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MOTS Chapter 35: The Dawn of Self-Knowledge

Like ten thousand suns coming all at once,
the modulation of discrimination arises;
the veil of transience covering knowledge is *maya*;
tearing this away, the primal sun alone shines.

Free translation:

The function of Wisdom discernment come like the dawning of ten thousand suns. This is the primeval Sun, which cleaves asunder the veil of maya that precipitates the transient forms of ignorance.

After our weeks of arduous study, but surely not because of them, realization makes its appearance in the Atmopadesa Satakam. Our preparation may optimize the benefit we make of its appearance, but unfortunately it doesn't bring it about. Such accidents remain mysterious.

The free translation clarifies the possible implication of the original verse translation that we have to do some tearing asunder to foster realization. It is the arrival of the Primal Sun that sweeps aside the duality of maya in its unifying radiance. All efforts are in a sense impediments.

Deb opened the class with an extended poetic presentation. When she is quiet she can even hear her own heart beat, but more often she is busily arguing points of view in her mind and these get in her way. Curiously the point she wants to prevail usually does, whenever she's managing the argument. But if she's really in a quandary she knows she has to leave the arguments behind and sink back into that place where she can hear her heart. It's a non-forced place of understanding where she can access the light of true discrimination. She feels that at every moment those insights and understandings are available, in a deeper place than the world of yes or no, good or bad.

This brought to my mind the venerable quote from a seventh century Zen master:

If you wish to see the truth
then hold no opinions for or against anything.
To set up what you like against what you dislike
is the disease of the mind.

I've put a longer version of this wonderfully resonant poem in Part II.

If we perceive the intrinsic unity, the good and bad aspects are naturally subsumed in it, and this is the discrimination Narayana Guru is endorsing. We of course suffer from a lifetime of being directed to focus solely on the polarities, to always choose good over bad, and pay no attention whatsoever to the unity. Deb argued that within a deep level you can't choose sides, since there are no sides to it. She offered an excerpt from her most recent online Brihadaranyaka Upanishad class with Nancy Y, where she wrote:

The heart is the home of our consciousness. Our insights come from here. Our actions arise here. The teachings are not for us to make the world right, our task is not to improve others. If we can suffuse ourselves with our very own profound core, if we open our selves to that, the joy that lies shadowed is again revealed. It is tempered and matured with experience, and change comes to us as an unpremeditated process. It is a great change and not a change at all and it is the most transformative of dedications.

Deb knows this implies we should just let people be exactly who they are, instead of trying to reform them, and she finds this both amazing and frightening at the same time. What might we discover if we let others speak for themselves? To allow it you have to let go of your own wants. She admitted to having "control issues,"

and that admission is an important step in letting it go. She now aims to let go of her need to control.

I agreed with the proposition, adding that ‘letting go’ has a hint of forcing the issue. I prefer simply ‘listening’. Yes, you have to let go of your inner monologue to actually listen to the other person, but listening can be a natural, joyous activity, once the otherness of the other no longer frightens you. Letting go is perhaps a more conscious effort.

Jan appreciated this thread, and felt that the dawning of the 10,000 suns meant that wisdom was coming from another place, in a sense. We don’t generate it—it dawns on us. She loved that even the wise have no access to the depth where it originates, which is the Absolute. What we can know is that if we quiet ourselves, we’re more open to whatever is going to come up, and those moments will be enlightened from this other source.

Deb pointed out the paradox, that where we come from is where that source is, so it is us, in a way, but it is much more than the conscious us. Jan modified her statement to: it’s not a part of us that we think of as us. That’s just right. As soon as we take credit for it, we’re controlling it, and so it is immediately something else. We can’t access it with our conscious ego, we can only invite it in.

It took me years to realize that prayer and worship were common ways to access our inner depth by letting go of the ego element. It doesn’t matter how you picture it, whether God, unconscious or unknown, just being aware that your ego isn’t the whole story invites it in. You don’t have to conform to any familiar format (despite pressure tactics by established institutions), you can invent a new way, or try several. The key is to have some optimism that a very large source of wisdom is near at hand and available to anyone humble enough to be open to it.

Deb talked about a dear friend who once said to her I wish I could believe in prayer. Of course we discount the begging kind of prayer, which is pure ego, but at its best it’s a way to open yourself up to a situation, which can be constructive and useful. She has just finished the gem of a book, *The Year 1000*, by Lacey and

Danziger. A thousand years ago the monks of England had their whole day divided into segments, and between them at prescribed intervals they would gather to sing together. It struck her as a beautiful way to stay grounded in your heart as you worked your way through arduous days.

Nancy talked about how the things that come to her attention the most are when someone is trying to convince her of something. Individuals tend to be coming from a place they want you to be in with them. Nancy is a natural free-thinker, firmly grounded in her own inner truth, and it's very foreign to some people. She said their pressuring her makes her wish they would stop, yet she dutifully acts to please them, mostly.

I commented that people's expectations pressure her, and Nancy replied with a sigh that that's what causes the awkward dances between people. All the differences in our attitudes are little tripping points, while at the core of it all our veils are swishing around and brushing against each other. I added that some of us inept dancers tend to step on other people's toes.

Paul sighed as well, knowing how we bump heads with even our most loved ones, yet we do it with such a good heart! He now knows that even with the best intent you can do great harm. He's struggled with his daughter especially, recalling how he once said to her, "You have a right to your opinion, but you have to understand that I'm right and you're wrong." It was the typical parental position he had grown up with. After talking with other parents, he began to see that by adhering to that attitude he wasn't allowing her to make her own choices—a sure way to increase her resistance. And he has come to realize how our individuality separates us from everything. That separation, if we truly believe in it, we spend most of our energies to defend our position. Our identity is with our past conditionings as opposed to being transparent, so we aren't really caring for the ones we care for most. Could we say a good parent is trans-parent? Paul now has become more tolerant and allows his daughter to have her own

views, to make her own mistakes, and it has had positive results in their relationship.

Paul's sense of humor has held up well, and he told us about his college psychology courses: I trained a rat for two years, so I thought I was well prepared to be a father!

After we stopped laughing, I lamented how holding doggedly to a position causes so much conflict and so much enmity. Why is it so hard for people to honestly admit that they have limitations? This has reached a dire level in our political discourse, with people wrapping themselves in impenetrable ignorance. Armed with certitude of their superior pose, their deafness deflects all influx of wisdom, not only outside but inside as well. They live in an echo chamber, an audio hall of mirrors. Let's at least not do that in our personal lives.

Whenever you say *I'm right* there's an implicit wrong you're also affirming. We have to get off that high horse. The need to be right comes from the hellfire of our upbringing: being wrong brings punishment. We are no longer under those thumbs, but we might as well be. Prabu asked why shouldn't people be able to disagree? What's wrong with that?

Religions purvey all sorts of techniques and hoops to jump through, but it's quite obvious that none of them are essential to enlightenment. They have a moral and operational value in many cases, but do not of themselves impart wisdom. As author Ken Kesey once asked, "Do you want to be a lightning rod or a seismograph?" Are you channeling the cosmic spark or faintly detecting distant thunder? The human default setting is to fear earthquakes and listen for them only so we can move away before they touch us. A seeker of truth needs enough courage to stick around when things start shaking.

The class did not discuss psychedelics, though the best of these substances clearly up the ante in the lightning bolt department. I'm enough of a blasphemer to presume that Siddhartha became the Buddha when the village girl took pity on

him for all his fruitless efforts and offered him a dish of soma, the food of the gods, but few Buddhists would consider the possibility. Some might even disavow *ahimsa* for long enough to thrash me, so I keep quiet about it. Anyway, even soma takers rarely have meaningful, lasting breakthroughs of the titanic nature that ten thousand suns implies. Nitya writes of its elusiveness:

In search of wisdom Buddha did rigorous penance. Practice and mortification did not bring him wisdom. The great awakening came to him not when he was sitting in meditation or performing any austerity, it came when he was partaking of the food an innocent village girl offered him. If Buddha's six years of mortification is looked upon as his preparation for Realization, there are others like Mohammed to whom Realization came without any special program of study or contemplation. The experience called Realization falls into a category of its own. It does not lend itself for observation or scrutiny by a third party. It can be known only from inside and only when it comes.

Nitya took a tour up to Delphi while visiting Greece during his writing, and his recollections emphasize his non-religious attitude:

Between Athens and Delphi I heard the names of many benevolent and evil gods and titans, but none of them touched my heart like Socrates or Plato. Those wise men remind me of the Buddha and Lao Tzu, Jesus Christ and Mohammed.

So why are all these people from at least 1,500 years in the past? Where are the recent realizers? Has realization stopped happening? Are we getting stupider? Or do we simply conceive of it differently in a post-religious world?

As far as modern psychonauts are concerned, it's clear that their insights are discredited in advance by the prejudiced arbiters

of acceptable behaviors. Those with vested interests in religious beliefs—which in its broad definition includes most scientists as well as the nonaligned—are scornful of what falls outside their comfort zone. Plus, and this is a good thing, people are less likely to unquestioningly line up behind a raving lunatic who has had a mind-blowing experience, until they reintegrate their vision into a comprehensible format. So I think there are still breakthroughs happening, they just don't make such a ripple as they once did. Plus, with so many belief systems solidly in place, there isn't much room for new ones. We only know of those old guys because a cabal took up their cause, often many years after they died.

Humans do have a psychotic propensity to fall for raving lunatics. It might be hard to believe if you don't live in the US, but substantial numbers of pseudo-Christians here are proclaiming Trump as the second coming of Jesus. At last! Halleluiah!

Jesus wept.

Yet too much caution in opening up to the *mysterium tremendum* and we will likely suppress its influence. It's a fascinating paradox. Nitya was always aware of how an academic interpretation could kill the spirit. Speaking of those same ancient rishis as he listed earlier, he underlines the inadequacy of mere knowledge compared to wisdom:

Today to familiarize oneself with their thoughts and gauge the depths of their words, one would have to take a course in philosophy from an academy of repute. After several years of discipline and study, a student might come out proficient in tracing the genealogy of those masters and the sources of their teaching. He might also be able to place the teachings in their correct historical perspective. We can treat such a student as a good historian and critic, but he would not necessarily have become wise like Socrates or Plato.

There was a period of ferment not too long back when the bondage of limited thinking was ripped asunder by the urge of people

everywhere to be treated fairly. The coffin of acceptability was stretched a bit. LSD was the most likely precipitating cause, though deep down everyone craves freedom and justice, so it perhaps just forced the rusted doors open at a time when many people were already fed up with the status quo. And then what to do? Without realistic guidance from honored wise people, the historical moment was more like an explosion that dissipated in all directions than a coherent step in the right direction. The jury is still out on whether the community vision will coalesce into anything strong enough to turn the tide.

I just refound an appropriate quote along these lines from Tom Robbins, in his masterpiece *Jitterbug Perfume*:

The sixties constituted a breakthrough, a fleeting moment of glory, a time when a significant little chunk of humanity briefly realized its moral potential and flirted with its neurological destiny, a collective spiritual awakening that flared brilliantly until the barbaric and mediocre impulses of the species drew tight once more the curtains of darkness.

If I were to describe my best experiences on LSD during that heady time, I couldn't do better than what Nitya wrote for this chapter:

Self-realization comes as a blast that converts all that seemed real up to that moment into a mere phenomenal show. What is most significant about the overpowering new awareness is its absolutist nature, which makes all relativistic values appear incidental and secondary. The spontaneous glow or splendor that arises from the core of one's consciousness is like a golden key that can unlock any secret, whether mundane or spiritual. As Bergson puts it, it is the gold coin which can never be fully equalled by any amount of copper coins.

I still remember the very first insight on an intense trip that my lingering suspicion that social pressures were utterly false was so, so true! Their absurdity leapt out as obvious beyond doubt. They were eventually replaced by a much more solid grounding, but that would take a long time and require expert intervention, mainly from Guru Nitya. At that moment they didn't need to be replaced: they were simply gone, and it was such a relief I laughed long and hard.

And that was only the beginning of realigning my psyche. Later there were moments of very bright light that melted all distinctions; maybe not ten thousand suns, but several. Another early revelation was that this was precisely the indescribable place all those saints and seers of the past were struggling to describe and advocate for everyone. That insight converted me on the spot from an agnostic to an appreciator of all the varied and brilliant thrusts humans had made since the dawn of time, on behalf of realization. Since their efforts always got corrupted one way or another, realization had to be renewed regularly, to keep the human spirit free. I was happy to be a contributor to that historically necessary endeavor.

I dropped out of college because I could clearly see the truth of what Nitya says here:

Discipline and study may give a scholar a flourish to his language and a logical method of presentation, but what is presented by the wise springs from a depth to which even they have no access. It is as if they become the mouthpiece of the Absolute.

I wasn't interested in flourishes! Eventually Vedanta did provide a logical method which was very helpful and liberating, very different from the ordinary logic of "you go along to get along." It recognizes the chasm between mediated thinking and inspired wisdom, yet it includes both, as it should.

Downplaying academic knowledge set off a fascinating discussion about words and their role in communication. Deb opened it with a favorite quote from Czech composer Leos Janacek I've placed in Part II. It beautifully emphasizes how much we can learn from nonverbal communication.

Nancy admitted to being hard of hearing, so some of her comments strike her friends as being completely off the wall. (Because they are.) She also knows you can absorb so much wonder, but it doesn't always come back out through the words you use. In that way we get caught more in the words themselves instead of what's behind them, and she finds that very frustrating and occasionally inhibiting.

Susan also spoke of letting go of words. She's just read *News of the World*, by Paulette Jiles, about a white man and an American Indian traveling through 1870s Texas. They can't speak each other's language, so it's an exploration of non-verbal communication, set off against the "news" that the man shares verbally with audiences in those days before newspapers.

Paul feels that our greatest problem is in our reliance on words, and Deb mentioned how the modern understanding of emotions is that they compress a great deal of information into feelings in a nonverbal format, where linear descriptions would be too cumbersome. When that saber-tooth tiger is about to leap, it's not time for inductive reasoning. Feet get moving!

While this is true, I found myself once again having to stand up for the immense value of words. The "wisdom of the depths" surfaces and is sharable primarily in words. Simply imagining that others know what you mean by a gesture is not adequate, since each of us will have a different interpretation. I admit that we also have different takes on what words mean, but they tend to move toward agreement.

Our most recent Brihadaranyaka Upanishad reading includes mantra IV.1.2, which reads in part:

"What is *prajna*, O Yajnavalkya?"

“It is the organ of speech, Your Majesty.,” said Yajnavalkya.
“Through the organ of speech alone, Your Majesty, are known the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, history, mythology, the arts, the Upanishads, verses, aphorisms, explanations, commentaries, the results of sacrifices, of offering oblations, of giving food and drink, this world, the next world, and all beings.

“The organ of speech, Your Majesty, is the supreme Brahman. The organ of speech never deserts one who, knowing this, meditates upon it; all beings eagerly approach such a one and, being a god, he merges with the gods.”

I’d say that settles the value of words and verbal transmission once and for all!

I’ve recently rephrased one of my adages, originally:

While a picture is worth a thousand words, a unitive insight is worth a million pictures. Poetry is a series of unitive insights.

I love it! The more recent one is:

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a good paragraph is worth a million pictures.

The limits and benefits work both ways. We aren’t supposed to avail ourselves of only one option.

Obviously 10,000 suns worth of energy bursting forth will not be fully describable in words. Narayana Guru knew only tropical suns, where one is more than enough to fry you at high noon, so he was speaking of an unbelievable intensity. Modern physics has a rough (possibly exact) equivalent in the ZPF, the zero point field, which packs an unimaginable amount of energy into every speck of the universe. One hundred orders of magnitude greater than the energy at the center of the sun in each cubic centimeter, by one estimate. It’s demonstrably present

mathematically, but we are somehow adjusted to it, so it's like the sea for fish: it's the invisible support system we swim in. It doesn't require any belief from us. In a way it's fortunate we can somehow tune it out, or we'd be continuously overwhelmed. Better to briefly touch it, and then figure out how to integrate that immensity into our daily lives.

Nitya, as you know, was circumspect about publicly proclaiming Narayana Guru's inclusion in the company of the most highly respected seers of all time, but he was privately convinced he was the best of the best. No trumpets needed to be blown. Nitya knew that Narayana Guru was speaking from direct, personal experience when he composed the present verse, and he summed it up this way:

Narayana Guru describes it as the emergence of the awareness of the highest discrimination of truth and falsehood. It awakens in the realized person like the sudden rise of ten thousand solar orbs. This awareness not only initiates into our being the wonder of having been awakened in a new sense of reality, but it also turns the relativistic knowledge of the wakeful and the dream into a phantasmagoria born of nescience.

We talked about discrimination, how the discrimination touted here is 180% different from the discrimination where certain groups are prevented from enjoying the bounty of the commonwealth. That sort of discrimination is a substantial subset of injustice. Narayana Guru is speaking of discrimination between truth and falsehood, between the underlying unity of all creation and the distinctions we put in place to try to satisfy our basic needs. Between the absolute and the relative. Justice is its central concern. The more the sunlight of wisdom is allowed to shine into the darkness of relativism, the more harmoniously we will live. Nitya concludes with a psychic push in that direction, because you never know, it just might have some positive effect:

Nescience or ignorance is beginningless; even so is the primal sun of self-knowledge. No other light can effectively tear asunder the veil of ignorance which is so fascinatingly knit on the warp of space and the woof of time with variegated forms and countless names. The cloud of unknowing veils the light of wisdom, and it can be removed only when it is shattered with the swift winds of spiritual discrimination.

All our elevating discussion passed quickly enough, and we had time for a lovely meditation to invite the cosmos into our negligible consciousnesses. For all we know, it did peek in. We are free to act accordingly.

Part II

Here's the Janacek quote, from an album cover in our library:

To him, folk art was the essence of musical life. He began the creation of his musical-dramatic style by studying living speech, and to this day there remain notes on speech melody jotted down in his bold hand. He would listen to salesmen, newsboys, railway guards, waiters, children and housewives as he heard them speak in Brno, the capital city of Moravia. And he would study the sounds of tears and laughter, of singing birds, bubbling brooks, falling rain and whistling wind. The melodic curves of speech were of vital importance to Janacek's musical language.

"It was rather strange when someone in my district would speak to me," he once told an interviewer. "Maybe I did not take in what he said, but that sequence of tones! I knew immediately what to think of him: I knew what he felt, whether he lied or whether he was excited. Sounds, the rise and fall of sounds in human speech, held for me the most profound truth."

* * *

From my article The Trajectory of Science
(<http://scotteitsworth.tripod.com/id18.html>) , on the ZPF:

Entrenched beliefs in purely blind randomness stem from the admirable methodology required of scientists to strive to not make assumptions. But simply because blindness is assumed doesn't mean blindness is thereby proven. Science is now coming to the realization that some form of intelligent patterning is accelerating creation and evolution to a tremendous degree.

Ervin Laszlo's book on the quantum akashic field points out that since up until recently intelligence was automatically subtracted from the modeling equations in physics, many presumptions but also lots of evidence of how such an unlikely "accident" as our universe could come about were scrupulously eliminated. New mathematical models for calculating true randomness in evolution indicate an order of quadrillions of years of blindly mucking about to produce a simple mammal-like creature, roughly a million times longer than the calculated age of our universe. And that's after starting with a viable universe at the outset. The highly respected mathematician Roger Penrose has calculated the probability of hitting on a universe as perfect as ours via a truly random process from among all possibilities as one in 10 to the 10 to the 123rd power, which is by far the largest number I've ever heard of, even larger than a googolplex.

The key idea in the new physics to make all this rapid evolution possible is that the quantum vacuum, nicknamed the ZPF or zero point field, isn't empty as it appears, it's packed with an unbelievable amount of energy. Would you believe one hundred orders of magnitude greater than the energy at the center of the sun in each cubic centimeter? That's one estimate. And the energy is holographic, meaning each part replicates the whole and is able to store vast amounts of information. The kind of information that could even contain the results of previous random universes,

forming patterns in the ZPF that could assist the current universe avoid unsuccessful strategies and home in on the tried and true.

The equations keep insisting the energy's there, but for a long time mathematicians conveniently deleted it, as it's not perceptible. Now some of them are wondering if they were deleting God, in a manner of speaking. The ZPF is very nearly omniscient, certainly omnipresent, and approaching infinitely omnipotent. If it only had a mean streak....

* * *

The Hsin Hsin Ming

Verses on the Faith Mind

by Chien-chih Seng-ts'an, The 3rd Zen Patriarch, 606 A.D.

The Great Way is not difficult
for those who have no preferences.

When love and hate are both absent
everything becomes clear and undisguised.
Make the smallest distinction, however,
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.

If you wish to see the truth
then hold no opinions for or against anything.
To set up what you like against what you dislike
is the disease of the mind.

When the deep meaning of things is not understood
the mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.

The Way is perfect like vast space
where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess.
Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject
that we do not see the true nature of things.

Be serene in the oneness of things
and such erroneous views will disappear by themselves.

When you try to stop activity to achieve passivity
your very effort fills you with activity.
As long as you remain in one extreme or the other,
you will never know Oneness.

Those who do not live in the single Way
fail in both activity and passivity,
assertion and denial.
To deny the reality of things is to miss their reality;
to assert the emptiness of things
is to miss their reality.

The more you talk and think about it,
the further astray you wander from the truth.
Stop talking and thinking
and there is nothing you will not be able to know.

To return to the root is to find the meaning,
but to pursue appearances is to miss the source.
At the moment of inner enlightenment,
there is a going beyond appearance and emptiness.
The changes that appear to occur in the empty world
we call real only because of our ignorance.
Do not search for the truth;
only cease to cherish opinions.

(I can send a longer version on request)