

II Apavada Darsana, Truth by Constant Refutation of the False

Verse 8

Consciousness alone, not another, shines; therefore there is nothing other than consciousness; what does not shine—that is unreal; and what is unreal—that does not shine.

3/6/6

This verse is a summing up of the main point Narayana Guru has been making in Apavada Darsana. Awareness or knowledge is what shines. The living meaning of the perception of reality, otherwise known as saccidananda, is all there is. Even what we imagine to be other than in our awareness is still our awareness.

Narayana Guru's explanatory comments, via Swami Vidyananda, are especially brief, mainly that: "All that enters consciousness is nothing other than what is real. That which is not real cannot enter consciousness. It is knowledge alone that remains real. That which is both real and consciousness is the Absolute, which is none other than the Lord as consciousness. Therefore, what appears as this world is nothing other than the Absolute."

We've been here before. Yet as long as we keep forgetting, it's good to be reminded of the unitive nature of truth.

Skeptics say, what about things you don't know about? Well, what are they? Give an example. As soon as something is postulated it becomes part of knowledge, indeed it's mere postulation can only take place in knowledge. This is a truth that came home to scientists around the time of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in the mid-1920s, but for some reason we can

never fully accept it. It doesn't mean we create the world, exactly, but consciousness as a whole does bring about an awareness of its own existence, and we are an integral part of that process. New things and ideas come into existence by our becoming aware of them.

The lure of the Unknown has always motivated people to seek—and find—new fields of knowledge, and this is a good thing. It's the lila of the universe. But we should keep in mind that what is taking place is the imagining of the Unknown within our consciousness and not something truly external that is providing this motivation. After all, how could something that is fully unconnected to us have any effect on us whatsoever? There has to be a link, however subtle, for entities to interact. The attraction of the Unknown is our own desire to know, propelling us forward through metaphoric imagery.

Our class has already pretty much accepted these Vedantic truths, so we spent most of the time discussing a corollary aspect in Nitya's commentary. Echoing Atmopadesa Satakam and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, he points out that if one fully grasps that there is only a unitive ocean of consciousness in which we frolic, then there is nothing to fear. If there is no other, there is no threat. Realization of this brings fearlessness:

The goal of the present study is to release ourselves from the perennial chain of human misery, and to establish ourselves in a state of happiness which is not transient. Turning away, repudiating, or fleeing are methods adopted to escape pain. Drawing closer, and using techniques of sharing or communication are indications that pleasure is being experienced. Pain germinates fear; pleasure brings hope. Of these two major propensities, fear and hope, it is fear that dominates both the conscious and the subconscious mind. Hope arises from that stratum of existence which is truth

itself—that is, the blissful Self. Hope asserts itself again and again as the will to live, the will to seek, and the will to actualize. Actualization of the highest possible values, or the realization of the Self, dispels fear.... To become established in fearlessness in all the four modified states of consciousness is another way of stating the main goal. (146, 147)

Most societies, including our own, emphasize fear as the most important motivator for the protection of life. Fear-based motivation tends to enclose isolated individuals in defensive barriers, thereby limiting freedom, and consequently happiness. In contrast, a hopeful attitude permits much greater freedom of expression, and so it is recommended for the temporary amelioration of fear. The true annihilation of fear only comes about from the realization of one's unitive connection to all. As long as one is still baffled by the veiling of this truth, there is much value in intentionally adopting a liberating belief system.

As Robert Frost said so well in *Mending Wall*, "Before I built a wall I'd ask just what I was walling in or walling out." By walling out the other we wall ourselves in, and the other is unlikely to even be aware of what we've done on its behalf.

Hope is similar but not identical to faith, but they both share the postulation of trust in a factor not yet fully comprehended or integrated. For instance, one can read wise books and become convinced that the universe is overall benign and blissful. Such beliefs make it much easier to let go of paranoiac and frozen attitudes and begin to look more closely at the nature of reality. And as Nitya reminds us:

Realization is not anything to be newly gained. As all individuated beings are manifestations of the Self, they do not have to go anywhere to discover it. Unfortunately for us

there is a veil of ignorance which creates the illusion of a dichotomy between the Self that is seeing and the Self that is seen. All we are asked to do by the Guru is to rectify this veiling ignorance of the individuated self. (146)

We have become accustomed to seeing the world through our personal veiling system, closely linked to fear and defensiveness. When we act with hope and optimism, we can study the veiling principle and begin to see how we color our picture of what we encounter. When fearlessness comes we may eventually discard our veils as unnecessary. Until then we can part them occasionally for a peek at unmediated reality. Once we set aside the veils we find that we are already fully ourselves. There is nothing that we lack.

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4/12/16

Apavada Darsana Verse 8

Consciousness alone, not another, shines;
therefore, there is nothing other than consciousness;
what does not shine—that is unreal;
and what is unreal—that does not shine.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Thus it is pure mind-stuff alone that shines
There is nothing therefore beyond pure mind-stuff at all;
What does not shine is not real either,
And what is non-real does not shine indeed.*

It's always nice to have old friends drop by for class, and last night we were joined by Amara and Lee, up from the Mt. Shasta region of California. Amara participated in our class in the 1990s, and now teaches Atmo with friends near her home.

I wanted to pursue what Narayana Guru means by shining in this verse, but the group was more drawn to Nitya's trenchant ideas about fearlessness. Before moving on to that, let me reprint Nitya's intimation about shining:

It is knowledge alone that shines. If something does exist but is beyond the range of our knowledge, it does not exist for us. Our consciousness remains unaffected by what is beyond the scope of our knowledge. That which does not shine or reveal itself in terms of existence is nonexistent. Nonexistence cannot assert its beingness in any way. (145)

The idea is not simply to repeat something along the lines of "shining is knowledge," but to explore what is meant by this assertion. How does it shine? What kind of light are we talking about? What is our role in relation to it, or its role in relation to us? It seems to me there is great depth here, worthy of investigation. Happily, Susan already sent some musings that fit the bill, which I'll append in Part II. Yet the question remains, what does this shining mean, exactly? If you have thoughts about this, please share them. A few of us touched on it after class, but as the hour was late we barely broached the subject.

Always a potent subject, fear is the guardian of the gate, easily turning away those who wish to enter the Beyond. Until we can stand up to its pressure, self-discovery remains a forlorn hope. So we always welcome exploration of our fears in the class, however they may connect to the subject at hand.

The important instruction that determined the class's focus on fear included:

The highest form of happiness is not any kind of excitement, as in the case of pleasure, but total fearlessness.... To become established in fearlessness in all the four modified states of consciousness is another way of stating the main goal.... Here we are not just engaged in theorizing. All self-realized people are fearless, and fearlessly accept what life brings to them.

(147)

Obviously, that is enough to spark several evenings worth of discussion and self-examination. Thanks to the spirit of camaraderie in the class, several people bravely stepped forward to do just that.

Deb started us off saying one good exercise is to think about what makes us anxious, to really notice it. She realizes her lack of understanding is the basis of whatever anxiety she experiences. I added that whatever we are afraid of, our ignorance makes it more acute, and there's always plenty of ignorance available. While we may not be able to disregard the causes of our fears, we can at least delete the excesses we add to them through the projection of possible negative outcomes. As we take heed of our imaginary fears, we may well find that they are quite unlikely to occur. If we can just tell ourselves to "wait and see," the terrible outcomes we fear simply don't come about. It should make us confident that we can reduce our fears to a minimum.

Amara talked about when Nitya died, she was beset by fear. In the back of her mind she had thought he would never die, and she was shocked out of her false belief when she heard the news. She knew the emotions moving through her were contrary to his teachings, yet they were ripping through her. As she watched the oscillations, she slowly overcame her gut fear, which was gradually replaced by profound joy. This is reminiscent of a story

of Jyothi's (placed in Part II), as well as one related in Atmo verse 83. First verse 83 itself:

To break, to exist and to come into being is the nature of bodies here—
one goes, another takes its place;
remaining in the highest, the Self that knows all these three,
the indivisible one, is free of modifications.

Nitya's commentary on this is excellent, as always. The most relevant part is:

Of course, it is out of the question to immortalize the body. Narayana Guru agrees here with the evolutionists that the very nature of the body is to break, then for something new to come and for that to continue for a while before it also breaks. Then its place is taken by another, and this will continue on and on. So there is nothing called the immortality of the body.

When Sri Aurobindo expounded his theory of spiritual evolution and the descent of the supramental, I don't know if he meant it this way, but what his devotees understood and we are likely to think when we read his book, is that the body, which is a receptacle of the spirit, is slowly changed by the supramental spirit to become an immortal vessel to hold life. He clearly seemed to imply a physical immortality rather than any theoretical one.

During his lifetime no one in the ashram was allowed to ask the question of what would happen after Aurobindo's death. It was taboo. They all believed he would not die and that his body was immortal. When he died, the ashram people wouldn't believe it. They refused to bury him. There was a French government at that time, and they did not subscribe to that belief. They had a law that a dead person should be buried

within three days. The ashram people said “No, he is alive. He is in samadhi.” After the third day the government decided to bury him forcefully, so the ashram finally allowed it after much dispute that he was still physically immortal. (584-5)

Many of our fears revolve around the wellbeing of our children. Deb talked about when our daughter Emily was sick with Lyme disease. It wasn't something she could just shrug off, as if a different attitude could fix it. There was no way to get to a place of “how wonderful!” The question was only how to deal with the transactional world and stay grounded in the shining aspect at the same time.

Karen's son had a terrible accident at the age of 28, and his life hung by a thread for several days. She was initially overwhelmed by fear, as is perfectly natural, but as she sat in the hospital, with no possibility of doing anything to help, she was slowly able to accept the situation, and once she did a peacefulness began to permeate her mind. She really felt the shining. She knew she had to accept what the universe wanted and this gave her strength. Her son recovered and is thriving.

Jan's greatest fears also came from threat to her son's health, which began at a very early age. The fear brought up all kinds of horrible anxieties about how it would turn out. Fortunately, most of them did not happen. Jan did a lot of work to subtract her projected fears for her son's future from the actual immediate situation, which was dire enough. By deleting the excess, she was able to bring her best caring efforts to bear. At first nearly paralyzed by her fears, she became a pillar of strength, and managed the very long treatment and recovery process superbly.

Bill reminded us that absolute fearlessness comes from complete identification with your true nature, and this is the breeding ground of compassion. Paul added that Nitya often speaks of overcoming obstacles in a wholesale manner. Where we have

mostly been advocating examining individual fears to sift out the excess—a piecemeal approach—this could be considered merely palliative care. The true cure is to reclaim our authentic nature, which is at one with all else, and there is no room for fear in it. It simply doesn't come up. Yet if you haven't achieved this level of enlightenment, (rather rare, in my experience), piecemeal work can also be very valuable. We only have the opportunity to recognize our fears when they arise, and that is the best moment to take them on. Either they drive us as tumbleweeds before a storm, or we stand up against the gale until they blow over. Once you achieve total Self-identity, they will have only the power of shadows on stone.

Jan, in the midst of a whirlwind of life changes, agreed that the piecemeal approach was working well for her. She strips down her fears to their raw essence, which allows her to get rid of all the projections that pop up around facing the unknown course of her new life. She feels like the teachings have helped her to stay strong and even thrive with the challenges she is facing.

Amara made a terrific point, that if we can see our troubles as a gift rather than a threat it shifts our orientation when fear arises. This is similar to something we often stress in class: that the situation we are in is exactly the place we need to work. Instead of seeking to escape trying circumstances, if we treat them as opportunities we will find they activate our best qualities. Amara talked about a friend of hers who was suicidal. Instead of commiserating about his troubles, she convinced him that by seeking escape he was avoiding his spiritual journey, and with the new framing the same problems he couldn't bear suddenly made him laugh. After the initial resistance, avoidance is often a lot more work than acceptance. Amara advised that if you can surrender, you can feel the peace that you already are.

Bill agreed that surrender is letting go of the ego's preferences, and quoted our favorite Buddhist teaching of Long Chen Pa, on The Natural Freedom of Mind:

Since everything is but an apparition
perfect in being what it is
having nothing to do with good or bad,
acceptance or rejection,
one may well burst out in laughter.

Lee is a naturopathic healer who works with a lot of sick people. He feels that their challenge in recovery is to accept there is a different way of approaching their health. Many of them have fallen in love with their illness, which is their "story," in a sense. We all like to have our story, but it can be toxic without us even realizing it. He asks his patients in advance to agree to forget everything they currently believe about their condition, to clear the decks so they can get a fresh start. Only then can the healing begin. About 20% walk away from even such a seemingly simple requirement, possibly worried that getting well would erase their claim to fame.

Deb felt that the verse we are studying also references our love for the story of our illness. I think she meant that we forget that we are consciousness through and through and simply become conscious of what we are viewing. The view includes many terrible and threatening possibilities along with the good ones, and they draw us further away from our center in pure consciousness. If someone proposes that these oscillating events we identify with are not the core of reality, we may deny it vehemently. Most of us are truly addicted to our personal perspective.

Moni added that we are equally addicted to ideas like love and compassion. We might agree to forego negative feelings, but the positive ones we hold on to for dear life. We are being invited

to transcend all our attachments here, both good and bad. Laughter is the best healing ointment for loosening their hold.

Nitya offers a short version of the solution: “Actualization of the highest possible values, or the realization of the Self, dispels fear. As an example, the experience of perfect love does indeed ‘cast out fear’.” He invites us to take this epitome and expand it into a holistic lifestyle grounded in fearlessness and expressed in loving kindness. Words like bravery and courage almost but don’t quite get to this point, as Paul intimated. They imply a dual perspective, where the optimal state is unitive. So long as there is an other, there will be fear, which we must meet with courage. That means the courage is dependent on the fear. A unitive position is fearless through and through, because there is no other thing to fear, and therefore there is no need for courage, bravery, or any other heroic virtue.

As to “actualization of the highest possible values,” we seek to cultivate and foster enthusiasm. Often circumstances conspire to lead us away from our master life interest, and we must find a way to restore it to its proper place at the center of our life. Nitya’s story about his heart attack in *Love and Blessings* is a wonderful reminder, concluding with Nataraja Guru’s ideas: “His theory was that we die when the plus side of our life is robbed of its vital interests. A good remedy for seemingly fatal diseases is to cultivate enormous interest in accomplishing something worthwhile.” It is also the cure for fear, according to Nitya.

As usual we struggled with how much to make efforts and how much to let go of trying. It is very hard to strike a balance. It has to be a dynamic dance and not a fixed program, however you face it. The minute we define it, it slips away from our grasp. Nitya doesn’t want us to lose sight of the essential point:

The goal of the present study is to release ourselves from the perennial chain of human misery, and to establish ourselves in a

state of happiness which is not transient. Turning away, repudiating, or fleeing are methods adopted to escape pain. Drawing closer and using techniques of sharing or communication are indications that pleasure is being experienced. Pain germinates fear; pleasure brings hope. Of these two major propensities, fear and hope, it is fear that dominates both the conscious and the subconscious mind. Hope arises from that stratum of existence which is truth itself—that is, the blissful Self. Hope asserts itself again and again as the will to live, the will to seek, and the will to actualize. (146)

The paradox is made more paradoxical by the fact that its resolution is already within us:

Realization is not anything to be newly gained. As all individuated beings are manifestations of the Self, they do not have to go anywhere to discover it. Unfortunately for us there is a veil of ignorance which creates the illusion of a dichotomy between the Self that is seeing and the Self that is seen. All we are asked to do by the Guru is to rectify this veiling ignorance of the individuated self. (146)

“Consistent refutation of the false” can be tough going. Narayana Guru will be reminding us of its inestimable value in the last pair of verses in the darsana. The last piece of advice we are given is to convert our insistence on being an isolated individual to being “a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” We are each a unique aspect of the total or absolute reality—the image that came to me was of the candles in a menorah—and no matter what happens to us there can never be a final disconnect with our “true nature” as the universal Self. Pain will not tear us away from our true nature, but the fear of it will cause us to forget. Despite its

challenge to our timidity, the Apavada Darsana has invited us to take heart. Nitya concludes:

If these verses are examined, we shall see the idea put forward of the Self transforming itself into all that is seen and experienced. At the same time we are reminded of the experiencing self. It is an inner sense of identity, that is, the Self experiencing itself, which removes from the mind all forms of anxiety and fear.

After a systematic application of the method of reduction, the Guru comes to the idea of the true nature of the Self, which is *ananda*. This he states in the two remaining verses of the chapter. (148)

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

All that enters consciousness is nothing other than what is real. That which is not real cannot enter consciousness. It is knowledge alone that remains real. That which is both real and consciousness is the Absolute, which is none other than the Lord as consciousness. Therefore, what appears as this world is nothing other than the Absolute. Existence and subsistence are both the form of the Absolute. Existence-subsistence-value all have the characteristics of the form of the Absolute. What is both existence and subsistence is a High Value at the same time.

* * *

Susan addressed one of what Deb calls “Gurukula clichés,” in the process shedding much needed light on it. Clichés can either conceal or reveal, depending on how carefully we pay attention:

In class, the phrase “true nature of the self” keeps coming up and I hear it but I’m never quite sure what it means. I know it’s something to work toward understanding. Then when I was meditating this morning, I realized that the quiet place that I find in meditation is what could be termed the true nature of the self. It is that place where the senses cannot take you. It is not a describable self with characteristics — intellect and knock knees and beautiful hair. It is just what it is. I think that I have thought after all these years of conditioning and competing and keeping up and education and striving that I would be looking for something more. More! But no. This is it. The this-ness. The quiet from which all that manifestation comes. If you don’t know that quiet which, in the end and always, is all and enough, then you can’t fully live. You are instead pulled one way or another constantly without knowing where the center is. Somehow I thought it would be more flashy. I thought there would be some flash, some excitement, but there is more and more quiet and settling in. Not something that can be explained. Now I feel as though I have always been top-heavy – so far away from myself – always in others’ minds. How do they see me? How do they think of me? They are so wonderful, smart, articulate. I am lacking constantly. There is also the knowing oneself that involves Dharma and one’s passions but I can see that I have to start with knowing the true nature of myself. For now I can feel it best in the quiet of meditation though of course it is always with me.

* * *

Perhaps you all know this story, but Amara did not. Since it parallels her own memoir, I’ll reprint it here. It’s up on his website now too (<http://aranya.me>).

Jyothi's Séance

After Nitya's death in May of 1999, his longtime assistant Jyothi was inconsolable. She cried the blues from morning till night, year after year. Her fitful efforts to spark some new interests always sputtered and failed. She moved back to her parents' home, and took occasional trips to visit friends, but nothing seemed to lift her spirits for more than a few hours.

Being a single woman in India is tough enough, but being seriously depressed is even worse.

After a half dozen years or so of this, she spent a few weeks visiting her friends in Singapore. As she was reluctantly preparing to return home, her heart heavy, a messenger arrived at the door.

"My master is asking for someone named Jyothi, staying in this house," he said. "She should come right away."

Jyothi's friends were baffled. They knew the man who had sent the message slightly. He was Chinese, supposed to be a medium, and lived not too far away. They had basically had no contact with him, but he had a good reputation, so they sent Jyothi back to his house with the messenger. She herself was a little bit puzzled, but not especially suspicious.

When she went in, she was amazed to see that the man's whole body language looked exactly like Nitya. He was sitting just as Nitya used to sit, and he greeted her with a secret affectionate name that only Nitya knew. He asked her to sit near him.

"I am sorry I had to send you away," he told her. "I needed to be alone when I died." Part of Jyothi's sadness was that when Nitya knew he was going to die, he sent her on a false errand to town to get her away. He didn't want her around, distracting him from his final samadhi. She is very emotional and talkative, as well as worshipful. And they had a very loving relationship. It would

have been very hard for both of them if she had been present. But she had always felt betrayed by missing the final moment.

“You have been very sad that I am gone,” he said. She nodded. He went on. “I have not gone anywhere. I am now everywhere. You should not be sad.” Jyothi looked at him in amazement. She couldn’t believe her eyes and ears. This guy even sounded like Nitya! He knew nothing about her or the Gurukula, and had never heard of Nitya, that was certain. But he *was* Nitya, in every detail.

“What is the matter with you? You should not be upset. I am everywhere. I am always with you. There is no end to life. Instead of mourning me, you should celebrate, celebrate, celebrate!” This last was said with great joy and strong emphasis. Jyothi promised she would mend her ways, and stumbled out in a daze. When she told us about it some months later, she would still light up from within, in great relief and joy. She took a firm vow to change her attitude, and ever after felt the certainty of Nitya’s presence always with her.

* * *

Golden threads have been popping up all over the place, as the universe honors our study of Darsanamala. The latest is from the program notes for Thomas Adés’ violin concerto:

Radio host, author, and music critic Tom Service, a longtime champion of Adés’ music, writes, “Adés talks about hearing the ‘magnetism’ in each note... every one of which becomes, under his composer’s microscope, a seething mass of musical possibilities. For Adés, this way of hearing is an absolute, a golden thread he follows in each piece he writes. The results, though, are the opposite of predictable or pre-planned. To hear what I’m talking about, listen to Violin Concerto ‘Concentric

Paths', which he composed in 2005. In just 20 minutes, this three-movement piece does something magical. The way it swirls ethereally in the first movement, exerts a tragic and vice-like grip in the... second part, and finally propels you into the uninhibited flight of the finale is like being spun into an infinite space.

Part III

Jan sent in some wise thoughts about the shining:

Hi Scott,

Your question at the beginning about what the shining means got me going, so I looked at Atmo and read a bit.

Verse 89 of Atmo talked about the sparks and glowing of pure knowledge. Reading that verse helped me understand Verse 8 in the Apavada Darsana better, and shed some new light for me on these ideas. For instance, there is something ephemeral about sparks that is key to what the verses are teaching.

Verse 89 reads:

*Existing in knowledge, as the being of non-being,
countless sparks arise, causing the appearance of the world;
so, apart from knowledge there is not another thing;
thus one should know; this knowledge bestows the state of oneness.*

Nitya then explains that sparks are the “innumerable offshoots” that spring forth from knowledge (which is the Absolute). Atmo here seemed similar to our verse in talking about how the “world is

nothing more than the continuous rising up of sparks from a common source.” Pg. 629.

What interested me most was Narayana Guru and Nitya’s meaning with the spark and its shining quality. Nitya talks about how we are “drawn to a tiny little luminous aspect in the experience.” p. 630..We go from one spark to another, we cannot give our attention to many sparks at once. They are made of stuff that holds light but that burns away, so we cannot retain the sparks. The contemplative sees that the sparks have a common eternal source, and that they are connected.

This idea that the sparks come and go is important and Nitya says we need to foster faith that “sparks will be continuously coming” and “there will be some joy in life all the time.” He also reminds us not “try to capture one and possess it, expecting to get all you need for the rest of your life out of it” because then you make a mistake. p. 631.

Nitya also says “we tend to exaggerate either the impermanence of all sparks, or else the glorious glow of a single one.” So we should strive to live somewhere in the balance where we remain unattached, enjoying the beautiful glow of all the sparks and their continuous flow.

I liked your idea of enthusiasm and saw it related here too in important ways. Nitya says even though the sparks keep coming and going, “why should you allow any moment of your life to be wasted, to be barren and meaningless?” He encourages us to make life wonderful and joyful, and this process is tied up with our individuality and how we each represent an individual manifestation with unique interests, desires, talents, etc. He even talks here (like you did) about longevity and how this process is

part of a long, happy life. “Find out your own interests. Keep life interesting. Let new sparks, new joys come.” Otherwise, life becomes hell. p. 634.

Lastly, I was surprised a bit by seeing how the idea of *lila* fit in here too. Just as the universe and Absolute is constantly involved in this elusive process of world-manifestation and has a “creative urge for world formation,” we too can be engaged in *lila* in our individual lives, and in doing so be close to our divine essence. The joy we experience “becomes a perennial experience” and encourages other people to find their joy and divine essence too. It’s a playful process that is probably exactly the kind of orientation we need to really live these ideas. I thought all of this was beautiful and very inspiring. I know there is more to the meaning of the shining quality, but this was something for now to think about. Jan