

2022 Patanjali Class 40

1/10/23

Sutra I:21 – Samadhi is near for those with intense ardor.

Sutra I:22 – Also, a further differentiation is made of mild, moderate, and intense.

The class went off on an enthusiastic tangent for nearly the entire time, so I recommend the old notes in Part II as addressing the very important issues of Nitya's commentary. I've pulled a couple of items up from there, as I know very few people read that far. The first cites a paragraph from Nitya's Preface:

Just as all rivers flow to the ocean, when all thoughts and inner movements merge in a state of absorption, samadhi comes. Samadhi means "union." Most people think of the union referred to by Yoga as an act of conjunction of two disparate elements. This is incorrect. When a sleeping person wakes up, there is no conjunction. There is only the transformation of an innate nature, which is experienced as an empirical awareness. Similarly, in Yoga, what is happening is not a union with a second reality but a change from heterogeneity to homogeneity. In other words, you gain a unitive vision of life in your understanding, dedicated program of action, and progressive cultivation of happiness, which is identical with the happiness of the world.

Samadhi is the central verity in Patanjali's yoga, his term for the sense of oneness, and it is first mentioned in sutra 21. Recognizing it as the central pivot of the entire philosophy is essential to grasp what's going on.

After the reading, Deb asked what is our commitment to a spiritual recognition or realization? Since Nitya ends with love and hate as sources of energy to which we become attached, she asked

us further, what makes a commitment to hatred or love so intriguing? How long do we stay involved? Hatred being explosively present in current events, she acknowledged it as a powerful source of passion and obsession. Despite its lethal persistence, Deb didn't believe it could be sustaining.

I wondered to myself if hatred persists precisely because it is not sustaining, with humans clinging harder and harder to their beliefs the less well they serve them.

With love and hatred taking center stage in our discussion, Jan wasn't sure of what inhibition meant in this paragraph about it, and how it interacts with obsession:

Love and hatred are catalysts that evoke the flow of energy. Hatred can cause a sudden surge of energy that adversely affects the entire physical system of a person. This is short lived, like the bursting flames of ignited gasoline. Love, on the other hand, is a steady flow that produces more and more energy in the long run. The purer the love, the greater is the chance of furthering the continuous flow of energy. Hatred has within it an intermittent operation of ambivalence in which obsession and inhibition operate side by side. In the case of love, inhibition soon wears out and both receiving and giving become obsessive.

Andy had a similar question about how he is when he's hating. He's rightly embarrassed to be a hater, when it happens, and tries to repress it, but there is something nourishing about being a hater, too. Bill noted how hating things give you lots of energy, as with on-line hate speech. People just eat it up, as it gives them a phenomenal amount on energy, but it's not good for you. Andy concurred that it is exhausting, and Nancy agreed it takes a lot of energy to dislike something.

Honestly, inhibition and obsession are used in a confusing way here. Inhibition is holding back, restraining, and obsession is barging forward without restraint. Their ambivalence in hatred is like Nitya's classic image of driving your car pressing down the gas pedal and the brake at the same time. It generates a fantastic quantity of heat. Though we tend to think of obsession as negative, when Nitya speaks of love obsession it is in a positive sense. Inhibitions are unnecessary, because love is a healthy state, and so obsession with love brings about a mutually enhancing, energy-filled exchange. Hatred, on the other hand, tends toward mutually assured destruction.

We spent a lot of time exploring the etiology of hate, well covered in previous notes. Hate is surely in the air these days. I don't feel we came up with anything new, but it was clearly an energy-inducing discussion.

Karen sweetly advocated for love, which we're all in favor of. We crave energy, and if we don't know how to love, hatred fills the void. A poem by Robert Frost came to my mind:

### Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

Deb appreciated how in his commentary, Nitya describes love as a circular movement between giver and receiver. Without the

inhibition of possessiveness and the holding back of the ego, what we give out as love comes back from the receiver as grace. Another paragraph from the Old Notes speaks to this:

Nitya tells us here that “In the spiritual pursuit, the idea is to give up totally and the receiving acts like a fountain where what is given in the form of love is received back in the form of grace.” Moni told a gratifying tale of her recent experience at work, where her kindness and love for her clients is being reciprocated in surprising ways. Because she refuses to become upset or hostile with them, she has overcome the chronic negativity of some of the struggling souls who come to her. Where a bureaucratic attitude would likely embroil Moni in endless wrangling, her serenity and unselfishness invite the best from others. It is wonderful that despite all the constraints built in to a less-than-perfect system, Moni can bring a lot of light into it. Not only that, but it’s nice to see that she’s getting appreciation back from a tough job, because that’s what makes it possible to bring her kind of energy to it.

The ”contribution from the Absolute” to the class was the long article in the Sunday NY Times magazine, excerpted from a new book by Tracy Kidder, of *Mountains Beyond Mountains* fame, called *Rough Sleepers*, due out next week. I read it after setting aside the Moni example for the class, but it presents the same subtle insight about what grace means in a unitive context. It’s the story of a young doctor who is sent to serve in Boston’s main homeless shelter. A circle of nurses greeted him on his arrival and read him the riot act:

This clinic inside the Pine Street shelter was run by nurses and was independent from other medical institutions. It was in part the byproduct of a change in nursing that had begun with the

feminist movement of the 1960s, a declaration of partial independence from doctors, and it was also a reaction to the callous treatment of homeless patients that many nurses had witnessed in Boston's teaching hospitals.

The morning O'Connell arrived, the clinic was closed for a shift change, but half a dozen nurses were already inside, waiting for him. In the cramped space near the clinic's front desk, metal chairs were arranged in a semicircle, with one chair in front, meant for him. In his memory, he sat there surrounded by nurses. Their faces were stern. They said they weren't interested in investing their time to train a doctor who planned to leave in a year. And if that was what he planned to do — to play doctor to a bunch of homeless men, earn their trust, have them learn to rely on him and then desert them — it would be better if he didn't come at all. He was probably looking for an interesting experience, they said. He probably thought he was doing a good deed.

They were warning him, in a way that made him feel accused of having committed those sins already — as he had, inwardly. He felt shocked, too shocked to feel offended.

One of the nurses showed him how to actually connect with his new patients:

Her voice, though high and small, sounded gentle. The nurses had seemed hostile, but O'Connell shouldn't take that to heart, McInnis said. Nurses created this clinic, and they were proud of it, and many of them would be happy never to see a doctor on the premises. She disagreed. Homeless people ought to have the benefit of doctors' skills. "I really think we want doctors," she said. "But you've been trained all wrong." Most if not all of the clinic's patients had experienced severe trauma, she explained, and the typical doctor's approach often terrified

them. So it would take time and patience and a lot of listening before O'Connell would even have the chance to act clinically. "You have to let us retrain you," she said. "If you come in with your doctor questions, you won't learn anything. You have to learn to listen to these patients."

And then he heard her say: "Come on in now, and you're going to soak feet. I'll show you how."

Homeless people have terrible problems with their feet, so medical care can start there. Yet it's the humbling act of kneeling at their feet, treating them with respect, that disarms them. It took weeks of doing this before the recipients began to open up, eventually talking about their medical needs. It's a very touching article to read in its entirety. Kidder clearly is drawn to the Paul Farmer archetype. Such people are true saints, but very down-to-earth ones, at that. Nancy's comment was spot on: if you start with kindness, being kind can lead you to love.

I shared a key Nitya quote that throws light on the story's relation with the sutras, from his Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary:

As we are used to accomplishing things and obtaining desirable ends by our actions, we entertain the false impression that for the self to become *brahman* there has to be some kind of process by which the part can evolve into the whole.... This is not so. We are always the whole. All that we need to do is forget the false notion that we are anything other than *brahman*. Realization is not accomplished by a forward march but by a regressive dissolution. Up to the last moment you have a choice to skip the whole process of samsara merely by accepting the fact that you are the Absolute. (BU Vol. II, 583)

Quotes like this should never be lost! I've gathered many of them from Nitya's vast Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary and posted them on his website.

Bill said that kindness is an action, so it's different from love, which isn't. By being kind, you get grace back. It negates the negativity of being angry, harsh, and destructive. Nancy took it one step farther: when something is bothering her, if she makes up her mind to be kind toward it, the feeling of not liking can be neutralized.

Anita agreed that kindness is an action, and our behavior follows our thoughts. She has found that by intentionally switching from being aggravated or angry, she improves her mood. By giving the other person the benefit of the doubt, both have a better time.

Susan showed how we could do this within our most routine activities. She has a box of chicken broth jars in the back of her car that she hasn't returned yet. Usually she tucks a cloth between them so they don't make noise, but last week the cloth had slipped out. It was so irritating as she drove around, and she kept trying to remember to fix the problem when she got out of the car but she kept forgetting. At last she realized she could use the noise to her advantage. She decided that every time she heard the noise, it would be a signal for her to think about where she was and what she was thinking — to wake up to the present moment. After doing this all one afternoon, she started loving the sound of the jars.

It reminded Bill of an exercise recommended by Thich Nhat Hanh: while you're driving, every time you see a stop sign you should stop and smile.

Regarding kindness, Bill reported that the most common question asked of the Dalai Lama, is how can you not hate the Chinese, who've destroyed your country? His reply is that they deserve kindness too, because they are not going the right direction.

According to Andy, as ego-centered beings we naturally consider both attraction and repulsion. Talking about love as standing outside of that alternation, breaking the flow of that attraction and repulsion, answers the question about ambivalence. The Guru is asking us to be lovingly aware of that.

The class was at long last drifting toward the essence of the study: samadhi or oneness. The sutra speaks of *ardor* for it, which means a high intensity of interest in it. Love and hate are side issues, not that important except to note that hate is a dualistic, projected state that interferes with the ability to have ardor for unity. And while we're aiming at samadhi, our actions are not contractual, where we do something in order to receive another thing in return.

I just finished proofing the seventeenth chapter of Nitya's Video Gita transcript, and saved out another fine example of the spirit of oneness or truth:

The BBC serialized a number of movies taken to present various religions. Of all the religions presented, I think the best one was the one on Islam. The director of that project chose for his study a dedicated couple in Cairo, a retired professor and his wife. They lived their lives according to the Holy Quran. What this gentleman learned from the Quran and how he lived was to think of Allah as the only power before which he should bow. Bowing before any other power according to him is idolatry. He understands Allah not as an object, not as someone sitting somewhere, but as the only Truth that pervades life, the only Truth that sustains life, the only Truth that controls life. He understands this not in philosophical terms. All his emotional life, his intellectual life, his intuitive life, and life at the very mundane level are all attuned to that. The clarity with which he and his wife were interpreting Islam would convince anyone that they had a very clear notion of their relationship



with Allah, and how that was continuously transforming their life. I refer to this particular instance because this is so true of all religions, not only Islam, if you accept the most central theme of any religion. (Nitya Gita video, XVII Intro)

Samadhi is the name in the Patanjali “religion” for the all-pervading truth, the Absolute, the Allah of Islam. Deb affirmed that commitment to that is the source of energy itself. Love is like a circulating fountain, with no dispersal of energy. We need to get past that point where we are seeing other people as for us or against us.

After some banter about the new physics, Deb shared a favorite quote from Nataraja Guru: “Meditation has the final result, not of solving mysteries but rather of making the sense of the mysterious live in the heart of man forever.” While posting it in his Selected Quotes doc, it nestled next to another I couldn’t resist, from L&B:

Enthusiasm for the Absolute to prevail is the only medicine for states of depression. The human mind is so constituted that its instructive dispositions need a strong numerator interest: a passion for Truth, Justice or Beauty. When one supplies this element all blues and troubles vanish.

Our closing meditation was prompted by a poem in keeping with our theme, by Charles Simic, who died the day before class.

### STONE

Go inside a stone  
That would be my way.  
Let somebody else become a dove  
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.

I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:  
No one knows how to answer it.  
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet  
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,  
Even though a child throws it in a river;  
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed  
To the river bottom  
Where the fishes come to knock on it  
And listen.

I have seen sparks fly out  
When two stones are rubbed,  
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;  
Perhaps there is a moon shining  
From somewhere, as though behind a hill—  
Just enough light to make out  
The strange writings, the star-charts  
On the inner walls.

## Part II

Responding in Nancy Y's class, 4/2/11:

My life is dedicated to actualizing the insights gleaned from spiritual teachings. I like to have infinite projects to work on that will never run dry, and spiritual development is the most infinite of all! I'm also hoping to read all the worthwhile books ever written, become proficient in all the literature for piano, and make friends with everyone, everywhere. In all four genres I am essentially at the beginning, one step toward a journey of a thousand miles, but

it's already exciting and delightful. So Nitya and Nancy's suggestion to love what we do and make it real is excellent.

I think I should recap a bigger chunk of the paragraph Nancy quotes for the first exercise:

Three major driving forces that can easily become exaggerated into pathological energy expenditure are the erotic passion to possess and dominate your love object; the insatiable greed to possess the means to dominate others; and a hankering after future security that is goaded by anxiety and paired with the hoarding of exchange-value tokens such as cash. To transcend the physically impressive needs of the body and mind, you should have a clear envisioning of the spiritual worthwhileness of seeking union with the Absolute or realizing the supreme nature of your Self. If the former kind of demand is like driving down a hill, the latter, your spiritual pursuit, is of an ascending order. A lot of stamina has to be put into the disciplining of your body and mind, even to bring it to a stabilized position from which to commence your ultimate search.

Much later in the book, Nitya mentions how many of us are like children who never grew up. Looking at aberrant behaviors with this in mind helps sort them out and even unearths hints for their resolution. Growing up and becoming spiritual are essentially the same thing, to my mind. There aren't all that many adults around, so we should try to become one.

I've learned most about the first category, because I fell in love young and felt it was a cure for my own insecurity and loneliness. I have been with the same partner my whole life, but in a continually evolving relationship. Deb was never insecure, and she taught me—very painfully, through periodic rejection and abandonment—to let go of my clinging. I thought what I had was pure love, but I grudgingly learned it was something less. Happily,

the well-grounded philosophy Nitya taught us has kicked in with a genuine sense of security that does not depend as much on external circumstances. Now I am much less “needy”—Nitya’s perfect word for our childish selfishness. I wish I could say I’m not at all needy, but having seen how deeply that trait runs in most all of us, I can never be completely confident that it has been eradicated.

The second category, the need to dominate others, is compensation for our human needs being squelched, in childhood or even later. I was fortunate to avoid too much repression of my dharma, thanks to growing up in a benign environment, so I don’t have those kinds of domineering urges, and steer clear of those who do. Manipulative types make life miserable for so many people, but at the same time there is a definite need for those with organizational skills to make things happen. I can see the value, but at the moment those with dictatorial inclinations have replaced the gentler souls who lead without recourse to force, and who are much more pleasant to work for. In other words, the two-year-olds have knocked the adults off the platform, for the moment. Too bad they’re so well armed....

Lastly, anxiety for the future is definitely ameliorated by having financial security, and I firmly believe a healthy society should offer that to its citizens. Right now in the US we are in the grip of rightwing terrorists who are dismantling or commandeering the entire social framework, and anxiety about security, personal and social, is soaring. Nitya’s and Patanjali’s solution to uncertainty about the future was sannyasa, casting themselves into the arms of the Absolute, and “taking no thought of the morrow” to paraphrase the Bible. Doing that perfectly is a tall order, and I can’t say I’m up to it. I’ve had a job, and now a pension, security blankets if you will. For those like me who are at best lukewarm absolutists, we have to neutralize our anxieties using reason and contemplation. That’s a kind of yoga too, so it’s okay, and practical. I do have a deep-seated belief that the universe cares for

all of us, ultimately, and things will work out on some level. I also believe that my own needs are not necessarily in tune with the universal good, so being ground to powder may be part of the universe's long-term strategy.... In any case, anxiety is unpleasant, but it is also a motivating factor. Without it, I (like many people) would be a tamasic, lazy, good-for-nothing. I know some people are obsessed with hoarding against an uncertain future, and that's debilitating, a narrowing of the spirit. A mild neurosis is perhaps best, for those of us who aren't able to "take the plunge" into perfect spiritual abandonment.

The "solution" for all of these problems is love, which, like pornography, is impossible to define, but we know it when we see it—or feel it, as in the case of love. We tend to believe that problems like the three I've been talking about have to be resolved before we can have love, but the truth is that love is not dependent on external factors, and if something is dependent, it is not true love. This is lucky, because there will always be problems, so dependent love is unattainable; but independent love is attainable.

What this means is that we have to become independent in order to be truly in love, and that's what the gurus are teaching us. Pry out and discard our dependencies, and what is left is an independent being capable of love, and able to respond optimally to the world we live in. Pretty sweet philosophy!

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6/16/9 Class Notes

Sutras I:21 & I:22

Samadhi is near for those with intense ardor.

Also, a further differentiation is made of mild, moderate, and intense.

Patanjali tips his hand in the debate over whether we should docilely go with the flow or make efforts toward a spiritual goal. There is nothing slipshod or accidental about the practice of yoga in his book. Samadhi is definitely something that comes about through intense effort. Nor is there anything resembling Christian grace where some divine being bestows perfection on you, or anything to pray to. It's simply a matter of getting your act together. Humans are off-kilter due to our divisive concepts, and we regain our equipoise by restoring unity to our vision. Unity is termed samadhi, sameness, in the present work.

Although Nitya has discussed it at length, we have just arrived at the moment Patanjali introduces samadhi. It can't hurt to recall a paragraph from the Preface:

Just as all rivers flow to the ocean, when all thoughts and inner movements merge in a state of absorption, samadhi comes. Samadhi means "union." Most people think of the union referred to by Yoga as an act of conjunction of two disparate elements. This is incorrect. When a sleeping person wakes up, there is no conjunction. There is only the transformation of an innate nature, which is experienced as an empirical awareness. Similarly, in Yoga, what is happening is not a union with a second reality but a change from heterogeneity to homogeneity. In other words, you gain a unitive vision of life in your understanding, dedicated program of action, and progressive cultivation of happiness, which is identical with the happiness of the world.

The class discussed wakefulness for a while. Paul helped us to distinguish the ordinary waking mind from the wide-awake witness of the turiya, the transcendental version. Being awake is a mysterious state, since we always think of ourselves as awake. It is only when we enter a subsequent state of wakefulness that we can

tell that we were previously asleep. For instance, when we are angry we feel wide awake, but after we calm down we are likely to feel that we were in the grip of some terrible misunderstanding. We decided it was essential to always question whether we are really awake or are acting under some undetectable compulsion. Here again, outside input is very useful, so long as it is intelligent. Recent examples of Christians who kill to uphold their tenet of “Thou shalt not kill” provide a cautionary tale of how we can be led astray if we meekly accept what we are told. Cults insist first and foremost that their followers cast out doubts and avoid inconvenient questioning. Going along without resistance is passed off as an advanced spiritual technique, but it is more likely to be a soporific to lull the mind back to sleep.

This subject brought us back to the aspect of effort left hanging last week, from sutra 20: discernment or discrimination. How do we discern what is helpful and what isn't? It's a tough nut to crack, and while we tapped on its shell a bit, we didn't actually expose the meat inside. The implication is that some things promote yoga and some don't. No one wants to change their lifestyle to accommodate waking up, unless their ardor happens to be intense. Most people find yoga to be of passing interest, or of middling attractiveness, but nothing to alter behavior over. Luckily we have a few class members who have put the teachings to the test and found their lives improved by it. That tends to ratchet up their interest level.

For example, Nitya tells us here that “In the spiritual pursuit, the idea is to give up totally and the receiving acts like a fountain where what is given in the form of love is received back in the form of grace.” Moni told a gratifying tale of her recent experience at work, where her kindness and love for her clients is being reciprocated in surprising ways. Because she refuses to become upset or hostile with them, she has overcome the chronic negativity of some of the struggling souls who come to her. Where a

bureaucratic attitude would likely embroil Moni in endless wrangling, her serenity and unselfishness invite the best from others. It is wonderful that despite all the constraints built in to a less-than-perfect system, Moni can bring a lot of light into it. Not only that, but it's nice to see that she's getting appreciation back from a tough job, because that's what makes it possible to bring her kind of energy to it.

The biggest hurdle to yoga is a drugged mind, and the hardest discernment to make is what to do about it. Western societies in particular are sozzled in sauce pretty much all the time. In the US, regular alcohol use is engaged in by around two-thirds of the population, though because the very elderly drink little, the figure for those in their prime is over four-fifths. Licit and illicit psychoactive drugs push the numbers higher, probably over ninety percent. Television is famous as a mental eraser, and should probably be included as a highly popular drug as well. Other countries may not be as maniacally wired as the US, but this is an issue everywhere.

While drug use makes life pleasant in the short run, it tends to freeze the psyche at the level it begins its involvement. I used to wonder why many students in my classes were so slow to learn, not so much in their minds as in their vitals, until I realized they were high on something, most commonly alcohol. The presentation of profound subjects was just another form of amusement for them, a flickering play of light and shade, to be forgotten almost as soon as it had ended. The ideas might stick in an abstract way, but they weren't able to be implemented. They couldn't get to the core. Interesting philosophy might assuage the conscience that the student was imbibing something meaningful, but it was just another trip.

For the average person in the average congregation, being mildly inebriated makes them much more vulnerable to manipulation, and much less likely to hold to high ideals in the



face of public pressure. Psychological testing has demonstrated how easily we can be manipulated by other people, especially if they wear the vestments of authority. And most of that testing has been done on sober subjects. So the most important aspect of discernment is to not have any excess baggage when you address the Absolute, in meditation, in class, or whenever you want to be serious. Yoga is not about learning to be a subservient follower. It is a way to gain independence, on every level and in every sense. Paradoxically, when we attain true freedom we are closest to attunement with the totality. If we are dependent on externals we are tuned out, even as we imagine we are tuned in.

## Part II of the 2009 Notes

Following up on ways we discern our path poorly, Deb groused about how tired she was of reading about spirituality, and feeling that she needed and wanted to live it and experience it directly. Substituting ideas for direct experience is something our brains readily do, because of how they work, but the heaven worlds we envision are more like a fool's paradise. Books, movies and other media are big sources of ideas, but they provide ersatz experience that only mimics the real thing.

This is at the heart of the game: how to keep it real. If we don't take the ideas we imbibe and apply them, we are living in a world of make believe. Part of us is likely to chafe at the superficiality of pretend spirituality, so we feel dissatisfied, and there can be conflicts with our mind if it insists that what we are doing is something special. If we misunderstand the feeling, we might reject the very thing we most need. That voice of dissatisfaction within is our inner guru trying to get us to wake up from yet another dream, a really captivating dream of imaginary spirituality. Of course, we can medicate our inner guru and make it be quiet, which provides an ersatz solution to an ersatz problem.

But a better choice is to address the problem directly by vivifying our encounters with life.

On a related note, our modern educational systems unintentionally train us to think of ourselves as more knowledgeable than anyone else. This is probably a defense posture against being taught side-by-side with somebody really sharp, yet it can have the same effect as leaving your doubts at the church door, in that valuable suggestions will be pointedly ignored. I am always amazed at the highly intelligent and educated people whose minds are slammed shut against some very important ideas, proving the assertion of the Isa Upanishad, verse 9:

Into blind darkness enter they  
That worship ignorance;  
Into darkness greater than that, as it were, they  
That delight in knowledge.

The solution is given in verse 11:

Knowledge and non-knowledge—  
He who this pair conjointly knows,  
With non-knowledge passing over death  
With knowledge wins the immortal.