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MOTS Chapter 28:

Without bottom or top, from the bottom to the crest where it
terminates—
what is known vividly is *turiya* consciousness;
inert matter does not know; having understood this,
know that what is said to remain in between is not knowledge.

Free translation:

That which has no beginning and no end and clearly sees
everything from bottom to top is *turiya*, transcendent
consciousness. The other extreme is the inert body, which has no
knowledge. That which appears to exist in between, articulated as
the output of cogitation, is ignorance.

This is one verse where the free translation is really helpful.
Narayana Guru's first line is somewhat baffling, with the bottom
and top simultaneously nonexistent and existent. Nitya and
Johnny's free interpolation clarifies that there are two distinct
poles under reference, the vertical, relating to time, and the
horizontal relating to space, which we are quite familiar with.
While space is circumscribed, time is endless, at least in a local
sense, while the all-encompassing *turiya* vividly comprehends the
entire gamut.

Normally we are so focused on the horizontal world that we
tune out from its vertical core, and conversely in meditation we
struggle to eliminate all vestiges of the horizontal to attend
exclusively to the vertical. Only in the *turiya* consciousness can we
handle both aspects simultaneously in an integrated fashion, and of
course this is the primary aim of Self-realization through yoga.

Nataraja Guru being at that time both clear-headed and
paralyzed on his left side is an apt symbol of the full range of

manifestation from inert to acutely aware, ranging from ignorance to knowledge, with degrees of admixture in between.

Even the most intelligent humans can be oblivious when focused within their “area of expertise,” and this can be tragic. When we fully capitulate to the demands of any situation we omit something essential. Nitya exemplifies this in the way the Guru’s medical attendants treated him:

One day two doctors attending on the Guru stood by his bed and conferred about his symptoms and the treatment each wanted to prescribe. In their spirited talk they virtually ignored the patient’s presence in the room. When they were gone the Guru told me, “Only my limbs are paralyzed. Nothing happened to my consciousness or intelligence. It is a pity that people think of a paralyzed man as paralyzed in his mind and soul also.”

There are many types of paralysis—those brought on by static thinking are curable through penetrating insight, though untreated they are as resistive of cure as any neurological paralysis. Modern materialists imagine the world is nothing more than temporarily animated dead matter, meaningless if not pointless. The entire world is being vivisected by rationalists in the way experimental animals were brutally treated not so long ago. On the other hand, true healers can offer superb treatment without needing to sacrifice compassionate involvement with their patients.

This brought up an excellent question about the ego from Prabu, how it fits into the scheme of an underlying transcendental awareness. Implied in his question is the idea that the ego presumes it is in possession of all the awareness it needs, so what else could be required? I would call this a ubiquitous blindness of human beings. I’m dedicated to keeping up with the best and brightest thinkers of the day, and am inevitably bugged by the limitations most if not all of them eagerly embrace. They may be very clever within a limited purview, but it is rare anyone touches

on the soaring expansiveness of Narayana Guru's inspired vision. And they never notice—none of us ever notice when confined in our egos.

Deb spoke about how as we focus more on the insentient end of the spectrum we become increasingly disconnected from global awareness. The part of the psyche that avidly attends to specifics is the ego. I suppose that since humans love to argue, they are drawn by their egos towards specifics, as there is nothing to argue about in global awareness.

Moni remembered how Nitya often accused us of being disconnected: we abandon the state of open-mindedness to get involved with our petty concerns. Deb agreed that this meant when we connect with the mundane, we automatically disconnect from the transcendental. Again, this is not necessarily true, but the ego knows no other way. It is too limited to fully embrace totality. Deb added that love and compassion are thoughtless and natural byproducts of realization because it doesn't impart a sense of isolation.

Nitya's later commentary on this verse, in *That Alone*, contains one of my favorite analogies about the ego. He was always so good at using examples from right in front of us in his elucidations. It was spring at Hall Street and the spit bugs had regurgitated their little white gobs all over the yard. I thought of them as lowly nuisances until the talk that morning, which included this:

Our sensory knowledge is only a projection of the properties of our sensory system, a projection that is made by the individuated being.

I like to compare the individual to a common insect, the spit bug. The spit bug is very tiny, smaller than a coriander seed. All the time it spits out a kind of foam all around itself. When you go for a walk in the morning, you can see its spittle all over the leaves and grass. It looks just like spit, but if you examine it you will find this tiny bug concealed in it.

Like that, individuation goes on spitting out constructs all around it. The tiny, fearful ego continually spews forth clouds of obfuscation in order to conceal its sense of insignificance, but its delusory images of glory appear to be no more than unwholesome excrescences to passersby. This is also what the single cell of the fertilized ovum is doing. It goes on spitting out more and more cells until it becomes a fetus. Then the fetus becomes a child, and the child a grown-up. We are still creating spittle all around. We spit out potentials; those potentials in us can be actualized at any time. Our daily wakeful experiences are expressions of motivations which lie buried in what is spewed out of an original program.

Nitya takes the opportunity afforded by his guru's complaint about the doctors to give us a working definition of turiya, referring to it as "undifferentiated consciousness," simultaneously transcendent and immanent, which is where he draws his chapter title from:

What the Guru said was very important to me. I thought of the inconscient matter that makes up the bulk of my physical organism, and the undifferentiated consciousness that pervades it. The undifferentiated consciousness in me is neither positive like wakeful awareness nor is it negative like the unconsciousness of sleep. It resembles neither the recall of a memory nor the fancying of an imagination. It is a consciousness that transcends all relativistic notions of time and space. It is pure, simple, homogeneous, and unobstructed by any limiting factor. While remaining pure and transcendental, it has the curious property of being immanent in the body. As immanent consciousness it seems to undergo various and altering states, and produces experiences of varying shades of awareness, such as the wakeful and the dream.

Moni was passionate about how this state of mind is brimming with care and concern for others. She talked about how it inspired Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence: once you see how everything is connected you naturally become peaceful and kind.

Nitya ends by quoting a poem by Kabir that fits the chapter perfectly:

Between the poles of the conscious and the unconscious, there
has the mind made a swing:

Thereon hang all beings and all worlds, and that swing never
ceases its sway.

Millions of beings are there: the sun and the moon in their
courses are there:

Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on.

All swing! The sky and the earth and the air and the water; and
the Lord Himself taking form:

And the sight of this has made Kabir a servant.

It reminded Deb of a favorite poem by Li Young Li:

The Hammock

When I lay my head in my mother's lap
I think how day hides the stars,
the way I lay hidden once, waiting
inside my mother's singing to herself. And I remember
how she carried me on her back
between home and the kindergarten,
once each morning and once each afternoon.

I don't know what my mother's thinking.

When my son lays his head in my lap, I wonder:
Do his father's kisses keep his father's worries
from becoming his? I think, Dear God, and remember
there are stars we haven't heard from yet:
They have so far to arrive. Amen,
I think, and I feel almost comforted.

I've no idea what my child is thinking.

Between two unknowns, I live my life.
Between my mother's hopes, older than I am
by coming before me, and my child's wishes, older than I am
by outliving me. And what's it like?
Is it a door, and good-bye on either side?
A window, and eternity on either side?
Yes, and a little singing between two great rests.

The class didn't talk much about either poem, but I might just say that both show the poets humbled by contemplation of the greater context in which they dwell. In humbling their egos, Kabir and Li are uplifted into a sense of the numinous that is characteristic of the turiya state. Nitya observes this in his ailing guru as well:

During his acute illness of the past four months, I have had many occasions to marvel at the vivid richness of his memory, the thorough logical coordination of his arguments knitting together the world of outer forms with the inner designs of meaning and value, and his profound sense of the numinous, which he experienced somewhat like a mystical aura around the forms he saw and the voices he heard. Probably he perceived the same numinous aura in the changing signs and symbols of time and in the attitudes and moods of the people who visited him.

Finally, Deb offered a recent poem of her own in the same spirit:

The Voice of Handwriting

The polished oak gleams as, in the dream,
I open drawers one by one and
discover small, rectangular cards
describing books—author, title, number,
what the pages might hold for readers,
vestiges of days without screen and cursor.
I realize it is my grandmother's handwriting
on each card, her long tails on Gs and Ys,
the Ds and Bs reaching high, every card
filled with her distinctive wavering script,
like a missive from another world
back among the living.
From where? Saying what?
I listen to her looping lines as if hearing
rather than reading her world
that is now here, the secrets of family
appearing briefly on the surface,
a reminder we are tiny beings
in circulating time— cards in a catalogue
floating through dreams,
listening to the surging river.

We had “world enough, and time” left over to mount an excellent meditation, shrugging off all conditioning to sit peacefully in the turiya state. Aum.

Part II

That Alone has some other really juicy parts that throw light on this verse, revealing its truly radical nature. Here're some of my faves, after the spit bugs:

We go to schools and colleges and walk around with fat books under our arms, thinking we are learning. Certainly we are learning something, but our learning is confined to the world of agitations of the nervous system. We do not go beyond that. Narayana Guru qualifies this as the knowledge that happens in between pure darkness and pure light, and says that it is not worthy of being called knowledge. If you do call it knowledge, then the funny noises the little puppy makes when it is tied up and can't see its mom are also great knowledge. We have only refined that agitation or excitement or dissatisfaction more elaborately.

Once upon a time, earlier scientists thought they were getting definite knowledge with absolute certitude. Then along came some sober people with more honest minds, like Einstein and Heisenberg, who said "Wait. Don't go that far. What we know is only from the standpoint of this individuated being who is using his senses and mind. All that we have to work with are data born of our sensory perceptions and our ability to calculate. This is understanding of a personal nature. We are unqualified to answer fundamental questions." Bertrand Russell calls this "piecemeal annexations of our impressions." That's all. Narayana Guru says it is what we articulate when we sit in between light and darkness, and that this is not the real knowledge we seek. So where do we turn when we wish to seek definite knowledge with absolute certitude?

This is the point where the need arises to transcend the triple states of deep sleep, dream and wakefulness. How do you know you have transcended? There comes a new clarity in the form of a transparency of vision where you see through the past, present and future. Your vision is not checkmated by any frontier: it is a

frontierless vision. It is not confined to name and form. It does not come under the category of cause and effect. We cannot say it has a beginning or an end. In fact, words that we use and thoughts that we celebrate are all of no use. This is the realm of infinite silence into which we can merge, where the present faculties which are very useful to us become of no use.

Now we come to a very difficult situation where we must go around a curve, so to speak, in our understanding. All the conditionings which we have so far called learning are no better than the salivating of Pavlov's dogs. All the rewards and punishments which you have had so far in the form of education help you only to salivate when the bell rings. Don't you want something better than that?

It is well worth knowing the secret of ignorance, but if you are indulging in that ignorance you live in the darkness and are not benefited by awareness of it. Most of us find ourselves oscillating somewhere between total ignorance and absolute enlightenment. What I try to do for one who is caught between these two worlds is to give a secret hint: that you go to the zoo only to marvel at it, not to get behind the bars. Perhaps one day a friend goes to visit the zoo and does not return. When we go to find him, he has gotten into one of the cages and is putting on a performance. We say, "Why are you here?" He answers, "I am experiencing the zoo." "Stupid man, come out. We sent you here only to have a look at the different animals in their cages, not to join them." He says "I am experiencing it. Give me a banana," and he becomes another monkey. We can only pity him and give him a banana and come away.