

III Asatya Darsana, A Vision of Nonexistence

Verse 5

There is no difference between will and mind; that mind, which is called ignorance and darkness, is a wonder, like Indra's magic.

5/22/6

Our discussion focused on how we are led astray when we try to actualize our *vasanas*. A deeply felt urge is interpreted by the mind based on a person's understanding of how to interface with the world. Because of our natural ignorance or partial knowledge, there is usually a mismatch between the seed and the field in which it is sown, between the pure vision and its actualization. We "force the issue" and end up with a less than perfect result. If we believe strongly enough that what we want is possible, no matter how unlikely, we warp the data to support our position.

As Nitya enunciated, there is a general form of wishful beliefs shared by all and a private form perceptible to only the individual.

For general willful delusion, it was hard to pass up the example of the Cheney cabal. A bunch of power-hungry men, who have already excluded everyone who might challenge their fantasies, sees a disarmed country with vast resources, ripe for the plucking. Doubts are dismissed as unpatriotic. The image of vast wealth just waiting to be taken is like a shining beacon that captivates their whole being. They are in a position to make it happen. And so they reach out their hand.... Predictably, there is a

lot of resistance from the real world. But instead of reassessing their desires, the cabal is self-reinforcing. Different spins are mobilized to rationalize their actions, drawing them deeper and deeper into disaster, all the while licking their chops. The thrust morphs into what it probably was all along: a desire of thwarted psyches to destroy everything outside themselves, and the momentum is almost unstoppable short of self-annihilation.

If only such folly was limited to those few....

Moni mentioned how her Christian friends are preparing for the end times, getting ready to liquidate their possessions and move to the hills, because the signs are clear that Jesus is soon to reappear. A little knowledge might show them that in the first century CE, followers of Jesus expected his immanent return, and ever since—almost two thousand years now—people have been interpreting their scriptures as saying he'll be right along. Because different interpretations are automatically excluded from the wishful thinking, no one is allowed to imagine there could be a symbolic meaning to the words, even though Jesus himself was very clear that he spoke in parables. Seventh Day Adventists have spent almost two hundred years moving their dates back a few years at a time, and believe it would be faithless of them to do anything else.

America is currently in the grip of a mania for physical exercise. Scientifically speaking, the optimum amount is twenty minutes of moderately vigorous activity three times a week, but millions of people feel driven to spend all their free time pushing their bodies to the limit. It's fueled by a love of competition as well, wanting to be just a little better than your neighbor. Sometimes I wonder if their minds and intellects and spirits feel as well exercised as their bodies.

I'd venture to say that all of us have succumbed to similar beliefs at some point in our lives. Or many points. And it turned out to be someone outside our fantasy-sharing group who finally

got us to realize our gullibility. This means we should always be open to consider new viewpoints, and not dismiss them out of hand because they don't agree with our own prejudices. Sooner or later such insular thinking leads to one disaster or another, be it war, poverty or sore knees. [This (2006) was written before the internet expanded the echo chambers exponentially.]

The personal form of willful delusion is particularly germane to reflective seekers of truth. We join group discussions to help us avoid these foibles, since they always seem perfectly reasonable to us as long as we don't have any feedback. As there is every chance our mistakes are embarrassing or worse, the class didn't directly discuss them, but left it to personal reflection. I thought about how—even as someone well versed in nondual thinking—I so often imagine my actions being performed for a future benefit or result. This can derail a proper appreciation of the present, as well as lead me to waste time on will-o-the-wisps. Remembering to keep ends and means unified is crucial.

Nitya sums up the case against personal delusion rather well:

Unfortunately, most of us are motivated by personal gains, and are so veiled by our personal ignorance that we draw thick ego boundaries and separate ourselves from the rest of the world phenomena. As a result of this darkness, the “other” can assume a fancied image which makes the individual hanker after it and thus become subject to infatuation. This brings about false hope after false hope, like that of a thirsty man going from one mirage to another. Such an unfortunate person runs after shadows, which results in mounting frustration. The “other” can also assume a demonic form, engendering in the person an element of fear. The fear grows from moment to moment until it becomes a paranoia that can assume gigantic proportions. (179)

Narayana Guru and friends suggest we lift ourselves out of this trap by aiming the good of the whole world, by conceiving of our efforts as contributing to the general welfare and not just to ourself. Simple enough, at least on paper.

Anita wondered why, if we're aiming for nonduality, we always talk about dualities like truth and untruth. The tried and true answer is that there is nothing to talk about in the unitive state. Words and concepts relate to the dual state, and they are also the tools we use to lead ourselves back to unitive awareness. Duality is a fact, but where we go wrong is to see its elements as disjunct. We think that good and bad are separate and opposed, but by seeing their inherent unity we come to know they are related and connected. This keeps us from taking sides and becoming unbalanced, like President George Bush swearing to rid the world of evil and thereby becoming the embodiment of evil himself. A little intelligence can go a long way in this business, but we have to think outside our box, and that's part of the paradox: thinking *is* the box. Yet others have somewhat different boxes....

After class I read the following in Nitya's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary, which dovetails perfectly with the subject at hand:

Yajnavalkya establishes that, as soon as it occurs, life correlates itself with tendencies which are detailed by religions as sins. With death, that tendency is overcome. This categorical recognition of sin as a phenomenon only pertaining to one life term dismisses a possible day of ultimate judgment and relegation of the individuated self to hell or heaven. This is the greatest contribution of Vedanta to humanity. We read "That very person, on being born or assuming a body, is conjoined with evils and on dying or leaving the body, discards those evils." Even people outside the Semitic religions entertain the thought that sin is a

phenomenon which is vicariously continued through generation after generation. It is this belief that the present mantra rules out.

Where there is no body, there are no sense organs. Where there is no sensation or sense data, there is no mind also. *Anna* (food), *prana* (vital breath) and *manas* (mind) all belong to nature and are governed and controlled by nature modalities. Extrapolating the mind into a non-physical, non-sensory world of abstraction is only a product of imagination. From wrong premises, most religions build up an imaginary world and threaten believers about the consequences of their actions as if they are deeply painted on the soul of a person. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the belief in a Day of Judgment is a cardinal article of faith. The votaries of these religions think that only such a belief will deter a person from indulging in evil. This is like adults trying to discipline innocent children by telling them stories of imaginary ghosts and goblins to tame them and make their minds submissive to the dictates of their elders. The havoc such a wrong faith does to a person, in principle as well as in practice, inflicts a deep mental injury on individuals which makes their bruised minds bleed with anxiety and pain all their lives. (Vol. III, 425-6)

Lastly, a refresher on hope, from *The Psychology of Darsanamala*, to counterbalance the diss we gave it recently, from Nitya back in II,8:

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)

Part II

I left out a whole interesting discussion we had about *sankalpa*, which is the word translated as will here. Sankalpa contains will, but is much a larger concept. Nitya likens it to a blueprint in consciousness, which leads to actualization of everything. Vasanas in their early stage begin as general forms that become more specific as they develop. Deb mentioned that these blueprints are the archetypes, that the Absolute, while formless and unlimited in itself, impels form through certain key designs that elaborate into the manifold expressions we are familiar with. This is often called Divine will. The fact that the universe is full of potential forms waiting to manifest is why everything we do is so easy. We aren't starting from scratch; all the accumulated wisdom of the evolution of the universe is at hand, perhaps of multiple universes. Ervin Laszlo, in *Science and the Akashic Field*, shows that this is coming to be appreciated even in physics nowadays. We are literally swimming in a sea of infinite potential. The recommendation of the wise as to how to use this potential is to open our hearts to it

and go with its flow, instead of trying to seize and manipulate it for our own personal advantage.

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8/2/16

Asatya Darsana verse 5

There is no difference between will
and mind; that mind, which is called
ignorance and darkness, is a wonder,
like Indra's magic.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Between the will and the mind
There is no difference at all;
That which is mind and called nescience and darkness
Like the magic of Indra, is a marvel.*

Each week when I set about to awaken the slumbering gods of inspiration by writing the class notes, I begin with a simple task: collecting the highlights of the verse and setting them at the bottom of the document, to be worked into the text as it unfolds. This is one of the special verses where almost every word has been collected. It was a real struggle for me to leave any of it out. The central subjects, *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*, go to the heart of our overarching challenge as yogis.

Speaking of these terms, I introduced *sankalpa* in last week's notes with Nitya's first two paragraphs from this verse. You may recall he likened *sankalpa* to a blueprint in consciousness that specifies how our psychic seeds become actualized. He continues:

Sankalpa carries with it a probability factor, and it is most likely that the desire to actualize it may bring it about. But it is also possible for desires to arise in consciousness which by their intrinsic nature are highly improbable. The ignorance of the individual, coupled with a rational myopia caused by infatuation, may easily convince a person that what is willed is not at all improbable. In spite of this improbability, they may try hard to actualize a desire and will fail to achieve it. In this aspect, the desiring imagination of the person is called *vikalpa*. Both probability and improbability are promoted with the desire to actualize, whereas the person sees nothing but probability due to their infatuated imagination. The infatuation is directly related to one of the many incipient memories, which we have referred to earlier as *vasana*. Thus, both *sankalpa* and *vikalpa* are born of *vasana*. (177-8)

With the blessing of hindsight, the obsessions of the past look like ludicrous infatuations with wholly fabricated chimeras. Is it possible that our current obsessions may also fail the test of time? Yogis scrutinize their desires to ensure they measure up, that they correspond with a reasonable assessment of reality in its broadest sense. They do not want to waste their time pursuing figments of their imagination.

One thing to notice in this verse is that Narayana Guru is revaluing the more typical attitude that these mental states are curses that permanently afflict humanity, so our only hope is to escape their clutches somehow. To the Guru, our condition, while difficult and even perilous, is also a marvel and a miracle that can lead us to a state of wonder. Where a vast amount of religious fervor is aimed at denying actuality, Narayana Guru asks us to look directly into the heart of manifestation. It's a bit like trying to swim upstream, where everything in the environment is sweeping you in the other direction. If you can persist (even making the effort a

habitual choice) the Source is not as far off as it sometimes seems when the darkness lies heavily on you. It's right around the bend, and the bend is nothing more than how the mind inevitably shapes that which has no shape.

In this light, Deb mentioned how early baptism was done in moving water, to symbolize that by becoming spiritually dedicated we are switching from a static state to a free flowing one. By cultivating our flexibility, we won't get caught and held in eddies of the current.

Deb saw this verse as a call to understand the deeper source of our experiences. I added that after understanding we are being invited to act in a salubrious manner. While most religions encourage you to keep the world at bay, here we are called to allow ourselves to be possessed by the universe.

Paul could see that individual consciousness erects roadblocks to such a universal perspective. In learning from a good teacher, we begin to see the innate beauty of the world, making us more generic in our understanding and easing away the fear.

Moni insisted, based on her religious tradition, that we have to go inward to find the Absolute. As noted, this is contrary to what we are studying, but it has such a hold it is a very persistent notion. The Absolute has no inward or outward location. Deb offered a nice reimagining, that our individuality is not a cloak obscuring the Absolute but the very exposition of it. Since the Absolute has no individual means of expression, we are its providers. Without us there would be no universe at all. And, after all, we are nothing more or less than the Absolute anyway. Her thoughts brought to my mind the 1933 movie *The Invisible Man*, based on the H.G. Wells story. When the protagonist was naked and invisible there was nothing to see, so when he wanted to interact with people he wrapped himself in bandages and clothes and then you could make out where he was. I figure the Absolute is in the same predicament—utterly undetectable, so in order to become effective

it has to dress itself in people and all the various and sundry creations of your typical universe.

As suggested by the Guru, the class took a fresh look at the dreaded terms *tamas* and *avidya*, a.k.a. darkness and ignorance. Nitya first helps us out with a definition:

We should think of the generic incipient memory of the universal mind and the specific memories of the individual mind. The whole gamut of universal incipient memories is called *tamas*, while the totality of each individual's incipient memories is called *avidya*. They are respectively translated here as darkness and ignorance. (178)

To the untrained mind, darkness and ignorance are oppressive states to separate ourselves from. Here we are being asked to accept them as part of the natural harmony and integrate them into our self-image.

In the Gita, Krishna explains that *tamas* is an absolutely necessary equal partner with *rajas* and *sattva*. The “lastingness” of everything is the *tamasic* aspect. Of course seeds (*vasanas*) are *tamasic*—the epitome of stability. They change extremely slowly if at all. They carry the essence of what has already happened in the past, and that must remain fixed. When they sprout into the new forms of our individual lives, they enshrine *sattvic* visions, which we then work *rajasically* to actualize. Darkness and ignorance thus look rather womblike. Just don't stay in the womb: come out and live. As Deb put it, you grow out of the dark seed state by relating to the world around you.

Our lives are rooted in this unspecified state of pure potential, tainted though it is with the inclinations of generic and specific *vasanas*. Obviously we have to make our choices based on scanty information, and these less than perfect selections produce the wide range of individual anomalies. A friend who does not like to

be publicly noticed called my attention just yesterday to something relevant I wrote about the Gita's Chapter XVI:

As concretely manifested states are progressively built up on abstract concepts, any minor anomaly in consciousness becomes powerfully magnified. Because of this, the slightest speck of dirt in the potion while it is being brewed can ruin the whole batch. In other words, we will come to see what we expect, more or less, even if the expectations are initially very subtle. The selfish, "diabolic" attitudes that Krishna lambastes are actually very reasonable to most people, and are often mistaken for common sense.

Well really, there is no way to grow anything without some specks of dirt being present. They could be seen as essential, even. They are part of the wonder of how the immaculate Absolute transforms into the untidily dualistic condition of a manifested universe. So don't try to become ultra pure. That's not the point. Don't try to wash the lather out of the soap, because soap is nothing more than consolidated lather. See how it all fits together. In addition, we do have a small but very significant opportunity to rework the blueprint of our life to make the building under construction into a more harmonious and livable edifice. Just knowing how our expectations skew our perceptions is an essential key to wisdom.

Actually, this is a critical area of spiritual endeavor. Nitya spent the lion's share of his time as a guru correcting his disciples by counteracting the more or less absurd fantasies we all had about who we were and where we were going. Looking back, he had an easy time spotting those absurdities, which we all thought were highly elevated common sense until we took time to think about them. It turned out that most were not based on anything substantial. Nitya felt we should begin with down-to-earth factuality, yet we had been drawn to his feet by the titillating

fantasies that are ever in circulation, so it took a major change of orientation to discover what he was talking about. Those who weren't willing to surrender their cherished attitudes to face up to their true condition eventually made off for gurus who wouldn't threaten their conceits—in other words, the popular ones.

The catch is that to some extent we do have a grasp on aspects of reality, just not the whole picture. Where the ego wants desperately to appear all-knowing, an honest assessment admits we know little and are stumbling ahead in darkness. Amazingly we usually find our way, not thanks to our smarts but by our inner guidance system, which operates in darkness. Still, it's hard to be comfortable knowing how severe our limitations are. Nitya accurately describes our predicament:

The total effect is one of magic.... What is perceived by the senses cannot be precisely located as an event occurring inside the brain or outside the body. Philosophy and psychology differ very much in deciding the status of what is perceived by the senses. According to the Vedantin, when a pot is perceived, the pot is where it is seen and also it is purely an experience within. Hence they call it *anirvacaniya*, “something which can never be determined.”

So, ignorance and darkness are perfectly natural and even necessary, but they can surely get out of hand if we let them. When life pinches, it is an indication that we have gone wrong and need to respond appropriately. The cure is not to keep battering away with our misguided notions, hoping for an eventual breakthrough, but to reorient them. In the terms of this verse, we should revise our *vikalpas* into *sankalpas*, or better, inhibit our *vikalpas* to allow the natural intelligence of our *sankalpas* to take over. Nitya underlines the importance of this:

Unfortunately, most of us are motivated by personal gains, and are so veiled by our personal ignorance that we draw thick ego boundaries and separate ourselves from the rest of the world phenomena. As a result of this darkness, the “other” can assume a fancied image which makes the individual hanker after it and thus become subject to infatuation. This brings about false hope after false hope, like that of a thirsty man going from one mirage to another. Such an unfortunate person runs after shadows, which results in mounting frustration. The “other” can also assume a demonic form, engendering in the person an element of fear. The fear grows from moment to moment until it becomes a paranoia that can assume gigantic proportions. These are classic examples of *vikalpa*.

The “gigantic proportions” is no exaggeration—witness the present buildup of tension worldwide. Individual fears are magnified when shared by others with similar fears, and mob rule is once again unleashed. If it is not counteracted by intelligent insight, it explodes, and those who survive the debacle regret at their unhappy leisure.

The class mused at length about how acceptance and tolerance are balms to collective insanity. I mentioned a recent [TED talk by Johann Hari](#), about how addictions of all kinds are substitutes for the connectedness we desperately need and crave. When we become psychologically disconnected from our self and our loved ones, we replace that loving sensation with all kinds of inferior substitutes. We imagine they will fill the emptiness, but in the long run they exacerbate it. His key idea is, “The opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite of addiction is connection.”

Or course, connection is something we may have also learned to fear, thanks to sundered relationships we have already suffered. At the moment much of humanity is giving in to those fears. The question is how to offer meaningful connections without

sacrificing our own creature comforts, many of which are also addictions. Tricky.

One popular response is to dismiss the world as unreal, and then we don't have to face up to it, directly at least. It's one of the ego's favorite ploys. The antidote is what the Gurukula advocates. In Nitya's words:

Although the world is generally treated as unreal in Vedantic literature, again and again there come exhortations from the great masters to do good to the world and to maintain the harmony of world order. This is called *loka sangraha*. Both in the Bhakti Darsana and Nirvana Darsana, the Guru tells us of the necessity to relate to the world in a meaningful way. Great masters like Krishna, Christ, Buddha and the Prophet have all desired peace on earth and fellowship between human beings. These good works are also sankalpas, but they are qualified as satya sankalpa, desirable imagination that can be true in all probability.

I brought in a couple of quotes from Nitya's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary that speak beautifully to this issue, and I might as well share them now:

If there is no desire, there is no life, no manifestation, no world. Only a person who has lost the sense of reality can say, "Do not desire." An inferior person desires to have a shack. A superior person desires to build a Taj Mahal. All that we can recommend is the supreme possibility of desire: fashioning your effort to accomplish the highest, the most beautiful, the most profound, which in its essence transcends all calculations of the mediocre. Within the *atigraha* the great secret of liberation can be accomplished. (II, 67)

You should have a heart which is mellowed with your humanity. More spirit needs to be put into the darkened aspect of your cognition.... If you are not affected by what you see, what you touch, what you feel, what you notice, what is the difference between you and a stone?

Reading a book and enjoying it is good, but reading yourself is more important. The language used to write a book has a grammar and a logic which govern how the words should be arranged to make meaningful sentences. Similarly, when you look at life to discover its grammar and logic, then alone are you participating in the remaking of your being. (III, 47-8)

Nancy concurred, saying “If you don’t accept individual memories and just stay there, you’re ignorant because you’re not taking in new things.” She figured you might as well not exist if you don’t take the plunge into manifesting your capacities.

Once again we attempted to draw practical examples into the conversation about how our mental orientation affects our thinking. Susan has been reading a book by Portland’s own Ursula Le Guin that plays with time. Temporal relativity is big in science fiction, because it rapidly becomes very complicated and nonsensical. Children older than their parents, that sort of thing. Susan has been realizing how dependent we are on time as a concept, and how disoriented we would be without it. In outer space there is no time as we know it, with its days and nights and years and seasons and all that. How important is the week to a working stiff? But again, it’s just an arbitrary structure with no basis in anything. We might just as well have a five or an eight day week.

Paul contributed a classic story that I will reprint in Part II.

I reprised a familiar topic that is especially germane to this verse. I grew up in a culture that believed in confrontation. You knew what you wanted and you fought with people you disagreed

with. Although I suffer from a naturally tender heart, I learned to be tough. About midway through my life, having had Nitya and Debbie as gurus for a stretch, I began to see how that attitude, despite being culturally supported and wildly popular, was a failure. Confrontation always toughened the opposition and brought increased enmity. It didn't resolve anything. I chose to try another approach where I listened carefully to the other person and then tried to meet them on a balanced plain of understanding. I saw how in my arrogance I was mostly supplying the other person's ideas to myself, so they became monolithic opposites, easy to refute. When I listened instead, I could see areas of agreement, and when I gravitated to those it invited the other person to also release their death grip on their position. Sometimes we would come to an understanding, but always there was more respect, and we would part friends. Simple enough. Actually, redrawing the blueprint was easy, and the new lifestyle reinforced itself through positive outcomes. It was getting to the decision to change my beliefs that was hard. We are good at clinging tenaciously to our ideas even when they cause us serious indigestion.

Nancy agreed that appreciation of others can be cultivated, and we should become conscious of making that possible. So much of our culture draws heavy lines between good and bad people. Deb told us that once upon a time in France (among many other places), if people didn't know you when you arrived at their village, they would just kill you. Then, no worries! That reputedly Christian land of France is also famous for the massacre of Beziers, where the entire Cathar population was slaughtered, with distinguishing between the holy and unholy left posthumously to God, with the advice to "Kill them all and let God sort it out." Pretty much the polar opposite of Narayana Guru's advice, which might read, "Love them all because everyone is God in one way or another."

It reminded me that the word translated in the King James Bible as *evil* comes from the Aramaic word for *unripe*. That one change makes a world of difference. Evil must be stamped out as hopeless and malicious, even justifying wars, but unripeness can be cured simply by providing more time and nourishment. Sunshine. This is a particularly poignant example of how crucial intelligent framing is.

Without influential people advocating for universal amity, we slide again and again into disaster. Here Narayana Guru stands up against a vast tide of complacent ignorance to view human flaws as intrinsic to the wonders of creation rather than as an evil to be eradicated.

We will be examining the magical effect of our framing again in next week's class. For now, Nitya sums up what we have learned so far:

On the whole, mind can be equated to a joint product of individual growth and collectively produced sankalpas and vikalpas, which have the general effect of a magic that can alternate between the experiencing of wonder and the experiencing of fear.

We closed with a meditation resolving to replace our fears and prejudices with openness and wonder. With due diligence we can make such miracles come about.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

What is given as the world which is false in respect of the three aspects of time is an appearance preserved with all the varied picturesqueness belonging to it, and seems itself as created by that

specific power which is the mind endowed with will. It is, therefore, described as a marvel (*adbhutam*) like the magic of Indra. Because this power remains in the form of darkness and nescience it is difficult to clearly determine the intrinsic nature of this factor which is itself unreal. Although all persons know that the objects produced by a magician are unreal yet they are taken to be real. Because it is difficult to find the truth about this unreality, it is said to be a marvel. In the same way, because it is not possible to understand the nature of the mind, it is also said to be a marvel.

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Paul's latest Brihadaranyaka Upanishad online response addresses the schism between perception and reality of the Asatya Darsana in an amusing way. He's the one friend from my fire department career who was interested in Gurukula philosophy, and a stalwart of our class. Here's his story:

The Jesse Incident

The liberation of truth from individualized social roles is fraught with ignorance. I know this from a personal experience I call *The Jesse Incident*. Assuming a social role superimposes a certain quality of inertia onto the kinetic manifestations of absolute truth. Sometimes what is 'seen' is not truly there. And what is actually there, is not seen.

I was in my first six months as a new Lieutenant at Fire Station 67 assigned on Engine 67. While returning to the station from a prior call I noticed a boy and a girl sitting in the middle of the sidewalk next to two fallen and tangled bicycles. The little boy was crying while the little girl was hugging the boy and trying to console him. We pulled the fire engine over to the curb and my crew and I went to see what was wrong. The girl said she and her friend bumped bikes and the boy fell onto the cement and skinned

his knee. As near as I could tell between his sobs, the boy was crying both because his knee was hurt, and because the front wheel of his bicycle was badly bent. After cleaning and bandaging the little boy's knee he was able to stop crying. With a cute little lisp he told us that he and his friend lived in the same apartment complex about six blocks away. We took the little boy's bike, set it on top of the hose bed, and helped the boy into the cab of the engine. The little girl said, "I'll lead the way". She rode her bike so fast that we could not keep up with her! The boy gave us the directions to his home.

When we arrived at the boy's apartment the girl was waiting at the front door. When the boy got out of the fire engine he ran to the apartment, threw open the door, and he and the girl ran inside slamming the door shut behind them. We carried the bike to his door and I knocked. The boy opened the door a couple of inches and looked up at me. I pointed out where we had put his bike and I asked if mom was home because I needed to talk to her. He opened the door wide and ran to the back of the house saying he would get his mom. I walked into the apartment and suddenly froze in horror. I saw standing before me a beautiful royal blue velvet shroud covering a coffin-like silhouette supported on sturdy metal scaffolding. The scaffolding had wheels and was adjustable in height, length and width – just like the scaffold funeral homes use to move coffins.

The boy returned to the front room and said that his mom is taking a shower and will be right out. The boy noticed my staring at the royal blue velvet shroud and turned around facing the coffin, and silently stared. Then, drawn like a magnet, the boy reverently approached the coffin and tenderly placed both hands on its royal blue shroud. As if in a shared trance, the girl positioned herself behind the boy and laid her right hand on the boys shoulder, and her left hand onto the shroud itself.

"What is that?" I asked the boy.

“That’s Jesse” the boy said.

My god I thought, that IS a coffin! My thoughts were racing! Should I be scared? What do I do? Are funeral wakes in a private home even legal? The mom returned from her shower and I decided to err on the side of caution. I would not say anything about the coffin in her living room until I knew what I was talking about. I first needed to find out the facts and norms concerning coffins, cadavers, private wakes and such. So for the time being, I just informed the mom about the bicycle accident and that her son’s knee was cleaned and bandaged by our paramedic. The mom thanked us and we returned to our fire house.

The first thing I did when back was to call the Washington County Coroner’s Office. After briefing him on the incident he assured me that funeral wakes happen in churches or funeral homes under the supervision of licensed funeral home representatives. I asked him for advice as to what I should do next. Without hesitation County Coroner advised me to contact law enforcement. I contacted the 911 center and requested that a Beaverton officer respond to Station 67. When the officer arrived I briefed him on the incident. The officer got a concerned look on his face and said he needed his shift captain to also respond to the fire station to determine a proper course of action for the incident. The three of us sat in my office rehashing the incident, and then the two Beaverton Officers responded to the little boy’s home.

About an hour later a Beaverton Police Officer came into my office and shut the door behind him. He stood on the other side of my desk, locked eye contact, and in a stern voice said, “What you saw wasn’t Jesse...it was a JET-SKI”! He sensed I didn’t understand and restated that what I saw wasn’t Jesse; IT was a JET-SKI!

I was speechless with a blank stare on my face while recalling the ‘cute little lisp’ the boy had when he spoke. And I

remembered the scene of the little boy and girl reverently laying their hands on the royal blue velvet. The little boy wasn't lamenting on Jesse's death, he was simply fond of that jet-ski.

The officer trying to break my trance said, "It was not a 'Jesse'...'IT' was a JET-SKI! In defense I inquired as to what kind of wife allows a husband to store a jet-ski in the front room of their home? The officer's voice dropped a few decibels and he agreed that a "normal" wife would NEVER permit her husband to store a jet-ski in the front room of their home. But, the officer informed me, the 'mom' was not a 'wife' – she's a girlfriend — and apparently *girlfriends* do allow boyfriends to store jet-skis in the front room!

It was then that I finally 'got' it – oops.

The emancipation of truth from the stained opacity of our assumed social roles can offer both humbling and humorous insights into the accumulated clutter we label reality. Even months after the 'Jesse Incident', it was not uncommon for a Beaverton Police Officer to saunter up to me and casually inquire, "So...do any jet-skiing lately?"