

II Apavada Darsana, Truth by Constant Refutation of the False

Verse 3

That which has no origin or dissolution is none other than the supreme Absolute; through maya the confusion arises that there is origin and dissolution in the Self.

1/11/6

This verse is an extension of the previous, so we sailed through with no problem. Even Nataraja Guru, in his brief summation, defers discussion on this idea to the fourth chapter, where maya is fully addressed. Nonetheless, Nitya brings out some important ideas in his comments.

After examining the projective origin of the cosmos in the first darsana, the second darsana aims to pare down those projections to the minimum in a process of reduction, by eliminating falsehood. What's left is to see life as lila, a divine sportive play, where all meaning occurs within the unfoldment of events just as the tree is contained in the seed. Such an attitude allows for more detachment, more ability to let go when the flow of events sweeps on from what you cherish or cling to. This is what is meant by *saucam*, purity, in the Gita.

Nitya's interpretation of the second half of the verse focuses on how the coloration of our minds is imparted to the "outside" world. Since we only are aware of a tiny fraction of the whole at any time, we select that fraction in accordance with our own interests, hopes, desires and fears. This is a generic defect of all humans, without exception. Aldous Huxley wrote of this idea in

The Doors of Perception after realizing on a mescaline trip that the brain was actually a reducing valve, screening out most of the vast dazzling chaos of the universe so that it could deal with an amount it can process. Here Nitya enunciates the downside: “If awareness is colored by a negative apprehension, it obscures the presence of a value. Then the natural bliss of the Self and its existential experience are separated by ignorance.”

Knowing that this is a universal dilemma, and not just the Other Person’s Problem, opens the door to compassion and empathy. We can very easily spot our neighbor’s colorations, but our own are invisible to us in the way that water is invisible to fish. We can only strive to see our own conditionings through the feedback of our experience. Life is really our Guru, continually offering instruction if we are attuned to it. So it’s good to be open to the critical statements of others, while being as gentle as possible in returning the compliments. Leave that part for the Guru principle to take care of. From my experience (and behavior) it is much more the norm to criticize others and be very gentle on ourselves.

This is actually one of the most important ideas to carry with us on our journey through the fields of lila. I believe that the idealism of the 1960s was derailed in large part because so many of us believed so totally in our own righteousness and utterly demonized our opponents. Turns out part of the motivation was the FBI clandestinely encouraging those attitudes in us naïve children, as an excuse to intervene. Where was Narayana Guru when we needed him?

We wrapped up our brief class talking about ways we’ve observed, in ourselves or in friends, how a mindset colors the surroundings. Moni gave the best example, recalling how when Nitya was almost 16 he had already started his life as a wandering mendicant, but he was beset with doubts and second thoughts. It began to bother him that his leaving home would have made his

family miserable. They were pining for him, knowing he would never return. He conjured up a picture of his grieving family as he took a train back to his village. He had to walk several kilometers in the dark evening to reach the family compound, thinking all the while how glad and relieved they would be to see him. As he entered the compound with aching heart, the first thing he heard was his mother's happy laughter ringing through the air. In an instant he realized that all his thoughts were just his own projections. He picked a spot out of sight behind a building to sleep, and in the morning, before anyone was stirring, he walked back out and down the road to his destiny.

Jan sent in a lovely "Yes, and...." I hope I didn't imply we should be MORE critical of ourselves, to match how we are with others, but that we should be more gentle and understanding with both sides. There's a lot of hostility floating around these days, where a sympathetic approach would accomplish much more of what we hope for. Which is exactly what Jan is saying:

Hi Scott. I liked a lot of what you said [in the notes], and I wanted to further try to explain what I was trying to say last night about this verse, and the idea of our colorations and projections vastly limiting and determining our experience. I see what you said about needing to be open to the criticisms of others, and to be wary (when we remember) of how our own projections and colorations shape our experience. Too often, you say, we are harsh in our criticism of others and gentle on ourselves. I think that is true, and maybe I am in the group that is also harsh in my criticism of myself. I think as much as we open ourselves to the criticism of others, in order to grow, we need to filter that through the inner wisdom that speaks from deep within us. For, as the entire tree is contained in the seed, I think it is important to see how different each seed is. We are all so unique and that is part of the Absolute's master plan. Our

life, with its own brand of projections and colorations, is our becoming and the shape and texture of our tree. Most of us cannot ever escape that. So I think we need to embrace ourselves a lot too! Accepting lovingly, and seeing with eyes wide open, how we again and again rise up like a wave and crash on the shores of our life. It can feel futile, relentless, out of control – because despite greater awareness, we repeat the same patterns that do not connect us to the Absolute, but obscure it. Still, like you said last night, that is the game, and our unique way of doing it is our seed doing its thing, and somewhere, somehow, we need to see the beauty of it, the humor in it, and the playfulness of it, and find that place of love that Nitya talks about. I just love that idea of our “becoming,” and seeing our life as being exactly the way it’s supposed to be for us, this seed doing its thing. Enough.

Peace, Jan

A last thought: Rationally speaking, human relations are impossible. With this caveat, one should presume a kernel of truth in what other people say, and presume our own assertions are only partially true as well. Then there will be plenty of tolerance.

A big part of the struggle to get along is to decode the other’s communication by making allowances for the colorations of their mood and predilections. Similarly, it helps to subtract our own colorations, which the other person possibly sees much better than we do—and vice versa. It is at this point that the ego defenses kick in to protect our own color scheme and downgrade the other’s. As long as both sides are convinced they are in sole possession of the truth, trouble will be brewing. Being aware of our universal intrinsic limitations is almost certain to reduce animosity.

It may be that more often than we suspect we are less responsible than we imagine. An overarching principle or impulse can lead us into conflict, and the individuals involved are only

incidental causes. As Shakespeare said, there is a tide in the affairs of men. We can stay afloat or sink with our own efforts, but we can't turn the tide.

As a practical matter, the degree of selfishness in each person's version is the key to sorting things out. Narayana Guru recommends a vision which gives equal weight to everyone's interests and tries to achieve the maximum general good. This not only involves making significant concessions from the point of view of your own ego, but also standing firm when others interpret your good will as an open invitation to take more than their fair share. Once again we find ourselves in need of a nuanced and dialectically balanced outlook. You must love yourself and the other in equal measure, which is easily accomplished only when the common ground of all is in sight.

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3/1/16

Apavada Darsana Verse 3

That which has no origin or dissolution
is none other than the supreme Absolute;
through *maya* the confusion arises that there is
origin and dissolution in the Self.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*To that which origin and dissolution is not
That is none other than the ultimate Absolute;
(That there) is origin and re-absorption
By maya's confusion in the Self (is supposed).*

Nitya continues his elucidation of Apavada, “the continuous refutation of the false,” elaborating on the fertile imagery of Narayana Guru’s verse. It’s easy enough to visualize that an eternal Absolute underlies a universe brimming with things that come and go. The modern mind routinely accepts this by picturing a sea of atoms, which continually take on new forms without forfeiting their intrinsic nature. But what does this mean for us?

Refutation of the false is known as deconstruction nowadays. We start with a monumental, roughly formed idea, and like a sculptor we chip away at it by picking out where the idea doesn’t stand up to close examination. Once the extraneous junk has been removed it is sometimes found that an exquisite sculpture is revealed that had simply been hiding within the original substance.

In any case, most common beliefs are easy enough to begin the deconstruction process with: huge chunks are rotten or otherwise unnecessary, and can be readily discarded. The fine finishing work can perhaps be left to the experts, but we all can benefit from deleting what is obviously false. The effort is made more amusing by the fact that lots of people swear by the rotten parts, and will curse you out for daring to impugn that they are less than divinely inspired. We might as well make a complicated game of it. Bring on the bathos!

Back in the 1970s when this book was composed, Nitya was frequently confronted by people who insisted the mind was the only thing standing between them and realization, so he always took great pains to disabuse us of such notions. The Apavada lends itself particularly well to his arguments on behalf of clear thinking. For instance, he writes:

The Upanishads repeatedly say that mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. Superimposition establishes the state of bondage, while the systematic denial of superimposed falsehood brings one to the state of liberation. (125)

If the mind is simply suppressed—fMRI reveals it never shuts down entirely, even in deep meditation or coma—the state of superimposition remains in the driver’s seat. And anyway, “the mind is an impediment” is simply another way of thinking, and for the most part an unhelpful one. How about trying “incisive thought is a means to unburden us of our ignorance” as an alternative:

In this chapter the Guru is not asking us to add to the already very many perceptual and conceptual patterns we have created. Instead, he is asking us to get rid of them so that we can go back to our primal consciousness.... The mind which can structure a gestalt can also unstructure it. (124-5)

I should point out that Nitya prefaces this statement with “In this chapter.” There will be other chapters. We want to go back to our source, not to stay there, but to infuse our daily life with it. Remaining in primal consciousness alone will come quite naturally at death. In the meantime, we want to reacquaint ourselves with that part of us we have forgotten: our own primal consciousness. This requires us to deconstruct our fallacies.

I have often asserted that the universe did not make any mistake in painstakingly developing conscious thought over the last 14 billion years. All that evolution, and then to throw it away and imagine that 47 million years ago was the peak? I don’t think so. What we really need to learn is how to use this rare talent properly. As with any new ability, it takes practice to become skillful, and we’ve barely scratched the surface at this stage. Our thinking is for the most part way too crude and obvious.

Of course, a conventional approach is not likely to get us very far from where we already are. Deb was charmed by an enigmatic statement from Nitya’s first paragraph:

To understand and experience the reality of space and time one has to apply the mind in an unconventional way. As the mind penetrates new dimensions of consciousness and our sense of individual self is diminished, conscious awareness itself becomes the mystery, and therefore also the answer to what now seems mysterious. (122)

We chewed on this for a while. What I think Nitya is getting at is that we have comfortable and intriguing notions that what we see and otherwise perceive as reality, but once we begin to intelligently question them we soon discover that our whole psyche is a much greater and more attractive mystery. We may then be drawn to focus not so much on details of the universe but on how the mind assimilates information and uses it, in other words on metaphysics more than physics. Chances are we will come to accept the next logical inference, which Nitya puts in this way:

The concepts of space and time are useful to us for our orientation in the perceived world, but the orientation is happening only in our mind. The question of the reality of space becomes even more interesting if we take into account the distinctions between psychologically projected space, mathematically computed space, and hypothetical physical space, about all of which we can only make presumptions. (123)

After describing these three main ways we project ideas of spacetime to create a plausible but fictional environment, Nitya acknowledges the challenge we face:

Man has not discovered any way of jumping out of his psychological outfit and rational speculation to find any means to solve this mystery. What he experiences is at once real and

unreal, hence it is called *sat-asat*. The Absolute is *sat*, “that which exists.” But *maya* is indefinable in that it is impossible for the mind to conceptualize “it is” and “it is not” at one and the same time. (124)

This is the stage where we may try all sorts of machinations and anti-machinations in order to try to break free of our false identifications, and some of these bring laudable degrees of loosening of the bonds. Jumping completely out of our psychological outfit remains impossible, though, no matter how much we may long for it. A classic Vedantic option for making the best of our confinement is to view our dilemma not as being in a soul-killing prison but as a fascinating game to be played in love and joy. In Nitya’s words: “The phenomenal world and the life experienced in it can be expressed in one word: *lila*. It means ‘playful sport.’”

Novices often mistake this idea as implying a license to run amok, but such erratic behavior would only degrade the game. Instead, we should play with whatever degree of expertise we can bring to it, and that requires understanding:

The Apavada Darsana looks at life as a sport or a passing show. But every game has its rules, and these must be recognized as valid within the frame of reference of the game. When the game is in progress we should play by the rules, indeed we must do so if it is to come to a logical conclusion in the external world. At the same time the more serious part of the mind can safely be kept aloof from the world-games, remaining unaffected by success or failure in those games. Such games, which collectively we call “life,” are played on the periphery of consciousness and – relative to what might be called the deeper center of consciousness – are illusory indeed. (125)

The rules Nitya mentions here are the natural shapes of reality, rather than any arbitrary mental constructs. Otherwise following rules would conflict with play as being ideally as freeform as possible. Unsupervised as well.

Coincidentally, Scientific American Mind just sent me a special report on The Creative Mind. It includes three essays, the first of which is The Serious Need for Play. (The other two are on the pros and cons of daydreaming and the central role of eccentricity.) Mostly the science involved just confirms what we intuitively know already, but if we are busy refuting falsehood it's nice to have a measure of proof for our speculations. Play, according to the article, is best when it's unstructured. Structured play isn't really play, it's about following rules. But when we (kids especially) are allowed unstructured time, we learn flexibility, tolerance, independence and many other qualities in addition to fostering creativity. Relying on oneself rather than someone else makes all the difference in decision-making.

The author cited a study that compared play-free preschools with play-oriented preschools and found a 3-4 times higher criminal arrest rate for kids who didn't get to play in preschool. Little things like that. If I get time I'll add some details in Part II. The ideas dovetailed with the schools in Finland visited in Michael Moore's movie Where to Invade Next. Finnish children have the highest academic rating in the world, but they hardly do any work. They play. No home work, short school hours, lots of recess. It turns out that "all work and no play" really does "make Jack a dull boy." And not infrequently a scheming crook. Presidential timber. When kids are allowed to play, on the other hand, they gravitate toward their personal talents and soon are eager to learn more about their favorite subjects.

Deb told us about her initial resistance to the idea of lila: when people are oppressed or otherwise in misery, suggesting they treat life as a playful delight is demeaning and insulting. This is not

an idea to be inflicted on others with a holier-than-thou attitude. It works well as a reminder for ourselves to not allow our negative apprehensions to further corrupt any situation we find ourselves in. The key idea is to try not to hang on to the states of mind we are in past their useful moment, but to flow freely. As Nitya points out, we take some things way too seriously. Children seem to naturally know their happiness resides within them, so they can be happy in all sorts of unappetizing conditions, and can easily move from one to the next. As we age, we learn to project the source of our happiness onto outside factors, stick to our preferences, and eventually make ourselves dependent on them. The best idea of lila is to rejuvenate our happiness within and bring it to every situation as the essence of who we are, just as little children do until they have it drilled out of them. Such happiness is not so dependent on the course of events.

This idea is emphasized by a curious sentence that no one brought up in the class: “What we call experience is an effect, a consequent factor. At the causal pole there resides the blissful nature of the Self.” Again, this reverses our normal assumption that forces in the outside world control our life. Obviously they are important, but we are supposed to be learning how to reorient from maya to the Self. If we take maya as the causal factor, all manner of chaos and confusion will be zooming in our direction, and there’s not much we can do about it. If the Self is understood to be the source—as has been amply demonstrated by Narayana Guru already—bliss and harmony are the causal factors we are being bombarded by. Such a reorientation is a major accomplishment, a transformation from victimhood to co-partnership with the forces of manifestation, and from despair to an abiding dynamic happiness. It would be impossible to be happy if our feelings depended on the outer world being made fair and just, as it so obviously is not; so what we have to do is release our own happiness from its dependence on outside factors, equalize it, and

then we have a chance to contribute something meaningful to the stew. If, as Nitya says, “We impregnate the external world with our own values,” don’t we want to make those values the very best we can? Nitya adds more essential advice to keep us on track:

Between a dominant value and its external actualization, awareness has an active role to play. If awareness is colored by a negative apprehension, it obscures the presence of a value. Then the natural bliss of the Self and its existential experience are separated by ignorance. (126)

Implicit in this is that the active role of awareness is to counter our negative apprehensions with intelligent antidotes. Certainly we have to curb the kinds of negative projections that can fill our mind with dread and callous self-interest. Sometimes, as with the guided meditations such as Mike has described, interrupting the train of thought to sit in silence is very refreshing. But deeply entrenched attitudes don’t give up easily. They come right back when the mantle of life is taken up again, unless they have been rooted out in the ways the gurus are suggesting.

The class (most of us are pretty old now) eagerly talked about how important externals used to be for us, but they have lost their thrill. Deb thought we were moving back toward the state of children, with our joy becoming an internal factor again. I pointed out that this was likely due to our work, not simply the aging process. Many older people become depressed as their external sources of joy dry up. Our society does not offer any alternative, but keeps finding ways to peddle age-appropriate entertainment. We have bought into a story that “the kingdom of heaven is within.” And ultimately, as I’m sure you’re all thinking, the outer and inner worlds are one, and our feelings flow in harmony with our life experiences.

Nancy felt that there are illusionary things that go on that put her in a good mood and there are illusionary things that go on that make her anxious. As long as you know it's illusionary, she is confident you don't have to feel that it is controlling you. Jan agreed that illusionary factors create moods, but just being aware of that principle has helped her to let go of the negative obsessions that sometimes plague her. This philosophy has given her the opportunity to look at her life in a different way. Nancy added that it's good to have a way to level your moods, since otherwise you hold on to them without realizing it. She included renunciates retreating to remote caves as sharing the same struggles as the rest of us, because the fixations are in our heads even if we don't take part in the world. Bill disagreed somewhat, claiming that under stress our negative tendencies come out more and more. I'd say there is no perfect path, just the way we go.

As Bill noted, after challenging us to take drastic steps, Nitya always brings us back to the "sweet and blissful serenity of the Self." We are supposed to laugh at our foibles rather than chafe over them, beating ourselves down. Life is a game, a sport. It should be played for fun. If you take joy in working to alleviate suffering—both your own and others'—then you will never run out of opportunities to express yourself in significant ways. After all, we all have faults, naturally. How could the infinite be converted into finite bits and not have something immeasurably valuable lost in the process? Yet since we are all constructed the same way, we are all in this together.

Suffering has two broad aspects: external and internal. When we're oppressed by our surroundings there may be little we can do about it, at least immediately. It's our internal suffering where we can have the most influence. Despite the propaganda that tries to convince us we don't have leverage on our thoughts, we have many options. Reframing, self-acceptance, and seeking assistance from a friend, are a handful of our huge options. We can find out

how much real influence we have on our psyche only by putting our shoulder to the wheel.

We had an interesting discussion on how to go about this. Bill cited the Buddhists who are dedicated to alleviating the suffering of all beings, who believe that before we can bring joy to other people we have to heal ourselves. I suggested that we should not wait until we are healed, but get right to it. It's just that we shouldn't pawn ourselves off as enlightened therapists, but only as loving friends. Susan talked about how frustrating she found it to endlessly go on about working selflessly for others. She was raised to only think of others, and while she has done wonders for her friends and family, she has suffered in the process. She is now learning how to include herself in that dedicated attitude, and she finds meditation to be a way to forget all those exhortations and just sit without aspirations, and it is quite restorative.

Scotty mentioned a talk by Alan Watts he once heard, where Watts pointed out that selfish is the opposite of selfless, and we all need some of that ish-ness to be whole. In other words, selfishness and selflessness are opposite ends of a spectrum where we need the whole range, and not just to go to one or the other extreme and claim you've made the right choice.

This is a subtle and fascinating aspect of spiritual investigation that we will be pursuing further. Suffice to say if you notice yourself leaning one way or the other, try to add some of the opposite onto the scales so that you come closer to balance. Susan needs to stop always worrying about others and treat herself as important also. Someone else who is too self-absorbed needs to force themselves to get out and do something for someone else for a change. To each their own. It's not easy to change our trajectory, but it doesn't have to be impossible.

One of my favorite ways to look at oneness is that each of us is going to actually *be* every person, every animal, every plant, eventually. We are living all the lives that ever will be, in a series.

So what can we do to make our own journey more enjoyable when we happen to be that other person at another time? An old sci-fi novella by Robert A. Heinlein, written under his pseudonym of Anson MacDonald, titled *By His Bootstraps*, may have been my inspiration. (Wikipedia has a [nice summary](#) of this very clever story, if you're interested.) It's a time travel adventure, and we eventually learn that each person in it is the same guy, but because of the circumstances and ignorance of the protagonist he doesn't recognize it when he meets himself. This leads to plenty of conflict: fighting, arguing, coercion. Just as in real life. Yet if you catch on to what the game is about, you might offer compassion, sympathy and kindness instead.

Regardless of how you view it, we must admit we share our gross structuring across the whole human family. Nitya closes his wonderful presentation with one last exhortation to not sink into delusory complacency:

Everyone experiences irrational fears and frustrations throughout a lifetime. This shows that the ignorance we speak of is not merely a defect of the individual mind. There is a generic aspect of nescience which affects all individual beings in one way or another. Generic ignorance conceals the true nature of things or of the Self from all people alike. This veiling aspect is called *avarana*. In addition, this same nescience can condition all minds to simultaneously project the same falsehood. This is called *viksepa*....

Everything we think we see is the illusory result of the action of those elements of consciousness called *avarana* and *viksepa*. From this it is evident that we should at all times keep the mind actively engaged in a continuous process of the reduction of projected anomalies. Such an understanding through reduction can and will, if properly done, lead to an unbroken experience of the sweet and blissful serenity of the Self. (126)

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

Because origin and re-absorption have been mentioned, being (existence) is also to be understood as included. That one reality which has neither origin, being, nor re-absorption is none other than that supreme and ultimate Absolute. In that Absolute, which is in the form of the Self, the origin, being and re-absorption of the world is taken to be present because of confusion. This confusion is caused by the conditioning (*upàdhi*) imposed by *màyà*. In the fourth *darsana*, *màyà* will be further elaborated.

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Excerpts from *The Serious Need for Play*, by Melinda Wenner, in *Scientific American Mind*:

[Stuart Brown, acting as the State's consulting psychiatrist, interviewed 26 convicted Texas murderers after Texas' most famous mass murderer killed 46 people at the University of Texas]:

He discovered that most of the killers... shared two things in common: they were from abusive families, and they never played as kids.

Brown did not know which factor was more important. But in the 42 years since, he has interviewed some 6,000 people about their childhoods, and his data suggest that a lack of opportunities for unstructured, imaginative play can keep children from growing into happy, well-adjusted adults. "Free-play," as scientists call it, is critical for becoming socially adept, coping with stress, and building cognitive skills such as problem solving.

A handful of studies support Brown's conviction that a play-deprived childhood disrupts normal social, emotional and cognitive development in humans and animals. He and other psychologists worry that limiting free-play in kids may result in a generation of anxious, unhappy and socially maladjusted adults. "The consequence of a life that is seriously play-deprived is serious stuff," Brown says. But it is never too late to start: play also promotes the continued mental and physical well-being of adults.

Another study suggests that play promotes neural development in "higher" brain areas involved in emotional reactions and social learning. Scientists reported in 2003 that play fighting releases brain-derived neurotropic factor (BDNF)—a protein that stimulates the growth of new neurons—in these regions. The researchers allowed 13 control rats to play freely with companions for three and a half days and kept 14 other rats isolated for the same period. On examining the rats' brains, the researchers found that the cortex, hippocampus, amygdala and pons of the rats that had played contained much higher levels of BDNF than those of the rats that had not.