

6/29/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 14B – The Word of the Guru

Nataraja Guru spoke like a monsoon-season stream fresh out of the Himalayas: with a torrent of concepts tossed out at lightning speed, overwhelming those in attendance who might be striving to stand against it—meaning to put it all together and make sense of it. The real transmission was the *guru-darsana* happening around, behind and within the blast, an inner landscape that was more a force of nature, like electromagnetism, or the opposite of gravity. Intuiting the darsana came in part from numbing the acquisitive part of the mind with an excess of input. To my knowledge, Nataraja Guru was unique in the way he did this, a genius exploding with insightful connections in every direction.

It can be seen in this chapter how Nitya sometimes employed a similar tactic, though considerably slower, and made more humane, loving, and individually crafted. The philosophy is plenty complex enough to “baffle sextillions of infidels,” as Whitman put it, so it can work just fine at a leisurely pace, and that can make it all the more attractive to a certain type of intelligence.

Bill talked about when he first sat in Nitya’s classes at the early Portland Gurukula. He was fresh out of college and his mind was as keen as it would ever be, and he was blown away and utterly charmed by Nitya’s brilliance. Without having met Nataraja Guru, he speculated that his, Nataraja’s, excessive mental current pushed a lot of people away, which it did. (Needless to say, this didn’t bother Nataraja Guru too much—it was sink or swim in his stream of consciousness as far as he was concerned.)

Nancy was there too, with Bill, at the Overton house in 1972, and found it a unique experience. It felt to her like Nitya knew everyone in the room intimately—you could feel he was registering them all, and cherishing them. We were all these thirsty minds and hearts, and he was so full of grace, it was beyond anything you could explain. You knew you were experiencing

something really beautiful, and he made you feel like you were a gift, that what was going on wouldn't happen without you. He didn't want to be a typical guru, with people kissing his feet, but to have an exchange with us, and you could tell he appreciated everyone being there.

Nitya's personable, super-caring style had a broad appeal in the counterculture. Most people do not want to have their "darkness removed," as the term *guru* implies, they just want to be uplifted and inspired. Nitya was careful to only discipline those who requested it, although some of that discipline did take place in public, where anybody might observe it. For almost everyone, it was a big relief that the grilling was happening to someone else. This gentler path could also be an effective entrée into the loving care at the heart of what was happening between guru and disciples. Many of us were "hep cats," and there's more than one way to skin a cat, to help dispel a cat's darkness.

The external tableau from time immemorial is caring people respectfully sitting together in common cause. Nitya makes this explicit here, in defining Upanishad:

Going near and sitting at the feet of a master is called *upanishad*. *Upa* means near. *Ni* means down. *Shad* means to sit. These three small words are highly suggestive of the spiritual context in which a master and disciple relate to each other.

The word "upanishad" also can be interpreted another way. It can mean the breaking down of obstructions in the right path. The obstruction of a disciple being ignorance, the role the master has to play is that of a dispeller of darkness or ignorance. The Sanskrit term "guru" literally means the remover or destroyer of darkness.

Steven was moved by this additional definition:

Another interpretation given to the word "upanishad" is the

initiation into secret wisdom. There is nothing more pregnant with grace than a guru agreeing to teach and granting a seat of honor to a dear disciple.

Steven agreed with Nancy that everyone attending those classes, both formally and less formally, felt they were in a seat of honor, that they were cherished. The situation was truly “pregnant with grace.”

I’m sure that’s what Nitya meant, that everyone seriously interested was honored, but I was initially put off by the implication—a hangover in our civilization from centuries of “sitting at the right hand of God” analogies—that the best disciple would get a seat of special recognition. Nitya never played that game; he was a true egalitarian. For that matter, some of us came to fear sitting too close to him, because those were the people most likely to be subject to “Gurukula grilling,” where your ignorance might be put on public display. But Steven and Nancy are right: the honor was not specially doled out: everyone was equally honored. Such cosmic kindness as the pervasive atmosphere is perfect for egos to relax in, allowing the whole psyche to open up.

Kris described how Nitya’s presence had a kind of resonance for her; even though she didn’t fully understand what he was saying, he had a galvanizing effect on her. It was more like the vibration of a tuning fork, that got you in tune with the peace and presence that he had. Now she understands the philosophy better, being more prepared, she can enjoy that too. She realizes the honor of being around someone who has already started being in harmony with the universe—how it helps put you on that path too.

It was apparent to all of us that Nitya was a very special person, despite the equality. Steven remembers every day, living in the Gurukula and sitting at his feet, and feeling that the setting was suffused with grace. What an honor it was! It took him a long time to realize how much grace was showering on him. It was over our heads....

The gist of the way the relationship happens is expressed in one paragraph:

The very first instruction given to the disciple symbolizes the highest discipline known to Vedanta: sitting silently with devotion and diligence and listening to the Word of the master. In fact, this is the only thing a disciple does with the guru all through their life. It doesn't matter how far removed in time and space they are from their guru, or even whether the guru still exists in the physical body at all. Throughout, the act of listening continues.

This could come across even if you hadn't asked for instruction, but were simply present "at the riverside," as the majority of attendants were.

Nitya was not just speaking abstractly here—we were a young and motley crew, full of ourselves, and mind-blowing ideas were in the air. It was a revolutionary era, remember, a prison-break of the mind, individually and collectively. Nitya gently encouraged us to settle down:

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.

Although we were outwardly quiet and respectful of him, he was well aware of the turbulent churning taking place in our minds, and he could see how that interfered with the subliminal transmission he was hoping to impart.

Steven mused how we all *tried* to quiet our minds, and we certainly didn't want to be suffering all that mental tumult. As Kris had said, being around Nitya was like magnetism, where you can

approach something that has a certain vibration, and by being close to it, you get it too. Or like the tempering of metal with the application of heat. This can even come from mentally invoking the memory of Nitya, or the principle of the guru. Associating with a guru is a purification process in the best sense. He concluded that we receive tremendous gifts even from his books. As Nitya says, it doesn't matter if the guru doesn't physically exist anymore—it's like we're listening to Nitya by reading these words, which are sheer poetry.

Speaking of gurus who no longer physically exist, Andy waxed reverent over Patanjali. He and Bill have been studying Nitya's interpretation of the Yoga Sutras with Nancy Y for two or three years, and have only a couple of lessons left. Though "they've never met the guy," Andy feels tremendous gratitude toward him. He might not even have been a real person, yet he's a stable form of consciousness that has been projecting itself into human society for more than 2,500 years. Andy has been reflecting on what his wisdom has done for him, and what an immense gift he's gotten from opening himself up to it. He feels a reverence for and pays homage to the *being* of Patanjali, which is not Patanjali the person, but just a beautiful fact of life.

I underlined that "listening to our inner guru" doesn't mean we are supposed to shut out the rich world of stimulation we exist in and just listen to our own self-reflective opinions. The ideas presented to us from outside stimulate so much discovery. Our inner genius is busily connecting us to a world of influence, which is surely a worshipful thing. The point is to not imagine something outside us is the sole cause of our salvation. It's a joint project, where our inner willingness leads us to incorporate outer alternatives. Either one standing by itself can knock us out of balance.

Bill was deeply moved by Nitya's poetic description of true listening:

The "third eye" is opened only by attuning the primal ear of the

eternal being in us to the sacred Word of the beginningless and never-ending master. What is so beautiful in the act of listening is the silencing of one's thoughts and withdrawal of the urge to act, which leads to an opening up of the ear and the other powers of perception.

Steven told us that as he and Kris were driving over to Karen's for a ride to class, Kris said her GPS was steering her wrong, and he thought, wouldn't it be nice if there was a Guru GPS, where you're going through life and you wonder if you should take a right or a left turn, and it would tell you? Assuming there is an inner guru GPS, then, how do we do that, how do we attune ourselves to it? How do we attend to that "primal ear of the eternal being within us"? He noted that most forms of meditation are aimed at that attunement. For that matter, Patanjali says it's Yoga. But how do we actually do it?

Nancy thinks it's breath, working with our breath, and it can lead us into a kind of primal meditation. Our first breath is the start of (outward) consciousness, and with our last breath, it's finished. It goes in and out, like the tides.

We all sat silently together for a few breaths, and then Steven intoned, "We need to quiet the noise. You're sitting at the foot of the guru but your mind is racing, so you have to calm your mind in order to hear." It was our meditative moment in midstream.

I agreed that listening is a perennial challenge. The master is not only a person sitting outside us, it's also our inner wisdom. We have to quiet ourselves just as much, if not more, to hear its whispers. Listening and being quiet and stopping our interpretive noise is a practice we can do any time, any place. There are some powerful gurus in this chapter but the real guru is with you all the time, as your true self. I promised to add a dab of illuminating neuroscience on this, and you can find it in Part II.

Nitya wants us to know that listening is an active skill:

All through the process of listening there is an awareness of the

transformation of all one's preconceived concepts. In fact, you are willingly initiating yourself into the alchemy of spiritual transformation by placing yourself in the crucible of fully devoted attention.

Paul complained about the persistence of his inability to listen, due to a favorite phrase that Nitya often uses: his *sense of agency*. As soon as he tries to listen, familiar thoughts creep in. He tells himself, okay let it go, but by then he's already holding hands with his next chain of thought. He wondered if he could give up his sense of agency in a wholesale manner, would he be able to focus on a single stable perception? With effort he can get his thoughts to dissipate just a bit, and it becomes easier to understand how he gets in his own way. Steven agreed it's a tall order to think you can bring the churning of your mind to a halt.

I assured Paul that that very natural process is also how our revelations come, so he shouldn't be too hard on himself. We're not out to permanently cut it off and stop the flow of thoughts: you want that, that flow is the inspiration of the "divine" coming directly to you. A temporary break is good though. It is true that those insights often are deflected in all sorts of weird directions. They are most often converted into an ego trip and lose their purity, but the more we fight that, the more blocked we become. It's a matter of letting go of our defenses more than smashing the perceived battlements.

Purity, by the way, has nothing to do with following a template of respectable ideas, it means that the original impulses, which are so subtle as to be nearly formless, get shaped by the way our mind habitually works, and get farther and farther away from where they started as we process them in comprehensible ways. Humans are expert at even reversing their direction completely and still imagining they are authentic. A measure of faith in the benignity of where they come from allows them to operate with less interference from our ego.

Andy added that we're not seeking to inject something into ourselves that we don't already have. We've mistakenly been taught that learning is the acquisition of something external to us, but the most stunningly simple observation of the gurus, the most unbelievable statement, is that you are That. It is an assurance that everything that you are seeking is eternally your birthright.

I brought us back to the original question of how is this accomplished? 'How' is a seeking term that leads us into the depths of the unknown. Yet as soon as you answer "This is how," the search is ended, and the machinations begin. In one framing, the question is right hemisphere and the answer is in the left. Science *seeks* certitude, but as soon as it finds it, the result becomes static, soon to be obsolete and dead. We inhibit ourselves when we think there is a right way to do things, and we don't know what it is, presuming that's what we need to find. In truth, the way is unknown, and we're living here to uncover what we can of it.

Steven affirmed we all have our own experiences to draw on; when we all share that, we sense the quickening of our spiritual development as a result. That sort of alchemy is what's transforming us. Bill agreed that little by little we learn to love, and all of us learn that way, through all the teachings, all the different pieces that create that flow.

We read a second section, where Nitya finally gets to the title of the chapter: The Word of the Guru. The Word or Logos. This is where we get an avalanche of ideas that exceed our grasp. (You'll see in Part II that *grasp* means left brain activity.)

Paul resonated with the whirlwind effect of the truths expressed becoming so overwhelming we can't pigeonhole them. After regaining consciousness after his liver transplant, he realized he could just relax, let God be God, step out of the way of what was unfolding. It heightened his awareness of the miracle of life. During his recovery in the hospital, the TV monitors were tuned to CNN, filled with people with legitimate complaints, and who needed to be heard now. Yet he was just happy to be alive, to



breathe. He didn't need to be heard. The value of breath for him was an effect of grace, and he embraced the part that grace plays in our being, It was freeing. There are plenty of things he wishes would happen, but a breath of air is an extreme enough act of grace, and he resolved not to ever take that for granted again.

A recent bit from Nitya's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary, based on the second chapter of Darsanamala, rings true to what Paul said, detailing an imaginary Fate we should strive to avoid:

People are happy when they have innate talents and are able to live a successful life in society. Many mourn that they came from seeds of inferior quality. They want to think that they are lost people who have been crippled even from the level of genes. They are not thinking of God; they are thinking of fate, a crazy superpower planning a destiny for all, and fashioning beings to go through predetermined paths of little joy and much misery. They think that once life is initiated in a body/mind complex there is no return and the destined path is to be tread. This gives the impression that life on earth is an imprisonment arranged by the caprice of an unknown overseer. (III.213)

Nitya starts the second section out with a rhetorical question: "If all that matters is imparting the meaning of words, why do universities with hundreds of professors, thousands of classrooms and millions of scholarly books fail to make us wise?" He concludes with an invitation we'll take on in the next class:

All that we have to understand here is the ever-entwining principle of the double helix with reference to pairs of positive and negative factors that constitute everything in the world of matter. A true master is one who has insight into the paradox of the dual aspects of existence in their ten thousand modes of

nondual operation. This is what is suggested by St. John's Gospel.

Thus to the guru the Word is the secret key to the total personality.

We can see Nitya is picturing a kind of mental DNA, with polarities that twist in spirals as they remain in contact. Adhering to one side of the helix or ladder by rejecting certain other aspects is polarizing. Harmony demands pulling together, coherence of the total, which aligns us with the experience, the dynamism, of the guru. This brings us to the throb of life itself, rather than the dead imagery of it as mere concepts. Again, check the cool quotes about this from McGilchrist in Part II.

Jan found the joining of the light and darkness in this conception reminded her of That Alone's verse 33:

Knowledge, to know its own nature here,  
has become earth and the other elements;  
spiraling up, back and turning round,  
like a glowing twig it is ever turning.

She found the glowing twig to be a magnificent symbol of consciousness, because it's not like we're always on, we go on and off. We regularly fade into forgetfulness, and that's the nature of the game. It gives her comfort to know that we're living in a world of maya that is going to manifest itself and then fade out. It's restful for her to know we are going to have periods where we are not fully connecting with the eternal being or anything special, just to the 10,000 things, and as we center we see how they lead back to the eternal, internal self.

I agreed, the idea is to treasure our aliveness, in whatever measure it's granted us at the moment. We live in a world where religions have made us all out to be sinners of various sorts.

Simply accepting the miracle of our existence is primary, while realizing everything else is secondary. What are we holding back for?

## Part II

I just reread Flip Flop, an article I wrote in 1983 about meeting the Guru. To my surprise it's actually quite good, and fits well with this chapter. Here's the link: [Flip-Flop](#) .

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Here are the two lovely excerpts from *The Master and His Emissary*, by Iain McGilchrist, I promised to clip in, but didn't take time to read in class:

### Newness

...cannot be willed, though it might be much desired; it requires an (apparently passive) patient openness to whatever is, which allows us to see it as if for the very first time, and leads to what Heidegger called radical 'astonishment' before the world. That concept is also related to Jan Patočka's shakenness: a sort of elemental driving out of the complacency of our customary modes of seeing the world. It is what Wordsworth in particular strove to achieve: in Coleridge's words,

to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

It involves reconnection with the world which familiarity has veiled. It is at the furthest remove from the need to shock: it requires looking more carefully at what seems only too familiar, and seeing it perhaps for the very first time. (173)

Conclusion (to ch 4, 5?, in part)

The nature of language in the left hemisphere and its relationship with grasp imply the overriding value to it of *use*. The left hemisphere is always engaged in a *purpose*: it always has an end in view, and downgrades whatever has no instrumental purpose in sight. The right hemisphere, by contrast, has no designs on anything. It is vigilant for whatever *is*, without preconceptions, without a defined purpose. The right hemisphere has a relationship of concern or care (what Heidegger calls *Sorge*) with whatever happens to be.

If one had to encapsulate the principal differences in the experience mediated by the two hemispheres, their two modes of being, one could put it like this. The world of the left hemisphere, dependent on denotative language and abstraction, yields clarity and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, static, isolated, decontextualized, explicit, disembodied, general in nature, but ultimately lifeless. The right hemisphere, by contrast, yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known—and to this world it exists in a relationship of care. The knowledge that is mediated by the left hemisphere is knowledge within a closed system. It has the advantage of perfection, but such perfection is bought ultimately at the price of emptiness, of self-reference. It can mediate knowledge only in terms of a mechanical rearrangement of other things already known. It can never really ‘break out’ to know anything new, because its knowledge is of its own representations only. Where the thing itself is ‘present’ to the right hemisphere, it is only ‘re-presented’ by the left hemisphere, now become an *idea* of a thing. Where the right hemisphere is

conscious of the Other, whatever it may be, the left hemisphere's consciousness is of itself. (174-5)

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I just rediscovered a part of the Portland Gurukula Diary that I've added to my bio for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, which illustrates this line: "The guru may be on the lookout for the luminous principle of positive vital function which is time and again confronted and negated by a darkness housed in the very physical and mental make-up of the individual whom the guru has to correct, guide and teach."

October 14, 1971

I woke up at 3:00 a.m. The eyes were in pretty bad shape. I went and flushed them with cold water and sat in meditation and thought of Scott, with whom I had had a meditation last night. Since I decided not to have any arguments or wordy fights with him, the next best I could do was to bring our unconscious and subconscious together so as to be woven into an inner liaison. To begin with I had difficulty finding some access to his mind. I waited for the physical light interfering with the psyche to subside so that I could look for the natural light that radiates from his own body. In fact, every object is luminous to some extent. What I was looking for was not any mysterious aura or astral light but a more intimate sight of his bodily self. It is nice to see a person separated from the clothes he wears and his physical background.

While I was waiting for this, his breath became more and more even and it was so very nice to see more and more peace enveloping us. I was right in deciding upon this approach. When we progressed in relating to ourselves through silence, the sense of duality disappeared from my mind and I was not thinking of his correction or any fault. At that moment he could be anything for me, such as a star or a little flower, a bird, a

tiny crystal, a beam of light or a simple thought. In me also there was no personal identity limited or conditioned by any past notion or future anticipation.

An inner thrill that had been vibrating through me grew up into an ecstasy that drowned in it all conscious ideas. When I emerged from it, the figure of Scott became more and more clear. I slowly got up and touched his forehead. As he wanted some more time, I went to the bathroom and washed my face. We said goodnight without making any comment on our meditation. After recalling all this to mind, I went to bed.