

4/6/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 7B – A Knock on the Door

The thrilling conclusion of chapter seven makes the case for a serious engagement with spiritual transformation. It may sound arcane to the old people in our class, as Nitya was clearly speaking to us as young adults who were contemplating our commitments, deciding on the direction of our life paths. He was a representative of a deeply committed lifestyle with ancient roots, inviting those with a similar bent, those with “an incurable need to understand,” to take the plunge into serious dedication.

There is plenty of valuable wisdom to imbibe in a more passive manner, for those enjoying what Indians call householder status: living a more or less ordinary life in a beautiful and satisfying way. Our take on these matters in the Portland Gurukula speaks unabashedly to those types, who are by no means considered “second best.” I feel very strongly that every life can be made meaningful, and Nitya was truly an advocate of this as well. (He eventually accepted that most of us were only moderately committed, and rarely expressed disappointment.) Here he echoes his more traditional framing, where heroic measures are needed to reclaim one’s independence:

A person fully opened up to the call of the spirit is called in Tamil *turavi*. There is a radical note contained in that small word. Literally it means “opening the door and walking onto the highway.” There are similar radical elements in the calls of all masters.

It's surely true that a life spent trying to fit in to local social standards is not going to transcend anything. I suppose it's the relative freedoms of the modern world, access to all recorded wisdom, and the availability of psychedelic medicines that permits us a less draconian path to selfhood.

We should also keep in mind that just walking out on the highway doesn't confer anything by itself. In stifling circumstances it's certainly necessary as a first step. Nitya gets to the gist in one of his perfect paragraphs:

All our early training at home, in school, on the street, in the marketplace, and even in church is to convince us to adopt the ways and means of successful transaction. We are taught how to labor and get its fruit, how to learn and practice over and over again to obtain efficiency, and how to apply a well-structured formula or technique to get a desired effect. Afterwards when we come to seek the spirit, we presume that we are expected to do something similar to achieve results. But masters like the Buddha and Christ and the rishis of the Upanishads draw a distinction between the world of transactional gains and the world of spiritual attainments, pointing out that transactional methods only serve us well in their appropriate context. The Indian saints call the world of transactional gains one of "small pleasures" and the world of spiritual attainment "the great happiness."

Modern understanding of the right and left hemispheres of the brain accords with this. Our right hemisphere is the residence of our "being," similar or identical with the realized states of fabulous description, always present and alive within us. Our social and language skills, and so on, are developed more in the left hemisphere, and cannot be described better than this: they are about "how to apply a well-structured formula or technique to get a desired effect." These skills actually subsume our free being, so the harder they are "practiced," the farther from being we get. It's an essential paradox: "practicing" letting go tends to be a kind of hanging on. All ideologies that picture the realized state as existing "somewhere else" exacerbate this schism.

Deb opened our conversation asserting that if there was just one small lesson of Nitya's she had access to, these three pages

(41-43) would be what she would choose. She felt it is so beautiful the way he talks about our constant transactions, whether physical, psychological or emotional, and how despite them we can't plan for what our eventual transformation will be. We think we can, so we put our energy into making it happen. Instead, we should strive to let go of our rigid ideas, to allow room for something more profound and open to replace them. The point is not to barter for realization, but to allow yourself to be expanded, to be available, as Nitya puts it.

Steven admitted this gets to heart of his ongoing frustration with trying get what Nitya is saying. When he lived in the Gurukula he wanted to know a method to gain spiritual advancement. In his understanding, you learned asanas, you chanted mantras, adopted changes to diet, practiced all sorts of techniques to purify yourself so you would gain deeper insight. Nitya was always evasive, never spelling out what you needed to do. Steven is still left wondering how to do what he's described here in terms of non-transactional openness, of just allowing things to occur. It's elusive!

Deb assured him it *is* difficult, and that is the point. That's why Nataraja Guru didn't waste time with being nice, just jumped into the arena of change and expected his students to jump with him. You don't start with an idea per se.

I added that not knowing what you're doing is much more efficacious than following a program. As the left brain is the part that figures out how to do stuff, the more you do that, the more you isolate yourself in your left brain. It's defeating what you're trying to accomplish.

As I've talked about in the past, when new people come to the Portland Gurukula, most of them want to know what they are supposed to *do*. When I tell them that's the last thing we're going to teach them, they go elsewhere. This is about making your own way—you are the only person who could possibly know yourself, so we urge you to get on with it.

The transactional world, with its “small pleasures,” does work that way, though, and there is nothing wrong with it. Figuring things out is the proper way to navigate your daily life. But something else is required to make entrance into your greater self, which is always sitting inside you, waiting for you to return to it. That’s why there’s so much you can benefit from in this wisdom, even if you are not as fully dedicated as is usually expected. We can also learn what this outlook can do for someone who isn’t going to spend 24/7 pondering the mysteries of the universe.

I’ve done lots of mechanical practices in my youth, imagining they would bring me to a realized state. They had nice effects, relaxing, healthy, calming, yet I eventually realized a mystical breakthrough is another matter entirely. Those kinds of fantasies are self-defeating. Side-tracks. I love how Nitya takes a gentle poke at them:

All these seekers are earnest and sincere. They have heard or read somewhere of what these wonderful disciplines can do. But what impresses me more is a John sprinkling water on a Jesus. The very irrationality of it makes it thrice dear to me as compared to the acrobatic disciplines of a hatha yogi.

We’ll never know if there was something “special” in that water....

Steven, who has been writing up his recollections for the Portland Gurukula’s 50th anniversary, mused that in reflecting back to his time in the Overton house, a definite transformation occurred over that period of time: there was this sweet increasing feeling of harmony and gentleness between everyone. He wondered if we can think of our interactions with others as not transactional in terms of getting something for myself but that I form relationships with others out of a sense of common purpose? To feel that warmth and bonding is different from transactional interactions. The bond he felt was palpable, like a ripening fruit, and it evolved.

That’s right: the minute you make it into something that is happening because of something someone intentionally did

profanes it. If you define it and try to replicate it, you can't. You might just think we are a band of brothers and sisters who have fun together and share good ideas, and leave it at that. We don't need a template—something special is coming through without any rigorous definitions.

Nancy said that despite all her years of studying this, she doesn't see it even as a transformation, but it's helped develop a posture to life that opens you to what unfolds. As you go through your day's activities, you can enjoy every bit of it, even the line at the grocery store, the traffic. Our lives are easier and more pleasant because of this posture. It expands your understanding, in place of having to push away what's not important to you. All those things matter.

Deb agreed it's all about being open to transformation. She asked, rhetorically, what did you not expect in your life, that you now have? It's important to learn to be open to it and accept it. We think of certain things as an annoying event or person, but how do we allow it to change us and make us more flexible and generous? She used to always be wishing things and people would just go away, disappear, and it didn't help. It only prolonged her angst. Now she's decided not to get angry and frustrated at people, but to try to meet them where they are. She loved Nitya's line how "the barriers of the individual break away." It describes a vision where the cracking apart of the individual allows them to be identified with a much vaster world.

I quoted John Lennon: "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." In our unfoldment, we miss the essence by doing all our programming and planning. I've found that young people these days are incredibly wound up about how to choreograph their lives, and if given the opportunity I advise them not to. Having plans shuts out the unexpected. Life is always trying to offer you something unique, and if you're working on your life plan you won't notice it. I tell them they're going to miss the train that's roaring through their life if they think the only path is the one they've already chosen.

Steven is reading Nitya's autobiography, and is often struck by how Nitya breaks free of cultural prejudices, such as being a male, being a sannyasi. He constantly wants to transcend those roles. There is such a liberal spirit that inhabits his approach. In that light, Steven has resolved to be more sensitive to his cultural prejudices and how our upbringing inhibits our ability to be global in outlook. He plans to meditate this week on the ways in which he is so constrained.

It's so true that we won't notice such subtleties unless we sit still and examine them, yet it's surprisingly hard to call yourself into question — to ask what are my assumptions, what do I take for granted? It's like water for fish. Unlike fish, however, it's very liberating to take ourselves out of our aquarium.

Steven talked more about reading the autobiography. He's gotten to the part where Nitya is traveling with Nataraja Guru, in a panoramic tour of India. He finds it astonishing to hear Nitya be so honest about his own sense of inadequacy, after only knowing him as the masterful swami he was when we met him. He marveled how Nitya allowed himself to be transformed, his remarkable frankness in describing the sexual repression in Indian culture, for instance. Steven saw how people would be so much happier if they could overcome their puritanism, their taboos. He finds it most refreshing Nitya is so open and free with his views. For that matter, he was a refreshing person to be around, allowing for the vitality of life to spring up all around him.

We discussed several personal examples of the interaction of determination and serendipity in our lives. The takeaway is that even in cases of extreme bondage, changes can sometimes take place, quite unexpectedly. Nitya sums up the principle:

Time and again we see people making a complete turnabout of 180 degrees in their life. I consider it as a stroke of good luck or a matter of divine grace if you are picked out of the multitude to become something different. Though there is no assurance that all those who are called will be honored,

mankind has only benefited from those who agreed to stake everything on opening up the next phase of human growth.

Call it divine grace. We may struggle mightily to enable a change, with no apparent effect, and then out of nowhere it comes. It's a lesson to not write "hopeless" people off. They need us to represent viable alternatives. Deb advocated being open to how the person is, yet maintaining your own integrity.

Nitya closes this magnificent chapter with a reprise of the *turavi*:

The Isavasya Upanishad begins with the presentation of the unbounded freedom which is gained by those who can confidently and courageously open up the door of their relativistic security and walk onto the highway of spiritual abundance. My role is to knock at the door of men and women who are ready, to tell them that there is an open world outside and that there is an unrestricted path on which to walk.

Part II

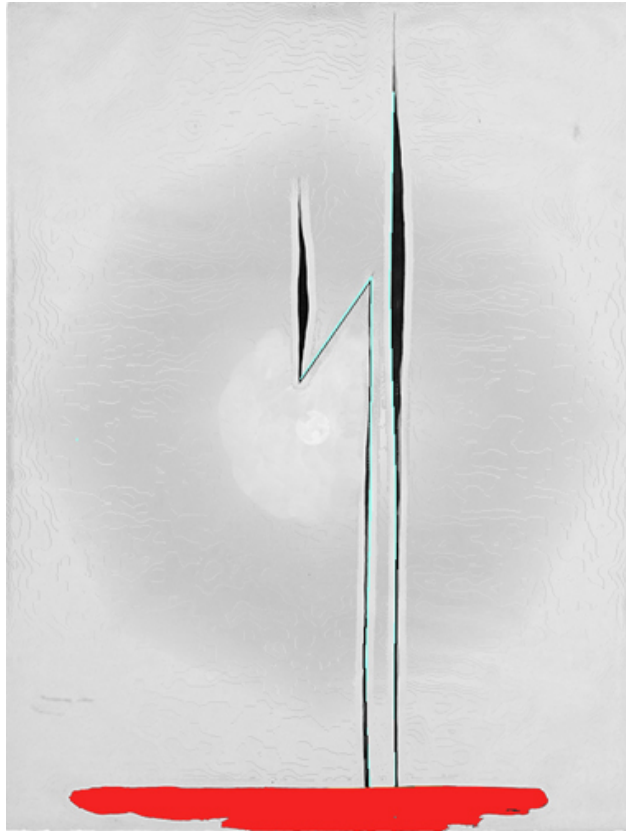
From Beverley:

Some thoughts on 'A Knock on the Door'.

In my life I have been a teacher in various secondary schools (11-18) in England, and taught English as a Foreign Language to children and adults, singly or in groups, in Ibiza. I have been given help in understanding myself by two Jungian analysts. I have trained as an Alexander teacher and practised this therapy with individual clients. In spite of all this I'm afraid I couldn't follow what Guru is saying in this chapter.

However, I did feel inspired by my reading to ruminate on choice, commitment and the relationship between inner need and outer attraction, and how all these affect attempts to help and advise people, especially in the teacher - learner relationship. I have been

here before - many times - and nowadays I like to use a symbol I created a while ago for the whole conundrum. I have no final answer this time either but that's not the point really; It's the questions and where they lead me in my mind and imagination that are so rewarding and give me heartfelt satisfaction.



From Anita:

Came across this in an email from someone else and thought it has some value for our class discussions

Anita

Lakota Prayer

*Great Mystery,
teach me how to trust*

*my heart,
my mind,
my intuition,
my inner knowing,
the senses of my body,
the blessings of my spirit.
Teach me to trust these things
so that I may enter my Sacred Space
and love beyond my fear,
and thus Walk in Balance
with the passing of each glorious Sun.*

According to certain tribes, the *Sacred Space* is the space between exhalation and inhalation. To *Walk in Balance* is to have Heaven (spirituality) and Earth (physicality) in Harmony.

At the core of this timeless wisdom is the word "trust". When did we stop trusting ourselves? When did we start giving that trust, that *power*, away?

In many ways the spirit path is a process of reestablishing that trust with the infinite that resides within us, just waiting to be activated.

Wishing you a day of balance and harmony,

* * *

Shyla R. sent a nice note:

Hello Scott ,

I haven't thanked you enough for sending me these mails regularly, without fail.

Nor have I mentioned ,how much these thoughts about Guru ,his ways and teachings have watered me .

He talks about growth ,and like green foliage ,in a balcony ,I edge towards these slim rays of sunlight .Thank you

