

4/30/13
Verse 19

The bottom, the top, the end, that is real, this is, no, that is—
in this way people quarrel; the one primal reality is all that is;
all this inertial matter is transient;
except as a form of water could a wave ever arise?

Free translation:

Not knowing that everything is a transformation of the primeval
Being, people come into conflict, asserting “It is the base,” “No, it
is the crown,” “No, no, it is this end,” “No, it is that end,” and so
on. All perceptions regarding static and inertial forms are transient.
How can there be any reality for a wave other than the water it is
made of?

Nataraja Guru’s:

‘Bottom, top or tip, reality here, there or that’ -
So do conflicts come: Prime Substance is all there is:
The inert here, all change and pass: How could a wave
Apart from the water’s form, another reality have?

We were joined by one of the old crowd, Brian, now living in
Ojai, California. Since he has worked unstintingly for peace in his
life, particularly regarding Jewish-German reconciliation, he
accidentally “chose” a highly appropriate verse to sit in on. Verse
19 is on most people’s “favorites” list, as is verse 20 coming up on
the horizon. Nitya was in rare form, even for him, during this
stretch.

At the time, Fritz Perls’ adage “I do my thing and you do
your thing,” was still popular, made even more famous by the Isley
Brothers’ 1969 hit song, *It’s your thing (do what you wanna do)*.
Posters featuring it were ubiquitous in hippie stores and living

rooms. Though Nitya admired Perls' gestalt therapy, he wanted to officially correct what he saw as the flaw in the anthem of individualist rejection of the status quo, to wit: we are one with everything. We are not only waves, we are waves made of universal water. Nitya's passionate logic comes together in the last two pages in one of the most moving paeans to connectedness to be found anywhere. It makes you feel that if everyone just read it, peace would break out on all sides.

We live in a culture that paradoxically deifies individualism while simultaneously mandating abject conformity to societal ideals. The pressure to conform breeds hostility that augments the separatist tendencies of ungrounded egos. It's an explosive mix that periodically rises to a fever pitch, to be exorcized by an orgy of bloodletting, abetted by the individual "right" to easy access to weaponry.

In contrast to this perpetual holocaust are the wise men and women who try to find ways to teach the insight that we are in essence the same, that love and caring are more successful strategies than turning your back. Our tragic flaw as a species is that this takes a long time to learn, while pulling a trigger or loosing an arrow takes only a second. Still, to the extent that intelligence matters at all, humans keep trying.

Nitya reminds us of the key element: we have to make peace in ourself before we can radiate it to our surroundings. This is not done in a day. All too often we go off filled with agitation to spread peace, and it doesn't work. We imagine if the world would just be peaceful, then we could be peaceful ourselves. But the challenge is to find peace in ourselves while the world burns around us.

One problem is that we mistakenly believe acceptance of mayhem is the same as condoning it. We have to accept that the world is in turmoil before we can achieve inner peace, but that doesn't mean we are condoning acts of violence and cruelty. Yet it is widely believed that becoming peaceful is unjustified as long as there is conflict. This is a very important issue to sort out, because

many well-intentioned people are drawn into callous attitudes because of it. They feel justified in hating the apparent sources of the violence, and so keep unintentionally feeding the flames.

Brian had a lot to share about listening and respecting your supposed enemy. He quoted a Quaker teacher he knew, Gene Knudsen Hoffman, who founded the Compassionate Listening movement that Brian has been involved with for over a decade. Her belief was “An enemy is one whose story we have not heard.” She found—and Brian found when he put it into practice—that careful listening establishes common ground. You see that the other person’s motivations are similar to yours. They lose their demonic aspect, and may even become friends. Hoffman wrote, compassionate listening is “a process in which people open up to new thoughts and ideas when they are carefully listened to. Sometimes they even change their opinions as they learn to listen to themselves.”

Listening is a rare skill that takes a long time to develop. We have been conditioned to maintain our self-identity using words, and many people feel that they hardly exist at all unless there is a continuous self-description taking place, both in their mind and in their mouth. Concentrated listening is a lot like meditation, and many suppressed insights come to the surface when the mental chatter is brought to a halt.

Of course, in real life conflicts, respectful listening is a major accomplishment in its own right, and I imagine only those who have made great strides in self-realization attend something like Brian’s Compassionate Listening seminars. Yet he reported some wonderful epiphanies even among the mature folks who participated. His specialty has been German-Jewish reconciliation, and he talked about the guardedness that became apparent on both sides as they listened to each other. Participants were mainly children born after World War II. Both groups felt a tremendous repression on the part of their parents to protect them from the awful realities of the era they had witnessed. But children are very wise, and they knew something major was missing in their

upbringing, even though the motivation for it was different. It turned out to be a revelation of a commonality no one suspected: this blocked area of silence and denial in their background both sides shared. Because of their listening, they were no longer two groups, just humans who understood each other.

The trick is, how do we do this *before* the war, rather than after, as is typical.

Brian also talked about gatekeepers, the inner psychological mechanisms by which we are prevented from evolving, but we can overcome if we come to know what we are up against. In the class we have called them inner guardians, our defense mechanisms. Compassionate listening is a fine technique for going through the gate. It turns out that we are imagining or projecting the gatekeepers, and they aren't even there if we stop maintaining the illusion.

Eric wrote down a poetic thought yesterday, and then was startled to find how well it meshed with the theme of the verse, so he read it to us:

LOVE is the method by which we proclaim the ineffable
UNITY of all things in a haphazard, chaotic, violent, titillating
and endearing world of endless duality.

Well said! Eric added that you could put peace or oneness in place of love, all refer to an inner state of acceptance and openness.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that this is not a class about abstractions, it is intended to become a living reality smack in the center of our being. Bill read out a couple of relevant highlights:

This verse has a very practical bearing on our life. It encapsulates the art of living together, the art of reconciliation, the art of harmony.

and

When you look at these things from the numinous side it unites everything, while if you look at them from the phenomenal side it separates them. There has to be a conscious effort on our part to recall our drifting interest and drifting mind to come back again and again to the numinous center. Then in our relationships with the rest of the world there will always be the consideration of unity.

Simple enough, right? The difficulty is that we have to buck a tide of insistence that we identify with our surface. Everyone we meet wants to describe us as what they see and expect. We have to carry literal identification all the time now, because anonymity is threatening to society. Loved ones beg us to live up to our separateness. And we should. We aren't trying to lose our uniqueness, only to add the extra dimension of our sameness as well. Then our uniqueness will be grounded on a rock rather than shifting sands.

Paul told a story about how he recently came unglued in public. He was going into a high-pressure situation, and knew it, so he gave himself a pep talk to keep it together. He knew what he had to do, and he would just do it and all would be well. But once he arrived, things didn't go quite as he expected, and he quickly lost his cool. The lesson is that there is a lot of stuff below the surface that has its own trajectory, gatekeepers and conditioning and so on. We can sit home and think good thoughts, but we don't make them ours until we put them into practice. I'm going to defer to Nitya's masterful wording once again, from the end of verse 48 (indexed under Pope):

All the religious words have frightened and confused us. Narayana Guru wants to give us courage, telling us, "Don't be afraid. You are as good as anyone. The essence of realization is in your own daily experience." With this realization you come to establish a universal norm for living that experience with others, not just in a state of absorption. When you are alienated and isolated it is easy to remain

always good. There is no chance for the Pope to smack another person, for instance, because everyone stands before him with great politeness and reverence. Nobody even says one offensive word to him, so why should he get angry? It is easy for him to be pious and good. But bring him to the marketplace and expose him to all the troubles there. Then we will see his true tenor. There is no need for any ethics when you are in the state of a contemplative who is completely absorbed in the Absolute.

Your realization is to be lived here and now in society where you touch and are touched by other people. Let us bring our realization to the marketplace. But you think realization is so holy and sacred that it must be kept separate, kept apart. That means you cannot live it. If you want to live it, it should be lived everywhere, at all times. Your perfection is a perfection for all time, not just for the church on Sunday. If you are perfect now you should be perfect in everyday life, too.

Life is kind to give us plenty of opportunities to practice what we dream up in yoga class or wherever. Paul's experience is familiar to us all. We want to be our persona, our social mask, but we are actually someone else. Getting to know our unmediated self is an intense and humbling experience, but it's how we really learn instead of making believe.

Mick pointed out that what we identify with is what we get upset about. If we can manage to not be identified, then what happens doesn't matter to us. But we are identified, and so it does matter. We don't believe we are until it trips us up yet again. So these events are direct feedback on our real state, not the imaginary one we prefer. We should be grateful for the privilege, at least after we pick ourselves back up from the floor.

As Mick said, peace is the predominant state of the universe. We bring dissent with us, and overlay it on the preexisting peace. Peace does not have to be made, it already is. *We* are what is disturbing the peace. Most maddeningly, in our very efforts to bring peace we are disturbing it. If we want to be a peacemaker,

we should open ourselves to receive peace first. Once again, the gurus are trying to turn us around to face in instead of out. Call it the Absolute, love, peace, Karu, it doesn't matter. It is our true nature, always ready and waiting for us. Aum.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

The bottom, the top, the end, that is real, this is, no, that is—
in this way people quarrel; the one primal reality is all that is;
all this inertial matter is transient;
except as a form of water could a wave ever arise?

It is hard for most of us to remember what happened yesterday. Our own childhood has become a half-forgotten legend, yet we are curious to know when the universe began and how it was when it began. Some people believe in an old God who created this world to kill his boredom. Others, being more clever, came to the conclusion, after a few centuries of probes and calculations, that it all began with a big bang. A big bang of what? Of course no one knows.

What you and I know for sure is that we live in a world of flux. The author of the Bhagavad Gita confesses his ignorance of the beginning and the end of this world. He agrees with us in the fact that he knows only the middle part. We have enough problems of our own without bothering about either the first cause or the final end. Even our personal issues are sometimes so complicated that we cannot make head or tail of them, and we decide to take a bold stand only because of the pressure of the circumstances. It is only natural that my food is your poison, so there is every possibility that you will challenge my stand and offer an alternative. Much of the change or flux in the society is caused by the lack of agreement among its members. However, there is an unconscious faith in us that the truth is always one. Similarly, we

must at least expect that there should be a general agreement in our conception of higher values, such as beauty, goodness and justice, otherwise people would not have joined hands as one single force to bring about the French Revolution on hearing the slogan “Equality, liberty and fraternity.” It is true that the votaries of this slogan did not live the spirit of it for long, but that does not prove that the oneness of human values is not a true principle.

There is an existential prayer which throws light on the agreement and disagreement, the hopes and frustrations of mankind:

I do my thing, and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations and you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I. And if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it can't be helped.

Our world has a history of blast and counter-blast of agreements and differences, but whether we agree or not, some great force is continuously and consistently bringing about day and night, putting us to sleep and waking us up. We are stimulated to eat, mate and keep the zest for life burning within us even when we see nothing but destruction all around us.

The great philosopher Sankara said, “Only the cause is real and not the effect.” According to him, the cause is without qualities and, being undifferentiated, cannot be a thesis for intelligent consideration. Thus, he gives us an exposition of the basis or ground of truth. This position is challenged by Ramanuja who extols the magnificence of the effect.

Consider a small seed and the mammoth tree that comes from it; its branches spread out in all directions covered by green foliage and overladen with flowers of colourful petals and sweet fragrance. If you wait a while, you might even gather its edible fruits. So what comes from the top cannot be judged by merely looking at the base.

It is into this world of conflicts that we have come. In this context Narayana Guru emerges as the peace maker, he agrees with the partial truth of everybody's argument. He points out that the ocean has a surface and a depth. On the surface there is room for all kinds of changes, such as high tide and low tide, silence, stillness, gentle ripples, rolling waves or mountain-like surging tidal waves. In its depth, hidden away from the surface, the ocean conceals several kinds of aquatic beings, minerals, oil, and treasures like pearls. The navigating on the surface and the vertical submergence into the ocean's depth give different kinds of experiences. A wise person should have a unitive way of recognizing all these facts. Such a vision will help us to be reconciled with the inevitable differences that are bound to be expressed by people who look at truth from different vantage points. This knowledge brings peace and tolerance into our lives. It gives us a sober mind to agree with others and it encourages us to cooperate with all.

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Nataraja Guru's:

'Bottom, top or tip, reality here, there or that' -
So do conflicts come: Prime Substance is all there is:
The inert here, all change and pass: How could a wave
Apart from the water's form, another reality have?

THE study of the history of thought or philosophy in any country reveals to us that various trends or tendencies giving primacy to one or other factor of existence, essence or value have held the field at certain places or times, to give place to another. In one and the same period in contemporary thought, or even in the same cultural unit, if sufficiently large, we can discover the same differing elements as between schools of philosophy or religious groupings. Empiricists and idealists come into conflict as

do Unitarians and Trinitarians, pluralists or nominalists. The possible varieties are endless and there is always bound to be between them an implicit differential as between an ontological or a teleological approach, a practical or a pure way, an existential or an essential standpoint. An ascending dialectical method like that of a Plato will clash totally or partially with the descending dialectical method. A hypostatic value-factor will tend to be discarded in favour of a sacred presence here and now.

Phenomenology opposes 'numenology'.

On the Far-Eastern scene we have pure absolutists who say that what can be named is not the true, and those other philosophers who put their faith in concrete problems of every-day statesmanship or politics. In India Samkhya philosophers pinned their faith on the aspects which appealed to human reasoning, while others postulated an ultimate and transcendental principle beyond, called Brahman (the Absolute). Even among those who accepted Brahman there were those who gave primacy to the cosmological or the psychological aspect. Theologies, Eastern or Western, have also tended towards the two poles involved in the central value accepted in their particular branch of theology. Pantheism and monotheism tend to be opposed. History is a record of how ideologies have many times and in many lands caused bloodshed on a large or small scale.

The Guru here dismisses these dualistic trends in favour of one central reality as inclusively covering all existences, essences or substances.

'PRIME SUBSTANCE IS ALL THERE IS': Conflict between two schools of thought, whatever may be the items, terms, or values, will necessarily be based on giving primacy to one or other of the factors involved. A dualism is implied in all of them. When, however, a philosopher takes care to give primacy to a notion that is not affected by duality, but conceives of it as being central,

neutral and prime in an absolute sense, he will be justified in calling it a reality which abolishes all rival realities. It is in this sense that the expression 'Prime Substance' is to be understood here. In fact it is no other than the Absolute, though not expressed yet in its fullest and most finalized form.

In the context of Western philosophy we have the controversy between essence and existence. The tendency in modern philosophy is to discredit the former notion, so dear to the Middle Ages' scholastic and theological thinkers, in favour of the notion of existence. This might be called an ontological tendency in thought, as against the previous teleological one. We know that pragmatism itself is an attempt to balance and counteract the tendency of pure rationalists to shake off the concept of the Absolute as an airy nothing. Dialectical materialism claims also to balance the 'spiritualism' implied in the usual theistic approach. Between these two tendencies, we have the notion of the 'thinking substance' of Spinoza, which is an attempt to strike the mean between mind and matter. The 'neutral monism' put forward by such modern writers as Bertrand Russell attempts again to find unitive ground between the two opposing or ambivalent tendencies of thought. The Guru here, by his support of the notion of Prime Substance, is only correctly taking the position as belonging to the Advaitic or non-dualistic tradition in the history of Indian thought. We could even go so far as to assert that this notion comes nearest to the idea of the Brahman or the Absolute when fully understood, as it is meant to be, in the context of the Upanishads. Perhaps because of the fact that he is still in the preliminary stages of development of his subject in the present composition, it is true that he uses the expression 'Prime Substance' purposely so as not to anticipate prematurely its fuller psychological, cosmological or other philosophical implications, which he is to develop stage by stage, according to his own method, in the rest of the work. The word 'substance' here comes closest to the name 'karu' that he gives to reality in the very starting verse of this composition.

‘THE INERT HERE, ALL CHANGE AND PASS’:

The distinction between the reality, which is a flux changing and passing, and the ‘being’ that is independent of becoming, is fundamental to the Advaita philosophy which the Guru, like Sankara, correctly brings up here for early discussion.

Discrimination between the transient and the lasting (nitya-anitya-viveka) is referred to in the Viveka Chudamani (verse 19) of Sankara as among the primary prerequisites even of a person who aspires to the wisdom of the Absolute (Brahman).

In the Western philosophical context we know of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus who said that one could not enter the same river twice. The philosophy of flux and becoming persists to the present day in Bergson.

On final analysis we find that whether in the East or in the West, philosophers of worth have recognized two aspects of reality, one that endures and one that does not, but both occupying, momentarily together or alternately, an important place in their discussions of reality. Being and becoming have between them a vertical unity and a horizontal contradiction. The Guru here juxtaposes them within the notion of the Absolute or Prime Substance. The relation between the two aspects is at the very core of the Advaitic tradition, which aims at transcending or solving the paradox.

In order to bring home the subtle nature of the problem implied, the Guru passes on to a rhetorical question.

‘HOW COULD A WAVE, APART FROM THE WATER’S FORM, ANOTHER REALITY HAVE?’: The Guru takes the classical example in Vedanta of the relation between the water and waves that rise thereon. Waves rise and fall but the water in the

ocean, as such, remains as the noumenon behind the phenomena, or as the 'being' behind what keeps becoming in the eternal flux of reality. The latter, 'becoming', is sometimes named Maya or Samsara in Vedantic literature. Becoming and Being are aspects of the same Prime Substance or the Absolute, when neutrally or centrally understood as the one to which both belong as ambivalent aspects.

The real difference between the physicists' empirical approach to reality and the metaphysicians' idealistic approach to the same reality, consists in something like that between the cross-section view of an animal or plant and its own longitudinal section. What we see might have a different appearance and might belong to two totally different epistemological categories or ambivalent aspects. If we should examine a cucumber in cross-section, or view the same longitudinally, it is the same object which is in question.

In a similar way, the specific form of a wave and the generic content of the wave refer to the same water. The difference, when closely scrutinized, amounts to something highly theoretical called the 'form' as distinct from the 'matter' of the wave - the outer apparent configuration to which the water is subjected. This shape is not matter, but is a conditioning of our minds. 'Wave' as a name and 'wave' as a form refer to the same substance that is Absolute.

Matter and form, however, meet both as abstractions with reference to the water which is the object of our study. The abstract notion of the water as a reality, universally understood, meets the geometrical notion of the form of the water, and both together produce in us a notion that is neither generic nor specific, but which constitutes the neutral link between the water of the ocean and the specific wave with its form.

In all this process of understanding, nothing new has entered into our understanding. The meeting-point of the form of the wave and

the matter of the wave gives us the notion of water which is common to the ocean and the particular wave that we might be thinking of. There is a dialectical interplay implied here which leads to the unitive understanding of water as a neutral entity between the ocean and the wave. Horizontally viewed, we have innumerable waves on the ocean's surface; and vertically viewed, there is the same differenceless water, whether called ocean or wave. It is in this sense that the rhetorical question that is put by the Guru here should be understood and answered. The Guru does not yet enter into the problem of unitive understanding as such, but suggests that there could not be a third factor other than the wave or the ocean that could be involved in this central neutral notion which has its place between the two poles into which reality itself could be divided phenomenally rather than noumenally.

It will suffice for us, at the present stage of our discussion of Self-knowledge as it is to be understood in the context of the Absolute, to concede that in the notion of Absolute Reality there is no extraneous third factor involved, other than the two ambivalent aspects into which the Absolute itself tends to be divided through the refraction that our own mind produces. A transparency to dualistic refraction is what is to be cultivated in the philosophy which is being presented here by the Guru.

Part III

Included as an attachment is Michael's sketch in honor of the tea tale. An excerpt from Jean's Yoga Shastra response to her online group studying with Nancy Y. seems germane to our quest:

In India at one point, Nancy had everyone in a class try to remember and relate his or her very earliest memory. I noticed that about 75% of those memories were painful, sad, or dark, which substantiates Nitya's words about "being hurt" and how our external environment influences our chemical reservoir within. But we are learning that a memory can be made instable simply by

remembering it, and using that moment to inject new information. By *reconsolidating*, it is possible to disturb the process of the old memory and take away the fear, anxiety, and pain connected to it. These on-line yoga group sessions are an excellent inspiration to manifest comradeship and friendship to each other. Gratitude for each one of you!

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John H recalled Fritz Perls:

I concur with the Guru regarding Fritz Perls. In a curious historical social moment Perls got a bit caught up in himself and so self got to be a bit more of a focus than I suspect he intended. There was that poster in every girls' dormitory in 1970 with his slogan: I am I and you are you and if we find each other it's beautiful.

I found it didn't work so well with the police shooting tear gas at me to get me and my anti war sign off the campus
They found me and I found them but it wasn't beautiful
I would have done much better to move when I was asked and then take my signs where they wanted me
But then again
It was the same Historical social party that old Perls got caught up in too I betcha

PS

Tear gas hurts the eyes a lot

* * *

Since Rumi was on the wind—or in the water—Scotty sent one of his poems after class:

These forms we seem to be
are cups floating
in an ocean of living consciousness.

They fill and sink
without leaving an arc of bubbles
or any good-bye spray.

What we are is that ocean,
too near to see,
though we swim in it
and drink it in.

Don't be a cup with a dry rim,
or someone who rides all night
and never knows

the horse beneath his thighs,
the surging that carries him along.

~ Rumi
(Cup and Ocean)

Part IV

Here is Jake's commentary:

With this verse, Narayana Guru continues with the point he made in the previous one by applying it to our practical daily lives. The endless bickering we experience in our transactional world reflects our attachment to manifest reality, our individual self interest and desire to remain. That observation is a commonplace for all religious traditions; avarice, greed, ego-centric behavior of all stripes are vices that arise out of a narcissism which is universally disparaged in just about every culture.

The fact that this condition persists in spite of its continuous condemnation indicates the power of illusion to dominate a human psychology when it operates on the principle that the physical

precedes the psychic. From this perspective, the isolation/separation of things, people—anything perceptible—establishes their autonomy, their clear boundaries. As a result, duality reigns and fear runs rampant; arguing and winning pushes knowing and letting know out of awareness.

In his commentary, Nitya uses the familiar notion of cause/effect to illustrate the sanity in reversing our basic premise, in beginning with the psychic as a principle on which to live here and now. The core of numinous transcendence—the metaphoric ocean from which the waves of appearance rise and fall—precedes everything, writes Nitya, a general goal that both religion and science share in their respective projects of identifying a Prime Mover or Primary element (popularized today as “the God particle”). The unfortunate quality both these tasks share is that they remain philosophical abstractions divorced from our practical lives.

Bridging that gap, incorporating a clear vision of the infinite as primary and the immanent as its twin in its ever-present arising as we experience life is the guru’s task in this verse. Because this animating principle is common to all manifestations in spite of form, everything is part of everything in continuous flux. The human body, Nitya points out, is a self-evident example. It contains a bewildering number of organs and systems all operating out of our conscious awareness united in a common effort to survive (until some part or parts don’t). This holonic pattern repeats over and over and results in an endless series of nested systems part of and containing within themselves other systems in a universal web of life.¹ Knowing this to be the case affords us the opportunity to see through the apparent distinctions/boundaries our senses and egos use in order to isolate ourselves. That isolation, writes the Guru, is transient and illusory: “Except as a form of water could a wave ever arise?” (p.123)

¹ See Ken Wilber’s *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* for a complete discussion of the holonic universe.

Unlearning the lies our senses and egos have so carefully constructed is no small matter because they are required for our survival here in the transactional domain. Without a developed ego, one is ill-equipped to face the challenges that survival among so many other entities demands. Those commonly referred to as schizophrenics (in the West) see clearly the death's head in any physical activity but lack to the ability to suppress and deny those perceptions, a talent the more "socially adjusted" among us develop early in life. Likewise, distinguishing between a rope and a deadly snake requires a keen sense perception coupled with a certain amount of poise. On the other hand is a complete submission to the illusory world of sense and ego, a world of endless bickering because the lies are not restricted to the very narrow domain in which they prove their value. Reversing this fundamental understanding on which many of us build our ontological house of cards opens the door to our evolution beyond reason.

¹ See Ken Wilber's *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* for a complete discussion of the holonic universe.