

## 2022 Patanjali Class 53

5/23/23

Sutra II:1 – Self-purification, self-study, and continuous contemplation on Isvara constitute practical yoga.

Sutra II:2 – For the purpose of bringing about absorption and attenuating afflictions.

Sutra II:3 – The afflictions are ignorance, ego identity, attachment, hatred, and lust for life.

We're now entering Patanjali's second chapter, which deals with practical yoga, beginning with a substantial section on the Afflictions, for now merely introduced in the third sutra. We'll make an effort to penetrate beyond the word concepts to their living impact on our psyches in subsequent classes.

Deb found it amusing that only after nearly a year and a half (our first class was January 4, 2022), have we arrived at the beginning, and only now are we ready to really examine ourselves and our stumbling blocks, learning how we can employ Patanjali's advice to melt them away. She feels we are all familiar with our essential stumbling blocks, which continue to come up despite our long acquaintance with them, interfering with our absorption and expansion.

Actually, we continue to stumble because we haven't truly addressed our blocks, and Patanjali only gives hints—remember, his are just lecture notes—it's Nitya who is teaching us how to go about freeing ourselves. He was always urging us, in his gentle way, to make a breakthrough. His opening commentaries are unequivocal invitations, for instance:

If you have lived for a long time with an undisciplined mind, allowing yourself to be conditioned with indiscriminate social habits, you cannot easily wean yourself from your established habits; you may find that the aloneness postulated by

Patanjali's Yoga cannot be easily attained. The threefold method suggested here—purification, self-study, and continuous contemplation of Isvara, the supreme model—is to enable your inner discipline to yield the desired result.

Inner impurities and spiritual absorption cannot go together. Diehard habits are the breeding ground of spiritual obstacles. If a seed is allowed to grow, in course of time, the stem of the plant will branch off and bring forth leaves, flowers, and seeds that belong to that particular species. In the same manner, each individual has many innate tendencies that can sprout. Hence, on the one side, new negative tendencies should not be encouraged to implant themselves in your personality formation and those that are already established, like parasites, are to be rooted out meticulously. (149-50)

Once again, Patanjali has just mentioned the three categories, and it's up to the interpreter to explain what they mean and how they are to be used to best advantage. In this, Nitya is unequalled for amateurs like ourselves, providing just enough information to prompt us to take it further:

Trying to reach the summit has three stages. First is exerting yourself physically and mentally (*tapas*). The second is understanding your own resources and applying your abilities to the best advantage (*svadhyaya*). The third is fixing your goal on the summit and attacking the problem by getting into a constant dialogue with the Absolute (*Isvara pranidhana*). When these three disciplines go hand in hand, you are disciplining yourself with kriya yoga.

It is easy to imagine. It is a little more difficult to explain to another what you see in your imagination. It is even more difficult to act according to your word. That is why action is given primacy in the self-discipline that is recommended. (152)

I emphasized the importance of Nitya's "hand in hand" in the above, since the image seems to have a linear implication. Words always unfold in sequential fashion, yet here, all three disciplines are facets of a single focus: examining ourselves in the light of the Absolute normative value, here called Isvara, with an eye to discarding or burning away the junk that we are learning to recognize. It is instantaneously effective. Yoga, when unitive, does not occur in stages, it's a concurrent grasping of eternal contemplative issues. The eight limbs of Yoga we are about to explore have the same sequential presentation, and are normally taught in steps, where you thoroughly deal with the first limb before you move on to the second, and so on. Yet all eight stages are present at all times and interpenetrate and support each other, and they are always works in progress. There is no finish line. They are not meant to be and don't have to be learned like a high school science or math class.

Andy mused that sometimes you can see how a certain conditioning is elective, and you can also see how one that first appears personal is generational. He was thinking of generations of men— how men's relationship to their fathers is a big issue, and what looks like an individual matter, if you probe into it, can be revealed to be a multi-generational or cultural issue. Andy didn't mean this as a way of letting yourself individually off the hook, but karmic conditioning can take lots of different forms and some are widely distributed. It was a tantalizing idea, yet Andy did not offer any specifics, which would have brought the ideas to life, so it served only as an echo of Nitya's second paragraph, above, where resolving afflictions is easy to imagine but hard to actualize.

Deb tried to help out, agreeing that many of our stumbling blocks are part of the whole sphere of being essentially an embodied entity who doesn't remember its source. She described

us as little sputniks, with millions of intangible interactions passing in and out all around us.

It was clear that dancing around the issues was far easier than getting a hold on them.

Bill reiterated the value of just remembering how we perceive the world and interact with it, there are so many impressions that go into the colorations making who we are: our genetics, our fathers, and our culture, for instance, all color how we see world, and influence how we interact at any particular time. The sutras help him to remember Isvara, bringing up the question of how you begin to see what is real, how to clarify your vision of what is. He and Andy may have been thinking of Nitya's introduction to the affliction of avidya, ignorance, here:

From the very start of life, our conceptual beliefs are built upon unexamined and vague hearsay, false conjectures, and the propaganda literature of people with vested interests. Because of having lived in family and community circles of undisciplined people, our minds cling on to several prejudices. That state is generally called avidya, being steeped in wrong prejudices and inadequate methods of right reasoning. (155)

Deb likened avidya in respect to personal issues to a box we are living in, and any answer you come up with is inevitably part of the box. Stepping back into non-verbal absorption is the greatest answer you can have.

Absorption was the hard-won culmination of the first chapter, so it seems the class was naturally reluctant to surrender it and cycle back to the beginning.

Jan shared a profound experience of absorption from earlier in the day, in her regular hatha yoga class. The teacher played some quiet chanting music in the background, and at the end of her stretches she found herself transformed, floating, peaceful. She had

already been thinking about some of her conditionings, and was trying to work with them in a focused way, but the hatha yoga helped her get to a different state naturally, by just relaxing into it.

This is all well and good, yet I felt I should stand up for the rooting out of negative tendencies of the subject matter. We're not just going to take recourse in the idea of the Absolute, which is a huge relief all by itself, we're also going to look at ourselves and correct certain weaknesses, by way of concrete self-examination. The question is, why do we so often unintentionally abandon that relaxed and groovy place within? Granted, we have been pondering these ideas for a long time, and have put many of our problems to rest, forever. Yet life is kind to keep bringing up what we haven't adequately addressed yet. The time is now and the place is here to take on those issues, if we are ever going to.

In keeping with that resolve, Deb spoke of the veiling principle of externality Nitya mentions in his brilliant exposition under the third sutra, opening with:

The Absolute as an idea is conceived of as the supreme truth, One without a second and unconditional. As just a statement, this has only a rhetorical significance. As individuals, our attempt is to experience the Absolute within the limitation of a living organism in which everything becomes conditional as soon as we try to comprehend it with our minds or senses.  
(154)

Deb was correct that this is where a lot of our work is, in the specifics of overcoming afflictions. We have to work on what we keep bumping into.

Jan rightly asserted that entering into attunement with our higher self makes for a deeper, more real, more vibrant world. That's right: both these aspects are essential. The self-examination and the Absolute-contemplation working together produce the

purifying heat of tapas. This is what happens in meditation, according to Bill: thoughts float by, negative ones like why did I do this wrong? You're just letting them go so you can get back to Isvara. Somewhat paradoxically, he called that a process of self-examination of those things arise that he needs to see and work on, the things that block you. Letting go and examining are diametrically opposed, obviously, yet that doesn't mean we can't do both.

The class's conversation was beginning to cohere around a transformative perspective. Deb noted we have a pattern of our self that we have constructed, which is our way of projecting on the world. Patanjali is holding out for the deconstruction of our falsely projecting self. Andy added that in a way, noticing is deconstructing. That's right: by bringing the awareness of the present to bear, some burdens of the past evanesce on the spot, and you instantly feel lighter.

For Nancy, you need to question why you are responding to something in a certain way. Bill admitted that so often we fail to look at what's causing us to read things the way we do.

Karen, holding her very meditative-looking cat, Tommy, in her lap, told us, "When I find myself examining some mood that I don't like about myself, my trigger is gratitude, so I try to immediately switch into that mode instead. Today I was driving home right at dinnertime with all the traffic, and I got stuck in a huge line and it was taking forever because there were people going by me and taking cuts in front of me, and I didn't think it was fair. After feeling bad about it, I decided there was no reason I should be upset. I tried to switch to a gratitude state, reminding myself that I was safe in my car, I was going to get home eventually, the trees were gorgeous and the sun was shining." It worked, Karen decided we need to have triggers like that to make us aware we can switch our attitudes.

While consciously rearranging our attitudes does work and is

the least we should do, I dared to suggest it doesn't get to the root. We need to uncover why we get upset in the first place, and then a permanent change is possible.

Susan thought Karen was completely justified in being angry at those drivers, and she totally related. Road rage has been a lifelong issue for her. She told us: “Now I try to go into my body when I am feeling frustration on the road, and think about my gut tightening. If I really think about the sensation and the feeling of discomfort, it helps me to feel less anger and frustration.”

I'm sure Patanjali would have included a sutra on road rage, except that cars hadn't been invented yet. It surely deserves acknowledgement as a major affliction in modern times. I pointed out that “going into the gut” was the same as getting to the root of the matter. The surface issue was rude drivers, which we are helpless to safely do anything about, but aren't there personal factors we could address? Karen got us on the right track with gratitude, yet why doesn't gratitude persist? Or bliss, for that matter? What else is going on?

When she feels distressed and angry, Deb finds it helpful to look for the thread going through, tying it all together. She finds that the conditioning of her family dynamics still affects her, and it's helpful for her to recognize that.

The light finally went on. Anita, another road rage babe, realized her anger might go back to her feelings of lack of respect that she has always felt, going back to a childhood with four domineering brothers who picked on her a lot, and, it seems, easily crowded her out for attention. She was always at the back of the line. Now, when someone cuts her off or does something stupid on the road, she feels it was disrespectful. That means, on top of the more or less minor event of the moment, a ton of unpleasant baggage was attached.

Knowing this, as Andy said, may be all that's necessary. I figure that Life is kind to give us opportunities to use the irritations

of the moment to access our chronic pains, and bring a measure of light and levity to them.

Anita's insight clicked for Susan. Bad driving is Not Fair! "That's what comes to me from my trials with my brother long ago. I wanted there to be rules when I was young and wanted them to be heeded. I felt such chaos at times and wanted more control. I guess the road sometimes feels that way too."

Childhood trauma is a kind of PTSD everyone carries, to a degree, and you can counsel yourself to let it go. We don't have to bring our brother, or our four brothers, along with us every time we are out on our own, being disrespected. Our burdens can be processed and diminished through yoga, and vaporized if we can make a true breakthrough.

From the old notes, below: We have to keep in mind that none of this even reaches consciousness without a sincere effort. It's not a conscious choice to remain afflicted, but a preconscious decision made early in life and then held onto with dogged tenacity.

Nancy thought that you can also look at it that when you put yourself in traffic, you are with a lot of individuals you don't know, and you don't have control over how they act, so it's important to conduct yourself in a straightforward way; you don't have to hold back. Don't be aggressive, but drive as you see fit. You are an equal part of it, and should not be persecuted for your own choices. Just like with siblings, Nancy thought—there is the possibility if you can conduct yourself in a way that is assertive, of holding your own. She admitted, "I'm in the opposite place: everyone is always honking at me, because I'm really irritating a lot of other people."

Susan had another epiphany: "I'm going to think of those irritating drivers as Nancy from now on, and then I won't be mad at them, because I could never be mad at Nancy." She further reflected, "I love to drive and it's one of the only things I actually



think I'm good at, so maybe there's an ego thing going on too." Egos and cars? Who would've thought it?

Anita shared a story that nicely reflects the spirit of yoga. She's just moved to Arizona, into a large apartment building especially for retirees:

I live in four story building and sometimes I'm tired before I get to the door, so I rest on a bench in the lobby. Sometimes people will stop and talk, and today a woman invited me to share coffee with a small group, up in the beautiful breezeway. I found four ladies, (I have moved to this part of the country where everyone is old), and they were all concerned about a woman who wasn't there because her son had died. They all had sympathy, and as they shared their stories, I realized there are no accidents, there must be a reason I'm meeting them, and what can they teach me? Then I thought, why should they teach me? Maybe there is something I can do for them. It made me realize that my concern had been selfish, so I changed it to what I could offer them. Maybe that is what I am supposed to be doing. Or maybe the offerings can go both ways.

A small realization like that makes literally a world of difference! I thought of all those boys crowding young Anita out, how she would have always been trying to get her little bit out of the turmoil, vying for a modicum of attention. And the habit is still present, unnoticed.

Anita went one step farther, admitting she is a judgmental person, but she has decided to turn the tables and imagine how unfairly others were judging her. What do we really know about someone we bump into, after all? Perhaps her judgments were more like projections. She supposed it had to do with aging: you get pushed along to be more humane instead of just human.

Nitya puts our discussion in perspective:

The culturing process of life as a whole is painful. That pain is often experienced as something similar to a conflict or neurosis. In the present case, already existing pathological states are therapeutically corrected and the system as a whole is morally and spiritually replenished and nourished so you can live a well-examined life with values that are spiritually homogenized. When such corrections are made in body and mind the cogitating faculty becomes more efficient and its power of comprehension becomes clearer. Precision increases.

When your own nature is becoming more and more evident to yourself, the imperfections of your social personality will become more and more clear. In its place Isvara—the universal person not afflicted with the love/hate dualities of physico-social life—can be accepted as a better model for imitation or identification. (148-9)

We used a story from the old notes of 2010 for our closing meditation:

We finished up with a wonderful story from Moni. At work there was a bipolar client who had everyone terrorized. No one had been able to get him any treatment because he refused to cooperate and would even beat them with his cane. He called for an appointment, and everyone decided Moni should handle him. Moni didn't know anything about the situation, but after they set up the appointment with her, people came and told her how dangerous and mean he was. Moni was nervous, but when he arrived she saw he was a small and weak fellow, and she began to relax. In her kind and gentle way, she reached out to him. It took some time, but she was able to become friends, and get him on the road to some badly needed assistance. People like him can easily sense the blocks and negativity in others,

and the fact that Moni was open and not hostile made all the difference. If Moni had given in to her fears, the logjam would not have been cleared, but instead she overcame them with wisdom, and the result was a win all around. This is a shining example for all of us.

## **Part I addendum**

One of my students in Gita 2023 included a bit related to our discussion. The author cited has a TED talk also:

I was just reading a book on siblings and how when one grows up with brothers and sisters there is a gut sense that things should be fair -- that if one child is getting more ice cream, say, than another, there the other child feels the unfairness acutely. Fairness is rooted in our DNA, and the part of the brain that lights up when we encounter something we consider unfair is the same that lights up when we experience disgust -- he writes: “we recoil from the very idea of inequity in the same way we roil from a rotten egg or putrefied meat. And this is not a concept that arose late in human development; it's the brain's insula that is the seat of disgust, a deeply buried region far below our vaunted—and comparatively modern -- cerebral cortex. Human impulses don't get much more primally encoded than that, and this same sense of equity may have played a key role in the formation of civil society itself.” p.44, Jeffrey Kluger, *The Sibling Effect*

## **Part II**

From Nancy Y's class of Jan 1, 2012:

What a beautiful section, here at the beginning of the second Pada! I'm particularly moved by this (now included in Nitya's Selected Quotes):

When your own nature is becoming more and more evident to yourself, the imperfections of your social personality will become more and more clear. In its place Isvara—the universal person not afflicted with the love/hate dualities of physico-social life—can be accepted as a better model for imitation or identification.

The word *Isvara* is derived from *Is*, which literally means “ruling from within.” The life of an individual is not an amorphous chaotic structure that comes from the randomness of the physical world. It has a goal to achieve and laws to abide by. The innate law of everything that governs, controls, and maneuvers it to function for the purposeful attainment of a given goal is Isvara. If you know there is such a guiding principle in your life, life becomes all the more dear and an incentive comes to live as correctly as possible. Thereafter, the lower aspect of the self will always be in resonance with Isvara, the higher Self. That Isvara is looked upon as your true teacher or preceptor. Relating always with that Isvara to develop insight into the meaning of your life combines both the purificatory and educative aspects.

If you have lived for a long time with an undisciplined mind, allowing yourself to be conditioned with indiscriminate social habits, you cannot easily wean yourself from your established habits; you may find that the aloneness postulated by Patanjali's Yoga cannot be easily attained. (149)

Contrarily, when you have lived for a long time with a fair amount of discipline, it becomes much easier to wean yourself from useless habits.

When Nitya explains the three guidelines of tapas, svadhyaya and isvara pranidhana, they seem like obvious principles that we all should take for granted, but such is not the case. In most places it's as if they are a great secret, and they are made out to be occult and esoteric mysteries. My friend Bill Robinson, in his autobiography, succinctly expresses why this is so: "People are far more willing to accept and become passionately devoted to the wildest, most absurd, and obviously fabricated tales, than they would to more mundane stories that just might be true." Though I like a good yarn as well as anyone, for building my personal castles on secure foundations I much prefer to dig down in search of solidity.

I once believed that lying on a warm beach with ridable waves was the perfect formula for bliss, but over the years I have been "cursed" to be inspired by Nitya to the point where a little of that goes a very long way. I crave intellectual, artistic, and interpersonal challenges, and am most happy struggling to resolve all sorts of dilemmas and paradoxes, both my own and my friends'. The rush of complex accomplishments is far superior to merely being heated by the sun, like a lizard on a chilly morning.

The essence of this new paradigm is a dialogue with the Absolute, which, since the Absolute is everywhere, is a dialogue with everything. Life continuously offers us opportunities to reassess our position, or to quietly examine the outlandish positions that those around us take for granted—or maybe that we ourselves take for granted. It's hard to explain the subtle difference between simply accepting the world and its people as they are, and being intrigued enough to try to discern the hidden motives and twisted notions that constitute the undisciplined ego's putative golden parachute or social security package.

This is yet another curse of Nitya: the comfortable falsehoods that cushion the orthodox mind have been "outed" so they burn instead of soothe. It took me a long time to realize that most people

are not interested in stripping off their burning cloaks, so I should keep my thoughts to myself, but learn it I did. The best method is to take lessons from what I can observe and apply it to my own life. Once in a while someone asks for a little help with a conundrum or wants to have an actual dialogue about spirituality, and then I love to join with them, but otherwise my contemplative relationship to Isvara is a personal affair. I well know, though, that interaction with the world prevents me from becoming narcissistic or otherwise trapped in a world of my own imagining. We have to be very careful to stay open to the whisperings of Isvara all around us, especially those that criticize our favored positions.

Not only can we visualize that the Absolute is everywhere and in everyone, it is also the inspiration that wells up within our deepest self, as Nitya makes clear in the above quote. The best discipline for the ego is to have it humbly listen to the inner promptings and assume its proper role as a late stage of a long, complex process by which the brain transposes inspiration into action. The ego's job is to discriminate our imbecilic promptings from the splendid ones, and learn (eventually) to select the latter.

Inspiration is a process that is going on within us much of the time, so the opportunity to attend to the Absolute is also continually present. All we have to do is remain open to it, which is easy enough, since doing so is blissful in its own right. And for a social misfit like me, surrendering my self-fixation for an Absolute-fixation is not only highly rewarding, it is a great relief.

Happy New Year to all my dear friends in Nancy's YS class!

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From the first class:

3/30/10

Sutra II:1

Self-purification, self-study, and continuous contemplation on Isvara constitute practical yoga.

A giddy full moon crew set out to begin to explore the second Pada, which deals with the practicalities of achieving the sublime states described in the first Pada. Since the Gurukula class always focuses on relating the teachings to our everyday lives, this part will be much more familiar and “user friendly.” Admittedly, many participants have struggled with the complexities and abstractions of the first part, but those who have stuck with it should find the going much easier from here on.

The class assessed the three aspects of kriya (practical) yoga listed by Patanjali as being negative, neutral and positive, respectively. They are also roughly parallel to tamas, rajas and sattva.

Tapas, or self-purification, is the process of paring away the impediments we have accumulated. If you didn’t know that we have been doing tapas all along in this study, now you do. Svadhyaya, self-study, is coming to know ourselves as we are. Until we dig down deeply into our psyche, we imagine we are the being we have been cajoled to believe in by others. Isvara pranidhana, contemplation of the ideal, offers a positive model toward which to direct our actions, our kriya. Isvara, as you may recall, is Patanjali’s term for the Absolute.

All three of these examinations should take place in concert, otherwise they become lopsided. Bill talked about how Western psychology is obsessed with the negative afflictions of the psyche. There is no admission of any higher unity to kindle optimism, so even if you root out many negative factors you may well remain depressed and unsatisfied.

Likewise, many seekers prefer to associate only with their positive side. They imagine that admitting to having negative proclivities makes them appear unspiritual. It’s one thing to be “in

the groove,” but what often happens is that the dark side is merely suppressed so that we can appear to be already realized. If something ugly pops up, instead of dealing with it, the seeker feels guilty and keeps it under wraps. As Jan put it, under their surface cheerfulness is a “simmering anxiety” that she has noticed on numerous occasions. It is only a false front.

Lost in all this wallowing and pretention is the development of the true self according to its interests and talents. Self-study isn't just study. Nowadays we would call it self-expression, or the joy of living. Unfortunately, the term ‘self-study’ conjures up an image of sitting at a musty table in the library reading a book. What is meant is that all actions and reactions are examined with an eye of neutrality, right in the thick of the fray.

Linda wondered if the neutrality we were talking about was anything like the equanimity she is familiar with from her Buddhist studies. That's a very astute question. Equal-mindedness is a goal in both Vedanta and Buddhism. What often happens, though, is that it is also treated as a means to the end. When that happens, important aspects of the psyche are suppressed in favor of a peaceful exterior. With that, instead of being the crowning achievement of self-liberation, equanimity becomes a tool of self-repression. You stifle your ups and downs to appear calm, instead of curing them to become truly calm.

Jan mentioned how grateful she was that when some negative part of her psyche surfaced, she could now see it as a healthy thing. She knew she could examine it and either dismiss it or correct it, and it would lose its unconscious hold on her. The class agreed that such “uprisings” were a sign of mental health, and repressing them was a kind of mental malaise. At the same time, there was nervousness among some that those impulses could take you too far, and you might get knocked out of balance. We have all learned to fear the suppressed aspects of our unconscious, and that fear is the very feeling we have that impels us into the suppression mode.



By no longer being afraid of herself, Jan was exemplifying the more open type of equanimity. It requires bravery and repeated effort (known as *tapas*) to learn that attainment, which is a true and valuable *siddhi*.

There is a reference at the end of the commentary about verse 8 of *Atmopadesa Satakam*, in relation to attuning to the voice of the spirit, either from within or from an experienced preceptor. There isn't much about it in that commentary, really, but I did find this bit that addresses what we've been discussing. The verse likens our sensory life to five birds flitting about and eating fruits:

The movement of the birds is qualified as *nayena*, evasive. The word *naya* has several shades of meaning. The tactics of a diplomat are called *naya*. The implication is that in outward form one seems to be upholding ethical norms and correct behavior, while at heart one is maneuvering with conceit. The defense mechanism of concupiscence is *naya*. In the Holy Koran one can find hundreds of passages decrying this kind of conceit. For a spiritual or moral life, one is asked to be straightforward and simple.

The Freudian concept of the clash between the id and the superego being reflected in the neurotic behavior of the ego, can be used to more fully understand the connotation of the term *naya*. The operation of the moral authority of the superego is a kind of mirroring within oneself of a fake image of public expectations. One then tries to conform to the requirements of that pattern with continuous deliberation, while at the same time indulging in a secretive enjoyment of forbidden pleasures, privately painting them with altruistic motives to look as bright and acceptable as possible.

Linda wanted to know where the authority promised in this sutra's commentary was going to come from. Similarly, Paul

wasn't sure how to distinguish the authentic inner voice from the selfish promptings of the ego, since both sound the same to our mind. Both can be equally convincing to us, depending on our inclinations. This is another very important consideration for the seeker of truth.

First off, as Deb and others maintained, we are trying to learn to listen to the authentic inner voice, because that is the final authority. Isvara teaches from within; it *is* within. Disaster comes when the voice of authority moves to an outside agency. That being said, it is very helpful to have a wise preceptor or guide to help us distinguish between our own authentic voice and the selfish, manipulative one we know so well. All agreed that that was a primary role of the group setting of the class. Despite a lot of experience, none of us is beyond the need for constructive criticism. When we say something that seems perfectly true to us, the class provides feedback on whether it is valid or in what sense it is off the mark. With that kind of support, we can rapidly learn to distinguish the source of our inner promptings.

There was a widely held feeling that the class really was acting as a kind of guide for all of us, and everyone felt powerfully sustained and encouraged by it. A brief but profound meditation period closed the evening. Whether it was the moon or the sharing, the ebullience and inspiration were palpable. Several people mentioned at the door how the ideas we talked about continued to resurface all week, and how much they meant to them. It is very gratifying to see how the group has matured and grown stronger during the course of this challenging and intense study. Aum.

4/6/10

Sutra II:2

[Kriya Yoga is] for the purpose of bringing about absorption and attenuating afflictions.

Really a companion to the first sutra, the second sutra gives us the opportunity to really explore how the threefold technique of kriya yoga—tapas, svadhyaya and isvara pranidhana—is accomplished in our lives. I asked for people to share what they do, but it's going to have to be a future input. No one was ready to talk about their spiritual program, but Patanjali is going to lead us along with detailed and explicit instructions, so later on maybe we will be able to. Please think about it, and write or share it when you can. Spirituality is not just one monolithic program. Each of us is unique and has our own methodology.

Last week we loosely categorized tapas, svadhyaya and isvara pranidhana as respectively addressing negative, neutral and positive aspects of our sadhana, our spiritual development. All are essential and should go together. Like the Holy Trinity, they are three aspects of one single impetus: the aim of attaining samadhi, unitive absorption. It is important to know how we express them in our own lives.

Nitya lays out the import of the sutra very clearly here:

Trying to reach the summit has three stages. First is exerting yourself physically and mentally (tapas). The second is understanding your own resources and applying your abilities to the best advantage (svadhyaya). The third is fixing your goal on the summit and attacking the problem by getting into a constant dialogue with the Absolute (isvara pranidhana). When these three disciplines go hand in hand, you are disciplining yourself with kriya yoga.

It is easy to imagine. It is a little more difficult to explain to another what you see in your imagination. It is even more difficult to act according to your word. That is why action is given primacy in the self-discipline that is recommended. Kriya yoga has a positive goal. It also has a negative goal. The positive goal is to bring yourself into a state of equipoise and

imperientially obtain absorption. When the mind is not disturbed by conditioned states, absorption naturally comes.

The last sentence presents the negative goal. Both the positive and negative approaches are critically important and balance each other out. Many superficial seekers downplay the negative aspect, but in yoga both sides have equal weight and value. The class discussed how conditioning warped our perceptions and conceptions, so that without purifying ourselves of them our positive imagery is likely to be false. We are prone to delusion.

I used the handy example of George Bush, though the type is as common as fleas on a dog. As President, he knew for a fact that he was tight with God, no doubt about it, so he could act like the devil and never have a twinge of guilt. His advisors were busy protecting him from any negative feedback or contrary information, so he could plunge ahead heedlessly. In addition, he was pathologically screened off from critical self-examination, preferring an overblown self-image to reality. God help us from ever falling into such a trap! We beg to know our shortcomings so we can stop inflicting injury and misery, even unknowingly, on the world around us. But unless we critically examine our premises, we will be tempted to think of ourselves in this way.

Nitya describes tapas as critical reasoning of a contemplative order. He recalls the classic metaphor of a gold nugget concealed in worthless detritus. We bring a hot fire to the slag, and the gold melts and drains out to stand alone and untarnished. Nitya says, “As dross leaves molten gold, so unwholesome emotionalism and wrong conditionings leave us when we insistently enforce our right reasoning.”

Svadyaya means we should approach spirituality from our own authentic position and not as imitators of somebody else’s style. We need to learn to be ourselves. It sounds easy, but so many

forces constantly tear us away from ourselves that it's more difficult than we imagine.

Isvara pranidhana refers to the goal we are seeking. What predominant interest drives us to study yoga, for instance, or seek God or strive for perfection in some way? We are all highly motivated, yet no one in the class was able to verbalize their personal motivation. Odd. We did admit that who we are runs through our entire life, and possibly beyond. Bill and Susan talked about finding old memorabilia and realizing it spoke volumes about their interests and talents, as much today as back then. Others recalled reunions with old friends and classmates that put long stretches of their life into a perspective where they could perceive the continuity of their self, of the gold core beneath all its trappings of temporal ups and downs. The consensus was that even though we have made a lot of progress, we are still the same.

I hope that in the coming weeks we can share more of how we perform these three aspects of kriya yoga in a personal way. In the interim I'll share some of my own ideas so the idea is clearer.

As a child I loved piano music so much that I was passionate about it. Each new piece I wanted to learn I would think to myself, "If I could just play this, I would be happy, I would be satisfied, I could die content." It seemed like heaven to feel those sublime emotions and be able to share them with dear friends. Sometimes I wondered if I should sell my soul to the devil for the ability to play like a virtuoso, but I decided that was going too far. My heart's desire impelled me to try really hard to play very difficult pieces, and the interest drew me back time after time. I didn't know it then, but this was an instance of isvara pranidhana.

As a young adult though, I had decided that doing yoga and meditating was the whole point of life, and I had dropped playing piano as just another useless encumbrance of an enlightened existence. One day I was driving Nitya around in my VW, and he said to me, "Meditation doesn't just have to be sitting in lotus pose

with the eyes rolled up. Music can be a very fine meditation.” From that moment my love of music came roaring back. I saw how relating to it was a kind of yoga, and how well it suited me. I’m a rajasic type with a very active mind, so sitting for hours on end doing nothing, mumbling mantras or counting beads, drives me nuts. I want a big, cosmic challenge, with something beautiful as the bonus output. This is the svadhyaya, the part about being yourself. Nitya saw who I was better than I did, and with just a nudge put me back on track. Without that insight I might have spent long years drearily imitating all those exemplars who “do it right,” all the time wondering why it wasn’t working for me.

As for the tapas aspect, there’s always lots of hard work and discipline involved with even a mediocre talent development. You have to overcome plenty of obstacles to have practice time and lessons, and so on. As an example, I bought an electric piano with headphones that just barely fit in my car that I could haul to work and play after hours. Often it had to be out behind the fire engines, moved whenever there was work to do there. Beyond the obvious, there are subtle factors to negate also. My well-meaning father was so awed by the abilities of professional pianists, which are truly unbelievable, that he convinced me that I could NEVER be successful at it. Like pretending Jesus is not a human being, he convinced me that pianists weren’t human, and so I could never be like them no matter how much I tried. Too bad, but then I’ve enjoyed my life more as an amateur lazy bum than as someone who had to put their every moment into one thing, no matter how wonderful it was. So perhaps it’s just as well. But I relate this as one of the obstacles that’s been at the back of my mind impeding my progress and self-confidence, which took some critical contemplation to neutralize. There are always plenty more. Every time you conquer one you become a little more free to exercise your abilities, or as the rishis put it, become one with the Absolute.

So tapas is as essential as the other two and just as liberating, even though we describe it as negative.

In his commentary Nitya compares the Greek legend of Sisyphus with the Indian story of Narayanathu Bhranthan. Sisyphus was punished to endlessly roll a heavy boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back to the bottom. Narayanathu Bhranthan did the same task, but voluntarily, and he purposely let the rock roll back down, laughing hilariously at the joke. The class had a lot of fun with the two very similar myths, recognizing how we can never fully complete our program, which is cyclic and endless. If we ever secured the rock at the top, the game would be over. Several people shared the popular belief that we aim for the goal of enlightenment or what have you, attain it, and then that's the end of everything. But then what do you do for the rest of eternity? Luckily, life will inevitably cycle you back to the beginning of something new.

I figure that such ideas come from static training in schools and businesses, where simple tasks have a definite beginning, middle and end. But life is not like that, even though we have learned to treat birth, life and death as matching the same formula. Reality keeps on keeping on, cycling around and about.

The two myths demonstrate alternative ways to feel about our life: either it is a punishment and endless drudgery, or a delight and a source of undiminished amusement. Obviously we want to enjoy the second attitude, but whatever physical, mental and spiritual ailments we have force us toward the first. Kriya yoga therefore includes "ways and means for healing and correction," as Nitya puts it. Most of us have this need in some form most of the time. If you are lucky enough to not need it, you are a rare and fortunate individual who would also have no necessity for a class such as this. For the rest of us, there is challenging and exciting work ahead. Aum.

4/15/10

Sutra II: 3

The afflictions are ignorance, ego identity, attachment, hatred, and lust for life.

The class had a small celebration to say goodbye to Charles and Brenda, who are off to India for a goodly stretch. We wish them the best on their voyage of discovery.

Once we settled down, we took a brief look at each of the afflictions, though this is pretty much old hat for the class. Still, even old hats fit, and it doesn't hurt to dust them off occasionally. Perhaps the most interesting discovery was that they are all closely related, five facets of a single psyche, with fear being the energizing basis.

First we set out to define ignorance. Bill said it meant ignorance of our true nature, which therefore is a universally shared generic state. The only cure would be to come to know our true nature, which is a rare enough accomplishment. Deb described ignorance as separating the outside from the inside, in other words, imposing duality onto the essential unity. There are many degrees and levels of ignorance, some of them beneficial and some not. We can only be separate individuals—which is the game we are currently playing—if we temporarily forget our true nature. Moreover, we would be overwhelmed if we took in all the data flooding our systems, so our brain selectively chooses a tiny but pithy part to attend to. It seems to me that this type of ignorance is a blessing.

The word translated as ignorance is *avidya*, meaning not *vidya*. *Vidya*, according to the dikker, is “knowledge; science, learning, scholarship, philosophy.” This, then, is the cure for *avidya*, which takes on a less sweeping aspect in this light. We don't know everything, and we are incapable of knowing



everything. Unfortunately we often act on the barest minimum of information. We should first learn as much as we can, and examine our assumptions closely, before leaping to conclusions. While there is but one dramatic cure for generic ignorance, which is to know the Self, there is plenty of improvement we can make on our native state of intellectual ignorance.

Every situation begins with us knowing nothing about it. Then we start to discern a smidgen of shape, and like a blast of storm our mind supplies the rest. Too bad that the subject is drowned in the tempest, and that all we see is a projection of our stored expectations. In our ignorance we are quite satisfied with that, because it is just what we expect. Oh really.... We shouldn't be surprised it is what we expect, because we project our expectations and then are satisfied that we see just what we expected. It's a closed loop. Our mind has become an isolated fortress, shutting out all contradictory or even simply new input.

That type of affliction of ignorance is called the ego. *Asmita* means the sense of mine-ness. We glorify our separateness, erect flags over the battlements of our fortress, and only admit others who are on our team. Our ignorance becomes ossified, highly resistant to enlightenment in any sense of the word.

The correction for this necrotic state is to open the gates, let down the drawbridge, and admit some fresh air. Where the ego has grown shrunken and desiccated, we need to expand the boundaries and flush it all with the water of life. Having an ego is natural and normal. Nitya always described it as the locus of consciousness, essentially a mathematical reference point. It's the thick walls that are the problem, the affliction. We may not be able to extend the walls to include everything, but we can open the doors and invite the world inside.

Our attachments are the result of the ego deciding what it likes and doesn't like, and refusing to reconsider its choices. These get fixed in stone, like the ego that selects them. In earlier classes

we have discussed the positive side of attachments. Possibly the most prominent is our attachment to our children, who rely on us to keep them alive for many years until they are capable of doing it on their own. If we weren't attached to them, the first time they were a hassle we would just walk away. Our attachment to a project allows it to be completed, and our attachment to our job means we will show up again tomorrow. None of these are afflictions.

Where attachments go wrong is when they are inflexible and grounded in our overall ignorance. In our extended metaphor they reinforce the walls of our fortress; in fact, in many cases they are the walls. We become attached to our false and defensive mental states, and then spend a lifetime braising in our self-imposed misery inside. These attachments become so fixed that it is nearly impossible to overcome their inertia. And they are self-reinforcing: the pain they cause is projected onto the outside world that threatens to erode them and wash them away, so the psyche puts all its energy into protecting them and shoring them up. Without a conscious decision to take them down, they are going to stand forever.

We didn't talk about hatred much. It is a predictable outcome of a separated psyche feeling miserable but adroitly suppressing all the real reasons for it. We are masters at blaming something external for our internal woes, and then beaming the white heat of hatred onto it. A handy example is the right wing mobs currently storming about in the US. Talk about a tempest in a teapot: there is no actual basis for any of it, but false beliefs fueled by worm-tongued liars in the mass media have got them in a rage, capable of any criminal act. When the fortress is threatened, rage and fury mount the toughest defense. It is impossible to even reach the walls when those psychic hurricanes block all approach.

Possibly the most easily misunderstood of the afflictions is abhinivesa, translated as lust for life. It should be clear that the joy

of living is not meant here. We want to live and love to the maximum. It's when the enjoyment of life becomes a craving and a subject for selfish manipulation that it goes wrong. Abhinivesa is an interesting word, meaning (MW), "application, intentness, study, affection, devotion, determination (to effect a purpose or attain an object), tenacity, adherence to." The first half are not afflictions, but they become more so toward the end. There is a sense of desperation in some people when they feel that life is passing them by, which, if they are locked in a mental fortress, it is. We want to be careful here: rushing around ever faster within our prison is not the cure. Calmly unbolting and throwing open all the doors is more like it. Most of the societally prescribed palliatives are of the former type.

None of this is easy to accomplish, because underneath all our afflictions and holding them together is fear. Scotty talked about how much he wants to be free and live as an artist, but whenever he tells that to other people they throw cold water on his aspirations. When people have become accustomed to their little boxes, the thought of someone stepping out of theirs is a threat to their false sense of security, so they try to talk them out of it. And usually they succeed. We have to be strong enough to not need the approbation of others to make our moves, but we've been trained to "read" ourselves in their faces.

We have to keep in mind that none of this even reaches consciousness without a sincere effort. It's not a conscious choice to remain afflicted, but a preconscious decision made early in life and then held onto with dogged tenacity. For instance, many children are smacked for being curious. A prominent fundamentalist "psychologist" advises you should wait until the child is nine months old, any earlier doesn't do any good, and then start the beatings. When you are struck for being open and curious, you quickly learn to fear wondering about anything that doesn't bear the stamp of parental approval, which is most things. All

through your life, at the back of your mind you are anticipating another painful swat, and to avoid it you shun any and all independence. Most of humanity carries this cross and many more.

We also talked about how this can begin in adulthood. American soldiers have a high suicide rate—actually higher than the battlefield death rate—because they cannot admit their fears in combat. The cult of bravado they are part of forces them to bury their feelings and never talk about them. Once they are on their own, those suppressed feelings cause searing pain, but all they have been taught to do is beat them down and try to ignore them. To ignore is to cultivate willful ignorance. Suicide and insanity are the ultimate achievement of our afflictions. That should motivate us to get down to cases and take yoga seriously. These afflictions are bad medicine indeed.

We finished up with a wonderful story from Moni. At work there was a bipolar client who had everyone terrorized. No one had been able to get him any treatment because he refused to cooperate and would even beat them with his cane. He called for an appointment, and everyone decided Moni should handle him. Moni didn't know anything about the situation, but after they set up the appointment with her, people came and told her how dangerous and mean he was. Moni was nervous, but when he arrived she saw he was a small and weak fellow, and she began to relax. In her kind and gentle way, she reached out to him. It took some time, but she was able to become friends, and get him on the road to some badly needed assistance. People like him can easily sense the blocks and negativity in others, and the fact that Moni was open and not hostile made all the difference. If Moni had given in to her fears, the logjam would not have been cleared, but instead she overcame them with wisdom, and the result was a win all around. This is a shining example for all of us.

Part II

How nice to receive a thoughtful response like Jan's here. This is how you make quantum leaps in your life:

Scott,

Thanks for the great notes on our enlightening class. I had a couple of afterthoughts. Thinking about the false and inflexible viewpoint, and how underneath its fortress is fear, I thought of how in some families, as was true in ours, some of the body of fear came from real places and events like the depression, or the Holocaust. When ancestors lived with fear of destitution and death, I think they tended to become imbalanced and then passed on those neuroses to their kids. In our family, anxiety over money grew to huge proportions and sort of blended in with the other types of fear we are talking about, so that I often felt if I strayed from the parentally approved path of careers...well I would starve and end up living on the street. I had a hard time early on making choices for myself and to further my dreams because of listening to these voices. With my kids, I am trying to give them a sense that they can pursue their dreams and that the "means" will be there. No doubt though I am passing on some fears too, unawares. I tell them that starvation and destitution are not ever going to happen - wanting to remove that fear from their psyche, yet just talking about it may be making it a concept for them. This week, I want to pay more attention to situations where I might not be letting in enough new flow and info, and keeping my mental fortress closed. As I have said before, I always think of the dialectic tool. When I see myself taking a position internally, and needing to defend it to myself or see that it holds a lot of psychic energy, I can try to step away from it and embrace its opposite...waiting for the seeds of truth to emerge from that place. Good fodder for the mind while gardening. Take care,  
Jan

