

3/31/15
Verse 99

Knowledge and I-consciousness—both are one to him for whom the veil is removed; to another there is doubt; if knowledge, having separated from “I,” can become another, there is no one here to know knowledge.

Free translation:

Knowledge and the self spoken of as ‘I’ are one and the same to a person for whom the veil of ignorance is removed. To one whose intelligence is still veiled, there will be many hesitations to admit this identity. If the ‘I’ could stand apart from Knowledge, there would not be anyone to know Knowledge.

Nataraja Guru’s translation:

Knowledge and ‘I’ are both one, for one divest of all veiling curtains;
Another might have reason to argue still;
If the ‘I’ could be taken as other than knowledge
None there is to know knowledge here at all!

In the sonata form that underlies much of Western classical music, a movement begins with a presentation of the main idea or ideas. These are developed, by examining them in various permutations, being broken down into component elements, and viewed in different interactions. Much of the genius of a composer is revealed by the profundity of the development. Afterwards the main ideas are restated, sometimes exactly as they first appeared. Yet they are not quite the same. Because of the development they have undergone, they mean much more than they did at first. Often there is a coda or tail to wrap up and underline the transformation. Consciously or unconsciously the impact of great music—as

contrasted with songs, ditties, and the like, which do not develop—is a measure of this intuitive sense of growth, of learning.

Atmopadesa Satakam is a grand symphony of concepts: a masterwork of our Age. Like a musical symphony, its opening motif is the Karu, the unitive core of being, with a constellation of attendant analogies. Over the course of its one hundred verses, key implications are isolated so they can be scrutinized and appreciated. The unity is divided into a number of aspects whose implications are sooner or later “normalized,” in Nataraja Guru’s terminology, meaning they are both stripped of the false projections that tend to accumulate around large-scale concepts and held up to view as essential building blocks of the psyche.

Now, at the end of the work, all the elements that were teased out have been woven back together, and we return our focus to the unitive Karu. Wonder of wonders, it is now vastly more meaningful than it first appeared. All the contemplative insights we have partaken of have contributed extra dimensions to our understanding. In the process, the rift that characterizes most of human awareness is healed. As Nitya puts it in *Neither This Nor That... But Aum*, “Immanence is pregnant with transcendence through and through, and transcendence is a reality of the here and now.”

Michael read out most of the *Neither This Nor That* version, as it is a masterpiece in which the knitting together of horizontal and vertical, immanent and transcendent, is described about as well as can be done. Nitya details the ways we unconsciously separate ourselves from the whole, affirming disconnected duality and undermining unity. Rather than reprint it, you can read it in Part II below. It’s short, but very sweet.

Many people wonder why they should bother to make the effort Narayana Guru and his disciples are inviting us to dedicate some time to. After all, we begin with the Karu, the Absolute—shouldn’t that be enough? Well yes, it could be, except we generally start out with only the *idea* of unity, and the effort is to transform the concept into a symphonic reality. The least we

should have learned is how much more is implied in the postulate of an all-embracing reality than we might have imagined. Hopefully, our efforts have made our life more worthwhile, more enjoyable and even useful. It is possible to believe fervently in unity and yet not be stirred by it at all. The thrust is for us to bring it to life as an adorable motivating force.

I often hear complaints that boil down more or less to “Why should I bother?” I remember my dear friend Kendrick once telling me that the Gurukula philosophy was too intellectual for him. Yet he persevered for some mysterious reason. Then one day he came to me with eyes wide open, and blurted out, “I get it. This is amazing!” From that day on he was an enthusiastic participant.

I personally always wonder at the resistance so many people feel to being more fully alive, and even more, what can break through their stasis to bring about a transformation. For the most part we are shrunken versions of what we might be, struggling to be content with a world view that separates us from everything, including our own being. For most of our lives we have been actively working to make ourselves small and unimportant, and in the process cutting off many avenues of natural expression. Even our spiritual life may be framed as another way to force ourselves to not experience. Narayana Guru is gently beckoning us to adopt a renewed sense of purpose. The great dictum *tat tvam asi*, That you are, when rightly grasped, instantly corrects the schism between who we think we are and who we actually are, inviting us to get up and dance.

In the knitting together process, Nitya addresses how our identification of separate items with names has obscured the underlying unity that would allow us to make sense of our place in the world. He says:

Every modulation has a name, which delimits the particular formation of knowledge to which it refers. A name differentiates one area of knowledge from another area with another name. Although the name is only a verbal modulation

of sound, it is capable of producing rigid walls of separation between the specified aspects of knowledge. Names are only just sounds, but the barriers they create sometimes cannot be broken, because we are so riveted to the ideas which are specified by the names.

Riveted is right! It's astonishing how tightly people cling to rigid ideas that not only make their own lives miserable but disastrously impact those who come in contact with them. Because oneness is invisible it is ignored, and competition for shreds and spoils supersedes amity. This is not only true in religious and political conflicts, it poisons our personal lives as well.

Charlatans and political manipulators constantly market the part as the whole. Egos defend themselves by doing the same thing, often with a ferocity that belies some desperate yet invisible paranoia. It's a simple enough remedy to accept that all beliefs are provisional, and yet who dares to do it? Why is it so radical? Just looking at the history of science as an example, we see new ideas supplanting the previous at an extremely rapid pace, and yet each iteration is hotly defended as "God's truth." (Little joke there.) Few dare to admit that it's only their best assessment for the moment, and leave room for later expansion. Or else they are sure in what direction the expansion will go, and block out other alternatives. Nitya expounds the underlying principle that is apparently so elusive:

Any kind of specification delimits the Absolute and can no longer be the Absolute. That is why Narayana Guru reminds us here that knowledge, arivu, and the knower, *aham* or 'I', are not two. If, however, the knower is carried away by the specification of the name, he loses his comprehension of this truth, substituting the incomplete for the complete.

So the prime meditation inspired by this verse is to take a look at what you cling to. You don't necessarily have to give up your

beliefs, but at least become aware of them. The rigidity comes mainly from the beliefs that are so wholly accepted that we no longer even notice them. Nor do we realize how powerful it is to be cognizant of what we routinely take for granted. Awareness gives us the little bit of distance to not take ourselves so seriously, to not abandon ourselves to our fears, and that is practically the most important step of all.

Paul cautioned us that no matter how expansively you imagine the Absolute, it inescapably means taking a subdivision of it. Moreover, if you attach yourself to duality and adopt separateness, duality becomes an exclusive reality. The gist is we hardly realize how easily we morph into a dualistic attitude, continuing to imagine we are thinking unitively. I added that we are not supposed to make a hard and fast division of unitive equals good and dualistic equals bad. Both are true together, as well as inextricable from a holistic appreciation. The aim is to not delete unity from our comprehension.

Paul was rueful that for his entire life he has been learning how to be separate, which has made it more difficult for him to identify with the concepts that promote oneness. He was well trained to curse the dark, but now knows that doing so doesn't dispel darkness, it makes it all the darker. The antidote is to turn on the light, to bring the ten thousand suns at once.

While that is certainly true, the blazing light is temporary for most of us. When the light is off we invariably slide back into our familiar patterns. Yet some degree of change has been initiated by the flash, and rewiring our neurons has begun. Frustration only holds us back: it's another way of cursing the darkness. We should foster our baby steps by being supportive of ourselves at all times. Regaining solid ground is most certainly a slow process, and yet it is definitely taking place. We should give ourselves credit for even a smidgen of progress.

In our younger days many of us were convinced that picking the "right" attitude and pitting yourself against all others to convert them to your position was the highest calling. The world is full of

evangelists of all sorts struggling to convert everyone else to their way of interpreting reality. It is plain to see the disasters that result from other peoples' beliefs, and yet we imagine ours wouldn't do that. We are in favor of peace, love and universal happiness. We hardly realize that no matter how "enlightened" the belief system, it remains a partial perspective, and thus the basis for conflict when mistaken for the whole. Like the lather inherent in soap, multiplicity can never be eradicated.

The open-ended mystery of Narayana Guru's verses invites us to contemplate their meaning without having a fixed, pat, and therefore trivial, take on them. All our school training pressures us to regurgitate sound bites and simplistic interpretations, and that has to be discarded in order to enter the full sense of what they have to offer. At the same time, I'm not sure I would understand any of this without the help of Nitya's hard won insights. For instance, the last two lines of verse 99 are a confusing double negative: "If knowledge, having separated from 'I,' can become another, there is no one here to know knowledge." What the heck?? It's elegantly convoluted. Several people offered interpretations that danced around the edges, but Nitya gets to the heart of it:

When one differentiates in one's mind, thinking "I am one and this is another," for such a person there is argument. There is a separation between the knower and the known. At no stage does knowledge stand separated from the knower, which is why the Guru concludes "If knowledge can be separated from 'I', there is no one here to know knowledge."

Stating this positively, knowledge is inseparable from the 'I'. We are knowledge, and knowledge is us.

Whenever the 'I' imagines there is knowledge elsewhere that it is separate from, a host of misunderstandings ensue. It turns out that knowledge is just another name for the Absolute: it's an all-encompassing condition that we participate in. Being aware of it makes all the difference. Deb recalled an idea Nitya liked to share,

that a baby and a wise person are in the same state. The only difference is the seer knows it, and the baby does not.

Deb also remembered the time she and Nitya were having an intense series of exchanges, and he told her, “I hope some day you’ll have less to defend.” An inner defensiveness leaps out of us automatically, as a shield to block unappetizing criticism. It is the duty of a guru to tell the truth to their disciples even when it hurts. This almost always provokes a clash in a world where everybody is tiptoeing around with the primary motivation of not upsetting anyone in the immediate vicinity.

Sometimes a confrontation is necessary to make a breakthrough. Why do we think that a quiescent attitude is all that’s needed? When *tamas* holds sway—as it so often does—it may take a substantial shock to generate the effort to give it up. Most often an outside factor is required to supply the juice, and then we call it the guru, the remover of darkness.

Once again, this study is not about becoming goody-goody, well behaved, docile people. Ethical behavior is another subject entirely, and religions routinely bog down over it, losing their spiritual impetus in hairsplitting over issues of right versus wrong.

Bill remembered Nitya telling him that there are times when righteous anger is appropriate, and he demonstrated it in his own life. Nitya’s anger was a terrifying thing to behold, believe me. It was never out of control, though, but was a well-tuned weapon. I have seen it used to break a disciple out of a stagnant mindset (most often me), and also to publicly shame religious hypocrites. It often made a positive difference. Being the object of his wrath was a blessing, but mostly it was one that would not be fully appreciated for a very long time afterwards.

In the light of this point, Bushra related a dream she had a long time ago. It started with a nuclear explosion in which everything was evaporating. Her body was fragmenting into dust particles and being blown about by the wind. It gave her an intense feeling of freedom. Eventually she settled back down to earth, where the dust particles of other people were filtering down over

hers. The particles of everyone sifted together, and their mingling was very sensual. It felt like coming home to Mother Earth. There was a sense of the Absolute, gentle and beautiful, with a deep interpenetration of everything in it.

Bushra awoke in a state of intense bliss. For a moment she felt guilty about the nuclear explosion, but she let that go and enjoyed the ecstasy of the dream for a long time. She realized that none of it would have happened without the blast.

If we are not prepared to let the world teach us, we will walk away as soon as we are challenged beyond our comfort zone. Instead, we can adopt the attitude of the gurus, that knowledge is our universal state and the world is our country, so everything that comes to us is a learning opportunity, an invitation to let our light shine.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum is a major supplement to the longer version this time. Where in most of the verses it is mainly a condensation of the full talk, here Nitya presents a fresh take of crucial importance:

When I say “I am” and “this is” I am using the same faculty of consciousness to ideate both the subjective “I” and the object of my consciousness. As mentation is mostly done with the aid of words, there is a sequential order in which words present themselves to the mind. Because of the time factor involved in arranging thoughts, one may notice that the idea of “I am” is experienced as a separate event from the experiencing of “this is.” On the basis of the semantic disparity which seems to exist between the many diverse components of consciousness, one may come to the conclusion that the self and its consciousness are separate. Truly, this is not so.

The tribasic division of consciousness, such as the knower, the knowledge, and the known, is a fundamental error which

lingers in the mind of even the most erudite of scholars. In verse 14, the mark of a seer is seen in the one who goes beyond the boundaries of the three worlds with an awareness that shines with an all-filling effulgence, in which there is no semblance of any tribasic division of knowledge. It is hard to find such a wise person.

Although many people are theoretically convinced that there is only one Self and everything is a modulation of pure consciousness, they are still tempted to make a convenient division between the transcendental and the transactional. This is like having one norm for the church and another for the marketplace. The final test of wisdom comes when one is challenged to uphold one's absolutist vision without any compromise whatsoever.

The last vestige of maya paints the Self as the sacred, sublime and mysterious that is not to be laid bare to the vulgarity of public gaze, and, in contrast to this, it caricatures the transactional as belonging to the mundane world, which can be the gross and common place where all profanities thrive. This kind of division caters to the shadowy world of charlatans, who indulge in conceit and self-deception.

To the truly wise, the sacred and the profane are relativistic ways of looking at one and the same reality of life. For such a person immanence is pregnant with transcendence through and through, and transcendence is a reality of the here and now. If such an absolutist vision of truth is not possible, then there is no point in speaking of an all-embracing Self that knows itself. The highest unity upheld by Vedanta is not a conjecture, but a truth in which the finite is woven into endless meanings.

Narayana Guru therefore says that the knowledge and the knower are not two. If, however, the knower gets carried away by the specifications of the name and the act of his knowledge, he loses comprehension of the unity of truth.

The seers of the Upanishads testify to the possibility of total knowledge when they proclaim without the least doubt: *aham*

brahma asmi—I am the Absolute. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.4.10) says:

Whoever thus knows “I am Brahma!” becomes the All; even the gods have not power to prevent his becoming thus, for he becomes their self (*àtman*).

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Nataraja Guru’s commentary:

THIS penultimate verse sums up the position of Advaita Vedanta in terms of Self-knowledge. The reasons advanced need no comment. No argument remains after this finally apodictic statement is made after examining all other points of view in the previous verses.

Part III

Once again, Nitya’s Brihadaranyaka quotes come from precisely where we are in that study. How does that happen? It almost feels like he is still teaching us in person. Some of his commentary there is particularly relevant as well, so I thought I’d share it with you:

We have affectivity in every sense organ. Our minds correlate our senses and coordinate our thoughts and feelings. We are assailed with the duality of pain and pleasure. Consequently we are distracted by the pettiness of our senses, and we stumble on every sensation. The possibility of a unitive vision of the total, irrespective of time and space, mood or clime, is a far cry. Because of partial illumination and because of the appearance of what has conditioned us partially belongs to the gloomy darkness of negativity, countless millions of people lose the chance to have any identity with something which is generally grand and beautiful.

The god is that bright faculty within us which gives commands to our bodily selves. It makes us obliged to carry out commands to make ourselves fit to be social beings or errand runners for the countless millions of stimuli that bombard our bodies and minds from all directions.... In the infrastructure of existence in a socially fabricated world, the animal-like person who implicitly obeys the commands of society is appreciated for his defects, his faults, his handicaps, and even for his stupidity. A slave master will shower praises on the slave who tirelessly labors for him. If a slave becomes wise enough to see the intention of the master and refuses to be exploited, he will be condemned. Similarly, when a wise person is about to become established in the world of total understanding, a number of obstacles arise. That person will be subjected to various forms of inadequacy. Such is the world of *samsara*, which abounds in subnormal or abnormal people who are always heading towards misery. Only if we know such traps are in the world will we be able to go beyond our limitations to become truly wise and have a clear vision of truth. (*The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Volume I, 181-82)

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Jake's commentary:

With a brief commentary, Verse 99 completes Verse 98 with an observation on our condition in the manifest world and how it always offers, at best, partial views of the Absolute. Entering into forms, the Absolute fills each one of them as a sword fills out its sheath. Once that transformation takes place, however, that thing or object is an isolated modulation of the Absolute we can recognize only as a separate object identified to us through our senses. At that point, our minds get to their business of naming form, thereby isolating it still further and placing it in a category with other words—and away we go. (I think the Tower of Babel

myth does a marvelous job of illustrating this process, however culture-bound the context might be.)

Once we've done our word-smithing, the term then enters our rational faculties where the nominalizations constitute "forms of knowledge" for our reasoning faculties: "Our minds rush to give a name to the experience" (p. 709).

This whole instantaneous process works to place us right where we find ourselves, or at least most of us. Hypnotized by the partial bits of nominal truth, we go about mistaking the part for the whole and construct boundaries between parts all over the place. This divided reality is the lot of almost everyone and goes a long ways in describing why distinctions between *mine* and *yours*, truth and falsity, are so common. As Nitya concludes, "When one differentiates in one's mind thinking, "I am one and this is another, for such a person there is argument. There is a separation between the knower and the known."

And so, for just a moment, simply be the Seer. Simply rest as the Seer, rest as the Witness, rest as that which sees but cannot be seen. . . . When you rest as emptiness, you are seeing your original face, the face you had prior to the Big Bang. This great Emptiness is the primordial background that has always already been your True Self, a Self never lost and therefore never found. This Emptiness is the great background in which the entire universe arises moment to moment. And this great background is—by any other name—God. That which is aware of you right now is God. That which is your innermost awareness, right now, is God. That which sees but is never seen is God. That Witness in you right now, ever present as pure Presence, is God. . . .

Still don't see it? How right you already are. For each and every one of us, 'by the very fact of not seeing and not knowing God, truly understands him who is beyond sight and knowledge; knowing this, too, that he

is in all things that are felt and known.” (Ken Wilber, *Eye to Eye*, p. 304)