

3/2/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 4D – The Bed of the Stream

Our pre-class chat was all about the vaccinations taking place with our peer group and nearly everywhere now. Moni and Karen were beaming with new confidence after their recent firsts. Bill and Nancy also had their firsts, but were hiking in the wilderness and unable to join us by internet. The possibility of returning to in-person classes peeped through a crack in the door. What a relief that will be!

This last section is as tough as any in the book, yet the participants made much of it. Once you catch on to what is being said, it quickly becomes familiar territory. It only sounds abstruse. That's why we hold classes. Beverley's wonderful graphic in Part II depicts our motivation with nonverbal eloquence.

In response to Nitya's musings about the way pronouns and their concepts fragment our consciousness, Deb thought of how each day we wake up into a world of multiple levels of consciousnesses, with corresponding personalities. We are being shown how to recognize what is united in all those, how every distinct shard of consciousness arises from that one consciousness underlying everything. Because of this, we have all sorts of connections and understandings with other people. There is fluidity between human beings due to our commonality.

It was an especially fun session, as we extensively reminisced about our experiences with Nitya. He used to say that when we wake up in the morning we have the option of putting back on all the states of mind we think are "us" or starting fresh. He would ask, why do we need to be the same retreaded person every day? We could take a renewed resolve to be something better.

I still vividly recall how, in being with Nitya, it felt like he was inhabiting you, right inside you. He could read your attitudes, almost like reading your mind. Sometimes he did read your mind!

It was like being cooked on a grill. He had a very different moral sense than we young hippie-dippies, so it felt very uncomfortable sometimes. Nitya told us in the first Portland Gurukula that whenever he looked at us (he meant with his inner vision) it was like seeing a clean white sheet hanging on the line, with several stains scattered over it. His job was to help cleanse the stains.

Only one other time have I had the sense of housing more than just me in my body. I've told this story before. Way long ago I had three women friends I was semi-intimate with, though they were all becoming aware they were lesbians. We had a fine friendship, and one day did an intense LSD trip together in the mountains. One event stands out. Soon after we started getting off on a very powerful rocket launch, we found ourselves in a small cave together. Suddenly, "my" I-sense included all four of us. It was exactly as if we were one person, but we were all present as our egos, too. There was 100% telepathy. It was uncomfortable for me, trying to restrain any unseemly thoughts I might have been having about them, and being embarrassed by my own lack of privacy. I had a strong sense of exactly what they were feeling: discomfort and amazement. It was clear we were all aware of what was happening. I'm not sure, but we came out of the cave pretty soon, and got some space between us, and we became separate people again. It was a relief, and I've always appreciated the value of separation since that day. It would be very hard to function if we were always aware of everybody's perspectives—we wouldn't be able to concentrate, we'd always be fending something off.

The fact that we are connected like this in our deep unconscious explains why there are so many synchronicities. Deb had just reported having a neat one in the morning, and I did too (the class often pre-announces itself with illustrative examples). A friend in one of my Gita classes had just reported getting very upset about people not wearing masks on walks, and has a hard time calming herself down whenever she meets someone like that. She usually says something, and even shouts at people. She wrote about it in her lesson response, and I suggested she use aum, the

Sanskrit “word of consent.” In one sense it simply means “it’s okay.” I advised her to step to the side of the trail and just say Aum.

She wrote back almost immediately to say she had been doing exactly that an hour before. She didn’t know aum, but she stepped to the side, waited for those people to pass, and told herself “it’s okay.” She not only didn’t get upset, she was elated to find I had written just what she was doing. So, did I get the idea from her, or did she get it from me? Or did we both get it from a third, unknown source? In any case we both got it.

In their long association, Andy was somewhat mystified by Nitya’s use of the word I. He felt his sense of ‘I’ was hopping around on him. He remembers being conscious of it and puzzled by how he was using ‘I’ in conversation, moving between a local and a universal sense. Once Andy asked him, weren’t there times in your life when you were working through stuff, when you were like the rest of us? Nitya shot back, “No, I was always a good boy.” Andy figured he was just messing with him, and yet.... Perhaps Nitya was slyly referring to Andy’s guilt about not being “good,” or “good enough.” I think Nitya grew up unusually free of the kinds of pressure we take for granted in America, in the world ruled by the Semitic religions, where you always have to measure up.

Of course, Nitya was somewhat like the rest of us in being lodged in his own ego in his youth, and it took many years to universalize it, but he did. In encounters as a yati and later a guru, he didn’t have to think about his responses, he just did them instinctively. And it often did have a corrective, or critical effect. As Deb said, he had an improvisational acuity.

Oftentimes Nitya told us he used ‘I’ as a reference point, for clarity. He certainly didn’t hold fast to it as his self-identity: he could be perfectly himself and yet non-defensive and open about any give-and-take. This might have been because of the common conceit that if you say ‘I’ it means you are egotistical. Nitya was hinting that this was a ludicrous oversimplification, especially the

implicit corollary that if you *don't* use the term 'I', it means you *aren't* egotistical.

I affirmed that Nitya was the least self-centered person I ever met—perhaps a low bar—yet it didn't make him a weak personality. *Au contraire!* He was a true Scorpio.

Andy went on that he could really put himself in your place, literally, and it was one of the things that made him so fascinating as a person. He made Andy feel alternately relieved and scared. He was so grateful to know him: someone who could speak to you with the intimacy of true closeness. Andy had intense times with him. He wasn't scared, exactly, but knew Nitya could straighten you out and expose you to the things you thought were hidden, in a very direct way, like you were utterly naked to him. It was disconcerting.

Moni told us that in the beginning he didn't do anything like that with her, but slowly she started listening to him and attended to the classes, and only after that did he start chipping away, without causing her too much pain. Only two or three times did he ask her to sit and talk to him, and then when she looked at his face, he is not the person who is asking the questions. Then she saw him as a guru, which was very different.

Andy came into the game a little later than some of us who got both barrels, but he observed some of that intensity still going on. He one time asked him why he didn't correct him like other people, and Nitya said, "because your voice is not strong enough in me." Meaning it was never a "correction," but more a realization of what the situation actually was. He was able to describe it, to point it out, and that alone acted to ameliorate the condition. But there had to be a shared beingness.

Andy added that it's really wrong to experiment on other people; if you're going to benefit them, you really have to know them well before you do anything like that. It can be criminal to mess with somebody's mind. Nitya was very careful with people who came to him, before applying any correction to them, though not so much in the early days.

Deb acknowledged that with the people we are related to, we are inside each other, so it's hard to set defining border. Nitya makes a key insight here:

When I say “they” I create a barrier and cause a limit to my own I-consciousness by cordoning off an area of my consciousness. Then I fill the other side with an indistinct grouping of centers of consciousness of ‘they’ which are so feeble that no single individual can function separately. Yet I assume ‘they’ has a collective dynamics to honor me or shame me, to grant me its approbation or to condemn me with its disapproval. In this way it becomes my social counterpart.

We can see how the use of the term ‘they’ reduces all the individual people in a group to an indistinct mass, more our own making than anything about the others. At least, much is left out. Deb noted that instead of inhabiting someone else’s consciousness, as Nitya was doing, with the ‘they’ you take a group of people and project them as not-you.

The media is inevitably presenting a seeming-other to us, and it's essential to reclaim them as people. That's something we've lost in the world we are now in, the intimate connections that restore appreciation for each other. Almost everyone has become a ‘them’ and it's incredibly corrosive.

Deb admitted it's very hard for us to get out of our sense of being an individual person, where there's always a difference between them and you. It's something that requires what Andy called earlier “spiritual heroism,” to overcome the intentional obstacles that have served us well for hundreds of millions of years, during the “eat or be eaten” epochs. Yogis are striving to go beyond that way of thinking, and it's only recently that this option is open to us. There are bound to be major setbacks in that sort of evolution—at the moment there is extreme fear and paranoia everywhere about otherness. Humans are no longer a unified family trying to collectively optimize our experience. We're

pulling back behind the barricades, begging to reclaim our separateness. There is so much fear of melting in the melting pot.

Since we can't seem to make this a universal goal, primarily as individuals are we are capable of lowering our guard and extending the region of amity. I'd say that during the not-long-deceased era of optimism, many of us took it for granted that it was already in place, that the "millennium" had arrived. I'm afraid now it was premature, but the intent is still the same: establish a safe civilization where justice and fair play can thrive. It fits seamlessly with a yogic understanding.

Moni said, only when we go beyond the society, at that time we might not have any worries or anxieties about people around us. That's when we can experience Brahman, the Absolute.

Nitya was intentional about not being fearful, affirming it's a mark of realization if you aren't afraid of the stranger. He welcomed and attended to everyone, including those who came to berate him. When they had gotten their point across, if they kept ranting you might observe Nitya unobtrusively turning off his hearing aids, as if he were simply scratching his ears. Then he would work on his latest project, oblivious to the noise.

I have been thinking a lot about Sunanda, who we talked about in the last class. When you are under pressure and being attacked, it's very hard to pull yourself together. You have to retreat to a safe zone in order to reestablish your self-worth. This isn't about keeping your act together under fire, first you have to reclaim your self. Gradually you are able to allow that to happen, and only then can you withstand the storms enough to be an optimal contributor to the situation. It depends on what kind of life you have, how much you get challenged, and whether you get opportunities to introspect. I feel that most people intuitively understand if you are giving them the room to not act defensively, and I've had some gratifying exchanges where if I forced myself to not be petty, the other person would open up also, and we could come to a measure of agreement and respect.

Moni actually remembers Sunanda, because she was with

Nitya when she was sending her feelings and complaints to him in letters. Though Sunanda was a very gifted writer, Moni felt she was a weak person who won't react to anything. To communicate is difficult for her, and then she goes and writes these powerful short stories. Her letters to Nitya were also like short stories. After she got married, she stopped writing to him.

We moved onto the final page about time. For most of the chapter Nitya was speaking of space, especially psychological space, so he needed to round it off with a dose of time. In another excellent paragraph, Nitya puts both time and space in their proper place:

When I pick up a hot cup of tea or chocolate, I am not worried about the space it occupies nor am I thinking about how many seconds elapses between the cup and my lip. But all this irrelevant data is laid on the table as the precious findings of the philosopher, who is bent upon manufacturing metaphysical problems for the edification of his own sense of vanity.

Nitya often shook us up about time. Which way does it flow? Here he reprises his take that you can look at it both ways: as flowing from the past to the future, or from the future to the past. Perhaps pure duration isn't moving at all. Henri Bergson distinguished mechanical, moving time, from duration, almost as we distinguish horizontal and vertical elements.

Deb mused that time is actually the flow of our experience which we both feel and live within ourselves, and yet we are accustomed to look at the calendar and the clock for references. It's easy to see how subjective time is: just as we move through it, it's either much too fast or too slow, especially this year, when space and time have become enormously large and heavy.

This reminded me how Nitya disdained calendar time. In the first Portland Gurukula, he talked about it in his diary:

We celebrated Aya's birthday with four fanciful cakes purchased in a hurry and presented almost in a mockery of enthusiasm. I was a little sad and indignant that such a dead formality was foisted on the unwilling minds of our inmates, who were more enthusiastic about their dinner than their sentiments.

I don't believe in these external expressions. Spiritually there is no birth day or death day, though the moment of one's spiritual birth and final realization could be a real day of rejoicing. However, this was an occasion to observe how each person is wrapped up in their own thoughts and emotions and becomes oblivious to other people's feelings. I wish everyone could be more sensitive to the finer elements that are burning inside each soul like a gentle flame. (L&B 358)

God, I wish that too! It brings tears to my eyes every time I read that last sentence.

We bantered a bit about time and the power of Now, how all these temporal categories dissolve when examined without rigidity. Anita observed how with time markers we make constructs to organize our experience so we can isolate things enough to have some kind of understanding, but it's all happening "right now" to each of us, both individually and collectively. Deb concurred, waxing rhapsodic that time was fluid and expansive. The 'now' contains the past and the future, it's not just this little moment when I'm speaking of it, it's all within us right now. If you couldn't think of the future and the past, then now would be nothing.

Mysteriously, the expansive view of time and the unconscious unity of space brought us suddenly to a new focus, where our ancestors made their presence felt. Andy offered that when you "lose someone" who dies, people say they don't really die, they are still alive in you, that their life had a kind of reverberation into what we call their future. Although their self-expression was concentrated in their life, they don't cease to exist

at death.

Anita agreed. For her, many of her family and friends have passed away, but she still feels a living connection with them. Everyone does.

Andy has kept a plant once cultivated by his wife Bushra, that still embodies her to him. It's much more than a memory. All that physically remains is a dried root ball of an amazing pattern. He feels she's still around in this tough, thorny plant that is so like her. He has named the root ball the Thinking Cap. He is in awe of the afterlives of even a single person.

In a recent Gita lesson, I asked people to recall a great teacher that meant something to them. It always brings back how much of who we are comes from our outstanding teachers, and by extension, everyone and everything else. We now know we are only about 10% "us" and the rest is foreign bacteria and parasites, but that slim remainder is like a mosaic of everything we have taken in during our lives. We are literally made up of other people, especially those we cherish or despise. How can we say they are really gone?

New grandparent Deb has been musing (in a reverse time direction) while gazing at the new infant, imagining the stream of all her own grandparents and great-grandparents she knows something of, how he will not ever know them, yet their way of living and being will be alive in him. They shaped her, and through her will shape him. He doesn't know and can't know all those people that will be part of him, yet he will actualize all their qualities.

Among other things, these thoughts inspired her to suggest to her son-in-law that he should write some reminiscences about his life, to give at least a little conscious information to his children. Perhaps we all should, in case they are interested after we're gone.

Anita has already done some of that, collecting newspaper articles about her family for her offspring—she gets a kick out of reading them too. On the other side of the ledger, she has felt deeply guilty for passing along a chronic illness to her son, that she

herself only contracted after he did, so she never knew about it. She has come to realize she is only a moment in the flow, the disease, MS, came from her ancestors and merely passed through her, so she's not really responsible.

Karen recently experienced the flow of generations and time in another way. After living in the same region as almost her entire family, her son has moved far away, taking his three kids, his dad, and many animals along with him. She feels like the flow of contact is draining away from her just now, but she know it comes and goes. Deb likened it to a huge fish moving invisibly under the water, where all we can see is a few ripples and whirlpools as it glides by.

Nitya's final bow for this incredible chapter is:

I began this enquiry with the sole intention of sharing my happiness with others, and now look at the cobweb of metaphysical tangles into which I have brought myself and you, my gentle reader!

Where will we go from here? Only time will tell.

Part II

From Beverley:



I am looking at this painting I did 10 years ago. I think about projection. I imagine this is a woman walking. Her shadow is maybe dancing - Like life, it all depends on how you look at it. If the shadow represents her inner self, which is her real self?

Next it occurs to me that we can see the dynamic of projection working in an opposite way. I reckon I unconsciously - in the moment at least - habitually project a 'suitable' persona to others. This can be seen as a useful social skill where I adjust to fit particular situations, or perhaps it's a protective device which also cuts me off from other people. The authentic 'real me' is an inner shadow figure and impossible to know directly. I think she is probably more sensitive, light-hearted, and spontaneous than the outer extraverted meme.