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MOTS Chapter 25: Double Gain vs Double Loss

What is good for one person and brings misery to another
such actions are opposed to the self, remember!
those who give great grief to another
will fall into the fiery sea of hell and burn.

Free translation:

What is good for one and might cause disaster to another is
opposed to the unity of the Self. Those who grievously hurt others
will consequentially bring upon themselves pain like hell fire.

There are times when the subject really resonates with the
class, and this was one of them. Our prime focus was on
disadoption, a term coined by Nataraja Guru for the recoil that
occurs when a loving accord is broken. While especially germane
to the guru-disciple relationship, it can be applied much more
broadly, as we found.

You must first adopt before you can disadopt. After class I
“accidentally” came across a helpful passage in *Love and
Blessings*:

Yoga is not a unilateral occurrence or function. It implies a
dichotomy of counterparts and their bipolar union. The word
advaita means “not two.” Not two is not the same as one. We
experience duality first. Through realization, we come to know
that the counterparts are not really two but are aspects of the
same Self.

When you say counterparts, don’t think of two quantitative
halves of equal or separate status. The seeking mind’s
counterpart is the truth that is sought. The devotee’s
counterpart is the God he loves. The union or oneness that you

seek is with the Absolute, termed differently as God, Tao, Bhagavan, Lord, et cetera. (275)

“The seeking mind’s counterpart is the truth that is sought.” The class expanded this idea to include the seeking heart’s counterpart, which is the love that is sought. We optimistically reach out for our partnership in the spirit of advaita, but frequently are disappointed when the object doesn’t measure up to our expectations. This can happen when we misplace our hopes onto any inferior recipient, yet Nataraja Guru had a very special case in mind. A disciple has to adopt a respectful attitude to a guru, otherwise their ego will overrule the needed adjustments to open the psyche to the transmission of wisdom. If the ego is not prepared to make the concession, it may pull away from the guru’s requirements and abandon the search.

Nataraja Guru was an intensely demanding teacher, and few could endure him when he turned up the heat. You had to really suffer ego humiliation, and even Nitya had his doubts at times. The key idea we can all deal with, though, is that our ego is prone to making decisions based on ease and comfort rather than submitting to a stressful but beneficial regimen. Adopting others who are complex and different is plenty hard, and we aren’t very good at it. There is real value in making the effort, though, and we have to discipline our egos to be successful. Ideally a therapist or good friend can help us ease out of our comfort zone so we can grow. This is what Nitya had in mind when he opens the chapter with:

Yesterday I was discussing with the Guru the problem of tension in the minds of some disciples. The Guru said, “By mutual adoption there is double gain and by mutual disadoption there will be double loss.” Narayana Guru says, “What is dear to one should also be dear to another,” and conversely, “When we bring harm upon another we are unwittingly lighting our own hell-fire.”

We in the class aren't necessarily disciples, we are just ordinary people. Still, we all know the feeling Narayana Guru epitomizes as hellish pain. Nitya describes it aptly: "The foundation of love dries up and the relationship breaks apart when disadoption creeps into the heart and turns love into hatred and trust into distrust." For most people, marital divorce is the most likely example of disadoption they will ever face.

Deb opened the dialogue explaining how Nitya is showing us both the simplicity of mutual adoption and the complexity of actually living it. It's easy to imagine that what we are doing is good for everyone, but often those are masks we use to excuse our selfishness. Getting beyond the division of the self and the other is the only way to subvert those distortions. Deb loved Nitya's example of the two women and the jackfruit tree as exemplifying the process.

I generalized the idea here simply as taking cognizance of the consequences of our actions. We need to examine what the effects will be, at least of our major initiatives. For instance, modern humans worship technology as an unalloyed good, so we can just make anything that is functional. Only later do we discover some inventions to be Frankenstein's monsters that poison the land or brainwash the minds. Recovering from such unanticipated actions is an immense liability, so the society prefers to pretend there's nothing the matter or pay lip service to it, which only exacerbates the problem in the long run. If we didn't heedlessly adopt things we shouldn't, we wouldn't have to disadopt them afterwards. Making toxic products and then poisoning ourselves with them is double loss writ large. Instead we should thoughtfully and fairly consider the impacts and likely results of our actions.

I would say the downfall of our species is unforeseen consequences. Acting on impulse can be liberating, but it can also bring tragedy, and we need to carefully distinguish what makes the difference. Check out the article I linked in Part II if you want to avoid another ridiculous unforeseen consequence.

Deb thought the question boils down to how do we act so we don't hurt anyone else. Andy also harked back to last week's reading about the Muslim woman who came to Nitya for help. He was especially drawn to this part:

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.

Andy thought this was a beautiful perspective on the 'other', the transcendental way of looking at our experiences. I concurred. It's also the new scientific way of understanding the mind, where what we see and interact with is literally a construct, a projection made by our brain to represent—usually minimally but sometimes rather better—who and what we are encountering. There was quite a bit about this in the chapter 24 notes. When the person you are angry with is in fact a part of yourself, you are actually combating yourself, and when something really irks you, you are still looking at your own version of what is happening. To bring that into an active living awareness is an exceptional accomplishment, and it can help us to get over being furious with all the fools out there. Nitya's advice to bring order to the disordered part of our self is exactly right. Andy mused that this is the meaning of the great dicta of Vedanta, especially *prajnanam brahma*, "this knowledge is the Absolute." In *That Alone*, Nitya explicitly translates it as "The external world is presented to you as your knowledge of it." It's simultaneously the newest and the oldest science.

Andy insightfully concluded that this meant our confusions also are expressions of that Absolute Knowledge, and this should lead us to forgiveness.

That happy thought inspired Jan to share a recent learning opportunity she availed herself of. Last Saturday was the annual Women's March in the US, and she was bothered by the divisiveness that has grown around it, especially the black/white schism. She wanted to understand more about the issues and did significant reading up on the topic. She found herself in substantial agreement with the black feminist's philosophies, and ashamed of the intolerance they met with even within a movement dedicated to raise the prospects of all women. Then, on the next night even, she was at a gathering of women and someone voiced criticism of the black women's approach. Jan was prepared to say, wait a minute, that's not quite right, there's more to this, and she shared what she had learned. Not only did she advocate for a more just treatment of the one faction, but doing so opened the door to a really great conversation for everyone to explore the topic.

Good people really are open to expanding their awareness, and because of her knowledge Jan was able to foster that in a really positive way. It's really too bad that even when there is a common goal, conflicts between the participants can undermine their effectiveness. When people fight for their way alone, they are opening themselves to marginalization and failure. I was reminded of a wonderful passage from *That Alone* that really brings home the point. I'll clip it into Part II, about integrating the universal and the particular.

Jan astutely concluded that even the phrase 'wanting to take a side' is problematic. Why can't we allow all sides? Yet this kind of commonality is bound to be a later stage that evolves after the personal experiences and specific needs are shared and acknowledged. Jan was confident you can't just be whitewashing the process—everyone needs to be respected and given a fair opportunity to tell their story.

Bushra said that women don't even agree on what it means to be a woman, and it's wonderful that all these things are being debated. She gave the example of liberation: to liberal upper class women it meant not being home, being allowed to work. To poorer

women it meant being able to be home, to not have to work. Deb agreed that we can't be all together unless we listen to everyone.

With people suffering so much oppression from multiple sources, people are not going to behave impeccably. There is tremendous pressure on anyone who has endured a lifetime of abuse. As Paul said, commonality means respecting differences, and he likened the immersion in a pool of activists to the Baptism of the Bible. You can't just sip the water of life out of a cup, you have to dive right in.

I want to say that there has been significant progress in women's rights recently, despite the chaos. Media always plays up the worst aspects of progressive causes, but it shouldn't have to be a coherent business anyway. One of the first images Nitya blew my mind with was in the first Gita class in 1970 in Portland. America was in a revolutionary stampede in all aspects of life, and plenty of folks were freaking out about the tipping over of longstanding sacred cows. Nitya spoke of admiring a beautiful egg. Then suddenly a crack appeared! What do you do? How do you patch it up? Then another crack appears, and another. The beautiful egg is being ruined! It starts shaking, and soon big pieces fall off. It looks like all is lost! And then a beak pops out, and soon a baby bird emerges. He might have added that baby birds are not the most handsome creatures, but one day they will be. The cracks in the egg are the beginning of new birth. His point was that transformation required Shiva's destruction to make room for Brahma's new creation, and I have always found the image reassuring.

Moni has learned recently about literal adoption and disadoption, from seeing some TV programs about foster children. Almost always the families who foster have strict rules and maintain an authoritarian stance. "Problem children" are mostly imprisoned in their rooms, except for meals. They tend to be shuttled from one family to another, so never dare trust where they happen to be at the moment. They are adopted physically but not emotionally, and soon take on a permanent attitude of disadoption.

They feel rejected by everyone, and decide in advance not to bond with their present family. They know better than to even try to establish trust because they know it's going to be ripped apart and thrown away when they move to a new family. Sadly, this attitude becomes a lifelong state of alienation for them. Only exceptional foster parents are able to make the effort to include the children in a healthy bonding that allows for the development of real trust.

To Bushra, the word disadoption assumes rejecting others and barricading yourself away from them. You're not adopting them but severing yourself from them. This is true alienation, where people are alienated from themselves and others and even their own work. It's most hurtful to the person carrying it out because the other—the one you're disadopted from— may not even perceive it.

This got Deb thinking how when you're breaking any relationship, the trust that was unconsciously present is somehow cracked and pulled apart. Bushra lamented that it becomes your permanent state of mind: once you're alienated you tend to be separated from most things. She can see how people barricade themselves for protection from the outside world, yet we are barricaded mainly from ourselves.

Bushra has worked with homeless teens, and she is acutely aware of how they have already alienated themselves from everything, to the point where they can't even recognize positive efforts on their behalf. They are in an isolated hell of their own, for sure. They are convinced all adults are punitive, so they maintain thick defensive walls. She mentioned how they are surprised when she talks to them and doesn't pull away—they can't believe she isn't afraid of them.

I noted how people like that are often headed to prison, and the ones Deb and Bushra meet with in prison are convinced that being incarcerated saved their lives. They are most fortunate to have found a program (Open Hearts Open Minds) where they can build trust, often for the first time in their lives. They can finally

feel permitted to express themselves. It's a tremendous gift the volunteers offer them.

Paul is acutely aware of how he had to disadopt his rigid upbringing in fundamentalist Christianity, with its mountains of rules backed by fear and paranoia. Bushra agreed that if we want to change the world, we do have to disadopt from the deadening status quo. The only place where we shouldn't disadopt is from the programs that are fostering our development. For many, the minute a program poses a challenge you drop out and move on to something else. That means you never get past the first stage of spiritual growth.

Deb pointed out that the biggest challenge is when you are aware of all the problems that need fixing, how to correct them without blaming anyone. It's an easy trap to say that others did the bad stuff and I'm here to fix it. Truer words were never spoken! How many disasters have been promulgated by the knowers of truth charging forth the straighten everybody out? It serves to distract them from their own faults, and not much else.

Paul questioned whether from a horizontal perspective life can ever reach happiness or non-failure, since when you divide the Self into individuals there is always going to be disagreement. Plus, in a sense disadoption implies there is another alternative, so it isn't fully vertical. I think he's quite right—pulling away from a spiritual program you are committed to is a horizontalizing movement. It's only when another horizontal posture masquerades as vertical that disadoption would be a clear-cut mistake. We should keep in mind that both the guru and disciple are learning from each other, so it isn't a monumental case of one being right and one wrong. Paul went on to say that the key is to look deep enough so you see the common thread, before you can successfully reach out with empathy.

Getting back to the role of adoption and disadoption in spiritual practice, in order to transform yourself you put your ego in a subservient place with teacher who is going to help you. When the guru puts pressure on and there is pain in the transformation, it

is normal for the disciple to pull back. If the urge to flee is not resisted and the search with that teacher is abandoned, that's the true disadoption. It amounts to reclaiming the ego's posture from the more holistic place the guru is advocating.

In Andy's estimation Vedanta in essence is an attempt to transform the psyche. It's a theory of knowledge. We are all occurrences within that Knowledge, and it occurs within us too. In a way this is common sense, but if we took it seriously, it would be able to reconstruct our understanding quite thoroughly. We would be more like a part of the world behaving with many parts, which is different from being an isolated actor, the way we tend to imagine ourselves.

You have to thoroughly trust a person and be willing to endure discomfort in order to transform. Doing so is a rare and special condition. We are much better at making up good excuses to take it easy and rely on natural evolution, where the timescale is millions of years. This an egotistical retreat from what's required for a full opening up to the situation and a breaking away from falsehood.

Whatever the relationship, when true love and connection has blossomed, its loss is one of the most painful tragedies we will ever undergo. The disadoption of a disciple additionally disrupts any delicate process of spiritual evolution the guru is promulgating. Our third chant at the Gurukula, referenced here, is a prayer for amity to be maintained throughout the transformative process:

Trust is always shadowed by distrust, and faith can at any moment tumble on disbelief. That is why the gurus and disciples of India always invoke peace before the commencement of any study or meditation and pray for protection from the mishap of disadoption.

If you have mistakenly adopted something or someone you shouldn't have, then disadoption is a very good plan. When your

adopted object is honorable, disadoption may well be a mistake. Sorting out which is which is a serious matter, and whenever we are suffering our decision-making powers are not going to be at their best. Nitya is well qualified to give us advice here:

The root cause of disadoption centers around the basic instinct of self-preservation. A wrong self-identity makes a person's ego vulnerable to the hazards of competition from an 'other'.

Since we all suffer to a greater or lesser extent from a "wrong self-identity" how do we upgrade it? Actually being willing to upgrade our self-identity already sets us somewhat apart from the madding crowd, intent as it is on hanging on to wrong identities for all they're worth. Usually we have to crash and burn before we are willing to consider an altered definition of our self. Vedanta suggests a remarkably simple parameter here:

Whether or not the self-image is adequate depends on how inclusive or exclusive one's identity is. Anyone who doesn't see his self beyond the limits of his body has to live in perennial fear of losing it along with the destruction of his body.

This too can cut both ways. People may identify with a movement and thereby lose the fear of destruction, but then they may wind up willing to die for a cause, and that isn't what is meant here. I'm sure you remember Nitya's twist on this in *That Alone*, verse 9:

Your compassion should be such that you are not caught in a snare in the name of compassion. You have to detach yourself. Martin Luther King spoke of having a cause for which you are willing to die. We want to change that to a cause for which you are willing to live. Dying is not a great virtue. Living is the great virtue, and not only living now, but living forever. (69)

I think that last “living forever” was meant to simply mean maximally alive rather than eternally alive. The Vedantic ideal is to have a supreme interest that fills you with enthusiasm; not just an eagerness to fly mothlike into the flames but to burn with a more subtle passion.

When Nitya speaks of self-identity he means Self-identity: knowing and living your connection in harmonious interactions with the totality known as the Absolute. It is open and dynamic; in fact, the limitations the ego craves for comfort are the very basis of the conflicts we experience. As Nitya puts it:

All exclusive identities are fraught with the potential disaster of becoming prey to jealousy and paranoiac fear of loss. Disadoption is the sure indicator of this dangerous bent of mind. To love and not to hate, to desire and not to be frustrated when the desired end is thwarted, are not in the normal order of nature.

Since the optimal path of loving equanimity is not our default setting, not the normal order of nature, we have to bring intention to bear. The paradox of letting go of our ego dominance does not mean blocking out our best thinking, either. Our ego can be convinced of the benefit of bringing in more awareness than it offers by itself, if we do it in a way that doesn't unhinge it, doesn't heighten its paranoia.

Sadly, this kind of solution is dismissed out of hand by the perpetrators of egotistic insanity, because they are making money hand over fist by pushing illusions to the limit, and to hell with the destruction it causes. As Yuval Noah Harari points out in his recent second book, *Homo Deus, A Brief History of Tomorrow*, the global economy is totally beyond anyone's control and no one understands it, adding the one thing that is understood: “The modern economy needs constant and indefinite growth in order to survive. If growth ever stops, the economy won't settle down to some cosy equilibrium; it will fall to pieces.” (52)

Well, if we can't defuse that one, at least we can rectify our personal hurricanes, as Nitya advises:

What is the way out? As just mentioned, insecurity and the fear of the vindictiveness of a rival claimant to one's own dear values are at the root of all disadoption and indulgence in evil. The insecurity or the fear of destruction comes from a false or partial self-identity. Suspicion and hatred are therefore directed to the 'other'. The remedy lies in a total vision, which is differently named as self-realization, God realization, redemption, salvation, total awareness, transcendental awareness, and so on.

Nitya cautions us not to adopt a trite version of Self-realization, either. We may be able to mollify our ego with make-believe suppositions, but our inner genius knows better:

This realization is not an event in time, it is not an occurrence at a point in space, it is not a state of exaltation, it is not a "kick." It is a seeing through time and space, seeing through the multitudinous, seeing through paradoxes and enigmas. It is being at once the change in the changeless and the changeless in the ever changing. It can be seen expressed a hundred times in our daily life, and it can also be missed a million times.

As the great world spins on, we can offer our humble contribution of an inclusive ideology that we have made meaningful in our own being. There are many ways to make it practical, as Moni's, Jan's and Bushra's excellent examples demonstrate.

We had only a few minutes for the closing meditation, as we were so excited by the fresh ideas that kept bursting forth. There was a real sense of gaining something meaningful and it making perfect sense, to go along with the pool of good feelings it engendered. It was a fine way to reach the halfway point in our explorations. I thought out loud that this was very likely the most

comprehensive examination of this chapter that has ever happened in a class. This seldom-appreciated masterpiece of Meditations on the Self is blessing us wondrously.

Part II

Here's the section from That Alone, verse 21, relating to universalizing our understanding:

If we can approach life from the point of view of the all-seeing witness, which is not tainted with incipient memories or proliferating interests, then we will see the good of all, the general good, in which what pleases me is also included. This is not attained, as some mistakenly think, by summarily dismissing what pleases me as an individual.

Often there arises a tendency for us to become self-critical if what we like is not liked by others. Yet if we are all human beings, there should be an underlying happiness regarding what we like. I like vegetarian dishes, and some of my friends like non-vegetarian dishes. So should I give up my vegetarian diet in deference to the others' non-vegetarian tastes for the sake of unity? Of course not. We have to think more generically about what we like. Vegetarian food and non-vegetarian food are both essentially food. I love to have food, and my friends also love to have food. At this level we are not different. So I can go with my friends to a restaurant and I'll have what I like and they can have what they like. We are all partaking of food. Basically, our need is the same and our fulfillment is the same. The differences are only in the particular details. Of course, the differences are also important and can't be overlooked. When I am hungry and you are hungry, I cannot just say that as both of us are one, I will eat for you also. You have to take care of your side of the business.

We have to distinguish how we cater to the general happiness, and what implications it has in its particular aspects. A husband and wife may love each other very much. They live a unified life, but that does not mean that they do not have two toothbrushes. Having separate

toothbrushes does not take away from their friendship in the least. When we shift our focus from particular objects back to the Self, we will stop getting so confused on this issue. (153)

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Evil was outside the class focus, yet there are some good points made about it in the chapter, and I'm wrestling with a student in another class who is obsessed by it, who could really benefit from learning a Vedantic perspective. Nitya has elsewhere claimed that if you think of Satan or the devil as the ego, you won't go far wrong. Here he says:

In religion and mythology, evil is given a separate status as if it is a malignant power that can set traps, occasion intrigues, impart randomness, veil truth, hide facts, cause illusions and fantasies, and make white look black and the good look wicked. The Hindus call it *maya*, the Buddhists call it *mara*, the Christians call it Satan, and the Muslims call it *iblis*. Even in politics we can see references to the embodiment of negative forces, such as the "factionist," the "revisionist," the "reactionary," and the "fifth columnist."

Those are old-fashioned slurs, for sure. I updated the list to include "Liberal." Now in America, *liberal* has become a curse word for the embodiment of evil, showing just how far our public discourse has sunk. My Random House dictionary of 1968 includes in its definition of liberal:

Favorable to progress or reform, as in religious or political affairs

Of or pertaining to representational forms of government rather than aristocracies and monarchies

Favorable to or in accord with concepts of maximum individual freedom possible, esp. as guaranteed by law and secured by governmental protection of civil liberties

Favoring or permitting freedom of action, esp. with respect to matters of personal belief or expression

Free from prejudice or bigotry; tolerant

Open minded or tolerant, esp. free of or not bound by traditional or conventional ideas, values, etc.

Characterized by generosity and willingness to give in large amounts

Given freely or abundantly

Not strict or rigorous; free; not literal

It's quite an accomplishment to make these benign proposals into evil concepts held by a diabolical enemy that deserves to be quickly killed off. The words Nitya uses are strictly twentieth century, and few people know what they mean anymore. But say liberal to the right people (there are lots of them) and watch as they become furious and verge on exploding with rage. "Such fools these mortals be!" as Shakespeare's Puck deliciously savors.

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Just in time! I have always believed sunlight was good for us, and by golly it is. Sent by my daughter Emily with the line Haha, Dad another of your predictions comes true:

<https://www.outsideonline.com/2380751/sunscreen-sun-exposure-skin-cancer-science>