

2022 Patanjali Class 44

Sutra I:30 – Physical pain or distress, mental depression, doubt, exaggeration, laziness, hankering after objects, insanity, having no firm ground for spiritual orientation, instability—these obstacles cause the distraction of the mind.

Sutra I:31 – Pain, despair, shakiness, and hard breathing are the companions of distraction.

Sutra I:32 – For removing these obstacles: repetitive practice of one truth or principle.

These sutras epitomize the “lecture note” style of Patanjali, where each term is merely mentioned, and it’s left up to the teacher to explain them. The terms are signs pointing to vast topics for us to flesh out, preferably under the tutelage of a guru, and then we extend their resolution (in the case of obstacles) into an ongoing practice. Nitya has astutely epitomized each term for us, yet it’s up to each one to extricate ourselves and leave the obstacles behind.

Nitya was always blessed with young people in his classes, and many of his comments are expressly aimed at that more volatile demographic. I suggested that as we in the class are an older cohort, some of these obstacles seem less dire now, despite being familiar to all of us. Then too, there might be other types of obstacles that are important and not listed, and we are invited to discuss those.

Linda thought aging itself would qualify as an obstacle. It’s true that especially the first couple listed—*vyadhi*, physical pain or distress, disease; and *styana*, mental depression—especially afflict elders, with the others less so, but I believe we shouldn’t consider aging per se as an obstacle. Advanced age is also a privilege and a heightened opportunity to leave at least some obstacles out of our reckoning. As an example, Charles readily admitted his putative insanity isn’t as bad nowadays, because he ran through it and got

tired of it. More than a few heads nodded in agreement: there are some old bugaboos we just can't get excited about anymore, and the relief is palpable.

Andy was drawn to the last part of sutra 32, which advocates repetitive practice. Nitya's unorthodox example is a smoker struggling to quit: "Not to smoke becomes a challenge and his resolve not to yield builds up will power. His mind returns to that resolve again and again and his decision gains the status of a meditation." Andy thought it was wonderful to ponder what that might mean.

Bill resonated with how, when the smoker gets serious about the challenge of quitting, it is an opportunity to turn it into a meditation where the repetitive practice encourages you to look at all the obstacles you didn't realize were involved. As we've gotten older, we may have noticed them but we're still influenced by them. As Bill put it, "In meditation I'll see an obstacle that I haven't really looked at before, and I learned I had to come back into myself with receptive practice. The more you practice the more you realistically look at those things in yourself."

For Patanjali, the repetitive practice is called yoga, a way of achieving union. Having indicated a few obstacles, he will next teach us how to remove them from our path.

Andy identifies his repetitive practice as connecting with Aum. He keeps going back to the idea of it, not in the sense of sitting there reciting the word but by marinating in a majestic vision of the full scope of awareness, of all four limbs of consciousness. The way the Mandukya Upanishad presents aum, which is the basis of the Gurukula's approach, has been beautiful to him ever since he first encountered it in his younger days. All the states together provide an overall map of who we are, and pondering that is his repetitive practice. His practice is not mechanical, it more like a teabag getting steeped.

Andy's expression of his practice is through visual art. He's at home most of the time, working on illustrations for each of the hundred verses of Atmo (Narayana Guru's Atmopadesa Satakam). He has around 70 of them up on a wall above his desk, so they are always in front of him. He's come to realize they are variations on the theme of aum. It's been filling his life for about twenty years, becoming a broad self-portrait.

Susan told us of her fear of flying, and shared her tale of woe jetting home from San Francisco earlier in the day. In her own words:

I forgot my purse when I went to the airport. Had to have Uber bring it out, and this interrupted my daughter at her work. I felt very humiliated to have left the purse behind and mad at myself for disturbing my daughter, because she was in the middle of an important presentation. Then several things happened that reminded me to have faith that it would turn out okay. I don't mean that I felt that all would be rosy, but rather that I could let go of this shame and anger and the closing-in feelings that go along with them. First there was a mother in the security line who helped me get bins for my backpack and shoes, even though she was dealing with a toddler and lots of her own family's luggage. Then there was the call with Scott in which he told me a story about his own experience with leaving important documents behind (way stupider and more fraught than Susan's! -ed.). Then I spoke to my ex-husband Rick about how bad I felt for inconveniencing our daughter. He reminded me of all that Sarah put us through when she was young (being a very intense and emotional child — and of course, wonderful!), and how much I did for her, and that helped too. All these things happened over the course of 30 minutes, and it was an instant giver of perspective, which I needed. They were unexpected and reminded me that I am connected with

everyone and all, and to have faith in this. Keep moving, it's just a bit of a stumble. I felt so much better, and the turbulent flight was much less miserable than it might have been. ☺

Thinking more about Andy's example from Atmo, I wonder if a flying plane is a good analogy. The plane is flying like a bird in the sky — soaring. It is magical and wonderful. The air currents are keeping the plane aloft, but they can also toss the plane around a lot and make it feel (from the inside) unsafe. But it is the truth, the reality of the air currents that one has to keep considering when the going gets tough. When a flight is turbulent now, I often think about how the turbulence is just evidence that the plane is being held aloft. The very thing that is scaring me is actually the thing that should be reassuring me.

Moni added that Susan trusted the Uber driver to deliver her purse, and he probably felt good about her trusting him, too.

Jan has a somewhat new repetitive practice. Paraphrasing her words: "I was obsessing about conflicts in my past, and it occurred to me that everybody has their own view of things, and I don't have to get them to agree with me for it to be okay. It helped release my obsession, and pointed me toward greater unity, how not to be so entrenched in your own view of things. There are times when I get hooked onto something, and want people to see it my way, but I don't need to now. I realize that many times people don't make the effort to understand each other, and I don't have to force it."

This is so true. Nitya often talked about how we are all coming from unique points of view, and yet we feel like we understand each other, and much communication actually succeeds. It's a miracle, actually. I spoke for Deb, who wasn't ready to return to class after her knee operation: something that continually amazes her is the different interpretations people have for the meaning of her poetry, when it's performed or read out. It's

true her intentions are not made plain, but that's a strength in poetics. There are times when what someone has told her they really enjoyed sounds utterly outlandish and would never occur to Deb in a million years, but it doesn't make the person wrong. In a way it adds extra layers of meaning to the original.

Andy said accepting this was an admirable attitude, about the respect the artist has for their audience. The difference between art and propaganda—both are passing on information, in a sense—is that an artist can give that freedom to their audience, while a propagandist attempts to force a preplanned response.

I noted that great music has this quality too, and the joy beloved compositions give to later generations contributes to the richness of the experience. Why would composers even bother to have expectations about the reception accorded in the far future? How could you know what it will be? Yet their music continues to touch hearts and inspire consciousness expansion as ripple effects of a point source.

Anita made a plea for suggestions of how to raise her spirits, as she's had plenty of those first-listed obstacles: physical pain and mental distress, plus the news and general blather brings in doubts. I've put a couple of suggestions in the Supplement, but we talked about it too. Clearly, what and how we think has a tremendous influence on our wellbeing, and we are susceptible to the claims of others, no matter their veracity. Patanjali and Nitya are offering us a streamlined ideology on how to handle adverse input, and it is good for the soul.

I offered a couple of counter-suggestions to Anita's thoughts, because that's what we need to do in yoga: counteract polarities with opposing or contrary notions, so as to bring us to a more neutral balance. For instance, because she had been made to feel meaningless and insignificant by an outdated science lecture, I talked about how vast and rich are our conceptions: we can imagine this entire universe, from the distant past to billions of

years in the future, and all of that is packed into the little nutcase of our skull. It's so amazing we are full of all of that stuff. The very fact that the universe created us is a spectacular achievement.

For good ideas to transform our inner pains, we have to keep them in mind, and bring them back when they slip away due to pains and disappointments. And we need to help each other get through hard times.

The first paragraph under sutra 31 struck Andy as germane to the aspect of reducing fluctuations:

Kham is space. If we live in a space full of sunlight, flowers, and beautiful things that make us happy (*su*), then we say we are living in a good space (*sukham*). But if our living space is cluttered with darkness, obstruction, misery (*duh*), then it is a negative space (*duhkham*). The experience of time comes from motion happening in your living space.... In the living space of most people, the fluctuations of time bring happiness and unhappiness alternatively. Only when these alternations cease can you say you have transcended time and space. (111)

Andy loves how we former hippies would ask each other, what space are you in? Your *kham* is your mental space. These sutras are a great riff on time and space, with a lot of subtlety about space as a psychological place, and how your space is evolving through time. Despite being so moved by these ideas for his whole life, Andy admitted that even in old age he hasn't transcended all the blockages and flaws Patanjali cited.

Yes, in the hippie days we called each other "Space Cadets," and one of the best musical pieces to come out of our improv group The Boys from Planet Earth was titled Space is the Place. It's at least a triple entendre: outer space, inner space, and spaced out. Space is all about place.

We do what we can to make our living space enjoyable and uplifting. Our best friends help. When we're down, we should reach out to them.

Jan thought spending time with poetry can help.

Andy always comes back to Atmo verse 18, where all your thoughts have at their center an awareness that never falls asleep, and unless we had that awareness, we wouldn't even be able to formulate our problems. Narayana Guru says you can tell this truth to anyone, no matter the pit they are in:

The "I" is not dark; if it were dark we would be in a state of blindness,
unable to know even "I, I";
as we do know, the "I" is not darkness;
thus, for making this known, this should be told to anyone.

Recalling this does not deliver us from the pain, but it does deliver us from identification with it, absolutely.

Linda has also found her practice in art, and related how aspects of her inner being have come out without any premeditation on her part, to astound her. The outer world realigns to promote her progress, as well.

Charles too has an art story, and lately he dreams in pictures, and then realizes them in a sketch or drawing. Like, Andy, they are related to aum, encoding three states of consciousness and a fourth which is not a state. To Charles, triads are very important—he is drawn to paradox and triads, plus the law of non-contradiction. Triads are how you escape from duality. Charles shared a new picture you can view in the Supplement, explaining also its links with the Gayatri Mantra.

In order to finish with a most important essence of where we're headed, we used a recent response in one of my Gita classes. Nita is around 80, and busy discovering yoga and unitive thinking

for the first time. A career English teacher, a colleague once told her she should read the Gita, because T.S. Eliot admired it so. Now, some forty years later, she has been in the class for over a year, and is proving how old age can be a transformative stage of life, despite the obstacles. This paragraph came straight out of her reflections, and was not much goaded by my commentary. She felt honored that we were going to use it for our closing meditation:

Evidently, the Gita has taken me into a new endeavor: I am finding a new way to be. In good times and in other times. What is my *habitual* way of dealing with direct conflict? I close down, go silent, hold back tears, demonize my opponent (behind his/her back, of course). And then, I cocoon, and talk to myself about that “bad person”—*and* about what I *said* or *did* to bring this all upon myself. And then I’m ashamed, embarrassed, spend sleepless nights making myself, too, into a “bad person.” How much better *it will be* to respond to conflict in a non-combative way! For starters, I will stand still and listen. I believe I am finding my way into Unitive Thinking. I think so.

Part II

The old Notes below are from what may have been our zenith in the Portland Gurukula class. Reading these was a thrilling experience for me.

6/25/11 Nancy Y’s class:

Early in our relationship, Nitya characterized the prime obstacles of my wife and me. For Deb it was “chronic hesitation,” and for me it was “chronic delayed reaction.” Both sound trivial compared to the broad categories listed in these sutras, but they are

very important in their own way. We have tried to overcome them mainly by just keeping them in mind, and it has helped a lot, though it hasn't completely cured us.

Since Deb is not in the group, I'll just briefly say how chronic hesitation—also known as chronic inhibition—applies to all of us. When someone says something that hurts our feelings or strikes us as wrong, we have been taught to bite our tongue, button our lips and turn the other cheek. That works fine in social situations, but when the offender is your close friend or (dare we say) spouse, resentment builds up like an overheated steam boiler. Multiple offenses add to the pressure. It's like there is a subterranean volcano growing inside, and the more we strive to suppress it, the more titanic the explosion when the pressure finally overcomes the resistance. The outcome of chronic hesitation is a life punctuated by heartrending blowups, separated by uneasy, nominal stretches of peaceful coexistence. The cure, obviously but stressfully, is to talk about our resentments before they become a full-blown disaster. We have to brave our own blockages in order to speak truth to the power of socially sanctioned behavior, risking a minor skirmish to ward off full-scale war. Therapists routinely suggest this, but putting it into practice is not so easy. It takes time and a long-term commitment.

My personal obstacle, chronic delayed reaction, happens when the impact of an offensive act or word ignites a chain reaction in me, due to previous emotional tenderness. A day or two later, when the wound heals enough, an appropriate response comes to mind, but it is too late to do anybody any good, except possibly as a preparation for next time.

Early in our relationship, as related in *Love and Blessings*, Nitya began to dig into this syndrome of mine. He knew I was still smarting from losing Debbie, who I considered my life's companion, and had recently dumped me "for good." Our rapprochement was still several years in the future, but the tensions

resided deeper than even that. It would take many years to dig down to them:

It has become typical of many sensitive and perceptive young people in the U.S. to have an extremely delicate and refined mind and emotional system with one or two vital strings snapped or unduly tightened. Mostly it comes from loneliness or unfulfilled love. Usually when young people enter into the arena of love, at least in the West, they make it a kind of temporally based affair and become involved in ambivalent reactions and reciprocity rather than resigning themselves into an eternal flow with unlimited liability. The result of this is that there comes a tragic end of love, which makes the person more circumscribed and closed than otherwise. All this is by way of passing reference and need not necessarily be true of Scott. But there is an area of tension and rigidity in his otherwise lucid flow of inner life. (L&B 330)

All of us are familiar with the “I wish I’d thought of that snappy comeback” flash of delayed reaction, when we think of what we should have said the day before, and we envy the quick-witted ones who always have a ready reply. But they may only be covering up, using a funny or stinging rejoinder as a substitute for repairing their psyche. My delayed reaction emerges from a central zone of samskaras, where a thoughtful response would be much more curative than a clever tongue.

The best approach is to heal the wounds first rather than defending myself, understanding that people are not trying to be as mean as they appear to be. Moreover, their cruelty is primarily their problem, not mine. Of course, the closer our friends and relatives are to us, the more painful our interactions can be. It has been a long, slow journey to knit my heart to where I can offer helpful advice instead of standing mute. Over many years the time

frame of processing delayed reaction has narrowed significantly, but a residue still remains.

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9/14/9 – original Portland Gurukula class notes:

Sutra I:30

Physical pain or distress, mental depression, doubt, exaggeration, laziness, hankering after objects, insanity, having no firm ground for spiritual orientation, instability—these obstacles cause the distraction of the mind.

We continue within the brief section addressing obstacles to samadhi, one that offers a preview of the intensity of the Yoga Sutras, which do not hesitate to bring white heat to bear on our illusions. In his brief but excellent commentary, Nitya presents Patanjali's list of obstacles in a way that shows how they are all interrelated. Moreover, while we all share these blockages in a general way, each person will have a unique complex of the issues that result in our inability to concentrate and instead become diverted into sidetracks.

We should probably restate for the record that yoga is primarily intended as psychotherapy for the sane, and not necessarily as a remedy for any of the problems on the list. It seems that some people imagine it to be a cure-all, but Patanjali's point is that these problems need to be corrected before the expertise of yoga can be properly accessed. There is no intent here to minimize the seriousness of any of these categories, any of which can and do take their sufferers out of contention for yogic concentration. Chronic pain, for instance, monopolizes the attention very effectively, and must be ameliorated before the mind can stabilize. Pain is in fact an indication that something needs

attention, so ignoring the problem and meditating or chanting aum is exactly the wrong thing to do. We can go through the whole list and see how awful each can be, but it didn't seem helpful to do in class. The point is that any or all of these can ruin your life, and it is well to avoid them if possible.

Anne especially reminded us that clinical depression is far more serious than the mere depression experienced by most humans, and which we frequently discuss in class. She will bring the latest definition to share next week. That being said, the knowledge we share together, based on the insights of very intelligent and careful observers of the psyche, namely the Indian rishis, can be very efficacious at supporting a typically alert person to excel in mental health and the joy of living. We offer it in the spirit of mutual benefit for those who wish to avail themselves of it, and have no intentions of foisting it on those who don't.

That being said, in the West in particular, the spirit of helpless victimization is fostered by various institutions that have much to gain from it. We learn to humbly accept our fate, which makes us dependable servants. Too, modern Christianity epitomizes the miraculous intervention theme, insisting that we are helpless without divine aid and so we must not look within ourselves for solutions. The whole culture is shot through with crippling philosophies like these. While it may console us in our unhappiness to suppose that we aren't responsible, these beliefs can be lumped under the category of "having no firm ground for spiritual orientation." Instead we should become self-reliant to the maximum extent, and shrug off diversionary thoughts of victimhood that undermine our self-respect. Our position is seldom incurable.

The only way to find out if a problem is intractable is to try to fix it. Some are, some aren't, but how do you know? It's a shame to give up before some significant effort has been made, but we live in a culture that encourages surrender immediately after the

first shot is fired, or sometimes before. Needless to say, the Yoga Sutra philosophy is rather more appreciative of what humans can accomplish, given a healthy measure of dedication. In any case, yoga is best for those whose problems are soluble. Whether they are or not, you have to overcome your problems before you can attend to subtleties, which should be commensurate with your abilities and interests. If you are missing some fingers, you can be a fine singer or drummer, but don't bother with the piano.

Susan had just been to a soccer game in which her son had starred. She watched all the players closely and noticed how when the mediocre ones were challenged by a defender they kicked the ball away but then quit. It was as if they knew in advance they couldn't be successful. The good players, though, kicked and then followed the action, going around the defender or away from them for another pass. They were always pressing toward the goal with full intent. Absent was the defeatist mentality of the poorer players, who were just trying to push the action away from themselves as quickly as they could. Nor did they seem to even realize that they were subtly giving up, as if resigned to their fate. The class adopted this as a handy visual image for what Patanjali is encouraging: when an obstacle appears, don't let it stop you in your tracks but find a way to keep making progress.

Moni felt that she experienced all of these obstacles after the death of her mother, and she told us frankly of her suffering for many days after coming back from the funeral. She was too depressed to return to work, and stayed home, sliding from one distracted state of mind to another. Then one day she realized she had to go to work or she would never get out of her depression. It took a major effort, but once she was back on the job she found her spirits lifting, and she gradually emerged from the state of despair that was gripping her.

Having something to do is underrated as a curative aid. Focusing on a project and getting the body moving can be a

monumental act of will for anyone immobilized by their obstacles, but utilizing concentrated will power can gradually bring the system back online, like getting a heavily loaded freight train rolling. At first there is a lot of steam and puffing without any movement, but soon there is a tiny increment accompanied by great sound and fury. Slowly, slowly, static friction is replaced by rolling friction, and the beast picks up speed. But you have to keep up the pressure.

Getting underway is the hardest part by far. Very often a stuck person will be self-medicating with drugs or alcohol, which sap any will to escape from the prison of obstacles. As you longingly gaze out through the bars, you may take some resolve to break free, but you have to wait until the drugs wear off to start. As the moment approaches, the pain mounts, a mental struggle ensues, and before you know it you have taken another dose. Temporary relief, but no escape.

A large chunk of the class was spent discussing Jill Bolte Taylor's very interesting book, *My Stroke of Insight*. She had her left brain taken offline by a severe stroke, which launched her into her right brain consciousness, which she compared to nirvana. Afterwards she spent eight years regaining her left brain skills so that she could communicate the experience to others. Being a brain scientist, she has an excellent grasp of what happened during the entire experience.

What neurological studies and her stroke have shown us is that we have within us the blissful state of oneness with the Absolute as part of our makeup. Building on top of that, the sequential intellect, with its language and number sense and general dualism, being brought into dominance, covers up our "spiritual" side to the point we forget it even exists. Thus, to reconnect with our spirit, all we have to do is relinquish the dominance of our left brain. Once we have re-membered our core,

we can integrate it with our surface mind in a happy confection, liberating our abilities and infusing our life with joy.

Deb noted that the ancient analogy of the two birds sitting on a branch, one witnessing while the other eats the five (sensory) fruits, is a pictographic image of the right and left brain dichotomy. That's exactly how our dual brain works, according to current understanding.

It helps to realize we're not accessing some far off, weird state, but something that really is right inside of us. Yet if we cling to the distractions of left brain dominance, we can go through a whole lifetime and never realize the treasure we carry within. Or, as in some forms of mental illness, the left and right brains are simply out of synch and not communicating properly, so our psyche is dis-integrated. We need both aspects to be healthy and well-adjusted as well as integrated, to be at our best.

Paralleling Taylor's insights is a fine book titled *The Religious Case Against Belief*, by James Carse, also highly recommended reading. Carse's thesis is that belief and religion are two separate things, like left and right brain functions. Often we mistake belief for religion, with very bad outcomes. Even in the Gurukula it is hard to shake the confusion between the two, and whenever I bring it up it engenders strong opposition. In his introduction Carse writes:

Offering a religious case against belief obviously implies that religion is not strictly a matter of belief. It may come as a surprise that a thoughtful survey of the history of religion provides scant evidence for an extended overlap of the two. Quite simply, being a believer does not in itself make one religious; being religious does not require one to be a believer. This improbable distinction has been hidden by the tenacious notion that religion is chiefly a collection of beliefs. (2)

Because of this confusion, we waste a lot of time trying to pin down exactly what we should believe, as if this was the key to heaven. Whole lifetimes are dedicated to splitting the hairs in just the right way. Yet one generation's "fighting words" are the next generation's disinterested shrug.

Carse, an expert on the history of religion, demonstrates his thesis with armloads of examples of the disasters brought about by belief systems. Beliefs require the setting up of non-believers as opponents and, as psychologists have demonstrated, the urge to divide and fight precedes any actual distinction between the antagonists. Belief turns out to be one of the most tenacious obstacles of all, probably residing under "exaggeration" in Patanjali's list. We should remember the Gita's advice in V, 15: "The all-pervading One takes cognizance neither of the sinful nor the meritorious actions of anyone; wisdom is veiled by unwisdom; beings are deluded thereby." In our present scheme, we can reword this as "the right brain is veiled by the left brain, causing us all sorts of delusions," but also offering us new and exciting potentials if we can bring the two hemispheres together.

9/21/9

Sutra I:31

Pain, despair, shakiness, and hard breathing are the companions of distraction.

In ancient India you were supposed to cure yourself. The world was not teeming with peddlers of nostrums and quackery who have a stake in prolonging illness, the way it is today. Therefore Patanjali does not coddle us in our unease, but shows us the way out. We are passing through the portals of the preliminary material and into the serious business of effecting our own cure,

and as Nataraja Guru used to say, “A drastic disease needs a drastic cure.”

As promised, Ann brought a healthy stack of literature on depression. Almost any type of unhappy state of mind can be linked to it, with the basic determinant for clinical depression being its persistence. Environmental and biological factors are very important. The main thrust seems to be that the attitude that depressed people just bring it on themselves and then refuse to deal with it is unhelpful and even dangerous. Such attitudes are a reflection of not caring, and the depressed person desperately needs to feel that someone cares about their situation. Not surprisingly, the bottom line with depression, as with many problems, is a lack of love.

Once we “grow up” we don’t remember what love is. We don’t know how to recognize it within ourselves; we don’t know how to give it; we don’t know how to welcome it when offered; it isn’t portrayed in the movies. When people speak of it they are usually talking of something far removed from it. No wonder we can easily become depressed and wonder despondently what the point of even being alive is. What’s worse, we are surrounded by people in more or less the same condition as we are, struggling with their own issues, and only able to offer love sporadically if at all. Disappointed and threatened, we build defenses to guard against incursions, and then are desolated when no one comes over the wall.

We, all of us, have had the love squeezed out of our world and even out of our world view. No wonder everyone is unhappy! And once everyone is closed off from each other, living in monk’s cells of quiet desperation, all we can offer or receive is palliative medicine to ease the pain.

This is a fair estimate of what the Buddha meant by universal suffering. It’s what Vedantins speak of as ignorance. I can guess it’s what the Semitic religions mean by sin, with its pejorative

overtones. Those pejorative overtones are a particularly nasty addition to the misery already prevailing, but they're kind of catching, like swine flu. One measure of disdain feeds on the next, with rapid escalation, until the whole point of getting back to a state of Edenic love is forgotten.

Patanjali should not be looked upon as an uncaring tough guy who thinks you are screwed up. Nor is he a boot camp sergeant pushing you to the limit. He is (we can imagine) a gentle soul who is reaching out in the best way he can devise to bring us all into a state of happiness, or love if you will. If he didn't care he wouldn't have bothered to leave us his lecture notes. He doesn't think that there are a few sick people in the world set off from a bunch of uncaring well people. We are all in the same boat. We are all traumatized and seriously—often clinically—confused. We need to help each other, to the best of our ability, and it's a crying shame that instead we have an abundance of the most seriously disturbed and misanthropic people being promoted in the media, thrown in everyone's face. They only make matters worse, by gleefully taking all the fun out of life. But that sells a lot of pills.

It's paradoxical to try to reach out to depressed friends, because almost anything might reinforce their unhappiness if offered at the wrong moment. It's possible for them to view a helper and even a lover from a cynical standpoint, that they're just doing it for their own lousy reasons and not because they really care. Any attempt to lift someone out of depression can engender resistance. But giving up in frustration proves that you really didn't care to begin with. So you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. Is there anything that will work under these constraints?

Our motivation in the Gurukula, at its best, is the same as Patanjali's. We try to walk a razor's edge of sympathetic caring and encouragement in self-help. Like most people, we aren't very good at it, but I've always figured that doing our best, flawed as it might be, is at least better than nothing. The Gurukula should also

symbolize the possibility that we can eventually emerge from our depressed state, that recovery is possible. That recovery is difficult is evidenced by the mediocre abilities of the Gurukula caretakers themselves. But that is also evidence of our humanity. We don't peddle miracle cures, unlike certain other religions that shall remain nameless. We offer hard work by the seeker of love combined with (hopefully) intelligent feedback by their associates. We try to foster a loving and supportive community atmosphere as a background to everyone's diligent efforts.

The goal of realization is not some airy-fairy, far-off heavenly state, but happiness here and now. Sometimes the terminology seems a little too poetic. In Nitya's present commentary he speaks of transcending time and space, and Paul admitted he didn't know what that meant. Basically, it refers to mitigating the ups and downs of life to be on an even keel, which is what we call true happiness. When we're unhappy, every second can seem like an age, but when we're happy the hours fly by without our even noticing them. Likewise, misery makes us feel cramped, tightly constrained, but happiness gives us an expansive feeling of immense relief. So Nitya isn't speaking of some rare achievement of Himalayan yogis muttering in caves for twenty years. Transcending time and space is an achievement we all have many times, but then it slips from our grasp. We are striving to realign our psyches to stay longer in the wide open spaces and minimize our prison time.

Since in this sutra Patanjali is citing the physical aftereffects of being stuck, of being held back by obstacles, much of the class was spent discussing one particular version: panic attacks. They often come out of nowhere and make a person feel like they are having a heart attack or otherwise dying. Interestingly, most of the class was familiar with them, and it's helpful to realize that you aren't the only one having them. With a smaller than usual class, everyone felt comfortable enough to eagerly discuss their

experiences. It felt like we were slowly letting some air out of over-inflated tires.

Interestingly, we had somehow gotten on the same subject with our friend the doctor, who was staying with us last week. Synchronicity strikes again. He told us that panic attacks were quite common, especially among teenagers, and that they usually declined with age. They are often accompanied by suicidal impulses, probably by exacerbating pre-existing thoughts. To me it looks like repressed material is surfacing without warning, with such a strong impact that it's like a physical body blow. Many sufferers do in fact wind up in the hospital emergency room. The teen years are when we are making the transition from dependent children to independent adults, usually without much practical instruction. We struggle to craft an acceptable persona, but that requires us to suppress important aspects of our self. When these break free, it terrifies us, exposes us to ridicule and censorship. I would say it is a sign of deep inner integrity that we aren't able to successfully turn ourselves into robotic cardboard cutouts to please everyone else.

John felt that we older people are more familiar with life's ups and downs, and so we don't freak out as much as younger people when hit by a moment of panic. That first plunge, especially, into the depths, is a terrifying thing. It really helps to know that you will cycle back up again.

And while you can abet the process with your own intelligence, we don't usually receive much useful instruction until after the fact. Moni talked about her inner voice that helped pull her out of her depressive episodes, by urging her to take a shower and go back to work, or to get out and see people. We should be trained to have that inner advice waiting, because doing things physically can really help lift a person's spirits. One diabolical aspect of depression is that it takes away the ability to even hear any inner or outer suggestion like that, and so all you can do is

“stew in your own juices” as my mother used to call it. Or you come to believe you don’t even *deserve* to get better. There is scientific as well as lots of vernacular evidence that activity is very helpful in combating a negative state. If nothing else, increasing the blood flow will wash out stagnant toxins much more quickly.

Another thing to know is that it’s okay to reach out to your friends. People present a façade of stoicism, so it looks like they don’t want to help, yet some at least are longing to be enlisted as allies, but afraid to say anything. The “wounded animal” urge to retreat into a hidden nest when suffering is natural but very dangerous. So friends should tactfully communicate that they are available to their friends, by demonstrating that they value love and friendship over appearances. We can eschew our roles as well-behaved actors on a stage, and instead go to the post-performance party to mingle with our fellows, careless of how we look to the audience. We can consciously throw off the delusion that a frowning God is watching our every move with his hand on the lever that opens the trapdoor to hell.

Okay, that’s enough for now. We have one more class directly related to these issues, and then a gradual transition toward even more intense practices. But these ideas underlie the whole field we are exploring, and we need to have them well established before we can expect to go farther. Obstacles are like lions guarding the gates. They keep out the causal gawkers and only admit those who have a serious determination to get past them.

Part II

One additional point for clarification: Vedanta considers consciousness as primary, and our classes are based on that theory. The materialist view is that our state of mind is a byproduct of our electrochemistry. Vedantins believe that while we may be temporarily constrained by our electrical wiring, the chemicals are released by our emotions as communication devices, and so are

more of an effect than a cause, though everything evinces an admixture of both principles. Chronic chemical releases can reinforce habitual states of mind that we may not like, but these can be altered by working on our state of mind. This approach offers a sound basis for self-improvement, whereas the idea of “consciousness as epiphenomenon” requires outside intervention. Of course, anyone is welcome to whatever works for them, because these are just ideas, and not necessarily right or wrong per se. Vedanta is very much against the tide at present, though the tide is beginning to turn. The hardest part, no matter how you look at it, is to believe you can change and to decide to make it happen, even if that merely means finding the right medication.

Finally, Rumi bridges all gaps:

Come, come, whoever you are--
wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving--
what does it matter?
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come, even if you have broken your vow
a hundred times--
come, come again, come.

Feedback:

Hi Scott/Deb/CherishedExplorers,

What a wonderful set of readings and contemplations.
I so value your ideas and experiences. Gratitude.
As you know, I've recently been exploring aspects of the
body's role in optimal development, particularly relating to
“distractions”, trauma and blocks.

I notice very interesting and helpful interrelationships among the various spiritual/consciousness approaches and various body/psychological processes.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi suggests a process to consider that I find very useful and seems quite sensible when considering how to re-establish **harmony**.

When a differentiating experience occurs, whether external or internal, we basically have two paths before us:

1. Experience --> Integration --> Complexity --> Harmony
2. Experience --> No Integration --> Complicated --> Disharmony

An experience may be sufficiently impactful or overwhelming that we may not be ready to or know how to integrate this for years (trauma, holocaust, loss of child, etc., or other depending on age/skill).

However, often we may neglect to integrate more common experiences for various reasons, lack of priority/time, lack of understanding/skill. Neurologically, this lack of integration leaves a very complicated "highway" in our brains, a bunch of extra parts rattling around in our engine which disrupts our smooth harmonious ride.

By choosing to integrate our experiences, both the present and the lingering backlog, the complicated extra parts find their place in our engine and we not only lose the rattles, but our engine increases in complexity and fuel efficiency, and runs at a new harmonious hum.

Integration actually builds a more complex neural network, increasingly able to leap tall buildings with a single bound....

How do we integrate?

Just as the body knows how to heal a small scrape on our finger, the brain has an equally natural process and is integrating experiences all the time. But often our body needs our help to heal so the broken bones come together, just as our psyche needs our focus so we don't rattle around.

Each person's integration system is somewhat unique, some more developed and efficient than others, but we all can become more fluid. Transforming experiences into language is common to most integrative processes, with "language" meaning words, sound, movement, visual...talk, write, journal, dance, paint.

Plus contemplation, meditation, long walks, watching the beach sunset, ceremony, therapy, 12 Steps, The Understanding and Forgiveness Journey, supportive groups/friends, and more.

If this group was a band, I'd name it "The Integrators".

Much love, Peg

Sutra 32 Class Notes are included in class 45.