

9/17/13
Verse 32

What is known is not that in which all qualities inhere, only the qualities;
as this, in which all qualities are said to inhere, is not visible;
earth and all else do not exist;
remember that there is only a form in knowledge which supports.

Free translation:

What we know is only the attributes and not their source. As universal abstractions cannot be perceived, it is incorrect to say that earth and all such are factual realities. They are only compositions of modes.

Nataraja Guru's:

It is not the inner agent but the expression
That we know; since the said agent of expression remains unseen,
Do remember the earth and all else is naught:
While the supporting outline of awareness is all there is.

Many of you will be very happy that today's class notes are going to be short, as we used the commentary for a guided meditation rather than a topic of discussion. I recommend you try it. I could say a lot, but it's much better if you use this as a personal springboard.

Also, there is a world of difference between reading quickly through a talk like this one and taking the time to let each of its concepts sink in. In the original class, Nitya was in deep meditation, fully tuned in to the reductive process as he described it to us. It's especially powerful to have someone present with you who is demonstrating the technique. Even though it is invisible, it is most definitely intuitively perceptible. But even on our own,

reading from a book, we have had enough preparation that it seemed there was real profundity in the room.

We turned the lights down low, and for once no one could follow along in the book. There is another world of difference between reading along while a commentary is read out and listening intently with eyes closed, or at least deemphasized. Though I frequently recommend carefully listening, the general habit is to read along, because it is much easier to follow the train of ideas. I suppose the difference is equivalent to the distinction between ordinary mentality and meditation. Last night was all about meditation. On his way out later, visitor Andy described it as sublime.

Before launching into his directed meditation, Nitya made sure we realized that even meditation was something largely incomprehensible to us:

What we call our meditation is no meditation at all. It is only certain body postures; it is being self-conscious about many of our physical aspects such as breathing, sitting in a certain way, or imagining a certain part of the body. We think that directing the mind inward means actually looking inward at such and such a place, which is essentially an action. Thus we are doing an exercise, not meditating. Sankara asked, "Why do you call it meditation? It is fun. It is some physical exercise. At best it is a psychological exercise. Even so, it has nothing to do with the Self."

As Susan noted, the verse is a demonstration of the neti neti technique. Whatever we think we know has to be thrown away. Our explicit knowledge is static, where the Absolute is dynamic. Nitya draws us away from our fixed concepts by saying, "Real meditation is not very easy. First you must drop from your mind all the names that you know, including your own. Drop not only the names of persons and things but also names of ideas, such as compassion, patience or whatever." This is why Gurukula students

are unable to give a pat answer when asked what we study: the minute we define it we feel we have falsified it.

In any case, we could have spent the whole evening pondering a single category, such as the dropping of nomenclature, but moving along is another way of dropping. We took enough time to conceptualize the gist of each category and begin to neutralize it, before sweeping ahead to the next. The commentary lends itself perfectly to such an approach.

The final paradox is that, even after giving up the last item on the list, the urge to act in response to the compulsions of necessity, it does not mean we should stop acting. We still act, just not with superficial motivations. Mick proffered the Catholic paraphrase, in the words of St Francis: “preach the gospel at all times and only use words when necessary.” Nitya closes with a thundering version:

Not being caught up in action is not an excuse to be lazy. Please try to understand what the Guru is saying here. It is almost impossible, since for at least the last one hundred years in European universities the poor minds of every man and woman have been put on the anvil of conformity and beaten into the shape of the empirical religion. This verse looks so simple, so innocent, but in a way it makes all the difference. So at least for a fraction of a minute, enjoy the great freedom of your own Self by throwing out all this garbage called name and form, cause and effect, obligation and society.

It’s astonishing what an impact even a brief respite from conformity can have—it begins to break the grip of a monolithic ignorance we have hardly ever even doubted, or else doubted in a clumsy way that only reinforced its hold on us. Glimpsing another possibility convinces us of the value of “disaffiliation from the context of suffering,” as Krishna puts it in the Gita.

Susan has had some keen insights recently about this essential idea, and kindly wrote them up for me. I’ll include her paragraph in Part III, but the gist is that she has been noticing how

other people are rigidly bound by their cultural orientations, and she quite rightly thought to turn her musings back on herself. It is always so much easier to see how others are caught than how we are! But if we presume we must have some of the faults we notice in other people, we can redirect our indignation to throw light onto our own ignorance. This is precisely the looking inward so often spoken of and so rarely attempted in spiritual life.

Jan is excited that what we're learning helps get our garbage out of the way so we can more easily do what we're meant to do. Once we reestablish our connection to the true self, it helps us live with more passion. Paul agreed that it was like we are a conduit of the pure potential that is God or the Absolute. Following his idea, I imagined God as Potential creating these extremely complex, intelligent and creative beings to manifest its potential, and then watching in dismay as they crashed into each other, wandered up blind alleys, became seriously confused and otherwise failed to manifest much of anything worthwhile. Are we manifesting our potentials, or helplessly boggled by their apparent vastness compared to our ability to express them? If we can stop gyrating haphazardly, perhaps we can recover our authenticity and “enjoy easily happiness that is ultimate,” to quote the Gita again.

Because of the website of interviews about Ramana Maharshi and his environs I sent out last week, we talked about his lovely corner of the universe. Michael noted how one interviewee was always wondering if he was making progress (becoming “spiritual”) and that Ramana convinced him he was already there. Since progress is an illusion—because we are already the Absolute—it is good to not make any. This is a common theme in the interviews, as well as Gurukula thought. Spirituality is not about becoming someone else, but becoming ourselves, what we already are in essence. Ramana had the ability to draw people into that space effortlessly, and even after he died the effect seems to linger on his beloved mountain, Arunachala. I think he felt the mountain was the real guru, and he merely its gatekeeper. I'll

resupply the link and include a nice response from Brian in Part III.

I could, but won't, write a long essay on each of the numerous categories Nitya mentioned that we meditated on, because they need to be personally unfolded. This is a place to do it for yourself as an exercise. You know enough to work your way into the stillness by cancelling the chaos, if only for a short time in ideal circumstances. As we proceed, its depth will grow in direct proportion to how you relate with it.

There was a decided air of deep centering as we hugged goodbye and made our way calmly out into the moonlit night.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

This body gives rise to the experience of many fictitious entities that have a transactional validity, such as names, forms, time and space. Like self-generated automatons, we breathe, think, speak and engage in many activities. There is a faculty in us called consciousness which questions, remembers, makes decisions and assumes roles. Actually, these are only properties of the living organism; they come into being with the body and with the body they perish.

Let us suppose that we dismiss from our mind all names and forms, also give up the orientation of belonging to a place at a certain time, give up the agency of action, give up identifications such as "I," "my," and "another," and don't bother to find out what is cause and what is effect. All these are functions of the mind, which is nothing but a phenomenon. Knowing this, give up the mind also. Even if one should succeed in doing all this, a persisting awareness will always remain.

This unconditional light has an existence of its own. There are no divisions in it like "before," "now," and "hereafter," it does not give rise to any kind of inductive or deductive inferences, also

there is no distinction of self and non-self. One does not arrive at this knowledge by meditating upon it. It is all by itself and for itself. The true nature of that is called dhyana.

Keeping the body still controlling the breath, concentrating on synergic centres, observing various kinds of dietetics, fasting and praying may all help one's mind to be disciplined, but none of this will guarantee the emergence of pure consciousness in its most unconditional and pure state. All that we can say about it is that it is. It is not an act of knowing, not an object of knowledge, not even knowledge of knowledge. Any attempt to describe it will only falsify it. All that one can do about it is not do anything. It is and that is all.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE type of reasoning adopted in this verse is called the 'sad-karana-vada', i.e., the way of reasoning that gives primacy to the cause and not to the effect. Philosophy may be said to be the research of basic verities as opposed to knowledge based on mere appearances. If we should give primacy to the effect rather than the cause, the chain of effects with their future possibilities would lead us to the specific multiplicities of phenomenal life till philosophizing itself would have endless multiplicity to pin its faith on, which would be impossible and absurd. The research for reality is for some firmer basis, and thus proceeds from effects to causes rather than inversely. The multiple effects have no philosophical status as reality at all, and are thus here referred to as consisting of nothingness, or of no significance.

The supporting outline of awareness is the resultant of the meeting of the two movements in consciousness referred to in the previous verse. A priori knowledge has to be understood in terms of the a posteriori aspect of the same event in consciousness considered

without psychic or physical prejudice, as it were, neutrally. The outline is the geometrical notion of a point that occupies no space, or a line that is meant to represent length only and have no breadth implied in it. On final analysis it is a result of consciousness, wherein various pure events could take place. The stuff of the events is neither mental nor material but belongs to that unitive 'stuff' which has to be distinguished as above duality and thus belonging to the absolutist order.

When we say that a table is two feet by three feet by two and-a-half feet, the complete significant notion that results is the resultant of the meeting in the consciousness of two different sets of reasonings which are of the two broad divisions referred to above. 'Two plus two equals four' is pure reasoning, and the table is what is given to the senses posteriorly. Both these meet in the significant or meaningful notion of the table as it enters into the reality of our lives.

The Guru emphasizes in the verse here the correct methodology implied in all knowledge. After various aspects of the subject of Self-knowledge have first been examined in the earlier part of the work, the Guru thus enters into more fundamental epistemological and methodological problems from the previous verse onwards. This section may be said to give place to an even more penetrating analysis after verse 36.

Part III

Here is Susan's insight of the week:

Several experiences recently have made me see more clearly how I am trapped in my own "anvil of conformity" and how I am so close to freedom. I just spent several days with a Japanese friend who is very conforming to his culture. I also last week observed some Japanese girls in a café talking. In both cases I could see how

restrained they were in an atmosphere that is not (seemingly) restrained at all. People here tend to be more open and relaxed. Of course this is not to say in any way that our culture is superior, only that I could see the strong difference between adhering to artificial rules of conduct and the wide expanse of possibility and potential that seems to be (the best part of) our culture. In this same way I could see how I have my own conditionings and rules of conformity that keep me from the wide expanse of the Absolute and from being who I really am.

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The link to the Ramana Maharshi reminiscences is on the site New Lives: 54 Interviews with Westerners on their search for spiritual fulfillment in India. This will set you down in #36:

http://www.newlives.freeola.net/interviews/36_hamsa_johannus_d_e_reade.php

Several people sent nice responses to receiving this. Brian's is particularly worth sharing:

Thank you Scott for this link, truly a treasure trove that will be enjoyed for breakfast, lunch and after dinner. At first I was a bit confused as I was reading the mention of David Godman, and I've been reading each night David Godman's biography on the life of Papaji, three volumes titled Nothing Ever Happened. Great read of a great contemporary saintly teacher of Advaita though without sutras or slokas or scriptures.

Nitya and my first teacher Swami Satchidanada both had visited with Ramana and it was their personal stories that has been my guide and constant lover of self inquiry. In 2011 we had the good fortune to visit Ramanashram and I too was struck in the chest with such a force of blissful light, that I couldn't walk as my legs

became rubber, my heart filled with light, and tears flowed like a spring shower. My arms reached over to the granite railing around Ramana's shrine, as the mind was surrendered to the heart, though more likely mind was put in its rightful place of servant of the heart. This experience was a physical phenomena though treasured, it was just a temporary state. As normal functioning returned after a while yet what remains is the joy of being awareness that is undivided as self and Self. That was quite the morning of our first day in the Ashram. Lisa had a similar experience while sitting on the marble floor having breakfast. Ramana's photos were in front of us, and his gaze was enough to reinstate the bliss of his grace. Lisa and I were consoled by an Indian man who sat next to Lisa, that this was normal here and to be expected. We were blessed by Arunachala, Ramana, and the masses of seekers of truth who have come before us.

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Jake's commentary relates the verse to politics:

In the Eighteenth Century, David Hume brought into focus (for us in the West at any rate) the distinction between what *is* and what *ought* to be. The facts of the matter, regardless of the matter, are what they are—the earth is a sphere, it circles the sun, people are born and die, and so on. On the other hand is the notion of what ought to be, that the world should be other than it is in some way, that people should, for example, share their property, should accept direction from their “betters,” should dedicate their lives to some cause. Arriving at a clear understanding of *what is* indicates a major step in our being able to operate rationally in a world of necessity. Knowing “what is going on” can facilitate enormously our skills in making life decisions. (One could say this general program goes a long way in explaining the purpose of psychotherapy.) Hume was struck by the consistent frequency with which people he talked with so casually confused *is* with

ought, how easily they moved from fact to projection thereby obliterating in the process the distinction and firmly establishing their assertions on the shifting sands of illusion.

The consequences of this mental sleight of hand show up at all levels of discourse and form (I think) the core argument we now see surfacing once again as forms of government become a public issue in America. On the right is the Eighteenth-Century American Constitution, a document that contained as its basic tenet the assumption that people are first and foremost self-serving. In a world of material scarcity, this founding document reflected the then-common understanding of human nature in a world of necessity—the way it is. A few years later, Karl Marx offered his alternative founded on what *ought to be* and assumed that the mass of humanity, the repressed workers of the world, did not share that drive for self interest so common to the capitalist. (A *false consciousness* hid this virtue from those on the bottom of the economic pyramid.) The Communist Workers Paradise was possible in this world of becoming because the overwhelming majority of the exploited would not exploit or take advantage of others given the power to do so. They were and are virtuous by definition just as the capitalist is the antithesis. The fallacies of this assumption were thoroughly illustrated in the model of the old Soviet Union and its natural consolidation and abuse of power in its bloated state bureaucracy, but the seductive quality of *ought* persists in a world of material inequality thereby encouraging a collective amnesia concerning Marx' fallacious underpinnings.

In this thirty-second verse is a direct suggestion on how to deal with this general problem that just won't seem to go away. At base, social arrangements are constructions that concern the ego-self in a transactional world. Nitya divides our knowledge of that world into experience itself and the cause of the experience. What happens is not the same thing as why it happens—*what is* is the domain of experience, and *why* it is is something else. In his explanation of this distinction Nitya follows two parallel lines of thought, one from the East (Sankara) and the other from the West

(Kant). Both speculative philosophies made a distinction between what is and why it is. Narayana Guru, concludes Nitya, combines the thinking of both these great minds “drawing a line between *dharma* and *dharman*, between ground and what is manifested on it” (p. 224). As Nitya does so, he offers readers a brief overview of Western and Indian philosophical histories: “Kant started where Berkeley left off. When he wrote he had Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke, Hume, and Berkeley. Sankara had before him the Purva-Mimamsa people” (who located the basis of manifestation in sound and so developed an elaborate mantra discipline) who were followed by the Buddhists, then the Sankyans (who identified the Parusa/Prakriti principle), and finally the logicians. Both Sankara and Kant followed an assortment of thinkers who had dealt with impressions or the nature of experience, and both came to a conclusion that those thinkers all suffered from the same malady—their arguments were all filtered through their bodily consciousness and ego to begin with.

This very point was later “discovered” and distorted by our late Twentieth-Century post-modern literary theorists in an attempt to undermine rational logic generally. The result of their reductive simplicity can be seen in the politically correct assumptions held by many in their elevation of the non-rational over the rational. In this vision obliterating the nastiness of hierarchy, the pre-rational infant or tribal cannibal is placed in the same space as the trans-rational mystic: both are virtuously non-rational and therefore trump the rational. The equating of the two acts as a vehicle by which the history of humankind can be re-written on the basis of what ought to be. The fact that the pre-rational dominated human culture for the vast majority of its existence and gave us such wonderful institutions as human sacrifice, slavery, cannibalism, and the divine rights of ruling classes the world over, are all now selectively air-brushed out of the story and replaced with a pre-rational Nirvana we can once again attain if only that nasty rationality (which we now *know* is bad) can be discarded. [For a much more complete discussion of this subject, see Ken Wilber’s

Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution.] In their misapplication of both Kant's and Sankara's insights, the post-modernists essentially follow the tried and true path of mistaking their own distortions as true, as free of the fundamental influences of mind, body, and ego. They exempted themselves as they accused others of committing the sin they were guilty of.

As long as we insist in prizing manifest reality as the sole reality, there is no other choice. In the corruption and simplifying of Kant's and Sankara's insights into life and the key to overcoming the mind and ego, we turn our attention to that which is not and will not last. As long as we keep circling back into manifestation as the ground on which to stand as we analyze that ground, our conclusions will be more of the same, variations of the same ground that lead back to that domain of the body consciousness and social ego. Re-focusing on the light within and *not* acting creates the open space in which we can stand apart from the world of necessity, and it is this meditative re-focusing that Nitya spends the last few pages of his commentary discussing. In these pages, he notes just why true meditation is so difficult and how it is distorted and misapplied by most who claim to practice it: "Real meditation is not very easy" (p. 228). In order to do so "you must drop all names, including your own, . . . names of ideas. . . . and memories . . . all directions [north, south, etc.] . . . the duality of cause and effect, and the distinction between 'I' and 'the other.' . . . In short, all the injunctions I have been giving you are not to do anything, but to do away with everything" (p. 229). As Nitya points out, concentrating on body posture, breathing, or anything for that matter may prove to be excellent exercise but they have no bearing on arriving finally at that "impenetrable place" where your awareness exists (p. 229). It remains always but is so buried under our focus on the extraneous that we go on as if that world of ego-mind and body actually exist and will endure on its own. Reaching our transcendent core requires that we unlearn the methodology we've been so thoroughly indoctrinated into accepting without question as a matter of survival and social advancement. That

training always leads us in a circular path forever re-creating the wheel: “at least for a fraction of a moment, enjoy the great freedom of your own Self by throwing out all this garbage called name and form, cause and effect, obligation and society” (p. 230).