

## I Adhyaropa Darsana, Cosmic Projection

### Verse 1

It was in the beginning as if non-existence—  
this world, like a dream; thereafter,  
everything was projected  
by the will alone of the Supreme Lord.

8/30/5

Our in-depth examination of Darsanamala got off to a terrific start with a nice group of 11 or 12, including Peter Moras from Sonoma, who was one of my co-instigators at the first Portland Gurukula in 1971.

The first verse of the first darsana, or vision, begins with the moment of creation: mysteriously, we move from nothing to something. What's that all about? We know, we have an inner certainty, that we exist. We also can look back and imagine a time when we did not exist, and peering into the future we realize it's likely that we will cease to exist at some point. Our present certainty of existence is called *sat*.

Narayana Guru says "as if" non-existence, because we presume there was always something. It only seems non-existent because we weren't there to observe. Suddenly, or gradually for that matter, we have become aware of a world, which includes us. This awareness is called *chit*.

Without awareness, it doesn't matter what exists. With awareness, everything matters to some degree. Things which matter a lot draw our interest, and our interest produces awe and wonder. We find such states enjoyable, and, as Mick pointed out,

we find the absence of interesting or pleasurable states miserable. The importance of what we relate to in this world, its value, is covered by the term *ananda*.

Sat-chit-ananda is one unit of... nonexistent existence or is it existent nonexistence?

The first darsana is the vision of cosmic projection. We have been molded by many stories about how the world came to be projected into existence. If we reduce our thinking to just what we know for sure, these are all hearsay. We realize we are projecting imaginary pictures we have visualized in the past onto the present. Narayana Guru considers this a prime cause of our confusion, and he is asking us in a most gentle fashion to abandon our speculative thinking and for at least an instant see the present as new and fresh, untainted by the past. Our vasanas and karma and memories and all that make the past a heavy weight. It requires a stroke of genius or a stroke of luck to set all that aside for just a brief moment, to be able to look at the world around us without our customary projections.

Verse I,1 of Darsanamala asks us for a sincere commitment to begin its profound study. In a way we should already be enlightened, since if we cannot step out of our projective dream world to join Narayana Guru in his unconditioned perspective we won't really learn anything. We'll be struggling to squeeze his vast vision into the small box of our habitual mode of thinking. It's like riding a wave: you have to stay out front, cutting through expertly. Once you fall just a smidgen behind, there is tremendous turbulence and you are at the mercy of powerful forces.

Henri Bergson concludes his essay *An Introduction to Metaphysics* with a perfect image of intuition. Metaphysical intuition is precisely the enlightened attitude needed in this study, and indeed in all endeavors.

There is nothing mysterious in this faculty. Every one of us has had the occasion to exercise it to a certain extent. Any one of us, for instance, who has attempted literary composition, knows that when the subject has been studied at length, the materials all collected, and the notes all made, something more is needed in order to set about the work of composition itself, and that is an often painful effort to place ourselves directly at the heart of the subject, and to seek as deeply as possible an impulse, after which we need only let ourselves go. This impulse, once received, starts the mind on a path where it rediscovers all the information it had collected, and a thousand other details besides; it develops and analyzes itself into terms which could be enumerated indefinitely. The farther we go, the more terms we discover; we shall never say all that could be said, and yet, if we turn back suddenly upon the impulse and try to seize it, it is gone; for it was not a thing, but the direction of a movement, and though infinitely extensible, it is infinitely simple. (pp. 89-90)

The infinitely simple key is to place ourself at the heart of the subject, instead of beating around the bush with endless theories and beliefs. The heart is the same Karu or core of Narayana Guru's other masterwork, *Atmopadesa Satakam*, the One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction. When we break free of our projections, however briefly, we automatically sink into that primary place.

Jan's six-year-old son sent a question with her last night. He wondered where love resides. People say it's the heart, but he doesn't think so. He thinks it's located in God. I think Louis is very wise, as long as he doesn't think God is somewhere else, but knows that the Love of God or the Divine or the Absolute or the Self resides in the core of all beings. When we place ourselves in That, we are prepared to begin our study.

9/29/15

Adhyaropa Darsana, Verse 1

It was in the beginning as if non-existence,  
this world, like a dream; thereafter,  
everything was projected  
by the will alone of the Supreme Lord.

Nataraja Guru's:

*In the beginning there was  
Non-existence indeed!  
Dreamwise then again by mere willing  
Everything existent created He, the Lord Supreme.*

In this first actual verse commentary, Nitya touches many of the themes that will be explored throughout the opening darsana, and beyond too, making for one of the longest chapters in the entire book. Because of its lengthy reading coupled with a late start, we only addressed a couple of issues, and saved much to talk about in later classes. Nevertheless, despite Deb being nearly tongue-tied at the outset, the community mind burgeoned into an absorbing and uplifting investigation. It was as if, in the beginning, we sat in a condition of nonexistence, and then, like a marvelous dream, captivating insights began fluttering into our awareness. It's quite a dynamic situation we find ourselves in!

The purport of the verse relates to many levels of existence, ranging from the personal to the cosmic scale of the universe as a whole. As usual, our focus is mainly on the practical implications for the immediate implementation by a seeker of truth. Nitya speaks to the pairing of the existential truth of our perceived world with an inner sense of awe and wonder:

Higher truth... becomes all the more dear when one knows it intimately. Each time we are aware of what is happening around us, a new experience can bring with it a new sense of wonder or intrigue. Inherent in this wonder or sense of concern is the realization of the newness of the experience; newness and spontaneity are factors in the sense of wonder.

Implicit here is that by truly seeing, everything is revealed to be new and delightful. We are not stepping into the same river twice. However, if we rely on our stock of memories to interpret our experience, which is the brain's default setting, our experience is deadened to the precise extent that we substitute our conceptualization for the reality that is offering itself to us. This reminds me of a favorite quote of Franz Kafka:

It is not necessary that you leave the house. Remain at your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be wholly still and alone. The world will present itself to you for its unmasking, it can do no other, in ecstasy it will writhe at your feet.

This advice was tacitly followed by Deb in her opening comments. She voiced the impossibility of adding anything to what Nitya had so eloquently presented, yet in that very act of surrender she had a vision of Athena being born from the forehead of Zeus, emerging fully formed as a warrior ready to do battle. Was Athena not “projected by the will alone of the Supreme Lord”? Moreover, bursting from the forehead is a protolinguistic image of creation by thought, which is exactly like a dream. In a wise person the thoughts emerge “ready for battle.” They are already well developed and can uphold mercy and justice by driving back the darkness of ignorance. We were witness to a small miracle: it was as if the ancient Greek myth and Narayana Guru's darsana had

come out together holding hands, two versions of a single truth, to take a bow at the inception of our study.

Very likely thinking of Bill and Nancy, who design and build houses (ours for instance), Nitya uses home construction to illustrate the relationship of thought and action in the willing of the “Supreme Lord,” who is, after all, each and every one of us:

Let us say a man designs in his mind the construction of a house. He has a mental picture of its dimensions, the number of rooms and their uses, its situation, decoration, and furnishings. He may picture the life of his family in that house, and even himself living with them a mental existence in a mental construction. But the house can be called an accomplished fact in the transactional sense only when it is transmuted from the mental world into the world of three-dimensional existence, built of substantial materials and with people inhabiting it. Yet the actual house could not have been brought into existence without the prior conception of it. Similarly, this world which I experience now exists as an integral part of my beingness. It may not have come as a consequent result of a person’s prior concepts, but in and through its continuous process of organization we see a steady, progressive actualization of logically reducible ideas of integrated forms and interrelationships of properties.

In other words, this is the opposite of randomness. If the universe were truly random, like a blind watchmaker haplessly shuffling elemental building blocks and accidentally creating a functional system, we might expect to see a lot of worthless, dysfunctional junk lying around all over the place. All the random experiments that didn’t work out. But we don’t. We see instead “a steady, progressive actualization of logically reducible ideas of integrated forms and interrelationships of properties.” It should easily tip us

off that there is some form of intelligence at work, some kind of patterning. Intelligent materialists at least admit this must be so, hypothesizing an infinite number of prior universes that are lending their infrequent success stories to the supporting substance of our present abode as a kind of template. As noted before, mathematician Roger Penrose has taken a close scientific look at randomness, and calculated that it would take at least a million times longer to produce a modestly complex animal than it has here, on the order of several quadrillion years. Something mysterious is speeding up evolution to a breakneck pace! Or we can imagine a million or two prior universes, which from our standpoint must remain purely imaginary—as if non-existent.

We don't know what this mysterious organizing force is, and we don't have to, though we give it names like Paramesvara. But we could easily be filled with gratitude toward the mystery. We might even become worshipful, since it has given us All This, scot-free. As we know, the best worship is to live our life to the fullest possible extent, maximizing our freedom and compassion and joy and mutual support. That's what Narayana Guru and Nitya are trying to get across to us. In terms of the house analogy, we have a fixed structure in our way of thinking that circumscribes our ability to find fulfillment. We picture things a certain way, and arrange our life to neatly fill the rooms we have decorated with our style of mental framing. Unfortunately, many of us have erected faulty homes, with strong shutters to keep out the light, and dark and uncomfortable furnishings. Many opportunities are excluded. If the world is based on our dreaming, why don't we dream of intriguing, exciting possibilities? It's not that we should ignore "reality," or what is more properly called "actuality," but we are doing enthusiastic psychic lifting rather than weighty self-suppression. We are sharing our smiles, once we rediscover them, and not so much our tears.

The “Supreme Lord” here is one of a number of ways Narayana Guru will address this underlying principle of organization. Nitya was fond of Spinoza’s *Substance*; you may have noticed how he sneaked it in:

As an alternative to the hypothesis of an independent creator creating the world with whatever means he has at his disposal, let us look at the very stuff called “world,” which includes us also in it. Think of it unitively as one primeval substance. It should not be difficult to see how a substratum can remain the same in its essence, without any fundamental change, and yet transform itself into a variety of individuated forms. When physicists speak of the conservation of energy and the transformation of matter, they refer to the same truth. The unchanging substratum, which is willing its own transformation into the manifested world, in the present context is called *paramesvara*.

Jan and Paul were drawn to the classic idea of the universe observing itself through the agency of the human mind, or really through every mind, which can be a wholly unitive idea. It is gratifying to think of ourselves as essential elements in the grand play of meaningful unfoldment that is our universe. Nitya elaborates on the definition of the overarching principle that Narayana Guru begins with, bringing us in explicitly:

Such a universal mind as we have referred to is called *paramesvara*. *Param* means “Absolute.” *Isvara* is derived from the root *it*, meaning “that which rules.” In every unit of experience of each individual this principle operates. Moreover, it does so in such a manner that all the parts of each experience are held together in a way which makes the whole experience unitively meaningful. This occurs in spite of the heterogeneous



functioning of the parts. This principle can be seen to be of the same nature as creative intelligence, so it can manifest as the awareness of each individual mind. It is as if the Universal is observing itself through the action of a properly focused human mind. Another aspect of this universal mind is its ability to interpret visibles in terms of calculables.

Proper focus is the key. More often we view the world “through a glass, darkly.”

I don't know if you stopped to wonder what that last sentence in that excerpt means. It implies that there is a level of existence that is behind or beyond the surface. There is more to life than just what we perceive, and it's what we make of what we perceive that shapes our existence. Moreover, making meaning is not just an aberrance of deranged humanity, it is intrinsic to the whole. All creatures are interpreting their perceptions in comprehensible terms, and these are capable of apparently infinite refinement. If one were to look for the meaning of life, this would be a good place to begin. The universal aspect means there is something unifying in our calculations: they aren't simply personal interpretations disconnected from the whole. If we are honest, we can infer this from the coherence that, defying all logic, makes itself apparent in the working of the world:

We can rightly infer that the world of appearance is a changing flux and that the only unchanging factor is the one witnessing consciousness. Of course, there is a constant element in the wakeful world of transaction that gives the contiguity to proceed from one wakeful experience to another period of wakeful experience. We have, however, to look for this mysterious element as a transpersonal factor.

In the present verse the Guru does not say that the world is dreamed by the individual. He attributes its existence to an

overriding principle which, like the human mind, can project its ideas in such a cogent and coherent manner that it should be possible for anyone to gain some understanding from and about it.

This is the kind of insight that should make us ecstatic. Nitya was good at expressing the roots of ecstasy in calm, measured tones, so that his listeners wouldn't get carried away. Yet we don't want to miss it on that account. It's just that we are guided to experience ecstasy as a deep pool of quiet assurance, rather than a maddened display explosively being acted out.

Pursuing the theme Jan introduced last week, Brenda waxed rhapsodic about letting go of our psychological strictures to achieve deeper communion with others, and with the All. She of course has put this into practice for all her adult life, so she herself is an excellent example. While having been raised in an intensely repressive household, she has found ways to emerge from its gloom to be a sweetly smiling light to all her friends and family.

This led to a discussion of the recent performance of Hamlet in the prison that several of us attended, as well as the subsequent dialogue at the Unitarian Church about arts in the prison programs. As in every aspect of life, a balance must be struck between full liberty and abject constraint. A great play in itself demonstrates this: by assuming a certain role, certain limitations, meaning is conveyed. The real tension for those who contribute to prison programs, is that almost all the things that are most needed are banned there. There can be no touching or other intimacy between prisoners and volunteers. Real feelings and relationships are not allowed, even though they are precisely what is lacking, and their absence is likely the primary reason for criminal behavior in the first place. The rules are meant to keep everyone safe, and they do to a degree, but mainly they add to the punitive and vindictive atmosphere, and make healthy growth nearly impossible. Balance

is never the objective: prisoners and guards maintain an extreme polarization, which is seldom if ever challenged. According to Deb, this is even harder on the guards, who suffer an abysmal early death rate.

And as Hamlet well knew, these taboos are everywhere. All the world's a prison, "A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons." While not as obvious as those who are physically locked up, people on the outside confine themselves in dungeons of their own making, or ones that have been made for them, and they have been invited to step inside and remain there, for the good of all and the grace of God. How often we voluntarily imprison ourselves, even as the door stands open! To me, that was Narayana Guru's main motivation: everywhere ostensible free human beings were imprisoned in mental chains of impossible tenacity, and he wanted everyone to recognize that none of it was necessary. At the very least we could take steps to reduce our self-imposed burdens.

We are brought to the close of Nitya's magnificent exposition with an affirmation of the intrinsic divinity of life. It is not bestowed by some outside force—divinity (or whatever you prefer to call it) is within every drop:

If the world is like a dream, can it be called real? The answer is no, it is not real. But if the world is unreal, how could it have a creator? Are we not forced to say that if the effect is unreal, the cause must also be unreal?

This leads us to a position where the initial assertion of a creator as a reality is cancelled out by the unreality of the creation. This in turn brings us to the awareness of a numinous but indiscernible principle that is behind the phenomena of both creator and creation. So we are led to the conclusion that the status of such a reality has an existence which is established *in*

*itself*, and which is independent of all other possible forms of existence.

If the world is unreal, at least there's a vast amount of it, and it's fascinating and intriguing enough to keep us interested forever. So we can drop trying to define exactly where it falls, and simply embrace it. This is the first big step on our journey of a thousand miles. Aum.

## Part II

As promised, I will reprint Swami Vidyananda's commentary on each verse, preserved in Nataraja Guru's *Integrated Science of the Absolute*. The Guru's hand is clearly evident by the density of the translation, and though he promised to add his own ideas in parentheses, his perspective is present throughout. It makes me grateful for Nitya's much more transparent interpretations. This version is nonetheless invaluable for hinting at the original atmosphere, with brilliant disciples attending on one of the most extraordinary gurus in all of history—can it be a mere 100 years ago? Vidyananda's commentary was approved and modified by Narayana Guru himself. (The background given in ISOA is reprinted in the class notes for the Introduction.) Vidyananda wrote of this verse:

In the beginning (i.e., at its upper limit which has to be distinguished together with other similar limits), there was non-existence. Posteriorly to this (in pure time), the Supreme Lord (*paramesvara*) when creation was to begin, by His mere willing created all this (i.e., gave it a conceptual status different from what was merely nominal), just as in the case of a dream (having its own virtuality within consciousness).

The stuff that dreams are made of is admittedly unreal to the extent that they belong to the world of ideas. In the same manner the world can be said to be unreal to the extent that its stuff is of the same order as His will. Whatever reality there was at this limiting point can be attributed to the Supreme Lord, rather than to His creation. The Taittiriya Upanishad supports this two-fold point of view. The world as objectively manifested apart from the Lord was there equated to nothing, tentatively accepting the principle of contradiction between existence and non-existence.

In Vedàntic parlance the upper limit set by the term *agre* (before creation or in the beginning) corresponds to the *pàramàrthika* or ultimate reality (i.e., the vertical), while *punab* (thereafter) refers to the *vyàvahàrika* or work-a-day practical reality (i.e., the horizontal).

It should be noted that according to Sanskrit convention, a work of this kind has to indicate the subject-matter, and also imply something by way of adoring the most high value of the Absolute. This requirement is only tacitly fulfilled by virtue of his beginning the very first verse with the letter *a* which, according to the Bhagavad Gita (X.33), is equated with the Absolute:

Among syllabic letters I (i.e., the Absolute) am the A. . . .

The first word of the verse, moreover, refers to something existing, because the word *àsid* suggests something existent (in the ontological sense of *sat*). Because of referring to *sat*, this word occupying the very first position in the verse, can also be considered as fulfilling the requirements of an auspicious beginning required by the same convention referred to above.

Moreover, the verse later on equates existence with the Supreme Lord, and further confirms and complies with this same requirement.

Part III

Deb contributed two of her poems that relate to the class:

### Moving Through the Desert

The snake winds his body

over rocky ground,

sand pulling

on shedding skin,

scraping off the slough

of old desire,

the life now too small,

and unable to breathe

he winds and pulls,

pushing forward,

moving into open breath,

out of constriction,

leaving behind

that last moment,

the tightness,  
into this touch,  
the limitless air.

\* \* \*

### Her Gaze Never Drops

The muse is angry,  
her words sting,  
she wants to be inside you,  
a deep place you rarely find.  
It is like a seed, the shell broken.  
Through the cracks, words.  
Here, this is yours,  
see the clear tunnel.  
Where have you been?

The fist can be hot, the sound hard.

Listening is our only option,  
we can't turn away.  
We stand in the open,  
listening to crackling vibrations,  
waiting, following our only path.

### Part IV

I know we already have too much reading here at the beginning, but I'm sure it will settle down soon enough. This is

just such exciting material! And most of us won't bother to read this far anyway. For the few of you who have, I've been proofing a wonderful talk by Nitya given at a Nataraja Guru's samadhi day celebration. I'll be putting it up on the website in its entirety on [Nitya's website](#), under the title *Nataraja Guru and Samadhi*, but this excerpt is so perfectly suited to the foundation of our study I want to include it here also:

All values may be centripetally reduced to one prime value, the value of values so to speak, which for Narayana Guru was freedom. Any person can be deprived of freedom in relation to their bodily senses, mind, intellect or emotions. A proper perspective is needed to diagnose what causes permanent distortion in one's personality and what can give sustaining stamina all through life.

One should know what causes defects in the personality, defects in seeing truth, defects in conforming to moral norms. According to Narayana Guru, seeing truth requires a lot of vigilance. Being awake and attentive is a sign of energetic existence in which a value is nurtured as the quality of life, the excellence of life. The other possibility is to become more and more sloppy, lazy and wayward. Such a person will cling onto the wrong supports. We can lean on God, truth, duty or integrity for instance, or we can lean on Fate, inactivity, lack of discrimination, or even succumb to fear. A person can tend to be irresponsible on the plea that he has no integrity.

Narayana Guru knew that if you wanted peoples' sloppiness to be corrected you should first make them active in their assigned works. He showed by his own example how work can be done perfectly. More recently, in the field of education John Dewey has suggested that a child should not be allowed to do anything halfway and give up. The child should be made to go to the logical



end and put perfection into finishing what it has begun. This was the modus operandi in Narayana Guru's life and teachings also.

In the core of human consciousness the Guru observed an oscillation of awareness between the periphery and the center, and between the center and an unknown depth. He was well aware that most people would find this difficult to grasp. He first visualized a vertical parameter going from the birth of a person to their death. He saw how a newborn child gets into encounters with all the incidents of life from the moment it wakes up until it goes to sleep. It's like a lump of clay sitting on the wheel of life on which social consciousness is acting like a potter. The horizontal occurrences of each day make impressions on the child which ultimately fashion it into a finished product. Each touch of contact registered in the five senses leaves an ineradicable impact on the growing psyche. Some touches are painful, some are pleasurable, and some are even boring. But through it all the person is vertically changing, not only growing physically but also in consciousness.

The person begins to see some things as favorable to him and some as against him. Over time he may learn to associate the favorable with a benevolent God and the painful with Fate or even the Devil. It is as if there are now two potters, one harsh, one benevolent, and between them the person is formed. One is lucky if the harassment of one is canceled out by the kindness of the other. But the usual situation is that many distortions enter into one's personality. Narayana Guru was profoundly moved by the distortions that are impressed on the mind of a child. He took note of the variations in those distortions between people brought up in different circumstances, from very wealthy to very poor. He came to realize that a person is mostly shaped by the education he gets. So he knew that to change society you needed to reeducate the public, and for that you needed a value science.

Farther on in the same talk, Nitya epitomizes the first five darsanas:

In *Darsana Mala* Narayana Guru had developed a scheme of ten philosophical visions to go from untruth to ultimate truth. The first phase is that of superimposition (*adhyaropa*). The child is taken care of by its mother. It imitates her and gathers from its childhood experiences the material from which to form its imaginations. When it cares for its doll its imagery is mostly unreal, yet some basis of homogeneity allows the elders to be sympathetic with the child. Still, the child's inferences are bound to be prejudicial, not judicial. As it grows into adulthood, it has to give up several already formed concepts and gain new concepts to match with percepts as well as memories. Growth means substituting false concepts with more approximately true concepts.

Narayana Guru showed Nataraja Guru that one should reject untruth, but in one's zest for change, one should not tamper with the fundamental basis of truth. First of all, a norm of truth is necessary to scrutinize a given situation. Only on the basis of it can one arrive at a conclusion to reject what is found untrue (*apavada*). When a criterion to distinguish truth is applied to a false projection, it will show the untruth (*asatya*) to be given up.

Our equipment in the search for truth and untruth is our senses, mind, practical experiences and hearsay, along with books. In all our experiences, something is going on outside that generates the data to be examined. It can be called maya. The conveyor of external data is operating as an oscillating principle of cognition (*bhana*), which is bound to come to a homeostasis if the organs are healthy. Bhana is the psychic power that transforms into various ontological projections of knowledge.