

2022 Patanjali Class 34

11/2/22

Sutra I:14 – And this [repetitive practice] is firmly grounded, being well-attended to for a long time without interruption and with devotion.

Today as I write this, it is Nitya's 98th birthday. His cheerful presence was very much with us last night, which featured the best attendance for a regular class in a long time. Linda S, who prepared the US edition of *Love and Blessings* for the printer, with great diligence and artistic flair, joined us. The special atmosphere of being in a room together was substantial compensation for the dark drive to get here, I trust.

Deb noted Nitya's Victorian harshness in the commentary, about sexual urges, typical of sannyasins of his era. He stood up for a peaceful and natural sine wave of libido, and sublimating one's energies by attuning with it. A close reading of his most jarring comment reveals it is the guilt and shame about sex that corrodes one's peace, not necessarily the act itself:

People who are preoccupied with autoeroticism and other unnatural forms of gratification disturb their sex rhythms. They not only impoverish the perennial energy supply of their bodies, but also endanger the tranquility of their minds by indulging in activities that they consider shameful.

Deb felt this means we should discern the history of patterns and habits in ourselves in a quiet and persistent way. The essence of the advice is to keep returning to those quiet, sparse patterns of thinking and behavior that allow us to open ourselves up beyond our comfortable habits. She invited the class to talk about the habits that they know of that obscure their natural vision and unfoldment.

I proposed that we could well address the habits that are most deleterious, like racism and sexism, which are deeply ingrained in our species, though the discussion remained on a more personal level. After millions of years of stasis, science has finally demonstrated the arbitrariness of our overarching prejudices in the last few decades, inviting us to normalize our beliefs on more the solid ground of potential equality. I felt we should take on these big issues in ourselves, if we want it to mean something, and it takes “repetitive practice” to fully adjust. For instance, as a committed feminist father, my good intentions were not always adequate from the perspectives of my wife and daughters. While I meant well and altered many behaviors, there was plenty of feedback that I had a long way to go to make it real, to truly grow and change. Admitting this drew knowing snickers from the women in the class, which I took generically more than personally. At least trying is better than not trying....

Deb insisted there are smaller issues closer to home we could face up to, and the ability to come back to our center is an essential part of Patanjali’s teaching. So that’s how it went.

Andy maintained it’s important to consider who is the *agent* of discipline, meaning we should be self-motivated more than following someone else’s instructions. Nitya taught him that discipline isn’t to be applied on a surface level, it comes from the attractive power of your essential nature.

That’s right: each of us is the ultimate arbiter of our discipline, the one who carries it out, and we won’t succeed unless we are genuinely motivated to make the effort.

Andy asserted that we already have a foundational level of discipline in us. For instance, in the habit of meditating, the discipline to do it might be something you apply as a matter of personal will, or you could do it recognizing that there is a central part of yourself that is already constantly aware, and that part of you doesn’t need discipline. There could be a discipline you

provide to simply recognize that there is a part of yourself that is wise. He wondered why it's so hard to tune into that?

Linda lamented she's lost her regular meditation practice, and so was especially drawn to this part of the reading:

Practicing discipline is like climbing a mountain with a heavy load on your back. An aspirant should have a lot of energy resources to tap; in the pursuit of perfection a lot of energy is consumed. To facilitate this you have to economically portion out as little energy as possible for carrying out the daily vocation of life. The remainder of your energy is to be entirely used for advancing toward your goal.

Again, though, this presumes you have a clear picture of where you are going and how to get there. The other side of the paradox is that we may interfere with our success by picking a route before we even enter the terrain. We should be ready to adjust our route around the obstacles we encounter and toward the most promising gradients. We are inspired by what we imagine it will look like from the top, but we don't have any idea what it's really like. Plus, much of the heavy load we set out with is the unnecessary habits of mind we could offload at any time, to make the climbing easier.

If we do have a part of us that is always meditating, and it seems we do, the constructs we adhere to for meditation actually erect barriers to our acceptance of that state. The more we engage in egocentric practices, the farther our naturally-attuned awareness recedes. Andy figures we should embrace this as a paradox, and that's right: if you don't do anything, you won't get anywhere, yet if you spell it out from a position of limited awareness or ignorance, you may head in the wrong direction. As yogis, we have to seek the ample middle ground between those poles.

Anita brought up the habit she most struggles with—worrying. It's deeply lodged as part of her nature, as it's surely not

something she consciously chooses. She tries to stay in the present, yet anxiety arrives as an extraneous factor sometimes. She is able to take some comfort in fact that there is biological stuff going on, but still it's, well, worrying. Nitya wants us to accept that real change takes time: "Correction can be carried out only by consistently engaging, for long periods of time, in practices that amount to the devaluation and de-coloration of the conditionings that have gone into the system."

I sympathized that *consciously* changing our attitude barely affects states of anxiety at all, so it doesn't go away without long saturation. Kris suggested remembering to breathe deeply, which is simple and really does have a measurable effect, and Anita admitted that when she was really worried, she has noticed that she's stopped breathing. It's something to keep an eye on, for sure. Kris taught basic deep breathing to her grade school pupils, and observed how effective it was in times of stress.

Anita owned up to having a kind of minor breakthrough lately. Maybe just because she's older, she doesn't care so much anymore. She knows that whatever is going to happen will happen. She's tired of dealing with medical challenges all the time, and now she's resolved to not let worries rob her of the joy of the day, and she can even laugh about some of it. She's had a little success with this new attitude lately, wondering why would she give up connecting to trees and rivers, enjoying the sun on her face instead of worrying about this and that. When it starts to churn, she wants to shout at her mind to just shut up!

Deb affirmed that both humor and fatigue are valid parts of our practice. Fatigue is important, where we just give up constantly trying. She admitted to being the Queen of "give me one more minute and I can make you see it my way." She's found if you can let your insistence go, then you can laugh at yourself. If you can trust what is going to happen, it's easier to relinquish the need to control.

The habit Jan is pondering now is that she's spent half her life being a caregiver, but now her children are grown and gone, and her dear little dog died last week, so she's feeling what it's like to be on her own. So much of her orientation was to be taking care of people, which she loved, but now she's letting herself discover repressed tendencies, parts of her that haven't come forth yet. She realizes that there's a level of dissociation between the demands made on her and her own grounding in herself.

Not yet knowing what those latent tendencies are, can be a good thing. We are familiar with our general interests and abilities, of course, but it's up to the Universe to put them to use. Our daughter Emily was just interviewed about women in leadership positions. She spoke about not having a clear idea of where she was going, but being open to possibilities, and they led her forward to a quite impressive career. You may be able to listen to it [here](#). My favorite part was her point about women having a more collective orientation to leadership than men, and that their contributions are no longer as marginalized as they once were. Bring it on!

I just randomly turned to this, in L&B: "To face uncertainty in life is a beautiful experience. It is much better than having everything planned and scheduled." (letter to Deb, March 7, 1973) It's fitting that Nitya should get a vote on his birthday. 😊

Of course, lots of us feel anxious when we don't have everything pinned down. The future looks as Unknown, and we have ample reason in our memory banks to fear it. Philosophy's role is to convince us to be excited, even eager about it, instead.

Andy admitted to what he calls daydreaming, and for him it's a terrible habit. Some days he realizes he's spent 99 percent of his life elsewhere, and beauty is only immediate when he's taking a shower. He gets angry with people who aren't there, argues with them.

Well, we do live in our minds. It's the human condition. Moni said that artists are always thinking of the next creation, only Andy is calling it daydreaming. Andy grumbled that Moni was putting a virtuous spin on it, but she has also done some painting, and everything she thought about was a possibility that she might use in her next creation. When your interest changes, it changes how you look at things.

I agree with Moni, and believe we doubt our free associations because we think we are supposed to be effective. I go along with John Lennon, that life is what happens when you are busy making other plans. But Andy's hinting at an important consideration, and we tried to work our way into it.

Linda allowed that it's hard to distinguish between fantasized experience and reality. Andy agreed some daydreams are an integral part of creativity, but they are also states of mind that syphon off his time and energy.

Paul put in that daydreams for him can be a vehicle to review the truth of what has happened. He gets angry at something or somebody who isn't there, and he does it for review, calculating things like how much of it do I own, and how much do they own? He sees it as a service he provides himself. It's true, we do this often, as a way of sorting through our interactions and ideas. We work things out that way. I think Andy meant more like being lost in a fog, absent. Absent-minded. Susan has written well about this and other matters in her long response, which you can find in Part II.

Andy summed up that the energy he has spent being angry had a lot to do with pushing away undesirable feelings rather than experiencing them fully, which is spot on. Anita concurred: part of your psyche/mind is trying to protect you, by diverting you from something that you don't want to acknowledge. But what can it be?

Linda wondered who does Andy's anger affect? I had

claimed only him, in that it isn't apparent to the person who caused of the upset, but Linda added a Tibetan Buddhist idea that our anger starts a whole karmic-effect chain reaction. She's right—our stifled emotions may leak out by the gallon. Still, most of us elders can remain outwardly polite and genial, even when we're boiling inside. On really bad days we stay home.

Deb was with Nitya in a restaurant in Rishikesh in 1971, when a pop song came on in the background. She was unconsciously moving and grooving to the music, which was essential to our "liberated" attitudes at the time. Nitya said stop that! and Deb got irked. (Susan also wondered what's wrong with that?) Nitya lectured her that it was a habitual response, that she was allowing herself to expend energy for no reason. Eventually she saw how there is a part of us that goes off with a stimulus we might not even notice, and now she tries to react differently when she hears songs.

It's the unconscious part that Nitya was hitting at, not the grooving, though he may have been looking for a chance to correct her—he did that sort of thing, and would hit right where you were most comfortable with yourself. And I should add that Nitya hated rock 'n' roll, characterizing it as "musical masturbation." Deb may have been pressing his buttons as much as he was pushing hers.

My advice to Andy, myself and others is to reprogram our self-critical thoughts to be gentler on the system. We aren't actually master-criminals, but sometimes we treat ourselves as if we are.

When Nitya takes about dissipating energy, he isn't speaking only about sex, according to Deb. We are always extravagantly expending energy here and throwing it away there. After coming back from India and her first deep exploration with him, she took up a career teaching. Nitya accused her of scattering everything in a million different places, and to what end? She might have been referring to this part of a letter in L&B:

I'm glad I could cast aside my father complex, however I still experience deep within me a concern and an anguish. It is not caused by fear that something might happen to you. Ironically the fear comes from a haunting feeling that nothing will happen to you. It is not uncommon for man to walk, but I expected to see you one day soaring high and diving deep. I told you of your potentials. With every gingerbread involvement you had you have endangered the highly potent release. You have been letting off your steam too easily, and frequently the pressure has gone down. Debbie, my precious Self, should you become so poor! You have a responsibility to the source that has so abundantly filled you with your potentials. (January 30, 1974)

Paul told us about trying to get a forbidden item out of his dog's mouth. It's impossible to pull out! The only way is to give her something she would rather have in her mouth, then she will give it up for the replacement item. He realized it's equally impossible for him to release his grasp on his habitual identity, which was established in childhood, based on things he should and shouldn't do. It doesn't take much of a reminder of an incident and he bites hard on an attitude that inhibits him. He tries to overcome it and get to his individual place of neutrality, where he can see he is involved in everything, and then he can sometimes let go.

According to the Gita, we need to find what interests us more than what we're stuck on. Verse II.59 says "Even the residual relish reverts on the One Beyond being sighted."

Guru Nitya's thoughts on sex and gender issues are nicely laid out in two chapters of *Love and Blessings*: Gender Bias, and My First Serious Break with the Gurukula. I only had time to read part of the first, affirming the Gurukula's firm commitment to gender equality. It was a fitting entrée for our closing meditation.

I'll include a paragraph I didn't read, to balance the steam analogy from the letter above:

[Nataraja] Guru later told me a story about a young and attractive swami of the Ramakrishna Mission who was observing absolute sexual abstinence. Once while traveling in a train near Paris he intrigued a French woman, who suddenly flung herself in his arms and kissed him. The embarrassment and shock was too much for him, and he had a stroke then and there. Afterwards the paralyzed swami was brought back to India, where he gave talks warning all the youngsters there that crude *brahmacharya* can build up pressure until one explodes like a boiler bursting. It was his task to explain to young people how they can let off their libidinal pressures without infringing on their morality.

May our morality never cause us to explode! Aum.

Part II

Deb sent over a poem she feels fits the sutra to a T:

Braiding and Unbraiding

Cross-hatched willow, leaf and rock, and our own
clever stitching have woven a weir made to hold back
the eager stream. We built with care, for sustenance and power,
yet now stumble on its use, no longer an aid but a hindrance.
How to disassemble the weir we have made?

Our conflicted thoughts too are caught in stem and bud,
in bark's tight hold, while fingers dig to untangle decaying
dams and find embedded in the wall new possibilities.

We pull out mud and shriveled plants, releasing first rivulets, then cascades of water, flowing and following the irresistible patterns of earth's geography, the ocean's ceaseless pull.

What gravity twines around our lives, what do we release, when we swim through heart's limitations into open water?

* * *

Susan sent what she *really* thinks, this morning, including a couple of topics that aren't covered in Part I, but I'm sure you can figure them out. I'm delighted to include afterthoughts from any and all participants:

Just did some journaling to try to figure out what on earth I was trying to say last night. Felt like a mess. It might have been better if I had just talked about how my month in Canada was a great instance of taking time away from my usual routines so that I could be more aware of how my mind works and could question my habits. I am so grateful for that time and it makes me more determined to make that kind of time here at home, in the midst of my routines. Much more difficult!

I am finding my way but I still can't explain it. I brought up the thing about my neighbors and worrying about what I am wearing when taking out the garbage and what my neighbors will think of me. This is about bringing up the old tapes in my head and questioning them. Why can't I wear any damn thing I choose at 62 years of age, without giving it a thought? And then the driving thing. I guess I am in a place where I am doing this helpful work (meditation, Internal Family Systems Therapy, Nitya's commentaries, class) and it helps me to notice the habits, so that's good. Then Andy and Deb brought up the thing about expending

energy needlessly in reaction to a stimulus that is habitual. I didn't like the suggestion that being compelled to dance would be a waste of energy or somehow a negative thing. I like to put on 80s dance tunes sometimes when I'm washing dishes or cooking dinner, just for the joy of it. The preparations are so much more fun. And if I need to get a lot of house work and organizing accomplished, I put on Baroque music and it really energizes me and keeps me on task. But I don't think that is what Deb was talking about. I can relate much more to the daydreaming phenomenon that Andy was talking about — the non creative aspect. If there are parts of me that are trying to be heard, parts that need attention (Andy talked about this too), I sometimes feel the brain fog descend and surround me so that I can't think at all. I start to drift. This is definitely the part of me, quite habitual, that does not want to acknowledge the hurt or pain or worthlessness I am feeling in those moments. When I was younger too, I would go into daydreaming fog and it was not productive but all about avoidance of feelings and it was a waste of so much time but I did not yet have the tools to recognize what was happening. I just felt so lost and checked out. Now I recognize it as a specific reaction (or part). It is not uncomfortable or unfamiliar but it does sap energy and it goes nowhere. So it is interesting to look at those moments when our systems have certain automatic reactions. I think road rage can be looked at this way also. If I see these leaps of my whole psyche into frustration and judgement for another driver, I realize that there are parts involved. There is the part of me that does not like to be late, the part of me that does not like to drive slowly (Mario Andretti part!), the part that wants everyone to obey the laws. And what is it, what part is it that is beneath all these other parts that is needing attention? This takes me right back to small Susan on the Ainsworth playground, being the last to be picked for softball, the little Susan who was the absolute opposite of cool -- loved by adults, avoided by children. This is the same Susan whose home life was sometimes out of

control. This Susan began to cling to routines and rules as a way to feel safe and following the rules made me feel worthy. This is all just stream of conciseness musing but interesting. So this goes back to what Anita said about the need for control when we are raging on the road.

Regarding Andy's comment about the foundational part of us that doesn't need discipline — such a cool thing that I am getting to know much better these days. This is similar to my health practitioners who say that the body knows how to heal itself. But (as Andy also mentioned) some of us need a discipline in order to be aware of the foundational part, the wise part. Maybe it is because of the daydreaming, drifting, brain fog tendency in me that I need to make such deliberate, concerted efforts. Meditation has been really helpful to me and so has the Internal Family Systems Therapy. They somehow help me recognize and disperse the fog and also move from being lost and stuck to being more connected to the earth and all beings. I am more able to recognize the habits and tendencies that are holding me back. And more able to see how I am not the center of the universe, thank goodness! I am confident that eventually this will really help my road rage.

* * *

10/17/10 Nancy Y's online class—

It should be admitted right off the bat that I'm no paragon of virtue, and (possibly for this very reason) I'm firmly convinced that virtue isn't necessarily a spiritual principle. I go along with Nitya's first guru, Dr. Mees: "In Europe and America there is a strong tendency to identify morality and spirituality. But anyone who has common sense and looks around, is aware that there are a great many people who are moral saints, but lack inner peace and

do not know true happiness. In the East the identification of morality and spirituality is as a rule avoided.” Of course, that last bit is a glib and false generalization. Mees is speaking only of the wisest philosophers. Much of the East is almost as crazy as the West when it comes to moral issues and their spiritual import.

That being said, much of my useless and wasteful behavior of the past has been subsumed in a bevy of challenging and absorbing projects. Perhaps these aren't strictly spiritual in the traditional sense, but I like to think that they open doors to a kind of usefulness where some of my old behaviors held them shut. And I like the Gurukula attitude that practical matters are an integral part of spirituality, and not to be discarded in favor of inactivity.

As to doing the suggested exercises, I feel like I have been doing them for decades already. Right now I'm caught up with so much really enjoyable “devotion” that I can't imagine adding anything more. I'm overwhelmed. I guess that means if you follow this advice there is a vast universe of potential you wind up tapping into. I'm really happy I entered this path so many years back. Now walking it is effortless. Well, not effortless, but I love it, so no force is necessary to make me walk it.

* * *

There are no notes from the first class, in 2009, for some reason.