

11/5/13
Verse 38

What is known as many is the other,
and that which shines forth as one is sameness;
having known the state, which is going to be spoken of, and attained
release,
remain dissolved and blended in the state of sameness.

Free translation:

What is known distinctively as separate and specific entities is the
'other'. What shines forth as the indivisible whole is 'sameness'.
This is going to be elucidated hereafter. Having known these
states, verticalize knowledge and learn the art of unifying
consciousness in the inclusivity of 'sameness'.

Nataraja Guru's

What appraises manifold variety, the 'other' that is;
And the 'same' is what unitively shines;
Thus understanding the state aforesaid, into that state
That yields sameness, melt and mix and erect sit.

In this verse Nitya underlines the need for practical
engagement to attain release from bondage. His conclusion sums
up how the transformation is brought about:

The meditation of this verse is to watch for the many tendencies to
close down or become narrow in your vision. Instead, enlarge your
boundaries and thus find your release. Only then will the functional
reality of seeing oneness become a persistent way of life.

Often the words of the mystics strike us as meaning we
should just turn off our relation to the world and all will magically

be set right. Nitya recognizes that there is much more to it than that. We are firmly tangled up in the way our brains have become wired and conditioned over the course of our life, and we can gain much by altering the narrative that guides us, to one which gradually rewires our neurology to a more harmonious orientation. Sure, there are rare occasions when a blast of energy from the Karu surges through our system and instantly deprograms it, and those are highly covetable. It produces the rare visionary. Yet that type of experience is exceedingly uncommon. In the meantime, while laying the groundwork for it, we can incorporate the wisdom others have gained and passed on to us, which has a salubrious effect also. In other words, there is much we can do to make our lives more worthwhile, short of a total explosion.

If we adopt such an attitude, every encounter is an opportunity to learn and grow. We aren't simply trying to find a path where nothing goes wrong, we are open to whatever comes, and instead of taking it as a personal affront we can use it as a way to liberate ourselves.

We all agreed that we can have a wide range of interpretations and reactions to a stimulus, and to a great extent our reactions are based on how we frame them in our mind. When we enlarge our sense of unity, we move from victimhood to participation. Doing so frees some of our vast potential. It's stimulating and expansive, rather than deadening and restrictive.

We talked about the tendency to satisfy our egos with snap judgments instead of admitting we don't really know the whole story. We routinely label a person based on their outward appearance, and that reinforces our prejudice. Instead if we made an inquiry and listened more carefully, our prejudices would be challenged.

Susan sent a link to a video advertisement for a hospital that gives a good practical demonstration of how this can work. The camera pans over a number of people moving through the building, giving a moment for us to experience our normal reactive judgment—remember, this is how our brains have evolved to

function, it is utterly normal—and then provides a sentence about each one’s very human concerns and needs. Doing so instantly melts our stereotyped view and invites it to become more empathetic. It’s quite effective, and should prove familiar to anyone following this Atmo study. Take a look:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDDWvj_q-o8 .

It’s often effective to provide a countervailing narrative to offset our habitual viewpoint. That’s what Nitya means when he says:

When a certain interest develops from the center of your being, it enlarges and becomes a whole field of interest. As a function, this aspect of the self is called *kala*. If you are looking for differentiation, the *kala* will be seeing differences everywhere. If you are looking for unity, then you will find a hundred reasons for seeing all as the same. One has to cultivate the *kala* of sameness as a functional reality, not just as an idea.

We are being instructed in this study to infuse *anya* with *sama*, the perception of otherness with sameness. Not to *replace* *anya* with *sama*, but to saturate it with it. This is a subtle endeavor that calls for a top-notch effort on our part. As Deb put it, there is a common source of identity that we all share. We have to reclaim it. Michael agreed, adding that rather than responding in terms of the selfish ‘I’, we have to be willing to set that aside. He has found that doing so opens him up to meaningful conversations with friends and family, where previously there was only blockage.

Nitya paraphrases the Bhagavad Gita’s sixth chapter for supportive material throughout his commentary. He was an interpreter of the Gita without equal, as exemplified by his whirlwind analogy here, which inspired us a lot. He is expanding on these four verses near the end of the chapter, on *dhyanam* (meditation or contemplation):

33) Arjuna said:

That yoga you have outlined as consisting of sameness, O Krishna, I do not see for this any stable foundation, owing to changefulness.

34) The mind is changeful indeed; it is agitated, forceful, and imperative (in character); like the wind, I consider its control difficult.

35) Krishna said:

Doubtless the mind is difficult to control and changeful. By practice and by dispassion it can be held together.

36) By a Self uncontrolled yoga is hard to attain; such is my opinion; but by a Self which is its own support, endeavoring, it is possible to reach through the means (indicated).

Here's how Nitya fleshes it out:

You bring about oneness through wisdom, compassion and fellowship. At this juncture in the Gita, Arjuna says to Krishna, "This all sounds very fine, but I have to actually live it. My mind is not under my control. Like a wild wind it comes. Sometimes a ship lying quietly on the sea will be caught by a wind which drags it away and batters it and breaks it to pieces. This is exactly what my mind does to all my decisions and good intentions. I take a good resolve, but like a typhoon the mind comes and whips it away and wrecks it. What can I do?"

Krishna agrees. "That is so, my dear Arjuna. Mind cannot be forcibly controlled. Sometimes it is like a whirlwind. But don't you see that the mind is not a whirlwind all the time? Your mind may be restless for a little while. It may smoke and fume. But after some time it calms down, and when it does you have access to it. That is the time to show it the right way. When the mind is sitting calmly, show it there is no need to boil. Your true nature is divine, and everything is a manifestation of the Divine. Don't feel agitated.

Deep down the mind understands. The next time it raves, somewhere it will know that this is not the right thing to do and it will settle down faster than the previous time.”

In this way Krishna shows how to gently tame your mind by detaching yourself from the things with which you are infatuated.

We are all comfortable enough in class now to admit the whirlwinds that rage through our lives at times, and that’s a substantial achievement. Jan really appreciated the whirlwind analogy, adding that when you aren’t in a balanced state, if you can let your reactivity settle down, then you gradually come back to the unity. It’s a hugely beneficial change of narrative to let go of our reactions rather than cling to them. Then our moments of peace and calm become more frequent.

Very often, however, we are so relieved to get a break from the whirlwind that during the quiet periods we don’t work on ourselves. We want to enjoy the temporary pleasure of not hitting our head against the wall. Yet that is our best opportunity to change course, our best time for meaningful reflection. We should be careful that our sense of relief doesn’t lead us to fritter away our best opportunity for incisive investigations.

What’s more, oneness is so disdained in human society these days that many, whenever they find themselves disconcerted by quiet time, actively seek new whirlwinds to be blown around by. Soon they never have a lull anymore. It’s a very common modern condition to be constantly aroused and inwardly miserable, yet the true antidote is never considered. The gurus recommend we cherish our rare enough opportunities to evolve out of the several dead ends that flesh is heir to.

Susan sent a paragraph that shows how she is beginning to use her opportunities effectively. In her own words:

Atmo seems to be percolating in my brain—before I read the verse today, I was thinking about my family members who

annoy me and [husband] Rick's family members who annoy me and how Rick and I tease each other about each others' families. Then I started thinking about other people I know who I find annoying and I would never want to live their lives or with them. After awhile, it seems that I had put just about everyone outside of my personal circle of comfort or what have you. I was shocked by this and felt very isolated. Of course I don't really feel that I am separate from friends and family and they are precious to me but somehow thinking about this made me feel that I was cutting myself off of my own volition. Then it was quite a tonic to read Nitya's commentary.

She added that inevitably as we get older we get stuck in certain limiting circles and ways of doing things. We need to expand and include others, and other ideas. We all lamented how young children don't yet have barriers in place, and so adapt easily to all sorts of conditions, but as we age our ambit grows progressively more circumscribed. By late in life we may become very narrow indeed. It's a trend we have to combat continuously and intelligently, lest we become bound to our favorite tree trunk by unbreakable vines of habit.

The isolating tendency Susan outlined has an even nastier denouement, when we turn the animosity inward and become estranged even from our self. It's the logical extension of the separating tendency. Once we become separated from our true nature, our beingness, we become zombified. Then our task of reconciliation is truly herculean. Baseless self-criticism diverts our energy from healthy concerns into self-stifling ones, and it is always ready to pounce at the merest hint of emergence from the miasma. Quoting from an old class notes: "The bottom line here is that, once you have learned the basics of social interaction and balanced your ego, hopefully by early adulthood, you can free yourself by letting go of the tight grip everyone feels they have to maintain all the time, and which is reinforced by subconsciously retained threats of punishment. By relaxing our self-criticism, not

to mention criticism of others, we permit ourselves to automatically rise to the next level of spiritual functioning.”

Mick pointed out that it’s hard to realize when we’re not fully present. In fact, it’s almost the most critical aspect. When the ego is detached from its unitive ground, it is seldom aware of how it is distracted. Deb recognized that when she daydreams, she trips or drops things or cuts her finger instead of the carrot. Such “non-Freudian slips” are ways our unconscious tries to jolt us back to awareness, part of the internal corrective process that is an important ally. But we are also welcome to employ our conscious to stay conscious, as well.

Deb brought up Nataraja Guru’s translation of *nivarnnu* as sitting upright, which Nitya translated as finding release. While related, they present two contrasting aspects of the Malayalam original. She noted how in Nataraja Guru’s excellent commentary, he spoke of an “attitude of alert relaxation combined with inner adjustment of the spirit tuned to the Absolute.” Alertness and relaxation seem to be opposed, but when dialectically united they help us to be at our best. Those are our artistic moments, our dynamic stretches of clarity. This is what Nataraja Guru means by sitting upright, in the traditional pose of a yogi.

I added that it also indicates a mental posture of perfect neutrality. Leaning one way or another means we are prejudiced. Only when we are perfectly upright are we free of preferences. We cannot attain sameness if we are leaning in any direction. Even something as seemingly trivial as “this is a Hindu concept” adds a subtle perversion to the idea of universality. It is either true or not, and it cannot be the possession of anyone or any ideology.

Ideally we attain to a posture of true openness, knowing we don’t know and being eager to find out what comes next. That’s when we discover that Life has been waiting patiently to reveal itself to us. If we haven’t noticed, it’s because we’ve been busily ignoring it. As Franz Kafka so poetically put it:

It is not necessary that you leave the house. Remain at your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be wholly still and alone. The world will present itself to you for its unmasking, it can do no other, in ecstasy it will writhe at your feet.

The Gurukula doesn't advocate any specific technique to find the eye of the storm. That does not mean that each person will not be benefitted by finding it in their own way, and through their own efforts. Walk the razor's edge between tension and release, effort and stillness. "Only then will the functional reality of seeing oneness become a persistent way of life."

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

People have different tastes and temperaments. Even within one family people like to dress differently, eat differently, and amuse themselves differently. Lack of agreement in opinions and personal values causes constant friction. When a husband and wife adopt different lifestyles and begin to fight, they make their home a hell for themselves as well as their children.

In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus says: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter and the daughter against the mother...." (Luke 12, 51-53). To verify the truth of this we can find any number of examples.

There is however a way to overcome this anomaly, and that is by cultivating unitive understanding. The Bhagavad Gita (VI, 27-32) gives the following instructions:

Such a yogi, verily, of calmed mind, of pacified passion, who has become the Absolute, free from all dross, comes to supreme happiness.

Ever uniting thus the Self, that yogi, rid of dross, having contact with the Absolute, enjoys easily happiness that is ultimate.

One whose Self is united by yoga sees the Self as abiding in all beings and all beings as abiding in the Self, everywhere seeing the same. He who sees Me everywhere, and sees everything in Me, to him I am not lost and he is not lost to Me.

That yogi who honours Me as abiding in all beings, established in unity, remaining as he may in every possible way he abides in Me.

By establishing an analogy with the Self, he who sees equality everywhere, O Arjuna, whether in pleasant or painful situations, he is considered a perfect yogi.

Mind does not allow itself to be controlled very easily. It can become weird and cause tempests, but there are moments when the mind is calm. Those occasions should be used to direct it to the universal oneness of the Self which animates everything. When the mind is calm it should be taught to become compassionate and get into fraternal commitments. If we do so repeatedly, the mind can be absolved from its hysteria and ultimately one can find one's full relief.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

HERE the Guru gives very precise definitions of the two fundamental aspects into which he has divided the totality of self-consciousness. The Upanishadic dictum which says that he who sees multiplicity or plurality 'wends his way from death to death' is the basic idea here.

A unitive vision of reality, and plurality, are twin aspects of reality between which the philosopher chooses the path of unity as against that which is based on plurality. Some pragmatic philosophers might be justified in insisting that plurality is as much real as the One of the idealists; but it does not follow that such an attitude which accepts the pluralistic manifold of interests or motives gives any peace or happiness to man. Torn between rival interests, he would be steeped into the world of conflicts and sufferings. Philosophy should not merely satisfy the intellectually or academically valid aspiration of man's interest in truth, but must bring him nearer to happiness, which is his goal in life.

Multiple interests in the relativistic world of plurality spell troubles, and unitive interest in life in the absolutist sense spells peace. The movement in self-consciousness tending to reveal the underlying unity of realities may be said to be vertical; and the other which tends to reveal the multiplicity, the horizontal.

These two axes are to be recognized by what they lead to, rather than by any innate characteristic in themselves. In themselves they are just tendencies or movements in contemplative consciousness. As a tree is to be known by its fruit, the distinction is based on the end they serve in the contemplative life of man.

After understanding the nature of the two rival conflicting tendencies, the second half of the verse gives precious practical indications pertaining to the actual 'practice' of yoga. All that a man actually does in the form of action is the orientation of the spirit or the inner tendencies towards the unitive instead of the world of pluralistic rival values. The whole of yoga, as understood in this verse, consists of sitting erect with one's inner tendencies turned to the appreciation of the unitive and unique value represented by the Absolute. The attitude of 'sameness' implies the idea of equality besides that of unity. By analogy with one's inner

being (*atmaupamyena*) as the Gita puts it (VI. 32), one is able to see the equality of everything with oneself. Unity is attained by a verticalized view and the horizontalized version of reality leads to conflicts with oneself and in one's relations with the external world.

The reference to sitting erect is reminiscent of the idiom of yogic practices which permeates the whole of meditative literature on the soil of India. A physical attitude of restful but alert contemplation, implying harmony, balance or peace has been a pattern of behaviour in India that has persisted through its long history of contemplative thought. The Shiva-yogi seal of Mohenjodaro, the Dhyana Buddhas scattered over vast areas of South East Asia in the form of images, and the instructions of the Gita (VI. 11), not to speak of the Hatha and the Patanjali yoga proper, and even the Brahma-Sutras - all stress this attitude of alert relaxation combined with inner adjustment of the spirit tuned to the Absolute. One has to be free from sleep as well as from wakefulness in such an attitude, as has already been recommended in the present work earlier in verse 7.

Part III

Nitya has a paragraph or two where he touches on a few mystical ideas that are not much a part of this study. I thought I'd mention one, and add it in an appendix, as it doesn't particularly fit the flow of the commentary as a whole. I'm pretty sure Nitya was gently implying that certain meditative practices are helpful in finding lulls from the whirlwinds of life, but he was always very careful to not come on as an advocate of any technique in particular. He believed that a life path is an absolutely individual decision. What he offered was wisdom and psychological insight.

You can look up the terms he uses in that section and find general information easily enough. I'll just say a bit about "When you center your consciousness in any of the synergic centers, it

is as if consciousness is flowing or streaming centripetally and centrifugally, while keeping that locus as a monitoring force.” That might still baffle your search engines!

“Synergic centers” was Nitya’s translation of chakras. Synergy is the convolution of forces to produce a greater energy than the sum of the parts. In the chakras, inward cycling energy (centripetal) and outward spiraling energy (centrifugal) meet. One of his more frequent guided meditations (though still uncommon—Nitya was very original about meditation, and seldom repeated himself) was to go through the chakras one by one. First we would spiral outward from the center point, and then circle back inwards. It brought an expansiveness and heightened energy to the locus.

In order, the correspondences are, for chakras one through seven: earth, water, fire, air, vibration/word, wisdom, and liberation. We would begin with the *muladhara*, the first chakra, and meditate on the solidity of it, the real material basis of our being, where we sit. Then Nitya would draw our attention progressively outwards, touching all the earthy elements in turn. We would feel the hardness of the floor and the structural basis of the room we were in. Then our flights of fancy would go farther, slowly taking in the solid aspects of the immediate environment, the town, the region, the globe, the solar system, the galaxy, and finally the whole universe. Then we would gradually return in an inverse pattern. On arrival back at the starting point, that chakra was now informed by a vast new perspective. With each chakra the focus was on the element epitomized in that level, and the approach was not linear but spherically centrifugal. Next we would follow liquids through the cosmos, followed by heat, gases, vibration, light, and occasionally the *mysterium tremendum* of nothingness.

Mick spoke of a similar meditation he does, only when you return to the “one point” (near the third chakra) you then cycle inwards infinitely: the point itself is infinite, only in the opposite “direction” of the outer universe.

Either way, it is a wonderfully freeing meditation, and one which reinforces the sense of unity with the whole cosmos. Try it sometime.

Part IV

Jake's comments are particularly excellent this time. You can see he's really made the material his own, which is just the thing to do:

In this verse is the admonition to locate the transcendent within, to hold to it, and to interpret all of manifestation in terms of it as you go about your life. Having established that our true Self is that which is unchangeable and true, the Guru in this verse turns to his readers and tells them it is time to live that truth. One could say, this is the "just do it" verse that is the culmination of those which have preceded. As he discusses the Guru's words, Nitya picks up where he left off in his previous commentary. "Sameness," he here repeats, must form the core of our understanding and point of view, for as long as we entertain separateness as a default position our minds will spin in endless mazes.

As he pointed out in verse 37, Nitya opens the present one by again noting that our lives are constituted of an endless stream of agitations and that the mind continuously manufactures fears and dread that divert our attention to the particulars. In doing so, it also divides us one from the other: "this tendency is seen everywhere, differentiating, separating, breaking away, alienating, rejecting" (p. 264). This *anya* drives us to continue in this path that makes us more and more isolated as we experience life. Cultivating the opposite tendency, *sama*, writes Nitya, requires that we reverse course and begin to see the commonality in all manifestation, including especially ourselves.

As a matter of fact, it is with the self that this whole process must begin, with our turning inward and observing just what it is

our minds are doing all the time. In order to illustrate his point, Nitya cites the Bhagavad Gita where Arjuna (seeker) tells Krishna (Absolute) that all that he (Arjuna) has been taught in the abstract is fine as far as it goes but that now he asks how he can make that advice practical, how he can live what he has learned when his mind does not seem to be under his control and constantly creates an endless stream of ideas laced with terror, fear, and worry. Krishna concurs with Arjuna in his observation and drops a key observation in saying that the mind cannot be forcibly controlled. It does what it does, performing in many cases like a whirlwind that kicks up smoke and fume thereby distorting and clouding any clear vision otherwise possible. But the mind is not always so agitated, continues Krishna. It does settle down eventually, and it is during these moments of calm that it needs instruction from our Self, that it needs to be reinforced in the fact that it like everything is part of the Absolute oneness the same everywhere and always.

In our secular western sense, this same advice has sound therapeutic value. Our alienation and solitude, the logical consequence of a mind left on its own, easily leads our egos to assume a heroic posture in defending itself from ideas threatening that position. In our world of strife and competition, the examples are legion writes Nitya—from family disputes to religious wars. And they are indeed endless as long as the mind is left on its own to defend itself in a world of necessity in which everything is other and everything is a threat. By centering on sameness rather than difference, we begin to change the narrative, so to speak, and instruct the mind on a new default position. During the storm of conflict, the teaching may not be possible, but afterwards, when the mind is calmed, that instruction can take place and can continue as is possible. The mind, says Nitya, will take in the lessons but won't necessarily demonstrate that it has learned anything right away. The education requires a constant application, advice common to that offered in contemporary psychotherapy. After the storm passes, pick through the debris,

sort out what is useful and what is not, and resolve to apply the lessons when the next event comes about, and it always will.

Detaching the mind from its obsessions *as they manifest* is often not immediately possible but can be given the proper and continuous discipline. Nitya calls this our “constant meditation” (265). In this phrase, he makes a distinction between “sitting cross-legged on the floor with eyes closed” and our lives generally which he then says “is a meditation.” Our true Self, our beingness is that which allows us to say “this exists” or “this does not exist,” and it is with this Self that we address all things that enter our lives. Once we establish ourselves in that Absolute and read our daily lives through it we will be in a position to meet all the whirlwinds we encounter without the necessity of attaching to them and being swept away again and again by a mind that just doesn’t know any better.