

12/10/13
Verse 43

Even those of good action are caught by nature
and whirled around in vicious circles;
one should know that non-action does not bring release from perverted
action,
only the non-desire for the fruit of action.

Free translation:

Even good people engaged in virtuous action are caught in
Nature's repetitive compulsions, and they helplessly go round and
round performing obligatory action. Mere omission of action does
not cure the mind of its urge to modulate. Only unitive
understanding, which is desireless, brings emancipation.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

By Nature's action caught, and turned,
Men of good action too, alas, keep turning round!
Mis-action to counteract, non-action avails not.
Gain-motive bereft, wisdom one should attain.

One of the primary beliefs that plague humans is that what happens to people is caused by their mental state. Not just that the way they frame events shapes their responses, but that they somehow bring about the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune based on what they think. Here Narayana Guru sweeps aside such superstitions. We live in a world with plenty of hard times mixed in with the good, and no one is immune. The point of life is not to escape unpleasantness but to realize and actualize our Self.

Believing there is a perfect attitude that can defeat the workings of fate is a kind of defensive ploy enabling us to judge others harshly based on the problems they are caught in as well as

distance ourselves from them, and it's no accident that we semi-consciously do the same thing to ourselves. We run ourselves down for our mistakes, instead of being our own best support and learning from our foibles, incorporating their lessons into our positive programs. At the same time we prefer to ignore problems for as long as we can, until they literally force themselves upon us.

A key ideal of the Bhagavad Gita that Narayana Guru echoes here is that goal-orientation is responsible for many of the warped attitudes our ego adopts. Imagining a future payoff for our actions is delusory, and giving it up is our best spiritual (as well as political) strategy. It is easy to state the principle, but it is in fact very subtle and has far-reaching implications. It made for a lively discussion in class that had to be brought to an abrupt halt when time ran out. Happily, more is on the docket for next week. I really hope to hear from others on this critical aspect of self-realization.

Whenever I have taught the Gita and gotten to the first iteration about relinquishing the fruits of action, I have encountered a storm of protest. The Gita says, "Your concern should be with action (as such) alone, not for any benefits ever. Do not become benefit motivated; be not attached to inaction either." (II, 47) Two verses later, Krishna adds, "pitiful indeed are they who are benefit motivated."

It's not surprising that such a radical teaching should bring howls of indignation. For our whole life we have been taught a simple program: choose a worthy goal, develop a means to attain it, and work diligently to bring it about. In transactional life this is exactly how we function efficiently. We make a list of what we need from the store, go buy it, and bring it home to make dinner. But spirituality should not be denigrated to a transactional—Nitya often called it contractual—activity. There is no one-to-one correspondence between what we do and the psychological or spiritual benefits we receive. The karmic connections are far too mysterious. But because of our thorough training in quid pro quo contracts, religions often feel compelled to promise the same kinds of simplistic results that a trip to the store provides. Such notions are spiritually pitiful because we are not only veering away from authenticity and opening ourselves to disappointment, we are

simultaneously blocking out the harmonious forces that abound in our world.

Because of the false belief that the world is crafted out of our imagination, spiritual life for many is little more than a convoluted way to escape pain. Then we gauge our progress on how easy our life is, instead of how valuable or meaningful.

When things go well for us, we may feel moved to help others to achieve the same condition. It's a seemingly compassionate attitude, but for a yogi it throws the direct penetration into the Self off line, converting it from pure to goal-oriented, from unitive to dualistic. It leads to a plethora of negative judgments, and the notion that people deserve what they get. There is a kind of cruelty hidden in it. In short, it's an egotistical posture.

I thought it was interesting and very much in keeping with this verse that yesterday was also the memorial celebration of Nelson Mandela. I heard some elegant testimonials on the radio while out doing my (utterly goal-oriented) shopping. Talk about a great human being who was whirled around in vicious circles by the animosity of those with vested interests! Yet no sensible person imagines he brought it all on himself; he was simply a mirror for the ills of a repressive society. He didn't invent those ills, but by confronting them as an absolutist, he catalyzed a sea change in which many impediments were swept away. Nitya's short version of Verse 43 addresses the subtle difference between working for justice as a pragmatic goal and upholding justice as an innate feature of a harmonious and reciprocally balanced universe:

Every good work is foreshadowed by a resistance. Like light casts a shadow, so the good intentions of an altruistic person rouse suspicion and fear in the minds of people who are either engaged in some act of exploitation or are afraid of losing their vested interest. In much the same proportion, the good man's intentions inspire hope and good will in people of like nature. Thus, what one individual initiates develops into a teamwork opposed by reactionary forces. If the good man is only an

idealist who is simply motivated by the desire to do good and who has no insight with which to discern the phenomenal world as a superimposition of the collective will on an unchanging transcendent being, he will take all the rebuffs and backfires as personal attacks hurled at him by a section of the ungrateful society for which he has made his best sacrifices. This will bring despair and frustration. It is sad to see so many patriots, politicians and welfare workers live their old age in loneliness, cursing their fate after wasting their precious lives in the pursuit of empty ideals and fruitless dreams. Thus, a man of good works finally becomes cynical of action.

We have, however, examples of another model, the ones who bring substantial good to the world without ever losing their good cheer, courage and hope. They are dedicated people with consecrated souls who do not look for the fruition of any benefits in a kingdom of God that is yet to come. They transcend time and live in the eternal present. If they do good actions it is not because they want to be good, but because they have so transformed into goodness that only goodness can come from them.

Interestingly, Nitya mentions the Buddha as an example of the unitive actor. Several people on the radio mentioned that meeting Mandela was a very powerful experience. One man likened him to the Buddha or John the Baptist—he had that same kind of passionate intensity, an almost supernatural presence. People like that all share a transformative dynamism that is the epitome of spiritual dedication.

Spirituality is supposed to attune us with our true nature, meaning it should foster the expression of our finest aspirations. These are processed deep in the unconscious, and struggle to find means to come into being. By listening carefully we can sense them, faintly, as if from afar. If instead of opening up to them we have a fixed program in place that we are content to conform to, their intimations will go unheeded. We become deaf to the very whisperings we desperately need to hear.

Deb responded to my request for examples of non-goal motivated activity with a litany of most of the major stages of her life. They all came to her “unbidden,” but because she was open to them she wound up doing wonderful and unexpected things. Most epochal (she didn’t talk about it last night, but we all know about it) was when Nitya asked her to travel around the world with him as his disciple. It’s hard to imagine how different her life would have been if she had said, “I’m sorry, but I’m going to grad school soon, because I want to be a teacher. How about in a couple of years?” But she dropped everything (me included) and headed off into the unknown, which was probably the best decision she ever made.

Deb spoke of those “divine influences” as a kind of electromagnetism, a way to allow our potentials to come out. As John Lennon once put it, “Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.”

Jan acknowledged that this philosophy is the exact opposite of everything we're taught in the society. In place of goals, it's all about wisdom and how to live up to it. Many years ago she was working as a corporate lawyer but was not satisfied. She had no idea what she might do instead. Then seemingly by accident she began working for a woman who she later learned does plaintiff's law for disabled people. Having a partially disabled son, this was much more in line with her passion, and she was instantly drawn to it. We tend to think that dissatisfaction is a negative condition, but it may well be the intimations of our dharma knocking on the closed doors of our mind: yet another invitation for us to open up.

The class sometimes exhibits a tendency toward familiar clichés like spirit dominating nature, duality is bad, or we should be making our life “more sattvic,” more pure. The subtle errors inherent in these attitudes are illuminated by Narayana Guru’s insights. Duality is normal. Where it goes awry is when we forget its grounding in a unitive state, so we become partial to one side of the coin and suppress the other, often violently. Our aim should be to infuse duality with unity, not eradicate it. The universe is not an unfortunate mistake or a random accident. It’s the best thing that

ever happened to us, or ever could happen to us! But we spoil it with our limited mindset of goal seeking and taking sides. We become like automatons crashing into each other as we single-mindedly pursue our self-interests. No wonder the human realm is so full of conflict.

In this verse, Nitya states very clearly the parameters of the spiritual quest for a yogi. In the short version (*Neither This nor That*) he says, “Nature and spirit are not two things. A properly harmonized nature is the best expression of the spirit.” The long version elaborates on this core idea:

Sankhyan philosophy has this dichotomy of matter and spirit, *prakrti* and *purusa*. Within *prakrti*, the polarization between the pure, clear sattva and the dark, inertial tamas creates a lot of movement from one to the other. This kinetic aspect is called rajas. The science of physics mainly deals with the forces of inertia and kinetics. The states which come to prevail between the functions of inertia and kinetics can be understood in terms of *intelligence*. (emphasis mine)

Yogis apply this philosophy in their personal life. They look for an ideal state where sattva, rajas and tamas are brought to an equilibrium. This automatically brings an equilibrium between spirit and matter also. Then that duality is transcended and a unitive aspect comes. The whole system becomes quiescent. A beatitude springs forth from within. Inertia is not pronounced. Our normal idea of clarity, in the sense of a subject knowing an object, is absent. There is no longer any differentiation. In that differenceless state, in the absolute fusion of spirit and matter, one becomes the aloneness of the Supreme. Such aloneness is considered to be a very high state. It is a return from the world of activities to one’s own original nature. This is the yogi’s ideal.

Intelligence must be brought to bear, because realization is an active process. Yogis acknowledge they have work to do: they have mental blocks that interfere with their optimal functioning. In the second half of the Hundred Verses we are taught to apply the

ideas we have learned in the first half toward personal liberation. Nitya sums up the holistic motivation we need to discover in ourselves very succinctly: “Your intention is to find ultimate release from all kinds of bondages that tie you down to the world of necessity, action and relativism, in order to attain absolute freedom.” Can we simply ignore our psychic distortions and have them go away? Hardly. Nitya says:

Another possibility is intending to not do anything, saying “I am in trouble because I act. Only a man who acts makes mistakes and gets caught. So I’ll avoid that by not doing any action.” This is called *akrti*, non-action. Will it help? If you do not act, will you become one with the Absolute? No. There are potentials in you which have their own dynamics to jump out and shape your behavior. They may make you act in very strange ways. Mere suppression or inaction is not an antidote. *Vikrti*, perverted action, comes out of you through reflex and instinctive urges. It spurts out and makes you act weird and crazy. This perverted action is sitting in all of us to some extent. We put on big cloaks of virtue and good action so it all looks very acceptable, but when we get hysterical we forget all that. Non-action is no guarantee against this: it can actually make it easier for such perverted action to surface.

A very interesting theory is emerging from the study of psilocybin mushrooms to cure post-traumatic stress disorder, which they do very effectively. Normal memories do not cause much anxiety or stress, but unprocessed traumas remain in our unconscious as if they are just about to happen, so they continually produce the debilitating fear and psychic immobility of PTSD. Psilocybin brings those unprocessed memories into conscious awareness, where they are converted into normal memories, which might cause mild regret but don’t have the power to undermine our normal state of happiness. The test results are pouring in: one guided trip to bring their traumas to the surface and people who

have been disabled for as many as twenty years are instantly set free, back to “normal.”

Deep meditation can do the same thing, when intelligently directed to areas of psychic tenderness. When we recall traumatic memories they can be processed, converted to ordinary memories that no longer induce compensatory behavior. These are the “bondages” which the yogi aims to obtain release from. The normal course of life affords us opportunities to take a look, but we habitually suppress them. Yogis vow to keep their eyes open.

Deb spoke for many, however, when she offered the flip side of self-examination. We have to also keep admiring the beauty and wonder of life, so we don't become morbidly self-centered. We simultaneously untie our shackles and look to the light. This is so true, so true! I tend to harp on the less traveled path, of critical self-examination, because it deserves a place at the banquet too. Very often the “look to the light” ideas are just another ego tactic to avoid dealing with what needs to be dealt with. The ego insists that peering into our inner darkness is denial of the light, but in fact it is a way of removing the veils so the light shines even brighter. As the Gita famously puts it, “What is night for all creatures, the one of self-control keeps awake therein; wherein all creatures are wakeful, that is night for the sage-recluse who sees.” (II, 69) By confronting our fears we take away their foundation, and they become vestigial.

An odd way I've been thinking of this verse is that when we consider a flatworm or other simple creature, we see how limited their awareness is. As far as we can tell they don't perceive much beyond their own skin, and what contact takes place is quite rudimentary. Then I wondered if there could be other beings who look at humans the same way, noting how little we perceive of our environment, that we're isolated within our tepid mindsets. Several people laughed and asserted that's what literature does! It helps us to see beyond our limitations. And there's always the hope that by seeing them we will expand out of them. It was a beautiful affirmation.

The class was so rich in sharing insights I can barely begin to do it justice. We agreed that we're really focusing now on critical issues with tremendous implications for our lives. Mick wondered aloud how mysterious it is to wake up, to become more aware. It is indeed a mystery, and yet efforts like we have been making have a high likelihood of success. We are cashing in our clichés for ideas we can really sink our teeth into. It's hard to imagine a more exciting community project.

Part II

A particularly helpful “shortie” this time:
Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

When an ego-centred man sees an object of pleasure, an interest to gratify some desire connected with that object is triggered in him. Even when he is not confronted with such a possibility he will hatch out plans to find means and ends that will take him from one pleasure pursuit to another. Occasionally he is cornered by mishaps that make him scared. Even when he is on secure ground, the paranoia of some unknown danger lying in ambush in the near future will haunt his imagination. It is easy to see how such a person becomes a victim of the enigmatic uncertainties of nature. When we say “nature” what we mean is not the hills and dales, or the sky and the ocean, but the nature of our own personality structure. Each individual is like a lump of inertial darkness concealing within himself various charges of dynamite of varying strength, all geared to blast off at different times. To make this picture complete we should imagine an imprisoned splendour in the dark mass which is in resonance with the divine source of all manifestations. By putting together the bright, the dark and the kinetic we get a rough picture of our nature.

Those people who are liberal minded and have altruistic ideals see the sameness of all and are moved with compassion to do good for others. They are certainly different from self-centred

hedonists, but, in spite of their good intentions, they too get trapped in the snares of the collective function of the triple modalities of the society to which they belong. They cultivate love, compassion and fellowship, and they initiate actions for the actualization of these ideals. Their watchword is “do good.” It is with great sincerity that they commit themselves to carry out enormous duties so as to bring welfare to mankind. Every good work is foreshadowed by a resistance. Like light casts a shadow, so the good intentions of an altruistic person rouse suspicion and fear in the minds of people who are either engaged in some act of exploitation or are afraid of losing their vested interest. In much the same proportion, the good man's intentions inspire hope and good will in people of like nature. Thus, what one individual initiates develops into a teamwork opposed by reactionary forces. If the good man is only an idealist who is simply motivated by the desire to do good and who has no insight with which to discern the phenomenal world as a superimposition of the collective will on an unchanging transcendent being, he will take all the rebuffs and backfires as personal attacks hurled at him by a section of the ungrateful society for which he has made his best sacrifices. This will bring despair and frustration. It is sad to see so many patriots, politicians and welfare workers live their old age in loneliness, cursing their fate after wasting their precious lives in the pursuit of empty ideals and fruitless dreams. Thus, a man of good works finally becomes cynical of action.

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Nature and spirit are not two things. A properly harmonized nature is the best expression of the spirit. The Buddha, who lived

2500 years ago, is just as vital, moving and forceful today in the minds of millions of people. The good work started in the Deer Park at Varanasi twenty-six centuries ago is still going on, transforming the lives of people.

Realizing truth is becoming beautiful. Beauty is another word for goodness, and goodness prevails where relativistic disparity and exclusion become nullified. It is for this reason that the Absolute is praised in the Quran as Allah, the beneficent and the merciful.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary is another excellent one:

THIS is a highly concentrated aphoristic verse meant to give a final reply to the never-ending discussion in Vedantic literature of the relative merits of 'jnana' (wisdom) and 'karma' (action). Between the followers of Jaimini of the Purva Mimamsa School and those of Badarayana who accept the Vedantic point of view, there is much subtle polemics, as between the rival claims of 'piety' and 'works', which are corresponding spiritual values in Western theological speculations.

Sankara's position is unequivocal in the primacy it confers on knowing rather than on work. In a masterly tirade against the plea for combining jnana and karma of those who give equal place to both, in his introduction to his famous commentary on the Bhagavad Gita he exposes the nature of the conflict and subtle paradox involved. Even after giving due consideration to all his arguments one is left with a vague feeling that a thumb-rule in this matter is not possible. The Guru here directs our attention to four different aspects of action under the Sanskrit terms:

prakriti (nature's action) tending to create what is specific and particular from the general matrix of virtual realities;

sukriti, action of the good man who wishes to escape its binding or compelling obligatory pressure in the matter of rising above necessity to freedom;

vikriti, perverted mis-action which arises out of our natural attractions and repulsions in relation to sensual or mundane interests; and

akriti which is non-action.

These are potent tendencies whose force is operative overtly or innately. A fly-wheel of a machine, once started, keeps moving even after active power applied has been withdrawn; *vikritis* are thus potentially operative tendencies in the psycho-physical dynamism of human life which cannot be denied but have to be countered or cancelled-out consciously before freedom could be established. The problem has to be faced with subtle insight into one's own self as belonging to the larger context of the Absolute.

A process of sublimation of gross tendencies of action in terms of subtler and subtler tendencies of purer and purer wisdom-content, is involved here, to be grasped through intuitive imagination. An organic or living approach instead of a merely mechanistic attitude is called for. The transition from the world of horizontal interests in things of the order of 'this is a pot', as analysed in the first of the two previous verses, has to give place to the purer interest conforming to the pattern of thought-movement implied in the nuclear, atomic or simplified proposition, 'this is knowledge', of the previous verse. Petty interest in utilities or pragmatic interests have to be transcended, and they have to be replaced by higher interests of a pure intellectual order before one could arrive at the full term of contemplative life. Ends and means have to be conceived unitively before the process of sublimation is finally accomplished. While non-action is not held up as the ideal, work is

not presented as the goal either. As in the famous verse in the Bhagavad Gita (IV.18) equating action and inaction, one arrives at a unitive view of these rival value-factors, and then alone a solution is arrived at which abolishes the duality in the neutrality of the Absolutist viewpoint. *Prakriti, sukriti, vikriti* and *akriti*, referring to four kinds of tendencies in the Self, have all to meet centrally and neutrally in the consciousness that is established in the Absolute, for which disinterest or a dispassionate attitude is here recommended.

Part III

John wrote a wonderful response to the text:

This is one of the most amazing pieces yet.

To accept what is, or to in some way exact some result for the good - both of these do and don't do philosophies can embrace good intention. But as Richard III says in the play with the same name: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." I can't take the time to write out everything I've done with what I perceive to be self-less and good intention that has, in fact, caused damage. Likewise, I have sometimes done nothing, and bad things happen because I didn't intervene. It is not possible for me to look into the near future and measure the results of either course. What I have found helpful is to try to consider what Arum Gandhi calls the genealogy of evil - which is to say, look at the tools I use because sometimes if I am mindful of the tools, and the methodology, I can detect possible bad consequences karmically - or just bad consequences generally. Kind of like trying to turn your car in heavy traffic, not being mindful that the turn signal isn't working. In another sense, if I use shoes made by next-to-slave labor, am I really helping the world by getting around in it, or am I letting something bad happen for my own benefit. I don't know where to find that middle - detached point. I am not sure if I'm supposed to

act about that, or not act about that, even. I suppose this is something of the ennui the European existentialists are always talking about - of course, I'd be in a state of ennui if I were post World War II survivor - except it would post traumatic. But I digress.

I remember one time - Walter Powell, who more or less financed and got the Powell's Bookstore in downtown Portland going - with the help from a brilliant if not dysfunctional staff - and I were sitting around eating pirogues and drinking Weinhardt beer - a tradition on the late Friday night shift. We talked of a million things. I asked him, as he was Ukrainian Orthodox, was the major difference, so far as he could see, was between the Orthodox and the Protestant Christian churches. He thought about it a minute - and then told me a story.

He said, imagine an island in a lake. On this island is a wonderful cathedral - a marvelous monastery - and place of peace, tranquility, and spiritual development. Every day, at five o'clock, the tide goes out and the people on the mainland can rush across on the sandbars and go to worship at this cathedral. Then, at 630, the tide rushes back in. If anyone has dawdled or is not on time, they drown.

In the Orthodox tradition, said Walter, death is accepted. The monks on the monastery weep and light candles and pray for the dead.

In the Protestant tradition, said Walter, death is unacceptable if it can be prevented. The monks in the monastery would build a sturdy bridge over to the mainland.

When to accept, when to change things - is this not one of the hardest things of all to know. I guess I have some spiritual development in that I even care about this problem. But should I do something with that insight, or not?

Ay yi yi.....

My response includes a link to a fine talk on the same subject. I should also reiterate Nataraja Guru's comment that "one is left with a vague feeling that a thumb-rule in this matter is not possible":

Well John, I've been wondering where you've been lately. Good to hear from you, and I'm glad the verse struck a nerve, as they say. Or a neuron.

Whenever I try to relay this philosophy in America I hit a stone wall. The theory must be, when all else fails, just do good, and you can't go far wrong. That's fine as a transactional stratagem, but becoming unitive is trans-transactional, you might say. I remember this idea blowing my mind on first hearings. Nitya convinced me that lurking within doing good was a secret ego ploy, that "I am better than you." "I am high and therefore you must be low." Doing good only succeeds when this dichotomy is absent. It is eminently possible to meet people as fellow aspects of the Absolute, and respond accordingly.

My daughter Emily has found this to be true, and it is one reason her NGO has had a positive impact in some very challenging places. Where most aid programs identify a problem and barge in to fix it, her outfit listens to the people and offers them assistance in doing what they see the need for. The difference is huge.

Did you see this Ted talk on the same subject? Good stuff, from a business standpoint.

http://www.ted.com/talks/ernesto_sirolli_want_to_help_someone_shut_up_and_listen.html .

This is a paradox that perennially baffles us. If we can't do something positive, then we think we shouldn't do anything at all. But there is another alternative: openness to what the situation calls for. It's by far the most difficult, requiring that we trim all the fat

from our ideals, but it's the one that has a chance of being worthwhile.

I think you'll find that Nitya really put it in a fine nutshell in the short version, *Neither This Nor That... But Aum*, which I'll mail out on Wednesday.

Stay cool!
Scott

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Four minutes to make a great point:

In this rare clip from 1972, legendary psychiatrist and Holocaust-survivor Viktor Frankl delivers a powerful message about the human search for meaning—and the most important gift we can give others.

http://www.ted.com/talks/viktor_frankl_youth_in_search_of_meaning.html

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Jake's commentary:

In Verse 43, the Guru speaks directly to the point at which our philosophy intersects with the “facts on the ground,” the physical and social realities we experience and live in. As he writes, even those with the best of intentions are caught in “vicious cycles,” and others attempting to avoid the problem altogether don't fare much better—repression is the road to perversion, a truism of both Eastern and Western psychologies. The Guru offers the solution in the verse's last line: the “non-desire for the fruit of action.” By attaching ourselves to the results of our efforts, we put time limits on them and then measure them according to their

relative egoic value, how they succeed or fail in enhancing the ego's sense of accomplishment.

In Nitya's commentary, he takes up the Guru's ideas in the second half of his (Nitya's) commentary. The first half, on the other hand, is a marvelously concise over-view of India's six major systems of thought (a summary that western readers may want to take a look at before beginning the verses generally). It is to the last of those presented that Narayana Guru and Vedantins belong—Uttara Mimamsa. Like most, this tradition borrows freely from the others in crafting its general contours and in the process renders dogmatic fundamentalism impossible. Denying essential principles does not lead to excommunication or damnation but, rather, leads back to where you began, spinning in egoic ignorance surrounded by a confusing world continuously morphing into the next form.

As one reads through the verses, the echoes of the six branches of thought reverberate again and again, and in Nitya's commentary of Verse 43, he spends the first half reviewing the sources. The six systems, he writes, fall into three pairs: Sankhya and Yoga, Nyaya and Vaisesika, and Purva-Mimamsa and Uttara-Mimamsa (the home of Vedanta). The first pair connects the Sankhyan "out and out rational philosophy" with the Yoga school in which yogis apply this philosophy to their lives. Sankhyan rationalism operates on a mathematical understanding that is based on binary functions, the most basic of which is that of Purusha and Prakriti, pure consciousness and manifestation (or the field of it). Out of the one comes the other—spirit to matter—and in the latter are the three modalities of tamas, rajas, and sattva, "inertia, kinetics, and the sublime state" (p. 290). The dynamic created between the inertia of tamas on the one hand and the pure spirit-like state of sattva on the other is the home of rajas or action. It's also the object of the study of physics in the West and the Yogi's home of practice in the East. By creating balance among all three, the yogis seek to arrive at that clarity attainable only where spirit and creation are in tune and subject-object duality evaporates. As

Nitya writes, the most revered of yoga sources is Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, which specifies how one might attain the state of oneness or Samadhi.

In the second pair of disciplines, the Nyaya and Vaiseshika, our "methodology for thinking" is connected to how we relate to and act in the world. For those partial to the Nyaya school, they come to know what they know through sense perception, inference, analogy, the principles of contradiction, sufficient reason, and authoritative source (such as a guru or essential text). For the Nyayukan, writes Nitya, "intelligence is that which deals with the objects of intelligence" (p. 291), and our doing or not doing anything in the world rests on how we relate knowledge with intelligence, between "things and ideas." An extensive complex of categories results, beginning with those associated with *substance* and *quality*. Nitya gives (among others) the examples of water and fire: water flows and fire burns. Applied universally, this principle organizes the elements of the world into their concrete manifestations and their peculiar qualities. From this first assumption arises an array of categories that include larger abstractions such as time and space, but the study of each individual, "separately and analytically. . . . is *visesa*. . . . the purview of the Vaiseshikas" (p. 292).

The last pair of schools, the Purva-Mimamsa and Uttara-Mimamsa, focus, says Nitya, on the nature of epistemology. For the Purva-Mimamsa (anterior) school, reliable knowledge is *apriori*. Whenever we experience something, it must resonate with some pre-existing knowledge in order for us to recognize anything. Nitya points out those concepts we are born with and with which we place subsequent inferences. We are aware of space and direction from the get-go and position objects as we (as infants) begin to recognize forms. When we move on to name the forms, we approach the work of the posterior school, the Uttara-Mimamsa, for which the process of semiosis constitutes a major study. By expressing our knowledge in words, we constantly work through the process of "consciousness transforming itself into

specific ideas so that it can become a communicable language” (the subject of verse 41, p. 279).

As Nitya writes in his commentary, Narayana Guru is of this final school of thought and the purpose of the verse is to point us in a direction that takes into consideration how all this knowledge affects our lives and, more to the point, how to use this dynamic in achieving freedom in a world of necessity. By becoming the observer and thereby not being controlled by compulsion or ego, by not attaching to the particular or the general as we oscillate between the two, we can avoid the pitfalls of a profound narcissism or the hypocrisy of an enforced conformity. Identifying with the universal welfare of all and preserving the general happiness is the proper internal position to assume, concludes Nitya, but when those best of intentions meet the world of necessity compromise becomes the coin of the realm. It is in this encounter with the concrete that we get caught up in the whirl of life as it is lived rather than as it fits in the design of the Absolute. For the most part, few actors on life’s stage recognize any other, and because of this state of affairs Nitya offers a solution that trumps the all too common alternative of withdrawing totally: “give up the desire for the fruits of your actions” (p. 295).

Egoic self-satisfaction is a hard nut to crack.