

2022 Patanjali Class 42

Sutra I:25 – In that Isvara the seed of the omniscient is not exceeded.

Sutra I:26 – That is the teacher of the ancients also, not being limited by time.

Sutra I:27 – Isvara’s signifier is pranava (AUM).

We began with a paradox. In sutra 23, Nitya marked Isvara as distinct from Samkhyan dualism, yet he opens sutra 27 with the affirmation that the Isvara of Yoga is not the universal Isvara of Vedanta, and that’s right: Patanjali is moderately dualistic, where Vedanta is unitive. Yet trying to nail it down is like trying to calculate how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Irrelevant. It takes us *away* from the unitive thinking we’re trying to cultivate. I invited the class to not obsess about the Absolute’s exact dimensions.

We might as well reprise Nataraja Guru’s two pithy quotes about the Absolute. This one makes the same point, elegantly:

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.

Then the Guru offers a tip on methodology:

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.

The hint is that if we don't worry about a precise delineation of the Absolute, it will seep into our life of its own accord. The left-brain desire for definition tends to undermine its effects. The point is to open our awareness, not to create a new limitation. There is joy of unity in all things, however you come to it.

Deb presented an overview of the three sutras, which take us from the limited forms of our daily knowledge to a deep contemplation of the inexhaustible attributes of the Absolute that feed all the transient aspects of our lives. We come to natural limits in the relativistic world, yet Isvara is an all-encompassing purusha or being, where knowledge does not have a form that can be filled. There is the knowledge we live with every day, but Isvara is the background that infuses everything, gives it a deeper meaning. While we have limitless fields of limited knowledge, all receive the never-ending breath of life through an Absolute that is unformed and open-ended. Nitya concludes, "Thus even a piecemeal meditation on the omniscience of Isvara can fill us with wonder."

Moni was moved by Nitya's extending the influence of Isvara to all life: "When a larva in water matures and comes to the surface and unfolds its wings, Isvara reveals to the larva that it can fly." She said if you meditate on such things, you see you are also going to fly, knowing all the wonders around.

I was reminded of Ed Yong's book *An Immense World*, exploring many recently discovered abilities of all the creatures on our planet. Until this century, humans have broadly considered themselves to be the pinnacle of evolution, yet all life forms have had the same amount of time to develop, so they are just as "advanced," and their talents are truly awe-inspiring. It may be that humans are actually the stupidest, because we're killing ourselves off. We are no longer listening to Isvara, while the rest of Earth life is.

Anita used to assume that everything was just how it looked to her: a rock is rock, and a tree is a tree. Now she sees how there is intelligence in everything, and lots of other forms of life are more advanced than she ever imagined.

Paul has been reading Emerson, who in an essay on knowledge wrote that when we know something it's like drawing a circle around it, or cutting out a piece of pie. Whenever we establish a border, it paves a path to draw a bigger circumference around it, and if you keep doing that it becomes the entirety of everything and doesn't leave anything out. It haunts Paul that the nature of god is like a circle: a circle whose center is everywhere and its circumference is nowhere.

Long ago I had some acid trips like that, where everywhere I looked was the center of the universe, surrounded by throbbing concentric rings of intense light. The center was everywhere, so there was no "outside," nothing that wasn't divine, nothing sinful—though what I was registering was all visual and conceptual, rather than moral. It's one of my most vivid experiences through the medicines, and still clear in my memory.

Sometimes Paul wants to understand things so much that he feels overwhelmed, and it brings on a sense of futility. It makes him feel that the pursuit of knowledge is like a dog chasing its tail, where the search itself substitutes for recognizing his true identity. It seems like final, perfect understanding is beyond his ability.

Deb was reminded of a conversation in college, between three friends studying very different subjects. They agreed it didn't matter what your path of knowledge was, the deeper you got into it, the more it revealed something general and profound about the world. They realized getting deeply into anything was the path to revelation.

I reassured Paul that just because we can't arrive at a finalized understanding, doesn't disqualify anyone. We're all in that boat. Imagining you've finally "got it" brings your search to

an end. Science seeks certitude, and spiritual seekers seek truth, but there is always much more to learn—truth and certitude are not fixed destinations that you arrive at and you are done. The mysterious part is that the search never ends, the goal is always drawing us and intriguing us, toward what Nataraja Guru called new value-forms of delight. And that's a good thing.

I offered the example of the pianist we heard over the last weekend, with his totally phenomenal, inhuman ability, even by the standards of this most complex of human performances. Despite of the impeccable, beautiful musical experience, I was convinced I should give up playing the piano myself, because such heights were obviously unattainable. I could never do that! I felt spiritually left by the side of the road, so to speak. Eventually the blues wore off, and I realized I could have plenty of fun bumbling my way over the piano as an amateur, a lover, and I didn't need to be perfect and supersonic. So, if our state of mind freezes us in our tracks, we have blown it. That isn't the point. The point is our less-than-spectacular life is still connected with Isvara, and it has plenty of wonder baked in. Let the great talents inspire us, but we are the only ones who can live our unobtrusive lives, and experience how special and meaningful they are.

Deb added that, for all his talent, that pianist—like us—may have many faults in other arenas. He could be a jerk.

Anita tried to console me that there are no such things as mistakes, and that's true enough in psychological terms. Yet there are mistakes in many fields. We can learn from them, and compensate for them, but it's sloppy to let them lie. Mainly, we shouldn't beat ourselves up over them, but use them as learning opportunities, as Deb said. We can work on perfecting ourselves without any danger of achieving perfection.

My cousin Stephen is a very good pianist, and his instructor used to say "You're improvising," when he made mistakes, which was cute, but Stephen knew what he was telling him. In music,

mistakes mar the beauty of what we're trying to communicate. For pianists, many mistakes are so subtle it takes a special kind of guru to help us hear them, let alone overcome them.

There are many places where accuracy is critical. Like surgery, which a couple of us are slated for soon. "Oops, Deb, I put your artificial knee in a bit sideways, but it should sort of work. Okay?" If you are sending a billion-dollar telescope into space to a specific optimal location, errors sabotage the mission.

Susan almost told us about the article in Sunday's NY Times Magazine, about Tesla self-driving cars, which work fine most of the time, but once in a while suddenly veer off the road and kill the passengers. The CEO thinks that's fine, because they learn a lot from the mistakes. Hmmm.

I agree we should get over the lingering fears from religion and such, that if we make a mistake we will be punished, possibly forever. If we are walking in untrodden territory, we are bound to make mistakes. Nataraja Guru urged us to make good mistakes, interesting mistakes.

But not in front of an audience. And not with our life.

Part II

Lots of Old Notes. We took each sutra as its own class, so were able to go much deeper. There's a long exchange with Wendy Oak, and much more, from several of you:

7/7/9

Sutra I:25

In that Isvara the seed of the omniscient is not exceeded.

The class had a tough time homing in on the meaning of the sutra, and it took a little digging to figure out why. Because of the methodology of Patanjali, the comments on sutras 25 and 27 are

reversed, in a way. In Nitya's mind, pranava should have come before omniscience. In a section like this one on Isvara, Nitya would have been steeped into all the ideas at once, so it's not hard to understand why it came out the way it did. Regardless, to make sense of this sutra, it helps to read the comments on 27, and vice versa.

Certainly the subject is broadly unified, so reading all about the pranava of sutra 27 as the designator of Isvara still led us to ponder Isvara the omniscient. Aum, the pranava, introduces the fourfold system of correlation of wakeful, dream, causal and transcendental that Nataraja Guru superimposed on the Cartesian coordinates. Isvara as the seed of the omniscient presents what I call the pulsation model, of a seed or point source expanding into full expression, which is then epitomized in a new seed.

The identity of the seed of the causal with the seed of the fountain source landed in Moni's mind with an audible "thunk." The whole group heard it arrive. As she explained it, when you look at a seed, there is nothing of what it will expand into visible in it, it is just this indistinguishable stuff. It is purely potential. Isvara is the absolute potentiality of everything.

Bill helped us to extract the omniscient element that is present but hard to grasp in Nitya's comments. When each of the four states of consciousness reaches its natural, unsurpassable limit, that is called omniscience. It's not a limit in the sense of a big iron wall, but when waking consciousness goes beyond a certain transactional verity, it becomes dream consciousness, and so on. At the outer limit of the wakeful we have the brilliant scientists of various persuasions. At the limits of the dream, Nitya goes on, "those who arrive at the frontiers of the world of imagination are recognized as master poets, master artists, master playwrights, and so on. In this case also, omniscience is marked by the unfoldment of a person's creative power so that it can be taken to its ultimate possibility."

The causal is bounded by the possible, which is defined by the laws of the universe. Nitya puts this beautifully: “What is not present as a potential in the cause cannot manifest in the effect. Conversely, anything manifested as an effect is indicative of a latent cause, a hidden seed. Here, the limitation arises from a pulsation within manifestation, expanding from a cause to an enlarged field of effect and, in the same manner, centripetally turning inward to epitomize the entire effect into a causal factor.”

The limits of the fourth state, the transcendental, are the canceling out of the knower and the known. What more can you say about it? Whatever it is horizontalizes into the other three states.

Paul detected a subtle mechanical aura behind Patanjali’s philosophy. He wondered if this meant we were supposed to attain samadhi by incremental steps, or if, as he understood it, it was to be grasped by some kind of quantum leap. Infinity cannot be attained by adding one plus one plus one for a very long time. So how do you get there? Paul was expressing the frustration of several people that Patanjali seems to be beating around the bush, not getting to the point. But he does have a very definite methodology in mind. Hopefully some patience and a few chocolate chip cookies will make all the suffering worthwhile.

This sutra highlights the difference between unitive Advaita and Patanjali’s dualistic Yoga. Here Isvara is an omniscient seed. When it expands into manifestation it is no longer Isvara, but becomes one of the other purushas. As Deb rightly pointed out, in Advaita the Absolute becomes all this, wakeful, dream and deep sleep. The Gurukula stands for the unitive, but we can accept some duality for purposes of discussion and contemplation. When all is said and done, the differences fade away into nothingness.

Much of our discussion followed Nancy and Anita’s taking each side of this polarity. Anita held that the great masters of history have all gone away into caves or mountaintops or had other

vision quests to achieve what they achieved, and their examples have inspired whole movements and religions. Nancy averred that, like honeybees, we are all part of a larger, coherent reality all the time, even if we aren't aware of it. There was a lot of territory to explore here, and the synthesis of both aspects provides a very rich sense of what gives life meaning.

The synthesis in question is that you can listen to your own inner voice, your dharma, and it will lead you where you should be going. That may be far from the madding crowd, or right in the midst of the most chaotic events, depending on your predilections.

The catch is that if we are pressed by outside circumstances into serving someone else's dharma, we may live an unfulfilled life, and there are billions of examples of this all around the globe. Sure, people usually make the best they can of their tough situations, but their lives are often very far from being like those of the busy bees who soar through the sky to sip nectar from exuberant flowers and return to make the sweetest of decoctions. Likewise, if we follow someone else's route to enlightenment, the very arbitrariness of it can kill the spirit. If it kindles a fire in the heart, fine, but if it's only an expression of discontent with the present it may lead to a dead end. Plus, as Deb said, most of those stories about the masters are allegorical. The "going away" can happen right here, right now.

To Patanjali, we must seek the seed of omniscience by subtracting all of manifestation and returning to its source. This is exactly Anita's point. To Narayana Guru and Nancy, all this is an expression of the Absolute, so we can embrace it right now. And we can see that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but mutually complementary attitudes.

7/28/9

Sutra I: 26

That [Isvara] is the teacher of the ancients also, not being limited by time.

An ideal subject for personal exploration united a small group on one of our rare outdoors classes. As the hot day mellowed into comfortable warmth and a half moon brightened in a peach-colored sunset over the coastal mountains, we shared our thoughts about the sutra.

The evidence of an eternal teaching principle of the universe, called by some the guru, is richly evidenced in all our lives. Very often we take its effects for granted, distracted by the unappreciative attitudes carved out by modern education, and imagine we are merely the passive victims of Fate. So it is good to take stock once in a while, to stop and call to mind a few of our manifold blessings.

Eugene mentioned that we usually don't realize the transformations we are going through until after they happen. It's true that the conscious part of our mind is the last to know what's going on. Often we resist change and cling to the comforts of the Known. But life's educational force can work behind the scenes even better than in the full glare of daylight. Eugene also noted this, that we may intentionally try to disrupt the process of our unfoldment, but it happens anyway. Our knowing is in some ways a block to evolution. Perhaps this is why the Isha Upanishad reminds us that those who relish knowledge dwell in even greater darkness than those who worship ignorance.

Each of us can retrospect over our lives and discern certain points where major watershed events occurred, but when we look closer they appear very much like seamless parts of a continuous unfoldment. When a seed sprouts and shoots upward, develops branches and leaves, then produces flowers and finally fruits filled with new seeds, it is one long, beautiful gesture. Yet we might notice the first stem division and think, "This is where the plant

began to become itself.” A fetus develops similarly, evidencing a continuous unfoldment of a constructive program, yet as observers we take note of the moments when the heart starts beating or the limbs begin to bud out, and think “Aha! that’s the important part.” The child’s internal program continues even after birth, but in the midst of all the chaos we begin to think that outside forces are doing the shaping. Only a contemplative will be able to see the internal unfoldment that is imbibing elements from the environment, drawing them to it in an intelligently planned manner. So it turns out that we are not victims of Fate: Fate is a victim of us. Better yet, we are partners in one of the greatest stories ever told: our life.

I don’t want to trivialize people’s personal narratives by recounting them here. Deb mentioned how some of her key stories began to seem like a cartoon version after she told them a few times, so she just stopped. Her friend Jane’s idea was that we carried our stories like identity cards to wear over our breast pocket, as a way to prove ourselves to others. It’s a tremendous relief when we have developed enough confidence to not need to ratify ourselves anymore. It also requires bravery, because we live in a suspicious world that may well treat us as criminals until proven otherwise. And it might not even be interested in our proof....

Each of you has your own portfolio of stories, and you can recount them to yourselves and share them with your best friends at rare moments. You can even send them in to the class notes group if you wish, since sometimes sharing is a way of letting them go. As Brenda pointed out, hanging on to our outdated self-descriptions is a mistake most of us make. She described one of her main stories from the past, one which served her well for a long time. Then one day she met a wise teacher who told her that it was time to drop it. It had become a narrative about a person who no longer existed, and letting go of it would permit her to be what

she was in the present. She was amazed at how freeing it was to let it go.

Eugene felt he has recently been working through that very stage. His favorite story has been very successful and useful to him, so it isn't easy to relinquish, and maybe it isn't fully time yet. His inner guru will know, and since he listens to it he won't be too far behind in making any necessary adjustments. Time lags are endemic to humanity, it seems. And it is possibly as much a mistake to let go too soon as too late. Our stories give our lives coherence, and help us to develop more complex aspects of ourselves. There is tremendous value in them. Only, we shouldn't become dependent on them. They are like the wake our boat makes as we eagerly plow ahead.

So, looking back along the timeline of our lives we can detect a smooth flow toward becoming who we are, or at least what we appear to be for the moment, because the flow is continuous. There is no point when it becomes a finished product. A big part of the fun of life is not knowing what comes next, and the fault of fixed self-narratives is that they rely on static conceptions that pretend we are in some sense finalized. Where our boat is now is not where we want it to stay always.

Watershed events look very intentional in retrospect, but when they happened we had no idea what they were going to lead us into. It's really so cool! It can make us melt with gratitude that this grand principle of learning, growth, and creative development is such an intrinsic part of life. Really, gratitude seems to be one of the best attitudes for fostering continued growth. And the flip side, ingratitude, is a perfect recipe for keeping us stuck in an impoverished conception of ourselves.

Recent brain scan studies reveal that we become consciously aware of new states quite a long time after the brain starts generating them. Our lives are born in darkness and grow into the light, over and over again. And this is a lucky thing, for if we were

truly in charge we would be far poorer at the job than our inner guru. I have often thought that if my life actually relied on me, I would rapidly find myself face down in the ditch, a feast for flies.

When humans really do put themselves in charge, we get the four horsemen of the apocalypse: conquest, war, famine and death. So let's not.

Several times I have looked back over my life to see that, with the grace of the guru, I had avoided some serious pitfalls that I was unknowingly walking on the razor's edge of. If I had been aware of them at the time, I would have become giddy and fallen in for sure, since pitfalls famously can draw and hold our attention. Only my ignorance coupled with the guru's beneficent guidance steered me through. Becoming aware of this invisible drama made me inwardly bow to him in intense gratitude, and rededicate myself to both serving him and fostering my own growth by adding fewer impediments.

We closed with an idea that came to me the one time I went to Greece. The Aegean Sea is filled with interestingly shaped islands. When you sit on one, you can see others on the horizon, and they seem as though they are calling to you. If some creative deity wanted to coax humans to develop a means of crossing the sea, by building boats and learning how to propel them, it would situate those intriguing and beckoning visions just exactly as they are. It made me realize that our life is filled with delightful visions that we can pursue if we are so inclined, and in the process we must necessarily learn and grow. We might have to invent new skills. It is a vision of a benign universe dedicated to evolving consciousness, which is a far cry from the cold, dead milieu of popular imagination, where we have to wrest every miserable step out of a hostile wasteland.

By class's end the dark had enveloped us. We might have been the shadowy shapes we could just make out, around which

the gentle music of our voices floated in the air, or perhaps it was only our imaginations.

Part No Part

It's always nice to have something other than my own blah blahs to pass along, especially when they are as delightful as the following. The first is from a new recipient and old friend, Lila Higgins from Massachusetts, and I share her first thoughts without asking. If there is anything remotely embarrassing I make sure to ask first, but this is from the other end of the spectrum:

Hi

Thank you for sending me the class notes. I go back to read them as there is so much work you all have been doing, it will take me awhile to jump right in-

I did have a dream (usually I don't remember them) last night where I was with all of you - and Peter and laughing. I felt such happiness - it has been so long since I felt that way. So some part of me in my soul is in joy to have some connection thru you to Nitya.

Love and blessings

Lila

Wendy Oak and I have been having a bit of a conversation about struggling with the Yoga Sutras, and her attraction to a number of more "candy-like" approaches to spirituality. She is in one of Nancy Yeilding's online classes. Her words should be tucked into the first page of any Gurukula study. She sent this with an okay to share:

Dear Scott

Firstly to say thank you for reading my thoughts and sending me your reply.

Lots of your remarks spoke to me and I have brought out your class notes for **Sutra 1:4 Part 1**, and found that the two go together.

I am not sure if I do just 'dither' along, but I certainly have wanted my learning to be accessible and comfortable, even if the teachings demand a more focused approach. So in one way I have wanted to not be too challenged, yet also felt a bit uneasy as if I was not giving it my all. Tuning into the bits I liked and switching off from the more inaccessible bits.

Also I have dug many wells. The sheer delight of opening up a crisp new book filled with fresh ideas, like opening Pandora's box. Drooling over how I already apply them to my life or maybe I can give this new one a go. Until another one comes along and lures me into its alluring promises and magic.

Of course alongside all these shallow wells, is the one deep one containing all Guru Nitya's treasures and related others.

This well is the one which asks for full attention to haul up the bucket. No quick fixes or flashy promises. I have visited this well many times but lowered my bucket just as far down as I could comfortably cope with.

Now I can hear Patanjali laughing down below. If you want me you will have to come and get me: 'I am not yours for a leisurely read in a hammock on a summer day'.

These first 12 lessons have challenged me. I haven't ever thought of giving up but certainly been very frustrated and resentful.

Feeling myself to be too stupid to understand all this incomprehensible stuff. In a dither. [Nancy has been very helpful, supportive and affirming]

So I was thrilled to read your earlier class notes and see how others felt a bit the same in the beginning. And how it is big choice time. And yes please I do want a resurrection, and okay it will initially be tough. As your Richard Wilhelm comments imply:

‘if a person encounters a hindrance at the beginning of an enterprise, he must not try to force an advance but must pause and take thought. However nothing should put him off his course, he must persevere and constantly keep the goal in mind.’

So with my head down the well and with determination to haul up the goodies, I am proceeding in a more serious manner. Prepared to give it my all. And I thank you so much Scott and your class for being so unitive.

with love from Wendy.

And my own thanks to everyone for being a part of the Gurukula family, both virtual and actual! Scott

8/10/9

Sutra I:27

Isvara’s signifier is pranava (Aum)

Aum is a word, more like a sound, that designates the Absolute. In the course of life we learn to associate sounds with concepts, and so we are always adding new features to the words we use, based on our experiences.

The aspect we most wholeheartedly want to append to our conceptualization is God or the Absolute itself. We collect a lot of

valuable information about these mysteries in our studies, but still have not attained what our words and concepts designate. How do we make the leap?

We are on the verge of a section where we can really dig into it, or as Wendy has said we can send our bucket down all the way to the water before we draw it back up for a peek inside. It's too bad that this part will be chopped up by summer breaks, so feel free to read ahead. Or, simply meditate on the mantra Aum.

Aum is designed to lead us back from objectivity into conceptualization, from concepts to their point sources, and through a nondimensional point into the transcendental. Our ordinary mind is fixated on objective aspects, so it takes a lot of repetition to ease our focus back to its source. We do this by chanting, but also by the regular class sessions where we examine aspects of our lives and relate them to the center, over and over.

A good class is a kind of nonspecific chanting of aum. First someone mentions a problem or observation or complaint. Then we talk about it, converting it to a sensible mental picture. Next we sit quiet and allow the externalizing trend to dissipate, allow for an inner stillness. After that—who knows? We don't make any claims, so that we don't have any expectations, which disrupt the entire process. What will be will be.

Nitya first mentions the five klesas or afflictions, which we are subject to but Isvara is not. They are: ignorance, attachment, aversion, egoism, and “excessive love of life.” We have discussed at length how ignorance, attachment and egoism can mess up our lives, but we did some good work with the other two. Aversion to evil is an important attribute of a sane life, so where does it go wrong? And of course love of life is a high value, one of the highest. So what can make it excessive?

Anita gave us a perfect example of aversion as an impediment. During her divorce of many years ago, she was so angry and upset she decided, “That's it! I don't need anybody ever

again!” Pushing her abusive husband away, she unintentionally pushed a great many other things away as well. Her feelings of aversion spilled over into other parts of her life. In consequence, many opportunities to love and interact with others were blocked, and it took her years and years before she could rectify her wholesale aversion and restore a loving basis to her life.

We assured Anita that she was not alone in acting that way. Pretty much everyone retreats to a well-defended fortress tower at some point in their life, and it usually takes until middle age to realize the pickle we’re in. We think we’re pushing away something horrible, but—inertia being what it is, equal and opposite—we’re also pushing ourself back from life. But the fact that we have at last realized what we’ve done gives us the chance to undo the locks, to come out and love again. Anita, along with others in the class who knew exactly what she was talking about, has thrown open the gates of her fortress self and stepped back out into the chaos of life. This is cause for great joy, tempered only by the sober realization that most people never find their way back out. Once in the tower, the self-imprisonment tends to be permanent, with the soul only released by death. We are ecstatic when another prisoner is released while alive!

Which brings up a fine mantra by St. Bob, perfectly expressing the pinch and the desire we have to become free once more. Sing it loud, sing it in the shower:

I Shall Be Released **Bob Dylan**

They say ev’rything can be replaced,
They say ev’ry distance is not near.
So I remember ev’ry face
Of ev’ry man who put me here.

I see my light come shining
From the west unto the east.
Any day now, any day now,
I shall be released.

They say ev'ry man needs protection,
They say that ev'ry man must fall.
Yet I swear I see my reflection
Some place so high above this wall.

I see my light come shining
From the west unto the east.
Any day now, any day now,
I shall be released.

Standing next to me in this lonely crowd,
Is a man who swears he's not to blame.
All day long I hear him shouting so loud,
Crying out that he was framed.

I see my light come shining
From the west unto the east.
Any day now, any *way* now,
I shall be released.

© Dwarf Music

As the song indicates, we carry resentments of the people and events that caused us to be locked up. But by turning away from the past and toward the light of the present we ensure our release from bondage. Resentment will never let us out.

Jan shared a similar story to Anita's, only without any specific details. Her contemplation has revealed how she bottled

herself up in the past, and now her desire for liberation is cautiously coaxing her to regain her freedom of spirit. We shared a bright moment with these two brave souls, where light, love and joy have triumphed over their chains. An age-old tale of redemption.

Abhinivesa, the excessive love of life, has some very positive features as well. The dictionary tells us, “application, intentness, study, affection, devotion, determination (to effect a purpose or attain an object), tenacity, adherence to.” You can see it’s going downhill somewhat, but still essentially positive. We have to turn to the root, ni-vis, to sniff out the rat. It has an extensive range of interesting meanings, but includes “to be fixed or intent on.” The affliction must be that when you want something very much, you may trample on other people who stand in your way, or miss some very valuable opportunities a little off to the side. Excessive love produces myopia, and of course it leads to attachment.

It turns out that excessive love of life is the flip side of aversion. Yoga asks us to remain in a neutral state, poised between charging forward and pulling back.

The pranava aum invites a reverse journey from manifestation, leading us to the unmanifest. We aren’t released from bondage by rearranging factors of exterior manifestation, but by passing through the cracks, so to speak. We shrink from objective awareness into the vastness of the unmanifest, freeing ourselves from the oppression of fixed forms.

We begin life as a single cell that undergoes a prescribed unfoldment without any conscious involvement from anyone. After birth we continue to unfold along more or less fixed lines, like a flower stalk rising up out of the ground. Environmental factors are certainly important, as they impinge on the innate program and alter it for good or ill. Gradually a sense of self is introduced, and at some propitious moment conscious awareness is born, like the

flower opening. This is the point where we may lose faith in our program of unfoldment and begin to flounder. We imagine that we are in charge, and we are all too aware that we know nothing. We are incompetent, and the future is a total mystery. We have met our ignorance, first of the afflictions.

In our bafflement, we deputize the only aspect of mind that seems capable of dealing with our ignorance, namely our ego. Despite its ignorance, the ego takes over from the innate program, and begins to unintentionally shred it to pieces. It follows the advice of fools and is led far afield. And as our inner assurance falls away to be replaced by an ignorant ego, we desperately cling to pleasurable bits of the environment as substitutes for inner bliss, and develop attachments to them. In a nutshell this is how the other three klesas afflict us.

By this stage of our study we are kissing goodbye to our afflictions. We are turning to Isvara, to the love and divine pattern that is the solid and true ground of who we are. We needed to see our afflictions and know them so we could let them go. There was a real sense in the class that this has happened. As Nitya puts it, we are now initiated into the yogic discipline of contemplation. Patanjali will soon show us how meditating on the pranava, Aum, will take us into the heart of the mystery.

Part II

Some more of my conversation with Wendy Oak, for your enjoyment and edification. Wendy has said some things very beautifully here:

Best of luck digging down to the bottom of the well with your bucket. It's a good metaphor, but we all know you've scooped up some goodies already.... Take care, Scott

I know. And yes, I have indeed. My bucket has dripped with nectar. It is Patanjali who is my issue. He feels an intruder. Maybe if I knew him a bit better. Is there any reading about him you would suggest, Scott? Thanks Wendy.

There is nothing better than Nitya's version of Patanjali. He manages to salvage the unitive aspect, while Patanjali is fairly dualistic. It isn't Nitya's best work, but it's far better than the competition. Hopefully the class notes can help too. So there is nothing else to read to fix things that I'm aware of.

Sometimes when we resist a teaching, it's because it's getting close to something we've been guarding for a long time. That's why persisting is important. At other times it is just off the mark. We have to decide, but some leeway should be accorded to a great historical figure.

And in case you missed this bit from a past class notes:

I want to pass on a trio of pithy sentences from Eknath Easwaran describing the Yoga Sutras. He writes (Gita Vol. II, p. 22):

The heart of this program is meditation, which Patanjali, a great spiritual teacher in ancient India, divides conveniently into three stages, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Patanjali's exposition is so precise and so free of dogma that I don't think it can ever be improved on in these qualities. But it is written in a kind of lecture note style, in the expectation that other teachers will elaborate on these notes in their own way on the basis of their experience.

Perfect. The sutras are more dense than koans even, often being simply a list of terms organized to remind the "lecturer" what to cover and when. Some of Easwaran's Gita commentary is not to my taste, but he gets off some great stuff here and there. This

comes from his commentary on VII, 1, which is a really commendable one.

Back to the present--I'm sure you can handle it. Feel free to forward your complaints to me, because I like to hear about them. Sometimes I can ameliorate them, or simply agree with them, and I may address the ideas in future notes. Ta, Scott

Thank you so much Scott for your welcome reply. You're right of course. I would like to read something about Patanjali's life sometime. How he fits into it all. More anon.
in deepest gratitude. Wendy.

Nobody knows anything about those guys, Vyasa, Patanjali, Buddha. It's all fictional. Vyasa means writer, in other words, Anonymous. Patanjali may or may not exist. What you read about him will be some proselytizer's tale. Send your gratitude to the ancient wise rishis as a whole. They all contributed at the source to the great river that has come down to us here in the lowlands.
Peace, Scott

Hello Scott

I was deeply shocked this morning to read that Patanjali did not exist. It felt like a hit in my stomach. Like a sudden bereavement. And then to discover that Buddha did not exist either was almost too much. I was totally stunned. Like finding out about Father Christmas.

Now I am pondering about all my dear friends, like Ganesa and Krishna and Siva. They probably didn't exist either. Yet in a curious way we have brought them to life, through loving them and their teachings. We clothe them in our thoughts about

them and our understandings. So now I am sure that they all do exist somewhere out in the ethers and in our hearts too.

This makes me feel bad about my fedupness with Patanjali. I am sorry I was cross with him. I see him now as a fine figure, filled with wisdom and light who is kind enough to give us his guidance. So he definitely exists for me and I am grateful that you helped me to discover my regard for him and accept his teachings.

'The heart of this programme is meditation.... I really do need to dive deeper here. Definitely lower the bucket and not rush to bring it up.

I liked the pithy sentences from EE. Really helpful to have a new view as it were. I suppose we are in the first stage of dharana.

Thank you for being so helpful.

all for now. Wendy.

Sorry about the pain caused by helping pull out that rotten tooth or poisoned arrow or whatever. But you'll feel better in the morning!

And you're right—what we make of these imaginary figures definitely exists, so we can use it to inspire and energize us, and as a means of communicating with others.

Aum, Scott

PS Entering a really good section of the YS after today

Part III

Passing on Stella's response, memories of days gone by in Kerala. If only such sanity would prevail in our time! RST

Scott,

Beautiful writings!

"A good class is a kind.....
First someone mentions a problem
or observation or complaint. Then we talk about
it, converting it to a sensible mental picture.
Next we sit quiet and allow the externalizing
trend to dissipate, allow for an inner stillness."

When I read this, I feel it is like American Indians and old Village
heads and members in India did for years.

I remember when I was small, many days at night people came and
talked to my father and discuss these things and came up with
solutions or just listening to them.

S.

Part IV

And since we don't meet for two weeks, here's an apropos reprise
of Nitya's Yoga Letter Seven, from about a year back, regarding
the question of whether we can allow life to unfold or if we need to
wrestle it into shape. Remember, this is a meditation, and there are
times when the opposite is appropriate:

This is a meditation in which the meditator does not meddle
with the seemingly ludicrous game that is going on as a surface
play of the mind. In this peaceful watching, inferential thinking
and all argumentative reasoning can be laid to rest for a while.
There is no need to worry about how you can sink into the depth
of your being without making positive attempts to attain your

release. Just as individual units of the projective universe have their constituents (dharma), which necessarily unfold their characteristic functions, the universal substratum also has its own intrinsic nature. It is not projective. Its function is analogically equivalent to the reemergence of the individual existence, which loses its identity in universal existence.

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For Nancy Y's Patanjali class 36 (I finally realized I should include her exercises):

May 14, 2011

Exercises:

Expand and deepen your contemplation of the omniscience of the supreme and irrefutable law that operates from within as the functional rhythm of everything and everyone.

Expand and deepen your awareness of and reverence and gratitude for the ever-burning light of wisdom that is enshrined in the heart of all.

Share your imperiences and experiences.

Isvara is Patanjali's brahman, the Absolute. Here we learn that its signifier is aum. And what is aum? A symbol of the Absolute coming into manifestation. So when we meditate on aum, we meditate on the Absolute. It's kinda handy! We don't have to look anywhere recondite or strange to find the Absolute, it's right here in the very hum of our lives.

I have written exhaustively about these sutras in the class notes, so I'm going to be somewhat brief today. I have the Spring 2011 issue of Gurukulam magazine to proofread, and it will be

really nice to get it out in the season it is supposed to appear in. I wish everyone well, especially Nancy, who is about to take a majorly wonderful trip.

One thing I didn't talk about much before is something Nitya says that I hope and believe is true: that whatever we do adds to the sum total of life in a permanent way, that death does not totally eradicate the gains we have made, even if there is no tangible record of our passing. Nitya writes:

Each embodiment enriches [life] with the registry of various experiences. The cumulative effect of undergoing such experiences becomes embedded in the genetic stream, the selective mold through which evolution sustains the biologic principle of Earth, which thus has in it a record of ceaseless learning.

Oddly, I often think of this in relation to my two wonderful dogs. They are great souls as far as dogs go—which is quite far—but early on I had them neutered so there are no progeny. Dogs, like most animals, can't talk and pass on their wisdom, and it's mostly intuitive and instinctual anyway, so even if they had babies there would be only so much they could communicate to the next generation. It leads me to ponder the miracle of instinct, where animals know so much with no overt training at all. There definitely has to be some inner teaching mechanism or guru, which we associate with aum, but most creatures merely experience without explanation. Actually, the dogs go berserk when we chant aum, so maybe they do recognize it....

Even though we humans have the capacity to pass along ideas to those who come after, what is actually shared seems vastly more than what is consciously being transmitted. It's astounding, really. It's more like there is a great eternal being evolving, and each of us embodied souls are participating in it in our

infinitesimal way, imagining we are doing the evolving but really just going along for the ride.

Listening to one of the late Mozart piano concertos yesterday (a superb meditation, by the way) I was struck at how seamlessly his late compositions morphed into Beethoven's early compositions. To call these guys geniuses actually underrates them significantly: they are cosmic souls who could not *possibly* have created their music out of thin air! Because of the continuity of the evolution of their music, it looks to me like there is a stream of musical divinity (if you'll forgive the term), broadcast from some inner space, and the musical geniuses of any era are the ones chosen at that time to translate the inner flow into audible notes for the benefit of all humanity (and my dogs too, for that matter, who love to listen to them, as do the birds nearby). We humans seem to be the last outward stage of manifestation of a continuous fountain of expression bursting from the heart of the cosmos, and not just in music, in everything.

It would be embarrassing if we took credit for what we do at the behest of the Absolute, but we do, we do! Better to incline before the fountain in supreme gratitude, and be humbled by being permitted to participate in the process at all. It is all too good to be true!

Thinking about these things yesterday and today gave me the kind of tingly meditation Nancy has recommended for this lesson, which is more evidence that the flow draws us in, we don't make it happen. I feel in my bones how everything I am somehow draws its sustenance from a cosmic ground that is the real reality, while I am merely the temporary embodiment of a small sliver of that immensity. Small or not, realizing it is so intense and uplifting, it fills me with bliss. So even before I sat down to study the lesson today I had already experienced its impact without any conscious intention.

That's what propels me through my days: I intuitively sense that there is a vast reality (Isvara) that I am vaguely depended from, and even though I am almost entirely ignorant of it, I do have a goodly measure of faith that I'm not making this up, that there really is an Absolute, without which I would be a puff of dust blown away in the lightest wind. The Absolute, Isvara, manifests through all of us, and we add our drop to the cosmic bucket just by being alive. To that I say aum.