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Verse 8

Enjoying the five fruits, such as beauty,  
mounted on a foul-smelling gun and evasively flying back and  
forth  
are five birds; having brought them down, through an inversion,  
that radiant inner awareness should fill one's entire being.

Nataraja Guru's:

Eating of the five fruits such as light and so on,  
Perched on a shot-gun foul-smelling, ever in wily changeful sport,  
Such, the birds five, in shreds, what can bring down,  
Wielding such a lucid form, let the inner self brilliant become.

While the book version of Verse 8 has some very important ideas, we turned to the last of the “original” verses, because it is truly spectacular. Nitya had always tried to be a kind of conduit for Nataraja Guru and Narayana Guru's wisdom, and you can almost sense it rising to a new level in the course of this talk. He starts out giving definitions and analysis, and ends up in an exalted state, like a true prophet, bringing home the exact sense of what must have been Narayana Guru's intent: to have us invert our entire outlook and by doing so release the imprisoned splendor of our own light.

Deb hardly dared to say anything after we sat in silence for a spell. How do you add to something that's already perfect? But in the magic circle of a dynamic group we eventually found a few crevices in the monument to make our explorations.

The first was that the birds aren't killed; our relationship to them is inverted. Many spiritual programs are exceedingly hostile to the world of sense impressions. Because of our associations with those ideas, we may believe that the birds are to be wiped out, blasted out of existence. But they are merely to be “brought down.” They are moving from being *out there* and of primary importance to being *in here* and of secondary status. Nitya's

explanation of this is perhaps the most transcendent part of his talk:

When the fool thinks everything is his, it is the ego which is fantasizing. When you transcend, everything is again yours, but there is a real difference. In transcendence the I-consciousness is merged with the cosmic consciousness, supreme consciousness, transcendental consciousness. Then there is no I. Instead of you wanting to possess the whole world, you allow the totality to possess you. You are not enjoying now, you are the enjoyment. The enjoyer, the enjoyment, and the object of enjoyment have now all become one in the supreme reality. You are completely at rest, totally at peace with yourself and the rest of the world.

This reminded me of a rampant consumer motto in the US: “He who dies with the most toys wins.” People here do not consider this a bad joke; they take it for gospel. Since it’s open-ended, the fact that you are never satisfied with all your “toys” does not convince you that the pursuit of them is ridiculous, it just means you don’t have enough of them yet. It seems like such a stupid trap, and yet it is the logical outcome of becoming mesmerized by the play of vibrations on your sensory apparatus. It’s a disease that’s very easy to catch.

The gun analogy underscores the intensity we have to bring to our search if we want to make any real changes. We are all professionals at window dressing, at fixing up our appearance to impress others. That’s another game that can absorb us for a lifetime, while never touching the emptiness that motivates it. We have to tear ourselves away from these evasive games and peer into the depths. Yet nothing is lost in the process. As Nitya says, “This is not a kill-joy. This is a magical way of changing everything transient into the eternal.”

Paradoxically shooting down the birds brings us back to life, then, revives us from our somnolence. Jan sent an amazing letter

showing how this works in real life, and I will append it as Part III. It well deserves to stand alone. Don't miss it!

Bill reminded us that the image of shooting the birds is not about a destruction of the senses, but about seeing their source. The Self is the focus of the inversion.

Moni added that the birds stand for the mind going from one interest to the other, leading us away from our center. The teaching is not about killing the mind but taming it.

The inversion in question is actually a re-version. Early in life we surrendered our autonomy and projected it into the outer world. That was our first inversion. It couldn't be helped, and it does work for awhile. Only when it stops feeding us adequately do we consider reverting to our true self, where we treat the birds as pale reflections of who we are, and instead turn to the bright light within our hearts.

This sounds hopelessly abstract until you do it, and then the Self is instantly recognized as much more real than our projections ever were. The fact that it seems abstract tempts us to abandon the quest and submit to our terrible fate. Narayana Guru knew exactly that this is the moment in our transformative process when we have to stand firm and take a brave decision. Once our pent up joy is released, wild horses couldn't keep us away from our Self any longer.

Michael felt that our earlier study of Patanjali helped him make sense of this verse. He compared the inversion of the evasive birds with the cessation of mental modifications that Patanjali treats as the goal of yoga. That's right on target. In both cases we are turning to a deeper source of inspiration to guide our footsteps. Michael added that the idea that our personality is an artificial interface with the "bird world" has helped him let go of his fixed and outmoded self-identity and open up, and that has led to a major improvement in his relationships with his family and friends, not to mention his own self.

Deb read out a brilliant poem by William Stafford, to reinforce what Michael had said:

## An Archival Print

God snaps your picture—don't look away—  
this room right now, your face tilted  
exactly as it is before you can think  
or control it. Go ahead, let it betray  
all the secret emergencies and still hold  
that partial disguise you call your character.

Even your lip, they say, the way it curves  
or doesn't, or can't decide, will deliver  
bales of evidence. The camera, wide open,  
stands ready; the exposure is thirty-five years  
or so—after that you have become  
whatever the veneer is, all the way through.

Now you want to explain. Your mother  
was a certain—how to express it?—*influence*.  
Yes. And your father, whatever he was,  
you couldn't change that. No. And your town  
of course had its limits. Go on, keep talking—  
Hold it. Don't move. That's you forever.

Deb then read out a part of the book version that is about as  
perfect a summation of the “personality predicament” as I have  
ever seen:

The operation of the moral authority of the superego is a kind  
of mirroring within oneself of a fake image of public  
expectations. One then tries to conform to the requirements of  
that pattern with continuous deliberation, while at the same  
time indulging in a secretive enjoyment of forbidden pleasures,  
privately painting them with altruistic motives to look as bright  
and acceptable as possible. The ethical considerations of trying

to please both oneself and the public are as enigmatic as the Sphinx. The kind of morality upheld by that kind of attitude is what Henri Bergson describes as “closed and static.” It is opposed to the morality of an Absolutist, which is both open and dynamic.

We should always keep in mind that this course is on the Self. Don mentioned after class that the subject is “absolute Self interest.” That doesn’t mean we become absolutely selfish. The idea is that we turn our interest away from trivialities to the Absolute Self, which is interesting enough to wean us away from the tangents we very likely have been pursuing. I reiterated that we are not here to solve anyone else's problems until we sort out our own. We are attracted to and distracted by other people’s issues, and become a greater or lesser menace if we try to solve them before we have adequately addressed our own. In any case, this That Alone study is the part of life where we step back and try to understand our personal predicament in the light of a very wise and compassionate philosophy. It is not about giving up anything, but only transforming it to a more realistic basis.

For Bobby, a central theme of this study is creativity. Where does creativity come from, and how do we foster it? He was intrigued by Nitya’s sentence, “Either you can be on the playground as one of the many players acting out their role, or you can be the supreme witness who is governing the whole game.” We talked about how if you try to manipulate situations it pushes you into the position of being one player among many. To be the unmoved mover, the supreme witness means remaining open to the demands of the situation and responding to them. Bobby told us about his becoming a businessman, which he is quite naturally suited to. When people enter adulthood they have to decide whether to be employed by others or be an employer themselves. Bobby quickly realized he was not content with letting others direct his footsteps. Certain decisions seemed obvious to him, and

he followed those and wound up with his own successful business, which gives him a lot more room to express his creativity.

Bobby had always been accorded a large measure of freedom as a child, with supportive parents and a safe environment to explore. It helped him develop into a confident and self-directed person. Vedanta philosophy aims to produce just such types, but it has to cope with the effects of less ideal upbringings most of the time. We can only hope for a world where children are loved and respected as they should be. Thankfully this is becoming less rare, though it is not yet a sea change.

Lastly, a very important word in this verse means *evasive* or *wily*. We tend to relate to the world of the five fruits as something that we have to scheme about, to plot and plan to get our piece. This is writ large in the world of work but it also underpins our relationships, and even our self-image. We don't see ourselves as we are, but as we wish we were. When teachers advocate truth and honesty, they are asking us to root out this secret evasiveness, this lightly veiled selfishness with which we interface the world. The inversion we are called to make means aligning ourselves with every situation in as straightforward a manner as possible. It helps to have a measure of faith that the universe is not our enemy. This comes from the benign fate of a healthy upbringing, but it can be learned through intense observation too. It takes some of the drastic determination the Guru recommends here.

For those who can commit to some serious attention, this course will enable a major series of revelations. It really isn't suited to a casual perusal, though it might be better than nothing. It is extremely gratifying that some giant leaps are already happening, and others are becoming possible. I'm sure the three gurus whose souls are reflected in this master teaching would be very pleased to see what we are doing with it.

Part II

Nataraja Guru's commentary:

## VERSE 8

Eating of the five fruits such as light and so on,  
Perched on a shot-gun foul-smelling, ever in wily changeful sport,  
Such, the birds five, in shreds, what can bring down,  
Wielding such a lucid form, let the inner self brilliant become.

THE way of absolutist contemplation is not to be mixed up with mere religious piety. There is a radical note struck in this verse. It aims at giving the would-be contemplative an indication of the drastic, uncompromising attitude involved in getting started on the path of real contemplative life. It is more than mere prayerful meekness. There is something positive in the attitude required. The Bhagavad Gita refers to the inwardness involved by comparing the aspirant to a tortoise which withdraws all its limbs into its shell (II-58). There is also a reference to the flame that remains motionless in a windless place, steadily adjusted vertically (VI-19). These analogies are meant to indicate in advance the personal attitude or psycho-physical adjustment involved in the initiation of the contemplative's progress.

In this verse we have to imagine a hunter trying to shoot down birds on a branch. They are evasively changing from one twig to another before he can take proper aim. Interests are ever shifting ground in consciousness. As soon as one is displaced another appeal to the senses comes along, initiating another chain of associations. Thus the chain of cyclic associations never comes to a standstill. Meditation thus recedes further and further away from reach. The hunter has to take a firm one-pointed aim. The metaphor is meant to dispose summarily of many psychological and other questions by a figurative language. A mixed allegorical and parabolic style is adopted here, so that many factors may be understood as covered in a suggestive rather than in a discursive manner. The reader is left to guess freely and to fill in the gaps where they are purposely left to be implied. This concentrated cryptic way is compatible with what was already pointed out in the beginning of the work itself when, in the first verse, we were told

that this composition was meant to be a chant rather than a discourse. This is reminiscent of the suggestive style of the Upanishads.

The reference to the foul-smelling shotgun on which the birds are seated at one end, at the other end of which we have to put the hunter who is about to pull the trigger, suggests a vertical axis between the two polarities or factors of the same Self. The birds with the fruits which they peck represent the sensuous interests based on each of the five senses opening to the world of horizontal values. The aspirant cannot afford to be enticed by these frivolous interests if he is to be seriously established in contemplative life. The hunter has to take his aim in such a way as to shoot down all five of them at once. This means that he has to aim at the focal meeting-point of all sensuous interests and associative processes in the mind. He has further to be uncompromising. If he appears to be a kill-joy in this respect, we have to concede that he is only so in the name of a greater gain of inner contemplative brilliance of the whole spirit within him. The smaller items of pleasure are inclusively transcended in this inner lucidity which he gains. The body being a differential factor between the two poles, is here referred to as something to be despised. When we think of the gross aspect of the body, consisting of tissue etc., it is really something to be despised. Pampering the body or cultivating the body-sense obstructs the contemplative way. When the gun is fired there is a flash of light which would fill the whole of consciousness without the duality of the mind or the body. Both are abolished in a full absolutist state of intense light within. The suddenness of the event suggests further that contemplation is not to be thought of as a slow process of evolution through laborious intermediate stages, as it is commonly thought of in the context of what usually passes for the practice of meditation or yoga. Even Patanjali yoga, as Vasishtha points out to Rama in the Yoga Vasishtha, is tainted by the idea of graded steps in contemplation, to be gradually ascended.

This attitude, tainted by Samkhya (rationalist philosophy) dualism has been revalued, not only in the Yoga Vasishtha, but is also implied even in the Bhagavad Gita in chapter II, in referring to self-discipline. The absolutist way of Advaita is thus slightly different from the ascent involved in the dualistic approach of hatha and raja yoga. A revalued, restated yoga is implied here. The way whereby contemplation becomes actually established may be a slow one, but the attitude of the aspirant has to be wholehearted and drastic.

When the verse is paraphrased and expanded to smooth out all the subtle mixed metaphoric implications, the unitively revalued psycho-physical plan or functional structure of the Self with its two polarities to be reduced into absolute unity of pure content will become sufficiently evident without going into further analysis of the expressions used.

### Part III

Jan has graciously permitted me to share the following letter with the group, as it exemplifies the challenges and purpose of self-examination. I assured Jan that everyone has these aspects in them, but few recognize them, and fewer still admit to them, but no one will criticize her for having them. We all know we are equally off base sometimes. If we pretend our faults don't exist, they will never be cured.

Jan has had a breakthrough where some of her negative personality traits carried through from childhood suddenly became visible to her. Now they will never again have the hold on her they once had. They won't likely disappear, but they will remain visible, and so correctable. This has unleashed Jan's loving kindness that was somewhat (but never entirely) impeded by such feelings as she describes. I leave in her personal address as another good example: revisiting the material helps it to go much deeper than a "once over lightly." Frolicking in deep waters becomes a great joy once we teach ourselves how to swim:

Hi Scott,

Thanks for the great class notes again. I enjoyed them and they inspired me to think more about our lesson.

I wanted to share with you some of my thoughts after my lunch yesterday with my friend who has terminal illness (lung cancer). We had a very nice lunch and talked about lots of things, mostly avoiding “the” topic, the end of life. But it did come up and I was so grateful because I wanted to share that with her and offer my support. Inside my head during the lunch and most certainly afterwards as I drove home, I was struck with how so many of my defenses came up and how selfish my thinking was. Thank god that was all happening in my head and I think I was able to hide it. I saw how my critical self was having a hey day, criticizing her parenting, her self-care, how she approaches her illness, etc.. (Of course in my head only). I saw how some part of me wanted to be distant from death and dying. It was ugly. When she didn’t want to talk about what the doctor said when she first sat down to lunch, I felt instantly hurt because I was not being included in the inner circle. So again, my first reactions were so selfish and childlike. But I held on somehow to a better path. I’ve learned to pause now and let these flurries rise up (as they will whether I like it or not) and then settle down like dry leaves in the wind. At lunch and afterwards by myself, I tried to hold these feisty and polarizing egoistic thoughts and emotions in one hand, while letting the other part of me hold my compassion for myself and for everyone. I consciously tried to breathe and stay centered in my heart and deeper self. I felt my pain and grief that I am losing my friend, that she is losing her life and her family is losing her, and that this existence is full of such heartbreak all the time. At least I ended up in a place of not feeling judgmental, of feeling love and being more expansive. I realized one small area I could make a difference, besides continually showing her my love and offering my support and help, is to love myself so that I can learn how to be

a container for all that I am. Then I am able to be a better friend, partner, and parent. I am so thankful to you and Deb, and Nitya, and our years of learning, that I have gained this ability to weather my own storms. I think we are all up against so much, living with these bloodthirsty tigers inside us (our egos and critical minds) and pushing away, in so many subtle ways, the very people we love the most. Then we get to look forward to aging, falling apart, and dying. Ay-yai-yai! We need help and like you said [in the notes], mentors and gurus to show us how to manage all of this and work with our defenses. When I can do that and access my deeper self and wisdom, it makes all the difference. It's like breaking through to the "other side," and being free, and feeling the amazing beauty, vitality, mystery and love all around us. When I get to that shining place, I think "ahh", this is where I want to be. So soon I want to get centered in that place inside me, and write my friend a note, trying again to show her how unique and special she is, and how much I appreciate her. Jan

#### Part IV

Paul wrote the kind of response we love to see here on the hill:

...aaahhh!!! I can't get 'This' out of my mind & I got stuff to do...

Jan's response rang the door bell in 'that middle ground' of the Self. That Self is the 'Center' whose Being is beyond the conditioned egoistic self. It is the ego that desires and performs a 'premeditated act of futility' in its attempt to become 'socially acceptable'.... Screw acceptability!

It is within the 'screwability of acceptability' that I think there might be some subtle magic in verse 8 of Atmo (original version).

**Guru Nitya says:**

***"In transcendence the I-consciousness is merged with the cosmic consciousness, supreme consciousness, transcendental consciousness. Then there is no I. Instead of you wanting to***

*possess the whole world, you allow the totality to possess you.  
You are not enjoying now, you are the enjoyment. The enjoyer,  
the enjoyment, and the object of enjoyment have now all become  
one in the supreme reality.”*

When the conditioned intellect (that I define as the ego or small self) realizes its ‘Emptiness of Truth’, there appears a self-optional opportunity to transform our identification (with the false ego) to That of the ‘Unconditioned Self. The Unconditioned Self is the ‘Being or Actualization’ of that ‘Silent Witness’ inherent within the Unconditioned Self. It is within that Greater Self where God ‘Sees as the Seen & Seer’ as the True Self. God is: the ‘Joy of enjoying’, ‘the Seer of the seen’, and the ‘Beer of beers’ (..Super Bowl this Sunday..).

I feel such gratitude toward “*That Alone*” and wish to God that I could give Guru Nitya a ‘**GREAT BIG HUG**’....God knows i ain’t perfect, but it terrifies me to realize what my life would have been like without the compassion expressed in Guru’s many..many..many patient & loving insights.

~ Blessings Guru Nitya ~