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MOTS Chapter 5: The Eternal Light and the Immortal Witness

People of this world sleep, wake and think many thoughts;
ever wakefully witnessing all this shines an unlit lamp,
precious beyond words, that never fades;
ever seeing this, one should go forward.

That Alone has:

Worldly people, having slept, wake and think many thoughts;
ever wakefully witnessing all this shines an unlit lamp,
precious beyond words, that never fades;
ever seeing this, one should go forward.

Free translation:

One should conduct oneself in the light of the eternal Lamp which witnesses the sleeping, waking, and discursive cogitation of those who are wedded to their own worldly affairs, and which itself has neither any beginning or any extinction.

Just exactly what is an unlit lamp in this context? Instead of breezing past it, the class mulled it over, bringing considerable insight to the image. And yet it remains enigmatic, which is a valuable feature in spiritual investigations. Once we pin something down, it loses its power to enchant us, to draw us forward.

It took us most of the evening to get back to this subject. Deb actually opened with a citation of the last paragraph:

If we did not aimlessly run after the receding mirages caused by the fickleness of the mind, we could turn to this light, the indwelling immortal witness, which is at once the seer and the agent that negatively causes the phenomena of this ever-enchanting and ever-deluding world of names and forms.

The first thing we need to realize—really realize—is that we are running after receding mirages, making up the ever-enchanting and ever-deluding horizontal world. It's easy to lose ourselves in the horizontal miasma because it's so endlessly fascinating, yet that's not a bad thing, as so many are wont to claim. Reveling in our beauteous environs keeps our energy vibrant, gives us a reason to live. What's needed is simply a matter of becoming aware of that nearly invisible additional aspect, our vertical core of the Self, poetically portrayed here as an ever-shining lamp. A full life balances and integrates the horizontal and vertical, our outer and inner lives. Either alone is bankrupt, devoid of content.

Narayana Guru was well aware of the tradition of negating life in his culture, to try to withdraw from the horizontal into the vertical, so he made sure to include the affirmation to go forward, to continue living your waking, dreaming and sleeping. Only don't forget the part that knits it all together, that imparts coherence. That's why the horizontal sucks: not because it is faulty per se, but because we have made it barren by turning our backs on its animating light.

When we forget our Self, we may well become fearful, anxious and unsure of ourself. We see only emptiness, so we feel we have to build an image, a persona, to compensate and ratify our existence. This actually takes us farther away from who we are, so the effort becomes more intensified even as it becomes better hidden by socialized behavior.

Once upon a time, societies affirmatively ratified their members' existence. We are currently in a paradigm where the old values have been discarded as out of date, though with no new ones to replace them, and it could even spell the terminus of the grand experiment of Planet Earth. Rationalism has treated value as irrelevant, or even inimical to truth, and value is surely a difficult problem, exacerbated by the psychotic values cherished by deranged thinkers. It's much easier to focus on minutiae, provable facts and so on. But just look at the result!

My friend Shyam Balakrishnan is writing an essay titled *Sovereignty and Self-Government*, and he puts his finger on the crux of our dilemma:

It is an obvious self-contradiction that our so called democratic institutions are based on the assumption of the innate value of human beings, and yet the only knowledge system considered authentic by these institutions [based on modern science] does not substantiate that assumption in any manner.

From a certain limited perspective, nothing has any inherent value, so science has deleted it from its thinking. Narayana Guru cured many ills and inspired great leaders by pointing to the immense Value hiding in plain sight, if only we are brave enough to take a peek. Shyam has just told me that he feels orphaned by the disturbing politics of modern India. I helped him edit his soon-to-be-published book of conversations of Narayana Guru, and he just wrote me, “The political situation is getting really worse here day by day by the militant hindutva groups and I hope the book would have a positive, enduring influence on its readers.”

So this is by no means a trivial side issue. The gurus are getting right to the meat of why we are failing. Their gentle light is easy to ignore if you're in panic mode. The very people who most need Shyam's book are unlikely to read it.

Fundamentalists go bananas based on half-baked thinking. Nitya makes the compelling point that humans are not fully present in anything:

It is quite common that when we eat, we think and talk of things that are far removed from the world of food or the act of relishing a nice meal. A tyrant husband and a nagging wife can spoil a good dinner by quarrelling over an insinuating comment or an unwelcome gesture. And I know from people's confessions that even in the course of mating, some men and

women think of someone else with whom they either have had or crave to have an affair.

It is a wonder that the mind cannot devote itself to what is assigned to it. Like quicksilver it is ever moving restlessly from one universe of interest to another.

Nitya often mentioned our inability to be present. He was especially bemused by the people who confessed to him that when they made love they would think of someone else. During the most compelling and intense activity imaginable, their minds still wandered. Nitya could hardly believe it. Didn't they know that being *more* present, not less, would make their lives so much more enjoyable? Extreme sports incorporating death fear seem to be about the only way to force the wavering modern mind to PAY ATTENTION. Nitya really hits on this here:

Our mind is such that it does not like to identify entirely with any state or activity to which it is directed. Attention and distraction go hand in hand. Every prevailing interest that has succeeded in catching our attention has to struggle hard to sustain that attention from being diverted by another incoming interest that is favorably supported by an environmental stimulus.

Paisley wanted to know why this is. He thought there must be some purpose, else why did we evolve a brain that was so permanently scattered? He later answered his own question by musing, "I don't think we could survive without our minds scanning every which way. We are creating a world we can understand so we can survive in it, and if it's tenacious it's because it needs to be."

This is quite true. The brain is a survival mechanism that evolved on a planet where eat or be eaten has held sway for hundreds of millions of years. Yet we are poised—have been for a few centuries—to make evolutionary progress, living in a world

where our safety is more or less guaranteed so we can explore other options than mere survival. The promise of the seers is of heightened, ecstatic awareness and expression. It's by no means imaginary, it is happening all around, now, just not in the temples of the moneychangers.

Unfortunately, most systems of thought prescribe moving away from our inner reality into artificial—if sometimes well-intentioned—forms. We are convinced of our unreality or at least our inadequacy, and so set about constructing our personal arks to escape the flood. Because people do not know the precious lamp of their own self they feel constrained to create an artificial persona. Meditation aims to put the brakes on doing that, to allow ourselves to experience what we already are.

Bill talked about how a lot of disciplines bring you back to your center. Our brains are stimulated, which bring up memories, and before that is fully digested the next stimulus arrives to begin a new cycle. The mind works that way unless you can do something about it. If you quiet your reactive mind enough, you can access the wisdom mind and rely on that for the perception of how you take the world in.

Jan was pleased at how nicely that relates to the previous verse: by coming home to our deeper self, we find that place that allows us to strengthen the wise part of our mind.

Andy recalled the verse this chapter is based on, noting Narayana Guru is not advocating smashing our thoughts with a hammer or anything. It's that one should conduct oneself in the light of the unlit lamp: being wakefully aware of its presence is contextualizing the operation of your self in relation to the phenomenal world. He was in the process of realizing that our tendency is to think of these two aspects of the verse—witnessing and acting—as diametrically opposed, but they aren't. It does look at first glance as if the one is meant to be the alternative to the other, but that is our habitual way of misunderstanding everything. They are to be brought together, to be integrated, and then we can go forward with confidence.

I feel that *presence* is precisely the right word to describe what the gurus are after here. We are present to the extent we are aware of our full reality in advance. We do not have to construct any persona to become our self, we already are a spark of the Absolute. It reminds me of a favorite quote from Kafka:

It is not necessary that you leave the house. Remain at your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be wholly still and alone. The world will present itself to you for its unmasking, it can do no other, in ecstasy it will writhe at your feet.

Nitya does a marvelous job of deconstructing our prideful sense of self, which perhaps even more than the love of money is the root of all evils, and he follows it up immediately with the antidote of perceiving the thinnest of the thin, the vertical thread of our continuity:

If our thoughts are disjunct, interests are jerky, consciousness is alternating, and awareness is interspersed with non-awareness, how can we say we have any self-identity? The man who says “I love” is in an entirely different state of mind from the man who says “I hate,” yet it is the same man who loves as well as hates. On careful consideration, we can see that there is a thread of consciousness running through all the variegated experiences of all the alternating states of consciousness, which gives both consistency and contiguity to the self, even when we are not aware of an I-consciousness at all. This witnessing consciousness is a constant factor that continues all through from the day of our birth to the fading out of the last spark of awareness at the termination of life. This all-linking consciousness is called the *sutra atma*, the thread of consciousness.

If we don't know our true Self, we can be convinced of all sorts of mischief. Science limits itself to horizontal realities, while the vertical essence is our true self, imparting flow, direction and meaning. This unitive center of our being is the real us that is present throughout our whole life, but all the time we're looking at the horizontal realm and interacting with it. We get pulled apart the more we try to assemble something meaningful from random spare parts. Instead we should be adhering to our vertical dignity, which affords us a mildly detached viewpoint, protecting us from undue influences. The idea called to mind one of Nitya's great lines from his book on Patanjali:

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)

Boy, how the howlers hold sway in these days of modern times! Howlers, growlers and wowsers.

Paul reminded us that a while back we said that the phenomenal world is the horizontalization of a vertical principle, which sounds pretty reasonable. The vertical is our evolutionary thrust from alpha to omega, inception to decommissioning, accompanied at all times by a reflection of the horizontal world that reveals who we are to us. It's not surprising we begin to mistake the reflection for our reality, especially since so many insist it *is* our reality, yet that is exactly what we set out to cure here. Let's get back to our real reality! Paul, knowing it's easier said than done, likened his mind to his beloved dog, Hearsay, who as soon as he sees something interesting goes tearing after it at full speed, Paul futilely entreating him to come back. He felt that being a vertical principle in essence did not confer on him the right to manipulate the horizontal, yet the mind has to be included as a contributing factor in its manipulation. This is surely an area to take great care in, and our out-of-control leaders prove the point:

they are giddy with power and have no grounded thought, running pell-mell after each new bedazzlement: near apocalyptic behavior.

Andy reprised an earlier idea of his, how he has to keep reminding himself that he can't organize god. It's like trying to force yourself to breathe. You don't have to. It's already happening. He went on, "This light in me. I am aware I can never engineer it into a more optimal state. I have a tendency to say I can sharpen things up, instead of seeing how they are already just fine." Again, this is a central human impediment, and yet our tinkering is not wholly pretentious. Or it doesn't *have* to be. It's creative and has the potential to be beneficial. Deb agreed that we have our silent, cosmic light within us, yet we're always trying to make it into something else according to our distorted lights. She liked Andy's previous iteration, that god makes art and we hop along for the ride. We allow ourselves to participate, with no need to take credit. Andy laughingly admitted that many artists talk about their work as a happy accident. It just happens, all by itself.

Andy also noted how we invest a tremendous amount of energy in pure fantasy. This is very strongly evident in politics and other imaginary worlds based on language: people verbally tormenting themselves and each other. There is an immense sphere of mental processes that have nothing to do with anything truly functional at all. In meditation it's possible to bring the light of the unlit lamp to bear on states of mind that are less than optimal, just to see them as they are.

Andy admitted that he was prone to "highly embarrassing mental events," and if you had to account for all your thoughts, it would be shameful. He feels there is something cool about turning the unlit lamp on those particular states we are ashamed of admitting, though he didn't specify them. I'd say that to some degree in a meditative light we can learn how many of those thoughts are not particularly shameful at all: that we've been carrying a popular form of guilt, and once we realize that we can unburden ourselves of it. Yet we rarely do, partly because the guilt

diverts us from facing our shame. This is another one of the basic impediments in human life, by the way.

Jan referred to our guilty secrets (which we all have, even though we are usually in denial, preferring the oh-so-good-citizen image) as “unflattering thoughts,” to the general acclaim of everyone. Much less loaded terminology! Then she charged ahead with admitting her “crappy thoughts,” how they cloud her thinking and distract her from more worthwhile pursuits. She was really seeing how, by becoming aware of the thought patterns involved, you could begin to break those bad habits. That’s what she did the night of her coming home story she just shared in Part III of the chapter 4 notes, and she reprised it for those who weren’t fortunate enough to have read her inspiring account. Jan felt the lesson was if we can admit awareness of our unflattering thoughts, they can strengthen (or brighten) the eternal light, just as we intend to do in our practice. It’s so important how we deal with tension, how the continual realization of ways our thoughts are going off track heals us and makes us stronger.

Bushra talked about how the brain misfires a lot, so we do have to have ways to restrain it. She often edits films, and after doing it for a while she finds she can’t stop: she goes around editing her day. It runs away with her. Both good and bad habits can produce that kind of unrestrained constrained behavior. She knows if she sits down she will instantly reach for a book. Reading is wonderful, but why can’t she allow herself to simply sit and do nothing for a stretch? She’s resolved to work on detaching herself from her impulses, to not letting her big dogs off leash so often.

Paul agreed how helpful it is to catch yourself in unproductive habits of thought that hold you captive, and to simply be aware of them. He was reminded of something he witnessed at his grandfather’s home in the northern Great Plains. There were flocks of sheep on the land, and when the lambs were old enough to leave their mothers they would go off on their own in a herd. It is utterly flat country, but once in a while one of the lambs would take a leap, as if there was something in the way. Then dutifully all

the other lambs would jump in just the same way over the same imaginary obstacle. It's an apt but discomfiting image of animal behavior, since humans aren't so very different.

Karen is very aware that when we don't attend to it, the light may grow very dim, even if it never goes out completely. If you attend to it, the light will grow. Her reminding herself of how amazing and miraculous the world is makes the light brighter to her, and so she is dedicating herself to making it as bright as possible. True, true, and true! The fact that it is always present does not negate the value of how we relate to it. Our co-creative role involves letting our light shine, as in Boz Skaggs' great song *I'll Be Long Gone*, which starts out:

I'll be long gone
By the time you make up your mind
Gotta make my own way
Around the kinda misery I find

I'll send you my best
Of regards and the rest
I'll leave up to your own sense of time

Chorus:

Yes, I'm gonna get up and make my life shine
I'm gonna get up and make my life shine
I've made up my mind to make my life shine

Letting our life shine has to be a humble effort of dedication without anticipation of glory, of quietly keeping the light undefined and unpromoted.

I wanted us to finish up with the class taking a good look at that unlit lamp, and it proved a worthy exercise. The free translation from *That Alone* does render the unlit lamp as an eternal lamp that has no beginning or end, which aptly modifies the image of an oil lamp that is yet to be lit. It's clearly a metaphorical

lamp, and it's always on. There's no change of state involved, with the clear corollary that we don't have to work to switch it on or otherwise ignite it. Karen is perfectly right, though, that our awareness of it grows brighter or dimmer depending on where we put our attention. But what exactly are we talking about here?

We get a broad hint from Nitya's paraphrase of the Upanishads, where we see by the light of the sun, but if it isn't up, we see by the light of the moon. If there is no moon, we see by the light of fire, and if no fire, then by the light of the mind. In case we don't get the point, Nitya makes it plain:

The mind gets its light from the ever-luminous consciousness of the Self (atman), which is like an eternal light that illuminates everything in the field of an immortal eye that is witnessing all that is happening in its field.

Bill has been taking the online Yoga Sutras class with Nancy Yeilding, and for a short while he has tried the technique of meditation sketched in her ninth lesson. He feels like it's turning his attention to the same place as this chapter addresses, the unlit lamp. Here's the exercise:

Sit quietly yet alert with your eyes closed and envision your pure, original nature. This may start as an intellectual process, but slowly let go of intellect and give some space for your inner intuitive or contemplative sense to reveal your pure, original nature, more being than knowing.

Bill was kind to pass along his written assessment, essentially what he told us last night:

I have used this exercise over the last couple weeks by integrating it into my morning meditations. Instead of watching my breath or a mantra I have been focusing at least part of each meditation on trying to envision the true nature of

mySelf- of being that- It has led on many occasions to a sense of joy, comfort and a sense of just being that has been wonderful to experience. When I can really get to a deep place with that I not only experience a sense of center but things seem to expand out like a clear sky without limits.

Deb agreed we're not talking about a lamp that is either on or off, "It's a persistent light, the awareness where I can see myself. Like you are in a dream and you know you're in one." She was reminded of listening to an audio production of Anthony Doerr's magnificent book *All the Light We Cannot See*. What is this light we cannot see? One major character is blind, but she sees more than anyone else. She is really present in a true sense. So the light is something within us.

I added there is a kind of mystical radio broadcast repeated for emphasis in that book, talking about how the brain is sealed within the black box of the skull, and receives no outside light. All the light it has it creates itself. All the light we see, we generate internally.

Susan commented, "When I think negative thoughts and get stressed, I have been trying to just let that be instead of fighting it. I seem to be opening to the vertical. It helps, but I can't figure out why in a logical way." That's good, since figuring out the inestimable is part of the problem. It's fine as a preliminary stage, and then we have to let it go, which is what Susan is becoming able to do better now.

Bushra added something nice about the witnessing state: it makes everything around you an object, which levels the field. It all has the same status. At the same time, you aren't so important in your own world.

Yes, the unlit lamp is the light of consciousness, poetically rendered. It cannot be constructed out of horizontal figments and tendrils. Humans are more than a mile-high stack of information in a bio-computer. Check out the Human Manifesto, penned to counter the superstitious belief that we are nothing more than

information, and therefore about to cede our sovereignty to computer-based entities that are far better informed:

http://privacysurgeon.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Human-manifesto_26_short-1.pdf.

Narayana Guru has been calling our attention in various ways to the light of consciousness within, for all five verses so far. It's the corrective for being lost in the endless confusion of untethered horizontality, and thus the proper place to start our search for truth. No amount of tinkering with details is going to fix the problem. As Paul is fond of quoting, our dilemma and its resolution is wholesale business, not to be repaired with piecemeal solutions. Our group endeavor once again nudged us into greater awareness of the ubiquitous light on which everything depends, and there was a sense last night it was really rocking us awake.

Paisley was surprised at how much Nitya was into dreams in these chapters. He thought it was cool that Nitya kept his sense of wonder about dreams, to the extent of being surprised by the anomalies he noticed on waking up, where we tend to discount them and treat them as obvious.

Because of the chapter's dream theme, Susan sent a sliver of Proust (in Part II) and we closed with a reading from the latest issue (August 2018) of National Geographic, featuring the science of sleep, by Michael Finkel. It's a fascinating article highlighting recent refinements in our understanding of this recondite state of mind, counterbalancing a raft of articles in the issue detailing how we are ever more rapidly destroying our planet. Could our insane rampages be due in part to sleep deprivation? Two of the facts in the article were that humans die sooner of sleep deprivation than from starvation, and practically the entire human race is sleep deprived these days. The author did not propose any relationship, but we are free to speculate. Americans sleep two hours less than we did a century ago, and are at least publicly more deranged. In any case, the last section of the article is an expansion of Nitya's

point quoted in the last episode, that we are partisan in favor of the wakeful state. And maybe we shouldn't be.

REM sleep is equated in the article with madness, a totally uninhibited state that fortunately is prevented in most people from animating the body, or who knows what might ensue. "Every time we experience REM sleep, we literally go mad. Psychosis is a condition characterized by hallucinations and delusions. Dreaming, some scientists say, *is* a psychotic state—we fully believe that we see what is not there, and we accept that time, location, and people can morph and disappear." Dig the finale:

When light seeps through our eyelids and touches our retinas, a signal is sent to a deep-brain region called the suprachiasmatic nucleus. This is the time, for many of us, that our last dream dissolves, we open our eyes, and we rejoin our real life.

Or do we? Perhaps the most remarkable thing about REM sleep is that it proves the brain can operate independently of sensory input. Like an artist ensconced in a secret studio, our mind appears to experiment without inhibition, let loose on its own personal mission.

When we're awake, the brain is occupied with busy work—all those limbs to control, the constant driving and shopping and texting and talking. The money-earning, the child-rearing.

But when we're sleeping, and we commence our first REM session, the most elaborate and complex instrument known in the universe is free to do what it wishes. It self-activates. It dreams. This, one could say, is the playtime of the brain. Some sleep theorists postulate that REM sleep is when we are our most intelligent, insightful, creative, and free. It's when we truly come alive. "REM sleep may be the thing that makes us the most human, both for what it does for the brain and body, and for the sheer experience of it," says Michael Perlis.

Maybe, then, we've been asking the wrong question about sleep, ever since Aristotle. The real wonder isn't why we sleep.

It's why, with such an incredible alternative available, do we bother to stay awake?

And the answer might be that we need to attend to the basics of life—the eating, mating and fighting—only to ensure that the body is fully ready for sleep.

I trust we all had sweet dreams last night! And the best of dreaming to you all.

Part II

Baiju's meditation:

We sleep and wake up, do the daily chores apart from eating and drinking, and again go to sleep; from the time of our birth we keep repeating it. These alternating states are not new to us and therefore we do not attach to them any special significance. We do not experience anything in deep sleep. In the wakeful state we have numerous thoughts that keep occurring, most of which happen to be involuntary and a few thoughts are worked in the mind in a planned manner too. What does not occur so easily, even after 'technically' learning the principle of the Absolute, is the thought that we are under the weighty influence of ignorance (*Maya*) and that we have forgotten our true nature. The forgetfulness of the truth is the one that drags us, by way of our endless thoughts, into the plurality of the sense-perceivable world.

In order to first inscribe the principle of the Self in our minds, before we proceed further, Narayana Guru reminds us in verse 5 that there is a priceless Lamp—the only priceless stuff ever, as the Guru implies--(earlier referred to as the supernal Sun), which keeps watching all that happens in this phenomenal world, our sleeping and waking up included. It never sets or gets turned off; nor, by the same token, does it rise or need to be turned on. Then he ends the verse saying: *itu kantu poyitenam*, which if literally

translated could mean that one should see this (the supernal Sun) before he leaves (physically from the face of the earth). It may also be interpreted to mean that we should set our life-goal to attain this (the supernal Sun).

We see that the Guru, in the verses 1 through 5, continues to give us from different angles a prodigious description of the Indescribable--the radiant Core (Karu) that shines equally within and without, the supreme Sun in the void beyond, the truth that is non-different from the phenomenal Universe, and now the priceless Lamp that ever remains witness to the Universe and the apparent pluralistic entities therein. As a culmination he indicates very clearly that It is the only invaluable worth one must never miss to attain.

I keep thinking why the Guru tries to explain the Absolute in so many different ways, and then realize that the principle of the Absolute is so abstract that an ordinary person like me will find it absolutely difficult to pursue the direct path to the Absolute. This fact is attested by the Bhagavad Gita (xii – 5):

The difficulty of those whose relational minds are set on the Unmanifested is greater,

For the way of the Unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach. (Nataraja Guru's translation)

Nataraja Guru in his commentary makes it clear that Krishna takes an apologetic attitude that the difficulty of directly seeking the realization of the Absolute is much greater than that encountered in any other Self-realization method. Therefore in the context of the foregoing verse from the Gita, Krishna favors a seeker who is devoted to a personal God.

In xii – 2, Krishna has already said:

Those with minds entered into Me, who unitively meditate on Me, with a fervour pertaining to the Supreme, those according to Me are the most unitively (attuned) in Yoga. (Nataraja Guru's translation)

According to Nataraja Guru, in a non-theistic way, a certain amount of anthropomorphism is admitted into the general scheme of the Gita. He further elaborates the point: "All devotees are human beings first and yogis afterwards, and there are limitations belonging to bodily existence which set a limit to establishing effective relation with the Absolute. Each man, according to his own temperament, has to draw the line between the transcendental and the immanent aspects of the Absolute for his own purposes of constant meditation. Those who by education and training are capable of visualizing the Absolute globally, yet impersonally, are very rare."

If that is the case, let us think why it appears that Narayana Guru suggests the path of meditating upon the Unmanifested. In fact in his earlier shorter works, the Guru used images from the Indian pantheon of gods and goddesses to represent the Absolute, which means the representation of the Unmanifested by the image of the manifested! Obviously the Guru considered an inclusive approach to help the less capable ones in eventually realizing the Absolute. Saints like Sri Ramakrishna had advised the less capable seekers to take the path of devotion to a personal God, and guided such seekers all along in the path of realizing the Absolute-certainly in the end transcending the personal God.

However, in his later works, which are the major ones such as *Atmopadesa Satakam* and *Darsanamala*, Narayana Guru focused completely on the transcendental aspects of the Absolute. Having lived in the twentieth century, he must have seen the ever rapid development in physical and natural sciences and the growing faith

of almost everybody everywhere in the possibilities of modern science alone, unaware of the limitations of its approach in knowing the underlying substratum—the eternal Truth. The Guru must have had a serious concern, though unexpressed explicitly, that in the coming years and centuries insignificantly fewer men and women would seek the attainment of the priceless Absolute in the absence of enough scientific or purely philosophic explanation that was free of the idolatry or the anthropomorphic methods and practices.

The Guru did not want the future generations to terribly miss the opportunity to seek and attain the realization of the Self and therefore, I surmise, he approached the Absolute in almost purely philosophical and scientific terms. Probably he had the consolation that, for the benefit of those who still wanted to tread the anthropomorphic path, there already existed enough theistic and non-theistic literature. The Guru, being so compassionate and sympathetic, thus made all efforts to describe the priceless Atman in so many different ways so that a seeker of reasonable dedication could with some steady effort start visualizing the Absolute globally.

Guru Nitya concludes meditation #5 saying that the plight we are in is because we “aimlessly run after the receding mirages caused by the fickleness of the mind....” That statement once again reminds us that the essential step involved for a seeker to make significant progress is getting rid of first the latent tendencies to go after those deceptive mirages of the phenomenal world. The techniques, methods and practices to be applied may be different for people of different temperaments and degrees of capability. From the broad spectrum of the transcendental and the immanent aspects of the Absolute, a particular person should make the optimal choice for himself in order to improve the possibility of a quicker success. It is a balancing act in which the direct guidance of a wise teacher becomes critical.

Narayana Guru does not explicitly specify the path but instructs us on the knowledge of the Unmanifested (the Absolute) in its purest form, and makes all effort to make it amply clear. Except for his prudent hints at times, the Guru, it appears to me, leaves the freedom to choose the specifics of the seeker's methods and practices to the seeker himself, which is what the modern man would appreciate.

Aum tat sat.

* * *

Susan sent the first page of *Swann's Way*, Volume I of *Remembrance of Things Past*, by Marcel Proust, apparently because it combines our two present themes, home and sleep:

For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say "I'm going to sleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would awaken me; I would try to put away the book which, I imagined, was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had been thinking all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I was awake; it did not disturb my mind, but it lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as the thoughts of a former existence must be to a reincarnate spirit; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to choose whether I would form part of it or no; and at the same time my sight would return and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of

darkness, pleasant and restful enough for the eyes, and even more, perhaps, for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, a matter dark indeed.

I would ask myself what o'clock it could be; I could hear the whistling of trains, which, now nearer and now farther off, punctuating the distance like the note of a bird in a forest, shewed me in perspective the deserted countryside through which a traveller would be hurrying towards the nearest station: the path that he followed being fixed for ever in his memory by the general excitement due to being in a strange place, to doing unusual things, to the last words of conversation, to farewells exchanged beneath an unfamiliar lamp which echoed still in his ears amid the silence of the night; and to the delightful prospect of being once again at home.