

2022 Patanjali Class 29

9/20/22

Sutra I:10 – Deep sleep is the modification that has the cognition of non-existence for its substratum.

The fourth modulation is *nidra*, which Nitya translates as deep sleep to fit the Gurukula structure. The term can apply to any stage of sleep, but when we afterwards cognize having had a period of non-existence, it can only mean deep sleep, *sushupti*, the profundity of unconsciousness. Of course, as Charles pointed out, we can't cognize anything *during* such periods—only after the fact.

Andy noted that nonexistence is not *asat*, true nonexistence, here; but *abhava*, because there is continuity before and after, which means there must be some kind of existence in between. Just as Nitya describes, *nidra* is a break in the action, a pause, so that useful previous experience can be consolidated into the brain's special language. All that's possible for the conscious mind to say is "After a spell of sleep, we can recall that our sleep was undisturbed."

Paul appreciated Nitya's clarification that we can nonetheless listen to silence and see perfect darkness. However, doing so is dependent on a conscious awareness, which is absent in deep sleep.

Charles wondered if we can have modulations without change: doesn't the idea of modulations automatically mean changes are taking place? Brain imaging has shown that even when we have no awareness of our own existence, modulations are going on, albeit quieter. The body is being maintained. Patanjali, like anyone else, could easily observe that a person in deep sleep was breathing and moving, so in some sense they were still existing. So he filled out his list of modulations to include one for times in the present when we were totally checked out, and another one in the next sutra to include the past via memory.

There isn't anything, yogic or otherwise, we can accomplish during deep sleep. In order to do its consolidating work, the brain switches off awareness, since it would interfere with the processing. It's as if we're not there.

Andy described *abhava*- nonexistence as uneventfulness within a temporal sequence. He recalled a version that happened to him when he wasn't exactly asleep. He had smoked a lot of pot, and he fainted. His last thought was "I'm passing out." His friends called an ambulance. Andy remembers comical waking interludes interspersed with periods of complete forgetfulness: riding in the ambulance, being in a ward with attendants, then a room full of medical equipment. He found it all very puzzling. He was cognizant of nothing going on in between, very much like deep sleep.

In his Dream Lab studies, Bill learned that deep sleep is a time of consolidating recent events into memories, while dreams are for processing what's learned, like preparing to put it into practice. Babies dream almost all the time, presumably because it develops their cognitive structure, and then we dream less and less as we get older. He read out from the commentary:

Sleep comes when we disengage our mind and sense organs from carrying out any mission: the senses are not particularly directed to any object; the motor system is not asked to carry out any errand; the peace to which we put ourself helps us just to be. (46-7)

We discussed the benefits we get from regular periods of inactivity attained in deep sleep, and how corrosive it is to not access them. Nancy has a Fitbit, a watch that quantifies her sleep stages, as well as other activities. On days when she feels rested and clear-minded, it shows that her dream and deep sleep states were

balanced. On bad days she's found out that she had almost no deep sleep, so she infers it is rest that makes the difference.

Jan wondered how inertia or *tamas* is related to the pauses in consciousness we have throughout the day, separating our different trains of thought. She sees that the way we characterize deep sleep is based on the ideas we have about it, rather than recalled experience. Of the *tamasic* element, Nitya writes:

As *sthiti* is a state of inertia, it is conceived of as an enveloping or veiling principle of nescience, the darkness of the *tamasic* property of nature.... The seer is cut off from all objects of perception. As modification is still going on, this state cannot be identified with *samadhi* or absorption. (46-7)

Bill said some practices use the space between thoughts for meditation. They are hard to catch, but he's done it for years, so he's really aware when a changeover is happening, and he can elongate it.

I offered that it is also efficacious to go with the flow and ignore the *sthitis*. I trust that my mind is coherent and focused, so the links that happen are leading me in the direction I should go. It would interrupt the flow to hold on to the *stheti* and try to stay with it. And at least for now, Patanjali isn't proposing it as a technique.

Paul recalled a college class where he learned it was very difficult to infer purpose for a design, presumably due to all the associations we bring to it. Our prejudices. He liked that periods of emptiness allowed us to clearly see a structure as it is, and from that neutral place we are better able to discern what influenced it.

Deb argued that stopping the flow is good, that it allows consciousness to be more porous to deeper levels of our being. From the depths she accesses, she finds transpersonal images rising up, and she uses the symbols to understand herself. Being at rest

allows it to happen. Deb admitted that her best poems come from those kinds of dreams.

Because it's paradoxical to describe non-existence in words, the class tended to speak in terms of dreaming instead. I suggested Deb was referencing archetypes, and that that topic should be included under the next sutra, on memory. Anita brought us up short, asking where archetypes come from. Clearly, no one knows, so I requested pondering them this week for further discussion when we meet again.

Anita regrets that the meaning of archetypes is veiled, and it's frustrating when you try to access them. I suggested that they derive much of their power from mystery, from not being defined. The minute I imagine "I get it," I diminish them to mere notions. They are potent symbols representing first principles, or prototypes. As they shape and energize our awareness and behaviors, we should be leery of bringing them baldly into waking consciousness.

Moni reported that Nitya once told her she had an archetype of family within her. What could that mean?

I'll gather some details about archetypes for next time, and hope you will too. They date back to Patanjali's time, though the space was Greece. The entry for *arche* in my Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Macmillan, 1967) begins:

ARCHE, a Greek term signifying beginning, or origin. In the earliest technical use the term referred to the primordial stuff out of which the world, according to the Ionian philosophers, was generated.... [Later] In philosophical discussions, it ceased to designate the primordial stuff and became instead a word for "principle of knowledge," "basis of being," "cause of motion," or "source of action."

Aristotle gets the credit for widening and popularizing the word, and eventually Carl Jung ran with it. Paul has sent an account of Jung's usage, linked in Part II.

While we're on the subject of archetypes, Deb has a primal fear of praying mantises, and around this time of each year, one appears at our doorstep to reactivate her phobia. They are not common here, but we did release an egg case when we first moved in, forty years ago. They show their gratitude to Deb every year. This time it was her actual birthday, and she nearly stepped on it as it waited for her by the front door. It delivered an impressive shock.

Charles told her 'mantic' means prophesy, or divination. That they are "praying" adds to their magic. He thought she should come to grips with her fear, and boldly greet their ambassador. She firmly insisted, "No way!"

So it goes.

Due to our outsized focus on dreams in this class, corresponding to Patanjali's "imaginary cognition," the old notes, in Part II, add much to the present account.

We closed with a few minutes of meditation, to allow room for nonexistence in our busy psyches, and then we wished each other a good night's sleep.

Part II

Paul sent this, for prepping for the next class. It's an impressive epitome of Jung's main tenets:

I found "Jung archetypes in 10 minutes". It's actually quite amazing. I needed to listen to it 3 time to retain focus... Great class last night. Like you said, it's reassuring that a 'Great Understanding' is not required. We are genetically evolved into what we need to be to Be.

...it's just fun to reflect on the miracle of our being...

<https://youtu.be/V8WuljiJFBI>

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Old notes, from 2/24/9:

Patanjali now introduces the psychic equivalent of negative numbers into his survey of states of consciousness. Deb homed right in on this idea with her opening comments. Basically, the negation of the modifications of mind is a subtle form of modification in its own right. Neutrality is something else entirely. The distinction between nothing and the compensation for the absence of something (“I have no apples” vs. “I don’t have five apples”) is one that every elementary school student has to wrestle with. While it looks the same on the surface, in practice there is a world of difference, as every mathematician knows. Deep sleep is precisely this negation in relation to wakeful consciousness. It is distinguished from samadhi in the exact same way negativity differs from nothingness.

Within the last decade it has become evident that the consolidation of memory occurs during sleep. The more or less raw data of everyday living gets sorted into the symbolic language of the mind by dreams, and then is converted to long term memory in the hypothalamus during deep sleep cycles. This not only provides the basis of our intelligence and sense of who we are, it is essential to our well-being.

Bill pointed out that if the consolidation phase of deep sleep is regularly disrupted, the coherence of the personality begins to break down. Paul added that sleep apnea does exactly this, causing the sufferer to wake up every time they drop into deep sleep, because that’s when they stop breathing and the subconscious

insists on keeping us alive. The result is exhaustion and disorientation. Paul asserted that this showed that all stages of the process of registration and consolidation were essential and natural.

We are familiar with the horizontal and vertical structural scheme of Vedanta. Perception is the horizontal positive, and conception the horizontal negative, for convenience referred to as waking and dreaming. The seed state of pure potential forms the vertical negative, and the flowering of this potential into full expression is the vertical positive, generally referred to as deep sleep and realization (turiya) respectively. Realization with Patanjali is called samadhi of course. Nitya clothes this structural image in some perhaps unfamiliar terminology here. Prakhya is the registry of an input, whether an object or an idea. Pravritti is the reaction our mind has to the input. The consolidation phase is called sthiti, or stabilization. Left unspoken at this preliminary stage is the realization or spiritual development that ensues from the process. The scheme reveals that the ancient rishis' observational science was astonishingly accurate, and is only now being confirmed by the extended observations made possible by modern technology.

Prakhya, pravritti and sthiti closely correspond to our old friends the gunas: sattva, rajas and tamas. The popular misconception is that these are good, tolerable, and bad, respectively. Despite the fact that samadhi is the transcendence of the modulations of mind represented by the gunas, and that the Gita specifically directs us to not be affected by them, they are nonetheless normal, healthy features of a whole life. One aspect of spirituality is to break up our attachment to one stage or another of the gunas and allow nature to take its course unimpeded. This freedom allows us to find a place apart from their influence if we are so inclined.

Brenda introduced surrender as a crucial factor in moving from the horizontal to the vertical. She cited giving birth as a moment when the horizontal factors become irrelevant and one has no choice but to surrender to the vertical requirements of the situation. This brought up some stories of women who wanted to opt out of childbirth at the last minute. Don Berry's wife Kaj attended many deliveries. One time a woman said, "I've had enough! I'm leaving." She got up off the bed, put on her robe and headed for the door. Just then a new contraction kicked in, and she doubled over. She realized there was no escape, and meekly allowed herself to be led back to the bed. Deb was being stitched up after her Caesarian delivery of Harmony, and asked the doctor how much more time it would take. She answered, "About an hour." Deb argued that she was leaving, she couldn't hang around that long. The last thing she heard was the doctor saying, "Increase the valium!" And Nancy famously admitted that in planning for a birth you imagine flowers and soft music and a quiet retreat, but when the time comes you could be in the middle of a railway station teeming with people and you would be content to just lie down on the floor and let it happen.

Jan, whose father has just died, added that death is similar to giving birth. When it comes to us we are forced to surrender our horizontal proclivities and accept our fate. Luckily, we practice these types of total surrender every night when we allow ourselves to slip into deep sleep. We learn that it's okay not to hold on "for dear life" to our surface attachments. While our ego may have other plans, a deeper part of us is drawn to meet our destiny, and that is both right and beautiful.

The image of childbirth is an enlightening one for an aspiring yogi. A universe of preparation, both conscious and unconscious, brings the mother to the perfect moment when everything is in readiness. At that point the only possibility is open up to the flow, and the result is new life, the ultimate creation and the greatest gift

of participation in the grand scheme of the universe. Our spiritual birth or rebirth is similar. We relinquish our petty concerns to merge with the Total Concern. And it doesn't come as a complete surprise, because we practice this every night. As we "drop off" to sleep we could easily feel profound gratitude to the overarching embrace into which we are releasing ourselves.

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6/11/10 Nancy Y's first study group

MRI studies have shown that deep sleep is definitely "modified," in the sense that brain waves continue, but they are quieter and more regular than with the dream or waking states. Knowing that most of our motivation and direction comes from levels deep in the unconscious strata, deep sleep seems like it must be a kind of point source of our conscious life. It will likely never be directly accessible to us, but the effects will reverberate through our familiar awareness as the framing and baseline orientation we take for granted.

The latest scientific interpretation I know of dealt with the regions of the brain that are activated during the dream and deep sleep states. These seem to show that deep sleep is where the brain incorporates and consolidates the new information from the day into its symbolic language. Later in the sleep cycle, the dream states are where we practice using the new patterns in quasi-ordinary situations, making them part of our repertoire.

If there was any proof needed that the brain thinks differently than we do, this is it! Its language is just barely our language. Dreams are pretty outré compared to our waking mind, and we can only imagine that deep sleep is some mathematical or symbolic representation only tenuously related to language or other familiar

syntax. Interpreting them is like listening to a foreign language and trying to make sense of it.

Normally we enjoy deep sleep first, then dream, and then go back and forth a couple of more times during the night. Thus we are processing, then practicing, over and over. There is a large consensus that new knowledge is consolidated during sleep, and that we need to turn off our conscious mind so the brain can translate recent input into its inner vocabulary.

Knowing there is a state that can be cognized as “non-existence” should make us humble. We are not the directors of our amazing life, but the beneficiaries of a vast complex of intelligent patterning. The more we accept and promote this invisible intelligence, the more we can live in harmony with Isvara or the Absolute or the Self, whatever you want to call it. While deep sleep isn’t exactly the Absolute, the principle of how we relate to it is similar.

Another implication is that since we have a serious break in our stream of consciousness every night, we could choose to be a different person every morning. We are more open to change than we realize. A part of our waking consciousness craves habitual activity because it is less stressful and demanding, but if we are already dissatisfied with some aspect of ourselves, we could opt to function in a new way. Perhaps this is why meditation is traditionally done early in the day, often upon arising. Such beneficial input at the “top of the morning” can positively effect changes that cascade down through the whole day, later to be incorporated as new patterns during our next sleep cycle.