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## MOTS Chapter 42

### Meditating on the Awareness of Awareness

“This is knowledge”; in that, what comes first, “this,” is sameness; its qualifying predicate is awareness; for intellect and all such to vanish, and for the true path to come, this should be meditated on.

Free translation:

When one says, “This is knowledge,” what comes first as ‘this’ is the unifying sameness; its distinguishing attribute is ‘awareness’. For all mentations like discursive cogitation to cease, and to gain the path of liberation, one should contemplate on ‘this’, which inheres in the universal identity.

Chapter 42 brings us to the end of the deeply incisive section on *sama* and *anya*—the one and the many, or sameness and otherness—preparing the way for a profound view of human relations in 43-50. Narayana Guru makes it clear that, while we may have no idea what *sama* means, we all refer continuously to “this,” and it amounts to the same thing. So all people have a working knowledge of *sama*, (as well as an intuitive one), though the specific term only matters to intentional seekers of truth.

In our meditations we focused on this This, and we could watch how our minds kept adding predications to the unformed emptiness it stands for. The idea of the meditations was to stop appending limiting concepts onto This, but it is such an engrained habit that even for practiced meditators it is not easy to interrupt the unending chain of associations. For instance, as a class guide I often begin to speculate on what I should say next. Ideas arise and I evaluate them for relevance. Almost instantly the openness takes shape. If I stop myself, it won’t be long before some random memory catches my attention, or another “good idea.” As I let it

go, I get a glimpse of how my mind keeps striving to fill the emptiness with something. Anything. It's not easy to take a vacation from this process, as it's built into the system from the very beginning. It goes along with the process of language acquisition.

Deb started us off with a poem she wrote she felt is in tune with freeing ourselves from predication. Here it is:

### Shards of Light

If this were the beginning  
of a new poem  
she would call what she felt inside  
the silence of snow.  
Memories of straight, shadowed trees,  
flakes falling hour after hour  
in the northern night.  
She walks to the edge of the lake,  
under the snow wordless cracks in the ice,  
under the ice, cold currents,  
the world a well,  
the moment before.  
Silence seeps from the weighted branches  
into her ears and eyes, her shoulders.  
Silence fills her mouth.

She turns  
to the over-hanging night,  
the open sky  
filled with shards of light,  
those long ago stars,  
their stories unraveling to her,  
their faint music  
becoming stronger,  
words and dreams, all drifting,

streaming down  
in dark currents, sparks  
and the voiceless song.

Poems are meant to speak to us prior to interpretation, at least initially. Prophecy, “forth-speaking,” is similar: a pure creation that is later limited by its interpretation but can also be treated as spontaneous to help free the mind. Pure art has the same aim. But then we are eternally compelled to predicate. The author of this wonderful poem added a worthy footnote: the ‘this’ of our study is the well that is present before anything is said and before there is a thought. It’s “the moment before.” We are being reminded to keep our foot or hand in that well and allow its sama, its sameness, to permeate us.

‘This’ is the same as That Alone, Karu, Hiranyagarbha, Absolute, Mother Nature, and so on. The Guru wants us to see how close it is to us: all those terms sound far away, but ‘this’ is right here, right inside our mental framing. Predications distance us in a sense from the subjects they predicate, so ‘this’ is one way to reduce that illusion. Our minds just keep trying to insert predicates, keep trying to supply programs, in a continuing effort to identify the ‘this’. You are invited to do your best to stop letting it run away from you. Let it be an undefined This. Nitya’s preferred meditation was simply to try not to do anything, including the trying part. Delete the goal and the means to attain it; delete linking associations; sink into the well. When in the well, don’t become a croaking frog, chanting away endlessly at some “spiritual” program. That’s another kind of predication.

Bill noted how this captures the essence of meditation, and how you can’t get to it by the intellect. I added that the intellect has a valid status in Vedanta, and Buddha is named for the word for it, *buddhi*. The free translation clarifies the real culprit: discursive cogitations, meaning the narrative compulsion. This is the mind functioning, which is distinguished from intellect. We may also place the intellect on hold in our meditations, but it is what brings

us to the well to begin with. Without we wouldn't stick our foot in. We wouldn't even know it was there.

Bill reiterated Nitya's conclusion that if we intensely desire to get at the core of truth, we have to turn to the universal without the intercession of words or thoughts. Deb didn't want us to think in terms of taboos, though, as if we had to shut something out in order to sneak into that silence. This wisdom is being offered to us with enormous generosity. We are being welcomed into a radiant place of beauty and amity, if we'll only let go of our reluctance to participate. It's a lovely and important point. Too much of spirituality has a negative cast, which is not necessarily in the preceptors' intent. They are motivated by immense caring.

Along those lines Jan affirmed it's bigger than our words. Indefinable. In trying to let go of our thoughts, being present with that core of truth is so much more amazing, we're drawn to it naturally. We don't have to shut down as much as open up.

Andy came to the class for the first time since his beloved wife Bushra died, and told us about speaking with her therapist since her passing. Andy mentioned she was spoiled in a sense by coming from wealthy family, but the therapist contradicted him. She was rich, he said. Rich, not spoiled. And Andy realized how she was truly rich in always being generous, always caring for others and prodding them to do their best. It was lovely to think of being rich as a positive quality, unlike so many examples in the headlines these days. Andy thought that every moment can be rich if it's not limited by our small-minded stories.

I reprised a favorite memory from Nitya's first class in Portland in 1970, about real richness and real poverty. It's a good one, and it's on the old website [here](#). I had surely seen how so many people loved Bushra because of her generous version of being rich in that way.

As Bill had mentioned, Nitya warns us that leaving words behind is also to leave our comfort zone, adding to the challenge:

Mind, which is conditioned to walk on the crutches of words, may find it most uncomfortable to leave the world of the predicables. Yet if we intensely desire to get at the very core of Truth, there is no other way than turning to the universal “This” and meditating on it without the intercession of words or thoughts.

We talked in the last class about how eagerly a parent instills language associations in their infant, and how exciting it is when they begin to emerge from their silent observations and begin to talk back. We heap on the praise, and boast to everyone who drops by. That evident delight and support firmly ground a person in language, and without it a person may remain a misfit with poor communication skills throughout their life. It’s tremendously valuable! But that’s also why later on we so seldom are able to let go of it to reclaim the more elemental aspect of our being. Most people don’t even suspect there’s a good reason to peek between the lines of words to see what else is going on.

Nitya’s paragraph on the process is well worth reprising:

Language is the medium of semantic commerce in which we use words and names as tokens of currency to purchase and sell ideas. In other words, token sounds are used to indicate our mental images of perceptions and conceptions. When we say “this is a pot,” “pot” is a sound token which we use by universal consent in the world of the English language to indicate an object with a specific form and a specific use-value. The pot as a verbal abstraction has no actuality. It is as fictitious as a dollar bill or a rupee note. With a dollar bill we can procure a certain fixed quantity of food or cosmetics or anything that is arbitrarily valued in that currency. By constantly exchanging commodities for currency bills, we are led to forget the fictitious character of the paper currency. This is equally or more true in the mistaken identity of a name or a word in relation to the actual thing for which it is used as a

token. Our surface mind is cluttered with hundreds and thousands of such word fixations. Like a beetle living within its exoskeleton, we are squeezed within the shell of a seamless verbal system.

Part of the allure of psychedelic therapy is that the verbal tagging is suspended and the voyager once again sees objects in an elemental form, without the kind of identification they normally are laden with. The vast miracle of even a scrap of paper is revealed. When vision is unclouded by word-association, an incredible beauty and endless profundity is seen in all things. Naming may well be suspended for a time.

In the unpsychedelic class context, Nitya shows us the stages of attaining a similar state through deconstruction. By examining the process as it takes place in us, we can work our way down to the universal ground, the sama. Here's how he describes it:

What is most clear to our mind is the meaning of a token word when it is employed to refer to an object that we directly perceive. Words become less and less clear as we go from the objective structure to the thought structure and the thought structure to the meaning structure and from the meaning structure to a fundamental value.

I quizzed the class on what Nitya means by a fundamental value, coming as it does at the end of the analysis. I admit it was a tough question. It's hard enough to go from the object we observe and speak of, to see the thought process behind it, and then see how the thoughts are shaped by the meaning value you attach to your concepts. Much of meditation and therapy stops there. But the gurus want us to penetrate deeper still, to a universal ground shorn of its names. We call it the Absolute, God, Nature, Matter, Substance, and so on, but the names are again fictitious token sounds that by no means are the same as what we are trying to indicate. I think it's very significant that Nitya did not specify what

he meant, either. He left it hanging in the air, so we might wonder, what is a fundamental value? What's beyond conceptualization? If we supply a favorite term, the search is terminated. We are content with the term, even though we have little enough idea what it is predicating, what it indicates.

Deb suggested the term 'love' is a fundamental value, and it's a decent one in our context as caring beings. It both limits the search and gives us confidence that what we're seeking is worthwhile and good. It's fundamental all right. She thought love was as general a term as you can get while still having defined thoughts: love is a kind of visualization or experience that bypasses the individual.

Deb also talked about how when you're in a country where you don't know the language, you can still understand people. There is something deeper than the words that gets communicated nonverbally. I added that that something is the core, and we all share it. We don't even know we're taking it for granted, as it's the water we're swimming in, but it connects us nonetheless.

This led Deb to muse that at some point in our search our words and our intellect can't go any further. She remembered Nitya describing it as being like standing outside a sealed black box in supplication. We can't pry it open with words. We don't even know how to get into it. But we honor it and supplicate its indulgence, and sometimes it lets us in, in ways we can't anticipate.

The carefully detailed process Nitya describes is meant to extricate us from conditioned states. Our semantic certitudes are fictitious at their core, mere tokens, stand-ins. But we fully believe in them and rely on them. Yet if we could suspend our dependence on them, couldn't we live a freer life? Susan has been pondering that recently, because she had the insight that her framing based on her family history was pinching her and stifling her own needs and feelings. She has a tremendous sense of dedication to what her family bequeathed her, and that keeps her from allowing herself to go outside the boundaries they set up for her when she was a little

girl. Lately she keeps wondering how to get more distance on her family of origin, most of whom are not even alive but whose influence still dominates her daily life. She never broke from her family as a teenager as many people do, which makes the connection seem even more solid. Teenage rebellion, while unsettling, is an undirected version of affirming the Self in one's life. Too bad it's prohibited territory, but it's a type of search for truth. I believe strong parents should encourage it instead of sabotaging it, painful as it is.

Family beliefs are everyone's burden, but few realize how strong are the bars of the cage they're in. Obviously, the Gurukula philosophy is designed to foster that kind of breakthrough.

Prabu talked about how the men in the prison where Deb works and he attends some, where Bushra was also a beloved moderator, are in many ways freer in their minds than people on the outside. They love their brief hours of sincere communication every week, and use them to the best of their ability. They talk about things that really matter, and admit their shortcomings. It has allowed them to really love one another, to bring a measure of life into that lifeless place. At least the ones in the program don't see the point in pretending to be what they aren't, when they know they have lost themselves already and just want to recover what they can.

Deb agreed, and added a lovely thing she recently read in a book by WS Merwin, about when he was living in SW France after WWII. One of the older residents told him about how before the war all the farmers would work together, and they would all sing songs as they worked. After the war that no longer happened.

Prabu recalled that in his community in Tamil Nadu people often gathered for serious conversations about books (there was a book group theme for the evening), and in gaps of the conversation they would all sing together. Above all it was important to be together. They also had community folk songs for planting the rice paddies and for harvesting. People might be working in different fields, but they would still sing together.



The implied point was that sense of community is close to the *karu* in some ways. The feeling of belonging to each other transcends individual isolation, and is important to human well being. It surely fosters caring for others. Jan thought singing was a great way to build a nonverbal sense of togetherness. No one said it out loud, but chanting together briefly, as we do in the class, and simply conversing in a unified discussion, can also nudge participants toward their communal center. We then paused to admire a beautiful sunset of bright orange and pink clouds swirling through a dark blue sky, another way to be inspired together.

Andy told us about vendors in Teotihuacan, Mexico, who peddle black obsidian discs for meditation. One of the Aztec gods has a foot made out of obsidian. Andy thought it represented a kind of negative force, going beyond the limit of the subject-object relationship, to be looking at something formless, indescribable. There were no words for it.

The overarching problem is that it turns out consciousness is *anya—other—*by its very nature. So how do we consciously turn off consciousness? Well, how else would we do it? And, oddly, it can be done. It helps to know the typical pitfalls that humans regularly encounter, but flailing may be as good a technique as any, and better than most.

Since we're bound to clarify in the end, and this is the end, Narayana Guru discovered the Absolute was the subject, while This, and our whole being—perhaps all existence—is the predication of that Source. Nitya concludes:

Narayana Guru refers to “this” as the unifying notion—*sama*. Consciousness itself is to be treated in this case as the predicate or the predicable quality of the all-inhering “thisness.”

A Westerner might prefer to call it matter over consciousness, but a predication is a predication. We need our consciousness as much as we need our matter and energy. It's just that the one should be

as infinite and all-pervasive as the other. It is, but we need know it is and act like it is. If so, our bondage will be less.

## Part II

It continues to amaze us how *Meditations on the Self* bears such a close relationship to the parts of Nitya's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary that Nancy Y's study group is reading simultaneously. As I go through the Upanishad I am digitizing excerpts as collected highlights. Volume I is already posted on Nitya's [website](#). We're now in the famous section where King Janaka asks Yajnavalkya what serves as light for a person. The answer is a series starting with the sun. When there is no sun, we have the moon. When that sets, we have fire. If there is no fire, we sit in the dark, but our speech brings the light. Finally, if we sit in the dark in silence, the light comes only from the Self—the inner light. Narayana Guru gave a “thought experiment” of sitting in lightless silence to reveal the Self in *Atmopadesa Satakam*. Here are some of the highlights from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary that bear on today's chapter, all from Volume II:

It is essential to keep our communication lines open all the time. Without communication, our existence cannot continue, our knowledge cannot be increased, our happiness cannot be perfected. We need instruction to know clearly who we are, whence this world, and more precisely about relationship and values. Relationships are elaborated when you are at a crossroads.... The word is the magical formula by which your being gets into continuous relationship with the scheme of your becoming and the actualization of that scheme from moment to moment. (390)

Only contemplative observation of a deep and continuous nature can unravel the paradoxical situation of pure spirit seeping into the inertia of physical matter and the physical matter becoming a fit medium for spirit to articulate. (393)

When the throb of semiosis becomes stilled and ideas do not flow into word images, both thinking and communicative articulation become silent. In a similar way, all the sensory functions can also go into oblivion. It is like the personal aspect of the individuated self ceases to function. Only for the short span of time that the physiological, neurological and psychological apparatus of the individuated person is not exposed to the awareness of subjective-objective interaction is the spirit of the individuated self experienced. (393-4)

A deeper strata or basis of pure consciousness is to be assumed which makes it possible for the individuated consciousness to function relatively independently of the psychophysical matrix to which each person is held organically intact. (394)

When the phenomenal world, having a plurality of names, forms and functional activities, is to be causally related to the one undifferentiated self, a critic may consider it a faulty vision and conceive of the implied logic as being eclectic and heterogeneous. [Yet] it is certainly necessary to relate all parts of the whole to an immanent homogeneity. (395)

At the peak of Self-realization, the central truth does not stand out as an objective counterpart of the Self. Instead, it is like a diffused light merging into the totality or a dewdrop dissolving in the infinitude of a fathomless ocean. (395)

In the ultimate analysis there is only knowledge. In the life of human beings knowledge comes simultaneously as a functional impression and a functional expression. Through our long familiarity with academic literature and verbal teaching given to us by professional teachers, we have come to make a dichotomy of knowledge and action. Further, the various spiritual programs associated with the search for the Self, listening to the description

of the Self, and pondering on the Self, are all done in a contemplative setting where the body is kept as still as possible and the mind is withdrawn from the imperative necessities of biological, biophysical and psychological incidents. As a result, we have generated a rather unreal picture of the Self.... Academic philosophy can at best give us only an image of the Self, which can be cleverly clothed in many aphoristic definitions and their elucidation. (395-6)

It is absolutely necessary to understand the Self as a process of becoming within the framework of being. (398)

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Moni was reminded of a section of the Gita, in chapter II, where Krishna begins nudging Arjuna toward a balanced state of mind. Narayana Guru's "This" is the same Absolute as Krishna's "This" here. This This is the same as That or That Alone, only it makes it more present—That is far; This is near:

22) As a man casting off his worn-out garments assumes others that are new, likewise casting off bodies that are worn-out, the embodied One takes to others that are new.

23) Weapons do not cut This, fire does not burn This, and water does not wet This; wind does not dry This.

24) Indeed it is uncleavable; It is non-inflammable; It is unwettable and non-dryable also—everlasting, all-pervading, stable, immobile; It is eternal.

25) It is undefined, unthinkable is It, as non-subject to change is It spoken of: therefore, knowing It as such, there is no reason for you to feel sorry for It.

26) Or again if you should hold This to be constantly ever-born or as constantly ever-dying, even then you have no reason to regret it.

27) In respect of anyone born, death is certain, and certain is birth for anyone dead; therefore, regarding something inevitable, you have no reason to feel any regret.