

3/18/14  
Verse 51

Having existed in knowledge, an I-ness, in the beginning, emerges;  
coming as a counterpart to this is a thisness;  
like two vines, these spread over the tree of *maya*,  
completely concealing it.

Free translation:

From pure knowledge emerges one's ego sense, simultaneously  
paired with the sense of 'thisness'. Like a twin creeper, the self and  
the other entwine the maya-tree all over and hide everything.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

From awareness the 'I' sense first emerged;  
Comes then with it 'This'-ness, as counterpart beside,  
These like creepers twain do cover entirely,  
The whole of the Maya tree to hide.

The awesomeness of Nitya's commentary rolls over us like a wave. After almost 40 years of close contact, I still can't believe how brilliant and downright helpful it is. In all my extensive reading, in science, philosophy and spirituality, I've still never found anything that comes close.

We settled in with calm anticipation, knowing we were in for a fine ride. Even Kai the Dalmatian kept peeking around the corner of the next room, begging with his eyes to join us in contemplation. The dogs feel it too. Unfortunately they are too distracting to be invited.

This is another verse where I should just say, "Read it!" and leave it at that. It is extraordinarily clear and direct, a reference guide to the four great dictums of Vedanta and how they are used to normalize the four regions of consciousness, divided into the

horizontal negative and positive and the vertical negative and positive. Sound boring? It well might, until someone clever tells you what it means. Nitya succinctly describes the importance of the vertical parameter:

When the fundamental truth of what I am is misunderstood it is an epistemological error. When the meaning of life is misunderstood it is an axiological error that is also called a teleological one, in other words an error in value assessment stemming from the misunderstanding of the natural design and end of life. *Teleos* means out there, in the future, what is yet to come, so teleology is an error regarding the future. We ask ourselves, “What should I become?” “What should I aim for?” and “What should I gain from my life?” If you are mistaken about these issues you might go on a wrong tangent, which is very serious. It is very important to know who you are and what you want to become. This marks the vertical parameter of life.

If we're bored about determining the meaning and trajectory of our life, we're in deep trouble. This should be the most passionate concern of any human (merely) being. We are diligently schooled in becoming bored easily to prevent us from “wasting our time” pursuing such exciting and rewarding tasks, and we have to turn that conditioning around.

The idea of a humanistic education is precisely to give people some basis to make intelligent decisions about the most crucial issues in our life: in particular who we are and where we're going. Perhaps you've noticed that this kind of education is being widely denigrated these days, removed from many college curricula, and generally derided as “useless.” It's true, if all you are going to be in life is a cog in a production wheel, a moneymaking machine, then knowing yourself has no value. It might make you long for time off from your job or daydream more, which would only make you less productive.

The bottom line is that society as it's presently constituted wants us to give up any claims to our personal worth and serve it mindlessly. We are given a false set of choices as we approach adulthood, all of which fall into the overarching pattern of distracting us from our

humanity. Heck, many Christians consider humanism as the greatest of mortal sins, not just dopey, but lethal, the tip of Satan's trident. The important questions are what job do you want and how much money do you want to make? How much of yourself are you willing to put on hold for your entire life? What kind of carrot do you want us to dangle on the end of your personal stick?

Possibly some readers don't know the apocryphal trick of hanging a carrot in front of a donkey's nose, to make it willingly pull its heavy load. The donkey desperately wants to eat the carrot, so it goes after it, not realizing the carrot never gets any closer, as the stick is attached to the cart. The carrot bounces around, making it even more alluring. If the donkey is stupid enough, it never catches on to the trick, but just keeps on going. You can easily picture it. The terrible truth is that this describes human behavior rather too well.

The road to success is crafted for those who make the right choices out of the limited range offered. If we are "smart" we learn early on to suppress our own ideas in favor of those we are given by others. Self-examination just holds you back. When people become depressed because they are not expressing their natural talents and inclinations, they are convinced by "experts" that they have a chemical imbalance and given medications to make them forget themselves even more. Even without the experts, many are perfectly capable of self-medication, which has a tacit permit from the popular imagination. Anything goes, just so you don't even *think* that there is more to life than what you have now.

How radical then is Vedanta, which advocates an active return to personal authenticity? Nitya makes a heartfelt plea for a restoration of our native common sense, which has to be grounded solidly in intelligent understanding. It is the opposite of "you go along to get along" with its subtext of "you erase yourself to get along" that we have been taught every day of our lives:

The only discerning instrument we have is our own mind and intellect. Yet we do not know how to differentiate between mind and intellect. We experience it all as part of our own totality of

consciousness. It is within this consciousness that we experience a certain faculty which decides things for us, known as the intellect.

How does the intellect decide whether something is right or wrong? It certainly should not be by imitating others' opinions, though the fact is that we can be very much influenced by public opinion. Most of the things which we take for granted are not verified or critically examined. We just copy somebody else. But as Socrates said, an unverified life is not worth living. If you want to live a truthful life it must be verified, and for verification the evidence should come from your own self and not from someone else. This means the basic criterion you can adopt is the certitude of your own self, self-evidence. Ultimately it should be evident to your own self.

Gaining that kind of evidence means obtaining a normative notion. Norm means a measure; normative, pertaining to measurement. A notion is an idea. So a normative notion is an idea you can measure by. Furthermore, you can measure something only with that which truly exists. You are most convinced of your own existence. Therefore your own existence is to be made the basis for measurement. Even if a thing is true to all people, until it actually becomes your own experience the truth of it is only an a priori intellectual acceptance. It has not yet become part of your life. However, what is tested and found to be true in the lives of so many other people who have gone before you is certainly very helpful for you to accept as a working hypothesis. It's a fine place to start. So you don't have to say that you will not accept anything until it becomes your own experience. First you accept the universal truths that were found to be true by many before you. Then you try to integrate and experience them in your own life.

Need it be said that "the universal truths that were found to be true by many before you" are what a humanistic education brings to our attention? The class focused on a corollary problem: how do we sort out what's true from what's a deceptive lure in spiritual theory? There is no easy answer, obviously, but that's all the more reason to dig into it.

Nitya puts it perfectly here. We listen and learn about universal truths, but then we have to personalize them by making them a living part of ourselves. This is very much an active process. It has to be, because our default settings have been pegged to social demands. It would be nice if we could simply let go and automatically return to our authentic self, but that almost never happens, possibly because we never can fully let go. A true sannyasin is one who can let go completely, and they are truly rare birds. Whatever is unconsciously clung to sabotages the whole game. As Mick asserted, we have become dependent, on every level. In any case independence is more than an absence of dependencies. It includes the intentional restoration of our true nature.

I read out a paragraph from Dennis' book, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*, bearing on this idea. I'll make it two paragraphs for the notes:

Aurobindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal, both Bengali theorists from the extremist faction of the Indian Congress, were the first to shape this synthesis that Gandhi eventually adopted. They insisted that swaraj ["self rule"] was too sacred a word to be translated into the Western notion of political liberty. Ghose argued that "*Swaraj* as a sort of European ideal, political liberty for the sake of political self-assertion, will not awaken India." An ideal of "true swaraj for India" must derive from the Vedantic concept of "self-liberation." Pal took the idea of swaraj still further by defining it as "the conscious identification of the individual with the universal." Its correct meaning derived not from Indian liberals like Dadabhai Naoroji but "in the Upanishads to indicate the highest spiritual state, wherein the individual self stands in conscious union with the Universal or the Supreme Self. When the Self sees and knows whatever is as its own self, it attains swaraj: so says the Chandogya Upanishad." Pal then contrasted this Vedantic conception of swaraj with the modern European notion of freedom, arguing as Ghose did the superiority of the classical India view.

“Indeed, the idea of freedom as it has gradually developed in Europe ever since old Paganism was replaced by Christianity with its essentially individualistic ethical implications and emphasis, is hardly in keeping with the new social philosophy of our age. Freedom, independence, liberty [as defined in Europe] are all essentially negative concepts. They all indicate absence of restraint, regulation and subjection. Consequently, Europe has not as yet discovered any really rational test by which to distinguish what is freedom from what is license.” Western thought should learn from the Indian philosophy of freedom because it is not negative but positive: “It does not mean absence of restraint or regulation or dependence, but self-restraint, self-regulation, and self-dependence.” This follows from the core principle that “the self in Hindu thought, even in the individual, is a synonym for the Universal.” (4)

The ego has many devious tricks to avoid stepping down from its false pedestal, and spiritual clichés are among its most entrenched weapons. We are entering a section addressing maya, one of the worst offenders in this regard, and Nitya takes pains to point us in the right direction:

Don’t just call it *maya* and dismiss it. Of course the whole thing can be an error, but it is not a piecemeal one. If it is an error it is wholesale. You are within that wholesale error now. Do not mistake something wholesale for something piecemeal. As long as you are within the frame of reference called the transactional, you have to give full validation to every item in it. It is here that the spiritual life of some people fails, because in the name of spirituality, in the name of philosophy, or in the name of realization, they belittle the validity of transactions. This ontological error is a big problem. To correct it, *prajnanam brahma* is given, to remind you that what is out there as your experience is born of the same reality that has produced you and your mind. Not until you realize this can you be at ease with the external world.

Nitya lists the general categories of error we are prone to, and gently counsels us to avoid them as best we can. For egos that have learned the hard way to protest their innocence at every turn, it is hard to admit that we have correctable flaws. Knowing there is only the Self helps a lot. Now there is no “other” to fear. We have only our self to work on; no one else knows enough or cares enough to do it for us. All we have to do is help ourselves to help ourselves. This brings us to the fourth and best known great dictum:

All this is in preparation for a final search, a search for the meaning of your own life. If you do not know the goal of your life, you might walk into many snares. If someone compassionate who has found out what can be most beneficial to a human being tells you, “Go this way, my child,” a lot of trouble can be saved. People run after so many things in their lives, and by the time they realize those things are all meaningless they are too feeble in their bodies and shaky in their minds to make much of an effort. The intellect is no longer clear, and the memory is failing. Only when they are good for nothing do they realize that they didn’t get anywhere. Since it is better to know this early, we are given a teleological pointer, *tat tvam asi*, “That thou art.” This is the fourth great dictum.

“What is That?” and “How can I experience it?” To answer these questions you have to lift your mind from everything to which it is riveted. You are tied down to this body, this mind, to things. You need to loosen your hold to all those particulars to which you are now tied. This transcendence, this elevation, the sublimity to which you can rise, can be attempted day after day. By itself, this gives direction to your life.... With a little insight you can make any path lead to your salvation and emancipation.

Toward the end of the class, another old adage surfaced, that instead of being selfish, if we are selfless everything will be okay. It's a key tenet of socialization, and while widely repeated, it is totally at odds with the Vedantic view, which Nitya summarizes very well at the end of his commentary. Putting yourself down and

elevating others is the flip side of elevating yourself and denigrating others. Neither are healthy choices, and both can lead to disastrous consequences. The only way out of this impasse is to know that both sides are one in essence, which takes the ego coloration out of the picture. Nitya gives many examples throughout *That Alone*, and this one is just right, furnishing a fitting close to our review:

Suppose you care for children, not necessarily your own. The central value here is compassion. Compassion is your passion. The passion of you and the child become commingled and flow in a single direction. For this to happen, what is most dear to you and what is most dear to the child have to be brought together as one unitive meaning, in one common center. That is the Self. It is the same Self in you and the child. One's happiness is the other's happiness. Every time you relate this way, you discover the greater secret of your own Self. So even though the meaning of life is given as teleological, that teleos is not very far off. It is in this very moment that you come to realize it. Then you go on to the next moment, and the next.

If we can learn to treat everyone the same as our dear child in this example, we have moved from selfish/selfless duality into the unity of the Self. Aum.

## Part II

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

“I am” is my most definite conscious experience. I am caught between two other entities. One is “this world” and the other is “this knowledge,” which seem to have no limit or beginning or end, and in which the idea of my “I am” is only an arbitrarily delimited notion with an ever-fluctuating boundary.

To some extent, I am composed of both these entities. I am partly of this physical world. As I can clearly distinguish my body



from other bodies, I can say “This is my body, these are my senses and mind.” I am also partly consciousness. Others relate to me with their consciousness and I relate to others with my consciousness. I do not know whether the consciousness that operates in all beings is the same as mine or not.

Who am I basically, fundamentally, truthfully? To decide this, I should know what is the reality which gives rise to the experiencing of “I” as well as “this.” What am “I” absolutely and what is “this” absolutely? Relativistically, I am not you and this is not that, but that is not the ultimate truth. The search for truth is necessitated by the fact that very often our knowledge is erroneous.

The Guru compares maya to a tree that is overladen and concealed by two creepers called “I” and “this.” The analogy of a tree is very suggestive. A tree has its roots and its ultimate fruition. Similarly, it has branches which can be schematically reduced to its two sides, the right and the left. We can make mistakes on all these four counts. The misunderstanding of the very basis of truth is an epistemological error. The misunderstanding of the value of truth is an axiological error; this can also come as a teleological error in our pursuit of life. Our incapacity to reduce the phenomena of the sensory world to unified principles, such as one prime matter, is an ontological error. To have no normative notion with which to discern truth from falsehood and to lose our heads in fantasy or preconditioned prejudices is a methodological error. Thus, there are four basic errors.

To correct these errors, the Upanishads give us four great dictums. “I am the Absolute” is a dictum for correcting the fundamental or the epistemological error by which one comes to the belief that “I am this body.” The dictum “This Self is the Absolute” can correct notions such as “I am happy or unhappy, sickly or strong.” This dictum gives the normative notion of the Self as the measure of all things. Ultimate evidence is “Self-evidence.” It enables us to avoid methodological errors. The dictum “This knowledge is the Absolute” gives a unitive understanding of the phenomenal world and thus helps us to avoid

making ontological errors. In our actual life situation such knowledge prevents us from exaggerating love or hatred and helps us curb desires that are likely to lead us into snares. “That you are” is the classical dictum given by every teacher, by way of instruction, as the ultimate goal to seek. The fruition of spiritual search lies in the realization of “That” as one’s own Self. If one knows this, he also knows what to seek and in which direction, and thus he will not commit the teleological error of taking off on a wild goose chase.

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Nataraja Guru’s commentary:

MAYA is the name in Vedanta for the principle of error or appearance understood in its widest meaning. In order to appraise truth one has to eliminate all possibility of error that might hide it from view. Truth and error are dialectical counterparts and Truth is not to be spoken of as something given, like an object or a lump of some reality that is taken in one-sided objectivity. Just as zero and one have to be distinguished, and the one and the many have also to be distinguished, before we can get to a proper notion of unity, the notion of the Self, as understood in its pure absolute reality, has to be submitted to the process of elimination of error, in all its epistemological grades, varieties and possibilities.

Error is like a creeper hiding a tree with its root and stem as also its branches spreading on either side. (Refer back to the same ideogram employed in verse 9.) Between the root aspect, the stem aspect, and its right and left aspects, we can broadly refer to four main possibilities of error which together represent the tree of Maya (or Error) when understood most philosophically. Appearance hides reality as Error can hide truth.

The first two broad philosophical divisions in error or appearance are here under scrutiny. Pure awareness is what can represent the neutral Absolute as next and nearest to it. It knows of no duality whether subjective or objective. Thus we could first think of a vague sense of awareness as emerging from this Absolute. When consciousness is further analysed, we are able to distinguish in the matrix of this vague neutral awareness four distinct limbs or aspects, of which two are here under reference.

Before enumerating all of them the Guru selects two of the most important aspects, which have their origin in pure awareness. These are the sense of “I”-ness or egoism and the sense of “This”-ness or objective appraisal of reality. Of these two, primacy has to be given to the “I”-sense, without which “This” cannot exist. There is a subtle interdependence here which is brought out by the word “first” employed in the verse. Just as electricity may be said to be first and its magnetic field could be referred to as its secondary phenomenon going together with it, these subjective and objective aspects of awareness have to be given their due status of importance with reference to the Self, which is here the central reality of all.

“I”-ness and “This”-ness may be said to constitute between them the twin creepers of all possible subtle error, which has in turn for its basis no other than the more gross Tree of Maya. The ramified errors of Maya, come under two subtler categories, under “I”-ness and “This”-ness. This mythic tree finds mention in many mythologies of the world. The Scandinavian mythology has the notion of the Yggdrasil, which is mystic and touches heaven. In the Upanishads there are various grades of references to the tree, which represents the relativistic cyclic or phenomenal aspect of reality.

The culminating notion of this kind of Maya Tree is found in the Bhagavad Gita at the beginning of the chapter XV where the tree is

equated to the world of reality known through the Vedas and which is still vitiated by relativism. This tree has to be cut down mercilessly before the higher path of the Absolute can be trodden (as verse 3 of the same chapter unequivocally lays down). This radical note is justified because the vision of Truth can only result when Error in all its gross or subtly suggestive bearings has been abolished altogether from consciousness. After the 50th verse the composition passes on to the end by beginning to cut the roots of Maya here.

In order to avoid error, as we said, we have to analyse and classify the possibilities and kinds of error. This is what is undertaken here, and the Guru brings to view analytically the two main branches of error which have their origin in ‘egoism’ and ‘objectivity’ respectively. The vague original vision of the negative Absolute which permits the rise of all things or worlds, to transform themselves in terms of the gross world as we see it, when further examined at closer quarters, reveals these two main divisions or categories of error representing the primal dichotomy to which all awareness become subject. These two branches have further ramifications which bear different buds or leaves of values or interests in human life. The roots, stem and branches too will become invisible to the common man when common interests prevail and are allowed to proliferate.

The un-philosophical man does not see the origins of error so as to be able to avoid them and seek the truth of the Absolute, which is or should be to him the highest of human values. The covering or veiling effect of Maya as the main source of error in life, is what keeps the contemplative in darkness. (A graded analysis of Maya and its component factors can be found in the *Darsanamala* of the Guru, chapter IV, commented on in our later work *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*.)

Part III

Nancy offered a very important idea I want to be sure to include. We had been talking about how people “go shopping” as an example of ways to distract themselves from dealing with their immediate problems, of “putting them on hold” in hopes they will just go away. That analogy was a change of pace from targeting (pun intended) the usual suspects: screens, drugs, sensationalism, and so on. Nancy added that the way people get concerned with distant political or environmental crises can also serve as a distraction. We worry and complain about issues, but don't do anything constructive about them, and it draws us away from being fully present. It is hard to distinguish real-world problems from disaster movies in the way they affect us and we relate to them. We are striving to assume the proper political position rather than being effective actors. Yogis shouldn't be concerned so much with their image, but with intelligently putting their ideas into practice.

It reminded me of a time when a student was complaining to Nitya about a problem in Africa. Nitya listened for a while, then told him, “If you really care about this, you should start heading over there right now.” The student got the message. He blinked in surprise, and came and told us about it. Then he began to reorient his life to be more effective close to home, right where he could have real impact. And today he is one of the most effective people we personally know, having a meaningful role in the lives of many hard-pressed folks who are very grateful to him.

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I thought it would be useful to put together the four great dictums, the mahavakya, as presented in this verse, along with their position on the Cartesian coordinates, per Nataraja Guru. First, Nitya's preamble:

From the two aspects of *ahanta and idanta*, ‘I’-ness and ‘this’-ness, you come to the core of both. What is in both ‘I’ and ‘this’ is called

‘That’. When you experience That in the Self as well as the non-Self, then the Self and the non-Self do not exist separately. This is a discipline which we need in order to go farther, the four-fold correction with four great dictums: a fundamental correction, a methodological correction, a correction of meaning and a correction of your apprehension of actuality.

I offer the following for convenience. Please refer to the text for elaboration:

*The ‘This’ aspect, Narayana Guru’s “What is this?”:*

Horizontal positive – (methodological, objective experience) *ayam atma brahman*, “this Self of mine is the Absolute.”

Horizontal negative – (apprehension of reality, subjective appraisal) *prajnanam brahma*, “The external world is presented to you as your knowledge of it.”

*The ‘I’ aspect, Ramana Maharshi’s “Who am I?”:*

Vertical negative – (fundamental; foundation) *aham brahma asmi*, “I am Brahma.”

Vertical positive – (meaning) *tat tvam asi*, “That thou art.”

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Jake’s commentary had some good points, but also demonstrates how setting up dichotomies can be over-simplified. Creating an organization named “Mothers Against Drunk Driving” does not automatically imply there are “Mothers For Drunk Driving.” The organization (formed by mothers of children killed by drunk drivers or driving, and thus hard to fault) takes on

entrenched laws and judicial practices that protect drunk drivers, and provide education to reduce the practice. Thus the dialectical opposition is the egregious social structures that permit or at least fail to discourage drunk driving, and is by no means limited to mothers. To me, this is a prime example of attending to needs right in your own back yard, or in this case, right in your aching heart.

Perceiving a dialectic clearly is a challenge to the yogi, as the colorations of the psyche tend to throw us off kilter. These have to be compensated for by courageous self-criticism. In fact, Jake's commentary is an invitation to do just that:

American consumer culture is easy to caricature. Since the post WWII period, such ridicule has morphed into a kind of national gestalt assumed and used by those on both the political left and right (and in between). Morally reprehensible both to materialists and religionists, the mindless acquisition of things and power can itself act as the punching bag from just about any dogmatic position as long as the exercise is kept out of sight by way of an arbitrary dismissing. Who would publically extol the virtues of greed and narcissism? Absent any opposition, the high moralists of contemporary America employ this kind of non-argument as license to champion just about any cause. The current craze "to do the right thing" without any necessity for exploring the validity of the claim has moved much of public discourse into the arena of character assassination before the fact. The organization denoted with the "Mothers Against Drunk Driving" platitude, as a relatively benign example, employs absolute hyperbole for the sake of a group at work to right a wrong that through its very title assumes an enemy: "Mothers For Drunk Driving." Members of this evil non-existent cabal are by extension those not directly supporting the virtuous tax-exempt organization. (Just where the line may be drawn as to what constitutes "direct support" is the province of those in charge of the effort and can be enforced as they see fit—the ends justify the means.)

The world ought to be other than it is, so deception and flat-out sophistry become the orders of the day. In a world in which dualities constitute definitions and the only plane on which those comparisons can be made is the physical/mental, this kind of “second tier” critique occupies a central place in our national conversation that, in itself, illustrates the lengths to which we have devolved by pushing the Absolute completely out of consciousness. It is this brand of “argument,” for example, with which our national obsession concerning “health care” and drug therapies is constructed and points to the absurdities and practical impossibilities of a mind completely focused on a death fear not seen since the Pharaohs spent their lives building escape route monuments to themselves.

It simply isn’t fair (whatever *that* means), so goes the meme, that some Americans can participate in this craziness while others are shut out by a system that is by consensus indefensibly evil at its core. Taking place at this second remove, so to speak, our political/social struggles are of our own making and by their design arbitrarily deny access to that which is true. It is to this interior construction separating our Self from “out there” to which the guru and Nitya turn in verse 51 and its commentary.

In his opening paragraphs of commentary, Nitya explains the Guru’s first point. The core “undeniable experience” we have “is that of an *I* consciousness” that we also know is not complete unto itself (p. 345). This *I* is, as we are also aware, distinct from what we sense in the world. The two vines mentioned in the Guru’s next lines of the verse represent, says Nitya, those two perspectives of our experience, but unlike the Guru’s use of the tree metaphor in earlier verses, in this case there is no person sitting under it because that person “has become one of the vines itself.” The interior and exterior have captured our entire awareness and broken reality into the two domains of *I* and *this*, the duality in which we all exist in conscious awareness and about which we need to understand in order to transcend the circularities this combination will create endlessly. Nitya presents the two



questions designed to address our search for a solution in the following pair: “Who am I?” and “What is this?” Because we are both *I* and *That*, the answers to the two questions invalidate the common error of privileging one and dismissing the other. The world of manifestation, of stuff and people and all the conflicts, cannot be relegated to illusion and rejected as a veil of tears to be passed through and forgotten. Likewise, the interior *I* of the *Self* cannot be denied because it does not submit to the scales and measures required by the senses. Both domains exist, and we consign ourselves to an endless cycle of partial truths and inflated little I-egos unaware of their Absolute-One source if we deny the whole.

Nitya devotes the rest of his commentary to presenting a blueprint for our avoiding error as we navigate *I* and *This*. The most efficient way of addressing the task, he writes, is to first address “who you are.” (Mistakes at this step are epistemological and teleological.) With this opening inquiry, Nitya offers the first of five dictums of the *Upanishads* designed to guide seekers to know truth: “I am Brahma.” In other words, our *Self* is the Absolute, that which we know ourselves to be and that which is verified continuously in our Deep Dreamless Sleep through which we daily refresh and energize our wakeful selves. This truth corrects the often-made fundamental epistemological error, one that completely dominates American culture. Other directed and self denied, the majority of American children learn early-on that the body alone—an only relatively true manifestation—is the complete Self. This answer to the question “who am I?” is then mirrored one dimensionally throughout the culture in its endless propaganda mantras masquerading as consumer advertising and little ego-I gratification exercises.

If this original error is set right and the Absolute-Self bipolarity become our one ground, then it can act as the “measuring rod” for our discerning truth when we encounter it. If what you experienced self-evidently reflects that one truth, that experience is

then valid. The evidence is verified internally and not assigned to dogma because someone else claimed it.

At this point, Nitya points out that experiencing everything first-hand before the fact is not always possible, so we by necessity rely on what others have said concerning experiences we have yet to participate in. In this respect, study of the words of sages and intellects coming before us is called for in order for us to become familiar with concepts still outside our direct perception: “It’s a fine place to start.” It is in integrating those universal truths with your direct experience that true education takes place and legitimate discernment is exercised. And that direct experience is founded on that interior eternal light free of all the “colourations” we so easily attach to it such as “I am my body,” “my ego,” “my social standing,” “my profession,” and so on.

Maintaining this discipline while making one’s way through the work-a-day world, however, requires that we make concessions to it in order to exist in it. Nitya here presents a third great dictum designed to remind us of this very condition: “The external world is presented to you as your knowledge of it” (p. 349). Dismissing the world as illusory won’t make it go away any more than assuming it is totality will erase the transcendent.

This general background, concludes Nitya, is all preparation for “a final search, a search for the meaning of your own life” (p. 350). This telos, or end purpose, Nitya writes, is contained in a fourth great dictum: “That Thou Art.” It is with this principle that Nitya talks in terms of daily life and our need to get started on the path to enlightenment while we still have the physical resources and energy to do so. Experiencing “That” requires our working on loosening the hold of the body, mind, and objects. The daily attempt to experience the Absolute in the Immanent gives us direction as we live our lives. As we come back again and again to that effort we can, along the way, evaluate experiences as to their capacity to accelerate or slow our progress. (If something has a negative effect, we ought to give it up, counsels Nitya.) Happiness, then, is that which corresponds to the Absolute both

within and without, and because it is the same so is the Self in all people. Sharing in that happiness constitutes the route through which we can realize our Self—and that realization is the very meaning of life, which is not “out there” somewhere. As Nitya concludes, it is “not very far off. It is in this very moment that you come to realize it. Then you go on to the next moment, and the next” (p. 351).