

3/4/14
Verse 49

All beings are making effort in every way,
all the time, for the happiness of the Self;
in the world, this is the one faith;
pondering on this, without becoming subjected to sin, be controlled.

Free translation:

All beings, at all times, everywhere, are exerting themselves to attain happiness. This quest for happiness is the one single religion in the world, of which no one has any dispute. Knowing this, one should not be lured into the sin of fighting one's own fellow beings.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Every man at every time makes effort in every way
Aiming at his Self-happiness; therefore in this world
Know faith as one; understanding thus,
Shunning evil, the inner Self into calmness merge.

Most of Nitya's commentary is a review of the first half of Atmopadesa Satakam. I am always amazed at how he can illuminate the nearly invisible thread in this most complex of works. I think of it as we are examining individual grains of sand closely, but Nitya also sees the whole beach, and can tell us where each grain has its place. That's what's meant by a global vision. Since each of his summaries of the work is special and revelatory, they are indexed under "overviews." There are quite a number of them.

The main division of Atmo is between the two halves, with the first half being the pure aspect and the second half the applied aspect. All through, of course, we have been drawing connections with practical matters, so there is no thick dividing line between them. But from now

on we will be directed to embody the change we have envisioned. Any gains will be commensurate with the effort we make.

Each trip through the Hundred Verses lifts us out of our stuckness a little more. It is up to us how much we make of it, but, as Nitya puts it, “[Narayana Guru] builds up the whole thing in such a wonderful way that you can never escape its impact.” Even if you resist every idea, just by wrestling with them you become a wiser person.

Deb opened the class with the image of shadow puppet theater. The audience sits screened off from the master puppeteer, seeing only the play of shadows on the screen, lit from behind by flickering oil lamps. On special occasions—such as when accompanied by a guru—you may be permitted to take a look at the other side, where the bright colors of the puppets are visible, and you can see the puppet master sitting there cooking up plots and cracking jokes. Most of us are content to view the shadow play as the total reality, however, and don’t realize we are permitted to tiptoe to the back if we get curious.

Paul and Bill noted that science has come to realize that the play cannot be separated from the observer. We think we are viewing an objective, outside world, but it is in fact being staged by our mind.

This is one good reason we are instructed to honor the other person. What we are really seeing is a reflection of our understanding projected onto an image of our world. If we revile some aspect of it, we are actually reviling ourself. This is very possibly the most important scientific revelation we can train ourselves to live with. What we see is us, reflected in something like a tarnished, fractured mirror. It is well established that light does not travel past the eyes into the brain. The brain is utterly dark, and receives input resembling the snow on a TV screen after quitting time, basically neural vibrations. The whole lit up show as presented to the conscious mind is “mahendra magic” served up by our clever, clever corpuscles.

Since our magnificent brains have spent a long lifetime in refining their imagery, we can’t just wish these images away, not should we. We are bit players in this game, and should respect what has been wrought on our behalf. Where we do have input, though, is in deciding whether to be selfish or generous, exclusive or inclusive. Every event prompts us

to make that kind of choice. The default setting, based on millions of years of survival priorities, is selfishness. Openness and fearlessness have to be deliberately made choices. We have all observed that if we repeatedly make salubrious decisions, we gradually move away from fear and selfishness to a more relaxed and enjoyable position. Isn't that what we really long for?

Jake wondered about the mention of control and sin in the verse. He knew that sin was defined elsewhere as ignorance. The Western world has made sin into a make-or-break polarity, but that was not the original intent. If I may borrow from my Gita commentary (IX, 26):

Neil Douglas-Klotz, in his book *The Hidden Gospel*, examines the Aramaic roots of Biblical language, which relies heavily on agricultural allusions. The original word used for *good* means ripe, and the word translated as *evil* means unripe. This takes the heavy sting out of Biblical diatribes as they have come down to us, with their thick barricade between the saved and the damned. So-called evil just needs more time to ripen. It is in no way barred from becoming good, given enough sunlight and nourishment. Viewing life like this teaches us to be patient with the unripe people among us, instead of blasting them literally or figuratively. We should lend them a hand rather than offering them a fist.

The sin in this verse is our habitual reaction of seeing the other as an enemy, as a hostile force. Narayana Guru is saying that when that feeling surges up in us, we should control it with intelligence, reminding ourselves that that what is out there is also in here, and searching deep in our psyche for the source of that reaction. Nitya touches on several examples of how to accomplish this; the most detailed is the Buddhist version:

The whole concept of Buddhism and the teaching of the Buddha is based on the redemption of misery. The Buddha does not go into a metaphysical inquiry of what this world is or what it is not. He only wants us to know that our common lot is misery and pain. This he

calls the first truth about our own being. The second truth is that pain or sorrow comes from ignorance. The third truth is that this ignorance can be removed. The fourth truth is that the cessation of ignorance is called a state of happiness or nirvana. Of course, what he means by happiness has nothing to do with pleasure.

The key is that this ignorance can be removed. Often people say this world is all about suffering, and leave it at that. But the Buddha didn't stop there. He related the suffering to ignorance and then suggested the antidote, understanding. Bill noted that here was where the eightfold path was brought in, the rectification of all the aspects of life that lead us into ignorance. Humans being what they are, right action, right view, right intention and the rest tend to get codified as rules and so drift back toward ignorance. But we aren't supposed to dutifully follow rules, rather we are to creatively dig below the surface to see what our own and the other person's motivations really are. That gives us the opportunity to at least not make matters worse, and occasionally we may even have a chance to instigate a change for the better.

This is seldom an instantaneous fix. We all have negative reactions to toxic stimuli at first, which is fine. We aren't sinners simply because we react normally, so there is no call for repression. But we shouldn't exacerbate the situation, either. Over time our carrying on will grow less and less. In a world where many people are suffering a pretty much permanent boiling fury, letting go of resentment is already a revolutionary act. Paul noted that we put too much importance on what others do. We have to turn it around, bring it home. Doing so is good for us and it's good for those we rub elbows with too.

And don't obsess about yourself, either, even though everything you know is you. Deb mentioned the value of humor, of lightness. You can't be lighthearted unless you have laid your demons to rest. Sadness and ignorance are a matched pair, and Nitya tells us we can assess our degree of ignorance by how sad we are. Right off the bat he says,

The mark of knowledge is *asokam*, having no sorrow. Where there is sorrow there is ignorance, and where there is no ignorance there is no

sorrow. You can easily find out whether you are ignorant or not by looking at yourself. If your mind has sorrow, if you are sad or in misery, it means you are in a state of ignorance.

This doesn't mean you should beat yourself up if you are sad or otherwise distressed. Know that this comes from some hidden trigger. Find it and bathe it in kindness and healing. See if you can become lighthearted about it, without sweeping it under the rug. Then offer the same to anyone who reaches out to you. But you can only do that well if you cure yourself first.

Bill recalled Jill Bolte Taylor's talk on emotional upset. We receive a chemical jolt from many situations, but the chemicals are rapidly metabolized. After a brief period, we continue the emotional upset only of our own free choice. If our anger or anxiety doesn't stop, it is because we are clinging to it. I'll include her two excellent paragraphs on this subject in Part III.

This verse is one place where Narayana Guru makes his "one religion" philosophy explicit: the universal religion is the search for happiness. Every action and intention can be boiled down to this simple premise, including those that seem utterly contradictory to it. I was reminded of my time at the Backwaters Conference in Kochi last summer, where top flight pundits were utterly deaf to the Guru's insight, and will append part of what I wrote about my experience there in Part III also.

So in virtually every action, "the primary motive is to move from a state of uneasiness to one of easiness, from discomfort to comfort, from maladjustment to better adjustment, from chaos to order, and from disharmony to harmony. This is a movement within the consciousness of all sentient beings."

Studying That Alone is admittedly a hard road. But the easy roads don't take you very far, or else they go the wrong way. We have to do more than scratch our itches, which then come right back, we want to really resolve our dilemma. I'd like to let Krishna also weigh in on the One Religion, Happiness:

And now hear from Me of the three kinds of happiness, in which one by practice rejoices, and in which he reaches the end of pain;

that happiness which is like gall at first, ambrosial at the end, born of lucid self-understanding, is called sattvic;

that happiness arising out of contact of the senses with objects, at first like ambrosia, at the end like gall, is called rajasic;

that happiness which at first and in after-effects is self-confounding, arising from sleep, lassitude and listlessness, is called tamasic. (Gita, XVIII, 36-39)

At the close I read out a quote from Gandhi that new friend Dennis Dalton uses to begin his book *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*, demonstrating Gandhi's perfect accord with the philosophy of Narayana Guru. It made for a lovely and inclusive meditation:

A variety of incidents in my life have conspired to bring me in close contact with people of many creeds and many communities, and my experience with all of them warrants the statement that I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and colored, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Muslims, Parsis, Christians or Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any such distinctions.

Once again we felt the harmonizing influence of sitting together in amity and shared focus on a superlative wisdom teaching. Deb noticed how when we do the opening chants it is somewhat ragged and less harmonious, but at the closing we are in tune. Repeating that kind of centering every week is an ideal therapy, and grows progressively easier with practice. Our good feelings radiate out to all who have joined us in this journey, here at the mid point. Aum.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

All living beings always show some conscious or unconscious activity: a worm wriggles, a dog runs around, a cat cleanses its face, an active man engages in effectual work and a passive man tries to make his body and mind as relaxed as possible. All these can be brought under the banner of behavioural science. Even the slightest movements, such as turning the head, changing posture, coughing, sneezing or listening to a sound, are in response to some need. The need stimulates a physical response, a physiological readjustment, an attempt to fulfill a biological urge or a conscious attempt to have moral, intellectual or aesthetic appreciation of a situation. In short, all actions are motivated.

The greatest common factor in all conscious and unconscious behavioural motivation is the search for happiness. Yogis seek kaivalyam, Jnanis seek self-realization, Buddhists seek Nirvana, the Christian goal is salvation; these are all different names for the *summum bonum* of everybody's search. Many people do not believe in any religion, yet they too have formulated their own philosophy and scheme for collective endeavour to achieve the common happiness of mankind. Humanism and Marxism are examples of religion-like movements, yet are not recognized as religions. Narayana Guru wants us to go beyond the semantic fixation of the connotation given to the word "religion" so that we can easily grasp the common goal of mankind, which is nothing but happiness.

Right from the first verse to the forty-eighth, the Guru has alluded to that one Self which is immanent in everything, animate and inanimate. He has also consistently referred to the reality of the Self in terms of pure transcendence. In either case the Self is of the nature of knowledge. He made very clear to us that this knowledge can be all-embracing and unitive on the one hand, and at the same time it can highlight the uniqueness of some specific modulation which has a meaning of its own. Transcendent knowledge in its purest state, that

being one of homogeneity, is free of all discordance and hence it is identical with peace in its broadest and most profound sense. The immanent Self, which expresses itself through multitudinous variegations, can be compared to the several colourful beams of light that radiate from the different facets of a well-cut diamond. Although each beam of light has only the momentary significance of tickling the colour vision of the spectator, that experience, which lasts only a fraction of a second, makes an absolute unit in itself, and its essential value is on a par with the unaccountable and infinite peace of the transcendent.

Life is always in a state of oscillation between finite experiences at the physical or sensory level and those at the parapsychical and transcendent level. The happiness that permeates the peace of the transcendent and the wonder of the immanent are only two faces of that supreme value called ananda.

In the course of the discourse so far, on more than one occasion Narayana Guru has pointed out how a negative factor, like the contrasting shadow of light, can effectively cause a tragic slur in knowledge so that a person may mistake the unreal for the real, the non-existent for the existent, and the pain-generating for the pleasure-giving. When this happens in an individual's life, his search for happiness becomes disoriented and his thoughts, words and deeds are likely to bring misery to himself and to others. The Vedantins call this avidya, the Yogis call it klesa, the Christians call it sin, the Buddhists call it avijja and the Communists call it exploitation. The Guru calls it agham.

Even a dog is capable of forgetting its body comforts to go a long way in being faithful to its commitment to its master. The love that links the consciousness of the dog to that of its master is a reciprocal one. That love erases all the diversities that otherwise constitute the psychophysical frame that differentiates a man from a dog. If even an animal can transcend its body limitations to express love and concern, how much more possible it is for a man to visualize his unity with all and identify his happiness with the happiness of all! Recognition of this common happiness marks allegiance to the one religion or faith which is of all beings.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

IF we should look at men anywhere in the world as they pass their lives in their normal activities, and observe them for any length of time, examining their actions in relation to their life-motives, we shall be able to make an over-all generalization which may be said to be the master-motive regulating human conduct in the most general terms.

No one will be seen to be doing anything with pain or unhappiness as the object in view. Even in austerities that may appear in the form of self-inflicted suffering, the regulating motive-principle will be happiness, as perhaps distinct from mere pleasure. All humanity in this sense can be said to seek the supreme felicity implied in Happiness with a capital 'H'.

If this generalization is correct we arrive at the notion of the happiness of oneself, as the basic motive force of all human striving hereunder for all time and anywhere.

Happiness, in other words, refers to a supreme human value in whose light all other motives are only secondary considerations or particular instances. Happiness as the aim of man gives unity to human purpose and brings all religions, faiths or creeds under its single sway.

If this verity should become properly understood by followers of different religions, we would be able to arrive at one single value common to all faiths or religions whatsoever, past, present or possible in the future, in any part of the world. Such a view must imply also its most important corollary that would exclude any possibility of saying that one religion differs fundamentally from

another. The one faith or religion that is the dear dream of every religionist to see established in this world can thus become easy of realization when approached in the way of the wise. Thus much bloodshed in the name of religious rivalry could be avoided, at least in the future.

The Guru not only presents here the happy prospect of one religion for all mankind, in a scientific or public sense, but more pointedly than that, asks each man to adopt this attitude so that he could find peace of mind for himself and attain the goal of happiness. The one religion of mankind would thus follow as night the day or as a natural corollary to the common human goal of happiness as the highest of unitive human values.

Part III

From neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight* (New York: Viking, 2006):

Although there are certain limbic system (emotional) programs that can be triggered automatically, it takes less than 90 seconds for one of these programs to be triggered, surge through our body, and then be completely flushed out of our blood stream. My anger response, for example, is a programmed response that can be set off automatically. Once triggered, the chemical released by my brain surges through my body and I have a physiological experience. Within 90 seconds of the initial trigger, the chemical component of my anger has completely dissipated from my blood and my automatic response is over. If, however, I remain angry after those 90 seconds have passed, then it is because I have *chosen* to let that circuit continue to run. Moment by moment, I make the choice to either hook into my neurocircuitry or move back into the present moment, allowing that reaction to melt away as fleeting physiology....

What most of us don't realize is that we are unconsciously making choices about how we respond all the time. It is so easy to get caught up in the wiring of our preprogrammed reactivity (limbic system) that we live our lives cruising along on automatic pilot. I have learned that the more attention my higher cortical cells pay to what's going on inside my limbic system, the more say I have about what I am thinking and feeling. By paying attention to the choices my automatic circuitry is making, I own my own power and make more choices consciously. In the long run, I take responsibility for what I attract into my life. (146-147)

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Here is the excerpt from my write up of the Kochi conference, 2013, pertaining to the present verse:

The three-day extravaganza ended with a roundtable discussion on Gandhi and Narayana Guru, focusing on the famous 1925 meeting between them. Some new (at least to me) material was brought forth, most definitely of interest. I had submitted the anecdote from *Love and Blessings* that was included in the class notes a few weeks back, but that wasn't presented.

The first speaker—I won't name names—averred that one key difference between Gandhi and Narayana Guru was that Gandhi's outlook was all-inclusive, respectful of diversity, whereas Narayana Guru was in favor of "one religion for all," implying that he was exclusive and narrow. I wanted to see who would refute that absurdity as the torch passed around the table from pundit to pundit. No one did. I asked to speak, but was repeatedly cut off in favor of more comments from those who had already weighed in heavily. As had been made clear already, I was an Untouchable, and Gandhi's inclusive philosophy did not apply to me.

Another round commenced, and the heaviest of all the pundits, a very intelligent, compassionate and widely honored

public intellectual claimed that while Gandhi was a philosopher, Narayana Guru was not. I again waited for any demur, but the claim raised not a single eyebrow that I could make out.

At the end of the round I held a microphone and asked to speak briefly, and was cut off several times in favor of inviting the previous speakers to add to their heaps of gathered wool. The microphone was repeatedly taken out of my hand. (Does this sound familiar to anyone?) At last the frustration level rose high enough that I was forced to interrupt. I had to beg for two minutes.

I said the gauntlet has been thrown down, and I needed to respond. Narayana Guru very clearly states that his “one religion” is the universal search for happiness. He did give very good advice about how to find it, but he was absolutely open in his acceptance of every legitimate means for seeking and finding happiness. There was nothing exclusive at all in his slogan or his attitude. I didn’t say it then, but he was an unbelievably and radically open human being, at a level that remains extremely rare even in our supposedly open era. While he and Gandhi might have differed on a few minor issues, they were in accord here, and I would say that if anything the Guru was more tolerant than the Mahatma.

I also dared to contradict the claim that Narayana Guru was not a philosopher, asserting that he spoken in very condensed terms, like Zen koans, and that it was Nataraja Guru and Nitya who expanded them into their full implications. In a subtle critique no one picked up on, I said that probably because of the culture he lived in, few people recognized his philosophical astuteness—intending to imply that if he had spoken at great length he would have been more appreciated. Apparently Gandhi’s collected works require 100 volumes. Narayana Guru’s easily fit in one small book, but they also speak volumes.

Part IV

Jake’s commentary:

While attending a state college decades ago, I was introduced to the concepts of pure and applied sciences. Mathematics, I was told, was not engineering. This distinction has traditionally implied the superiority of the theoretical over the practical, at least in western academic circles where the echo of arbitrary power hierarchy still resides in the respect accorded the philosophical degree (Ph.D.) over the more practical degrees that often include an *s* in the acronym. Since the 1990s, however, the practical has come to dominate in the form of computer applications to all disciplines (a development that may eventually erase the pure/applied dichotomy as traditionally understood).

Written long before the computer age, the Guru's verses use this traditional dichotomy as an over-all organizing principle to arrange his *100 Verses*, says Nitya, but as the Guru does so he leaves out entirely any indication that one ought to be held in more esteem than the other merely because of placement. The two work as unified sequence in the *Atmopdesa Satakam* that begins with a broad base, "the body of information given to us in these [first] 49 verses," and then concludes "from the fiftieth on [in] ... what we call the applied aspect" (p. 334). Because one section precedes the other and is dependent on it for its purpose does not indicate its superiority. As he reiterates continuously, there is only one Absolute.

Much of Nitya's commentary on verse 49 constitutes a review of the preceding verses, a summary that points out how the guru establishes in his opening verses "what we might call one God" (p. 330). As he writes, however, the Guru did not use the word, deferring instead to the concept of and "inherent principle" (or the Absolute). These terms are really all placeholder terms for the transcendent beyond the grasp of the mind or its words. What remains true is the human condition of ignorance and sorrow spoken of in all the wisdom traditions and the necessity of our overcoming it in order to live in the Absolute here and now. Nitya devotes the first few paragraphs of his commentary pointing out this fundamental theme of the *Upanishads*, the Buddha's

teachings, and the *Bible*. In all three cases, sorrow is a condition of ignorance and can be eliminated once we wake up to that duality: “You can easily find out whether you are ignorant or not by looking at yourself. . . . If you are sad or in misery, it means you are in a state of ignorance,” and misery, in turn, is that condition universally sought to be avoided and replaced with happiness (p. 329). When Christ admonishes us to love our neighbors as ourselves, adds Nitya, he is invoking this very principle because “nobody wants his self to be misery” (p. 330).

As Nitya continues his summary, he goes on to show how the Guru explains the notion of one Absolute constant by noting how it manifests both internally and externally in the forms of continuous changing physical phenomenon and our constant mental stream of consciousness. One experience mirrors the other as “consciousness comes as in the form of an inquiry” that eventually narrows to an experience of a world of interest in the mind. All this never-ending change is the work of our stable Absolute, a contradiction common to all traditions.

With the sixth verse, continues Nitya as he summarizes, the Guru gets personal by writing that few people ever can come to know “the true nature of beingness” (p. 331). Hypnotized by the circus we are born into, we lose that awareness of oneness in the unconditioned state. The Guru, says Nitya, then uses an anecdote in verse ten in which we are asked to eliminate as much sense stimulation as possible by imagining ourselves in a dark room when another person is known to us only by his or her referring to him or herself as an *I* when we ask, “Who is in the dark?” The only ground we have for answering such a claim is our own sense of *I*: “in a very subtle way, the Guru passes on from the question of one God to one mankind or one Self, the self of all.” His subsequent discussion of ethical codes ties the metaphysical to our physical lives.

With the thirteenth verse, writes Nitya, the Guru asks us to meditate on the Absolute One and how it manifests in all beings. With that grounding, he proceeds in subsequent verses to discuss

the mind, how to create knowledge and how it connects with the Absolute in our experiences of the one and the many. The possibility of being overwhelmed by our infatuations with physicality and its ego is then contrasted to our alternative capacity to identify with others and associate our own happiness with theirs. But it is with the principle of happiness and its universality that the Guru concludes the first half of the entire work. That universal desire, says Nitya, guides all religious traditions. When we include that one truth as our common bond and do not allow our minds to distract us through its capacity to continuously construct ego boundaries, thereby alienating our happiness in the process, we reach the “mainstream of happiness for all.”

With the fiftieth verse writes Nitya, the Guru will move on to demonstrating how the body of knowledge he constructed in the first 49 can become instrumental to us as we live here in the buzz and confusion of human life, an aim Nitya foreshadowed in the concluding paragraphs of his commentary on verse 48:

When you are alienated and isolated it is easy to remain always good. There is no chance for the Pope to smack another person, for instance, because everyone stands before him with great politeness and reverence.

Nobody even says one offensive word to him, so why should he get angry? It is easy for him to be pious and good. But bring him to the marketplace and expose him to all the troubles there. Then we will see his true tenor. There is no need for any ethics when you are in a state of a contemplative who is completely absorbed in the Absolute. (p.328)