

2022 Patanjali Class 50  
May 2, 2023

Sutra I:44 – By this, savicara and nirvicara (consciousness with and without conceptual configuration), having the subtle for their objects, are also explained.

Sutra I-45 – And the province of subtle concepts extends up to the noumenal.

Sutra I-46 – These are only seeded absorption.

In prepping for this class, I found the old notes to be among our very best, making Nitya's complex ideas plain as day. They are highly recommended for a full appreciation of these sutras.

The “this” in sutra 44 refers to the previous sutra, which reads “In unobstructed consciousness, the memory is purified, as if devoid of its own form, and the object alone is illuminated.” This is a fancy way of saying “perceiving an object untainted by memory” makes it unobstructed. Removing the double negative yields, “Memory clouds our vision.” Here we are delinking memory associations not just with objects, but with concepts, and even the space between concepts and percepts.

Most spiritual seekers can fairly easily shrug off the lure of material attractions, but we are more hard-pressed to renounce our comfortable cushion of concepts that prop up our self-image. We are “yogis,” “truth seekers,” “artists,” “sannyasins,” or what have you, so we are okay, even special. What more do we need, beyond a socially acceptable label? In our alternative societies, at least, these are exquisite and honored labels. But are they real? Do they mean anything?

Nitya begins his commentary by laying out four main types of thought:

The four modes of mentation are compulsive repetition (cinta), linear movement through ideas (vicara), vertical absorption or contemplation (manana), and stabilized absorption (dhyana).  
(135)

In her opening comments, Deb epitomized these as first, where the mind goes round and round in what can become vicious circles; next, linear thinking, focused on cause and effect; then a more powerful state where we settle into ourselves; and fourth, where we rise up into a general, non-specific state of consciousness. Nitya underlines that these ways of thinking are how we create our world, as the explanations we give ourselves become the seeds of our future experiences.

Deb sees these sutras as a kind of springboard to a less-modulated understanding. She invited examples of memory-modulated experience from the class, and offered one of her own. Growing up, she lived on or near beautiful Midwest lakes—like pleasure-domes within that flat, endless cropland—where she spent lots of time, like Ratty in *The Wind in the Willows*, “messing around in boats.” As an adult she became urbanized and lost touch with those joys, until a fateful day when she visited her brother back in Minnesota and they took a boat ride with an old friend on Lake Minnetonka, where they once lived. The feel of it, the smells, brought back such vivid memories that she almost passed out, and her time on board was so amazing she can hardly recall being in the boat at all, only the memories that surged within her.

Karen shared a similar story, growing up near California’s Lake Shasta, before moving away to Portland. She grew a family, and when her boys were old enough they visited the lake, which she likewise found overwhelming, reactivating all her childhood delights.

We agreed that life would be barren without memories, and Nancy talked about how she takes familiar walks to intentionally activate lots of feelings, both good and bad, making her happy.

While there is nothing at all wrong with this, Patanjali is inviting us to not allow ourselves to be all the time entwined in memories. To take a break from them, so we can learn how to see how they affect us. Life's serendipity awaits our awakening, our opening up to new possibilities. Deb recalled Thich Nhat Hahn speaking of mindfulness as remaining open to what comes to you, and remaining non-judgmental. Nancy protested that her walks *are* mindful, thank you, and Deb agreed that each walk can be a new experience, full of beneficial ideas. A boat ride filled with memories is way more fun than just riding in a boat.

Jan affirmed that the vertical absorption or contemplation mentioned by Nitya keeps our consciousness centered, and by opening herself to it, she finds deeper places to explore in her self-awareness.

That's right—the deeper places surely extend beyond the limits of our memory, bringing renewal and creative engagement as we discover them. I simplify the memory paradox by acknowledging we are energized by both good and bad memories, and while Patanjali lumps all memories as equally obstructive, there is little reason to strip away the good ones that motivate us to live well. Why not work first to neutralize only our bad, prejudiced, negative memories, and if we ever get done with them, we can decide whether to get toss out our cherished ones, also. I, for one, don't see the point, and I suspect Patanjali would agree—he just didn't bother to state the obvious, in his terse little koans.

Moni gave us a couple of examples. Every day in her job she talks to as many as twenty people, each of them with different needs, and she has to analyze their situation without prejudice, to provide a fair assessment of what the State can do for them. She has to set aside her background so she can be the most helpful,

keeping in mind the legal and ethical constraints. She has to keep herself oriented to a neutral place, without hatred or partiality. Moni also linked the sutras to the famous rope/snake analogy, where in poor light we may think we are seeing a snake in the bedroom, but if we turn on the light we may see it's a flower garland left for us by a friend. We can be seriously terrified by our false imaginings

These days, many people are being urged to see poisonous snakes everywhere: in ropes, garlands, people. The ancient wisdom has been artfully inverted by blowhards, to the woe of the populace. It's business as usual: making money out of fear.

Speaking of which, Kris attended a school board meeting the other day, where the toxic right-wing agenda is chipping away at her beloved institution of public education. Teachers are being cast as evil, out to ruin children, and it's very painful for these dedicated public servants, so full of care and concern for the wellbeing of youngsters. Kris found it very hard to keep her cool and stay neutral, when hardhearted ideologues held the stage, deaf to anything but the aspersions from their favorite propagandists. She made an effort to give them credit for their position, but remained fearful of the damage the proposals would do, and definitely did not change her position.

Nancy offered that there was fear on both sides. Fear is still the prime mover, for propagandists.

Charles, who attends on Zoom, sent this just in time for the early edition:

I'm a bit deaf. Last night I had trouble following the thread.

What deaf people who don't want to acknowledge, to themselves and others, this "organ inferiority" do, is to fill-in the blanks unconsciously, pretending to themselves that they are fully aware of the meaning.

Not aware that they're missing anything. The perception is, they're hearing everything.

Well, it seems Patanjali's saying that's what all of us are doing all the time in different modalities. We only fancy we're living in a common objective world. We're all filling in the blanks, but the blanks being filled in from person to person aren't the same blanks.

Is that what's meant by "partial stimulus, total response?"

As I see it, our class is the perfect place to practice achieving neutrality, with mutual support and compassionate listening all around (if you can hear it). Political meetings are not a propitious place for negotiating fairness and balance, as both sides are prone to erect defensive barricades, and paint the opposition with projections. The more we can practice balance in a supportive environment, the more likely we can preserve it at other times, under duress.

As Deb said, we need to learn to recognize and disengage from polarized positions. One thing that's sure is if we hold fast to our side, the other side will hold even harder to theirs, and the polarities will escalate. Karen sympathized how hard it is to refrain from judgment, especially with people like evangelicals, who specialize in it. There's no way you will ever convince them to change their mind.

Bill thought you could just give them a hug and move on. He was kidding, sort-of. He clarified that what he meant was, don't be hateful. He told us he was full of hate in his younger days, (not apparent to his friends), so one time he asked Nitya about it. Nitya told him there were situations when righteous indignation was permissible, but you had to do it with skillful means. And above all, don't be blinded by your prejudices.

I can attest Nitya was very skillful, as well as thunderous, with his righteous indignation! When called for.

There is so much practical advice in the Old Notes, I have to share some of it here. One sentence I love: “This brought us to yet another paradox: the more you eradicate the story you tell about yourself, the more you become yourself.”

Speaking of sutra 46, *These are only seeded absorption:*

Ultimately, all states are seeded. Ramana Maharshi always woke up as himself. Narayana Guru would never be mistaken for Nataraja Guru. Joan of Arc and Buddha are easily distinguishable at all times. There is a mysterious essence that persists in people no matter how far they go in their unseeded transformations.

Then this:

The only way to make sense of this sutra, then, is dialectically. We tend to think that if we ignore our percepts and concepts we are automatically launched into samadhi. Patanjali considers the dropping of percepts and concepts as merely the flip side of being absorbed in them. Samadhi then must be a synthesis that discovers a golden mean between attending and not attending to our thoughts and perceptions. This is going to be tricky!

An analogy that makes this clearer is the metamorphosis in Lepidoptera. When a caterpillar has munched its fill of input, it weaves around itself an insulating cocoon or chrysalis. Inside it dissolves into a uniform mush, and then reforms into a beautiful creature capable of soaring through the skies, once it has burst its container. This is unseeded meditation at its best, and we do something like it all the time. Every night we effortlessly dissolve in deep sleep, and we strive to do the same in meditation during part of our waking hours. Most of us,

though, when we get up from our bed or sacred seat, are still the same person. It's like the cocoon breaking open and... the same old caterpillar crawling out. Why is that? What prevents us from achieving the celestial transformations we all suspect are possible?

Patanjali tells us that the seeds of our habitual actions and choices will continue to bind us until we are both willing and able to let them go. This is the "moment of truth" in Yoga, and it can be somewhat scary. If we insist on holding onto our self-definitions, we can have an exemplary life and "do" yoga and meditation all we want, but we will remain caterpillars. That's the usual choice, and why the world is filled with spiritual pretense. Caterpillars sitting around boasting about the flights they will someday take, over lunch.

My example below is copied from the old notes, because I was the notetaker last night in Susan's absence, which precludes me from digging into my memory chest. It reveals the importance of attending to our negative memory seeds. The first part was not read out, yet it's a nice addition:

A friend who is reading Love and Blessings called me before the class and mentioned the part of the Portland Gurukula Diary (Sept. 28) where Nitya asked me if I was ready to deny myself and take up my cross. I was unsure of myself and expressed my doubts. I may as well reprint the section here, as it relates directly to the present sutra:

Today Scott read the diary and came to me for a talk. The other day when I asked him whether he was willing to deny himself and take his cross, he was equivocal. I saw him both physically and spiritually anemic and somewhat worn out from the situation he had written to Debbie about when

we were in Singapore, and I could understand the kind of negative pulls and pressures that were dragging him into blind alleys. At that time, I sincerely wished that I could some day be of help to him. Now he is with me and can be benefited.

I told Scott I didn't give much importance to his equivocal statement. Jung says that our external life and conscious self are only like the few leaves of a lily that are visible outside while the bulb which forms the major part of the plant remains buried underground. When we make judgments and take resolutions, though such mental assertions have a relation to our inner life, these are only insignificant expressions of the vital moods of the psyche. If we change inside, then all the dreams we have now, all our expectations and resolutions can be altered or annulled in no time. Consequently, I was not very keen for Scott to take any resolve or make any pledge. I appreciated his sincerity.

He said that he was somewhat afraid of me and that he was feeling unworthy to be my student. I asked Scott not to succumb to any such degrading thoughts about himself. According to the Gita, a man should raise his self by his own self and should never let himself down or think lowly of himself. In all our trials and tribulations, the consolation that comes to us is not from anyone external but only from our own selves. Hence, the self is man's best friend.

It's typical that many things pondered on the day of the class have a direct reference to it, with the lily bulb image roughly paralleling the cocoon analogy I wanted to use last night.

The main thing my friend wanted to talk about, though, was my feelings of unworthiness. I told him it took me many years to become even minimally comfortable around Nitya. My fear and sense of unworthiness were not something he was doing to me. I



was doing it to myself. He was merely being the mirror a guru always is, and reflecting back to me what I felt about myself. Much of it was damn embarrassing, let me tell you. For instance, I was not consciously aware that I had learned to despise myself and fear release from my prison. I had been carrying all sorts of self-doubt like a weight for my whole life, and was perfectly used to it. Its oppression was “normal.” I offer this as a fine example of a seeded state. At the time I was having great meditations, hanging out with a sublime guru, attending classes, doing hatha yoga. But the conviction I had been handed as an infant that I was unworthy remained to poison every aspect of my life. It took me many years of intense work to finally be able to walk away from it. Because it was “me.” How deeply the seeded state cuts into our happiness, and yet we usually want to defend it tooth and claw! Even if we resolve to let it go, we have to seriously roast each of those seeds or they just sprout right back the minute we aren’t looking.

The class closed with a resolution that each of us would permit ourselves to be the new, free, strong being we envision, and refuse to be pulled back into our old habitual half-alive states. May it be so!

## **Part II**

Notes from a snow holiday, between sutras 44 and 45:

12/29/9

Wishing everyone a very happy new year! Last night’s class was canceled due to snow, a beautiful blanket about 12 cm. deep, the wet kind that sticks to every branch and transforms the stark winter scene into a mystical fairyland, and made especially charming by the multicolored Christmas lights reflected off it. Since we live at 300 meters elevation and the roads up are steep, it isn’t safe to hold class in these conditions. Probably though, after

the bustle of the holidays, everyone was perfectly content to stay home and sit by a warm fire, watching the flakes joggle gaily down and communing silently via the hypotesphere.

My favorite meditation of the week is almost always Wednesday morning, when I sink into the memories of the previous night's class and open myself up to inspiration based on it, so that I may be able to produce a palatable enough report. When it works it feels like a magic carpet ride to unknown castles in the sky, even if to its eventual readers it is perfectly mundane. The experience also feels like being near the hub of a vast wheel whose spokes connect with each of you, our known and unknown partners in this exploration sprinkled around the globe.

At this tamasic stage of civilizations that threaten the very life of the planet with their inability to take sensible and necessary actions, the value of yoga is highlighted even more than usual. Yogis exemplify a willingness to abandon outmoded behaviors and embrace the call of the Absolute that keeps life vibrant and thriving. We can only hope that such people as you—apprenticed as you are to a great philosophical system featuring virtuoso expositors—will be seen as leaders in demonstrating expertise in action, inviting in blasts of sattvic and even transcendental energy to shatter the old molds. Aum.

### **Part III**

12/15/9 – Portland Gurukula

Sutra I:44

By this, savicara and nirvicara (consciousness with and without conceptual configuration), having the subtle for their objects, are also explained.

What Patanjali means here is that we should use the technique described in the previous sutra in relation to the wakeful

state, and also apply it to the dream and deep sleep states. We are now delinking memory associations not just with objects, but with concepts, and even the space between concepts and percepts.

Most spiritual seekers can fairly easily shrug off the lure of material attractions, but we are more hard-pressed to renounce our comfortable cushion of concepts that prop up our self-image. We are yogis, truth seekers, artists, sannyasins, or what have you, so we are okay, even special. What more do we need, beyond a socially acceptable label? In our alternative societies, at least, these are exquisite and honored labels.

Patanjali is asking us to discard even these excellent descriptions as impediments to samadhi or simply being. As we sit in meditation, we should slough off all concepts that pop into our mind as extraneous. There will be a stream of them, such as “I am now meditating,” “I have to do this for twenty minutes,” “This is getting me high,” “What a good boy am I,” and so on. Instead of the ordinary linking of related concepts that is our mind’s forte, we are looking for the space that is beyond or between the concepts. With practice, all those conceptual configurations begin to seem unnecessary and even damaging to the underlying purity of unsullied consciousness.

Where conceptualization really goes awry is when the seeker becomes a partisan of some well-established movement, such as a religion. Once syndicated, concepts begin to take on a life of their own, and may easily become an end in themselves rather than a means to an end. Patanjali presents them as important stumbling blocks on the road to clarity.

Concepts can readily torpedo a promising spiritual search. As soon as something exciting happens, we have a tendency to grasp onto it with all our might. We imagine we are enlightened, and that the insight we just had is the whole deal. Such an attitude brings open exploration to an end. The ego climbs back into the driver’s seat, convinced yet again of its ultimate superiority. The evangelist

who gets a taste of religious ecstasy and then wants to sell it to the whole world is a classic example. Their spiritual growth comes to a screeching halt, because they are busy convincing others that the little puddle they have just stepped in is in fact the whole ocean.

Richard Holloway is a writer and Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, as well as a former Bishop of Edinburgh. In yet another incidence of synchronicity, I was reading his essay in *Revelations, Personal Responses to the Books of the Bible* (Canongate, 2004), the very day of the class. Because of the publisher's strict prohibition against reprinting even a smidgen, I'll have to paraphrase his incisive introduction to the Book of Luke. He suggests that religion should be considered dangerous to health, because of the "seductive deceit" of substituting words for what the words represent. This is particularly critical where words *about* God are treated as if they *were* God. The ensuing confusion opens the door to endless strife and violence. What's more, it can seduce us into merely talking about the great mysteries instead of experiencing them, replacing direct experience with descriptions, or conceptions if you will. All this is well known to philosophers. But sometimes art, especially music and poetry, can use words or other concrete forms to connect us with the ineffable. Interestingly, Holloway uses horripilation—the somatic response of hair standing on end—as a measure of artistic success, the same response Arjuna experienced both when he was cast into despair by fate and when he reconnected with the Absolute at the apex of his return trajectory.

Scotty gave us a perfect example of how this plays out in everyday life. The other day he was busy doing errands all day long, and when he and his friend got home they felt frazzled. They decided what they needed was "art therapy." They pulled out the watercolors and sat down with some fresh paper, and as they concentrated on the simple act of painting they felt rapidly restored to sanity and calmness.

Nitya's example is to chant or sing a simple mantra to retain mental focus in the face of an onslaught of concepts. As in Scotty's example, as you hold fast to the chant or the beauty of the song, irrelevant parasitical concepts, being unreinforced, fall away and leave you in peace.

One aspect of this we discussed in some depth was the fact that there is an interim period of great vulnerability at this point of the study. When you discard all the mental buffers with which you insulated yourself from hostile winds, you become very open to any influences in your vicinity. This is a stage where withdrawal from the world may be well advised. At least it is wise to practice in seclusion until a new grounding is established. Ultimately, there should be no difference between public and private aspects of our life, but for most of us this is a serious transition.

Once you have abandoned your defenses, the void must be filled with the spirit of the Absolute, or something less savory may lodge there in its place. A lot of well-intentioned seekers have been sucked into some pretty ugly backwaters by exploitive charlatans when they reach this highly suggestible state. It is important to have a trusted advisor or guru, or at the very least a dear friend or support group. Even a good book such as Nitya's commentary can be very helpful, but that is asking a lot of an object that cannot assess you frankly or respond to your needs directly. We hear what we want to hear, and disregard the rest. Somehow, you must find a safe haven where your foibles can be pointed out to you for correction.

Bill wanted us to know that we shouldn't only be fearful of the unknown, that we should be eagerly seeking it, and this will overcome many obstacles. It brought to mind my friend Jim's story. He was assisting a dear friend at the end of her life to settle her affairs. She was in hospice care, and a couple of weeks ago he got a call that she was near the end. He rushed down to bid her farewell. As he solemnly approached the bed he could see she was

indeed in her last hours. She opened her eyes and said to him, her voice thrilling, “I’m so excited! I can’t wait for what comes next!” Jim has been beaming about her ever since.

One concept we’re burdened with is that death is something sad and regretful. How refreshing to recast it as a doorway to the infinite. That simple and painless conceptual change causes masses of negative thoughts to dissipate and blow away in the wind.

Deb mentioned the three Narayana Gurukula Gurus and Ramana Maharshi as examples of those who lived publicly without any drain on their state of mind. But while all were amazingly casual about living “on stage” as it were, they all underwent periods of seclusion before entering the public domain. Most of us get tired by interacting with others, and need to pull back and rest periodically. It seems that as we are able to relinquish our self-identity in meditation to an ever greater degree, our need for seclusion will be lowered.

This brought us to yet another paradox: the more you eradicate the story you tell about yourself, the more you become yourself. Who you are in essence is indeed the Absolute, but as you become the Absolute you don’t lose yourself, you become ever more yourself. So all of what we think we are turns out to be a jumble of detritus blocking the fluid expression of who we really are. We well know that other people have partial, mostly false, conceptions of us, but we sometimes delude ourselves that our own versions are spot on. In fact, our concepts are nearly as flawed as those who only know us from a distance and through a glass, darkly. Patanjali, buoyed by Nitya’s elucidation, is helping us to find ourselves by the very act of abandoning our limiting concepts, so that we may open ourselves to the maximum possible extent to our true nature.

1/5/10

Sutra I:45

And the province of subtle concepts extends up to the noumenal.

A powerful and important sutra welcomed us into the new decade with a healthy dose of sharing and caring. We spent our hour following Nitya's advice regarding how we conceive of our world: "When these concepts are dropped one by one the mind will go to subtler and subtler areas until it comes to what may be called the very stuff of consciousness." We spent a lot of time meditating deeply, discarding concepts, and the silence quickly became vast and all-enveloping.

What appears to be a solid and incontrovertible world turns out on examination to be a construct of our mind based only very loosely on input and mainly consisting of our predilections and preferences. While this is fine as far as it goes, we want to discover what other potentials we have to transcend our conditioning and learn to see and experience the events of our lives as clearly as possible. While we have often spoken about this in class, last night it felt as if we had broken through a conceptual barrier to truly understand it.

Anita had had a lesson along these lines just that morning. She likes to sit outside on her porch, soaking up the predawn peace while her cat has its breakfast. This time a loud cacophony screeched by on the nearby road. The cat was terrified, and couldn't decide whether to run or hide. But Anita quickly figured it was only a motorized street sweeper cleaning up the storm debris, and she could relax and wait for the racket to fade away. Wondering about the different responses, she realized that she had a mental image that identified the threat as something benign but her cat did not.

Identification is our norm. We have spent our lives learning to pigeonhole and defang all aspects of our world, because we are programmed to do it, and it is damn useful too. We don't want to spend our entire lives in a state of fear at every sound. Since the

inception of life on the planet, all its forms have been obsessed with survival, and rightly so. If they weren't as alert as possible they didn't live long enough to reproduce. Only very recently has one species discovered the key to security—more or less, though we seem pretty eager to throw it away again—and so been given the chance to explore what its potentials are in other areas. It would be high tragedy if we were so relieved by merely being unthreatened for a time that we abandoned the search for greater expressivity, but most people do. To a yogi what security really means is that we can stop looking for marauding tyrannosaurs and turn to the very stuff of consciousness, as Nitya likes to call it. We can find out who we are, and what our talents are, and exercise those talents. We can begin to make life more joyful for our friends and ourselves. To do that, Patanjali is paradoxically asking us to be more like the cat and less like the woman in the patio chair, only to leave out the fear.

Materialists of our present time treat materialism as a kind of religion. They fervently believe in it, and bend the world to conform to their beliefs. The Charvakas of ancient India, on the other hand, were true materialists. If they heard a sound, they didn't dare link it to any concept. They only accepted what they could see and touch. They considered the next room, as well as everything beyond it, imaginary. And they're right. We hold those aspects of our world that are not immediately present as concepts, as memorized images. Sure, it is likely that there is a whole world out there, but all we know for certain is what we perceive. The rest is all concepts, or a gestalt of concepts. When we close our eyes in class, we imagine a roomful of good friends, a toasty fire, rain pattering on the glass, and sleeping dogs dreaming of chasing rabbits. In place of all that, during our meditation we pare down our imagination to as close to zero as we can make it. The many facets of our world are reduced to a single mindstuff. Like a painting with many elements, we can pick out different features,



but all are an integral part of the whole picture. Without even the least of them, the picture would not be complete.

The painting stands for consciousness. Consciousness unites all into one.

As Paul pointed out, you can't even say that the picture is unitive and the elements in it are dualistic, because if you pit unity against duality, that itself is dualistic. Duality is an integral part of unity; they are not separate things. Only our vision is limited, not the underlying reality.

The class excitedly described various ways we unnecessarily pad our world with extraneous concepts. It looks like we're beginning to really "get it." Scotty gave an excellent example. When a child bumps its head, it will look to its caregiver to see if it should cry or not. Usually, in America at least, that caregiver will croon, "Oh you poor thing! That must hurt! Are you okay? Ootchy-poo." Taking its cue, the child will start bawling. It is being trained how to react, and it can put on quite a spectacular performance. But the whole thing is a sham. With minor bumps and bruises, I always laugh and say something like "Wasn't that funny!" Or I'll distract the child by doing something silly. And they'll move right on to the next thing and instantly forget they ever stubbed their toe.

This is such a great example, because we have all been trained to cry and carry on over nothing at all, by people who imagined they were being sympathetic but who were actually inculcating poor-to-miserable habitual responses. This is the kind of crap we most want to scrape off our psyches, and it is fairly ubiquitous. We've not only been taught to rue our trivial little pains, but to fear strangers and strangeness, follow the rules, suppress our emotions, and all the rest. In the ultimate analysis, none of that is necessary, nor is it beneficial to anyone. But it exists at an unconscious level which requires some serious digging to get deep enough to root it out.

This even touches on questions of immortality. Our immortal-appearing consciousness is disheartened by the appearance of death as a permanent end. We don't actually know what will happen any more than we know what is making that racket out on the street, but we have been taught that we will be terminated at some point. So we spend our adult lives beset by doubts and sadness over life's insubstantiality, where we could be reveling in our very existence for however long it lasts. I'm not saying we should replace one fantasy with a better one, such as substituting immortality for mortality. Shouldn't we do away with that kind of fantasy all together? All those limitations on our "stuff of consciousness" have negative aspects that we simply do not need and will be much happier without.

Deb read out a wonderful poem, used as an epigram by Jim Harrison in his (excellent!) new book of poems, *In Search of Small Gods*:

Walker, your footsteps  
are the road, and nothing more.  
Walker, there is no road,  
the road is made by walking.  
Walking you make the road,  
and turning to look behind  
you see the path you never  
again will step upon.  
Walker, there is no road,  
only foam trails upon the sea.

Antonio Machado, Proverbs and Songs, #29

After class she read one of our all-time favorites out to me, because it expresses the idea of the class even better than the one she read there. After nearly 900 years it continues to open hearts. I

pass it on to you as a shared blessing, and vehicle to carry our loving thoughts to everyone who is fortunate enough to receive it. It's by Yang Wan-li, from the gem *Heaven My Blanket, Earth My Pillow*:

### Night Rain at Kuang-k'ou

The river is clear and calm;  
    a fast rain falls in the gorge  
At midnight the cold, splashing sound begins,  
like thousands of pearls spilling onto a glass plate,  
each drop penetrating the bone.

in my dream I scratch my head and get up to listen.  
I listen and listen, until the dawn.  
All my life I have heard rain,  
    and I am an old man;  
but now for the first time I understand  
    the sound of spring rain  
    on the river at night.

1/19/10

Sutra I:46

These are only seeded absorption.

Patanjali draws a line here between mere stabilization of consciousness and total absorption, between samapatti and samadhi. Like any distinction along a continuum, it is somewhat arbitrary. We can think of samapatti as covering the early stages of meditative absorption and samadhi as referring to the more fully realized later stages. After this sutra, completing the section on seeded absorption, five sutras remain in this first Pada or Part covering seedless absorption.

The “these” in question in this sutra are fourfold: stabilization of consciousness either in an object or the absence of any object (savicara samapatti or nirvicara samapatti); and stabilization in an object or in the absence of any object (savitarka samapatti or nirvitarka samapatti). Okay, so maybe the “these” are only twofold! I’ll take a minute to examine these terms more closely. If you want to skip down a couple of paragraphs, it’s fine with me.

According to the venerable Monier-Williams dictionary, savicara means “that to which consideration is given,” while nirvicara means “not needing any consideration.” Likewise, savitarka means “accompanied by reason or thought,” while nirvitarka is “unreflecting, inconsiderate.” The distinction is certainly subtle enough! This is one reason I usually soft-pedal the Sanskrit in how I interpret these works: there is room for endless confusion and hair-splitting. We don’t have to worry about what name some state should have. We should focus instead on what it means in our everyday life. Our class did this most excellently last night, and I will get to that shortly. But because these terms have an important place in the Yoga Shastra, I wanted to clarify them here as much as possible.

Going to the root, vitarka means “conjecture, supposition, guess, fancy” and so on before coming to “reasoning, deliberation, consideration.” When Nataraja Guru speaks of speculation as a high road to the Absolute, he must have had something like vitarka in mind. Vicara is rich in meaning, with overtones of the judge or investigator. MW includes in its definition “pondering, deliberation, consideration, reflection, examination; doubt, hesitation; dispute, discussion.” This sounds a lot like our classes here at the Gurukula.

Nancy Yeilding’s own glossary for this book very much wants to make the distinction that vicara refers to concepts and vitarka to percepts. From our structural background this is

probably a fine way to look at it, though I don't find it exactly reflected in other sources.

The only way to make sense of this sutra, then, is dialectically. We tend to think that if we ignore our percepts and concepts we are automatically launched into samadhi. Patanjali considers the dropping of percepts and concepts as merely the flip side of being absorbed in them. Samadhi then must be a synthesis that discovers a golden mean between attending and not attending to our thoughts and perceptions. This is going to be tricky!

An analogy that makes this clearer is the metamorphosis in Lepidoptera. When a caterpillar has munched its fill of input, it weaves around itself an insulating cocoon or chrysalis. Inside it dissolves into a uniform mush, and then reforms into a beautiful creature capable of soaring through the skies, once it has burst its container. This is unseeded meditation at its best, and we do something like it all the time. Every night we effortlessly dissolve in deep sleep, and we strive to do the same in meditation during part of our waking hours. Most of us, though, when we get up from our bed or sacred seat, are still the same person. It's like the cocoon breaking open and... the same old caterpillar crawling out. Why is that? What prevents us from achieving the celestial transformations we all suspect are possible?

Patanjali tells us that the seeds of our habitual actions and choices will continue to bind us until we are both willing and able to let them go. This is the "moment of truth" in Yoga, and it can be somewhat scary. If we insist on holding onto our self-definitions, we can have an exemplary life and "do" yoga and meditation all we want, but we will remain caterpillars. That's the usual choice, and why the world is filled with spiritual pretense. Caterpillars sitting around boasting about the flights they will someday take, over lunch.

The class brainstormed an exercise where we will watch the process of waking up or getting up after meditation to see how the

seeds come and wrap us in their false cocoon, their womb of habitual comfort and easy expectations. We have dissolved, so this is our moment to say, “I’m a new person now. The junk that used to be me is dead and gone.” This could happen every moment, really, if we are willing to fend off our conditioned clothing and stand naked in the sun. We can watch as if from somewhere deep in our gut, the old identities rise up to claim us. And we can refuse to be duped again.

Ultimately, all states are seeded. Ramana Maharshi always woke up as himself. Narayana Guru would never be mistaken for Nataraja Guru. Joan of Arc and Buddha are easily distinguishable at all times. There is a mysterious essence that persists in people no matter how far they go in their unseeded transformations. We noted how babies are clearly who they are from birth, even though they are maximally dissolved, as also the very old. Life on earth seems to have an hourglass shape, very broad at the end and beginning but tightly pinched in the middle. But through thick and thin we remain who we are. The ego is afraid to let go of its conditioning, and deters us from the struggle by imagining that we will disappear if we dare to burn our seeds. It pictures a mindless army marching across a barren landscape that we will join if we reject our accustomed behavioral patterns. But throwing out those accretions permits us to become more our true selves, not less.

Adults have a low opinion of children in our society. They don’t realize they are divine, complete beings, but imagine they are lumps of clay to be pounded into acceptable shapes. By the time the child is a few years old they have been utterly convinced that this is true: they are nothing unless they conform to a social mold. They forget their ground, thus becoming unsure and reactive, struggling to adapt to external demands. Or they overcompensate and become little tyrants. Either way, their core is temporarily lost.

Susan likened this to dharma. Fools claim that dharma is duty, that you only have to follow the rules laid down by others to

be righteous. But we know that dharma is the rediscovery and reclamation of our lost souls. It is becoming once again who we are, daring to stand upright and live directly and honestly. Deb (who has been “cheating” and reading ahead) read out the last paragraph from Nitya’s sutra 48 commentary:

When all impressions of the past are flushed away with yogic disciplines, only pure consciousness remains. It has no impurity so it is absolutely truthful. Hence it is the ground for all truthful perceptions, inferences, and actions. The entire yogic discipline is to purge one’s consciousness of all its impurities and make it pregnant with a reality that can be actualized in the here and now.

Those elderly people who don’t cling to their old personas undergo a natural return to a childlike state as they ripen. I promised to include a link Peggy sent this week about longevity, and here it is: <http://www.ted.com/talks/view/id/727>. I recently read an article by this fellow that was quite good, much better edited than this talk. The stress there was on happiness and sense of community, which is not so much emphasized in the talk. They very often go together. Anyway, there are some surprising findings here. The best part is the pictures of centenarians, all of whom are alert and alive, happy and satisfied. While it’s no guarantee of a long life, finding your dharma is essential if you’re going to have one.

A friend who is reading Love and Blessings called me before the class and mentioned the part of the Portland Gurukula Diary (Sept. 28) where Nitya asked me if I was ready to deny myself and take up my cross. I was unsure of myself and expressed my doubts. I may as well reprint the section here, as it relates directly to the present sutra:

Today Scott read the diary and came to me for a talk. The other day when I asked him whether he was willing to deny himself and take his cross, he was equivocal. I saw him both physically and spiritually anemic and somewhat worn out from the situation he had written to Debbie about when we were in Singapore, and I could understand the kind of negative pulls and pressures that were dragging him into blind alleys. At that time, I sincerely wished that I could some day be of help to him. Now he is with me and can be benefited.

I told Scott I didn't give much importance to his equivocal statement. Jung says that our external life and conscious self are only like the few leaves of a lily that are visible outside while the bulb which forms the major part of the plant remains buried underground. When we make judgments and take resolutions, though such mental assertions have a relation to our inner life, these are only insignificant expressions of the vital moods of the psyche. If we change inside, then all the dreams we have now, all our expectations and resolutions can be altered or annulled in no time. Consequently, I was not very keen for Scott to take any resolve or make any pledge. I appreciated his sincerity.

He said that he was somewhat afraid of me and that he was feeling unworthy to be my student. I asked Scott not to succumb to any such degrading thoughts about himself. According to the Gita, a man should raise his self by his own self and should never let himself down or think lowly of himself. In all our trials and tribulations, the consolation that comes to us is not from anyone external but only from our own selves. Hence, the self is man's best friend.



It's typical that many things pondered on the day of the class have a direct reference to it, with the lily bulb image roughly paralleling the cocoon analogy I wanted to use last night.

The main thing my friend wanted to talk about, though, was my feelings of unworthiness. I told him it took me many years to become even minimally comfortable around Nitya. My fear and sense of unworthiness were not something he was doing to me. I was doing it to myself. He was merely being the mirror a guru always is, and reflecting back to me what I felt about myself. Much of it was damn embarrassing, let me tell you. For instance, I was not consciously aware that I had learned to despise myself and fear release from my prison. I had been carrying all sorts of self-doubt like a weight for my whole life, and was perfectly used to it. Its oppression was "normal." I offer this as a fine example of a seeded state. At the time I was having great meditations, hanging out with a sublime guru, attending classes, doing hatha yoga. But the conviction I had been handed as an infant that I was unworthy remained to poison every aspect of my life. It took me many years of intense work to finally be able to walk away from it. Because it was "me." How deeply the seeded state cuts into our happiness, and yet we usually want to defend it tooth and claw! Even if we resolve to let it go, we have to seriously roast each of those seeds or they just sprout right back the minute we aren't looking.

The class closed with a resolution that each of us would permit ourselves to be the new, free, strong being we envision, and refuse to be pulled back into our old habitual half-alive states. May it be so!

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Old Notes from Nancy Y's first online class:

11/4/11

Developing one-pointed attention is the gist of these sutras. Forgive me if I sound redundant, but I love to fall back on my music practice for this, since at the beginning of our relationship Nitya told me that meditation wasn't necessarily sitting in lotus pose with the eyes rolled up. It could be playing the piano, or any number of other things. Whatever captivated and held the attention.

Today I was practicing very hard for a session with two other players. The piano has to be the anchor for whatever else is going on, so I have to have my part down really well. In terms of the exercises, I was focusing on the vibrations of sound in space. There was my erratic performance matched up against an ideal as expressed in the music and maintained (overly rigidly, it's true) by a metronome. As I concentrated ever harder, the right notes began to happen more and more in the right timing. For an amateur like me, it's a strenuous effort. For a gifted musician it comes easily. Maybe too easily, because I think the hard work itself is beneficial. Real pros take it for granted, but I never do. On the rare moments when I hit it on the nose, it is very satisfying. A high.

Of course, there is some room for sloppiness when playing with other amateurs, because they are wrapped up in their own problems and don't really notice when I blur the lines a bit. My cellist likes to say, "Only you and the angels notice your mistakes." Life doesn't demand perfection, it permits us to be simply close, usually. A lot of things can be "good enough." But I know when I'm on or off, and that witnessing consciousness is what presses me to try for excellence. This applies to most fields of endeavor, I imagine.

The weakness is that "pure consciousness" remains elusive and rare, and doggedly slogging ahead is more the norm. But there definitely are moments of neutral clarity. For me, chanting—although it is a form of music, and very hypnotic—is much more foreign and strange, and so pure consciousness is harder to achieve

that way. I am almost always aware I am chanting, feeling like an imposter, whereas when I play the piano well for a burst I naturally relinquish the sense of being the person making it happen, and feel right at home. That perhaps is “pure-enough” consciousness.

I used to imagine that anyone who was a musician must be an enlightened being, just by spending so much time in the midst of the divine sounds they produced. But musicians exhibit the same range of personalities as any other vocation, from wise to idiotic, nice to nasty. Obviously, then, our samadhi remains filled with seeds, meaning the depths we achieve are not a permanent transformation. We are not required to “drop our concepts,” and so we come back to our ordinary mentality when the instruments are put away. This is an important tenet of yoga: while what we do is significant, and has an impact on us and on others, it does not take us to total realization, to unseeded samadhi. Yoga is not a religion that prescribes well-defined activities to achieve its goals. Instead it invites flexibility and intelligent participation in life.

I just reviewed how dopamine, which is activated by feelings of interest and love for the subject, also promotes neuronal and myelin sheath development, which improves brain functioning. The point of the article I read was that young children should be allowed to follow their interests and not be forced to do boring but “improving” tasks like flash cards and rote memorization. They learn a hundred times faster (literally!) when absorbed in something they love, and the benefits rapidly spill over into reading, riting and rithmatic. Dopamine gives us the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. So it isn’t so far off that we adults should also perform yoga as a dance of delight, and not rely on abstract hopeful thoughts that we will somebody attain “enlightenment” for our motivation. We don’t have to listen to boring diatribes in an uncomfortable church or temple, but can

rush out and smell the flowers. This is yet another example of modern science ratifying ancient teachings: follow your bliss!