

2022 Patanjali Class 45

2/28/23

Sutra I:33 – The mind is clarified by cultivating friendliness toward happiness, compassion toward misery, gladness toward virtue, and equanimity toward vice.

Sutra I:34 – Or, by the expiration and retention of breath.

Deb joined us for a few minutes at the start—she is improving steadily, but still can't sit in a chair for very long. After the chants, partway through the reading, she tiptoed out.

Sutra 33 is one of the most profound of all Patanjali, listing four broad situations of life and how to treat them. Of course in lecture note style; the original Sanskrit makes it more obvious that happiness and misery are polar opposites, and virtue and vice another pair. Instead of treating them in opposition, Patanjali instructs simple friendliness and gladness toward the positives, and undisturbed compassion and equanimity toward the negatives. Where the non-yogi might display pity for misery and unfriendliness and disdain for cruelty or vice, a more balanced mental state is called for.

In a dualistic system, we are glad about virtue and unhappy about vice but here the alternative is to remain equal-minded, not polarizing into pro and con. Patanjali subtly inserts equanimity where we would normally expect disapproval in forms like anger or hostility, because he is teaching Yoga. Mild positives like friendliness, compassion and gladness are beneficial and therefore permitted; it's the strong negatives that demand our immediate correction. Fans of Narayana Guru can never forget the first line of Atmo 46: "By fighting it is impossible to win." In the ultimate analysis, we are fighting ourself, so it is essential to continually bring yourself back to a state of yogic equipoise over events that cause disturbance.

According to Nitya “it is better to resort to the particular discipline that is most appropriate for each situation.” Makes sense. He writes at length about the first pair, friendliness toward happiness, leaving it open for us to do the same with the other three. The old Notes, in Part II, feature a number of excellent examples of all four. It’s a topic that could form the basis of an entire semester of classes.

Continuously practicing friendliness, compassion, gladness and equanimity is not so easy, so Nitya, with a twinkle in his eye, presumes Patanjali followed them with a simpler possibility:

The negative conditioning already built in one’s system through previous experiences gets in the way of the actualization of the ideals of friendship and compassion. Knowing this limitation of the human mind, Patanjali offers an alternative that can be definitely carried out because it is in an area over which the aspirant has control: the outgoing and incoming breath. (116)

We reserved discussing breath and prana for its place later, in the Sadhana Pada, (the first is the Samadhi Pada, remember?) but agreed it’s okay to retain breathing as a continuous ongoing practice in the meantime.

Bill recalled that Nitya would take issue with anyone who had a fixation on any extreme practice, as they’re all just different ways of looking for the truth. Nancy preferred to replace looking for the truth as *existing in the truth*, as these are all ways to be in rhythm with your environment, to sustain a rhythm in your existence. That’s an important point: if we’re looking for something, it implies we don’t have it, yet with Patanjali, truth or Isvara is the core of our existence, and we are recognizing it as central. It is never lost. Both are right, of course.

Andy was at a Buddhist temple once, and was very surprised that the talk being given, referencing original teachings of the Buddha, refers to the same four things mentioned here, and he realized how important they are for Indian teaching generally.

Bill has been working with those same principles as the Brahmavihara, the four immeasurables of Buddhism—loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity—meditating on them each day and using them as steppingstones to how he interacts with the world. He finds it brings him a lot of perspective and comfort. Surprisingly, the hardest one for him was joy, remembering and recognizing and sharing joy with people. Then he realized, if you get blasé about life, you can't truly enjoy your friendships.

Paul wondered whether joy was achieved or merely recognized? Bill responded that Nitya defines it as the recognition of the Self, and added that it's your responsibility to share that joy with other people.

Paul has been puzzled by this, because we can all learn to project things like compassion, as in a play—we can play the part because we have seen it acted it out by others. A true display of joy or love seems to Paul to include understanding the equanimity of self-identity, and it leads to a transparency of vision.

Moni thought we are always presented with two situations, happiness and sorrow. A person who is practicing yoga should find a middle ground and try to keep the mind there. We have limitless opportunities to be happy, or we can be sad also. We can get into stressful situations in our life where our balance is changing, and we should try to bring it to a middle place, the yoga state of mind. Only when that state is recognized can we see or hear what is beautiful around us, or even someone else's sorrow. The other person can be in situation of high stress or anger, revenge, and we want to express friendship or honesty to help. That person might not accept it. He hasn't come to that middle place, hasn't had that

experience before. We should have compassion for him, and if we can observe these things, we can always be in a happy place.

I agreed. It's very helpful to recognize how we react non-yogically to these stimulations, and then we can most intelligently bring the teaching to bear. We need to know how we reflexively react to people. Theoretically we believe in all these nice terms, but what do they actually mean? For instance, are we always glad about virtuous people, or are we suspicious that their virtue is not genuine, or envious that they have something we don't? What types of upset does vice cause in us—we need to know before we can bring about equal-mindedness.

After a little reflection, Anita shared a fine example from the night before. She is planning to move to Arizona to be near her daughter and son in law, and they called to say they had found a house to buy at the same time as Anita's very challenging move. To make matters worse, the house is located near the ex-husband's home, a person who still substantially bothers Anita. Several things about it worried her, and her thoughts were not pleasant, to put it politely. So her first reaction was selfish: wondering how are you going to help *me*? Then—with a nod to 15 years of yoga study—it came to her that over everything she was *happy* for her daughter, because she knew how unhappy she's been without a home, and her getting one was the primary fact. She acknowledged all her spiritual training has had an impact, and she was able to catch herself from demonizing her daughter because of her own feelings. She could express genuine compassion and happiness, and in responding to her kindness, her daughter assured her they would still help her with her move. "Mom, don't worry!" Anita got relief too. It was a win-win.

Andy's example was based on the fact there is no room for anger in Patanjali's yoga, it's not a supported emotion, yet our political life is full of anger and he's not immune to it (again, putting it most politely). He sometimes does an exercise where he

tries to understand corrupt leaders as people as fully as possible, to see into them with a speculative heart, wondering what kind of a kid had they been who aspired for this? Andy realizes that something he doesn't understand shaped them, and it does help him, admitting the possibility of having a composed frame of mind in relation to them. It softens his polarization.

I reiterated that Patanjali is replacing anger where we'd expect it in the sutra with equipoise, marking a shift to yoga from polarized rage. I too have developed some sympathy for politicians in the hate-filled environment of the modern era they are basted in all the time. It's easy to sympathize with the good-hearted souls who can magically endure the toxic atmosphere, but I can easily imagine how corrosive it is on the mean-spirited ones, too.

Andy feels we should lighten up on ourselves, as well, suggesting if you think you have vices, to take a deep calm slow look at the foundation of your unresolved bad mental habits, rather than pouncing on yourself. It's a question of how can you deal with your own mental furniture.

This is so true: we learn to get down ourself for not fitting in, consequently deciding we're not okay. We can be quite harsh about it, and it just makes matters worse. Andy thought we were better off seeking empathetic equipoise.

Susan regrets that she was not allowed to be sad or mad when she was young. Now she believes it's very important to recognize anger and sadness and process them, and Andy agreed we should be completely, sympathetically aware of our emotional states. He also appreciated Moni's take, that observational neutrality allows this kind of healthy relationship with your own negativity.

Moni experiences these kinds of stresses in her job as a case manager for people seeking state support. Different people come to her with pre-judgment, who have been unhappy all their life. They feel they are not being helped by anyone. Very seldom does she see a person who is just happy with what they have in their

situation. They point fingers at you, they say certain rude things, they are unhappy, and they yell at you and get so angry and walk around the office, shout at you as they go out. When they come back again, she sees them as if it is the first time, so as not to have judgments. She concluded, “We have to keep in that middle place, otherwise we won’t be able to do them justice.”

Jan appreciates how we can work with our reactivity: these goals we are working on, the four parts of the practice, help us to get away from reactions that keep us away from being in a peaceful place. She spent the past weekend with her daughter on a visit to the San Juan Islands, and she found herself practicing a lot of these things, especially equanimity and patience. Mira wanted to work in the afternoon *on our vacation*, so Jan would take a deep breath and try to be okay with that and not react in a polarizing way. By doing that she could instead bring in loving kindness, eventually finding common ground with her, and there were periods of joy mixed in. They even talked about yoga while walking in the forest, because her work is looking to bring that into the health field, doing research to see how it impacts certain psychological problems. She wants to deepen her understanding of yoga, but not by learning from her mom, who is busy working on her equanimity....

Anita sympathized how mother-daughter relationships are in a world of their own, especially with an adult daughter. Mothers have a nurturing core that is hard to let go of. Her daughter complains, “Mom I am 50 years old, and you don’t need to mother me!” so Anita tries to keep her mouth shut. But the urge never goes away.

Nitya often extolled the Mother as an ideal archetype, and is holding it out to all of us here:

Even if her child pulls away and becomes hysteric when she tries to give it a bath or some such help, a mother does not

become hostile to the child. Her only concern is what is good for her child. When you adopt such an attitude of active interest in sharing all your good moments of friendliness with another person, they gain a more and more sympathetic understanding. You are not only making a friend but helping them to be an adorable friend. (114)

We have to treat an adult differently than an infant, surely, but caring and attending to the real needs of the person is paramount in all cases. Sometimes the best option is for the compassionate mother to remain in the deep background.

Anita has a young friend who recently had a liver transplant. It was a tremendous ordeal, with lots of pain, and readmission to the hospital, including re-intubation. Anita tries hard to be a friend to her, as the woman has such high standards of behavior. In the early days of her problems, Anita told her, “Lisa, sometimes you are not going to feel like being nice. You can be grouchy. People are aware that you are not in a normal circumstance, that you are in pain.” On other days, she would send her a joke to cheer her up.

Moni encounters these kinds of things daily: deep sorrow, stress; it wears you down if you worry too much about them. She does spend time with her losses, but she tries to come back to a different place, to cultivate friendliness toward happiness. Otherwise she might spend all her days and nights in gloomy, dark situations.

I have found there are plenty of people who despise happiness, who are suspicious of it, who doubt its veracity. Because they don't know it, it has to be fake. And much of it is. Then there are those like Patanjali and Narayana Guru, for whom it is an indicator of higher consciousness. They are not speaking of the same thing at all. The same word is being used for diametrically opposed concepts. That means we shouldn't treat these terms as trite clichés, but dig into them to ascertain their

substance. We can be friendly toward an idea or an icon sitting on a shelf and remain as we have always been; or we can befriend our authentic nature, which is one with the cosmos, though uniquely formed, and grow exponentially. Like a shy deer, our true nature will come to us if we carefully reach out our hand in welcome.

For the last word, I had intended to read a piece from the old notes, below, covering “gladness toward virtue,” but because of the drift of the class, I selected Tony Hoagland’s poem, WHY I LIKE THE HOSPITAL. I didn’t reproduce it in full, since it’s from his most recent book Turn Up the Ocean, but the first lines of the first two verses are:

Because it is all right to be in a bad mood there,

I like the hospital for the way it grants permission for pathos

The poem ends observing a man “no longer expecting to be saved,”

But if you looked, you could see
That he was holding his own hand in sympathy,
Listening to every single word,
And he was telling himself everything.

Part II

Once again, the Old Notes offer a deeper analysis of the sutras. First, what ceasing mental modifications looks like—Narayana Guru’s impression of Ramana Maharshi, after their one meeting:

Narayana Guru: Nirvrtti Panchakam
Five Verses on Final Emancipation
(trans. Nitya Chaitanya Yati)

- 1) What is your name? Your caste? Your work? Your age?
From questions such, when one is free, he gains release.
- 2) Come! Go! Don't go! Enter! What are you seeking?
From questions such, when one is free, he gains release.
- 3) Departing when? When arrived? Whither and even who?
From questions such, when one is free, he gains release.
- 4) I or you, this or that, inside or out, or none at all,
From such cogitations, when one is free, he gains release.
- 5) To the known and the unknown equalized, without difference to one's own or to that of others, even to the name of such indifferent,
From all such considerations, who is freed, he himself becomes the one released.

* * *

Response to Nancy Y's first class:

7/17/11

It's quite wonderful how our progress in the Yoga Shastra class in Portland parallels this online study group. Right now we're going through the eight limbs for the last time, studying asana (posture). Sutra 33 also gives the essentials of asana. It's very gratifying to me that on reflection all four aspects mentioned by Patanjali here have become the base of my relationship to my surroundings. I say aum in gratitude to the great teachers who have guided me to a decent posture after all these years.

Nitya only describes the first of the four directions given in the sutra, friendliness toward happiness, leaving it for us to fill in

the others. He warns us of the corresponding weakness here, of taking happy situations for granted, and so tuning them out. I'd add that many people are actually suspicious of happiness, not trusting it. Being happy can bring out a nasty streak in people, where they want very badly to "cure" the person afflicted with it. How sad, and yet I suppose there is good reason for it in a world where happiness is linked to pleasure, and pleasure can be gotten in some strange places. Sometimes happiness is not as deep as it could be, but we should be content to let everyone decide for themselves what makes them happy. In any case, learning to be accepting about another's happiness (not to mention our own) isn't as easy as we might think. Yet only when we can identify with the happiness of others can we appreciate what a liberating feeling it is.

Compassion toward misery is easier to imagine, but harder to implement. The natural response to misery is avoidance. It's as if we subconsciously believe it's contagious. Once we become firmly grounded in our own steady state (asana) we will know that it cannot be stripped from us by circumstances. We cannot contract misery from others unless we welcome it in. It is generated by our own shortcomings. Knowing that, we can be brave enough to be compassionate to our unhappy friends, and the negativity of avoidance will be canceled.

Cultivating gladness toward virtue is also a relatively simple matter. Still, there is a very human tendency to resent and be secretly jealous of virtuous people. I'm not talking about the kind of swaggerers who wear their virtues on their sleeve as a badge of holiness, but real deep-down virtue, which is among other things unselfconscious. The cure for our veiled resentments is to be glad. Gladness is like a light shining into our dark recesses. Ordinary people do such amazing things, and think nothing of them! Admiring them should be easy.

Maintaining equanimity toward vice is a bit more complicated. Many people feel it is their duty to get very upset

about vice, and they want to put it behind bars forever. It's a way of loudly proclaiming their own innocence, which they secretly know is a deceitful mask to begin with. But shoving things out of sight doesn't fix them, though it sometimes satisfies the gullible. If we were actually normal, though, we wouldn't feel we had to protest so much. Add to that an incisive understanding of the roots of every situation, and vicious people will seem more like hapless victims than diabolical evildoers. It doesn't mean we should "kiss the hissing cobra," but knowing why it hisses helps us to appreciate it; to let it be instead of hysterically smashing it as soon as it raises its head. Then our often violent negativity will be neutralized, allowing us to reassume our solid asana.

Of the four "directions" described in sutra 33, two are neutral and two are moderately positive. We are instructed to move toward the positive and remain centered about the negative. That is the proper asana, the mental posture that allows us to progress in yoga, not to mention our daily life. Sutra 34 tells us that sitting properly in a balanced state of mind naturally evens out the breath; or better, the breath is naturally even, but our chaotic states of mind make it ragged. By assuming a harmonious posture we naturally quell the chaos.

I've just spent a week immersed in Portland's annual piano festival, which from my side means sitting still and listening, listening, listening, with full attention. The dazzling display of harmony and complexity performed with the most prodigious of human talents is easy to attend to. In fact, it is so captivating it's impossible to mentally wander off very far. The festival is a lot like those ten day meditation retreats some people take, all-absorbing and engulfing, and for me quite a bit more stimulating. The spectacularly talented performers are my gods and goddesses, hurling thunderbolts of brilliance and wafting clouds of nuances at us mesmerized mortals riveted to our seats. I'm quite sure there were many times I stopped breathing so as not to intrude the

slightest ripple into the peace emanating from those grand—truly grand—pianos.

Listening to a great performance is a practical version of the eight limbs for the nonreligious person. Restraining all extraneous mental modifications and observantly educated in the art form, I am filled with gladness toward the virtuous works of the masterful composers as reanimated by transcendently gifted musicians, who interpret their visions in stunning performances. I must say the expertise exhibited by those geniuses is breathtaking. Rapt in the experience, my breath becomes almost nothing. Distractions are easily banished by the intensity of my focus on the music, allowing me to glide with the flow into unimagined realms of ecstasy. Absorption is the natural consequence of all those elements being brought together at the same time and place. Patanjali calls it samadhi. When it's happening I don't call it anything—that would be too distracting. Aum.

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9/28/9 Portland Gurukula class notes:

Sutras I:32 & 33:

For removing these obstacles: repetitive practice of one truth or principle.

The mind is clarified by cultivating friendliness toward happiness, compassion toward misery, gladness toward virtue, and equanimity toward vice.

Okay, we're into the meat of the study now in earnest. We have pried out the gross blockages of our lives, the things that trip us up, our obstacles, and we can move on to clarifying the mind. Sutra 32 wraps up the obstacle section, and sutras 33-39 suggest different techniques to accomplish this primary thrust of yoga. As

we will see there is nothing arcane or bizarre about yogic techniques.

Patanjali starts us off with the assurance that we can overcome our difficulties if we dedicate ourselves to success. We have to stick to it. One drawback to a world lacking focus and saturated with entertainment is the rapid rise in Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD), either clinical or mundane. Rising to a state of equal-mindedness requires adherence to a master interest, in other words “repetitive practice of one truth or principle.” Having some program, mental or otherwise, to return to on a daily or even hourly basis leads to one-pointed concentration, with its clarity of mind.

There is nothing particularly mystical in this assertion. We’ve already discussed how musicians and other artists, businesspeople, sports stars, teachers, and all the rest put cumulative energy into their favorite forms of expression in order to develop their expertise. Patanjali will now give a handful of suggestions for training in the art of contemplation. These should be very familiar to anyone who has hung around the Gurukula for any length of time.

In his commentary on sutra 33, Nitya addresses only the first of the four templates, “friendliness toward happiness,” leaving the others for us to ponder on our own. There is a lot of amplitude here, and the class took delight in digging into its purport. One thing we realized toward the end of class is that these four categories of discipline can be applied both to outside contacts and our own mental processes, though not necessarily in the same way. For instance, gladness toward virtue might mean you support and praise good behavior in others, but to do the same toward your own strengths might be egotistical. A sense of gratitude or relief that you didn’t screw up *this time* would be preferable.

The Sanskrit originals make it clear that happiness and misery are two sides of the same coin, as also virtue and vice.

Therefore it's worth pondering how friendliness and compassion, as also gladness and equanimity, are symmetrical as well.

Patanjali is so upbeat it almost makes you sick! Just kidding—but he may not have too much appeal for anyone attached to negativity, which of course is a major obstacle in its own right.

Deb talked a lot about her favorite negative reactions to the vices of certain family members (not me this time!), and how quickly they can get her goat. Once recently the claim was so absurd that she was able to laugh instead of boil in a fury, so that's progress. But what does the opinion of a distant cousin matter anyway? If their attitude can ruin part of our day, they have defeated us. Retaining a neutral attitude about their vice, their viciousness (same root), means their gas is wasted on us.

A lot of people agreed that neutral and neutrality are weak words in their common usage, indicating retreat and cowardliness. This is far from our intent! Neutrality within the Gurukula is very dynamic: steady, but with an intensity at its heart. It means being poised on the razor's edge between fight and flight. The term razor's edge gives some indication of the sharp challenge of finding the exact neutral balance point in any situation. The extremely short Nataraja Guru humorously presented the same spiritual challenge as how to mount a horse: if you don't jump far enough you fall back, but if you jump too far you go over the other side. You have to do it just right to land in the saddle. Needless to say, neutrality does not mean ignoring the horse and leaving the barn, but climbing into the driver's seat.

So, back to Nitya's presentation of friendliness. What an under-appreciated quality! Chogyam Trungpa said that the spiritual journey begins with befriending yourself. And after that you are able to befriend others. If you have a hidden agenda, it perverts plain old friendship and spoils it. If you *need* a friend, or are after something, you will drive people away. So learn to be content in

yourself, and then all else will follow. It struck me that Nitya's advice about friendliness gave a good general description of the role, such as it is, of the Narayana Gurukula:

The person who is bracketed with you in social life may seem uncouth or overbearing. If you cultivate your identity with that person, then it becomes your duty to transform them into a very likeable person. You can accomplish this not by aggressively intruding into the lives of others but by helping them to understand themselves and making common programs with them so that no one need feel that they are alone in this world without a comrade to assist.

When you adopt such an attitude of active interest in sharing all your good moments of friendliness with another person, they gain a more and more sympathetic understanding. You are not only making a friend but helping them to be an adorable friend.

My career in the fire service was excellent training for learning how to get along with people who were initially despised. There was a lot of latent animosity beneath our veneer of camaraderie, but we also had a need to work together as a team. Living in close quarters with those you looked down on previously, you begin to see their well-guarded humanity and find common ground with them. It's not always possible, but it frequently is. Now I use the slogan from an antiquated concept of justice as a mantra: people are innocent until proven guilty.

Moni talked about her suspicious feelings towards people she meets on the street, how she knows it is a negative attitude, but it leaps up, like the startle reflex from seeing a snake. She is trying to master it so she can connect with others, but it takes a lot of repetitive practice. So far she has worked up to being able to smile at people.

Anita cautioned us that in psychology a negative instruction was less effective than a positive one. For instance, telling yourself not to smoke when you decide to quit compounds the difficulty, by focusing on what you are trying to leave behind, so instead you should resolve to breathe pure fresh air, for instance. Patanjali may be seen to follow this sensible attitude with plenty of positive recommendations throughout the book. Spiritual life often bogs down when it is treated as “withdrawal from” instead of “moving toward.”

This reminded Deb and me that we resolved to phrase everything positively with our children for as long as we could. We had a “no on no” campaign. It worked well, especially since we treated the kids as wise sentient beings who wanted to please, rather than born sinners in need of simplistic correction. It was a very good ongoing meditation to catch ourselves before the habitual “no!” escaped our lips.

Negativity may be said to be a mania in our modern culture, and the class discussed how corrosive it was on civil society. People in the US at least are terrified of one another, with their natural paranoia inflamed to bursting by a media playing on their prurient interests for disasters. Class members began to get agitated about this, because blaming others is so much fun, but we reined it in under the aegis of “equanimity toward vice.” The solution is not to get upset about vice, but to intelligently foster virtue as a replacement. And how you frame it mentally makes a huge difference as well.

This led to a lengthy discussion about how to combat vice. Does equanimity mean ignoring evil? Hardly. Being of calm mind allows you to be much more effective in upholding justice. I recall many times that Nitya provided a terrific role model in this. One occasion in particular stands out. We were at an “Interfaith Gathering” in Ooty, with government officials and leaders from the Muslim, Hindu and Christian faiths trying to bridge their

differences. There was a lot of self-serving dissimulation going on. At one point, Nitya got up and blasted everyone, calling them vipers and telling them that he was personally going to report their backstabbing manipulations to God. The air was fairly singed, and I was very happy to be sitting slightly behind him. Peeking around his robes, I got a great look at a welter of stunned reactions. Everyone in the room felt personally chastened. Afterwards there was a sincere call for everyone to work together for a better local environment. Some concrete proposals were adopted and later acted upon. Throughout the whole performance Nitya never was angry, though he might have looked it. He didn't turn red, his breathing never sped up, and as we left he was as cheerful as ever, already on to the next subject.

I also have a number of rather rueful memories when Nitya blasted me face to face for my failings. Only one of us ever got bent out of shape, and it wasn't him. If he had appeared upset I could have thought he was off the mark too, but his calm and collected delivery gave him 100% of the high ground. He was simultaneously fully present and yet detached. Believe me, it's a devastatingly powerful strategy.

Even with all these many paragraphs, we have barely scratched the surface of this sutra, so pregnant with potential. More will undoubtedly be worked into the next series of classes, so the case is not closed. Nor will it ever be.

Part II

Before I even started writing this morning I received this from Suzen:

Dear Scott,

I had a razor's edge dream last night -- something about balance -- but, alas, I can't retrieve it. I just remember that I woke up in a half

waking kind of way and said to myself, "Wow, that dream is all about the razor's edge!" Cool, eh? I like it when class rolls right into my nights.

Also, on the way home last night I brought up that one part of the Sutra about "gladness toward virtue" because I just hadn't figured it out. Now my inclination is to think that "virtue" is an extreme in opposition to vice. So when someone seems perfect in every way, we will be more centered if we are glad about this rather than jealous or hostile.

I guess I get tripped up because I think of virtue in a more neutral way, somewhat like this snippet from the Wikipedia page on Virtue:

In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle defined a virtue as a balance point between a deficiency and an excess of a trait. The point of greatest virtue lies not in the exact middle, but at a golden mean sometimes closer to one extreme than the other. For example, courage is the mean between cowardice and foolhardiness, confidence the mean between self-deprecation and vanity, and generosity the mean between miserliness and extravagance.

If that is the meaning of virtue, then of course we would be glad, right? So I think Patanjali's virtue is more like good fortune or bravado? What do you think?

Thanks for class. It was such a pleasure and a comfort and most appreciated.

Aum,
Susan

Part III

We also discussed the recent neurology discoveries that accord with abhyasa, repetitive practice. We now know the brain is capable of growing new neurons at any age, though the process is very slow relative to other cells of the body. Much more quickly, though, we can forge new connections between neurons, which basically have the same effect, namely to permit learning. Daniel Tammet, in his new book *Embracing the Wide Sky*, (Free Press, 2009), reports on the results of MRI studies:

Though practice falls short in its proverbial claim to make us perfect, it is necessary if we want to obtain long-term or permanent results from our study.... The learning curve shows us that, while practice will always help improve performance, the most dramatic improvements happen first, with diminishing returns thereafter. It also implies that with sufficient practice individuals can achieve comparable levels of performance in a wide range of tasks, but only if the learner does not relax as soon as an acceptable performance is reached. Rather, expertise comes solely from a continuous process of structured, diligent study. (34)

In response to the undercurrent belief that you have to combat evil head on in order to defeat it, calling into question Patanjali's recommendation to keep cool in the face of vice, I read out the following beautiful story from *That Alone*, pp 314-15:

There is an Indian myth that a certain demon came and challenged Balarama, the brother of Sri Krishna. Balarama accepted the challenge. He went, raising his fist to smash its head. Then the demon became twice the size of Balarama. Seeing this, Balarama, who had psychic powers, grew double the size of the demon. The demon doubled in size again, and

started lifting hills to throw at him. Then Balarama realized he could not overpower the demon. He turned to Sri Krishna and asked for help. Krishna smiled and said, “Brother, leave him to me. I’ll deal with him.”

The demon turned to Krishna and found that in his hand there was no weapon. Krishna stood with his hands open and smiled. Then the demon became the size of an average human being. Krishna still stood there with his bewitching smile and said, “Come on friend.” He came close and became smaller than Krishna. Krishna patted him. He became very small. Then Krishna took him in his hand and stroked him. He became so tiny.

Then Balarama came and said, “Brother, I don’t understand this. How did he become so small? How did you tame him?” He replied, “Brother, don’t you know this demon’s name?” “No.” “This demon’s name is Krodha, anger. When you become angry, you are only feeding him. He thrives on somebody else’s anger. When you take away your anger, there is nothing to nourish him. He becomes less and less. So when I give him love, there is nothing on which he can feed himself and he becomes very small.”

This is also the central teaching of Buddha: with hatred you never appease hatred, but with love you win all.

Part IV

Jan shared an article with us,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/well/live/awe-wonder-dacher-keltner.html> . She wrote:

This NYT article below from yesterday is about **awe** and it seemed related to our last class and Sutras I-33 and 34. It talks about awe

as an experience or emotion that is close to joy and how “experienc[ing] awe comes from what...is called a ‘perceived vastness,’ as well as something that challenges us to rethink our previously held ideas.”

It is related to deep contemplation, loving kindness and compassion. Some of its sections of the article that I liked were:

One of the most reliable ways to experience awe, Dr. Keltner found, was in the simple act of witnessing the goodness of others. When we see others doing small gestures, like walking an older person across the street, we start feeling better and are also more likely to perform good deeds....

Ms. Salzberg, whose forthcoming book includes a section about awe, also believes in the importance of this interpersonal wonder. She recommended paying attention to your neighborhood bus driver or grocery clerk, looking for those daily moments of kindness. If we notice those around us who are “dedicated to goodness or having a better family life than the one they were raised in or to being good to their neighbors,” she said, we can strengthen our sense of awe....

“Awe has a lot of the same neurophysiology of deep contemplation,” Dr. Keltner said. “Meditating, reflecting, going on a pilgrimage.”

So spending time slowing down, breathing deeply and reflecting — on top of their own benefits — have the added advantage of priming us for awe.

I think many of us in class experience deeply awe often, even many times a day, and benefit from how it enlarges our consciousness, allowing us to connect more with our inner being and the larger Self. That is Yoga for sure. And now we learn it's good for your health too, no surprise!

* * *

Scott:

I'm pretty sure admiration seldom measures up to awe, but it could, with the right mentality. Like admiring Beethoven or Thomas Merton, etc. I'd say awe has to be transformative, or it's a lesser god.

Random House dikker, analogue edition, 1968, Def 1, is how I've always thought of awe: "an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear etc. produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful, or the like. *Obsolete*: fear or dread."

* * *

Karen:

I actually this week was listening in my car to NPR and caught the last part of a segment on Awe. Someone being interviewed on the importance of being in Awe many times a day. It's really quite easy to do !

So guess this is the time I should share my story of Awe. On New Years Eve my cat Tommy went out about midnight after we had watched NYC ball drop. This was usual for him and he would always come back in later.

But that night he didn't. And he wasn't there the next morning either. Nor the next day or the next week... he just disappeared. I looked and called, asked neighbors, put up many posters and even

went online. Nothing. Weeks passed and there was talk of coyotes being in our area but I just couldn't imagine my Tommy boy falling prey to that ! Then when I had given up ever seeing him again we got a call from a shelter. The day after my birthday 2/21. They said they had found Tommy !

I was SO surprised and amazed, could hardly believe it ! But the big surprise was that the shelter was in Roseburg !! A 3 hour drive from my home in Portland. ???

I was so excited, that my sons Todd and Chip drove down to Roseburg the next day to pick him up for me ! Happy Birthday Mom ❤️ They made it down and back on Wed. Just before the snow storm hit ! Tommy and I got to have a snow day Thursday to cuddle on the couch ! He was happy to be home ! But what a story he could tell ! He must have been picked up but then what ?? He was gone 43 days !

Another Awe ... the name of the shelter was Amazing Grace Rescue and the name of the woman who ran it was Angel ! All in all it was very Awesome. !!!



Tommy happy to be home in one of his favorite places 🍷 🐱

* * *

Gayathri wrote:

Nancy had pointed me to this wonderful dialog between Dr. Keltner and Krista Tippett on her podcast 'On Being' <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/on-being-with-krista-tippett/id150892556?i=1000597768139>

I was listening to this when I was on one of my walks and came across this tree stump with some cracks in it and some green (and dried) shoots that had somehow found their way through the cracks. It was a moment of pure delight and awe! And another

moment of breathtaking awe when I saw this sky stopped at a traffic light on my way to pick up Sirisha from school. Everyday moments of awe :)



