

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

Verse 6

To one who reasons correctly the world appears as a mirage in the Self; and to the indiscriminate, by confusion, a reflection looks as if it is real.

5/30/6

Nitya begins his comments with a recap of Plato's cave allegory, which must be well known to all. It's also recounted on pages 127-8 of *That Alone*. Though he later points out some difference between Narayana Guru and Plato, the part that relates to this verse is the same for both: we are fixated on our shadows, and we see our reflections through a glass, darkly. We see only a sort of after-effect produced when our light shines through the smoky class of our vasanas, samskaras, and general outlook. Interesting word, isn't it—outlook. We are looking out, and miraculously see basically what we expect and miss what doesn't conform to our outlook.

The fire in the cave that casts the shadows is a metaphor for our core consciousness. If we sink into ourselves, tuning out the shadow play of projections that dances before our eyes, we come to know ourselves as an unflickering light of awareness. This is the forgotten aspect of our whole being, which is subsumed in the busyness of the changing surface of events. These events are wholly dependent on the light of consciousness—without it there is no show.

Some of our confusion in rediscovering our Self comes from looking for our inner light in the outer play of shadows on the wall. We are trained to look out... and to look out! We strain our minds to detect the light within what we see. At the same time we are worried, anxious about the outcome. But we are focused away from the light, and only need to turn around in our mind to find it: letting go of the shadow play and sinking into our own depths. There is a paradox here, a simultaneous wanting and releasing that nudges us into our center.

This is what Narayana Guru describes as reasoning correctly. The word he uses is prajna, being wise or aware. According to Gaudapada, prajna is the mass of consciousness, another word for turiya, the fourth state that permeates the other three. When we step back from individual items of awareness to sink into our mass of consciousness, we cease to be a subject perceiving an object, either actively in the waking state or passively in the dream. A healthy life pulsates between peripheral involvement and regular hot baths in the prajna, until one no longer excludes the other: they are simultaneously present.

Somehow we took a tangent that once again turned out to be very relevant. Anne mentioned she has felt abnormal for her whole life. I noted I had raised my kids to believe there was no such thing as "normal." Superficially we all imagine there is a normal state, but when we get to know any person below the surface, we find they are unique and different in any number of ways. Odd even. Unfortunately, we often run ourselves down for not being normal even though on reflection there plainly is no such thing. This is exactly what Narayana Guru is attempting to cure us of in Asatya Darsana. For him, we are in essence like a beautiful flower garland, clusters of complex and unique functional gestalts strung together in ensembles and sequentially arranged along the thread of time. Each is so fragrant and inspiring! It adds supreme value to life by its very existence. But we have learned to view it as a

poisonous snake, a threatening, negative, hostile creature. This is the reflection we take to be real, the mirage of projection that leads us from delusion to delusion in our wanderings through the desert. We can actively unburden ourselves of this type of delusion by reacquainting ourselves with our garland-ness. Since everything created is the Absolute in essence, it is infinitely wondrous. Proper reasoning leads us back here again and again, until we know it in our bones. When we rejoin our own beauty, we can gently help our friends to rejoin theirs too, and the joy of insight spreads far and wee. Why are we holding back from this simple realization?

After word:

Looking up “through a glass darkly,” which Ingmar Bergman also used for a film title, it is from I Corinthians. This is one of Paul’s epistles in the New Testament that scholars think was probably written by Paul himself. Much of his stuff, including the really heinous crap, was added on later by deranged misogynous vision-seekers. But this section is lovely, and provides a New Testament antidote to the prophecy freaks who want to destroy the planet so JEEesus will HAVE to come back. Here’s the whole chapter 1Cor. 13, with the prophecy stuff starred by me. Check it out:

[1] Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

*[2] And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

[3] And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

[4] Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

*[5] Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

[6] Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

[7] Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

**[8] Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

**[9] For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

**[10] But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

[11] When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

**[12] For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

[13] And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Sure, charity is an old-fashioned term. We say love or kindness nowadays. The dikker says its antonym is malevolent, a perfect word to describe fundamentalists, also removing the gift-giving element from charity, leaving us with benevolence in general.

And in case 'far and wee' escapes you, it's from a favorite poem:

[e.e. cummings](#)

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-

luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-sotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and

the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

* * *

8/9/16

Asatya Darsana verse 6

To one who reasons correctly
the world appears as a mirage in the Self;
and to the indiscriminate, by confusion,
a reflection looks as if it is real.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Like a mirage to a wise man
The world looms in the Self,
Just as to an infant by confusion
A reflected image might real seem too.*

Once again I have had to reprint practically the whole commentary to weave into the notes, as it is a tight and crucial dissertation. In the midst of the summer doldrums, a small group bent our minds to the essence of Narayana Guru's provocative image, giving our best effort at doing it justice.

It is interesting that Nitya translates *balasya* as an indiscriminate person, while Nataraja Guru gives it as an infant. Both meanings are in the dictionary, but here Nitya's take is better, as we shall see. MW has *balasya* as "young, childish, infantine, not full-grown or developed... puerile, ignorant, simple, foolish," along with child or boy. But is an infant really foolish, or is it the indiscriminate adult who badly misses the mark?

When we look in a mirror as adults, we are convinced that what we see is us. It is the innately wise infant that knows the image is not them at all but something outside, thus matching the definition of this verse of one who reasons correctly. Adults are so complacent in our attitudes that even in the class we all assumed

that we get it right and infants get it wrong, which is 180% off from correct reasoning. This demonstrates the profound hold our fictive understanding has on us. It appears we still have very far to go to comprehend our true circumstances. We adults are the infants who take reflective images as reality.

Of course, this is about much more than the square of glass we have mounted over our bathroom sinks. The entire world is a mirror reflecting us in a very mysterious and practically incomprehensible manner. After years of hard work, we have become wholly absorbed in fitting ourselves into the projection before us, while neglecting our inner core of the Self.

This is reminiscent of and throws light on the Bible's 1 Corinthians 13, verse 10-12, with its typically convoluted wording:

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Dude must have been really stoned, but the gist parallels Narayana Guru's much clearer wording. From a spiritual viewpoint, the childish person is the one who mistakes the reflection for reality, who adjusts and conforms to other people's opinions and demands. This is the sense that Nataraja Guru uses the word *infant*. The mature adult—that rarest of rare characters—is one who has discovered their true being within, who has done away with the part in favor of that which is perfect. They will likely still take other people's opinions into account, but they will

not be thrown off center by those opinions, based as they always are on partial knowledge.

The very fact that we assume we already “get it” and are therefore adults is just another obstacle to detaching ourselves from the miasma of projections we are immersed in. So long as we base our self-assessment on the partial reflections of the environment, we can never attain our full reality, even though it is always with us, as Moni rightly reminded us.

Deb summed up that we are seeing ourselves in the mirror of the world, and we think that’s who we are. One implication of this is that it’s better to look clearly at conflicting situations, so you can make out the major misapprehensions causing the conflicts. Don’t assume that the conflict is who you are. I added that’s why we think of ourselves as flawed beings—everything around us confirms this, and insists we agree to it. Deb agreed that the conflict confirms our sense of separation. She added that for her, meeting Nitya was unnerving, because he was not being a reflection but was grounded in himself as the source. It was something new to her, something unexpected. It took some getting used to, and then it became a joy she couldn’t resist.

Moni mused that those around us—relatives and non-relatives both—make our life happy or sad, but if we come to know this we can train our mind to act better. She meant we should not be so affected by the storms raging in other people. We can calm our own storms, and then build up a powerful “high pressure area” that is not dissipated by low barometric readings in the immediate vicinity. For Moni, it helps her to know that we can’t make everything perfect for everyone else, even though we try.

In his commentary Nitya recounts Plato’s cave allegory, which has substantial relevance to our condition. You all know it. The key idea here is that when we finally realize how we are bound, it takes a herculean effort to break free. We have become comfortable enough in our bound state, and there is a natural

tendency to not rock the boat. Yet if we do not struggle intelligently, we will not escape our predicament. We have to not only overcome our native reluctance, but also endure the scorn and derision of an ocean of complacent fellow human beings. This is by no means a trivial endeavor. Nitya touches on it in this way:

At some moment, one may feel the urge to turn away from the shadow and look toward the light. Only at that time does the person realize that he is bound and that his senses are turned toward the shadow. When he struggles to turn away from the shadows, his bondage is experienced with greater intensity. Others who have not the least idea of the light that is casting the shadow look upon this man as foolish. All the same, that person becomes more and more convinced that he can obtain no peace without realizing the truth. (180-1)

The key is that last line. Do we become “more and more convinced” to seek truth, or do we give up and subside back into our shadow state? Do we settle for an ersatz peace, or do we insist on the peace that surpasses understanding, that goes all the way to the core? And what is it that stimulates us to look to the light in the first place?

Deb said the way to live this teaching is to make turning toward the light a recurring practice that we perform every day. She quoted something I had shared with her earlier about Beethoven: the elevated ideal that Beethoven had of the artist was “to educate his fellow man by reminding him of Humanity’s natural goodness.” He wanted to communicate directly, “from heart to heart.” She noted there is something that calls out to us, whether it is music, language, connection or something else. It sparks a response in us to go beyond our ordinary state to discover our intrinsic goodness. What makes Beethoven’s music so

compelling is its passion for penetrating to the essence of meaning. We can hardly help going along with him.

Bill agreed that the artist reveals these opportunities to us, helping us to realize that everything we look at in our world is a reflection of the Self. This is what is meant by “reasoning correctly” in the verse. Moni added that if we can connect with that, our anger and sorrows and conflicts with others diminish.

Deb took this insight to another level, musing that when she has a problem she normally deals with it through various arguments, but that’s exactly what she has to leave behind in order to really understand. She knows she has to sink into a deeper place to fully resolve the problem. Moni commented that it’s all water, but on the surface it looks different. We have to dive beneath the surface to make the whole connection.

We talked about the difference between readjusting only our ideas and of making the adjustment real: of real-izing those ideas. For the most part we are satisfied if we simply upgrade our concepts to a superior level. That satisfies the ego just fine: token change without any uncertainty. My philosophy is better than your philosophy. Easy enough. To really let go, on the other hand, requires exceptional bravery. Often, without a lot of internal pressure we aren’t going to bother. Where, oh where, does that pressure come from? We have to challenge our own assumptions in place of clinging to them, and this is utterly contrary to the ego’s inclination.

Many people turn to ideational spirituality as a way to avoid suffering, and many religions promise the end of suffering. But every saint that I’ve ever heard of has suffered mightily, both physically and conceptually. Suffering causes us to respond and grow. Look to the kings and queens of history, with their easy lifestyles. Very few of them had much going for them. There were lots of lunatics among them, inbred and clueless. The best rose to

their heights by meeting the challenges of proper government. So the point is not to escape suffering, but to not let it defeat us.

Moni saw this in the many people she meets in her job with the elderly and needy. All get pretty much the same benefits from her office, but some have become more gentle and loving, blossoming as they age. Others become more difficult, smaller, unhappy and afraid. It is all based on their history and how they mentally frame their worlds.

Our bondage comes not just from our own misunderstanding but from peer pressure. We need to examine how our social connections oppress us and how we unconsciously give in to them. There are literally thousands of ways we defer to peer pressure without realizing it. The gurus suggest it is in our interest to call them out, to turn the light of awareness in their direction.

Susan talked about how your own kids want you to always be the same, and they never want to know who you really are. Several of us laughed out loud, because we think of our children as our closest allies and dearest companions, and yet it's totally true: they don't want the reality of our lives to upset the static image they cling to of who they think we are. The mommies and daddies of their halcyon childhoods, I suppose. Because they are so dear to us, we are always walking on eggs in their presence, careful to conform to their expectations. Those are among the powerful and invisible chains of bondage we willingly submit to.

I'll append a poignant take on relational chains in Part II.

Deb contributed something she remembered from Thomas Merton, that we think we know who we are because people greet us by our name when they see us. The associations with our name go as deep as anything, since they were repeated from almost the first day as "who we are." Yet our essence preexists our name, by leagues and leagues.

I shared a quote from Zen nun Nan Shin: "By not quite accepting, because they do not please us, things that are *so*, we

spend our entire lives making meaningless gestures somewhere next door to reality.” This expresses perfectly how the ego intervenes in warping reality into a stereotyped nonchallenging condition.

Whatever we may say, it is a mystery why some can mount the effort to change for the better and others cannot, being too rigidly held by their deference to parental or peer pressures. I supposed that it is easier to change during the “chrysalis period” of late teens early twenties, when the mind melts down like a caterpillar, preparatory to emerging as a butterfly. In a healthy society we would encourage independence and self-reliance in the emerging adult, but in ours we do our best to constrict the result, producing complacent consumers in place of confident citizens.

Deb noted that even if we are afforded the proper conditions, it takes a lifetime to even begin to bring out one’s inner artistry to the degree it is possible. It can be realized at any age, of course, but an early start is a big help. Getting there eventually is essential. It never hurts to reprise the greatest line from The Gospel According to Thomas, translated by Elaine Pagels: Jesus said, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.” That’s about as good a reason to care as any I can think of.

Before leaving the cave analogy, Nitya adds an important point, that Plato’s image is dualistic and does not properly accord with a unitive perspective. Plato’s “intelligibles” are the equivalent of heaven, a place above all the turmoil where perfection is the norm. The “visibles” are the projected shadows of this perfection, filled with all the imperfections that reality demands. This dualism adds another layer of confusion to an already challenging predicament. Nondualism does not take recourse in any remote influences, like heavens or gods. We are already in the optimal place: the present, the here and now. Nitya says:

Narayana Guru does not go all the way with Plato. He does not make the division between the visibles and the intelligibles. To him, the only world we experience is the confusion of the conceptual and the perceptual. This is given in verse 20 of Atmopadesa Satakam:

Other than this the world has no reality;
“there is” – all such that people say is without reflection;
even if to a numbskull it appears to be a snake,
will a fresh flower garland ever become a serpent?

On reading this verse, one may mistakenly think that the Guru is in agreement with the materialists when they say that this visible world is the only reality. But this is not so. This verse should be read together with the previous verse, in which the Guru categorically refutes the reality of the world of inertial matter. There he emphasizes the fact that “prime substance is all there is.” (181)

Nitya continues to probe our confusion:

What is important to notice... is that the ground of all appearances is given as the Self. When a child is seeing his own image in the mirror and in his confusion takes it for a second person, both the seer of that vision and the confusion about it are coming from his own reality. Without the child there cannot be any reflection, and the duality creeps in between him and his image by a lack of recognition. (182)

Nitya also liked to look closely at the word recognition, breaking it into its original sense of re-cognition. We cognize, but then we look closely at our cognition and adjust it intelligently. That’s how

we re-cognize. To recognize in this way is the same as the original meaning of repent. Pensing is thinking, so repenting is (or was) rethinking. In the present day the word has all sorts of guilt and sin associations, but it once meant to do the kind of work we are attempting here now: to bring our intelligence to bear to correct our deceptive interpretation of reality. Nitya continues:

The word “recognition” is given here in a very meaningful sense. The Self cognizes itself only when it is in its primeval state. In this state it is a pure awareness of blissful existence. What the child cognizes is only a transient body which has the quality of inertial matter. This cognition is defective. It is only an assumed self, like an assumed lake in a desert. The true Self will reveal itself only by an act of re-cognizing, used here in the truest sense of the word. (182)

Deb agreed that we need to reidentify, then amended it to “re-be,” a prefiguring of Nitya’s converting beingness to be-ness, which he does later in the Bhakti Darsana. She meant that identification is inextricably linked to looking in the mirror, and we are trying to fully transcend that context. Instead of depending on dubious reflections, if we reside in the *prajna*, the innate mass of universal consciousness, we are returning to our state of being, our state of “be.” In doing this we allow our consciousness to accept who we really are. Nitya provides a powerful conclusion regarding this *prajna* that should be read carefully:

In this verse, the particular word chosen by the Guru for a wise person is *prajna*. According to the Agama of Gaudapada’s *Mandukya Karika*, *prajna* is a mass of consciousness. It is one alone that is known in all the three states of consciousness: the wakeful, dream and dream sleep. Modification of this consciousness can come in the form of percepts, concepts and

memories. In all these states the only reality is the mass of consciousness, which is personified here as *prajna*.

Ego is pronounced as a conscious agent cognizing forms of the wakeful world, and in that state the agent stands in contradistinction with what it is seeing as a world of objects. The same ego changes into a passive factor when it occurs in the dream state, without the maneuvering power to employ any direction to the act of cognition. When it goes beyond these two states, the personal identification of ego diffuses and comes to its own true nature as a mass of consciousness. If this egoless state becomes a stable state of consciousness, even when there are apparent alterations coming to the state of consciousness as surface phenomena, the person continues to be benefited by a recognition of his *prajna* state. This remains even when he plays roles of the agent of the dream and agent of the world-vision as an empirical fact.

We talked at length about this mass of consciousness, which is similar to the *turiya* or the *karu*, or really, the Absolute or the Self, and how it relates to our surface awareness managed by the ego. We are being asked to surrender our ego's role as the head honcho, and in its place to trust in the inner "mass of consciousness" instead. That alone remains steady in the midst of the turmoil of life. As Moni stated, it is always present in everyone. We can rely on it. We just have to be careful we don't rely on an empty image of it, which is very easy to do. In fact, it's the norm. We have to actually access it, or it will remain as a nice belief, a smidgen better than everybody else's belief. In other words, an ego posture.

There is a norm to measure whether we are in tune with our true nature or not, and it's often called love. Do we experience love, or merely long for it, believe in it? Love is an undeniable feeling that communicates easily "from heart to heart." It inures us to suffering, even as it takes away the fear of suffering. It has other

names, but the feeling is what matters most. Are you loving; are you kind, always, no matter what? If not, perhaps you have settled for a fiction in place of the underlying reality that the universe provides. In the meantime, we have the assurance of Narayana Guru, who wants so badly to help us he has bequeathed us words of inestimable value. They continue to reverberate in us, calling us forward, in a quiet congruence with Beethoven's siren songs to joy, and all the many other voices and imagery with which our fellow lovers of life sing its praises. How fortunate to be afloat together on this magnificent sea!

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

For a child having no discrimination, when it sees a reflection in a mirror it thinks that there is another child in the mirror. The child treats the reflection as if it were a real child. This is due to confusion in the child's mind. By confusion we mean the erroneous comprehension of one thing for another. But a person who has attained to discrimination understands the reflection in the mirror to be non-existent. In the same way people of non-discrimination understand the world as real, but those with discrimination take it to be non-existent. The mirage that is seen in the desert in the form of water seems only real to animals, while those who have knowledge and experience understand it to have no real existence. In the same way, the wise man who discriminates between the transient and eternal values in life arrives at certitude in knowledge. He treats this world like a mirage, or, in other words, as having no real existence. It is only to people of non-discrimination that the world seems real. The world is a mere superimposition, epiphenomenon, of the Self. Therefore it is absolutely non-existent.

* * *

A lost relic of the sixties, is the cherished comic book that we spent many hours coloring—stoned of course—at the invitation of the author. Come read it with me one day: I dasn't lend it out. Back in those days, Dan O'Neill was syndicated in the San Francisco Chronicle, and at Stanford we bought the paper regularly if only for this one strip.

Dan O'Neill, *Hear the Sound of My Feet Walking.. Drown the Sound of My Voice Talking..* (San Francisco: Glide Urban Center Publications, 1969)

Fred and Hugh are having a conversation. They are in the afterlife, kind of, and Hugh has been guillotining carrots. He says:

I **lived** like a carrot once.. So I mentally **died** like one.. So I exercise with violence to remind myself that I have to live **twice** as hard.. to compensate for dying once.

How did you die..?

I was **chained** to death.

How is one **chained** to death? It sounds terrible!!

Actually.. it's a quite **ordinary** way to die..

You haven't explained death by chaining!!?

It's simple!! People who love you **load** you with chains.. one upon the other.. until the chains grow so heavy you aren't there anymore.

Is it **painful** to die of chains!!?

Of course it is.. But it's most painful for the people who loaded you with chains in the first place..

Really?

Sure!! There they are... holding **one** end of a loose chain.. nothing feels **so** loose as a heavy chain that isn't taut anymore...

Do the people with the chains suffer..?

Of course... They **loved** you!! They only wished for you to be happy...

It must be sad holding an empty chain... It must be **especially** sad when you realize you wasted precious time building and holding chains.. and your own life has been waiting to be lived...