

4/23/13
Verse 18

The “I” is not dark; if it were dark we would be in a state of blindness, unable to know even “I,I”;
as we do know, the “I” is not darkness;
thus, for making this known, this should be told to anyone.

Free translation:

The Self is not darkness. If it were darkness, we would not have known and identified ourselves as 'I', 'I'. As we do know, we should let everyone realize that the Self can be known.

Nataraja Guru’s:

The ‘I’ is not darkness; were it so blind
And unaware of this ‘I’, ‘I’ we should have remained;
Because of such awareness, in order to know
Thus (as such) to one and all declare.

That Alone is once again building to a peak, culminating in a universal favorite: the end of Verse 20, where Nitya convinces us to make every minute lively and rich. After that we’ll be taking a break for several weeks, so we can practice what we’ve learned.

Reading the text led us to a still point where meditation was effortless. Sitting without discursive thoughts is a way of reducing the ‘I’ to its essence. Instead of our many self-descriptions of I am this or that, we experienced the core of awareness, freed of its habitual identities. When gurus like Ramana Maharshi recommend meditating on “Who am I?” this is what they mean: seek out the unitive I at the center of all the plurality. That alone is our true existence; the rest is window dressing.

Of course, the window dressing gives us our personality, defining who we are in this life to those around us. It’s not a bad

thing. It's beautiful. Each of us is a unique product of what we have experienced. It's something to be cherished, and shared. The only problem is that most of us have forgotten the core and become fully identified with the periphery. Narayana Guru wants to help us reconnect with it. Our surface is subject to all sorts of insults and injuries, and if we believe that is all we are, we suffer. That's why the outer world is considered dark, that our outward orientation is a kind of darkness. Returning to our shining core is the antidote to suffering. It makes life worth living. In his short version, Nitya puts it this way:

When people believe they are ignorant, this negative knowledge brings with it both depression and inertia. They lose the capacity to seek, to strive and to understand. Thus, when they perpetuate their ignorance, life becomes truly dreadful and pathetic.

I'm sure we all know people who are paralyzed by their negativity, convinced there is nothing in them of any value. It's a self-fulfilling belief, and nothing we say to them seems to be able to pass through the paralysis. The Guru suggests a closer look at the core of awareness to restore the inherent dynamism animating every one of us. Let's again defer to Nitya:

We have seen in the previous verses' meditations that our experience can have within it a bright spot and a dark spot. Between the range of these two extremes there can be many gradations of consciousness. When we turn only to the dark element, life appears full of crises. It may look negative, depressing, bleak, meaningless. Even at such dark moments it is with the consciousness of 'I' that we say it is bleak and dark. Turn to the very self with which you say this, and that brings you back to the brightest spot within yourself. Then you won't lose the stable footing of your life. You are reclaiming your own self-awareness. If you habilitate yourself in the

bright center of your own self, then you can withdraw from that which frightens you, that which makes life dark.

Although the principle is simple, making it real is not at all simple. We first have to take a resolve to not submit to the temptations of negativity, which are highly addictive. In an inversion of the idea, many religions rail against the “temptations of the flesh” and preach asceticism. However, the idea is not to refrain from the joys of life, but to share them and enhance them, which we can do best if we are not totally enchanted by the play of external events. It’s a warning not to go only by appearances, to see beyond surfaces.

Both Scotty and I remembered being semiconscious in the hospital in the past, which was like our meditation in that all our personal associations were absent. There was only a core awareness. It was as strong as ever, but didn’t have any externals to cling to. In my case at least this was lucky, because I was in a hellish realm. If I identified with “Scott” there would have been much to fear, but there was no such person. Every once in awhile my persona would start to reappear, and then I was filled with dread, but as long as I remained neutral it was okay. Narayana Guru assures us that everyone has a neutral core like that, and we should get to know it.

To do so it’s very helpful to reduce our dependence on our external identity. Scotty recalled Rumi’s advice that if someone asks you who you are, tell them you are a soul within a soul within a soul. That’s better than saying you’re the Absolute, which people always take as a megalomaniac fantasy, unless you assure them that they are the Absolute too. It’s a good place to wax poetic. So go with Rumi, or invent your own non-identity.

Scotty’s experience of being hospitalized for dehydration from pneumonia as a young child brought up the idea of samskaras. When it happened it was a firsthand experience, very mysterious and baffling. Afterwards it was explained to him, which converted it into something like the memory he has now: a fixed story about what had taken place. Direct experience is

rapidly converted to a description, which as Scotty put it “gets in the way of the timeless moment I am.” Again, it does serve a useful purpose, but the downside is that as we age we enjoy less and less direct experience and more and more experience mediated by memory. It makes us feel less than alive. Narayana Guru is quite sure we can break free of the dominance of samskaras and vasanas and come back to life. In most of us they don’t actually disappear, but by deemphasizing them we can make room for bursts of fresh adventures. All we have to do is replace the mania for description that characterizes our species with a calm acceptance of it as merely an adjunct tool.

Everyone is different at the level of samskaras and vasanas, but we are very similar if not identical in our core. Thus the core is the center of amity, fellowship and love, and our individuated surface is the source of conflict. Conflict based in amity is very dynamic, but without the certitude that we are one... well, look around. All those unnecessary tragedies are what motivated Narayana and the other gurus to try to share the insight epitomized in this verse. They want us to regain our joyful and compassionate center, and then share it with those around us. There is a chance that it will be appreciated. It might even catch on.

Paul took us on an interesting tack, probing the apparent intelligence of animals, like sensing earthquakes and tsunamis, not to mention the innate harmony of their existence. He felt they weren’t separating the one into many and then reassembling the many into one, the way humans do. Perhaps there is something in the universal core that knows more than we suspect.

Animals can be teachers for us, because they are more in tune with their instinctive intelligence than we are, and it’s very intelligent indeed. I recalled that our conscious mind is located in a very thin and recently evolved veneer of cells on the surface of the brain, while every cubic centimeter of the brain’s mass has as many connections as there are stars in the galaxy. It’s like our conscious awareness is the Earth, but the whole brain is the Milky Way. Hanging out exclusively in the veneer is the height of folly.

Consciousness is a wonderful development, possibly the best development so far, locally speaking, but separating it from the vast mass it rests on it is, well, kind of stupid. We should be welcoming input from our depths, instead of ignoring it with all our might. Ignoring and ignorance are close cousins. Because animals don't have all our inhibitions, they easily channel the wisdom of their whole brain into what they do.

Fortunately, we humans only block some of the input that our brains so thoughtfully prepare for us. We are quite dependent on many of its arcane alchemies. And they are finally being accorded respect by the neuroscientific community. Nowadays it's the more conscious part that is being trivialized, as in the claim that we have no free will.

Jan appreciated Narayana Guru's call to share our light with each other. Not in a preachy way, but just by being authentic and honest. She loves it when a friend opens up to her, and finds that very often she learns something valuable about herself just by listening. I'm sure that's what the Guru has in mind here. He was never preachy himself, but taught by example or very pithy comments that went directly to the point. He was a keen observer. We may never be that focused, but our openness is communicated in marvelous ways, nonetheless. It marks the joy of companionship.

Paul reported on an experiment where patients were given contact lenses with a dark spot on them. Very quickly the brain adjusts to compensate, and the dark spot disappears from the visual field. He pointed out that our beliefs act in the same way to blot out what we don't want to see. Since we have learned to view the world negatively, that is the interpretation we put on everything. It's a self-inflicted ignorance, though perhaps less intentional than we realize.

The subtext here is that we can have a tremendous impact on our world, or our interpretation of it at least. It's a matter of not giving up the quest in advance. The gurus are leading us to a more enlightened attitude that will throw light where it is most needed,

to either raise us out of our malaise or else reinforce our balance. The problem is that realigning our attitudes requires neural rewiring—we can't just think it and it's done. We have to repeatedly reinforce the new intelligence, and only after some time will it become second nature for us. It might take a hundred verses.

Susan gave an excellent example of how that has played out for her. She used to have a chronic belief that she was a very unworthy person, and she took all sorts of criticism excruciatingly to heart. She was alternately in despair over her failings or reacting angrily when her inner dignity could no longer bear the oppression. After diligently studying Nitya's teachings for several years, she got some distance on her ego's reactions. Instead of being hurt she would stop and ask herself if the criticism was merited or not. Am I like that? Do I do that? She began to see that at least sometimes the criticism was a window into the other person's unhappiness, and she was only the handy wall for them to scrawl their graffiti on. She stopped taking everything so personally, while still learning what she could from it. In fact, she began learning more, because she was no longer clouding the issue with her jangled reactions. This was a very large step toward healing for her, and has made a world of difference.

Paul had an epiphany that what Susan was talking about was the meaning of the Biblical assertion that the meek shall inherit the earth: that by not defending our egos but being open we take in so much more. Meek is often taken to mean self-deprecating to the point of inviting slaps on both cheeks, but it's actually a kind of antidote to egoism. Instead of being aggressive or defensive, we remain neutral, and then we are more fully available to the situation. Inheriting the earth doesn't mean that we become emperors or anything, only that we partake in the true import of what's going on. Paul received the "Epiphany of the Evening" award for this, including the double entendre of Evening.

Our evening closed with a very profound meditation to tune out all the extraneous noise of our psyches and dwell in the core of awareness. Reacquainting ourselves with our core is the goal:

when he talks about sharing Narayana Guru does not want us to rush out and proselytize, only to radiate our authenticity, as he did. He doesn't want us to keep it bottled up. Like the animals, humans can sense our positive radiation and take heart, without having to have it tediously explained or aggressively foisted on them. Gentle works best. The next verse commentary will expand on the value of sharing in friendship in a most inspiring fashion.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

There are moments of deep despair and darkness in our lives, yet even on such occasions the consciousness of 'I' continues to shine as pure awareness; only what it is aware of is darkness. Even when the most intense physical darkness blinds our eyes, we do not lose sight of this inner awareness. It is true that people vary as regards the amount of information they have about things. We can also see that there is a difference in the quality of their comprehension: a wise man can be differentiated from a dull-minded person. In spite of all these differences, the mind of every person is animated by its own light within. So if a person says "I am ignorant," it is to be taken only in a relative sense.

In the Kena Upanishad (II.2) it is said: "It is known to him to whom it is unknown; he does not know to whom It is known. It is unknown to those who know well, and known to those who do not know." Thus, according to the seers of the Upanishads, recognition of one's ignorance is considered the first step of one's pilgrimage to wisdom. First of all, to say "I do not know," there should be a light of consciousness to know what is not known. Secondly, there should be the discriminating function of consciousness, which alone can decide what is known and what is not known. If these inner faculties operate soundly, then one only needs to direct that consciousness toward its own ultimate realization. Thus, potentially, every person has a capacity to know and to realize.

In our social circles we recognize certain people as sages, seers or knowledgeable ones. This brings to one's mind the doubt that he is probably of an inferior nature and he does not have the capacity to know. Narayana Guru in this verse makes the appeal that such fear should be removed from everybody's mind, so that all can confidently move into the direction of right knowledge. According to Buddhist legend, when Gautama became awakened as the Buddha, he marvelled at the truth that became known to him and he thought it was too much for an ordinary person to comprehend, so he decided to keep his realization a secret. At this point Brahma Sampati appeared before him and said, "Oh Blessed One, you have become the Buddha, the Awakened One. What you have come to know can save the whole world; do not hold onto it as a secret. The world is sleeping and only a thin layer of darkness veils their eyes from right comprehension. If you share your noble truth, many will rise from their stupor to accept it." This admonishment was taken seriously by the Buddha and he wandered far and wide around India for over 50 years to awaken people to their own inner light.

When people believe they are ignorant, this negative knowledge brings with it both depression and inertia. They lose the capacity to seek, to strive and to understand. Thus, when they perpetuate their ignorance, life becomes truly dreadful and pathetic. Although we are not of the same stature as the Buddha or the Christ, in our own simple way we can share the little joys of our lives and bring at least a few people to their own centre so that they can realize the worthwhileness of their own lives.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

The 'I' is not darkness; were it so blind
And unaware of this 'I', 'I' we should have remained;
Because of such awareness, in order to know

Thus (as such) to one and all declare.

AFTER settling some preliminaries in connection with the ego or the Self viewed directly in the first person, rather than in the second or the third, following the experimental way in which the existence of the Self was asserted (in verses 10 and 11), the Guru here passes on to its closer examination as in itself or 'as such', without reference to anything outside itself.

One transcends here the region of doubt and of probability. We have here a way of reasoning which is one hundred percent certain, without detracting, for that reason from the strictly methodological and epistemological validity of the verity that has been asserted.

Although the form of the reasoning here might be thought by empirical thinkers as conforming to no sort of scientific reasoning, being open, according to them, to the objections of verbalism, tautology or even solipsism, we have to remember that different forms of reasoning must be considered as suitable to different departments of knowledge or science. Pure and practical reasonings cannot each have the same method. The Cartesian dictum 'cogito ergo sum' belongs to the domain of what is called rationalism, while in the experimental sciences we have observation and inference leading to certitude of judgements or propositions. The Guru here adopts axiomatic thinking.

One way of reasoning is as valid as the other, although the exigencies of the domain of reality to which the reasonings apply may be different. Formal logic and the proofs of mathematics have different grades of validity, but the degree of certitude that they imply could be the same. That we are aware of the presence of the Self in ourselves is here treated as equal to the proof of the existence of the Self or the Soul in an absolute sense in each of us. By asking us to declare this self-evident verity to all, the Guru

brings to the discussion an open, public, or scientific character. There is axiomatic public validity for the negative awareness of the self as asserted in the last two lines of this verse.

Part III

Jake has not lost his enthusiasm, and highlights a couple of important subtleties:

In this verse and in Nitya's commentary on it, the point of view shifts once again. In this case, the starting point is our ontological certitude, our essential knowing that we tend to overlook especially when negativity invades. In Nitya's commentary, he opens with an exploration into what we really know by following Descartes' reasoning which led him to his *cogito*: "I think, therefore I am." In broad terms (continuously mis-interpreted by western critics), writes Nitya, in order to reduce his knowledge to this axiom, Descartes first de-bunked Biblical dogma and then his own sense data. Both present distortions that led him to conclude that his only certitude was that he doubted.

Narayana Guru, says Nitya, follows a similar route but goes several steps beyond Descartes. That which doubts endures and continues on. It must, because in order to doubt, or in Narayana Guru's vision in order to know you are, say, depressed or in darkness at all you must know—have the knowledge that—light or knowledge exists. If you are completely in ignorant darkness without any knowledge at all, you would not know you were in darkness and could have no discomfort in that position. You could intuit no alternative and would strive for nothing. Improving one's condition, the drive in and of itself to do so, indicates some kind of alternative however far it is out of awareness, an alternative perhaps best illustrated in the abstraction of *perfection*. As a knowable quantity, the term is meaningless beyond its capacity to suggest some kind of preferred option not apparent in the present.

However distorted that drive to change might become in our transactional world, it is a universal force indicating an echo of our Absolute Self. This *gnosis* or knowledge cannot be separated from our *I*. The knower, the known, and the knowledge are one and precede any mental or scientific rationalization. This self-evident “I am’ becomes the measuring rod of all knowledge All other truths are derived only by using this normative notion.” (p. 131)

Our fundamental awareness of our existence is that core to which we can withdraw in order to stabilize our lives, and each of us shares in this awareness. In communicating that commonality, we connect with the world as it is and avoid the trap of constructing the illusion that our withdrawal will lead us to a yet-to-be spiritual and rarified utopia that the more benighted are simply not capable of “getting.” As Nitya writes, Jesus said the Kingdom of God is within you” and available to everyone. In other words, waking up is an individual project and all of us are at different stages in the process. Forcing the issue—as history teaches so clearly in the lessons of the Inquisition, Joseph Stalin, and Adolf Hitler—creates catastrophe because it is an attempt to apply material immanent force on a process originating in the individual transcendent and working its way into the immanent. This kind of imposing is characteristic of both religious and atheistic belief systems and reveals their shared assumption that the physical precedes the psychic rather than vice versa. (See Verse 17.) If one is convinced that the immanent world comes first, then it can easily and logically follow that employing external force on and demanding conformity of those you see as less aware than yourself (those displaying a *false consciousness* to the Marxist believer or a denial of Divine Truth to the keeper of the one true religion) can transform into a moral obligation. Horrors notwithstanding, The Grand Inquisitor and the doctrinaire Marxist and Nazi social engineer are all certain of their sacred missions, a rationalized certitude that none of the three would extend to the others.

