

2/5/13

Verse 9

Growing on both sides, in a blossoming state,  
is the one vine which has come, spread out and risen to the top of a  
tree;  
remember that hell does not come  
to the man dwelling in contemplation beneath it.

Nataraja Guru's:

He who dwells in contemplation beneath a tree  
Whereon climbing, a creeper bears aloft on either side  
The blossoms of the psychic states; mark, such a man,  
By inferno unapproached ever remains.

Verse 9 is one of the anchors of the study, an image that readily comes to life in the mind as a perennial support. Nitya's commentary is thirteen glorious pages, and Deb and I were unable to decide on anything to leave out. We decided instead to accord two classes to it and take on half at a time, and it was great to see what a wise decision it was: a level of enthusiastic participation rose up as a tangible tide in the room as the evening progressed.

The downside of all this wealth is that I feel somewhat like a poet standing on a rugged coastline looking out to a gorgeous sunset over the ocean and wondering how I'm going to fit all that on this little slip of paper I'm holding....

The image is of a contemplative sitting under a tree, somewhat lost in bliss although remaining aware that there are entangling vines growing up the tree that have to be kept from catching them. Deb noted at the outset that the entire image is about us: the vines are not some foreign entity but an aspect of our innate nature. Both the tree and the vines grow from the seedbed of vasanas that is our own legacy. The contemplative is also us, yet,

like the hunter of the previous verse, is set slightly apart in the image, hinting at the element of detachment.

Structurally, the tree represents the vertical parameter and the vines, like the birds and fruits of the previous verse, the horizontal. The vines are the wakeful and dream, or objective and subjective aspects of our life.

Verses 8 and 9 form a matched pair. As Nataraja Guru points out, “These two verses must be treated and understood together in order to extract from both the central doctrine which the Guru wishes to transmit and which is tacitly contained between them.” The hunter shooting down the evasive birds is filled with intentionality, while here the intensity is cooled. We have to combine both sides in our search: trying and not-trying, eyes open and shut, knowing that everything matters a great deal and not at all. Exaggerating one side or the other is a lopsided approach that leads to problems.

If the vines catch us, we slip into a state of hellish misery. This doesn't just refer to addictions and derangements. The contemplative has to stay continuously aware because our normal brain functioning converts fresh experience into stereotyped memories. The first time we do something it is new and exciting, so we do it again, and again. Before long we are operating on a memory of how fun it used to be, and then on the memory of the memory, and so on. It becomes a habitual behavior instead of a free choice. The mental image of joy is a far cry from real joy. It becomes tarnished and begins to shed tears. Soon we see it is a mockery of us, and despair replaces contentment. Or else we become indifferent. Neither option is acceptable to the compassionate gurus, who are trying to steer us clear of such a fate. That's why gurus are notoriously unpredictable—they want us to stop having expectations about them, and thus about anything. Instead of imagining we know what's coming, we should be eagerly anticipating that something great is sure to be happen, and we have to stay alert so we can drink it to the dregs. Missing out is a tragedy, tantamount to descending into the inferno.

Hercules' twelfth and final Labor was to go down into hell and bring out the dog Cerberus who acts as a kind of one way gate at the portal: easy in, impossible out. In my research I came across this from Dr. Mees:

The Labour of overmastering the Dog of Hell is from the spiritual point of view the immediate task before humanity in the present age. Buddha anticipated the need of the Capricornian Age by enjoining people to seek a cause of suffering, namely desire, hidden in the unknown world of man's soul. When the Black-out of the Tradition was still almost complete—as was the case until quite recently—people did not know the dark forces in the Underworld of their unconscious, smugly imagining that they had reached a peak of civilization. Modern thought denied the existence of Hell (mistakenly “understanding” it in a literalistic manner) and dismissed it as a superstition. In the first half of the twentieth century humanity has been rudely awakened to the knowledge that there *are* extremely dark forces within the soul of the Fallen Man, or, to speak in terms of modern psychology, within the unconscious. (iii, 209)

The Gurukula is aligned with modern psychotherapy in affirming that it is not optimal to ignore the dark forces within. They are unpredictable and potentially destructive. At the minimum they lead us away from our innate bliss into a state of being only partly alive. Bringing them to light breaks their hold on our unconscious. But this is a hard road in a time when easy answers proliferate. The serenity promised by most religions and many spiritual paths is highly appealing, especially to those whose instinctive and habitual fear of the unconscious is too intense to face.

Deb recalled the inversion we talked about last week, in the sense of inverting our horizontal tendencies into vertical meanings. I added that the most important inversion is that ordinarily we think the vines are not us, that we are the victims of

circumstance. But all that we see is us: we must invert the idea that the world is “out there” and realize it is within the self. We must accept the onus of being co-creators of our life. This is actually remarkable difficult to do, because we are already caught in the vines, even though we may not realize it. We have become so comfortable being strapped to the tree of our life that we take it for granted. If we struggle the vines pinch us, so we interpret that as a divine message that we should stay in our place. That’s why Narayana Guru put the hunter before the contemplative: we have to break free of our entanglements before sitting in peace makes any sense; otherwise we’re simply resting in our entanglements.

Which is hell.

That’s why, addressing a seemingly peaceful metaphor, we talked at length about our experiences of hell. At this point the tide of the class really began to rise, because we have all been in a hell state, and would really like to get out and stay out. Another inversion the contemplative can and should practice in meditation is, instead of distancing ourselves from hell by being piously peaceful, call to mind times (if they aren’t already immediately present) when we were in hell and try to see what brought us to that state. Our incompetence stems in part from being afraid to look into the face of fear. We may feel like recognizing our fear is some kind of mistake, but it is the very definition of bravery. If we can discern what blunders or tragedies swept us into hell, we have a good shot at turning the tide.

We solicited volunteers to tell us about their experiences. It’s a tricky business, because our worst times are very private, and we didn’t want to dredge those out in the class. The intent was to give examples of how to confront these issues without embarrassing anyone. Luckily, Michael had a perfect instance he was willing to talk about, and it made it easier for everyone else to follow suit.

Michael was made the butt of an April Fools joke last year, that he fell for hook, line and sinker (an image of a fish taking the bait and being caught). Michael was furious and very likely humiliated, but because of his contemplative practice he reasoned

that the joke itself wasn't that big a deal. It was his *reaction* to it that packed most of the firepower. And knowing that, he could forgive the perpetrators and simmer down. There is a world of difference between being caught up in our reactions and witnessing our reactions. Several class participants have reported that they can regain their balance much more quickly once they notice their contribution to hellish situations.

Susan had a similar reaction, and was kind enough to send me a synopsis this morning. She had a:

hellish weekend after receiving my son's school reports — For weeks I had been feeling expansive and most excited about the Gurukula class and my readings and then suddenly I was thrown into (I threw myself into!) a sort of depressed state in which I couldn't do much of anything or enjoy anything. Other incidents were adding to my downward spiral and on Sunday I couldn't even remember the other things but they still were adding to my down feelings. I was aware all during this episode that I was going down and that I was creating this miserable state. I tried to talk to myself about it and see the other side and remember that I always get through these things.

In the past Susan might stay stuck for weeks, but because of her diligence she only dipped for a day or two before starting to float back to the surface. The difference is witnessing yourself as opposed to just going along with (and reinforcing) your feelings. It helps most of all if we have become conscious of just where those dreadful feelings originate in us.

This reminded me to include a bit from Jill Bolte Taylor, about the neuroscience support for this approach, from her book *My Stroke of Insight*:

Although there are certain limbic system (emotional) programs that can be triggered automatically, it takes less than 90

seconds for one of these programs to be triggered, surge through our body, and then be completely flushed out of our blood stream. My anger response, for example, is a programmed response that can be set off automatically. Once triggered, the chemical released by my brain surges through my body and I have a physiological experience. Within 90 seconds of the initial trigger, the chemical component of my anger has completely dissipated from my blood and my automatic response is over. If, however, I remain angry after those 90 seconds have passed, then it is because I have *chosen* to let that circuit continue to run. Moment by moment, I make the choice to either hook into my neurocircuitry or move back into the present moment, allowing that reaction to melt away as fleeting physiology....

What most of us don't realize is that we are unconsciously making choices about how we respond all the time. It is so easy to get caught up in the wiring of our preprogrammed reactivity (limbic system) that we live our lives cruising along on automatic pilot. I have learned that the more attention my higher cortical cells pay to what's going on inside my limbic system, the more say I have about what I am thinking and feeling. By paying attention to the choices my automatic circuitry is making, I own my own power and make more choices consciously. In the long run, I take responsibility for what I attract into my life. (146-147)

The clinging vines of our life have managed to convince us to hold tight to our misery, or else hold equally tightly to the blocking out of our feelings. Narayana Guru, in his oceanic compassion, wants to share his experience of living fully by relinquishing both negative options. Nitya describes what he means in this way:

In the process of the realization of the Self we are always trying to attain the state of the transcendental. The transcendental, or the witness, is here separated from the tree.

The Guru symbolizes it by a contemplative who sits under the tree of manifestation. About him many things are happening. He sees that all these things are going on, but he just sits there, seemingly unconcerned. He is not really a careless hobo, because the creepers are always growing in all directions and covering everything. If you are not alert as you sit there, if you don't sit in the proper way, you will also be caught and covered. And yet, you do not run away from it. You sit right under it, doing *tapas*.

Nitya's examples of *tapas* are so perfect and wonderful that despite having gone through this book a thousand times, I'm quite sure that I remember them from the initial class. Like many people, I was thinking of *tapas* as some special technique of esoteric yoga, hatha or pranayama or sitting tight and trying really hard not to do anything. Nitya's examples of the simple and practical choices we can make literally blew my mind. (I know, I'm prone to this. Happily.) Maybe we think that that's not enough, that spirituality has got to be some great, weird special thing that sets us apart. One of the main reasons I love Nitya and want to hug him as much as Paul is that he always showed us how to express and live our love right in the moment, this simple moment of sitting together, being alive right now. We are fed on grandiose stories of burning bushes, crowds at the feet, sermons on mounts, decades of penance, genies out of bottles; so we can hardly believe that just being alive and sharing our presence with our dear friend is the most beautiful experience that the universe has spent thirteen billion years trying to make possible.

Narayana Guru is saying to us, "This is it, guys." Don't imagine it's somewhere else, or that it will happen in the future. You are in the midst of the one and only miracle of all time. Please enjoy it, and help your friends to love it, too.

Eric added that this doesn't necessarily mean being meek. He's right: much of our meekness and gentleness is self-abnegation, and therefore unhealthy. Many times a little

assertiveness is very therapeutic, on all sides. Eric recalled a recent phone call at work where he was loud and angry (not his usual state, by any means). He was well aware that he was being aggressive, but he knew the situation called for it, so he didn't rein himself in. This is very good. One of the most ubiquitous models that is drilled into us is to be well-behaved, but that often requires numbing our spirit. We trade our independence for the relative peace of not offending anyone. But doggone it, deep down we aren't satisfied with it! We need to reclaim our spirit and bring it back to life. Daring to be appropriately unpleasant isn't a bad technique at all. Half the people I know are too polite, to a fault, and sometimes I wonder where they are hiding behind all of that niceness. Eric was very clear that simply reacting isn't helpful, and often anger is a reactive behavior. But it should be part of one's palette for certain occasions, such as overcoming inner or outer inertia.

Drew could see that the course in Atmo is similar to something he tried recently, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, or DBT. His description made it sound like there are many areas of overlap. For instance, the past breeds fear and worry about the future causes anxiety, so we should pair them off and return to a middle ground in the now. The key is to arrive at a synthesis of the opposites rather than simply seeking a mid-point on the continuum. At any rate it sounded promising. It's heartening to see dialectics continuing to be revived from its low point in the twentieth century.

Drew's touching on time and fear prompted Michael to sing us part of a song by Prince: "what if time's only reason was to give us all something to fear?" It's true that the present is quite delightful, but we fear we might lose it, so we make the present miserable in the process. How dumb is that? Michael felt that time was a kind of invitation to constrain ourselves rather than existing without a boundary, but that if you treat time as arbitrary then it becomes more porous. Science keeps trying, but continues to be



unable to locate anything called time. (I'll append the full song, The Truth, in Part III.)

We finished up by talking at length about tapas. While often thought of as a severe ascetic discipline, Nitya's commentary liberated it from that stigma, converting it to gentle and sweet and accessible to all. Deb described tapas as an act of distillation of the essence, traditionally as the burning away of everything extraneous. She said it was about letting go and looking with clarity into our core, also taking care how we use our words, being aware of the repercussions of what we say and do. Bill added it was a positive effort to lift the spirit and never allow our self to get bogged down in negativity. I insisted that spiritual transformation is not some kind of magic, but simply a way of penetrating into the situation and not getting distracted by incidentals.

For our closing meditation, I suggested we have come to feel that we have to be perfect. We have been trained by the traumas in our past that if we make a mistake, terrible things will happen. But they won't happen now—they are ghosts of the past that we haven't figured out how to release from captivity. That means if we accept that fallibility is normal, it helps us let go of a lot of tension and anxiety around our behavior.

So ended half of one of the hundred verses in this masterpiece of self study. It's a good week to contemplate why and how we get in hell, and how to get back out, as with the Arab proverb: Think about the leaving *before* you enter! Please share what you can of your insights, if only with yourself.

## Part II

Nataraja Guru's comments are long, but I'll append them all. The best parts are the first and last, so you could read a page and then skip to "Inferno."

He who dwells in contemplation beneath a tree  
Whereon climbing, a creeper bears aloft on either side

The blossoms of the psychic states; mark, such a man,  
By inferno unapproached ever remains.

HERE we come to a verse which is intended to close a preliminary section in the development of the subject-matter of the whole work. In the next verse, we see that the Guru treats of the nature of the Soul or Self in man, thereby entering one step further into the subject-matter. But before doing so he uses a word-picture, the ancient idiom of a man sitting under a tree which is found so often in the contemplative literature or mythology of various parts of the world. This idiom is recognizable from the Shiva Seal of Mohenjo Daro to the fig-tree in the Bible associated with John the Baptist. While the immediately previous verse also used the language of a word-picture in referring to the alert and active hunter who with absolute precision aims a weapon, arrow or gun at a unitive target of value, uncompromisingly and radically dealing with petty relativistic attractions in life, an attitude which is a prerequisite for initiation into wisdom proper. Here the personal attitude is that of a more fully contemplative man sitting under a tree and detached from the lure of passing interests.

#### THE CONTEMPLATIVE OF VERSES 8 AND 9:

These two verses must be treated and understood together in order to extract from both the central doctrine which the Guru wishes to transmit and which is tacitly contained between them. This is the case also with other similar pairs of verses which can be located by the careful reader throughout this composition. In the active huntsman giving place to the contemplative sitting under a tree we have the indication of two limiting ways which are complementary - the initial limit positive and the other negative. Both these refer unitively to the contemplative state required before any Self-knowledge can be initiated and progress.

The plain meaning of the verse must be sufficiently clear; but it is important to be able to see, through the mixed or complex metaphorical idiom, the scientific content as it should be grasped

in the context of the Science of the Self representing absolute reality. The man dwelling beneath a tree should be understood as distinctly living apart from the tree itself. The relativistic context of time and becoming, with a duration tending to be historical rather than pure, is not the proper world of the contemplative. He not only lives apart from it, but under it. The tree has its stem which is the common origin of all the various branches and ramifications arising from it. The roots constitute its negative or retrospective part, referring to memory and other factors in the background of the personality. The man under the tree is above the level of the ground which hides the roots from view, but he is in the shade of the leaves. He is thus in a neutral middle position of detachment between the two extremes of time's pointer as it indicates opposingly to the past or the future. He is balanced and neutral, as it were, between the rival tendencies involved. He sits calm and wholly apart in his loneliness, and thus escapes or transcends all tribulations.

'BENEATH A TREE': The tree of world mythology and as employed symbolically in the lingua mystica of humanity all over the world must be examined at closer quarters. The description of a mystical tree with roots upwards and branches downwards, given at the beginning of chapter XV of the Bhagavad Gita is a revised version of the same tree which is found in many mythologies and scriptures throughout the world, whether oriental, occidental, Nordic or Asiatic.

In modern nursery tales we have the last remnant of a heaven-kissing tree in the story of Jack and the Beanstalk - the 'tree' that touches heaven and earth. The myth of the heaven-supporting tree is also found in the Scandinavian sacred Ash tree, Yggdrasil, which drops the honey from heaven, with three roots of various values, belonging to the refined heavenly Asa-gods, the coarse Frost-Giants of nature and to the Underworld of negations. At its top is the heavenly eagle and at its root is the snake, while in

between there is the squirrel which sows strife between the eagle and snake (Vide Brewer's 'Dictionary of Phrase and Fable'). The Cross of the Bible is sometimes referred to as representing the idea of a 'World Tree' whose origin can be traced back to antiquity, far earlier than that of the Medieval Christian legends. The tree is praised even in the hymn 'Crux Fidelis' sung on the day of the crucifixion during the Mass. Alan Watts gives the hymn:

'Crux fidelis, inter omnes  
Arbor una nobilis:  
Nulla silva tamen profert  
Fronde, flore, germine.'

(Faithful Cross, the One Tree noble above all: No forest affords the like of this in leaf, or flower, or seed.) (12)

In the Book of Job (XIV. 7-14) we have a reference to a tree of life that sprouts again in the context of Job's belief in resurrection. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (III. 9. 28.) the same analogy of human life to a tree is mentioned:

'As a tree of the forest,  
Just so, surely, is man.  
His hairs are leaves,  
His skin the outer bark.'  
(Hume's translation)

Modified references to the same tree are found in the Katha Upanishad (VI. 1), and in the Svetasvatara Upanishad (III. 9), and are referred to respectively as 'Its root is above, its branches below - this eternal fig-tree,' and 'The One stands like a tree established in heaven'. In the Svetasvatara Upanishad again, later, there is a dialectical revaluation (VI. 6) where we read:

'Higher and other than the world-tree, time and forms is  
He from whom this expanse proceeds.

The bringer of right (dharma), the remover of evil (papa) the lord of prosperity,

Know Him as in one's own self (atmo-stha) as the immortal abode of all.'

(P. 409, R. E. Hume, 'The Thirteen Principal Upanishads', Oxford 1950)

The whole of chapter XV of the Bhagavad Gita is meant to revise this notion of a World-Tree into more absolutist terms. An examination of the implications of the chapter will reveal that the purer absolutism implied in the teaching of the Gita treats of the tree as a human value beyond historical time in terms of mere pure duration which is timeless. By the man being made (as in this verse) to sit beneath a tree and apart from the phenomenal aspects which it represents, or as in the Gita by the cutting down of the tree, the idea suggested is to transcend becoming.

The Book of Job tries to make the same distinction but the subtle revaluation is lost or overcovered in translation or through the exigencies or vicissitudes of language. For our purpose here it would suffice to remember that the Absolute can be viewed as a living person as represented by the World-Tree or in more pure terms as an abstract Value.

It will be seen in the Bhagavad Gita in XV, 3-4 that the higher path of absolutism is clearly distinguished from the lower or relativistically-coloured form of absolutism found in the Vedic teachings, these latter being compared to a tree which has to be cut down mercilessly before one can follow the higher path of absolutism which the Gita finally stands for. These verses from the Gita are:

'Nor is its (i.e. the tree) form here comprehended thus (as stated), nor its end, nor its beginning, nor its foundation.

Having sundered this holy fig-tree with strongly fixed root, with the weapon of decisive non- attachment,

Then (alone) that path is to be sought, treading which they do not return again, (thinking)  
I seek refuge in that Primordial Man from whom of old streamed forth active (relativist) manifestation.'

Involved in relativistic versions of the Absolute, one is still exposed to the dual influences of pleasure, and pain. In the higher path indicated, suffering is by-passed altogether.

'A CREEPER BEARS ALOFT...PSYCHIC STATES':

The psychic states here refer to the waking, dreaming and deep sleep trio (jagrat, svapna and sushupti), called the avastha-traya (the three states), to which every living being of the higher order is seen to be subject. The examination of the content of the three states in man has been employed in the Vedantic method (especially of Sankara) to arrive at the notion of pure or absolute consciousness which underlies all three. Understood in this way, the Absolute has been named avasthatraya-sakshin, the witness of the three other layers of consciousness in graded order, reaching to the familiar waking state which is the first or most superficial. This way of analysing personal consciousness is employed masterfully in the Mandukya Upanishad. This shortest of Upanishads is a precise subjection of consciousness to the most exact contemplative analysis, and in a spirit of scientific though subjective experimentation. On this Upanishad is based the Gaudapada Karika (commentary of Gaudapada, predecessor of Sankara through his Guru Govinda) which is a monumental work forming the basis of the whole superstructure of Vedantic psychology, so valuable to the methodology and epistemology of the science of the Absolute. Sankara's Bhashya or commentary on the commentary of Gaudapada, makes it further precious to all students of Vedanta.

Thus in classical Vedanta we have three states of consciousness as named above, with a fourth one which, as the basis of them all, corresponds to the Absolute itself. This fourth is the turiya. Like

white light or grey light, it is implied in the others, which have a status like that of the primary colours of the spectrum, red, yellow or blue.

In the verse here, it will be noticed that the Guru slightly deviates from the conventional number three in favour of a symmetrically conceived pair of alternating states. In the preceding verses we have already noticed this symmetry of a bilateral kind. It is suggested in the alternating states of sleeping and waking which overpower, or take over charge of, consciousness in everlasting alternation. In and through these alternating states pure consciousness continues as the central vertical axis. The horizontally alternating pair has, as it were, a superficial content merely. The third state, sushupti, has a negative vertical status. The fourth state, turiya above, attains the status of Absolute consciousness. As for the third state, sleeping, left out by the Guru in his vertically symmetrically-conceived plan, it must be supplied by us as virtually implicit in the person of the man under the tree. It requires no special mention as it enters consciousness only virtually, and does not regulate conduct. Bergson has the same four states compared to a swallow flying over a river, a boat on the river, the river itself and a man watching all these.

In this revised picture presented by the Guru, we therefore think of the alternating states of waking and dreaming as bearing blossoms on either side. Dream has its bright and beautiful representations as much as the waking state, when seen with the neutrally poised eyes of a true artist who is neither too positively awake nor deeply asleep.

The meanest and most ordinary of subjects presented in the visible outer world of the waking state can be considered quite interesting. The paintings and drawings of such artists as Honoré Daumier (1808-79) have amply revealed that even scenes ordinarily considered ugly or not particularly beautiful, can have a hidden beauty in the situation of life that they might suggest in a globally synthetic manner.

Daumier's famous painting of a butcher cutting up an animal is ugly according to conventional standards of beauty when flowers or birds might have been chosen by the artist. But the attitude of the butcher represented by Daumier succeeds in drawing out the essence of a necessary and realistic human situation in which the ugly itself attains to the status of a subject dignified enough for a real artist to paint.

In the case of reputed artists other examples of this kind are considerable. By telling their own tales in which value- factors are hidden, even waking life with all its ugly contents can be considered beautiful in the sense of the 'Flowers of Evil' (Les Fleurs du Mal), employed as the title of a volume by the French poet Baudelaire. The flowers or representations of the dreaming state are as beautiful as the corresponding flowers of the waking state as revised and seen, as it were, through the eyes of the artist and the poet who can, as Shakespeare would say, 'see Helen's beauty in an eye of Egypt'.

The contemplative has to participate thus in the attitude of the poet before he can establish himself and be initiated into the reality symmetrically viewed in this manner. Like the man in the famous statue of Augustus Rodin (1840-1917) called 'The Thinker' (Le Penseur), the man sitting under the tree in the Guru's verse should be understood, not as living in a vacuum of abstraction but as having for his content of consciousness all the other possible grades of truth or reality implied. Tree, creeper and the two orders of blossoms must be viewed globally with that degree of detachment which belongs to real living man in truly human contemplation.

**'BY INFERNO UNAPPROACHED EVER REMAINS':** Joy and suffering, light and darkness, positive and negative, prospective and retrospective orientations of the spirit, are to be understood as poles of the vertical axis of the personality of man As in a plant, where the roots seek darkness geotropically and the twigs seek



light heliotropically, so too the consciousness of man is caught between ambivalent poles.

The detached man who sits under the tree takes up a neutral position between the positive and negative. He avoids the lure of the sense-luxuries of objects of little interest and recedes to wholehearted or lastingly worthwhile interests by placing himself nearer to the negative pole. This would mean being nearer to the trunk of the tree which would represent the master-tendencies in life treated as if tied in a bundle together. Bergsonian metaphysics would lend support to such a picture of 'being' and 'becoming' put together globally and unitively, although finally Bergson tends to stress 'becoming' at the expense of 'pure being', which latter admits no creative evolution.

In thus placing himself correctly in detached neutrality, and if biased at all, more negatively than positively, the Self escapes all possibility of being caught in the alternating phases of the plus or minus of the situation. Self-realization is thus freedom from suffering when one's consciousness is balanced: first vertically between dreams and facts, and secondly between positive and negative vertical states, when established in the neutral fourth state.

(12), P. 157, 'Myth and Ritual in Christianity'. Also see P. 335, Vol. II, A. MacCulloch, 'Mythology of All Races'.

### Part III

Susan has been taking notes to help my dwindling supply of neurons, and included the full text of the very interesting song Michael brought up. Her effervescent intro was worthy of passing along too:

What a great class! So fun to experience it again through the notes! This was all so great. I really like the discussion about tapas at the end and all the different ways people talk about it. Very cool! I

didn't write down but now I remember the idea that there is no formula for tapas — we create our own. This is a very lovely little hint/miniature of the larger philosophy — we are reading, discussing, reconfiguring, trying to find clarity but not because we are trying to fit into something specific or carry out a specific formula. Rather, we are doing all this so that we can allow the creation of our own way from deep within, from the seed bed.

My mind is abuzz with fun stuff — back to the expansion and out of the hole I created over the weekend! Yay!

[yay! indeed.]

Okay, here is the Prince song, source of “what if time’s only reason was to give us all something to fear?” Song is The Truth and here are the lyrics:

Mm  
What if half the things ever said  
Turned out 2 be a lie...  
How will U know the Truth?  
If U were given all the answers  
And U stopped 2 wonder why  
But how will U know the Truth?

Everybody's got a right to love  
Everybody's got a right to lie  
But the choice U make aint no piece of cake  
It aint no MF piece of pie

{clock ticks}

What If time's only reason?  
Was to give us all somethin' 2 fear?  
And if so y'all, the end of the journey's so clear

Questionnaire, What did U stand 4?  
Questionnaire, Who did U save?  
When it gets right down to—wait a minute  
When it gets right down to the nitty of the gritty  
When it gets right down to it U take more than U gave

Everybody got a right to love  
Everybody got a right to lie  
But the choice U make aint no piece of cake  
It aint no MFMF {O (+> screams the following} piece of pie  
{computer blips}

Mmmm oh  
Gotta (Gonna?) tell the truth y'all  
Gotta tell the truth  
Gotta tell the truth y'all  
Gotta tell the truth  
Gotta tell the truth y'all  
Gotta tell the truth

If there was just one day  
That everybody tell the truth  
We'd all trade bank accounts & move to back to Neptune

(I can still hear Michael's beautiful voice singing this!)

\* \* \*

For anyone still awake, I thought my commentary to the Gita's seventh chapter, verse 16 was germane enough to include. I was going to excise the part about the distressed seeking the Absolute, but it all seems interesting enough. We tend to overlap in several categories, after all. Some days we're wise, and some we're distressed, some days we're curious and some just trying to get by:

16) Among doers of the good, four kinds are intent on Me: the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of the goods of life, and the wise.

Four broad categories of seeker are introduced as those who do good. We may at first imagine that the categories range from pathetic to excellent, but shortly Krishna is going to refer to them all as honorable. If we look more closely we can see what he means.

“Doers of the good,” is used in contradistinction to the previous verse that spoke of “foolish evildoers.” As we have often noted, most of us oscillate between doing good and bad things throughout our lives, despite intending to be good consistently. When we are distracted by illusion or “embroiled in maya,” we screw up on a regular basis. We get tripped up by the rotating gunas, and mistake our imaginings for reality and our selfishness for altruism. Therefore we should not presume that we are comfortably in the “doers of the good” category and only far off bad people are the foolish evildoers. What is meant here by “doers of the good” is those who dedicate their lives to spiritual or edifying purposes, while “foolish evildoers” are those who don’t. All of us are flawed, however.

The first category of seekers of truth is the distressed, and Arjuna himself is an excellent example of it. For many of us, only when the house of cards we have carefully constructed crashes down do we turn inward to seek salvation from our limitations. Our health might fail, or a loved one die or become seriously ill. We lose our job and worry about homelessness. We discover we have been living a lie, or barely living at all, and we suddenly confront the emptiness of the life we are caught in. Our self-respect is shattered when our props are knocked out from under us by such circumstances. When things like this happen, the majority of people try to find ways to reconnect with the ordinary course of life. But the one in a thousand who “strives for perfection” looks

inside to seek the Absolute, usually under one of its many pseudonyms, like God, Allah, Jehovah, Shiva, etc. We make a bargain with our favorite form of God: “I will do anything you ask, if only XXX can be rectified.” “Please make XXX well, and I’ll spend my life worshipping you.” You’ve probably done something like this yourself, so I don’t have to list any more examples. Even inveterate atheists call on something like this at times. They might name it Chance or Luck or the Unknown, but it’s the same thing.

As Krishna assures us, in whatever way we relate to the Absolute, it responds in kind. Luck can save as efficiently as Jesus, and it often does. In some way, motivated by distress we pray inside for a connection with a higher power. Who knows if it is just a part of our unconscious, or an actual divine being we are visualizing? And who cares, if what we imagine works. To the degree it is possible, a dialogue with the mystery under any name makes a difference. It can bring us back to life, wake us up to a wider purview.

A lot of people hope for bizarre miracles, based on symbolic allegories found in scriptures, and that can lead them into massive self-delusion. Sorry folks: natural laws are as miraculous as it gets. Raising the dead is about *spiritually* restoring people to life, not reanimating corpses. Making the blind to see is about bringing back *spiritual* vision. Some medical operations can actually restore lost senses, vision especially, though recently hearing too, but that isn’t what the stories are talking about. They are dealing with reconnecting with the Absolute to reanimate the corpse of what was meant to be a life. Your life.

If the drive to know the Absolute because of distress is sustained, it is as good as any of the four types of seekers. But frequently the desire to attain the Absolute wanes as the immediacy of the tragedy wears off and the normal routine is resumed, which is why the category of the distressed is not rated as excellently as the wise, who remain ever united with it.

“Seekers of knowledge” refers to those of us with an unquenchable curiosity. The challenges of life have convinced a

part of us that by understanding what is going on better, we will have more fun and avoid some tragedies. Life is a great game if we know the rules. We discover we have been punished or at least restricted under a system of half-baked beliefs that don't hold up under logical analysis, so we want to find something that makes intelligent sense, to hitch our wagon to. I remember my infinite frustration as a child, wanting to know Why things were the way they were. My father would always tell me, "Because I said so." That was the end of the argument, and it drove me nuts. I was willing to go along with any rules, as long as I understood why they were in place. But most rules are arbitrary or have veiled purposes. Religions have the same mulish bottom line: "Because God said so." "Because that's the way it is." That whole attitude is so frustrating! These are not reasons at all, they are unquestioned assumptions. They are used to disguise an inherent inequality or injustice. Intelligent people want intelligent reasons for things, and asking questions does not automatically imply rebelliousness. Eventually though, in normal life we become pacified. We learn to accept the dictates of our family or religion and stop asking uncomfortable questions. The questions are uncomfortable because the person we're asking learned in their turn to stop asking the same things and just accepted what they were told. They fear they will lose their insecure footing if they readmit their former curiosity into the picture. After all, "curiosity killed the cat." There's a fine adage to get kids to shut up and deny their natural urge to wonder.

So here Krishna is welcoming seekers of knowledge to question and to doubt, because they lead you to grow, to refine your relation to life. But if knowledge in the form of piling up bits of information becomes your modus operandi, then it is another form of death. We must not stop when we have replaced an inadequate formula with a better one. Our quest should take us to the highest plane. Of course, if we stop part way, our rewards will be perfectly proportional to how deeply we've delved. Almost all of us stop part way, once we find our level of satisfaction—or our

level of incompetence per the Peter Principle. Ergo, this category is listed as second best.

The third category is a little problematic. “The seeker of the goods of life” sounds like those enamored of possessions, which is categorically denounced by the Gita. This is evaded in several translations by saying things like “seeker of the good,” “seeker for good in the world” (Aurobindo), or those desiring “to serve humanity” (Easwaran).

The word in question is *artharathi*, which MW translates as “desirous of gaining wealth, desirous of making a profit, selfish.” The *artharathi* is one whose goal is *arthartha*, which means “effective for the accomplishment of the aim in view,” getting us closer to some meaningful sense. Both come from a doubling of *artha*, with its wide range of meanings, including ‘meaning’ itself. Also “aim or purpose; cause, motive, reason; and substance, wealth, money.” *Artharathi* begins to look like “those who find meaning or purpose in being skillful at what they do.” *Artha* is undoubtedly the source of the word ‘art’, along with its relatives like ‘artifice’. My Random House Dictionary describes art as “the quality, production, expression or realm of what is beautiful, or of more than ordinary significance.” I love dictionaries! How hard is it to define a word in the most cogent and succinct manner? And they do it as a matter of course. They are very artful at what they do. A relevant definition of art is the ninth: “skill in conducting any human activity.” I think this gets us to the gist of the *artharathi*, who thus becomes a seeker of skill in the conduct of life. That does indeed sound honorable.

We seek the Absolute to make us skillful and excellent in our daily life. Once again this can have an upside and a downside. It may benefit the world and our place in it, or we can indulge in a lust for power so we can stand out, heightening our ego and doing damage to our surroundings. When Krishna calls this class of seekers honorable, he is of course referring to the former type.

Power-mongers are easy to write off, but many of us engage in a subtle version of it to some degree. An important motivation

for many people in spiritual life is to become highly knowledgeable about their chosen religion or practice, in the belief that other people will love them for it. Secretly we doubt ourselves, but we think that if we just learn enough about a subject and can remember it, people will be drawn to us. We don't believe we are special but our favorite teaching is, so we adopt it as our stand-in. We don't so much lust for this type of power over others as long for it, impelled by the sadness of a neglected soul that craves love but doesn't get enough. It is not necessarily a bad thing, if the resulting stature is handled wisely, but because it exacerbates a schism in the psyche between who we are and who we want to be, it has the potential to go awry. In any case, it is sad whenever a person longs for love but has a hard time finding it.

Finally, the wise are intent on the Absolute because that is the very nature of life. They see that all are one, and doing good is the most natural response to such an awareness. There is an infinite potential to foster happiness, understanding and joy in living through meaningful participation with the people and situations you come in contact with. With so many possibilities, why languish in confusion? Perfection can only be enhanced by participation. Mistakes are opportunities to learn and improve, not occasions for chagrin. The wise are motivated by the needs of the whole picture, not by selfishness, and this puts them at the top of the list.

Part IV

Peggy's art:





## Part V

Susan shared a gloriously touching video to remind us how alive a newborn is. The “hell” of this verse is that divine beings like this can grow up to be bitter, hate-filled, miserable adults. The Gurukula is dedicated to keeping this spirit glowing in every being. We can talk about it all day long and make only slow progress, but this little girl speaks volumes:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fi7MEuuLko>