

MOTS Chapter 19: Nothing to Argue, Nothing to Establish

The bottom, the top, the end, that is real, this is, no, that is—
in this way people quarrel; the one primal reality is all that is;
all this inertial matter is transient;
except as a form of water could a wave ever arise?

Free translation:

Not knowing that everything is a transformation of the primeval Being, people come into conflict, asserting “It is the base,” “No, it is the crown,” “No, no, it is this end,” “No, it is that end,” and so on. All perceptions regarding static and inertial forms are transient. How can there be any reality for a wave other than the water it is made of?

It looked like I would finally have a brief morning of writing for such a short chapter, yet to my astonishment the class expounded on the basic idea in splendiferous display, so that once again I have my work cut out for me. Narayana Guru has put his finger on the crux of the matter here, and the veteran class made the most of its implications.

And what is the crux of the matter? That the unifying element in all life is primary, with the manifold divisions separating one from another as secondary. Simple to say, yet enduringly elusive.

Seen from the Guru’s wise perspective, all the conflicts and arguments of humanity are misdirected attempts to assert that the secondary characteristics are in fact primary. Not only philosophers but scientists have repeatedly demonstrated the falsehood of imagining the topology of the surface as representing the core. After presenting a quick summary of a few of the most popular fictions, Nitya inclines his head toward a fellow who understood their proper relation:

Amidst the clanks and clunks of these various philosophical jargons, I see the solemn figure of Narayana Guru sitting in calm repose, nodding his head to everyone, agreeing that all of them are right in their own fashion. It is so relaxing and peace-giving to know that the apparent manifoldness of reality has an inner structure which really holds everything together as part of a homogeneous whole. The depth is as much real as the height. One with true understanding sits firmly on the seat of his own Self and smiles with the serenity of a Buddha, having nothing to argue, nothing to establish.

The philosophers Nitya mentions all made giant strides toward a unifying ideology, digging down to broadly essential values that bring together innumerable aspects of life. Yet the proof of their partiality is found in whether an opposing or augmenting viewpoint is possible. So long as ideas clash, they cannot be all-encompassing. They all stop part way, I suppose because the terrain was already getting plenty interesting.

Each time a philosopher unites seemingly disparate elements, it makes for a new system, and is exciting enough to cause a stir. Over time, though, people may dig deeper, rendering it out of date. At least they will surely argue over its shortcomings. The Absolute is a postulation of a zone where there is no longer anything to add or subtract, the place where everything really *is* included. Each belief system is absolute to the extent that this is true in it.

It seems to be an innate quality of humans to want to have battles. I've included a fascinating page of speculation on this from Charles in Part II, from his recent Gita class response. Deb has been reading the book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, by Y.N. Harari. Harari maintains that a huge swath of human understanding is based on us vs. them, whether between big groups or in personal interactions. To Deb, this is the attitude we must relinquish if we want to rise above conflicts. From the yogic perspective, you see how the other person is just like you, with the same needs and desires, only presented in their unique and

different fashion. Rather than clashing, if you really listen to the other person, and translate their terms into your own language, you begin to realize that you are like them and they are like you. It brings about a vast change in your way of thinking. And you don't have to convert or be converted, you simply allow them to be.

I'm afraid Harari and Charles are quite right, however. We humans thrive on animosity, and will create it where it doesn't yet exist. In America, the energy of WWII pulling the US out of the Great Depression has become an article of faith. Now we "know" that peace is not profitable. Creating conflict is not only easy and natural, but extremely profitable, and with a little cleverness you can arrange for the money conveyor belt to discharge lots of it directly into your pocket. So we are in a predicament that favors discord: using a portion of those vast sums to keep the turmoil churning and the profits rolling in. Make sure you have an enemy you can demonize, and people will worship you even as they descend into penury and work like slaves. In the past we have had religious leaders who militated against the situation, but they have been thoroughly marginalized. It's falling to nature as the last resort to bring about a restoration of sanity. That will definitely be the hardest way out for almost everyone on the planet.

Narayana Guru has shown us how to use the technique of yoga to bring about a prosperous, dynamic peace. By presuming that everyone has same needs you have a basis of communication, and at the heart of it is the ubiquitous desire for peace, having needs met, having a good time, and all the reset. The basic requirement for healing is to be settled and satisfied in your own self. If you are unsure of your self, you will likely turn to external solutions, with their distracting lures and hidden agendas. For this reason the Guru directs us to come home to our self first of all.

Jan felt the verse is presenting an overly intellectual approach to seeing someone else's position, and she felt coming at it from the heart is what is called for. You can understand another's position if you first accept and love them, realizing how they are part of you and an essential part of the whole reality.

Really, it works both ways: loving helps us to include the other, but intellectual understanding helps bring us back on track when our instinctive feelings lean toward rejection. The malaise is when our heart and our intellect lose touch with each other. Paul summed this up nicely as “empathy with intent.”

Paul talked about how he has come to realize that he has a partial understanding even in areas where he is an “expert.” Adults are experts, aren’t we? Well, relative to children we may be. He told a sweet story about making popcorn one time with his then six-year-old son. Adam heard a car running in the street and connected it to the popcorn popping, imagining that was how a car was propelled. Paul realized he couldn’t explain the true workings of a car to someone that young, since he didn’t yet have enough experience, but he realized that the boy was on the right track: force, in the form of explosions, were at the heart of the movement. Paul realized that even though he thought he had a superior knowledge, he was still far from the truth. Plus, education wasn’t always so much about absolute truth as appropriate truth. It gave him the grace and humility to be open to learning more for himself, and at the same time to be compassionate about someone who knew less. It didn’t mean they were incapable in the long run, only in the present.

Susan talked about a new type of preparation she did to help herself be more present with her family. Last week was Thanksgiving, a US holiday of family gatherings, and before that often-stressful event she spent an evening writing down all the things that were bothering her about the people who would be coming over to dinner that day. She also wrote down what she was NOT going to say to them, and what familiar arguments she WAS NOT going to get into. With that preparation she was more able to listen to everyone and not get frustrated. It recalled Nitya’s angry letter writing from chapter 13. When he was done venting his spleen he’d tear up the letter. Susan shredded her documents, the modern equivalent. In both cases there was a therapeutic release, plus Susan was well prepared for what was to come.

Families are a rich source of painful personal learning. Andy talked about his divorce of almost exactly 20 years ago, and how despondent he was. His friend Susan took care of him, including giving him some taped lectures by Pema Chodron that he found really helpful, especially one on the Buddhist aphorism “Exchanging yourself for the other.” She advised driving all blames into one place, which was located in you, not in the other person. It puts you in a position of understanding rather than projecting. Andy could see how you contain all the world’s innumerable possibilities inside you: depending on circumstances you could have become Hitler or anyone. You have deep-seated vasanas for all bad behavior. This means when you are in a position of strife you look within yourself for where that is being manifested. You’ll find you are accusing someone of something that you’ve got yourself. He found it a powerful meditation.

Deb concurred, saying she has noticed something in someone else that she hates, yet on reflection she realizes that the upset is coming from herself. It certainly takes the wind out of your angry sails, doesn’t it.

I reiterated that we have to be truly confident in our self in order to be brave enough to fearlessly admit our weaknesses. Narayana Guru’s loving attitude helps us to establish that ground on a firm footing. As Andy phrased it, it helps us to see how we are all co-inhabitants sharing the same vast nature.

When we summed up that this was the main idea of projection, that what is in us is referred to others and then we are free to despise it, Paul wondered if projection ever has a positive influence. I pointed out that this study of wisdom teachings is itself a form of positive projection. We are learning to project the aspects in us that are universal and loving, and to give them priority over the selfish and small-minded aspects we also harbor. Andy added we are projecting an acceptance of our self and others together. So don’t despise yourself for projecting, just notice it happening and use that awareness as an opportunity to upgrade your responses.

Bushra also made a speech about the perils of projection, how we should be sure we aren't making assumptions about what other people are thinking and feeling, which is so important we should remind ourselves of it every week. I invited everyone to contribute what do they do about it. Projecting is how we operate as ordinary human beings—is there anything we can do to improve the situation?

Several of us were in favor of upgraded listening, not the kind that is waiting to pounce and make a self-interested point, but one that puts your own ego in abeyance so that what the other person really is saying comes through to you. If we are secretly hoping to convert the other to our view, we aren't truly listening. Deb recalled how in Nitya's classes, he would often give very puzzling answers to people's questions, but on pondering them she realized he was speaking to the real conundrum in the person, which didn't always get expressed directly in their question. He was listening to more than the words. I once saw a psychology article that claimed the actual word content in communication was 7 percent, with tone, gestures, body language, etc. accounting for the rest. I don't think intuitive "vibes" were even included, as they are inevitably subjective. Whatever, listening is about much more than hearing words and rationally analyzing them.

Bushra herself gave a great answer of how to reduce projections: she doesn't take herself so seriously anymore. She knows that her feelings are transient, so what do they matter? She can now happily engage in heated arguments, since she isn't in them to win, but only to enjoy the give and take. Laughingly she said, the hotter the better! She and her cousin Aysha do it a lot now, having really passionate arguments and laughing about where they wind up. It brings them closer, not farther from each other. Bushra said she doesn't care about the point of view, it's fun to do the drama. This is of course something you have to do with a friend: not every stranger would be safe to argue with.

There was speculation that Mediterranean cultures were less uptight about arguing than northern Europeans, for instance. Bill

was reminded of being in Greece one time, on a ferry filled with all Greek people. He was amazed how they were super animated and argumentative, to the point he was afraid a fight might break out, and then they would giggle and hug each other. It was all in fun.

For Deb, stopping projecting comes from the heart. If you are in a situation with loving care for a person you are going to pay more attention to them and not project your own values on them.

This echoed Jan's point from earlier, and Jan added that there is a process of inward reflection that helps us make conscious what is unconscious. In it we become more aware of parts of ourselves we're afraid to face, and so more likely to project. In love you're often faced with something horrible about yourself, and then if you can embrace the ugliness, it softens your heart to yourself.

Bill talked about his Yoga Sutras class with Nancy Y, how Nitya brings up parallel trains of consciousness: labored (with mental modifications) and non-labored (the silent witness). It led him to observe this in his brain, which he found really enlightening. Watching the whole drama was his silent witness. The lesson Bill drew was to learn to utilize himself more effectively, by including the witnessing aspect within his daily activities.

This reminded Deb of a special dream she'd had the night before, her first ever remembered dream of flying. She started off walking through dense jungle, feeling very busy and interactive, but soon she found herself gliding through the air above it all, looking down on it as a detached witness. It felt wonderful! It brought with it a sense of compassion and generosity of spirit. On top of that, it reminded her how important it is to befriend yourself.

That's so true! We keep projecting in part because we don't forgive ourselves, which is much harder than realizing the other person isn't really matching your projections, and giving them a pass. We have learned self-criticism at such a very deep level, almost from day one, it's almost our default setting. So to fully stop projecting we have to first befriend and forgive our own

humble self. We can admit we are also a spark of the Absolute. We are worthy too.

Bill continued, another part is that you create a lot of noise with your memories and your reactions, and these have such a complex set of impacts. If you can understand them and see them for what they are it gives you the capability to let them go. That's a tall order, of course, and Prabu was reminded of a quote from Immanuel Kant, relayed by Irving Berlin: "out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made." Back in *my* day, 'straight' was an insult, meaning unhip or not turned on. Yet it remains an imagined positive goal (or safe cover) for many people. Possibly another part of non-projection is to realize we are all bent in all sorts of amusing and tragic ways, and that's what makes us individuals, where our charm lies. Prabu felt Nitya's account of the arguing philosophers should teach us the beauty of diversity.

Bushra revealed that she is just now discovering the silent witness and the non-labored approach in her life. Not needing to have ideas or feelings for a time is a new experience for her, and it's a lovely place. There is nothing she has to do in it. It's an amazing spot, not always accessible, but she finds it most often in the interval in between sleeping and waking. This state is exactly what Narayana Guru is holding out to us here in verse 19, and Bushra has found it in her own way.

This is so exciting a discovery! As Bushra said later, it's not a difficult thing, you just find it and there it is. I think it helps for us to have a definition that it's okay to take a break, to not always be doing something productive. Taking a break from the melee is paradoxically the most productive thing there you can do, at least psychologically speaking.

Nancy mused that that is how the poet becomes her words before they ever are set down in some order, that we are the poetry before it is written. Bill agreed, and thought that is where the yogi ends up, in the Self within the self, looking at the world without attachment. The witnessing self is definitely something you can cultivate.

Paul is still humming with Nitya's claim in a past lesson that he doesn't renounce the world because it isn't his to renounce. Such a beautiful sentiment! Paul can see that this is precisely where the two become one, where humanity joins with the transcendent and they become the same thing. It takes the lasting wound of dual thinking out of us. Paul was reminded by our talk of the Balarama story from *That Alone*, which I will add to Part II. Deb summed it up as so long as we fight with people we are feeding the demon. I'm sure you remember it. Krishna gives it love, and the demon shrinks until it can be easily handled. It is no longer threatening.

Moni closed the proceedings with a story from her work in social services that perfectly fits the theme of the chapter. She received a call at her help desk from a very distraught person. "May I help you?" she asked in her sweet voice. "No, you won't help!" he angrily replied. He needed money, social services to live on, but every offer or request Moni made was rejected with suspicion. It was like that for a long time. Everything Moni proposed was rejected with an insult. She didn't get ruffled, but kept trying to help. Eventually the hostile caller became more docile and they worked together on his problem. Finally she gained his trust. He asked her name, and she said, "You'll laugh." "No I won't." "Yes, you will!" "What is it?" "Moni (pronounced exactly like money)." And he did laugh—how could you not? When the call was over, he wanted to give her a hug, and she wanted to give him one in return. They were both in tears. Such a patient and persistent effort is exactly what Narayana Guru tried—and succeeded—to inspire in everyone he met. It is a tremendous contribution to a species not only on the edge of insanity, but being eagerly pushed toward it by those who profit most from human misery. It was a perfect close to our evening, and a lesson to us all. Aum.

Part II

Charles now lives too far away to attend our class, but he is in the online Gita class, and sent this (edited) observation just a month ago:

“United in the strife that divided them.”

TS Eliot .Four Quartets.

If the yogi holds aloof from pairs of opposites seeing both sides with an equal eye ,then how does he deal with the American midterm elections, now only days away? my practical question to myself.

There is a tendency in groups of humans to divide up into two sides and have a contest. This is always going on everywhere in the world, brawls, gang fights, wars big or small, or in sports or business competitions. It seems to be instinctive. That’s just what people do. Always have done.

Lately in the USA, there seems to be a kind of balance, half on one side, half on the other, between Democrats and Republicans. Half of them must be wrong, but who knows which? It seems to me that the side I’m inclined toward is keeping the light, while those others are accelerating the downward spiral. My reason says that the actual problem is that the people are divided up into the usual two hostile sides, with each lot believing they’re right and the others are wrong.

To get some perspective on this, I’m looking back to the sixth century in Constantinople, to the struggles of sports fans favoring one or another team of chariot racers in the hippodrome . by the fifth and sixth century, the situation had developed into a rivalry of two gigantic factions, the Greens and the Blues. It was not just about sports fans cheering on their favorite teams. The people of Constantinople were very much addicted to rancorous debates over rather abstruse topics of Christian theology. specifically, the rival views on the nature of Christ held by Orthodox and Monophysite factions.

By a mysterious process, there was a coalescence of the Green faction with Monophysitism and Nicean Orthodoxy with the Blue faction. These were passionate and excitable people. and the mixture of sport and theology seems to have triggered mass insanity.

There were riots in the hippodrome of increasing intensity as well as clashes in the streets of rival Blue and Green gangs. Finally, the riots were so far out of control that the Emperor Justinian himself was under threat. So he ordered the gates of the hippodrome to be sealed , confining 150,000 sports fans/theology enthusiasts. And then he sent in regiments of Goths and Thracians, who had no sports preferences or theological opinions, and ordered them to kill everyone, which they did.

Dualistic thinking was the cause of it all, and if we are asked who was right and who was wrong, or, who would you vote for , the Blues or the Greens,? we could deal with it as proper jnana yogis ought to do, inclining not to the one side or the other. The thing is, after fifteen centuries, it no longer matters. but things that are happening now, matter now. How can I deal with my own preferences in the present situation?

My thoughts included:

A famous psychology experiment along the lines of Charles' musings about strife is the Robber's Cave experiment. There is plenty about it on line, but this article has a balanced view with more important details than most:

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/literally-psyched/revisiting-the-robbers-cave-the-easy-spontaneity-of-intergroup-conflict/>.

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Here's the magnificent ending to Chapter 46 of That Alone:

Just as beauty can overwhelm you, there is only one thing that can transcend this tree [of the ramifying branches of mental modifications]. It is given in the Gita as *asanga*, the sword of nonattachment. Instead of fighting you, I allow you to be. I do not merely allow you to be, I also include you. I accept you. When I accept you, I have already taken the zest to fight away from you. In the face of my calmness, you also become calm. So, if winning is your motive, win the heart. When you fight, not only does the other perish: you also perish.

There is an Indian myth that a certain demon came and challenged Balarama, the brother of Sri Krishna. Balarama accepted the challenge. He went, raising his fist to smash its head. Then the demon became twice the size of Balarama. Seeing this, Balarama, who had psychic powers, grew double the size of the demon. The demon doubled in size again, and started lifting hills to throw at him. Then Balarama realized he could not overpower the demon. He turned to Sri Krishna and asked for help. Krishna smiled and said, “Brother, leave him to me. I’ll deal with him.”

The demon turned to Krishna and found that in his hand there was no weapon. Krishna stood with his hands open and smiled. Then the demon became the size of an average human being. Krishna still stood there with his bewitching smile and said, “Come on friend.” He came close and became smaller than Krishna. Krishna patted him. He became very small. Then Krishna took him in his hand and stroked him. He became so tiny.

Then Balarama came and said, “Brother, I don’t understand this. How did he become so small? How did you tame him?” He replied, “Brother, don’t you know this demon’s name?” “No.” “This demon’s name is Krodha, anger. When you become angry, you are only feeding him. He thrives on somebody else’s anger. When you take away your anger, there is nothing to nourish him. He becomes less and less. So when I give him love, there is nothing on which he can feed himself and he becomes very small.”

This is also the central teaching of Buddha: with hatred you never appease hatred, but with love you win all.

Part III

It's rare to receive a real response to the class notes these days, unfortunately. Jean has come through on this one, though, appreciating several of your contributions:

Dear Scott,

Fine reading, your class notes. The opening part, about people in conflict, seemed to have the "leaders" at the present G-20 meeting in mind-- Trump, Xi, Putin, Erdogan, MSB, May, etc.! Then I liked the discussion on "empathy with intent," the way to combine intellect and heart. As for Mediterranean argumentative technique, true, but the British Parliament can get quite wild, too, and still people are civil with each other afterwards. The story about Moni/money at the end was priceless!

On the topic of "upgraded listening"-- putting your ego aside to hear what the other person is really saying-- it reminded me of something I just read in the Lewis & Clark Chronicle Magazine, an article about Kim Stafford, "The People's Poet." The afterword included a poem of his from "The Flower of Unity: Post-Election Poems". Here it is:

PRACTICING THE COMPLEX YES (by Kim Stafford)

*When you disagree with a friend,
a stranger, or a foe, how do you
reply but not say simply No?
For No can stop the conversation
or turn it into argument or worse--
the conversation that must go on, as a river
must, a friendship, a troubled nation.
So may we practice the repertoire*

of complex yes:

Yes, and in what you say I see...

Yes, and at the same time...

Yes, and what if...?

Yes, I hear you, and how...?

Yes, and there's an old story...

Yes, and as the old song goes...

Yes, and as a child told me once...

Yes. Yes, tell me more. I want to understand...

and then I will tell you how it is for me. ...

("Yes, I said yes"-----it made me think of e.e.cummings, though a different context.) --Jean