

2022 Patanjali Class 31

10/11/22

Sutra I:12A – They [the modifications] are restrained by repetitive practice and detachment.

At last Nitya makes it explicit what we're up to and where we're going in this minimalist work. The Yoga Sutras resemble lecture notes that a guru might use to elicit lengthy expositions on the sparse words mentioned but not defined. In sutra 12 we meet *vairagya* and *abhyasa*; briefly, detachment and practice. We've been dying to find out what the practice is. Is there one? And, aren't detachment and practice opposites? Don't we tune out in detachment, and tune in with practices? Maybe we'll find out. The opening reading was of about half Nitya's commentary.

It looks like we're going to employ a most informal template this time around. We didn't really address these Sanskrit terms, so I recommend reading the first part of the old notes, in Part II, which gives a better sense of them. After that is an extensive homework section, where people submitted examples of how this plays out in real life—fun but optional reading.

We continued our focus on the fifth category of modification, memory, from the last sutra. Just in time, the Absolute offered a timely quote about it, from author James Baldwin's collected essays, *The Price of the Ticket*:

History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations.

Andy liked Baldwin's admission that almost no one knows this. I agreed it's very sad that history is imagined to be about things that are over and done with, and by no means relevant. It's not surprising that a Black author is more acutely aware of its weight, since American Blacks step into a hostile historical context every time they go out their doors, facing the very real possibility they could be shot dead by a stranger, simply for muddled historical factors of unresolved hatred locked in their brains.

Deb spoke about Nitya's contrasting how "the Indian seer sees a psychic depth whereas his Western counterpart sees a somatic depth." Yet he immediately admits, "Body and mind are not two separate entities." (Keep in mind that breadth is horizontal, depth is vertical, and they don't negate each other.) Deb spoke of our somatic memory and the psychic depth we all enjoy, how they come together in a kind of three-dimensional dance. Memory determines how our species expresses itself, just as Baldwin notes, and we are all embedded in it. He's right that we *are* our history, but we can also bring awareness to bear, and rewrite the code, to some extent. In that sense, memory can be a most liberating aspect of our being. Andy added that we have both individual and collective memories, and perceiving how the collective assumptions constrain our individual thinking and acting is very important.

I emphasized that this shows the high value residing in a study like this, where real issues are observed and taken to heart, so we can upgrade them. Detachment gives us a clearer perspective, so we can resolve to change for the better. As we have seen many times, change is not simply adopting new ideas—we have to rewire our neurons, and that's a slow process demanding abhyasa. Nitya gives gratifyingly specific advice on how to go about this:

For your actualization, you require appropriate instruments, congenial environments, and the will to actualize. Thus it is up to you to live in an environment that is not conducive for drawing out the potentials of any evil disposition with which you are genetically endowed. Again, it is up to you not to will an action that can strengthen an evil samskara, a malignant disposition. It is again in your power to nullify the potentiality of a negative force by accentuating the positive thrust of a benevolent disposition. This freedom of the individual to change themselves, to reorganize the psyche, is given in the present sutra as the cultivation of detachment and repeated exercise in the building up of benevolent dispositions as well as the eradication of malevolent dispositions. The cultivation of non-attachment is here termed *vairagya* and the repetitive practice by which a desirable potency can be actualized is called *abhyasa*. (56)

Deb readily admitted she has certain dispositions, for instance the depressive coolness of her Scandinavian roots, and Andy seconded that emotion. Disposition is the right word for how the vasanas and samskaras nudge us in familiar directions. So Deb tries to not give her negative dispositions energy, instead fostering attitudes that are generous and constructive, which move her away from the negative tendencies.

Anita was struck by Nitya's references to genetics, including the classic example of Schrodinger's calf, which knows immediately after birth, without any instruction, where to head for its nourishment. She mentioned having dispositions for things like anxiety and guilt, but these are learned dispositions, only minimally, if at all, genetic. Sweet children who are punished or criticized, learn them all too quickly, and no meaningful antidote is ever offered, until you go out and find a guru or therapist as an adult. Nonetheless, we do have predilections and dispositions that

we need to be aware of, so we can take steps to ameliorate them. No one said it was easy!

Bill reminded us that this is just where continuous practice leads to detachment, but did not elaborate. Paul pleaded to know what that means. How do we change? It's confusing. He agreed humans have a gravitational pull, or a pole star, inside us, and we're drawn like the calf to the udder by something that carries us along without our having to know what we're doing. He often feels defeated by his conditioning, as if it is a curse that he can't escape, and he's decided experience should be required to carry a warning label.

One encouraging finding of latew is that certain actions, including possibly concepts, appear to enter the genetic code and become part of the DNA, *during our lifetime*. Our changes do get encoded, and become transmissible, maybe not even through progeny. I suggested to Paul that thinking of our limitations as a curse is likely to be immobilizing. Freezing. It works better to treat them as *opportunities* for conscious change, because it's simply the way we're made.

In that light, Jan was inspired by a recent horoscope reading, that directed her away from what Nitya calls malignant feelings, to reorient herself toward joy. She believes in it strongly, and has felt real excitement in doing this, as it brings her a genuine engagement with her progress. She was thrilled by Nitya's line, "It is again in your power to nullify the potentiality of a negative force by accentuating the positive thrust of a benevolent disposition."

The Absolute also weighed in this morning, with an excellent article from Aeon, on Henri Bergson (greatly admired by Nataraja Guru) and Laughter:

Using metaphorical language, Bergson describes life as an 'effort', a 'vital impetus' constantly striving to break free from its own material constraints through ever more sophisticated

evolutionary innovations. However, said Bergson, ‘most often this effort turns short’. Throughout the history of life, organisms that have failed to adapt to environmental challenges have gone extinct. Both at the individual and at the species level, survival has depended on organisms’ ability to demonstrate ‘a certain elasticity’, enough adaptability to find ways around material obstacles. [The Link](#).

Laughter is one of the positive factors that helps us maintain our elasticity. There are some very funny things in the article, in case you need some laughs.

We conversed at length about Paul’s inner “gravitational pull” and how we might sense it better. First we took a look at the ways it is disrupted by normal routine and intentional propaganda of all stripes. Anita is very aware of her “gut sense,” and takes its indications seriously. She was driving somewhere recently, and got an intuitive feeling that she needed to turn around and go another way, so she did. It’s likely that if she had been with others in the car, she would have been distracted from its slight tug, and maybe gotten into trouble. I commented that’s why solitude is advocated so often in spiritual manuals—we hear the inner voice best when we are alone and have tuned out distractions. When we’re in a detached state, as a matter of fact.

Bill added that detachment, the silent witness, is like our moral compass, and morality is a learned behavior. (There is a genetic component, however.) Paul knows the feeling as it being “in your bones.” Guts, bones, what else? He wondered why the sense of community was inaccessible to so many people when it seems like inner truth, and I said that the moral compass for community togetherness is there, but for 99.9% of human history, that feeling was tribal-sized, and other tribes were considered lethally dangerous. They often were, so those tribes that survived were very suspicious of strangers. Even as recently as the Middle

Ages that was a wise policy. That's more deeply in our DNA than collective love. It's only been around the last 2500 years, when rare people like Lao Tzu, Buddha, Mahavira and Moses began public efforts to broaden tribal love toward global love, and it's still a work in progress. We in the Gurukula have been very optimistic about that sort of evolution, but our species is currently plunging back into terrified withdrawal from universal justice. Those of us who care have to preserve the spirit of togetherness, which is also enshrined in the great art and literature of humanity. Including Patanjali's Yoga Shastra.

Because of our discussion of communal consciousness or the collective memory, Deb brought up psychic entanglement, loosely based on quantum entanglement. Though it's very hard to scientifically verify, we are all affecting each other invisibly, as well as visibly. She told the story of her grandmother, who woke with a start one night in Iowa, and then fainted. Several days later she heard that her beloved brother had died at that very instant, a thousand miles away, in East Tennessee.

Anything that can be proved can also be disproved. As yogis and spiritual seekers, we don't need proof, we can accept entanglement stories straight out of direct experience. And we don't need any excuse to shine our loving light into the world.

Part II

The original Class Notes are extensive and astonishing, even including Paul's first recounting of his child in the grass theme, plus a detailed look at the Santa Claus problem:

3/10/9

Sutra I:12

They are restrained by repetitive practice and detachment.

“They” of course are memories. [I have realized since that “they” refers to all five categories of mental modifications] It would probably be helpful to gather all the sutras of this section together, since each alone is but a fragment:

- 11) Memory is the not slipping away of experienced impressions.
- 12) They are restrained by repetitive practice and detachment.
- 13) Of these, repetitive practice is the effort to maintain steadiness.
- 14) And this is firmly grounded, being well-attended to for a long time without interruption and with devotion.
- 15) Detachment is the consciousness of mastery in one who is free from thirst for seen and heard of enjoyments.
- 16) That is the highest *vairagya*: through awareness of the Self, there is freedom from the least desire for the three qualities of nature.

John wanted to know what the difference was between detachment and non-attachment. In one sense they are the same, but detachment can also refer (as it does here) to the process of breaking free of something, while being unattached means the freedom is already accomplished. As Nancy mentioned, this is a very important distinction. Detachment can be and often is a cloak for aversion, leading to avoidance: you don't want to face some unpleasant situation or truth, and so you actively ignore it. Once it is deep enough in the unconscious to be invisible, you take pride that you have achieved detachment. It's a relief to feel that the unpleasantness is gone. But as any psychologist knows, it will just

sit there and motivate you all the more and in bizarre if not downright psychotic ways, depending on how important it is.

Paul assured us that this study was not about repressing unpleasantness to escape from the impact of the world, but to free us to participate in the world unencumbered by the colorations of our conditioning. As we free ourselves, we become more present, not less. It is essential to keep this in mind as we proceed, because as mature adults we have dealt with the easy stuff, but as we go deeper into the Yoga Sutras we will be meeting some of the better-hidden “monsters from the id.” It can get pretty intense if you aren’t taking it as seriously as Patanjali intended.

We read only half of the long commentary on this sutra. There is a minor error in the first part, where Nitya compares the Indian and Western models of vasana and genetic instinct. He says that the Indian model is vertical and the Western is horizontal, but in fact both are vertical. Both relate to progression over time, to the effects of the past on the present, to its impact on the horizontal world in the present. The difference is more about materialism versus consciousness, or physics versus metaphysics. The Westerner is always looking for a material cause, while the rishi traces the source to the atma, the self. Once you investigate either of these far enough, they begin to look very similar, and Nitya himself bridges the arbitrary gap he made:

The Western and Indian views can be profitably combined into a complementary whole. Whether taken genetically or as a psychic continuance, we come to the conclusion that every thought in us is deeply engrained. Our fear and hope are not surface manifestations. In that case, the problem of erasing a conditioning, changing a habit, and reorganizing our mind cannot be easily accomplished.

This assumption is really the starting point of our journey. We admit to ourselves that our surface life is an echo of something deeper, and we dedicate ourselves to discovering what that is. We know it will not be easy, that we can't simply change ourselves through wishful thinking and false claims. We have to really learn to see our true nature, unadorned by the constructs we have built up to conceal it. When Patanjali speaks of freeing ourselves of memories, he means these attachments and prejudices that veil the world and our nature in an imaginative gauzy spider web of illusions.

Nitya then goes on to describe the fourfold color grades or varnas that these conditionings sort us into. Sanskrit scholars resemble Aristotle more than a little in their urge to classify and categorize, and the first broad distinction of types is found here. The Bhagavad Gita goes into this matter in great depth, for those who want to pursue it further. We concluded our reading with an overview of the work we do by living as yogis:

For your actualization, you require appropriate instruments, congenial environments, and the will to actualize. Thus it is up to you to live in an environment that is not conducive for drawing out the potentials of any evil disposition with which you are genetically endowed. Again it is up to you not to will an action that can strengthen an evil samskara, a malignant disposition. It is again in your power to nullify the potentiality of a negative force by accentuating the positive thrust of a benevolent disposition.

At the moment we are employing the instrument of Nitya's commentary and the congenial environment of the study group. Our success depends on our will to actualize what we learn. We know that part of us resists the teaching, and is very clever about it, so we have to boldly press ahead. We should not allow ourselves

to be put off by puerile deterrents and distractions. We need to take a firm resolve. Otherwise, a wishy-washy approach may get us into deep water before we learn how to swim. We would be better off to stay on the shore, lounging on the beach and telling stories about what we imagine might be out there.

The homework assignment is intended to bring up deep-seated conditioning so we can actualize our detachment, become steady, and attain real freedom. It will continue throughout the study. For now there was such a high level of participation that it will have to be presented in a second installment.

Part II

Homework Assignment

I'm very happy that everyone took the homework seriously. I even got a couple of emails, which are pretty rare these days.

Deb started us off by telling us how when she met new people as a child, she sometimes would hate them, but the ones she hated became best friends later. On quizzing her, the feeling wasn't hatred exactly, but more like disdain or derision: "What an idiot!" She now felt that the person must've touched something in her that initially reacted negatively, but then she learned it was actually in accord with herself.

Something similar was experienced by many people, though perhaps not to such an extreme. I know I'm always amazed by how my initial assessment of people is modified by getting to know them. It's really fun to see how the criticism and caution are replaced by amity, as the cardboard cutout of the first impression is fleshed out.

Scotty related a story in the same vein, about when he was 9 or so. There was another kid who lived nearby, and whenever they ran into each other he would be wracked with a strong negative emotion, so strong it was an actual physical reaction. He wondered

if he was doomed to fight the kid, so they'd pass each other on opposite sides of the street. This happened frequently for a couple of years. Then one day they came face to face, and they stood there trembling with that same almost magnetic enmity. Then Scotty wrestled out, "I.. think... we're... supposed... to... be... friends." It broke the ice, and everything normalized after that.

How terrific for a youngster to be able to turn that situation into a positive one! Eugene said he definitely would've fought the guy, and I think most boys would have, or at least run away and taunted from behind a tree. The word 'friend' can be a peacemaker by itself. I was once in a very dangerous situation with a hoodlum bent on killing me. I said, "Hey, let's be friends!" He was so stupefied and surprised to not be confronted that he drove away as fast as he could.

Scotty also talked about his time as a teacher at Head Start, which here in Portland is almost exclusively attended by African American kids. He was comfortable with the kids, but when graduation day came he was conscious that the parents were hostile toward him. Suddenly he felt what it was like to be in a minority, the embarrassment and exposed feeling, if not the danger. Undoubtedly in that position whatever hostility was present would be exaggerated in his imagination, and having been to a couple of those graduations myself I can attest that Albina Head Start is not a hothouse of racial tension. But our minds have quite properly evolved to acutely tune in to danger and ignore nonthreatening situations. If one or two people are hostile and everyone else friendly, we will focus on the ones that represent a threat.

Here's where repetitive practice comes in. We react due to our conditioning—much of it genetic—in ways that we can recognize as inappropriate. We can gently remind ourselves of the logic of the situation, and eventually get over it. Probably we will always react to being outsiders with some degree of alarm. It's natural, and even healthy. But the yogi makes friends, overcomes

the prejudice, quells the fears. An undisciplined person amplifies and exaggerates the fears, reinforces the prejudice, and makes enemies.

Teaching was another main theme of our discussion. Eugene had taught high school for a half dozen years. Each year he became intimate with his students, and then they would go away for the summer and come back distant and cool. Or he would never see them again, because they'd graduate or drop out. He found this very hard, and realized it was due to some need for connection on his part. The class's solution was to recommend repetition, that after a few more years he would be okay with the inevitable turnover of students.

Like most of us, Eugene early in life had been afraid of meeting new people, and eventually realized it was of way of protecting his own sensitivity. We fear being judged, and even if we aren't, the fear itself makes us miserable. But often we are judged, in this crazy world, and it reinforces our defensiveness. Identity politics at its best is a way to gain confidence about yourself despite being marginalized by the social mainstream. A happy and fulfilling life proceeds from inner self-confidence, and is not supplied from without, although it is almost always beneficially engaged with its surroundings.

This led Eugene to reintroduce a theme he has been struggling with as an adult, related to the detachment/avoidance issues we talked about earlier. He believes that we are ratified as valuable individuals by the energy we give to others, but at the same time the giving can seem arbitrary and egotistical. So should we give up or keep pressing? This is a difficult conundrum, and a good example of how important our beliefs are. We will choose to do what we think is best. Different religions span the spectrum on this matter from recommending intense workaholism to abject idleness. Plus, rude opposition can make us want to give up our idealism, as can our association with less motivated friends. There

are many factors to consider in choosing one's optimal place on this spectrum, and it helps to know that none is absolutely right or wrong. You have to find what suits you, according to your innate predilections. There will be a lot of pondering about this very question throughout the yoga study.

Bill's homework example was about when he coached groups of kids in a competition called Odyssey of the Mind. The coach is not allowed to make any suggestion, but is reduced to "herding cats" as he put it. Bill is someone who usually likes to be in charge, so it was a perfect antidote to his normal inclinations. There are times that by holding yourself in check, you let other people flower, and this was a particularly good example.

Paul talked about a couple of ideas. He tends to be shy and uncomfortable around groups of people, and has examined why, and that has helped. He had an epiphany lately where he was in a public place feeling a measure of self-pity, and then he saw a child bend down and look at a blade of grass in rapt wonderment. He instantly identified with that state, and knew that the wonder lifted you out of self-absorption automatically. If we try to push away our misery it grows bigger, so instead we must turn to the light. Light banishes darkness. As the Gita (II, 59) claims, "The residual relish disappears on the One Beyond being sighted." Paul has also noticed how many of us learn to defer responsibility to others. In a way we are trained to abdicate our sovereignty, leaving us at the mercy of our conditioning and the whims of strangers. This is one of the most far-reaching effects of memory. We "remember ourselves" right out of touch with our dharma.

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As I thought about the homework assignment, I realized that pretty much every situation in life is tainted by our expectations and learned limitations. I wanted to select a few that had the most

impact on our peace of mind. I brought some outside examples, but felt I should start with something personal.

As a child I had been carefully instructed that in any dispute I should consider that everybody else was right and I was wrong. In other words, the world is perfect and well-adjusted, and only I am somehow screwed up. It took a long time for me to realize that this was not the case, and the world was a madhouse that sometimes functioned adequately in spite of itself. Recovering from that false belief was an immensely long learning curve for me. For years I internalized every angry outburst, accident, mistake and act of meanness around me. It caused an immense amount of pain and self-doubt. Pain and doubt do have their uses, and it may be that my vasana to become a yogi was responsible. Who knows? But I began to have doubts about the belief itself when I was accused of things I definitely knew I hadn't done.

At around 13 years of age a neighbor kid who had been caught smoking a cigarette told his parents that I had taught him how. I was a sworn enemy of tobacco and knew it was a lie, but I went through a third degree grilling over it. The experience opened my eyes to a more realistic view of the world. Still, my initial impulse is to take the blame for every ill.

Interestingly, in my early work with him Nitya pushed those same buttons. He was trying to smash my ego, and it was an ace technique. We had some difficulties, and I went to his room to try to clear them up. He wouldn't accept any explanation. I became more and more upset from my inability to convince him of my innocence and good intentions. At one point he actually said, "If other people think you are wrong and only you think you are right, then you are certainly wrong." It hit right in the center of my self-respect, and I was devastated. Later he told me, a lifetime pacifist, "If I try to correct you, you will go and get a gun and come back and shoot me." It was too much. I loved him desperately, but he saw me as a hate filled killer. I had no option but to back away. It

precipitated five years of extreme doubt and self-examination. Only some thirty years later, reading *Love and Blessings*, did I see that Nataraja Guru had used a similar technique on him, leading to his “first serious break with the Gurukula.” I tell this tale as an example of how a guru works with conditionings to cure a disciple of them. Nataraja Guru used to say that a drastic disease needs a drastic cure. While we may be talking gently about cures in our study group, at some point there has to be a strong personal confrontation with our hangups or we may not be able to wholly break free of them.

I also did a lot of musing about the Santa Claus syndrome, when we discover our belief in something sweet and beautiful turns out to be baseless, or at least very different from what we originally thought. I still remember the sense of betrayal in finding out dear Santa was a myth, and it was hard taking my children through the same transition. Recently a friend sent a hilarious video of Bruce Lee playing impossible ping-pong with a numchuck. I already knew the video was a fake, and that pretty much anything can be done with visual images these days. But my friend was crushed. It makes a huge difference if you believe something or if you think it’s a lie. The film is the same, but in one instance you get joy and amazement, and in the other it may still be amusing but it’s a pale imitation of what you felt before you were disillusioned.

So should we disillusion ourselves, or try for better and better illusions? Does wonder and delight depend on illusion, and are we better or worse off after disillusionment? Should we leave it to someone else to destroy their own illusions, or is it fair to help them out? These are legitimate questions at the heart of what we’re looking into right now. The questions are bigger than a Bruce Lee video. Think of the 911 cover story and other false flag operations used to paint Muslims as evil and worthy of destruction, the JFK assassination, the financial meltdown occasioned by smoke and

mirrors. We believe in falsehoods all over the place, and we don't like it when they fall apart. We may well be marginalized in society if we do pierce the illusion. Illusion is big business.

I brought up the example of Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan series. The books were a sensation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I myself was a big fan, along with several others in the class. After a while I began to notice that each new book was more and more outlandish, like a little kid seeing how far he could push his luck.

We've seen that syndrome with the Bush administration, too. Once they realized no one would stop them, they went as far as they could wielding the lies, to the sorrow of the whole world. In that case it meant disaster; with Castaneda, it meant beauty and even a transmission of wisdom.

I read the first book of criticism on Castaneda to come out, and it plainly exploded any pretense to factuality. Since then I cannot read those books anymore. I want to. I have nice copies of all of them, but if I pick one up I can't get excited about it. But they once made an impact on millions of readers, and there was even a Castaneda cult for his whole life. There is probably still something going on. That's how religions get started.

Anyway, growing up means dispensing with illusions to gain freedom, but we want it to be a gain and not a loss. The process should make us happier, and yet it can make us cynical and miserable. The latter tragedy happens because most people don't look for the reality behind the veil. They strip away the veil and find Nothingness. But tearing away the veil is only part of the game, albeit an ongoing, lifelong process. We aim to find the underlying reality clothed in Nothingness that is the true source of joy, amusement, happiness, and yes, even illusion.

That's the gist of our class discussion. The rest are appended as further examples that arrived via email and literature. Please share your own examples at any time during the study as they are

revealed to you. I think people are eager to hear about them, as they are eminently practical. I also solicit feedback on whether we should cherish or disdain our illusions. Or is there a third way?

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In class, Anne synthesized a lot of our talk by noting that our expectations are based on memory and conditioning, and the Gita urges us to give up expectations. A couple of emails underscored this important concept.

Jean Norrby wrote of her shattered expectations about teaching. She was hired as an English teacher in rural Oregon, and took the job filled with optimism and high ideals. These crashed on the shoals of disastrous reality. She had a horrible time, and if you write her I'm sure she would share her story with you. I'll paste in just two sentences: "While people in Portland were going through 100 verses of self-instruction, I was going through more than 100 days of self-destruction. So many bad things happened that at one point I was weeping hysterically in a corner, being comforted by some nice girls." This is an example of being disillusioned as painfully as possible. Friends feel free to talk up a certain vocation, or marriage, or fifty-mile hikes, but they don't dare tell you the downside, and let's face it, we don't like to listen to naysayers ourselves. We prefer to find out the hard way.

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Anita wrote about a friend who had just died, and the difference a change in attitude about death can produce. She concluded by saying:

I suppose in some way, this experience is like the homework assignment you gave. Where in the past my beliefs would

have had me “up against the ropes,” filled with anguish over Ed’s death, the wisdom teachings that I have been exposed to helped me to open my eyes and come closer to understanding the beauty of the passage from this life beyond.

On a lighter note, Anita also told me of a surprising event that revealed her inner transformation to her. Like Bill, she learned that by holding yourself back from interfering it allows others to gain independence. Briefly, her cat Leo got out of the house while she was feeding a wild cat by the back door. She has been dreading this, expecting them to fight, so she had a momentary freakout. But then she thought that she should just let it be, that the situation would take care of itself. Sure enough, the cats gently touched noses and then her indoor kitty stood quietly while the wild one finished her meal. Anita recognized that this was an example of a real change in how she relates to the world. She no longer feels she has to control everything in order to protect it from harm, she is confident that events will take their course as they are meant to. It takes quite a load off one’s mind when you feel you can trust the Absolute, and thus life itself.

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The book *Everyday Survival*, by Laurence Gonzales, is filled with interesting examples of what we’re talking about here. The subtitle is *Why Smart People Do Stupid Things*, and the reason we do is the damping down of our intelligence due to conditioning. The book inevitably has a somewhat negative slant, since survival is linked up with threats to survival, but the aim is positive, and it brings home the importance of the type of study that yoga represents. Life isn’t solely a matter of adjusting to little inconveniences. Sometimes it really packs a wallop. But we practice for the big ones by paying attention to the ordinary ones. I

thought the following example was symbolic as well as very actual.

In the aftermath of the Indonesian Tsunami of 2004, animals fled to high ground, and all the native Andaman Islanders also survived. Only those who weren't as alert or were very unfortunate died. Gonzales describes what happens when we are held captive in our memory banks and unable to process a new situation, what he politely calls a vacation state of mind:

One video... shows a lone man facing the sea as the wave approaches. He doesn't move. He just stares at it until it sweeps him away. Other videos show crowds of people on the beach, watching the wave but doing nothing to escape. One of the most haunting videos shows people on the beach at Penang, milling about, walking casually, or standing in relaxed attitudes, hands on hips, as the great wave approaches in the background. They seem completely unaware. One of them is obviously recording the video. They all see the wave but do not move away. When the wave reaches them at last, they laugh as it gathers around their feet and ankles and begins to rise. Only when the wave knocks them off their feet and starts to sweep them away do they scream, as they comprehend the grave miscalculation they have made....

Educated and sophisticated as those people may have been, their mental models and behavioral scripts were useless when their environment underwent a completely predictable change. They had created a stable mental model of their world and an indelible script for what they were doing. They were on vacation in the benign sunshine of a happy beach. Only at the last, as they were knocked over, did the wave sweep away that model and rewrite that script, in many cases too late to do them any good in the future. (47-48)

Those of us who witnessed the Mt. St. Helens eruption of 1980 may remember an old and cheerful character, Harry Truman, who had lived at the base of the volcano all his life. Despite numerous warnings by scientists that the mountain's eruption was immanent, he didn't believe it. "I've lived here for 80 years and it's never done that before!" he would say. He was almost certainly the first to die as the largest landslide of recorded history roared down on him.

Both these example shows that what Gonzales calls mental models and behavioral scripts, and Vedantins call vasanas and samskaras, can paralyze us or make us stupid. Sure, they have their good points, but unless we manage them with alert intelligence we run the risk of being victimized by their bad side.

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Baird sent the following by Inayat Khan, apropos of nothing and everything, but it fits well with our discussion. Despite outward differences, Sufism and Vedanta are very similar at heart:

When an ordinary or an illiterate person meets a poet, he sees the man-part and not the poet-part. But if he is told that this person is a poet he may see the poet-part when he meets him. He now sees that he is a poet in his actions and in his words; in everything about him he sees the poet, whereas otherwise he would not have been able to see this. Thus a great poet may go among a crowd and the people will only see the man in him; they do not see the poet, and they do not know how profound his thoughts are. So once a person begins to recognize God in man he does not see the man any more but God. The man is the surface, while God is deep within him. Such recognition brings a person into touch with everyone's innermost being, and then he knows more about people than they know themselves.

Ah! how desirous I was to see the divine Beloved!
It is not the fault of the Beloved that you do not see;

He is before you!
It is the fault of you who recognize Him not.

Everything, whatever you see is nothing else but
The Presence of God!

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Finally, for those few still with me, economist David Korten explains how our economic system exploits our illusory beliefs (tamasic mental models) to divert wealth into the hands of the few. From the excellent and positive Yes Magazine:

Don't Fix Wall Street, Replace It
by David Korten

Why not an economy of real wealth?

The current economic debate centers on how best to revive our existing economic system through some combination of a Wall Street bailout and a job-creating economic stimulus package. That amounts to trying to revive an economic system that has failed in every dimension: financial, social, and environmental. Rather than prop up a failed system, we should use the current financial crisis as the opportunity to create a system that works. Trying to solve the crisis with the same tools that caused it is the definition of insanity.

As individuals, we humans appear to be an intelligent species. Collectively, however, our behavior ranges from supremely wise to suicidal. Our current collective economic insanity is the product of an illusion—a belief, cultivated by the prevailing economic orthodoxy, that money is wealth and that making money is the equivalent of creating wealth.

Money is merely an accounting chit with no intrinsic value—it is useless until we exchange it for something of real value. Wall Street's specialty is creating money for rich people without the exertion of producing anything of corresponding real value. They increase their claims against real wealth without increasing the supply of goods, making it harder for the rest of us to meet our needs.

Real wealth is, first of all, the tangible things that support life—food, shelter, clothing. Of course, the most valuable forms of real wealth are those that are beyond price: love; a healthy, happy child; a job that provides a sense of self-worth and contribution; membership in a strong, caring community; a healthy vibrant natural environment; peace. Our Wall-Street-driven economic system makes fantastic amounts of money and actively destroys all these many forms of real wealth.

We have been in thrall to a pervasive cultural story, continuously reinforced by academics, government officials, and corporate media, which led us to believe our economy was functioning splendidly even when it was quite literally killing us. You have heard this story many times:

"Economic growth, as measured by Gross Domestic Product, creates the wealth needed to provide material abundance for all, increase human happiness, end poverty, and heal the environment.

The faster we consume, the faster the economy grows and the wealthier we become as the rising tide lifts all boats."

The logical conclusion from this story is that the faster we convert useful resources to toxic garbage, the richer we are. The only true beneficiaries of this obviously stupid idea are a few very rich people who reap financial gains from every economic transaction—whether the transaction cures a disease or clearcuts a rainforest. It is a system that deifies money and dilutes wealth.

In contrast, the Main Street economy is comprised of local businesses and working people who produce real goods and services to meet the real wealth needs of their communities. It has been battered and tattered by the predatory intrusions of Wall Street corporations, but it is the logical foundation on which to build a new, real wealth economy of green jobs and green manufacturing, responsible community-oriented businesses, and sound environmental practices.

Let Wall Street corporations and their phantom wealth machine slip into the abyss of their own making. Devote our public resources to building and strengthening Main Street businesses and financial institutions devoted to creating real wealth in service to their local communities.

Homework

A picture with us in it is more interesting than one without. An old photo of family members we don't know is more interesting than one of an unknown group.