

## 2022 Patanjali Class 76

Sutra II:32 – Purity, contentment, self-purification, self-study, and continuous contemplation on Isvara are the observances. (The niyamas: sauca, santosa, tapas, svadhyaya, isvara pranidhana.)

### C – Tapas, self-purification, enthusiasm

'Twas the last class of the year, and most of our elves were in attendance, including a steadily improving Deb. Alright, a wavily improving Deb.

The old notes are rich enough to cover the topic, which is good because we wound up discussing *dana*, gifting, more than tapas. It is one aspect of tapas, and the old notes bring in many more aspects of it.

I made the comment before we started that the first niyama was purity, so tapas here must mean something more like enthusiasm, the heat generated by the joy of doing what you love, in a disciplined context.

In Deb's opening monologue, she thought of tapas as the restraint of distractions so that we may return to an essential aspect of who we are. She referenced Nitya's commentary, where he associates smell-tapas with remembering, and our true essence is what we need to remember. Our senses keep us active and alive, yet they have to be actively integrated with the core of our being. Senses actively attune to the present, and its enjoyment may be dulled by the memory connections called up. She maintained that enthusiasm takes different forms for each person, and highlighted Nitya's line, "To discern the beautiful, to create and protect it with the intention of sharing it with others, is another tapas." The tapas of sight.

Linda was happy to hear this, and had been moved by our reading of Nitya's commentary. The chaotic world is so depressing

right now, and we all feel helpless about to do about it. The philosophy reaffirms her art, validating its purpose, its necessity. I agreed: if all lovers of beauty and kindness gave up in despair, the war mentality will have won. Our role—and there are millions if not billions of us—is to keep alive the panoply of loving, artistic values in a world gone mad. One of many valuable roles we embody, naturally.

Linda had not known enthusiasm originally meant alignment with the divine within, and was much cheered by it.

Deb offered that our ability to express beauty is itself an answer to the cruelty: affirming the spirit of beingness. She praised Linda's outpouring of marvelous artwork, and the rest of us chimed in.

Paul liked Nitya's use of fission and fusion, as the way heat separates and unites, in his portrayal of tapas. The physics emphasizes the connectedness within creation, and helped him realize that the present reality and our past memories are not always as compatible as we imagine. They don't always combine harmoniously, and it's something we can purify ourselves of, by not letting our memories blind us.

Along that line, Deb said tapas includes the pruning away of distractions, to bring focus and inner balance. For Andy, tapas is connected with intention. We are choosing to be a yogi, and it requires self-discipline. It's effortful. Deb added that we improve through the reaffirmation of our intentions. We get deeper in because of our commitment.

I spoke up in favor of our natural, loving tendencies, which carry us forward without having to force ourselves or adopt a program. Actually, many artists and other creative types are more revolutionary early in their lives, and then as they work with their abilities, their sizzling inventiveness tapers off. Those artists who remain dynamic into their older age have found ways to remain open to inspiration.

Susan was apologetic she couldn't make tonight's class, as she had other needs. Of course, I'm highly dependent on her note-taking, but always admit (as my tapasya) the class comes second, whenever life calls. There is even a paragraph about this in the old notes:

More than half the days, before class, I get calls from Scotty letting me know that he'd really like to come out but he's painting right now, and it's going really well, so he just can't break it off. He's in a unitive place expressing his artistic nature, and disrupting the flow would be a mistake. Or Jan or Susan will call to say they have some program with their kids so they can't come to class. Instead of chastising them for not caring enough about our "spiritual" study, I praise them for putting their energy into what matters most in their lives. That is real tapasya. We teach people to love their lives and everyone in it, and if they skip class because they are living the teaching, so much the better.

Andy has been reading *The Gift*, by Lewis Hyde, a most important work that has come up several times before in our classes. A highly recommended read. Andy is attending to the part about art as a gift versus art as a commodity. Hyde differentiates between work (performed for another) and labor (done for one's self), in the struggle to produce something great. A gift must be passed on, and what you give away must come from the heart.

Deb was enthusiastic, recalling Hyde's theme that the power of a gift is that it moves. Nitya had a similar attitude. If he was given something, he might use it or play with it for a while, but soon he would give it to someone else. He never treated it as "his."

Nitya's motto was "truth is not for sale," the corollary being if you pay for it, it isn't truth. Truth has to be freely given. His

philosophy undergirds the Portland Gurukula, where we do what we do without charge, and insist it's worth every penny.

Anita recalled a saying that the white man is interested in how much he has, while the native is interested in how much he can give away. In fact, Hyde depicts this poignantly in the early going of his book.

I've noticed the ancient idea of keeping the gift moving has caught on in the present-day "pay it forward" movement. Instead of being paid back for a loan or a gift, it is paid forward to someone more appropriate. We give to our children without expectation of repayment, and they in turn pass their wealth, both spiritual and tangible, onto their progeny, or someone else's. No debt is incurred.

Giftng art made me think of a yogic connection with the romantic notion of suffering for your art. The suffering is a natural consequence of being completely wrapped up in what you're producing that you don't attend to life's necessities. William Blake, obsessed with his mystical atheist visions that no one would buy, came immediately to mind. On the other hand, some wannabe artists imagine that the suffering *produces* artistry, so they employ it as a technique to become what they aspire to, but may not have the natural talent for. The comparison holds up well with yoga.

We talked about giveaways for a while. The Krishna of the Gita includes gifting as one of the acts that should not be given up to achieve higher consciousness. Deb told about our one-year-old grandson, Rhodes, playing a game with his mom and nannie of giving a small item back and forth to each other, and then he went to the playground and surprised the other children by giving them things—simply enjoying this new "grownup" act he'd picked up.

Jan remembered owning a beautiful ornament from Brazil, and then in middle school adopting a ritual where she was moved to give it away. It was almost as if the ornament was asking to move on. Bill recounted the story of his friend Baird, who used to

carry a bag of silver dollars (once valuable and rare) and slip them into hidden places where a random person would discover them and get a jolt of pleasure, though he would never know who.

Several of us had had a stranger pay in advance for their meals at a restaurant, without any connection, part of the pay it forward movement. It was always a pleasant surprise, and often they would continue the thread by paying for the next person's bill.

We thanked each other for another year of caring and contemplating together, and returned in the closing meditation to the theme of tapas as an observance of central value. We had come up with three original adages to carry with us into the holidays, beginning with Hanukkah, today:

Andy – Tapas means inserting yourself into universality.

Deb – Tapas is repeatedly returning to an essential aspect of who you are.

Scott – Tapas is what separates the vigorous aspirant from the dilettante.

Ho, ho, ho. Merrymaking to all, and to all a good night!

## **Part II**

11/11/12 – For Nancy Y's study group:

I go along with Dylan Thomas on this: we should rage against the dying of the light, not as physical death but as mental stupefaction. Rage to me means energy, in the form of a calm and collected but nonetheless intense intention aimed at staying awake in a world of slumber. Perhaps even a contented energy, because it

is channeled into creative and constructive directions, at least some of the time, and when it does it elicits joy.

Which brings us to tapas, where the intensity is directed toward a meaningful goal (or may itself be the meaningful goal). I don't like the translation "austerity" for tapas, because I prefer it to be abundantly joyous rather than austere, but it's the right word anyway. Our austerity is to remove the impediments to our well-directed energy, our enthusiasm. A lot of people simply adopt austerity and stay there, which is the same tragedy yet again, achieving stasis in place of creative evolution. Tapas means paring away the junk so that our bountiful river of soul can flow ahead undammed.

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3/15/11

The third niyama is tapas, self-purification.

Tapas is usually translated as religious asceticism, with the aim of self-purification. But we've already had *sauca*, purification, as the first of the niyamas. It really means heating up, and refers to the heat generated when what we are *supposed* to do—as enjoined by the words and examples of our preceptors—is pitted against our habitual behavior. The pressure to change the course of our life produces heat as a byproduct of redirecting our inertia. As any physics student knows, pressure produces heat, and the more pressure, the more heat generated. But most of the heat is a waste product, little more than an external indication that something else is going on. This tells us that there has to be more to the story, something central.

Most of us in the class come under the category of the marvelous word *tapastanka*, "afraid of austerities." And while the word may have been coined as a derogatory term, I take it as a

compliment. Sure, you can make your mind do weird things by torturing yourself and starving yourself and denying your normal inclinations, but I think it's absurd to classify those manifestations of stress or injury as spiritual. Krishna rants about them in the Gita's Chapter XVI, calling those who deny the Absolute within themselves "cruel haters in the world, worst of men," in verse 19. So our view, one that makes the Gurukula especially excellent, in principle at least, is that we are actually the Absolute, it is in our core, and therefore we should attend to that part of ourselves with kindness. Our Absolute core is pouring its loving support into us at every moment, so why adopt a practice that shuts off the flow? Traditional tapas theory is that like a dam accumulating water, tapas holds back our thwarted life energy, which can then burst forth when the floodgates are opened. But what happens if the water is never released? The pressure builds up to an explosive level. Nitya often described such practices as recipes for insanity. The Gita repeatedly describes attaining the Absolute as easy, yoga as the free and easy way. Take VIII, 14 for example: "One without extraneous relational mental interests, remembering Me day in and day out—to such an ever unitively affiliated man of contemplation I am easy of attainment."

The dictionary provides a number of meanings for tapas based on its root of fire or heat, ranging from the pain and suffering caused by severe ascetic practices to self study and service. Honestly, I'm bored with the whole austerity business as it's traditionally presented, and I had planned to bring a more modern interpretation to supplant the medieval one that so many find perversely attractive. Happily, Deb started off by saying almost exactly what I had in mind, that the psychic warmth we bring to our endeavors is an essential part of how meaningful and excellent they are. I immediately felt gratitude that I didn't have to be the primary iconoclast for one night, at least!

Patanjali gives us a tip in the right direction by including tapas as an observance and not as a restraint, and Nitya's commentary amplifies that angle. Nitya gives examples of how each of our senses are confronted with good and bad options, or options that can be handled well or poorly, and tapas is the discipline by which we consistently choose the better or best alternative. It is a positive, inclusive process, not a negative shutting off; an observance and not a restraint. Deb really brought home the point that we can easily get caught in repressing negative aspects of ourselves, but the better strategy is to move toward the positives, allowing the negatives to wither away naturally.

When we love someone or something, we feel warmth toward them. Even English terms contain the same concept as tapas: we get "fired up," are "on fire," or "have fire in our eyes." We are "hot" for something. Surfers and other exhilarators are "stoked," like a locomotive boiler stuffed full of coal blazing along at full speed. Lukewarm, on the other hand, indicates a middling interest level that will never be sufficient to bake any bread. When I put in this week's class invitation that tapas is "that which separates the vigorous aspirant from the dilettante," this is what I meant. Only a few people are so turned on by spirituality that they become passionate about it; most are moderately interested and throw it a bone occasionally, and then take it as proof that the whole thing is a waste of time because nothing much came of it. For them it's just another sit-com, another show on TV.

Then there are those who cannot be held back. More than half the days before class I get calls from Scotty letting me know that he'd really like to come out but he's painting right now, and it's going really well, so he just can't break it off. He's in a unitive place expressing his artistic nature, and disrupting the flow would be a mistake. Or Jan or Susan will call to say they have some program with their kids so they can't come to class. Instead of chastising them for not caring enough about our "spiritual" study, I



praise them for putting their energy into what matters most in their lives. That is real tapasya. We teach people to love their lives and everyone in it, and if they skip class because they are living the teaching, so much the better. And of course that's very different from those who just aren't interested, who can't keep their boilers heated up. They don't come because tamas has a good grip on them, and it keeps them "chilled out."

This brings up a good way to look at our subject: the difference you feel in how you relate to your own child compared with how you relate to some other child you might meet in the course of your day is an indicator of true tapas. Like the love of your child (or mother, friend, favorite pastime) compared to the duller moments where they are absent. That warm, loving, genuine feeling is what we are trying to tap into as a permanent state. It comes naturally to us in certain areas, but then we can extend it to include more and more territory. First we have to cherish it where we find it.

Charles wondered about charisma, the ability to inspire enthusiasm. When we are in the presence of someone who has dedicated their life to truth, it inspires us, fires us up. If we have laid some psychological dry wood in the proper configuration, sparks from the charismatic person can ignite our own passion. If our psyche consists of a pile of soggy sticks, though, the sparks just go out with a hiss. So keep your tinder dry! Which means supplying your own heat to drive out the damp, so that you're properly prepared when inspiration strikes. Rajas produces heat; tamas dissipates it. Sattva is already cooking.

Summing up, Deb likened tapas to a laser light beam. Ordinary light is chaotic and omnidirectional, but in a laser it is disciplined to all go in one line. The harmonious concentration of the chaos produces stunning and unexpected power. Deb said that what we are to treat negatively are the distractions that interrupt our focus on what we love, and as we hold them in abeyance we

enter an increasingly intense merger with our chosen subject. We generalize the state by calling it union with the Absolute, but it doesn't have to be as vague and immaterial as that. The object of focus can be our art, our business, our friendship, our life. Whatever it is, we are supposed to learn how to become absorbed in what we do. In the Gita's twelfth chapter, Krishna recommends Arjuna select a specific form to worship, if nothing else because loving the formless is much more difficult. I say, why not love both, since they are essentially the same anyway? Love the numinous and love the actual things you do, the actual people you know, and don't even consider them as separate things. They are one and the same.

The class assignment was to examine where tapas comes from in our own lives. For instance, everyone who takes the trouble to drive out in the pouring rain to the Portland Gurukula—or who even just reads the notes off the internet—cares enough about what they find there to make a significant effort. What exactly is that motivating factor? If we can identify it, it will help us to nurture it and foster it. I hope the assignment doesn't turn out like so many others, quickly displaced by the demands of everyday life. What you discover doesn't have to be shared, but you will learn a lot from peering into what it is that turns you on.

## Part II

Michael wrote a fine response to the class assignment that arrived in the email just before I went to bed; here is his, plus something I just sent in for my own Yoga Shastra study with Nancy. There is a wonderful excerpt from *Love and Blessings* (149-150) relating to keeping up a head of steam in our boilers. Last (and best) of all is Nitya's page 147 of *That Alone*, suggested by Wendy for other reasons, but which perfectly expresses the updated definition of tapas as *enthusiasm*.

from Michael:

Thanks again for a swell class. I'll be mindful of my tapas and keep the metaphorical home fire burning.

In class you asked us why we choose this Unitive Way. For me it was rooted in the loss of my biological father to suicide a few days before Xmas when I was 9 years old and dealing with the subsequent existential vacuum in my psyche. The impetus was therefore to improve my Human Operating System and hopefully to achieve some equipoise, to use last week's buzzword. I confess it was my first Acid trip at 18 that got me over the emotional hump of my father's absence. Although- except for perhaps one experience with Saliva Divinorum, no psychedelic trip has EVER touched the acme(s) the wisdom traditions have opened for me over the past 28 years.

Returning to the Gurukulam has gently restoked the smoldering embers of my dormant practice. I have studied the wisdom traditions since I was about 17 years old and given the Tao De Ching to read. Stories by J.D. Salinger, not to mention comic books, also pointed the way as well. Next on to Zen via both D.T. & Shunryu Suzuki, Reps, a dash of Watts, in no time I found Jung and through him Ramana Maharshi, Alchemy, and the I-Ching. By that point I met our pal Kendrick, he blew my fuses with the Gnostics, the Christian Mystics and introduced me to you and the gurus of your Vedantist lineage. After the passing of our mutual friend I again retreated, and like Cthulhu I slumbered in my house at R'lyeh, torpid but still dreaming of something more: the ineffable One Taste of the Absolute. I am glad to reawaken my practice and moreover in a welcoming group of fellow travelers.

Namaste.

Michael.

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With apologies to Nancy for borrowing my own response to last week's exercise, which had to do with what inspired and motivated us:

Of course, my most "famous" inspiration was the breakthrough LSD trip I took in spring of 1970, while attending Stanford University. I really got a good education there! Launched inwardly far into "outer" space, I realized that the ecstatic state I was in was what the wise seers of all ages were talking about, more or less, and trying to communicate to the rest of us, raving or otherwise. I immediately resolved to seek that blissful condition without the assistance of any magical substances, and within a few months had lodged myself at the feet of Nitya Chaitanya Yati. The rest is history, as they say.

More philosophically interesting to me, though, is that from very early in childhood I have had a powerful urge to figure out what's going on, like Rene Daumal's "incurable need to understand." Also like him, "I don't want to die without having understood why I lived." Some of my motivation must have come from being punished as a young child, both justly and unjustly, and trying to trace back the cause so I could avoid it in the future. Whether or not that was the sole motivation at the outset, it grew into a strong desire to look into the meaning of everything. No wonder Nitya was such a fantastic discovery! Finally, here was someone who actually knew what he was talking about, after a lifetime (19 years by then) of being surrounded by people who were equally or more baffled than I was. And he wasn't dishing

out simplistic answers, where I could just be satisfied and go about my business unaffected, but instead he immeasurably augmented my thirst for knowledge and comprehension. And over the years, like altering the course of a gigantic battleship, he turned me away from “neurological agitations” to (semi) serene contemplation.

I have written about a few of those guru blessings in *Gee, You Are You*, and *Flip Flop*, articles now posted on my website, so I won't be any more tedious about that here. But yes, sure, my motivations are significantly based on memories, particularly positive ones. Memories are critically important. We might imagine we can be motivated by something so pure it transcends memories—and we may well be, at some level—but our conscious mind sits on top of a treasure trove of memories, not unlike the proverbial iceberg with 9/10 below the surface, and without them it would sink in the sea, unsupported. Memory is us, as much as consciousness is, and it is to be embraced even as we try to ensure that it will not cloud our vision.

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A touching moment from *Love and Blessings* (149-150):

When I arrived at Fernhill Gurukula, it was four in the afternoon. Mangalananda Swami was gone. Only Nataraja Guru was there. He was all alone in the kitchen. Seeing me walking in, he poured out a cup of tea for me. He held out the teacup and a biscuit. When I relieved him of both the items, he abruptly asked me if I came prepared to join him as his disciple, to which he added, “You have been preparing yourself to be a sannyasi all these years. Are you ready now?”

This was a moment I had long been dreading. I was not at all prepared. Nataraja Guru was ferocious and uncompromising, and I had always had a horror of him. My powerful attraction to his

wisdom was counterbalanced by my repulsion of his personal idiosyncrasies. The way he had always thought of me as his disciple was very irritating. In every way he was an absolute contrast to Dr. Mees, who was an ideal, loving Guru. With hesitation I said, “I have to think.”

Nataraja Guru looked very offended. Shaking with anger, he said, “I knew this. I knew this. Narayana Guru told me he would have nobody and I would have nobody. So all the enthusiasm you showed these several years was only a bluff. You have no pressure. Your engine is at Runneymede.”

It was an insult. Runneymede is a station on the steep mountain railway up into the Nilgiris. Engines usually stop there for an hour to get up a head of steam. So I understood the sarcasm in the analogy. I was furious. In the white heat of anger I slammed the cup and saucer down on the table. Instead of running out of the kitchen, though, I bent down and touched both his feet and said, “Take me. I am giving myself to the Guru for whatever it’s worth.”

He laughed uproariously. Then he became suddenly calm and said, “That is right.” Thus my surrender to the Guru’s cause and my initiation all happened in a comic manner. Now many years later I understand that the gravity of my gesture and all its implications were a million times greater and more profound than I realized.

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Lastly, the final page of Nitya’s verse 20 commentary from That Alone. As Wendy says, “Whenever I get stuck, Atmo always brings answers, as if Guru is whispering in my ear. I am overflowing with gratitude for all the beauty and understandings which rest quietly in the form of these pages, until opened, when the true values become the focus.”

The passing moments of our lives are to be made lively and rich. One thing I have learned in my life is that the moment that comes will not come again. It's gone. You can see the moment approaching. Receive it with open arms. Glorify it by enriching it with your joy, finding a new value, a new sense of direction in life. Have a renewed sense of wonder. Thus, that moment becomes eternalized in your life, it is a moment to be remembered and to be proud that you could live it so well. Then you can move on to the next moment; this one has already been immortalized in you. What you have achieved in that moment is your eternal repository. Wonderful! You feel fulfilled. You are filled with gratitude: "Oh, I lived this moment so wonderfully!" This is your own life, in this very world, with all these amenities given to you in the here and now.

With this understanding you are eager to race to the next moment because it is going to be wonderful, going to be beautiful. It will yield so much. You see the promise of the future already in it. It is going to be still more wonderful than what you have already lived. Then you pass on to the next with joy and grace. The day opens up with such beauty, such promise. There is nothing like life, nothing like this world, a world where you can make friends, a world where you can create beautiful things, a world where you can share beauty with others and where you can make others part of your own self. A world where there is such an abundance of love and sharing.

The only thing is that you shouldn't drift into darkness. Don't look at the world as something horrid, but as beautiful, divine. Every bit of it. Then we know we are the creators of our own fate. Not through this individual ego with all its vagaries, but through a full affiliation with the eternal, supernatural light that enriches everything. Only then will we have the strength to become masters of the situation, the whole beauty of creation, the beauty that has painted the petals of the flowers, which has given shape to the

butterflies and birds, which makes the mountains look awe-inspiring and the oceans look vast, which makes the clouds float so gracefully overhead. This is where we find our true freedom.

You belong to the same overmind of beauty. Not with your ego but with your spirit. Participation in it will reveal to you the divine artist in you, the divine musician in you, the divine intelligence, the divine creator, the divine lover, the divine unifier, the divine peacemaker within you. It's such a blessing to be in this world, to be born here and to live here. This body of ours will fall away just like a candle burning out. But before it burns out the candle gives off a lot of light. What does it matter that it is eventually extinguished? It has lived its moment of light. We live surrounded by smoke and darkness. Make up your mind that you will live this day, each coming moment, in all its worth and beauty, and that you will share it with all. This is the great teaching the Guru offers us.

### **Part III**

This jumped out from the Darsanamala Class Notes of 2007—thanks are due to Brenda for the apt quote:

### **VIII Bhakti Darsana, Contemplative Devotion**

#### **Verse 6**

I am ananda, I am Brahma, I am atma; in such forms, for whom there is always identification, as a contemplative he is well known.

9/4/7



Bhakti occurs when the contemplative is fully identified with one of the aspects of the Absolute, such as the three enunciated here. If the identification is described in words, there is inevitably a degree of interpretation involved. Narayana Guru assures us we should gladly accept the other person's interpretation also, and not insist that ours is the only "right" one. If there is valid identification at some point, the heart opens in generosity to other interpretations; if there is only imagined or anticipated identification, it is less easy to admit the other person's perspective. There is a tendency to become inflexible, in hopes that a rigid adherence to established guidelines will accomplish the imagined result.

While it may sound mysterious and far off in both time and space, identification with the Absolute is the simplest, most ordinary state, the one from which we have sprung and in which we swim all day long. It is nothing more or less than reality shorn of its interpretative aspect. Brenda provided us with an apt quote from Henri Bergson, from *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*:

Suppose then, we imagine a mind always thinking of what it has just done and never of what it is doing, like a song which lags behind its accompaniment. Let us try to picture to ourselves a certain inborn lack of elasticity of both senses and intelligence, which brings it to pass that we continue to see what is no longer visible, to hear what is no longer audible, to say what is no longer to the point: in short, to adapt ourselves to a past and therefore imaginary situation, when we ought to be shaping our conduct in accordance with the reality which is present.