

**II Apavada Darsana,
Truth by Constant Refutation of the False**

Verse 5

This which is unreal, being an effect, has a cause; it is not the world, but the Absolute alone that is real, which a dull mind wrongly imagines to be unreal.

1/23/6

My favorite part of Nitya's commentary is his humorous lifting of Karl Marx's skirts, revealing the naked nonmaterial basis of his materialistic philosophy. Yet another breathtaking example of how sharp the gurus are, with their ability to focus on the keynote or absolute hub element in vastly complex and even wordy philosophical systems. Most of us remain "baffled by the bullshit" as firemen are wont to say, meaning we get lost in the intricacies of peripheral arguments and never find the gist. So many words are expended because so many philosophers never found the gist themselves, though they often thought they did. But once you sight the Absolute you see it everywhere, no matter the clouds of confusion thrown up by hapless mortals in their struggles to get a grip. I believe it was Bishop Berkeley who said that philosophers kick up dust and then complain that it's hard to see....

Which is exactly the point of this verse: we get so distracted by all the specific incidents, colors, shapes, sounds, and so on, of life, that we forget it is all the Absolute and start to believe the delusion that it's a world. The unity is lost in the multiplicity. The eternal is veiled by the transient. It's still there, we're just not noticing. The smartest folks around easily fall for the deception

too, and so are lumped in with the rest of us as having dull minds by the guru. We are all dull because we only go half way to a total vision. It takes energy, contemplative energy, to peer through the gloom and catch the light, to discern the golden thread of truth knitting together the beads of nature's necklace. Sometimes, often with guidance, we do it, but then we all too quickly slip back into our familiar stupor of easy acceptance of socially constructed reality, the path of lesser resistance.

One of the aims of our small group class is to reinforce effective contemplative penetration by mutual support, so we can stand free for a brief time of the superficial side of things, which we are immersed in most of the week. We are reminding each other of the essence, optimistic that we will find it less elusive the more we dance with it.

Anita wondered what all this demystification was going to do for life after death and reincarnation. I think the implication was if so much of our persona is based on false images and transient values, what's left when all is said and done? Do we just disappear without a trace? Does the Absolute go on without us, or do we have a continuing part to play in the grand game?

This is a question that only the full course of Darsanamala will be able to adequately address, but it's okay to have provisional views in the interim. It's good to set traditional beliefs aside, though, and remain open to new insights, and we can rest assured that what will be will be, whatever we may happen to believe. Still, I had just read a section in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad that was germane, and tossed it into the ring. It says that our earth, water and fire elements are transient and will perish in time, but that the air and akashic elements are eternal and won't perish. So we're 2/5 eternal and 3/5 transient. As in all fields, our anxiety for the future stems from our identification with the transient part over the eternal. We should "lay up our treasures in heaven" rather than

count on those things that moths and rust eat up. Some Jewish guru said something like that about eternal and transient values.

In case the Upanishadic symbology is unfamiliar, the earth element stands for the physical part of existence. Almost everyone agrees that your physical body is going to rot when you die, and although the elements are still around in various forms, they will never again gather together in the same form that you are in now. I learned this year that on average 10,000 cells are replaced in our bodies *each second*, so you already aren't the same body as you were when you started reading this sentence. Bodies are not as stable as they appear, so don't cling to them. Generally we die when they wear out or are broken anyway.

Water stands for our emotional nature. While we revel in many of our emotions and rue many others, it's just as well that we treat them as passing experiences. They won't be coming along with us when we pass through the eye of the needle. We do cling to them of course; they are intense and addictive. We get a rush out of them. But like a drug addiction they are also debilitating and stultifying, and we're blessed that they can eventually be stripped from us by some kind of transition. Death as detox. The pain of death that Carl Jung mentions in his amazing chapter on *Visions in Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he thought was the uprooting of his emotional ties with earthly life. Once free of them, he was loath to re-embrace them when he was brought back from the portals of death. They are sweet on the surface but painful where the roots get into our innards. The Brihadaranyaka says they are not eternal.

Fire represents the ordinary linear, discursive thinking mind. We identify with this part of ourselves more than any other. The 'I' usually hangs out here. But it's pretty easy to see that our thoughts, like what should I have for breakfast, let's go shopping, what movies are playing tonight, and so on ad infinitum, are not coming along. Actually, we're pretty good at not clinging to many of them already. They slip from our consciousness without regret. Others,

like prejudices and fixations, we hold on tight to, but that may be because they are reinforced by emotions. All our elements interpenetrate and overlap each other.

So what's eternal? Air signifies intuition, our subtle intellect that rises above petty, self-centered concerns. Wisdom lies in this element. Surprisingly, the Upanishad (sorry, Brihadaranyaka is just too hard to keep writing!) says we get to keep our finest insights and intuitive wisdom. While the junk thoughts go, what we've truly learned and made our own stays with the soul or whatever you call the part of us which persists. It would be much better to identify our 'I' sense with this than the mundane, transactional thought processes we feel obliged to attend to all day long.

Akasha stands for space or spirit. It is our quintessence, the essence of the five elements. If anything is going past death it would have to be this.

This is only one of many possible schemes, but it has a lot of merit in my estimation. The Upanishad is fairly outspoken in affirming reincarnation. The 2/5, 3/5 thing is absurd of course. The eternal 2/5 is virtually all that matters, so make it 99 percent. This reminds us that numbers are not actually equal, we only imagine they are because of the rational conventions of dull minds. In this particular scheme 1 is the smallest number, 2 the next biggest, and so on up to 5, which is unimaginably vast. No amount of ones and twos and threes could ever add up to five here. So take any scheme, especially your own, with a grain of salt.

Our meditation for the week is to always look for the Absolute in every aspect of transient phenomena. Bill has promised to have the knack by next week's class. We eagerly look forward to his report.

* * *

3/15/16

Apavada Darsana Verse 5

This which is unreal, being an effect,
has a cause; it is not the world,
but the Absolute alone that is real,
which a dull mind wrongly imagines to be unreal.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*By being an effect and thus non-existent
An existent cause there is, the world is thus not indeed;
On the other hand, it is in the Absolute alone that is existent
That dull minds mistake as non-existing world.*

Our last class of the winter was joined by Prabu, both the class and Prabu brimming as usual with philosophical speculations. At the moment Prabu is an emissary from California's Silicon Valley, currently one of the centers of technological progress and consequent wealth on the planet. Prabu feels at odds with all that digital creative ferment, so I asked him to tell us about the difference between the prevailing mentality there and his own. In other words, what is it that he does not fit in with? He sees that the computer world exists because of its ability to model reality in an abstract fashion, and he is striving to escape from abstract thinking to home in more on reality. What bothered him most was that there was little or no questioning of the modeling process, while he is busy questioning everything. As with any movement, questioning its premises instantly makes you an outsider. You'd better keep quiet or you will be jettisoned.

I offered that computer programming was popular because it is successful. The great thing about maya, despite its varying degrees of unreality, is that it works. We might as well resign ourselves to accepting unreality, because functionally it undergirds everything

we do. A wholehearted rejection requires total sannyasa. But isn't there some middle ground where we can accommodate maya without contradiction? Isn't everything more or less unreal?

We need to recall as our pivot point Narayana Guru's main premise. According to Nitya, "In this chapter the Guru directs us to try our best to attain to a clear and precise vision of the Self, without getting caught in the cobwebs of fancies and superimpositions." This has always been the aim of philosophy, at least when it is stripped of its own cobwebs and fantasies. It seems to me there is a huge difference between ridding ourselves of excess baggage and rejecting the world totally. Why can't we embrace the world with all its imperfections at the same time as we unburden ourselves of our conditioning and blind spots?

Philosophy aims to perceive reality, but the search appears to be an unending process. That too is a good thing. Nitya highlights two main threads of Western thought for us:

In this chapter the Guru does not want to leave anything unquestioned. This is reminiscent of Descartes' *Meditations*. Bacon and Descartes were the first among modern Western philosophers to open the era of critical skepticism. Descartes succeeded in evolving a systematic methodology to differentiate facts from opinions. In that system he eliminated those items of knowledge which failed to impress their categorical certitude....

Descartes arrived at an axiomatic basis for his methodical system of thought, and expressed it as *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." In this axiom the certitude of the self arises from the self itself. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a book called *Being and Nothingness* to refute the stand of Descartes. He denied the "categorical certitude," saying that when it is said that A is A, it looks like begging the question. (135)

I have also been bugged by $A=A$, the first axiom of the edifice of mathematics. To me it's an obviously false assumption. Two different things are not the same; they are never the same. Only an abstract value we might assign to them could be considered equal as a practical matter. They may look the same or stand for the same value, but they are nonetheless distinct. So "equal" is very different from "is identical to," or even worse, "is." Yet we take it as meaning just that, and the fact is, it works. The vast implications of mathematical reasoning are built on the false premise of $A=A$, and you can produce working systems from it. Our grasp of reality is based on it, and we can build atom bombs and MRI machines because of it. If we insist on only perfect truth, then no math is possible. Our interaction with whole world comes out of the dissonance of ideas being slightly out of kilter.

My own love affair with mathematics ended when I was unable to accept the basic premise of calculus, that something very close to something else could be considered a working representation of it. My compatriots who accepted that premise went on to far fields of abstraction and accomplishment. Which of us was the bigger fool? From the standpoint of those who accept the unreality and make a living passing it on to others and building better mousetraps based on it, I am the distracted woolgatherer. From my point of view they are building houses of cards, castles in the air. Yet it seems that the world needs both types, and in every realm there is a value to cutting to the essence of what matters.

There is a theme in the commentary of a spider and its web, both in the excerpt from Karl Marx and Nitya's quote above. We spin fantastic edifices, both mental and physical, and live within them. When adequately aligned with reality they catch us our dinner. From an absolute perspective they are unreal, but from a practical one they are essential. This is a paradox that as philosophers we have to come to terms with. Happily, if we don't come to terms it's still a paradox that manages to sustain us and

support our blind thrusts in ignorance. Aren't we fortunate that this is so?

It looks like the search for truth does not so much mean coming up with an irrefutable proposition, but of finding a harmonious state of being within the inevitable contradictions of living in a manifested universe. Although it is a central concern, Nitya addresses this almost in passing, using economists as examples of severely restricted scientists:

The search for happiness is unfortunately very much restricted by economists, who appear to see the highest values in life as questions of supply and demand in the world of physical wants. It is true that man is very much occupied with the satisfaction of his physical needs, such as the preservation of life, shelter, sustenance, security from natural hazards, the compulsive need for action, and so on. But if he is to develop his full human potential, man must also satisfy other needs. These include companionship, the recognition of his worth and value as a person, the mysterious prompting which makes him seek to understand the nature of his own being and his relationship with universal being, and many more. The needs in the second class are more complex than the generalized theories of biologists, for example, seem to indicate. Man's psychological and specific problems are more complex and interrelated than what is known in the world of socioeconomics. (133-4)

Jan caught this spirit and reread this paragraph to us:

In all his oscillations of needs and satisfactions, man again and again comes to the experience of happiness that gives him a sense of peace and restfulness. This resting place is what is termed here the Absolute or Self. And this experience, or the possibility of it, is common not only to mankind but to all

sentient beings. The Guru describes it as the only unchanging reality, which serves as a substratum in the whole process of becoming. (134)

Jan has used such insights to expand her acceptance of ways of life and modeling at wide variance from her own. She has just returned from a visit to her sister in Arizona, who marches to a different drummer, and for most of their lives they did not get along very well. Jan has relinquished any desire to convert her sister to her own way of thinking, and is reaching out in friendship by accepting her as she is. As an example, she attended church with her sister, and although their professed ideas seemed strange and jarring to her, she could see that for the church members it helped them to be loving and mutually supportive. Who would it have benefited if Jan had been critical of her sister's preferred cobweb?

Jan's story reminded me of Narayana Guru's famous axiom: a religion is good if it makes a better person. All else is cobwebs, excess cushioning. It is similar to Jesus' saying, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Our ideas and behaviors aren't always in synch. In fact, outlandish ideas can serve to energize loving hearts, and likewise very well turned ideas can produce a bitter, judgmental feeling toward anyone who might be less holy than I. Fundamentalist scientists may scorn the illusions of churchgoers, but don't dare to look for their own illusions. Highlighting the follies of others is a great way to draw attention away from our own faults. Mocking others' beliefs is a way of imagining we are somehow perfect. Yet no one who really understands the setup here could imagine they were perfect.

Talking about this reminded me of the turmoil over belief in God. A disciple of Nataraja Guru, Patrick Misson, has succinctly characterized the Guru's wisdom that belief in the existence of God is beside the point:

When the question of the proof of the existence or non-existence of God came up, the Guru would treat it as a false problem. All religions have different names and attributes for what they call “God.” None of them, however, would disagree if you were to describe God as “The highest of all values.” Everyone has some things that they value in life, even the atheist. So if you go to the highest level of abstraction and generalization and talk of High Value, it does not really matter whether you label it “God” or not. High value exists because it is, by definition, that which you value most in all existence and it cannot be non-existent without an absurd contradiction.

Moni was reminded by this of a brilliant vignette from Nitya’s book *In The Stream of Consciousness*:

Once I was accompanying Nataraja Guru on the train from Delhi to Amritsar. Among our fellow passengers were two gentlemen who were workers of the Indian Communist Party in the Punjab area. Seeing our saffron robes and our beards they took us for religious people, and wanted to discuss some of the fundamentals affecting human life.

The older one asked the guru, “Sir, do you believe in God?”

Nataraja Guru replied, “I cannot answer that question unless you tell me what you understand by the term ‘God’. The existence or nonexistence of God is to be determined by its definition.”

The elderly gentleman pursued his point, “And what is Guruji’s definition of God?”

Nataraja Guru gave him a slight smile and a look and answered, “That which is right when you are wrong is God.”

Once he stopped laughing in agreement, Michael added that *In the Stream of Consciousness* is a book we should study in class some

day. We never have, but it is full of pertinent stories, so some day we will.

Moni then told us a well-known fable about a brahmin and a kshatriya. The brahmin said that the sun was the Absolute, but the kshatriya begged him not to say that: the Absolute is beyond the sun. It is not and can not be a manifested principle. Moni added that part of the impact of the story is that normally the brahmin should be the guru and the kshatriya the disciple, but in the story the roles are reversed. The fable means to turn everything on its head. Curiously, Moni did not know that in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad online study group several of us are taking with Nancy Yeilding, out of its many hundreds of verses that is exactly the one we are studying this week (Adhyaya II, Brahmana 1, Mantra 1). Amazing how the world holds together, isn't it? It may not have gotten the word yet that it is unreal.

So let's face it, all beliefs are false to a degree and true to a degree. We can consider their operational efficiency as very important. Jan gave the example of our differing views on the intelligence of animals. Not so long ago, whales were regarded as having no feelings, and they were slaughtered in vast numbers. Now that we have come to learn how sensitive and wise they are, we have stopped killing them for the most part, and are striving to convince others to stop killing them also. Compassion is growing for many of God's creatures, whose needs are beginning to be considered along with our own selfish appetites.

Nitya quotes Marx at length here, because he is an admirer of his diligent refutation of many falsehoods about humans and their works. He also slyly refutes an aspect of materialism as evinced by Marx, based on his quote: "It is strange that such a hardcore materialist should unconsciously give priority to ideation before action." What passes for materialism is just another ideology, after all. That's how we're made. Knowing this should make a person—

especially a self-described materialist—less doctrinaire. Nitya generalizes the lesson in this:

If we give the world of superimpositions the status of absolute truth, then consciously or unconsciously we are accepting a double standard. That can result in contradiction. Here the Guru wants us to discipline ourselves to be as uncompromising as possible when it comes to giving our conclusive verdict in furtherance of the only truth. (135)

So sure, you may believe in materialism, but beliefs are metaphysical no matter what their shape. So please be a little humble about it.

We didn't spend any time looking at the verse itself, but it's worth doing on your own. It portrays a retroactive reduction. The world is a proliferation of effects from previous causes, and effects do not have independent reality of their own. They are dependent on what causes them, and those causes are dependent on previous causes, ad infinitum. If you retrogress far enough you can arrive at a cause of causes, the original bifurcation of unity. Nitya describes it this way:

The complex phenomena of socioeconomics, biochemistry, physical chemistry, and astrophysics are pregnant with endless ramifications and details. But if we trace the whole process of their emergence, from the most immediate in the series of phenomenal effects backwards in time to their one primeval causal factor, we shall eventually come to a terminus. This terminus is none other than what was described in the previous chapter as the binary function of primeval creative energy, which contains within itself a positive aspect of brightness and a negative aspect of darkness, or *taijasi* and *tamasi*. (132-3)

Performing a meditation like this puts things in a coherent perspective. Narayana Guru considers it a very valuable exercise, with plenty more in store as we go forward. Together we can reject falsehood while maintaining amity and mutual support. How delightful is that!

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

All things which constitute an effect are unreal. This is well known. Therefore, the whole world is unreal and because of being unreal it must have a cause which is real. Because the cause alone has a status in reality, it naturally follows that the effect is unreal. That unique cause which represents real existence is the Absolute. Dull minds not capable of discrimination due to a confusion between existence and non-existence, treat real existence as unreal. In other words, they mistake the Absolute for the world and thus suffer.

* * *

The first paragraph of the commentary stands in isolation, and we didn't talk about it particularly. Here it is:

In the world of transactions our experience is holistic. It is only psychologists who for convenience analyze and speak of it in terms such as cognition (*asti*), connotation (*bhati*), and affection (*priya*). When consciousness is expressed as awareness, even as the first faint comprehension of an object, event, person or idea, it comprises in it the idea of existence, an intimation of its general nature, and the dynamism to affect the perceiver in a positive or negative way. (131)

Nitya's fabulous elucidation from verse 21 of *That Alone* is quite germane, and bears repeating, in case anyone has forgotten it:

Now the Guru tells us to look again at that light within. It is always shining forth with the same kind of brilliance, but it passes through a kind of mechanism of different gears. The gears can make the light seem brighter or darker. It can even be turned off for a time. When that happens you are in state of *tamas*. Light is still within you, but it is as if you are in the dark. You are helpless. Then it can be turned on a little. It is your own little light. And it can be turned up to its fullness also.

When you turn your light on, it illuminates your world of experience, whether inside or outside, as if through a shielding glass. The glass is your mind. It's not a very faithful device for giving you a transparent vision; it is clouded in various ways. It is already colored with your interests, which have come to you because of previous conditionings. You yourself have experienced pain or pleasure previously in conjunction with something you are now encountering, so you are already colored in favor or against it. Several of these prejudices or preconditionings are already present in you. And the conditionings need not necessarily be previous ones. Someone can put into your mind a prospective expectation, which also colors the mind. All these bring about differentiation.

Reality has three unifying aspects. One is called *sat*, existence. I exist, you exist, this couch exists, the house exists, the sky exists, the world exists. All these can be brought under one common heading of existence. All that exists is a genuine existence which implies the existence of all. It's called *sat*.

I am aware of my existence, of your existence, of the existence of the world. Thus I have an all-embracing awareness that includes everything. What is not in it, I will never know.

This awareness, which includes in it good and bad, far and near, one and many, big and small, irrespective of all variations, is just one knowledge, *cit*. So we have one all-inclusive existence and one all-inclusive knowledge.

I value my beingness and you value your beingness. Everything tends to become valuable in one way or another. All these values are measured by our own happiness. This is called *ananda*. So we have *sat*, existence; *cit*, knowledge; and *ananda*, the primordial value. Taken all together, the whole of reality is therefore called *sat-cit-ananda*.

One can be permeated with the consciousness of *sat-cit-ananda*. It can be blissful if it is not differentiated, but instead of this generic sense of existence, subsistence and value, we tend to see things individually. When they are broken into bits we have instead *asti*, this is; *bhati*, I know it; and *priyam*, I love it. In Western terms these correspond to cognition, connotation and affection. In the fragmentary notions of *asti*, *bhati* and *priyam* there is scope for a great deal of confusion. We can have “This is, I know it, I dislike it;” or even “This is, I do not know what it is, therefore I do not know if I like it or not.” Only when we cultivate an ever-prevailing sense of unity are we out of this confusion. When we identify with the egoistic self we see only through this fragmentation and do not experience *sat-cit-ananda*.

If we can approach life from the point of view of the all-seeing witness, which is not tainted with incipient memories or proliferating interests, then we will see the good of all, the general good, in which what pleases me is also included. This is not attained, as some mistakenly think, by summarily dismissing what pleases me as an individual. (151-3)