

2022 Patanjali Class 52

5/16/23

Sutra I:50 – Registered and preserved impressions born from truthful consciousness prevent the registration and preservation of other impressions.

Sutra I-51 – All being restrained, by the restraint of that also comes seedless absorption.

This ends the section regarding unseeded absorption, *nirbija samadhi*, and also concludes the first chapter, the Samadhi Pada. We are now supposedly prepared to begin Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga, the Eightfold Path.

Sutra 51 speaks of the restraint of restraint, which reminds me of Kendrick's maxim: "Moderation in everything, including moderation." Patanjali's point is more than a jest—true restraint is not forced or even noticed; it must be gentle and minimal. We may begin restraining our faults with might and main, but we end up restraining our restraint, because it has already worked. I know 50-year veteran meditators, already highly restrained, who still make believe they have to rein in a wild horse.

Two images popped up for Deb during the reading. In the first she was standing by a clear, transparent stream of water, feeling both separate from it and the same. The second was of Ramana Maharshi, who came to Tiruvannamalai as a young man and lost himself in bliss in a dark basement for many days. When he was found, ants had been consuming his body. He was so detached he didn't notice.

Deb realized we don't desire the completely unseeded state, it is unappetizing. (Of course, desire is a seeded state to begin with....) The Maharshi eventually left that state but retained his transparency, and that worked well, for everybody.

Deb also found it hard to *imagine* the unseeded state. Being unable to imagine it is essential, since whenever we use our

imagination we are growing thought-seeds. Yet she felt all of us have the unimaginable within us—it's part of our daily life, whether we are aware of it or not.

In his commentary, Nitya reviews the Nirvana Darsana, where Narayana Guru describes progressive states of absorption, beyond his own comfort zone. He very much wanted to stick around and help change the world for the better, in keeping with the halfway point of nirvana. The fifth of its ten verses is:

Having burned everything with the fire of wisdom,
aiming the good of the world,
doing action according to injunction,
the knower of *brahma* remains firm in *brahma*.

At later stages of absorption, detachment takes you out of touch with your surroundings. Bill recalled Ramakrishna in a similar state, praying to be left as a bee only sipping honey, rather than drowned in an ocean of honey.

On the other hand, too much attachment produces a countervailing loss of contact, so this is an essential yogic balancing act. I'm writing a report on the Bellingham Conference I attended for the Anthropology of Consciousness, with a butterfly chrysalis theme of transformation, including this:

Patanjali, the codifier of Yoga as a system, 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 to the ego it is as frightening as death. If we insist on holding onto our self-definitions, we can maintain an exemplary life and “do” yoga and meditation all we want, but we will remain caterpillars. That's the ego's preference, and why the world is filled with spiritual pretense.

Caterpillars sitting around boasting about the flights they will someday take, over lunch.

Deep, unseeded absorption need not be debilitating, as Nitya eloquently explains:

It is like an actor who can accept the role of a king, a judge, a police officer, or a thief with full consciousness and deliberation. Then, when the play is finished, he can walk out of the theater without carrying with him the state of mind in which he was for a short while. The man who acted as king knows he has no regality when the play is over. The person who pronounced judgment knows he has no power or authority to judge anyone. The policeman need not be rigid or unfriendly to the man who acted as a thief. The actor who played the role of a thief does not carry with him any sense of guilt.... A yogi who has realized the Self looks upon the transactions of the world only as the role-playing that is assigned in the drama of life, without any false identity that can cause torment later.
(144)

Nitya's images of the actor-yogi are so vivid and alive! He shows us how to stay attuned, but without reacting, and most of all without holding on to what passes through us. The less transparent we are, the more junk that sticks to us.

Jan affirmed that being judgmental in itself does not connect us with the Absolute, so she's learning to not hold on so hard to her opinions. It requires letting go of ego imprints, which isn't easy, but it's worth it! Only our roles in the play require judging.

Bill was smitten by the way Nitya talks about the purusha abandoning prakriti, which is more on the total detachment end of the spectrum:

The state of nirvana as described in Vedanta corresponds to what Patañjali calls the state of *kaivalya*. The word *kaivalya* is derived from *kevalam*, which means “aloneness.” Individuation comes because of the proximity of purusha to prakriti. In that state purusha is not alone. But the aspiring yogi disciplines himself or herself and withdraws from the impressions laid by perception. On transcending them, the yogi attains samadhi without an object. But the memories already gathered in him or her can still cause trains of thought. With further self-discipline, the yogi transcends the dynamics of incipient memories and comes to samadhi without a subject. When such transcendence is maintained and the yogi denies further impact of prakriti, the latent potentials to act or to desire are removed and he or she comes to a state of total liberation. Then the purusha is alone. Hence it is called the state of aloneness, *kaivalya*. (145-6)

Susan had to miss class due to being overwhelmed by excess prakriti, you might say. Some times you have to grit your teeth and face the music. Anita just finished with a different version of excess prakriti, pulling up stakes and moving to another state, and now has rejoined us in the green room.

Nitya opens his comments with a reminder:

In India, it is a common custom to say “*AUM shanti, shanti, shanti*” at the end of a prayer. In that invocation, AUM represents the ground of everything. The sounds A, U, M, have reference to the wakeful, the dream, and the deep sleep, respectively.

Bill didn’t recall Nitya connecting the three shantis with the three states of mind, yet that is why it is repeated: to bring peace to the

wakeful, peace to the fantasizing dream state, and peace to the ineffable deep sleep. The real surprise here is that he connects the M with samadhi, also. The entire vertical axis, then, is grounded in samadhi. Patanjali gives it ascending labels, but I don't think we need to split those hairs—there are too many seeds in them. Our vertical essence is the ever-present samadhi Deb mentioned earlier.

Speaking of threes, the class revisited transparency of vision as being the outcome of unseeded absorption, and Nitya often reminded us that transparency equals sattva, translucency represents rajas, and opacity equals tamas. Alternatively, clear glass, frosted glass, and dark glass. Union with the Absolute implies not peering through windows at all. The seeds of consciousness build frames, which enclose windows. Windows are meant for looking horizontally, in all directions.

I shared the rest of Nitya's descriptions of transparency of vision from *That Alone*, as illuminating the unseeded state of absorption, as only he could do.

The Gita does not recommend withdrawal or turning away from the world that is seen, but the cultivation of a transparency of vision by which one sees the Absolute alone as the one reality residing in all. (44)

The context here is the struggle of life. If you see yourself as a bundle of nerves, muscles and bones, each part alone means nothing. They have to be integrated to be functional. Nor can you find in anyone's brain a region that produces poetry or that makes them humorous or depressive. It's a total function.

From your initial darkness you have to find out the laws of the whole universe, its physical operation, biological operation, the psychological evolution that takes place in it, and the consciousness of higher values towards which we are moving. The discovery of one law leads you to another and that to still another. Everything is part

of one unified or unitive law. This doesn't mean you should study statutes and know all the rules and regulations. That's another matter. Here, your consciousness itself is the law. It is as if the law is revealing itself in the form of your own consciousness. You are gaining a transparency of vision of the whole universe of which you are a part. Rather, you *are* the universe, and you are the knowledge of the universe, too. (576)

In this verse, Narayana Guru wants us to know pure knowledge, and that the three dynamics—what he calls the modifications of earth—operate within the frame of reference of this pure knowledge. In their operation they produce endless specific modifications, which range from the illusory through the transactional to the transcendental. In this range are many degrees of difference, and these are very important to differentiate. Simply saying they are all modifications does not help you. You have to see in each piecemeal experience what kind of modification has come, what its essential nature is, and how you can see through it. This means a transparency of vision is to be cultivated, by which you can neutrally assess a situation that is superficially dismal or cheerful.

If you look outside and see that your car is buried in snow and ice, either you have to look for some special equipment to clear it all away or you can say, “This is not going to be a permanent feature. If not today, tomorrow the sun will come and melt it all.” When you think like that you don't become panicky. If you don't know what causes a situation or how long it will remain, you are ill-equipped.

Most of us make our lives miserable by taking the illusory as transactional and by not seeing a way out of the transactional into the transcendental. If the transactional is binding and you do not see a way out, then you are fully committed to it. But it should not be binding. There are any number of so-called transactional commitments which are unnecessary. You can free yourself from

them. You don't have to perpetuate misery by keeping yourself obliged in so many situations. (593-4)

Pondering these ideas, Bill has found himself more able to stop and look at his own reactions, which helps him remember to seek clarity. Doing so makes life interesting. The universe is always giving us opportunities to become transparent, with a little restraint. Deb spoke ruefully of the challenging circumstances on which we project our burdens, disturbing our interactions.

For the 2009 class, Dipika sent a poem by E.E. Cummings with a supremely positive spin on unseeded absorption in the Absolute. After we read it last night, the class naturally merged in *sat aum*, the peace of unseeded absorption.

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in

*my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)
i fear
no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you*

*here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which*

grows higher than the soul can hope or mind can

hide)

and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

Part II

I find it fascinating that right in the middle of the section on unseeded absorption during the first class, I had my brain injury, and got to spend a few very long days in what felt like a hell-world of unseeded, dissociated absorption. It's not something I wish to get back to! We did sutra 49 on February 9, 2010, I went to hell and back, and then sutra 50 on March 9, 2010. By that time I had recovered substantially. Since then, my motto is "If I want to learn about life, I'll go to Helen Bacque."

First, the later class, during preparation for Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds:

Nancy Y's first class, 12/3/11

I'm going to give everyone a break and write a shortie for once. I'm in the middle of final proofing of my book ms., along with setting up readings, on top of everything else. Exciting, but frantic. It figures that this assignment would come up right in the middle of it! And the next assignment will be when I'm indexing, plus away skiing with my family. Oh, well. Life is never boring....

We of the Sixties generation rejected many false identities as a matter of our growing self-awareness, mainly the theoretically positive roles society had laid out for us to wear. But more elusive and less openly talked about are our negative assumptions about ourselves, which are so universally bought into that virtually no one notices them, at least publicly. I consider it important to not only

have detachment from the transactions of the world, but to be detached from the way I have semi-consciously decided to orient myself to the world. These aren't so much roles as limited frameworks or skewed perspectives, and these are what really cause us "torment" as adults.

Familiar ones for me include the conviction that I'm not a welcome participant in other people's lives, that any problem in the local environment is my fault, that I am mediocre and worthless, etc. They can be very comfortable attitudes because they help me avoid conflict by keeping to myself. But they are a waste of my potential. Plenty of people are happy to help me reinforce those falsehoods, too. Anyway, I have to be eternally vigilant to spot negative self-images like them when they sneak into my awareness.

As for the transactional roles, it's quite amusing, often enough, to observe how people think of you and not allow yourself to be caught by their projections. Instead of identifying with them, you can assess what assumptions are coloring the person's mind. Sometimes, though, the colors can be very dark in a paranoid society. As a middle-aged male, many people assume I'm a predator out of hand, for instance. It's a little harder to not feel upset by such things.... Practice does help.

My first lesson in all this came when I was a young adult. I'm a dog lover, and I was walking down the street and encountered a cute, small dog, who stood in front of me and barked his head off. I tried everything to assure him that I was friendly and would be happy to pat him, but he had a fixed notion that I was a threat and his job was to bark. You could see his whole soul was being poured into the racket. Every friendly gesture I made was interpreted as a hostile ploy, so I finally gave up and went on my way, pondering how we all are like that, and wondering how many pleasant encounters I had missed by holding onto a dogged attitude.

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3/9/10 Portland Gurukula

Sutra I:50

Registered and preserved impressions born from truthful consciousness prevent the registration and preservation of other impressions.

It's been exactly a month since the previous class. During that time I lost my mind through illness and regained it to some unmeasurable degree. Now we'll see if I can present valid and valuable ideas on virtual paper once again.

It was especially wonderful to gather again with dear friends and fellow travelers. The web of loving souls in which I am tangled supported me spectacularly as I dangled over the void. My Gurukula family is the central fact of my life, and this became even more apparent through the invisible realm I call the hypothesesphere. Aum, and thank you all.

Deb opened the class with the key idea of this sutra: that truth is not attained via struggle with falsehood. Combat is not necessary. When truth is arrived at, falsehood naturally finds no place to lodge.

One classic analogy that expresses this nicely is the cave that always remains dark. Wrestling with the darkness doesn't do anything at all to improve the situation. But once a torch is brought in, ten thousand years of darkness are dispersed in an instant.

The notion of the Absolute is equated with truth, as well as beauty, goodness, bliss and so on. This gives us a symbol of truth to both measure ourselves against and to strive toward. Harmonizing with the Absolute means attuning with truth. While discriminating truth from falsehood is tricky, we can know it in our bones, as the class explored. Mostly we come to know it

negatively. As Nitya points out, our false identities cause torment. Torment and misery can be said to be the markers of falsehood, and likewise bliss or peace to be the markers of truth. Of course, much of our misery is false, and a good measure of our bliss is also. Slapping a label on something does nothing. We have to really know what we're talking about.

This calls to mind a story Nitya relates at the end of *In the Stream of Consciousness*:

Once I was accompanying Nataraja Guru on the train from Delhi to Amritsar. Among our fellow passengers were two gentlemen who were workers of the Indian Communist Party in the Punjab area. Seeing our saffron robes and our beards they took us for religious people, and wanted to discuss some of the fundamentals affecting human life.

The older one asked the guru, "Sir, do you believe in God?"

Nataraja Guru replied, "I cannot answer that question unless you tell me what you understand by the term 'God'. The existence or nonexistence of God is to be determined by its definition."

The elderly gentleman pursued his point, "And what is Guruji's definition of God?"

Nataraja Guru gave him a slight smile and a look and answered, "That which is right when you are wrong is God."

You can see the Guru slyly chastising the inflated ego of his questioner while presenting him with a perfect definition. Brilliant!

Nancy kindly reminded us that just as there is nothing that is not the Absolute, so there is really no such thing as falsehood. There are only ways that we think and behave, none perfect and none somehow "ungodly". This is certainly true, and yet it indicates the subtle distinction (which may not even be any

distinction at all) between Advaita Vedanta and Yoga. Yoga, at least Patanjali's Yoga, calls for working on yourself to achieve a higher consciousness, or what have you. Call it an intention of turning to truth. Advaita asks us to drop our dualistic thinking to know we are already perfect. Perhaps it's a little less active.

From my recent experience, torment is an accurate term for the experience that accompanies false identifications. The separation from all that I know and love in this world was unbearably ghastly and painful. My experience parallels Carl Jung's Vision, in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, at least the early part. Probably because of the brain dysfunction, I never achieved his later state of equipoise, only the initial painful part. Jung's tale is one of the most gripping constructions of words I have ever encountered. Here's a snippet to tide you over while you unearth your copy of the whole story:

I had the feeling that everything was being sloughed away; everything I aimed at or wished for or thought, the whole phantasmagoria of earthly existence, fell away or was stripped from me—an extremely painful process. Nevertheless something remained; it was as if I now carried along with me everything I had ever experienced or done, everything that had happened around me. I might also say: it was with me, and I was it. I consisted of all that, so to speak. I consisted of my own history, and I felt with great certainty: this is what I am. “I am this bundle of what has been, and what has been accomplished.”

This experience gave me a feeling of extreme poverty, but at the same time of great fullness. There was no longer anything I wanted or desired. I existed in an objective form; I was what I had been and lived. At first the sense of annihilation predominated, of having been stripped or pillaged; but suddenly that became of no consequence.

Everything seemed to be past; what remained was a fait accompli, without any reference back to what had been. There was no longer any regret that something had dropped away or been taken away. On the contrary: I had everything that I was, and that was everything.

Something else engaged my attention: as I approached the temple I had the certainty that I was about to enter an illuminated room and would meet there all those people to whom I belong in reality. There I would at last understand—this too was a certainty—what historical nexus I or my life fitted into. I would know what had been before me, why I had come into being, and where my life was flowing. (290-91)

Paradoxically, I discovered that our identification with what we love is far more painful to relinquish than what we reject as “wrong”. We willingly give up falsehood, but resist with every atom of our being abandoning what we cherish and what makes our life meaningful and rich. That means that these are also false identifications in the absolute sense. This, to many of us, is the breaking point of the entire game. We are not willing to take this final step until it is forced on us. As a teacher I shouldn’t feel that way, maybe, but I do. I dearly love my best-crafted false identities.

Deb spoke thoughtfully about this issue. We are not called upon to turn away from our lives, but only to detach from defining ourselves through them. It’s a razor’s edge to walk, for sure. We must not become unloving and uncaring and withdraw into nothingness; we must give our all. We want to give our all. At the same time we know we are more than any situation or predicament we find ourselves in. Our identity should be with the Absolute. It’s easier if we truly come to know that everyone and everything is indeed the Absolute in disguise.

Speaking of which, Nitya continues his brilliant analogy with the theater in his commentary. I might as well reprint it here. He describes the steps the disciplined yogi takes to achieve the final goal of unseeded samadhi. Then:

This can be followed by a question as to whether the perfected yogi becomes incapable of functioning as a person. To this the answer is “no.” It is like an actor who can accept the role of a king, a judge, a police officer, or a thief with full consciousness and deliberation. Then, when the play is finished, he can walk out of the theater without carrying with him the state of mind in which he was for a short while. The man who acted as king knows he has no regality when the play is over. The person who pronounced judgment knows he has no power or authority to judge anyone. The policeman need not be rigid or unfriendly to the man who acted as a thief. The actor who played the role of a thief does not carry with him any sense of guilt.

A yogi who has realized the Self looks upon the transactions of the world only as the role-playing that is assigned in the drama of life, without any false identity that can cause torment later.

Well, sure: easier said than done. But you have to admit it is an excellent way of looking at it. An actor is the Absolute in disguise, and that’s what we are.

So the key teaching of this sutra is that we are not to define ourselves merely by our outer activity, but to reside in our true nature as the Absolute and know we are That. Jyothi spoke about how the infant is already a yogi, but the society insists that it pursue all sorts of studies to become something else. Usually the program is foreign to its true nature, its svadharma. As we grow up we become increasingly dissociated from who we are. We struggle

to force ourselves to conform to the demands of the life we are thrust into, and suffer to a greater or lesser extent because of it.

These societal demands define our roles as actors. As Jan said, it is important to work on our roles so that we become very good at them. And they aren't always exactly what we would choose. She's right. Our ignorance is truly vast, and by the time we need to decide how to live we have little or no idea of who we really are. We find out gradually as we work with the material that falls into our hands. Attaining our svadharma is therefore like attaining the Absolute. It is something to work toward, but rarely if ever fully accomplished. Again, there is the dance of playing your role well and also of leaping out of your familiar ruts to embrace the sky.

Susan told us that at a party she was asked the time-honored question, "What do you do?" She couldn't answer. Finally she said "nothing." Bill told us this was also how the Dalai Lama answered the question. The Gita agrees: "Relinquishing attachment for the benefit of works, ever happy and independent, though such a man be engaged in work, (in principle) he does nothing at all." (IV, 20). Later it advises us to think of everything we do with the mantra "I do nothing at all."

I consider asking a child what they want to be when they grow up a form of abuse. The class probed some alternatives for all ages, like "What do you most like to do?" "What's your philosophy of life?" "What was the best thing that happened to you this week?" Questions like that are similar, but instead of imposing a burden they invite the person to reveal what they might wish to of their inner interests. That's a substantial difference.

Deb brought us back to her opening point as being perfectly relevant here. Instead of defining ourselves through what we do, we should trust that we are much more vast than any specific role or talent. As we let go of the obsession to prove ourselves to others by pretending to be somebody and doing certain things, we can just

be ourselves, and this is truly infinite. We can make it easier for each other by ceasing to require it, and also to demonstrate it. Scotty talked about how when you have found your svadharma, people are attracted to you, because they secretly want to be freed of their burdens in the way you are evidencing.

Happily, I was met at the computer this morning by a poem sent by Dipika that beautifully expresses part of the meaning of this sutra. It makes a perfect close to the notes. It's by E.E. Cummings:

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in

*my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)
i fear
no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you*

*here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which*

grows higher than the soul can hope or mind can

*hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart*

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

3/16/10

Sutra I:51

All being restrained, by the restraint of that also comes seedless absorption.

A sweet gathering of dedicated souls paid tribute to the grand finale of the First Pada of the Yoga Shastra. Fueled by Deb's production of the World's Finest carrot cake, from Martha Lain's grandmother's perfect recipe, a lively and well-rounded discussion gave shape to the impossibly shapeless and possibly nonexistent state of nirbija samadhi, seedless absorption.

Deb opened the class with her recall of the reclining Buddha of Polonnaruwa, one of the world's most magnificent sculptures, depicting the moment of easing into the samadhi of death. It wears the most beatific smile, symbolizing that death is nothing to be feared, and perhaps even welcomed.

That led us to the gist of this sutra, and the meaning of the whole study. Is the cessation of mental modifications the goal, or merely the inevitable end? Since most of the yoga program may be described as learning how to make the candle of our psyche burn ever brighter, why would the ultimate achievement be its snuffing out? All of us are in favor of stripping off the burdens and blindness we have inherited to become freer and happier, but what's all this about quitting the game entirely? Are we reading Patanjali wrong, or is there some upside implied in this that we haven't yet understood? The way it's presented made me think of a passage from Nitya's *Love and Blessings* (p. 157):

In my travels I went to see Siddharudha Swami in Hassan. The Swami's ashram was a traditional old institution where many ochre robed swamis were living. Many were coming as well to pay homage to him. Nobody knew the swami's age,

maybe 100, maybe 200, or even 300. It varied according to the informant's credibility. He looked for all the world like a living corpse.

At five o'clock in the morning, ten disciples ceremonially came to him, prostrated at his feet, and pulled him out of bed for a hot water wash. Before the bath his body was smeared with turmeric paste, and afterwards he was painted with sandal paste and clothed with a T-string, a dhoti, a shirt and a turban. Then he was decorated with a *rudraksha* garland and several flower garlands. In the main hall of the ashram he was seated on a throne-like chair, where he sat cross-legged in *padmasana*. Then there was a ceremonial feeding. He did not open his eyes or mouth, but some milk was smeared on his lips and wiped off. I was told the swami had not taken any food or drink for twelve years.

This ritual had been going on every day for a very long time. He did not pass urine or stools. I was also told he did not perspire. There was no evidence he was breathing. If he was dead, why wasn't he decomposing? It was all a mystery. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed the possibility of anyone living without food, drink or breath.

As the Swami's face looked like a corpse, it gave me an eerie feeling to sit and watch him all day. The swamis there were very hospitable, and there was nothing lacking for a visit of any length of time, but I only stayed for three days.

I don't know about you, but nobody's going to worship me if I slid into a state like that. They'd just toss me on the fire, or worse, into a casket. I suppose I'd make a good Halloween decoration to scare the neighborhood kids.

None of us has much first-hand experience with the cessation of mental modifications, so we spent the time speculating about what it might mean to folks like us. This led us to discuss at length

the release from suffering, the widely touted benefit of yogic and other attainments.

The only way to totally avoid suffering is to find our way out of life, in other words to die, so most of us agreed coping with it was the price you have to pay to hang around. Entering nirvana, attaining *nirbija samadhi* with its congruent cessation of mental modifications, and dying, are different aspects of the same ultimate detachment from suffering. The “rub” with all of them is you have to give up pleasure too, which includes all the delights of this world of transient manifestation, including bonding with friends and family members. So most of us are willing to hold off until we no longer have a choice in the matter. In fact, having a choice would be just one more set of mental modifications. Choice has got to go too.

Buddha made an especially big deal about suffering, because he led a sheltered life and only discovered how miserable most people were with sickness and all the rest after he escaped from his cloistered palace. We in the modern world are in the same boat, living relatively pain free lives and only discovering how nasty suffering can be when it rains down upon us individually. We have been blessed to have big blocks of time without an endless series of tragedies. Science, with its many medical and nutritional breakthroughs, can thus be seen as the primary spiritual fountain-source of the human race. Laying a sewage system, for instance, which only became a widespread goal of civilization in the last 150 years, thanks to the advent of germ theory, can be seen as a prime remover of suffering in the form of disease. Thus many very material activities are highly spiritual. Spirituality is not just about the pie in the sky.

As Anita pointed out, suffering sometimes turns us into philosophers, and may also teach us to seek transcendence. Thus it is a (well-disguised) blessing in many cases. At the same time, intense suffering usually blocks the ability to entertain any

philosophy or pretend to any spirituality, beyond perhaps the ability to endure. Just as food must come before philosophy, good health is also a requisite. It may be spiritually ideal to have a chaotic mix of happiness and suffering, and not simply fulltime happiness.

The greater part of our studies in the Gurukula is aimed at releasing ourselves from bondage and its concomitant suffering. Since most of us are not doctors or researchers, this means addressing mental and philosophical suffering, as Bill insisted. This has a parallel value with the medical sleuths and caretakers, who deal primarily with bodily ills and their causes. The widely held belief is that when suffering is annulled, the native state of the human being is extremely blissful. Bliss is not an attainment; it is our "default setting." Therefore we should spend our time in annulling suffering, to leave room for bliss. This seems logical, but is it?

We ran out of time before I could relate how my recent adventures with brain inflammation were like a protolinguistic journey through the fifty-first sutra. Our "normal" state consists of a happy merger of spirit and nature, purusha and prakriti. As my brain started to fall apart from the pressure of an abscess, these poles were pried apart. Or perhaps they naturally separated. I became a transparent witnessing spirit or consciousness looking across a gulf of nothingness to a complex and yet dead field of quasi-material images. Hallucinations if you will, vivid but strangely lifeless. If it had been my time to go, possibly I would have withdrawn into pure consciousness, but I desperately wanted to reintegrate with the field and get back to my friends and family. My helplessness was very frustrating, but the determination was there, even in the face of extreme suffering.

What seemed clear to me then and now is that the in-between state was where the pain was most intense. Returning to life with

the confluence of consciousness and world, purusha and prakriti, was most desirable. Escape into pure purusha has been recommended by rishis and saints forever, but was nonetheless uncertain. The state in between these two poles was ghastly beyond belief: neither alive or dead, lost in an artificial universe invisible to everyone else. Like Nitya's corpse-yogi.

It struck me that what I was helplessly moving toward experiencing is what detachment really is: becoming utterly indifferent to the moiling and roiling of prakriti. Since I was under duress, I was unable to explore where this might lead. And I didn't want to go there yet anyway; I wanted to get back to what I knew, even as I saw it was made out of absolutely nothing at all. I was quite aware of the vaporous nature of everything created. Yet I was filled with wonder that all this could be constructed out of nothing: the original miracle of miracles.

We—or at least I—have to continue to wonder in ignorance about pure consciousness, and whether it persists beyond death. We have the purported words of others who have gone before, but it's hard not to consider these speculative. Brilliantly speculative perhaps, but ultimately unconfirmable. This is truly Unknown Territory. Some people can accept such testimony, but not I.

I have to admit to being a wimp when the chips are down. I suppose this is why celibacy and aloneness are advised, because it's much easier to let go of what you don't love. Because I'm deeply in love with the totality of existence and all its spectacular individual manifestations, I put all my energy into fighting back into life. With a lot of help and good fortune I made it, this time. But the guys who make history are the ones who go the other way. At least, their stories are told by their admirers, unless they decide to reemploy mental modifications. The ones we know and love are the ones who “come back,” the Narayana Gurus, Ammajis, Muhammads, even Ramana Maharshis. Jesus didn't come back—

he promised to, but the event is still pending—but his story as we know it is almost entirely a fiction invented by his followers.

Buddha had the best-known enlightenment of all time, but he too came back to teach. After speaking many words of wisdom and surcease of suffering, he died with a blissful smile on his face. Reclining Buddha statues around the globe remind us of this, and entice us to discover the meaning of life that he knew. We want very much to share this with our dear ones, but there is no guarantee that this can happen. As Nitya says here:

The state of nirvana as described in Vedanta corresponds to what Patanjali calls the state of *kaivalya*. The word *kaivalya* is derived from *kevalam*, which means “aloneness.”

Individuation comes because of the proximity of purusha to prakriti. In that state purusha is not alone. But the aspiring yogi disciplines himself or herself and withdraws from the impressions laid by perception.

What I was relating above about my near-death experience is identical to “the proximity of purusha to prakriti.” In life, spirit and matter are happily married. In death they separate and drift apart. It seems to me that the purpose of the universe is to provide purusha with a prakriti to play in, and so to withdraw from the play—the *lila*—is the opposite of what we should be doing. We should integrate the two poles and delight in what blossoms forth. Sure, eventually it will all turn to nothingness, and we will once again be lone spirits floating through the void. That may well be our true home. But trust me, it will take a lot of suffering before it becomes an attractive proposition. This world is still the berry in the palm of our hand.

The class agreed that the Yoga Sastra has a great value short of our ultimate annihilation. Every bit of it is enlightening and instructive. It’s not that it all leads up to the last sutra like grades to

Parnassus. Learning to live well at every step is also important. Most of us are quite happy to retain our mental modifications, spending our time improving and refining them over the chaotic ones we were previously presented by happenstance. Where and how far to take this instruction is up to each individual.

We have now covered the whole rainbow of Patanjali's teaching. The next Pada—section or chapter—will offer more detailed work on many aspects of mind that can bring us a lot of freedom and healthy guidance. Before we begin, I welcome your comments on the first Pada and the way we've interpreted it, and especially on this crucial question of withdrawal vs. engagement with the endless series of miracles that we call life. Aum.

Part II

Some ideas from the book *Monsters and Magical Sticks, There's no such thing as hypnosis?* by Steven Heller & Terry Steele, Ph.Ds, were also part of the class. There are some revelations in it about removing obstacles that even Patanjali would admire. I promised to include my review for those interested, and here it is:

Like Vedanta, psych can be deadly dull or it can be relevant and exciting. This one is a thrill a minute. I read a lot of psychology, and this is one of my all-time favorites.

In the middle of my time with it, I had a temporary loss of brain function. When I emerged, I was very touchy about reading anything with any darkness in it. You'd be surprised how close to 100% of books contain a significant measure of fear-inducing material to a tender mind. Despite dealing with my psychological struggles, this book was a joy from start to finish. The good doctor radiates a very bright light, and I will probably read it again very soon to catch what my stuporous brain missed.

Happily, the very tight foreword by Joyce C. Mills & Richard J. Crowley, sums the book up better than I could. This is the lion's share of it:

Steve Heller, together with the help of his dear friend and colleague Terry Steele, has provided readers with a dynamic and brilliant entrance into a magical world within each of us—a world where it is believed our true abilities, inner learnings, and healing resources reside. Through the use of humor, metaphor, and enlightening case examples, Heller takes us far beyond the conscious world of what we “think” and “perceive” reality to be, and stretches our minds into the dimension known as the *unconscious*. His original, and often provocative, theories and approaches help shed new light on the classic question confronting many of us: “Why can't I overcome my problem when I'm so competent in other areas of my life? Why am I continually stuck in this area?”

Heller's views take us into a powerful realm within the unconscious mind that not only perpetuates the problems, but also contains solutions. It is here that Heller offers the field of psychotherapy a major contribution: his conceptualization of the “unconscious/out-of-conscious” sensory system finally provides clinicians with a tangible and precise means of working with the elusive and problematic aspects of unconscious functioning. By creatively evoking, assessing, and utilizing the language of our sensory systems, Heller is able to identify the out-of-conscious sensory system that is generating the system, pain, or unwanted behavior. He then shows us how he playfully and hypnotically helps clients enter into their own out-of-conscious sensory systems to bring back into conscious awareness the innate resources of this pivotal area.

This process facilitates the clients' discoveries of choices in their lives, and activates their abilities to break unwanted

patterns of feeling and behavior. What was once creating the problem—out-of-conscious sensory system—now becomes an ally and a resource for generating growth, not only within the previous problem area, but into other areas of life as well.

If ever a book makes you want to jump for joy, this is it. Not only do you feel like you are in the presence of genius, but it is a genius that comes in a lighthearted and healing form.

Having worked with a few people on their problems, not to mention my own, I was almost jealous, and at least seriously humbled with admiration for Heller's cleverness. He does admit that he selected some of his best successes, and he had plenty of failures in his career too. But I couldn't help but feel how plodding, boring and dull my approach is compared to his. I'm a true Taurus, the ultimate bovine. I can have an explanation that makes a lot of sense, and I try to baldly convince my friend of its validity. It may be quite logical and convincing, but it often doesn't work in precisely the areas it's most needed. We may both agree that it's the right rationalization or framework, but any meaningful change is slow or nonexistent. I have had a tough time figuring out why we can't simply decide to fix ourselves and then do it and get it over with. Cow man very slow to catch on!

As Mills and Crowley point out, our problem areas are particularly resistant to conscious intervention. We can be very convinced of a right pathway, but we find ourselves deviating from it against all our willpower, even with outside help. Heller in his practice could help people cure themselves in no time, and with hardly any effort. Call it what you want, he was freeing the person's own psyche to do the work it already wanted to do, and even already knew how to do, but was being blocked by a type of hypnotic suggestion.

In our Vedanta studies we have talked a lot about how conditioning by authority figures in early childhood curtails our

free expression and the development of our full potential. Heller saw conditionings as essentially identical to post-hypnotic suggestions. He also found a unique method to speak the personalized language of the psyche so he could cancel the debilitating suggestion. And in many cases it worked. When you read about his successes in releasing a troubled soul from bondage, you have to be a pretty cold character to not want to jump up and down for joy.

If Heller was still alive I'd be heading for his next seminar. Sadly, he isn't.

Speaking of which, once a certain university professor invited Heller to address his class. The previous session he had lectured on the utter invalidity of hypnosis. Heller agrees it's invalid—ordinary concepts of what hypnosis is are false and misleading. Anyway, instead of being insulted by the ploy, Heller addressed the class, but as he was doing so he thoroughly hypnotized the professor without him even realizing it. It's one of the funniest tales I've ever read. When the prof finally realized what had happened, he became an ardent enthusiast and regular attendee at Heller's seminars.

The title story is perfect example of how Heller's system works. At around 3 or 4 years old, Heller's son became convinced that the football and baseball on the floor of his bedroom turned into monsters at night and were trying to attack him. Heller and his wife tried all sorts of ways to convince him not to worry, but in vain. "Logical, factual, linear, left-hemispheric explanations accomplished the sum total of nothing. We then decided to become illogical (some might call it creative) to solve the problem." Out of everyday materials they crafted a beautiful magic stick. They told their son they had been to a special magic doctor, who had made a magic stick that would keep the monster balls away. He had also given them some magic words to use when pointing the stick at the monsters.

That night he performed the prescribed ritual with his parents, and slept peacefully through the night. The next night he did the ritual all by himself. One or two nights more and he put the stick in a corner and stopped using it. After two weeks he gave them back the stick and told them he no longer needed it. Heller concludes, “The moral of this story is: Since his unconscious processes, based on his belief systems, created his inner reality of monster balls, it took his unconscious processes to create an inner reality that believed in a cure more powerful than the monster balls to solve the problem.... Within a matter of a few days, he not only learned *how* to solve the problem... he *had solved it*.”

Even if you never intend to do any psychological investigations, this is a very amusing and stimulating book. It’s written for therapists to work with their clients, so one unfortunate absence is how it might apply to work on yourself. I’ll be pondering this to see if it might work. Even so, enlightening insights are helpful in ways you can’t always anticipate.

The book has had its fifth printing from New Falcon Publications in 2009, so it should be relatively easily to find, unless you live outside the US. The excellent Introduction by Robert Anton Wilson is up online somewhere, and I have copied it, so if you’d like me to send that to you I will. Just keep in mind: there’s no such thing as hypnosis.

Part III

When purusha becomes entangled in prakriti, it’s called karma.

Part IV – responses

from Deb:

Here's my reply, which is mostly cadged from a conversation last night with Charles. We talked about 3-dimensional perspective in Western art—how the vanishing point does not exist in reality,

but has to be there for ultimate reference, because it makes the rest of what is painted cohere into a comprehensible structure. The final seedless samadhi is like that: it is our (transactional) vanishing point, unseen, not in the visible picture, unattainable even, but its hypothetical assumption makes everything else cohere and relate. I think that is a fabulous way of looking at it and very perceptive. Thank you, Charles.

To me it is like Narayana Guru's Darsana Mala: the whole field of consciousness is shown and given a relation: from the first projection or manifestation to very last extinguishing of that manifestation.... This is what the 51st pada is showing us: the final point or "step" in a long continuum. It is the same outlook as the Tibetan Book of the Dead: when you know how to die, then you know how to fully live.

from Peter M:

I googled Siddharudha Swami. At this link: <http://mimuktananda.com.au/siddharudha.html> it says he died in 1929. Guru Nitya was five years old at the time. So years later when he was traveling around India, he must have seen his undecayed corpse as he so appeared.

I have been giving some thought to the question you have been posing in your notes; to withdraw from life or to engage with it. From my own experience, when I withdraw into my Core I experience the peaceful, blessed, deathless state of Pure Existence, Consciousness, Bliss. When I come out of that withdrawal from my mind and senses, I experience the world which, as you know, is formulated and perceived magically and masterfully by our mind and senses. When I engage in the world of my mind and senses I am still interacting with existence, consciousness, and bliss in the particular forms and ways that That Almighty manifests, made possible by the self-founded, substantiating light and energy of the

Self. If I meditate on the essential Reality of the universal Sameness as my own Self and the Self of the world, my understanding gets corrected and becomes unitive. My ethics and actions tend to harmonize with that Self-understanding as long as I abide in my peaceful nature. My recent long spell of profound suffering, disbelief, and difficulty at having to let go of a deep attachment to some particularly intimate friends is a testament to what happens when I lose sight of these fundamentals. I forget my Self. I have tears, heart pains, and pathetic poetry to attest to my experience. I definitely saw and see my Self in them, but my yearning and efforts to hold on to them when the earth shook us free so-to-speak was coming from my ego's grasping.

I think the natural way to go is to oscillate between self-referring to our Ground, then to relate with the world in whatever way we want or need to, keeping alive the Knowledge of its non-dual, Self Nature. Then no fear, good fortune, and a neutral, balanced attitude to deal patiently with life's contraries and changes.

I picked up Nataraja Guru's commentary of the Bhagavad Gita last night before going to sleep. He makes the same point on p. 304. What matters is one's remaining affiliated with the Absolute. Then we can do whatever we want. Withdraw drastically or gradually into the numinous, or wear the guise of an ordinary person and keep on trucking, serving humanity with one's might and sense of humor; enjoying the ride and the fireworks show as the numinous Itself.

Chapter VI, verses 31-32

(31) That yogi who honours Me as abiding in all beings, established in unity, remaining as he may, in every (possible) way, he abides in Me.

The expression *sarvatha vartamanah api* (remaining as he may in every possible way) is meant to indicate that this teaching does not demand from the yogi any particular pattern of behaviour known to the spiritual world. He is free to conduct himself, behave, or appear as he likes. The one determinative here is that he remain affiliated to the Absolute.

Ekatvam asthitah (established in unity) lifts the subject of yoga from a form of discipline to the level of philosophical and unitive understanding, though not merely intellectual, because of the qualifying expression *sarvabhutasthitam* (as abiding in all beings). The philosopher must have established a living unity with all beings.

(32) By establishing an analogy with the Self, he who sees equality everywhere, O Arjuna, whether (in) pleasant or painful situations), he is considered a perfect yogi.

The notion of equality between men as extended beyond human life to all beings is the basis of *ahimsa* (non-injury) and is derived from the unity of the Self as understood in verse 29. All are brothers in the Self and unitive understanding can include the whole of existence. There is also a unitive equality which refers to oneself, which is a balanced neutrality between happiness and sorrow.

In the yogi, we have to understand two sets of adjustments; first his unitive adjustment with all beings, and secondly those with the great variety of situations alternating between happiness and sorrow. The former is "horizontal" and the latter "vertical." Where both refer to the same yogi, he can be described as *parama* (highest) (304-5).

The key motivator in most human beings is the avoidance of pain and knowing and living the happiness of our Being. We do

the former by doing the latter. How? By withdrawing the mind from the external, specific aspects of our consciousness to taste and gain insight into our pure, blissful, internal, eternal Core that fills both inside and out. "The practice of yoga consists of this merging of the mind through withdrawal, in the Self" (page 301). Nataraja Guru further addresses the ultimate and absolute nature of the Happiness that one attains through "withdrawal" on page 301 and 302, Chapter VI, verse 27.

Time for lunch.

With love. AUM Peter

Part V

Susan recommended this, from the end of That Alone, verse 6, as helpful to our discussion:

According to the Gita, the two constituent factors of our lives are the triple modalities of nature, *prakrti*, and the consciousness that is characteristic of the spirit, *purusa*. Nature is seen as being responsible for the aggregate of cause and effect, and the consciousness of the spirit as being responsible for the search for happiness. As the spirit is imprisoned in the body, which is dominated by nature, the search for happiness is vitiated by the distorting and veiling principles of *rajas* and *tamas*. Even *sattva* has a tendency to create a sense of attachment to anything pleasure-giving.

In the diagnosis and treatment of these defects, yogis and Vedantins hold different views. In Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms*, Chapter 2, Sutra 17 says: "the cause of that which is to be avoided is the union of the Seer and the Seen." The Gita does not recommend withdrawal or turning away from the world that is seen, but the cultivation of a transparency of vision by which one sees the Absolute alone as the one reality residing in all. Perceiving

the Self alone in everything is given as the ideal in the sixth and seventh mantras of the Isa Upanishad:

Now, he who on all beings
Looks as just (*eva*) in the Self (Atman),
And on the Self as in all beings--
He does not shrink away from Him.

In whom all beings
Have become just (*eva*) the Self of the discerner--
Then what delusion (*moha*), what sorrow (*soka*) is there
Of him who perceives the unity!

In Narayana Guru's *Yoga Darsana*, he combines the positions of the Vedantins and the yogis when he says:

That which always unites the mind
With the reasoning Self, and also gets united with it,
And which is in the form of restraint,
That is praised as *Yoga*.

Where the seer, the sight and the seen
Are not present, there the heart
Should be joined, as long as incipient memory-factors
(are present);
Such is *Yoga* (says) the knower of *Yoga*.

Although the nature of consciousness is to seek liberation, the instrument at its disposal defeats that purpose. The serial order in which experience comes is: awareness, activity, and a consolidation of the total effect as a conditioning. Such conditioning inevitably leads to a future recurrence of the same experience, which will be dominated by a reaction of flight or

combat if the accompanying emotion is painful, or attraction if the accompanying emotion is pleasure-giving. Identification of consciousness with the modalities causes forgetfulness of one's true nature. This is what the Guru laments in the present verse.