

VIII Bhakti Darsana, Contemplative Devotion

Verse 8

Thus the wise man sees everywhere nothing but the joy of the Self—not even a little of anything else. His *bhakti* indeed is the highest.

9/18/7

I have to confess I missed this class, being out of town. The joy of the Self being universal notwithstanding, I wish it had been otherwise. I'll just sketch in a brief synopsis of the commentary to maintain class notes continuity. If anyone who attends can add to it, they are most welcome.

Clearly, this verse is as easy to comprehend as anything in the entire work. The more you examine your milieu intelligently, the more the all-pervading joy of existence is revealed to you. That's what makes the study such a delight. It's also why I shudder when people avow living in the Now as a way to screen off reality. The Now must include everything or it is only another form of mental defense system. A cloak for the spiritual ego. And the recent article by Oliver Sacks about Clive Wearing, the musical prodigy who contracted the worst case of amnesia known to science, reminds us how absolutely essential memory is. There are many different types of memory—Clive could still perform music at the highest level, for example—and the loss of some are more devastating than others. But living without the one that integrates the personality in time is a never-ending nightmare, a living death. When every moment is new, it has no meaning whatsoever.

What living in the Now really means is that you are most effective when you concentrate your attention, withdrawing it from skittering about in its ordinary, disconnected fashion. One-pointed attention is the hallmark of meditation, and it is a gratifying state, especially after the feeling of disorientation and being lost that accompany chaotic mental states. And what better to focus the attention on than the universal joy of the Self? As you open up to the joy it responds in kind, opening up to you. The wise one mentioned in this verse is most definitely living in the Now in the proper sense, accepting everything and not discounting anything. His joy is indeed the highest.

Okay. In the commentary Nitya traces in yet another subtle way the course of consciousness, from its fluctuation between the horizontal plus and minus, perception and conception, to the vertical negative where we make sense of it. It is very important that percepts and concepts match, but that part is well established now. Unavoidably, each of us has a different value interpretation of the world. As these multiple visions at the vertical negative are refined and made more universal, they rise up to the turiya, the fourth, where they all blend together. Their petty differences, so to speak, are annulled by the oceanic nature of their unity.

When a seeker achieves this oceanic unity, he or she becomes a seer. Nitya says:

Only this truest of all contemplatives can lucidly shift his position from one angle of vision to another, so that he can have an unprejudicial appreciation of every individuated being's value-orientation and concealed or expressed motivation. As he sees clearly the triple manifestations of the illusory, the transactional, and the transcendental, he excels in maintaining his position in the neutral zero from where he can easily enter into the most adorable Absolute. It is this

efficiency that makes his contemplation the highest of all achievements. (391)

Before arriving at this inspiring conclusion, Nitya passes through an idea well worth highlighting. Cit, the subsistent, is the golden link between sat and ananda, existence and value. It's the part that perceives and makes sense of it all, that which we loosely call consciousness. The point made here is that existence, and value or joy, are eternal factors, but the subsistent is our purview for "work on what has been spoiled," (hexagram 18, *ku*, in the I Ching).

Nitya instructs us:

Effecting the most needed purification of this vast realm of consciousness is the mighty challenge which every seeker of truth has to take upon himself. All the disciplines enjoined in the wisdom texts of all religions, all the austerities of mystics, and the self-discipline practiced by yogis are most useful to convert this infinite realm from the ocean of misery to the ocean of knowledge. (390)

For all of you who sometimes wonder just what we're up to in our Gurukula classes, now you know!

Actually, *ku* is one of the great hexagrams to check out, whether or not you've thrown it. Wilhelm makes some interesting and relevant comments, such as "Decay... has come about because the gentle indifference of the lower trigram has come together with the rigid inertia of the upper, and the result is stagnation. Since this implies guilt, the conditions embody a demand for removal of the cause." Guilt only means the decay has a human cause, as opposed to being a consequence of fate. Later he adds, "Decisiveness and energy must take the place of the inertia and indifference that have led to decay, in order that the ending may be followed by a new

beginning.” Sounds like the whole world might have thrown this one! I particularly like the sixth line: “He does not serve kings and princes, / Sets himself higher goals.”

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12/5/17

Bhakti Darsana verse 8

Thus the wise man sees everywhere
nothing but the joy of the Self –
not even a little of anything else.
His *bhakti* indeed is the highest.

Nataraja Guru’s translation:

*For the wise man who sees
Thus at any place whatever
There is nothing at all other than Self-Bliss;
His contemplation verily is the highest.*

Narayana Guru simplifies the essence of wisdom to its minimum requirements here: the best contemplative sees nothing but the Self, everywhere. There isn’t much you could add to that, so Nitya once again sketches the ways we deviate from such an awareness. His job was to remind us to get back to the essence, over and over, until it happened to happen. His task never ended, as simplicity remains remarkably elusive!

The verse says that the highest form of bhakti is when you see only joy everywhere. The reaction of the typical human to this is, “But... but... but...” It’s so hard to accept, because it isn’t merely a belief, it has to be a realization. With our habitual divisive thinking we just don’t get it. We are attuned to perceive areas of

possible joy and vast stretches of joylessness, particularly in chaotic times such as the one we find ourselves in now, and aim for the one and reject the other.

In the hope we will learn a yogic orientation to supplant our inherited transactional expertise of separating everything, Nitya runs us through the basic picture again and again. The first order of business is to match our conceptions with our perceptions. Again, that sounds simple enough, yet the human mind has a fantasizing tendency that overlays wishful thinking and bizarre beliefs onto the ground of what we perceive, and the outcome is almost certainly conflict. Nitya says:

When the alignment between perceived objects and their conceived properties is erroneous, perceptual illusions take the place of objective observations. When the required alignment has a correct one-to-one correspondence, the ensemble reckoned by the mind as the ‘other’ provides for a valid transactional context for the individuated self to enter into encounters or reactions. (388)

So the first task of the spiritual aspirant is to become aware of and then subtract the projections and superimpositions we routinely add on top of the ocean of joy in which we are eternally swimming. This wouldn't be too hard if there were gurus everywhere reminding us, but instead we are surrounded by charlatans actively promoting their own selfish interests at the expense of anyone who will buy into their manipulative sales pitches. Which is why Nitya observes that “In the case of most people, consciousness is more or less filled with the fluctuating details of the illusory and the transactional.”

We seem to be living in a time of the explosion of lunatic beliefs about God that are having real impacts on people's lives, and the Self is a most fertile ground for misaligned

correspondences between ideas and reality. It's no joke that well-armed cruelty and viciousness are widely extolled, even within several major religions. The most salient place to misalign our ideas about the Self with a pure, neutral version is religion. The Self is most often called by some name of God. Everyone agrees that God is all-loving, all-wise, all-compassionate, and so on, yet all sorts of opposite concepts are glorified alongside of these estimable qualities. Here in the US, we see our President, Trump, extolled as the perfect Christian. Never mind that he is the exact opposite of everything the Biblical Christ stood for and bears no relation whatsoever to him, because if you believe it, it must be true. Your friends in your chosen echo-chamber agree with you, making it even more true. A huge billboard has sprung up on the road to the Portland Gurukula, part of a massive read-the-Bible campaign, claiming improbably "Read the Bible to find out why Jesus created you." Nowhere in the Bible does it claim Jesus created anyone. Maybe that's the idea: people will pore through the whole Bible looking for that claim, and though they never find it they will have read the whole book. Anyway, it would be farcical if the same people weren't advocating guns for all, I suppose also in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength. These are glaring examples of what Nitya means when he talks of a "fake norm of ananda." False values, cherished because you hope they will serve you according to some perverse fantasy. Sadly, as several of us know perfectly well from personal experience, false hope in false values is truly self-destructive.

[Here at the beginning of 2024, [the Tom Tomorrow cartoon](#) focuses on the same topic, in "The Cycle of Manufactured Outrage."]

Spiritual seekers are dedicated to relieving themselves of burdensome beliefs, especially about the most far-reaching aspects of life, like God. It's ultimately for their own good. As Bushra

beautifully put it, if you are accusing, you are adding to the violence. She gave the example of Saddam Hussein in her native Iraq, who was accused of every terrible thing, some true, some not. Yet under his rule Iraq thrived, and when he was deposed things got much worse. It's an old story. We accuse because we imagine it lets us off the hook. As studies have shown, blaming is contagious. And it isn't effective in any real way. Bushra's example reminded me of Nataraja Guru's joke about standing in a noisy room and yelling at the top of your voice for silence. You're only making it louder.

Nancy wondered whether the terrible things that happen don't sow the seeds for great things in their aftermath. If everything is connected and in balance, maybe that's how evolution goes forward. Pain can help us have a clearer perspective.

The idea of perspective reminded Karen of a poster she's seen of a wide swath of the universe, galaxy upon galaxy forever, with an arrow pointing to a tiny speck in a recondite corner, indicating "You are here." Bill summarized the turmoil as nothing more than elements of the world playing out. Yet it's very hard for us to maintain a logically detached state of mind. Only if we can see everything as the Self does it become somewhat easier.

Honored visitor Swami Charles imagined a far-off country ruled by Republicans and Democrats, one good the other bad, and was puzzled how to fit Narayana Guru's philosophy into such a scene, in case he should find himself in a place like that. Deb remembered that Nitya advised always going to the heart of a person, as the heart was the true source of the social person. That means he was always trying to find out the cause of each person's attitude, instead of dealing with only its expression.

I said this was where the simple version of this verse is all you need to know: if you are taking sides, you aren't living up to the highest contemplative ideal. Any way at all that you rate one

thing over another, you are addressing something other than the oceanic joy of the Self. It's a challenge because when we look at the surface we see terrible things happening, and we want to replace them with good things. The class unfurled a long and fruitful discussion about looking to the cause instead of being captivated by the effect. I wish you were there, because I'm not able to write about it.

As one example, though, I've been reading *Out of the Wreckage*, by George Monbiot, an examination of the beliefs that have brought us to national and international disaster, and how that might be rectified. The core beliefs of Republicans and Democrats are largely the same. One is more heartless than the other, but when those are the core beliefs, disaster is assured whether you're nasty or nice. It has already happened many times over, so it isn't speculative. The point is that choosing between one version or the other of a failed philosophy is not going to get you anywhere. You will only be effective if you find out what the underlying motivations are and address those. The same is true of our psyches, of course.

Andy paraphrased Suzuki Roshi: as the world is permeated with evil, if you want to see the Absolute you have to become quiet. I was reminded how ineffective I am when caught up in noise and turmoil—my only hope of being in any way valuable to a situation is to find a quiet retreat and gather myself together. When I do, I often have useful insights, and may even be able to act on them.

One of the beliefs that keeps us bound to illusions is that we don't have to do anything to undo our bondage. Since so many of our efforts are futile or misdirected, we come to believe that all efforts beyond obvious transactional exchanges are futile, which is extremely unhelpful. The rishis offer a more propitious narrative that can lead us out of the ocean of samsara and back into the

ocean of joy from which we have sprung. Nitya describes it this way:

The cognitive mind has a tendency to move from multifarious effects to a unitive cause, so that the many can be unified through a process of reduction to arrive at a basic factor in which are seeded all the ramifications of consequential developments. When this tendency is promoted, the philosopher's quest to apprehend the source of everything increases until it culminates in an intuitive vision which becomes more and more organized, holistic, and reliable as a constant ground which has the potential to manifest itself into the variegated world of names and forms. (388)

This doesn't mean we should abandon our common sense respecting the world we live in, it only means that if we lose touch with our inner strength we will find ourselves at the mercy of a constantly shifting and deceptive milieu, a nightmare where we are driven by the walls of our cage:

In the perceptual appreciation, the operative force that acts as a mechanism of attraction or repulsion is an instinctive conditioning of a vitalistic order, which is inherited by all living beings to a certain extent as a device for the organism's self-preservation. This instinct misfires when the previously mentioned alignment between the perception and its corresponding conception is erroneously made. Then it is not very different from the trial-and-error chance operation one sees in the case of the rat in the maze. (389)

There's a hint here that a healthily holistic attitude has an actual impact on the world of names and forms, so it's more than empty-headed woolgathering.

Managing our own salvation is by no means a trivial endeavor of a dilettante, as it is likely to be viewed by traumatized maze-walkers. It requires both courage and the good fortune to have enough freedom to experiment with various options. We are rapidly coming to the end of a historical period where large numbers of people had quite a bit of freedom to experiment, and those who didn't may rue the time wasted once they have no more to throw away.

We're not talking here about being the smartest person in the room, which is a popular ideal:

The growth from mechanistic gestaltation to a more intelligent appreciation of a consciously apprehended ensemble shows maturity. Yet even this ability brings a person only to a level of the mediocre assessment of subject-object relationships. (389)

Nitya is speaking of the arena of competitive games that absorbs most of our attention. Behind it is the idea that wealth, fame and success bring joy automatically. It is certainly an appealing notion, no matter how many stories we hear of the emptiness that isn't purged by opulence or popularity. But if we are brave enough to see through this illusion, we may naturally turn to a more yogic type of mentality where inner and outer factors are brought together harmoniously:

It is in this rapid current of mind that the subtle maneuvering of consciousness enters to give the whole experience a meaning and worthwhileness of a perennial nature. (389)

The class took this to mean the emergence from duality into unity, from taking sides to seeing the joy of the eternal in everything, without exception. There are always plenty of disheartening actions happening that threaten to steal away our joy, and they will

if our joy is based on certain defined limits. The joy of being on the right side, the winning team, of being holier than thou, and so on, do not meet Narayana Guru's definition of the highest type of contemplative bliss. The surface will always have two sides. That's why we have to contemplate a total unity as an Absolute without attributes. The minute we give it a nuance or a twist, even the very best twist we can imagine, it becomes limited, and falsehood quickly colors our impression. Suddenly there are some catching the boat and some missing it. That's not where we're going with this! And yet we fall back into that kind of thinking all the time.

I should probably take a moment to clarify Nitya's paragraph presenting the complex enigmas that keep our head spinning:

The three orders of the mosaic that go into the structuring of the world, the two streams that culminate in the confluence of the unified stream, and the three appraisals of the imperiential connotation such as the meaning, the self, and the Absolute, are all in a muddle until wisdom prevails to sort them out and relate with diligence the triads of the physical, psychological, and cosmologic aspects of the entire situation. All these aspects are replete with enigmas of the worst order. (389)

The three orders are the perceptual, the conceptual and the intuitive, in other words, what we perceive, how we think of it, and what our instincts tell us about it. These last range from raw gut reactions to the sublime wisdom of our inner genius, and it's the role of the conceptual mind to sort those out and apply them to the other two. The two streams are the same system without the conscious conceptual, leaving only the perceptual and the intuitive. If these can be brought into confluence it produces an "incessant flow" of a "rapid current of mind." The three appraisals listed are essentially ananda, chit and sat, in that order.

It is not so simple to keep these complex factors regulated in an effective way. Nitya reminds us that “What should be the most tangible, objective, and irrefutably existent can also be the most spurious phantom of an illusion.” He goes on:

In most cases such defects belong to a generic possibility of error shared by all members of the species and the detection of the error comes to most people only when it is too late to rectify. (389)

Nitya used to say that the generic possibility of error was what Christians meant by original sin: the limitations of the innate structure of our being. We are built in a certain fashion, and this precludes any number of other things from being natural to how we function. You could also call it maya. The Christian notion of individual sin covers the region we actually have control over, the mistakes we make due to our own poor choices.

Once again sat, chit and ananda are threaded through the entire presentation. Nitya takes a close look at the middle term of saccidananda:

The second realm... is the individuated self, which can function merely as the mind propelled by desires and sustained by memories, representing a faulty ego, or it can assume the mighty role of transmuting everything into modes of consciousness as the supreme and primal *cit*. This is the golden link between existence and value, which can rightly be called the subsistent. It dominates the limitless world of consciousness, which includes in it both the conscious and the unconscious, and the known and the unknown. (390)

Existence and value are of course sat and ananda. The Gurukula excels in treating ananda as much more than bliss, which is the

ordinary translation. The bliss of ananda arises from value assessment, which provides meaning. The meaning of a thing is what gives it its impact. Nitya adds evaluation to the definition of ananda, highlighting the personal involvement. The three aspects of saccidananda are of course one universal thing described with three aspects. Nitya portrays this vividly as the variously perceived being conceived and evaluated, reflecting Narayana Guru's use of *brahma*, *atma* and *ananda* throughout this chapter, as an alternative form of saccidananda:

The true *bhakta* is one who is established in the consubstantiality of the eternal trios, who is capable of unflinchingly holding on to the one existentiality of the differently perceived, the differently conceived, and the differently evaluated ground of all. (390-1)

Remember: the ground does not change because we happen to be seeing or describing it in various ways. The minute we forget we are only imagining the change, we set up a division and prepare to do battle over it. So we are called to continually purify our thinking by paring it down to a non-differentiated basis, almost like a mathematical point or an empty void. And sorry folks, this doesn't happen without effort:

Effecting this most needed purification of the vast realm of consciousness is the critical challenge which every seeker of the Self has to take upon themselves. All the disciplines enjoined in the wisdom texts of religions, all the austerities of mystics, and the self-discipline practiced by yogis are most useful to convert this infinite realm from the ocean of misery to the ocean of knowledge. (390)

It isn't enough to have a simplistic belief that everything is one, we have to reduce everything that catches us out, back to a level where it is connected. Doing so is our contribution to peace and harmony. Anything less falls short of Narayana Guru's ideal, which we revere as the way to promote the kind of world we all aspire to live in and enjoy.

Sure, it might happen by accident, but it's highly unlikely.

Bushra shared a sweet story illustrative of how to have a unitive attitude when confronting terrible circumstances. Thich Nhat Hanh was asked by a distraught soldier what he should do to atone for killing a child in the war. Hanh told him there are millions of children who need help right now. Help one of them and you will be healed.

That's so perfect! We waste our lives stewing over our mistakes, when we could truly atone for them by a generosity of spirit. Not just in our mind, but in the most actual ways possible.

Michael noted that Nitya was keen on tangents in his commentary, maintaining that through wisdom you regain the holistic world. Writing about joy is problematic, but much can be said about the impediments to happiness. Like the Absolute, to describe joy is to shrink it, so we leave that to direct experience. But Michael did us the honor of relating a joyful moment at work, and it made us all feel even better. He was talking on the phone with a customer, a woman who is on death's door, and so lives every moment to the hilt. Her voice alone was full of joy, and he was thrilled. Every moment of her life, no matter how mundane, was blissful, she said, because she was alive to be there with it. She is living every day to the maximum of her ability. It made Michael want to rush home and put a note on his fridge: Find Joy!

In the same spirit, Deb related her time at this weekend's piano concert, performed by identical twins, Christina and Michelle Naughton. To her they were like angels, expressing and sharing abundant joy in the world. They emanated a palpable bliss

as they played, and their technical ability was almost unbelievable. We spoke briefly with them afterwards, and they struck us as a force of nature, wired in ecstasy and barely noticing the shadowy humans in front of them. They bowled everyone over.

If Nancy's theory of balance is right—and I'm sure it is—then we will see more of these natural yogis, highly evolved beings, as the dark netherworld of the human psyche shrieks into disaster. It's a philosophical delicatessen out there.

Paul mused on how the “figure eight of consciousness” image touched on “the transcendent imminence and the imminent transcendence.” Transcendence is a feature of the vertical axis—call it the goal of moving from the alpha to the omega. Immanence is the horizontal component at every step of the progression. We treat them as separate for convenience, but they are always one, so we should apprehend them from a position of “neutral zero,” as Nitya liked to put it. This is symbolized as the point of intersection of the two zeroes that form the 8. Paul is right that there is a movement implied. We contemplate the transcendent and then bring what we learn into immanence, into every aspect of our environment. Or we contemplate our world, and then look for how all those manifold items have a transcendental, unitive basis embracing them. We are not going to insist on one or the other standing alone. They depend on each other.

We have to be mentally flexible to shift our position to accurately see what's going on in the depths. The present political turmoil is just another example of what happens when you live in a fantasy world and ignore important problems until they become intractable, when they have you by the throat. Narayana Guru invites us to get on with it now, in Nitya's words:

Only these truest of all contemplatives can lucidly shift their position from one angle of vision to another so that they can have an unprejudicial appreciation of every individuated

being's value-orientation and concealed or expressed motivation. As they see clearly the triple manifestation of the illusory, the transactional, and the transcendental, they excel in maintaining their position in the neutral zero from where they can easily enter into the transcendent imminence and the imminent transcendence of the most adorable Absolute. It is this efficiency that makes their contemplation the highest of all achievements. (391)

We have been celebrating the birth of Bill and Nancy's first grandchild, who Deb and I had met yesterday, on her fifth day out in the light. It reminds you how a baby is drenched in the Self, and as I held her I whispered to her, "remember this place." Of course, she won't, consciously. None of us do. But we know it instantly if we are fortunate enough to find our way back. Deb and I were both reminded of a favorite saying of Tagore: "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man."

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

In the same way as worldly people enjoy sensual pleasures on the basis of the Bliss of the Self, so too the wise man enjoys Self-Bliss everywhere. He does not see anything but Self-Bliss in any object of interest. Because a wise man knows the unity of the living Self and the Supreme Self, the bliss he enjoys everywhere is known by him to belong to the Self. What is more, he treats without any difference all such bliss anywhere and in any creature as belonging to himself. In other words, the bliss of the creature is identical with the Bliss of the Self. The wise man understands this verity. Because he is capable of seeing all bliss as pertaining to the Absolute, his contemplation is called the most exalted.

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Michael sent a link to a discussion you may find helpful and amusing:

This lengthy anthology (?) of several articles on the topic speaks wisely to things we were discussing in class last evening.

I highly recommend it.

Michael

<https://medium.com/@neallwebster/sorry-but-you-are-not-entitled-to-your-opinion-ef4b06b3f094>