

2/24/15
Verse 94

The world and the truth exist intermixed;
this state is one of great iniquity;
in this, which is beyond the grasp of word and mind,
how can any right reason operate?

Free translation:

There is an inherent iniquity in the unreal world and Reality
presenting themselves as one indiscernible whole. To these, which
cannot be demarcated verbally or conceptually, how can any role
of methodology be applied?

Nataraja Guru's translation:

As a mixture of what is the world and what is the real,
That which presents itself before us is a great iniquity indeed!
This is what is indeterminate, beyond grasp of word or mind;
How could the course of right reason move within its domain?

The conclusion of the verse commentary is so crucial, I want
to use it as the starting point:

The world is not what you anticipate. You cannot just take an
answer from a guru or someone else and use it blindly. You
have to make learned wisdom your own, and then evolve your
own way of applying it to things.

This is utterly essential, and we should never forget it. Among
other things, it's what distinguishes a cult or closed sect from a
healthy spiritual probe.

As we have often noted, this idea runs strongly against the
grain of the social veneer. From birth we have been pressured to

take a well-defined stand and stick by it. In place of the logical doubts that Nitya characterizes so well in his talk, we pretend to unshakable beliefs, often clinging to them in unconscious desperation. Our culture is permeated by such beliefs. For example, Jan's son was recently in a national debating competition, where he did very well. In a debate it is essential to stick to your premise, whether or not you actually believe in it. You are judged on how well you support your assigned position, and you must leave out anything that doesn't incontrovertibly back it up. This is a useful skill in some transactional arenas, but not so helpful in keeping the heart open, which is another useful skill we don't often get trained in, at least in school.

Because of the various pressures we have experienced to adhere to a fixed position, we wield our attitudes like a defensive shield or even an offensive weapon. Narayana Guru is gently suggesting we can lay down our military hardware and come out of hiding. We are invited to stop battling our enemies and recognize our common lot with everyone and everything.

Our study is not about finding a better system and allying ourselves with it to make our position that much more impregnable, it's about admitting our true condition and accepting it. Then we should find common cause with all.

I love that in *Neither This Nor That*, Nitya describes the mind as a bombastic commentator. After studying this work in depth, the many baldfaced assertions we may have once taken for granted might make us cringe. Of course we are mostly very polite people, but under the surface we are holding hard to our selected preferences. Since they are essentially vaporous, we have to cling fast to them to make them seem real.

I find it quite charming that when Gurukula friends are asked what our group is all about, we don't have a ready answer. There isn't a descriptive motto we repeat—in Portland almost no one would offer the famous one scrawled on walls in Kerala, though they might have heard it once or twice. What is it about? Nothing that can be readily put in words, that's for sure. We are not going

to win any debates. Perhaps we could say we are learning to be flexible and open, but such terms are generally treated as clichés. Nitya puts it this way:

There is a horizontal aspect of life and a vertical aspect. If you don't know how to coordinate them properly you become confused. The Guru doesn't want to make a fixed scheme to put into your hands. If he did you would make another mistake. You would then have ready-made pigeonholes in which to place your ideas of horizontal and vertical. The next day what you found to be horizontal might have become verticalized and you won't be flexible enough to make the change.

Deb pointed out that the terms horizontal and vertical have sometimes been a kind of Gurukula cliché. Instead of a nuanced understanding, sometimes we might hear that vertical is good and horizontal is bad. Vertical is spiritual, while the horizontal deals with mundane (hence, unspiritual) reality. Yet both are intrinsic and essential to everything. In a relaxed pose we intuitively know this, but when we try to pin it down in words we fly off on tangents. Narayana Guru calls this an injustice, as if we are nailing a butterfly to a board and mounting it in a museum. This only works as a living philosophy, and is not meant to be codified.

This openness is well known as a concept (or cliché), and yet it remains unexplored territory. And that's a good thing. Here's Merry Prankster and Oregon author Ken Kesey:

The answer is never the answer. What's really interesting is the mystery. If you seek the mystery instead of the answer, you'll always be seeking. I've never seen anybody really find the answer. They think they have, so they stop thinking. But the job is to seek mystery, evoke mystery, plant a garden in which strange plants grow and mysteries bloom. The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer.

Our brains are geared to relax and feel good when they aren't under threat, and in school that means when we have the right answer. Nitya doesn't want us to stop thinking just because we've found a comfortable niche in the turmoil. If that was enough to make us happy, there would be no problem. Yet it doesn't hold up. Nitya slyly counteracts the default setting most of us believe in with a kind of religious fervor, saying "All we know is the appearance of things, and we can easily come to the conclusion that reality is just as it appears. For those who think that way, all problems are solved...." Of course, since problems persist for all of us, we can conclude that appearances are in fact deceptive. Yet a strange compulsion continually sweeps us back into our default setting of rigid belief, not just in appearances but in abstractions as well.

Right before class I was reading the new issue of National Geographic, a magazine that has grown tremendously in recent years to become a coherent voice for progressive causes and global understanding. The feature article is on what is called a war on science, the tendency of many to disregard scientific evidence in preference to unquestioned beliefs. The theme should have meshed perfectly with the class subject, and Nancy championed it for doing so, yet it offended me because I was guilty of the same faults. Science was treated as a monolithic good that we must believe in or else. Anyone expressing doubts is painted as superstitious or at least gullible. There were no convincing arguments, only platitudes. Science has never been faultless, but somehow we want to make it the new God. If all criticism is discounted, we are on the verge of destroying the earth because of our faith-based science in the service of greed.

Michael assured us that science routinely forgets it has grown out of a narrow band of philosophy. That reminded Prabu of something Noam Chomsky said, that physicists study the universe, but when they can't fit something in they say it is the purview of the chemists. When chemists can't explain something, they pass it on to the biologists. When biologists can't explain something they

defer to the psychologists. And when psychologists can't explain something, they say it is in the realm of philosophy. So in a very real sense, philosophy is the whole context in which the various disciplines have their delineated places. It's when the part insists it is the whole that the fabric begins to tear apart.

Scientists are by no means the only culprits—mistaking the part for the whole is a universal human failing. Synchronously, before I sat down with the magazine I was reading Thomas Pynchon's latest book, *Bleeding Edge*, in which he rants about capitalism as the state religion of the US, which it surely is. In response to a shred of doubt, a guru named Shawn says: "It's not a religion? These are people who believe the Invisible Hand of the Market runs everything. They fight holy wars against competing religions like Marxism. Against all evidence that the world is finite, this blind faith that resources will never run out, profits will go on increasing forever, just like the world's population—more cheap labor, more addicted consumers."

Or in the excellent wording of John Lennon, in the song I Dig a Pony, "You can syndicate any boat you row."

What is the urge to appear to be affiliated with an unimpeachable ideal? As far as I can see, it is in compensation for feelings of insecurity, as in the religious attitude "I believe in God, and God is perfect. Therefore to doubt me is to doubt God, to doubt perfection." It's very effective, really. The Guru feels that such egregious claims are unnecessary if we take the pressure off, if we make it clear we aren't out to punish or undermine anyone, or allow such things to be done to us, either.

The point is not to develop a boilerplate philosophy or science, since that is evidently impossible, it is to be able to love life to the full. One way of doing that is to ease up on the mania to define everything. Then we can tiptoe out into the open, to commune with friends. Richard Linklater, in his movie *Waking Life*, has a character conclude as he's dying:

When it was over, all I could think about...was how this entire notion of oneself, what we are, is just... this logical structure, a place to momentarily house all the abstractions. It was a time to become conscious, to give form and coherence to the mystery. And I had been a part of that. It was a gift. Life was raging all around me, and every moment was magical. I loved all the people, dealing with all the contradictory impulses. That's what I loved the most— connecting with the people. Looking back, that's all that really mattered.

Deb recently listened to an old Hank Williams song, *Lost on the River*, featuring a chorus of “I'm lost on the river / The river of life.” It made her think how we are in a flowing beautiful river and we can't predict where it will take us, so we need to be open and flexible and vulnerable in how we understand our world. It made me realize that you can only get lost if you have a rigid picture of what the River is. If you “go with the flow” you are never lost, you are right where you're supposed to be.

Beliefs are not simply intangible clouds, they are often used as weapons. Possibly it's better that we argue about ideas in place of killing each other, but the arguments sometimes do lead to killing. Ideas can be very aggressive. Beliefs, then, can be hazardous to our mental and physical health. We adopt them in hopes of finding love and acceptance, and wind up polarized against those with different ideas. That's why Narayana Guru emphasized that our goal was to share ideas, not to argue and win. It takes an entirely different mindset to share than to fight.

Bushra was reminded of *ostranenie*, (defamiliarization in English) a Russian concept defined as “the artistic technique of presenting to audiences common things in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance perception of the familiar.” She characterized it as a way of removing the incrustations of our mental orientations to become more open, and she cited Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry as a prime example of *ostranenie*. (Wikipedia has a fascinating glimpse of his remarkable artistic

flair, if you want to learn more.) Ostranenie is certainly akin to Vedantic deconditioning, and the class approved mightily of the word Bushra used, incrustations, as describing the way our mental padding accumulates until it obscures any original form underneath.

Nitya broke down the same idea here in terms of caksusi and manusi, caksusi being the immediate impression and manusi the way it is processed in the mind. He put it this way:

In the last verse we were speaking of manusi and caksusi. They are the two wives who weave the whole garland of experience. Caksus means the eyes. When your eyes look at something, the first perception that comes to you can be called perception. In the second, third and fourth moments, and so on, you are no longer seeing it. When the first impression comes, the sensation, the caksusi, passes on the data to the manusi. Sensation turns into cognition. You think about and interpret what you have seen. Cognition changes into recognition almost immediately.... That means you have structured the meaning of your perception in your thoughts, and thereafter you see only the meaning of your perception in the object.

As soon as you start using words you are getting into dialectics, which belongs to the world of semantics. The first impression is only for a split second, then manusi takes over and the whole thing is mentally created and stabilized. A name is given to what you have created, and thereafter it is a nominal perception. You are far removed from the real basis of your perception. All you can say about the real is that neither your sensation or your mind reaches it. Between the sensation and the mind you are busy structuring an understandable entity to which you can give a name.

Ultimately, all our understanding of sensations is a nominalistic understanding, dialectically conceived. On such a basis it is hard for right reason to operate. This is what Narayana Guru is saying here: what a person of common sense

with a personal identity takes for granted as this transactional world of experience is very confusing.

The odd thing is how content we become with our personal incrustations. It takes effort to peel them off, and since incrustations are comfortable enough after we adjust to them, we just snuggle into them. That's one more way tamas can get such a stranglehold on our psyche.

Our brain is wired to give rewards for the proper pigeonholing of strange objects into familiar categories. Once we can fit something into its correct slot, whether or not it does it justice, we can relax. Our schooling is largely based on a similar form of programming, so the urge to categorize goes very deep. It takes a goodly measure of dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs to energize the search for something more valuable than a wall covered with well-filed dossiers shoved into neatly labeled receptacles.

Jan talked about how she has learned a great deal by listening to others, instead of always supplying her own pat descriptions. It's an everyday form of *ostranenie* (in itself an unfamiliar word for a familiar concept), and Jan honors its role in her life: the simple act of quieting her inner "bombastic narrator" to listen well has taught her so much, including about her potential to enlarge her understanding in many ways. Again, this requires letting go of the need for already being in possession of any final answer.

In a surprising shift, Susan saw how this pertains to the importance of having a home. She told us: "I am moving out of my family home of 18 years and I feel the pull toward reacting in habitual ways — toward sadness, grief, fear, and though these all have a place in this process, I am trying to also stay open to not getting stuck in those. I am trying to see a wider view, to just go forward step by step." She also thought of the white horse parable as being pertinent (<http://scottteitsworth.tripod.com/id41.html>), how "friends and family and even I sometimes want to say this

process is good or bad but you can't label it, you can't define it, you just have to move forward, one step at a time."

Andy immediately related. He has lived in as many as thirty different places as an adult, and is processing what his present, more stable home means to him. He has lived there longer than anywhere else since childhood, and he didn't feel much at home even back then because he shared a room with his brother, and they fought a lot. Andy has been a wanderer in this life, though he knows and admires those who have found "home" within themselves. He cited an incident Nitya recounted in *Love and Blessings*, which I will clip into Part III, where his grandfather cursed him to be a wanderer. Nitya wandered homeless for most of his life, but you could see that he was at home in himself. He didn't depend on any fixed abode for his sense of identity.

The first chakra is the basis of our individuation, in other words, where our sense of being grounded is centered. Our psychic home. In a sense, everything in our personality is built up on top of this, including, as Deb said, our grasp of truth. If we aren't firmly grounded, we seek to satisfy the craving for home in family, tribal, national and other identities. While these can provide some sense of belonging, their partiality is also the breeding ground of conflict. Narayana Guru has been teaching us to begin with an enlightened sense of home in our self and then extend that gradually to all the layers of the onion of the universe we are surrounded by.

Susan noted how some people don't support her need to move; they tell her it's wrong, and this just makes her job harder. Yet it does force her to keep moving ahead, because part of her is tempted to not change, and she knows she'd better not give in to it. Andy agreed that the cultural reaction against change is very strong, a countercurrent we have to take into account. In Susan's case, her neighbors see that she has the most beautiful house on the block, and they imagine her house is also a perfectly satisfactory home. Of course, house and home are not the same thing, though they sometimes overlap, especially in the popular imagination. Her neighbors do not know the intricacies behind Susan's decision.

This reminded me of Nitya's story from back in Verse 20, that cautions us to remember that the physical act is not the whole transformation, the real change has to come from within. I'm sure Susan is confident that her move is only an echo of her inner need for authenticity. Then, too, the physical and the mental interpenetrate each other and influence each other tremendously. Sometimes if we're mental stuck we can initiate some transformation with a change of scene. Here's Nitya's story:

When I was a student, I felt very miserable. The whole college situation seemed meaningless, so I wrote a letter to my principal stating I was going away. He sent back a note asking me to come and see him before I left. When I went to his office, he invited me to lunch with his wife and him. He said "It's a fine thing that you want to leave on finding that this place is not meaningful to you anymore. That's very good. But tell me, when you go away, are you going to take your mind with you also, or are you going to leave that here?"

"Surely I take my mind with me wherever I go."

"That means you'll be taking the same sorrow, sadness, suspicion, doubts, misery, everything with you. It will be the same in the place where you go because you are taking all this with you. If you can leave your mind here and run away from it, fine."

This is so true. I get letters almost every day from people who say that they want to get away, to run away. Go away where? We think all the misery is because we are with certain people and certain situations. When we move away it will again be a wonderful world. If you can create a wonderful world in another place, you can create it where you are now, too.

Prabu shared a funny story about when he went to school for the first time. Something in us knows we are being sold down the river when we swap our life of freedom for the socially constrained hierarchy of education. When Prabu came home the first day, he begged his parents to buy more buffaloes so that he could take care of them and not ever go back to school. His family had 25

buffaloes, so he computed that if they bought 24 more for him to take care of, he would have all he needed. So sweet! Yet like caring parents everywhere, he was not given the option.

It called to my mind the indelible image of holding like a tenacious spider to the sides of the taxi door with all four hands and feet, while the driver and my mother pushed as hard as they could to force me inside, so he could take me to nursery school. Some “nursery” that was!

Deb epitomized the dilemma perfectly: we should be at home with our ideas but we don’t want to solidify them or set them in concrete. If we are brave enough, we can be at home with flexibility and freedom from dogma.

Moni talked eloquently about how when she was younger she so wanted her own home, and for a while she thought she had one. But then it was no longer true and the fantasy had no more importance for her and she left. Words and memories create our personal universe, yet we have to resist the way they bind us.

Bill added that we have a strong genetic desire to have a home, and that is certainly true. Home is where we are safe. We can relax and not worry about being eaten or frozen to death. I think the philosophy is intended to expand on that wonderful sense of security and safety and extend it as far as possible. Certainly to those we come in direct contact with. In a sense civilization is the embodiment of security, with its theoretical extension to everyone and every place, so that we are set free to explore potentials that dinosaurs never could. For some, the need for security brings about a shrinkage to a tiny, unstable island of temporary safety. For others, a solid footing can be projected into new territory, and the sky’s the limit. Spiritually minded people perceive an ultimate form of safety in being the Absolute in their core, which emboldens them to reach out in all sorts of ways.

Someone like Susan, on the cusp of a new life, can’t be sure of what lies ahead. Her certitude has to come from within. She can gather an abiding sense of it in her heart, and then it will go with her wherever her path, with its inevitable ups and downs, leads.

I'm sure everyone knows that we are all in the same boat, though at various levels of intensity. The lessons we learn and the insights we gather from the intense times can be carried over to tide us over the calm times too. Once we are at home in ourselves—not in any trite sense, but with a real attunement with That Alone—it is not something we can ever lose, and the more we feel its support the more confidence we will have to carry out the steps we need to take and the steps we want to take.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum is fantastic this time:

In our daily life the world appears to us as one whole piece belonging, all at once, to the same space and time. We do not realize how much the past, the present and the future are all interwoven. We visualize a uniform world. Part of this world is seen directly with our eyes and heard with our ears, and to that we add the recollections of what we have experienced at some other time, then this is further complemented by what we have heard or read as having been experienced by someone else. This picture is further enhanced by our imagination with the speculations of mythologies, theologians and scientists.

The factual stuff occupies only a very small space of our visual and auditory range, and even this small area is beyond our physical access, as we have in our possession only certain sense impressions. No one has yet proved that our sense impressions are exact copies of the models outside. In fact, if we are to believe the astronomers, the stars we see take us beyond several light years and thus the starry heaven is only the ghost of the past, which, however, goes pretty well with the panorama of our present. When a man in New York talks to a person in Bombay and to another in California within the time span of ten minutes, one man speaks to him from the past and another from the future. When we drive past the rows of trees of an apple orchard, the trees nearest to the car

seem to move fast and the farthest ones more slowly, and so we see endless patterns of triangular formations, which give us a somewhat global vision in relation to an imaginary point that can be marked in the farthest reaches beyond the horizon. All these irrelevancies in time, space and appearance are ignored, and such incongruity does not make us suffer in the least when our business is confined to a small physical area such as eating our breakfast or shaking hands with a friend. If, however, we become ambitious and attempt to execute a project involving large areas of space or long durations of time, then we have to leave the familiar ground of our physical notions and we must adopt many topological considerations.

The bargaining of prices in a flea market is comparatively easier than for two philosophers to convince each other of their respective stands. For example, when a Buddhist is asked to testify on a red pot and a blue jar, he will immediately raise an objection to the mixing up of names with things. According to him, pot, jar, red and blue are only arbitrarily devised names, and the actual things denoted by those names belong to another order of reality which can only be sensed. Sensations do not come in the form of names. Where Aristotle or the Christian theologians make a dichotomy of an actual thing and its essence, the Buddhist thinks of this as a game of verbosity, since in his opinion perception happens only in the split moment in which the senses receive a stimulus from an object.

We see things not merely with our senses, but also with our mind. The mind is like a bombastic commentator who explains all impressions in terms of past experiences and future possibilities. Thus, all at once, perception changes into recognition and the mind attributes a use value to it, which originates from the intentionality of the mind to earmark an object for future use. We are very much deceived by the language we use. For example, when a Christian theologian says that a person is factually true because he belongs to the here and now world of perception and will essentially continue because he has an essence which is not confined to the

world of facts, as a personal opinion it may sound innocent enough, but it can be vitiated with the ulterior motive of the Church. If the basis of reality is what is given here and now in terms of perceptual data, and as all that changes in a few hours or even after a split second, a person of the present cannot be accused of any of his past crimes. Yet, by accepting the concept of an unspent essence, the theologian can also maintain the essence of a man's sin along with the man's essence, and so the man can be called to account for his sin on the last day of judgment.

By mixing up the world of facts with the world of ideas, whether philosophically sound or fictitiously humorous, man can bring himself to situations of embarrassment, if not downright harassment. Narayana Guru thus says that there is an inherent injustice in the peculiar mix-up of things, the responsibility of which cannot be put on anybody's shoulders.

Evidently there is an erroneous vision on the part of everyone. If all people should suffer from a disease which made them see all objects as doubles, there would be universal agreement in what is seen and consistency in their vision, but their perception would nevertheless be defective. All empirical knowledge is in the same position, and this kind of illusion is called *mukhya vibhrama*. If one person sees three moons when all others see two moons he is making an empirical mistake, and this is called *pratibhasika bhrantih*. As our experience bristles with such errors of both a transcendental and an empirical order, the Vedantins put in a category called "the cognition of the unutterable," *anirvacaniya khyati*. The Guru, therefore, says that the reality of this world is beyond the comprehension of our mind. Both philosophers and scientists claim to have devices or methods by which they can give precise information of exact truths, but if we examine these claims in the light of what we have already said, it is not difficult to see that even the most ambitious scheme will have only partial credibility.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

THE Absolute is presented to man's view in the form of both appearance and the reality behind it. These two are like grains that cut across each other, and the process of reasoning has to move, as it were, in straight lines between the cross-grains of the fabric thus presented. What is true in the cross-sectional view is false from the long-sectional view. Everything as presented is both 'yes' and 'not' at the same time. This is what constitutes the enigma, the knot or the question mark that is said to be life in its total aspect. The Jaina *syad vada* (may-be-may-be-not) approach reflects this puzzlement.

We have in India what is called *pramana-sastra*, which is sometimes called logic. Western logic along the usual lines does not strictly correspond to this. Reasoning leads to inferences; but these inferences are themselves of two distinct kinds: one which is for one's own conviction (*swartha*), and the other which is for agreeing with another (*parartha*). The latter is verbalistic and depends on a formalism known to Aristotelian syllogisms, while the former is based on the thought processes that take place in the individual himself. The anti-verbalistic character of Indian logic is referred to as follows by the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce:

Indian logic studies the naturalistic syllogism in itself as internal thought, distinguishing it from syllogism for others.... It does not make the verbal distinctions of subject, copula and predicate.... All these are extraneous to logic, whose object is the constant: knowledge considered in itself. (22)

When the Guru speaks in terms of '*pramana*', which we have translated 'right reason' and which is to be valid, he must have been thinking of the Indian schools of Nyaya and Samkhya. Aristotelian logic is different, as we have just seen. It is more

verbalistic rather than based on the thought-process itself. If one, the Indian way, is to be called 'vertical' the other should be called 'horizontal'. The means of testing the validity of truth and the object-matter of logic thus presents epistemological and methodological difficulties. It is in this sense that we have to understand the Guru when he says that reality is presented to our intelligence as a great 'iniquity'.

This 'iniquity' is the same negative principle of Maya which has been examined in various verses previously and referred to in verse 88 as the great tribulation. Sometimes Maya is referred to as a goddess of evil import, and sometimes in mythological language this same principle could be seen as represented as the dark and terrible Kali. Just as there are gradations of mildness and ferocity between the Saraswati of Sankara and Kali of more ancient literature, the former being more Sanskritized or refined than the latter, we have in philosophical literature reference to this active-creative horizontal and negative principle, sometimes treated as the same as the Absolute, and sometimes as extraneous to the notion of the Absolute.

The creative power of the Absolute could be intellectually viewed or more emotionally viewed. The Guru is here content to call it the principle of injustice in this verse, while in verse 88 it was a more open enemy. The injustice here consists merely in that it obstructs, by its indeterminism or flux as Bergson would put it, the application of logical processes to the discovery of ultimate or absolute Reality. Both Indian logic, which thinks in pure subjective terms, and Western logic which inclines to objectivity through syntactical elements of language, do not avail in cutting the Gordian knot.

(22). pp. 255-56, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, by M. Hiriyanna, M. A., Allen and Unwin, London, 1932.

Part III

Erratum: Right after the part about Eddington, in the paragraph beginning “Whether you are a philosopher or a scientist,” the phrase “reality *or* transactional facts” should read: “reality *of* transactional facts.” (no italics—they’re just for clarification here.)

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Nitya’s chapter from L&B, pages 31-3:

GRANDFATHER’S CURSE

As the elders were always steeped in their own affairs, we children had to plan our own routine every day. By now there were all together forty cousins, but the term cousin was in fact not known to us. We lived together as brothers and sisters. The younger and weaker ones among us felt the struggle for existence very keenly. Bullying was the main entertainment for all of us.

For some time I was looking for a way to combat those who bullied me. One of my cousins found an easy way of depriving any one of us of our cake and candy by spitting on it, as there is a general taboo in India against eating anything that has had contact with another’s mouth. He was not allowed to get away with this for long. Others started the countermeasure of spitting on whatever he grabbed that way. It was around that time I introduced biting as a major weapon, and very soon I earned respect and a name for myself. One day another fellow bit me on the lip and the doctor had to put in a few stitches.

In our daily rounds of quarrels a cousin who was a year older than me came out as the bully hero. My mothers and grandmother always made much of him. This caused some rancor in me, and I was looking for an opportunity to show that he was not so superior. In the morning when we all assembled for breakfast, I purposely sat next to him. When one of the mothers served us a kind of cake

with coconut topping, I ate mine and then briskly removed the topping of my cousin's cake. When he tried to stop me, I threw a whole heap of cakes out into the courtyard.

All were stunned at the sight of my grandfather advancing toward me. A terrified voice came from the women's apartment; it could have been my mother crying out. By then my grandfather had already picked me up by one hand. I thought he was going to dash me to the ground, but hearing my mother's loud shrieking, he dropped me on the floor and stood there as if he were in a trance. Then he said in a very solemn tone, "You will live in the streets. You will have to be fed by others. You will miss the food of your home. All your life you will be fed by others."

After that there was a great calm. My mother came running out of the room and dragged me into a corner. She became hysterical and thrashed me recklessly until I almost fainted. Nobody came to console me. After a time I got up with difficulty and walked out to the cow pen.

In those days the cow pen was bigger than the house. There was hay spread in it for drying. I crouched down in the hay and started crying and sobbing for being born among cruel people who didn't care to understand the mind of a child. I knew it was wrong to throw cakes in the mud, but it seemed the only way I could call attention to the injustice of favoring the bully.

Though my mother had beaten me soundly, what was haunting my mind were my grandfather's solemn words. He said I would live in the streets. That meant I was now a stranger in this house. I wondered how I came to live there rather than in the street. He said I would miss the meals of my home. What difference should it make to me? He said all my life I would have to be fed by someone else. If that was so, could I at least endear myself to those someones?

My head that felt so battered lay heavy on the hay. I closed my eyes and tried to forget everything, but the entire scene repeated itself again and again in my mind. Then I felt someone stroking my hair. When I opened my eyes, I saw another of my

mothers sitting beside me with tears in her eyes. In a cracked voice she said, “You are a silly child. You don’t know what happened today. Your grandfather cursed you. He’s our God. We don’t know any divinity other than him. He’s a man who never speaks any untruth, so his words cannot be spoken in vain. No mother can accept the fact that her son is cursed by her own father. Her own despair made her furious. In desperation she was beating at her own fate. You should pray for your redemption.”

She was friendly and loving, but I thought of her speech as coming from the opposite camp. I was resolved to be a child of the street, and I didn’t care for anybody’s consolation or sympathy. I had already visualized how I would walk alone through the streets of the world. Of course my world was not yet very big. After that incident and until this day, I have never felt I belonged in the home of any person. I have always thought of an unknown “other” waiting for me around the corner or in another home to show me a place to sleep and offer me a plate of rice to eat.

* * *

Jake’s commentary is especially good on this verse:

In most definite terms do the Guru and Nitya in their verse and commentary here present our situation in the 21st century world, a place where the experts, doctors, priests—the list goes on—work tirelessly to control our lives and fix our gaze outward. But the “world,” writes Nitya in his concluding paragraph of commentary on this verse, “is not what you anticipate. You cannot just take an answer from a guru or someone else and use it blindly. You have to make learned wisdom your own, and then evolve your way of applying it to things” (p. 677).

As he works his way to the foregoing conclusion, Nitya debunks materialism, fractures Western theology commonly understood, describes our process of nominal understanding, demonstrates how it operates in our different domains as we go

about our lived lives, and clearly outlines the limits of mind. It is in this concluding observation that he reveals a corollary fact, the fundamental flaw in our education industry—where the principle of slavishly following models has become institutionalized and enshrined as pedagogical excellence.

In his first few paragraphs, however, Nitya opens his exploration of the “world of appearance and reality” by facing directly the theology of materialism. Relying wholly on sense perceptions, writes Nitya, the materialist must, in order to remain logically consistent, limit the world to the immediately sensory and by so doing narrow it to a very small slice of the phenomenal. Achieving that position, the true believer ought to find serenity. The world is only the immediately perceived. But, as Nitya points out, they generally aren’t very rigorous in their application and proceed to add other’s perceptions, testimonies of all sorts, and so on until the picture gets very confused. Just how to limit all the sources of secondary data becomes unmanageable unless one simply makes arbitrary judgments [that, ironically, are more often than not controlled by unexamined compulsions arising from the samskara/vasana domain.]

In the Western theological tradition, the materialist’s contradictory certitude takes the form of a combining of sense experience and the concept of *essence*. Nitya traces this duality back to the medieval schoolmen who found in Aristotle’s logic “the priority of objective experience” and to this concept they added the idea of “essential qualities” (p. 673). An essence, they went on to claim, is that which makes each manifestation or thing uniquely what it is. In the case of people, this rationale applies to each one of them, and one’s essence remains intact upon death, the character of which is determined by the sin one has committed. In the case of original sin, a pillar of organized Christianity generally, one’s guilt is self-evident. The way out of this dilemma of predetermined guilt is to petition a third party for pardon, in this case Jesus Christ (symbolized through his various living representatives) who alone has the power to save. In this scheme,

“objectivity is the appearance of the essence,” writes Nitya. He then notes that the Guru sees this “well knit business” as an injustice: “You are not given a chance to state your case since logically you have already been given the proof” (p. 674).

Fundamental to these two most popular theologies of contemporary American life is the unexamined premise—both accept phenomenal reality as absolute. As Nitya explains, our perceptions are anything but true as our sensations translate to concepts (words) instantaneously. Agreeing on words, we construct our nominal worlds far away from the original and clear perception. The thing in itself remains as enigmatic as ever: “What a person of common sense with personal identity takes for granted as their transactional world of experience is very confusing” (p. 675).

At this point, Nitya offers as illustration the distinction between classical and the post 1920s physics of Einstein and others. For matters associated with our everyday life, engineers and builders find classical geometry, algebra, and arithmetic functionally useful. Lines are taken as being straight and weight and mass are stable. For sending missiles to the moon, space/time calculations based on an alternative set of principles is required. Functional reality depends on the domain of the experience in which one works.

The challenge of distinguishing the real from the unreal confronts us continuously, says Nitya. Our reasoned reality and the transactional facts we always face do not line up, but they occupy the same space. Without turning inward and excavating our Self, this confusion/contradiction cannot be overcome, a condition Nitya explains by reference to an anecdote offered in the *Katha Upanishad*: “The creator made a great blunder, a big mistake. When he created human beings he did not turn the eyes inward, he turned them outward. Therefore we can only see things outside and do not know what is happening within” (p. 676).

And within is the answer beyond reason and the mind. Any one point of view from any domain of our holonic universe will

contradict some other view. Our interior world is to remedy this “enigma of contradiction properly, to discern truth (the vertical dimension) and also to make sense of the transactional world “in its infinite number of domains” (p. 677). This journey is peculiar to each of us and requires a personal plan in each case.

Part IV

Beverley wrote:

I really like the Atmo verse 94, but am still puzzled by this.....

As soon as you start using words you are getting into dialectics, which belongs to the world of semantics and all our understanding of sensations is a nominalistic understanding, dialectically conceived.

I understand the argument as such but can you find a synonym or rephrase *dialectics/dialectically* for me? Perhaps you could explain what you think Nitya means, and then what you think it means. Maybe there is no difference? What IS philosophy if not semantics anyway? It's all words.... words....words.

My response: I appreciate your question very much, and I admit I too was somewhat surprised by this part of the text, since we have been having recourse to dialectics throughout the study. Thank you for inviting me to take the time to ponder it. Now I don't think it's so problematic.

First of all, and lucky for us, immediately afterwards Nitya says straight out what he means:

This is what Narayana Guru is saying here: what a person of common sense with a personal identity takes for granted as this transactional world of experience is very confusing.

Looking at the overall concept of the study, we have a unitive core or karu which is the source of the dualistically structured world of transaction, perception, and all that. No finalized conception of the karu is possible; it is either experienced or it isn't. Our conceptions and their words focus on the dualistic world, in which we make surmises about the unitive state in terms of duality. Narayana Guru is inviting us to regain contact with the karu, the core of each of us that is a universal ground we share in common.

In our study we have been using philosophical words and their associated concepts to wean ourselves from an abiding fixation on fragments of the whole as being the whole, which is pretty much a universal misapprehension. The idea is to dive into unity and integrate it with the dual world we live in. Most words heighten the attachment to specific items, but a few, like these, can turn our attention to something more healing, more creative, and more productive of understanding. Nonetheless they can't help but exist in the realm of duality. This is valuable to keep in mind, but it shouldn't dissuade us from using wise words to aid our ability to rejoin our deeper being.

Because of all this, the word I suggest you can substitute for dialectic is *dualistic* or simply *dual*. Our problems with the dual world arise when we take one part of it in isolation. The idea of dialectics is to balance the sides of any duality to allow us to apprehend its underlying unity. If we are immersed in unity, there would be no need, and indeed no possibility, of employing dialectics. That means they are useful but not ultimate.

* * *

A perfect example of how we humans unconsciously buy in to mass hysteria and label it science (or some other unassailable position) just arrived in my in-box. Accepting the official story of the 9/11 New York City disaster requires ignoring scientific evidence and knuckling under to strong peer pressure. That is

definitely the easy route, but a few courageous citizens of the world refuse to go along. Denmark's Dr Niels Harrit is one of them. He is a chemistry professor who examined dust samples from the WTC and found traces of high explosives (nano-thermite) in every one of them. The three buildings—one of which was not even struck by a plane—were obviously demolished by explosives, yet the weight of public opinion is so strong that most people don't accept it. Believing the cover story is a matter of faith, buoyed by the belief that "our side" would never do such a thing. Here's the report I received:

Two weeks from today, Dr. Niels Harrit, the distinguished co-author of the landmark nano-thermite paper, will appear in Danish High Court to bring an appeal in his libel suit against the Danish newspaper *Weekendavisen*.

In a December 2012 article titled "Madness in the Royal Library," *Weekendavisen* writer Søren K. Villemoes referred to Dr. Harrit and his fellow 9/11 activists as "crackpots," while also comparing them to creationists and Holocaust deniers.

*“. . . Is the library soon going to open its doors to an exhibition showing us 'alternative' theories about evolution? . . . **Why not just invite in Niels Harrit and the other crackpots from the 9/11 skeptics movement while we are at it? What about the holocaust denial movement?**”*

Søren K. Villemoes, Weekendavisen, December 7, 2012

For Dr. Harrit, a scientist who taught chemistry for 40 years at the University of Copenhagen, this amounted to an allegation of scientific misconduct and a baseless attempt to damage his hard-earned reputation. So he decided to seek recourse under Denmark's strong libel law — and give himself the opportunity to prove in a court of law the scientific legitimacy of his 9/11 research.

Of course, this is about much more than undoing baseless insults. It's an opportunity for a leader in the 9/11 Truth Movement to show in a court of law that the science behind controlled demolition is not just legitimate, but overwhelming.

Moreover, because Dr. Harrit has been a national figure ever since his [2009 appearance on TV2NEWS](#), the case is likely to be widely covered in the Danish media — especially if he wins!

What the Case Comes Down To

Under Danish libel law, Villemoes has the burden of demonstrating a factual basis for his claim. As a journalist, he must also demonstrate that his reporting meets the standards of good journalism. At the first trial, he did *neither*. Still, the judge egregiously ruled in his favor.

In the High Court, Villemoes will have a much harder time, because Dr. Harrit is being allowed to submit more evidence — namely, the video of WTC 7's destruction, as well as an actual sample of the WTC dust, which Dr. Harrit will use to demonstrate the dust's authenticity, and therefore his good scientific conduct.

Dr. Harrit will also call two witnesses. One, Jan Utzon, is a world-renowned architect and AE911Truth petition signer who testified previously. The other, Dr. Per Hedegård, is a physics professor from the University of Copenhagen's Niels Bohr Institute. His statement to a newspaper in 2010 dismissing Dr. Harrit was the only evidence used by Villemoes at trial. *Today, Dr. Hedegård has completely reversed his position and insists on testifying in support of Dr. Harrit!*

Thanks to Dr. Harrit's relentless pursuit of the truth, we now have an incredible opportunity to achieve some symbolic justice for *all* 9/11 researchers and activists.

* * *

Speaking of faith, now that a number of large projects are wrapping up in my life, I am able to begin a final edit to the last chapter of my Gita commentary: Chapter XVII, dealing with *sraddha*, or faith. (Chapter XVIII is already done.) The first few paragraphs of the introduction strike me as also being relevant to the discussion about scientific beliefs earlier in the notes:

Sraddha is what we believe in. Everyone with a healthy mind has a set of core beliefs that anchors their life. We are not simply rational beings that function best with nothing but stripped down linear facts to consider; we are holistic mega-systems in which rationality plays a small but essential part.

Our supposedly rational thoughts are wholly shaped by what we believe, however irrational it might be. Trying to think without beliefs is an interesting meditation, but in the long run it invites chaos and confusion, because our mind simply cannot function that way.

Beliefs can be liberating or binding, depending on whether they are open or closed, and it's the binding ones that give believing a bad name. Liberating beliefs should be cherished and shared, but many beliefs that purport to be liberating are actually binding. Before turning Arjuna loose on the world, Krishna wants to help him scrutinize his core beliefs so he can discard the restrictive ones while promoting the more expansive and valid kind, and consequently optimize his actions.

Sraddha is commonly but inadequately translated as faith, for lack of a better English word. Faith is intimately connected to our actions, and ranges from abject servility to absurd notions to dynamic insight into the nature of reality. Fervently held ideas

often provide motivation for an entire lifetime of dedicated activity, with some people even being willing to die for their beliefs. It is very helpful to know where on the scale of values (sattva-rajas-tamas) our ideas fall. Wasting your precious hours or even giving your life in service to an absurd or corrupt belief system is high tragedy, testament to a lack of clear thinking at the very least.

A bit later, this:

Rational scientists, then, are as full of faith as anyone else. Their faith is in what they can perceive and measure; they believe in solid, material truth. They also have faith that what most people believe is false, and needs to be revised. At their best, they include themselves in that assessment.

Faith is also the essence of religion, the hub on which its various practices whirl. Yet the converse is not true: religion is not necessarily the essence of faith. Knowledge or understanding is. Chapter XVII addresses religious beliefs in a general philosophic way, without promoting any particular form or creed. The Gita stands with Narayana Guru on this: whatever the religion, if it makes a better person it is good. There is no illusion that any kind of ritual will produce results beyond the performance of the acts themselves. At the same time, Krishna wants us to know that what we believe has a crucial impact on how we live.

Like many scientists, I come to the subject of faith as one who thinks of it as a synonym for facile and delusory ideas, so the whole business of sraddha was initially hard for me to swallow, until I realized that my faith was nothing more than what I believed in. Then it made perfect sense. Our lives are directed much more than we realize by what we believe to be true, as the placebo effect clearly demonstrates. Our actions, naturally enough, are designed by us to conform to our expectations. Everything not directly connected with our senses, which is almost the whole universe, including most of our friends and family at any particular time, is

present only in our memory. We believe—we have faith—that all those things exist, and have a past, and will have a future, but we have no concrete evidence for it. All is supposition. So we are profoundly shaped by our faith, our beliefs, even we doubters, all more or less to the same degree.

Perhaps to the wise our faith in imaginary constructs is risible, but nonetheless it's what we have to work with. We have to proceed from where we happen to be. An important corollary idea is that our views are subject to an influx of wisdom and understanding, and this changes who we are in an actual sense.

Part V

Jan sent a nice note, which I share not only for its own sake, but to encourage any of you still with us to send in your feelings about what this work has meant to you. Knowing how much we influence and support each other, this is nice to hear about:

Scott, thank you for the class notes. They were great. I really liked the quotes too.

You wrote about trying to “ease up on the mania to define everything. Then we can tiptoe out into the open, to commune with friends.” Then you gave that great quote by Richard Linklater, in his movie *Waking Life*, as he's dying about connecting with people. I realized that this idea was something like what I was trying to express in class. I'd been feeling touched and grateful about the people in my life who have helped bring these ideas of Nitya and Atmo to me. I thought of books like *That Alone* that can sit on a shelf until someone brings them to life for another person.

It seemed amazing to me how these really profound ideas and abstractions, this wisdom about connecting with our true nature needs to come alive through people sharing with people.

Ultimately, like Linklater said, it's about our relationships.

I know Scott that you have talked about how we need to bring this learning inside and really live it to understand its full meaning. I was thinking how for me, all of that is also intertwined with hearing other people's personal experiences and stories of being connected to this mystery, or of losing it and finding it. Somehow, it all really comes to life and full meaning for me through this sharing. I can still have moments of connectedness alone, but the shared experiences are so profound and learning from others.

Deb's comment about being on the river of life is like this. All of this illustrates the importance of the vertical realm to our awakensness because in the vertical world we learn from others, from our experiences, from our misunderstandings and our mistakes, etc. And the wisdom we extract again from our experience is perhaps only as relevant and true as it transforms our life, and continues to evolve in relationship to our world, again making it somehow inseparable from our relationships. I'm really just tripping out on some of these ideas. Back to basics - a big lesson in the verse is to strive to remain open to learning and to not let our beliefs become rigid.

In the debate realm with Louis, it has been challenging to stay grounded in all this. Debate is all about ego and winning, about bravado and arguing. But I have looked for moments to remind Louis how much wisdom comes from connecting everything with his heart and internal sense of truth, and how much he is learning from others. Then if he wins, he can be appreciative of how others taught him. Some of that can be helpful to remember. Jan

* * *

My Gita Chapter XVII commentary is really fun to revisit. I just looked over a section that echoes Jan's noble sentiments:

8) The foods which promote life, vitality, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness, and which are tasty, rich, substantial and appealing, are dear to sattvic types.

This section on food is almost always taken literally, which is all right as far as it goes. It is interesting that the Gita, centuries before the onset of latter day food manias, may have made the connection between one's state of mind and what one eats. But it is much more valuable to think of food here in the larger symbolic sense of what we mentally ingest, what we take in psychologically. This covers our reading, our viewing, who we listen to, and so on. In other words, what we imbibe, what thoughts we are drawn to and take in and savor. What types of religious service we attend. Such nourishment is clearly related to what we believe, our sraddha. Thus food stands for information coming into the system, and can be dialectically paired with gifting, examined at the end of the chapter, which covers information going out.

The sattvic version of such "food" includes uplifting and inspiring art and literature of all stripes, sermons preaching the unity of all, loving words from friends (preferably in a nice restaurant...) and the like. Input that leaves you feeling loving and kind and generous, unafraid to reach out to others. We are tremendously blessed that our world is so rich in these types of food, and we should serve them to our friends whenever we can.

From the Gita's standpoint, philosophy—the love of wisdom, or the wisdom sacrifice—is the most sustaining and delicious food of all, and Krishna has been serving Arjuna one of the greatest banquets in history. Food for eating is gone by the end of the meal, but ideas that are "tasty, rich, substantial and appealing" are perennially on the table.

Part VI

Some 13 years ago I wrote an article for Gurukulam Magazine about my nightmares, entitled Growing in the Dark. I've

just been rereading it. It's rather good, if I do say so myself. Gripping. Anyway, a couple of paragraphs I wrote go along with Prabu's reluctance to attend school in Tamil Nadu, and I thought I'd share them. You can read the whole thing, about four nightmares and what they turned out to represent, here: <http://scotteitsworth.tripod.com/id14.html> .

For the first few years of my life I had had a tremendous amount of freedom. I lived in an idyllic world where I was allowed to roam freely around the neighborhood, which was full of kids, dogs, undeveloped lots for playing ball, and woods and waterways for exploring. Forcing me into school was like breaking a wild horse. I bucked and fought against going to a place where I was unnerved by the loud noises, aggressive boys, and programs I didn't understand. I spent a lot of time being yelled at in the vice-principal's office. It was several years before they were able to "saddle" me, though I retained a certain wariness for the duration of my school years.

This is the time of our life when we go from freedom to bondage, abandoning our unfettered life for the world of rules and obligations. The school symbolized this process, but it is one which is enthusiastically promulgated by parents and society as well. Words, both written and spoken, begin to replace direct action in the child's life, and other people's interests begin to take precedence over our own. Whether or not it's an inevitable transformation, it's helpful to understand the psychological trauma we went through and how we suppressed and internalized the misery of it.