

9/10/13  
Verse 31

Without prior experience there is no inference;  
this is not previously perceived with the eye;  
therefore, know that the existence of that in which all qualities inhere  
is not known by inference.

Free Translation:

Without prior experience one cannot make inferences. As the Self is not a perceptible factor, one cannot infer the existence of any principle postulated as *dharmi*, the basis of attributes.

Nataraja Guru's

Without prior experience, inference there is none,  
The agent of overt expression not being experienced  
By the senses, the presence of such  
By inference cannot be known: do mark.

Three serious verses now focus Narayana Guru's and Nitya's intensity on our unintentional hypocrisies. Over the first thirty verses we have been (more or less) gently prepared for the blow, and given plenty of time to opt out. From here on, their thrust is directed at those who intend to take the study to heart. Of course, any of it can still be appreciated from a psychological distance, but the gurus are attending mainly to the needs of sincerely dedicated students. They could safely assume that a third of the way through the hundred verses, all the dropouts will have dropped out by now.

I most definitely remember the heat being turned up at this point of the original class. I was seared into an awareness that I had substituted convenient descriptions for reality, and was operating on their basis. That meant I had unintentionally closed myself off from the impulse of the Absolute, the edifying energy that was

continuously available as long as I didn't block it with prepackaged concepts. It was particularly galling because I was especially fond of the quote from Henri Bergson, "the true mystic just opens their heart to the onrushing wave." Deb and I even had it prominently displayed on the wall of the farmhouse we were renting. Nitya's words shocked me into redoubling my vigilance over my own foolishness. I realized there is a counterwave in the brain egged on by social convenience: pure experience is continually converted into ideas which, no matter how flexible and glowing they may be born as, eventually become fixed and stereotyped. If we continue to cling to our former visions, we become ossified and static along with them.

Much of what passes for spiritual wisdom includes imagining we get it, which in this light means we don't. Keeping open to the wave requires a continual vigilance, continual questioning and skepticism, in just the right measure. Too much and we suppress our contact with the wave as much or more than if we imagine we are riding it but are not.

Deb opened the class with the classic Bergson analogy of Notre Dame cathedral, that there are two ways to come to grips with it, either walking around and viewing it from various angles or else going inside and soaking into its beingness. Bergson insisted that no amount of picture postcards could ever add up to the experience of being inside. Our descriptions, postcards, and so on are the inferences referred to in this verse.

Along the same lines, Paul emphasized an important idea that Nitya subtly weaves in, but is deserving of a second glance. The two transformative techniques Nitya outlines—repeating *asti, asti*, 'and this, and this'; or *neti, neti*, 'not this, not this'—are also inferences. Really, all techniques are inferences, and must be recognized as such. Nitya says, of rishis chanting *asti asti*, "Anything which comes within the frame of awareness is affirmed as also being true. They know that each time they affirm something they are affirming only a part, which they presume belongs to a whole. This is in anticipation of someday arriving at a notion of the

whole.” He implies something similar of neti neti: “After denying everything, you come to a certain mystical silence in which you cannot further deny anything and yet you know that you cannot deny the existence of that state. You are enveloped and engulfed by an undeniable experience.”

The stumbling block for spiritual seekers is to substitute the technique for the reality of the Absolute, for the undeniable direct experience itself: the scrumptious berry in the palm of our hand. Then we begin to pride ourselves on our technique and direct all our energies toward it, while the real goal fades into the background. The ego has won another round.

The theme of the ego being a hard nut to crack continues through this group of verses, and the guru of life provided lots of additional material this past week. I’ll get to it presently.

In Nitya’s commentary we learn that the ego isn’t just solid like a nut, it is also diabolically clever. Since we believe it is who we are, all its protestations, reasonings, aspirations and so on are perfectly tailored to be convincing to us. *Of course* we believe what we believe! The veil of the ego is invisible to us, so we’re sure we’re already realized. This is where the light of a sincere guru is virtually indispensable.

One nice thing that happened this week was, thanks to the wonder of the internet, we heard from Jean Pierre Rohart, who traveled with Debbie and Nitya through Europe and India in 1971. He is an artist who did the first cover for *Meditations on the Self*, but we lost touch soon after. Forty years later he has resurfaced. Rereading the section of Nitya’s autobiography covering that fateful journey, I came across a worthy section that related to this verse:

There were times when I used harsh words to prick their egos, which was somewhat unpleasant, but I’m afraid there is no other way to break through habitual modes of thinking. And I needed to disrupt the attachments they had developed for me as the source of their understanding. I wanted to force them to

look clearly at themselves, to find their own inner visions and the strength to live them.

A Guru sometimes has to hit the ego hard. The anger this produces helps dissolve the disciple's pretences, so they can see themselves and their weaknesses clearly. Each of us has a lie at the very core of our being. It is so transparent that it's easy to miss, easy to believe that we are already united with God without paring away the veil. We must first realize the "I" is a lie; God is the only truth. This strikes at the essence of the ego, the sense of self. I told the students to stay alone and quiet for a few days and look into themselves. They needed to see how the ego blocks them from their true nature and bottles them up with so many wretched lies before they can grow out of it. (290-1)

There's the rub! We effortlessly choose what appeals to us, the pleasant, obvious, easy road. Why not? That's how our brain is designed to work, has worked for at least hundreds of millions if not billions of years. Doing so has always been critical for survival. But now we're queuing up for a different kind of evolution, not grounded in survival, and it takes a guru to serve up the unpleasant truths our ego adroitly steers us away from. We have to doubt what we take to be our self to energize the search for the real self, and this is exactly what we desperately want to avoid. It may not sound scary, but it is. Otherwise, why do we shy away from it?

Life also provided me this week with the book *Breaking Open the Head*, by Daniel Pinchbeck. Since we've just had our defenses described as a hard nut to crack, along with Jan's breaking all the bones to open up to truth, it instantly made sense. The Bwiti people of Gabon use a root called iboga as a sacrament to accomplish exactly what we've been talking about: transcending the prison walls of our mental constructs. One group of them describes it as breaking open the head, and that's what we're up to also. Didn't you know? We're trying to pry ourselves out of the

box we have carefully built and maintained since childhood, designed to present an attractive image and coincidentally protect us from harm. We've decided we don't want to spend the rest of our life in a box. So far all our strategies have been based on box construction, our best-developed skill, but it's not going to work for extricating ourselves from one.

Human gurus are very rare, so benign Nature has blessed the human race with psychedelic medicines as an outreach program for those not fortunate enough to have a human version on hand. I'll add some terrific excerpts from Pinchbeck's book in a later part, but here's a teaser from the introduction:

Carl Jung wrote: "People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls." Is it possible that our society has built up a vast edifice of technology and propaganda in order to avoid that inner confrontation? Enveloped by media and technology, we have come to prefer secondhand images to inner experience—what Jung called "the adventure of the spirit." The self-knowledge achieved through personal discovery and visionary states seems alien, even repellent, compared to the voyeuristic gaze, the virtual entertainments and hypnotic distractions of contemporary culture. Perhaps we are due—even overdue—for a change. (5)

So yes, this is the place in the course to take stock and decide if clambering out of your box is really what you want, because it doesn't happen by itself. It takes intensity. I believe Lao Tzu was right: the outer world is a reflection of our inner state. We cure the world's ills by curing our own. And as Nataraja Guru said, "a bad disease needs a drastic remedy." So let's get on with it.

Popular spiritual nostrums are much easier to swallow than Narayana Guru's medicine, because they mainly address the pleasure principle. The serious paths will never be trodden by crowds. It's one of God's best jokes: sequester truth behind a barrier that is so friendly you never want to take it down. Then

only a misfit will want to dismantle it. It takes serious intent, most often impelled by anger, misery or other upset. Why would a comfortable person even bother?

Anger alone won't do it, because it lacks direction. Intelligence is required to steer the determination. It's a very complicated business. Ferocious deconstruction combined with a loving attitude and a keen grasp of how everything fits together. Rare air indeed.

After seeing how the person he knew as himself (and despaired of) was constructed out of all the experiences and pressures he had undergone throughout his life, and then standing apart from all of it under the influence of the drug, Pinchbeck arrived at an understanding of the self that echoes Narayana Guru's:

Through iboga, I recognized my existing self as the product of all the physical and psychological forces that had acted upon me. Yet there seemed to be something beyond all of it, something that was "mine," an energy projected from outside of my biographical destiny. That energy was the self—and the self's tremendous capacity for transformation. (29-30)

That's what we're unsure of, and so draw back from genuine commitment—is there anything more to us than our constructed neurology? We can only find out if we manage to transcend our persona. But we can be encouraged by the fact that it is universal for those who do go beyond their boxes to proclaim an eternal basis, a supernal wave sweeping through the cosmos that we are a fleck of foam upon. Whatever it is has a "tremendous capacity for transformation."

Only Nitya could sum this up in a way that does justice to its profundity. After struggling through a challenging class, it was like a beckoning oasis to come to his final page:

After all this tearing down and destruction, something still prevails. The seeker does not name it, he doesn't even call it an experience, but he knows he is That. It was with That he first spoke and first knew everything, and what he thus understands he cannot limit in any way. He cannot give any distinction, any name, any form to it. It overwhelms him and fills him. For him there is no 'I,' there is only That. The very This which otherwise remains indistinct and indiscernible has grown to fill everything. Now there is no need for anything to illuminate because this is the same which remains in the darkness as the only luminous truth. It is self-luminous, an existence which proclaims its own existence, a knowledge which is knowledge through and through but not a knowledge of any thing. It is not deep; it is depth itself. It is not valuable; it is value itself. It is not making anyone happy or blissful, because there is no subject/object differentiation to say "now I am blissful." Yet it is devoid of all disturbances.

One who arrives at this comprehension is not assailed with any doubt. There is just Being. All that you can say is "It is." Even that is wrong to an extent, because 'it is' is a kind of judgment. If you can somehow compress Thisness and Isness into one and remain in the silence of pure Beingness, rid of all the colorations given by the sensory system, the mind, and your expectations and prejudices, that is the only reality.

If you are fully merged into that pure state, there is no ideation of the subject as 'I'. Words become useless. One knows the sublimity of height, the oceanic depth, and the boundlessness of infinity. Only after fully knowing what that is will you be able to look upon this world as a passing show, a shadow without substance. At the same time, once you are fully convinced of that, it is a sheer joy to come and play this game of Indra. You are a child playing the game called life on the expanse of nothingness.

## Part II

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

In the process of learning, the most important factor is the capacity to compare a given situation to a previous experience and to deduce from it its possible consequences. Even lower animals like cows and dogs are capable of recalling the kind disposition of a person with whom they had previously been associated, and of showing him affection. On the other hand, if pain and threat are associated with their previous encounter with that person, the animals will hastily bolt away from him, sensing a potential threat. Man has not only efficiently employed his power of recall and deductive logic, but he has also greatly enlarged their uses to his advantage. He uses several extrapolated devices; so much so that his associations with the laws of nature and memories of the world of calculables have become extensions of his arms and eyes for probing and experimenting beyond the outer fringes of the farthest horizons of the known universe.

The accumulation of perceptual and conceptual data has now increased so much that it cannot be all stored in the “black box” of an individual's memory. To facilitate the use of this ever-increasing data, mammoth computers are plugged into the performance desks of present day scientists and businessmen for ready reconnaissance and instantaneous inference. Even with all this, man is at present at a great disadvantage to decipher what eludes the scope of his perceptions and his calculations. What escapes attention is not a far-off nebula hidden away in an undiscovered universe, but the very Self that gives him his sight to see, his ears to hear, his intellect to reason, his emotions to love, and a creative ego to structure a world all for himself. Even concrete objects are not the things they seem to be, they are functions and processes. We can absorb all the functions around us and statistically arrive at an approximation of the predictability of the pattern of recurring functions and processes. These functional dynamics behind all cognizable experiences are called dharmas. What is it in which all these characteristics inhere? Who is it that functions? These questions cannot be easily answered. Take an



orange for example, something in it is retaining its spherical shape, something is radiating its orange colour, something is shooting capsules of its aroma into the surrounding air, a mysterious formula in it continues the alchemy of maintaining its acidic sweetness. All these are dharmas and we know them. Where is the orange, the dharmi that is coordinating all these properties? The Buddhists found a way to solve this problem by summarily dismissing the need for a universal ground.

For Vedantins, dharma, the flux of the phenomenal transformation is not the last word. They look upon Brahman, the Absolute Being, as the ground of all. We cannot recall this ground as a memory of the past, because it is not directly known to us through any of our previous experiences, nor can it be deduced from any of our relativistic notions. Hence, the methods of perception and inference are given up as of no use in knowing the self. The instruction given by the knowers of the Absolute is to listen to their word testimony and reflect on it.

The most important word in this verse is the “this” found at the beginning of the second line, which says “this is not previously perceived with the eye.” In several verses “this” is equated with the universal ground of all knowledge. Like the term “that” in the Upanishadic dictum “That you are,” *tat tvam asi*, “this” also stands for the all-embracing universal, the *dharmā*, of which everything else is a dharma.

\* \* \*

Nataraja Guru’s commentary:

DEDUCTIVE inference is knowledge that follows experience by the senses. Such an inference is called a posteriori in philosophical terminology. Some philosophers in the West have given importance to another kind called inductive inference which corresponds more to the a priori, where the experience comes after the process of thinking has taken place.

The visible world is an expression of a function or event in consciousness or underlying phenomena. The mind is neither inside us nor outside, but mind and matter refer to consciousness phenomenologically. Understood in this manner, rather than as empirical facts existing in outer space alone, we have to recognise two kinds of inference, one that is a priori and the other that is a posteriori.

The Guru here makes pointed reference to the latter kind of a posteriori inference, which is technically called ‘anumiti’ in Sanskrit logic or Tarka Sastra. The correct term for inductive inference is ‘anumana’ which would correspond to the movement of thought from the particular to the general.

These two movements in thinking are important to distinguish if we have to arrive at fundamental philosophical verities such as the ‘thing-in-itself’ to which Kant refers. The phenomenal world has as its substratum or basis the world of the entelechies which Aristotle refers to, from which, as latent potentialities of phenomenal expressions, whether mental, material or both, the manifested world becomes or takes being.

‘Dharmi’ and ‘dharma’ are the two simple Sanskrit words used by Guru to distinguish the two aspects respectively of impression or innate potentiality, and overt expression or manifestation of the same absolute reality implicit in them both. The Sanskrit root ‘dhri’ (to bear or support) is at the basis of the two terms, and the ‘dharma’, when overt, may be said to be the horizontalized version of ‘dharmi’, the potential agent, which is innate. Spinoza’s terminology might refer to these two aspects as the ‘natura naturans’ and the ‘natura naturata’ respectively. Whatever the technical terms that different philosophies might employ, the distinction is between two kinds of thinking in making inferences; one which has sense-experience as an anterior condition, and

another which is independent of sense-experience but still carries with it a high degree of conviction.

It is true that empirical science gives primacy to the phenomenal aspects of reality, although scientific method, as is generally admitted now, is largely based on the inductive reasoning which may properly be said to belong to the theoretical or metaphysical kind of reasoning. The Guru is here particular to caution the seeker of Self-knowledge about the limitations of the a posteriori form of reasoning. If one wants to be a philosopher one has to change the method of reasoning from the a posteriori to the a priori. The very first 'sutra' (aphorism) of the Brahma-Sutras (Aphorisms of the Absolute) insists on this recognition of the a priori approach when it states that Brahman (the Absolute) is to be proved not ontologically but by appeal to the a priori; for, as it puts it, if Brahman were not true all the sastras (texts) would refer to nothing significant at all, which would be absurd to suppose. 'Sastra-yonitvat' and 'tattu samanvayat', which are the third and fourth of the sutras, insist on the importance of the a priori approach so inevitable as the basis of all metaphysical or philosophical thinking. A complete science of the Absolute must give its proper place to both of these.

### Part III

Daniel Pinchbeck is a wonderful example of a lost soul who took the "Krell brain boost" of psychedelics and had his life restored in "one interminable night." His first book is a delightful discovery, though his more recent stuff looks rather wacky. Unfortunately our culture lacks a scheme of understanding such as provided by Vedanta at its best, so many who leap over their limitations aided by chemicals are hard pressed to make good sense of the experience. Too bad they don't have a copy of That Alone handy.... Anyway, I've preserved some excellent highlights for your delectation. You can easily translate the terms from

“psychedelic drug use” to “spiritual quest” to see how this pertains to our study:

Daniel Pinchbeck, *Breaking Open the Head* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002)

From the intro:

When he tried mescaline for the first time, the chemist Sasha Shulgin found “the world amazed me, in that I saw it as I had when I was a child. I had forgotten the beauty and the magic and the knowingness of it and me.” He realized the tiny amounts of white powder he had ingested could not have caused such profound visions. It had only revealed what was inside of him. He understood that “our entire universe is contained in the mind and spirit. We may choose not to find access to it, we may even deny its existence, but it is indeed there inside us, and there are chemicals that can catalyze its availability.” (4-5)

In *The Long Trip*, a study of visionary drug use through history, Paul Devereux muses: “I sometimes wonder if our culture, acting in the manner of a single organism—in the way a crowd of people or a classroom of students sometimes can—somehow senses a deep threat to its own philosophical foundations residing in the psychedelic experience. This might help account for the otherwise irrational hatred and repression of the use of hallucinogens, and the smirking dismissal of the psychedelic experience as a trivial one by so many of our intellectuals.”

It is the nature of repression to be invisible. Something that is repressed can’t reveal itself to us, can’t appear as a break in our awareness—then we would see its workings, and the repression would be dispelled. In a world of information overload and perpetual distraction, repression manifests as a dismissive giggle, a yawn of boredom, a sin of omission.

“Repression is reflexive,” notes the literary critic Frederic Jameson, “that is, it aims not only at removing a particular object from consciousness, but also and above all, at doing away with the trace of that removal as well, at repressing the very memory of the intent to repress.” For over thirty years, a tremendous force of cultural repression has been exerted on the subject of psychedelics. (4)

Carl Jung wrote: “People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls.” Is it possible that our society has built up a vast edifice of technology and propaganda in order to avoid that inner confrontation? Enveloped by media and technology, we have come to prefer secondhand images to inner experience—what Jung called “the adventure of the spirit.” The self-knowledge achieved through personal discovery and visionary states seems alien, even repellent, compared to the voyeuristic gaze, the virtual entertainments and hypnotic distractions of contemporary culture. Perhaps we are due—even overdue—for a change. (5)

(me): Pinchbeck was tripping on iboga, and his entire life was played out in careful review. He sums up his experience:

Laid out for me was the entire, intricate process of my self-development. The process was complex and yet ultimately organic. The extension of the self was, I realized, a natural process, akin to the blossoming of a plant. While a plant extends toward the sun throughout its life, human beings evolve internally. We rise up and flourish, or become stunted, involuted, as we react to the forces that press against us. Our growth takes place in the invisible realm of our mental space, and the unreachable sun we rise toward is knowledge—of the self and the universe.

Henry James once described human consciousness as “a helpless jelly poured into a mold.” Iboga compelled me to perceive the exact shape of that mold; at the same time, it allowed me to

escape that sense of helplessness. I felt a mingling of wonder, sorrow, and freedom. By letting me perceive the shape of my past self, iboga also seemed to be freeing me from the burden of that past. The action of the drug actually was—as I had heard it described but wouldn't believe—the equivalent of ten years of psychoanalysis compacted into one interminable night. (29)

Through iboga, I recognized my existing self as the product of all the physical and psychological forces that had acted upon me. Yet there seemed to be something beyond all of it, something that was “mine,” an energy projected from outside of my biographical destiny. That energy was the self—and the self's tremendous capacity for transformation. (29-30)

\* \* \*

Jakes commentary:

Verses 31, 32, and 33 are a unit designed by the Guru to introduce our self to our Self, to offer “a methodology to assist us in our search for truth,” writes Nitya in his opening sentence. In this initial verse of the three, the Guru and Nitya begin with the concept of Self, point out how it is unlike anything in manifest reality, and then provide a beginning point for our journey inward to locate that which must be experienced and cannot be “learned about.” Only by experiencing the Self can it become the fundamental position for us from which the world of necessity can be seen and known for what it is.

The core contradiction in this model is that because the Self is not part of a category or property but is the category/property totally, it “is an existence which proclaims its own existence. . . . It is not valuable [but] is value itself” (p. 221). Coming to terms with the Self requires a methodological discipline unlike that which we commonly use to “learn about” some thing, and Nitya offers two, both of which deliver us to the same place: “to arrive at what is not

known” (p. 219). The rishis of the Upanishads, continues Nitya, begin with the assumption that there is only one truth, an axiom that means no duality can exist for anyone experiencing truth, which is always consistent. To experience this one truth, we need to let go of our well-trained habits of internalizing relative phenomenon, turn inward, and experience that still center. One way of getting out of these “mind-formed manacles” (as Blake called them) is to affirm everything that we perceive, think, feel, and so on. If truth is made up of these perceptions, then affirming it all until nothing remains leaves nothing out, and all is all. Nothing remains to be considered. The second route (for the introverts among us says Nitya as he continues with his explanations of the two routes outlined by the rishis) is to deny all experience as not truth until only silent awareness emerges. In both cases we are left with one awareness that we know is awareness and *it is*, not a part of something nor an entity outside ourselves—our mystical true Self experiencing Self.

By following the argument by affirmation or denial, we can know the Absolute as us, rest in that truth, and participate in the passing world of necessity as we decide to because the illusion that the manifest world is real (stable and solid) has been exposed for what it is, complete with a wizard of Oz behind a curtain manipulating the scenes.

With this general point, Nitya concludes his commentary while noting that this first step in explaining our Absolute he will expand upon in subsequent verses. Leading up to this conclusion, however, he discusses the nature of what passes for knowledge in our conscious world of awareness sandwiched in between the “silence of inert matter and the silence of the unknown inaccessible reality” (p. 218). In this narrow band of awareness, “this twilight region,” we essentially expand our pre-selected inferences gleaned from some impressions and make up the whole. Perceiving some partial perception of truth, we go on to reason the rest and claim a whole by way of our prejudices. This kind of methodology dominates in the world of becoming as we attempt to explain to

ourselves (based on this relative basis constantly sliding under our feet) a reality made up of matter, life, and consciousness. In our “physically-bent” western terms, these three domains correspond to the physical sciences, the biological sciences, and the psychological sciences. In pursuing some kind of knowledge in these domains, Nitya continues, we narrow down our question to the particulars of the case, what we “want” to find out, and then go about the task. Unfortunately, we can never arrive at the “thing in itself” as Kant made so clear; we can only experience what our senses tell us. Experiencing our senses constitutes our knowing. Nitya gives the example of “knowing” an orange. As we explore the properties of the orange, it disappears and becomes a mental composition constructed out of its properties—an inference. It always was an inference, but familiarizing ourselves with what our minds made up does not mean that such a way of “knowing” is unimportant. In this twilight, such a method is useful as far as it goes. Technology *does* work in manipulating what we infer to be the case, but this inferential “knowledge” is not knowledge in the true sense of the term. Relative perceptions are always partial. The mistaking a partial truth for the whole constitutes the fundamental error of the materialist dogmatists and the exoteric religionists. Neither can arrive at an Absolute foundation on which to stand because neither can affirm nor deny their way through all the illusions standing in the way. Both camps deny open spiritual inquiry as a pathway for knowing the Self as repression, denial, and projection all combine to guarantee ignorance.

\* \* \*

Pratibha has joined the class fairly recently, and sent this:

To Mr T and all,

Reading Verse 31 seems to me to be a parallel with Samkhya. This perhaps the first written philosophy was written prior to the



time of Buddha, before 2500 BC. I had the unique and precious experience of studying this text with a par excellent meditation and Sanskrit master. More than the study of any other text, it deals in detail with Principles that are Eternal and principles that are evolutes.

In brief, only two principles are eternal and separate, in proximity of each other yet ever separate. They are Consciousness/Purush and Matter/Prakriti. All else are evolutes of these two principles and then evolutes of the evolutes. Prakriti consists of three energetics: Sattwa-light, Rajas-activity, Tamas-inertia that have infinite variations of interacting.

I invite discussion, debate, questions on this.

with best regards,  
Pratibha Gramann Ph.D.

Part IV

Susan sent us a fine example of the walking meditation, in which she works her way to an important distinction about a matter that psychologically cripples many people:

Thanks for the class notes. So much to think about.

As I was walking this morning, I tried to figure out an experience I had recently in terms of the transformative techniques that Nitya talks about in his commentary. Without going into unnecessary detail, I met with a man about a month ago whose company had offered to help with a project in my neighborhood. Over the course of the conversation, the man seemed impatient that I was not more prepared with my request and I in turn was frustrated that he could not see that I had been originally misdirected about the meeting and what was expected. It was really no big deal but as I thought about it this morning on my dog walk, I revisited my frustration with this man all over again. Since I realized this was an

opportunity for working on something that bugged me more than it should, I thought about the verse. Would it be more proper to deal with this man in the asti asti camp or the neti neti camp? I decided that if asti asti was about including everything as divine and realizing that the parts were part of a greater whole, “and this and this” might be a better technique for me. If I dismissed him with neti neti, wouldn't that make him some how other or less than me? I'm sure this isn't true but it just occurred to me that I have found more peace in these situations when I realize that the person who infuriates me is part of the divine. This helps me let go. I understand the neti neti technique in a more conceptual sense and probably I'm just not getting it.

In other news, I had an interesting talk this week with an exercise instructor. Ashley teaches Gyrotonics (kind of like Pilates but different). She told me that she recently had a student from Europe come for a session. After about 15 minutes or so, the woman asked Ashley to stop complimenting her and just tell her what she was doing wrong. Ashley was intrigued to hear from this woman that in Europe there is much less complimenting in general. Instructors (in the exercise world at least) tend to tell people what they are doing wrong and clients/students hear them and don't take offense. They don't need constant encouragement and compliments to improve and stick with it. Ashley and I had fun thinking about what this might mean. If it is true that clients in the U.S. need more encouragement and are not so used to hearing the straight scoop, does this mean that people have more fragile egos? I told Ashley about the hard nut to crack that we had been discussing in class and she loved that idea. It's as though the compliments that people heap on others make that hard shell even thicker and harder. This may make it harder for the complimentees less able to deal with direct truth. On the other hand, if a person just tells their student what they are doing wrong without any sugar coating and the student knows that this does not mean they are stupid or bad or incompetent, then there is more of a direct communication. The

ego doesn't get involved and this makes the nut shell less thick perhaps. Here's an example (in case I'm getting too confusing): Last week, a friend and I went to play duplicate bridge at a bridge club in town. This was a three hour session with a teacher who was there to consult when one needed it. This woman has run this bridge club for many years and she's terrific. But she doesn't do any sugar coating. Despite her great humor, she struck me at first as quite gruff. I was initially a bit put off by this because when she corrected me, I thought she was putting me down but of course she wasn't. She was just telling it like it was -- "You can't bid three hearts with that kind of hand." She wasn't there to give compliments and make us feel good about ourselves — she was there to help us be better bridge players. She is fantastic. She really seems to be someone who sees everyone in an equal way. She is fair and straightforward. I thought of this again when I was reading the class notes and the excerpt from Nitya's Love and Blessings about Guru's hitting the ego hard in order to help a person get to the core of their being. From childhood, I have been focused on outside approval for so many things and the box I have created for myself has depended on this approval. What a relief to be able (more often) to let go of that need.

\* \* \*

Now and again in our class someone or other brings up the cliché of quieting the mind, as if not producing any thought waves was equivalent to realization. Patanjali played into this big time with his *citta vritti nirodha*, the cessation of mental modifications. I think that rather than bringing everything to a halt, we are being directed to quiet the surface chatter of our squirrelish egos so that in the ensuing calm more profound thoughts can arise. It is in any case a delicate subject that must be handled very carefully. What usually happens is the outright suppression of thought, which in itself has little or no spiritual value. It's basically an ego ploy. As

long as we're alive, some form of thought, some vibration of brain tissue, is going to be taking place.

The transformative impact of verbal counsel cannot be underestimated, and the Gurukula, while embracing the value of sitting quiet, also emphasizes the role of intelligent assessment of our own predicament. Silence leads to deeper thinking, and deep thoughts lead into silence, in a mutually beneficial spiral of interaction.

I think the following excerpt from *Breaking Open the Head* is a worthy presentation of the role of language in spiritual life:

For the aboriginals, the natural and supernatural aspects of reality are inseparable. Humanity has a sacred task in the world, and exists to perform a sacred function. This task is connected with the ability, or gift, that separates them from all other living things. The gift of language.

In "The Mushrooms of Language," an essay on Mazatec shamanism, the writer Henri Munn notes that linguistic inspiration is the most profound effect of eating the mushrooms. "Those who eat them are men of language, illuminated with the spirit, who call themselves the ones who speak, those who say." The ability to heal is directly related to ecstatic and inspired speech, "a primordial activity of signification," imparted by the mushrooms. "The Indian shamans are not contemplative; they are workers who actively express themselves by speaking, creators engaged in an endeavor of ontological, existential disclosure." The shamans are enunciations of revelatory reality.

Walter Benjamin's thoughts about the nature of language echo the indigenous viewpoint: "The existence of language... is not only coexistent with all the areas of human mental expression in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything," he wrote. "There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate

their mental meanings.” Signifying is, in itself, a sacred act—“in naming the mental being of man communicates itself to God.”

In Benjamin’s conception, the existence of language, the possibility of expression, is immanent in every object that exists. For the aboriginal, the ancient act of naming, of storytelling, literally invents, initiates, the world. The shaman’s use of language, his chants and songs, is formative, primordially creative, as well as protective and healing. As Terrance McKenna put it, for the shaman, “the universe is made of language.” Myth weaves the world into being. (75)

Daniel Pinchbeck, *Breaking Open the Head* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002)