

3/19/13  
Verse 13

Having offered the flower of your mind to that Lord  
smeared with sacred ashes, the three *gunas*,  
having cooled down the senses, unwound everything, and become calm,  
when even the glory of aloneness has gone, become established in  
*mahas*.

Free translation:

To become established in the Supreme Being, offer the flowers of  
your mind to the Great Lord, whose body is smeared with the  
ashes of the triple modalities of nature. Incline before Him in  
devotion. Turn your senses away from all objects of desire. Feel  
freed of all bondage. Become cool, and do not be excited even by  
the wonder of the Absolute.

Nataraja Guru's

Unto the Master who dons the ashes of the three modes,  
Offering the flower of the inner self, inclining before him,  
With all sense-interests effaced, divest of all and cool,  
Even from the grandeur of loneliness bereft, into glory sink!

We have often found that our smallest attended classes are  
the deepest. Possibly instead of waiting for others to say  
something, people are more forthcoming, but there is usually a  
more intense focus too. That was certainly the case last night,  
where we honed in on one of the most practical and transformative  
of all the hundred verses. The intimacy of the smaller setting is  
especially excellent for contemplation.

Our task was to convert the religious imagery Narayana Guru  
employed into modern psychological imagery. Nataraja Guru says  
that because the Guru's image is so familiar in South India, he

avoided reams of boring explanation by using it. That's fine, but the key is, what exactly does it mean to make a flower bouquet of our mental modalities and offer them to the Lord? The class first wrestled with this in general terms, and by the end we were able to extract specific examples.

Our psychic life is like a flower garden, filled with a riot of plants in all stages of growth and maturity. Weeds and prized specimens vie for their moment in the sun. Ordinarily we shield our garden from view and for the most part let it grow as it will, not realizing how important our influence is. Neglected, the weeds will choke out the flowers that give us the most joy. Aggressive plants will overwhelm the gentle ones we cherish the most. There is work to be done here!

Making a bouquet to offer means first of all that we have to care for our psychic flowers and not just take them for granted. We need to stop and admire them occasionally. When we do, we realize that our experience of the present is colored by our history. We are not really seeing anything as it is, but through a glass, darkly\*, as a largely fictional creation of a brain struggling to make sense of its surroundings. Our primary fault is to project our inner state onto the outer world, and then become convinced that we are at the mercy of that world. Because of the way our mind is structured, it looks very much like the outside world is the basic fact and we are a provisional adjunct. But by now we *know for certain* that it's exactly the other way round.

Thomas Merton, in *Mystics and Zen Masters*, writes about an important moment in history when Christians lost touch with their inner God and moved it outside, separate. They then believed that the Muslims could steal it and they had to go conquer them and get it back. Almost a thousand years of vicious conflict has ensued from that once instance of projection alone. Merton writes:

Thus we see that in the course of time the peaceful and defenseless pilgrimage, the humble and meek "return to the source" of all life and grace, became the organized martial

expedition to liberate the land promised to Abraham and his sons. It is surely significant that in the Middle Ages this conception of the Christian life became deeply embedded in European man: the “center,” “the source,” the “holy place,” “the promised land,” the “place of resurrection,” becomes something to be attained, conquered, and preserved by politics and by force of arms. The whole Christian life and all Christian virtue then takes on a certain martial and embattled character. The true life of Christian virtue now becomes a struggle to death with pagan adversaries who are wickedly standing in the way of one’s divinely appointed goal and perversely preventing fulfillment of a “manifest destiny.”

Above all, the Crusades introduces a note of fatal ambiguity into the concept of pilgrimage and penance. What was intended as a remedy for sins and violence, particularly murder, now became a consecration of violence.

Nitya puts his finger on how this inversion trips us up. I remember this as a particularly intense moment in the original class, realizing how I was wedded to obtaining my sense of meaning from outside, and how that had made me a kind of beggar:

The enjoying self in you has many concepts of attraction, but when you turn to your inner reality all these seem false. At that point you begin a return. It is a pilgrimage from unreality to reality, from your sense orientation to the realization of your most divine center. And when does this take place? Every day, all the time, whenever our senses are drawn outward to get glued onto objects, and the great surge of excitement comes. This is the time to hitch it to the central core of our own divine being, rather than identifying the excitement with an objective, external situation, as we invariably do. Each time a pretty thing is attracting you, you become a beggar: haggard, poverty-stricken, wanting, desiring, stretching your hand, crying for it. You become miserable. Once you get it, you realize you have

wasted a lot of time in pursuing this trifling thing. Now that it's yours, you just put it aside.

And I want to repeat the most essential idea in the commentary, the crux of the whole matter, reprinted at length last week:

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.

Because the world is our appendage, and not the other way round, we are continually supplied with a program of unfoldment. We fear that a niggardly life won't give us what we need, but as the Rolling Stones sang, we can't always get what we want, but we do get what we need. If people really believed that, they would be much less anxious about life's uncertainties. But as long as we remain convinced the outside world is, well, outside, we will never be free from worry.

When we "make an offering" we spiritualize our experience. We move the center from outside to inside. By doing so it is converted from ordinary, random, meaningless activity to a cherished place in a meaningful evolution. The world is reflecting our inner transformation, giving it every opportunity to be seen and appreciated by us. Scientists are right: the world isn't intrinsically meaningful. It's just a bunch of stuff. But what they leave out is that meaning is imbued in the world by consciousness. And that's a good thing!

The more we are fully present in the present, unaffected by previous misunderstandings, the more "spiritual" or "real" our experience is. It's not that we discard the past, but we convert it from misunderstanding to understanding. It has an important role to play, but we got it all wrong back then, and we need to rectify

that. A healthy relation with our past is the solid ground we stand on, but our traumatic history has made the ground unstable.

Spiritualizing our experience means it is no longer demonic but divine, as Nitya puts it. The world is no longer terrifying and threatening, it is our field of dreams, a garden in which to actualize our potential. It's hard to imagine any single idea could have a greater impact on our lives than this. Let's look at some specific examples.

Several people admitted that they were micromanagers of aspects of their lives. They gave rather mundane examples of things that bothered them because they weren't done the way they wanted. It's a common experience to like things done a certain way, and get upset when someone else does it differently, or doesn't do it at all. So, in ordinary life we go along being irritated by a string of disappointments in the outside world, both great and small.

Spiritualizing this means putting a stop to the irritation by looking into our psyche to its source. Why do we have such a strong reaction to trivial irritations? It is not what we see in front of us, but we have heavy baggage from traumatic events in our past. Something awful happened to us, and our response—perfectly reasonably—was to obsess about what we might have done differently to prevent the tragedy. The more we suffer, the more we scheme to avoid future suffering. Unfortunately the footprint of those tragedies creeps into our petty pace without our even realizing it. This is a common heritage of all humans, though the traumas range from light to unbelievably heavy. We all have traumatic kinks in our psyches that throw a long shadow on the world we encounter.

The spiritual insight then, is that I am overreacting to the present based on my fear of punishment or pain learned in the forgotten past. My offering to the Lord is my resolve to let go of my guardedness, my self-fortification, because it is no longer relevant. I very badly want to be present here and now, and my fears are poisoning the possibility. I might resolve to stop

micromanaging, for instance, but I won't be able to until I calm the fears that are driving me.

Another person—I'm going to leave out names because they are a distraction—routinely runs down his ego. Well don't we all? But in our class we are trying to heal our egos and help them become just the right size. They are valuable and important, but they are a problem when they are deformed. Anyway, we stopped our friend and wondered why he always runs himself down. We all think highly of him. But he was raised in a fundamentalist Christianity that constantly undermined him. Is it possible that his self-criticism was learned in childhood, in a context where his wants were routinely suppressed? You can bet on it. So we see where it comes from, and then we discard it. The spiritual tack is to catch ourself running ourself down, make it into a bouquet and offer it to the Lord smeared with ashes: the one who will crush it to powder and smear it all over his body, wiping out its influence. The person in question is merely an example of something we all do, of course. We don't retell these stories to cure him, but to cure ourselves.

Another friend carries an even heavier level of self-loathing that harshly colors his attitude. We could argue about it all day and get nowhere, or just leave it alone and get nowhere. But we wondered if his upbringing in the Catholic Church, where he, a sensitive and intelligent child, was taught he was a sinner, and doomed to burn in hell for all eternity for being himself, had something to do with it? Very likely. So his offering could be that instead of running himself down he would think, "Oh, here is that Catholic legacy coming up again. I'm not going to carry out those toxic dictates any more. I give them all up!" This decision begins the healing process in earnest, where beating himself up will never produce the peace he longs for. That's why the rishis tell us our very nature is divine. We don't have to make something new out of ourselves, only scrape away the venom that has blinded and crippled us.

The human race is basted in these perverse belief systems that convert sweet, innocent children into angry, miserable adults. When are we going to get over it?

We also brought in science as a perverting influence. The very rationality that should be our salvation secretly joins forces with fundamentalists in sabotaging our souls. Einstein pointed out that you can look at the universe in two ways: either everything is a miracle, or nothing is. Possibly in response to the excesses of religion, modern science has a bias toward making everything seem trivial, ordinary, boring and meaningless. As if the universe was a bad accident, an imposition on our freedom to not exist! The closer you look at anything, the more amazing it becomes, filled with layer upon layer of incredible complexity, all working together in perfect harmony and brimming with endless potentials. If that isn't miraculous, what is? So science could easily be our salvation, but it is all too often perverted by a presumption of meaninglessness, coupled with the demeaning of our intrinsic value. Then we carry that over into our daily life and wonder why there is no joy in it. Geez.

The Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction are a collective cure for this universal malaise. Unfortunately it's a slow process—we can't rewire our brains in an instant. That's why a momentary high wears off, because the underlying neurology remains the same. The vision inspires us, but it recedes into the distance. We have to battle it out in the trenches, recognizing our foibles and surrendering them to “the Lord.” Cast them into the volcano. Scatter them to the winds. They aren't protecting us anymore, they are killing us. They are a little like flypaper: you can't shake them off, and they stick to whichever hand you use to pull them off. We have to outsmart them, and they're lodged so deep as to be darn clever themselves.

Narayana Guru, with the able assistance of Nitya and Nataraja Guru, is offering us a helping hand to extricate ourselves from the quicksand of our social malaise. Do we merely admire the hand, or reach out and take it?

This would be a perfect opportunity for all the far-flung participants in the class to say, hmmm, my case is different, but this is important stuff. Here's how MY past is impinging on the present. I'll write it up and send it in, to see if it can help others to break out of their cages. Maybe thinking more about it will help ME to break out, too.

Just a thought.

I will start adding Nitya's short version of commentary, from *Neither This Nor That... But Aum*, along with Nataraja Guru's, as Part II. This one captures the intensity and motivation of the verse even better than the long version. This study is not for voyeurs or tagalongs. It appeals to those who have lost the taste for ordinary reality, treating it like a well advertised amusement park that is in reality a prison. The House of Mirrors can never fully satisfy them again. They have to break free.

\* Paul, in 1 Corinthians, was trying to get at the same idea, that our childish innocence is grounded in our true self, but our adult orientation is outward, away from our self. The former is total while the latter is partial. Here's more of the context of my reference:

[9] For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

[10] But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

[11] When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

[12] For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Part II

From *Neither This Nor That... But Aum*:



Having offered the flower of your mind to that Lord smeared with sacred ashes of the three gunas, having cooled down the senses, unwound everything, and become calm, when even the glory of aloneness has gone, become established in mahas.

We live in a world of ideas, facts and fundamentals. These three fields correspond, in a general way, to our thoughts, actions and feelings. Ideas are vivid when they come, and they can be freely structured into patterns and motives if we know how to handle their logical structuring. A fact is rigid, as it is ruled by physical laws and social conventions, but one aspect of it can always be turned against another so as to neutralize its potential or make it aggressively real. The fundamentals imply the real challenge of life and are wrapped in the mysteries of vagueness and uncertainty.

When ideas become structured patterns of thoughts they sit on the surface of the mind as semantic tools and they lose their potential to make a breakthrough from the established concepts of our humdrum world. When a genuine idea blazes forth as a leaping flame from the furnace of Absolute Truth, it causes such a conflagration that all relativistic ideas are burned to ashes and the world can no longer be the same for the person to whom this happens. In the transactional world, where actions and reactions are governed by the conventional norms of conformity, life becomes tedious and boredom sits heavily on everybody's conscience as a taskmaster of duty.

When the thrust for the soul's freedom erupts as a frenzied volcano, man-made walls of prohibitions and the sceptre of commandments are brushed aside as of little or no relevancy to the vertical unfoldment of the true meaning of life. When the nonessentials, misunderstood and propagated by dull-headed fanatics, form the morbid crust of social mores, there may come from the pen of a grief-stricken poet of unbounded compassion or

the tearful eyes of a great lover of mankind a word or even a look that can abolish a whole world of patterns and modes, so that humanity can begin again from scratch and return to the innocence of its childhood with fresh hopes and dreams. This tri-basic annihilation of morbid ideas, crude actions and outmoded values is symbolized in this verse by the great God smeared with the ashes of the modalities of nature: sattva, rajas and tamas.

To understand this perennial source of creation (mahas), the boundless source of subsistence and the imperishable value of the ever new theme of fulfillment, one should reconsider one's own ideas, actions and preferences in the light of the Absolute. This can be done only by consciously negating what is taken for granted and by going for reassurance to the very fountainhead of truth. This cannot be done with any sense of leisure: there are no holidays in the quest for the Absolute. Although this might sound like a tall order, what issues from such a discipline is the sundering of all fetters and the simultaneous emergence of a freedom that was never known before.

As our enslaved mind had never before known such freedom, it might become drunk with excitement. A consistent follow-up of the discipline will result in the experience of the same freedom, which will soon become an accomplished fact of the fundamental that governs all ideas, actions and values. There is nothing more to gain than to know that this is possible in this very life itself.

Nataraja Guru's commentary:

### VERSE 13

Unto the Master who dons the ashes of the three modes,  
Offering the flower of the inner self, inclining before him,  
With all sense-interests effaced, divest of all and cool,  
Even from the grandeur of loneliness bereft, into glory sink!

THIS verse follows an antique and somewhat idolatrous figure of speech. The worship of Shiva, the great God of the Himalaya, who

is at the same time the Guru Dakshina-Murti (the divine manifestation of the South), as pictured by Sankara himself, long before the Guru Narayana, is almost an inevitable idiom on the spiritual soil of India.

The great God is pictured here as sitting in meditation, cut off from all sense-interests, meditating on the Absolute and identical with it. This language is familiar to all Indians and especially to the temple worshippers of the South. The Guru invokes this ideogram to convey easily what he could otherwise have said only in many a dry paragraph.

The principle implicit in idol-worship correctly understood, is to treat of the two bodies involved - that of the worshipper and the worshipped - as interchangeable terms in a dialectically contemplative manner. The self of the seeker on one side and the personified Absolute on the other form limbs of a reversible operation like an osmosis which takes place spiritually between the two poles which in reality, belong to the same vertical aspect of the Self as distinguished in verse 12 above. The Guru is merely employing popular idiom here and no anthropomorphic god is necessarily postulated, although the ruling-out of such a god is equally to be avoided. Whatever anthropomorphism might persist will be cancelled out by trans-subjective and intra-physical complementarity of counterparts.

The notion of the Absolute, which is neutral between the two poles of the same unitive Self, can be conceived in pure or practical terms and, as long as the limbs of the equation are properly conceived as dialectical counterparts, no harm is done to the resulting doctrine touching reality that results from the cancelling out of counterparts.

The subtle dialectics implied in the exchange of values that can take place between the 'Self' and the 'non-Self', whether

subjectively or objectively treated according to the correct rules of dialectical understanding, cannot be elaborated in the language of mechanistic or syllogistic reasoning. Here the Guru therefore bypasses discussion of the truth of God in the usual ontological or ideological discursive manner of modern philosophers in the West. The logical manner employed by Voltaire, which can be valid in its own way, is not resorted to either. Theology proper is avoided but the same purpose is served here by the simpler dialectical approach. After helping us to distinguish the Self from the non-Self in the previous verses, the Guru passes over quickly to equate them so as to resolve them both in the context of unitive Self-realization proper, without the usual logic-chopping or laboured theology.

To extract the correct sense of this verse the reader has to imagine himself as a Shiva-worshipper of South India who prayerfully offers flowers at the temple of the God who represents the Absolute in the antique and natural language of iconographic ritual and symbolism. The flowers are to be thought of as fine value products of the mind of man. They belong to this or the 'self' side; while the master or Shiva would represent the 'Greater Self' which is its own counterpart. The offering of flowers is a symbolic gesture by means of which a bipolar relationship is to be established between the Absolute as the 'Self' and the Absolute as the 'self'. They further represent the specific aspects of everyday value-factors or items corresponding to the infinite small change which pays for the gold coin of the notion of the Absolute, which is an all-inclusive and supreme value in life.

An osmotic interchange of values, representing a reversible process or operation, takes place between the two counterparts envisaged here, which leads to self-realization, after the manner of the 'flight of the alone to the Alone', as Plotinus would describe the event or process.

The 'glory' in the last line refers to the principle of the Absolute, still within the limits of the phenomenal aspect of reality as understood in verse 4. The Guru avoids referring at this stage to the pure notion of the Absolute as meant by the term Brahman, but uses rather the word 'mahas' (the Great Principle) as used by the Samkhyas and as understood later and used more unitively in Advaita Vedanta, as we have pointed out under verse 4 already. This is by way of respecting methodological strictness in developing the subject matter stage after stage from the known or knowable to the more unknowable or unpredicable.

'THE ASHES OF THE THREE MODES': The theory of the three gunas or modalities in nature, whether psychologically or cosmologically understood, is developed in a whole chapter (XIV) in the Bhagavad Gita devoted to their character and mechanism. The Bhagavad Gita itself presents a revised picture of the modalities, which are given a psycho-physical rather than a cosmic status; and the three stratifications within the limits of necessary action, as understood in the dualistic Samkhya philosophy, are presented more unitively as applicable to the unitive personality of man. The gunas or modalities of nature are treated without the more pronounced body-mind duality of the earlier Samkhya school.

The Guru here sees the possibility of effecting further unity in the same sense as in the Bhagavad Gita. The three levels or strata of modalities in natural and necessary expression, when they attain the Absolute, as represented by the Master who is Shiva, are nothing more than ashes, generally worn as three horizontal lines on the forehead and body. Here they have no effective living influence on him who has transcended the necessary or negative level of life, where alone modalities could be operative. The gunas may be described as the dark or dull (tamas) the passionate or the active (rajas), and the pure or sublimated (sattva) expressions of psycho-physical life. On the body of Shiva, in the ideogram here

employed by the Guru, these modes, which are sufficiently real from the side of the worshipper, have but the status of mere ashes as attributed to the counterpart, the worshipped symbol of the mystery of the Absolute.

‘THE FLOWER OF THE INNER SELF, ETC.’: In verse 9 the various states of consciousness natural to man have already been referred to as bearing blossoms. In relation to the plant itself the flower represents the most specialized aspect. Such specific items represent horizontal multiplicity of sense-values as against the vertical unity of the pure Self. The special growths of a plant refer to luxury items in life, as suggested in the Bhagavad Gita, which compares the leaf-buds of the great banyan tree of its famous fifteenth chapter to the stanzas of the Vedas, which represent the hedonistic values implicit in the Vedic religion. It is there recommended that the tree with the buds be cut down mercilessly before one can follow the higher path of the wisdom of the Absolute.

The flowers in the verse under examination here are also petty utilitarian or sensuous luxury-items, even of the context of holiness, which have to be sacrificed in the fire of absolute wisdom for progressing in the path of self-realization envisaged in the present text. Moreover, the Absolute is a wonder and is adorable, as the most supreme of human values. Axiology, phenomenology and personalism represent attitudes or principles which remain blended together in this reference to the subtle relationship that one has to establish with the Absolute before merging into it could normally be expected.

‘SENSE INTERESTS EFFACED, ETC.’: When a proper bipolarity has been established in the manner indicated above, the lower series of interests naturally give place to the higher sublimated ones. The interests operative at the sense level of the personality depend on objects of perception stimulated from

outside. They are horizontal interests which are of secondary importance only. When the full current is switched on by the bipolarity established, as it were, vertically, between the self and the Self representing the Absolute, these interests recede. The absorbing nature of the latter bipolarity detracts from the intensity of the sense-attractions to such an extent that, like stars that fade in daylight, their appeal is countered and effectively nullified. They become faint and enfeebled in proportion to the positive interest in the Absolute which becomes progressively established.

‘DIVEST OF ALL AND COOL, ETC.’: The pure Self within sits in nakedness and simplicity, as opposed to the peripherally conditioned personality that might have social dignity or status belonging to the outer world. Pilgrims to Mecca have to divest themselves of all decorations and even tailored clothes before entering the holy of holies. Likewise, the South Indian temple has to be entered wearing as few clothes as possible. This is symbolic of the rejection of all peripheral conditionings that might colour the pure self from the extraneous and apparent phenomenal world. The utter nakedness of the soul may perhaps trail clouds of glory, as the poet might say, in its spiritual journey from God, but nothing of worldly decoration really belongs to it. Moreover, the outer world is ‘of the madding crowd’s ignoble strife.’ Both these states of affiliation to group-psychology or activity have first to be transcended before the path of self-realization as envisaged here can be followed up. The cooling therefore refers to the slowing down of the tempo of active outward socialized life.

‘EVEN FROM THE GRANDEUR BEREFT, ETC.’: Zeus with his thunderbolt represents the great god on high as understood by the Greeks. Indra of the Indian context is likewise a chief of the gods of heaven. There is something quantitative still persisting in them in the attributes applied to them which imply horizontal values.

The Absolute is not a quantity with any magnitude, but

rather a pure quality without magnitude. Even the hypostatic glory that we attribute to God in praising Him is not consistent with the image of the Absolute as understood in the purer non-theological context of contemplative self-realization. Neither can we say, however, that the Absolute is without greatness. The 'greatness' (as we have translated the word mahas here) is to be understood as a glory that participates more in the vertical aspect of value rather than in the horizontal.

The distinction that we are trying to make is something like the distinction between 'natura naturans' and 'natura naturata', as used by Spinoza in his philosophy. The former has a vertical value while the latter is horizontal in its content. We have a similar reference to two kinds of gunas (modalities of nature) in the Bhagavad Gita (III. 28) which reads 'the gunas reside in the gunas', meaning that modalities remain as principles with no horizontalized expression. The grandeur of the subject is absorbed in the greatness of the counterparts in the Absolute without getting horizontalized in the process. Without this subtle philosophical distinction between the two aspects, horizontal and vertical, the meaning of mahas and mahima, as used in the original text, must remain mostly obscure. The 'sinking into glory' represents the 'flight of the alone to the Alone'. The sinking further suggests that the forward progression is itself a vestige suggestive of duality which has to be counteracted by an inverse process which is sinking backwards rather than going forwards or rising. This is more in keeping with the 'negative way' proper to contemplation. In pure becoming there is no movement at all in the usual sense. The Absolute would correspond then to the 'unmoved mover' of Aristotle.

### Part III

Paul's link about the meeting of a poet and a scientist:



<http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2012/04/27/when-einstein-met-tagore/>

Above is the link you requested. It also exists in short form on Speaking Tree but this link is more complete. There is also a whole book dedicated to that same meeting that is on my wish list.

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Scott:

There are so many important corollaries to Verse 13 that I want to cover at least one more before we move on. As noted, the class discussed the micromanagement of our lives that feels like a solution to pressing problems but in fact does not get to their roots. By dealing with surface issues, such an attitude is inadequate to affect the underlying causes of our discomfort, so it leaves us frustrated and anxious and feeling incompetent.

Pretty much everyone in the modern world either micromanages, over manages, or simply manages their lives. This is in contradistinction with the model of the liberated one who lives by instinct and is open to happenstance. The hidden problem is that these are two distinct frames of reference that need to be clearly differentiated.

Linear, rational management is the proper way to deal with the horizontal world, but it is inadequate to cope with the complexity of the unfolding evolution of the psyche: what we call the vertical or spiritual realm. For that, a dialectical or yogic approach—the pairing of opposites to achieve a heightened perspective—is ideal.

It is very important to distinguish the different types of ideation and their proper fields. Nataraja Guru cautions us that “Dialectics is conducive to unitive understanding only, and spoils the case when applied to ordinary situations in life where usual ratiocinative methods or logic would be the proper instrument to

employ.” (Gita, p. 112.) He expands on this at length in *Unitive Philosophy*, concluding on page 378:

Existential, subsistential and value aspects of the Absolute have three different methodological approaches, one proper to and compatible with each.

A normal methodology applicable to integrated knowledge whether philosophical or scientific has to accommodate within its scope these three kinds of approaches to certitude, each in its proper domain. The experimental method suits existential aspects of the Absolute, the logical suits the subsistential and the dialectical suits the value aspects of the Absolute. Interest in the physical world gives place in the second stage of ascent to logical psychology or phenomenology, where ratiocination plays its part. Finally we ascend higher into the third aspect of the Absolute where value relations hold good and the instrument or methodology used is that of dialectics.

Management, then, is necessary and appropriate for coping with horizontal actualities, but when it is carried over into spiritual life, it undermines our progress rather than furthering it. The fact that linear concepts are easy to manage explains why people love to have a neat, well-defined program for their spiritual practice. The unknown can be unnerving. But as Joseph Campbell so eloquently stated, “We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.”

Since over-management blocks rather than promotes the inner flow of the psyche, a vague sense of dissatisfaction creeps in. We then cast about for a new solution or redouble our efforts with the present one, but seldom look into our own makeup to identify the real impediments and give them up. That’s the solution recommended by the present verse: we should take a close look at these flowering propensities (including their roots), make a bouquet out of them, and offer them to the Divine, in other words, give them away. We don’t reject them outright, we cherish them

first, since they are very much us, a part of our history. But they no longer serve us well, if they ever did. It is time for them to be let go of. Donate them to the Void.

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Jake's contribution:

In the conclusion to this verse's commentary, Nitya sums up his point in a gentle admonition that we assume a posture or point of view as we go through our daily lives. Our procedure, he notes, is that we follow one world of interest after another without realizing what we are doing and, in doing so, mistaking that series of mentally manufactured worlds as real. The consequences of this "mindless" skipping from one event to the next are a series of disappointments and regret. Implicit in the attention we pay to this mistake of projecting ultimate value on that which always perishes is a compulsion to discover the transcendent in its immanent forms only, without noticing the finite nature of that metaphoric wave on the water. The experience becomes one of identifying with the manifest wholly and in a consecutive manner. The Guru, concludes Nitya, asks us to back up just a bit as we go through our days and assume a broader and more stable point of view—as the mind reels on in its compulsive process. If we can maintain that point of view which allows us to perceive all this activity as a continuous rising and falling of the phenomenal and do so while we are in the thick of it, we have an opportunity to live in the transcendent in every moment of time we create and not get caught in the snares of regret, fear, and depression.

In his opening paragraphs, Nitya points out that all the major religious traditions make this point of view part of their teachings and generally present it as a pattern of one's first succumbing to temptation, followed by a falling away from the divine center, repentance, and then a re-merging with the divine. Nitya gives the example of Christ and the series of temptations Satan offers if only

he (Christ) will renounce God. When Christ does not, his redemption becomes his lived experience in the transactional world, every part of which is a play of the Absolute creating, dissolving, creating. The Guru, adds Nitya, is not proposing we dismiss the work-a-day world as an illusion to be avoided but rather that we participate in it, enjoy it, but not be seduced by it. When we attach absolute value to the ephemeral we end up in a spiral of regret and fear. Appreciating the phenomenal is not the same as attaching to it as if it alone contained eternal truth.

In the pages between his opening and closing comments, Nitya offers an overview of the Indian mythology, a great metaphor, designed to explain the process through which we create our daily worlds of interest (which can last from a few seconds to years) and become attached to them while, at the same time, those very same worlds come and go without our noticing that feature. The Lord of preservation (Vishnu) represents the work of our mind which is monotonously busy supplying us with an endless variety of distractions that the “Supreme or Infinite . . . the Great Lord . . . crushes in his palm, turning them into ashes. He smears his body with them. What we see as a great reality . . . is not even skin deep.” (p.97)

Giving imaginary form to our human impulses, behaviors, and ordinary ways of behaving is bound to become an exercise heavily influenced by cultural peculiarities, especially when they are given graphic form to boot. However, drawings of the various Hindu deities, I think, offer what amounts to characterizations of our common psychology as it operates in and through material manifestation, frantically determined to keep our attention riveted on the movies it manufactures and screens minute by minute. It was this narrow obsessive compulsive behavior that sociologist Jules Henry identified in the 1960s as a fundamental element of an American consumer culture then only a fraction as influential as it is today. He noted that becoming a more discerning or sophisticated or eco-friendly or broad-minded consumer will not change the prime directive of the larger enterprise, one that by

definition excludes anything not reduced to a quantity that can be commodified—and the infinite just doesn't qualify as a quantity no matter how hard one tries to make it fit. But Americans continue to try, an effort Henry was less than charitable in characterizing when he quipped, “In order to exist economically as we are we must try by might and main to remain stupid.” (p48)

## Part IV

### Scott's Apology

I have received some undoubtedly well-deserved criticism lately, and it is best for it to be publicly aired, I think. Although it makes a catchy title, apology is really not the right word; rebalancing is more like it. Therefore I'm not going to list the complaints against me, but simply address the core issue and admit my mediocrity. I am not looking for vindication or expiation of my sins, so it would be better for everyone just to ponder the matter and not worry too much about my part in it.

The question is, should there be intensity and possible unpleasantness in a spiritual quest, or is that a de facto indication of the unfitness of the teacher? Some think it is, and a few accept that it might prove valuable. It's actually a very important question, particularly since many people judge spirituality primarily on the basis of pleasantness. The trick is, when there are obstacles to overcome, extra intensity is necessary. For those who are already sufficiently realized, it may not be necessary. Of course, it is a guru's or therapist's role to push, and that's different than a teacher. It gets a little tricky when you're teaching about a guru, however.

To me, the point of having a class on the wisdom of the gurus is for the benefit of those who wish to overcome their personal impediments, and is not so worthwhile for those who have already accomplished this. I have been editing a paper for the Spring Gurukulam magazine about one disciple's relationship with Nataraja Guru that puts this quite nicely:

All of us who hung around Nataraja Guru for any length of time were there because we had problems in our lives that we were looking to him to help us solve. As he used to say, “If you have questions about where this world came from and what is the meaning of your life, then wisdom can be of use to you. If you have no such problems, you don’t need wisdom.” Also, “If your typewriter is OK, leave it alone, but if it isn’t working properly, take it to the repair shop. This is what Gurus are for.”

For those who think I’m a prideful false guru, I would answer that I’m trying to use my reasonably extensive knowledge to direct people to some real gurus, namely Narayana Guru, Nataraja Guru and Nitya. My attitude is that I am “pinch hitting for Babe Ruth” whenever I open my mouth in the wisdom context. That means I’m a poor substitute from off the bench, standing in for the most iconic baseball player of all time only because he can’t be present. It is probably inevitable that I will misrepresent the real gurus, but there is some chance I won’t strike out totally. I like to think it’s better than nothing.

*That Alone* presents the dichotomy expressed so clearly in verses 8 and 9, of on one hand a hunter shooting down distractions with deadly intent and on the other hand an alert contemplative sitting quietly. There is a place for both aspects in a spiritual quest. The Bhagavad Gita also encourages a serious attitude and an ability to persevere against obstacles, epitomized in XVIII, 36-39:

And now hear from Me of the three kinds of happiness, in which one by practice rejoices, and in which he reaches the end of pain;  
that happiness which is like gall at first, ambrosial at the end, born of lucid self-understanding, is called sattvic;  
that happiness arising out of contact of the senses with objects, at first like ambrosia, at the end like gall, is called rajasic;

that happiness which at first and in after-effects is self-confounding, arising from sleep, lassitude and listlessness, is called tamasic.

Nataraja Guru summed up a lot of territory by saying, “If it makes you happy and kind, it is the truth; if it does not make you happy and kind, it is not the truth.” He meant in the long run. Nitya’s autobiography *Love and Blessings* is full of the travails he went through at the hands of his most excellent guru. Of course, he had asked for it by requesting instruction. If he hadn’t he might have remained a soap manufacturer.

For an ordinary teacher—or an usher in a theater, as in my case—there is a fine line to walk between making ideas lively and valuable while not offending anyone’s sensibilities. How much do you bring out the implications that aren’t obvious, and how much do you let them go by the board? It’s a perennial challenge, and in a subject charged with such intensity there are bound to be mistakes. That’s why I take criticism to heart: true or false, it’s an antidote to egotism. It may taste like gall at first, but after awhile the taste improves.

## Part V

Brenda characterized what she has written as “making a bouquet of my reflections and tossing it into the fire!” She shares with us a perfect example of what the Guru meant by Verse 13, to wit: Having offered the flower of your mind to that Lord smeared with sacred ashes, the three *gunas*, having cooled down the senses, unwound everything, and become calm, when even the glory of aloneness has gone, become established in *mahas*.

Over Spring break, I was with my family in Klamath Falls, the portion of my family that are evangelical and steeped in Christian fundamental jargon.

When I was a child, I too was dipped in this myopic tea of religious arrogance and superiority. I was told that because Christ

died for my sins that I was one of God's chosen ones, in fact I was above others!

Well, over the years, after I had walked the aisle and 'accepted Christ' and then proceeded to be baptized, I realized that all of my family, and all the people in the Church were hung up on words and not by actions. They were in fact disconnected from a Christ-filled life through their actions.

I saw a mean, hypocritical, adversarial church body, who, to my mind were schizophrenic. One face, sickly sweet, the other, mean as a snake, and completely justified in their interpretation of Christ's teachings and how they judged others. They used their judgments as a way to not communicate with others different from themselves.

I had only walked the aisle because I was told that in order to sing in the church, I had to jump through the hoops of the order. I had been singing solos with piano accompaniment, only to shock the congregation when it came out that I hadn't yet publically accepted Christ as my personal savior.

Well I got on that task right away! The worship for me was the music, so I found my way by their rules, without taking the dogma to heart.

Over the years, I have seen the devastation of this mean spirited view of God. My family is split apart by their own personal religious views, they have judged one another, condemned one another, so that we can now never be in the same room together, ever. But I renounced the dogma and the church when I was 14. I also left my family to begin my heroine's journey. I called the pastor and told him that he was embellishing his sermons with his own prejudice and hate, and that is not what Christ would teach. I



told him that I will not participate in such evil, unconscious behavior.

Presently, I am the only family member who visits all these divided factions of the family. Yes, I live set apart from our own version of the Mahabarata War! I see the war on both sides of the chariot, and I am the mystic skimming like a flat stone upon the waters of unconscious minds, who are drowning in the waters of dogma that they have never questioned.

The rift in my family goes so deep and is justified by the small religious minds in arrogant opposition, but I am not needing to air my beliefs, I act, not preach.

For example, I brought my niece back to Portland from Klamath Falls, she hadn't seen her grandmother for six years because the grandmother had a rift with her son, the father of my niece. I didn't tell the grandmother that I was bringing her granddaughter, I just called to say, I look forward to seeing you, and I have a surprise...! When we walked through the door, the grandmother burst into tears and the granddaughter embraced her now frail grandmother with all-encompassing healing unconditional love. The heart was open, no time to prepare a defense, we were able to have a joyous visit and reclaim what is essential for everyone, belonging, and that elusive value: familial piety!

I move within my family as a free agent without being a member of a specific church body, without qualifying my existence by fundamental Christian values.

Sure, there are aspects of my being that were deeply affected by this early indoctrination, but I questioned it then and I question it now. But in my renouncing this interpretation of religion, I am not devoid of the goodness of the church, I see the positive values, the minds might be wrong, but sometimes their hearts are right. I will remain imprinted by my Baptist beginning, yet I know that my very being is not wrong, and that like Walt Whitman in Song of Myself, my very being is a great poem! The shame of being small

has fallen away and I am able to share the light of love and acceptance with my family even in their restricted frustrated consciousness. I can even see their beauty in ways that are hidden from themselves.

I went to hear our own local NY Times reporter, Nicholas Kristof last night at Reed College, he said, 'you must create the opportunity to have an education beyond your country, find some way of traveling, get out of your comfort zone. There are so many places you can travel out of your comfort zone in your own town!' He mentioned tutoring in prison, neighborhoods in need, mentoring a child to read, grassroots organizations in need. He said, 'Do this, and it will shape you for the rest of your life!' **GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE!** Well, that resonated with me indeed!