

4/13/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 8 – Reaction and Review - #2

Three highlights from another Q and A session make up this brief chapter. A subtle joy in reading it is to be reminded of Nitya's proclivity for expanding exponentially on a question or comment, while including veiled criticisms both personal and cultural.

The first comment ends: "It seems to me you are speaking of too many things all at once." Nitya immediately responds with this rejoinder:

Life is orderly only in textbooks, in the analyst's lab, and in *The City of God* of St. Augustine. We live it here as a complex whole in which perception, feeling, emotional reaction, reasoning and many other biological and psychological processes are simultaneously occurring as a collective response to each given moment. While you cannot theorize without resorting to abstraction and generalization, I want to keep as near as possible to the facts of life rather than its assumptions.

So we readers are skewered by the truth that we are operating in terms of assumptions in place of realities. While many of the attendees of the original session missed the barb, not all of us did.

There is a value in simplifying experience in order to make sense of it, yet when we replace direct experience with mediated, interpreted, verbal experience long enough, our contact with its source is lost, at least to our waking consciousness. As both types of experience have their place in knowledge, Nitya adds: "There can be knowledge *of* things and knowledge *about* things." In this context *of* refers to direct intuition and *about* refers to academic analysis.

We've been portraying this dichotomy for some time as related to the two brain hemispheres, where the left brain is

knowledge *about*, and the right brain is knowledge *of*, broadly speaking. Any time you pare something down to a system, you lose its specific context. Whenever we define something it becomes a left hemisphere proposition, in the process draining vitality out of it.

The point is that no amount of talking or calculating about something gets quite all the way to what it is; it can never lead (by itself) to direct awareness of it.

The Gurukula's favorite analogy is Bergson's, where going into Notre Dame cathedral gives you a meaningful experience of it, yet you can take 10,000 pictures and send them to a friend, but they will be unable to communicate the power and magnificence of its essence. No one can walk into Notre Dame and not feel something amazing, something much more than any description.

Anita wondered if that means the left brain is thinking about what the experience contains, and why it is different? She further asked, is it always trying to analyze? In a word, yes.

In some types of meditation we try to rein that left hemisphere activity in, to restore beingness. Our "being" is in direct contact with the environment at all times, but we routinely tune it out in our obsession with interpretation, which we must remember is always more or less tangential to experience.

Our academic inclinations are so strongly reinforced by our training that we aren't comfortable with *being* per se: we prefer predetermined self-help programs, like spiritual practices that spell out a routine, ideally with some number of steps so we can check them off in sequence.

Nitya's passion was to lead us back from this labyrinth to our true nature, our beingness:

After some twenty centuries of studying *about* things, a reaction came from several sources, and today humans are once again interested in what actually prevails upon them, no matter how pinching or nauseating it might be. I respect this new

attitude and personally feel an urgency to throw more light on the knowledge *of* things also.

Nausea is a sly reference to Sartre's novel, by the way. Nitya often mentioned it, as he was so nonplussed that people could feel nauseated about the miracle of existence. For him, it was always the *joy* of life. The delight. Very little nauseated him. Finding a hair in his food did, in case you're wondering.

Steven admitted befuddlement, protesting "if there was any Indian teacher that I have met or studied, Nitya and the Narayana Gurukula is by far the most abstract and analytical. I can't think of any living teacher who has written so many books." Since I (Scott) was pushing aside analytic thinking, how would I explain what Nitya's practice in life embodied? What is the secret he discovered, that he's trying to get across to us?

My first response was you could treat Nitya like Notre Dame. (Didn't go over.) What I meant was there was an incredible experience of being with him, and while all those books he wrote only conveyed a hint of it, like Bergson's postcards of the Cathedral. Still, it's way better than nothing. The words are all meant to invite us back into the cathedral, where many words urge us to run away from it. I read out Nitya's own response, from the Foreword to *That Alone*, which I'll copy in Part II for those of you who don't have it memorized. As usual, he nails it there.

Regarding the befuddlement (a happy state!) around Nitya's largely Nataraja Guru-inspired philosophizing, Steven first read out part of the epigram for *In the Stream of Consciousness*. Here it is in its entirety:

No analysis of consciousness is better known to us than when it is revealed to us by the "inner programmer" who always hides behind our own inattentiveness, and no discipline is more effective to attune our consciousness to the ever-abiding charm of our own beauty than that which is conspired by the sequential eventualities of life, which may look random,

coincidental, and even incoherent.

What he's saying is, rather than making detailed plans and carrying them out, if you want freedom you permit your life to sweep you along. It too has a plan, and it's tailored to exactly who you are. Our personal dharma is trying to produce something out of us that is quite profound and special, yet we are blocking its expression by hanging on so tightly to our fixations. Our shoulds. That is not the way to optimally develop your life, though it has its place in the horizontal world of give and take.

"Back in the day," Nitya summed some of us up in a short phrase, which was astoundingly accurate, from the ones I've heard about. Steve Weckel's was "Inhibitions to creative catharsis." He mentioned it in a conversation the other day, meaning he's been pondering it and mulling over it for nearly 50 years. It's a mantra that tries to open him up to his abundant genius, which all his rigid upbringing did its best to squelch. There's no "how to," in that mantra, but contemplating the concept did free up much of his creativity.

My phrase, by the way, was "Chronic delayed reaction." I've gotten better, but I used to almost always hear something intense, like a guru instruction, and not until a day later would it hit me with what it might have meant. Way too late for a perky rejoinder, which Nitya would have liked.

Another friend's I remember was "Chronic hesitation." He would be tempted or invited to do something terrific, but then would hold back just long enough, and the moment would pass.

Anyway, Nitya did teach a lot of important and lesser known things in those books, some traditional Vedanta, some traditional science and psychology, some reasoning processes that permit your beingness to participate in your life more. Words can lead us away from beingness, but they can also turn us back toward it: they can bring us out of the fogs of our own making, and help us stop inhibiting ourselves from direct, cathartic experience. You can't just stop yourself and say "let's not do anything," you need to

*convince* yourself to truly modify your behavior. At the core of Nitya's books is the unity of the universe, which is the basis of our world, with its ethics and morality, and so many practical issues he addresses as well. In this chapter he is speaking about the direct experience that changes your microstructure, that opens you to more direct experience.

The second Q and A speaks to this, including:

There is a glaring contradiction between the social norms of the society and the ego-oriented norms of mental hygiene practiced in the West. People in the East, especially India, are subjected to an even more hypocritical and schizophrenic split between their loyalty to altruistic universal values and their parochial social behaviors.

A much healthier attitude can be evolved if the democratic or socialist way of life is treated as a natural corollary of the spiritual oneness of consciousness that is experienced by all.

I don't know about the "even more" part—all over the globe humans are hypocritical and schizophrenic, professing high values and living in denial of their actual small-minded ones. It's the natural outcome of the schism between being and scheming, and it's firmly cemented in social complacency.

Bill offered an example about what's happening in physics these days. The harder physicists look for a unified theory to explain everything, the deeper and farther into the woods they keep getting. Nitya avoids that paradox by constantly bringing us back to the Absolute, the One, without being doctrinaire about it. Oneness is not something we can truly describe, yet we can return to it as a kind of touchstone.

Steven remained somewhat dubious. He has starting reading Nitya's Patanjali commentary, and is blown away by its analytical clarity. It gets deeply involved in the enumeration and analysis of each aspect of mind. Nitya doesn't suggest we should lose sight of the key spiritual principle, but clearly there is some importance for

him and in his lineage for profound philosophical thinking. Its philosophical profundity is mind-boggling in scope and complexity. Steven concluded, “If all I was looking for was direct experience, I could find a meditation practice to focus on this or that.

I didn’t get a chance to respond, but what I wanted to say was that the direct experience isn’t so much about objects or practices or programs, or anything conceivable, for that matter. Even though Nitya mentions ‘things’ here, truly direct experience is of what we call the Absolute: the essence behind the scenes, behind the things. The scene keeps evolving, but its essence does not, and that’s what we’re missing. To access it, different people have different tastes in what works for their inner impetus, their dharma. And there’s no predicting when or if a breakthrough will occur. Of course it’s always promised, in the successful programs: the promise is what makes them successful

Bill cited Patanjali’s famous line that yoga is the restraint of mental modifications, and revisited the first quote above, that our life is a complex whole “in which perception, feeling, emotional reaction, reasoning and many other biological and psychological processes are simultaneously occurring as a collective response to each given moment.” He enthused it’s an amazing process to understand those complexities and then get back to the point where they no longer influence you. Or as I’d put it: where they influence you harmoniously. Bill again quoted Nitya: “A much healthier attitude can be evolved if the democratic or socialist way of life is treated as a natural corollary of the spiritual oneness of consciousness that is experienced by all.”

This is germane to the third Q and A, where Nitya exposes the inadequacy of our mental shorthand:

We all play with a number of vague concepts such as God, the Tao, the Unknown, Chance and Fate. The emotional state of mind in a particular context justifies the use of one or another of these terms. If what is fateful turns out to be beneficial, Fate

will transform itself into God. In the same way, when hope is belied, God becomes pale, and from beneath his mask Fate will bare its teeth.

Fixing an inflexible meaning to these terms only shows our unfamiliarity with the workings of semiosis, which affixes a certain meaning to a certain term in a given context.

Our Being understands these meanings much more thoroughly than our interpretive aspect. Their nuances “speak” to us, directly.

Nitya has another of his rounds with the various meanings of the word ‘God’, which rely on context and intent more than the actual dictionary definitions. It reminded Steven of a time Nitya illustrated semiosis for him, how Hindi has a word for every occasion—acha. “I just found a million dollars lying in street!” Acha! My mother passed away yesterday.” Acha. “How’s it going today?” Acha. Nitya was a good actor, and a captivating storyteller, and he knew how to bring his points to life.

I added that in a Psych 101 textbook I had read that the actual words make up 7% of communication. The rest is context, inflection, gestures, tone, and so on. I don’t know about the exact percent—as you know, I maintain that 93.7 percent of statistics are made up on the spot—but it’s a small part of the whole.

Steven has been investigating the nature of consciousness and has shared a link to what interested him the most, which you can find in Part II. He is excited that there is a lot of ferment over panpsychism in academia now. Consciousness is getting to look more like the building blocks of the universe than matter, since matter keeps vanishing on the observer. What It’s All About is an ongoing corpus of discovery. I have my doubts that the left brain alone will ever be able to resolve it, since it so routinely denies wholeness, but it’s not going to ever quit trying. It would be sad if it did.

Susan related how she was able to have a substantial “conversation” with a German-speaking woman on a train. At one point the woman sneezed, and Susan reflexively burst out

“Gesundheit!” The woman was delighted Susan knew her language, not realizing it’s the single polite German word most Americans know. Susan also talked about her learning curve with her new puppy, where she has a trainer who’s trying to get her to be more generally aware of how what she does is understood by the dog. Word meanings themselves comprise 0% of that kind of communication, but gestures, inflections, tone and the rest are acutely appreciated by all animals, and dogs perhaps better than any, including humans. Susan is trying to be more direct in getting her messages across. Vedanta for puppy owners!

Anita lamented that the whole world is communicating all the time, but as human beings we don’t recognize most of it. We now know that even trees communicate with each other. For us, it’s a matter of unveiling. Along those lines she wondered if virtual reality is an oxymoron. It seems all of life is virtual reality, including the knowledge *of* and *about* it. When we think we’re just working on *of*, it’s really *about*.

That’s indeed how we’re deceived: we think *about*, and imagine we’re knowing *of*. We have to internalize that our genius brains are creating what we perceive out of mere vibrations on our sense organs overlaid on memories. It’s a benign (hopefully) delusion, and we have to work within it—there’s no alternative. It’s helpful to know the slant we’re putting on the picture, for sure.

Here’s my bottom line: I trust my carefully vetted and heavily critiqued internal virtual reality, and I’m very suspicious of someone else’s, which is likely to be commercially motivated, or worse. I’m not thinking of nature videos, but of the goggles you affix to your face like a giant leech. I’m sure it can be awesome, but my own version is already awesome, and a number of its defects have been pounded out of it already.

Anita is over her mountain climbing days, yet she visits a Youtube channel where a guy gets out in the world and films himself, and she enjoys watching. He camps in his car, loves to be alone, climbs and hikes in different scenery, and it is wonderful for her. She knows her experience is not the same as his: he actually



feels the dirt and the breeze and is frightened by the bear, but she gets those feelings as well, without getting dirty or eaten. It makes her wonder about her experience—how much is *of* and how much is *about*, and is it all simply knowledge *about*?

I mentioned mirror neurons, that respond as if we were really doing the actions we perceive. Though in some dispute, there is good evidence that they do exist, since you get the same chemical reactions from just witnessing. It touches on a most relevant issue for our time: discerning truth is no longer a simple prospect. Perhaps it only ever seemed simple.... What is truth, what is reality, is being totally shredded, pummeled. In the computer age anybody can make anything up and make it look real, conning millions of people with ease for vicious fun and lethal profit. What does it take to not fall into the pits?

One crucial factor in avoiding quagmires is having a viable community of thoughtful and caring people, who are brave enough to resist popular derangements. Need I say more?

My gratitude is boundless.

Aum

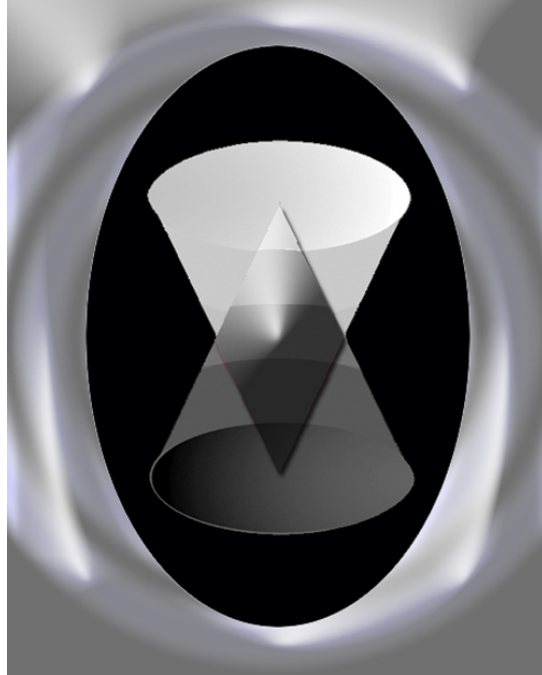
## Part II

Beverley's missive:

I followed this chapter of Reaction and Review with ease. I am grateful for Guru's explanation of how differently Western and Eastern consciousness functions - starting with this: "Generally speaking, in the West the lifestyle of people is collective, while their thinking is individualistic. In the East the lifestyle is individualistic, but they think more in terms of the universal."

His suggested solution sounds appealing and I like to believe that every little step in the right will lead to a better world one day. "A much healthier attitude can be evolved if the democratic or socialist way of life is treated as a natural corollary of the spiritual

oneness of consciousness that is experienced by all."Here's an image to symbolise this aim.



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The first part of the Foreword to That Alone:

Narayana Guru once asked a young novice, “Do you know Vedanta?”

The young man answered, “No. What is there to know about it?”

“Do you know what water is like?” replied the Guru.

“Yes.”

“Do you know what wave is like?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know that water and wave are not two?”

“Yes.”

“That is all.”

“If Vedanta is so simple, why do people spend so much time studying it?”

“Because people forget the wave is water.”

“Why do we forget?”

“Because of maya.”

“How do we get rid of maya?”

“By knowing that wave and water are not two.”

“What is the use of knowing they are both the same?”

“So you won't put such questions!”

This story was told to me by my Master, Nataraja Guru. As he himself was a disciple of Narayana Guru, it is even possible that he was the novice mentioned.

The point, however, is that truth is so very simple we don't need to make any effort to know it, but an undetectable ignorance conceals what should be obvious. Then we take a lifetime of beating around the bush to arrive once again at what is already known to us. Once the lost truth is regained, the search comes to a close and there is no need to utter another word.

Between the effortlessness of the obvious and the silent wonder of regaining the forgotten truth, there are many hurdles to be cleared. The truth we speak of is neither fact or fiction. It is not the object of immediate perception or the subject of mediate inference. Either you unconditionally know it or you do not. This is the knowledge which cannot be taught but, paradoxically, it dawns upon you on listening to one who knows.

There is no assurance you will know because you listen, and there is also no assurance you will know if you do not listen. What one listens to is a word symbol of that which cannot be adequately symbolised or represented. To rectify this defect, a series of mutually complementary symbols can be presented by the knower. One or all of these analogies may prepare the listener to have a state of mind which can suddenly get the jolt of confronting the Absolute. There is no guarantee, but it is in the compassionate

nature of gurus to offer any number of chances to those who are willing to listen.

In the Atmopadesa Satakam, the polarising of the Self and the non-Self is therefore presented with one hundred variations.

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Steven recommended a video about the present-day understanding of consciousness:

Evan Thompson....I think that's his name...is wonderful. His talk is challenging but worth struggling through.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6K3o-TNJXyM&t=10s>

Evan Thompson's work attempts to develop a useful synergy between neuroscience, the phenomenological school of philosophy (which places emphasis on the primacy of lived experience) and eastern philosophies. Though he seems to reject "panpsychism" (the view that consciousness can exist outside of individual life forms), he does see great value in bringing the subjective insights of persons such as Buddhist practitioners into the "horizon" of neuroscience.

Here's his latest book:

**Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy**

Part III

Anita shared the link she's been watching, and a screen shot:

The YouTube hiker I watch is at [Suvrving.com](http://Suvrving.com)

6:18



suvrving.com

Dwelling, etc.

Menu ▾



## Welcome!

Hi, I'm Tristan. I run a YouTube channel called [SUV RVing](#). I travel around the western United States and go on adventures in the mountains and desert, all while using my little SUV (a 2011 Toyota RAV4) as a mini camper.

What are you interested in?

- [The latest SUV RVing videos](#)
- [The articles I've posted here to the SUVRVing.com website](#)
- [The SUV RVing book on Amazon](#)
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- [The SUV RVing Facebook Group](#)
- [@SUVRVing on Instagram](#)
- [Adventure Know-How](#) – My online membership site where you can gain access to a map of all of my free campsites, monthly bonus videos, and more.
- [Kamchatka Gear](#) – My online store that sells SUV RVing merch plus accessories to make your SUV RVing/vanlife/overlanding/car camping adventures easier.

I also have a second YouTube channel called [Tenkara Addict](#). It's dedicated to the simple Japanese method of fly fishing, tenkara.

## Part IV

Dear Beverley sent an appreciation, always a sweet surprise:

I want to tell you how very much I enjoyed your class notes this time. They are so interesting. This time I had to stop every few lines and relish what you had written there – I scribbled this down ...! 'The schism between being and scheming' lovely! and I like the 'touchstone here:

“Nitya avoids that paradox by constantly bringing us back to the Absolute, the One, without being doctrinaire about it. Oneness is not something we can truly describe, yet we can return to it as a kind of touchstone.” Attached is an image that together with your comments here has made the word 'Absolute' rather more acceptable.)

