

3/25/14
Verse 52

The sky will glow as radiant sound—
on that day, all visible configurations will become extinct in that;
thereafter, the sound that completes the three-petaled awareness
becomes silent and self-luminous.

Free translation:

When the sky of consciousness is enflamed with the vibrancy of
sound (the Word), all perceptual forms disappear in its radiant
blaze. When, in that splendor, the small voice that gives finality to
the three-fold segmentation of awareness also ceases, there
prevails only the radiance of the Self.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Filled with word-content, that day the firmament shall radiant
blaze,
And in it shall become extinct all the visionary magic:
Then too, that small voice completing tri-basic knowing
Shall cease and Self-radiance prevail.

Three new friends honored the class with their presence last
night, and felt at ease sharing their thoughts. It's curious how often
a first time visitor comes in on one of the difficult classes, as if the
spirits of the gurus want to emphasize the seriousness of the study.
No one came to test the waters during the recent "whipped cream"
section, in fact, several stopped coming. So ya never know in this
business.

In Deb's video memoir (filmed by Vyasa last fall), she
remembered Nitya coming up to her after one of the very first Gita
classes in 1970 and telling her, "When I say something that
everybody likes, I see you sitting there unmoved, but when I say

something deep and difficult, I see you nodding and smiling, while the rest are not paying attention.” It was an invitation to the dance, so to speak. A deep and difficult dance, all-absorbing.

Nearly 44 years later, this same Debbie opened the discussion saying that if there was ever a talk that nothing could be said about, this was it, that adding anything more was ridiculous.

Though, as usual, after that nod to silence and centering and respectful appreciation, we gradually warmed up to another valuable interchange.

Since aum is featured in the talk, being the radiant sound that completes the three-petaled awareness, I figured it wouldn't hurt to review the structure of aum. Though the Mandukya Upanishad spelled it out quite some time back, it remains obscure to this day. Whenever I see the word aum spelled om, I know instantly that this open secret of the word is not known to the writer. Reviews being perfectly honorable, here we go.

Nataraja Guru combined the Cartesian coordinates with the four letters of aum_. A, spoken with mouth wide open, symbolizing the waking state and perception, he placed at the horizontal positive. U, made with mouth half open, symbolizing the dream state and conception, he placed at the horizontal negative. M, made with mouth closed, stands for the deep sleep state of pure being and is located at the vertical negative. Finally, the silence that the word aum tapers down into during chanting epitomizes the fourth state, turiya, which has no name and contains the other states within itself.

All too briefly, the vertical represents time and the horizontal, space, which is always in the present. Our evolutionary development in life moves vertically up from its inception in the unconscious to full consciousness. At every stage there is a horizontal world spread out around us that we can interact with and where we can learn to match our conceptions accurately with our perceptions. Gurukula studies unearth many helpful subtleties from this simple premise.

For instance, I came across the following while editing my Gita X commentary, a verse where silence is said to be the absolute value of esoterics:

Many words are meant for problem solving, which is ever a horizontal business. For penetrating the vertical essence of existence, words are more often stumbling blocks. At least their implications must be pondered in silence. The idea of silence being the absolute of esoterics is that stillness can penetrate beyond the veil, whereas specific techniques manipulate the veil in various ways. Spiritual programs are valuable insofar as they harmonize the veil of words and thoughts and make it less obscuring, but silence effaces the whole garment. Profound words emanate from a core of silence. Verbiage can be visualized as a pyramid, with silence at the apex, sublime poetry and other inspirational communications in the upper reaches, descending to more horizontalized directives toward the base. The bottom level consists of the meaningless chatter many people use to ward off their fear of quiet.

The main focus of our discussion was the sound within the sound. Humans make all sorts of chatter, as a sort of inhibited form of communication. If we listen to the words we often are led far afield, but we can also listen to the impulse within the words, which tells a very different story. It's like when as children we felt loving and wanted to share that with our loved ones, but the impulse was thwarted, in any number of ways. Love repulsed hurts, so we learned to clothe our feelings in obfuscating language. We learned to say what's expected of us, what others want to hear, and before long we were as separated from ourselves as everyone else. Then we "fit in." It's a Procrustean setup, but we hardly notice it once we have been cut down to size.

A useful meditation is to think about all the ways in the past our loving impulse was rejected, how it felt and what we did about it. It gives us the courage to begin to reclaim it.

I know, I'm preaching to a choir that is already reclaiming itself, but it's still a great meditation!

Mainly we are rejected for all the "right" reasons. Some religions believe that kids are little sinners who have to be bashed around to become angels. It must have worked once, thousands of years ago, because despite the perennially gruesome outcome, people still swear by it. Even non-religious people feel it is their sacred duty to socialize the little mites. Often administering some kind of pain is the most effective technique.

Ayomide, made the excellent point that it isn't just children whose love is thwarted. Our minds are bombarded with many different types of conditioning that affects all we say and do, all through our lives. Social class, gender, you name it. I agreed that if suppressing our love stopped after a couple of years, we would all have recovered by now. But it never lets up, even when we are playing along. And all too often we unconsciously pick up the torch from our oppressors and become oppressors of the next generation. It's all "for their own good," done with the best motives. Tragic.

It strikes me that because adults are all nursing our own wounds, we are afraid of reopening them and resist the invitation of children to regain our true nature. We unconsciously try to make them like us, when it should definitely be the other way round. A favorite Tagore quote of mine is: "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man." Waves of fresh love come into the world every day, and yet somewhere along the line they are converted into sad vestiges of their potential. Restoring the freshness is what spiritual life is all about.

So. Underneath the pain and frivolousness is a soul calling out for love, and sometimes also broadcasting it. If you ignore the window dressing and listen carefully, you can hear the modulations of aum underneath the glamour. Deb's singing lesson earlier in the day with Eugene covered the same idea. He called her attention to a single sound in the center of her body that goes up and down to make the songs. It's not that each note is different; they are part of

a continuum, the hum of our being. This is closely akin to the verse text, where the central sound that creates everything infuses all the levels of consciousness, as if they are different notes of the song of our Self.

Kian recognized this in many conversations he has had. So many words went back and forth, but when he analyzed them there was a very brief message within all the flimflam. Deb added that she read about one poet's development, that at the beginning of her career she had so much going on that she couldn't shorten what she was writing, but eventually she learned how. As she got better at her poetry, she became more succinct, and vice versa. We can easily see this weakness in others, but we really should focus on our own way of speaking. We should ask ourselves, "What am I really trying to say? What is unnecessary here?" I remember an adage my father once told me, "A wise man thinks twice before he speaks once." I had probably been babbling on, and that put an end to it on the spot.

Donna made everyone laugh by telling us how when she first read the commentary, she never wanted to speak again. Then she thought of an amazing dichotomy: the universe and the diverse. Diversity was the opposite of university, and yet they are also the same, they go together. She recalled a Joseph Campbell quote, after he had traveled all over the world, that we are all singing the same song in different languages. Ergo, the universe is diverse. Presumably, the thought made her brave enough to speak again.

Michael mused that Shakespeare used highly florid language to communicate powerful meanings, to delineate characters with surgical precision. Economy of words is good sometimes, but abundance is also wonderful. The key is in having something worthwhile to say.

Eugene told us about his six aunts who would do "tarrying" in the family kitchen. It's a kind of sound-making that goes beyond words, kind of like speaking in tongues. Eugene remembered them fondly, sitting together and embracing each other in sonic shawls. I looked into it this morning and the term seems to come from

tarrying or waiting for the coming of the Lord—what you do in the meantime. It turns out that Eugene’s family lives at Pentecostal ground zero, so this is the real deal:

The idea of “tarrying” for the Holy Spirit came out of the Pentecostal Revival which started in 1906 around the turn of the 20th century. It started in a “mission” church on Azusa St., in the now doomed city of Los Angeles, California. There, according to His promise to restore all things, God began to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, manifesting “the Gift” and “gifts” of the Holy Ghost - exactly like it was in the early church. From here the Pentecostal revival spread around the world like wild-fire. Signs, wonders and divers manifestations of God’s Spirit were multiplied beyond number. (Professor David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible*)



Listening to the sound within the sound called to mind a favorite quote about Leos Janacek, the Czech composer:

To him, folk art was the essence of musical life. He began the creation of his musical-dramatic style by studying living speech, and to this day there remain notes on speech melody jotted down in his bold hand. He would listen to salesmen, newsboys, railway guards, waiters, children and housewives as he heard them speak in Brno, the capital city of Moravia. And he would study the sounds of tears and laughter, of singing birds, bubbling brooks, falling rain and whistling wind. The melodic curves of speech were of vital importance to Janacek’s musical language.

“It was rather strange when someone in my district would speak to me,” he once told an interviewer. “Maybe I did not take in what he said, but that sequence of tones! I knew

immediately what to think of him: I knew what he felt, whether he lied or whether he was excited. Sounds, the rise and fall of sounds in human speech, held for me the most profound truth.”

Mick insisted that most people speak from their mind, but true speech comes from the heart. People dance around what they're trying to say because they can't get to the heart. He advised everyone to be the beauty of their heart. Ayomide added a nuanced view, that by careful listening we can hear the messages between people. It doesn't necessarily depend on being painfully direct, only on not being distracted by the surface presentation. That encouraged Deb to add that, “if I really know what I feel and I'm not trying to manipulate someone, that makes all the difference.” It was one of several big Ifs that came out in the class. Meaning, manipulation and obfuscation are usually what's happening in communication, and we hardly notice.

Mick gave a hilarious performance of how we communicate worlds with the tone of our voice, most notably in how we speak to animals and children. With a series of grunts and purrs he “spoke” a wide range of ideas. He finished by admitting that his wife often tells him that “what you say is right but how you say it is wrong,” because he gets so worked up when speaking.

Interestingly, the class segued from sound into light. In Indian philosophy, sound is the most essential element, with light being the next layer. Here is the part of the commentary that inspired us:

Knowledge or consciousness may be compared to light. Light can vary from the most feeble ray to the brilliance of a million suns shining all at once. If there is no light, you don't see anything. If there is a little light, it makes a contrast between light and shadow. With more light there is a sharper contrast with the darker shadow. But if the light is coming from everywhere and there is no shadow left, you can't see anything. The most intense light effaces the distinction between the source of the light and the illuminated object.

If you take the analogy still further, it also takes away the difference between the seer and the seen. The seer, the seen and the seeing are all just one light.

The Guru here says the sky of your consciousness is blazing forth in such brilliance. He began with the sound. Now he says the sound is blazing forth, leaping into flames. The very sky of your consciousness is on fire. It is radiant. Within that radiance it is so bright that you do not see any difference between things. The Guru says all those details of vision are effaced in this one radiance, this great splendor of light.

There's a paradox here. Religions like to play up the explosive realization aspect, the flooding of light. It appeals to us because it's exciting, and also because we have come to believe we are supposed to be someone other than ourselves, that we're not okay. Narayana Guru has gone to great pains to teach us that we are in fact realized, that we are walking miracles. Sure, we can do better, but we only have to become ourselves again to begin to repair the damage. As Donna put it, remembering is re-mem-bering, taking all the various parts of us that are scattered around and bringing them back together.

I'm going to have to give the light/shadow discussion short shrift, but it was excellent. Michael brought in Jung's insights into the shadow side of the persona, how we repress the "bad" and put forward the "good," two abstractions (really one dual abstraction) that produce a split psyche. We wind up projecting our shadow onto the other and hating it. Nitya's image of how we can't see anything if there is all darkness or all light, that life and understanding take place in the arena where they overlap, is healing in any number of ways. Elsewhere I compare it to the ones and zeros of computer language: all of one or the other is no information at all. It's the combination that tells us everything.

Narayana Guru often slipped into merger with the Absolute, but he wrested himself back to wakeful consciousness so he could inspire those around him to arise from their oppressed condition.

He often prayed to not slip into the light of aum—at least not yet. Because he stuck around, the lives of many millions of people were transformed for the better. For our closing meditation, we took one of his prayers, reprinted in the Introduction to Nitya's *Psychology of Darsanamala*, that puts the motivation most poetically. It's from *Subrahmanya Kirtanam*, in a free English translation by Nitya, and eerily echoes a lot of what we said in class. It gave us a chance to momentarily dip into the mystical unity of our core:

All discernible forms disappear where light is not paired with shadows, and all imaginations cease where beatitude reigns supreme. Such is the resplendence of your supreme state. It is as if your brilliance has swallowed the sun and the moon. Your lotus feet rest in the brilliant fire of the wisdom of the third eye. Oh Lord, reposed on the colorful wings of the phenomenal peacock, my supplication to you is not to disappear.

The moon has gone beyond the horizon. With it also have gone the fantasizing dreams of the night. The sun has risen in the firmament. The moon and the shimmering stars are no more to be seen. It is a good time to immerse deeply into the depth of beatitude. Alas! That does not befit the occasion. It is not the time to be lost in spiritual absorption. Look, here is the world drowning in the dark ocean of misery. In body and mind millions are diseased. By drinking they have increased their torpor. These unfortunate wretches are to be roused from their drunken madness. Oh ye people, wake up now! It is time for you to enter into the cleansing river of eternal wisdom and perennial joy.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

We come to know many things by seeing them. All the things we see are also named and explained to us by someone or other in many words. Compared to what we have come to know through hearing and through word-content, what is otherwise known is meager. Even a person devoid of the faculty of physical hearing is exposed to word-content. Word is structured sound. When sound is structured, it gains psycho-dynamic power. The very stuff of our world is said to be the Word. Sound is vibration. By altering the pitches and frequencies of the vibration we create words that govern our lives. We use words to hurt, to command, to instruct, to govern, to lead, to appeal, to console, to express grief, to describe, to paint visions, to tickle the soul into soaring high into the heights of sublimity and to lead the mind into great depths. Sound can shake us and also pacify us.

Sound is a quality, the intrinsic nature of akasha—the all-filling psychic space. All things exist in the space of akasha; hence, sound can affect, influence and alter things. In verse 2, the Guru told us that this entire visible world is a modification of the light of the sun. In a higher and broader sense, the space he refers to is the firmament of consciousness. The sun that shines in the space of consciousness is knowledge.

Knowledge can be compared to light. There is a range of light which varies from the most feeble flicker to the highest brilliance, brighter than the radiance of a million suns. Knowledge of things is feeble and knowledge of the Self is radiant. In this verse, Guru speaks of a state in which the space of the psyche blazes forth in great brilliance with its word dynamics.

When light increases it removes all shadows. Things are seen only by contrasting light with shadow. If all shadows are removed, the nature of visibility changes. Not only are the light and what is illuminated unified into one, but the seer is also united to the seen and the act of seeing. Thereafter, only brilliance exists. In the Mandukya and Chandogya Upanishads everything of the past, the present and the future is said to be the modification of aum. The world of the gross, the subtle and the causal are all covered by the

symbolic word formula, aum. What remains when the secret of aum is revealed is the final silence into which everything seen, heard or known vanishes.

The tribasic notion of the knower, known and knowledge is unified into the still voice of the One Absolute. In that, there is neither vision nor sound. There exists only the One that shines by itself.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE starting point for the treatment of the subject-matter of the second half of the composition, as we have pointed out, has to depend on inner experience hardly capable of being put into words. In spite of this innate difficulty of the subject-matter, however, the Guru here writes a verse surcharged with inner experience so that the more critical and methodological discussion might follow. Whether this forceful verse reveals the actual state of mind or consciousness of the Guru or not, it is more important for the disciple to examine its implications carefully so that he himself can have the benefit of what the Guru tries to say by way of instruction about the Self.

'Sabda' and 'dhvani' both refer to sound, but it is not merely sound as studied in physics that is meant here. 'Dhvani', which is the word used by the Guru here, is to be taken together with its meaningful import as the word and its meaning taken together. Whether spoken or understood, the word has a contemplative content which Vedantic literature refers to as the source of all visible realities. We have therefore rendered 'dhvani-Maya' as 'filled with word-content'.

How could such a 'dhvani' or sound blaze into radiance, so as to fill the sky? This is another suggestive subject in the above verse

which has to be justified. If magnetism can be equated and understood in terms of electricity, it will not be altogether out of place to speak of intense meaningful sounds setting fire, as it were, to the total field of inner consciousness, more especially to the higher or more positive aspects of the same. With an apocalyptic touch the Guru here predicts such a glorious day for everyone in the path of Self-realization.

The colourful world of vain attractions and repulsions in which we pass our everyday lives is here brought under the grade of a visionary magic. Though tantalising and elusive, they are not substantial, and when the higher levels of perception or vision are established within consciousness by intense thought or contemplation, the lower region which is the source of lazy visions of ramified value-sets tend to get weakened and the visions abolished altogether, absorbed into white light full of meaningful import.

Just as the vision of individual trees can get effaced when the forest becomes globally discernible, or thread disappears when we focus attention on its woven effect of cloth, so the entities that depend on lower passive states of mind disappear if inner attention is increased. It is thus that the outer show of colourful magical display is said to be absorbed or extinguished in the higher though more interior vision. The vision gives place to meaningful sound, culminating in the conceptual light of the Absolute Name.

The horizontal view of reality that we take in our non-contemplative or passively lazy moments of life, when our attention is not properly focused on the central reality, has its tri-basic division which is known to Vedanta as the 'triputi' already explained. This makes the three operations within consciousness in respect of any proposition have three distinct or disjunct divisions which give the subject, the object or the meaning primacy at a given time. It is a syntax or a subtle linguistic element that thus

divides a single meaningful content of thought into three apparent parts or aspects. Full contemplation can result only when this tri-basic prejudice, which belongs to sound in the sense we have explained, is not operative within consciousness. The still voice here under reference, which is the last link between outer and inner language, shall stop when the full vision of the Absolute is about to be established. This dual state is here compared to the ‘All-Filling-Light’ of Self-realization.

Part III

Jake's commentary notes the particular value of Nitya's insights for Westerners:

In this verse, the Guru attempts the impossible in his efforts to describe the interior experience of attaining the state of *turiya* (enlightenment), our waking up to the real, the Absolute in that ultimate awareness in which, writes Nitya, “all-embracing consciousness” transcends our routine procedures in perceiving the world. In such a state, the knower, the known, and the knowledge—the wakeful, dream, and deep-sleep states (the gross, subtle, and causal)—“all merge into the pure silence” that follows the work of *Aum*, a certain sound (p. 356). And sound is that on which all experience is constructed.

In the Guru’s descriptions of Turiya and in Nitya’s comments on them, words reach their levels of failure in attempting to describe that which transcends the senses. The tools, so to say, are not up to the task (as is true in any language) and rely almost exclusively on figures of speech designed to offer visions in one form or another: “the sky of your consciousness blazing forth,” “a million suns rising all at once,” and so on. As in all such efforts to describe the ineffable, the uninitiated are in a *Catch-22*: they can legitimately comprehend only if they already understand. But it is in that very distance between the ultimate goal contained in the descriptions and our condition of worldly ignorance that Nitya

offers what, I think, is of particular value to our understanding the Guru's highly stylized metaphoric verse. As Americans, we may not yet be able to participate wholly with the Guru's complete vision, but in Nitya's commentary we can begin to piece together a journey beginning with the first steps firmly anchored in our experience here and now.

As the Guru has established in previous verses, our world of awareness is constructed largely out of words and concepts our minds cobble together out of them. We have names for everything, and, as Nitya points out, if we dismiss them all from our awareness almost nothing remains (beyond dumb, timeless nature). Words, however, originate in oral expression. They are atmospheric vibrations crafted by our tongues and breath. With sound, then, we can express a meaning (arising from somewhere unexplainable) that can be carried in any number of melodies (or not) depending on the mood we wish to attach to the content. Through this mysterious process we paint out word pictures that others might or might not visualize, in the process essentially translating sound into sight. This miraculous series of events denies explanation, concludes Nitya. By directing our "vital breath," or prana, to and from words we express our world that we again inexplicably codify in marks on page our minds can comprehend. The underlying character of sound, in its pure form, is that of the Absolute, and in that oneness we all share thereby affording us the opportunity to communicate with and understand each other. In this respect, the "mathematics of music is already within us because we *are* sound" (p. 355).

This measurable precision of the cosmos that permeates it entirely and that is the substance of words manifests in infinite variety because of this plastic character. In addition to literal denotation, words more often than not carry heavy connotation or implied meaning that can be multiplied in combination with other words. Poetry, for example, distances itself from literal word representations in its employment of tropes, analogies, and so on.

A “scientific” description of the sun is quite unlike “Sol smiling in the morning heavens” in both meaning and content.

Concerning this very point, Nitya presents the Purva-Mimamsa school of thought that claims the world is constituted of sound, a world in which this sound influences everything. This school’s collection of mantras or sound patterns speaks to this basic quality in which the world is a mind’s construction fashioned out of the one eternal Absolute. By becoming one with that sound, our consciousness burns away all others and “like ten thousand suns shining all at once” we know ourselves and the Absolute are not two.”

As is the case for any journey, the arriving at this enlightened destination requires that we begin with our first steps by our using the tools at hand. Understanding the Guru’s vision demands an awareness beyond what the rational mind can comprehend (commonly known as understanding). But that mental capacity, for many of us, *is* our tool at hand and if we deny it as having value—a position sometimes taken by those championing irrational “feeling” as superior to reason—we are disqualified as participants in knowing the Absolute. It is this very procedure that has been employed by “New Age” devotees who essentially damn reason as a weapon of Western hegemony that has been used to bludgeon the more noble non-rational peoples of the globe. By ignoring any distinction between pre and post rational states, much of the critique of American culture relies on a general disparaging of reason per se as it has marched on through Western Europe to the Western Hemisphere. Through non-thought, in other words, intellect itself is seen as the enemy of the good and those possessing it automatically qualify as demonic unless or until they deny their heresy and embrace the irrational. Inquisitions have not gone away.

In this verse, the Guru offers a spectacular vision we have yet to participate in, and Nitya articulates the pieces of it in terms our

minds can understand. But as Frithjof Schuon once commented, rational Intellect¹ is also of the Absolute and

“the . . . denial of the presence, whether virtual or actualized, of the uncreated Intellect in the created being, finds its most usual expression in the erroneous affirmation that no supernatural knowledge is possible apart from Revelation. But it is quite arbitrary to maintain that on this earth we have no immediate knowledge of God, and in fact that it is impossible for us to have such knowledge. This provides one more example of the opportunism that, on the one hand, denies the reality of the Intellect, and, on the other hand, denies to those who enjoy the possession of it the right to know what it causes them to know.” (p 57-58, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*)

¹ “The Intellect is not reason. Reason proceeds discursively, through language, and like a bridge joins two banks, Knower and Known, without removing the river between. The intellect knows intuitively and (as noted above) identifies the Knower with what he knows, causing one to become the other.* Or rather, to invoke again the point about tense, the Intellect *is* the Absolute as manifest in the human soul; Eckhart states the case precisely when he writes: “There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable; . . . This something is the Intellect.”

*In Sanskrit one who knows in this mode is *evamvit*, a Comprehensor, one who has “verified” in his own person. As long as one Knows only of his immortal Self, he is still in the realm of ignorance: he really knows it when he becomes it.” (Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religion*, p. XIV)