

2022 Patanjali Class 48

3/28/23

Sutra I:40 – The yogi's mastery extends from the finest atom to the greatest infinity.

Sutra I-41 – In one whose mental modulations have been attenuated, consciousness remains stabilized in the cognizer, the act of cognition, or the cognized, taking the form or color of that, like a transparent crystal.

Susan exulted that we are in the midst of a string of palindromic dates, starting with 32123, then 32223, and will end with 32923. It must have something to do with universal enlightenment, but we're not sure what....

Our much-recovered Deb read out the sutras, appreciating how Patanjali is telling us we live in two worlds at the same time, an outer and an inner world, and how to interlace them so their luminosity permeates our lives. It takes a gentle but consistent turning toward the inner light to open to the unity. We entangle ourselves in the outer world, but within it is an awareness of the oneness of the universe, and the commentary directs us to open ourself to it, to be constantly attuning ourselves.

Bill appreciated how Patanjali is inviting us to see what it's like when our mental modifications are quieted, by looking inward to the light. He felt reassured that it doesn't come all at once: it's a gradual assimilation. That's right: a significant difference between Vedanta and Patanjali's yoga is the latter has room for graded progress. Vedanta is like Zen—all or nothing. (Actually, Zen is derived from the *dhyana* of Vedanta.) Nitya, of course, is analyzing Patanjali with reference to Vedanta, so we get the best of both worlds. We should always enjoy the best of both worlds!

We've arrived at a sort of halfway house, having just finished the two sections on overcoming obstacles and stabilizing the mind. Once you have achieved this basic, beginning state, you are still

cognizant of your surroundings and they persist in affecting you. As we go farther into ourselves, we will be overcoming their impact to be less susceptible to the distractions of the world around us. That's the meaning of the transparent crystal on the red carpet, which only looks red due to its proximity to something else. Red implies the hostility or attraction of our outward-directed cognition. We have learned to think of ourselves in terms of the internalized colors, forgetting our underlying transparency, forgetting what we truly are.

The old notes, in Part II, include an excerpt from the Yoga Darsana commentary of Nitya's *Psychology of Darsanamala*, that accurately defines yoga in terms of what we are:

Even after receiving the secret instruction *tat tvam asi*, "That thou art," from one's teacher, one may not become a yogi unless this consciousness of the union of the subject and object is continuously realized by perpetuating the retentive idea "That thou art." This is not possible unless one empties oneself of one's ego. Personal ego is an aggregate of memories called *vasana*, and it is always active to produce volitional imagery. This is called *sankalpa*. *Sankalpa* is the root cause of all human miseries. An effective step in withholding from being influenced by the *vasana* is returning again and again to the true nature of the Self. This withdrawal is called *pratyahara*. When once the Self is seen through an act of *samyam*, the Self can be seen in all and as all. When there is nothing extraneous to attract or distract, consciousness becomes steady and *samadhi* is achieved. Thereafter one does not experience the duality of the subject and the object. Such a state is praised as yoga. (DM.417)

Lately Andy has been studying *Darsanamala* in Nancy Y's first online class for it, pondering his own experience throughout the

day as a fellow who calls himself “I.” The work challenges him to see himself as a universal I, so he’s been contending with the paradox of also being a regular Joe who is beset by all the problems that happen in daily life. He now spends long periods of time living alone, finding it a powerful experience of examining his mental furniture, both positive and negative. He’s a universal being, yet he’s also immersed in the flow of memory, which has well-defined configurations, almost like furniture in a room. His mental furniture of memories includes hashing out the features of old relationships, examining those memories with a detached philosophical attitude.

Because of this, he’s more and more open to Narayana Guru, who has come to mean something truly cosmic to him. He cited the first half of verse 24 of his *Atmopadesa Satakam*:

“That man,” “this man”—thus, all that is known
in this world, if contemplated, is the being of the one primordial
self;

Andy waxed rhapsodic: “I live with that memory. It’s not a battle but more like mental waves. The person who calls himself I — I bow down to Narayana Guru as the transcendental element in my being, even as I experience myself as the limited Andy. There are so many ways that Narayana Guru is nourishing me all day long— he’s so vast.”

Susan was taken with Andy’s mental furniture idea: “I see my mental furniture as the stories I tell again and again about my family frustrations. I tell people about them and afterward wonder at my retelling the same thing for no good reason — it doesn’t help me — it’s stuck inside my psyche like heavy furniture.”

Deb’s knee operation has changed her personality to a surprising extent, including giving up reading articles about

subjects she is already familiar with, which she used to enjoy. Now she finds they cover up her luminosity, by reinforcing her conditioning.

Susan had an epiphany that helped with her furniture: “I was doing some breathing exercises and thinking about how people always say ‘the breath’ when referring to breathing in meditation and breathing exercises. I was interested that they don’t say “your breath.” Then it came to me that it must be because it’s not my breath but the breath of all. As we breathe in and out, we are all connected to each other and to all the plants and creatures of the earth. This felt like a wonderful, self-illuminating realization.”

Andy talked about how for him, living alone is intriguing, and noting that a number of us live by ourselves. With fewer distractions, there are so many opportunities for sinking into yourself, with nothing covering things up.

Jan is one of us who is living alone, after her son has taken a job in another state. Her house seems so different now, and she can feel herself sink into places in her psyche that were harder to access before. She appreciates the quiet and peacefulness to do her work, and the silence is positive for the practices we are talking about.

I reminded us that ‘alone’ is a contraction of all one, which is, after all, the aim of yoga affiliation. Just now Deb and I have gone from a quiet, aloneness-saturated house to a full-fledged carnival, with family and dogs on site. We can readily observe the schism between cognition and centering in inner awareness, and to realize how much others are pulling us out all the time.

At the moment in Patanjali’s course, we are in an intermediate stage where we need to actively set aside alone time. One day it may be our natural habitat, but until then we have to reinforce our change of attitude until the circuits are rewired. Nitya expresses this beautifully:

During your whole lifetime you have been continuously conditioned with the impact of various energies coming from the outside world. For most people—who have only gained the training to know gross objects with name and form—it is not easy to extricate the conditioned power of cognition from the impact of the external world. A discipline is needed so that turning inward can be practiced and made a reality. For that, you can do certain exercises such as abstracting a value that is seen as manifesting in the outer world. Importance is given to the value that makes something attractive rather than to the physical place, object, or event in which the value manifests. This is a process of turning from the world of concrete objects to a pure form of knowledge. Turning in from the exterior to the interior is *pratyahara*. When this exercise is done several times, your identity with the inner reality becomes more stable and more easily recognized. (129-30)

Deb still recalls how Nataraja Guru showed this, when she met him at the World Parliament of Religions, in Kerala in 1971. After a full, very busy day, he would be sitting out in the evening surrounded by his hippie disciples, telling stories and carrying on, not tired in the least. She realized he had no social ego that required energy to maintain, he was just being who he was. In other words, we are moving heavy furniture around; he wasn't.

Andy was puzzled by what Nitya meant in the above quote by “abstracting a value.” He likened it to a gathering over the weekend for the release of Prabu Muruganatham's first film, aptly titled *In The Beginning*. It's related to the prison projects that many of us are associated with, and Andy is intimately connected with most of the people involved. It has all stemmed from the work of one person, Johnny Stallings, and has expanded to a substantial community of people supporting and caring for a neglected

demographic. He sees it as a high value being brought into the world, moving through reality into actuality over many years.

I encouraged Andy to tell us about his art project of illustrating each of the hundred verses of Atmopadesa Satakam. It isn't so much about configuring the lines, it's about expressing the profound love and beauty he wants to communicate. It couldn't happen without his reverence and perseverance. It's an individual way of bringing an esteemed value to life, and there's nothing simplistic about it. Plus, because actual expression can never fully attain the Absolute but only indicate it, Andy continually improves his work. He's never quite finished. This is the way the Absolute—the highest possible value—motivates lovers of life. Nitya expresses this eloquently in a newly discovered quotation:

The actualization, which is yet to come, is not a complete product but a continuing process of going from one finite stage to the next finite stage, infinitely, not quite reaching it, nor coming to a stage where you can say now it is perfect. When you think of an infinity which can never be reached but will always be attempted, and we move towards that direction, we have an idea of the Absolute. (Nitya Gita video XII.2)

Andy admitted he gets his sense of identity through that kind of value: “If I've made a picture of some philosophical point of Narayana Guru and I'm done with it and I feel a sense of satisfaction, it's as though I've painted a self-portrait. I see myself in the picture. It's a unitive experience of the picture and myself, the meaning is in my life, the meaning is in the picture, the meaning is in the act of making the picture, and of others seeing the picture.” He also gets a sense of something subtle moving through reality, like a wind or tide, helping create collective gestures and movements.

Jan could relate: “When I am painting something that feels meaningful, before long it’s like something crystalizes and you feel yourself in it and you feel that something is healing in yourself. It can bring me to profound emotions, and I see that as one of many ways I connect with love, unity, and the acceptance that leads to transparency.” Here’s more on art from the old Notes:

We briefly discussed artistic creativity in this light. Most of our artists receive a vision from their unconscious memory storage in the form of an insight and then try to replicate it on canvas. The closer they can get to a Zen-like blast of instantaneous expression, the more joyful the process. By perfecting their art they can bring their vision and expression ever closer together, in an asymptotic approach. It doesn’t seem to matter whether they treat the vision as an external divine gift or as a gift from their own unconscious. Either way it’s wonderful and inspiring, and yet there remains a gap between the vision and the expression no matter how close the approximation, and this is true of other types of activity as well as visual artistry.

Bill was also struggling to understand how to focus more on the values we find important or desirable to us, rather than their external manifestations. He thought we are trying to make the external expression match a value, and incorporating it into our consciousness. Actually though, the values create their expressions: they are its seeds. Making our desires into the seeds for growing values is problematic, though popular.

Deb wondered about the word ‘attenuated’ in the sutra, so I read out a part of the old Notes where it is mentioned:

This sutra [41] marks a major transition for the aspirant in yoga. Obstacles having been conquered and the mind stabilized, at last a beginning on a solidly-grounded footing is

possible. As we begin to practice living relatively free of impediments and consequently tune in more and more to our environment, our sensitivity is heightened, but we are still moderately attached to everything we perceive. If we aren't careful we can be thrown off-kilter by the vagaries of life.

The sutra deals with the period when our vrittis, our mental modulations, have been attenuated by our discipleship with wisdom. Recall that the opening statement of the goal of yoga according to Patanjali is to restrain the vritti. This does not mean that the vritti cease, necessarily, only that they aren't permitted to run away with us because we have them under control. But their influence on us is definitely much reduced by our preliminary practice. The word 'attenuated' is almost exactly the same as *kshina*, the original Sanskrit word, whose meanings include, according to MW: "diminished, worn away, waning (as the moon)." The waxing and waning of the moon is a good analogy, because in a well-rounded life our attachments grow steadily until young adulthood, and when detachment begins to be practiced they start to diminish.

While we are learning detachment, if we continue to focus on the world as the source of reality—referred to here as the threefold aspects of cognition—we become highly susceptible to outside influences. Our defenses to them will be attenuated, but we have not yet become sufficiently grounded in our Self to retain our balance under pressure. We may become easily upset.

This condition is symbolized by the classic Vedantic analogy of a transparent crystal resting on a red carpet, making it appear red. A crystal gets filled with whatever color it comes in contact with. Rene Daumal, of *Mt. Analogue* fame, called this the chameleon effect. We become a reflection of our surroundings, usually without even realizing it.

As we familiarize ourselves with our natural transparency, we simultaneously open up to the world around us. It's like peeling a protective coating off the crystal, or unwrapping the package you brought it home in. Initially, what remains of our ego is even more buffeted by the colorations injected into us by our surroundings. This is the stage when it becomes particularly important to settle our mind regarding how we relate to others. We are not red, but other people see us as red, and they want us to agree with what they think they know. If we won't agree we are red, we must have a screw loose! Nobody can see the transparency, so they focus instead on the cognizable factors that make it appear visible. At the present stage of yoga we are turning to the transparent crystal of the Absolute, which is our true Self, but all that energy trying to color it this way and that keeps us confused. It is very challenging to hold to transparency in the midst of coloration, so what should we do about it?

The Notes include several options in answer to that last question.

Deb loved attenuating as the waning moon, with fond thoughts of our Tao Te Ching class, where the Tao is closely related to phases of the moon. She also liked Nitya's example of friendship as a value — you can get irked, but you remain committed to the expression that continues throughout the relationship. It's about the person, and also bigger than the person, like Andy's subtle, motivational wave.

Friendship is like art, in that it can be eternally refined and perfected. We easily envision more than what its expression can encompass. Patanjali's point is that nothing you say or do gets you to your true self, so we should turn away from that. What if the real source of joy wasn't friends, arts, good deeds? What if it was something inside you, and you turned to that, and then you brought

what you found to everything you did? The your love and joy would permeate every activity and every interaction.

It occurred to me that also like art, our class is a good example of something that's greater than what any of us can put into it. We get more of a sense of what it is by sharing our different perspectives, yet it's the very partiality of our understanding that drives our interest for it. Most of us are old enough to not be much bothered that we won't achieve perfection, yet we are buoyed to know it's present during both good and bad times. As Deb summarized, yoga seeks to unite, and it's the letting go that brings about the merging of subject and object.

Part II – Old Notes

9/1/11

First off, I read Sunita's complaint (about contemplation versus sex and other fun things) right after assimilating an amusing article in the latest *Scientific American Mind*, the psychology branch of *Scientific American*. Kelly Lambert, in *A Tale of Two Rodents*, concludes, or more properly, arrives at an early climax in her tale, when she reports on a study at Princeton University, "Even though sexual behavior is stressful, at least in the beginning, the rewarding aspects of the behavior appear to lead to both new nerve cells and more sophisticated connections among existing neurons in a brain area critical for learning and memory. This study suggests that sex builds more complex brains. There, I said it."

So party on, Sunita! Or as we were prone to say in the Sixties, "Use it before you lose it." I'm pretty sure the idea of renouncing sex in favor of contemplation is to avoid distracting entanglements, which sexual relations can certainly engender, but

with a pickup line like “Let’s make our brains more complex together!” ziplessness should be easily attainable.

Those who mistake temporary pleasures for eternal ones can wind up spending all their free time pursuing the will-o-the-wisp of transient joys. Having “fun and games” as a subset of the joys of a well-examined life is very different from a desperate belief that the fun and games are all that is worthwhile.

On the flip side, I think it’s a hangover from Puritanism that enjoying life is somehow considered inimical to spirituality. Nitya frequently mentions that joy is the distinguishing mark of spiritual progress. But any activity can be either liberating or binding, depending on how it is taken, so make it liberating! Liberation from Puritanism seems like a worthy goal in itself.

I wrote the above even before reading Nancy’s lesson for today, but now I see that it segues perfectly into it, and not just “Notice how the potency of this discipline is deepened by repetitive practice,” (which gains an added metaphoric significance in the light of the above). Any captivating experience can be a doorway to move from the exterior to the interior. Nancy and Nitya suggest that we focus on a single value and not the external circumstances that promote that value in a specific way. All too often, the suggestions for such a practice are somewhat dry or sterile, like watching a candle burn or contemplating your navel. But there is no reason it can’t be a vigorous activity or thrill. I believe it’s supposed to be whatever turns you on, what you are interested in or excited about. That’s where we find our personal door. Often sex, for example, is a doorway to a meaningful relationship with another person, which opens up a vast territory for delightful exploration, with a million subtleties to express and contemplate and cope with. Sounds like a pretty good deal.

As Nancy expressed so well in her Lesson 41 response analysis, Yoga study “counters the prevailing cultural trends... toward consumption and self-indulgence.” We consume and

indulge mainly to avoid facing ourselves squarely, and since evasion is not deeply satisfying we have to repeat the game endlessly. That is what we are being counseled to avoid, not blissful interactions with our fellow beings. Nancy concludes with a quote from Nitya that we are not aiming for a state of inertia, but to be able to continuously rebalance ourselves to maintain our poise in the midst of flux. There's nothing like an active interpersonal relationship to give us plenty to work with in that regard! "Such a poise makes us a blessing to ourselves and to others," Nancy rightly concludes. It isn't about disappearing from the world, but participating in it more fully and with expertise.

Nitya's comments on these two sutras are truly wonderful and enlightening. I was going to pop in some excerpts, but they are such an organic whole, they should be read and reread in their entirety. At the end of I:40 Nitya echoes Sri Aurobindo in advocating bringing the conscious and unconscious elements of our mind into resonance so we are not at the mercy of unconscious forces. Then everything we do becomes an articulation of the divine, or what Nitya calls here "the unconscious manipulator of life." If we pay attention only to its conscious aspects, the lion's share of our psyche will be directing our life unconsciously, and we will scarcely be aware of what's really going on.

This is yoga practice as it relates directly to our life. We have to start where we are, and not set out as some carefully imagined version of ourselves, which would be almost certainly false. We like to think of ourselves as the Pure, the Virginal, the Spiritual. The ego preens and prunes our self-image to make it look perfect, but that is not spirituality, it is egotism. We have to first become our real selves, and then the work we do will be significant and relevant. Without first rebelling against our false persona, our fantasized state of being, we are just puffing steam into the air. These are the times that try yogi's souls, when we struggle to move from fantasy into reality.

The above is a paraphrase of the famous opening line from Thomas Paine's tract called *The Crisis*, circulated early in the American Revolution. There are distinct parallels in it with yoga philosophy, so I'll paste in part of the first paragraph:

THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.

The “sunshine patriot” is like the ego's persona, all bombast and bluff with no authenticity, but if we put sincere efforts into what we believe, it makes us “a blessing to ourselves and to others.” Paine was speaking of external tyranny, but we are wrestling with internal tyranny, which is equally stubborn. There is some hope that internal freedom enables external freedom, and that the proper way to achieve freedom is to work on ourselves first. If we peg our freedom to outside factors, we will never arrive, so we rely on inner wisdom first and foremost. When that is accomplished, Nitya assures us, the intellect “reflects only the pure light of the Self.”

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11/17/9

Sutra I:40

The yogi's mastery extends from the finest atom to the greatest infinity.

After passing through a section on overcoming obstacles, and another one dealing with stabilizing the mind, we have properly prepared ourselves to participate in the graded forms of samadhi soon to be elucidated. Obviously Patanjali intended his students to do more than quickly read through and have brief discussions of this preliminary material. Each sutra stands for a major stage of learning, with repetitive practice a must. This is the part that a sincere student of yoga should be excited about, and lacking which, yoga becomes a mere dilettantish indulgence.

Twenty-first century neuroscience concurs that changes in the brain are possible, but require considerable effort to establish as permanent. Because of the inescapable inertia of its physical makeup, toying with ideas offers the brain a glimpse of what is possible, but it quickly returns to its accustomed state of conditioning in the absence of reinforcement of the vision. In this study we are striving to decondition our attachments so that we can live up to the idea attributed to Bergson in the previous note, that “we are free only when our act springs spontaneously from our *whole* personality as it has evolved up to the moment of action. If this spontaneity is absent, our actions will be simply stereotyped or mechanical responses.” So it’s very important to revisit these radically transformative ideas regularly, more often than once a week.

Most of our class was focused on ideas covered in previous sessions, including dreams, birth trauma and prenatal bliss, rebirthing, and psychedelic experience, all ways to try to have unconditioned experiences. While interesting, their essence has already been recorded in earlier notes.

The main idea that I think is implied in the sutra got short shrift, probably because it is so radical: that consciousness is primary and what is perceived is secondary. Our ordinary delusion is to imagine we are a byproduct of material forces, when in truth

they are a product of our awareness. Or better yet, that both are a product of a vast mystery we call the Absolute in lieu of a better term. The yogi achieves mastery not by learning how to tinker with the world, but by inverting habitual perception and realizing they themselves are the fulcrum on which everything turns. We are being instructed to withdraw from the play of lights and sit firmly established in our Self. It won't hurt to recall a few related verses from Narayana Guru's Darsanamala, from the Yoga Darsana:

3. All this name and form is Brahma indeed. Thus, in the Absolute, mind always merges well. This is ascertained as yoga.

5. To whichever mind goes, from all that this should always be restrained, and should be united in the Self—this is yoga. In this should remain united.

6 & 7. Sankalpa—the cause of all disasters of mankind—along with projections, should be uprooted and incipient memories be restrained in the Self. What is seen has not the perceived reality, because what is seen is the seer itself. Who is thus united in the seer, he is the best among yoga knowers.

It's valuable to revisit a paragraph from Nitya exceptional commentary on Darsanamala, from the same section:

Even after receiving the secret instruction *tat tvam asi*, “That thou art,” from one's teacher, one may not become a yogi unless this consciousness of the union of the subject and object is continuously realized by perpetuating the retentive idea “That thou art.” This is not possible unless one empties oneself of one's ego. Personal ego is an aggregate of memories called *vasana*, and it is always active to produce volitional imagery. This is called *sankalpa*. *Sankalpa* is the root cause of all human miseries. An

effective step in withholding from being influenced by the *vasana* is returning again and again to the true nature of the Self. This withdrawal is called *pratyahara*. When once the Self is seen through an act of *samyam*, the Self can be seen in all and as all. When there is nothing extraneous to attract or distract, consciousness becomes steady and *samadhi* is achieved. Thereafter one does not experience the duality of the subject and the object. Such a state is praised as *yoga*. (417)

So the mastery of the universe, from microcosm to macrocosm, does not involve doing, experiencing, or even knowing. It is our native state, and it is dissipated by our projection of it out into a putative external world. In *yoga*, the world (“all this name and form”) we see is treated as the Absolute. We also learn that we are the Absolute. That means all that is, is us, and we are all that. In this way we realize a unitive attitude, giving us the ability to act without a memory lag, which is a time delay occasioned by associative linking and mediation.

We briefly discussed artistic creativity in this light. Most of our artists receive a vision from their unconscious memory storage in the form of an insight and then try to replicate it on canvas. The closer they can get to a Zen-like blast of instantaneous expression, the more joyful the process. By perfecting their art they can bring their vision and expression ever closer together, in an asymptotic approach. It doesn't seem to matter whether they treat the vision as an external divine gift or as a gift from their own unconscious. Either way it's wonderful and inspiring, and yet there remains a gap between the vision and the expression no matter how close the approximation, and this is true of other types of activity as well as visual artistry.

By relinquishing the outward impulse altogether, it is possible to eradicate the gap between limit and asymptote. They are the postulation of calculus, in other words, of a calculating

attitude toward the world. Mostly we live carefully calculated lives. Calculus marks the substitution of a scheme onto reality. It “works” because schemes work, but they are also substitute realities. If we can restrain our calculating tendencies, against all our training and previous experiences, we are already masters of the universe. This is precisely the direction the Yoga Sutras will now be taking us. In our own disparate and personalized ways we are already masters of calculation, but the Absolute is not a product of calculation, nor is it affected by it. As Nitya will tell us in the very next verse[41], “When this exercise [of restraint] is done several times, your identity with the inner reality becomes more stable and more easily recognized.” That’s all we’re trying to add to the picture.

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11/24/9

Sutra I:41

In one whose mental modulations have been attenuated, consciousness remains stabilized in the cognizer, the act of cognition, or the cognized, taking the form or color of that, like a transparent crystal.

I apologize for the length of this recounting of last night’s class, but this is one of the most important sutras in the entire sewing kit, and our class did it justice with a lively and laughter-enlivened discussion. Persevere if you are able, and I’ll try to reproduce some of the levity along with the wise advice we batted around.

This sutra marks a major transition for the aspirant in yoga. Obstacles having been conquered and the mind stabilized, at last a beginning on a solidly-grounded footing is possible. As we begin to practice living relatively free of impediments and consequently

tune in more and more to our environment, our sensitivity is heightened, but we are still moderately attached to everything we perceive. If we aren't careful we can be thrown off-kilter by the vagaries of life.

The sutra deals with the period when our vrittis, our mental modulations, have been attenuated by our discipleship with wisdom. Recall that the opening statement of the goal of yoga according to Patanjali is to restrain the vritti. This does not mean that the vritti cease, necessarily, only that they aren't permitted to run away with us because we have them under control. But their influence on us is definitely much reduced by our preliminary practice. The word 'attenuated' is almost exactly the same as *kshina*, the original Sanskrit word, whose meanings include, according to MW: "diminished, worn away, waning (as the moon)." The waxing and waning of the moon is a good analogy, because in a well-rounded life our attachments grow steadily until young adulthood, and when detachment begins to be practiced they start to diminish.

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This condition is symbolized by the classic Vedantic analogy of a transparent crystal resting on a red carpet, making it appear red. A crystal gets filled with whatever color it comes in contact with. Rene Daumal, of *Mt. Analogue* fame, called this the chameleon effect. We become a reflection of our surroundings, usually without even realizing it.

As we familiarize ourselves with our natural transparency, we simultaneously open up to the world around us. It's like peeling a protective coating off the crystal, or unwrapping the package you

brought it home in. Initially, what remains of our ego is even more buffeted by the colorations injected into us by our surroundings. This is the stage when it becomes particularly important to settle our mind regarding how we relate to others. We are not red, but other people see us as red, and they want us to agree with what they think they know. If we won't agree we are red, we must have a screw loose! Nobody can see the transparency, so they focus instead on the cognizable factors that make it appear visible. At the present stage of yoga we are turning to the transparent crystal of the Absolute, which is our true Self, but all that energy trying to color it this way and that keeps us confused. It is very challenging to hold to transparency in the midst of coloration, so what should we do about it?

One time-honored solution is to retreat to a quiet place where outside interference is minimized. Another is to quit the practice entirely, because it feels like it has become too intense, and our sanity is threatened. The most common response is to toughen up the defenses and push the world away, treating it with disdain or hostility. Of these, the second and third are tragic and terminal to yoga, though the failed yogi often pretends to still be highly spiritual, and may well be able to continue the façade indefinitely, given a steady supply of gullible associates. Addiction to palliatives is also common, as that condition may sometimes resemble heaven.

The first tactic, that of retreating, should be recognized as a means rather than the end-in-itself it often becomes. We move to a still place to grow stronger in our sensitivity and compassion, so that we are better able to withstand the buffeting of the everyday give and take. When mistaken for the goal, however, it results in participation of the individual being lost to society, which desperately needs it. And face it, detached individuals need the buffeting to keep from stagnating. They just don't need so much that they are overwhelmed. But once stability is achieved, we very

much want the yogi to return to the world and lend their wisdom to it as a full-fledged participant.

The vast majority of us take a fourth road. We turn to wise teachers and helpful friends to help us retain some stability as we get bashed around by life. And we experience plenty of ups and downs. But gradually we grow strong enough to offer a hand rather than reach out for one. As Nitya explains here, looking for the meaning or value in every occasion fosters such a healthy growth pattern, and eventually our understanding gives us strength.

We all agreed that it is essential to process the “zingers” we encounter, somehow. If we simply ignore or repress them, they lurk around and zip out at a later date to hurt someone else, and we probably won’t even recognize where they came from.

Our class was rich with excellent examples of dealing with this conundrum, reaffirming that you don’t have to go looking for spiritual work, it comes right to you wherever you are. Viewed from a distance, many of the examples were humorous, though not necessarily at the time. Pierre Delattre describes this well in his book *Walking On Air*: “I am a firm believer that comedy rules the world. God laughs and plays and has his little jokes, and who are we to catch on to them all? Certainly humans and beasts have one thing in common: We like to get ourselves into trouble just so we can find our way out again. Trouble puts us to the test.” At least humor is part of the way of healing from the wounds inflicted by our troubles. When we can laugh at them, we are on our way back.

Not surprisingly, due to the class makeup, several examples were of artists, who put their heart and soul on display in their art and then have to bear some really thoughtless and heartless comments. Everyone feels they are knighted to be a critic, and the less they know the more critical they are likely to be. Art criticism is often the vehicle for suppressed resentments to surface that have little or nothing to do with the actual art in question, and this is a

very good place to look for the veiled meaning behind what people are saying instead of merely being shocked and dismayed by it.

Scotty's example stood out. He paints misty and mysterious landscapes that most people find beautiful and welcoming. Recently at an open house a woman came in to the room where his latest paintings were displayed, and gasped in horror. In front of a group of onlookers, she began a long rant at Scotty. "These look like scenes from a murder! Ghastly! The trees are so scraggly, they must be starving, and it's so ominous the way you put them right next to that river!" She went on for several minutes, and Scotty was never able to respond because he was so nonplussed. Something so unexpected can't help but throw you. What was that woman carrying, after all? Yet it's too bad that it usually takes us days to realize what we should have said, and so initiate a constructive dialogue. We miss golden opportunities when our egos are upset and our still-fragile transparency is darkened, even briefly.

I recalled a most egregious example and burst out laughing, but never had the chance to relate it in the class. During their college days, Deb and a very dear, very outspoken friend were walking down a street together in an art community/beach town, and stopped to admire an art gallery's window exhibition. They scanned this and that, and then their eyes came to rest on a tawdry picture of a mother and her baby. Deb's irrepressible friend burst out, "That's the ugliest baby I've ever seen! Unbelievable!" Then they realized a crowd had quietly gathered behind them, and they casually turned to look as they continued down the street. It was the whole family with the baby in the picture, including the mother! They immediately fled the scene in flaming embarrassment.

We can only hope that the mother realized they were ignorant kids who didn't know squat, but she probably had to wrestle with

some very hurt feelings for a while. As Deb says, she and her friend will burn in hell for that one.

The class offered several more examples of their feelings, tied to their artistic expression, being assaulted by thoughtless people. This is normal in a world with very little moral education, or suffering from what is called low emotional intelligence. At least it does provide us a chance to watch how much our ego is tied to our behavior. As we well know, unitive or artistic activity is minimally modulated by the ego, or not at all. But the little devil inevitably creeps in, and it's lucky it can be rooted out by being exposed. When it is shocked it leaps into view for a second.

Anita has had such a hard time lately she didn't even come to class, being exhausted and stressed out. It was one of those weeks when everything went wrong. But talking on the phone earlier in the day, she told me how she was working on staying detached and viewing the various tragedies in their proper context, and her yoga practice really was making a difference. Most of us don't have a problem with good times, only the bad times, even though perhaps we should treat them identically. When times are tough, the yogi gets going by cultivating detachment and compassion, and not crying the blues. Anita hopes to be back in the fray by next week's class.

Nancy also had a very hard week and was unable to attend, though for unrelated reasons. She exemplifies a person who can let hostility flow off her back, while meeting every challenge. She designed a new store that is just opening, and there is always high tension from all sides that peaks at that exact moment, all of it directed at her as the responsible party. She is a sutra herself the way she stays flexible and appears unruffled even under high stress, which allows her to cope as well as possible with the problems that are thrown at her.

Bill, as a building contractor, has had a lifetime of coping with similar challenges. Just when you have done everything

exactly as requested, the customer changes their mind. Or you spend hours on a proposal, only to have it rejected. Or you do a beautiful job, and the customer is furious with you for it. This is ideal on the job training for a yogi, reminiscent of Milarepa.

Strangely, the very unexpectedness of the assaults we experience can sometimes be a spiritual blessing, if we are strong enough to cope with them. In fact, some strands of Buddhism recommend doing something completely unplanned and outside of your regular patterns as a way to shatter your habits. Planning to act in an unplanned way is inherently tricky, if not impossible, though, so life sends us these well-disguised blessings to force us out of our comfort zone. We can even learn to enjoy encountering unanticipated situations for this very reason, but again we have to be solidly grounded first. A natural way to become grounded is to meet a number of such challenges and discover that you don't disappear even when you are made to look like an idiot or worse in the eyes of the world. Revisiting Delattre, he says "Everybody knows you can't transcend wisdom unless you are willing to play the complete fool.... It's someone who performs at the inspired level of a complete idiot we need now—somebody willing to perform in a way that seems entirely senseless, devoid of all good judgment." (39)

Nitya reminds us in his commentary that from early on we are directed by all our influential family members and teachers to watch the outer world—cognize, cognize, cognize!—and it's not at all easy to extricate our cognition from all that conditioning. As already noted, he suggests we look for the value or the meaning at the core of events as a way to slowly break the hold. Doing the unexpected is another way, but again if you expect to be doing the unexpected it doesn't work as well. Sometimes it works on other people, though. My wearing two different brightly colored socks stopped being unexpected for me nearly forty years ago, but it still

upsets conditioned minds far and wide, so it would be a shame to give it up even though it borders on the habitual.

One opportunity many of us have fairly frequently is to be humiliated in public and not freak out. The class went into detail over how it is the ego that reacts with pride or shame, and our transparent nature is not affected. Usually we are prejudiced in favor of compliments and against criticism. But the yogi pairs them off against each other, realizing that since we don't even know ourself, how could anyone else have any idea of who we are? If they compliment us we should remember our shortcomings instead of swelling with pride, and if they criticize us we should bring in a positive note so we can likewise remain balanced.

I remember Nitya's advice that whenever someone criticized him, he would agree with them wholeheartedly, but then add "You don't know the half of it. I'm so much worse than you think." We can all recall times we've intentionally or unintentionally hurt someone. There are things that still pain me 50 years after they happened. I wish I could go back and do them over. Silly, relatively trivial things for the most part, but handy to recall when there is danger of being unduly influenced by someone else's opinion.

A yogi is not taken in by flattery, either. Compliments can be as false as criticism, and are potentially more dangerous, because they slip right past our guard. In fact, we welcome praise! We deserve it! Yet we are much more likely to be led astray by kindness than by cruelty. To a yogi, it just means the crystal looks blue instead of red.

Nitya concludes with an account of life after the transition period comes to a close:

When all conditionings are scraped off, recall and association become less frequent and stability is established. The inner organs undergo a drastic change. The ego is no longer

paranoid about the countless messages brought in by the sense organs. For instance, even if a person is shouting scandalous words at you, if you treat it only as noise, then you put up with some noise and you are not provoked. In this way the external world is nullified to the yogi. When the ego, the questioning mind, and memory recall are all pacified, the intellect, like a transparent crystal, reflects only the pure light of the Self. That prepares you for emancipation from the bondage of the world.

We all agreed that the ideal is to treat words as mere vibrations without meaning, but that is a level of conditioning not even the greatest gurus easily relinquish. Words will have their impact, but then we can readjust our psyches so that the impact is minimized, if need be. On the other hand, some words are so important and transformative we want to cherish them forever. Most of us have favorite phrases we call to mind when we are down in the dumps, and if they don't instantly restore the light, they at least turn us back toward it. Nataraja Guru's words in the following beautiful story, recounted in *Love and Blessings*, are a perfect example. We concluded the class with it. It comes just after Nitya was taken to a Christian revival meeting by a friend who was eager to convert him:

The next day when I returned to Varkala, there was already a rumor in the air that I'd run away from the Gurukula and been converted to Christianity by an American missionary. As I walked in, Guru met me at the front door. He started teasing me as if he really believed I had run away and become a Christian.

I decided to go home. Without explaining myself I went straight to my room and packed everything. Then I headed out to the front gate intending to prostrate before Guru and take my leave. Seeing my bundles, Guru said I didn't have permission to take

anything from the Gurukula. I said I wasn't taking anything other than my own books and clothes. He called to the other man, who I totally despised, to call the police, since I had probably stolen some books. This made me so furious I threw the bags down and cried, "I don't want anything from here! Take it all!" Then Guru said, "All right, take those bags inside," and someone did.

I started walking down the road. He followed me, saying "You are mad, absolutely mad. It is dangerous to allow a madman loose in society." I stalked on. He shouted, "Suppose a tiger in a circus wants to run into the street, will the circus man allow it? Like that, I am the ringmaster and you are the wild tiger. Get back in your cage!" I didn't see the humor of his comments, so I just kept walking.

Then Guru caught up with me and tenderly held my hand. "If you really are going, I can't let you go scot-free. I should punish you." I agreed, and held out my cheek like a martyr. He slapped me lightly twice. Like an ideal Christian I turned the other cheek, and he slapped me again. Then, in a prayerful voice full of benediction he said, "I am beating you so that the world will not beat you."

I was still determined to leave him, and I started to turn away. He held my hand with the utmost tenderness and said, "Wherever you go, always remember Narayana Guru's words *alapamatram akhilam* (it's all a meaningless sound in the air). After all, what we hear from others is only the air vibrating. It can sound like praise or blame, but that is only our interpretation. True spirituality is to cancel out all pairs of opposites and maintain one's equanimity." My feet faltered. My anger was gone. Peace and a sense of great blessing came. I recalled how Ramana Maharshi had asked me to read the story of Milarepa, and remembered all the painful days of Milarepa's intense mortification, which had brought him so many changes. But I decided to continue on into silence. (173)

Part II

Hard to believe that there could be more, but this occurred to me on a walk in the rain today. The Biblical counsel “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” (Matt. 7.1), resonates perfectly with the Vedantic crystal analogy. If we are silently fuming over other people’s behavior or beliefs, we are in fact voluntarily coloring our own pure crystal nature with the very things we reject. Someone’s ideas have a certain coloration in our view, and as we cogitate over them our own psyche becomes that color. We might blame our downfall on the other, but it is in fact a choice we have made on our own. Jesus and Patanjali clearly teach us to not make this mistake.

Not realizing this metaphysical truth, warriors who imagine they are defending the true faith from infidels inevitably become indistinguishable from their enemies. They intentionally adopt the behavior of those they hate to use in the battle, whether that behavior is imaginary or real, and they rapidly become embodiments of the evils they oppose.

By consciously fighting to change the other, we are unconsciously trying to harmonize our own psyche through the diffraction grating of the other. This is particularly unhelpful and confusing. A very static approach to change.

Jesus elaborates on this key idea in Luke’s version: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven,” (6.37). Here the crystal reflection is understood to work both negatively and positively. Probably Jesus held many classes on this very subject, but most of the content was left out of Luke's class notes, which were written more than fifty years after the fact.

Strangely, John’s later version reveals the invisible hand of empire reaching in to pervert the original spiritual instruction: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous

judgment," (7.24). Subtly, a 180 degree change is thereby foisted on trusting students of the scripture, greasing the slippery slope toward holding Inquisitions.

The bottom line is that we should be broadcasting the love and bliss of the light of the Absolute from our psychic crystal radio sets, instead of inviting in the "sins" of the world to cast a veil over that light. Only we can make that choice and implement it correctly, by remembering that we are forever looking at our own shadows on the walls of our communal cave.