

10/28/14
Verse 81

Prakriti divides: on one side is the agent of enjoyment;
on the other, whatever shines outside
as the here and the beyond, as an expansion of thisness,
is the world of enjoyment.

Free translation:

Nature divides itself into the enjoyer and the enjoyed. The conceiving self that illuminates all as counterparts of knowledge is the enjoyer; what is extended as 'thisness' both here and beyond is the universe that is enjoyed.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Nature, dividing, at one time as the enjoyer of everything
Outside, immanent as transcendent, it shining looms;
At another time again by 'this-ness' expanded
It spreads out before as the enjoyable universe.

Verse 81 is a meditative summation of the material, an invitation to experience oneness deep in our awareness. I suggested listening to the reading as a meditation, not trying to hold onto or parse any of the ideas but using them as conduits to go as deeply as possible into our collective consciousness. The image that came to my mind as I listened was a quiescent pond, with Nitya writing in broad strokes on the surface of the water. Each gesture left a mark for only an instant, with the pond almost immediately returning to its unruffled state. It was a vivid image of unity embracing the myriad possibilities of otherness while remaining essentially unchanged, and the image was how I actually experienced the oneness in my mind.

It is especially wonderful to have someone reading the commentary out to us, and it may be as close as we can get to sitting in on the original talk. Shutting the eyes and just listening intently allows for maximum openness, which can be somewhat approximated by reading bits and then reflecting on them for a meditative moment. Habitual reading patterns, or following along in the book while someone else reads it out, hold the mind in a more externalized focus. Such focus is fine if there is time afterwards to let it “sink in,” as we do in class, but on our own how often do we allow ourselves the luxury?

In the next verse Narayana Guru uses the image of rubbing sticks together to light a fire to elucidate the importance of focused effort. The rubbing itself isn't the goal; we want to catch fire with enthusiasm. Still, no rubbing no fire. There is an intimate relation between the effort with the sticks and the resulting blaze, after all is said and done.

The final bundle of ideas in the last twenty of the Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction draws all we have learned together into a conflagration. On the surface the ideas may seem innocent enough, yet with the insights of a master to help us see their implications more clearly, the sky's the limit. Nitya invites us in right off the bat:

This verse takes us to the very core of our personal existence. Personal existence may at first look like a consciousness shining within a body, but that is a shallow understanding.

And a very familiar “shallow understanding” at that! The most popular myth of the so-called rational age we live in.

Usually I can excerpt a few choice paragraphs to build my notes around, but this commentary is so seamless, so perfect, I hesitate to break it up at all. Probably you should just reread it and throw these notes away. I'll take a stab at it, though, for my own benefit at least. I'm still rather disoriented from yesterday's cataract operation, and this is helping me regain my mental

stability. It's good I have a firmly ingrained habit of writing notes after the classes! Still, what I've written strikes me as somewhat jumbled, just like my brain at the moment.

Nitya reminds us of something we never seem to quite comprehend, that the apparent world out there is a confection cobbled together out of memories grounded in our own personal history. We don't really know how or what others perceive; we only think we do. This limitation is the nearly universal basis of injustice: we don't see the facts, ever, only our beliefs about what the facts should be. Because of our internal prejudices, we prefer our interpretation to anyone else's. It's downright ridiculous!

Occasionally something strikes us as so discontinuous with our experience that we can't help but take a minute to process what it means. We search for memories but don't have any. That tiny lacuna is the only really vivid experience we can have, a brief break in the prevailing obscuration of memory. The rest is merely recycled versions of what we have met before. This is why for most people there is a steady diminution of serendipity over time. To an infant everything is new, while to the adult everything has its allotted category, whether it fits well or not. Injustice is the measure of how poorly our beliefs fit the truth of the present occurrence.

Vedanta is a great system for minimizing the distortions of our understanding, and it acknowledges that we have to make the final leap out of memory-based perception by our own efforts. We are seeking a primary, direct experience rather than a mediated, secondary one. We work on minimizing distortions to lay the groundwork for a real breakthrough. Even breakthroughs tend to be make-believe, as in those who loudly proclaim they are reborn. Mostly they've just adopted a new ideology. Anyone who is truly reborn prefers not to talk about it, as doing so deadens it very quickly.

Nitya describes the impact of the unexpected this way:

When we are confronted by a situation that is altogether new, however, we do not have any alternative other than to give in to it. Before we are able to process the situation into our memory of previous experiences, there is a moment when it fills our whole awareness. It stands there like an all-encompassing wall. We do not immediately see any way to surmount it, because its bottom goes to the very bottom of our consciousness and its top to the very top. Its ends are beyond our reach. It becomes a This with a capital ‘T’.

That ‘This’ is not “out there” as an impassive truth. We are intimately related to it because it concerns us, it challenges us. We cannot overlook it or forget it even for a split second. It fills every pore of our consciousness. It is not a thing, not just an event. It is a total This.

The author James Joyce coined the term “esthetic arrest” for the space created by the impact of art as a supplier of newness. I found a sweet description of what he meant from Kansas State University professor Michael Wesch:

To see “being” is to see the person beyond your typical judgment of that person. To see “being” is not to “see” but the empathic experience of recognizing shared being. The viewer achieves what James Joyce calls “esthetic arrest,” a state in which “the mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.” In Joyce’s beautiful words, it is “the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani ... called the enchantment of the heart.”

This should clarify what Nitya was referring to when he spoke about the “total This”:

This great wall or confronting reality or undeniable existence does not appear as a historical consequence of anything else. It looks as if we are confronted with an otherness which has its base in the primeval reality. It extends to the boundless, unending future. It defies historicity by

defying our categorization of it using our memories of previous experience.

And does it matter? Oh, yes. It is how we transcend the cramped, undervalued version of our self we have come to believe in. In a way the “other” is always trying to draw us out of our small, guarded nest to be much greater than we imagine is possible. Since our true nature—our default setting—is infinite, all we have to do is relinquish our arbitrarily imposed limits to expand again into boundlessness. Boundaries have their value, as in the lake that would dry up if it was not contained by its shores, but we have become “boundary masters.” All we know is boundaries. Tight ones. We come together to learn how to let them go and rediscover the rest of our potential. The injustice of limiting beliefs that don’t match reality doesn’t just apply to others: we are unjust to ourselves as well, selling ourselves short. Again, the text puts this masterfully:

In this experience we are transformed from a miniature ‘I’ to an ‘I’ which is boundless. It is as if we are also beginningless and endless, capable of responding to the challenge in its totality. When we come to this state, the transformation of a particular ‘I’ with a dimension of finitude into this infinite ‘I’ is directly connected with the ‘other’. In this particular case the personal ‘I’ transcends several of its limitations, such as age, name, sex, nationality and so on. All these are irrelevant little details of the modulation of ‘I’. None of them now appear as the essential ‘I’. The essential ‘I’ here establishes itself in the transcendent. The transcendent merges into the immanent. The transcendence of this ‘I’ is given to it by the existential verity of the experience, which we naturally expect to come from the ‘other’.... When you truly grasp this you are left with an inside story of experience. You are no longer an individual who is planted deep into a system along with many other individuals, looking at particular things like a flower or a sunrise. You have become the universal person.

It is very curious that while this is relatively easy to understand theoretically, it takes time and effort for it to percolate into our prevailing

mindset. It is gratifying that several of the class participants are reporting the realization of their studies. They are *feeling* it, where before it was just a loose pile of good ideas. I'd add more about this in Part III.

The class spent a lot of time pondering enjoyment. Most philosophical systems downplay its value, equating it with distraction and irrelevance. Jan praised the gurus for recognizing its vital place in the scheme of things. It's how we recognize we are on the right track, following our enthusiasm. Deb noted enjoyment is actually en-joy-ment: being in a state of joy. Because of our cultural bias toward work and misery, enjoyment is routinely trivialized, equated with transient pleasure as opposed to abiding happiness. Narayana Guru describes authentic enjoyment as the indicator of rightness, even as the measuring rod of your realization. Both Nitya and Nataraja Guru have written more about enjoyment in Part II, and I recommend you check it out especially this week.

Enjoyment fits into the present verse in that living in the clutches of memory is dulling and leads us away from joy, while breaking through to an unmediated connection with events is supremely uplifting. Embracing the other as it truly is, is the way we simultaneously free ourselves. The other affords us the opportunity to compare our private version with the present, which is always new even when it strikes us as *passé*.

Bill talked about how the experience of unity takes us out of the need to direct our steps toward achievement. We aim for improvement because we devalue who we are now. While this isn't all bad, we actually achieve much more by optimistically accepting our unique role in the unfoldment of the cosmos. As Nitya demonstrates, our urge to define and delineate relative levels of ability actually make us less than what we are:

This meditation should take you to a very intense level of experience. You don't very often go into that state, it's true. When you sit in your own armchair and think of some other people as despicable or lovable, you have become a miniature 'you' thinking of miniature 'others'. There is a way of giving deliverance to that miniature 'I' sitting on that armchair with its little prejudices so that it becomes a universal 'I'. Then that despicable character can be seen as part of your visualization,

the ‘otherness’ of your nature, which is only presenting itself in a certain way. The feeling of revulsion you have is another despicable aspect of the ‘I’ consciousness. You cannot turn away from the despicable person, because he’s inlaid in you.

Armchairs are (or were, before AC) rare in India. It’s too hot to be snuggled in an enveloping seat. Nitya’s use of them as images of detachment from the actual world has at least one root in Nataraja Guru’s pithy mixed metaphor: “Armchair philosophy bakes no bread.” Chairs in general are getting a bad rap these days. The latest *Scientific American* boasts an article titled *Chairs That Kill*, detailing how sitting for extended periods is associated with many of the ills of modernity, including premature death.

Nitya clarifies the distinction between sitting comfortably detached and actively baking bread:

We are not philosophizing here; we are living it. And as we are living it there is this natural division of the experiencer and the experienced. This division is held to be true only for the purpose of understanding what we are experiencing.

Finally, Nitya takes aim at a widespread conceit of most armchair philosophers, including many of us hotheaded youngsters in his original class, who were very glib to pin blame on people we despised. Subconsciously we wanted to transfer all our faults to others, so we could appear squeaky clean to the guru. He wasn’t fooled. A yogi considers that the other is how the universe reveals aspects of their inner makeup to them:

There should be no eagerness here to disown the ‘other’ in order for you to become a very special person. You must face the ‘other’ with courage and totally accept it. You cannot escape it. Resisting and beating your breast only proves your ignorance of your own nature, your ignorance of your belongingness to nature. Here your earlier

acceptance of everything as aspects of pure consciousness is no longer just a casual remark you have made, it becomes a living experience.

This is one of the most critical realizations in all of spiritual life: since we are literally attached to the other—one with the other—rejecting it produces all the schisms and conflicts of existence. We mistakenly imagine that by disowning and fighting the dark side we will drive it away, but all we're doing is making it bigger—exactly the opposite of our intent. And we have learned to think of our own self as the other, too. We run ourselves down in a thousand ways, for no good reason. It's purely destructive, after whatever minimal learning opportunity it might afford. A very bad habit we're stuck on. That's why we have to befriend our self first. Reversing our attitude on this has a profound impact. It shouldn't even be that difficult. We start with the mere concept, and gradually make it real. The next verse takes this proposition a few steps farther.

Several of us were especially moved by the concept of becoming a caretaker of the world. Isn't that a natural urge burning within the human breast? Again, this is not accomplished by becoming something separate and special, but by entering into the whole of life and being it. Oneness happens when I and the other grow back together. We're talking about literally merging into the other. Not as in "otherworldly" but as the other that surrounds us on all sides, all the time. Nitya concludes:

Consciousness percolates into that which is experienced. It is a process of exosmosis and endosmosis where you cannot say which is which. Each penetrates into the other. Then all the dualities such as the ontologic and the teleologic, the immanent and the transcendent, the real and the actual, and the spiritual and the natural, are all fused into the one full reality, and you become the caretaker of it. You are the possessor of it, and you are That. There is no God outside to look for or to realize. There is no wisdom lying outside to seek and find. You are the law, a law unto yourself. You are the truth.

Part II

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

When life becomes serious and I as a person face my real confrontation, I cease to be just one person among many. From me arises the overwhelming consciousness “I am,” and I stand in abeyance to respond or strike as the situation demands. For me, the situation becomes the “other,” my only counterpart. The equation is “I am and this is.”

In this context I am not a modest ego living in a finite body. I grow to an enormous size. My head rises above the clouds and my feet are planted in the very ground of the universe. It is as if I had roots reaching unfathomable depths. I extend in all directions and, lo, before me is the great wall of my confrontation. It can be he, she, it, or whatever. For me it is my “other” that springs into action as my inescapable challenge, my paramount confrontation. Here I am facing my destiny. It whispers, asks, shouts, scowls, screams, appeals, requests, whimpers, murmurs, stares, glances and goes into uncomfortable silence, leaving me to my own guesses. I distinctly hear every word articulated and not spoken: “I am your life. Do you accept me? Can you do justice to my trust, my expectation? Can you love me? Do you dare to reject me? Do you understand the secret of my spell, the worth of my values, my hidden mystery? What scares you? Do you have the courage to walk with me, to go the whole way with me?”

I become “I” only when I am confronted, doubted, trusted, questioned, loved, hated, endeared, estranged, accepted, rejected, insulted, or glorified. The “other” is the enjoyed, the only enjoyment that is. Everyone whom I have known thus far as “you,” “she,” “they” and everything known and unknown is now the “other.” I am the one who sees it, hears it, smells it, touches it. Without me it has no existence that is either loved or hated, admired or condemned, accepted or rejected. “I” and the “other” are the two faces of the same coin. Here there is no God or man, no spirit or matter. There is only the nature of the enjoyer that enjoys, and the enjoyed in the arms of its enjoyer. From the infinitude of

the cosmos to the finitude of the cup I hold to my lips, it is all one bhogyavisvam, the universe of enjoyment, and I am the sole enjoyer, the bhoktri rupam.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

MAN is related to nature in two principal ways. The relation is established through the interest that a man might take in life, whether subjectively or objectively understood. It is thus a value-world in which he is placed. This value-world or setting that any man may be said to find himself in, is called 'Nature' here, as contemplatively understood in its complete and two-fold aspect. We have to think of man as forming the core of the situation, and then it would be possible to refer to the two aspects of Nature distinguished here. Vertically there is the pure world of things-in-themselves, both actual and perceptual, conceptual or even nominal, covering the ontological and teleological, or the immanent and the transcendental realities, as related to the mind, spirit or inner consciousness. This same inner agent or witness is the one which is also related to the horizontal series of graded interests that, like a feast, is spread out before him as items of enjoyment. Whether this horizontally-spread-out feast is to be enjoyed in an ethical sense is not to be discussed here. The recognition of this two-fold aspect of Nature is all that is intended in this verse.

We know in philosophy such distinctions as the ontological and the teleological, the immanent and the transcendent, the phenomenal and the noumenal and other such pairs of distinctions. They belong to different philosophical contexts. The attempt of the Guru here is to classify Nature into two sets, resembling the divisions of Spinoza - both of them being outer manifestations. It is here viewed from a neutral psycho-physical standpoint where mind and

matter are given equality of status under the aegis of what is known as Nature, understood under the aegis of the Absolute.

Nature is a conditioned aspect of the Absolute seen through the self or the ego of man. Although thus conditioned, the division here is fundamental and necessary for methodic self-realization because the vertical and the horizontal aspects should not be mixed up. If mixed up, they will not yield the final vision of the Absolute which has to identify the self and the highest of human values under one scheme.

Another subtle philosophical point to note here is that the two value-worlds of Nature meet in the central self which is the enjoyer. As the Sun and sunlight are related, the enjoyer and the enjoyed aspects of nature must belong unitively to a central reality which is here 'Nature' written with a capital N. Nature under the aegis of the Absolute is the common meeting-point of the actual and the perceptual. Thus we have here one of the most important of the correlations for a normative notion of the Absolute in the context of Self-realization. Nature thus neutrally understood would be the point of intersection of the vertical and horizontal aspects in the context of the Absolute itself.

Part III

Jan's response to the last class is also very much to the point here also. I was talking about this verse being the beginning of knitting all the many threads of the Hundred Verses back together. The idea of listening as a meditation is we can begin (or continue) to not struggle directly with the ideas, but relax into them. It's like learning to float in swimming. We may flail in panic at first, and of course we sink, which makes for more panic. Only when we find a way to stay calm in the panicky situation can we relax and let go—and then we float effortlessly. Struggling to understand is like flailing, yet it is our entrée almost every time we find ourself in a

new and frightening situation. Floating in life is rather more challenging than floating in a pool, yet the principle is similar. Here's Jan's letter:

Hi Scott,

I've been ruminating on this verse, still having difficulty but have had some insights too. Some of your phrases from the class notes have stayed with me: the assertion of the wonder of consciousness and then by underlining the emptiness of words, and "In any case, the naïve interpretation is to try to shut out words as leading us astray. The intelligent interpretation is to use enlightened words to recover our essence from the desert of incomprehension we have wandered into."

One insight I had (and I don't know how naïve it is) was this - that I realized sometimes I *devalue* my own spiritual experience, where I am conscious of being more connected, less tied to my boundaries, etc., *when* I cannot put a label on it or find the right words to describe it to other people.

Going about my day yesterday, doing my yoga and feeling at peace with myself and the world, I realized in light of this verse that I do not need to do this devaluing. Perhaps I can reorient myself and try to allow the glory of consciousness to shine through without rushing to words and logic. No doubt it's still going to be a chatter in my head, that voice of trying to find the right words to explain what I feel. But perhaps I can try to let those words sit over somewhere else as possibilities, or snapshots, and not let them limit me as much when I am experiencing the Oneness.

I did feel a slight shift in myself, thinking of "going into the silence" in a new way. It felt kind of liberating and exciting.

And another message I get from this verse is that ideally we do not let words hold us back from the process of “realization” which the verse and your notes talk about as our main pursuit in life. That makes sense to me. Nor should we let our words have that restrictive impact on others, ideally.

Thinking all of this, I end up at the place you talk about above where we try to use enlightened words to recover our essence and such words that allow others to uncover their essence too. I am inspired to walk softly and quietly on the earth and to try to speak more from heart and my sense of truth.

Later she added: I am enjoying these verses so much! Susan said it well in class, that you get parts and then look away and wonder if you got it and understand at all. It’s complex stuff.

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Susan related a story that fits in with Jan’s thoughts better than placing it in the first notes. Both of them have been in the class for a long time, and are noticing some “liberating and exciting” changes in their attitudes. This is not the “quick and easy” version of spirituality! Much more solid.

Susan delivers free meals to elderly shut in folks every Sunday. The last time out she relaxed out of her (everyone’s) usual perspective of “I and the other” into a more unitive state. By doing so she felt an intimate compassion for her clients, and saw them as more vibrantly alive than she had previously. Though shy to write about it, I coaxed a smidgen out of her. The main idea is that her abstract framing of universal unity became an actual living experience for her, and she was thrilled, excited to augment it with more connectedness next time out. She wrote:

When taking food to elderly people this weekend for Meals on Wheels I thought about the separation between myself and the

people I serve. I wondered about our connection and how to really feel and understand it. During the course of the morning, as I talked to various people on the route and as the sunshine sparkled in my eyes as I emerged from each building, I was struck by the idea of the light that connects all of us. There is the light of the Absolute in me and in everyone. It feels good to share that and helps to dispel the divisions between us.

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The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad study group continues to run a mysterious parallel track with the That Alone class. Here's the paragraph of Nitya's commentary I thought fit well with the present verse:

Instead of interjecting God into the innermost core of the world, the Isa Upanishad speaks of it as the most overt reality of the perceptual world. If that is so, then in every sound of this world we are expected to hear the word of God, *nada brahman*. Similarly, to every touch we are expected to be thrilled by the touch of the Absolute, *brahma sparsa*. In every form we see we are expected to see a version of the divine presence, *isvara darsana*, and in every taste we get we are expected to taste the blissful elixir of the divine, *amritattva*. In every smell we are expected to get the *punya gandha*, the smell of the purified. (94)

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Jake's commentary:

“This verse takes us to the very core of our personal existence,” writes Nitya in his opening sentence, second paragraph, of his commentary. And in his fourth paragraph he drills down into what he means after dispatching two truths about how we know what we know. On the one hand is the fact that we can

never know what others experience, social engineers' protestations notwithstanding. On the other is the process through which we think we can know anything rationally by associating whatever it is with our previous like experience. As Nitya has pointed out in his earlier commentaries, all education is essentially an exercise in association and naming, a sequencing that takes place continuously during our lifetimes. With this verse and commentary, however, the Guru and Nitya move deeper yet into the territory and address our condition where we are faced with continuous novelty, that is, a condition or event we've not previously encountered. In these cases, says Nitya, "We do not have any alternative other than to give into to it" (p. 566).

Our own death is the one common enigma we all face as qualifies as that *unknown*, in spite of all our stories we spin in order to comfort ourselves. Faced with this cosmic reality, we no longer associate ourselves with our little isolated ego-I. Beginningless and endless, death (as an example) forces us to transcend our separate self and obliterates our sense of *I* and *other*. We experience a universal reality, and "when you truly grasp this you are left with an inside story of experience. . . . You have become the universal person" (p. 567).

What follows these ideas in Nitya's commentary would most likely be branded a heresy by the religionist right in America and hopelessly naïve superstition by the atheist scientists on the left. Both the *other* and the *I*, writes Nitya, are within you; our interior experience is made of both elements simultaneously. Thus, what we experience is ourselves and no existence remains not included in that experience: "There is only nature: your total nature or nature's total you" (p. 569).

Given this core truth of what *is*, concludes Nitya, that there is no entity outside ourselves to seek out, petition, or appease in some fashion, that such an outward-focused project will only lead us in circles in our pursuing what is not there, we face the uncomfortable fact that all that our little I finds repulsive or desirable are none other than elements of ourselves. In traditional psychological

terms, our projected shadows of ourselves—those characteristics, behaviors, and so on we find repellant in others (or that we envy)—are precisely those characteristics, behaviors, etc. we deny in ourselves. Trying to “disown” them merely leads to our denying them. Facing and claiming them, on the other hand, forces us to confront those shadows our minds think we don’t have and that the *other* possesses. As long as we cling to this little I notion of ourselves, we stay victims of a lifetime project aimed at not knowing who we are.