

9/16/14
Verse 74

Innumerable particles of dust inhere in earth,
and there is no difference in the earth that constitutes the particles;
just as inert matter exists in consciousness, consciousness finds its
expression
here in the body; therefore, when contemplated, this is one.

Free translation:

In the earth there are innumerable particles, and in each particle there is a world of the same earth-principle. Just as the body is conceptually envisioned by consciousness, consciousness is articulated by the body. When carefully considered, these are not two different things.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Particles there are innumerable in a world
As within such a particle a world too abides;
The inert merges thus in the mind-stuff, as the mind-stuff too
Within the body; thus, on thought they are One.

It's hard to imagine a better description of the indescribable than this. Well, it's more than a description; there is an extra dimension here. Ideally in going through it, you have to try to visualize the thrill of sitting at the feet of a guru, whose words are vividly coming alive in your mind. You don't get that experience by mere reading. There is a contemplative way of perusing the text that takes you to another level. Of course, a living guru provides a significant part of the energy of the ideas, and no book can offer that, no matter what they claim. By there is much we can activate by sinking deep into meditation and going over the material in that state of mind. Sitting in class (or with a friend) provides the additional opportunity to listen with eyes closed as it is read out. That way the words can go very deep, beyond the surface level of visually analyzing them on the page.

The pattern of the morning talks that became *That Alone* was often to begin at a level of agreement with ideas that are familiar and indisputable, then draw increasingly refined implications leading to uplifting, transformative conclusions. You can see that pattern here very clearly. After a selective review of what we've learned, one or two new elements or angles are added. Then practical examples are aimed at several of the class participants, without specifically naming them. The intense concentration of listening to the guru, along with the pervasive sense of ecstasy in the room, was capable of opening our minds to an oceanic awareness. Or at least a good-sized pond of awareness. The climax here came in this paragraph, spoken with long pauses for us to sink into each sentence and each pole of the dichotomies presented:

When you sit in meditation and slowly absorb yourself into your own silence, the world disappears. Your own physical attributes disappear. In one sense you are gathering everything together into your own center. At the same time you are extending yourself within your consciousness in an unbounded, limitless expansion. The next moment some need of the body or a social pressure can bring you back instantly to the world of name and form. Then your consciousness seems so small. It is a finite flickering within you, like a shimmering spark which is visible...not visible...experienced...not experienced...known...not known. The wonder that makes consciousness so expansive as to include everything, and so diminished it becomes less, even, than a faintly glowing spark, gives us an inkling of the ground to which we belong.

Meditating on this made it perfectly clear that we were sitting solidly on the ground of our own being as a very tangible reality. Meanwhile the polarities—based here on the overarching division of inert matter and consciousness—were seen as externalities, floating in the mind's eye like a mirage. Some time you can try reading the verse that way, or at least this climactic paragraph.

It is possible to read all the verses this way, and get a lot more out of them. That's the value of a second or third reading. The first time through, there are so many wonderful ideas that a fast reading is perfectly justified.

Eugene talked about an important idea we may not have raised before. He's realized that expecting the study to "do" something is all wrong. Instead, it's about aligning your transactional orientation with your core values, and this takes time. The idea is to strike roots in our authentic being, something we have to do for ourselves: it can't be done for us. Our culture is so attuned to have things done *to* us, that even this simple point is radical enough. Most newcomers to our class spend a little time with it, nothing obvious happens, and they go off wondering why anyone was silly enough to bother with it. They never realize they've unconsciously declined an invitation to the dance.

Eugene's thoughts reminded me of my first time through the Hundred Verses. I was full of all kinds of expectations myself, and I anticipated something magical happening when we got to Verse 100. The last class was a titanic anticlimax for me! Which became a lesson in itself. Only gradually did I realize that the verses weren't leading anywhere—we were already there. I suppose my expectations helped keep me diligently focused to a degree, but they also kept me distracted from some of the value of what was utterly present every day. Luckily for me, Nitya's assurance that we learn despite ourselves turned out to be very true. Because this point became a major focus of the discussion, I want to reprise the end of Verse 65, where Nitya was summing up our adventure together:

This was certainly a wonderful experience for all of us to gather in the mornings and sit together and commune. Not all the days were alike, and everything you heard might not have been so inspiring, but here and there something must have gone deep into you. That little bit which strikes home, that makes a flicker of recognition and continues to shimmer in us, is enough to give us some direction in life. There is no need to learn each verse and then rationally apply it in everyday life. You can even hear it and forget it. Forgetting means it only goes deeper into you. Once you have heard it, it will go and work its way by itself.

The effect will be very subtle. It comes almost without you knowing that it is something which you heard that is enabling you to see things in a new light or make resolutions in a certain more helpful way. Nothing is ever lost. Even this very peace that comes to our mind during these verses is so penetrating that we feel the depth of the soul, the Self. It is indescribable. The indistinct part of it is as beautiful as the distinct. In a Chinese painting most of it is indistinct, but this does not make it in any way less valuable than a realistic photograph.

Anyway Eugene, while loving That Alone dearly, has treated the class like a hot tub that's way too hot. Meaning, you can dip your toes in for a short time, but then you have to get away and cool off for a while. Now it seems he senses the excessive heat isn't in the tub, it's in the bags he's carrying, and he's experimenting with putting those down and leaving them at the gate. Cool!

Eugene was amused by a New Yorker cartoon, showing a homeless man standing on the street holding a cardboard sign to beg alms. Such people are ubiquitous in America these days. The sign reads, FOLLOWED MY BLISS, and it raises an important question. The idea of sannyasa, renunciation, is to surrender your ego to a greater reality, and is often tritely described as following your bliss. It sounds good, but the problem is there has to be a connection with a deeper motivation than just personal preference, because the ego is in charge of what we think is going to be blissful, in other words, our likes and dislikes. When the unexamined idea of following your bliss merely gives the ego free reign, the result is frequently disastrous. For those of us who cannot extricate ourselves from the domination of our egos, a modified interpretation is essential, one like what is described in this verse as a unification of analysis and synthesis, or say of being and becoming. Trying and not trying. As Nitya has often advised, we have to know how the game is played, so we aren't played for a fool. Yet we still need to know how to let go, too.

The level of everyday realities is poetically described by Narayana Guru here as dust motes blowing in the wind. Elsewhere we've had grains of sand and so on. Nitya succinctly outlines the healthy balance we need to strike:

When we cater to the necessities of life at a surface level, keeping ourselves busy with the motes, we must also keep our feet planted firmly on that stable ground. It's like a tree having its roots deep in the unknown, out of which its sustenance flows. The water and minerals and whatever the tree needs enter through this invisible network in precisely the way in which the tree can make use of them. Like that you should have your own roots in the ground of the Absolute, while the inner nourishment you receive, like the tree's, is kept well hidden from the public gaze.

There is a widespread belief among the disaffected that just going into the roots and ignoring the aboveground (public) part of our personal tree is enough. What it really amounts to is an overcompensation for the "normal" life we are assaulted with on all sides, where the roots are not even acknowledged to exist. It seems like we're engineering an escape from a hostile world, but unless done with expertise, the necessities of life are not transcended, and they can be even more severely constraining when ignored. It is worthwhile for most of us to learn how to deal with them effectively, leaving us less fettered to explore our roots in earnest.

In a way Jake has the opposite problem as the cartoon hobo: he is feeling frustrated with the wordy way he has been wrestling with *That Alone*. He has an academic background, and is bumping up against the limitations of that orientation. Analysis is valuable, but only up to a point, Nitya addresses it adroitly here:

When a great Guru speaks of unity, it's not a unity you arrive at through equations. Physicists know that all forms of matter are basically one energy, but that does not necessarily make them wise. What they have is only information about the theory of unity. If they were actually grounded in that unity, they would experience it differently. They would witness modulations arising out of the one substance, and the infinite becoming extended in terms of the finite, with consciousness assuming the modes of the extended forms. Through and through they would be experiencing the absolute togetherness of the dual aspects of

the All. Then they would be what is known in Sanskrit as *visva mitra*, a friend of the world, or *vasistha*, one who dwells in all as a dear value, rather than mere academics.

Frustration at its best is the feeling of resistance we notice as we peel off layers of conditioning and strive to change our direction. We wish it was easy, but it seldom is. It can also mean we are forging ahead in the wrong direction, certainly, but that's not Jake's problem. The roots of academic detachment go very deep and are culturally reinforced, so they don't give up without a struggle. There is much of value in them, after all. But once you intuit that there is more to the game than what meets the eye, it is frustrating to try to squeeze yourself into that inadequate framework. There is a kind of leap involved. We are perfectly capable of making the leap, except that so many voices—both inner and outer—are calling out “Don't do it!” In fact, if we didn't hold ourself back, it wouldn't be a leap at all. I think Nitya puts this perfectly in a couple of places in his commentary, including this:

Like many dust particles making one clod of earth, we can put ideas together to make a world of ideas. By knowing many particles of dust we can build an edifice with them by piling brick upon brick, so to speak. We can also pile argument on top of argument to build up theories. But there is a limit beyond which we cannot go with our senses. The area where they operate has a boundary. The area where the mind operates is also limited. It has its frontier too.

So part of our experience lies in our sensory perception and part in our mental conception—thought processes, reasoning and so on. Beyond these frontiers is a greater reality which cannot be reached with the mind or the senses. When you look at it in this way, the ground seems far removed, obscure and unknown. But the fact that the ground is actually within the mote, within your sensations and your reasoning, shows it to be nearer than the near. This is why the Isavasya Upanishad says, “It is farther than the farthest and yet nearer than the nearest.” It is the most external, yet nothing is more internal. What fills the inside and the outside is that reality alone.

The point of this study is to become dwellers in our own ground of being. Like strangers in a strange land, we have been exiled from our own native place. It is very heartening for Eugene to tell us that he is more and more drawn to his innate wisdom, that his inexplicable love for the subject has percolated into him enough to where he recognizes there are valuable changes taking place. And he is willing to respond to the call.

Each of us has our roots in the Absolute, no matter what we may believe. The roots do not depend on what we think, fortunately, or else we would have been cut off from them long ago. Many of us are like trees looking around and declaiming, "I don't see no stinkin' roots!" Or else we think our roots should be over there somewhere, and we have to go and cultivate them in a special place. We could instead just accept that we are always nourished by our cosmic roots, and whatever we do expresses that nourishment. Once again, the world is not a mistake to be eradicated, but a magnificent triumph to be celebrated. The ground of the Absolute is called *bhu*, earth, in this verse. Nitya reminds us we already have our links in place to it, and the dust motes are the ineffable expressions of its manifestation:

If the poet is the *bhu*, the words she writes are the *poti*, the dust. If the artist is the *bhu*, every stroke of the brush is the *poti*. If the philosopher is the *bhu*, every idea expressed through him becomes a finite mote as it is brought forth. Poets all over the world get the same symbolic vision, the same allegoric language, inspiration of the same order. With the roots of their souls they touch the life-giving water of the spirit, expressing motes of wonder out of the Absolute substance.

It just so happened that our poet in residence, Debbie, had a pair of appropriate poems handy to read to us as we settled into our ground, easing away from the analytic and into the mystic:

The Ten Thousand Things

An old house shuttered against use,
boots caked with dust, the powder of earth.

The smell of dust, dry and hot,
mixed with ripening sweat from work.

Our clothes dust-covered, a faint odor
like memories murmuring in the shade.

Dust fills the air, rising and falling
in the afternoon sun, small worlds brushed from fingertips.

* * *

white orchid

waxy petals unfurl slowly against the tropical earth pale insects
burrow in
drawn by fragrance escaping molecule by molecule through
soft loam
surrounding the tendril of whitened stem piercing soil
branching off
a flower then another creeping underground this life unseen
unheeded
above ground our life drawing sustenance from the dark
explosion

* * *

There we are, dust and earth, two things that are yet one. When the unitive earth dries out and becomes fragmented, it turns into dust particles that fly around for a spell. When they return to earth they merge back into the totality. We are invited to cherish each mote as we live it, but are advised to

never forget the ground on which the dance of maya takes place. Nitya's closing thoughts made for an excellent meditation:

When you attend to the nearly infinite number of finite motes, each in its own way gives you an experience of pain or pleasure. When you attend to your own ground, it is a deeper experience than what you have on the surface. It is a serene joy. Within it you are self-contained. There is no duality of 'I' and the 'other'. It is like returning to one's real home. It is one's own beingness.

This is not a mere philosophical state. It is a very rich experience, full of love. There is an all-filling grace and benevolence permeating it. The Lord's Prayer says: "Thy kingdom come...on Earth as it is in Heaven." There is an actualization or realization of that prayer in this experience. It can truly be said all glory and power belong to it.

Part II

Nitya carried the bliss of his morning prophecy particularly nicely into this chapter of *Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:*

The relation between a particle of dust and the whole earth symbolizes the relation between our peripheral life and its infinite basis. At the surface level, our senses and mind are encountered by many specific entities and each such encounter changes into a miniature world as, fully or partially, it occupies our interest for the time being. Each such world can be compared to a particle of dust. Every particle has its rightful place in the whole. Similarly, even a triviality has its niche in the general edifice of life.

In its sensual or social pursuits, mind comes to a satiation point, or a point of boredom or frustration, and it recoils again and again to its own depth in search of the meaning or worth of life. This is the returning from the dust to the universal ground. Great masters who were well established in this ground, such as Vasiùña, Vålmañki, Vyàsa, Buddha, Yàjnavalkya, Christ, Muhammad and Narayana Guru, relied entirely on the free flow of

wisdom that came from the one common ground of all, to which they gave different names such as Paramàtman, Narayana, Purushottama, Tattatah, âtman or Brahman, God, Allah, and Arivu or knowledge. All were fully conversant with the Absolute, its attributes, and the innumerable modes that come into manifestation and disappear on the surface of consciousness.

When the mind is identified with the attributes of the modes it has little chance to be conversant with the ground. Like the root that nourishes a tree, the light of the Absolute arises out of the ocean of the unconscious as a blazing island of pure resplendence, life sap flows into the veins like the sweet elixir of immortality, mind's inertial sloth changes into the jubilation of inspired visions, and the woes of a lifetime disappear like a mist in the flood of sunlight. Such moments of blessedness are lived by everyone at least for a short period of time. This is a recurring experience for poets, musicians, artists and contemplatives.

It is part of the physical condition that its modes fall into harmony, become imbalanced and jolted, and go into periodic states of inertia. This aspect of nature's phenomenality has full sway over the world of finitude, the world of dust. The modes and their attributes, being part of the extension and the illumination of the primordial substance, come into union again and again with their own ground. Religious seekers of truth think of this favour as a divine grace and remove all the egoistic obstructions of the conscious self to receive this communion which comes from within. Jesus Christ describes this as brides who, burning their midnight lamps, keep their vigil for the arrival of the unpredictable Beloved. The mystic lives in the nuptial chamber of his divine Beloved, and in this union the duality of the speck of dust and the universal ground is abolished.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary is once again superb:

THE same subtle dialectics implied in the relation between the one and the many which was epistemologically considered in the previous verse is now taken up again in its ontological implications. The material world consists of particles as known to

modern particle physics, which, between the expanding universe of astronomy and the quantum world of nuclear physics, has come to recognize a subtle reciprocity of correspondence as between the micro- and macrocosms. The big universe and the universe of particles which behave as if they were little systems of their own, are familiar features of the modern idea of the nature of the physical world. In fact what is called physical now admits what used to be called mental, and what is mental has absorbed within its boundaries what was once outside its scope. Cybernetics and semantics are branches of modern science which participate both ways by subtle reciprocal ambivalent links which are neither mental nor material. Matter and mind have to be viewed in the light of a 'neutral monism' or of a 'psycho-physics' by which, instead of being two distinctive relatives of different orders, they belong to one and the same epistemological basis. Fechner may be said to represent this philosophical school of psycho-physics in the West, and Russell, James and even Bergson, who solves the paradoxes of a Zeno and a Parmenides by a modern scientific methodology of his own, also belongs to this neutral ground of motion, both brute and pure, which meet in his 'motor schemes'. Modern mathematical physics has notions of space and time united under the concept of a common field.

The Sanskrit word 'jada' is the opposite of 'ajada'. Heaviness, inertia, lack of any initiative, discrimination or will to guide itself—these make up the dark, material aspect whose attributes have to be conceived philosophically together before its living contrast with what is called chit, which is its counterpart, is also similarly visualized as a factor in the subtle two-limbed equation here involved. We have translated the word 'chit' by 'mind-stuff' as affording the nearest point of contact for the natural insertion of mind into matter or vice-versa. The word 'chit', as used in Vedanta, specifically refers to that aspect of clear consciousness that is capable of entering into some bipolar relation with an outside object.

In the last two lines of the present verse, the body (udal) is said to be comprised within mind-stuff (chit) and vice-versa. The reciprocity, complementarity, or mutual cancellability between conjugates such as time and space are notions beginning to be acceptable even to modern physicists. The macrocosmos might be said to comprise the microcosmos or vice-versa. Modern cosmologists at least would not be shocked by the postulation of such a possibility. Dialectical methodology is becoming more and more acceptable to scientific thinkers.

Here the Guru adopts a thorough-going epistemological and methodological standpoint. Textbooks like the Vedanta Paribhasha, although they seem to have use for pramanas (means of knowledge) such as the pratyaksha (direct perception) in common with materialists who rely on this first of all pramanas, take care that there is first established a common epistemological basis for the two, matter and mind, to meet on common ground. The methodology and epistemology proper to contemplative science, which belongs to the context of absolute wisdom, has to be elaborated in detail only hereafter. The Guru here anticipates a unified science wherein mind and matter could reciprocally comprise each other on neutral ground.

Part III

Jake's commentary:

Verse 74 and Nitya's commentary on it speak directly to the issue of epistemology and how our implicit assumptions concerning it determine for us, largely out of awareness, much of what we assume we are deciding. In the American experience, two examples (in very broad terms) can help, I think, illustrate in a reverse way the Guru's message: American fundamentalists and academic scientists. Both place final authority outside the Self

and both have institutionalized processes built on that principle in order to justify, at length, the validity of a rarified separated deity or the “common-sense” authority of the sense/mind.

In his commentary on verse 74, Nitya spells out precisely how both of these camps miss the mark. The error is in the unexamined/assumed premise essential to both, that our perceptions/thoughts can be accurate only if they are purified through a common consensus we are to seek out and privilege. (As a corollary, both factions are also dedicated to preaching their positions via rationalizations and concepts—all manner of mental exercise.)

In his opening few paragraphs, Nitya reverses ground on both avenues of thought by referencing Christ, Buddha, Narayana Guru, and others as all possessing an air of certainty and authority borne of their familiarity with and their living in the Absolute as they occupy the manifest. Beginning with that knowing, they conduct no experiments and “are not eager to prove anything” (p. 516). In his verse, the Guru defines that which comprises our world of becoming as particles (motes) that arise out of the infinite and assume forms and shapes. The mind then manipulates concepts arising from the senses and its own manufactured concepts: “we can also pile argument on top of argument to build up theories” (p. 517). The mind, however, meets a limit where it runs into the infinite out of which manifestation arises, “a greater reality which cannot be reached with the mind or the senses.” This inherent conditional contradiction, writes Nitya, does not affect our Absolute consciousness, which remains unconscious (for us) as it evolves into shape and form. The two are inexorably combined, and our projecting onto the Absolute merely mirrors for us that which we wish to see because we are caught in our own senses/mind world. “What is above as particles is finite and discernable. Within the substance there is a vast scope of attributes, and the very discernability of these attributes makes the ground indiscernable” (p.518). The existence of that ground—Absolute, God, Brahma, (fill in any place-holder word)—the mind

cannot prove or disprove because of the very structure of the totality, a wholeness our American scientists and fundamentalists fail to perceive as they continue to quarrel.

Nitya goes on to cite the Guru who was once asked how he had become so learned. Earlier intuited by our Nineteenth-Century American Vedantist, Emerson,¹ Nitya answers as follows “First everything came to me as one knowledge, and afterwards I found it is also written in books or discussed by people” (p. 518). In the world of necessity our minds pay attention to the particular. By the same token, writes Nitya, we need to “keep our feet planted firmly on the stable ground [of the Absolute].” Jesus, continues Nitya, often demonstrated this whole position as he often moved off to be alone after being very much socially involved. Living in and experiencing both domains, he concludes, is not the same as reading about them or making academic study of them. Knowing demands direct perception, more often than not requiring of us some sort of meditative discipline. And that requirement also, in turn, necessitates our turning inward where the truth is “farther than the farthest and yet nearer than the nearest.”

¹ “In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our own spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.” (Emerson, “Self-Reliance, p. 149, *Selected Essays*)