

12/9/14  
Verse 86

The body and all similar things have no being one in another,  
and become untrue for that reason; another part,  
remaining without setting from day to day,  
once again, as the true form, attains perfection.

Free translation:

The substance of one body is not in another. This fact contradicts the rejection of individual formations. As the verity of objects persists through time, their substantiality gains the status of the real.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

The body and other things all have no being one in another,  
Thus the converse position becomes untenable;  
As from day to day this remains without setting  
It gains the status of verity emerging once again.

In his own commentary, Nataraja Guru provides a helpful summary of verses 86-88, a particularly wonderful section of *Atmopadesa Satakam*:

Already the epistemological basis on which the statements of these three verses are to be understood has been laid by the Guru himself in verse 36, and following. The 'same' and the 'other' referred to there are no other than the two ways of knowing open to man's intelligence. The 'same' implied in reality is the inclusive principle of togetherness, and the 'other' is the exclusive principle of contradiction or difference. The impenetrability of matter is the physical expression of 'otherness', strangeness, exclusiveness, or the principle of contradiction. All things hang unitively together in the

sameness which yields the unitive way to happiness and right understanding. These two principles give the horizontal or the vertical view of reality. In the present verse the horizontal view is taken in the first two lines, and in the last two lines the vertical verity is indicated.

Building on these principles, Nitya equates ritam and anritam, the positive and negative dynamics of truth, with sama and anya, sameness and otherness, respectively. In *Neither This Nor That But... Aum* (henceforth NTNT) he adds: “All bodies have two aspects: the perishable, when each object is taken by itself, and the imperishable, when it is taken materially, conceptually or nominally. The perishable aspect is called anritam and the imperishable aspect is called ritam.” (I suspect Nitya intended *immaterially*, but that isn’t how the book turned out.)

One of the main thrusts of our study is to try to discern the imperishable within the perishable, the eternal within the transient. Nitya goes on in NTNT: “A person living a life without exaggerations can always overcome the disasters caused by the perishing aspect of bodies, and can continue to be in harmony with the rhythm of the world order by faithfully holding on to the imperishable, the unified whole.” So when events shake us up, as they often do, we have to recover our stability by infusing our comprehension with the sense of unity, and then our decisions will be optimized. If we merely react, we place ourselves at the mercy of chaotic events. By reclaiming our stable ground, we can bring our whole being to bear optimally on the situation.

As an example of recovering from trauma, this week I saw a mere couple of second video clip of how pigs are raised for food in factories, and was blasted with torment at the horrific brutality of it, on a par with Nazi death camps. For more than a day I was utterly heartbroken, ready to quit the earth in despair. Torturing animals is utterly unconscionable, one of many scourges that are growing rather than receding in our badly misnamed age of reason. I knew full well that suicide was not an intelligent response, but

that was how I felt. Hard as it was to let go of the imagery, I slowly knitted myself back together, not by blocking out the new knowledge, but by reaffirming my commitment to advocate for justice and sentience in humans, and of course to never, never eat pork or anything like it. I consoled myself a bit with the “Happy Pig Farm” we drove past in Sweden when we were visiting Jean a few years back. Their sign read something like “Our animals live free and happy lives until the fateful day.” It’s the least we can do for these almost human creatures.

In place of despair, then, the shock energized me to once again renew my sincerely felt commitment to be kind to every creature, and to teach kindness and compassion as intelligent life choices. And I continue to accept that barbarism is widespread and not likely to be cured by anything I do or don’t do. It’s a tragic fact of life.

The point (as always) is that we humans are all too often tossed about in a sea of confusion and reactivity. The Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction are a deeply compassionate offering by a great seer to familiarize us with a core of equanimity from where we not only make good decisions but also are able to feel terrific as we make headway through life.

I can’t remember who specifically it was, but you can tell from the commentary that someone who had been enthusiastic about the study gave up and left around this stage. That happened occasionally; people would come and go. Nitya was very generous about it, but when you have poured your best thoughts into making a study meaningful to an interested friend, and it seems to be resonating with them, and then they suddenly drop out with barely a parting word, it has to be disappointing on some level.

Disadoption is a strange thing. We want to change, to be cured of our ailments, but if the comfort of our habitual mental nest begins to break down, it can be very unsettling. Right when the teaching begins to have a positive effect, we get nervous and look around for an escape. As a friend put it this week,

“Sometimes it can feel a bit scary and disorienting moving beyond the usual storylines of the ego.”

A yogi should admit that we all hold idiotic ideas dear. They vary from person to person, but we all have our weaknesses. Often the more idiotic our beliefs, the harder we hold to them, since they would dissolve if held up to scrutiny. That Alone does not mollycoddle idiocy—far from it. When our cherished illusions begin to fall away, we are pressed to decide between comfort and spiritual growth. Without a measure of serious will power, comfort normally wins out.

The fact is, the ego insists on ruling the roost, and it weaves a compelling story to enshrine it as top dog. Idiocy at its best, really. A practical philosophy like this includes deflating the ego from its bloated condition to regain its proper size. Nothing is more insulting to an ego, more threatening, than being constrained to an equal footing with other aspects of the Self, so the deflation is a crucial aspect of spiritual development. Given its way, the ego will usually opt for bowing out. There has to be a deep commitment already in place to hanging in there.

We rely on defensive walls for our sense of security, and everyone wants to feel secure. Narayana Guru and Nitya’s instruction encourages us to expand those walls to become increasingly more inclusive, through wisdom. Like air in a balloon, the very process of expansion reduces the density. It can feel like a decrease of security, unless the connection with our imperishable core is maintained.

The process is akin to contemplatively moving from horizontal involvement to identity with a vertical witness. Nitya spells out the details particularly well here:

As a seeker, when you look at your daily activities, at how you feel fulfilled or dissatisfied, at how you are depressed one day and encouraged on another, you doubt the value of your life. You need to remember this is at the level of modulations. If each day you can find a deeper level, if you can get established in the firm ground of your

beingness, then you stop worrying about the modulations. You know there is a pure being which goes on and on. Your status then is of a witness, not a doer. You are a knower, but not in the sense of one who gathers information.

Sitting still as a witness naturally quiets and calms the ego. Nitya continues:

Egoistic performance, egoistic knowledge and egoistic enjoyment, which are all in the transient field of modulations, are now considered as actions happening in nature, produced by nature's own laws. You do not take the responsibility of them on yourself and worry about them. The wind blows; therefore leaves flutter. It is a gnawing wind; the skin feels cold. As it feels cold, the body trembles and shivers. It's all part of nature. You do not have any responsibility for it because it belongs to anritam.

Where is the ritam then? There has to be something that persists all through for the cloud to rain, the fire to burn, the wind to blow, for you to breathe, your food to be digested, your blood to circulate, and so on and so on. This mainstream of life is where ritam is.

Paul reminded us that the ego loves to take pride in our small accomplishments, such as keeping cool under stress. We seldom realize how bound we are, how the creeping vines of verse 8 have already had us in their grasp for many long years. We have to be ready for the next challenge, because life is always going to give us another opportunity to screw up.

This and the next couple of verses describe our relationship with the nature modalities perfectly. For me it has always been a major aha! section. Unburdening ourselves of the gunas works together with the transforming to witnessing consciousness, which will soon be described as converting from sattva, rajas and tamas to sat, chit and ananda. The more we spend time with this, the more it becomes our operative state of being. Nitya knits this all together with the thrust of the verse:

The triple modalities, sattva, rajas and tamas, which cause special attention, attraction and consequent binding between you and something, have their effect at the surface. You are to leave them and become the single large eye rather than the two small eyes. You become an observer of life's daily chores taking place in the outer world, and of the cyclic movement of your emotions, thoughts and memories which unfold inside you like a cinematographic film. You watch both the outer world game and the inner world game. You become the great witness. The transience is allowed to be, but as you know it is ephemeral and anyam, you begin to be more allied with what persists.

The persisting thing, out of which day and night, silence and articulation, rest and motion, and meaning and non-meaning come, is sama. The two main attributes, knowing and being, persist. When knowing and being come together as the knowing of all and the being of all, it brings perfection. You live in perfection all the time, while you witness pervasive imperfection on the surface. The first is ritam, the second, anritam. Anritam belongs to the 'other', to anya, while what belongs to sama is ritam. What belongs to the 'other' is imperfect, what belongs to the unitive way of knowing is perfect.

This teaching is in concert with the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna instructs Arjuna, "The Vedas treat of matters related to the three gunas; you should be free from these three modalities, Arjuna, free from (relative) pairs of opposites, established ever in pure being, without alternately acquiring and enjoying, (unitively) Self-possessed." (II.45) The ordinary view is that we should try to be sattvic and turn away from rajas and tamas, but sattva is the very thing that catches our attention and begins a new rotation of the gunas. Once our interest is aroused, we put energy into maintaining it. When the energy drains away and we are left with the tedious remains, tamas holds sway. Often we resign ourselves to trying to hold onto any vestigial memory of the original interest, even after it's long gone. Because of this, there is every possibility of staying

stuck in tamas. Nitya alerts us to sattva's lure, at the edge of the slippery slope:

Moving away from the center means becoming influenced by sattva, rajas and tamas. Even sattva as such is not very helpful. It operates mechanically with rajas and tamas in a cyclic manner. Nature, prakriti, always functions by rotating the three gunas. When sattva comes you feel interest. When rajas comes the interest changes into an emotional state. When tamas comes you forget what the interest was in the first place. You ask yourself, "Why am I doing this?".... Your whole attempt is to wean your consciousness as much as possible away from the direct impact of these triple modalities.

The modalities, being reflections, are mere shadows of the light of our being. Again, I can't do better than quote Nitya:

On one side is *chit*, the pure light of consciousness. On the other side is the reflected world of consciousness. Most of the time you don't see how pure consciousness operates, because you live in the reflections, in the modalities, away from the substance. You are caught in a shadowy existence, a shadowy understanding, and a shadowy experience of values. Being shadowy and without substance, they fail you again and again. One has to remain quiet for the clouds to pass, and the sun of consciousness to shine again. Eventually it comes back, but you have to be patient. You cannot push the clouds away any more than you can push a river where it doesn't want to go.

Of course, Nitya is implying a dynamic quietude, not a tamasic, closed-off one. I always think of a gyroscope, which owes its stability to its spinning motion. If it stops spinning, it falls over. Likewise, being a witness requires alertness, combined with a restraint of the wobbling affections of partisanship.

It was such a rich class! Some of it may have to go into a later episode. After the next session we have two weeks off for the holidays,

so everyone will have time to recover. It's a great season to reflect and practice being a witness, especially since this time of year features the highest stress levels, at least for us far northerners. For now, I'll close with a very important idea. Nitya enunciates very clearly how realization is a slow growth process. People make a big deal of the spectacular acid trip kind of realization, since it makes exciting reading, but it's by no means the whole story. If we take it to be the only important aspect of spiritual life, then everything else gets shoved aside as unimportant. In place of that, we are trying to infuse every moment of our lives with meaningful intensity.

Jan who loves to garden, was drawn to Nitya's flower analogy. She is given confidence by the idea of incremental growth, where the flash idea is daunting for most of us. Basically, we've all experienced growth throughout our lives, but only a few have had rare moments of major breakthroughs. Nitya puts the idea this way:

In one sense we can say that realization comes like ten thousand suns shining all at once. It is also true that you gain ground little by little, more like the sprouting, growth and unfolding of a flower. You can't tell how much the flower grows in a day, but it is nonetheless growing. Like that, you gain your ground in wisdom in invisible increments. Some days you make mistakes and prakriti wins. The next day you make amends for your shortcomings and go further. If nothing else you have learned how nature can come and assail you when you are weak or unprepared, and the next time you will be prepared.

This game is continuous. The pursuit is continuous, growth is continuous. Realization is also continuous.

Susan was enthusiastic for the snow analogy. It does seem that problems pile up if we don't deal with them. Nitya concludes his talk with an appeal to keep up our energy and focus:

Both kinds of realization are happening. There is a gradual maturing, and also the sudden flash. It seems the flash gets most of the

attention. The maturing part is also important, where you have to fight against the constant clouding of your intellect by nature. It's like the road workers clearing the roads of snow while it is snowing. As soon as they clear it the snow starts building up again, so they have to do it all over again every half hour or so. Like that, sometimes winter sets in in your mind, and the snow falls. What can you do? Just wait for spring to melt it for you? No. If you turn away from the clearing of the snow, it will become more and more heavily laid down. So get exposed to the discipline.

## Part II

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

Things appear as separate entities, such as a man or a dog, a pen or a book, a cup or a saucer. The body of a thing has its own special qualities which makes it unique and different from other bodies. When a body perishes, its existence terminates and it does not continue in the existence of another body. For example, grandfather is different from father and father is different from son, and when one of them dies his existence is not transferred to his progeny. Their essential difference and individuality belong to their bodily existence, and however real they might look or however dynamically they might assert themselves, all will die one by one in the course of time. Thus, their physical existence proves to be a transient phenomenon.

Even when a chair or a cup breaks, the idea of the chair or the cup does not break, and the names "chair" and "cup" will continue, unaffected by the physical destruction of those items. Similarly, when a person such as the Buddha ceases to exist physically, he does not vanish altogether from our memory. In fact, in his case, his individual existence has changed into a universal existence. Two complementary principles in physics are the conservation of matter and the transformation of energy. The matter that has gone into the making of a man or a chair or a cup cannot turn into

nothingness, it simply undergoes a transformation and continues as indestructible matter. Thus, materially, conceptually and nominally, everything continues even after the empirical disintegration of the perceptual body-content.

All cups come under the same category: cups. Thus, the exclusiveness of a thing ceases and it becomes participatory in a class that continues to function. A truth that can function with an operational dynamic is called ritam. Thus, all bodies have two aspects: the perishable, when each object is taken by itself, and the imperishable, when it is taken materially, conceptually or nominally. The perishable aspect is called anritam and the imperishable aspect is called ritam.

Our vexations are caused by the anritam to which we are exposed. When we rely on something to function forever in an individual capacity, we receive an abrupt shock at the sudden ceasing of that individual entity. This entity could be one's father or mother, husband or wife, automobile or refrigerator, one's typist or typewriter. The physical death of one's parents or spouse can be overlooked if one accepts the reality of their continuous presence in one's loving heart. The automobile can be towed to a service station for repairs or it can be replaced, and one can hire a new typist and get a new typewriter. This does not mean that there is no room for the delicate sentiments one might feel for one's typist or automobile. They are the poetic embellishments of one's psyche.

A person living a life without exaggerations can always overcome the disasters caused by the perishing aspect of bodies, and can continue to be in harmony with the rhythm of the world order by faithfully holding on to the imperishable, the unified whole.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary is particularly helpful this time:

IN the next three verses we come up against a problem of great importance in philosophy. The knotty question as to the relation between the one and the many, the generic and the specific, and of over-all existence, essence or substance, immanently or transcendently understood, with ontological or teleological implications, is brought into the focal point of scrutiny as a correct methodology would require in this verse. We know that scholasticism has vainly tried to determine whether God created the species or the genus. The individuality that distinguishes a Peter from a Paul, according to some, is not the work of God, who only thought in terms of principles and generalities. Did God think of the particular, and is He the author of evil in the actual sense? No satisfactory philosophical answer has been found to this day. The hand of God has been revealed to none, while philosophers dispute and the theologies of different religious groups wage wars.

Already the epistemological basis on which the statements of these three verses are to be understood has been laid by the Guru himself in verse 36, and following. The 'same' and the 'other' referred to there are no other than the two ways of knowing open to man's intelligence. The 'same' implied in reality is the inclusive principle of togetherness, and the 'other' is the exclusive principle of contradiction or difference. The impenetrability of matter is the physical expression of 'otherness', strangeness, exclusiveness, or the principle of contradiction. All things hang unitively together in the sameness which yields the unitive way to happiness and right understanding. These two principles give the horizontal or the vertical view of reality. In the present verse the horizontal view is taken in the first two lines, and in the last two lines the vertical verity is indicated.

The words 'satyam' and 'rtam' refer respectively to the ontological (*sat*) and the rational (*chit*) aspects of reality. The former is rightness or conformity to world order or law in the domain of existence, while the latter refers to the formal world of

logic. This distinction is recognized as 'fact true' and 'logic true' in modern logic.

The world order continues in spite of the alternating falsehood implied in it from the logical standpoint. The two kinds of verity put together constitute the paradox of life which is to be referred to as the unpredictable in the verse below (87).

The word 'all' in the first line of the verse is to indicate that it is not merely the actual single instance of impenetrability, but the law of impenetrability of matter generally which is under reference here. In generalizing we discuss a philosophical truth or verity and not mere actual experience.

### Part III

We discussed in class the time-honored meditation on a candle flame Nitya reprises in this verse. In essence, the flame is an analogy for life or spirit. It looks continuous, yet on analysis it is produced by transient particles. This is one of the fascinating dialectical paradoxes that drew Prabhu to the Gurukula philosophy. As Prabhu related, materialists, both Buddhist and scientific, use this image as evidence of the meaninglessness of life. Life springs as an epiphenomenon from inanimate bits, and without them it cannot exist. Its seeming continuousness is an illusion, and the actuality is a series of discontinuous events produced by insentient chemicals.

Nitya wants us to know that the Guru is offering a different interpretation: "All of us are serial in that same sense. But Narayana Guru says that if we look at things this way we are relegating them to *anya*, to the 'other', and then they have no truth."

Why is it hard to imagine that the universe includes all those inanimate bits so it can produce the flame? Doesn't sentience have any place in the picture? It seems that the flame is an essential,

meaningful part of the process, giving off light and heat where there was none before. Why should we throw it away, or better, blow it out? That's the illogical shortcoming of materialism: you throw out meaning and then insist there is none. You kick up dust and complain of cloudy vision. Then when life degenerates in consequence, it is nothing more or less than you expected all along. To quote the Gita again:

They say that the world is without true existence, without a basis, without a presiding principle, not resulting from reciprocal factors (lying beyond immediate vision), as if asking, "What else is there other than that caused by lust?"

Willfully holding to this view, these men of lost souls, of little understanding, of harsh deeds, emerge as non-beneficial, effecting the world's decline. (XVI.8 & 9)

Jake resonated with the flame analogy in a unique way. He has felt like each of our lives is a single moment of the burning candle, only vastly stretched out in time. This paralleled something Deb read in *Speak, Memory*, by Vladimir Nabokov. When he was four years old, Nabokov realized that he and everyone else were joined together in a river of time. It's so beautifully written, let me type up a bit:

Thus, when the newly disclosed, fresh and trim formula of my own age, four, was confronted with the parental formulas, thirty-three and twenty-seven, something happened to me. I was given a tremendously invigorating shock. As if subjected to a second baptism... I felt myself plunged abruptly into a radiant and mobile medium that was none other than the pure element of time. One shared it—just as excited bathers share shining seawater—with creatures that were not oneself but that were joined to one by time's common flow, an environment quite different from the spatial world, which not only man but

apes and butterflies can perceive.... Indeed, from my present ridge of remote, isolated, almost uninhabited time, I see my diminutive self as celebrating, on that August day 1903, the birth of sentient life....

My father, let it be noted, had served his term of military training long before I was born, so I suppose he had that day put on the trappings of his old regiment as a festive joke. To a joke, then, I owe my fist gleam of complete consciousness—which again has recapitulatory implications, since the first creatures on earth to become aware of time were also the first creatures to smile. (21-2)

To me, Nabokov's river of time is like the candle flame, and each of us is an instant in it. Without our participation, would there even be a flame?

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I mentioned a nuanced view of *tamas*, of how we stay stuck, by Oregon's poet laureate. Here it is:

“An Archival Print” by William Stafford:

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.

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Susan found a video of the nuclear fission demonstration I mentioned: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjqIJW\\_Qr3c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjqIJW_Qr3c). We were talking about the linear models used in science classes, like billiard balls striking each other. The demo shows how a single event can have an explosively complex effect, even if all the elements are supposedly “square” or “linear.”

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Jake's commentary:

In verse 86, Nitya and the Guru continue the lesson of the previous one in examining more closely the principle of establishing “the true being of the items that are part of our experience” (p. 605). In his commentary, Nitya extends his reference he began in verse 85 in which he briefly mentioned a friend who was part of the group listening to Nitya as he explicated the verses day after day. This friend noted his disinterest in the discussions of the verses, his tendency to want to be elsewhere—his creeping boredom with the whole process. In this anecdote, Nitya illustrates our common lot in the world, our natural tendency to get lost in the details, the minutia, and lose sight of “the supreme Absolute value of all we experience. As our attention trails off

subject to Maya's gunas we take our eyes off the prize and are swallowed in cyclical reality.

Nitya is not saying that this world is to be avoided or denigrated or, as some would have it, transformed into a rigidly enforced policing of all behavior, a position that denies one half of the dualities required for the world to function as our senses/mind have so carefully trained themselves to recognize. Denying the charging rhinoceros because its behavior does not comport with our happiness may assuage the moralist in us but will cost us our life regardless of our sentiments. And we face this contradictory situation daily—nature and the world operate according to cycles, gunas, and mathematical precision and all of that activity, forms, names, ideas, etc. are unstable, will dissolve sooner or later. We are in the middle of it all. But as Nitya writes of nature, “You do not have any responsibility for it” (p. 608) and all of it will pass.

The problem of attachment thereby emerges as the core subject of this verse and Nitya's commentary on it. The triple modalities and their binding character, their power to seduce and hypnotize “have their effect on the surface” and will continue to exercise that control as long as we remain as we are. Coming to understand and *know* that fact presents us with a dilemma that can be remedied, he writes, by leaving them [the gunas] and becom[ing] the single large eye rather than the small two eyes” (p. 608). By assuming this position as we examine the word each day, watching “both the outer world game and the inner world game,” we “become the great witness.”

In his concluding paragraphs, Nitya adds that becoming aware and living in that space is not stable: “The game is continuous” (p. 610). Realization, he goes on to point out, comes as a “flash,” but that sudden insight occurs because of the groundwork one steadily works on beforehand. The daily education, meditation, and labor required in order to make us ready for this instantaneous insight is as equally important as the waking up itself. This process he likens to working on a Chinese puzzle that we cannot perceive as we assemble but that comes into view

all of a sudden as we back away and view the whole after toiling for so long. But even at this point our work is not finished. A new puzzle always presents itself at that point and off we go. It is in the turning away from the puzzle that we get de-railed, a detour, I think, now ever-available in our Electronic Dark Age.