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## MOTS Chapter 38: All can be the Other and All can be the Same

What is known as many is the other,  
and that which shines forth as one is sameness;  
having known the state, which is going to be spoken of, and  
attained release,  
remain dissolved and blended in the state of sameness.

Free translation:

What is known distinctively as separate and specific entities is the 'other'. What shines forth as the indivisible whole is 'sameness'. This is going to be elucidated hereafter. Having known these states, verticalize knowledge and learn the art of unifying consciousness in the inclusivity of 'sameness'.

Nitya continues giving example after example of how sameness and otherness intermix and coexist. It's clear that otherness is more attractive to wakeful conscious, and that we take the sameness for granted as a kind of unconscious background. Unfortunately, this often translates into ignoring or discounting the common bonds we thrive within, since they don't make enough noise. They're too peaceful. Part II has some thoughts of primatologist Frans de Waal on how this basic core of unity came to be, implying how much better off we'd be if we stopped trying to impose morality from outside and instead simply celebrate its natural existence. Even the gentle guidance of a Jesus or Mohammad tends to get more hostile over time, as secondhand instruction is substituted for innate awareness. That's why the gurus keep redirecting us to our own cores to discover truth, rather than simply spelling it out for us.

Once his point has been amply made with several examples at hand that day, Nitya can at last bring it down to the psychological context that is the real *raison d'être*:

We were traveling yesterday, we are traveling today, and we will be again traveling tomorrow. For that reason all our travels can be treated as belonging to one and the same trip. In a sense, life itself is one long journey. If birth is a boarding station and death is a terminal, the cycle of births and deaths in endless lives also comes under the category of a very long and mysterious adventure.

We can see from the text that Johnny Stallings has joined Peter O in traveling on the train with Nitya. This was the period when Johnny was helping care for Nataraja Guru, who had about four more months to live. Wouldn't it be fantastic to dial back the clock so we could join them on the train! Halcyon times indeed. Riding around with the Guru was like sitting in a pool of sameness as a fascinating parade of otherness whizzed past the window.

Deb marveled at how easy it is for us to be distracted by seeing those differences, and she recalled a fine example of what an difference it makes to adhere to sameness throughout: Back around 1975 Nitya made one of his frequent visits to the Center Family commune near Portland, and he had two Indians with him, a businessman from India and a swami from Fiji. Being in America was a far cry from either's comfort zone, but the businessman was utterly alienated and withdrawn and refused to compromise his behavior in any way. Karen, then at the Center Family, recalled how he would only sit on a chair, where everyone else would sit on the floor. He clung to Nitya, and was not interested in the hippie world around him at all. The Fijian swami, by contrast, was relaxed and felt perfectly at home no matter where he went.

The paradox is that humans think of sameness in terms of having the same *otherness*: all our favorite props, which is not sameness at all, it's adhering to differences. True sameness is having a steady core no matter the external circumstances. To outsiders it may look like otherness. So even the appearance of sameness and otherness is backwards, in a way.

Nitya was fascinated by the parallel between electricity and the life force. A couple of centuries earlier many scientists wondered if they were the same, even performing experiments that led to the writing of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley. This is one of the few places Nitya set down his thoughts on this subject in writing:

The normal tendency of the mind is to get hooked onto a provoking stimulus and become interested in a delimited field of awareness. Awareness can be compared to the flow of electrical energy within a live wire. If electricity is localized in a heater, it generates heat. The same energy can be utilized to keep a refrigerator cold, or it can be converted into the sound waves of a radio or the light waves of a television. But it is impossible for the same energy which is being consumed in one instrument to be used simultaneously in another instrument. Though the source energy has the quality of universal sameness, in its actualization it splits into many, where each is an other in its relation to the rest.

The practical issue for us as seekers of unitive understanding is clearly delineated: “If mind can recognize sameness just as it notices otherness, why does it so often divide things and forget the all-embracing sameness?” We might ask why sameness doesn’t have anywhere near the impact of otherness. The balance is tilted in favor of disharmony and conflict. The problem and its solution are restated here in the clearest possible terms:

Our mind is always subjected to the horizontal pull of one interest or another, which goes on perpetuating the difference between the self and the other. Only by a consistent vision of the all-inclusiveness of the self and by the repeated return to this unitive vision can one ultimately escape from the obduracy of error and finally establish oneself in the unifying Self which knows no other than itself.

Deb's comment about this was, "We're in the era of the other." Meaning, who in our troubled times is advocating for a unitive vision? Those who make a living out of conflict, primarily the military and its stooges, are expert at capturing everyone's attention and manipulating it to amplify fears and hatreds. It's easy enough, since we are preprogrammed to keep a defensive eye out at all times. The remedy is training ourselves to have that "consistent vision of all-inclusiveness," and when it's forgotten, finding a way to return to a unitive vision.

Knowing full well how dire the imbalance is between *sama* and *anya*, Nitya makes a provoking declaration:

We have an infatuation of interest in the present which makes our mind whimsically insistent on having full identification with the presented stimulus.

Whimsical? And aren't we *supposed* to live in the present? I wondered why he would use such a lighthearted term, and solicited examples of whimsy from the class. Most of the responses were far from whimsical, mostly replaying the gist of this section on *sama* and *anya*, so I thought I'd better show what I meant.

Nitya is speaking of the tragedy of breaking your deep contemplation on the Absolute to attend to trivialities. Rather than bemoan how awful that loss is, he chooses to chuckle about it: such fools these mortals be! The present can be a rude interruption of an eternal oceanic state, so it isn't the be-all and do-all the clichés make it out to be. One amusing example that came to my mind was in a classical music concert where the music is soft and profoundly evocative, occasionally someone will pull out a cough drop and try to unwrap it ever so carefully so it doesn't disturb anyone. Yet we are so attuned to hearing anything out of place that the slightest rustle catches our attention immediately, and then we tune in to the agonizing process of them taking the drop out, for

several minutes. Meanwhile, cosmic musical proclamations have gone by unheard.

A more modern example is if I'm having a conversation with pretty much anyone under 50 (not Prabu, though) we can be in an intense exchange that I consider very meaningful, but after around 30 seconds their phone will beep or flash and they instantly turn their head down and start to play with the device. It feels like a guillotine severing the connection between us. I choose to treat it whimsically and not be offended, but much of great worth may have been lost. Humans are addicted to movements just like the monkeys we've descended from. Playing with your gizmo is a self-isolating act that paradoxically feels like taking in more. In all these types of situations, by losing the contemplative depth we may have been in to attend to distractions we keep our life at a superficial level.

In another example, Deb gave me credit for keeping focused while playing the piano: it requires a lot of concentration that screens out distractions. Pretty much any distraction instantly causes mistakes, so it's a marvelous meditation practice. But I immediately gave Deb more credit than I deserve, as I'm fairly easily distracted, because she can sit in the same room with me practicing, making lots of mistakes and reworking sections over and over, and she can read a book or write a poem without noticing the very loud clatter behind her at all. It's astonishing, and a great quality for a spouse of a musician to have. And this ability is far from whimsical, it's essential. Think of those who can sleep at parties or on a jolting bus ride, or live in crowded, noisy cities and maintain their centers. The screening is a very important mental faculty.

Paul summarized the most important takeaway, that we don't have to get rid of the concept of otherness, we can just expand our base to include both aspects. He also wondered about the definition of obduracy, which Nitya uses here, drawn from the last verse. It's in the translation here as the difficult. *Dura*, the root, means hard, as in durable and duration. Endure. The obdurate actively resists

our feeble efforts to overcome it. It isn't a simple rock we can move and then proceed: it keeps jumping back in our path. It can trick us. It's a perfect word for the sensory input that captures our attention in trivial ways so we forget the miracle of every moment of our precious lives. We do our duty to some dead and dusty tome or advertising ploy instead of suckling the milk of the Beyond, and imagine we're being Good when we're actually missing out.

Deb added a nice insight that when you have an established pattern of thinking or remembering things in a certain way, it builds up until it becomes nearly insurmountable. Paul lamented the obduracy of trying to stop doing things that are not profitable and do instead things that are inclusive. He sees how clinging to his identity as Paul makes it harder to be flexible in his choices. That's a fridge quality statement: "My self-identity makes it harder for me to be flexible in my behavioral choices." So, what's keeping us from loosening up a bit?

Deb cited Narayana Guru's key ethical building block as understanding sameness or oneness. I read out a bit from Frans de Waal's *The Bonobo and the Atheist*, a tour de force book on morality as being grounded in tribal primate (and other animal) behavior. That means moral sentiments lie deep within us, at least 100 million years worth, as dinosaurs are now known to have lived communally. The religions that trumpet morality are latecomers to the game, a mere couple of millennia, taking full credit for nature's work and screwing it up in the process. Atheists are screwing up in the opposite direction, and de Waal explores the common ground between their polarities, just as a good yogi would. It's a deeply touching read that I highly recommend, and you can find a few paragraphs copied out in Part II.

De Waal, though an agnostic unconcerned with God's existence as an unprovable abstraction, sees the value of the unifying impulse of religion, and wonders how we are going to replace it.

Nataraja Guru once said that prayer must work, or why else would people continue to do it? Deb cited Nitya's *The Intelligent*

*Man's Guide to the Hindu Religion*, where the supplicant projects their highest value into an idol, which ideal is then solidified in them by the process. Prayer, then, is a way to reduce our ego-dominance and invite a greater awareness into our being. Both fundamentalist religion and fundamentalist atheism are platforms for the ego to jump up and down on: ways to close down rather than open up the psyche. And thus immoral.

Last year's book "Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist," by Eli Saslow, details how entrenched human prejudices are, and how slowly they can be mitigated, if at all. After being raised in an environment that allowed no outside input, the saga of the protagonist's vision clearing took many years, with an entire college doing their best to bring it about. We are incredibly resistive of contrary ideas. Once again, inbred attitudes can pass as being true to some inner unifying premise, but they play out as isolating and potentially lethal. The surest route is to smash everything in an all-out war, after which waking up seems like a worthwhile alternative. A well-guided psychedelic journey accomplishes the same with peace and love instead of bloodshed and hate—guess which option is legal?

Nitya closes with a reminder of the unifying basis of the two most popular religions. In 1972 this didn't seem so far from current practices; in 2019 it seems like startling news:

In Christianity all are seen as brothers and sisters by assuming that we are all born of the same Father. In Islam the word *haq* is used as complementary to Allah. Allah is described as that which cannot be equated with anything seen or heard. This uncompromising definition of the Absolute leaves no room for confusion. At the same time the complementary term *haq* enables one to see everything as originating from the merciful will of Allah.

Prabu added an interesting touch he recently has been reading about, in Ted Hughes' *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete*

*Being.* Hughes draws a comparison between Jesus's mother Mary and the sage Vyasa's mother Satyavati. Prabu is excited to learn of the similarities between these different traditions.

Nitya's touching conclusion is an appeal for us to really make a change of heart, an achievement that is by no means a one-time accomplishment. It has to be our daily bread:

What we refer to here are not the closed disciplines of any particular religion or system of philosophy. We are referring to the one Truth behind all truths and the one Method which lends its key to every method. If you do not see this secret, then you are a lonely soul standing bewildered in a chaotic crowd of strangers who are all others, whose ways are different and goals are weird, unknown, and strange to you. If you do know the secret, there is no one to be pushed away and no one's goal is alien to yours. You realize the sameness of all.

We soaked silently for a few minutes in the joy of being together in sameness, a friendly environment where all are welcome, safe, and supported, allowing for optimal opening of the heart. I mused that its very perfection seems to be daunting to those wandering in the wilderness of otherness—lonely souls in the chaotic crowd—so our class remains small and recondite. It's much simpler that way!

## Part II

From Frans de Waal's *The Bonobo and the Atheist*, published 2013. He is speaking of higher level morality based on group consciousness, after having traced two more basic levels in several animal species, especially apes. The entire argument is fascinating and closely parallels our studies, but here's the denouement:

[A third level of morality] requires greater powers of abstraction as well as the anticipation of what may happen if we let others get away with behavior that doesn't even directly affect us. We have



the capacity to imagine its impact on the greater good. The underlying values are, again, not that complicated, because surely the functioning of a community is in the interests of all its members, but it is harder to find parallels with other animals. We build reputations of honesty and trustworthiness, and disapprove of cheaters and noncooperators to the point of ostracizing them. Our goal is to keep everyone in line, putting collective interests before selfish ones. Morality serves to spread the benefits of group life around, and to keep a lid on exploitation by a powerful elite. Here, I am following the traditional view in biology, going back to Darwin, of morality as an in-group phenomenon. As Christopher Boehm has summarized it:

*Our moral codes apply fully only within the group, be it a language group, a nonliterate population that shares the same piece of real estate or the same ethnic identity, or a nation. There seems to be a special, pejorative moral “discount” applied to cultural strangers—who often are not even considered fully human....*

But even if there can be little doubt that morality evolved for within-group reasons, without much consideration for humanity at large, this is not necessarily how it needs to be. Nowadays, we desperately try to move beyond moral parochialism and apply what we have learned about a dignified human life to the wider world, including strangers, even enemies. That enemies have rights, too, is a novel notion: the Geneva convention on prisoners of war stems only from 1929. The more we expand morality's reach, the more we need to rely on our intellect, because even though I believe that morality is firmly rooted in the emotions, biology has barely prepared us for rights and obligations on the scale of the modern world. We evolved as group animals, not global citizens. Nevertheless, we are well underway to reflect on these issues, such as universal human rights, and there is no reason to take the naturalized ethics advocated in this book as a prison from which

we can't escape. It offers an account of how we got to where we are, but we humans have a long history of building new structures on top of old foundations. (234-5)

De Waal has a moving wrap-up at the end of the book. Here's the smidgen I read out to the class, with a bit more for context:

Mammals are affected by the distress of others, leading to levels of altruism far in excess of what gene-centric theories predict.

This is why the [imaginary] bonobo disagrees with anyone who pits evolution against morality, such as the well-known American neurosurgeon [and fundamentalist Christian] Benjamin Carson, who claimed, "Ultimately, if you accept the evolutionary theory, you dismiss ethics, you don't have to abide by a set of moral codes, you determine your own conscience based on your own desires." The problem with such statements is that if humans everywhere develop a sense of right and wrong, one of our deepest desires must be to live in a moral world. Carson assumes that morality goes against our nature, and that our desires are all bad, whereas the whole point of this book is to argue the opposite. Thank God, if I may, we share with other primates a background as group animals, which makes us value social connections. Absent this background, religion could be preaching about virtue and vice until it became blue in the face, we'd never get its point. We are receptive only because of our evolved grasp of the value of relationships, the benefits of cooperation, the need for trust and honesty, and so on. Even our sense of fairness derives from this background. (238-9)

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I mentioned this visual history year by year of global human development, because we assume the world we live in has always been like this, but it surely has not. Change is the norm; stasis is imaginary. We can and should achieve concord with whatever

comes along. These maps are necessarily imperfect, but it's fascinating to watch the complex progress of the species moving toward a global network from its many fragments:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymI5Uv5cGU4>

This is a slightly longer version that includes prehistoric movements, major discoveries, and less obnoxious music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6Wu0Q7x5D0>