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MOTS Chapter 40: There are Shortcuts to Kicks but Not to Realization

In sameness and in the other each one's
qualifying force always comes and becomes established;
by the fluctuating function of these two,
which comprises all, everything becomes the object of awareness.

Free translation:

Their specific powers alternate between synthesis and analysis. Even though the contexts of operation are innumerable, the dual functions of the assumption of the agency of the subject and the knowledge of the object belong entirely to these two entities.

We shook off the cobwebs of two weeks off with a rather baffling verse much dependent on the previous several chapters of elucidation. To the class's credit, we quickly got back on track.

Nitya's path through the then-prevalent psychedelic explorations of his new friends in the West is also initially baffling, and you can sense his bemusement at their antics. Bill remembers him sarcastically calling us his marijuana boys and girls. He was challenged for several years by all our behaviors that were not endorsed in the traditional Indian attitude of self-restraint and utmost dignity. He was tolerant of us up to a point, but always stood for less demonstrative actions, at a time when anything-goes was the norm. If you read Part II of Love and Blessings, his diary of the first months of the Portland Gurukula, you can get a good sense of the cultural clash.

In any case, his example turns out to work well, once you adjust to the lurid side of it. A couple who none of us remembers (could he have meant Bill and Dana Kauffman, I wonder?) took LSD together and had a profound experience. It's not uncommon to get so far from the familiar that you can't imagine how you

would ever be the same again, but then the medicine wears off and you do come back to more or less where you left off. It's only natural to want to ask someone knowledgeable what it was all about. Nitya writes:

After a couple of days Bill and Diana regained normalcy and came to see me. They both were sad that the experience of being one with the indivisibility of cosmic consciousness was so short-lived, and they had to once again face the actualities of life as a wretched couple in the Oregonian society.

Many of us realized at that point we needed a guru to show us how to stay unified permanently, and that's exactly what led me to Nitya. I thought he would be impressed by the outcome of my tripping, but that was far from the case. He considered it essential to not ingest anything that tampered with the mind, beyond a bit of caffeine. I resisted at first, what with the drug culture at the cutting edge of positive change in America, but gradually came to love the steady state he helped me to locate. As I confessed to my Gita class just yesterday: "I'm glad I had a guru to kick my butt and help me get over my trivial amusements faster than I would have otherwise." I've tucked more about psychedelic guidance in Part II, along with a survey of the complexities of the experience.

Here Nitya compares the relatively tepid results of Bill and Diana with Ramana Maharshi's complete realization:

Once he came out of his absorption he attended to the needs of his body like any other normal man. There was one difference. The vision of oneness in which he was absorbed did not leave him to the very end of his life.

Although I'm no Ramana Maharshi (who is?), when I finally had the vision of oneness aided by LSD, it never left me, either. But I didn't have a proper framework to understand it, and Nitya gave me that. For plenty of people, oneness brought about a permanent

change for the better. For those with faulty framing, it could go the other way, surely.

Nitya ties it together with his last paragraph, giving the measuring rod for sama and anya: only things that last are absolute. If the experience comes and goes, it is not:

However vast are the fields of the cosmos and the worlds of the psyche, any experience of cosmologic or psychologic import can be seen as coming under the category of either sameness or the other. The sameness to which we are exposed in the state of deep sleep, or under the effect of psychedelic drugs, or yogic trances is transient. Only Realization stabilizes the perennial vision of sameness in spite of the ever-changing pattern of the other that frequents the mind.

Nitya was well aware that “The wisdom of immortality is interlaced with the nescience of mortality,” as he puts it in his Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary. But adding that wisdom back in to a desolate lifestyle is crucial: ordinary life (and even most spiritual life) is grounded exclusively on the nescience of mortality. Nitya’s next two sentences after the interlacing are “Ritualistic performances of sacrifices are prompted by nescience: thinking that one can thereby acquire material wealth and extend the term of life in the physical body. People waste so much effort because of these suppositions.” (Vol.II.339.) *Theories* of immortality are mortal. You have to experience it, know it, and feel it, which is what *saccidananda* means. Even if you’ve only had that experience of permanence for a flash, it readily interlaces with the deadly mundane, bringing it to life.

Deb opened the discussion reminiscing about a time we all visited the Center Family. Nitya was addressing us all sitting together on top of a hill amid a group of trees. He asked us to think of sensual pleasures and how long they last, and then think of sitting on this hill for a hundred years and feeling the breeze. Then

we should think of the difference between these two. For Deb, that's what he is getting at here: insight and steadiness.

Although we try to go light with the praise of our teacher, this seemed a moment it was okay. When you were with him it was easy to call up that sense of eternity. He was like an electric dynamo, drawing us into a centered, blissful state without any seeming effort on our part. He did it gently and sweetly but it was at the same time very intense. He certainly didn't want to attend to any trivialities.

Deb noted that one thing she especially appreciated about Narayana Guru and Ramana Maharshi was that however renounced and focused they were, they always took care of the daily necessities and the interactions with people. It taught her that we don't come to realization by pushing that aspect of life away, it's an integral part of our realization.

I agreed. Realization isn't sama in the absence of any, they are one thing we're seeing in two ways: life being taken from no perspective and every perspective, usually in alternation but ideally simultaneously. This implies all you need to do to restore the absolute factor within is to momentarily suspend your perspectives.

In a way, that's what happens on a good psychedelic or yogic experience: your perspectives are broken open, releasing a unitive vision. Bill and Diana became literally invisible on their trip, just like Ram Das on his well-known one. He recalls how one by one all his personas came up to him as seemingly real people, but then disintegrated before his eyes. He would say, I can live without that; I don't have to be that one; that isn't the real me. All the while he was thinking, "thank god I have a body," but after all his personas disappeared he looked down and he didn't have a body, either. Then he finally knew he wasn't just a physical being, he was an eternal essence, and his heart soared.

Opening up became the thread of the class, and a most worthy one. Susan saw a reflection of it in her and her brother's difficulty in recognizing faces. Everyone is sure you will recognize

them, but if you don't it can really shake them up. Her brother once didn't recognize his old girlfriend when she visited him as a "surprise," but the surprise was on her. She was so angry that he didn't know who she was from her looks that she never spoke to him again.

Really, our whole species is obsessed with the solidity of fragile mental constructs—I believe this is called maya in some circles—and it is driving us collectively mad at the moment. Prabu told us about how recently some scholars in India had proposed that Vishnu was very similar to a certain Jain god, and since Jains, Hindus and Buddhists are actually very closely related, perhaps he was derived from it, or the other way around. Both have the boar as their vehicle, for instance. It looks rather obvious from a distance, but in the present climate the scholars were inundated with hate mail, and probably death threats. People can't admit that their ideas are just that: ideas. They have to pretend they are real and actually exist somewhere, god nose where (pun intended).

What the gurus are actually proposing here is that we might realize there is no solidity, that we are going on hypotheses, and that's okay. If we just knew that much we wouldn't feel divinely commanded to kill each other and destroy the earth in the bargain. We could be amused at the fictions our fellow humans believe, instead of furious.

Paul put it really well. He caught on to this concept living with his grandfather, who sometimes saw things that weren't there, particularly spiders. As a child, Paul learned to be honest and tell the truth, and his grandfather, who knew he hallucinated, would abide by Paul's observation. He placed his trust in Paul, because Paul didn't make fun of him the way others did. It made Paul realize how much we depend on and idolize memories, because they help us function, have friends, do jobs, and all the rest. The problem is, if we depend on them as our exclusive ruler, it inhibits us from seeing the true connections between things. He concluded by asserting you can't become what you already are, and I added,

you don't have to, because you already are you. Just stop trying to be an imaginary person and let yourself be.

The thing is, we're nervous that we don't actually exist unless we can make something tangible happen. I again gave my favorite example of people who talk continuously just to assure themselves they exist. Existence by itself is so subtle we don't notice it, so we come to believe we have to make it tangible all the time. That can easily turn into bad habits that keep us very much stuck. If droning on isn't our thing, we may have other reassurances we rely on, like "I am this body," or "I am this person." I have never forgotten the first meditation we did with Nitya in 1970, affirming "I am not the body," while physically going through the Gayatri Mantra. It really did shatter a number of inane assumptions, and was mindblowing.

The idea is if we could stop worrying that we had to prove that we existed we would find out what our existence really was. We need to stop defining ourself by what people think of us or even by what we think of ourself. Deb added that we often do extreme and dangerous things just to "prove ourselves." In mind of this, Bill reread the assertion of the text, "Only Realization stabilizes the perennial vision of sameness in spite of the ever-changing pattern of the other that frequents the mind." Empty chatter or thought streams don't do it. Sensory stimulation doesn't do it. Fluctuating patterns can never accurately represent the Unchanging.

Prabu read out an apt excerpt from Walt Whitman's Song of Myself:

I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content.

One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself,
And whether I come to my own to-day or in ten thousand or ten million years,

I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait.

Whitman just turned 200 this year, on May 31, so he show know.

This strand led to the most important insights of the evening, that by admitting we don't know everything, we open our hearts to tolerance and amity, including toward ourselves. I had been reading *A Story Like the Wind*, by Laurens van der Post, and I've quoted some of it in Part II, about how adults pretend to know everything and children are expected to know nothing, so their meaningful participation is not invited to the table. European colonists treated Africans like children, and van der Post ponders what they lost by not letting those deeply wise people give anything back to them. Everybody who is stuck in their cultural background totally misses those opportunities for enrichment, so we should not be afraid of letting our favored things go and allowing other perspectives in. We don't have to know everything, and believing we do perverts us for our whole life.

Paul lamented that he's spent 60 years learning from others through books and classes, yet he's at the state where he finally understands that he knows nothing. All of our experience that we call knowledge is kind of an illusion. He has found it's easier to give himself up to the greater awareness if he can let go of his insecurities.

Deb spoke of being aware there is a bigger sphere than the little packet of knowledge we hold. She remembered sitting outside a class in college and realizing "I know a lot but I don't understand a single thing." Accepting this, she is now busily listening and learning from every situation.

Love and Blessings is packed with stories of Nitya getting accustomed to a situation and then Nataraja Guru coming along and smashing it to pieces. Nataraja is an aspect of Shiva, the destroyer aspect of reality, while Brahma is the creator. I cited the famous rueful words of Nitya about his guru I'm sure you all remember:

Wherever I proved to be successful or was becoming admired, he had a knack for sabotaging the situation. Once I asked him why he was doing this, and he told me his name was Natarajan and he was only doing his duty, adding “If Shiva doesn’t demolish, Brahma won’t get a chance to create again.” I have to admit that whenever he intervened to get me to terminate a program it always led to another program of greater spiritual value.

So break your mind open. There are so many ways to do it, and talking about it in class helps support and refine the process. Among other things, it shows us how to live together. Deb quoted Nitya that you are a myth and I am a myth. So why do we need to kill each other? I wondered why it is so hard to let go of even the most idiotic beliefs, like Vishnu came before the Jain god, or Trump is the second coming of Christ at last. Come on! Do you even need a guru to show you how ridiculous such claims are? Not to mention unimportant? By accepting our emptiness we access true truth, the harmony that is fully independent of items of knowledge: sama.

Part II

I’m just rereading *A Story Like the Wind*, by Laurens van der Post, recounting the amazing wisdom of old Africa, and yesterday’s reading was perfectly synchronous with the class. The seventh chapter begins with a long meditation on how children and “the childlike people of Africa,” in the European prejudice, are considered unworthy of contributing anything to the fixed European attitudes, which 100 years ago were much more oppressive even than they are now. Adults like to pretend they *know*, and that knowing leads to the greatest of human tragedies. Van der Post suspects for the Europeans this is “a form of overcompensation for their unawareness of some vital element in themselves.” Here’re a couple of excerpts. The book is hitting me

this time as a masterpiece I didn't adequately appreciate in my former readings.

Francois, a 13-year-old boy, is the narrator:

“Had [his parents] ever really matched their longing to give with an equal longing to receive? Did they ever allow the people of Africa to give them what they could give only in their own unique way?” The questions moved like an unseen magnet below the surface of his feelings, and conditioned in a certain pattern hitherto unrelated fragments of experience. The pattern was all the more telling because had he not himself experienced the agony of always being at the receiving end and so rarely at the point where one was allowed to give something of oneself? This was perhaps one of the greatest burdens of being young; one was always expected to take, and so rarely thought to be in a position of ever wanting and needing to give as well. And what one had to give, even when accepted, once measured in the scales of deliberate values of the grown-up world, appeared trivial.

Was one not forced into the position a mature philosopher would have found hard to sustain; to give to persons like one's parents only by offering oneself to them as a living receptacle for receiving everything they thought desirable to give from a lofty grown-up height?.... The fact remained that much of what passed for education in the European world of Africa was a painful process of being extracted like an impacted wisdom tooth from the immense world of antiquity to which the young naturally belong—an extraction so complete that finally all contact with one's aboriginal self was lost and the instincts through which it had been maintained were totally discredited.

As a result one came to adolescence stripped of one's natural armament, if not utterly naked and ashamed, as if to a second birth, a purely private and personal birth into the contemporary world.

The immediate effect of this tragedy on his feelings was to start a change in his attitude of relative indifference to the European world of Africa into one of aggressive antagonism.

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One common misconception is that LSD magically produces the mystical experience every time out. Hardly. I enjoyed it sporadically for two years before my breakthrough experience, which was a quantum leap over its predecessors. Partly this was due to the lack of guidance, which definitely moves up the timeline and even can produce spectacular results a single episode. When it happened for me, I was being “guided” by the Beatles, whose music was “designed with your mind in mind,” as the Firesign Theater put it. The time was also rife with mystical speculations, which played their part as well.

The spectrum of benefits described below was already noted in the early Sixties in scientific circles. I’ve shared this astute analysis before, but its time has come round again in our class:

Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987)

Speaking of the LSD research at Myron Stolaroff’s International Foundation for Advanced Study, Stevens writes:

The Foundation was not reticent about the data it was seeing. Seventy-eight percent of its patients claimed an increased ability to love; 69 percent felt they could handle hostility better, with an equal percentage believing that their ability to communicate with and understand others had improved; 71 percent claimed an increase in self-esteem, and 83 percent returned from the Other World with the conviction that they had brushed against “a higher power, or ultimate reality.”

Robert Mogar, the Foundation's expert in such diagnostic tools as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, had never seen anything that could produce the kind of dramatic changes that LSD routinely produced. (178)

The Foundation's theoretical Manifesto—*The Psychedelic Experience: A New Concept in Psychotherapy*—was submitted for publication in late 1961. In it, the psychedelic experience was broken into three broad stages: (1) evasive maneuvers, (2) symbolic perception, and (3) immediate perception.

The evasive stage, according to the authors, was what earlier therapists had confused with schizophrenia, leading to LSD's misclassification as a psychotomimetic. What happened was this: the drug, by its very nature, released such a flood of new thoughts and perceptions that the patient's normal conceptual framework was overwhelmed, producing a panic condition with overtones of paranoia. But with skillful manipulation of set and setting, the therapist could guide the patient smoothly through the evasive stage to the point where the overly famous hallucinations began. These shifting geometrical patterns were a last gasp of the ego which, "having lost the battle to divert attention through unpleasantness, seeks to charm and distract the conscious mind by throwing up a smokescreen of hallucinations to hide the inner knowledge which it fears."

Actually, the hallucinatory level was a preparation for the realm of symbolic perception, which was where the psycholyticists spent most of their time, deciphering the curious symbolic patois: "The subject constantly works off repressed material and unreality structures, false concepts, ideas, and attitudes, which have been accumulated through his life experiences. Thus a form of psychological cleansing seems to accompany the subjective imagery. This results in considerable ventilation and release almost independent of intellectual clarification. Gradually the subject comes to see and accept himself, not as an individual with 'good' and 'bad' characteristics, but as one who simply is."

But there was also a higher level still. Past the symbolic stage was a land of no boundaries:

The central perception, apparently of all who penetrate deeply in their explorations, is that behind the apparent multiplicity of things in the world of science and common sense there is a single reality, in speaking of which it seems appropriate to use such words as *infinite* and *eternal*.

As Abram Hoffer had told the last Macy Conference, if you could lead a patient to this point, then nine times out of ten a cure would miraculously occur. Why this happened was not easily explained in psychological terms (as Leary had realized when he decided to opt for the rhetoric of applied mysticism). But it seemed to be something like this: overwhelmed by the realization that one was an “imperishable self rather than a destructible ego,” the patient underwent a kind of psychic expansion, in which “the many conflicts which are rooted in lack of self acceptance are cut off at the source, and the associated neurotic behavior patterns begin to die away.” As the self expanded, it burst the webbing of unhappy relationships that had tethered it to the ground. (179-180)

[The included quotes are taken from the *Journal of Neuropsychiatry*, Nov-Dec, 1962]

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Here's the excerpt from That Alone about spittle bugs:

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. (197)

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Bill mentioned the email I sent out for the class invitation when I was having my brain infection. It's rather amusing in retrospect, so here it is:

Here going to trute form Wednesday. Scott has lost kind brain, unfastunibluy, but Debby han histkend. Hus as bruge to Tuesday beck buck, and then we'll have a brake. Sorry.

(When I had my brain abscess in February 2010, this was the best I could do to send out the class invitation for the next Tuesday. I had been told there was nothing wrong with me, so was trying to carry on as usual despite my suspicions. I remember copying Wednesday and maybe Tuesday from former documents, as I struggled to spell all the words I knew were incorrect. Happily this was the tipoff to get me to care no matter what obstacles the hospital put up.)