

**III Asatya Darsana,  
A Vision of Nonexistence**

**Verse 1**

All this is a permeation of mind, but mind is nowhere to be seen. In the same way, like the blue and so on in the sky, the world is seen in the Self.

4/11/6

The apparent blueness of the sky is a favorite Vedantic image, but modern scientists are perfectly at home with the knowledge that color as such does not exist in the “outside” world, but is a subjective interpretation of the mind, or we should say the brain.

Brains can be seen but the mind cannot, which lends credence to a materialistic interpretation of creation. But by now in Darsanamala, Narayana Guru has well established that the universe is a projection of consciousness, and that the theory that it is built up bit by bit from subatomic particles into ever-increasingly complex arrangements is at best a partial picture based on imagination.

The first verse of Asatya Darsana can be unsettling, but it is a steppingstone to a holistic and beatific vision. Modern science has also come this far, realizing that we each dwell in isolated projections of our own mental apparatus. Ubiquitous uncertainty has been noted and even measured, and yet in everyday life even the best scientist carries on as if everything was perfectly certain. In our core we all experience certitude, despite the imperfections of our interpretive equipment. This is actually essential to our

survival. If everyone on the freeway were obsessed with uncertainty, it would be a bloodbath out there. Yet when uncertainty is masked by false certainty, such as in the political arena, the result is often a bloodbath too.

So how is it that all these individual fictions—Nitya calls them hallucinations here—can cohere in a successful and even delightful interaction? There must be something beyond the mere coordination of sensory data that unites life into harmonious synthesis, a programmer or programming factor for our biocomputers, or whatever. Nitya points out that as far as the individual is concerned, it is the vasantas that provide the programming. For the whole enchilada there is a universal Will or Urge, the various aspects of which were elucidated in the first two darsanas. It will become clear that turning our attention away from the chaos of material uncertainty and directing it to the harmonious Core or Karu is the lion's share of the work of contemplation.

In any lion's share, be careful not to let pride trip you up! While this is a very bad pun, in fact our pride in the neat interpretations we have made about life holds us back from truly attaining a new vision. We need to lose faith in appearances, to stir up the congealed pudding of our habits, before we can strike out in fresh directions. Otherwise we are only imagining we are going anywhere; the truth is that like Procrustes we are squeezing the new into our old framework, and mangling it. Remember, he was the thief who welcomed travelers and then cut them down to fit his bed, trimming off the head and limbs so that nothing hung over the side. This is the perfect metaphor for how we truncate reality to suit our needs and wants, when we should be eager to embrace it exactly as it comes to us.

Nitya concludes by reaffirming that “the individual mind is part of the collective mind.” We know this because “when we are subjected to a collective hallucination we are completely carried away by the similarity of responses in a number of individual

minds.” And remember, the collective isn’t just the sum total of all the greasy, smelly, barbaric—and, sure, brilliant and witty—humans. It’s something so much greater we tend to refer to it as divine.

Our path through Darsanamala is indicated by Nitya in his concluding paragraph:

We can prove that the world-experience of man is illusory, but that does not help us very much to escape from its tragic spell until it becomes completely transparent to us in what manner the Self is veiled, and how projection manifests in all the individual cases of the experience of entities with names and forms which seem to exist within the framework of time and space, with inner relationships such as cause and effect, and with whatever is treated dualistically as other than one’s own self. (166)

As Anita asked, how do we break free from the iron grip of those vasanas we don’t like, when they continually sprout up from our inner seedbed? Observing how the vasanas first tinge the psyche with desire, we can learn to notice the process at an earlier stage, before we become enmeshed in the actuality of the situations that the vasanas are programming. It may take a while before the spell cast by the vasanas becomes “completely transparent,” but even “partially transparent” helps a lot. Knowing the process even intellectually makes it easier to let go. We gradually change our world by embracing the beautiful expressions of the vasanas wholeheartedly, and merely watching while the terrible ones dissipate unreinforced. Radical yogis say let it all go; I say you are free to carefully and intelligently select the true, the good and the beautiful if you’re happy sticking around. It seems to me the Programmer has created the program for our use and delight.

Ann and Moni spoke about how children and baby animals have precisely the attitude of openness and love we are aiming for. After painful experiences pile up over time, we become increasingly guarded and cautious, and block much of what might turn out to be ecstatic. Ann and her husband are starting to keep bees. She is excited by all the new intricacies, while he is always discomfited by finding out what he should have known before he got this far. Her attitude is “Ah!” and his is “Arrgh!” She wondered rhetorically who would get stung....

I'll close with a poem Peggy sent yesterday, the same day as this class on interconnectedness despite individuation, once again affirming our unity in the core:

### The Reality of Interconnectedness

-P. Grace Chun

The illusion of separation  
And ignorant emphasis on differences  
Form the basis and justification  
For models of war.

The reality of connection  
And wise emphasis on commonality  
Form the bonds and compassion  
For natural peace.

Basic universal humanity  
Cannot be divided and conquered,  
Yet the primal instinct of fear  
Can cloud one's vision  
And close one's heart  
To simple obvious Truth.

War is a false equation.

Free yourself from the hypnotic illusions  
That plague our planet with destruction.  
Ignorance now reigns supreme.  
It is time for the women to step forward.  
We are all related.

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6/7/16

Asatya Darsana Verse 1

All this is a permeation of mind,  
but mind is nowhere to be seen;  
in the same way, like the blue and so on in the sky,  
the world is seen in the Self.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*All this (world) is of mind-stuff:  
The mind, however, is not anywhere;  
Therefore like the blue and so on in the sky  
The world is seen in the Self.*

A marvelous analogy of the dependent or mysterious manifestation of the world in the Self sets us off in earnest on our search for the meaning of nonexistence. Sky is invisible and intangible, yet from a certain angle of vision it takes on a number of qualities, like blueness and the appearance of solidity. In the nearly one hundred years since these verses were set down, neuroscientists and psychologists have come to the same conclusion as Narayana Guru: what we experience as our self is a

complex image with no localizable basis. “Mind is nowhere to be seen” is a chant of many modern materialists, and it’s true enough. But as to what can be made of it there is plenty of room for divergence.

Let’s cut to the chase: on the surface, this affirmation means there is nothing; everything is a fiction, which might well precipitate nausea and despair in a materialist. But Narayana Guru accepts that the world is as real as a world can be, only its basis lies in an immaterial source. It’s not any where, or any what, but it has nonetheless produced this universe. Moreover, attempting to erase our existence to achieve some putative other state, empty or otherwise, is futile, like trying to scrub the lather out of soap. And why should we erase it, when existence is a superlative, magnificent, endlessly delightful miracle?

It might help to recap verse 88 of *Atmopadesa Satakam*, along with the beginning of Nitya’s commentary from *That Alone*:

Everything is real in itself; one who grasps the basic truth  
will understand all this as one;  
if not known introspectively,  
*maya*’s great enmity certainly creates much confusion.

After such a minute study of all aspects of the Self and its indivisible aloneness, even when we come to the eighty-eighth verse of *Atmopadesa Satakam* the world has not disappeared. It persists, through all the reevaluations we have had. And we are the same people. We are engaged in the same kinds of activities, and we still react to each other the same way.

If the world persists must it be real? Is it real or not? Does it exist or not exist? Narayana Guru says have no quarrel—just take it for granted the world exists. Not only this world. Whatever there is. It’s all okay. *Sakalavum ullatu*, everything is real.

Rather than lamenting that we cannot pin down the mind, we might just as well revel in the fact. Mind—the very context of our existence—is supremely subtle. It can't be fixed, as much as we may feel compelled to pin it down. It is always several steps ahead of us, opening up new possibilities and inviting our participation in them. Where a fulminating fundamentalist might sneer at the naivety of those who follow their heart, the Guru would rather we encourage much, much more of it. In our local arena we are capable of converting a desiccated desert into an Edenic garden. What does it matter that the mind is not confined to a nerve ganglion in the cingulate cortex or some other recondite corner of the brain? Wherever it may be coming from, it is here, presenting us with a breathtaking sequence of vastly supported development known as our life. Until you find it and start monkeying with it with hammer and saw, there is a whole lot of living to be had. So let's get on with it!

Nitya succinctly states our problem in his summing up:

We can prove that the world-experience of man is illusory, but that does not help us very much to escape from its tragic spell until it becomes completely transparent to us in what manner the Self is veiled, and how projection manifests in all the individual cases of the experience of entities with names and forms which seem to exist within the framework of time and space, with inner relationships such as cause and effect, and with whatever is treated dualistically as other than one's own self. (166)

Deb was amused by the way Nitya downplays the value of intellectual abstractions when they come at the expense of our creative participation in life:

“Sky” as a factor experienced as external to the human organism is the result of a collective hallucinatory projection described in the preceding chapter as *vikshepa*. Even the scientist who knows the complex function of the brain is not very much impressed by his knowledge when he goes to the ice cream parlor and insists on strawberry flavored ice cream. (165-6)

While all this is true, we have to remember that we are just at the beginning of our examination of nonexistence, of *asat*. This verse is not necessarily the final word. But we do need to know that the world we see and interact with is essentially a construct, otherwise we may make egregious errors. Realizing this is quite a challenge. Bill mused it was a very mysterious process how the Self manifests as the individual self. Fortunately the Self’s manifestation is not dependent on a clear understanding of it, or we would be in big trouble.

Since the way we interpret existence is the outcome of a unique set of developmental forces, we are sure to have no more than a partial understanding, as does everyone else. Again this is a *good* thing. It gives us a reason for being, and plenty of room for improvement. Humans have a curious compulsion to impress others by being absolutely right, and often wield that hubris to the detriment of their fellow beings and the environment. Humans are often drawn to those who claim to know all, and frequently surrender our common sense to them, with all manner of disastrous repercussions. By accepting our limitations, we become more tolerant of other points of view, more flexible, and less gullible. Rigidity stems from a fixed set of notions, and storms through the world as a conquering army. Needless to say, this is the opposite of the open attitude of Narayana Guru and his Gurukula, which wafts around the globe more like a fragrant zephyr.



Because of this, we should routinely spend some time examining our attitudes and separating the wheat from the chaff. One of my favorite sentences from Nitya's book on the Patanjali Yoga Sutras is "The yogi makes every effort not to be a howler telling untruth or a simpleton believing in something because somebody said it or it is written somewhere." (243) To counteract the combative impulse and invite us to a harmonious attitude, Nitya later adds, "It is not difficult to cultivate an awareness that is both critical and sympathetic." (371) Well, sometimes it *is* difficult, but that's no excuse to be unsympathetic.

Prabu asked how we go about freeing ourselves from the mind's domination, which does not mean ridding ourself of the mind. This is not about separating ourself from our self, but raising our self to a more harmonious frequency. The pulsation model we studied earlier is very relevant to this issue. Recall that our experience begins in a secret core where only potentials exist; nothing has yet come to be. Out of that certain proclivities develop, and are shaped by everything they encounter, eventually taking a more or less fixed form as the way we view the world. Since the world we perceive is a construct based on partial understanding, we have to break our attachment to it as an unalloyed reality. To do this the yogi withdraws from it—temporarily of course—to sink back into the unformed depths. If this is done thoroughly enough, new potentials are activated even as those old and in the way are de-energized. We can then resume interaction with the world in a refreshed and renewed fashion.

This is not a onetime effort, but a continuous process of vivifying every aspect of our life by oscillating between our core and periphery.

This is why we meditate—to take a break from our habitual attitudes and allow new capacities to come online. Most vasanas have time stamps on them to mark when they are most appropriate, and our best spiritual impulses have to bide their time through the

early stages when they are not particularly relevant. After the periods of physical and mental development and reproduction and social involvement have been attended to, we have more freedom to nurture the most profound of our abilities, ones that have patiently waited for their chance to blossom. If we put them on hold for some more time, we may die before they have their hour in the sun, and that would be a colossal waste. All of what we have done up to this moment has set the stage for their debut. If we continue to replay the behavioral scripts we have gotten used to, those proclivities will not have a fighting chance. So we have to budget some time to meditate or otherwise bask in our source codes.

Jan wondered whether we should bring positive affirmations into our core so as to elicit our best vasanas, which is a common suggestion. Of course we want to be as good as gold. The problem is that whenever we bring anything with us into the neutral state it is no longer neutral. A yogi has to abandon—again temporarily—all desires, no matter how salutary. Then, as we emerge from neutrality to attend to everyday dualities, positive support can be used to encourage our best instincts and gently weed out the unhelpful ones.

This reminded Deb of Bill's oft quoted remark of Suzuki Roshi: we sit, in Zen, because it is our true nature. In other words, not to attain anything. Our true nature is nirvana, and nirvana doesn't have or require any additional program. Of course, attaining nirvana is a desire in itself, so even that should be left off as having been a necessary starting point only.

As we are all aware, there are many types of meditation that can open us up to our spiritual depths. Prabu has recently been discovering the glories of Beethoven and other Western composed music. Art at its best resonates with our highest aspirations, and can waft us deep into our beingness. Psychedelic medicines famously break the hold of habitual non-reality, freeing us to

cherish a temporary freedom from fixed perspectives. Sometimes a new hobby is enough to energize our enthusiasm. Even philosophy like the one we are pondering can wean us away from our dead ends to give birth to renewed joy in our hearts. What do my kids call it for the body? Oh yes, exfoliation. Like snakes, we have layers of dead skin that need to be rubbed off to let the new skin shine. Joseph Campbell calls the way art at its best affects us *esthetic arrest*. It breaks the hold our expectations have on our psyche, making room for the new.

At Moni's and Jan's prompting we discussed dreams at length. Jan made the connection with meditation explicit in that we are seeking guidance from within, and dreams are a fairly handy way to invite our deeper wisdom to participate in our unfoldment.

Moni recalled Nitya's advice to enjoy the freedom from our waking mind we have during sleep. On waking, we can try to remain without putting our familiar persona back on for a while, and this is actually very healthy. Bill, our dream expert, added that both the hypnopompic and hypnagogic states (immediately preceding waking or right after falling asleep, respectively) are ideal times for meditation unburdened by the demands of waking consciousness. We have increased freedom of thought if we can remain in that in-between state, which means not thinking in terms of "what I want," among other considerations. Just the tiniest nudge at most, or we will wake up.

Jan has been keeping a dream journal, and feels that it is increasing her receptivity. She is listening more carefully for her inner promptings, and yearning for more of that kind of instruction.

At the Portland Gurukula we don't advocate for any particular type of meditation, but do suggest that some form of self-reflection is bound to be spiritually uplifting. To me, not having a fixed program is essential; for others, they have to have something planned out or they wouldn't do anything. It's up to each individual.

Anyway, perhaps you caught the reference to the pulsation model in the opening paragraph:

In the introduction to this *darsana* we have given a general idea of the structure of consciousness. We see it as a phenomenal structuring arising out of the mysterious depths of a primeval darkness. This structuring becomes horizontalized as a binary function consisting either of a subject-object duality or as a subjective state witnessed by a focus of consciousness experienced as “I.” In either case the notion of the knower as “I” appears to be detachable from the known.

That primeval darkness is the unitive source that expands into the dualistic horizontal world of our conscious experience, in the process becoming delimited. We are invited to return to it frequently so that oneness and multiplicity are kept in harmony. Nitya reminds us:

In the two earlier *darsanas* the Guru has established that everything perceived and conceived is basically the manifestation of one’s own consciousness. But we are still uncertain about what it is that causes perceptual images to arise as experiences of different forms, colors, and other sensory data. We are somewhat trapped, because the only mechanism available to us for the examination of how our mind works is that very mind itself.

The mind is only a trap when it becomes overly attached to its relationship with the horizontal. We need a constant reminder (like this class) only because the mind is susceptible to becoming stuck. Once we regularly use the mind as a tool for coming unstuck, it becomes a very good friend and helpmate.

Nitya touches on a couple of Western philosophers who first grasped what Vedantins have been saying for a very long time:

Immanuel Kant points out that we cannot jump out of our mind and senses to know exactly what an object is before its image is adulterated with the biophysical and psychochemical peculiarities of our brain-stuff. According to Heisenberg, a physical entity cannot be scrutinized without the act of scrutiny disturbing its structure. In the same way, we can say that we can never perceive anything without causing agitation and disturbance in our motor-sensory system.

In a broader context, however, we are capable of at least improving our relationship to our surroundings. Functional MRI has shown that psychedelics impel the brain to function holistically and overcome the barriers between it and its surroundings, imbuing it with a sense of universal oneness. Listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with an open mind can do it too, as Prabu can attest. So while we acknowledge the isolation of the brain, mind does not necessarily suffer from those same limitations. (I'm fond of James Fadiman's phrase, "The mind and its brain.") The spiritual quest could well be epitomized as the struggle for transcendence of our current limits. It means being aware of those limits while seeking to overcome them. The voices that insist we have no chance of breaking free are not helpful. If we believe them, they will be proven right. So don't believe them! Nitya continues:

When Schrodinger spoke of the world as a construct happening in the brain with percepts, concepts and memories, he missed one thing, which was pointed out later by John C. Lilly in his book *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer*. There he asks the pertinent question: "If all we experience is programmed and computerized by the human

biocomputer, who is the programmer of that computer?” This vital question, the most fundamental question we can ask, was overlooked or disregarded by scientists for a long time. Let us ask it again: “Who is programming the mind?”

Narayana Guru was careful to present a programmer before turning our attention to what is programmed in the individuated mind. The program is the storage bank of incipient memories. And, as far as the collective consciousness is concerned, it is the universal Will which is the substratum of all existence, order, development and purpose.

The mind and the Absolute are not two, at least in the Indian perspective. Either way, when we sink into the core their very existence evanesces. They are not describable in any way, and certainly not nameable. They just are. Therefore meditating on the mind is like meditating on the Absolute: when it dissolves into nothingness, you are finally getting somewhere. Nitya tells us:

In this verse, the Guru first highlights the common experience shared by all, that is to say the existential experiencing of generally known things and ideas. This he does by turning our minds towards the consideration of these phenomena. After stating that all experiences, whether seen by us as subjective or objective, are of the mind, he asks us to make a critical search for the mind itself. When the mind looks for itself it vanishes like a phantom, leaving behind only sensations, ideations, conceptual images, and sensory impressions.

We are all one, and we are also separate. Separation allows for all sorts of things that are impossible in a condition of oneness. We are not taking sides, only seeing as much of the total context as we can. Separation allows us to develop our own uniqueness, thus contributing something new to the universe, which apparently is

not interested in repetition. Too boring. So, Warden, open up your cells and let go!

## Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary reprises the traditional Vedantic view of reality vs. unreality:

In the sky there are no colours such as blue, etc. In spite of this, however, we know this verity as we actually perceive the blue colour in the sky. In reality only the sky is real, and blueness, etc., are fully unreal. In the same manner, in the pure unqualified Self this world is perceived which is a presentiment of the will. It is the Self alone that is real, and the world consisting of mind-stuff is unreal.

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Bill reread a favorite paragraph of his from the introduction:

In *Darsanamala*, Narayana Guru is not much interested in the analysis of man's woeful condition of ignorance. He is interested in imparting a positive discipline called *atmavidya* – a Sanskrit term meaning “knowledge of the *atma* or Self.” It is only through the acquisition of true knowledge that man can be freed from what he sees as nauseating or sorrowful conditions which are bound to arise during the span of his conscious life on earth. *Atmavidya* is a discipline of understanding evolved by seers over a period of thousands of years, and they have found it to be effective in releasing individuals from the negative conditions arising from ignorance. (158-9)

Nitya wrote this to counteract the negativity prevalent in many belief systems. Unfortunately, this can also be interpreted to support escapism, so I want to add another perspective from Nitya's Yoga Sutras commentary:

Yoga is not a passive way of closing one's eyes to injustice. If the yogi has a moral conscience, he or she has to challenge all three kinds of involvement in violence (greed, anger and delusion). (267)

So I guess if you don't have a moral conscience, then don't bother about injustice. Nitya did. This echoes the earlier quote of his: "It is not difficult to cultivate an awareness that is both critical and sympathetic." I think this hints at the balance of the yogi that achieves the neutrality of the core, with its vasana garden of infinite potentials.

### **Part III**

A couple of loosely edited ideas based on the verse, before we head farther into the Asatya Darsana:

Mind is a nonexistent but apparent entity we presume to exist. Narayana Guru saw what neuroscientists are beginning to visualize with their instruments: that what we perceive is like a magic show produced in awareness. If we get some distance on it, it looks like a painting or video, in other words, like an arbitrary interpretive arrangement made to please the viewer. We never know the scene as it is, because we are condemned to view our interpretation of it, and everyone else is in the same pickle. Our task is to refine and normalize our interpretation so it has a universal basis rather than clinging to our personal preferences.



Realizing this allows us to expand out of the personal and into the universal. This frees us to be more effective, because the bonds of our limited and limiting personality are broken.

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Why worry about whether we can truly know a thing-in-itself, when we have hardly begun to know ourselves? If we don't know who we are, how can we be sure of anything else? We are so vastly isolated within our personal conceptualizations we have almost no clue what might lie beyond them, either in fantasy or reality.

Scientists try to ascertain "facts" by leaving the personal element out entirely, but if the universe is an epiphenomenon of consciousness, how can that be possible? If you leave out the personal factor, you leave out the entire basis of existence. We have barely begun to be aware of anything outside our immediate needs, building gradually on worm consciousness. Forget determining the exact location of an electron, a more important question is who is this person next to me who I think of as my friend? Do I know anything about them? I don't know myself, and they don't know themselves either. At least if we wonder about this, we may learn to hear a faint intimation from something outside of our shuttered awareness. If we think we know, or think knowing is unnecessary, we won't even try, and all we'll hear is the reverberation of our own suppositions.