

I Adhyaropa Darsana, Cosmic Projection

Verse 3

9/13/5

Before origination this was
latent in him; thereafter, from him,
as sprout from seed, by his own power,
it created itself alone.

The subtle, likely unintentional duality engendered by the two terms ‘him’ and ‘it’ here should probably be rectified along the lines of “Before origination this was latent within it; thereafter, from itself, as sprout from seed, by its own power it created itself alone.” The use of ‘him’ inevitably calls forth the echo of an external god masterminding the process of creation, which is pretty clearly not the aim of the verse.

The basis of Nitya’s commentary comes from the Chandogya Upanishad, where Svetaketu is instructed by his father to cut open a fig tree seed and examine what he finds. A nice paraphrase may be found in *That Alone*, pages 116 and 117.

The point is there is an unending series of causes which are effects of the previous cause, ad infinitum, and these oscillate from virtual nothingness to full expression. When we examine one segment of the process, cosmologically we can infer a Big Bang universe, individually we find a plant or animal growing from a seed, or psychologically we see consciousness emerging from unconsciousness. In all these forms, there isn’t an external frame into which creation is growing to fit; instead, there is an inner urge or drive which expresses itself from within. There is no god mixing

up ingredients in a bowl, but there is a divinely cosmic principle of expression and development unfurling itself far and wide, mysterious enough to intrigue and baffle us for all eternity. Nowadays, it seems that physicists are contemplating such matters more even than contemplatives, but everyone seems determined to avoid the big picture if it conflicts with their preferred prejudices.

Nitya sums up the point in a terrific paragraph which I copied for the introduction and will copy again:

As a result of the conditioning of the faithful by the established religions, and of the skeptics by the categorical statements of science, man has become bifurcated in his sense of his true beingness. Having thus separated him from his true ground—that substratum that gives rise to all beings—those responsible for this have largely repressed in him the sense of wonder and delight in which one who knows his true being lives all the time. Looking in vain for some religious statement or scientific formula which will neatly encompass the whole mystery of being, so that we can file it away in our box of consumer goods and calendar maxims, we have forgotten that the mystery we seek to penetrate is our own mystery. (56)

From the psychological point of view, which for me is the one most relevant to a spiritual search, the most important point is made at the end. Nitya says:

A proper philosophical study should take into account the concrete facts of life and the problems arising from them. It is easy to say that the world is a projection, but it makes little sense if one does not follow this with an explanation of how the projection is experienced as a concrete fact. A philosophy which ignores this will not help us to emancipate our

consciousness from the psychic colorations and social conditionings which perpetuate our misery. (58)

I took a long walk today, and every time I tried to focus on going beyond lip service with this idea, my mind diverted me onto a sidetrack. It's actually a very elusive business! We are deeply conditioned to put up and shut up, so when we try to peer into our nature the very desire to explore throws us off the track. I kept bringing myself back to the subject, but never got very far before my mind was AWOL once again.

This may be the key area where religion and philosophy fail: it's so easy to say it's all in the mind or everything's a projection, but then what do you do about it? Most often, nothing. Hey, if it's all unreal, why bother? Well, if it's so unreal, why does it bother you? You participate in the whole universe, whatever its exact status, so you are as real as it, and vice versa. The just-accept-Jesus ploy is a variant version of it's all in the mind, by the way. In each of these cases the thought is merely to agree with a simple idea or formula and then forget about it. Meaningful examination is avoided once again. We have a million tricks to keep ourselves asleep.

Narayana Guru knows the biggest hypocrites are the ones who agree to a simple program and then feel superior to others who see things differently. Darsanamala is given as a structural key to decode our confusion, but it demands more than a smug dismissal of alternatives. The way consciousness manifests and operates is going to be vividly described, so that we can take a hard look at how our conditioning impels us to act. By studying it the hope is to loosen the claws of impulses arising from our own darkness, and promote those born of light. We're just beginning the game, but by verses 7 and 8 of this first darsana the downside of not tuning in is going to be made very clear. I'll reiterate that this is

to release us from misery, even though at first blush we are heading directly into it. Hang on!

* * *

10/6/15

Adhyaropa Darsana, Verse 3

Before origination this was
latent in him; thereafter, from him,
as sprout from seed, by his own
power it created itself alone.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*This (world) before creation was
Latent within Himself,
Thereafter, like sprout from seed,
From Himself, by His power, by itself it was created.*

Scott's emendation:

Before origination
this was latent within it;
thereafter, from itself, as sprout from seed,
by its own power it created itself alone.

One of Nitya's top-grade commentaries sparked an unbelievably dense and complex conversation, which it will not be possible to reproduce in any detail. Luckily these are perennial themes we will be pondering throughout the entire course, so I can simply share the beginning—the seed state—for now, and as we go along more will be added. These issues are not questions with

simple answers. They are more like keys to unlock rusty doors opening on seldom-visited wings of the castle.

Normally I begin my account by copying my favorite selections from the text, but this time I found I had to choose essentially the entire thing. This verse even includes the paragraph I considered the most pregnant in the whole book and used in the introduction to epitomize the subject matter:

As a result of the conditioning of the faithful by the established religions, and of the skeptics by the categorical statements of science, man has become bifurcated in his sense of his true beingness. Having thus separated him from his true ground—that substratum that gives rise to all beings—those responsible for this have largely repressed in him the sense of wonder and delight in which one who knows his true being lives all the time. Looking in vain for some religious statement or scientific formula which will neatly encompass the whole mystery of being, so that we can file it away in our box of consumer goods and calendar maxims, we have forgotten that the mystery we seek to penetrate is our own mystery. (56)

At least one other paragraph here could serve as an essential marker of the way, indicating the utter practicality of enlightened spirituality:

A proper philosophical study should take into account the concrete facts of life and the problems arising from them. It is easy to say that the world is a projection, but it makes little sense if one does not follow this with an explanation of how the projection is experienced as a concrete fact. A philosophy which ignores this will not help us to emancipate our consciousness from the psychic colorations and social conditionings which perpetuate our misery. (58)

Once again we are reminded that just “dropping the subject” does not get us anywhere. We need to actively emancipate ourselves from the toils of bondage. I think it’s safe to say that most philosophies ignore this, often pointedly. It suits the ego’s desire to remain in control, no matter what. The ego much prefers make-believe spirituality to something that would knock it off its perch.

Bushra and Michael noted how consciously regulating your breathing can restore a calm and even ecstatic mental state. This is true, of course, but Vedanta wants to go one step farther and investigate why we get into a charged state in the first place, with its chaotic breathing and other symptoms. If we can unearth the cause and resolve it, then we can remain in a balanced condition much more often. While it’s good to know palliative measures we can employ when stress gets the better of us, it’s preferable to “disassociate ourselves from the context of suffering.” There are a number of ways this can be brought about.

Deb phrased the issue as a question we could each weigh in on. How do we learn our lessons? What do we actually have to do to address them? It’s one thing to admit that we should do something, but that admission is only the first step. Unfortunately, it’s often the only step, and we retire satisfied with our efforts. At least until the next wave of turbulence strikes....

The most familiar answer is the one Bushra and Michael proposed, and that works for minor issues or the ones we have already dealt with: calm yourself. Get control. But we are also addressing what Nitya will call in the Bhana Darsana, “the malignant seeds that can sometimes erupt as a pathological catastrophe.” When we are in the grip of a serious malaise, reminding ourselves of the blissful state doesn’t always work. If it does, of course that’s fine. But what else can we do if we can’t simply shrug it off?

Deb noted that her wants are what make her uptight with situations that block them. She finds that letting go of what she wants is very freeing and relaxing. First you have to know what those wants are, and only then can you consciously let them go. Often they boil below the surface, making genuine letting go more challenging than it should be. They are quite accomplished at distracting our attention from them.

In this context I mentioned listening to the other. It is a huge step to go beyond our clinging to our own perspective to listen to and accord respect to the person we are in conflict with. The tendency is to misconstrue what is said to suit our position, and not hear what is actually being talked about. I have invariably found that my version of the other person's stand and how they portray it if given the chance do not match. Once I start to respect their opinion, it either begins the healing process, or at the very least makes my counterarguments more relevant. It's much more effective to focus on the other person's actual issues than battle my own straw man arguments.

If life's problems are seen as educational opportunities, then disagreement becomes an entrée into self-examination. If they are treated as mere obstacles, impediments to me getting my way, then they are just my excuses to indulge in self-delusion.

Along the same line, Bushra held out for embracing paradoxes, not logic, by which I think she meant abstraction. Take things as they are, rather than how you would like them to be. Again, in this study we are aiming for resonance with the actual situation rather than any projected simulacrum. Deb admitted we are often uncomfortable with ambiguity, and so are less likely to accept different opinions than we ought to. She quoted physicist Niels Bohr: "No paradox—no progress."

In this verse, appropriately enough, Nitya talks about seeds sprouting and developing. This is a common theme in many of his lectures. What is not so obvious is that as a guru he was planting

seeds in his listeners, along with encouraging their own latent seeds to grow. We're already packed with seeds, with a wide range of possibilities, but much of our early conditioning serves to sterilize them and prevent them from being expressed, so they don't rock the boat of social niceties. Andy wondered about the many "spiritual" programs that aim to roast the seeds and assure that they don't ever manifest. These are clearly different from the Gurukula version of Vedanta, and I think this important difference is finally being realized by the class members. This is not about suppressing who we are, but exulting in it and living it. "Celebrate, celebrate, celebrate!" Narayana Guru inspired immense changes in Kerala by convincing the downtrodden and servile castes to replace their stagnant position with a dynamic interest in participating in life on an equal footing with everyone else. If he had encouraged them instead to squelch their innate desires to evolve, they could easily have done so. They had had centuries of practice, reinforced by scriptural authority, to remain abased.

And so do we, though it's not quite so obvious.

So Nitya was continually adding spiritual fertilizer in his talks. Whenever he invokes sperm and ovum, seeds, fruits and so on, he was injecting his listeners with the impetus to bring new progeny into the world and nurture them. He makes its meaning explicit in his Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary: "One's progeny is none other than oneself." (I. 249)

The wonder and awe generated by contemplating the mystery—especially in the company of a wise teacher—is drawn into our core to bathe the seeds of our creativity, and if we restrain from suppressing a few of them they will burst forth on the wings of compelling interests. This is how universes are made, as well as individuals.

Darsanamala is a depiction of the whole course of a life, from inception to dissolution. We have already moved out of the pure latent state to begin the exuberant proliferation that will mark our

term of life. The last darsana, on nirvana or extinction, chronicles the progressive disappearance of this urge to proliferate. Notably, Narayana Guru does not want to go all the way to full extinction until he has to, as I pointed out in the introduction. On the verge of total merger into the totality, he begs to retain his individuality so that he can inspire others to live a joyous and useful life. His ideal is the fifth verse, halfway through the Nirvana Darsana:

Having burned everything with the fire of wisdom,
aiming the good of the world,
doing action according to injunction,
the knower of *brahma* remains firm in *brahma*.

What is burned are “the inhibitions to creative catharsis,” (one of Nitya’s writing prompts for his disciples), the weights and obligations and personal preferences that drag us down from aiming the good of the world. There is a lot of roasting going on in spiritual life, but if we are not alertly discriminating in what we roast, as the ego is in charge we will very likely be killing off our best qualities along with the bathwater, and that only makes more room for our less apparent and less wholesome qualities to take center stage.

As Bill once again remarked, this is a very practical and down-to-earth philosophy. This is not idle speculation to exercise brain cells. Nitya says:

If the world of empirical experience is described as being similar to a dream or to magic, one might tend to think of it as a shadowy nothing that may evaporate when one falls asleep, or when one turns away from the magician. The phenomenality of this world is not to be understood as a mere hallucination of the mind. To emphasize the factual and transactional validity of the world of wakeful experience, the

Guru adopts here the simile of a tree germinating from a seed.
(55)

We can see that Narayana Guru's ideas are in close accord with those of modern physicists. There is no external manipulator running the show. The programs are intrinsic to each being, and have been in place since the very first instant. That the programs are clearly of immense intelligence should not disqualify them from reasoned acceptance. Nitya even references an esteemed physicist on this subject:

If a seed should be examined and the potential tree looked for in it, not even the most powerful microscope will reveal any hint of the details of the tree lying latent within. The most primary forms of life, in its various manifestations, are so indistinct that merely to examine an identified form will not reveal whether it is going to be a fly, a barley plant, a black cat, or a philosopher. This idea is very humorously presented by Schrödinger in his book *What is Life?* (56)

Paul noted an important idea we have not yet recognized. We had a long discussion of the meaning of Adhyaropa as superimposition or, in Nitya's parlance, cosmic projection. Mostly we've been treating it as it was presented in the introduction to this darsana:

When an inner idea envelops a seemingly perceptive situation, christening it with a definitive term and recognizing it as having the status of an objective percept, what arises in consciousness as the understanding of that object is called projection, or more conventionally, superimposition. In this respect we should note, however, that the substratum of the superimposed knowledge is totally concealed from us. We tend to describe such an experience in terms of objective sensory

qualities or properties actually belonging to the perceived object. This we do in spite of the fact that all such qualities or properties are projected by our own automatic recall of concepts. (42)

Paul, in keeping with the seed image of this verse, noted that projection also describes the emergence of creation from its latent state, the way it erupts into existence. In this sense the Absolute is projecting the universe. He is quite correct that the double entendre is meant: creation projects from the ground of all, and once established, it mentally projects theoretical replicas over the true essence of everything. Moni added that there is a dichotomy here between the seed and the *para*, the Beyond. One is infinite and the other a simple dot. Yet the dot contains the infinite, and in a sense the infinite does not contain the dot. Uniting this paradox is an excellent meditation, by the way.

The word superimposition has a negative taint, but projection in this sense does not. The more positive note appealed to Jan, whose sunny personality is drawn to the higher values such as love, communion, joy and beauty. She saw how the affirmation of the finer seeds in us helped connect us with the inner mystery. In a way this is another answer to Deb's question, and it parallels and amplifies Bushra and Michael's. When we turn to the sublime, at least some of the gross entanglements slough off, starved of our attention.

Thanks to scientific advances, one minor area of confusion in the commentary can now be updated, and I'm sure Nitya would be happy about it. Possibly unintentionally he slightly bifurcates created entities from the primeval force here:

Everywhere the surging power of the mysterious primal cause can be seen in its perennial program of transformation. It will

not be denied. A tree may take root in a small patch of earth among huge granite rocks. Slowly its roots will spread in the search for nourishment. In time those roots will split the great rocks as they push outwards, blindly impelled by the primeval force. (56-7)

It's that "blindly impelled by the primeval force" that got me. While it's true that in one sense we are blind to our own development, and that may in fact give the primeval force within us an easier time, yet the primeval force is not external in any way: it is utterly within the root or the body or what have you. A very exciting article reveals what scientists have lately learned about intelligence in plants, and especially their roots. I think you will enjoy reading this in its entirety: The Intelligent Plant, by Michael Pollan (The New Yorker magazine, December 23, 2013). <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/23/the-intelligent-plant>. I'll clip in a couple of bits to give you a taste. Pollan reports that the authors of an important paper on recent findings of plant capabilities:

argued that the sophisticated behaviors observed in plants cannot at present be completely explained by familiar genetic and biochemical mechanisms. Plants are able to sense and optimally respond to so many environmental variables—light, water, gravity, temperature, soil structure, nutrients, toxins, microbes, herbivores, chemical signals from other plants—that there may exist some brainlike information-processing system to integrate the data and coordinate a plant's behavioral response. The authors pointed out that electrical and chemical signalling systems have been identified in plants which are homologous to those found in the nervous systems of animals. They also noted that neurotransmitters such as serotonin,

dopamine, and glutamate have been found in plants, though their role remains unclear.

The part that reminded me of the verse was this, showing that roots are anything but blind:

Scientists have since found that the tips of plant roots, in addition to sensing gravity, moisture, light, pressure, and hardness, can also sense volume, nitrogen, phosphorus, salt, various toxins, microbes, and chemical signals from neighboring plants. Roots about to encounter an impenetrable obstacle or a toxic substance change course before they make contact with it. Roots can tell whether nearby roots are self or other and, if other, kin or stranger. Normally, plants compete for root space with strangers, but, when researchers put four closely related Great Lakes sea-rocket plants (*Cakile edentula*) in the same pot, the plants restrained their usual competitive behaviors and shared resources.

Nitya closes his wonderful talk with yet another seed blessing for us to take to heart. Like the seed, we are to embrace the radiant sky and simultaneously dig down into the deep dark depths for our nourishment. A healthy plant needs both to thrive:

When a seed is sown in moist earth it swells and bursts, and a tender shoot emerges which projects itself upward while the embryonic root system begins its downward projection. The newly sprouted plant seeks sunlight and the nourishment it can take in from the air. The root descends into the earth in its search for water, salts, and minerals. Part of the plant's organism is heliotropically oriented; the other part performs its functions geotropically. The metabolic function of the plant in the act of photosynthesis can occur only in the sunlit air, it

cannot take place in the roots. On the other hand, only the root system can supply the plant with the necessary water and other nourishment found only in the earth. Thus, there is a complementarity between the two environments of light and darkness. In us also there is a similar dichotomy, of a conscious life with its voluntary functions and an unconscious life which is fully controlled by an autonomous system. The same can be seen also at the cosmic level, in the interplay between negative and positive forces. The Chinese philosophers speak of these as the principles of yin and yang. Narayana Guru will elaborate on this in the next verse. (58)

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

Before creation this world was only potentially present in the Lord. Thereafter, at the time of creation His power, which was in Him by its own self-potency created all this manifested world like sprout from seed. This power is capable of shrinking into nothingness, as well as expanding into elaborate sets of manifested entities. It is only the potent virtual entity which is present within the seed and is capable of manifesting itself as sprout, stem, branch, leaf, flower or fruit. Likewise, it is a potent power within the Lord who created this world. But the Lord is not subject to any process of becoming. It is that power alone, which is dependent on Him, that can be transformed (*vikàra*) and is capable of creating this world.

* * *

On studying this verse yet again, I have come to see it as a primary inspiration for my audio book [Coming Back to Ourselves](#):

Finding Authentic Direction in the Chaos of Being. It's a perfect example of a seed introduced into me long ago, watered with substantial effort and reflection, that years later appears as an apparently isolated "stroke of genius." Yet here is the very root, the seed. In the audio I have elaborated on Nitya's proposal that the inner guide that nurtures and constructs us in utero remains with us all through our life, and is available to be accessed at all times. I think you'd find it rather interesting! In any case, here's Nitya's paragraph that makes the idea explicit:

We have to postulate an indistinct cause as a point of departure on our journey toward some kind of certainty and understanding in this speculation. A static entity cannot be called a cause. If we visualize the dynamism involved in the cause-effect relationship, the cause would be placed at the negative pole or alpha point of an imaginary vertical axis. Millions of fertile sperm are contained in the semen of a male, and of that great number one may find its way into the appropriate ovum in a female womb. Now a cause is on its way to unfolding itself stage by stage. This simple event, which is physically concealed even from the couple engaged in the act of intercourse, becomes more and more complex. Even after objectifying itself in the external world as the birth of a living child, the cause may continue to assert itself for many more years, as the child is transformed through the stages of adulthood into old age. Such aspects of cosmic creation are not ephemeral, as are dreams or the workings of magic. (56)

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This is an appropriate time to re-present two favorite quotes from *The Sayings of the Ancient One*, by P.G. Bowen, 1935.

From the African School of wisdom:

Rejoice that you are the Seed from which a MAN may grow: then turn to the Book of Nature and read this lesson there:

Behold the seed that in due time will grow into a lofty palm! It does not, while yet a seedling, struggle up to the surface of the ground; for there the desert sun would scorch it, and the desert wind suck out its life sap. It does not seek the upper air until it has roots bedded deep and firm. It makes no untimely haste, but stirs into growth as the Year awakes and rests when the Year sinks to sleep. Learn from the palm and be happy to grow. Think not at all of what stature is yours. Fix no limits for your growth. It has no limits, except those you create by your own willing and thinking: therefore think only of growing, and never of being full grown.

Rejoice if your lot be happy, but if it be miserable rejoice also. Joy and sadness are your twin slaves, joined from birth, and they must serve you together, or serve you not at all.

Part III

Susan has become my amanuensis in recent years, taking notes on the class, which due to her journalism background are quite excellent. At the moment she is on vacation, so I am placed on my own recognizance to remember who said what. I've taken a few notes myself, as the brain is starting to turn to compost.... The paucity of my notes only reminds me what an invaluable aid Susan's efforts have become. Susan sent this from her remote location in the style she emails them to me, just for fun:

Deb

—where is Susan?

Scott

—She has run off to California and left me in the lurch. How will I remember what we talk about tonight?

Bushra

—I'll make a film about it and send it to you in the morning.

Andy

—I'll paint some images that will help you remember the class.

Deb

—And perhaps I could add some poetry to make the ideas clearer.

Moni

—I will translate the whole thing into Malayalam so it will be even clearer.

Prabu

—Just to be sure that we are covering all the bases, I'll write a paper about how Tolstoy would have thought about the verse.

Michael

—Perhaps a comic book rendition of the class would also be in order?

Jan

—Or I could make jewelry that would help you feel the light, depth, and sparkle of it all?

Paul

—Somewhere between the ecstatic child playing in the grass and my furious time in the police waiting room, there are many things I could add.

Bill

—I'll give you some information about how the architectural dimensions of the room added to the discussion.

Nancy

—I could of course add some thoughts about the more interior aspects of the room but I think Scott will figure it all out himself. He will know what to write. It will just come to him.

Deb

—Kai and Lucy! What have you been eating today! Thanks for adding to the discussion in your own way...

Part IV

Susan contributed yet another:

Dear Scott,

Lest you think I've completely disconnected from Tuesday nights, here are a few thoughts. Thanks for the notes. You seem to be doing very well without me!

I agree with what Deb said in class about our discomfort with ambiguity. I struggle with this daily as I am going through my current transition of becoming unmarried and trying to find a new home and a vocation. Part of me longs to be settled and to figure out what I am doing and where I am going. Sometimes I feel very sad and frustrated about my uncertainties. But when I am reminded (though this study and the little validations every day) to turn to the mystery I am better. I can let go and open to the possibilities. I like how Scott put it in the notes:

"The wonder and awe generated by contemplating the mystery—especially in the company of a wise teacher—is drawn into our core to bathe the seeds of our creativity, and if we restrain from suppressing a few of them they will burst forth on the wings of compelling interests. This is how universes are made, as well as individuals."

Then there are the more practical ways to deal with getting out of the way of one's own becoming. There are not only "the weights and obligations and personal preferences that drag us down" that Scott mentioned but also the way we see ourselves in the world that can keep us frozen in place. These days, as I no longer have my safe havens and am in transition I am more aware of the ways I see myself as "less than" and I can see that the roots of these stifling conceptions are from my early life. Instead of seeing myself as Susan with all her possibilities, I more often go to the default Susan—slow, inept, the frequent maker of mistakes and wrong utterances. How wonderful to read this verse, then, and to think of all that is possible, all that has nothing to do with my past and my perceived limitations. There are many ways I can feel this in my life too (more and more, I should add!) — when I am doing something creative or having a good talk with someone or walking outside.

In relation to all this, I like these quotes from Anne Lamott's recent book about writing:

"Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life.... I think perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping-stone just right, you won't have to die. The truth is that you will die anyway and that a lot of

people who aren't even looking at their feet are going to do a whole lot better than you, and have a lot more fun while they're doing it.”

“Your problem is how you are going to spend this one and precious life you have been issued. Whether you're going to spend it trying to look good and creating the illusion that you have power over circumstances, or whether you are going to taste it, enjoy it and find out the truth about who you are.” (Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird)

Aum,
Susan

* * *

Jay echoed the sentiments Susan shared, to close the third verse:

Perfection is an enemy of mankind, because for me all JIVAS are imperfect until they become SHIVA. Accepting the current situation is winning half the battle. Keeping efforts going and having faith is the other half. This is what I have learnt in my life.