

6/11/13
Verse 22

The happiness of another--that is my happiness;
one's own joy is another's joy—this is the guiding principle;
that action which is good for one person
should bring happiness to another.

Free translation:

What is dear to another should spell endearment to me also. This is the correct policy. Therefore, whatever good one does should be so intended as to be beneficial to others also.

Nataraja Guru's:

The other man's interest, that is even mine; what to oneself
Is beneficial is so for the other man also; such is the course of
Discrete conduct; all acts aiming each man's Self-happiness
Must spell at once the happiness of the other fellow-man.

To get the most out of this section on ethics, all that we have learned so far must be brought to bear. It's almost like an end-of-semester exam. There are a couple of perennially challenging ideas that only give up their secrets when understood dialectically and grounded in Self-realization. Fortunately we have two more powerful verses that will help us along in this matter.

The first idea that Narayana Guru takes for a baseline is that everyone is seeking happiness all the time. The end of the first half of Atmopadesa Satakam makes this explicit, in Verse 49:

All beings are making effort in every way,
all the time, for the happiness of the Self;
in the world, this is the one faith;
pondering on this, without becoming subjected to sin, be controlled.

We resist this because the bizarre ways many people seek happiness strike us as actually seeking unhappiness. Their happiness would be our unhappiness, and vice versa. What fascinates us bores them to death, and what they are obsessed with strikes us as ridiculous. Nonetheless the universal pursuit of happiness is the key to understanding all behaviors.

We have to give up the egotistical fixation that our idea of happiness is the right one, and other people's are wrong. We aren't trying to assign criminality here, so much as to understand. The criminality comes in when the other's legitimate happiness is transgressed. But when that is taken care of, where do we find our own happiness?

The second idea brings this into focus. Our true nature is experienced as happiness, ananda, but we have been diligently trained to refer it onto objects and processes outside ourself. Because of this, instead of realizing our blissful nature, we associate it with selected things and associate its absence with other things that interfere with what we want. Our preference for certain conditions has divided us against ourself, made us poor. We are impoverished because no amount of external activities can restore our blissful being. They produce little dollops of bliss here and there, for which we have to compete with others for the limited supply.

That's why many people were vying for the Guru's attention at Hall Street: it seemed like he was the source of their bliss. Being with him was blissful, being away from him was not. He would laugh at our folly and refuse to be caught, knowing that we were missing the point. His presence was meant to remind us of our own bliss, not to deliver it to us straight from the caves or jungles of India. As long as we identify our happiness with something external, even including great teachers or our dear children, we will sell ourselves short, and in the process do a lot of mostly unintentional damage.

The class did not accept the radical teaching of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad that engagement with your loved ones was on a par with the pursuit of wealth, or for that matter, of anything else. Nitya paraphrases it thus:

The reason God created the universe, if you believe in that, is for God's own joy, not for anyone else's. This is why in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it is said: "No husband loves the wife for the sake of the wife, but for the sake of the joy of the Self. No wife loves the husband for the sake of the husband, but for the sake of the joy of the Self. No parent loves the child for the sake of the child, but for the sake of the joy of the Self. No man loves wealth for the sake of wealth, but for the sake of the joy of the Self." In none of these places is the reference to the ego as the self; it is to the universal Self, the Self that is in all.

The rishis want us to recover the bliss within, and then our every action will be blissful, whether good, bad or indifferent. But the class was drawing a thick line between certain dubious kinds of pleasure, like the pursuit of wealth, and the obviously legitimate love for our spouses and offspring. As Nitya points out, we have to learn to distinguish between the self and the Self, the ego and the soul.

The fourth Brahmana of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad has the famous conversation between Yajñayalkya and Maitreyi that Nitya was referring to in his comments. There the list is much more extensive, including not only husband, wife, child and wealth, but social status, nature, gods, beings, and ultimately, all. Anything and everything you love is based in the love of the Self, and is a mere reflection of it. So don't pursue reflections, enter the loving ground, and all things will be added unto you. B.U. 1.4.8 provides the bare scheme, central to Vedanta:

That self is dearer than a son, is dearer than wealth, is dearer than all else, since this self is nearer.

If of one who speaks of anything else than the self as dear, one should say, 'he will lose what he holds dear,' he would indeed be likely to do so. One should reverence the self alone as dear. He who reverences the self alone as dear—what he holds dear, verily, is not perishable. (Hume translation)

That's why this is a study of Self-instruction. We are regaining our Self, and it is regaining us. We are cashing in our temporary pleasures for lasting happiness. It doesn't mean we should stop doing what we like, but only realize the true source of the interest, the joy.

Moni related how painful it is to misunderstand this. When she was in love, once upon a time, Nitya quoted this to her. "You don't love that man. You love your Self." She was devastated. Loving your Self sounds like loving yourself, even though it is not the same. People think they are loving for the sake of the other. The mother loves her child dearly, and thinks there is something wrong with it when she hears these supposedly wise words. So this isn't something to take casually. It has to be understood correctly or it spoils the game.

The idea is to bring more love to bear, to heighten it, universalize it. Right in the middle of the love you are having for your child. The child is the reflection to show you your own true nature as love, as bliss. It's a double affirmation. But it is a double negation if you think, oh, I shouldn't be loving this, I should be loving some abstraction called the Self. Don't laugh: that's the way it is often taken. That's why people rush off to monasteries and caves and remote mountaintops. They close off their love, in hopes of finding love. If they had better discipline or a less challenging environment they could discover it right in the midst of their transactional life, but it isn't easy. With all the confusion, it's seldom a simple proposition. So going away seems perfectly plausible.

There was a lot of disdain in the class for the pursuit of wealth, but the Upanishad wasn't aiming at the obsessive money

lust that's glorified today. Most everyone enjoys a level of comfort from having their basic needs met, and when they aren't met they become anxious. The advice doesn't necessarily mean we should forego meeting our basic needs, as it is again often taken. It means that as we meet our basic needs, the comfort and pleasure we feel can be seen as a reflection of our inner being, and then it won't seem so precarious.

Narayana Guru's and the Upanishad's wisdom is the exact opposite of the religion of selfishness that has come to dominate the modern world. Ayn Rand et al. unleashed the raw ego in people and anointed it as the true messiah. In their view, selfishness has a magical ability to determine the optimal path in transactions. The heartlessness and destructiveness of it should be obvious, but we can always make excuses, blame our problems on unbelievers. Narayana Guru wants us to recognize that we are all in this together. We could say that true selfishness includes the other, because we are all one Self. His is a philosophy of connectedness, in contrast to the atomization that is the result of selfishness. That means we have to take all aspects into account. We have to look into the impact of what we do. A certain course looks very profitable, but it erases an ecosystem, so I'll refrain from the temptation. There are literally millions of examples on all sides of how selfishness causes permanent harm, so it seems pointless for me to list a few. Selfishness is beginning to look literally and globally suicidal.

Joanne wondered if it is acceptable to pursue wealth because that's what makes you happy? (Again, the class was taking pursuit of wealth as a crime, not an honorable activity.) Hers was a gentle version of, "Well, we can't judge others, so is raping okay, since it's someone pursuing their idea of happiness?" Or as Michael Moore asked a corporate executive espousing the same thing, "If it's all strictly about profits, why don't you sell cocaine then?" If we believe morality has no role and short-term gain is everything, then selling fabulously expensive and addictive drugs is the ne plus ultra of business. Let's get it straight. And yes, Rand wrote

glowingly of someone who murdered a young girl, because it showed they were free of social restraint.

Do we even have to wonder about this?

Anyway, we can make serious headway if we put our brains to the task. We need to really hone in on the subject. This is a fertile field for intense examination, for clarifying our vague ideas. I gave an “assignment” to the class to come back next week with a more developed sense of what’s going on here.

Mick affirmed that the core principle is to do no harm, and that’s one aspect for sure. Deb said that in pursuing your happiness it can't be on the backs of other people's unhappiness, that your happiness has to be partly based on other people’s happiness. We talked about some of the trivial forms of amusement people are entranced with. The thing is, each of us finds our interest captivated by something unique to us. We can respect that, if it does little or no harm, but also use it to remind ourself that the joy resides in our hearts, not in the objects we chase after.

The core idea is this: we are the Absolute, and our nature is absolute bliss. We have lost contact with our true nature, and instead of turning back to our inner light, we keep looking all around for little pleasures to fill the void we sense from the loss. We become partisans for what we like, and come to fear that others may take it away. This is especially virulent in religion and politics, where some are willing to kill for their home team. The Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction are aimed at restoring our connection with our authentic Self, the true source of peace, love and joy. Since we are That, it cannot be truly lost. When we are restored to it, everything we come in contact with will reflect the joy, not just a few selected items. The rishis believe this is the cure for what ails us, and by implication all other cures are quack medicine, temporary fixes.

Nitya’s comments may seem a little bit odd because this is one of those verses where he was covertly addressing the people in the room. It’s subtle, but you can sense it. There was a doctor prominently involved, and Nitya was striving to make these ideas

clear to him, and of course hoping we would all translate the terms to our own vocations. A true healer recognizes the reciprocal relationship of doctor and patient, while another type may operate as a technical expert but keep a thick line between themselves and their patients. It is hard not to think of the rewards, the pay and time off, the admiration, and so on, even the skill with which the treatment is rendered, but Nitya wanted to emphasize that it is the bipolar relationship in every endeavor that makes it worthwhile, richly satisfying. The pursuit of wealth and power, because they aren't reciprocally related to something positive, are empty. They fail to satisfy, so we have to always try for more and more. It's a tragic treadmill. Of course, we've gotten so used to it that we probably like it. That's why so few even care about Narayana Guru's heartfelt wisdom. You have to lose a measure of faith in the little pleasures, and we have decided they're good enough for us. So it goes.

Part II

From Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

From the wriggling worm in a ditch to the philosopher in meditation, all are seeking happiness. Every movement of the body and pulsation of the mind is in search of happiness. Most people think that happiness comes by pampering the senses or pleasing the mind. Our senses do not know what is painful or pleasurable. A sensation becomes painful or pleasurable only when the sense organs are in contact with the mind.

What is it that pleases the mind? Two factors gladden our minds. One is explicit and the other is somewhat concealed from our gross perspective. Let us first consider the explicit cause. In our mind there are many latent urges and unconscious desires which seek gratification. When we place ourselves in an environment and then move from that environment to another, opportunities arise for one desire or another to relate itself to an

external factor in which the possibility of its gratification is visualized. An effort is then made to exploit that situation so as to derive gratification. If the attempt succeeds it brings pleasure and if it fails it brings frustration. In addition to desires, there are also hidden fears of pain-giving situations. Some of the moves we make are to avoid such situations. If we are successful, we experience a sense of security and consequent happiness.

All instances of search for pleasure and gratification of desire involve us in some action. We can in fact say that all actions are motivated by the desire for happiness. When we are in pursuit of pleasure we seem to think that the object of pleasure has the ability to produce pleasure in us. Mostly we are infatuated with that expectation.

If we only knew that happiness is a state of mind and it has come from within us, we would not be so rash in making our pursuit blind and aggressive.

Now let us consider the more subtle and concealed cause of happiness. The true nature of our Self is its self-founded existence in pure consciousness. It is free of all kinds of miseries and is at peace with itself. A mind that is running after sense objects thinks of the Self as an unknown alien entity which is difficult to know and realize. Although mind has no light of its own other than what is derived from the Self, with the aid of the senses it converts, like a kaleidoscope, the light of the Self into many structured patterns of a fragmentary character.

The natural law of homogeneity fuses existence with existence, knowledge with knowledge, and happiness with happiness. When two people come together without effort, they recognize each other's existence. They do not hinder the free flow of their consciousness with private motivations, and their knowledge easily mingles as they take to each other with great ease. Without any apparent reason this sense of belongingness brings peace and happiness. Separative notions such as "I" and "you" disappear from their minds and they think of themselves as two persons bracketed into one. Thereafter they spontaneously

refer to themselves using words like “us,” “ours,” and “we.” Here a person that was at first apprehended as the other has been transformed into non-other. This kind of togetherness is experienced between lovers, husbands and wives, parents and children and between dear friends. This effortless union is effected by the natural happiness of the Self and by effacing the apparent duality that is caused by physical conditions.

When the outward zest for pleasure and its source are seen more and more within the Self, ego boundaries become effaced and compassion flows more easily in all directions. Such an attitude makes life joyous as we find the union of everybody's happiness through continual acts of sharing.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary is particularly sublime:

The other man's interest, that is even mine; what to oneself
Is beneficial is so for the other man also; such is the course of
Discrete conduct; all acts aiming each man's Self-happiness
Must spell at once the happiness of the other fellow-man.

AS we have said, this verse completes and resolves the complication referred to in the previous verse. The Guru takes particular pleasure in playing on the strings the same note or melody. By this he only wishes to underline the law of human relations and conduct which is here enunciated in keeping with the correct dialectical approach.

Desires can come into conflict when treated unilaterally and horizontally, but are resolved into the harmony of unity when both the counterparts of the relational situation are brought together through correct Self-knowledge.

This way of confronting the problem of evil which otherwise puzzles theologians and philosophers equally, is the prerogative of the dialectical, as against the merely rational approach. Steeped in scientific or unilateral rationalism, modern philosophers in the West have forfeited their more ancient heritage of wisdom. In what has been called the 'Nichomachean Ethics' of Aristotle (named after Nichomachus, the classical philosopher of Greece), the West had the beginnings of this way of looking at moral problems. Rationalism, as with Voltaire, found no explanation for evil, and suggested no remedy that took man beyond good and evil. Theologies retained a God who could punish and excuse sin and thus help man to transcend evil, but the roots of theology in the reasoning faculty of man were overcovered by myth or by pseudo-science. The identification of one's own best interest with that of one's neighbour, who, in principle, represents one's own dialectical counterpart among human beings with whom one comes into daily relationship, is the secret and time-honoured way of peace on earth and good-will to all mankind, which is the philosophical basis of human ethics as directly derived from wisdom through Self-realization. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man contain the same ethical law.

The equation of the Self and the non-Self which is the essence of dialectical wisdom, implicit in the ethics presented in this and in the previous verse, has its philosophical echo in the Bhagavad Gita, chapter VI, verses 5 and 6:

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

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

Here two sets of selves are juxtaposed unitively without conflict and also put together horizontally with conflict entering into their relations. The ambivalent aspects of the same Self can be conceived unitively or dualistically, the former resolving conflict and the latter accentuating it.

ALL ACTS AIMING EACH MAN'S SELF-HAPPINESS,
MUST SPELL AT ONCE THE HAPPINESS OF THE
OTHER FELLOW-MAN: These words from the latter half of the verse have an apodictic finality of form, and enunciate correctly and succinctly the whole foundation of the ethics on which the Guru's idea of human relations are based. The law of all morality is stated here in unequivocal terms. This law is conceived strictly according to the Science of the Absolute, whose method is dialectical and not merely rational. It should be noticed here that the ends and means of morality and the subjective and the objective aspects of it are brought together in a way which is in keeping with the Science of the Absolute. The personal and moral factors or elements involved have to be submitted to a dialectically-valid operation to yield correct results.

One classical example of making wrong use of dialectical reasoning is contained in the Bhagavad Gita (II.5) where Arjuna shows himself as a person capable of dialectics but, as when a telescope is turned the wrong way, the certitude that he arrives at becomes vitiated by a certain negativism whose fallacy requires a master dialectician like Krishna, the Guru of the Gita, to put into relief in the chapters that follow this verse. We should not linger over the subtleties involved here for fear of a long digression.

The use of dialectics is for double affirmation, as double negation cancels each negation by its positive and unitive import of a highly imaginary order. When we say, for example, 'darkness has no existence apart from light', the double negation of darkness involved in its denial in absolute terms, brings into being an

absolute notion of light in a double sense. This verity is implied already in grammar and in mathematics where dialectics is tacitly recognized. The good of man must be understood as belonging to the context of the Absolute; and what is good for humanity and what is good for the individual, both subjectively and objectively understood, must all point to the absolute human value representing the good of each and all at once. No act can be considered ethically valid if it is only of partial application.

It is often thought that religion and ethics depend on the person concerned and are therefore relative to the individual. This is not the way to look at truth. It has to be from both its aspects of self and non-self. Correctly speaking, morality, though personal, cannot afford to connive at error in the furthest corner of the world. Each man is his brother's keeper. One man unjustly treated anywhere in the world calls for retribution from the whole of humanity with one voice. It is in this sense that slavery is immoral, and that a mere mechanical equality is not desirable either. The dialectics of the one and the many involved here has to be kept in mind if the full implication of this law enunciated here is to be understood in the spirit intended by the author.

Part III

Rajen has been following the class since very early on, but has finally sent a very important critique. The next three verses especially deal directly with a definition of good versus bad, if you will, so it is good (sic) to bring these questions up just now. Very timely! (And to me, evidence of the Absolute at work....)

I would say the main question boils down to one shared by many others: how can we accept the Self (Absolute) without compromising our healthy skepticism? Isn't it a matter of faith? Corollary: is postulating the Absolute even necessary? I will throw this out to everyone before I add my thoughts:

“The core idea is this: we are the Absolute, and our nature is absolute bliss.”

Thus begins the penultimate paragraph of the Class Notes relating to Verse 22. Subsequent part of this paragraph illustrates or elaborates the essence behind this sentence.

The reading of this paragraph left one with a lingering doubt about the correctness, or even incorrectness, of the case made out. This person, therefore, raises a hand seeking some clarification. One has no basis yet to say that “We are the Absolute” or that “our nature is absolute Bliss”. The fact is that this person has not realized the Absolute. This ‘self’ has not Known the one spelled with capital “S”. The issue, therefore, is how far would the point made be appropriate?

There is another related aspect that may require examination. Way back, when one read Ayn Rand’s books, doubts similar to that of Joanne, or the one brought up by Michael Moore, arose in this person’s mind too. One remembers clearly, how the philosophy propounded by Ayn Rand agitated this mind. Ultimately the issue became the need for defining criteria for evaluating ‘good’ versus ‘bad’. It occurred that whatever is ‘life supporting’ could be considered as ‘good’ and *vice versa* for ‘bad’. This is so because the ‘self’ cannot be a particular part of the ‘whole’. The ‘self’ has to be seen as a random part of the ‘whole’, the whole consisting of everyone and everything around. Once this criterion is devised, Ayn Rand’s philosophy of ‘objectivism’ made sense then. If a person acts in a manner that harms anyone else, it is bound to result in complimentary response, firstly, within the person himself or from the other as also from the collective group – the person, the clan, the society, the law, etc. Unless one supports the life of the other, one cannot hope to be similarly supported. . The reason for going into these details was not to justify Ayn Rand’s philosophy but to suggest that perhaps the definition of good or bad as attempted then can also be used to interpret this Verse. It may become easier to understand the Verse, despite the

fact of one not having Known the Absolute, as pointed out initially.

(This is the first time that one is seeking entry into an ongoing discussion in the class. One does so with some degree of hesitation and a sense of humility. If any flaw is to be found, one would be grateful to be so advised).

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Jake has provisionally completed his *That Alone* commentary, so we can look forward to having it as a weekly addition:

To say that “happiness is the main goal of life” (p. 156) is to repeat a truth common to all religious/philosophical traditions. But it is in his commentary on this verse that Nitya demonstrates what I find fundamentally spectacular about *That Alone*: a drilling down into the truths that for the most part are passed over as beyond human understanding. Happiness may, indeed, be a life goal, but without reasoned support, the statement becomes platitude. Nitya’s purpose is to erase that quality as he explains the guru’s twenty-second verse.

In his opening few pages, Nitya explains the first of two causes of happiness: the senses and the mind. Everything we do or think is designed to ease our condition in some way, from eating to sitting to coughing and so on. These kinds of trivial adjustments qualify as happiness under its larger umbrella (as do physical pleasures) and indicate the enormous number of forms happiness can take. What we eat, where we eat, and so on, indicate the highly stylized and personalized dimensions that our happiness can assume. Of particular note at this point is the nature of this kind of happiness. In order to be satisfied in this domain, we locate objects external to us and quite naturally transfer our desire for them to the thing itself (the chair, bed, food dish, etc.). In a strictly physical context, the thing becomes the prized and necessary item

in order for the happiness to be actualized. Our skills of projection, in other words, we develop long before we know we are doing so, and happiness becomes possible only through acquisition of that external thing.

Fulfilling this urge, this *priyam*, writes Nitya citing the Guru, leads us to all kinds of confusion. We desire something because of latent pre-rational urges that lead to desires then to will then to action. Complicating this model still further is the fact that others in our social circle are involved along the way, especially when the desire is directed at another person, such as is the case of lovers. In each situation, however, others are involved in one way or another, and it is in these collateral arrangements that the first series of unintended consequences arises. For in each case an effort is made to a more or less degree to make the happiness a common experience and thereby to unite the participants. Nitya uses the term *svakiya priyam* as a label: “Let my own happiness be your happiness; let your happiness be my happiness” (p. 158). In this connection a bi-polarity is established which is foreign to the brute who seeks only his own sensory satisfaction. (The possibilities for miscalculations are legion.)

The hidden cause of happiness, its true source, is the “self-luminous light” of the Absolute out of which all forms arise and recede. Because of our early and consistent training to survive in a world of necessity, we easily lose sight of this fundamental reality. The Self, not the ego-self, is that which remains always constant and is that which translates all our existential experiences (such as those involving a gift object) into phenomenological experiences (detecting love in the gift) even though the two operate in different domains. The happiness, because it is at base an essential element of an “all embracing consciousness of knowledge” is of that single one reality (p. 160). Happiness in any form in which it is pursued or realized is ultimately a universal—“That thou art.” Because each of our Selves is that universal happiness in its purest form, *the other* does not exist as all boundaries are erased in a cosmic love,

an “all in all” that John Milton positioned as the true form of God’s oneness.

Nitya concludes his commentary by noting that realized souls who operate always in this oneness do so as a “spontaneous expression of Self-love” quite distinct from an egoic self love always aimed at aggrandizing that construction built by the mind and senses and anchored in an attachment to manifestation those organs can identify. The distinction between *Self-love* and *self-love* makes Nitya’s comments about husbands, wives, children—all people—comprehensible. When he notes, “no parent loves the child for the sake of the child, but for the joy of the Self,” or that no man loves anything for the sake of the thing, he is standing on the firm ground of transcendent/immanent bi-polarity. The statements appear to be celebrations of narcissism only for those embedded in an egoic worldview where *love* is *attachment* and the other is always feared.

Part IV

Here is my response to Rajen. For easy reference, I epitomized his questions as how can we accept the Self (Absolute) without compromising our healthy skepticism? Isn’t it a matter of faith? Is postulating the Absolute even necessary? I think we can leave the question of good and bad for the next couple of verses, which really do address them head on.

Dear Rajen,

First of all, I want to commend you for using *penultimate* correctly, meaning “next to last.” Not too many get it right. It sounds like it should mean “really, really, absolutely last,” but it doesn’t.

Narayana Guru has made a compelling case, I believe, that we are the Absolute, but a part of us routinely rejects it as facile. There is a reason the rishis have given “I am the Absolute” and “The Absolute is you” as fit subjects for perennial meditation:

there is nothing self-evident about it. It takes a profound experience to convince us, and when that occurs oneness is the first and most compelling fact, but until then our doubts linger.

In the meantime we want to maintain our healthy skepticism, and that's fine. I have a suggestion that might help with the doubts, based on yoga. Please let us know your further thoughts on this subject.

For most of our life most of us have been consciously and unconsciously chanting the mantra "I am not the Absolute." We have been busy noticing how we don't fit in, how we are different from our surroundings, unique. Although perfectly true, this has created a lopsided state of mind that demonstrably produces much heartburn and environmental chaos. A yogi should notice this and decide to chant the opposite mantra for awhile, so as to come closer to a neutral state of balance. "I am the Absolute" and "The Absolute is everything" are the corrective mindsets to try on for size. Once we have corrected the imbalance we can drop the whole subject. We are what we are, and our theoretical definitions tend to separate us from whatever that might mean. The whole point of Self-Realization is to become what we are, which would be ridiculous and unnecessary if we hadn't lost something critical. (See Paul's response below.)

Replacing our negative mantras with positive ones isn't so irksome if the Absolute is taken to be the totality of existence and nonexistence, which must necessarily include us, but humans have a tendency to anthropomorphize even *brahman*, and thereby limit it.

We have also pondered the holographic universe theory of physics, which postulates that each monad of the universe contains the whole. The rishis liked the image of dewdrops, each of which reflects the same sun from its unique perspective.

In the introduction to my upcoming book, *The Path to the Guru*, I have included an explanation of the Absolute which you may find helpful:

The Absolute

The Absolute is a philosophically rigorous term that has fallen on hard times due to linguistic confusion, but is centrally important in Indian thought. It sums up the unitive position that all is one, and is used in place of more limited terms like God or Nature because it is impeccably neutral, whereas there is always a temptation to imagine some things are not God, for instance, or are abhorrent to nature.

Absolutism, which is another matter entirely, has given the Absolute a bad name. Absolutism is when a political belief is considered to be absolute and its acceptance is forced on everyone. Where the Absolute is all-inclusive, absolutism is harshly exclusive. A seeker of truth must clearly distinguish these two utterly different principles with similar names.

Despite the postulation of an Absolute, which keeps consciousness properly oriented and is common to all systems, whether philosophical, religious, or scientific, there is no such thing as absolute realization. Anything realized has to be relative, less than the whole, which means there is no absolute right or wrong, or any last word. Whenever the mind goes beyond its accustomed boundaries, it undergoes an expansion that feels like liberation or realization, but no one has yet ascertained any end to human potential. Greater expansion is a perennial possibility.

Because of this, there is always more to be discovered. Once we realize that our knowledge is inevitably partial, we will know that learning never ends and there is no ultimate panacea. Anyone claiming finalized answers is in fact seriously deluded, and is most likely intending to manipulate others for their personal benefit. In any case the idea of finality brings growth to a halt.

If the Absolute is imagined to be a fixed item that can be disdained or rejected, it is not the Absolute. Nataraja Guru emphasized this frequently, asserting, "The notion of the Absolute has somehow to transcend all paradox, and even vestiges suggestive of it. This is an utterly necessary position,

epistemologically speaking. Ultimate truth cannot be thought of as having a rival or be ranged against itself.”

Because of the confusion, let's set forth a definition, from the Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

The Absolute is a term used by philosophers to signify the ultimate reality regarded as one and yet as the source of variety; as complete, or perfect, and yet as not divorced from the finite, imperfect world. The term was introduced into the philosophical vocabulary at the very end of the eighteenth century by Schelling and Hegel....

In 1803...Schelling argues that philosophy, as concerned with first principles, must be “an absolute science,” that it is therefore concerned with what is absolute, and that, since all things are conditioned, philosophy must be concerned with the activity of knowing rather than things or objects.

“Philosophy,” he writes, “is the science of the Absolute,” and the Absolute is the identity of the act of knowledge and what is known. Schelling gives the name “Absolute Idealism” to the philosophy in which this identity is recognized. The exponent of Absolute Idealism, he argues, seeks out the intelligence that is necessarily embodied in nature, and he achieves by means of “intellectual intuition” a grasp of the identity between knower and known.²

Indian philosophy predates these Western philosophers by at least two millennia, but the concept is identical.

The central claim of Vedantic philosophy, as presented in the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, is that each and every person is a manifestation of the Absolute, and our challenge is to come to remember that truth in a world where objects and events constantly distract us from it, often even intentionally. This not only gives us unlimited hope, it empowers us to do our best. We are accorded the highest possible respect in advance. If everyone and everything is sacred, then there is no possibility of sacrilege. We have no need

for divine intervention, because we are already miraculous. Life is a continuous “divine intervention,” so what more could be needed?

For this reason, students of Indian wisdom are instructed to meditate that they are the Absolute and the Absolute is everything. Seekers start out imagining the goal is somewhere else. They are not realized, are not worthy, and so on. These are all fictions that evaporate under scrutiny.

Narayana Guru once said that to know that the wave and ocean are not two is the goal of spiritual search. The starting point of our search is usually to see God or the Absolute as separate from the world. The truth of the matter is that they are one. Realizing this is all that matters, but it’s far more than an intellectual exercise. It has to become a living reality at every moment. That takes a little digging for most of us.

Sadly, we are so brainwashed and have forgotten who we are so thoroughly that we shy away from even the prospect of seeking for our true nature. Instead of daring to be our cosmic selves, we have learned to reduce our expectations to just making the best of a bad situation. To restore our normal courage the rishis recommend meditating on the phrase *tat tvam asi*, “The Absolute is what I am.”

Keeping in mind that anything that has an opposite is not the Absolute, it cannot be said that the Absolute is big or small. Obviously, if we define the Absolute as unknowable and indefinable, and we equate truth with it, then truth is going to come in as indefinite and unknowable. Curiously, the claim of Vedanta is that we CAN know the Absolute, by participating in it via mystical intuition and surrendering our partial vision for an overwhelming participation in the whole. Many religions offer the assurance that such an experience is valid, not delusory. We are invited to judge for ourselves.

* * *

Here’s Paul’s contribution. I’m sure Rajen is hoping to hear from a few more of us:

RE: The demise of healthy skepticism in the postulating of (or faith in) an Absolute.

Hi Rajen,

I was glad to see your e-mail Scott sent out yesterday (I miss our philosophical discussions on Speaking Tree). I hope you are finding benefit and challenge in Scott & Deb's Atmo class. I find it out of the 'ordinary' that for every question I believe resolved, that single resolution creates ten more questions. I am learning that maybe there is wisdom in valuing the questions as much as their apparent resolutions.

You pose a collective apprehension that I would like to contribute my two cents worth.

RE: *"I would say the main question boils down to one shared by many others: how can we accept the Self (Absolute) without compromising our healthy skepticism? Isn't it a matter of faith? Corollary: is postulating the Absolute even necessary? I will throw this out to everyone before I add my thoughts:"*

First, I must preface a realization that I deeply value a healthy skepticism, but no faith is required. If it were not for skepticism I would still be indentured in servitude unto a deceptive self-manufactured reality. For forty years my conception of god was that of an old guy sitting in heaven writing down everything I did in one of two columns labeled "right" & "wrong". If I did more right than wrong, I went to heaven. If I did more wrong than right, I went to hell. Fear and guilt were my only behavioral motivators. Looking back, what terrifies me most was not the prison walls of my self-construction, rather the fact that I learned to love my incarceration as a self-sanctified divine intervention. It was the angel of skepticism that made me question the perceptual false-reality of my experientially limited truth. Within skeptic questioning the Absolute (through proper reasoning or dialectic thought) became more empirically valid than my ego's distorted

version of my conditioned truth. It is through healthy skepticism that the Absolute becomes a Self-evident Truth. As Truth became Self-evident, I then needed faith to postulate the validity of my conditioned transience to be labeled as my personal reality or truth (maya). What I previously believed to be 'real' became a not-so-subtle form of insanity. And what I used to believe as Un-Real now became the only rational & logical identity of Self as Absolute Truth. The Absolute is not conditioned or conditional. I (the ego) am conditioned and conditional. Absolute Truth is single by nature. Relative truth is multiple and many faceted within nature (Prakriti). Absolute Truth is pure in its singularity & potential. Any other version of that Single Truth is form of miss-truth (duality). That single Truth (Spirit or Purusha) envelopes both the un-manifested and manifested aspects of our Being. When I remember that *I am That*, the false separation of self (ego) from the Greater Self (God or Absolute) is unified with and as the Whole.

~ All is One ~

~ we are paradox wherein dualities loose definition ~

Part V

A few more helpful ideas have occurred to me regarding Rajen's questions.

In the elusive matter of unity and oneness, Nitya's Foreword to *That Alone* is well worth revisiting. After struggling to write something coherent about the subject, I'm left in awe once again of his seemingly effortless ability to express the inexpressible, a tribute to the wedding of his poetic soul and lofty intelligence, seasoned with humor. You can almost hear him chuckling as he told the initial story. It's well worth checking back in to this masterpiece every so often.

My audio talk, *Coming Back to Ourselves: Finding Authentic Direction in the Chaos of Being*, provides a different angle on the puzzle. The authenticity in question is the Absolute, which is our

core nature, and I talk about very familiar and noncontroversial aspects of our life in respect of it. It's available for download from wetwaremedia.com.

It's rather elusive these days, but a well-executed psychedelic experience almost always features a compelling sense of unity, accompanied with amazement that you could ever have forgotten such a thing. There's nothing foreign about it, that's for sure! It feels exactly like who you really are. It clears up the doubt very effectively and permanently.