

2022 Patanjali Class 57

6/20/22

Sutra II:10 – These attenuated (afflictions) can be removed by a regressive reemergence into their origins.

Sutra II:11 – Their modifications are to be removed by pure contemplation.

I played the slow movement from Prokofiev's second piano sonata to set a meditative mood for our increasingly rare in-person gathering. My excuse was that when you practice something for 50 or 60 years, and then get to perform it twice, it is tempting to try to sneak in a third.... So I did.

For the reading, I skipped the included exercise, which is a drawing practice, and instead shared an “accidental” discovery, from Wendy Oak's notes taken in the 1987 Fernhill Gurukula classes, probably meant for sutra II:16 – “The pain that has not yet come is to be avoided.”

### **One Exercise:**

Foster your capacity to distinguish between the avoidable and unavoidable situations of life, to avoid the avoidable, and to improve the unavoidable, by activating one or all of the corrections of suffering that Guru compassionately outlines for us:

- understand the screen on which the play of life is projected and that you are not different from the experiences you are projecting
- create a conducive environment by carefully structuring your world
- withdraw your mind from the market place where it gets easily soiled
- respond to your nightmares arising from irrational fears by going deeply into the areas of the mind and illuminating them with the inner light of the Self

- see the impermanence of the causes of misery
- avoid that which can be avoided, mitigate that which can be mitigated
- live simply

Our two sutras can be combined as “Pure contemplation removes the afflictions through a regressive reemergence into their origins.” The implication is the origin of the afflictions is the origin of everything: Isvara or the Absolute. The Singularity. The afflictions are a proliferation from a seed state, the same as every aspect of our life, and healing takes place by reconnection with the root cause. *Pratiprasava*, the word translated as regressive reemergence, means “return to the original state” in the yogic context. More on this unusual term may be found in Part II.

Deb felt Nitya’s commentary makes a clear distinction from the Western psychological approach to afflictions, which is to delve into individual problems, looking for their specific origin and trying to correct them with understanding. While not totally futile, it struck her as akin to Nataraja Guru’s opening the door from the hinge side—harder work, and much slower. Yoga focuses on a transcendent way of dealing with our difficulties by a constant closeness or deep sinking into that very light that animates our being. In that way, the afflictions are not to be separated out; instead you use contemplation, dhyana, to merge with the transparency of your original nature.

Nitya summed dhyana up as intense love, rather than an intellectual accomplishment: “In the contemplative discipline, consciousness is to be drawn from all sides to your own center with rapt attention and an attitude of devotion, which is as close as possible to intense love.” It is “a state in which the mind is not invaded by imaginations or apprehensions of any kind.” Jan was captivated by how all sides are to be drawn into the center, which

to her meant we need to let go of all externalized thoughts and urges to become established in a pure, transcendent place.

Deb was also amused by Nitya's claim that "Meditation is not dhyana. It is only a serious form of pondering. Dhyana is contemplation." Nitya clarifies the discrepancy in his *Psychology of Darsanamala*:

In our own times, meditation and contemplation are used as synonyms: both the terms have lost their precise connotation and have become vague in meaning. So it has become necessary to revalue and restate the terms 'meditation' and 'contemplation'. Sequentially, meditation comes as a prelude to contemplation. The way to know something, as Henri Bergson puts it, is not by going around it, but by first entering into it and then being it. Meditation is an active process of applying one's mind to make a total 'implosion' of the depth of whatever is to be known. The state of actually being it is what is achieved by contemplation. It is a passive but steady state. (DM, 368)

Moni was intrigued that the afflictions are causal in nature, without any physical presence. They are the rudiments of real obstructions, like their seed state or point of origin. Andy felt it is hopeful that the afflictions are subtle and can be attenuated, which means reduced, made less potent. Meaning, the less we promote our afflictions, the fewer the obstacles we'll encounter.

Nitya is taking issue with the idea that you can rediscover the exact trauma that made you the way you are, and then rectify it. From Patanjali's perspective, the sources of our afflictions are ungraspable, and you can't pin down how came about. You could easily spend your whole life sorting through that stuff. The Indian approach is to bring in more light and love, without having to erase the cause.

As we've already learned, every cause becomes an effect,

which becomes another cause, endlessly. It's actually one thing going on that is given two different names, due to perspective. Yoga invites us to step outside that vicious, or anyway endless, circle. Vedanta's premise is you are already fixed, so get on with expressing who you are. It's not quite a default setting, it takes contemplative devotion, engagement, and so on, but it's eminently accessible.

Deb could see how if we try to follow those threads back and back, we are getting lost in suppositions. It's better to simply merge into life. Nitya does conclude that the Western psychological process at its most refined is not that different from Patanjali's regressive reemergence. Regardless, you are that place. You aren't attaining something outside yourself.

We began searching for an alternative word to mindfulness, which has become a cliché, and is loaded with ego-laden intentionality, though Deb did cite Thich Nhat Hanh, who expresses it as a perfectly neutral, harmonious term: mindfulness is the non-judgmental witnessing of a situation.

For Susan, *curiosity* fills the bill of an undefended openness, a nicely original usage. Curiously, the old notes, below, include this, about me: "I am widely curious, and do not consider it unspiritual to be so. I always despised the maxim 'Curiosity killed the cat,' obviously part of a grand plot to emasculate human potential."

A few years back, Andy did a Zen retreat with Paul Haller at the San Francisco Zen Center, and he really liked his way of talking about alertness of mind. Haller used word *noticing*, a faculty that never goes to sleep. For him, it's not a sense of personal agency, it's a light. You are simply aware, with bare pure awareness, lacking a sense of agency. It suggested to Andy that noticing was something innate, that was always functioning and you could turn to that, reside with it.

Deb described it as a neutral awareness. The ego is always

willing to force and dominate, always has an intention for its own end, and what Nitya is recommending is the polar opposite of that. She hesitated as she said this, knowing it isn't exactly the *opposite* of anything, though it looks like it.

Bill likes the term *recognition*. If someone bumps into you on the street, you get angry, but if you recognize it is just anger, you can see the affliction at work, and let it go. He admitted that noticing is a useful tool in identifying those afflictions, too.

Andy cautioned that it's often believed that learning this entails struggle, yet in the Zen retreat, the teacher said that's a myth. We assume that concentration or recognition is an effortful thing, and it may be, but at the core of it there isn't effort, because it's self-founded. He admitted that's a hard idea to get.

It's made more difficult because we are trained to progressively learn a topic, like mathematics or philosophy, steadily gaining ground, and yoga doesn't do well with that kind of approach. By knowing a lot of interesting ideas, you can seem erudite and make money off it, but what is actually being talked about in the old texts is a different matter: stabilization in what we already are. While learning is intrinsic to us, there is a solid ground that supports us as well.

Under the sutra advocating pure contemplation, Nitya addresses the impurities that impede it. He begins with initiation, which is often seen as a boon granted by a teacher to a disciple:

Actually, initiation is from the side of the initiated rather than from the side of one who is initiating. The person who is seen to be ritualistically giving an initiation is at best only a witness. Absolute dedication has to come from the initiate. (176)

Nitya initiated some people early in his guruhood, and before long realized it wasn't something he could give away, and he backed off. I was never formally initiated by him, but my

enthusiasm was definitely ignited, and some mysterious things did happen. “I’m an initiate” threatens to be just one more piece of ego-baggage. Nitya always generously shared his wisdom with all comers, but unless they had the drive to learn, it wasn’t going to go anywhere. He lost far more students than he kept—actually a blessing in disguise.

Moni resonated with the last page, where instead of the superficial student wanting to look perfect to the guru, they each support the other in maintaining moral (spiritual) integrity. That way we are going back to our center. She was referring to this:

In the contemplative life, the disciple is always trying to look as perfect as possible to the watchful and critical eyes of the preceptor. The initiate is expected to be in a continuous state of contemplative dialogue with the Absolute.... The initiate has to bring their thoughts, words, and actions in a vertical line where each supports the other in maintaining moral integrity. (177)

I brought back a Nitya excerpt from earlier in the Yoga Shastra, where initiation means taking the initiative:

As an aspirant yogi you have to take initiative with unflagging interest, to have a critical examination of your preformed habits, and then scrape or modify the behavioral pattern in such a manner that it is cleansed of ignorant adherence to evil or superficial modes. Instead of a static view of an effect or a cause, you are expected to develop a transparency of vision by which you can clearly see the manifested effect and the entire process through which, from the primeval cause to the present effect, the manifestation came. You should also have the sagacity to unhook all expectations of the future from the performances in which you are presently engaged. (59)

The morality mentioned is not a dualistic, good-versus-evil business. I wondered what it takes to transform yourself into love bomb? Moni answered, it takes being fearless. All causal afflictions arise from fear. Jan added, it also takes commitment.

Jan was engaged by the way Nitya lays out the purification of the four aspects of the inner mind. Speaking of the impurity of the recalling faculty, she saw how letting go of toxic memories from our past that used to trip us up, gets easier as we get older. It lightens our load.

Susan offered a perfect example. The other day she was looking at pictures of her graduation from college in 1982, for the first time in many years. Her mother was there in her wig, because she had cancer and didn't live much longer. Susan writes: "I have had many feelings about the graduation over the years — sadness mostly. This time though, when I looked at the pictures, I realized that many of my other relatives were there — aunts and uncles and cousins, my grandmother and great aunt too. I cried when I realized that the main thing I was feeling about the graduation *this time* was how much I was loved by my relatives, and how grateful I was to them for being there. I had never felt that before, because I had been so absorbed by my feelings about my mother."

Speaking to the fourth aspect of the inner mind, judging, Andy said non-judgment is really important. Judging is a whirl in conciseness that ties you to a particular fixation. Deb agreed: "Ego—we could just let go of that."

I begged to differ. We are talking about a regressive reemergence, a return to our original state. Along with that, our full being includes an ego, with which we judge more or less accurately, for our own well-being. The capacity saves us from mistake after mistake. But the judging faculty should be cleansed of things like condemnation, conditioning, and prejudice, which hurt us and hurt those we encounter. Rather than following arbitrary rules, we should feel like "I want to do this because this is

my work, my dharma, and this is what I love and this is what I'm doing." There are many essential judgments to make to support our expression.

Somewhere along the line we may have picked up a mechanistic idea of purification as scrubbing off dirt, or worse, thoroughly suppressing our questioning mind, our memories, our intellect and our ego, but Yoga philosophy is meant to keep us from getting bogged down in any such thing. Pure contemplation means not wallowing in all those irrelevant, extraneous places. It's not about scrubbing off the bad, (remember the soap that keeps on lathering!) but of turning to something more immediate. Let me clip in a couple of Nitya's helpful analogies, from his Selected Quotes:

Just as coffee is made with ground coffee beans, sugar, milk and water, heated into a solution, our consciousness, which is like pure water, is mixed with the poisonous coffee powder of memories, the sugar of libidinal urges, and the whitener of pretensions. (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Vol. II, 607)

The noumenal and the phenomenal can be compared to pure light and the rainbow, respectively. Pure light by itself has no form and color, whereas the rainbow is a colorful spectrum with an arc-like shape. To a person's uncritical mind the rainbow, being visible and objective will appear as positive, whereas pure light is what they might know only by mere inferential abstraction. On the other hand, someone with a discerning mind sees the rainbow as a negative phenomenon which falsifies the true nature of light. The relation between light and the rainbow is of an independent factor and a dependent accident. Light can shine on its own, whereas the rainbow cannot exist without the light even for a second. On that account, one can treat light as real and the rainbow as

unreal. In spite of this philosophical verity, the fact remains that the rainbow is part of our experience. There must be something in the very nature of pure light that accounts for the emergence of the rainbow. To that extent it cannot be unreal. In the same way, the phenomenal, while being entirely dependent on the noumenal, cannot be dismissed as unreal. That is why Vedantins call the phenomenal world *sadasat*, meaning “real-unreal”. (Gita, 181)

We finished with a brief meditation, and, since it was the eve of the summer solstice, I played Prokofiev’s first movement of the same sonata, so full of feeling.

**Part II** – Regressive reemergence – *pratiprasava*. Culled from below.

Readers of the commentary will note that *pratiprasava* is translated here as re-emergence and later as reemergence. I suspect the former is an inadvertent error, and yet it has a certain appeal. I remember Nitya as a master contrarian, and can easily imagine him visualizing the word as meaning the emergence from the miasma of afflictions that have temporarily beset us, back into our original state of grace. Still, the word is best defined as reemergence, even though that is a Nitya-ism. My spell checker allows for reemergence but not reemergence.

MW (the dictionary) has *pratiprasava* as “return to the original state” in the yogic context. Interestingly, the historically earlier definitions are: “counter-order, suspension of a general prohibition in a particular case,” and “an exception to an exception.” By the way, for you youngsters out there, ‘counter-order’ does *not* mean what we’re having for lunch.

I like the ancient senses of the word, because our afflictions are like exceptions to a free life, or prohibitions (like inhibitions)

against true happiness. Our work is to countermand those bedazzlements to reveal the blissful essence they are blanketing. If our afflictions are considered exceptions to our normal state, then we want to except the exceptions.

Pondering the sutra on a long walk yesterday, and noting that this is the stretch of the Yoga Shastra where a lot of people drop out of the study, it hit me hard that most of us actually love our afflictions. Well, perhaps it would be better to say we are very attached to them. When it comes right down to it—and this part of the study is where it does, where rapid progress begins to show for all our hard work to date—we are very comfortable with our afflictions. They are our working model for how to live, those carefully chosen likes and dislikes, and the awareness that we are actually beginning to change frightens us into a retrenchment. The threat of abandoning our afflictions strikes us as scary, a leap into the unknown. Better to leave that crap for somebody else to deal with! So we may secretly abandon our efforts, even as we continue to pay lip service to the practice.

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Nancy kindly searched the book for further reference to *pratiprasava*, and found these, which both favor reemergence:

>From I:7

That is why a return to the source, *pratiprasava*, is the most important theme to study in Yoga.

>From III:2

Three stages are conceived: an original state, a state of transformation, and a state of final union. In Semitic religions the original state is considered divine, the second state as the egoistic phase of rebellion, fall, and regret, and the third state as the return

to the source. In Buddhism it is the mindless state, the conditioned state of habit formation making many cascades of turbulent karma, then coming to the state of *nibbana*, the cessation of streaming. In Samkhya and Yoga, the original state is the equipoise of the triple modalities of nature in which the association of purusha with prakriti cannot be discerned. The second state is the impact of the three modalities and three states of consciousness affecting the purusha through wrong identity, and the final is the release of purusha into the state of aloneness through the discipline of *pratiprasava*, regressive reemergence.

### **Part III**

#### 3/24/12 Class Notes

As someone who was never formally initiated into anything, it is a relief to read Guru's words on initiation in his commentary, how it is a reflection of our own motivation and not something that can be conferred from outside. Nataraja Guru used to say that you give sannyasin's robes to a budding disciple, and they grow into them the way a police cop grows into their uniform, but again, that only happens if the person is dedicated to that end. There are plenty who don't ever make the grade, because they aren't really trying. One thing I have never had to doubt was my inner craving to understand, to make sense of the world, even at the expense of my good reputation. ("Good reputation" was never something I had to lose in the first place, however, so we can't call it much of a sacrifice!) But I know when you are really inspired to learn, learning takes precedence over social standing. You go where the light leads you.

I guess I'm a lazy bum, because I have to confess that for the first exercise I've substituted my piano practice for the visual exercise Nitya describes. He could draw perfect circles and yin-

yang symbols on the blackboard, while I have trouble just making the dots. But I trust the point is the same: to hold the mind steady and slough off its tendency to wander. I'm currently preparing a gigantic, difficult piece to play with 7 or 8 other instruments, and it is definitely an exercise in concentration, plus there is the added pressure of holding my part very steady so that everyone else can join in just right. I use a metronome to check my regularity with its timed clicks, and some days I waver a lot and other days it is almost effortless to stay on the beat. I can tell that my wavering days are the ones where I'm not as much "myself" as the good days, in a subtle sense. It does foster an immense admiration for those gifted musicians (and others) who can be naturally and facilely at one with their projects.

The second exercise is a good one, and as a summation of our afflictions it comes at the right time in the study. Here's my take on the four aspects of my own mind:

I am widely curious, and do not consider it unspiritual to be so. I always despised the maxim "Curiosity killed the cat," obviously part of a grand plot to emasculate human potential. (By the way, I can't find a gender neutral version for emasculate, or even a feminine equivalent—any suggestions?) Happily, over a long and dissolute life, there has been a gradual focusing on more shall we say profitable interests. This is partly historical, because I grew up in a time of tremendous change, when the old order was overthrown, at least where I was living. We tossed every socially accepted notion into the garbage, and then gradually retrieved the stuff that proved to be of more lasting value.

Probably those who have been strongly repressed are the most curious about unhealthy activities, like the proverbial minister's daughter. I was fortunate to have been gently and kindly repressed, so my need to act out was less. And I was most fortunate to be drawn to a great teacher who made the search for truth even more exciting than I ever imagined it could be, which

helped me wriggle out of my ropes of seaweed without substituting even heavier ones.

Purity of the recalling faculty is possibly my strong suit, and has been from the beginning. One benefit of growing up in an intense and scorn-ridden society is that you become very cautious about making dumb mistakes in public. You check your answers two or three times before you dare to present them. Because of this baptism by fire, I readily notice sloppy thinking when a person's recall doesn't quite match the original topic, though I have learned to keep my mouth shut about it, because people can be very defensive. More often, there is a subtle ego bias where we all have to drag a line of thought into safe territory, playing fast and loose with the facts. Even when our recall works well, we should never become complacent about it, because there is plenty of room for future errors, and humans are famous for outliving their optimal brain functioning these days. I'd say this is a place for lifelong exercise, to keep our memory muscles strong and resilient.

Okay, so now my weaker parts come up: intellect and ego. I do a lot of concentrated intellectual work, so I really love my mental vacation time, my pleasurable activities, which any proper saint would consider an inexcusable waste of time. Rather than dampening my intellect, I like to think they whet my appetite for further efforts. I could be called lazy, and have been, but I have more energy for the respectable stuff if I also take breaks. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," is an old adage my grandfather used to repeat. So by academic standards I'm a lightweight, but I have been modestly effective in my own way, and have enjoyed the ride throughout. And I have never met a person with whom I would willingly trade places, even as I sincerely admire the many highly accomplished and talented souls who fill this blessed globe from end to end.

As for egos, we have to assume ours are full of "moral and spiritual lacunae" even as they look perfect to us. We are experts at

glossing over the gaps! That's the true nature of the ego, after all. Here is where we have to accept criticism from other people, because that's the only way to see ourselves free of our own prejudices. Other people may be way off in their criticism, just as we are, but we can nonetheless subtract their prejudices and look for the kernel of truth in what they tell us. It is equally true that I have been intensely self-critical most of my life, but much of that is false also, or at least exaggerated. Actually, it's a comfortable position to consider yourself worthless, and then people's derisive barbs don't sting as much, but it isn't accurate. At my age, you get tired of all the garbage and just want to be out from under it, so it's good to critically examine your own self-criticism as well as other people's. You strive to achieve neutrality in the churning sea of desires you float in. It's quite the challenge, but the alternative is unbearable.

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6/15/10

Sutra II:10

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Pondering the sutra on a long walk yesterday, and noting that this is the stretch of the Yoga Shastra where a lot of people drop out of the study, it hit me hard that most of us actually love our afflictions. Well, perhaps it would be better to say we are very attached to them. When it comes right down to it—and this part of the study is where it does, where rapid progress begins to show for all our hard work to date—we are very comfortable with our afflictions. They are our working model for how to live, those carefully chosen likes and dislikes, and the awareness that we are actually beginning to change frightens us into a retrenchment. The threat of abandoning our afflictions strikes us as scary, a leap into the unknown. Better to leave that crap for somebody else to deal with! So we may secretly abandon our efforts, even as we continue to pay lip service to the practice.

Because of the near-impossibility of overcoming our own preferences and habits without assistance, Nitya extols the value of a therapist. In ancient India, the therapist was called a guru, and a long period of dedicated time combined with reverential deference was spent in perfecting rapport with them. In the Gurukula we call this bipolarity. Nowadays few have the time for it, and respect is little observed. The afflictions militate against dedication to a

recondite and abstract goal like liberation. It is extremely rare to have the good fortune to stumble upon a real guru who has the time to work with you, and to whom you can dedicate the adequate time and energy in return. For the rest of us, we pick up a bit here and there and hope it will eventually amount to something.

We could call a close relationship with a preceptor the induction method. This month's *The Sun* magazine has an apt quote from Clarence Buddington Kelland: "He didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it." A very great deal is communicated in this way that can never be adequately transmitted by words.

One important technique of therapy is to decode our dreams and other symbolic language of the deeper mind, since once we bring the light of conscious awareness to them, we have a golden opportunity of pulling their hooks out of our flesh. Nitya tells us that Patanjali, like the Gita, recommends flooding our interior with light, and then using the light to correct our "surface disturbances, personality maladjustments, and dysfunction of the psyche."

The class talked a lot about dreams, and how they throw light on our path. Scotty had a pair of important ones back to back. He dreamed of two ostriches. He was admiring one when the other suddenly charged in and bit its head off. He was shocked and stunned. Then in a subsequent dream he was in his car. There was a mouse on the window sill telling him "you have to get past me if you want to get anywhere." He swept the mouse out of the way. When he awoke he felt sad for the dead ostrich and the mouse. But in talking about the dreams with his counselor, and so bringing in the light of reason, they realized that ostriches stand for burying our heads in the sand, in other words, ignoring our problems and hoping they will go away of their own accord. Thus killing it is a good thing, and it marked a breakthrough for Scotty in taking control of his own destiny and severing the bonds of his childhood inhibitions. The mouse was seen as a tiny insignificant creature

that was preventing him from being the driver of his life-car. As long as we allow ourselves, we can be held up forever by minor impediments. With the smallest flick Scotty cleared his window so he could forge ahead.

In both dreams his sympathy was initially with the affliction. Only upon reflection did he come to realize that his sympathy was for the wrong things. These dreams perfectly illustrate the theme of the class, that we cherish our afflictions and thus get nowhere. Working with a helper, Scotty was able to see how his affections were misplaced, and muster a thunderbolt to sweep them out of his way. Without the help, he might well have stayed stuck, but instead he broke free.

Author Michael Meade has a great quote in *The Sun* also, referring to the importance of this type of breakthrough and how it was once built into the social fabric: “Ancient peoples invented rites of passage in part to break the spell of childhood and move the initiate from the mother’s lap to the lap of the world. To this day, a person must dismantle the spell of childhood or fail to find their place in life.” The sea of adult children we swim in testifies eloquently to a devastating absence of this crucial step, a void that Scotty’s dreams helped him to fill.

A question arose about the meaning of Nitya’s idea that

It is not easy to have a regressive reemergence into your own system without knowing how the microcosm is integrated into the macrocosm and what psychological forces are sculpturing the symbols of an inner secret language that is entirely individualistic.

What he means is that our personal language and understanding is at variance with the actual structure and meaning of the outside world. While it’s true that social cohesion is comprised of a motley conglomeration of individual interpretations, there is nonetheless a general notion of what it amounts to. This is even more true of

what we call the Absolute, or the innate structure of the universe as a whole, which is entirely cohesive. We would like to have easy access to this “macrocosm” but the idiosyncrasies of our microcosmic comprehension throw up roadblocks and deflect us from the necessary straightforward openness. We have to “normalize” our shaky understanding by erecting a close correspondence between our mental structure and the real basis of the whole. In practice what this means is that we constantly need to reassess our perceptions, which as often noted are notoriously prejudiced. In a group setting, or better yet with a trusted counselor, we open ourselves to correction, since others can much more easily see where our blind spots block our vision.

Because transcending our afflictions is so important, several more sessions are dedicated to it. We really can’t progress further in yoga without a triumph in this area. If we coddle our afflictions, we might continue reading along, but our psyches will be stuck here, blocked by our habitual mindset from making progress.

## Part II

Nancy kindly searched the book for further reference to *pratiprasava*, and found these, which both favor reemergence:

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Three stages are conceived: an original state, a state of transformation, and a state of final union. In Semitic religions the original state is considered divine, the second state as the egoistic phase of rebellion, fall, and regret, and the third state as the return to the source. In Buddhism it is the mindless state, the conditioned state of habit formation making many cascades of turbulent karma,

then coming to the state of *nibbana*, the cessation of streaming. In Samkhya and Yoga, the original state is the equipoise of the triple modalities of nature in which the association of purusha with prakriti cannot be discerned. The second state is the impact of the three modalities and three states of consciousness affecting the purusha through wrong identity, and the final is the release of purusha into the state of aloneness through the discipline of *pratiprasava*, regressive reemergence.

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6/29/10

Sutra II:11

Their modifications are to be removed by pure contemplation.

Patanjali continues to show us how to overcome the afflictions that clog our lives with unnecessary hassles. This is one of the most critical sutras in the entire oeuvre, and Nitya matches it with a brilliant commentary. The class was inspired to particularly deep contemplation and mutual reinforcement, which is a delectable method to penetrate the mysteries and paradoxes of our afflictions: the unhealthy entanglements we welcome, foster and may even defend to the death.

As we have noted before, afflictions are a lot like clothing for the psyche. We are born without them and enjoy that unfettered state briefly, but our caregivers rush to bundle us in them. Before long we are uncomfortable without them, and “wouldn’t feel right” in their absence. In fact, if we are caught without them, like being naked in public, it feels like a real emergency—ranging from mild anxiety to full blown panic—until they are back in place.

Coincidentally, I have been perusing a new book on relieving chronic pain in the body, *Pain Free*, by Pete Egoscue. The thesis is that structural “dysfunctions” and misalignments cause chronic

pain, often at remote locations that do not appear to be directly connected. By normalizing (as Nataraja Guru would put it) the orientation of the musculoskeletal system, the pain disappears rapidly and with minimal invasion. Egoscue opens his Introduction by saying, “We are different in height, weight, and possibly gender. But our common possession is the body’s inner power to heal itself and to be pain free.... Being pain free takes personal effort and commitment.... Episodes of pain are aberrations that can be easily treated if the body is permitted to do its work.

Unfortunately, many of us don’t understand even the most basic features of this magnificent ‘machine’.” He goes on to point out that most medical interventions address the radiated effects rather than the root cause, thereby offering temporary relief at best.

Yoga makes a quite similar claim for mental pain. We are drawn to the imposing largeness of our disturbances and miseries, which are in fact the referred effects of hidden causes, and we medicate those instead of going to the root and realigning our understanding. It should come as no surprise that the miseries persist, since their causes are not addressed, and that they will often reappear as soon as the medication wears off. The rishis insist we should stop looking outwardly for our salvation, and instead bring to bear intense “personal effort and commitment” to relate to the Absolute principle within us.

Nitya underscores this in his assessment of *diksha*, or initiation. We go to a teacher imagining that they will provide us with a cure, that they will initiate us into a program that will raise us to the heights. But the impetus must come from within us. Nitya says, “Actually, initiation is from the side of the initiated rather than from the side of one who is initiating. The person who is seen to be ritualistically giving an initiation is at best only a witness. Absolute dedication has to come from the initiate.” It should be self-evident that it isn't the guru's job to motivate the disciple, but it isn't.

Diksha is an interesting word, whose root *di* means either to soar or fly; or to shine, be bright, excel, and so forth. Time and convention have modified this into a formalized discipleship initiation, but the essential idea is that we are fully capable of shining forth and are only prevented from doing so by our afflictions.

This reversal of the normal conception of initiation is of such critical importance! The major proportion of seekers are looking for someone to lead them, and they are content to be willing followers. Most successful religions and cults play to this affliction, making a virtue out of docility and subservience. Many people come to our class wondering what they are expected to do, and they leave baffled that doing and expectations are not in the mix. They will seek until they find a suitable shepherd, and then if that scene becomes too threatening to their comfort they will throw it away and move on again.

A yogi, on the other hand, is expected to be their own shepherd. A guru waits patiently for that rare one with the mettle to make their own way, humbly and without egotism, only needing honest feedback to see what they cannot see for themselves.

Initiating your own deep interest is of critical importance, otherwise the whole spiritual game becomes a snare and a delusion. Instead of an absolutist polarity based around truth and wisdom, the poles are then based on appearances and trivialities, with the teacher trying to meet the expectations of the seeker and vice versa. Barring a wholesale brainwashing or forced dedication, such relationships are bound to dissolve before long.

This means that one important form of contemplation is to examine your motivations, to really see why you are doing what you are doing. Almost everyone has some high motivations mixed together with some erotic attractions and puerile expectations. Moving toward the former and away from the latter is the

purificatory process Patanjali is urging us to practice, here and everywhere.

Do the robes the teacher wears signify their willingness to act as a guide, or are we attracted to a certain look that we imagine is holy? Is it the philosophy or the beautiful brown skin and the flowing beard that calls to us?

Nitya once confronted this issue by shaving his head and beard. Frankly, he looked awful, and all those who were staying with him because of his good looks took off, never to return. He found their fickleness vastly humorous, but then he found a lot of our foibles so.

Meditation is conceived in the Gurukula as the active mental work involved in reducing our ignorance, while contemplation is alignment with the Absolute, also called God, the higher Self, and many other names. Chapter VI of the Gita examines this distinction in depth. In my introduction to this chapter I quote Nitya, from page 368 of his commentary on Narayana Guru's *Darsanamala*:

In our own times, meditation and contemplation are used as synonyms: both the terms have lost their precise connotation and have become vague in meaning. So it has become necessary to revalue and restate the terms 'meditation' and 'contemplation'. Sequentially, meditation comes as a prelude to contemplation. The way to know something, as Henri Bergson puts it, is not by going around it, but by first entering into it and then being it. Meditation is an active process of applying one's mind to make a total 'imploration' of the depth of whatever is to be known. The state of actually being it is what is achieved by contemplation. It is a passive but steady state.

Paul offered a good analogy from “real life.” As he was driving out to the class, he was busily mulling over a number of problems in his life that caused him anxiety. Then, about 2/3 of the way here, he more or less automatically switched from meditation to contemplation. He felt himself come into focus in the present, which featured beautiful clouds and serenity of mind. It made him wonder if beauty was the main ingredient of truth, and just what was truth, anyway? His insights led to an interesting exchange about how we know truth.

The experience of beauty can be eternal and substantial, or it can be a delusion based on the laziness of an ego that prefers habit and creature comforts to freedom. Ideas can also seem convincingly true even when they are not. This is the arena where we need outside input, so we don't fool ourselves into a kind of spiritual miasma. This is one of the key paradoxes in the search for truth. As Deb said, we have to give ourselves to it, let go of our guard. And yet, surrender must be done correctly or it is more like giving up. Is it detachment or simply *tamas*? It's hard to know for certain, and our friends are there to help us make the distinction.

Immersion or contemplation is a lot like being in love. We should be in love all the time, and the afflictions that pull us out of that state should be addressed and defanged. Not ignored or palliated with medication. Band-aid solutions mask our love along with the pain. In her gentle but passionate way, Jan poignantly affirmed how working along these lines has been an uplifting part of her recent life. Often the effect is unconscious—in other words, she doesn't try to change her state of mind intentionally—but she finds that it naturally happens once in a while and makes her feel good. This isn't purely by accident, because she has thought deeply about yoga and contemplation, but reflects the natural way in which happiness can infuse our life even when there are many external challenges. This is a sweet triumph of an expansive heart, one that knows how to love.

## Part II

From my own commentary on Chapter VI of the Gita, dealing with dhyana, or meditation/contemplation:

1) Krishna said:

Without depending on the results of action, he who does necessary action is a renouncer and also a contemplative, not he who has (merely) given up the sacrificial fire, or who (merely) abstains from ritualist (or other) action.

The chapter begins by repeating the gist of what has been heretofore taught. The golden mean of yoga is achieved by the one who takes care of the requirements of life as they arise, but who is not pulled off center by expectations of future rewards.

When the Gita was written, rejection of Vedic ritualism and overthrow of caste distinctions were in full flood. Brahmin-led ceremonies centering around the fire sacrifice were abandoned by the new radicals. Krishna cautions those who feel that simple rejection of the old is an accomplishment in itself, that it is not enough. It is an excellent first step, but truly unconditioned action can not be based solely on rejection of conditioning. Rejection removes the fetters, but it still remains for the contemplative to dive deep or soar high.

2) That which people call renunciation—know that to be yoga, O Arjuna; one who has not given up his willful desires for particularized ends never indeed becomes a yogi.

Yoga at heart is the union of the individual with the universal. The way to bring this about is for the individual to relinquish the sense of agency of action. All the “elusively subtle”

instruction of the past three and a half chapters is meant to guide the seeker to thoroughly yet safely abandon the particularizing beliefs “I am the doer, “I am the knower,” and “I am the enjoyer.” When this happens in the correct way, the universal impetus is conjoined with the individual person, bringing a flood of bliss and a harmonized direction to life.

### Part III

Susan finally found time to read the class notes from the last two sessions, and wrote a helpful response which I’d like to share in part:

Dear Scott,

I’m finally reading the class notes from three weeks ago (Sutra II:10). This is amazing stuff and it seems quite relevant to where I am. At first I thought the sutra meant something completely different when it mentioned “regressive reemergence.” I thought it meant that we need to go back in time and figure out the origins of our afflictions — kind of like talk therapy. But then after reading your notes, I figured out what it meant and how it related to Nitya’s commentary. It all became clear. The sutra is talking about reemerging or more correctly re-merging with one’s true self as the key to getting rid of afflictions: “flooding your interior with the true light of your own nature.” This is so different from going back to the roots of afflictions in order to get rid of them. It does seem that the more I stand on my own two feet (recognizing more and more my own two feet), the more clearly I recognize the afflictions for what they are. Sometimes they seem not to be afflictions and maybe that is also a reason why we are comfortable with them. I know so well the feeling of clinging to these and just giving lip service to the transformation. It is hard to really dive in but wonderful and relieving when I can. Growing older is an especially

good way to have to confront some of these things. Such a humbling process. Along with all the ways one's body doesn't work as well, look as good, or feel as good, one is confronted with the things that one has held onto for decades that should have been long ago discarded — various feelings of resentment, pride, superiority, modesty, outrage, etc. It's quite a clearing out time, it seems. And I'm really wanting to see it clearly. At the moment I feel in a cloud. I am excited about dealing with my afflictions but it is also overwhelming. (very interesting definitions sent by Nancy by the way — in the second part of the notes).

And as for the guru relationship that is mentioned in the commentary, what exactly does that mean “absolute bipolarity” between the master and disciple?

Now I've just read the notes (I and II) from this week. So much in all that! Wowie zowie. So much to ponder. The poems are heavenly and your Gita notes too. It's all very inspiring. Did you do the exercises? Very interesting. Reminds me of the alternative school that Sut's daughter attended two years ago in Vancouver BC. She had to do a lot of repetitive drawing and somehow it really altered her brain in a positive way. She went from being terrible at math to first rate and improved in all of her other subjects too. It was like a realignment somehow.

Nice to spend time thinking about all this! Thanks for reading/listening, as always,  
Susan

And my response:

Dear Susan,

I should definitely answer your question about the absolute bipolarity between master and disciple. The words are Nitya's, in his comments on II:10, and they are a key Gurukula concept. In II:11 he adds “The Sanskrit term *diksha* is very important because it suggests absolute bipolarity and continuing attention being given wholeheartedly to the persons, things, and events with which you are involved in the situation of your search.” So the bipolarity isn't only with the guru, it's with everything you meet. Instead of confronting the world from within a defensive bastion, firing shots over the walls, so to speak, the disciple demolishes all barriers to openness (afflictions) and meets life heart to heart. Because the world contains many dangerous and even deadly elements, it is essential to work with a trusted friend to develop that kind of openness in safety before applying it on the greater stage. I suppose that's the theory behind monasteries too, so long as they don't become an end in themselves.

Wisdom is not well transmitted when the recipient filters it through their defense mechanisms and extracts only what they already believe in. They should be open to new input. Therefore there has to be the brave and often humiliating mindset of standing psychologically naked before your guru, and accepting criticism without indulging the natural urge to make excuses. Obviously trust has to be well established before this is even a good idea, much less actually possible. Not everyone can handle such a corrective role with the proper balance of accuracy and gentleness.

I've written quite a bit about trust in various forms in [my commentary on Gita IX, 1](#). You might reread it if you're interested, but I'll excerpt a little here:

Chapter IX begins with a key secret regarding the bipolarity that reveals the Absolute. Krishna addresses Arjuna as one who does not mistrust him. In order to assimilate the pure teaching of a master, all possible misunderstandings and mistrust must be

overcome. If there is the slightest doubt remaining, the seeker's ego will always divert their attention when the chips are down. Doubt is a dual state of mind, and thus wholly inimical to unitive awareness.

Perfect trust is an exceedingly rare state of affairs. History is filled with the tragedies of those who trusted where they should have doubted, and were subsequently led to their doom by exploitive so-called gurus and political leaders. It is more than a cliché that trust must be earned and not granted gullibly. But for those few who have achieved that very unusual perfect bipolarity, direct wisdom transmission is possible. Arjuna is now on the brink of receiving an oceanic vision from Krishna requiring absolute attunement between them.

Cautionary tales still need to be brought in, as the ancient rishis must have been as familiar with the perils of surrendering one's sovereignty to another as we are in the present. Indeed, one of the most central themes of the Gita is Arjuna's realization of his loss of dharma through social pressures, and his struggle to reclaim it. He trusted where he should have doubted, and got into serious trouble, as his life became confining instead of liberating.

The relationship of guru and disciple must weather many storms. The seeker is treading the razor's edge of questioning everything the guru says while maintaining good faith. Having an underpinning of trust means that when the teacher says something that hurts the disciple's feelings, instead of thinking the guru is cruel or stupid, you presume there is meaning in the apparent madness. You accept the rebuke, then turn to yourself and examine how it applies and why it hurt, with an eye to making necessary improvements. The ordinary response is to guard the wound and defend it, and since it is the ego that gets wounded, that is also what is defended. Then the teacher is rejected as an assailant, and the learning process comes to an end. In Gurukula parlance this is known as disadoption.

Arjuna has already worked through the tricky business of establishing real trust with a true guru by his pointed questioning throughout the first half of the Gita. His legitimate doubts allayed, he is ready for what is to come. Little does he know that he is going to be terrified to the depths of his soul when he gets a peek at Krishna's true nature. It will require every bit of trust he has in his heart to stand firm and not run from the sight.

Thank you for asking an important question. Absolute bipolarity is a Gurukula cliché that we usually read right past without thinking.  
Respectfully, Scott