

2/26/13
Verse 11

“I,I,” thus, all that are spoken of,
when carefully considered, inwardly are not many; that is one;
as the receding I-identities are countless
in their totality, the substance of I-consciousness continues.

Free translation:

What are spoken of as 'I, 'I', when carefully considered, are not separate entities. Within the total Substance these are only modes, while the continuity of the ego is maintained by the connectedness of the attributes into which it is modified.

Nataraja Guru's

The repeated 'I, I' contemplated from within
Is not many but remains One; divergent egoity
Being multiple, with the totality of such
The Self-substance too continuity assumes.

The second of two difficult verses opened its heart to the group, and we were able to share many exquisitely enlightening insights. We have gotten into the beneficial habit of intensely harmonized focus, and it is really taking us places.

The two verses are a matched pair. The first demonstrates what could be called a horizontal unity: two people side by side see that they are the same. The present one presents a vertical unity: the continuity through time of a kind of golden thread running through all the innumerable I-identities we have had through our entire life. Even as we engage with the myriad attractions and repulsions of our days, there is a constant focal reference point of self. A string of points through time becomes a line, a thread. When charged with bliss it becomes a golden thread.

Deb's opening idea was that if we can access this unity in all manifestations we will not be overwhelmed. Michael saw Nitya's presentation of it as a clever gambit to convert the multitudinous world outside into a seamless inner awareness. Outside events appear to be beyond our control, but when we realize that they are an internal production staged by our brain, the door is open for us to become active participants in our own life.

We'll have to call on a Malayalam speaker to tell us what word is translated as 'substance' here, which is the source of the unity. One of the epiphanies Nitya was most fond of—in part because Nataraja Guru was impressed, and that was an exceedingly rare occasion—was equating the Absolute with Spinoza's all-permeating substance. Here we find it worked in as "the substance of I-consciousness," and in the free translation it is taken to another level and even capitalized a la medieval style, where the 'I' is merely a mode within the total Substance. This is definitely a nod to Spinoza, who both gurus admired immensely. But it is unlikely that Narayana Guru knew of him. So what did he have in mind?

Modern neuroscience is approaching the substance of consciousness from a provocative angle. Estimates are that several billions bits of information strike the nervous system every instant, but out of that welter of information the very clever brain selects a tiny fraction, a couple of hundred that seem most important. It then fleshes them out with previous memories, arranges them in a plausible time sequence, embroiders them with expectations, and presents the amalgam as "reality" to our awareness.

This works very well, ordinarily, and most of the time we aren't even aware of it, but it has a tendency to screen out new information and substitute stale imagery that worked in the past. We can easily become stagnant, fixed in a dream reality, overlaying our wishful thinking onto a miraculous universe. The net result is to dull the beauty, converting the splendor of ten thousand suns into a black and white rerun. Our study is intended to revive our appreciation of the total reality we have unintentionally so drastically reduced, by finding ways to open

back up to it. Aging doesn't have to be a one way slide into the past, beating against the current.

In terms of how the Gurukula defines this quest, it is to recover the unity residing at the core of the apparent multiplicity. The 'I' as we know it is a persona constructed to interface with the multiple aspects of our environment. The witness—pictured as the contemplative sitting beside the tree in Verse 9—is our true self, and is not affected by the passing show of events. The 'I' that is affected is a confection of the entangling vines climbing up the tree, or what's called the ego. Enlightenment involves shifting our center of identity from the ego to the witness, or to the core of our being, the karu. We don't give up the ego, but we shift our focus away from it as the center of the self so it can assume its proper role as an adjunct.

Michael (cleverly!) described the way we buy into our constructed reality as throwing ourselves under our own bus. Our beliefs are like a big, heavy vehicle lurching down the road, and we commit psychological suicide when we cling to our limited outlook. Often we run right over ourselves, flattening our best intentions on the pavement.

Michael also brought up the most important idea of the evening, that we have to lose faith in our persona before we can mount the energy necessary to discover our true self. Our attention has been directed for our whole life into bolstering and perfecting our persona, so we naturally hold on tightly to it. We were instructed by authority figures to define ourselves as they wanted to see us, and added on our acquired likes and dislikes. The “psychotic breaks” that seem so widespread these days, mark when people begin to perceive the insubstantial nature of their constructed reality. Unfortunately, in a world where buying into the illusion is all-important, such psychotic breaks are treated as a terrible disease to be cured as quickly as possible. The result is to make them virtually permanent features. But wise gurus, as well as radical psychologists like R.D. Laing, see such breaks as part of a healing process. It is much easier to integrate a scary and antisocial

aspect into our sense of self if it is welcomed as a potential cure instead of being treated as a terrible affliction. The door to the Unknown should have a welcome sign on it, instead of the more usual “Abandon hope all ye who enter.”

It is a supreme challenge to lose faith in the meaningless part of ourselves that everyone around us cherishes, or at least takes for granted, and turn to that which is routinely spurned. The least we can do is provide a nurturing environment for such a positive change of heart. If, instead of fearing that we are “losing our grip,” we developed trust in the excellence of our inner arranger: that super-intelligent subconscious that is constructing the newsreel we watch all day long, we would have a much easier time abiding in our own skin. We should be grateful of the blessing if and when our persona is shattered. Being terrified is a learned response, though deeply inculcated. We could try another tack.

Susan pointed out that it’s hard to let go of our I-identity, because it feels comfortable. We’re used to it. Our sense of self is built around it.

That’s exactly right, and that was Michael’s point. We stick with our illusions as long as we feel comfortable with them, and imagine they are our self. The self of Narayana Guru’s Self-instruction is another matter, and we will be gradually sinking into it as we forge ahead. It doesn’t come to light just by our wishing it would, but that’s a start. It is like a seed buried in warm loam. It needs time and care to slowly come into the light. We begin to care for it when our illusions no longer support us: as we look at them, they begin to melt into thin air. What will be left of us when they are gone?

Mick quoted one of his teachers that we must always insist that we are formless, unbound, and not conditioned. It goes along with one of my mottoes: self-description is stultifying. The more we describe ourselves, the more we limit ourselves. Instead we can dare to let our identities (and people’s perceptions of who we should be) run off us like water off a duck’s back.

Jan suggested that scrutinizing all her various I's is an important precursor to finding her sense of unity, and that's where her compassion comes from. It is also important to realize that compassion for others is an extension of having compassion for ourselves. Realizing that everything we encounter is within us makes compassion come alive. Moni, who is expert at extending compassion to her unfortunate clients, even when she feels put upon, talked at length about it. A key aspect is that just going along with what other people ask for is not necessarily being compassionate; it is abandoning our role in deciding where and when to render aid. Compassion has to be more dynamic, nuanced. It has to emerge from a solid foundation within us.

At accident scenes I occasionally encountered people with brain injuries, and they typically ask the same burning questions over and over, because they don't remember having just asked you, and they haven't processed the meaning of the answer you just gave them. They are extremely upset and need attention badly, and they can tie you up all day answering questions like "Am I all right?" or "Where am I?" Sometimes the compassionate thing is to leave them and attend to another injured person. It helps to realize that nothing will satisfy them, but it's hard to pull away, regardless.

We talked a lot about loss of the sense of self, which is extremely painful and disabling, but it now appears that it is yet another construct of the brain. Our sense of self is closely tied to our persona, which we have built up all through our life and identify with in ways we barely suspect. Our true self is deeper, and can't be lost. But the persona is our means of interface, and to get along in the world it is an invaluable asset. We want to keep it healthy even as we exhume our lost beingness. This is a delicate matter that many fail to successfully negotiate.

After digging seriously and honestly into this pair of challenging verses, we ended with a good infectious laugh, ostensibly over my ludicrous enthusiasm for each and every verse of *That Alone*, but really as a kind of "laughter of the immortals"

as Hermann Hesse put it, expressing, along with relief, a barely contained joy. We'll see if we can finish with such a fine flourish after every class. It's a way of releasing the intensity, and returning to our familiar self, though our golden thread has grown a little longer and is glowing somewhat brighter.

Part II

Nataraja Guru's commentary:

VERSE 11

The repeated 'I, I' contemplated from within
Is not many but remains One; divergent egoity
Being multiple, with the totality of such
The Self-substance too continuity assumes.

HERE we touch the paradox of the one and the many which started to puzzle philosophers from pre-Socratic days in the West and the early pluralistic Vaisesika and dualistic Samkhya philosophers on the soil of Indian wisdom.

The notion of unity in terms of self-consciousness, which was touched on in the last line of the previous verse, based on metaphysically conceived form of contemplative experimentation, is further analysed here with its dialectical implications. Even within the domain of unitively-understood metaphysics there is room for the one-and-the-many paradox to persist. A monist in the philosophical sense or a monotheist in the theological sense should not be confused. This, however, often takes place. One who sees all as one, in the context of non-dual or unitive understanding of the Absolute, is the truly wise man. The latter implies a dialectical approach which is not given to the mechanistic reasoning of even correct theologians and philosophers. Reason has to go one step beyond even the intuition that Bergson postulated. When the faculty of dialectics which, as the coping stone of wisdom in man, attains to its full scope of directing and regulating thought-

processes through its ascending and descending movements, as we have elsewhere studied, one would be able to think of an Absolute that unitively combines being and becoming and even the one and the many by one single act of understanding.

Plato's Parmenides analyses this possibility masterfully. Even in the Bhagavad Gita we find one allusion at least where the possibility of an absolute notion of reality viewed from the dialectical rather than the rationalistic angle is present. Referring to the various forms of sacrifice open to men, the author of the Gita envisages the possibility of a wisdom-sacrifice to the Absolute as follows:

'Others also, sacrificing with the wisdom-sacrifice, worshipfully attend on Me (the Absolute) unitively, dualistically, as also many-sidedly, facing universally everywhere.' (IX.15)

The possibility of seeing the one and the many together in the notion of the Absolute, which is really above even mathematical symbolism, has remained one of the puzzles of philosophers, both Eastern and Western, through the centuries. 'The Absolute is above all count' as the Guru Narayana himself says later in verse 68 of the present work. In verse 87 the non-predicability of the Absolute is alluded to further. The very first verse of the Book of Tao (Tao Teh Khing) which term represents the purest notion of the Absolute in Chinese philosophy, describes the Absolute in the following striking manner:

'The Tao that can be told
Is not the Absolute Tao:
The names that can be given
Are not Absolute names.
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth

The Named is the Mother of all Things.'

How then, it could be asked here, is it possible to speak of the Tao that cannot even be named in the mathematically-conceived language of the 'one and the many'? Although the notion is not predicable in the usual rationalistic and mechanistic terminology of a living language, the subtler language of dialectics can be used to reveal its inner structure. When we say in algebra 'let x be the unknown factor' we have in reality started saying something about it, and at the same time not said anything definite about it. Mathematics as the handmaid of mechanistic physics which uses static notions expressed by symbols, can still, as Bergson points out, be limited in its scope of revealing absolute reality, especially in its negative aspects. Bergson sums up:

'Metaphysics is therefore the science which claims to do without symbols.' (14)

Although this is true as far as it applies to the mechanistic sciences, in modern times after the work of Pascal, Descartes, Leibniz, Poincaré and Eddington, there are newer forms of mathematics which can bring even the negative aspects of the Absolute under scientific scrutiny. We reserve for a future study the explanation of such mathematical possibilities.

For the present we shall content ourselves by referring to the possible meaning of a symbol like the square root of minus one, which can refer to nothing that we can visualize mentally but would still be capable of valid interpretation in pure non-utilitarian higher mathematics which could be put at the service of metaphysics more aptly than at the service of ordinary physics. Modern physicists are feeling more and more the need for some such precise language.

When the Guru here states that the sum total of the

divergent multiplicity in consciousness attains to continuity with the One which represents the Absolute in a more finalized sense, he is only delving further into the structure of the notion of the one Absolute. The Absolute can have a positive and a negative side. The conflict between the two has to be overcome by a dialectical approach. The one and the many can co-exist without contradiction or paradox in the mind of the trained dialectician, while to the mechanistic thinker who is not a true contemplative and who is incapable of using higher mathematical symbols like the square root of minus one there is a glaring intellectual cul-de-sac out of which he cannot jump.

In this verse the Guru is just broaching the subject of transcending contradiction and reducing contraries unitively. In later verses we shall see him going deeper into the application of this dialectical approach which eluded even masterminds such as Bergson, and continues to trouble the mathematical though sceptical genius of a Bertrand Russell. Whitehead, being an avowed Platonist, does not view the Absolute except from the positive side of lasting intelligible values. The correct method of the approach of Guru Narayana will become more and more evident as we proceed.

'THE SELF-SUBSTANCE TOO CONTINUITY ASSUMES': In modern physics we have begun to be familiar with terms like 'the continuum of space-time'. This language which is non-Euclidean and non-Newtonian is sometimes called that of Relativity as opposed to the Absolutism implied in the older classical science. Einstein is the one primarily responsible for this change-over. But when we examine closely the physical theories of Einstein we find that a new form of Absolutism in terms of the unit or constant velocity of light lurks at its core.

In reality Relativity, especially when it refers to time, is only the dialectical counterpart of the Absolutism of space. Giving primacy to space above time, Einstein preferred to take a position at the

other or lower pole of the vertical axis to which both what is called Absolutism and Relativity could equally belong.

The relation between the Absolute and the Relative as the two terms referring respectively to Einstein or Newton, is itself one to be understood in the subtler light of dialectics. The Absolute that cannot be told about, as in the quotations above, is the neutral and silent Tao of Chinese Taoism.

Einstein's Relativity with a capital R corresponds to the 'Mother of All Things' of Taoism, rather than to the Newtonian notion of the Absolute which would correspond to the 'origin of Heaven and Earth'. Dialectical methodology and epistemology are still in the process of formulation at the present time, and neither Einstein nor Eddington has arrived at the omega point which marks the positive opposite limit of the negative alpha of the Absolute. Like the space-time continuum, the Absolute and the relative Absolute have to be understood unitively as belonging to one and the same context of the Absolute that cannot be told about. Both physics and metaphysics would then derive from this central normative principle a correct methodology and epistemology. The following extract from Eddington will help us to see how the continuity between the one and the many, as suggested in the verse of the Guru here, is quite in keeping with the language being vaguely formulated at the present time by first-rate physicists who may be expected to be quite matter-of-fact and not merely sentimental in their approach to reality:

'We take as building material relations and relata.
The relations unite the relata; the relata are the meeting
points of the relations. The one is unthinkable apart
from the other. I do not think that a more general
starting-point of structure could be conceived...
The relation between two human individuals in its
broadest sense comprises every kind of connection or

comparison between them - consanguinity, business transactions, comparative stature, skill at golf - any kind of description in which both are involved. For generality we shall suppose that the relations in our world-material are likewise composite and in no way expressible in numerical measure. Nevertheless there must be some kind of comparability or likeness of relations, as there is in the relations of human individuals; otherwise there would be nothing more to be said about the world than that every thing in it was utterly unlike everything else. To put it in another way, we must postulate not only relations between the relata but some kind of relation of likeness between some of the relations. The slightest concession in this direction will enable us to link the whole into a structure'.(15)

It is not hard to notice from a scrutiny of the above extracts that the modern physicist is, as it were, at the end of his tether in the matter of building an intelligent structure of the physical world. The physical and metaphysical worlds have to be linked through coordinates that are common to cosmology and psychology. Man is finally the measure of all things, whether cosmological, psychological, or both. The four-dimensional world with space gives us the relativist picture of reality; and the one which gives time primacy over space gives us the absolutist picture. Both have again to be related as between relata, as Eddington puts it. There is no escape from subtle dialectics here. Instead of turning one's face against it or hesitantly asking for 'the slightest concession' as Eddington does, the bolder and more straightforward approach would be to adopt the methodology and epistemology of dialectical reasoning on which the Guru Narayana here relies. (cf. our later work on 'An Integrated Science of the Absolute')

The continuum here presupposed as existing between the divergent self and the One Self is thus to be understood in the light of the dialectics which will unravel itself stage by stage as we cover verse

after verse in this sequence of verses. Eddington's reference in the above quotation to business transactions and golf as linking one person with another might be considered as referring to outer aspects of life needed for understanding the physical world. The problems of contemplative wisdom concern the inner rather than the outer. Hence it is that we see that the Guru Narayana takes care to eliminate extraneous factors so that in the dark room postulated in the previous verse, pure relations between one man and another could be more clearly visualized. Pure dialectics operates best when outer or extraneous factors are minimised. The one and the many selves, whether seen as between two individuals or within the plus and minus sides of the same individual can thus be seen to attain equality, sameness, homogeneity or continuity as here mentioned. Unitive understanding, which is the proper subject-matter of non-dual (advaitic) wisdom, is what is here implied.

Eddington further clarifies this same problem as follows:

'.....to gain an understanding of the Absolute it is necessary to approach it through the relative. The Absolute may be defined as a relative which is always the same no matter what it is relative to.' (16)

The various subtler discussions about the interrelations between what is called Vyashti (particular) and Samashti, generic, universal), which we find in such works as the Vedanta Sara of Sadananda, bear testimony to the same kind of epistemological problem, which has troubled the minds of Indian thinkers also. The genus and species relationship presents the same problem in the context of European scholasticism.

(14). p. 175 Ibid.

(15). PP. 225-226, 'The Nature of the Physical World', (Everyman's London. 1947.)

(16) p. 82, 'Space, Time and Gravity'. (Harpers.)

Part III

Michael sent links to two excellent essays on psychosis. The Watts one is quite long, but typical of his amusing open-mindedness. Both are worthwhile and relevant reads if you have the time:

Alan Watts:

http://deoxy.org/w_value.htm

Al Galves

http://renew-ireland.com/information/health_of_psychosis

* * *

Deb sent a lovely poem by the photographer Minor White, very much in the Vedantic spirit:

Equivalence Minor White

Not equal to equivalent to

Not metaphor equivalence

Not standing for but being also

Not sign but direct connection

to invisible Resonance

* * *

Jake has been working his way through *That Alone* for the nth time, this time compiling his own comments. Oddly enough, he feels that this is exactly the book for many of us in our generation of Baby Boomers. He has agreed to share his writings-in-progress, and I will pass along the parts that strike me as of universal interest. He has asked for feedback and described how he works:

I'm of the mind that the more input the better. Any and all suggestions will be appreciated—whatever their content. And thank you for any time you can spend with this.

(I do my reflection on *That Alone* early in the morning when I sit with whatever it is I call my practice—and when my mind is the most keen. As a result, I write with a pen and then later input and revise with the computer. I'm 25 verses behind in inputting—and that does not include the total revision that is required. --Well--)

His thoughts on Verse 11:

For most of us, our practical method of accommodating our condition is to deal with manifestation on the one hand as something to be handled by our inner selves and on the other by not accounting for the context in which the procedure takes place, thereby reinforcing our continuous anxiety in facing an external world with which we are at odds and always surprised by. In this verse, writes Nitya, the guru offers a practical method for reversing that sequence as a way of our beginning to take control of what we assume is in control by first isolating our ego, our *I*, as it experiences a world of interest. As we go about our day, we are in experiences, one at a time, continuously—enjoying breakfast, conversation, whatever. And in each case, the ego-consciousness is having that experience in which it is “a different kind of mind” (p.85) concentrated on that activity and the various forces at work at the time. This *I consciousness* of the wakeful moment, the ego consciousness, creates the memory of the experience and places it

in sequence with others, thereby forming our personal memory or history. In each case, points out Nitya, the *I* “is a consciousness or knowledge of a knowledge of the present moment in the nature of that knowledge” (p. 85). The knowing of this dynamic is, adds Nitya, an expression of that knowledge. In this complex, then, is the intersection of our lived ego in-time experiences and the ever-present transcendent knowledge out of which manifestation advances and recedes. We experience the transactional world by way of the ego-centered *I-consciousness* that morphs into an experience of the experience as they present themselves. One cannot know the transcendent without the ego *I* creating time, space, and memory all along the way. In each case the quality of the experience is unique to that experience in an isolated state that is then arranged in sequence with all others.

At this point, the materialist stops any inquiry and circles back to pick through the wreckage in different ways. What went wrong, what went right, what stories can be fashioned to communicate the experience to others—popular entertainment and mass marketing live right here by demarcating a thick boundary indicating where one is supposed to circle back. The transcendent dimension can be assigned to the mysterious occult, becoming an auxiliary department to be classified by the ego-centered *I*. Science fiction and horror are commercial growth industries in their own right.

The contradiction at the heart of this circus is hidden in plain sight—that all these *I*-experiences of knowledge are not really separate, discrete moments in time and space: “I just have a clarity, an absolute certainty from within that I am the same” (p. 86). Despite memory and experience, there remains an intuitive core of Self that observes all and remains unchanged. The child you were and the adult you are don’t affect the fact that you are you. That core is the transcendent one not controlled or driven by the ego-self and is beyond its influence. By knowing that this unbroken unity, this “homogenous principle,” is always the same and is in everything, we can become the contemplative sitting before the

tree with twin creepers, aware of our condition and able to function in a transactional world intent on keeping us spinning in circles for which the transcendent I has been replaced by an It, where something or someone else becomes the ultimate authority for our lives. *Big Brother* (or Hollywood) could ask for no more.

Part IV

A most special last minute addition to the Verse 11 bouquet, from Peggy:

Re: We talked a lot about loss of the sense of self, which is extremely painful and disabling, but it now appears that it is yet another construct of the brain. Our sense of self is closely tied to our persona, which we have built up all through our life and identify with in ways we barely suspect. Our true self is deeper, and can't be lost. But the persona is our means of interface, and to get along in the world it is an invaluable asset.

As my mother's Alzheimer's disease slowly melded her brain and melted her ability to orient via identity, I suffered after each visit, sitting in my car weeping. She suffered deeply also, grasping at flickers of fond memories, panicking when she'd look in a mirror, drawing maps of relationships, losing them. We grasped and flailed together, until one day I came for a visit and she said, "I have no idea who you are but you're just lovely." And I said, "Shall we walk in the garden?" From that day forth, our suffering ceased, no longer orienting via identity but rather connecting via our deeper selves in the present moment. Of course, she could no longer safely or freely interface in the broader world, so I'm not recommending Alzheimer's disease

as a path to "Be Here Now."
But that remarkable shift we shared
remains my sacred foundational axis...
in life, in love, in art, in the grocery check out line...
in standing side by side
quietly peering at the garden's beauty
where only that delicate purple iris exists.