

## I Adhyaropa Darsana, Cosmic Projection

### Verse 7

10/9/5

When Self-knowledge shrinks, then ignorance is fearful;  
substantiation by name and form, in the most terrible fashion,  
looms here, ghostlike.

This verse packs a wallop, and another overflow crowd provided a very interesting evening of exploration. Sunita and Ashok from Chicago and their dear friend Tracey from Seattle, Jyothi from Tellicheri, and Johnny Stallings from Ashwood joined the regular and irregular participants for a potluck and community diving expedition. I expect that by next week we'll be back to what we call normal, about half as many.

In verse 6 we completed the process of creation and were poised at the perfect moment, akin to the Garden of Eden in Western mythology. In Darsanamala too, the next stage is the fall, but sans sin and disobedience to an angry god. The rishis well knew we weren't issued an owner's manual along with our body, we have had to figure things out for ourselves. It makes the game a lot more fun, as long as the spirit of play is maintained. In Vedanta all mistakes are forgiven, just as soon as you understand them.

In a classroom setting we might have studied this verse phrase by phrase, and I think I should do a bit of that now. The class itself was so huge and wide-ranging I'm overwhelmed at the thought of summarizing it.

Okay, we start with "*when Self-knowledge shrinks.*" Under consideration is atma, the capital S Self, in this case meaning the

collective whole rather than the individual self. This is the state of the Garden, sama, the all-inclusive unitive state. In general, when one self expands in awareness, the “other” diminishes. Only an adept dialectician can keep both the immanent and the transcendent in mind simultaneously. Otherwise, as we become embroiled in our individuation, our small s self takes center stage and our knowledge of the unitive Self shrinks. This is the critical moment Narayana Guru asks us to examine now.

As we grow up and as our consciousness becomes more sophisticated, we begin to distinguish separate items from out of the original uniform substance. This is actually a very useful thing to do, allowing us to participate in the world around us. It’s by no means a sinful act, but it does produce an ego, which is nothing more than the locus of sensations and ideations experienced by the individual. The problems arise when we forget the unity underlying all the separate entities. We are trained to be expert in addressing all the manifold separate happenings—again, a great thing—but we get so caught up in the game we forget the field it’s being played on. Because we project our inner sense of bliss onto all those separate items, we imbue them with a meaningfulness that is not intrinsic to them. Imagine our disappointment when those items fade away, leaving us feeling bereft. (Maybe you don’t HAVE to imagine.) They always do fade away, eventually, despite our valiant attempts to hold on to them. Since we’ve imagined they supplied our happiness, we worry our happiness is going away with them.

Darsanamala is carefully designed to help us reestablish our connection to the unity that is our true source of happiness, which as Andy pointed out, never went away. It’s always there, in and through everything, but we don’t see it because, well, it’s invisible. Only separate items are visible. When folks say “we believe what we see” they are unconsciously limiting their purview to omit the ground of the Absolute. We must develop a new way of seeing that

isn't dependent on sense data produced by the world of multiple selves, *anya*. We should say "we believe what we know," or "we believe what we understand," instead of "we believe what we see."

Vedantins call the state of being focused on separateness "ignorance." Narayana Guru observes that because of the shrinking of our Self-knowledge, "ignorance is fearful." Nitya addresses this aspect very well in the first paragraph of his commentary. Once we identify with a limited self and its items of knowledge, we automatically divide the universe into the known and the unknown. While most of us are comfortable with the known part of ourselves, somehow a profound and primal inner state of fear becomes associated with the unknown, and we can run amok precisely to the extent we forget our interconnectedness with all. A million psychology texts have been written to partially explore this terrain, but seldom is the cure mentioned: reconnection of the part with the whole. Narayana Guru at this point in the garland isn't introducing the cure either, he is taking a hard look at the disease (which is exactly what we have: dis-ease). His cure will unfold over the course of the entire work.

The class spent a lot of time examining fear as a motivator. Anita shared her major lesson of the week. She'd had a terrifying nightmare, threatening death in the most realistic and also twisted, dreamlike fashion. When she awoke she was frightened to the depths of going back to sleep and thereby completing her extinction, so she thought hard of the most mundane things to keep from falling back into it.

Most of us have experienced powerful fear at some point in our life, and the most common response is to immerse ourselves in trivialities, the "hamster wheel" of life. The social milieu consists of an endless series of tasks and pursuits to take our minds off of fear. If you were going to hide truth to keep it safe from discovery, this might well be the place to put it: right behind the fear. Then

nearly everything we did would lead us away from where we most needed to look.

Johnny had learned that a Polynesian tribe of expert dreamers taught that if you are being chased by a dream monster you should turn and move toward it, not run away. This is in fact the proper way to deal with fear, but it's much harder than it sounds. Life is clever to present us with fearful situations that are perfectly matched to our weaknesses, and our deeply ingrained biological imperative is to flee. It takes contemplative patience and practice and a substantial measure of bravery to stand firm and face our fears squarely. Again, regaining our ground in the Absolute is the only chance we have of not being unnerved, as Arjuna was in the midst of his battle in the Gita.

*“Substantiation by name and form, in the most terrible fashion, looms here, ghostlike.”* The lake of fear within us (who knows where it comes from, really) becomes reinforced by description. Substantiation here means that ghostlike, ephemeral things—fears and ideas—are made substantial by us putting shapes and words on them. For example, a good Christian fears God. This “God” is merely a word, to which various concepts are attached. The concepts are what is meant by the form here in most cases. No one has ever seen God, but all are supposed to lie down in abject terror in His presence, and if you don't, you don't belong to the group.

Words upon words are piled on the believers until they feel they are truly experiencing the fear of God. Then they can spend their whole life feeling righteous about behaving timidly according to someone else's dictates, or lashing themselves over minor transgressions. Such a truncated life often leads to major transgressions in the imaginary name of God, crusades for instance. The measure of how much people inwardly hate this wholesale repression of their feelings while outwardly going along with it can be seen in the gleeful tortures, the hacking to bits and

burning of nominal nonbelievers. Often, the tortures would be commuted if the nonbelievers would agree to a short string of words, and more often than not they chose extensive torture and death rather than say those words. That's about as real as a ghost can get.

Of course, God is supposed to have an upside of blessing you in the future. But what about terrorists? Goblins? Murderers? No upside here at all. In place of a church, we have television to instill the fear of others in us. TV is excellent for this purpose, because its message bypasses the critical thinking areas of the brain to go straight to the "reptilian zones." Firefighters watch a lot of television, so I got to see the effect close up: after viewing the most outlandish and slanderous presentation of, say, ethnic minorities they would nod and say "That's just how it is." It proved to them how dangerous the "other" was, and they felt certain that anybody who didn't believe it was deluded.

If you boil any of these deranged beliefs down to their essence, there is nothing but opinion and speculation and wishful thinking to them. They are truly "ghostlike."

The human race is currently having a peak experience of mass hysteria and fear of the other on a scale the Upanishadic rishis and the more recent gurus could scarcely have imagined, but they got the principle right, from observing smaller-scale disturbances. Fearful delusions fueled by words and imagery have led to all our disasters of history. When confined and repressed within an individual, such delusions produce a similar self-destructiveness, leading to mental and physical disease and the stifling of love and joy. If we don't make an effort to root them out, they sit inside and bide their time, often under a pleasant and law-abiding veneer, until an opportunity for expression comes along.

Narayana Guru felt so strongly that we were throwing away our natural inheritance of happiness for no good reason, and he was passionate about offering a clear-headed pathway back to the

bliss that he knew from personal experience was our inner nature. Subtract the false and what's left must be true. He wants us to realize that everyone we meet is a reflection of our Self, and thus we should show sympathy for everything that comes along. By loving our world we are loving ourselves, and vice versa. We can only incline our heads in appreciation, offer thanks to Chance for helping us find our way to this great teacher, and dedicate ourselves to really getting the meaning of what's here. My thanks to everyone for a memorable and intriguing class.

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11/10/15

Adhyaropa Darsana Verse 7

When Self-knowledge shrinks,  
then ignorance is fearful;  
substantiation by name and form,  
in the most terrible fashion, looms here, ghostlike.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*When Self-knowledge shrinks  
Then prevails nescience fearful,  
Ghost-like, taking name and form,  
In most terrible fashion looms here.*

Verses 7 and 8 indicate the dead end we come to when we mistake our projections for reality, and the rest of Darsanamala is Narayana Guru's best effort to help us extricate ourselves from this often-painful predicament. These verses are therefore the most crucial starting point for a sincere search for truth. Unless we

recognize that something is out of kilter, we won't be able to rectify the situation.

We have all felt in our gut how the fear of imaginary beasties like ghosts can cause us a lot of pain and lead us to avoid certain locations, even though we may be fully convinced that there is no such thing as ghosts. This is the paradoxical state of mind the gurus want us to contemplate. Even though we are careful to only believe in things we are quite sure exist, they assure us this is not true: most of what we believe, if not all of it, is generated in our mind and does not correspond to anything actual in our environment. The fact that our beliefs “work”, that they have an operational effectiveness, overrides any reservations we might have about them. If we don't accept the gurus' premise and take a good hard look, we will simply continue in our default mode setting.

This is where a comfortable life actually militates against self-realization. The antidote is not to make our life uncomfortable so much as to be aware of how comfort lulls us to sleep. We are actually very fortunate that a compassionate teacher is helping us to stay alert against all odds.

Running through the Gurukula version of Vedanta is the awareness of how the fear of the other sabotages our peace of mind. Nitya's *That Alone* commentary on Atmo verses 36-41, dealing with sama and anya, is just about the apex of this strand of wisdom. Nitya epitomizes that section briefly here:

When knowledge is circumscribed by the boundary of an “other,” then the fear of that “other” can make the sphere of knowledge shrink. The idea of the “other” is saturated with fear. The only way to remove fear is to expand the horizon of knowledge until nothing remains beyond knowledge itself. (73)

The possible addition we find in Nitya's Darsanamala commentary is that the existence of the other is almost always a projection. In *That Alone* we are instructed to extend our boundaries to include the other as it exists, primarily as other people and other living beings.

Deb's opening thought was how well this verse outlines what our practice is. From a state of unitive absorption, aspects emerge that we then separate into subject and object; in other words our mode of thinking bifurcates the existing unity. The idea that we project illusions means that we inevitably split reality into yin and yang, good and bad, and so on. As Nitya puts it, "We modify the state of pure consciousness, which is absolute truth, to produce the illusions which we mistakenly call reality." Restoring our acceptance and appreciation of unity, Deb thought, was the short version of what we are doing as seekers of truth under the aegis of the Gurukula. She wondered, "how do we see through all that surface complexity to understand the deep inner cohesion of our world?"

Projecting duality on top of the omnipresent unity doesn't actually disrupt it; fortunately for us nothing can harm the unitive basis of existence. Weapons don't cut it and all that. Recall the Gita, II, 23 and 24, which read:

23) Weapons do not cut This, fire does not burn This, and water does not wet This; wind does not dry This.

24) Indeed it is uncleavable; It is non-inflammable; It is unwettable and non-dryable also—everlasting, all-pervading, stable, immobile; It is eternal.

Nonetheless, we tend to forget this basis of the world, caught up as we are in the manifold specific expressions of it, and there is nothing like an Other to draw us out of the peace of unitive



contemplation. Most of us no longer believe in ghosts as disembodied spirits, but we do firmly believe in ghostly ideas, thoughts untied to any real basis, which include all the ways of describing unity in terms of duality. What do we do when we are asked to give up the very things we most believe in? We refuse, of course.

Mostly we just nod and smile and walk on. Paying lip service to projections disguises our inclinations. Deep down we are committed: damned if I'll give up what I'm most sure of! The fear is that without our beliefs we are nothing—we will sink in the void. It doesn't matter that millions of glowing souls testify that it's safe and effective, that there is nothing to fear. That conviction is exactly what we have to surrender. That's why it's so hard to do!

We are so accustomed to our fears we hardly notice them. Fear prefers to remain out of sight. Instead of having to catch it, we can examine our beliefs, because these have often been impelled by fear. Nitya lists some examples of where to bring our attention:

The idea of “other” arises because we are very much influenced by our individuation as an entity possessing a specific name and form. True knowledge can exist only when one has a transparency of vision which transcends the limitations of formal perceptions and nominal conceptions. The immediacy of cognition in a person is a referent recognized by him as “this.” Every “this” can be connected with a conceptual predication. One says, “This is what I see; this is what I hear; this is what I like; this pains me; this is beautiful; this is ugly.” There is no end to the formations of units in knowledge. Moreover, when such formations are taken as disjunct entities, the conscious “I” stands apart from all of them as a separated individual in an ocean of infinite “otherness.” (73)

The verse implies a couple of useful techniques we can employ. Narayana Guru is not denying the importance of the terrible things that happen in our world. Far from it! But in our meditations we can see to what degree these are phantoms. What do we perceive of them here and now? Very little, if anything. So they are only present as memories and mental constructs. Ghosts, you might say. In the previous verses we have been examining how we shape our ideas more from previous experience than from any actual qualities of the subject. There is a substantial benefit to sitting down and seeing how our thoughts are based on suppositions and not any content of the present. It might lead us to imagine we could in fact be happy *now* despite the perception that the world is filled with suffering. They are not mutually exclusive propositions. It might even be worth considering that our happiness is a major contribution to the well-being of the world we live in.

We did collect a few examples of this kind of exorcism of ghosts. This week Susan did more driving yoga (her favorite!). Sitting in heavy traffic and feeling resentful for those ahead of her who didn't go as fast as she would have liked, she thought to herself that everyone else wants to get where they're going as much as she does. No one wants to sit in their car waiting for the light to change. Immediately she felt better and her stress level lowered.

Jan recalled being on a hike with her philosophy professor in college. As they crossed a high bridge he talked about the fear of heights being related to a subconscious desire everyone has to leap to their death. Jan had never been concerned about heights, but suddenly it was as if the fear was transmitted from the professor into her. Right then and there she became afraid of heights and has never gotten rid of it. Of course, it's a natural fear, but this illustrates how we often curse each other with ideas, and they are hard to counteract. It's like they are contagious. We should be very careful what we infect our fellow beings with.

I talked about my own fear of heights and how I worked hard to put it in remission in order to become a firefighter. I definitely made substantial progress, enough to work on high roofs and climb the 100 foot aerial ladders carrying heavy equipment. Previously I had routinely given in to the fear, but my desire for the job pressed me to stand up to it. It was like holding a snake, where the initial repugnance cools down to acceptance and sometimes even attraction. We recalled Bushra's wise words from the last class, telling how by meditating on her impending death, she went from a wall of fear to have what she described as an amazing experience in which many doors were opened.

Jan thought it would be good to carry on a dialogue with our fears. Fear happens right where we are most in the dark, so it is showing us exactly where we need to work. As Deb said, when you register fear you can look to where the sense of otherness is being evoked, and try to bring intelligent appraisal to bear on it.

Deb owned up to a deeply lodged fear of praying mantises—insects resembling Indian walking sticks. They are rather creepy, but Deb can't even bear to be near them. She runs away screaming. Last weekend she was doing her monthly dialogue group in prison. One of the inmates talked about spending 9 months in solitary confinement (such torture is routine in US prisons), a stretch that could easily drive anyone insane. He discovered a praying mantis in his cell, and befriended it, giving it food and water and keeping it alive for the entire time he was “in the hole.” It was his only companion. Deb was amazed to think of her mortal enemy being a dear friend, and wondered what it would be like if that was her only option for communication. Still, she hopes fervently that it never comes to that.

Moni added insult to injury—in a ghostly sense—by telling about a tiny woman who loves crocodiles and rescues them. Another of Deb's worst terrors is crocs. Even the idea of them activates her ghosts.

While it can be anything, often enough the Other actually appears in the guise of a human being. Moni told us about a friend of hers, a really brilliant fellow, who would carve out a specialty and become the most knowledgeable person in that field. Yet as soon as another person took up the subject, he would get upset and change to a new field. He couldn't bear to not be the sole exemplar of his interest.

I suggested a current political fantasy here in the US. A rightwing buzzword these days is immigration. Politicians conjure up a ghostly army of illegal immigrants creeping over the border to take our jobs and undermine our glorious way of life. Immigrants are the latest embodiment of the soulless communists of the 1950s or the bomb-toting terrorists of the turn of the century. The epitome of fear. If you are fortunate enough to encounter one, however, you will most likely meet one of the most humble, hard-working, gentle, unpretentious, selfless people on the planet. Knowing someone like that can convert a paranoid fantasy into compassionate understanding, and might even impel an effort to help out. That's how Self-knowledge grows.

This illustrates Nitya's simple assertion that "This separative apperception is the result of a lack of contemplative discipline." In other words, contemplation guides us back to unity, to pulling together. Contemplation can be active as well as withdrawn and solitary. He gives examples of where to look in our Self-contemplation:

Knowledge occurs only when there is a pure comprehension of the blissful awareness of existence. This possibility can be veiled by a mistaken identification of existence with nonexistence, knowledge with nescience, or the apprehension of responses such as disgust, fear, and nausea as value-factors.  
(74)

Nausea is in there as a nod to Sartre, I suppose.

There was a lively discussion of the political scene in America, which is without doubt at the lowest point in our history, far surpassing previous abysses such as the late nineteenth century robber baron era. Political discourse is a perfect illustration of this verse: “When Self-knowledge shrinks, then ignorance is fearful.” The fearful ignorance is backed up by substantiation through name-calling and the conjuring up of frightening images. Conjuring is a magician’s trick. There is a kind of demonic magic at work here. “See how it all comes as Mahendra magic!” (Atmo 27). It’s running wild here these days.

So, in America and many other places, demonizing the other is the central motif, because generating fear is a very profitable undertaking. But what can we do about it?

Narayana Guru implies a technique in the first line. Ignorance becomes fearful when Self-knowledge shrinks; therefore, expanding Self-knowledge dispels the fear-inducing ignorance. This is another case where battling head on with the problem is not the solution. Rather we should expand our loving awareness of the totality, the entire context, and then the fear will naturally disperse. Moreover, we should recognize that the real-seeming fears are in fact only ghosts substantiated by name and form, otherwise known as concepts and percepts. We talked about several practical ways to come to grips with this.

Jan shared an interview she heard on the radio of a British rabbi, whose basic message was that the time has come for us to find God in the stranger. This is an old idea that must be revived every moment of our lives, because the brain’s default setting is fear of anything strange. India has its similar motto: the guest is God. So we need to convert the unknown into the known, the stranger into the friend, on all levels.

As Nancy insisted, we ignore the ravings of public figures at our peril. History is full of buffoons who took power and wreaked

havoc. She's right. The Guru's message is not a call to tune out but to tune in. A healthy world needs our participation. But wishing things were better is just another ghost. As is fearing what could go wrong. The idea is to be as fully present as we can be. We aren't likely to be able to solve all the world's problems, but we can lend a hand with the problems that do land in our lap.

Nancy could see that the serious problems we face weren't going to be solved right away. To me, problems and their solution is what the Earth is all about. This is a school for souls, and if there were no problems there wouldn't be any learning, either. We should view problems as an invitation to do good work rather than as a curse. Nancy felt that having a more grounded perspective could be as contagious as spreading fear and distrust. Deb added that instead of pushing our apparent enemies away, we could foster the ability to reach out and wonder why they think that way. We can have a sense of openness, of caring toward others.

Karen wondered if she should send loving thoughts toward the lunatics that dominate our public discourse at the moment. Would that help? I suppose anything that energizes loving thoughts is reasonable, yet I assured her that her loving nature already radiated in all directions and affected whatever it could. So she shouldn't try to force the issue, but rather continue practicing love wherever she was and whoever she was with. This is something she is already quite good at. In terms of Narayana Guru's implicit advice, she could assess the situation intelligently, perhaps noticing that politicians were intentionally creating a distraction from real issues more worthy of our attention. What is the motivation? It's hard to say, but we might quickly realize that following the entertaining ravings of hired goons is a miasma that can suck us in and paralyze us from doing anything of value. Our commercially-oriented world benefits from luring us into its context. It just might be that "disaffiliation from the context of suffering" (the Gita's

definition of yoga) is our finest personal contribution to just about everything.

Speaking of which, the Gita's definition of yoga, given in Chapter VI, is always worth revisiting. The four verses are a single sentence:

20) (That state) where the (relational) mind attains tranquility, restrained through continued cultivation of a yogic attitude, and where also the Self by the Self in the Self enjoys happiness,

21) that in which one cognizes the ultimate limit of happiness which can be grasped by reason and goes beyond the senses, and established wherein there is no more swerving from the true principle,

22) and which, having obtained, there is no other gain thought of which could be greater (in value), in which, when established, there is no swerving even by heavy suffering

23) —that should be known by the name of yoga: disaffiliation from the context of suffering. Such a yoga should be adhered to with determination, free from spiritual regret.

We have a million ways to excuse ourselves from the possibility of happiness—we have become experts in denying ourselves the joys of a contemplative attitude. Nitya talks about the central place of happiness in relation to this verse of Darsanamala in his Atmo verse 58 commentary, which I'll append in Part II.

In closing we sat together in the unified state beautifully indicated in Nitya's closing words:

There is the possibility in some for consciousness to free itself from specific transactional events and the fantasizing ideations of dreams, to remain poised in a state of unconditioned awareness without falling into the state of deep sleep. This is called the fourth state of consciousness—a state of pure transcendence. As this state is without finite limitations, it is called the pure state of the Self. In fact, the other three states occur within the state of pure consciousness, as modifications of consciousness, producing item after item of what is generally called knowledge or experience. We modify the state of pure consciousness, which is absolute truth, to produce the illusions which we mistakenly call reality. So habitually and continuously do we vary our focus of awareness, that few of us come to know that the pure state even exists. This is one of the tragic aspects of individuation. Narayana Guru gives a clearer picture of that tragedy in the next verse. (74-5)

## Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

In this verse it is pointed out how, because of the absence of right knowledge (*avidyà*) about the Self, all beings find creation to have a terrifying aspect. When such knowledge is absent then nescience (lends support) to the appearance of name and form (*nàma-rupa*). (This plurality of) name and form (entities) seem ghost-like in a most terrifying fashion, presenting themselves as appearances.

It is only because there is a lack of Self-knowledge (*àtma-vidyà*) that the whole of the universe seems to be the seat of all fear and suffering. When the correct knowledge about the Self prevails, all apparent sufferings and their sources (in the world) disappear. There will not be any cessation of suffering until one realises the



true knowledge, resulting from the realisation of one's own self. Self-knowledge is the most superior of all means for release. In the same way as in cooking the only means is fire (or heat), so there is no salvation without Self-knowledge. This is what Shankaràcàrya has taught.

By this verse the man who is desirous of getting release from suffering resulting from lack of Self-knowledge, is to be considered an *adhikàri* (a person fit to study this science), and that the subject-matter of this present work is *àtma-vidyà* (the Science of the Self). Furthermore, between *àtma-vidyà* and this work there is the relation of subject-matter and object-matter. The final release from suffering due to nescience and the attainment of the goal of full Self-knowledge, is the aim and utility of this work as required by Sanskrit convention.

Suffering and ignorance apply not only to people in this world but to all created beings, whether seen or unseen, wherever they be in the universe. In principle this applies to all of them. (It is to be remembered that) even the creation undertaken by the Lord involves the same wonderful and terrifying elements of this very kind.

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From the end of That Alone, Verse 58:

Everything belonging to the world of relativism has an origination, and hence is terminable. In the first vision of his *Darsanamala*, the *Adhyaropa Darsanam*, Narayana Guru says:

When Self-knowledge shrinks,  
then ignorance is fearful;  
substantiation by name and form,  
in the most terrible fashion, looms here, ghostlike. (v.7)

Forgetfulness of the Self or the Absolute is called nescience or ignorance. The feeling that a happy moment is gone or is only about to come indicates a rift or chasm in Self-knowledge.

Although the sun does not go anywhere, for the people dwelling on the rotating earth it looks as though it is rising, traveling across the sky and then setting. For those who know that time and space are only creations of the mind, however, there are no limitations and there are no events.

The value of the Absolute is coexistent with its beginningless and endless existence. The highest value of the Absolute as a living experience is identical with happiness, and the normative notion for deciding its validity is the unexpending nature of the *summum bonum*. In other words, the nature of the Absolute is eternal happiness. For this reason Narayana Guru equates imperishable happiness with the Self, and the Self with the Absolute. Perceiving or experiencing happiness is the same as knowing the Self, and to know the Self is to transcend all limitations, such as time and space, name and form, cause and effect, and the duality of subject and object. Therefore, we should remain Self-founded in the unexpending Beingness of the Absolute.