

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

### **Verse 8**

10/18/5

“This is terrible and empty of content, like a phantom city; even as such, the whole universe is made as a wonder by the Primeval One.”

The first thing to notice about the verse is that it’s dialectically structured: This is terrible—This is a wonder. Neither side expresses the whole truth by itself; only by pairing terror and wonder do we come to a neutral understanding of what the whole universe is.

Frankly, I’ve always been frightened of this verse, which conjures up desolate images like something out of H.P. Lovecraft. To my delight the class revealed the transcendently beautiful side of the realization behind the description of the world as built up out of projections. It may have only been the effects of Moni’s birthday cake, but to me this was one of the most inspiring and elevating classes we’ve ever had at the Portland Gurukula. Of course, Jyothi, in her third and last class with us, brought a fresh perspective and the “vibe” of Guru Nitya particularly vividly. And she started us off playing the veena which has sat handsomely but disconsolately at our house for eight years awaiting the opportunity.

Early on, Bill mentioned that he had spent the week reflecting on the last verse, watching the process of fears and anxieties arising and then dismissing them. Bringing awareness to

neglected areas of our psyche is precisely what this study is all about.

Nitya gets the gist of the Adhyaropa Darsana perfectly in his commentary:

The world presented to us as individuals is not the entire universe. It is a very limited environment of a relatively few square miles in area, and which belongs entirely to the present moment. We can perhaps give it a time-span of a few hours. The problems arising from it are likely to be few and simple, but we complicate matters which should only arise from, and relate to, our individual environment, by hooking on to them the structuring of a vast and complex world. The world with which we complicate our responses to sensory input is the conditioning passed on to us from generation after generation. This conditioning arises from the store of information chronicled as the history of human endeavor and discovery—the story of man’s encounters with nature and his fellow humans. Thus, the world we think to be real has in fact very little objective reality. It is padded out in all directions with half-baked conceptual notions and hidebound prejudices. (78-9)

We started off with an exercise of examining one way each of us is drawn away from the present to worry or obsess over some imaginary difficulty. It took quite a while for most people to come up with something, probably because I phrased it poorly. Luckily Charles started us off with one common to everybody, mentioning how watching the news and realizing how manipulative and narrowly selective of disaster and misery it was, made him derisive and focused on faraway imaginations. Sophisticated people aren’t too easily sucked in to simply accept the news, but because of its powerful and effective presentation we still have to struggle to reject it, and there may well be subconscious attunement anyway.

Widespread television news watching has made America vastly more fearful and anxious and suspicious of strangers, all based on clever psychological manipulation to sell products and policies. We may choke back our conscious fears, but experiences we witness take place on multiple unconscious levels as well. Television is specifically designed to bypass conscious mediation. Nancy then made an interesting comparison between television news bias and the individual's innate selectivity. We choose what suits us just as the news chooses what suits it. Limitations are inevitable. Nitya's commentary reads, "what has been experienced by us in the past reasserts itself in the present in every situation, appearing as a frightening and ghostlike presence which haunts us in our transactions with the world." (79)

The normal state of humanness is to identify with our beliefs, yet to not be aware of how we do identify with them: "I am my ideas," "I am what I think," "I am what I have gone through," "I am my expectations," and so on. These might well be consciously denied but are deeply felt in the body. There's a lot of resistance in conjunction with letting such notions go, if only for an hour in a class exercise. But this is an advanced class, with a lot of collective thought-water under the bridge. Most people are already familiar with false identifications and have rooted many of them out. Moni mentioned that often during the day she goes along with certain ideas, getting swept up by them, but at some point she'll become aware of what's happening and simply drop them. What better advice could there be? Few of us are able to be so centered in the present that we aren't pulled out of our "home" by fantasies, but as long as we don't identify with them, at some point we'll realize what's going on and let them go, coming back to our center. The Gita recommends this as its primary meditation technique. The trick, and hopefully Moni will say more of this in future classes, is to "simply drop it." False identifications cling precisely to the extent we are unaware or partially aware of them. Only an

advanced contemplative can consistently get to that flash of awareness and instantly drop the burden. Most of us struggle much more than that. Still, if there is a path and we are on it, this is what it is. We are engaged in a process of releasing identifications with the past and future and allowing ourselves to join the flow of the present as full-fledged participants in the game of life.

Others then contributed their personal sticking points, but also contributed how they had successfully resolved their problems through wise insights.

Nitya says, “Two threatening aspects of life are our present ruminations on past experiences, which arouse regret and remorse, and the fear which arises when we contemplate the uncertainty of the future. Remorse related to the past and anxiety related to the future—so much of these overlap into the present that the world begins to look like the Inferno for a great many people.... The here and now is always simple. It is a great wonder that we insist on complicating it, thereby introducing an element of dread, by linking it with a dead yesterday and an unknown tomorrow. This we do at the expense of our enjoyment of the present, which could otherwise be a loving and meaningful experience of the Self.” (p. 79)

If the proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof, the class understood the intent of this verse very well. While beginning with a terrible, empty city we moved to a profound sense of happiness and communion in the present, precisely the purported loving and meaningful experience of the Self.

\* \* \*

11/17/15

Adhyaropa Darsana Verse 8

This is terrible and empty of content,

like a phantom city;  
even as such, the whole universe  
is made as a wonder by the Primeval One.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Terrible and empty of content  
Like a city infernal,  
Even as such a marvel  
Did the Lord make the whole universe.*

Oh, you should have been there! On a classic Oregon stormy night, we had another communal leap into the depths of the verse, covering a wide range of territory. I am totally daunted to try and reproduce a significant amount of it. Wish me luck!

Deb opened with the thought that the core of this commentary is asking, what is it we are conscious of and how are we conscious of it? In addressing this we are aiming for a lucid understanding of our overarching Self. She pointed out that the verse's first word—this—refers back to the previous verse, where it is said that substantiation by name and form, grounded in ignorance, is the empty content we project as our world. Here again it is underlined as terrible, in case we've missed the point. It's okay if this bothers you. In fact, if it doesn't bother you, you aren't likely to seek truth, as the effort to forge a more solid basis of understanding is often called. Presumably everyone along on this group study would prefer to reduce their ignorance and is willing to make at least a modicum of effort to put together an improved version of themselves.

A lot of the commentary seems to refer more to the next verse, being a survey of different views of how the world has evolved. Nitya liked to lead his students on extended meditations like this. But there are some very relevant ideas sprinkled

throughout it. Fortunately, Nitya provides a “pull quote” that expresses the gist of not only the verse but the whole endeavor of Darsanamala in two short sentences:

The world we think to be real has in fact very little objective reality. It is padded out in all directions with half-baked conceptual notions and hidebound prejudices.

The gurus assure us that this is not a fixed situation that we are helpless to deal with, although we are bound to remain limited to some degree. Nonetheless we have plenty of control over skinning the hide off our prejudices and baking our ideas more fully. Sure, a devious part of us resists enlightenment with all its wiles, but if we are dedicated to overcoming our own resistance, we can make plenty of meaningful progress. To add to the incentive, Nitya adds another key concept, impeccably stated:

What has been experienced by us in the past reasserts itself in the present in every situation, appearing as a frightening and ghostlike presence which haunts us in our transactions with the world.

As we have learned, usually these pernicious influences are invisible, just like ghosts. We have to infer them from their effects, and this requires self-observation and welcoming the opinions of others. It's not always easy, but the results are often quite satisfying. We did some wonderful work together last night.

One thing that finally occurred to me at long last is an implication of the second half of the verse. Not only our personal substantiation, but the world too is made *from the beginning* as a phantom city, empty of real content. It is wonderful and marvelous, as well as terrible and empty. This means that the solution to life's problems is not to be found in some ultimate transactional answer.

It isn't that we can finally "get it right" and after that everything is okay. There is no perfect state within the transactional. We cannot have a life free of difficulties. The world is inevitably dual, and will always have good and bad aspects generating dissonance. We can refine our understanding, and spread kindness and consideration wherever we go, but the hope that we will eventually achieve an earthly paradise is a vain one. The only resolution comes from reacquainting ourselves with the source, rather than trying to resolve the chaos. The chaos is not going away no matter what we do.

Despite this, we appear to be doomed to keep trying to fix everything with the perfect program. Narayana Guru is hinting that this is a fool's errand. Instead we can accept the frailty of every system and every human attempt to live well, making us more tolerant and compassionate even as we staunchly resist becoming bogged down in prejudiced and conditioned thinking. It's actually a profound idea, if we take the time to assess how our actions are motivated by the attempt to get the right answer, instead of relating our partial vision with a universal basis that infuses everything. The invitation here is to a major change of orientation.

A most easily practical aspect of our study is touched on by another of Nitya's clearly stated ideas:

Two threatening aspects of life are our present ruminations on past experiences, which arouse regret and remorse, and the fear which arises when we contemplate the uncertainty of the future. Remorse related to the past and anxiety related to the future—so much of these overlap into the present that the world begins to look like the Inferno for a great many people.  
(79)

This is of course a very familiar idea, and yet it bears revisiting. Jan affirmed that she is going through a difficult time of transition,

and this philosophy has helped her to keep heart and remain optimistic. She has a lot of uncertainty in her life right now. She keeps trying to be present instead of looking ahead too much, and when she manages this, she knows she is more in touch with her loving feelings and all that is great with the world. It's not that there aren't serious challenges, but she is trying not to add her fears of what might go wrong. She well knows that the anxiety this generates undermines her ability to face what she has to deal with in a competent manner.

Facing changes always brings up worries about the unknown future, and it is anything but easy to reassure ourselves that it is going to be okay. You would think that a lifetime of more or less successful outcomes would be enough to give us confidence, but that isn't how our brains work, apparently. Remember how Atmo verse 66 is Narayana Guru's assertion of this truth, beginning: "Food and all such always come again as a matter of course." Still, when we're hungry we worry. We need reassurance, in addition to food. Food can stand for all items of need, of course.

The point is not to abstain from having goals, but to move toward our goals uncluttered with expectations and worries. Nitya was a great example of how this works. He often had visions, directions, programs, but he didn't draw up specific plans. He intuited a need or a good idea, and left it to the universe to implement it. He thought about it and gave himself to it, but had faith that it would come about if it was worthwhile. Many things fell together under his auspices. It often looked like a kind of everyday magic was springing up around him.

Susan provided another example of how we do this. Like Jan she is in transition and is looking for a new house to buy. She has the vision that this is where she is going, and she makes the necessary efforts to bring it about, which are quite demanding, especially right now in Portland. She strives to keep a calm and equal-minded attitude while she is going about the search process,



looking for the perfect place to settle down again. She knows that anxiety about the outcome will only cloud her peace of mind and make meeting the challenge harder than it already is. She also has to expand the rigid expectations she naturally has based on her previous (exceptional!) living situations, so that she can appreciate the possibilities of places that are superficially different from what she is used to. She admits that some days she is better at remaining neutral than others. In any case, there is a mutual participation between the possibilities afforded by the environment and her own efforts to match up with them. It gives her the chance to weed out extraneous modes of thought.

Deb talked about how people often argue that there are so many awful things going on in the world, how can anyone keep their equanimity? Shouldn't they be upset? The solution isn't to pretend that problems don't exist so you can live in a vacuum, but to be fully present in every situation. That is the optimal contribution; worrying about distant "rumors of wars" doesn't accomplish anything useful.

Paul admitted he sometimes feels guilty that with all the chaos in the world he can remain dispassionate and removed. Yet it is still so easy to get rattled. Some little thing happens—many of us have had water leaks in our houses this week, for instance—and you feel put upon by fate. Somehow we have to deal with the "leaks" and console ourselves that they are as much a part of reality as the good times.

Paul also felt that the meditation Nitya recounted was one he could relate to:

Once Narayana Guru asked a disciple, who later became Nataraja Guru, to meditate upon the room in which he sat as though nothing existed outside of it. He wanted his disciple to practice living entirely in the present moment and circumstances.

Paul could feature going into a room and subtracting everything from his mind beyond immediate perception. It would feel good. Give the gift of presence. I agreed that we should do something like this occasionally, possibly daily. There is a value in pulsating between small and local and broad and general. Each feeds and counterbalances the other. Often we bring our general beliefs in to the small room with us. The trick is to check them at the door.

Nitya elaborates this key idea beautifully:

The world presented to us as individuals is not the entire universe. It is a very limited environment of a relatively few square miles in area, and which belongs entirely to the present moment. We can perhaps give it a time-span of a few hours. The problems arising from it are likely to be few and simple, but we complicate matters which should only arise from, and relate to, our individual environment, by hooking on to them the structuring of a vast and complex world. The world with which we complicate our responses to sensory input is the conditioning passed on to us from generation after generation.

Bill summed up that it all boiled down to a matter of being present. The way we react to things is like the phantom city, and we need to know we are the Self and not the phantom. Nitya's conclusion brings this home poignantly:

The here and now is always simple. It is a great wonder that we insist on complicating it, thereby introducing an element of dread, by linking it with a dead yesterday and an unknown tomorrow. This we do at the expense of our enjoyment of the present, which could otherwise be a loving and meaningful experience of the Self.

This reminded Susan of something she once heard from a therapist, that she should be planetary herself, instead of orbiting other people's planets. All our half-baked notions keep us on the periphery, focused on family members and difficult situations, instead of sinking into ourselves. If we are planetary, we actually have more effect on others around us. In our orbiting as untethered asteroids we mean to be effective, but we don't have enough gravity to accomplish very much. We can all observe how Susan is beginning to really put this advice into practice, and it's heartening to see.

To me, this verse isn't just suggesting an occasional technique to be put into practice during meditation. Everything we encounter affords us the opportunity to center ourselves in the present. Nitya's point about "half-baked conceptual notions" speaks to this. Normally we react before we understand the full story. We should not be content with this! On a large scale, the reason black ops work so well is that nations react quickly to the provocation, and don't concern themselves with the real culprits. It makes impressive political propaganda, and a lot of mayhem. We also do this in our relationships. Our first response is often prejudiced and based on very limited information (which could be called ignorance). If we allow for more information, we will almost certainly change our tune. Unfortunately, humans are prone to do what nations do: react quickly and then stand by the faulty position we've taken, deflecting all attempts to correct the record.

Moni said that thanks to her years in the class she had changed her way of thinking. She used to always bring in her opinions into every discussion but now she is comfortable leaving them. Where she reacted immediately to name and form, now she sees that as her prejudice, and rethinks her position. It's a very big change for the better. Moni has always been kind and considerate, but that was often at her own expense. It was forced to some

degree, and sacrificial. Now it is more natural, because she doesn't have to hold onto her opinions so tightly.

Nitya often taught how for anything to be actualized, the potential has to already exist in the Absolute ground. It is not empty. It looks empty, but it is filled with potentials. We are the agents to actualize those potentials. Jan talked about how that feels when you are at a crossroads, how you sense the possibilities yet remain uncertain of your best choice. Knowing that you will create a different reality depending on which way you go forces you to concentrate intensely on your decision. It can even seem overwhelming.

One of Robert Frost's most famous poems, *The Road Not Taken*, captures the delicious dilemma of not knowing which way to choose. (You can read it here, along with a fairly interesting article deconstructing its popularity as, in fact, his *most* famous poem, and possibly the most famous poem in the English language: <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/09/11/the-most-misread-poem-in-america/>). I'll include Nitya's writing about the actualization of potentials in Part II.

Oh, there was so much more... I give up. One last idea I can share is something Deb brought up. She was rather baffled by this part of the commentary:

Primeval Spirit before the creation of the world is depicted as the infant Krishna, reclining on a fig leaf which floats on water, while sucking the big toe of his right foot. There is also a famous sculpture by Rodin of a child feeling with one finger a thorn stuck in the sole of his left foot. In all such ideograms we have the idea of an existence prior to its manifestation.

This turned into a great example of brainstorming, as the class came up with a number of insights. First, one image depicts pain and the other pleasure. There is definitely a sense of meeting a new

stimulus, of exploring something, and perhaps of trying to figure out what to do. Nancy hit the nail on the head: these images portray the junction between existence and experiencing that existence. It is experienced by our interaction with it.

Thinking of the Rodin sculpture, Deb recalled an amusing incident from when our daughter Harmony was about 2 years old. We were taking a walk in the Arizona desert, actually on a manicured golf course, in the evening when nobody was around. Harmony started saying, “Happening, happening.” We didn’t think anything of it at first. To us, a happening was a cool event, a gathering of happy souls. Like our family walk was a happening. But Harmony kept saying it, and became more insistent: “Happening!” Suddenly I realized she was trying to say something urgent with her limited vocabulary. After studying her for a while I looked at her sandal-clad feet, and there was a three-inch long thorn stuck in her heel. It was a very painful happening indeed! I suppose it also illustrates how our conditioning kept us adults from getting the message right away, though we did catch on eventually. And not too much blood was spilled.

The class shared several examples of how our ignorance interferes with our enjoyment and full participation in life. Perhaps you can think of your own examples in the security of your own home. It’s always a relief to cast off those ghosts! Aum.

## Part II

Swami Vidyananda’s commentary:

As the visible world is like an infernal city, empty of content (*sunya*) and terrible (*bhayamkaram*) so in the most wonderful manner, the visible and invisible aspects referring to all possible worlds were created by the Lord.

Because the Lord is all-powerful and capable of accomplishing anything, He was able to create something which had no basis in reality, but still could be seen as a wonderful appearance, because it is at once empty of content and terrible, though describable as a marvel (*adbhuta*).

The term *vibhuh* employed in the verses refers to the omnipresence, omnipotence, and everlasting eternity of the Lord. (*vi*, before; and *bhuh*, what exists; because it existed before, it is called *vibhuh*).

\* \* \*

Here are some relevant thoughts from Nitya's *Psychodynamics of Pranava*:

What is potentially not present in the cause cannot manifest in the effect. Conversely, anything manifested as an effect is indicative of a latent cause, a hidden seed. Here the limitation arises from a pulsation within manifestation, expanding from a cause to an enlarged field of effect, and, in the same manner, centripetally turning inward to epitomize the entire effect into a causal factor. This process, which is going on interminably, is happening in the unknown and in the unconscious. Therefore the entire perspective of it is not available either to perceptual observation or to conceptual comprehension. Here also, a limitation is set which has for its frame of reference the time-space continuum and the intrinsic laws that govern the origin, expansion, reduction and dissolution of mass. Omniscience in this case is when the process in the unconscious has been maximally interpreted to the conscious mind. When one cannot go farther into the niche of the unconscious, the omniscience of causal consciousness reaches its insurmountable frontier. (57)

More:

The phenomenality of creation is a cyclic process, very much like the spurting of water in a fountain, which remains visible in the process of rising and falling, and then becomes one with the water of the reservoir, only to be thrown up again in the next moment. Life on earth is also cyclic. The process of obtaining a body, the use of it for carrying out whatever action is appropriate, and finally disintegrating, to be transformed again into the instrument of another living being, is just like the water circulating through a fountain or a smith casting the same metal again and again into new forms.

In such processes, the water or metal and so on are not enriched by the specific transformation they have undergone. But life is not like that. Each embodiment enriches it with the registry of various experiences. The cumulative effect of undergoing such experiences becomes embedded in the genetic stream, the selective mold through which evolution is sustaining the biologic principle of earth, which thus has in it a record of ceaseless learning. (58)

### Part III

I knew Jean would read the article on the Frost poem, and she sent a very helpful addition:

I'll take the bait; it's a nice diversion. Here's a little more history about "Road Not Taken." (Wikipedia)

*Frost spent the years 1912 to 1915 in England, where among his acquaintances was the writer [Edward Thomas](#). Thomas and Frost became close friends and took many walks together. After Frost returned to New Hampshire in 1915, he sent Thomas an advance*

copy of "The Road Not Taken."<sup>[2]</sup> The poem was intended by Frost as a gentle mocking of indecision, particularly the indecision that Thomas had shown on their many walks together. Frost later expressed chagrin that most audiences took the poem more seriously than he had intended; in particular, Thomas took it seriously and personally, and it may have been the last straw in Thomas' decision to enlist in [World War I](#).<sup>[2]</sup> Thomas was killed two years later in the [Battle of Arras](#).

It's neither here nor there, but it struck me suddenly that the young Robert Frost (1874-1963) sure resembles the young Joe Hill (1879-1915).

But the point is well taken (from the article you suggested), that we always grapple with self-deception when constructing the story of our own lives.

\* \* \*

Nitya's *Psychodynamics of Pranava* elaborates on a section of the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, which we studied together a while back. This is related to Sutra 1:30, and is essentially the same as what Nancy used in the book, *Living the Science of Harmonious Union*. I reprint it here because it's so relevant to the challenge of making good decisions and Frost's poetic take on it, and it's an instance of Nitya's great driving analogy of pressing down the brake and the accelerator at the same time:

To arrive at a certain goal, even if you have the best mode of transportation, if you have no mind to get up and drive your vehicle, you will be sitting lost in boredom. As years go by, we see more and more people who are exposed to mental depression. They know they have to get up and act, but they



cannot even make up their minds to hold a pen. This is the dysfunction that comes from the mental side, called *styana*, mental depression.

The body and mind can both get in each other's way. The mind is willing to go but the body sits there like a heavy load, or the body is ready to move yet the mind is apprehensive about allowing the body to function. The result is like the driver of a car who puts his feet firmly on the accelerator and the brake at the same time—a lot of commotion goes on inside but nothing happens. Such a person is aware of the dreadful waste of his time, and that itself causes a drain of energy. Consequently, his energy cannot be channelized in any direction. One of the greatest tragedies in human life is that many hours are wasted each day because of this kind of inability to take a decision. This is called *samsaya*, doubt.

When a machine is operating only at a throbbing level and not put into gear, it becomes overheated. It is the same with our body-mind machine. Sitting in one room and endlessly ruminating causes grievous distress to one's nervous system, and this causes many people to exaggerate. They become nervous, irritable, and unable to cope with anyone or anything. Such a delirious state is named *pramada*, exaggeration.

An exaggerating mind spends too much energy in a short time and the body and mind feel exhausted. Nature's way to prevent further deterioration is to take away incentives to act, making the body and mind lazy. This is *alasya*.