

VIII Bhakti Darsana, Contemplative Devotion

Verse 6

I am ananda, I am Brahma, I am atma; in such forms, for whom there is always identification, as a contemplative he is well known.

9/4/7

Bhakti occurs when the contemplative is fully identified with one of the aspects of the Absolute, such as the three enunciated here. If the identification is described in words, there is inevitably a degree of interpretation involved. Narayana Guru assures us we should gladly accept the other person's interpretation also, and not insist that ours is the only "right" one. If there is valid identification at some point, the heart opens in generosity to other interpretations; if there is only imagined or anticipated identification, it is less easy to admit the other person's perspective. There is a tendency to become inflexible, in hopes that a rigid adherence to established guidelines will accomplish the imagined result.

While it may sound mysterious and far off in both time and space, identification with the Absolute is the simplest, most ordinary state, the one from which we have sprung and in which we swim all day long. It is nothing more or less than reality shorn of its interpretative aspect. Brenda provided us with an apt quote from Henri Bergson, from *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*:

Suppose then, we imagine a mind always thinking of what it has just done and never of what it is doing, like a song which lags behind its accompaniment. Let us try to picture to ourselves a certain inborn lack of elasticity of both senses and intelligence, which brings it to pass that we continue to see what is no longer visible, to hear what is no longer audible, to say what is no longer to the point: in short, to adapt ourselves to a past and therefore imaginary situation, when we ought to be shaping our conduct in accordance with the reality which is present.

Nitya's beautiful commentary begins "The impenetrability of matter and the evanescence of an idea such as 'God is Love' are conjectures of mind." In other words, both the materialist's standpoint and the spiritualist's standpoint are based on mental projections aimed at interpreting the same underlying reality. Life is a continuing series of identifications and interpretations concocted as each of us wrestles with the flow of the stream of consciousness. But how seldom do we relax our guard and simply delight in the flow itself? Nitya concludes by saying "If only [our consciousness] could leave the surface for a split second and dive deep to become enlightened of the 'inside' story, it would become at once free of the multitudinous world and would see in wonder, listen in wonder, and later speak in wonder of the one Absolute all this is. Although such a state of the highest wonder has no need for articulation and has no words for expression, in such a state it is as if one declares one's truth as *aham brahma asmi*, 'I am the Absolute.'"

In a variation on a tried and true metaphor, Anne likes to imagine standing in a river as the water sweeps past her. There is no possibility of holding back the flow, so she can watch in wonder as events approach, unfold, and pass along downstream. Most of

what occurs is very entrancing, but there are occasional frightening moments, as if a log or dangerous fish were coming around the bend and about to crash into you. Well, of course you don't just stand there, you get out of the way. And sometimes they claim their pound of flesh. Sadly, those who have been hurt or who have been taught to be afraid stand in the river with all their attention trained on detecting the next disaster as far ahead as possible. They ignore the wonderful, limpid stream that tickles their ankles because it is merely a distraction from being on guard. And if they wait long enough, some dangerous thing will sooner or later come along, as if to confirm their suspicions. If it misses them they focus on how awful it might have been if it hit them. And if it does collide, their expectations are proved right. Unfortunately, not only do they miss the many enjoyable parts that way, they are in a sense frozen in anticipation of the next disaster. Their imagination supplants their awareness. By staying cognizant of the flow at all times, one is much better able to take the necessary steps to avoid problems or cope with those that actually occur. This unquestionably includes making substantial efforts to detoxify and neutralize past traumas, which we all harbor to one degree or another.

Anita sagely reminded us that even in some cases where we are strongly motivated to intervene, the best option may well be to let go of our need to be in control. With loved ones we want so much to fix things and make them okay, but our very intervention may actually be part of the problem. Knowing when to participate and when to hold back is yet another razor's edge to walk, an art form to be expressed, with an instant feedback mechanism usually built in.

In the long, magnificent unfolding of our life, we have all been trained to have little faith in the inherent wonder of the process, but to imagine we are wholly responsible for causing it to happen. The conflict between our uncomfortable realization that we have no clue how to accomplish anything beyond trivialities

and the empowerment of the ego to be the final arbiter of our destiny, produces a permanent state of angst, of low-grade worry and anxiety. By redirecting our vision to appreciate the magnificence of life in all its variegations, embracing the negative along with the positive, we can shed the misery of fearful anticipation in large measure. It is not so hard to accept our limitations, when we are aware that they are vastly more than outweighed by the unlimited Absolute. We are riding on “inexhaustible formations and elaborations,” unfolding the harmony of lives of unbelievable complexity, permitted to tinker with superficial factors like what to have for dinner, where to work or who to marry. Of course we struggle with how much effect we can and should have on the river as it flows past our feet. Getting it just right is an art form indeed. But the vast majority of everything is cared for and guided by the loving yet subtle hand of nature. Being aware of this brings a profound sense of gratitude to balance the ups and downs of our daily life. We don't have to build the building, we are only empowered to paint the façade. We don't have to create the river, only to refresh ourselves in its cooling waters.

Part II

Anita wrote about Nitya's sentence: “The impenetrability of matter and the evanescence of an idea such as ‘God is Love’ are conjectures of mind.”

I'm really glad you provided some explanation of Nitya's opening sentence as I was not clear at all about what it meant. I had to look up “evanescence” as it's a word I don't come across frequently. As usual, looking up a word in the dikker always leads me into more pondering...why would a “an idea such as

‘God is Love’“ dissipate or disappear (definition of evanescence)?

What is a “conjecture of mind”. The dikker says conjecture is inference based on incomplete or inconclusive evidence. So, ‘God is love’ is based on incomplete or inconclusive evidence? Maybe ‘love’ is the problematic word here.

Anne’s vision of standing in the river and also Brenda’s of being a river were both helpful to me last night. And I do relate to what you said about not being so concerned about watching for the next log or whatever that it takes me away from enjoying the lovely refreshing coolness and flow of the water. Detoxifying past stuff is something we all appear to be involved with.

My response:

As to conjectures about God is Love, God is definitely the bigger conjecture. Most of us have felt love in several forms, but what do we know of God? We rely solely on hearsay and speculation. Our utter conviction about the solidity of God resembles more than a little the materialist’s conviction about the substantiality of matter. When examined closely, matter turns out to be almost entirely empty space. Even the tiny bits of “actual” particles in all that space consist of mostly empty space too. Similarly, when we examine our beliefs in God they turn out to be mainly unwarranted assumptions, having more holes than an atom, you might say. What do we truly know of God? All we can point to is the perfection of “all this.” God is merely a presumption to account for the perfection.

It’s just like Susan’s story last night of her friend who taught her little boy a wonderful lesson when he was 4 or 5. First she

pointed to his foot and asked, “Is this Brucie’s foot?” “Yes,” said Bruce. “But is this Brucie?” she asked. “No,” said Bruce. Then she moved up to his knee. “Is this Brucie’s knee?” “Yes.” “Is it Brucie?” “No.” And so on all over the place. She was trying to give him an idea of his soul, or as we would say atman. His body was perceptible, but his sense of self was not. Still, it had an irrefutability that even a child could easily vouch for. The class couldn’t help wishing someone had done the same for us when we were little. Mostly we were rigidly instructed to identify with our bodies. For instance, it never worked to say “I didn’t take the cookies—my body did!”

When we need a reassuring image to hold onto in the flux of the river we float in, we habitually cling to the flotsam and jetsam of half-baked notions with famous names. I’m speaking of God, Allah, Buddha, Krishna and all the rest. It would be better to think back to when we were learning to float in the pool as a six-year-old. You had to grok how to lie back and relax, in a chilly medium that seemed perfectly unsupportive. You put your arm down and it went right through! Freak out! The trick was to overcome those feelings of panic, and trust that what they told you was true: you would float, just as generations of kids before you had floated. Just lie back and let go. The calmer you are, the better you float. Once you get the hang of it, it’s quite a lot of fun. Something that truly holds you up is not evanescent. The evidence for it is therefore conclusive.

Part III

Baird sent along a poetic version of my stutterings about floating. Hurray for the great writers, and for the friends who share them with us!

Your discussion reminded me of

“The Avowal” by Denise Levertov:

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit’s deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.

* * *

11/21/17

Bhakti Darsana verse 6

I am *ananda*, I am *brahma*, I am *atma*;
in such forms, for whom
there is always identification,
as a contemplative he is well known.

Nataraja Guru’s translation:

*I am Bliss, I am the Absolute, I am the Self,
In whom in such forms,
There is always creative imagination,
As a contemplative he is well known.*

Another magnificent essay lifts us to sublime heights rooted in the seed of the verse: exactly the sort of thing that Narayana Guru must have hoped to arouse with his pithy koans. I mused that

how easily we made sense of it showed how much our study has entered into us. If we had not delved far into the Gurukula version of Advaita Vedanta, it might have been rather baffling, but since we have it has become what it was meant to be: a valuable teaching tool as well as an inspiring poetic infusion.

Nitya has noted before that the secret wisdom of the Upanishads or similar wisdom texts is an open secret, available to anyone who has adequate preparation to understand it. No one is barred, yet without laying the groundwork such secrets remain out of reach. We ourselves determine what is a secret and what is not.

Once again we struggled with this concept. It is a very common notion that by not thinking, by not seeking intelligent understanding, we will somehow miraculously arrive at the realizations heralded by the gurus. Believing this, we are constrained to equate our personal ignorance with the wisdom of the ages. That idea subtly inserts the ego in the center of the picture, where it divides everything and excludes what doesn't suit its pretensions. This study isn't about reclaiming our survival-based default settings but of overcoming them to achieve something miraculous, paradoxically within everyone yet rarely attained.

The excellent contemplative of this verse knows the One in the midst of the many. (This One is capitalized to distinguish it from being merely one of the many—it is of a different order entirely.) Deb started us off quoting from the last paragraph:

The hand that is busy with the creation of the phenomenal sometimes shares its art with painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, writers, dancers, and even kids in their tender age who gather together to forge their enchanting world of eidetic creation. In all these inexhaustible formations and elaborations, what is at work is also the One which is always at rest. By remaining One it becomes the many.

Deb urged that our task is to always feel and participate in the One. While admiring the variegations of the manifested world, she knows the experience of beauty is a unifying sensation within her.

Scotty could intuitively feel how artists and musicians (he is both) at their best link up with the flow. He is currently contemplating what his next move in life will be, and he has found a place on the Oregon Coast where the different rhythms of the trees, valleys, sunlight and the waves all vibrate together to make a continuous music for him. He wonders why he should do anything other than dance with this process. It reminded Andy of an idea from the Ashtavakra Gita that the realized mind was like the sky. Sky or ocean, both represent openness, oneness. Whatever you do to the sky it does not lose its skyness. Whatever shape it is formed into, it is not fundamentally changed.

Paul chafed at how we are constrained to accept rules of the proper way to act. He feels very insecure in his acceptance, though he has often acquiesced to the demands made upon him. He was recently enchanted by an artist who painted an ugly, deformed tree instead of one of the many perfect specimens that surrounded it. She felt that true beauty comes from experience, from suffering the abuses of life and being shaped by them, while persevering and staying alive. This led us to an acknowledgement of how we are drawn into dualistic thinking by the cult of the ideal: we admire the “perfect” tree and pity or scorn the less perfect ones. All, of course, have defects, yet at the core all are perfect. Having a selective idea of perfection leads all too easily to feelings of superiority and inferiority. None of us quite measure up to ideal perfection, and we know it. But shouldn’t that be okay? Are we denigrating ourselves merely because of a simplistic notion that ill serves us? Probably.

I noted how perfection is an especially deceptive notion in the political and religious arenas. If some minor infraction is made public, a worthy politician may be doomed, while her much more egregious fellows get away with murder so long as their disguises

hold up. Or the charlatan who puts forward the best image captures the trusting flock, while his more savvy neighboring sages are ignored. The worst of it is that we regular folk often think we are not okay until the time we are perfected, which basically means we will never be okay. Unless we can accept having flaws, we will always undervalue ourselves. That doesn't mean we shouldn't work on improving our self, only that we should be kindhearted about how we go about it.

Deb offered that perfection is often taken as a static idea, but it must be a dynamic, living process that accords with the nuances of each moment. Moni gave a perfect example from her day at work, where she was challenged by a seriously deranged applicant for assistance. Because of her expertise at what she does, she handled the situation in a way that minimized its negative impact. For someone like her, it is almost a matter of instinct how to handle that kind of emergency. She was surely drawing on her full consciousness, and not merely her frontal lobes.

We talked of peace, love and understanding, and the general consensus was that the first two have priority as potentially absolute values while the third is more a measure of how far we are separated from unity. Again, this is contrary to Vedantic wisdom and intent. Understanding is a dialectical process where the Self and the non-Self are brought into harmonious unity, which state has characteristics that evoke what we call peace and love and so on. Without understanding they remain partial at best.

On examination, peace and love as we know them are always partial realizations, ideals we strive for yet which remain as distant goals. The minute we say we embody either one we have separated our self-image from what we think of as the unpeaceful and unloving. Only understanding achieves a state that includes everything. Earlier in the morning I had been proofing the Jnana Darsana in Nataraja Guru's *Integrated Science of the Absolute* (ISOA) and saved this in the highlights:

The overall structure of reasoning proper to the Science of the Absolute presupposes further a common homogeneous matrix, where reasoning can freely move as awareness within its own external and internal active or passive limiting attributes. There are always the substance and the thought involved. The former has a horizontal and the latter has a vertical reference. When paradoxes and vicious-circle arguments are avoided or resolved, one attains the Absolute easily, which is the overall aim of pure reason. (259)

Pure reasoning is supposed to be the effort we are expending to incorporate the truths of Darsanamala into our lives. A couple of more highlights from ISOA may help:

What the reasoning process is finally meant to accomplish is to reveal the truth of an equation between the Self and the non-Self. (261-2)

The gap between concepts and percepts has to be bridged by a reference to known and valid reasoning processes belonging generally to the domain of logical thought of Indian philosophy. (263)

This is precisely what is meant by resolving duality into unity. It is an active process, as the human default setting is dualistic. Our brains evolved to serve the purpose of survival in a world where everyone is prospective dinner for someone else. We are attempting to spend a few minutes free of such compunctions, in hopes of developing the kind of highly-evolved being advocated by the saints and sages of all time: one grounded in a unitive oceanic state brimming with peace, love and understanding. Nitya starts off by undermining our conceits about this:

The impenetrability of matter and the evanescence of an idea such as ‘God is Love’ are conjectures of mind. How many such conjectures is the mind capable of? No one can say, because mind is replete with millions of such shimmering mentations that glow like fireflies. This is an activity that goes on continuously.

From a cosmic perspective, our beliefs are fascinations we entertain ourselves with, those flitting fireflies, and we are trying to take a break from the hypnotic state these fascinations engender. If we can, we will find ourselves resting in the Absolute. Could we budget even a few minutes a day to foster this? Why not? As the Gita puts it, in II.40, “Even a little of such a way of life saves one from great apprehension.” From great anxiety.

Andy noted how this and the last verse enclose an amazing simplicity and purity. He shared an example of how to unite the one and the many. Lately he’s been going to the gym and working out, a new and tedious behavior. The treadmill is utterly boring, so he has added listening to Indian ragas while he slogs along. The singer occasionally hits a pure luminous note that seems to him to epitomize the One among the manyness of his exercise routine, and he is captivated by it. Charmed. Sound really does have the ability to attract and focus our attention, which makes the everyday dullness fade into the background.

Instead of a meditative focus on unity, we are trained to classify and sort all the separate items of existence, and to try to be happy with that kind of squirrel cage work. It’s sure fun, and it’s easy to measure! It has definable results. Those fireflies are very pretty, and naming them is quite satisfying. It was our first major task as infants, and always brought us rewards if we had attentive caregivers. In a sense we’re still doing it:

In each such glow there looms existence as 'this is'. Each affirmation of the given existence is immediately predicated as 'such and such'. Nothing comes so handy as a predicable to be classified. Classification is made on the basis of a mark of distinction. The uniqueness of each mark is based upon its worth or value. Again, this worth is decided upon the predicable's capacity to stimulate the ego to glow with an affective identification.... Any one identification does not preclude the ego from forgetting it in the very next instant, only to assume another identification which is as unique as the previous one.

That's the human mantra: "This is such and such. Now This is such and such...." Those pernicious gurus claim that there is an even better light than fireflies hiding behind the endless play of existence, and we won't notice it if we are too caught up in the play. To access it, Nitya often suggested we try to observe how one fascination fades out and is replaced by the next. Ordinarily we don't even notice how we skip from one thing to the next, because the next thing commands our full attention, so he recommended watching how one disappears and the next elbows its way in. It establishes a flow that takes us out of the eternal moment of the One:

This process of shifting from the 'be-ness' of one identity to another is as compulsive as the flow of time, which no one can inhibit or reverse.

So yes, we're not going to be able to stop the flow, but we're going to attune also to the interstices, so that we keep our life in perspective. Nitya very eloquently details how the sequence of items of interest envelops and binds us:

Although a once assumed and experienced identification is cast aside in the next moment like the slough that is molted by a snake, the process by which each identification is arrived at is carefully preserved as a brick in the superstructure of the built-in world of ever-growing dimension in which the ego dwells.

There is nothing trivial about the way the world engulfs us within system after system:

When a person dies, they are believed to have come to a total extinction or a transference to some mythical realm of dead souls. But when a memory slips out of consciousness it is only normal to expect the same to reappear with exaggerated or diminished importance on many a subsequent occasion. Thus what is feared as the past that has departed forever goes on coiling around the present, making the present fabulous in its inclusion of the variegation of names and forms and the correlatives of causes and effects. In this great process that is happening in the psychic replica of cosmic evolution, systems are fused into systems.

Paul set off a major, almost giddy discussion by asking what the purpose of the phenomenal world is. He wondered if there was some intelligent design, and wouldn't that indicate a purpose? Can we learn about the design by investigating each substance?

I suggested a phenomenal world was a great idea, and that it would be extremely boring if nothing ever happened or nothing ever changed. Bushra rightly added that we wouldn't know it anyway, because without a phenomenal world we wouldn't exist.

I'm guessing that Paul is struggling with the determination of many scientists to subtract meaning and purpose from their world models. It is a disheartening trajectory. Nitya calls such innately limiting ideas "ludicrous" in the third paragraph. That kind of

reductionism served a purpose once upon a time, at the beginning of the scientific revolution, but we are desperately in need of integral wisdom at the present time. Divide and conquer grounded in meaninglessness is killing the planet, but our hubris is so great that we would rather die than admit our failings, and if we can't even admit our failings we are certainly never going to relinquish them.

Bushra summed Paul's question up from an absolutist viewpoint: purpose and design are not two things. They are one thing seen from two different angles, like form and content. As every form has content and every content has form, every design has purpose and every purpose has a design. They are created together. She mused how silly it is for humans to split everything up. I threw in that we learn about the inherent design in objects by investigating them. If we don't do anything, they remain inert lumps of matter. By learning their secrets we find all sorts of additional possibilities: so much is hiding beneath the surface. The process of discovery is a fascinating one, and our lives would be a far cry from what they are if we never went beyond simple acceptance to find out what makes the universe tick.

Nitya touches on several typical models of perspective, in each of which a form of purposefulness is implied, though he wasn't addressing it right then. Purpose is what gives life meaning, and meaning provides interest. In this, fact and fiction interlace in amazing ways. Nitya often noted how much more alive fictional characters are than factual ones. Here he puts it:

Still another model is of geniuses like Vyasa, Valmiki, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and others, who populate the world with countries, people, and all kinds of weird wars and enchanting love affairs with such creative ability that a Ravana, an Arjuna, an Agamemnon, an Othello or a Mephistopheles has

a more enduring personality grid than anyone who is still in flesh and blood around us.

Another of the suggested models is why I bother to try to share this wisdom, because it is a common and unnecessarily tragic one:

Another model is to walk blindfolded into lifelong imprisonment, looking upon every fetter and chain as a duty to be performed in the collectively accepted and believed world of transaction, which houses institutions like home, society, religion, nation, and every form of manmade law. (384)

How is it that we come to believe so devoutly in this particular model of enslavement, and why is its overthrow seen as a radical departure from the norm? It must serve the social needs of humanity very well. If we are too timid to take the quantum leap back into our true self, there is a quasi-reliable set of ideas that are universally adhered to, at least in public. They comprise a decent ethic, more or less. Most of us define ourselves as either upholders of the status quo or denigrators of it. Either way, we hitch our star to the pole of bondage. To add to its hold over us, most religious systems advocate taking care of each obligation as the sole means to liberation. Vedanta recognizes that there is no end to these obligations, so if you want to break out, you'd better try to figure it out. But what will the neighbors think if you do become independent-minded?

Bushra offered two lovely alternatives to ordinariness. She used to teach videography to teenagers, and it could be very challenging. One day she decided she was going to first and foremost love her students, and everything changed. There were still problems, but they became opportunities to reimagine herself in a positive way rather than reasons to feel thwarted and resentful

of her students. What a sea change such a simple alternative attitude can produce!

Bushra also spoke of a man at the prison where she volunteers, who decided to follow a Buddhist practice of only eating between dawn and noon. Food in prison is often a political weapon, being bartered for favors, so much so that sharing food is illegal. After the inmate adjusted to his new diet, he began to set his dinners in the middle of the table and not eat them. At first his tablemates were suspicious. What do you want for it? What are you up to? He told them he wasn't bartering for anything, he was just giving his food away. Bushra observed how suspicion was transformed into acceptance, and it was a big relief for everyone to step out of their contractual mindset. Even the prison guards, who usually are very strict about enforcing rules, could see that it was a benign act, and they let it continue. Now at that table, if someone doesn't want all their food they put the excess in the middle of the table, free to everyone.

Both Bushra's examples show how a change of attitude can have a positive impact. *Deciding* to change isn't so simple, but once you have made the decision it is an easy way to "attain the Absolute." Of course, phenomenality can go in any direction, and we are free to develop it in whatever way we believe in. As Nitya advocates, we can try to open to the inner One, distancing ourselves from the world of agitations:

In all these inexhaustible formations and elaborations, what is at work is also the One which is always at rest. By remaining One it becomes the many. Even when a person is at the height of hilarity, or pinched in every limb with shooting pain, this One, the purest of all consciousness, sits as gently as a meditating Buddha and witnesses the ongoing drama of pain and pleasure, while the poor ego is tossed on the surface in the

tumult of transactional agitations such as of cognition, volition and feeling.

Part of the joy of our class gathering is that we allow for little tiny cracks in the veneer. Even a little bit is very refreshing. Our egos are working so hard to maintain the fictional 'I', thrashing about in the eddies of a universe unfolding, that they are gratified to have a rest in a safe environment. Nitya winds down his meditation by coaxing the ego to continue to loosen its grasp:

If only it could leave the surface for a split second and dive deep to become enlightened of the 'inside' story, it would become at once free of the multitudinous world and would see in wonder, listen in wonder, and later speak in wonder of the one Absolute all this is.

A simple conclusion remains to be drawn when we perceive that the Absolute (God, Nature, etc.) is all there is:

Although such a state of the highest wonder has no need for articulation and has no words for expression, in such a state it is as if one declares one's truth as *aham brahma asmi*, "I am the Absolute."

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

As stated in the previous verse, a contemplative having conceptually and intellectually understood the truth of the great dicta like "I am Bliss," "I am the Absolute," "I am the Self," as referring to the same reality when he realizes himself to be the Absolute through his own inner experience (perceptually), this

state is said to be the most superior kind of contemplation. The man attaining to this kind of contemplation is the best of contemplatives.

* * *

Susan was unable to attend class this week (Thanksgiving holiday in the US), but sent this very thoughtful contribution after reading the verse at home:

Dear Scott,

Just read the verse and you were right, it's a great one indeed. One of the best, I think. I have been contemplating this sort of thing a lot lately — specifically the conjectures of the mind and how we shift from one identity to the next. I have been reading *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurie and it's all about this sort of thing. The female protagonist is constantly imagining herself in other people's shoes and thinking what they must be thinking and thinking what will happen next as though it is set in stone. She is almost never right in her conjectures and she is never really present to herself. In fact, in all this first person narrative we never learn her actual name but only who she is in relation to the other characters (Mrs. de Winter, for instance). The *Rebecca* of the title is another woman who has died before the book opens. The main character lives in a dream world her entire life and never really comes to herself. I can relate to this as someone who struggles to stop projections and worries and imaginings. It takes a lot of intention and work to push aside our tendency to project all sorts of worlds. The formation of these is so relentless. Sitting quietly in meditation and imagining a still, watery surface (I think this came to me partly from the first verses of this darsana) I can “dive deep to become enlightened of the

‘inside’ story,” as Nitya says. It is so reassuring to find the stillness again, to remember the One.

* * *

In response to this that I sent out last week:

Apodictic is a favorite word of Nataraja Guru, and it turns out it was Merriam-Webster’s word of the day for 11/1/17. I thought I should double-check my memory while plowing through the Jnana Darsana, and thought you might enjoy their one-minute refresher course also:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apodictic>

Part III

Susan sent some additional insights:

I had some more good thinking time, spurred on by Nitya’s commentary:

The projecting worlds and structures that Nitya refers to also make one think that things are going to happen in a certain way or should happen in a certain way — according to a plan, in a specific order (some particular, proper, foreordained, righteous, correct plan and order?). I am going to be honest and kind and generous and that will lead to a good life and a happy family. If my children say this or do that, it means that this or that is going to happen and I should worry or intervene or let go. If I were just smarter and worked harder I would be more fulfilled and mean more to my family and friends. We are always looking to the outside for that order, that

plan — these ideas about how we should live and how things are going to happen is all based on what we are told or how other people do things or how things have gone before that cause us to reach for or avoid similar outcomes. Cause and effect. I struggle at times with the idea that this is not real, this idea of cause and effect. But more recently with piano and with my dreams I can understand better. Piano is going really well these days. It is so satisfying and it feels as though the music spins out of me in a way I never experienced before I started with my teacher Susan Riggs last year. Before I had an idea about how it should go and how it certainly wasn't going with me. I thought if I only had talent or if I'd only practiced 10 hours a day or if I'd only been smarter, I could get to such and such a level and really excel and then I'd be happy, fulfilled and also feel partly legitimate in even existing (yes, sometimes it gets quite pathetic). This is all ego driven stuff and even my reaction to it was based on the structures I was erecting constantly. I was always disappointed in myself because I was not living up to some expectation. These days, I'm quite sure, objectively speaking, that I am no better at the piano than I ever have been but now it doesn't matter in that way to me. It's more like emerging from a cocoon instead of trying to fit myself into a mold. I'm just going along, learning the pieces from the inside — listening, feeling, allowing. Sweet, and so lacking in the usual tension and angst that I used to feel. My recent dreams about babies are very much like this too. This little life that I am nurturing is very much a part of me and so full of love and no stress. I'm just letting this be and not thinking too much about it yet — seeing where it leads.

I've always been told to be myself and love myself (my mother and my friends through time have remarked on my lack of self love and lack of assertion) but that takes me to a place of inadequacy. I think of a specific formula and structure to get to the place of

knowing myself and putting myself out there and I can't even do that right. I'm supposed to have strong opinions and expound on things, I supposed to say what I want and insist on getting it. Now that I'm reading the book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, by Susan Cain, I can see that this way of categorizing how a person should be actually may not be appropriate for me. I know people are just trying to help. They want me to be confident and fully myself but it's possible that for me that might look very different. Inside, I feel as though I'm growing and finding my way but outside I am still an introverted type. The author of the book, talks about how the world prefers and lauds extroverts. I think I have always felt inadequate because I am not that. But it is just a formula, another way of being. How refreshing to read about others like me who are not less valuable. They are just themselves. Anyway, there is more to say about this subject and the book (which I have just started) later, as it seems relevant to the discussion in class and my current emergence from the bindings of conditioning.

This again reminds me of the Chinese finger trap. We think we have to figure things out in one way (with force and according to the usual plan) and yet the solution is so unexpectedly about opening to an entirely different possibility. Love that.

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Once again the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad lesson we are studying in Nancy Y's online group contains an uncanny parallel with our Portland Gurukula class, almost as though Nitya was speaking directly to us. I mentioned in the class how Nitya asked us to watch how one item of interest disappears and is replaced by another, since we hardly ever notice the transition, and so live

without a sense of the greater context. He elaborates on this nicely in Volume II, pages 25-6 of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

There are three mysteries here. The first is that we do not know what the noumenon is, and yet it manifests. The second is that when the noumenon presents itself as phenomenon, it is so elaborate and variegated with every possible difference in the parts of the manifested that each part stands out as absorbingly enchanting. In the mystery of being fascinated by that, we are not in any mood to make a probe into the original cause. The third is that what has been so clearly presented to our perception and mental comprehension vanishes into nothing like a will-o-the-wisp. Death or cessation of the manifested happens so abruptly and unexpectedly that we have no clue to find out what veil the manifested has disappeared behind.

The first mystery refers to the projection of the world from the unknown. The second is concerned with the demonstrative data which looks real in all details and is very well choreographed to be the most adorable presentation of the dance of life. The third is the dissolution, which leaves us in the awkward position of someone who is deceived.

Not only that, but it also addresses Paul's question about purpose:

Ultimately... consciousness propels the life of the organism with the appreciation of cosmological purposiveness. At first this purposiveness is confined to the nourishment of the organism and then to the propagation of the species. Only much later does it come to have a program of the evolution of its own self. Having become tired of always carrying an inertial body like a cage or a shell, the spirit wants to leave not only its terrestrial home but also the greater home of its cosmological

life. It becomes a constant dreamer of being liberated from body/mind instrumentality. (29)

And:

In empirical experience the intellect has to play a great role in leading consciousness through appropriate paths to be in tune with the central purposiveness of life. Whatever is gathered through dreams, imaginations and poetic experiences is to be revised and restated with the ultimate aim of making the soul free in its onward journey. That is why Yajnavalkya gives two aspects of *udgitha* as the main aid a person has to correct themselves from time to time and make their pursuit of life wisdom-oriented. (31)

And:

This mantra does not yield its result to one who merely hears it or reads it. One has to make an intense probe, sinking into its depth. All symbols used in the mantra are to be deciphered by *manana* and *nididhyasana*....

When a candle burns, it does not know that it is giving light to the world and that its wax is burning away. Most people who live in this world are also like lighted candles or burning lamps. Many people do not know they have a purpose in life and that, unknowingly, they are fulfilling it. A few people are conscientious. They know that they have come to this world to seek perfection every moment. The perfection we speak of is not formal or existential perfection. Apart from these kinds of perfection, there is value achievement. The highest value is the *summum bonum*, which means a person comes to a peak experience of a total expression of beatitude and happiness, which is equally and evenly shared by all who enter into

empathy with that person. That is why it is said that no man is an island in this world. (32)