

4/8/14
Verse 54

In sleep the wakeful state does not exist
and when one wakes up no trace of sleep remains;
day by day, in this way, these two, having emerged
from the primal *maya* woman, arise and alternate.

Free translation:

In wakefulness there is no sleep, and likewise there is no sleep in
the waking state. Day after day these twins are born of *maya*'s
womb, and they continuously alternate.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

The waking state, it obtains not in sleep
And sleep again does not attain consciousness
When awake: day by day these twain are born
Of *Maya*'s womb and keep alternating on.

Andy felt this verse had a Zen flavor, which he treasured. He loved the sheer contrariness of absolute unconsciousness versus having a world of experience. This is a proper attitude for a seeker of truth, not to pin things down but to have our polite certitudes swept away so that we can be open to much more of who we are and what the world is.

Deb noted at the outset that this verse continues seamlessly from the previous. Last week *maya* was identified as “an event, an experience or a context that shows within it an enigmatic pull towards two opposites.” Now we are learning the skill to unite those opposites in order to ally ourselves with the absolute aspect that underlies them. She felt assured that understanding the whole context ameliorated the urge that presses us toward partisanship to one side and consequent conflict.

We have now arrived at a very important issue: the reality of the universe. There is a lot of confusion over whether everything is one or if there is only duality. According to Nitya, it depends on your perspective:

Maya and the Absolute are not two, and at the same time they are two. They are two when you are facing the duality, but where the duality is resolved maya changes into the Absolute. At this end of experience it is maya, while at the other end it is the Absolute.... The seeming insurmountability of maya is a methodological error where we are trying to interpret the whole in terms of a part. If we can just give up that approach and allow the whole to prevail, that's beingness. But all these words such as beingness, meditation, etc. are to be treated as if they are not said. Once you conceptualize them you are on the other side, merely playing with the tools of consciousness.

We have come to a stage of our study when we have an opportunity to put down our tools of consciousness—some might call them toys of consciousness—and put some extra sincere effort into imbuing our concepts with meaning, in order to bring them to life, to vivify them. It's not a matter of improving our definitions as much as opening ourselves to whatever goes beyond them. Our words have been carefully tied to limited concepts. Yet why can't we expand our concepts, and as a byproduct of the effort put more bounce in our nouns, more verve in our verbs? It takes some effort, but the result is all on the upside. I always wonder why that isn't more appealing. In fact it's a gas.

Despite the central importance in Nitya's talk of seeing the limitations of words, by verbally leading us into subtle insights that liberate us from the tyranny of words, he also demonstrates their potential power and value. We have to first realize the limitations of words before we can go beyond them, and the only thing that will convince us of that (barring a spontaneous mystical experience) is words. Last week we were reminded that what we see and otherwise

perceive is a mental construct, not the reality it appears so convincingly to be, and here we are reminded of the same regarding verbal constructs. We are convinced our words correspond with reality as such, but in fact they are symbols with little or no intrinsic correspondence to what they indicate. If we don't take the trouble to instill real meaning into the words, we will spend our lives chasing after empty forms. Since that is the common lot of humanity, the gurus have extended their compassion in gently helping us to restore at least some measure of meaning to our symbols.

The power of mantras is not that rote repetition automatically brings enlightenment, but that by pondering them we expand our mental framework. The process is open ended. At first a phrase like "I am the Absolute" is simply an abstraction, basically meaningless, but if we really think about it, the idea grows on us. Eventually it becomes a statement of resonant truth that fills our whole being and steers us clear of small-mindedness.

Nitya liked to ask us if when we said the word sugar did it taste sweet? Nataraja Guru's version was if you said the word God and didn't fall down stricken with awe, humbled by its power, then the word had no real meaning to you. Nitya paraphrased his guru in his comments:

Here [Narayana Guru] is focusing attention on what we should meditate on. This is not an easy thing to do because we have taken refuge in word concepts. In India, most people do not know Sanskrit. If a Sanskrit word is used, it gives a sense of authority to the speaker. A person can thereby tyrannize others with it. When they say "I am now quoting from the Upanishads," everybody bows their heads. It is a kind of slavery, linguistic servitude.

We have become victimized by such fancy language. The words sound impressive, but do we actually experience their meaning? No. We only think we do. It is just like saying "I believe in God." "Oh, did you meet that fellow somewhere?" "No, but I know all about Him. I hear about Him all the time." All this so-called familiarity with God is just having heard the word a hundred times, a million

times even, from others. Is that God-experience? What do you mean by God-experience, anyway? Knowing the meaning of the word is only a dictionary experience.

One of the reasons we may feel our lives are emptier than they should be is this pervasive “dictionary experience.” It is how we were trained all our lives, to match definitions with terms, to select the right answer to every question. Forget direct experience. Ergo, questions without answers are meaningless. Now we want to learn to use them as new tools to unlock the black boxes of our brains.

I have recently been watching a compilation of interviews from a recent conference on “Science and Nonduality.” It strikes me primarily as a ratification of Nitya’s strong words. Fancy science concepts are bandied about without any real sense, and when we hear things like “quantum entanglement” or “relativity” we bow our heads. But because I’ve been pondering these matters for a long time, almost all of what I watched struck me as pure psychobabble. It boiled down to simplistic and ungrounded beliefs dressed up in language that will before long be regarded as inane. Newage. It’s really embarrassing to realize we do something like that all the time, throwing up smoke and mirrors to try to baffle and impress the opposition. Now would be a good time to quit that game, since we’re not baffling the opposition as much as we are hollowing out ourselves.

Andy contributed a related cautionary note: don’t think that just because you can discuss something that that you understand it. Bushra elaborated, that once she gives up control the whole business is very simple. She felt that the sleep half of the verse was about not having control or being in control, which is exactly right. Blending that into our waking life that is trained to be controlling is an excellent technique to relinquish confounding verbiage. Bushra tells her filmmaking students to “trust the process,” advice we could all take to heart. We all proceed with what we know, but often we are so self-critical we block many intuitive nudges in promising directions. By trying too hard to “do it right” we wind

up with “shitty little projects” as another art teacher once called them. Bushra’s simple-sounding but not so simple advice to trust the process is a way to keep ourselves open. We know the process and can carry it out, but in trusting that we do know enough, even though we don’t know much, we permit ourselves to be more open to serendipity. The results are often very good.

The class made much of finding the borderline between sleep and waking, as if it was a mystical achievement. In Zen it is sometimes made out to be a unique place, better than both separately. Here the idea is more to integrate the two familiar states so they work together. Hey, even teaching them to get along is a challenge! The difference is probably only one of semantics.

Last week we talked about the idea of holding an idea in mind as you went to sleep, which invites the unconscious to offer its wisdom via dreams or directly into conscious awareness as we wake up later. I routinely solve minor problems that way, and it works very well. Scotty talked about how he paints right up until bedtime, and then the next morning before his eyes even open, he gets a vision of what to work on next, something occurs to him that feels so rich. He finds that it’s a wonderful tool for creativity.

Deb related something she heard about the great filmmaker Federico Fellini, that he never looked at his films until after he was done shooting them, because he thought it would prejudice his work. He wanted everything to come straight out of his reservoir of creativity, unmanipulated by his conscious thoughts. In a similar vein, Susan told us about how when her kids went to a Waldorf school the parents were asked not to put their kids’ art on display at home, since it would convert the creative process into an ego enterprise based on receiving approval. The school found that displaying art caused the children’s creativity to stagnate.

So there are many, many ways we inhibit our full functioning by constipated thinking. By taking the time to really meditate on these matters, we can break free of such impediments. It is something we are eminently capable of. Nitya says:

This is difficult but not impossible. It's not like thinking of a square circle; in fact, it's not conceptual at all. When we try to contemplate, the main mistake we commit is in replacing direct understanding with intellectual understanding. We tend to imagine the unconscious in terms of consciousness, timelessness in terms of time, spacelessness in terms of space. This is an injustice, squeezing the unconscious into the mold of the conscious in order to try to understand it. It is also partisan: you are in favor of consciousness.

I well remember that last line striking me dead center when Nitya said it. We identify with the small sliver of ourselves that is wakeful consciousness, and block off the rest, the lion's share. My reaction then (as now) is how stupid of me! I've got to try and get over it. While I was still smarting with the sting of that new insight, Nitya followed with more heavy hits:

We carry our body and mind with us everywhere, and yet we don't know anything about its secrets. Our greatest paradox is our own self. It is like a mobile box of ignorance with a candle placed on top of it. When blind men walk at night they carry a torch so that nobody will knock them over. We are just like that, a big unconscious with a little sign of consciousness riding on it. It's also like the big hill behind us here, that has a red light on top so planes won't crash into it. Does the light help the hill to know itself? Does our consciousness help us to know ourselves? No, it doesn't.

This brings us to the very crux of the situation. Hamlet's problem was to be or not to be. Ours is being and non-being. All that we have read and thought about and all that we philosophize becomes suddenly of no use to us. It is as if we are ignorant little toads who have wasted all our life till this moment, and now we cannot do anything. How terrible this is. Most people give up here. We have only come to the fourth verse in the second half of Atmopadesa Satakam. We have another forty-six to go. It is very important to persevere at this point.

That's right. These insights are not intended to ruin us but to free us. Make our lives far more interesting and enjoyable. They sting only because we know they are true. But from what I've observed, Nitya is right. Many people give up right when the chance comes along to really make a change for the better. Egos fear change like the devil.

Not only that, but our egos have been in charge for so long, they can effortlessly steer us wherever they wish. Their dictatorship is so familiar we don't even notice. Oh, I've got something else to do that's more important. I want to stay home tonight. I don't feel good enough, I'll just skip it. I think this is a point where the charisma of the teacher is valuable. People stuck it out in the original class in part because they were attracted to Nitya as an exceptional person. Otherwise going to a soccer match or catching the latest movie would have been more pleasant. Anyway, if we are going to change ourselves for the better, it does take some pressure, some time in meditation examining our assumptions and opening ourselves to unaccustomed perspectives.

What makes this fun? I have no idea. Either it is or it isn't. I do know that I like the idea of persistence. I find it fun to incrementally improve and occasionally make a little leap—a leaplet. “Slow and steady wins the race,” is one of my favorite adages. I have learned that neurons are slow and tedious to rewire into fresh networks, but once they do the new channels are as easy or easier to surf than the old ones. And as we allow ourselves to admit the small impulses from deep in our makeup that could be described as messages from the divine or the influence of the Absolute or the wisdom of the collective unconscious or just simply insights, we can experience the delight of learning that we are much more than we ever imagined.

Our socially acceptable concepts have been way too small, confining us for no good reason. We should not only reconstruct our concepts, we could spend whole chunks of time sitting without recourse to any. That's true openness, what Mick calls the awake mind, alert without expectations. It's what the ego irrationally

fears, but which is like the food of the gods to our soul. It isn't hard; we just think it is. Nitya brought the class to a close with a beautiful meditation on the optimal orientation that is easily within our reach:

We are not in any way referring to a hopelessly difficult attainment. The mystical depth in question is in no way an intellectual exercise to be scientifically gauged. This is why at the very beginning, in the opening verse, we were asked to approach the whole subject with a sense of surrender, a deep devotion, with absolute reverence to the unnamable that shines by its own light both as the known and the unknown. The Guru recommends a greater acceptance of the sense of awe and wonder. We must stand before this seeming impossibility with wonder, allowing ourselves not to do, but to be done with.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

How do we distinguish a wakeful state from that of deep sleep? In the wakeful state the subject recognizes himself as "I am." This idea exists in conjunction with the idea of the extension of space occupied by bodies of different forms and names of varying significance. There is a recurring notion of the continuous passing of time and the awareness of the agency of oneself as the doer of things and the enjoyer of experiences. The details of the wakeful state, when closely examined, look enormous. All these items of awareness are covered by a blanket expression called "consciousness."

In deep sleep, there is no "I." There are no bodies extended in time or space. There is no claim of doing or enjoying anything. It is as if all contents of consciousness had been completely removed from the mind. Does the mind exist in this state? No one can say. What is the state of mind if we are to presume its existence even when there is no awareness? Psychologists speak of the

unconscious. If both consciousness and the unconscious belong to a single entity, what are its characteristics?

In verse 5 and 6 Guru speaks of the fluctuating modes of waking and sleeping, desiring and acting and of one's incapacity to comprehend pure beingness devoid of the flux of becoming. In verse 7 Guru suggests the possibility of remaining neutral to the waking state of being conscious of time, space, things and actions, and to the unconscious state of sleep, which is egoless, timeless and devoid of the awareness of things.

We only know the wakeful state. Although two wakeful states are interspersed with a gap of the unconscious, we can easily pick up the thread of the preceding occasion and continue our wakeful transactions in the present as if there had been no break. However, something suggests that some time elapsed between the time of going to bed and the time of getting out of bed. The quality of that time is a total forgetfulness of everything known, including time and one's own identity. Through an act of presumption we can structure the imaginary state of our unconscious.

Psychologists speak of consciousness as having within it the dichotomy of the conscious state and an unconscious state. This is the most inconceivable of all paradoxes. We can think of both black and white as colours; they are not contradictory. At their worst they are only contraries. Consciousness and the unconscious are contradictories. Upholding and validating two contradictories is called maya. This is a beginningless paradox. Both colours and colourlessness semantically belong to the context of colour. In the same way both the conscious and the unconscious belong to the context of Beingness. Giving content to that beingness experientially is a challenge to the contemplative.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary converts waking and dreaming to day dreaming and night dreaming, a nice touch:

IN verses 5, 6 and 7 the subject of the states of consciousness in relation with sleeping, waking and thinking were once alluded to, and it was indicated in verse 7 that the state of pure awareness was something midway between the states of waking and sleeping. Following up further the same idea, the Guru here indicates the neutral vertical axis that may be said to subsist between the alternating states of sleeping, waking and dreaming. There is one feature which is common to both sleep and wakefulness. In both, the subject witnesses either dream-objects or the objects of the waking world which, in the contemplative context, could in principle be called day-dreaming.

Our attention is here being directed by the Guru to this activity common to dream and day-dream that goes on in spite of the opposite and mutually exclusive nature of the two states that are compared here. The parity, implicit in terms of the active though not objectified content of sleep and waking, is stressed and explained further in the verse that follows. In contrast, in the present verse it is the mutual exclusiveness of the sleeping and waking states that is horizontally examined.

Maya is the principle of nescience or ignorance which is not an entity but a convenient term or mathematical factor or element with which to relate the two aspects of the Absolute, which always co-exist. Like the square root of minus one and its positive counterpart in the square of the same number, understood reciprocally or ambivalently as it enters into electro-magnetic calculations in modern physics, Maya is to be understood in terms of the philosophy of India, especially that of Sankara, as a negative vertical factor admitting contradiction horizontally but unity vertically.

Although his rival, or rather complementary, Vedantic teacher, Ramanuja, developed a theistic view of the Absolute, in which he could discuss the same Vedanta without the help of this Maya

concept, by transferring to the power of God himself all that was attributed to the power of Maya or nescience, this negative principle, or 'negativität' in Hegelian terminology, has persisted to this day in Indian philosophy through Sankara.

The Guru Narayana, elsewhere in his Darsana Mala, analyses this concept in a whole chapter, and presents it in a fully revalued and scientific form. As the negative principle of creative manifoldness in nature, Maya is figuratively spoken of as a female that gives birth, while the positive fertilising aspect of the same natural power is transferred sometimes to the masculine principle such as Shiva, rather than to Parvati, his consort in the popular mystical or mythological proto-language of theism of India. This negative factor, which in principle contains the created multiplicity of the waking and the dream worlds together, ranging from existing to intelligible worlds, is the central axis common to the asymmetrical states of waking and sleeping, when viewed horizontally and independent of both.

This is the domain of this negative potentiality of the Absolute which is Maya, examined from the plus side of the vertical parameter for its reference in the context of this verse.

Maya is no other than the Absolute itself, when all movement or creativity is subtracted from it. The relation is a dialectical one, and is indicated by the word 'ananya', (non-other) explained by Sankara. Maya and the Absolute are related dialectically and not merely as in mechanistic logic. Pure consciousness, when free from the Maya-content of names and forms, becomes the same as the Absolute. Thus it is that we are directed to try to cut at the root of Maya by meditating at the point of insertion of the Maya-function within the pure Absolute. As electricity and magnetism act on different planes while yet belonging to one and the same energy, we have to imagine a unity and a difference here which

itself is to be resolved into a final unity at the end of our search for Truth.

Part III

I want to add an interesting part of the class that didn't fit into the flow of the notes. I have noticed that when we hear our name it elicits a visceral response that can give us a hint where our attachments are located. Our name has been essentially the same since birth, and it has been used to get our attention all along, so it is connected right at the source. We have the opportunity to observe our reaction when we casually hear our name, especially when it is meant for someone else with the same name, when we have no reason to respond anyway, like in a store or other group setting.

Paul was reminded of a psychology class he took in college, where they had students working on projects and then interrupted them with various distractions, including their name, via headphones. The name immediately overrides what you are doing, as do other distractions, graded according to their urgency.

We can apply this insight more broadly to realize that our attachments are regularly interrupting our creative endeavors. Often such endeavors are permanently canceled by the welter of attachments flesh is heir to. As Mick concisely put it, we are distracted because we are attached.

Paul went on to add that when you dissolve personality, you allow the pure potential of nonbeing and being to come together. It reminded him of something he heard about Thich Nhat Hanh. He used a half tap on a bell to remind everyone of a place of neutrality. Then in the midst of everyday activities he would sound the bell and bring everyone back to equipoise for a moment. It was a way of infusing neutrality into the mundane.

Deb had done a meditation where you say your name over and over, until it becomes like a nonsense word that is no longer connected to you. It sound rather liberating, and it reminded me of

R.D. Laing's 1967 book, *The Politics of Experience*, where he examines the word "experience" in such depth and repetitive detail that you pretty soon have no idea what it means. Actually, this could be a valuable side study to *That Alone*, essential deconstructionist psychology, and I found the first chapter here, in case you don't already own a copy:

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/laing.htm>

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Jean sent some thoughts:

Dear Scott,

I just read your notes, on words and their limitations, among other things. "...*put more bounce in our nouns, more verve in our verbs...*" I liked this!

As for not really understanding the word God if we *don't fall down stricken with awe, humbled by its power* (Nataraja), I remembered how the most holy word is not even spoken by the Jews. You can't even pronounce YHWH. And it means "the wordless." I just checked, and sometimes they say instead HaShem (The Name) or Shem HaMeforash (The indescribable Name). I find this even easier to grasp and accept than "the Absolute." I almost prefer "the great mystery."

Recently I watched a TV program on quantum entanglement that was far from psychobabble. It was on ultra-secure high-speed Internet communication, how entangled photons act like tripwires for any outside tampering, based on the idea "you look at it, you change it." It went on to show how quantum cryptography is safer than asymmetrical cryptography, because the RSA algorithms of

the latter, based on prime numbers, can be broken by quantum processors. Still, you can never know WHO you are communicating with, and the greatest threat is ourselves, not mathematics. They had a neat example: Alice and Bob want to communicate, but Eve wants to eavesdrop. However, by looking at the communication, she will change/tamper with it in such a way that both Alice and Bob will know that someone has listened in to part of it. From what is untampered with, they can construct some secure line. BUT, what if Eve ties up Alice and replaces her, and Bob thinks he is communicating with Alice, but he isn't. Or you could bribe your way in. Or, there's always a way.

Then the program shifted over to ultra paranoid computer science. Since fingerprints and iris scans are subject to theft or copying, what then? They are looking at ways of putting passwords into the unconscious. Here it even touches on mantras and how repetition changes neural pathways. The muscle memory in the basal ganglia can record long sequences without conscious access to details. How do you ride a bike? What is the 13th note in a Beethoven symphony? (you have to start at the beginning to know) So they experimented with a guitar interface, and using both hands to instill a specific melody or riff-- *order* (left hand) and *timing* (right hand)-- a.k.a. bimanually coordinated intercept response-- after repeating this about 200 times, it was ingrained in a person's unconscious. "You leave the lab knowing something you don't know that you know," (I'm sorry, I know this sounds very rumsfeldish), and that is the code.

Quantum entanglement with many practical applications!

Time for silence.

Jean

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Dipika wrote:

look at this...

The central teaching of the Upanishads can be given in one sentence: *tarati sokam atmavid*, the knower of the Self crosses over all pains. *tarati* means crosses over; *sokam*, sorrow; and *atmavid*, the knower of the Self. The mark of knowledge is *asokam*, having no sorrow. Where there is sorrow there is ignorance, and where there is no ignorance there is no sorrow.

so its kinda stupid to be stupid...wot ?

if you are seriously aware when such an emotion overtakes you & you analyse it & figure out the root cause, with careful watching one can stop oneself from wallowing & becoming a prey to it. (to sorrow)

Ive been doing that in dealing with the loss of my dad...the crying is all self-pity in losing someone ' I' loved & who has been there as 'my' father...

Dad lived a great life & was mentally & physically alive and about till he died at the age of 81...

so its 'my' personal loss which is making me weepy
everyone loses parents & everyone eventually passes away

I wrote back:

Here's an additional thought:

Feeling sad about loss of a loved one isn't exactly the sorrow referred to. That's more like acute memories surfacing intensely, and it's quite beautiful, actually. If it persists and moves into self-pity and so on, then it's a type of ignorance, certainly. Sorrow in this broad sense is more a negative attitude toward life as a whole, sense of victimhood that impedes full functioning, that kind of thing. I always advise people that it's okay to let yourself feel sad about the loss of a loved one. If nothing else, bottling it up only

represses the feelings and makes us less alive, and possibly mentally stuffed up.

I do totally agree that it's stupid to be stupid, and that examining our state of mind is the cure for a wide variety of psychological ailments. Self-examination can easily highlight whether our feelings are legitimate or if we're just carrying on to pamper our ego. In the case of a close family member, sadness should naturally move toward honor and appreciation, and on to the ecstasy of having known someone dear, which has to be a supreme accomplishment of any universe.

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In getting ready for Nancy's all-star study group on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, I'm reading over the index of highlights I prepared on my first trip through the work. This jumped out as germane to Atmo verse 54, from Volume I:

Many people muse on the glory of realization, and dream of someday reaching there while, as if from behind, they are eaten up by the canker of ego and the darkness of ignorance. Every religion and every philosophy is trying its best to assure us that there is a bright tomorrow when we will be in the benevolent hands of the Supreme. This is a kind of panacea where the believer is held captive by self-hypnosis. But if we can shake ourselves out of this stupor and become more wakeful and conscious, we will see that we are in the hellfire of ignorance—an ignorance that we ourselves have generated, if not during this very life, then in a previous one. It is all because we glorify the highest and neglect our existential life.

Unfortunately, our existential life is one of functioning as a masochist and/or a sadist, taking pleasure in hurting ourselves, as well as feeling the vigor of life in the blood we or others profusely shed. Although we make many hypotheses painted in numerous

colorful forms that fascinate our imagination, they do not help us to come out of the quagmire of illusion. The next course for us in our search for the Absolute or Self-realization is to give time to the factual situations of life. However, this does not mean one helpless person should hold another helpless person on their lap with the two sitting together bemoaning their fate. That will not help either. We have to see our egos clearly to know which aspects are malevolent and which aspects are benevolent. We have to rigorously clear away the agony-brewing aspects of ignorance or selfishness. The selfishness which we speak of here is the bias which in every walk of life leads us away from that central benevolence to which we should gravitate every moment. (635-636)

Part IV

Susan has been working up to writing about some of her thoughts that are coalescing in this second half of Atmo:

I went to the art museum last month to see the Francis Bacon triptych called Three Studies of Lucian Freud (who was Bacon's fellow artist and the grandson of Sigmund Freud). I stood in front of the three large paintings, each a different perspective of a man sitting on a chair with a kind of headboard behind him. In each painting, the man is inside a minimal frame of a contorted box. It doesn't feel like something real in the painting, but rather something that comes from the subject's psychological contrivance/way of thinking. The man's face is all mashed up, not in a cubist sort of way, but more chaotic. I was at first repulsed by the paintings and had to fight the urge to go read the lengthy explanation on the wall behind me to make sense of them. But I stood there longer and then put myself into the man's head so that I was looking out. From that perspective, I could understand the contortions of the figure and the placement inside the box-like frame. When one looks at a person from the outside, everything

usually seems in order – mouth below the nose, below the eyes and a hair style of some sort on top. It can all look “normal.” But thinking about the inside, at least for me, there is not the normal image – my brain flits around from thing to thing, one moment going over the to do list for the day, week, year, and the next being side-tracked by some anxiety that can overtake me for seconds or minutes. Then there is a surfacing and on to changing the laundry or feeding the dogs or going out to some volunteer work. It isn’t neat inside, it isn’t predictable. But how funny that I see that as ugly, as I first saw the paintings. But now I don’t really see it as ugly, just disorganized perhaps. And the box of the painting felt significant too. In class we have talked about being in a box. First there is the realizing that one is even in a box. It’s like waking up at a certain point in childhood and realizing your parents aren’t perfect and that you are separate but this doesn’t usually happen all at once. Maybe there are brilliant sparks of it from time to time so that you know that much as you can appreciate your parents and what has been given you, there is some baggage to be thrown out. You do not have to keep it all. I have been a packrat and a person who is very sentimental partly I’m sure because my parents died when I was young. Not only have I kept many objects from my past but also many ideas and conditionings. This Vedanta study has helped me to sort so much and I’ve gotten rid of many things – real and mental. I’ve also come to terms with and accepted many things real and mental so that these are not so burdensome. Now I come to a point in my life when there are again big changes but these are more natural – my children are separating from me, going off to college and beyond. This leads me to further assess my own life. Verse 51 is especially poignant. That triptych by Francis Bacon is especially poignant. How am I still trapped and content and unknowing? Still sitting in that box of my own making? That box is not only made up of conditionings from my parents and my early life but it is also about how I see things; how I view the future, my fears, my projections, my clingings. I don’t want to be in a box because then I am not authentically myself.

This does not mean that I do not take on some of the elements of my conditioning but I need to examine these things and then discard them, accept them or willingly and gratefully make them my own. What do I look like without the box? This exercise makes me feel selfish and self-indulgent. Those are my internal voices. They are my blocks. They are also the walls of the box. But the truth is that although I have had so much privilege my life and opportunity, this has always been clothed/veneered in guilt for me. I am careful for the most part and fearful. This kind of privilege does not mean that I have taken time to figure out what I want. In fact I think that being comfortable has made me feel that I don't also deserve the privilege of figuring out what I want. Better to look to the needs of others. As a result I have a hard time figuring out what I want and having kids was a great distraction (a good distraction!) -- always much to do and think about.

I just reread Nitya's account of his time of silence from Love and Blessings. It is wonderful to read about his process of shedding conditionings, though I'm sure it must have been even more challenging than Nitya makes it sound. So great to hear how the voices in his head quieted and how he mingled with nature. The verse this last week (54) and the class discussion that went along with it struck me so much as a way to reach my more authentic self, as Nitya did when he kept to silence. Nitya talked about words and how empty they can be: "Knowing the meaning of the word is only a dictionary experience." Being a nut about words and an owner of several large dictionaries, I have many layers of words that surround me and that have become my armor and my identity. We need words and yet we need to go beyond. As Scott wrote in the class notes: "Last week we were reminded that what we see and otherwise perceive is a mental construct, not the reality it appears so convincingly to be, and here we are reminded of the same regarding verbal constructs. We are convinced our words correspond with reality as such, but in fact they are symbols with little or no intrinsic correspondence to what they indicate." This is

a terrific meditation for me – going beyond the words and not only that but, as Deb said in class, “allowing yourself to be permeated,” echoing Nitya’s comment at the end of the commentary about allowing ourselves to be “done with.” Here, of course, I am using words to explain what I mean by going beyond words but really I feel that I am just beginning to understand in my very being what this permeating means. Bushra helped me understand it further when she talked about trusting the process and remaining open. I have thought about these things many times since class, and especially when I have a quiet moment to let the cares and words of the day drift away. I feel lighter because of this and more able to extend that openness to other less quiet parts of my day – a great feeling!

Scott put it well when he said in the notes, “And as we allow ourselves to admit the small impulses from deep in our makeup that could be described as messages from the divine or the influence of the Absolute or the wisdom of the collective unconscious or just simply insights, we can experience the delight of learning that we are much more than we ever imagined.” To begin with, there is having faith in the Absolute and learning the words about the concept. But then the more we let go of our conditioned selves, the more we get out of the way of our authentic selves (our small bit of the divine; the Absolute) and we can feel the possibilities and the peace.

I feel so incredibly fortunate to be studying Atmo again and to have been at this long enough that I feel more and more heaviness lifting!

Aum,
Susan

* * *

Jake's commentary, starting with a thought he just relayed:

When I reviewed verse 54 in my old beat up copy of *That Alone*, I found a comment I'd made years ago. I never looked back:

“Promising only not more of the same—this surrender offers what will transpire with or without our will or consent. That inevitability can be delayed in a play of endless samsaric cycles, a choice not known as choice but a compulsion, a continual repetition of errors.”

A good friend of mine, my ex-basketball coach, died a few years ago embracing his firm conviction that atheism best explained his existence. Once dead, he told me on more than one occasion, that's the end of life, consciousness—the whole nine yards. Throughout his seventy-plus years, he had thoroughly absorbed the lessons of a secular American culture, finally by arriving, he reasoned, at the only logical way to square the instability of blind belief (of Western religion) with a material kind of Hemingway-esq nihilism.

Since then I have found my friend's brand of Stoicism fairly common and illustrative of an approach that stands as a kind of bookend to the occult paradigm for explaining the universe. Littered with extra-terrestrials both domestic and foreign, this alternative method of dealing with the ineffable, this new Age translation of 19th century New Thought, occupies a second default position that sometimes completes the former. Scientist Richard Dawkins, for example, an unsurpassed and wildly popular contemporary exemplar of atheism, connected the two when he offered the idea of an “extraterrestrial seeding of the earth” as a possible counter explanation to the Biblical Genesis myth he finds so distasteful (see the commercial film, *Expelled*)

In Verse 54, the Guru and Nitya begin where my friend and the culture leave off, so to say. Facing the Absolute unknown, our reason meets a wall of mystery in death, so it resorts to its own best resources, which are all firmly anchored in the world of

necessity, maya's playground. Unaware of alternatives, our minds do an outstanding job at what they do, but if history teaches anything, the existential questions appear to be continuously and consistently unanswered. (If anything, the atheists march to scientifically obliterate all vestiges of "superstitious" religion has now reached the national stage where the church/state squabbling can only result in a materialist "final solution.")

In the opening paragraphs of his commentary, Nitya concedes the usual condition of almost all of humanity. Passing through the dream and deep sleep states without paying attention to them, we are pre-occupied with our awake state, its mental constructions and continuous surprises maya throws our way. "Natural instincts, . . . to eat and mate" come to occupy pretty much all of our awareness and make it almost impossible to escape. This wakeful state, he continues, is "programmed and structured" by our sense of *I*, which having created space, time, and names, offers us endless variations and distortions that threaten our physical existence and appeal to the senses (p. 366). The mind works to detect and measure some of this vast world of consciousness, and we endlessly share with others our perceptions and experiences that in ways are themselves multiplying as technology marches on.

On the other side of all this swirl of manifesting maya is that which the mind does not know and recoils from. In the deep sleep state, says Nitya, we are not aware of anything. There is no observer observing the thoughts of the mind, no duality: "It is simply a vacuity." This observation is universally true for both the materialist and the spiritually-minded. In the deep sleep state, the *I* has ceased to be, but we all concur in our realization (upon awakening) that we have been somewhere else. The clock tells us as much as do the changes in our environment that have transpired, such as the new snow on the ground and so on.

So far, so good. But it is here that the atheist draws the line between what is real and what is not based on the mind's capacity to operate on its principle of duality. In the deep sleep state, no

duality operates. Therefore, so goes the reasoning, I think, it does not exist—regardless of our undeniable, daily experiencing of it. In point of fact, it is “no-thing” because no comparable can operate with which to compare it. The ego-*I* evaporates along with the mind and its common sense of *I*. In this is the enemy, the unknown, that which is to be resisted, because it will end us—as Dylan Thomas pleaded on behalf of his dying father, “Rage, rage, against the dying of the light.”

The deep dreamless state, writes Nitya, is essentially a presumption. We cannot re-member occupying it, but we presume we’ve been there when faced with the evidence. In the West, we attempt to explain away this reality by way of a linguistic distinction: one is the conscious state and the other is the unconscious state. This word distinction, however, fails to explain how our same entity can exist in both if they are not part of the same over-arching consciousness. In other words, concludes Nitya, they may be contrary but they are not contradictory. It is in this clarification that the materialist separates himself from those having at least a premonition of the transcendent. In claiming a contradiction, the atheist stoically continues in applying the dualities of maya thereby privileging the mind and its *I*. Because this is also the world of name and form, language becomes tyrannical as it replaces direct perception; the map becomes the territory as names get further and further removed from common experience by their transformation into their Latin and Greek equivalents: “scientists decided to give all their terms in Latin or Greek, just like the Indian Brahman uses Sanskrit” (p. 367). Likewise, in the world of the western religionist, implied authority becomes codified in terms such as *God*, a placeholder term for the impressionable that can then be reduced to an anthropomorphic form or some variation of Pantheism associated with symbols mistakenly assumed to be the Absolute. (The waves replace the water.)

The problem, writes Nitya, is that “Maya and the Absolute are not two, and at the same time they are two” (p. 369). This

mutually exclusive/inclusive condition gets further distorted because our tools for “knowing” operate for only one half of that condition; our intellectual powers are just not up to the task of explaining the transcendent. In the mind’s restless project to “do,” it de-rails us from our capacity to *be* in the process of that which surpasses understanding.

Our ability to rest daily in that state of being without paying much notice to it suggests, I think, that something there is that is being done to us if we only pause long enough to pay attention. This reflecting on the Absolute, this *beingness* rather than *doingness* is the beginning of a journey the Guru, concludes Nitya, has mapped out in the second half of *The One-Hundred Verses of Self Instruction*, a road perhaps less taken but one that makes all the difference (my apologies to Robert Frost).