

2022 Patanjali Class 56

6/13/23

Sutra II:8 – Hatred (*dvesha*) is that which accompanies pain.

Sutra II:9 – Clinging to life (*abhinevesha*) is sustained even in the learned, as in the ignorant, by the dynamics of one's own deep-rooted interest.

The final two afflictions now claim their own sutras. Instructions on how to attenuate afflictions continues through sutra 15, then blends into the following section of eleven sutras on The Task of the Seer. Only after that detailed preparation does Patanjali present his trademark eight limbs.

“For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love.”—Carl Sagan

Deb talked about a poem on quantum mechanics she has been preparing, and noted the connection of quantum entanglement with Yoga: if you fiddle with one side of a theoretical coin or entangled system, the other side responds, and it isn't a case of cause and effect, it is due to their actual unity. This shows that time and space don't exist in quantum reality, and loving and hating, which these two sutras portray, are the very manifestation of the non-duality we live within. The idea is our pain comes from attachment of wanting only one aspect, one side, and wanting to possess it or take ownership of it.

Andy mused that the first affliction, avidya or not-knowing, is the field of all the other afflictions. Avidya is a dualistic state in which opposites seemingly exist, and pleasure and pain are the results of our original ignorance. Deb concurred that avidya is the field where we see things as dual, which is our primal misunderstanding.

I pointed out that the unity of quantum states doesn't pertain to the everyday world of gross objects, only vanishingly tiny particles, because it approaches *consciousness*, the true field, where these truths do hold sway. Whenever we're attracted to something, there is an inevitable compensating element of repulsion. Indeed, it's the essence of motion. Of existence.

For Andy a paradox is struck here—in our self-help program we are trying to avoid pain, yet the movement toward pleasure is entangled with it. The offer of Yoga is moving at a 90-degree angle out of that duality. Yet Yoga *is* about feeling better, isn't it?

The three Gurukula Gurus were continuously upbeat and happy but it was not a polarized happiness, not dependent on external factors. They were settled in a joyous equipoise. I read a neuroscientist's hints about how this comes about, from David Eagleman's book, *The Brain: The Story of You*: "No one is having an experience of the objective reality that really exists; each creature perceives only what it has evolved to perceive." That means unifying our consciousness is an *evolutionary* prospect. I also shared my take on this from the old notes:

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 hardly 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 other people 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.

Andy thought to mention that it was the fourth anniversary of the passing away of his dear wife Bushra. One thing that stood out to him in that event is how at the end she was so desperately wanting to feel *solid*. There was a powerful insistence, of requiring everything to be as expected. Yet life is conditional, unfixed. It isn't solid. Andy learned a great deal, and is grateful to have had that intense experience, because when you are unavoidably exposed to the reality or actuality of someone's departure as an embodied being, you understand that to be true of yourself too, and of everything. He wasn't sharing this in a spirit of sorrow or grievance, only the realization that, Hey, we're all getting older....

I read out a splendid sentence from *A Gentleman in Moscow*, by Amor Towles, that seems to relate:

[The Count] had said that our lives are steered by uncertainties, many of which are disruptive or even daunting, but that if we persevere and remain generous of heart, we may be granted a moment of supreme lucidity—a moment in which all that has

happened to us suddenly comes into focus as a necessary course of events, even as we find ourselves on the threshold of a bold new life that we had been meant to lead all along. (441-2)

Susan wanted to add the word *curiosity* to this quote, to go with its perseverance and generosity of heart. For her, being curious is a way to not control, and she's learning this from nature. She wrote: "I put together a little bird bath recently and was so happy when I went out there today to see an actual bird perched on the edge, a lesser goldfinch! So cute! The bird and nature in general are such good reminders for me to stay curious, not get too wrapped up in thinking that I am making my life happen."

Andy watches a lot of television, and (because of this?) knows there is a strongly reinforced cultural strain where we all believe that we are our bodies. It's an article of faith that we will be around forever. It's established even in the wise, as it's a libidinal power—we have the full authority of our libido sitting behind it. It's not so terrible, but it is an *illusion* of solidity, and thus a child of avidya. Andy is now convinced that it's really important to focus on the central importance of avidya here.

I agreed with Andy that the ego decides it has to make our life happen, but it's a fantasy and a delusion. We have very little power to make or do anything; we are just riding the tide. Deb added that it's not just that we think of ourselves as solid, we think of ourselves as the primary agents of action, also. Only if you stop and look hard do you realize we are part of the wave.

Anita added that Nitya often speaks of co-creating, and it seems to her we do, both by the focus we maintain, and how we interpret what's around us. Deb said the key is that you co-create without regret, bringing in your experience and understanding, but with an inner sense of not grabbing on to the result. If you can bring your insight and ability to co-create and keep a light touch—

not holding on with your claws—that is the balanced way.

Jan was impressed by the Exercise for sutra 9, especially the first and third parts, as helping us to get out of the way of our natural unfolding, to connect more with the evolving universe we live in. They are ways of dissipating the compulsive pressure, which is accumulating from our will to live according to a certain plan. The old notes characterize Nitya's three parts; for those who don't have them at hand, they are described here:

The exercise applies to our whole life; it's not something you do for a few minutes during meditation. It epitomizes the attitude of a wide-awake yogi. We are asked to discern whether our action is (1) intrinsic to the natural unfolding of our dharma, (2) the rationally intentional development of intellectual and other skills, or (3) motivated by some powerful emotion. In the first case we are to merely witness the unfolding as resembling the opening of a flower. In the second case we should look into the benefit and the impact on everything that might be affected by it. In the third case, which we ruefully acknowledged as being distressingly common to all of us, where a surging emotion runs away with our good judgment, we have to counter the pressure by intentionally holding back. As we ponder the situation, the pressure will gradually diminish below the threshold where our mind can clear again. We should additionally try to see other people's perspectives, and not be in a hurry to defend our own. All this will keep the pressure down to a manageable level.

Very often we mistake the third condition for the first. We believe our emotional urges are the unfolding of our dharma, and so we allow them free rein. It's not surprising that the horse of our libido runs wild in that case.

I love the concluding sentences of Nitya's commentary: "Reason gently and watch what others do without positive or negative exaggeration. Do not be in haste to establish your point." Great advice!

Nitya made a warning comment on the lust for life, in keeping with his renounced attitude:

The will to live becomes a mad frenzy when motivation is directed to the achievement of a certain goal. Even the trivialities of life such as wanting to have a cup of tea or coffee or a smoke can look so very important when the environment is not conducive to getting a drink or a smoke. In such situations people may even develop panic and anxiety. (170-1)

This sounded like addiction, and consumerism, to Charles, where each of us in the West is positioned so we are getting more than anyone else. We believe we *need* it: if the environment is not providing coffee and smoke, we are unhappy. The amount of resources we use to maintain our daily lives is incredible. We are getting the lion's share, and yet we still want more.

Face it, capitalism thrives on dissatisfaction. Yoga is an antidote to that, a counter-direction. A yogi realizes we don't need all this stuff, we need to find out who we are and allow that to be what it is. All of us have been trained to feel we are not adequate in ourselves, that we have to become something more or do something else to matter. The paradox is that we will be more valuable as ourselves—in ways that truly matter—than as a cardboard cutout with all the right faddish features tacked on to it.

As the class had been talking exclusively about lust for life, I suggested we go back to sutra 8, hatred as an affliction. Hatred is super important, yet we've learned to steer clear of it, as if that made us unhating. Deb brought up something she's learned about herself, how when she meets people, if she really dislikes them,

she knows they will become a good friend later on. It shows her how attraction and repulsion are thoroughly intertwined, and like Susan, she tries to stay curious, open to what comes up. Since the day was Bushra's departure date, I recalled that Deb and she were leery of each other, with possibly stronger animosity than that, for a long time, but eventually they became first-class friends, the very best. They became true soul sisters.

Clearly hatred is the opposite of love, but we still don't realize how utterly they activate each other. Andy proposed that the experience of hatred is always aimed at the other. I disagreed at first, because self-hatred is so widespread, but then realized it happens precisely because we treat our own false self as another kind of other, and hate it the same as we project our misery in the form of hate toward others. We treat ourselves as "other" in order to hate ourselves, and getting over that is a major hurdle.

It's irrefutable that adults slough off their own blocks onto their kids, and then the kids take the poison on as a lifetime obligation. Once you internalize the criticism of loved ones, it's always exaggerated, and you never get anywhere, because you're too busy beating up on yourself. You know you're not good enough to succeed. It's very sticky. I read out a couple of fitting examples from master hypnotist Stephen Heller, you can find near the bottom of this doc.

I'm personally very aware of self-hatred, and feel justified in claiming that the essence of Vedanta is to reestablish yourself as the Absolute, where there's nothing to hate and no one to do the hating. Our culture raises us as inadequate, born sinners, needing to become an altered person to be of any value. That conviction doesn't just go away on its own, it has to be outed.

It's an unpleasant topic we'd prefer to avoid, but Patanjali is rubbing our noses in it. Jan stood up for the central tenet of psychotherapy, that working on the very things we are repelled by teaches us a lot about ourselves. Often, just coming to a neutral

place by disarming the pieces we don't feel comfortable with, is enough.

Like me, Charles also knows the topic personally, and talked about how self-hatred is something we become aware of very slowly. When you're younger, you don't know that it is going on: you are subject to moods, doing things that are bad for you, and you don't know why. It seems as if it's happening *to* you, initiated by outside factors, until you realize you are doing it to yourself. Old ones do it to the young ones too, and the young ones don't understand and consequently they feel miserable their whole lives. They need to gain a little detachment, to draw away from it, de-potentiate this negativity coming from within, or they will live a very self-destructive life. Addiction and use of drugs is a great form of self-destruction, never realizing that this is you doing it to yourself. It's like hitting yourself over head with hammer and wondering why your head is hurting. These are samskaras you can't see unless you get a mirror.

Time for another fabulous quote, from author Mary Doria Russell: "The trouble with illusions... is that you aren't aware you have any until they are taken from you." If we're lucky, they get "taken" from us by challenges from feedback from our surroundings. Otherwise, we have to root them out ourselves, which requires knowing they exist.

One thing Charles learned from Tibetan lamas is that everybody has garbage mind. He observed his own long ago, in meditation, when all these bizarre advertising jingles from the 1940s came up. Later, when they didn't come back, he realized they were being discarded as they replayed. I had a similar experience in a hammock in paradise, the Oaxaca coast at age 22, beset by TV jingles from the 50s. Jingles in the jungle. You'll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent. Arrrrggghhhhh! Yet then they lost their potency.

Andy advocated acceptance, the honest acknowledgement of

habitual patterns that can be difficult to see. Cultivating a state where you are presented with what is coming up is very useful, and then letting go of it, not suppressing it, seeing it's part of the baggage. We have to notice it, first.

Friends and teachers can help with the noticing, which is the most important step in the healing process. Deb lamented how we hold on to previous things in life as though we need them, but we don't. What we really need is to uncoil our fingers, releasing our grip on our habits of mind. She remembered how Nitya gave out assignments not as corrections but as ways to re-channel a beautiful unfolding or direction in people's lives, away from their static habits.

One thing we older folks can be grateful for is that the external sources of the afflictions in our system are very much reduced. We are no longer hounded by authority figures and house rules. That means we are in an optimal place to live without being commandeered by the afflictions Patanjali mentions, if we manage to stop supporting them. Such freedom is a blessing of adulthood. I'm pretty sure our parents didn't mean to instill so much garbage in us. They meant well. So we can dispose of it and enjoy harmoniously whatever time is left to us. The thought eased us all into a closing quiet meditation on freedom from affliction.

Part II

Charles sent a link with comments:

<https://youtu.be/HclKLAAj20Y>

Dear Patanjalists

This may be obvious to someone more technologically sophisticated...

I found out by happenstance that you can listen to some grand

books on utube .

For free,with occasional ads ,which are like mosquitos at the picnic

Also if you touch at the bottom of the screen it will show how many hours,minutes and seconds the reading lasts in toto And further ,putting your finger at the right hand end of the red band,you can move forward and back in the narrative.

So, find the last section of The Cities of the Plain at 8:13:00,that is At the point

Eight hours,thirteen minutes,zero seconds

Then press play and listen to the final one hour of the book: The total duration of this audiobook is nine hours and thirteen minutes.

This is a coda to the Border Trilogy.It is entirely other than the novel,The Cities of the Plain.third novel of that trilogy.

It is a film script,
a dialogue between the old cowboy ,Billy Param ,and Death.who is the teacher teaching about the dream state and the waking state.

It is a short story that might have been written by Jorge Luis Borges.

or a metaphysical tale.as in the Katha Upanishad,the dialogue between Nachiketas and Yama,
or like the Knight playing chess with Death in The Seventh Seal.
Ingmar Bergman.

I mention this metaphysical tale at this time ,soliciting your attention only because
Cormac McCarthy died this morning,Tuesday June 13,2023.

As Scott sees it ,McCarthy was an Old Testament prophet. We might read this dialogue as prophesy.

* * *

I stumbled on a relevant section in the Darsanamala Class Notes for I.2:

Our class is not about debating what did or did not happen, factually; it is aimed at each of us recognizing the tendency in ourselves to pad our nests with the attitudes we have been saddled with in the course of our mental development. We don't have to hold to them, but since that is our default setting as brain-operated beings, we do have to intentionally let them go or they will persist. The very ideas that make us uncomfortable if they are questioned are where we most need to do the weeding, and if we accede to our preference for the easy route, we will effortlessly ignore the most entrenched falsehoods in our psyche. We don't have much problem in observing other people's idol worship, but it is much harder to look into our own. Narayana Guru, in his fierce compassion, is going to keep turning our heads back into our own being, because right behind all our garbage is where the beauty of our being resides. Recall the Isa Upanishad's golden disc that hides the sun: a simulacrum—a false but plausible simulation—is the best place to hide truth, because we are content to be satisfied with it. Nitya often characterized himself as a gardener of the soul, helping us to see behind the façade:

My lot is of a clumsy old gardener who cuts and prunes the bushes and hunts out the vermin and the fungus that come to destroy the delicate buds of his blossoming bushes. (L&B 371)

Why is it so hard to disabuse ourselves of false beliefs? Lurking behind them in our subconscious, in our samskaras, is the threat of punishment. Free thinking has almost always been met with severe correction, even as it was professed as a virtue, and in the back of our minds we still fear the lash. In our reflection on our earliest memories, we can likely recall moments in the first years of schooling where our unpopular ideas were met with derision, and we hastily abandoned them in favor of groupthink. (Searching groupthink will bring up a wealth of relevant ideas. This one is very good: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupthink>).

Part III

Old Notes, 3/4/12

As obscure or at least bare bones as we might think Patanjali can be at times, hatred is so ubiquitous that we don't have to look far to see it has not yet been laid to rest by a wise and mature human family. Still, just calling it an affliction doesn't mean much. It takes something like the Gita verses quoted in Nitya's commentary to bring it into focus. His exercise boils down to watching every occasion where we get angry, tracing it back to its source in frustrated habits of mind, and quickly dropping it. Actually, the second exercise asks us to pretty much do the same with our thirst for life.

Hatred is an expression of anger that is not relinquished after it has served its useful purpose, if any. Anger can be therapeutic and energizing, but if projected outward and clung to, it turns into debilitating hatred. So for the yogi, letting go is essential. No one

gripped by hatred can be imagined to be a yogi. “Only s/he lives who loves,” as Narayana Guru famously said.

Interestingly, just as if we cling to our anger, it changes into hatred, by clinging to life we convert it into a form of death. I wonder if Patanjali had that similarity in mind when he put the afflictions in the order he did. May be.

I wrote class notes about abhinivesa a couple of years ago, in the wake of my near-death experience, when clinging to life had been made utterly tangible to me. There is nothing like life’s immanent loss to highlight its preciousness, its irreplaceable beauty and poignancy. Yet at the same time someone in that position cannot avoid realizing its transiency. Those notes from our previous study in Portland are actually quite excellent, if anyone would like additional extrapolation of the subject.

One especially good point from the old notes, I feel, is that in a survival-based world, clinging to life quickly becomes part of our DNA. I’ll include a clip, which you are welcome to skip if it isn’t fair for me to quote myself:

It’s easy to imagine how the avoidance of danger would be one trait that was naturally selected through survival of the fittest. In a primitive environment of eat or be eaten, those who were easygoing and non-fearful would be consumed before they had a chance to reproduce. Only the fearful escape artists would live long enough to have offspring. So deep in our vasanas—our genetic code—is the urge to cling to life, and because of this we are here today.

In at least some parts of the modern world, though, we live with a high degree of protection from being killed for someone else’s benefit. We now have the potential to develop a higher state of mind, where trust, love and kindness prevail over the impulse to scurry under the fridge when the light is turned on. This higher state has actually been under development for a long time; it is

now thought that dinosaurs were social beings that cared for their young communally. Cooperation and caring have recently come to be considered hard-wired in our brains. Certainly, acting as a group offers a lot more protection than living as a lone individual, so communal cooperation was an evolutionary leap forward.

It is to be hoped that modern humans have made significant progress since the Triassic Era. In the historical period, thanks to moral education and protective laws and the policing of them, we now have the opportunity of stripping our psyches of those prehistoric gut fears. We no longer have to be hyper alert when approaching a stranger. We can relax and radiate good will, and the stranger will most likely respond in kind. After three and a half billion years of evolution, we at last have the potential to craft a world based on loving kindness instead of threat and violence.

So not clinging hard to life and opening up to a more loving environment is an evolutionary leap in the right direction.

We take for granted what we imagine to be life's sureties. Only when we are convinced that they are not sure at all do we cherish them to the degree they deserve. Life feels eternal, but at least the obvious parts are not, and realizing this without holding tight helps us love life all the better.

Clinging to life sounds like an affliction all right, but it is an affliction that reminds us to love every minute we are blessed to have, or to suffer through. On the flip side, the cure sounds like we should become callous to being alive; not let it bother us. That would be a tragic interpretation, for sure, though it is common enough. Instead, we can use this affliction to heighten our love of life and our dedication to sharing—we just shouldn't try to hold on to something that will wriggle through our fingers like an astral fish. It isn't our fish to hold. It is a gorgeous moment to admire, perhaps feed, take a lesson from, and then watch as it disappears down the river of life.

One aspect bears repeating, that surmising some kind of afterlife, which is a form of abhinivesa, can take away our natural enthusiasm for living in the present. It can be an excuse to procrastinate, because only the future is truly considered important. Not only that, but it is a future that is not particularly dependent on what we do in the present, though partisans of sin and karma have tried to rectify that. It seems to me we are better off imagining that this life is all there is, which encourages us to give it our best effort. Whatever comes next will come next, regardless of what we believe, so let's get the beliefs out of the way to make room for it. At the same time we will be making room for an abundance of zest in whatever we do.

* * *

6/1/10

Sutra II: 8

Hatred (*dvesha*) is that which accompanies pain.

The flip side of happiness was much easier to distance ourselves from. We spent a moment meditating on the exercise to establish a witness for our obsessions and inhibitions. Like pain and pleasure, sukham and dukkham, obsession and inhibition are two sides of the same coin of exaggerated attraction and repulsion.

Of course, while sitting quietly in a peaceful environment it's very easy to practice witnessing. It's another matter when some provocation ignites a latent reaction and we blow up. That's when we really need to do our yoga. But in anticipation of such an event we can practice in our spare time at home. And again, the group setting makes it so much easier. Our meditation at the end of class was so blissful and intense that I had to force myself several times before I could begin the closing chant, and everyone seemed

equally reluctant to come to the surface and join in. Balance is indeed a delightful state.

Here is where the important difference lies between the bliss of unity and mere pleasure. Pleasure has its shadow side, its compensating negativity. We usually choose to ignore it until it builds up into a towering thunderstorm that blasts into our atmosphere. Yet, like a thunderstorm, emotional outbursts can act like a corrective to reestablish balance, and without them our world would become very dry. As Nitya puts it, “You cannot hold onto the pleasures of life and boycott the pains of it. The true happiness postulated by the yogi is neither embellished by pleasures nor embittered by pain.”

I thought we should offer incidences of our own negative emotions to see where they arose, and I picked out a few of my own. Then, as I meditated on them during the preliminary exercise, I realized they weren't really examples of hatred, they were outbursts of rage that were due to my own desires being thwarted. And looking back, some were like thunderstorms in clearing the air and reestablishing peace. Only where I couldn't quell the accompanying upset did they metastasize into prolonged misery.

One of my favorite examples took place in spring of my senior year in high school. My best friend and I were hoping to travel to Europe that summer, and I had saved up enough money from various neighborhood jobs to pay for it. Europe in those days was dirt cheap. We were going to travel with my friend's sister, who I had a secret crush on, and one of her best friends. Probably my inner mechanism wanted to arrange for me to marry her and spend my life with her, which I eventually did, but I wasn't consciously aware of any such considerations at the time.

My parents had only one word for any independent ideas I ever had: No. I tried every argument, but without success. One night at dinner the issue came to a head. I can still see my fury, boiling up like a volcanic eruption. My whole life was being

stifled. I had a vision of adventure and excitement, but the gate was being shut and locked. I remember shouting, and taking a steak knife off the table and hurling it down on the floor, where it obligingly stuck, waving back and forth. Then I stomped out the front door, a large pane of glass in a frame, slamming it so hard that the glass shattered into a million pieces. I didn't look back, but stalked the three miles down the road to my friend's house. In my mind's eye shimmered the stunned looks of my father and mother and brother's faces. Ours was a family where you never raised your voice or revealed your emotions, and I had shattered that tacit prohibition as surely as the door glass.

Five or six days later I got a call from my mother, asking me deferentially if I would come home so we could talk about the trip. They had decided to allow it. Miracle of miracles.

Part of the lesson here is that anger is sometimes justified. I wonder what my life would have been like if I had not gone away that summer. It seems that everything in my adult life unfolded from that seminal adventure: liberation from bondage to menial necessities and joining my life partner, who led me to Nitya, among many other things. So there was a cosmic flow boiling invisibly in my life, and the outer world wanted only to pretend it didn't exist. If I had remained meek and mild, well-behaved, I wouldn't have ridden my dharma and eventually become myself. I shudder to think how close to psychic disaster I was, and how fortunate that fate guided me through. I only knew my good fortune after the fact.

Jan offered a similar example. In dealing with her son's medical care, she mentioned one doctor who she disagrees with on some issues. She accepts her, but some of her stuff is off the mark. Instead of simply nodding her head and agreeing with her claims, Jan can see herself getting resistive. She has had a long struggle to obtain proper care for her son, battling walls of ignorance and misdiagnosis. So her ire rises, and she stands firm about what she

wants. This is good for everyone concerned. It isn't hatred at all, only righteous anger.

When anger is permanently lodged in place, it may be called hatred. Intelligent people who can look to root causes realize there is no place for hatred anywhere in their life. Anger has its value, but then we must return to the witnessing state as soon as possible, to prevent permanent derangement.

Stephen S. Hall, in his new book *Wisdom, From Philosophy to Neuroscience* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2010) writes about regaining our balance, what he calls emotional regulation. "Emotion regulation may be the most powerful lens in human psychology; polished by time and curved by intimations of mortality, it allows us to see what is really important in our lives." (78) He describes a team of researchers at the University of Wisconsin headed by Richard Davidson that has done studies using fMRI and EEG. One finding was that

Adults (the average age was sixty-four) who regulated their emotions well showed a distinctly different pattern of brain activity from those who didn't. Indeed, the pattern seemed to reveal a conversation going on between different parts of the brain, which, when weighted in one direction, kept negative emotions like anxiety, fear, and disgust in check. These even-keeled people—Davidson specifically refers to them as "emotionally resilient"—apparently used their prefrontal cortex, the front part of the brain, which governs reasoning and executive control, to damp down activity in the amygdala, those twin almond-shaped regions deep in the brain that process emotional content. In people who are unable to regulate their emotions, amygdala activity is higher and daily secretion of the stress hormone cortisol betrays a pattern associated with poor health. "Those people who are good at regulating negative emotion, inferred by their ability to voluntarily use cognitive

strategies to reappraise a stimulus, lead to reductions in activation in the amygdala,” said Davidson. He added that such regulation probably results from “something that has been at least implicitly trained over the years.” In other words, these people have somehow *learned* to regulate their emotions. (74)

Wisdom may in part be a function of cognitive attention. The ability to maintain emotional balance, and to ignore extraneous or emotionally disturbing information, appears to be strongly correlated with the focus that often accompanies contemplation or reflection. (74-75)

A significant part of the class was spent talking about our role in teaching our children. The general consensus was that we project our fears onto children especially, since—at least as teens—they seem to be more dependent on us than they actually are. Paul and Deb made it clear that in the teen years they intentionally take an opposite stance to pretty much everything we want to impart to them, so it is wise to not be overly doctrinaire. Susan maintained that we should turn to ourselves as the source of the anxiety, and not worry about them so much. Paul added the very important idea that they learn vastly more from experience on their own than they ever would from not listening to our preaching. Therefore they should be given reasonable freedoms to discover truth for themselves.

In my experience, kids have finished absorbing much new input from their parents somewhere around ages seven to ten, and after that they need to learn to individuate. Thwarting that natural process is more dangerous than trusting them to be wise when they still fall significantly short of the ideal.

We don’t hate our children, obviously, but we hate some of what they do and what they champion. That hatred has its roots in our own fears and myopias, so we can brighten the scene by biting

our tongue and looking into our heart. Projecting our fears onto children is commonplace but deleterious. Yogis need to look within to find the field that needs tending.

6/8/10

Sutra II:9

Clinging to life (abhinivesha) is sustained even in the learned, as in the ignorant, by the dynamics of one's own deep-rooted interest.

It's a real puzzle to see how abhinivesha is an affliction. We're talking here about our interest and our will to live, without which life would be short and dull. The subject bears some serious examination. We gave it a first look in the notes for II:3, on 4/15/10, which are helpful to review. I noted there that the word is defined as "application, intentness, study, affection, devotion, determination (to effect a purpose of attain an object), tenacity, adherence to." If these are afflictions, then they are ones we are happy to have. There must be something deeper down that we should be dealing with.

I awoke this morning with a new idea of how to address this matter. Narayana Guru has pointed out that even the lowliest of creatures will recoil from an attack, and therefore all sentient beings have the survival instinct. Because of this, non-hurting is of paramount importance.

It's easy to imagine how the avoidance of danger would be one trait that was naturally selected through survival of the fittest. In a primitive environment of eat or be eaten, those who were easygoing and non-fearful would be consumed before they had a chance to reproduce. Only the fearful escape artists would live long enough to have offspring. So deep in our vasanas—our genetic code—is the urge to cling to life, and because of this we are here today.

In at least some parts of the modern world, though, we live with a high degree of protection from being killed for someone else's benefit. We now have the potential to develop a higher state of mind, where trust, love and kindness prevail over the impulse to scurry under the fridge when the light is turned on. This higher state has actually been under development for a long time; it is now thought that dinosaurs were social beings that cared for their young communally. Cooperation and caring have recently come to be considered hard-wired in our brains. Certainly, acting as a group offers a lot more protection than living as a lone individual, so communal cooperation was an evolutionary leap forward.

It is to be hoped that modern humans have made significant progress since the Triassic Era. In the historical period, thanks to moral education and protective laws and the policing of them, we now have the opportunity of stripping our psyches of those prehistoric gut fears. We no longer have to be hyper alert when approaching a stranger. We can relax and radiate good will, and the stranger will most likely respond in kind. After three and a half billion years of evolution, we at last have the potential to craft a world based on loving kindness instead of threat and violence.

Not too surprisingly, those who are still in the thrall of their fears feel threatened by such a concept, and are working hard to make sure it never happens. If we fight them, they automatically win, because we have joined their side. If we ignore them, they may shoot cruise missiles into our wedding parties, or throw us in jail for smoking pot. It takes contemplative brilliance to steer a course between the two impossible options of fighting back or turning away. I think that's what Patanjali is getting at here. That's also what Krishna tried to teach Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. There is a dialectic secret for us to discover.

The class followed up on Nitya's suggestion that fantasies about immortality are an important mode of clinging to life, and that these delude us enough to be considered afflictions. If we are

aiming at perfect neutrality—and the whole postulate is that neutral balance is the key to yoga and samadhi—then mooning over what will happen in the next life actually prevents us from attaining that state.

Perhaps the thought that we are immortal is exciting and energizing, and provides an important incentive for the novice. Yet as we sink into the cessation of mental modifications, becoming established in more mature understanding, incentives become unnecessary. In fact, they become albatrosses weighing us down. Patanjali is asking us to shed their weight and be free.

Akin to the longing for immortality is the desire to be noticed and acknowledged by others. We want to know we exist, and we want our surroundings to tell us this, over and over. It is natural to want to have a positive impact, to “do good,” and to be honored for our achievements. Again, a novice works harder by imagining that someone else will be impressed by their efforts and accomplishments. But at some point we have to shed that outward-directed motivation too, and learn to act from our true center.

The class also had a high admiration for the suggested exercise. The one here applies to our whole life; it’s not something you do for a few minutes during meditation. It epitomizes the attitude of a wide-awake yogi. We are asked to discern whether our action is intrinsic to the natural unfolding of our dharma, the rationally intentional development of intellectual and other skills, or motivated by some powerful emotion. In the first case we are to merely witness the unfolding as resembling the opening of a flower. In the second case we should look into the benefit and the impact on everything that might be affected by it. In the third case, which we ruefully acknowledged as being distressingly common to all of us, where a surging emotion runs away with our good judgment, we have to counter the pressure by intentionally holding back. As we ponder the situation, the pressure will gradually diminish below the threshold where our mind can clear again. We

should additionally try to see other people's perspectives, and not be in a hurry to defend our own. All this will keep the pressure down to a manageable level.

Very often we mistake the third condition for the first. We believe our emotional urges are the unfolding of our dharma, and so we allow them free rein. It's not surprising that the horse of our libido runs wild in that case.

Abhinivesha is not a heinous affliction, like egotism or hatred, but by its acceptability it is hard to even notice its binding effect. Because of this, it is perhaps more tenacious than the more obvious afflictions. It is omnipresent, occurring in the wise as much as the unwise. If we can look at it in our contemplative moments, we can see that it is indeed extraneous to us, and then we can exorcise it by looking deeper, into our true core. This is precisely the curative effort Patanjali will be propounding in the coming sutras.

We will have several more classes where we will look at our afflictions from a contemplative perspective. It will be beneficial if participants can identify their own versions, and we can then work with them in the group. Part of us resists such spiritual cleansing. This is an important stage to press ahead, since the resistance is the ego defending itself. Yes, it will probably win, but we can learn a lot from the skirmish, and all growth is to our benefit. Like a blade of grass pushing up through a concrete sidewalk, we have to overcome daunting obstacles before we can surge up into the light.

Part II

One further aspect of immortality we discussed was the urge to live vicariously through our children. With the best of intentions, we strive to inculcate what we know of the world, to give our offspring a notion of how life looks to us. We hope to establish a smidgen of stability for them in a rapidly changing world, and keep them as safe as possible.

One problem with this is that kids learn from our example, and not so much by what they are told, especially by their parents. They learn the most through imitation of us, without even realizing it. The problem with words—and this goes for many other situations too—is that there isn't always a clear connection between what we say and what we do. The link is mysterious and we generally take it for granted rather than seeing the connection ourselves. Because of this, there is often resistance toward our words, even as there is tacit acceptance of the deeds. Nataraja Guru distinguished communication via words and deeds as metalanguage and protolanguage, respectively. He well knew that children communicated better pictorially than verbally.

The urge to cling to life disrupts our ability to communicate clearly to our children, and everyone else for that matter. Our desire to put forth a nice bouquet of images masks our honest inner core, from ourself as well as others. It should be obvious that this is a truly major impasse that can only be gotten over by serious self-examination.

Dr. Stephen Heller gives many examples of how the naïve mind reads—or misreads—words, in his book *Monsters and Magical Sticks*. One is close to my heart: if you tell a child that children should be seen and not heard, and then praise them for being quiet, they will grow up to be shy and withdrawn. Many of Heller's examples involve major lifelong inhibitions, and they are fascinating to read, since he is a genius at cancelling what he calls the post-hypnotic suggestions involved. Here are a couple more brief ones:

In the “real” world of everyday life, hypnotic communications and transactions take place all around you. As you open yourself up to the many possibilities, I am sure you will begin to see more of them. What of the parent who gives a small child a “dirty” look and says, “You'd better clean up your room

or else,” and then walks away leaving the child to wonder, “Or else what? The Jolly Green Giant will throw me away?” The child then becomes anxious, agitated and then waits for disaster. What of the child who is told, “What’s the matter with you? Can’t you do anything right?” and the child begins to think, “I can’t do anything right,” turning the question into a directive. S/he may even come to believe that mommy and daddy will be *pleased* if s/he doesn’t do anything right. If the child begins to carry out the suggestions often enough, well, I don’t need to tell you what *those* results could be. (31-32)

The point of all this is that if we stop trying so hard to get a message across to our intended recipient by pushing harder at them, and instead look into the meaning of what we want to say within ourselves, we will actually be able to communicate much better with all kinds of people. Our communication becomes less a matter of clinging to life and more a matter of simply being alive.