

9/30/14
Verse 76

As countless grains of sand ceaselessly blown onto
the surface of a pond generate ripple after ripple,
by untruths successively blown,
the inner self is transformed from within into various forms.

Free translation:

As sand in a wasteland is ceaselessly blown by gusts of wind,
which disturbs the surface of a pond and makes it increasingly
shallow, the sands of untruth are continuously disfiguring
consciousness, and the inner self is cluttered with multifarious
forms.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

As with a well with measureless sand dropping ceaselessly,
Whereon wafting tier on tier, fitful gusts prevail,
So too, to the waftings of untruth's hierarchy exposed
Inwardly does the Inner Self multitudinous forms attain.

One of the reasons I'm so fond of this verse is that it is a totally original, very complex metaphor. Many of the images in the Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction are upgraded classics: familiar analogies with a piquant sprinkling of additional insight added. This analogy stands out for its uniqueness, which is why I used it in the introduction to describe the whole book, picturing Narayana Guru sitting next to one of these ponds in deep meditation. Those who have been to the tip of India can easily visualize the setting, the almost otherworldly and untrammled landscape where the Guru spent his years of retreat. One of the marks of a true seer is the ability to perceive meaning in everything they encounter. Here Narayana Guru charges a visible scene with profound instruction,

and invites us to enlighten ourselves. I'll clip in the first few pages of the Introduction for additional atmosphere in Part III, in case you don't have it handy.

During the original class I suspect Nitya was sometimes saying "motes" when we recorded "modes." D and T are nearly reversed from us in Indian languages, as are P and B. Modes can be considering general grouping of motes. It sounds to me as if motes were what was meant here, much of the time, yet I wound up using modes. I meditated long and hard on each instance during the editorial process, and I'm convinced there is no ideal solution. We can conjure both ideas throughout this section.

The motes of dust in Verse 74 have here become the grains of sand having their impact on our sequestered personal puddle, and the oceanic water element of Verse 75 has morphed into that same personal pond. They are artfully brought together in the present image. Sand is dirt, and it clouds the water that begins in us as close to pristine as anything could be.

It doesn't do any good to pretend the grains of sand don't exist, that they blow into other people's ponds but we are immune. Many of us in the original class were proud of our invulnerability, and Nitya wanted to knock us out of our smugness. He addressed us directly, with his patented gentle ferocity:

You have to consider this analogy as representing the events in your daily life. You are at the mercy of the world in which you are placed; extraneous things over which you have no control are creeping into your mind from all sides. You are not any special being. You can't be a state within a state, you are just part of the whole. Your world is full of horizontal winds that affect your equanimity: the actions of people and what they say about you, natural events and disasters, good and bad news, radios, television and all manner of public media. There is more than enough to disturb you, wherever you are. This is all the sand blown in to bring chaos to the serene surface of your personal pond.

If it were only a surface phenomenon you could say it was essentially harmless, but there is more to it than that. Whatever has caused the disturbance settles in to clog up the water. After blowing horizontally, the sand falls vertically down into the very depths of your life. First it affects your surface consciousness, then the water where your thoughts, ideas and emotions are, and then it sinks to the very bottom. The bottom is what has already been formed in you as your samskaras or the reactions through which you have built up your personality traits, innate dispositions and consolidated memory. Though it is invisible, this terrain of the very bottom is affected from moment to moment by the detritus that sifts down from our conscious experience. You can never remain precisely the same. You are not totally changed, but something is happening. Each day you are subtly different. You are still carrying all the previous sediments of your life, but something has been added and the contour of the terrain has changed. It changes day by day.

Deb talked about how in high school and college you try to understand your place in the world by coming into contact with lots of new ideas and a wide variety of people. While admirable enough, it tends to become a habitual distraction, and our ground gets obscured by all the busyness. We need to maintain a clear connection with our inner being much more than we need a big fan to blow lots of sand into ourselves.

She's right: in our society the more sand the better, and there's a big fan for sale down at the corner. Yet even if we downplay it we can't just do away with sand, it blows in regardless of our attitude. The trick is to learn how to cope with it and not be undone by its impact.

Extra intense verses like this one were always my favorites. We are normally well defended if someone wants to offer a correction to us, but with a teacher or guru we trust we can allow ourselves to open up and receive what they suggest. The intensity

of talks like this one drives the ideas beyond our ego defenses, and instead of desperately resisting we can allow it to press into our watery depths. It can serve like the radioactive trigger of a nuclear device, which is driven into the core to set off the explosion. If it doesn't go in just right, nothing happens.

Unfortunately, even when we desire liberation as an idea, when the intensity builds we almost can't help resisting being liberated. I love Freud's analogy of the patient who pushes the dentist away when he approaches his mouth with his pliers. It's an instinctive reaction we have very little control over. That's part of the value of an extended study like this one: bit by bit we drop our guard, laying the groundwork for a breakthrough. We know we are going to resist, so we learn to hold back and quell our instinctive fears.

And why should we bother to have our psychic teeth pulled? Why not try to feel good all the time? We can see any number of sad souls for whom that didn't work very well at all. Nitya only hints at the extent of the tragedy:

If you take only this life and look at what has happened from your birth to the present, there are a number of memories you are not very happy with. Certain inner formations you are not very willing to own. Some people even feel guilty and ashamed about this. They are afraid they cannot hide their inner terrain from the public, and that society might reject them if others saw the kinds of formations they have. There comes a fear of rejection which can lead to pathological cases. This is a very sad state at the end of the process the Guru is describing. Is it possible for us to avoid it?

“Pathological cases” is putting it mildly.

We have been taught to pay total attention to the sand grains swirling around in our surface consciousness, and ignore the rest. They seem so important, so immediate! The depth and the topography of the bottom are out of sight, so they seem like

products of mere metaphysical speculation. We can easily ignore them, and are encouraged to do so by everyone around us. Instead we fixate on the blowing, swirling sand, not realizing the damage it can cause our psyches. Nitya ratchets up the intensity to try to bring us to our senses:

Like the word ‘fire’ that represents fire but is not it, and the word ‘sugar’ which has nothing to do with sugar, the so-called love, so-called compassion, and all the other conceptual things we live in social life, are only false images. In themselves they have no value, but as they are false images you can use them to exploit each other. They become an accumulation of trash in which you live blindly.

The commentary presents a passionate call to discriminate between the conceptual version of spirituality and its real basis. I remember Nitya talking about how when he was a new and enthusiastic advocate of Narayana Guru’s philosophy, lots of people were coming to him with their problems. He took them very seriously—took them to heart, as it’s called—and soon his health began to decline. He became seriously, chronically ill. Then he realized that it was the way he was relating to all the poison people were bringing to him for disposal. He was taking it from them and holding onto it. He decided it should be “God’s problem,” not his, and developed a technique for passing whatever was brought to him right through his body to the divine. Of course it’s just a matter of framing, but his health began to improve. He was still being compassionate, but he was now also dispassionate. In place of intentionally being compassionate, he was the embodiment of compassion. It made a world of difference. This is how he means for us to step out of our egotistical programs, no matter how admirable, and convert to an absolutist attitude.

In the same vein, Deb related how our daughter Emily, who works to help uplift young women in oppressive circumstances, is constantly hearing about discouraging and depressing problems

from her clients. She says, “What does it help them or me to get negative about it?” She knows if she can stay in a happy and grounded place, it is much better for everyone. She is not such a saint as to reside unruffled by the agony around her, it takes hard work. But she does it, because the alternative is too awful.

Paul and Andy talked about their observations that trying to do good can go far wrong, as with misguided compassion. Andy attributed this to the fixing of a plan or program grounded in an ideology. Once your steps become inflexible, disaster looms. The blowing sand is capable of turning to concrete if allowed to settle.

We have recently been visiting prisons with some friends who help the inmates, and Andy was asked by one of the prisoners, “When I say that I feel like I’m no longer in prison, what does that mean to you?” Many of them feel gratefully liberated from the oppression of prison when they are doing the programs brought in by concerned citizens. The question got Andy pondering the roles we all are stuck in. In prison, your role is screwed into you with the most terrible finality. There is no chance of escape. Roles, then, are socially devised imprisoning patterns. For those who have failed badly in society and been caught, they are sometimes necessary. Possibly we all need them for a while, to varying degrees, but then we need to learn to go beyond them too.

I added that we all have an absolute core that is the source of our freedom—hell, it *is* our freedom. If we base our notions of freedom on outside factors they will always be in peril. In prison there is no immediate lure in the outside world. Prisoners can have major incentive to seek freedom in themselves if they know it is possible. On the other hand, we on the outside can delude ourselves endlessly with new diversions. I often think of Nitya’s opening line when he spoke at the infamous San Quentin prison, that instantly got everyone’s attention: “We are all in prison.”

Nitya talks about the *anrita parampara*, the endless procession of deceptive imagery that assaults us. The grains of sand keep swirling, sometimes in beautiful patterns and sometimes in painfully sharp bursts. Our water grows fairly clear at times and

then silts up again. We can falsely imagine that the patterns are leading us to salvation, if we can only part ways with the past. It's just like the history of scientific research, where last year's beliefs are rejected while the new ones look like pure gold. This skewed perception is called maya, and Nitya introduces it here in a most memorable paragraph:

You always think the last was wrong but the next is right. When you are deceived, you make up your mind not to be deceived again, but you do not know how you are caught. Maya knows her business. It is not the first time she has done it. She has been doing it forever.

We are caught by having mistaken images for what the images purport to represent. The thing-in-itself is the absolute value of our world, but we cannot know it through our interpretive mechanisms. The least we can do is reject the falsehood of our images. By reflection we can break their hold, and this allows us to sink naturally into our depths. Because we *are* the Absolute, it isn't that it is barred from us, only that we bar ourselves. We bar it by being fascinated with the superficial, the mediocre metaphors of previous speculators. These may satisfy us as long as we believe they are the whole story, but now we know better. Narayana Guru's metaphor allowed Nitya to put the possibility of breakthrough in such simple terms that we might even be able to take the advice:

What is in the other person that is lovable? And what is in you that loves? If you see the ground of it, it is the one Absolute. But that ground is now covered by sediments from the continuous dropping of dirt, or anrita. You have to dive very deep and break through the built up deposits to arrive at your original state. The surface of the pond is your consciousness, just into the water is the subconscious state, and the dark terrain you cannot see from the surface is where your incipient memories are lying. Beneath those incipient memories is your

real ground. If you can reach that real ground you can see the higher values such as love, justice, compassion and truth in their most pristine and pure form.

Susan reported just such a breakthrough. These last few verses have convinced her that she has been driven by a pressing need to always be right, and that was causing her no end of misery. If she was right no matter what—if she was the Absolute through and through—what did she need to prove? I think she will write about this, so I'll leave it to her, but the class took it to heart. It was an important step in the right direction.

Andy agreed that being right is utterly captivating, and being sure you are right is a characteristic of ideologies. You hold your position sacred, and don't dare to change, even when it is called for. It reminded me that instead of being truthful, we often make up plausible stories to fit our preexisting ideology. The belief precedes the perception. That's exactly what keeps us bound.

To me, a couple of important reasons we insist on being right are perfect examples of how samskaric sand has altered the terrain of our pond bottom. As children, many of us were spanked or otherwise humiliated for doing something “wrong,” even if it was unintentional or beyond our youthful ken. The pain we felt caused us to devise strategies to stop being considered wrong; in other words, we developed an intense passion for being right. This is one of the deepest samskaric stalagmites there is. Later, mainly in our schooling, we were told repeatedly that getting answers right was the key to success in life, and that wrong answers were tantamount to throwing our lives away. For some the pressure was overwhelming, some less so, but in the modern world this pressure is ubiquitous. And because these beliefs are so commonplace, we don't even notice them. Beyond that, we don't notice how we twist our lives to appear to be always right. We routinely make up stories to cover our tracks, dissimulate, divert, and protest our innocence, all the while praising truth to the rooftops. And we hardly notice the discomfort it causes us—it's just the “normal”

state of a human being. Yet if we can give up that unnecessary drive to defend ourselves, we'll notice a tremendous feeling of relief, accompanied by a freeing up of our options.

It's not easy. I related a time about ten years ago when I went through an amazing period of my life falling apart. I was barraged with accusations from all sides, true, false and irrelevant, and was forced to accept them all. My urge to resist was tempered by long apprenticeship with Nitya, but it still was very strong. I never realized how deep my need to be seen as a decent human being was. It was incredibly difficult to admit to everything, false and utterly demeaning accusations most of all, and give up the urge to defend myself. But doing so actually launched me into a new state of being. Still, I wonder if anyone would ever take the leap if they weren't forced to. It's a very painful transition, like being born again. Only much later can I be grateful for having gone through it.

The problems we meet in this verse only yield to a dialectical solution. They cannot be resolved in a linear fashion, because truth and untruth are always intermixed. If we lean on one side, the other rises in response. When we asked Prabu when he first arrived what he liked about the Gurukula ideals, he said right off that the dialectical approach drew him to it. It appeals to us intuitively. We knew immediately he had come to an appropriate place.

While we have downplayed any purification rites in this study, it is nonetheless part and parcel of sane living. The trick is to not make it into an ego program, but merely the natural outgrowth of a healthy attitude. I just got a note from John, talking about the next verse, that is totally appropriate here: "It make sense to me that by subtracting all the knowable that you get to the unknown and get to know it. But even if I label it Zero - or nothingness - am I not in danger of somehow putting more knowable back into the unknowable than might belong there?" That's just right. Let it be. We can't force it, nor can we sit idle. Defining it changes it into something else. Finding the neutral ground in the midst of the swirling dualities of life is a high art form, and a challenge we intend to rise to.

The closing paragraphs made for a knitting together of all the tumultuous ideas of the verse, so beautifully addressed in our dedicated communal search:

You can meditate on your own self as a wayside pond. You should be a very sacred reservoir of wisdom, but instead the way of the world is such that you are like a neglected pond, and every gust of wind from the public media, school, university, church or home is blowing into you and filling you up with garbage. See all the rubbish that has accumulated so far!

But it's not quite all rubbish. Here and there you will also find some precious stones amid the trash: a heap of rubbish, then a pearl; another heap of rubbish, but then a diamond. There are some people who are successful in burning away all the trash and gathering together their pearls and diamonds to make an inside which is rich and beautiful. You can work that way on yourself.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

We think that our inner self is a private possession secretly guarded in the confinement of our heart. In fact, nothing is more exposed to the caprices of the outside world than our sensitive inner self. In this verse the Guru compares our inner self to a neglected pond in the middle of a wasteland where sandstorms are common. The wind blows, continuously whipping up sand from all sides to disturb the tranquil limpid water. Several patterns of ripples arise on the water's surface and distort all the reflected images. Further, the same sand, after polluting the water by making it murky, sinks to the bottom and changes the formation of the terrain. Thus, continuous affection comes to the terrain, to the water and to the surface; or in other words, to the ground, the content and the mode.

The sandstorms to which we are exposed are the many phenomenal items that come to us as the perceptual images of what we see and the conceptual images of the words we hear or read. Everything we see, touch, smell, taste and hear affects our consciousness and causes reactions of love, hatred or indifference. Consequently, we experience pulls of attraction or repulsion. These correspond to the everchanging checkered patterns the ripples make on the surface of the pond. The murkiness of the water corresponds to our changing moods and the mud that settles on the bottom, altering the pattern of the terrain with deposits of one layer upon another, is the conditioning. This in Sanskrit is called samskara. The samskara of a previous life, or the innate disposition with which we are born, is called vasana. Vasana itself is a superimposition of ignorance on the Self.

Rousseau says that when seeds germinate their shoots grow vertically. Later, horizontal winds blow and bend their stems, making them grow into crooked trees, or force creepers to entwine upon them. In our social life we are exposed to the horizontal pressures of society, and that distorts our nature. We become arrogant and assertive, or else submissive and dependent.

If the phenomenal wind is false, why do we not refuse to be affected by what we see and hear? Maya is not false altogether. It is both true and untrue. Love is true and attachment is false. Truth is real and appearance is deceptive. Compassion is valuable, but it can make a person vain or it can be used as a cover to exploit another. Beauty is goodness, but sensual attraction can be a trap. Thus, all higher values have their counterfeits. We realize our mistake only after we experience the deception. It is hard to keep away from affections.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE process by which the transparent and pure factors that originally made up what is called the ‘inner self’ or atma of man, as given to contemplation, is transformed from its original purity and unity into multiplicity, and its degradation to gross indigence in its spiritual status, is here pictured by the Guru through the analogy of a neglected well such as one sees on the coastal regions of Kerala. The horizontal gusts of wind prevail eternally, and the process of sanding-up of the original water is to be thought of as eternally happening from the bottom of the water from inside and upward. On the other side the limpid transparency of the water that was once present is perhaps to be treated as also far removed in time. Whether water is still present or not in the well is not important to the analogy, whose purpose is to reveal the operation of the factors that destroy the transparency of the original waters and keep making it opaque or translucent.

The two factors involved are: one of truth that helps the participation of mind with matter; and the other of falsehood which is a contrary wind which counters the possibility of their participation. The operation of these two factors, eternally and together, results in the multiplicity that life presents to the non-philosophical mind.

‘Measureless sand’ is referred to here as against small installments of sand, so that the reader may not have the impression that the process has a beginning and is to be visualized as a mere phenomenal fact of the outer world. The purpose of the analogy would be best served only when the picture and the process it portrays are fitted correctly into the structural philosophical background where they are to be operative. Similarly the hierarchy of untruth here referred to would suggest the co-existence of truth with falsehood for all time, instead of coming into force suddenly. Wisdom has always by its side its own enemy in the form of nescience.

If one is light the other is darkness or smoke. This second negative factor has been compared to smoke in a flame, the dust on a mirror, or to the amnion and the allantois that cover the foetus. In the Bhagavad Gita a high absolutist status has been conferred on this negative factor, which is there described as having the form of desire ('kama-rupa') and which is further alluded to as nitya-vairi (eternal enemy) of the wise. (Gita, III. 39). This is a clear recognition of the horizontal factor operative at the very core of the Absolute Self.

The horizontal gust of ever-wafting winds here, blowing untruth against the interests of the transparent waters of the well, is the same factor. Both vertical and horizontal factors operate on the Self at one and the same time. This is neither strictly an event nor a process, but has to be understood philosophically as both, with all its subtle dynamic and static implications. Human life touches here the philosophical paradox of the one and the many, and the other possible paradoxes of the big and the small or the material and the spiritual - all of which are implied in this transparency or opacity through which matter and spirit participate.

The participation of mind and matter has been a metaphysical problem that has uniformly agitated minds of all countries through the ages. In India itself, Vedanta has its schools of Advaita, Visishta-advaita and Dvaita (non-duality, qualified non-duality and duality), which have between them contributed so many volumes of polemical literature of the most hair-splitting order that the discussion itself is sometimes considered sterile and useless. The Upanishads contain hints of this subtle participation, sometimes referring to it as the bridge that gulfs immortality or as the double road that links and permits the two-way traffic between two great cities.

There is an ambivalent osmosis of plus and minus involved here which requires much insight to grasp. To help in such an

understanding the Guru here resorts to the analogy of the clear waters of the well that gradually get sanded-up by adverse winds of falsehoods. Imagination and insight have to fill in the gaps to make the picture living and complete.

Part III

From Deb:

The distraction that can fill up our lives reminded me of a contemporary media class I took in college. The teacher was talking about how we have access to so much information that simply knowing about something makes us feel as if we are doing something, though that is certainly not the case. In fact, it's as if more information leads to less participation. And this was in 1968! Long before that proliferation of constant news, always available information and screens, screens everywhere. It is something to remember when we are given choices. What will stabilize us, lead us to a deeper, personal understanding? And what will be an endless tangent?

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More on the image from the beginning of the Introduction to That Alone:

A thin, intense-looking man sat quietly next to a small pond near the southern tip of India. The man's legs were crossed in lotus pose and his body remained quiet, but his thoughts were intense and penetrating. A bright sun shone brilliantly on the surface of the water, and each tiny wave carried a burning image of the solar disk on its crest. The pond was alive with the dancing, shimmering wavelets, undulating hypnotically in a way that would have mesmerized anyone less wakeful.

The soil in this region is sandy in all directions, to the south and west joining the shore of the Arabian Sea with a barely noticeable break. Palms and scrub undergrowth grow sparsely in the desert soil, twisted by heat and prevailing winds. At the foot of the nearby mountains, increased nutrients allow the jungle to grow more thickly, while the tropical climate favors an exuberant outburst of life. Vines cover the trees, epiphytes blossom on every branch, and insects swarm in profusion. Snakes, many of them poisonous, lie camouflaged in branches fallen to the ground.

As the day wore on a light breeze sprang up, and sand and dust sifted onto the pool's surface. The man watched carefully as the dirt slowly sank into the crystalline water, swirling downwards as myriad speckles of light, until lost in the darkness of the depths. He knew that in time the little lake would fill totally with sand, becoming as dry and barren as much of the land around it, but that the wind would also scour out a new hollow in a new location which the monsoon rains could fill up in turn.

As the young man critically studied the scene the depth of his contemplation intensified. The wind sang through the vine laden trees nearby. The multiple sun-images gradually merged together, increasing the light to a dazzling degree. Suddenly, like a dam giving way, his awareness was flooded with insight rushing upon insight, and he was enveloped in a gloriously all-embracing happiness. In the face of such meaningful brilliance, the best he could imagine doing was to incline in reverent adulation of the source of all this wonder.

Deep in his state of blissful contemplation, the man's mind reeled with the implications of the scene before him. Not a single insight, but a full flood of them prevailed on all sides, filling his whole being with understanding. The wayside pond became a perfect image of humanity's eternal situation. Whatever elements were present in the surrounding world, the winds blew them into the pond. This meant that if an individual self was likened to a neglected pond in a waste land, the winds bringing in dust from the surroundings represented the forces of nature or maya presenting

perceptual and conceptual material. Each of these sensory forces affects consciousness by producing some kind of reaction, as an agitation of the surface. By its very presence the material affects the clarity of the water, and as it sinks to the bottom its accumulation alters the terrain in the same way that samskaras condition the individual, by slowly changing its shape.

To the blissful meditator the one sun above clearly represented the Absolute, the giver of all light and life which remains unaffected by the rotation of the earth, cloud activity, storms, or any other terrestrial phenomenon. This was the Self with a capital 'S'. The multiple images reflected by each separate wave, mirror, dewdrop, or other surface on the earth below were like the endless parade of changing individuals, selves with a small 's'. Each of these images reflected the true sun in a beautiful and uniquely distorted manner. When the pond was still the images grew more and more perfect, though no one would be so foolish as to mistake even the most perfect of them for the sun itself. When wind rippled the surface the images became increasingly agitated, until at their most extreme the image of the sun was entirely obscured. But no amount of clouding or evaporation had even the most negligible effect on the sun above. It was exactly like the individual self's relation to the Self: close and harmonious in moments of peace, farther from sight as one became more agitated.

The man, of course, was Narayana Guru, and just such a profound realization came to him as he sat alone in the wilds of South India. Through him the fruits of his revelation would begin to spread out in ripples of wisdom which would eventually benefit the whole world. But first he had to allow the inner principle that was instructing him to increase his understanding as much as possible.

Like a grand book, the whole universe is a symbolic expression of higher truth, and the guru principle is a name for the beautiful way in which this truth reveals itself to the seeker. For Narayana Guru the world of nature around him was the medium of this invisible wisdom transmission, so that everywhere he looked

what he saw was full of meaning. The vines climbing into the trees spoke of the pattern of our lives where the accretions of memories slowly choke and submerge our original form. The red hot ember of a stick from a cooking fire being twirled around to produce virtual images became an analogy for the course of our lives, with its bright, moving spark of the present leaving a virtual aftereffect in shapes in memory. Spinning oil lamps hanging in the dark of a simple place of worship spoke to him of the inner structure of the human body. Waves rolling in to the shore whispered of individual existences sweeping across the depths of the Real. Each grain of sand became for him a precious jewel of value beyond price. He was overwhelmed by intense happiness and gratitude for this oceanic awareness, and knew he must share it with anyone who might also wish to embrace it. The time of teaching was not far in the future.

Sitting quietly in the midst of this flood of meaningful images, the Guru began to formulate a new and revolutionary philosophy. While the prevailing belief of most of humanity is that this world is either unreal or merely a practice ground for a future life in another place, he knew from inner assurance that this was the whole, and it was many times over more than enough. That Absolute, which everyone spoke of in different ways, was itself manifesting as all This. Everything was here, at this very moment. But when it was conceived of as having a specific form, people tended to forget the original mold from which it came—its Karu—and focus only on the form. This led to arguments and disputes. But those who remembered the source had no need to quarrel, they were content to know and share their knowledge.

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Jake's commentary:

In the third paragraph of his commentary on verse 76, Nitya boils it down to one sentence: "In this verse we are dealing with

untruth in practice” (p. 531). And as he goes on to spell out what he means in that claim he once again follows the Guru’s water metaphor informing the verse itself. In this case, the subject is a pond (our selves) which various winds assault constantly. They blow all manner of pollution onto its surface, clouding its purity in the process as sediment eventually settles to the bottom where it acts to alter that which is already there. Like the pond, we have little control over whatever life throws at us, but if we can stay aware of our position and of our continuous changing because of it we have an opportunity to combine realization and our immanent lives. The untruth Nitya speaks of in his key sentence is the out-of-awareness compounded effects of the world’s onslaughts—in terms of vasanas and samskaras—that fool us into accepting chaos and cyclical darkness as real.

As Nitya continues his exploration, he moves away from the water image and into the human condition by equating the pond’s impurities with our individual constructions, words and concepts, that we accept as representing reality. As Kant made so clear centuries ago, we can never know the thing in itself, but that lack of certitude does not prevent us from making up words about it. Taken as a position generally, our never-ending use of language to construct our worlds is so pervasive that by and large that reality goes unnoticed, however much the fact remains that words are always metaphors of our own design. What happens, writes Nitya, is that the tail comes to wag the dog: “the words you speak, the words you hear and even the words you think come to control your life from morning to night. . . . So you are living in a world that is false through and through” (p. 531).

Language certainly is useful for our getting along in the world of necessity, but when that position completely blocks our vision and obscures truth, we end up embracing words and concepts as the only reality, lost in maya’s dance (stirred up water). Buddhists and Vedantists, writes Nitya, have differences as to how one can avoid this trap, but they like everyone else face this perennial condition. In any case, by designating the Self as

real or by recognizing maya and by knowing yourself as not that, you may arrive at that balance of awareness required for stability and non-attachment.

In practical terms, dealing with the untruth of maya demands a clarity of mind that can distinguish between what *is* true from what *ought to* be true as it is word-constructed. In this distinction, the realized Self can and often does assume a position frowned upon by word/phrase constructed societies embedded in samsara. But, as Nitya repeats, maya is untrue and unstable where we run up against its word-crafted demands to conform to its expectations. And for this condition Nitya counsels us to “let it be” (p 534).

In illustrating his advice, Nitya offers examples that reveal how “maya goes about her business” as concerns the core principle all of us live and on which we construct much of what we call “relationships”: love. The seminal error, he writes, lies in our socially (word) constructed definition of the term. In the name of love, compassion, justice, goodness, and so on, we often go about conducting ourselves according to maya’s relation-definition of the phrases. Firmly tethered to the notion of *contract*, love (and the others) becomes a quid pro quo arrangement to be measured according to what we will receive for whatever we provide. Narrowed to specific people, for instance, love becomes the chain of obligation that is so very popular on contemporary daytime television. Nitya offers the example of a young man who had written him about his losing his job and his obligation to provide somehow for his aging parents, “three sisters and two brothers” (p. 534). He “should,” that is, provide for them and was asking Nitya for advice about how to do so. Nitya points out that the young man was never consulted in the first place when any of these people were born and, as an adult, has responsibility for himself only (and for any dependent children he may be responsible for). At a certain point of maturity, however, the child assumes a self-responsibility. Human culture, continues Nitya, endlessly creates “should” obligations where none exist in the first place. A blizzard of words obscure *is* from *ought*, and, in Nitya’s illustration, results

in the young man's constructing a ladder of obligations on a word-manufactured non-existent contractual foundation. In fact, says Nitya, "huge tomes full of words have been written to confuse people" who after reading them suffer all the more because they can see how they don't measure up (p. 535).

As Nitya continues, he presents a more specific discussion of the distinction between love and attachment. As he has pointed out in earlier commentaries, love "is your realization of oneness with the Absolute" (p.536). Attachment masquerades as love when the notion of *all* disappears and attention gets narrowed to one person or thing. From there, the convention that "one cannot live without the other" blooms full force along with its dark sibling—one's loss of control precisely because of the attachment: you made me love you.

Words are the stuff of maya; the map replaces the territory as we spin in a world of *should* only occasionally related to *is*. That condition, concludes Nitya, our cloudy pools of Self constantly assaulted by wind gusts, does not suggest that truth values do not exist hidden from view: "it's not quite all rubbish" (p. 547). "There are some people who are successful in burning away all the trash and gathering together their pearls and diamonds to make an inside which is rich and beautiful. You can work that way on yourself" (p. 538).

Part IV

Susan made good on her promise to elaborate, and demonstrates how we can grow from playing a game as much as a session with a therapist, if we are alert. In fact, we can grow everywhere in every situation:

Hi Scott.

Here is what I wrote about being right. It feels like a beginning — very interesting to explore.

The root of needing to be right is possibly shame from early years. Where does that start? We come into the world without shame or self-consciousness but just like Eve and Adam in the garden, at a certain point we hide our true selves because we are ashamed. If we don't hide our true selves they are left open to possible ridicule (and as time goes on, we have taken that ridicule so much to heart that we ridicule ourselves as we imagine or anticipate criticism). I can remember very clearly the underpinnings of my compulsion to hide Susan. There were harsh words and punishments when I did things wrong or made mistakes – – these included everything from grammatical errors, bad manners, “back talking,” accidentally breaking things, accidentally spilling things, interrupting, talking too much or at the wrong time. I got this from my parents and from the grandparents on both sides. The message was clearly be good, be positive, and smile. Don't have or express anger or sadness – – this is unacceptable. So I was ashamed of my anger, sadness, questions. Somehow I still maintained a bit of exuberance – – my true self – – the pure, flowing, crystal clear water of my ground. I know my family loved me and that is huge. But they did not know how much their corrections were smothering my confidence and equanimity. To reinforce my feelings of shame, my relatives were complementary if I was good and kind and smiling and well mannered. I liked that good feedback and I was a master at getting it. The more I was good, the more I suppose extreme it was if I made a mistake or if some fault or failure leaked through the veneer. Then I would be punished or reprimanded and I remember the hot shame and the conversation I would have with myself in which I would say, “Never again!” Never again will I expose myself to this shame. I need to be right and do everything right. I need to be very careful. I need to stop taking risks. But is that where it starts? The need to do everything for oneself and not ask for help starts there. The need to not seem ignorant starts there. I guess the need to not appear wrong starts there.

Through my work with you and our class I have whittled away at this compulsion to be right. Mostly I have noticed it. I have noticed how I tend to get defensive if I am exposed. My contrived walls are heavily defended. As a Taurus, I am also very stubborn so that doesn't help.

More recently, this need to be right has been thoroughly shaken by playing the game of bridge. Three years ago some friends and I started getting together on Sundays to teach ourselves how to play. We're still at it and much improved, thanks to some classes on the side and a few better players joining our group. I love the game more and more and now play Wednesdays too, with friends who have played much longer than I have. Despite my enthusiasm, bridge is a real challenge for me. My brain is not naturally suited to the logic and remembering and thinking many plays ahead that are required. Only time and about 10,000 hands of Bridge will help me but I persist. As a result, I open myself to critiques and analysis not only from others but also for myself. Every time I start a hand, I'm taking a risk of sorts. It's amazing how realizing that I just played the wrong card sends me right back into the skin of little Susan. I feel the shame. I am embarrassed. I don't want to be seen as stupid, wrong, unthinking. After each hand we analyze how it went and that can be harsh. But vital. That's the learning part. Some people aren't kind about their critiques but I've learned it isn't meant to be demeaning. It helps to have supportive friends to play with. I still hate to look like an idiot when I play wrong card but I can let it go most of the time. The advantage of Bridge is that you just have to keep going. I can't get defensive or mired in self-loathing too long because there's always another hand.

Aum,
Susan