

2022 Patanjali Class 32

10/19/22

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

With a nice in-person group, including Nitya's old pal Jyothi in a rare appearance, we delved into *abhyasa* and *vairagya* in a meaningful way, guided by Nitya's increasingly intense comments, where he shrugs off the popular "puerile" and superstitious forms of bhakti, assuring us soon "we will have ample opportunities to dwell on the details of the discipline and the methods of actualization of values."

Downplaying the mirror-image religious and scientific arrogance of the West, Nitya writes:

An Indian god is never more serious than Shakespeare's Puck or Ariel. After all, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi are all only poetic fancies, metaphorically referring to deeper psychic realities. (58)

In her opening remarks, Deb subtly criticized our class for mistaking the finger for the moon it points to, pleading we don't want to get caught in whirlpools of self-critical examination, but often do. This turned out to be a secret and valuable undercurrent of the evening. She referred to the mind's veiling and projecting propensities described in the last paragraph:

Nature is said to have two inverse impacts on our minds. One is the concealing of truth and the other is the precipitating of imaginary pictures that are easily taken for true. The veiling principle is called *avarana* and the projecting principle is called *vikshepa*. Eliminating the *vikshepa* from our mind will automatically pull off the veil. Every moment is thus a moment

of challenge to decipher the mystery of life presented in the form of enigmas, paradoxes, and conundrums. That is why it is said that there is no holiday in spirituality and no one can act as a proxy. (59)

We are cautioned that Nature, in the form of the gunas, is the force that keeps us bound. Sutra 16 sums up detachment in that context: “through awareness of the Self, there is freedom from the least desire for the three qualities of nature.” Deb summarized another potent part of the commentary, where the projecting principle is overcome, bringing a transparency of vision that penetrates the veils. She described it as moving into or being aware of uninhibited space.

Bill was excited by another potent paragraph, urging us to aspire to positive thoughts and away from the negative. This amounts to the essence of the practice, for him. The intentionality is spelled out in perhaps the most definite part of Nitya’s essay:

As an aspirant yogi you have to take initiative with unflagging interest, to have a critical examination of your pre-formed habits, and then scrape or modify the behavioral pattern in such a manner that it is cleansed of ignorant adherence to evil or superficial modes. Instead of a static view of an effect or a cause, you are expected to develop a transparency of vision by which you can clearly see the manifested effect and the entire process through which, from the primeval cause to the present effect, the manifestation came. You should also have the sagacity to unhook all expectations of the future from the performances in which you are presently engaged. (59)

Deb is currently reading *A Tale for the Time Being*, by Ruth Ozeki, and is struck by the great-grandmother, a Buddhist nun who repeatedly exhorts herself to Be Awake! Deb finds it paradoxical

to force oneself to pay attention like that, because you wind up *not* paying attention to what is presented, but only to your own determination to think in a certain way. It's funny how repeating a mantra where you urge yourself to be awake puts you to sleep.

This struck a chord with Anita, bringing up her question whether we over-correct in trying to restrain our modifications. Isn't it inhibiting? And when is it okay to go with the flow?

Deb responded that it's definitely a challenge—we have to simultaneously try and not-try. The point is to see how you're distorting what *is*, with your attitude.

Anita often feels beset by anxiety, and she tries to just accept it as the way she is constituted. That hasn't helped, so she's tried a new tactic that works better: she substitutes gratitude for her anxiety, thinking of all the wonderful things that have impacted her life.

I offered that offsetting a negative state with a positive one is the essence of Yoga as a practical dialectic, along the lines of the Bhagavad Gita, though not so much Patanjali. Anita is actually doing yoga, without thinking of it as a “yoga practice.” Just doing it. I asked her if it is becoming easier to calm herself that way, and she readily agreed. That's because yoga as a technique works. When we feel unhappy, we feel like we could change immediately, just by wishing hard enough. But we are up against our neural wiring, which reorients only very slowly. (Which is a good thing.) Yoga is a way to consciously stabilize the mind in ways that actually do have an impact in the depths of our being, where ordinary thinking and doing don't reach. I read out a bit of my Gita commentary, VIII, 8, on continuous practice. First the verse:

Meditating, with the mind engaged in the yoga involving positive effort, undistracted by anything else, he goes to the supreme divine Person.

Once again positive effort is called upon. There is a heroic element in yoga which distinguishes it from slipshod forms of worship. Distractions are to be subdued with calm persistence.

Constant practice, *abhyasa*, was introduced in VI, 35 as a means to bring about control of the mind leading to yoga. It does not necessarily refer to any specific technique, but only means adhering to your principles. Whenever a negative or obfuscating impulse leaps to mind—and it happens all the time to everybody—you counteract it by bringing in an upgraded, intelligent determination. This allows you to plunge like an arrow into the core of the Absolute. If instead you latch on to the impulse, it will lead you off on a tangent and you'll miss the mark.

It's virtually certain that we will be upset and unhappy at times all our life. The yoga solution is to accept it to a degree, but also to counterbalance those states with dialectic pairings, plus understanding, so we don't keep adding to our misery with false projections. ('False' and 'projections' are roughly the same.)

One projection we should dispense with via understanding is that we are genetically condemned to misery—it's a learned, conditioned state, and we can unlearn it. But we have to really work at it. Make-believe doesn't hold up. If it did, we wouldn't be taking these classes, which suit those with active intellects, like Anita.

Some of Anita's friends tell her she worries too much, that she's paranoid. I assured her there was plenty to worry about, but many people, even good friends, don't want to hear about it. They are afraid of it and are blocking out. We should only talk about such matters with like-minded folks. I offered a great rejoinder from cartoonist Dan O'Neill: "Paranoia is fear of unreal weirdos. Who needs it, when there are so many real weirdos around?" Fear of *real* weirdos is not paranoia.

Of course, we humans have a tendency to project extra weirdness on top of real weirdness, and this is what yoga teaches us to stop doing to ourselves. If we withdraw the projections, we may find things aren't as weird as we imagined. As Bill put it, this is why we are advised to *restrain* our mental modifications. Let's keep them as real as we can.

Paul wondered how closely related were detachment and transparency of vision. If they aren't the same, they are very close. Bill tried to distinguish them, and wasn't able to, beyond the emphasis on looking or not looking. But we aren't selling detachment as a closed-off state. Patanjali will soon say it's being "free from thirst for seen and heard of enjoyments." When we're detached, we attain transparency of vision, because we aren't interfering with it. Simple enough. The easiest part is to stop thirsting for those "enjoyments" that obviously induce suffering. We've been teased into many of them, usually without realizing it. Discarding them should be fairly simple, and easy to stick with.

Jan brought us back to Nitya's line that stopping projecting *automatically* pulls off the veils, bringing us to equipoise. She is finding that kind of steadiness percolating into her life more and more. Thinking perhaps of Anita, she has found it's very important to ask questions about what's going on. At the same time, we don't need to force things, but just be open and questioning. She has found that by being quiet and waiting for answers, they come to her, eventually. She is definitely experiencing the gradual transformation we have called sinking into the depths of yoga.

Andy appreciated everyone's great responses, but he cautioned that when studying the veils carefully, we have a tendency to think our job is to construct a solution, to fix things, so that we can come to an ideal state. Patanjali is not telling us to do that. We are just cycling through prakriti, nature, via the gunas, and that is inevitable. All our questions and answers reside within prakriti, and that's exactly what we are detaching from.

Nancy agreed instantly, admitting she struggles with both negative and positive thoughts, and trying to prioritize them. She realizes this takes her off the track. Her advice: let them go by. Stop grading yourself. This isn't about rating yourself, but to free yourself from ratings. We aren't trying for the highest score.

Andy, delighted, assured us we each contain an immense amount of sanity, and that's a beautiful thing to trust. He also stuck up for bad thinking. He has done lots and lots of it, and gotten a great deal out of it.

So go ahead and fuss and fume. It helps us break free. Remember the bumpersticker wisdom: Well-behaved Women Never Made History. Face it, trying to always remain cool, calm and collected stifles many beneficial impulses.

Jyothi recalled Guru Nitya telling her our life itself is the grand adventure, the true journey. On the way, all the emotions will come: sublimate them, don't suppress them. We do this by looking at a beautiful flower, or a baby, for instance. That is self-discipline, and we all know how to practice it. For direction, she still hears the inner voice of the Guru. In the twenty-two years since he died, that voice is still alive within her.

Jyothi recalled Nitya often telling her, "Don't do that!" and she would get very angry. Then he would say, "Don't take life so seriously! It's a beautiful river, full of divine, peaceful silence. It's only a game we are playing."

Anita appreciated this, and told us that being in nature settles her down. Her favorite release is to find a deserted road near her, open the windows, and drive at walking speed, because she can't walk much anymore. It soothes her, and brings her equipoise and detachment. Yet she wonders if she's merely distracting herself.

Deb thought it was more she was settling in to her inner truth, where the constructs aren't so strong.

I thought Anita's question about distraction went to the heart of this business. The practice is simple. We concentrate on a topic

or an action, but at some point our mind wanders. This is true for all of us. As soon as we notice we have “gone elsewhere,” we bring our attention back in focus. It works to stabilize the mind. It’s the most basic part of the game.

In this case, always doubting one’s good feelings is the wandering mind at work, and returning to them is the practice. When we’re raised with angry gods looking over our shoulders and judging our behavior, self-doubt becomes chronic. Along with the Gita, let’s be sure to be the mainstay of our own Self, to support our authenticity.

Nitya talks of two paths, two tendencies, leading up or down the evolutionary ladder. We turn up the heat with tapas to go up. He writes:

It is to contradict [the gravitational tendency to descend] that tapas is prescribed. It is an ascending path like that of a fish swimming against the current, a boat going upstream, or climbing a mountain with a heavy load. To drop anything—including our own body or even mind—is always aided by the gravitational pull of Earth and the earthiness in our mental attitude. Only with resolute determination can we ascend the path. This ascending path of tapas includes several disciplines that are to be integrated into a single holistic attempt, which is at once a purification (vairagya) and the actualization of a hierarchy of values (abhyasa).

We will be adding in several absorbing meditations as we proceed, and we can practice keeping our attention on them, and bringing it back when it wavers. It will be applicable to everything.

Deb told us that in the past year of struggle she has cherished a vision of Nitya as a squirrel living in her heart. As she goes blah, blah, blah, he listens. She’s found it instructive to have that silent listening happening, and she wrote a poem about it:

Inside My Heart
by Deborah Buchanan

A squirrel lies curled
in my right ventricle
tucked into the bottom curve,
tawny tail around his body.
He is the silent witness
of riddles and questions,
breath unknowing.
Squirrel raises his head
to hear my complaints,
then nuzzles in, soft and fierce,
patient as my cries fall
into understanding.



Nitya self-portrait as a koala, on an airline menu, 1971

For our closing meditation, Deb read out the fabulous poem by Joy Harjo: For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet. You should find your own copy, but I'll clip in a short excerpt. The whole is Harjo's version of practice, *abhyasa*, at once modern and traditional Native American:

Don't worry.

The heart knows the way though there may be high-rises,

interstates, checkpoints, armed soldiers, massacres, wars, and those who will despise you because they despise themselves.

The journey might take you a few hours, a day, a year, a few years, a hundred, a thousand or even more.

Watch your mind. Without training it might run away and leave your heart for the immense human feast set by the thieves of time.

Do not hold regrets.

When you find your way to the circle, to the fire kept burning by the keepers of your soul, you will be welcomed.

Part II

Ye Olde notes:

3/17/9

Sutra I: 12 Part II

Memory is restrained by abhyasa and vairagya (repetitive practice and detachment).

Deb started us off by expanding on a lovely idea of Nitya's, that the collective memory of the community is like a tapestry. Each of us contributes a small part of the whole fabric, which is transmuted over time by our individual participation. Thus the very thing that binds us is seen to be beautiful and inevitable. It is more like a magic carpet that swishes us through space and time, following our collective will, shaped by who we are.

Inevitable though it is, the yogi intends to evade the limitations of the tapestry at least momentarily. The web of collective samskaras is our fallback position, but we are striving to step outside the woven, familiar part to discover new territory. It is possible that the thread (sutra) that each of us represents links us to the tapestry no matter what, but at least we will have stretched the tapestry into a new, improved form. As Nitya tells us,

To uncoil our personal consciousness, which is interwoven with the collective unconscious, is not as easy as we might imagine. In certain cases there has to be an abrupt breaking or the burning of bridges. This process is called *tapas*. *Tapas* is the general name for the cultivation of detachment and the repetition of helpful practice. (57-8)

Nitya goes on to note that even in those who imagine themselves rational and unaffected by the collective paradigm, archetypal imagery colors the mind. One example is the angry God and the rebellious Satan that became converted to the superego and the id of Freud. A yogi is expected to abandon worship of deities and instead see them as “poetic fancies, metaphorically referring to deeper psychic realities.” Which they are, they are.

This insight was part of what Scotty found “spine tingling” about the study. He has only recently discovered Gurukula philosophy, and is finding it exciting and stimulating, revelatory even. He has been reading ahead with delight. So last week he pitied me for my belief that Carlos Castaneda had his adventures in a library basement instead of the Barranca del Cobre, but this week it’s okay. While there is a certain value in worshipping hypostatic notions, for the yogi the value is much greater to delve into their psychological meaning. We can doubt the factuality and still benefit from whatever truths may be found, anywhere.

In any case, it's heart-warming when a new participant clicks with the ideas and is uplifted by them. Scotty was already walking on the ceiling before we met him, so the uplift is pretty impressive. He has been painting like a man possessed, as the cliché goes.

This led John to add that he didn't pay much attention to the philosophy, but whenever he left after class he felt very good. He would come with several problems and a measure of sadness, but they would be eased by his time in the class. He thought there was something more than philosophy going on.

That's right. We are all in a situation where we feel safe, so we can let down our inner fortress walls. When we do, the natural magnetism, the "vibes," freely intermingle, in a soothing, energizing collectivity. In other words, we are not just studying, we are practicing what we preach. We are opening our hearts to the onrushing wave, expanding the circle of our definition of self as wide as we can. It is a balm, and a tangible one, to bathe in such an environment, and to relax our eternal guardedness.

Anita had some incisive questions. One was about how we relate to beauty. She understands that it is a personal experience, but here Nitya says, "Theoretical knowledge of the truthful, the good, and the beautiful is to be obtained from a bonafide teacher or the source books of recorded wisdom." We assured her that this did not mean there were absolute lists of good and bad things, true and untrue things, and pretty and ugly things that we should mold ourselves around. Yes, some scriptures do spell out such matters, but they are to be taken as a guide, not as unbreakable rules. What the teacher should be doing, and what the scriptures should be teaching us, is how to uncover goodness, truth and beauty in ourselves. There is a vast amount of inspiring experiences all around us, and yet if we cling to our petty preferences we will miss almost all of them. The idea of stepping off the carpet or outside the tapestry is to relate to the source of these higher values.

Nitya describes a dichotomy in life: either we live according to our unrefined urges and our conditioned responses, or we make an intentional break from them and seek an unconditional state of freedom. The former is known as the descending tendency, and the latter the ascending. Nitya doesn't call them paths, because we are free to change direction at any time. Tendencies is what they are. Remember, from last week he instructed us:

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 himself or herself, 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.

Nitya elaborates this very important idea later:

As an aspirant yogi you have to take initiative with unflagging interest, to have a critical examination of your preformed habits, and then scrape or modify the behavioral pattern in such a manner that it is cleansed of ignorant adherence to evil or superficial modes. Instead of a static view of an effect or a cause, you are expected to develop a transparency of vision by which you can clearly see the manifested effect and the entire process through which, from the primeval cause to the present effect, the manifestation came. You should also have the sagacity to unhook all expectations of the future from the performances in which you are presently engaged.

Anita wondered whether a transparency of vision was possible that could reveal everything about a subject, from the original cause to the present. It is possibly a case of hyperbole the way Nitya put it, but we certainly can see beneath the surface to get a clearer view of what is causing the phenomena that we meet, once we are able to set aside our colorations and conditionings. The very term revelation means that the inner workings are revealed. I'll give an example at the end of the notes.

Susan brought up a great question about this. It seems contradictory that we are supposed to be ourselves, free of all conditioning, and yet we are simultaneously supposed to use our best intentions to direct ourselves to a specific goal. Deb noted that paradoxes only existed when we drew a thick boundary line between aspects that from a unitive perspective were not different. Yet this is one of the essential dilemmas of yoga study. We have to be able to trust the teacher, because plenty of effort is wrongly applied in this world. Hitler was ostensibly trying to fix things, which shows how far off the mark we can go. But non-effort does not get us anywhere. It takes effort to sink into nothingness, and without proper instruction and assistance we may get lost. Patanjali here describes the effort as bringing ourselves back to detachment even as our mind slides willingly into attachment. Noting that by eliminating projections we automatically obtain the requisite transparency of vision, Nitya concludes:

Nature is said to have two inverse impacts on our minds. One is the concealing of truth and the other is the precipitating of imaginary pictures that are easily taken for true.... Every moment is thus a moment of challenge to decipher the mystery of life presented in the form of enigmas, paradoxes, and conundrums. That is why it is said that there is no holiday in spirituality and no one can act as a proxy.

To close, I offered another example of our homework assignment. On my recent India trip I had a revelation of a conditioning factor that had a significant impact on my life. As a child I was alternately welcomed and loved and coldly pushed away by my parents. Often I would run up to them full of love and excitement, wanting to share something with them, and they would say, “Children should be seen and not heard,” which meant I was supposed to go away. I can still feel the surge of painful chemicals in the heart region occasioned by the rejections. Sure, it’s selfish of the child to always want to interrupt, but I wasn’t thinking. I was just loving and then being rejected, so I worked very hard to suppress my lighthearted urges to go to my loved ones. Over time and without realizing it, I internalized the feeling of being very careful to not bother others. Whenever I would see a group of people talking together and hanging out, I would get an echo of that painful adrenaline rush and slink away. It grew into a wall of certainty that it would be rude for me to interrupt something that was already in progress.

While I was in India I spent quite a bit of time reflecting on memories of childhood, and this is one that came up. I recalled what I could about it, repetitively dipping back into it. Then at the Somanahalli Gurukula I passed by a group of good friends, and was trying to remain invisible until I got out of sight, but they called me over. I apologized for bothering them, but they welcomed me and said they wanted me to join them. Suddenly I was able to literally see the dark colored emotion that had closed me off from any number of happy occasions. Some people might welcome me and some not, but I would never have a chance to find out because my outdated but still vivid memories blocked the opportunity. While this may seem like a trivial example, I think it shows the principle rather well of how digging down to the cause behind the veil is liberating. It took effort, and a willingness to slide out of the box of “normality” to make the breakthrough.

When I was ready, life itself provided the breakthrough opportunity.

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The Notes from Nancy Y's first class offer an excellent example of how to put the teachings into practice. I cannot for the life of me recall who I was talking about:

August 29, 2010

Sutra I:12 is one of those great expositions that bring the whole study into clear focus. It "says it all." My favorite part is near the end when Nitya tells us:

Nature is said to have two inverse impacts on our minds. One is the concealing of truth and the other is the precipitating of imaginary pictures that are easily taken for true. The veiling principle is called *avarana* and the projecting principle is called *vikshepa*. Eliminating the *vikshepa* from our mind will automatically pull off the veil. Every moment is thus a moment of challenge to decipher the mystery of life presented in the form of enigmas, paradoxes, and conundrums. That is why it is said that there is no holiday in spirituality and no one can act as a proxy.

A longtime friend just wrote me an accusatory letter, filled with thinly-veiled venom, and claiming that all sorts of people agreed with him that I was posting false and hurtful material about important issues on my website. Taken at face value, the letter could have sent me into a tailspin of regret and hurt, but I was already confident that my postings are quite honorable, or at least written with honorable intent. With a little investigation, it turned

out that my friend was invoking others to bolster his position, but they did not share his feelings. He made the mistake of mentioning a couple of names, so I could check on the matter, and he sent an email exchange as “proof,” but what was proved was that he was deliberately twisting the subject to his own advantage and my own disadvantage.

I have a hard time dropping a subject like that, even after feeling personally exonerated, so as I wandered through my day I pondered (not for the first time!) what the real motivation was for the attacks. Different thoughts would surface and throw light on the problem, and then subside. Some ideas were more substantial than others, and some were clearly off the mark. As I sifted through them, a constellation of convincing ideas began to emerge. The more I looked at them, the more convincing they became. I had a kind of slow motion aha moment, in which many, many of my friend’s actions for his whole life suddenly began to make sense. Not only that, several of his associates’ weird actions of the time also came into focus. I revisited a number of past incidents from the new perspective, and they now appeared more logical too. I mean logically comprehensible: the underlying motivations were selfish and highly exaggerated, products of bloated egos vying for top dog positions. These people were not acting logically, except from a selfish standpoint, but their actions could be deciphered logically once the key to the lock was obtained.

Sorry I can’t be more specific, but I only want to discuss the principle here, not embarrass anyone. Nancy may have a strong suspicion of who and what I’m speaking of, and she possibly had these same realizations herself many years ago. The point, though, is that an enigmatic hostility was deciphered because I resisted a superficial reaction and instead tried to peek beneath the veil waving in my face. If I had, in my usual fashion, agreed that I was a terrible person always causing hurt and let it go at that, responding only to the veil, I would have missed an important

learning opportunity. Instead, by resisting the vikshepa (habitual projecting principle) a lot of light was thrown on a mysterious and serious quirk that has persisted and bedeviled many of us for a long time. So by relinquishing my egotistical urge to take everything personally, one small area at least of the ubiquitous veil was torn asunder and thrown into the fire. It made it easy to not answer the call to arms. Makes the effort seem worthwhile, doesn't it?

And of course Thich Nhat Hanh is correct that if we look at anything with a penetrating openness, we can see the whole universe in it. I could continue to ramify the insights from this one event to throw light into all sorts of recondite corners. There comes a point where the value of doing so drops precipitously, however. These are problems of the past, and my friend is seriously stuck back in some very old issues. If he wanted my assistance it would be a different matter, but he doesn't. If I even offer to help, it calls into question his certainty that he is right and everyone else is wrong, which he is not open to relinquishing. So my job is to resolve my own bafflements and then move ahead once again. This part of the deal is called detachment. Detaching myself from a thoroughly-examined mud puddle allows me to be ready for the next one I'll step into, which is probably not far off!

A letter I wrote to one of the people my friend mentioned touched on this subject in a way that might be helpful regarding the exercise, especially in relation to transparency of vision and the assignment to "Scrape or modify your behavioral patterns to cleanse them of ignorant adherence to evil or superficial modes." Choosing sides is frequently "evil or superficial," providing the basis for conflict. I asked M whether she had complained to my friend, and she responded that she saw me as a bridge builder who had done a lot to heal old wounds. Here is my response to her:

Dear M,

I thank you for thinking of me as a bridge builder, which is a favorable assessment I know, but it has prompted some thoughts I thought I'd pass on to you.

A bridge is needed to link two sides separated by some kind of gulf, implying that the ends where the bridge touches down are solid and distinct. I don't accept that as the situation, specifically or generally. In this world there are only people, with whom we either connect or we don't. Often people like to feel like they are part of a big team, because it induces confidence to ameliorate their insecurities or otherwise help them to be stronger, but that can also be tangential to the real issue of how humans can evolve spiritually. It may be helpful or not, depending on many factors. But I am not on any Nitya team, waving a Nitya flag and trying to make peace with the Nataraja Guru team. I'm just some guy trying to learn from those two amazing teachers. The teachers are both gone, and all we have are books and the memories of those they taught. There are not likely to be any more books, but we can hope that there are treasures still waiting to come to light in various brain boxes scattered around the planet.

A more apt metaphor than bridge builder would be that I am a space cadet visiting far-flung planets, interested in what the residents can teach me, and happy to share any of my earth-based knowledge if anyone is interested. The residents are sometimes hostile, in which case I move along, but are often friendly, in which case I like to land my rocket ship and pay a visit. I am not proselytizing for my own values to convert the "heathens," and am not looking to be converted by them either. I'm simply interested to hear about their customs and the overarching laws of the solar system they live in. I do know that everyone's knowledge is limited, so I take what I'm told with a grain of salt, but there is nonetheless a great deal to be garnered from every sphere.

I guess what it boils down to is I'm more like a lineman, stringing up lines of communication, rather than a bridge builder engaged in

diplomacy. (I would make a very poor diplomat! Too unorthodox.) I like being a space cadet ranging free. Perhaps this is an immature attitude, perhaps not.

I know this is not telling you anything new. We all love and respect Nataraja Guru because he didn't draw thick lines between himself and others. What you have said about him, for instance, "So many examples of his uncompromising commitment to the principle and practise of universal brotherhood... it all moves me as ever to the bottom of my soul." He exemplified in his total being that the key to yoga was total acceptance, and was not about having your team come out on top of some other team. All three of our gurus are masters of openness. Circumstances often pressure us to pick sides, while the gurus unflinchingly urge us to embrace the whole. That's what advaita, nonduality, is all about.