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## MOTS Chapter 39: Differentiating Analysis and Unifying Synthesis

To continue, of these forces just mentioned,  
the second division, sameness, is of one quality,  
while for the first, the difficult, there is no end to its qualities;  
thus, these are of two kinds.

Free translation:

Moreover, of these two powers, ‘sameness’ is unitive, while ‘the other’ pertains to that which is never exhausted of its indistinctness and begs for clarification. They are of two separate kinds.

We’ve been delving into *sama* and *anya* for several chapters, so we’ve kind of gotten the gist by now. Narayana Guru acknowledges this with his opening “To continue,” and Nitya echoes him with “Our journey continues.” It’s a gentle reminder that we’ve been closely following Narayana Guru’s lead throughout, even though in the book it is not spelled out beyond the Foreword. For me, it adds an extra dimension to include the original verses from which Nitya is drawing his inspiration.

Since the reading was so short, Deb included a page of Zen koans, reproduced in Part II. It got her to musing that we forget that just thinking itself is a dual process, and on top of that quieting the mind is just another activity: the flip side of activating it. Any person who controls the mind and can make it work to their advantage is firmly within the world of acceptance and rejection. Narayana Guru is pointing to something mysterious that underlies all of that.

I concurred. It’s not that quieting the mind isn’t a good activity, but if we take it on as a necessary task of getting from poorer state to a better state, it agitates the mind into rampant dualism. It’s a classic paradox, in that even if the goal is desirable

that isn't how you go about it. We are meant to accept all aspects, before and after, better or worse, and so on, as the material we have to work with. By setting up spirituality as an ego attainment, we undermine its validity, setting the stage for conflict and endless wrangling about superiority. Truly unitive activities are not strenuous in that sense.

Paul spoke about how odd it is that our attachment or our identification with anya is so deep and natural that sama appears to be just another 'other' to us. That's why we think of unity as something existing beyond or outside of what we are. He ruefully quoted Rumi, though it was probably Tagore, who said, "It is very simple to be happy, but it is very difficult to be simple." That's a yogic koan if ever there was one. Bill thought it complemented the last two sentences of our text: "The unifying synthesis is hard to achieve. The differentiating analysis comes with a natural ease."

Deb felt that since we are incarnate beings, there isn't any way to be in a situation without projecting a dualistic perspective. Rather than get bummed out by this insurmountable barrier, Paul cheerfully added that it's really restful when projecting stops, since it requires so much energy to identify our values and then foist them onto the situation in order to control it.

Susan told us about her regular morning writing meditation, which has developed into a way to get in touch with her greater self with almost no effort. She tries not to force anything, but just starts putting pen to paper. At first what usually comes up are very ordinary ideas, like "I really don't know what to write," but soon it takes on a life of its own, and she has astonished herself with all that comes out of her mind. It has shown her how busy her mind is all day long, without her hardly realizing it. She finds it to be a grounding meditation—it seems to have shown her her own depth, where before she wasn't sure she was all there because she wasn't outwardly productive all the time. Quiet people are taught in myriad ways that only obvious things matter, and they don't tend to be very obvious.

In regard to being established in our greater Self, this meant to Jan that we may not be aware of it, but we don't need to be. Maybe it's even better if we aren't. Otherwise the ego will horn in on the flow and block the access.

Paul had an interesting reversal for us: it's the individual self that isn't attainable. The Self, sama, is ever-present, so it doesn't even need to be attained. It's the otherness that recedes indefinitely. There's always something bigger or better for us to want to be, so we can never fully arrive at it. Nice!

We mused together about how many great writers (and other artists) claim to draw inspiration from an unknown source, not even specified as being within or without. If you claim the source, it's likely to dry up, so you might as well attribute it to God or some other mystery. Author Kurt Vonnegut liked to say his ideas were beamed from a radio station in Chicago. Likewise, Deb remembered author Tom Robbins telling an audience a long story of exploring an underwater lake beneath Elvis Presley's mansion and finally coming upon a remote island containing a treasure chest full of stories. Whenever he's ready to write another book, he just goes down there, opens the chest, and pulls one out.

The trick is to not let the ego take credit for a process where it is only the final arbiter, but to see how actions, including thinking, well up from depths, which are fortunately beyond its reach: that way they arrive in a relatively pristine condition. Taking credit bruises the fruit, often badly enough to make it inedible.

An unconscious prejudice in favor of sameness over otherness set the tone for much of the class, as it almost always does. Narayana Guru's even-handed handling of an all-inclusive yoga is "elusively subtle indeed," as the Gita puts it (IV.17). I suppose it's due to the human proclivity to favor otherness at the expense of sameness that spiritual attitudes invoke the reverse. Yet a countervailing effort just keeps the wheel turning. Balance is quite important to achieve, yet it's perhaps a side issue that neutralizes aspects of otherness, but doesn't necessarily achieve

unitive harmony, which is a true synthesis, not an antithesis. The gurus cited in our discussion (Lao Tzu and Seng-ts'an, the 3rd Zen Patriarch, in addition to Nitya and Narayana Guru) all make a case for the integration of unity and duality, rather than trying to suppress one to reveal the other. Duality is *subsumed* in unity, rather than negated by it.

The implication of the verse text, and amplified in the Part II quotations, is that anything that has an opposite belongs to *anya* or otherness. If God symbolizes unity, then, there cannot be any not-God, and if you conceive of one, your God-concept is faulty. Similarly, if your idea of spirituality is dependent on certain set behaviors it is definitely limited.

This brings about the pesky paradox that doing and not-doing are both beside the point, which is baffling to a highly motivated species where doing is everything.

Despite this equanimity, the Gurukula premise is that effort is to be made. As the class conversation slipped toward inertia-laden fatalism, Jan eagerly read out her favorite sentence from the last chapter:

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. (133)

In other words, whenever we find ourselves obsessed with dual conditions, we need to remind ourselves—lead ourselves back—to an inclusive perspective. Only by making this a habit through repetition, or by rewiring our neurons in the modern parlance, will the ease of a well-established unitive vision abide with us. The adjustment is sabotaged if we try to push away the duality to attain unity, because it makes us focus more on the duality than the unity, short-circuiting the rewiring process. It actually strengthens the

posture we want to grow out of. This concept is contained in the Zen quote below, particularly in this koan:

when unity is not understood  
both activity and quietude are failures

This is easily read as activity and quietude are failures, but the true meaning is that they are no longer failures once unity is understood. From the unitive perspective, both activity and inactivity are sublimely successful. And under close examination there is a clear duality presented here too: unity is either understood or not understood, and the former works and the latter does not. As my dad used to say to me when he'd trip up my false sense of certainty: put *that* in your pipe and smoke it!

Fortunately Nitya mentions the gist specifically in his very brief commentary: "The only possible distinction of the Self from the other is that the Self has only one quality while the other has an infinite number of qualities." Since we so often make unitive claims for dualistic concepts, this is of prime importance to keep in mind. It's a usable measuring rod. Nitya's longer elucidation of it is also very helpful:

While it's easy to enumerate hundreds of differentiating factors to describe the other, it is next to impossible to figure out what the Self is. It has no name; it has no parentage; it has no physical form. Nobody knows its beginning or its end. The only possible distinction of the Self from the other is that the Self has only one quality while the other has an infinite number of qualities. We can put this in another way. While the Self is an integrated idea of nothing but a homogeneity of sameness, the other is an aggregate of heterogeneous qualities which can only be partially scanned or scaled.

The class's most interesting discussion was begun by Deb acknowledging that "we're the ones making the divisions and

adding the accents,” in other words, shaping our communication and perceptions to fit our conceptions. This is the world of the other that we inhabit so easily. She noted various familiar thoughts along the lines of: “I really know this person, since I have watched them as an other. I know what they like and what they do.” That means we make up our knowledge of a person based on their outer, anya qualities, so do we really know them? We think we do, and often are satisfied with only that much.

It was interesting to think of how we “know” our dear friends. To me, beyond (or despite) of all those visible qualities, an essential sama-person exists. Real friendship is attunement with that inner soul, and the outer qualities are secondary. Some of those we like and some we don’t, but we can still love the essential person. So out of that otherness emerges an intuition of essence, where our true kinship lies.

Bill still has a few friends he has had since childhood, and he feels he knows them on that kind of essential level. They obviously have been outwardly different all through their long acquaintance, but there is a persistent connection that holds up throughout. I suggested the best friendships include being in resonance with both the unique individuality and the oceanic sameness of a dear one.

Paul added a unique twist. He is grateful for the job he and I did as emergency responders, in part because in an emergency every front that people put up is temporarily inoperative. We very often met our clients as raw, unfiltered beings. Some of them tried to put on their respectable acts, but the threatening situations they were in made them irrelevant. We were called on not to restore their respectability but their lives. It was very direct activity, and we saw people in more authentic, albeit tragic, conditions.

In Nitya’s summing up, once again we meet with obduracy, that mulish resistance of reality to giving in to our misconceptions, including our highest ideals (*why can’t we squeeze truth into a box!*):

The unifying singular quality of the Self is called *sama*. The obduracy of the other, which abounds in a plethora of qualities and which cannot be fully understood in the sense in which we know the Self from within, is called *visama*.

One last insight here is that we will never fully understand the other, since *anya* is endless. The human race is determined to come to a final reckoning where everything is perfectly understood, not realizing it is a self-defeating, false premise. *Anya* is infinite. We will always strive to know more and do better, but if we could give up the pretense that there is a single, perfectly right solution to it all, we would likely get along much better with our fellow beings.

As we wound down toward the closing meditation, we lamented why our default setting is so often the divisive one, instead of the synthetic one. Talk about wiring! We are blowing gently on the side of a gigantic battleship that's been steaming ahead for many millions of years, hoping to get it to change course. Even if we blow harder, it's not going to be an easy task! However you conceive it, it's going to take plenty of effort. Not making an effort is not going to achieve any transformation. Nitya ultimately teases us with a perfectly simple summation:

The unifying synthesis is hard to achieve. The differentiating analysis comes with a natural ease.

Darn! Wouldn't it be nice if it was the other way around.

The good news is that due to our diligence over a long stretch of time, the harsh hardness of divvying everything up has lost its savor, and it is far easier to bring a synthetic understanding to bear on the challenges of living than it was before we started trying. I am always uplifted by the success stories I'm hearing, from good people all over the world, proving to me that it really does make a difference to bring unitive understanding to bear.

Because of the obduracy, though, I'm tempted to repurpose the greatest last line of any book, F. Scott Fitzgerald's close of *The*

*Great Gatsby*: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” For us it might read:

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly  
into duality.

Row on! Aum.

## Part II

Deb read out the first part of Johnny Stallings’ version of the Hsin Hsin Ming, by Seng-ts’an, 606 CE. The classic version was cited in the chapter 35 notes.

the great way is not difficult  
it has no preferences

when love and hate are absent  
all becomes clear

make the smallest distinction  
and heaven and earth are far apart

if you want to experience it  
don’t be for or against anything

conflict between liking and not liking  
is the disease of the mind

if its deep meaning is not understood  
we strive in vain to quiet the mind

it is perfect like vast space  
nothing lacking, nothing left over



accepting and rejecting  
we can't see the essence

don't get entangled in outer things  
or abide in inner emptiness

when the mind is still  
all views disappear

trying to quiet the mind  
is just more activity

caught in duality  
how can you know oneness?

when unity is not understood  
both activity and quietude are failures

\* \* \*

Deb thought the second verse of the Tao Te Ching bore a similarity to the Hsin Hsin Ming. Here are two versions.

Gia-Fu Feng:

Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness.

All can know good as good only because there is evil.

Therefore having and not having arise together.

Difficult and easy complement each other.

Long and short contrast each other;

High and low rest upon each other;

Voice and sound harmonize each other;

Front and back follow one another.

Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing, teaching no-talking.  
The ten thousand things rise and fall without cease,  
Creating, yet not possessing,  
Working, yet not taking credit.  
Work is done, then forgotten.  
Therefore it lasts forever.

Ursula Le Guin's strikes me as an especially unitive translation:

### Soul Food

Everybody on earth knowing  
that beauty is beautiful  
makes ugliness.

Everybody knowing  
that goodness is good  
makes wickedness.

For being and nonbeing  
arise together;  
hard and easy  
complete each other;  
long and short  
shape each other;  
high and low  
depend on each other;  
note and voice  
make the music together;  
before and after  
follow each other.

That's why the wise soul  
does without doing,

teaches without talking.

The things of this world  
exist, they are;  
you can't refuse them.

To bear and not to own;  
to act and not lay claim;  
to do the work and let it go:  
for just letting it go  
is what makes it stay.

### Part III

Immediately after writing the notes I went out to the hammock and started reading a birthday gift: Philip Pullman's *Daemon Voices: On Stories and Storytelling*; (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018). It added another voice to Vonnegut's and Robbins's mentioned in the class. Here's the part that most struck me, not just about how our inner genius serves up our creativity, but how to handle its delicacy. Pullman's advice about the writing process can easily be translated to other art forms, and even to daily life. Speaking of the author's responsibility to the story itself, he writes:

There's something fragile there, something fugitive, which shows itself only to us, because it trusts us to maintain it in this half-resolved, half-unformed condition without exposing it to the harsh light of someone else's scrutiny, because a stranger's gaze would either make it flee altogether or fix it for good in a state that might not be what it wanted to become.

So we have a protective responsibility: the role of a guardian, almost a parent. It feels as if the story... [is] just the most evanescent little wisp of a thing—as if it's come to us and knocked

at our door, or just been left on our doorstep. Of course we have to look after it. What else could we do?

What I seem to be saying here, rather against my will, is that stories come from somewhere else. It's hard to rationalise this, because I don't believe in somewhere else; there ain't no elsewhere, is what I believe. *Here* is all that is. It certainly *feels* as if the story comes to me, but perhaps it comes *from* me, from my unconscious mind—I just don't know; and it wouldn't make any difference to the responsibility either way. I still have to look after it. I still have to protect it from interference while it becomes sure of itself and settles on the form it wants.

Yes, *it* wants. It knows very firmly what it wants to be, even though it isn't very articulate yet. It'll go easily in *this* direction and very firmly resist going in *that*, but I won't know why; I just have to shrug and say, "OK, you're the boss." And this is the point where responsibility takes the form of service. Not servitude; not shameful toil mercilessly exacted; but service, freely and fairly entered into. This service is a voluntary and honourable thing: when I say I am the servant of the story, I say it with pride. (14-5)

But I haven't quite finished, because I don't want anyone to think that responsibility is all there is to it. It would be a burdensome life, if the only relation we had with our work was one of duty and care. The fact is that I love my work. There is no joy comparable to the thrill that accompanies a new idea, one that we know is full of promise and possibility—unless it's the joy that comes when, after a long period of reflection and bafflement, of frustration and difficulty, we suddenly see the way through to the solution.... (16)

Just to remind you, here is the section from Part I that resonates most with it:

We mused together about how many great writers (and other artists) claim to draw inspiration from an unknown source, not even specified as being within or without. If you claim the source,

it's likely to dry up, so you might as well attribute it to God or some other mystery. Author Kurt Vonnegut liked to say his ideas were beamed from a radio station in Chicago. Likewise, Deb remembered author Tom Robbins telling an audience a long story of exploring an underwater lake beneath Elvis Presley's mansion and finally coming upon a remote island containing a treasure chest full of stories. Whenever he's ready to write another book, he just goes down there, opens the chest, and pulls one out.

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