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## MOTS Chapter 7: My Orphanage in the Guru

Do not wake any more, and without sleeping remain as  
Knowledge;  
if you are unfit for this,  
then steadily fix your embodied self in devotional service to those  
great ones  
who ever live free from birth, in silent contemplation, awakened to  
*aum*.

That Alone has:

Do not wake any more, and without sleeping remain as  
Knowledge;  
if you are unfit for this,  
then keep yourself in the service to those contemplatives  
who live free from birth, awakened to *aum*.

Free translation:

One should remain without waking to distracting interests and  
without being asleep to the reality of the Self. If you cannot do this  
by realization, you should offer yourself in service to those  
contemplatives who have gone beyond the dualities of birth and  
death to know the secret of Aum.

The free translation above gives away the mysterious secret  
of this verse, which I'm always in favor of. We're none too bright,  
so make it plain! Nitya's commentary also spells out the meaning,  
while in *That Alone* it is lost amid the grand overview Nitya  
presents. Thanks to the simple directness of the seventh Meditation  
we were able to tease out a few excellent practical examples of  
how this plays out in everyday life.

Yes, I know: if you're already intrigued by a philosophy you will be drawn into deeper waters by the concepts you don't understand, and this is certainly an essential guru technique. Keep the student baffled so they can't pretend to know before they actually do. Yet that egotistic pride should be an early hurdle, easily gotten over. Only when we stop pretending and surrender our pretensions to a teacher can true learning begin. Nitya makes reference to this in *Love and Blessings*:

In my final examination for honors I had stood first in the university, but after a half hour's discussion with Nataraja Guru I was convinced that what I had learned in the classroom was completely useless, and I should start over again from the beginning. In the course of each day's study, many things I thought I was sure of were to be given up as erroneous assumptions. When I first came to him, he told me it normally takes twelve years under the supervision of a guru for a disciple to cultivate a right formation of philosophy. Considering each day's grilling, I think I was lucky to get closer to twenty-four years instead of only twelve. (155)

Nataraja Guru, Nitya's main guru, made sure to erase everyone's pretensions, whether or not they were dedicated to him. The accounts of this in *Love and Blessings* are intense and yet charming as well. (These have all been excerpted in a document on Nitya's website, here:

[http://aranya.me/uploads/3/4/8/6/34868315/nataraja\\_guru\\_in\\_love\\_and\\_blessings.pdf](http://aranya.me/uploads/3/4/8/6/34868315/nataraja_guru_in_love_and_blessings.pdf)). I'll share a bit that shows the flavor:

I saw in myself a certain dignity and a slightly exaggerated self-respect. I took pride in coming from a family of poets and teachers, and on that account felt I was a person of high sensibility and cultural finish. From the very beginning Nataraja Guru felt I had a bloated ego and a mask of spiritual benevolence. He described my meek way of always remaining

polite as sheer hypocrisy. Usually he made a frontal attack on anyone who appeared hypocritical, and didn't keep a disciple waiting long to be told what was wrong with him. He used to say, "A drastic disease needs a drastic cure." (170)

It's not many who can endure such ferocious treatment. We're fortunate to have an intermediary to take the edge and most of the sting off. It can still be effective if taken seriously.

Nitya does a marvelous job throughout *Meditations on the Self* and especially in this chapter of epitomizing the ego-framing typical of many seekers, and we all related to the insecurity, doubt, anxiety and so on that he speaks of. Nitya knew those states well, but by the time of writing he had mastered them to a significant degree. His guru was still alive at the time, so his deference was perfectly natural, but I think he was bringing this up so that his readers could identify with the relevance of the teaching. This isn't about retreat to some distant heaven but a way to release our full potential in the here and now. One of the strengths of the book is this personal element, which also serves to demystify Nitya to an extent. He was a regular guy! And he became something rather impressive too. Maybe there's hope for us after all.

Observing his own rajasic and tamasic modalities is a key part of his self-revealing meditations. While trapped in the darkness and negativity of *tamas*, he notes:

It annoys me how my words are misunderstood. I am shocked to see how something good done in all earnestness boomerangs at a weak moment with destructive negativity. When I feel like a lonely martyr struggling in the midst of a strange mob where each one is mercilessly stomping on the other's face, I very often sit listlessly and mumble words of self-pity.

Many of the class laughed in recognition. The "confessional" section admitting human weaknesses is substantial, so I'll just include the last paragraph:

I pretend to be brave, courageous, and tactful, but in the pit of my belly I feel the uneasiness of a paranoiac fear. I try to conceal my mistakes under a carpet of casualness, but under my feet they shriek and jostle. I am further depressed by the thought that I cannot help those who are snatched away from me by the grim hand of fate. This is the world of wakefulness from which Narayana Guru cautions us to step aside.

The roots of all this ego-poisoned behavior go deep into our genetic structuring. Nitya calls our attention to the ancient term for this causality, *vasana*, and frames it in a most helpful manner:

I know I'm a product of the past. In me are lying hidden hundreds of latent habit traits or incipient memories, called *vasanas*. In fact every modulation of the mind has in it the waking up of an incipient memory. Even good *vasanas* can drag us into the behavioral chain of desiring, seeking, manipulating, acting, reacting and getting further conditioned to repeat the same experience with added zest. Such being the case, who would still want to open Pandora's box after learning it contains deadly germs like cholera and plague?

And why do we struggle to escape the tyranny of our DNA? Because it forces us to follow certain game-trails through the jungle of existence, and though this may be quite useful, it reduces our experience to a very slim version of what is possible. The explorer in us craves a wider purview, and especially, much more freedom:

*Vasanas* are the seeds of karma. Everywhere the wise who are aware of the octopus-like tentacles of karma are seeking ways to burn away its seeds so they aren't forced to begin old chains of behavior over and over again. Perhaps it is in this sense that the Guru cautions us not to wake up.

That's right—the Guru does not want us to wake up to our old habits and limitations and the cruel demands of a social world firmly grounded in a static attitude. As neurological plasticity has taught us, we will surely set up new pathways and habits, but they are not doomed to be as restrictive and inappropriate to our well being as the ones we started with. We can indeed learn! And grow! And it feels great!

The teaching here is not spelled out, but we can make it out if we look carefully enough. We crave comfort, and try to find it by establishing stable conditions, but these can put us to sleep, and if they are stripped away we wake up in anguish. Our unitive core is the domain of true comfort, or as we more often say, happiness. We can regain the comfort of not being glued onto events and impulses, if only we can maintain contact with our core. I reminded the class of the interpretation that came to me during my ten years of Gita commentary, that rebirth is a symbol for repeating the past, so not being reborn, or being free from birth, as the verse says, means being free to live sacrificially, or freely, liberated from the bonds of habit.

Susan was attracted to the word comfort, set off against the reports of Moni on their way out to class of how Kerala is suffering from the massive flooding, which doesn't get much news coverage in the USA. Susan was shocked to learn that there is a whole vast State where so many are uncomfortable right now! It got her thinking about comfort and mental stability and how we tend to work for and find that in our lives. She finds great comfort in her home and her family and friends. She finds comfort in being able to count on certain things, such as food, routines, and the availability of bathrooms, all things in short supply in present day Kerala. She knows she is comforted by memories and also by future events to she looks forward. She admitted she is probably also comforted by bad habits and relentless negative memories just because they are so familiar. The verse, by contrast, is about finding comfort in our core, rather than in any of these things. It is

about not thinking/feeling that our comfort depends on our day-to-day way of living but rather on something deeper, more enduring.

Moni told us of one particular news story about the flooding she found very moving, and relevant to what Susan had just said. The video shows a woman going by boat to her house to see what has happened to it. The water has receded, so it looks normal. She opens the door and water pours out. She goes into the guest room, but there is nothing there, it has all been swept away. There has been water inside up to the roof, and everything is soaked and muddy. She goes into her kitchen, and everything is floating or upside-down. Bedroom — want to change my clothes — everything in different positions, floating in the water, unwearable. To Moni's surprise, despite the disaster she is facing, she said she is a happy person now. All the people of different backgrounds are in the refugee camp together, caring for each other, eating from the same plate. It made her realize we are all just people, whatever our backgrounds and preferences. She said it showed her we have to wash the political problems out of Kerala. They have been aggravated in the last 15 years or so by religious strife, but that didn't use to be how it was.

I mentioned that it was Nitya, gone a little more than 15 years now, and before him Narayana Guru, who had such a calming and unifying influence on South India. Nitya was brave and outspoken in vilifying religious leaders for inculcating combative ideas. He spoke out often, gave many speeches, and had lots of coverage in all news publications. I recalled my trip with him to an interfaith gathering in Ooty, where he stood up and hurled curses at all the “vipers” (he pronounced them wipers), and promised them he would tell God on them for their selfish mulish stupidity. Everyone in the room was electrified, and I was very glad to be sitting right behind him so the lightning bolts were heading away from me. I also got a good look at the stunned countenances. Afterward everyone was humble and asked each other what they could accomplish together. Some long-range benefits came out of that meeting, including the start of municipal garbage cleanup. The

key, though, was that without someone like Nitya to set them straight, nothing but animosity would have been promoted at the meeting. I wondered at the time what would happen once Nitya was no longer on the scene with his wide following and pacifist motivations, and the current buildup to perhaps even civil war is an unsurprising consequence.

The Kerala woman's relief at finding her imagined orphanage in a hostile world was false, and there is a human community everywhere we all already belong to, is a nice example of the practicality of the verse. It inspired me to think of many of the current American politicians as believing in the cult of orphanage: every man for himself. There is no connection with Rousseau's revolutionary call for union via yoga, according to Nataraja Guru: All for one and one for all. You are completely isolated, so what you do doesn't matter, except the joy of besting your fellow beings, and the whole planet while you're at it. They make up Nitya's "strange mob where each one is mercilessly stomping on the other's face."

I go back to a time when an all-inclusive national unity was praised and occasionally practiced in the USA, but that time is long gone in many high offices. The Ego writ large fills the necessary role of the guru pretty much everywhere, and egos are not inclined to admit that they may not be the optimal guides for behavior or even simple understanding. The ground of being is no longer part of materialist philosophy, so its vestiges are easily forgotten in the rush of events and the pressures of making a living.

Sleep in this verse's context means forgetting, being oblivious, and here again we need to distinguish the positive and negative versions. Nitya expresses this perfectly:

It is nice to forget unwholesome incidents and menacing prejudices, but there is nothing more disastrous than forgetting one's real identity.

He goes on:

In the normal course of most people's waking life they are no better off than when they are dreaming or asleep. Though they imagine they have an identity, it is largely fictitious. True identity is when we know we are the unexpended, ever present consciousness called atman, which is identical with the Absolute. So the Guru's warning is not against physical sleeping any more than it is against physical waking, but against the possibility of us forgetting our true or essential nature, called *sat-cit-ananda* or *saccidananda*.

Deb talked about two health books. *How to Make Disease Disappear*, by Rangan Chatterjee, which advocates for "still time," quiet periods when you aren't trying to do anything but just sink into yourself. He's an MD who often gives prescriptions for just that: what in our family we called quiet time. It reminded Deb of a charming story from of another favorite book, *The Heart Speaks*, by Mimi Guarneri, where a patient with chronic heart problems was given a prescription for... one small dog. Caring and loving the pet was all that patient needed to get well again.

Jan and Susan praised the Guruluka class as a wonderful way to feel connected, and Jan further agreed that good social relations are one key to being healthy. This is a whole subject in itself! We thrive by interacting with others, and not necessarily obsequiously: genuine disagreements can be as exhilarating as accord, at least when they're worked out. As a mom, Jan knows that caring for others is a way to care for ourselves too. It's a win/win.

Caring in just the right way for others is a very challenging endeavor, and getting it right is a yogic process that is indeed healing for the giver as much or more than the recipient. Karen noted that there is a thin line between caring and enabling, or what I would call indulging. Moderns often give willy-nilly, assuming that the receiver will be gratified and healed by it. This is a great example of finding the perfect balance between being asleep to the recipient's needs and awake to a course of conduct that you bring



to the situation but may not be exactly relevant. You may remember the Italian aid worker in Africa (I should look up his TED talk), who realized that all the aid Europe was pouring into Africa based on its own ideas was causing more problems than it solved, so he tried a radical alternative: he listened to what the African's felt they needed and gave them his foundation's support. Voila, success! And now he's a popular speaker on the circuit.

Evangelists of all stripes bring their awakeness to the abstract reality of their preset beliefs as their gift to the needy, and their wake of wreckage puts the Kerala floods to shame. Barbara Kingsolver's tremendous novel *The Poisonwood Bible* is the last word on the subject, which should have been killed and buried long ago but which refuses to die.

So this is a field where our most aware attitudes unhampered by dogmatic beliefs should be brought to bear. Narayana Guru was a true master, so we're learning it from the best of the best. He is proof that it works.

The chapter's finale trends toward Nitya's heartfelt gratitude to his guru, who had only half a year left to live. His transition from a shaky, lonely soul to a stabilized, confident philosopher is well worth highlighting. It begins with an awareness of how little we truly know, and how little help the tried and true methods of transformation can supply:

I can reason with great ingenuity and prove to my mind that I am the Absolute, but a little scratch on my ego is enough to make me lose my equipoise. Repeating mechanistically a great dictum, like That thou art or I am the Absolute, will not bring me the everlasting beatitude of a well established contemplative.

I am not a Buddha marveling at the beauty of the Aryan truth, revealed to him under a bodhi tree in a flash of intuition. Neither am I a Narayana Guru or a Ramana Maharshi firmly established on the reality of the One Self, which is without a second. I am a shaky fellow torn between the frailties of the

flesh and the apprehensions of my mind. I am groping in darkness. I have lost my way in the dreary desert sands of skepticism and confusion.

Nitya admits at the end that he remembers feeling all the very human emotions he lists here, and they led him to seek a teacher of the highest caliber, even one he intuitively dreaded: “These are the thoughts that long ago made me thirst for the living Word of a guru in flesh and blood.” As is usually the case, we have almost no idea what we are in for when we approach a guru! Not knowing is precisely how our darkness is ameliorated, since we cling to it without realizing we are hanging on for dear life. A guru dashes our expectations, until we surrender them in exasperation. Nitya was most fortunate to be drawn into the unique orbit of Gurus Narayana and Nataraja, as neither of them pandered to their followers in the least.

There are a couple of subtle references toward the end that a casual reader is likely to miss. The first of these is to a hymn Nitya loved, Lead, Kindly Light, about walking in the path of the guru—the Christian guru is Jesus, of course—that I will reprint in Part II. You can see it echoed here:

I should have a properly charted path to tread. Someone should kindly lead me. I am craving the light that has illuminated the path of all the enlightened seers who have gone before me. That light, along with the goal, the path, and guidance to walk the path correctly, can come to me only from a guru.

The second veiled reference is to the iconic image of Nataraja, a humanlike incarnation of Shiva dancing in a ring of fire, with one foot planted firmly on the dwarf of ignorance, the other raised in ecstatic dance, while one hand beats out the rhythm of life on his drum. It needs no reference to Indians, but for the Americans I brought our beautiful bronze version to join us in the class. We found it in a large warehouse in Bombay in 1985 that

was packed with exceptional sculptures, and carried it all over the country on our journey, and jammed it next to our seats on our flight home. Now it resides in a place of honor in front of the window by everyone's favorite gathering place at the dining table. It's especially appropriate in this chapter on becoming fully awake because Shiva destroys our tamasic fixations to make room for the newness of the spirit. A guru must have a streak of Shiva in them, lest they be simple enablers of the status quo. Nitya likens his guru to the dancing Nataraja:

I am thankful to the unknown benefactor who caused my path to lead me into the physical presence of a guru. Thank God, he has all the enigmas of the world resolved, and he is steadfast in his wisdom. He is a true Doctor of Gnosis and also a muni who is ever engaged in the meditation on the One Self that appears as the many. While keeping one foot firmly rooted in the actualities of life, he can playfully raise the other leg to the heights of sublimity. When he dances the cosmic dance of transcendence, he is one without a second. He is indeed one to whom the secret of the pranava, aum, is fully opened. I have great faith that in the scorching flames of his reason I can burn away the potency of all my dormant vasanas.

We talked some more about the concluding idea of orphanage, which has a double meaning. I used to take "My Orphanage in the Guru" as meaning he was an orphan adopted by the guru, but as a group we took it where Nitya must have also meant: the guru has an orphanage-like institution that takes in orphans and cares for them, giving them just what they need. It's a refuge, and we are all refugees. I suppose it's true in a way that we're spiritual orphans, and that's a good thing.

Deb felt the key idea of orphans is that they have no support. On top of that, I added, the pressures to conform and obey are a negative "support" in that they drive us away from our true nature

toward an illusory hitching post—almost always cloaked in the guise of being good for us.

Ultimately, orphans are not dependents, so that makes them independent. But we benefit immensely by surrendering a measure of our self-interest to a wise seer who can help us be far more than we imagined was possible. For most of us it won't be a special person, but a principle, and it's good to even consider the person as the embodiment of the principle. The guru that is the dispeller of darkness surely deserves to be capitalized:

In my years of search I was destitute, an orphan in ignorance.  
Now I feel profoundly blessed that at last I have found my  
orphanage in the care of the Guru. Aum.

In less than a year Nitya would be converted to being the guru who many thousands looked to for their support, to his surprise and then his humble acceptance.

## Part II

Baiju managed a fine contribution at the last minute:

Narayana Guru's intent in the first six verses of *Atmopadesa Satakam* was to give the committed seeker of the Truth a depiction of the Absolute as clearly as words could ever express. Such a statement I make intentionally because words coined by humans are inadequate or even incapable of fully describing the nature of the Absolute. The Guru knew it more than any of us. He knew, as he instructs in verse #7, there existed a way of acquiring the *Jnana* without the help of words. But such methods have become already less practical in the world of modern science and materialism, and so the Guru - a *muni*, the abode of compassion, could not keep quiet but strive hard to make people realize what the ultimate goal of the humans is.

Having provided a fairly detailed description of the Absolute, the Guru now begins, in verse #7, to instruct the seeker as to how he could be quicker and be more effective in the seemingly insurmountable path to the realization of the Self:

So far you have been sleeping, without waking to the fact that you are the abode of the never transforming Self; sleep no more (don't ever forget that you are the transcendental Knowledge – the Atman). You (your mind and senses) have been awake until now only to get entangled by the biological needs and material interests that ceaselessly flood your mind and senses. Now you should withdraw your mind and senses from those *vikalpas*, staying awake only to the Self. Not an easy task!

Figure out whether you are qualified to achieve the two steps prescribed – qualified here means having the ability to achieve it by yourself. What is it that makes you qualified? Are you yet a *tyagi*? Or, do you think you are determined to become one--one who renounces everything that keeps occurring in the mind as *vikalpas*--and you will never retract the resolution? You will keep with you only the bare minimum mundane things which are absolutely required to attain (or required until you attain) the realization of the Self. You will anyway renounce the little necessities you kept once you realize the Self. Also, verify whether you will stay resolute and diligently adhere to the demanding discipline that goes with the pursuit of the Absolute. And finally, are you capable of constantly maintaining your mind's focus on the unmanifested principle of the Absolute? That's how you test whether or not you are qualified to do it by yourself. If not, there is another time-tested practice for those who genuinely yearn for the Absolute.

(*Tyaga* or Renunciation mentioned here could be misunderstood, if it is not clarified. In the previous verse, the Guru has taught us that our inside is the never transforming

Self; there is nobody to realize it because the human mind is flooded by the constant flow of biological needs and material interests called the *vikalpas*. The word renunciation as used here is but the process to check the *vikalpas*.)

The Guru continues: here is what then you should do. You need to devote yourself to the service of a *muni*. Who is a *muni*? *Muni* means one who stays silent.... Be cautious in your search though. A *muni* you should go in search of is one who is silenced by the experience of living in oneness with the Absolute; when he himself becomes the Absolute, how can he speak! And such a *muni* is unaffected by the birth-death cycles. He is Brahman himself. Living with the *muni* in complete devotion to him, and in reciprocation enjoying the love and compassion of the *muni*, you will also eventually transform yourself, maybe not consciously, into the Absolute. Then between you and the *muni* there is neither you nor the *muni*, there is only the Absolute. Some say it happens by some sort of mute transmission of the grace of the *muni* into the devoted seeker. The process of transformation is inexplicable, yet you will know it when your transformation is complete.

The Guru says much more in this verse. Every time one meditates on it, he hears more and more insightful instructions from the Guru.

Narayana Guru himself was a *muni* who was awoken to AUM (the significance of which is referred to in the present verse) that represents nothing but the *Brahman*. Still he wrote these instructions of the Self because he knew the seekers would rarely find such *munis* in coming years and centuries. So he put down the instructions in such a way that an assiduous seeker who assimilates the visions contained in the *Atmopadesa Satakam* would qualify himself to successfully complete the pursuit of the Absolute.

*Aum tat sat.*

\* \* \*

Paisley also sent his reaction to the chapter:

I, too, am a shaky fellow (“This shaking makes me steady. I should know.” Roethke) who has lost his way. In fact being lost *is* my way. I have craved and prayed a teacher would take me in out of this crazy weather but none has come. Whatever the weather, I am in it. God bless the ground! This has decided to teach me directly. Given me what I wanted. Learning the hard way—by going where I have to go. Now I begin to walk softly, look my way into it feel not knowing. Sense the instruction of birds in the backyard. Thorny ever encroaching blackberries. The growing fissures in the more than a century life of the concrete wall. All a small step from the center of one tiny paradise. Thanks for a little friendship, and Ted for great great words, and change, for unlikely bliss.

And This

Have I talked about ‘xibipio’? A small group of about 800, the Hi’Aiti’ihi (The Straight Ones) people of Brazil use this word to describe an important part of their minimal body of beliefs about life. It refers to directly perceived experience. Indirect experience, hearsay, stories, everything that happens out of sight, is suspect, to be taken with a grain of salt. All other societies who don’t understand the significance of xibipio are the Crooked Heads. They also practice total non coercion. No one is told what to do.

\* \* \*

Here’s the Christian hymn that Nitya loved and often quoted, from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home,—  
Lead thou me on!  
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene,—one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou  
Shouldst lead me on:  
I loved to choose and see my path, but now  
Lead thou me on!  
I loved the garish days, and, spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long thy power hath blessed me, sure it still  
Will lead me on;  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone;  
And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

[John Henry Newman](#)

### Part III

Jan sent some thoughts on the chapter:

I liked the notes that pulled together many of the great ideas about this verse. I came across this writing of something Pema Chodron said that related to our verse, and the idea of being an orphan or refugee, which is next. Here's the link:

<http://www.philosophyforlife.org/pema-chodron-on-staying-open-when-things-fall-apart/>

She talked about our work as:



*First, to grow in the capacity to live with nothing to hold on to, so when you die, and there's nothing to hold on to, you're trained.'*  
*This, in fact, is what we've been studying all week – Nagarjuna's teachings on emptiness, which I'll write about next week.*  
*'Secondly, invite all sentient beings as your guests. There's no guest list. All of them.'*

To me, Verse 7 and its words about being an orphan spoke to this idea of relinquishing our attachments to this world in favor of finding our support in the Absolute. Scott wrote about that so well here:

Our unitive core is the domain of true comfort, or as we more often say, happiness. We can regain the comfort of not being glued onto events and impulses, if only we can maintain contact with our core.

I really like this part of Nitya's discussion too:

In the normal course of most people's waking life they are no better off than when they are dreaming or asleep. Though they imagine they have an identity, it is largely fictitious. True identity is when we know we are the unexpended, ever present consciousness called atman, which is identical with the Absolute. So the Guru's warning is not against physical sleeping any more than it is against physical waking, but against the possibility of us forgetting our true or essential nature, called *sat-cit-ananda* or *saccidananda*.

Maybe some of our work is changing our outside world, and strengthening our inside world, so that we can be brave enough to live more awake, grounded in the deeper divine self. I know our class has given us many tools for looking at why and when we go to sleep, in the sense of losing our connection.

Back to Pema Chodron, I also like how she spoke below about responding to things happening in the world today. It also related to the verse, as we aim to be grounded in our absolute nature, hearts open, without formulaic, fixed responses to external events.

Responding to news about Chogyam Rinpoche's son, she said:

*This is the time of #metoo. How could I not support that – I'm a woman. Women should take a stand, what's been dysfunctional should be addressed. When things fall apart, it impacts you, even at a subconscious level. At the same time, it's an opportunity for something freeing to emerge. I have no preconceptions of what that will be. I have no idea what will happen with the United States, or with the planet – they're not doing great either. But I'm an advocate for keeping your heart and mind open. Don't get polarised into fixed, militant or fundamentalist views.*

*It's characteristic of this time. Everything is blown wide open. That makes us all insecure. Our knees shake and our stomach is in turmoil. We don't like that as a species. But the training of the bodhisattva is to become slowly able to hold that falling-apartness, with eyes wide open, with heart wide open. What we do – that's the future.*

#### Part IV

Paisley responded to Jan's contribution in this way. I first checked to see if he meant it to be shared with everyone, and he wrote back: "Yes, please share it with the group. That was my intention and I forgot to say it. I was telling Andy today that my process of understanding is intimately connected to my ability to actually voice what I think I think." A point many of us can well relate to! Here's what he sent:

Thank you so much, Jan!

I don't really know who Jules Evans is but he wrote a great article. So bravely honest and open. And your thoughtful comments are terrific! It *is* so important to stay engaged with our falling-apart situation. And to stay awake even in the worst darkest darkness. Allowing it to be and to open up to your deepest self. I think that's where the *real* realization takes place. I wrote the following in my journal just a few hours ago, waking up after a particularly dark yesterday:

“Why do you always bring me down? Don't you see? Don't you see? It's so hard as it is. Being so fundamentally alone. Before the word there was only God. Alone in the dark dark. There was no space. Nothing. If you can see into that then you can make your way toward worship. When the darkness comes upon you and you are afraid. The impossibly deep fear you feel in the primal night. When your world seems to be slipping away. Madness and ‘the powerful odor of mendacity’ stretching out everywhere and forever. Bolster your courage and face the dark and move into it. Feel what that original solitude of God must be like. The immense loneliness of that. Only then can you turn and face the light and truly worship the glory of this wonderful transforming that is life.”