

3/12/13
Verse 12

See the skin, bone, dirt and inner urges which end tragically to which the I-identity is conjoined; this which perishes is the other; oh, grant the cherished boon that the great I-identity increases to perfection.

Did I mention that this is one of my favorite commentaries in all of *That Alone*? I suppose I did. I can trace many of my most substantial ideas to it, and it never fails to remind me to take care and rein in my ego. So it holds a special place in my heart.

As we begin in earnest our conversion from a horizontal to a vertical orientation, Narayana Guru offers us two verses to clearly distinguish them. Mistaking the one for the other is a tragic mistake we routinely make, and is the legitimate impetus for a course of study to rectify the injustice. Sketching out the parameters is not too hard, but putting it into practice is another matter. As Don said, it is simple but not easy.

At the outset, Deb brought in Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan rishi in close accord with the Gurukula on many fronts. His book, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, details the clever ways the indwelling spirit is treated as a possession of our ego. Instead of releasing our I-sense into the spirit, we use static ideas about the spirit to glorify our egos' appearance to ourselves and others. Defining and appropriating the indefinable and ungraspable is what the rinpoche calls spiritual materialism. His insightful antidotes are applicable in any field.

Spiritual materialism is such an easy trap to fall into that Narayana Guru recommends a prayerful attitude to help us steer clear of it. We need the assistance of some outside agency, and our friends should be considered flawed because they suffer from the same malaise we do. Lacking a wise therapist, at least we can remind ourselves that the ego is just a tiny shred of cloth covering the body of our being, and turn our attention to that greater reality. A

prayerful attitude not only redirects our attention to the spirit, it simultaneously humbles our superficial self-importance. We pray to a greater Self, which is our true nature and does not need to be clothed in the garb of a familiar deity. In fact, the less defined it is, the better, because our definitions are created out of the same ignorance that our egos are. We are opening up to the Unknown.

Moni pointed out that this study is a pursuit of true knowledge. We have to ask ourselves how much does the ego play into it? The ego tends to bend 'true' into 'mine' or 'my truth'. It's a much bigger gap than we realize.

Nitya's story of the simpleton and the goat poignantly illustrates how we are at the mercy of other peoples' opinions. The 'I' we employ to navigate the world is a construct of shrewd guesses based on the feedback we receive. We have to be brave enough to reject this fictitious being in order to reestablish connection with our true Self. Our casual acquaintances only know the fiction, and continue to draw us back into playing along with it. And indeed, so do we. We have bought into our own story line. Everything in our environment militates against us reorienting to the source, the Karu. Yet that is who we really are. Coming back to ourselves is what the dissatisfaction we feel is trying to foster. Too bad that so many ersatz emoluments are available to continue the distraction forever, if we don't stand up to them.

Peggy's poem about her relationship to her mother, shared in the last mailing, eloquently describes the kind of relinquishing that has to take place, and the painfully deep roots that oppose it. Yet her breakthrough was so simple and sweet! She simply gave up clinging to her past identity, and she was immediately able to be fully present. It has become the core of her life, what she called her "sacred foundational axis."

The first major step in the transformation is to become our own best friend. We have been looking for ratification from outside for so long we have forgotten who we are. In a sense we have considered ourselves beneath our dignity—an object of scorn and derision, attitudes which are epidemic in our social sphere.

Treating our self fairly and with kindness, yet without exaggeration, is critical. Chogyam Trungpa wrote extensively of this, and the Gita, in Chapter VI, verses 5 and 6, puts it this way:

By the Self the Self must be upheld; the Self should not be let down; the Self indeed is its own dear relative; the Self indeed is the enemy of the Self.

The Self is dear to one (possessed) of Self, by whom even the Self by the Self has been won; for one not (possessed) of Self, the Self would be in conflict with the very Self, as if an enemy.

We are enjoined to take over the reins of our life that we once surrendered to the perishable world we register with our senses. What could possibly be holding us back?

In place of our Self we have substituted our story, as Mick put it. We tell a plausible narrative about ourselves, with lots of sad parts and a few happy parts, if we are lucky. Everything that happens to us we fit into the story, usually mangling it in the process. To wholly stop self-referencing is very difficult, and indeed there is some value in maintaining it, but we have way overdone it. Nitya often said how the I was merely a reference point, and as such it was valuable. But we tend to exaggerate its importance, as well as keeping the reference point moving so it is where everybody wants it to be. Then it becomes a ridiculous game.

Susan recalled in her early teens how battered she was by other kids' negative opinions about her, how she longed for their approval. At the same time she looked down on them. Funny how those two go together, isn't it? Later in life she met some of them again, and they thought she was okay. She felt really happy, even though she still didn't like them! So there is a crucial part of us—the ego—that desperately wants to fit in with society and feels good when it does, no matter how much our intelligence tells us it is not important and even unhealthy.

Mick related how, as a child growing up in Catholicism, he was taught that he was Bad. Being bad quickly became an integral part of his self-identity. Almost all of us have that to a degree, but the Judeo-Christian religions take it to the level of a mania. You might want to stop thinking that it wasn't quite right, but that would be Bad! Thinking contrary thoughts is Bad! Evil, even. So you stop trying. It's a very effective technique for imprisonment. Plus, every bit of conflict or criticism you encounter reinforces the feeling that you are worthless, not important, an insult to God's purity. No wonder so many of the devout look constipated.

Persecuted minorities live in a more hostile environment that they don't dare ignore, and so their lives easily become warped for protection. Nitya blasts that cold-hearted injustice here and elsewhere. What is it that impels people to abuse their fellows? Life is tough enough without adding more travails to it.

It called to mind a short story from John Steinbeck's *Travels With Charley*, a book that surveyed the United States of circa 1960, when the proper term for black people was Negro. There are several passionate and moving chapters on race issues, which were still steeped in barbarism at the time:

I lived then in a small brick house in Manhattan, and, being for the moment solvent, employed a Negro. Across the street and on the corner there was a bar and restaurant. One winter dusk when the sidewalks were iced I stood in my window looking out and saw a tipsy woman come out of the bar, slip on the ice, and fall flat. She tried to struggle up but slipped and fell again and lay there screaming maudlinly. At that moment the Negro who worked for me came around the corner, saw the woman, and instantly crossed the street, keeping as far from her as possible.

When he came in I said, "I saw you duck. Why didn't you give that woman a hand?"

"Well, sir, she's drunk and I'm Negro. If I touched her she could easy scream rape, and then it's a crowd, and who believes me?"

“It took quick thinking to duck that fast.”

“Oh, no sir!” he said. “I've been practicing to be a Negro a long time.” (236)

What a shame that our normal humanity has to be suppressed because of the lethal threats of injustice that have persisted throughout our history!

There are other people who were worshipped as children, told they were perfect and wonderful, and given every opportunity. In a way, it's almost more insidious than being reviled, because a positive self-image is harder to relinquish than a negative one. Or so you would think. Even though it is equally a false construct, there doesn't seem to be any reason to give it up. It feels fine. We will hold on tight to it until a trickle of doubt creeps in, a sense that this isn't really me. What could be missing? Here is where doubt is its most valuable. We should enlarge it rather than try to eradicate it as soon as we can, because it will lead us back toward our authenticity. Most of us doubt our true nature and believe fervently in our false persona. That orientation needs to be reversed.

Very often the “spiritual” attitude is that all input is bad, that we must turn away from it to find our true reality. Narayana Guru's Advaita teaches us to locate our true reality right in the midst of our daily life. This is the challenge that will take us awhile to live up to. We aren't either to get embroiled in actuality or withdraw into fantasy. We are to stay firmly grounded in ourself, and let that grow and expand. Both Nitya and Nataraja Guru say some harsh things about the ego in their commentaries, I think to counteract the excessive fondness for it we permit ourselves. The ideal is to remain neutral. The next verse will clarify any confusion. I want to bring in part of it now, a section worth rereading many times:

So, at the very height of the excitement and joy of gaining something, you are asked instead to relate it to the very core, to spiritualize that experience. You are not asked to kill the joy, but

only to look for its essence. You have to realize that it is not produced by objects, but is an essential part of your own divine nature. If the joy we see in a person, in a desirable thing, opens a window for us to see the Lord, the Absolute, the Divine, which is our own truest Self, then everything becomes a door for us to enter into our innermost sanctum. This critical process is described in the first two lines of the verse: “Gather your mind-modalities as flowers and make an offering of them to the Supreme, who transcends all the necessities of the world.”

You are not asked here to withdraw from everything, but to transcend everything. This is accomplished by spiritualizing, by seeing everything as divine. *Vananni*: a sense of reverence should come and fill your whole being. You are standing before a child, your own child, and thinking of it only as a child which has come from you. But when you look with this new vision, it is no more a child. You see the divine manifestation in it. You can see your union with the divine in that which makes your heart go to the child’s heart, and the feeling of trust the child has in you. When you see that union it is no longer a discomfort, it is a devotion. You are not bound. Otherwise you feel obligated and bound to everything to which your senses take you. Now it is glorious that you are given an opportunity to be with your own real being. With that reverence which comes and fills you, your work becomes a devotion. It is a service, an offering, a dedication.

Sakala mazhinnu means you are no more a person bound within the shell of this human mortal coil. You become expanded. Your expanded being fills everything, embraces everything. The spirit encompasses everything, and you are one with it. Now you are liberated; you have become free because the spirit is free.

Simple, isn’t it? But not easy.

I suggest we invert the idea here, too, and think of how we reinforce other people’s self-identities instead of giving them the freedom to be themselves. We should guarantee that we don’t force people into roles out of our own expectations or demands.

We should be very careful not to touch the chafed areas of irritation that persecuted people must always carry. These are the least of our contributions, and anyone not willing to make them should not dare imagine they are spiritual or even fair in any sense.

We should ask ourselves how we unintentionally put pressure on others to conform to ordinary frames of reference that leave out the oceanic bliss of existence, and stop doing it. I meet so many people who are apologetic about their feelings: you can see they want to say something, but instead they say what they think you want to hear. When I sense that, I like to give them the option of speaking honestly, by providing a safe venue for it. When it works it is usually appreciated quite a bit, though many people won't even take the chance when it's offered.

My favorite awful example is asking children "What do you want to be when you grow up?" While usually well-intentioned, it forces them to think of themselves as being inadequate the way they are, uninteresting to the social world. Instead I ask something like "What is your favorite thing to do?" Then they can enthuse about the joys of their life, if they aren't already too inhibited by previous demands.

This is much more radical that it may appear. We live in an ocean of social attitudes based on divisiveness and rejection, and our identities are built as much on what we hate as what we love. Sneering and disdain are the safest poses to strike, and invite like-minded folk to be do the same. Refusing to join that game makes you an instant outsider. This is where being our own best friend is most essential. We have to access the warmth and support of our own inner being to replace the adulation of a corrupt social milieu, because said adulation is commonly based on inferior motivations.

Part II

Nataraja Guru's comments are especially germane here:

VERSE 12

With skin, bone, refuse, and many an inner factor of evil end,

Wielding these, lo! one ego looms: this which passes,
Is the other: that Self which grows to perfection,
O grant the boon that it may not the ego swell!

THE repeated 'I', 'I' of the previous verse has a way of asserting itself in two distinct manners. This verse suggests that one of these ways of assertion is favourable to self-realization while the other is detrimental to happiness when understood as the end or goal of life.

The structure of the Self which has been analysed in the two previous verses is filled with a content, not in terms of a vague abstraction, but in a very realistic, operational, human, and even a pragmatic manner, by which the aspirant to self-instruction can find his way and choose the right one of the two alternatives open to him in the path that marks out his progress in self-realization.

By cultivating the ego which has bodily attributes, the end is not happiness. By cultivating the Self that is non-bodily but has other attributes of a series of values in an ascending subjective scale leading to happiness (whose nature will become clarified only in the later verses), we stand in danger of having a bloated egoism in the name of some fetish-concept of personal spirituality which might lead us into the blind alley of a megalomania. Spiritual life often contains this soul-killing possibility of a wrong kind of self-hood which can be full of horizontal taints such as passion, pride or ignorance. The Bhagavad Gita (XVI. 21) refers to this sort of danger in strong terms as constituting the gates of inferno:

'Three-fold is the gate to inferno which can counter
Self-hood - desire, anger and avidity; renounce
therefore these three.'

A horizontally-oriented self-hood spells evil while a vertically-oriented self-hood reaches out to the good ideal. A prayer for a

boon to save self-hood from being developed in a wrong or compromised sense and a warning against such a danger which is so easy to fall into in the name of self-knowledge, from which we can think many 'holy' men suffer, is what the Guru takes the opportunity, sufficiently in advance in the course, to warn against in this verse, whose main purpose is to state that difference between the two forms of the same self. The modalities of movements in consciousness, to which these two egos are subject, has a paradox, conflict or contradiction at its core, which it will be the task of succeeding verses to effectively abolish.

To distinguish the two selves implied in the contemplative life envisaged here, constitutes the important initial step to be taken. We shall have occasion to examine the nature of the contradiction or the complementary character of the two selves involved. For the present we shall do no more than to refer again to the Bhagavad Gita (VI. 6) which also posits two selves for resolution into unitive terms, as follows:

'To one who has overcome the self by the Self, the Self is his kin: for one self-less, however, the very Self can remain inimical like a (veritable) opponent.'

The verse immediately preceding (VI. 5) also refers to the subtle inner structure of the Self in man:

'One has to support the self with the Self, one should not let it down. The Self is the kindred of the self, the very self is the Self's (own) enemy.'

This 'I' within has its convergent (vertical) and divergent (horizontal) aspects which have to be carefully distinguished,

'LO! ONE EGO LOOMS, ETC.': The 'lo!' here which stands for 'look,' implies a warning, as we have said above. In Vedantic

literature generally this error of self-identification with a certain bodily or un-spiritual aspect or attribute of the personality is called the *dehoham buddhi*, the attitude of mind that says to itself, 'I am the body.' It is important to notice here that in the verse above, as in Vedanta generally, the line dividing the body from the mind, or the physical from the spiritual aspect of the personality is underlined.

When we use the word 'mind' in English it is meant to include all that is spiritual in a vague manner. Manas (mind) however, as understood in the strict Vedantic sense, belongs to the bodily side of our life rather than to the spiritual, because it is one of the inner organs together with buddhi, chitta and ahamkara (intelligence, relational sense and individuation), which depend for functioning on the stimuli entering the body from the objective rather than from the subjective side.

Psycho-physical parallelism, if at all admissible, has to be understood as taking place between elements in consciousness that really belong to two rival poles. The line which is to separate what belongs properly to the side of the psyche and what belongs to the physical aspect of life calls for minuter examination in the light of the polarity or ambivalence which is to be postulated as the base of this question of parallelism.

In the present verse one notices that the Guru takes care to indicate that the ego that wields the skin and bones includes on its side many other factors of evil portent, which conduce to unhappy ends. Even religious or other sentiments as sometimes popularly felt, as when one hears of 'an enjoyable funeral requiem or dirge' or of someone who cries throughout a melodramatic film show, have mixed sentiments involved, which are hard to put strictly into one compartment or other in the polarized scheme that we have to think of, in respect of the two selves involved.

In fact, finally the two selves have to be abolished through unitive understanding. It is this which it is the task of the present work of the Guru to accomplish.

In other works of the Guru this parallelism and polarity is discussed by him in greater detail, as for example in the composition called Chit-jadangal (Thought and Inertia). The same theme is indirectly touched upon in Indriya-Vairagyam (Sense-detachment) and in Pinda-Nandi (Prenatal Gratitude), as well as in some other compositions of the Guru.

The problem here is the same as in chapter XIII of the Bhagavad Gita devoted to the 'kshetra (field) and kshetrajna (knower of the field) distinction.' Sankara's famous work called Drig-drishya-viveka (discrimination between the seer and the seen) is based on this same fundamental distinction—so important to be made before the Self can be properly realized.

When one has succeeded in eliminating the horizontal tendencies adhering to the self and it is thus purified, the very self asserts itself and grows into power or perfection by double assertion and double negation. In the process, if one again rests peripheralized in interests, as for example being too much taken up by social or political problems, one might become some sort of distorted absolutist in the deprecatory connotation of the term. In the name of institutional forms of holiness we have examples of distorted personalities with egos exaggerated or awry in one sense or another. These pitfalls have to be avoided by the aspirant to contemplative life. The ego should not be allowed to suffer bloating, warping or distortion.

If we should think of social duties it can be of items which are free from the relativistic taint. The good work of the Good Samaritan in the Bible is disinterested and correctly altruistic, while many well-intentioned works in the name of religions suffer from relativistic

taints or partialities which, like milk in a dog-leather bag, as Sankara would put it, have no real spiritual value.

‘THAT SELF WHICH GROWS TO PERFECTION, ETC.’: Once the distinction between the two aspects of the same unitive or Absolute Self is made, it will be easy to see how a normal process of spiritual progress can be established. Perfection or plenitude is the goal to be attained by the progressive self put on its proper path. The attribute which grows to perfection refers to the pure or verticalized self which still stands in danger of being compromised by horizontal factors.

If Bishop Berkeley denied objectivity to the body; while John Locke in his philosophy gave primacy to the objective aspect of reality in the context of European philosophy; we have David Hume, the sceptic - whose position has been humorously summed up in the textbooks as consisting of the pithy saying, ‘no matter, never mind; no mind, what matter!’

In a revised methodology pertaining to a more complete Science of the Absolute, as envisaged in Advaita Vedanta, to treat of body and mind from the standpoint of what Bertrand Russell would call his position of ‘neutral monism’ is justified. He restates this in his History of Western Philosophy (Allen and Unwin, London, 1946) as follows:

‘I think that mind and matter are merely convenient ways of grouping events’ (p. 861)

Earlier on the same page he says:

‘Thus from both ends, physics and psychology have been approaching each other, and making possible the doctrine of ‘neutral monism’ suggested by William James’ criticism of consciousness’.

Thus we see that the position taken by the Guru is not repugnant to the attitude of the latest pragmatic or empiricist philosophers, even though they might call themselves 'sceptics'. They represent a form of agnosticism which is a natural corollary to absolutist wisdom of the correct kind, which still remains to be formulated scientifically.

Part III

John H. wrote:

Atmo 12 is very thought provoking indeed. When I ask myself to point to the "I" in me, I usually point between my eyes - probably signifying the brain. But if I'm horny, I might point to another part of me, or hungry, yet another, or my foot hurts - another. so yes, I am a dog skin.

But being a dog skin bag isn't all that bad - I happen to like dogs, the thing wrong with them is that they don't live long enough.

But is it possible that all the parts of the dog skin and the milk inside - the inner bodily stuff - is it possible that each part has its own consciousness? Is that why there is a committee in my head? When my serotonin levels are way down, like when I take bad acid, the committee is like the Senate and I think my consciousness gets Sequestered. But if my serotonin levels are higher, after good sleep, some part of me seems to take control of the committee -but it's usually the hurt foot, the hungry belly, or whatever. If the inner self is part of the distracted parts, why can't it just say, hey, I'm in charge here? I feel like there's more than one of me in here sometimes

My response:

John, you have expressed the human condition quite clearly, just as Narayana Guru posed it in Verse 11. We are a series of I's

stretching through time. The study is intended to strengthen the part of us that stays the same in the midst of all those changes. It's not something we just decide on and it's a done deal—it's a gradual rewiring of our orientation. We are giving the eternal part of us a chance to grow, in a sense adding a little sunlight, rain and fertilizer to a burgeoning plant. Those who pay close enough attention through the course will most certainly have a more solid sense of their inner coherence as we go along. This is powerful medicine.

Fear not, the growth isn't based on any particular belief or practice. The requirements are simply listening, paying attention, questioning and pondering. A neglected part of us will grow and move into the limelight, very much like a garden full of seeds in Just-

Spring. The I that's different in every circumstance doesn't go away, it merely assumes its proper role. It actually grows stronger and healthier, which is the very reason it doesn't have to elbow into the middle of every dispute, or be undone by them.

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Jake has highlighted some important ideas that got short shrift in the Notes. Here is his Verse 12 summation in its entirety:

In this verse, Nitya's Narayana Guru outlines directly the procedure for "knowing thyself." Citing Sankara, Nitya writes, "Our real form . . . is an apprehension of True Beingness." It is in the realization itself that we find our eternal form, our Atman that is always observing and never changing¹. It is consistently that which forms our divine core at the base of the changing forms of phenomenal manifestation.

Nitya's commentary on this procedure simplifies matters and points to the very large error that commonly occurs along the way,

¹ In his *The Atman Project*, Ken Wilber devotes a fairly extensive discussion of this lifelong endeavor.

that of attaching ego to the apprehension rather than our eternal Self. This error, in fact, informs so many Atman Projects that they are, more often than not, translated as legitimate and as the path to a self-aware life.

This first error can be avoided, says Nitya, by a concentrating or meditating on that which is imperishable and in not identifying one's true self with the ego and its sources of existence—the body and the mind. In spite of humanity's best efforts and best intentions, both of these elements which make up our basis for existing in transactional/dream realities will dissolve and disappear, as waves on the water. In my estimation, the ego is merely doing its job (in its version of the project) of self-preserving the living organism, but the foundation for the job is unstable. By attaching to the mind/senses of the immanent and then on that foundation building an effort to know the transcendent we miss the mark and substitute the immanent wholly.

At this point, because the authority for knowing one's core exists in phenomenality, the ratification for that authority is in the hands of others sharing the same experiential experiences. In other words, legitimacy becomes an exercise in egalitarian democracy. One is voted in as guru, adept, prophet—whatever—and then convinces oneself that it all must be true. Idolatry, to use a homely reference, can thereby easily become the coin of the realm and in fact often is. Cultural popularity, as Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and political machines exploit it becomes an egoic affair of locating in the population as a whole those ego-inflating concepts all rooted in materiality, such as physical desirability, financial riches, personal power, and so on, and then mirroring them in a personality that those “watching” can assume they possess.

This house of mirrors can continue as long as individuals stay away from any notion of the possibility of an apprehension of true Beingness. As a matter of fact, such an apprehension can now be denigrated as self-serving and divisive for a philosophy thoroughly grounded in a world confined to sense and mind. In a world of material and literal consensus and conformity, paying heed to, or

worse yet, appealing to a higher Self not touched by ego and therefore beyond the reach of a majority ratification of the materially grounded amounts to apostasy and deserves nothing less than derision and mockery.

In this verse is the Guru's call to remain steadfast in attending to the true Self as the foundation for one's Atman Project. Along the way, as Nitya councils, be aware of the ego's efforts both internally and externally to de-rail the search into a materialist circular one. And essential for that effort is an attending to humility and the insidious nature of a pride-stroking ego. In order to maintain such a position, one must appeal to an absolute transcendent power beyond the popular vote. Nitya uses the term *god* for this power and later will explain that the word is a place-holder type of term for the transcendent, one that takes many linguistic forms but is not any one of them. In humility is the open admission that all is not the ego, a position for which, as Emerson opined, "the world whips you with its displeasure."

¹ In his *The Atman Project*, Ken Wilber devotes a fairly extensive discussion of this lifelong endeavor.

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Local teacher Melanya (not in the class or even aware it exists) just sent me something applicable to our present study. It's rather light by Gurukula standards, but we're way on the tough end of the spectrum, so some of you might enjoy this type of interpretation. It's nicely put, and a worthy addition to the discussion:

Trusting yourself doesn't mean following your impulses and doing whatever you want. It doesn't mean ignoring the feedback you get from the world. Trusting yourself is a practice of learning to listen to your body and your wise mind so that you begin to notice when you are opening to the world and when you are shutting down.

Most of us have all kinds of ideas about how we should be. We should be more disciplined, more confident, we should generally be better than we are. And we have this agenda to improve ourselves. So we push ourselves with a kind of subtle self aggression.

Or we may have given up on ourselves and feel it's not worth trying anymore. We might as well indulge in all our vices because we're hopeless. So we collapse.

Often we flip back and forth between these states - we push and then we collapse. Then we pick ourselves up again and push... and then we collapse. It's exhausting...

The good news is that it is possible to live another way. It takes practice and a lot of care.

Here is a simple practice I learned from Tara Brach. It only takes a few minutes. You can do it anytime you have a moment where you can bring your attention inward for a little while. I've found it to be a simple and very effective way to learn to listen to my inner wisdom and to begin to notice what helps me open and live more fully - and what triggers me to shut down, defend my position, or collapse.

You could try it right now.

Take a moment to check in with your body, to allow yourself to inhabit your body more fully and simply feel. Check in particularly with the core of your body; your belly, heart and throat. Hold the question "What is asking for attention?" and see what calls to you. Allow yourself to be surprised by what emerges. And when something asks for attention, simply bring care to that area of your body or that emotion that arises.

The most important aspect of this practice is to bring a warm caring attention to anything that arises. Often we want to fix that pain or solve that emotionally dilemma. What is really needed is warmth and care.

Some things are harder to bring care to than others. If you have trouble bringing care to your experience, imagine someone else bringing care to you, someone who has cared for you at some point in your life.

Part IV

One more important idea that I didn't have time for yesterday follows from Nitya's story of being called a guru. From Verse 12:

When the first man comes and says, "Oh, great Guru!" you say "No, man! Don't make fun of me." Then two people come and say "great Guru!" "Eh? Am I? No, I am not." Then ten people come and bow and call you a great Guru. You look at yourself and ask, "Am I a great Guru, or not?" Then a hundred people come, then ten thousand in seven jumbo jets. Now you cannot deny that you are really a great Guru, it's all confirmed. So you have to say, "God, come and save me. This is where you are needed. I won't be able to get over this temptation by myself."

It brought to mind the beautiful letter Nitya wrote to one of his dearest disciples after he assumed the role of Guru following Nataraja Guru's death, in November, 1973. He guarded against egotism by drawing a thick line between himself and the abstraction called Guru, that to him was Natarajan:

You (who know the pulsation of my heart and the rising and falling temperature of my soul) have gone beyond all barriers of social convention and personal differences to sit with me in

the silence of eternity. This witnessing without regrets and without comment makes you ever more dear and sacred to my heart.

It is evening. I am in Guru's room. I sleep on his bed, sit on his chair, eat from his plate, and receive people's homage and love. I am the guru. And yet I am the simple man whom you befriended, listened to, loved and hated, chided and chastised, adored and suspected. Those phases are gone. Now I understand the thoughts and feelings of Jesus for God and of Mohammed for Allah. I have learned to be humble and submissive. Any moment the Guru may need my heart to pulsate his love, my mind to think his thoughts, my hands to wipe someone's tears. I was not an ideal disciple either in my dedication or in my surrender. Both dedication and surrender now come with a grace that was not hitherto known to me.

Ever since I declared myself as "Guru," people are arranging big and small ceremonial receptions. In the last month I have revived my old friendship or familiarity with several thousands of people. News came in all Indian papers that I am planning an East West University. Some good architects are making designs. The project is in the air.

Being treated as a guru was something Nitya personally dealt with quite often, in a country with unshakably fixed ideas about it, but we can extrapolate his attitude to all the ways people describe us, and how difficult it is to resist. Also to how we describe them. It's the way we all become shaped to fit into our society, and it often pinches grievously. The neti neti (not this not this!) approach is to always remind ourselves that we aren't what we are being told we are, even as we listen for the kernel of truth that might be lurking in the words. We should also restrain ourselves from pigeonholing others with our preconceived notions. A little investigation invariably shows that the reality is different from any presumptions we make about it—and that's a good thing.

My parents had no background in Indian philosophy, so I was always directed to listen closely to criticism and pay heed to it. They might have warned me that not everyone is a wise rishi, but they left that fact out. My child's ego was quick to deny its faults, so it was important to be constrained to take other views into account, and I appreciate them for that much. But over time this morphed into abandoning my inner strength in favor of popular opinion, which is so pervasive I was quickly overwhelmed.

Then too, Nitya's valid point is that positive input is much harder to resist than criticism. I remember at age 10 we moved to a new state, and I entered a school that was a year ahead of my old one, right in the middle of the course. The kids were very different, too, and I was feeling awkward and out of place. Later the first day a boy handed me a note: "I used to like Terry Dukes best, but now I like you best, because you are the tallest." Wow, what a relief! I had a friend, and the ice was broken. It made me happy to be tall, which was apparently the only criterion, since I hadn't actually met the boy before. For a long time I felt confident, thanks to my height. I was tall, and that was special. Two years later a girl shot up and towered over me, but that was okay, because girls didn't count. I was secretly worried, though. Then in a few years a lot of kids caught up to my height, and my claim to fame was ended. Sic transit gloria! Which is why we have to keep flitting from one self-image to the next. Multiply this times a million, and you have the basis of personality, of the ego. No wonder philosophers consider it a fiction!