

10/5/21

In the Stream of Consciousness – Part Two

Chapter 17E – Bhoga and Yoga

“Certitude resides at the core of consciousness.” With this simple premise, we were launched into an exceptional examination of how we relate to the world around us. Important supporting quotations from the Gurukula literature have been placed in Part II.

Deb was amused that in the story, two celibate yogis are talking about the polarity between sex and nondual unity—how they are not separated, and there is a complementarity in their supremacy, inviting a vertical transcendence. Although Nataraja Guru was an old-fashioned Victorian in many ways, he strongly accepted enjoyment as an essential aspect of life. Nitya was also extremely restrained, yet she recalled a time at La Center with Nitya, where we were all sitting up on the hill, under some trees, everyone feeling blissful together. He said there were several peak experiences, including sexual orgasm, but right here we are in a moment that never ends. He was calling our attention to the steady state of ananda, in contrast to mere temporary access to it through specific behaviors.

Steven was struck by the profundity of the thought that “Man seeks certitude,” how it boiled everything down to its essence. Our existence in the horizontal is directed to certitude: all people want to *know*. They want to be convinced that what they see is real, what they believe is real, their actions are real. He has taken courses in Western epistemology, the study of knowledge, but found the instructors dismantled certitudes rather than teaching how to seek them. The classes brimmed with disputes and hairsplitting arguments. Steven is more drawn to Indian epistemology, which supports the possibility of certitude. He recently listened to a talk by Swami Dayananda, who considers scriptural authority, direct experience, and inner realization as valid routes to certitude.

Nataraja Guru stewed for years over how he should begin his *Integrated Science of the Absolute* (ISOA), his magnum opus. He ultimately decided on “Science seeks certitude.” This does not mean it finds certitude and then comes to a halt. The seeking is the thing. If you look at the history of ideas, certitudes come and go, most of them quickly discarded, and usually ridiculed in the process. It is folly to claim you have the final answer. The seeking of certitudes does consist of discarding the conditioning and unexamined assumptions we not only operate under, but *have* to operate under, because there isn’t a final, perfect template for our actions. We are flawed beings working with the partial information we are able to access. And all things considered, we do very well with it, thank you.

Remember, the certitude Nataraja Guru advocates is connection with the core of our being, not just a set of ideas that purports to explain it all. Only the core remains unchanging and connected, all else is in permanent—dare I say terminal—flux. There is little point in exactly defining the universe, but attaining the core of wisdom is truly transformative, permitting us to act with confidence despite our limited awareness. If we should ever claim to have fully arrived, we will have merely proved we haven’t.

Paul recounted his aha! moment at the hospital last year, when he was telling his doctor that he knew some things, had been around for 61 years and figured a lot of things out. Like most adults, he wanted to forge on in his own way. The doctor rebuffed him: “You have no clue. Your beliefs will kill you. Here’s what you need to know.” Paul instantly realized that he was operating on lethally conditioned knowledge, seriously out-of-date knowledge, and he had to upgrade or die. He knew he had to stop doing what he liked, and trust another voice. That taught him that truth is not so much an achievement as a process of giving up the falseness of previous beliefs. His earlier sense that he understood himself was more like enjoying the comfort of familiar feelings.

We easily gravitate to such lazy comforts, which is why we need to invite challenges and doubts to our default settings. Paul likened his hospital transformation to Baptism, where you symbolically die under water and are reborn when you come up for air. It has helped him discard many negative self-images.

Paul related another vivid example of conditioning. He was in a house with a sleeping baby, and heard it severely choking. Instantly he was in emergency mode, ready to charge in and save its life. Then he discovered it was only a door creaking; the baby was fine. After that, every time the door “choked,” he simply smiled and nodded, knowingly. It no longer pushed his buttons.

Anita was recently discharged from the hospital after a serious bout of bronchial pneumonia. At home the week before, she had begun to fight for breath, which is the ultimate adrenaline jolt. She felt like she was going to die, and got panicky. After emergency transport to the hospital, she felt safe again, almost like a child, because she trusted her caregivers. She did take note of the subjective aspect. The certitude part came later, after a sobering diagnosis of advanced lung disease, likely from secondhand smoke from her family, long ago. Anita faced the certainty that she was really dying, not immediately, but not as far off as she had imagined. Taking it quietly, with calm acceptance, she pondered what to do about it. She quickly decided she wanted to experience as much joy as possible from now on, which meant letting go of negative habits, and living with as much kindness to everyone as she could muster. Where she’s had a tendency to be a bit testy at times, she is going to turn it around, with kindness first. She summed up her certitude: I am dying—so are you! Now she’s going to be nicer about it.

Deb concurred. We want to experience essential existence, the “is-ness” of life, the continuum of bhoga and yoga.

Paul proposed that accuracy in dealing with the horizontal can act as a guide to our vertical nature. He meant what Anita was saying, that when you deal with your actual life with care and kindness, it opens up the joy of living. You realize the world is

magic. Consciousness is magic. You can experience magic wherever you are, in whatever you're doing. In addition, he's found that when he's angry or upset, if he asks a question of the universe, it provides him an answer. Possibly he's just opening himself to his best instincts by asking the question, by admitting his ego doesn't know. On the other hand, some dissatisfaction with the mundanity of the horizontal energizes his striving.

In a unique example of the value of horizontal feedback, Anita's son-in-law bought some hen's eggs to hatch and raise, but only one survived. They put the chick in a box, but it chirped piteously without cease. Anita did some research, and had them put a mirror in the box. Then they added a stuffed animal and a ticking clock, which makes the sound of a heartbeat. The bird was instantly content. Anita thought, we all want to know if we exist. The world reflects us back to ourselves so we know we exist. That's the certitude we're in need of.

We could also say we need companionship, and, fortunately, we can make do with very little. Chicken little.

Steven surmised seeking certitude originates in the quest to control nature—it's a survival tactic, to assure our basic needs. When it becomes sophisticated, it is called science, but it's still about understanding for control. Spiritual seeking is in a completely different domain, and yet we purify ourselves so we can better reflect our true being, and that's a kind of control also. Steven felt that the achievements of yogis are really beyond his reach, and it's frustrating. Overcoming the duality of the self and the non-self is impossible, except for the rarest of people. All he has is the faith that it *can* be achieved. In the meantime, he too has resolved to live with joy and kindness, an excellent interim decision.

I reiterated the point about seeking rather than finding certitude. One critical takeaway is that we aren't required to wait until we achieve some rare "realization" to begin to live our lives well. We are flawed, stumbling people; nonetheless we can engage very well with the magic of our surroundings. One of our major

impediments is that we believe we are supposed to be something other than what we are, something really amazing. Like God. It's a socio-religious hangover, and we must recover from it. We all know a lot and are good people, so what's the deal with sabotaging our enjoyment with stern commandments from the creaking doors of our heritage? The Gurus in the story include bhoga with yoga. We are supposed to enjoy our existence, make it even more fun for everyone, because we are here. Why do we resist this?

Karen put in, shouldn't life feel good?

Deb remembered Nitya speaking of the unconscious as a kind of sealed box, like the indestructible ones carried on commercial airplanes. She cited Yoga Darsana verse 4, where Nitya says:

Autonomous modulation takes place as a conditioned reflex. The instinctive behavior of a person has behind it the inbuilt accumulation of the information of their genetic past, and hence the power of the autonomous to produce modulation is enormous, instantaneous, and mostly of an undetectable nature with regards to the implied unconscious motivation. This is a biologic 'black box' zealously guarded by the unconscious, and the challenge it offers to the yogi is the transmutation of the autonomous into the voluntary.

Deb recalled that Nitya taught that your reason can only take you so far into the black box, and then you have to quit trying in order to reach the depths of wisdom. You make supplication to the mystery. We all try, and the mysterious unknown is always there. The blessing comes from bowing our head and letting go of our stuff.

Steven really appreciated Deb's words, and mentioned how Einstein consciously remained humble and in awe of the mystery throughout his life. If it was good enough for Einstein, it was good enough for Steven. Deb concurred that the more we know, the more it's an *impenetrable* mystery. It only seems simple when we

don't know much. If knowing is controlling, we surely need to know how much we don't know.

Steven poetically likened it to a warming fire, something you don't "know" precisely, but you feel its warmth, you sense the truth of it. He gets that feeling in the arts, from the expression of beauty.

In the arts, too, if you define or pigeonhole a work, you limit its impact. In a sense you profane it. First let it hit you with full force; worry about how to describe it later.

Deb remembered Nitya saying that good luck is simply the way you get through difficult situations, implying to her that managing them deliberately makes them *more* difficult. Again, this pertains to the value aspect of life and relationships. According to Nataraja Guru it "spoils the case" in mundane matters, which we shouldn't necessarily leave to luck:

Dialectics is conducive to unitive understanding only, and spoils the case when applied to ordinary situations in life where usual ratiocinative methods or logic would be the proper instrument to employ. (Gita, p. 112.)

Deb read out from Reaction and Review #4 (in SOC) as dealing with the control issue:

Experiences can be concept forming or concept dissolving. Social life is a participation in a transactional frame of reference in which a particular face of the ego is related to particular things, events, and specific moods and temperaments of individual people. The game of transaction is primarily carried out by forming concepts, using the mind as a chessboard and formulated concepts as pawns. Implied in transactional experience is the dialectical interplay of the one and the many.

In the concept dissolving experience, consciousness reverses its flow from the specific to the generic. The guru, identified

with the Absolute, is the genus of all genera, and all that is to be experienced is the identity with That, which transcends all specific concepts. In this context the Guru stands for That and the disciple for 'I'. 'That' has no meaning, except in the sense of being the only reality, and 'I' is to be understood as the only experience.

Andy mirthfully saw how this also related to the last chapter: "That which is right when you are wrong is God." He recalled times when he would ask Nitya a question, and even before he was finished asking, he would realize that the premise was dualistic, making the question irrelevant, or anyway answering itself. This happened often, and to many of us. Nitya's stillness and neutrality spoke loudly enough for us to hear it. Andy also addressed Steven's other dilemma, saying the idea "I don't measure up in stamina to real yogis," is a hindrance. We are never apart from the Self. It's impossible to be.

That's right. Our heritage convinces us that there is a level of perfection that we must reach in order to be "godly" or "realized" or, even, "okay." Only the top competitor wins the trophy. No one can best Milarepa in doing impossible acts for his guru. You have to climb the highest mountain. The Gurukula philosophy includes acceptance of life in every condition of imperfection. We will never be perfect, never have full certitude. We can be sure of that, at least! But we are already awesome. We are conscious entities, and are invited to use our consciousness to the utmost. Throw off all doubts, knowing we are already the Self, ready to live life to the fullest. The Gita's fourth chapter ends:

42) Therefore, sundering with the sword of Self-knowledge this ignorance-born doubt residing in the heart, stand firm in the unitive way, and stand up, Arjuna.

Steven felt the crux of the issue was whether we simply accepted these truths or if we really *experienced* them. When we don't understand completely, we suffer. We're always suffering.

Andy suggested we learn from suffering, it's what leads us, and he went farther: realizing our limits is what makes us capable of compassion. (One implication being that if we only honor the highest achievements, compassion is hard to come by, because everyone looks like they don't measure up.) If we honestly accept what *is*, and say yes to it, then you get beyond the focus on limitations.

Anita was excited by compassion being brought up. She suggested we could just look at a baby—their compassion is innate, and contagious. She has two infant great-grandchildren, and when they lie together in a cradle the compassion between them is palpable to all beholders. She also wondered whether consciousness comes from more than the brain, leading the class to extol body experiences as exemplifying consciousness. Bhoga. In Part II, you can see even Nataraja Guru started with the body as the basis of self-evidence. Deb talked about the various centers of intelligence being discovered lately in places like heart and gut.

Lisa Feldman Barrett, in her *7 1/2 Lessons About the Brain*, wants us to know that thinking is a minor offshoot of the brain, at best:

The idea that our brains evolved for thinking has been the source of many profound misconceptions about human nature. Once you give up that cherished belief, you will have taken the first step toward understanding how your brain actually works and what its most important job is—and, ultimately, what kind of creature you really are. (2-4)

She means thinking is overrated: it's just a tiny trickle of the immensity of what's going on upstairs. The job of brains is to coordinate the countless processes that maintain our wellbeing. Consciousness and thoughts are not the same, either. We don't

need to accurately locate our consciousness in order to use it wisely and well, and exuberantly. It isn't dependent on what we know; well, only slightly dependent. So let's all make the most of our consciousness, one of the universe's greatest inventions.

Karen, a transcendental massage therapist, said she transfers her certitude to her clients through her touch. For her, the whole body is aware and alive, and that certitude is her gift to them. It's something we should all allow ourselves to feel.

Part II

Bhoga and Yoga

We were setting out on a long journey from the Nilgiri Mountains in South India to Punjab in North India. As soon as we boarded the train, Guru said, "Man seeks certitude."

People were still pushing each other aside to find their seats. Both inside and outside the train there was a lot of noise, and the situation was absolutely chaotic. But when I looked at Guru, he was sitting with his eyes half-closed, absolutely oblivious of the shouting and disorder in the compartment.

I pulled out my notebook and started writing. He continued, "Man is endowed with reason. Like a crest-jewel, there shines in human reason the jewel of discrimination that enables man to discern the true from the false, the essential from the nonessential, the self from the nonself, and the transient from the eternal. It is this discernment that brings certitude. Certitude brings peace. In peace the duality of the self and the nonself is transcended, at least momentarily. That moment of nondual silence is yoga.

"Life alternates between bhoga and yoga. Sexual consummation marks the peak of bhoga, and spiritual absorption arising out of true certitude marks the peak of yoga."

* * *

Nitya, in the New Foreword to ISOA, the Integrated Science of the Absolute:

The very first lesson I learned from Nataraja Guru is that certitude resides at the core of consciousness. In spite of syllogisms which descend or ascend between generalities and particulars, there is always a middle term whereby certitude is established. What is called proof or certitude is not a tangible thing, but refers to actuality or reality. Reason moves, as it were, in a vertical axis that is both transcendental and immanent at one and the same time, and also fully subjective in status.

Nataraja Guru considers it both a scientific and philosophical imperative to have a central absolute certitude to infuse all certitudes to be approved as bonafide. To do justice to the postulates of Narayana Guru, Einstein and Bergson without creating a cleavage in the unitive certitude they all seek, Nataraja Guru maintains his dictum that a normative notion of the Absolute is within the reach of human understanding as given to man anywhere in the world. For this purpose Nataraja Guru suggests that the *a priori* and *a posteriori* approaches to truth or knowledge have to be made to come together from opposite poles, as it were, to meet on common ground. In other words Nataraja Guru is suggesting “a process of normalization and re-normalization to be implied.” To make this point clear Nataraja Guru refers to Einstein’s special theory of relativity.

* * *

Nataraja Guru, from comments on verse 90 of Atmo:

Our thinking or reasoning has its starting point in our experience of things which exist by natural right, such as our own body. We say to ourselves, ‘I have a body’, and then perhaps comes the higher thought that Descartes pointed out as the basic starting-point for his methodic thinking in this metaphysical reasoning, which was

formulated by him in the words 'cogito ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am). We build up certitude about reality in this manner, with the body-sense or experience as the more natural starting point.

* * *

Nitya, Karma Darsana, verse 4:

The faculty of reason is used by most of us in the formulation or the attempted formulation of precise judgments. This faculty relies greatly on its capacity to detach itself from the irrationality of emotional urges, and to make itself follow as closely as possible the laws of logically structured argumentation. Logic and mathematics are considered by most to be natural forms of the finest expression of the reasoning faculty. What is called science today is very much a product of logical and mathematical reasoning. Science seeks certitude, and bases that certitude on evidence. But the highest form of evidence is always that which is self-evident. In the case of science, self-evidence is not confined to the logical sufficiency that may be experienced by one person; it is taken to be that seen as self-evident by all whose minds are logically disciplined.

Part III

Dipika comes through again:

Well discussed!

I personally feel that the only certitude is that of 'not knowing anything of the vast Unknown'.

And that we are all in it together.

In a way this keeps one humble & open to learning.

As you said Science uses mathematics & logic, but even those are in a constant state of flux, if someone discovers something new or reworks a formulae, the so called final scientific answer can be different.

I love your comment that 'we are all awesome' regardless of our flaws... to learn to love ourselves and others despite them, is a certitude we need to learn and keep learning!