

1/8/13

Verse 5

That Alone:

People of this world sleep, wake and think many thoughts;  
ever wakefully witnessing all this shines an unlit lamp,  
precious beyond words, that never fades;  
ever seeing this, one should go forward.

The original version is nearly identical:

People of this world sleep, wake,  
and think many thoughts.  
Ever wakefully witnessing all this  
there shines an unlit lamp,  
precious beyond words;  
That is never extinct.  
Ever seeing this, one should go forward.

Nataraja Guru's:

People here on earth, they sleep, wake and think  
Various thoughts; watching over all of these with intent eye  
There dawns a priceless light, which never shall dim again;  
Led onward by this, one should forward wend.

What a joy to gather once again and dive deep into  
Atmopadesa Satakam! The class is one form of Karu: a hub of  
concentrated energy that radiates outward, first into the hearts of  
all the people sitting in the room together, from us into the  
empyrean, and afterwards into the internet where it seeks out the  
hearts and minds of another circle of friends. Then, as is only  
fitting, some of that energy pulsates back to the center as thoughts,  
feelings and emailed words, to be radiated once more.

For class we used the original commentary, which is very different from the book. Both are excellent, and should be read together. Nitya epitomizes the first five verses for us in the original:

In the first verse we were asked to bow down before that yolk (Karu) which is becoming manifested as everything, both the external and the internal world all at once. In the second verse it was described as the great sun in the firmament of our consciousness. In the third we were told that it is an oceanic treasury of divine value. In the fourth it appeared as a knowledge which is abundant. Now we are told it is a priceless lamp.

Verse five marks our arrival at our state of conscious awareness in the present, and the lamp is the witnessing aspect of consciousness. Both the world of necessity and the world of contemplation are represented in it.

Nataraja Guru explains that “verse 5 tries to draw the distinction between the horizontal and the vertical attitude implied in contemplative life. The dynamism of the horizontal factors, as they regulate common human life, is outlined in verse 6; while the same is viewed from the vertical in verse 7. The student must read all these verses in the light of one another.”

The book version included a quote from the Mundaka Upanishad that expresses the same idea as verse 5, and has always fascinated Deb:

Two birds, fast bound companions,  
Clasp close the self-same tree.  
Of these two, the one eats sweet fruit;  
The other looks on without eating.

Deb assured us that while these two birds are thought of as separate, they are in reality two aspects of one thing. They are “fast

bound companions” because they are not really separate at all. As Deb put it, an inner core of reconciliation or centering is always present underneath the busyness of our lives. It is that quiet witnessing power that we can settle into. In our handy structural scheme, the witnessing bird is the vertical parameter and the busy, interactive bird represents the horizontal aspect of life.

I offered an important implication, that the witness, which is the very light of consciousness, is watching our own life, and that is the proper subject matter for our witnessing. This is all about working on our self. Looking out of our eyes at the world is not the same thing at all. The ego distorts this neutral awareness and directs it outward. It is so easy to fixate on the horizontal side of life, and get drawn into being harshly (or sweetly) judgmental without even realizing it. Once that happens, the witnessing consciousness becomes useless as a tool of spiritual evolution. What’s worse, bearing witness upon others is a way to avoid self-examination. Why worry about our self when there’s so much wrong with the world? Our outward focus produces a schism where our inner guidance system is no longer attended to. But the true witness is the benign force that, like a gyroscope, keeps us on course. This is what we intend to bring back online in our life.

Meditation is a way to bring ourselves back to witnessing our inner landscape, of taking a break from the endless busyness we meet outside. Occasions like the class naturally and easily reestablish an air of neutrality. It is not an instantaneous transformation by any means; it is a gradual process of sinking back into our core, made more challenging by the attention-grabbing nature of the horizontal world, with its insistent demands.

Susan was not sure how a neutral witness squares with the creative impulse that Nitya is so fond of describing. Here he says, “Guru calls our attention to that light which was with us when we were in our mothers’ wombs, diligently functioning, putting everything together in the right place.” The third verse posited the wave of being that each of us is, arising from an original point in the ocean of samvit, of universal consciousness, entering a tiny egg

and elaborating into a fully developed human being. This is the first miracle, and one that we always take for granted. Nowadays in an effort to do away with old-fashioned analogies like God, we say there is a genetic code that is being replicated, but what does that really mean? Nothing. Some inscrutable internal intelligence is guiding the incredibly complex course of development with a high degree of success. It is masterfully creative and also the witness of its achievements. So this neutral witness, this unflickering lamp of consciousness, is an integral part of life lived harmoniously. Without it we lose contact with our inner guidance system.

Nitya describes how after birth our attention is drawn away from our core to the periphery, “almost like an indoctrination.” But the light within never goes out or leaves us: it is our true self. It’s only that we learn to ignore it. In the process our inner confidence is replaced with anxiety, and then desperation. Our study of self-instruction is all about how to restore our confidence in our self when the invitation to despair is so compelling and even socially mandated, and then made tolerable with medication.

The Gurus agree with the scientists that there is no external godlike being running the show. Each of us is our own “god.” In other words, there is an internal unfolding program that is an integral part, even the essential part, of who we are. It is a value that unifies, where external focus fragments. Nitya asks us to regularly recall it to mind, in our process of healing. Our feelings of loneliness and emptiness are the measure of our separation from our self. But restitution is not far off. We don’t have to realign the world, but only reclaim our self. When you reestablish connection with your self, “You are here in reciprocation with the powerful director of your life. You have an owner to your life, a Lord. You are no more an orphan, you are properly parented. Let us become rich with this feeling today, and let the whole day be a coming back to your center again and again, and relating that center to all that you deal with.”

This made perfect sense to Paul. He noted that humans are the only animals who feel the necessity to find God outside

themselves. Then we go looking for it. If we would only stop seeking it outside, unity would fill us from within, naturally. We have made a God out of dualism, of dividing the world in half, and the fear of God actually prevents us from healing the split.

Scotty connected this with the sense of ‘I’—I need this, or I won’t put up with that. This is the indoctrination Nitya is talking about. Because of its basis in memory, Scotty called it our tether to the past. We associate our very identity with our likes and dislikes, but those are actually what separate us from our true self.

The lamp-like witness is something that we will be probing for a long time in our study. There is an obvious level of witnessing, of just seeing what’s going on, and then there are many important but subtle aspects to explore. First off, we tend to mistake the ego for the witness, because it is the basis of our identity. But to whatever extent we hold opinions for or against anything, we are not being a true witness. The witness is actually the corrective, or the countermeasure, to our mental state, particularly our ego. According to Scotty, the Toltecs called it the second attention. Our first attention is the ego’s interface with the world. Behind it, in a way, is our second attention, the calm, unflappable, fearless, true witness.

Moni recalled how Nitya never was anxious or afraid, never insisted on his own importance. He was always in the witnessing state. It’s only when we have a stake in something and we fear losing it that we get upset. His powerfully grounded witnessing was tangible to everyone around him, too. You felt like he could see right into your soul, more clearly than you yourself could. He was exquisitely aware of what he was describing in this verse, that the witness is the light of consciousness:

That light which is behind our eyes, ears, touch, mind, intellect.... Turn to that light beyond. Guru says we cannot determine the worth of that light. It’s like a lamp which is not only shedding light but also seeing. It’s like a flame with an eye in it. The flame is illuminating an object and is also seeing

it. There is nothing happening in our system that is not seen by that eye. Only in its light does everything function.

Michael added a sweet thought: the eye with which you see God is the same eye through which God sees you. It also called to mind the quote from Teilhard de Chardin: “The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen.” Seer and scene evolve in tandem, as they must.

Another of Deb’s favorite phrases appears here: transparency of vision, and the class delved into its implications. What exactly does it mean? Paul hit the first nail on the head, that transparency of vision means you aren’t distracted by the surface activity but see through it to its underlying unity. You are still seeing the manifold nature of actuality, but it doesn’t occupy your whole attention. You can see the connections between all the parts, and their similarities along with their differences.

There are other levels too. One very practical one that everyone has experienced is when you talk with a friend who’s agitated. They may tell you a string of stories that wander all over the place, and they can easily pull you away from being present. But if you hold your ground you can see the real problem lurking behind the obfuscation. It’s like a spittle bug ensconced in its cocoon of froth, spewing out distracting regurgitations. Transparency of vision, then, involves shrugging off all the tangential aspects that keep coming in the way of a clear grasp of the situation. Scotty added that this allows you to be aware of additional possibilities that aren’t immediately obvious.

Bobby made an excellent point, that preconceived notions are what stand in the way of transparency. We have them, and may even want to keep them, but we should withhold projecting them onto situations. To be fair in our interactions, we have to suspend our prejudgments. Otherwise we’re listening more to ourselves than to the other person, and missing the best part of the story.

Mick feels that self-referencing is the cause of opacity, which is the opposite of transparency. (The middle ground is called translucency, and is our normal range. We are seldom perfectly transparent or perfectly opaque.) Most people judge everything in terms of its relation to them, but that obviously is a distorted perspective, because there is a lot that has nothing to do with them. Ultimately it's selfish. The relation of events to the perceiver is one aspect of the total situation, but one that should not exceed its normal value. Mick is right that we tend to exaggerate powerfully in our own favor, and generally speaking there is no need for it. By doing so we inject expectations, and expectations make things heavy and less flexible. Less transparent, you might say. A battered person, struggling to defend against possible incursions, necessarily judges everything in terms of what its impact might be on them. As they heal, they can expand their boundaries and get a little distance from the oppression. This is very important. The tendency is to rebound with overcompensation, taking too much in place of blocking everything out. A contemplative attitude can help us to move quickly to a state of balance, where excesses are unnecessary. We don't have to completely abandon our sense of self, but it needs to shrink—or grow—to a normal size.

Deb offered another favorite example, of when she was in India in 1971 at the World Parliament of Religions. It was a big, bustling, chaotic scene, hot and uncomfortable. Even though she was minimally involved, she couldn't wait for the day to end. She was exhausted, overwhelmed, and stressed out. On the way to her tent in the dark of the evening she passed Nataraja Guru, sitting in a chair amid a circle of people. He was chatting away as if it was the first hour of the morning, totally fresh and full of energy. He was master of ceremonies, with a million demands on his time all day long. Deb was astounded. She instinctively knew it was his transparency of vision that allowed him to never feel tired or put upon, no matter what he went through. We get tired because we hold on, often without even realizing it.

Again I must apologize for all of what I can't fit into these notes. If they become too long they will stop being read by many people. Class was yet another "surfeit of tarts"—I likened it to a shaken bottle of champagne, which when opened sprays out deliciousness in all directions, and keeps on foaming. The class was primed to extract meaning after meaning into the wee hours.

We closed with a brief meditation to recall Nitya's directive to continually revisit the precious light that is our guide, our internal compass. We have taken it for granted and then forgotten it, and so have become unsure of our way. It is the miracle of miracles, in a universe that is miraculous in every detail. Appreciating the miraculousness draws us back into resonance with our witnessing lamp. We should regularly reawaken to the wonders of life. For now it's our assignment, but the joy it fosters will rapidly change it into an effortlessly blissful endeavor.

## Part II

Nataraja Guru's comments are wonderful. As we go along I will select the best, but anyone who wants the whole thing should order a book from Varkala or you can read it online at <http://www.advaita-vedanta.co.uk/index.php/content/255-atmopadesa-satakam> :

On verses 5-7 generally:

Here the Guru Narayana brings dialectics to bear on common human life. These three verses, therefore, have to be read together so as to see that unitive fibre running through all three of them. The same thing is said from three dialectically different points of view. Using the terminology we have developed in the pages of Values we can explain broadly that verse 5 tries to draw the distinction between the horizontal and the vertical attitude implied in contemplative life. The dynamism of the horizontal factors, as they regulate common human life, is outlined in verse 6; while the same is viewed from the vertical in verse 7.



The student must read all these verses in the light of one another.

In this translation all we are trying to do is to find precise modern equivalents and illustrations for the ideas presented by the Guru and his predecessors and, if possible, to continue the very trend of modern philosophical thought which itself is waiting, we believe, for a more unitive restatement in terms of a new world-philosophy where the scientific spirit would not be lost, but would be preserved in an extended sense.

Verse 5

People here on earth, they sleep, wake and think  
Various thoughts; watching over all of these with intent eye  
There dawns a priceless light, which never shall dim again;  
Led onward by this, one should forward wend.

Verse 6

One has to wake, then go to sleep, of food partake, or mate,  
Thus do promptings dissipating keep coming round;  
Whoever could there be, therefore to wake  
Unto that reality's one and changeless form?

Verse 7

To wake never more, ever sleepless to remain, as awareness;  
If for this today you are not fit, then in the service  
Of those silent ones who ever dwell awake to AUM,  
Absolved from birth, steadily fix your form.

Verse 5 comments include a summary of the territory covered so far:

After preliminaries about the subject-matter and the general approach to it have been broadly indicated in the first four verses, the theme narrows down, as it were, to its proper contemplative

limits, not as a cosmological or as a merely psychological abstraction, but in terms of a way of life or a bipolar relation from a more personal everyday point of view.

What was neutrally treated in the first verse as the 'core' spreading its light homogeneously within as well as without the central Self (which is the subject-matter and the object-matter of the whole work), we saw that the Guru, for methodological requirements alluded to it as a 'supreme Sun' postulated as a second pole marking the goal of attainment for the contemplative. The inevitable duality thus introduced - somewhat akin to a pagan sun-god, though not strictly so when viewed more closely - was again to be reduced into terms of 'non-difference' and strict 'loneliness' in the next two verses.

Here in verse 5 we should not miss the change in the analogy. Instead of a sun in the void, there is an eye watching the actions and thoughts of man. In the Isa Upanishad (verse 16) there is the reference to the purusha or supreme Spirit 'yonder' which is equated at the same time with the supreme purusha 'within' the contemplative 'here'. The Person in the sun and the person within are equated to constitute the central unitive Absolute without prejudices of the subjective, objective or conceptual as explained in verse 4.

The eye above is watching the watcher from here below who is caught in everyday necessities of personal life, such as waking, sleeping and thinking of various interests arising during the workaday life of the common man. Necessary aspects of life touching the common generality of mankind are not bypassed by the Guru but, more like a modern pragmatic philosopher, the contingent and the necessary aspects are brought together, as if with equal importance, in the treatment of the highest contemplative text. There is no other-worldly escapism in such a way of treatment here. The Guru thus catches up with the requirements of modern thought as against the ivory-tower isolation of the more ancient classical writers, whether of the Eastern or Western context.

'THINK VARIOUS THOUGHTS': Contemplation becomes strictly established only when the multiplicity of interests which regulate human activities are absorbed and united into a single bundle of one master-interest proper to the absolutist way. If we were to distinguish this master-tendency at the core of life as the vertical, then the plurality of interests that keep succeeding one another in our life ordinarily, clashing and displacing one another for occupation of the centre of the stream of consciousness, might be called the horizontal factors. The well-founded intelligence or the properly cultivated wisdom in man always seeks the unitive value of the vertical.

Plurality of interests and thoughts, arising from desires or instinctive hungers that cannot be wholly satisfied, is the enemy of the contemplative. This does not mean, however, that to be a contemplative means killing out the legitimate joys of life. But in and through all interests, a master-interest must always be preserved. All actions and thoughts motivating them must be gathered together into a master life-tendency, so verticalized as never to enter into conflict with the minor fissiparous dissipating interests of a life without such a dominating interest. What is here implied is a process of sublimating pluralistic interests to a unitive interest.

'WHICH NEVER SHALL DIM AGAIN': The idea suggested here is of an everlasting value in life. When we reach the end of the work, in verses 93 and 98 this dominant everlasting life-interest in the self-hood of man is reiterated, after the implications of such a claim have been properly covered in the body of the composition.

When we say "Man as Homo sapiens is characterized by wisdom" the verity of such an axiomatic statement is accepted without further proof. Wisdom's method admits of such a priori reasoning as normal. It is true there is a modern tendency in thought to speak in terms of probabilities rather than in absolute

certitudes. This is the result of the a posteriori habit of mind brought into vogue by science. But when a unified science becomes an accomplished fact, as hoped for by some of the best minds of our day, the absolutist form of reasoning implied here will not be really objectionable. A priori inductions and a posteriori deductions will become equally valid in a unitive way of exact thinking which will bring the humanities and the sciences together as belonging to one single discipline.

In the history of Western philosophy the body-mind duality of Descartes, if viewed in the light of dialectical methodology, implicit as in Dante, need not really be considered as objectionable, as some modern critics tend to think. Dialectical methodology requires at least some initial duality, even though it abolishes it later. The occasionalism intervening between the body-mind duality makes full amends for the initially-supposed dualism and makes of it as respectable a theory as any other, conceived on the same dialectical lines. The dialectical method permits duality in order to efface it more completely afterwards.

### Part III

Michael sent a link to a long and fascinating essay by Ken Wilbur that accords with our study in a number of respects (though not all). He writes:

I think this may help clarify some of the mysteriousness of "the Witness" concept introduced in Atmo Verse 5.

SIDEBAR: the quote I mentioned in class ""The Eye with which I see God is the same Eye with which God sees me" is from the always delightful Meister Eckhart.

First up, American philosopher Ken Wilber's explication of the concept which I think is the easiest to grasp:

<http://integral-options.blogspot.com/2009/04/ken-wilber-always-already-brilliant.html>

Secondly for another way of looking at it, I direct you to the Wikipedia entry about Pointing Out Instructions, This is more focused on the higher Buddhist Traditions, but I think it is indispensable to any student of Advaita Vedanta:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pointing-out\\_instruction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pointing-out_instruction)

Deb contributed a poem:

### **Angles of Vision**

The road curves slightly  
upward and to the right,  
hidden by tangled trees.

Our walk takes us into  
the shadow's darkened ring.

The path can be described as an arc,  
deviation from a straight trajectory,  
the shortest line between two points,  
simple integers expressing location and relation.

Feet follow a line of spatial progression,  
everything condensed to spare geometry,

the curve a mathematical function

radiant in its abstraction.

Or: the mottled shade is blown by breezes

sifting through the leaves,

we hear the rustling of unseen birds

while stepping from shadow to sun,

the air cooling, then warming our skin.

Along the roadside a flattened snake skin

dries in the heat, footsteps echo intermittently,

our path a meander through these woods.

Varying angles of vision,

separate yet entwined—

one elegant and intricate arithmetic,

another the softened, whispered hush

that allows one to be lost, then found.

Deb also contributed a metaphor:

*Ghostly Presence*

I flip the small square of glossy paper back and forth, run my finger along the edge, and peer at the grey patches of form on the front surface. How many of these old photos have I sorted through over the past year and a half? Thousands, literally. There were boxes I simply glanced at and tossed into the garbage. Others I went through one at a time, deciding with my brother what to do, who wanted what. Now I have my own piles, ones to be mounted or put in order, some to be scanned on the computer. Sorting through all these photos from my parents' house has been strange and surprising. I expected the, "Oh, look at that! Do you remember them?" I expected my brother and me playing in the backyards of our Fifties' neighborhood, splashing in our wading pool, vacations in the cold waters of northern Michigan. What I was unprepared for were the unknown eddies and tangents I would find. Find and follow. Soon I had to start keeping records of the older photos, mostly black and white and small, of who was related to whom, where the photo was taken, who was highlighted, caught for a moment and held up to scrutiny 50 or 100 years later. I found photographs of my grandmother as a small child, her mother as a young woman in Denmark. My grandfather's stepfather posed with his brother in their village before leaving for America. Stark houses on the newly tilled Midwestern dirt. Long skirts, large hats, and grave stares at the camera. My uncle sent an old velvet and metal album that belonged to my other grandmother with photographs of her family, people I had never heard of--a beautiful, alive young girl, my grandmother's cousin, and an old, severe man posed on a chair in front of Niagara Falls. And then there's a casual, sweet scene that seems almost contemporary except for the clothing: two young couples out for a picnic in the woods, lounging and enjoying the spring weather. No names or inscription, but I think the one woman is my mother's mother. I peer into the photo and try to see if it is her, long, long before I knew her. All of these people, before I knew them or heard of them, were busy with their lives, probably harder lives than we now know and slower, but lives with disappointment and anxiety

and desire, restraint and tenderness, everything we experience and think of as particularly ours. I watch them in their frozen world and try to see the patterns of connection. What were their emotions, their hopes that influenced someone who knew me and influenced me? How is it that I look into one person's face and each time see my daughter? It is as if there is a strange resonance passing not through air but through time. Or is it a languid animal swimming underwater, rising to the surface to breathe, first here with this person, then later, 10 years or 60, and a new face, a new person and yet connected all the same. Each movement I make has a haunting, transparent quality, myself and the other, the many others who are inhabiting this continual past that we call the present.

#### Part IV

Stella has asked a pertinent question related to this verse:

Dear Scott,

"Love is what we are born with  
Fear is what we learn"  
Is this statement wrong?

"Fear is precognition or anticipation of what could go wrong, which comes with genetics, it is inborn and not learned.

While loving our kin also comes with our genetics but loving 'others' is a learned business, a culture."

[These are] other people's opinions...

Loving 'others' is learned, I agree.



Because I see in kids not wanting to share toys with other kids...but we have to teach them. First section am not sure.

What do you think?

Thanks,  
--Stella

Dear Stella,

This is an important question, and both these contradictory statements have merit. What people don't realize is that we teach children fear very early on, and then we accuse them of being naturally selfish when that fear manifests as they become social. Caution about differences in the environment is probably genetic to some extent, and quite healthy, but fear is learned from wants (needs) not being fulfilled, as well as painful stimuli. The first big fear for many of us was birth trauma: being squeezed really tight, diminished oxygen supply, and suddenly bursting into an unfamiliar, uncertain environment.

Healthy children learn generosity and kindness by being helped to overcome their fears. On the other hand, many parents reinforce the fears and encourage their kids to stay on guard at all times. The way they are raised produces vastly different outcomes.

To me, genetics is interesting and important, but to give it sole dominion is a mistake, like putting the cart before the horse. It is a fascinating part of the process of the intangible becoming tangible. Based on current understanding, I see a lot of ideas like "Cruelty is genetically determined, so we have to accept it," or "Love is learned behavior, so it isn't important." That makes science into just a sophisticated superstition, a foil for our prejudices.

From my personal experience, and that of many others, the essence of the universe is light, and its impact is love. Everything derives from that ground of loving light. Fear is the shadow that light casts when it impacts actual objects. The whole point of spiritual life, then, is to overcome our fears and other blocks so we

can bask in the love of the kindly light within, and share the joy of it with others.

The bottom line is, whatever you think of genetics or God's will or any other causal factor, be kind and considerate to your children. Respect them. Love them. And do that with all God's children.

Peace,  
Scott

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Sujit continues his series on the Malayalam text:

I have about five interpretations of Atmo and between them there are subtle differences in the transliterations and interpretations of this verse.

In this verse Narayana Guru has used some uncommon words in Malayalam like '*ulakar*' for 'people' (though '*ulakar*' is common usage in the Tamil language) and the word '*parttu*' for 'witnessing' (again a common usage in Tamil). Shows how Narayana Guru has extended his multi-lingual background into expressions in the Malayalam language. Malayalam being a language that has its origins in Tamil and Sanskrit, there exists plenty of room for such borrowings of words from its parent languages. Interestingly, such borrowings into Malayalam often go to enrich the verse with insightful expressions. The poet might have borrowed words here solely for the sake of alliteration or rhyme - for e.g., '*ulakar*' to go along with '*uragani-unarnnu*'.

The mention of the precious, priceless or invaluable lamp in this verse is - that of an invaluable lamp as 'rising' ('*uddikayum*' from the word '*udayam*' or rise, as in sunrise), rather than to mean

'shine'. Nataraja Guru rightly translates it as 'dawning', adding more animation to the reading. When it is read as 'rising' or 'dawning' it also adds more to the sense underlying this verse, connecting it to the state of enlightenment experienced by Narayana Guru.

About the repetitive cycle of sleep and awakening that people go through in their lives, and their quest for answers in their 'wake state', Guru Muni Narayana Prasad has added a very thoughtful stream of explanation in his Malayalam interpretation of this verse. For your appreciation, my translation of Muni's words would be as follows:

"We are reading this while we are awake, isn't it? However, is this really our full state of awakening? When new knowledge is gained, don't we experience a newer awakening? It is only when we experience an awakening that we realize that until then we were in a state of darkness on that subject. Likewise, are we now sitting in a fully awoken state? By no means can we say yes! It is unsure whether any individual exists in the state of full awakening. So whatever we call a 'wake state' will still have elements of sleep. Hence a state of full awakening is what remains desirable for all of us to attain. Perhaps the ones like Narayana Guru are those that have experienced the state of a full awakening."

Somehow the different interpreters I read have stayed short of connecting this verse directly to Narayana Guru's experience of enlightenment (like many often comment about the later Verse 16 etc.). Guru Muni is one that came closest in seeing this view.

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Susan has also been doing some serious reflecting lately:

My friend, Melanie, sent me this poem today and it made me so happy to read it:

### Why I Am Happy

Now has come, an easy time. I let it  
roll. There is a lake somewhere  
so blue and far nobody owns it.  
A wind comes by and a willow listens  
gracefully.

I hear all this, every summer. I laugh  
And cry for every turn of the world,  
its terribly cold, innocent spin.  
That lake stays blue and free; it goes  
On and on.

And I know where it is.

- William Stafford

Since class (and for many years), I have been grappling with the idea of how does one connect with the vertical, with the Absolute more consistently and thoroughly. We keep reading about going beyond the "multiplicity of interests" or at least gathering all of these up and verticalizing them. I kind of get this but not really. I've been in the vertical, I've felt the connection with the Absolute, with the witness that is my true self as opposed to my ego. Or have I? After class last week, I really questioned this. It was interesting to think how easily we conflate the ego and the witness. Or at least I do. This has inspired to me to look more closely at these ideas and ask harder questions. I often get caught up with the philosophy and the analysis of what exactly is meant by Nitya's words and the words of people in class and the people who write about class and

the verses. It's like a puzzle and I like puzzles. Understanding comes slowly to my mind but I enjoy the exercise very much. But sometimes, it is just the exercise and I forget to take it further, to really feel deeply the understanding. Sometimes I just want to get it right and figure it out so it's all clear. But Vedanta isn't like that. It's much more of a leap and a faith and some grace mixed in. I keep resting in the ego when I think I'm letting it go. My self doubts are a kind of resting as well as my self righteousness. I am very dependent on the interests constantly rising to the surface of my consciousness. I find it very hard to tear myself away. So for now, since I feel that I am far from getting this stuff, I am happy to read the poem (above) and feel that this is a way of sinking into the Absolute, the vertical, the depths.

I think that we tend not to adhere to the slight pressure of a goal or helpful program because we don't have the faith that we can succeed. I think the reason is that we figure things are downhill from here (which could mean the same thing). But, as you have said, we do have to push ourselves to study Vedanta, while at the same time we can't have expectations. But some pressure is necessary and worthwhile. The results can be amazing. This works for exercise programs too and other kinds of learning, etc. But there has to be some faith in ourselves because it is about the future and we don't know much about it. Or maybe it isn't about the future at all. It's just the now and the now and the now.

I responded:

Sounds like you've had some intrepid inspirations regarding your study this time. This is the kind of more serious questioning that really accomplishes something. Hope you'll be able to stay with it. This is the advanced version of puzzle solving, if you will.

You are by no means alone in conflating the ego and the witness. That's what trips us humans up on a regular basis. There are no red flags to indicate when we're mistaking the one for the other. We

have to either guess or be told. For that matter, it isn't important whether you are unique or not. Bringing intensity to your search so as to distinguish important aspects of the mind from each other is what's important, and this shouldn't depend on anyone else's status. I just don't want you to think that you're not okay but everyone else is. That's another impediment.

One of Vedanta's challenges is to not get caught up in the details but push on to the essence. We have to make the ideas real. It's easy to see that in most cases this doesn't happen. The ideas have a certain value, sure, but by themselves they don't light our fire. We could spend a lifetime analyzing all the ideas, but they are supposed to be merely like the ordinary explosion that initiates nuclear fission for the big blast. Use them to really press in deep.

The bottom line is some pressure is necessary, as you say. This is not about getting to a comfortable place and quitting, but about shaking off the doldrums and waking up. We go back to sleep if we stop trying. I'm glad the fun of doing it is keeping you tuned in.

Susan added:

Worrying about others' status, whether in class or [socializing] or whatever is something I do too much. Thanks for pointing it out. I regularly point it out to myself but it is rather a battle to let it go. As you know...