

## Darsanamala Combined Class Notes 2023

The best comments from our two classes during the digital era, 2005-8 and 2015-18.

### **I Adhyaropa Darsana, Cosmic Projection**

#### **Introduction**

9/22/15

Adhyaropa Darsana  
Cosmic Projection

The Darsanamala class is shaping up to be our deepest ever. Last night's gathering featured the kind of searching discussion you always hope for in a study group, but which is an exceptional occurrence. Fueled perhaps by the fresh apple cider from our backyard orchard, and inspired by Nitya's perfect epitomization in his mini-introduction to the first darsana, we were off and running from the opening gun.

The key idea here at the beginning of Darsanamala is one that is at first very unsettling: what we see and are assured is the real world is in fact a construct, a living museum diorama that bears at most a nodding resemblance to what we can only guess is the real world. Our certitude, reinforced over a long lifetime, is utterly false. Mainly it is a defense mechanism. Of course we are going to recoil at the very thought that this solid world is in fact a mirage. But once we begin to accept it, a marvelous thing happens. The world is understood as a reflection of our consciousness, and it becomes a way to get to know ourself in a much more profound way than before, when we were forging ahead on presumptions and bluster. The world is actually revealing important information about who we are. It has become our guru, the very principle of

enlightenment we so want to align ourself with. The universe is revealed for what it is: an educational non-institution, a Gurukula.

Deb thought she should just print out this first essay and read it every morning before starting her day. She admitted it was a strange thing to question our experience, which seems so obvious, so direct. We see interactions and we are sure we know what they mean, but then we get into situations where our convictions meet with strong opposition, and we are forced to reassess them. She recalled a time when she was passionate about an animal welfare issue and Nitya accused her of merely projecting the non-self onto the Self. She was furious! But then she could see how most of what she was doing about it was manipulating her own beliefs and ideas, with little actual action involved. If we really believe in an issue we should do something about it, and not just align our beliefs so we appear blameless.

Because we bring our personal experience into the confection that is our relation to the world, we can never touch bedrock reality: it is all our personalized interpretation of it. Fortunately our individualized take on reality is not completely isolated from the rest. It is not madness—it has a system. We may not grasp the system, but we can intuit it from the evidence of a functional world, of a oneness that knits us all together despite our many flaws and idiosyncrasies.

The real miracle here is how we can understand each other at all. Each of us has built up a unique perception of the world from the moment we were born, and this has been compounded for our entire stay. And yet, as Nitya puts it, “there is a mysterious element operating identically in all individuated minds that makes the compositions of concepts almost similar at the transactional level.” I like that wording—not just similar, but “almost similar,” which is not very similar at all. But it works, and that seems undeniable. So what is going on here?

Jan wanted to know what this mysterious element was, and there's the rub. It has to remain mysterious. If we label it God or Absolute or Self or Maya, we may feel we have solved the mystery, but we have merely killed it. We have buried the mystery in a set of static concepts, which we can then manage to suit our fancy. What the mystery does as a mystery is of inestimable value: it refutes our petty certainties. Remaining out of our grasp, it tantalizes us to reach for the stars.

Andy has been reading a lot of Ramana Maharshi lately, and he noted how the Maharshi regularly subverted peoples' questions by insisting there was only One. While we are full of questions we can never accept this One. Andy felt the One referred to that no one could accept, was the mystery. Regarding ultimate questions, we are better off not imagining we know anything for sure. Then we remain open to all there is.

I added that that was why Ramana Maharshi was always asking people to wonder "Who am I?" Or perhaps, "I am the question Who?" It evades all our descriptions. The minute you define the mystery, you lose it. We have to employ a somewhat unusual technique, to not try to pin down what everything is but to hold back our learned need to define it.

So we are not searching for an ideal definition, we are letting go of defining, which has inculcated itself deep into our being. This will be a gradual and somewhat demanding process as we go through Narayana Guru's careful guru-instruction. That's what Darsanamala is about. It is like learning to float in water, when everyone about you is flailing with all their might. While Narayana Guru got the big flash of ten thousand suns rising in his mind all at once, he had spent decades in intense contemplation and searching self-inquiry prior to that supernova event. It seems that Ramana had it just happen to him, so he represents a very different take on how to access the mystery. This brings to mind an excerpt from

Nitya's *Therapy and Realization in the Bhagavad Gita*, a series of talks to a psychology convention in Sydney, Australia in 1975:

What was right for Ramana Maharshi could not be expected to be right for Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi wanted to fight the British nation. He wanted to establish satyagraha. He strove to do these things and much more. But if you go to Ramana Maharshi and say "Come out for a satyagraha," he will only go deeper into his meditation, because his nature is such. You should know what your nature is, and you should not work on a spirituality that does not agree with your nature.

People come and ask me, "Could you please tell me what kind of meditation I should have?" I keep quiet. Then they think I haven't heard their question. They ask a second time and a third time. Then I ask them if they would like some orange juice. They make their own conclusions and go away.

Nobody can give a meditation to another person unless they know exactly what that person wants or what he is like. If meditation is not to be given from one person to another, one must get into that state from within oneself. Each person has to decide what he wants and where he stands. If one does relate to another person, just as a patient goes to a psychologist, and through a number of sittings they can get into a kind of rapport in which they understand each other, then it is possible for one to give the other certain guidelines. But even then it is all worked out from the inside.

By abandoning socially constructed reality, we realize we are unique and in the cosmic sense truly alone. This can make us utterly grateful to the mystery for keeping us sane and whole and in contact with our fellow beings, yet it leads to a whole new set of problems. We are no longer searching for how to fit in, but of how

to express our unfettered uniqueness in a healthy and satisfying manner.

The class selected the wood stove in the room as an example of how we all perceive differently, which is fine as far as it goes, but such common material objects are seldom the cause of our troubles. It's the ensembles or gestalts where our imagination has free rein to run amuck. Later in the chapter, Narayana Guru is going to teach us that these constructs can be harrowing sources of paranoia, that many of the projections of the mind are "terrible and empty of content, like a phantom city." Here at the outset, by contrast, Nitya is gently introducing us to them:

Although consciousness flows without cessation, the mind introduces breaks in that flow in much the same way as commas and periods are used in the text on this page. Each element of judgment, so introduced, stands alone as a unit of understanding. When viewed in terms of logical relevancy or epistemological belongingness, several such units are interrelated and recognized by the mind as one whole. These complex units are very often confections which are admixtures of percepts arising from the external and the individual's subjective value sense.

Our overall outlook paints a certain coloration over everything we perceive and conceive, and we will be examining this closely in the weeks ahead. Discerning the private tinting we have gotten used to is a major step in personal liberation, and it allows us a chance to detect the colorations of our fellows also, and thereby make allowances and become more tolerant.

I solicited examples of the effects of personal colorations of the psyche, as this is something we all could share. We can learn a lot from each other! Each of us must have numerous incidents we can contribute.

Susan offered a fine, non-personal example. She had just heard an interview with memoirist Mary Karr tell about a trick she used in her classes at Syracuse University. She is famously intense and aggressive, and she has a gentle Buddhist teacher friend she uses. The students are familiar with both of them. Her friend comes in to the class and starts arguing, often vehemently, with Karr, and afterwards she has them recount what happened. No matter how rude her friend has been and how peaceful and sweet Karr remained, the students always reported that she was the aggressor. It was clearly their preconceived notion, and they tailored the action to fit it.

This reminded me of a psychology professor I once read about who always staged a crime in his class. He had a friend burst in wielding a knife and stab him, with fake blood and all. Then the man would stand still and look straight at the students for about 15 seconds before running away. Some time later, after the professor got up and cleaned off and the mayhem quieted down, the perp was included in a “police lineup” of possible suspects. Even though the students had gotten a perfect look in bright light at him, identification was very little better than random chance. Mostly they picked someone who looked like a bad guy. This is a shocking finding that implies that many people are wrongly incarcerated on the basis of what is essentially prejudice. And it is not only they, but we, who are imprisoned by this psychological defect.

I have a couple of personal accounts I’ll write up later, but since I already do most of the talking, I wanted to leave this to the class. It’s an invaluable exercise.

Deb remembered how, shortly after her mother died, our daughter Emily was in college and wasn’t going to come home for Christmas for the first time ever. Christmas is a big deal in our family, a real loving close family time with lots of treats and fun. So Deb was very sad. For the first time ever, she remembers looking at our beautiful Christmas tree, bursting with cherished

ornaments and cheerful lights, and hating it. Yes, it was obvious that the tree wasn't the problem, but she loathed it nonetheless with all her pent-up disappointment.

And she recalled the oft-told tale of talking with Nataraja Guru while wearing a beautiful sari someone had lent her. He said, "They call that green, don't they?" She got the message with a jolt. She had immediately thought, no it *is* green. But the Guru's words had shaken her out of her sure identification with the surface quality. Green was only a label, after all.

Jan brought up an important issue at this early stage, that there is a process of letting go of the things we are holding onto involved here. It wouldn't be so bad if the problem was simple, but we can't even see what we need to let go of. She is perplexed by the many layers involved in how we conceive of ourselves. We might say that those who aren't perplexed just aren't paying attention.

This is so crucial! So often the very factors that oppress us the most are the ones we cling to the hardest, without even realizing it. Our psyche is that paradoxical! So we could make an excellent beginning by examining what we believe most fervently; we'll do more on this later. All we have to know for now is that we *can* let go, and though in the back of our mind we may fear terrible consequences for not behaving properly, it will actually make our life more enjoyable and satisfying if we can overcome our resistance. As Deb said, we get caught up in behaving correctly instead of just being there. Much of our early training was in how to behave.

Andy cautioned that the process of letting go should not be conflated with Western psychotherapy, which identifies problems and is content to make the patient upset with them. In Vedanta that is only the preliminary work. We are meant to go all the way to realize our identity with the Totality, as in *tat tvam asi*. Going just halfway is misery making, and worse in many cases than doing

nothing. The aim is nothing short of full freedom. In *Therapy and Realization in the Bhagavad Gita*, Nitya makes this point:

In the Gita, Krishna wants Arjuna to know what his dharma is and how he should perform it. Implied in this is a reevaluation of the value system to which man should conform, and of the proper functioning of those values in our life. For that, Krishna, as a teacher, is also doing what the psychologist is doing to his patient. The psychologist is not there to provide a plank for the patient to lean on which will always be held up by the therapist. Rather he should help him to stand on his own feet. That is possible only when the patient obtains an insight into his own problems, his own being. When he knows what he is and how he should function, he will be able to function by himself. The very basic attempt of a psychologist is to make the patient realize himself.

If self-realization is the motive of the psychologist, why do we stop half way? Why don't we push it all the way until the patient is no longer a patient but a student, and further, not a seeker but a seer? Krishna functions here not merely as a therapist, he offers much more than therapy. He educates his patient. His patient becomes illuminated. He is no longer simply a patient in relation to a psychologist – the seeker has become the seer.

Paul brought up an essential idea relating to the second paragraph:

Each time the mind becomes aware of a concept there arises along with it a witnessing consciousness of the concept as the agent of its knower. This agent is recognized as "I." In the process of relating the concept to a percept, and after such objectivization, relation is established between the subject "I"



and the objectivized concept-percept complex. It is in such an interrelationship of concept, percept, and the agent of awareness that knowledge is experienced.

Paul figured that the agent of awareness—the I sense—must remain in a neutral place, or we get into trouble. If our knowledge is a byproduct of past memories and past experience, we tend to give the small s self too much authority over what we perceive as truth. By returning to the deep sleep state, the sushupti, we restore our neutrality every night.

I agreed that ideally our awareness is centered in the vertical parameter, which stretches from sushupti to turiya, or alpha to omega, all the time, day and night. This is our evolution from the seed state to full development of our potential. Meditation and related activities, like enthusiastic creative endeavors, keep us in tune with our vertical dharma. The small s self is a composite of horizontal percepts and concepts (mostly concepts, really), and to the extent we identify with them we are drawn out into the periphery of consciousness, where we experience the disconnection with our true being. Letting go of those identities can be anxiety producing, if we aren't confident of the ground of the Absolute we are always supported by. This calls to mind the quote from the Yoga Darsana I reprinted in the Introduction:

To those who are constantly under the spell of their ego-infatuation, forgetting or forgoing the ego is fraught with the fear of being destroyed. Such a prospect always brings to them a plaguing sense of insecurity. So they always prefer to have some sense object to be associated with, or other paranoiac people to make friends with. This emotional dependence and sense indulgence keeps the mind always at the periphery of consciousness, and it becomes incapacitated either to dive deep or to fly high.

The vertical parameter is infinite; the horizontal is limited. While maintaining our expertise in horizontal matters, those who stay with this study will have the opportunity to relinquish its implacable dominance over their lives.

These notes actually only scratch the surface of a very stimulating class. I'll call this good for now because these issues will be examined in depth as we make our way along. Yes, for some there is hesitation on the brink, as is only natural. But we are in good company. Any pressure to evolve is voluntary, and loving support is abundant. It will be most fascinating to see where this leads. Aum.

## Part II

An excellent introduction to the basis of the work and its authors may be found in Nitya's talk, [\*Nataraja Guru and Samadhi\*](#).

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Dipika kindly wrote, from the city of myriad mumbles, Mumbai:

What a great beginning to this garland of Knowledge. It's Ganesh Chaturthi in India today [Sept. 17, this year]. The birth of Ganesh 'the remover of all Obstacles'. May our minds be rid of all obstacles as we gain the key to understanding. Ellora is magnificent....can't wait to explore this :)

Aum

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Jan has just read *The Art of Loving*, by social psychologist Erich Fromm (1900-1980). The book includes an essay from “Love in the Life of Erich Fromm” by Rainer Funk and translated by Marion Hausner Pauck, which Jan has quoted below. In case you aren’t familiar with the word, biophile is defined as “One that loves or has a strong affinity for life and all living organisms.”  
Jan’s message:

Here are some of the ideas of Erich Fromm that impressed me which I talked about in class. In focusing on the need for love, the deeper self, and the inner obstacles many people have to loving, I thought his ideas were relevant. These words below aren’t his but are written about him:

Human ability to love is grounded in the “biophile,” in being attracted by the living...The decisive question is now whether and how humans can succeed in feeling the original need for love and how to express it. A completely decisive entrance to the often buried and repressed need for love is the perception of one’s own inner obstacles.

The question of self-understanding and self-analysis, the entrance to the unconscious strife and imagination, as they become recognizable in dreams, but also in peculiarities of one’s character and symptoms, now plays a greater role in shaping Fromm’s daily life. He takes almost one hour every day to analyze his dreams and to meditate, and to practice concentration and physical exercise...(then it talked about how Zen Buddhism helped him and other mystical traditions).

The way to the inner life that Fromm practices is directed not toward inwardness and seclusion from the world but rather to another, namely more creative, more sensible and loving encounter

with reality, with others, and with oneself. Exactly because this encounter is also always defined by distorted experiences in relationships, a way to the inner life is to overcome those impediments that have been built not only by one's relationship to one's parents but are also caused by society."

The end of this essay also inspired me in describing how in his late years, Fromm really lived his ideal of loving life and people:

"The more Fromm succeeded in recognizing the inner hindrances to his ability to love and to conquer them, the more he was able to practice his capability of loving as though it were a sensual need. Whoever came to know Fromm in the last decade of his life was able to observe that he experienced his capability to love as a *need*, to be related to other persons in a loving way. To be able to express his love became for him in a fact a need he could not renounce, and one which he satisfied as much as possible.

Because of Jan's mention, I looked Fromm up and found this list of quotes, which almost all sounded like they could have come right from our class. So here they are:

*Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence.*

*Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve.*

*Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.*

*To die is poignantly bitter, but the idea of having to die without having lived is unbearable.*

*The quest for certainty blocks the search for meaning. Uncertainty is the very condition to impel man to unfold his powers.*

*Only the person who has faith in himself is able to be faithful to others.*

*If a person loves only one other person and is indifferent to all others, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment, or an enlarged egotism.*

*Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction.*

*Not he who has much is rich, but he who gives much.*

*One cannot be deeply responsive to the world without being saddened very often.*

\* \* \*

Lastly, I just thought I'd reprint my email invitation to the class:

The Adhyaropa Darsana begins with its own brief introduction, and ends with a larger essay on Cosmic Projection. To my mind, this sketch is worth the price of the book all by itself. The element of the psyche it illuminates continues to baffle and subvert us at every turn, and expanding our awareness of it can lead to a much clearer orientation to our surroundings and insight into our ongoing mental state. How can you beat that?

Part III

I've been going over material for inclusion in the new Nitya website. This morning I was rereading Nitya's interview in Cosmos Magazine, from around 1974. After his classic description of meditation, it has a tie-in with the very material we have been discussing in class, led by Andy and Jan. After I locate that precious magazine in the archives, the whole thing will be posted on the website. In the meantime, here's the relevant excerpt:

### Nitya Interview with Cosmos Magazine

Cosmos – Do you meditate?

Nitya – My whole life is a meditation.

C – What does meditation mean to you?

N – It means bringing my whole life's interest and behavior in tune with the world and the values which I consider high. I meditate on how I can always harmonize my inside and outside to a pattern of value which is most endearing to me.

N – Instead of the sophisticated interviews which psychiatrists have with their patients, if they were instead to cultivate a personal relationship, not as therapist and patient but as friends, and encourage the patient to see more of themselves instead of only their disease, the treatment would likely have a much more successful outcome.

Here in the West the psychologist has been pointing only to the disease and focusing the patient's mind to the negative aspect of himself, when the patient has so many other positive aspects which could be shown to him, and from this he will benefit, if he is allowed to do so. The other part will heal when the best in a person is brought out.

I would like to see the frontiers of science open up to the possibility of scientific research into the spiritual realms. One field

into which they had been moving and then came to an abrupt stop is psychoanalysis. Freud taught that by analysis of the patient's psyche we could tell what was wrong and then could correct it. I say take it further. Establish what is wrong, but also what is right. Treat them not as patients but as students. Then psychoanalysis can lead to Self-realization.

A tendency to move in that direction was shown by people like some at Princeton, Carl Rogers and Erich Fromm, who had a conference with Suzuki on this. Their intention was to take it beyond the therapeutic level to the level of understanding and realization. The alternative therapy should be an alternative *to* therapy; that is, learning, studying and teaching realization.