

I Adhyaropa Darsana, Cosmic Projection

Verse 9

10/25/5

From the sun, by stages, was not at all how the world came to be; from the Self this appeared all at once, as one's vision comes in sleep.

Now I know why Nataraja Guru wrote his magnum opus based on Darsanamala. Each verse opens up such a vast panorama of a single aspect of life that even a two hour discussion barely touches it. Verse 9 is especially germane to days of modern times, and I'm daunted in my chair trying to figure out how to find a way into its Grand Canyon. Always keep in mind that these class notes are nothing more than a jumping off point for further musing. The nice thing about a class—well one nice thing of many—is how the wide-ranging contribution of different people's ideas stimulates new trains of thought and takes us in unanticipated directions, ostensibly under the guidance of the guru principle present as the ground of it all. As individuals we are often stuck in our comfort-zone perspectives even when we don't wish to be, and group interaction more or less effortlessly frees up our movement in the stream of consciousness. On top of that, occasionally a participant will give voice to the word of the guru itself, as Charles did last night with the help of a double dose of Nilgiris tea. (Now we know the proper sacrament for him....)

On casual perusal this verse is very similar to the prating of fundamentalist religious types who have re-christened their attack on evolution as Intelligent Design. Charles, who hails from Texas

and is therefore more expert in these matters than the average American, waxed rhapsodic that mainstream religion is about morality, not metaphysics. It's a power and control game, an extension of parents disciplining young children that has a devastating effect on adults. He led us to an examination of the difference between religion and metaphysics. Susan described how Christianity in particular, but by no means exclusively, considers the problems of life to be already solved, so all anyone has to do is behave according to various strict codes of conduct and avoid individual expression at all cost. Science too envisions a blind universe of inert matter in which ultimately there is nothing anyone can accomplish. The similarity is amusing to a degree, but only after embracing the freedom Narayana Guru advocates and metaphysics studies, which is in tune with the pulse of rare seers from all religious and scientific faiths.

Metaphysics seeks to know the nonmaterial world just as healthy science seeks to know the material. It's that "seeking to know" business that drives fundamentalists wild. Why seek when you already know everything and God's in your back pocket? Doubt implies lack of faith, a cardinal sin and express ticket to hell. Established religion fears intellectual curiosity because deep down it is aware it has no claim to truth. If people were free to question, some of them would take their money and leave.

Charles mentioned Dionysus the Areopagite as a fifth century Christian metaphysician admired by Nataraja Guru. His philosophy underlines the crucial point in all this: that ignorance means living in darkness, but when you think you know it is a far greater darkness. The attitude of humble search and openness to truth in whatever form it may appear is an antidote to many serious problems. Once religious swaggerers decide they own truth the blood starts to flow.

The attitude of entering a Cloud of Unknowing resonates with Narayana Guru's "not at all" statement in this verse about

what we imagine we know about existence. The first bit of Dr. Mees' introduction to *The Key to Genesis*, which appeared also in the last issue of Gurukulam in 2001, clarifies the evolution issue:

LITERAL AND SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION

The first Chapter of Genesis has been generally assumed to present an account or theory of the creation of the material universe and of the evolution of life. For that reason it cannot be a source of wonder that modern man, with his knowledge of material processes in the universe and of biology, has tended to look down upon Genesis as a poor product of an ignorant mentality. No doubt the people who knew the meaning of Genesis in past ages would have shaken their heads if they had come to learn of the modern way which tends to take everything at its face value alone and to interpret spiritual scriptures as if they were textbooks of astronomy, physics or biology. For Genesis does not describe cosmic and biological processes. Its purpose is more profound.

The aim of religion is to make man happier and to help him find peace and bliss, within himself and in his relation to the world without. It does not make anyone happier to know how the material world is created (assuming that such knowledge is possible at all) and how the physical processes take place and can be controlled. In connection with many aspects of science the world has learned to its cost to what extent control of matter can endanger and destroy peace and happiness. Atomic bombs and clouds are now looming in the sky threatening to shatter man's peace altogether and to cloud his horizon for evermore.

Modern man has largely lost interest in "established religion", because its dogmas, based almost wholly upon a literal interpretation of Scripture, offend his intelligence. He has become convinced that the great astronomers and physicists

of these days have something to tell us that is more intelligent than the superstitious and outworn traditions which are contained, according to his belief, in Scripture. And who can blame him, as long as he does not know the deeper meaning hidden in the fundamental teachings of [scriptures like] “Genesis”?

I consider this essay one of the most important influences in my life and worthy of reading over and over.

Anita put her finger on a very important question hovering over the discussion, one for which there is no pat answer but which must be addressed throughout one’s life. Metaphysicians postulate a ground of Being, a nirvana, a divine emptiness, some even call it God or the Absolute. Terminology aside, there is an unmanifested aspect that doesn’t seem to have any palpable connection to manifestation. Anita wanted to know how they connect, or if they do. Specifically, Nitya concludes his commentary by saying:

Narayana Guru assists the student to simplify the complexity of the world by helping him to know the planet on which he stands, and by giving him a new angle of vision which he can use, together with a viewpoint he can adopt in every situation. Then he will have a correct perspective and understanding of the problems presented to him as they arise. This will change the world described as a “boundless ocean of misery” into one of clear knowledge and precise laws. Then his understanding of the world will be more correct and profound, and his ability to deal appropriately with problems which confront him will be much improved. (82)

The danger is that when there isn’t a living connection between the ground and the individual, ideas become frozen, and once petrified, they inspire conflict rather than harmony. As it is the natural

tendency of ideas to become frozen, it is incumbent on everyone to keep questioning their assumptions and embracing as wide a vision as possible. Above all we must find our connection with the divine and renew it constantly. Fortunately this is fun rather than tedious. The upside of religion is that it codifies spiritual behavior, to help an honest seeker assess if she is going wrong by comparing her actions with broadly accepted norms. The Ten Commandments are one such example, so that if you support killing Muslims, for instance, you know you are off the mark. If you are stealing resources from the local inhabitants, no amount of pretension about your chosen religion can excuse the violation of truth. And since even gentle Narayana Guru mentions metaphoric hellfire as the result of abusing the other, who is really you in another guise, there is much value in sorting this out.

Although I wish I could say more I hope I've communicated the gist. The sun is peeking in the window. Aum.

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12/15/15

Adhyaropa Darsana Verse 9

From the sun, by stages, was not at all
how the world came to be; from the Self
this appeared all at once
as one's vision comes in sleep.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*If from a Sun in graded succession
This world came, such was not the case at all.
Presented as if out of slumber,
At one stroke, all came to be.*

It has been a wonder-filled year for our class, and the sense of psychic evolution vibrated among us, gathered by a warm fire in fellowship. Once again everyone present made substantial contributions, which is gratifying evidence of the releasing of inhibitions and the relaxing of defenses. It makes me eager to continue our mutual expedition in the new year.

Deb set the tone by suggesting we are used to seeing our world as a cause-and-effect, building block construction, but Narayana Guru is intensely insisting that our world is a unified experience, a dynamic singularity that can't be broken into bits. This has a critical influence on how we participate in the world and how we understand our place in it.

I added that the study of the history of our universe, while fascinating, is a horizontal activity detached from our core issues. Our lives are essentially a vertical unfolding from an alpha seed state to an omega of realized possibilities. Understanding the universe does not necessarily translate to self-awareness. Our growth is a more direct, inner matter, and there is a mysterious relationship between our knowledge of the external trappings and our internal awareness. It is not one or the other: both go together as a single whole with two primary aspects.

Andy weighed in with what most any modern human must think of this verse: it is a carryover of the old, entrenched ignorance that has been gradually alleviated by the scientific study of the cosmos. He even said it "sounded like Genesis," meaning that arcane, outmoded, first book of the Bible. By curious coincidence, I had brought Dr. Mees's book on Genesis, which insists that it is by no means an account of material creation. As Mees puts it regarding the Biblical Genesis, "Its purpose is more profound." It is not an accounting of physical creation, but of the dawn of spiritual/psychological wisdom. We lose a great deal by presuming the former.

In addition to the commentary, I read out the first part of Dr. Mees' introduction to *The Key to Genesis*, which propounds a similar idea to Narayana Guru's bold assertion. As most of you know, Mees was Nitya's first substantial guru, and Nitya's first task as disciple was to type up his monumental three-volume unification of world religions and mythologies, titled *The Revelation in the Wilderness*. You can see Mees' lasting impact on Nitya in his near-paraphrase of the introductory remarks I've reprinted in Part II:

The book from which our mythological story comes is not a textbook on cosmogony or astrophysics. Its subject is *vedanta sastra*, the science of transcending the world of sensual knowledge to attain imperishable peace and happiness.

It may be that our concept of the term "world" is too abstract. The world with which we should concern ourselves is that which presents itself when we wake from sleep or emerge from an unconscious state. This world is composed not only of earth, water, fire, and air; we are also continually confronted by situations which demand from us meaningful reactions.

The crucial idea here is that our study of the outside world is inevitably a horizontal exercise, which as Jan pointed out is nonetheless valuable and important. Yet re-accessing our vertical essence is the thrust of the study, and to do this we have to trace our trajectory from a dimensionless dot to an ever-expanding psychological entity. From this perspective, the world is presented to us only in the way our conscious awareness accesses it, and we need to see how that works.

I had offered the distinction between the horizontal and vertical aspects to try and clarify the issue, but as Andy rightly pointed out, ideas like that have a positive and a negative side. We don't want to separate them as vertical = good and horizontal =

bad, which can easily happen. The spiritual is nestled right inside all our physical, mental and emotional challenges, and imagining them to be separate torpedoes our ability to cope in a healthy manner. Nitya explains this beautifully in his commentary:

The world we see, in addition to its physical qualities, is also a complex structure of situations and responses; projected by ourselves to the extent we are often unable to separate our sense of self from it. To connote the world that is presented to us as a ceaseless input of sense data, all relevant associations and concepts that lie buried in the unconscious must instantaneously enter our conscious awareness when required. If there is little or no aberration of consciousness, we can very quickly recognize not only the relevant informational details of the situation presented to us, but also how it will affect the preservation of our life, the continuing quality of our integrity, and the progress and unfoldment of the Self expressed as our own self. Our individual self and its interaction with the world is assessed always in this manner. (81)

The key here is “If there is little or no aberration of consciousness.” We need to insure that our aberrations of consciousness have been corrected and healed, and that is a lifetime endeavor. It does get easier over time, though.

I have just finished proofreading Nitya’s *The Psychodynamics of Pranava*, and will be making it available on Nitya’s website (<http://aranya.me>) very soon. It includes a lovely, poetic version of the iconoclastic central idea of this verse:

The mystical language of the Aitareya Upanishad presents a creation myth which is worthy of being contemplated upon with veneration. When the two slits beneath the eyebrows of the newly born baby open, the sun is generated in the cosmic

sky and light enters the child's visual system. They are initiated into the wonder of seeing all illuminated objects. Similarly the soul of the baby frees itself to go in all directions through the crevices of the ears. It is filled with the choir of the spheres that is sung to greet the music-loving soul, which becomes so infused with the symphony of the universe that the child becomes an equipoised being dancing to the rhythm of the mysterious waltz that it hears from within. All beings are singing to the child in continuous orchestration. It is as if the physical world has been in eternal prayer for its lover to sprout as a connoisseur of all the beauty it can present. (21)

Most of us readily agree that the world is existent as *sat* prior to our appearance on the scene. Yet without a consciousness to perceive it, what is it? It is "as if non-existence," which is the very first line in Darsanamala. The universe has to be perceived before it can be known to exist. Narayana Guru is adding the *chit* aspect, and our absolutely essential conscious awareness opens up the domain of meaning, *ananda*, as well. Here, however, we are primarily concerned with *chit*. We are redirecting our attention from manipulating external items of interest to the core reality from which consciousness draws its existence. As Dr. Mees puts it, the study of external details doesn't necessarily change us for the better. By contrast, our inner growth brings clarity of knowledge and understanding, positively impacting every aspect of our life.

Jan gently protested that she spends most of her days attending to external demands, and we definitely don't want to consider these as "unspiritual." The unified attitude being taught by Narayana Guru means that everything we do is spiritual, when seen in the right light. Going to the store can be an exciting exercise in observing the complexities of the miraculous universe, or it can be an unwelcome task we imagine is taking us away from what we really want to do. Is it a joy or a curse? Jan admitted that

things that she used to resist she now enjoys doing much more, and that is an indication of her progress. Jan is taking more joy in being alive, even in the mundane details, and it is evident to those around her, too. I think it's a very catching attitude, especially if there is a philosophical predisposition for it in the catcher.

This led to a discussion around fatalism, initiated by Nitya's warning:

If we do not find within ourselves the source and the engineering of the situations to which we present ourselves, then there is danger that we shall succumb to a fatalistic philosophy. Narayana Guru certainly does not subscribe to such an attitude of fatalism. For him, man is capable of creating, modifying, and resolving his own world. To be able to do this properly, man should know where and how his microcosmic being finds its placement in the macrocosmic world, which is conceived, sustained, and eventually dissolved by the Supreme. (82)

Bill underlined the importance of this paragraph in inviting us to be more involved. We have a role in creating our world, and an opportunity to go deeper in our understanding. Andy added how modern science has bequeathed us a "billiard ball universe," where everything is predetermined, though that is starting to open up, at least in theory. As I have noted before, science began as a refutation of the inflexibility of religion and the assertion of freedom, and it has now come full circle to insist there can be no free will or unforced decision making. This shows science is simply another "religion," another of humanity's periodic attempts to understand reality that seem to always begin in freedom and end in bondage. Perhaps we are ready for a new outburst of freedom, a new religion. At least it's something that individuals can undertake

at any time. We don't have to be part of a movement to strive for liberation.

When Moni first joined up with Nitya, she once happened to say to him: "That is my fate." He told her he didn't believe in fate, that each of us is the source of what happens to us. So Moni doesn't use that word anymore. She realized that by thinking in those terms, she was surrendering to her own ignorance instead of the Absolute. The class loved that line. All too often we surrender to our ignorance rather than to our higher wisdom. It's soooo much easier....

After class I talked more about this with Moni. There *is* fate, of course, the tide of life over which we have no control. Some things are fated, some are not. In his statement Nitya was, typically, providing the missing half of the dialectic of fate/no fate. But there is fate; it's just that we shouldn't surrender to it, to use it as an excuse to indulge in our own ignorance. We should focus on whatever we can impact, and bring in the kind of intelligent appraisal that the gurus have been teaching us, so that we can optimize our actions.

I think this is what Jan meant when she was talking about spending time in the horizontal. That's where we *do* create our world. She said she looks at events to see how she is shaping them based on how she thinks of herself. And that's just right. For the most part we don't act in a vacuum, we embrace the world as it comes to us. The assessment she is making of those horizontal activities is the vertical element itself. It isn't just a trip to the store or whatever, but an opportunity to learn how she is put together, and how that might be played with to make life more joyful and rewarding. It can easily include pure action with minimal doubt as well, once the course is set.

Scotty offered a nice example. When he was young he used to hang out with his grandmother most every Sunday. She would ask him if he believed in Jesus, and he would say no. But then he

would ask her to tell him about it, and they would get into lengthy discussions that both found delightful. It was how they loved each other. This showed him how being open might lead to insights in unexpected places. They could have insisted on their positions and slammed the door between them, and nothing would have happened, other than resentment and hurt feelings. But they listened to each other, and life and love were allowed to take their course. It's really very beautiful how often and how easily that can come about. Don't we all wish we'd do it more?

Deb summed up that each of these outer events is an occasion for creatively understanding and bringing in our insights. How different is that from mere acquiescence to our fate?

I posed the question for each of us to examine how we are "fatalistic" in our relation to life. Do we accept our lot with resignation? Have we adopted a mediocre self-image? Do we feel that we are outside of what matters in life's mainstream? If instead we realize that each of us is the center of our own universe, that we matter as much as anyone, we will feel empowered. There is much of value we can accomplish.

Narayana Guru was the perfect example of what this means. He inspired an entire region of the globe to stop accepting its given conditions, its "fate," and become courageous to make meaningful changes. I asked the class how many, when they heard "there is danger that we shall succumb to a fatalistic philosophy," thought immediately that *they* didn't believe in fatalism, *they* weren't fatalistic. We think of it as something only ignorant people believe, but as Nitya implies, any time we find ourselves on the outside of any situation, we are unintentionally falling into that kind of miasma. We feel like we don't matter, or can't do anything about it. So we accept mediocrity. We are being fatalistic. The attitude can make us mediocre ourselves, and there are many gradations of this malaise.

Somehow we have all had our attention drawn out to far frontiers where we have little or no impact. It breeds a feeling of helplessness. By focusing on our immediate milieu, we have many more opportunities to share the wealth of our being with our friends and family. So bring the focus home. Home to the heart. That's what Narayana Guru is insisting on.

Andy discussed one of the more extreme effects of this displacement of the psyche: a sense of victimization. We feel we are the victims of fate, or forces beyond our control, and it makes us helpless. We surrender in advance, without even knowing what the battle is about. We have to come to grips with the reality behind the veneer of "fate," of fatal mental states. Nitya describes how this is done in precise language:

Narayana Guru assists the student to simplify the complexity of the world by helping him to know the planet on which he stands, and by giving him a new angle of vision which he can use, together with a viewpoint he can adopt in every situation. Then he will have a correct perspective and understanding of the problems presented to him as they arise. This will change the world described as a "boundless ocean of misery" into one of clear knowledge and precise laws. Then his understanding of the world will be more correct and profound, and his ability to deal appropriately with problems which confront him will be much improved. (82)

Pinning down the details of the external world is an exciting and never-ending prospect. Yet we shouldn't make our self-image dependent on exact knowledge, because there never has been and never will be a full accounting. This is one of the unfortunate effects of our schooling, that we feel like getting the right answer is the key to happiness. We talked about how a true scientist admits to provisional knowledge about how the world works, while the

insecure ones insist that they are right. We all have varying levels of understanding in every field, and that is nothing to be ashamed of. If we don't bring our provisional understandings to bear on our life, though, we are missing the boat.

Andy cautioned that we are constantly entrapping ourselves in our own metaphors. We need to stay alert to the ways we substitute prior fixed ideas for clarity and wakefulness. Nitya offers yet another hyper-cogent description of how this is maintained:

We should recognize here that there is really no difference between dreams and subjective mental images. These mental images meet halfway, as it were, with the stimuli coming through the sensory screen-and-response mechanism as the input to consciousness of data relating to external objectivity. The interaction between a pre-structured mental image and newly presented sense-data restructures the conscious picture into a finalized vision. This is described in this verse as the world presented to the self through the operation of its own vision. (81-2)

This will ring down the close of the year for our class. My gratitude is boundless for all the quality time we have spent together at the metaphorical feet of the gurus. Don't miss the great stuff in Parts II and III. And most of all, have fun out there!

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

If it be said that this world came to be in gradual steps out of a primordial Sun, we say it is not so at all. From the Self, as if from sleep, all came into being at one stroke.

There is a traditional belief that there was an original Sun and from that Sun, by successive steps the universe was produced; the sky was produced, and from the sky the atmosphere, from the atmosphere the fire, from the fire the water, and from the water the earth.

This view is not correct. This world with all its features that we experience in practical life came by the willing of the Self out of the Self, coming out together all at once. Before creation, the Self had the character of being itself alone (*kevalam*). When one wakes from deep sleep (*sushupti*), the whole world becomes presented all together. In the same way, at the time of creation, by dint of the will of the Self all is manifested together, and projected from out of the Self. There is also the Upanishadic dictum which says, "The one Self thought, let me be many." By this verse the theory of gradual creation (*krama-srishti*) is repudiated and that of instantaneous creation (*yugapat-srishti*) is upheld. What is implied herein is that the power of the Lord is so great that it could create all this world at one stroke.

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Here is the first part of the introduction to *The Key to Genesis*, by Dr. G.H.Mees. You may have the entire text in your copy of Gurukulam Magazine, third-fourth quarters, 2001, and I will also append it to the email. It remains one of the most powerful essays I have ever read, and stands as a clear alternative explication of Narayana Guru's verse:

LITERAL AND SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION

The first Chapter of Genesis has been generally assumed to present an account or theory of the creation of the material universe and of the evolution of life. For that reason it cannot be a

source of wonder that modern man, with his knowledge of material processes in the universe and of biology, has tended to look down upon Genesis as a poor product of an ignorant mentality. No doubt the people who knew the meaning of Genesis in past ages would have shaken their heads if they had come to learn of the modern way which tends to take everything at its face value alone and to interpret spiritual scriptures as if they were textbooks of astronomy, physics or biology. For Genesis does not describe cosmic and biological processes. Its purpose is more profound.

The aim of religion is to make man happier and to help him find peace and bliss, within himself and in his relation to the world without. It does not make anyone happier to know how the material world is created (assuming that such knowledge is possible at all) and how the physical processes take place and can be controlled. In connection with many aspects of science the world has learned to its cost to what extent control of matter can endanger and destroy peace and happiness. Atomic bombs and clouds are now looming in the sky threatening to shatter man's peace altogether and to cloud his horizon for evermore.

Modern man has largely lost interest in "established religion", because its dogmas, based almost wholly upon a literal interpretation of Scripture, offend his intelligence. He has become convinced that the great astronomers and physicists of these days have something to tell us that is more intelligent than the superstitious and outworn traditions which are contained, according to his belief, in Scripture. And who can blame him, as long as he does not know the deeper meaning hidden in the fundamental teachings of "Genesis"?

Warnings against the literalism-that-kills have already been uttered in very early times. Origen wrote in the beginning of the third century A.D. regarding the Creation-tradition: "What intelligent person would fancy, for instance, that a first, second and third day, evening and morning, took place without sun, moon and

stars; and the first, as we call it, without even a heaven? Who would be so childish as to suppose that God after the manner of a human gardener planted a garden in Eden towards the East, and made therein a tree, visible and sensible, so that one could get the power of living by the bodily eating of its fruit with the teeth or again, could partake of good and evil by feeding on what came from that other tree?"¹ And yet many generations of Christians have been "so childish"! It is true that quite a few people have intuitively felt that many statements contained in the Bible should be explained symbolically, and some have attempted to do so. Unfortunately the meaning of the basic symbols of the ancient traditions of mankind has been long forgotten, even though some symbolic implications have been preserved. But knowledge of a few words of a language does not give understanding and command of that language. As words only serve a useful purpose when they can be grouped together to form intelligent sentences, so symbols are only of use and interest in their interrelation. A symbol by itself, that is, taken out of its context, has only a very vague inspirational value, largely depending on its connection with the unconscious. A symbol grouped intelligently with other symbols in a myth, a ritual or some other tradition remaining over from more enlightened times, contributes to a lesson in traditional psychology which may contain, literally, a world of meaning.

Elsewhere² I have shown at length that the symbolic meaning of the Commandment of Moses, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness that is in heaven above", is that man should not interpret his sacred traditions in a literal way. The warning against idolatry is a cautioning against *mental* idolatry. By an irony of circumstances even this symbolic warning has itself been explained in a literal sense, already in early times.

¹ De Principiis IV; 16.

² See "An Exposition of Traditional Psychology", I.

The Bible is full of warnings against literalism. I have shown at length elsewhere³ that Jesus thundered at the “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites”⁴ for the same reason, accusing them of killing the prophets, that is, those who reveal the inner or symbolic meaning of Scripture, which is often much the opposite of the literal meaning. I have also shown that Jesus was killed by the priests of Jerusalem, representing the literal interpretation of the Law or Tradition, because he stood for the inner meaning. The Sin of Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, the only sin that “shall not be forgiven”,⁵ is also intimately connected with literalism.

As “prophecy” is, etymologically and traditionally, the “forth-speaking” of the inner meaning of the Law or the Tradition, “blasphemy” is the “hurt-speaking”. This is the wrong interpretation of the Law, based on the literal and the rational view. Therefore Jesus said: “And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”⁶ *Thought* always stands in the way of the spiritual or inner functions of life. The Holy Ghost is the spirit of the Law or the Tradition. Quite significantly Jesus, before he spoke the words just quoted, said: “And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.”⁷ “Blasphemy” against the Holy Ghost, that is, the wrong interpretation along literal and rational lines of the Spirit of the Tradition, is the unpardonable sin, because it affects the world at large. It poisons the minds of others and turns them away from the Tradition, which

³ See “An Exposition of Traditional Psychology”, II.

⁴ St. Matthew 23; 13-39.

⁵ St. Luke 12; 10.

⁶ Ibid. 12; 11-12.

⁷ Ibid. 12; 10.

offers them the chance of Salvation. Therefore Jesus said: “Woe unto you, lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering ye hindered.”⁸ The “key of knowledge” is the Key to the inner or symbolic meaning of the Tradition. Its use allows a man “to enter into himself”. Preventing oneself from entering into the Spirit of the Law is stupid, but hindering others is hurtful and “unpardonable”.

When Jesus speaks on this subject his indignation is violent and boundless, and it is clear that the hurtful literal interpretation of the Law is a subject that concerns him almost more than any other. This is the case because his very mission was bound up with it. He came to “fulfill the Law” in its inner and symbolic meaning, in a priest-ridden world which interpreted it in a literalistic manner. He accused the professional upholders and teachers of the Law of “blasphemy”, of killing the prophets and of building their sepulchers. The killing of the prophets is the stopping of the mouths that “speak forth” the Tradition from within. Jesus himself was killed by the priests of Jerusalem because he had come and lived for that purpose. The building of a sepulcher of a prophet means the establishment of a sect with a special creed. This symbolism is still commonly understood in those parts of the East where the inner meaning has prevailed over the literal meaning of religion at least among a few. A son and disciple of Kabir Das, the Indian mystic, once said: “A sect is the mausoleum of the Guru.”

It is clear that the literal and rational, or rather, pseudo-rational, interpretation of Scripture, makes for divisions among men and creates sects, as at an earlier stage it was responsible for religions ceasing to be in spiritual communion with one another.

Part III

⁸ Ibid. 11; 52.

Here's Gayathri's report that was sent out earlier, now blended into the class notes, with some excellent responses from friends afterwards:

My ten-day silent retreat at Spirit Rock was so precious and wonderful. I consider it a gift to have had the opportunity to unplug and dive deep into the silence. It's not too often that one can take ten days away from family and home, especially when you have young kids. So it was a gift from dear Joy and the kids and I'm so grateful to them for that.

The routine and setting at the retreat were familiar to me this time and it took me less time to settle in. I recognized that familiar feeling when the outer silence seeps in to become inner silence. It happened at the end of day two this time. I think it was day three or four the last time. Anyway, once that happened, the body and mind settled down to a nice hum, moving in and out of deep states of silence and meditation. I had two significant insights during the course of the ten days that I'd like to share and document. In some ways, these responses are like a journal for me. So sharing it with you all is a way for me to document it for later. Of course, that's not the only reason. It's also because as fellow travellers on this path, you all know some of my history and will understand what I'm trying to share.

I had the first insight at the end of day two of the retreat. This is approximately how the process went. It was far more nebulous than the way I'm about to express it, but you'll get the idea.

- So I was sitting in meditation, when I suddenly got in touch with a really yucky, ugly, difficult-to-see part of myself. It was an arrogant, full-of-myself, miss-know-it-all kind of energy and

it had a heavy, almost painful feeling to it. I may have mentioned this earlier that when I was growing up, I used to get a lot of praise/approval/validation from my parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, friends of my parents, teachers and friends for various “accomplishments” like winning prizes for singing or badminton or chess or quiz or debating or for participating in plays or placing first in class for academics and stuff like that. In my middle school and early high school years, I began to believe all these people and started to think that I must be special and knew better than my peers. I was popular among my friends who reinforced this narrative that I was special.

- As I sat with this feeling, I felt so horrible thinking, “Oh my God! Was I really like this?! I wonder how people even liked me.” I was thinking of my sister and how she was always shy and grew up feeling “less than”. I felt so terrible for how insensitive I was to how she was feeling in those days. I was so busy being full of myself that I barely paid any attention to her. When we were younger, we played together and spent time together, but as I got older, I just pretty much ignored her. I sat there, shedding tears and feeling so much sadness and compassion for my sister and for the loss of what could have been a much closer relationship. I asked for her forgiveness for my complete cluelessness. It was just an awful, awful feeling and I was filled with regret, remorse, guilt and a deep sadness.
- Then, I suddenly touched another part of myself that was sitting right behind this outwardly confident, accomplished, miss-know-it-all. It was a scared little, vulnerable, mouse. I realized just how scared I was in those days to fall short, to disappoint, to fail, to be ashamed or embarrassed, to be outed as fake, knowing all along that I wasn’t half of what people were saying

I was. When I touched this part of myself, I began to feel compassion for myself. “Oh you poor thing! You were so scared!! You had to work so hard to keep up a façade.” I sat with that for a while and shed more tears.

- Then a beautiful thing happened that I can't quite describe in so many words. I touched something at the core of my being that I can only describe as a reservoir of LOVE. It was so pure, beautiful and blissful. There was no story there. It was just pure love. When you strip all the stories of yourself away, what you're left with is love in the purest form. Each of us has that same core of love. We're not only lovable because of the very fact that we exist (and not because we can sing a good song or get good grades or win prizes or get promotions or whatever), but in fact, we are love itself!
- Later when I thought about it, I put together my experience from a few months ago (where I felt that everything was infused with a divine intelligence, a divine perfection) with this one and came up with people have been saying for ages - GOD IS LOVE. The taste/flavor/quality/characteristic of this divine intelligence is love.

What was remarkable about this whole experience was that it started out yucky and ended in bliss! It started out with life and the messiness of conditioning and ended with a love that was beyond conditions....

The second insight was a more direct one and happened on day seven of the retreat. Jack Kornfield, one of the teachers at the retreat (and a fabulous one at that), was leading us in a guided meditation on sound. He was ringing several kinds of bells with different sounds and I was sitting there listening to these sounds, aware of my breath, body, thoughts and various sensations

including these sounds. I could see how these sounds were rising and disappearing in my awareness just like thoughts were rising and disappearing and sensations were rising and disappearing and each breath was rising and disappearing. Everything felt like a wisp of smoke with no real substance. Suddenly, I had a flash of insight that this idea of Gayathri was also rising and disappearing in my awareness just like the sounds of the bells. It seemed to have the same ephemeral quality, with no real substance at all. It was just a narrative, a story. It had the same wisp of smoke quality. It was arising from my awareness and I was aware of it at the same time. I later thought of this verse from Narayana Guru's *Daiva Dasakam* – “*Are you not maya, the wielder of maya and also the rejoicer in maya? Are you not the True One who having removed maya, grants the supreme union?*”

A couple of days later, another teacher at the retreat read parts of an article by an American philosopher by the name of Daniel Dennett titled, “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity”. Dennett says that the center of gravity of an object is not an actual physical set of atoms or molecules and has no mass or any physical attributes. It is simply a location in time and space. Similarly, the small self is the “center of narrative gravity”. I really loved that phrase and it made a lot of sense to me in the light of this second insight. When I go to sleep, this center and narrative around it dissolves and there is no Gayathri anywhere. When I wake up, the Gayathri narrative re-crystallizes around the center and continues to build on that narrative. In fact, this whole response is a part of that same narrative - that I went to such and such retreat and had such and such experience. It's all part of the same story!! It has no real substance.

(Scott here) I occasionally write responses to others in the study group, and here's what I tacked on about the above:

[I loved] Gayathri's account of her 10-day retreat, which included another stunning revelation. How beautifully she recounted her process of self-examination, digging through some unpleasant memories and defenses to regain her center as a being made of love! It reminded me of the Isa Upanishad, where truth is hidden behind a false image of itself. Even more intractably, how simple it is to hide truth behind the very thoughts that we instinctively shy away from, so that we never even begin the effort to break through to it! It's an archetypal dilemma. And sincere thanks to Gayathri for reminding us how worthwhile it is to own up to our foolishness, so we can shed it like an old snakeskin and rediscover who we really are.

Her second story (actually an extension of the first) about seeing herself as a construct with no real existence—a truly liberating insight—reminded me of an oft-told tale of Richard Alpert, a.k.a. Ram Dass. On his first psychedelic excursion, all of his personalities came and confronted him, and he initially identified with them. But then they would dissolve away and vanish, and he let them go. I found a version from *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, by Don Lattin (a very fun book, by the way). Tim is of course his close friend Timothy Leary:

Alpert started really coming onto the psilocybin. There was too much talking in the kitchen, so he walked into the living room, a darker and more peaceful setting. He sat down on the sofa and tried to collect himself. Looking up, he saw some people over in the corner. *Who were they? Were they real?* Then he started to see them as images of himself in his various roles. They were hallucinations, but they seemed so real. There was the professor with a cap and gown. There was a pilot with a pilot's hat. There was the lover. At first, he was a bit amused by the vision. *Those are just my roles. That role can go. That role can go. I've had it with*

that role. Then he saw himself as his father's son. The feeling changed. Wait a minute. *This drug is giving me amnesia! I'll wake up and I won't know who I am!* That was terrifying, but Alpert reminded himself that those roles weren't really important. *Stop worrying. It's fine. At least I have a body.* Then Alpert looked down on the couch at his body. *There's no body! Where's my body? There's no-body. There's nobody.* That was terrifying. He started to call out for Tim. *Wait a minute. How can I call out to Tim? Who was going to call for Tim? The minder of the store, me, would be calling for Tim. But who is me?* It was terrifying at first, but all of a sudden Alpert started watching the whole show with a kind of calm compassion.

At that moment, Richard Alpert met his own soul, his true soul. He jumped off the couch, ran out the door, and rolled down a snow-covered hill behind Leary's house. It was bliss. Pure bliss. (54-5)

Whether or not you have snow to roll in, may your winter solstice be filled with bliss. Love to all!

* * *

Responding to Gayathri, Jan wrote:

I really enjoyed reading about Gayathri's meditations and two insights. Her finding the core of love that is the true Self reminded of what I've talked about in class too. Of course knowing that and really feeling that are two different things. She is inspiring me to open to that part of myself now, especially during this dark heavy period when the small self is so full of complaints. Thanks for sharing it!

Susan wrote:

Thank you so much for sending this! Incredible, wonderful, mind-blowing stuff and very helpful to me.

Gayathri's epiphanies remind me to have compassion for myself and to be patient. I am going through a big transition in my life and sometimes I really want it to be over. I do not like feeling so unmoored. I look too much to the past, clinging to the vestiges of the familiar and safe, thinking I somehow need to fashion my future out of the tatters of what I pulled apart. But now I am realizing that this transition is a shedding process. I need to look at those roles that Gayathri talked about and release myself from them. I need also to not jump into a new role just for the sake of having that identity security but to have my new life grow out of the seeds deep within me. Out of the love that Gayathri described. How to do this? I'm not entirely sure. But I think just letting go of my narrative more and more (which is a rather awesome undertaking!) will get things flowing within.

I like the way James Hollis talks about this in his book, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*:

"This is the essence of what Jung means by individuation. It is a service not to ego, but to what wishes to live through us. While the ego may fear this overthrow, our greatest freedom is found, paradoxically, in surrender to that which seeks fuller expression through us. Enlarged being is what we are called to bring into this world, contribute to our society and our families, and share with others. It cuts a person off from the herd, from collectivity, but it deepens the range in which more authentic relationships can occur. It may be necessary for us from time to time to absent ourselves from the world in order to reflect, regroup, or revision our journey, but ultimately, we are to bring that larger person back to the world.

Jung describes the dialectic of isolation and community in this way: 'as the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation.' (pp. 12-13)

"...virtually all of us lack a deep sense of permission to lead our own lives. We learned very early that the world exacted conditions that, if not met, could result in punishment or abandonment. That message, overlearned and internalized remains a formidable block to the ego's capacity to elect its own path. Only when the ego has reached a certain measure of strength, or perhaps more commonly, is driven by depression to make a different choice, can we overthrow this tyranny of history. (p. 13)

"Rather than ask, what does my tribe demand of me, what will win me collective approval, what will please my parents, we ask, what do the gods intend through me?... Of each critical juncture of choice, one may usefully ask: 'Does this path enlarge or diminish me?'" (pp. 14 to 15)

I think I've sent out that quote before but it seemed a perfect time to repeat it.

Aum,
Susan