

10/8/13
Verse 34

Mounted on the rotating wheels of a chariot which have half-moments
and such for spokes,
the world rolls on;
know this to be the beginningless divine sport
that is ever going on in knowledge.

Free translation:

This is going on through beginningless time, this divine sport of
the world, as if we are mounted on a chariot of becoming having
for the spokes of its endlessly rotating wheels the infinite
progression of milliseconds.

Nataraja Guru's:

Half a second is what makes the primordial hub
Of the car-wheel, mounted whereon the world rolls on:
Know this to be His sport divine, beginningless
In the domain of consciousness ever going on.

Nitya, the master dialectician, brings in humor as an antidote
to the pressing intensity of the study, and just in time! The divine
sport of life, lila, plays a significant role later on, but it makes an
essential appearance here as we approach the breakthrough
depicted in the next verse. Seriousness combined with
lightheartedness is a critically important dual aspect of yoga.
We've had plenty of seriousness. Now we get a dose of levity to
leaven the loaf.

In the original class at Hall Street, we began each day with
these verse meditations, spent the day pondering them, and then
met again in the evening to hash over what our most significant
thoughts had been. Many participants spent the whole day at the

house assisting Nitya in his work, and having direct interactions with him. Talk about immersion! It made me almost glad to have to go off to my regular job, so I could take my mind off the subject for awhile.

For everyone involved, the intensity had built up to a phenomenal level by this point in the study. Normally repressed aspects of the psyche were peeking out all over the place: our Freudian slips were showing. I recall a shared sense of true momentousness, that a major breakthrough was immanent. We felt like sailors plunging through unknown seas, expecting any moment to encounter an unknown continent. I'm sure at least some of our attitudes were exaggerated on the heavy side, as though we had fallen overboard and were flailing in the water, watching helplessly as the ship sailed away from us. I know I was simultaneously reeling from multiple revelations and darkly critical of my many failings that had also been coming to light.

Nitya's laughter and ebullience as he elucidated this verse was like being thrown a life ring: it lifted us out of our mental eddies and hauled us back on board the good ship. All that heavy thinking didn't have to weigh us down, it could just as well buoy us up. When Nitya made fun of poor St. Augustine, he was gently chiding us as well, calling us to lighten up and float, spiritually speaking. It is far too early in the journey to be overly self-absorbed, or worse, to give up in despair.

I hope that readers can hear at least an echo of this genial rishi lifting us out of the muck of confusion with only his words, activated by the energy of their delivery. His smile shines light on our confusion, urging us to not spoil the fun by being too serious. Insoluble dilemmas needn't freeze us in our tracks—they can be a source of endless delight.

I suppose our state of mind was the inspiration for the corrective image Nitya begins his talk with. We were all thinking of a distant goal, and imagined we were undertaking a heroic journey toward it. But in truth we aren't going anywhere: "We are always placed in the exact center of a space in which it is

equidistant to the horizon in all directions. We can never go near the horizon, and we can never be away from the center. No matter how hard you try, even if you run as fast as you can you will always be in the center of the space bounded by the horizon.”

Likewise with time: we can only exist in the present, while the past and future are its ever-inaccessible horizons. Part of our malaise is to project our happiness into the remote distance, beyond the horizon, both in time and space. Narayana Guru is teaching us to bring our focus home to right where we are, here and now, to leave off fantasizing about remote possibilities and become familiar with the magnificence of our essential being, our Self.

Notice how it's the world that rolls along: the chariot stays in place, even though its wheels are turning like a cosmic clock. The chariot of our self remains at all times in the center of the circle bounding our awareness. I remember when we used to smoke pot while driving (many, many years ago!) we would get the feeling that an invisible giant was turning a crank to unroll the scenery under us, while we sat still. It turns out there's more truth to it than we suspected. I also remember one of my first insights while tripping was to see the center of the universe everywhere I looked. Little spirals whirled out from whatever I gazed upon, and I knew that the center was everywhere—everything was the center of its own universe. I suppose that's why this verse has always made perfect sense to me.

Atmopadesa Satakam includes a lot of deconstruction, the dismantling of our conditioning in order to experience our innate freedom of spirit. While many academic deconstructionists become pedantic and even angry about the absurdities of humanity's fallacious constructs, Narayana Guru's approach includes chuckling about them. His gentle teasing coaxes us to come out from our barricaded fortresses to dance in the open. If we can let go of our absurdities, we can experience what the next verse depicts: the bursting forth of intense white light to inundate our being.

So what is it that holds us back? We all knew this natural freedom as young children, but it has been driven deep underground. Our constructs of time and space are built on its ghost. Now time can seem painfully long, as Narayana Guru first expressed in Verse 15:

To the blessed ones who have sucked the milk of *para*
ten thousand years is but a moment;
but if knowledge succumbs to *apara prakrti*
half a second seems like a thousand years.

It all depends on whether we are where we want to be or not. Unfortunately, we have been convincingly taught that we *really* want to be somewhere else, and we believe it in our unquestioned assumptions, so we are often uncomfortable with the present moment. We are always headed somewhere more important than here. What a terrible malaise! We should laugh about our predicament and get over it. If you're in a place where you don't want to be, you're in prison.

I remember Nitya telling us that he was like a little kitten: wherever he was set down he was content. He would lick his paw, sit quietly and purr. Even in situations that drove me nuts with impatience, he never seemed ruffled. He was always fully engrossed in what was happening, no matter how tedious it seemed to the rest of us. That meant he was available to be at his best, whereas I was not—I was busy fretting and fuming.

Mick called our frustrated impatience “doing time.” We “do time,” and so suffer its excruciating expanses of *apara prakriti*. People in prison “do time.” Mick spent a few years in prison for growing pot, an unjust imprisonment if there ever was one, so he knows how exaggerated time becomes there, especially in the US where sentences are unconscionably long. He well knows, too, that we are all in some kind of prison. When we are bound by restrictive behaviors, we are doing time. Yet there is no sense of

time when there is complete immersion in the self, something that's always available if we know how to tap into it.

Deb agreed that we “do time” by telling ourself a negative narrative, which gives us an obligatory sense of having to do something, to fight back or forge ahead, rather than simply accepting what or who we are. Paradoxically, we “do” more effectively when we accept our self: the socially-pressured activity we feel compelled to do is ineffective both in terms of our happiness and in its ultimate outcome.

Although time is imaginary—indefinable and immeasurable—it has the ability to oppress us, if we let it. Older people tend to become depressed because they see time running out, as well as losing contact with friends and family. Their depression compounds the barrier between them and the world. Time can't be defeated by ignoring it as imaginary, we have to dig down and face it and accept it, and only then will it lose its grip on us. The Atmo class shows us that we have many viable options and we can make the choice to get out of prison. For most of us, the doors are not locked, only intimidating.

When we were kids, life felt great no matter what we were doing, and there's no reason it can't still be that way. I recalled staring for hours at a patch of grass in a corner of our back yard, immersed in bliss. The grass wasn't the cause of my contentment; I was content, and so whatever I did was enjoyable. I didn't have to do anything or make anything happen. The memory triggered thoughts of Paul, absent last night, who was once deeply moved by seeing a young child staring at the grass, and has related it in class several times. It reactivated Paul's sense of wonder at the ordinary, something we need to reclaim. Instead of doing time, we can do timelessness, which provides plenty of room for wonder.

Depressed older people reminded Susan of her grandmother. She told us “whenever my brother and I visited our grandmother in her later years, the first thing she would say after we walked through the door was, when do you have to leave? Before she even

said hello. She couldn't enjoy the time we had together because she was so fixated on the passage of time."

The class entertained a lively discussion that boiled down to the fact that we are caught up in arbitrary constructs, and become sad when they don't do what we want them to. We expect our arbitrary constructs to keep us happy, to persist and hold us up, forgetting that our true nature is the real support, the thing that makes life's transience endurable and even enjoyable.

The problem is we don't take things for what they are, we append interpretations, converting them into concepts. Our dissatisfaction (and as Moni added, fear) comes from feeling the emptiness and uncertainty of concepts compared to reality. Managing our activities using reason leaves out the inner impetus that brings them fully to life. There is a deeper grounding, a solid basis, that we need to access, by transcending our interpretive apparatus.

Susan related a perfect example from her recent trip to New York. She went to the Natural History Museum, one of the wonders of the modern world, and visited the great halls filled with life-sized dioramas, displaying stuffed animals in their native habitat. They are incredibly detailed and beautiful, something to delight a child no end, not to mention adults. Susan noticed a mother and two small children proceeding from one to the next. The children were not allowed to look at the dioramas, they were made to pose for a photograph in front of each, wearing the same ridiculous expression, hands beside their heads like little flowers. If they stole a glance at the wonders behind them, the mother yanked them around. Susan could only imagine that the pictures would be added to a huge pile of rubble that would never be seen by anyone. But the kids were being well trained that the present was unimportant; later was all that mattered. What a terrible sacrifice! Instead of preserving the wonder of life those children enshrined in their very being, they were being taught how to die to the world, to substitute a meaningless abstraction for nearby beauty. Susan pondered how something like that must have

happened to all of us, just not so brutally, perhaps, but nearly as effectively.

Forgetting our true nature is made easy for us, the skids are greased, but why is it so hard to forget the things that torment us? When our feelings are hurt, we can wind up holding on to them for dear life. Mick gave the example of bumping into the car in front of him one time. It was just a minor “fender bender,” stemming from a brief loss of concentration, and yet for *years* he beat himself up over it. He kept replaying it in his mind as a reason to run himself down, to accuse himself of stupidity. And not just him; it underlined the fact that the whole human race is stupid! We all nodded our heads, knowing we do the same thing. Moments of callousness or cruelty from decades ago are burned into our memory banks. The best explanation is that we have been trained to despise ourselves, and have taken over the job of self-criticism from our caregivers. Because it’s an unexamined behavior, our self-criticism has run roughshod over our spirit. But once we have given these matters a good close look, ideally learning to laugh about them, they lose their hold on us. Deb quoted Nitya telling us once that it’s not that you have to become something new, it’s that you open your eyes and see what you really are.

The critical point here is that by the time we are aware of the present, it has become the past. It requires a different tactic to live in the present. We have to let go of the baggage we are clinging to, both consciously and unconsciously. That leads to a more humorous, lighthearted approach better in tune with the present moment. And it opens the door to the flood of transforming light described in the next verse.

Since Nitya’s concluding words sum it all up so beautifully, let’s hear them again:

There are so many categories. We assemble them all within this tiny glow or spark of our own consciousness. But they do not really exist, they are just postulates made by the tiny spark. They are the showmanship of the great magician. Whoever that is, it goes on

making the projections of space and time, name and form, cause and effect, and so on.

This is my joy. I dip into the unconscious and come back into consciousness and make all these things, play with them for a time, and then go back. Then I come back and start doing it again. That's the joke which is going on. God is a little baby sitting in the center of our own consciousness. Out of nowhere he creates an infinity of space. Out of half a moment he makes pure duration. With that infinitude of space and infinitude of time he fills a world of wonder and rejoices.

And yet, within that same world, fully knowing all this, we cry out, "I cannot adjust to that fellow. He has become so nasty." Or "Today has been a very negative day. It makes me unhappy." Or even, "I can't take any more of this life, so I'll just commit suicide. There's no other way." Knowing that all this is a joke, why don't you laugh at yourself? That's all that is to be done.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

Once there was a Scholastic theologian called St. Augustine. He was a world-renowned philosopher and a Christian mystic. In his *Confessions* he meditates on time and says: "Does not my soul most truly confess unto Thee, that I do measure times? Do I then measure, O my God, and know not what I measure? I measure the motion of a body in time; and the time itself do I not measure? Or could I indeed measure the motion of a body how long it were, and in how long a space it could come from this place to that, without measuring the time in which it is moved? This same time then, how do I measure? Do we by a shorter time measure a longer, as by the space of a cubit, the space of a rood?"

In this prolonged meditation on time he became more and more confused about it and he finally came to the conclusion that

there is no past or future, but only a fraction of a passing moment called the present.

The past is only a name for the recall of our memory; the future is the name for our anticipation. How do memory and anticipation become time? The Indian concept of the present is that which can be measured mentally or literally. We can measure space and objects in space, but we will be frustrated if we try to measure time; it always slips away. Even the whole of the moment does not present itself as a complete unit.

Isn't it strange that a universe with a history of countless billions of years is comprehended in all its seeming infinitude within the fraction of a vanishing moment? Guru humorously compares the world to a jolly ride of a mammoth chariot, whose motion depends entirely on the transient half moment which a spoke takes to move.

Well, the world may be a fleeting phenomenon; should that make the Self also fleeting? The Self is pure knowledge. However, in the experience of most people, mind becomes as restless as this rotating and revolving universe. It is hard to control the mind. There are, however, occasions when the mind is restful. Visualize such a state. When you are at peace with yourself, mind is like an expanse of consciousness. In such blessed moments one does not say it is gone or it is coming, there is no sense of time. The breadth and the depth are also not differentiated. Peace reigns supreme, there is no limit to it. In our imagination we can soar high, and with equal ease we can dive deep.

In that knowledge which is devoid of the consciousness of space and time, a little bubble of motivation comes to burst on the surface. It causes a small ripple no bigger than a ring. One ripple begets another, each bigger and wider than the previous one. Very soon the mind becomes a stormy sea; it becomes eventful. In this deluge one sits on the crest of a tidal wave and laments for the lost world of peaceful harmony. The anticipatory dream of the future comes as well. Things do not turn out as expected and that brings frustration. Life appears like an autumn leaf fluttering in the wind;

one trembles with fear. The only knowledge in that moment is a sense of helplessness. The magnitude of the self has now shrunk into a torn bit of consciousness, it gets caught in the eddy of uncertainty. Where is the goal? What is life's achievement? Nothing is known. In frustration one gives up all hope and sits down to rest his tired limbs. Then from somewhere, like a gentle breeze, peace returns. The restless world changes once again into an infinitude of silence.

What is all this? Maybe God is playing. Life is a divine sport, and eternity rides on the wheels of fleeting moments.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE Vedantic idiom permits us to conceive of thought as taking place within the general consciousness or awareness as its matrix or general background. No strictly philosophical answer could be given to the question why this should be so. The answer to 'how' this could be so is what is attempted by the scientists who explain that science is concerned with how a candle burns and not why it burns.

Metaphysics or theology has to step in to deal with the latter question. The personal pronoun here, attributing events in consciousness to an absolute agent, whether theologically or metaphysically understood, is to indicate this limitation and not because of any superstition about a personal God. Vedantic idiom permits such a use and as the Guru has to pass on to another aspect of Self-knowledge after this verse by way of summing-up, he lapses into the current idiom of Vedanta by which all events, including what takes place in pure awareness, are treated as belonging to the notion of the normative Absolute of all thought, without which thought itself would have no basis. The personal pronoun is to be treated as incidental, and those who can do

without thinking of a personal Absolute could do without it perhaps with greater difficulty as pointed out in the Bhagavad Gita:

Greater is the difficulty to those whose mind is attached to the unmanifested. For those who are conditioned necessarily by their own bodies the way of the unmanifested is difficult of accomplishment. (XII.5)

The dialectical moment or the eternal present is a notion familiar in the West in the writings of Plato. Time and eternity meet neutrally in this notion. In modern times Bergson has restated this same notion by his idea of eternal change and becoming in the context of pure time. The contemplative vision which presupposes the Absolute, at least as a normative principle, if not in personal terms, could see the circulation of thought as taking place round a nucleus, as it were, of thought, which is the hub where the logos or the verb may be said to represent mental events, in its most basic or primary form. The karu (core) which referred to the same thinking substance, located in pure time, in the very first verse of this composition, conforms to this same central substance, as we have already explained.

The analogy of the wheel is found in the Upanishads in several places. The rim, the spokes and the hub have been used to explain the various aspects of the structure of thought, and in the Upanishads, the Buddhist writings, and the Gita itself, the idea of a wheel and a circulation is employed many times. The duration of time which we think of when eternity is given a content, and the 'half a second' referred to here, allude to the same substratum of Absolute or Pure Time that figures even in modern times in the philosophy of Bergson, which in turn has become acceptable to the pragmatists of today. There is therefore nothing old-fashioned in referring to Time as constituting the hub of the car-wheel representing the more peripheral events, when viewed phenomenologically. Time is momentary at the core of the world,

which is to be treated as a peripheral manifestation. The first two lines of the verse refer to a cross-sectional view which is cosmological, while the last two tend to give a longitudinal view where eternity is present and pure subjective Time acts as a reference to phenomena.

Part III

Going through Chapter VIII of the Gita, I came across a section that bears on the subject of the present verse, as well as filling in some background material that is useful to keep in mind. Since no one else has written about Verse 34 (other than Jake's finished commentary below), I thought I'd throw in this additional food for thought:

14) One without extraneous relational mental interests, remembering Me day in and day out—to such an ever unitively affiliated man of contemplation I am easy of attainment.

Throughout the work there is talk of easily attaining or reconnecting with the Absolute, but what exactly does it mean? The Gita suggests we relate ourselves to some universal truth within creation, up to and including becoming one with all of it. It is the very goal of the spiritual quest, but is it a chimera? Are there only disconnected particles of matter, with nothing to tie them together? Or, as the saints and sages of all ages and points of the compass have averred, is there a unity that embraces all the disparate elements and gives them meaning? Infinity is a necessary factor in any complete philosophy, but does that mean it actually exists as something or even as nothing?

The universally present quantum vacuum is beginning to look a lot like what is called the Absolute. Wholly imperceptible, it nonetheless consists of nearly limitless energy which informs the development and evolution of beings through retention of successful patterns. In a sense it is a hyperconscious entity,

omniscient as well as omnipresent and nearly omnipotent. It may be that in a spiritual quest we are on the road to a conscious participation with its seemingly divine energies. Though as of now its features are primarily speculative, science is moving rapidly toward acceptance of this surprising recent discovery, revealed primarily through mathematical calculations. Can this be what the rishis have been tapping into all along?

Whatever the exact scientific status of the universe may be, we can probably all agree it is something. We can also probably agree that whatever it is, its manifested aspect—all the stars and planets, dark matter, living entities, and so on—are in a constant state of flux or change. There is a state of Now in this flux, the condition of how things are exactly at this moment, right where each of us is positioned to take it in. Because we look outward for our ratification, we register other people's Now, which is subtly out of step with our own. But if we look within ourselves, the Now is thoroughly up to date. Although we are constrained by our relative placement in the time-space continuum, it appears possible to attain the Now at our own location, through meditation. Yet almost none of us are even aware of it. When we perceive things with our senses, there is a delay in registering them, during which time the universe moves ahead slightly. When we further analyze the sense data, matching it with our memory stores in order to identify it, we fall even farther behind. The effect is summed up in the famous last line of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

Early in life we develop our mental outlook and beliefs, and the incoming data becomes secondary to this fixed framework. We slip more and more into the past, as far as the present moment is concerned. We learn to live in our heads, and whatever scant new input makes it through the system is fitted snugly into a preexisting framework. We pigeonhole the data in our musty desk of preferred beliefs, to the degree that nothing new and therefore potentially transformative can ever get through to us. Once we have screened

out all new perceptions and conceptions, and instead live timidly according to the tried and true rules invented by previous head dwellers, we have become “normal” and “ordinary.” The deal works well enough if you are satisfied with a simple structure that meets your most basic needs, but man does not live by bread alone. Deep down we want to be fully alive.

Something inside us remembers the excitement of relating to the world as an immediate experience, as we all once did in childhood. Occasionally the urge to enlarge our experience to reconnect with the Now impels us to seek what we glibly call truth, or even more glibly call reconnection with the Absolute. It’s better to not call it anything, and necessary to not have a fixed idea of what it might look like. Fixed ideas are part of the problem, not the solution.

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Jake’s commentary:

In this verse and commentary, Nitya and the Guru trim away our illusion and mental constructions to show us what *is* true when it comes to our practical situation in our bodies as they operate in the transactional world, the fact that we are aware that we live in space, that a vast area exists all around us, and that we are always at the center of it. As Nitya writes, no matter how fast we move or how far, the horizons around us remain out of reach and are the limits of our perceptions. Because the horizon continuously recedes, we, in fact, infer the rest. Whatever is beyond our senses we presume to exist by inference. We cannot know any of it through direct perception.

The other half of our physical/sense predicament concerns time. Events occur and we arrange them in sequence, or our minds do, so that we can operate in the space where we create time, which remains an enigma in spite of our attempts to spatialize it into past, present, and future. In a nutshell, time is not space, so

our quantitative tools for measurement distort from the get-go. A clock, for example, measures solar movement by assuming that the point of comparison is stationary, an impossibility in a universe where everything is in motion. Solar cycles like life, death, entropy, and evolution continue in nature as endless and beginningless systems of motions within motions. To assume a stationary point exists and that one observable cycle out of the numberless others represents a unique truth is both a testament to the mind's capacity to create a thing not known to nature but also illustrates its ability to perpetuate illusion.

When this illusory construction of time becomes dogma and not simply an aid in completing instrumental tasks, it emerges as a barrier to perceiving the world as it is. The present experience is the only *time* that is verifiable and actual. Past and future are both experienced only in the present as memory or projection. In either case, they can only be known in the present as the mind manufactures them. Nitya observes that memory becomes memory "only when it is relived in the present," a construction I might add that is rarely accurate. As concerns the future, such a projection is even more inexact because of its having to be cobbled together by the mind out of the bits and pieces at hand.

In order to conceive of time, the mind, more often than not, places it into spaces and has done so for thousands of years. Measuring exactly where the present moment begins or ends, or where a moment of awareness becomes memory have been elusive questions since thought has been recorded. Nitya cites the Buddhists and St. Augustine as having dealt with the issue of time measurement, and neither settle the question. The Buddhist school of Vijñānavāda, says Nitya, theorizes that manifestation exists and dissolves in thirds of moments: "Before we recognize it, one third of the whole moment has already gone by" (237). For his part, St. Augustine in his *Confessions, Book II* talks to God lamenting the passage of time and its inevitability, but he never gets an answer.

More recently, Nitya continues, scientists have simply forced time into machine movement, applied names to forms, and ignored

all the contradictions. We now accept “time zones” as established facts and allow the illusions they establish to trump our personal, verifiable experience. If we do, indeed, “lose a day” when we cross the International Date line, just where did it go? The fundamental contradiction lies in the very nature of time itself which is constant change or motion, and everything is included in that model. Augustine’s lament speaks directly to this essential character of time and indicates our paradoxical condition: as part of the system, we, too, are in motion, so any measurement we apply is in the midst of as much change as the phenomenon we wish to measure. There is no baseline. In each system, “from the atomic to the galactic,” a new set of time/space relationships obtain and operate as long as they operate. Nitya gives the example of a person in an airplane flying at several hundred miles per hour. Inside the plane, the person operates within a space in which his operations conform to physical laws in certain ways. If he were to drop an object it would fall to his feet and stay there. If he were to stand outside the plane and drop the same object, it would be miles behind him in a matter of seconds. When the plane lands, however, the two spaces operate on the same system.

The principle that applies to space/time is one of relative position, is constantly changing and, for the most part, that dimension is out of awareness and beyond the mind’s capacity to conceptualize in terms of duality. There is not that which is not time and space, so what is it? Nitya gave the short answer in verse 27: “What is, is not known; while what is not, is known” (p. 194). By insisting on the mind’s talent for naming forms and measuring what it cannot conceive of in terms of cause and effect, we look for what can’t be found. Insisting that the transcendent conform to the immanent, thereby by making the former accessible to the senses, we secure an endless task of verifying our limitations.

Concerning this point, Nitya briefly mentions the concept of God and the general campaign of so many to discover him, her, or it. In contemporary American popular culture, much of what passes for theological “debate” centers on the mind’s capacity to

conceptualize the transcendent and in assuming the mind's final authority on the matter. In metaphoric terms, this presumed condition is equivalent to a wave demanding that the ocean depth reveal itself as a wave, all the while unaware that the wave and the water are not two. More to the point is the fact that we spend roughly a third of our lives not in it (but in deep dreamless sleep) and still manage to ignore that reality because of the mind's power to manage our awareness in the service of the ego-self, a task so very necessary for our physical survival in a world of necessity but so limiting in our attempts to wake up.

Part IV

A lovely note came today from Anita, who was an important class participant for a long time, but has been unable to attend in recent years. Her story exemplifies the subtly uplifting effects of intelligent contemplation. Like many Americans, she has her deepest insights while driving a car, which she calls her auto guru:

The other day as I was driving home, my "auto guru" came on again and I found myself pondering my life. For some reason, I was surprised to realize that I had a peaceful encompassing sense that "I" was happy.

It was surprising because I have, of late, had lots of challenges and experiences that you wouldn't expect to make anyone happy. My MS was acting up causing me to alter how I do some basic daily things and spend more time and money with my physicians that I would choose. Other physical challenges have been bombarding me as well.a possible surgery coming up, I had crossed over the "line" to full blown diabetes and was taking a new medication which made me ill so I had to take probiotics to help with that. And then I broke out in an all-over miserably itchy rash and went thru more medicines ending up at the dermatologist's office for

even more medicines. And, these are just the challenges of the body, there are others. Heard enough??

My intention is not to whine or elicit sympathy, but just to demonstrate that the dichotomy between what I was experiencing in my daily life and how I was feeling at my core were at odds to say the least.

As I continued to ponder this situation, I realized that all of these challenges and circumstances were truly temporary and in essence, Maya. "I" was in that space where I could draw in to the doorway that is in each of us.... the doorway that I go "in" in order to shift "out" of the temptations and noise of daily existence and move to the sublime freedom of that place for which I have no name.....the 'place' where name is not. The 'place' where peace is.

Wow, I thought. This is really cool! Isn't this amazing!! I am happy, no shit!

All of those challenges and experiences are still with me and.....so what! I know in my true self that I can handle them.....bring it on. Sounds somewhat arrogant, huh? Not really, because in my core I am all powerful as are we all.

Where did all of this confidence come from? I must share with you that my years of studying the teachings of Nitya, the years I spent attending class at the Gurukula at Scott and Deb's, the lunch discussions I have had with Scott.....the meaningful conversations with all of my dear friends at the classes.....this is where this confidence came from. I value the legacy of the gurus and teachers with all my being. Thank you!

Love and blessings to you,
Anita

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Pratibha sent a thoughtful response to the comments I passed along from Gita VIII, 14:

I'd like to connect on this, though I've not read all that follows it.

It seems that even if one has relational mental interests, one can attain the Absolute. What's important is that one does their Sadhana and fixes for the day their relationship with the Absolute. Especially effective are pranayama breathing practices, but maybe it is Tai Chi, or other centering practice. This centered focused state then influences all work and relational interests during rest of day.

I think a relevant question arises: what is the absolute? If by absolute is meant a silence of divine presence, is this not the Absolute? It is referred to by several other names. For some it could be surrender to a particular image that one implicitly trusts, but the important thing is that it puts the person's mental activity at rest, and it seems to be there for guidance as work, decisions, conversations play out the day.

Feedback appreciated.

Pratibha

Dear Pratibha,

These are centrally important questions; thank you for bringing them up. I'll try to add a bit to what you've said.

First of all, definitely the Absolute (whatever it is!) is available to everyone, and everyone has relational mental interests. They are not mutually exclusive. Ordinarily these interests tend to pull us out of our center and become ends in themselves, which is fine as far as they go, but it leaves out the Absolute as the balancing hub of a healthy life. The dissatisfaction people feel is that their relational mental interests are abstract, mayavic you could say.

Relating to the Absolute in a preferred form touches us in the depths as no abstraction can. It knits all our varied interests together in a coherent manner, which makes life meaningful.

You have found that pranayama puts you in touch with something profound, so you are drawn to it. That's really wonderful. As you note, trust is an essential factor: we have to believe in something in order to love it and stay in contact with it. We can never trust what we don't believe.

The caution Narayana Guru wants us to keep in mind is that, because we want very badly to trust, we may have hitched our wagon to unhelpful goals. He offers the key distinction: if it makes you a better person, it's good. We are not always good judges of ourselves, however. Nor are our causal friends.

What I've found is that the ego can effortlessly insert itself into our spiritual quest and derail it. Here is precisely where the persistence you imply as sadhana is essential. I would add also including input from an unprejudiced outside observer. When the ego feels the first rumblings of change that threaten to knock it off its perch as top dog, it moves the attention to something new. It engineers a loss of interest in the former practice, what Nataraja Guru called a disadoption, and goes on to something less threatening. The ego is delighted to maintain a veneer of spirituality to keep up its respectable appearance. That means it substitutes a canned program for the dynamism of a rebalanced psyche. It feels more comfortable, because the ego is no longer threatened, so the transition is easy. The only downside is we don't get anywhere.

We are about to enter a section of Atmo where the ego is redirected to its proper place and purview, and it can be unsettling. A seeker has to believe that such a dose of salts is for the better, or they will think "I need to find something else, something more my style." The ego rarely steps down voluntarily from its self-generated pedestal. There usually has to be severe upset of the psyche before the ego agrees to real change. As I'm sure you know, Shankara likened spiritual motivation to feeling like a deer

trapped in a forest fire or a fish in a pond that is drying up. Without that kind of intensity of purpose, we continue to sleepwalk through our life.

I'm sure you see this is a razor's edge to walk. Many practices are harmful, and yet they have their enthusiasts, so how do we really know what will help? We have to choose wisely and then stick with our choice. Often we have to fight the urge to drop the practice and return to square one.

The razor's edge is underscored in your last sentence, where the preferred image of the Absolute puts our mental activity at rest, while it *seems to be there* for guidance of our activity. The guidance and the activity must go together. I agree we have to quiet our superficial mental activity to really listen for guidance, but we also have to live the guidance in our own way. We are not just dutiful servants acting out a template, we are becoming independent operators, also known as adult human beings. It's a supremely profound transformation. We can see how it goes awry in the angry shouts of fundamental religionists, who only imagine they are listening to God.

Once again I really appreciate your thoughtful musings about these central issues, which I'm certain are relevant to many others among us.

Part V

Susan wrote again!

After a busy week, I have enjoyed some time to quiet my mind this weekend and to think more deeply. Time off the hamster wheel! What joy! I find myself coming back again and again to my Alexander Technique study as I am pondering Atmo. As I've mentioned before, one of the main ideas in this technique is "non-doing" and inhibition of "end-gaining." This means that as I walk, bend, turn, and reach, I try not to think about the goal of each action. As I climb a set of stairs, I try not to think about where I am

going and what I will do once I get there but rather I focus on being very present in myself and this starts by allowing my neck to be relaxed (along with a few other instructions). It is amazing to me how this way of focusing and letting go has made the lessons of Atmo deepen. As I am able more and more to keep myself from end-gaining in my movements, I am also able to not get swept away in the future. I can more easily stay in the present. This repeated turning inward helps to remind me that truth starts within. Though I cannot articulate the full meaning of this, it feels like a wonderful opening.