

3/16/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 6 – Are You Mine?

It's odd how people are drawn to renunciates for advice about their love relationships. At the time this book was written, the mid-1970s, Nitya was continuously beset by couples and jilted lovers asking for his intervention or crowing about the true love they had finally found in another person. Most of his admirers, in the US at least, were in our early twenties, so this was a major bone of contention for us. He tried valiantly to encapsulate how he saw the topic in this chapter, without being overly blatant about it, I think because he either didn't want to trivialize such an important subject, or because he had been teaching about it for years, and expected we might have begun to catch on.

The chapter *Are You Mine?* is a powerful entreaty for us to shake off the selfishness that taints any and all of our interpersonal relations. I've added some definitive writings of his in Part II that you'll find very helpful, especially the excerpts from *That Alone* at the end.

Deb read out the entire chapter, as we figured a second hearing would be stimulating. After our brief meditation on it, she lamented how we so strongly identify with the positives and negatives in relationships, which tow us away from a balanced attitude. She highlighted the sentence: "The dialectics of commitment and dodging commitment is a game that is played from the day of the inception of polarization," asserting it's not just dealing with marriage and romantic relationships, but how we live our life in relation to that polarization, in everything. She admitted it's a fire and brimstone chapter, but underneath it is a beautiful way to be one with our world and not be destroyed by our misunderstandings.

I attempted to spell out that undercurrent a bit, that the satisfaction we long for comes from within us, and this is what Nitya means when he speaks of true love. Most of us are

conditioned to think of true love as Mr. or Ms. Right, the one perfect partner, but Nitya is speaking of what we might term self-realization. If we externalize the object of our desire, whatever we identify that need with is not ever going to be as complete as we hope for. We cannot know the other as well as we know ourselves. If we realized the real satisfaction is in us, we would not put the (unfair!) onus on others. That means true love is something you discover in yourself. Nitya is advocating for finding that all-pervasive love that permeates everything, including our dim-wittedness.

Since so many people were bringing their complaints to him, Nitya was well aware of the despair caused by thwarted love. Speaking of the chapter's title, he writes:

This question is the hub on which the pleasantries and sweet nothings of romance turn towards the dark and dismal abyss of sorrow and tragedy. It is a question that undercuts the relevance of logical reasoning. It draws its power from the emotional bias of the one who questions and also from the other who is expected to respond.

Steven was struck by Nitya's strong sense of dialectics here, how he is constantly showing how something turns into its opposite: love into hate, commitment leading to fleeing commitment, and so on. There's only the one complete paragraph about true love, which he agreed is more like spiritual fulfillment.

Anita spoke up for most of us, how struck she was by the sentence "It is not unusual for two people who were clinging to each other in love to roll away to the opposite edges of their bed and experience between them the cold blast of an unfriendly Siberia." She recalled in the last years of her marriage that exact dynamic, and how devastating it was. Now, many years later, she realizes that she had expected this other person to fulfill her and to be so many things to her, and now she can see she was looking in the wrong place. It really brought home the message of the chapter.

Deb sighed: if that person will only love me a little more, that's when things will be all right. We think that way when we aren't understanding the core of our relationship. She recalled Andy's words from last week, that in a marriage there is a way of acceptance where you allow the other person to be what they want to be.

Andy added that in a marriage you never experience the complete person, despite expectations to the contrary. We're totalities that will never have access to all of the other. His challenge is to encounter his own darkness and treat the darkness of his partner generously. The truth you think you know is both true and untrue, so the best you can do is submit to an increase of your appreciation of the totality of yourself and your partner. It means embracing the other person's shadow alongside your own, and ideally working with it together.

Deb noted this requires a generosity of sharing your own darkness and accepting your partner's, and Andy agreed it's aspirational—a work in progress. Always.

Steven, who is reacquainting himself with Nitya after many decades, was struck by the distinct cultural differences in terms of relationships that are played out in the text. Nitya is coming into an American counterculture, where conservative ideas about traditional marriage were being thrown out the window, not to mention the craziness, with so many people losing their bearings. On the other hand, he comes from a traditional Indian context, even a most stifling culture, with arranged marriages, strict gender roles, psychological oppressions of a very different type. Since he was never married himself, it's interesting to think about how these cultural phenomena are affecting his understanding. As Steven was reading the text, something rang a bell for him from his earlier encounters: Nitya was combination of a wise and loving being who was capable of ripping the veil off untruth, exposing all the horrors of reality. He was unsparing. His depiction here of a lonely man and a lonely woman is bone chilling. He doesn't beat around bush. Deb added that he's trying to show us that a commitment to a

whole understanding of ourselves in the world is the basis of true love, that we can dedicate ourselves with “unlimited liability” to the world. It’s a worthy alternative, knowing we have what we need right inside us, though elusive.

Steven told us how he always marveled at Nitya: how he was so engaged in personal relationships all over the world, writing letters back and forth, people pouring out their hearts to him in letters. Steven remembered a steady stream of visitors at the Gurukula having private meetings with Nitya, that he was enmeshed in a vast web of relationships despite the fact that he was a renunciate.

Deb commented that he was a renunciate of ego and duality.

I added that I love the Gurukula philosophy precisely because it’s about how to act well. It isn’t about retreating from life to discover something special, it’s being immersed in what’s all around us, all of it special.

Anita, who has contributed an interesting essay about love, (along with a couple of songs), linked in Part II, shared one of its premises: if mankind hadn’t learned how to reach out and form relationships with one another, we would not have survived as a species. Whether we are talking about love between two people or not just marriage but friendships, we have to consider our level of commitment with friends and family too.

I tried to clarify the distinction between love, and caring commitments. In tribal cultures, and with our primate forebears, the most essential consideration was getting along and supporting the group. Your individual desires and inclinations were not much fostered: you went along or you were banished. Or the clan died out. It’s universally accepted now that humans’ ability to work well in groups was the reason for our species’ success. It’s really only recently that there is enough “room” for substantial numbers of people to explore the depths of their own psyches. We are now in a position where all of us can realize true love in ourselves and live it consciously. When done right, it contributes mightily to the wellbeing of the entire spectrum. In a sense it’s the culmination (so

far) of evolution. For that matter, science at its best lives this love, and because the society has supported it, many very practical benefits have come out of it.

Deb said not only is it valid in romantic relationships, but your relationship to your children or to your parents entails this ability to get beyond your limited or constrained self. She asked, how do you love them and not command them?

Karen responded, first about children: it takes a lot of letting go from the time they are born. With toddlers, you have to let them walk by themselves, hurt themselves. Then they go away to school and soon have children of their own, and you get to the point where it is all okay, where you just love them no matter what. You don't feel you are in charge.

When Andy watches parents with young kids, he wonders what could beat that love? There seems to be something absolute about it. In other situations you can imprison someone in your love. What is it about having children that's so special?

My sense is that a new baby takes the place of the parent's ego, becoming the new ego center. It happens automatically, and you can't deny it, though young parents might try. It's by far the widest ego-reduction practice on the planet, though there are of course many other ways. I hastened to assure Andy that there is plenty of imprisoning going on in child-rearing, despite the whiff of the Absolute being present. It's no simple task.

Steven has observed that men become different beings when they are in relationships with women. If there were only men, he thought, the world would be more violent. The worst aspects come out in an all-male culture. So it seems women have a tonic effect on men. As a gay man, he noted how many gay men idolize women, treat them as goddesses, imitate them. In an all-male environment, there is a certain lacuna, something is missing, a spiritual energy that softens men.

He went on, if relationships are lived out in a state of awareness, it is conducive toward spiritual growth. The path of renunciation, sannyasa, is only for a few. We don't need to see

them in opposition to us householders. Most of us will be in relationships, so the question is how do you infuse those relationships with deeper understanding?

Jan felt the idea of your shadow and trying to love others in your life from a balanced place was key here. During her Jungian therapy in the past, she came to realize she was projecting loving tendencies onto her brother instead of herself, that she was seeing her “male” qualities in him and adoring him because of them. The therapy helped her to recognize the masculine sides of herself she liked. It’s a long process of piecing together ways we can be more integrated with our shadow side. It seems we mainly see our own shadow when it is projected onto others. Our dependency comes into relationships, bringing confusion, if you are not clear enough or strong enough in yourself.

Andy feels we exist, in some abstract sense, because of love. We have being, and our being has assumed a certain form—there is a kind of miracle in that. We are god’s love concretized. That’s the sense in which love can have that absolute angle, for him.

Steven mused on the darker sides of what Nitya describes in this chapter, that it’s important to refract that through the social structure. For a lot of human beings, the relationships they have are constrained by the forms of injustices they suffer, economic impoverishment, violence against women. So much psychological suffering is passed on, generation after generation. For many people this is their lived experience. That’s part of reality too. He hopes there is a kind of social solidarity that comes from deep compassion.

I suggested we love this philosophy because we care about everyone else too. It’s generous, open, confident, and it does not depend on others’ states of being to feel right. If we need to have the whole world a paradise before we can live free, we will never get there. This is a true dialectic paradox, because, as Steven and many others have said, (he mentioned MLK and bodhisattvas) so long as one person is oppressed, we are all oppressed. But we can

only find our way out from under our own oppression. That's why it's so important to harmonize yourself.

In Vedanta, there truly isn't any other, and as soon as you think of an other you have violated the purity of your love. Nitya's thoughts on this are presented at length in Part II. I also read out one of the vignettes from the last part of SOC, titled Sharing:

When our train steamed into a major junction, we purchased lunch packets. Guru opened his packet and was about to eat his first morsel of food, when a small boy of seven or eight who stood outside the train stretched out his hand. Guru passed the ball of rice on to him. The boy quickly swallowed it and stretched his hand again before Guru had eaten the second morsel.

This annoyed me, and I wanted to push the child away. But Guru stopped me from doing that. He ate the second rice ball he had made and then gave another ball of rice to the boy.

He turned to me and said, "I know people are annoyed by beggars. Poverty is bad, but it is not a crime. Every man is trying to live as best he can. What you see here in India can never happen in the West. This boy is a total stranger to us, but he is so confident of the love and compassion of others. It is that trust of man in man that makes him stretch out his hand. You should become tearful at the sight. This mutual recognition and sharing is discredited in sophisticated societies.

"Do not mix up the issues of abolishing poverty and relating to someone in need. If you take the first issue, you will have to tackle the economy of the whole world. Do it if you can. But the second question has an immediate urgency. You don't have to renounce your happiness, you are only expected to share. Your own happiness is to be bracketed with the happiness of others."

Most people get more and more angry and depressed if they are fighting injustice without nourishing themselves adequately. It will drain the soul, though it's true: some people thrive on it, and thrive on self-abnegation.

The older I get the less I like the idea of enlightenment, especially as a fixed accomplishment. It's egoistic, and I don't think it's something we should be going after. Wisdom, understanding, compassion, kindness: they're fine, but don't label them. Live them.

I read out two paragraphs from Deb's account of Guru's Walks, about Nitya's coming to terms with women, reprinted in Part II. Our closing meditation was partly inspired by this, and partly by an essay Deb found of Thomas Merton (more, with links, in Part II):

What I wear is pants.

What I do is live.

How I pray is breathe.

Who said Zen? Wash out your mouth if you said Zen.

If you see a meditation going by, shoot it.

Who said "Love?" Love is in the movies.

The spiritual life is something people worry about when they are so busy with something else they think they ought to be spiritual.

Spiritual life is guilt.

Up here in the woods is seen the New Testament: that is to say, the wind comes through the trees and you breathe it.

## Part II

Beverley sent this:

Here is a small personal addition to Guru's description of the joys of being in love. His lovers are sharing the joy but being in love is not always a happy experience.

### On Being in Love

I need an imagined future  
To contain the splendour of this joy.



«»«»«»«»

And more.....how I delight in the past,  
which brought me to this present bliss.



### One Face of Love

Ah me, the pain of love. I am ill.  
Oh, the anguish of this longing.

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Now I recall; Cupid directs arrows  
As well as strewing roses.

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The excerpt from Guru's Walks, by Deb, in Gurukulam Magazine, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter, 1996:

At the end of our walk, as we were turning back up the hill. Guru began to talk to a few of us—Andy, Suellen, Scott, and myself—about the various differences between himself, Nataraja Guru and Narayana Guru, particularly in their relationships to women. Narayana Guru, he said, was a very traditional sannyasin in his outlook on women: he was afraid of them. He wouldn't let them touch his feet, and when one would prostrate to him, he would almost climb up his chair to keep from being touched. Nataraja Guru, on the other hand, would vacillate. Sometimes he was very traditional, aloof, even afraid as Narayana Guru had been. Then, at other times, he could be adoring. His years in Paris and Geneva had taught him friendliness with women, but that was an overlay on his strict orthodox upbringing.

“And then me!” Guru laughed as he recalled his first encounter with western women. He was in Australia in 1970 staying at Professor Iyengar's house. One evening an Australian woman came in and prostrated at his feet. Afterwards she stood up and said, “That is the Indian way of greeting. Now here is the Australian way,” at which she gave him a big hug and a kiss on the cheek! That was shocking enough, Guru said, but the real teacher in changing his attitudes towards women was Celia Novy's oldest daughter Camille, who was then fifteen years old. When Guru went over to Celia's house for the first time, Camille was sitting at the dining room table doing homework, her feet up on the table along with her books. “Hi, Nitya,” she called out while chewing gum. To a formal, proper Indian, let alone a sannyasi, this was stunning behavior. Guru said that up until then, no one, not even Nataraja Guru had ever called him Nitya and at that moment all of his swami-hood, all of his role and its behaviors and expectations dropped right onto the floor. And that was the beginning of his person-hood. He said he still considers Camille one of his gurus. There have been many accusations towards Guru of favoritism to

women, charges of excessive friendliness. But what he had learned, he reiterated, beginning with Camille, was an equality of relationship to women, as friends and as students.

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Anita mined a couple of the “Are You Mine?” songs from the net:

Unchained melody - The Righteous Brothers (LYRICS/LETRA)  
[60s]:

<https://youtu.be/YVVZxkUMs7s>

For tonight’s class “are you still mine”

St. Levi - Are You Still Mine?

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=F3UsCowl3w&feature=share>

Plus: A Brief History of Romantic Love and Why It Kind of Sucks:

<https://markmanson.net/romantic-love>

(He’s trying to talk to young people, so uses their immature language. He also misinterprets the multiple-entendre “All You Need is Love,” as most people do, but it’s still a pretty good rant—RST)

More Scott: Manson credits the 19<sup>th</sup> century with inventing romantic love. Stephanie Coontz attributes love marriage to the early movies, beginning in the 1920s. Her specialty is the history of marriage up to the present, and she’s awesome—I’ve mentioned her before. Here’s her site: <https://www.stephaniecoontz.com/> . She found that monogamy is also a relatively recent development.

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Deb ran across this gem from Thomas Merton:

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What I do is live.  
How I pray is breathe.  
Who said Zen? Wash out your mouth if you said Zen.  
If you see a meditation going by, shoot it.  
Who said “Love?” Love is in the movies.  
The spiritual life is something people worry about when they are  
so busy with something else they think they ought to be spiritual.  
Spiritual life is guilt.  
Up here in the woods is seen the New Testament: that is to say, the  
wind comes through the trees and you breathe it.  
- Thomas Merton, from ‘Day of a Stranger’, 1965

In this ground-breaking essay, Merton allows himself to speak in  
the unexpurgated voice of the self he was excavating to be most  
true. You can read the entire essay here:

<https://hudsonreview.com/1967/07/day-of-a-stranger/>

Scott—I liked this line, which he elaborates on:

It seems to me that when one is too intent on “being himself” he  
runs the risk of impersonating a shadow.

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That Alone verse 72 is perhaps Nitya’s most definitive writing on  
this topic, and I recommend the whole chapter. It’s astoundingly  
brilliant! It also seems worthy to pull out the two most germane  
segments:

Any noble sentiment like the search for wisdom or love or  
compassion, any of the higher values which can become your  
motivating force, immediately become affected by both vidya and

avidya. Why do you love another person? What is the meaning of love? When love becomes very real to you, what you experience is the forgetting of the otherness of a person and also forgetting your own limitations. In the intensity of love you forget yourself as well as the other. There is only love and not the lover and beloved as two separate entities.

The most natural, most honest feeling that can come to a person is being drawn, not just to one person, but to all. Opposed to this you have images built up from inside of what you want to love and what is hateful. It is here the dichotomy comes, created by name and form. When your heart goes out to just one person in love, even that is fine because you are extending your self-identity beyond the limits of your body. You see your reality in the other person also. The other's happiness or unhappiness becomes your happiness or unhappiness. This allows you to cross the frontiers of physical limitation to which you have become riveted. This part is vidya. It is not nescience that makes you love; it is vidya, it is knowledge, it is wisdom that leads you to it.

When love pinches you, becomes filled with anguish and sorrow, it is because you have images about it. These images belong to avidya. The pursuit of love is engendered by vidya, but it often ends up in avidya. You smile and you expect a smile back; you touch and you want to be touched in return; you give and you want something to be given back to you. In this way you make it transactional. It becomes a contract, and if the contract is not carried out exactly as you want it to be you become very dissatisfied. Only when love is self-contained and has no hankering behind it does it belong to vidya.

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If you look closely at the painful aspects of your life, only a very few items are actually inevitable. Most of them are minor things we exaggerate or things we bring upon ourselves. In the area of

avidya there is a very large chunk you can just throw out, and by changing your thoughts and attitudes the rest of your suffering will be greatly minimized.

An area where this can have an important affect is love. Love can be so painful. "I love you. Why don't you love me in return?" "How much I love you...why don't you care about me?" It brings great agony. And what is this love? It is the love about which Kahlil Gibran says, "Your thirst, your hunger. The hand you hold out in want." You are like a beggar. You are not the rich donor: "Let my heart flow to you." You are so thirsty and so hungry that you are in terrible need. You want the other person to give to you. It is this need, this thirst, you call your love.

"I want to love and also be loved." It's like a contract. If you truly love, you want to see that the person you love is happy. If the other person's happiness is to have their own way, why can't you be happy about that? Many people, like Victor Hugo, have tried to bring out this point, but they are dismissed as romantic dreamers. There is much more than a romantic dream in it.

In contractual love we do not elevate ourselves. There isn't much difference between an animal caught in an instinctive, reflexive need, and we human beings who think of ourselves as far removed from our animal life and yet react in highly predictable ways.