

1/26/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 4A – The Bed of the Stream

The bed of the stream of consciousness refers to the foundations of our conscious existence. Nitya cleverly works a number of bedrock Vedantic concepts into a meditation of self-examination. The result is dense enough we decided to take on the chapter in short sections, giving full attention to each slab of the foundation.

Nitya opens with a key question, “What do I want?” He means it in the broadest possible sense. We each have a huge number of wants in our stream of consciousness, and these vary from person to person, from hour to hour. It would be pointless to study those in a context such as this. “What do I want?” addressed philosophically is a question that leads deeper into the bed of the stream. The bed includes the universal wanting, often driven by a sense of incompleteness. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad calls it hunger, the first urge of creation.

Nitya used to refer to what he’s getting at here as the master drive, the unitive, general principle that determines the shape of all our specific wants, from trivial to significant. What is it that guides our life, that gives it meaning, including the drive to sit virtually in a dedicated class to mount a spiritual search? Many people would consider that idiotic, and a waste of time. Obviously, anyone who is still hanging with us feels differently.

Nitya is clear he is happy, and he wants to share his happiness. Happiness is unitive, and wanting to share it with friends is the first duality, since he has to differentiate himself from the others. It’s a very narrow separation, because the joy is so overriding that it minimizes any awareness of otherness. Nitya waxes rhapsodic about the beauty of happiness, to set the tone:

On certain occasions it’s like the jubilation of a serene ecstasy that is radiating its brilliant hue, spreading a profound sense of

beauty around me. On other occasions it may come as a feeling of soul-stirring gratitude for being placed in a situation of exquisite goodness. There are moments of wonder and amazement in seeing how a cloud of darkness that had been veiling truth and filling the mind with menacing doubts and hesitations suddenly vanishes and is replaced with a conviction of truth that is wholly reassuring and comforting. And there are moments when time passes without being noticed, and the duality of the seer and the seen does not exist at all.

If there is anything greater than this which can be termed happiness, my search is in its pursuit.

We are so suggestable! When we read out these words it moves us a little, but having the actual person sitting there is so much more soul stirring. Being present with a living guru, words like these have the additional impact of bringing those feelings to life in you. They really lift you to an ecstatic, problem-free state, just as art or beaches or love add meaning to existence. This isn't about trying to ignore the world to stay happy, it's a combination of self and other, united in conscious awareness.

Andy talked about how all the answers to Nitya's question have the subtext of happiness. You want this or that so you can be happy. I want to go to the beach because I'll be happy there. Either way, you don't normally analyze why you want something, it's a pre-conscious motivation.

One of the most central Vedantic premises is that the source of happiness is within us, as our true nature, and we project this onto all the things we seem to want. Once we do that, we also project our happiness to those outside factors, and then feel desolate if those factors are missing. Yet in an absolute sense, those things are not where happiness resides—we are. If we knew this, we could maintain a steady state of joy even as unfun events were unspooling. You don't need stuff to make you happy: you're happy and you do stuff. Karen blurted out how it works:

“I’m happy and I want to go to the beach!” Sure, we can take our happiness wherever we go, preferably to delightful places.

It should be easy, yet we are trained by the ubiquitous consumer mentality to be sad if we don’t get what we want. Our first post partem gig was to cry to let mom know we were hungry, and it’s snowballed from there. Here we’re trying to reconnect with the unitive aspect that has gone into hiding because we’re busy looking for what we want elsewhere. Trying to get our assumed needs met. That’s still important, but so is a near acquaintance with our true nature: the bed of our life stream.

Deb agreed we’re always looking for something to direct our attention to, so it’s most valuable to explore what it is that we think we need and what it is that we think we want. Then again, sometimes she wakes up and she’s so happy, and she wonders why. There’s no apparent reason for it.

Susan was inspired to tell us about her best times in the last 10 months of pandemic isolation. She’s been spending time with her nephews, one 4 and one 8. They walk around together, and time slows down. She shares in their eagerness to enjoy life to the full, playing games with chestnuts in the park, riding bikes, going on the swings, hanging out in nature and just seeing what happens next. She is so happy to be seeing and hearing and experiencing in a very open, slow, basic, childlike way.

When you’re in a place like that, you’re not wondering what problem it’s solving, you’re simply experiencing your native joy, sometimes labeled bliss. This is what’s meant by going with the flow. Kids are naturally in the flow. We adults tend to judge ourselves and direct ourselves with approved intentions, damming up the flow. It’s a complex skill to be self-critical and also let yourself go. Kids teach us that.

Kris agreed, noting that as adults we let lots of things get in our way, often by thinking about what we *don’t* want happening. Unlike us, kids can be beginners, not perfectionists, and not be bothered by it. They don’t believe they have to be judging themselves as much.

Self-criticism can ruin your life, and certainly spoil your fun. We need to reclaim the joy of being alive. We should be appreciating the upside along with being mesmerized by the downside, which allows us to get back to the steady state, the flow. We can turn off or dial down our negative obsessions, and learn to float. Many of the things that upset us out are abstract, stories we've heard that we fixate on. Our direct interactions with people are likely to be more pleasant, or at least more manageable. The modern world is getting drawn out of touch, losing immediate contact, and it's not thriving.

We now boast a whole (mostly male) generation trained on computer games, where if you kill the alien, you get a reward. If you kill them all, you win. And aliens are 100% evil, so mercy or tolerance are just stupid. The games don't teach how in real life if you kill an alien of any type, you've done a terrible thing with endless negative repercussions, including on you.

I've been waiting to see how this type of upbringing would actually play out, despite the protestations of psychologists, likely paid by the gaming industry, who insisted that spending your childhood in a computer simulation wouldn't have any effect. The worldwide violent, raging lunacy of the present strikes me as exactly what's most likely to happen.

Kris is a third-grade teacher, and lamented how the parents of her pupils are those very app addicts I'm referring to as kids, who spend all their time on their phones, only setting them aside to yell at their children. The hell that will be paid is now with us, it seems.

Though perhaps not as catchy as a video game, self-realization still plays a role for those who are interested in enduring happiness, as opposed to endless stimulation. Interested in steadiness in place of powerfully amped ups and downs. Not to mention rewards for bad behavior.

Andy was interested that Nitya starts with the claim that he wants to be happy, but he also says he wants to share his happiness. He takes the sharing part as a given. Andy wondered, Is he asserting that as universal? When we are happy we give it away,

and want to give it away because it feels good. These are simple things to say, but they can take you to a profound place if you really think about them. We wouldn't expect that happiness is our fundamental nature. We need to distinguish that real happiness from the kind of happiness that we think we're going to attain.

The sharing part is fascinating. Why would you want to hide true happiness? You *want* to spread it around. In these times, when self-interest is the new God, the ersatz happiness its worship produces makes you retreat from sharing. You want to hide your riches so no one else can steal them. It's a zero-sum game: mine *or* yours. True happiness expands when it is "given away," or shared, and in mine *and* yours.

Deb recalled the first Easter Egg hunt we held when our kids were little, around 3 or 4. Calder, older than Emily by a year, was a better hunter, and he would take an occasional look in Emily's basket. If he had found more eggs he would add some to her basket to make them even. It was so touching, and unprompted by any adults, as far as we could tell. Children do have an innate sense of fair play, so long as their own needs are being met.

It is a mystery where this shared happiness comes from. Scientists are busy trying to characterize it as a selfish attitude in disguise, but I'd say selfishness is a learned behavior. The bigger question is why generosity persists in people against all odds? Face it, being around happy people makes it easier for us to be happy. Simple enough. Again, you can run, but can you hide, if you make everyone else miserable but your sycophant friends?

In his autobiography, Nitya was clearly at odds with his upbringing, feeling like a misfit and an outsider, so he didn't learn his loving care for others from that part of his life. Just what is the source, then? Some questions will never have an answer.

We discussed Nitya's introduction to *sat-chit-ananda*, or existence-awareness-meaning. Ananda is often translated as bliss or happiness, as well as *value* in the Gurukula. Anita wondered if absolutely everything had a value, even things we don't care about, and the answer is yes, in the broad sense. Come on, existing is a

value in itself. We may not know what its value is, but everything has some value, if only as a place-holder. What things mean *to us*, is a different matter. Our sense of value is hierarchical, ranging from nearly zero to trending toward infinity. Many things are zero meaningful to us, but the interesting part is what our highest values are, like the things Nitya lists in the first quote above. He also makes a great point about the highest value of all:

Why am I bringing in the idea of the Absolute? I think it's for the same reason that the physicist postulates one hypothetical "matter" behind all quantifiable and measurable things, and that the biologist presumes a single biological principle which is believed to be animating all forms of life.

It's the value and meaning that give you that feeling that you want to share them. I recollected how Nitya made us happy by continually drawing us back into that unified appreciation of our connectedness. We would all be together, laughing, digging on cool ideas, not structured, not thinking we were making things happen, they just were happening. Beneath it all was love, which is the best term yet for the bed of the stream, the unifying force that some even in the modern West have tapped into. Love needs to be reciprocated all around, and throughout history we can read about fitful attempts to make happiness a permanent condition of the community. Nitya says:

As I have been living with a number of people around the globe, I have reason to believe that all human beings are generally of like nature in spite of the personality variations that distinguish one individual from another. It is this perceived homogeneity that makes me optimistic of being able to share my happiness with others.

Any moment of happiness can take you to that divine-feeling

place, where you are in tune with the greater Self. You can be vast, and it's still okay to just be you, too.

We wound down with exactly that kind of appreciation. Anita insisted happiness doesn't have to come from any extraordinary circumstance: "When I sit on my patio, I can look out and there is grass and trees and butterflies; like when you look through a microscope: all these things I didn't know exist are suddenly right there! It's like being in a symphony of noises and smells, bombarded by messages, just by sitting on the patio and opening to it, not being stuck in my little 's' self. There's a whole magnificent existence right there."

Deb enthused that if we just open ourselves to it, we can see something so much more profound and larger.

Karen had done the same thing as Anita: "When we first went into lockdown, I had to stay home from work, so I made friends with my patio. I sat out there a lot, which I never was able to do before, and spent hours on my patio because there wasn't anything else to do. I could see the whole universe from there."

Where are you sitting? Fabulous.

Part II

From Beverley:

Introduction part2

Before digging down to the bedrock that supports my consciousness I felt the need to round off my introduction to this study. I have been looking at my astrological chart again recently. It's my birthday soon and I thought to look for a new symbol for Aquarius to celebrate the start of a new year in my life. I copied this image from the Web which, by a happy synchronicity, seems like an excellent symbol for a study of the stream of consciousness.



* * *

From Nitya's Gita video, chapter III:

There is a good story that once the Lord Buddha gave a great sermon in the deer park of Sarnath, near Benares. Five thousand *bhikṣus* were listening to it, and those *bhikṣus*, even though they heard the Lord speaking for more than an hour, they appreciated his words, his love, but no one seemed to have made any connection with the highest realization to which he was making subtle references. Then the Lord turned away from them, and he took a lotus flower, looked at it, and smiled. At that very moment, just by seeing the smile of the Lord at the flower, Mahākāśyapa, one of the disciples of Buddha, became immediately enlightened. So that enlightenment was not because Buddha was there, or he saw the lotus flower. Anything is enough. Anything in this world can suggest to us the beauty, the grandeur, of the Self. When you are looking at a flower, the flower is only an excuse for

you to see how the world exists, how it is existing in your awareness, and how that awareness is a great joy. And thus, you're not depending on any object of pleasure for your joy. You see yourself in everything. And this becomes exchangeable. The flower is myself. I am the flower. (Gita video, III.17)

* * *

Susan told us about a newly formed cloud appreciation society — <https://cloudappreciationsociety.org> . You let everything go and just groove on the clouds. It's very popular, because “stopping to smell the roses” has become an endangered sentiment. We need peer pressure to remember to do it. On walks, Nitya would literally smell the roses, urging us to try it ourselves.

* * *

My Uncle Alex, who is up in Heaven now, one of the things he found objectionable about human beings was that they so rarely noticed it when times were sweet. We could be drinking lemonade in the shade of an apple tree in the summertime, and Uncle Alex would interrupt the conversation to say, "If this isn't nice, what is?"

So I hope that you will do the same for the rest of your lives. When things are going sweetly and peacefully, please pause a moment, and then say out loud, "If this isn't nice, what is?"

— Kurt Vonnegut, [If This Isn't Nice, What Is?: Advice for the Young](#)

Part III

Dipika continues her poetic contribution:

Quite often when everything is calm and even boring... one does feel that inane insane happiness creep up and bubble inside and its not *because* of anything...its just there. Definitely something to hang on to. I thought it might be a mood swing...and used to sort of wait to feel low till I realised that one could consciously keep looking at the brighter side of things and extend the state. Of course... it takes persistence and you have to be checking yourself all the time...not easy these days!

The moving ember
Creates Time & Space
And an 'T' Face