

6/22/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 14A – The Word of the Guru

Early on, Nitya was accosted by many seekers who, like me, were inspired by books like *The Autobiography of a Yogi*, casually, and sometimes frantically, asked him or begged him to be their guru. This chapter is his measured response. He would have been well served to have had copies made and handed out to all comers.

One time while I was at Stanford University, there was a young boy, maybe 14, who was tripping on acid in our vicinity, and every light he saw he wanted to run toward. He was being literally drawn to the Light. We were outside, and the brightest lights were car headlights, so we had to hold him back, every minute. With his cosmic forces fully operational, it took three or four of us to barely restrain him, small as he was. That evening comes to mind when I picture all of us who had met a glowing representation of human potential in the form of Swami Nitya. Needless to say, he was not amused by our “vulgarity.” His first order of business was to get us to back off and regain some dignity, if not respect. Then he invited us to just be friends, instead of disciples.

In the case of the young tripper, we had to wrestle him to the on-campus medical center, where administering Thorazine to dampen psychedelic hysteria was their most common treatment in those days. Nitya used only words to defend himself from rude intrusions, but they could be strong medicine, too. Verbal Thorazine.

We didn't read this far in the chapter yet, as we're taking it in stages, but here's one of Nitya's conclusions:

You can be literally sitting at the feet of a wise man, and yet if your own mind is making a hell of a noise within you, no true listening actually takes place. That's why several years of

preparation are necessary before one places oneself before a master.

Learning to listen! Not unlike the present-day echo chamber of the internet, there was a lot of furious agitation and not much listening going on in the revolutionary epoch of the 1970s.

In her opening monologue, Deb cited fact that there are two axes we live within, the vertical and the horizontal. Friendship and socializing are horizontal activities, while spiritual dedication is vertical. Many of the people who wanted to be disciples were thinking in terms of a social contract, which is horizontal, not vertical, as they might have fantasized.

Of course, none of us were familiar with those concepts yet, in the early going. And it wasn't on the docket to be explicitly explained. Bafflement was part of the technique. As Andy put it in his most recent Gita class with me, "Guru Nitya was a master at playing back and forth between dualistic and non-dualistic dimensions of the student teacher relationship as an instructional strategy." He was brilliant at using the interplay of those two, and we loved him as a person as well as a guru. It's an ideal situation if you can keep your frames of reference straight. The problem was we were so young and needy, craving love and attention, that there was plenty of clinging, which Nitya rightly resisted. Here and there in his writing you can get a mild sense of it, but it was generally "off book." Eyes only. Thank goodness!

When it went well, we were in heaven. As Andy put it, Nitya would play with the paradox of being a guru and being just "one of the boys," and was most amused by it. In a dignified setting, there is no reason to draw a hard line between the two aspects—we were simply friends who were absorbing cosmic knowledge by the bucketsful.

There were also many complicating factors that we didn't understand at all. One was that Nitya was still a disciple himself, when he first arrived, but we treated him as a fully realized guru.

Fortunately, his talents were so attractive and exciting that before long the pretensions we had looked silly no longer appropriate, bringing the resolution, “I’ve got to stop playing those games.”

Nitya shares that he once had at least a semblance of our Youthful Folly, concluding:

The stable foundation of my discipleship is laid on my guru’s consistent victory and my continuing failure in all the trials to which we put each other during a period of twenty-three years.

It struck Steven that this implied a hierarchy, the way the guru is victorious and the disciple is defeated. At the same time he realized, in the example Nitya gives here, that Nataraja Guru disarmed all polarized situations by refusing to play Nitya’s ego games. He was instantly available when Nitya put them aside, and their relationship would be reestablished on the spot. For Steven, one of the important qualities is this relationship of authority, where the guru has the final word: it’s something hallowed and essential to spiritual enlightenment.

And yet, if this is openly harped on, it actually tends to exacerbate the duality. It’s more that by taking an opposite stance the guru equalizes and neutralizes the exaggerations of the disciple. Neutrality is the outcome.

Narayana Guru was as non-hierarchical as it is possible to be, truly treating everyone as equally-legitimate aspects of the Absolute. That was radical enough. Let me quote myself: “Like Krishna opening his mouth to display galaxy upon galaxy, Nitya shamed us by displaying an intelligence we could barely comprehend and had hardly encountered anywhere else. It was the best invitation possible to ditch our pretensions.” We were humbled without any humbling taking place—it was merely made obvious we were at the starting line, no matter what our self-image happened to be.

Deb affirmed that Nitya didn’t feel that Nataraja Guru was an

authority in any social way, and cited his eloquent riposte to a critic: “That which is right when you are wrong is God.” Yes, there is a strong hierarchical tradition in India, but the Narayana Gurukula doesn’t adhere to it. Part of why Narayana Guru was a revolutionary person and was so influential was that he never held himself apart. He had a full identity with everyone.

While agreeing with Steven that cultural history plays a big part in the Indian concept of a guru, Bill cited this lovely account of Nitya’s relationship to his Guru:

When I first came to live with Nataraja Guru, I asked him to enlighten me on my relationship to him. He said, “In the social context you and I are two free individuals who live their lives as they want. In the wisdom context I am the guru, and you are the disciple, and any violation of our nondual stand is to be seen as a consequence of disadoption.”

Love and Blessings has a more complete description of the moment, which is worth including, for the record:

The next day when he was sitting musing, I asked him, “Guruji, what is our relationship?” He said, “In the context of wisdom teaching I am your guru, and you are my disciple. In social situations you are you, and I am I, two free individuals who are not obliged to each other. When I teach, you should listen and give full attention. Don’t accept until you understand. If you don’t immediately understand, you should have the patience to wait. There is no question of obedience, because my own maxims are ‘Obey not’ and ‘Command not.’ Instead, understand and accept.” That was the lifelong contract I maintained during the twenty-one years of our personal relationship and another twenty-six years of my relating to him as the guiding spirit of my life.

Deb admitted that the social contract was a large weight for us to

get through, with its give and take, and cause and effect. Nitya always strove to move us past that type of construct.

A point Nitya makes later in the chapter is how can we surrender ourselves to a guru when we don't know who we are yet? If we really understood, we could participate without fear of something being unjust. That's the point of this chapter: to bring us to a more intelligent appraisal of ourselves, before any surrendering happens. Here's the bit:

A disciple cannot straightaway surrender his mind or individuated self to his guru for the simple reason that the disciple is not at all clear in his mind as to what the self is. When he is so troubled and tormented by a capricious mind over which he has little or no control, how can he ever make a gift of it to his guru?

Nitya adds here that "This would be a very painful and shameful act if such a submission were to place the sovereign in me at the beck and call of another person as my social superior." Can we distinguish intellectual superiority from social superiority? It's not so hard, but they are commonly mixed up. Moreover: "It is easy to understand the disciple's nonduality with the guru intellectually, but in actual life there are many short circuits and much spitting of fire." Very true! Without the fire, it can get a bit chilly.

So, what's the point of all this? Paul mused that the pursuit of truth is kind of instinctual at birth, but if you spend enough time here on the planet you become subject to the general addiction to duality, where the avoidance of pain and striving for pleasure, and the survival mechanism, are where we place our attention. Because of this, there's a kind of holiness in getting us out of our ignorance. We pursue what we see in others in hopes that our duality can be displace with non-duality. This is where it takes leap of faith or trust, for the displacement of darkness. It's like the relative truths we've been conditioned to live by allow us to establish a relationship with a guru, not logic.

Andy responded to Paul that you do need faith, but it's faith in something that you can't see or don't know, and that's the disciple's lot. Faith is a kind of fuel that sustains you through the process of relating to a guru. You appear to have a relationship with somebody, but it's not the kind of relationship you've grown up with, so you are constantly having the rug pulled out from under you. It's both an ancient and a modern problem to discover a true guru and not be misled by deceptive people. In Andy's time with Nitya, he was constantly upset: like the letter writer from Australia in Nitya's story, "registering his protest about what he interpreted as denial of his discipleship and also listing a number of claims that I should consider for accepting him as a disciple." Andy wanted attention, and everybody there wanted attention, and he was a master at withholding attention. He would invite you into intimate contact, and then next day you were a fly on wall. It gave your ego a workout! There was a kind of pulsation that he deliberately used with you and sometimes it would escalate into hostility. Spitting of fire, indeed. It was a process of destroying all our projections. Being around somebody who was this brilliant, funny, crude, a joker, and a very cheerful person: somebody you liked hanging out with. The next day that was not the point, and it was destroyed.

Jan drily observed that the social contract wasn't really being followed.... Yesssss.

Steven summed it up that the relationship between guru and disciple is dynamic. Unscripted, we might say. There is a psychic transfer, and it enables you to move beyond attachment. It's sometimes painful and sometimes loving. He remembers Nitya's gentleness, poise, quiet movement, so tender and soft, but there were also occasions when he, Steven, was the object of wrath, and it burned. Even so, over time he felt his mind becoming more and more peaceful.

Andy recalled wondering why isn't Nitya tougher? His model was Zen guys who hit you with a stick. He once asked Nitya why he didn't discipline him more, and Nitya responded,

enigmatically, “Your voice isn’t strong enough within me yet.” Nitya wanted to take some people—not everybody—to a place where there is a verticalized relationship. For the others he could be a beautiful friend, full of practical advice, but what he “wanted” (though he didn’t want anything from anybody) was that they would drop their fascination with relating horizontally. What we’re really looking at is philosophy, and it takes us into a mystical silence, where our tools of assessing stuff fall short. No matter how hard you tried, you couldn’t manipulate him.

I commented that though Nitya was a clear example of celestial brilliance, he insisted we ignite it in ourselves. It wasn’t that he was the supplier, but we imagined he was, and that made it painful when he cut you off, because you were craving the guy, not the reality. Yet how else could you find it within? For me, being terrified of him worked well enough to keep me at a fair distance for many years....

Bill affirmed Nitya was always willing to be a good friend, and it was hard when people only saw him as a guru, especially since the guru-disciple relationship had a much deeper and more profound meaning to him. He didn’t take lightly, and many of us did. It was hard for people to get close to him in that way, as he didn’t want to have 15,000 followers. No jumbo jets.

At this point Deb broke in to remind us how we keep talking about the guru as Nitya, but that can be a trap, because Nitya is not the actual wisdom or light: “guru” is a process of enlightening you, so you recognize the light. What we’re talking about is making our vision deeper and wider, and a guru is the bipolar aspect of that. It is the presence of the Absolute that is going to ignite us, not the focus on a particular person.

True, yet because we imagined this guy was our guru, he was very important in teaching us. This chapter is specifically about our relationship to him as a person, so we are not missing the point by talking about how we stumbled through our dances in a vacuum.

Andy shared again a revealing insight, about a friend who

took one of Nancy Y's online classes with him. His friend had a hard time getting into the spirit of Nitya's writing, because he was obsessed with processing whether he agreed or not with each proposition. Andy was put off by that, feeling our own agreements or disagreements with things are rooted in a shallow level, a surface reaction. Nitya was calling people to be quiet and open in an indescribable way, to find an inner truth that goes beyond whether we agree with an idea or not.

In a vertical parameter, nit picking about specific points is a defensive measure that keeps the wisdom transmission safely at a distance. We Westerners are well trained in such distancing. In addition to the new social distancing, we suffer from deep-rooted mental distancing.

Steven wondered what the meaning was of Swami Nitya becoming Guru Nitya after Nataraja Guru's passing? Was it spiritual or pro-forma?

Deb felt it was a spiritual marker in addition to the mechanics of the Gurukula organization, yet the term came to him first because of the lineage, the parampara. Nitya disliked the term Swami, and we had always seen him as a guru. Still, something changed when he was recognized in India as a guru, as you will see shortly.

Narayana Guru did not initiate anyone as a guru. He himself was just so obviously one that everybody treated him as a guru from the moment he came down from the hills. Nataraja Guru gave himself the title Guru, as Indian tradition allows, and Nitya and Prasad got the title due to their position in the parampara. As Nitya has made clear elsewhere, initiation is something we do ourselves. If we don't initiate the chemistry, no external initiation will make a dent in our hard heads.

Andy quoted Jyothi: guruhood is something that grows up around the new guru, meaning not just that there is this personality, but the universe is conspiring around this person. It's a total phenomenon. In the atmosphere around the Guru, Andy always felt he was in a halo of occasionalism, of serendipity, and this took it

out of a focus on a person and made it sort of open. Paul, while insisting we show them respect, acknowledged the guru is a facilitator, like a placenta, and we don't hang the placenta on the wall and worship it. It is not the person, it is the growth we experience around them.

Anita asked Deb: if the guru is more than a person and there is participation between guru and disciple, how would I personalize that in my life? Deb replied that anything that teaches you is your guru. It's a principle that poses a challenge to all preconceived ideas. The guru is the process of enlightening.

The idea enlightened Anita's understanding of the term, and she told us about having a down-in-the-dumps day recently. She took her car to the river, as she usually does at such times, and though the weather was beautiful, she was still feeling really low. But then a butterfly flew right past her open window, and she became aware of bird singing in the bush next to her, and her spirits began to mend. The next morning, when she woke up, she thought, doesn't the butterfly know it has a short life? It's flitting along doing its dharma, not worrying about it. It's a part of what makes everything exist, the bird and butterfly both. It was like the butterfly was her guru, lifting her out of darkness. She realized even if she was down and wasn't feeling significant, just living her life every day does contribute to the total existence.

That's right. The guru often appears as a momentary input. All of us have had the experience of a stranger saying something out of the blue, or someone saying something at work in passing, yet it stings or elates us, and stimulates a train of thought that needed to happen, and might not have happened without it. That's because our own guru is within us, *is* us, projected into the world in these forms that we can perceive, depending how in tune we are with our own guruhood. We don't always listen well to our inner guide, so it has to project reflections on the cave walls that we can register.

Steven told us about Terrance McNally's revolutionary plays on tolerance and the affirmation of groups that have suffered

stigmatization. His plays are capable of channeling so much truth about the human condition, and people say seeing them changed their lives. Art has the power to play the role of guru, as do poetry, theater, anything that condenses human experience. Because it is more concentrated and transformative, art works like a medicine.

I wanted to know, then, what *isn't* the guru? Isn't everything potentially affecting us? Everything is capable of teaching and inspiring and uplifting us. There is always something to work with and resolve. What we respond to is what we recognize as the guru, and it's a ubiquitous phenomenon, a force of the universe.

Anita echoed that the guru is in everything if we are open enough to see it. Her river, the Snake River, has many spots she visits, some fast, some calm; sometimes it's turbulent and volatile and dramatic, and other times it's calmer and more serene, but it's still being a river.

Anita, if you don't know The River Hymn, by the Band, or if you're ready to hear it again, check this out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnOkUk9Ynwk> . A guru song.

I recall in the 1970 Gita class, Nitya pointing to the light fixture and saying "I'm that light fixture, but Nataraja Guru is the electricity that makes it shine. The fixture itself has no light of its own. It's only a conduit." He always felt like Nataraja Guru was the brilliant source of his thoughts, the way some of us think of Nitya now. I keep finding how all my ideas were originally his: there is a continuity of our thinking. Even the few thoughts I imagine are due to my own cleverness, eventually I stumble across them in something he wrote—something I might have even edited—and I'll realize how deeply into me those thoughts have gone.

Deb reminded us of a paragraph Nitya wrote about the moment he became an official guru, reprinted in *Love and Blessings*, the transition that got him out of his egotistical suppositions and filled him with tenderness. It shows us how the guru lineage is a Word that is constantly manifesting.

Letter to Debbie, November 17, 1973:

It is evening. I am in Guru's room. I sleep on his bed, sit on his chair, eat from his plate, and receive people's homage and love. I am the guru. And yet I am the simple man whom you befriended, listened to, loved and hated, chided and chastised, adored and suspected. Those phases are gone. Now I understand the thoughts and feelings of Jesus for God and of Mohammed for Allah. I have learned to be humble and submissive. Any moment the Guru may need my heart to pulsate his love, my mind to think his thoughts, my hands to wipe someone's tears. I was not an ideal disciple either in my dedication or in my surrender. Both dedication and surrender now come with a grace that was not hitherto known to me.

Part II

Dipika was kind enough to provide us with a bit more:

Have just started reading...
and am at the part where Anita is asking Deb... if Guru is more than a person... n Deb says... the Guru is the process of enlightening!

... and I have this ambient music playing in the background...
where this Indian voice speaks out...
these are the lyrics...

'Enlightenment is not something that you have to choose
When there is no choice
That which remains is enlightenment
The ego is afraid
It is saying

What are you doing
Loosing yourself
Listen to the gaps
Between the words
Listen to the emptiness
Between the lines
Listen to me not what I say
Then an understanding will arise
And suddenly like a flash of lightening
You will be able to see me
And the original that is right now happening before you
Music does not mean much
In fact it doesnt mean at all
Just sounds
But music gives you something of the unknown'

<https://youtu.be/MW1K-ZeYKsA>

When you speak about learning from everything and everything
being a Guru... a musician and his inserted lyrics from a talk... are
also a learning :)

It just happened 🙌

xx

And:

think it's Osho's voice...

despite his madness n spiralling into megalomania... he made a lot
of sense... and his books were written in a simple format... I started
there n then graduated further in my search!

(only books not the ashram)

