

2022 Patanjali Class 73

11/21/23

Sutra II:31 – Not conditioned by class, place, time, or occasion, the universal restraints constitute the great vow.

Here we have yet another sutra that appears to be an unimportant link between two sections, something to read quickly and pass on, yet Nitya's commentary flings these words across the stars, converting them into a major teaching expression with incredibly uplifting implications. Without the connections he makes, the individual yamas would be much less significant. The unitive principle Nitya invokes in this sutra is the uniting link between the five distinct restraints, which can then be read as covering every possibility of outwardly-directed spirituality. The last paragraph, affirming that realization brings about harmonious action (and not the other way round), takes away the fantasy that proper behavior makes us wise. As he put it in his older Isa Upanishad commentary, "Self-realization does not come as a cumulative effect of action. It comes only with the clear comprehension of Truth." Here he elaborates:

Every religion has a central axiomatic principle on which the morality of that religion is established. In the Upanishads the axiomatic teaching is given as the unity of the one Self that is in the heart of all. It is this realization that leads us to both ahimsa and satya. Then we will have no private world. When we look inward we will see the entire infinitude of consciousness as our truth, the only Absolute. We will not see another there. When we look outward, from the blade of grass under our feet to the far off invisible galaxies also, they are all one. So there is nothing to be privately desired or grabbed. Then the truth itself stabilizes us in our belongingness with all.

It is this vision of oneness that cancels out all pairs of dualities in a realized person's life. The basic nature of life is the knowledge of a single existence and that existence is not—even for a second—different from the total value or ananda of life. Thus the yogi is a person of open morality whose religion is a dynamic religion and not a static, structured one. (249-50)

Deb felt it was most important to recognize that each religion has an axiomatic teaching at its heart, and presumed that wanting something for yourself went against that axiomatic teaching, yet that is exactly backwards. Universal goals like love, amity and tolerance motivate us to aspire to higher values in our life, and incorporate them. We live in a world where we are under a million constraints, and taking a unitive attitude seriously and personally is essential to freeing ourselves from their burden. Humans are obsessed by the constrictions they perceive as necessary, claiming them to be god-inspired, and are ever thrilled to kill one another over them. Still. A yogi does not capitulate to the status quo if it is cruel and unjust, and so in principle does not capitulate at all, until a premise is vetted within their own understanding.

The post-WWII generations once embodied that spirit, insisting we could no longer put up with minimizing life and love, resolving to expand the potential ambit of our concerns. Liberation is a very important aspect of what is being taught here. Being spiritual doesn't mean behaving according to other people's opinions: truth comes from your heart and your best considered judgment, and you do what you can with that to enhance the world's beauty and your life meaningful. Nitya's very first sentence is: "A yogi has to be a law unto himself or herself."

Nitya talks at length about Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, closed and open. "Closed morality is when a person holds back from untruth or dishonesty because of the fear

of the punishments with which religion and government threaten their votaries.” In open morality:

You are honest to yourself, not because honesty is required by the law of the country or the mandate of any religion. A truthful person is fearless. It is not fear of punishment that deters such a person from doing wrong, but simply being unable to concede to evil. If you are such a person you are a law unto yourself, living in your own opinion and not in the opinions of others. Then your love, honesty, compassion, generosity, and peaceful nature are characteristically your own. You do not look for any reward for honesty or absolute dedication to truth.

The class discussion emphasized that this doesn't mean our decisions are always clear-cut, and don't need to be carefully thought out. None of us is a perfected paragon of virtue, and we exist in a complex labyrinth of possibilities and opinions, where selfish motives abound. Having an open-minded affinity group like the Portland Gurukula class is a helpful, low-pressure adjunct to finding our own way through life.

Deb invited the class to ponder and share how we understand the idea of closed and open morality and religion. In the 2012 class, we began by pondering the difference between restraints and observances—yamas and the upcoming niyamas—which on close inspection overlap considerably. In a sense Nitya's commentary reveals the synthesis of their dialectic. If we treat them as religious or philosophical injunctions they become a form of closed spirituality, whereas if they spring from a natural appreciation of the oneness of everything, their expression is spontaneous and joyful. Nitya makes it clear that following rules makes for a hodgepodge of minor vows, but acting from a state of the realization of unity is the great vow, however it may be enunciated by wise preceptors.

Paul recalled somebody really smart mentioning that spirituality and religion are mutually exclusive: if you have religion you won't be spiritual, and vice versa. In the religion of his childhood there were a lot of dos and don'ts and a lot of things that didn't make logical sense — you just had to have faith and believe it. His religion was a severely closed morality.

As a child, Karen's family was involved in a rural Baptist church, with lots of hellfire and brimstone. Punishments aplenty. Then when she was 11, her mom visited relatives in California and got introduced to the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda, which radically changed how she felt about religion and spirituality. It didn't take her long to drop out of the Baptist church. In their small town you were friends with everybody, and knew there were so many hypocrites, preaching niceties on Sunday but not living that way. Her mother led her to a more spiritual attitude to life, and Karen has always been involved with spiritual things since. She has a hard time with religious people. Eventually her mother discovered Harvey Freeman, who was very spiritual in those days, and made inspiring teachings his own from many different sources.

Deb quoted Nataraja Guru: "Contemplation cannot be erected on a non-factual basis. The higher human values contemplation incidentally brings to light as its obvious mark cannot ignore truth or fact without being absurd. Truth in fact is indeed the pedestal upon which wisdom of the highest kind rests." Truth, of course, is much more than keeping track of every detail of the universe: it means adherence to a unitive understanding, and it is devalued by being tied to purportedly good or evil actions. The Guru likely intended to rule out fantasies, like imaginary heaven-worlds, being taken for reality.

Susan cited [Mark Twain's War Prayer](#), agreeing it doesn't make sense that a divine being would take sides, so they aren't going to be Playing for Our Team.

I noticed that we had been focusing on peculiarly American religions of the present time, many of which are harshly exclusive and hate-filled. We are once again beset by outrageous examples of egregious religions, ever-more lethal gangs we have been trying to civilize for thousands of years with little success. Yet a lot of those religions were founded on the basis of truly spiritual people who truly lifted hearts and eased minds. Religious beliefs tend to get farther and farther separated from their origins over time, yet they can be reinvigorated by those who fit their spiritual vitality back into the dead letter.

Andy agreed that sometimes religion and spirituality can come close together. Take a guy like the Dalai Lama, who is a devout Buddhist and sincerely thinks it's important to practice Buddhism, but is open to other religions. And you can be highly spiritual and follow the teachings of Jesus.

Andy remembered an exchange he had with Nitya, where he praised the atmosphere by complimenting him, "It's really great to be around spiritual people." Nitya replied, in no uncertain terms, "There are no such things as spiritual people!" Andy figured he had unintentionally implied that being spiritual made for a better class of folks, and Nitya disavowed that idea: no one is superior or inferior.

Jan offered that open morality to her means looking within ourselves for these values and not living by some external code, and especially, not living in fear. Andy echoed: "The fear that you are going to get kicked out;" Susan: "That you are not being part of the tribe;" and Karen: "You're going to hell!"

In the absence of Biblical hells, thoughtful believers are eager to supply hell on earth, to make up for God's shortcomings. So we end up cringing inside forbidding walls of conditioned beliefs that tell us, like the Beatle's song [You've Got to Hide Your Love Away](#) (think of 'she' as the Absolute):

... Here I stand head in hand
Turn my face to the wall
If she's gone I can't go on
Feelin' two-foot small

... Everywhere people stare
Each and every day
I can see them laugh at me
And I hear them say

... Hey, you've got to hide your love away
Hey, you've got to hide your love away

... How can I even try
I can never win
Hearing them, seeing them
In the state I'm in

... How could she say to me
Love will find a way
Gather 'round all you clowns
Let me hear you say

... Hey, you've got to hide your love away
Hey, you've got to hide your love away

Deb invoked the end of the Gita and Dante's Divine Comedy, where the guru tells the disciple, after complete edification: now you have learned, and I can give you no more regulation. You may follow the truth as you see it.

I have added the first part of my commentary on the Gita verse in question, in Part II, as it cites several beautiful quotes from a variety of sources on this same topic, including the Dante.

Speaking of which, let me add this from my Gita VIII commentary:

As we have noted before, religion depends on an apparent separation between cause and effect, God and humanity. An infinite number of stages instantly spring into being between any two discrete points. Suddenly a need for guides, intercession, indulgences and other complicated and expensive claptrap arises, even though none of these can actually bridge the imaginary gap they are predicated upon. Reconnection with the divine is therefore made dependent on the completion of an endless series of meritorious acts, up to a supposed critical mass that promises but never quite delivers salvation. The Gita aims to erase all such mirages through direct realization of the supreme primal state, which is one without a second, and thus independent of merit, along with its codependent behavior, striving.

Anita, our conscience in residence, burst out, “I have known enough people in my life who are ordinary people and who practice religion and follow rules, and they are very spiritual, so I’m not buying into the idea that you can’t be spiritual if you are religious.” She admitted she didn’t always like religious rules, but feels we are being unfairly judgmental about people who are religious. As long as they aren’t hurting anyone else, there doesn’t have to be a separation between religion and spirituality.

While not wanting to argue whether a person might be spiritual or merely nice and polite, it’s totally true that we cannot determine another person’s spiritual stature based on our own opinion of them. We can’t even (and shouldn’t) determine our own “spiritual level.” Being spiritual, in a unitive sense, does away with all such distinctions, recognizing them as the projections they are certain to be, along with caste, creed, color, and all that.

Deb agreed with Anita that there are plenty of people who merge both spiritual and religious pursuits, and we all cope with restraints and injunctions, as they are pretty much ubiquitous. Intelligent rules can act as gateways to better understanding. We don't want to cordon off areas of good and bad: we have to evaluate them based on who person really is. As Narayana Guru famously expressed it, who cares what religion they hold, as long as it makes them a better person?

In a sense, Vedanta is a type of religion, and as Andy said, one of its main tenets is that we are all one. That's the big deal, that's where it all starts. Only if you are in a religion that is splitting people into saved and damned, then it's not a spiritual path. I added that dividing up other people as okay or not, is hardly limited to religion.

For Jan, the problem is judging other people by some closed morality system, insisting they should conform to it. Living authentically in your open morality is what leads you toward love.

Paul, raised in a very closed religious system, admitted he has a bias: if you once ate mac and cheese on a daily basis, and then you found yourself getting sick, it might be that even today you can't smell mac and cheese without getting an upset stomach. Not so long ago, two friends he respects were talking with him about the age of the Earth, and maintained that the dinosaur fossils could easily have been buried by demons to mislead people. Paul figures you can't argue with insanity, even though there's a unity that embraces all of it. "It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into." – Jonathan Swift

I was raised agnostic and atheist, fully respecting science, but when I became interested in religion, if only for literary purposes, I realized that half of the instruction in my family came straight from the Bible. Its highly respectable morality and spirituality permeate our culture much more than we realize—or used to. In any case, there are plenty of religious people who

are dangerously deranged and want to repress women and replace democracy with theocracy and outlaw science. We do not intend to kiss the hissing cobras, but we do wish to give peace a chance, by trying to open ourselves up and root out the prejudices and minor vows that make our lives—and other’s lives— miserable.

My mother raised me ebulliently to be kind, generous and considerate (though it took forever), one of her most oft-repeated lines being, “If you can’t say something nice about someone, don’t say anything at all.” Taking “nice” to include” helpful,” I gradually grew into that much.

The gist, Andy went on, comes from inside us. It’s an inner discovery, that your Self is the common self of all, and then you have a spontaneous allegiance to true morality.

Deb agreed inner revelation can happen within a structure, as in a church or synagogue, or outside of it. I added one blessing of having religion, so long as it is truly loving: if you believe in it, you don’t have to worry, you are covered. You are okay. Without external ratification, many of us struggle to feel that way. Ideally the people Anita was talking about are accepting a belief-system allowing them to be themselves (as much as they can bear), and they are encouraged to do this by their chosen institution. If it works for them, they can be a great blessing to their community, and they don’t have to sweat the small stuff. Likewise, Patanjali’s teaching should help us to not obsess over how we go about our days.

Anita, who used to attend LDS churches, shared some interchanges with her Mormon friends. She is able to have meaningful talks with them, and does not feel harshly judged, though that has not always been the case. She concluded religion can serve a good purpose if people have kind heart.

Deb sympathized that it can be a difficult situation because people use all sorts of justifications for their closed-mindedness.

This put me in mind of one of my favorite atheist adages from the Bible: judge not, lest you be judged. It's a unitive attitude: the one who you are harshly judging is ultimately you—all that's "out there" is you. Without instruction, we don't realize how by judging others we are just dividing ourself against ourself. We imagine we are doing something valuable by picking nits, but we are actually gnawing on ourself.

It seems preferable to Jan, in terms of being unified and compassionate, to be aware that everyone is doing the best they can and encourage them to be the person they want to be by connecting to their own inner values.

I squeezed in one last thought before the close. Nitya often talked about becoming more and more open, to the point where there is no more private you. He wasn't speaking of gross outward privacy. We are not meant to reveal everything we think or do to everyone in the vicinity. Like the rest of us, when he used to bathroom, he closed the door. The public, non-private attitude he means is being open, and not just open to what you like, but to what happens to you, including what others like.

Aloneness, privacy, is very important to me, and in that I'm not alone. Meditation, as one instance, is a private act that often needs to be hidden and not diluted by the turbulence of other people. Jesus was on to that, in Matt.6:

[2] Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

[5] And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

[16] Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Being un-private, undefended, means something more than taking truth serum. Everything is you, everything is present, yet you still need to grasp what is appropriate to share, and keep what isn't to yourself. Nitya is not saying you have to be like Ramana Maharshi who lived on stage, nearly naked, open to everyone, in total bliss all day long. It is only incumbent that you embrace everything, having unlimited liability, as the gurus liked to say, meaning you give as much as you can because you see the others as you. The distinction is clearly expressed in Nitya's final paragraph:

Every religion has a central axiomatic principle on which the morality of that religion is established. In the Upanishads the axiomatic teaching is given as the unity of the one Self that is in the heart of all. It is this realization that leads us to both ahimsa and satya. Then we will have no private world. When we look inward we will see the entire infinitude of consciousness as our truth, the only Absolute. We will not see another there. When we look outward, from the blade of grass under our feet to the far off invisible galaxies also, they are all one. So there is nothing to be privately desired or grabbed. Then the truth itself stabilizes us in our belongingness with all. It is this vision of oneness that cancels out all pairs of dualities in a realized person's life. The basic nature of life is the knowledge of a single existence and that existence is not—even for a second—different from the total value or ananda of life. Thus the yogi is a person of open morality whose religion is a dynamic religion and not a static, structured one.

Let's give Virginia Woolf, from *Moments of Being*, the last word:

From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock.

Part II

First, from my Gita chapter XVIII commentary:

63) Thus has wisdom more secret than all that is secret been declared to you by Me; critically scrutinizing all, omitting nothing, do as you like.

The Gita is a graduate course in freedom, and the diploma it offers is individual empowerment. This is brought home in two explosive verses at the end of the work, this one and 66.

Krishna first calls this wisdom more secret than secret. What can he mean? Ordinary secrets are like the mysteries of nature. They can be discovered with a little investigation. They are piecemeal secrets. Understanding the Absolute means penetrating a wholesale secret, requiring wisdom of another order of magnitude entirely, a whole new state of mind. As noted earlier, it is not a problem to be solved, it is a realization to be lived.

We have arrived at the Gita's ultimate teaching, simple and direct: First eliminate all false factors, by engaging in a heartfelt wisdom sacrifice (questioning, pondering and studying). When all

falsehood is removed, only truth remains. Then you are properly prepared to act freely under the guidance of your own intelligence. Such a stupendous achievement is indeed more secret than any mere secret. It cannot be attained simply by cleverness, or mechanistic ritualism, or by following a formula, or anything that can be spelled out. It is the evidence of true maturity, attained through bipolar affiliation with a guru and thus with the Absolute itself.

To do as you like and abandon all duties for an unwise person would be a license to run amok. This may sound like encouragement to break the law, but we have to remember that Arjuna has been taught a comprehensive scheme of the total purport of existence. Krishna only gives this highest teaching after the full course of instruction is completed, and tempers it with the admonishment to critically scrutinize everything and omit nothing before doing what you like. With a full understanding of how we interact with the Absolute and how the Absolute sustains and nurtures us all—every one and every thing, without exception—such freedom can at last be creatively implemented. When you are absolutely convinced that everything is united in its essence, kindness, compassion and all the rest of the positive virtues are as natural as breathing.

Lacking an awareness of the whole, people's actions fall short of perfection in direct proportion to their limited outlook. But because Arjuna has plumbed the depths and scaled the heights, and has opened himself to embrace everyone and everything as equally valid and valuable, he has earned the right to his freedom. Where less accomplished seekers bicker over their partial viewpoints, Arjuna has gained an all-encompassing awareness. As Richard Wilhelm, in his comments on the I Ching, Hexagram 52, *Keeping Still*, writes:

When a man has thus become calm, he may turn to the outside world. He no longer sees in it the struggle and tumult of individual beings, and therefore he has that true peace of mind which is needed for understanding the great laws of the universe and for acting in harmony with them. Whoever acts from these deep levels makes no mistakes.

Saint Augustine advised much the same thing as Krishna does here, and as simply: "Love, and do what you like." Thomas Merton, in *The New Man* (The New American Library, 1963, p. 14) expresses it this way: "Man is truly alive when he is aware of himself as the master of his own destiny to life or to death, aware of the fact that his ultimate fulfillment or destruction depend on his own free choice and aware of his ability to decide for himself. This is the beginning of true life."

In Dante's *Purgatory*, there is a most touching moment when disciple Dante is about to emerge from his long journey through Hell and Purgatory to enter into Paradise, and his guru Virgil similarly promotes him to his own recognizance:

When under us the whole of the stairway
had run and we were on the highest step
of all, Virgil fixed his eyes upon me

and said, "You have seen the temporal fire
and the eternal, my son, and you have come
to where I, by myself, can see no farther.

I have brought you here with understanding
and art. From here on your pleasure must guide you.
You have emerged from the steep ways and the narrow.

Look at the sun which shines on your forehead,

look at the young grass, the flowers, the trees
that the earth here, all by itself, grows.

Until [you have your heart's desire]
you may sit here or wander among these.

Expect no further word or sign from me.
Your own will is whole, upright, and free,
and it would be wrong not to do as it bids you.

therefore I crown and miter you over yourself.”

—end of Canto XXVII, Dante's Purgatory, translated by W.S.
Merwin (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000)

Allen Mandelbaum notes, as Dante eagerly enters Paradise immediately thereafter: “Dante's keenness ‘to search within’ and ‘around the forest’ is so great that he does not respond to Virgil's last words.” Happily, Arjuna will take the time to express his sincere appreciation in verse 73, before entering his own version of paradise, inhaling the rarified air of a free human being.

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Old notes:

11/8/12

I'm particularly fond of Nitya's last paragraph, affirming as it does that realization brings about harmonious action (and not the other way round). It takes away the fantasy that proper behavior makes us wise. As he put it in his older Isa Upanishad commentary, “Self-realization does not come as a cumulative effect of action. It comes only with the clear comprehension of

Truth.” Pages 249-50 in the Patanjali book describe the kind of Truth he means:

Every religion has a central axiomatic principle on which the morality of that religion is established. In the Upanishads the axiomatic teaching is given as the unity of the one Self that is in the heart of all. It is this realization that leads us to both ahimsa and satya. Then we will have no private world. When we look inward we will see the entire infinitude of consciousness as our truth, the only Absolute. We will not see another there. When we look outward, from the blade of grass under our feet to the far off invisible galaxies also, they are all one. So there is nothing to be privately desired or grabbed. Then the truth itself stabilizes us in our belongingness with all. It is this vision of oneness that cancels out all pairs of dualities in a realized person's life. The basic nature of life is the knowledge of a single existence and that existence is not—even for a second—different from the total value or ananda of life. Thus the yogi is a person of open morality whose religion is a dynamic religion and not a static, structured one.

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2/15/11

Sutra II:31

Not conditioned by class, place, time, or occasion, the universal restraints constitute the great vow.

Here we have yet another sutra that looks like an unimportant link between two sections, something to read quickly and pass on. But Nitya's comments fling these words across the stars, converting them into a major teaching expression with incredibly uplifting implications. Without the connections he makes, the

individual yamas would be much less significant. The principle Nitya reveals in this sutra is the uniting link between the five distinct restraints, which can then be read as covering every possibility of outwardly directed spirituality.

I get the sense that the entire book is building to a climax. It started with some difficult and even daunting chapters, leaving many of us wondering what the point was. Now our hard work is coming to fruition. Not only is the subject matter more accessible, Nitya's interpretations are attaining a high level of sublimity. The excitement it engenders was throbbing through the class, with terrific insights offered by many participants, while the quiet ones were drinking in the atmosphere, unwilling to break the spell by opening their mouths.

We began by pondering the difference between restraints and observances, which on close inspection overlap considerably. In a sense Nitya's commentary reveals the synthesis of their dialectic. If we treat them as religious or philosophical injunctions they become a form of closed spirituality, whereas if they spring from a natural appreciation of the oneness of everything, their expression is spontaneous and joyful. Nitya makes it clear that following rules makes for a hodgepodge of minor vows, but acting from a state of realization of unity is the great vow, however it may be enunciated by wise preceptors.

An example of what this means is that it is one thing to not hurt another because of fear of punishment by legal authorities in the present or eternal damnation in a religious future, and it is another to sincerely not want to cause pain regardless of the rules. The yogi does not hurt, or tries hard not to hurt, because of knowing that the other is just like them. They have empathy for others' feelings. Of course, unless you live in a vacuum you will cause hurts as the normal consequence of bumping up against your neighbor. Some bumps are even justified.

Even the best of gurus sometimes cause pain. John Spiers in *Guru the Unknown* notes of the guru-disciple relationship: “The situation is entirely free; there is no taint of blind belief on one side or autocratic tyranny on the other. Indeed a certain outspokenness, which does not mince words, and which may even transgress the bounds of what is “respectable” usage, in the hypocrisy of the relativist, may also be present. Clearcut truth may shock the conditioning of the disciple.” As we have often pointed out, the physician may have to inflict discomfort to ward off even greater problems in the long run. Or as Nataraja Guru put it in his Gita introduction, “a bad disease needs a drastic remedy.”

Nitya shares with us the absolute principle at the core of Vedanta: “the unity of the one Self that is in the heart of all.” When you are conscious of oneness, all the other virtues rise to the surface as a natural consequence. The Semitic religions that form the basis of Western civilization treat individuals as born sinners who have to be pounded into proper shape by severe handling. Diametrically opposed to it is the Oriental vision that we are all the Absolute in essence. In that there is no need to alter the person, rather the impetus is to remove the stumbling blocks which hinder the free expression of each person’s innate beauty. The first and most direct result is overwhelming kindness, which is the motivation for ahimsa.

Paul made several very thoughtful contributions, including one in particular that really sparked some reflection. This past week he read the Spiers book, where the Swami insists that all consciousness is conditioned. This invited the question, if this is true, how can we ever know unity, which is by definition unconditioned? Does this throw us into inescapable morass of multiplicity? If not, how do we access that core awareness, and since most of us already accept it, how did we come to it? This is a very important issue, because a clichéd concept of oneness not only leads to spiritual egotism, it pollutes the entire field. Walk

into any New Age bookstore and the pollution chokes you. Peddling spiritual clichés may be good business, but it is very poor at promoting psychological progress. We learn far more by doubting and questioning than by curling up in a comfortable and familiar lap. Spiers writes, in the same paragraph quoted above, “Self-realization and wisdom come through the direct intuitional awareness of the prepared and serious student-seeker who is capable of following the model way set by the Guru, after long and serious discussion—like the questions and answers in the Upanishads or in the Bhagavad Gita.”

We invited everyone to share why they held the core belief of the unity of all things, and what shape it took. As with all questions that go to the heart of the matter, there were few ready answers. Each was busy pondering why indeed that was the case. Could this whole study be just a charade, a fool’s detour into tangential indulgences? Or does it evince something real?

Those of us who have had successful psychedelic experiences can remember the moment when our brains lit up with the realization that we are all one, because it is an irrefutable fact of that state. I vividly recall even after four decades my doubts circling out and back like boomerangs, utterly defeated by the soaring certitude of universal connectedness on all sides. Later I came to see oneness as a scientific and philosophical truth as well, but the basis of the whole edifice stems from those glorious moments when the entire brain was firing harmoniously.

Several people talked about the proof in the pudding: that by accepting the testimony of a wise seer, usually Nitya in many of our cases, their lives changed gradually yet dramatically for the better. Oneness was accepted initially as a hypothesis, which then proved itself to be valid by its efficacy to convert a frazzled soul into a coherent witness with a measure of self-control. As Nitya understated at the very beginning of his comments, “A life without adherence to law and discipline can be very chaotic.” Many of us

know very well how that chaos feels. Let's not forget that he is talking about inner laws, not externally imposed ones, either.

Charles made the excellent point that while we insist on this “great vow” arising from our inner certitude, we often have to have some external inspiration to come to it. For most it isn't available through popping a pill. We are taught by something “beyond” us how to see, and then we practice what we've learned until our eyes begin to open. Hopefully we keep going until they are wide open, but I'm afraid that a glimpse of the light is usually sufficient. Mostly we take little peeks on rare occasions, but even these can have a positive impact. As Paul said, we pulsate from stupid to awake and back to stupid, and that seems to be how we learn in actuality. This is a more realistic view than the one from the best-loved stories, where a seer bursts into full awareness and remains there forever. The game of life is to dress ourselves in veils and experience the relief of pulling them off every so often. And isn't that what the Absolute itself is doing, eon after eon?

John was put off by all our glowing accounts of how uplifting the infusion of oneness has been for us. He wanted us to remember that there was plenty of pain in life too, and obviously he's right. We are not Pollyannas with our head in the sand; we are people who have suffered tremendously. Usually though, we have a harder time accepting that upside of life than the downside. We either fasten onto misery or find ways to blot it out with distractions. Neither of these is the yogic way. The rare state is to minimize the suffering while not simply closing the mind to it. For the most part, yoga does not eliminate problems; it teaches us how to stop compounding them with our own exaggerations, and that can make a lot of difference all by itself.

John said he hadn't found prayer to be of any use, except maybe to make him feel better. There didn't seem to be any divine being interested in the outcome of anything. That's right. Since we are the Absolute, we are the ones who care, who are interested, and

all the rest. Who suffer. Who are filled with love. There isn't anything else. We are it. So we shouldn't imagine that what we do doesn't matter. Everything that matters is what we do, and everyone who cares is us too. This is one of the key implications of *tat tvam asi*, the assertion that you are the Absolute. We shouldn't abnegate our lives in the misguided notion that some glowing being presiding over a remote heaven remains unaffected. Every life is crucially important, because it touches all of us.

The Bible has these same truths, but as Paul said it has been twisted around until they have been forgotten. Nowhere more than in respect to the oneness of all. Take for instance Matt. 25: 40 and 45, where our interconnectedness is presented dialectically. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Thanks to Susan, we will close with a relevant excerpt from Nitya's original *That Alone* day five meditation, the one that isn't in the book but you get when you ask me to send it to you. It elaborates Charles' idea that our concepts are symbols that we use for guidance; that we don't just pull this stuff out of our innards, but can be led to it by our feelings, or say our intuition:

Today's meditation is to seek to go back to this light, which is always shining within. Become constantly aware of that, and see that it has no beginning and no end. It is witnessing, the witness within you. There is a great discipline lying in it. You need only your peripheral mind to tend to all the external functions. The core can go on continuously shining as the unchanging cause. Notice, watch and witness all the changes going on and also remain as the unchanging.

I don't know how God thinks, how God sees, but I'm very familiar with how my Guru looked at things and how he

evaluated them. When I think, do, behave, I see his watchful eye over me. I can hear within me his whisperings of caution. I know what he approves of and does not approve of. This is what happens when one intensely accepts within oneself the dharma of the Buddha, the way of the living Christ, the all-seeing eye of Allah. You are here in reciprocation with the powerful director of your life. You have an owner to your life, a Lord. You are no more an orphan, you are properly parented. Let us become rich with this feeling today, and let the whole day be a coming back to your center again and again, and relating that center to all that you deal with.

This does not have to be read as calling us to make ourselves small, but is a time-honored technique for making us appreciative and brave enough to truly be ourselves.

Part II

Brenda wrote a lovely appreciation of oneness, including what makes it slip from our attention, something we touched upon in class but didn't make the earlier notes. Thanks, Brenda! And let this stand as an invitation to all you spectators, to look into your own motivations and share what you can with the rest of us.

For me the One is represented by selfless service. When one gets out of the way and allows for an expansive process to unfold. This can be experienced during any activity. When one takes the ego out of the process without fanfare it leaves one with the delightful awareness of all as the One.

Whether one engages in meditation in sitting, or through activity in assisting others in need, the awareness I bring to my activities is that I am a conduit, and through me divine energy flows, which connects me to the One.

I embrace that this process of life is a natural one, and that a connectivity to the One is always palpable. I too look to Nature, in that I am a part of Nature and my small life reflects the cycle of Nature, and that I too have a Spring, Summer, Fall and then Winter which leads me inevitably to a death of the body, in that also, is the One.

I find it harder to have compassion for the rude, sensation driven motley minded miscreants who have an overdeveloped sense of self importance, without thinking of others, those who have an inflated sense of entitlement, and who work themselves up into a froth of negation. This weakness in myself separates me from the One, and my prejudices separate me from the One. In my reaction to others, or tolerance of unpleasant manifestations in others, there is a shrinking of that expansive feeling and an unwillingness to share, in other words, I am aware of the work I have to do so that I have an even mindedness. This awareness in myself calls me to a clear, honest and benevolent look within myself. Perhaps my judgments are what separate me and create that withholding, even though I am aware of this tendency in myself. The fear of being judged creates a shrinking feeling, and the expansive mind and heart seem to be obscured.

Part III

I'm reminded of Peter M's experience giving a talk in Kerala one time. As he enthusiastically elucidated sublime point after point, he began to wonder how much of it his Malayalam-speaking audience was really getting. So he chose a universal experience and asked, "How many of you have ever ridden on a bus? Please raise your hand if you have ever ridden on a bus." Not a single hand went up, so he realized he was performing a pantomime rather than a disquisition. Similarly, I expected some rebuttals of

John Spiers' assertion that all consciousness is conditioned, but my mailbox is empty this morning. I talked about the idea in class, and in the interest of completeness I wish to add something here too.

Probably the wording should be, "all *ordinary* consciousness is conditioned." But how is the Absolute attained if not in an unconditioned state of consciousness, in which even the word 'state' is out of place? As Bill reminded us, the cessation of mental modifications, the initial proposition of Patanjali's Yoga, brings about samadhi, the sameness that transcends conditioning. In the Gita, ordinary consciousness is seen to be subject to the three conditioning gunas, but Arjuna is advised to be free of all of them. In Mount Analogue, Rene Daumal proposes that the spiritual mountain must rise above conditioning to pierce the sky. He writes, "For a mountain to play the role of Mount Analogue,' I concluded, '*its summit must be inaccessible, but its base accessible* to human beings as nature has made them. It must be *unique*, and it must *exist geographically*. The door to the invisible must be visible.'" (34)

Without some kind of continuum linking us to the Absolute, the spiritual search would be a fool's game. That is why we are clearly instructed at the beginning that we are the Absolute, *tat tvam asi*. Within all our conditioning—good and bad—is a core or kernel of unconditioned truth.

Paul's point is nonetheless very well taken, because we are easily fooled by conditioned versions of the Absolute. The Upanishads compare these ubiquitous tawdry imitations to a cheesy sun-image that floats in front of the sun and is worshipped as though it were the actual sun itself. We have to ruthlessly cut such things down to reveal the unconditioned version they conceal. What is left when all conditionings have been discarded is the Absolute we seek.

If we resign ourselves to the plausible falsehood that the unconditioned state is not accessible to us, we will accept all kinds

of claptrap with a temporary, superficial appeal. And that's what we see on all sides. It is a real challenge to accept that we are imprisoned in a sea of conditioned perception and not lose heart. It often seems there is no escape, so we grasp at the straws of sun-images instead of holding out for the real deal.

Within the maelstrom of widespread conditioning, the message and example of the truly unconditioned are there to console us. And we don't have to go far to find them. The Spiers book Paul was reading reveals how amazing our own Narayana Guru was, for instance. Though still underappreciated by the greater world, and even within the Gurukula itself, he was one of the giants of human history. Reading about his achievements as an unconditioned human being, it is impossible not to be inspired. He has been turned into a golden sun disk all over South India, his picture beaming out from every altar and advertising poster, but we honor him truly when we take his teachings to heart and learn how to slough off our own limitations.