

3/10/15

Verses 96 & 97

The atom and the indivisible, both as being and non-being  
shine from either side;  
thereafter, being fades away  
and the experience of non-being, having no foundation, will also  
cease.

The atom will disappear in the vastness of knowledge,  
leaving no trace of its parts; on that day the indivisible will attain  
perfection;  
without experiencing, one does not know this unbroken  
consciousness;  
it is the silence-filled ocean of immortal bliss.

Free translation:

The finitude of the atom and the infinitude of the indivisible whole  
shine side by side as if they exist and also as if they do not exist, so  
it is not possible to determine with any certainty which of these  
two experiences is true.

On the day when the finite is fully absorbed in the glory of the  
infinite, that knowledge will attain the perfection of the Plenum.  
One cannot even imagine the totality of the all-filling  
consciousness without experiencing its immeasurable magnitude.  
It is like an ocean of silence in which everything is submerged.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

The atom and the infinite thus, as being and non-being  
Do both from either side shine forth; this experience too  
Of being as well as non-being shall thereafter be extinct  
And devoid of foundation, forever, both shall cease to be!

Within the glory of wisdom, the atom, bereft of parts shall  
extinct become  
And the infinite too, shall that day its perfection attain;  
Without directly experiencing this cannot be known, this boundless  
Stuff of pure intelligence, this silence-filled ocean of immortal  
bliss.

Nitya paired these two complementary verses at the climax of the study because they belong together. After this, the curtain comes down and a wise comedian steps out to offer us a few parting words, but this is what we have been building up to all along. All the threads of our understanding have been gathered up and put in their proper places, to provide a firm basis for settling back down into the core of existence. We are no longer pretenders; we know what we are doing. Or do we? Even the thought that there is someone who knows something and that there is something to be known has to be relinquished before we can sit quietly in this state. The next verse will remind us of this in no uncertain terms: “We have not known anything here so far.” Yikes!

The Guru’s being and non-being are addressed by Nitya as the particular and the general, and the class discussion began around the excellent way he treats them in the commentary. Our brains are only capable of comprehending one or the other perspective at any instant, and this often leads to a disconnect between our beliefs and our everyday behavior. Some folks adhering to hate-filled ideas can be perfectly civilized in personal interactions, without the least sense of contradiction.

Nonetheless, the more specific we are about our beliefs, the more likely we will be marked out as someone’s enemy. Seers, by being open to the general context, accept all specifics and are harder to pigeonhole as an enemy. This is as true with your neighbor as much as with a far-off foreigner. By being open and non-threatening we invite amity and accord. If we judge the other

harshly, enmity is almost certain to be the outcome, unless they happen to be a wise yogi.

Much of our study has been to work to integrate the general into the particular, since so much of human tragedy stems from these aspects being out of joint. The universal is a balm for the particular. Nitya doesn't quite come out and say it, because we should all know it by now: if the general is left as a pure abstraction, it has no impact on our lives. For a healthy life, the general needs to be realized by aligning it with the particular. Instead, if we turn the general (God, etc.) into something particular (this is what God is), we will endlessly have to struggle with the internal contradictions it generates. Nitya laments:

We are not speaking here of some abstract philosophy, remote from our normal concerns. This is something we deal with every day. When we think of the particular the general naturally becomes dimmed down, and vice versa. You can sit and argue for days whether the world is constituted of atoms or whether it all comes as the manifestation of the word of God, and it won't change much in your personal life. The general and the particular interweave all the time without having much effect on each other.

Paul mused on how we are in tune with the general as infants, but we are required to distinguish the particular for our own safety, and later for the expression of all the higher functions we enjoy as sentient beings. It has always frightened him how easily we substitute the small self for the vastness of truth. The faith in imaginary realities that most are forced to accept to fit in as a small self is highly destructive, both inwardly and outwardly. Moreover, we don't realize how addicted we are to the small-self realities. Letting them go is no simple task.

Deb agreed with Paul that taking things on faith is a cop-out. Our experience of the particular is a limited understanding of the

situation, and here we are being asked to take in the wider world. It's an expansive view.

Nitya often used the analogy of the triangle to clarify the relationship of the general with the particular, and never better than here. The ideal, or say the absolute triangle, does not exist anywhere, and yet it forms the basis for all the particular triangles, every one of which gives an example of what "triangle-ness" means. He explains this in the light of our chant of purnam:

It's an exercise in mathematics, but the rishis believe it will bring peace. *Aum purnamadah*, that is perfect. You can think "that triangle is perfect," or "triangularity is perfect." *Purnamidam*, the triangle which you have now drawn here is also perfect. You cannot say it is an imperfect triangle. *Purnat purnam udacyate*, it is from the conceptual general triangle that the present manifestation of the triangle is effected. That's clear enough. Then *purnasya purnamadaya purnameva avasisyate*, by deducting this particular triangle from the general—that is, by focusing on the particular and forgetting the general—it doesn't affect the truth of either part. If you take them together, as all the particular triangles constituting the general triangle, it will also be perfect. By taking them together or subtracting one from the other you do not affect the truth. If you know this you become peaceful.

We considered a few of the more important implications of this superb elucidation. First of all, it utterly eradicates the hierarchical view that is the foundation of most human belief systems. Each triangle is perfect in itself, and demonstrates a unique aspect of the general principle, no matter if it is a commonplace triangle or an exceptional one. Moreover there is no need for a triangle to aspire to triangle-ness, because it already is one. Ultimately, then, no triangle is better or worse than any other. All are perfect.

No amount of triangles piled on top of each other will ever equal to or be able to serve as the general triangle. They are simultaneously the same and yet not the same. One reveals the general triangle as much as 500,000 together do. All that the big pile shows is the diversity of possibilities inherent in the general concept. That means that the wisdom we seek is not a cumulative quantity, like an extreme educational achievement or record-setting performance. We don't have to build anything up; it is epitomized right here in the way things are. The Absolute is not something that is closer to brahmins than to shudras, it is the innate template of all of us.

To make sure we don't unintentionally create another kind of limit, we have to extend the triangle metaphor to include all forms, geometric and otherwise. Moni and Prabu used the example of the Buddha, where billions of statues have been crafted to try to reproduce his enigmatic essence, yet none has ever been able to. Just as an infinite number of triangles still do not equal the general triangle, and an infinite number of statutes do not reproduce the reality of their subject, an infinite number of created entities do not add up to the Absolute. An infinite number of beads counted or pranams rendered does not put us in touch with it. Yet nothing is outside of it, either, so in a sense we are always in touch.

Without the uniting concept of the general triangle, the three lines on the blackboard would be meaningless marks, mere chalk dust on flat slate. This leads us naturally to saccidananda, sat-chit-ananda. The triangle has three limbs, like the holy trinity or the Absolute described as existence-subsistence-value. The one thing has three aspects, but that does not break it up into three parts:

When you say *sat-cit-ananda*, do not think there are three things sitting in the Absolute. There is only one thing, not three. You can either look at the one thing as existence or look at it as knowledge or look at it as value. The purpose of the present two verses is to synchronize our idea of existence and

our idea of value as one idea of consciousness. The main thing is how exactly that consciousness operates.

Ah, yes. The main thing is how consciousness operates. Nitya elaborates on the all-pervasiveness of consciousness:

In the light of this understanding, existence and value, which we have examined separately in the previous verses, are now to be brought together. There is no separate existence as such, and no separate value as such. There is only consciousness. The fact that consciousness glows is existence. The fact that the glow has a certain brilliance is itself the value.

Prabu just received a scholarship for his graduate studies program. One of the questions he had to discuss with the judges of the award was what his goals were as a student. I wondered how he had handled it, since he's more interested in philosophy as a goal than electrical engineering. He laughed and said, "I told them the truth: I am interested in consciousness and how it functions." A perfect answer that could apply to any discipline—and they bought it! Nitya ratifies his strategy here: there is only consciousness. So what else could be a goal?

At the beginning of Atmo we emerged from the karu, the core, and took a close look at every level of existence. By doing so we have healed our misunderstandings and dispelled our ignorance. Now we are settling back into the karu. Touching our core is what gives meaning to our life and puts it all in perspective. Without that element life becomes eccentric, develops wobbles. We feel cut off from something important. It's as if we are wandering in a desert searching for water, yet there is a vast aquifer just under the burning sands. All we have to do is dig a bit. As Nitya describes it:

We have now come to the last few verses, and Narayana Guru wants us to finally retire from this endless process of intellectualization. We cannot go on discussing forever. We have to retire from where all these operations are taking place, and go into the very core, the very depth, to the place particularity emerges out of and reemerges into, and the place where generality comes into focus and disappears out of focus again. We are to turn to that source.

A lot of people wonder why we just can't stay in the core and call it good. From my observation, it is easy to mistake an egotistically padded nest for the core, and the many spiritually deluded people who make that mistake enter a kind of self-imposed fortification, shutting out the world and its problems, and imagining they have reached nirvana by doing so. The study we have undertaken is a kind of summary of the process by which a guru helps a disciple to overcome the inclination to merely screen out unwanted aspects of the total and become encysted in their imagination. The core being the template of everything, re-entering it should put us in tune with all the rest. It's a place of infinite potential. Simply shutting out input is not spiritual per se. Later in his talk Nitya offers some more advice to keep our perspective on track in this subtle business:

To come to this you have to retire from all discursive reasoning, from applying any and all gimmicks and techniques, and from putting forth efforts, thinking that at the end of the effort you will get it. You retire from your role as an actor. You retire from your role of enjoyer and from your role as knower. You just allow yourself to be enveloped by whatever is. In fact, the 'is' and the 'is not' are both canceled out there. You no longer even look for what is or what is not. They are not relevant. It's only a question of giving up.

Then the Guru says there is no point in repeating this ad nauseum, either you know it or you don't. Either you are at one

with this beingness or you are not. It is not consciousness of anything. It is not knowing anything. It's just knowledge, pure and simple. It is a deep, deep silence, where there is no question of change or transformation.

The main implication of this is that the popular belief that we have to do something to attain the Absolute is itself an impediment to attaining the Absolute. It is time to sit still and stop projecting our learned concepts, which may sound simple, but often is not. The concepts both pro and con are still only concepts until we let them go, and this is where unintelligent quietism can fail: it's as likely to be tamasic as transcendent. Nitya is leading us into a penetrating awareness with his words, which are best read through slowly. In the original class there were long pauses between each phrase, where a dynamic silence really could prevail. You can watch how the words evoke an image or an emotion in your mind, but then watch as these evocations subside, leaving an undefined mass of knowledge or light:

“This.” “Mine.” “My child.” “I am the mother.” “I am the father.” “I.” “Humanity.” After making a statement, if you allow silence to prevail and envelop you, the idea that comes with all its brightness becomes more spread out. The sharpness of its edges goes. It becomes vague. It fills the silence. Or the silence is interpenetrating into your thought. The next thought dissipates into silence, and at last the silence overcomes you. ‘This’ becomes a new pulsation of idea...no idea...idea...no idea...yes...no...yes...no.... Then comes a ‘yes’ that has no form, because it swallows up both the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’.

The universality of things and the particularity of things, your personal preference and the preference of all, the love you give and the love you receive—all these ultimately subside.

The observer and the observed both blend into the observation.... The knower and knowledge, the doer and the action, the enjoyer and the enjoyment, all merge into this one



silence.... The inner and outer...before and after...the one and the many.... All these differences are now effaced.

In a way this requires becoming lost to our ordinary framing and expectations. Nitya counterbalances our normal assumptions with this sense of releasing control:

The best of all the meditations I know is not thinking or chanting or following some practice. It's allowing yourself to be lost, not directing your thoughts with any kind of motivated mind, not taking interest, not picking anything up, not feeding yourself on memories or paying heed to inner suggestions. It's not very difficult. It happens by itself, and then it affects others also. It's contagious. The silence envelops you and becomes very strong. You cannot say what kind of experience it is, unless you are caught in it. This is something we are carrying with us all the time.

So in a way all we have to do is stop our discursive thinking and nurture the glow that supports it from within. We are so much bigger than we imagine. This is from the February 2015 issue of *Scientific American*, in an article linking the future of computers to the structure of our brains:

The average human brain, according to many estimates, can perform about 10 million billion operations per second and uses only 10 to 25 watts to do so. A supercomputer would require more than 10 million times that power to do the same amount of work. And a computer does not even come close to performing such complicated tasks as pattern recognition. (59)

So, as David Eagleman says, in his 2011 book *Incognito*: “If you ever feel lazy or dull, take heart: you're the busiest, brightest thing on the planet.”

Probably you are only consciously aware of a few billion operations per second or so. Quieting down our “bombastic inner narrator” allows the other 9.99 million billion to percolate into our awareness more. Some of these are frayed, traumatized neuronal connections that can and should be repaired, but we have done what we could about that by now. We can also recognize their nefarious influence and not pay them heed. For the rest of the operation, who knows? We are not going to make any claims. Bathing in them is perhaps the consummation we have been seeking. Let me quote Nitya yet again:

It is a little like being drunk, without normal orientation. There is no purpose, no questions or answers, no ‘I’ and no ‘other’, nothing to do. You have in a sense done everything, so there is nothing more to do.

I guess that’s part of the key: if you haven’t yet lived your life to the full, there is so much potential brimming up that it would be a shame to stifle it. Once we have “done everything,” or expressed at least a good measure of what we came to earth to accomplish, it is much easier to “rest on our laurels.” As I recall, Nitya realized this disparity, or realized it in a new way, right in this talk. I saw his eyes light up as if he’d had a new revelation, just before he added, “I’m not suggesting you get totally into this while you are still young, but short spells of it can be very refreshing and very reassuring. It will take you home, whatever that means.”

We were a mostly young, energetic crowd, and an instruction to “stop acting” must have seemed seriously out of place, despite its time-honored status. “Short spells” is just right for most of us. Life is arid without a connection to our core being, but just as in watering your garden, you don’t keep pouring water on it all day long. You give it just enough and it thrives. Too much and it drowns. When you aren’t watering, you can be taking delight in its endless variegations and unanticipated intrigues. You might even slip out of the garden unobtrusively and go buy a bottle of wine to

share with a dear friend. You never can be quite sure what the right thing will be.

A couple of class members shared some of what they have learned from the time we've spent on the Hundred Verses, and I'll add those in Part III. Hopefully there will be more of this later.... If the class has meant something to you, please share it if you can.

## Part II

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

### Verse 96:

Our daily life is based on experiences coming from two sources; one set of experiences comes from our sensory perception and the other comes from our mind. The senses perceive particular objects and the mind places the particulars under categories and classifications which are formulated by general ideas. Consciousness oscillates between what is perceived and the general idea of a previous concept which enables the mind to identify what is perceived. Scientists, who are engaged in formulating general laws by resorting to the logical method of induction, go into the minute details of the particular by employing the technique of analysis and thus arrive at notions of atoms and their constituents such as subatomic particles. As all observations in science are to be referred to one unified principle, abstractions and generalizations are employed to give an integrated view of the total field of search. Thus, the world stands divided as the atomic and the universal, which the Guru terms here as añu (atomic) and akhaondam (the indivisible).

The analytical and synthetical observations of the scientist are not different from the experiences of the common man who, in his day-to-day life, also relates himself to a number of particular interests and then goes to bold generalizations which, at least every now and then, release him from the bondage of objects, names and

interests that are locally fixed. In this alternating shift of emphasis, the idea of the particular weakens the vision of the general and the vision of the general obviates the idea of the particular. The alternating interests of the particular and the universal seem to operate in turn in the mind in such a way that one pertains to the empirical world of things and the other to the conceptual world of subjective consciousness. The reality of a thing is not decided merely by its appearance, but by the interest, value, or meaning it registers in an individual's mind. To a hungry man the presence of food is intensely real, but to a fully satiated man it is something to be ignored. To a person who is in love with his wife or child nothing is more real than his wife or his child, but when he resents them they seem to become unreal to him. The main source of reality in one's empirical life is the need to satisfy desire and to avert fear.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (3.5.1) Kahola asks Yajnavalkya to explain to him the Brahman that is immediate and direct, the Self that is within all. To this Yajnavalkya replies, "This is your Self, that is within all." Kahola then asks, "Which is with all, Yajnavalkya?" and Yajnavalkya answers, "That which transcends hunger and thirst, grief, delusion, decay and death. Knowing this very Self, wise men renounce the desire for sons, for wealth and for the worlds, and resort to the mendicant's life. That which is the desire for sons is the desire for wealth, and that which is the desire for wealth is the desire for the worlds, for both these are but desires. Therefore, the knower of the Brahman becomes disgusted with scholarship and lives upon the strength which comes from pure knowledge. He becomes meditative. He discards what originates from ignorance and from scholarship and he enters into silence. By cancelling out what arises out of silence and non-silence, he becomes a knower of Brahman." This is what the Guru describes in this verse when he says that even the experience of being and non-being disappears.

We should bear in mind the implication of the terms "being" and "non-being." For a materialist or an empiricist the being is that

which has an objective materiality, such as a cup of tea which he can directly perceive as well as sip to quench his thirst. To such a person the general notion of cups of tea appears to be a mere idea which belongs to the world of universals and thus, in this context, beingness is of the particular and non-beingness is of the universal. To a philosopher or to a quantum physicist the entire universe has its beingness in an indivisible reality and all the particular phenomena are only transient modes; in this context the particular is non-being and the universal alone has beingness. Whichever way beingness and non-beingness are understood, both lose their purport again and again according to the changing moods of the perceiver's mind.

This can also be understood in another way. According to the Chandogya Upanishad and also to the Bhagavad Gita, the individual lives in two perishable worlds. One is the world where man produced gains by his efforts, but neither his tools, such as his body and mind, nor what he can produce, such as wealth, can last very long. The other world is the heaven he may merit by his good works, but the merit of good work is relative and eventually runs out, and the heaven that he might win is not everlasting. Thus the world of here and that of the hereafter are equally transient. In the present verse Narayana Guru says that both our empirical experience and our conceptual experience, having no foundation, finally cease to be.

In the Chandogya Upanishad it is said that a person might lavish his love on his father, mother, brother, sister, or other relatives and friends, and he might take delight in sensual pleasures like sexuality, or in music and other sublime sources of ecstasy. At the physical level all these items are of a perishing nature, yet, even when any of these items are physically removed from him, he can still hold fast to these values as the treasures of his heart. Heart in Sanskrit is called hridaya, which literally means "here it is." To some people their dead parents, wife, or children are insurmountable obsessions, thus the beingness or the non-

beingness of these relatives does not prevent a mind from being affected by the sources of desire: hunger, fear and grief. These objects of interest are treated by the Chandogya Upanishad as anritam, a malfunction that belongs to the nescience or negativity of the Self.

In the course of our daily life we are again and again relieved from the tyranny of ignorance when we go into deep sleep. In that state, both our beingness and non-beingness cease to be. Several passages in the Upanishads describe the content of deep sleep as sat, which means “pure existence.” In the Mandukya Upanishad the state of deep sleep is described as an undifferentiated mass of pure consciousness, prajnana ghana. We do not remain in deep sleep for long, so when we wake we come back to the world of being and non-being. The wise man, however, goes into the deep silence of his heart. In the Bhagavad Gita (X, 38) the greatest secret of the Self is described as a profound silence, and the austerity leading to such a state (XVII, 16) consists of restraining the mind from all its cravings and purifying one’s creative imagination, so as to attain the cheerful disposition of serenity and gentleness with which one enters into a deep silence. This verse is to be bracketed with the following one, as there we are given an elaboration of the final state to which a perfect contemplative goes.

Verse 97:

In verse 26 Narayana Guru describes the Self as the limb-owner which imprisons itself with a veil whose strands are none other than ignorance. In the present verse he introduces us to the final release of the finite to become once again identified with the infinite, the Absolute.

The Aitareya Upanishad mentions the three successive births of the Self. At first it is identified with a sperm that lies in the semen of a man and has the vigour and brightness (tejas) derived

from all the limbs of the man. The sperm is an anu of microscopic stature. The archetype of the sperm is the Cosmic Person, ever resting in the space of the symbolic heart of the divine song gayatri, which has for its lower limbs the light (consciousness) that animates an embodied self, the vital fluids that circulate in the body, the nourishment that maintains the organism and the gross world that becomes the environment of the individuated self. (See Chandogya Upanishad, 3.12.6). When the semen containing the sperm is transferred from a man to the womb of his mate, the Self has its first birth, at that point it is both finite and limbless. The Self is not created by anyone, it is born of itself, *atma-bhuyah*. It becomes non-different from the organism of the woman, just like one of her own limbs; it does not injure her and she nourishes this Self that has entered into her. A question can be asked now, “Why does the Self recreate itself again and again?” The answer given in the Upanishads is: *esa lokana santayati*, for the purpose of continuing these worlds. In taking a body the Self accepts two objectives: one is to envision the welfare of the world and the other is the contentment that can be derived from the fulfillment of this mission. These purposes, however, are not conducive to the emancipation of the Self. The woman subsequently gives birth to a baby with a well-structured body, which has in it all the vital organs needed to live a full life on earth. This is the self’s second birth.

Although seemingly born, the Self is unborn, and in principle it is independent; however, as a person fated to live on earth, its masculinity is vested with the understanding of all worldly transactions. He is a potential builder, always eager to engage in action. In his earthly life he is continuously exposed to needs, but he can overcome his hurdles, and his life is even punctuated with short or long periods of joy and peace. He reasons, wills, acts and plays the forward flowing game of life as one who will never be vanquished. He is heroic and he establishes his supremacy in the heavens, the atmosphere and on earth. The Self’s femininity is intelligence, and it has the power to modulate. She is aphrodisiac,

steadfast, willful and a fulfiller of the ordained. She gets into tortuous paths even though endowed with the quality of being elusive. She is both earthy in her designs and powerful in her words, she is the mother of all, an intoxicating wine of life, a provider of ecstasy-like honey and an initiator into the secrets of psychic powers.

After engaging in several actions of merit and demerit, facing both the prospects of fulfillment and of frustration, the Self finally wishes to be relieved of its bondages. Having reached his or her age, the person dies and the Self is born again. This is the third birth. In the Aitareya Upanishad (2.4.5), the sage Vamadeva speaks thus of these three births:

Being yet in embryo, I knew well  
All the births of these gods!  
A hundred iron citadels confined me,  
And yet, a hawk with swiftness, forth I flew!

In embryo indeed thus lying, Vamadeva spoke in this wise. So he, knowing this, having ascended aloft from this separation from the body, obtained all desired in the heavenly world, and became immortal – yea, became (immortal)!\*

Although the Vedic poets cared very much for the hedonistic pleasures of heaven, the later seers discredited this as of little value, and in the Bhagavad Gita Krishna speaks derogatorily of those who desire the pleasures of the heavens. The highest goal praised by Vedanta is the ultimate emancipation of the Self, the release from the fear of death and the attainment of immortality. The following prayer is given in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.3.28):

asato ma sadgamaya  
tamaso ma jyotirgamaya



mrityor ma amritamgamaya

From the unreal lead me to the real!  
From darkness lead me to light!  
From death lead me to immortality!

In this prayer the unreal (asat) is none other than death and the real (sat) is the same as immortality, just as darkness (tamas) is the same as death and the light (jyotis) is immortality.

The final emancipation of the Self is described in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in many striking verses of profound wisdom. In chapter 4, section 4, Yajnavalkya says:

5. But people say: “A person is made (not of acts, but) of desires only.” [In reply to this I say:] As is his desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve, such is the action he performs; what action (karma) he performs, that he procures for himself.
6. On this point there is this verse:  
Where one’s mind is attached – the inner self  
Goes there to with action, being attached to it alone.  
Obtaining the end of his action, Whatever he does in this world,  
He comes again from that world To this world of action.  
– So the man who desires.  
Now the man who does not desire. – He who is without desire,  
who is freed from desire, whose desire is satisfied,  
whose desire is the Soul – his breaths do not depart. Being verily Brahma, he goes to Brahma.
7. On this point there is this verse:  
When are liberated all  
The desires that lodge in one’s heart  
Then a mortal becomes immortal!  
Therein he reaches Brahma!

As the slough of a snake lies on an ant-hill, dead, cast off, even so lies this body. But this incorporeal, immortal Life (praña) is Brahma indeed, is light indeed.

This higher state is alluded to in this verse as bliss through and through. The Chandogya Upanishad (3.5.4) describes the experiencing of the supreme teaching as one which produces as its essence great splendour, and it says: “Verily these are the essences of the essences, amritasya-amritam.”

The closing of this verse reminds us of the closing of Narayana Guru’s Universal Prayer:

In the ocean of Your Glory  
Of great profundity,  
Let us all, together, become sunk  
To dwell therein everlastingly in Happiness!

\* All Upanishad excerpts are from Robert Ernest Hume, The Thirteen Principle Upanishads (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)

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Nataraja Guru’s commentary:

VERSE 96

BESIDES the dialectics of the one and the many which was treated in the previous verse, we have the last vestige of individuation or ideation which refers to the part and the whole or the big and the small. These paradoxes were known to Zeno and other pre-Socratic philosophers and have been resolved in various ways by philosophers. The Guru here and in the next verse comes up

against the same time-honoured problem with reference to the ultimate unitive status of the Absolute in the Self as a high value.

The one and the many are dialectical counterparts. Both of them, like the big and the small, motion and stop, have to be resolved into oneness, just as size is to be resolved without its relative aspects that contradict it, and pure motion as against stop. All these solutions could apply under the same dialectical methodology to Being and non-Being, which were resolved in this verse in terms of a central notion of the Absolute. Zeno of Elea and his teacher Parmenides worked on the solution of this paradox presented at the core of the notion of the Absolute; and Plato himself through Socrates employed and developed dialectical thinking in later times. All of them insisted that changeless Being or Self was the ultimate Reality or Truth. Strict logic had to be abandoned here in favour of a higher and purer way of reasoning called dialectics, about which much vagueness still persists to the present day. Indian Yoga methodology is akin to dialectics, as also the axiomatic thinking gaining vogue only at present in the scientific West. (See our later work).

#### VERSE 97

THE glory of knowledge and the perfection of the Absolute have a common ground in the experience of the Self. The existential and the subsistential sides – into which categories of thought the central reality was understood as belonging in a polarized and dual fashion – attain a neutral unity in which cognition, conation and emotion merge into a central experience. The culmination of wisdom has to take place in the individual, and the mere thoughtful analysis or synthesis to which it is prone will not bring it to the equilibrium or sameness or unity which is here to be understood. We know that the maha-vakyas of the Vedanta such as tat-tvam-asi (Thou art That) etc., have all of them two sides: one immanent and the other transcendental, or one ontological and the other

teleological, which meet to produce the ultimate experience of the yogi or the correct dialectically-trained philosopher. In verse 99 below, the Guru himself will refer to this union of the self and non-self aspects of knowledge. In this verse and the next we thus touch the finalized position of Advaita Vedanta teaching. It should be noticed also that in the description of this rare experience of the true philosopher or yogi, as understood in this series of verses, as we see it in the last line of the present verse, there is a blending of rational and emotional factors.

The Absolute, though finally one and one only, is cognised under three final categories of understanding, which are referred to as the sat (existent), chit (the rational or intellectual) and the ananda (the value factor or element) – under which the experience gets its reality-content or character. A mere emptiness or absence of interest as in something insipid is not the end or aim of Advaita Vedanta. Mere intellectually-biased schools of philosophy like the Vijnana-vadins and the Sunya-vadins, although their philosophies could be otherwise tenable and quite respectable, might err in this direction of lack of value-content.

### Part III

Paul got the ball rolling on a new aspect of the verse, noting how the unconscious part of us is hyper alert to cues from the environment, and it yanks our attention hither and yon with the greatest of ease. I would add cues from our inner self on top of that. Because of our predisposition to distractions, finding and holding to our core reality is a challenging undertaking.

John brought up philosopher Daniel Dennett, who talks about the mind's obsession with safety and survival. Dennett is what you might call a first chakra philosopher: everything is about self-preservation. He does not acknowledge any higher values or interests, but that's not so much the point here. He's right that we do have a deeply entrenched layer of survival programming. John's

point was you had to have a measure of trust in order to open yourself to the idea of a universal consciousness, to something more than the dog-eat-dog, survival of the meanest attitudes that remain popular even today. He remembered a game we used to play back in the Sixties, where you would stand in a tight circle of people with your eyes closed, and let yourself fall backwards. You had to trust your friends would catch you, and they did. Be able to relax your guard for just that fleeting moment was a huge relief, allowing you to instantly let go of several deep-seated fears. If there were enough participants you could push the person in a number of different directions around the circle, which added to the sense of release. Being passed overhead around a crowd was another transcendent experience that occasionally happened in those halcyon times. It works against our inner urge to retain control, allowing us a welcome glimpse of freedom.

Getting over the viselike hold of your survival instincts gets you high in a great way. Deb likened it to Nitya's ideal meditation of getting lost—giving up your grip on fixed notions of any kind.

Jan talked about how we have moments where we are hanging on to the small self but we have a greater awareness too. Along with the specific self-interests she is called on to uphold, she always asks herself what's the biggest picture I can come up with here? She isn't at peace until she can reconcile those positions.

It may not sound like much, but this is a great leap forward in conscious awareness. It's what Narayana Guru and Nitya are asking us to do, and something Daniel Dennett and his ilk will never accept. And yet, in the loose way general beliefs and particular fixations are intertwined, everybody does this to some degree. Even animals do it at times. Even Dennett, probably. It actually takes a forceful effort to screen out other peoples' interests and isolate your own and stick to it. Fortunately our default settings are much more benign than those ideologues would have us believe.

Susan added that when she is at a concert, her mind sometimes wanders, but then she notices it and pulls herself back

to attending to the performance. If the truth be told, this is another yogic practice. The trick is to not get upset with yourself for wandering, which everyone does, but focus on the restoration of centered attention, which is not so common.

Jan's and Susan's burgeoning self-awareness is very significant. It takes plenty of self-reflection before we can catch ourselves in the act, so to speak. Usually we just go along with the distractions and tangents that are always pressuring us. As Deb put it, each moment is an invitation to be right there.

It never hurts to recall the beautiful description of meditation in Chapter VI of the Gita. Note how closely this agrees with the present verse of That Alone as well as Susan's observation:

24) Abandoning completely all desires originating in the will for particularized ends, curbing the collection of sense-functionings on every side

25) —slowly, slowly, activities should be brought to a standstill by reason steadily applied, establishing the mind reflexively in the Self, without thinking of anything whatever.

26) Whatever causes the changeful, unsteady mind to go out (again and again), from each such, restraining it (again and again), it should ever be led to the side of the Self.

27) Such a yogi, verily, of calmed mind, of pacified passion, who has become the Absolute, free from all dross, comes to supreme happiness.

28) Ever uniting thus the Self, that yogi, rid of dross, having contact with the Absolute, enjoys easily happiness that is ultimate.

I always love that line: the yogi enjoys easily happiness that is ultimate. Hard to beat.

Lastly, Jan wondered about Nitya's take on politics, which is perhaps more germane to verses 21-25 and 43-49. It's an important subject, though, and Nitya does mention politics in this talk as an example of the interplay of the general and particular. The short answer is that most political action is not based in the karu, or grounded in a reconnected psyche. Very often we see a problem and want to fix it, and we are impatient to get to it. Of course, we have to act that way, much of the time. Problems do demand our attention, whatever our state of mind at the moment. The weakness is that by responding immediately we tend to act from an egotistic standpoint, and so miss what earlier Jan called "the biggest picture I can come up with." Our efforts fall short to the degree they are disconnected from a universal awareness.

This is why Gurukula folks always groan in despair when (as is very often the case) Narayana Guru is described as a social reformer. Narayana Guru was a mystic who happened to leave a wake of social reform trailing behind his boat as it sailed the sea of consciousness. Everyone who knows about him wonders how this gentle, quiet man could have transformed an entire region of the globe so superbly and with almost no violence. He was so effective—among the most effective humans of all our history—because he did not plot and plan a revolution, but first came to know the Self and hold to it. Then he also made himself and his good sense available everywhere he happened to be. It inspired good people to work hard to change their circumstances, and it kept them from getting caught up in petty quarrels or giving in to the urge for vengeance. The time was also ripe for a new deal. So the Guru's example is to become realized first. Really realized. It doesn't count if you think you are realized. Then act as the biggest picture you can comprehend invites.

Let's close with a reprise of that early "political" section of Atmopadesa Satakam, in honor of a philosophy that is simultaneously active and inactive:

Verse 21

Endearment is one kind; this is dear to me;  
your preference is for something else;  
thus, many objects of endearment are differentiated and confusion  
comes;  
what is dear to you is dear to another also; this should be known.

#### Verse 22

The happiness of another—that is my happiness;  
one's own joy is another's joy—this is the guiding principle;  
that action which is good for one person  
should bring happiness to another.

#### Verse 23

For the sake of another, day and night performing action,  
having given up self-centered interests, the compassionate person  
acts;  
the self-centered man is wholly immersed in necessity,  
performing unsuccessful actions for himself alone.

#### Verse 24

“That man,” “this man”—thus, all that is known  
in this world, if contemplated, is the being of the one primordial  
self;  
what each performs for the happiness of the self  
should be conducive to the happiness of another.

#### Verse 25

What is good for one person and brings misery to another  
such actions are opposed to the self, remember!  
those who give great grief to another



will fall into the fiery sea of hell and burn.

\* \* \*

Jake's commentary:

With these two verses, the Guru and Nitya descend into/transcend the core of what they have been teaching throughout the preceding verses. Our consciousness holds all of what we experience as existence and value. It is that oceanic depth from which and in which everything takes place. "The purpose of the present two verses," writes Nitya, "is to synchronize our idea of existence and our idea of value as one idea of consciousness. The main thing is how exactly that consciousness operates" (p. 690).

At this point, continues Nitya as he explains the Guru, it is time to "retire" from all this intellectualizing and word manipulation. The endless flow of the particular out of the general, the ever-present arising/subsiding of manifestation can be dissected and discussed by minds, but that chatting does not effect the reality/process of that which is and that which is not. As an example, in our contemporary culture both factions of our culture war (and those in between) are so thoroughly wedded to this "debate" that Nitya's admonition here to "give it a rest" falls, for the most part, on deaf ears. As he points out, those prizing the particular see it as constructed of building blocks—from atoms to galaxies—the secrets of which can be discovered through diligent mental work systematically applied. On the other hand are those defending a "true" vision of a universe emanating out of the oneness of god particularized through word. The possibility of both views offering partial truth slips through the cracks, so to say.

Where the particular and the general continuously emerge and disappear is that "location" the Guru and Nitya point to as the solution: "We are to turn to that source," writes Nitya, "where the observer and the observed both blend into the observation." In this

profound meditative state, we go to the source, the truth that is already at our core and always has been.

Earlier in his commentary, Nitya used the example of a triangle as a way of illustrating our source of all knowledge. An instructor teaching about triangles, he writes, can speak only of them in abstraction and illustrates them through his drawings of them. These pictures always remain representations of the idea or maps of the territory. From the teacher's drawing, students can generalize the features common to the idea of a triangle but will never get to the thing in itself, which preceded all the representations of it. This *general* discussion is the part of knowledge we all originally own while we busily go about constructing representations all over the place and, in the process, veil from ourselves the legitimate source of the knowledge existing in the first place. *Learning* thereby transforms from a journey of self-discovery to a search for someone or something else to teach us what we don't know we already possess. In this upside down education system and with our eyes firmly fixed outward, we take seriously the direction pointed out to us by scientific experts and the culture's high priests. Ignorance rules.

In this verse and commentary, Nitya and the Guru say it is time in our study to drop all this nonsense and go to the Absolute source. By this time in our study of the *100 Verses*, writes Nitya, "either you know it or you don't" (p. 692). Both the drawn triangle and triangularity are true, and our mind's ceaseless efforts to reconcile them must be transcended in order for us to evolve. Nitya tells a story of his experience of this "letting go" as he describes "the best of all meditative " states in which all thought, dualities, and differences "are now effaced" and where "truth of both [the general and specific] belong to a verity that axiologically exists with us. The Self approves of the truth. It's not a certitude which comes from any outside authority; the connection comes from within, from one's own Self" (p. 691).

#### Part IV

Freeman Dyson, writing about *Brilliant Blunders*, by Mario Livio, in the New York Review of Books (March 6, 2014, p. 4) made an astute observation that fits the theme of scientific hubris Daniel Dennett always calls to mind:

A theory that began as a wild guess ends up as a firm belief. Humans need beliefs in order to live, and great scientists are no exception. Great scientists produce right theories and wrong theories, and believe them with equal conviction.