

1/15/19

## MOTS Chapter 24: Being the One in All and All in the One

“That man,” “this man”—thus, all that is known in this world, if contemplated, is the being of the one primordial self;  
what each performs for the happiness of the self should be conducive to the happiness of another.

Free translation:

What is known as that person or this person, when carefully considered, is the one undifferentiated form of the primeval Self. Whatever one does for the happiness of one’s own self should also include the happiness of others.

Deb was very excited to read this chapter out for us, because on January first, looking ahead to the new year, she randomly opened the book to it, and it really spoke to her in a most optimistic way.

This verse and the next conclude the section of Atmo on inclusiveness, or what might be referred to as social justice. In verse 25 Narayana Guru cautions that failure to include the needs of others in our actions brings about a hellish condition, not unlike the one we stand on the brink of now, as the religion of Ayn Randism, with selfishness as its central tenet and divine operating principle, stands triumphant. Let’s hope the ancient Chinese premise that structures collapse precisely at the moment they are in their full glory still holds true. Otherwise even those of us who ascribe to unity will be drawn with the tide of the time into a new version of hell. It’s already getting a lot hotter these days. Lots of folk are falling into the lake of flaming excrement.

There are a couple of subtly communicated points here that we covered joyfully in the class. First off, there has to be a careful consideration, a philosophical pondering, to perceive the unity of

all. It isn't obvious, and our default setting as sentient animals is to act on the basis of superficial differences. Nitya even notes this separating tendency in himself as he wanders the hospital where Nataraja Guru is being cared for. He finds himself particularly drawn to another renunciate, as the one seen to be a lot like him:

As a man dedicated to God I should have felt the same love and compassion for all. I was somewhat surprised at my behavior and the discrimination I had shown against the other patients. In the renunciate I recognized certain values that were equally dear to me. A recognition of homogeneity is the basis of unitive vision. What separates us as human beings is the distinction of our particular forms on the existential level and different ideas in the field of consciousness. Where there is a common value, its appreciation can lift the mind above all formal differences to register the awareness of our essential unity.

Despite his ideology, Nitya's immediate attraction is to someone most like himself, but then he brings in a contemplative reflection in order to expand his feeling of attraction to a general principle in resonance with all the inmates of the asylum. Planet Earth is our shared asylum, our hospital suffering a shortage of proper care and supplies, but nonetheless filled with dedicated personnel.

This notion inspired Deb's opening comments, how her biggest hope in attending college and emerging from a fairly monochrome childhood, was to be exposed to new types of people and to learn about their world views and come to understand them better. As she has gotten older (and having already had a wide range of experiences of different cultures) she wonders if she needs to keep exploring every variation or if she would be better served by sinking deeply into the commonality we all share, to find the unifying thread of all of us together. Commonality is certainly the theme here.

I asserted that it is literally true that if everything encountered is a construct of your own mind, regardless of its existential status,

how you relate to it directly affects *you*. It may look like you are impacting others, but you are actually impacting yourself, first and foremost. Being contrary to our presumptive perception of externality, you really do have to work your way into this understanding, but it has actually been scientifically validated in the years since Nitya wrote these lines. Our default setting as animals who must use their senses to stay alive in a hostile world is to be suspicious of anything new. Living in a reasonably safe environment affords us the opportunity to get to the next level and realize the direct involvement we have with what we perceive. We are relating to our Self. Knowing this should inspire us to take a kindlier approach to our surroundings, since they are us.

After visiting the renunciate in his hospital bed and going back to his room, Nitya is approached by a young woman who is outwardly different in every way from him, and he shows us what a truly unitive attitude looks like. He instinctively knows what she needs and provides it, without any quid pro quo (contractual) expectations whatsoever, and she receives his gracious gift in the same spirit:

She was not excited or even surprised. She behaved as if she was simply another body animated by the same Self and propelled by the same thoughts that had been governing me.

Prabu talked about how her asking for help in the way she did was a uniquely Indian behavior. (In any case it isn't much a part of American culture.) India's populace has such a tradition of caring and nurturing each other, that it is quite natural to seek help in this way. Prabu didn't mention it, but the guru tradition is central to this wonderfully supportive attitude.

A second implication of Nitya's presentation is that in India there is no expectation of being explicitly recognized for your generosity. No one is obliged to be grateful. Nitya does not expect any outward appreciation for his gift, implying even a simple expression of thanks would sneak duality into the picture. This was

rather shocking to the Western sensibility of the class, and set off quite a discussion.

Susan and Bill talked about how they diligently taught their children to say thank you and be grateful, and that is the Western way. It is a method of expanding the limited purview of the child, and that's an important effort. Prabu then told us about how hard it was for him when he first arrived in America to learn to say thanks for everything, because it isn't a part of his culture. He says he has learned to do it, but he laughingly admitted he still makes mistakes and forgets sometimes. He could see the self-interest in wanting to be recognized for what you do for someone else, how that was a little bit egotistical.

Moni agreed with Prabu, noting how real gratitude is so deep you can't express it in words—words cheapen the gift in a way. Being made to say thank you makes children feel small.

That was my experience too. In the past I often had great times with children, doing offbeat things with them like being silly, horsing around, and we would be in resonance, just having fun together. Their clearly evident appreciation of being allowed to be themselves for a while was more than enough gratitude for me, and I didn't look for anything more. At the end of our time the parents would insist on their saying thank you to me—in spite of my protests—and I could see how it broke the charm of our friendship, making them separate (and lesser) once again. Instead of two equals we became a giver and receiver, and it hurt my feelings almost as much as it hurts theirs. I suppose the parents assumed I was relating to their kids for my own benefit, so I needed the thanks. Not true. I was sharing their natural innocence and joy, which I have never wholly relinquished, so both of us lost that with the insistence on returning to “proper” behavior. What would have worked better was if the parents had thanked me, the kids would have seen the example and naturally learned the trick. By being forced into an uncomfortable and arbitrary response they were more likely learning resistance coupled with resentment, which is far inferior to gratitude.

Moni tacitly agreed, and spoke about how an Indian child hears and sees so much of their family as they grow up. They aren't taught explicitly, but they learn by example, and it goes really deep into them.

Nitya didn't expect any payback from the woman he helped. His model is what is now called paying forward: you give a gift and the recipient passes along its echo to another person who needs it. Deb put it as the gratitude is recognized in the gift being moved ahead, while suspending your own need for recognition. The gift is only vital if it keeps moving.

I wished we had Nitya around to see if he ever heard from the young woman again, to tell us what became of the gift. Probably he forgot about it quite soon and that was the end of the story, but it would be fun to hear about whether she became a famous scientist or teacher, or what became of her.

Bushra felt perhaps the biggest gift Nitya gave the Muslim woman was the ability to give things without accountability, how you should give and not ask for anything in return. Moni agreed that this happened frequently in Nitya's life. He was asked by so many people for help, but he could choose the right one. He couldn't help them all, but he selected the ones where he felt he could make a real difference. Because he was so widely respected in Kerala, Moni was sure the letter he wrote for the woman had more power than giving her thousands of rupees would have.

Paul summed up the discussion in saying that socialization depends on who socializes you and where you are socialized. It can be inhibitory or make you excel, depending on how it's done. His unitive example was he's never heard his heart thank his lungs for breathing, or vice versa. They do what they do perfectly and naturally support each other. So while his conscious self says thank you, his body doesn't have to. In fact, it might throw off their delicate machinations if they took the time to do it.

In trying to bring all sides together, I pointed out that this was a class in yoga and meditation. Teaching your children respect and gratitude is another matter, a horizontal issue. Nitya's teaching is

to help us see the world as a reflection of our being, and in that any outward response to a gift taints its purity. Regardless, we will now be more considerate of Indians who haven't been trained to say thank you to everything.

Nitya was a mind reader as well as an intuiter of future outcomes, but he didn't need any mystical ability to act unitively in this case:

Now, when I claim insight into her conscious as well as unconscious mind, do I mean I was seeing the content of her mind just as I see fish or water plants clearly through the glass of an aquarium? My reference here is not to that kind of transparency. My mind must have created out of its own mind-stuff a young girl in my awareness who has a maximal or minimal correspondence to the actual person that was before me. The question of transparency did not arise, because I was only relating to my own Self molded in the image of another person. Thus the bright part of my Self was only trying to bring order into the disordered part of my Self.

Deb thought this was exactly what was meant by "a recognition of homogeneity." We need to be looking at a deeper, continuous unity. Bill added that the concept of doing something good for the self was the same as doing something good for someone else, could be an important meditation in itself. Narayana Guru suggests it as a way of life, meditation or no.

The class had some fun giving examples. Bushra's brother was a teenager in Lebanon during the war, and one of the basic premises was if a bomb went off you didn't go to help people, because there might be another that would be triggered by your arrival. Yet no one could restrain their natural impulse to rush in and help. It doesn't matter at such times what your differences are with the victims, even knowing there is danger to yourself, you have to help out.

Bill thought this was similar to the White Hats in Syria, totally devoted local citizens who have banded together as a force to rescue people in trouble. They are targeted by the regime, but do it anyway.

Paul and I experienced this in a less dire degree in our job with the fire department. We worked with a wide range of people, including some who were surely Trump's base types—really *base* types—yet when we responded to emergencies those differences were erased by the needs of the moment. We all worked together as a team, and there wasn't any time or inclination left over to worry about yourself. We were bonding in the sense of everyone being committed to rectifying the situation. Like that, the section of the study we're in on social interaction is meant to teach us how to leave selfishness behind, because of the marvelous paradox that selfishness is self-defeating. It makes you much less effective in whatever you have to do.

Bushra brought the premise to the simplest level yet. Her brother Haidar, when he goes through a toll booth, always pays for the car behind him. It's usually only a small amount, but the people invariably honk or wave, and everyone gets a good feeling from it. They are all complete strangers. This philosophy is truly applicable on simple levels, and there is nothing wrong with everyone getting a minor lift out of what a yogi does. It reminds me of a favorite poem of mine, by Johnny Stallings, who worked with Nitya on the free translation of Atmo we are using. It's short enough for me to memorize:

My foreign policy:  
There are no foreigners.

Haidar's kindness reminded me of our friend and neighbor Baird Smith. At his memorial service I learned of a game he had played for a long time. He bought gold dollars by the bagful and would hide them all over the city, imagining how people would find one and think, "This is my lucky day!" He never knew what

transpired, but figured that would be the case. Each of us at the memorial got a gold dollar coin to secrete somewhere in his honor, for someone else to find.

Jan enjoyed hearing about these everyday niceties. For her it was a conundrum to realize that as much as we are trying to be in tune with the inner unity, at the same time what gets us stuck are the small-self issues. We are learning many ways to work on the small self, and recognize that it works along with purpose of the greater Self. We all have egos and they get in the way. She concluded with a happy paradox and an important point: we can be most proud of being more focused on the unity when we aren't thinking about it. Meaning, I think, we are most ourselves when we do things naturally, without having to force anything. Or at least when we strike a balance between trying and not trying.

Paul echoed with rueful humor that whenever he focuses on unity while driving, he veers into a ditch.

Moni giggled as she remembered an old issue of the Malayalam Gurukulam magazine, featuring an anecdote of Narayana Guru. He was always teaching about how contact with the primeval Self reduces friction and problems. When we think of ourselves as separate is when all these emotional upsets happen. In 1922 he was chatting with one of the long-term inmates, one who had attended many of his classes. The inmate asked the Guru, "This morning you again talked about how we are all the same. Why are you always saying nothing is separate? What is the benefit of it? I just want to sit somewhere and do nothing." The Guru smiled and replied, "You don't have to do anything, but you are already doing something. You are creating a world that does not exist, and then you are participating in it!"

Paul knew exactly what he meant: We make up everything about the world and then spend so much of our energy defending it. What would happen if we stopped?

Which naturally leads in to the conclusion of Nitya's lovely chapter about the unity of all:



It is in recognition of this that Narayana Guru says, “There is no difference in the Self, although in our surface life we distinguish one person from another on the grounds of external differences.” To be in tune with this inner unity we should dedicate all our actions, words, and thoughts to the single cause of Universal Happiness—a happiness that is not restricted to anyone and can be shared by all.

Even Ayn Randism excuses its selfishness as being the *true* route to universal happiness: all the people who suffer from the effects of selfishness are forced by their misery to join the rush to prosperity, which is what will make them happy in the long run. Leaving aside the cockamamie notion of money being the root of happiness, I guess the crux of the failing is in treating happiness as an individual attainment in a competitive atmosphere, rather than as our true nature. This divides happiness into the haves and the have nots, which is essentially the old Puritan business of holy and unholy, the saved and the damned, but with a bit more personal option. It boils down to an excuse to rationalize criminality and turn your back on suffering, which, codified into the political positions now hemming us in, exacerbates suffering very, very much.

The Vedantic perspective, in accord with neuroscience, is that the inner genius of our being is presenting us with situations and people commensurate with our learning and growing process. We should embrace them as aspects of our Self in order to be wholly ourselves. It is well known that when you dream of different people, every one of them is an aspect of you. This is true in the wakeful too: those seemingly different people are really here and they are really you. I’ve included a paragraph of mine from another class in Part II, dealing with this in a generalized way.

We finished with just enough time for me to play a meditative piece on the piano, Claude Debussy’s Submerged Cathedral, *La Cathedrale Engloutie*, depicting an ancient Breton myth of a grand cathedral at the bottom of the sea that periodically

rises up into the sunlight for a short time, and then sinks back down again out of sight. We usually think of meditation as starting up in the sun of wakeful consciousness and diving down to the depths for a period, after which we rise back to the surface. This music depicts an opposite movement, and was well suited to the pensive state we were already in. It's a truly glorious piece, even more evocative where Prabu lay down underneath the instrument to be oceanically absorbed in the sound vibrations.

There was no need for anyone to say thank you—we all just experienced a moment of beauty and oneness together.

## Part II

The first paragraph of my most recent response in Nancy's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad class adequately sums up my take on oneness and the difficulty of communicating it:

As a teacher of Vedantic concepts, I have tried to get across the idea of unity, oneness, to all sorts of people who have not had the experience, and at least for me it is nearly impossible. Our senses only perceive multiplicity, and our linear thinking is specifically designed to deal with it. To move toward unity can only be a matter of what's left: globally encompassing intelligence or reasoning. Most people's intelligence is affixed primarily to sensory input, which only accesses a smidgen of the totality. This section of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is trying to make the same point, carefully reducing the differentiated world to a unitive context. The halfway point has been attained by modern neuroscience: everything we perceive is an aspect of a drama staged in the brain. It's like a television broadcast or a dramatic performance: we would never presume that each item of the show is being performed separately, without any relation to the rest. It's one stream with many parts embedded in it. So why do we treat life as a big pile of isolated units? Some physicists have gone even farther, to project this concept of unity onto the universe as a

whole, yet that is an even greater intellectual abstraction. And even fewer people know what to make of *that*, what it means in terms of how to live life optimally.