2022 Patanjali Class 33
10/25/22

Sutra I:13 – Of these, repetitive practice is the effort to maintain steadiness.

The first of two sutras on abhyasa launches us into Patanjali's practical instructions. We are to ask ourself, if it takes effort to maintain steadiness, how exactly do we go about it? Effort and steadiness appear to be contrary propositions, like trying and not trying.

Deb called our attention to the second paragraph, where Nitya addresses this very clearly. After listing some of the challenges of managing a living entity, with its shifting attentions, he admits, "It is with such a body and mind that we have to practice the very difficult equalization of the oscillating function of consciousness that moves between the knower and the known." He then pinpoints the crux of the problem:

> Half of our attention is to be given to objects that are external to our physical person, and the other half has to remain with the cognizing consciousness. The fluctuating attention, which alternately gives the idea of "I am knowing" and "this is what is known," is a state where active modification is going on. In Yoga practice, this modification has to attain a state of serenity in which the vibratory function of consciousness becomes so very even that attention does not shift from the mental space it occupies to any new item of perception or cogitation. (61)

Of course, the two halves are not equal-sized in any sense, it's just that there are two of them. The yogi seeks to strike a balance between the two poles of outer and inner, to engage with it as a unitive experience. Two pages later, Nitya brings in the classic

premise of Vedanta as confirmation (note there is a typo in the book, corrected here):

> When a person acquires the ability to see only the light and not the illuminated object, nothing separates the light of consciousness from the external light that consciousness illuminates through the act of reciprocation. Thus the seer sees the seen in a union in which the seer, the act of seeing, and the seen do not have separate identifications.

Implied here is that the light spoken of is the light of conscious awareness, rather than an effect of photons on material objects. When we "see the light," it isn't because of turning on a power switch, but by understanding in a fundamental way.

In that light, I suggested that listening to Deb read out the lengthy sutra 13 commentary was reminiscent of Nitya's teaching style. Two or three times a day he would lecture on an ongoing topic, and those present sat quietly and concentrated on hearing and comprehending what was being said. It took our full attention, and then some. Possibly the group focus added an extra degree of attentiveness, as did Nitya's complete absorption into and reverence for his presentation. So without ever thinking "I am practicing stillness" we did it regularly, and it was the greatest joy. You knew if your mind wandered you would miss something special, so you held it as tightly focused as you could.

Bill appreciated that there is no special "practice" as we tend to think of it, in either Patanjali or Nitya. It's just about continuous contemplation, including doing what you do to find quiet in yourself. Deb agreed, saying that we all have our own preferred ways of uniting the knower and known, so that there isn't a constant oscillation.

Nancy exulted over the good rain we had this day. She went out walking in it, and feeling it with all her senses made her happy,

bringing her calmness and peace. She didn't worry about getting soaked, she just was gathered into the glorious rain. She let herself go in it.

Paul, who similarly loves to sit and watch the birds in his yard, wondered why that kind of passive observation is superior to our active apprehensions and endless catering to necessity.

This is exactly what Nitya is addressing here, with the merger of seer and scene. When we think of ourselves as separate, dealing with everything is hard work. Knowing that everything we perceive is being presented to us as a symbolic passion play by our inner genius takes the edge off. We aren't alone, we have help, and it's right on board. It's all one.

Nancy agreed that being at one with her environment adds another dimension to her experience, making her more light-hearted, because she isn't so far from the center.

Deb said we keep getting pulled off center by little hurts and wants and needs. If she merges with her breath, it evens things out, and she recovers her steadiness. Nancy added that this helps her accept and deal with those things better, because she knows deep down they are part of her existence. Paul's assessment was that beauty really is in the eye of the beholder—we bring it to the scene, like an act of grace. Moni's observation was that when Nancy is seeing this, she isn't thinking, "I am the seer, or I am the doer." She's simply present.

Again, this is not a special practice we do in our spare time, it's how we relate to our whole life. Paul was grateful for the alternative to his always being upset, and as he puts it, chasing his own tail. Instead, he can pursue being restful through seeking the one.

And, as we're already one, there's no need to seek it. All we have to do is stop chasing the tail of the delusion as we've been trained to do, imagining we are a separate entity from the rest. That's precisely what we're practicing at times like this class:

resisting the futile chase. It moves us toward our true default setting (as it used to be) of calm.

Andy has begun to really register this lately, in his meditations. He's always had what he calls a visual model of meditation, where there is this world, and then, also, this little light in him. Now the light and the world are merging, the seer and the scene are merging, becoming That alone. Although it can be described in three parts, there is only consciousness. It reminds him of Atmo, verse 4, in *That Alone:*

> Knowledge, the object of interest,
> and one's personal knowledge are nothing other than *mahas;*
> merging into that infinite, Supreme Knowledge,
> become That alone.

Nitya's commentary on this verse is most helpful in grasping his meaning in the Patanjali, and I highly recommend it in its entirety. Here's one paragraph, on the threefold (in Gurukula parlance *tribasic*) aspect of consciousness:

> In the present verse we are facing three problems of epistemological importance. First of all, we should know what prompts the mind to move from one universe of interest to another. We attribute this to the latent urges or incipient memories, which we have approximated with Jung's personal unconscious and its motivation. The second question is, "How do the latent urges get into consciousness?" Here the Guru traces their origin to *mahas*, the primeval stuff. Thirdly, why is consciousness fragmented into the knower, the known and knowledge? From the second part of the verse we can deduce that a dissipation of interest causes the fragmentation of consciousness. In other words, unity comes about through a merging process occasioned by the total focusing of the mind.

> When that intensity is relaxed, the mind returns to its habitual attitude of a knower having knowledge of the known…. Let us now go into each of these problems in more depth.

Andy thought this explained the mysterious line from the Sutra 13 commentary: "The exercise is kept going by simply not feeding any memory with another associated memory. As a result, cognizing consciousness turns on itself to cognize cognition." I asked him if the way his light and the world were merging in his meditations was hard work, or perhaps a natural evolution? He readily characterized it as a natural unfolding, since the light never goes out. We only lose sight of it when we struggle to escape the whirlpools we feel caught in. He cited Dogen Zenji that enlightenment only seems exotic at the beginning.

When our light engulfs the world and they merge, that *is* enlightenment: where inert objects are imbued with the light of our awareness.

Light isn't some special fluid we have to generate in our alchemical laboratory. It's a metaphor for consciousness. The light we imagine penetrating into our eyes is another fiction. That type of light is converted to electrical impulses at the entry point, and is processed in the totally dark brain cavity. The light we think we "see" is self-generated, by and in concert with our awareness. When we "turn around" and become aware of it, it is worthy of veneration. It's truly a fantastic accomplishment!

Deb felt this was exactly what Nitya meant by not feeding memories with a chain of more memories, where each one leads to the next, and the next. Just let them go, as they are intervening with the present. Moni reminded us the mind has to be steadied again and again.

The question for Andy is how not to be *effortful* about it. It should actually be restful, but how? Nitya is aware of this:

> Even that can be tiring because attention is also associated with an activation of the mind supported by rajas. Rajas can corrode into the serenity of sattva and the yogi can consequently become exhausted. Where there is a depletion of mental energy caused by the over-activation of rajas, tamas sets in with its benumbing inertia, and the attention lapses into fatigue and sleep. Thus rajas and tamas are two cardinal enemies of meditation.

This led Andy to cite another favorite Atmo verse, 63:

> Apart from remaining in knowledge without becoming other than it
> and knowing this knowledge here,
> struggling in frustration, one does not know;
> who sees this supreme secret of the wise man?

Actually, Nitya and Johnny's free translation (in the appendix) is easier to understand:

> 63. The wise know there is only Knowledge, so they remain one with it and don't struggle. For them the truth to be known is here and now. But only a few see this secret. Those who do not know this think of it as an unknown entity to be sought and discovered, and under this delusion they struggle and agonize.

So we have to remember that That, Supreme Knowledge, is always here.

Karen finds that breathing, equalizing prana and apana, works best for her. Nitya was cautious about teaching pranayama to us overly-casual types, so he only makes a passing reference here, essentially that "yogis watch their breath, cultivate intimacy with its natural rhythm, and correct it if the breath is too short or

very hard." Even that simple practice works wonders. Karen also finds, in keeping with one of our main themes, that peace and centeredness comes naturally during her work as a masseuse, but whenever she sits to intentionally meditate, she has a lot of trouble. (q.v. Susan in Part II.) It really is more natural for most of us in the midst of well-chosen activity.

The sutra's central idea reminds me of Atmo 62, the second half of which reads: "This will not come by mouthing a phrase; the absolute state is attained through relentless contemplation."

Unitive consciousness is all well and good, but Anita told us she often very badly wants an other. Maybe because of her upbringing, she longs for a consoling God. She didn't want to rely just on herself. This is a beautiful idea, but she feels guilty about it in some circles.

I told her that viewing the wise aspect of the universe as wholly Other protected it from being claimed by the ego, which is one a hazard of believing we are the Absolute. Our conscious mind knows only a very slight amount of the whole, and the far more brilliant inner part of us is as 'other' as anything else. Many people access it more fully when they do treat it as remote from them. Just as Andy told us in the last class, that having bad thoughts had served him very well at times, we don't have to always stick to an idea of perfection. Still, knitting life all together can also be consoling, in an abiding way. However you relate to an absolute principle, please allow yourself to feel good about it.

Deb concurred with Anita, saying one of the joys of being embodied is sharing with an other. I might add that treating the person next to you as God makes Him extra-easily accessible.

Anita often talks to herself, and has multiple voices in her conversations, and she wondered what that was about. Another reason to feel guilty, perhaps? Deb asked her if they weren't all parts of herself, and before she could agree, Nancy burst out, "That's nothing more than *thinking*. It's how our brains work things out, bringing in different aspects and perspectives." Nancy talked about how when she's cooking dinner, she keeps giving herself advice, or telling herself no, that isn't a

good plan. It is one reason she's such an excellent chef. (I said that, not she.)

Several of us worried about having a variety of voices in their heads, and I assured them this was good training for putting the sutra into practice. Our world includes millions of people, who can fill in for us what we don't know or supply us with what we don't have. Heck—they're more a part of us than we are! Nitya exemplified that attitude. He graciously gave a hearing to all sorts of cockamamie ideas from people, and when he admired art and beauty, he'd sometimes say, "Aren't I beautiful!" All those experiences were *him*, to him. It made others feel included, and enriched his world beyond all limits. We could also see those "others" as more aspects of our own consciousness, supplying us with life lessons and opportunities. It is how our brain functions, after all.

This served as a perfect prompt for our closing meditation. We come together in our little class to openly share aspects of our own consciousness with each other, expanding our awareness and our inhabited terrain. We are part of each other. We've been practicing it for a very long time.

Part II

Notes from the first online class, 9/21/10:

I want to say a bit about Nancy's recommendation to "Break through the verbal to the nonverbal; then wait in peace and receive light or guidance from within."

Not linking memory associations to our present outlook helps us to attain to a nonverbal state, and there is no doubt that many of our conflicts stem from how we interpret our world with verbal conceptions. But nonverbal stability can imply either peace or stupor, depending on several factors. This is a very subtle and easily misunderstood part of the practice. Waiting without having

first made a significant effort will not produce any result, unless we are going in for that thirty-years-in-a-cave kind of spiritual practice. I believe the rishis are offering us more rajasic types an activist path as efficacious as that purely sattvic ideal that sounds so romantic but in actuality would be titanically boring, like a living death.

We must not ignore the context: Nitya makes this recommendation for those who have already done a lot of work, along the lines of the yamas and niyamas we will be studying later on, and which make up the musculature of Patanjali's Yoga anatomy. In our fast-paced culture, we may sit quietly for a spell, but then we are busy secretly expecting some inner guidance to magically appear, and so of course it doesn't. The guidance doesn't come from naïve or trivial input, but from a deep, committed study. Perhaps I live in a lightweight part of the world, but I'm not meeting very many people who are willing to make a sincere enough effort to do anything more than superficially amuse themselves. I feel that the ones who are properly motivated with enough energy to produce a real breakthrough are rare.

Nitya counseled us to not ask any more of people than they were willing to freely give, and that's good advice. But it shouldn't be illegal to tell them that there is much more to be gained by a sincere effort than by a casual dabbling. Nitya and others like him are prime examples: they have put their whole being into what they do, and they are the ones who are guided by a profound inner light. We go to them because of that light, because we can intuit its presence within them.

On the other hand, even if we haven't made much effort at all, we should still try to bring ourselves to a peaceful state and open ourselves to inner instruction.

Whatever our degree of commitment, one eternal question we face is, after waiting for guidance in a nonverbal state for a period of time, how do we distinguish between our ordinary mental jabber

and valid insights? What are the sources of these two very different types of thought, and how do we tell them apart with confidence? To make the distinction we need to know just what it is we are accessing. Then, for these insights to have an impact, they have to be formed into concepts which are then described in words. Otherwise, if they remain nebulous and unexpressed, what can they really do for us, or what can we do with them? We wind up acting the way we wanted to all along based on our conditioning, and the whole business is pointless.

From another perspective, it is very complicated and technically demanding to shut down the sensory system, but by simply becoming absorbed in an activity or train of thought, the five senses go into remission, so to speak. So, in many places the advice is to discover our intrinsic interests and get into them, and the chatter of the body drops way down. I do this myself with piano playing, where every wayward thought sticks out like a sore thumb, usually causing a mistake in the performance. Playing an instrument is a lot like the electronic biofeedback that fascinated Nitya for a period and he mentions here: playing well includes discarding the random chatter that the brain is fond of to ratify its own existence. A good performance in music is the same as the valid insights of yoga we are musing about here.

I tend to play less in the late summer and get back in the swing of things as the cooler fall weather ushers me indoors, as now, so I have been playing more lately. Days off means rust accumulates, so I've been rusty, and the main rustiness is that the discipline of suppressing tangential thoughts while playing has declined. Right now there are lots more intrusive ideas wandering through, and I can plainly see how they sabotage the music. More biofeedback is needed, which means practicing with better concentration. So for me, the early stage of the "musical year" is a lot about learning YET AGAIN to stop thinking while playing. Playing is in some respects merely a different type of thinking, it's

true, so I'm only inhibiting the distracting thoughts. Without discipline, my mind is quite content to fire randomly. So it takes repetitive practice—the famous abhyasa—to quiet it down so I can do a decent job.

It always amazes me that real musicians, or say, real talents in whatever field, come by this mental steadiness naturally and seemingly without effort. For the rest of us, we have to work hard at it. But I see it as simply a higher level of thinking, not a state beyond thought. Perhaps it's a matter of definition. Either way, we are aiming via repetitive practice to achieve mental stability, which can be called yoga.

One thing Nitya leaves largely to our imagination is the main purport of this sutra: that repetitive effort is a key factor in yoga. This doesn't mean we should select a boring routine and then keep at it endlessly, which seems to be the common wisdom. It means that we cannot rest on our laurels after one or two successes, but have to be alert and open all the time. Yogic transformation calls for a lifetime of diligent effort. It isn't about achieving a cumulative result, but producing results continuously as we go along. Sure, if a technique isn't going to work, it is good to give it up as soon as possible, but often we abandon an efficacious practice too soon, before it has begun to have its effects. This is particularly true of spiritual disciplines, which are on a much larger scale than the daily chores we are most familiar with. Abhyasa is like changing course on the proverbial battleship by pushing on it with our shoulder from a rowboat positioned alongside. If we only knew how to get to the helm! But we don't. So we need to apply pressure where we have access.

More:

I have to say first off that Sashi seems to be going through some really intense challenges and handling them with an

admirable degree of yogic equipoise, or steadiness as the sutra puts it. Keeping her ground in the midst of the hurricane. Good going, Sashi! Your example is a lesson for all of us: if we are attached to the outcome, or favor one side of a conflict, we can hardly help but become deeply embroiled, roasted on a spit so to speak, and emotionally buffeted. Remaining neutral is our salvation. But it is so hard, especially with close friends and family! Really though, how can we develop that kind of discipline away from the battlefield? Such challenging events are our "graduate exam" in practical yoga. It looks like you, Sashi, are earning your diploma! My sympathies are with you.

I have just come back from a walk with a friend and student who recently turned fifty. She has been digging through her attic clutter of family memorabilia for several months, and is worried that she is becoming addicted to the process. So we talked about it in reference to Patanjali's and Nitya's directive to "Stop feeding arising memories with associated memories."

In the light of this advice, then, digging into our past might appear to be a bad thing. But I recalled that when I turned fifty—some time ago—I made a journey back to my childhood hometown, my grandparents' homes, and some of my childhood haunts in the region, which are very far from where I live now. Standing in the places I had once thought of as the whole world brought back many profound and long-buried memories, many of which felt as intense as being run through with sharp swords from an excess of joy or bittersweet nostalgia. (Nostalgia, by the way, quite literally refers to returning home, a classic Greek theme.) But it was such an overwhelming experience: life is so beautiful, and so transient, and I have almost never felt it so thoroughly! It was amazing to dredge up my early history again, reactivate the mind of the child within, pay a mental visit to those long dead relatives who meant so much to me, and just feel how a place could look

substantially the same and yet be totally different. I remember one evening, after a beer or two to sweep away inhibitions, of crying full bore for several hours. Earthshaking sobs and torrential tears, like being the survivor of an apocalypse. Yet the next morning I was back on solid ground, everything returned to its proper niches within the fringes and folds of my brain.

It was all very cathartic and healing, which I hope is also the outcome my friend achieves from the sorting through the past she is currently doing. A strict teacher might say it is useless self-indulgence, but what it actually accomplishes is adjusting a lot of the memory baggage from childhood into a more streamlined, adult perspective. Doing it actually lightens the load. And it gives a measure of closure to an era that at the time we never expected to end. Kids don't know that their childhood is ever going to morph into something unknown, and that may be an inhibiting expectation we subconsciously carry through adulthood.

Of course, it's possible to get stuck in longing for the past, but I have never felt particularly inclined to revisit those places again. Revivifying them once did provide an important release, and now it is easier for me to follow the yogic suggestion of blocking memory associations, because there aren't so many heavy recollections standing on the sidelines waiting to be brought into the game. Any agitation they might have embodied has been quelled, to the degree it ought to be.

Living a life where such heaviness as memories carry is added on to present experience would be like wading through deep mud in a swamp. To flit like a butterfly from flower to flower we have to break the chain of associations and fly free of them. This is much easier to do when they have been befriended, and not just abandoned in our forward progress without proper respect and consideration.

The bottom line is that we learn steadiness through intelligent processing of blasts of agitation. The repetitive practice is to regain

our steadiness after it has been struck down by events, as is sure to happen. But as we do practice, we get better and better at recovering our composure, and this allows us to be like Sashi: a helpmate and pillar of strength for those caught up in the maelstrom.

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3/24/9
Sutra I:13
Of these, repetitive practice is the effort to maintain steadiness.

Patanjali's sutras are extremely terse and condensed, koans for meditation. On their face they tell us very little, serving mainly as a skeletal structure for us to hang our own insights on. Patanjali's own meditations must have been to find the gist of every term or idea, and he was very good at it.

In his comments Nitya addresses how strongly our sensory input distracts us from the steady, detached state of advanced meditation. Deb liked the idea that we learn to look, not at the object, but at the light that illuminates the object. We learn to listen, not to the sound, but to the vibration that carries the sounds. We learn to feel, not the touch, but the neural system that transmits the touch. And likewise with taste, smell, temperature, and all the other senses. In this way seemingly exterior factors are gradually sublimated into being treated as aspects of consciousness.

We have to take care that our meditation practice remains lighthearted and nonjudgmental, in other words sattvic. We seek to break our habitual chains of associations to sit in the peace of emptiness for a time, and as we are repetitively brought out by our thoughts, we gently discard them over and over. When this process becomes a chore, rajas kicks in with lots of drive, and eventually

we become tired out. At that point tamas reigns, and we shut down until we are revived by sleep. Nitya puts it this way:

> The exercise is kept going by simply not feeding any memory with another associated memory. As a result, cognizing consciousness turns on itself to cognize cognition. Even that can be tiring because attention is also associated with an activation of the mind supported by rajas. Rajas can corrode into the serenity of sattva and the yogi can consequently become exhausted. Where there is a depletion of mental energy caused by the over-activation of rajas, tamas sets in with its benumbing inertia, and the attention lapses into fatigue and sleep. Thus rajas and tamas are two cardinal enemies of meditation.

Susan was not in class, but she confessed to me the day before that after seven years of study she still wasn't very good at meditation. She could sit quietly for at most a minute before intrusive thoughts would grab her attention. This is actually typical, since most of us are rajasic types. The important thing is that, after having budgeted a little time for the exercise, you don't just leap up and obey your thoughts, but set them aside and recapture a moment of serenity, however brief. In a busy life even a few minutes of this can be transformative.

Her honesty is refreshing, and when I related it to the class, many agreed that this was not unlike their experience. We are for the most part active people who want to become freer in our actions rather than simply inactive, and yoga is admirably suited to our type. Yet even a little effort to maintain steadiness can dislodge impacted "poisoned arrows" in the psyche. It is remarkably efficacious. This not widely known because few people even spend the minute Susan could muster once in awhile. For instance, yoga as practiced in the US is primarily a series of calisthenics.

Practitioners imitate a leader or count a duration, all the time concentrating on the body. At the end they may pat themselves on the back for being healthy and zip off to their next appointment. It does produce a feeling of peace and calm for a while as the stretched muscles relax. But real abhyasa, repetitive practice, is not about physical exercises. It proceeds from the calm afterglow of the exercises to examine our mental makeup fearlessly and directly.

When we bring attention to bear on our veiled psychic landscape, a habitual defense mechanism repulses our attention. It is like the Biblical sword guarding the gates of heaven, warding us off from every angle of approach. This means that the lack of peace in meditation is an indication we are homing in on something important. If we continue to bring our attention back to these "heavenly gates," the ferocity of the defense will slowly dissipate. Ere long our consciousness will expand and begin to topple the boulders massed at the entrance, or dull the sword. Then we can sit still a little longer.

Anita had just such an experience to report. She couched it in terms of memory, how memories can help us regain our freedom. Because she remembered a previous situation, she was able to see it in a new light. But without the recall of it, it would have continued to languish in her unconscious.

That's right. The way she used memory was different from what Nitya means by "not feeding any memory with another associated memory." The kind of memories we have been decrying are the habitual behaviors and mental scripts that keep us frozen in the past, and that we shore up by repeating clichés. Anita was bringing her present consciousness to bear on an aspect of the frozen past, and by so doing dislodging it from the barricade surrounding her, as it surrounds each of us. Plus, she should recall this a few more times to ensure it doesn't grow back. All the way through, memory is used to loosen the habit. The overall scheme is

that the unconscious is brought into consciousness, and then released to blow away in the wind.

Briefly, Anita remembered when she had been made president of the Relief Society at her church. Looking back, she realized her pride in the post had colored her attitude a bit, and made her somewhat jealous of the contributions of other people. She went so far as to quote the adage that "“Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Luckily she wasn’t tempted with absolute power, but she could see that even a minor position of superiority unleashed some pent up feelings. To her credit, Anita did not beat up on herself for swaggering a bit in the past; she saw that being young and insecure, the presidency gave her a chance to be admired and appreciated by others. And now she knows that we have to supply that sense of being loved and admired we so crave from within ourselves. If that becomes an accomplished fact, we never have to worry about our secret needs twisting our actions to selfish ends. We become free to give in the pure sense, and our actions are commensurately benign. It’s too bad more people in positions of power are ignorant of the truth Anita is exploring.

The transition from childhood to adulthood includes going from being the center of attention to being on the periphery, or even outside the periphery. What’s worse, few of us are taught that we are always the center of our own attention, and that if this is linked to a grasp of the unity of all life, we never have to feel lonely or marginalized again. Most people go through life bemoaning the loss of being appreciated by their parents, trying to reclaim a substitute for that attention through ridiculous antics, or smothered in despair that it cannot be found. If they had more faith in themselves, all that misery would be unnecessary. This is the secret that Anita was applying in a practical fashion.

Anita also recounted a recent instance of getting angry when her cat broke something. She quickly went and sat on the side of

her bed and meditated about it, so the anger passed quickly. She didn't castigate herself for the anger, which would only have prolonged it, but forgave both the cat and herself. After all, she had good reason to get upset, and the cat was only being a cat. In a few minutes the cat came and curled up in her lap. For the most part, animals don't hold grudges, and we shouldn't either.

Paul confessed that it's very difficult to not beat up on ourself and run ourself down when we become aware of our faults. This stems from childhood training via punishment. We take on the role of punishing ourself for our mistakes from absent authority figures. This is the great triumph of authority, but it is the curtailing of our independent life that we are now struggling to reclaim. We very much need to see that we will learn and grow more if we are kind and supportive of ourself than if we are hostile about our faults. As the Gita tells us in Chapter VI:

5) By the Self the Self must be upheld; the Self should not be let down; the Self indeed is its own dear relative; the Self indeed is the enemy of the Self.

6) The Self is dear to one (possessed) of Self, by whom even the Self by the Self has been won; for one not (possessed) of Self, the Self would be in conflict with the very Self, as if an enemy.

Borrowing from my own comments on verse 5:

> What the Gita is recommending here is that when events send you reeling, instead of running yourself down or becoming furious with some bystander, you should support yourself with kind and understanding words in your inner voice. This is a technique that can be easily learned. Watch how you carry on after you are stung by a chance remark or accidental occurrence. When you begin to criticize yourself and

> magnify what happened, spending lots of time on it and making yourself depressed, switch over instead to a consoling voice, assess the situation clearly, tie it up with a bow and drop it in the nearest garbage can. Then forget about it. If your grievance needs to be redressed, you can now take calmly considered steps to respond appropriately. In this way the self has become your greatest helpmate, like a supporting relative or lover.

This is exactly how Anita dealt with her anger.

Led by Anita's courage, the class shared several practical examples, and hinted at several more, of how they were able to recast old habits in new light. This demonstrates that the "homework" of our study is still being pursued. I hope that this will continue. It's quite evident that bringing these insights into group awareness reinforces them, and instantly makes them seem less egregious.

Part II

Working on my Gita commentary, I stumbled on this relevant bit from VI, 7, where we are exhorted to remain steady in both honor and disgrace:

> It is a contemplative art form to progress from needing external assurance to having self-respect. Learning to love yourself unconditionally is a necessary prerequisite for wisdom acquisition. Clinging to honor or rejection from without merely postpones the date of reckoning with your own sense of self. Because we want very much to be loved, and strive hard to be lovable, we are easily beguiled by praises. At other times, false accusations resonate with our own degraded sense of self-respect, and we allow ourselves to be brought down by them. In both situations we are drawn out of our grounding in the truth of who we are by external influences.

It is especially artistic to be able to honor yourself when those around you despise you for who or what they think you are. Minorities in every context—racial, sexual, religious and all the rest—have had to struggle to maintain their dignity in the face of persecutions, ranging from mere contempt to outright genocide. There is nothing simple about dealing with disgrace, be it earned or unearned. The least we can do is stop persecuting people for being different than ourselves. Knowing that everyone is doing the best they can with what they've been given, and that they too are filled with the Absolute to the very tips of their fingers, we should ever be prepared to help, not hinder, our fellow humans.