



# Spaciousness in Joint Relationships: Leaving a Light Imprint on the Earth ~ Sharon Gannon

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Focus: Ahimsa

Setting: Workshop Class

Place: Jivamukti Yoga NY

We are going to chant sutra # 3 from Chapter 2. Why? Because, come on, we are radicals. Right? To be radical means like radish. Comes from the same root and that root is root. So a radical is someone who likes to go to the root or likes to investigate causes. Does not like to just stay on the surface. Patanjali tells us that if a yogi really wants to attain yoga, then they have to be willing to deeply look into things. He says that when he says, "*Atha yoga nushasanam*" He opens his whole book that way. You can have this if you are willing to go beneath the surface. So that is what a radical does. Goes beneath the surface. OK.

There is one thing that I want to talk about. Some people have been asking me so I thought I would take this time to embrace this. And it has to do with of course, we just had the Halloween celebration. And people asked if it really has any meaning or is it just a hallmark creative holiday. So I thought we would take a few moments to look deeper into that as radicals. Do you want to do that for a couple of minutes? Ok.

Uhhmm, the ones who really know how magic works. And magic of course is a... shift in perception. Then those who really know how magic works, they know that there is great meaning in an angle. Whenever an angle is formed, there is great potential there. And of course the joints in our bodies provide us with tremendous potential. They can become congested. Right? A lot of tension. Or they can become spacious. And also if you read accounts of realized beings and Ramakrishna gives some beautiful accounts of Samadhi, descriptions of Samadhi. And all of these great beings they say all a similar thing when they try to describe the physical experience. They say something like "*my joints were loosened. My joints became so spacious it seemed that whole planetary systems could fit in the joints of my body*". So there is something to that I think.

So anyways in certain times of the year when space time sort of opens up because of a joint intersection at the equinoxes. And of course Halloween and all saints day come when there is that fall equinox time. When the fabric of space time is thin, which is how it is during these moments, these times of the year. When it is thin, then the interaction between dimensions is more transparent, more available. And we know that there are many disembodied souls that do not have a body like we do. And of course it is a great privilege to have a body, because it is more advantageous to work out karma when you have body, a physical body. And it is more difficult to work out your karmas, to resolve your karmas, when you don't have a body, a physical body, when you have another sort of body, an etheric or astral body. It's just more difficult. And sometimes in some traditions, they refer to some of these disembodied souls who are in a state of conflict, unresolved karmas, as hungry ghosts, hungry ghosts, they are hungry. They are hungry, they want peace. They want to resolve their karmas. And of course those karmas have come about through acts of violence, either thought, word or deed. And self-condemnation, sadness, all those negative things that we have been discussing, focusing on for a while here.

So the tradition really is that on that evening, all halo's eve, that these hungry ghosts, they can kind of pierce through the dimension of time and space and they can cause some mischief - as hungry beings can "*I want this, I need this, give me this, get this.*" So people knew this and so they put out food for them. And still when we go to India we see scary demon type masks on people's houses -- that is to scare away, you want to get a mask that is more scarier than the demons that will come -- to scare them away and food offerings are put out. And it sort of developed that all the little kids dressed up as gobs and goblins and they go to the houses and ask for candy.



But know that that has a very ancient source, that tradition. Know why All Saints Day is the following day? Because if you survived that night of being harassed by the hungry ghosts and the demons, it was only because you had the protection and help of holy beings, saints, angels, your ancestors. All kind of traditions say different things. You are suppose to spend that night in communion with holy beings. And then in the morning you show your gratitude because you are still there, the sun has risen and you are there, you were protected because of their help and kindness. And so it is called the Day of the Saints. Ok. So now you know.

But this is not disconnected from what we will be investigating today in our radical investigation of ahimsa. We want to understand how to be non-violent. How to have the equanimity of mind to come from a place of peace. We have to know something about where violence comes from? What is the cause of violence? Why would someone be violent? Where does it come from within ourselves? The yoga practice is, I mean I am sure many of you in this room will agree that it is a very potent form of physical therapy, psychotherapy. We even have some professional psychologist here -- Would you agree that it is a very potent form Dr. S....?. And it is potent because it helps us to overcome our inadequacies, our sense of smallness, and it opens us up to our true nature. Which is very large and expansive. Which is very kind. Which is joyful. Which our very deepest nature is joy. But to access that we have to have confidence. We have to have a self-confidence. And that is what the practice provides. We become as we practice, more and more self-confident. I am not talking about arrogant. I am not talking about that kind of confidence that is connected to the small ego self. I am talking about that kind of confidence that arises when you connect to the eternal self, the divine self, whose nature is joy. Who has created this whole universe. That which is immortal, eternal, transcendental. And when we begin to actually feel the potential of connecting to that and we do when we practice yoga. And we start to become less and less interested in the petty stuff. Our insecurities, our self doubt, they seem insignificant compared to the wider larger potential.

So when someone is violent it is usually because someone is being provoked. And I talked the other day a lot about experiments that were going on in the sixties to try to create ways to make people violent for military purposes. And they found that if someone was in pain, they would tend to be more violent towards others if they were in pain themselves. So we as yogis, we know this to be true in our own self. But we know that we don't have to react in that way. That we could open up and exercise a choice. And the only way we can know we can do that when we find ourselves in a very difficult situation, in an anxiety producing situation, in a situation of pain, is if we practice. And so the asanas should put us through some very anxiety producing situation in a controlled environment, in a safe environment, so we can find ways to connect to that higher self. Right? Understanding? So people like Dr. Martin Luther King, he was able to move people, inspire people, to motivate people. Because he himself was confident. He was self-confident. He was connected to the higher self. And that gave him equanimity of mind, this calmness of being.

He was well aware of the situation, of the socio-political situation in which he lived. He was well aware of the violence of the inhumanity that was going on between human and human, between blacks and white, between human and non-human. He was well aware. But knowing that truth he didn't freak out. He didn't respond in anger. And sometimes when we come into a situation when some truth is revealed to us that we did not know before or we did not realize that it was that bad, like we learn about factory farms or slavery that is going on in some part of the country or another country. We just like get angry, we start screaming and we loose our equanimity of mind. We loose our connection to the higher self and then we are truly ineffective. We are only contributing to the chaos that in our hearts we want to try to eradicate. So we have to find ways to build self-confidence so we can truly make a change in the world that will actually just be a reflection of the change that is occurring inside of us. When we become more calm, more non-violent. Then that starts to become more externalized. But if we point the finger - it is happening out there - and I am not going to be calm until you all settle down and be calm. You are doing all these bad things - how can you expect me to be good when you are doing all these bad things. It doesn't really work that way.



So lets chant Yoga Sutra II:3

*Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesa, Abhinivesah, Pancha Klesah*

These are the afflictions. These are really the internal violences that are going on, that are keeping us from happiness, keeping us from a deep and sthira steady connection to the supreme self. If we want to know how to be free we have to look at these. The first one - Avidya. All the other ones stem from that. Avidya is thinking, misknowing, thinking that you are someone that you are really not. It is when we forget we are the divine self and we think we are the personality. Oh I am so and so, I am this astrological sign, this is my profession, I live here. That kinda of thing. We become very sure of that and everything kind of stems from that. Asmita: which is attachment to ego. When we think we are the personality, then we are very concerned with feeding it. Like, whats in it for me? How is it going to help me? To heck with anyone else. So we become self centered, as oppose to other centeredness, thinking about the happiness of others first. Of course that is what a saint does. And that practice, thinking about the happiness of others over your own, is a practice that will actually bring you to enlightenment. There are no others, it is only you. So if you want to expand your concept of self, start by expanding it by truly being compassionate. Puts yourself in the other person's shoes, their skin and feel it out there, what do they need right now. That is the practice.

Raga and Dvesa are preferences. When we are bound by our preferences, then we do violence. These are all ways, why we would be violent. Something is hurting you lash and hurt somebody else, because you are being hurt. The boss yells at you so you go home and yell at your kids. It's a normal thing to do. But remember we are not normal. We want enlightenment. We have to find other ways of dealing with difficult situations and not look upon those difficult situations as in our way, but as providing for us the way. As opportunities.

So all violence stems from these things. Now think of it. When people take drugs, they are feeling bad, they want to feel good. They want to run away from a bad feeling and move into the good feeling that the drug gives them. That's because of raga and dvesa. The drugs actually of course are violent. They have bad side effects on the person taking them. And also there is a whole domino effect of the violence that was incurred in wherever the drugs came from. If it was cocaine or heroine. My God we don't have to go into that.

That whole violent scenerio in other countries and the crime. Huge stuff. Pharmecutical drugs, lot of violence. Anytime you see what looks like an innocent little white, blue, red pill. But that little pill was the result of tremendous suffering and violence. Many animals being degradaded, tortured, destroyed, killed. Much violence.

And Abhinivesah is the fear of death. And when we are afflicted by feeling we are going to die, don't we have something in our judicial system if it is self-defense it is Ok to kill somebody, its ok to inflict pain on somebody if you are protecting yourself from death.

So these are normal reactions for normal people. And they can be the correct ways to act in some situations. But the yogi remember is not so interested in being right. They are interested in being free. That's why Patanjali he gives ahimsa as a practice. He never says you must be perfect. You must never harm anyone. Because anyone who takes a serious look at ahimsa, will become very humble. Because they realize that it is impossible to live in a body, in this world, and not cause some amount of harm to others. This holier than thou *"I practice ahimsa, I am a vegetarian, I don't hurt anybody"* That's living in a delusion, self-righteous, judgmental delusion. Because we all cause harm to others.



That's why Patanjali in his seemingly infinite compassion, puts it in a category of yama which puts it in the second chapter the Sadhana chapter - chapter on practice. He says it is a practice. So what practice implies is you do your best. You find ways to cause the least amount of harm. Then that becomes a thrilling adventure in how to live your life everyday. And then you start to educate yourself and you realize it looks pretty innocent that action of leaving on the lights or something to light the way for someone else to come home. But then you realize wow underneath that there is a lot of violence using up all those resources. You start to see these kind of things. Or you start to see "Oh it just my lunch". Then you start to see how your lunch, seemingly just an innocent hamburger or a ham sandwich, could have this huge ripple effect. So you start to just figure out ways to live more kindly. To leave a more light imprint on the earth. And it becomes actually, like I said, a thrilling adventure.

But to do this we have to be confident. And that's what I want you to think about when you practice the asanas practice. To not runaway from painful situations. But to find within those situations, spaciousness. Like when a joint an interaction. Because a joint, is just a representation of a relationship. You are going along this way and then something else crosses your path. That's what a joint is, a meeting place. That's why it is thought to be a place of celebration by those who know about magic. Because it is full of potential. Because relationships will provide us with the means to freedom or the means to become more and more imprisoned or bound. Let me just read this, I read it the other day. This is the first paragraph from the first chapter of this extraordinary book called *Shantaram* by Gregory David Robert. Shantaram means a man of peace. And this is about a man that learned how to truly practice non-violence.

*"It took me a long time and most of the world to learn what I know about love and fate and the choices we make. But the heart of it came to me in an instance, while I was chained to a wall and being tortured. I realized somehow that the screaming in my mind, that even in that shackled, bloody helplessness, I was still free."* He was in a prison. Maximum security prison where he was being subjected to a lot of torture.

*"I was free to hate the men that were torturing me or free to forgive them. It doesn't sound like much I know. But in the flinch and bite of the chain, when its all you got, that freedom is a universe of possibility. And the choice that you make between hating and forgiving, can become the story of your life."* I think that's what Dr. King means when he says, *"I have decided to stick to love, hate is too heavy a burden to bear."* Lets go back to our mats.

