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MOTS Chapter 14: The Being is Realized in the Becoming

Going beyond the boundaries of the three worlds, with all-filling
effulgence,
when the three-petaled knowledge has faded out, ever brighter
shines that light;
a pretentious seer will never grasp this;
thus, the Upanishads' secret word should be remembered.

Free translation:

Remember the secret of the Upanishads. The Self in its pure state is limitless and indivisible. It is bereft of divisions in time, and it fills the entire consciousness without the divisions of the knower, the known, and knowledge. One does not gain this state merely by making false claims to it.

Both Deb and I had the same reaction to the full reading of this chapter, the longest in the book: it is a magical performance leading the listener to effortlessly experience several of the high values of its content. It does that in part by affirming those values in a way that's eminently comprehensible as well as intriguing, and it performs a similar feat to the marriage ceremony that makes up the backbone of the chapter: Beingness is realized by heightened awareness of the act of Becoming. Or, the Beyond is accessed through how we live our actual lives. This means there is no unleapable gap between the individual and the Absolute. They are one and the same, a most consoling realization.

Deb marveled how cleverly mysterious and simple the essay is. Nitya's magic show demonstrates how spiritual and daily life are going back and forth all the time, interpenetrating each other, and how in the performance of action we can allow symbolic realities to become part of our everyday life. She thought it was a

beneficent sleight of hand: despite unconscious assumptions, we don't have to keep life sequestered off from its full measure.

If this full measure is understood, it removes our learned feelings of inadequacy. Our whole society is based on the presumption that all humans are sinners who have to become something other than what they are to be acceptable. If we realize we are already "owned" by the universe *as we are made*, a number of inhibitions will drop away of their own weight. We aren't accessing anything foreign to us, we are simply accessing our true nature. Nitya even spells this out toward the end, in mystical terms:

[The mystery implies] transformation and transubstantiation. In conducting the ritual, I'm preparing myself to transform what is subjective in me into a reality on the objective plane, and to transubstantiate the familiar, objective, and mundane world and its objects into a holy, sacred, divine, spiritual state.

Curiously, bald-faced intention isn't effective in bringing this about. Certain actions, like traditional marriage ceremonies, religious rituals, spiritual practices, and even holiday celebrations, coax the unconscious into participation with the tidal flow of our inner lives. Nitya cautions us against being overly rational about this process:

Anything to which I can relate myself changes into a symbol. The transformation of things into symbols is not affected by the process of rationalization. Rather it happens by an unconscious transference of my several identities and images.

I noted that this is precisely where science, along with its stepchildren, capitalism and manipulative politics, fail. When humans intentionally subtract the mysterious context in which our play of life is performed and ascribe all import to the shrunken dimensionality of the rational mind, some rather important aspects

are automatically deleted, like meaning, joy, happiness and expansiveness, to name only a few.

This doesn't legitimize introducing wild fantasies into the game, either, but it does invite a contemplative approach. Nitya puts it this way:

My attitude towards life is that of a Vedantin. I don't have gods to propitiate or desires to fulfill. To a Vedantin the reality of this world is phenomenal, and the acceptance of this truth is what has made me a renunciate.

So we aren't supposed to substitute wishful thinking for rationalism, but only to be open to creative impulses from the depths of our being. These can certainly be crafted with rational and scientific guidelines. My favorite line of many in this exposition is Nitya's musing on what a renunciate renounces:

What did I renounce? I did not renounce this world, because it is not mine to give up. I belong to it like a budding or withering flower, or a floating or raining cloud.

This turns the tables rather neatly: the world does not belong to us, as some egos loudly insist, we belong to the world. This converts a closed system of systems into an infinitely open one, and as Deb said, brings a sense of lightness to life. In part this levity is accomplished by minimizing the effects of memories and expectations, which we objectively define as the past and future. Nitya puts this rather subtly:

I am comfortable when my past is not far off and my future is on the threshold of my present. In other words, when my "here" is without any rigid spatial boundary and my "now" is an eternal present.

The crucial part of Nitya's contemplation vivifies this reductive process:

What do I seek? Honestly nothing—not even truth or liberation. If I exist, I exist in truth. Truth manifests in me, and it sustains me. Perhaps I will only defile truth if I attempt to lay it bare on the surface of my consciousness. Of course, I prepare myself for the advent of truth, and I accept it gratefully whenever it reveals itself to me. I adore it, and I dedicate myself to it wholeheartedly.

And there's no "perhaps" about the defilement. Every attempt to epitomize truth or reality into a definable quantity—something humans have always been obsessed with—inevitably leaves out crucial factors. Such ideas tend to "work" for a period, until they become actualized as part of the fabric of life, at which point they flamboyantly reveal their limitations by collapsing, often disastrously. We are in one such period right now, where leaving out the importance of the natural world in human scheming is beginning to rebound as impending doom. So yes, there is a paradox here. We want and very much need truth, but the minute we proclaim it as this or that, we have made a terrible mistake. Nitya's open invitation for truth to come in and sustain him, while not hunting for it in all the wrong places, is a fine example of how to stay in tune with something so fluid as truth, without defiling it.

I guess our rigid definitions are where the defiling happens. Truth must necessarily take a different outer form in addressing each circumstance, so if we nail it down as a specific fact or form it quickly becomes something much less benign, even opposite, to truth. And we live in a time when huge religions are trying their hardest to squeeze humanity back into outmoded forms that might have worked for grandpa but don't suit the present, under threat of death, even.

Nitya also muses about liberation, the handmaiden to truth. Instead of chafing at his limitations, he chooses to look at the

degree of freedom he enjoys. This enables him to see the internal factors that create bondage, which he can directly address:

But should I not be liberated? Physically I'm not bound; I can move about at will. Socially and politically I'm a free man. If I previously experienced any sense of bondage, it was as a paranoic fear created by my own ill-conceived concepts of the ego and the superego, and my placement in society as a responsible member. By embracing death I have transcended fear. The only chains that can bind me now are my memories, and the only prison walls I see around me are my prejudices. The occasional compulsions that I might experience come from the vestiges of my emotional attachments.

And why not liberate ourselves from the puerile ideas about God we haul along on our journey? Vedanta revels in the beneficent support of a disinterested Absolute, yet this is a hard breakthrough to bring about in our understanding. Jan was especially charmed by how Nitya presents it:

I believe that I have succeeded in some measure in dismantling my anthropomorphic fixation on the superego. Today, in its place, I look for manifestations of beauty, goodness, justice, kindness, tenderness, openness, honesty, and a hundred other values. In contrast to a superego hanging heavily around my neck and forcing on me the compulsion of a categorical imperative, these virtues invite me to openly share their beauty and freely participate in their positive expression.

Gurukula veterans should be well acquainted with what Nitya means by an "anthropomorphic fixation on the superego." The echoes of our upbringing cause us to feel like some stern deity is always looking over our shoulder and judging us. Or the neighbor or the surveillance state. Much of this is another self-imposed

burden we carry without making any meaningful attempt to relieve ourselves of its weight.

Nitya accepted Freud's threefold division of the psyche into superego, ego and id. His assessment of liberation includes all three. Next he speaks of the ego:

I am no longer at war with my ego, either. In the structuring of my consciousness, my ego acts as a central locus of coordination, and also as the percipient of the value orientation of all the passing gestalts of my wakeful and dream awareness. My ego assumes the role of the enjoyer, doer, and knower only when I consciously commission it to hold these positions. It is no longer rigid.

Subliminal urges are in some ways the trickiest, since they masquerade as legitimate spiritual impulses. Well, actually all three aspects do that, don't they? We can assess their validity in how they impact the world around us, another way our Being is recognized in our Becoming. Nitya characterizes one essential measuring rod as the degree of openness we experience:

Even subliminal urges have become less exacting, and they show a willingness to play more open games. I am now happily placed, because I don't have to feel terribly obliged to society or tradition.

Society and tradition being the closed forms that are almost always inimical to openness, we have to surrender our obligations to them in order to give ourselves breathing room.

Even when we sincerely try our hardest, the forms we have internalized in the distant past can trip us up. Nitya is amused by how this automatically makes him a rival of the brahmin priest at the marriage ceremony in the eyes of the hosts: "It struck me as very amusing to be in a situation where I had become a poor man's rival through no fault of either of us." Like a good contemplative

Yati, Nitya not only denies his own enmity, but presumes the other is free of it too. The presumption of innocence is another high value we humans have rarely realized to its full extent....

Another memorable line comes from a quote from Carl Jung, echoing Nitya's belonging to the world like a cloud or flower:

The self, like the unconscious, is an a priori existent out of which the ego evolves. It is an unconscious prefiguration of the ego. It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself.

No matter how it is expressed, the poles in the situation are the individual, identified as an 'I' or ego, and the mysterious otherness of the universe, whether internal or external. Nitya shows how the marriage ceremony is a form to promote a spiritual union via transformation and transubstantiation. In other words, the inner being is projected onto the outer form, and at the same time the greater mystery beyond ordinary awareness is incorporated into the participants without conscious effort, even though the setting is fully intentional. Nitya describes this in another superb sentence:

A contemplative uses the archaic form of the ritual to go beyond the known to arrive at an understanding that will give roots to his psyche in the unknown. Such an attainment is called *apurva*, which literally means "not gained before."

The class also talked about how natural this attainment of "roots in the unknown" is, especially to children. We love ritual repetition, as long as it's done in fun, without doctrinal stress. Many of us in the class grew up without much religion, but holidays fulfilled the same role, with their decorations and feasts and music and shared happiness. This was proved when we proposed to change our upcoming November 6 class on Election Day to the 7th, which this year is Diwali. Prabu got so excited about bringing fireworks to class to celebrate Diwali properly, it was really sweet! We all

recognized his joy of looking forward to an exciting repetition of a happy time he has known before.

Halloween is another of those impending holidays brimming with excitement, and Andy and Bushra thought we should put showering fireworks in pumpkins for the artistic merit of the display. They have done this before, and you can even see some of it on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOqf_ttxHeM.

Bushra talked about how she did go to church, but she also had lots of great aunts who did all sorts of ritual things, and she loved the magical feelings these imparted. As a kid, she experienced the lovely stimulation of other people feeling faith. She finds it interesting how much we need symbols and rituals. When she slips into a church now—usually in Mexico where she and Andy spend part of each year—she feels called upon to buy a votive candle and put it in a secret niche with other candles. As she does this, she feels as if she has become the very light of the candle, and she knows it is the ritual that allows her to feel that.

Bushra also advocated that rituals are a way of breaking out of the unending demands of the world, of giving us a break from routine. In the Middle East the Muslim call to prayer five times a day allows everyone to stop what they're doing and pause in worship, suspending everyday life for just a moment.

Andy reminisced about when they traveled to India with Nancy Y and visited Ashmir, a pilgrimage site for Sufis. There is a big shrine at the tomb, filled with rows of men counting beans and saying the 99 names of God, sort of like saying the rosary in Catholicism. Andy felt it as a mantra-like experience, like a poetic medium that people put themselves in.

Deb likes the sense of experiencing the numinous, whenever you can get outside your everyday configuration, where you can allow yourself to be a part of a non-constructed space. This understanding is important to her because it burns away the specific, static posturing we can become stuck in.

Several of us noted how children are naturally intrigued by rituals and often create their own during playtimes. Jan didn't grow

up with any ritual framework, but from a young age she felt called to what she described as an urge within the sacred. She recalled early on, in the first grade even, how she would take her younger brother to the nearby beach where they would talk to the ocean as if they were talking to God. They would collect things to arrange in their worship times too.

Jan also recalled a time as an adult when she visited the prehistoric caves in France that have some of the oldest art yet discovered. Their guide told them that the animals depicted were not ones the people were hunting, that they were symbolic, sacred in a different way. Jan felt the enchantment of the place, how humans had brought in fire to these deep recesses so they could leave their marks in secret. It taught her that humans have always had an inclination to reach out to something mysterious, just as she had done on that beach in her childhood.

Andy and I talked about holidays as our only family rituals, yet so exciting. The fact that they are just annual events makes the anticipation almost unbearably delicious for kids. Andy thought that as a child you are absorbing the emotional vibrations behind all the actions that people are doing, and I'd say that the child is also bringing something undefined of their own as well. In many ways children are more alive to the mystery of life than adults, and we unconsciously long to restore the beauty we once felt so powerfully. It requires a restoration of our innocence, another goal that can't be achieved rationally.

Paul spoke to how in his life rituals were more a negative feature. He can appreciate tradition, but he doesn't like how the Bible and other scriptures are used more as weapons of intimidation. Paul much prefers that Christianity of seers like author and historian Elaine Pagels, who retold the story of Nicodemus in a way he loves. In Paul's retelling of hers, Nicodemus went to see Jesus. Jesus met him and invited him inside the temple, but Nicodemus wouldn't follow him. Jesus asked him why. Nicodemus told him that since his (Jesus') steps were sacred, he wondered if he should take off his shoes before coming in.

Jesus told him that if he believed he should remove his shoes before walking on sacred ground, he should have removed his shoes at birth.

I agreed with Paul that Being can just as well be obscured by Becoming as revealed by it. The ignorant actions that cause Paul to recoil are the obscuring aspects, and they are legion in our world. Nitya is delineating for us a special kind of attitude that is releasing rather than binding. In Sanskrit one of the words for religion is *granta*, meaning a knot. Bondage is frequently built into religion as a way to keep the faithful in line and in tow, and it works well in that regard. Nitya is of course leading us away from bondage, and it's always important to be aware of the difference. Knots are to be untied and not retied.

Nitya goes into detail about the meaning of the marriage structure and the upgraded homa, the fire sacrifice, the Gurukula performs. I was especially intrigued by the meaning of the ghee, the clarified butter used in the ritual:

The substance used for the libation is clarified butter. The gross food the cow eats is changed into its blood. The blood nourishes the udder. From the udder, milk comes. Cream is the essence of milk. From the cream, butter is made. Clarified butter is, therefore, considered the most refined end product of the entire process of nourishment. It is chosen to symbolize the ego. With the offering of the libation one's identity with the Absolute is established. This marks the climax of the transformation and transubstantiation.

Nitya didn't want to leave out addressing an important part of the verse: "a pretentious seer will never grasp this." Or, in the free version: "One does not gain this state merely by making false claims to it." Such pretence comes out of the defilement of reducing reality to a formula. I always think of Procrustes, who mangled all his visitors, cutting off their limbs so they would fit on his too-small guest bed. We really don't want to do this! Nitya

could see that if he refused to perform the marriage ceremony, it would only be due to his egotistical beliefs. Instead, he is content to witness his body going through the motions, and in the process finds humor and insight as he provides loving care in blessing the innocents who have appeared before him:

My conformity to this kind of ritualistic tradition is not necessitated by any social compulsion. It is not my doing or not doing a ritual that makes me a Yati. Even if I conformed to all the external details of a renunciate's life, I would still be only a hypocrite if I didn't transcend my ego-sense and sense of the agency of action. The actor, the action, and the field of action are all aspects of a perennial becoming of which the actor's own self is an eternal witness.

This brings him to one of Deb's favorite sayings, the transparency of vision that comes from not occluding the situation with personal demands:

A true Yati is endowed with a transparency of vision. He sees the one as the many and the many as aspects of the unchanging One. The Being is realized in the Becoming.

Altogether the chapter is a magical performance, and everyone felt it was one of our best classes ever. Our meetings are a kind of open ritual. We start with small talk, tea and treats; sit together in the same room; open and close with brief chants; read Nitya's writings, meditate on them, and then discuss them. It allows us to open our hearts and minds to the maximum. It's a kind of becoming that invites our being to be a full-fledged participant, and it works in ways we hardly notice, much less expect. It does feel very, very good, though.

Part II

Prabu read a Rumi poem in tune with the flavor of Nitya's description of the fire ceremony:

A Just-Finishing Candle,
Translated by Coleman Barks

A candle is made to become entirely flame.

In that annihilating moment
it has no shadow.

It is nothing but a tongue of light
describing a refuge.

Look at this
just-finished candle stub
as someone who is finally safe
from virtue and vice,

the pride and the shame
we claim from those.

The related excerpt of the text is:

The latent fire in the firewood symbolizes the omnipresence of a universal principle which is involved in the process of becoming and which can reduce everything into the state of the pure Being. The ultimate release described as nirvana both in the Hindu and the Buddhist literature is analogically compared to the burning out of a piece of firewood. When a burning piece of firewood is brandished in the air, it can make many patterns of fiery lines, loops and circles. However, once the fire consumes the whole of the firewood, it is reduced to ashes and will no longer produce fiery patterns. It loses its property of

changefulness. Reduction of a burning piece of firewood to ashes is called *alata santi*—the peaceful consummation.

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A letter to the editor of Scientific American, October 2018, highlighting a key difference between real life events and isolated behaviors, and the unintended limits of “scientific” learning:

Game of Life

Erik Vance’s “Can You Supercharge Your Baby?” is a sensible article on the limitations of modern toys, videos and other paraphernalia in helping augment young children’s mental development. Yet there is another aspect of child play he overlooks: the substitution of social games with “passive” toys used mostly alone, typically via television, computer or cell phone, without exercise.

Social games are vital for the mental and physical development of children. Perhaps most important, such games are based on rules that are accepted by all players, and they are fun only if everybody abides by those rules. Children who play with cell phones can cheat at will; they are the masters of their digital universe and thus become self-centered, without consideration for resolving social conflicts.

Eduardo Kausel

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So there is value in social settings and feedback. We aren’t talking about a monolithic tuning out of the environment. More of an improved interaction based on the whole context. Relating well with others is an advanced skill of our Becoming, advanced because it is also not reducible to a simplistic formula. We have to meet contingencies as they arise, not as we want them to be.

Part III

Paul's most recent Brihadaranyaka Upanishad class response elaborates on the thoughts from this class, and he has permitted me to include them for your delectation:

Life is a golden ladle surfacing from the depths of latent longing quenching its thirst as perennial actualization. I have a new respect for sadness. Conditioned feelings of sadness (or any feelings of disenfranchisement) are not just a curse to endure, they are critical binary bits of affective information that we need to embrace and heed their guidance. I believe wisdom becomes wisdom only when the intellect recognizes the limitations of all our conditioned 'becomings'.

Last Tuesday at Scott & Debs class on Nitya's book *Meditations on the Self* we were discussing the symbolism and mystical affect we experience through various tribal rituals. It was beautiful to hear the class describe experiences of the sacred through ritual, song or place. Unfortunately, my personal experience with organized religion has left me a bit 'twitchy'. The elders of my church seemed prone to weaponize the Holy Bible as a bludgeoning tool of mass enslavement. I have not been in a church for years, but I still flinch a bit in sadness when passing by one. That 'flinching sadness' I feel has been a guru to me in allowing me to recognize the limitations of some of my conditioned beliefs that still possesses the power to incarcerate my freedom. Conditioned beliefs are a form of knowledge. There is nothing inherently good or bad with knowledge; knowledge is simply a utilitarian conglomeration of memories employed to survive. It is nice to be able to tie our shoes every morning without having to relearn that task again and again every morning. Conditioned knowledge is efficient, but limited in its optical

scope as confined within the borders of duality. Yajnavalkya presents a wisdom of emancipation from our ignorance. I can personally testify to the fact that the *burdens of superstitions and mimicry* become much lighter when we lay them down.

~ When the heart is light as light,
the manifested world is a thirst satiated
transitory realization
is Imperishable's actualization ~