

6/10/14  
Verse 63

Apart from remaining in knowledge without becoming other than it  
and knowing this knowledge here,  
struggling in frustration, one does not know;  
who sees this supreme secret of the wise man?

Free translation:

The wise know there is only Knowledge, so they remain one with it and  
don't struggle. For them the truth to be known is here and now. But only  
a few see this secret. Those who do not know this think of it as an  
unknown entity to be sought and discovered, and under this delusion  
they struggle and agonize.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

This wisdom that ever remains non-other to the Wisdom  
Than the knowing of which just as such, here, what  
By heterodox disadoption one can never come to know,  
Such, the supreme secret of the pundit, who is here to see?

This is yet another verse where we can only be grateful for the  
wise interpreters who have explained its nuances to us. Reading the  
verse text gives only a faint whiff of the riches to be mined by sincere  
contemplation. My profound thanks to Nataraja Guru for discerning the  
vast parameters woven into each of Narayana Guru's verses, and to  
Nitya for further refining them in comprehensible terms that can lift us  
to their level. Aum.

When my fellow students in the class wonder why I get bent out of  
shape by people talking about how far away realization is, how it is only  
the purview of rare and special individuals, and it is an exotic state in its  
own right, they should know that verses 62 and 63 are coursing through  
my veins. In reality the whole hundred verses urge us to revel in the full

value of our so-called everyday experience, but these two express it in irrefutable terms. Nitya was speaking to a room full of starry-eyed dreamers very much caught up in those types of delusory fantasies when he said:

Whatever realization you are to get, you have to get in this life. It must infuse the very pattern in which you are living. There is no sense in pretending to be a Ramana Maharshi or a Sri Ramakrishna. You can't make a Kali temple here in America and sit before it undergoing all the devotional rites Ramakrishna did in anticipation that one day, suddenly, Kali will jump out of the stone image and give you the "big hit" on your head. No such thing is going to happen, but still we fantasize.

Mick added a caveat that we are deeply in debt for the wise instruction of our favorite gurus for leading us to this kind of insight. True enough. We just have to be cautious not to imagine that realization is some stereotypical or distant event—we are realizing every moment we are truly awake.

This led Paul to one of his favorite insights, that we are the way the Absolute witnesses itself. It's such a valuable realization to know we are a key player in a universe filled with key players. No one else sees from our perspective. I satirized poor God, pulling out her hair in despair, because she so painstakingly created everyone, taking billions of years to evolve them to the present point, and then they all decided they weren't worthy of being seers, that only other, more important people were the real seers. Where did we learn we weren't important? (This is a rhetorical question—I hope you know by now!) Our most crucial role, both to ourselves and to any god we might imagine, is to express our own talents grounded in our best understanding from our own unique perspective. As James Surowiecki concludes in *The Wisdom of Crowds*, a study of how groups can be most effective: "Paradoxically, the best way for a group to be smart is for each person in it to think and act as independently as possible." In other words, our best contribution to the

world is to actualize our self to the best of our ability. I'm pretty sure that's what Narayana Guru has in mind for us with this study, as well.

During his time at Hall Street, Nitya was avidly reading everything he could of cutting edge science, especially physics, psychology and the budding field of neuroscience. He would be particularly gratified that the development of these fields continues to ratify and augment the insights he shared with us. Ideas that used to seem incredibly radical are now taken for granted as the basic assumptions for scientific investigations. Take for instance the reversal Nitya instructs us to carry out:

A thing sits solidly here before you. It is gross, concrete. But you can convert it into just your knowledge, because only your knowledge is there for sure. Then the concrete thing becomes very subtle. It is identified with your own consciousness, is part and parcel of your awareness.

He amplifies this idea later:

However there is one impediment, something called *vipati vijnana*, seeing everything as its opposite. The Self is seen as the non-Self, and the non-Self is seen as the Self. It is not just because you are in the wakeful and the world is presented there and you can do anything that it becomes a happy occasion. No. From your side you have to do one thing. Certain kinds of understanding are to be reversed. For instance, what you experience as concrete you have to reverse and see how it is not concrete. It is only your idea of concreteness that seems to be so solid. Only your prejudicial view of a certain situation as inimical makes it so. You should be able to work on it to reverse the whole process.

The conversion Nitya speaks of is not some mystical practice, it's merely accepting the reality of our situation. As neuroscientist David Eagleman puts it, in his book *Incognito*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2011), "You're not perceiving what's out there. You're perceiving whatever your brain tells you." (33) The

amazingly convincing illusions cobbled together by our mind's eye should be understood to be best guesses grounded in memory rather than reality as such. Eagleman describes the process in more detail:

The first thing we learn from studying our own circuitry is a simple lesson: most of what we do and think and feel is not under our conscious control. The vast jungles of neurons operate their own programs. The conscious you—the I that flickers to life when you wake up in the morning—is the smallest bit of what's transpiring in your brain. Although we are dependent on the functioning of the brain for our inner lives, it runs its own show. Most of its operations are above the security clearance of the conscious mind. The *I* simply has no right of entry. (4)

This is a humbling realization, but it is only the beginning. We then have to find out what we actually are capable of.

Scientists are beginning to agree with the rishis that our mind stages our life for us as a kind of theatrical play, because that's the best it can do at this stage of evolution. I keep thinking of how amazingly Shakespeare expressed the same insight some 400 years earlier, that we are trapped in a cheesy projection of our memories of the past and fantasies of the future, and the result may well be disastrous:

**Macbeth:**

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.  
(Act V, scene 5, 19-28)

When our delusions catch us we might well realize with Macbeth that our own thoughts are a tale told by an idiot, and we are the idiot in question. Hopefully we won't be so shamed as to wish for extinction: the point of this embarrassing (or worse) realization is that we can do much, much better if we are cognizant of our innate limitations and learn how to work with them. It's more like the wise utterances of our inner guidance system are misinterpreted thanks to our own idiotic faith in our senses and memories, and then we allow ourselves to be led astray. We have to reconnect with the coherent part behind the curtain of sense impressions. Eagleman recognizes this:

The first lesson about trusting your senses is: don't. Just because you *believe* something to be true, just because you *know* it's true, that doesn't mean it *is* true.... This is because your senses will tell you the most inglorious lies....

After all, we're aware of very little of what is "out there." The brain makes time-saving and resource-saving assumptions and tries to see the world only as well as it needs to. And as we realize that we are not conscious of most things until we ask ourselves questions about them, we have taken the first step in the journey of self-excavation. We see that what we perceive in the outside world is generated by parts of the brain to which we do not have access.

These principles of inaccessible machinery and rich illusion do not apply only to basic perceptions of vision and time. They also apply at higher levels—to what we think and feel and believe. (53-4)

Understanding this makes all the difference in the world. As Mick asserted, we react and are caught up in our reactions, but a

yogi knows they have the choice whether to react automatically or not. We can let our knee-jerk reactions go and contemplate our better options. Ideally we might not react at all, but normally we do. Our system is designed to react to stimuli. A contemplative adds an extra dimension of more or less intelligent choice. Then, despite being at the mercy of our mental structuring (which will be addressed in more detail in the next verse) we at least begin to have a say in how our life pans out. Nitya puts it this way:

It is up to you to make your consciousness bright or dull. If you decide, “Oh, this is the time to mourn, to sit and become boorish,” you can. Or you can realize it’s nonsense, just nonsense, to get into depressions. Instead you could think, “My Self is a treasure, and each passing moment is to be enriched with the treasure of my own Self. Every possible relationship I may get into here with the things that are presented to me in the wakeful, I will also enrich. If the Absolute is all joy, all bliss, there is no reason why this moment also should not be like that.”

Well, it helps to realize this in theory, but Nitya well knew how difficult it is for us to actualize it in order that our life can be continuously blissful, or even tolerable for that matter. It takes a serious commitment to bring about the state Nitya is speaking of. One major impediment is that our depressions undermine our commitment, so instead of continuous contemplation we offer fitful bursts separated by wide gulfs of stewing in our own juices. Instead of acknowledging how we have been subverted, we passively wait for the next savior to come along. This brings to mind one of the Beatles’ greatest songs, *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. It’s a gentle siren call to wake up from our malaise. I’ll reprint its words in Part III.

There is a savior in this story, and it is you. We can save our self. We need to unearth all the subtle ways we abdicate our integrity, so that we can regain it. In Nitya’s words, “The purport of this verse is not to take you away from the pragmatic utility or

the transactional richness of life. It merely adds another dimension to them, the dimension of the Absolute. And in so doing they become infinitely more valuable.”

The class struggled heroically with what this means in practice. I gave one example based on my extensive readings in psychology, with a special tip of the hat to Alice Miller, who really explored how profoundly our upbringing affects our adult life. Yes, our innate abilities are important, but many researchers have come to the conclusion that each of us, at least on the surface, is primarily a product of our nurturing. That means if I had the same input as some other human I totally disagree with, I would be indistinguishable from them. This has led me away from enmity to compassion. All of us arise from the same universal substratum, the same neutral or nearly neutral ground, and then are shaped by so many forces beyond our control. Mick noted how if we identify with being the product of this conditioning process, as we generally do, we will stay stuck there. We will cling to it. Yet we do have the option to mitigate our idiosyncrasies by referring them to a more universal norm. This can be our personal contribution to human evolution, and it is no mean feat.

This transformation not only can but must be carried out in everyday life. We might practice at first by spinning theories in isolation, but only when the chips are down do we have the chance to bring our best game to the table. Shouldn't we be eager to have those opportunities? It's perplexing that so many people would rather avoid them so they can remain stuck in their mediocre identity. Where is the upside to that? Bad hypnosis has pinned us in place. Give yourself a counter-suggestion! Meditating on Nitya's superlative words is one excellent way. How about his concluding paragraph:

What is recommended to us here is this unifying vision. You cannot have a unifying vision in spiritual absorption, because you don't have to. In deep sleep you are not asked to do it because you cannot. In the dream also you are essentially helpless. But in this wakeful

state alone, it is possible to become critical, thoroughgoing, penetrative, meditative, reflective and perceptive of this possibility of seeing the Absolute in the relative.

Or we could hearken to Deb, who rhapsodized how beautiful is this vision that whatever happens to you, good or bad, it's like a gift to see the Absolute value factor in it and relate it to yourself. The Absolute is the persistence of beauty and energy that unites all of us. Look for it—it is right in the center of everything that happens.

## Part II

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

The act of knowing happens only in the present. Most people look upon the knowledge of the present as only a passing transaction of little worth. When we think of realization, the picture that comes to our mind is one of a future event of great consequence. We expect it to be exciting, awe filled and incomparable to everything. We are told that one gets it only after a hard struggle. How can the present, which is only you and me and this mundane world with its daily chores, be the ultimate reality? It cannot be. At least this is what we decide.

Let us think of the state of spiritual absorption. In this state there is no distinction between the knower and the knowledge; there is no point saying what one should know or should not know. Even though in this state knowledge prevails, it has no differentiation within it. It is neither the knowledge of anything nor of anyone. We presume it to be knowledge because we have no words with which to describe it. In deep sleep we do not know what is happening. We cannot say that either knowledge or non-knowledge prevails. There is no ego in deep sleep to either be a cognizer of the state or a director of it. In the dream state we cognize many things, but we have no power to change the course of a dream or to get into a critical examination of its content while the dream is going on. There is a definite knower in the wakeful state of here and now, and it has a clear cut knowledge.



The knowledge of the waking state is of the universal and of the particular. It is of things as well as ideas. It is of the concrete as well as the subtle. We can programme and alter the activities of the present. We can make the quality of the present bright or dark, fascinating or dismal. We are not only the knowers but also the directors of the present theme of knowledge. If a dream is a fiction, the transaction of the present has the validity of the factual. In the wakeful state one can choose to react, or withdraw, critically evaluate, and contemplatively reflect. It is the only state which gives us the power to direct our thoughts so as to penetrate deeply into the meanings of things.

Without altering the structural existence or the pragmatic utility of the clothes we wear, we can easily judge that the material they are made of is cotton or wool. It can be taken further to the fundamental reality of primal energy. It is only a matter of knowing. This does not tamper with the material actuality of the clothes, but the reality of the clothes will give an altogether different dimension to our knowledge. In the same way, while being in the wakeful world of transaction, one can also recognize it as the one knowledge that changes into dream, deep sleep and the state of spiritual absorption. It is always and only one knowledge. This realization can only come here and now. There is no need to be excited about it. It is a simple matter of knowing. However, this knowledge makes all the difference to the meaning of life. The knower of this knowledge in the here and now is a true seer.

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Another excellent commentary from Nataraja Guru:

THIS verse has to be read with the previous one to enable one to see its purpose, which is to complement and correct any deflection from the strictly neutral position we should take as between orthodoxy and heterodoxy that might recommend itself to any one who seeks progress in the matter of contemplative wisdom. The self and non-self, which have an interchangeable character as the subject-matter or the object-matter, now of orthodoxy and now of

heterodoxy, have between them a subtle middle ground in which true knowledge takes its forward stride to Self-realization. It represents the domain of pure wisdom as such, and the stride that is taken from the subjective aspects of the same wisdom is not an event at all in terms of the central neutral and normative Absolute which is also the content of the other. Absolute Wisdom is, moreover, all-inclusive and already implicitly contains the subjective aspect which on final analysis is non-different from itself.

The neutral and perfectly central or absolute Wisdom refers to what one realises just as such without any sense either of heterodoxy or orthodoxy. It is a simple event which is not an event at all in a gross mechanical sense. The words 'knowing just as such here' are meant to stress the ease and the directness or neutrality of the inner event of knowing, when it refers to pure Self-realization, which is neither objective nor subjective. Most religions and philosophies now prevailing err on one side or the other. Hence the justification for the last rhetorical question.

As against people who suffer by orthodoxy from a subtle form of mental reservation or disadoption of what is strange to them (referred to in verse 62); there are others, according to the present verse, who tend to exaggerate the importance of extraneous aspects of the wisdom of the Absolute, such as those transcendental aspects of it which remain strange from the side of mere orthodoxy. The exaggerations of heterodox disadoption are equally bad. It is not conducive to pure wisdom to strive in the seeking of wisdom, whether positively or negatively. It must be a simple event.

A note of warning is here struck against any excesses in any direction. Those who tend to adopt eagerly the varied sensational and new-fangled, odd or fantastic ways of self-realization are hereby warned off against possible excesses in their approach. The

two verses, 62 and 63, are meant to bracket or enclose between them the pure context of Absolute Wisdom.

In the last line of the verse the Guru reveals his plaintive mood, tinged with sadness at the fact that most of the enthusiasts in the name of spirituality whom we see in this world fall either into the category of the over-orthodox or the over-heterodox. A balanced pressure between these rival forces has to be maintained, and the two counterparts should not cancel-out altogether into dull and lazy states of vacuity or emptiness of interest. All the forces that converge to the point of Self-realization have to be focussed on to the wisdom that is ever present and which is normal and natural and needs no straining to be seen in its own light.

There is involved in such a process the penetrating insight of the pundit, who is the intelligent, learned or well-informed man in such matters. The Gita uses the word 'panditah' in this laudatory sense, although punditry is sometimes applied to mere learning. It is in the true Gita sense that it is employed here. The supreme pundit is neither orthodox nor heterodox but holds himself between these tendencies. Only the most learned and those of the most penetrating insight in such matters come to this right way. The majority of seekers of spirituality or wisdom get lost and fail to hold the balance. This is the justification for the note of sadness with which the verse concludes.

The way of absolute wisdom sits still without taking sides, established within the neutral core of wisdom as such. The firm establishment of wisdom is what takes place within wisdom itself and not with reference to anything extraneous to it, whether belonging to the side of the Self or the non-Self. It is thus a simple event which is not an event at all.

Part III

While My Guitar Gently Weeps, by George Harrison

I look at you all see the love there that's sleeping  
While my guitar gently weeps  
I look at the floor and I see it needs sweeping  
Still my guitar gently weeps

I don't know why nobody told you  
How to unfold your love  
I don't know how someone controlled you  
They bought and sold you

I look at the world and I notice it's turning  
While my guitar gently weeps  
Every mistake, we must surely be learning  
Still my guitar gently weeps

I don't know how you were diverted  
You were perverted too  
I don't know how you were inverted  
No one alerted you

I look at you all see the love there that's sleeping  
While my guitar gently weeps  
I look at you all  
Still my guitar gently weeps

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Jake's commentary:

Verse 63 and its commentary extend the conversation established in verse 62 (and its commentary). In the present discussion, the Guru and Nitya explore the connection between our recognizing the Absolute and our position in the world we live in,

especially as we experience it in our state of wakeful consciousness. The primal energy of the Absolute is that changeless one source out of which everything in the universe of becoming originates, and that one-ness is always present. It is in our capacity to perceive that dimension as our senses present it that spiritual growth/awareness lies: “this is the great possibility of the wakeful [state]” (p. 432). It is also that which proves to be so elusive to so many who seek their spiritual awakening as a thing or event.

Nitya opens his commentary by pointing out what “most people” mean when they talk of a spiritual life. In the American experience (as in most others), such a life means denouncing the material and sequestering oneself in a monastery, ashram, or other community such as those created by the Mennonites, Shakers, or Amish that have populated the fringes of the culture. Along the same lines are the devout fundamentalists groups so alive and well in the “fly over states” between California and New York. On the “leftish” end of the scale are the “progressive” thinkers filling retreats of all kinds as they pursue their spiritual grails. In the majority of these cases, Nitya writes, these folks have heard stories of great trials and tribulations and work mightily to a spiritual breakthrough characteristic of the model-stories they hold as exemplars. “But,” says Nitya, “you cannot live someone else’s story as your life. Your life is all you have, and it’s a very simple thing” (p. 430).

Personal realization, continues Nitya as he begins to detail what he means, can only be had in this life, in our states of consciousness: Samadhi, deep sleep, dream, and wakeful consciousness. In Samadhi, that state of total bliss, one experiences no sensations or ideas, no “modifications of the mind.” At one with the Absolute, one in Samadhi cannot decide to do anything or think anything—“you are not really there as an agent.” A similar condition obtains in the deep sleep state, and arriving at that state cannot be the result of one’s effort, which is just as irrelevant as it is for one in the Samadhi state. The dream state,

third of the four, shares that “no direct control” character in as much as while dreaming we follow the mind’s creations as they appear elliptically but have no say in what appears—no matter how much we wish to be in command. As Nitya confesses, “I try all the time, but I have never succeeded in maintaining a coherent logic in a dream state” (p. 431).

Wakeful consciousness, concludes Nitya, is the one of the four states in which we can have a say in the matter. Our daily rounds are made up of our decisions to act or not—to read a book, take a walk, serve lunch in a diner, split the atom, whatever. In this wakeful place, we are free to make choices and act on the knowledge we have acquired (or become re-membered with) through our senses and the mental constructions attached thereto. This knowledge is “factual” in the sense that it is founded on direct experience in the world. In that respect, this knowledge is also partial in that it does not deal with the Absolute oneness, the truth that does not pass away and out of which all phenomena arises. But in that arising is the Absolute, writes Nitya, if we can but assume a position from which we can perceive it as it operates here and now. To illustrate the point, he deconstructs the wool wrap he wears in order to fend off the cold. The wrap function, he notes, is his arbitrary assignment for a piece of cloth that, in turn, is made up of wool fibers grown on sheep. Composed of chemical compounds, these fibers are essentially a group of molecules and atoms, the major feature of which is space or an absence of “stuff” generally. Reduced to its essence, Nitya’s wrap, like all other material forms, is an appearance of the primal energy at the core of everything we sense and/or think about. This alternative way of perceiving the world our senses present us is possible only in our state of conscious awareness where we have the opportunity to sensually/mentally experience and can choose our response. In no other of the three states do we have the tools or the freedom to do so: “this is a great possibility of the wakeful” (p. 432). In this state, then, is the opportunity to connect our lived experience with what the Buddhists note is the basic point of this existence

generally—happiness—a condition that is the definition of the Absolute. In connecting our everyday, wakeful experiences with the Absolute primal oneness it manifests, we find that happiness in all lives here and now, in the present moment.

Nitya concludes his commentary by noting that by positioning yourself so that you can be happy, you control whether or not you are. The show is appearing and re-appearing endlessly, but your attitude toward that circus is entirely up to you. As you proceed, however, bear in mind, he suggests, that duality is a basic property of the world of necessity. In it, the ego-self is commonly seen as the legitimate Self and that legitimate Self is seen as the non-self. In other words, your ego-self and those of others will combine to push you into a position of prizing the materialist view that they reward. Realizing that the only thing concrete in this conception is the idea that it is so (in spite of the empirical data proving its transitory existence) requires a wisdom to see the world as it truly is, to “give primacy to the substance of consciousness” (p. 434). And in that substance, all things and beings are of equal status and exist in the now:

To see the world in a grain of sand  
And a Heaven in a wild flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour . . . .  
(William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence.”)