

2022 Patanjali Class 59

7/18/23

Sutra II:13 – As long as the root cause is there it must fruition as a class programmed for a certain duration and experiences.

At the start of class, I noted that many of us had recently completed major stages of our lives, having brought valuable aspects of our lives to fruition if not completion, and I invited us to ponder this as the commentary was read out and share our feelings in the discussion. What I said was: “Try to think of something major that you have finalized or that has come to a state of maturity, and how much you made it happen and how much it made you happen.”

Of course, we are naturally reticent, but we often don’t even recognize such things, which is perhaps why Patanjali is drawing us out a bit here.

Nitya tells us that karma is the sutra’s focus, and Deb opened with the assertion that action is the most obvious thing we relate to. Even for a class like this, we made the decision to study the subject, to read about it, gather in class, and share our ideas. These are all personal actions. The “root cause” is a much deeper well of action for us, not just our personal momentary choice but a long stream of familial, social, cultural, biological, even genealogical history, which are the source of our manifestation. Contemplating the background allows us to see sources of actions that divide us from each other, and separate us from the world. As we look at the source of where our inclinations come from and how they interact with world, it enables what we really want to happen, to happen, and to be an active part of, not just doing things as an automaton. This sutra is an opportunity to think about where our actions come from and how they interact with our world based on their source.

After a long pause, I read a provocative section of the original class notes from almost exactly 13 years ago, where Nitya

cloaks our familiar yogic attitude with an unfamiliar phrase:

The class spent much of our time pondering what “opposing energy channelization” meant. Actually, it describes what we do as a matter of course in the Gurukula, which is to try to counterbalance our exaggerated tendencies with their opposite in order to reestablish equipoise. In science as well as yoga, this is most often done by bringing right knowledge to bear on the situation. But right knowledge is very hard to determine, and in the interim we can postulate the opposite of what we believe or feel, and this provides a temporary quiescent basis from which to strive for a better awareness.

We have talked about this program extensively over the years. Here Patanjali wants us to adopt it in earnest before we attempt to go farther in our studies. Merely paying lip service guarantees that everything which follows will be mere pretense as well. Unacknowledged samskaras and vasanas constrain our lives to a much greater degree than we realize. Like water for fish, they are the ocean in which we swim through our lives, and we take their topography for granted, until for some reason we stop and call it into question. Usually we do that only when the water begins to boil and cook us, but we could be proactive about it.

After Deb’s dad died, she wrote a poem about him expressing how much of his habits and personality she had been finding in her. There was a strong impetus of what she thinks of as herself as if it was coming from him, and she extrapolated that the people closest to us can touch us in that way. It made her aware how many of our actions have roots much longer than our actual lives. She is fascinated with a book-making term, palimpsest, where successive writings are laid down on the same vellum paper, but often leaving readable traces of the previous texts for historians to decipher. It’s

a vivid image of how the past never really leaves us, but keeps coming up beneath the surface even after we write over it, and it's part of what makes up our present outlook as a person.

After another long reflective pause, I shared my own example for the prompt, from earlier the same day. I had just completed the last proofing/editing project for Nitya, for the transcript of his [video Gita class](#) posted on Youtube. (The transcripts have not yet been linked to the videos, but hopefully will be one day, as they're very helpful.) It's pretty much my last editing of Nitya's writing, a karma that began nearly 50 years ago, stemming from my simple question prompted by gratitude for his teachings: "Is there anything I can do for you?" Whether or not he had insight into my character, I was as unaware as any dissolute twenty-four-year-old of what I was good for. He replied, more or less, "You can help me prepare my Gita book for the publisher." Yes, I had read voraciously all my life, eagerly studied grammar in 7th grade, developed a good vocabulary, and had an undeveloped flair for writing, but none of it had gelled. It seems he saw my potential but I didn't. My engagement with the Gurukula writings has gradually grown from the absolute law you were never supposed to change a word of the Guru, to an increasing ease to recover his intent where it wasn't made clear, which to me was a most thrilling and perilous practice. The understanding and fluidity I developed in this way has carried me through my life, growing from that long-ago buried seed into an invisible garden of unearthly delights. And I was basically done with the entire episode on the morning of this class. There might be a few scraps yet lying around, but all the major projects I can foresee are taken care of.

Curiously, or not, the last section I worked on opens with a teaching that once again was as if Nitya was saying, "here is my contribution to tonight's class":

A kind of definition is given here of *sukha*, happiness. That is, when you go on practicing, and you start taking delight in it, that is *sukha*. There is not a very big distinction, but some distinction can be drawn between *sukha* and *ananda*. It is a very appropriate thing to say that *sukha* is cultivated through practice, that when you again and again do it, more and more interest comes, and then it becomes *sukha*. (Nitya Gita video, XVIII, 36)

I found a nice home for it in [Nitya's Selected Quotes](#), right after this one, which shows why practicing is also seriously downplayed in yoga:

All our early training at home, in school, on the street, in the marketplace, and even in church is to convince us to adopt the ways and means of successful transaction. We are taught how to labor and get its fruit, how to learn and practice over and again to obtain efficiency, and how to apply a well-structured formula or technique to get a desired effect. Afterwards when we come to seek the spirit, we presume that we are expected to do something similar to achieve results. But masters like the Buddha and Christ and the rishis of the Upanishads draw a distinction between the world of transactional gains and the world of spiritual attainments, pointing out that transactional methods only serve us well in their appropriate context. The Indian saints call the world of transactional gains one of “small pleasures” and the world of spiritual attainment “the great happiness.” (SOC 41-2)

Moni pointed out the sutra could be talking about caste, when it says class. In the modern world you always hear, “he is a loser,” “he is an achiever,” and all sorts of other classifications. Now we have a lot of people on the street, should we call them losers? Why

did it happen for them that way in their life? Maybe there are some dormant issues, problems which were not treated. You are writing over the past, but what is never erased is always present, and that is troubling them. Guru is saying right knowledge is the means, yet how do they find it? As of now, those people are not bold enough to come out and accept changes, to listen to a caring person or go for counselling. They may have high aspirations but don't have the foundation or tenacity for it.

I lamented that many people, mostly religiously motivated, reach out to these folks and try to share a healthy philosophy with them, but once you are addicted it almost never works. It can't get traction. We are lucky we were raised with more or less healthy philosophies, and because of it we have confidence that when things are difficult we can sort through them and solve them. Which demonstrates the value of thinking and words to convey coherent concepts.

Andy acknowledged that all of us are wrestling with our own *kleshas*, our own afflictions. The first step is an honest acknowledgment of their shape. While Moni alluded to people locked in negative patterns and blaming their environment, Andy well knows the problem is in your own mind. Even the first step—realizing it's your problem—is huge. It's a step of clarity, and is foundational. As Narayana Guru says, 'the other' is hard to win over, but winning over the other you can begin to have moments of inner honesty to gather the required courage and clarity. Self-examination means acknowledging your own karma, and it's very profound to realize you are the inheritor of karma, and karma is endless. It goes back through multiple generations and other life forms.

I added that if you blame other people for your problems, you can't do anything with that. Working with yourself is the only thing that works, when you're stuck. Posing as a victim freezes *tamas* ferociously.

Bill continued Moni's train of thought, saying that on the surface most of our actions are meant to bring us pleasure, avoid pain and express desires, but there is a deeper level that was there before. He said, "Those are our conditionings, and when I'm sitting in meditation all is calm and my aspiration is for good for everyone, but how do I take that into my life, into my transactional existence? There are those seeds, influences, that color what we do, and we are learning about them. The wisdom of teachers can brush away clouds, reflective of our bigger self."

Nancy told us she spends hours trying to sort out what came with her from the past, passed down from her parents. She had a large family, with many similarities between the siblings, similarities that have become even more pronounced over time. All those acquired tendencies: education, events, interactions, she's trying to find how to navigate through that. She finds it's easier to tackle the events in her current life than those she was genetically born with, and she felt this sutra redefines that for her.

Because Karen was adopted, she didn't know anything about her birth family until she was 50 years old, so she finds it always interesting to listen to people who were raised in tight family units with siblings. She lived as an only child, and was excited when she found her birth mother, located three brothers and a sister, and later found another brother. They all connected really well. It has been an interesting meditation, being part of her adopted family and her birth family. Because she was raised alone, she developed her own independent self, and she feels content with her relationships, from that perspective.

Paul agreed we're a mixture, not only from the first minute after birth until now, but we genetically go way back. In a literal sense we are the universe's capacity to question itself. Knowing that grants him a sense of freedom to realize he is much more than his sixty years of existence.

Musing on caste, as an adult he found out that his Grandpa Jess was 80 percent Indian, likely Cherokee or Shawnee. He recalls arguments between his grandpa and evangelical dad about religion, with his father shaming Jess that he must go to church every Sunday. Jess took him outside and pointed to the top of a nearby hill, and said, “That’s where my God lives.” Knowing this has helped Paul rid himself of his religion-induced guilt, by imagining he may be a lot more like his grandfather than his parents. We go so far beyond the present.

He found out Grandpa Jess he wouldn’t admit to being an Indian because people would beat him just for that reason, and Paul has seen it for himself.

Bill and Andy are coincidentally studying the karma darsana of Darsanamala, and Bill loves how the Self is both actionless and yet has the remarkable power to create all worlds, the 10,000 things. Andy loves Narayana Guru’s analogy that the Self behaves like rain falling, though he admitted most of the time we are not thinking like that when we are acting; we believe we are an agent doing what we have to do.

Charles remembered Nataraja Guru saying to him, “I’ve never heard you talk about your family but you must have come from a good family. Even to be a good policeman you have to come from a good family.”

Deb was amused, because Nataraja Guru pretty much disowned his own family. I reminded the class that everyone is part of a family that is 100 percent successful at sexual reproduction, without ever missing it for all its 650 million years, or you wouldn’t be here. So we all come from excellent families.

I read out a caveat to the discussion, beautifully expressed in a note from Deb to the 2010 class:

Dear Scott and Readers, I would like to add a small something to our last class discussion and to Scott's notes.

What I talked about in class was the interplay between recognizing what happened to you in the past (i.e., what was "done to you") and accepting what is our part in any situation and moving forward. The first step, of course, is to see where our hurts and difficulties are, to not ignore or repress them in the hopes they will go away. In fact, when ignored they gain in intensity. But this recognition is only a beginning.

When we widen our view of any situation, look at who the people were, their histories, what our original misunderstandings were...then our past becomes wider, more neutral, and less like "when bad things happen to good people." Someone may have hurt us in the past but if we keep revisiting it and giving it energy (without a compassionate resolution), it is we ourselves who are recreating that event.

In the third book of her memoir, *Lit*, Mary Karr writes in her introduction that all the while she was trying to protect her son from her own mother's alcoholism and craziness (without understanding for her mother), she herself became that crazy, drunken mother for him! I think this is why forgiveness and compassion are so important in spiritual disciplines: without it we continue the karma of blame and hurtful action.

In his poem *Archival Print*, William Stafford describes the stuck situation of excuses and blame perfectly (this is just the third stanza here):

Now you want to explain. Your mother  
was a certain—how to express it?—influence.  
Yes, And your father, whatever he was,  
you couldn't change that. No. And your town  
of course had its limits. Go on, keep talking—  
Hold it. Don't move. That's you forever.



So the essence of Patanjali's sutras is move out of this stuck cage and into a wide world of understanding and acceptance.

Stafford's poem is so perfect—a gentle yet irresistible encouragement to not stay stuck in our stuff. We waited to let it embrace us, then Jan spoke of love and acceptance, which are so vital to how we live this philosophy. Even as we look at what parts of our lives are genetically conditioned, she thinks of Mary Oliver's poem asking what do I want to do with this one precious life? What wants to come up within me? Living with the unifying principle in the sutra begs for our love and acceptance; sometimes it's looking inside at what that seed is that needs to be loved, and sometimes it's looking out into world and bringing our love to others, as we consider how our actions are affecting them.

When Paul was camping one time, he got up early in the morning before anyone else, and went to a mountain stream to meditate. After a while, his wife Dorothy came down and told him his stream was just a fallen log. Paul has poor vision that was making him see something that wasn't there, and it showed him he had a great capacity to lie. He could be wrong, yet the arrogance of his certitude led him to cherish what he believed.

I suggested it didn't matter at all whether it was a log or a stream—from what Paul could tell he had the right experience of it. We are always apprehending less than the whole, yet what we get out of it is its value for us. That's the ananda factor. Other people may not agree, but at heart it's the cherishing that counts, not the scientific identification, which is officially upgraded twice a week anyway.

## **Part II**

Old notes:

5/4/12

In the hard work of actualizing values, it helps a lot to have outside pressure to assist when inner determination flags. Overcoming egotistical pride is one of the lifelong challenges. I am fortunate to be married to a strong-willed woman who is hypersensitive about pride, and who likes to keep me on my toes. I have experienced the shooting embarrassment of being called to “toe the line” a lot more than the average person, let me tell you! It has given me plenty of practice in letting an angry reaction dissipate and replacing it with gratitude. Sometimes it takes longer than at other times.... The really tough one is when the accusation is not really correct, but I have to swallow my pride and accept it anyway. As a typical American child, I learned early to defend my honor to avoid a spanking or other punishment. As an adult, though, the punishment comes more from the defense itself, and I am not likely to be actually smacked by anyone. So accepting blame, even when I am pretty sure it isn't too much my fault, is a really good exercise. Blame lights a bright fire of ego resistance, which throws a lot of light on the situation, even if it's a leaping, ferociously colored light. The ego's shadow becomes visible as it dances on the walls of the cave. Nitya had Nataraja Guru to provide this service this for him, and I have Debbie. I can't imagine how stuck in a rut I might have been without the periodic flare-ups.

I have tried all my life to change up my routines so that I didn't form habits, but I realize the routines are trivial compared to patterned thinking that holds us back without our even noticing. Some habits free us up, of course, like tying a shoe quickly and without effort, or playing an instrument. The ones that bind are those you miss, not the ones you see.

I have always tried to not repeat myself in conversation. And for 26 years at work, I shaved with a different sequence every morning. Recently, I was gratified to read in Stephen Heller's

*Monsters and Magical Sticks* his suggestion to break habits of mind was to shave differently every day. He was a hypnotist who excelled at helping people break longstanding and debilitating habits. The review I wrote about his book includes:

In our Vedanta studies we have talked a lot about how conditioning by authority figures in early childhood curtails our free expression and the development of our full potential. Heller saw conditionings as essentially identical to post-hypnotic suggestions. He also found a unique method to speak the personalized language of the psyche so he could cancel the debilitating suggestion. And in many cases it worked.

Well, we don't usually have access to someone like Heller or Nitya, but they can steer us toward recognizing our conditioning and taking steps to change it. Sometimes intention is enough, but for the really entrenched habits we have to hope for grace, I suppose, or a wise helper. And by sharing our stories and insights we can help each other make progress as we stumble along our individual ruts, for which opportunity I am most grateful.

\* \* \*

7/13/10

Sutra II:13

As long as the root cause is there it must fruition as a class programmed for a certain duration and experiences.

Nitya's discourses were often long, involved dissertations that captivated the minds of those assembled, yet there was also a sense that an additional transmission of wisdom or knowledge was taking place under the surface. Afterward, the feeling was of a glow, as though a potent seed had been planted, watered, and

bathed with sunlight in its snug womb of our heart's core. The present commentary is reminiscent of those wonderful days that those of us privileged to experience with him will cherish forever.

Unfortunately, the planting of invisible seeds is undoubtedly the most valuable aspect that cannot be transmitted by the written word alone. At least in a class reading accompanied by meditation, a faint echo of that radiance might possibly be heard. Or, if you have experienced it somewhere in the past, it may still call to you faintly even as you read the dry print on the page.

If the bliss of wisdom instruction reverberates in your psyche still, it is because it has become a *samskara*, a cultured impression.

This sutra speaks of *vipaka*, fruition, and Nitya mentions *trivipaka*, threefold fruition, coming from the *karmasaya* or the aggregate of all *samskaras* brought over from the past life, in other words, the *vasanas*. The three aspects that are collectively called the *karmasaya* are that it:

- 1) manifests at birth
- 2) determines the body's lifespan
- 3) produces experiences of pleasure and pain

These are the official definitions, but they are misleading. The idea that the *karmasaya* determines our lifespan comes from the hope that we can fulfill our karmic destiny in this life. But that is seldom the case. The impetus to be reborn—such as it is—comes from unfulfilled *samskaras* that have not had the opportunity for completion in the present life. Moreover, seeded potentials mostly do not manifest at birth; they come into play at the appropriate age for their expression. However, the expression of *samskaras* definitely does embroil us in experiences, which usually have pain or pleasure as their outward manifestation. Because of this, the negative ones in particular need to be dealt with drastically, lest they circumscribe our lives and lead to great misery.

The bottom line is this: the seeds of the past will sprout sooner or later. They have a necessary length of time for their expression, and as they develop more and more fully they produce experiences with good and bad consequences. We can sense their invisible operation in the way that the world conforms to our needs. The feeling of grace, destiny or fate comes from those seeds arranging our life to make their sprouting and growth both possible and fruitful. As Nitya puts it, “The priority of a certain karma to perform comes more as a reciprocal polarization between incipient memories and environmental factors that are conducive to the performance of the required action.” Those environmental factors are choreographed by the busy, busy action potentials lodged deep in our unconscious.

Not all samskaras are to be tossed on a funeral pyre. The healthy ones are to be watered and tended, and revisited every once in a while. It’s likely that after the passage of time they will be hidden in the rampant weeds of everyday life, so some of those entanglements need to be uprooted and the area around the beneficial samskaras cultivated anew. Then they can thrive and grow into something beautiful and substantial in your personal garden.

On the other hand, the afflictions—which after all comprise a very large chunk of our lives—are to be negated: pulled up by the root and tossed on the compost pile to become fertilizer for the rest. In the crucial paragraph of his comments, Nitya writes:

If the cause for conflict resides as a dormant tendency in the karmasaya, it will mature in the course of time. To abort that possibility, the nucleus of that cause should be squashed. If wheat or paddy rice are husked, they cannot germinate again. A fried seed also loses its potential to germinate. Such is the relationship between the potencies of impressions laid by previous actions and the conflicts that arise from the maturity

of those impressions. Nescience, ego-identity, attachment, hatred, and infatuation should be carefully discerned and rendered impotent with the practice of opposing energy channelization. Right knowledge is the means to destroy these negative forces. (184-5)

The class spent much of our time pondering what “opposing energy channelization” meant. Actually, it describes what we do as a matter of course in the Gurukula, which is to try to counterbalance our exaggerated tendencies with their opposite in order to reestablish equipoise. In science as well as yoga, this is most often done by bringing right knowledge to bear on the situation. But right knowledge is very hard to determine, and in the interim we can postulate the opposite of what we believe or feel, and this provides a temporary quiescent basis from which to strive for a better awareness.

We have talked about this program extensively over the years. Here Patanjali wants us to adopt it in earnest before we attempt to go farther in our studies. Merely paying lip service guarantees that everything which follows will be mere pretense as well. Unacknowledged samskaras and vasanas constrain our lives to a much greater degree than we realize. Like water for fish, they are the ocean in which we swim through our lives, and we take their topography for granted, until for some reason we stop and call it into question. Usually we do that only when the water begins to boil and cook us, but we could be proactive about it.

As usual, many samskaras are rather personal, and it isn't always easy to share them in class. We solicit them from the brave, because they are common to all of us, but they can be worked on in private too. Samskaras can often be accessed consciously with some effort, while the deeper vasanas are out of reach, except by a wholesale realignment of the psyche. Still, the one can lead to the other, or prepare the ground for it.

I started the discussion with one thing I've been working on over the last year or so. In my regressive imaginings I came to realize that I had learned in childhood to feel worthless, that my presence spoiled other people's enjoyment of their lives and I should just stay out of the way. Of course, that's true some of the time, but not always. It's an extrapolation that kids make when their natural enthusiasm is rebuffed by their family or friends, for whatever valid or invalid reason. Certainly each person has their own needs and programs, and the rambunctiousness of children can easily throw a monkey wrench into their plans. Instead of being mature enough to temporarily defer to their needs and pull back, kids train themselves to pull back all the time, and their energy and love can be permanently thwarted.

It seemed that many in the class could see some similar type of self-restraint in themselves, once we had talked about it for a while. For instance, Susan's dad had yelled at her that her timing was always off, and she struggled through her whole life trying to figure out what her personal fault was that she had such bad timing. She had no worse timing than anyone: kid's timing is different from adult's, that's all. They want to love or play or tell a story when they feel like it, and adults might have some other program at that moment. The common feature is that children don't react like mature adults. They become wounded, and then become martyrs of their wounds, valiantly preserving them even in the face of contrary information. As Paul put it, the crutches we adopt are often more terrible than the original injury. Indeed. We move from crutches to mummy's shrouds, actively and cumulatively repressing our natural instincts to love and share and make life joyful.

Paul was raised in a very strict and oppressive religious community. Children are damaged enough by the accidental good intentions of their caregivers, but how much more by the intentional battering of religious zealots? Where parents tend to

want to encourage happiness and love in their offspring, those dark and damaged true believers actively strive to stamp out the natural ebullience of the newcomers to this planet. Sad. Criminal, really.

But with the best of intentions we can injure our children, and much of the damage they suffer is unintentional and we don't even realize it's happening. For instance, I recently learned from my daughter, now in her early twenties, that I "ruined" her life when she turned six. I had told her six was the best age of all, and rhapsodized about how wonderful it was. In my mind I was telling her how much I loved her and supported her. What she heard was that this was the peak of her life and it was all downhill from here on. She imagined all the fun was about to end, and it was my meanness and cruelty that was taking it away. So you never know.

The yogic cure is to oppose all our afflictions with right knowledge. In my daughter's case, though, she wouldn't listen to my side of the story, that I was trying to share my love and exuberance with her and make her feel good about herself. She is holding tight to the misunderstanding she had at six, and still resenting me for it. If she becomes a yogi (or scientist) some day, perhaps she will be able to let it go. Or it can be a lifelong affliction. Ultimately it's up to her.

Ah, if we only could have a global vision to see the whole picture, it would be so easy! But we are always limited by our sensory apparatus, as well as those pesky conditionings. To come closer to the ideal we can put ourselves in the other's shoes, and try to bring a broader awareness to bear. Susan had heard a great suggestion, that we put ourselves back in that thwarted place in the past and try to imagine a better outcome, what we'd really wished had happened. Doing so can relieve a lot of frustration and lead to insight about the whole business. Every person has their unique perspective, and it's close to impossible to be perfect from any perspective.



In my example of feeling—nay, knowing—myself to be worthless, now when I have that instinctive urge to slip away and not bother anyone, which comes with an acute pain in my heart region, I recognize it as a samskara. First I recall to mind that I have actually made a positive contribution to several people’s lives, which channels oppositional energy into the darkness. Fairly quickly that brings a measure of balance and clarity. Then I ask myself, what does the present situation in itself call for? What’s really going on here? Sometimes I would actually be welcome, or at least tolerated. It may well be that I’m not welcome, and that’s okay too, just so long as my action is based on the needs of what’s happening now and not on some internal regulation laid down years ago.

This kind of work is slow, but it produces gradual changes in a positive direction. The more you do it, the more you recognize the invisible promptings and the less you are compelled by them. As Deb said, we have to let go of the obligations we were led to believe we had to carry forever.

We should not cast our temporary needs in stone and then worship them. We are aiming for expertise in action, which means maximal flexibility. Nitya additionally recommends that we affiliate ourselves with a great visionary, because they have found their way out of bondage and can impart that freedom to us by a kind of osmosis. We can work on our afflictions and also experience the rush of afflictionless living in between our bouts of hard work. The next sutra will give us another chance to explore this important stage in depth.

## Part II

Anita has kindly agreed to share her response to this week’s notes, which cover an experience common to many of us, and Deb has offered to let me include her new poem, which she claims has

nothing to do with the class but strikes me as the perfect yogic attitude for shedding samsaric afflictions.

Dear Scott,

Even though I have not attended the Gurukula class lately, I read with interest the class notes each week and miss the class very much. This week, I feel prompted to send you a note about my experience of my personal samskaras.

I have been interested in Tarot cards for some time and have several decks which I have studied from time to time. For the past several months, I have been doing a daily reading for myself using a deck that has 'glyphs' taken from petroglyphs found in mainly the southwestern US. A small book came with the cards that offers the 'wisdom reading' for each card. I write these down each day in a small journal. But rather than write the word for word reading, what I do is display two cards, read the words from the book and then ask the 'greater consciousness' to help me interpret and understand how I might use the wisdom to lead the best life I can for the highest good.

Usually, a message comes immediately to me. I often recognize the validity or truth being offered although I don't always like it. When a particular glyph appears often in my daily readings, I know I need to pay attention.

In my reading this morning, the message I got was that I need to face my fears before I can make desired changes. I was also reminded that there may be childhood fears still driving my beliefs/actions. No surprise I guess, as childhood is such a tender impressionable time and deep seated beliefs are often imbedded at that stage.

As I relate this to your class notes about samskaras, I realized that one of my earliest memories was of being shunned or excluded from a small group of preschool girls. I can't remember all the specifics, but the overwhelming feeling of shame and hurt is still easily accessed by me in my 'honored elder' years. This belief, that there was something undesirable about me or that I wasn't good enough or whatever... has no doubt played its role behind the scenes over and over in my life. It has, for example, made making friends a major stressful activity. It has caused me to 'hold back' many times and observe or watch and not be my true or whole self. While in the Gurukula, I feel accepted and therefore much more myself, in other arenas, I often shy away from the very relationships I desire because of the fear of being rejected, shunned, or judged to be undesirable.

Well, that's one of my more predominant samskaras. Now, to learn to negate it or diffuse it??

With love,  
anita

One of the most damnable things about our afflictions is how easily they become established but how long lasting and tough they are to dislodge, and one of the best reasons for having a loving and tolerant attitude is that it helps compensate for that negative history that lies heavily on pretty much everyone you meet. Not to mention that it helps us shed our callous "skin." Here's Deb's poem:

Moving Through the Desert

The snake winds his body

over rocky heat,  
sand pulling  
on shedding skin,  
scraping off the slough  
of old desire,  
the life now too tight,  
and unable to breathe  
he winds and pulls,  
pushing forward,  
moving into open breath,  
out of constriction,  
leaving behind  
that last moment,  
the tightness,  
into this touch,  
the limitless air.

### **Part III**

Deb has added a very important point. Thank you for this valuable contribution:

Dear Scott and Readers, I would like to add a small something to our last class discussion and to Scott's notes.

What I talked about in class was the interplay between recognizing what happened to you in the past (i.e., what was "done to you") and accepting what is our part in any situation and moving forward. The first step, of course, is to see where our hurts and difficulties are, to not ignore or repress them in the hopes they will go away. In fact, when ignored they gain in intensity. But this recognition is only a beginning.

When we widen our view of any situation, look at who the people were, their histories, what our original misunderstandings were...then our past becomes wider, more neutral, and less like "when bad things happen to good people." Someone may have hurt us in the past but if we keep revisiting it and giving it energy (without a compassionate resolution), it is we ourselves who are recreating that event.

In the third book of her memoir, *Lit*, Mary Karr writes in her introduction that all the while she was trying to protect her son from her own mother's alcoholism and craziness (without understanding for her mother), she herself became that crazy, drunken mother for him! I think this is why forgiveness and compassion are so important in spiritual disciplines: without it we continue the karma of blame and hurtful action.

In his poem Archival Print, William Stafford describes the stuck situation of excuses and blame perfectly (this is just the third stanza here):

Now you want to explain. Your mother  
was a certain—how to express it?—influence.

Yes, And your father, whatever he was,  
you couldn't change that. No. And your town  
of course had its limits. Go on, keep talking—  
Hold it. Don't move. That's you forever.

So the essence of Patanjali's sutras is move out of this stuck cage  
and into a wide world of understanding and acceptance.

#### **Part IV**

In response to the last notes about Anita's feelings of rejection from childhood, another person wrote about how they felt that they were kept on the periphery by one or two people within the Gurukula itself. I wrote back that I was very sorry that even the Gurukula doesn't always live up to its ideals. The complacency that can come from being part of even an open-minded and universalist (dis)organization can permit ugly attitudes to breed unchecked. There has to be a commensurate attitude of self-criticism in place to ward against this tragedy. That's what separates the yogis from the boys, so to speak.

Rejection is something that everyone experiences to a greater or lesser extent in their lives, and we all have better or poorer skills in coping with it. One part of our brain is a highly attenuated defensive apparatus to detect and protect against injuries of all kinds, whether psychological or physical. Excessive sensitivity to rejection is a negative affliction impacting almost everyone we meet, and it means that many humans will be quick to react to hostility and relatively slower to warm up to friendly overtures. Moreover, they can become stuck in overreacting to the strangeness of a new situation until it becomes familiar. If we understand their (and our) negativity in this light, we will be more tolerant and forgiving without any special effort.

In my early experiences with Nitya especially, I was conscious of a sort of inner circle that I felt very much on the

outside of. Oddly, almost everyone had the same perception, so it was more a mindset than a reality. Nitya was a towering figure whose very existence brought our veiled neuroses to the surface. Sure, there was plenty of jostling for the Guru's favor, and plenty of jealousy stirred up in those who felt they received less attention than someone else. And there was gloating by some of those who had momentarily secured a front row seat. For his part, Nitya worked very hard to remain neutral and unprejudiced toward the whole sorry lot of us, and he often railed against our petty attitudes that were creating the specter of an in-crowd. As we adjusted to the unfamiliar terrain, we learned that only by relinquishing the whole imaginary setup of in and out crowds, of beliefs in divine favoritism, could we be still enough to approach the Guru in a meaningful way. All the jostling was essentially counterproductive. Looking back, those smug ones who felt like insiders missed the boat. They had physical proximity but not very much spiritual resonance.

Nowadays some people probably look on me as an insider of the Gurukula, but I know it's mainly a matter of perspective. There is really nothing for us to be inside or outside of. The world is open to all. If we don't play games of comparison, assigning ratings all the time, then everything will have an equal—and superlative—value. To paraphrase Bishop Berkeley, we close doors and then bang on them in despair. If we would only leave them open, the problem wouldn't arise, or at least it would be much less drastic. Our calling remains to gather the courage to walk through the aperture once we realize it is unblocked.

Like our individual uniqueness, the integrity of some perfectly legitimate groups does come under attack sometimes, so it isn't sensible to trust everyone blindly. I'm thinking especially of native tribes who welcomed European newcomers with open arms, only to be wiped off the face of the Earth. A number of religions

(one in particular) along with their votaries are famous for sabotaging alternative communal setups. They are certain God is only on their side and not anyone else's. Definitely a case of lethal derangement.

A newcomer is like a foreign body entering the bloodstream of the existing group. The "immune system" of protective awareness should check it out and determine if the foreign body represents a threat or is in fact a new source of nourishment. If the immune system attacks its incoming sustenance, that person or group probably won't thrive for very long, and if it fails to repel a hostile invader the host will likewise have a shortened or diseased lifespan. It's quite an important issue.

Another class of newcomers, those who enter a group in order to manipulate it from within, resembles psychoactive drugs more than food or illness. Such people can have a major impact in scrambling or redirecting a system. This may be good or bad, depending on how honorable their intentions are and how badly in need of reform the group is. It takes significant analysis for the host group to process the new input and either excrete or incorporate it.

Some organizations that are eager for new followers are like hungry dinosaurs, eager to gobble up whoever comes along and transmute them into their own flesh and blood. Those outfits are better left alone if you want to retain your integrity. Their attractiveness resembles the fake worm dangling in front of the anglerfish's mouth or the cheese in the mousetrap. Because of this unsavory potential, the Gurukula intentionally refrains from recruiting. Occasionally offering classes is about as sinister as we get.

There are two distinct types of welcome that a group can employ: the hungry jaws of the carnivore—like the television evangelist with his donation phone number always on the screen, slick operators standing by—and the genuine love and open arms



of fellow human beings. Needless to say, the Gurukula intends to always adhere to the latter modality.

Well-established religious and other organizations often come to feel they are immune to any and all injustices, and tend to treat criticism as evidence of a lack of faith and a cause for expulsion. At that stage we can rest assured the spirit has evaporated from the organizational puddle in question. An inability to tolerate doubts and an often vicious hostility toward those with their heads out of the collective sand is nearly ubiquitous when patriotic or religious fervor holds sway. As often noted, the Gurukula welcomes criticism of all types, so long as it is in the spirit of wisdom sharing and not just a form of jousting or warfare.

Because of the real and imagined threats to their existence, groups are naturally and often unintentionally exclusionary, but when threatened they become increasingly defensive and doctrinaire. Especially when people have to struggle to join a group, they can become the most ferocious defenders of the faith they hold in common with their newfound family. The more insecure a person is in regard to their position in an organization, the more protective they will be in guarding the “purity” of the faith. This is baldly apparent in childish cliques like the one Anita remembers hurting her feelings so. Behind the aggression and nastiness is the fear that any member might fall out of favor at any moment. To an immature mind, meanness can be seen as a proof of loyalty.

The grade school my kids attended had a motto for the playground: “You can’t say you can’t play.” Although it required some effort, it proved quite easy to teach kids to be inclusive of other kids. If someone wanted to join a game in progress, they had to be allowed in, and very soon everyone would be having fun together. That works fine until the kids get old enough to mask their games behind false fronts. Hopefully we can remain young enough at heart to avoid such tragedies.

Luckily, the Gurukula does not have any turf to defend. Its “property” if any, is almost exclusively in the metaphysical realm of ideas. We want everybody to play. Because of this, we should be gentle and considerate to all newcomers, and go out of our way to make them feel unthreatened. They aren’t coming to steal our entitlements but to learn. There has to be an expectation of a few bumps as adjustments are made to accommodate the newcomer to the extent they care to be involved. If it is a bad match, that will become apparent before very long, and an amicable separation can take place. Anger comes from frustrated desires, and is evidence of failure in a spiritual fraternity.

As we have gleaned from the Patanjali lessons, the best thing when faced with any difficulty is for us to work on our own feelings and bring them to a highly realized state. If we are in a position to exclude or marginalize another person, this means we need be on guard to transform our belligerence into a welcoming attitude. We might have to focus on our own insecurities and laugh them away. In the case of being excluded by someone else, it would mean understanding that person’s unfortunate attitudes and not letting them spoil our enjoyment of life. Walking away in a huff isn’t always the best tactic. So this is a very complex issue. Resolving it isn’t easy, but it is doable, and its accomplishment will bring a lot of satisfaction.