

8/12/14

Verse 69

Hearing and such as horses yoked,
occupied by the self-image, the dexterous psychic dynamism drives
the chariot of *rati*; mounted therein, the ego
is continuously chasing each pleasing form outside.

Free translation:

Our organism can be compared to a libidinal chariot yoked to sense perceptions, which are the horses. It is driven by the mind. Its occupant is the ego, the self-image, which is restlessly pursuing objects of pleasure in vain.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

With hearing and such as horses linked, carrying within
The Self-image, and ruled over by the master of thinking powers
Such is the libido chariot, mounted whereon the 'I' sense
Unceasing deals outward with each form of beauty as it proceeds.

We are now entering a very intense section on *rati*, the inner urge in beings. It treads the razor's edge between doing and not doing, intent and surrender. What really is our role in our life? What are we capable of, and what are we not? Should we be active or passive? The normal option is to choose one leg or the other and pursue it with dedication. The Guru's advice is to synthesize both, in the act of intelligence called yoga.

Our life should be meaningful. It should matter to us, very much. This course of study has laid a solid foundation for us to let go of our restraints and fly high on the wings of our inspiration. There wouldn't be much point to it if we prepped so thoroughly and then stayed stuck on the ground. As Nitya describes the

structure of our being, “Here we have the picture of the vehicle that conducts you to the great domain of values. The highest abode of values is the Absolute itself.” So where are we going? Is the Absolute just one more nice idea, or does it have a transformative impact on us?

In the chariot metaphor Narayana Guru employs, each leg of the dialectic is a horse, a being that symbolizes power, speed and intensity, not to mention barely manageable wildness. The horses are just like our sense interests, always probing the environment, always eager to explore. They have to be yoked together to pull the chariot properly. Yoga means to yoke, to join two (or more) poles together. The chariot’s progress is vertical, through time, even as it rolls along a horizontal pathway, but the horses are the positive and negative factors that provide the motive force. Too much reining in and they stop; too little and they run away with us.

Words on paper don’t much convey the dynamism of what they are meant to indicate here. The class caught a slight whiff of the power of rati, which upset the docility we for the most part have adroitly substituted for our innate intensity in our daily lives. A little lightning now and then isn’t a bad thing.

The horses have to be trained to work together, or chaos will result. Nitya presents it this way:

The horses can be either divine or demonic, and life goes on alternating between them. Unless you can transcend the duality of this alternation, you will not be able to ride your chariot to the highest form of happiness, the Absolute.

All beings are seeking happiness. The trick is how is it actualized? Narayana Guru wants us to locate the source of happiness within ourselves and recognize that the form is merely the incidental opportunity for our happiness to manifest. It’s a kind of inversion from the social insistence that everything enjoyable resides in an object for sale outside ourselves. Nitya reminds us:

When you give priority to the form and forget the essence, you are misled. Only the appearance is there. From the appearance you judge that something is going to make you happy, but of course it doesn't. You run after a pleasing form thinking it will give you happiness, but in the end you turn away with dissatisfaction and frustration.

Nitya adds, "This is a case study of Americanism." A little bit of prep and then on to the next attraction. Don't hang around long enough to make any real progress. Now, forty years later, we could revise this to a case study of the human condition. The whole world has caught our disease.

I promised the class to append the Dalai Lama's take on happiness, and you'll find it in Part III. He puts it very simply, but the implications are vast. Here we are going deeper. The goal of happiness is one, yet infinite are the ways we employ to chase after it. Can we intelligently choose our route, or are we hapless victims of fate? Even if we fervently believe in our victimhood, we have been choosing practically from day one, though not always intelligently. Narayana Guru and his helpers are trying to throw some more light on this often murky endeavor so we can up our percentage.

Nitya liked to think of the Word (logos) of the Bible as meaning the innate urge in beings we are familiarizing ourselves with in this class. We all have a drive built in that does so much enabling for us behind the scenes. Perhaps we should honor it more. Nitya says:

When the Word begins to operate, it is called *mahatattva* or the great principle. The supreme principle has a logos, a reason about what and how it is going to manifest. Whatever is going to be brought into existence is not going to be done in a haphazard manner. It comes as a cosmic or universal manifestation of the law. The principle, the meaning, the relationship, the purpose—all these together can be called the reason of manifestation, identified with the mahatattva. In this, buddhi, the intellect, has a priority over everything else because it is nearest to the Supreme, in the sense that it brings the light of the Supreme to manifest in everything.

The priority of the intellect is because it directs our awareness to the unfolding of the mahatattva, so we can support it instead of impeding it. This is rather important! I'll add some very helpful supporting material on this subject from Nitya's Therapy and Realization in the Bhagavad Gita and my own Gita commentary in Part III.

Yes, the oft-maligned intellect gets pride of place in this philosophy. As affirmed in the last verse notes, buddhi is our conscious acknowledgement of the higher values and our means of access to them. Turning our back on the intellect basically cuts off our appreciation of those values. It's like throwing away the reins and sitting back in hopes the horses aren't going to take you anywhere too awful. I think that notion is grounded in a fond memory of the early days when our parents toted us around and did everything for us. Nice, but defunct.

There is a subtle dialectic presented in this paragraph:

While there are slight differences in their metaphors, in the Katha as well as the Maitreya and Mandukya Upanishads there are references to the body as a chariot, with the senses as the horses, the mind as the reins, and the ego as the driver. The Guru has combined what is given in these three Upanishads with the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna holds the horses and Arjuna sits there as master.

The basic metaphor has us driving our own chariot. The Gita version has Arjuna (the conscious mind) as rider while Krishna does the driving. It means we surrender the illusion of control and allow our higher self to guide us. That the two aspects are combined in Narayana Guru's version means we are to find the balance point between doing and not doing. We have to hold the reins and also invite our inner impetus to show us the way. It's a high art form. There will be much more about this in the next stretch of verses.

Andy noted how each verse seems to have ramifications in our lives that are hard to explain. The coherency of the study and apparently unrelated aspects of our daily existence are striking. I feel we are given opportunities to practice what we've heard. That's why I always solicit

input from others, because they must be having the same sorts of relevant events. There was thunder in the air and thunder in our week and thunder in the class. I won't list the coincidences I noted, only to say that the innate urge coordinates these things so we can grow and learn. All we have to do is pay attention. As the Gita says, it is objectively verifiable, as plain as the nose on your face. The guru principle is always with us.

Andy was also fascinated by the pratima, the divine image that is reflected in each being. Nitya describes the metaphor beautifully:

A reflection, statue or image is called a pratima. Vedantins give the simile of individuated selves as being akin to the foam on the ocean. When a wave breaks, the froth produced consists of millions of bubbles of various sizes. The sun shining above is reflected by each bubble, the small ones as much as the large. And not only the sun; anything the sun illuminates is also reflected on each bubble. When a bubble bursts, the sun and the world do not disappear. Only their images that were mirrored in that particular bubble are gone, forever.

You and I are the bubbles which mirror this cosmic show illuminated by a sun outside. There is only one supreme Sun, but we see millions of suns reflected uniquely in each individual bubble. Each of us has our own sun. This is called a pratima. Thus, the self that is in the individual ratha is only an image of the Supreme.

Andy wondered if this didn't imply we are all perfect, and in a sense it does. Perfect can mean many things. Our concepts are undoubtedly imperfect mirrors of our perfection, clouded as they are with the alternating modalities of nature, sattva, rajas and tamas. In a sense, the spiritual quest is to transcend our reflecting process and merge with the source, not as a permanent state but as a way to minimize the distortions we impose on the source and restore the depths of our happiness. Our beliefs and derangements color and obscure the supernal light, twisting it into strange configurations that do a lot of harm. The least we can do is try to cure ourselves of this disease.

We discovered (once again) that in intense confrontations, ghosts of our memory banks rise up to cloak our perceptions in false ideations. Our friend might not be a foe, but something like him was a foe once, and so we treat him as one now. Our memory associations bring in the foe where none exists. A contemplative learns to detect this conditioning in the heat of battle, where it is most likely to surface and cause problems. Timid people are content to avoid awakening their confounding demons, and some are fortunate enough to succeed. Even a sleeping dragon can have a powerful dampening effect on the psyche, however.

We try to imagine the sun and try to imagine we are it, overlooking the garbage pile we sit on. Yet a good driver knows the road conditions, and takes them into account. There are potholes everywhere! Enjoying the highest values is not a default setting, once we have gone through the turmoil of growing up. We reclaim them with the aid of every aspect of our amazing chariot. In sum, “What we seek is happiness indeed, and we are equipped with an instrument that is well-suited to this purpose.”

Beneath all our junk we are reflections of the Absolute, and so is everyone else. We shouldn't mistake the guarded reflection on everyone's surface for the purity we can observe when we intelligently cancel out the distortions. We definitely should start with the premise that inside everyone is the same glowing ember we cherish in ourself. It's likely to be well hidden, but it helps a lot to know it's there.

Nitya exemplified sruti at its best: wise words that cured, uplifted, challenged. His stinging remarks were intended to break us free of our delusions. Our knee jerk reaction to them might have been that he was being mean to us, that he was a nasty fellow, but that was obviously not the case. He corrected us out of love. Like many a healing practice, it hurt at first but afterward brought relief. This should be kept in mind when taking your chariot out for a spin!

Nitya's closing was another classic:

No matter how the Guru is represented in your life, it should be that guiding light within you, that great power within which can always direct you to the right orientation. Sruti here is most important, but

we should also remember that everything connected with the senses is already defeated by our previous dark inclinations, tendencies, experiences and conditionings, and this makes us always mistake the appearance for reality. It is really a wonderful verse to meditate on!

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

Sweet sounds attract the ear. They are the microwaves that form the warp and woof of music. In Sanskrit, microwaves are called sruti. Sound is said to be the quality of ether. We are not speaking here of the medium of sound, but of the element of which it is a quality. After the failure of the Michelson-Morley experiment, scientists came to the conclusion that there is no ether. They may be right. This does not cause any despair to the Vedantin however, except for the fact that akasa is wrongly translated as “ether.” If akasa is not matter, it must be non-matter, or spirit. In the present context, we may understand it as an entity which can function both as a thing and as knowledge. In any case, it is good to commence a study of life from akasa, which is both thing and no-thing.

From the subtlest ether to the grossest form of matter, such as earth, there are several grades of materiality. It is well known that all physical things exist within an electromagnetic field that is not seen; we know it only from its effect. In the Guru's analogy, he begins with sruti (microwaves), which is close to this subtle force. Man is a bundle of nerves, and nothing affects him more intensely than the quality of the sound he hears. It can lull him to sleep, rouse him to erotics, excite him to flight, or drive him mad. Although the sound we hear is caused by a vibration that disturbs the fluid in the cochlea, this is only a minor function of this organ when we consider the fact that our bodily balance to stand erect and walk on two legs depends very much on the sound functioning of this organ. Thus, the primacy given to the sense of hearing is very appropriate.

In Narayana Guru's analogy, the ego is mounted on the chariot of rati (the libido), which is drawn by horses (the senses, such as hearing, etc.). There are two implied secrets in the analogy of the horses. One is that the horses always proceed to a goal, as our life, yoked to the senses, is always goal-oriented. Secondly, the power of locomotion is measured in terms of horsepower. This implies that the senses are capable of arousing and releasing the energy required for the motivational pursuit of life.

The reference to “hearing” in this verse is similar to the reference to beauty in verse 8. From this it is evident that each sense has its attraction and they are all equally irresistible. Although the metaphor of the chariot appears in the Gita and several Upanishads, the one presented here is more complex than any given elsewhere.

There are three occupants of the chariot: the self-image, the ego and the psychic dynamism. Of these, the actual execution of the driving of the chariot is assigned to the psychic dynamism, which itself is an entity constituted of four factors: the interrogating mind, the recalling memory, the judging intellect and the affective ego. The separate mention of the ego is to highlight one aspect of the psychic dynamism, but, in fact, the ego can be bracketed with the psychic dynamism, which in this verse is further qualified as dexterous.

The ego is both an existential thrust and an ontologic awareness. The awareness is perpetuated by repeatedly recognizing the identification of the knower, the doer and the enjoyer as I-consciousness, and by constantly saying “I,” “me,” “my,” and “mine.” The self-awareness of the ego is a mirroring of the eternal light of the Self. In other words, the ego is a superimposition on the Self. Although the Self is universal, indivisible, partless and formless, the superimposed ego is strongly coloured by the finitude of the body in which it functions. The self-image demarcated by the ego naturally casts a boundary line in the light of the Self. The individuation thus formed is recognized here as the image of the Self, atma pratima. Thus, it becomes imperative for the ego to be flanked on one side by the Self- image and on the other by the psychic dynamism, which is referred to in this verse as karanam.

From the Sanskrit term it is evident that the ego (ahanta) is wielding both the motivation and the instrument of pursuit. The motivation is happiness. This has a double significance. For the ego to become aware of itself the only light comes from the Self, which by nature is ananda. Hence, it is obviously only natural for the ego to remain wedded to happiness. The ego, however, is not a finite version of the Self, as its substance comes from prakriti, which is constituted of the five elements and the three qualities known as sattva, rajas and tamas. These, while being dynamic, are devoid of any light of their own to be conscious of their functions. The ego is the only link between the Self and nature. The innate qualities of Self, mirrored by the ego, become subjected to the veiling principle of maya and, as a result, confusion arises. Ananda mirrored in prakriti is called rati. The chariot is not real, but a phantom created by the image of the pleasure-giving on the constantly changing façade of sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva, rajas and tamas are only principles and they have no content except in relation with the manifested elements of ether, air, fire, water and earth—or the psychic dynamism—when they have manifested through the individuation of a person.

This gives a clear picture of the ego which, goaded to seek happiness by its primary nature (the Self), finds only the confusion caused by its association with prakriti when its happiness is sought in the shadowy world of the psychophysical objects of the senses. This is certainly a most deplorable state.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE participation of the Self with the outer world of interests has a graded, serial, polarised nature which has to be understood operationally and in globally integrated fashion as a totality in the context of the Absolute. Piecemeal notions of such verities found in text-books of different psychological, philosophical or theological disciplines are here seen integrated together as if

hanging by the same peg. Modern phenomenology undertakes a similar task.

The central reality here is the 'Self-image' referred to as the 'atma-pratima'. The double description implied has to be justified in the light of the word *karu* (core) as employed consistently even from the very first verse. Like the 'thinking substance' of Spinoza, it is psycho-physical and neutral between mind and matter. What is more, it does not participate directly in outside action with forms or things other than itself. Like the 'unmoved mover' of Aristotle or the 'agent of pure act' of classical philosophers, this self-image is the most direct and really given representative of the notion of the Absolute.

On the South Indian soil the sight of such a ceremonial procession as seen in this verse is familiar to the common man and what is more, in the Upanishads themselves this same imagery has been employed in several places, comparing the self with the charioteer and the senses with the horses.

The Katha Upanishad (third valli, verses 3-6) states, 'Know that the soul (atman, self) as riding in a chariot'. The rest of the analogy is the same there, except that the manas is further compared to the reins, which does not contradict the picture the Guru presents here.

Svetasvatara Upanishad (2-9) says: "Like the chariot yoked with vicious horses, his mind the wise man should restrain undistractedly."

Maitri Upanishad, II prapathaka, goes into the functions of each of these factors in greater detail, beginning, "This body is like a cart without intelligence..." and explaining how the pure Absolute itself could be the driver.

These stray comparisons and analogies have been brought together here by the Guru in a more complete and coherent form, to serve as the basis of an integrated notion of the Self in a fully contemplative and absolutist context, with a scientific status given to it, although put in the language of antique imagery. The comparison of the Self to an image in an idolatrous chariot procession (such as takes place to this day at Puri Jagannath - the 'car of Juggernaut' being known to the English idiom itself), the latter representing the inevitability of the force of providence in human life, might have an outlandish flavour. When we consider, however, that it is neither mind nor matter that we have to think of neutrally and psycho-physically here, this prejudice will lose its force, if any. The image represents the notion of 'substance' rather than of mere matter. The procession represents a parameter for accommodating graded spiritual factors around the self.

The more solidly material side of the situation here portrayed is to be traced backwards into the chariot rather than forward to the horses which represent the senses. Between thinking and substance - which are aspects or attributes of the neutral Absolute - is to be located the neutral Self-image. After this, more negatively, we have the physical basis of the self as the libido, as understood in modern psycho-analytic literature such as that of Freud, Jung or Adler.

The word 'rati' which we have translated as 'libido' here, as the nearest corresponding notion of the West, may be viewed as highly coloured by sex, or only tinted with a shade of the sex element, according to different schools of psycho-analysis, whose prudery in such matters might vary according to their puritanism or paganism. That sex is the basis of the body is sufficiently proved by the fact that the body is born by sex, even if merely immaculately. When the Bhagavad Gita goes so far as identifying 'kama' (passion) with the Absolute, as it does in chapter VII verse 11, this kind of paganism may be said to be natural to Indian

spirituality. Science and religion do not come into conflict here. Sex in fact enters - or is the whole of - the stuff that makes up the Self in its negative aspects, while the senses make up the positive element. Whatever might detract from the spiritual status of the Self by its participation with the libido on the one side is made up and added to it by its being linked to the ruler of the instruments of knowing (the 'karanas'), which are also related to the same self on the positive side.

The chief philosophical verity to be extracted from this verse consists in recognizing the perfect aloofness and neutrality of the pure thinking substance that corresponds to the highest Absolute Self. The horizontal forces that are positive or negative operate on a different plane and leave the self-image intact at the very core. The reference to the aesthetic participation with beauty-forms does not belong to the perfectly neutral self but its negative counterpart, distinguished as the 'I' sense, which is slightly asymmetrically located on the negative side of the scale or graded polarised series in the analogy employed here.

Part III

The story of the Dalai Lama visiting an American ski area in the mid-1980s ends this way:

As we finished, a young waitress with tangled, dirty-blond hair and a beaded headband began clearing our table. She stopped to listen to the conversation and finally sat down, abandoning her work. After a while, when there was a pause, she spoke to the Dalai Lama. "You didn't like your cookie?"

"Not hungry, thank you."

"Can I, um, ask a question?"

"Please."

She spoke with complete seriousness. "What is the meaning of life?"

In my entire week with the Dalai Lama, every conceivable question had been asked—except this one. People had been afraid to ask the one—the really big—question. There was a brief, stunned silence at the table.

The Dalai Lama answered immediately. “The meaning of life is *happiness*.” He raised his finger, leaning forward, focusing on her as if she were the only person in the world. “Hard question is not, ‘What is meaning of life?’ That is easy question to answer! No, hard question is what *make* happiness. Money? Big house? Accomplishment? Friends? Or ...” He paused. “Compassion and good heart? This is question all human beings must try to answer: *What make true happiness?*” He gave this last question a peculiar emphasis and then fell silent, gazing at her with a smile.

“Thank you,” she said, “thank you.” She got up and finished stacking the dirty dishes and cups, and took them away.

Accessed 8/13/14,

http://www.slate.com/articles/life/culturebox/2014/02/dalai_lama_at_a_santa_fe_ski_resort_tells_waitress_the_meaning_of_life.2.html

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Here’s the excerpt from *Therapy and Realization* in the Bhagavad Gita pertaining to drive. Nitya is speaking about the end of Chapter II:

Some people think that if you control your mind and even practice abstinence, then you will be able to get over the conflicts of life. Here the Gita warns that it is not like that. Only by seeing the Supreme will you be able to harmonize the relative. What is required of you is to see the Absolute in order that you may know how to tackle the relative.

How do you see the Absolute?

Only when you see the Absolute can you say that your *prajna* is well-established and that your wisdom is well-established. You are asked here to take the example of a tortoise that pulls its limbs inward, its head inward, its tail inward. The turtle has a very significant structure. It has a head, a tail and four limbs on the sides. The limbs are on the sides and head is on the top and the tail is down at the bottom. Like that, your personality also has a head and a tail and limbs on either side. You have a drive and you are heading toward a certain interest. Your interest has a tail end, too. The tail end is lost in your unconscious and you don't know anything about it. What is the urge that is prompting you to do things again and again and again? All through your life you can see that you have a master drive.

What is this master drive?

If you do not know your master drive, you will not be able to control it. To know the master drive, you should know its head as well as its tail. The head is consciously seen in your scheming, planning, scheduling, etc. If you examine the things you have schemed for in a day, what you are planning immediately, what you planned yesterday, what you want to do tomorrow, you find the head of your interest. But the tail won't show up immediately. There is a hidden purpose in your mind which makes you do all these things, and to discover what this is you have to go to the tail end. What you actually perform is on two sides. In one of the Upanishads (it is also quoted in the Brahma Sutras) there is a structural reference to our happiness. Happiness is said to have a tail and a head and two wings. *Sukham*, the positive awareness of happiness, is the head. The unknown Supreme is its tail. The general sense of happiness, or the pleasurable of things which you can imagine, is the left side, *modha*. The right side is *pramodha*, that is, an individual item of happiness of which you are indulging at a particular time. *Sukham* is the head, *brahma* is the tail, *modha* and *pramodha* are the two wings. This is how you are led forward in your flight of life.

The first thing you are asked is to centralize all these things. You have to find your own center, and bring *sukham*, your positive idea of happiness, to your center. Likewise, you have to find out your unconscious urges and see that they are also brought to the center. It helps to bring all your strategies back to the center to have a good look at your own self first. This center is “I am.” (38-40)

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My commentary on the Gita, V, 14 and 15 also seems relevant, for those interested:

14) The Supreme does not generate either the idea of agency or activity in regard to the world, nor the union of action and benefit; the innate urge in beings, however, exerts itself.

The first part means that the idea that we are the doer, that we are the cause of things happening, and even the very idea that things happen, are strictly human concepts. They do not exist in the primeval state of the universe. Nor is there any guarantee that certain actions will produce certain results. Many people get outraged when bad things happen to good people, or the other way around, imagining that this casts doubt on the existence of God. All it casts doubt on is their immature conceptions about how the universe works. Meditating on this verse will help break the fixation on managing life simplistically that we so often bring to our spiritual search.

Despite a transcendental neutrality on the part of the Absolute, the innate urge in beings asserts itself. What exactly does this mean?

Variously described as the will to live, the *élan vital*, life force, and so on, there is a mysterious but palpable forward motion in all living beings. As it takes shape in human life, at least, it creates the idea of agency, the sense of “I am doing this now.”

Historically it has generally boiled down to “I am looking for something to eat, or someone to reproduce with.” Additionally the vital urge conceptualizes its environment in terms of cause and effect, which is expressed as the union of action and benefit in the verse. We do something so we will get an expected result. At a higher level of consciousness we think, “Here is what I have to do in order to find food or get laid.” Of course, in modern society this has become highly abstracted, with plenty of additional needs and wants overlaid on the basic survival and reproductive requirements of life.

The implication here is that the Absolute is veiled in a sense by these cortical processes, which also generate the sense of ego or self. In meditation we can temporarily turn off this complex of innate urges and be much more closely in tune with the Absolute, here referred to as the Supreme because of the mild duality inherent in this idea. The effect of many spiritual practices, including psychedelic experience, is to quiet the cortex to allow awareness to shift to deeper levels of the psyche.

The Indian view is that the innate urges arise in the depths of our being far beyond conscious awareness, in what are called *vasanas* and *samskaras*. *Vasanas* are like our genetic potentials, and *samskaras* are the processed memories we use to interpret our world. These arrange our life and shape our awareness, sprouting deep in the unconscious and later on passing before the witnessing eye of consciousness on the way to actualization. For us to take credit for them in our late stage of awareness, we must be ignorant of their source, and we are. It seems to us that we invented them from scratch, but in fact they are almost completely developed by the time we become consciously aware of them. We wrestle with them to force them into line with social strictures and our preferred personal narrative, altering and often damaging them in the process. Their innate perfection is compromised by our ham-handed management. Krishna is asking us to leave the best of them alone, and sit quiet. We have to sublimate the bad ones at some point, but the good ones are already sublime. For now we are

learning to participate, not direct. In meditation we should just sit and watch as the innate urges bubble up through our awareness. Later, when we get up to act, we can promote the beneficial ones and withhold reinforcement of the unhelpful ones.

In a healthy mind our experiences are recorded as memories, and they begin to form definite patterns that shape how we relate to the world around us. One typical example is that if we live in a hostile environment, we become more suspicious than if we are surrounded with love and protection. Samskara is the term for how memories condition our outlook. While often treated as a negative influence because they condition us to habitual trains of thought, samskaras also have a decidedly positive aspect in that they free us from having to reassess every item of experience as if it was completely unprecedented. The positive side of our memories we generally call knowledge, and the negative aspect is named prejudice or ignorance. Samskaras include all of what we have learned, both true and false understanding of useful and harmful information.

When what we have mentally assimilated is consolidated to an unconscious essence, it becomes a vasana. Depending on your belief system, vasanas are either the seeds of karma you carry between lives, or they are the information encoded in the genes you inherit and pass on to your progeny. No matter what you believe, no one imagines your superficial memories, like how to get to the store, are passed along to the next life, but only a highly refined essence or a useful genetic configuration. Scientists are coming to realize that learning is occasionally genetically encoded and thus also passed on, but we don't have to determine the exact truth here. The impact is undeniable: a major factor in life is what is glibly called instinct, the pressure of deep-seated urges to shape the lives of all creatures great and small. Instincts are the same as vasanas, emerging from the genetic inheritance or memory bank of life or whatever you want to call it.

Instinct is a classic example of how by naming something—often derisively—people think they have explained it. Yet nothing

could be more mysterious than instinct. No matter how you describe it, it's still a wonder. It appears only those creatures who've schismed into duality (i.e. humans) have lost the knack of living harmoniously and expertly in tune with their instinctive urges. Civilized beings still have instincts, but we are expert at suppressing them. Some would call that progress; others consider it a tragedy.

Intuition isn't far removed from instinctive understanding. It comes from listening to our subsurface urges and learning to cope with them. An immense part of our spiritual program is to try to regain that instinctive, intuitive part of our psyche, while retaining whatever is valid in our reflective thought patterns as well. Tricky. And exciting.

The emergence of vasanas and samskaras is similar to the idea of unconscious material rising to the surface in Western psychology, in that if they are suppressed they cause emotional pain and mental aberrations. Their expression is the very purpose of life, after all. Society, however, prefers that they be stifled in the interests of "keeping the peace" or "maintaining law and order." Rigid adherents of this attitude can successfully prevent the emergence of their vasanas and samskaras. The end result is a life lived in vain; no spiritual or even psychological progress can take place under these circumstances. Many psychological quirks and bodily diseases have their root in the suppression of natural urges. The throttling of legitimate inner expressions is the ultimate waste of existence, and the ultimate triumph of socialization over individual integrity.

On the other hand, uncritical identification with our inner urges will certainly lead to problems. We have negative proclivities along with positive ones. We must learn to not be caught by them, otherwise they will continue to be expressed over and over and build up a lot of momentum that interferes with our freedom of choice in activities. Going with the flow is not a completely mindless process, but the mind must be restrained to make room for the flow to be apprehended.

15) The all-pervading One takes cognizance neither of the sinful nor the meritorious actions of anyone; wisdom is veiled by unwisdom; beings are deluded thereby.

Krishna now assures his disciple that although his urges may be harshly judged and persecuted by society, the Absolute does not use the same measuring rod, or, for that matter, any measuring rod at all. Everyone has good and bad aspects, and it is largely a matter of luck which side stands out to our peers. What really matters is our relation with the inner truth of existence, which is the core of wisdom. The peeling away of ignorance to attain—or regain—our native wisdom is the defining theme of human spirituality.

In the case of a global awareness, such as the one described here, there is no room for judgmentalism. There can only be compassion for those who have been trained to favor the veil over the radiant inner source. Focusing on sin is often confused with spirituality, but it is in fact a primary distraction from it.

Our nature is like the sun in naturally giving off light, but over the course of our development it first gets obscured by dust and dirt, and eventually whole blankets of ignorance accumulate over it to keep it under wraps. Its light, should it shine through the miasma, threatens to reveal the falsehood permeating so-called normal attitudes, so it must be suppressed at all costs in the interest of society. Truth is unafraid to stand naked, but falsehood needs to be artfully dressed up in order to pass muster.

Good and bad actions comprise the warp and weft of the veiling blanket. Focusing on them means putting our attention on the veil, and favoring one aspect over the other just makes the blanket stronger and more rigid. The Gita's solution is to stop being mesmerized by the veil and instead attend to the Absolute reality behind it. By strengthening our connection with the light our bonds will be evanesced from the inside out.

Nataraja Guru reminds us that the classical God of myth is obviated by this fearless attitude:

The theistic context to which sinful or meritorious actions belong is more finally abolished in the first lines here. The pardoning and punishing God of theology... is revalued in the second line in keeping with the idea of pure wisdom in the most general terms. Beings are deluded and thus imagine theological gods who punish and reward, and also imagine that the innermost being is affected one way or another by necessary activity. All such notions are mere suppositions due to the veiling effect of *ajnana* (ignorance or unknowing). (268)

Giordano Bruno, the sixteenth century European philosopher who was burnt at the stake for heresy, put the same idea very simply: God “makes his sun rise over good and bad.” He himself discovered the downside of this truth at the hands of his Inquisitors, but even a transcendent God finds it impossible to produce a coin with only an up side.

Part IV

Speaking of synchronous “coincidences” to our Atmo study, fellow traveler Peter Coyote shared a sweet tribute to his friend Robin Williams, a comedian who committed suicide recently. Beautiful on its own, Coyote uses a similar horse riding metaphor to the class notes:

Robin William’s Last Gift

Robin and I were friends. Not intimate, because he was very shy when he was not performing. Still, I spent many birthdays and holidays at his home with Marsha and the children, and he showed up at my 70th birthday to say “Hello” and wound up mesmerizing my relatives with a fifteen minute set that pulverized the audience. When I heard that he had died, I put my own sorrow aside for a later time. I’m a Zen Buddhist priest and my vows instruct me to try to help others. So this little letter is meant in that spirit.

Normally when you are gifted with a huge talent of some kind, it's like having a magnificent bicep. People will say, "Wow, that's fantastic" and they tell you, truthfully, that it can change your life, take you to unimaginable realms. It can and often does. The Zen perspective is a little different. We might say, "Well, that's a great bicep, you don't have to do anything to it. Let's work at bringing the rest of your body up to that level."

Robin's gift could be likened to fastest thoroughbred race-horse on earth. It had unbeatable endurance, nimbleness, and a huge heart. However, it had never been fully trained. Sometimes Robin would ride it like a kayaker tearing down white-water, skimming on the edge of control. We would marvel at his courage, his daring, and his brilliance. But at other times, the horse went where he wanted, and Robin could only hang on for dear life.

In the final analysis, what failed Robin was his greatest gift—his imagination. Clutching the horse he could no longer think of a single thing to do to change his life or make himself feel better, and he stepped off the edge of the saddle. Had the horse been trained, it might have reminded him that there is always something we can do. We can take a walk until the feeling passes. We can find someone else suffering and help them, taking the attention off our own. Or, finally, we can learn to muster our courage and simply sit still with what we are thinking are insoluble problems, becoming as intimate with them as we can, facing them until we get over our fear. They may even be insoluble, but that does not mean that there is nothing we can do.

Our great-hearted friend will be back as the rain, as the cry of a Raven as the wind. He, you and I have never for one moment not been a part of all it. But we would be doing his life and memory a disservice if we did not extract some wisdom from his choice, which, if we ponder deeply enough, will turn out to be his last gift. He would beg us to pay attention if he could.

* * *

Jake's commentary:

In his commentary on this verse, Nitya writes, “this is a case study in Americanism” (p.476). Pursuing one form after the next and remaining unaware of the treasure under our very pillows we sleep on each night, we are continuously disillusioned with our currently-held illusions and go on mindlessly adopting/discarding external goals empty of content. By expanding on the Guru's verse, Nitya connects what we now live daily with the wisdom presented by the rishis (sages) of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* where the characters Krishna (divine consciousness) and Arjuna (men and women) are part of the ancient human condition we, for the most part in contemporary America, think is so unique about our post-modern progressive culture.

In his verse, the Guru employs the classic Indian metaphor of the chariot, the image-archetype of our lives. The senses/horses draw our body/ego chariots as the mind holds the reins unaware, in most cases, of the Absolute/intellect at hand through which the entire enterprise can be directed to the source for which it was created in the first place—realization. In Arjuna's case (in the *Gita*), life has arranged events to be so baffling and unexplainable to his mind (having friends, family, and enemies on both sides) that he cannot follow through in leading his army into an Armageddon-battle about to commence. He hesitates right on the about-to-be battlefield with armies arrayed all around him so immense they fade into the horizon, and he begins to entertain questions of purpose and value. Turning his attention to his charioteer and long time servant and confidant, Arjuna begins to listen to what the man has to say and slowly begins to realize that this one so very close to him all these years is none other than Krishna himself. The powers of the senses and the mind-ego have led Arjuna to this literal dead-end, and Krishna now begins to teach the young man the one way out of this mess—a journey

articulated in the text of the Gita as the two carry on a conversation that turns out to be the point of the work.

In Nitya's commentary on this verse, the conditions and processes that led to Arjuna's predicament constitute Nitya's text, a general way of living that mirrors our common American lot. In short, the *Gita*, the Guru, and Nitya all take as given Arjuna's human condition as a beginning point, and we have yet to get off the dime.

Nitya opens his commentary by spending several pages reinforcing a fundamental character of our sense-ego mind world. That system, he summarizes, operates autonomously and moves us to alternate always between the dual poles inherent to our senses. Swinging from the divine to the demonic, our lives are essentially out of control unless "you can transcend the duality of this alternation . . . and ride your chariot to the highest form of happiness, the Absolute" (p. 472). Illustrating this given, Nitya narrates a fable drawn from the *Chandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanshads* in which the gods and demons sought to defeat one another as the human was formed. As the senses were created, each camp sought to privilege itself, a conflict that resulted in our capacity to hear, see, taste, etc. sensations both pleasant and repellant. This duality extends to the mind itself where, as John Milton once noted by way of the "lost Arch-Angel" Satan himself as he enters his new demonic kingdom after being driven out of Heaven along with one third of the angels,

Farewell happy Fields

Where joy forever dwells: Hail horrors, hail

Infernal world, and thou proudest Hell

Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings

A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.

The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.

(*Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 249-255)

As Nitya and the Guru have noted elsewhere, we are drawn to pursue happiness as a reflection of the Absolute we seek, but we

do so in a manifest world: “the question is, how do we relate to the supreme Self [while in our body form]? (p.474). In answering that question, Nitya traces the connections between our physical selves and our preceding Absolute state, how the world of the infinite emerges into our being by way of the “four inner organs” . . . “*manas*, the interrogative aspect; *citta*, memory; *buddhi*, reason and intellect, and *ahamkara*, ego” (p. 475). The processes are roughly parallel in our social and ontological evolutions.¹ Emerging from the Infinite at birth, we don’t know we exist and make no distinction between “Prakriti and Parusha, the creative dynamics and the spirit” (p. 475). Citing St. John, Nitya completes the Christian equivalent: “in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” Entering manifestation, we begin to experience the natural/mathematical laws of nature, and events unfold in a more or less pre-planned manner.² At this very early developmental stage our memory resembles instinct more than a history, and the impulses arising in us move us to seek nourishment and comfort without any documented history of ever experiencing them. Nitya cites the Nobel prize-winning physicist Erwin Schrodinger who observed

¹ Ken Wilber’s *Up From Eden* offers a marvelous overview of the notion that ontogeny and philogeny—humankind’s individual and social evolutions—demonstrate “certain similarities in the [two] fields of development and that we are able to individualize schemes of the highest forms of generality which involve all levels of the psyche in its [two] types of development. We also recognize structural plans in the two types of development The whole point is that it should not surprise us at all if, looking back into those tales of dim Eden, we find the faint traces and misty trails of the ever-circling Uroboros, the mysterious serpent of early evolution, standing at the base of human psychology just as it does ontogeny.” (p. 27)

² Sir Charles Sherrington presented a marvelous description of nature’s pre-determined processes in his 1940 study, *Man on his Nature*. One particularly telling example he details concerns the embryonic development of the eye: “As wonders, these things have grown stale through familiarity. This making of this eye out of self-actuated specks, which draw together and multiply and move as if obsessed with one desire, namely, to make the eye-ball. In a few weeks they have done so. Then, their madness over, they sit down and rest, satisfied to be life-long what they have made themselves, and, so to say, wait for death. . . . Whence comes the means and whence the prevision? The eye prepared in darkness for seeing in the daylight world.” (p. 128, 134).

that no one needs to instruct the newborn calf on where to seek the udder or why.

Later, the interrogative aspect of the mind begins functioning and aided by reason establishes the basis necessary for the ego to develop and face the world. For its part, the intellect is that capacity most closely associated with the Absolute and, as Nitya pointed out in his commentary on Verse 68, will come to our aid in our relentless search for happiness however distorted it may be. It is in discriminating among the options available to us that we make errors again and again because for many of us inserted in our American rat race are the demons worked in as the fix from the get-go.

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