

## 2022 Patanjali Class 65

Sutra II:23 – The conjunction of purusha and prakriti is the cause of the apprehension of the essential nature and powers of both.

Sutra II:24 – Its cause is nescience.

Sutra II:25 – The absence of the conjunction of prakriti and purusha is through the elimination of nescience; its absence is the liberation of the seer.

There is one more sutra on avidya, making a total of eleven. The section both starts and ends with the conjunction of the seer and the seen, purusha and prakriti, otherwise known as life. I'll clip the whole section in Part II, for reference.

These three convoluted sutras can be boiled down to: ignorance makes the world and its perceiver come into existence. Removing that ignorance is liberation. It could almost be read as life is ignorance; death is liberation, yet we prefer to look for an alternative.

Note that the trick proposed is to remove ignorance, avidya. It doesn't mean we are to wrest prakriti and purusha apart, though that's a common interpretation. We do look inward to the elysian fields of our pure, transparent consciousness during meditation or yoga practice, but it's a mistake to imagine we're fully unattached from it.

It's well worth reviewing some concise ideas from the old notes:

Patanjali tells us that awareness itself is a byproduct of spirit and nature being *conjoined*. The wording makes it sound like two separate things are brought together to produce “apprehension,” but the Vedantic notion is that one oceanic source is divided into two aspects, which then can interact. It is

the interaction itself which produces awareness. As Nitya puts it, this is one of the major mysteries of life—and it actually may be the prime mystery from which all others flow.

Because we have “taken sides” and identified our self with the purusha half of the divide, we tend to think in various terms of reuniting with the other half, or else cutting it off. The secret is that the harder we struggle to accomplish that, the more stubbornly the schism remains in place. We are directed to instead turn to the One Beyond, or better yet, the One Within, attaining which the duality naturally ebbs away.

This is from Darsanamala notes, 2.6 (3/22/16), regarding the “liberated state”:

The recently discovered “default networks” of the brain are a leap forward in our understanding of the mind and the role of meditation. Recent fMRI studies were made of people doing tasks, the kinds of things that have been studied a million times, only in these studies the focus was on what the brain was up to *in between* the tasks. The question was, when “nothing” is happening, what is actually going on in the brain? It turns out there are some very fascinating areas that light up at such times.... My take on this discovery is that meditation is a way for us to spend quality time in these in-between or default areas of the brain. They appear to overlap in a vertical hierarchy very similar to stages of spiritual enlightenment.

The bottom line here is that, once you have learned the basics of social interaction and balanced your ego, hopefully by early adulthood, you can free yourself by letting go of the tight grip everyone feels they have to maintain all the time, and which is reinforced by subconsciously retained threats of punishment. By relaxing our self-criticism, not to mention criticism of

others, we permit ourselves to automatically rise to the next level of spiritual functioning.

Back to Patanjali notes:

The main point in Nitya's commentary, though, is that there are two distinct ways to look at life, yet they are not mutually exclusive, as some believe. We can make plans and take steps to carry out our plans, or we can live purely in the present, plan free. The Western mania is for implementing plans, which is why eightfold paths and eight limbed yoga are more popular than loosely organized philosophies like the Gurukula's. Sometimes yoga is taken to mean living without any conscious direction, channeling fate so to speak. But that is a recipe for what Nataraja Guru called becoming a misfit, where the ego subtly inserts itself into the position of dictator or saboteur. Those whose lives are ruled by plans and laws are another kind of misfit, overly rigid. But there is no reason not to take the best of both sides, where our life is permitted to have shape and meaning, yet is nonetheless flexible enough to be open to new possibilities. If we can remember the purusha and step back from our ferocious attachment to prakriti, it isn't too hard to do.

Patanjali's take on nescience is somewhat at variance with the Gurukula/Gita idea expounded by Nitya here. Patanjali's version is absolute: any contact between purusha and prakriti causes ignorance, which can lead to the attitude that prakriti is a kind of pollutant that the purusha should avoid stepping in at all costs. Such a schism is fraught with peril.

Our take is that the interaction of purusha and prakriti is a happy miracle, and it should be revealed in, enjoyed and appreciated. Ignorance is when the purusha forgets itself and is so mesmerized by the prakriti that it is totally drawn into the

drama. It comes to believe that only the play of nature is real, and so it is buffeted by the ups and downs of temporal existence. Reclaiming vidya, then, is by remembering our true nature as the indwelling spirit. Avidya impels us to try to “fix” prakriti for our own or its own salvation, but that leads us into an endless morass of actions and consequences. Once we realize that prakriti is just like that, we may still offer our help and love to those around us, but we can more easily relinquish the urge to fight, to pit one aspect of nature against another.

What this means is that just because the world is ultimately false in the sense of being an arbitrary construct, it is a beautiful and fascinating place to play out our destiny. How could there ever be a created place that wasn't arbitrary? So lighten up and break out a smile. Still, we should definitely use our transcendental perspective to reduce the inherent falsehood to the minimum. Falsehood isn't monolithic: it starts as only a tiny inclination, but we magnify it beyond all reason, and then we're really unhappy.

I brought in this part of Nitya's Yoga Letter 15, from the book's appendix:

If you aspire to live the disciplined life of a yogi you should have a clear picture of the alternation of your personal consciousness back and forth between the compulsive behavior of an animal and the detached, repressive withdrawal of a conscientious person. Both of these aspects are symptoms of having no control over your life and remaining as a slave to the forces of circumstance.

What is expected of a yogi is to become the master of the situation under all circumstances. Between your myth and your physicality there is a neutral zone where your witnessing

consciousness is seated. When the witnessing consciousness also assumes the responsibility to will, the volition becomes more and more freed from irrational forces. Instead of leaving the act of restraint to the whims of your neurotic fears, all intentions can be carried out in the floodlight of your fully operating awareness. (370-1)

“Compulsive behavior” takes place when we are caught up in prakriti, and “repressive withdrawal” is the one-sided flight into purusha. The way to escape these mirror-image forms of slavery is to discover the neutral zero in their midst and establish a dynamic, witnessing consciousness there.

Deb opened the class bemused that we are most of the way through the book, and only now are we finding out the essence of what we’ve been studying. We are in a sense taking all of our impediments, our baggage, off us, so as to be truly ready to delve into yoga. She reread the end of the sutra 23 commentary:

There is a wholesale liberation when the master of the individuated life feels free within the frame of reference of the immanence in which the purusha is placed and carries out the dictates of immanence even when in perfect resonance with the freedom of transcendence.

All implications of bondage and liberation become evident through the comparison and contrast of the two sets of norms with which we are equipped. One set of norms is given to us to play effectively and pragmatically in the world of empirical facts, the world of relativity or relativistic values. The other set is to reveal the falsehood of relativistic experiences so that we may have a unitive understanding. Thus this sutra holds in its grip one of the major mysteries of life.

Deb reaffirmed it's not that you're choosing one norm and pushing the other away, but seeing how they can be integrated for a fruitful balance for an individuated life.

I added that liberation is not a fixed, final accomplishment. The preparation we need to have made by now for yoga study is being willing to confront our own avidya, to recognize and admit to it rather than defend and cling to it, which allows us to continually pursue yoga with a transparency of vision.

That pretty much sewing up the discussion, we asked Andy to tell us about his role in producing the diagrams for the book. In the present instance Nitya simply handed him a sketch, which he digitized on an early computer program. It seems to him to have been added sideways in the book, but it's a curious conglomeration, regardless. He recalled Nitya liked to do things unconventionally to keep everyone on their toes. Another of Nitya's sketches appeared as if it was looking south from the north pole, and Andy commented, "It looks like you've changed your point of view." Nitya forcefully shot back: "There is no point of view!"

After regaining his composure, Andy realized having a point of view belongs to the relative. In a yantra there is no point of view because you are all the different parts. Western art uses perspective, which looks like it was taken with a camera. Perspective depends on the point of view of the observer, so it's a dualistic convention. In Eastern art, space is much flatter. Around the time when the Europeans show up, Indian painting started to shift, took on perspective space. That carries a meaning with it: you are an individual in space looking at a scene, and it looks the way it does because of where you are standing. It's as if the frame is a window and out there is the world. A camera does this automatically: you get a picture from your point of view, and that's realism, as we imagine it to be. For Nitya, there *is* no point of view. It was an appeal to a higher form of realism.

Deb was excited about the non-point-of-view in art, always having admired the traditional Chinese scroll that as you unroll it, you go through continuously changing time and space. Unlike Western paintings, scrolls have multiple points of view, and like that, prakriti and purusha work together to express the transcendence in our immanent lives. With talent and skill we are able to maneuver in a generous beautiful way in relativistic life, where there is no fixed viewpoint and everything is included.

Andy mused that you can't disentangle prakriti from purusha—to see or experience them, they must be together for our existence.

It seems to me that's the main difference between Vedanta and Patanjali's Yoga, where purusha and prakriti are taken as different things. The Vedantic idea is that they are one thing that is always conjoined. It's a unitive situation, and out of that arises the seer and the scene as complementary aspects. This is covered in Narayana Guru's Bhana Darsana. They emerge from an intrinsic unity instead of being created separately.

Andy admitted the possibility is still held out in Yoga that purusha can withdraw from prakriti, and that's what leads to kaivalya, aloneness. Moni agreed aloneness and liberation go together. Paul reminded us aloneness is all oneness, the very definition of liberation.

Nitya knew what imaging has since proven: "No state of consciousness is absolutely free from other states of consciousness." (227) Even in a deep coma, the brain remains active.

Since art was the topic, I offered the image of an artist creating a masterpiece. The artist and the canvas are not two distinct things: nothing can happen unless they work together. From our perspective, they are both prakriti manipulated by purusha—matter driven by energy. Which are essentially equal. Purusha and prakriti are creating together at all times, and all

expression is brought forth by their interaction. Only one thing is happening, one creation. The artist can stop painting and just sit alone in kaivalya, and that's freeing of any neurotic fears and engagements they may be obsessed or plagued by. It's valuable to clear the mind for yoga practice. The result is not a magical state; it's quite ordinary, though very refreshing.

We are ridding ourselves of avidya so we can get the most from what Patanjali has in mind, next. One aspect of avidya is to think in terms of goals, to have programs to accomplish producing a particular end-product. Patanjali's Yoga is a unitive situation broken into eight aspects bearing very loose directives or descriptions. Living it requires an alert life, both engaged and detached, focused on high values. We are being asked to rid ourselves of thinking we aren't already the Absolute, binding ourselves with mantras like "if I could only do this, I would become enlightened," "I have a long way to go," "only special people are enlightened," and so on. We are but buds blossoming and bearing fruit on a bush in the wilderness, not industrious workers fashioning a Tower of Babel to reach heaven.

Paul told a tale of learning to ride a motorcycle when he was a boy, with so many stages of learning, struggling, being made fun of, falling down, needing help. All the while he was trying to learn neutrality, so he could cope better. It was a developmental opportunity for him.

I asked him who was purusha and who prakriti in the story? Of course he felt the bike represented prakriti, and yet it was the agency for him learning many life lessons, so its value was only in relation to purusha. It's a fine example of what the sutras are teaching: this was Paul's life unfolding, beginning to bud. All those triumphs and tragedies were bound up together. We're happy to share funny stories with each other, but none of it is "out there." All of what we see is scrolling on our private movie screen. The interaction of prakriti and purusha produces apprehension,



meaning knowledge. We're always meditating and learning and growing, and that's a good story to tell ourselves, too. A healthful story. It might even be true....

Deb concluded we are assessing and interweaving aspects of our lives, learning to balance and integrate rather than push away or choose.

A nice quote popped up recently, found in my Gita commentary, where Void and Compassion stand for purusha and prakriti:

Thanks to Nataraja Guru, in *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, Chapter X, we enjoy this clarification:

Saraha was also a Mahayana Buddhist who lived in India about ce 850. By way of contrast we quote a short part from his *Treasury of songs*:

He who clings to the Void  
And neglects Compassion,  
Does not reach the highest stage,  
But he who practices only Compassion  
Does not gain release from toils of existence.  
He, however, who is strong in practice of both,  
Remains neither in samsara nor in nirvana.

(E. Conze (tr.), *Buddhist Scriptures*, Penguin, London, 1960, p. 180.)

Deb found a perfect poem right after class, epitomizing the message:

## Thanking Master Zhang with a Poem

By Wang Wei

Translated by Susan Wan Dolling

I tend to love quiet now in my evening years,  
Not caring much about much in the world.  
Making no long-term plans, I just keep to myself.  
Emptied of knowledge, I have returned to the woods.  
A breeze blows through the pines, loosening my robe.  
The mountain moon is my lamplight for playing the qin.  
You ask for the secret of transcending all worldly matter:  
Just listen to the fisherman's song coming down the river.

### **Part II**

The section of sutras on avidya:

16: The pain that has not yet come is to be avoided.

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

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.

19: The stages of the triple modalities of nature are the particular, the universal, the differentiated, and the undifferentiated.

20: The seer is consciousness only; even though pure, it witnesses cognition.

21: The very being of the seen is for the sake of the seer alone.

22: Although it becomes non-existent for one whose purpose has been fulfilled, it does not cease to exist because of being common to others.

23: The conjunction of purusha and prakriti is the cause of the apprehension of the essential nature and powers of both.

24: Its cause is nescience.

25: The absence of the conjunction of prakriti and purusha is through the elimination of nescience; its absence is the liberation of the seer.

26: The unbroken discrimination between the Self and the non-Self is the means of eliminating nescience.

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From the old notes:

9/9/12

I have been thinking about how using drugs as a boost to enlightenment convinced many of us that there was nothing to be done, that if we just stopped doing anything and went with the flow, all would be perfect. Basically it brought about a slide into *tamas*, stuckness, much of the time. I remember a cashier at the hippie co-op in 1971 proudly proclaiming that she didn't do arithmetic, as she handed me the incorrect change for the third

time. She was lucky I did know how to add and subtract, despite being quite a stoner.... Hers was a typical mix up of norms. So many of us (me included, until I met Nitya) believed that unitive understanding would also serve well in pragmatic circumstances, but it doesn't. You have to be able to function. You need to know math to operate an old-fashioned cash register. I guess that's why machines have been invented since then that can calculate sums for all us stupids. Maybe when machines take over *all* our tasks we can just space out permanently, but in the meantime it's not a good idea.

To me, wrestling with the demands of the world is part of the fun, too. I need something to stimulate me, or else I feel worthless. Bored too.

Another example: listening to music is passive, and playing it is active. Or reading as opposed to writing. Passivity is often thought of as spiritual or unitive, and activity as dualistic. Yet you can't have one without the other. It's fun to do both, and in the sum total of all human actions there has to be reciprocity between the two poles.

I'm not so sure about unconscious withdrawals, but I've made plenty of conscious ones. Actually, on reflection, the way it works is you consciously decide to cordon off certain areas, and then you can remain blissfully untroubled by them, just as if you are unconscious of them. That's how most people cope with the nefarious practices of the many secret military services humanity has spawned—they pretend they don't exist or else they're benign, so they can safely look away. Personally, I prefer not to ignore things that might deliver a poisonous bite.

Best example for me is what I've told several people who have come to me for guidance because they were stressed out from all the anxiety generated by their environment. I assured them that half (or more) of their misery will cease immediately if they stop watching TV. TV, at least in America, is designed to produce

anger and shock at the foibles of others. The news, along with most of the shows, has become a string of heartbreaking disasters, and people who watch it become afraid to go outdoors. Why make friends with your neighbor, since he could easily be a mass murderer? Why go downtown, where you might get knifed or raped? Why not stay in your home, trembling with fear, and sucking on the teat of the TV? THAT neutral technological device can't hurt you, can it? Or you could buy some of those wonderful products it advertises that promise to calm you down or get you off.

I believe it's very important to be well informed, but TV is not the way to do it. It is classic disinformation. Tuning it out and turning it off is like unstrapping that rotting albatross from around your neck and taking a cleansing shower. Pratyahara for the modern world. Once a neutral state is achieved, we can turn to the best information sources we can find, and be thoughtful about what we learn from them.

TV today means screens, because it's only one of many ways now available to get us to pump out adrenaline.

Another take on exercise two is that I've dropped out of most activities of my younger years to pursue my writing, counseling and musical interests, which are largely simple and solitary. I have to accept that I'm no fun if I don't indulge in any of the behaviors that revolve around drinking and other social lubricants, like gossip, sports, movies, political activism, and so forth, but I don't find these very stimulating any more. Too bad. Yet I'm not sad! I realize I'm kind of addicted to yogic thinking and seeing how it impacts every aspect of life. That's a real kick, to me!

I relate strongly to some of the ideas in one of my current reads, on cosmology, called *The View from the Center of the Universe*, by Joel Primack and Nancy Abrams (New York: Penguin, Riverhead Books, 2006), especially this:

In a reversal of all historic and even prehistoric precedent, it is normal today to consider people who are more concerned with cosmic reality than with making money to be out of touch and *unrealistic*. As a people, we now have the scientific ability to see so much more deeply into the universe than ancient people, yet we experience it so much less and connect with it almost not at all. This widespread cultural *indifference to the universe* is a staggering reality of our time—and possibly our biggest mental handicap in solving global problems. (6)

I mention this because social lubrication is very often a cover-up for the despair that accompanies this cultural indifference to the important aspects of life. Feeling strongly about this has marginalized me socially, but it can't be helped. I'm heartened when I encounter fellow nerds here and there who still wonder about the meaning of life and don't medicate their unhappiness so they don't notice it anymore.

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11/9/10

Sutra II:23

The conjunction of purusha and prakriti is the cause of the apprehension of the essential nature and powers of both.

Continuing the theme from the previous two sutras, Patanjali tells us that awareness itself is a byproduct of spirit and nature being conjoined. The wording makes it sound like two separate things are brought together to produce “apprehension,” but the Vedantic notion is that one oceanic source is divided into two aspects, which then can interact. It is the interaction itself which produces awareness. As Nitya puts it, this is one of the major

mysteries of life—and it actually may be the prime mystery from which all others flow.

Because we have “taken sides” and identified our self with the purusha half of the divide, we tend to think in various terms of reuniting with the other half, or else cutting it off. The secret is that the harder we struggle to accomplish that, the more stubbornly the schism remains in place. We are directed to instead turn to the One Beyond, or better yet, the One Within, attaining which the duality naturally ebbs away.

Deb had found a relevant stretch of That Alone that explains this very well, from verse 56, which she couldn't locate during the class, but is included here. Actually, the entire commentary is very helpful, and the end is among Nitya's most poignant and powerful statements anywhere. I recommend rereading it sometime soon.

The ocean and its waves analogy dealt with in verse 56 is a more unified version of the purusha/prakriti duality. Nitya says:

The factual world should find a place in existence, but the possibility of arriving at an absolute should also be there. If you can combine these two into one total vision it is called *samvit*. Is *samvit* cosmic consciousness? Yes. Is *samvit* matter? Yes. Is *samvit* pure Absolute? Yes. Is it God? Yes. Is it the devil? Yes. What is it not? ‘Is’ and ‘is not’ are both *samvit*. It is dynamic, and in that dynamism innumerable possibilities are happening.

Out of the ocean of *samvit*, two possibilities emerge that are of general importance. One is the mind that perceives and the other is what is perceived. One is not the cause of the other: both are only consequential factors. It is not that the ocean is more real than the wave. The water and its agitations are both products of a total action situation.

Nitya adds an important corollary a little bit later:

To deny the wave and the ocean together, if you can, is wisdom. But if you then sit on what you have rejected, saying “I have realized; this is my realization,” you have only made a new slab of ignorance called “my realization.” I don’t know if I am making sense to you. The very moment you realize that this is truth, you have falsified the whole thing. So where is the grace and where is the joy of the Absolute? It is all this. Don’t be afraid: it’s all still here.

What he means is that thoughts asserting “I am this” or “I am that,” no matter how sublime or excellent, identify us as a purusha distinct from prakriti. Therefore we should never take pride in our attitude, or any value it might have contained is instantly erased. If we are enchanted enough with just being alive we won’t have time for pride, or any need for it either.

Paul reminded us of the classic idea that purusha is immersed in prakriti in order to know itself, or in Western terms, God created humans in order to have something see him in all his glory. Either way, purusha/spirit is the transcendent and prakriti/nature is the immanent. Their conjunction creates the world.

Another classic analogy uses light and darkness. Purusha is pure light, prakriti total darkness. In either one, nothing is perceivable. Only when light mixes with darkness do distinct features become evident. This recalls the first book of Genesis, where light impregnates the dark womb of the firmament and an entire universe springs forth. There they are called heaven and earth, respectively. Once they are separated, the flow of time begins.

When prakriti and purusha are conjoined, life is artistic in the broadest sense. Even the most mundane details are delight-filled. I always think of Kurt Vonnegut’s image of the dead waiting in long lines to get back into a body, any body: black, brown, or white; male or female or even animal. Being dead is utterly *boring*, so



they are desperate for a chance to live again, and will take anything they can get.

Vonnegut wanted us to remember this while we are actually alive, but somehow soon after we are born we are convinced to defer living until after death. So we go back and forth across the divide between here and hereafter, searching for resolution exactly where it isn't. The longing for a perfect afterlife is actually a devastating blow to our spirit, and an utter waste to boot. We would be much better off to long for our present life, and attain it and enter into it.

This came to my mind because Scotty had been at a show of his artwork, and he heard a lot of people muttering about how they didn't have a creative bone in their bodies, couldn't do any art, etc. etc. He finally got fed up and accosted two people, to let them know that everybody can and should do *something* artistic. He told them that everybody has so much experience that they all are capable of some form of creativity. Our lives are so rich compared with some other periods of history! Too bad we don't give them their due. Scotty wondered where we learn that we are powerless and that the important things in life are all done by others. This is a terrible though unintentional effect of a belief in a distant god who runs the world. It permeates society as a pernicious foreboding that we are inadequate and inferior. Scotty wanted, like Patanjali, to intervene on our behalf, to convince us we are perfectly wonderful. All we have to do is pick up the ball and start running.

If we look at nature as the whole story, we feel cowed by its magnificence. If we imagine our spirit or soul is the only thing that matters, we will devastate the environment. Nitya presents the inner secret here, that neither extreme is where we should be directing our energies:

Essentially, there are two states: being bound to nature or being free of nature. These can also be termed as transcendence and

immanence. Both are only of partial value, so far as individuated beings are concerned. The ideal state is when the individual is conversant with both immanence and transcendence....

All implications of bondage and liberation become evident through the comparison and contrast of the two sets of norms with which we are equipped. One set of norms is given to us to play effectively and pragmatically in the world of empirical facts, the world of relativity or relativistic values. The other set is to reveal the falsehood of relativistic experiences so that we may have a unitive understanding. (224-5)

What this means is that just because the world is ultimately false in the sense of being an arbitrary construct, it is a beautiful and fascinating place to play out our destiny. How could there ever be a created place that wasn't arbitrary? So lighten up and break out a smile. But we should definitely use our transcendental perspective to reduce the inherent falsehood to the minimum. Falsehood isn't monolithic: it starts as only a tiny inclination, but we magnify it beyond all reason, and then we're really unhappy.

We got into a discussion of the astonishing complexity and utility of prakriti, and Deb mentioned the new idea of solar roads. You can learn about them here: <http://wimp.com/solarhighways>. It certainly appears that nature is endlessly bountiful and adaptable. There is no reason for us to despair because we've reached the edge of where our imagination has so far taken us. It is only a failure of imagination. The universe has plenty more options we haven't thought of yet.

11/23/10

Sutra II:24

Its cause is nescience.

We continue our brief survey of *avidya* (nescience) prior to arriving at the ever-popular eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga. Though brief, commensurate with the minimalist sutra, Nitya's comments make a banquet of food for thought here.

The word nescience, meaning not knowledge or not science, was consciously chosen by Nataraja Guru to supersede the more common translation of *avidya*, ignorance. A great deal of what we imagine to be truth is actually our (not very well considered) opinion about details of the world, or *prakriti*, and thus is very far from truth. Humans readily become aggressive about their opinions, but truth needs no defender. Its inherent validity makes it "a fortress unto itself." The section on *avidya* is one more opportunity to really examine our own certitudes with a courageous eye. Patanjali wants us to cleanse our minds of as much junk as possible before we begin practicing the eight limbs.

Science itself is hampered by all manner of prejudices masquerading as facts, and strenuous measures are taken to purge its experiments of bias, which are well-known to affect the results. Yoga is no different, and yet the quantity of absurd ideas taken for granted by its votaries makes it more resemble a pseudoscience than a science. Wishful thinking is fine, but when strenuous efforts are made to convert fantasies into reality, they cultivate a breeding ground for frustration.

Patanjali's take on nescience is somewhat at variance with the Gurukula/Gita idea expounded by Nitya here. Patanjali's version is absolute: any contact between *purusha* and *prakriti* causes ignorance, which can lead to the attitude that *prakriti* is a kind of pollutant that the *purusha* should avoid stepping in at all costs. Such a schism is fraught with peril.

Our take is that the interaction of *purusha* and *prakriti* is a happy miracle, and it should be revealed in, enjoyed and appreciated. Ignorance is when the *purusha* forgets itself and is so mesmerized by the *prakriti* that it is totally drawn into the drama. It

comes to believe that only the play of nature is real, and so it is buffeted by the ups and downs of temporal existence. Reclaiming vidya, then, is by remembering our true nature as the indwelling spirit. Avidya impels us to try to “fix” prakriti for our own or its own salvation, but that leads us into an endless morass of actions and consequences. Once we realize that prakriti is just like that, we may still offer our help and love to those around us, but we can more easily relinquish the urge to fight, to pit one aspect of nature against another.

It’s worth reprising the Gita’s take on this question, from Chapter III. Krishna says:

- 4) By refraining from initiating activities a person does not come to have the attainment of transcending action, nor can one by renunciation alone come to perfection.
- 5) Not even for a single instant can one ever remain engaged in no action at all. By virtue of modalities born from nature, all are made to engage in action helplessly.
- 6) He who sits controlling the organs of activity while ruminating mentally over items of sensuous interest—such a lost soul is said to be one of spurious conduct.
- 7) He, on the other hand, who keeps the senses under control by means of the mind, then commences unitive activity while still unattached—he excels.
- 8) Do engage yourself in action that is necessary; activity is indeed better than non-activity, and even the bodily life of yours would not progress satisfactorily through non-action.

9) Outside of activity with a sacrificial purpose, this world is bound by action. Even with such a purpose, do engage in work, O Arjuna, freed of all attachments.

Bill likes to give Patanjali more credit than I do, that when he says “Yoga is the cessation of mental modifications,” he really means “*extraneous* mental modifications.” Perhaps some scribe accidentally omitted that adjective, but I doubt it. Patanjali’s very reasonable idea is that to know the purusha absolutely we should utterly turn away from prakriti and sit with only our purusha, our soul. (Purusha only became a single unitive spirit later in history.) He can believe this because he sees purusha and prakriti as two separate things. Nondualism has it that they are merely two ways of looking at the same thing, so you don’t draw a thick line between them, but move to their common ground.

Aldous Huxley, in *The Doors of Perception*, spends a lot of time on this same question. The book is really a delight to reread for those interested in these matters. Huxley took a mescaline trip, and the book is a review of his insights. In this excerpt, he was entranced by a trio of mismatched flowers:

“Is it agreeable?” somebody asked....

“Neither agreeable nor disagreeable,” I answered. “It just *is*.” *Istigkeit*—wasn’t that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? “Is-ness.” The Being of Platonic philosophy—except that Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea. He could never, poor fellow, have seen a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged; could never have perceived that what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they

were—a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence. (17-18)

Nitya reiterates a key point in his comments, that those who live in balance “see the relativistic imperfections of the given world but at the same time see how beneficial it is to use all the faculties of this body/mind complex and enjoy the vast changes of this world. They want to live in the transcendent and the immanent at once.” There is a veiled implication here that it is very important to accept the shortcomings of prakriti, which is unabashedly the field of dualism. If we are caught up in prakriti, we can become obsessed with rectifying its defects, which can lead to conflict with others who see things differently. Often to promote our side we demonize others, with the result of becoming more and more trapped by the clinging vines of insoluble dilemmas. To reclaim our freedom we should step back and view the apparently dire straits of prakriti with a sense of humor or lightness. This is not easy to do, because prakriti is a master of entrapment. Patanjali says, flatly, “Stay away!” Nitya goes with Narayana Guru: “Sit there in contemplation, enjoying the world but keeping an eye on those clinging vines, because they’re pretty sneaky and will catch you precisely when you least expect it.”

The main point in Nitya’s commentary, though, is that there are two distinct ways to look at life, yet they are not mutually exclusive, as some believe. We can make plans and take steps to carry out our plans, or we can live purely in the present, plan free. The Western mania is for implementing plans, which is why eightfold paths and eight limbed yoga are more popular than loosely organized philosophies like the Gurukula’s. Sometimes yoga is taken to mean living without any conscious direction,

channeling fate so to speak. But that is a recipe for what Nataraja Guru called becoming a misfit, where the ego subtly inserts itself into the position of dictator or saboteur. Those whose lives are ruled by plans and laws are another kind of misfit, overly rigid. But there is no reason not to take the best of both sides, where our life is permitted to have shape and meaning, yet is nonetheless flexible enough to be open to new possibilities. If we can remember the purusha and step back from our ferocious attachment to prakriti, it isn't too hard to do.

In that regard, visitor Eric has been doing vipassana meditation, and he told us a little about it. It involves ten-day retreats with no talking, where you concentrate on every inch of the body from head to toe and then back up. Eric found that it released vast amounts of energy trapped in his body, and unleashed some powerful feelings. After the storms passed, he felt he could sit quietly and watch his mind engage in its furious machinations without getting drawn into them. Eric was taught that the reason for the meditation on the body was to defeat the abstraction of the process by the intellect. In terms of yoga, the mind is the essence of prakriti, while the calm witness is the purusha. It is equally important for the yogi to subvert intellectualization by performing actual activity and not just “mailing it in” mentally.

Bill reminded us of Suzuki Roshi's famous statement, that those who sit in Zen do so not to gain anything, but because it is their true nature. Likewise we “practice” yoga not for some future payoff, which is speculative at best, but to become more alive to the present. Restored, we arise from our seats, full of the joy of life, to chop wood and carry water.

11/30/10

Sutra II:25

The absence of the conjunction of prakriti and purusha is through the elimination of nescience; its absence is the liberation of the seer.

In any study of nescience it is especially valuable to be yanked out of our prevailing egoistic state of certainty, which allows us to open up to new possibilities. Nitya's commentary filled the bill, helping us to sit together in a state of abject confusion and bafflement. As Charles said to me later, listening to classes in Malayalam for six months while he and Brenda were in India taught him to accept being totally unaware of the purport of what was going on around him. I think for most of us, last night's class might just as well have been in Malayalam!

The good news is that the one final sutra on nescience should help clarify the subject again, and then we will begin studying the most straightforward part of Patanjali's yoga: the eight limbs. The fact that Patanjali is so practically oriented contradicts the escapism implied in sutras like this one. In any case, the sutra is a kind of baptism by fire, where our comfortable conceits are at least singed if not consumed by the flames.

We have noted before, many times, that Patanjali's teaching is dualistic. It seems he identifies us wholly with purusha and treats prakriti as nothing more than a condition of bondage. The more unitive approach of the Gurukula is to integrate the two sides, to realize there is only one state, ever. Rejecting the environment is fraught with multiple perils. As Deb said, we will dispense with prakriti when we are dead; in the meantime it is an ever-present part of being alive. Functional MRI studies confirm this: even yogis in meditation and people in deep sleep and even comas have continuing brain waves, only quieter than when they are awake. The mind being part of prakriti, it would have to cease functioning entirely to meet Patanjali's criteria.



We should probably give Patanjali more credit, and fault the words he had to employ. He may not be leaning exclusively toward purusha, but toward a numinous state beyond both aspects of manifestation. That is definitely how we should take this, in order to get the most out of it.

In sutra II:23 we were instructed that the conjunction of prakriti and purusha allows us to apprehend “the essential nature and powers of both.” Here in sutra II:25 we have the opposite: their disjunction. Liberation in these terms means no longer apprehending either purusha or prakriti. Having recently been in just such a disjointed state, I have to say it is very, very far from anything we imagine as a comfortable—or even a spiritual—state. Nonetheless it is our destiny, when this life comes to a close.

Once again my study at the Yeilding Online Institute (YOI), where we have just revisited Letter Fifteen from the Appendix, dovetails well with this sutra. It’s a most excellent summary of the scope of yoga, well worth another read. The following excerpt throws light on the question we wrestled with last night:

If you aspire to live the disciplined life of a yogi you should have a clear picture of the alternation of your personal consciousness back and forth between the compulsive behavior of an animal and the detached, repressive withdrawal of a conscientious person. Both of these aspects are symptoms of having no control over your life and remaining as a slave to the forces of circumstance.

What is expected of a yogi is to become the master of the situation under all circumstances. Between your myth and your physicality there is a neutral zone where your witnessing consciousness is seated. When the witnessing consciousness also assumes the responsibility to will, the volition becomes more and more freed from irrational forces. Instead of leaving the act of restraint to the whims of your neurotic fears, all

intentions can be carried out in the floodlight of your fully operating awareness. (370-1)

“Compulsive behavior” takes place when we are caught up in prakriti, and “repressive withdrawal” is the flight into purusha. The way to escape these mirror-image forms of slavery is to discover the neutral zero in their midst and establish a dynamic, witnessing consciousness there. False spirituality imagines it can escape its own shadow with more and fiercer efforts; Krishna laughs and says, “No. It’s easy. Just go to the middle.”

The Vedantic view is that purusha and prakriti arise together, as the plus and minus of *bhava*, awareness. Thus, the harder we try to cling to one side of the situation, the more exaggerated the other side also becomes. To make it go away we have to move back *toward* it.

Paul related how thinking about complicated things sometimes brought him to an impasse or a dead end, and he learned a lot about which direction to take from this. At least he learned where not to go. This is a yogic version of “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” Curiously, in some spiritual paths “nothing ventured, nothing gained” is taken as a positive recommendation.... We are not on such a path in this class.

In some respects, prakriti is the presentation of the new, or let’s say the present. Screening it out, then, is a kind of resistance to the unfolding of our natural abilities. Again, Patanjali urges us to burn all our vasanas, while the Gurukula Gurus and the Gita say foster the best and only toast the rest.

Yet another synchronous discovery is a section of Carl Jung’s *The Stages of Life*, dealing with the transition from youth to adulthood. The following quote from it fleshes out our discussion, supporting what Nitya calls in Letter Fifteen “becoming the master of the situation under all circumstances.” We can see that Jung is also a dialectician, as well as a global visionary:

We are all familiar with the sources of the problems that arise in the period of youth. For most people it is the demands of life which harshly put an end to the dream of childhood. If the individual is sufficiently well prepared, the transition to a profession or career can take place smoothly. But if he clings to illusions that are contrary to reality, then problems will surely arise. No one can take the step into life without making certain assumptions, and occasionally these assumptions are false—that is, they do not fit the conditions into which one is thrown. Often it is a question of exaggerated expectations, underestimation of difficulties, unjustified optimism, or a negative attitude. One could compile quite a list of the false assumptions that give rise to the first conscious problems.

But it is not always the contradiction between subjective assumptions and external facts that gives rise to problems; it may just as often be inner, psychic difficulties. They may exist even when things run smoothly in the outside world. Very often it is the disturbance of psychic equilibrium caused by the sexual instinct; equally often it is the feeling of inferiority which springs from an unbearable sensitivity. These inner conflicts may exist even when adaptation to the outer world has been achieved without apparent effort. It even seems as if young people who have had a hard struggle for existence are spared inner problems, which those who for some reason or other have no difficulty with adaptation run into problems of sex or conflicts arising from a sense of inferiority. (392)

If we try to extract the common and essential factors from the almost inexhaustible variety of individual problems found in the period of youth, we meet in all cases with one particular feature: a more or less patent clinging to the childhood level of consciousness, a resistance to the fateful forces in and around

us which would involve us in the world. Something in us wishes to remain a child, to be unconscious or, at most, conscious only of the ego; to reject everything strange, or else subject it to our will; to do nothing, or else indulge our own craving for pleasure or power. In all this there is something of the inertia of matter; it is a persistence in the previous state whose range of consciousness is smaller, narrower, and more egoistic than that of the dualistic phase. For here the individual is faced with the necessity of recognising and accepting what is different and strange as a part of his own life, as a kind of “also-I.” (392-3)

The essential feature of the dualistic phase is the widening of the horizon of life, and it is this that is so vigorously resisted....

What would happen to him if he simply changed himself into that foreign-seeming “also-I” and allowed the earlier ego to vanish into the past? We might suppose this to be a quite practical course. The very aim of religious education, from the exhortation to put off the old Adam right back to the rebirth rituals of primitive races, is to transform the human being into the new, future man, and to allow the old to die away.

Psychology teaches us that, in a certain sense, there is nothing in the psyche that is old; nothing that can really, finally die away. Even Paul was left with a thorn in the flesh. Whoever protects himself against what is new and strange and regresses into the past falls into the same neurotic condition as the man who identifies himself with the new and runs away from the past. The only difference is that the one has estranged himself from the past and the other from the future. In principle both are doing the same thing: they are reinforcing their narrow range of consciousness instead of shattering it in the tension of opposites and building up a state of wider and higher consciousness. (393)

