

2022 Patanjali Class 41

1/17/23

Sutra I:23 – Or, by continuous contemplation on Isvara.

Sutra I:24 – Isvara is a distinct purusha unaffected by the propensities of affliction, action, and fruition.

Before reading Nitya's commentary, I reminded us of the previous two sutras, presenting samadhi in the classic, relativist Samkhyan form: Samadhi is near for those with intense ardor. Also, a further differentiation is made of mild, moderate, and intense. That's why the "Or" in sutra 23 is epochal. Patanjali is adding a new category, or non-category—the Absolute. There is no mild, moderate or intense in the Absolute. Nitya says:

This ingenious device of bringing in Isvara as the twenty-fifth category in Yoga epistemology marks its distinction from the Samkhyan epistemology, which has only twenty-four categories. Instead of diversifying the epistemological cohesion of the system, the twenty-fifth category unifies it in a remarkable manner.

In honor of this Vedantic upgrade from duality, let's invite Nataraja Guru to comment on the Absolute:

The notion of the Absolute is within the reach of normal human understanding. The mystery hitherto surrounding it is only due to an epistemological paradox which has to be shed, dissolved, abolished, or banished from our way of thinking. Then a content can emerge from behind it, as it were, helping us to give precise significance even to such a subtle and ultimate notion.

There is a paradox at the core of the Absolute.

If you try to resolve the paradox, if you try and pin it down, you get a chair or a table; it does not dance.

It's also helpful to repost Nitya's upcoming mention of Isvara in sutra II:1—

When your own nature is becoming more and more evident to yourself, the imperfections of your social personality will become more and more clear. In its place *īśvara*—the universal person not afflicted with the love/hate dualities of physico-social life—can be accepted as a better model for imitation or identification.

The word *īśvara* is derived from *īś*, which literally means “ruling from within.” The life of an individual is not an amorphous chaotic structure that comes from the randomness of the physical world. It has a goal to achieve and laws to abide by. The innate law of everything that governs, controls, and maneuvers it to function for the purposeful attainment of a given goal is *īśvara*. If you know there is such a guiding principle in your life, life becomes all the more dear, and an incentive comes to live as correctly as possible. Thereafter, the lower aspect of the self will always be in resonance with *īśvara*, the higher Self. That *īśvara* is looked upon as your true teacher or preceptor. Relating always with that *īśvara* to develop insight into the meaning of your life combines both the purificatory and educative aspects. (YS 149)

Imitating or identifying with Isvara is a crucial idea. With a dualistic mentality, we identify ourselves as what we love and what we hate, what we know and what we don't. By introducing an all-encompassing perspective, we are no longer dependent on external events or static postures to determine our state of mind. We can continuously exist in a blissful equipoise, and not be

victimized by our own opinions, no longer being brought down by what's happening around us.

Deb said that up until this moment in Indian philosophical history, there had been a multitude of forms in nature, prakriti and a multitude of gods, purushas. Here Isvara serves as a unifying principle. By transforming from individual beings experiencing events, we come to a greater and greater generality that unifies all aspects of our life. It's a reconciling vision.

In the word breakdown, Nitya gives several definitions for Isvara: spirit par excellence; supreme spirit; noumenon; higher Self; designated by *pranava*, AUM. All these terms are meant to indicate a higher reality. Several of us were unfamiliar with Kant's noumenon, the reality of the thing in itself, which we can only presume, in contrast to the phenomenal appearance that we can perceive, but which bears an uncertain relationship to the original.

Linda found the idea of Isvara was beautiful, and just what she needed to hear. She has been obsessing about a distraction that has grabbed her mind in an unhealthy way, but contemplating Isvara restored her to a healthy attitude.

Andy felt the reference to aum was significant: what we have learned about aum is there is an unidentified fourth state that's a mystery. All the texts that treat the fourth, *turiya*, (after or engulfing waking, dream and deep sleep) are united in saying it is indescribable. There is something within us that is essential to the whole picture, though it is not compulsively involved with the transformations going on in other states.

Deb described the thread we've been following—we started off with postulating the cessation of mental modifications, and now we have come to the point where we are having continuous contemplation of the Absolute. Patanjali is turning our attention to a much more over-arching and inclusive noumenon: the inner light of the world.

Bill was also struck by how Patanjali establishes a link between the Absolute purusha and all the little individual purushas—how it interacts with all the beings that manifest in the world, and how we connect with that as an individual. Patanjali is encouraging us to continuously contemplate that as an understanding of where our source is, within us and without of us, so we can be unaffected by all the goings on of prakriti. By finding that connection and meditating on it, we minimize our mental modifications and get to our true nature.

The 2009 Notes, reproduced in Part III, are chock full of interesting examples, including this take on continuous contemplation:

The class discussed what continuous contemplation means. It sounds like you are never supposed to get off your yoga mat, but that isn't the idea. I started us off with how when driving a car you cannot drop your attention for even a moment or you will crash. We don't have to anxiously fixate on the road and hold the wheel with a grip of doom, we can relax and enjoy the ride. But we have to have some awareness dedicated to relating to what's happening around us.

The gist of continuous contemplation is that everything that happens is taken as meaningful to your search for truth. There are no random disconnected events. They are all linked within the oneness of the Self. So you don't dismiss anything, you cherish it. When something happens to you, you examine it to see what your part in it is. And you listen to your friends and advisors, who are likely to pick up on what you are missing.

In sutra 24, Patanjali characterizes karma or prakriti as having three stages: affliction, action, and fruition. These might indicate past, present and future; or tamas, rajas and sattva. At their best, they symbolize the progression: ignorance, yogic practice, and

realization. No matter how you think of them, Isvara is not affected by any of them.

Andy noted they are a cycle, and we are caught in a compulsive involvement with them. We are afflicted because we are compelled to act, and actions have unpredictable results. We are bound by the consequences of those choices. He hopes that by continuous contemplation of Isvara, we can be released from the compulsory results of our actions.

Let me borrow another good bit from the 2009 notes:

Nitya uses a nice metaphor of a game of pool in his commentary to describe the threefold karma. Players line up in their minds what they want to make happen, then they strike the cue ball with a stick, after which balls are knocked around in a more or less unpredictable fashion. The results follow the laws of physics, but only rarely does the ordinary person do everything just right to make things bounce the way they want. More often they have to assess how everything ends up and plan their next shot accordingly. While a helpful metaphor, as Anne said, life is more like a game with an infinite number of balls all bashing into each other, and going every which way. Not only that, but the table is uneven, curved and bent so that the balls never go exactly where you aim them.

The state of ignorance in which we plan our shots in this crazy arcade is the affliction mentioned here. We are only in possession of a tiny amount of the information and skill we need to knock a ball into the pocket. The shot itself is the actual karmic action, and the way the balls realign afterwards is the fruition of the action.

Isvara, then, is like a light above the table, illuminating the game but unaffected by it.

While we know what we want to accomplish and some of what we need to do to get it, no matter how expert we are, there is the ignorance that we really don't know how it's going to play out. If nothing else, knowing our limitations helps with the frustration of missing the shot.

Deb felt it was a good reminder, that transcendent beingness is there all the time. When we forget this we allow ourselves to be afflicted. I added that we cherish and defend our favorite afflictions, on top of the natural affliction of not being sure what is coming next.

The Isvara within us is always guiding us, like the difference between playing pool in the dark or with the light on. Our inner light is always on, day and night. Deb and I presented an astonishing example of inner guidance from our recent reading, and I've appended some juicy excerpts in Part II. Knowing about these inner processes that we normally take for granted instills gratitude for the innumerable gifts we are blessed with, without which our lives would be impossible.

Jan wondered if the witnessing consciousness is related to or the same as Isvara. Is it part of it, or are they separate? This is a much trickier question than it appears at first. Most of us had no idea.

Bill said that Isvara is not a monitoring or overarching consciousness, like the Western God. It is unaffected by what goes on, both within our consciousness and in our interactions with nature. The witnessing consciousness exists within ourselves—it's an individual thing.

That's right, sort of: witnessing is focused on our actions, though it has to be unaffected to truly qualify as a witness. True witnessing consciousness is far rarer than it's made out to be, and is aligned with Isvara, for sure. But there remains a connection with the individual purusha. Because of the puzzlement, the Gita

has a whole chapter on the topic, positing an all-inclusive purusha to contain and transcend the Samkhyan individual purushas.

Nitya's definition here is perfect: a supreme being, supreme purusha, like the purushottama of the Gita. He's speaking of reduction, of reducing the many to one central principle:

A corresponding methodology of reduction is accepted on the objective side. All experiences can be considered as items of a gross world of transactional verity, a subjective world of conceptual composition, and the residual existence of a consciousness that turns upon itself. Finally, all these are accepted as the phenomenal variegations arising out of the immanence of a transcendent supreme being.

The 'gross world' is the horizontal positive, in Nataraja Guru's scheme of correlation. 'Conceptual compositions' comprise the horizontal negative. 'The consciousness that turns upon itself' is the vertical negative, the alpha, and is a fascinating way to put it. As consciousness develops from that seed state it becomes "the immanence of a transcendent supreme being," the omega or turiya. So life as a whole, and not simply witnessing it, is our job—discovering the immanent transcendence within, so that as we drive around, that tremendous interactive force is keeping us on the road.

It's essential to not split hairs about small and large purushas, and so on. We are trying to imagine and identify with an idea or concept that inclusively transcends all the concepts we are afflicted by. We are looking to a universal not afflicted by comparisons to something else. As Nitya put it so well: "Isvara can be accepted *as a better model* for imitation or identification." We become it through identity and expansive imagination.

The day before, Jan had been inspired by historian [Heather Cox Richardson](#) writing for Martin Luther King's birthday, about

ordinary people doing the right thing, following their inner light. It complimented our closing meditation, borrowed from the old notes:

Norman Cousins, in his book *Anatomy of an Illness*, quotes the then almost ninety-year-old Pablo Casals, the master cellist, on the role of the individual in bringing about world peace. In conversation they had come to the conclusion that the biggest problem was that the individual felt helpless:

“The answer to helplessness is not so very complicated,” Don Pablo said. “A man can do something for peace without having to jump into politics. Each man has inside him a basic decency and goodness. If he listens to it and acts on it, he is giving a great deal of what it is the world needs most. It is not complicated but it takes courage. It takes courage for a man to listen to his own goodness and act on it. Do we dare to be ourselves? This is the question that counts.”

Part II

Excerpts from *An Immense World*, by Ed Yong (Random House, New York, 2022), which I poorly explained in the class, and I’m not trying again:

When animals move, their sense organs provide two kinds of information.... You can think of them as other-produced and self-produced. From my desk I can see the branches of a tree rustling in the wind. That’s... other-produced. But to see those branches, I had to look to my left—a sudden, jarring movement that sent patterns of light sweeping across my retinas. That’s... self-produced. Every animal, for each of its senses, has to distinguish between these two kinds of signals. But here’s the catch: These

signals *are the same* from the point of view of the sense organs.
(325)

When an animal decides to move, its nervous system issues a motor command—a set of neural signals that tell its muscles what to do. But on its way to the muscles, that command is duplicated. The copy heads to the sensory systems, which use it to simulate the consequences of the intended movement. When the movement actually occurs, the senses have already predicted the self-produced signals that they are about to experience. And by comparing that prediction against reality, they can work out which signals are actually coming from the outside world and react to them appropriately. (Footnote: It's frankly astonishing that this works....) All of this happens unconsciously, and while it isn't intuitive, it is central to our experience of the world. The information detected by the senses is always a mix of self-produced... and other-produced..., and animals can tell the two apart because their nervous systems are constantly simulating the former. (326)

Whenever an animal moves, it unconsciously creates a mirror version of its own will, which it uses to predict the sensory consequences of its actions. With every action, the senses are forewarned about what to expect and can prepare themselves accordingly. (327)

[This is] why your view is stable even though your eyes are constantly darting around. (328)

Distinguishing self from other isn't a given; it's a difficult problem that nervous systems have to solve. "This is largely what sentience is," neuroscientist Michael Hendricks tells me. "And perhaps it's

why sentience is: It's the process of sorting perceptual experiences into self-generated and other-generated."

That sorting process doesn't require consciousness, or any advanced mental abilities. "It isn't some fancy, late-added thing in evolution," Hendricks says. It exists in nervous systems with a few hundred neurons and those with tens of billions. It's a foundational condition of animal existence, which flows from the simplest acts of sensing and moving. Animals cannot make sense of what's around them without first making sense of themselves.... If the sense organs acted alone, nothing would make sense. (328)

Compare this with our old friend *7 1/2 Lessons About the Brain*, by Lisa Feldman Barrett (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, 2020)

How does your brain decipher the sense data so it knows how to proceed? If it used only the ambiguous information that is immediately present, then you'd be swimming in a sea of uncertainty, flailing around until you figured out the best response. Luckily, your brain has an additional source of information at its disposal: memory.... In the blink of an eye, your brain reconstructs bits and pieces of past experience as your neurons pass electrochemical information back and forth in an ever-shifting, complex network. Your brain assembles these bits into memories to infer the meaning of the sense data and guess what to do about it. (66-7)

This whole constructive process happens *predictively*. Scientists are now fairly certain that your brain actually begins to sense the moment-to-moment changes in the world around you *before* those light waves, chemicals, and other sense data hit your brain. The same is true for moment-to-moment changes in your body—your brain begins to sense them before the relevant data arrives from your organs, hormones, and various bodily systems. (72)

Predictions transform flashes of light into the objects you see. They turn changes in air pressure into recognizable sounds, and traces of chemicals into smells and tastes. (72)

If your brain has predicted well, then your neurons are *already firing* in a pattern that matches the incoming sense data. That means this sense data itself has no further use beyond confirming your brain's predictions. What you see, hear, smell, and taste in the world and feel in your body in that moment are *completely constructed in your head*. By prediction, your brain has efficiently prepared you to act. (75)

Part III

My response from Nancy Y's 2011 class:

A lovely and refreshing meditation this morning, with a bright sun energizing the chilly air, filling the room with light. Aum, hrim, aim, saum. Mmmmm. I don't do this enough. It reminds me of those years with Nitya, when he discoursed so enchantingly and we could sit still and simply be absorbed in his presentation. Bliss, bliss, bliss. Aum.

It's a tough meditation, forcing my chaotic mind to concenter over and over. Feels great to even go into it a little way.

I love Nitya's line, "A randomness that assumes a course of purposiveness, and a purposive maneuvering that is mounted on a horse of uncertainty work hand in hand." So we plunge forward blindly, but a mysterious coherence guides us. My dogs can run full tilt through a blackberry thicket without a scratch. They must be meditating on Isvara, we humans say. They say, in doggie language, "Just plunge. Isvara will guide you." Woof.

So. Continuous contemplation on Isvara. To me, it doesn't mean having a static image that you hold in your mind all the time, but rather knowing that all this is Isvara. If you know it's all Isvara, then everything you contemplate is Isvara. The corollary is that each time you forget and get caught up in superficial matters, you gently bring yourself back to the awareness of the overarching unity of all life.

Luckily Isvara doesn't have a godlike form the way Krishna or Shiva do, so it's easily to contemplate it as all this and not be distracted by incidentals.

"All this" includes a very rare sunny day here, so the world outside beckons. My plants need weeding very badly! The dogs will demand a walk, so they can practice running through the blackberries. And tonight we host a fundraiser for Johnny Stalling's theater in the prison project film. Isvara is very great—it never runs out of possibilities!

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6/30/9

Sutra I: 23

Or, by continuous contemplation on Isvara.

Prior to the start of class we had a discussion about a friend currently in extremis. It was so heartening to hear the intelligent sympathy that everyone genuinely felt, and the wide range of its embrace. Everyone brought a slightly different perspective to bear, which provided mutual enrichment for penetrating to the nub. It reminded us of the value of a gathering of friends, the geometric increase potentiated by linking minds in series. Not to mention revealing the innate beauty of each and every participant. This turned out to be a perfect overture to tonight's Sutra.

Nitya describes the emergence of Isvara as Patanjali's term for the Absolute. Samkhya is a system of duality based on prakriti and purusa, meaning nature and spirit or matter and energy. Isvara is the term for the totality of purusas, as though all the individual souls in the universe were molecules in a titanic oversoul.

Philosophers group related items together to allow them to understand the world better. Really, everybody does this quite naturally. The word for 'chair' for instance represents a general concept that can include many different specific instances of items that can be called chairs. Sometimes even a fallen log or a stone is a chair. Superficially, they are quite different from your favorite easy chair in your living room, but as chairs their relationship becomes quite simple to grasp. We don't usually find people arguing over whether a log is a chair, because it's easy to see how it could be one. So prakriti, nature, is easy to unify.

Spirit is a little trickier to generalize, and people have a much easier time fighting over their differing versions. We readily acknowledge a spark of consciousness in each living being, but it takes a yogi or a philosopher to see that they are all integral parts of an indescribable absolute Self or Isvara. We might lump beings, human and otherwise, into various categories, but these are more based on physical characteristics than spiritual ones. We have to penetrate below the surface to begin to comprehend the oneness of all beings, but happily, as we do go deeper the oneness readily becomes apparent.

Patanjali is going to dedicate a significant part of his magnum opus to this concept, so more will be forthcoming. For now we can see that he has made a distinction between samadhi, sameness or unity, and Isvara, the Self. The division parallels the former distinction of those who make no effort and those who do, and is even closer to the distinction made in Chapter XII of the Bhagavad Gita, where Arjuna wants to know if he should contemplate the formless void or personify it in some fashion.

Krishna tells him that the personal version is easier, but that both take you to the same place. Similarly, the only reason to have samadhi and Isvara both is that samadhi is union with the Self. At their core they make reference to the same experience.

The class discussed what continuous contemplation means. It sounds like you are never supposed to get off your yoga mat, but that isn't the idea. I started us off with how when driving a car you cannot drop your attention for even a moment or you will crash. We don't have to anxiously fixate on the road and hold the wheel with a grip of doom, we can relax and enjoy the ride. But we have to have some awareness dedicated to relating to what's happening around us.

The gist of continuous contemplation is that everything that happens is taken as meaningful to your search for truth. There are no random disconnected events. They are all linked within the oneness of the Self. So you don't dismiss anything, you cherish it. When something happens to you, you examine it to see what your part in it is. And you listen to your friends and advisors, who are likely to pick up on what you are missing.

Deb mentioned that early in her time with Nitya he told her that the bedrock of spirituality was honesty. We are prying through our natural obfuscating mentality to reclaim a straightforward assessment of every situation. We don't warp it to suit our preferences. Nor is it a random world of "every man for himself." We are interconnected, and we float in an ocean of truth. It's not always easy to descry, but that's what we're working toward. Of course, this takes effort, well-directed, intelligent effort. Continuously.

A lot of examples were offered, enough to fill a small volume, but I'll just pick one or two. Susan has been working hard to back off from her desire to micromanage some factors in her life. She heard a psychologist say that very often in conversation we don't really listen to the other person. We have an agenda, and

what we say is a gambit to manipulate the other person into bringing up the subject we are dying to talk about. So the conversation isn't a real exchange, but more like a boxing match, with each side maneuvering for advantage. Susan realized that if she really and truly listened to the other person, by suspending her own agenda, she would learn a lot. More important, she clearly saw how that kind of manipulative behavior killed the spirit of exchange, and made the other person erect walls of their own. Listening invites the other to come out; lecturing drives the other person into hiding. Of course, you will succeed in getting your ideas across much better with someone if there is mutual sharing than if there is mutual hostility. But Susan went one step farther, and asked herself why she needed to propagate a program at all. By not taking the reins, the other learns to ride, and that is a joy for both.

Susan also talked about codependency, how we want so much to help the other person that we sometimes give them enough rope to hang themselves. It's very hard for us to say no to a friend or family member, so we either string them along or indulge their negativity. One hard part of being honest with others, is to let them know, gently but firmly, that we disagree with them. In the same way, we resist being honest with ourselves because it's easier to "go along" with our habits than to take ourselves to task. When we allow for destructive behavior, whether in our self or in others, we are allowing a lacuna in our continuous contemplation. Walking the razor's edge between this kind of standing up and holding back is yet another art form of yogic discipline.

6/30/9

Sutra I: 24

Isvara is a distinct purusha unaffected by the propensities of affliction, action, and fruition.

Typical of Indian wisdom, Isvara, the Absolute, is more easily defined by what it is not than what it is. Patanjali expands karma, action, into a threefold process to teach us more about it, and in the process distinguish it from ordinary purushas, who experience karma as a matter of course.

Jan wondered about the word 'distinct', whether it meant that Isvara was a distinct thing. Not so much that, but the idea is to distinguish it from ordinary purushas, the distinction being that it is unaffected by karma.

Nitya uses a nice metaphor of a game of pool in his commentary to describe the threefold karma. Players line up in their minds what they want to make happen, then they strike the cue ball with a stick, after which balls are knocked around in a more or less unpredictable fashion. The results follow the laws of physics, but only rarely does the ordinary person do everything just right to make things bounce the way they want. More often they have to assess how everything ends up and plan their next shot accordingly. While a helpful metaphor, as Anne said, life is more like a game with an infinite number of balls all bashing into each other, and going every which way. Not only that, but the table is uneven, curved and bent so that the balls never go exactly where you aim them.

The state of ignorance in which we plan our shots in this crazy arcade is the affliction mentioned here. We are only in possession of a tiny amount of the information and skill we need to knock a ball into the pocket. The shot itself is the actual karmic action, and the way the balls realign afterwards is the fruition of the action.

Isvara, then, is like a light above the table, illuminating the game but unaffected by it.

The admission that we act in ignorance brought a volley of stories from all participants. It seems we cannot help but imagine that everyone else knows what they are doing, while we inwardly

chafe at our own inadequate knowledge. It's nice to know we're all in the same boat.

Anne and John talked about raising kids, how you had a wonderful vision of how it was going to all unfold, but then the random factor of the kids' own interests and desires "skewed the pitch," as cricket players call an uneven field. They roll away from you like a cue ball zooming toward its own destiny, and where they end up is anyone's guess and everyone's anxiety.

Anne and John's oldest son needed open heart surgery at the age of two. Anne related the intense feelings of having to make a life and death decision for her child while not being sure what was the right course to pursue. For us ordinary purushas, our lives are punctuated with agonizing periods like that, thankfully not very often. John and Anne had a successful outcome, but there are no guarantees.

John felt that luck played a big part in karma, and that's right. Scientists like to boast that if they had complete knowledge of some process they could predict outcomes, even to the end of time, but they are deluded. We *never* have complete knowledge of anything, and the sheer volume of karma, vast and interwoven as it is, endlessly produces new and unanticipated results. Krishna says that luck is a quality of the Absolute in Chapter X of the Gita. Luck is the same as Chance or Fate. Quantum mechanics bows to Chance as what determines the behavior of particles. As Deb pointed out, we only know what our luck was after the fact, as a *fait accompli*. We may hope and pray for good luck, but we only know about what kind we've received when we examine the new pattern in which our pool balls are scattered over the table. And while we call it good or bad, it's merely a reading of how the balls are lying after all the myriad forces have acted on them up to that point. Nor is it ever static even for an instant.

In honor of this concept, Bill reread us Nitya's great line from the commentary: "A randomness that assumes a course of

purposiveness, and a purposive maneuvering that is mounted on a horse of uncertainty work hand in hand. With innumerable such occurrences of randomness all around, the course of action is determined within a field of uncertainty.”

Paul related a funny story from his days as a firefighter. A really tough-looking guy was having a heart attack, so everyone on the call steeled themselves for resistance from him. People under duress can get pretty nasty. The ambulance attendant ordered him in a bossy tone to get onto the stretcher. He answered meekly in a high, lisping voice that couldn't he please take his slippers with him? Which slippers? Those fuzzy ones over there. Ah, so he was another meek soul just trying to appear fearsome for protection. The point being that we should be careful not to make too many false assumptions, since we are indeed colossally ignorant.

Paul's story reminded me of a friend from Texas whose grandmother was a hard-bitten holy-roller fundamentalist. She lived her life being damn sure of what lay ahead for her in heaven, sitting on the right hand of the Lord, and she wasn't shy about carrying on about it all day long. But when death approached, all her bluster fell away like tissue paper in a rainstorm. She spent her last days whining like a little girl, overwhelmed by terror of the unknown gulf yawning before her.

So it's wise to acknowledge our ignorance, and get used to it. We don't need to impress anyone that we know what's going on, though everyone seems obsessed about it. As Bill said, lots of religions tell lots of stories about what's coming up, and it makes them very popular. Jan read a number of such tall tales in the period after her father died, but they didn't satisfy her. From her centered perspective they seemed bizarre and unnecessary. The bottom line is we will meet our fate squarely only if we have discarded our unfounded expectations. That doesn't mean we don't try to play the game with expertise, but only that we surrender our false posture of smug wisdom based on other people's fairy tales.

Isvara is not pandering any such stories. It is unaffected by the all-absorbing game we are caught up in. Bringing in that detached perspective will help us live our lives more fully and with less anxiety about the lion's share over which we have no control.

We closed with a fitting word from a wise musician that Deb came across this week. Norman Cousins, in his book *Anatomy of an Illness*, quotes the then almost ninety-year-old Pablo Casals, the master cellist, on the role of the individual in bringing about world peace. In conversation they had come to the conclusion that the biggest problem was that the individual felt helpless:

“The answer to helplessness is not so very complicated,” Don Pablo said. “A man can do something for peace without having to jump into politics. Each man has inside him a basic decency and goodness. If he listens to it and acts on it, he is giving a great deal of what it is the world needs most. It is not complicated but it takes courage. It takes courage for a man to listen to his own goodness and act on it. Do we dare to be ourselves? This is the question that counts.”