

VII Jnana Darsana, Consciousness and its Modifications

Verse 4

That by which I-consciousness and innumerable such effects, which belong to the non-Self, are known, is said to be knowledge of the non-Self.

5/15/7

One of the most liberating ideas in all of spirituality is implied in this verse and elaborated by Nitya in the commentary. The non-Self captures all our attention almost all the time. We base our self-esteem and even our happiness on transient events, but if we were able to comprehend them as peripheral rather than central, we could bask in the eternal joy of the Self that is always within us. The concept is simple enough, and yet all our studies are to help us redirect our vision from the kaleidoscopic play of events by which we are enchanted, because we have such a hard time fully understanding it.

The so-called Western view is that external stimuli cause effects within our mind. Such a belief has the unintended consequence of making us feel dependent on the accidental tumult of daily life. We develop an addiction to manipulating our input to maximize what we consider to be beneficial causes and minimize the downside. We become “control freaks” to varying degrees. At times this works very well, but to our chagrin most of life is outside our control. Certainly the important things are. When difficult circumstances occur, as they always do, we are buffeted around by them and can feel unfairly victimized. Or worse, some

deeply held guilt makes us decide we are being fairly victimized, and so we participate in perpetuating the disaster. Needless to say, neither of these attitudes is particularly healthy.

The Upanishadic model of cause and effect being revitalized by Narayana Guru here was covered in depth in the Bhana Darsana. Briefly, consciousness is the cause, and the subjective I-consciousness and objective actuality arise within it as matched pairs of effects. From this model, tainted with the Western scheme, arises the idea of manipulating consciousness to optimize our life. But consciousness, often called the Self, is not subject to manipulation. Lucky for us it is already on an optimal trajectory, one which the Guru is trying to teach us to open ourselves up to. Instead of trying to bring unlimited consciousness under the command and control of the limited ego, he is recommending that we surrender the ego to the wise command of consciousness as a whole.

The secondary situation under consideration in this verse is that the I-consciousness becomes conditioned and forgets its dependent status, then sets about tinkering with its world. It concocts an inflated sense of its own value, and becomes blind to many subtle aspects of the entity to which it is attached. The more it becomes myopic and self-centered, the more tenaciously it defends its turf. Although it is selectively observing its world, it refuses to embrace a larger outlook that might bump it off its throne.

The key teaching here is that we can have some detachment and distance from the chaos if we see the factors as being non-Self items. They are effects rather than causes. This actually makes them available to being affected by a change in our attitude. They glow when we glow and threaten when we feel threatened. They are beautiful when we see beauty and ugly when that's what we are looking for. This is a very empowering belief, because while we cannot have much effect on things outside us, we have lots of sway

over our own mental topology. We can train ourselves to not be hurt by accidental occurrences. We can bring light and love to those we encounter, and leave off the sulking and the sense of being shortchanged due to other people's selfishness.

John pointed out that while all this may be true for a person's relationship with inanimate or semi-animate objects, as in Nitya's lengthy example of a man in a seedy hotel, it is much more important in relationships with other people. This is most certainly the case, but it takes a while to become proficient in relating to people in this new way, since the impact is so much greater. We can work up to it by examining how we interpret even minor details. In the final analysis, whatever causes us grief or pain is precisely the place to turn our contemplative eye.

Both Moni and Debbie related how they had had very difficult stretches recovering from deaths in the family, but both had emerged recently from the worst of it. We wondered if there was anything in our study that could help us through tough times like those. Nancy felt our inner life was a kind of weather. Storms come and go, and there are sunny stretches too. Sometimes we have to wait patiently for the weather to change. The gunas, the modalities of nature, are very much like weather, and have their separate durations. The study is not a way to eliminate or alter the inevitable ups and downs of existence, so much as it is a way to take them with calmness and a peaceful mien. Opening up to the tides of the Absolute—or its weather, if you prefer—instead of battling Fate to control our destinies, is the option most in harmony with the structure of how we're made.

If we try to force the issue, such as in coping with the loss of a loved one, we tend to make things worse rather than better. We exaggerate the sadness or else unwittingly sweep the matter under the rug, pushing it into the unconscious arena where it will cause pain for years to come. We want to know some way to deal with it, and grasp for simple stories so we can wrap our minds around the

vastness. We simplify things that are more than we can grasp. This makes us prone to tales of heaven worlds or reincarnation, which true or not, are for the ego imaginary flights of fancy to ease our pain through turning away from the harsh situation itself. Facing what you actually know squarely and fearlessly carries you through the difficulties most efficaciously, but it requires living with the pain and not trying to avoid it.

Nowadays we often take a pill to ease the pain, and more and more of us are becoming dependent for life on mood altering medications. Pain is thought of as being caused by a chemical. It is very much out of fashion to believe we have a spiritual destiny to work out, and that struggling with our problems is actually how we grow and sometimes even become wise. In the out-of-favor Indian model, chemicals are associated with pain or pleasure, but are equally effects of the underlying cause. The dear mother or father dying is the cause of the pain. Believing our feelings are caused by a chemical means we should neutralize the experience chemically. Chemical neutrality is a kind of living death, but perhaps that is all we can cope with, wounded children that we are. Maybe we'll never know anything more than our chemistry.

Toward the end we reaffirmed that what we are studying is not about crushing and disposing of the ego, it is about healing it and locating it in its proper place. It is about being the ego and very much more. As Anne said, we can embrace all egos within our ego, not just cling to our own personal one. When we talk about vast whole systems, the ego gets worried that it will be deposed. We can make a deal with our ego: we won't depose it if it won't try to co-opt all the territory outside its native habitat. Then we'll all get along just fine.

We closed with a lovely stretch of quiet communion, in which all non-Self items were merged in the soft light of evening.

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7/25/17

Jnana Darsana verse 4

That by which I-consciousness and innumerable
such effects, which belong to the non-Self,
are known, is said to be
knowledge of the non-Self.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*As innumerable effects of egoism and so on,
What as pertaining to the non-Self
Attains to awareness, that is said to be
Awareness of the non-Self.*

Nitya explicates the fourth verse of the darsana with a clear assertion of the central idea of Vedanta, advocating an inversion of our attitude toward the world and our place in it. A spectacularly beautiful evening and our full complement of regulars made it a night for the record books. It hardly matters that there aren't really any record books dedicated to bliss.

Deb immediately restated the gist of the teaching for us: the items of our daily experience lead us away from our self. The more typical reaction to this tendency is to try to push the world away and remain at home, but the Gurukula Advaita-Vedantic approach is not be lured into reacting to any happenstance in a kneejerk fashion, but to retain a luminous outlook or in-look while participating to the max.

Nitya takes us straight to the point:

Every item in our life can pull us off on a tangent, and may take us far away from our center. This accounts for the eccentricity displayed by most people. (339)

A friend recently likened the centered state of mind to a musical instrument being in tune. The tangents initiated by distracting obsessions are like a string being incorrectly tightened or loosened, producing a sour or discordant note instead of the harmonious tone that results when we are right on.

We keep falling for things that catch our attention—human brains are designed specifically to do this. In a dangerous world, it's a must. In fact, I'd say it was the central learning experiment of Earth as a school for souls: how do you keep your psychological integrity when all the stimuli striking you are drawing you away from it? To live up to its role as instructor, the world is becoming more and more frantic, because we are so sophisticated nowadays that it takes a ton of distraction to catch our attention: the chaos has to stay one step ahead of us, lest we stop and think and sort it out.

Moreover, we bring our existing value sense to everything, judging it in terms of what we are already sure of, whether it is true or not. It has always struck me how the exact same thing can be a delight to one person and anathema to another, and Nitya notes that very thing in his essay: "Two men placed in identical circumstances may have quite different reactions to them." This tells us that for the most part the value comes from us, and not from the object itself. Even a bomb blast can seem beautiful to one person and awful to another.

Knowing this helps us to reverse the arrow of causes producing effects, as explained in the text:

Empirical science, developed mostly by Western thinkers, considers external factors as causal entities that produce the effects of sensations on our senses and mind. According to such

thinkers, a stimulus is the cause and the response to it the effect; the stimulus comes from outside and the effect is experienced in the self. Vedantins look upon this theory as putting the cart before the horse.... We have already mentioned the selective structuring that is implicit in the perception of objects. On account of this, Vedantins look upon external objects as *karyam*, that is, effects. The causal factor is seen to be in the preconditioned ego. Thus both the cause and effect are conditioned. (339)

“Selective structuring” refers to how the mind chooses what and how to interact with, out of the virtually infinite welter of possibilities impinging on it at all times. A most useful awareness is how we bring our habitual mode of perception to every situation, which inevitably leads us to increasing narrowness and rigidity. Once we begin to watch how we are diminishing everything with our attitude, we are more likely to change our way of thinking to promote liberation in place of bondage. If we were less sure of ourselves, we might entertain a wider panoply of possibilities in our interpretations. One does wonder why this option is so seldom selected, since the result is almost surely a much happier life, but I guess the prospect of a happy life seems risky to many people. We certainly have been trained to defer happiness to “later,” preferably in an unattainable utopia or an imaginary afterlife, so we can get on with the business of being miserable in the present.

I shared a favorite example of how two people can see the same thing utterly differently. A few years back at a wedding I was walking past a table where one of my oldest and dearest friends was sitting. She and her husband are lovers of bluegrass music, while I’m a classical buff. I heard her declaim, “I just HATE classical music!” Then she spotted me, stopped abruptly, and added, “Except yours.”

It isn't hard to see how our upbringing and exposure determines the music that really rocks our soul. There probably has to be something from very early in life involved, for us to achieve the heights of bliss. But humans like to think that their music (or politics or religion or you-name-it) is the best and all others are inferior. Ideally, as in religion, God has already registered the decision in your favor, and wants you to help Him punish those who feel or believe differently. On the other hand, to someone like Narayana Guru, grounded in an oceanic vision of unity in diversity, all such conflicts are unnecessary and absurd.

My example reminded Deb of her high school English teacher, who addressed her oh-so-worldly-wise pupils on the first day of class, insisting "There are no boring books." She got everyone's attention immediately, since at age 16 pretty much everything except your peer group is BORING. The teacher went on to say, "There are books you will find fascinating and ones you'll find boring, but that comes from you, not the books." The books themselves are never boring. She would have agreed readily with Nitya's exposition here:

The meaning-value or significance of things which we experience may appear to us to be of great importance or of none. This means that within ourselves we have a normative notion of value. We automatically make use of this notion as a measuring rod to evaluate the significance of each item of experience that crosses the field of our mind. In that field, items are not referred to an ever-abiding value. (337-8)

The predetermined value-significance of many things for many people is that they are boring, hateful, or otherwise to be avoided. With the Guru's or the teacher's mindset of eternal interest, many areas closed off will open up to you. In her English class Deb found out something she already knew but was

suppressing so as not to seem uncool: reading really was a fascinating enterprise.

If we can discern the causal nature of our conditioning, in place of continually reacting to the latest insult, the logical conclusion is that there is no absolute music or belief or country or anything, and hierarchical structuring is contrary to good sense, bound to produce unnecessary conflicts of all types. All those aspects of life, no matter how monumental they appear to us, are not eternal, and so belong to the non-Self. Narayana Guru tells us to not look for our Self where it is absent. Or better, that our self is not just a summary of the things we like and don't like. It is "us" at all times, even in very hard times, which Bushra reminded us are being experienced by a vast number of people these days.

Since our human neurology is dedicated to pigeonholing data, getting out of—transcending—our limited mindset takes substantial work. We have to rewire the mechanisms of our brain by repeatedly reminding ourselves that what we see is shaped in large measure by our conditioning, and is not "reality" as such. The visible world certainly looks convincing, which is why we have to stop and ponder it every so often.

Deb has been reading *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, by Carlo Rovelli, and is thrilled by his lucid rendering of the pillars of present-day science. She talked about how the world we see as stable and sensible is in reality seething and surging in several directions at once: the world is more like a movement of undulating waves, where nothing seems to exist at all until it interacts with something else equally nonexistent. This reminded her of the Absolute: a pulsing ground that flashes into momentary existence and then subsides back to ground.

Mentioning Rovelli's book reminded me of its example of the importance of learning, of how we can overcome our limited understanding by decoding the incomprehensible surfaces of our environment. The first chapter focuses on Einstein's

general theory of relativity, described as “the most beautiful of theories” by the eminent Russian physicist Lev Landau. In conclusion, Rovelli writes of the theory: “All of this is the result of an elementary intuition.” Then he gives a very brief formula that expresses the essence of the theory in mathematical notation, which looks perfectly incomprehensible to the layman. After sharing the formula, he adds:

That’s it.

You would need, of course, to study and digest Riemann’s mathematics in order to master the technique to read and use this equation. It takes a little commitment and effort. But less than is necessary to come to appreciate the rarefied beauty of a late Beethoven string quartet. In both cases the reward is sheer beauty and new eyes with which to see the world. (12)

The subject of physics got Andy musing on the limitations of physics and cosmology, how since they are based on models they can only penetrate reality so far and then they more or less disintegrate. They fade away at the margins. At the same time, knowledge is most visible at the extremes, at the limit of our ability to see or perceive. Andy thought we could reframe our experiences simply by staring into space. He added the caution that it is totally possible to be mesmerized by sublimity. I think he meant that we can become so obsessed with minute details or even abstractions that we lose touch with the everyday existence that gives our life purpose and ultimately, satisfaction.

The theme of Jnana Darsana is that we are sitting in the transcendent state at all times, and being pulled out away from it by our fascinations. Therefore it is not surprising that there is an outer limit to our ability to comprehend. It changes everything to realize we are the originator of the world in terms of our personal

and unique perspective. I summed it up as the big bang happening right in your heart.

Jan noted that philosopher Joseph Campbell similarly suggested we create our idea of self out of the non-Self, which is spot on. I wish she'd elaborated, as this is another crucial aspect we barely touched on. We are the Absolute, but in place of acknowledging it we fashion an idea of who we are from all the petty opinions and projections we accumulate in our passage through life—like barnacles on our keel. A ship is much more than its barnacles. We need to be careful not to mix up this social self with our true self, the one grounded in eternity, sailing from exotic port to exotic port.

Bushra asked, if the world is polarized, how do you find your way back to your center? When asked how she managed it, she said for her it was a simple matter of doing ordinary chores, like laundry or cleaning the kitchen, and then she would become grounded again. But what about people in terrible conditions, like those whose families have just been blown up or their whole town devastated by an earthquake? She knew she lived a privileged life where she didn't have to worry about that kind of thing happening to her, but what if it did?

I responded that there are many impediments to becoming, or more accurately, remaining, Self-realized. A popular one is to imagine that life has to be in proper working order before anything good can happen. It isn't and it never will be a perfect world. There will always be winners and losers, justice and injustice. So we have to make do with the hand we're dealt. And who can say what leads toward and what away from enlightenment? A peaceful life may breed complacency, and many of our most prominent citizens suffered greatly, which motivated them to try harder to have an impact on the world's problems. I recalled a favorite story from Carlos Castaneda dealing with this question, which is linked and

cited in Part II, along with some other quotes from him unearthed for us by Susan.

A lot of people weighed in with sympathetic advice for sufferers, but that isn't the point here. We all do what we can in the ordinary sense; we are good, caring people. We help our neighbors. As Paul put it, the political earthquake we're experiencing these days is an opportunity for people to reach out to each other and stand together for the high values we collectively cherish—peace, justice, fair play and all the rest.

But beyond that, what can we do for ourselves, to be prepared for whatever challenges appears in the future? The Gurukula philosophy is aimed at bridging the gap between our ordinary waking consciousness and the totality of our being, which is almost infinitely greater and wiser than our ego. In this study we aren't being called upon to do good works, but to make room for that greater wisdom already on board to participate in our activity. Ordinarily our judging and scheming overwrites its subtle input, and so we unintentionally ignore its aid.

Although warfare or natural cataclysms were not involved, I have had several profound and almost unbearable periods of suffering in my life. The mental organization I learned from my gurus was the straw I held onto in the whirlpool of out of control emotions. If we can just hold on long enough, we will likely make it through just about anything. Sure, we know of many people who have undergone troubles we can not imagine surviving, and we should be grateful for being spared. But our problems are our own, and having something to cling to, to believe in, buoys you up until you can get back to dry land. For religious people there is God and scriptures, but for those of us who don't have that kind of belief, the mental practices of balancing taught in yoga can do the trick. Hey—if the mess is awful enough, even atheists call on God. But what the Gurukula is adding to the world's repository of salves and balms is an intelligent replacement for what modern science has

stripped from our armamentarium: an agency greater than our ego-guided awareness, what we call pure consciousness.

Almost everything we do is beyond our control. We know some of the autonomous functions of the brain, but we don't yet worship them as intelligent guides. We prefer to keep our cool, but the worship—appreciation—is what opens the door and energizes the exchange. As the magnificence of the indwelling genius is actually experienced, reverence for it naturally develops.

Nitya's teaching on this matter is spread over the whole chapter, if not the whole work. Here he adds an important piece of the puzzle:

One who has a clear understanding of the Self and the non-Self knows his ego to be only a tool for him to witness the manifestations of the transactional world. To him all factors which are of social importance to others, and which are projected by them onto his ego, are easily seen to be only parts of the transactional game. He may agree to play a conventional role, as an older man might agree to pretend to be an elephant for his grandson to ride. The man will not lose his own sense of identity when he plays games with a child. In the same way, one who is fully aware of the Self is inwardly amused by the game in progress between the individuated ego and its several objects of experience. (339)

“Pretending to be an elephant” is something we can all relate to easily enough, even if we're too old to get down on the floor and actually do it. It should be simple enough to translate the idea to our personal identity. I'm pretending to be Scott, but I know what looks like Scott isn't anything at all. Just a fiction. Hopefully a nice friendly fiction that can edit a few books and hold a few hands before it evanesces in the mist once again. What kind of elephant

are you playing at being this lifetime? Or, are you still certain you are one?

Paul talked about the Vietnam War veterans we worked with in the fire department, which actively recruited them at a time when many businesses did not. One friend of Paul's in particular had survived two or three terms of duty by effectively suppressing his feelings, and he was damn sure not going to allow his feelings to surface in civilian life now that the war was over. Paul tried to get him to, because the best firefighters are compassionate and feeling people, but once the defenses are in place they take on a life of their own. With enough "shell shock" (as it was once called), a person remains dead set against authentic feelings for the rest of their time on earth.

We never can tell who will have enough determination to overcome their defenses and rise to the call of enlightenment, and who won't. There is only one volunteer we can offer for the sacrifice: our own humble self.

Narayana Guru for his whole life was a recruitment officer for the waging of peace and happiness, and his inviting hand is ever extended to us. Although we act casually, the wise inner being of everyone in the class is throbbing with ecstasy over the opportunity to align ourselves with his liberating wisdom. Removing our conditioned doubts as impediments to the opening-up process is the lion's share of the conscious contribution we can fairly easily make.

Let me close with Nitya's heartbreakingly beautiful conclusion to Atmo verse 86, in *That Alone*, since it sums up our questions from the class so well:

Most of the time you don't see how pure consciousness operates, because you live in the reflections, in the modalities, away from the substance. You are caught in a shadowy existence, a shadowy understanding, and a shadowy experience

of values. Being shadowy and without substance, they fail you again and again. One has to remain quiet for the clouds to pass, and the sun of consciousness to shine again. Eventually it comes back, but you have to be patient. You cannot push the clouds away any more than you can push a river where it doesn't want to go.

In one sense we can say that realization comes like ten thousand suns shining all at once. It is also true that you gain ground little by little, more like the sprouting, growth and unfolding of a flower. You can't tell how much the flower grows in a day, but it is nonetheless growing. Like that, you gain your ground in wisdom in invisible increments. Some days you make mistakes and prakriti wins. The next day you make amends for your shortcomings and go further. If nothing else you have learned how nature can come and assail you when you are weak or unprepared, and the next time you will be prepared.

This game is continuous. The pursuit is continuous, growth is continuous. Realization is also continuous. Then why do we say that realization comes like a flash? It's like a Chinese puzzle. When you look at one, for a long time you won't see anything. Then it flashes, and you suddenly see the figure that was hiding. Once it shows, it is hard for you not to see it.

This kind of realization comes all at once in a big flash, and we can say it is coming like ten thousand suns. But that doesn't mean that you are realized once and for all. The next situation may be quite different. Another puzzle will be presented. Then again you will look for a long time, until abruptly, all at once, it comes.

Both kinds of realization are happening. There is a gradual maturing, and also the sudden flash. It seems the flash gets most of the attention. The maturing part is also important, where you have to fight against the constant clouding of your intellect by nature. It's like the road workers clearing the roads of snow

while it is snowing. As soon as they clear it the snow starts building up again, so they have to do it all over again every half hour or so. Like that, sometimes winter sets in in your mind, and the snow falls. What can you do? Just wait for spring to melt it for you? No. If you turn away from the clearing of the snow, it will become more and more heavily laid down. So get exposed to the discipline.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

The non-Self factors mentioned in the previous verse such as the effects of egoism, sense objects, etc. are innumerable. They pertain to the non-Self, where all objects of knowledge are found. Without knowing the witnessing Self which is capable of understanding all the innumerable effects, what cognises only these objective entities is the opposite of what has been described in the previous verse and constitutes the awareness of the non-Self. This awareness of the non-Self is conditioned.

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The story from Carlos Castaneda's *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan*, can be accessed here: <https://www.generalistlab.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Carlos-Castaneda-A-Separate-Reality.pdf>. [The word *roe* in the middle is an error; it should be the obvious: *me*.] The scene begins on the bottom of page 13, where Castaneda is eating in the hotel restaurant and observing a group of shoeshine boys outside, and runs a couple of pages to the end of the first chapter. Here's a little bit from the middle of the section:

I had said that, and I repeated again that in my opinion to become a man of knowledge was one of the greatest intellectual accomplishments.

“Do you think that your very rich world would ever help you to become a man of knowledge?” don Juan asked with slight sarcasm.

I did not answer and he then worded the same question in a different manner, a thing I always do to him when I think he does not understand.

“In other words,” he said, smiling broadly, obviously aware that I was cognizant of his ploy, “can your freedom and opportunities help you to become a man of knowledge?”

“No!” I said emphatically.

“Then how could you feel sorry for those children?” he said seriously. “Any of them could become a man of knowledge. All the men of knowledge I know were kids like those you saw eating leftovers and licking the tables.”

* * *

Susan sent in some Castaneda quotes this morning. I am reminded there are many wonderful things in his books, in spite of their fictional storyline that was once treated as non-fiction:

“To seek freedom is the only driving force I know. Freedom to fly off into that infinity out there. Freedom to dissolve; to lift off; to be like the flame of a candle, which, in spite of being up against the light of a billion stars, remains intact, because it never pretended to be more than what it is: a mere candle.”

— [Carlos Castaneda, Don Juan: the Sorcerer](#)

“Anything is one of a million paths. Therefore you must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if you feel you should not follow it, you must not stay with it under any conditions. To have such clarity you must lead a disciplined life. Only then will you know that any path is only a path and there is no affront, to oneself or to others, in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you to do. But your decision to keep on the path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary.

This question is one that only a very old man asks. Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my own life I could say I have traversed long long paths, but I am not anywhere. Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you.

Before you embark on any path ask the question: Does this path have a heart? If the answer is no, you will know it, and then you must choose another path. The trouble is nobody asks the question; and when a man finally realizes that he has taken a path without a heart, the path is ready to kill him. At that point very few men can stop to deliberate, and leave the path. A path without a heart is never enjoyable. You have to work hard even to take it. On the other hand, a path with heart is easy; it does not make you work at liking it.”

— [Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*](#)

“We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves strong. The amount of work is the same.”

— Carlos Castaneda

“Think about it: what weakens us is feeling offended by the deeds and misdeeds of our fellow men. Our self-importance requires that we spend most of our lives offended by someone.”

— Carlos Castaneda, *Fire from Within*

“Beware of those who weep with realization, for they have realized nothing.”

— Carlos Castaneda, *Fire from Within*

“For an instant I think I saw. I saw the loneliness of man as a gigantic wave which had been frozen in front of me, held back by the invisible wall of a metaphor.”

— Carlos Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan*

“To ask me to verify my life by giving you my statistics is like using science to validate sorcery. It robs the world of its magic and makes milestones out of us all.”

— Carlos Castaneda

[I wonder if the word meant was millstones? – RST]

Part III

I came across a terrific article, in *The New Yorker* – July 10 & 17, 2017 issue,

(<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/07/10/shakespeares-cure-for-xenophobia>) that speaks to the question of how to intelligently address the darker aspects of our cultural legacy, especially regarding race. The Jewish author of the study of

Shakespeare, *Will in the World* and the non-fiction historical thriller *The Swerve* wrote about confronting anti-Semitism at Yale as a student in terms of Shakespeare's superficially most racist play. I highly recommend the entire article for presenting a mature attitude for facing an issue that more often makes us want to run away and hide our heads, or else get pointlessly upset. Here's a tidbit:

Shakespeare's Cure for Xenophobia

What "The Merchant of Venice" taught me about ethnic hatred and the literary imagination.

By Stephen Greenblatt

I was determined to understand this birthright, including what was toxic in it, as completely as possible. I'm now an English professor at Harvard, and in recent years some of my students have seemed acutely anxious when they are asked to confront the crueller strains of our cultural legacy. In my own life, that reflex would have meant closing many of the books I found most fascinating, or succumbing to the general melancholy of my parents. They could not look out at a broad meadow from the windows of our car without sighing and talking about the number of European Jews who could have been saved from annihilation and settled in that very space. (For my parents, meadows should have come with what we now call "trigger warnings.") I was eager to expand my horizons, not to retreat into a defensive crouch. Prowling the stacks of Yale's vast library, I sometimes felt giddy with excitement. I had a right to all of it, or, at least, to as much of it as I could seize and chew upon. And the same was true of everyone else.

I already had an inkling of what I now more fully grasp. My experience of mingled perplexity, pleasure, and discomfort was

only a version—informed by the accidents of a particular religion, family, identity, and era—of an experience shared by every thinking person in the course of a lifetime. What you inherit, what you receive from a world that you did not fashion but that will do its best to fashion you, is at once beautiful and repellent. You somehow have to come to terms with what is ugly as well as what is precious.