

12/16/14
Verse 87

Taking each kind alone, it exists;
mutually, each excludes the other;
when this is remembered, body and all such
are neither real nor unreal; that is indescribable.

Free translation:

When each entity is taken by itself, it has existence and it excludes other things by the law of impenetrability. When this fact is considered, the body and such cannot be rated as real or unreal, they can only be termed indescribable.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Each taken by itself, all things here do exist; treated mutually
Each class excludes the other; considered in this way
The body and other things are neither real
Nor lacking in verity; they become unpredicable.

A number of the old stalwarts gathered for our last meeting of the year. We have pondered much together, and our directed efforts often wafted those present to sublime depths. It's hard for me to imagine a life without the regular bathing in substantiality we have treated ourselves to. All through the week I now have a well-established confidence in the back of my mind that my ups and downs are grounded in a steadiness that is infinitely compassionate and intelligently comprehending of my foibles. It's a blissful relief from anxious doubt! My sincere thanks are extended to all participants, virtual as well as actual.

We have now paused, poised on the verge of verse 88, which is the culmination of many of the threads of our explorations. We have had several verses to examine the degree of reality of the world we live in, progressively breaking down our certitude that objects are the only

reality and inviting our awareness of the all-encompassing substratum they are formed from. Verse 88 will accord everything reality to the extent it is functionally valid. Nothing of significance is to be dismissed. By this point we should have successfully put everything in its proper perspective. So our three-week break can allow what we've learned so far to sink in and prepare us for the ultimate merger.

Deb's opening survey covered the whole arc of the verse. She likened Nitya's opening gambit about seeing and looking, the outside coming in and the inside projecting out, as being two kinds of arrows. Her image brought to my mind the battlefield of the Bhagavad Gita, where Arjuna and Krishna hold their ineffable dialogue on the science of the Absolute right in the midst of the flights of arrows from both sides. Deb pointed out that there is a meeting point between the subjective and objective aspects that is a non-formed and neutral essence that percolates up into all the various forms we meet here. We examine the classifications of forms in order to perceive how we get tangled up in details and forget the underlying transcendental reality. She sighed that this awareness brings us a sense of humility or at least restraint, because we no longer have to pretend to a certainty that is most certainly a pretense, a superimposition of a partial interpretation onto reality. Deb was once again struck by how thoroughly we imbue the world with our own limited ideas. Then all we can think is "Oh, maybe...."

Andy picked right up on "Oh, maybe." It's the original conversion of certitude into uncertainty. But we can employ it as a technique for disentangling ourselves from the false certitudes of the world of superimposition we have inherited. When coupled with the relinquishment of having to understand specifically, it becomes a positive, rather than its normally negative, impulse. Most of you know we are gliding toward Verse 100, which does not begin with "Maybe that, or maybe this," but with "Neither that, nor this, nor the meaning of existence am I, but existence, consciousness, joy immortal." There's no comparison.

Bill mused on how we mentally construct an objective reality we think is totally real, and yet it is impossible to accept it, because intuitively we sense it is simply a construct. Andy added it has a

momentum of its own that we get swept up in, and so are rarely able to detach ourselves from. If we do nothing, we will be carried along by it. Bill saw that this inherent momentum was why as soon as we resolve one issue, the next one pops up to engage our attention. I suggested this was exactly where counteracting the momentum with an equal and opposite force was what brought us to neutrality, but the consensus was you could just stop, just step out of the river. I guess you are free to take your pick and see what works for you. The momentum is not unlike our planet's rushing through outer space at tremendous speed: unnoticed and unaccounted for.

Paul offered a fascinating analogy of the polarizing filter on his telescope. Polarized light is not scattered, but channeled in a single direction. You can turn the filter 90 degrees and the image varies from perfectly clear to utterly dark. He felt that this was how the superimposition of partial understanding affected our view of the world, or of the heavens for that matter. Paul likened his own attitude of being in charge to resembling a polarizing filter in front of the witnessing eye of the Absolute, reducing the clarity in direct proportion to our dependence on a single, well-defined perspective out of the infinite sea of possibilities. Scotty appended Paul's image with a favorite saying of Joseph Campbell's, that once you finally see your path clearly laid out before you, know it is not your path. The idea is the same: we intercept the pure light of the Absolute and channel it in limited ways, which convert it into something that is inevitably inferior.

Our certitude is always misplaced, at best a steppingstone to a greater awareness. We are trained to hang on tightly to what we have been taught as a fixed system. Creative people are those who can let go of old certainties and open up to other options as they come along. Narayana Guru wants to show us how to free ourselves from the tyranny of negative and confusing systems of thought.

For instance, functional validity makes abundant sense if we picture it in terms of Narayana Guru's own enhanced perspective. He looked out upon a sea of people he knew were infinite divine beings, miracles of evolution, embodiments of wonder. In his lifetime, many of those around him bore a self-image forged from a rigidly certain caste

hierarchy that assured them they were inferior and unworthy. Because of their negative self-image, they willingly consigned themselves to miserable, subservient lives, made barely bearable by occasional self-destructive venting of the pressure. He didn't see any reason for their position to be fixed in stone. If they simply converted to a different framing of who they were and what their world was, everything would change. History proved that he was right with astonishing rapidity.

Atmopadesa Satakam invites us to do the same, to ask ourselves why we insist on framing the world in ways that make us small and unhappy. It doesn't require adopting unscientific beliefs; in fact, many of those cherished unscientific beliefs are precisely what hold us fast in immobility. We have been examining them throughout our study, so I won't list them now. Each of us is invited to conduct our own examination of them at any time.

The central premise of the work is not hard to grasp: how we frame our world has a direct impact on our life, and we are capable of altering our framing. Therefore we can have an impact on the course of our life. We are not helpless. Then, too, the great thinkers and seers of all times have left suggestions to assist us in lifting ourselves out of spiritual poverty, so we already have a lot of support. Even so, it is normally a glacially slow process. Mostly we don't just change in a heartbeat, we have to restructure our neurons by repeated upgrades to our habitual thought forms. The schism between what we envision and how long it takes to get there can breed frustration and despair, undermining our resolve. Sitting quietly, alone or in a group, permits such steam to boil away into empty space, restoring our peace of mind.

Narayana Guru's contemporaries were blessed to share a revolutionary vision that produced a positive momentum in their lives. The modern world is much more fragmented, so we have to elicit an internal momentum rather than find it in our surroundings, with a few notable exceptions. You are fortunate indeed if you can share in one of those communities whose overall momentum is positive.

Hardheaded materialists insist that the objects we perceive are what the world is, period. That is certainly how it appears. Enlightened scientists and philosophers now know that such a barefaced belief is

unfounded: objects are presented to us as a bare outline sketch that we fill in with presumptions based on previous experience. In fact, the sketch itself is almost invisible, with the bulk of our perception being internally generated. Looked at historically, people have always insisted they were right and were perfectly certain of it, even willing to kill for it, but now we look on their views as patently absurd. Even most of the people who insist they are right nowadays look at their ideas as absurd, not seeing the writing on the wall that from an enlightened perspective our beliefs are bound to be flawed, no matter how stridently we back them up with “facts.” Nitya sums it up this way:

Facts are incidental in life, but operational meanings give facts validity for your empirical life. This is why the Guru says these forms are not anritam, they are not functionally unreal. They are unreal only in the sense that in themselves they have no beingness. Their beingness is only of consciousness, caitanya.

That is precisely why we have made such a close study of consciousness: it is the co-creator of our world. Our surface mind is obsessed with details, sorting them by their predicted impact into various categories. It’s a great survival tactic, but not helpful in freeing our spirit to soar. That means it’s both a facilitator and an impediment. Nitya clarifies the mind’s dual nature:

In the objective world and the subjective world our minds work by pigeonholing, by classifying everything into kinds.... The Guru says *tanu mutalayatu satumalla*, meaning that the central aspect of a perception, mental or physical, which brings you to pinpoint a thing as belonging to a class, is not real. Is it unreal, then? No, because it has functional validity. For all the transactions you make, you depend on this operational validity. Because it has an operational validity you cannot say it is unreal. Since it is neither real or unreal, the Guru calls it *avacyamayitunnu*, indescribable or unpredictable.

To my astonishment, I noticed that the word unpredicable somehow morphed into unpredictable in the text, so please change it in your document. Delete the t. The book has it right. Unpredicable is a Gurukula word, close kin to indescribable. It means you can't add a description of an object without limiting it unfairly, so stop doing that. As with indescribable, we can and do describe things, and that's functionally valid, but if we want to penetrate to their essence we have to relinquish the urge, at least while we're meditating on reality.

Andy has been studying verses 30 and 31 with the online group, and he read them out as close cousins to the present verse. Here they are:

Inert matter does not know; knowledge has no thought
and does not articulate; knowing knowledge to be all,
letting go, one's inner state becomes boundless;
indeed, thereafter he never suffers confined within a body.

Without prior experience there is no inference;
this is not previously perceived with the eye;
therefore, know that the existence of that in which all qualities
inhere
is not known by inference.

Verse 31 is especially closely related, and the whole class had an aha! moment in seeing how 31 and 87 throw light on each other. Susan humorously proposed we start over from the beginning as soon as we finish, and I have to admit this is a work that grows more brilliant with every reading. We will leave restudying it to individual initiative, however.

Inference does not reveal the Absolute, but nevertheless it is the perspective we employ all the time. We are trained to do it, forced to do it, and crave doing it. Since it is hard to know the original state of anything, we make simulacra of it, analogies. Inductive reasoning is central to transactional life: because of this and this, then this. The "thing in itself" remains ever elusive. Nataraja Guru has more on this idea in his commentary, in Part II.

One of my favorite insights of Nataraja Guru's is that inductive reasoning isn't so special. Its importance is overblown. Even barely sentient cows are capable of induction. If a cow sees you raise a stick, it will shy away, which means it is inferring you are going to strike it.

Another classic insight is Nitya's rant about plastic flowers, which comes in this verse:

In verse 85 the Guru likened everything we see here to the masterly production of an artist, describing it as a snake painted by a master. In other words it has a marvelous form but no substance. The form is what gets a name. Even if you fashion the form of a flower in paper or plastic, the mind accepts it as a flower. It has no qualities of a flower, and yet we use the fake one in place of a true flower for decoration. We even call it a flower, since the name is so easily associated with the form. But it lacks any substance that would make it a flower.

To what category do a plastic flower and a plastic orange belong? You don't think of them as belonging to the same species, even though they are both plastic. One belongs to a flower species and the other to the citrus species—isn't it total nonsense? They are plastic lumps. How can one be a fruit and the other a flower? Since you have an idea of the kind in your mind, different categories are put under one class. You are once again seduced by the form over the substance.

Appreciating how our minds effortlessly produce a functionally efficient interpretation means we can stop feeling like we have to get everything right all the time. This is a very important insight, overcoming an obsession many of us have struggled to cope with. Here's how Nitya expresses it:

This whole mechanism called the functional aspect of consciousness is not something which should bring us to any depression, but to a state of elation. Accepting this takes a big load from our hearts. We no longer need to insist on having to understand everything. This

whole creation-manifestation-projection is such that it is bound to be uncertain. That is the only certitude: the certitude of uncertainty. When we accept it we think, "I am not called upon to know everything. Fine. Now I can be a very simple person. There is no need for me to be as intelligent as God. It is God's creation." Or call it Nature if you prefer.

This is a world of wonder. The classes and categories that are relevant to our daily experience have an operational validity. This makes things very easy for us.

This actually goes 180 degrees counter to our social education. Society will always be looking to assign blame for everything, but we could at least stop doing it to ourselves. We have been trained to criticize ourselves harshly, but here we are invited to take a different tack. The mania for being right is actually a defense mechanism of the ego, stung repeatedly in its development by castigation for its failures. The idea seems to have resonated with Deb, and she was kind enough to send me a paragraph summary already this morning:

During class last night one of the last sentences rang a kind of clarion bell for me: You don't need to understand everything, you can let it simply be. It made me think how for much of my life knowing has been so compelling, so important. There has been an almost frantic push to know, as if by knowing I possess. As I thought of it, I realized one of the reasons we want or need to know is that we feel that by knowing we order the world around us, we control it somehow. And even more crucially, it helps us define who we are. By knowing our world we know ourselves... which is a kind of a reverse or inverted path to knowing. And what the gurus are saying here is just the opposite, that by sinking into our undifferentiated being we will know ourselves and the world.

I know several others among us for whom this is particularly significant; perhaps they will share their thoughts with us one of these days. One or two already have.

The class adopted Husserl's term for reducing our external focus in order to merge with what we are calling the *karu* in this study: transcendental reduction. Deb's last sentence says it perfectly: "by sinking into our undifferentiated being we will know ourselves and the world." Reduction normally seems like just throwing stuff away, but the idea is that by throwing it away—even temporarily, as in meditation—we allow ourselves vastly more room to exist. Much of our study has been a repeated effort to discard unnecessary padding in our thought process. This is a bountiful field for contemplative plowing!

The belief that life is unreal may cause us to dismiss much of importance. We might be led to conceive of ourselves as glorified beasts of burden, born to serve others, instead of magnificent creations of nearly infinite potential, looking for ways to express that capacity. Narayana Guru therefore assures us that everything is real enough. Not ultimately real, perhaps, but real enough. The ultimate reality resides in the Ground of all, but what it supports is as real as manifestation can get. So don't dismiss it, cherish it in its proper magnitude. Everything is exactly what it is, and yet, Nitya concludes:

I don't go to the other extreme and say each by itself is absolutely real. I have to be cautious, not taking everything for granted. It can be misleading. I am wakeful and vigilant because this is the field where I may encounter many snares.

The aspect which we say is a wonder is called *paramartham*, ultimate meaning. Where there is a functional reality it is called the transactional, *vivahara*, and where it is illusory it is called *pratibhava*. So there are these three aspects: the illusory, the transactional and the transcendental.

The transcendent is full of wonder, and it is uncertain. Why is it uncertain? Because the subject-object duality is effaced there. Husserl calls this the transcendental reduction. That is the ultimate reduction, by which you come to pure beingness, absolute and unquestionable. You are not there to question because you have merged into it, you have lost your face and your mind. This is not bad, because in its place you have gained the whole. In addition, you

have the very workable field of transaction and the murky realm of illusions. It's all very beautifully laid out.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

Our experience can generally be divided into two aspects—looking and seeing. The looking aspect is usually recognized as the subject and the seeing aspect as the object. One might be led to think that the subject is inside and the object is outside. This, however, is not so. Spinoza speaks of the nature that natures. Similarly, knowledge has a rigorous incentive to know, and its fields of interest are many, such as the physical, the chemical, the biologic, the social, the historic, the linguistic, the artistic, the musical and so on. When consciousness is directed to any particular field, it confines itself to the one class it selected, chooses one species in that class, and within that species it might concentrate on a sub-species and then on the characteristic marks or qualities of its individual entities. Mind functions both analytically and synthetically. Consciousness vacillates between what is seen and the motivational urge. At the analytical level the mind is with a thing or an individual.

As an individual, Peter is different from Paul. Each individual has his or her own separate life and personal qualities, thus, in that sense, one person can never become an exact substitute for another. As an individual entity undergoes transformations during the course of time, its functional reality, or *ritam*, cannot be considered uniform and universal. Lack of conformity and universality puts the entity under the category of the transient. The duration of existence can be one millionth of a second or a hundred millennia, but that does not change the status of a thing which has only a finite existence. Whatever is finite in its duration is unreal.

Individuality is not the only reality. Peter, Paul and John can all be included in the class called “man,” and Mary, Ruth and Sarah come in the class called “woman.” They can all be included in a general class

called “humanity,” and although lions and monkeys cannot be included in this group, they can join man in a class called “animal.” Animals, birds and vegetation can all go under the even more general classification of “living beings.”

The entire world stands divided between genus and species. In the present verse the word *inam* is translated as “kind,” but in another work entitled *Jatilashana*, Narayana Guru elaborates the meaning of *inam* by saying that what distinguishes the individuality of one from another is called “kind.” If there were no kinds, we could not conceive things, it would in fact be as though there was nothing. Formal individuations rise from the depth of consciousness one after another, like waves appearing on the surface of the ocean. It is in the mold of knowledge that the cast of every individuation is produced.

As an example of “kind,” the Guru points out the characteristics one may notice in the biologic world in which each species has its own kind of body, appearance, sound, smell, temperature and taste. Except in the case of lower forms of life, each kind has its own males and females for mating and reproducing. Those who cannot mutually mate and reproduce are not of the same kind. Thus, in the world of transactions, the embodiment of a being or a thing is very important. However, when we closely scrutinize a thing or a being that has a gross body it proves to be only in a transitory phase. For instance, when a candle burns its entire body disappears leaving no traces anywhere; thus, its grossness and its form are easily convertible into invisible gaseous entities. Some potted plants require no manure; they grow fabulously with just a little moisture, some light and materials they gather from the air; it is as if they can produce all the matter required for their foliage and stems out of nothing. Thus, what is visibly present as a concrete entity disappears, and, in the same manner, invisible forms of energy manifest into concrete entities. These transient formal factors are not true, in the sense that they have a beingness which corresponds to their visual form, as all kinds are entirely dependent on their form and placement. In what Husserl calls regional ontology, they are only appearances.

For the above reason, in this verse Narayana Guru treats kinds as unreal, but at the same time, in the factual world of life situations, every

kind that constitutes a system has a structural relevancy and a functional reality and therefore we cannot say that the kinds are altogether unreal. In this context the Guru recognizes the functional validity of things, and, as it is contradictory to say that the kinds are substantially unreal and functionally real, to avoid such conflict he calls them indescribable.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

A PREDICATION is a statement made consciously and philosophically in respect of the truth of reality of any entity actual or conceptual. Definitions and relations too are sometimes called predicables. Where there is a subject there is also a predicate to which it is a subject. When the subjective and the objective sides tend to be confused with one another predication is not possible any more.

Here we have to clearly distinguish the factors that contribute to such an indeterminism, incertitude or unpredicability. The uncertainty principle has now come to find place in modern physics through Heisenberg, who has formulated it not as a mere doubt but as a positive factor of uncertainty defined as a principle. Similarly when the Guru says here that because of difference and agreement with some central philosophical norm, the reality of an object of a certain class becomes unpredicable, we have not to confuse it with mere difficulty of knowing. Even with a high degree of intelligence, this unpredicability will persist, because it is a fundamental epistemological factor. It is not just vagueness.

There is a central paradox at the core of life itself by which what is true and what is false present the contradictory character of each other. Truth could appear false and vice-versa, so that we arrive at a strange and necessary uncertainty when both are perfectly balanced. They are in fact the obverse and the reverse of the same

coin, represented by the Absolute, which transcends paradox and all possibilities of paradox.

In the next verse the Guru will use the technical term of Advaita Vedanta philosophy, viz. Maya, to designate this same principle of uncertainty, as it covers all possibilities of error in philosophical speculations in respect of the Absolute. The outside fact and the inside truth come into subtle conflict through the principle of Maya, which is the uncertain negative principle or 'negativitat' as Hegel would call it.

Kant would say that the reality of a thing-in-itself (ding-an-sich) is unknowable. This thing-in-itself is what philosophy seeks to understand. The phenomenal world is self-evident and requires no special exercise of the attention or of reasoning. The outside world is present even when we deny it or lazily witness it. But when we focus our attention and reason about it to find its cause or underlying reality, such reasoning abolishes it. Thus it is and is not, according to the degree of attention we are able to bring to bear upon it. If, by introspective reasoning we examine its basis, the Absolute that is given to such deeper intuitive reasoning takes us to the thing-in-itself.

Part III

Jake's commentary:

In this verse, the Guru and Nitya explore the distinction we experience between existence and beingness. In the previous several verses, writes Nitya, the Guru has been preparing us for this exploration that he had previously illustrated with his pot/clay analogy. Our senses/mind identify a pot as existing, but the beingness of the clay, the constant element, presents us with a contradiction insofar as just what is existing in the space we've allotted to both. On the one hand, the pot certainly exists, however

temporarily, as it occupies a transactional and practical position for us. On the other hand is the clay in both form and content, an element always present regardless of form. It is this durability that gives it *beingness*. The pot exists but contains no beingness.

With this generally applied distinction as a starting point, Nitya moves on with his commentary. Kant long ago established the impossibility of our being able to know any “thing in itself,” writes Nitya. What we perceive is our projection that, with the aid of public consensus (and our senses), becomes our objective reality. These things or modulations, says Nitya, we always give names to thereby privileging the map over the territory, so to speak. The names of the forms then constitute a secondary province of perceived reality that, depending on the extent to which it is ratified via consensus, becomes the common notion of what *is*. As an illustration of just how much we buy into this privileging of form, he notes our propensity to group objects exclusively according to their un-real character. A plastic flower and a plastic orange, for instance, we classify as flower and orange when in fact they are both lumps of plastic. As Nitya writes, we name our experiences according to their properties and do so in a fairly arbitrary manner in order to suit our immediate need. People are “my students” or are wearing like dress depending on my interest at any one time. The qualities, he says, are generally termed *differentia* and follow a pattern from the most broad to the most specific. Porphyry’s Tree, he adds, is one such ancient classification system that follows this trajectory moving from the *accidental differentia* (a person’s clothes, for example) to more essential *differentia* (one’s ability to reason). All of this sorting and classifying has its functional utility in our work-a-day world so “you cannot say it is unreal. Since it is neither real nor unreal, the Guru calls it . . . indescribable or unpredictable” (p. 615).

At this point in his commentary, Nitya brings in the phenomenology of Husserl in order to move our point of view from the exterior *seeing* side to our interior *looking* side where the Self and the *real* connect. Nitya applauds Husserl’s efforts to

establish what he calls a new science and then connects it to the Guru's exploration of beingness and existence. For both views, the world of objects exists but as they do for all individual perspectives they inevitably become identified individually through our senses of differentia associated with the modulation. In the Indian model, writes Nitya, this process involves our "two sides" of perception, our looking and seeing sides that connect via our interior consciousness. Common to all three elements is pure *caitanya* or consciousness, a combination that produces for us what we "think is a valid experience": "Facts are incidental in life, but operational meanings give facts validity for your empirical life. . . . They are unreal only in the sense that in themselves they have no beingness" (p. 617).

In his concluding comments, Nitya points to another situation created by this interplay of beingness and existence, a condition almost universally mis-applied in the US, especially as it is reflected in the contemporary culture war. This "functional aspect of consciousness" or inevitable process through which we experience the world and act in it denotes that uncertainty rules the day. The only certitude [in this] is the certitude of uncertainty." On the one hand, the mind cannot grasp the Absolute because of it (the mind's) necessary use of duality/senses in order to operate and, now, on the other hand is the transactional world not completely within the grasp of the rational mind. The only domain within, in the latter where we have very limited say, is that having to do with our personal transactional reality: "The classes and categories that are relevant to our daily experience have operational validity" (p. 617). On the whole remains uncertainty, but our specific experience in the world is transactionally valid and knowable.

Remaining aware of this over-arching reality eliminates for us any mandate to "know everything" as the materialist/scientifician-atheist demands (as an essential Omega point) or abdicating all personal power and projecting it all onto external "Nobodaddy" (as William Blake so eloquently put the

matter). In either case, the principle endures that the world, existence itself, is not as it *should* be and will be “corrected” in a future that exists nowhere now but will sooner or later as long as we hold fast to that which is not stable and does not endure.