

9/18/18

MOTS Chapter 11: The Substance of the Transient 'I' is of the Eternal Self

“I,I,” thus, all that are spoken of,
when carefully considered, inwardly are not many; that is one;
as the receding I-identities are countless
in their totality, the substance of I-consciousness continues.

Free translation:

What are spoken of as 'I', 'I', when carefully considered, are not separate entities. Within the total Substance these are only modes, while the continuity of the ego is maintained by the connectedness of the attributes into which it is modified.

The thought experiment from the last verse is extended by “careful consideration,” which is not different from meditation. In chapter 10, we learned that the experience of 'I' was the same in all people, and if Narayana Guru had left it there we might think that the 'I' itself was the same as the Self. Here he adds that while we are unified in our similarities, the inclusiveness of oneness is a much deeper matter.

Deb opened with a favorite quote of hers from God knows where, some French philosopher she thinks, that there *is* another world, and it is right here. Nice! She equated it with the glowing source of the 'I' that is not delineated by experience, but resides at the core of our being. This verse is to help us keep in mind the differences between it and the more superficial I that is glued onto external experience. Bill mused that right at the center of our I-consciousness is our true self.

I believe the word 'that' in the verse should be capitalized, as it refers to the oneness, as in “That alone.” *That* is one. The Guru is extending the point we arrived at earlier, that no combination of separate items will ever equal That, the oneness. We've been

calling it totality, but here the term is specifically used for a big pile of stuff, so we can't use it that way for now. No agglomeration is ever enough to be Everything, or The One. Yet despite it being 'more' or 'beyond' any totality of items, it remains the very nature of all those 'I's.

Paul is always boggled by how the part includes the whole and so is essentially the same as it, even though the senses can only perceive parts. We spent a decent amount of time meditating on this paradoxical yet incontrovertible state, which is the essence of yogic insight. Comprehending the abstract idea isn't too hard, but only when you look *carefully* at it from a witnessing state of neutrality, does it begin to look real.

The point for a seeker of truth is that the 'I' can be either a unit of separation or, under heightened awareness, a unity of congregation. Needless to say, the separatist I is staunchly defended by emphasizing the differences from the next I, and this is the "obvious" point of view. Our heart, or our intuition if you prefer, also senses an affinity with the other. In order to elevate the affinity the egoistic "defense industry" has to be decommissioned. Only if it is able to surrender its need to defend its preferences will the ego be able to embrace the innate unity below the surface.

Nitya once drew a picture of this idea as houses in a town, each unique and set off from the others, but below the ground he sketched in the service pipes and wires, and to give it an additional boost, a common basement or crawlspace. Thus the homes are both divided and united at the same time.

A hostile mentality puts up barricades around the ego-house and sits inside with weapons at the ready, expecting enemies. Compassionate people, knowing they share a common predicament with their neighbors, open their doors and invite entry, gladly paying the bills for water, gas, sewer and electric services—the blessings of the commonwealth.

You've probably noticed how Nitya grounds each chapter in a real-life example. Nitya's external theme for this chapter is a minister he greatly admired and worked with for a number of

years, who eventually initiated an intentional community not far from Portland. He was most un-Indian: outwardly hyper-energetic and unflappable, charismatic and vivacious. Huge. Maybe the biggest difference was, loud. Boisterous. He was always saying 'I' this and 'me' that. By no means a "silent recluse," certainly the opposite of hushed Dr. Mees, Nitya's first guru. The relationship was astonishingly stimulating for both, proof that opposites can attract. Nitya first uses his friend's self-obsession to highlight the unity within diversity he exemplified:

Two words which come profusely from his lips are 'I' and 'me'. Despite nothing of his two experiences being alike, the 'I' and the 'me' serve as perfect links to give continuity to all his painful confrontations and joyful encounters as the ceaseless ebb and flow of the selfsame life of a single individual.

Here the 'I' is the linking factor providing continuity, which holds up even when the sequence of experiences seems quite chaotic. That means in that case the 'I' that is the self, the more or less solid underpinning of existence. Jan associated this with the witnessing consciousness, that can watch the transient 'I' without being disrupted. A person can either have confidence in their grounding in the Self, or they can identify with the flickering of the passing show, in which case they will be hard put to maintain their solidity. Ideally a yogi does both, bringing the solidity of the Self into every aspect of their life.

Jan told us about Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), which also directs you to the witnessing consciousness. It helps people in turmoil connect to their eternal self, by going into yourself and witnessing what you're feeling. It reminded Deb of the psychedelic advice from *The Secret Chief*, to confront upsetting episodes by holding fast and not running away from them. If you can make yourself observe them, the fear drains away to be replaced by calmness and confidence. It brings a real resolution.

Nitya uses this opportunity to reprise the karana, the fourfold operation of the mind's assessment of each item of experience:

The four main factors involved in an experience—doubt, recollection, judgment and affectivity—are structurally and functionally interrelated. When one modulation of consciousness gives way to another, the doubt that aroused the outgoing modulation ceases. The recollected memories that gave orientation to that particular modulation disappear. The judgment of what has been experienced is automatically converted into an “informative feedback” and is tucked away in the unconscious folds of the causal consciousness ready to be recalled on another occasion. As a result, the emotional threshold of affectivity is lowered to the minimum and dissipates.

There really is a turning on and turning off of attention with each new item. Life would be even more confusing if they overlapped appreciably. It's very handy to break the flow of life into discrete bits so we can fully attend to each one. This is dependent on a healthy I-sense to maintain necessary connections, functioning almost like a mini-Absolute, an all-enveloping basis of the individual's experiences, imbuing them with meaningful shape. As Nitya puts it:

One factor that does not disappear in the transition [between experiences] is the I- consciousness. It continues by changing into a new pattern with a fresh doubt, a fresh recall of memory, a new judgment or predication, and another novel experience of affectivity.

Nitya knew that he should define experience at this point, and he does:

To make its meaning precise let us treat it as a gestalt and define experience as an organized unit of awareness having for its nucleus a value. It can be a positive value such as a sense of pleasure or peace, or a negative value such as pain, fear or boredom. An experience need not always be rational. It can be as simple as tasting the sweetness of honey or as complex as comprehending the intricacies of a glass bead game.

The glass bead game is a somewhat obscure reference. During the 1960s Hermann Hesse's books were very popular with the spiritually-inclined, and one of his best bears that title. Wikipedia gives a succinct summary: "The game is essentially an abstract synthesis of all arts and sciences. It proceeds by players making deep connections between seemingly unrelated topics." Of course it's a metaphor for the spiritual search, and only a mastermind like Hesse could pack a whole volume with meaningful insights about it. Anyway, in Nitya's reference it serves as the opposite pole to a simple momentary taste of sweetness.

Paul was struck that last week Bushra had talked about the I being a point of reference. He wondered exactly what that meant, so I filled in some background as Nitya used the term.

Indian spirituality has a long tradition of denigrating the use of the first person pronouns: if you are truly realized you no longer think of yourself as an I. Narayana Guru generally used 'we' or 'this one' for himself. The idea is to decommission the ego, but Nitya saw that you could be just as egotistical (or more) while using another appellation. His solution was to use 'I' simply as what he called a point of reference, to indicate the person in question but not to build any specific platform around. If you say "I am teaching this class," you don't make it a point of pride, but only a statement of fact. Your self-worth is based on it, it's only a clarification, a simplification. It allows for neutrality without playing games with pronouns. So we are free to use first person pronouns, but we should take care that they don't trap us in our old habits. Nitya includes a worthy paragraph about it here, reminding

us that ego experience is secondary, an interpretation of fluctuations rather than a steady state:

The idea of 'I' occurs to our mind as a point of reference. We are therefore likely to treat it as the central locus of our consciousness, but those who know the art of reducing epistemology to experimental science will easily see that the conscious 'I' is not the nucleus of experience. Rather it is the stuff that is going to be colored in each experience with a persistent doubt, an inner coordination of the relevant aspects of associated memories, a consequent judgment, and a value stress. This coloration, that causes the I-consciousness to become fully identified with its own doubt, associated memories, structured composition of awareness, value sense, and consequent affectivity is to be considered a gestalt or a single unit of experience.

This led us to discuss the distinction between self and Self, or ego-I vs. neutral reference-I. Deb thought if you merely considered your part as one integral aspect of a total experience, you wouldn't feel ownership. You aren't thinking I own this or I am better than the next person. Jan added that the small I attends to fleeting phantoms—which is fine—but the witnessing I has an essential role in a coherent, broader perspective.

I talked about how that attachment to the fleeting by the small I, is the basis for evangelism of all stripes. Nitya and his lineage never felt they needed to press their ideas onto others, but merely offered them as worthy of consideration, to be taken or not as the other person was inclined. Narayana Guru's famous maxim that we aren't out to argue and win, but only to share wisdom, is the same. The worldwide mania to dominate and be the best not only causes endless conflict, but seems to shrivel its perpetrators more often than not. Like white supremacists, for example, who are the lowest of the low in terms of humanity.

Andy mused about the paradox that very shy people can also be gigantic egotists. Egotism isn't limited to the dominators and pushy types, it's ubiquitous. "I am unworthy" or "I am miserable," can be just as strong attachments as "I am better than you." If you keep to yourself, no one can challenge you, and you can carry on unmolested, so it's a fantastic ego ploy. The value of a guru, therapist or trusted friend is that they can alert you to the excesses of your ego in whichever direction, when you may only be pretending to do it, unaware of your biases. Hesse is particularly astute in his novels at revealing the subtle taints of ego in many seemingly respectable activities. The glass bead game not only is a brilliant intellectual exercise, its hierarchical nature is a major obstacle, dealt with by its players with various degrees of success. Winning games and conquering your faults may be two very different matters.

This idea reminded Paul of an episode of an old TV show, M.A.S.H., where Hawkeye, one of the characters in the war zone, went crazy. He was sent to a psychiatrist, who told him his problem was fear, and fear is the basis of many problems. The psychiatrist told Hawkeye that fear directed inward produces depression; fear projected outward produces aggression; but if you can divert fear to the side a little bit, it produces humor. Paul's tale also produced humor.

Bushra shared that her way of coping with egotism was to think of herself in the third person, and then she identifies with it less. "Bushra likes this" gives her psychological distance that "I like this" does not. It hints at the fictional nature of our likes and dislikes. And she added another crucial factor, that being in extreme distress will often push us to surrender our ego to the inevitability of our problems, allowing us more access to our inner state of detachment. She sees how Islam encodes this idea, that the helpless self must surrender to Allah. Many religions have this in the mix, the only danger being that manipulative people can try to get you to surrender to them as representatives of God, so you have

to be careful. Plenty of imitation gurus have pulled that trick on their followers too.

Yet the point is well taken. We are helpless in many respects, and our ego stands out brightly as it does battle with the problems. We rely on it. Surrender to an abstract principle you don't own can be healing and even show the way through the impossible. Bushra added that a lot of suffering is due to our trying to control something that is beyond our ability.

Giving up the ego's role of commander-in-chief can open you up to a wider perspective, so you can see more of the aspects you left out in your calculations. This can even open your heart.

Nancy told us she is always reminding herself to let go of her I sense. The surrendering and letting go of the concept of Nancy makes every situation more fluid. She is a new grandmother, and relating to an infant is a natural way that this can happen without stress or conflict. Here's this little being who isn't much into 'I', busy exploring and not over-thinking, as a model. She held that when you put less importance on yourself in every situation it eases the discomfort. It's easier to feel that you matter, yet not take yourself too seriously.

From this fruitful discussion you can see that there is no formula being set forth here. Each person has a unique way of dealing with their life, though we have general categories of obstacles to cope with in common. And we can all benefit from the sincere help we might be blessed with.

Nitya occasionally related consciousness to a kaleidoscope, and I wonder if that was what he had in mind as the glass bead game he mentioned, as a kaleidoscope is filled with glass beads:

A near analogy to the changing patterns of the I-consciousness is the sight we see in a kaleidoscope in which the beads are always the same and are of the same number, but the patterns vary endlessly. At one turn the optical pattern can look simple and meager, and in the very next it may change into something immensely complex and colorful. The limited number of the

beads in the kaleidoscope with its infinite possibility of structuring, destructuring and restructuring epitomizes the I-consciousness.

Inversely, I wonder if Hesse had the kaleidoscope in mind when he titled his game? The back of my mind says yes, but I haven't reread the book for over forty years.

Paul reasoned that the excitable self is the 'I' that looks though the kaleidoscope, and that maybe you could dialectically integrate it with the witnessing state as the thesis and antithesis, to bring about a satisfying synthesis. Prabu added that as we look through the kaleidoscope, if we are in confusion we think that the pattern is the real thing. What we forget is that the pattern is made visible by the light shining through it. It's the light that persists and illuminates; the pattern changes all the time. This gives us a clearer understanding of the beads, too. A very apt insight!

So we have been looking at two contrasting forms of 'I', but we don't want to become schizophrenic over it, so Nitya adds a lovely comparison to help us keep our cool about this complex business:

Now the question is, which is the truer self, the 'I' that gets into all these moods or the 'I' shorn of all moods? It is very much like asking which is the truer water—the kind that is running, gurgling, frothing, making gentle ripples, or thundering loud with the destructive might of a tidal wave; or the water that is standing calm with a gleaming surface like a sheet of glass, mirroring the golden disc of a rising sun half hidden by the blushing clouds of the orient sky. Not any one of these aspects is less or more real than any other.

Once again, we often hear how a “spiritual” attitude stands apart from other perspectives, and there is none of that here. It's all one. If we know the essence of every wave is the water it is made of, we can accept it much more easily. So much of our culture (no matter

what yours is) is based on making distinctions, clinging to preferences, choosing up sides, and so on. The yogi relinquishes those games. Yes, many of those games are idiotic, but a yogi doesn't take amusement from disdain either, but just stops playing them. Nitya takes this golden opportunity to unite our understanding:

The multitude of possibilities only indicates the inexhaustible qualities of consciousness that can be experienced as the 'I' in me and the 'I' in you. It is the same cosmic 'I', the Word, the Logos, that is expressed as the boundless universe—boundless in both time and space—which is like every cause that is breathing itself into the actualization of its effect.

The class got a kick out of that last phrase, the feeling that causes breathe themselves into effect. It's so gentle and kind, like a zephyr on a balmy spring evening. Nothing to get balmy over.

Andy brought up two verses from the Gita he found immeasurably consoling at a time in his life when he was having severe depression. They are from chapter VI, on Dhyana, Unitive Contemplation:

5) By the Self the Self must be upheld; the Self should not be let down; the Self indeed is its own dear relative; the Self indeed is the enemy of the Self.

6) The Self is dear to one (possessed) of Self, by whom even the Self by the Self has been won; for one not (possessed) of Self, the Self would be in conflict with the very Self, as if an enemy.

Where humans are trained to expect rescue from a divine or otherwise supernal source, the Gita asks us to care for ourselves. This can certainly include asking for outside assistance! While we are the agent of our own salvation, we may get help, but we know

ourselves better than anyone else, even better than a guru who can read your mind and your body language with uncanny accuracy.

With those famous verses in mind, we slipped into a penetrating meditation, boosted by Nitya's closing words that also invite us to enter the peace of a neutral witness:

The transient 'I' has the same substance as the eternal Self.
What is here and what is yonder over there cancel out in the
silence of the unutterable and the unthinkable.

Shhhhhhhhhhh!

Part II

Baiju's meditation adds much, quite different to what we talked about in class:

Verse #11 of *Atmopadesa Satakam* is another one that is not so easy to interpret what exactly Narayana Guru has intended. For that reason, the translation and the meaning explained by any two commentators tend to differ to some extent though the general import of the verse can be interpreted on the basis of the principles of Vedanta the Guru himself has expounded elsewhere.

I have been meditating on the verse for several days, looking into the different possibilities of the meaning of every word the Guru has employed in this verse. While Guru Nitya's detailed commentary in *That Alone* is very profound and educative, I was trying to read a simple explanation in the verse for me to meditate on.

This is what came clear to my mind so far:

The first half of the verse is straight forward. It says: we got the answers, 'I', 'I', to the question asked in the previous verse (who are you?). It appears to everybody that the I-consciousness

(individuated self) of each person is different. If we make deep meditative inquiry, we will find that ‘inside’ they (the ‘I’s that appear different) are not different, but one and the same. Let’s note the significance of the reference to ‘inside’ as it is always in the Guru’s instructions. What does it mean? It says, in order for the inquiry to be successful and find the distinct appearance of each individual ‘I’ to be non-different—that it is the same non-dual Self—it (the inquiry) must be carried out after withdrawing the sense organs from their objects. The ‘inside’ the Guru refers to is not necessarily within the boundary of the physical body of the inquirer. Rather it is the ‘space’ one experiences when he has successfully withdrawn all the senses from their objects. Now you proceed with your inquiry, you will see that there is only one ‘I’ which is the non-dual Self!

Now let’s read the second half:

Akalum = that which will go away/vanish – transient

Ahanta = I-consciousness, individuated self

Anekam = many/multitudinous

Aakayaal = therefore/for that reason/because

Ee tukayil = in this totality

Aham porulum = the Self which is the Essence/Core also

Tutarannitunnu = continues (as the reality)

Thus the second half reads as follows:

Because the transient individuated selves appear to be multitudinous, the Self which is the one Essence also continues in

the totality (of the individuated selves that appear to be multitudinous).

In the first half of the verse, the Guru has already clarified that, on inquiry, the separate appearances of the individuated selves can be found to be the one non-dual Self. The second half is not a mere repetition of what is told earlier; we are already told that inside every being there resides the Self as the Core; all our search is to realize that Self. The natural question here is how just one non-dual Self can reside in all the beings at the same time. That's the mystery. The Guru is helping us here to unravel that puzzle.

-The transient individuated selves are many. But always remember they are transient.

-The Transient things can be countless as long as they are just appearances (*vivarta*).

-It is also a 'feeling' of the individuated selves that, if there is a Self to be inquired upon, it will be there inside each individuated self. (The cause for that feeling is also the non-dual Self, as the Guru shows us, read on.)

-But in reality it is not so, the Guru gives enough hints. The non-dual Self resides in the 'totality' of all that appear to be multitudinous. The key word is totality. Let's keep meditating on this part.

-It is very clearly stated that the countless individuated selves are evanescent. And in the totality of the evanescent continues to reside the Self, which is the one Essence or Core.

If we continue to meditate on this aspect, it becomes clear that the totality that we see itself is ephemeral and what stays unchanged

all the time is the one Core that continues to stay in the ever-changing 'totality'.

We may also think that the non-dual Self to have control over all the manifest entities, It has to reside inside each entity. In order for the Self to control the entities, it need not stay inside the physical boundary of the entity because, after all, the entities are just appearances caused by the Self; in reality there is nothing other than the Self; then where is the question of the entities, their physical boundaries and control?

Implicitly, the Guru made it clear that the totality is no reality; the non-dual Self alone is true. And the never-changing Self will forever keep displaying the transient totality.

We can experience the profoundness of *advaita* by continuing to meditate on this verse.

Aum tat sat