

1/5/21

In the Stream of Consciousness
Chapter 1 – The Wholesale Deal

Welcome to one of the lesser-known gems in Nitya's oeuvre. This is the first time the Portland Gurukula has taken *In the Stream of Consciousness* up for study, overshadowed as it has been by the Big Ones. I'm delighted its hour has come round at last. (Search that last phrase if you don't recognize it; 'has' has been added.)

Deb thought she was being linguistically clever in her Zoom invitation in writing, "From the deep current of the Tao into and on to the Stream of Consciousness." Then she read the chapter, and realized Nitya is describing beautifully what happens if we really allow ourselves to sink deep into either the Tao or the Stream: the same nameless blocks of time, the same sense of psychic energy, the same sun (or moon) of happiness and sweetness. And isn't that what we hope to do? To go from our obsession with concepts and names into this sweet simplicity?

My plan has been to make the Notes very short, especially since they have grown enormously in the last few years. As we read out the chapter and a lively discussion ensued, touching on one after another important issue, I began to realize that at least this first chapter, and very probably all of them, deserved a significant treatment. Regretfully I realized my Wednesdays were still going to be taken up in a mystico-verbal dance of the keys. Delightful and disappointing at the same time. Anyway, this chapter deserves a serious treatment.

In the Stream of Consciousness was put together just before the major study at Hall Street that became Nitya's finest achievement: *That Alone: The Core of Wisdom*, and it carries much of the same tone of the masterful sage-recluse that he had become in that period. A number of us: Moni, Andy, Bill, Nancy, Deb and Scott, were already intimates at that time, approaching 45 years ago.

Nitya always wanted to make his philosophy relevant to the real needs of real people, and the Stream of Consciousness (henceforth also SOC) was particularly apt for this. He begins by listing a few of his contacts in a twenty-four-hour period with people seeking help for a variety of reasons, after first attending a talk by Baba Ram Das at the Paramount Theater to a capacity crowd of around 3000. (“Those were the days, my friend, we thought they’d never end.”) He muses:

These experiences are not figments of my imagination. The couple of thousand people who came to the theater, the wise man who wanted to try music to retrieve the interest of his audience, the young man in London struggling to get a new position, the ailing philosopher, the woman wanting to make hay while the sun shines, and the lady with an unmanageable kundalini are all to be included in whatever program we envision if we are to claim any access to the path of happiness.

He notes that by excluding the irrational, science limits itself to other concerns than the needs of so many perfectly typical yet struggling men and women. There follows a brilliant section reasserting the importance of human values:

Human reasoning is a big bully that always wants to dominate over all the other faculties which constitute conscious experience. Man knows no other way of reshuffling the stuff of his consciousness than by structuring it in terms of logic and convincing himself and others that his logical stand contributes to the stabilization of ethical standards and that his reason and emotion are harmoniously blended. We bring significant limitations upon ourselves because of our disproportionate allegiance to reason and our confidence in its supremacy.

Look at all the great people who have captured the hearts and imagination of mankind down through the centuries, such as the Buddha, Lao-tzu, Jesus Christ, Bodhidharma, and the

Prophet. Even though today we have voluminous literature to expound the pros and cons of every word they uttered, not one of them arrived at the peak of their experience at the fag end of a chain of well-structured syllogisms. Life's dark fears, untiring hopes, vivid and hazy imaginings, and deep-rooted and irrational urges all came together at a certain moment to forge out of those great ones a model that was to influence mankind forever after.

This tells us that any attempt we make towards understanding should include entering into the thick of life to experience in full measure everything that contributes to the tremendous impact of what is sometimes described as the *mysterium tremendum*.

Andy loved that Nitya includes all these people, that there's nothing exclusive about who is worthy of becoming realized. It's part of the radical acceptance he advocates throughout, and especially at the chapter's conclusion. Deb agreed that you can't have a complete world view unless all those problems are included in it.

Paradoxically, Nitya entered fully into "the thick of life" by withdrawing from it totally, spending a year and a half in self-imposed silence, cut off from all contacts. I'll add more in Part II about his account in *Love and Blessings* (L&B), but it's the primary topic here as well.

One of the main themes of Nitya's teaching was the demeaning nature of pretense. Because we don't accept ourselves, we put on a false face, pretending to be a well-crafted persona to meet the imagined needs of other people, and it undercuts our connection with the most important part of ourself: what he called our Self. He never wanted to be a pretentious platform swami, though temptations abounded. Thank God he didn't!

I've been reading *The Master and His Emissary*, by Iain McGilchrist, as expanded in 2018, and will be referring to it frequently in the future. McGilchrist is a neuroscientist who

presents a nuanced updating of the left and right brain hemispheres that fits very well with intelligent spiritual understanding.

Generally speaking, our right brain is the Master of the title, the part of us that comprehends context and meaning, among other things. The left side of the brain is its emissary, using language and rational analysis to cope with the world the Master lives in, but unable to fully synthesize its findings by itself, for which the holistic right side is required. The left side leaves out what makes us self-authentic, and McGilchrist argues that our modern left brains have utterly forgotten their grounding in the right, in the Self, and this is responsible for the dire state of humanity at the present time: knowing we are missing something essential yet not knowing what it is.

Nitya in his early 30s came to an explosive moment of truth, when he could no longer bear the schism between his outer and inner realities. In both accounts, his advance into silence felt as if a solid plank he had previously walked on had fallen away, terrifyingly plunging him into a bottomless pit. He wondered:

Is it really necessary to use so many words, constantly supporting arguments with more arguments and adding appeal to appeal? As a young man, for about eighteen months I went into a state of silence without even resorting to signing with gesticulations, nodding my head in approval or disapproval, or expressing my intention or preference by changing the direction of my look. The immediate reaction that came to my mind was an awesome fear, as if the plank under my feet had given way and I was drifting away from anything that could be named or described.

The “plank” is the illusory structure we put together to interface with the world as it has foisted itself on us. Much of our effort in social interactions is to shore up the plank, and only rarely do we make efforts to set it aside so we can walk on solid ground. There isn’t any actual pit: it’s the fear of losing our protective mask that

creates one, and under it is our true Self. Once he got used to living without a plank, a platform, a schtick:

My world became very simple, very diminutive in size and without a clock ticking on the wall of my awareness. It was not in the least expected that such a dwindling world would transform itself into a spatial immensity that could swallow up all concepts of size, so much so that I could be at once a dimensionless mathematical point as well as an infinitude of immeasurable vastness. Simultaneously, the eternal present grew big enough to allow the icebergs of time to appear and float for short durations, before sinking back out of my awareness....

The outcome of the whole thing was very neat. From behind the darkness of my emotions there arose the subtle light of a new dawn to bring good cheer and sunshine to my identity, which was no longer bearing upon its forehead any label which could be read and classified.

Bingo! The left brain does the reading and classifying. It's essential stuff, but not the *only* stuff, which is where we've lost the thread. Taking breaks from classifying and reasoning to reside in our quiet and confident right hemisphere, restoring it to its rightful dominance, brings back our "good cheer and sunshine." There's nothing trivial about it, despite what the left brain believes.

Moni summarized the story in an interesting way. Nitya in his younger days always thought he was on the right path. Nataraja Guru slowly chiseled away all his certitudes, until it became very painful. After some time Nataraja accused him of things he didn't do, and that is why he broke away and went into silence. Then he himself was shutting down to his old values, and finally he came to a point where tears of joy could come out, he became free. He had been punished and ridiculed, then he moved on, coming out of the black shadow. It was a moment of truth in his life.

Susan was the first to draw a specific connection to Nitya's suggestions. She is reading books about relationships with mothers, and it inspired her to write about her own mother. It got her thinking how thin a piece of her mother's life was her experience as her daughter. Then it struck her that her relationship was just her own narrative and not who she really was. Through this she felt she was getting free of her narrow knowledge of what that most important person in her life meant. She realized that in a way, her limited idea of her mother limited her as well.

Deb concurred, noting how she, Deb, also has a story about her brother, a story about herself, a story about her husband. She didn't elaborate, except to note that dropping the labels is scary enough. Kris told us that her yoga teacher advised her students not to "spin a story," because you don't really know.

I reviewed how parents mostly mean well, and don't realize that what they teach us as children is going to be so constraining later on. They rarely intend that, though some do. Yet we grow up taking it as gospel, and are bound up by it.

Nitya tells us when he adjusted to allowing his emotions to run free of such inhibitions, he cried. He was always a tender-hearted fellow, but I've noticed that when someone is restored to their real Self, it is such a relief that tears pour out. Tears are in fact managed by the right brain, which is in charge of most emotions other than anger, and are unique to humans. Putting "me" together is a left-brain activity, while *being* me is right brain. Being yourself again is a huge relief of largely unnecessary stress, overwhelmingly gratifying—and familiar. Because it really is us. I had a friend who made a breakthrough a couple of summers ago who then sat in a tree and cried for at least a half hour, after reclaiming her lost self, feeling vastly refreshed. Once you know how to ease into it, without "making it happen" in any way, the restoration stays with you.

Giving up on ineffective verbal attempts to attain the nonverbal state appealed to many of us. Kris mentioned how we label things too soon, before we even get to know what they really

are. We look at things and immediately put them in a category. For Kris, Nitya's silence was almost like being a baby—you don't know what the outcome will be while something is happening, so you just observe. She quoted the italicized part from the second verse of Dylan's song *The Times They Are A Changin'* (my italics):

Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who
That it's namin'
For the loser now
Will be later to win
For the times, they are a changin'

Callin' on St. Bob got us reminiscing about a favorite line from the fourth verse of Dylan's neglected classic, *The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest*: "I don't call it anything" Said Frankie Lee with a smile:

"Eternity?", said Frankie Lee
With a voice as cold as ice
"That's right", said Judas, "Eternity
Though you might call it 'Paradise'"
"I don't call it anything"
Said Frankie Lee with a smile
"All right", said Judas Priest
"I'll see you after a while"

Judas Priest, by the way, is a euphemism for Jesus Christ, when used as a mild oath. The song ends with a memorable moral, a Dylan rarity, which fits well with today's theme:

Well, the moral of the story
The moral of this song
Is simply that one should never be
Where one does not belong
So when you see your neighbor carryin' somethin'
Help him with his load
And don't go mistaking Paradise
For that home across the road

Jan has been reading Oregon author Brian Doyle's book *One Long River Song*. In it he talks about his meetings with Peter Matthiessen. Peter was talking about a time when he had gone with Buddhists to a Zen retreat at Auschwitz concentration camp, where they spent time grieving to try to experience that horrific place and try to be open to it. At one point a number of them spontaneously started dancing and singing together. They couldn't believe they were doing it. It felt to Jan like a kind of breakthrough similar to what we're looking into right now. She said it reminded her of the life force just coming through them. According to Doyle, Peter kept talking about it for the rest of his life, of being open to a deeper sense of something, or as Deb said, a cleansing of that space.

You can find more background here, a bit of a pan, but an interesting review of the book about the Zen retreat at Auschwitz: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/books/review/in-paradise-by-peter-matthiessen.html> .

I wondered if any of our several artists were rankled by what Nitya said about the limits of form:

We think it's of considerable use to have a name assigned to everything. It is certainly easy to recall a mental concept by

attaching a nametag to it. Another item of information to aid in the recall of a concept is the form itself, but in that case there has to be the immediate presence of the thing which bears the form. Names, on the other hand, have the plasticity to be used for the purposes of abstraction and generalization, and can refer to what is present as well as what is not present.

Still, I don't have to demolish the entire world of name and form to be complete in my appreciation of life.

I feel that artistically-rendered form is intermediate between the object and its name. Nitya was surely referring to object forms, but artists render forms that are similar to names in that they can carry information and refer to things not present. Form is the provenance of the right brain, names the left.

Anita wondered about Plato's idea that everything was expressed in primary forms, and Andy filled us in. Briefly, Plato believed in a higher realm of formal archetypes and a lower realm where they took on specific forms.

Andy spoke of several implications, how there are different ways that the mind modifies itself. With some distinct forms, you perceive them and everyone around you will agree. With others, you can be mistaken about them, like the dirty old rope in the path that looks like a snake for a moment. You made a mistake, because the light was dark, or you weren't looking right at it. Then there's another form that is only words. Nitya once told him you can handle phrases as if they're real things but you should realize when it's a "verbal delusion." His example was a "flying gold hill." Your mind can picture it, it makes sense, yet there is no such thing. So there are many categories of things that are more real or less real. Ultimate reality requires our dropping naming and forming.

The inner instrument—the way we're experiencing—you have a function in you that is constantly operating, called *manas*, always asking what's this? what's this? What this question is presupposing, that you are going to answer, is always what 'this'

is. Out of your memory you are supplying the ‘this’ that answers that question, every time. It’s requesting that you make up an it, and the world is a whole lot of its. It’s a function of your stream of consciousness to always have to assign a name to everything, Here Nitya calls the name a memory tag: something that tugs that composite “this’ out of your archives.

What Nitya is describing is that faculty basically shutting down. He wanted to have his inner instrument stop dominating him, stop organizing everything for him.

One time when Andy was in graduate school he came out of the studio one night, and was walking home through a forested area. Suddenly he heard a scuttling sound, turned around and there was a dark shape hanging from a tree. He couldn’t identify it, and experienced a moment of pure terror. (The classic adrenaline rush.) Then he saw it was a raccoon, and immediately the fear ebbed. But for a few seconds it had completely defeated his naming function, his *chittam*.

If you want a refresher on this fascinating process, check out The Apple Experiment, on my website: <https://nitya-teachings.weebly.com/articles.html> . I’ve added Nitya’s breakthrough insight on this in Part II.

Anita wanted to know what the purpose of all this was. We need to remember that the *karana*, the fourfold function that also includes our intellect and ego, is a very useful function of the brain, while at the same time prone to falsify direct experience to some degree. With a well-integrated left and right brain, the distinct aspects can coexist in an optimally balanced fashion. The integration normally requires shutting off our dominant side to spend time in the subdominant. Stopping the wandering, discursive mind for meditation is a typical technique, though the left brain is wily at co-opting the process.

Nitya was always equal-minded about this ambiguity. Here he writes about enjoying the best of both worlds:

Memory does play a vital role in life, by continually forging

link after link to make life consistent. And even though I question the validity of contiguity in time, I do appreciate the contiguity of meaning. However, the result of my experiment with prolonged silence was that I was no longer under any pressure to recall past events, things, or the interrelations of things.

The left brain is the side that always asks what the purpose is, what's it all about, and it's protected in its insularity by the normally-subconscious terror of letting go that Nitya and Andy mentioned. Nitya further adds, "Suppose I want to look at the world as it is, without adding anything to it or subtracting anything from it. Even the very thought of it makes me shudder."

We are afraid to relinquish our ego's tenacious hold on the pittance of reality it imagines it possesses, even to regain our whole being. That's why it normally needs an outside stimulation: near-death, LSD, a guru as with Nitya, or a shock as for Andy, though his only lasted a few seconds, thankfully. Nonetheless he's been meditating ever since....

Andy offered another way to become aware of the process, a way of stepping back from immersion in the phenomenal flow. On his recent covid-lockdown meditation retreat, held solitarily in his home via computer, he did a lot of meditating. Occasionally the teacher would intrude with a guided meditation, but through the week Andy was able to go deeper and deeper into a calm state. From that he was able to pay attention to what goes on when someone is talking to you, when the teacher's voice came through the device. He realized words are completely abstract. They are forms, forms of sound that we all agree mean a certain thing. It was the first time he was struck by how strange that hearing of language could be. He was able to watch the noise of the guy talking to him and see how his mind hooked up to the meanings. It was another experience of form, of meeting his interpretation of form.

Bill made good connections with his current Patanjali study

with Andy and Nancy Y, about the way the mind builds up a series of names to explain the world. He loved Nitya's description of how daunting it was to drop the names of his friends, and how it shows how deeply we relate to the world as a cognitive structure, how reliant we are on it. It plays in to how you perceive the world, and how much of the way we react to things is built up on our memories. As we get older we spend less time in our intuitive sense, so getting out of our cognitive structures takes special experience or understanding, as when we get together in this group.

Nitya's conclusion is a magnificent exposition of the meaning of his realization in silence, and brought us to a fitting meditative close:

Today when I sit at a distance of ten thousand miles and twenty years from that simplified version of life and scrutinize the civilized world through which I've been rambling, I'm filled with a joy of understanding that life is at once simple and complex, that we can discover it by forgetting it and we can forget it by accepting it.

The acceptance I'm speaking of is not in terms of canons or commandments or enumerated laws of fundamentals. It doesn't happen by becoming profoundly scholarly or by climbing the pinnacle of saintliness. The simple peasant of sweet innocence, when he smiles, when he cries, when he leaps to his full height with rage and passion, and when he sits in calm repose, is living the life that you and I have forgotten and have now to rediscover through just such a wholesale abandonment and a wholesale acceptance.

Part II

How bare is the second part of these notes, without an opening haiku from Beverley! What a wonderful chapter in Portland Gurukula history it has been, having them every week.

Nitya has a longer account of his period of silence in *Love and Blessings*, in *Transformations in Silence*, which is an excellent companion read. It's even better if you read the previous chapter, *My First Serious Beak with the Gurukula*, beforehand, which covers the initiating shock. To me this the climax of the entire autobiography, a true rebirth saga.

Three excerpts from *Transformations in Silence*

At first it was just like falling into a bottomless pit, as if the solid plank under my feet had been pulled away and I was plunging downwards. Then I began to feel the terrible speed with which my body was going down. I needed something to hold on to and was frantically searching for support. There was nothing. A great fear came over me, and I began to think I was going mad. I wanted to cry out for help. Then I saw my will becoming stubborn to stop me from doing anything silly. I don't know how long I sat there, but around two o'clock in the morning I finally fell asleep.

There was nothing to do other than going back into meditation. But normal meditation was not possible, because I was sinking deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole. The sense of panic was sometimes so alarming that I almost cried out. Intense loneliness and overpowering fear brought up feelings of regret and self-pity. My first reaction was to run away, but the will to stand by my pledge of silence had become truly strong. At the same time, I wondered if my will was tyrannizing me and I was only imprisoning myself.

In about two weeks I began to stabilize, and there was no more fear of falling. Instead, a spirit of inquiry came to my mind and I was ready to go back and ponder over the meaning of each verse of the *Atmopadesa Satakam*. As I had all eternity before me, there was no hurry to master the hundred verses all at once.

I sat with the first verse for many days: “Permeating the knowledge which brilliantly shines at once within and without the knower is the *karu*; to that, with the five senses withheld, prostrate again and again with devotion and chant.” Each day it was as if I was going deeper and deeper into a vast gold mine and discovering fresh meaning in each word. The work became my constant companion. As I pondered the significance of each verse it was as if I was having a dialogue with Narayana Guru himself.

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From the chapter Cancellation of Gain and Loss, on the ‘what’ of ‘this’—the inspiration for my apple experiment:

A very beautiful thing happened while I was teaching F.H. Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality* to the students of the senior M.A. class. In it Bradley presents his idea of “this” and “what”. His whole contention can be summarized as follows: “This this is different from this this because of the what of this this and the what of this this.”

On first reading we get only a jargon of words. When taken individually, in every item of cognition a certain “this” is presented, and we are curious to know what “this” is. “This,” as such, is an undeciphered presentation of an unqualified presence. The cognitive function has to examine the features of what is presented to see how it can be distinguished from whatever was presented previously and whatever is to be presented afterwards.

Bradley’s statement did not yield any immediate envisioning of the problem it presented. So I allowed the students to disperse, and they all went to the canteen for coffee. I returned to my residence and had a cup of hot coffee. After taking a few sips, I opened a book that was lying on a table. It was Narayana Guru’s *Atmopadesa Satakam*. I opened it at random and read, “In ‘This is a pot’ the first impression, ‘this’, is the difficult to discern; ‘pot’ is its qualifying predicate.” The gist of what Bradley was trying to

say in an elaborate essay running to many pages was given by Narayana Guru in just two short lines. I was thrilled by how he explicated this philosophical problem without going into the jargon of logic. I could hardly wait for the next class to share my new insight and joy with my students. Then I thought there should be more opportunities for me to teach Narayana Guru's vision rather than beating about the bush with Bradley's philosophical paradoxes. (161-2)

Part III

Dipika has indeed caught up, and still likes reading about the classes! She writes:

It has indeed...

when

'Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world'... 🤔

Nice play of words by Deb :))

So incisive what Guru says and well explained. Thank you.

Identification is not only with nouns but we add adjectives to give more emotional complexity

e.g.It's a grey gloomy drizzly day

which then keeps up a continuum of thoughts.

I tried my hand at a haiku...

though will miss Beverly's gems... they were lovely!

Drop the plank

Of identification

Dive into Simplicity

love

Dips