

12/3/13
Verse 42

“This is knowledge”; in that, what comes first, “this,”
is sameness; its qualifying predicate is awareness;
for intellect and all such to vanish, and for the true path to come,
this should be meditated on.

Free translation:

When one says, “This is knowledge,” what comes first as 'this' is
the unifying sameness; its distinguishing attribute is 'awareness'.
For all mentations like discursive cogitation to cease, and to gain
the path of liberation, one should contemplate on 'this', which
inheres in the universal identity.

Nataraja Guru’s translation:

In ‘this is knowledge’ the initial ‘this’ is ‘same’
While its attribute is cognitive consciousness.
For the mind and all else to vanish
And the good path to gain, this should one contemplate.

In a way, the forty-second verse completes the broad sketch
of consciousness Narayana Guru has provided us with from the
very beginning, and the first half will wind down with some of the
delightful implications of his enlightened framing. In the second
half we are invited to make it real, to put the wisdom into practice.
It can be rather intense, so the Guru next grants us a peaceful and
uplifting stretch to prepare ourselves for it.

In the last verse Narayana Guru began with “This is a pot,”
and now we have “This is knowledge.” The first refers to sat, the
existential aspect, and the second to chit, the subsistential aspect,
the interpretation of reality by conscious awareness. Nitya adds the
value aspect, the ananda, in his commentary, which is the aspect

that attracts our interest. Taken together, sat, chit and ananda constitute complete units of experience and unify them. There is a kind of paradox involved, in that experience requires separation from unity, the isolation of discrete items in a consciousness that is otherwise unitive. It is at once the creation of a meaningful universe and the potential destruction of its coherence. Nitya puts it this way: “From this one overall knowledge we modulate one little piece, and then label it and put it aside as a separate entity. We already belong to a world of unity of consciousness, of universal awareness, which has no specificity at all. Then when indicativeness tickles the mind, one definite piece is carved and forged out of consciousness.”

This separating faculty is called the intellect, and despite its revered place in Indian philosophy it always comes in for derogatory comments in class. Almost no one ever shakes off the popular notion that the intellect is the enemy of spirituality. It continues to amaze me. If you want to pack your bags, retreat to a cave and stop enjoying life, fine. Otherwise, heal your intellect and then it becomes the key to holistically processing everything you do. Grasping the difference is critical to this study. Nitya says:

If we sit in silence, it is fine. It is not the silence of a graveyard. It is an all-filling silence. We are not being with one specific form of endearment, we are in a natural state of eternal bliss. In the present verse, the Guru puts it that all the specifying aspects that come are aspects of consciousness, nothing else. If the intellect which is causing these specifications can be removed, you get *sadgati*, the right path. While *durggati* is the path that leads you to trouble, to bondage, *sadgati* is the path which brings you liberation. Vedantins also have two paths. One is called *pravrtti*, the involved, that which binds you to action, the action-oriented path, while the other is called *nirvrutti*, the releasing way.

The Guru’s point is that if you seek liberation, you should ask the question, “What is this?” You don’t ask “What is this?” in the way

that takes you to individual specifications and things. You are aiming at the ‘this’ in the sense of “What is the this-ness?”

Look closely: it isn’t the intellect per se that is to be tossed away; it is *the intellect that is causing the specifications* that leads us down the wrong path. The cure given here is to turn our attention to the ‘This’, the unpredicated substance, the unifying generality. And again, not to dispense with all specifics, but to base them on a universal norm rather than our personal whims.

Our best friend the intellect becomes our enemy when it forgets the underlying unity of the universe. As a tool of the ego, it loses its capacity to be expansive and just. But when it’s directed again and again to ‘This’, to the unspecified totality, it lifts us out of our partial awareness. Narayana Guru describes the specifying function as a kind of magic, and Nitya laments that we get caught up in our own magic acts and forget we are acting:

If a person is contemplative, he should have a detached mind so that he knows that even when he is relating to many things, they are all born of one consciousness, called ‘this’. Then we will not be caught in the magic that we ourselves create.

We are strange kinds of magicians that create a magic which we then get caught in the snare of. We need to be so clever that we create, but only amuse ourselves and do not get caught.... We are always creating demons out of our own minds and getting afraid of them. Narayana Guru says to not get caught in this delusion.

I would add that demonizing our intellect is a clever magic trick of the ego, since it is the primary tool to reduce the ego’s grandiose schemes. The ego limits the intellect’s role so as to not let it challenge the precarious perch it has devised for itself. We all agreed that this was a place where outside assistance was sorely needed, and why gurus often seem to behave as contrarians. They

can see our ego tactics when we do not, and refuse to let us get away with them.

Nitya puts his finger on another aspect of the primary paradox that is a rich source of confusion:

[A] unit of value cuts itself off from other values and the rest of our knowledge. Consciousness is chopped into many fragments by our deciding upon the values of things, items of interest, upon whatever is presented. Through this process every item of knowledge decided upon by the intellect vivifies the world, vivifies consciousness.

Where does it all come from? Out of the one knowledge.

To vivify is to bring to life, to animate. So values simultaneously separate and bring to life. Our life is an expression of separateness. And that's not necessarily a bad thing at all. The problem is that values taken in isolation will lead us astray, so we need to refer them to a neutral state to keep them in perspective. The gurus ask us again and again to return to the unity at the core of life, the karu. Not to reside there permanently, for most of us, but to rectify our values, so that our life will be optimized. They ask us to worship this feature even, to have such respect that we are moved to rise out of our poverty of imagination to invoke a transcendent vision. It is not supposed to be just another idea off the rack, it should motivate us. We should care. And if we allow ourselves to touch it, the value of caring in us is vivified, brought to life.

Bill mentioned that he has not been able to do his usual daily sitting meditation for several weeks, due to recovering from an operation, and he feels like he's less in contact with himself. He well knows that his sitting makes the connection with the core real, it converts it from an abstraction to something that keeps his life in harmony. And simply sitting is close kin to Narayana Guru's ideal: it doesn't have a goal or any expectation attached to it. Bill often quotes one of the roshis (Suzuki?), "We don't sit to gain anything, we sit because it's our true nature." The simple act of taking time

to stabilize the psyche has far-reaching implications, which shall remain unspecified. Bill can hardly wait to get back to it.

Susan also reported that she has begun taking several meditative breaks during the day to rebalance herself, and it has had a positive impact on her state of mind.

None of us is likely to be one of those great saints who sits all day lost in meditation, internally heading home to the giant sun at the center of the universe. We bathe in unity and then forge our way out into duality, harmonized and detached from the projections that bedevil so many of our fellow beings. The Irish satirist Jonathan Swift would have really appreciated this approach, caught as he was in a time and place he despised for its cruelty and hypocrisy. He lamented, “We have just religion enough to make us *hate*, but not enough to make us *love* one another.” Unity was not only unpopular but undreamed of in his day. Narayana Guru is beckoning us to go all the way to love.

Deb talked about *hiranyagarbha*, the golden egg that is the Upanishadic equivalent of the Big Bang, the point source of the entire cosmos. It’s obviously related to the *karu*, the yolk of creation. Like pecking chickens who have no conscious memory of our life in the egg, we live immersed in specificity. This teaching reminds us that the core, the egg, can be recognized, can suffuse us while we live our lives here. We can remain grounded in that vibrant beginning even as we go about our daily tasks.

Jake gave an example of the intellectual reclamation that accompanies opening up to the unitive core. He read the arguments I linked about biocentrism (in Verse 41, Part III), which are fairly persuasive, but instead of being led down a primrose path by them, he could clearly discern how they were basically a litany of preferences reinforced by citing other people’s opinions or pulling pie out of the sky. Because they sound like popular opinions, we unconsciously are compelled to agree with them, but if you can keep your head their fallaciousness is readily apparent.

Jake talked about how we project our interpretation onto everything, and how hard it is to pare those interpretations down to

essential facts. He once took a class in report writing dealing with describing a crime scene, and it showed him how most of what he thought he saw was just an opinion. The teacher kept telling him no, no, those aren't facts, they're just your interpretation. Digging down to the essence was a herculean task.

It reminded Deb of a painting class she took with Suellen once. There was an eggplant (brinjal) on the table, and Suellen kept urging the class to "just draw what you see; don't draw your *idea* of what you are seeing." Again it was a daunting challenge to eliminate the excess interpretations and truly see the object as itself. The point was that we non-artists don't draw well because we are drawing interpretations rather than actual things. Our specifying intellect throws us off every time. If we really drew what we saw, it would be beautiful.

Deb used to use the old apple experiment in her writing classes, which really brought this idea home. In case anyone wants to read it again, here's the original writeup:

<http://scotteitsworth.tripod.com/id39.html> . It's a revealing exercise, first done in a class on peace I gave at the Unitarian Church in 2004 in response to the second Gulf War, demonstrating how our minds embroider tiny bits of facts into whole narratives, and then act on them.

The point of knowing this, as several people agreed, is that we can alter our way of looking at things and develop our capability to move beyond being caught in illusions. In many respects this is the job of the intellect. If we just assume everything is as we imagine it is, nothing changes, and we are easily led into blind alleys. Vedanta shows us how to catch ourselves in the act, so to speak, and interrupt our habitual programs. Contemplation of the Absolute is very important, but with an intelligent scheme of correlation added in it becomes even more dynamic.

Susan talked about how this process has affected her. She used to be very dependent on other people's opinions of her, but she has gradually developed her independent streak, her ability to stand her ground under fire. (In fact, she is the Z in my upcoming

book, giving a perfect example of this. Maybe I'll clip that bit into Part III.) Recently she was out walking with a friend who was shocked that she wasn't going to dye her graying hair. Other friends have been wondering why she doesn't make herself look prettier. But because Susan has been growing to appreciate her own authentic nature, she doesn't identify as strongly with her surface details. She realizes it's a mark of insecurity that some women feel they have to look attractive, as though their human qualities aren't enough. Of course, looking beautiful is delightful, but if it masks a fear of loss and rejection, then it's very sad. The real "knockouts" are those who aren't pretending to be someone else. The curious thing is that the women who are criticizing Susan are also drawn to her because she is not pretending. She is straightforward and honest with them, and it's a great relief.

Mick got a laugh with his simplified version of this verse: "Don't let your mind run you." Of course, it's a tricky business, one that no formula can ever quite provide for. We shouldn't—as Mick intended—be carried away by our partial judgments, but we should also be open to the highly intelligent inner guidance system we are blessed to carry around with us. Many of our problems come from tuning this out. Meditating on "This" is a nonpartisan way of welcoming it back into our lives.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

This self is the Absolute. This body is perishable. This is truth. This is untruth. In all this, "this" indicates that there is something to be considered. In all these atomic sentences the word "this" is the nucleus. When "this" is presented by itself it makes no definite sense. In the sentence, "This is a pot," "pot" qualifies "this." The predicative aspect is therefore called *visesa*. "What is this?" is the problem-raising element of mind; its complementarity comes from the predicating judgement, "This is a pot." The faculty that

complements the mind is the intellect. Mind goes on asking questions, and the intellect goes on answering them.

As “this” is a common term used to indicate or suggest the presence of everything to be known, it has an inner homogeneity. For this reason it is called *sama* or sameness. In the sentence “This is knowledge,” “this” is *sama* and “knowledge” is its qualifying predicate. Before predication the specific properties of things and ideas remain hidden in the unknown or the unconscious respectively. Knowledge has three functions: it invites attention, it relates the subject to the predicate, and it grasps and retains the meaning.

It is the intellect that reveals to the ego the emotional value potency of the predicated specific property of whatever is presented to consciousness. The revelation of values causes intrigue in the total personality. The individual is most likely impelled to react to an actual situation or a potential situation indicated by the value significance of the experience in question. We have two options in such situations. One is to approach the subject from an ego-centred angle and initiate a chain of action/reaction complexes. By assuming that posture the knower becomes both an enjoyer and an actor. The other possibility is to look at the issue unitively from the passive standpoint of a universal spectator. Although being a spectator of the passing show of life may bring a general sense of appreciation, it does not produce any compulsions to take upon oneself the role of an actor. Consequently, such an attitude promotes release from role-playing situations. A contemplative who aspires to peace and harmony is recommended here to cultivate a unitive understanding of the purport of “this,” which comes to the surface of the mind as never-ending ripples of curiosity.

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Nataraja Guru’s commentary:

THE other universal atomic or elementary proposition in terms of pure reason or knowledge is subjected to scrutiny here. Here too there is a positive or a negative, a specific or a generic aspect; while the movement itself here may be said to be the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspect of reality. Like the square root of minus one understood graphically in terms of the correlates of Descartes, we have here an aspect of reality represented by 'this', which is negative and belongs to the vertical aspect.

The negative nothingness understood in its pure or dialectical aspect is the ground of all absolutist realities of every grade of value, from the lowest to the highest; and within the scope of this series marking the path of spiritual progress in contemplative life we have to seek to become affiliated and promoted stage by stage to the full freedom of truth.

The specific attribute of pure reason is stated to be cognitive consciousness (bodha) in this verse. The epistemology of the Vedanta strictly distinguishes between the Self and the non-Self sides, the conceptual and the perceptual aspects of the event called awareness within consciousness. 'Jnana' is applied to the subjective or conceptual and 'jneya' to the objective or non-Self aspect. As with the Mimamsakas, consciousness is a form of activity here, and the positive act of cognition is different from mere passive awareness. These dualistic distinctions, however, finally get absorbed into the unitive status of the Absolute; but for purposes of methodology and for epistemological analysis, we have to distinguish them here.

When knowledge becomes finalised beyond terms of becoming into terms of pure being there is neither plus nor minus to be distinguished, but only the pure unitary or unitive light of the Absolute that is fully itself. This ultimate standpoint is the goal of the aspirant for Self-knowledge and is referred to in the second

half of the present verse. The path to contemplative progress is just indicated and not defined or described fully yet.

Part III

Here's the part about Z (Susan) from the April 2009 class notes, way back in the Yoga Shastra classes, plopped into my Gita Ch. II commentary and soon to be world famous in *The Path to the Guru* (PTG):

A friend who has been studying yoga for some time related an opportunity to put “reason in action” into practice. Let's call her Z. Briefly, an old friend pulled her aside one day and accused her of betraying their friendship. She was furious with Z. Like Arjuna, Z's initial impulse was to recoil in horror and prepare to flee. She first assumed she was guilty as charged, and she began to give herself a lecture about what a horrible person she was. Then she thought, “Wait a minute, I don't think I betrayed anyone.” She mastered her reaction and stood her ground. First she asked if their friendship could be salvaged. Her friend said she didn't think so. Then Z asked her to explain what was the matter. All the time she was struggling to calm herself down. As she became calmer, she began to be able to respond in helpful ways and to present her side of the story more clearly, not to mention to see her friend's point of view dispassionately. Her friend has some personality quirks that were exaggerating the problem, and Z didn't feel she needed to take responsibility for those. But she did take cognizance of them and worked with and around them. After a difficult half hour, Z was able to restore peace and her friend's trust.

This is exactly how to put the Gita's teaching into daily practice. An uninstructed person might have started a war by hurling back defensive accusations, or else retreated with hurt feelings. The friendship might well have been broken. Z had what she described as a rare opportunity to make peace by uniting their two sides of the story. Right in the midst of “ordinary” life, such an

opportunity had unexpectedly appeared. Those who become skilled in yoga will find their talents at resolving problematic situations called upon more and more, and in the bargain they can turn an initially miserable encounter into a beneficial one.

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In Nitya's Patanjali commentary, the very last chapter contains some important reminders that bear on our study. You may recall that dharana is holding the focus of the mind; dhyana is contemplation; and samadhi is sameness or equipoise. Above and beyond these ideas, Nitya presents some key insights about spiritual psychology at the very end of his *Living the Science of Harmonious Union*:

Aloneness does not actually mean an alienation from anything. It is arriving at a neutral zero by finding out the law of contradiction, which, in modern days, is spoken of as finding a homeostasis. In our daily practice we should again and again come to the neutral zero, where the ekagra, one-pointedness, of consciousness comes without effort. Only through a relaxation of all compulsions acting in the body does one come to the supreme silencing of the plurality of function. That is real ekagra, and not taxing one's sensory system or lifting oneself out of all awareness.

In samyam, the word of the preceptor is the main instrument by which the disciple's persona is carved out or orchestrated. In every person there are resonating ideas as well as dissonant ideas. When all the possible resonances adhere to each other, a nucleus emerges as a persona. The dharana that is put into a Yoga aspirant's consideration can be as minimal as a mustard seed. But when it resonates with several potentials, the inner organs of consciousness jointly assume responsibility to choose the right model for evolution and the personality of a yogi comes into being. This is like the organic growth of a sperm in an egg becoming a chick, the

chick coming out as either a hen or a cock, which grows into maturity and breeds its species. Similarly, the Yoga student goes from listening to instructions, to meditating on instructions, to finding in all external environments appropriate challenges to be accepted and converted into one's own natural counterparts in the process of evolution.

We have to keep in mind the three prospective states of mind, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi. At each level you need to have conscious participation to make sure that the word dynamics taken for samyam will yield the correct result. When you are at the dharana level it has to resonate with your own inner dharma. You should not try to change yourself so much as to alienate yourself from your svadharma. A test of whether your dharana is congruent with your svadharma is the continuous experience of the growth of an inner joy.

Thus the very first consideration in actualizing dharana is to look introspectively at the quantitative and qualitative growth of joy within yourself. When that flourishes, dharana is both the foundation of Yoga and the pointer to the goal of achieving perfection.

In contemplation (dhyana), you have to assure that your ego does not transform into a parasite privately feeding upon your spiritual exercise, gloating on the importance of your relativistic position in integrating the external and the internal. To grow into the unlimited dimensions of the Absolute, you should be on the lookout for any relativistic factor becoming negatively conditioned in your transactional consciousness.

In social circles, such socially attainable efforts are very much appreciated. That may encourage a person to be a social reformer or a philanthropist. But those efforts will not bring a person to liberation. There has to be a self-releasing awareness that prevents

the identification with socially accepted titles from imposing on the consciousness of an aspiring yogi.

This implies the necessity to normalize and naturalize one's life from moment to moment with continuous discipline. The contemplative has to be super-conscious of the innate factors that prompt consciousness and the outside factors that color consciousness. The yogi has to go beyond the binding of localization and of any special mode into which the personality gets bonded. Then alone does the yogi become a transcendent being.