

2022 Patanjali Class 35

11/15/22

Sutra I:15 – Detachment is the consciousness of mastery in one who is free from thirst for seen and heard of enjoyments.

The old notes for this difficult sutra, forming the present Part II, highlight its relevance to our era, and converted me from dismay to admiration when I reviewed them as part of my class preparation. Before reading out the commentary, I passed along one of their primary insights: the wording is “seen and heard of” enjoyments, which is wholly different from simply “seen and heard enjoyments,” as I initially took it. Nitya, especially, accessed his profundity of love through engagement with sensory stimuli, and daily urged us to do the same. Apparently Patanjali is speaking of detaching from what we are told by other people, concepts we unwittingly replace our own authentic experience with, like heaven worlds awaiting us if we’re well-behaved, or other desirable attainments that require following prescribed templates. He wants us to be more present *now* rather than being committed to futuristic speculations, for reasons I hope are obvious.

Like all of us, Deb found this sutra challenging at first, with Nitya listing so many varieties of consciousness. Yet the more she thought about it, she attuned to a thread of beautiful vision running through it, epitomized as the aspirant existing in the witnessing consciousness, not just the reacting consciousness. By favoring neutral witnessing over our reactions, we become more aware of our attachments, which is critical to becoming detached about them. As Nitya puts it: “Those who are in resonance with the self-luminous light of pure consciousness become aware of the bondage to which a person is subjected in the world of phenomenality.” The sutra is teaching us how we can live a regular life without being weighed down by toxic memories, projections and assumptions, and that is the real thrust of the lesson.

Several of us underlined Nitya's very practical observation, that detachment happens when "the witnessing consciousness becomes more strongly established than the reacting consciousness." This is something we can easily pay attention to, once we are alerted to its value. Bill called this the beginning of Patanjali's road map of practice: as we look more closely at what our conditionings do to us, how all-encompassing they are, and how much our desires influence our needs, we can learn to see those things, and look inside rather than outside for guidance.

Deb picked out a couple of phrases she was most moved by: "In the world of transaction, linear thinking and logical reasoning are helpful. But true spiritual insight comes from intuitive flashes," and "your pre-incarnate reality, which is of pure light, [is] not imprisoned in the cage of a body." She loved Nitya's description of how yogis live in that radiant state rather than constantly obsessing on whether they are properly understood and appreciated. Bill added that this is "the intelligence that does not depend on previous conditioning," meaning the witnessing consciousness we can all cultivate.

This is a skill we have to work to develop in a culture fixated on reactivity, and made increasingly hyper-reactive by the internet. Every faction wants us to weigh in on what makes us mad, and is convinced if we aren't upset there's something wrong with us. Yoga teaches how we can quit that game and just sit and observe the situation, which is the way to de-fuse explosive situations.

In Indian tradition there are many who take this to a shocking extreme. I wrote this in the old notes: "The descriptions of *videhis* and *prakritilayas* sound like mentally checked-out people to me, and their simplicity is the kind of state we will naturally achieve when we slip into senescence or stupor late in life. Is it possible that *that* is what we are being called to strive for? I don't think so."

What I realized this time is that while these people seem wacky, totally absent, they are *exactly like people tripping*, who

are for the duration totally tuned out. They are in the grip of an inner world of revelation. Like King Janaka, if you offer them food they might eat it, but they aren't hankering after it. They are unaware of what they're wearing, if anything. None of that matters. Lots of us were like that occasionally in the Sixties, including me on good days. My second realization was that the vidhis and prakritilayas are stoners. They are ganja-babas, soma users, smoking divine medicine to achieve altered states, often all day every day. Nitya was a little bit naïve about such topics. Regardless, there are other ways to tune in to intuitive levels, and that's what we'll be exploring with Patanjali. While I of course support the use of entheogens to amplify the witnessing state, it's not what this class is about.

Andy has been pondering how our sense of ourselves as isolated ego individuals is really a construct of what we like and what we don't. When those things are minimized, the central 'I' notion is likely to be much more lightly held. The witness, then, is just naturally the case, and the extremes of renunciation are a natural corollary of it.

Susan has really been looking into the way the stories we tell ourselves can be impediments to going deeper inside. In the past in her difficult interactions with others, she always assumed that the other person was the problem, and that she needed to work it out with them in order for things to go better. Now she realizes she can work it out within herself. With the inner work she's been doing in the last year, she's finding that her interactions are not as fraught as they used to be. Now things get better without having to wrangle with the other person or fix them somehow. She can let them be who they are, it's okay.

Likewise, Paul figures this is all about the narratives we tell ourselves. And there is not only his own narrative about himself, he has one for everyone else, and they have theirs about him, so it gets really complicated. It feels like he's forcing himself into a

cage as well as forcing others into another cage. Being anxious about our bondage, then, is actually a healthy response, and he experiences it like Ramakrishna's description of being held under water: there's an illusion of drowning, feeling trapped, fighting for the next breath. While it makes you panicky, it's needed because then you know you are caught in a cage, and unless you know it, you won't escape. When he loses his balance, it reminds him he is the one in bondage.

That's right: when our ego comes roaring out, blaming and accusing the other, denying their validity, it's a golden opportunity to turn to the witness state and let go of our instinctive reactions. These are the episodes when we can clearly observe our attachments, and unless we get into these situations we will continue along with our pleasant but narrow complacency. They provoke us to change for the better.

Since we are rewiring our brain—a gradual, physical process—repetitive practice really helps. I suggested to the class that we all have done a lot of that work already. If we look to our past attitudes, some of the things that used to drive us nuts now seem laughably trivial. (This is a good exercise.) They just don't bother us as much as they used to. That very practical detachment is a life-long, never-ending process, but everyone present is already an estimable, well-wrought human being. It might not hurt to presume everyone we interact with is estimable as well.

Jan especially appreciated Nitya's focus on intuitive flashes and on the "intelligence that does not depend on previous conditioning." She finds it inspiring and liberating to open up to that core of wisdom at the same time as she is detaching from what blocks it. She has been tuning in to some Jungian lectures dealing with the shadow, about working on detaching by confronting your shadow, and it struck her as remarkably similar to the class topic. It's not just about looking at your dark, stuck side, but also a way

of making your way toward inner wisdom and intuition, by freeing yourself from those conditionings.

Andy brought up a nuance that isn't dealt with in the commentary, that "detachment is the consciousness of *mastery*...." It sounds almost as if it's introducing an ego slant, but I'm guessing it's an approximate translation, and the intent is more the conscious awareness that you are capable of directing to the witness rather than the ego's reactivity. There's nothing wrong with a little self-confidence that you can handle the situation, by relying on intuitive understanding rather than external manipulations. It's a kind of mastery.

Andy agreed it was beneficial to have something you can depend on which is not connected to need or opinion, and having real faith in that.

Nitya adds 'power' in the word definition of *vasikara*, and that's more what's meant here. The dictionary has *vasi*, the more important first half, as "subjection or subjugation; holding others in magical submission to the will." Curiously, it's primarily a Buddhist word, with a bodhisattva having ten such powers, and emphasizing the magic part, including 'bewitching'. The *dikker* has the whole word as meaning "to reduce to subjection; subdue." I suppose 'mastery' is somewhat Patanjali-like, but it seems a bit excessive. I'm glad we took a close look at it. It boils down to subduing our interests in tangential matters.

Moni caught the traditional spirit of it: you are training yourself to overcome each of your feelings that are based on social norms and your needs. Step by step yogis are controlling their feelings. They have to go through so many exercises, and the things that are important to ordinary people are not important to them. Clothes, relatives, approval—all fade away when they get into the mastery of negating things.

Deb cautioned that when we think of disciplining ourselves, it's a linear idea. We can make ourselves do or not do something,

but relinquishing that kind of formation and allowing ourselves to be intuitive and witnessing, is a different kind of mastery. Instead of that, we can let the inner breezes loosen us up.

This got Andy wondering about discipline generally — where is discipline applied from? We have a powerful habit of thinking we can get to some ideal state through acts of self-improvement. He felt that what is being described here as mastery is outside that way of looking at things.

I put in that it definitely helps to have a teacher, scripture, or like-minded friends, and that is part of this study, where we are “sitting at the feet” of two masters, through their writings. That’s scripture. If we do it all on our own, it’s easy to get into an ego-projected, dead-end state. Andy rejoined that the master is not a person, but I amended that to the master is not *necessarily* a person. I imagine there is a guru-principle in the universe, but my imaginations are not always verifiable. We do need to include a perspective outside our comfort zone, and we are fortunate to have a great deal of it in our little meetings. This is from the old notes from Nancy Y’s class, in Part II:

Nancy’s caution about taking any advice too far in her last paragraph is top-notch. Honesty, determination and compassion are all prized qualities exemplified by gurus, but we have to be careful that our craving for honesty does not progress into making us excessively critical, our determination does not become rigidly dogmatic, and our compassion doesn’t have any taint of superiority or separation in it. As Nancy says, here is where we can all be a big help to each other, providing gentle feedback, as well as helpful examples of what actually works. It is a great blessing to have friends who trust us enough to haul us back in the boat if we happen to fall overboard. I thank all of you in this study, and especially Nancy, for being there in that way.

I feel that way in the present study, too. Obviously!

In case anyone still believes they are somehow unfit, and I know all of you very well, I made it explicit that everyone here was an exemplary person, a credit to the human race, with extensive wisdom and huge hearts. You aren't being egotistical to admit you have a legitimate place in the scheme of things. Maybe someone else believes you don't, but you should, definitely. Undervaluing ourselves is a prime place to apply detachment. Remember, a yogi offsets undervalue with overvalue, and comes out even.

I shared an old example of how detachment plays out in ordinary affairs, which you can read about in the first indented section of Part II. Nancy contributed a perfect example of her own. Cooking and meal prep is a big part of her life, but periodically she goes on a cleansing diet, nearly a fast, consuming only one modest item for a few days up to a week. She finds it shows her how much you are conditioned to simple thoughts like "It's time to eat," and "What will I make?" The restricted diet interrupts everything, and you see how you are set up on a system of sustaining yourself, all around food. You realize how much your life has been conditioned, and helps you simplify your everyday needs and wants. It's really hard, too! But you learn about all those parts of yourself, saying you don't need to do this, you are fine without it. Detachment increases the awareness of how your mind works, and your actions follow your thoughts

Supporting our ego choices is practically effortless, so you mostly notice them only when you stop indulging them. Only when confronting them do you realize how ferocious they are, and you have to stand up to them, or they win. We're fighting ourselves in a way, though it must be waged with gentle pressure, like Deb's inner breezes. In a sense, we're unworking rather than

working on it. Simply clearing the mental space brings detachment. From Nitya's sutra 2 commentary:

A cloud is taken to its destination by wind. Similarly, the physical and subjective effort of the yogi can take their discipline only to a certain extent. Thereafter—like a cloud being taken by wind—the disciplined mind of the yogi transverses in the spiritual realm without any ego-oriented effort. (13)

And from his sutra 13, regarding biofeedback: “She puts all her efforts into being effortless.”

Paul wondered when we talk about discipline, of being self-disciplined, how much of that mastery is itself a product of conditioning? And how much depends on seeing an intuitive truth, and that by itself displaces old conditionings? He is wary of his attachment to conditionings, knowing that for him to say “I'm not going to allow my conditioning to have any influence on my behavior,” isn't effective. He can believe he's doing it, but he won't see the falling away of attachments unless they can be replaced with something much greater.

I clarified that we aren't eradicating our foundational conditioning, only taking it into account, so we can counteract its negative influence. Our conditioning makes us our unique shape, and is 99% terrific. The 1% skews the pitch, and is eminently fixable. Everyone is conditioned, no matter how awesome they are. So let's not spend our lives combatting our natural existence. We should act in an easy-going, free-flowing way, and if we fight ourselves we are never going to release the blissful reservoir behind the dam.

Deb had just read a Chogyam Trungpa quote: “All of us have within ourselves a tremendous source of sanity.” She identified that sanity with our witnessing consciousness, which has the power

to allow us to be at our best in situations. If we recognize it and dwell in it, that sanity is a version of the mastery of detachment.

Part II

The old notes do a fine job of bringing the teaching into the present tense. First, from Nancy Y's class of 11/7/10:

This sutra should be famous as the source of Nancy's call to share our imperiences, which are clearly explained here!

The gist of the sutra is perfectly summed up by Nitya: [A yogi who becomes oblivious of the ego-body relationship] "experiences no strong attraction or avoidance. It is not that he suffers or tolerates whatever is happening around him. Instead, the witnessing consciousness becomes more strongly established than the reacting consciousness." When we are new to the study, we may suffer intense reactions, like the ones in Shankara's famous descriptions of the fish and deer in mortal peril. By learning detachment we wean ourselves away from overreacting at least, if not from reacting at the outset. Where some religions encourage ever stronger reactions to anathema, yoga teaches the opposite.

Sashi's tale of family struggles is again the perfect example of why we undertake this study. In a highly charged environment, if we are attached to our reactions we will be buffeted without rest, but if we can hang on to our neutrality it is like being in the eye of a hurricane. Only when we are steady can we offer worthwhile advice to our friends who are "tempest toss'd." If we take sides we only aggravate the situation.

Achieving peace after a storm is much more dynamic than always being at peace. Honestly, the descriptions of *videhis* and *prakritilayas* sound like mentally checked-out people to me, and their simplicity is the kind of state we will naturally achieve when

we slip into senescence or stupor late in life. Is it possible that *that* is what we are being called to strive for? I don't think so.

The key is that we should retain our awareness of situations, even while having a comfortable resting place in the witnessing state. Then we can function like Janaka or Sashi, making wise rulings or helping others to work through their own dilemmas.

I'll clip in one paragraph from my earlier "class notes" commentary on this sutra, simple but useful nonetheless:

In the class I gave a perhaps trivial example from recent experience. I was just down in Reno visiting friends, whose boy had a Little League baseball game we attended. We sat right behind the umpire, who was terrible—it's actually surprisingly difficult to be a consistent, unbiased referee—but at least he was uniformly awful. There was an element of fairness in his umpiring, because it was off the same amount for both teams. If an ump has a secret preference, like knowing the coach or having a child on the team, the neutrality gets disrupted. That's why in professional sports the referees are kept totally isolated from the teams they will judge. Sitting in the stands, I noticed that the parents who were fervently involved got upset by the bad calls that went against their kids but not against the other team. As a neutral observer, it was easy for me to see how everyone's perceptions were influenced by their relationship to the situation. Again, this is Patanjali's teaching, that we are most clear-headed when we observe from a neutral standpoint, free of obsessions and inhibitions, such as living vicariously through our children and their performances.

What was left unsaid there is that some of those biased parents got *very* upset, actually angry, which not only spoiled their fun and their children's fun, but probably made the umpire even worse than he was to begin with. The tragic potential is unlimited.

Occasionally there have even been stories of a parent killing a referee over bad calls in their kid's game.

Nitya's teachings here help us to address the paradox in all this. If we just ignore everything and go ahead based on our inner predilections, we are very likely to act with prejudice. Neutrality requires effort to achieve effortlessness. This is not well understood, from what I have observed. Humans make great efforts to pretend nothing is the matter, forcefully ignoring important features of their environment, in the name of spirituality. The real salvation comes from paying attention to what's going on and then discerning a neutral position in the middle of it. This means that effortlessness emerges from our yoga practice, and is not achieved by wishful thinking or wishful non-thinking for that matter. Simply ignoring conflicts can mask serious problems that will eventually surface to cause us grief.

Abasing ourselves before an imaginary god and trying to make ourselves servile or even dead is a very common attitude, but one that horrifies me. If there is any specific, limited god in this universe, which is rather dubious, it seems to me they would want us to be fully alive rather than walking corpses, inventive and creative rather than followers of prescriptions. Such a prayer only makes sense as a way of communicating with our inner nature, the core that can act with perfect harmony if we open ourselves to it. And it may be that being oblivious of how it works makes it work all the better.

Nancy's caution about taking any advice too far in her last paragraph is top-notch. Honesty, determination and compassion are all prized qualities exemplified by gurus, but we have to be careful that our craving for honesty does not progress into making us excessively critical, our determination does not become rigidly dogmatic, and our compassion doesn't have any taint of superiority or separation in it. As Nancy says, here is where we can all be a big help to each other, providing gentle feedback, as well as

helpful examples of what actually works. It is a great blessing to have friends who trust us enough to haul us back in the boat if we happen to fall overboard. I thank all of you in this study, and especially Nancy, for being there in that way.

Class of 11/30/10, on the closely related Letter 15:

Wow, Letter 15 packs a punch. Brilliant and important. When Nitya speaks of prakritilayas as “Those who identify their stream of life as an integral part of the eternal flux of elements,” they become much more accessible, no longer seeming so otherworldly. I suppose I relate to this more as an intellectual abstraction, but I often ponder how we are so placed in a natural continuum that our life takes its course almost like floating down a river. We may swim a few strokes and splash around a bit, but the general drift—the “eternal flux of elements”—remains very little affected. A prakritilaya, then, is someone who is content to go with the flow and not try to swim away to an imaginary safe harbor.

I also love that the guru treats “the compulsive behavior of an animal” as the flip side of “the detached, repressive withdrawal of a conscientious person.” The conclusion to be drawn? “Both of these aspects are symptoms of having no control over your life and remaining as a slave to the forces of circumstance.” This is the kind of radical perspective that so attracts me to this particular guru. The majority are pleased to condemn compulsive behavior, but then wax rhapsodic over all sorts of prescribed repressions. Personally, I find repressiveness to be even more deleterious than normal compulsion, and lament the toll of human suffering wrought by those who revel in crushing every feeble attempt at independence on the part of inhibited people, or at least who praise dull quiescence as evidence of spirituality. Nitya hits the nail on the head with seeing these as complementary afflictions.

In the Letter, Nitya presents a rare insider peek at the way a relation with a preceptor can break us free from such a bind. This is an intellectually satisfying depiction of spiritual development, which is not often spelled out in non-worshipful terms. That's the way I like it! The key is in having an actual person to relate to, rather than a set of ideas or ideals, because another person will be much less colored by our desires. It's awfully easy for us to bend our perceptions to match our goals, even when our actions testify otherwise.

Nitya describes the horizontal pole, which we normally picture as objective/subjective or waking/dream, as connecting myth and physicality. We could call these fantasy and actuality. The recent revelations of Wikileaks about the sordid reality of "diplomacy" highlight an important way this plays out in "real life." There is a violent and corrupt manner in which virtually all governments operate, but it is kept out of the public eye quite effectively, and anyone pointing it out is treated as a traitor to the cause. Instead of striving for honesty, governments produce a cover story tailored to the beliefs of their citizens, in order to mollify them and divert their attention away from the criminal behavior. It works very well, for the most part.

Citizens' discussions of the issues then degenerate into how much to accept or reject of the cover story, and they are made utterly impotent, because the cover story is a myth to begin with. But most people are content to docilely accept what they are told, and hope for the best. It is definitely much safer that way.

Wikileaks has performed a bit of yogic contemplation on the general consensus, revealing its falsity for all to see. Many people will simply ignore what's going on, and most of the rest will argue that it is necessary, and so the veil should be put back in place as quickly as possible. Only the real yogis will uphold truth and justice, those values that verticalize the horizontal pragmatic disasters regularly mounted in the self-interest of various power

elites. Yogis know that ignorance breeds bad things, up to and including mass murder and war. In refusing to comply, they withdraw from the physical/myth orientation of prakriti to seek the true freedom of the purusha. They rest assured that buying into a myth holds very limited benefits at best, and so they don't.

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The notes from the first Portland Gurukula class are long, but very much to the point. They really helped me appreciate this problematic sutra:

4/7/9

Sutra I:15

Detachment is the consciousness of mastery in one who is free from thirst for seen and heard of enjoyments.

The translation is inevitably a little bit clunky, Sanskrit being as dense as it is. The idea here is that detachment is the mastery of consciousness that comes from being free of perceived (seen) and promised (heard of) attractions. When I first read this sutra, I missed the second, all-important 'of', and just took it as seen and heard enjoyments. But Patanjali is referring to what we hear about from others: the lures that religion and other advertising schemes offer to suck people in. The promises of heaven, wealth, and a carefree retirement supply virtually all the motivation of ordinary folks, and the rest is made up of the seeking out and satisfying of sensory hungers. Detachment is a way of breaking out of these motivations to assess life from a neutral and unconditioned state of mind.

Nitya relates a range of states of detachment reminiscent of Narayana Guru's Nirvana Darsana of *Darsanamala*. Anita was suitably horrified by the extreme examples. Nitya relates an even

more extreme example in *Love and Blessings* (p. 157), where he visits a saint who is to all appearances dead:

In my travels I went to see Siddharudha Swami in Hassan. The Swami's ashram was a traditional old institution where many ochre robed swamis were living. Many were coming as well to pay homage to him. Nobody knew the swami's age, maybe 100, maybe 200, or even 300. It varied according to the informant's credibility. He looked for all the world like a living corpse.

At five o'clock in the morning, ten disciples ceremonially came to him, prostrated at his feet, and pulled him out of bed for a hot water wash. Before the bath his body was smeared with turmeric paste, and afterwards he was painted with sandal paste and clothed with a T-string, a dhoti, a shirt and a turban. Then he was decorated with a *rudraksha* garland and several flower garlands. In the main hall of the ashram he was seated on a throne-like chair, where he sat cross-legged in *padmasana*. Then there was a ceremonial feeding. He did not open his eyes or mouth, but some milk was smeared on his lips and wiped off. I was told the swami had not taken any food or drink for twelve years.

This ritual had been going on every day for a very long time. He did not pass urine or stools. I was also told he did not perspire. There was no evidence he was breathing. If he was dead, why wasn't he decomposing? It was all a mystery. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed the possibility of anyone living without food, drink or breath.

As the Swami's face looked like a corpse, it gave me an eerie feeling to sit and watch him all day. The swamis there were very hospitable, and there was nothing lacking for a visit of any length of time, but I only stayed for three days.

For some reason we imagine that the extreme is what we are supposed to accomplish. If it happens to us we won't care anyway, but until it does we can aim for a more engaged expression of detachment. Narayana Guru did this, praying to not merge totally so he could minister to the needs of humanity. The Buddhist bodhisattva has the same ideal, and Nitya mentions Janaka, the ancient king who continued to fill his role even after becoming fully enlightened. Nitya gives the Gurukula ideal in respect to Janaka: "To be absolutely normal in transactions and never to exaggerate anything on the basis of physical obsession or inhibition."

This also answers Anita's question of what exactly is liberation anyway? Obsessions or inhibitions—attractions and repulsions—are the twin exaggerations that throw us off balance. While we may be drawn into spiritual life by our obsessions, we have to pacify these in order to become truly spiritual. We want to replace an immature conception with a mature one. The obsessed continue to do mental cartwheels, like standing on street corners spewing saliva at passersby or privately mortifying their flesh, if they fail to become detached from their initial obsessions.

The class mainly focused on practical examples of detachment in the normal range, and we solicit more in the upcoming weeks from everyone reading this. It's all well and good to relate extreme examples, but the more important thing is to put these principles into practice in ways that benefit us and are in tune with our inclinations.

Scotty, an artist, got us going in earnest by relating how he hears many people insist that they "don't do art." He says they invariably look down when they say this, as if they are unconsciously aware of the failure it represents. If he presses them, they all mention that someone made a comment when they were young that hurt their feelings, and so they withdrew from

expressing themselves in that way. This is exactly the point. We have infinite potentials, yet we inhibit them so that we won't suffer public humiliation. We learn to hide out in dark corners, safe, as it seems to us. But as Jesus puts it in Mark 8:36, "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" We force ourselves into the Procrustean bed of social approval so that we can "fit in," and in the process sacrifice our own dharma, our very lifeblood. Patanjali is radical enough to urge us to abandon this terrible sacrifice we've made and regain the light of our own souls. There will be a lot more of this to come. Please, give it some thought and share what you can with your fellow travelers.

Deb clicked with Scotty's perception. She told us how she used to do tons of art projects, but for some reason in the fifth grade she stopped and never went back to it. She couldn't remember why. The same thing happened with her singing, and she does remember the exact comment that drove her away. Happily, thanks to Eugene's inspiration she has taken up singing again, after a lifetime of secretly longing for it, and it's as if a weight has been lifted. Our souls want to express themselves, and they should. Detachment is to bring out this kind of freedom, not to suppress it.

I gave a trivial and a more profound example from recent experience. I was just down in Reno visiting friends, whose boy had a Little League baseball game we attended. We sat right behind the umpire, who was terrible—it's actually surprisingly difficult to be a consistent, unbiased referee—but at least he was uniformly awful. There was an element of fairness in his umpiring, because it was off the same amount for both teams. If the ump has a secret preference, like knowing the coach or having a child on the team, the neutrality gets disrupted. That's why in professional sports the referees are kept totally isolated from the teams they will judge. Sitting in the stands, I noticed that the parents who were

fervently involved got upset by the bad calls that went against their kids but not against the other team. As a neutral observer, it was easy for me to see how everyone's perceptions were influenced by their relationship to the situation. Again, this is Patanjali's teaching, that we are most clear-headed when we observe from a neutral standpoint, free of obsessions and inhibitions, such as living vicariously through our children and their performances.

The difficulty of being a wise judge like Janaka or Solomon is humorously presented in a wonderful fairy story called *Queen Zixi of Ix*, by Oz author L. Frank Baum. In it a young boy becomes king, and he is asked to render judgments on several matters brought to him by the people. In one, two women insist they own a cow, and he is required to decide who to give it to. He pleads that he can't decide. Then his very wise sister whispers an idea to him. He sends one woman out of the room and asks the other to milk the cow. She walks up and gets kicked head over heels. The other woman is brought in and easily milks the cow, and the king awards it to her. Everyone applauds the wisdom of the boy. As she leads the cow out the door, he asks her where she got such a nice cow. She reluctantly asks if she must tell the truth, and he says of course. "I stole it from that other woman. But no one can take it from me now, for the king has given it to me." (Does this remind you of the CEO bailout bonuses in 2009 current events?) The courtiers all are shocked into silence. "How can that be?" "Because I understand cows, and she doesn't." And off she goes with the stolen cow. But King Bud restores a measure of justice by giving one of his own royal cows to the wronged woman. The point of this is that even if we want very much to be neutral and just, it is no simple matter, because much of the world is bent on obfuscation, and there are no end to factors to be taken into account.

Ramping up in impact, I watched the movie *Under Our Skin* this past week, about Lyme disease and the suppression of care by

insurance companies who want to maximize profits at the expense of patients' needs. Conflict of interest turns neutral doctors and review boards into political activists that in essence are committing murder and consigning thousands of other patients to lives of misery and destitution. How the profit motive warps medicine is subtly yet clearly demonstrated by this excellent documentary.

Of course, government in general has been warped in the same way, corrupted by the selfish interests of lobbyists and their purchase of the decision makers. Free markets are the code name for rampant greed and the deification of selfishness. The absolute operative principle is that if you have perfect selfishness operating ubiquitously, you have an ideal society. The poverty of this political religion is rapidly becoming evident. To counter its "death spiral" we hereby embrace a philosophy that intentionally casts off selfishness. Patanjali doesn't come right out and say it—the sutras are too terse—but unselfishness is precisely what makes for a just and humane and ecologically balanced society. We add our vote for unselfishness one human at a time: *ourselves*.

Part II

Patanjali hasn't offered much in the way of specific techniques yet, but Nitya mentions a few in his commentary. First he distinguishes between experience and imperience. Paul wanted us to make the distinction clear, because we usually take imperience to be the mental component of experience. But here it is used differently. Experience includes the external object or situation as well as the mental perception of it. Imperience means establishing an inner connection with the Absolute. It is "an identification that comes through the establishment of an inner unity aided by intuition." Detachment is essentially the process by which we move from experience to imperience.

As a kind of technique, Nitya delineates three aspects of detachment. First is the consistent practice of self-control or

restraint, like staying home from the bars to read and ponder *Living the Science of Harmonious Union*, for instance. Meditative pursuits get easier after we live a wild life for a stretch. As Scotty said, it is easier to meditate on silence after we chant or blow our trumpet. Like that, we stretch our muscles with hatha yoga so we can sit relaxed afterwards. It is good to have experimented with your desires so they don't pester you as much when you're sitting quietly. I have always advocated not having a baby until you no longer want to spend the evening partying. If you've partied enough in your daze of youth, you are much happier staying home and changing diapers. You don't envy your "carefree" friends, because you love and enjoy what you are caring for.

Then you must practice discrimination. Nitya says, "When two values are before you, a discriminative judgment should be applied to see which is conducive to your liberation and which leads to bondage. In life, you have to turn away from many things that are likely to have miserable consequences." If your life isn't full of examples, you are a very fortunate or a very sequestered individual.

The third aspect comes closest to what we think of as a technique of yoga: to concentrate on a single sense to the exclusion of the others. Instead of remaining in what Nitya calls the mental state dampened by the cumulative effect of sensory overload, we screen out all but one sense. Classically, people meditate on a candle flame or a mandala or a landscape, using the visual input to negate other stimuli. Many of us are fond of listening to music or birdsong or the wind or a stream. We have all had the experience (imperience?) of listening hard to something beautiful, and it becoming a profoundly moving event. The music or the rush of water changes from a simple sound into one full of meaning, something that allows your spirit to soar. You get high on it. Or we snuggle down with a friend and concentrate on the amazing sensations we can feel through our skin, that screen out all

mundane thoughts for a while. Yogic eating means we taste our food fully, instead of mechanically and distractedly munching it. And when we smell a flower, the one-pointedness of it lifts us off our feet, so to speak.

Scotty has invented his own way of practicing this ekendriya (single sensory stimulus) meditation, by initiating a dialogue with his aches and pains. He talks with the balky limb or organ, and has found that they heal up or relax quickly. Unlike the average person who wants to flee from their body when it is uncomfortable or diseased, which undoubtedly aggravates the problem, he turns directly toward it and attends it. He has found this version of one-pointed concentration to be quite salubrious.

All these things can be practiced at any time in any place. We can use the varying conditions in which we find ourselves to detach from those very conditionings. The impact of this type of yoga is practically unlimited, and tremendously freeing, when brought to bear on life.

Part III

New friend Dale, about to start Gita 2023 with me, sent a compliment for this account:

Hi Scott,

When you sent the class notes I was reading about Vairagya so the class notes were very helpful to me in understanding this with clear examples given in the classes study of Nitya, Pantanjali and all of the classmates comments.

Thanks for allowing me to take a look at this important work you are doing with this class study.

"..so the enemy's fort which we will capture is nothing but our own home, the Heart". (FROM Guru Vachaka Kovai).

Abiding Peace and Happiness,
Salutations, Aum, Namaste,
Dale

* * *

In sending the next-to-last lesson to Gita 2021, I found this apt epitome of our exploration of sutra 15:

The Gita is intended to help us restore harmony between who we are and what we do, not by fitting into the world but by rediscovering our core nature and then fitting the world into us.