

4/22/14
Verse 56

Like waves arising in the ocean,
bodies one by one suddenly arise, then merge again;
alas! Where is the end to this?
In the primal ocean of consciousness potent action is said to exist.

Free translation:

In the ocean of consciousness, modulations arise one after another,
causing the experience of perceiving embodied objects. Alas! Where is
the end to this? In the sea of *samvit*, latent action is always ready to
actualize.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Like waves instantly arising on the ocean
Each body one after one rises to subside again:
Where, alas, is the term for this? Know this as action
Taking place perpetually in awareness-ocean's prime source.

This is another commentary when Nitya was at his best: laughing,
emphasizing subtleties, discovering new thoughts that amused him no
end. His audience was utterly charmed into an elevated state of mind.

As she left after the class, Jan told me she was so moved by the
reading that she cried. Apparently there is some of the old mojo still
hanging around!

And Fritjof Capra, the physicist, cried too, at seeing through the
surface façade of the universe. Tears of joy are one way to open our
hearts up from the tightness that normally afflicts them. Maybe they
should be called tears of relief. It is so *relieving* to remember we are
much more than we have been led to imagine! To relieve means to raise,
so we are uplifted. All we have to do is willingly relinquish our little

boxes, our clichéd sound bites. One of my all time favorite ways of putting this is in Nitya's Darsanamala commentary:

Looking in vain for some religious statement or scientific formula which will neatly encompass the whole mystery of being, so that we can file it away in our box of consumer goods and calendar maxims, we have forgotten that the mystery we seek to penetrate is our own mystery. (56)

Andy waxed rhapsodic about the poetic power and beauty of Atmopadesa Satakam. He thought "the primal ocean of consciousness" was such a moving phrase, and lamented that only Moni of all of us can understand the Malayalam original, filled as it is with nuances and musical enunciation. The rest of us can but try.

This week's theme for me is the freeing of the humpback whale from the fishing net that totally bound it, to the point of death. It fits very well with the oceanic aspect of the verse. Don't miss it:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcXU7G6zhjU> . Like the whale, we are bogged down by our samskaras, barely able to move, waiting, even hoping, for the end. But with a little Vedantic intervention to cut away the net we can regain our freedom of movement. The ecstatic leaps of joy of the whale at the end of the video are symbolic of the spirit reunited with its true nature, the brimming bliss of being fully alive in a vast ocean, able to express our glorious abilities once more.

When Narayana Guru laments, "Alas! Where is the end to this?" he is speaking of our complacency with the state of bondage, of being tied to waves and oceans and forgetting their infinite source. It's an echo of verse 6: "who is there to comprehend reality's one changeless form?" Where does the impulse come to break out of our strictures? Don't we all semiconsciously sense our imposed limitations, and then hold as still as we can so as not to chafe from them? It is rather heartbreaking if you think about it.

Bill agreed that dissolution is not very comfortable, but by not hanging on to our small wants we can get beyond them to a

sense of openness. In any case, how we relate to them is our choice, more or less.

So where does the impulse toward liberation arise? What makes some want to yank off the unbreakable nets, or the clinging vines as the present study describes them? Narayana Guru's image is of an alert contemplative keeping an eye on the creepers as they reach out to ensnare her, but our actual condition is more like the whale's: we are already entangled and bound fast, and are so used to it that we wonder what all the ruckus is about. A psychedelic or other mind-expanding experience can remind us of what we're missing, but other than that, where does our motivation come from? Until we taste the joy of release we tend to carry on as if it was nonexistent.

We have been thoroughly conditioned to a narrative that keeps us shut down. Nitya waxes passionate in trying to coax us out of our minor fixations and narrow-mindedness. I know that the present class participants are more mature and much wiser than we were in the original class, but the advice is still worth considering. Back then we held lots of puerile ideas about God, divinity, salvation, and all the rest. It prompted Nitya to exclaim, "To my mind, the ice-creamlike grace for which you crave is only one tiny little drop of the whole truth." His overall message is well expressed in the simple sentence, "You attain a greater freedom when you give up your small freedoms." Because of our docilely accepted narrative that life is parsimonious and limited, we content ourselves with mere survival and amusement, and our greatest potentials remain shrouded in obscurity.

Of course, present class participants have made great strides in redirecting their guiding narrative and improving their lives in consequence. Jan talked about how she has examined what she called her little childish wants (which we all have), and has found that it is enough to be aware of them. It is easy to see how they limit us and keep us from something better. She had an opportunity last week to be with a problematic family member where she could let go of her personal preferences, and it opened up a wonderful

new level of feeling for her. She felt very much freed by it, even though the other person involved hadn't changed and felt no different than before. Jan added that because of the Atmo study she now finds wonder and magic in everything, and the ever-changing quality of her life inspires her to live more poetically every day.

The gap, or better, the abruption, between direct experience and our description of it is a prime element of the verse. Our brains are busily working to reduce experience to manageable bits and pieces, to freeze reality, if you will. We have to make a determined effort to turn the tide back toward aliveness. For example, Deb related an experience she had on a walk where she heard a rustling sound in the trees and suddenly a huge bald eagle flew out in a graceful arc around her before zooming off. She was overwhelmed with awe induced by that rare and unanticipated event. Though we all tried to recreate the experience just by hearing about it, what we imagined was surely pale in comparison. Deb's memory of it was also pale, but less so, certainly. A memory can't help but be less than the original. As Andy said in respect to realization in general, no explanation is ever adequate.

And yet, it is better to try than to give up on that account, because partial attempts are all we have, and they are spectacular enough. Most of us won't ever see a bald eagle close up, so we were thrilled to just hear about it. There is nothing wrong with trying to communicate the zest of being alive, even as we strive for moments of special clarity. We know we will always be constrained to partial successes, and knowing this keeps us humble, and alert too. It's just that wherever we decide to stop, imagining we've at last gotten the whole picture, we run the risk of becoming small minded. Only our ego is determined to show off as a wise knower of truth; our spirit treats life as a provisional unfolding process, and is delighted with it. Nitya puts it this way:

To deny the wave and the ocean together, if you can, is wisdom. But if you then sit on what you have rejected, saying "I have realized; this is my realization," you have only made a

new slab of ignorance called “my realization.” I don’t know if I am making sense to you. The very moment you realize that this is truth, you have falsified the whole thing. So where is the grace and where is the joy of the Absolute? It is all this. Don’t be afraid: it’s all still here.

Life doesn’t have to be clung to, because we already have it. The idea is we don’t have to nail it down, we don’t have to define it, because however we do we limit it. In our study we are using words to lever ourselves out of the too small narrative we have been saddled with, like the discarded nets of thoughtless fisher folk who long ago went somewhere else, leaving only their garbage behind.

The narrative—really a constellation of narratives—that Atmopadesa Satakam offers in place of our tawdry ones is now being approached by the scientific community as well. Take this of Nitya’s. After reducing water to its elementary particles, which have nothing of “water” in them, he adds:

The very substance out of which water is created is imponderable. Only because of the massiveness of the ocean are you impressed. But what is that massiveness? Where does it come from? It is all built up out of something infinitesimal. The very finitude of it is beyond the grasp of our imagination.

A few years back, physicists were theorizing that, because of anti-matter, the universe could have sprung from as little as an ounce of matter. This year, they posit an infinite number of universes in our “multiverse,” and they all emerge from a singularity that is smaller than a single subatomic particle. They come about a quadrillion to the ounce, I guess. Infinitesimal indeed. For our multiverse to “work” according to mathematical principles, you must start with a tiny amount of an infinitely dense substance that doesn’t dissipate as it expands. That one assumption makes it all work, at least on paper. For now. Pretty awesome, eh?

The samvit ocean, the ocean of all possibilities, is another foreshadower of modern physics. There is no good reason anyone can think of that our universe is the only option. Scientists no longer even call it *the* universe, because there are an infinite number of them, supposedly. The latest figures are that the space in our universe has 10 to the 500th power states, and ours is simply the local version. And compared to other numbers being bandied about, this is a relatively cozy figure. Here's more samvit, as reported by Max Tegmark:

Quantum mechanics limits the variety [of universes] even at a fundamental level.... The result of this limitation is that the total number of ways in which our Universe can be arranged is finite. A conservative estimate, erring on the high side, is that there are at most 10 to the 10 to the 118th power possible ways in which a universe the size of ours can be arranged. [Footnote: This is an extremely conservative estimate....] An even more conservative bound, known as the holographic principle, says that a volume the size of our Universe can be arranged in, at most, 10 to the 10 to the 124th power ways. Otherwise, you'd have to pack so much stuff into it that it would form a black hole larger than itself.

These are huuuuuuuge numbers, even larger than the famed googolplex, [a number] so large that you couldn't write it out even in principle, since it contains more digits than there are atoms in our universe. (Max Tegmark, *Our Mathematical Universe*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, 130-31.)

Max might even quote Nitya some day, in relaying the significance of such concepts:

Once you understand the Guru's perspective, a great freedom is bestowed on you. There are no longer any boundaries. Infinite are the possibilities of change. You are no more bound to create a functional program and then act it out. The big function, the great

karma, is still going on endlessly, and you and I are part of it.
Nothing else needs to be made to happen.

If that doesn't make you leap for joy, and keep on leaping, I don't know what will.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

“The ocean and the waves” is a poetic allegory of great potential. Why should the ocean endlessly create waves? What makes it boil so restlessly? Does anything happen in the ocean? The answer to these questions can be “yes” and “no.” New waves appear continuously on the surface of the ocean, hence we can say that something is always happening. In the same way, we can also say that nothing is happening, as it is always the same mass of water. The formation of the wave is only an appearance caused by the shape of the surface of the water.

It is agreed that the wave is only an appearance of the surface inundation of a watery mass. Negating the reality of the wave does not simultaneously prove the reality of the ocean. Is not the ocean just another appearance? The basic molecules of water are almost invisible. What causes those molecules does not satisfy the requirements of tangibility. An expanse of water is an abstract view with collective consent such as a fleet or a flock, and for this reason it is only a mental image. In Van Norstrand's Scientific Encyclopedia, the word “matter” is ignored as no longer valid or of any fixed operational meaning.

This brings us to the ludicrous situation of comparing a consequential fallacy to a fallacious cause and we get totally confused. If neither ocean nor wave are true, what could then be the ground of these two grand illusions? Both the Buddhists and the Vedantins declare the total situation as one that belongs to action, karma. Is action the action of anyone in particular? Not necessarily. Existence is action. It can be a generalized total action or multiple actions. This view does not help us

to go far from the analogy of the ocean and the wave, we only shift our venue from poetry to metaphysics

Those who argue in favour of the impenetrability of matter and the self-substantiation of things only prove that an indiscernible action produces several qualities, such as a mind that perceives and a body that is perceived, to enumerate only two out of the inconceivably vast field of karma. The phenomenologically and transcendently reduced notion of the Absolute—reason and the perceptible qualities—come together here in what the Guru calls the ocean of samvit. Karma is its only dynamics. The substantiality of the body is a product of the value synchronization of the assumed existence of valid or imaginary ideas.

* * *

Nataraja Guru's commentary:

The plurality of souls and the comprehensive unity of all souls into one are philosophical or religious opinions that have given rise to much disputation. By way of reconciling the pluralism with the unitive status of individual and universal selves, called 'jivatma' and 'paramatma' respectively in Indian philosophical terminology, the Guru presents here a unified simple synthetic picture in which the ideas of the one and the many get reconciled in an overall notion of the absolute awareness. It could be called the collective cosmic consciousness of humanity which represents the Absolute in psychological terms.

The body is what we see, which consists of specific attributes such as solidity etc., which might mislead us to think that it has nothing to do with consciousness. In the very beginning of the composition, in verse 3, the Guru has given us an idea of how the elements such as earth, water, fire, etc., have to be viewed from the point of view of non-difference with the Self. It is because we look at the body with our own fleshly eyes that the prejudices of solidity, etc., seem real. Viewed as if from the inside of

consciousness itself, and in terms of consciousness, the duality of mind and matter vanishes, and we can see the relation as consisting of only between what is general or generic ('samanya') and what is specific ('visesha'). The specific expression of water that is universal or generic, is the wave. Between the two, ocean and wave, there is a subtle dialectical reciprocity when quantitative and qualitative aspects are thought of together and unitively.

The everlasting and beginningless principle of the unmoved mover that has its source in awareness pure and prime, is an Advaitic doctrine which is based on the a priori approach to absolute truth and thus requires no other proof. The phenomenal world is but a projection of the mind and has no status apart from consciousness or awareness itself. Even according to Aristotelian doctrines there is a 'prius' in matter which can be traced backwards as far as we like, and which gives us the answer of the unmoved prime mover, which is linked with consciousness or involved in it as the 'prius nobis', the anterior source in terms of awareness of all manifested matter where potentialities reside. The reference here to the prime ocean of pure awareness is not therefore unknown to philosophical thought, whether Eastern or Western.

The ocean of awareness which is, as it were, the source of motion or action, known as 'karma' in Indian philosophic terminology, is not confined to individual consciousness nor is it limited by it in its range of memory or imagination. It has to be understood in its infiniteness and its fully absolutist status. The two ambivalent aspects of the ocean here under reference must be put together into one whole with the prime root- or source-aspect on one side and the specialized wave-aspect as end or effect on the other. The phenomenal world conceptually presented to the contemplative vision has to be a verticalized version of the usual view of reality, which tends to be a horizontalized version. The noumenal and the phenomenal aspects of the Absolute thus hold together individual

bodies and the one Self – as the ocean is the basis of the many waves that rise and fall on its surface.

Part III

Jan sent the kind of response that gladdens the heart:

I really was touched by this verse and our discussion last night. I think the symbol of the wave captures so much because it shows both the individual form that the Absolute takes, but also its transitoriness. The story about the physicist Capra also showed the mystery and enormity of this cosmic flow, how the universal is taking form and then disappearing constantly, how the process of energy and matter is so dynamic, destructive and then creative.

That this cosmic flow between the minute, matter, and the infinite is mysterious and pretty much unfathomable, and yet also the foundation of our existence.

This idea of *samvit*, the sea of formlessness and being, spoke to me - how body after body arises out of it, and disappears back into it.

I loved that idea and couldn't help but think of it in the context of family, having just come back from my weekend in Arizona with my siblings and mother.

I was struck over the weekend with how much our individual bodies are shaped by these things we grow up in, families. How one generation passes on so much, both positive and negative, to the next, shaping the struggles and issues, at least somewhat, that they face. How grief, pain, rejection, disappointment can be written all over bodies and faces. How tangled it all gets, how tight grows the web of these reactive habits and strategies. How rigid they become.

We've had our share of conflicts in our family and my goal was to not add to that confusion or polarization. I also wanted to stay

present with my feelings and my agenda in case moments arose when I could work with certain family members to talk and improve our relationship. But mostly I wanted to stay closer to my deeper core and compassion as my wise counsel in the moment and it helped. I felt called to a nurturing role with everyone, looking for opportunities when alone with each to be that way. My brother, who seems really closed off from us all, distrustful and sullen, was of course harder to reach out to. I can't really describe what happened with him but I felt "freed" and definitely sensed an energetic shift within me of release. It felt good to me to show him my love without expecting too much in return (ok, I did want him to carry on a conversation, use words, sit with us, and look at me....). On some level, I realized he was no longer the young man that hurt me so long ago, he has changed so much. So I let that loss and hurt go. I felt more connected to the "now" of us which I had to admit, isn't much right now. I saw him hurting and closed off and that touched me. I let go of my personal wishes for our relationship, realizing they won't be met anytime soon and likely never. He's got his own process going on now. I tried to see the bigger picture of what it all meant, and who I was. I felt the mystery and awe of family and interconnection and that meant more to me than my individual wishes, so I hung in there and tried to be a good companion and to speak the truth and show compassion when possible. I protected my little sister when she got emotionally beat up. I see how the particular matters because that is each of us, and we all need respect and attention and protection. I realize now how the process Capra saw is kind of what I saw too but in my family, over our lifetimes, over the weekend, how we shatter each other, shower upon each other, and intermingle and then rebuild ourselves. It's all kind of mystical, painful, tragic and beautiful and I'm reminded, especially after last night, to try to be the ocean and enjoy the interconnection.

Thanks again for steering us on this journey and learning process across the deep blue...Jan

* * *

Jake's comments:

In his commentary on verse 27, Nitya makes a seemingly contradictory statement that illustrates our situation in the world of becoming: “what is, is not known; what is not is known” (p.194). In this remarkably compact passage, he communicates the conundrum we participate in as we navigate our awake state in the world of necessity. What we think we “know” by way of our senses and ego-centered mind is an existence continuously in motion as it arises and recedes; as the wave upon the water, the wave is not. What is not, however, is also that which directly affects us as we are physically constituted because in that form and awareness of it, we, too, are part of what is not and are likewise in constant motion. As Nitya points out as he explicates the present passage (verse 56), “it is only in the world of existence that we have this problem. Buddhists say there is nothing called existence other than action. . . . Vedantins here agree. . . . Something exists because it has a functional efficiency (p. 383).

In our perceiving some thing, we employ our senses, which are designed to correspond to certain impulses, and this system allows us to survive. More often than not, when doing so we immediately take things to the next level by “imbu[ing] it [the impulse] with a personality as if is a separate entity (p. 382). We interpret the *appearance* of the wave as real rather than knowing it to be a transient manifestation of that underlying reality of the ocean (Absolute). But assuming an accurate point of view and remaining in the knowing that the wave is appearance only (temporarily perceptible) leads to the question of the nature of the real in the Absolute. What is it that constitutes the Absolute of the metaphoric ocean's depths? If we follow the physicist's explanation, we end up with calculations indicating that space (whatever that means) constitutes most of what we call mass and

are left with questions as to why any of it exists. The Absolute can thus be seen as an even greater hallucination than the shapes and forms of the material world our senses tell us is “out there.”

When we include our Selves as part of this continuously changing and massive process, we might get an indication of how little we know and how narrow our centering ego-self has arranged our awareness of it all in order for us to have any position from which to operate. For this functioning, the ego-self is a necessary element in order for our mental health and ability to navigate the world. In order to enter into an awareness of that which *is* and *is not*, however, we can't remain in that ego safety zone and it is in that movement out of it that disorientation and terror come to retard the process: lose your senses, lose your mind.

Nitya points out that this over-all action condition is that out of which both mind and what it perceives are generated. One does not create the other, and both are of one nature. In this statement is a disqualification of both material atheism (the American Left) and beliefs in a separate divine entity (the American Right). Both these visions demand a barrier between body and spirit in order for their respective constructions to stand. Denying anything not physically measurable, atheists concentrate all efforts on “correcting” the never-ending anomalies of Maya and in creating the earthly paradise that their arch-enemies (the religionists of various stripes) endeavor equally as hard to establish somewhere and sometime else, thereby transforming the principle of quantifying time (a mental construction to begin with) into the unexamined premise on which the entire construction rests—if nothing else, Biblical historiography is a story with beginning and end.

“Come out with the truth. Tear down all these stories, says Nitya. Then not only does the wave disappear, but the ocean also” (p. 386). In other words, the illusions we witness and that which is beyond the senses are equally and simultaneously untrue and true. With that knowledge, however, we arrive at a position where we continue we “lose our minds” and bearings. In that terror many turn back. Ironically, writes Nitya, resting in that realization and

declaring it “mine” merely adds “a new slab of ignorance called ‘my realization’” (p. 387).

In his last few pages, Nitya suggests that a way to navigate this juncture is to “let go” into the totality of *samvit*, a term that denotes the combination of manifestation and the Absolute—and their continuous, endless dance. That, implies Nitya, is true and contains all in all. Within it, our different states of awareness flow and will re-emerge because we cannot be anything other than that which is/is not. It is our fear of losing our ground in conscious awareness that so terrifies us (our ego-self), so we cling to that which will not last.

The obvious irony in this frantic grasping is that we move daily among our states of awareness, trusting we will return to our awake state when we drop off to deep sleep. Nitya sums up by offering a parallel possibility beyond what we are already familiar with, a subjunctive narrative: “Just suppose there is a possibility of your waking up for a split second being aware of the state of deep sleep” (p 387). In this space, the dream and awake states are merely set aside momentarily—to be revisited as always. The notion that each exists independent of the other is the stuff out of which our death fear is born. “Doing this imprisons part of Beingness within what you call your identity” (p. 388).