

2022 Patanjali Class 67

10/3/23

Sutra II:29 – Self-restraints, observances, posture, regulation of vital forces, withdrawal from distraction, holding the focus of the mind, contemplation, and absorption are the eight limbs of Yoga. (Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhaya or samadhi)

Sutra 29 features a simple list of the eight limbs, and in a mere two pages Nitya epitomizes each one, including correcting popular false notions about them. For now, the most important idea to keep in mind is that the limbs are not sequential. We have been so educated in a stepwise fashion that we are inclined to imagine we have to learn the first, then the next, and eventually we reach samadhi and are enlightened.

Nothing could be further from the truth! Any sentient adult actually knows quite a lot about each limb, and they all are in play all the time. We can practice them one at a time, but what we learn stays with us permanently, and they all support each other. There is no way around presenting them in a coherent sequence, which the Patanjali consortium has done brilliantly.

In verse 98 of *That Alone*, Nitya was hitting our egos hard about our tepid engagement, and made the eight limbs sound like they would take lifetimes to master. It's a good way to get lazy minds to redouble their effort, and it seems to me a worthwhile adjunct to this moment in Patanjali, also. I suggest you read it again, soon, for inspirational purposes. Sequential and non-sequential attitudes both have their place in a complete vision.

I invited class members to share what they remembered of our previous yoga studies, or a time when they took a new resolve to change their life. Charles admitted he never learned any discipline, and never acquired any skills, while he was growing up. He chuckled that only in America in the 50s and 60s could you be

so undisciplined as that, and have your whole family as codependents.

As a young adult he went to India, where he got in trouble and ended up in Katmandu, in a monastery. The lama gave him shelter and assigned him the discipline of doing prostrations, 111,111, where you go all the way down and spring back up. At the same time you're rhythmically repeating a long mantra, and with your mind you are visualizing a mandala of the five buddhas and the five directions. The practice engages body, speech and mind – synchronizing these in a particular routine that you do over and over again. It's very difficult to complete it. Charles never got to point where he could mentally visualize the complicated mandala, but the physical and speech aspects he could handle. It took him a year, doing hundreds of prostrations each day, of pretty much continual movement. He used the morning for prostrations, and the afternoons for reading non-Vedanta books, like Philip K. Dick and CS Lewis. Sci fi, imaginative literature.

I told him we think of him as our most erudite participant, so did that practice bring enlightenment? He admitted that as soon as he stopped, he went back to his old dissolute ways.

I wondered how he might have learned so much, then. When my daughter Emily was in fifth grade, I sat in a few times. The teacher was riveting, and I listened closely, but all the kids were talking to each other about their favorite TV shows and clothes and paying no attention whatsoever, yet by the end of the year they had grown a lot, and must have learned by osmosis.

Charles did finally admit that sometimes things get in and make sense to him. He spent thousands of hours sitting with Tibetan lamas giving dharma talks, mostly doodling and staring at the art on the walls. He said, "I can't pass a quiz on that. I didn't understand what was being said." Well, we aren't trying to pass quizzes on details so much as grow globally, so semi-conscious listening might be the more effective route.

Then Charles admitted he sat in on many lectures by bikkus, not really getting it, and he was around Nataraja Guru off and on the last years of his life, listening to him for several days, and then he'd be off somewhere else. It's clear the Guru had some influence on him.

Charles talked about what a fast-paced entertainer he was. In the classes, Mark Albert and Bennington were taking notes furiously, but it was mostly a few people just hanging out, and the rest he chased out or they ran from the room in terror. He was a comedian and he was enjoying himself. He'd be the lion tamer. He'd take his cane and say I attack their egos and make them jump on chairs, and he would roar like an angry tiger. He was doing stuff with their minds. There wasn't anyone who had a free ride.

Whenever Nataraja Guru found someone who believed that Patanjali's Yoga was a series of steps, he'd run them through the ringer. He was very clear that all the parts are integrated, and need to be grasped as a whole.

Bill recalled a story from Ram Dass's autobiography, about meeting his guru. He found him at last and he was blown away, and right away asked to be his disciple. Maharaj-ji told him to go with an assistant to a remote location and study Patanjali for four months, to get some discipline. He claimed it was the most disciplined thing in his life, and he came out it grateful and prepared to interact with the guru.

Karen also graced us with some of her history. She got introduced to Nitya in a round-about way. Her mother went to hear this exciting new speaker in town, Harvey Freeman, around 1971. She was really enthralled, and kept talking about him, but Karen had two young kids, and begged off. She did have a spiritual mind at the time, read Ram Dass and such, and finally started going to Harvey's lectures. They were held at the Mallory Hotel for a while, then he moved to a large theater in downtown Portland that he filled every Sunday.

Before long Karen got involved in his church and eventually became part of the commune that they established in La Center, Washington. That was a big deal, a big change in her life. She left an office job and took her two kids out to Nowhere, Washington. Around 25 people shared the beautiful grounds. Harvey would do lectures, and many people came out from Portland to experience the land and listen to his lectures. He had a knack of being able to read widely and then combine it all in his own words. A lot of people got a lot of good energy from it. Yes, he became narcissistic, but that was later.

Harvey invited Nitya to participate in their gatherings out at the ranch, and some of the most wonderful times were when Nitya would come and give a class. Many of Nitya's followers would go along, and it really did seem like the utopian future was coming true.

The class chatted for a while, but were saving our energies for the upcoming yamas, the five restraints forming the first limb, each deserving of its own class. South America also has yamas, but they are spelled llamas, in Spanish, and they are very hard to restrain. So we have to be ready.

I had brought along a few useful ideas to read, about yoga in general, but saved them for the Class Notes. Here you go:

From ISOA, an idea applicable to the whole of our study, from the third chapter titled Phenomenology. It opens with a revelation about dialectic/yoga wisdom, that the resulting synthesis doesn't erase existence but *encloses* it:

Antinomies such as science and nescience, truth and error, are not treated by Narayana Guru as capable of being strictly cancelled out leaving no remainder of content. There is a subtle bracketing principle as in Husserl's fundamental phenomenology where the bottom of a receptacle and its lid are

put together in such a way that the content still remains existent and real. Paradox when resolved does not abolish all content into nothingness. On the contrary, by a reasoning involving both a double assertion and a double negation, the full absolute existence is reaffirmed rather than emptied into nothingness. (388-9)

From Darsanamala Class Notes 7.1:

The idea the verse expresses is that both conditioned and unconditioned states are included in the one knowledge that undergirds our existence. We tend to think of conditioned as bad and unconditioned as good, or if we're pragmatists the other way round, but both are complementary aspects of a sane outlook. One without the other is not complete. Reuniting them is the aim of this darsana on knowledge, as well as of Darsanamala as a whole.

From the previous Patanjali class, on unification of limbs:

Another valuable preparatory step was offered by Scotty. He has been thinking that his art was the main activity in his life, and the Gurukula yoga study and his qigong work were other interests that, while enjoyable, were drawing him away from his dharma, so he only made room for them when he wasn't consumed with painting. Lately he has come to see that, far from being disjunct interests, they are all building blocks of a single artistic flow, which for him has its actualization in painting, but can easily include all those other aspects without conflict. Instead of having to decide between one thing or another, he sees it all as one process, like the growth of a plant with several branches. This is a very important realization, one that will allow a more wholehearted participation in whatever

he finds himself engaged in. Yoga study is not meant to be separate in any way from what we do in our lives.

Last, an all-purpose blessing, to end with good cheer:

I must have said before, but it bears repeating, that we are conditioned by an inheritance of three billion years of survival mentality, in which our whole attention has been absorbed in trying to reproduce before we were eaten. At long last we have evolved a measure of safety so that we can begin to entertain thoughts beyond mere survival and reproduction. Yoga is an invitation to grow our spirit in new ways and discover what else is possible. It is foolhardy to imagine we have anything more than a vague notion of where we are going, but an infinite potential is there for us to begin to colonize, and every contribution enlarges the community's sphere of knowledge. Each of us will tread a unique path, but since they all intersect at various points we all welcome reports from the front lines of our fellow adventurers. For all of our sakes we wish each of you an intrepid journey!

Part II

11/8/12 (Nancy Y's class included sutras 29-31)

At first I was daunted by the length of the reading, but after poring through it I am very grateful for the opportunity to read this section once again. It is Nitya at his best, perfectly describing the cream of Patanjali. I am well aware of how difficult it is to pin down a vast subject like ahimsa or brahmacharya, and can only sit brim full of admiration for Nitya's expertise in epitomizing all these terms. His summary of the eight limbs is impeccable.

I love his calling the yamas or restraints the “five states of integrity.” Right there is a significant reevaluation: restraint is dualistic; integrity is unitive.

In a way I think many people live the eight limbs of yoga—and especially the first couple—without realizing it. There are plenty of kindly souls who are well balanced and integrated, but they never make headlines and so slide by relatively unnoticed. Without necessarily having an especially refined philosophy, they treat others with respect and minimize their cravings. They cause as little pain and damage to their surroundings as possible. Content in themselves, they don’t waver under pressure. Their existence is a support for their friends and neighbors, while not asking any reciprocation from them. They probably wouldn’t care that Patanjali codified their excellent way of living, and might have little or no inclination to do so themselves. To them, it’s just common sense.

To me, common sense is misnamed. It’s fairly rare, and seems to be getting rarer. But it does exist.

The danger in spelling all this out is that the ego likes to make good behavior part of its résumé, and that spoils it. Spiritual activity falls short when there is a contractual basis for it. We have to realize that these steps in themselves bring joy; or rather, joy naturally brings about this way of living. Put another way, “The residual relish disappears when the One Beyond is sighted.” (Gita, II, 59.) It’s an interesting process, where we have to be simultaneously cognizant and not cognizant. Like riding a bicycle, where you have to study it at first, and then with practice it becomes effortlessly pleasurable and useful.

We don’t really need any Great Vows unless our natural caring and enthusiasm have been lost. It’s a little clunky running the show from the tip of the iceberg that is our conscious mind. But those who need a corrective template are well served by Patanjali’s yamas once they are properly demystified, as Nitya has done. I

guess the course of life is to go from unity to duality and then back again, and in doing so we grow a little each time—so long as the unity is restored.

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1/4/11 Class Notes

Sutra II:29

Self-restraints, observances, posture, regulation of vital forces, withdrawal from distraction, holding the focus of the mind, contemplation, and absorption are the eight limbs of Yoga.

Nitya's commentary is a fine example of his genius at saying a vast amount in a very few sentences. In a mere two pages he epitomizes each of the eight limbs of Patanjali's Yoga, including correcting false notions about them. It is as if we are still sitting at the feet of the great master, striving to soak up as much as we can from each pearl of wisdom he utters. Aum.

Since we will be taking all of these eight categories as a separate class, including each of the five restraints and five observances, we only touched on them last night, but it still led to a lively gathering, much energized by the holiday break. After next week's class I will be in India for four sessions, during which time Deb has agreed to take notes, and I've asked all participants to preserve any special thoughts or questions that come up for them, so that when I return I can reconstruct some of what transpired in this very important segment of the study. This is after all what most people think of as Patanjali's whole yoga program.

Of course, Patanjali wasn't just blowing smoke with the previous 79 sutras of preparation. We have cleared away a lot of garbage so that we can get the maximum benefit from what lies

ahead. Each term will now be full of meaning and connections, as we will surely see.

Another valuable preparatory step was offered by Scotty. He has been thinking that his art was the main activity in his life, and the Gurukula yoga study and his qigong work were other interests that, while enjoyable, were drawing him away from his dharma, so he only made room for them when he wasn't consumed with painting. Lately he has come to see that, far from being disjunct interests, they are all building blocks of a single artistic flow, which for him has its actualization in painting, but can easily include all those other aspects without conflict. Instead of having to decide between one thing or another, he sees it all as one process, like the growth of a plant with several branches. This is a very important realization, one that will allow a more wholehearted participation in whatever he finds himself engaged in. Yoga study is not meant to be separate in any way from what we do in our lives.

In a similar vein, Deb opened and closed the class with a visualization she had that the eight limbs were not arranged like a ladder, but really were like limbs. She pictured an egg-shaped core with eight radiating arms arrayed around it. Such an analogy is quite valuable, allowing us to remember that this is not a linear sequence, but all eight stages take place simultaneously. They are somewhat tangential to a central meaning, which is the Absolute, or perhaps our soul or spirit.

The sequential training everyone receives in their schooling reinforces linear thinking, the idea that one thing follows logically from and is built on previous steps. In one sense realization is the process by which a linear sequence is converted to an operating gestalt. The class explored this idea in specific types of activity. Susan mentioned playing the piano as one example in which all eight limbs take place simultaneously. You have to set aside a chunk of time free of conflicting demands, then as you sit down

you assume an optimal posture and breathe regularly, tune out distractions, maintain focus, have a contemplatively insightful relation to the music you are playing, and let yourself go into a kind of transcendental state that doesn't have to consciously think of any of these separate elements. The result is an excellent performance, even if you are a beginner and you have very far to go yet to become a great musician. Acting with expertise merely allows you to evolve, to grow, at whatever stage you may be. Whenever one or more of these limbs are disrupted, the growth is much less. For instance, if your mind keeps being drawn away by extraneous thoughts, you will make plenty of mistakes. Clearly this applies to whatever endeavor a person chooses to devote themselves to, and not only music or art. So please don't think of the eight limbs as resembling grades in school, where you have to graduate from one to pass on to the next. All are to be gathered into your core, your soul, to enrich your life at all times.

I recommend reading Nitya's entire commentary at regular intervals during this part of the study. Much of what we have been through is very complicated and dense, but here he has sketched out the highlights, which can spare us a lot of unnecessary toil and trouble. For instance, *pranayama* is epitomized as balancing our energy expenditure with its restoration. There is a universe of specialized breathing exercises and arcane multi-year practices out there called pranayama, but what if the whole point was simply to harmonize our work and rest periods, our food and exercise, stress and relaxation, and so on, in order to feel good? This is something we aim for every day. When we feel harmonized, life is joy, ananda.

Likewise, *asana*, posture, has been expanded into a vast enterprise of "yoga" schools and gymnasiums. Recall from Nancy Yeilding's Introduction:

Instead of the comprehensive, holistic way of life expressed by Patanjali's *Yoga Shastra*, Yoga [is] typically packaged—most often as a commercial product—as merely a form of exercise, a series of stretches, postures, and breath control, with an occasional nod toward meditation. All of this can be very beneficial of course, and it certainly must answer a need, as Yoga has not only become very popular, but also big business.... But the theory and practice of Yoga offer much more in the way of invaluable guidance.

The result is millions of people diligently stretching their muscles and dreaming of it leading mysteriously to enlightenment. Well, the dream keeps 'em paying. But again, what if the point was simply to feel good so that your life is pleasant enough that it doesn't prevent you from actualizing your abilities? What if you should just exercise and stretch enough that the body doesn't disrupt your focus? Maybe there are important things we are leaving out of our philosophy. Maybe we are more than our bodies.

The class loved Nitya's description of asana as the position a cat takes when it is preparing to pounce on a rat. If the cat were to do a series of stretching exercises first, the rat would easily escape. She just gets ready, and an instant before the rat expects it, she springs. I can hear Nitya alternately chuckling and melodramatically intense as he describes the scene. He is really speaking to our inner selves, exhorting us lazy bums to have a goal as engaging to us as the prospect of a battle for a hearty meal is to the cat. The mental quicksand that surrounds us in a corrupt society saps our strength and blurs our vision, threatening to turn us into zombies content to serve our masters. Yoga is a way to wake back up and reclaim our vital self-consciousness, a way to be filled with zest for life.

Nitya defines *pratyahara* and *dharana* as the process by which we discover what our true interests are and pare away all the junk that impedes their development. Without this simultaneously

elementary and exceedingly complex understanding, all the rest is just spinning our wheels, a waste of time. Pretence. This is where the bulk of our energies should be directed, so the rest has meaning. Instead, we often gravitate to something simple and well-defined, like following prescribed rituals. Muscle stretching. But you can do that for a very long time before it will reveal your true nature.

Knowing who you are and what that means about where you should put your energy, leads naturally to *dhyana*, contemplation, the deepening of your relationship to your life. And as you release yourself into that life and are able to discard ideational incentives, *samadhi*, sameness, comes about as the unitive realization of who you are. As Nitya puts it, “Once the mind has attained the tranquility of a non-modulating state, the intellect is no longer deputed to act upon the bid of the ego to examine the external world. Instead it becomes fully established in the blissful state of the Self. That is indicated here as *samadhi*.”

Since this is not a linear program, we all have moments of *samadhi* when our life is harmonized, yet certain of the eight limbs are emphasized at different times. We go in and out of them regularly. They all impact each other and have relative prominence or quiescence, but all are present and even essential all the time.

I must have said before, but it bears repeating, that we are conditioned by an inheritance of three billion years of survival mentality, in which our whole attention has been absorbed in trying to reproduce before we were eaten. At long last we have evolved a measure of safety so that we can begin to entertain thoughts beyond mere survival and reproduction. Yoga is an invitation to grow our spirit in new ways and discover what else is possible. It is foolhardy to imagine we have anything more than a vague notion of where we are going, but an infinite potential is there for us to begin to colonize, and every contribution enlarges the community’s sphere of knowledge. Each of us will tread a

unique path, but since they all intersect at various points we all welcome reports from the front lines of our fellow adventurers. For all of our sakes we wish each of you an intrepid journey!

Part III

Charles sent links to the practice he was talking about, and the place. I noted they do three prostrations at a time, not 111,111.... But they are already mellowed out.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ka-Nying_Shedrub_Ling

A charmer, but after all that time with nataraja guru I had a certain immunity

<https://www.google.com/search?q=chokyi+nyima+rampoche&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en-us&client=safari#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:7d1d0eee,vid:SvvXnRglhc0,st:0>

How to Prostrate in the Tibetan Buddhist Style

<https://youtu.be/QKVN4tb0moM?si=6d13NIEaVf4IXRNu>

<https://www.google.com/search?q=buddhist+rapid+prostration+practice&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en-us&client=safari#fpstate=ive&ip=1&vld=cid:98791e1e,vid:WeaKrIysF70,st:0>