

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

Verses 9 & 10

Ananda alone shines as real, not anything else; therefore, everything is ananda through and through; apart from ananda nothing else is known.

All is indeed existence, consciousness, and pure happiness; in this there is not even a trace of the many; he who sees this as many goes from death to death. (II, 9 & 10)

3/13/6

Narayana Guru winds up the Apavada Darsana with two very simple and straightforward verses. Perhaps because of this, Deb led us into a discussion of an interesting corollary aspect mentioned in Nitya's commentary. She wanted us to consider how truth and beauty are related. Nitya says:

Here in these two concluding verses of Apavada Darsana, Narayana Guru wants us to recognize that truth is nothing other than happiness. Happiness is that which sustains the value of everything in life. When life is permeated with happiness it is the same as saying it is beautiful. The beauty of the Self is its unalloyed bliss. This bliss permeates the knowledge of the Self. (150-1)

Deb started us off by asserting that truth comes from living in harmony with one's dharma, and that a life expressing dharma is intrinsically beautiful. This precipitated a lively exchange of ideas.

We wanted to know if beauty was true, was ugliness also true? This question arises when we mix up vertical truth and beauty as eternal values with their horizontal expression. Truth in Vedanta is that which persists. Horizontal truth is better called actuality or fact truth, and is subject to continual change. Because such events are true momentarily and then are not any more, they are described as being *sat-asat*, both real and unreal. Likewise, beauty as a vertical value is an expression of the happiness that is the nature of the knowledge of existence. Horizontally, beauty is paired with ugliness, and is primarily a sensory impression or is descriptive of temporal occurrences. Horizontal beauty is wholly in the mind of the beholder. Even though most of our minds are conditioned alike so we tend to agree on what constitutes beauty and ugliness, that doesn't make our opinions vertical or particularly true.

Horizontal factors that continually change are impossible to pinpoint exactly. Even if you could describe something accurately, which is highly dubious, it is already different in the next moment. One can never securely know the truth of things that are seen from different perspectives and which transform from moment to moment. Exploitation of this relativity of "facts" allows politicians to flimflam the public and literally get away with theft and murder. To a lesser degree and often unintentionally, we live our lives behind a screen of untruth in which we hide from others and simultaneously cease to know ourselves.

In a consumer world where horizontal factors are manufactured constantly to overwhelm and allure us, we are greatly in need of an anchor of sanity to keep us from being swept away in the torrent of crap flooding our awareness. What might have been optional in a pastoral and quiet world of the past is

essential in the chaos of the present day. Nataraja Guru's scheme of horizontal and vertical correlates is extremely helpful in sorting out truth from Truth, good and bad from Good, beauty and ugliness from Beauty, and so on.

Nitya agrees that despite our true nature being happiness, "This proposition does not correspond to our everyday experience. Again and again we are caught in the grip of painful problems which we find hard to resolve." In our darkness we project threatening or fearful imagery onto the other, and then suffer far more than we would if we took things at face value (whatever that may mean). Deeply ingrained though it is, the anticipation of imaginary problems should be gently relinquished.

Nitya concludes, "If truth is hidden and untruth is veiling it, one can never reach the truth without first removing the veil of this ignorance.... The very knowledge of falsehood is the most efficient method to eliminate it." It would also work to meditate on truth, but our minds are so constituted that what we imagine to be true is generally as false as anything else, and we end up meditating on falsehood and calling it truth. The imagining of what something is, is the very veil itself. We are making a serious effort through this study to break free of the veiling imagery of our conditioned outlooks to know the Absolute as it truly is, both as unconditioned and as the substratum of all creation. We don't have to do away with anything. We only need to know the eternal that permeates the transient, the transcendent that fills the immanent increments of our lives. It is right here, all around us. Our ideas about the Absolute invariably become part of the transient flux, though, and thus are the veils we intend to set aside through intensity of tapas or effort.

This resolve leads us naturally to the next darsana, Asatya, for a close examination of falsehood or nonexistence.

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5/3/16

Apavada Darsana verses 9 & 10

Ananda alone shines as real,
not anything else; therefore, everything
is *ananda* through and through;
apart from *ananda* nothing else is known.

All is indeed existence, consciousness, and pure happiness;
in this there is not even a trace of the many;
he who sees this as many
goes from death to death.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*High Value (Bliss) alone exists and shines,
Therefore not anything else at all;
Thus everything is of the stuff of the High Value,
And besides this High Value nothing else exists.*

*All is indeed existence-subsistence-value,
Herein there is not even a little plurality;
He who sees (this) as pluralistic;
From death to death he goes.*

The conclusion of the Apavada Darsana was attended by Father George Thadathil, currently residing in Darjeeling, who knew and worked with Nitya off and on through the last four years of his life. Another new friend named Jane also joined us, and she seemed quite capable of appreciating the material. At least she didn't run screaming out the door, as most visitors do....

Deb made the important observation that here at the end of the darsana about the refutation of falsehood, Narayana Guru brings in two verses extolling ananda. Joy itself is the ultimate refutation of ignorance. We can and should address distinct items of misunderstanding as they arise, but when the bliss of the Real is reestablished in our hearts, negativity is refuted in a wholesale manner. Unfortunately there is not a one-to-one relationship here, as Nitya observes, because ignorance is perennially renewed:

Here in these two concluding verses of Apavada Darsana, Narayana Guru wants us to recognize that truth is nothing other than happiness. Happiness is that which sustains the value of everything in life. When life is permeated with happiness it is the same as saying it is beautiful. The beauty of the Self is its unalloyed bliss. This bliss permeates the knowledge of the Self.

This proposition, however, does not correspond to our everyday experience. Again and again we are caught in the grip of painful problems which we find hard to resolve. (150-1)

We well know the almost mystical ability of ignorance to discolor our life and lead us into dead ends. What a trite world it would be if ignorance had but little power! Not to worry. But it can often be like a ferocious beast that we ignore at our peril. Nitya points out its best trick:

We have already noted that the negative aspect of the Absolute is nothing but darkness. Earlier we said that darkness is not only the mere absence of light; it has a dynamism which paradoxically makes us believe the real to be unreal and the unreal to be real. (151)

Nitya adds, despite the universe being a manifestation of light and delight: “The capacity of ignorance to reveal a pattern of threat is

tremendous.” This leads us to shrink into a defensive posture that only exacerbates our ignorance. We combat it by breaking ourselves open, by working to become more expansive in our thinking and acting. Yet, as politicians well know, fear is a much more immanent sensation, and much easier to foster. Humans have a long history of sectarian warfare that permeates our mentality, and evolving to a peaceful paradigm is a long and demanding process. We can be profoundly grateful that so many of our fellow beings have dedicated themselves to precisely this project, in various modalities, all over the planet. As a species we are already well into the journey of a thousand miles.

As we have often noted, there are two essential aspects involved in the refutation of falsehood. On the one hand we can minimize our negativity and optimize the positive. But this can become one-sided, and then it feeds back into an overall ignorance. This is a tricky business! The second, far more subtle aspect is to maintain awareness of the intrinsic relation of the positive and negative as comprising a unitive situation. We can't just hold to the good and reject the bad, because at heart they are the same single situation. We have to embrace the whole.

Deb added that the monumental falsehood that we are invited to refute is that the world is various and manifold, not having oneness at its core. Ananda is understood as the oneness that everything is grounded in. When you attain the one, all the fracturing disappears. Deb recalled that Thomas Merton defined sin as the distance from God, or in our terms, the distance from oneness or the Absolute.

We live in a social setup that is based on salvation from without, but Vedanta, and the Gurukula philosophy in particular, calls on us to be our own saviors. While help is always welcome, we must not become complacent that someone else will take care of us somewhere down the road. It's our job, and our joy. Full

participation in life is where the joy resides. This includes meeting unwelcome challenges.

Nitya reminds us, “The Guru recommends not only a withdrawal from the world of ignorance; it is also expected that we will make a progressive ascent from one state of happiness to another.” Nitya continues:

Every day should be an exercise in raising our own self from one degree of happiness to another. Spiritual progress means making today better than yesterday, and assuring oneself that tomorrow will be even better. The *Darsanamala* was not written by Narayana Guru to cater to the curiosity of an armchair philosopher. It is not meant for mere discussion. The Guru calls it a *darsana*—a philosophical and mystical vision. (153)

Earlier in the day Father George and I were discussing the limits of the academic perspective. He is surrounded by it and yet also maintains a more vital thread in his life. Vedanta itself can be overly academic: it is often a series of definitions and complex semantic theorizing that can be deadening to the spirit. In yet another yogic balancing act in the Gurukula, we strive to focus on the essential enthusiasm of the exploration while not allowing ourselves to get bogged down in minutia. Leave the petty details to the timid. Being fully alive requires bravery to accept the unknown consequences of our choices, rather than rely on the speculations of others who may or may not be on target. In other words, we should dare to think for ourselves.

Jan has been reading one of the dream books recommended by Stanley Krippner when he was here, *Realities of the Dreaming Mind*, by Swami Sivananda Radha. It is encouraging her to do what these verses also imply: to focus on her true nature and make every day an exercise in going to a higher level. She is trying to

focus on the right things—silence, space, flexibility, and so on. The aim is to be headed to the right place, and continually renew herself in the process. It reminded her of the famous saying about continuous contemplation of the Self that Bill is always bringing up. Contemplation naturally expels ignorance, just by shining the light of awareness on what has been festering in the dark.

Deb concurred. She remembered Nitya saying all we had to do was open our eyes and we will wake up. Yet this does require attention and flexibility. Flexibility is exactly what we lose when we are in a bad mood. Deb says she gets snarky (look it up!) at times, and flexibility is the first thing to go. We all work hard in such states to defend our position, instead of trying to grasp the other person's point of view. The Guru invites us to change our approach precisely at moments like these. Not so easy, I'm sure we all agree. Yet it's only impossible if we don't make any effort.

Happily the present commentary with its Biblical references opens the door for a visiting Catholic Father to join the discussion, especially someone as broadly educated as George. George knew that the happiness of ananda is described as *atma sukham*, a state of being in which there is no pain. The idea is that as you subtract guilt, fear and remorse from your attitude, what is left is your true self, your core.

We talked with George for some time about his exchanges with Nitya, which if I find time I will add in a later note. It was a bit off topic, but fascinating too. George has been very kind to honor the value of our humble Gurukula, feeling uplifted here and sensing a strong vibrational concordance with Fernhill Gurukula.

Bill wondered how being aware of our false concepts can be juxtaposed with the positive impulse to increase our happiness. Many people are afraid that if they confront their darkness it will swallow them whole and they will be doomed, but it's just another trick of the ego to avoid criticism. George's description matches the first verse of Atmo, that if we strip away all the extraneous junk

we are left with our true nature. Bill later answered his own question by recalling Patanjali's restraint of mental modifications. The modifications in question are the many falsehoods with which we decorate our persona. Patanjali is perfectly clear: you don't just stop thinking and voila! You have to overcome numerous obstacles and make all kinds of efforts to bring false mental modifications to a close. Left alone they will caterwaul along for all eternity. The human brain can habituate to just about anything, toxic or not. Bill asserted that we impose a lot of structures on the world that aren't necessarily valid, which drew groans of recognition from around the room.

The Christian references in the commentary fit our visiting dignitary quite well. George noted that many in Kerala accused Nitya of being a bishop in disguise and not a "true" Hindu or whatever. He surely was a great admirer of the Bible, and his decoding of its arcane symbolism was superb. He felt he had a personal relationship with Jesus, as recounted in the Love and Blessings chapter *The Light Of The World And The Life Of All Beings*. Here he brings in Jesus as an example of the kind of bravery spiritual authenticity demands:

Philosophy in the West has assumed the nature of a discipline of logical speculation. This is to be contrasted with the vision of a mind like that of Jesus Christ. He had a penetration of vision which was not built up on a series of syllogisms. When we listen to his word, our hearts reverberate in unison with the truth of what he proclaimed. The truth of it can be put to the acid test of action, it can be assailed by logical reasoning, but it cannot be altered or modified by a speculative mind. This kind of seeing is called *darsana*.

Narayana Guru gives the *Apavada Darsana* with the same authority. He assures us of redemption from the clutches of

ignorance while also promising us the positive path of ascending the mount of eternal bliss. (153)

In academia, nearly everything is based on previous observations by supposed authorities, and footnoted to substantiate its pre-acceptance. In spirituality, personal reflection is also brought in to provide the substantiation. Doing so is often referred to as acting from the heart as opposed to the mind—a loose but widely used metaphor. We know that both heart and mind are vague aspects of core consciousness, without any fixed abode. As the Biblical Matthew put it regarding fixed abodes: “And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matt. 8.19, 20) Having established the necessary flexibility, Jesus invited his disciples two verses later to “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.” Scribes represent the academic, dead letter, secondhand relation to life, and the disciples the living spirit and its enthusiastic explorations.

Because of the human tendency to rust on our laurels, to wait for an “expert” to bail us out, or to just be content with comfortable mediocrity, Nitya once again reminds us of the importance of taking the bull by the horns:

If truth is hidden and untruth is veiling it, one can never reach the truth without first removing the veil of this ignorance. As the Guru is convinced of this, he invites us to the third darsana, which is the envisioning of falsehood. The very knowledge of falsehood is the most efficient method to eliminate it. In modern psychological therapy, the psychoanalyst tries to spot the cause of a hidden malady. That in itself is the treatment. Here is where the method adopted by Narayana Guru goes beyond that of conventional psychotherapy. The psychologist

leaves the patient at this point. He does not help him to go further and see what he truly is. In the remaining darsanas, the Guru does just this. (153)

The commentary contains a subtle example of the work we could be doing. Nitya quotes one of the most controversial and baffling verses of the Gita:

Even if one of very evil actions should worship Me with a devotion exclusive of all else, he should be accounted to be good all the same merely by the fact that he has a properly settled determination. (IX. 30)

Pretty much everyone reads this with the automatic assumption that it refers to someone else. Even if we have low self-esteem, we never allow ourselves to believe we are evil! Krishna must be talking about those murderers and rapists we read about in the papers. But the Gita has to be approached as if it is speaking directly to us about us. It is not aimed at anyone else. It's directed at each of us as an individual seeker of truth. The secret message here is that we all have memories we feel guilty or ashamed of, and these come back to haunt us, all the time. They are the veil: they drag us into negativity, making us subconsciously certain we are inferior and unworthy. We are riveted to our negative self-image, and religion often exacerbates this aspect of the psyche. So we regularly fall short of our potential. Krishna is suggesting that while we may have been taught we are evil or not-so-good, and we certainly know of our many shortcomings and failures, we have to overcome that veil of regret if we are ever to become free. Krishna's properly settled determination is to orient ourselves in a fresh and open manner to the present, intentionally discarding our doubts and fears about our abilities. He assures us we are not guilty criminals denying our unsavory past, we are divine beings facing

life as we should, always. We are making ourselves available to the situation as sparks of the Absolute rather than as whipped dogs, inwardly cringing. It's a beautiful message, and Nitya inserts it here as an open invitation to let go of our misery and allow our inner beauty to blossom forth. We are being encouraged by a wise teacher to make an epochal breakthrough.

From a modern scientific perspective, everything we perceive is a projection staged in our mind's eye. That means that everything is within us. There is nothing outside. If we hate or mistreat any aspect of our experience, we are hating or mistreating ourselves. We should definitely look into why we do this. What has led us to despise our very being? The gurus over and over beg us to take a kinder attitude toward all creatures, with our own self at the center of the picture. Every millimeter we creep forward benefits everyone and everything. We live and share the joy of existence more each day. This should easily register as increased satisfaction with our life, even in the midst of the confusing chaos of a dynamic universe.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary is almost no commentary at all:

Verse 9 - This verse merely underlines the High Value content called bliss or *ananda* as comprising the totality of the Absolute.

Verse 10 - The meaning of the verse is sufficiently clear. The note on which it ends is reminiscent of an Upanishadic dictum as found in the Katha Upanishad. The Absolute is here reduced as comprised with the categories of existence-subsistence-value.

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The following is an excerpt from *Therapy And Realization In The Bhagavad Gita*, a series of talks to a psychology convention in Sydney, Australia, in August, 1975. It amplifies one of Nitya's assertions in the present verse commentary:

In the Gita, Krishna wants Arjuna to know what his dharma is and how he should perform it. Implied in this is a reevaluation of the value system to which man should conform, and of the proper functioning of those values in our life. For that, Krishna, as a teacher, is also doing what the psychologist is doing to his patient. The psychologist is not there to provide a plank for the patient to lean on which will always be held up by the therapist. Rather he should help him to stand on his own feet. That is possible only when the patient obtains an insight into his own problems, his own being. When he knows what he is and how he should function, he will be able to function by himself. The very basic attempt of a psychologist is to make the patient realize himself.

If self-realization is the motive of the psychologist, why do we stop half way? Why don't we push it all the way until the patient is no longer a patient but a student, and further, not a seeker but a seer? Krishna functions here not merely as a therapist, he offers much more than therapy. He educates his patient. His patient becomes illuminated. He is no longer simply a patient in relation to a psychologist – the seeker has become the seer.

(The full text is available at Nitya's website, <http://aranya.me>.)

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Here are the excerpts and my jottings from Father George's book. He was pleased to note that my reading it out in class was the first time he was privileged to listen to his own words being shared in this fashion. Nice! We traded books at the Kochi conference in 2013, so I own one of the rare copies in America. The first edition is now gone. A second edition is in the works, and I will share purchase information when it is ready. English-speaking readers interested in Nitya will find this an essential addition to their library:

Vision from the Margin: A Study of Sri Narayana Guru Movement in the Literature of Nitya Chaitanya Yati

George Thadathil (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007)

In the caste hierarchy of the late 19th century Kerala, the Izhavas [Narayana Guru's caste] ranked highest among the *tindal jati* (category of castes that polluted from a distance). Those below them, the Cerumas, Pulayas and Nayadis had to keep 20, 36, and 72 feet distance respectively, at the sight of a Nambuthiri, at the apex of the order. The Nayars and above them the Ambalavasis, had pollution only by touch. Izhavas as a consequence could not enter the home of Nayar or Nambuthiri, or their temples; neither were they allowed to use the public [bathing] tanks and wells, roads and bridges, nor speak with, eat, or marry them. Izhavas too in reverse kept away from the castes lower to them. To these above disabilities were added denial of admission to traditional caste Hindu schools, and administrative jobs. Worse still, they could not wear footwear or carry umbrella, their women were not allowed to cover their breasts, wear ornaments, carry water on their hips or milk cows. They could only build single storey houses which were called kudi. (14)

There is a subtle distinction between the Artist and the Mystic. Both strive for promoting order and experiencing unity. Yet, the routes both take differ even when they rely on similar means like *yoga*. The artist's perception of unity is not exclusive but diffusive. The mystic's perception of unity is exclusive through a process of centering. In other words, while the mystic concentrates on the Oneness of the many, the artist immerses in the many-ness of the One. Some writings of Nitya have been criticised by many as contradicting other writings of his. The root of this apparent contradiction lies in his being both an artist and a mystic at the same time. One could go to say that it was the artist in him that predominated even after having attained mystic experience. It was here that the compassion and call to transform others in and through one's endeavors prevailed upon a serenely self-seeking personal journey of fulfillment. (116)

His numerous writings on religious themes disclose twofold potential of religiosity to evoke transformation in consciousness: first, in keeping with earlier mentioned rational mode, the provision for a critical knowledge base to revalue all traditional beliefs and practices; second, in keeping with the objective assimilation and personalization of religion, to induce an aesthetic-religious experience. What he has in concrete achieved through his many books on religious theme is to have challenged a prevalent adherence to religion on blind faith and induced a process of personalization by discovering the truth of religion for and within oneself. Here again the contrariety so peculiar to his thinking is evinced in the way religions are proposed to be transcended—not by negating them or disregarding them, but, by fulfilling them or attaining their goal. (121-2)

[In the Narayana Gurukula tradition] Advaita is not pure monism, rather a holding of tension of the available polarities, as if in search of a midway; this is what the notion of nonduality adds as a qualification. Despite textual evidence to delineate his philosophy it should be noted that he was unique in being non-aligned to any then-existing religious, sectarian or caste communities. He did not preach and promote nondualism as a creed, nor did he consider any school of philosophy should be polemically decried or outwitted to propagate his. Similarly, he is unique in that he was not tainted or coloured in the least by patriotism, pride in Indian culture or Hinduism. In contemporary rating of socially conscious philosophers of modern India this is a factor not sufficiently stressed. (134) (Citing Nitya.)

me: Thadathil has done non-Malayali readers a great service by translating many pithy statements from his Malayalam writings. He has seemingly read everything the Guru wrote and distilled into a coherent thesis. While his interpretation diverges from mine in a number of places, the variations are for the most part minor: shades of interpretation rather than doctrinal clashes. The global insights and respectful treatment Thadathil provides tower above any minimal misalignments I noticed. Nitya would have appreciated Thadathil's intellectual acumen and absence of clichés. It's a very rewarding read.

Thadathil has a keen eye for Nitya's dialectic presentation, which usually takes place on such a broad scope as to be nearly invisible to the casual reader.

For class notes. "Caste" can stand for any form of limiting self-identification, whether imposed from without or within:

The pedagogical project... to transform the self... aims at resolving the tension between identity and equality. Identity speaks up for uniqueness, for specificity and subjectivity, whereas equality stands for sameness, egalitarian treatment and citizenship. The two are contrary ideals and harmony requires both—equality at [the] experiential level of mutual relationships and identity at the experiential level of qualifying the complementarity of relationships. The Izhava history with which we are grappling reveals how there is a possibility of transcending caste identity in the process of claiming or demanding equality. It is a movement in the direction of being oneself and more, not less. In other words, the transcending of the pejorative sense of caste is possible by acquiring the privileged identity resulting from a superior (heightened) consciousness. A consciousness provided by and built upon advaitic intuition. (123-4)