

9/10/19

## MOTS Chapter 50 Notes

When I Became Truly Aware of the World the World Said I Am You

The ground, together with water, wind, fire and sky,  
the functioning ego, right knowledge and the mind—  
waves and ocean: what else is there?  
All these worlds, having arisen, are changing into knowledge.

Free translation:

The impressions of earth, water, fire, wind, sky, the ego-sense, knowledge, mind, and of all aspects of the one and the many, such as waves and the ocean—on entering into consciousness these transform into knowledge as they rise into the hierarchic series of states of awareness.

Nitya closes his *Meditations on the Self* sitting alone on the Varkala beach cliffs, contemplating the scene:

I sat there motionless, like the bronze mermaid of Copenhagen, wondering at the enigma of my body and mind becoming hushed into the silence of a great stillness while my soul was being devoured by flames of beauty.... My heart was filled with a great calm and serenity, as if I was the consciousness of the cliff on which I sat. At once the time span of my consciousness widened, and I felt in the throb of my pulse the rhythmic beat of cosmic cycles. I was experiencing a new sense of freedom. Below me the waves were beating against large blocks of stone. It looked as if the perennial flux of Becoming was rousing the eternal Being from its unshakable depth of unruffled silence.

In 1972, Varkala beach was unknown to the outside world, a magical, perfect getaway, due to the fact—in addition to its beauty—that there was hardly anyone there. It remained unchanged in 1979-80 when we Westerners arrived in a small cluster to celebrate the new decade with Guru Nitya. A number of us would often head down to the beach after morning classes. Even with the shortcuts through the villages it was more than three miles, but we had tons of energy. I was 28. Egad.

The paradisiacal spot featured typically gentle, rideable waves, and a shower from a spring pouring out of the cliff. The water was drinkably pure and cool, and still is, fed from the mountains nearby. At one time Varkala had springs all over, but wells have dropped the water table much deeper now. There was a bathing spring not far from the Gurukula, now dry, where we would wash. Indians bathe with their clothes on, but even so it was men in the morning and women in the afternoon.

The only other people ever on the beach were the Muslim fishermen, and we loved to help them pull in their nets. Even with 5 or 6 of us lending a hand, it was heavy work! In those pre-TV days, crowds of kids would follow us around, laughing and pointing, yet even they did not come as far as the beach.

Jean, visiting from Sweden once more, punned that she had a concrete feeling about this chapter. Her whole trip this time is about going back in memories, linking up with childhood friends and going through old family memorabilia, and she was reminded of her journey to India with Nancy Y, in 2009. After being at the Gurukula for a period, they spent two or three days at the beachside bungalows, near where the cliff dips down to the stream and the road that come out by the beach. She remembered sitting up on top of the cliff watching the people below, and the gulls. If you left your tea sugar out on the table, the seagulls would swoop in and try to take it. Peter O. was around and came down to swim with them a couple of times .

Speaking of concrete, Susan admitted that this commentary made her feel better about her climate change dread. It gave her a sense of permanence, of solidity, despite the impending disaster on our hands. The earth will survive us. Susan is also reading a history of our species, *Sapiens*, by Yuval Noah Harari, taking consolation in the inevitability of the evolution of the planet and the beings on it.

Deb agreed that when you realize the long timespans of geologic history, it is comforting to believe life will go on. All through the ages, beings arise and disappear. The solution implied here, Deb thought, is that if we stop being separate from the world, then we'll treat it as it should be treated.

Jan agreed that letting go enough and connecting with the beauty around us in the earth, the natural world, is the way to find that connection, that oneness again. It's something our class has focused on. She also wondered whether the computer was going to be a factor in evolution from now on, and whether or not that was a good thing.

Deb felt we should give up trying to imagine where we're going in the future, as we surely have no idea. She talked about the ancient people who began worshipping together, never imagining it would lead to agriculture and the need to settle in one place. Yet our whole civilization is based on the worshippers putting down roots.

This was the first time I fully recognized the agricultural image in "putting down roots." Once upon a time we literally put them down and tended them, and that where we had to live. Now it means moving somewhere you plan to stay, but not many of us are farmers anymore.

Deb continued that if we somehow make connections with the freedom of the planet, we can move along with it. This made me think in terms of tides—the tides in the affairs of men as well as geology. Each of us has little or no impact on the overall tide of

planetary existence, yet within that tide we have ample opportunities to enliven our immediate surroundings, making them less awful and more beautiful. Nitya wanted people to have a more enlightened way of understanding their world, and then beauty and accord would be natural outcomes. He's done a really fine job of imparting his ideals in this book.

Deb reiterated we should actually realize ourselves in the midst of that tide, and Susan added all the good and bad is in us.

I wanted to agree with Jan that being aware of what's going on is valuable, even essential. While we can rest assured we have no idea what will happen, the awareness that humans have screwed up big time and are doing little about it is energizing younger people in particular, since they realize they will not have a planet to live on soon if we don't make major alterations.

None of this philosophy is meant to teach us to ignore our intertwinings with the universe. We shouldn't panic and we definitely shouldn't imagine we know exactly what's coming, but we can still treat climate change seriously and take action. This is facilitated, oddly, by remembering we are watching a screen of projections created by our mind. We can easily tint the screen very dark and everything will look more awful than it is, so we must rectify that tendency. The divisive, separatist attitude that so many people are using to tint their screens is poisoning us, making us miserable. And paradoxically, less responsible. Why care, if we're doomed?

Vedanta as a unifying antidote can really help. We can reach out to our dear friends when something upsets them, helping keep our screens neutrally tinted, as maintaining camaraderie reinforces caring.

Deb concurred, maintaining we're also the editors of the movie we're projecting. Fear and angst is our superimposition out in the world, and we have to be careful we're not editing what we

see only to confirm what we feel. True, but I'd say editing our minds is a tricky business, with no quick fixes available.

A yogi strives to see clearly at all times, knowing they are the source of much of the dust clouding their vision. Let me reclip my three favorite quotes from Nitya's Patanjali book:

The yogi makes every effort not to be a howler telling untruth or a simpleton believing in something because somebody said it or it is written somewhere. (243)

Yoga is not a passive way of closing one's eyes to injustice. If the yogi has a moral conscience, he or she has to challenge all three kinds of involvement in violence (greed, anger and delusion). (267)

It is not difficult to cultivate an awareness that is both critical and sympathetic. (371)

Fridge quality sayings, eh?

Nitya's merger of his consciousness with the scene in this chapter is a prime example of how to handle the terrors of the present.

Back to Nitya meditating on the cliff, watching the sea and sinking into his identity with his surroundings. Deb pointed out that in his contemplation the world has become his consciousness, showing us how we look out and see the world as aspects of ourselves. We don't see what we think: an object that is obdurate, but something that arises out of and becomes part of us, the whole field of consciousness. Yet this awareness can be as solid as a rock. Nitya goes on:

I saw in my consciousness the archetypal rock of being—the *kutastha*. Small and large waves of awareness are always

beating against the bulwark of this indestructible core of the mind.

You may remember the *kutastha* from Darsanamala, Karma Darsana, ninth verse:

In spite of action becoming self-accomplished  
by the psychic dynamism and the senses,  
the wise one thus knows—"I am the  
unattached *kutastha*."

Nataraja Guru has this about *kutastha* in his Atmo comments: "The self in its extreme positive aspect is spoken of in Vedanta as rock-firm (*kutastha*). The notion of such a self; firm, compact and of a substance fully itself with nothing extraneous to its own pure, rich being or sat, is natural to Vedanta."

Kutastha is all about firmness. The Gita treats lots of practical matters in terms of the gunas in its last two chapters, including, curiously enough, firmness (next-to-last, right before happiness):

33) The firmness by which the activities of mind, vital functions, and the senses are kept from deflecting (from the true path) by yoga, is sattvic.

34) But the firmness by which one holds fast to duty, and pleasure, and wealth, desirous of the results of each when the occasion presents itself—that firmness is rajasic.

35) That by which a stupid man does not give up sleep, fear, grief, despondency and wantonness—that firmness is tamasic.

I've written about *kutastha* for verse 33:

The sattvic version of firmness relates to perseverance in working toward a goal. If people always followed their whimsies, we would live in a world of dilettantes. It takes great tenaciousness to become a fine dancer or musician, to complete a novel, or even build a bridge or other complicated structure. And yes, for those so inclined, maintaining the pressure of their philosophical or scientific enquiry takes them beyond the neophyte stage to increasingly refined insights or achievements. A Vedantic compliment is to be considered a *kutastha*, a “rock-fixed” or well-founded seer. When you see truth it is easy to hold to it; when it remains elusive your ideas are sure to waver. Steadiness is thus a sign of wisdom, as long as it's enlightened.

As his disciple, Nitya had been blasted by Nataraja Guru like heavy surf for a couple of decades at this point, giving his musing a symbolic tone: the cliff where he was sitting “must have been facing the fury of winds and waves over centuries—nay, many millennia. All the soft clay in it has washed away. What's left has a ruggedness that matches the ravages of time.” There's a self-description in there, I think.

Nitya always had an iron will, but it had been tempered by his guru to where he really was a *kutastha*. Johnny Stallings has related how he had never seen anyone endure the abuse Nitya got from Nataraja Guru. It's hard for us to appreciate it was because the Guru had such hope for Nitya being the real deal—a true guru in tune with the universal. The result of the hard going was a true gem of a *kutastha* rock.

As he says here, sometimes during his tempering process Nitya must have wondered, “Are rocks free?” That kind of freedom doesn't always feel like it. Unhindered freedom is

paradoxically not as free as a disciplined style, yet the ideal balance point contains the best of both. Again, great artists are the perfect examples, combining creativity and discipline simultaneously.

Contemplating freedom is always of value, and that's the theme of this final chapter. If we haven't intuited the presence of Nataraja Guru's spirit sitting with Nitya, he brings him in specifically:

My Guru once told me of the four dimensions of freedom, illustrated by Henri Bergson with the example of a flowing river with a sailboat, a flying swallow, and a contemplative watching the flow of the river, the course of the boat and the flight of the swallow. As I contemplated the glorious scene before me I felt I was reliving the experience of Bergson's contemplative.

Of course Bergson was a favorite of Nataraja Guru's, a powerful influence who plays a major role in *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*. We can sense his presence whenever Bergson is mentioned.

Deb wanted to have us contemplate the four dimensions of freedom and then share what we thought they were for clarification, but then we veered into other terrain.

I did think it important to investigate the four freedoms. Nitya talks about them as if they were the physical dimensions of our world. A dot has no options to do anything. The first dimension makes a line of dots possible, the second dimension makes geometric forms possible on paper, the third dimension allows for solids. These are all observed by a witnessing awareness, intimating the time aspect, which is the fourth dimension.



Waves like those Nitya was observing go more or less in one direction, representing the first level of freedom. At least they're moving, if only slightly freely. Our linear thinking does the same: we fire up trains of thought, and they go steaming down the tracks. Nitya muses there isn't much freedom in waves or linear thoughts, it's only one-dimensional, yet it isn't static.

A ship on the water is still confined to horizontal actualities, but it can go in two directions, forward and back as well as side to side, so it has more freedom than a wave. Nitya accords this a better standing:

The logic of my mind can also cruise on the surface of consciousness. Like the ship, it can lie at anchor or move from one harbor of interest to another. It can communicate and trade. In fact, my reason is the navigator of my life.

Pretty good, but there's much more possible than simply sailing around between harbors of interest..

Next Nitya describes a seagull soaring up into the sky. It moves in three dimensions, having added the vertical. Nitya wonders about this third dimension of freedom:

Do I have anything in my consciousness which has such unfettered wings of freedom? When I meditate and allow the beauty of the world of spirit to prevail upon me, very often there appears in the firmament of my mind a flash of insight like a meteor, and it brings to my spirit a flush of joy which can overwhelm me with ecstasy. I have very little power to generate this experience or to control it when it comes.

By now, Gurukula stalwarts should be suspecting there is a structure underlying these images. That we have very little control over this third type of freedom hints at the vertical aspect of

existence. While we have much control over our wakeful mind, and some influence on our dreaming mind, the unconscious is another matter entirely. From birth to death we follow a trajectory that is thoroughly built in to the system. Only the general dispositions that we learn through discipline can have a subtle influence on how this unfolds. The vertical is something we release ourselves into, we sacrifice our ego for, not something we intentionally build. Building is horizontal, wakeful activity.

Our suspicion is confirmed when Nitya describes the fourth dimension of freedom, which sounds like a perfect description of turiya, the omega of the vertical axis:

There are also moments of tranquility when the mind is like calm waters on which we see the undisturbed image of the sun. Only in such moments do I know my center. It feels like I'm returning Home. Maybe this is the fourth dimension of the mind's freedom.

Home is where the heart is, the heart being the center. Reducing our experience to only its vertical thread feels like coming back to ourselves, like coming home. Home is a very satisfying and releasing place to hang out.

One thing that struck me last night was that I tend to think of the four states as sequential, but they are all present all the time. We emphasize them alternately, but both polarities of the horizontal and the vertical are always with us. All of it is who we are all the time; all states are always available. Nitya is not thinking he needs to realize x, y, and then z, he's just sitting in his awareness, and there is no law that you have to do certain activities to attain it.

Jean put the sequence back in, wondering if when you die the four dimensions of consciousness go backward. Do you feel at one with everything, then experience the ecstasy of joy, then only the

freedom to go back in forth in memories, then you're confined in the wave and finally it disappears? Whoa!

I suggested Nitya had just turned 48 — he was likely not thinking about death. And of course no one really knows what death is like, though many claim to. We're kind of leaving it as an open question. Yet it's fascinating to wonder about. We're mostly pretty old, so death seems more inevitable to think about, and we've had some major passings this year.

One current theory I find intriguing is that the brain lights up everywhere, at least in a good death, where it unfolds naturally. This has been observed under fMRI, more often in psychedelic trips, but also end of life events. The brain becomes super bright and interconnected, which brings feelings of unity into prominence. In a way, when we're totally lit up, we've come Home, back to being fully ourselves all at once. Does simultaneity annihilate time?

Jean protested that your individual consciousness is only there when you are alive, and I responded that we don't really know if that's true, but we definitely have consciousness now and should make the most of it, which I'm sure was Jean's point. Deb mused how often we forget we are this enormous consciousness, since we only see the barest surface of it.

Jean has been going through old family photos and reading lots of old letters to her mother from her grandfather. In a way she feels she is bringing them back to life in her own consciousness. Susan put in that she once made tons of photo albums when her kids were young, thinking they would want to dwell on them all the time, but now she has realized that they wouldn't mean anything to future generations even though they are important to her now. It's all okay. Letting things go is okay, she's decided.

And why not have a brief coda to emphasize the way yoga brings us to that calm center of turiya, at the apex of our

unfoldment? Bringing the seer and the scene into perfect resonance, duality evaporates. Nitya's conclusion is most poignant:

With these thoughts I looked up and caught the last gleam of the setting sun. The 'I' that sees the sun and the sun itself stood cancelled out in my mind as pure awareness. There is nothing but awareness. It fills all and assumes all forms without causing any violation to its own nature of formlessness. I am that awareness. Though I'm not particularly anything, in essence I am everything.

Just before our brief closing meditation, Jan took a moment to sincerely appreciate us for holding these classes. To murmurs of agreement she told us: "In terms of living our lives purposefully, I want to thank you for having this class. It helps us go out into our week, helps us find our center. It's a joyful time of sharing." It was touching to hear, and I reiterated that we are all as amazing as those historical figures that are revered by the masses. We can be cool ourselves, even if we aren't famous!

Our class is my favorite thing in life, offering rich satisfaction and stimulation, and I'm deeply grateful for all those who can make it out to share. I have two online classes going also, and they are wonderful, but the personal contact adds a tremendous feature that can't be duplicated with any machinery. We all merge significantly as we sit and ponder together. Deb added a few wise cracks that made us all laugh, proving that laughter is another thing that rarely can be passed along on line, and it's a real bonding activity. You can only type LOL so many times, and it's hardly ever actually *funny*. In the online classes we tend to make monolithic statements and pass them back and forth, but in a physical grouping we can interact in myriad ways. It jess cain't be beat.

Karen sweetly added that we have created a sacred space with our class (in our living room, no less!), a novel concept for sure. Yet she's right. On Tuesday nights we quickly settle into a profound place where we all become part of a greater sense of being, one where everyone is supported to be and express themselves without fear of humiliation.

So the Portland Gurukula has finally honored *Meditations on the Self* as it richly deserves to be, with a close study among dear friends. It gave us so much! Thank you Guru Nitya for another brilliant excursion, and thank you Peter O. for preserving it for us to rediscover more than 45 years after it was published.

We made a tentative pact to take up the Tao Te Ching starting in mid-October, and then settled back down into our second degree of freedom to drive home.

## Part II

So. This ends the notes for *Meditations on the Self*, and with it the main reason for their continued existence. Between 2004 and 2019 I have made comments and collected class insights for Nitya's impeccable commentaries of *That Alone: The Core of Wisdom*; *The Psychology of Darsanamala* (twice); *Living the Science of Harmonious Union* (Patanjali); *Isa Upanishad*; *Mandukya Upanishad*; and now *Meditations on the Self*.

These works are superb elucidations of spiritual practicalities I believe to be in a class by themselves. Anyone wishing for additional clarifications beyond the Guru's own can find them online as long as my websites persist.

After the first run through Darsanamala, ending in early 2008, I wrote that I was going quit writing the Notes. Wendy Oak sent me a plea to keep on, stimulating twelve more years of ever-expanding essays. I was initially mildly irked, but soon fell in love with the process. It has become an integral part of my life, for

which I'm most grateful to Wendy, who acted at the time as "the voice of God."

I have no way to judge the Notes on their merits, as they have been my primary spiritual exercise for the last fifteen years or so, a tactic for opening myself to the vast treasury of wisdom Nitya poured into my thick skull for almost thirty years. Several friends have occasionally sent appreciations, which is always heartwarming, but they are far from widely read. Mostly they are a way for me to exercise my brain and language skills, and remind myself over and over of the relevance of this modernist approach to Vedanta. As I write them, I feel that I am living the science of harmonious union, letting the inner genius guide the process while I supply the fingers and editorial knowhow to bring its insights to birth, week after week. It's a very satisfying indulgence.

Over the years I have become convinced of the wisdom residing in every human being, yet for the most part it is bottled up and silently fuming over its lack of opportunities for expression. This is my way to let my version out to play on the playground on a regular basis.

In the last four or five years, Susan Koe (and very occasionally a substitute) have taken notes during the classes to assist me in giving everyone credit for their ideas and assuring that not much will be overlooked. I am deeply grateful for their support, especially as my short-term memory has been weakening of late. I invariably write a full account from memory and then use the extra notes to insert additional material. I get to add new ideas too, when they boil up after a night's sleep. Nowadays I have lots of "Oh, yeah!" moments, when I'm reminded of a valuable thought I was unable to mention in the class.

There is some chance I will continue to write Notes when we start up a new class in the future. As of now, the only suggestion is to study the Tao Te Ching, which hardly needs any additional

commentary. Yet there may well be room for a Vedantic perspective, so we'll see.

Gratitude is due the class members, without whom none of this would have happened. Their persistent support and presence kept the ball rolling, for over 41 years now. It's certain they feel as I do, that this is an important, even essential, part of their lives.

Aum.

### Part III

Beverley sent us a kind note:

So the end of the Class Notes on Meditations on the Self has come. Guru Nitya feels like a friend when reading these short commentaries. I often wish I could be magically transported to share the meetings in your house.

I was much struck by the way Nitya describes how he felt sitting on the rock overlooking Varkala beach. What struck a chord in my heart was the sense of place that he conveys. I remembered reading how Jung when young had a special large stone he used to sit on quietly on his own. It had a personality and always made him feel safe. Recently I have had a binge on all Alan Garner's books. Alderley Edge, the area where he grew up and lives, is permeated by thousands of years of human interaction with the place. The gods seem very close there. It is a liminal place where the boundary between the transactional world and the transcendent meet. I have recently read another book about the marshy Fens in Norfolk. There is a famous wooden circular Seahenge at Holme-by-the-Sea. The Neolithic people who lived there seem to have experienced this place as a sacred boundary between the land and the sea; between the gods and man too. I like to think of this as a

metaphor for the boundary between consciousness and the unconscious.

This paragraph does not really begin to convey what is going on in my mind. The point really is to feel so grateful to Nitya for his thoughts, and for you and your truly amazing devotion to making his work available to others.

My life has suffered a sea change as it were. I do not sit on a rock to give support but I have discovered a surprising amount of energy available for me to make a recovery from my fall. I have been positively enjoying myself and feel happier too. I think this could be because I now have something to look forward to and a goal to aim for. It's nearly six months now and I can walk with a walking stick, although the limp is still bad and I do need the security of someone beside me to grab if necessary. Around the house I use a trolley, which is mainly needed to carry things. It really does seem like a miracle that I feel so light - hearted. Maybe it's the 'Nitya Effect' after absorbing all that humane and inspiring guidance in the book.

Dear Scott I really do feel so much gratitude and much respect too for everything you have done in making the wonderful Guru Nitya available for everyone and moi in particular.  
with love from Beverley