

IX Yoga Darsana, Transpersonal Union

Verse Ten

In this world yoga, in short, is of two forms—knowledge and action—thus. All forms of yoga are conclusively comprised in these two descriptions of yoga.

12/11/7

The Bhagavad Gita examines knowledge and action in detail and brings them together as one in yoga: “Yoga is reason in action.” Narayana Guru accomplishes the same thing over the course of the Yoga Darsana. The verses alternate an emphasis on jnana and then karma, thought and action. The overall structure is worth a look.

Verse 1 focuses on the mind. In it “we have an image of a bipolar affiliation between the limited mind and the total consciousness, brought about through a form of restraint.”

Verse 2 focuses on the heart. Yoga is the action of joining one’s heart with the Unknown.

Verse 3, name and form is the Absolute, therefore the mind merges in the Known.

Verse 4, the joy of this union is yoga.

Verse 5, we should consciously remind ourselves that all this is the Self, which is the Absolute.

Verse 6, willing, a form of action, should not be yoked to one’s vasanas or creative urges.

Verse 7, we should remember that what is “out there” is a reflection of “in here.” This verse could be considered to pertain to both thought and action.

A progressive merger of these two aspects is evident throughout the Darsana. Next they come together completely:

Verse 8, bliss draws the mind into union.

Verse 9, meditation brings union via subtle activity. In summary:

Verse 10, yoga is jnana and karma together.

Nitya, in his conclusion, surprises us with another structural revelation. In the great dictum *tat tvam asi*, That thou art, ‘That’ is the vertical or conceptual aspect of the Absolute and ‘thou’ is the active or horizontal. Jnana yoga releases us from the conceptual hypnosis of the Other, while karma yoga releases us from our perennial fixation on our self. “Thus, when the secret of the Self and the non-Self are taken together, it is evident there is only one yoga. It is both jnana and karma and also it is neither jnana alone nor karma alone.” (426)

The class explored some crucial aspects of why action and intelligence have to go together. We looked into the explosion of new aspects of what is often lumped into New Age religion, such as tarot reading, palmistry, divination, crystal energies, astrology, what is loosely called shamanism and so on. The question is how does one distinguish the real from the false, the discovery of hidden meaning from the projection of wishful thinking? This is critical, because as Anita pointed out, we don’t want to limit ourselves to what we already know. That would be stasis, and few people are so bold nowadays to insist we already know everything. To what extent do these practices help and what is their potential for harm?

If I was honest about reporting the class, I’d have to say that we were very accepting and tolerant of almost everything anyone could think of. I was pretty surprised at this. Vedanta should foster a strong sense of scientific skepticism, along with its open-mindedness and compassion for all sorts of venues. To paraphrase

Voltaire, while we may disagree with many things people believe, we will defend to the death their right to jump off the cliff of their choice.

I can report, though, that no one gave any reason that any of this purportedly spiritual exploration has any value at all. Anne put it best in perspective. All these practices are like Rorschach tests, the random inkblots that reveal the mental projections and topology of the interpreter. As such they can be seen as charming, even endearing, if not manifestations of gullibility. At best—and this is often the case—they provide a format for the release of people’s intuitive insights. Intuition is the aspect of mind we most closely link to spirituality. Of course, the line between true intuition and blatant ego projection is a fine one. That’s why we are making such a detailed and careful study of how the mind works and how easily it is deluded.

For me, as everyone already exasperatedly knows, delusion can be very dangerous. We always have the examples of our “fearless leaders” in business and government, raping and pillaging the planet while remaining within their dream of enhancing good and driving away evil. A clearcut is a “biological access trail.” Torture is “enhanced interrogation.” War is the best of all possible worlds. I brought up the example we heard the night before, of a doctor who was giving a fund-raising lecture in Atlanta to bring an Iraqi child to the US for medical treatment. Someone in the audience asked, seriously, “You mean there are *children* in Iraq?” To the consumer of propaganda, the Middle East is all terrorists, so there is no downside to waging all-out war on the entire region. Imagination is superimposed on actuality usually to its great detriment.

We had a dispatcher in our fire department who used a pendulum to look for gold. Soon he was using it to predict all sorts of things. One day he received a fire alarm and dispatched the fire engines. I was on the call. Soon he came on the radio and said,

“You can all return. False alarm.” He had used his pendulum to determine it. But there actually was a fire, fortunately not a very big one, and eventually his mistake was overridden. He was very lucky not to have been “fired” over the incident.

So things like this can be harmless amusements as after dinner entertainment, parlor magic, but when lives are on the line they should be treated with caution. We have to ask what mechanism is involved? Do we understand it, or just hope that it will work? How much is wishful thinking and how do we distinguish truth from imagination?

A lot of these “spiritual” phenomena have been studied, and there is always a very low incidence of provability. Yet loads of people insist on their validity. Why? What’s the attraction?

We can use our basic Vedantic norm and ask “Do they bring lasting happiness?” Very often the interest is the product of bored and disconnected people searching for some new titillation for their hungry minds. They are hungry because what they have been consuming is “empty calories”—the junk food of spiritual trivia. Newness is attractive. The ego likes to feel it has access to hidden secrets that “ordinary” people are ignorant of. But the happiness it occasions is temporary, very short lived. Human history is littered with cast off beliefs that didn’t hold up to reason in the long run. People rush to accept and embrace the new, but when they “wake up in the morning” so to speak, what looked like the partner of their dreams to be in bed with reveals its flaws all too quickly. They inwardly cringe in shame that their vasanas carried them away yet again.

Nitya headed the Institute for Psychic and Spiritual Research in New Delhi for several years in the mid-1960s. While he did scientifically examine a very few yogis who could perform measurable feats, a very large percentage were simply boasting, to put it kindly. The Portland Gurukula is extremely lucky to have a few of the magazines the Institute issued, which can be perused in

the Archives by visitors. Here's a related clip from Love and Blessings, which gets to the crux of the dilemma:

When I wrote to [Nataraja] Guru of all our projects and findings he was very skeptical of the net outcome of such studies, which were motivated by simple curiosity and did not have any high purpose that could enhance the dignity of man or serve his universal well-being. Moreover he pointed out that I was committing an epistemological violation by mixing up the subject matter of Vedanta with the frame of reference of physiological psychology. As the director of a scientifically biased research institute I was being obliged to minimize the value of mysticism and take in its place only what was scientifically verifiable, limiting the scope of Yoga merely to physiological achievements.

In the eyes of a positive scientist I might have appeared to be doing the right thing, but Guru would never make any concession allowing methodological make-believe. I was literally placing myself between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea—between *samsara* and *moksha*, materialism and spirituality. I recalled Narayana Guru's dry comment that relativism is a kind of malarial fever that can produce relapses at any time. As a Yati, a renunciate, I knew I shouldn't compromise between absolutism and relativism, yet I couldn't fully side with the Indian sannyasins either. They were mostly old-fashioned conservatives, and I had no patience with religious rituals.

Thus for some time I was in a world of suspense, not knowing if I should quit my post or try to push the limits of science. I thought it might be possible to create a new dimension of research that could accommodate intuitive reasoning in a way that wasn't opposed to rational norms. To shift physiological research to spiritual study would require a

methodology suited to the new epistemology. With this in mind I decided to make myself familiar with the methodologies employed by a number of modern scientists as well as several of the new age psychologists who were trying to defend parapsychology as an extension of behaviorism.

Still, I began to feel like I was caught between two worlds, the high motivation of my guru and the idle curiosity of my comrades. (245)

Bill told us about the days of his youth, doing psychic research in New York. He said it was fairly easy to tune into a psychic space where you could “read” many truths about a subject, past, present and future. Those were heady times.

When he went west and met Nitya, Nitya told him a “ferry tale.” It went like this:

A yogi practiced a certain technique for many years until he was able to walk on water. He lived by a beautiful river where he could practice his craft. One day a wandering monk came to the river. The yogi offered to ferry him across. The monk agreed, and the yogi invited him to climb on his back. He clambered up, and the yogi strode across the water to the other side, where the monk got down. He handed the yogi a dime and went on his way.

Bill blinked once or twice, and then the meaning of the story came to him. What seemed like a very exciting ability really had little practical value. Even walking on water wasn't a very big deal compared with the wisdom that could set you free in your heart. What do you want to do, take walks on a variety of lakes or find lasting happiness?

As we've noted before, religious claims about siddhis are best taken as symbolic. Raising the dead, helping the lame to walk

and the blind to see are all spiritual metaphors for the dawning of wisdom. Literalism is a bad joke. Do the blind regain their sight through faith or through medical intervention? When we look around, do we see people flying through the air, people walking on water, and the dead coming back to life? No. Tortillas with the Virgin Mary on them, yes. In other words, projections of mind, of wishful thinking. Lots of claims, to entertain and bilk the lost and desperate, whose mainstream religions have let them down by being patently false and absurd, whose government is deranged and whose pundits are insane. Sure, some of the games are nice and even sweet, like the Rumi divination cards we played with at a dinner the other night. But none of this equals a serious scrutiny of the meaning of life, of how everything we see is a reflection of our mental imagery. It doesn't necessarily help us to link our hearts to the Unknown, unless we are prepared to take it to that level.

Gunther Grass characterized the twentieth century as "Barbaric, mystical, bored." Unfortunately, that is all too apt. Very few are willing to make a serious search. We only want entertainment to pass the time while we are waiting to die.

Narayana Guru invites us to walk the razor's edge. Can we dispense with all the garbage and still retain anything at all that matters? Are we brave enough to first question and then act on our intuitive realizations? Can we swoosh through life, or must we timidly follow the leader? At this point we should be beginning to know wisdom in action.

Our little group demonstrates how much is possible with sincere dedication to something with a solid basis. We have been digging deep in this gold mine for a long time, and transformations are happening. No one is walking on water, but some are seeing life in a different, more welcoming light. Some are daring to imagine being themselves, waking up their slumbering parts. Even just being able to say a few words in a closely-knit group of weirdos, like ours, is an achievement. Many are giving much more

than they were able to before, needing to take less, broadening their self-identification. The love that is quietly shared between us in our lives is perhaps the preeminent mark of distinction here.

None of this will make headlines or be seen on the ill-named reality television shows. Nobody is going to attract a throng or start the next fad. Well, you never know, maybe they will. But for now, we are getting to know ourselves as real, authentic human beings, and that's all the miracle we will ever need.

Part II

I had a good walk today and thought some more about what links the diverse and curious practices of our modern, if not new, Age. I realized I do what the palm reader does, or the intuitive astrologer or whatever, when I sit down to write class notes. The practice allows the contents of the subconscious to come to the surface. Here's how it goes:

The morning after a class, I sit at the computer and type in the verse itself. Then shortly thereafter a thought will come, often just a fragment, and I start to enter it. As I type the idea extends itself and points to further implications, so I keep plunking away. Sometimes another thought will leap to mind and I'll switch to writing that down, confident that I can go back and finish the first one later. This goes on until a more or less coherent result emerges.

I think I've talked about this process before, but I never saw that it's the same thing as when someone sits before a tarot deck or wields a pendulum over a list of flower essences. The physical vehicle is an aid, a catalyst, that stimulates the flow of intuition. It also excuses its validity, because we don't always trust raw intuition. We want to see an actual crystal ball or else we'll be more on our guard.

We usually begin in our chosen medium (pun intended) cautiously and tentatively, but over time we gain confidence because the flow does come, and it keeps coming most of the time.

The practiced astrologer, or any other kind of therapist for that matter, is legitimately more confident after years of success than on the first outing. I no longer fear to sit at the computer Wednesday mornings, I am eager to see what will leap forth onto the screen. And unlike a palmist who makes a living at it, I don't have to pretend to know what I'm talking about. I can just do it and see what comes up. Later I can use my background to decide what to toss and what to save.

Everyone has their own preferred method of accessing the inner world. When an artist sits at a canvas, the process is the same. An idea comes, and they dab on a little paint. Inspiration then points a finger at the next move. A composer hears a line in her mind, which leads to another and another. Then all she has to do is write them down. Some start with a fully developed concept, and others just start in and wait to see what comes along. Works both ways.

So all this talk about finding your dharma and tuning in to your true nature and all, is about finding ways to access your inner potential. There are millions of avenues available, many not yet invented. We should encourage each other as much as possible, and help each other to keep it beautiful and gentle. Some folks find it easier to let it out through violence and aggression than through kindness. That's the norm to hold to, kindness. I may think parlor magic is silly, but lots of people feel even more strongly that philosophy and mystical contemplation is pure baloney. It's a matter of personal preference, so long as no one gets hurt.

Accessing our inner world is like chemistry. We don't invent new chemical properties, we discover them. The properties are latent in the elements already. But they will stay latent if we don't make the search and bring them to light. The spiritual search is an open-ended journey of discovery, encouraged by the many who have trodden similar paths and found great joy in them.

Contemplation of the Absolute is something that transcends and yet also incorporates these methods. Nothing in itself takes you to realization. Instead, realization takes you to all things. Maybe that's where we go a little overboard: we insist that what we do is the way to God. No need to be so pretentious. They are simply ways. Ways we choose.

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3/27/18

Yoga Darsana verse 10

In this world yoga, in short, is of
Two forms – knowledge and karma – thus.
All forms of yoga are conclusively comprised
in these two descriptions of yoga.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*As of wisdom and action, yoga in this world
Is of two kinds, and within these summarily
The whole of the further elaboration of Yoga
Is comprised conclusively.*

While Patanjali is accorded pride of place in yoga philosophy by many, the Bhagavad Gita is the last word in a full comprehension of yoga. As far as I'm concerned, it's the last word in philosophy, period.

The Gita presents yoga as dialectic synthesis, so it is no wonder that jnana and karma—wisdom and action—are united in it. Its third and fourth chapters are named karma and jnana, but when you delve into them they are presenting one and the same thing: action infused with wisdom, called simply reason in action.

As Deb intimated, Guru Nitya makes it all quite simple. How can you have action without wisdom infusing it? Intelligence affects action and action gives the chance for intelligence to show itself. It's a beautiful challenge that instead of polarized contradictions, you see an interpenetrating expression of action and knowledge together. Jan agreed, feeling that with this verse we are at last coming to a place of peaceful resolution, after all our hard work.

Speaking of polarized contradictions, Bill just sent me a link to a review of the latest Gita translation: [Godsong, by Amit Majmudar](#). Majmudar's fresh effort was apparently done with great enthusiasm, but what is clear is that neither the translator nor the reviewer has the least idea that the paired couplets that occur throughout the Gita are actually exemplifications of yoga. Instead they are treated as contradictions. The reviewer not only makes the common mistake of identifying Arjuna's refusal to participate in injustice as the Gita's support of injustice, he describes the Gita as "the most enigmatic of religious texts, a masterpiece of moral ambiguity." Actually the Gita is utterly unambiguous. The mistake is to consider the polarities of any dialectic in isolation, leading to what Narayana Guru, through his foil Vidyananda, cites from the Gita's chapter V:

4) That rationalism and yogic self-discipline are distinct, only children say, not the well-informed; one well-established in either one of them obtains the result of both.

5) That status attained by rationalists is reached also by yogis; he who thus sees rationality and yoga as one—he (alone) sees.

And while we're at it, how ambiguous is the immediately previous verse:

3) That man should be recognized as a perennial renouncer who neither hates nor desires; free indeed from conflicting pairs (of interests) O Arjuna, he is happily released from the bondage (of necessity).

Sounds pretty definitive to me. The Gita is all about how to synthesize those conflicting pairs to attain release from bondage. It's a shame that the concept appears so elusive to those who don't have the wherewithal to really understand it.

If this is a digression, forgive me. I think it is exactly what Narayana Guru is implying in this wrap-up of his darsana on Yoga. And it leads to Nitya's opening salvo, that we have to go beyond mere manipulation of rational structures to arrive at a revelation of the intrinsic meaning of anything, or else our knowledge is childish, if not something worse:

Knowledge comes by listening, listening to the truth that is revealed by one who has met truth by knowing it and being it. Listening is an active process. It becomes fruitful only through meditation on what is heard. Manipulating a rational structure of what is heard is conceptualization or merely improving upon concepts that have been formed earlier. This does not bring wisdom to the listener; it only helps in the acquisition of information. Knowledge, as Socrates says, becomes a virtue only when one is fully acquainted with the full purport of the secret of a revelation and it is lived in its entirety.

In common parlance, batting ideas around is not the same as being immersed in a revelatory experience. Narayana Guru is definitely not aiming at the former option. Just like Krishna, he wants us to realize, to make real, our inner propensity for excellence.

Taking his cue from Vidyananda's exegesis, most of Nitya's commentary speaks to the Gita, such as this:

The Bhagavad Gita says nobody can remain even for a short while without doing action. For the embodied being action is imperative. If the course of action is left to the push and pull of random chance, it soon becomes so complicated that one loses his ground and will not be able to retract himself from the whirlpools of frightful actions. So it is necessary to know the secret of action and make it unitive with the understanding of the cause and effect involvement of the ego with several programs of action. This problem being very grave, even Lord Krishna in the Gita says that the course of action is too difficult to comprehend, even for a wise person.

What is meant here by “the course of action” is the threads of karma. Many people make simplistic pronouncements about what causes what, but real action has a dizzyingly complex basis. When these complexities are taken into account even theoretically, it reveals that our judgments about cause are largely a matter of prejudice. Which is good to know. Life presents us unerringly with the outcome of the totality of karma, but our grasp of its origin is rudimentary at best, and invariably speculative.

Processing this can allow us to release our sense of guilt and incompetence so we can play the game more masterfully, with full focus. We must take responsibility only for actions we initiate, not for the tides that sweep us along. And it's crucial to know the difference, in our own lives and those of others:

In this vast field of phenomenal changes, action belongs to the ‘other’ and one need not pin one’s responsibility or conscience to it. One has to own actions only when they are willed with the motivation of achieving an end. It is here action has to become unitive.

In closing the Yoga Darsana study, we should definitely have assimilated the meaning of yoga, which opens the door to an absorbing entrance into nirvana, the subject of the final darsana. To this end we mounted a couple of “final exams” about yoga. First was for everyone to share how we defined yoga for ourselves; in other words, how action becomes unitive. These were, in fact, unitive exams—nonbinding, ungraded, lighthearted, done to broaden our wisdom rather than to put anyone on the spot.

I offered the basic idea of uniting opposites as intrinsic to yoga, and gave a sketch of Nataraja Guru’s brilliant explanation from Unitive Philosophy. You can read it in Part II.

I also shared a recent example, from the anthropological conference I just attended. After my sketch of the Gita’s relevance to the modern world, the chair of the Anthro/sociology department at a university on the East Coast asked me what that kind of yoga actually meant. I asked her if she had ever felt inadequate, that she didn’t measure up. That question hit the nail on the head—she was from a Russian Jewish family from Philadelphia, with classic mother issues. She said “Oh God, yes! My mother... I could never satisfy her.” I suggested it was impossible to fill the void in her mother by constantly doing things for her (not too much of a leap), and she groaned, “She was a black hole. You could pour anything in and it just disappeared without a trace.” This woman was also an aspiring writer. I told her yoga in this case was a way of countering all that inadequacy with what she knew about herself that was positive—kind, thoughtful, smart, what have you. You use that counterweight to pull the negative bolus to the center, where you bring positive and negative together. Right in your heart. You realize they are other people’s ideas, and that even your own ideas are extraneous to the present moment. When they are evenly mated you can disregard them, which allows your creative drive to come forth with minimal distortion. The woman’s eyes lit up. It was a new and delicious concept. She practically gasped, “That sounds

wonderful!” Even the bare-bones idea gave her a little lift from the endless misery of non-yogic interaction, which is epitomized in the second half of verse 23 of Atmo: “the self-centered man is wholly immersed in necessity, performing unsuccessful actions for himself alone.” Who needs it! We all need very badly to get free of it, and yoga is the method.

The conference did produce a couple of useful terms to veil enlightenment, so it could be safely treated in an academic environment. I liked “non self-referential” states, because it implied how much of our wheel-spinning behavior stems from an obsession with our self, our persona, and forcing it to measure up. Self-referential thinking is antithetical to a yogic state. Another term was “non-symbolic” states, meaning those evidencing direct experience. Concepts are symbols, and they cloak experience in cloying add-ons. Moments where we enjoy a creative rush without having to define it are non-symbolic.

Getting back to yoga, Deb thought of a ropes course our children practiced on at school. I think it’s now called slack lining, where you walk on a loose rope instead of a tightrope, which gives a supreme challenge to maintain balance. The kids had another rope to hold onto so they didn’t fall, but it’s still quite a workout. Deb thought it exemplified Harmony’s name: you had to be in balance, in harmony, to pass the course of the rope.

Deb also thought of how ropes and other things are braided together. Making one thing out of many makes it stronger and more useful.

Karen reported she had been on a roller coaster ride all week, with many ups and downs at high speed. It was like she was strapped in and had to go with it. She is not usually subject to big surges of emotion, but she bumped up against several interesting phenomena that caused her to be alternately excited one day and then disappointed the next. She “took Sunday off” to stay quiet and take a look at what was going on, which is a very nice example of

yoga in action. She said it helped a lot. I added that Karen's lifetime of pacific strength served her in good stead, as she recovered her inner calm quite rapidly after her wild week.

Once Karen's roller coaster ride ended, she made up her mind not to get back on board. She added that having a sense of humor about it helped too. Jan laughingly agreed. She has been on a rough ride of her own for some time, though she's pretty much heading out the turnstile, and she knows that keeping a sense of humor helps a lot, making it easier to let go of problems after they are resolved. Humans do have a tendency to keep replaying their travails, even past the point where we might learn anything more about them. Letting go is another aspect of yoga in action.

Susan summed it all up by saying that it's not so much what happens to you but how you react to it. She cited the beginning of the commentary, of how important it was to listen, and meditate on what you hear, wrapping up our survey of yoga techniques.

The second "exam question" was based on the Gita's famous yogic instruction about action and inaction in chapter IV, titled Jnana Yoga:

18) One who is able to see action in inaction and inaction in action—he among men is intelligent; he is one of unitive attitude, while still engaged in every (possible) kind of work.

Nitya gives us the incentive to look into this, that if we don't pay attention we are likely to become entangled in complicated unintended consequences:

When the ego is infatuated with the emotional or value significance of the end of action, one loses sight of the binding nature of action. So a karma yogi, as advocated by the Gita, sees action in inaction and inaction in action.

After a period of silence I offered the basics, which are related to another famous Gita quote:

II.69) What is night for all creatures, the one of self-control keeps awake therein; wherein all creatures are wakeful, that is night for the sage-recluse who sees.

When we act without reflection, it's as if no one is home. We are just doing what we must and not adding any influence. So we are inactive even in the midst of action. Clueless, you might say. Then again, if we don't add anything to the demands of the situation, we can calmly go along with its requirements and not lose our cool. Losing our cool would be an action within the ongoing action, and so disruptive. Staying inactive within our actions means we are free from doubt, regret, wishful thinking, and so on, and just allowing it to happen.

By contrast, if we sit still and contemplate, we become much more aware of the situation, more alive to it. Thinking is often the very best form of action, and the less physically active we are, the easier it is to bend our minds to the subject. It's also worth noting that the Gita does not say there is *only* action in inaction and inaction in action—I'd say both states (which are in any case relative) include aspects of both action and inaction. Krishna just wanted us to not think divergently about action, and he teaches us brilliantly by challenging our intelligence.

Deb noted that the Gita's teaching of not wanting the fruits of action was a core part of inaction in action, an astute insight if I do say so. If you don't have any intent to get something, your action doesn't have the sense of grasping. If you're not so invested in it, that's what you can call inaction in action.

Jan's contribution was talking about dealing with situations that present themselves and then quieting and centering yourself so the authentic you that wants to come forward can come forward.

Giving yourself enough meditative time to get vertical. She likes that this leads her to see the other person's perspective, especially in terms of their emotions, and this really brings out her compassionate nature.

Karen brought up a current feeling we all shared: admiration of the kids who have mobilized the entire country against those making war on them with guns. The March for our Lives happened two days before our class, and the kids were amazing. The whole world is in awe of their carriage. It's impossible to adequately honor them here in the notes, though our conversation was very moving. It was surely unitive action at its best. Deb told us of our son-in-law's take. He contributed money to the rally, and in thanking them he said he "hopes we are riding on youth's coattails to a better world."

This leads to Nitya's allusive invitation to face up to the impossible complexities of karma and unify them:

Natural actions, actions to fulfill bodily necessities, and actions to perpetuate the welfare of the world are always relevant. When the relevancy is accepted with full understanding, and actions are performed in accordance with the injunctions of the science of the Absolute, karma becomes unitive. Such knowledge of the non-Self distinctly reveals the Self as the Supreme Knower in all sentient beings.

This is undoubtedly mysterious, even as we can easily agree to it. I think what Nitya is getting at is if we look at the world and subtract our intentionality, we can see how it functions amazingly well and has a current of its own. It cannot possibly be random. There is a coherent direction, or many coherent directions, and they are all coordinated by what we call the Self or atman. You could call it nature or physics or some other term of the moment, but it still isn't random. A random universe would have self-destructed

almost immediately. And it surely isn't "me" who makes it happen, though mega-narcissists like to believe such poppycock. For now we are looking with unselfish absorption and deep gratitude at a supremely functioning bounty nestled in our barely-deserving arms.

This perspective itself is a kind of psychic release, as Nitya well knows:

Knowledge of this transcendental aspect of the Self, the *param*, releases the mind from all its cravings. As a result, the lower self comes to know the higher Self in all its glory. This is *jnana yoga*.

The conclusion should be obvious by now, but Nitya does us the favor of making it explicit just in case:

When the secret of the Self and non-Self are taken together, it is evident that there is only one yoga. It is of both *jnana* and *karma* and also it is neither *jnana* nor *karma* alone. This is the conclusive teaching the Guru gives on yoga.

I closed with a reading from Love and Blessings that shows how yoga can take place even without any direct involvement by us, just naturally occurring in the circumstances of our lives. It's how the whole thing operates, after all. It's an oldie but goodie, and I'll clip in some of it to Part II. And so we bow to the profundities of Yoga Darsana, and the great soul who bequeathed it to us, a perfectly natural action.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

The two divisions of Yoga are wisdom (*jnàna*) and action (*karma*), characterized in the following way. The Yoga of wisdom is concerned with the reality underlying the principles of the Self – which are based on existence, subsistence and value or bliss. These principles have to be brought within the scope of one's experience in the form of self-realization. This requires a discrimination between lasting and transient values in life belonging to the four prerequisites of the same kind mentioned in Vedàntic texts. Such realization can take place only under conditions of detachment. As for the Yoga of action (*karma*) it has the following characteristics. The carrying out of such necessary duties or actions which have the wisdom of the Self as the end in view and are done without any thought of enjoying the fruit and gain therefrom, as well as having no sense of bondage, but rather keeping within the limit of righteousness, as an offering to the Lord (*isvara*,) such is the Yoga of action.

The division made in the *Bhagavad-Gità* (III.3) refers to the kind of principle of classification of the two kinds of Yoga and conforms and justifies the same when it says that the Yoga of wisdom of the Sàmkhyaans and the Yoga of action of the Patanjali yogins, are the two main disciplines found in this world since ancient times. The Yoga of wisdom has also other descriptive titles applied to it, such as *jnàna-yajna* (the wisdom-sacrifice), *Sàmkhya-yoga* (meditation based on reason), *tyàga* (renunciation), *samnyàsa* (more mature renunciation), *buddhi* (discrimination), *buddhi yoga* (meditation based on discrimination), *akarma* (non-ritualism), *naiskarmya* (non-activity), and *kevala-jnàna* (plain and simple wisdom).

In the same way the Yoga of action has other descriptive titles applied to it, such as *yoga-yajna* (the meditation-sacrifice,) *yajna* (sacrifice), *nishkàma-karma-yoga* (the way of meditation which aims at no advantageous fruits thereof), and *kevala-yoga* (plain and

simple Yoga) as well as *kevala-karma* (plain and simple action). There is also the term *dharma* (righteous way of life) applied to both the Yoga of wisdom and the Yoga of action.

In reality both are the same. The *Bhagavad-Gitā* (V. 4 & 5) makes it clear that *Sàmkhya* and Yoga are to be looked upon as the same, and he who sees this alone truly sees. It also underlines that only children treat them as distinct, and not well informed *pandits*. Even if one of these disciplines is properly accomplished the result of both of them accrues. These passages in the *Bhagavad-Gitā* treat wisdom and action as forming one discipline only. It is necessary, however, to have the guidance of wisdom as a primary condition. One has to recognise that all actions depend upon wisdom or intelligence. Thereafter, when action is performed it has to be done with intelligence, detachment and the sense of non-active understanding. That is, one should be able to see action in inaction, and non-action in action.

The one who is able to see these two disciplines as not being different is both a *jnàna-yogi* and a *karma-yogi*. The *Bhagavad-Gitā* (IV. 18) also says that the man who is able to see in action non-action, and in non-action action is a true *yogi* while still engaged in every kind of action. The gist of this statement and all the elaborations to which it is capable of being subjected, confirm the unity of these two disciplines.

All the further ramifications of the discipline of Yoga are comprised within the scope of *jnàna-karma-yoga* (the Yoga of combined wisdom and action). Even this distinction in reality is not of much consequence. In spite of this, however, in order to distinguish the way of life proper to those who adhere to philosophy and call themselves *samnyàsins* (mature renouncers) and those who combine philosophy with their own activities correctly belonging to their own situation in life, can be more properly called *karma-yogis*. This distinction in nomenclature is

commonly adopted in order to distinguish the two patterns of behaviour in ordinary life. On closer examination both are the same. As the *Bhagavad Gità* (V. 5) puts it, the same point of attainment is reached by the *Sàmkhya* philosophers and the Patanjali Yogins.

Although the *Bhagavad-Gità* initially accepts the outward duality between the two disciplines, it stresses the inner unity based on the common end of both. In short, whatever action one might perform and whatever Yoga one might practise it has to be done under the auspices or guidance of intelligence. It is only for action done under such guidance that the name of *Karma-yoga* or the Yoga of action can be applied. It is only when Yoga is accompanied by wisdom that it can be considered to be the supreme goal of human existence which is *moksha* (liberation) or *nirvāna* (absorption).

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This excerpt from my commentary of the Gita's II.39 and Nataraja Guru's *Unitive Philosophy* is of crucial importance to understanding yoga dialectics:

The Gurukula defines *saccidananda* (sat-chit-ananda) as existence-subsistence-value (or meaning), which is different than other systems, especially the ananda part, which is usually translated as bliss or joy. Relating what we have studied so far to saccidananda per Nataraja Guru, Chapter I was observational, pertaining to *sat* on the lowest level of the vertical axis. The Samkhya section we have just concluded deals with *chit*, the induction and deduction of linear thought. The next section on Yoga brings in dialectic thinking useful in matters of ananda or value, at the top of the vertical axis. All these can and should be

treated integrally and not sequentially, but it is very important to distinguish the different types of ideation and their proper fields. Nataraja Guru cautions us that “Dialectics is conducive to unitive understanding only, and spoils the case when applied to ordinary situations in life where usual ratiocinative methods or logic would be the proper instrument to employ.” (Gita, p. 112.) He elaborates on this structural scheme in his *Unitive Philosophy* (377-8):

Between a posteriori inferences from experimental data, we pass thus into the domain of such propositions as the famous Cartesian dictum, *cogito ergo sum*, and build rational or theoretical speculations upwards till we touch a region in pure higher reasoning which employs dialectics, called by Plato the highest instrument of reasoning, independent of all visible or sensible facts.

This kind of reasoning, the dialectical, which takes us to the threshold of higher idealistic values in life is the third and the last step in philosophical methodology taken as a whole. The laws of nature refer to the world of existence. Rules of thought, whether axiomatic or based on postulates, refer to the world of subsistence. The third step of reasoning lives and has its being in the pure domain of human values, those referring to the True, the Good or the Beautiful, which are values in life and thus belong to the domain of axiology.

The visible, the intelligible and the value worlds which we can mark out on a vertical line represent levels of higher and higher reasonings culminating in the dialectical. It is like soaring, or resorting to ascending dialectics as spoken of in certain circles. This level has, just inferior to it, the world of formal or syllogistic reasonings admitting of the limits of contradictions at its lower limit and of tautology at its higher limit, where logistic and propositional calculi are employed.

At the lowest level in this vertical axis, where empirical or at least ontological factors prevail, referring to existent aspects of the physical world actually, perceptually or even conceptually understood, we have a region where certitudes naturally take the form of laws such as that of gravitation, or the conservation of matter and energy. Electromagnetic and thermodynamic laws belong to the Einsteinian physical world, whether treated epistemologically as real or ideal.

Thus existential, subsistential and value aspects of the Absolute have three different methodological approaches, one proper to and compatible with each.

A normal methodology applicable to integrated knowledge whether philosophical or scientific has to accommodate within its scope these three kinds of approaches to certitude, each in its proper domain. The experimental method suits existential aspects of the Absolute, the logical suits the subsistential and the dialectical suits the value aspects of the Absolute. Interest in the physical world gives place in the second stage of ascent to logical psychology or phenomenology, where ratiocination plays its part. Finally we ascend higher into the third aspect of the Absolute where value relations hold good and the instrument or methodology used is that of dialectics.

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Finally, the excerpt from *Love and Blessings*, the end of the chapter Cancellation of Gain and Loss. Nitya has been teaching at a college in Madras, now Chennai:

By the beginning of 1954 the atmosphere at the college had become rather suffocating. Although nobody directly asked me to resign, there were several pinpricks. I thought I would wait for Nataraja Guru's counsel before taking an initiative. And although I

thoroughly enjoyed my sessions with the students, I felt an urge to walk away from institutions and find the freedom to go into whatever pleased my inner self. The call to go into an elaborate comparative study of Narayana Guru with all the major philosophers of the world was becoming irresistible. Moreover, my stance for equality was getting me into hot water with the administration.

A few days later Nataraja Guru came to see me again. When I told him how smothering the college atmosphere was and how I felt like revolting against it, Guru said, “An educational institution is a sacred place. When you were in need of it, the Vivekananda College opened its doors and welcomed you. When you leave it, you should go out with dignity, without regret and without malice to anyone. Give your blessings to the students and say goodbye in good taste to your colleagues.” He added that leaving a position should always be considered a promotion, like leaving a short ladder to get onto a taller one. So I tendered my resignation with good grace.

Though as usual Nataraja Guru had said exactly the opposite of what I'd expected, it was sound advice. If he hadn't cleared my mind I'd have felt very angry and frustrated. Afterwards I learned firsthand of the Benevolent Grace that guided me to leave my academic career behind when I revisited Vivekananda College twenty years later. I went to the philosophy department and saw all my old friends sitting on dirty chairs in musty rooms and looking no brighter than the fossils displayed in the biology lab.

A couple of days before Nataraja Guru's arrival on that occasion, I had received a letter from my sister, Subhashini, that she had chosen the man she wanted to marry and that the wedding should be performed at an early date because of my father's worsening condition. It had been quite some time since I'd seen my father, so I thought of going to stay with him until after the wedding. Nataraja Guru agreed to solemnize her marriage.

My father was sinking each day. He was literally having heart failure. Every day it failed, and every day it was revived. By his bedside my father had the manuscript of his last book, his reflections on Narayana Guru's teaching. He expressed a desire for Nataraja Guru to write an introduction for it. After the wedding, when all the guests had departed, my younger sister, Sumangala, read some of the poems to Nataraja Guru. The next day as he was about to leave, he wrote a short introduction, which my sister read out to my father. Then he lay back peacefully, and Nataraja Guru took leave of us.

I remained with my father, sitting on his bed. I'd had no sleep for a few nights and was very tired. I leaned on the wall and dozed off. My mother gently nudged me. When I looked into her eyes, she looked at my father, and I could see he was dead. There was no other reaction from my mother. She just accepted it. Thus within twenty-four hours there was a happy wedding and a not so happy death in the same family.

Guru read of my father's death in the paper the next day. He sent me a card saying, "This is typical of the incidents in the life of an absolutist, to have the plus and minus aspects balancing and canceling each other out, leaving the absolutist in the silence of a neutral zero." To me it was the snapping of the last link with my family and harkening to a new call to accept the greater freedom of my life's mission. I returned to the Varkala Gurukula as a regular member of the ashram. (162-3)