

5/6/14  
Verse 58

Do not think in ever-new terms of yesterday, today,  
tomorrow or another day;  
all the endless counting and measuring is due to confusion;  
one should know that there is not any difference.

Free translation:

One should realize it is futile to ruminate on the past, be expectant of the present, and fantasize about the future. Without endlessly counting and measuring in confusion, one should cognize the One that always prevails, perceiving there is no differentiation.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Thinking not in terms, ever new, of yesterday, today,  
Tomorrow or even another day, never-endingly  
Know, all things we count or measure  
As of confusion's making; difference there is none at all!

Verse 58 is the only one that didn't happen. Somehow in all the travel and turmoil of Nitya's abundant life it was skipped. Later at Edda's request he did a short version for *Neither This Nor That... But Aum*, which is what we used in *That Alone*, but he didn't want to go back and revisit it with the total commitment he brought to all the rest. By the time the lacuna was noticed we were several verses farther along, and he was ecstatically caught up in the flow.

It's not hard to understand why he didn't want to back up. Narayana Guru had a secret structural plan in Atmo, which we have barely touched on in the class, being so caught up in just examining each verse by itself. Yet it's a very important, if implicit, part of the study, and a prime reason Atmo is so

profoundly transformative. That's why Nitya wanted our full commitment to the whole work at the outset. While there is plenty of profundity in each separate verse, there is an order of magnitude leap if you carefully go through the whole sequence. That's partly because what we think we know tends to be more superficial than we imagine it to be. The gurus want us to soak into it in a meaningful way, otherwise our transformation will be more superficial than we imagine, also.

In fact, the linear progression of the verses is critically important. They all are linked together most marvelously. Andy noted how this verse is a continuation of the last one, if you look into the depth of its meaning. Working from Nitya's commentary on verse 57, he talked about how the "endless traits of maya" emerge from the point source of the Absolute, spread to the circumference and rebound to the source, creating a virtual field in between. As he put it, "there is a weightless primordial ocean generating a field of events and experiences, streaming forth from the potential of the dot. The guru is asking us not to get caught up in the narrative sequence but to focus on the dot and the horizon as an enduring situation." The field in between the dot and the horizon is the arena where we count and measure things, but if we truly want to understand what's going on we have to grasp the entire context. As Deb put it, we can be in it but at the same time not overly obsessed with the details.

We have examined before how the curiosity of humans combined with our scholastic training leads us to believe that what is to be known is simply what we can see and touch and manipulate, so if we can just "see it all" we will be happy and wise. Around the time of Narayana Guru's composition of *Atmopadesa Satakam* (1897) the scientific world was congratulating itself that pretty much everything was known, except for some minor tidying up around the edges. Though the guru wasn't especially tuned into the so-called Western mentality, he somehow sensed this dead end attitude, probably because it's actually a universal pose we merely describe as Western.

Everybody thinks that if we just count and measure a little better, we'll have it. A better answer makes us a better person. The more clever scheme wins the contract. We have been chasing that will o' the wisp for millennia, which is fine as far as it goes, and makes for history and all, but we keep believing we'll come to the end of it soon, though we never do. That converts the temporary illusion of maya's field into a monolithic edifice at which we worship, becoming seriously deluded in the process.

Shortly after the birth of *Atmopadesa Satakam*, quantum mechanics and relativity burst on the scene, wiping away the illusions of complete knowledge almost instantly. Of course, we are still clinging hard to those illusions, while paying lip service to the radical nature of the new insights. Isn't that just like humans! We try our best to remain content with the small bit we have so far counted and measured, and can't understand why it doesn't satisfy us. We can't see what's missing. Literally. Because it isn't visible.

The class gets an "A" for last night, because, working from a few brush strokes laid down by the gurus, we painted a broad canvas that was very beautiful. Parts of it were especially breathtaking.

So sure, counting and measuring are essential and appropriate in transactional matters. But we are striving here to take in the greater context, so as to crawl out from our state of confusion. We reminded ourselves that we easily make the mistake of transferring our happiness from its source within us to the objects it is casually or even accidentally associated with. Then we are destitute when those circumstances evanesce.

I remember several times in my life when everything was so wonderful I insisted to myself, "I have to keep coming to this place!" or "I'm going to keep doing this over and over, because it's so great." None of those blissful configurations ever happened again; couldn't possibly happen again. Thanks to a certain mental orientation, I was able to watch as those momentary delights melted and changed, moved ahead and left their previous shapes to become what they always were: mere partial images in my mind,

with no reality anywhere. Nitya reminds us of this in his brief but potent commentary:

Forgetfulness of the Self or the Absolute is called nescience or ignorance. The feeling that a happy moment is gone or is only about to come indicates a rift or chasm in Self-knowledge.

Instead of trying to recreate past successes or work toward promising ones in the future, we are asked to turn to the source of happiness within. If we can pull this off, our inner happiness will illumine everything we come in contact with, both the dark and the light regions of the field. Nitya expresses this well in a celestial analogy:

Although the sun does not go anywhere, for the people dwelling on the rotating earth it looks as though it is rising, traveling across the sky and then setting. For those who know that time and space are only creations of the mind, however, there are no limitations and there are no events.

Once again, we are being invited to rise out of our limited perspective to embrace the whole. Nitya put it so well in the last verse: “Lovers of wisdom, unify yourselves, unite your understanding! You have nothing to lose but your stupidity, your madness, and you have a whole world of eternal joy to gain.” That state he’s speaking of is like seeing the sun from an absolutist rather than a relativist perspective.

Bushra was charmed by the idea that there are no events. She likes to sit quietly, not even imagining that doing so will promote the potentials of her deep places to manifest. But that is how it works anyway. If we can get out of the way, with all our counting and measuring, hopes and fears, creative inspiration that is bottled up waiting for its chance to come to life will make its way through us onto the field. Bushra is right in an important way: if we sit quietly thinking that our quietness (or yoga or good behavior or obedience) will give birth to great art or permanent happiness or

anything else, we aren't really being quiet enough. Those thoughts are the endless expectations Narayana Guru is trying to wean us away from, so that our true greatness can shine forth. It worked for enough of his associates in Kerala to start a movement that in a short time utterly reformed the society there.

Make no mistake: this philosophy is about realizing our full potential, not repressing it, as most religions and spiritual beliefs are wont to do. Quietness is not the absence of potential, it opens the door for so many potentials to manifest. This is a good time to reprise Nitya's wonderful conclusion of his Verse 50 commentary:

You cannot get rid of all the waves and just have a pure ocean. That is what everybody is trying to do—sit firm and close the eyes so that you get rid of all thoughts and ideas, and then finally you are left with the pure, pure ocean of the Self. Narayana Guru says this is like someone taking a cake of soap to the washtub and trying to wash all the lather out of it. No matter how much you wash, it cannot be done. The more water you pour and the more you rub, the more the lather comes. Trying to get rid of all the thoughts and ideas in the mind in order to come to pure consciousness is like that. It is in and through all this that you have to see pure consciousness. It is not that you kill everyone in the world and then find peace. Let your good neighbors be there. Their dog may bark, but you can still be peaceful. See how it works for you today.

We often hear talk about having a blank mind, but it is only the surface sliver that needs to be arrested occasionally. The mind in its entirety is never blank. Only our awareness of it is. But that is precisely when the unconscious dares to tiptoe into the range of our awareness, ready to emerge into conscious awareness when the light is switched back on.

I reminded the group that we often take the teaching to divest ourselves of the past and the future in too simplistic a fashion, crudely subtracting those elements instead of integrating them into a holistic vision. We aren't talking about a narrowing down process but of opening up. Alzheimer's disease and amnesia

include nothing but the now, but they in no way resemble the wisdom we are seeking. Several people used children as an excellent example of what is meant. They are totally present in the here and now, but are fully awake and engaged. Alert. Jesus recognized this: “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt.18.3) Children have such wonderful imaginations because they have fewer inhibitions about promoting their inner richness.

Many people believe the opposite: that if you surrender your attachment to items and objects you must also be surrendering your chances of happiness. Moni remembered some skeptical person once asking Nitya, “Are you happy?” Moni loved Nitya’s answer: “I am happiness.”

That nonpareil reply reminded Susan of a recent conversation with her brother. The last vestige of their once extensive family dwelling places is a cabin in the mountains. Philip is very attached to it, as Susan has been in the past. But with the evolution of her philosophical side, Susan no longer feels the heavy weight of attachment. She loves the place, but knows it could burn down or otherwise be lost, and she is confident her happiness will continue no matter what. But Philip cannot accept that, and he accused her of not being a reliable steward if she didn’t feel attached in the same way he does. Secretly he fears the loss of his happiness that he is sure the loss of the building would bring. To the ordinary mind, caring is equated with desire and attachment. This philosophy is the opposite: by letting go and breaking free we become *more* capable in every way.

As impartial observers, we can anticipate that attachment might lead to poor decision-making, and Susan’s freedom from it will help her to choose well. But Philip epitomizes the attitude foisted on us by the social milieu we are basted in. We are heavily pressured to develop attachments so as to assuage the desperate cravings of anxious people. Too bad it doesn’t work. Too bad we so often play along.

Jan agreed that this verse was very helpful to her with the impending adulthood of her two children. Children are the most common attachments for most people, and letting go of them is very hard. Yet we can rest assured that we will be better friends to them if we are free of attachments, and will be considered pests if we cling to them. It doesn't hurt to have a wise guru or two to help us let go, but once we do let go we find that the light didn't go out. It got brighter.

We can be confident that everything is operating just fine all the time. If the universe was dependent on our correct counting and measuring (as we have been led to believe) it would have crashed and burned a long time back. But it is we who have crashed and burned—the universe is just fine, thank you. We rehabilitate ourselves by readmitting the universe into our closed compartment of self-identity. Nitya makes this abundantly clear here:

If the mind is not filled with a holistic interest and the urge to act is not fully lived, dejection or boredom seeps in and creates an interlude between one main event and another main event. Time looms large as the fact of experience, when such interludes bring the drag of expectation and ask the mind to wait. Mind cannot wait endlessly for interesting things to happen, so it recalls past events which in some manner were exciting, agitating or disturbing. Another device which comes easily accessible to the mind is to fill the interlude with an interesting item such as a fantasy.

The Guru is asking us to take our recalled experience of yesterday and our “what's next?” anticipation of tomorrow and the day after, along with the now of today, and see how the objects and events in them are only configurations of the modalities of consciousness. He wants us to look for the difference in nondifference and the nondifference in difference.

This reminded me of one of my favorite letters from Love and Blessings, that Nitya wrote to Simon & Dee Curtis in Sydney,

Australia back in July of 1973. I promised to put the highlights of the letter in the notes, and here they are:

Depression by itself is not a disease. It only shows that there are some kinds of air pockets in your personality that are not fully plugged-in with life interests. For long you were running away from life and were seeking hideouts for your psyche. Now you're coming out of the bush to face the challenge of the city and the burgermeister. It's an education in itself. Even the most sublime song can be sung sitting on solid ground....

To have our roots in that which we can trust and to walk in the direction in which light shows the path is the only secret to be known, and I am glad you know it. The way our love and trust became so meaningful and so valuable was not fashioned by either of us with any motivations. When people think of God realization, they mistake God for a certain entity. On the other hand, if you understand it as that which silently enters into our life and establishes endearing values that make life real, then it is a sure instance of realization. No day passes without both of you being remembered as passing moments of reality that make life on earth worthwhile.

Nitya treated all of us that way, and even from beyond the grave his words sing out his fervent feeling of love for all.

## Part II

*Neither This Nor That* is the same text as the one in *That Alone*, the only time Nitya didn't do a long version. So you've already read it.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:



THE Absolute is beyond all count or measure. It belongs to an order by itself removed from all relativistic considerations. The world of science, which depends on counting or measuring, has to be transcended before the pure notion of the Absolute can emerge in all its neutral glory.

After giving us in the previous two verses an intuitive and imaginative picture of reality in its rational and empirical aspects, put together unitively round the central neutral stuff of awareness or consciousness after the manner of the 'thinking substance' of Spinoza, or dialectically conceived as by Parmenides - the Guru goes one step further in the same direction to abolish all sense of duality in the heart of the Absolute. He takes hold of the time-factor and reduces it in terms of pure duration as Bergson has succeeded in doing in his 'creative process' of the 'vital energy'.

When the visible world has been subtracted from the totality of experience there are still objects that can be measured or counted. Scientific knowledge, in the empirical sense, pertains to the world of measurement or enumeration. The notion of the Absolute, understood in terms of self-consciousness or in more realistic cosmological terms, can be put into the melting pot of absolute awareness where all differences give place to a final synthesis or unity.

Science has been defined as depending on knowledge by measurement. Counting too belongs to the arithmetical world. The Samkhya philosophy of India belongs to the world of counting the categories, numbering twenty-five as between nature (prakriti) and spirit (purusha). Enumeration is an integral part of the Samkhya school of philosophy. To the extent that abstraction and generalization are involved in these approaches to truth, they have a place in philosophical speculation, but when we come to the finalized notion of the Absolute, as envisaged in the Vedanta, these enumerated items and measurable aspects of reality are to be

thrown into the melting pot, so as to reveal the basic reality, which is Absolute and devoid of all differentiation. Measuring and numbering fall short of this ultimate notion.

The Guru is here underlining this basic verity, although analytically he too, in some of his writings, such as the analysis of consciousness called 'Arivu' (Epistemology of Gnosis), enumerated aspects of the Absolute in a graded manner, in keeping with a science of the Absolute.

The neutral, normative and differenceless basic Absolute is, even there, fully and basically retained. Lesser epistemological and methodological requirements alone make such enumeration of categories permissible. The unitive differenceless Brahman or the Absolute remains ever the norm of the science of the Absolute.

### Part III

Jake's commentary:

Very brief, Verse 58 makes the point over again that holding fast to that which is—the Absolute—is the road to self-knowledge and happiness. Ignorance is that condition we exist in when we lose sight of or forget that the Absolute itself is happiness. In ignorance, the mind spins endless memories and fantasies as it hijacks our awareness thereby creating our illusion of time and discrete events to which we then assign value in the form of sentimentalized regret, future anxieties, and so on. We connect these values to the experiences because they are manufactured by the mind, are cobbled together out of the nine major moods of Indian psychology, writes Nitya. Four pairs and one single mood constitute the total, four dualities and an isolated one: "erotics and compassion, heroics and hatred, fear and peace, humour and revulsion, and wonder" (p. 397).

Infinite are the possible combinations these moods can take as they exist exclusively in our relative world of Maya and pretty

much control the ignorant mind. In his commentary on Verse 49, Nitya made the same point when he discussed misery and sorrow, the common lot of most: “If your mind has sorrow, if you are sad or in misery, it means you are in a state of ignorance” (p. 329).

In this present commentary, Nitya connects this nearly universal condition with our mind’s enormous capacity to take complete control when our Self loses its way in confusion/maya. Once we are embedded in that darkness, discrete events appear to be linked in a time sequence and that compound operates as the basis on which we make value judgments and on which we base our perceptions of what is real. The un-real draw of maya and its dualities for the mind is that wherein the mind moves from one event to the next. This restlessness creates the boredom the mind associates with those vacuums where no value/event is placed. As a result, regret and prospective fear are the bookends between which the mind spins in its frantic attempt to deal with the inexorable march of time that it created in the first place in order to centralize and thereby recognize phenomenal reality as it comes and goes.

As Nitya characterized this condition in Verse 28, “most of us find ourselves oscillating somewhere between total ignorance and absolute enlightenment” (p. 200). He then goes on to narrate his zoo analogy in which a man becomes so enraptured by the zoo and his need to “experience” it, he joins the monkeys in their cage and refuses to leave. “We can only pity him and give him a banana and come away,” Nitya concludes. So completely hypnotized by his ignorance of the Absolute, our caged ego will violently defend a position that it has spent the treasures of a lifetime to achieve, a point brilliantly illustrated by C. S. Lewis in a brief work of fantasy *The Great Divorce* in which the protagonist along with many others catches a transcendent bus to the afterlife. Propelled out of their “zoos,” these recently deceased, for the most part, tenaciously hang on to the devils they know their minds know.