

1/27/15
Verse 90

The unreal does not conceal what exists,
such is the experience; what exists is; in this way,
at every step this is enveloped by existence;
therefore, body and such effects are existence through and through.

Free translation:

The unreal cannot conceal the real. That is our experience.
Existence asserts itself at every step, producing all effects, such as
the body.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

What has no basis in reality can never hide what exists;
Experience vouches for this; asserting the reality
Of what exists, at every step, by existence all is enveloped:
The body and other things thus have pure being for content.

Nitya's commentary on this important verse can strike us as somewhat stodgy and overcautious. Bushra aired her disagreement with it, which goes to the heart of the matter. How do we access the unknown if we limit ourselves to known, familiar territory? Shouldn't we look for opportunities to take leaps beyond the ordinary? Yes, of course. The point is well taken. Most of us have found wonders crucial to our evolution when we stepped over our boundaries. But like everything, there is a happy middle ground between the extremes, which in this case are rank credulity on one hand or excessively severe skepticism on the other.

Knowing the context of Nitya's explication of the verse is very helpful in seeing why he took the tone he did. At the time of the original class, many attendees were wild with enthusiasm for all sorts of outlandish, purportedly spiritual, notions. The "New

Age” was in full flower, so untested but alluring avenues of titillation were appearing on the scene almost daily. Many of them were patently ridiculous, as with the messages from other galaxies or ancient Atlantean warriors: wishful thinking dressed in supposedly respectable-enough clothing. Accusing anyone of telling tall tales was against the tenor of the time. The wilder and weirder the better.

On top of that incredible chaos, which was for the most part merely risible and not too psychologically damaging, several of the students Nitya had given a lot of time and attention to had lost interest in his approach of serious, grounded contemplation, gravitating instead to flash-in-the-pan gurus that were popping up like toadstools all over the place. They promised quick and easy results, which brought in the gullible but wasn't necessarily backed up by anything substantive. Several of those cults ended quite badly. So Nitya was politely suggesting in this talk that folks should think twice before leaping into something that from his perspective was absurd and fraught with peril. He had been around a lot and seen plenty of absurdities, so it was natural for him to want to give advice to the naïve children that were sitting in his living room.

There isn't much less common than common sense, so Nitya felt he had to stand up for it:

Before one gets the highest realization, one should know how to listen to one's own common sense. It is at the risk of common sense that most people seek spirituality, and this heads them towards trouble.

Everything has an innate limitation as well as enormous potentialities. Sand cannot hold water. But sand can be melted and fused into transparent glass, which can hold water. If you look at a handful of sand and a glass bottle, you would never imagine there could be such a transformation. Enormous possibilities are lying concealed in the sand.

But however much you try you cannot get milk from sand, except in fairy tales. This is the field where charlatans thrive. When you abandon ritam, functional reality, they all rush in. “We shall help you! Now you have given up your common sense. Very good! That’s an important requirement of our path. From here onwards we will be fast friends.” This kind of spirituality is not safe.

This is not an injunction against exploration beyond fixed boundaries, only against opening ourselves to exploitation. And there are sound reasons to undergo a bit of discipline. Atmopadesa Satakam is a very intense teaching. Despite making no claims and promising no miracles, pondering its nuances can inaugurate a sea change in a person’s life. That’s why we’re spending a moment to fasten our seat belts:

This verse is given for stabilization, so you won’t just take off. In the next five or six verses there will be another critical focusing on the verity of things here. You may lose your ground if you are not once again reminded to hold on to your common sense. This is just like telling a child to hold on tight while they are getting on a merry-go-round. The Guru says to hold on tight to the functional reality you know through your common sense, until you come to the other end.

This is the compassion of the Guru. Instead of making a fanfare of euphoria, he asks us to sit firm.

Once again, our parallel Brihadaranyaka Upanishad study meshes with That Alone quite well. In our latest section, dealing with the chant we have added to our opening ritual in the Portland Gurukula (lead us from falsehood to truth, etc.) Nitya is confronting the same kind of perennial derangements:

Misunderstanding can lead us to the blind alleys of many indefinite presumptions, imaginations, fantasies and surmises.

While right understanding leads us to the clarity of distinctive light, a wrong notion can take us astray into darkness. If we enter into darkness we soon lose interest. That is why we spoke of the wrong notion as a dead end. Confusion is confounding. (BU I:137)

Obviously the main thrust of Vedanta and the Gurukula philosophy is to break out of our habitual behavior and negative thinking patterns, so this important subject should not be construed as inhibitory of our best aspirations. Most of what we think of as free activity is actually totally conditioned, and sorting out where the blocks are takes a sharp eye and a brave heart. Deb told a story of when she was traveling with Nitya in 1971 and receiving some rather intense discipline. They were sitting together in a restaurant in Rishikesh. There was pop music blaring, and Deb started unconsciously swaying along with it. Nitya said sternly, “Stop that! It’s just a habitual, unconscious response, and to get to your real understanding you have to break out of those conditioned responses.” Not surprisingly, Deb got angry and fumed to herself, “That’s such a petty thing! I’m just living the music. What’s the big deal?” Later on, though, when she took time to think it over, she realized he was right.

Sometimes dancing can be just about the most freeing thing on earth, helping us to let go of our inhibitions, but that kind of artistry isn’t the same as twitching along with some commercial recording. In any case, Nitya used it as an entrée for Deb to take a look at something she routinely did without thinking, which proved to be a liberating effort.

She’s telling me now how it was often that way: Nitya would intentionally provoke her, and she would get furious. The anger may have helped her to overcome her own resistance though, because once she cooled down she would see the good sense in what he’d said. A couple of other provocations she recalls from those early days include Nitya ending arguments with “Maybe some day you won’t have such a strong need to defend yourself,”

and “I hope eventually you’ll have another idea of freedom.” As you probably recognize, these were aimed at universal ego traits, not just some silly girl’s hang-ups. Freedom is defined as what we are fantasizing about at the moment, and we cover our insecurities with a vigorous, if subtle, defensive bluster. Without a guru to help us confront them, static mental states like those are likely to persist indefinitely.

The main thrust of the study is to bring us into alignment with our inner rhythm, or ritam in Sanskrit. Our functional reality. This is the intelligent principle that built us up from a fertilized egg cell into a fabulously complicated neonate, and then continues to offer directions for our development throughout our whole life. Unfortunately we learn to tune its intimations out and pay attention to the radio in the restaurant or the man behind the curtain or what have you. It is too gentle to compete with them. We substitute anritam—improper understanding—for ritam, and then wind up drinking kool-aid when the mood strikes us.

Opening ourselves up to the benign influences of our inner genius reestablishes a harmonious rhythm in our life. Lacking that, we cast about for a substitute, and are frequently disappointed with an inferior imitation. We seek ritam from our friends and family, our job, our avocations, but don’t realize we have to uncover it in ourselves first. Once again Nitya says it perfectly:

The Guru says anritam can never satisfy you because truth will soon demand functional reality, and that whenever functional reality is belied the actual situation will expose it. If a man convinces you he is a very good plumber, but then he doesn’t know how to fix something in your bathroom, it proves his claims are false. When what he says meets the acid test of functional reality, he has to confess he can’t do it. The simple things in life can show this up very clearly. For instance, if you want to prepare a meal you should know how to cook, otherwise the result will not be edible.

This is a very important lesson to learn. If we get confused in situations in our daily life, like our interpersonal relations, it is because we are not paying heed to functional reality. This is different than abstracting the total truth in a situation. That also has a great value. But we live every day in the manifest aspect rather than the unmanifest, so for that we need not the philosopher's truth but commonsense truths which are valuable for everyday situations.

If we just stop caring about it, anritam doesn't go away, it continues to plague us. And it's not an occasional business at all. In Nitya's words:

In fact, we do this kind of thing to ourselves, nature does it to us, society does it to us. It is happening on many levels. There are many kinds of make-believe between people. There is a lot of scope for anritam.

A major theme of most religions and most spiritual paths is dissatisfaction with our self. We are trained to reject who we are and adopt a hypothetical substitute. Doing so actually creates the inner warfare we inwardly suffer from and then project onto our surroundings. Narayana Guru's compassion is to teach us to try to make peace between our warring factions. Seeing the Absolute as our true essence is the most radically healing revolution possible. Self-rejection lies at the very alpha point of our mental imbalance, and its cure is self-acceptance. As Paul affirmed, this doesn't mean we are to unquestioningly accept the personal, egoistic self, which is merely the nexus of all our falsehood and self rejection, but to accept the capital S Self of the book title: One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction. We seek to reacquaint ourselves—egos and all—with our true Self. We are That. Can we dare to believe in it and treat it as real? Trusting that we embody the Absolute is much more complicated than it sounds, because we are so saturated in anritam. We would rather be following a path to somewhere else, a

promised land, where we can cash in our chips for our due reward. The last thing we want to do is accord ourselves the respect that every particle of existence deserves.

Discovering perfection within ourselves does not undermine our ability to act, as is sometimes imagined, it frees us of a welter of obstructions that we tenaciously hold in place with our false beliefs. The resolution is wonderful expressed in this small gem of a paragraph:

The ultimate we search for and the immediate we live in are united. They are not two. Here and now we are living in the Absolute. That's why Sir Arthur Eddington said that the Absolute could be defined as a relative which is always the same no matter what it is relative to. When there is such a degree of dependability, the relative becomes the Absolute.

One teaching that has really rocked my socks for all these years comes near the end of the commentary. When seekers reject themselves they are unconsciously rejecting the whole shebang. If we don't matter, what does? But we are all infinitely valuable. This world is not an embarrassing mistake; it's a golden opportunity.

These are bedrock ideals at the heart of this masterwork, and we are most fortunate that Nitya has teased them out for us, because they are anything but self-evident. And one more thing. Nitya often mentioned the value of our humble eyelids, implying among other things that we have a measure of control over our world, so it's nice it found a way into That Alone:

Before he leads us to the ultimate peace at the end of the work, Narayana Guru once again reminds us that God did not make a mistake in creating this world. God was justified in giving you a skeletal system, an anatomy, which is so structured that when you want to raise your hand you can, or when you want to make a fist you can, or when you want to point your finger nothing is simpler. It is a perfect arrangement with no mistakes.

So don't say the physical world is superficial. There's nothing superficial about it. It's even a great thing that you can close your eyelids. Just the tiniest movement and the whole world disappears! Open your eyes and the world comes back. What a great wonder! Blinking is the simplest reflex action in the body. From the far-off stars to the grass beneath your feet, it all disappears and returns with a snap. What could be more wonderful than that? It belongs to the world called empirical, and the truth of it belongs to the ontologic world. Thus it is stabilized.

This is definitely one of those verses where you wonder what it means and what can be made of it, and once again Nitya has presented us with an earthshaking elucidation that has the potential to liberate us from a fistful of misunderstandings. With a little reflection, his clear insights can easily be assimilated by anyone. It's really a divine magic, that out of a tiny seed such a magnificent tree can emerge.

It was such a rich class! There is much more to it, but I like the flow of what I've written so far, so I'll save what remains for an addendum in Part III. Aum.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

Everything that constitutes our experience has an ontologic reality. This reality consists of an innate structure that has its correspondence to a coordinated function. The structure and the function, when taken together, give the existing thing an undeniable reality. This is, so to say, the anatomic frame of the entire universe which enables it to function harmoniously. It is called ritam and it is not confined to any one thing, in fact the inner structure and function of a thing is complementary to many other things. The beauty, the fragrance, the structure of the petals, the

placement of nectar in the calyx and the special design of a flower are the exact requirements to attract the bee or a butterfly to fertilize it, while the insect relishes the honey. Thus, there is a complementary between two entirely different species for the continuance of both.

This kind of interrelationship between all living forms reveals *ritam*. The universal order of functional harmony can be easily observed, such as day and night, the varying temperature of the sun, the clouds that bring rain and the gaseous constitution of the atmosphere, all of which help perpetuate life on earth. Everything, from subatomic particles to the mightiest stars, is linked to this ontologic law of mutual subsistence, and the microscopic verity of the *ritam* is as real as its macrocosmic validity. This innate law, however, can at times be misunderstood and cause great confusion, as for instance when one mistakes a rope for a snake, or mother-of-pearl for silver. This kind of mistake is called *anritam*. In our interpersonal relationships we might project on another qualities that he or she does not possess and later come to grievous frustration. Such confusion, caused by *anritam*, does not remain undetected for long; sooner or later one finds out one's mistake. Some can deceive some people some of the time, but all people cannot deceive all people all the time. If a man pretends to be an engineer, a physician, or a chartered accountant, he might get away with it till he is put into a crucial situation where he has to show his efficiency in the particular trade he professes, but his inefficiency will reveal him to be a hoax. In the Bhagavad Gita it is said that one should never attempt to do anything for which he has no natural aptitude. Pretension brings fear.

In all situations of cognition, action and appreciation, the ontologic reality of the situation comes both from the I-consciousness and its objective counterpart. The viability of cognition, action and appreciation confirms the reality of whatever constitutes the experiential situation; it is as if truth envelops everything and confirms it to be so again and again. As the source

of reality is the same in all experiences, we can say that all positive experience is of the same existential truth which is identical with the Self.

In the Apavada Darshana of the Darshana Mala, Narayana Guru says that if this world is affirmed to be real, then it is existential, and if the reality of the phenomenal world is denied, its truth becomes subsistential. As both the knower and the known have existential validity, it can be concluded that what is seen as the psychophysical reality in the here and now of life are all effects of the one supreme existence.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE word 'sat' as understood in Vedanta refers to the ontological basis of existence. It is not merely the empirical and particularly objectified being that it connotes.

Rtam, as employed in the Sanskrit of the Vedas and the Upanishads has some reference to the necessary cosmological world-order. What is in keeping with the laws of nature may be referred to have this kind of verity.

Anrtam is the opposite of rtam. Here in the present verse the Guru uses these words in their strict sense. The verse says first of all that anrtam (what exists outside of the world order or reality) cannot hide astita (the condition of being or existing). Truth is what proves itself by entering experience. Although horizontally-viewed Maya implies being and non-being blended into a state of indeterminism; vertically viewed from the absolutist standpoint, as it were from within the thing-in-itself, its truth remains unaffected. This follows from what has been already discussed in previous verses such as 87, 73, 55, 42, 28, 20, 4 etc. To see that existence applies to the Absolute so as to make it the truth that we seek

through reasoning philosophically, we have to follow the special contemplative absolutist methodology and epistemology developed here from the beginning and also see the arguments in line with the scheme of values. When we say that truth will prevail, although misrepresentations might mislead men for some time, we are referring to this ontological principle of veracity which runs through the whole course of our thinking. If someone should say that fire will not burn, experience will prove the contrary. At the logical level of reasoning, similarly there is an a priori principle of truth which is all important and of which syllogistic proofs are only secondary shadows. The best proof is what is evident, other proofs are only less valid. In the higher domain of human values too, the basic existent element of the value must determine its validity by its goodness. At every step in reasoning that we might take leading up to the highest values in life, we have this ontological principle of existence giving it a status in truth or veracity. This has been brought out on almost similar lines in the Bhagavad Gita XVII. 26, which explains how 'sat' (the ontological principle of existence) enters into all levels of reasoning, and even gives its sanction to the rightness of any action that we might decide to take.

Our thinking or reasoning has its starting point in our experience of things which exist by natural right, such as our own body. We say to ourselves, 'I have a body', and then perhaps comes the higher thought that Descartes pointed out as the basic starting-point for his methodic thinking in this metaphysical reasoning, which was formulated by him in the words 'cogito ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am). We build up certitude about reality in this manner, with the body-sense or experience as the more natural starting point. Reasoning processes of the formal world which we might call the world of subsistence, succeed those of the world of existence, resulting from the active state of the substance which forms the core of our material-cum-spiritual being as the 'thinking substance' of which Spinoza conceived. Then, above all, comes the

world of values in which again the veracity of rightness is supplied by the element of 'sat' (the existent principle of reality) which runs through all the three levels of existence, subsistence, as well as value. Finally the supreme value of all, which is the knowledge of the Absolute, is reached as the term of all philosophical enquiry. This is touched upon later in verse 93. This verse, in short, brings out the truth that an existent reference as a vertical parameter runs through all grades and categories within the Absolute.

Part III

Class notes continued:

Earlier in the week Deb and I had been talking over Chogyam Trungpa's idea of befriending yourself before you can even begin a healthy spiritual path. In many respects his ideas are as cogent as Nitya's, but one area of dissonance is the widely held belief of the ego as an enemy. *The enemy*. The Gurukula idea is that the ego has a valuable place in our existence, and only needs to be healed and brought to heel. Meaning harmonized with the total psyche. Actually the spiritual ego loves the *idea* of killing the ego, and it uses it to its glorification: "I have done away with my ego; aren't I great? And of course that places me above you and beyond the criticism of all you egotistical people." At the least, reining in the ego can be a form of self-suppression that must be handled very carefully or it can wreak havoc.

Paul played mediator between these positions and suggested that if the ego was essentially the sum total of our blocks and inhibitions, then doing away with it is what we're ostensibly up to in our class also. That is true as far as it goes, and expresses the Buddhist perspective correctly. But the Vedantic view, as filtered through Narayana Guru at least, is that there is more to the ego than that. It is the locus of our self-awareness, which is essential to sentient life. Blocks and inhibitions confuse the ego, which is the aspect of our being responsible for stabilizing and integrating our

life, and ameliorating them allows it to perform its very useful function properly. The next few verses will throw more light on this issue.

Trungpa's view roughly equates with David Eagleman's metaphor of the ego as resembling a stowaway on an ocean liner, isolated in the windowless hold. What good is it? It might as well be rooted out of hiding and thrown in jail. By contrast, the Gurukula accords the ego a place on the bridge, the command center, with veto power over certain critical decisions. An essential task in this position is to try to cure the ego first of its acquired mania for vetoing virtually everything. It has already vetoed its healthy connection with the rest of the ocean liner it belongs to, and that's what most needs to be restored. And it cannot do this on its own, without feedback from a trusted source.

Actually this schism is nearly universal, to the point where it is hardly even noticed by anyone. We go on wondering why our every effort goes awry, but it's because we're out of touch with our Self. A lot of it has to do with the rational ego being isolated from our innate wisdom, or what Nitya calls here our common sense. It's a tough job to separate humans from their common sense, but our educational system is up to the task. Still, it takes a long time.

Andy reflected on the unusual thrust in Nitya's commentary that falsehood is actually an integral part of the Absolute too. Truth reveals falsehood and vice versa because both fall under the same overarching laws. This is important because if falsehood is pushed outside the context of the Absolute, then you get the primary duality of good versus evil and my side versus your side that we have taken pains to reject over and over in the course of the study. Paul added that this shows untruth is merely relative to our experience, and does not have any independent reality of its own. This is what is meant by maya.

Moni, in reference to the Malayalam proverb referenced by Nitya that you should learn to sit before you leap, asserted that this means you need to know reality before you enter a spiritual path. Setting out on the basis of fantasy is not safe. Deb added that that's

what is meant by asana, which is a proper yoga posture symbolizing a balanced state of mind.

Coincidentally, I got some feedback this week from a friend who wrote that he doesn't accept that there is a second level in life somehow managing the part we perceive. Once you create the discrepancy between a source and the world as an effect, and especially if you personify that source in any way, you inevitably project a partial viewpoint onto reality based on wishful thinking. This is what separates philosophy and religion, where we move from the pure expression of our being to questions of morality and truth in opposition to falsehood.

The whole point of *tat tvam asi*, the ninetieth verse, and all that, is precisely to avert this kind of dualism, so rooted in the Western (and unexamined human) world view. There are not two separate things going on here, only one. That one is expressed in various ways, so we perceive it as many. But to a contemplative it remains one in essence. That's why morality and its correlates are irrelevant if not inimical to the search for truth. My friend is right: we have to take care not to trivialize the one by giving it a glib name and an imaginary form, but rather use its principle as a sharpening stone for maintaining well-focused contemplation.

We may say oneness is the crux of the matter. We are ineffectual precisely because we have been led to believe the right place is somewhere else, and so we are not included in the one. Relearning we are the Absolute in every corpuscle and so are right in the thick of things, brings us back to life, raises us from the dead. As my friend insisted, the Absolute isn't some distinct being with its own personality; it is simply what we are all made of. It does have rather awesome properties, and acknowledging those with reverence can help us regain a solid footing, but it does not necessarily have to be directed—at least in the Vedantic perspective—to an external god or force. I agree with Stan Grof, there is divinity everywhere and no deity anywhere. In any case, those who subtract obvious misunderstandings have surer path through life, so we welcome such critiques.

Andy honored Nitya as exemplifying this unitive attitude with everyone who came to him for advice or discipleship. He didn't have a fixed program to inflict, and would not presume to correct someone until he really knew them. He never experimented with people. For the most part he didn't have to, because he was not only astute at sizing people up, he had a kind of x-ray vision that probed deep into their souls. In place of taking us at face value, he could perceive the motivating factors in what bubbled up to the surface. What's more, you could feel him in there with you, and it made you (me at least) hyper self-conscious of your own defenses. Sometimes it enabled you to admit how spurious they were and begin dismantling them, though it wasn't at all easy.

Lastly, the call to pay heed to the wisdom that has been passed down to us grates on the modern mind, thanks to the distressing popularity of low-grade religious texts to excuse outrageous behavior. Nitya emphasizes the importance of scripture in his comments, including:

Perhaps your teacher picks up a book and says, "This work was traditionally followed by both teachers and disciples, and according to Sutra 37 you will first experience this, then this, then this. For at least two thousand years people have been following this and having the same experience you have." Then you can feel you are very safe. You have a living example in your teacher and also a tradition which supports it. They come in a straight line down to you. So it is almost certain to be a true experience.

When you don't have this kind of authentic reference point to see where you stand, you can be misled.

I am one of those who normally balks at such suggestions, but I had to come to grips with it at the end of the Gita's sixteenth chapter, where two verses unexpectedly extol scripture as guide. I'll clip in what I wrote about those two below, as they are quite germane and also fairly short.

That should about wrap up this very rich excursion into common sense and ontological reality. Whew! Next we go on to *priyam*, endearment.

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Paul submitted an original poem in response to the verse:

~ **just a view of View** ~

The Ghee of Butter:

is the Walk in walking
the Dance in dancing
the Song in singing

a Thought in thinking,
is just view of View.

the Design in design
the Function in function
the Purpose in purpose,

Thinking in thought,
is just a View of view.

the Love in loving,
the Affection in affection,
the Desire in desire,

as a Just View in View

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Jake's commentary:

Verse 90 represents a hesitation or moment of reflection before the Guru moves on with his conclusion to his work. The world we live in and its natural and mathematical laws cannot be bypassed as an inconvenience for those on the spiritual path, a journey we participate in aware of it or no. Relegating the manifest to illusion status and therefore consigning it to the illusory is a common mistake, says Nitya, one shared, I think, by both materialists and religionists. In both camps are those preaching a brand of transcendence the attaining of which does not require any particular attention to the world of necessity as it *is*. For both groups, that world is an embarrassment to be ignored and/or straightened out because it should be other than it is. In this verse and Nitya's commentary, the Guru and Nitya correct the error of following this path. The world is real in spite of its temporary nature. It is also where we live and is not other than the Absolute ground. The wave and the water are not two, or as Nitya writes, "the ultimate we search for and the immediate we live in are united. They are not two" (p. 643).

In his commentary, he defines a phrase rarely used with any coherence or accuracy: common sense. In the world of necessity, common sense guides us if we are aware of where we are and the laws of nature. Nitya calls this point of view a "proper" understanding of functional reality. As an example, he describes the very practical situation of an infant crying to be fed. The mother, otherwise occupied, might slip a pacifier in the child's mouth as a quick fix solution that lasts only as long as the child is not aware of this slight of hand. It has yet to quickly link its mouth with its stomach but sooner or later hunger will emerge as undeniable. At that point, the infant's practical necessity overcomes the illusion and once again the tantrum resumes. The parallels this example presents with the world and our fictions we spin about it are obvious and point to the inevitability of necessity trumping illusion however long it may take to do so. Both nature

and society operate in this general manner and do so on an infinite number of levels.

This exposing of wrong perceptions/conception (*anritam* in Sanskrit, writes Nitya) *will* appear when functional reality is violated because nature operates on principles such as gravity, life/death cycles, and so on. “Even malfunctions adhere to certain laws,” adds Nitya (p. 641). Mechanics, physicians, engineers, and others participate in their disciplines on the basis of those consistencies inherent in the detours presented by disease, machine breakdown, natural disaster, and so on.

Squaring the inexorable laws of nature with our ontological constructions creates a dicey condition when we do not have some way to measure the validity of experience beyond our isolated context. Here, Nitya brings in the wisdom of the rishis, gurus, and texts that have stood the test of time. In the wisdom passed down through the ages is that source for measuring one’s experience: “when you don’t have this kind of authentic reference point to see where you stand, you can be misled” (p. 642). At the same time, those sources, breathing or otherwise, can only be verified through our lived experience. Sooner or later, the truth will trump illusion thereby revealing the “pacifier” we have been clinging to so fiercely. When we confirm truth, concludes Nitya, we have united the seer and the seen, the observer and the observed. “The truth of an experience,” he concludes, “lies half in what is presented and half in the experiencer” (p. 643). It is this combination that makes up the whole as one seamless piece—a truth the American political class and its religious arbiters at the other end of the spectrum have succeeded in consigning to the stuff of fantasy and fiction.

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Here are the two final verses of my commentary on the Gita’s Chapter XVI, to explain why scripture has a value in helping keep our actions free of bizarre tangents:

23) He who, having abandoned the guiding principles of scripture, acts under the promptings of desire—he cannot attain perfection, nor happiness, nor the Supreme Path.

After all the training to become free and expert in expressing our inner potentials, this pair of verses extolling scripture comes as a bit of a shock, seemingly out of step with the rest of the Gita. Several factors mitigate this initial impression.

First of all, keep in mind that the Gita has high standards for a work to be considered scriptural. Most of the tawdry and confusing texts of obligatory rituals that we call scripture fall far outside its definition. Only the finest distillation of wisdom rates this nomenclature. It goes without saying that many writings—or ravings—widely regarded as scriptural are in fact ghastly, hate-filled garbage. A wise person will never unquestioningly accept the opinions of others about such matters, but will doubt even the most hallowed social conventions.

Those basted in their childhood with religious injunctions often think of scriptures as a kind of strict penal code before which everyone must bow down in terror lest they be subjected to eternal torment. This is definitely part of the problem rather than part of the solution! Moreover, the overt or implied threat of hell prompts the believer to act on the basis of desire: the desire to avoid eternal punishment. This is contrary to the neutrality necessary for true stability and happiness.

The Gita was composed in a time when there were very few books, and they were not so much conglomerations of rules as compilations of inspired poetic insight for how to deport oneself through life. Such genuine scriptures help their votaries to be free, and rely on intelligence rather than fear to accomplish their goals. Freedom from fear, as we have seen, brings happiness in the present, obviating the need to long for incarnation in future heaven worlds.

24) Therefore the scripture is your authority in deciding what should and should not be done. Understanding what is indicated for guidance in scripture, you should do work here.

After much thought, Nataraja Guru began his magnum opus, *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, with the simple sentence “Science seeks certitude.” Certitude is as mysterious as truth, and like it, is susceptible to misplaced enthusiasm. We can feel quite certain about things that are not at all true; in fact, history contains an unending litany of people being motivated by certainty about matters that had tragic consequences and which seem ludicrous in retrospect. The contemplative must be cautious about the soaring sense of inner certainty and make sure it has a reasonable basis. Although certitude is exactly what is sought, it must be doubted and questioned, and held up to comparison with the accepted standards of wise predecessors. Only if it matches those guidelines can it be considered legitimate. As Mark Twain said, “It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.”

The Gita is returning to solid ground after exploring the most sublime reaches of human potential, preparing the student to reenter the actual world. Pure spiritual intuition does not avail in all circumstances except in the rarest of cases; for the majority of us—those who plan to maintain a measure of connection with society—there should be external guidance available. While an enlightened guru is an ideal guide, readily available scriptures fill that role for most people most of the time.

The dilemma of whether to surrender to outside advice or one's inner promptings is perennial, that is to say eternal. There is no hard and fast answer for it. We have to enlist all our resources all the time in order to be on the safe side.

Very often even the wisest person will be puzzled as to the right course of action. Rather than being led astray by the persuasive arguments of someone with a vested interest, not excepting one's own ego, the neutral wisdom of a scripture may

offer superior advice. At least advice worth considering. The ego can be very convincing in rationalizing an unwise course of action. By comparing our inner promptings with a widely admired hypothesis, we can be assured that the desire is legitimate and beneficial rather than merely selfishness masquerading as virtue.

Taking the most important teachings of the Gita as a whole, scripture would have to be considered a valuable adjunct to an intuitive connection with one's true inner nature, one's dharma.

One can't help but think that the Gita may be offering itself as an eminently wise scripture to be attended to. While we are aware of Godel's second incompleteness theorem, which asserts that systems asserting their own consistency are inconsistent, we can bring our own judgment to bear as well. The Gita most definitely provides ample encouragement for a penetrating and open-ended excursion into the nature of reality. It doesn't have to blow its own horn. Sipping its sublime nectar is convincing enough.