

2/3/15  
Verse 91

Whatever effort is made in relation to each  
object of endearment it remains ordained;  
this dear value—unborn, unspent, unpredictable, one without a  
second—  
remains established in happiness.

Free translation:

It is a law that one strives to actualize what is dear to one's heart.  
As this impulsion to act is constant, its cause should be understood  
as a dear value, beginningless, never fully spent, unpredictable and  
one without a second. In short, this is the one happiness that gives  
reality to life.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

The effort that is made in view of something dear to one  
As ordained too, remaining always constant and same  
There is a dear value, unborn, unspent, unpredictable,  
One and secondless, which ever endures as one's happiness.

Now that we're on the home stretch, it's time to give away all  
the secrets, to make as clear as possible what we've been up to. Of  
course the secrets stay secret even when expressed as clearly as  
Nitya does here, but it doesn't hurt to peek at them. We might just  
catch on.

Andy wanted us to be cautious about "taking the Lord's  
name in vain," in other words, of freezing these analogies into  
fixed concepts that then kill their spirit. This is a very important  
consideration, and we want to take it seriously. The spiritual ego  
thrives on transcendent concepts, and in doing so erects a nearly

impassable barrier to the openness intended in authentic spiritual practices.

Yet taken to an extreme, over-cautiousness about conceptualization can inhibit us from making any effort at all to understand the mystery. That is an option that many people choose, but this kind of study is based on the conviction that contemplating the psyche is an enlightening proposition, that it can point us to ways that can actually help to lift the obscuring veil. We can and should include awareness of the inherent paradoxes and snares in our contemplation, to avoid becoming frozen. Narayana Guru's ineffable image from Verse 9, of the contemplative sitting under the creeper-laden tree and keeping clear of the entangling vines, permeates the whole study and should always be kept in mind.

This week's New Yorker magazine features a terrific article by Michael Pollan on the budding field of psychedelic therapy. He includes the neuroscience take on what may well be the ego, the control and command center currently known as the "default-mode network," which was not distinguished until the twenty-first century. While this network is in some respects the mastermind of brain selectivity and conscious thought, it serves to inhibit a large portion of the impulses from the older, deeper parts of the brain. Both psychedelic medicines and focused meditation have been observed to dial down the intensity of the default-mode network, allowing access to a much fuller range of conscious experience. It appears Aldous Huxley was right on with his insight of the brain as a reducing valve, though it now appears the brain *includes* a reducing valve but is also processing a vast amount of awareness at all times. Our conscious mind is trained to attend mainly to the dribble that passes through the valve, but by a shift of interest we can access the whole—oddly enough not by opening the valve wider but by turning it off temporarily.

Prabu made an astute comparison with quantum theory, where things exist in a state of pure potential until they are collapsed by observation to a specific result. Why should we always assume that the result we choose is the only possibility?

As Andy rightly warned, we can easily feed the default-mode network (he didn't use this rather unwieldy term) with concepts *about* the turiya, and be satisfied that we have achieved something wonderful when we haven't. This is the fool's paradise Nitya has been referring to all along: contenting ourselves with the idea rather than the reality. That's one reason the verses are hard to grasp, why the Gurukula gurus deliberately avoid easy answers and glib sloganizing. There is a simple contentment to be had from putting the mind at rest with a clever analogy, but in the long run it is stultifying. Our efforts are to wake up rather than to make our slumber more peaceful and cozy. If our expectations are always being met we can safely doze off.

Deb asked Andy how he lets go of the normal orientation of achieving a goal through measured steps. Andy admitted to having "a neti neti personality." He added, "If I take the teaching to be a proposition that something is so, an alarm goes off in my head." He has been learning to let go of the compulsion to cling to fixed notions, but he naturally sees the tendency everywhere now. He is working on letting go of his strong reactions to those who are content with trivialities.

Michael agreed that he too was learning to be at ease with not describing the indescribable. Of course his new attitude will jar with the ordinary paradigm of having to pin everything down, but so what? Our society has a descriptive mania, and it is killing direct experience.

The ego's role is to process experience, converting it to a secondhand version. No matter how magnificent the story it weaves—and it knows precisely how to push our buttons because it is "us" as far as we can tell—its version is nonetheless a story, a fiction. Our task is to find a way to access the whole. Not doing anything leaves the ego in charge, with its selected dribble of processed experience, and yet whatever strategy we employ is almost always managed by the ego as well, so it remains little more than an "enhanced dribble." Finding a way out of this stalemate is the great challenge to the dedicated seeker.

A guru helps, but all we have is a book version, which is seriously watered down. Of course we are not going to pass out LSD at class, but we can have moments of stillness in meditation when we turn off the narrator by means of an open attitude that invites the influx of everything we are. Whenever we do that together in the class it is... well, we're not going to predicate what it is. We've already done enough of that. Why do we have to call it anything?

Check out these two widely separated verses, from The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest, by Bob Dylan (1968):

“Eternity?” said Frankie Lee  
With a voice as cold as ice  
“That’s right,” said Judas Priest, “Eternity  
Though you might call it ‘Paradise’”  
“I don’t call it anything”  
Said Frankie Lee with a smile  
“All right,” said Judas Priest  
“I’ll see you after a while”

Well, the moral of the story  
The moral of this song  
Is simply that one should never be  
Where one does not belong  
So when you see your neighbor carryin’ somethin’  
Help him with his load  
And don’t go mistaking Paradise  
For that home across the road.

Well, for convenience, most of the time we do call it something. Many things. Here in That Alone, at the behest of a great teacher, we call it happiness. Narayana Guru boiled the mystery down to how it affects us, and epitomized that as happiness. It’s about as good as you can get, with words. Here’s how Nitya puts it:

What appears to be the final culmination of an experience is how we are affected by it, in other words the degree of happiness it brings us. And when we closely examine how we relate to things—how we envision and interpret them and how we select a stimulus or a group of stimuli—we can see that the consideration of happiness is to some extent an unconscious process. This was explained earlier as a selective structuralism which is implied in our behavior.

Selective structuralism is a Nataraja Guru-ism indicating how the psyche selects relevant factors from the environment and matches itself to them. While we do this consciously to some extent, the vast majority of the matching up process is unconscious, or preconscious. This is certainly an underappreciated aspect of life: how we are led to choose from a palette that is carefully selected long before we are even aware of the masterpiece we will be painting. The good news is that this happens *despite* the ego's interference, so if we can calm the ego down—make it an integral part of us rather than top dog—we are automatically more open to our innate abilities. Our ego is well trained to put a halt to our spiritual unfoldment, but we have been learning all along in this study that we don't have to knuckle under to it. We can soothe and comfort the ego like the baby it is, and it should let us have more psychic space. Sometimes a good argument can convince it to lighten up of its own accord. At the very least we can have faith that the dynamic program of our inner being is available whenever we give it a hearing. We can stop being partisans of our culturally attuned ego and become partisans of our individual uniqueness—even to the point of relinquishing our definitions about our individuality. It's a difficult but highly rewarding effort.

Nitya has described selective structuralism before, but here he does as good a job as he ever did:

In the structuring of any situation in our minds, we select certain of the aspects out of the multitude which are present. The criterion of selection is our happiness. If something promises happiness, our whole being is automatically attracted towards it. Even before our conscious intelligence decides that something is going to make us happy, an unconscious factor in us senses the possibility of happiness and we are drawn to it....

Like a bee that is attracted towards a flower and then instinctively goes to the very part where the honey is, we are also drawn to objects long before we consciously know anything about them. You start recognizing you are in love with someone only after it has already gone deep into your system. At first you may even feel irritated by them, and try to avoid them. But recurring thoughts come. Images flash through your mind again and again, and eventually you become fascinated with them. Only then do they become what is called *visayam*.

Before you are aware of it, movements have already started in you to relate to a particular object. You are first unconsciously drawn to it and then later you recognize it outwardly. The recognition of it comes only when the link is already psychically established between you and the object of interest. Then it becomes a *priya visayam*.

Later in his talk Nitya took the bee metaphor farther:

There is a very alive core in us that is like a honeycomb in a beehive, in which there are newly laid eggs, eggs in the process of hatching, and busy bees engaged in building up the system. Our growing personality has many eggs that have not yet hatched, some in the formative stages, and some that are very much alive to the external environment. The eggs are called *vasanas*—innate dispositions or incipient memories—and they are all looking for opportunities to express themselves.

So our dharma keeps pushing up, trying to surface, despite our best intentions to keep it under wraps. Again, where many religious and spiritual practices are glorified attempts to continue the repression, Narayana Guru wants to restore our ability to act in freedom. His success at initiating a peaceful revolution in South India is a testament to the potential of his attitude to liberate tremendous energy. In a human being restored to normality, interests arise in a coherently related continuous series, and can accomplish wonders. In a person whose default-mode network has been shocked by trauma, the ego is masterful at shutting down the flow. Revitalizing the flow is where we most need to bring our efforts to bear. Nitya first touches this lightly:

The Guru is speaking here of the normal cases. There are abnormal instances where a person is so shocked by the failure of one priyam that they become shy of putting forth any effort, and the whole psyche may withdraw into a shell. They become withdrawn, sometimes to the point of catatonia. But as long as you don't enter into such malfunctioning, you will continue to take interest in life.

This tips us off that priyam can be taken to refer to the interest we take in life, or what we have elsewhere called our enthusiasm. (More on priyam from Nitya will be found in Part III.) Enthusiasm incorporates the idea of an inner divine sense that is energizing the interest. We often think of this as a state of happiness, and that should be safe enough. And if we are healthy, our natural ebullience raises us once again from the dead whenever we get shut up in a tomb of self-doubt:

The fundamental nature of the Self is happiness through and through. In individual cases we often stray away from our true nature and forget we are happy beings. As a result we become unhappy. We are on foreign ground. We are not grounded in our own true nature.

Any kind of grief, suspicion, distrust or frustration is an indication you have moved away from your center. You have left your native ground. Then you see some sign of happiness somewhere. It reminds you of where you belong, so you immediately move towards it. This is a natural law. The Guru says it is always operating, unexpended.

Out “true nature” is also called turiya, among other names. The deepest parts of our psyche are at home there, but the ego is not. It has other concerns. To access the turiya requires a quantum leap. Yet the rishis have known all along that it was in us and accessible to us. It takes very little ingenuity to translate the terms from traditional Indian psychology to present day neuroscience. We can easily do that in order to communicate with those unfamiliar with traditional wisdom, but the rishis are still way ahead in comprehending the implications. We are very fortunate that we don't have to limit ourselves to the beginning stages that are being upheld by rigorous science. We are grateful for it, certainly, but not willing to be held back by it in our enthusiasm for self-discovery.

Whether or not the early state of consciousness is perfectly pure or not, is the turiya or not, is an arguable proposition. We don't have to wait on a scientific verdict on this, either. The whole psyche is obviously full of interest and wisdom. Evidence is mounting that this extra dimension heals the mind rapidly when admitted into awareness. If we are fortunate enough to live in safe surroundings, we can easily borrow time from our default-mode network to embrace this latent propensity. The article linked to by Pollan (such a good name for a biology writer!) in Part III, along with the attendant video, show examples of the dramatic and rapid healing that is possible when our true nature is rediscovered.

In a classic understatement, Nitya makes the same point:

In fact, the fourth state is the pure consciousness lying buried behind all the conditional states of consciousness: dream, wakeful and unconscious. It is never far from you, but it is



veiled by your dreaminess, your sleepiness and your daily activities so that you forget it. If this unborn, unexpending, non-dual, unitive value of life, which is the eternal, blissful happiness of all, can prevail in the wakeful also, then the quality of your transactions changes.

Yes, the quality of your transactions changes—from misery-based to joyous, from fearful to confident, and on and on. It's no small thing.

At Andy's urging the class focused *aprameyam*, which is translated here as unpredictable. While we have encountered it before, it never hurts to have a review.

The turiya is unpredictable, meaning it can't be described. A predication is a description, a conversion of unity into duality or analogy. Since it is indescribable, any description is bound to be more or less false. We can't produce the state (or non-state) by piling up descriptions, but fortunately, since it's always present, we can reveal it by removing impediments. This is the main thrust of the study. This related fragment from the commentary was a favorite of everyone:

There is a common stream of consciousness, in which there is a common effort going on and a common happiness which we all recognize at once. These three strands unite in the one Self to which we all belong.

When you have this inner connection, the world is not alien and no one is a foreigner to you. The other person's joy becomes as much your interest as your own, and the other person's light becomes your own light, too. You come to a kinship with the whole world. Narayana Guru relates this to the fourth state, which is a translucent state where the 'I' consciousness is a kind of shimmering witness of all that is going on.

Translucent is the right word—you can see right through it, and yet it is also there. Fascinating. Because of course it is all visualized by the mind's projections.

Again, this state or non-state is not attained by building up a set of practices. Those kind of attempts are just delivered to the ego's résumé. Rather we are removing obstacles. Nitya puts this well also:

You believe in productivity, in always producing something. Your thinking is that before you produced it, it did not exist; that with your own effort it was produced. Then you transfer this type of thinking to your happiness. If you are not in a state of happiness, you engage in some effort that you think will make you happy. You believe that happiness is produced, manufactured like a plastic wastebasket or some other consumer item. The Guru wants to correct this notion. He says happiness is your true nature, so it is not produced. It is unborn, *ajam*. It is also *avyayam*, unexpended. Just as it is not produced, it cannot be used up.

In daily activities, when you do something, even though it may be very exciting for a time, you eventually become tired of it. It becomes boring, and you want to put it aside. It has become *vyayam*, expended. But once you discover the true happiness of the Self you will find that it does not diminish. It is *avyayam*, unspent, undecreasing.

Prabu noted that scientists are determined to produce the basis of consciousness in the same way. What they don't realize is their concept of consciousness is limited to a small slice of what it actually is. Sure, they can come up with the plastic wastebasket version, but what are they leaving out?

In conclusion, Nitya offers two gems of advice:

Both the dual aspects of the observer and the observed are to be transcended to arrive at the idea of *aprimeyam*.

The aprameyam Narayana Guru is speaking of is a very valuable key for us. It means one without a second. One without a second is something you don't have to visualize.

Can we stand to relate to something we can't describe or visualize? It makes us appear crazy to those fixated on superficial realities. So this is a private relationship, "not to be traded or sold."

Moni brought us to a happy ending with one of her favorite sayings of Nitya. People would ask him if he was happy, because they had a superficial idea of happiness that didn't match how he carried himself. He would always answer cheerfully, "I'm not happy—I'm happiness!"

## Part II

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

Life is a continuous series of releasing and directing forces to obtain, precipitate or perpetuate happiness. An object, a person, a situation, or an event becomes an object of interest when one visualizes in any of them a potential form of happiness. The interest automatically releases a chain of action to actualize the potential.

In the world of mechanics the operation of a force can be one of conservation, as when a body is static, or it can be one of motion when action is required. The action of a living being is akin to the spreading of the total momentum of its psychophysical energy into areas that are physically or psychically relevant to place the individual in a comfortable position from which to derive the maximum happiness a situation can yield. Barring miscalculations that can misfire and cause undesired reactions, all the ontologically valid matchings of one's desire with what is desired always assure the actualization of one's happiness.

Although each individual item of interest and its actualization are short lived, the principle of the quest for happiness, the direction of energy to actualize it, and the process by which the potential becomes actual belong to an innate law of the world order. The existence and the operation of this law—that all objects of interest always evoke effort on the part of whoever desires anything—is exemplified by the incessant searching of all individuals, which results in either realization or frustration. Not having an overt or positive desire is also a desire to be, or to withhold, or to withdraw. We think we are absolutely actionless when we are in deep sleep, but watching a person in deep sleep will soon explode this myth.

In verse 90 the ontologic verity of absolute existence was highlighted, and our transactional world was put on the stable foundation of valid comprehension of the real, within the frame of reference of a relativistic world of individual entities. In that verse the emphasis was on the existential validity of things, whether they were of a physical, psychological or cosmological order. In this verse the focus is on values that, by complementing the passing moments of living beings, can bring to the individual a mode of happiness that can to some degree approximate one's perfection. In other words, the topical interest of the present verse is the teleological pursuit in which, consciously or unconsciously, all living beings are engaged.

Although the value that catches one's fancy for practical attention is apparently of a transient order, as a value it participates in the basic blissful essence of the Self. The Self is not transient and hence its essence is beginningless and endless, indivisible and one without a second; it eludes the comprehension of all relativistic minds. Even though this highest of values is of an elusive nature, all relative objects of interest become enduring to the individual because of the all-pervading nature of the Self, without which nothing can exist, nothing can be known and nothing can be experienced as either painful or pleasure-giving.

The Self alone is. It is existence, subsistence and bliss.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

IN this and in the next two verses (92 and 93) the Guru is able to establish a link between the highest of human values and the ontological aspect of the same in terms of the Self. Action, especially conceived in terms of pure action (karma), as also understood as such in Aristotelian philosophy, is brought too into this unitive Self. Thinking itself and contemplation are actions in this pure instrumentalist sense and concern the Absolute as their aim, goal or object.

All men are constantly engaged in some sort of effort to better their lot in the world of value or interests that is in the environment of each. These values could refer to the goods of the earth or aim higher in the hierarchy of human values. Whatever the motive, the striving or effort to better the lot of each is a constant and uniform factor. Such an effort or constant activity belongs by inevitable necessity to human life. After being born we cannot stop breathing, although it might be possible, as in hibernating animals, to modify or control the function so as to minimise it to a great extent. The pure action involved would still remain, and the coefficient of the pressure of effort would be the same mathematically conceivable, functional or operational constant.

All effort or striving must be to attain a goal. Whether the goal is an outside cosmological one or is still within the limits of the psychology of the individual is not yet raised in this verse. It will be in the next verses, especially in the 93<sup>rd</sup>. Whatever its status, be it theological, psychological or cosmological, the Guru wishes to lay down the law that it represents a mathematical constant that never changes. It refers to some item of interest dear to the self. Although individual, men conceived as living biologically within

body limits, might be taken to have a limit set to their efforts, as a general law applicable to humanity as a whole there is a never-ending effort which can be admitted to be a mathematical constant.

This constant effort has its dialectical counterpart in the Absolute, which in itself represents the finalized and supreme value for Man. This apodictic approach has characterised this work uniformly from the beginning, and both a priori and a posteriori reasons have been advanced dialectically together in support of the final, ultimate, human-value status of the Absolute. The epithets lavished here in the latter half of this verse on this dear value are therefore not out of place. They may be seen to conform to the description of the Absolute in the Mandukya Upanishad as it applies to the 'fourth' or turiya state mentioned there.

### Part III

Priyam is indexed in That Alone. Here are some helpful hints from elsewhere in the book:

One can be permeated with the consciousness of *sat-cit-ananda*. It can be blissful if it is not differentiated, but instead of this generic sense of existence, subsistence and value, we tend to see things individually. When they are broken into bits we have instead *asti*, this is; *bhati*, I know it; and *priyam*, I love it. In Western terms these correspond to cognition, connotation and affection. In the fragmentary notions of *asti*, *bhati* and *priyam* there is scope for a great deal of confusion. We can have "This is, I know it, I dislike it;" or even "This is, I do not know what it is, therefore I do not know if I like it or not." Only when we cultivate an ever-prevailing sense of unity are we out of this confusion. When we identify with the egoistic self we see only through this fragmentation and do not experience *sat-cit-ananda*.

If we can approach life from the point of view of the all-seeing witness, which is not tainted with incipient memories or

proliferating interests, then we will see the good of all, the general good, in which what pleases me is also included. This is not attained, as some mistakenly think, by summarily dismissing what pleases me as an individual.

Often there arises a tendency for us to become self-critical if what we like is not liked by others. Yet if we are all human beings, there should be an underlying happiness regarding what we like.  
(152-3)

There are many preferences involved in this *priyam*, or this main item of the fulfillment of an urge, to make us really happy. We prefer to eat in a certain restaurant, to be served by a certain person, to eat food prepared in a certain way. Some people like their food boiled, others steamed, and still others fried. We stress the quality of the object as the main condition for happiness. Happiness is thus considered as an external factor which is coming in to us. Our desire is inside; happiness is manifesting outside. So it becomes a conditional factor. Narayana Guru tells us that we become confused by thinking of happiness as an external factor.  
(157)

Coming up in Verse 93:

If you have the eye of a contemplative you can see that a stream of life is continuously flowing through you. Your own *priyam*, your own desire, is instrumental in how it is channeled through you. You desire food and you partake of it. Its nourishment is essential for you to retain your individual existence. You may not recognize on a daily basis that your love for food is a love for the perpetuation of the self, but in effect it is so. Of all instincts, self-preservation is the first and last. Everything else serves to aid in the preservation of the self.

The food you eat, the water you drink, the sunlight that nourishes you and gives you energy, the air you breathe, the emotional affinity you have for other people, plants and animals,

your intimacy with others--all these make dents in your concrete individuality. The external world flows into you and you flow into it. An exosmosis and an endosmosis are taking place whereby you become part of the world and the world becomes part of you. For all this the operational dynamics come from priyam, desire. (664)

These examples are calling our attention to the significance of the totality of the desire manifesting in its individual aspects. Even though the singled-out value is a relative thing compared to the totality, you cannot say it is nothing. It is also to be seen as part of the Absolute. The way the Absolute manifests is through each individual desire. In the desire you can see the mark of the Absolute. So all desires are to be seen in the Absolute, and the Absolute is to be seen in each desire.

Of all earthly pleasures for human beings and other animals, the one that most excels is when a couple is in the deep embrace of love, experiencing orgasmic ecstasy. But the Upanishads say that experience is as nothing compared to the coupling of the cream of your intellect with the Self in the cosmic embrace. When that happens it is as if you have all the embraces of the world. You are in eternal union. It is this eternal union with the Self that you should see reflected in all other forms of embrace.

It may be just the eye caressing a flower or the finger giving a tender touch of loving care, but you should be able to see in it the coming together of the essence of your own life with the totality. The individual essence and the cosmic essence merge into one another. What pulls these two together is desire—a priyam or endearment—but it is that which brings you to the ultimate release, the absolute perfection. (669-70)

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It seems like a Rumi poem is called for. Many would be appropriate, but how about this:



How can we know the divine qualities from within? If we know only through metaphors,

it's like when virginal young people ask what sex feels like and you answer, "Like candy,

so sweet." The suchness of sex comes with being inside the pleasure. So whatever you

say about mysteries, I know or I don't know, both are close to being true. Neither is

quite a lie. Someone asks, "Do you know the prophet Noah?" You may answer, "Well, I've

read stories in school. I've heard the legends that have come down." But only someone in

Noah's state can know him. Now I hear a theologian reacting, "Don't get stuck in that ditch!

What you have just said is absurd." And that king of saints, the quth, replies, "Any state

other than what you have experienced seems absurd. You have had certain visions. Before

them, did not mysticism sound ridiculous? What you've been given has released you from

prison, ten times! And won't this empty desert freedom you feel now someday be confining?"

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Here's the excerpt about quieting the ego, or anyway the "default-mode network" in modern day parlance. The whole article about psychedelic therapy, is well worth reading, and is found at [http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/trip-treatment?utm\\_source=tny&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=dailyemail&mbid=nl\\_020215\\_Daily&CNDID=31707011&spMailID=7470134&spUserID=ODA5MDExMzY4ODUS1&spJobID=620190617&spReportId=NjIwMTkwNjE3S0](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/trip-treatment?utm_source=tny&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dailyemail&mbid=nl_020215_Daily&CNDID=31707011&spMailID=7470134&spUserID=ODA5MDExMzY4ODUS1&spJobID=620190617&spReportId=NjIwMTkwNjE3S0)

Excerpt from Pollan, Michael. The Trip Treatment (The New Yorker, Feb 9, 2015):

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to pick apart the scientific mystery of the psychedelic experience has been taking place in a lab based at Imperial College, in London. There a thirty-four-year-old neuroscientist named Robin Carhart-Harris has been injecting healthy volunteers with psilocybin and LSD and then using a variety of scanning tools—including fMRI and magnetoencephalography (MEG)—to observe what happens in their brains.

Carhart-Harris works in the laboratory of David Nutt, a prominent English psychopharmacologist. Nutt served as the drug-policy adviser to the Labour Government until 2011, when he was fired for arguing that psychedelic drugs should be rescheduled on the ground that they are safer than alcohol or tobacco and potentially invaluable to neuroscience. Carhart-Harris's own path to neuroscience was an eccentric one. First, he took a graduate course in psychoanalysis—a field that few neuroscientists take seriously, regarding it less as a science than as a set of untestable beliefs. Carhart-Harris was fascinated by psychoanalytic theory but frustrated by the paucity of its tools for exploring what it deemed most important about the mind: the unconscious.

“If the only way we can access the unconscious mind is via dreams and free association, we aren’t going to get anywhere,” he said. “Surely there must be something else.” One day, he asked his seminar leader if that might be a drug. She was intrigued. He set off to search the library catalogue for “LSD and the Unconscious” and found “Realms of the Human Unconscious,” by Stanislav Grof. “I read the book cover to cover. That set the course for the rest of my young life.”

Carhart-Harris, who is slender and intense, with large pale-blue eyes that seldom blink, decided that he would use psychedelic drugs and modern brain-imaging techniques to put a foundation of hard science beneath psychoanalysis. “Freud said dreams were the royal road to the unconscious,” he said in our first interview. “LSD may turn out to be the superhighway.” Nutt agreed to let him follow this hunch in his lab. He ran bureaucratic interference and helped secure funding (from the Beckley Foundation, which supports psychedelic research).

When, in 2010, Carhart-Harris first began studying the brains of volunteers on psychedelics, neuroscientists assumed that the drugs somehow excited brain activity—hence the vivid hallucinations and powerful emotions that people report. But when Carhart-Harris looked at the results of the first set of fMRI scans—which pinpoint areas of brain activity by mapping local blood flow and oxygen consumption—he discovered that the drug appeared to substantially reduce brain activity in one particular region: the “default-mode network.”

The default-mode network was first described in 2001, in a landmark paper by Marcus Raichle, a neurologist at Washington University, in St. Louis, and it has since become the focus of much discussion in neuroscience. The network comprises a critical and centrally situated hub of brain activity that links parts of the

cerebral cortex to deeper, older structures in the brain, such as the limbic system and the hippocampus.

The network, which consumes a significant portion of the brain's energy, appears to be most active when we are least engaged in attending to the world or to a task. It lights up when we are daydreaming, removed from sensory processing, and engaging in higher-level “meta-cognitive” processes such as self-reflection, mental time travel, rumination, and “theory of mind”—the ability to attribute mental states to others. Carhart-Harris describes the default-mode network variously as the brain's “orchestra conductor” or “corporate executive” or “capital city,” charged with managing and “holding the entire system together.” It is thought to be the physical counterpart of the autobiographical self, or ego.

“The brain is a hierarchical system,” Carhart-Harris said. “The highest-level parts”—such as the default-mode network—“have an inhibitory influence on the lower-level parts, like emotion and memory.” He discovered that blood flow and electrical activity in the default-mode network dropped off precipitously under the influence of psychedelics, a finding that may help to explain the loss of the sense of self that volunteers reported. (The biggest dropoffs in default-mode-network activity correlated with volunteers' reports of ego dissolution.) Just before Carhart-Harris published his results, in a 2012 paper in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, a researcher at Yale named Judson Brewer, who was using fMRI to study the brains of experienced meditators, noticed that their default-mode networks had also been quieted relative to those of novice meditators. It appears that, with the ego temporarily out of commission, the boundaries between self and world, subject and object, all dissolve. These are hallmarks of the mystical experience.

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Jake's commentary:

In his commentary on this Verse 91, Nitya recounts the Guru's message in practical terms, a message that brings together a number of principles the Guru has developed in previous verses. The Vedantists, as the Buddhists (and others), position our drive for happiness as that which propels and compels us along our life path. Whatever we are attracted to, and that goal continuously shape-shifts in our work-a-day world, we perceive as that which will provide us with happiness. The irony in this inevitable process is that we are rarely conscious of that fact and become only somewhat dimly aware of it after the fact. Drawn to something, we don't understand its value until later.

In the transactional world, writes Nitya, those encounters take place on the physical, psychological, and social levels. In our discovery of truth—those principles that are consistently validated through experience—is that on which we establish our common consent and thereby our connections to each other and all things. That connection *is* the value we seek. It is the happiness we sense in that person or object or whatever to which we are attracted. As Nitya writes, “We don't love for the sake of love, but for that which brings us happiness” (p 648).

At this point, Nitya re-introduces the concept of *vasanas* (incipient memories) and by implication their siblings, the *samskaras*. As he explicated earlier in much finer detail (In his commentary on Verse 17), these “memories” that transcend mind and precede reason, guide our attraction as we continue through life. In Western psychology, the parsing out of *samskaras* constitute a major part of talk therapy, but the study of *vasanas* is left largely to the mystics, who, as Narayana Guru so eloquently exhibits, employ verse and analogy in their efforts to discuss the subject.

The Guru's use of the term *ordained* in the second line of his verse speaks directly to the power of the *vasanas* in their guiding our routes and life choices. When we can become not only aware

of this force but in tune with it in all our states of awareness, when we allow it to lead and not become pathologically attached to some notion of success or failure, we enter, writes Nitya, the fourth state beyond the awake, dream, and deep sleep states: turiya. In this state, we perceive all in all and remain in a state of “pure consciousness,” or happiness (p. 652).

And happiness cannot be manufactured, as Nitya and the Guru make clear. It is a continuous state we become aware of as we wake up to our true realized state. “Happiness,” writes Nitya, is your true nature, so it is not produced” (p. 653). His conclusion flies in the face of our 21<sup>st</sup>. century American cultural point of view. For both the atheist and the religionist—and the various degrees between—Nitya’s statement is nonsensical. If the whole point of existence lies within, guides our lives, and cannot conform to our percepts and concepts arrived at through our physical lived existences, if, that is, happiness cannot be materially measured (via the regular ego-centered usual suspects) or meted out in terms designed by our mind in its awake state (heaven as a *place*, god as separate but anthropomorphically assembled), then happiness can have no coherence or meaning. Finding no “sense” in Nitya’s truth, the arbiters of American culture seem bent on preserving an illusion that, if the Guru and Nitya are correct, will sooner or later be exposed by nature’s irresistible drive to conform to what is.

#### Part IV

Paisley sent a nice email after the last class notes, which he really liked:

Here is a story about true nature.

Chu-chi was a young monk who lived in a remote hut and practiced zazen by himself, alone. One evening a young nun named Shih-chi or True World appeared at his hut. True World did not knock or call out when she arrived but just walked in. This was

just a ten by ten one room cottage. She found Chu-chih sitting in zazen right in the middle of the room. Without taking off her sedge hat, she walked around him three times and then stood before him saying If you can say an appropriate word, I will take off my hat. In Zen it is an act of self-presentation by a pilgrim to a teacher. It is then followed by 3 bows to the floor and other procedures. True World did not observe the proper ritual, however, and Chu-chih was unable to respond. He seemed dumbstruck.

So True World walked around him 3 times again, stood before him and said If you can say an appropriate word I will take off my hat. And again he could not speak. She repeated the same behavior a third time. Silence. So she turned and walked out. When Chu-chih came to himself he went to the door and called out, It will be dark soon Why don't you stay for the night? She turned around and this time said If you can say an appropriate word, I will stay the night. Still he could not speak so she turned and left.

Chu-chih was downcast. He felt he had been defeated by True World and he thought I'm going about this matter of finding realization the wrong way. I need a good teacher. He packed his gear and then because it was dark sat nodding over his pack waiting for dawn. Suddenly the tutelary deity of the mountain appeared in the dark and said Don't leave. A great Zen master will come here soon and you can consult with him. So Chu-chih unpacked his gear and waited. sure enough in a couple of days T'ien lung appeared.

Chu-chih told him the whole story and T'ien-lung raised one finger. With this Chu-chih was enlightened to the dimensions of the true world.

Later Paisley explained why the story appealed to him:

What I was thinking of is the connection (which is very closely related) to turiya. True World. Chu Chih encounters turiya but

doesn't know what to do because he's been sitting alone so he gets a teacher.

My response:

Very true. The ego is wily enough, in most cases, to know that a teacher is its biggest threat, so it keeps comfortably at a distance. It doesn't seem to realize that every part of the person benefits from opening up, including it, because it's so committed to defense it can't imagine anything else.... Those who've had good trips do have an inkling, however.

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Dipika also contributed a story:

This lovely parable is from "Your Sacred Self" by Dr. Wayne Dyer.

In a mother's womb were two babies. One asked the other: "Do you believe in life after delivery?" The other replied, "Why, of course. There has to be something after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."

"Nonsense" said the first. "There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?"

The second said, "I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can't understand now."

The first replied, "That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is so short. Life after delivery is to be logically excluded."



The second insisted, “Well I think there is something and maybe it’s different than it is here. Maybe we won’t need this physical cord anymore.”

The first replied, “Nonsense. And moreover if there is life, then why has no one has ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said the second, “but certainly we will meet Mother and she will take care of us.”

The first replied “Mother? You actually believe in Mother? That’s laughable. If Mother exists then where is She now?”

The second said, “She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are of Her. It is in Her that we live. Without Her this world would not and could not exist.”

Said the first: “Well I don’t see Her, so it is only logical that She doesn't exist.”

To which the second replied, “Sometimes, when you’re in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive Her presence, and you can hear Her loving voice, calling down from above.”