

3/17/15
Verse 98

We have not known anything here so far,
having spoken of great happiness;
even if intellect and such disappear,
the reality of the Self, without becoming disintegrated, will continue as
knowledge.

Free translation:

It is evident that we do not know what this august reality is;
otherwise, how could we qualify every touch of pleasure as great
happiness? The Self is not the sum total of dependent originations.
Even when the intellect and such faculties are undone, the Self will
remain unaffected as pure Knowledge.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

Till now, not a thing have we here known, as we have kept saying
In every case, that there is something still of greater happiness;
Although the mind and other factors might vanish
The selfhood of the Soul (Atman) must be said to be wisdom ever
unspent.

Coming to the end of another journey through the Hundred
Verses is a very poignant time. Nothing in my experience matches
the depth and grandeur of its vision. In a world obsessed with
Tweeting and similar sloganizing, it is a supreme anomaly. Just as
no amount of copper pennies could ever add up to the gold coin of
the Absolute, in Bergson's analogy, no number of sound bites will
ever amount to a serious penetration into the nature of reality. I am
extremely grateful to a culture that has preserved the ideal of
careful and patient consideration of the meaning of life, as well as
the exceptional thinker who has conveyed it to us.

Going back through the commentary this morning to pick out highlights was embarrassing. The entire dozen pages are a highlight reel. You could just reread that and call it good. Yet we managed a very wonderful class, and there may be something in these appended pages of value—we'll see. At least we had an unexpectedly big turnout for this intense and rather daunting chapter, and took it well enough to move into mutual joy and hearty laughter by the end.

I don't know if I was alone, in the original class, in secretly thinking, almost against my will, "Wow, we're almost there! After Verse 100 I'll be fully enlightened. Something big is going to happen." The buildup, the intense dedication, the power of the meditations day after day at the feet of the guru—what could be better than this? And then came this talk, ripping it all apart as an ego trip, mocking all my thoughts as petty pretenses! I was thoroughly skewered, guilty as charged. At least I had learned enough to not beat up on myself too much about it, but to renew my dedication to unburdening myself of all those kinds of extraneous garbage so that I might one day be capable of making a meaningful contribution to the world I inhabited. I was, however, very seriously humbled.

The crux of the matter is our mania to judge the relative merits of everything we encounter, thereby throwing an obscuring veil over it. We are like trained seals who are good at guessing which box holds the fish. But this has cut us off from so much else that is a permanent part of us. Nitya starts us off by dismissing this relativistic information gathering:

In this verse Narayana Guru says you have not known anything so far. We are in verse 98, and he is saying we don't know anything yet! By saying "we" he includes himself in this state of affairs. Until now, we have not known a thing properly. Why? Because we have been saying "Oh, that was excellent. It was wonderful, superb!" All these implied comparisons are there because you have never known your true state, in which

there is no good and bad. There are no superlatives and nothing to compare anything to. It's just bliss through and through. Only if something has aspects could you say, "In the morning it was like that, and after noon it became like this." There are no high and low tides in the joy of the Self. It's always the same. So we have to confess this is something we have not known.

I think Narayana Guru was only being polite if he actually included himself in the 'we', but no matter. The point is well taken. Realization is not like the best concert you ever attended, or the highest moment you wafted off to while reading a book, or hanging out with a dear friend, or participating in an exhilarating sport. It's being in a permanent state of bliss, where doing the dishes is just as amazing as an audience with the Pope. This goes against our cultural indoctrination and our habits of mind, which, Paul stressed, are predominantly aimed at self-preservation and self-interest. These are essential, of course, but amount to only a tiny part of our total capacity. We want to open up to all the other possibilities of our ten quadrillion operations per second capability. This is likely optimized by an equal-minded, welcoming attitude toward the unknown. Nitya reminds us it is within us:

St John of the Cross knew the Self. I have my genuine doubts about St. Teresa's experience, because she spoke of the many gradations of ecstasy she found as she went from one chamber to another. But St. John never admits any kind of comparison. At the bottom of Mt. Carmel there is nothing and at the summit also there is nothing. All he could say was, "Nothing, nothing, nothing!" The nothing of which he speaks is the same as what the Buddha called Nirvana. It is the burning out of all the possibilities of the phenomenal, which brings you to a pure state. It is even a mistake to say you have come to a pure state, which uses the comparative language of the transactional world. The state was always there. You never left it.

Nitya's book *Love and Devotion*, which we will be looking into in our next class on the Mandukya Upanishad, is constructed around a study of St. John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila, in comparison with Jayadeva and Sankara in the Indian context.

So what's the problem with covering our butts, of watching out for number one? Humans do not live—really live—by bread alone. Bread—survival—is only the launching pad. At a time of plentiful bread and adequate security in many cases, it is a shame to not explore what else is possible. While some may be able to ignore the pressures of their latent potentials trying to manifest, for many it creates a powerful sense of failure and depression when these are not given a chance for expression. Nitya reminds us it is a poor choice to turn your back on your Self:

Such kind of a nonreflective way of life leads you to the most agonizing kind of experience. The bright moments of life bring you, for a while at least, satisfaction in what you are doing. The next moment the whole thing appears to be futile, meaningless. Then come a few bright moments. Then doubt assails. The net result is living in a vicious circle.

The whole point is to wake up from the wakeful, in the way we wake up from the dream and are no longer oppressed or entranced by its images and we feel we are even more ourselves. In a way we have no control over the process, and simply wake up at the proper moment. Yet as Gayathri said before, we can make ourselves more prone to waking up through contemplative practices. Nitya emphasizes here the value of making an effort, of consciously correcting our mistakes and rewriting our lives with fewer typos. As Deb pointed out, this goes along with the last verse, where Nitya gave that beautiful paragraph on losing oneself as being the best of all meditations. You remember it: “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.” Dialectically paired with that, we can recognize our follies, helped by a teacher if we’re lucky, and put our energy into more harmonious behaviors. The trick is to do it from a transcendental perspective rather than the ordinary, contractual basis we are so familiar with. Nitya compares Vedanta with some of the forms of Buddhism with the same thrust:

Vedantins have the same method, as when Yajnavalkya resorts to the method of negating everything, saying *neti neti*, “not this, not this.” When this is done intellectually it brings absolute boredom. Sitting there and doing this as an intellectual process brings only darkness and frustration, because you are doing it in the wakeful and so it doesn’t lead you to wake up from the wakeful. The transactional verity is to be rejected, but not from within the transactional frame of reference. This is where we fail. Without becoming endowed with a higher consciousness, we fail. Nothing you do while remaining in the ordinary consciousness takes you one step further.

If we use the term ‘higher consciousness’ to distance ourselves from the core reality, we will never wake up from the wakeful. The higher consciousness is an integral part of who we are, so it is always available if we call on it. The sad fact, though, is that we have become so accustomed to our existence in the wakeful that it seems like too much trouble to embrace a wider ambit. Here is where Nitya starts to put the pressure on:

This naturally leads us to the question, “How do you become endowed with higher consciousness?” There is no need for me to even mention that here, because no one is going to follow it. It’s just a waste of time. You have to discipline yourself. Is there anyone who is willing to become a disciple? No one. Truly no one. Absolutely no one.

And why is that? You have your small likes and dislikes, your little pleasures. If a compromise could be made to include your special preferences in the plan of the discipline, then you would be willing to have it.

Nitya heard this same kind of thing from his guru, and I'll clip that story into Part III.

Verse 98 includes several classic moments, including a blast at yoga as it is treated in America, and the disrespectful way sincere teachers are treated here as well. Nitya had lost a few prospective disciples to lurid charlatans with attractive promises, and felt he should at least stand up for his position as a dedicated absolutist. I leave you to read about it in the text, as every time it goes deeper into the heart. He sums it all up with: "When spiritual life has to vie with Madison Avenue, competing for attention with lurid and exaggerated images, only Madison Avenue will win." Madison Avenue was once the home of all the big American advertising agencies, who were experts at peddling everything both necessary and unnecessary, from diapers to warfare, on a gullible public. Guru's who adopted their techniques drew big crowds with big bucks, and many of them eventually got into big trouble.

We get an idea of the breadth of yoga discipline with Nitya's brief summaries of *ahimsa* and *saucha*, non-hurting and cleanliness, as the real building blocks of Patanjali's yoga. They are not merely simple concepts that you accept with a nod, but a way of life that is practiced at every moment, forever. Life is always presenting us with new and unique situations to practice our wisdom, and it will never run out of fresh permutations to challenge us with. Responding with expertise is what keeps life exciting. Just for an example I'll quote this:

Even the very first step, *ahimsa*, requires great discipline to be made a part of one's life. Ahimsa means not hurting, nonviolence. Many people are capable of adopting a pacific attitude which is superficially very goody-goody. That is not

ahimsa. If you apply ahimsa to yourself there are many weeds, parasites that live on your own spirit. They are all hurting you, draining the very sap of your spiritual life. In a lackadaisical atmosphere where you don't bother about them they will thrive. And the same thing is also happening to other people. To see clearly the spirit of one and the spirit of another, and then to remove those parasites from a person's life, the methods we resort to may sometimes look harsh. It goes against the grain of our understanding of a passive life.

As with nearly everything, a simplistic understanding of spiritual principles is actually deadening and harmful to the spirit. To make it viable, intelligence has to be brought to bear. Nitya goes on: "Today's verse is a reminder to us that if we are serious we should begin from scratch.... If you fail it is not because there is no one to teach you or the methods are inefficient, but because you have not prepared."

Bushra found Nitya's story about the woman who spent twelve years on the preliminary steps of yoga very inspiring. In the modern world we are so wedded to instant results. She was very impressed with the woman's patience. Deb noted that she started by blaming her teacher, but then once she accepted the situation, she really got into what she was doing. The positive energy elbowed the negative helplessness out of her mind.

I've often thought that the drug culture, and now the computer culture, is responsible in large measure for our "push button mentality," where everything is expected to happen instantly. It's quite seductive. Especially that we can take a pill and have a very compelling vision of higher consciousness, makes it seem like there is no effort involved. Effort is pointless. It is easy enough to observe that that does not hold up in real life, however, despite its popularity as a quick fix. There are millions of stagnant souls waiting for salvation and going nowhere, along with a significant number who are making sincere efforts and accomplishing a great deal.

Nitya also leaned on the unconscious prevalence of “American exceptionalism,” the belief that our country is the best ever, despite its flaws, and a fault that we were reluctant to own, without a doubt:

One of the students in the PSU class I am giving handed in a paper the other day about the life she has experienced growing up in America. It was very painful for me to read it. So much ugliness is there! Yet every day when I saw her in class she looked pleasant enough. We know well how to put on fronts while having all this garbage behind them.

She could write only what she has experienced, and it is not her fault that her experience is such. She lives in a society, and she is trying to live as best she can conforming to the prevailing pattern of behavior. I should say, though, it is the most rotten, most stinking model of society. How can she ever aspire to be clean in such a society?

We have become almost like robots in accepting the constraints of our society. Although there has never been anything like it in history, it seems like the only sensible possibility, which is another trick of our brain’s provisional construction of reality. It certainly sabotaged our ability to benefit from Nitya’s teachings, as he threw our complacency back at us:

Things of the world, such as the office where you go to work, make a certain demand on you. If you are late they mark you late. If you don’t go they won’t pay you, and if you stay away they will fire you. But when it comes to wisdom teaching you think, “After all, it is not as square and structured as my office. So what does it matter if I don’t go one day?” You don’t give that kind of excuse at your workplace. Then you think, “That man there who is the teacher, I don’t pay him anything, so what does it matter? He is giving it gratis. If he were a man of worth, would he do that? He is a cheap fellow, and that is why he is

giving that kind of teaching. So I can go whenever I feel like it. I can listen to the extent it pleases me. If it rains I won't go."

In case it wasn't clear enough, Nitya made it so:

The point is, you have to give every last bit to get the teaching. And it's not what you pay or what you give, but the attitude you have. Do you want it to suit you, or are you going to suit yourself to the situation? You have to make a hard search on this question. The best is always inconvenient, so the next best is preferred....

In Plato's *Republic*, the best of all possible states is described, but Socrates knew it wouldn't work because people were not prepared for it. He said, "This is the best. Even if it is not going to be lived by any people anywhere, I cannot say this is not the best."

We cannot change a country, its culture, its traditions or its heritage. If you are born there and have to live there, you probably have to look for what is suitable to that country. Of course, it won't bring about waking up from the wakeful; it only rearranges the wakeful itself a little more conveniently.

Ouch again! All our sincere hopes and efforts trivialized as merely rearranging the furniture.

Bill reminisced about that first class: "When we were younger and going through Atmo, we didn't realize what the discipline would mean." We all thought we were committed, but it was orders of magnitude less than the norm Nitya was familiar with, which was definitely not about casual passing interest or what is convenient.

I'm still bemused about a letter I received in appreciation of my book, *Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds*. After some very nice compliments, the writer expressed surprise at how passionate I was about the subject. It's as though spiritual people aren't supposed to *care*. Passion, enthusiasm, is what it's all about, especially in the

subject of that book, the Gita's Chapter XI, which is as passionate as anything found in any scripture. Passion and excitement—an absorbing interest—are the markers that you have found your dharma. The model of the detached thinker who dispassionately peruses ancient texts to pass the time is not a part of this philosophy, at least. This is about taking failed lives of suffering people (starting with ourself) and converting them to the dance of delight that is everyone's potential. I'm never sure why it doesn't electrify everyone who touches it.

Nitya's own powerful concluding words are for all the world like the moment when you're learning to ride a bike (or a surfboard) and your teacher gives you one last big push and zoom! you're on your own, getting the ride of your life:

I am telling you the truth—accepting or not accepting it is up to you. Taking this into account the Gita says that only one in a thousand seekers is really serious about their search, and of those only one in a thousand finds truth....

This verse is a challenge to us. When Narayana Guru says we have not known anything, we should be able to say we *have* known, we have learned from our substantial efforts. For that to be possible we should at least make a sincere attempt to raise our consciousness to another level. Such an effort cannot be made by someone else on our behalf, we have to do it for ourselves.

You have to bring your life to a white heat. Even in material things, such as splitting the atom or studying the depths of space, seekers have to make contrivances which look almost impossible, but they do it. And what do you gain by smashing an atom? If you want to know the least bit about a particle, an *anu*, you have to spend so much money and effort, keep a great vigil and constantly refine and sharpen your tools. Then, to know about the Absolute how much greater dedication should you have? How much more willingness should you have? How much more preparedness?

On your keyboard, if you make a mistake the next step is to consciously erase it. It won't go away if you just leave it alone. Then, with decision, after effacing the error, you have to type in the right thing. In our life also there has to be a reconsideration of each mistake followed by its resolute correction, before we go on with great resolve. Let us hope we will have the courage to make a determination in our own minds to start fresh and become more conscious of what we are doing.

Jan was particularly touched by the idea of reconsidering our mistakes. She could see how it was the same part of the brain that made the errors in judgment that could be redirected to let go of oppressive ideas. Normally, we make our judgments within the same flawed context we are trying to wriggle out of, and this keeps us stuck. At the same time, it's the ideal place for intelligent appraisal.

Susan added something a therapist once told her, that it is very important when you have had an argument or a hard conversation with someone or an outburst of anger (etc) to return to them and talk about it. It's really important for your mental health, because even if we're right in the argument, the meanness in it is wrong. Revisiting it gives the opportunity for healing and letting go of resentment.

This brought Deb to remember the invention (around the time of the original class) of self-correcting typewriter ribbon. At last it was a simple matter to erase a wrong letter on a typewriter, and then plunk the right one over it. Kids of today have no idea how tedious the process used to be. One way or another it has to be done, though, or you pass along a flawed document. Nitya himself was a tough taskmaster when it came to typing, and many's the page I've had to throw away because of a single error near the bottom.

Scotty took the idea to a more subtle level talking about his qigong practice, where a different tone is applied to each organ,

with the intent of reinforcing the positive and erasing the negative in them. So the practice of erasing errors has many forms and many levels, but the idea of waking up from the wakeful includes all this and more.

The class wound down with the delights and worries about being lost. Bushra advocates it as an enjoyable adventure to set out to do. Of course, there is lost and there is LOST. If there is no shock, no challenge, then it isn't really being lost. But we can practice it a bit by wandering without intent, either physically or mentally, and see where we wind up. It certainly invites serendipity. Happy trails!

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

In this verse the Guru says, “We have not known anything so far, having spoken of great happiness.” It may sound strange to a person who has read or listened to 97 verses of Self-instruction to hear in the 98th that all his listening and meditating did not bear the fruit of knowledge. Knowledge in its highest sense is not different from being the Absolute. When a person says, “this is happiness,” or “this is a greater happiness than the previous one,” his knowledge belongs to a relativistic order. In absolute knowledge there is no approximation, either one knows or does not know. Even after knowing, if a person doubts his knowledge he is still in the dark. One should have absolute certitude in what one knows.

This is illustrated in the Chandogya Upanishad with the story of Satyakàma Jàbàla. Traditionally only a man of superior birth was accepted by a Vedic teacher to be initiated into the highest truth of the Absolute. The story of Satyakàma is given to illustrate the fact that the wisdom of the Absolute is unconditional.

Satyakàma was the son of a servant-maid and he did not know who his father was. He felt a great yearning to know the

Absolute, so he asked his mother who his father was. She became sad and shame-facedly said to him, “I do not know this, my dear, of what family you are. In my youth, when I went about a great deal serving as a maid, I got you, but I do not know to what family you belong; however, I am Jàbàla by name and you are Satyakàma by name, so you may speak of yourself as Satyakàma Jàbàla.”

Satyakàma went to see the Guru Gautama and asked for wisdom. In his innocence, he did not see any cause for shame in telling the Guru that he was illegitimate and born of a servant-maid. The veracity of the young boy’s mind touched the truth-loving Guru and he received him as his pupil.

The boy was asked to take care of four hundred of the Guru’s lean and weak cows. He took them to the forest and tended them till they became strong and had increased in number to one thousand. One day a bull in the herd offered to teach him a quarter of the Absolute. The bull instructed him to meditate on the east, the west, the south and the north, as the quarter of the Absolute known as “the shining” (prakàsavàn). The Absolute is well-known to be of four quarters, or limbs. It is symbolized by aum. “A” represents the wakeful, or the eastern quarter where the sun rises, causing people to wake up. “U” represents the dreaming state, the western quarter, where the sun leaves man to his dreams. “M” is the deep sleep which is the southern quarter, the deep unconscious of the Alpha point wherein reside all the potentials to be actualized in the course of time. The three sounds, A, U, M are followed by silence, which represents the transcendental, or the Omega point, the northern quarter. Thus, what fills the four quarters is nothing but one consciousness. àkàsa means “space” and prakàsa is the “light that fills the entire space.” Satyakàma paid heed to the bull’s instructions and honoured its words as though they were as respectable as those of God.

On his way back to the hermitage, he built a fire and sat by it. The fire suddenly spoke to him and offered to teach him a quarter of the Absolute. As Satyakàma agreed, the fire asked him to meditate on the earth, the atmosphere, the sky and the ocean, as the

quarter of the Absolute known as “the endless” (anantavàṅ). In the Taittiriya Upanishad (2.11) the Absolute is defined as satyam jñānam anantam brahman, which means: “He who knows the Absolute as the real (satya), as knowledge (jñāna), and as the infinite (ananta) is the knower of the Absolute. One who knows the Absolute becomes the Absolute.”

Satyakāma meditated on what the fire had taught him and on his way back to the hermitage he again built a fire and sat by it. This time a swan came to him and asked him to meditate on the fire, the sun, the moon and the lightning, as the quarter of the Absolute known as “the luminous” (jyotiùṁàṅ). The Absolute is the light of all lights. Satyakāma meditated on this.

Before arriving at the hermitage, he once again built a fire and this time a diver bird came to teach him the last quarter of the Absolute. The bird told him to meditate on the breath, the eye, the ear and the mind. This quarter is known as àyatanavàṅ, “the support of all.” Satyakāma meditated on the Absolute as the ground of everything.

On arrival at the hermitage, his Guru saw him beaming with his inwardly gained light and asked him why he looked as brilliant as a knower of the Absolute. The Guru wanted to know if he had been instructed by someone, and Satyakāma replied that he had not been instructed by any man but only by the elementals, and that he now desired to come to know the four quarters of Brahman from his Guru, as a disciple’s knowledge does not become perfect until it has been learned from a preceptor. The Guru then taught Satyakāma the four quarters of the Absolute with its sixteen components, and this coincided absolutely with what the elementals had taught him.

The truth that permeates the world and the truth that comes from the word of the Guru are not two; however, when the conformity of both these becomes evident to a disciple, he feels fully assured that he has come to know everything. A person might be guided and controlled by the very Absolute itself, but until one knows that, it is as good as knowing nothing. In the

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (3.7) Yājñavalkya mentions how earth, water, fire, atmosphere, wind, sky, sun, the four quarters of heaven, the moon and stars, space, darkness, light, all things, breath, speech, eye, ear, soul, mind, skin, understanding, and the semen are all ignorant of Brahman, which rules over them all as the soul and the inner controller. Mere beingness is one thing, but to know one's beingness is another.

In this verse Narayana Guru attributes our ignorance to the comparisons we make of various degrees of happiness. Incomparable happiness is of the spirit, which is in the eye. In Sanskrit it is said, *sukha àkàsa akshi purusha*, the happy domain of the person in the eye.

Supreme yoga comes only when the seer and the seen become united in one. In the case of an ordinary person, the eye sees everything separately and individually, but it cannot see itself. Such a person gathers information, but cannot claim to be a true knower because he does not know himself. When the world outside and the person inside become united in the act of seeing or knowing, nothing is left outside to be known, and then alone can we say that we know everything.

* * *

Nataraja Guru's commentary:

IN the process of Self-realization the seeker of wisdom passes through many stages before arriving at the ultimate term of his research. As long as something better is left over in the mind of the seeker, we cannot say that the term of knowledge has been reached. In this sense we have to say that we have not known anything at all, which could be rightly asserted only when we have found something on which we need not improve.

When, in our analysis of the self, we have successively discarded the peripheral vestures of the self by the well-known process of

‘neti, neti’ (not this, not this), as recommended in the negative way of the Upanishads; discarding one outer vesture of reality in favour of another inner factor more real, as when we go from the senses to the mind; we finally arrive at the term of our enquiry, beyond which thought cannot go, and the value to which thought is applied cannot be improved upon. Such a term is described here as Self-possession or Self-realization as it is understood in usual philosophical language.

The two aspects referred to in the previous verses meet unitively and neutrally in this central value-factor. It is thus that wisdom becomes finalized in terms of value.

Part III

The class ended with a reading of the passage from *Love and Blessings* where Nitya dedicates himself to Nataraja Guru. There is an echo of this in Nitya’s Verse 98 commentary, and it is a beautiful reminiscence regardless. I’ll add more than we read out, from the end of the chapter An Unceremonious Initiation into Discipleship. Nitya had spent time at Sivagiri and known Nataraja Guru, and at this point had been wandering as a mendicant around India for some ten years:

It was evening when I reached the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, which was very beautifully built, with a marble shrine for Sri Ramakrishna. In those days I was fond of prostrating and sitting in altar places with my eyes closed. Starvation kept my body in a comely shape, and I had long flowing curls of dark hair. That’s not a style of sannyasi recognized in the Ramakrishna Ashrams. They are mostly shaven-headed, with plump cheeks and attractive clothes, so I looked very different than the others.

After giving my cordial salutations to Swami Vimalananda, in a few short sentences I requested him to accept me as a novice of the mission. Swamiji smiled almost approvingly. Then he

suggested we go for a walk later. After an hour or so he called me to go with him.

For at least ten minutes he observed a deep silence. Then he asked me, “Do you think there are no gurus in Kerala?” Suddenly I remembered that I’d tried to fit in with the ashram of Sri Narayana Guru at Sivigiri and had become very upset. I had also visited Swami Vidyananda Tirthapada’s ashram thinking I could relate with Chattambi Swami. The atmosphere of that ashram was very parochial, and it in some way prevented me from knowing Chattambi Swami closely. I mentioned the names of those swamis to Swami Vimalananda and said I’d found little attraction to the ashrams connected with their names.

He said that was because all genuine spiritual seekers were running away from Kerala, not wanting to give dedicated service. Then he pointedly asked, “Who is there for Narayana Guru?” He said to himself, “Perhaps Natarajan.” As if he’d made up his mind, he said, “I want you to go back. You are most needed there. Sri Ramakrishna has more than enough disciples. You should not seek power, glory or reputation. If a tree blossoms with fragrant flowers and sweet honey, from all over the forest bees will come. Like such a tree, you should remain where you are. Allow time to bring maturity. You will also blossom. Tomorrow morning you will return. I shall send a brahmachari with you to the bus stand so that you can go back to Ooty and see Natarajan and from there go to Kerala.”

He did exactly as he said he would. The next day when I arrived at Fernhill Gurukula, it was four in the afternoon. Mangalananda Swami was gone. Only Nataraja Guru was there. He was all alone in the kitchen. Seeing me walking in, he poured out a cup of tea for me. He held out the teacup and a biscuit. When I relieved him of both the items, he abruptly asked me if I came prepared to join him as his disciple, to which he added, “You have been preparing yourself to be a sannyasi all these years. Are you ready now?”

This was a moment I had long been dreading. I was not at all prepared. Nataraja Guru was ferocious and uncompromising, and I had always had a horror of him. My powerful attraction to his wisdom was counterbalanced by my repulsion of his personal idiosyncrasies. The way he had always thought of me as his disciple was very irritating. In every way he was an absolute contrast to Dr. Mees, who was an ideal, loving Guru. With hesitation I said, "I have to think."

Nataraja Guru looked very offended. Shaking with anger, he said, "I knew this. I knew this. Narayana Guru told me he would have nobody and I would have nobody. So all the enthusiasm you showed these several years was only a bluff. You have no pressure. Your engine is at Runneymede."

It was an insult. Runneymede is a station on the steep mountain railway up into the Nilgiris. Engines usually stop there for an hour to get up a head of steam. So I understood the sarcasm in the analogy. I was furious. In the white heat of anger I slammed the cup and saucer down on the table. Instead of running out of the kitchen, though, I bent down and touched both his feet and said, "Take me. I am giving myself to the Guru for whatever it's worth."

He laughed uproariously. Then he became suddenly calm and said, "That is right." Thus my surrender to the Guru's cause and my initiation all happened in a comic manner. Now many years later I understand that the gravity of my gesture and all its implications were a million times greater and more profound than I realized. Suddenly it occurred to me that Ramana Maharshi had probably advised me to read about the Great Tibetan Yogi Milarepa in order to prepare me to be the disciple of Nataraja Guru, who in so many ways resembled Marpa, Milarepa's fiercely absolutist guru.

Nataraja Guru had no inside or outside. His anger, humor, and compassion all manifested spontaneously. He was never apologetic or regretful. He certainly didn't believe in the conventional Christian philosophy of "do good, be good," nor in entertaining people with pleasantries and well-mannered behavior.

On the other hand, he welcomed encounters that opened up areas of vital interest in a philosophical point or problem, as in the case of Socrates and his group of young followers like Plato.

The next day when he was sitting musing, I asked him, “Guruji, what is our relationship?” He said, “In the context of wisdom teaching I am your guru, and you are my disciple. In social situations you are you, and I am I, two free individuals who are not obliged to each other. When I teach, you should listen and give full attention. Don’t accept until you understand. If you don’t immediately understand, you should have the patience to wait. There is no question of obedience, because my own maxims are ‘Obey not’ and ‘Command not.’ Instead, understand and accept.” That was the lifelong contract I maintained during the twenty-one years of our personal relationship and another twenty-six years of my relating to him as the guiding spirit of my life.

* * *

Jake’s commentary:

In Nitya’s commentary on Verse 98 is a practical summation of the work of the *100 Verses* and points to where just about all of us, especially the American Baby Boomers are as we pass from the scene. It is far past our deadline to wake up—however marginally we can—and most of us won’t so very attached are we to our carefully crafted illusions. As Nitya writes concerning the Guru’s point in this verse (and by extension all the preceding ones), “Today’s verse is a reminder to us that if we are serious we should begin from scratch” (p. 704), that our journey of a million steps begins with one and continues one after the next. Along the way, Writes Nitya, we must also give up our attitude of serving our self and suit ourselves to the situation rather than demanding that the situation suit ourselves. It is in this reversal of vision that the depth of our attachments is both obvious and subtle. The latter are the most dangerous, I think, because they get internalized the

earliest, before we have words to name them. These samskaras or pre-rational impressions form before we know we've formed any and set the limits for the choices our minds later allow us to "freely" make as we go about our wakeful days, busily assembling and re-assembling concepts while simultaneously shifting our attention from one object of interest to the next. This wakeful state of affairs, says Nitya, is not qualitatively any different from our other states of awareness. *Knowing that* is our first step in a journey no one else can take for us. Or as Jimmy Hendrix opined on a soundtrack years ago before ending his life: "I'm the one that's got to die when it's time for me to die."

In his opening few pages of commentary on this verse, Nitya summarizes our focus of awareness from birth to death. Infants, he notes, alternate between states of deep sleep "and a dreamlike experience where the wakeful and the dream are not very distinct" (p. 696). As the child grows, the distinction between the wakeful and the dream becomes more discrete, and by experiencing the same people again and again the child begins to recognize them. Along the way, it begins associating names with forms and eventually the wakeful state "stands out as a separate experience" (p. 697). By this time, continues Nitya, the child recognizes three states: the wakeful, dream, and deep-sleep. The "continuity" of the wakeful, the fact that we can resume activity after the interruption of the other two, results in the wakeful assuming a legitimacy the others can't match: "So the wakeful begins to seem more true" (p. 697). For most, this progression ceases with the prizing of the wakeful state. (The validation of this sequence lies in our own ontological histories and experience—we all *know* this summary to be accurate if we sincerely re-collect our own lives.)

At this point, Nitya throws in what we cannot deny if we are intellectually honest. Every thing we know and experience points to the continuation of this sequence beyond our certitude of the wakeful state and our trivializing or mystifying of the dream and deep-dream states. "In this verse," writes Nitya, "Narayana Guru says you have not known anything so far" (p. 697). As long as we

mis-measure ourselves on the scale of the mind's dualities, speculating on how some transcendent or absolute awareness comports with what we have comfortably constructed as our awake state, we will remain in it merely peeking over the fence, to employ an agrarian metaphor. In an Absolute state, Nitya writes, comparisons are not possible because it is not two: "There are no high or low tides in the Joy of the Self" (p. 698).

The adventures we experience in our wakeful lives (and work on in our dreams) don't affect our true one state. Our experiences of that awareness are as dreams are to us in our awake state, memories without substance, illusions we realize as illusions only when we wake up from our "awake" state. These events we experience phenomenally, writes Nitya, seem so very real to us but in the "domain of spirit nothing is really happening" (p. 699). This "wa[king] up from the wakeful" is the point of all spiritual pursuits, continues Nitya, but the hindrances to that transcendence are legion and subtly engrained in each of us. For that reason, he concludes, *very* few people (*none*, says Nitya) make the breakthrough to realizing where we already are. To make his point, he offers the example of yoga as it is practiced in America. Classes generally begin with a focus on posture: "That means you have already violated the spirit of yoga. . . . That is the third stage of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. . . . It takes a long time to just accomplish the first two steps" (p. 701). Following these first three steps is an escalating series of those requiring years of practice and diligence. Adequate preparation, he says, is almost always missing in such endeavors because they are demanding and require a dedicated introspection along with a discipline built one step at a time. This waking up is not a comparative exercise contest aimed at achieving a goal that is again to be measured by way of some duality grounded in wakeful awareness. I'm reminded here of science fiction movies—*War of the Worlds* type of films—in which some extra-terrestrials invade Earth and go about their business of conquering it, just as we would given the opportunity. Following the final conflagration scene, Tom Cruise

(star of the latest version) speaks to the mystery of it all as he surveys the wreckage. In the 1950s edition, the director was more blatant (or honest) by inserting across the closing vision, “Or is it?” following the concluding “The End.”

Duality is drama. Waking up from the wakeful is to see that drama from what it is, a dream that came and went, leaving no footprint. And there will always be some element of that dream we will want to take with us. By so doing, we work on a premise out of awareness—that the mind’s way of perceiving through duality remains constant. This is not the end, but is it?

“The next best thing,” concludes Nitya, “is to be a person bound to a situation in life, and deciding to live one hundred years doing your action without becoming attached to it” (p. 706).

I’ve heard it said that the point of all this discipline and work in preparing oneself, the dedication to one’s spiritual practice, is to finally come to the realization that you didn’t need to do it. All that chopping of wood and carrying of water was unnecessary—but necessary. By this time in the study of the *100 Verses*, writes Nitya, “We should be able to say [that] we have learned from our substantial efforts” (p. 707). We might now be ready to take our first steps “to start fresh and become more conscious of what we are doing.”

Part IV

Dipika sent a sweet response to my request for a reaction to the journey through That Alone:

It's such a positive uplifting study.

It takes you gently by the hand guiding you through myriad mental notions

Taking our understanding through the particular into the whole

Correcting and pushing us into the right stream

So we know its neither this nor that

*And we learn to be a peculiar blend of involvement without
sentimentality*

*Learn that parting is sweet sorrow and gain the courage to do so
To eventually learn that nothing really changes or has changed
That all these are modulations of the mind
And only deep silence is the way*

much love

* * *

Susan contributed a paragraph from the class that I couldn't easily fit in to Part I. She is preparing to move out of her "dream house," and into a whole new life on her own:

The packing up of my house has me going into periods of sadness and existential starkness. Last Friday was especially hard, especially since I was listening to the last part of Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End* in which all things and people on earth and earth itself are sucked into some other energy/consciousness. This forces me to confront the ways that I am dependent on material comforts and how hard it is to dismantle the world as I have known it for 18 years. But it's not a bad thing. I get sad and even depressed but then I let go and feel much better. It seems I have to confront these feelings. This seems part of the discipline that Nitya is talking about and as Deb mentioned, the losing oneself as discussed in the last verse.