

2/16/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 4B – The Bed of the Stream

It felt like old home week to get back to our online class—we can only imagine what a real return to in-person meetings would feel like, with all the hugs, goodies, and smiles....

After an ice storm and two weeks off, we started slowly, and then gradually warmed back up to the subject. Deb noted that in this section (I'll include the part we read out in a separate doc) we are contemplating the tiny individual in the midst of the vast cosmos, the infinitude of everything, who is nonetheless the center of that cosmos. She appreciates how the juxtaposition of two distinct fields is something that Nitya often does, displaying their melding and contradiction at the same time.

Referring to Nitya's line about this, that "I enjoy the unique position of always remaining at the center of the universe that I perceive with my eyes and admire with my mind," I recalled a couple of early acid trips where everywhere I looked was the center of the universe—each locus emitted concentric rings of light like ripples in a pond, or the electron shells of atoms. It was the exact center! Everywhere I looked the same thing happened, and there were hundreds of identical images in every direction. I intuitively realized that every place is the central hub of the universe, which is a little different from realizing their unity—more like identity within multiplicity.

I noted that consciousness is becoming more respectable to physicists these days as a generative force to reckon with. If you pictured matter vs. consciousness for the original Creative principle as a horse race, matter got off to an early lead and was way out ahead, so far it appeared to be a one-horse race for a very long time. Over the last century or so, though, consciousness has pulled to neck and neck, and is even ahead by a nose in some quarters. I'll put my money on consciousness, in case the race ever comes to an end.

In the synchronous universe, it isn't surprising that I was reading an article the day before class about some very recent theories of the universe that focus on consciousness being the source, not matter. Here's the link I promised:

### **New hypothesis argues the universe simulates itself into existence**

A physics paper proposes neither you nor the world around you are real. <https://bigthink.com/surprising-science/new-hypothesis-argues-the-universe-simulates-itself-into-existence> .

Nitya quotes Schrodinger (1887-1961) on how the world is formed, which touches on early non-materialist thinking in this regard. Bill noted the connection in the first line of the quote: "The world is a construct of our sensations, perceptions and memories." Bill thought the excerpt echoes Patanjali, in that with him the world is manifested by how we are interacting with it, and how our memories affect it. While the material world must exist in some sense, its perception is a personalized manifestation, run through the individual grinding wheel.

The baffling truth is that without a consciousness that perceives it, the universe doesn't exist, or it "might as well" not exist.

I brought in the McGilchrist book, *The Master and His Emissary*, again, his postulation that the whole brain dominated by the right hemisphere grasps complete systems in context, then passes the task of analysis to the left hemisphere. Ideally, the analysis is fed back to the right side for integration, but what is happening in science these days is that the analysis is believed to be the end of the process. Unintegrated analysis can never regain unity on its own: no matter how cleverly it is put back together, it remains a jigsaw puzzle, or a Frankenstein's monster. The famous Bergson quote Nitya includes addresses this: unity is the gold coin, which no high a pile of analytical pennies can ever equal in value.

It's essential for our understanding to take apart our encounters, but then we have to allow them to be knit back together holistically. Analysis doesn't allow for the smile of a baby, the smell of the rose. It's always fragmented, and you never get wholeness back from the fragments, no matter how well arranged. The object or the other is never an original simple thing again. Nitya wants us to realize how grievous that is!

Andy sees this as a challenge to our intellect. He suggested the simple experiment of trying to watch your thoughts, and if you do, you soon realize there is an awareness behind your thoughts. There is something lighting up your world, and you turn toward it in so many attractive settings, but it remains concealed from you. You can't see it. He felt this was the starting point for understanding Nitya's complex unfolding argument. Andy called it a given, amazing discovery that we can all make.

I added, the reason it's concealed is we are looking for the light, but we already *are* the light. Deb mused about how we get distracted by the light, and forget that we are already existing as the light. That flash of fascination that we go for is what blinds us. You have to be constantly turning around to your core of witnessing.

Andy responded: the meditative exercise is to remember and to forget also. Forgetting is our human lot—actually, both remembering and forgetting are our lot.

Nitya asks: "If I am substantially the very stuff of the Absolute, how is it that my comprehension is shrouded by a thick veil of ignorance every now and then, which makes me so stupid so as to not understand even simple things clearly?" I'm not sure if he was speaking for us, or if he still had moments of incomprehension himself, but it brings up a major theme of my thinking this week, that polarity is what drives us forward for our growth and development. Humans stagnate in comfortable conditions, when we imagine we've got it all down. The Oriental view we are not adequately accepting is that there are pluses and minuses in all of us, in everything. In the West we are made to

want to live as pluses only, but that leads us off a cliff of extremism. Everything in the universe embodies polarities, and our very life requires positive and negative factors for its harmony. We thrive on a psychic clash of unknowns, in which the negatives inspire more of the positive, and perhaps vice versa.

My thoughts prompted Andy to read us an amazing WS Merwin poem, which you can find in Part II. He called it a description of the way we space out, go on tangents and miss what's present. While living in paradise, we might be mad at somebody from our distant past. Andy well knew our madness could turn into a hurricane. Yet the poem honors that, accepting that it's human nature to space out from the present, something we might have learned of as a flaw.

Deb felt the Hsin Hsin Ming classic was relevant (a section is reposted in Part II). It's *always* relevant! Its ideas include: as long as you choose activity or emptiness, you are missing the point. All that is difficult within us, is due to the choices we are making. There needs to be no sense of hurry or necessity, etc.

Charles has been pondering resentment lately. It's something that makes everyone unhappy, a negative feedback loop. He's trying to figure out how to make resentment itself the problem, instead of the content of it, which is likely unresolvable. Nowadays he's thinking about it on a practical level in Covid land, seeing how it doesn't cure anything to levy blame, much less to hold on tight to our anger about it. As in the Merwin poem, you have a nice afternoon and then you're smoldering with rage about some stupid slight and everyone involved is made miserable. He wondered, if you can have the counterparts to agree that the resentment itself is the problem, wouldn't it be easier to get past it?

I agreed getting over nursing resentment quickly is the best thing you can do about it—it's a very stubborn attachment. I remembered how, especially as an adolescent, I loved hanging out in that resentful state. It was comforting, somehow, and I reveled in it. It's true *tamas*, like a frozen lake of emotion. Getting out of it is a slow thawing process, but intentionality can help.

Charles told us that Dali Lama says give the other person the victory. Good advice. Nitya has said the same, as you have to lower your ego to make the gesture, and that's a great way to do it. Here's the end of verse 37 in his Atmo commentary, which I offer as a more complete accounting of what needs to be included:

The ultimate thing is to become *saumya*, which means finding the quietness within you. It is by attaining sama, sameness, that you become quiet inside. This is to be cultivated throughout. Each day begins a new series of encounters. Each encounter is to be taken as a challenge to reestablish your inner serenity, inner quietness, inner sense of sameness through an act of adoration, an attitude of worship and a sense of the sublime.

There is no need for you to win all the time. Your greater victory lies in your acceptance of defeat, allowing the other to win. You may be in an argument. What does it matter if you win or not? Give the other person the chance to win. Even if he uses some falsehood, when you allow him to win he rethinks the situation. In his heart of hearts he knows he did not deserve the victory. He knows the truth of your silence. You do not become egoistic and you don't make the other person egoistic either. It will chastise him as well as purify him.

Thus, through the cultivation of silence, sameness and serenity, you come to a unitive understanding from within. This brings peace and harmony. Where there is peace and harmony, love spontaneously comes. When you give yourself into the hands of grace, the hands of the Divine, things which are difficult to attain become abundantly possible. Then you can say you have attained the discrimination of the unbroken, by which every 'this' is brought under the spell of the universal sameness.

The class got into the topic, since it is familiar to everyone. As Bill said, it's human nature to nourish the bad and forget the good. He lamented Merwin's implication that by the time you recognize what's making you joyful you've let it slip away.

To me, one point of the poem is to get us out of that partisan attitude of what's right and what's wrong. Often, thinking about that distant person who you will never see again is actually more of an enlightening experience than enjoying the lovely flower on the table next to you. In this regard I've been thinking about my parents lately. I will never see them again, but the older I get, the more I see how I am like them (a concept I used to mightily resist), as well as how much of real excellence they passed on to me. That kind of reassessing and reexamining from a safe distance has taught me a great deal about life and my own shortcomings.

Nitya brings in one of the main themes of his teaching: getting out of what he calls here transactional consciousness, elsewhere contractual thinking: the quid pro quo mentality. Resentment is a natural outcome of making your happiness dependent on the reciprocation of others. On the other hand, if you act from an independent spirit, you can accept whatever comes out of every encounter, and there's nothing to resent.

Transactional consciousness is inevitably dualistic, simply put here as "Transaction implies establishing a relationship between I and the other." That means duality is only one part of consciousness, though the one we make the most of, outside of spiritual inquiry. In any case, it's polarity that makes the world go round, and produces change, for better or for worse.

Laughingly, Charles affirmed, "I'm not resentful, I'm righteously indignant!" That means I have a reason, but there really isn't a reason for it. It's a nuisance for everybody.

Deb thought that all the reasons we give for our negativity are just a cover for feeling misunderstood. Why do all these things keep happening? Because we create them, and become them. Charles added that there is resentment and counterattack, the attempt to build a wall: here's what's wrong with you and I'm blameless. As though if you were to squabble about it long enough, you would clear it up.

I reminded the class that Nitya's most crucial question is how do we get out of it? Charles has come to see it as a matter of

timing, observing “if I don’t hit back, don’t say anything, there’s say 90 seconds, if I can just not blow up. Often the emotional charge will be out of it by that time.” That gives the space for somebody to change the subject.

I was struck by his 90 second observation, and after class ran down this from Dr. Jill Taylor, tucked in my Gita chapter XII.17 commentary, with the first bit from me:

We may revel in our good fortune or curse our bad fortune, and it’s possible to carry on nursing our reactions for a long time. But clinging to those states takes us out of our center, thereby reducing what the Gita refers to as union with the Absolute. They should be allowed to dissipate as soon as practicable.

Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, the neuroanatomist, puts it this way, in *My Stroke of Insight* (New York: Viking, 2006):

Although there are certain limbic system (emotional) programs that can be triggered automatically, it takes less than 90 seconds for one of these programs to be triggered, surge through our body, and then be completely flushed out of our blood stream. My anger response, for example, is a programmed response that can be set off automatically. Once triggered, the chemical released by my brain surges through my body and I have a physiological experience. Within 90 seconds of the initial trigger, the chemical component of my anger has completely dissipated from my blood and my automatic response is over. If, however, I remain angry after those 90 seconds have passed, then it is because I have *chosen* to let that circuit continue to run. Moment by moment, I make the choice to either hook into my neurocircuitry or move back into the present moment, allowing that reaction to melt away as fleeting physiology.

What most of us don’t realize is that we are unconsciously making choices about how we respond all the time. It is so easy

to get caught up in the wiring of our preprogrammed reactivity.... (146)

Charles figured it's a matter of triggering, of being triggered. The word reminded Deb of a story from a friend. She was complaining to her husband that a certain neighbor "pushes all my buttons." Her husband suggested, "Why don't you try to have fewer buttons?"

Bingo!

Andy put Nitya's plaint into the vernacular: "How can I be the Absolute and have all this stuff going on? How is it possible that I'm the Absolute if I'm dragged into this shit over and over again?" For him, the jury is still out.

Deb suggested: simply accept it. Don't leap to react. Jan agreed we could very well sit in another part of us that doesn't react so intensely.

Susan thought it is universal that we are triggered by our families, no matter how far away from them we may be. She admitted she well knows her brother triggers her, and so before every conversation with him on the phone, she imagines she is Mr. Collins from a movie of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, a comical vicar who is always covering his mouth so he won't keep speaking, because he is letting the other person talk. She covers her mouth just like Mr. Collins does, and it actually keeps her from getting so upset. "Remembering this during the conversation helps me to stop being triggered, and makes me more sympathetic to Philip." She sent two pictures of the vicar you can check out down in Part II. I think you have to do it when you can't be seen, unless the provocation is too fantastic.

Andy thought seeing the world as a great novel was bound to help.

My grandmother used to use the same mouth-covering gesture when she secretly approved of something but knew she wasn't supposed to, saying "Ohhhhh, kid!" It was a modified "Shhhhh."



Anita took us back to polarities, wondering how the idea was going to help us avoid stupid attitudes. She asked, we're talking about simplistic attitudes, but doesn't it all boil down to good and evil, or yin and yang? You can't have one without the other.

We have plenty of examples around us where people are convinced their position is the right one and their opponents are wrong—lethally wrong, going to hell wrong, even. It is rarely true that one is 100% right and the other 100% wrong, but we like to feel that way. Each side may well have a point, and who's to judge? (Us, of course.) I've been pondering lately, if you don't fully understand the other person, how can you have an accurate opinion about them. You are bound to react out of prejudice. Mostly we don't bother to inquire very deeply into the other, we pin our beliefs on them, and push them as far away as we can. Obviously, unless you stop having fixations about good and evil, you will never understand the other person. It requires us to stop holding on so tenaciously to our position, which we've not evolved to do, and we are trained away from.

As Deb put it, we're in varying levels of non-comprehension. She remembered Gurdjieff intentionally stirring up problems, because they forced his disciples to accommodate them and evolve their tolerance.

What got me out of many of my obsessions was coming to feel okay about and be supportive of myself. I realized an underlying self-doubt energizes our fixations. When I finally healed some of those, I didn't have to cling to certainty anymore. I realized you don't have to fix all the things you broke, you just have to fix where you are now.

I just added the lyrics to Dylan's song My Back Pages at the end of Part II—so right on! Here's the last verse:

Yes, my guard stood hard when abstract threats  
Too noble to neglect  
Deceived me into thinking I had something to protect  
Good and bad, I defined those terms

Quite clear, no doubt, somehow  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now

How many perfect 10 songs did he write? Has anyone been able to count them? This might be an 11.

Bill cited Nitya's line, "This central agent is none other than the I-consciousness," adding, so many of these problems arise when you put somebody else in the 'other' category instead of being in the same category as them. It's that I-ness that gets us in trouble. "Yes, your royal I-ness."

So true. I added that many of us consider *ourselves* as the other. One thing that unites many of the Gurukula affiliates is we are outsiders. We might have taken a half-step, but we still need to wholly unite with our self. When we become 'other' to ourselves, we have a hard row to hoe.

These are a few of the threads Nitya is plying in this most complex chapter. We'll have at least one more session, maybe two, to find where they are leading us. Aum.

## Part II

Beverley is getting into SOC now, and sent two more entries. She already has one in 4A, so I'm including both here in 4B. Beverley writes:

This first part belongs with 4a page 2.

Here Guru is mentioning the numerous dichotomies one encounters when embarking on self analysis.....

"In all these dichotomies we can trace two common factors. The common factor in the concepts of I, spirit, mind and the self is the principle of awareness or self-luminous consciousness, while the concepts of the other, matter, body, and the non-self have objectivity and existential verity in common."

I thought of the little Ladro ceramic I have, which I see as me - Beverley- stepping forward on life's journey ready to deal with whatever dichotomies I might meet along the Way.

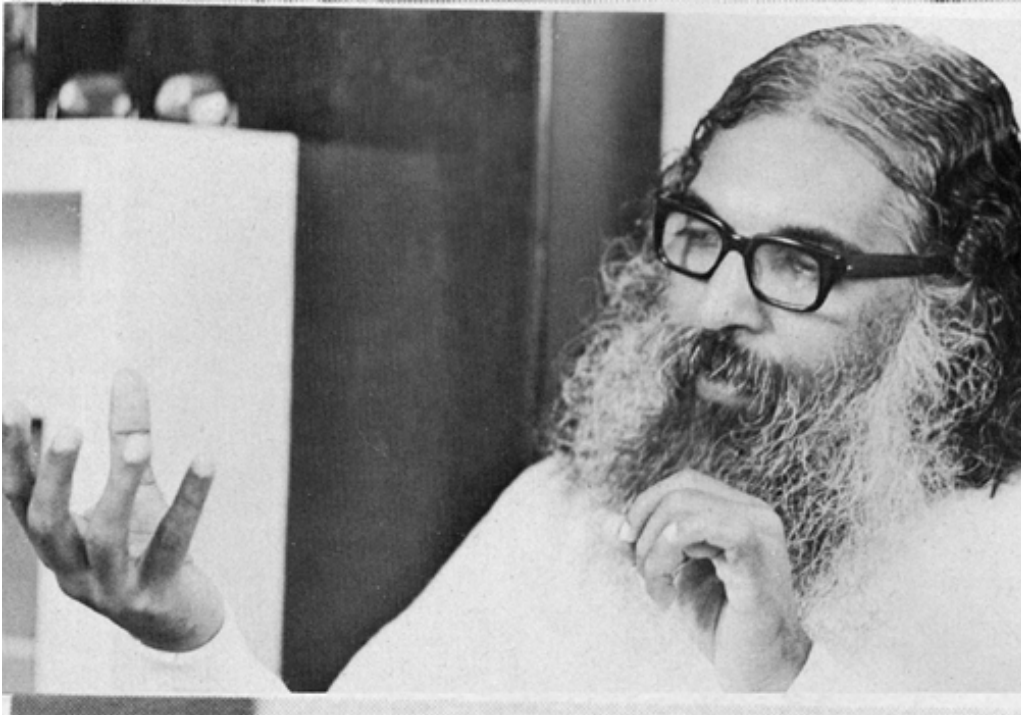


Now for 4b.....

I have been digging deep as I continue with this chapter. I was much struck by this on page 5: Guru writes:

"The Absolute that I'm referring to here and which will have to be alluded to several times later, is not to be taken as something huge and massive into which we can push this universe..... It is the simple truth, that which is singularly good, and that which brings a peerless joy such as in the case of a pearl of priceless worth."

I like this very much; it reminds me of Guru saying something similar about a berry in the hand. I need to be reminded frequently that it's simple truths like this that ring true, and bring the light of understanding to my mind and warm my heart.



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Andy read us *One of the Butterflies*, by W.S. Merwin (*The Shadow of Sirius*: Copper Canyon Press)

The trouble with pleasure is the timing  
it can overtake me without warning  
and be gone before I know it is here  
it can stand facing me unrecognized  
while I am remembering somewhere else  
in another age or someone not seen  
for years and never to be seen again  
in this world and it seems I cherish

only now a joy I was not aware of  
when it was here although it remains  
out of reach and will not be caught or named  
or called back and if I could make it stay  
as I want to it would turn into pain

\* \* \*

Deb referred to this beloved chestnut:

The Hsin Hsin Ming  
Verses on the Faith Mind  
by Chien-chih Seng-ts'an, The 3rd Zen Patriarch, 606 A.D.

The Great Way is not difficult  
for those who have no preferences.

When love and hate are both absent  
everything becomes clear and undisguised.  
Make the smallest distinction, however,  
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.

If you wish to see the truth  
then hold no opinions for or against anything.  
To set up what you like against what you dislike  
is the disease of the mind.

When the deep meaning of things is not understood  
the mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.

The Way is perfect like vast space  
where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess.  
Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject  
that we do not see the true nature of things.  
Be serene in the oneness of things

and such erroneous views will disappear by themselves.

When you try to stop activity to achieve passivity  
your very effort fills you with activity.  
As long as you remain in one extreme or the other,  
you will never know Oneness.

Those who do not live in the single Way  
fail in both activity and passivity,  
assertion and denial.  
To deny the reality of things is to miss their reality;  
to assert the emptiness of things  
is to miss their reality.

The more you talk and think about it,  
the further astray you wander from the truth.  
Stop talking and thinking  
and there is nothing you will not be able to know.

To return to the root is to find the meaning,  
but to pursue appearances is to miss the source.  
At the moment of inner enlightenment,  
there is a going beyond appearance and emptiness.  
The changes that appear to occur in the empty world  
we call real only because of our ignorance.  
Do not search for the truth;  
only cease to cherish opinions.

\* \* \*

Susan found images of Mr. Collins for us:



\* \* \*

My Back Pages, by Bob Dylan

Crimson flames tied through my ears  
Rolling high and mighty traps

Pounced with fire on flaming roads  
Using ideas as my maps  
"We'll meet on edges, soon," said I  
Proud 'neath heated brow  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now

Half-wracked prejudice leaped forth  
"Rip down all hate," I screamed  
Lies that life is black and white  
Spoke from my skull, I dreamed  
Romantic facts of musketeers  
Foundationed deep, somehow  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now

Girl's faces formed the forward path  
From phony jealousy  
To memorizing politics of ancient history  
Flung down by corpse evangelists  
Unthought of, though, somehow  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now

A self-ordained professor's tongue  
Too serious to fool  
Spouted out that liberty is just equality in school  
"Equality," I spoke the word  
As if a wedding vow  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now

In a soldier's stance, I aimed my hand  
At the mongrel dogs who teach  
Fearing not I'd become my enemy  
In the instant that I preached  
My existence led by confusion boats  
Mutiny from stern to bow  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now



Yes, my guard stood hard when abstract threats  
Too noble to neglect  
Deceived me into thinking I had something to protect  
Good and bad, I defined those terms  
Quite clear, no doubt, somehow  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now