

9/3/13
Verse 30

Inert matter does not know; knowledge has no thought
and does not articulate; knowing knowledge to be all,
letting go, one's inner state becomes boundless;
indeed, thereafter he never suffers confined within a body.

Free translation:

The inert body does not know. It does not cogitate or articulate. One who knows all this to be only variations of knowledge becomes expansive in the transparency of comprehension, and does not thereafter suffer from body identification.

Nataraja Guru's:

The inert, no awareness it can have; awareness no thinking needs,
Nor does it any discourse hold; knowing awareness to be all,
And then renouncing, transparency of spirit gaining
In body-bounds confined, he suffers nevermore, indeed!

Our class was particularly rich, enlivened by several visitors from afar, three wise magi (Jean, Fred and Peter) who followed the star of the Gurupuja in search of newborn wisdom and took a detour to the Portland class on their ways home.

Verse 30 stands out as one of Nitya's favorites, so it is not surprising that he takes us deep into the subject matter. He often harped on the concluding point, that pain is natural and inevitable but we have a tendency to augment it, adding all sorts of fears and projections that prolong our misery. If we minimize those, very few events will be capable of unseating us from the horse we're riding.

As usual we had a real world example this week. At the Gurupuja, Desiree's dog accidentally nipped her hand, opening a

two inch (5 cm) tear across the back of her hand. Desiree admitted she is traumatically upset by injuries, but she knew that, and so she averted her eyes while several of us attended to her. All through the stitching process she looked the other way, knowing that the sight of what was happening would freak her out. Because of this, she kept her spirits up throughout. Many people get carried away by the sight of their own blood, even in a trivial injury.

On the other hand, if she'd denied anything had happened to her and striven to suppress her awareness of it—typical human behavior—she would have amplified subconscious feelings that would have prolonged the upset produced by her aversion. But she accepted what had happened, trusted in her caregivers, and rode through the whole experience with flying colors. She wrote me two days later that she is doing fine.

It was just as well it was her own beloved dog that did the deed, too. Otherwise, resentment might have come easier. Anything that causes clinging can make matters worse. Looking around, much of the human race is marinating in resentment, some justified of course, but much of it way past its “expiration date.” Even “legitimate” resentment inhibits unhindered functioning. Yoga includes releasing all of what we obsess about, after due contemplation of it.

I well remember in my childhood, extending well into high school, that I took perverse pleasure in holding tight to my unhappiness. Pain was a kind of sweetness I grew to love, and I could take hurt feelings and stretch them out for a very long time—even months I think on a few occasions. Luckily it didn't become chronic, but it easily could have. I suppose I have pot to thank for reminding me that life can and should be funny and joyous.... And love, too, of course. Curiously, Desiree had recalled similar feelings of admixed sorrow and joy, which we talked about on the way to the medical care facility, and she read out in a Wordsworth poem during a poetry sharing at the Gurupuja. She sent along a link to it:

The line from Wordsworth is
“In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.”

From Lines Written in Early Spring:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/181415>

I had that coupled in my mind with a quote from P. L. Travers, something along the lines of: “the cup of sorrow is always full; for a grownup it is a flagon, for a child it is a thimble, but it is never less than full.”

Nitya himself admitted to a streak of hypochondria, and a version of one of his favorite stories about it appears in his autobiography. I’ll add it into Part II, as it’s very inspiring. For now I’ll just say that by the time we knew him he had mastered his own tendencies to exaggerate, often, as he says, by pondering over this verse.

Blocking pain out is the flip side of obsessing about it. We are instructed to find the balance point where we take it for exactly what it is—no more, no less. It’s not easy, but it can be done.

Jan told us that her son entered high school for the first time earlier in the day, and was quite miserable. She could see that Narayana Guru’s way of facing challenges applies to all kinds of pain. High school epitomizes social stresses, and many people never recover from either the pain they endure from not fitting in or the egotistical pleasures they incur by being envied by their peers.

In the current (September 2013) issue of Harper’s Magazine is *Wrong Answer*, by Nicholson Baker. He details how many, many people are seriously damaged by high school math classes, and presents a very creditable case for making advanced classes optional. It’s astonishing how many people’s self-esteem took a major crash in algebra class, and for essentially no reason. Math is not going away, and there are plenty of people who understand it and love it. (Some of those might lose self-esteem at the

Homecoming dance, but they aren't forced to go to it.) Sure, algebra teaches you how to think abstractly, but so do many other disciplines. Since reading the article two weeks ago, I've already had several people admit they still burned from math humiliation in their teens. If you're one of those, take heart. The article will help you let go of the pain you secretly carry. Possibly just knowing that you are not alone will accomplish the same thing.

Some of you may have missed the closely related information on stereotype threat back in the Verse 21 class notes, Part III. I'll reprint it in the current Part III, because it's very powerful stuff.

We spent a lot of time chewing on Nitya's comment that the ego is "a hard nut to crack," although, as Moni said, it was just a simple metaphor:

When it comes to the ego, it is a hard nut to crack. Social acceptance has become a great necessity. A greater necessity, though, is your acceptance of your spirit, acknowledging your own truth, your real existence. Your primary and most valuable identity is not even recognized.

We develop a hard, opaque shell to protect our delicate inner self or ego, and over time we identify more and more with the shell and forget what it surrounds. We can never be wholly ourselves until we reverse the misidentification.

Fred said if we do nothing the shell will break open of its own accord and the oak tree will grow out of it, but that's not quite accurate. A nut needs proper soil and water and heat to soften the shell, allowing the developing seed inside to break it apart. The proper environment for the ego to grow into a towering oak that can give shade to other creatures is the soil of good nurturance, the water of intelligent wisdom, and the heat of deep thinking. Then if all that effort occasions vertical growth, the ego can break through its shell and make progress. Over the course of our study we will be assured that an ego grand enough to include everything is healthy; our aim is not to make it smaller or destroy it. The ego is

essential, but an unhealthy ego is a hazard to both its owner and anyone nearby.

I often think of the parable in Matt 13, 3-9, where Jesus hints at the disciple's role in fostering healthy growth:

Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The ego is a tough nut to crack because an immature ego spends its energy reinforcing its defensive shell. When a crack appears, it fills it up with putty. Pretty putty. Most social pressure is aimed at encouraging us to have a gorgeous outer crust for others to admire, and there is precious little profit in peeking inside at the meat. Even spiritual movements can morph into social pressure groups, where everyone competes to be more lovable or "holy" in the eyes of others. So we egos shellac our shells with impervious materials and tattoo them with images of liberation, all of which just make the shells thicker and harder. As Narayana Guru lamented, after all that, "Who is there to comprehend reality's one changeless form?"

There is a foreshadowing here of our work with the ego that will become intense in verses 36-40, the section on *sama* and *anya*, sameness and otherness, otherwise expressed as I and the other. Nitya lays some groundwork after listing a few of the ways we can malfunction, by saying:

Finally you can have trouble with the *ahamkara*, the ego. This might make you personally self-conscious, wanting to be accepted by everyone. Often there is a great craving, a thirst for recognition. You look all around, thinking “who is going to admire me; who is going to recognize me?” You are always saying “I and the other,” “I and the world,” “I and the people.” You are suffering from “I and the other” all the time. What a wretched life. Somehow you have to transcend all these maladies, because without doing so life becomes a horror.

Narayana Guru’s suggestion is that we turn our affiliation from the physical body and the social ego to a third possibility, our own pure Self.

Because most of us were undervalued as children, or else overvalued in ways that weren’t true to us, we crave normalization of our values. Our mistake is to look to others to determine our true value, when the only way to get it right is to do it ourself, aided by some good advice, obviously. That’s what the Hundred Verses boil down to—attaining the transparency of vision to not exaggerate in any direction, but to be truly and spectacularly ourselves. Some very helpful teachings on this lie just ahead.

Speaking of foreshadowing, Nitya retells a favorite and very relevant story of his at the end of Verse 68, which I’ll also reprint in Part III, as it will be awhile before we get to it. It’s closely related to this verse’s intent. You’ll like it.

Once again it was such a rich class I feel utterly inadequate in recounting it, and yet even this little bit is so wonderful I’m not going to cry about what’s left out. Several people have told me recently that they read the class notes and get a lot out of them, which is very gratifying. I’d do it just for my own sake, but it’s nice to know the notes have a life of their own. Still, being here in person has several advantages, even beyond the tea and cookies.

Jean honored us one more time in person, but is about to fly back to Sweden, so she shared a Vedantic story with us, also tucked in Part III. As a true contrarian, she wrote this morning that

the cookies were the best ever, and she's an expert on them. I thought they were the worst ever, though still acceptable. So there you have it. We can't even agree on cookies, but we can still love each other. Why not?

Part II

First off, the story of Nitya's "heart attack" from Love and Blessings. The whole chapter, Heart Pangs, from page 246 is a worthwhile read, touching on the clash between the Gurukula and the profane wing of the Narayana Guru camp and highlighting Nataraja Guru's wise interventions, but here is the gist as far as the present verse goes:

I went back to Singapore with the intention of bringing a rapprochement between the Gurukula and the [Sri Narayana] Mission. This time I succeeded, but the emotional strain of mediating between different groups with intractable vested interests caused me to lose my stamina, and I fainted while giving a talk. I was rushed to the hospital, where the doctor surmised I had had a heart attack. There was no foundation for the diagnosis; even so, I was initiated into the mystery of myocardial ischemia by being given all the worst drugs that are administered to heart patients.

After sixty-five days in the hospital, the doctors gave up on me. It was a remarkable night. Several nurses spent the entire night in my room, kneeling by my bed and praying to the Good Lord Jesus to save my life. I think God must have listened to their prayers. Next day, I was flown to Kuala Lumpur where a doctor consoled me, saying that there was a good chance I would live for at least six more months. I just wanted to hold out ten more days so that I could get back to Varkala and pay my last respects to Guru.

My sister was a pathologist and her husband was a cardiologist. They met me at the Trivandrum airport with a stretcher, a wheel chair and bags full of medicine, and took me up

to the Gurukula, where Nataraja Guru insisted that I be accommodated in his room. After the doctors had left, Guru came in and looked disdainfully at all the pills and capsules and tonics. He insisted that I throw them all away as part of my therapy. In the morning he expected me to get up at half-past four and take down notes as I had always done. He thought that lying in bed would only worsen an ailing heart. Later he took me by the hand and made me walk around the hill a bit.

Under Guru's care I slowly started improving. Little by little he gave me small assignments to do, and in the morning and evening he took me out for short walks. His theory was that we die when the plus side of our life is robbed of its vital interests. A good remedy for seemingly fatal diseases is to cultivate enormous interest in accomplishing something worthwhile.

* * *

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

A pinprick is enough to give intense pain. How many kinds of pain are there? Headache, earache, pains in the eye, the throat, the chest, the back and many more such items can be included in this catalogue. Certain pains are incessant and will not leave the body once they become chronic. If a patient takes a pain-killing tablet or is given anesthesia before undergoing an operation he does not feel any pain for some time. From this, it is evident that the pain is not in the tooth or the back, but in the consciousness of sensitivity. This consciousness is neither of the body nor of the self. It is an experience that occurs where the psyche articulates in the somos.

Our experiences of reasoning, recalling memory, loving and hating, gratifying desire and feeling frustrated are also happening in this inner junction. These experiences are to be understood as different from the pure consciousness of the Self, which is alluded to in verse 27 as the knowledge that knows itself in the dark. In the

wakeful and dream experiences many coloured and preconditioned items of consciousness pass through the mind. These are absent in the state of deep sleep and in the state of transcendental absorption. The absence of awareness in deep sleep is caused by a total veiling of the light of the self by *tamas*, the inertial opacity of nature. In the state of transcendental absorption, any specific forms of consciousness are absent because the activity of all three modulations of nature has ceased. This fourth state is referred to in this verse as “the boundless.”

The idea of I-consciousness comes with the recognition of the individual’s personal identity with the physical body and its many sensations. To move away from that identity to a pure state of absolute consciousness one has to go a long way. Various disciplines, such as study, ritualistic worship and meditation, are all employed to achieve that final goal of attaining the transcendental.

Although it is possible to go into the pure state of spiritual absorption, some vestiges of the impressions connected with the body and its needs will continue to exercise their influence as long as the body is alive. A wise man will look upon all such conditions as the inevitable appendages of physical life and will not relate such things to his pure Self. Nature is phenomenal and what belongs to nature will continue to function in the body/mind complex. A wise man does not worry about it.

* * *

Nataraja Guru’s commentary:

THIS verse closes another section by marking out a stage in self-realization. The transcending of the vestiges of the physical and the heavily material aspect of consciousness, which is referred to generically as the inert, is the subject-matter of this verse. The renunciation is in favour of what is not bodily but what belongs to pure reason, to which the higher consciousness by its very

constitution, directs its attention. We should not mix up cogitative thinking, or even discoursing, with this higher affiliation to wisdom which is preferable when it is silent and wholehearted. Rival interests do not enter into such a verticalized affiliation of the true contemplative. Knowledge must help to gain more knowledge and then arrive at the term of knowledge where one becomes aware of the absolute status of knowledge. A transparency of spirit comes which has other attendant states of mind like peace, calmness, etc. enumerated in the Gita (XVII. 16).

The reference to release from bodily bonds belongs to the idiom of the soil of India, where the ‘mortal coil’, as in Latin or Greek thought, is an evil to be cast away. This way of speaking about spirituality is not very modern but it is natural and time-honoured. Even in the modern sense, however, it could be understood without any of its vulgarised connotations. The physical and the psychophysical are two ways of viewing our consciousness. The former leads to bondage while the latter leads to release. The contemplative way is one which begins by taking a unitive and neutral position as between the body and the mind.

Part III

I have always treasured these words, from a long lost book:

The Sayings of the Ancient One, African School

Rejoice that you are the Seed from which a MAN may grow: then turn to the Book of Nature and read this lesson there:

Behold the seed that in due time will grow into a lofty palm! It does not, while yet a seedling, struggle up to the surface of the ground; for there the desert sun would scorch it, and the desert wind suck out its life sap. It does not seek the upper air until it has roots bedded deep and firm. It makes no untimely haste, but stirs into growth as the Year awakes and rests when the Year sinks to

sleep. Learn from the palm and be happy to grow. Think not at all of what stature is yours. Fix no limits for your growth. It has no limits, except those you create by your own willing and thinking: therefore think only of growing, and never of being full grown.

Rejoice if your lot be happy, but if it be miserable rejoice also. Joy and sadness are your twin slaves, joined from birth, and they must serve you together, or serve you not at all.

* * *

The following is reprinted from Verse 21 class notes, Part III. Knowing that most other people share your fears and insecurities, and they will get over them in time, is a very powerful and liberating piece of information:

This was brought home to me today reading an article in the latest *Scientific American* (June 2013), about the subtle effects of prejudice on academic performance. In *Armor Against Prejudice*, Ed Yong reports on stereotype threat, “the fear of failing in a way that reinforces derogatory stereotypes of one’s social group.” Briefly, psychologists have identified a universal fear in young people that they are inferior and others have an advantage over them. Prejudice aggravates the effect, and has a measurable impact, and of course it hits persecuted minorities hardest. The most fascinating feature of the article is that some very simple strategies have been devised to mitigate the harm, despite the chronic entrenchment of prejudice in society.

It isn’t just that one group or another is inferior, we are all inferior one way or another, and we tend to obsess about it:

To date, hundreds of studies have found evidence of stereotype threat in all manner of groups. It afflicts students from poorer backgrounds in academic tests and men in tasks of social sensitivity. White students suffer from it when pitted against

Asian peers in math tests or against black peers in sports. In many of these studies, the strongest students suffer the greatest setbacks. The ones who are most invested in succeeding are most likely to be bothered by a negative stereotype and most likely to underperform as a result. Stereotype threat is nothing if not painfully ironic.

The process has been well analyzed: prejudice causes anxiety, which undercuts motivation and lowers expectations. “People tend to overthink actions that would otherwise be automatic and become more sensitive to cues that might indicate discrimination. An ambiguous expression can be misread as a sneer, and even one’s own anxiety can become a sign of immanent failure. Minds also wander, and self-control weakens.”

Stanford University’s Geoffrey Cohen has achieved impressive results with a stunningly simple and inexpensive program: he has people consider what is important to them and write about why it matters for 15 minutes. Doing so boosted students’ self-confidence and immunized them against stereotype threat to a surprising degree.

If kids are taught in middle school that these feelings are common to everyone and go away over time, it has a tremendous impact. Cohen collaborated with another Stanford professor, Greg Walton, providing kids with survey statistics and quotes from older students that show that feelings of inferiority are common to everyone no matter what their race, and that they eventually go away. It helps them stop framing their abilities in terms of race and develop heightened respect for their own abilities. In one experiment:

Walton and Cohen tested their hour-long exercise with college students in their first spring term. Three years later, when students graduated, the achievement gap between blacks and whites had been halved. The black students were also happier and healthier than their peers who did not take part in Walton’s

exercise. In the past three years they had made fewer visits to the doctor. Walton acknowledges that such a simple exercise may look trivial to an outsider. But, he says for students who are “actively worried about whether they fit in, the knowledge that those concerns are shared and temporary is actually very powerful.”

Many of us in the original That Alone class also had doubts about our worth. That jostling for the Guru’s favor was the result of inferiority complexes, amplified by the competitive basis of our culture. He was applying a broad version of the simple programs of these psychologists, helping all of us to gain self-esteem, and realize that we were the captains of our fate, knowing that we would certainly grow. He treated everyone unitively, as being equally worthy and capable. And we blossomed under his benign care.

Not only do we all have our likes and dislikes, we have our strengths and weaknesses. Verse 21 encourages us to be glad that others have different strengths and weaknesses than we do, and to be supportive and compassionate about people’s sensitivities. It’s much easier if we are assured we will grow stronger as we go along, in whatever way best suits our abilities.

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The marvelous ending of Verse 68. I can’t help but add more than I intended at first. The Paul Reps story is about halfway down, if you want to skip to it:

You should take this as an invitation to intuitively keep yourself at a neutral zero in orientation. You are not asked to run away from home or commitments. You have a body, and until it drops away everything pertaining to it is relevant. The complaint here is about the lopsidedness that comes when you exaggerate the value of one side and become blind to the other, as is often the case. You should never be blind. When your

bodily needs are to be met you should still be aware of your spiritual side. And when you are experiencing spiritual ecstasy or joy, don't forget you have a body and that many important laws pertain to it.

To have this fully balanced state is true wisdom. In this you do not give an exaggerated importance to your bodily comforts or your bodily pains. You don't exaggerate spiritual gains, nor do you negatively condemn the spirit as nonfactual or dreamy. This brings great peace to your mind. It is a peace that makes you efficient on both sides.

You know that some day the body will drop off, but until that time it is to be treated as an excellent instrument. It is magnificently equipped with both senses and a sensory interpretation system. When all is working harmoniously you have a healthy mind, a wonderful gift through which the great joy of the Absolute can be lived in a million ways and can be understood and appreciated in a million forms. Then as an artist, musician, writer, worker, engineer, doctor, housewife, mother, father—whatever your field or role, it all becomes deeply meaningful. You can appreciate it in all its richness. Yet as you know this is a passing phase, you are no longer threatened by it. Death no longer has its sting. You have already accepted it. If you know that you are hired for only eight hours a day at your workplace, you don't cry when the bell rings for you to go home. Your life is just like that. When death rings the bell, you just say it's all over. You know in advance what it's going to mean, so there is no fear. Death, the greatest of terrors, doesn't affect you.

Another great fear is that somebody may say something about you behind your back. But if you remember that when you are focused on the body side everyone's vision is naturally blurred and they all see only from their own point of view, you can just accept it. You know that those who look at you from above think you are below and those who look from below think you are above, those who look from afar think you are very small and those who look from inside think you are very big, and you just say, "That's your view. Fine." You don't have to get annoyed. You give complete freedom to everyone to have their own views about you. "You are moral." Fine. "You are immoral." Fine.

There is a story in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* by Paul Reps, about a grain dealer's daughter becoming pregnant. Since she was not married, her father became very angry. He asked her, "Who did this mischief to you?" She wouldn't say. He said, "Come on, tell me! Otherwise I will kill you." So she answered, "That Zen master who lives next door, he did it." The father was even more enraged. The Zen master was young and handsome, and everyone had great reverence for him. But the father thought, "This mischievous fellow is a black sheep."

He took his daughter, went there and said, "Hey, man! Take her! She's pregnant, and you did it!" The Zen master answered, "Is that so?" "Yes, that is so." "Fine." He said to the woman, "Okay, you can stay here. I'll go out and beg some food for you." But nobody would give him food because now they thought he was immoral, that he had impregnated this woman. So he became a woodcutter. He worked, brought food, and gave it to her to eat. Finally the time came for her to give birth. There was great shame and a deep sense of guilt in her, but the Zen master attended on her with great compassion, and the child was born.

Afterwards she went to her father and said, "I did a very bad thing. The Zen master is not the father of my child. He is a very pure man, very compassionate. I cannot bear this guilt!" "Then whose child is it?" "It was a fisherman from the market." Her father lamented, "Oh, what a terrible thing I have done to the great Zen master! How can I get any merit in this life? All my merit is gone!" He hurried to the Zen master and said, "Sir, you are not the person who fathered that child!" The Zen master answered, "Is that so?" "Yeah. I'm taking my daughter back home." "Fine."

This is where you have to stand. No matter what happens, no matter what anyone thinks, you can just say "Is that so? Fine." To be able to do this you have to be at a neutral zero, neither on the body side or the other side. This is the most central teaching of the Isavasya Upanishad. When you know the secret of avidya, you cross over death. When you know the secret of vidya, you enjoy immortality.

* * *

Jean's Vedantic story:

A wealthy man saw he was coming to the end of his life, and called his children, three sons, to him. He told them the eldest was to get $\frac{1}{2}$ of his goods, the middle child $\frac{1}{3}$ and the youngest $\frac{1}{9}$. A few weeks later he indeed passed away.

When the time came to divide his estate, the sons discovered he owned 17 elephants, and they were baffled at how to divide them up according to his wishes. Finally they went to the king and placed the matter before him.

The king looked thoughtful for awhile and then offered to give them one of his own elephants. Now that they had 18 of the valuable creatures, dividing them up was easy. The eldest son got 9, the second son got 6, and the youngest got 2. But when they divvied them up, there was one left over! What should they do?

They again went to the king and asked for his advice. He thought for a moment and said, "I will take my elephant back."

What was the role of the king's elephant?

Although we are expected to ponder the matter, Jean's friend gave an answer. By giving just a little bit more, the problem disappears. If you turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, show a little generosity, it meets the needs of the situation. I would add that it's a fine example of a catalyst, a substance that precipitates a change without being affected by the process. A yogi or guru is a catalyst. There are many occasions when any of us could give a little and foster beneficial outcomes, but in a fearful and competitive society we are encouraged to hold tight to what we have. By doing so, many golden opportunities are lost.

Part IV

Jan "makes the honor roll" this week with a memorable response:

Scott,

Thank you for the notes and wonderful class this week. Tuesday night I felt the calming influence of kindred souls, and as many times before, the Guru's wisdom applied beautifully to the matters I was wrestling with that day - high school dilemmas. My fresh insights from Verse 30 and everyone's comments helped a lot.

I wanted to share one thing, that I kept thinking about that phrase which describes the ego as a "hard nut to crack." It applies so well because it captures the idea of our ego being a crusty shell of defenses, and it also portrays the sweet seed of potential and life that lies within. In the couple days after Tuesday class I went to High Holidays at Havurah. I am always touched when ideas in the services overlap with our class. Rabbi Joey talked Wednesday night forcefully about the Jewish New Year as being this important time to step back and find the awe around us. He quoted old masters who talked about the important task we face as being the one of breaking through our egoistic tendencies and defenses. The metaphor these masters used was "breaking our own bones" with one poignant quote talking about breaking every bone in one's body to get to a more truthful, open place within one's self. I don't know why I liked that so much (...I am not really a violent person). I think I could relate to the fierce toughness of these defenses and limited egoistic perspectives, and bones seemed such a good image of that too (along with the seed). I think we do need a vigorous response to deal with many of our habitual, or emotional tendencies that hold us back from our more expansive harmonious self. I like the irony of how our bones support us in life, as does our ego, and yet they can be like prisons too, if we are not careful and attentive. Inevitably, there is a cage from which each of us lives each day, a desperate place of negative thoughts, limited understanding, emotional triggers, with a lot of that being tied to events beyond our control, our childhood and our parents'

cages, and yet as dismal as all that sounds, we have this beautiful universe inside us and everywhere, if we can learn to break the bones and crack the seed of the ego, again and again. I am touched this week also by how lovely it feels to be around sweet open seeds, like I always do with our class. I am grateful to everyone for inspiring me and helping me in my endless cycle of growing, smashing... and so on. Jan

From John:

Many things that I have done that I now regret were done out of fear - motivated by fear. Fear that I wouldn't get something or the fear that I would lose something. When I realized this, I mean, really got it. Grokked it - or fully knew it, as Arjuna got it - I found I was doing less to be ashamed of.

However, to keep me honest, the Supreme Spirit has shown me that I also do things out of neglect, carelessness, or inattentiveness that I deeply regret. Very deeply regret. The consolation that my motives were not fear based nor selfish, or influenced by others doesn't ease the regret. I have much growing to do still. The trick I need to do is one of two things: become the fastest gun in the West, or to get out of the gunfight. I use this simile or metaphor, whichever it is, because I find myself concerned with what's going on with this Syria business. I actually wrote Pres. Obama an email asking him to not do business as usual, not to play cop, but rather, make a decision to not decide to do something based on the previous decisions that have got us to this place. I digress.

How to get out of the gunfight when that wasn't what I wanted to do in the first place.....

You don't suppose it's because I live in a crowded world? Or is that a cop-out and blaming my external circumstances for my internal mess?

Part V

From Jake:

In this verse is a major bit of advice on how to navigate life as you are assaulted by it on the physical, social, and spiritual levels. As Nitya concludes in his commentary, meditating on this verse periodically can help us face our daily condition, a point he summarizes in his final few sentences in the following manner:

This inert matter does not know anything. My pure soul is not the one which sits and thinks and worries. . . . This body is just one thing floating in the ocean of consciousness like a piece of cork. . . . Is there pain? Yes, there is pain. Did someone say something terrible about me? Yes, he said I am a very evil man. . . . Aum. Aum. . . . Be it so. What of it? (p. 215)

In his arriving at this conclusion, Nitya sorts out the elements contributing to our world of misery. In so doing, he paints a particularly vivid portrait of the contemporary American held in hypnotic trance by the culture's illusion masters. By continually reinforcing the material reality of manifestation, of the communal ratification of value in objects, people, and arrangements located in the constantly arising/dissolving phenomenal, those guiding the social trajectory can continue endlessly creating and solving "problems" that exist in realms which require the grand illusion for their existence in the first place.

The key to ending this insanity lies within each of us, and in his commentary Nitya explains how we can locate it, an explanation that reasons right through the barriers of "divine mystery" or collective guilt. Morality exists only where more than one individual participates.

Nitya begins by pointing out the obvious: our physical lives are controlled by pain and pleasure. The varieties of pain are legion, and many are inevitable. Without awareness, however, that

body can experience no sensation at all, and so it is within this narrow compass where agitation and awareness combine. As we assemble our ego during the first quarter of life, it can assume an even more important position and can trump the physical agitations for a source of general discomfort (pain). What we think people think of us can develop into our driving force, leading us to all kinds of distortions. Assumed in this ego-identification is the essential functioning of the reasoning mind, constantly at work defending the ego as it operates in the physical body, a condition, in turn, naturally influenced by nature's "triple aspects of *sattva*, a pure-clear state of reflection; *rajas*, a turbulent state of distortion and conditioning; and *tamas*, an opacity where consciousness is veiled from everything" (p. 210). These three aspects (the *gunas*), says Nitya, operate on our five sense impressions in concert with the ego, mind, intellect, and memory, the infinite combination of which can also lead to any number of malfunctions. If, say, our sense organs aren't impaired our memories might be, or our brains may malfunction or our ego demand attention—or all of the above. In other words, our capacity to create misery out of ignorance and confusion reaches far beyond our capacity to control it as long as we stay wedded to the illusion that our not-self is our true Self of the Absolute. And it is this very core that Nitya identifies on page 212 as our common American lot: "Not self is recognized in the western world as self. Buddhists call it *anatman*, that which is not *atman*."

The body and the ego definitely exist, adds Nitya, but your true Self is the only one of the three not subject to constant and inevitable change. Identifying with that Self as the body and the ego—with their endless catalogue of accompanying thoughts—continue as participants in the world of becoming constitutes the purpose of contemplative meditation. In that identification is our centering oneness, our true Self so viciously denied by our twenty-first century cultural (largely atheist/materialist) arbiters, a minority brilliantly (and ironically) outlined by Dostoyevsky over

a century ago in his portrait of the Inquisition's Grand Inquisitor as he addresses a sixteenth-century incarnation of Jesus Christ:

There is a mystery here and we cannot understand it. And if it is a mystery, then, we, too, were entitled to preach a mystery and to teach them [humankind] that it is neither the free verdict of their hearts nor love that matters, but the mystery which they must obey blindly, even against their conscience. So we have done. We have corrected your great work and have based it on *miracle, mystery, and authority*. [underlining added]

(p. 301, *The Brothers Karamazov*.)