

9/9/14  
Verse 73

In one substance there are many,  
and in many things there is one meaning; reasoning thus,  
everything becomes inseparably inclusive in knowledge;  
not all know this great secret.

Free translation:

In one thing there can be many constituents, and many things can be encompassed by one meaning. Thus, when everything is understood by complementary equations, nothing falls outside Knowledge. This secret of all-inclusive Knowledge is not known to all.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Of one thing there could be many, as in many objects  
One single meaning could reside; by such knowing we can know  
Consciousness as inclusive of all, differencelessly;  
This secret ultimate is not given to all to know.

Deb opened the class remembering a time at the old Center for Truth up in Washington that we used to visit with Nitya. One time he brought along two Indian swamis. The Center for Truth was an archetypal hippie commune, which would have been an extremely alien setting for the visitors. Deb noticed how one swami was totally comfortable there and the other was really miserable. She felt it depended on whether he was focused on surface anomalies or was able to look deeper, to the core.

Nitya traveled all over the world and was comfortable with all varieties of humans, because he related to their essence. At the same time all kinds of people were naturally attracted to him because it is a welcome relief to be taken for who you really are

instead of who you appear to be, even if you don't think in those terms.

The theme of this verse is that the unifying factor in all varieties of experience is named knowledge. Narayana Guru's philosophy evolved to where he used arivu—knowledge—as the most appropriate term for what others call God or the Absolute or Nature. Some of us like to call it consciousness, but that has the secondary implication of something polarized with unconsciousness. All these terms, along with the rest of the good attempts: love, harmony, wisdom, and so on, can stand as an expression of unity or be viewed as only one leg of a polarity. There is likely no way out of this verbal paradox. We just have to know that the unified state is here referred to as knowledge. It includes what we know and what we don't know, and yet is much more than their sum:

There is a homogeneity between the world and us, into which we read our meanings. And what is that homogeneous element for everything—for beauty and ugliness, goodness and evil, truth and untruth, kindness and unkindness, and love and hatred? Only your knowledge is common in all these. As aspects of knowledge, they are all equal.

As long as we are focused on one or the other leg of a polarity, our attention is diverted from the totality of knowledge. And while we have been struggling to conceive of wholeness, the very act of struggling pushes us away from it. If we can accept it as our intrinsic nature, it becomes much simpler. As Nitya says:

This uniting of opposites is not anything foreign to you, it's virtually instinctive. You don't put the contending forces of your life side by side as some kind of logical proposition to be brought to unity. It is more as a wholeness into which you plunge, into which you give yourself.

Well, I'd say both aspects are important. We can mitigate our confusion with an intelligent framework of understanding, which provides a platform, so to speak, for diving into the wholeness. Otherwise we may be diving onto a concrete floor or into a garbage dumpster. Or not diving at all.

I think it's helpful to realize that Nitya was addressing two trends in his students. Many of us over-intellectualized our spirituality, but there was a strong counter-current in those days of anti-intellectualism. People's lives were literally falling into ruins because of the belief that thinking about their problems was the *cause* of those problems. While not so noisily proclaimed any more, that belief is still a powerful force among us.

As with all psycho-spiritual ideas, a dynamic tension between these poles is the happy median. While intellectual pretensions are honored in Western-style societies, and so do not lead so obviously to abject disaster, they are often hollow at their core. Their emptiness is the basis of the dissociated psyches that haunt the seemingly well-adjusted members of society, and scream most loudly in the halls of power.

Partial positions—one-legged arguments—can be comfortable enough to keep us trapped forever. The blessing of a wise guru includes urging us to question our comfort zone, so that we can begin to include the vast potential we have forgotten exists. The commentary includes a direct reference:

You should look at your life. See what pinches you, and what gives you a sense of elation. What makes you feel happy, satisfied, content? These are the meanings for you, and the sum of your meanings constitutes your life.

Nitya was thinking, of course, that we were satisfying ourselves with cheap imitation jewelry that far too easily drew our attention away from the vast treasure of rare gems we already possessed. For instance, what on earth is the attraction of bickering and complaining about other people's foibles? It must be strong,

because he was hearing a lot of it. He could easily perceive that it was an ego-defense, a pathetic attempt to divert attention away from the problems people were desperately trying to ignore, but pinched them nevertheless. He knew if we looked at the pinching and understood its motivation, we had a chance to ameliorate the whole miasma. Likewise, those who sung the praises of a new teacher or lover and the next week were on to someone else: if they knew their happiness was based in them and not the other they could remain steadier. Exaggerate less. The endless progression of hyperactive acceptance and rejection could take a vacation.

We don't have to censure the other person before we can be happy. Much of the commentary is a lecture on tolerance. Understanding breeds tolerance and ignorance breeds intolerance. Though ignorance likes to picture itself as wisdom, ignoring the root of the tension does not resolve it. Nitya urges:

What do you do with your compass when the needle is being deflected by a nearby anomaly? Can you tie the needle to some fixed point? No, you cannot. You have to take the deflection into account and compensate for it. You have to accept the diversities of things and the reasons which make them diverse.

Fred noted the similarity between this section and the earlier section on sama and anya (36-41). There is a subtle structure to the whole work that resembles how a symphony is built on a plan, but when we listen we aren't aware it's there. The structure is part of why we are so affected, but we don't have to think, "Oh, now the music's transposed to the subdominant," to feel the joy. Atmo's structure is designed to be imbibed as a whole, and leaving out random parts is like missing segments of the music. The result is somewhat disjointed.

The gurus perceived the structure, and Nataraja Guru occasionally talks about it, but nobody has fully revealed it, to my knowledge. It would be like a course in music theory, useful to experts but maddening to the rest of us. Still, if we count from the end back 36-41 verses, we get 69-74, the section progressively addressing the paradox of the one

and the many. Nitya even talks about the dichotomy in terms of the ego, recalling how sama (sameness) should be gradually extended to annex the anya (otherness). As we know, the Gurukula advocates a healing and opening up of the ego rather than its suppression.

The pattern got me thinking this morning how Atmo begins and ends with the Karu, the core of being. In the first verse it is addressed almost as an outside factor, by bowing and chanting to it, and at the end, after so much transformative effort, it is realized as our very essence: “Neither that, nor this, nor the meaning of existence am I, but existence, consciousness, joy immortal.” The journey from the Self to the Self in Atmopadesa Satakam is so carefully crafted while feeling so freely formed that it leaves me speechless with awe.

Andy was captivated by what he described as an elaborate redefinition of love:

If the supreme value you care for is that which unites everything for the simple reason of what it is—that is love. This love is not the libidinal force of which Freud speaks. It is not even the first pole of love and strife which are seen as two contending forces by Democritus. Probably the word “love” itself is wrong. It can be considered as that harmony which can be brought about by the synthesis of pairs of opposites, like love and strife. Opposites can fall in such a way that they strike a balance, out of which an overarching harmony emerges.

Achieving this “requires a large-heartedness and broad-mindedness, a great empathy and compassion—not just to live and let live, but to have a positive attitude of appreciation and admiration.” The class discussed this in depth, and as always with some new angles, but since we have covered it in many notes already, I’m not going to revisit it now.

I’m sure the gurus would be delighted that recent scientific observations reveal that the experiential unity of who we are is comprised of many different parts of the brain working together in harmony. What appears to be a unified perception of a fixed world

is a conglomeration in which most or all of the disparate parts of the brain are at work all the time. I gave the familiar example of reading, where one area of the brain recognizes the shapes of letters, another the first letters of a word, another whole words, yet another the relations between words, and another their relation in a sentence. Their meaning arises from all of them being coordinated without any central locus, which is why reading well is such a major achievement. So even neurologically we are a unity that incorporates multiplicity. They are not even two separate things. The one and the many are intrinsic to each other's existence, one thing described in two ways.

Susan told us of an interesting organization that teaches parents how to handle their children by putting a little ear bud in their ear so that experts behind a one-way mirror can give them suggestions in the moment. Andy drily commented that we already have an ear bud, but didn't elaborate. I think he meant that we are already experts, but we have shut off the connection, so we have to turn to outside "experts" to bail us out. This is such a legacy of the Judeo-Christian mindset! We are not okay, but others can make us okay if we listen to them. The thought that God or another expert is looking over our shoulder and judging our behavior is incredibly inhibiting. If a parent listened instead to their love for their child, they wouldn't need advice at all. I ruefully admit that if their love has been trampled to death, then they need help wherever they can find it. I'm sure that's what those experts are offering. What we should get out from under is the assumption of our own inadequacy. If we are healthy, we are already an expert.

Our hope and purpose for holding classes at all is to reconnect people with their inner "expertise" so they can act optimally. There can be no fixed definition of what this means: it is lived out in (the probably misnamed) real time. We meet contingencies and are given the opportunity to engage our whole being in response. Our failures should spur us to open up more, to dig deeper for our self-confidence, rather than give up. But we live in a world where the message is you are not okay, you need Jesus or Ayn Rand or Buddha or the three-minute manager, or...? What you really need is your Self, and you are already

it. The greatest of all jokes is that this whole explosive hubbub we are caught up in depends on us being kept in ignorance of this one central truth. Until you get the joke, though, it is not so easy to laugh.

So let's have a humorous footnote. When I finished rereading the text last week, I was blissed out on the insights in it and sent it out with a quick note that this was more proof that *That Alone* was the greatest book of the twentieth century. I felt I was being rather modest not including some other centuries along with it. Yet I had just read:

Look at our wonderful world, with so many various kinds of climates, wildlife and vegetation; and people of different cultures, histories and languages, filled with myths and legends of all sorts. There are so many gifted writers, poets, storytellers, playwrights, actors, musicians, artists and philosophers, all full of wisdom and absurdity. Is it possible for you to pick out of this vast ensemble one person or one philosophy or one piece of music and say it is the best and is the only truth? Of course, fanatics do that, but if you are sensible you cannot.

Well okay, it makes me look stupid, but I can still think of *That Alone* as the best, so long as I don't claim it is the only truth, which of course I don't. I'm not a fanatic, and I love many, many slices of life. Fiction books are a separate category that cannot be compared with it. The twentieth century has some stunning works of fiction that generate immense joy and insight without any obvious plan, more like a symphony than non-fiction can perhaps ever be. In any case, I hope you'll all laugh at me rather than jumping up and down in a rage at what a fool I am. After all, I agree with you! It took me years to stop jumping up and down in horror at my own absurdities, so that the shy creature within could begin to dare to come outside now and then.

Like the man says: not everyone knows this great secret. The understatement of the century? I'd say so.

Part II

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

We live in a situation of one and the many. When you become self-conscious you feel like one placed in the midst of many. The many may look strange and even scary. When you are in a new environment the consciousness of the other is very intense. In such a context you instinctively want to defend yourself and you may either want to withdraw into your own shell or look for emergency exits through which to flee in case a contingency arises. In a strange environment you will look for a sign of friendship, such as a greeting smile, an outstretched hand to receive you or a kind word of inquiry. When this happens you brighten up and try to establish a bond with the person who symbolizes the goodwill of the new environment or the society to which you are a stranger. Spontaneously there manifests a bridge between hearts to reciprocate friendship. You don't need to hang on to your "I" and call the other person "you." You can now bracket yourself with the other and say "we." If in this new environment your new friend introduces you to ten others who are his friends, the love and confidence he kindles and nourishes will flow toward all the other ten. Thus you now have a bigger circle of familiar social space to own as "ours." How does this transformation come to you and to the people involved with you? To answer this question we must look into the meaning of whatever we have experienced.

Let us now take another situation. You are not in a strange place, but in a cosy room of your own secure home. You have no problems with your neighbours or any member of your family. You are left to yourself. In such a situation everything other than you seems to blend into one single harmonious whole. In the middle of this passive infinity you sit smoldering as if the person within you had split into many entities, each with a different voice and no common interest to bind them together. In this case, the one has changed into many. The solid "I" has dissipated into many fragments, like a crowd of heterogeneous elements, which you



want to reunite into a solid “I.” Thus, the problem of one and the many can arise in so many ways. Philosophers of all times have given their best attention to this.

In Plato’s Republic, Socrates speaks to Glaucon of the one in the many and the many in the one as follows:

We predicate ‘to be’ of many beautiful things and many good things, saying of them severally that they are and so define them in our speech: And again, we speak of a self—beautiful and of a good that is only and merely good, and so, in the case of all the things that we then posited as many, we turn about and posit each as a single idea or aspect, assuming it to be a unity and call it that which each really is.\*

Again, in the dialogue with Parmenides, Parmenides calls Socrates’ attention to the many that partake in the one:

I accept that, said Socrates, and I have no doubt it is as you say. But tell me this. Do you not recognize that there exists, just by itself, a form of likeness and again another contrary form, unlikeness itself, and that of these two forms you and I and all the things we speak of as ‘many’ come to partake? Also, that things which come to partake of likeness come to be alike in that respect and just insofar as they do come to partake of it, and those that come to partake of unlikeness come to be unlike, while those which come to partake of both come to be both? Even if all things come to partake of both, contrary as they are, and by having a share in both are at once like and unlike one another, what is there surprising in that? If one could point to things which are simply ‘alike’ and ‘unlike’ proving to be unlike or alike, that no doubt would be a portent, but when things which have a share in both are shown to have both characters, I see nothing strange in that, Zeno, nor yet in a proof that all things are one by having a share in unity and at the same time many by sharing in plurality. But if anyone can

prove that what is simply unity itself is many or that plurality itself is one, then I shall begin to be surprised.\*\*

In chapter IX (14, 15) of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says:

Always singing praises of Me, ever striving, firm in vows and saluting Me devotedly, they are ever-united in worshipful attendance;

Others also, sacrificing with the wisdom-sacrifice, unitively, dualistically, as also in many ways facing universally everywhere, worshipfully attend on Me.

All shades of value appreciation, ranging from the most negative, such as boredom, frustration, intense physical pain or mental agony, to a neutral state of evenness of mind and to the highest form of bliss or ecstasy, come in one single scale of gradation which is called ananda. This value appreciation is called artha. Artha means wealth and meaning. Wealth is meaningful only when its appropriate use becomes relevant to a situation. An appropriate meaning depends on many factors, such as time, space, and interrelationship between things. The problem of one and the many is most relevant in discerning the many.

We look for values such as good health, sound mind, command of language, dexterity of action, and power to assert and accomplish. These and many other values can come like spokes in a wheel and be united in one and the same person. All these become appropriate values only if their union within the individual makes him happy.

In the present verse, the Guru speaks of the one meaning in the many things and the many meanings in one thing. To live this unity with a full appreciation of all the varieties of differences that constitute any life situation, a discipline that can continually harmonize all pairs of opposites is needed. Music is a good example of striking harmony.

Narayana Guru visualizes an inseparable inclusiveness, in which the one and the many can be harmonized. When a person attains this unity he recognizes the one fatherhood of God, the one motherhood of nature, the one brotherhood of all sentient beings, and the whole world as his country.

\* Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, Bollingen, 1973, p. 742

\*\* Ibid. p. 923.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE dialectics of the one and the many, as elaborated in Plato's *Parmenides*, is the subject-matter of this verse.

We know that the same philosophical problem comes back in scholastic philosophy in the form of the relation between genus and species. The discussions have been so fruitless that scholastic hair-splitting has become proverbially held up to ridicule because of such so-called logic-chopping.

Even to this day, however, the dialectics implied in the question is not seen by usual textbook logicians like Bain, while Bradley may be said to have an inkling of this two-sided approach to the link between the one and the many. In India this two-way approach finds mention even in the *Rig Veda* (X, viii. 58-2), and in the *Bhagavad Gita* (IX. 15) which refers to *ekatva* (one-ness) and *prithaktva* (separate plurality) as pertaining to the same central truth of the Absolute.

The idea of unity depends on the notion of multiplicity, which is its inevitable dialectical counterpart. When the one and the many cancel out there is the numinous value called the Absolute. The conclusion of the passage in Plato's '*Parmenides*' reads as follows:

‘Let this much be said; and further let us affirm what seems to be the truth, that, whether one is or is not, one and the others in relation to themselves and one another, all of them in every way are and are not, and appear to be and appear not to be.’ (18)

The statement in the last of the verse here to the extremely secret or subtle nature of this question is thus justified.

If we should reduce the truth of this metaphysical subtlety into common parlance we could think of a garden with peach or mango trees of the same kind and age. The knowledge of one tree would apply to all trees and thus justify the statement, ‘Of one thing there could be many’ and conversely each peach or mango tree, irrespective of vertical differences through the seasons, when in different months it is without leaves or with flowers only, as seen clearly with cherry or peach trees in Europe; and also, in spite of horizontal differences due to location and minute individual details of an incidental nature (such as what distinguishes the finger-print of a Peter from those of a Paul) - conforms in principle to an archetypal pattern or model of a tree in terms of inner consciousness, where meanings of meanings have their being. ‘In many objects one single meaning could thus reside’ as the verse states in the second instance.

When we admit that the notions of the one and the many are dialectically interdependent in this manner, we can go one step further and generalise that ‘consciousness’ is ‘inclusive of all differencelessly’, where one and the many merge in the unity of the Absolute. Contemplative insight is required to penetrate into this secret of secrets, as the Guru takes care to warn the reader. At least such knowledge is not common to all.

(18) P. 87, ‘Dialogues of Plato’, Vol. II, translated by B. Jowett, Random House, New York, 1937.

## Part III

This morning I was posting the links to Sraddha's Youtube videos of Nitya talking about Chattampi Swami on my website: <http://scotteitsworth.tripod.com/id2.html> , and I happened on an old article I wrote back in the late 1980s, likely updated about 10 years ago. It's a nice example of the impact of dialectical thinking, and struck me as worthy of inclusion in these notes. I imagine you can guess who the professor in question is!

### Wealth and Poverty

If you keep an open mind, occasionally you learn something new. Once, many years ago, I was taking a class from a wise old Indian philosopher. Everyone in the class shared at least one common belief: that America was fabulously rich and India untouchably poor. (This was back in the Seventies, before Reagan's revolution has in fact bankrupted the country.) At one point during the lecture this fellow said, "America is a very poor country, while India is incredibly rich." The statement shocked us to the point of outrage. What could this guy be talking about?!

"In America, you have so much money and material goods," he went on. "But your attitude is one of extreme poverty. You all hold out your hands and cry and whine that you don't have enough, that no one is doing anything for 'me, me, me.' You are like the worst kinds of beggars. No amount of material opulence will satisfy you." We shifted uncomfortably in our seats—perhaps a lot of us matched that description. Many of us were always complaining without helping, taking without giving, filled with unwarranted desperation for...what? We were like lost children trapped in adult bodies, still crying for their parents to come and comfort them.

"In India we have few material goods, but we are nonetheless rich. If you are hungry, the poorest person will share his last crust

of bread with you. So many people will offer you a place to sleep, clothes to wear; they will walk with you to show you to your destination. They don't ask if you're a member of a particular sect or religion or political party, they deal with you as a human being. Their arms are always open in trust and friendship, no matter whether they have a lot or a little to give. That is real wealth. That is how truly rich people behave." Many of us hung our heads in shame. Right there a resolve was born in us to change our attitudes, to replace our impoverished sense of ourselves with an outlook of calm contentment and fearlessness—in other words, of psychological wealth. Looking back to that class, I see it as a most important step in gaining maturity, in becoming an adult in the actual sense, as opposed to what passes for adulthood in our manifestly immature society.

"Many of you are standing there holding out your cup and crying and begging to have it filled. But grace is showering us on all sides. The universe is fabulously rich. The problem is that you are holding your cup upside down. You have only to turn your cup upright, and the many blessings this life is filled with will fill it to the brim over and over again. Thank you." The professor strode off the stage, leaving us rooted to our chairs, pondering and pondering again.

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Jake's commentary:

In verse 73, the Guru and Nitya delve into a condition we all live with/in during our stay in the world of becoming. The contradictions we constantly encounter between the one and the many as we move through our awake/dream lives means that our ontological certainty vacillates between our awareness of being an isolated one and of being many entities within one. In so doing, we point to that which constitutes the essence of our own values, the one commonality informing what we seek as meaning.

This paradoxical condition, writes Nitya, has been a philosophical “problem” for centuries. As he frames this dilemma he asks us to look both outward and inward. As an isolated body, we sense ourselves as that isolated body, as separate, and are constantly defending ourselves from and/or connecting to others we can share our worlds with. On the other hand is our interior reality that at first appears as a whole One but soon loses that integrity the more we examine it. Our “I” dissipates into many separate elements. “Your memories walk around like ghosts and your desires take centre stage one after the other” (p. 509). In both cases, then, we look for a unity so necessary for us to incorporate others into it and at the same time to accept them as part of that wholeness.

The question, continues Nitya, turns on an examination of what we value, a search which leads directly to that which constitutes happiness. We all assign values to experiences, but none of us share the same list. Variations are infinite, but these differences apply to experiences or things, or people on whom we have projected happiness. Our *I*, the enjoyer, is the common element in all cases, and in each one reference to that which “I enjoy” or “I dislike” will direct me to the name I’ve applied to the form. The thing itself is nominal, but the impulse, happiness, is a universal one—a knowing of “the homogeneity between the world and us, into which we read our meanings” (p. 513). In this balance is the nature of what we seek as happiness, “the supreme value you care for is that which unites everything for the simple reason of what it is” (p. 514). Nitya first labels this force “love” but then modifies the term and uses *harmony* and *balance* as more accurately descriptive.

In this commentary, Nitya echoes Plotinus’ second century thoughts on the One and the Many and marries them to later notions of our holonic universe. Systems nested within systems from the molecular to the stellar, the cosmos is a dynamic balance from the chemical to the social to the stellar, and it is that balance itself which makes the manifest out of its diversities.

In his *The Perennial Tradition*, Aldous Huxley notes what happens when the harmony in any system breaks down. A failure, such as lung cancer in the human body system—or acts of violence for the social holon—creates a ripple effect throughout the system thereby killing the innocent body part along with the offending lungs in the first example or breaking down the society in the latter. In these rather common cases, the innocent and the guilty suffer equally as nature is thrown out of balance.

“This uniting of opposites is not anything foreign to you,” writes Nitya, “it’s virtually instinctive. You don’t put the contending forces of your life side by side as some kind of logical proposition to be brought to unity. It is more of a wholeness into which you plunge, into which you give yourself” (p. 514).