

8/20/13  
Verse 28

Without bottom or top, from the bottom to the crest where it terminates—  
what is known vividly is *turiya* consciousness;  
inert matter does not know; having understood this,  
know that what is said to remain in between is not knowledge.

Free translation:

That which has no beginning and no end and clearly sees everything from bottom to top is *turiya*, transcendent consciousness. The other extreme is the inert body, which has no knowledge. That which appears to exist in between, articulated as the output of cogitation, is ignorance.

Nataraja Guru's:

Bereft of bottom as of top, from bottom to the crest  
What transparent awareness has, that is *turiya*-consciousness;  
The inert no knowledge has: what it cogitating tells  
From in between, is no knowledge at all, do mark!

Our vibrant group, never the same twice it seems, was treated to a perfect twilit evening, with the Coast Range mountains glowing beneath a radiant sky, made even more luminous by a rising full moon that by the end of class “gave a luster of midday to objects below.” It was almost too easy to sink into a profound reverie and remain blissfully silent.

Nitya's commentary is so perfect that we had relatively little to add, and yet it is deceptively amusing, because we are being asked to call into question our entire life. Being an expert dialectician, Nitya would often laugh and joke when delivering the most fearsome teachings, because otherwise they would call up our

well-built defense mechanisms. We readily let in humor, though, and then it works on us from the inside if we are alive to it.

For those who miss the serious implication of this verse, Nitya makes it explicit:

Now we come to a very difficult situation where we must go around a curve, so to speak, in our understanding. All the conditionings which we have so far called learning are no better than the salivating of Pavlov's dogs. All the rewards and punishments which you have had so far in the form of education help you only to salivate when the bell rings. Don't you want something better than that?

Well, no, we keep hoping our educated conditioning is going to somehow produce a miracle, and free us. It's only when we get impatient enough with its false promise that we cast about for something different.

Nitya was a master at drawing illuminating examples from the ordinary objects that we routinely take for granted. In this case he spoke of the white foamy blobs that covered the ground at that time of year, spit bug spittle being an uncanny reverberation of Pavlov's salivating dogs:

I like to compare the individual to a common insect, the spit bug. The spit bug is very tiny, smaller than a coriander seed. All the time it spits out a kind of foam all around itself. When you go for a walk in the morning, you can see its spittle all over the leaves and grass. It looks just like spit, but if you examine it you will find this tiny bug concealed in it.

Like that, individuation goes on spitting out constructs all around it. The tiny, fearful ego continually spews forth clouds of obfuscation in order to conceal its sense of insignificance, but its delusory images of glory appear to be no more than unwholesome excrescences to passersby. This is also what the single cell of the fertilized ovum is doing. It goes on spitting out more and more

cells until it becomes a fetus. Then the fetus becomes a child, and the child a grown-up. We are still creating spittle all around. We spit out potentials; those potentials in us can be actualized at any time. Our daily wakeful experiences are expressions of motivations which lie buried in what is spewed out of an original program.

The point of the verse, and indeed much of Atmopadesa Satakam, is that we “insignificant bugs” identify with the seemingly significant constructs we throw up to hide our delicate natures, to such an extent that we forget who we are. It’s not that we shouldn’t be spitting out (read: actualizing) our potentials; that’s what the whole game is about. It’s just that once we are firmly ensconced in our “excrescences” we lose our heads over them. We are willing and eager to fight over things that we should be laughing about: the more or less ludicrous fictions that are our common predicament.

We can hardly be blamed for taking ourselves so seriously, since everything in our social environment urges us to adopt a persona and accept that we are nothing else. It is undoubtedly an essential stage of development, to become *something*. But that should not be the end of the project. Deep down we know that our projected image is false, or only partially true. We are much more than that. We need to revive the memory—the living reality—of our true nature. In a world where everything militates against authenticity, it takes a brave soul to maintain a measure of detachment from their superficial identity.

I thought of an example last night but didn’t mention it. Many years ago a friend of mine was reveling in his identity as a gay man, delighted to talk about it with me as a nonjudgmental person. It was in the early days of the gay pride movement, and coming out and accepting yourself as gay was a huge issue, not to mention seeking acceptance from the broader society. There was an immense release of pent up energy, of boundless giddiness, in the air at the time. I offended him by (rather tactlessly I suppose) asserting that the catchword of that era, “identity,” was a stumbling

block to self-awareness. I'm not sure he's ever quite forgiven me, though we're still close friends. But his reaction made me realize that at an early stage of development, identity does have a value, even though it's true that any partial identification is bound to be an impediment to full self-awareness in the long run. Once the giddiness, the blessed relief of released identity dies down, you can just be yourself again. Oppressed people—meaning all of us in one way or another—have to first stand up for ourselves and acknowledge the limitations foisted on us by our oppressive surroundings. But if we insist we are only the one single aspect that is inviting the oppression, we are dooming ourselves to unending harassment. It's the same with racial or caste identity: there is a measure of benefit to initially thinking of yourself in limited terms so you can find common ground with your community, but ultimately it is essential to cast off all limits and expand your self-image to the utmost.

Nitya offers us a “secret hint” of how to integrate our unitive core with our necessary extension in actuality, which is to see life as a kind of fantastic zoo or department store featuring many different animals or goods, but to not feel any obligation to identify with any particular aspect. Since all awareness is partial, we don't abandon ourselves to it, we accept its limitations. This could cause tremendous angst unless we are grounded in something more real, because our true nature longs for solidity. The mistake we make is to try to make our temporary constructions appear permanent, instead of going around a parabolic curve, as Nitya puts it, where our horizontal fascinations are transmuted into vertical aspirations. The horizontal world of percepts and concepts is a chimera, a perpetual shimmering fog that forever eludes our grasp. The common lot is to keep grasping, but the Vedantic solution is to turn away from the fog and seek within for our satisfaction.

The world we live in has a tendency to fix us in place, to make us feel like a caged animal on display. We draw more visitors if our cage has a neat label with our name and habits explicitly spelled out. The image recalls Verse 9, where a

contemplative sits under a tree covered by clinging vines, taking care not to be caught by them. If we momentarily drop our guard, the vines could bind us fast. So we watch them carefully, even admire their beauty and cleverness, but take care to keep out of their grasp.

As Bill described it, Verse 27 tells us that existence is a kind of magical display, and Verse 28 is about not getting caught up in the magic. We can watch the performance and be entertained by it, but shouldn't be fooled. Of course, as Michael said, living in a cage often seems safer, because you can close the door and you can have a keeper. Ideas and life are neatly partitioned, so you don't have to worry about them. That's a temptation most people readily succumb to. The magic show convinces us that someone else is in charge and we buy into it, thereby surrendering our initiative and independence. It's the universal fatal flaw.

We also twist every lesson life offers us to fit our preconceived notions. Jake talked about sharing the zoo and store analogies with a church group he attends. That particular church is basically a pragmatic institution aimed at impacting the material world, and there is no spiritual feeling in it. Jake was amazed that everyone loved the analogies, but they took them exactly the opposite of how he understood them. Not realizing they themselves were firmly identified with their roles, like animals in a zoo, they saw themselves as trying to liberate the animals. And of course that's another valuable lesson: we identify with really excellent visions. We are really "good." We do what's right, and we want the best. Obviously we aren't going to imagine that that's a limiting identity—it's a liberating identity. The spittle we dress ourselves up with is really beautiful stuff, nicely sculpted. It protects us so well because it is above criticism.

I suppose that's why a legitimate guru criticizes you right where you believe you are invulnerable, and why only a rare seeker dares to listen to them. Of course they're wrong to criticize your best features!

A zoo cage is a polite term for a prison, after all. Paul grew up in a church where they were quite sure that everybody else was in prison. They were the liberators. They knew God, and if people would just listen to them they would be saved. Otherwise they have no chance. Burn, baby, burn!

All of us are like Procrustes, the ogre who invited visitors into his home, but then chopped them down until they fit in his too-small guest bed. We don't really see the guest on our doorstep, we see what we expect, what we want to see. We mangle them to fit our world view, and in the process kill them. It is so tempting to imagine our partial view is absolutely correct, and to wreak untold damage as a result.

The lesson here is that everything is partial and therefore subject to revision. Only the pure witness, the turiya, the perfect transparency of vision, approaches absoluteness. Any reaction, pro or con, yanks us firmly back into the provisional world. It's only our fear and insecurity that makes us impute absolute values to relative matters. True believers are those who are secretly aware they don't know anything, and cannot bear to have their weakness be revealed to others. Some might even kill to keep their shameful secret hidden.

Susan followed Nataraja Guru's suggestion in his previous verse commentary to notice the link between Verse 10 and the present, and she read us out the last paragraph of Nitya's commentary, as it makes the connection perfectly clear. I'll add a bit more, as it's so germane:

In the Isavasya Upanishad, we are asked to become familiar with the secret of ignorance, where I consider 'you' and 'I' as two. We are also asked to become familiar with the secret of wisdom, that 'you' and 'I' are the same. If we do not know these secrets, we can be led into ridiculous situations. Unitive understanding does not mean you can jump out of the transactional world and become something else. The world does not evaporate away when you realize the one 'I' that

pervades everything. It continues to be there, so you have to come to terms with it.

All the same, the truth is that there is no world other than the one you construct out of your own concepts. It is something like a novelist or playwright who makes characters out of his own imagination, and then discovers after a few chapters that he is bound by the limitations of his creations. He has become so committed to the characters that he can't make any changes. The members of the cast refuse to allow any enlargement of scope or vision by the author. It is his own creation, but the creator has become fully dominated by his creations. In the same way we create our own world and then we become afraid of it, or we get caught up in it and we don't know how to deal with it. It is an enigmatic situation.

The meditation that one should engage in with this verse is to see the oneness, which you know through the witnessing consciousness, and also the curious way in which the world created by you makes things difficult for you.

Deb brought us to the close with one of her favorite images. We are standing over a bubbling spring of vibrant living consciousness that is constantly feeding us, rising up in a gushing fountain and flowing away, never becoming dusty or frozen. We cannot hold onto it. It is ever moving, like the wave mystics just open their heart to.

On that note we closed with a meditation that could have lasted forever. The mutual support and fellowship of the greater Gurukula was palpable in the room. It is so tenuous, so subtle, yet that is one of its greatest strengths. There is no heavy organization, no fixed rules, no duties. Everyone is free to have their own perspectives and lifestyles, and we simply and lovingly help each other to refine our understanding. Why is that so unusual? It is the motivation in every heart the world over, but it so often gets stymied, lost in the chaos. It is delicious to knit it back together, as we did last night, and just allow ourselves to be. No one was

required to proclaim their identity. Everyone was just what we are, undefined, unburdened. Aum.

## Part II

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

Without bottom or top, from the bottom to the crest where it terminates—

what is known vividly is *turiya* consciousness; inert matter does not know; having understood this, know that what is said to remain in between is not knowledge.

Everybody has some knowledge of something. Mostly the knowledge we speak of is information of things, people, events and interrelations of properties. Now and then we come to a point where it is natural for us to say, “I do not know.” In a previous verse the Guru defined the self as the knowledge which shines by its own light in an otherwise all-enveloping darkness. What is the darkness he speaks of? Is it the ignorance we are recurrently confronted with? The recognition of ignorance itself is an act of knowledge. When a person says, “I do not know,” it implies two factors. One is the experience of a void, an impasse, a psychological block and a sense of helplessness, and the other is the dissatisfaction of not having experienced a postulated or hypothesized knowledge.

A well-known discipline with which to seek and find knowledge is science. In spite of the enthusiastic pursuit of many truthful seekers in this field, those who have mastered it, like Einstein, Max Plank, Rutherford, Heisenberg, Schrodinger, Sir Arthur Eddington and Bertrand Russell, have stepped down from the claim of absolute knowledge to a modest and humble stand, then told the world not to expect from the scientist a final answer to any ultimate question. All they can assure us of is a statistical approximation of what each observer finds from a particular angle



of vision, which, in all probability, must be coloured with the state of mind of the observer. Even though the basic teachings of the rishis of the Upanishads, the Chinese sages, the Buddha and Christ are looked upon as the echoes of perennial truth, there is a need to follow up the latest revisions in the field of science, so as to keep oneself acquainted with the natural laws that are newly discovered and the earlier findings which have proved either incorrect or inadequate.

What makes it so difficult to have absolute knowledge of things? Nature, to which our mind and body also belong, has in it inertia as one of its main qualities, so it is no wonder that our mind is subjected to blockages caused by its own inertia. The claims of tangibility and verifiability by direct perception have two major disadvantages. Almost all perceptual experiences are lived within the frame of reference of our dreams, without having to use the external organs of sense. The so-called immediacy need not be attributed only to the wakeful moments of perception; the certitude from within, during the dream, is as strong and clear as we perceive it in the wakeful state. If the wakeful state sublates the validity of the dream state, the dream state also sublates the experience of the wakeful. Secondly, the universality of sense data is arrived at by the common consent of what is otherwise confined to each person's private experience.

The darkness which the Guru speaks of covers the state of the wakeful, the dream and deep sleep. The experiences of these three states come under the category of the gross, the subtle and the causal. The Self mentioned in the previous verse is the dispassionate witness of all these states, and it is mentioned in the Mandukya Upanishad as the fourth state, turiya. Non-cognition of duality is the mark of turiya. No amount of information makes that knowledge better or worse and it is never more clear or less clear. It is not relativistic, it is the Absolute.

The knower of the Self calls knowledge only that which is non-differentiated, although within it there is the negative sphere which accounts for all differentiations. When we look at the Self

this way, we can say that the world consciousness is the darkness which resides within the consciousness of the self and operates as the proliferation and actualization of all incipient memories. It is like a dark shadow caused by a bright light; it should not be treated as knowledge.

All that fills the pages of voluminous encyclopedias is to be considered only as information that the little mind of man has arrived at by making shrewd guesses of what the senses have perceived and the mind has tabulated. To a knower of the Self only the realization of the Self is acceptable truth.

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Nataraja Guru's

THERE are two aspects of consciousness within, as given to the contemplative vision. They are to be understood as dependent and independent; as the physical and the psychic or the psycho-physical aspects functioning simultaneously. One has a transparency and clarity, filling the whole of being as from within, without any remainder, spreading from our consciousness of the soles of the feet to the top of the head.

The other kind of awareness is not total, and like the reflex-action in the muscles connecting them with the central nervous system, functions transversely, hesitating and using halting syllogistic reasonings which are only probable and indirect in their nature and weak in their degree of certitude.

On the other hand, single or partial stimulus is translated into total responses by the transparent consciousness. This latter is to be recognized as the 'turiya' consciousness as opposed to the consciousness dependent on the physiological aspect, which is here called inert, and which, by its very nature, is against the notion that life's totality represents. The vertical axis is the dynamic, and the

peripheral bodily responses are static. These two antinomian aspects make up the whole of the consciousness as the interlocking psycho-physical factors, both dependent and independent of each other, and what is more, the physical has an inhibitory effect on the other. Between them, they could represent knowledge and nescience.

The Guru here leaves out of account the usual classification of consciousness into four as in the Mandukya Upanishad:

jagrat = the waking,  
svapna = the dreaming,  
sushupti = the sleeping,  
and turiya = the 'fourth'.

In the Guru's Darsana Mala, as in the Mandukya Upanishad, the fuller description is given. Here, conforming to the necessities of the context, the Guru selects only the 'jagrat' and the 'turiya' (the clear inner all-pervading consciousness) for the sake of contrast. The intermediate ones of the four 'limbs' are implied in the two others selected for mention here. The omitted limbs refer to the dream-world and that of deep or dreamless sleep.

The definite reference to the limits of foot and head here is not to be understood in a mere physiological sense but in a neutral psycho-physical sense. As in space understood as a reality here and now in modern physics, the reference to bodily limits gives to the Absolute Awareness of 'turiya' a fully real status as a concrete universal entity.

### Part III

Jean not only attended the class, but submitted a report:

Paeon to the Atmo class, August 20, 2013

Most times I sit on the other side of the world and follow the Portland Gurukula's Atmo class through Scott's class notes and appendices, all the time wishing I could have been there, too. Last night, wishes came true. On-line classes can give a lot on many planes, but there is nothing quite like real physical presence, sitting in the bosom of a kindly group, focused on the same subject.

My sister and I drove up to Skyline Blvd as the sun was getting low in the sky. We discussed Verse 28 on the way, and I filled her in on the main ideas and key words: spitbug, agitations, the A-U-M-turiya axis, *not* real knowledge vs definite knowledge, the limitations we are ensnared by and how we can keep ourselves outside of that prison.

We arrived at The Place, entered to meet old and new friends, were served hot tea (mine was from Ooty!) and sweet cookies. The sun had set when 13 earnest people gathered in the lower living room looking out on Blue Hills that took me back to the Nilgiris, with golden sky on turquoise background, lighting up the backdrop. The ancient chant began to vibrate from throats around, ending *om shanti shanti shanti*. Scott proceeded to read out Nitya's whole commentary for Verse 28, which was a good grounding. A discussion and commentary ensued.

We were a group of "older" people, 6 women, 7 men, and as such, certain bodily deteriorations are in progress. Eyeglasses had to be fetched. Aging skin needs to be tended. Soft cushions are welcome to sit on. Some good points and moments of levity were missed (by me) due to impaired hearing. The very senses that bring information to our minds, which help to form our perceptions, memories and concepts, are declining in acuity. Even this it is beneficial to sit back and observe.

The blue coastal range became black and faded into the darkening sky, and a bright star shone down from above. As the final words and chants were sounded, it was around 21:30, and my thoughts were with Wendy in Brixham, probably up for her cup of milky tea and early morning meditation. I just *knew* she was with us, then and there.

My own thoughts on Verse 28 may have gone a step further than we touched on last night. Nitya's story about the zoo, and the man who entered the cage and became part of the zoo instead of merely an observer, made me think immediately of when Thoreau protested an early American war by refusing to pay taxes to support it, and so he was jailed. His good friend Emerson came to visit him, and asked, "What are you doing in there, Henry?" The answer he got was, "What are you doing out there, my dear Ralph Waldo?" I found myself questioning the actions of being involved vs being the detached observer. The whole scenario of Srebrenica came up in my mind, of the UN observers from the Netherlands who did nothing to prevent a massacre of 7,000 men and boys. So what are we to do?

The answer came in my last on-line class with Nancy on Patanjali's yoga sutras, and I had time to think about it on the plane ride over the ocean. To put it in my own words, in a way that makes sense to me, it is important to be involved in our daily lives, just as it is important to be able to step back and take in the bigger picture. Both the involvement and the detachment should take place many times each day, in the wink of an eye, so to speak. It's the proverbial "counting to 10" when angry to regain composure. And so, it is all right to enter that cage in the zoo, or to go shop in the department store, if at the same time we can leave the cage, leave the store, and go hang out in that corner of the operating room that so many near-death patients have occupied, when they watched all that was going on to save them, yet were transcended above it. I see it as a Dance of Life, back and forth

between involvement and transcendence, moving as simply and easily as possibly.

It was dark as we drove away from Scott's and Debbie's, and the full Green Corn Moon was on the rise, and the night was young, and people were both going to sleep and rising to meet the day, all over the earth.

Love to you all, and looking forward to seeing many again at Gurupuja at Nancy's.

Jean

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John H wrote:

I am having a hard time with this verse. Some how the contradiction of the dialectic creates a "polylectic" to me  
And what is and isn't become one  
Oddly  
Instead of sending me into a personal crisis  
I feel joy  
Which is welcome at this moment

I hazarded a response:

Unresolvable conflicts can do that, in a non-threatening atmosphere especially. You don't need to reduce your "polylectic" to a dialectic—it just means you're looking at a variety of angles. Life is a very complicated business, as is only fitting. If we could reduce it to a simple formula, it wouldn't be worth the bother. Happily, we can't.

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Continuing Jake's commentary:

Verse 28 can be seen as an extension of the previous one in which Nitya presented the word-contradiction describing our condition vis-à-vis the Absolute: "What is is not known; while what is not is known." In his continuing exposition, Nitya clarifies the matter in practical terms making what appears to be a mutually exclusive statement difficult for even the most dedicated materialist to deny.

In the first section of his commentary, Nitya describes our daily condition in space and time that constitutes our awareness during the awake and dream states. Sense perception and mental constructions fashioned out of them are the stuff out of which we make our worlds. Those impressions, in their place, are limited to the capacity of the organs that create them but can be enhanced to some extent by way of various instruments. Microscopes, telescopes, and so on extend our senses for awhile. Mathematical structures act in the same way, allowing those representative symbols to replace the descriptive functions of the senses, thereby allowing the mind to predict the odds of some kind of result—again for a while. In both cases, however, limits are reached and the sense/mind fails to comprehend. Nitya cites an ordinary condition: watching a rocket blast off into space. At a certain point we lose sight of it and then resort to instruments that can reach so far. Our individual reality is always limited to our position; the horizon is ever-receding regardless of how far we advance. Likewise, he says, as we move through our daily lives, our memories of what we experienced fades almost instantaneously while our accuracy in predicting what will happen is anything but certain.

In both space and time we are therefore adrift while attempting to make a coherence out of that which continuously appears in our experience. Because cause/effect seems to be at work in these encounters we assume it is a universal constant and always true, but this unexamined epistemology as a basis for

reading everything, writes Nitya, very easily comes undone when followed to its logical conclusion: the world and everything in it is an effect of a cause that in the final analysis can have no cause. God, the Prime Mover, whatever, is cause-less thereby undermining the theory totally.

As we live, we experience what our bodies and minds are capable of experiencing, but we have an extremely limited range both internally and externally. Chemical changes within the body occur continuously triggered by forces we can't recognize. To show this internal condition, Nitya follows the geneticists in order to examine biological evolution. Chromosomes carry our information that is duplicated in each cell, thereby building our biological selves automatically and autonomously. This system, "self-agitated," responds to stimuli in different ways, and it is the studying of this process of agitation-response that constitutes what we commonly recognize as knowledge (science, medicine, etc.). In other words, elaborating on these agitations, explaining them, is the gigantic project of western education in its pursuit of "knowledge" that Narayana Guru, writes Nitya, says "is not worthy of being called knowledge" (p. 199).

Confined to "the world of agitation of the nervous system," this version of the pursuit of knowledge, it seems to me, is limited to the "unreal world" which "is" the continuously manifesting/dissolving ever-present arising that never ceases—as waves on water. In this relativist world still made up of the wakeful, dream, and deep-sleep consciousness, the fourth state (*turyia*)—the Self (the eternal unchanging observer witnessing the other three) can be denied while at the same time assumed. That which allows us to stand aside observing phenomenal manifestation requires a place separated from that which is being observed. By being unaware of such a distinction, we can maintain the illusion that what is observed as form is of the same "stuff" as that which is observing, a condition taken as fact by the materialist. When both the observer and the observed are made solely of sense-based emerging/dissolving fabric, the question of



value must likewise conform to the same mandate so *how* becomes the equivalent of *why*. Knowing, for example, how the circulatory system operates and how it might be altered in order to delay death in specific cases translates into knowing why it operates.

The persistence of the *why* question suggests its source may stand outside the phenomenal, but in a practical sense, spending time with this kind of inquiry into meaning has no value for those married to the world of necessity, where the gene, as some leading atheists have said, controls life's direction. Indeed, for this worldview, wasting one's efforts considering the question of life's purpose could quite possibly be an obstacle to survival. (As a corollary to this rationalizing—if the Self were the ego-self only, it could be aware of nothing more and inquiries into the Absolute would never come up.)

Originating in the Absolute, that which *is* and therefore *is not* (phenomenal), the Self, Nitya points out, transcends “the triple states of deep sleep, dream, and wakefulness” (p. 199) beyond cause and effect. This fourth state is where knowledge/transcendence resides, where the conditionings we've mistaken for knowledge become seen for what they are—“rewards and punishments . . . in the form of education [that] helps you only to salivate when the bell rings” (p. 200).

In his last few paragraphs, Nitya offers advice on how we can best deal with this daily condition which moves us between the world of ignorance and that of enlightened knowledge. First of all, he points to the *Isavasya Upanishad* where the Rishis note that those who rejoice in either world as superior live in darkness and that “those who know the secret of the world of ignorance transcend death” (p. 200). In other words, appreciating both for what they are allows us the balance we need as we careen daily between enlightenment and ignorance. Nitya uses two analogies to illustrate the point, one is about the zoo and the other concerns a department store. In the first example, Nitya discusses a zoo visitor who gets so caught up “experiencing” the zoo that he climbs in a cage and refuses to leave. In the second example, the

shopper lives the same attachment; in this case, there are just too many interesting items in the store for him to let go. The hypnotic power of the phenomenal creates amnesia for the inmates who cling to the phenomenal as the one true faith. Buddha, Christ, and others, says Nitya, periodically offer methods for over-coming this “zoo business” while at the same time offering us a way to live in it as it truly is, a point repeated by others in a variety of languages and philosophies:

The nature of intelligence is not to identify itself passively and as it were blindly with the phenomena which it registers but, on the contrary, to reduce these to their essences and thus to come in the end to know That which knows. (Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute*, p. 237).

#### Part IV

Dipika gets it:

I love this verse...it's like a clanger  
a wake up call to all of us who are drifting in sweet somnolence  
we really do imagine that if we are 'good' we are on the right path  
that the Universe has its ways of working & we can wait for it to  
show us the way

Now... the clanging is in my head

you're saying I'm responsible  
I'm the creator of my world & my circumstances...I know that to a  
certain extent  
Surely am not wholly souly responsible  
I come with my vasanas so half my life I behave like the Pavlovian  
dog  
After which I start recognising my behaviour  
And behaving more like a human than a dog

But even then the ‘good’ is still a caged reaction

And the fact that I have observed this change...is possibly a start

Cant wait to read the rest...

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Susan too:

I’ve written something to go out to the class. Will wonders never cease?

Among the many wonderful things said during last night’s class, it was Debbie’s comment near the end that struck me the most. She talked about needing to be vulnerable and open. Thinking about these words helps me to make the leap that Nitya is asking us to make in his commentary – to go around the “curve” from the horizontal to the vertical. When I become ensnared in the horizontal world, when I start feeling anxious and grasping about hanging on to the world I have created (my spittle), it helps me to remember about being vulnerable and open. Those words unlock some kind of fortress in me. These days, I find I am very concerned about the positive outcomes I want for my children. Peter and Sarah are now 17 and 20 and still I am hoping to give them the bits of wisdom that will assure their safety and happiness. But of course they don’t want to hear what I have to say anymore. They are beginning to live their own lives now and I really need to let go and be open to what might happen. It’s very difficult. I remind myself that I have given them lots of love and support. I have to trust what I have given them and I also have to allow myself to be vulnerable in this situation. For me, this means that I may feel uncomfortable because I am stepping off of what I perceive to be solid ground. I am accepting that I am not in control. Instead of putting all my attention toward my children, I can sink

into myself in a way that I often forget to do. As Scott mentioned in the notes, the solution is “to turn away from the fog and seek within for our satisfaction.” I could spend the rest of my days worrying about my children and trying to control so many aspects of my own life, but ultimately I know this is a kind of barred enclosure. When I do let go and open to the possibilities, I am turning to that cloud of unknowing, the vertical aspect, the Absolute. Though this is undefinable and mysterious, I can say that it is indeed satisfying. It is wonderful to be free of the cage and to dive into a “place” that is so alive and honest and rich. I am thankful to have our class and Nitya’s commentaries to remind me about being open and vulnerable so that I don’t become too comfortable in my various cages.

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I’m presently reading *Vision from the Margin: A Study of Sri Narayana Guru Movement in the Literature of Nitya Chaitanya Yati*, by George Thadathil, and plan to submit a review for the next issue of Gurukulam Magazine, (which is also the last from Portland). Discovering it was quite a nice surprise, as I think it’s the only English language book expressly about Nitya. George is a Catholic priest from Kerala, now teaching in Darjeeling, who I met at the Kochi conference this summer. He seems to have read everything Nitya wrote. Anyway, the following paragraph popped up a few hours after I wrote the bit about identity in the class notes. Narayana Guru was born into the Izhava caste, Kerala’s largest, and his social reform efforts are often framed in respect to it:

The pedagogical project... to transform the self... aims at resolving the tension between identity and equality. Identity speaks up for uniqueness, for specificity and subjectivity, whereas equality stands for sameness, egalitarian treatment and citizenship. The two are contrary ideals and harmony requires both—equality at [the] experiential level of mutual

relationships and identity at the experiential level of qualifying the complementarity of relationships. The Izhava history with which we are grappling reveals how there is a possibility of transcending caste identity in the process of claiming or demanding equality. It is a movement in the direction of being oneself and more, not less. In other words, the transcending of the pejorative sense of caste is possible by acquiring the privileged identity resulting from a superior (heightened) consciousness. A consciousness provided by and built upon advaitic intuition. (123-4)