanders. Who quite naturally resist, and the battle is on.

In his commentary, Nitya artfully takes us through the fourfold stages of mind without using the Gurukula clichés of horizontal and vertical. In their place he uses empirical and ultimate, but the idea is the same. Empirical salt is what flavors our food and we keep in a shaker on the table. Ultimate salt is sodium chloride, an arrangement of atoms into a particular molecule. It's more a scientific description, quite tasteless. Yet each has its value. Table salt makes food delicious, but it can't be used to identify other types of salt elsewhere, such as in a cave, the ocean, or in tiny amounts catalyzing cell metabolism. For that we need the ultimate, vertical truth of it.

Needless to say, this has far-reaching implications. Each human being is an empirical reality, seemingly disjunct from the rest. Yet from a scientific point of view, we are all of a single species and are extremely closely related. If we focus only on the empirical aspect, it heightens our sense of separation, but if we turn to the ultimate factors it brings the endearment of unity. Both are important. Paul reminded us that we aren't trying to make the empirical disappear into the ultimate, but to harmonize each with the other. We still have to avoid empirical dangers. Yet, due to the projective nature of reality, bringing unity into the picture is a healing art. We must heal through unity, and not by throwing our

weight behind a particular aspect, however much "better" it appears.

Visitor Vasiliki wondered how we are to stay centered when things like the Gaza slaughter are taking place. We can't just callously shut out the awareness, but that awareness makes us miserable. And yet we're helpless to alter the situation even a little bit. She wondered further that if we were living there whether we could find peace at all, ever.

I'm sure all of us have felt the same frustration. Vedanta is not a Pollyanna exercise of screening out unpleasant facts. That would be in the Western model, of trying to alter the world so that it suited our hopes and desires, after which we could then have peace. Security is the basis of sane living, no question. But the Indian model is that the world will always have tragedies to match its comedies, and thus it is futile to strive for a world of only comedies. By turning to our universal core, we can know peace, and then we can share our peace with those around us if it so happens. From that perspective, instead of fighting back in a rage, we can quote Jesus: "Forgive them, Lord, for they know not what they do." This technique is more efficacious than it might at first appear.

Laurence Gonzales cites a number of experiments in *Everyday Survival* that demonstrate that we as ape-descendants are prone to exceedingly aggressive behavior in the absence of restraining guidance. Our proclivity is to fight, to see the other as an enemy, which allowed us to survive in the dog-eat-dog days before civilization dawned. Now we are attempting to transition to a kinder, gentler paradigm, but we are bedeviled by continual setbacks. Many clever experiments have divided up identical types of people and put them in various circumstances, after which they selected opposing features of identity around which to attack each other. It takes intelligent directing of our mind and body to overcome the genetic urge to kill first and negotiate afterwards.

The genome project has proved we are a single race of people who, before mass communication, wandered apart to live in isolated groups. Now our isolation has been swept away by mass communication, global travel, and sheer population density. Tribal identities like Jew, Arab, black, white, Hindu, Muslim, and all the rest are glorified gangbangs, extrapolations of blue bandanas vs. red bandanas. Excuses to hate, and sometimes to kill. It was less crucial to cure this ignorance when conflict was limited. Now that we have the power to commit mass suicide, we have to get over it, one way or another. Once again, it's not that we need to choose the "right" faction, it's that factions themselves precipitate our problems.

The first chakra, the one we sit on, stands for security, basic physical security of safety and bread. Without our basic needs being met, all else is empty of meaning, pie in the sky. Once we have such a solid grounding, we can go on to build the emotional, intellectual, loving, intuitive, spiritual, and liberating chakras that depend on it. No yogi worth their salt would wish for their own security at the expense of someone else's. Peace in the global world is for everyone or no one.

The class was at its best last night, with trenchant comments from a large section of the group, and silent communion from the rest. I have barely scratched the surface of our discussion, but that will have to do. Together we learned how a single word in the ancient Yoga Sutras could easily expand into a world of meaning and instruction. In fact, the most important half of the present commentary awaits us next week.

mid-January to mid-February

I have been in India for a month, but I want to jot some notes anyway about the three classes I've missed, to keep up the continuity of these notes. Now that we've cleared the preliminaries

and gotten to the meat, I don't want to let any of it go by the board. It seems that no one took notes at the classes, so I will just have to give my own impressions. It's too bad, since one main value of the class is the transcendence of any single perspective through mutual interaction and intercourse. Yet I am persuaded by the same rationale that must have created the universe: something is usually better than nothing.

Sutras I:6 & 7 Part II

I'll make this brief, as I'm sure we'll cover these issues again in due time. Direct perception becomes less and less important as we age, until as adults we fill in whole worlds from a tiny sliver of actual input. We infer a lot from a smidgen of perception. Nitya says:

The certitude of what is experienced is not limited to the physical or physiochemical source of the energy that is highlighted in an act of perception. It always has reference to the total need of the person, which is a historical summation of all the evolutionary processes involved in the formation of each individual. That is why a return to the source is the most important theme to study in Yoga.... Every perception is a challenge. At most what comes from the external world is a quantum of energy that tickles a few receptors. The mind is required to interpret the source of that energy and formulate a meaningful picture.

Nitya humorously asserts that the intangible mind we postulate to account for this vast inflation of sensory input is of the same order as God. If we believe in one we might as well believe in the other. That is, if we believe in the mind we might as well believe in God.

Since our mind is filling in the context—converting a sketch into a masterpiece, so to speak—we want very much to be certain that we are doing this with as much accuracy as possible. We enlist the aid of wise seers to verify our thinking. Nowadays that means psychologists, scientists, “experts” in a particular field. Study groups are excellent ways to normalize ourselves, so long as they are dedicated to avoiding being led astray by some vested interest. We can notice in ours, however, which has been running for over 30 years, that there is a powerful resistance to normalization in all of us. People gravitate back to their habitual stance even after any number of epiphanies or adjustments. Our world view is frozen from some time in adolescence or shortly thereafter. There has to be a firm determination to break free and take new information to heart. We must thaw ourselves out and let the stream of consciousness flow again.

Caution is in order here, because there are also many false witnesses that pass for wise seers. Television and radio lend a veneer of believability to propagandists of all stripes. The classic example is the fatherly actor who puts on a white coat and looks so much like the family doctor that he can sell you almost any prescription medicine. Nitya notes that the mind is untrustworthy because we can plainly see how it can be tampered with by mindblowing drugs, not to mention its disruption in mental illness. These caveats lead us naturally to the next sutra.

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From Nancy Y’s first class—

3/20/10 (One month after my brain injury)

Sutra I: 6 & 7

I like the idea of the first exercise. I have had a vivid lesson in at least part of its subject matter recently, but can't visualize how it could be drawn. I'm more of an aural, rather than a visual, person.

Peering across from that aptly named vortex of individuality, it's hard to imagine the attraction that pulls us into horizontality. At the same time it's easy and natural to slide right into it. Certainly pain and pleasure energize our choice. Barring a heroic practice of neutrality in opposing them, we will find ourselves horizontalized before we know it. Once there, we set up shop to learn to interpret our world. Nitya concludes this paragraph's sketch with the registration of a perception. Voila! Back in the saddle again.

I've been meditating a lot lately on the evolution of perception on our planet. When life first arose it didn't have any sense organs, and they were very slow in developing. As a unicellular being you were suddenly absorbed or suddenly found yourself absorbing someone else. Or maybe "you" weren't even enough aware of what was going to even realize that was what had happened. Gradually—though actually extremely rapidly compared to random accidental evolution—creatures grew more and more sensitive in interpreting their environment. Higher order animals and plants of the present are amazingly adept at sensing and responding to the world around them. This success has had the added bonus of providing us humans with some free time to devote to philosophy and to the extension of awareness into the ideational or vertical dimension.

My favorite bit from this commentary:

Every perception is a challenge. At most what comes from the external world is a quantum of energy that tickles a few receptors. The mind is required to interpret the source of that energy and formulate a meaningful picture.

Ah, there's the rub! Our inheritance is an acute accuracy in interpreting the world, based on the slimmest of data, because failure to do so often meant death. But the vertical has no such feedback mechanism, and we can go very far afield without suffering any immediate problems. This is both a blessing and a curse, as the saying goes. We have a lot of freedom to speculate and imagine whatever we like, and yet have a harder time knowing when we are tilting at windmills, in other words, confronting imaginary projections. We can wind up very confused and unhappy about what is or isn't real.

For now in the study we are only marking out the parameters. Suffice to say that yoga, and simply paying close attention, are methods by which we can move in the direction of certitude. And it's very nice to have good companions for the trip! Meaning you guys. Aum.