

4/1/14  
Verse 53

The primal energy implied in this  
is the seed from which everything here proliferates;  
having understood that, without forgetting  
to clear the mind deluded by *maya*, meditation should continue.

Free translation:

The primordial potency inherent in this is the seed which gives birth to  
all we see here. Bearing this in mind, and never forgetting it, one should  
meditate on its secret to dispel the thrall of *maya*.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

That primordial potency that herein resides  
Is the seed that gives birth to all here we see;  
Merging the mind in that, never forgetting,  
Maya-mind to end, ever do contemplation pursue.

A gathering of fools on April Fool's Day—this year a once-in-a-century palindrome—made the most of this amazing commentary, which presents the secret of aum and *maya* in a most accessible and sensible manner. It's hard to imagine that anyone could fail to see the value of a unifying effort after reading it.

Maya is often viewed as if it was an oppressing force that is to be dismissed with a disdainful flick of the head, as if by denying it, it will just disappear. No way Ho Zay! As Nitya averred in the last verse, our very existence is a part of *maya*. It is a wholesale condition; the way the universe is constructed. The way we are constructed. So *maya* cannot be ignored, except by ignore-ance. What Nitya teaches us is how to understand it and cope with it intelligently. First he alerts us to how *maya* may be recognized:

Maya... is both real and unreal. Maya is not a thing, it is a situation. Whenever there is an event, an experience or a context that shows within it an enigmatic pull towards two opposites, it is an instance of maya.

Whenever we find ourselves clinging to one side of a dual situation—which we all agreed was often—we are dealing with maya. Instead of fighting harder for our personal preference to prevail, if we open ourself to what else there is and take a close look at the total context, it changes from a conflict situation to a revelation of the mystery and wonder of life. We become agents of healing rather than partisans in warfare.

Aum is the “glowing radiant sound” of the last verse, which is the “this” in the present verse: “The primal energy implied in this is the seed from which everything here proliferates.” In other words, the life impulse begins as a point source or seed, expands through the stages of consciousness to become fully actualized in the transactional world, and then recedes back to a point. The seed contains all the potentials of manifestation in a compressed form, but these are only perceived when they become actualized. A continuous pulsation unites the source and its elaboration in the here and now. The gurus recommend we consciously tie the confusing flux of manifestation with its core value as a seed-source in order to maintain our stability. Only when we become stabilized in the wisdom of the total context can we become pillars of strength for our fellow beings.

Nitya’s description of a typical predicament is well worth revisiting:

If you bracket all this intrigue together it is a single situation with two sides, one of grace and beauty, warmth and joy, and the other full of darkness. Whenever an experience has such a duality you can say it is subject to maya. In your life you can find hundreds of such situations where with great love you move toward a certain value, and when you are about to possess it you see a hundred other possibilities drowning you in unanticipated problems. You cling to it;

you cannot have it and yet you cannot let it go. When such a duality comes, you become like a person possessed by an evil spirit. You don't know what you are saying or how to behave. You are at a crossroads, where turning one way is wrong and turning the other way is also wrong. We come to such crossroads in life again and again, and they are all situations of maya.

We all readily agreed that the “hundreds of such situations” is perhaps a lowball figure, and in fact even in the midst of this teaching, right in the class, we could notice the tendency to slip back into partisan positions of “this is right and that is wrong.” There is a lot of work ahead regarding maya, and Nitya is going to point out that Maya (as a quasi-humorous personification) really knows her business. She knows exactly how to catch us, and she is amazingly good at it. In Verse 88 (a worthwhile verse to read ahead on, one of the very best), we learn “If you understand maya, it will lead you to brahman. If you don't understand—crash! It's a good game and a terrible game. If you enter the game, be sure you know all the rules. If you don't, it will beat you.” And of course, we've already entered the game, ages ago. We never had a choice. So should we just allow ourselves to continue to be battered and fried, or should we learn how to deal with her?

Happily, we have been helped by experts to see through the fog to some degree, though we all secretly cherish our favorite opinions, and we cling to them with undue ferocity. But progress has definitely been made.

As an example of healing, Deb told of an important dream she had recently. She has been very angry with someone in her family, and has been struggling hard to figure out how to show him the error of his ways and get him to change. It has made her miserable for a long time. In the dream she was watching herself. She approached the man and gave him an unreserved hug. She was no longer trying to correct him; she was merged with him and felt only love. Deb the observer knew this was the cure, and it was a tremendous relief as all the pain and anguish drained out of her.

Then she went around hugging many other friends. These were not like ordinary hugs with two separate people involved, they were total mergers into a blissful unity. She awoke in a state of ecstasy, which persisted for a long time. Not only that, but her specific upset was mitigated in waking life, even though she still is aware of persistent problems.

Susan read out the last line of the commentary as being wonderfully appropriate to all our travails: “Seeing unity in and through all the diversities, always, through a process of meditation and not of analysis, not one of fragmentary observation but instead always living it as a whole, is the message of this meditation.” Deb’s dream was meditation in action at its best. And undoubtedly the healing impulse started much deeper than the dream state, called forth by pondering and wrestling with her dilemma. It arose in the turiya, the glowing silence in which everything resides, and pressed up through the deep sleep state until it was perceivable to her in the dream. The gushing fountain of reconciliation and forgiveness she experienced then suffused her life in the wakeful state as well. And now her conscious acceptance of the process sends positive pulsations of gratitude and transformation back toward her core. It will produce a positive feedback loop, unless it is undermined by bad habits of thought. Supported by the wisdom of the teachings she returns to frequently, it should easily become established as a new paradigm in her life.

This is precisely why Nitya always said that meditation was a 24 hour a day business, not something to practice now and then. Every situation we are in is a challenge to “rise to the occasion.” With such an attitude, meditation is never drudgery, it is an active doorway to love and delight, an ongoing opportunity to move from misery to bliss.

Regarding Deb’s amazing dream, Paul later mentioned how if you think of a question just before you fall asleep, you sometimes will dream of a solution or get an insight about it. Possibly this is a way to “send a message” down into the depths of your being, which then pulses back to throw light on the matter.

Deb had been putting a lot of energy into her problem all through the day, of course, but Paul's is a really good idea: consciously send a focused request into your karu, your core, at the verge of sleep, and it will easily go very deep.

Jan resonated with the idea of aum leading us back into the center of our being, and that the inevitable duality of life is grounded in the unity. She feels that the idea has had a major impact in her life, that when she has a tendency to feel sorry for herself and become passive, she now taps into her conviction that she is an unlimited being and it restores her self-confidence. This is reason enough to pursue a study like this one, and Jan's inner radiance that shines forth more and more is evidence of its efficacy.

Deb has been watching a movie about Chogyam Trungpa, who she studied with for a year or so. One of his disciples, Pema Chodron, said something that resonated with her, that what we are really afraid of is sanity, of actually becoming the vast, amazing beings we are. We keep some favorite neuroses handy in our pockets, ready to pull out whenever our wholeness threatens to reclaim us. I would add that the study of the ways we repress the inner fountain of sakti is vast, and includes far more than a handful of neuroses. But that's for another time.

Susan was also moved by the last line of this paragraph:

The original sound 'aum', including the entire continuum from the silence where you merge through the 'a' where you transact, are all seen as one organic whole. Then you are not surprised by the eventualities in life, as you are when you see only one side. When you stand on one side of a hill it is physically impossible to place yourself at the other side also. But the knowledge that there is another side and that the vision from another angle could be different takes away from you the big fear, the big hatred, and the big confusion.

Susan admitted that fear, hatred and confusion were states she knew well. She has made significant strides in laying them to rest by bringing new perspectives from *That Alone* into her life. She used to feel that she needed to appear all-knowing so that people would admire her and not see her faults, which loomed large in her self-image. Now she accepts that all of us are only privy to partial knowledge, and admitting it is not just okay, it is liberating. Accepting ourselves as flawed and yet still loveable is a major breakthrough for our anxious egos, allowing them to let go of their defenses and pretenses and become normalized. She harked back to the epochal sentence in Verse 44: “Your position is rigid to precisely the extent that your vision is limited.” Fear and hatred are supremely rigid positions, and their disjunction with our desire for peace and joy throw us into confusion. We could just as easily posit the contrary: our vision is limited precisely to the extent that our position is rigid. So we can work on this from both sides together.

Eugene added an important insight about confusion, that when he gets caught up in situations he forgets the unity. He feels called upon to fix situations or protect people from the negative consequences of their behavior, but then he gets drawn in to the chaos. Thinking about unity helps restore his equanimity, and to let go of his impulse to protect. I’d add that being a protective, supportive person is a wonderful thing, not something to be given up, but becoming embroiled in the turmoil is not helpful. As long as Eugene remains grounded in a unitive vision, his urge to care for others is a valuable force for healing. And life is kind to show us where we need to work on ourself. The very thing that pulls us out of our groundedness to become upset is where we should look to uncover the roots of our own malaise.

Eugene’s thoughts prompted Deb to recall another classic bit from the text:

The other person may be quite mad. Usually the immediate impact of this is you also go mad. But you can remain sane and save the

situation, rather than proliferating madness by reacting to it. There is enough madness there already. Why should you add your own to it? Usually we are drawn towards it; there is every temptation to join in the confusion. This is called maya.

Moni agreed that maya was valuable, that it helps us to get going in life. It pressures us to grow and change, to be more engaged. In spiritual life we try to see conflicts as opportunities rather than oppressions. Oppression means we run away, but opportunities are to be welcomed.

Mick noted that the one-point of his martial arts training sounded exactly like the *adi bijam*, the unitive seed of Vedanta. Acting from the one-point keeps practitioners in balance. It contains all the dimensions, while having no dimensions itself. His operating premise and acknowledged challenge is to welcome all with a glad and open heart. That doesn't mean you necessarily approve of everything, only that you remain open against the tendency to close down. Our likes and dislikes create tension in the mind, which is the source of fear, anger, confusion and all the rest.

Mick was also struck by Nitya's point that "The history of ideas is within you. It's a continuous flow of great force, of which you are now a passing effect." It humbles and calms us to know we are just a small part of an unfolding drama, and don't have to worry about directing the whole show. Forced directorship pits us against the flow of the mystical wave of life, while merely playing our part encourages us to open our hearts to it.

Bushra recalled in school how her fellow students would be partial to various "isms," and fight about them all the time. But she liked all the isms, as far as they went, and didn't feel she had to choose any particular one and defend it. It made her able to laugh where others became bitter. She described her attitude as relativism, but it is something else. Relativism would be to grade all the isms hierarchically and compare them. Though she would probably never admit it, she is actually bringing a unitive viewpoint to bear.

Andy told us of his “operating theory” that since everyone has come forth from the same unitive ground that contains every possibility, they have infinite potential. But not everyone is able to express their potential qualities: they often are diverted away from them by circumstances. The theory gives him space for compassion and to become less judgmental about people’s failings.

In conclusion, please, please don’t imagine anything is resolved if you dismiss something with the truism, “It’s all just maya.” No one reading *That Alone* should ever be prompted to make such a blunder. It’s a way of turning our back on a problem, but it doesn’t solve anything. As author Philip K. Dick defined reality, it is “that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.” He might have added, it often comes back with renewed power to instigate mayhem. Our closing meditation reprised this critical truth, so eloquently expressed by Nitya:

So how can you say it is all maya? You cannot just brush it aside like that. At the transactional level it is a reality.... Narayana Guru here recommends the continuous contemplation of the primal seed of all this. If the cause is real, as the effect has come from the cause it also belongs to the real. You dismiss the effect as unreal because you see one part of it and another part is hidden from you. This falsifies its unity. But if you look to the unity, it cannot be false. Seeing unity in and through all the diversities, always, through a process of meditation and not of analysis, not one of fragmentary observation but instead always living it as a whole, is the message of this meditation.

## Part II

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

Maya is a context, a situation, an appraisal or judgement which tends to be torn between the duality of acceptance and rejection, admiration and aversion. It appears to be truth and falsehood



simultaneously or alternatively. Casually, two people are attracted to each other. A strong sentiment of love arises between them. They are surprised at their total acceptance and their endless capacity to surrender and do sacrifices to honour this noble sentiment that makes their hearts pulsate in unison. A spark of doubt arises, it smoulders and creates a thick fog of misunderstanding. Everything said and done in good faith and love reappears as evidence of selfishness and conceit. Cherishable memories become loathsome symbols of treachery and deceit. Thus, love begets hatred. This kind of dual situation is called maya.

A man thinks that by obtaining riches and amassing wealth he can resolve all problems. When wealth comes it solves many problems of poverty, but, in turn, it also brings a thousand and one unanticipated evils. Then the same man wants to renounce all wealth to get a grain of peace. Thus, any number of examples characteristic of maya are to be seen in everyday life.

For one moment, let us return to the source of our awareness and watch how it expands. Awareness expands at the recognition of names, forms, meanings of things and situations, apprehension of fear, doubt, curiosity and hundreds of other reactions, desires, associated memories, designs of action and the consequent plunge into an irresistible and compulsive action. The stream of consciousness and its accompanying behavioural activity are gushing out of a mysterious depth like a powerful fountain. We cannot dismiss the whole thing as a fictitious phenomenality.

In the previous verse we took notice of the still voice of aum which brings the mind to its culminating silence. When the process is regressively understood, the stage before that silence is the effect returning to the seed state of its cause. The stage before that is the withdrawal of all active forces to the subjective level of dreaming. Out-and-out manifoldness and the dual interplay of the subject and the object are only experienced in the transactional world of wakefulness. If the original cause is true, what comes out of it as effect is also true. There is only one difference: when one is

transmuted into many, it assumes many kinds of dualities, such as above and below, left and right, inside and outside, big and small. The proliferation of duality is staggering. It is hard for a feeble mind to retain its sense of oneness when the manifold aspects are so intensely or acutely expressive, as pain and pleasure, elation and depression, or profound and profane. We are subjected to the tyranny of maya only when the secret link with the unitive principle of the oneness of all in the only existence of the subsistent value of the Absolute is not cognized as the abiding factor in all instances of experience. This can be done only by cultivating a contemplative awareness of the one reality which is the core of everything.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

HAVING in the previous verses brought all reality to the concept of an all-pervading self-luminous entity, into the vastness of whose glory all sense of individuality or self-identity is lost, as it were, in a neutral notion of the Absolute, the Guru here passes on to examine the same in terms of a living purpose, taking a teleological rather than an ontological perspective.

The 'atman' of the Advaita Vedanta has been compared to a lamp that lights a theatre; while it sheds its light as a witness ('sakshin'), the players who represent the living beings or jivas come or go in the world of phenomena. It is usual to refer the phenomenal world to Maya, as its source. Maya is only a philosophical term applied to the possibility of all kinds of errors, actual or conceptual, in the human mind. From simple optical illusions to the grandest of errors of mistaking the Self for the non-Self or vice-versa, man lives in error, and within the alternating range of certitude and doubt, he finds himself alternately in fear or wonder, eternally caught by lack of clear insight, within the living limits of a smile or

a tear. Maya, it is true, is the source of the world of appearances, but behind and implied in Maya itself is the deeper-seated seed, which is also the source of the visible universe and which is independent of even the errors with which Maya is capable of inflicting the human kind. Maya as used here holds within its scope both its negative and positive implications before all duality's taint is abolished.

The 'potency' referred to in the first line refers to the 'sakti' or power that is said to belong to Maya in Vedantic literature. This power should ultimately be traced to the Absolute itself, because without the light that the Absolute sheds, no errors would be possible at all. They would not arise. Although Maya is the immediate source of error, the final seed of error resides in the heart of the great neutrality of the Absolute described in the previous verse. Maya as a concept has validity as long as any vestige of duality in the Absolute persists due to its dominant negativity, as Hegel would put it.

Maya gives birth to the phenomenal (or the visible), while the noumenal and neutral Absolute is the source of all, or the ultimate cause. In itself, the Absolute viewed as Maya is causeless, and remains as an abstract principle tending to be negative in its import.

Assuming names and forms, Maya has the power of creating a world of plurality or multiplicity of percept-concept entities with which the actual world becomes filled at any given waking or dreaming moment. The common seed of both Maya and 'jiva' (a living unit) is to be traced still further backwards to the Absolute at the negative levels of this notion, whose best expression, as we have seen in the previous verse, is in a glory, filling all space. Maya may be said to live and express itself negatively and horizontally, while the glory of the Absolute may be said to have a vertical range, retaining still a common point of contact between

the two. The positive and negative aspects of the Absolute, with a neutral central aspect best expressed by silence, are all implicit in Vedantic writings of the different 'acharyas' (teachers) of India by names such as 'para' (ultimate), 'sakshin' (witness), 'kutastha' (positive or well-established), etc., into whose intricacies we shall not, at present, enter. Neither definitions nor examples can help the seeker here if he does not also have that imaginative and intuitive gift of vision which Sankara has called 'uha apoha' (an inductive-deductive insight. See our later work).

The second half of the verse refers to what one should do to advance in self-instruction. The pursuit of contemplation is here recommended, not as an obligation but as a free choice by a wisdom seeker. The word 'manana', used in the original Malayalam text for 'contemplation' here, refers to a discipline mentioned in the Upanishads and in the Gita which distinguishes between mere intellectual appreciation of a verity which is called 'sravana' (coming from hearing the words of a Guru), and rumination over the truth as 'marking' in the familiar phrase of 'read, mark and inwardly digest' found in the context of Christian liturgy. The same distinction as between mere reading and marking, which refers to a further intensification of attention, is greater in the third term 'nididhyasana' - going with 'manana' and 'sravana' in Vedanta - (which would correspond to the third degree of attention implied in the term 'inwardly digest' of the Christian context). In the Bhagavad Gita this same distinction is under reference when in chapter XVIII. 55 we read:

'By devotion he (the aspirant) knows me, to what extent and which I am; and thereafter, having known me, philosophically, he enters into me.'

The knowing process, in the intellectual, academic or philosophical sense, has only a weak degree of attention or faith involved in it. This has to be made more complete or perfect by the act of

entering into the Absolute itself as meant in the philosophy of Bergson. The Absolute is within the consciousness of man and conversely man lives within the consciousness of the Absolute, The third degree of contemplation in the series of ‘sravana’ (hearing) and ‘manana’ (mental identification of what one has heard, or knowing it by heart as schoolboys say) is ‘nididhyasana’ (knowing the Absolute as if from inside it or as the Absolute within you). In the present verse this last stage of self-realization is not yet under reference, but we have to know the whole context if we are to have a precise notion here of what is implied by ‘manana’ which we have rendered in English, as the pursuit of ‘contemplation’.

The result of such active contemplation would be to cut at the root or the source of error, where it branches out horizontally into the visible world of names and forms, without denying the real seed which is lodged in the heart of the neutral glory of the Absolute itself.

### Part III

Jake’s commentary includes a fresh (and vegetarian) take on the square circle:

Meditation is not analysis, however effective the latter is in solving our engineering or other physical puzzles. We might reason our way to a moon landing or the latest computer application, but the rational method fails magnificently when we apply it to knowing who we are, why we are here—our nature and purpose. In this verse, the Guru presents a route for the latter quest, one that directs inward our attention and whole Self rather than outward. In that reversing of direction is the shifting from analysis to self-aware meditation, a project, Nitya says in his commentary, that “must become the main current of life” as we cycle daily through the awake, dream, and deep dream states (p. 363).

In his claim that the route to enlightenment follows the highway of meditation, Nitya is in common cause with the mystic traditions generally and the core of the religious ones. But for the sake of our rational understanding he walks us through what is obvious for those awake and so difficult to perceive for those of us caught in the thick of things.

Nitya opens his commentary with a discussion of our daily and very real condition, a situation captured in the term *Maya*. It defines our position in wakeful experience, the defining character of which is its “enigmatic pull toward two opposites.” To illustrate the point, Nitya uses the example of the common romance that begins with youthful bliss and then turns negative as each party comes to see those details about the other that had formerly passed undetected. Originally attracted to the One, each party is eventually surprised by its inevitable details that make it manifest in the world of the many. Surprised, that is, by that which comprises manifest reality—the physical details that come together to make up the whole—each partner forgets the Absolute transcendent force attraction that compelled the process in the first place, having replaced the vague perception of that rationally unknowable state with the physical one for which the details constitute the whole.<sup>1</sup>

In the minutia are the surprises. As Nitya points out, if you are in a continuous conundrum in which any choice you make represents an opportunity missed, you are squarely in the realm of *Maya*. One could say that this dance of *Maya* is the stuff of every situation we face whenever we make any decision. We can choose only one course at a time, but by so doing we deny others, the consequences of which offer advantages not contained in the chosen course. Any choice, in other words, represents the wrong one if we dwell on the missed opportunities in not taking it. Regret

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<sup>1</sup> Putney and Putney’s 1960s text, *The Adjusted American: Normal Neuroses in the Individual and Society*, presents a Freudian and very American narrative detailing the same condition in Chapter 10 of the text, “Love or Marriage,” pp. 106-25).

and/or paralysis or any number or any number of psychological maladies can easily come to dominate one's conscious/dream states as a result. Our lives, writes Nitya, can be a continuous series of "crossroad" events in which "turning one way is wrong and turning the other way is also wrong" (p. 359).

Maya is the natural condition of the world of necessity, constantly arising and receding out of the transcendent. As such, Maya is very real to our awake state and is the space where our consciousness comes to participate in its tangible form. As Nitya writes concerning the particular, in our awake state we must deal with those to whom we owe money, but in our dream state we need not, and in our deep dreamless state, debtors—indeed all manifestation—merges into the Absolute for which the many cease existence.

Sensing the Absolute in the immanent in which we spend a good deal of our physical lives and return to periodically, we enter and exit Maya. In so doing, we are constantly blind-sided by the many details that the Absolute proliferates into when it presents itself to our senses. Those contradictions and ironies pile up all around us as the intellect-ego takes over the job of dealing with them, a task the mind is not well equipped to perform. Having lost direct contact with that which *is*, the mind goes about constructing boundaries and frantically attempts to reason through that which—unlike the issues attended to in physics and engineering, for example—transcends reason. Maya is what it is, and our intellectual demands that it be otherwise deny reality altogether. It's as if we were to require the planets orbiting the sun to become cubes of asparagus-like tofu.

The fault in all this, says Nitya, lies in our own point of view—not in the stars. Our conscious world is very much with us and demands our attention. We ignore it at our own peril. By the same token, its dual nature is also real and defines itself in the manifold dimensions in which it fractures the transcendent. It is in our capacity to hold both of these perspectives at the same time that, says Nitya, we are in a position not to be continuously

surprised, bouncing from one misery to the next. Maintaining this contemplative attitude “must become the main current of life” (p. 363) in order for us to hold this “dialectical method of looking,” of “critically seeing a thing with a unitive understanding, the one and the many at the same time” (p. 362).

This process Nitya is describing cannot be approached by way of the intellect but requires a meditative posture in which we live life as a whole rather than attempt to reason through its fragments as we encounter them. The pieces are always of a larger picture; circumstances surround and precede all events. And those events, in turn arise out of a state for which the mind has no explanation. On the other hand are the practical choices one must always make in a world or ever-present arising where the material demands have very real consequences. This giant contradiction, the very fabric of maya, operates beyond our feeble attempts to control it, and in this verse and its commentary, the Guru and Nitya counsel us to avoid that fundamental error by asking us to deal with Maya as it is and on its own terms. To do otherwise, to follow the demands of our ego-self, is to guarantee more of the same—a condition Einstein once noted as the very definition of insanity.