

## **VII Jnana Darsana, Consciousness and its Modifications**

### **Verse 10**

*Aum tat sat*—what is thus instructed, arrived at as the union of the Absolute and the Self, devoid of functions like willing—that is said to be absolute knowledge.

6/26/7

Reaching the end of the seventh Darsana concludes all the preparatory work meticulously laid down for us by the gurus. Almost two years of detailed study has brought us here. It is a rare achievement! We have penetrated deep into the Unknown Territory of a modern day Upanishad. The likes of Narayana, Nataraja and Nitya are unlikely to be seen again in our lifetime, giants among us. As Sir Walter Scott (no known relation) put it, “But search the land of living men / Where wilt thou find their like agen?”

And our achievement is not an end at all, but a preparation to begin in earnest, freed of much of the dead weight we’ve been packing for most of a lifetime. From here on we explore the blissful state of progressively fine-tuned merger in Totality, analogously called love and many other names.

After introducing aum as the word chosen by the ancient rishis to designate the Absolute, Nitya summarizes the possibility we have been presented with:

As Darsanamala is intended to aid the student to realize the union of the Self and the Absolute, the present verse is given as a conclusive teaching that the nondifferentiated knowledge

of the Absolute and the Self can come only when all vestiges of conditionings, both psychologic and cosmologic, have fully disappeared.... The imperiential union of the psychologic and the cosmologic indicated in the present verse is not a knowledge that is one among many items of information that one gains through an act of ratiocination or by dualistic cognition. It is a tremendously sweeping and overwhelming denial of all the limiting adjuncts of an individuated self. After one has embraced this indescribable union, even when the previous individuation returns it does not gain the dynamic status of an ego-centered individual again. Both the psychologic 'I' and the cosmologic 'other' are reduced to mere appearances, and a strong bond of union prevails as a substratum for the superimposition of both 'I' and the 'other'. This knowledge has the existential verity of irrefutability and the subsistential transparency of a boundless Self-knowledge that is not alienated anywhere as a part torn off, or even modulated as an objectivization of any kind. In its absolute value-content it is intensely ecstatic, which can be poorly illustrated by such examples as the total union which is experienced in love. (364-5)

We can note sat-chit-ananda woven through this definition of absolute knowledge as existential verity, subsistential transparency, and value content. In our study we have assiduously sorted out our mental projections and defects to arrive at a reasonable degree of certitude regarding existence. Mental transparency is particularly important as the measure of how prepared we are to move forward in our life free of conditionings. Whatever we cling to will impede the clarity of our contemplation, so we let it go, good, bad and indifferent. We have stopped identifying ourselves with what we believe, because it is never good enough. Belief is already of the past, out of date. Like the contemplative in Atmo, verse 9, we can

now sit alertly, watching the twining vines of attachment snake toward us and adroitly dodging their embrace. Such uncluttered contemplation allows us an unimpeded value vision, where wisdom dances with action on the stage of unalloyed happiness.

Although most of us still cook up our own programs regularly, we have learned how to relinquish the sense of agency and the urge to warp reality to our personal whims. We are open to the intuition of our divinely bequeathed stream of consciousness. Nataraja Guru puts it this way about the concluding verse of Jnana Darsana:

The ultimate goal of awareness is to establish the identity between the living Self and the Absolute. Within the scope of such awareness, there is neither room for such notions as Brahma (the creator) nor for the willing of the phenomenal world. Therefore, because of its superior nature and its identity with the Supreme Self, it has here been referred to as Ultimate Awareness.

Regardless of whether there is a Creator who wills the universe into being or whether we are the willing creators of our personal point of view, we are asked to give up those notions. We aren't giving up things that are true, we are just giving up our ideas about them. Artificial reefs of flotsam and jetsam have grown up around our dualistic beliefs in willing Creators, and we need to clear the channel so our ship can sail through! As soon as we cease snagging our beliefs into a rockpile and holding onto them for dear life, the natural currents of the ocean will do the sweeping for us. We don't have to laboriously dislodge the mess and dispose of it piecemeal.

We talked about this last idea in depth. There is a vast paradigm around painstakingly rooting out all our multitudinous badnesses, I suppose because it's a way of making money for gurus and therapists. We have been reminded many times that attuning

with the Absolute transforms our inner demons into gorgeous statuary, if nothing else. An ancient Chinese saying is that crime and love go hand and hand. Chogyam Trungpa calls our less savory side the manure which enables our good seeds to sprout. He instructs us to never reject isolated parts of ourself, but to accept it all. Acceptance doesn't mean repeating the mistakes, but being kind to yourself about them. Maybe even laughing about them. I can never quote Long Chen Pa enough on The Natural Freedom of Mind:

Since everything is but an apparition  
perfect in being what it is,  
having nothing to do with good or bad,  
acceptance or rejection,  
one may well burst out in laughter!

Both Bill and Susan found the present verse revelatory. Those pesky beliefs about rejecting our "bad" side to advance the "good" are deeply seated. After that, we want to teach our bad side to be good. Only when we stop condemning our foibles as the spawn of Satan, and cozy up to them instead, will we cease tormenting ourself. And we don't have to confess our "sins" to anyone else, though that can be helpful sometimes. We merely have to confess them to our own contemplative eye, never forgetting to relate them to the infinite mercies of the absolute ground of being.

Baird later sent this addition:

An interesting pop version of this idea today is Debbie Ford's book "The Dark Side of the Light Chasers". She quotes Jung who said that the shadow is "the person you would rather not be." In this book she teaches that rather than trying to get rid of or suppress negative traits to become whole, we need to first identify these unlovable traits and then find the gift in each one.

I'll close this Darsana with a relevant quote from an American rishi, Walt Whitman, excerpted from his poem, Song of Myself:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid  
and self-contain'd,  
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,  
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,  
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of  
owning things,  
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived  
thousands of years ago,  
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

\* \* \*

9/26/17

Jnana Darsana verse 10

*Aum tat sat* – what is thus instructed,  
arrived as the union of the Absolute and the Self,  
devoid of functions like willing –  
that is said to be absolute knowledge.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Designated as "AUM that exists"*  
*Attained to unity of the Absolute and the Self*  
*Devoid of willing or other functions*  
*That is said to be ultimate awareness.*

At long last we completed our exploration of the Jnana Darsana, often disrupted by summer activities, and could come to grips with the extensive treatment of conditioning that makes up not only the rest of the darsana but the bulk of the entire work up to now. It's time to get deconditioned!

Deb started us off with the idea that unconditioned knowledge is not something we create or have as a goal, which automatically rules out most of our beliefs about it. We shouldn't keep making false images about what freedom is: if we are clear about understanding ourselves, our effulgence will be visible to us. I added that we address conditioning not so much to become more refined and expert in our handling of our own inevitable limitations (though this is valuable), but to be able to intentionally detach its claws from our psyche. We are aiming for freedom, and the Guru knows it takes more than good intentions to attain it. He is showing us how to transform our wishful thinking and fitful efforts into a more successful strategy. It's going to take a kind of leap out of our comfort zone, but the result is well worth the effort. The class did some really great work on this. First off, Nitya epitomizes the point that conditioning must be overcome:

As Darsanamala is intended to aid the student to realize the union of the Self and the Absolute, the present verse is given as a conclusive teaching that the nondifferentiated knowledge of the Absolute and the Self can come only when all vestiges of conditionings, both psychologic and cosmologic, have fully disappeared.

The word Self is capitalized here because while *atman* includes the whole range of individuation, the end of the spectrum that is analogous with the Absolute is distinguished from the small 's' version that resembles the self of Western psychology: the isolated

individual. In Sanskrit we have to intuit the meaning from the context, but English allows us the distinction afforded by different sized letters. The ambiguity can assist the thoughtful student to notice how the self/Self and the Absolute are in fact not two separate entities, though we inevitably divide them in our mind.

As is often the case, the online Brihadaranyaka Upanishad study with Nancy Y parallels this idea, and I've included some essential suggestions from it in Part II to aid the contemplative investigation. In realizing the Absolute as our very nature, Nitya quotes from one of the most important commentators on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: "Suresvara... maintains the belief that such a revelation will not come by itself unless a person seriously aspires for it."

The verse opens with three perspectives for naming the unnamable Absolute. In Nitya's words: "As *aum*, *tat*, and *sat* are employed differently to describe the indescribable, all three terms have become so semantically rich as to each stand singularly for the Absolute." Meditating on their meaning can bring us to absolute knowledge, if we are steadfast enough. Nitya makes the gist clear enough that his readers should have no doubt:

Indivisible and all-embracing knowledge is *aum*, and that is indicated here as the Absolute. The cosmological aspect of the Absolute and the psychological aspect of the Absolute are indivisibly united.

Deb talked about *aum* as the word of consent, according to the Chandogya Upanishad. In that sense it means not holding on, and allowing the other to be. It is generous. Nitya very often referred to it this way, and Deb's musings led us to the most important thoughts of the night. She took consent to mean 'yes', which is fine, although I would say an Upanishadic consent is perfectly neutral, more like the "Is that so?" of Paul Reps' Story of the

Fisherman (see *That Alone*, p. 470), or a noncommittal “okay.” In any case, ‘yes’ does not necessarily draw us into conflict, while ‘no’ is bound to. When we deny something, we reject it or else seek to “fix” it. It has captured us, in a way. We are giving ourselves over to it. This happens to countries and ethnic groups, as well as to individuals. We could say that the loss of democracy in the US was brought about by the rejection of the USSR, which led to the adoption of precisely the same criminal activities and totalitarianism that the enemy was supposedly using.

Andy enlarged on this aspect in talking about the first Gulf War. US President Bush declared “We have drawn a line in the sand.” (Of course, the line was already behind the enemy, so they had already crossed it.) Andy could see that we draw abstract lines in the sand all the time and then are unhappy that people don’t honor them the way we expect. We don’t have to hold the line, yet we harbor stashes of all kinds of limits that we impose on others. Deb added that these are precisely what we are called upon to renounce: our desires and limitations. For me, the line in the sand is how we seek to justify our “criminal activities.” If we weren’t being selfish and greedy, there would be no need for arbitrary divisions.

The idea of consent has another eminently practical element. We falsely presume we are meant to manipulate the world, to make it right or at least improve it. The idea of consent means we accept it as it is. It is okay. It doesn’t depend on us. We have already learned in this study that if we look carefully enough, all the good and bad elements begin to make sense. They have their reasons. They are evolutes of prior causes, and so have an inevitability to them. We have to dig very deep to uncover any original cause. This reversal of perspective is so profound, and yet we hold back from it because we have been taught it isn’t okay to have it. We’re *supposed* to stay ignorant and upset. Therefore anything that mitigates our misery must be all wrong.



This brought us to writer's block, and how to get creativity flowing again. Often any technique we use becomes part of the block, and the frustration we feel only makes matters worse.

In talking about how we let creative opening happen to us, Susan quoted a favorite author, Elizabeth Gilbert, who suggests we treat creativity as our loving friend who is trying to communicate with us, rather than as a remote and special quality beyond our reach. Susan supplied some pithy quotes from Gilbert, which I will tuck into Part II.

Getting back to the word of consent, Jyothi mentioned that aum is all-embracing: in a way you are saying yes to everything, and it brings you relief and satisfaction. You are giving space for the other to exist.

Deb's perfect example was on the personal level, and everyone felt a strong resonance, especially the women. She recalled a time in her late teens when she was a budding feminist and having a discussion with her very dear brother. Her proclamations of equal rights and opportunities were met with demeaning counterarguments, and she got so furious that she burst into tears. Some years later she realized that her upset was due to an unconscious granting of rightness to the prevailing social position espoused by her brother. She had begun from an underdog posture, and so could never get traction. A liberated perspective would assume equality as the ground, and treat inequality as the perversion, and if she had attained it she would have had much more confidence in herself.

There was so much good discussion around this, and what a great idea for everyone to feel that it spoke to them! I am at a loss of how to put all this in writing, but happily Deb has recounted her story for us:

When my brother and I were both in college—deep into personal exploration and radical ideas—we were out to dinner

with my parents and got into a heated argument about women's rights. I argued passionately about feminism, feeling it intimately as well as ideologically. My brother was clever and intellectually adept and was having fun picking apart my arguments. It didn't seem to me that much of it was personal to him, but I remember feeling so imperiled by what he said, feeling that my own freedom was about to be revoked. It was threatening and infuriating and I finally burst into tears at what I felt aggression towards me.

A few years later when I thought about that argument I almost laughed, both out of amusement and relief. It was mostly relief because at that point I no longer felt as if my brother's ideas had power over me. I felt more liberated and more firm in my own self. His arguments were his arguments, but they were not some kind of closet in which to hold me. I had liberated myself and could not be held in thrall to what I felt were wrong positions. Of course that wasn't an end point, and my understanding of freedom has enlarged and altered over the years. The point that struck home for me was that by releasing myself from certain attitudes I had also released myself from threats by others.

I know that in other societies those very ideas are enforced by violence and are not so easy to shake off. But that is another arena.

Jan was one of those who strongly identified with Deb's story. She felt that most of us have family history relationships that can hold us back. She could see how knowing this drew her toward a more loving place, and she resolved to be more clear in her self-awareness and not to be so triggered by other peoples' expectations. She wanted to look hard at the ways we are coerced into giving up who we are.

I added that skewing the pitch—such as enforcing inequality behind proclamations of fairness—was a primary tool of those who exploited others and drew comfort from their elevated perch, callous to the suffering they were causing. The liberation Narayana Guru advocates is eminently practical because it frees us from this kind of exploitation. There is no reason we have to accept unfairness, even when it is enshrined in the legal codes and social habits on every hand. Fighting those head on will take many lifetimes, but freeing ourselves has a possibility of success in only a few years or decades. With a breakthrough it can be initiated in an instant, though to make it continuous is likely to still take a lot of practice, as the environment is usually set against us. But we shouldn't wait for legal permission to be ourselves. Let it happen now!

Paul put this idea in a unique and helpful way: we have let our transient perspectives become our entire wisdom. He then retold the metaphoric story that ends Nitya's *In the Stream of Consciousness*:

### Sink or Swim

Two friends and I were sailing a boat on a lake in India. The particular part of the lake we were on was notorious for being tricky. When we took a certain turn, the boat capsized and all three of us were thrown overboard.

None of us knew anything about the hazards of that lake. When I came up, I saw my friends thrashing about and gulping mouthfuls of water. They were in a panic and seemed to be drowning. Cautiously I put my legs down, feeling for the bottom. It turned out that the boat had capsized in shallow water, and when I stood up it was only up to my shoulders. I rushed to my friends and showed them that they could stand on their own feet, and together we waded out of the lake.

Today when I see many of my friends struggling, I am very much reminded of this incident.

The central notion in this dilemma is that we are led (by both science and religion) to presume we are miserable wretches who don't deserve anything. Vedanta proclaims the exact opposite: we are in essence the Absolute, and equal to everyone and everything. It's a truly revolutionary idea, although our conditioning militates against us realizing it.

Bushra made a crucial point that whenever she experiences this equanimity of oneness it is a rattling experience. It shifts her world. In other words, it is transformative, and she has an ecstatic feeling that something important has happened. She lives in its shadow, having her concepts shifted and rearranged. Moni agreed that this is the same thing she feels when she goes into a temple: the beauty of the place lifts her out of her smaller self, and the effect lasts a long time.

In terms of the present darsana, freedom and bondage, or liberation and servitude (or slavery), are what's meant by unconditioned and conditioned. Conditioning is very practical, and it bites us hard. "Proper behavior" in society means capitulating to our bondage. Hopefully we are already experiencing the reduction of our social claustrophobia, and it's high time to really make the teachings come alive in our being. Nitya first invites us to the next darsana, the Bhakti Darsana. While most often taken in the conditioned sense of worship, bhakti literally means "conjunction with light." Nitya reiterates the transformational aspect, which Bill so often quotes as "bhakti is continuous contemplation on the Self." The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Shankara and Narayana Guru all make this assertion. Nitya stretches the idea in a practical direction: "Bhakti... is going to be defined in the next darsana as a continuous process of knowledge being weaned away from the conditioned to become undifferentiated from the unconditioned."

(364) Contemplation thus gains a well-directed intention—the very one we have been elaborating in this study.

Nitya further invites us to become freer through dedicating ourselves to the rest of the work, in a very inspiring paragraph:

The imperiential union of the psychologic and the cosmologic indicated in the present verse is not a knowledge that is one among many items of information that one gains through an act of ratiocination or by dualistic cognition. It is a tremendously sweeping and overwhelming denial of all the limiting adjuncts of an individuated self. After one has embraced this indescribable union, even when the previous individuation returns it does not gain the dynamic status of an ego-centered individual again. Both the psychologic ‘I’ and the cosmologic ‘other’ are reduced to mere appearances, and a strong bond of union prevails as a substratum for the superimposition of both ‘I’ and the ‘other’. This knowledge has the existential verity of irrefutability and the subsistential transparency of a boundless Self-knowledge that is not alienated anywhere as a part torn off, or even modulated as an objectivization of any kind. In its absolute value-content it is intensely ecstatic, which can be poorly illustrated by such examples as the total union which is experienced in love. Finite experiencing of love between two people is prized above everything because that is the nearest individuals can arrive at with their conditioned knowledge to the appreciation of the blissful nature of the Self nondifferentiated from the Absolute. It is this blessed state that is going to be dealt with progressively in the next three darsanas. (364-5)

Once again, don’t miss the practical hints on uniting the Self and the Absolute reprinted in Part II.

I closed the class with a reading from Nitya's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary. First I thanked everyone for the community of interest that makes the class go beyond anything I can feel or know individually. The support we give each other, and the group sense of belonging and caring, makes for a supremely special high point of the week. I hope some of that spirit even gets communicated to those who only tune in via the emails.

Beginning the second volume of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Nitya offers a more eloquent paean to the group endeavor than I was capable of. He is introducing the famous story of King Janaka offering great wealth for winning a philosophical competition attended by many philosophers, which the sage Yajnavalkya wins. First Nitya recounts a gem I didn't read out:

Shankara points to the relevance of Janaka giving a thousand cows and gold for just answering questions. The lesson is that resolving doubts and coming to know the Absolute is many times more valuable than wealth. Wisdom is that which is most rare, not cows, gold, prestige or the success of winning the competition. This example is given to impress upon us that our search is not for social or economic values. Yajnavalkya's rare knowledge is worth far more than any number of cows or amount of gold. (II.5)

And here's what I did read, an appreciation of what we have together, and what we may not realize is more valuable than gold:

This chapter brings us into intimate relation with the innermost flow of the harmony of reason which interrelates values. The discussions between the seers at the conference deepen the certitude in our consciousness. The impact of the shared search takes us from the intellectual to a wider field of experience: to living our oneness, in beauty and joy. The finality of truth

comes not from the head alone but from our knowing with our senses and mind and even intuitive flashes. Each person is aided in listening, pondering over, and living truth by communion with a community of lovers of truth. (II.5)

## Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

It is the same unconditioned awareness of the first verse that is also treated in this verse. The word *AUM* is what has been conferred by ancient sages (*rishis*) as designating the Absolute in the form of pure awareness. The *sruti* (original Vedic texts), *smriti* (traditional secondary texts) and *puranas* (epic or heroic lore), all present the same wisdom in applied form, and the word *AUM* is well known to be used in these texts as denoting a meaning everywhere referable to the Absolute. In other words, "unlimited" "absolute" and "awareness" are the same as *AUM*, and this is the Absolute. Such phrases as "*AUM* the one eternal letter is the Absolute," "*AUM* is all that," and "*AUM* is the Absolute," are phrases indicating the same truth in the above body of literature. Patanjali also declares, "That Absolute remaining always untouched by harsh or painful activities is indicated by the descriptive sentence, "the uttered syllable *AUM*," and "The Lord has many names." Of all, the most superior and general in applicability, easy to utter by all persons, and the object of meditation by everyone, is the syllable *AUM*. The word *AUM* has also the meaning of general assent. Any name applied to the Lord (*isvara*) who is of the form of pure consciousness is valid, when referred to by *AUM*. Because it is not capable of being referred to by any name at all, it is beyond the reach of mind and speech, it has been indicated by the relative pronoun "that" (*tat*). By "that" something is meant, which is beyond all predications. Being

eternal and essentially of the stuff of pure consciousness, it is called existent (*sat*). This term means, it has an existent reality in all the three aspects of time. The philosophical principle indicated here is that all other things are not real, and the only reality is the Absolute. Therefore, what has been described as “*AUM*” or “that” or “existent” are three perspectives of the same. Thus, the three syllables *aum-tat-sat* have been accepted in such authentic literature as the Vedas, as well-known terms for absolute awareness (which is the same as the Lord or the Absolute).

The ultimate goal of awareness is to establish the identity between the living Self and the Absolute. Within the scope of such awareness, there is neither room for such notions as Brahmà (the creator) nor for the willing of the phenomenal world. Therefore, because of its superior nature and its identity with the Supreme Self, it has here been referred to as Ultimate Awareness.

\* \* \*

Jan was eloquent about *aum*. It reminded her of a time in Mexico when she observed a mother being loving to her young daughter, how unselfconscious she was in acting in ways that are frowned on here. Jan felt that *aum* meant letting the total into us, letting it integrate into us. She hopes to find a deeper place where she is in unity with it. For that to happen she has to make room for it. I added that there is more room than we think, and cited Nitya’s retelling of the tea party from Alice in Wonderland, in *That Alone*. I might as well include the whole end of verse 21:

Even after we learn this wisdom, when we go out in the world our life is again governed by preferences. ‘My’ comes instead of ‘our’. “He is my friend, my Guru. I have a right to protect my friend.” “No, no. He is *my* friend; he is my Guru. I see it like this.” Then they fight. The combat is in the ego field. From



there if you can get into the spirit field it is very wide; there is enough room for everything. When Alice wanted to join the tea party, all the animals said, “No room! No room!” Alice was indignant. “There is plenty of room. Why do you say there is no room?”

There *is* plenty of room. You don’t have to fight and say that because that person is there you don’t have any space now. Your space is not taken away by anyone. The space you occupy is always there for you, and the space occupied by the other is there for them. The Absolute is big enough to include everything and everyone.

Jesus said, “Don’t bother about the flocks. My sheep can be outside the flock also. Why do you bother about a person being in a different church? If I am really the Good Shepherd, I will go where he is. It doesn’t matter if he wanders away from the group. In my Father’s mansion there are many chambers.” That’s a beautiful way of putting it. There is not just one chamber in God’s mansion; it has such variety that there are unlimited possibilities.

We have to reorganize our lives and make our visions wide. The more interests that are there, the more wonderful it is. You paint and I sing and another person dances: it will only enrich our lives the more. Why should everyone do the same thing? In contrast to the Soviet communists, Mao Tse Tung once said, “Instead of one flower, let there be a million flowers blossoming. Why should there be only the red flower? Let there be a million flowers with a million hues, flourishing.” That’s wonderful. Even when a million flowers of a million hues flourish, it is the flower-ness that we glorify. In other words, if we know the essential value that is lived out differently by different people, and if we glorify that, it is one. Let us cultivate that insight by which the oneness is immortalized.

\* \* \*

Here are the excerpts on creativity Susan supplied from Elizabeth Gilbert's *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear* (Riverhead Books, 2015):

“But inspiration is still sitting there right beside me, and it is trying. Inspiration is trying to send me messages in every form it can—through dreams, through portents, through clues, through coincidences, through déjà vu, through kismet, through surprising waves of attraction and reaction, through the chills that run up my arms, through the hair that stands up on the back of my neck, through the pleasure of something new and surprising, through stubborn ideas that keep me awake all night long . . . whatever works. Inspiration is always trying to work with me.”

“Pure creativity is magnificent expressly because it is the opposite of everything else in life that's essential or inescapable (food, shelter, medicine, rule of law, social order, community and familial responsibility, sickness, loss, death, taxes, etc.). Pure creativity is something better than a necessity; it's a gift. It's the frosting. Our creativity is a wild and unexpected bonus from the universe.”

“In order to live this way - free to create, free to explore - you must possess a fierce sense of personal entitlement. Creative entitlement simply means believing that you are allowed to be here, and that - merely by being here - you are allowed to have a voice and a vision of your own. The poet David Whyte calls this sense of creative entitlement ‘the arrogance of belonging,’ and claims that it is an absolutely vital privilege to cultivate if you wish to interact more vividly with life. Without this arrogance of belonging, you will never be able to take any creative risks whatsoever. Without it, you will never push yourself out of the suffocating insulation of personal safety and into the frontiers of the beautiful and

unexpected. It is a divine force that will actually take you out of yourself and allow you to engage more fully with life. Because often what keeps you from creative living is your self-absorption (your self-doubt, your self-disgust, your self-judgment, your crushing sense of self-protection). The arrogance of belonging pulls you out of the darkest depths of self-hatred - not by saying ‘I am the greatest!’ but merely by saying ‘I am here!’”

“I believe that our planet is inhabited not only by animals and plants and bacteria and viruses, but also by ideas. Ideas are a disembodied, energetic life-form. They are completely separate from us, but capable of interacting with us—albeit strangely. Ideas have no material body, but they do have consciousness, and they most certainly have will. Ideas are driven by a single impulse: to be made manifest. And the only way an idea can be made manifest in our world is through collaboration with a human partner. It is only through a human’s efforts that an idea can be escorted out of the ether and into the realm of the actual. Therefore, ideas spend eternity swirling around us, searching for available and willing human partners. (I’m talking about all ideas here—artistic, scientific, industrial, commercial, ethical, religious, political.) When an idea thinks it has found somebody—say, you—who might be able to bring it into the world, the idea will pay you a visit. It will try to get your attention. Mostly, you will not notice. This is likely because you’re so consumed by your own dramas, anxieties, distractions, insecurities, and duties that you aren’t receptive to inspiration. You might miss the signal because you’re watching TV, or shopping, or brooding over how angry you are at somebody, or pondering your failures and mistakes, or just generally really busy. The idea will try to wave to you.”

“Creativity is sacred, and it is not sacred. What we make matters enormously, and it doesn’t matter at all. We toil alone, and we are

accompanied by spirits. We are terrified, and we are brave. Art is a crushing chore and a wonderful privilege. Only when we are at our most playful can divinity finally get serious with us. Make space for all these paradoxes to be equally true inside your soul, and I promise—you can make anything. So please calm down now and get back to work, okay? The treasures that are hidden inside you are hoping you will say yes.”

“I believe that our planet is inhabited not only by animals and plants and bacteria and viruses, but also by ideas. Ideas are a disembodied, energetic life-form. They are completely separate from us, but capable of interacting with us—albeit strangely. Ideas have no material body, but they do have consciousness, and they most certainly have will. Ideas are driven by a single impulse: to be made manifest. And the only way an idea can be made manifest in our world is through collaboration with a human partner. It is only through a human’s efforts that an idea can be escorted out of the ether and into the realm of the actual.”

“So whenever that brittle voice of dissatisfaction emerges within me, I can say "Ah, my ego! There you are, old friend!" It’s the same thing when I’m being criticized and I notice myself reaching with outrage, heartache, or defensiveness. It’s just my ego, flaring up and testing its power. In such circumstances, I have learned to watch my heated emotions carefully, but I try not to take them too seriously, because I know that it’s merely my ego that has been wounded--never my soul. It is merely my ego that wants revenge, or to win the biggest prize. It is merely my ego that wants to start a Twitter war against a hater, or to sulk at an insult or to quit in righteous indignation because I didn’t get the outcome I wanted.

“Ideas are alive, that ideas do seek the most available human collaborator, that ideas do have a conscious will, that ideas do

move from soul to soul, that ideas will always try to seek the swiftest and most efficient conduit to the earth (just as lightning does).”

\* \* \*

A section of the Appendix to the first volume of Nitya’s Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary addresses how brahman is to be meditated on via the atman. Here are the parts I’ve entered into the highlights document:

The highest teaching of the Upanishad is epitomized in the instruction, “One should meditate on all aspects of the totality (*brahman*) as the Supreme Self (*atman*)” (I.4.7) The aspirant meditates on this aphorism after listening to the *sruti* reiterated by an authentic person as one’s own guru, provided the guru is an accomplished *brahmavid* and an erudite knower of the *sruti*. (628)

When a person chants the sacred mantra AUM, the verbalization of A, U and M is suggestive of the chanter’s wakeful, dream and deep sleep states. Then the person goes further into the deep and eternal silence which is inaudible but fills the entire consciousness as the inexpressible, imperishable verity of *turiya* (the fourth state). Similarly, *sravana* or listening is to be followed by a silent meditation in which all specific idea formations are dissolved in the unnamable Self.

A beginner may not know how to proceed with the discipline of unifying the multitudinous proliferation of consciousness in the wakeful and dream states.... Hence it is necessary for a disciple to keep his or her body, words and mind in perfect attunement with those of the guru. (628)

The instruction to meditate on *brahman* as *atman* is called *vidya sutra* by Suresvara. Sutra is the conjoining thread. Although *atman* is invisible and all-pervasive and transcends the limits of time and space, it occurs to a personalized organism like a human being as an item of illumination. This light of awareness within the phenomenal scheme is felt in the individual's sensory system and memory storage and as the flash of judgment and consequent affectation about a circumscribed item of awareness. Each such illumination is like the fluorescent shining of a firefly in the night or a dewdrop that is made to glitter kaleidoscopically by a gleam of sunlight. (628-9)

In and through individuated experience, the thread of *atman* glows with the intention of unifying specific instances into a contiguous knowledge of the Self. Thus *brahman* can be meditated upon by recognizing the Self in and through the proliferated variegations which appear as the phenomenal shimmering in the wakeful and dream states. For this the meditator has to catch what precedes an illumination and what follows the glow of awareness. This is like diving into deep sleep or the causal consciousness and refusing to succumb to the breaking up of the Self into instances of display.

After listening to the teacher's pronouncement of the a priori truth, the disciple closes the eyes to efface the physical distance between the disciple and the preceptor. Then the natural oscillation of modulating consciousness (*bhavana*) is substituted by the intuitive flash of holistic apperception which is the heart and soul of the testimony of *shabda*. (629)

The thread that relates the understanding of the disciple and the vision of the teacher reflects the sutra that relates the Self with the cosmos or the Absolute. (629)

Illumination comes like a flash of wisdom, and it is the revelation of such knowledge that establishes in a person an unchanging attitude for the rest of one's life. Suresvara... maintains the belief that such a revelation will not come by itself unless a person seriously aspires for it. The seriousness of one's search depends on how one prepares oneself to gain such an insight. Every passing moment is an opportunity to have a hard look at the facts of one's life to see what blemishes are there that can be steadily removed.”  
(630)