

## **VIII Bhakti Darsana, Contemplative Devotion**

### **Verse 5**

Ananda, atma and Brahma—such are the names of this alone, so it is said. In whom there is such certitude of awareness, he as a contemplative is well known.

8/28/7

Deb started us off noting the progression of the three Sanskrit terms in reverse order. Brahman is the Absolute, atman the Self or the conscious totality, and ananda the experience of it. While all refer to the same ultimate reality, there are increasing shades of personal comprehension involved. Narayana Guru's order becomes progressively more sublime, inviting us to step outside our familiar parameters.

In keeping with the purport of the verse, Anita challenged us to relate what we felt when hearing the words in the commentary, especially peace, oneness, love and truth. Her point was well taken, that we hear the words and nod our heads solemnly, just as others do with terms like God, Allah, Buddha, and so on. We convince ourselves we have understanding because we know the words, but we do not. In fact, such an attitude makes accessing the truth behind the words even more speculative, more theoretical.

Narayana Guru is reminding us once again that these are merely names. Convincing “certitude of awareness” is another matter entirely. Knowers of the former are academics; knowers of the latter are true contemplatives. The advice is plain enough: we

must effect a transformation of words into living awareness through the practice of contemplation, the experience of bhakti.

Guru Nitya's masterful commentary guides us through just such a transformation, but only if we follow along in three dimensions, so to speak. Here again we encounter the limitation of reading out from a printed page. Anita is now practicing listening carefully to the reading, rather than following along in the book, and she found that at least some of it came more alive that way. We have to concentrate much more to listen than to read, and bringing more of our faculties to bear on a subject brings it more to life. This gives us a broad hint as to how to proceed.

Nitya reminds us of the chaotic side of creation, where every part of it from microcosm to macrocosm and all forms of life and consciousness are in constant motion and transformation. In the midst of this confusion:

One is bound to be frustrated about not seeing any trace of the Absolute anywhere. Even the idea of the Self is irreparably disfigured because of its substitution with the individual's physical body and the constant shouts and stutterings of the ego. In spite of the ever-raging storm of such adversities there is a ray of hope, because every now and then the senses discover a momentary joy in the objective presentation of a sensation, a cognition, an imagination, or in a constant and contiguous presentation of a certain certitude, which can come and stay as a permanent plank under one's feet. It is by firmly standing on this plank of certitude, the 'be-ness' of life, that one makes a dent in the world of names and forms, causes and effects, and actions and actors, to enter into the ontologic existentiality which sustains every form and name and the causal unity of actions revealed as the governing law of the universe. This law is discovered and appreciated as the constant behind all the

variables in the changing worlds of the physical, the chemical, and the biological. (380)

The real mystery here is where does that plank of certitude come from? While each of us experiences it differently, the core is the same, and it corresponds to all those overused words mentioned above. Vedanta aims at an intelligent assessment of everything we encounter, which will reveal an inner unity amidst the multiplicity. This could easily be held to be the aim of science and philosophy in general, when they are broadly directed and not intentionally limited to the elaboration of minutia. But in all these cases there is some hard work involved. The popular approaches offer to provide us with a simple, readymade comprehension, and all we have to do is pay our money and take our chances. No wonder they are popular! But they mainly offer a “new, improved” set of names and words. This doesn’t satisfy the scientist or contemplative who demands the proof—the certitude—of actual living experience.

The idea of the Absolute is the best that words can do to focus the attention on the overarching unity of existence. ‘Universe’ is also a good concept, meaning “to turn into one.” When we speak of contemplating the Absolute or the universe, it is an active process of paring away extraneous details and pairing up polar opposites. When done correctly, it produces a plank of certitude on which we can stand or, more likely, cling to in the midst of the raging flood.

Practically, we can take the occasions of love we have experienced and try to generalize them to a larger context. But you have to start with the love, with something you really feel and know to be meaningful to you. Once upon a time Anita thought that marriage would provide this, but it fell apart, revealing its innate limitation. She did truly feel it with her children, but they grew up and moved away. Deb then recalled something Nitya once told her. When he was staying with Ramana Maharshi, the

Maharshi would look on the crowd of many hundreds of very diverse people with the beaming countenance of a mother caring for her children. Somehow he had managed to imbibe that supreme experience that many mothers know intuitively, and then it became an ever-present state of mind for him.

Those who have actually been mothers have a big head start with this one. But again, everyone is unique. Where does your own plank come from? And how stable is it?

## **Part II**

Susan sent a full reaction to the recent notes:

I loved last week's chapter. So beautiful (despite the fact that they are just words). I have been thinking so much about Mother Teresa (and was happy you mentioned her in your note to Baird) and this verse helped me think about her struggle, especially the paragraph you copied: "One is bound to be frustrated" etc.

When I heard about the writings of Mother Teresa and that she had been so burdened with doubt, I felt very sad for her. Some of the commentaries on the web say that it is this doubt that made her work so hard for the poor and so it was a good thing. This doesn't make sense to me. It reminds me of one of the Tibetan monks I read about who went through his rituals for 19 years before feeling any connection to God. He said he had to go through all that. Of course I cannot know what these saintly people went through. I know that the fetters of maya can be overwhelming. Of course I am still working on this myself. But the little partings of the obscuring clouds, when "the senses discover a momentary joy," dispel doubt for me, even if only momentarily. And little by little, these joys form a plank for me. I really feel this is true. On this plank I can see the ever-raging storm from a distance and more objectively and it is such a relief. I am not always in it. Did Mother Teresa have a plank or was she in the storm? Is her doubt so far

beyond what I can imagine? My life is full of beauty and pleasantries. Her life was spare and she was constantly dealing with misery. Maybe Bhakti is easier to find in Portland Heights than the ghettos of India, though it is everywhere. I guess this is what drove Siddhartha to leave his privileged home life. He wanted to know truth. Comforts do make it harder to find truth perhaps. I can't imagine living a life like Mother Teresa or those monks in France but I always envy them a little because I figure they have really had to deal with their demons and that maybe they have found a place of great peace and clarity. But still I see that Christian focus on the outer God and the following of rituals and laws -- does this help one see God? When I first became Catholic and took communion, I fully expected fireworks to go off. I thought I would feel some incredible flow of God. And yet, nothing happened. The service was beautiful and the music was nice but I didn't feel God. As I told you before, when I was going through that first year of classes and thinking so much about Catholicism, I did feel very enamored of the idea of Jesus and it was like falling in love. I would lie awake some nights in ecstasy. But there wasn't the connection in my mind and soul.

Well, I can't really explain it. All I can say is that when I started reading Love and Blessings and Atmo, things made so much more sense. For the first time God was not invisible or distant. This was earth shattering for me, just because it wasn't earth shattering. Lightning didn't strike but there was peace that I hadn't felt before. More than anything I guess I saw that I might be able to find truth/God/answers/peace through this philosophy. The whole journey made more sense. Not just sense. Something deeper. Hard to explain.

But I guess Mother Teresa was really working hard to connect to God. She had felt it once and she wanted to feel it again. What is that about? Maybe it's so incredible and who am I to say that it wasn't worth working for decades and being miserable? I

guess I could compare this to my own journey in that I would feel very disappointed not to be able to let go much more than I am able to do now. This is work that will take years, I expect. But I need to work at it more than I have been.

Sunday best, Susan

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11/14/17

Bhakti Darsana verse 5

*Ananda, atma and brahma—  
such are the names of this alone, so it is said.  
In whom there is such certitude of awareness,  
he as a contemplative is well known.*

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Bliss, the Self and the Absolute  
Are said to be the names of this alone;  
In whom there is such awareness  
He, as a contemplative is well known.*

We listened to Deb read out Nitya's exquisite darsana as a wisdom *transmission* rather than a wisdom *exposition*. It's what you're supposed to be doing sitting at the feet of a guru: listening as hard as you can but not analyzing. Just letting it percolate into you. Churning over it is for later. When a guru presents this kind of subject in person, their energy adds a powerful dimension to the words. If listened to respectfully in a meditative state, the meaning goes deep into the psyche. Ordinary thoughts like "I don't believe

that,” “I’m not capable of that,” “this applies to others,” “what does THAT mean?” “Oh, I get it,” and so on are discarded if they arise at all. The result is a rare and vital experience, one that is occasionally achieved in the university classroom or the religious service, but can be a regular feature of association with a guru—even perhaps secondhand, as we are constrained to be here. Regardless, a *transmission* is a blessing in the best sense, granting us the opportunity to grow in understanding of our true capacity as sentient beings.

There is little here that needs to be explained. We have been working on our comprehension of the subject quite diligently. Now it is time for the guru-blast to drive what we’ve learned deep into our receptive souls. We should be confident by now that there is no hidden agenda on the part of the teacher. It is being done with the best of intentions, for our benefit. We can drop our guard as we take our seats.

The pattern of the exposition is one Nitya often used, though it was not always so plain to see. He begins by acknowledging our condition of bondage to necessity, and reassures us that there is no need to think we are unqualified because we are less than ideal human beings. We all have our faults and our blind spots, yet we are welcome.

Having opened the door to all comers, Nitya then takes us through the full panoply of existence, opening our sights and our hearts as wide as possible. It’s an endearing plan: take the tightly wound, knotted psyches who have come to you for edification and show them how to untie or otherwise discard their knots and float free. Send them home glowing.

The vastness of the talk reminded Deb of standing on a mountain looking out at the horizon. We had just learned of a friend who died doing just that: he was sitting on a patio of his home in Santa Fe, gazing at the Sangre de Cristo mountains in the distance. His wife came back from a walk and he greeted her

quietly. A few minutes later he closed his eyes and was gone. I only hope I'll be saying goodbye to this magnificent planet in a like fashion when my time comes.

Deb also recalled the time we were in the San Juan Islands with Nitya, standing on top of the highest peak watching the sunset over the intricate expanse of Puget Sound, with the Olympic Mountains in the distance. An ineffable sight, the kind of view you can't help but think of as spiritually uplifting. Deb was feeling ecstatic, but Nitya brought her down to earth with "why are you always stuffing sensory experiences like this into yourself? You are already everything. You don't need this—let it go." Though she was initially angry, Deb realized before long that he did have a point. Bhakti includes realizing that definitions like it/you/this are all mythological symbols that overlies continuous reality. Even "I am enjoying this experience," displaces the experience into a conceptual jar, like the one that was exhumed from the universal ocean in the last verse.

The sunset idea reminded Bushra of a favorite verse from *Song of Myself*, by Walt Whitman:

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me,  
If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me.  
We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun,  
We found our own O my soul in the calm and cool of the  
day-break.

Bushra agreed how intense the realization of our true nature was, as when we watch a gorgeous sunset, so we have to pass along what pours into us by radiating it outwards. We might explode otherwise! Deb agreed that such beauty might well obliterate the individual, so we had to keep it moving, keep it circulating. Nitya also advocated not holding onto to anything, but passing it along. Bad stuff you could just toss in the trash, but the good stuff was



important to share with friends. Jan took the opportunity to acknowledge the value of a small circle of trusted friends like the one we enjoy here in the Gurukula, where the small size allows for special intimacy and a sense of protected security. Shelter from the storm, as Bob Dylan expressed it. Getting value from a group is almost in inverse proportion to its size.

Prabu is also a fan of Whitman, and thought another quote from Song of Myself also suited the meaning of the Darsana, that we are the Absolute, very well. The Absolute is not reserved for the elite or the terrific, it must include ordinary mortals just like us. That thou art. Whitman sings:

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch  
or am touch'd from,  
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,  
This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

Such blasphemy! Such prophecy!

Speaking of blasphemy, Deb recalled the hilarious film Monty Python's Life of Brian, where the multitudes are too busy believing in an ordinary schmuck to pay attention to the real messiah just next door. The film was widely banned for blasphemy, which was great publicity and made it a big success. Our beliefs really do keep us from accepting so many valuable aspects of life that keep landing in our laps, where they invite us to open up and let go. Life will always do that. Ergo, we must not hold on too tightly to what we know lest we turn our backs unintentionally to the much greater portion we know not. That is exactly what is meant by being imprisoned by our beliefs. Perhaps we could have a Gurukula viewing of Life of Brian, as it continues to be regarded as one of the funniest movies of all time. Are we ready for a laugh these days?

In case we are inclined to not admit it, Nitya reminds us of how daunting the task of right living is, how easy it is to forget to let go of the past, and assuring us it is no wonder we are sometimes confused or disappointed with our own contributions:

The consciousness imprisoned in the psychosomatic matrix of an individual is endlessly drifting, with a nucleus of an I-consciousness which is likely to be infested with the infection of an almost incurable egotism. And yet this ego is commissioned to do the tremendous task of understanding the mini-infrastructure of the individuation given it to monitor as well as the meta-structure of the cosmic system of which this psychosomatic sub-system is an organic and integral part.

Note how we are being addressed here as distinct from our ego, which is a small though essential part of the totality of consciousness. It is astonishing how many elucidations begin and end from an egotistic perspective. Here we are looking at that problematic part as a detached observer. That tiny director is confronted with a universe that is infinitely beyond its comprehension:

This growing, changing, evolving, decaying, and dying organism of ours is constantly being hit by forces extraneous to our body and mind, just like a billiard ball, because the phenomenal world is a hyperactive cloud chamber in which everything, from the most invisible subatomic particles to the inconceivably large galaxies, is always moving, with each in its own orbit and all with a regulated motion. Clashes, blasts and counterblasts, and alchemic changes both gradual and instantaneous, are continuously taking place at the gross level of solids, liquids and gases, and at the subtle levels of energies

and modes of consciousness. Such is the world of a beginningless chaotic cosmos and an endless cosmic chaos.

We are not expected to have any impact on the grand scheme, only to keep our act together. Nitya puts this much more eloquently than the American slang version:

However negligible is the role of an individual in the grand scheme of the known and unknown cosmos, human life is so fated that each individual's universe is physically and conceptually structured around the continuously pulsating notion of 'I', to which every perception, every cognition, every volition, and every aesthetic appreciation, positive or negative, is to be constantly coordinated to preserve the integrity of one's orientation.

Our role in preserving our sanity and optimizing our life is given an invitingly positive spin, as a myth that calls to us:

The I-consciousness in us is expected to act as a baby Hercules or an infant Ashtavakra to do the tremendous work of deciphering the hydra-headed myth which is presented to its already contaminated instrument of observation, and each time with a different Gordian Knot. It is no wonder that millions and millions of ego-oriented individuals fail in this task a billion times, to be gobbled by the terrible witch of logical fallacy whom Indians call maya, and others sin or Satan. However terrible or incomprehensible this myth looks, it is the home, sustenance, and only meaning of our life on Earth and the cosmic whole to which such a life belongs. Deciphering this myth is variously called awakening, liberation, emancipation, knowing the Tao, God-realization, salvation and Self-realization.

The hydra was a beast faced by Hercules that grew two new heads whenever one was cut off. Many problems in life grow more complex as we “fix” one aspect, only to find our actions have precipitated new challenges.

The Gordian knot means many things to many people, but basically it describes a knot that is impossible to untangle. You could spend your whole life working on it, but you could just cut it with your sword, as Alexander the Great is supposed to have done with the original. The problems of the psyche are so complex that we could spend a lifetime working them out in a linear fashion, even if they don’t keep sprouting new obstacles. Some kind of quantum leap, a departure from the familiar, is needed to bring about a breakthrough. You can imagine my opinion about this, so I won’t mention it today. Just find a way to think outside the box—it’s a good exercise even if you come up short.

I reminded the class of the thought-provoking article Michael shared in the last class notes. [Here](#), in case you missed it. Humans keep using analogies to try to figure out what we are, but these invariably throw dust over our true nature and obscure it. Author Epstein makes an excellent case that we are coming to the end of the usefulness of the sixth grand analogy: that our brains are bio-computers. Read it if you want to see what those analogies are, and how their vestiges are still with us even today. Epstein sums up that idea:

Each metaphor reflected the most advanced thinking of the era that spawned it. Predictably, just a few years after the dawn of computer technology in the 1940s, the brain was said to operate like a computer, with the role of physical hardware played by the brain itself and our thoughts serving as software.

As Epstein points out we hardly resemble computers at all. So what will the next analogy be? We sorely need one. I think the breakdown of societies and ecosystems is a symptom of the lack of a meaningful narrative, now that everything has been thoroughly deconstructed. What we study in our classes would be an excellent choice, but it is not simplistic enough to serve on a large scale. You can't describe it in a slogan, plus its central aim is to do utterly without analogies. It is excellent for serving individual people willing to put a lot of time and energy into strengthening and balancing their psyches, but it is not suitable to a mass movement. Probably the key failing is that it relies on each person to take control of their own life, and our more comfortable setting as humans is to be followers of an impressive, self-assured leader. We're currently getting a very painful education on how far away from good sense that can take us.

Could humans get along without a religion? Meaning without an all-embracing system of explanations? People say science will be the next analogy (or religion), but it's a meaningless term—intentionally so. And meaning is the key to it all, as Andy averred; moreover, it is a truly human characteristic. We are not computers in part because we care about and use meaning. Ananda—value or meaning—is precisely what machines, computers, and AI (artificial intelligence) leave out of the picture. No wonder science keeps coming up with new ways to kill each other and destroy the planet we live on. Some religion that is! Andy insightfully added that meaning is not a construct. It is what we are made of. It can't be built. If it was built, the result would only be an artificial version of what ananda actually is.

Prabu noted that linguist-historian Noam Chomsky said that AI is more like natural stupidity than artificial intelligence. Should we call it NS instead?

Andy also related what little is known of the well-known sage Ashtavakra, who was cursed while in the womb and was

consequently born crippled with eight bends in his spine. Nitya is using him to exemplify our condition of severe limitation at the beginning, which can be overcome with diligent effort. You can read the very solid Vedantic wisdom exposition attributed to him here: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ashtavakra\\_Gita](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ashtavakra_Gita). Michael sent another link: <http://realization.org/p/ashtavakra-gita/richards.ashtavakra-gita/richards.ashtavakra-gita.html>. He called it “very accessible and readable, a walk in the park for our classmates.”

Hercules was similarly constrained to battle a number of challenges before attaining a final liberation. He had gone mad and killed his family, and its expiation was to perform his famous Labors. He was an adult at the time, so I speculate that Nitya’s reference to babies and infants is to our psyches. We are setting out, right at the beginning in a sense, to cure our malaise. If we are not burdened with weighty self-images, we can proceed freely as the situation requires. By this stage of Darsanamala study we should have at least gotten a little distance on our persona, treating it more like an overcoat than as who we actually are. We don’t always need to put it on.

Still, Nitya does not expect us to be completely free beings, and does not minimize the pressing forces life exerts on us:

In the fragmentary heap of relativistic notions and impressions that cling onto our sensory or cognitive consciousness with the firmness of a bionic handshake, one is bound to be frustrated about not seeing any trace of the Absolute, *Brahma*, anywhere. Even the idea of a Self is irreparably disfigured because of its substitution with the individual’s physical body and the constant shouts and stutterings of the ego. (380)

In the 1970s when this book was begun, there was a lot of interest in bionics, the study of how to replace or imitate body parts with

mechanical devices. The field has grown dramatically since, with artificial limbs of superb utility now available. You cannot extricate yourself from a bionic handshake until the other person lets go of you. It's an apt description of our entanglement in sensory experience. When we are under such indomitable pressures, it is little wonder that the subtle factors in life remain out of reach, or at least out of sight. We should be convinced by now that they are not only within our reach, they are who we actually are: they are our very being. Nitya reminds us where and how to look:

In spite of the ever-raging storm of such adversities there is a ray of hope, because every now and then the senses discover a momentary joy in the objective presentation of a sensation, a cognition, an imagination, or in a constant and contiguous presentation of a certain certitude, which can come and stay as a permanent plank under one's foot. It is by firmly standing on this plank of certitude, the 'be-ness' of life, that one makes a dent in the world of names and forms, causes and effects, and actions and actors, to enter into the ontologic existentiality which sustains every form and name and the causal unity of actions revealed as the governing law of the universe. This law is discovered and appreciated as the constant behind all the variables in the changing worlds of the physical, the chemical, and the biological.

Bill was touched by the idea of a permanent plank of certitude, and is feeling like we get a little glimpse of it in our class, even. It is a platform we can stand on, psychologically speaking. I read out an excerpt from *Love and Blessings* where Nitya loses his provisional plank and begins moving toward the permanent variety, which you can read in Part II.

As Nitya has often noted, the awareness we seek does not always come from the big bang of instant realization. It more often takes the form of a gradual dawning of insight guided by the convincing arguments of a wise seer who is gracious enough to teach. Here's Nitya's quiet version of the Visions of Johanna:

As we become more and more familiar with the inner unity of an otherwise heterogeneous world, we begin to see with more transparency the common anatomy of universal laws in their mathematical logic, and the syntax and inflex of the language of universal myth in the grand drama of life, expressed through the ecstasies of love and the tearful pathos of a wrongly placed love's failure. Then we have already entered the portals of truth and we are no longer outsiders to the secret of creation. We are no longer blindfolded. Individuality does not obstruct us from seeing that the same Self, which one can clearly perceive behind the notion of I-consciousness, continues in its homogeneous and unlimited vastness behind the ever-deceiving symbols of 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'they', 'this' and 'that'.

It finally dawned on me that what Nitya meant by *inflex* is *inflections*, and I recommend you change it if you are keeping a copy of the text. [Actually, inflex might be a fascinating use of a very rare word meaning: To bend; to cause to become curved; to make crooked; to deflect.]

Nitya's all-encompassing talk makes its way to "unlimited vastness" and what it means to us, and concludes with a paean to the many ways the vastness can be conceived:

Just as I am dear to myself, the endearment has now magnified a thousandfold and become coextensive and commingled with the Self of all. Fetters of the individual are broken; frontiers of vision are smashed. The perilous separation is averted. Love



reigns supreme, and in its clear sky there never comes even once a cloud of suspicion or hatred. Consciousness is freed from the bondages of the past. Time is no longer segmented. Allah alone is. It is as if that 'is' is not an 'is'. It may be called the *sunyata* of the *nibbana*, One without a second. Verily, "this Self is the Absolute," *ayam atma brahma*.

We eased down from our discussions with another ecstatic meditation period, where all stray thoughts and feelings were sloughed off, leaving us in a bliss-filled emptiness that the gurus intend us to truly have confidence in as an incontrovertible plank on which we walk at all times.

## Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

It is the same ultimate reality having the attributes of existence-subsistence-value which is also referred to as the Self, the Absolute or Bliss. Such a certitude is called contemplation (*bhakti*). The man possessing this certitude is the real contemplative (*bhakta*).

In this verse the truth of the great dictum (*mahāvākya*), "This Self is the Absolute" (*ayam àtmà brahma*), is indicated. We know by this that the Self referred to is in the form of bliss (*anandarupa*). The correct understanding of the meaning of this dictum is true contemplation and the man possessing this knowledge is the true contemplative.

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In *Love and Blessings*, after the almost unbearably touching scene of Nitya walking out on Nataraja Guru and the Gurukula, he begins his 18 months of solitude. Abandoning his social supports—what he often called crutches—he plunged into the void. The beliefs he had always assumed to constitute a solid reality evanesced like dew before the sun. Eventually they were replaced by the kind of plank he advocates here: direct experience of being an essential part of the whole.

When Paul cited the analogy from the last verse of taking a pot full of water out of the ocean, I added that the analogy only works if you imagine an ocean separated from the sky, making a dualistic condition. The true ocean of existence is everywhere, so a pot filled with spirit cannot be lifted out of it. We may think of ourselves as being separate, but that doesn't make it true. Deb shared a line from Emily Dickenson that she once dreamed of, repeating over and over: "exultation is the going of an inland soul to sea." The joy of realization is reentering the universal after having been separated out from it, and the plank of certitude is the awareness of this verity, not as an idea but as a convincingly felt experience. Here's Nitya's account of how his isolation stripped him of the false plank he had been treading on, from *Love and Blessings*:

## TRANSFORMATIONS IN SILENCE

A large number of people came to watch me vanish into my secret abode. I stood for a moment at the door looking out at the crowd that was showing all shades of sentiments. Many had their eyes overflowing, some were sobbing, and some literally crying. My heart sank to a profound depth of sorrow. I closed the door and sat in silence the darkness. It was as if I was dead to the world.

After two hours of silent meditation, I became curious. From the growing silence, I knew that all those outside had gone away. I

felt a desire to open a window and look out, but I thought it would be a dishonest way to sneak out of my silent state. So I stayed in meditation on my bed. But however much I tried to remain silent and without thought, I kept feeling as if I was falling into a great abyss, somewhat like Alice going down the rabbit hole.

At first it was just like falling into a bottomless pit, as if the solid plank under my feet had been pulled away and I was plunging downwards. Then I began to feel the terrible speed with which my body was going down. I needed something to hold on to and was frantically searching for support. There was nothing. A great fear came over me, and I began to think I was going mad. I wanted to cry out for help. Then I saw my will becoming stubborn to stop me from doing anything silly. I don't know how long I sat there, but around two o'clock in the morning I finally fell asleep.

Around 4:00 I woke up. My first thought was that I should have a set program to bring some sort of system to my new mode of living. (174)

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You can listen to and read the amazing poem Visions of Johanna, by Bob Dylan, here:

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bobdylan/visionsofjohanna.html>

### **Part III**

Prabu sent an essay critical of the Epstein, which I'm including for those interested in how computers work more than how brains work, which remains unknown. It has as many faults as the first article. What strikes me is that in the present state of

scholarship there is so much anger and negativity, a mirror of our political sphere I suppose. Everyone is fighting for their turf, for being right by highlighting the faults of others. While the two authors share a similar conclusion, the second has to emphasize his disdain rather than voice agreement. It's an interesting lesson, especially since Graziosi does not prove his contention either. Here's Prabu's letter with the link:

I read the Epstein's essay "The empty Brain" and found some of his descriptions of computers and brains quite unconvincing. So I did a little research on the topic to clearly understand the subject. I came across the below article. It points out the fallacies of the Epstein's essay but agrees with his claim "that the brain is not the sole cognitive resource we have available to us to solve problems." It's an interesting reading.

<https://sergiograziosi.wordpress.com/2016/05/22/robert-epsteins-empty-essay/#comments>

My response:

Thanks for this. The author makes some good points of criticism, but doesn't actually support his own thesis, as far as I could tell. He puts it off for another time. Like him, I also noticed that some of Epstein's points were simply tautologies. The part I liked was the summary of metaphors we have been dependent on through history. We always think of the present one as "right," which is kind of true but also a kind of mental crutch. A half truth.

Knowing that our paradigms change and therefore have a significant level of uncertainty helps to mitigate arrogance, to my mind a worthy goal.