

I Adhyaropa Darsana, Cosmic Projection

Verse 6

10/4/5

Like potential yogic power, in the beginning this was nature indeed; thereafter, like a yogi, the Lord of the World unfolded his magical powers.

There's an important nuance here. Vaibhava doesn't exactly mean potential power, it means potent power. According to the Monier-Williams, vaibhava means superhuman power or might; sakti. The second definition is grandeur, glory, magnificence. All of those meanings are meant by Narayana Guru. It's important to keep in mind the potency of what is potential. Before *what is* comes to be, it exists as a potential of the ground of being. Only in this extended sense is potential the right word to use.

This is the last verse in which "in the beginning" appears. Considering that verses 3 and 4 treat one subject and the words in that instance are "before origination," every verse up till now has "in the beginning" in it. We may safely say the game has begun, and we're about to see what will happen next. But not quite yet. We're poised at the magical moment when creation has just bloomed and is not yet tarnished with decay. Everything is still perfect in emerging out of a unitive impulse from the ground of being.

The second half of the commentary deals with the fear that is properly the subject of the next verse. It's natural to want to rush ahead to the stuff that will be most germane to our current problematic conditions, but we tried to hold back and just appreciate the magnificence of existence for a time. Up till now Narayana Guru has

been asking us to imagine propitious and harmonious states, in order to keep our individuated life in perspective. From this point on we will be wrestling with the tangents we have embarked upon due to confusion of concepts and values. He wants us to always keep in mind the excellence of the whole to which we all belong, to make our exploration less unsettling.

Sometimes I ruefully have to say ya shoulda been there. Last night's class was, by Gurukula standards, very big. The overflow crowd of about fourteen moved to the living room. Gurusharan Jyothi and Peter Moras graced us with their presence from afar, and some rare birds from Portland also showed up. Matching the splendor of the attendees was a wide-ranging discussion with innumerable high points. The whole reminded me how infinitely unique each person is in this world. From a distance we may all look alike, but once known up close there is a universe of unmatched personal experience in each one. All the same we are mysteriously able to unite around ideas and share meaningful interchanges effortlessly. Underneath the surface, profound energy is generated or at least reinforced by the proximity of the souls in one location. Add tea and black bottom cupcakes and the room approaches critical mass, no pun intended....

Speaking of the cupcakes—made by Deb from an ineffable recipe bequeathed by Jean Norrby—some humble soul left a bag of homemade cookies on the counter which were only discovered after the fact. We'll try to keep them for Sunday, (I can't make promises) but hope the perpetrator will identify herself. There's nothing so sad as cookies in hiding. Like the Absolute, right there but overlooked by the madding crowd.

Over the course of the evening one crucial but somewhat incoherently expressed question kept trying to surface. It was also incoherently answered to an unsatisfactory degree. We could call this a group grope: the group was groping for what was lurking in the back of the mind. I guess this shows how old we've gotten, but never mind.... Usually I find that in subsequent readings the invisible gurus answer the

question very beautifully. This morning I was reading verses 6 and 7 in the two Isavasya Upanishad commentaries by Nitya. In a section entitled The Sublimation of the Gross, he writes: “We live in a world of two complementary infinitudes. One is the spiritual infinitude of homogeneity. Its counterpart is an infinitude of the heterogeneous. Between these two extremes the individuated human oscillates.” In essence that’s where our question resided. It’s truly a crucial question that goes to the heart of the paradox of living: *How do we integrate so-called spiritual and material matters, or does one preclude the other?*

Usually in actual practice we vote in favor of one or the other. Just as we favor pleasure over pain, we become a partisan and allow the lame leg to atrophy. We are proud to be either a spiritual person or a materialist. A unitive philosophy believes these aren’t even two separate things, they are one. Nataraja Guru used the cross (hence: crucial) of the Cartesian coordinates to integrate horizontal and vertical elements. Each element by itself is one dimensional; in relation they are two- and by extrapolation multi-dimensional. In other words, alive. The system is only healthy when they are balanced together. The text of those two mantras from the Isa Upanishad read:

The one who continually sees all beings in the Self alone,
like that, in all manifested factors the Self also,
that person, because of such a vision,
never becomes repulsed.

In whom all beings are known as the Self alone,
what delusion is there
or what sorrow
to one who beholds this unity? (v. 6 & 7)

In a sense the entire Narayana Gurukula philosophy is aimed at answering this question. I particularly commend verse 20 of That Alone as one of the best epitomes of an idea running through the entire work.

We will be homing in on it as the weeks go by, in Darsanamala. Also relevant, the book just out, *Unitive Philosophy* by Nataraja Guru, is a tour de force of integral wisdom, though not for the faint of heart.

In a way it's fitting that we didn't answer the key question. This study in its entirety is one answer. Some have wondered why we must go to all the trouble when we already know the answer. I'd say that we know the answer in words, but we don't know the answer in "the fleshy tables of the heart." (2 Cor. 3,3; thanks to Dr. Mees.) Through the serious pondering of wise words, known in the Gita as the wisdom sacrifice, we transform a concept into a living reality. Without the effort, we have to make do with empty words. It's deeply satisfying to be joined by so many seriously questing souls in such a process. Aum.

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11/3/15

Adhyaropa Darsana Verse 6

Like potential yogic power,
in the beginning this was nature indeed;
thereafter, like a yogi, the Lord of the World
unfolded his magical powers.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Potentially what even as Nature remained
Like the psychic powers of Yoga;
Like a yogi did He, the Lord of the World, work out
His varied psychic powers thereafter.*

Nitya's periodic reviews are always helpful and even revelatory. The one he offers here is an excellent example,

chronicling the emergence of the world from the ground of the Absolute:

In the first verse, the potential power of the Lord was equated with *sankalpa*, the imagination of the Lord. In the second verse the same power was described as *vasana*, or incipient memories. The third verse identified that power with *sakti*, the two-fold power inherent in the Lord. Verse four was an elaboration of the same power of *sakti*. In the fifth verse the specific power of the Lord was described as *manas*, mind. Finally, in the present verse we have the power identified with *prakriti*.

Extrapolating from this a bit, Lord, of course, means the impersonal Absolute. From out of that inconceivable whateverness, an imagination, an impulse arose. Elsewhere it's called the Will of God or the Word or *logos*, and so on. The impulse develops according to pre-existing patterns based on previous iterations, known as *vasanas*. The impulse's incredibly intense energy, *shakti*, divides into a positive and negative polarity as it becomes manifest. In the course of development it passes through the focusing lens of a mind, which projects it out to proliferate as "all this."

As Nitya tells us, *prakriti* is universally translated as "nature," but the literal meaning is "that which proliferates." This is an important distinction for us to make at this juncture, because we cannot help envisioning nature as something outside of us, but Narayana Guru is redirecting us to an inward gaze. The proliferation is emerging from the mind. Our own mind, as a perfectly fine example of the universal mind, projects out of itself a bountiful universe to revel in. It's like a magic trick: fashioning something out of nothing. Lots of things out of nothing. And it's taking place right within our purview, so we are able to affect the

proliferation through our participation. What a delightful proposition this is!

I suggested the best way to use this verse for self-realization is to examine how our mental framing shapes everything we encounter. Normally we take what we see for granted as “out there” and independent of us. When we reframe it as being within our mind—as it surely is—we not only heal the schism of “us versus them,” we can begin to take baby steps toward releasing our own potentials. Up to now we have suppressed those potentials due to our training, but we have decided that this is “a sordid boon.” Instead, along with Wordsworth we want to reclaim nature, and with it our hearts.

You, dear reader, are invited to look at this in your own life, and hopefully will be able to share some of it with the class. It’s a highly liberating practice! Take examples of the way you framed an aspect of your life and see how it has caused you to act in certain limiting ways. As Deb pointed out, it’s very hard to spot how we are framing, because it’s our reality. That’s what superimposition means. But I assure you that taking our delusions for reality is not the best possible practice. Narayana Guru, in his compassionate nature, is helping us to see how we’ve gone off kilter, and is going to help us regain our sanity, even as we are convinced we never lost it.

Andy noted how prakriti is comprised of the three gunas, and that they are constantly warping our perceptions. He and Deb agreed that the challenge is to restore our grounding in unity even as we are inundated with multiplicity and its consequent distortions. Bill noticed how Nitya slipped *substance* in and equated it with prakriti and its endless proliferation. Deb fine-tuned this with the reminder that the prakriti we’re speaking of is within us, and not so much the world outside. The constant replication is what we do by projecting our framing onto the world. As my

family used to accuse each other of, we make mountains out of molehills.

To get the ball rolling on this assignment I offered a couple of examples, one profound and one fairly trivial. I proposed that Narayana Guru was able to inspire an entirely peaceful revolution because he truly understood the principle described in this verse, whereas Gandhi, with the same pacifistic motivation, accomplished his goals only at great cost. We have to acknowledge he was met with much greater enmity and managed a wider range of religious groups, yet there was a very different tone in his efforts, too. Gandhi pushed his agenda, manipulated and schemed how to make it work, while Narayana Guru had total faith in the rightness of sensible change, and was therefore much more of an unmoved mover. Gandhi was not a realized seer, he was a politician at heart. Narayana Guru was authentically much less aggressive—almost totally non-aggressive—a lover rather than a politician.

We can take this as a great personal lesson, because to some degree we are all politically motivated. Contractual elements of our life are quasi-political: we make compromises to achieve our ends and expect tit for tat. Narayana Guru's example is to become grounded in who we truly are, so we don't feel we have to struggle to get what we want. Whatever comes is welcome, either as a gift or a challenge to solve. We can relax and enjoy.

My trivial example is that I have been doing tons of editing work yet again, including Nitya's rare work *Pranava*, of which Sraddha has the only known copy. Deb has recently typed it up and I'm polishing it prior to putting on the Nitya website (<http://aranya.me>). I came to a place where there are three poems by Guy Murchie, from a favorite book of Nitya's, *The Seven Mysteries of Life*. It's well over 700 pages long, and I groaned that it would take forever to find the poems so I could check for errors. But there's no alternative in editing: it is unethical to publish a

flawed version, and there were sure to be mistakes in what I had. Regretting the task ahead of me and imagining it to be huge, I opened the book at random and there they were!

There were a number of lessons for me in this. I felt as though Nitya had reached out of the heavens and guided my hand. Of course, he's just the face I put on the Unknown, and others have their own favorite faces. However you slice it, it's a mystery, a magical act. There is no plausible explanation for something like that. It showed me how there is much more going on here than I imagine—and I imagine quite a lot! It turned me instantly from an independent drudge slogging through a difficult task to a happy soul filled with worshipful gratitude. Whoever/whatever found those poems is worthy of adoration, and I don't have to specify what it is. In fact, by specifying, I am guaranteed to miss the mark. Whatever happened, it is surely something other than anything I can imagine, and in fact that is the central implication of this verse of Darsanamala. I feel like it was even offered as my personal example to share with the class, and its very simplicity makes it especially handy for that. We need to know that all we encounter is this Unknown, from the tiniest detail up to the vastest sweeps of galactic history.

Jan underlined the value of openness to inviting the involvement of this mysterious and magical inner power. She affirmed that when we define “what happened” it shuts out awareness of everything we have left out. So the point of our efforts is not to define God or the Lord more accurately, but to undefine it. The need to pin down the butterfly of the Absolute that so permeates our culture is to be converted to the invitation of unknowing. A cloud of unknowing, you might say. Then things naturally come to us.

Deb also shared an example of how framing affected her, in a transient incident that is a kind of inversion of mine. She was going to walk down to the mailbox and get the mail after dark (it's

a fair distance). She was her normal bubbly self, but I said, I guess there aren't any coyotes out right now, so you'll be okay. (Lately they have been howling in packs very close to the house, and they are HUNGRY.) I was a bit worried about her. Almost instantly she went from buoyant cheerfulness to fearful doubt, and she had to take a flashlight and a rattle before she felt brave enough to go fetch the mail.

The point is, I guess, that it should be an easy assignment to see how your framing affects your behavior, since literally everything we do is influenced by our attitude.

Scientific detachment walks a fine line between non-projection and accidental (or worse, intentional) dismissal of the unitive basis. I'll include a fine couple of paragraphs on the indeterminacy of science by Fritjof Capra in Part II, along with a couple of related quips. When I read them out, Bushra felt it was very liberating to see that scientific ideas are as provisional as our everyday attitudes, so long as we don't cling to them. There is no final answer to anything, just better and better tries. Paradoxically this makes every answer meaningful within its proper context. Central to a healthy attitude is that we must not dismiss the ground, the basis on which our erroneous suppositions are erected. Nitya is spot on here about this important aspect of philosophical insight:

A hypothesis of the Vedantin, that the world is a superimposition on the supreme Self, will fail if he agrees with the supposition that a superimposition can stand without its substratum.

A more correct example of superimposition is when one sees an illusory snake when in fact he is looking at an ordinary piece of rope. The proposition that the rope can be removed without disturbing one's experience of the snake is readily seen as false. If the rope is removed the snake goes with it. On the other hand we can say that God, through the exercise of his yogic power,

creates the illusion of blue sky, mist-enshrouded mountains, singing birds, beautiful trees and flowers, the world of social transactions, and both heaven and hell. It is this power that remains as the substratum of all the illusory creations.

At the same time that God is involved in this world-production, he himself does not undergo any change. The apparent multiplicity of what is presented before us in the world can be attributed to a continuing erroneous judgment of the individual mind, which is itself effected by the cosmic illusion.

This contains my favorite quote in the whole commentary: “If the rope is removed the snake goes with it.” I can visualize Nitya beaming with laughter as he said it. This rope/snake analogy has been raked over the coals for millennia, but this is probably a unique and uniquely humorous wisecrack about it.

Nitya is also testing our flexibility. When he uses “God” to exemplify the Absolute, he well knows that most of us have not converted from our juvenile beliefs of a grandfather-like being to the definition he has repeatedly stressed of a neutral, unmanifested potential. Even calling it a potential sells it short. There is no descriptive noun that can do justice to the non-concept we are dancing with. Nitya is using God to make us aware of all the extraneous projections we hang on the term, God. He doesn’t do the actual legwork—it’s for each of us to address in our own meditations.

A fair chunk of Nitya’s commentary is a bridge to the next verse, where fear takes center stage. When the proliferation of the process of manifestation Narayana Guru is chronicling is weighed down by the baggage of misunderstanding, terrible things can happen. Look around: terrible things *are* happening. We are meant to take a close look at how we have been diverted and perverted, before the Guru sets out in the rest of the work to cure us of our

follies. This is a good time to interject one of the Beatles' greatest songs, composed by George Harrison:

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

I look at you all, see the love there that's sleeping
While my guitar gently weeps
I look at the floor and I see it needs sweeping
Still my guitar gently weeps

I don't know why nobody told you
How to unfold your love
I don't know how someone controlled you
They bought and sold you

I look at the world and I notice it's turning
While my guitar gently weeps
With every mistake we must surely be learning
Still my guitar gently weeps

Well...

I don't know how you were diverted
You were perverted too
I don't know how you were inverted
No one alerted you

I look at you all see the love there that's sleeping
While my guitar gently weeps
Look at you all
Still my guitar gently weeps

Although the White Album version is perfect, here's a rare version you might enjoy listening to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezd7fRvJgtc>

And another with visuals, albeit terribly edited ones:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDs2Bkq6UU4>

Those good guys played their hearts out to perform the magic of making a better, more loving world, and had a tremendous impact worldwide. Perhaps we can do something like that in our obscurity, out of the limelight, where there's so much less pressure and criticism to deal with....

Nitya touches on a most crucial aspect of spiritual dedication in response to fear:

All beings are fearful, but of all of them man is the most paranoiac. Great nations hastily stockpiling nuclear bombs and other weapons are confirming the fear man has of his own nature when it is expressed as a corporate entity. In fact, the fears of nations are grounded on wrongful assumptions, hearsay, or at best a partial knowledge. In all of us lie incipient memories associated with painful experiences in our past. When these painful memories are reactivated, fear is very often the result.

The point we have often made is that fear effortlessly diverts us from confronting painful memories, which are better called samskaras. The incipient memories or vasanas are deeper than our present-life memories, though these can also be confronted.

Bushra gave an excellent example. She is facing her death from cancer somewhere in the middle distance, and talked with her counselor about it recently. He suggested they do a meditation together on her impending death, to imagine what it would be like to be dead. She found that when she confronted it, the fear of death

went away. She had an amazing experience. Doors were opened, and she quickly felt much better. It turns out that by avoiding things that bother us, they maintain their hold on us and keep up the miserable stresses, but if we examine them directly they vanish like the snake in the rope.

I must say, it was a great relief to hear somebody else say these things! Nothing in Vedanta meets more resistance, and the subject is almost invariably changed as soon as possible. We are afraid to take a clear look at our fears! How funny is that? The gurus are telling us they are largely empty threats, but we're too cowed down to believe them.

I was reminded of my longtime friend Steve, who used to boast that he was never afraid of anything. I would suggest that maybe he wasn't in touch with that part of himself, and he would smilingly shake his head and disagree. He owned a small sailboat, and one day he was working by himself on the engine down in the small, cramped hold, when the hatch slammed shut and appeared to lock itself. Suddenly Steve was blasted by a volcanic terror that he was trapped. He hurled himself against the hatch and sprung it open, leaping out into the blessed open air. Later he sheepishly told me that it turned out he had fears after all, and now he knew it. The fear of death is famously the most disturbing of all, normally manipulating our lives from behind the scenes, yet when brought out in the open by a brave heart, it can lose its sting. As Andy put it, pondering the scope of this brings you to exalted life.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

In the beginning the world was *prakriti* (nature), having the same status as the psychic powers of a *yogi* (mystic or unitive inner experience). Thereafter, at the time of creation the Lord made

manifest his own nature in the same way as a *yogi* makes manifest his powers.

The psychic powers of a *yogi* are in reality only incipient memory factors within himself. What we mean here by *prakriti* only refer to tendencies capable of functioning as contraction or expansion, which could be merely mental in status; or, otherwise stated, it is mind itself which is referred to as none other than *prakriti*, as we should here understand. All the manifoldly manifested powers of a *yogi* are only innate tendencies in his mind, belonging to his own nature, and later on to be expanded and elaborately manifested. In the same way, it is *prakriti* that is virtually presented in terms of mind-stuff that becomes transformed into this expanded universe as presented to our vision. What has been discussed so far under the terms of *sankalpa* (willing), *vàsanà*, (incipient memory factor), *shakti* (potent specifying power), *manas* (mind) and *prakriti* (nature) have one and the same meaning. The term *avidyà* (nescience) to be used in the next verse also falls into the same (verticalised) series. It is possible to refer to this same factor in many other ways. In view of simplicity and for the student's (apodictic) clarity and understanding, we have merely followed a graded series of terms with different designations.

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Here are some relevant pithy quotes about the limits and promise of science. I'm sure you could find many more if you used the right search term. First, my old favorite from Volume I of Nitya's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary:

Science is to help us avoid the folly of putting our trust in nonsense. (435)

This is from Fritjof Capra, *The Science of Leonardo*, (New York: Random House Anchor Books, 2007):

All scientific models and theories are limited and approximate. This realization has become crucial to the contemporary understanding of science. Twentieth-century science has shown repeatedly that all natural phenomena are ultimately interconnected, and that their essential properties, in fact, derive from their relationship to other things. Hence, in order to explain any one of them completely, we would have to understand all the others, which is obviously impossible. This insight has forced us to abandon the Cartesian belief in the certainty of scientific knowledge and to realize that science can never provide complete and definitive explanations. In science, to put it bluntly, we never deal with truth, in the sense of a precise correspondence between our descriptions and the described phenomena. We always deal with limited and approximate knowledge.

This may sound frustrating, but for many scientists the fact that we can formulate approximate models and theories to describe an endless web of interconnected phenomena, and that we are able to systematically improve our models or approximations over time, is a source of confidence and strength. As the great biochemist Louis Pasteur put it, “Science advances through tentative answers to a series of more and more subtle questions which reach deeper and deeper into the essence of natural phenomena.” (158-9)

The Pasteur quote reminds me of my favorite from Teilhard de Chardin:

The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen.

Lastly, from *Autobillography*, by Dr. Bill Robinson, a highly recommended survey of the present:

Everything we know is wrong

I have strolled down the aisles of library stacks in the philosophy section, and found no answers—just books citing other books citing other books going back to Plato, who didn't know either. They could do no better than guess, and compare their guesses with other guesses.... Clearly, if thousands of years of the best minds of the Western World could get no further than this, then pushing an intellectual approach as far as it can possibly go is ineffective and misleading.

What about the answers that come from contemplation? Savants and saints all through history have been contemplating their respective navels and written the results of their divine inspiration, or passed them down in oral traditions. Some of the subject matter is beyond our ability to observe, but much concerns our material world and can be directly measured and tested. Without exception, the cosmologies describing the material universe in all the world's traditional cultures are at wide variance from what we now know through science. Just about everything that could be gotten wrong, was gotten wrong, and by a very wide margin. (4-5)

Part III

I'm currently doing a final edit on my long-delayed audio book, and am reminded of an important aspect of framing I talked about. In the Indian model, the intellect is the bridge between our ego and the depths of our being: the karu or core of wisdom. In the Western model, by contrast, the intellect is little more than the rational tool of the ego, the sword it uses to wage its battles, which

is why it is considered a major impediment to full functioning, in Indian spirituality. Spirituality in Western terms then advocates turning off or minimizing the intellect to remove the blockage. From the Indian standpoint this is exactly the wrong thing to do: since the intellect is the connection between our conscious mind and our deeper being, by shutting it down we effectively burn our bridge to the unknown. This is one of the most significant stumbling blocks in spiritual life, responsible for the many childish, unexamined beliefs rampant in many seekers' fantasies, and it can easily be corrected by a simple redefinition of the intellect's role.