

2022 Patanjali Class 62

8/22/23

Sutra II:17 – The cause of that which is to be avoided is the conjunction of the seer and the seen.

Sutra II:18 – The seen consists of the elements and sense organs, is of the nature of illumination, activity, and stability, for the purpose of experience and liberation.

It is easy, and I think quite common, to read sutra 17 as boiling down to *the conjunction of the seer and the seen* is what is to be avoided. Nitya's interpretation, and mine, is that what is to be avoided is attachment to the afflictions we have just been studying. Seer and seen being conjoined is perfectly normal; we just want to ditch the afflictions. What the sutra most likely means is "The cause of the afflictions is the conjunction of the seer and the seen." That doesn't mean every conjunction causes afflictions. Their cause is to be found in the seer being mesmerized within certain scenes, or what is sought for, yes; yet many other, non-afflictive attractions are also caused by our attending to them, and we should. We have to. Just as we aren't being instructed to silence all mental modifications, we aren't being directed to ignore the world we live in.

The scene this is played out on is listed in sutra 18, which Nitya intentionally translates as leading to both experience *and* liberation. He could have written experience *or* liberation, but he didn't. They go together. They are not mutually exclusive.

This lends a different impression than the one where we spend our meditation time trying to stifle our thoughts and actions. They are the very nature we work with to craft a meaningful life. We are using this philosophy as a way to free ourselves from afflictions so we can be more effective at whatever we decide to do with our lives. Nitya doesn't want us to fall into confusion about this:

Illumination, knowledge, programs you to feel many things— anxiety, curiosity, urges, drives—that make you restless. This restlessness is not a disease to be cured. It is needed for all the activities of life. Once you are disturbed, you are stimulated to accomplish and experience. (203)

“Nature” was intentionally chosen in the translation so we won’t miss that illumination, activity and stability are early terms for the nature modalities: sattva, rajas and tamas. The gunas collectively are the immanence within transcendence: ever-present, they are to be spiritualized, made the agents of liberation, though they are not transcendental in themselves. He goes on to say that accomplishing what you are driven to do brings stability, the third of the practical virtues or modalities. Tamas. Later, Nitya tells us where this leads:

Narayana Guru wrote sixty works that can fit into a small book. Then Nataraja Guru devoted himself to explaining and elaborating those teachings. He wrote five thousand pages on only nineteen of the original works. I am studying and writing thousands more pages, but there is still so much untapped, left for others to continue. So much came from one man, like radium that goes on radiating. Such great geniuses change the world. We need to begin with changing ourselves. If we find the unperishing truth within us, we can go on tapping that forever.

In this sutra Patanjali is drawing our attention to the *pradhana*, the power we have within us, and asking us to perfect our lives and bring our potentials out to finality. (205)

Deb felt the essence of these sutras is we are born into a world of bondage, and we can experience the world and bind ourselves to it

or we can disentangle ourselves. The person who can understand those parameters and yet sink to the core and share its sensibility is truly a yogi.

The areas that are most expansive and enlightening in us are where our interest takes us, and it expresses itself in joy, she continued. The essential idea is that there can be a core inspiration and that can multiply and grow and expand. It's not that you're locking yourself in and closing yourself off, but touching vital aspects of your life and going with them. Deb invited the class to share how that manifested in their lives.

Jan has been reading a biography of the French artist Henri Matisse that expresses that same idea: art as a way to bring forth the passionate potential within us. She's finding it so inspiring. Even when bedridden at the end of his life, Matisse would continue to create, he would be moved around his studio in a bed on wheels so he could see it from a new perspective. All his life he brought forth original and beautiful images for all of us to feel joyous about.

Anita offered something simpler than the usual suspects: music, art and nature. A woman came to help her with unpacking, as she still has many boxes to go through since her move. The woman's inspiration was simply kindness. When a person extends kindness, it's a beautiful thing for both the receiver and the giver, and Anita felt inspired by it. They had a good time, laughed together, and she took care of the things Anita could no longer do.

Deb beamed that allowing someone to be kind to you is essential, also, because when we are kind to someone, we are already getting out of the small fence around ourselves. I noted in our culture it's considered a weakness to be helped by anyone, but if you allow people to assist you, they love it too, as you have given them the opportunity to be kind.

Paul was haunted by the section on finding transcendence in imminence and imminence in transcendence:

If you want to be emancipated from all the effects of the culturing you have undergone, the horizon of the application of your values needs to be expanded.... To transform your value system you have to use the same faculties you used to acquire it, such as your brain. The same equipment that you use for experiencing is to be used to transcend that experience. First you accept your bondage, then seek and find emancipation. A true yogi can experience transcendence in immanence and immanence in transcendence, first [becoming] bound, then enjoying that bondage for the benefit of the world. (203-4)

In simplest terms, immanence is horizontal and spatial, while transcendence is vertical and temporal, but we need to go deeper than that.

Paul's example of transcendence in immanence in everyday life came from watching a program about the evolution of bugs, how they are able to camouflage themselves from predators to assist in their survival. Nature has given them so many possibilities that at any point they can transform to match their surroundings. His takeaway was either we become slaves to our conditioning, or we can use that same conditioning as a way to set ourselves free.

Deb recalled visiting one of Portland's most beautiful parks with Nitya, where an aged flowering cherry tree was in full bloom, so gorgeous it seemed unreal. Nitya told her it could be seen as transcendent imminence, or you could say the imminence was underneath the transcendence.

I readily grasp transcendence in immanence, where we are absorbed in something that makes us joyous, and get so caught up in it that hours pass without our noticing. Yet the other way around puzzles me: how do you get imminence out of transcendence, in practice?

Deb's response was the tree can't exist without being imminent, but through the tree we can see the transcendence of life and beauty. That again is transcendence out of immanence.

It seemed to Jan that imminence in transcendence speaks to how we see life as constantly changing, even as it is always the same in essence. We look back over the vista of our life and can see in those patterns of beauty the refraction of the Absolute in its transcendent glory. That's more like it.

Surprisingly, Paul recalled it as a kind of aha moment that I had once talked about, how light is invisible until it has something to reflect off of. If you apply the idea spiritually, there is a transcendence that can be seen in the imminent, the imminent is an expression of transcendence itself. Then Anita chimed in: "That's what I was going to say too!"

The surprising part was I had brought up that idea in the exact same Patanjali class 13 years before, and not only that, I had copied my presentation from those Notes and brought it to read last night. So maybe we do retain ideas from the old classes.... It's from 2010, the year of my brain injury, and I'd been floating in space for quite some time. Here 'tis:

I have lately been pondering deep space from a new perspective. We commonly picture "empty" space as dark. But the truth is, space is filled with light. Light passes through it from a nearly infinite number of directions, coming from billions of stars in billions of galaxies, spread out in all directions. What this tells us is that light in itself is invisible or what we think of as dark. Only when it strikes an object does light become visible, and what we perceive is the portion of the entire spectrum that bounces off the object. Colorwise, then, we are seeing exactly what the object is not. More important is the realization that light is dark, that we cannot see it. Our mental apparatus requires objects to illuminate the invisible sea of light

for us. So naturally our attention goes to the objects rather than the light. Yoga calls our attention back to the light.

Thinking about these notions gave me an answer to my question. The immanent cherry tree we see right now is an instant in a continuum of life that has been unfolding since the dawn of time. What we see here now is just one instant in a perpetual flow, evolving and repeating cyclically forever and ever. We are here now, but we are also part of a species that has been going on for hundreds of thousands of years. So, when we see a plant or a bug or listen to a symphony, we have the event and also the context of everything we know about it. There is vast knowledge out of which there is an example of the moment, and the moment puts us in touch with that greater knowledge to whatever extent we are aware of it.

This lovely idea could be a stimulus to enlarge our knowledge, to continually expand our awareness of context.

Moni said the actual belongs to the present—that is the essence of the actual. That’s right: the horizontal is always in the present.

Paul related a small epiphany. He used to struggle with things he didn’t understand, because he thought it was necessary to understand in order to progress. But what he started to see was the way the subconscious mind is carrying on with our heartbeat, maintaining all our physiology, all that makes us live, is being carried on back in the shadows.

The subconscious, many times it communicates in dreams, we see it poke through everyone once in a while in the wakeful, directing our attention. Paul believes it’s no longer necessary to understand things like time, where so many brilliant minds are just as confounded as he is. It’s happening whether he knows it or not.

In everything Paul has experienced, nature has a detailed design, so even if he doesn’t understand the intention, he knows it

will work. The acorn knows how to become a tree. It's not necessary for him to know, so there are no great feats of understanding.

I assured Paul that all the universes that were designed to operate based on the knowledge of the inhabitants, failed. It's too shaky a foundation. Curiously, I have already clipped in two bites on this very topic, and here they are. First, from my Gita commentary on chapter XVI:

It is fortunate for us that science depends on psychology and not the other way around, since we seemingly will never attain to absolute truth in scientific terms; it is an unending unfolding process. If our well-being depended on understanding exactly how everything works, we could never be happy until we were all-knowing. But we can learn to access happiness within a partial understanding. By fully opening ourselves to the present, we can attain an ecstatically productive state of mind no matter how much we are privy to know factually. Then too, the incremental unveiling process is blissful and satisfying in itself.

And a Nitya gem, from *Meditations on the Way*:

I was previously working with the blind on a weaving project, and I was amazed to see how when some thread would break, they would instantly sense exactly where the break was. For all our sight, those of us with healthy eyes would not be able to locate it that quickly. Similarly, if you are blind to your ego, released from it, you get an insight from your spirit which helps you to locate intuitively any break. You cannot proceed without mending each break. With our normal ego-sightedness, it will escape us. (106)

Jan was touched by Nitya's line "Most people do not know how much energy they have because they don't know how to have a goal-oriented life and how to direct their pent-up energy to their goals." She finds it sad that people don't feel worthy of their goals, and Jan feels this study is giving us a framework to find our power within, citing the last line: *pradhana* is "the magic of melting frozen energy and growing into a person with wider horizons and higher visions."

I suggested you have to be told that that's a good idea, and it should be taught to everyone, in school. So many religious and social constraints insist the opposite, and we buy into them. Jan knows inhibition leads to depression, which is all about the latent energy being trapped inside you. She wondered if there weren't gentle ways to suggest to people that they have goals that they haven't followed through on, or thought about more?

Deb recalled that Nitya used to ask people what they really cared about, as a way to hint that they take action about it.

To me, the best option is to live it and demonstrate it by example. As people age, we shrink into comfort zones that exclude many valuable options, and it is too bad. We are here for love, not suffering. What's holding us back?

We almost meditated on this most perfect poem, but had to settle for the darkness of light, also wondrous to ponder. It was found after the end, and is Deb's example of transcendence within immanence:

From Blossoms
By Li-Young Lee

From blossoms comes
this brown paper bag of peaches
we bought from the boy
at the bend in the road where we turned toward

signs painted Peaches.

From laden boughs, from hands,
from sweet fellowship in the bins,
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard, to eat
not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
the round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live
as if death were nowhere
in the background; from joy
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom to
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

Part II

The first part of the old Notes refers to the attempted murder by stabbing of Swami Tanmaya, then resident at the Ooty Gurukula. Dr. Isha was in our first Yeilding session.

7/9/12

Heartfelt thanks to Isha for her full report on Tanmayan. It's so shocking and unfair! And it doesn't bode well for the openness the Gurukula has so far been able to maintain. I pray that that can be preserved.

I'm very happy that Dr. Isha treated the situation as unavoidable, and so imposed herself on the scene. Avoiding the pain that can be avoided doesn't mean we should try to live in a pain-free cocoon. That kind of interpretation encourages us to run away and hide out. But Patanjali has something much more dynamic in mind: that we deal with situations directly, yet in a way that minimizes their downside. Our confusion and attachment can well add to the pain, so those have to go. Our task is to deal with our encounters in a way that doesn't add to the burdens, but reduces them. That means raising a little hell sometimes is worthwhile, if it produces a better outcome in the long run.

Sutra II:17 can sound like if we simply tune out from life, all our problems will go away. I agree with Nitya that that is a bogus interpretation, and affirm that we should accept this as false from the very beginning. We have to read these sutras in a more positive manner. I think Isha's example of bringing her intelligence to bear is perfect for so many situations where we can contribute expertise and wisdom, but we hold back because we tell ourselves we ought to leave it to others—the “experts” or at least those in charge. But there are so many times when speaking out has turned the tables from tragedy to a far better outcome. That means we should willingly inflict a little pain if it will prevent a greater misery.

I think exercise 2 (to direct our pent-up energy to our inspired goals) is right to the point, and its underutilization is responsible for many of our avoidable disasters. So much advice counsels us to hold back, to restrain ourselves, for future spiritual benefits. Our upbringing is also laden with restraints, compressing our vast and chaotic nature into narrow channels that are acceptable to society—and a very damaged society at that. We only add to the damage if all we contribute is the effluvia of our repressed psyches.

Restraint might be okay to some extent, except we don't always take the next, very important, step, which is to use that

channelized energy to focus on worthy goals. Our psyche is like a dog tied to a stake. It wants to charge after something attractive, but is brought up short, time after time. Once it has been trained to know what to seek, and pace itself instead of roaring off half-cocked, it should be let off the leash. Unfortunately, by adulthood we are so accustomed to being tied up we have forgotten how to go about realizing our best intentions. If the leash is untied, we just lie down where we are, and expect things to come to us.

I am more irked than I sound. I have a friend who is currently in extreme pain, but she and her husband won't do anything about it, because they are both paralyzed by their beliefs. They imagine God will intervene on their behalf, and they may get lucky. Plus, financial constraints push them toward inexpensive but inadequate care, because the society itself has its priorities backwards. My friend is preparing to die. She is certainly in great pain, while living right next to an abundance of advanced medical facilities. This is the obvious version of people thinking they are acting wisely when they are merely hiding their heads in the sand. There are plenty of more subtle versions, too, where people's potential is wasted because of well-meaning beliefs that sabotage their will power. It breaks my heart, really.

As Nancy was mulling over with our last responses, “be here now” and “the power of now” are more complicated than they are usually made out to be. The now contains the past and future in it, so if the now is made to exclude those aspects it is a shrunken version of what it should be. There is plenty of junk to push aside before we can “be here now,” but the actual underpinnings of the present need to be appreciated. The now is often treated—intentionally or unintentionally—as a way to escape facing up to the total picture. While it may provide temporary relief, escapism doesn't work in the long term. Like medicating oneself with drugs or alcohol, the problems are still there the next morning, contributing to the awesomeness of the hangover.

Nancy, referencing Nataraja Guru, is right on. There is a paradox at the heart of the Absolute. One version of the paradox is that the *now* includes all time, and the *here* includes all space. We can benefit from focusing in on the now if our conception is big enough, or we can just as easily obscure everything of importance. It depends on how awake we are, how intense our contemplation is.

When people have a tendency to go to extremes, paying attention to the here and now is meant to nudge them back to a more centered neutrality. We indulge and obsess, and then we compensate by trying to cancel all activities. Back and forth, from one extreme to the other. Remember, the obsession arises as reciprocation for the excessive restraint. If you want to cure the one, don't overdo the other. The Gurus' advice here is to do, but do well. Act with expertise. Get off the roller coaster of hot and cold, zoom and stop, excitement and dread. Our svadharma, activity in accord with our true nature, is there to support our efforts to express ourselves easily and happily. Patanjali is right: the purpose is all about "experience and liberation." Anything less is off the mark.

If we remember the scene in our mind is laden with errors and inhibitions, even though it looks perfectly plausible, we won't act so impetuously that we make grievous errors. I think that's what these two sutras boil down to. But we also have to remember that its deceptiveness should not cause us to utterly abandon acting, only to correct for the distortions. It's really an exciting prospect after all, tiptoeing along the razor's edge.

I keep hearing Yeats' immortal words from his poem, *The Second Coming*: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity." Our yoga study is intended to resurrect our passionate intensity, after we correct for our many misdirected efforts. Our friends and family need us very much, they just don't need our extraneous crap. Our goals should

definitely include looking out for their welfare. They need us to see what's important and what isn't, and advocate for it. For that matter, we need that just as badly for ourselves!

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9/21/10

Sutra II:17

The cause of that which is to be avoided is the conjunction of the seer and the seen.

Several celestial factors converged last night, intersecting with some delicious snacks, which made for a most memorable convocation. A beautiful sunset ushered in a nearly full moon moving into alignment with Jupiter, the planetary Guru, at its closest position to the earth since 1963. All this on the threshold of the fall equinox. With so much energy, it was hard to quiet the giggles so we could mount enough seriousness to begin chanting together. Once we did, though, we covered a lot of ground crucial to our study. I apologize for a very long write up, but this is a subject that should not be slighted.

I included in the reading of the commentary an important paragraph from way back in I:13, which I am studying this week in the online study group I'm doing with Nancy Yeilding. It felt almost like a disembodied Nitya was bringing this back to my attention because of its relevance to our discussion:

Advanced yogis isolate the agent of illumination from the object that is illuminated. In other words, they focus their attention on the light that falls on an object rather than being carried away by the effect of light and shade that suggests phenomenological forms. When a person acquires the ability to see only the light and not the illuminated object, nothing

separates the light of consciousness from the external light that consciousness illuminates through the act of reciprocation. Thus the seer sees the seen in a union in which the seer, the act of seeing, and the seen do not have separate identifications.
(63)

Along these lines, I have lately been pondering deep space from a new perspective. We commonly picture “empty” space as dark. But the truth is, space is filled with light. Light passes through it from a nearly infinite number of directions, coming from billions of stars in billions of galaxies, spread out in all directions. What this tells us is that light in itself is invisible or what we think of as dark. Only when it strikes an object does light become visible, and what we perceive is the portion of the entire spectrum that bounces off the object. Colorwise, then, we are seeing exactly what the object is not. More important is the realization that light is dark, that we cannot see it. Our mental apparatus requires objects to illuminate the invisible sea of light for us. So naturally our attention goes to the objects rather than the light. Yoga calls our attention back to the light.

The Vedantic idea is that the subject and the object arise together out of an underlying oneness. When we are fascinated with objects and think “I am perceiving this,” we separate the subject from the object and enter a state of duality. The classic yogic technique is to remerge the two sides and return to unity. There are a number of ways to accomplish this. One is to meditate on the seen until the merger takes place. Whenever the idea “I am...” intrudes, we just drop it and return to the unified state where there is no I.

Paul talked about the way we as seers try to hold on to the seen, and wondered how we could be more present by not trying so hard. The repetitive practice of yoga includes continually bringing ourselves back to the present, as soon as we realize we have

slipped into the past or are fantasizing about the future. It's quite a challenge, because when we look hard at some idea, it is in the present for an instant, but then it quickly flows into the past. Most of our thinking is remembering—in other words, based on memory. We have to simultaneously let go of the idea and hold onto it, if we are to develop any subject past its surface gloss. This quality of the mind inspired the famous last line of *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” Its evidence in psychedelic drug experiences led the Merry Pranksters to try to accelerate their psyches to warp speed to see if they could keep up with the flow of the present. That approach produces a bright fire, but eventually reaches burnout. The rishis knew that it was nearly impossible to stay in the moment, so their advice for us is to do our best, and learn how to recognize that we have slipped out of a concentrated state into sidetracks, and then gently and patiently bring ourselves back. Given enough repetitions, we can learn to catch on early and bring ourselves back with minimal effort.

The alternative is to wander aimlessly, following the random impulses of an undisciplined mind. While this may pass for spirituality, it isn't yoga, and it may well lead to emptiness and futility in life.

The union of the seer and the seen or scene sounds very mystical, and indeed it is. But recent neurological discoveries may have revealed what those wise old rishis were trying to communicate in an age without much technology. It now appears that our brains assemble the available input into a kind of Swan Theater of the mind, where miniature replicas strut and fret and perform in real time, and that that is what we are actually working with. The play our brain stages looks perfectly like an outside world to us, but that is simply part of the illusion: a very important illusion because it allows us to respond more or less accurately to the world, avoiding lethal incursions, charming potential mates,

sharing knowledge and joy, and so on. When we mentally run from a sabertoothed tiger, our actual legs churn too, carrying us to safety.

The more perfect this imagery is, of course, the more “in tune” we are with the world and our life in it. Unfortunately, the images are tampered with by a whole host of what we have been calling afflictions. The more afflictions, the less accurate is the correspondence between the perception of the world and our conception of it. Therefore, to achieve union, we incrementally work toward harmonizing the two sides of the dilemma. If we merely insist that what we see is “the truth,” and fend off all contrary indications, we subject ourselves to potentially serious delusions. We get bent out of shape by the undeniable fact that other people's versions don't match the one we insist is the truth. Clinging to our preferred version, we can go very far afield into derangement, and the effects of that can be readily observed almost anywhere.

This brings us to a major point of divergence between Patanjali and folks like Narayana Guru. Patanjali says it is pointless to try to match our mental image with reality, while our gurus consider it well worth the effort. Patanjali seems to be positing another reality that we should retreat to, away from this one, while the Gurukula favors an integrated approach. Nitya concludes his comments by making this clear:

The inner organ of a person is such that whatever image is projected on it will leave an impression that can remain in the depth of consciousness to the very end of life. Thus you are not only suffering from what is immediately projected on your senses and inner organ, but also from the stored impressions that remain with you as painful memories or inviting visions. Patanjali is of the opinion that, pleasant or unpleasant, these memories are the source of misery and should not be

encouraged. According to him, all programming is to be avoided and he prescribes the abolition of the conjunction of the seer and the seen. But this is not always considered to be the greatest ideal. His two commentators—Valmiki of the Yoga Vasistha Ramayana and Vyasa of the Bhagavad Gita—give the alternative of positive programming, turning to what is good for you. (201)

Recall in the Gita that Arjuna wanted to run away from the terrible battle, but that Krishna insisted he stick around and face the music. This is the revaluation of “positive programming” Nitya is referring to.

Verse 67 of Atmopadesa Satakam of Narayana Guru also speaks to this same issue, and it is well worth reviewing Nitya’s comments on it in *That Alone*. I’ll quote it at length here, because it is so critical to our development:

Earlier [Narayana Guru] said that by exposing ourselves to great anguish and by struggling we cannot achieve an identity with the beyond. This secret is known to the truly wise. The wise person does not struggle, but lives in harmony. Is this a great thing? It's a very great thing.

If you read all the literature passed off as spiritual, and learn about the many techniques and gimmicks sold in the marketplace, and if you study the various kinds of exercises and disciplines people are trying to impose on themselves, you can see the importance of this caution. Contrary to popular belief it is not through any physical, mental or psychic struggle that we become endowed with wisdom. The Guru asks us not to look for it within the world of our thoughts or memories. Don't seek a reality other than the two mentioned here, the ordinary and the Absolute. You may read about psychic phenomena which excite you and charm you to run away from

these two stable grounds—the transactional and the transcendent—and look for a third reality. It is the search for a third reality that puts you through endless struggles....

Narayana Guru speaks of three wrong places in which many of us search. One is within our own thought sphere: taxing our brains to find a third reality. Another is living in wait for a vision to come, since we have so often heard of such visions coming to others. The third is striving for attainments. If you consult the Theosophists, for instance, they can give you the whole plan of aspiring to attain an astral body and fly to the seventh sphere. There are plenty of groups in the world with complicated plans for your life, but their ideas will only drag you into fruitless searches.

What, then, is this spiritual power or spiritual insight we are speaking of? If the Guru discourages us from seeking in all these places, where do we get it? It happens as simply as the little child getting breast milk from her mother, or the apple tree producing flowers and fruits in its proper season. It's as natural as that. If you don't think of yourself as only a creature of transaction, and if you keep yourself open to the greater ground in which the transactional occurs, something like an osmosis between your transactional world and the transcendent ground takes place. (460-62)

Paul told a story that taught him the same lesson. He was watching a little child crawling along in the grass. Perfectly “ordinary” grass. But the child was screaming with delight. Paul realized that the grass was a new thing to him, and he was totally getting into it, and this meant that if we truly paid attention to all the ordinary things that surround us, we could be in ecstasy too. Every last bit of life is a superlative miracle. Thoughts that there is something somewhere else of greater value leads us to devalue what we know, so it becomes dull and lifeless, and that’s a tragedy.

Where we trip ourselves up is that we only know a small amount of the ordinary realm. Most of it is still unknown to us. So we fantasize as to its potential, which is after all infinite. Plunging into the unknown is a fine thing, but if we have a preconceived notion about it, it isn't truly the unknown but only a mental postulate we have prepared in advance. Then it becomes the "third reality" Nitya warns us against. To uncover more of the unknown ordinary realm, we need to relinquish our expectations and cultivate more openness. The gradual discovery of more consciousness and its concomitant knowledge is what makes life thrilling and evolutionary.

Sharing thoughts such as these led us to really dig into the gist of the paradox here, and the class did it justice: what work is legitimate, and what is the purpose of waiting for inner guidance? What I wrote this week on I:13 covers the matter fairly well. After describing the efforts a yogi makes to regain balance, Nitya concluded his commentary there with an important summing up:

Even when the body remains still and the prana is harmonized, the mind can be frequented by chains of thoughts and other forms of mentations. To get rid of these inner irritations, we have to tune to our higher understanding of consciousness and apply that knowledge to devalue the entertaining of thoughts, ideas, and memories that are unwholesome. Here knowledge is used with advantage.

When even thoughts are controlled there are blockages that stop us from going beyond the pale of consciousness; these blocks are constituted of thoughts that are made up of words. A breakthrough at this level is bound to be mystical and non-verbal. After going deep into such states of consciousness, we come to a state of waiting in peace and receiving light or guidance from within. Thus the field of pacifying consciousness and remaining in serenity is enormously vast. In

one lifetime it is not possible to explore all the paths and employ all the methods. What is most appropriate for a person to know and practice will be given in chapter two. (65)

My response:

I now want to say a bit about the recommendation to “Break through the verbal to the nonverbal; then wait in peace and receive light or guidance from within.”

Not linking memory associations to our present outlook helps us to attain to a nonverbal state, and there is no doubt that many of our conflicts stem from how we interpret our world with verbal conceptions. But nonverbal stability can imply either peace or stupor, depending on several factors. This is a very subtle and easily misunderstood part of the practice. Waiting without having first made a significant effort will not produce any result, unless we are going in for that thirty-years-in-a-cave kind of spiritual practice. I believe the rishis are offering us more rajasic types an activist path as efficacious as that purely sattvic ideal that sounds so romantic but in actuality would be titanically boring, like a living death.

We must not ignore the context: Nitya makes this recommendation for those who have already done a lot of work, along the lines of the yamas and niyamas we will be studying later on, and which make up the musculature of Patanjali's Yoga anatomy. But in our fast-paced culture, we may sit quietly for a spell, but then we are busy secretly expecting some inner guidance to magically appear, and so of course it doesn't. The guidance doesn't come from naïve or trivial input, but from a deep, committed study....

There is much more to be gained by a sincere effort than by a casual dabbling. Nitya and others like him are prime examples: they have put their whole being into what they do, and they are the

ones who are guided by a profound inner light. We go to them because of that light, because we can intuit its presence within them.

On the other hand, even if we haven't made much effort at all, we should still try to bring ourselves to a peaceful state and open ourselves to inner instruction.

Whatever our degree of commitment, one eternal question we face is, after waiting for guidance in a nonverbal state for a period of time, how do we distinguish between our ordinary mental jabber and valid insights? What are the sources of these two very different types of thought, and how do we tell them apart with confidence? To make the distinction we need to know just what it is we are accessing. Then, for these insights to have an impact, they have to be formed into concepts which are then described in words. Otherwise, if they remain nebulous and unexpressed, what can they really do for us, or what can we do with them? We wind up acting the way we wanted to all along based on our conditioning, and the whole business is pointless.

A friend of ours is a prime example of the reason in action that is yoga at its best. She has found herself in the midst of a major family crisis, acting as a mediator. As in the Kurukshetra of the Gita, barbs and arrows of venomous intent have been flying all around, but somehow she has managed to remain in a neutral state right in the thick of things. She is as surprised as we might be to discover that the work she has done is paying off. It hasn't made the conflict disappear, but it has made her able to survive and even blossom within it.

If we are attached to the outcome, or favor one side of a conflict, we can hardly help but become deeply embroiled, roasted on a spit so to speak, and emotionally buffeted. Remaining neutral is our salvation. But it is so hard, especially with close friends and family! Really though, how could we ever develop that kind of

discipline away from the battlefield? Such challenging events are our “graduate exam” in practical yoga.

Yogic awareness helps all levels of conflict, even minor ones. Jan wondered how to deal with her son who is entering the age group where he wants to hone his skills in verbal combat and criticism. Her example: a tiff over how much to feed the dog. Her son didn't think Jan was giving her enough food. “Mom, either you can starve the dog or she can get fat, which do you want?” With a question like that, you have to realize that the ostensible reason for the argument is tangential, merely an excuse, but the person may not be aware of what their real motivations are. Our ordinary response is to argue back, in which case the polarization increases dramatically, and a youngster with a lot of energy will win over an older, more sedate person every time. The yogic response is to anticipate that most people like to argue, whether or not they hold a grudge, and in any case this whole scene is within your head, so you decline the invitation to battle. You might probe what the other person imagines the needs of the situation to be, or simply say something like, “Yes, I'll think about your suggestion.” Or you can treat the disease rather than the symptoms, by lavishing love on the needy one. That way you can retain your peace and still find a solution acceptable to the other.

Part II

Class was canceled this week because so many were on vacation. Sutra II:18 is so key we want to be sure to have as full attendance as possible. Happily Susan, who is in California, sent some of her excellent thoughts about last week's notes, and she is far enough away I can post them with impunity. ☺ This is the kind of meditation that must make Patanjali's old bones sigh with satisfaction: we can easily say words like Light, Love, Absolute, God, but what are we really talking about? If we cannot perceive their essence, how do we have access to them? Asking such

questions with determination opens the gate that divides the possible from the impossible.

Dear Scott,

It is a quiet early morning time here in Truckee. I'm reading your class notes again. They are brilliant, by the way. There is much to think about in them. I am still struggling with the light thing and the coming together of seer and the seen. Even with all the examples and exercises, the feeling of what you are saying eludes me mostly. There are glimpses but not full understanding. This doesn't really bother me (as it might have 7 years ago) but I it is curious. Here is a question. What is the light? Is it the light of the sun? I think it is and it isn't. We perceive things with our senses and so we are reliant on understanding our being/individuation in this way and our part in the play. But ultimately the light cannot be the sunlight because that is part of the play. And then what would it mean to be blind? You wouldn't see the light. This made me start thinking about how one sees the light in an auditory or tactile way (as we talked about briefly in class) -- how to bring together the heard and the hearer? It's a crazy thing to realize that (at least for me at this point) one needs to dip in and out of duality to make sense of things. I think about the first verse of Atmo and the words "with the five senses withheld." Those come back to me often when I am trying to figure out the sutras. We need the senses for our part in the play but then we must somehow let go of our reliance on those in order to feel all-oneness. I can explain this and I can probably do it but I can't get from one to the other intellectually, if you know what I mean. The good thing is that in "working" on this and thinking about it, I learn so much and feel less caught in the play; more able to disentangle myself. This is such a relief and helpful in making the most of every moment.

Here is a part of your notes that I particularly liked:

“The more perfect this imagery is, of course, the more “in tune” we are with the world and our life in it. Unfortunately, the images are tampered with by a whole host of what we have been calling afflictions. The more afflictions, the less accurate is the correspondence between the perception of the world and our conception of it. Therefore, to achieve union, we incrementally work toward harmonizing the two sides of the dilemma. If we merely insist that what we see is “the truth,” and fend off all contrary indications, we subject ourselves to potentially serious delusions. We get bent out of shape by the undeniable fact that other people's versions don't match the one we insist is the truth. Clinging to our preferred version, we can go very far afield into derangement, and the effects of that can be readily observed almost anywhere.”

I think you are talking about two things — first, the play that we are creating in our mind and that we see before us and second, the way in which the afflictions distort the already distorted. It seems that we have to be aware of both. But then I suppose the play that we create is also made up of the afflictions over time. What a mess! No wonder we get so stuck. Your last lines are so key. I think people are very uncomfortable letting go of the “truth” they see before their eyes. We are used to “seeing” in this way. It is threatening to think that it might not be solid, unchangeable, dependable. Funny that we can get caught up in a whole make believe scenario of religion — it is just a story that we make into our reality (what you mentioned as a “third reality”) — and yet we can't see that we have done the same thing with our personal life belief system. It is more a belief than reality. We don't want to let go because we will be alone and scared or we will go insane or we will not be invited to the party. But if we do start to chip away at

the play and our afflictions, it really isn't so terrible. It is very difficult at times but I think one is able to embrace uncertainty and the lack of solidity a bit more. I am of course still working through a whole swamp of afflictions and I do get caught up in my version of the play very often but when I come up for air and let go of these things, I no longer feel anxious. It's a really good thing!

It's funny that I hadn't read the end of your commentary when I wrote all this. I just finished reading and I feel as though you are responding to what I wrote! Funny, isn't it?! I'm glad I didn't read the whole thing before I started writing because it gave me an opportunity to do some deep diving and it felt wonderful. I am not going to start berating myself for neglecting to do this every morning, however! It's just good to remember that deep diving is powerful and maybe it wouldn't hurt to devote more time!

With gratitude for your notes and your willingness to read,
Susan

Part III

Nothing like some positive feedback. It's so gratifying when we can accomplish what should be simple, but takes a long time to become so. This is a yogic success story from Jan:

I wanted you to know that the insights I got from my last class about dealing with Louis really helped, and after a couple of days of me trying to not engage in discord and step back from his attempts to do so, he and I somehow found our way to a nice time again. He miraculously seemed appreciative of me and wanted to chat about life and other people's relationships and that felt great.
Jan

10/5/10

Sutra II:18

The seen consists of the elements and sense organs, is of the nature of illumination, activity, and stability, for the purpose of experience and liberation.

Deb started us off with a crucial point regarding Nitya's interpretation of the last part of the sutra, that the seen can be directed by our involvement with it either toward experience or toward liberation. According to Nitya, "Patanjali says we are equipped for two opposing reasons. We can experience the world and bind ourselves to it or we can free ourselves from all its knots. It is up to us whether we want to be free or stay in this world of happiness and sorrow."

The usual interpretation of such an assertion is that we can either be caught in the world or make our escape from it. Deb's idea was that by characterizing the bondage as being to happiness and sorrow—in other words to polarity, duality—what Nitya intends to tell us is that we can live our lives either way, but live we must. We can live as liberated beings or as those embroiled with the inevitable ups and downs of manifested existence. The choice is up to us, but there isn't any option to simply abandon the game. We can free ourselves from the knots, but that doesn't mean we can dispense with knots. We encounter potential situations all the time in which we can become bound or remain free, and how we treat them determines which way we will go.

This is of course a most important difference between the Gurukula's philosophy and majority opinion. It is easy to read this as recommending complete withdrawal from the seen, and that is a common fantasy held by millions who in fact have no intention whatsoever of relinquishing their existence. Nitya makes a passionate plea in his commentary for us to release the untapped energy bound up in us. This can be channeled toward the goal of

liberation, but that comes thorough active engagement, not forced suppression. Nitya says,

Many people's energy is blocked, frozen. Most people do not know how much energy they have because they don't know how to have a goal-oriented life and how to direct their pent-up energy to their goals. Many young people in India, eighteen to thirty years of age, suffer from depression. Their energy is pent up and they do not know the magical power within them. They need to know how their essence can be brought into conjunction with their motivation to bring that essence out as actions and then stabilized as a seed bed for future occasions. (204-5)

Too bad that more of us than young Indians suffer from the depression of not being able to express our true potentials! Needless to say, this advice is meant for everybody.

This reminds me of a favorite letter excerpt from Nitya's Love and Blessings, written in July, 1973: "Depression by itself is not a disease. It only shows that there are some kinds of air pockets in your personality that are not fully plugged-in with life interests." It's a shame that somehow we have become convinced that not doing anything will solve our problems, so we hold back harder and harder as the fountain within tries to burst forth into expression. Instead we should throw off our clothes and leap in, to splash and frolic in the sunlight. As Jan reminded us, that fountain is our real self, and becoming aware of it and permitting it to flow is precisely what we are called to do here.

Prakasha, *kriya* and *sthiti*, or illumination, activity and stability, are close kin to *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Being detached from the three *gunas* does not mean they stop being important, only that they are no longer our masters. Nitya spells out their value:

Illumination, knowledge, programs you to feel many things— anxiety, curiosity, urges, drives—that make you restless. This restlessness is not a disease to be cured. It is needed for all the activities of life. Once you are disturbed, you are stimulated to accomplish and experience. (203)

He goes on to say that accomplishing what you are driven to do brings stability, the third of the practical virtues or modalities.

In the mind's eye it is possible to visualize Nitya's passion as he dictated this commentary to a roomful of very respectful, but largely spiritually thwarted, listeners. (At least in India they know enough to go to a guru....) He wants to use the bare bones of the sutra to transmit passion to these bright souls wearing heavy, dark garments hung on them by their families and societies. Direct exhortation is too intimidating to such delicate souls, so accustomed to their anguish that they barely notice it. Nitya is speaking in parables, the parables of an ancient science, but through them he is blowing as much power as he can muster into those deflated beings. Behind the quiet words is a brilliant flame, a solar flare, an impassioned plea for waking up and coming alive.

My heart bleeds every time I think of that great man, whose inner fountain was gushing in a full flood all the time, being so gentle with us "stupids" who heard only such a very little of what he was laying out for us. How could he inspire us to make progress? Pushing harder doesn't usually work, it tends to breed resistance, an opposing force. Not pushing at all doesn't do anything, either. It's a mystery how to get it across, which analogy or gambit will finally spring open the doors of perception. This is something good teachers all have to adjust to. If they want to succeed there will be plenty of frustration, and if they don't care at all there will be no teaching, period. Somewhere in between is the golden mean. Nitya found it by commenting on the classics while

inwardly visualizing the needs of his audience and sending out invisible healing energies. When you were in Nitya's presence, there was a feeling of transmission worming its way through your own density, although there might not be any outward indication of it. When reading his books, we just have to imagine it, but that has some residual power too.

There is a very large, ancient tree near here that whenever I'm in the vicinity I pay my respects. I press my forehead to its thick bark and spread my arms as far as I can to embrace it. They barely begin to reach around its curve. The tree doesn't actually do anything, but I can feel a tremendous strength in it. Something very powerful flows into me, a sense of majestic peace and dignified stability. As Tolkien's Ents, the giant walking trees would say, we are such hasty beings! Who knows what will open us to our inner guidance system, where we can dare to let go of our blocks and afflictions? Only when we release ourselves from our petty amusements can we begin to admit the gigantic power lying latent in our depths.

Nitya intentionally translates the sutra as experience *and* liberation. He could have written experience *or* liberation, but he didn't. They go together. They are not mutually exclusive.

In the right frame of mind, then, Nitya's words leap off the page to grab us by the lapels and shake us, to rouse us from our stupor. After briefly describing the immense accomplishments of Narayana Guru, whose inner fountain was volcanic, Nitya sums up:

So much came from one man, like radium that goes on radiating. Such great geniuses change the world. We need to begin with changing ourselves. If we find the unperishing truth within us, we can go on tapping that forever.

In this sutra Patanjali is drawing our attention to the pradhana, the power we have within us, and asking us to perfect our lives and bring our potentials out to finality.

Can you hear the call? I don't know how it can be put more plainly.

I learned a very interesting thing this week from recent EEG studies of infants. Apparently, the deepest parts of our brain control us until around the end of the second month. At that time the cortex begins a tug of war which it almost always wins, but there is a period where the infant goes back and forth between the two. The EEGs show first the old brain stem and limbic system, and then the newer cortex taking turns in calling the shots. It may be that the original guide is reluctant to turn the helpless person it has been caring for over to such a poorly informed entity. Scientists now think the loving stares that babies lavish on their caregivers at this age are really caused by the changeover taking place in their guidance system. Anything to take love out of the picture! I read it as perhaps a fond farewell of the old wisdom, aware it is fading from the picture, offering a final blessing before being subsumed in the chaos of yet another life. Who knows if the new owner will ever remember this part of itself? The fountain of joy and direction we each possess may languish unheeded for the rest of our life.

But this is a really exciting discovery, that our early life is confirmed to be guided by an inner genius that maintains our basic functions but also directs our development. Here is the visible intrusion of the Absolute, the intelligent force that protects us from chaos until we are ready to begin to assume conscious control ourselves.

Early in our history, our conscious mind wrests the steering wheel away from the instinctual part of us, and off it goes. To our

misfortune, our conscious mind loses contact with this inner genius, and in its stead learns to steer by the light of the darkness propounded by other conscious entities. Spiritual enlightenment may be nothing more than recovering conscious contact with this primeval part of ourselves. Geniuses may be those who have retained the connection all along. This is the inner fountain source, the Absolute potency that bubbles up in everyone. It is not some subtle intangible nothingness, it is real. It's just that we have covered it over with a speculative blanket which we then sit on as heavily as we can, while the fountain gushes up, striving to find an opening.

This fountain source of the Absolute pours out from a point source within every living thing, including atoms I suppose. Animals that live by "instinct" simply haven't developed enough cortex to override their inner fountain. It serves them well.

Like the water that is the same in every fountain on earth, notwithstanding the chlorine, coins and garbage that often find their way into them, the Absolute information program that powers all of us is the same, but it is tempered and shaped by our individual genetics and unique environment. The universal becomes particular as it is expressed. If it is carried over correctly so it can infuse the cortex with its instinctual intelligence, that may well be the source of genius. A partially successful mix may produce degrees of autism and other developmental problems.

In any case, spiritual perfection or yogic accomplishment then means that we reconnect our detached superficial consciousness with our dharma-voice residing in our most ancient parts, and the two learn to work together. This illuminates the familiar Gurukula premise of the transcendental and the immanent interpenetrating each other. Our conscious mind is concerned—quite rightly—with immanence, with all the stuff happening to us. Our deeper brain/mind houses the transcendent factor that gives

coherence to our life over time, the unfoldment of our potentials and all that. We optimize our life by bringing them together.

What we have often thought of as a right brain-left brain dichotomy makes more sense in terms of new brain-old brain. Barring injury, the whole brain is turned on pretty much all the time. This is a very exciting perspective, and we can discuss further implications in future classes. But for now, it reinforces the message of the sutra: we must yoke our energies to a meaningful course of life.

Several class members were surprised about the goal orientation in this sutra, but remember, Patanjali is goal-oriented. His is not pure advaita, nondualism. The goal of liberation is to rediscover the transcendental and infuse it into the immanent. The goal of experience is to uncover the transcendental joy through participation with immanent activities. In practice, there is little or no difference between these paths. When the seemingly incompatible sides of the equation are brought together, there is only one thing left: a holistic life. Our conscious and unconscious hum in harmony.

To help release the vast potential energy frozen in our psyches due to the schism between who we are and who we think we are, Nitya presents a fresh perspective on the chakras, well worth a read. Suffice to say here that in the Western view the brain stem is the oldest part, regulating essential unconscious processes. In the Indian picture, the transcendental energy resides at the base of the spine, and it can rise up through the chakras to couple with the higher conscious centers through certain kundalini yoga exercises.

Without choosing sides, the class closed with a wonderful group meditation where we dropped our outward focus and sank back into the deepest regions of our brains. It didn't matter which came first, spinal cord or brain stem, we just allowed ourselves to sink back into it. We want to welcome the fountain of truth back

into our conscious lives, to bathe in it and revel in it. But it is very shy of stepping out into the mad world in which we perch. The meeting has to be deep in the crypt. There was such an intense feeling of bliss in the room, no one wanted to bring it to a close. Eventually, though, the call of immanence roused us from our reverie, and the class dispersed into the night.