

2/17/15
Verse 93

To one detached from the changing body,
nothing is more dear than his Self;
as the self-oriented value continuously remains
in this state, the Self is eternal.

Free translation:

To one who has withdrawn all interest from the changeful body,
nothing is more dear than the Self. As this love for the Self never
diminishes in anyone, it should be known as the eternal.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

To one who has cut connection with the changeful body
There is nothing which surpasses in value his own Self:
As the interest that prevails in respect of oneself, as ordained also,
Never-ceasingly endures, the Self, eternal it is.

In this verse we are given one final iteration of the core idea of Atmopadesa Satakam, that there exists a unitive essence of all manifestation that is cleverly concealed by the mesmerizing play of surface events, and restoring our awareness of it lends both a meaningful coherence to the play and invites us in to participate to the full. The two aspects of surface and depth are to be kept in resonance with each other, instead of striving to erase maya to remain in the unmanifested state, as is frequently attempted. If we try to wash all the lather out of soap, it will take us nearly forever, and if we ever do succeed we will discover that the soap was all compressed lather to begin with, and nothing remains.

Nitya begins his commentary with a recapitulation of the solid grounding of this eminently practical philosophy:

In the immediately previous verses Narayana Guru conceded to the transactional world whatever value can be allotted to it. From the existential point of view, he gave a relevant placement to whatever is ontologically real within the frame of reference of a relativistic world. Then, in the same frame of reference, whatever teleologic processes are going on were also recognized. After giving the transactional world what it deserves, he is now calling our attention to the transcendental state of the Self.

Briefly, ontology focuses on what something really is, and teleology covers where it's going. Both these aspects—otherwise known as the horizontal and vertical—are important to look into.

The idea of a transcendental factor often brings a lot of confusion, because we tend to think of it as being separate from mundane reality. In Vedanta however, the transcendent aspect is an integral part of what exists; in fact, it is the whole of it. There is no separation. The gurus have taken great pains to disavow the idea of a separate reality, but reorienting our habitual thinking is a slow process. The notion of a separate and better reality existing in some remote location permeates our species' ideologies more thoroughly than we normally realize, and it is something we take totally for granted. Unfortunately, transferring the transcendental to an “offshore bank account,” so to speak, puts it permanently out of reach. This is precisely the misconception Narayana Guru has set out to relieve us of.

A handy way to conceive of the Guru's revolutionary idea was presented in the last verse: that the world is an enlightening mirror for us to see hidden aspects of ourself, albeit requiring a lot of interpolation to read the mirror correctly. In that commentary Nitya invoked good Sir Arthur:

As Eddington puts it, some of the major actions we see we know only as concepts. We have to accept these concepts or else we would not be able to explain certain things that take

place. In fact, when examined closely most of the action in our personal experience will also be seen to depend on ideas passing through our mind.

Taken in the right light, this means the way our inner self is projected onto the world can serve as a kind of guru to us, helping us dispel the darkness brought on by imagining an unconnected world filled with dissociated acts, and allowing us to discern their relevant meanings and our relationship to them. This does require a close examination; without it the causal factors remain invisible to us.

Among other things Narayana Guru had high hopes of relieving his contemporaries of a particularly deadly misconception: that they were ordained by God to be second (or lower) class citizens, essentially feudal serfs. His success in upgrading their self-image had major beneficial repercussions, and now we are invited to do the same in our own lives. Since our circumstances are far different from nineteenth century Kerala, we have to discern in what other ways we underestimate our true value, and why do we steadfastly adhere to those false notions?

Susan contributed a modern version of this question. James Hollis, in his book *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, asks: “Where has life, in its unfairness, stuck you, fixated you, caused you to circle back and back upon this wounding, as a provisional definition and limitation of your possibilities? Why do you continue to cooperate with the wound, rather than serve something larger, which serves you in return?” Or to put it simply, why are we stuck and why do we work so darn hard to stay stuck?

Where a scientific attitude serves us very well in the relativistic world of maya, something more is needed to get us unstuck, and we inwardly crave to recover it, because it gives life meaning. Something in us intuitively remembers it. In Nitya’s elucidation, Narayana Guru “cites value as the most significant factor to explain both the existence and timelessness of the transcendental state of the Self, and its infinite, eternal nature.”

This contrasts utterly with the affirmed thrust of science, which, quite rightly, does its utmost to subtract meaning or value from its probes. While the aims of philosophy and science may ultimately coincide—to discover ultimate truth—the means is radically different much of the time. Nitya continues, “All the Upanishads emphasize this same aspect at some point. From the ephemeral, the attention of the aspirant is directed to what is eternal.” Again, most science nowadays is constrained to rule out the eternal to focus solely on the transient, though that has not always been the case. In former times it was believed that a thorough knowledge of the ephemeral would reveal the eternal, and that was motivation enough for the best minds to burn the midnight oil.

Nitya provides a fascinating analysis of the importance of integrating the transactional with the transcendental:

In the preservation of the individual self there is a bright aspect, which is the cream of your consciousness and can be called the intellect, and also a dark aspect, an autonomous, unconscious aspect that maintains the integrity of the physical organism and the harmony of the mental functions. These are symbolically known as Indra and Prajapati in India.... When you alienate yourself from the unconscious you also become alienated from the total ability of both the autonomous and the pure intellectual functions. You begin to live in a contaminated world of relativism. It is in that contaminated world that we have chiseled out a niche we call the transactional.

The Guru is trying to help us to get back to our original state so we can reclaim the whole to which we naturally belong rather than getting stranded on the desert island of the transactional. When we find our way to the hall of vibhu we are given a throne to occupy. The throne is called *vicaksana*, the reference being to one who is capable of discerning right from wrong, true value from the imaginary value of fancy, and who is endowed with the dexterity, the expert ability and the know-how to reach the full potential and bring it to fulfillment, rather

than pursuing fantasies and facing frustration. If you are not capable of directing the right desire toward the right object and of employing the right method to realize it, then you cannot keep up what is expected of you: to be an aparajita, an all-conquering person.

As usual, we should take the phrase “all-conquering person” to mean one who has overcome their inhibitions and obstacles to enjoy enhanced freedom, and not in any military or commercial sense.

Nitya reprises the idea of a transcendental reduction, of digging back into the depths of the psyche in order to overcome our limitations. If all we are now has emerged from a single point source, like a zygote, we can retrace our development back to that point, and possibly pass through the looking glass there to explore the causal inception of our being. Here is how he describes the technique for the present commentary, typically invoking Jung as a foil for his own experience:

Part of the process of moving ahead includes coming to the realization that there is a larger situation to which you belong. Then you enter into the apprehension of *vibhu*, that which was there even before it was manifested. In his *Symbols of Transformation*, Jung speaks of plunging into our childhood memories. The child is the beginning, the womb from which the adult has come. So the adult sinks back into the womb of childhood. Through childhood memories and dreams you reach the other world, which was present prior to your individuation. From the world here you enter into the world beyond. The Upanishads speak of this as entering into the Great Hall of Vibhu.

Entering the Great Hall of Vibhu was something Nitya had personal experience of, thanks to Ramana Maharshi, and I'll attach his fascinating account of it in Part III.

Prabu got the class rolling with a germane question. He first noted that Ramana Maharshi was totally inactive, whereas Narayana Guru supported an active expression of life. Nonetheless, both epitomized the most profound realization in their own way. I expected him to be curious about the distinction, but he surprised me by wanting to know how that type of full-fledged realization relates to the kind of satisfaction that artists, writers, and other successful people get from producing things like beautiful works of art, literary masterpieces, or sociological or technological revolutions. Much of our study has emphasized that sort of elevated everyday expression, and downplayed the much more uncommon state of the realized masters. This is in keeping with Narayana Guru's own very compassionate presentation. Rather than extolling a rare and likely unattainable state of mind, he wanted us to realize the transcendent beauty in every moment, and to not displace our enjoyment of life in favor of a hypothetical future state. From a perspective well-founded reason, everything is equally cosmic. The Guru wants us to be alive now, and not postpone it to an indefinitely receding future. We are invited to love and live in the present, whatever its condition.

From my understanding, most of history's greatest artists and successful entrepreneurs did not attain anything like the transcendental satisfaction of the gurus. Many of them were miserable. It often seems that misery is a terrific stimulus to creativity, and contentment its saboteur. But again, the two gurus Prabu cited were both lightning rods for transformations great and small, while evincing an oceanic contentment that those around them could feel. Their ecstasy was palpable, though undoubtedly exaggerated in their acolytes' imaginations also. It's extremely exciting to be around someone in such a state. Even animals are attracted to them.

I suspect Prabu is concerned that if we treat the ordinary as extraordinary it could water down our motivation to excel in the way those gurus did. This is a valid dialectic problem to keep in mind. Ideally the appreciation of beauty or another high value

should galvanize our highest aspirations rather than dissipating them through the doldrums of trivial satisfactions. Yet humans often do become content with mediocrity, and stagnate in consequence. Once again, Nitya's advice is right to the point:

The omnipresent truth, satyam, is the most desirable. Narayana Guru says the desire which never leaves the self is desiring the eternal truth that manifests everywhere in all forms. However different it may appear in its forms or by whatever names it is known, you should always go beyond the form and the name to realize it as the one truth and desire it.

So this philosophy does not recommend doing away with all desires, only those that bog us down and mire us in confusion. The burning desire to understand, to know unity, is almost always a healthy one, a kindly light to lead us on.

There is no reason not to admire the highest ideals even as we accept the likelihood of our falling short of them. Realized souls like Narayana Guru and Ramana Maharshi are the gold standard, making it easy for us to not get caught by the lures of charlatan gurus who, realizing they were never going to make it, threw up their carnival tents halfway to the goal. Halfway is fine, so long as you don't pretend you have achieved anything more. I know I'll never be a top-flight pianist, and yet my love of playing music fueled by the inspiration of those who do it well keeps me eagerly motivated. There are several artists in the class who do fabulous work and love what they do, even though the world doesn't beat a path to their door. We should easily be able to contemplate the highest state and also accept our decidedly mixed condition. We have plenty of weaknesses to work on, with compassion, and this can be an exciting mission in its own right. Compassion in learning is especially important for those of us—and there are many—who downplay themselves for their failure to be that one in a million, who conceive of themselves as mediocre.

Now is the perfect time to integrate the ideal and the actual in our hearts, and free ourselves from unconscious self-loathing.

So sure, none of us is going to pretend that our meditations are on a par with the ultimate attainments of the great masters of history. We did offer Prabu a practical example of what Narayana Guru is saying here. Prabu is studying to be an electrical engineer. Many electricians, and many engineers for that matter, are concerned solely with the minute details of their jobs, how to run electricity through conduits to appliances, and so on. But the most excellent among them, the Tesla's and Volta's, creatively contemplated the mystery of electricity in addition to amassing detailed knowledge about it, and so were able to bring forth unimaginable products and open up whole new fields of possibility. Because they were active contemplatives, they were much more than drones—they were creators. Who knows what Prabu will discover if he is able to extricate himself from the mundane relationship with his calling required by his schooling to reach for a transcendental vision inspired by those liberated souls he so admires? Or better yet, to achieve an integrated amalgam in which the transcendental and the mundane feed into each other to produce the quantum leap of a dialectic synthesis? Nitya offers a caution about how easily we can fall short of such a triumph:

You should be able to tame the mind and the senses so they will appreciate the higher value, which is the value of the Self. What they should desire is union with the Self rather than the fragmentary images that come and go. But the mind distracts you, repeatedly showing you small, ephemeral images and urging you to hug this shadow and that shadow. You try to catch them, but you always encounter frustration.

When you're in school, as Prabu currently is, or for that matter in any transactional context, most of what you are absorbing is lots of "small, ephemeral images." Supplying the eternal factor—the

overall context, and the meaning—is his, and our, self-assigned “homework.”

Scotty wholeheartedly agreed that artistically refined aspirations were preferable to a transactional fixation. He told us about how he used to do his art and bodywork with the prime motivation of making a living at it. At some point he converted to doing the work for its own sake, keeping the financial incentive more in the background. He found he not only had more fun, he became more successful. Undoubtedly there was a renewed authenticity in his artwork as it was freed from the taint of monetary considerations, and this is something an art patron can often feel. By tuning in to his dharma rather than the ephemeral allures of moneymaking, Scotty now enjoys his life much more than before.

In conclusion, Nitya reiterates a claim that he often spoke to us about, but rarely put in print. He was a renunciate who believed strongly in sexual abstinence as a way to consolidate the energy for a spiritual breakthrough. His was a voice in the wilderness of America in the early exuberance of its sexual revolution. Yet many of us knew he spoke the truth. For myself, I had experienced an overwhelming bliss at the behest of LSD, and in that state no ordinary act compelled me or drew me out in any way: I was completely absorbed in wonder, and worldly involvement was no better than a distraction. The state was another order of magnitude, perhaps several orders, greater than the delights of orgasm. Yet it was, fortunately, also temporary. That state was way too intense to sustain for long. But it was amazingly educational, allowing me to at least have a clue what the gurus are getting at.

When Nitya taught things like the following, you knew he meant it, and lived it. He knew exactly what he was talking about:

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.

In this verse, from an ontologic ground the teleologic finality of the soul's search is brought to its complete perfection. "This is a man's highest path. This is his highest achievement. This is his highest world. This is his highest bliss."

(The quote is from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: IV.3.34.)

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

In one sense, we are living two realities at the same time. Our physical reality is one of constant change in which there is no reversal of anything that perishes. The process of aging is the same. Childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age, old age and death follow one after another and there is no reversibility in this series, but the I-identity, which becomes formulated almost at the awakening of our consciousness, remains unaffected throughout our life. Although we have no consciousness of a personal identity in deep sleep, when we wake, the lapse of I-consciousness during that state does not cause any sense of discontinuity either in our beingness or in our personality. Psychic and assumed contrasting moods, such as hilarity and grief, or depression and excitement,

also do not effect the continuous and consistent identification of one's personal self. A person can give up several of his interests and change some of his fundamental beliefs and social values or religious tenets, yet on that account he will not feel that his I-identity was ever lost. Unlike the physical state, one can recall and relive almost all past experiences in their full emotional content. Thus, both the physical reality and the psychic reality are variable in two different ways, but in between these two changing phenomena the I-identity remains as a constant.

When we examine the secret of this constant, what we arrive at is a value which is in the form of an endearment. It is this value that is continuously perpetuating the I-consciousness as a stable nucleus of all the physical and psychic events that come to pass during the span of a life: "This is what I like." One is committed to please one's own self with religious zeal. In fact, man cannot think of a greater torture than the thwarting of his prerogative to please himself. This is what the Guru terms here as *àtmagata priyam*, which means literally, "the endearment that goes toward the Self."

The Kaushitaki Upanishad gives a picturesque analogy of the ascending path of man. As a being, man first enters into the world of physical reality where he derives sustenance from nature; the air becomes his vital breath, solar energy his fire, other thermal sources supply the body and the mind with energy for their growth and activity, and other friendly forces attend to man's needs like a shower of grace. Life moves on from moment to moment in a stream of timelessness. It grows like a tree and becomes the captive of its individuation. The will to live operates as an irresistible force called the *aparajita*. While the conscious life is controlled by the intellect, the *elan vital* is attended to by an autonomous system that is in charge of maintaining all bodily functions. It is placed between the potentials that are hidden away in a prior absence and the possibilities of the present into which one can mould oneself. In choosing one's part, one is endowed with the power of discrimination. The main sap of one's life is an abundant supply of libidinal energy. The spirit in man becomes

wedded to two consorts: one is called cakshusi, which means pertaining to the organs of perception, especially the eye, and the other, called manasi, means pertaining to the mind.

Between the data provided by the senses and the preferences of the mind, the garland of life is woven until the body drops. In this analogy the individuating self also belongs to a timeless reality, and its will to live is none other than its will to love itself. In the same Upanishad there is another passage which says that the experiencing of endearment is like the burning of the object of desire in the sacrificial fire of one's love for the Self; what persists in this process is only the resultant joy of love. The highest form of love is the love of truth and truth is none other than one's own Self.

The Chandogya Upanishad associates the experience of endearment with the Cosmic Person's desire to enjoy. In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna has a cosmic vision during which he sees the countless mouths of the many as the mouth of the Cosmic Person, and all eyes, hands and legs as part of one Person actively moving about to possess and enjoy the world that he desires.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it is said that it is not for the sake of the son that the son is loved, but for the sake of the happiness of the Self. The happiness of the Self is praised above everything else. In the Bible, though the object of desire is shown to be of no special worth when compared to the undiminishing value of the Self, another analogy amends this by saying that if a person who has one hundred sheep loses one, the love for the remaining ninety-nine will not compensate for the love he feels for the missing one. The endearment of the Self experienced on each occasion has its own unique quality.

Of all forms of joyous experience nothing surpasses the ecstasy that a couple derives from a fond embrace or an orgasmic state, yet, even such ecstasy is surpassed by the peerless bliss of the Self, when the pure intellect of individuation, freed of all colourations, becomes united with the Self. When this happens one

cannot tell if the consciousness belongs to a state of immanence or transcendence.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE absolute status of the Self is here established by following up the line of reasoning that was started in verse 91. The dear object to which all human effort or endeavour is directed, as it were, backward, is not to be thought of necessarily as something outside of the self. On final analysis this value has its subtle locus in the self itself.

When we think of the self, however, we have to eliminate its peripheral vesture, which is full of elements or factors of change. In verse 12 already, these two aspects of the ego and the self: one changeful, transient and subject to maya; and the other, the self which is a pure witness inside and lasting, have been explained. The ambivalent factors involved in even deeper seats of body-consciousness were referred to in verses 68 and 72. When the horizontal aspects of the self have been eliminated, there would remain the pure vertical aspect of the self which would represent the highest of human values for anyone and for all.

Love of self, as understood in this way, and mere selfishness have to be distinguished. In this connection there is a well-known passage of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (IV. V. 6) which brings out the difference in a very telling manner: Yajnavalkya speaks to Maitreyi about the nature of the love between them as husband and wife, as follows:

‘Lo, verily, not for the love of husband is a husband dear, but for the love of the Soul (atman) is the husband dear. Lo, verily, not for the love of a wife is a wife

dear, but for the love of the Soul (atman) is a wife dear.’

This series covers values such as sons, wealth, cattle, Brahminhood, etc. in the same strain to point out that the direction of contemplatively-understood values is to be sought in the Soul and not in outward items of apparent values.

Elsewhere in the Darsana Mala of Narayana Guru we have a definition of what constitutes ‘bhakti’ (chapter VIII, verses 5, 6 and 7) where we come up against the same idea of unitively treating ananda (value factors), atma (Self) and brahman (the Absolute) as interchangeable terms. The bipolar relation between husband and wife has its relational content which belongs neither to one party nor to the other, but is to be understood dialectically to be a common value-factor applicable to both together and at once.

Part III

Nitya’s time with Ramana Maharshi was stunning, and some day I’ll try to gather all his memoirs into a single document. Here’s part of his first visit as it appears in *Love and Blessings*, describing the regression he experienced thanks to the Maharshi, all the way back before his conception. Nitya was always an eager activist, and we meet him as he became very frustrated at the seemingly static state of the ashram:

The atmosphere was very reverent and serene, but my feeling persisted that the Maharshi was just lazy.

When I had first come, I had stood before Maharshi and saluted him, but he didn’t take any notice of me. Being a young man with a lot of self-esteem and ego, I had wanted to impress everyone with my ability to chant the Gita. After a couple of days of just sitting there quietly and anonymously I became very bored, so I decided to leave. In India it is a custom not to approach or leave a saint without offering some present, so I went out and

bought some oranges. I placed them on the ground near his feet and prostrated, even though I didn't have the least desire to bow before him. He took no notice of me. I thought he was treating me like a shadow or a dead man. I was filled with resentment. I wanted to walk away as though I had done nothing more than my duty.

For some reason or no reason, I lingered there for a moment. Then what a wonder! Maharshi's gaze, which had been floating over my head, became slightly tilted, and he looked straight into my eyes. It was as though two magnetic shafts were coming towards me. Both struck me at the same time, right in the middle of my heart. A great darkness began spreading around me, and I felt very dizzy. My body started trembling. I couldn't control myself. Soon it was as if my own consciousness was an unflickering flame placed in the vastness of a lake of darkness.

A sort of retrospection started unreeling my memory from the present to the past. It was just like watching my life played out in reverse. I was riveted to the scene, unable to move. Many things that had happened in my life passed before my eyes. Soon I remembered being back in my mother's womb. At one point I felt a strong physical shaking, and remembered hearing that my mother had fallen off a collapsing bridge while she was carrying me. I continued to retrogress, back before my conception to my existence as a mathematical entity defined only by vasanas and dharma. A great peace filled my entire being, as I became totally absorbed in the interstices of the cosmic matrix. After many years of search I had at last returned to the Source.

Eventually somebody tapped on my shoulder, and I came back to my senses. The Maharshi was no longer before me, and the people in the hall were also gone. Everyone had left for the dining hall. I was invited to come and eat. I walked as if in a dream. To my utter surprise, when I got to the dining hall I saw that the leaf on Maharshi's right hand was not claimed by anyone. I was asked to sit there. When food was served, Maharshi looked at my leaf as

if to ascertain that every item served to him was also being given to me.

From that moment Ramana Maharshi was no longer a person to me. He was a presence, or rather he was The Presence. He was that which I was seeking, and he was everywhere. I needed no effort at all to be with him again. What held my heart with an imperiential enchantment was neither the memory of a social person nor the proximity of an unforgettable one. It was as if the duality between the perceiver and the perceived had become merged in a single unitive phenomenon. (141-2)

This led Nitya to experience what he recounts at the very beginning of his autobiography:

Now I shall tell you how I was born. When an animal has a vertebral column running beyond the length of its trunk, it becomes a tail. My memory also has a kind of tail, rooted far beyond the trunk of this present life in the folds of the prenatal past. Everyone's consciousness begins from this prenatal region, though only a few can recall it to mind.

When I think of the cosmos, my mind spreads out into the infinity of what we know as space and time. From the here and now it stretches out beyond the horizon to the far fringes of outer space, lingering there in bewilderment since whatever lies beyond our known existence can never be more than a vague supposition. Similarly, as memory flows back from the present through the annals of history, plunging ever deeper into the fossils of prehistory and myth, the mind once again recoils on itself, unable to reach the beginning of time. And the imagination shoots into the future, piling possibilities upon possibilities until it too reaches a blind alley of bewilderment from an excess of complexity.

Such are the virtually immeasurable dimensions of our cosmos, the space-time continuum. But the cosmos marks only one of the poles of the axis of truth. The other pole or counterpart is marked by a point which has neither any dimension or location.

This pure, spaceless, timeless, nameless aspect is the individual aspect of the all-embracing Absolute or Brahman. It throbs with a negative dynamism. In fact the movement is so subtle that it cannot even be termed a throb or a movement of any kind. Yet the negative charge precipitates the fusion of its own spiritual spark with a positive impulse from within the creative matrix of the cosmos.

Such an activated spark was the primal cause of my being. It became elongated as a mathematical line without thickness, on which were strung all my previous tendencies and talents. The pure ray which issued forth from the matrix of the cosmos and the dimensionless point became colored and split in two. One half became positively charged and attained the color of gold. The other was negatively charged and became blue. The two rays passed through the entire gamut of time and space, and through all names and forms and every kind of memory that anyone had ever had, and entered the psychophysical orbit of Earth from opposite directions. The golden ray circled the Earth clockwise and the blue ray circled counterclockwise, and both of them entered opposite halves of a ripe pomegranate. This very fruit happened to be in the garden of the haunted house where Raghavan and Vamakshy Amma had recently taken up residence. Seeing the fascinating glow of the fruit, Raghavan plucked it, cut it in two, and gave half to his wife; both of them ate their share.

In that mystic communion the negative ray of the spirit entered Raghavan's soul, while the positive ray spread itself throughout every part of his wife's organism. They became possessed of a great love for each other and felt a strong need to cling together. During this loving consummation the two rays again united and became a fertilized ovum. The dynamic rays, before becoming a fetus, took from Raghavan twenty-three chromosomes with the qualities of becoming poetic, intelligent, kind, open, frank, gentle and sensitive, and from Vamakshy Amma the qualities of being willful, austere, forgiving, generous, and so

on. The fetus began to grow in the mother's womb to eventually become the present writer. (4-5)

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Jake's commentary:

In this verse the Guru and Nitya shift the focus of their discussion to the transcendent Self, the unchanging "witnessing consciousness" always existent as we live through our transactional world. In the previous verses, the Guru has, in Christian terms, "rendered unto Caesar that which is Caesar's," has granted the sense/mental validity of the world and acknowledged its very relevant place in our experience. They have also noted the place and function of mind in this arrangement. It is more or less on automatic pilot in its persistent changing of focus as it shifts attention and more often than not attaches to items, people, etc. in an attempt to locate the interior Self, the value, in them. This projecting and reading back along with the frustration produced by the effort goes a long way in explaining a life encouraged and sanctioned by those extrinsic to our Self, both in our personal and social lives.

The eternal light, the truth, or whatever, is not "out there" existing in some thing else, however, much our commercial or social arbiters insist. To illustrate this point, Nitya discusses the routine practice of children obsessing on toys, first one then the other. The value they seek, writes Nitya, is not in the object but is in the child's Self, a condition the child is not capable of realizing. In the "adult" world, this relationship gets endlessly repeated in the common quest for "love." Seeking the happiness of the Self, the little self repeatedly finds frustration in "failed" relationships, the very stuff that makes up the entertainment industry and so many others. It is the alternative, the Self and its eternal value which is the constant observer in us all, that Nitya and the Guru turn to in the present verse.

From the Self's perspective, certain facts emerge. One can see, writes Nitya, that the body must ingest life forms of some kind in order to exist and, conversely, eventually becomes food for other life forms. That inescapable organic relationship places us (while occupying a body as far as our limited experience can tell us) squarely within a seamless network or, as George Harrison once wrote and sang, "Life goes on within and without you."

The self preservation instinct, writes Nitya, takes two forms: the intellect on the one hand and a "dark . . . autonomous aspect," Schopenhauer's "will to live." The unknowable force we can see in all life forms including ourselves as we move from the embryo to adult to eventual dissolution in our sentient life. That irresistible force is further illustrated in the universe generally as it moves inexorably from the Big Bang in an endless cycle our minds are not capable of comprehending. (Even a mere 15 billion years is a quantity that escapes me.)

As our self desires an endless catalogue of things, writes Nitya, it is assisted in its endless journey by the desiring intellect (Indra) on the one hand the autonomous and irresistible force (Prajapati) on the other. Both "consciously and unconsciously" we manipulate our conditions in order to always "move ahead" (p. 665). And a major event in this movement, he continues, is our waking up to the larger cosmic scheme. The interplay of the intellect and this constant force we operate can lead us to a realization that both our volitional and non-volitional actions interpenetrate experience. Nitya illustrates this no-volitional dimension by way of a reference to Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*. Through regression therapy, one can ride back through memory and uncover that which precedes it, those embedded pre-rational lessons we learn before the mind has words for forms or ideas. By continuing backward, so to speak, a larger pre-incarnate awareness emerges wherein distinctions among objects disappear and the mind loses its footing altogether.

As Nitya writes, "The Guru is trying to help us get back to our original state so we can reclaim the whole to which we

naturally belong rather than get stranded on the desert island of the transactional” (p. 666). In this original state are the causes (vasanas) of all the effects we live through in our lives as we go on creating samskaras that then become part of the vasanas. As Nitya so aptly observes, “If you do not know the cause, then you do not know how to deal with the effects correctly” (p. 666).

Our Self, then, is always distracted by the senses and mind, thereby concealing our original state. We essentially de-rail our own search and cloud our vision. We miss that spark of the Absolute present in what attracts our interest. Hypnotized by form, we can’t see that unchangeable truth right in front of us. As Nitya and the Guru have repeated again and again, the Self is on an inevitable quest to find the Self, and when we sense sorrow because we know we have lost something of value (a parent’s death for instance), “you cannot say it is nothing. It is also to be seen as part of the Absolute” (p. 669).

Neither other-worldly nor isolated in our sense reality, the Guru’s position outlined in this verse and its commentary reveal in stark relief the intellectual/philosophical vacuum at the core of the 21st century American experiment, a position that, because of (or perhaps in spite of) its contradictory character, points to enormous possibilities of innovation and opportunity—if it can evolve.

Part IV

I have been listening to *Damian*, by Hermann Hesse, one of the books I avoided “back in the day” because everyone was reading it. It turns out to be incredibly powerful and wonderful, and Hesse’s ideas certainly fit in with our Gurukula classes. As I go along, I keep thinking, “I’ve got to share that with everybody!” Finally, I could no longer resist. This translation I found, different from my own copy and the audio book, nonetheless works well, and adds a perfect finishing touch. In my copy, this is on pages 107-8):

And at that point the realization suddenly burned me like a searing flame: For each person there was an “office,” but for nobody was there one that he was permitted to choose for himself, to define, and to fill according to his own wishes. It was wrong to desire new gods, it was totally wrong to try and give the world anything! There was no duty for enlightened people, none, none, except this: to seek themselves, to become certain of themselves, to grope forward along their own path, wherever it might lead. I was deeply affected by that, and for me that was the profit from that experience. I had often played with images of the future, I had dreamt of roles that might be meant for me, as a poet, perhaps, or as a prophet, or as a painter, or whatever else. That was all meaningless. I didn’t exist to write poetry, to preach sermons, to paint pictures; neither I nor anyone else existed for that purpose. All of that merely happened to a person along the way. Everyone had only one true vocation: to find himself. Let him wind up as a poet or a madman, as a prophet or a criminal – that wasn’t his business; in the long run, it was irrelevant. His business was to discover his own destiny, not just any destiny, and to live it totally and undividedly. Anything else was just a half-measure, an attempt to run away, an escape back to the ideal of the masses, an adaptation, fear of one’s own nature. Fearsome and sacred, the new image rose up before me; I had sensed it a hundred times, perhaps I had already enunciated it, but now I was experiencing it for the first time. I was a gamble of Nature, a throw of the dice into an uncertain realm, leading perhaps to something new, perhaps to nothing; and to let this throw from the primordial depths take effect, to feel its will inside myself and adopt it completely as my own will: that alone was my vocation. That alone!

* * *

As usual, our Brihadaranyaka Upanishad study group is in close resonance with the Atmo trajectory. Here are a few excerpts from the latest for your delectation. First, Peter included a

perennially germane quote from Dr. Mees's book, *The Revelation in the Wilderness*:

For a Sage or Saint the very world of every-day life is a heaven of light and bliss. The aspirant should aim at attaining the Light of God, the Grace and Bliss of Self-Realization, "here and now", while in physical embodiment, and not in the here-after of one or other of the other forms of existence. Infinitely more precious is the Experience of Paradise, the Kingdom of Heaven, while in ordinary waking consciousness -- to use the traditional term -- than while in some form of trance or sleep. The Treasure of Light and Grace, though deeply hidden, yet lies open to all and can be brought to the ordinary light of day of everyday life (The Book of Battles, p. 209).

* * *

Part of what I wrote for our online Brihadaranyaka study group strikes me as worthy of preserving here as well. The subject was Nitya's dense and intense twenty page dissertation on the famous mantra, "Lead us from untruth to truth; lead us from darkness to light; lead us from death to immortality":

Ah, inspiration! I was able to take my own advice in coming to terms with this lesson, and it helped a lot. On my first reading I felt really bogged down and somewhat frustrated, because I was treating it as an ordinary book. On my subsequent readings I consciously framed it as a suggestive, guided meditation, which was the proper spirit to be profoundly inspired by it. I sat quietly and let the words sink in, especially the chant itself as it is repeated for each aspect of existence that Nitya touches on.... There was room to vitalize Nitya's hints with my own thoughts. For me, it brought back a vivid memory of sitting by him in his chair in the prayer hall as he reclined with eyes closed and spoke from the depths of his being....

One of my favorite meditations is music, and the past two days we have been treated to one of the world's top pianists, Denis Kozhukhin. His two concerts included the monumental sixth, seventh and eighth piano sonatas by Sergei Prokofiev, played with transcendental mastery. They are among the most intense and awe-inspiring expressions of psychological art in any genre, and Kozhukhin was up to the task, which has to be the most complex and demanding use of the body humans are capable of. In a lifetime of hoping, I have only heard them performed live one other time, a relatively tepid performance that revealed a lack of understanding of the depth of the music. It's possible to play the notes correctly and still not put across the meaning, somewhat like the first of my readings of the dense material in our present lesson.

I mention this because such events are very much like the confection of guru and disciple in a deep study, or (as it's put in the Upanishad) sat and jyotis conjoined in amritattva. A master musician communicates the highest expressions of a master composer, and intelligently prepared listeners imbibe it with sympathetic ears and minds. The result is a kind of heaven on earth: a performance hall that virtually dissolves in bliss. That is the kind of fulfillment that life is meant to provide, if only at rare intervals. Those high points infuse all the rest with meaning.

* * *

In Nancy Y's summing up that she does for each of our Brihadaranyaka lessons, she wrote eloquently of a couple of themes of perennial interest also, and has graciously allowed me to share them. Gayathri had included the link to the Pollan article discussed in the Verse 91 class notes, and was very intrigued by it. Nancy wrote, in two separated paragraphs:

Like Gayathri, I also followed the link to the article Scott shared and was particularly interested in the references to the "default mode network," as I have recently been editing a book in which it

is prominently featured, as the part of our brain that is actively "telling stories," even when "nothing observable is going on and we are not actively relating to the world around us," and the main story it is telling is the story of "I, me, mine." It is fascinating to learn about how meditation (and certain drugs) reduces activity in the default mode network, reducing the ego sense and seeming, as Gayathri puts it, to be the "physical / neurochemical basis for enlightenment or amritam or immortality." She brings up two interesting related concerns, one about whether "amritam gives us a leg up in terms of survival of the species?" This she thoughtfully answers with: "Enlightened beings are not interested in greed, power, violence and the like – all potential causes of our ultimate demise as a species. That would definitely be an evolutionary advantage in terms of propagation of our species." To that I'd also like to add the suggestion that evolution can be considered in more expansive terms than propagation of the species.

According to Patanjali, yoga is citta vrtti nirodha, "the restraint of mental modifications," which could be understood as another way of describing the deactivation of the default mode network. The yamas and niyamas relate very pragmatically to what aggravates citta vrtti (mental modifications). If we are not being truthful, for instance, it exacerbates the "I" sense, trapping us in inner whirlpools of deceit, self-justification, and so on, in story lines that reverberate and consolidate in the default mode network. The yamas and niyamas are presented as two of the eight limbs of yoga because they also qualify as significant practices that contribute to our becoming "accident prone," by supporting our capacity to "become established on firm ground, apportion the effort with continuous meditation on the endless nature of perfection, harmonize the opposites, withdraw from distraction, hold the focus of the mind, and imperience the continuous flow of consciousness in unitiveness."

[The reference to being accident prone was in response to Gayathri's recall of the Zen saying that "nirvana is an accident, but practice makes you accident-prone!"]