

6/3/14

Verse 62

Do not think of the absolute truth overpowered by the sense of “mine”;  
what knowledge comes from merely saying “do not”?  
This will not come by mouthing a phrase;  
the absolute state is attained through relentless contemplation.

Free translation:

Do not despair that you cannot own the Absolute as your private  
experience. What knowledge can come by mere negation? Nothing. Nor  
does knowledge come by merely repeating the word “Absolute.” It  
comes only by continuous contemplation.

Nataraja Guru’s translation:

Mere orthodoxy, which keeps saying that one should not adopt  
As one’s own a doctrine belonging to another side, how can it  
True knowledge bring? Lip service does not avail –  
One has earnestly to contemplate the state supreme.

The problem with the perfect verse commentaries—this is  
certainly one—is not in struggling to add something to them, but in  
being very careful not to take anything away. By rights I should  
just reprint the original and take the day off. Yet I am bound to  
make the attempt.

If you ever want to know why the Gurukula philosophy will  
never be popular, this is a good verse to read. Everyone’s beliefs  
and religious affiliations are exposed as pale imitations of truth, or  
worse. Anyone who has an egotistical attachment to a position—  
and that’s pretty much everybody—is going to be offended, unless  
they have decided in advance that paring away their ignorance is  
worth the effort involved. In a sane world such paring would be the  
central rite of passage to adulthood, but we humans have by and

large lost touch with our sanity, and instead it's all about whose attachments will prevail. With Narayana Guru we can wonder aloud if anyone is going to take the trouble to relinquish their attachments and reclaim their sanity.

Even the best of teachers has better days, when they are really "hot," as Nitya was with this one. During the Atmo classes Nitya was normally at his best in a very quiet way. If we weren't near the front we had to strain mightily to hear him. In the early morning sessions with his audience still half asleep, he ably demonstrated how gentleness and quiet can be far more intense than loud and declamatory. I well recall a couple of mind-blowing ideas I met that day for the first time, like Nitya's criticism of scripture: "The more suffering encountered on the path, the more likely the book will be a classic." Well of course! Many of us in those turbulent and acid-inspired times were thinking in just such terms. We were expecting the big blast, the transforming whirlwind, that all our efforts were going to culminate in a volcanic eruption that would catapult us into a higher state of being. Even explicit denials failed to deter us, as when Nitya said:

Is salvation, or the highest truth, or realization of the Self or the Absolute, or God-realization, something you get by piling effort on top of effort? No. By working very hard you can make money and riches, get a house, an automobile, a position in society, and many academic degrees and other honors, but that kind of amassing of your labor will not bring any realization. All those efforts are only egotistic trips; they only serve to harden the ego when treated as steps to salvation. That very ego will shield the truth you want to see away from you.

Of course, we took note, of a sort. I remember thinking, "Okay then, I will try not to try. That must be the secret." As I was musing on that, Nitya was anticipating my logical reaction:

Often when somebody tells you, as I just have, not to indulge in all these various trips, that they won't bring realization, you might adopt

a negative attitude. You might think, “OK, then I won’t do anything. Let realization come whenever it comes. I will just allow things to be.” If you take such an attitude, will it bring realization? No, it won’t work either. If you leave yourself to the mercy of natural events, your mind will be like a monkey, running from one fantasy to another, one mood to another, one depression to another. There are so many incipient memories in you wanting to find expression through the gratification of desires that urge after urge will come, and you will run after them. This will only take you to greater madness and greater darkness.

Hmmmm. Happily, Nitya didn’t just leave us stranded in darkness. He gave several superlative examples to help us reorient our thinking. It took a long time for them to sink in, but they began to eventually. This is not due to any weakness in the teaching, but the stiffness of the blockages we carry. It takes time for nectar to percolate through concrete, and it never does if you tilt your block and let it run off. That’s why we have yet another exhortation in this verse to stick with it. And yet, sticking with it even sounds too dualistic. We *are* it. We stick to it even when we don’t remember anything about it. We are the light. When we pull off our veils, it shines brightly; at other times, less brightly. Fortunately it is not dependent on our conscious recognition of it. Here’s how Nitya describes it in this verse:

OK. We have discarded all the egotistic trips. We have seen that mere negativity won’t help, and that there is no use in just mouthing phrases. What, then, is the way out? You should go back to the very first verse in the book, in which it is said, “Turn your senses inward; calm down. Calm your mind. Just watch what is going on. You see a world outside and a world inside. You can discern one thing from that: a knower is knowing. There is a field which is known, and there is a light which is illuminating that field. Behind your seeing, there is that light. Behind your hearing, there is that light. Behind every thought it is there. Every passing idea is illuminated by it.” What is that nucleus of illumination which is in every experience? Invariably

it is the self-luminous light which is experienced as the seer. It has no break. It is continuous. It takes no effort at all to know it.

Nitya wasn't peddling formulas. As Deb aptly put it, "No prescription teaches us how to be alive." Prescriptions are deadening. Yet on account of our schooling that's what we're all looking for. Who will give me the proper prescription? What's the right answer? Aren't good grades the ticket to the next level? Where is the squirrel cage I'm supposed to run in? All those beliefs create a gulf between who we are and who we think we should be, which lays the groundwork for unhappiness. As Nataraja Guru puts it in his commentary, we wind up either accepting or rejecting the status quo, and "There is a subtle spiritual suffering implicit in either case." We have come to base our life on the false values of society instead of our own light.

How about this prescription: the point of life is to get as close as you can to expressing the inexpressible? Just a thought.

Andy told us about how he meditates on his breathing, how it can easily become mechanical, but if he pays close attention each breath is an artistic event. I think many "spiritual" practices are designed to be repetitive and produce a hypnotic state rather than revealing the wonders of creation. They actually take us away from creative involvement, though I should admit that even hypnotic states can be moderately amusing. Many people swear by them, in various forms. I remember as a beginner I signed up for the Self-Realization Fellowship exercises of Paramahansa Yogananda. He claimed that performing pranayama one million times brought enlightenment. Unfortunately (or not) I got bored before I even got to 10,000, so I dropped out. But I did notice that after enough repetitions I got into a tranquil state that lasted for a while. Kind of pleasant, but the promise of a future payoff wasn't exciting enough to keep me interested. I wanted something that would also satisfy my intellect too. Fortunately, I did.

The class examined the idea of "relentless contemplation" for quite awhile. Relentless has a somewhat negative sense in English, implying that perhaps we should relent but we aren't going to because of a pre-

established intention. I think Americans are relentlessly anti-effort in respect to spirituality, and that's the real reason for the anxiety this idea perennially generates. All around us we see serious efforts to support egregious crimes and heartless policies, and conclude that intentional efforts are necessarily misdirected. It's too bad, because we very much need well-directed efforts to make the most of our predicament. Occasional sorties don't have any effect, except to possibly convince us that our efforts don't work. Brain science agrees with the gurus: rewiring our circuitry takes lots of time and focused effort.

In any case, the more usual phrase employed is simply "continuous contemplation," as Bill reminded us. Nitya uses this again in the free translation, and Nataraja Guru renders the Malayalam original this way: "One has earnestly to contemplate the state supreme." If being earnest still makes you nervous, Nataraja Guru says this in his very worthwhile comments, referring to the ordinary tendencies to either accept or reject premises that we are trying to go beyond, which he addresses as orthodoxy and heterodoxy:

The cure for both these tendencies or 'doxies' is the calm contemplation of the absolutist or finalized standpoint implied in what is referred to here as the supreme state.

So we're back to calm, and you can relax. Nitya has been trying to quiet our horses all along, going beyond calm to *most gentle*:

The Guru is here suggesting to us the most gentle pressure in the search. At the same time it is not lukewarm. It is an *urjita*, an out-and-out search, but that search is not directed to just one isolated area. Life itself is the search. It goes on until we come to what is called *paramapadam*, an absolute state.

(Though it is not recognized in any of my dictionaries, it seems readily apparent that the English word *urge* comes from the Sanskrit *urjita* used

here, meaning powerful, mighty, excellent, great, important. Nothing negative about that!)

“Life itself is the search.” Such a simple statement, and so radical. We have all been convinced at some fundamental level that we are not okay, that something else is what matters, where the action is. Will anyone dare to reenter their own dharma with full acceptance of its supreme value, instead of timidly imagining themselves to be imposters in somebody else's game? Narayana Guru laments that we have cast off our life and don't dare to pick it up again. Later Nitya repeats this core idea for emphasis: “You need to be a participant in all this. Live your natural life. But in and through this life, see the light which you are.” Stop looking for the once-in-a-lifetime “big bang” and learn to appreciate every moment. No more deferred gratification. That's what being here now really means, too. Not that if you are totally here some supernatural blast will happen. No. The present moment is magical already. It's all magical. What you see here is the magic. Get into it. I'm sorry to keep quoting Nitya, but since he said everything perfectly, why not? This is key: “You no longer try to arrive at an event called realization. You are not looking for one single experience of an overwhelming nature. In one sense you should always be overwhelmed, because there cannot be anything more overwhelming than this.”

Jan tried to speak about this idea, but she was overwhelmed and wound up speechless. The intensity of her feelings came through, despite her words failing. She has been reorienting her life very gradually in the direction pointed to by the Guru, and has been doing it long enough that she is beginning to really experience the difference. As a tender-hearted person it has touched her deeply, and she has resolved (and begun) to express herself in a more authentic fashion both verbally and artistically. It is overwhelming, in the best possible way.

Another memory I had from the original class was that I'm pretty sure this was where Nitya came up with the idea which he used often afterwards, that we were driving our psychic cars while pressing on both the accelerator and the brake at the same time. I recall when he said it he stopped and chuckled, as though it had just popped into his head. Here's how it came out:

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says, “By just controlling from outside, inhibiting everything, you only make yourself a hypocrite.” It’s like putting on the brake and pressing the accelerator at the same time. First bring down the inner pressure. Then the outer will naturally come to a close.

Nitya did not drive a car, so he found car analogies particularly amusing, as well as appropriate to our rampant car culture. When you drive using both pedals the car lurches and screeches, which I’m sure reminded him of the whining and complaining he often heard in his private conversations with stressed out seekers.

We talked a little in class about how we inhibit ourselves in this way, but hopefully we can do more in the upcoming classes. It’s very important stuff, especially since it’s normally invisible to us. We are so accustomed to reining ourselves in that we take for granted that that’s how we should be. We have no idea how to drive using only the accelerator. Inhibiting ourselves while professing an uninhibited nature is the hypocrisy under reference.

Nitya concluded his sublime talk with an evocation of absolute wisdom, reminiscent of the “aesthetic arrest” of James Joyce, in which “the mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing”:

The state of being the Absolute is continuous and simple. It’s not a static experience or event. When you think of it, don’t think of it as a great mass with the whole world inside it. A little baby smiling is a simple thing, but within that simplicity there is no shade of pretension. It doesn’t smile to please anyone. It just smiles. A little flower tosses its head in the breeze—that’s an absolute event. It is not a copy of a flower or an idea of a flower, it is an absolute flower. It shines of itself. So when you think Absolute, don’t think it should fill the whole universe. There is a timelessness in it and an irrelevancy of the space occupied. It just is.

This is understood by the Japanese poets when they write haiku. The quality of the haiku is the element of the Absolute in it which

comes as just a little shimmering—of its beauty, of its plainness—in your heart. That’s it. You don’t have to explain it to anyone. You should never read haiku to someone and then give a commentary on it. That’s the worst thing you could do with it. Instead, silently read it and close the book. Then just feel the serenity that pacifies you and makes you forget the world for a little while, even if only for a fraction of a moment. A fluttering leaf comes down and you gaze at it. Until it hits the ground you forget everything. It’s an Absolute experience. You don’t have to be ponderously meditating, “Who am I? Who is seeing this leaf which is fluttering in the autumn wind?” You falsify the whole situation by thinking that way.

This led naturally to our closing meditation on the poem *Green Emblem*, by Deborah Buchanan:

Leaf  
body  
wavering in air  
waiting  
to fall and mix  
become duff  
as earth calls  
a long  
tremulous  
moment  
hanging  
as branch holds  
against the pull  
the lean  
the gravity of desire  
and finally  
falls into  
fecund embrace

Part II



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

I want to achieve God-realization or salvation in this very life. What should I do for that? Mortification of the body is an excellent means. Like the wayside Indian yogi sitting on a seat of nails to meditate or like a Carmelite friar wearing a coarse robe, you can fast and pray and subject yourself to flogging. Have it the hard way, as they say. Another way is to beat a drum and cymbals with hysterical devotion. Sing loud and dance or walk in procession shouting the name of God. There is still another way, learn to contort your body and sit in 108 postures every day, breathing in grunts, hisses or hiccups. If you are called by God, you can distribute tracts and call on your neighbours to embarrass them or choke them with your insistence on quoting from scriptures. Lead an army of faithfuls shouting “Jihad” and kill those who refuse to accept your faith. If that sounds too heavy, go from one sacred place to another and expiate your sins by offering worship in every temple of God.

All these egotistic trips to obtain truth only harden the ego, and truth will only recede like a will-o'-the-wisp. The supreme truth of the Absolute is not a thing or an entity which one can acquire by mere effort, as with riches or a position of power. It is not something that comes by piling hours upon hours of hard labour.

Okay then, let us give up and wait for salvation to come as and when it pleases. Will this attitude help? No, it will not. Left to itself, the mind will only go from one fantasy to another, hungering for gratification of desires. Mere negativity will not take anyone anywhere.

How about reading the wisdom books of all the realized souls or repeating religious maxims and formulae? One can become very scholarly by reading books. It may help you become a pedagogue or help you to impress others, but it will not assure your emancipation. What is left to be done now? Adopt the attitude given in the very first verse of instruction in this series. Dim the light of the ego. Calm the mind by turning the senses inward, and discern the seeing light from the seen. Notice with reverence the same self-luminous light that shines as the nucleus of all sights, all sounds and all experiences. Know this

intimate inner truth to be the same as that which is sought after and searched for as if it were a far-off reality. Know also that it is the same light that appears as the entire world. In the peace of your heart discard and recognize, constantly and without break, until the all-embracing Absolute alone shines in and through and over and above everything.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary is particularly excellent here:

WHEN a man adopts a religious or spiritual life consisting of articles of faith or patterns of behaviour, he can take one of two alternative courses: that of the orthodox who tend to exaggerate the value of what is already their own by previous conditioning or adoption; or else he could err on the side of heterodoxy by saying that beliefs or modes of life outside of what one has been conditioned or brought up to adopt for oneself are better than what are already one's own.

The general law that underlies the bipolar situation in which each man may be caught is enunciated in verse 60. The two aspects, referring to the self or the non-self, cling together and fuse into each other as a central or neutral verity in any case. They form a value that is dear to the person concerned, and as long as they are true from normative standards of spiritual life they must all be considered equally good. In other words, as the next (63rd) verse is going to enunciate more pointedly, the true dialectics as between heterodoxy and orthodoxy is the rule of the golden mean of Aristotle. The present verse speaks from the side of the conservative self or of hide-bound orthodoxy; while the next will be seen to give primacy to heterodoxy – and from both the sides it insists on the need for earnest research for the correct middle path.

The conversion that takes place in certain people at certain times – by which they disadopt gradually or suddenly what was their own,

or go with particular insistence in the opposite direction, i.e., of vehemently adopting what is not their own – is a familiar event in the world of religious life. There is a subtle spiritual suffering implicit in either case.

In the present verse the Guru refers to the orthodox tendency to disadopt what is not already accepted. Mere conservatism of this type is as bad as its counterpart of heterodoxy.

The cure for both these tendencies or ‘doxies’ is the calm contemplation of the absolutist or finalized standpoint implied in what is referred to here as the supreme state. What are understood as particular ‘isms’ or creeds refer to partial aspects only of the absolute all-comprehensive Truth that covers existence, subsistence and values at once. The ‘supreme state’ mentioned in this verse is thus a neutral and normative standpoint with respect to the Absolute.

Most people who call themselves religious are only interested in the outer forms of religious life. The doctrines and patterns of behaviour implied refer only to the world of outer values in some social or group life. These tend to fan rivalries and exclusive attitudes of mind. One has to seek for deeper religious values which belong to the spirit and not to the dead letter. The ‘Lord-lordism’ against which Jesus himself complained belongs to this world of superficial or conventional reactions of lip-service to spirituality. The munafiqun of Islam and the Pharisees of the Bible are not truly spiritual. The Guru here points out that spiritual progress in the direction of absolute wisdom cannot come by mere repetitions of formulae, however correct they may be intellectually or valid by their meaning. There must be a religion of the heart that goes with it, and such a spirituality or contemplation has to be cultivated, not by allowing oneself to be swayed by the sentiments of the people at its dull superficial level, but more deliberately with reference to the finalized wisdom of the Absolute.

## Part III

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Jake's commentary:

In Verse 62 and Nitya's commentary on it lies a clear explanation of the cultural-political warfare that has engulfed America for the last 60 years. The larger point of this verse/commentary is that this conflict is an old debate of universal character. The names attached to the players over the centuries and around the globe have come and gone—and will continue to do so as long as Truth remains out of awareness. The current liberal/conservative divide in an American culture unable to deal with itself is but the most recent incarnation of an ancient human conflict that can be transcended but never won.

In his opening paragraphs, Nitya comments on the all too human search to find meaning and how it more often than not gets crafted into a story involving great struggle in overcoming obstacles. In general, he notes, the more spectacular the battles the more attractive is the narrative. Christ's life, Buddha's life, the story of St. John of the Cross, the mortification of Yogis, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and so on, all present stories containing anxiety-producing events that act to elevate the suffering and the miraculous character of them while at the same time reducing the contemplative and ontological dimensions. A crucifixion is drama; a man contemplating in a garden is not.

The spectacular elements, the painful disciplines, writes Nitya, are "all beside the point" (p. 422). These mighty efforts to attain a "god-realization" (or realization per se) as an obtainable goal to be secured once and for all feeds an internal frenzy to get the job done, to find truth by battling for it, and then enforcing it

once it is at hand. Our common experience in the world of necessity validates this model because it works in the getting of possessions, status, degrees, admiration, etc. Hard work and diligence directed at a specific goal very often results in the attaining of it. As our Wall Street investment gurus never tire of telling us, “no one plans to fail, they just fail to plan.” These kinds of successes, Nitya goes on to say, “only serve to harden the ego when treated as steps to salvation” (p. 423).

It is at this point that the material-atheist of the political Left breaks ranks with those determined to find realization of the Absolute in the immanent by way of the mind’s direct effort (the religionists’ grail). Several pathways offer alternatives at this point, three of which are the following: do nothing, devote one’s energies to the study of great thinkers/seers, or simply declaring yourself the Absolute and be done with the matter. In these three routes can be found the way of the noble nihilist (in the Hemingway tradition), those dedicated to the elevating of the scientist/medicalist to a sacred caste (including the scientists of the social sciences), and the game of the outright charlatan/hypocrite peddling all manner of self-improvement/”mastering” snake oils in a bewildering array of products and disciplines.

The stoic nihilist, at the mercy of natural events, has only his mind as a compass, and it “will be like a monkey, running from one fantasy to another, one mood to another, one depression to another” (p. 423). By the same token, writes Nitya, narrowing the quest to study only may afford you the luxury of a large vocabulary, and “if you become a great scholar someone may honor you, but that is not realization” (p. 424). And declaring yourself to be Brahman (or god), “you are Brahman only in your own fantasy.”

In this broad squabble among the egoic efforts to explain the world, both of the major currents, the atheists on the one hand and the religionists on the other, share a common bond in seeking an answer outside the Self, in the external world. A belief system,

great guru, world-renowned expert, the universe generally, or an inflated ego per se all share a profound ignorance of that which *is*. Firmly established on the sand of that which *is not*, the search for what cannot be there gets continuous technological make-overs that create the illusion that the same old battles are fresh and new. In short, the American experience, in this regard, is novel only for those unacquainted with human history and human nature.

And it is in the common human reality that the key can be found for transcending the whole circus, writes Nitya. “You should go back to the very first verse in the book, in which it is said, ‘turn your senses inward; calm down, calm your mind’ . . . you can discern one thing from that: a knower is knowing. There is a field which is known and there is a light which is illuminating that field” (p. 424). Our self-luminous, constant, light that is so close we do not recognize its presence illuminates all our sense input and thoughts. This knowledge is not attainable by pursuing it or by attempting to quantify it. It is that eternal knowledge that precedes any of our experiences in each moment. That awareness of who you are is not, then a quest for some rarified elevated state but is that which functions continuously in natural life.

While maintaining this position, councils Nitya, “you should remember two things” (p. 426). All forms hide their Absolute reality and whenever we partition “my experience” as exclusively your own, you create artificial conceptual boundaries between yourself and others. “Knowing” these two things as you move through the world offers the possibility of transforming yourself from a doctrinaire partisan attempting to argue and win into a living exemplar of one who “knows and lets know,” one who lives truth beyond words. As the Friar Thomas A`Kempis noted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century,

A pure, simple, and stable spirit is  
not distracted, though it be employed  
in many works: for that it doeth all  
to the honour of God, and being at  
rest within, seeketh not itself in anything

it doeth.

He to whom all things are one,  
he who reduceth all things to one, and  
seeith all things in one; may enjoy  
a quiet mind, and remain at peace in  
God. (*Imitation of Christ, Book I, Ch. 3*)