

7/17/18 class notes
MOTS Chapter 2

The psychic dynamism, the senses, the body,
the many worlds known by direct perception—everything,
when contemplated,
is the glorious embodiment of the sun that shines in the sky
beyond;
this should be realized through relentless search.

(The book has “the inner organ,” in place of “the psychic dynamism.” Very helpful contextual reading would include Nitya’s *Mind in the Indian Perspective*, posted on his website <http://aranya.me/index.html>, here: http://aranya.me/uploads/3/4/8/6/34868315/mind_in_the_indian_perspective.pdf)

While we’re at it, I think I’ll include the “free translation” version in the *That Alone* Appendix, painstakingly worked up by Nitya in conjunction with Johnny Stallings:

By a relentless search one should realize that the inner faculties, the senses, the body, and all the worlds of our interest are but transformations of the glorious substance of the Sun shining in the void of the Absolute.

We get introduced to “relentless search” right at the outset. We aren’t anymore just sitting in a park looking at stuff. We are looking closely at our self looking at stuff, and doing our best to make sense of it. There is all the difference in the world in doing this.

Narayana Guru has begun his Atmopadesa Satakam with the universal Core, shining within and without everything. The very next concept is the relentless search to discover our own inner workings, because they embody this supreme principle. Andy was deeply moved that Narayana Guru characterizes this All as the

“glorious embodiment” of the supernal core-sun in the verse. The embodiment sports a high-value adjective because we aren’t meant to take it for granted or to disparage it in any way. It is so magnificent we should be moved to bow to it in ecstasy, chanting poems of reverence. It should make every minute of our life exceedingly well worth living. Andy knew that ‘glorious embodiment’ is another term for maya, yet who can downplay it the way we do maya? Maya is an obstacle; glorious embodiment is a consummation devoutly to be wished. It’s late in our hour on the stage—let’s cast off the tawdry shroud we have laid over our universe and admire it in its full glory. It’s precisely here that the relentless search is brought to bear.

Searching with diligence may well be the primordial paradox: there is nothing to do, and nothing can be done, and we are nobody, yet we have to act with our full intelligence or we will miss the boat. How can this be?

To introduce the psychic dynamism I offered the analogy of a prism. We accept the reality of our limited perceptions in the same way we only see white (invisible) light most of the time. If we send the light through a prism, however, we discover it is made up of several different types of visible light blended together. Like that, our “seamless” mental processes have been analyzed by the rishis into several discrete stages, and this allows us to comprehend where we might go off the track and what we can do about it. The prism doesn’t just appear there by magic: we have to put it in place and examine what happens, or it doesn’t teach us anything.

But there is much to learn. I feel if there was one thing that could meaningfully change the interactions of people it would be to realize that what is coming at you is really coming from you. Not totally, as Deb quickly pointed out. We aren’t necessarily responsible for the things that happen to us, good or bad, but in the sense that whatever happens to us, we have a range of ways to assess it, and these can often make a difference in the type and degree of suffering or pleasure we get out of it, as well as how effective we are able to be in response.

Nor is this a one-way process of defanging the actual world to make it groovy. Many times something that looks benign is far from it. We have to judge in both directions. I was reminded of the cuddly bears we had seen earlier in the day at the zoo, who looked so adorable you wanted to give them a hug and take a nap with them, yet that would be a fatal decision.

Now we're back at the park introduced in the first chapter, and Nitya takes the opportunity to reflect on how his mind is admiring the view anew, and breaking it down in terms of what is called the *antakarana* or psychic dynamism or inner organ. Dynamism is good to mention, because it's a very active process that basically constructs our world for us. As neuroscientist David Eagleman, among others, has pointed out, the senses provide the brain with patterns that most likely resemble the "snow" on a television that isn't receiving an organized broadcast. The inner controller takes this digital blizzard and builds a coherent picture for us to consciously work with. It does an amazing, nearly undetectable job! Yet there is plenty of room for discrepancies. We have no way of knowing if our version accords with that of other people or any actual reality. From a scientific perspective it seems impossible that it would, and yet we are able to communicate and function, so there must be a substantial overlap.

Nitya considered our ability to communicate with each other the greatest miracle of all, and that this pointed to a universal context or transpersonal controlling force that holds us together. Otherwise real communication would confront too vast a gulf to be of any use; in fact, it would confound rather than confirm. Of course we only approximate true understanding, as far as we can tell, but it is still incredibly useful as well as comforting, knowing we're not utterly alone and helpless.

To Bushra this meant that each of us sees the world through the filter of our own minds, yet we also communicate and have common visions, even across cultures and through time. It is the all-inclusive light that allows for this common ground.

Nitya sums up the psychic dynamism in a properly down-to-earth fashion appropriate to the book's style:

Each sense organ has an external receiving inlet and an internal transformer, so to say. A physical stimulus such as light or sound cannot pass muster beyond the receptor. It is relayed further on as a nerve impulse. At the psychic pole of the senses this impulse is questioned, compared, recognized, identified, related to other deciphered impulses, and affectively evaluated by the instruments of the mind.

One of the essential contemplative efforts to convert ordinary mentation to what we often call spiritual thinking, is when we realize that we are continuously witnessing an interpretation and not reality as such. Because the brain is so good at the masquerade, we easily believe what we see and perceive is just the way things are. Hence the need for relentlessly reminding ourselves that this is not so. The next person must have a different version, and we'll have to compare theirs with ours in a fair-minded way, in order to make sense of our shared experience. If we insist our version is the right one, then the other is automatically wrong to the extent they disagree with us—a very nasty closed loop that reinforces our own ignorance. If you believe that, become a politician, not a yogi!

Filmmaker Bushra talked about how when making a movie you arrange the setting and the lighting to draw the viewer's attention to the most important area of the screen. It's part of the technique, and just like what our minds do. She added that the projecting light itself is invisible to the audience, just as the shining core cannot be seen. We can only infer it from the result.

Deb recalled how she sometimes visits an old friend and exclaims on their new painting or other feature, only to find out it's been there for ten years, and she just never noticed. Chuckles of recognition on all sides greeted her admission.

The Gurukula term for the way our brains choose what to display and what to ignore is *selective structuring*. Aldous Huxley

described the process as a reducing valve, with the brain telling the conscious mind a vastly simplified story so it doesn't get overwhelmed. Bill put it similarly: we take in thousands of items of sensory stimulation every second, yet the brain somehow sorts it out. It's an essential process that allows us to make sense of our world. If that innate talent has ever forsaken you, you'll know how important it is.

Andy mused on this for some time. He was looking for a synthetic term, but wasn't satisfied he'd found it. He felt our way of talking about mental behavior is neither idealistic nor materialistic, it's kind of like agnostic. The objects that you behold are the result of a mental operation that encompasses two poles — your interest and a material something, ungraspable. It brings a kind of uncertainty, maya-like uncertainty. You can't say it's projection with complete certainty and you can't say it's a material thing that's bombarding you with its presence. All you can say is it's actual. In summary, there is complete continuity between world we are looking at and the light of the Absolute.

Deb put voice to the practical corollary: if you watch yourself and see where your interest goes it can give you a deeper understanding of yourself.

If you'll recall, Nitya settled on the word *actuality* to distinguish how we perceive and interact with reality, with *reality* signifying the full truth we can never quite attain, though it's useful to postulate.

Jan was thinking about an important aspect of how the *antakarana* plays out. Nitya sums it up nicely:

Every stimulus touches a key of graded value deep down in the psyche. The resonance or dissonance produced by the affected keys decides the harmony or disharmony of each experience.

She was thinking of what a challenge it is for us to stay open in how we assess values. We usually become fixed in taking things a certain way, which closes us off to possible better options than

what we are holding to. She felt it underscores how important meditation is in helping us let go of our attachments.

Jan has been doing some painting lately, one of those things she has a knack for but hasn't had much time to do yet in her busy life (her uncle is a polymath with a well-developed and recognized talent as a painter). Now that she's beginning to wield a brush, she's discovering a new way of seeing and understanding. Painting isn't a talent that should be managed the way our social and rational skills have to be. Instead she doesn't have a formulated idea of what an artist is; she's simply trying to express herself, and it feels freeing. She loved the way the last paragraph, including the quote above, invites us to step back and sink into the domain of high values, so we can try to live in a connected way as our own glorious embodiment of the Self.

I invited Andy to also share his feelings about being an artist, knowing that it's something he now minimizes. The less said the better in some respects, and yet everyone in the class is reaching out for some kind of artistry in our lives, no matter what our talents—or lack of them—amount to. Andy admitted that when he was young, identifying himself as an artist was very important. Then he realized that making art was something God is doing all the time, and you can just hitch a ride on that; if you are a lover of beautiful things you do ride along, eventually. So he takes little credit, though his friends give it to him anyway. Now when he's making a picture, eventually he falls in love with it. His love is a growing thing, that expands as the work takes shape, and is fulfilled when the work is complete. It's all about loving what he's doing.

Andy added that he's also in love with the processes that make the work happen. It's possible he reveals himself more and more in what he's working on. In a way you become your painting, he said. There is an immense satisfaction in this—he accesses an ecstasy in becoming one with his painting.

Andy has been illustrating the hundred verses of Atmopadesa Satakam, and is up into the eighties by now. He does like to tinker

and refine his work, so many are still works in progress. Despite this, we invited him to share his paintings related to each chapter with us, starting next week. I don't know if we can post them online, but you can drop by his house any time—they are pinned up above his desk in a long line, awaiting the next burst of inspiration. Anyway, I'll ask. They are not only beautiful, they are like nothing else anywhere.

Our study is promising to be much more profound than I had anticipated! Nitya was 48 and we were in our twenties when he spoke the book and Peter recorded it, and many of us are now much older than he was, and it makes for an altered perspective. We can see how much Nitya was putting himself into the book (it will become more apparent as we go along) and how he was willing to share his own foibles and struggles with us, both to retain his humility and to teach us something we might emulate. When the book first came out we were all so in awe of him that we missed a lot of this subtext. At least I did.

Though Nitya had been a teacher—a really great teacher—for much of his life, having disciples was a new thing for him in the early 1970s. From being the much-abused disciple of Nataraja Guru he was suddenly a revered guru in his own right. It never went to his head, but you can sense in the tone of the book the excitement as his future life was opening up to him. He was now in demand by eager seekers all over the world. His first few lifelong disciples were in place; more were on their way. He had recently rededicated himself to Nataraja Guru after a “vacation” and was in line to become his successor as head of the Narayana Gurukula. In fact, Nataraja Guru was already partially paralyzed from his stroke, and would die in about six months, leaving him to assume the mantle.

Nitya was a great letter writer along with his other talents. I think it's appropriate to pass along part of a very touching letter Nitya wrote to Debbie in November 1973, about his adjustment to guruhood, that is included in *Love and Blessings*:

It is evening. I am in Guru's room. I sleep on his bed, sit on his chair, eat from his plate, and receive people's homage and love. I am the guru. And yet I am the simple man whom you befriended, listened to, loved and hated, chided and chastised, adored and suspected. Those phases are gone. Now I understand the thoughts and feelings of Jesus for God and of Mohammed for Allah. I have learned to be humble and submissive. Any moment the Guru may need my heart to pulsate his love, my mind to think his thoughts, my hands to wipe someone's tears. I was not an ideal disciple either in my dedication or in my surrender. Both dedication and surrender now come with a grace that was not hitherto known to me.

Well, he certainly prepared the ground for his surrender very well, and we will read about some of it in the days ahead. I can never read this passage without tears coming. How fortunate we are to have his voice echoing in our heads! Aum.

Part II

Baiju has added another terrific enhancement of our class endeavor, examining in detail Narayana Guru's original work. He told me he is entering a busy period, so he may not be able to keep up this pace for some time, so don't miss this:

Narayana Guru, while being a true yogi, was the embodiment of compassion; and the Guru wrote *Atmopadesa Satakam*, it appears to me, in order to benefit as many seekers of modern times who have little prospects of listening to (*shravana*) a Self-realized *acharya* (teacher or Guru), which is the first of the three steps of the Upanishadic formula for realization of the Self (Guru Nitya's Preface refers to the formula at the very beginning). In the Upanishadic context, a wise teacher means a Self-realized wisdom teacher. And one of the qualifying criteria for the disciple to study under such an Upanishadic teacher was to have unquestioning faith

(*shraddha*) in the words of the wisdom teacher, who had already been living in oneness with the Self. Keeping that background information, I develop a strong impression that the Guru's verses in *Atmopadesa Satakam* are very direct and assertive instructions (possibly as it is in the tradition of Upanishadic teachers) with the intent that those beloved seekers who have "faith" in the Guru's visions and follow them assiduously must positively benefit in their Self-seeking endeavor. Such was his compassion. The visions he present are primarily based on his own experience of living in oneness with the Self. The occasional references or allusions to the other texts are to remind the seekers of the nondifference between his Advaita visions and the Upanishadic teachings.

So far, the assertive instructions of the Guru are seen clearly there at the end of the verses 1 and 2 – in verse 1, he says *teru tere veenu vanangitenam vanangi otitenam* (one should ceaselessly prostrate and chant); verse 2 ends, *teranju teritenam* (one should relentlessly go on with the inquiry – to know the Self). A cursory examination of the rest of the verses will also show that the Guru, in *Atmopadesa Satakam*, throughout makes such assertive instructions, as deemed necessary, at the end of his every statement that elucidates a particular aspect of the Self.

Thus my observation is that, by such assertions, the Guru indicates there is much dedicated "work" involved in knowing the Self. This work is not of the kind that we do to fulfill our needs of our worldly lives. Nor does he suggest that all the normal work of our day to day lives have to be stopped. As we continue to do all of them, there has to take place a **parallel stream of unbroken effort**-a contemplative effort unlike the physical effort in the other form of work. What does the parallel stream of effort involve: the devotion to the Self, the constant awareness that it is only the Self which enables us to do all the work we do, and maintaining a firm thought in our minds that our **central goal** is only to know the Self and be the Self. And that thought should necessarily be extended in

the form of an inquiry (to know the Self). It was the same advice Ramana Maharshi gave his disciples: continue your unbroken inquiry asking yourself “Who am I?” which is again non-different from the Upanishadic method of “*neti neti*” – (I am) not this, not this.

So let’s remember always our central goal. Guru Nitya affirms in his Psychology of Darsana Mala: “...the more serious part of the mind can safely be kept aloof from the world-games, remaining unaffected by success or failure in those games. Such games, which collectively we call “life”, are played on the periphery of consciousness and – relative to what might be called the deeper center of consciousness – are illusory indeed (P. 125, Apavada Darsanam, verse 3).” It’s clear what should occupy the deeper center of consciousness.

Let’s think for a moment of our inner organs (viz. mind, intellect, memory faculty and affective ego), sense organs and organs of actions. Then we have starting from our own physical bodies to the infinite number of objects of the Universe. The Guru says in verse 2 that, if we do *vicara* (contemplative inquiry), we will realize that all of them (the inner and outer organs of our body as well as the entire Universe outside) are nothing but the adorable Sun (the Light which is the transcendental Knowledge) that rises in the sky beyond – in the sky of pure consciousness. We should realize It by engaging ourselves in a ceaseless inquiry.

According to Vedanta pure consciousness (*chit*) is beyond the inner organs (referred to earlier). Bhagavad Gita (III – 42) expands on this: the mind is beyond the senses; further beyond is intellect; the Self which is pure consciousness (transcendental knowledge) transcends the intellect too.

The Sun that shines in the sky of pure consciousness, referred to as the supernal Sun, is the Knowledge that illuminates everything in

the Universe. In Vedanta, the word equivalent to “illuminate” also means to display as objects of form and name. (Let’s also keep reminding ourselves that the supernal Sun, the Core, pure consciousness, the Knowledge-with a capital K: all refer to the one and the same Self). The Knowledge itself remains a witness, unchanged. It is the Core of all manifested world. Alas! But ignorance veils the Self that illuminates the Universe and so it does not occur to us that everything perceived by our senses are the very same Self. So, the Guru, in verse 1, asks us to turn the senses inward and meditate; first find **It** looking inward so you succeed in getting rid of the thick veil of ignorance. Ignorance removed, we will spontaneously see in the outside world also the very same Self - the brilliance of the ever-shining Core alone.

Now in verse 2 the Guru more specifically tells us: reflect contemplatively on everything starting from the subtler inner organs to the grossest world outside, only to find all of them to be nothing but the adorable presence of the supernal Sun—bear in mind! It has to be unremittingly inquired into.

This exercise of inquiry the Guru advises in this verse is one of “training” the mind, presumably the senses now turned outward, to see the Self in all objects outside too. In other words, it is the exercise to free the mind completely of its conditioning and colorations (referred to as ignorance), which altogether hides the vision of the Self.

(The Guru must have been pretty sure that the moment the senses are turned outward, they would be driven by their natural tendency to go after their objects; therefore, make enough inward-looking meditation first so the mind gets tamed sufficiently to exercise successful control over the senses.)

Aum tat sat.