

2/25/14  
Verse 48

The self encased in a body, in his eidetic consciousness, understands all such as, “That is mine” and “This is mine” bereft of body identity; on considering this it is evident that everyone has truly experienced.

Free translation:

In spite of being identified with their own body, people do think of other people and things as their own and say, “This is mine,” or “That is mine.” On considering this, it is evident that everyone has some experience of the oneness of the Self.

Nataraja Guru’s translation:

The dweller within the body from its existential body view  
In respect of all things treats ‘that’ or ‘this’ as ‘mine’  
Transcending physical limitations; when we consider this  
We should concede that any man immediate realisation has.

Before the class even began, Paul wondered about the statement Nitya makes at the end of his comments: “After the next verse there is a major change. If the whole one hundred verses is viewed as a garland, the first forty-nine present a kind of descending dialectics. From verse fifty onwards, an ascending dialectics is used. It is easy to go down, difficult to go up.” What the heck does he mean by this?

Nataraja Guru throws some light on this in his Verse 50 comments, including:

In both the halves of the work we notice that the topics discussed are around factors of subjective import, as the subject matter of the whole composition would warrant. Introspection, however, becomes affirmed deeper in the second half as deeper recesses of the Self are

brought up into view and scrutinized more carefully, where again the reader would profit by noting the inward approach to the subject matter.

There is a loose but elusive structure to *Atmo*, but for our purposes, we can limit ourselves to the overarching aspect Nitya is pointing out. The work opens with the *karu*, the absolute core of existence, and it ends with us gently merging back into *sat-aum*, which is essentially the same thing but by then consciously realized. Here in the middle we are focused on very practical, exteriorized implications of our essential nature, such as how to get along with others. So the descent is more an exteriorization, and now we will be progressively interiorizing. If we take the study seriously enough, this grand dialectic permits the factor of the Absolute or *karu* to permeate every aspect of our life, from the most subtle to the most gross, and back again.

What this midpoint boils down to is that we have been learning a well-developed theory and now we are going to put it into practice. While we have been stressing the importance of doing this all along, the intensity will be ratcheted up so that our ideas have every chance to become our living reality, our default setting if you will. I still remember a day many years ago when these ideas began bubbling up in my mind as “my” thoughts instead of as learned abstractions the gurus were teaching me. I couldn’t believe it! It was not only amazing, it made me feel giddy. Ecstatic. Uplifted. I mean, the flow was recognizably their ideas, but they were being shaped by my individual personality. In a social milieu where we are eternally constrained to convert our life into a dehydrated abstraction, it was a welcome relief. There was no sense of possession, only a relinquishment of my small persona. My “I” was no longer in the driver’s seat, it was along for the ride. The joy ride.

Clearly, this is not the *One Minute Manager* or the *Three Minutes to a Pain-Free Life*. Only by pondering these ideas many times over and in many different and relevant contexts will they finally come alive in our hearts. The content is sublime enough without that, but even more delicious with it.

So, on to the class.

There are two main concepts of substantial import here. First, realization is not a remote and rare accomplishment, it is available to every one of us all the time. Second, our realization is to be expressed in everyday activity. Nitya presents them so well I want to let him describe them:

A big myth is now exploded with this verse. You have now come so close to the experience of the Absolute. It is within your reach, in the palm of your hand, so to speak.... All the religious words have frightened and confused us. Narayana Guru wants to give us courage, telling us, “Don’t be afraid. You are as good as anyone. The essence of realization is in your own daily experience.”

And this perennial reminder:

Your realization is to be lived here and now in society where you touch and are touched by other people. Let us bring our realization to the marketplace. But you think realization is so holy and sacred that it must be kept separate, kept apart. That means you cannot live it. If you want to live it, it should be lived everywhere, at all times. Your perfection is a perfection for all time, not just for the church on Sunday. If you are perfect now you should be perfect in everyday life, too.

That first sentence should resonate in your life, day after day. “Your realization is to be lived here and now in society where you touch and are touched by other people.” Make it real!

The technique Narayana Guru has suggested is to consciously notice how we incorporate other aspects of existence into our own. Start with what you know is yours, like “my house” or “my friend,” and then extend that just a bit more, and then a bit more. Pretty soon the whole universe is yours, and what that implies continues to grow.

Sure, this is primarily an *attitude*. Nobody actually knows or owns the whole universe. But there is a huge difference between a life of openness and acceptance of everything and one truncated by exclusivity.

This distinction comprised the majority of the class discussion, and made for an inspiring session.

By now we should be fully convinced that the way we frame things is a critically important factor in how they affect us. Nitya puts it this way here:

Your existence becomes a meaningful factor by the incorporation of values that you want to live by. When you say “I am,” you are a living entity. In this there is a well-integrated, compact idea of beingness encapsulated as your existence. So your existence is your identity with values for which you live, for which you stand. Your freedom, your understanding, your validations of things—a number of these factors put together become your existential beingness.

This means we really are what we think we are. Not so much with our surface consciousness or our wishful thinking, but as a deep down conviction, the way we structure our thoughts. That’s also why transformation is a slow, repetitive process: we are changing over our neural connections and not simply switching ideas. We can consciously select better values and improve our understanding, but unless we can free ourselves from the submerged anchor of conventional beliefs we are unlikely to sail anywhere. We don’t even realize how much we cling to them and depend on them.

We may not be aware of it, but one thing our society has utterly convinced us of is that we are not worthy of realization. Other people matter; we don’t. Narayana Guru is trying to restore us to our true selves in a healthy way. Much of people’s blather and bluster of aggressive confidence is to compensate for those feelings of insufficiency, but they are mainly window dressing. Underneath them the doubts remain. The guru wants us to gently and kindly give ourselves the kind of support that brings us back to who we truly are, which is much more valuable than we could ever hope for from outer acclaim.

A lot of doubt springs from the conviction that we don’t fit in to the world we live in. I was just at a spiritual gathering in California with a highly regarded teacher. One of the participants voiced a common

belief: “The one thing I know for sure is I’m not all this. None of this is me.” Everyone nodded in agreement, and the teacher gave a discourse on *neti neti*. But I was shocked. It was clearly an ego ploy to avoid responsibility, because the person obviously believed in reality as he routinely perceived it. He just didn't want to be blamed for it. You can't accomplish anything constructive by pretending the connections you have are not there. Paradoxically, you loosen the bonds by first accepting that you have them and befriending them. Then they no longer oppress you, they inspire you or afford you opportunities for liberating interaction. Then you welcome them rather than push them away.

I suggested adding *asti asti* as a counterpoint to *neti neti*, that they go together. After the meeting ended, a woman was very grateful that I had said that. She had just lost her mother, and was not able to simply dismiss her from her mind. She was so relieved to not have to think of herself as “unspiritual” because she had strong feelings for her mother. I have noted how many teachers are callous about the effects of their poorly-understood teachings, thereby reinforcing the doubts people hold about themselves.

Even in the Gurukula we often hear a preamble of self-abnegation before someone says something. They always assume their thoughts are outside the mainstream, or not as important as someone else's. Deep in our soul we feel we have to excuse ourselves for intruding into everyone else's peace of mind. It's a form of mental crippling, and it won't go away until we shine the healing light of understanding on it.

Narayana Guru overturned the chronic malaise of South Indian society by convincing downtrodden people that they were as valuable as anyone, that they truly mattered. As soon as they started to believe it and live it, their world began to change dramatically for the better.

Jan gave a great physical example of how this philosophy plays out. She takes a hatha yoga class, and has been struggling with a muscle that is very tight and painful. Every class she has tried to force it to relax, but it has remained a problem for her. Last week she decided to switch from being upset at the tightness to letting go of her negative thoughts and concentrating on the expansive sense of stretching. Lo and

behold, along with her thoughts the strained muscle also eased up, and she found her body relaxing and feeling much better.

We could think of our mind as a muscle, and Jan's metaphor would work with it too. Incidentally, the latest issue of *Scientific American Mind* (March/April 2014) has an article on the enlargement of certain important areas of the brain by hatha yoga practitioners. Good going! The article also noted that the typical regimen in the West was 70% physical postures, 20% meditation and 10% breath work. Pretty close to my personal regimen of mostly shaking my fist, making faces and jumping up and down, combined with quietly steaming in fury (20%) and shouting (10%). Guess I'm a hatha yogi after all....

Susan and I had talked earlier about a friend who is chronically depressed and incredibly negative, the product of a history of abuse. Because of how she has been treated, in one sense it is "right" for her to feel this way. And yet it makes her life even more miserable. Everything goes wrong for her. Susan plays bridge with her, and is astonished that she always, always draws a terrible hand to play. Somehow it fulfills her expectations that nothing will ever go right for her. This poor friend has gotten so wrapped up in her negativity that nothing can break through it. Bad results confirm her mental state, and she deftly parries all positive offerings to convert them to a negative cast. It reminded me of how certain animals will abuse an injured family member rather than offer support. It's as though the injury invites further abuse. Anyway, Susan observed that there was a definite connection between her friend's attitude and what happened to her, on many levels, not just cards. Could it be true for all of us, in our own ways?

I used to have hostile feelings toward authority figures, so whenever I encountered one a surge of anger would erupt inside me. Again, it was all based on legitimate reasons: people like them were inflicting horrors all over the globe. But with that attitude I wasn't having any effect on them, and I was experiencing the negativity myself. I was including myself as yet another victim of their abusive authority, and they weren't even aware of it. Once I adopted Narayana Guru's attitude, I first of all discounted my prejudices and tried to remain open. That had the effect of drawing the other person in to a less defensive

exchange where communication was at least possible. In addition, my anger was replaced by compassion and a search for understanding. I could see that a history of abuse was at the root of cruelty wherever it arose, and I resolved to redirect my efforts to the causes rather than the effects.

If we keep ourselves sequestered in a vacuum, everything we encounter must come from our own mind, so there is really no chance for us to change anything. Each time we meet someone or something outside our personal boundary, however, we have an opportunity to make it a new part of us. In other words, we learn and grow. Paul summed this central idea up by saying that unity depends on duality to expand its parameters. Nitya expressed it as we are transcendental and immanent at once. Our work in this study will be to bring poles like these together as we proceed.

## Part II

### *Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:*

In one sense we are this body; when the breath is gone, it will be cremated or buried. Thereafter nobody would consider the person identified with it to be existing. When a person is physically alive we speak of him as black or white, or fat or thin, but all transactions come to an end when the body perishes. However, we know that we are more than a body, and further, we think of our body and mind only as instruments of some unknown entity which is working out its course using these tools in a mysterious way so as to achieve some mysterious purpose.

Even when we make sharp distinctions between one person and another we are aware of some unifying factor which pervades the life of all beings. This view is held even by ordinary people. A person speaks of “my body” or “his body.” He might point at a certain woman's body and say, “She is my wife.” Those who say that and those who hear it know that this reference is not to the mere physical body of a woman. In all relationships such as husband and wife, parent and child, friend and

enemy, it is a non-physical entity which establishes a relationship with its counterpart in other embodied persons. People even refer to impersonal things or non-living entities as theirs, as for instance “my house,” “my book,” “my honour,” or “my religion.” At St. Peter's Basilica, the Ramadan at the Kaabah in Mecca, or the Kumbha Mela at the Prayag in India, millions of strangers come together and feel united as though only one spirit was animating all bodies, and pulsate with spiritual fervour. These are not necessarily the wise men of the highest kind of spiritual enlightenment. However, it is a fact that they do transcend all their physical limitations to experience the one which has no special name or form and which is truer than the truth of the existence of any one of them in particular.

When a person says “I exist,” he thinks of his body as proof of his existence. He knows that the animation of his life is confined within the limits of that body. When the same man says “my wife,” “my country,” “my religion,” and “my world,” he is referring to a series of mental horizons that cover areas of interest which are not only outside his body, but can also be of such a wide range that they can be qualified as infinite. To have such an experience one need not be a great philosopher or a great saint. A man who fondly pats his cow or cuddles his dog and considers them as his belongings is consciously or unconsciously recognizing the homogeneity of his essence and that of his pets. When we consider that people all over the world have this universal experience, we can confidently say that, at least to some degree, every person experiences the Self and thereby he also transcends his physical limitations.

No man is too low or too mean to be admitted into the unifying experience of the Spirit.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

IT is usual to speak of immediate realisation as a rare thing among men. Here the Guru asserts the converse of this verity when



viewed from the context proper to contemplative thought. All men have self-realisation already implicit in their relational life.

When a man says that a certain thing belongs to him he is in reality establishing a relation between two entities, one of which is physical and the other that has only a psychic status.

His body, which is physical, cannot establish any direct (logical) relationship with another discrete body because of the property of matter known in the textbooks of physics as impenetrability.

A chair is not able to consider another chair as its own. We have therefore to postulate a subtler substratum of the physical body so that the bipolar interest-relation involved between the Self and the non-Self units of the situation may become understandable.

The only reasonable postulate that can admit the possibility of this inter-physical and trans-subjective or trans-physical or inter-subjective basis of interest or participation as between inert and living entities can be that the medium in which the interest thrives or can function is a neutral psychophysical stuff. This neutral psychophysical stuff can be neither totally material nor totally mental in status. It has, in fact, to participate transparently, as it were, with the very stuff of the reality of the Absolute itself on homogeneous ground.

It is in this sense that we have to understand the Guru to assert that when we come to analyse the situation we lay here the very basis of all interest-relationships. This basis implies in principle Self-realisation, which from the standpoint of the common man is often thought to be a very rare or precious possibility in human life. We associate Self-realisation only with people like Socrates. The Guru here asserts it to be every man's prerogative.

The 'existential body' that is referred to above calls for some explanation. Since inter-physical interest of body with body is easily seen to be impossible and, as we know, on the other hand, that in common experience the relation referred to does exist as a reality, we have to say that the relation is between the existential aspects common to the physical and the mental. This neutral ground has to have a homogeneous or transparent basis at the level of existence so as to be real at all. The other possibilities are for both the factors to be considered essential or at least subsistential. Public reality has to insert itself in the existential and not in the subsistential or the essential, which tend both to be lost in the domain of idealism rather than realism. The ontological 'sat' in Sanskrit which has been used by the Guru in the original verse, further refers to existence rather than to subsistence or essence. The delicate distinction that we are trying to make explicit here can only be adequately treated in a fuller chapter, as we have elsewhere attempted.

Man's life is regulated and understood with reference to his natural or normal life interests. If we should take an overall view of the interests of man in human life, we shall find that one general factor dominates their whole range, whether we take daily interests or the higher interests, here or hereafter. The everyday interests may be said to begin with satisfactions such as hunger. When thirst is quenched man is satisfied and may be said to be happy. When moral, aesthetic or religious consolations or satisfactions are included within the scope of our scrutiny, in a similar way, we find that even they, as they range from the more common to the most rare and specialized interests of man, present the same underlying law, which is that man seeks happiness at all times and in all ways. After exposing the basic structure of bipolar interests in the previous verse, the Guru next goes on to a bolder generalization on the same lines, arriving here, at the centre of the work, at a very important statement about the fundamental unity of all faiths, applicable to humanity as a whole.

## Part III

I'm usually chagrined about all of what I leave out of the notes from our very rich classes. Here's a bit more. Jake talked about an issue this verse brings up for many people, that if you credit everyone as being the Absolute in essence and realized to a degree, shouldn't you give them your full attention and consideration no matter how screwed up they are? What does it mean, then, when people take advantage of you, or go on endlessly trying to drag you into their spiral of despair? Does that disprove the theory?

Not at all. It proves the theory that we are sensitive beings easily corrupted by the input we experience, especially in early childhood. The depth of the misery for some is unbelievable, like a psychological version of the atomic bomb. Sometimes we can defuse it, but once the bomb is detonated, all we can do is run for cover.

This is a place where our discriminative intelligence is put to the test. We start with "innocent until proven guilty," but gradually come to understand just what we can and cannot accomplish. Eventually we may have to give up and put our energies where they can do more good. I always think of the wonderful letter (in L&B, 9/24/71) Nitya wrote to Debbie, which I recently reprinted in the Verse 46 notes. Here's a bit longer version:

When [someone] says high things and does not live up to them, you should underline the value of his vision and should ask why he always fails. The answer is that he sees the vertical possibility, but he does not know how to cross over the hurdles of the gross brutality of the horizontal. There is no easy correction for this, other than going all the way through the process of deconstructing the wrong mold and re-integrating the very Self that has to see its own integrated vision of itself.

You should not be saddened about anyone unless your sadness has a positive or negative impact on him to jolt him out of the impasse and set him right. I may observe a fast, or cry, scream, slap myself and roll on the floor like a mad dog if only I see the ghost of a chance to pull the other to the right track. If that is not possible, I prefer to walk away with a prayer in my heart.

Scott: A yogi is not simply an unquestioning giver, they use their intelligence to probe to the root of the situation, which is almost always hidden from sight. We have to know we live in a world filled with desperate people who are out of touch with themselves, and we have to protect our integrity. For me, if there is the least hint of change or even the intention to change I will hang in with a person, but lacking that a dignified withdrawal is warranted.

John, while not a class participant in person, somehow intuited this thread and wrote:

This covers a lot of my rockier roads on my journey. I just had a hard experience that has lasted ten years. A retired professor with rage problems insisted on my company at least once a week at Monday breakfast. The conversation - all his. - centered on himself, his angers and experiences. I went with this for ten years, even giving him major breaks in his book buying from me. And tried to have him understand my path which is to understand others and work on changing me so he might get the notion of accepting.

However, he had gotten so used to being enraged that he began to find fault in me. I would cop to it and then lead him to the realization that I wasn't deserving of his rage. And that his rage would vanish if he could just accept himself and others. But last week I could take no more of this enraged energy and told him we would have no further interaction as I plainly pushed his buttons by merely existing.

I feel badly but also feel that I need to quit sticking my finger in the light socket. Again I am reminded that I am a part and that my part isn't necessarily to try to improve the other parts. Maybe like Jan, by letting go, the change will come of its own and in the way it should or maybe was meant to be.

Scott again: I'm sure this is something we've all experienced, possibly often. The key is to not become callous or depressed about the dire state of humanity. Discerning the faint glow of the Absolute beneath the pall helps us to keep heart. We are privy to just a small piece of every story, so we are free to believe, along with Dr. King, that "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

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John also sent a fine response to this series of verses awhile back:

When I studied Principia Mathematica - and mind you, this was a long time ago - one of the things that struck me is that one had to accept four Axioms at the outset in order for all of the other volumes of logical formulae work. These axioms could not be proven, but rather, accepted. This bothered me and more and more, I ran into scientific and logical masterpieces that brought into question how certain any thing really could be. Gödel's proof - Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle - the list goes on. I studied W.V.O. Quine - father of computer logic - who had some mathematical insight as to how to solve some of the seeming contradictions - and so I tried to figure out, using Quine's own tool of bracketing - and so I would come out with things like this:

The following would be a contradiction:

My truth is not the universal truth.

Because it states basically that I do not know any truth.

So Quine suggested to me, via his books, that if I bracket it like this

(My) Truth is (not universal) truth.

Which is to say, that Me and the Universal are different.

Now that uncomplicates the issue to me because now it isn't truth that's a seeming contradiction, but the fact that Me and the Universal are different.

Since I am part of the universal equation- I'm here, am I not - this is plainly not true. What is true is that I am a part and my comprehension of the whole MIGHT be limited so long as I put up the distinction that I am apart from the universal.

When I saw myself as part of the universe, I got the deeper meanings of "We are stardust" and "We are children of God" and I could see larger pictures. However, the universal seems to want me to be special and unique, too. So, I will take my rhubarb pie without ice cream, my friend - and it doesn't bother me a bit that everybody else wants ice cream.

So sometimes, logic helps. But the trick is this about logic, one must accept some axioms as true at the outset.

Then, well, it's like trying to play monopoly using another game board's rules. Imagine trying to play checkers using chess rules. Which piece would be the knight, the queen, the castle? Oy. Though, like life, it might be an interesting game to play, no?

What we accept in some ways defines that individual part of us, I guess.

#### Part IV

Jake's comments:

With this verse and the next, writes Nitya in his commentary, the Guru completes the first half of his work that up to verse 50 he

has aimed at our “everyday experience” as much as possible (p. 323). Once he pivots in following this descending trajectory with that mid-point verse, he will be constructing an “ascending” dialectic. Concluding his commentary, Nitya writes, “It is easy to go down, difficult to go up” (p. 328).

As Nitya unpacks verse 48, he begins by explaining the place of ethics, laws, and the like as existing entirely on the phenomenal plane in which we are aware of our body and its limitations, a boundary not experienced when we are in the dream or deep dreamless states. The existence of the body separation in the wakeful state presents us with an opportunity, says Nitya, to exercise a power we possess only when dealing with others—to purposefully direct our Self to experience an awareness beyond the two body limitations while still encased in it. The first boundary is circumscribed by our physical limitations while the second is an ego boundary that he is careful to differentiate from a social ego. This “center of consciousness” constitutes our capacity to include others in our awareness (rather than automatically exclude them) as we expand our affection for the world and all beings in it.

In his previous commentary on verse 31, Nitya approached this procedure for inclusiveness in his discussion of the two methods adopted by the rishis of the *Upanishads* for arriving at the truth of an Absolute unchangeable One: either affirming or denying everything. It is the former, the “argument of affirmation,” in which anything coming within the range of awareness is deemed to be true that we come finally to realize the oneness of all, and it is that practice that Nitya again proposes in his commentary on the present verse. The exercise is based on an intuition of that oneness that leads eventually to its revelation in awareness because it cannot be contradicted if it is continuously and relentlessly applied. In other words, the awareness of the truth of a constant Absolute emerges as axiomatic and requires no “logical” or “scientific” proof.

Because this self-evident truth is available to any one at any time and arises out of common experiential awareness, it is not the

property of any group, organized or not. By expanding our circle of inclusion we reach far beyond our body limitations and become all those “others,” a phenomenon Nitya illustrates through his reference to the mother/child connection and the pet owner’s sympathy for his or her pet. It is our individual efforts that bring to conscious fruition the oneness of all manifestation, but barriers to this choice continue to present themselves. As Nitya writes, “You have now come so close to the experience of the Absolute. . . . It is within your reach. . . . When Jesus says, ‘The Kingdom of God is at hand, close to you, within your own heart,’ people still doubt it.” They do so, writes Nitya, because they fear and have been taught to doubt their own perceptions. The power of organized religion (secular or otherwise) rests firmly on its capacity to control what is acceptable to conscious awareness and in locating the power to do so outside the individual, a condition written about long ago in Antebellum Massachusetts:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.  
Accept the place the divine providence has found for  
you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection  
of events. Great men have always done so, and  
confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age,  
betraying their perception that the absolutely  
trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through  
their hands, predominating in all their being.  
(Emerson, “Self Reliance,” 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph)