

III Asatya Darsana, A Vision of Nonexistence

Verse 10

The One is real, not a second; the unreal indeed appears to be real; the *sivalingam* is stone alone, not a second made by a sculptor.

7/17/6

The third darsana roars to a close with an intense image that unifies everything we've addressed in it so far. We had a grand class on a gorgeous summer evening that illuminated many aspects of the verse, so grand we had to break it off arbitrarily so participants could get some shuteye. I'll only be able to touch a couple of highlights.

It's worth quoting Narayana Guru's own comments to make the verse's main point absolutely clear:

It is the Self that alone is real. Anything other than the Self is not at all real. The unreal world merely has a semblance of the real. That which seems like the Siva lingam is really the stone itself. As for the Siva lingam, it merely seems as if it is a reality other than the stone. What is real is the stone, and the Siva lingam is what is supposed on the basis of what really exists. The Siva lingam is not one that the mason made independently of the stone. It is the stone itself. The stone is real and the Siva lingam is unreal. In the same manner the Absolute is real and the world is unreal. The unreal world only seems real.

To a contemplative who is looking with clear eyes, religious imagery is as much maya as anything else. Of itself it does not represent anything other than the material and workmanship that went into it. It is the people who worship it who bring their learned attitudes to the image and project them onto it. The gurus describe this as eidetic thinking. Eidetic comes from the Greek word for form, *eidos*, whence our word idol. Existence implies form; a formless existence has no meaning. But the Absolute is beyond form, hence the eternal conflict between our concepts and what they purport to represent.

The projection of our imagination onto the real is called idolatry. In religious idolatry, our most intense feelings are gathered, and any disagreements over the nature of what the idol stands for release pent up frustration in the form of rage. The frustration comes from the mismatch between Reality and its partial representation in images. Instead of opening up to a more all-encompassing vision, we prefer to fight for the domination of our idols over those of others.

The more we profess meekness or submissiveness about our idolatry, the more the rage builds within. There is really no solution other than giving it up.

The preeminent Catholic mystic of our time, Thomas Merton, wrote scathingly of how Christians imagine they are not idolaters and everyone else is. As they bow before two intersecting pieces of wood with a sad doll impaled on it, they sneer at a world filled with godless idolaters. In *Faith and Violence*, he saw nations of TV worshippers and exclaimed “We are idolaters. We make simulacra [likenesses] and we hypnotize ourselves with our skill in creating these mental movies that do not appear as idols because they are so alive!” He adds “Our idols are by no means dumb and powerless. The sardonic diatribes of the prophets against images of wood and

stone do not apply to our images that live, and speak, and smile, and dance, and allure us and lead us off to kill.”

Narayana Guru is painfully aware how so often people severely criticize others’ beliefs, even though they have exactly the same status philosophically as their own. In this verse he offers up his own religious milieu for sacrifice, saying in essence, “The people in my country see the Absolute with certain religious trappings superimposed. I hereby declare those trappings have nothing more to do with the Absolute than any other beliefs. None of them touch the Real. Because I don’t cling to my own background, I can embrace everyone else’s as being their best effort seen from their own point of view. I can agree we are speaking of the same mysterious reality, and I have no need to fight to prove which version is better.” He wanted with all his heart for people to come together in the bliss of existence, and he showed gently how it could so easily be done.

Nitya’s commentary echoes the gentle approach to a fiercely absolutist position. “It is with the best of intentions that one begins to set out in the search for truth. As the search is directed by a finite mind using the finite doors of perception and the limited concepts of word images, sooner or later the seeker is likely to confine his final summation of truth as a fixed entity visualized by the individual’s mind.” As soon as we think we’ve got it, an image becomes fixed of the ever-changing, ever-ungraspable Absolute. While the Real flows on, we stop and examine our image so as to understand it better. It’s such a natural thing to do! The paradox is that even as we are learning and growing, what we are learning is going rapidly out of date. What we are learning about can never be fully grasped nor even momentarily stopped from its continuous explosion of creation. Yet we cannot help but try.

The major religions are stages where large chunks of humanity held onto the vision of the moment, and are still studying and pondering over it. There’s nothing wrong with this, as long as

you allow that others will be attracted to other aspects and so will explain things differently. The class readily agreed that the Absolute could be worshipped in everything and anything, even “bad” things like toxic chemicals. To a chemist, those chemicals are the most amazing things on earth, infinitely entrancing. The rest of us think they are horrible. It is incumbent on the chemist to ensure that her object of worship doesn’t cause harm on the horizontal world by keeping it properly contained. If she inflicts her chemicals on delicate organisms, she can do great damage.

The partiality to one version of truth, beautiful as it may be, conceals a dangerous subtext. Nitya concludes, “Unless one transcends the conditioned operation of the mind he will again and again come back, through the back door as it were, to the same world of ignorance that he is trying to escape by adopting one device after another.” We begin by loving truth, but as Deb said we then grasp it with our mind and truncate it. We unavoidably make it an image, an idol. Unless we can release our grasp, open our minds, conflict will arise over the very thing that was apprehended in sweetness and light. This game takes wisdom to be played well. There is much left to learn. We are invited to step on into the Maya Darsana for further instruction. Aum.

Part II (from 2004 Peace Class)

Probably the most important idea of the evening centered around how intuition reveals the Absolute. Henri Bergson, the great French philosopher, found agreement with the Upanishads in his equating the Absolute with pure movement and pure duration. It is like a flowing river. Our normal mode of thought is to sit on the bank and make mental images, like snapshots of it. Our minds are filled with these static snapshots, which I illustrated with rectangular picture frames superimposed on the flowing river.

The river is the source of an infinite number of static images, but no amount of images put together can ever equal the pure flow of the Absolute. Although 24 frames a second can fool the mind into perceiving a flow of static images as a movie, it's still only a simulation. To truly participate in the flow one must plunge into the river by an act of intuition, in the way Bergson describes: "The true mystic just opens their heart to the onrushing wave." This illustrates his two ways of knowing a thing, either from outside as ideas about it or inside as being it.

Some images are fairly accurate and others less accurate. Some have the mark of eternal truth when they really match the flow. But all images fall outside the river to some degree.

We discussed in some detail how we become attached to our mental imagery and fail to keep up with the flow. Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters* put all their youthful, psychedelic-inspired energies into trying to catch up to the moment, but found it always just ahead of them. The minute you examine something, you have to hold it for a second and you're already a step behind.

"So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past," are the immortal words that F. Scott (no relation) Fitzgerald ends *The Great Gatsby*. We fixate on our best assessment of reality with the help of parents, school and church, and lose the dynamism we're born with as children of the Absolute. Worse, we become identified with our images to the point that any criticism of them is a criticism of us. Now we're ready to fight. People who have different lifestyles or attitudes are an implicit criticism of our own views, so we resent or hate them. The dark side of our mind thinks the best fix is to destroy those who are different from us.

Luckily, since everyone understands this mechanism, which is widely taught, world peace is flourishing on all hands....

An important corollary is that many people are satisfied with the happiness they derive from clinging to outmoded ideas. As

long as they aren't being excessively harmful to others, there's no value in trying to change their minds. It's ourselves we have to work on. We're the ones who are unsatisfied with the dead letter and are looking for the living spirit. Let the dead bury the dead. Find the river of ever-new life for yourself and don't worry about anyone else. Once you've found it you can share your light with all, but until you do you're only making trouble. An awful lot of conflict comes from arguing over whose static concepts are better. Yes, they have a relative degree of largeness and inclusiveness or smallness and exclusivity, but that's not important. The real solution is to attain the Absolute and incorporate all relative positions into your oceanic vision of love and forgiveness.

Here's how Nataraja Guru summarizes a section on intuition:

The Absolute has to have a living content, without which it is nothing more than a word without meaning in life. The content is the resultant of the meeting, from two opposing sides, as it were, of physical and metaphysical factors, both reducible in terms of *intuition* into a common homogeneity. When so reduced into unitive terms there will be a mutual transparency and participation between matter and mind in a neutral matrix with a constant osmotic interchange, like respiration mentioned in many of the Upanishads.

Action and inaction meet in such an alternating osmotic interchange that is both inter-subjective and trans-physical. This grand osmosis, which includes the macro- and microcosms at once within consciousness, collective or individual, yields peace and joy without limit. Such are some of the high claims of Vedanta. (*Vedanta Revalued and Restated*, Ch. 12)

A key factor in staying alive and attuned to the world in a healthy way is to reevaluate or even discard old frames of reference when they become outmoded. The great minds that found their way into the flow conceived beautiful frameworks to express what they discovered. We have been blessed with their visions as the religious and philosophical systems that have been handed down to us, and they can remain valid for a long time. But they only remain alive if they are reinterpreted by each succeeding generation. Once conformity with somebody else's interpretation is enforced, the visions die. Many examples leapt to everyone's mind here, not only Christianity, but "the Founding Fathers," detachment, God, and on and on. Once-grand ideas that have been reinterpreted until they bear little or no resemblance to the original, but have become albatrosses we hang on each other like leis.

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9/6/16

Asatya Darsana verse 10

The One is real, not a second;
the unreal indeed appears to be real;
the *sivalingam* is stone alone,
not a second made by the sculptor.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*One (alone) is real, not a second:
What is unreal indeed seems as being real;
The Siva-lingam is stone itself,
Not a second made by the sculptor.*

Over the years I have developed a good habit of writing up the class the morning after it takes place. Due to unavoidable demands this week I have missed my rhythm, and will have to cobble something together long after the glow of the class has faded into the background. What's more, I don't have Susan's excellent summations these days to draw on. Too bad, since the Asatya Darsana has turned out to be so powerful and essential. But I'll give it my best shot.

We are now in the stage of spiritual search that most of us are content to consider already over and done with. Hey, we get it, so let's move on to the fun stuff. Whether or not we really do get it, the problem with this attitude is that it dualizes spirituality into a process with a before and after, which is precisely what Narayana Guru is scrupulous to avoid.

The Guru has no specific program he wants to inculcate, since we do not need any predetermined pathway to become the spark of truth we already embody. This is what is meant by Bill's frequent invocation of Zen master Suzuki Roshi saying that we don't sit in Zen to accomplish anything, we sit because it is our true nature. Spiritual programs lead to being stuck, to being "secondary" in the terms of the present verse. Direct involvement is primary. Once you have a fixed program you are outside the essential reality, as the histories of religion and science teach us. What was once firmly believed is now viewed as an absurd anachronism. Learning a specific skill is another matter, and that's where programs of development have their place. But we're after something else here.

All so-called evolutionary steps are integral aspects of a unitive event of heightened awareness. We don't self-examine and then move on to Elysian fields. Everything is already taking place within the Elysian field. The self-examination is the way we open ourselves to our complete reality, sometimes called our true being. If critical questioning stops, we are likely to stagnate. What is

heralded by the ego as spiritual growth may turn out to be nothing more than a new way of giving up and going back to sleep.

And no, it's not just Scott being a jerk again, as usual. In any case, I'm not the original jerk. Daniel Pinchbeck, in his most excellent book *Breaking Open the Head*, salts his work with a couple of pithy quotes that could adorn the gates of eternity. First, a sweet one from author Joseph Conrad: "One must explore deep and believe the incredible to find the new particles of truth floating in an ocean of insignificance." Then there is this classic from Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*:

Whenever there is a reaching down into innermost experience, into the nucleus of the personality, most people are overcome by fear and many run away.... The risk of inner experience, the adventure of the spirit, is in any case alien to most human beings. The possibility that such experience might have psychic reality is anathema to them.

Astonishingly, Jung's observation is just about as true of spiritual seekers as those who believe only in superficial realities. The primary difference is the method of denial.

The class began, naturally enough, with an examination of the sivalingam icon. We passed around a group of pictures of them found on the internet, for those unfamiliar with the ubiquitous image from the Siva temples and central to Siva worship. Narayana Guru himself was grounded in the Saivite tradition. While having extremely complex implications, the essential sculpture consists of a conical, rather phallic stone rising out of a stylized vagina-like receptacle. As with much traditional art, there is little variation in how it is realized. Nitya provides essential background in his commentary:

In India the *sivalingam* is an icon carved out of stone by a sculptor, which is used as a protolinguistic expression of the omnipresent auspiciousness of everlasting, existential beauty. Just as children may see a motorcar, a dog, or a man in the piece of wood, adults also use the crutches of icons as pegs to hang their ideas on.

In the previous nine verses of the *Asatya Darsanam* it was clearly shown to us that our notion of the world is eidetic. In the *sivalingam* there is neither a phallic emblem nor the auspicious Absolute—it is only a piece of stone, but the sculptor can visualize the indescribable Absolute in it.

I likened the sivalingam to two prominent symbols we all use without a second thought: the numerals 1 and 0, the one thrusting through the other. Interacting fruitfully, these genital-like numerals can be made to produce a digital universe that is hard to distinguish from an analog one. In the twenty-first century we worship the digital icons far more than any supplicants in a Hindu temple ever could admire a sculpture. One and oneness are visually as well as conceptually related.

Zero also indicates undifferentiated unity in another way, described by Buddhists as *sunyata*, the shining void. In this study also, we are invited to substitute nothingness for our false beliefs. Surprisingly, this does not lead to despair, which is all modernity currently offers as the fruit of deconstruction, by taking away our security blankets while providing no tangible substitute. In Narayana Guru's perspective, we contact the fullness of the depths of our being by first popping the balloon of our provisional hypotheses, otherwise known as our ignorance and stupidity.

Bill recalled our good friend Thomas P. as waking up each morning for many years with the thought, "Up till today I have been foolish. From now on I will do better." A simultaneously humbling and energizing affirmation. Science itself is a continuum

where surmises are examined and found wanting, and so upgraded to new and better surmises. This is a vast improvement over clinging to outmoded surmises. Yet each dog has its day.

Jan wondered why and how this tenth verse is the culmination of the chapter, a worthy question as there is a definite direction to each darsana. As noted earlier, these last few verses are segueing into the next group, the Maya Darsana. This is a good place to affirm that the One is real and all representations of it are unreal, at least in terms of how accurately they represent oneness, and that's precisely what this verse does. This conundrum is the essence of maya, and the key to the entire deconstructive process we have been undertaking.

Deb responded to Jan that the Asatya Darsana undercuts everything, so here at the end Narayana Guru reaffirms the uncuttable essence. (Recall Gita II. 23-25: Weapons do not cut This, fire does not burn This, and water does not wet This; wind does not dry This. Indeed it is uncleavable; It is non-inflammable; It is unwettable and non-dryable also—everlasting, all-pervading, stable, immobile; It is eternal. It is undefined, unthinkable is It, as non-subject to change is It spoken of.) Moreover, the lingam is the most important visual element in Siva worship. In the history of Asian art, one of Deb's specialties, she noted there is a deep root that produces the manifold expressions: their exuberance is all tied together by oneness.

I have often wondered if the verse was expressed wrong somehow, that the word *not* should be deleted and it should read: "the sivalingam is stone alone, a second made by the sculptor." Certainly the sculpture is not the entirety of the Absolute, it is only a symbol signifying the Absolute, and therefore secondary, which is the main thrust of the Asatya Darsana and Nitya's magnificent commentary on it. No one was able to make a case for it in the class. Perhaps you can send us one.... [Later I decided he meant it is *not* a second Absolute.]

In any event, the stone's identity as a sivalingam is intrinsically meaningless; we have to penetrate to the reality it represents before it can have any value for us. Let's bow to Nitya's trenchant elucidation:

The main operational meaning of *linga* is the application of a conceptualized idea expressed through the medium of a protolinguistic ideogram, such as a sign or symbol, or through the metalinguistic expression of a name. When we understand the full implication of *linga* in this way, the word *sivalingam* as a phallic emblem of Siva turns out to be a narrow meaning. Siva stands for the indestructible reality without beginning or end, which by its own nature is awareness through and through, and which is peaceful due to its having no modifications whatsoever. Even the term "unnameable" is a name; the qualification "indescribable" is already a description. When the indescribable is indicated with a sign or symbol, it becomes *sivalingam*.

So it seems to me that Nitya is already bumping the verse up to mean that the sivalingam isn't even a symbol for most of us, it's just an oddly shaped stone, period. Unless you are steeped in Indian iconography, it won't tell you anything about the Absolute at all. There is nothing within the shape that says "Absolute." Since we are engaged in deconstruction at this stage of the Darsanamala, it sounds like this is indeed what the Guru is after. Wow. Intense. Iconoclastic. It's almost blasphemous; it certainly is from an orthodox perspective.

If this is true, the sculptor can never make an adequate symbol for the Absolute. All our creations are doomed from the start to be unreality masquerading as reality. It's scary. Happily, later on Narayana Guru will be reconstructing a bare bones essential framework for a harmoniously functioning universe,

which gives due credence to the existent miracle of our harmoniously functioning universe. But first he has to strip all the flotsam and jetsam out of the way. There's plenty of that.

Nitya credits the artist as knowing the limits of their craft, which is nice of him. Most of us do what we do out of a conviction we are channeling reality. We think our version is better, more beautiful or whatever. The thirst to depict something excellent is what impels the artist to create in the first place. In some respects, not being inhibited by a wise philosophy allows creativity to blast through all barriers more readily. Nitya depicts how the meditative artist, by contrast, goes about creating beauty:

Before the sculptor begins to work on a stone he conceives the idea of the symbol that is to represent for him and others the idea of the Absolute. He knows pretty well that the attributes of the Divine, such as timelessness, omniscience, and omnipresence can never be adequately presented through his craftsmanship. These eternal values in his mind belong to the vertical order. The medium and the craft used to convert the medium into a message belong to the horizontal order. In the *sivalingam*, which he carves out of a stone, he combines his vertical value parameter and the horizontal craft and medium into a single holistic expression.

This is a crucial insight, and a perfect use for Nataraja Guru's Cartesian coordinate analogy of the vertical and horizontal. Our unfoldment as human beings as well as artists is an invisible vertical process that is only roughly indicated by the ways we express it in actual horizontal terms. What we see and show is always an analogy for the entirety of what we are. This evoked in Deb the image of the river, always flowing, even as it produces an endless variety of gorgeous temporary patterns.

Of course, we continually relate to the actual products of our efforts as if they *were* eternal and universal. This is fair enough, yet our partisanship may lead to dreadful consequences, such as wanting to eradicate alternatives to what we consider worthy. Nitya cautions explicitly against this:

There is always the possibility of people of lesser intuitive perception missing the message and looking upon the material artifact as a reality in itself. The great crusade made by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers against idolatry is in its truest purport a call to recognize the essence. Yet even in such a noble endeavor, fanatical enthusiasts missed the message and have come to the same level as the idolaters in looking at the artifact as an object of hatred.

It is only fair to include the rest of us as potential transgressors:

This kind of protolinguistic ideogram is not confined to the followers of Siva. In the Christian form of worship such symbolic expressions are used extensively. In C. G. Jung's *Man and His Symbols* we can see the extensive use of symbolic representations by people belonging to all cultures and times. Metaphors, similes, and other allegorical expressions used in language differ from the stone-wrought image of the *sivalingam* only in the medium selected by the exponent.

So in a way we are condemned to live by analogy. Yet with Darsanamala we are being led to include more direct experience at the heart of how we express ourselves.

Deb concluded from this that the wise love each other for what they are, not for what they believe. We argue when we are attached to our favorite images; the wise are not.

Paul was brought up in a fundamentalist Christian environment. He remembered young girls in tears because they had been bawled out for not wearing the requisite old-fashioned dress on a Wednesday night—a perfect example of the absurdity of beliefs. How in the world could choosing one type of clothing over another influence your relationship with the essence of the universe? And yet we fall for more sophisticated versions of such lunacy all the time. We choose all kinds of window-dressings because we are assured they are going to make us a better person in one respect or another. Foolish. It keeps us busy, at any rate.

Luckily for us, mistaking an image for reality, while nearly inevitable, is functionally efficient so long as we are aware of the discrepancy. Paul noted how images do help us to input the beyond, so are necessary. This is the essential paradox: we need them and they work, but they are not eternal, and so not ultimately real. We have to be prepared to continually modify and upgrade our imagery. Even recognizing our perceptions as imagery instead of “truth,” “reality,” and so on, is an important step. Our mental framing is always inadequate. It works for a while, then gets bogged down and stuck. We lose our flexibility. We have to let go to avoid tragic fixations.

While Nitya has made the connection between art and idolatry perfectly clear here, he has continually added affirmations throughout the study to help us deal with the ferocity of the material. The idea is that by stripping away our dependency on metaphors, we may access something solid beneath the façade. Since we are timid souls, we need to have faith in an essential solidity to help us move forward. Without it we may come to a grinding halt in confusion, or even lash out in anger, as religious fanatics are wont to do. This is a risk we take if we wholeheartedly enter into the mystical power of Narayana Guru’s teachings, which is why we have spent so much effort in assuring a global, all-inclusive, loving attitude is in place before we begin breaking

down the barricades. As an anonymous friend recently wrote, it is wise to have a staunch friend at our side to reel us in if we go off course. Nitya agrees:

It is with the best of intentions that one begins to set out in the search for truth. As the search is directed by a finite mind using the finite doors of perception and the limited concepts of word images, sooner or later the seeker is likely to confine their final summation of truth as a fixed entity visualized by the individual's mind. This is in no way different from the sculptor deciding to express his visualization of the Absolute in the form of a *sivalingam*. It certainly helps him and another person of identical vision to sense the Absolute by extrapolating the meaning of the symbol beyond the scope of the manmade artifact, as well as by interpolating into the medium the purest of notions that can never be confined to any form or name.

I read out a relevant part of my Gita commentary that I think makes this kind of framing more explicit, and will append it in Part II. I use contemplative words as my most creative art form, where others prefer music or visual imagery and so on. Nitya wants us to always remain humble that no matter what our chosen medium we will never achieve the unachievable, and affirms that there are always pros and cons in every endeavor:

We began this chapter by saying that all that is, is the mind. Unless one transcends the conditioned operation of the mind he will again and again come back, through the back door as it were, to the same world of ignorance that he is trying to escape by adopting one device after another. Empirical perception can be erroneous or valid, but in either case it comes under the category of relativity. That is why modern scientists like Einstein, Planck, and Heisenberg are discrediting the possibility

of attaining any final version of truth. The rishis of India are not pessimistic about the realization of truth. They do not identify the Self with the mind. By knowing the Self one becomes truth. This point is going to be elaborated in the next chapter.

This is the ultimate paradox of our position as sentient beings. Art both indicates the One and pushes it away. Neither aspect is adequate by itself. We have to dynamically combine both together to be fully alive.

Finally, Nitya leaves us with a few words of summation to what the Asatya Darsana has been all about:

This chapter is mainly to focus our attention on sifting the unreal from the real.... Even after making such a rational assessment of the several pitfalls that we may come across in the world of names and forms, there is no guarantee that such knowledge will spare us from conditionings.

Conditionings are after all an integral and unavoidable part of how our body-minds function. We can work to rewire our conditioning to optimize it, and keep aware of its influence. Beyond that, we may be fortunate to have moments of liberation when our conditioning loosens its grip and we can catch our breath in freedom. Our well-directed efforts help align us with that possibility.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

It is the Self that alone is real. Anything other than the Self is not at all real. The unreal world merely has a semblance of the real.

That which seems like the *Siva-lingam* (i.e., the phallic emblem of Siva) is really the stone itself. As for the *Siva-lingam* it merely seems as if it is a reality independent of the stone. What is real is the stone and the *Siva-lingam* is what is supposed on the basis of what really exists. The *Siva-lingam* is not one that the sculptor made independently of the stone. It is the stone itself. The stone is real and the *Siva-lingam* is unreal. In the same manner the Absolute is real and the world is unreal. The unreal world (only) seems real.

* * *

Here is the poem Deb read out, which eloquently expresses the spirit of our present contemplations:

In Memory of Joseph Brodsky
by Mark Strand

It could be said, even here, that what remains of the self
Unwinds into a vanishing light, and thins like dust, and heads
To a place where knowing and nothing pass into each other, and
through;
That it moves, unwinding still, beyond the vault of brightness
ended,
And continues to a place which may never be found, where the
unsayable,
Finally, once more is uttered, but lightly, quickly, like random rain
That passes in sleep, that one imagines passes in sleep.
What remains of the self unwinds and unwinds, for none
Of the boundaries holds – neither the shapeless one between us,
Nor the one that falls between your body and your voice. Joseph,
Dear Joseph, those sudden reminders of your having been – the
places

And times whose greatest life was the one you gave them – now
appear
Like ghosts in your wake. What remains of the self unwinds
Beyond us, for whom time is only a measure of meanwhile
And the future no more than et cetera et cetera ... but fast and
forever.

* * *

My Gita commentary excerpted from VII.3, in keeping with
the spirit of the verse, aims to nudge us out of our habitual
complacency:

3) Among thousands of men, one perchance strives for
perfection. Even among the striving who have attained, one
perchance knows Me according to proper principles.

The first thousand under reference are the multitudes that
busy themselves with mundane matters—getting and spending and
all that. Only the rare individual wants to know the meaning of life,
and how to detach from all that ceaseless and circumscribed
activity. This is not at all surprising. It is the rarity of the second
order of magnitude that makes us wonder.

Many of those who “seek the havens” (Tolkien) or “dance to
a different drummer” (Thoreau) initially feel superior that they are
“far from the madding crowd” (Hardy). Unfortunately, the vast
majority are merely looking to replace an old, outdated formula
with a more modern, up-to-date one. Or a more ancient and
venerable one. They believe that by learning a few rote phrases or
ideas or following some prescribed practice they have
accomplished all that is possible. But Krishna assures us that the
Absolute cannot be reached by any formula. Only the rare soul

who dares to step outside all artificial barriers has the potential to meet it face to face.

There is a world of difference between the rare individual in touch with their dharma who truly marches to the beat of a nonconforming drummer, and those who only read about it and then fantasize and dream about different drummers in a romantic way, but timidly stick close to the tried and true. The latter make up the 999 of the second thousand who don't know the Absolute according to proper principles.

A brief survey of history will show us that even the most perfect formula quickly becomes a stale cliché. Humanity preserves the best formulas the longest, but over time they lose their meaning and become empty strings of syllables. The second thousand is mainly made up of repeaters of improved slogans, but who are not striving to learn their meaning. There is really very little to separate them from their mundane brethren. They want a code of laws to cling to. They are not interested in real matters of the spirit, “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (Jesus)

One in a thousand thousands is one in a million, the very phrase used today to indicate maximum rarity. If it were as common as one in a million, there would be over 8000 enlightened humans on earth at present. Probably the true figure is more like one in a billion. But Krishna is trying to teach something more than simple rarity. He wants us to avoid the easy pitfalls of spiritual egotism. We must ask ourselves if we are simply acting out our old habits dressed in fancy clothing, and thereby disguising our shortcomings from ourselves. Can we dare to stand naked in our own candid assessment? Or must we always dwell in a “culture of make believe,” (Derrick Jensen) in order to validate ourselves in the eyes of others? Who will dare to make their life real?

If there is any scripture that should be viewed as not peddling a formula but recommending transcending all formulas, the Bhagavad Gita is it.

Part III

I might have mentioned in passing that the river Deb mentioned is an ideal symbol of the horizontal/vertical coordinates. The flow of the river is its vertical aspect, while each ensemble along the course is a horizontal component. The nice thing about the analogy is how easy it is to accept both aspects simultaneously—how could you have a river with only one axis or the other? They quite naturally go together.

I've also been thinking about Ramana Maharshi's advice to ponder the question "Who am I?" We live in a world obsessed with getting the right answer and being done with it, and much spirituality bears the stain. Ramana's question has a well-known and simple answer: I am the Absolute; we are all the Absolute. But the answer is meaningless without mulling over the question. That's where all the understanding comes from. That's what transforms us. Being the Absolute can mean anything. What it does mean is whatever we put into it by contemplating it with our whole heart and soul.

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Amara was in synchrony with us, and sent her inspiration, implying that the sivalingam activates or is activated in the seventh chakra:

Last night I was reading aloud Verse 9 in the Saundaryalahari.

The last line of the verse strikes me as referencing the deep symbolism of the sivalingam.

“...You do sport with your Lord secretly in the thousand-petaled lotus.”

Nitya opens his commentary of this verse by saying,
“ In this verse we are given a functional structure for the relation of the personal self to the universal Self.”

This verse in total reads...

The earth place in the muladhara, water in manipura,
Fire in svadhisthana, air in the heart, with space above,
And amid eyebrows placing the mind,
while breaking through, You do sport with your Lord secretly
in the thousand-petaled lotus.