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MOTS Chapter 48 Notes

You Think You Do Not Know When You Know You Do Know

The self encased in a body, in his eidetic consciousness, understands all such as, “That is mine” and “This is mine” bereft of body identity; on considering this it is evident that everyone has truly experienced.

Free translation:

In spite of being identified with their own body, people do think of other people and things as their own and say, “This is mine,” or “That is mine.” On considering this, it is evident that everyone has some experience of the oneness of the Self.

A frequent visitor to the Northwest, Howard joined us in the class for the first time ever, even though he met Nitya almost as long ago as we did, in the early 1970s, and he has studied That Alone online with Nancy and is currently enrolled in her Patanjali class. It made for an especially happy evening.

We also had the honor of the “young American girl” of the story reading it out to us in person. The opening references the round the world trip Nitya made with Deb and Jean Pierre in 1971:

During the past three years I was living most of the time in English-speaking countries. It never occurred to me even once that I was in a foreign place or that I was communicating with foreigners. When I returned to India from the United States, I had with me a young American girl and a young Belgian gentleman.

The plot intermixes foreign and domestic perceptions to erase their potential for prejudice. While visiting the Golden Temple on that trip, one of India's most famous sites, Nitya was struck by the flexible nature of those ideas:

The situation was very paradoxical. I stood with my friends, who were not my countrymen, and with my countrymen, who were not my friends. In one respect I owned both, and in another I didn't own either of them.

Author Kurt Vonnegut coined a term for associations that people make much of but that are essentially meaningless: 'granfalloon'. It underscores that our identities with abstractions like nation, race, religion, gender and so on are innately meaningless from a cosmic perspective, but obviously the arbitrary meanings we lend them in deluded states can cause all manner of mayhem. In verse 48 of Atmopadesa Satakam, Narayana Guru uses our attraction to them not as expected to downplay them, but as evidence we have already begun to identify with greater realities than our mere self, and calls this the beginning of realization. It's a nice twist, as well as an invitation to learn to identify more broadly with everyone and everything. We have already begun the journey.

There is a natural development involved in realization. It isn't always an aha! moment that converts us instantly from ego-based selfishness to universally aware hipness. That happens in rare instances, but the Guru wants us to think of our expanding inclusiveness as truly spiritual growth. And if we don't begin the process on a solid footing, it isn't going to get very far, leading Nitya to say:

Identity with a thing or person is established on the basis of existential factors to which a person is related organically, circumstantially, or through common interests.

In other words, we begin with what's right around us, what we can accept, what our contacts are. Implicit in this is that if we have a loving, supportive environment, in our childhood especially, that is the ground we will be expanding out from. If we have inconsistent support in infancy, trust develops poorly or not at all, and we will not be capable of much expansion in later life without a dedicated effort. Most of our relationships and fictional affinities will be related back to an emptiness that cries out for love in so many ineffective or poisonous ways.

This lac of innate trust is the arena where what looks at first glance like a simple proposition promising only gain, breaks down into misunderstandings and hostilities. We don't get what we want because we don't realize what it really is and have no idea how to go about it. We imagine what's available out there will compensate for what's missing in here. Much spiritual advice is cloaked in obscure terminology, while political directives appear clear and direct but are secretly manipulative. The result is what we can observe all around us: the collapse of civilized discourse and a rush to fear and conflict.

Nitya wanted very badly to teach humans that we can make or preserve our world as a paradise as easily as we can make it a hell world. The place to practice is in any available human relationship, or really any relationship that takes us out of our limited self:

A trans-physical identity projected onto another person or thing as an intrinsic part of one's own ego and value adherence is not different from one's functioning as the operational self of the other person or body, which is something like a transmigration of one's own self into the other.

We learn so much from doing this! The horror movies depict it as a one way thrust where an inimical person takes over an innocent one, but in real life the other person is already occupying their self, so we have to accommodate them. It's a two-way exchange of care. In the process we learn what works and what doesn't. Success isn't guaranteed, and we don't always do very well. We have political and religious leaders who publicly advocate cruelty as the method, and who sneer at kindness outside of their prescribed boxes. It's quite easy to get lost in a madhouse of mirrors if we look outward for salvation.

When done well, reaching out to a friend accesses an opportunity for us to practice love and kindness, which turns out to be what we wanted all along. Perhaps we were initially deluded as to how to go about living love, but we're getting good instruction now. Nitya exalts in it:

Jesus said, "Your heart is where your treasure is." We live in what we love. The best definition that can be given to the Self is "the awareness of love." There is no one who has not experienced it.

Deb ran with this, inverting it as informing us we all know the Self whenever we love. She mused aloud, what is it in love that helps us transcend our limited identity?

Moni said that when you have the feeling of love for anything, you are knocking down certain of your guards. It helps us overcome our limits. Her words inspired Andy to open up his heart to us. He has recently returned from his wife Bushra's memorial, which was held in Washington, DC, on the other side of the continent, because of the many attendees from the Middle East and Europe.

Andy told us he has been bracketing certain pairs of experiences in the last day or two, trying to comprehend death,

including pairing life and death, happiness and sadness, time and space, that sort of thing. It's essentially a yogic exercise. One way of describing death is that when someone dies their psyche loses its limitations, just as we have been talking about. We think of everything in terms of when or where something happens—it's a form of conditioning. When we see someone's psyche becoming spaceless and not bound by time, we're used to thinking of them being somewhere but they are no longer there. Where did they go? When? We are stuck within those terms. Death seems like striking off some frontier of your existence, a box you can't normally get out of.

Andy saw an old photograph at the memorial of Bushra sitting in a hammock with her niece, Zanna, who was two at the time. The little girl is smiling and beaming, and Bushra is on fire with joy. She's lit up. You look at this photograph and you realize that her pleasure has crowded out every other thought. She's not thinking of past or future. She is possessed by the presence of this young kid. He saw that joy and death can also be bracketed together.

In bracketing these two people, Andy sensed a *quality* that is using them as a perfect expression of itself. They are two people who are not thinking about anything at all except that they love each other. They are in the timelessness and spacelessness of death and of joy. Mostly we dwell in a box that excludes those experiences. To Andy it was somewhat disturbing to hit the edge of that box, because you can't get beyond it rationally. It makes you feel completely ignorant. Your philosophy is humbled by it, yet it is right there in front of you.

I suggested that the humiliation helps lower the ego, which helps you get out of the box. Bill clarified by invoking the title Nitya gave to this chapter: you think you don't know, but maybe you do.

Andy saw the box as a mental limitation that we necessarily impose when we're alive. Yet he found it shocking that we do that, and only realize what's going on in certain dramatic moments, like the death of a loved one. Deb offered that feeling that kind of grief allows you to experience the intensity of love, and thus to break out of your box.

I referred back to Moni's statement, adding that love is supposed to be the essence of life and death. True love doesn't recognize barriers, it very naturally sweeps them aside, actually it dissolves them.

Jan shared that the realization she had hearing this verse was that love and joy in herself and others in daily life is the grounding of everything we're talking about and learning about here. She is so glad this philosophy has given her that awareness! That is what it's all about: seeing a moment happening and being a part of it. She loved Nitya's mention of the marketplace (see Part II), because she was in the Yucatan with her family one time, when her kids were emerging from childhood, and she was struck by a mother she saw in the outdoor market. She was with her infant daughter, and the love she was showing to her went right to Jan's heart. She thought, this is God. Jan almost wanted to get down on her knees and worship her. At the same time she realized the lack of such deep love in our society. The woman was caring for her daughter in a devoted way, without self-consciousness. For Jan, when we see moments like these we can pause and recall the vastness of love, how it stands out against the box mentality.

Jan's joyful account reminded Andy of one of Nitya's early classes at Portland State University, when Andy was just getting to know him. One of the students had just had a child, and she was holding him in her arms. Nitya paused for a moment in silence, and then he pointed to the woman and her child and said, "if you can't see God now, you never will." For Andy, it revealed a cosmic bond, a visible, tangible reality that had "God" written all over it.

Mother and child is an iconic image that speaks effortlessly of love to everyone. I have realized that the Christian Church's success rests in great measure on its use of the mother and child motif, a perfectly spiritual expression that is universally recognized. Not even the coolest baby elephant writing scripture with his broken off tusk can compete with that.

If there is anyone who didn't experience love beyond their womb time, we feel very sorry for them. We may elect them to high office as a consolation, but I'm not sure it helps much.... There is no substitute for love, though humans keep searching for one.

As proof of the pudding, the very idea of a mother and child in love brought happy reminiscences from practically everyone. Children embody living freely, and we are eager to have a sip of it whenever we can. A child's enthusiasm is so intense it's hard to stay with it for too long, but it's only the excess of bliss that wipes us out.

Bill had played earlier in the day with his granddaughter, and shared how there is no limit to her love and openness to the world around her, how she is totally absorbed in it. Nancy was present too, and spoke of the magic of being with a child, how their fascination with bugs and birds and toys draws you into an excited state. Hearing this, Prabu recalled watching bugs and following ant trails as a very young boy.

On the verge of a month back home in South India, Prabu then shared his earliest memory of his mother, from when he was maybe five. As a child he was often lost in thought, and one day he was sitting on the ground in the back yard, listening to a koil, a familiar bird with a longing, plaintive cry. In a kind of meditative state, he was unaware that his mother had come looking for him. Then she was sitting behind him, gathering him in her arms and asking him what was in his mind. The moment he was enveloped by her loving arms is still vivid in his memory.

Deb could see how the theme addresses the way we can allow ourselves to become close to other people. In the relationship you have with your significant other, for instance, you accept their shadow part, let barriers down and don't defend yourself. The hope is to be accepted and not judged, which is very freeing. Kind of a "you let your guard down and I'll let down mine" agreement.

Moni has noticed this even with strong-natured people like her grandfather or uncles, who would play with the little children in a childlike way. They take down all their guard, not thinking for a moment "I am the mighty uncle or grandfather." She giggled in adding, that's why you call your wife your better half: she gives you the chance to come out of your barriers. You have to put those barriers down or you won't be in a good relationship, or even just a friendship.

In a sense we were all paying homage to pure direct experience. We secretly want to keep contact with the living reality behind the conceptual scenes we erect in the foreground to keep us safe. Gurus and accidents and children remind us of it, in hopes we will let go of our rigid attitudes. At least gurus know we should embrace life to the full. To Narayana Guru that is the bliss, the ananda value, all beings are drawn to.

Susan was very excited about a quote she ran across from Tolstoy that seemed relevant to the comments about Bushra, as she was someone who lived very much in the present and was and continues to be such an inspiration:

Remember that there is only one important time and it is Now. The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion. The most important person is always the person with whom you are, who is right before you, for who knows if you will have dealings with any other person in the future? The most important pursuit is making that person, the one standing

at your side, happy, for that alone is the pursuit of life. [from
The Emperor's Three Questions]

A cautionary tale for Googlers: I first searched one sentence without Tolstoy's name, and all results (I checked three pages) incorrectly attributed this to Thich Nhat Hanh and his book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. So Tolstoy invented mindfulness.... The point is, be careful with search results: algorithms aren't respectful of rights, not to mention privacy.

Late in the chapter Nitya reprises a paradox that he often touched on. Actually this might be the first place he brought it up in writing. It sounds to me like the kind of thing Nataraja Guru would have spoken about. It's that when you deny something, it means you implicitly know something about what you're denying, or else you're just denying a fiction of your imagination, which is ridiculous. Here's the present iteration:

Even when someone says "I don't know God," he knows very well that God is something other than his sensation, perception or ratiocination. He feels certain of this. So he knows God indirectly. With regard to the Self, he makes an assertion of his self a hundred times a day in his attitude of "my" and "mine". Of course, there is a degree of difference in being self-conscious and having Self-Realization.

Jan thought of a corollary: you do know when you aren't there, which means when you get lost, it is important to throw open the windows and wake up again.

That's very true, and yet the point is also that we actually don't know when we're lost. We feel lost when we aren't, and then again we tend to think we're found no matter how far off the edge we've wandered. Yes, sometimes we're right about it, but the Guru doesn't want you to think you aren't there when you most

definitely are. Recognizing how you are there at all times is a big help in reclaiming the whole enchilada. Our whole education is aimed at teaching us we don't matter, we're not important, and in order to be worthwhile we have to become something else. It's the main sales pitch of Planet Earth, and it generates a lot of wealth for a number of people. But fear not—there isn't going to be a stampede to realization anytime soon. Those profit-making schemes are securely entrenched, because few dare to admit their true nature is the Absolute, *tat tvam asi*.

The gnawing paradox is that we are affirming that we don't measure up to something that is a fiction to begin with, tying ourselves in knots over the reality of the fiction instead of turning to what's real in ourselves. That reality is undefinable, so we only know it if we stop hankering after imaginary, simplistic chimeras. This is exactly the pickle we're in: we are convinced we are not where we are supposed to be. Resolving this demands an inversion of our default settings, normally hard slogging.

This reminded Bill of his online Patanjali class with Nancy Y, where he's talking about the energy that is available inside us to move forward. According to Patanjali, prakriti takes care of our needs and desires for living, while the other part, the purusha, is the energy used for discovering the self. By the time you get done balancing the two, if that's all you're paying attention to, you have no extra energy left over. We still have to dig down to our core to reveal the Self. Cultivating that can bring you a source of energy that you didn't know was in you.

Howard, a Zen practitioner, had sat quietly through the class, but now offered an amusing Japanese therapy he's familiar with: morita (it means playing ball on running water), where you make a to-do list, like "wake up, brush teeth, walk outside, etc." When you do something on the list, you cross it off. The point is that all day long people are doing kindnesses for each other, but since they're not on the list, we don't realize they are valuable. In a way

we know it but we don't know we know it. Morita therapy serves as a reminder that the little things in life deserve recognition.

Bill wasn't sure if Narayana Guru was talking about the ego in referencing "That is mine" and "This is mine." It is, and yet there's another element: we're including something more than ourselves in defining our ego. At first, as a child, we're simply claiming ego territory, not unlike colonial annexation of an "undiscovered" country, but eventually we have to appease the local inhabitants, so it's no longer just about me, it's about us. That marks the transition from child to adult. The farther you go in this direction, the more the ego is put in its rightful yet circumscribed place as the last check on impulses and a guiding sense of stability, while its dominance is subsumed in a more holistic perspective.

I like to repeat one of my favorite poems by Johnny Stallings, which neatly expresses the adult attitude:

My foreign policy:
There are no foreigners.

The reason for the seemingly simple affirmation of this chapter is that we unwittingly harbor doubt that we are okay as constituted. Our entire education has been that we are not okay, that we have to become something else of be valid, even though we may have been sincerely praised for our talents. There remained the conviction that we would "grow up" and become something better. An unconscious presumption like that impedes our natural functioning, and dampens our relationships. We could simply ratify who we are to ourselves, but it helps when a great and respected guru tells us the same thing—we could be wrong, but he's sure to be right. So I guess we are all okay. The Guru says so. Secretly, we still may not buy it.

Nitya has been striving all through the book to make these concepts as clear as day. His conclusion follows suit:

The higher realization is seeing one's own Self in all beings and all beings in one's Self. Many people think this is a rare experience that comes only to a privileged few. In fact, at times all of us transcend our physical limitations and identify our interest with another person, institution or ideal, and can even go to the extent of giving up our life for the preservation or fulfillment of that interest. Considering this natural efficiency of the mind to transcend the body's limitations, we can reasonably claim that, at least to a certain degree, all of us have enjoyed the experience of seeing our Self in another or seeing another's Self in us.

Nitya expanded on many of these ideas in his later book *That Alone*, so I've put some of the most important clarifications from it in Part II just ahead.

Spilling out of the house after the closing meditation we were greeted by a perfect evening: balmy, dark, star-filled and quiet. A loving embrace from a universe we truly belong in, and that needs us to fulfill it, if only for a moment.

Part II

Here's the magnificent ending of *That Alone*, chapter 48, a bit more than I read out. After relating a joke about a husband worrying about his wife in childbirth, Nitya makes a powerful point about how the instruction of this verse is crucial to anchoring our self-respect:

One has such an identity with his body of interest that this sort of thing is a common experience. And if you and your husband or wife or dear friend can be of the same self, you and the whole world can also be of the same self. You just have to extend it, extrapolate it a little farther.

Clearly, *tanu* is the key word in this verse. One is realizing within the body of one's own interest, "this thing is mine," "that thing is mine," becoming oblivious to the bodily limitations of each thing. One neither thinks of his body nor of the impenetrability of the other body. They are all brought under one homogeneous reality.

This homogeneity is the integrating secret. When I talk to you and you listen to me, it is already with the realization that at a certain level you can leave your peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, forget my peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, and enter into a world of ideas where my conceptual visualization of an idea and your conceptual visualization can become so alike, so identified with each other, that the word can make sense to you. We have to go beyond our bodies to communicate.

Next the Guru uses the term *anubhavam*, becoming like the other. It is not a mere resemblance, it is a factual identity. One becomes the other one. You transfer yourself from your bodily system to the bodily system of another. Within that oneness the duality of the body is no longer an issue. That's why, when a mother hears that her child has met with an accident, she becomes panicky. When she sits with the child, it is hard to tell who had the accident. The mother's and the child's faces look so alike in their sadness and pain.

This is reestablished in our lives every day. When you pick up a cat and say "my dear kitty," you have already gone beyond your bodily limitations and your own body identity. People do not realize that this itself is part of your realization. Of course, it needs to be further perfected. When you say someone is a realized person, it is not that she hugs a cat. There's a bit more to it. But you make a beginning just by hugging the cat.

A big myth is now exploded with this verse. You have now come so close to the experience of the Absolute. It is within your reach, in the palm of your hand, so to speak. When Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is at hand, close to you, within your own heart," people still doubt it. They say "if it is so close, where are the signs? Why are the clouds not becoming all pink and red? Why aren't the trees bursting forth in light

and the sound of God's own voice?" Jesus says, "Ye hypocrites! I give you no signs."

All the religious words have frightened and confused us. Narayana Guru wants to give us courage, telling us, "Don't be afraid. You are as good as anyone. The essence of realization is in your own daily experience." With this realization you come to establish a universal norm for living that experience with others, not just in a state of absorption. When you are alienated and isolated it is easy to remain always good. There is no chance for the Pope to smack another person, for instance, because everyone stands before him with great politeness and reverence. Nobody even says one offensive word to him, so why should he get angry? It is easy for him to be pious and good. But bring him to the marketplace and expose him to all the troubles there. Then we will see his true tenor. There is no need for any ethics when you are in the state of a contemplative who is completely absorbed in the Absolute.

Your realization is to be lived here and now in society where you touch and are touched by other people. Let us bring our realization to the marketplace. But you think realization is so holy and sacred that it must be kept separate, kept apart. That means you cannot live it. If you want to live it, it should be lived everywhere, at all times. Your perfection is a perfection for all time, not just for the church on Sunday. If you are perfect now you should be perfect in everyday life, too.