

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

Verse 7

The Self does not, like milk, attain to another form; therefore, everything, as in the creation by Indra's magic, seems to be through superimposition.

6/6/6

The next morning early after class, Deb and I are flying away for a vacation, Grid willing, so I'm going to write a smidgen ahead of time, add any gems from class late Monday night, and ship it out half-baked. The main reason is to be able to write 6/6/6, the old Number of the Beast from Revelation. It has recently been discovered that the number was mistranslated and may actually be 616. You can find some good info on this via:

<http://ralphriver.blogspot.com/2005/04/number-of-beast-616.html>

Take a look particularly at the Ralph Sutherland letter a little below the top in the comments section [2024-his letter has been deleted]. According to him, a Biblical beast is someone who worships himself and lords it over others, reminiscent of not only the Cheney cabal but Chapter XVI of the Gita's list of demonic attributes. Lacking humility and mercy, and taking credit for divine dispensations or Chance factors. That kind of thing. [No wonder it was deleted....]

Anyway, this is the last chance to write 666 as a date for a long time.

And now on to the verse. Milk curd is a very popular food in India, and milk is a much extolled substance in all its

transmutations, such as ghee, cream, butter and so on. Milk is something that visibly and rapidly evolves, so here and elsewhere it is used to epitomize nature with its endless transformations and permutations. At the same time, milk and all else consists of nothing but the Self, but the unitive Self does not evolve. If it did it would imply that it wasn't everything yet, there was something missing. This is the nursing mother of all Paradoxes. How do we unify these two seemingly disparate entities? As Nitya asks, "Does the One transform itself into the many, or is it only seen as the many?" He further points out that we have arrived at the place in Darsanamala when we wade into the concept of maya.

One classic analogy for this paradox is color. Light appears unitive, but is colored by the objects it comes in contact with. We believe we perceive the object and its color, but we're only seeing reflected light that has been affected by the object. In fact, we see exactly the color that objects aren't. They absorb the colors they are, and reflect those they aren't, and the latter are what we see. Still, it's a good analogy. It falls short in that light is affected by objects and the Absolute is not. This means the Self is even more subtle and pervasive than light. And light bounces off "real" objects, but in the Absolute Self the reality of objects is highly questionable. And there's no bouncing going on. But Light is a fine example of the One actually transforming into the many, at least theoretically.

As I said, we're getting into deep water here.

Another favorite analogy is of a crystal being placed on a red cloth. The crystal remains colorless and pure, but now it looks red. This exemplifies the One that is only seen as the many, but isn't, quite.

We're still in the Asatya portion of the work, because we're not trying to figure out so much what Truth is, only what it is not. In the last verse we concluded "reality" is a mirage-like magic show, so it is only true to the extent we believe in it. Now we're

gently detaching the Absolute from its entanglement in the mirage. Eventually it will stand Alone.

Needless to say, we wrestled mightily with this paradox in our class tonight. And Nitya's commentary compresses a lot of knowledge into a very small space. But bracketing the brainstorming (a tempest in a teapot?) we sat still and admired the mysteriously real yet intangible imperceptible Absolute. We could hear how sounds were superimposed on it, and see how objects floated in it. It's relatively easy to picture the ocean when the waves are calm. Of course we all leap to attention when agitation builds, and forget the steady ground.

We talked about how we are trained from very young to think of a sequence of steps leading up to a reward. As a child you do yardwork and get your allowance. You study hard to get an A at the end of the semester. You do ten things to get your merit badge. Religion convinces you that what you are doing is building an edifice to the heavens, that you should do good so you can arrive in paradise one day. So we imagine realization also is the end product of a series of steps on a path, and that our life is a temporary pit stop not even halfway there. But Narayana Guru doesn't agree. He insists that no arrangement of waves will ever produce the ocean. Waves can evolve all day long, but the ocean is always there, always perfect and complete. It lacks nothing that we waves can provide. We are not just studying for an eventual A; every moment of our life is as important as the next.

His attitude is that life is lila, a divine sport, lived for the joy of it. The living can be made very beautiful, but it doesn't take you anywhere other than where you already are. The excitement, compassion, intrigue, artistry and so on are rewards in themselves, not means to any ends. This is initially a difficult proposition, but that's because our habitual behavior bristles at being overthrown. Once you reintroduce the joy of living back into the equation, you release your vast potential for all kinds of positive attributes.

Doing good is motivated only by the pleasure of itself, not by some scheming ego intent on storming the gates of heaven by complying with a bunch of musty rules from an intellectual graveyard. When we drop future payoffs from our game plan, everything lightens up. The dead weight of duty sloughs off our back, and we can stand erect for the first time in a long while. Narayana Guru isn't trying to make us miserable, he's trying to bring us out of our dark caves and into communion with all the magnificent creations that infinity can project, so that we can taste the joy that is our very Substance.

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8/16/16

Asatya Darsana verse 7

The Self does not, like milk, attain
to another form; therefore, everything,
as in the creation by Indra's magic,
seems to be through superimposition.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*This Self [un]like milk (that turns)
Does not attain to another form;
Therefore the whole (universe), as if created
By Indra's magic, exists as (an eidetic) presentiment.*

In keeping with the exploratory spirit of summer, we enjoyed a new visitor, Sarah, who has not studied any of the material before. Because of this, I asked the group to each weigh in on the central idea as elaborated in Nitya's commentary: What does the essential duality of being and becoming mean in actual, practical everyday affairs? (This would also be a particularly good time for

readers around the globe to send us their thoughts on this subject....)

Nitya's offering is a complicated talk that can be boiled down to the essential dichotomy expressed in the verse. The nice thing is that in this challenging work of subtle implications, this is one of the verses where Narayana Guru gives us a clear statement of the core principles, going right to the heart of the meaning of a spiritual search. Nitya opens with a sly wink affixed to his statement of the issue:

In the Bhagavad Gita the Lord says:

Abandoning all dharmas, come to Me, the One, for refuge;
I shall absolve you from all sins; do not despair. (XVIII, 66)

When the word *dharma* is translated as "religion," it may sound like all religions are being derided. But if we stick to the strict philosophic meaning of dharma as the principle of becoming, and contrast it with *brahman*, the principle of unchanging beingness, we get a deeper and wider meaning.

So, the dichotomy in question is being and becoming. It can also be framed as the Absolute and Creation, sameness and otherness, or unitive and dual, etc. Nitya introduces a provocative new one, "intuitive knowledge and discursive knowledge," which we didn't have time to look into directly.

Bill started us off (Deb is in California) by citing how Nitya pins it down: "What is seen as the many are the modifications of the One. Here a question arises: 'Does the One transform itself into the many, or is it only seen as the many?'" Bill left the question open, as it is meant to be. It is probable that there is no definitive answer to it.

Nancy mused that computers are examples of how positive and negative factors (in the form of ones and zeros) interact to produce infinite variety. This breaks the world apart for her. She realizes that the world is not as concrete as we might imagine it to be, which makes it easy for her to let go of certain positions.

As for Moni, she reviewed how when we look at things we add so much extra weight from our memories. This means the way we look at things makes them different each time according to their context.

To Jan, both being and becoming seem to be part of the Absolute. Becoming is the expression that the Absolute takes in the world, while being is the part that is unchanging, beyond forms.

Sarah joined right in, affirming that where she is, is where she will always be. Her sense is that there is only the moment we are in now. The future is unknown and the past is already gone. Plus, we remember it wrongly, so it's really, really gone. The present is all there is.

Karen asked what Indra's magic was. I offered that it is a kind of adumbration of maya, as we are now moving toward the Maya Darsana. Indra is the Lord of the senses, (i.e. the mind) producing convincing images from the electronic input flooding the brain. We can only presume the images bear some relation to our world, and the presumption seems to hold good. This is real magic! Bill described it as the process of the One being manifested as the many. Few are actually aware that we are interacting with a reproduction of the original, and that may be just as well. It's ideal that we can have a nearly instantaneous interaction with our world, despite the interpretations we cannot help but employ for comprehension. The yogi's job is to take time out occasionally to check on the accuracy of their movie and filter out some of the distortions.

I'll add a helpful overview of the structure of Darsanamala by Nataraja Guru in Part II, which includes a sentence relating to

where we are now: “Both plurality and duality get abolished by a method of elimination of what is doubtful and unessential.” I guess this implies that plurality and duality are both doubtful and unessential, yet they are nonetheless integral to the miraculous magic of existence. A contemplative takes the time to observe their defects, for all that. We really don’t want to go hog wild based on a fictional reading, do we?

Susan talked about her anxiety, a most practical issue: how the becoming includes all the things she worries about, and the being is when she can let go of them. It’s like a larger kind of meditation for her. She now feels that after many years of study she can recognize she is doing this, and it makes her anxiety much more manageable. She still gets anxious, but she isn’t nearly as distressed by it and recovers more quickly.

The thrust of this verse is that there are two main themes in spiritual life, either that attainment is the product of a series of necessary steps or that you are already realized and just don’t realize it. That means there are no intervening requirements keeping you from being all you can be. It’s only a matter of releasing your understanding.

Narayana Guru (disparagingly) epitomized the first version as milk turning into curd. Without certain definite practices, you don’t get curd from milk. The highly prized Indian curd is basically what Westerners call yogurt, and Western curd is different, but the point is the same. The vast majority of spirituality and especially religion falls into this category.

In terms of transactional life, steps—evolution—are inevitable and necessary. But to the Guru, attaining our true nature, which is already at hand, is actually put off by thinking of it in transactional terms. The goal recedes forever as long as we treat it as a goal. It does make for lots of fun and games, but sometimes the games are not so fun, and that’s normally when we question our attitudes and do our best to reform them.

Instead of imagining spirituality in linear terms, we are now subtracting the obstacles we have unintentionally erected to self-realization. Our thoughts are riddled with ways we picture going from step 1 to step 2 and so on, until a desirable end is reached. We imagine we are not okay and need to change to something other than what we are now in order to become okay. This is a primary source of anxiety, and a curable one at that. We could make ourselves turn into Curds and live far from the rest of the world, but perhaps we should become Wise Yogurts instead, at home everywhere. We could stop taking ourselves on wild goose chases and begin to honor who we are right where we are. We have barely begun to know ourselves in any real way, both as individuals and species-wide.

I think we should realize that the relation of being with becoming is not a question with a simple correct answer. It is a mystery that leads us into the depths of contemplative awareness as we ponder its paradoxical implications. Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita does a hatchet job on easy answers. Before blowing the reader's mind in the ninth chapter, he softens us up with some reassurances:

2) Royal science, crowning secret, purificatory is this, superior, objectively verifiable, conforming to right living, very easy to live, and subject to no decrease.

Then he makes sure we cannot pigeonhole the Absolute (which he is a symbol of), much as we seem to want to:

4) By Me all this world is pervaded, My form unmanifested; all beings have existence in Me and I do not have existence in them.

5) And further, beings do not exist in Me; behold My status as a divine mystery; further, Myself remaining that urge behind beings, I bear them but do not exist in them either.

6) As the great (expanse of) air filling all space has its basis in pure extension, thus you should understand all existences as having their basis in Me.

Plenty of paradox there! And indefinability. This leads directly to the crucial dilemma here: is realization the end result of a cumulative process, or is it an immediate and immediately available condition? For the most part religions and spiritual self-help programs offer well-defined steps to undertake to achieve a specified result, whether it be entry into heaven, self-perfection, or what have you. You can't make a living telling people they are already the Absolute in essence, so all they have to do is let go of all the confusing junk they have accumulated through their half-baked thinking. It's much more lucrative to promise exceptional and titillating possibilities to draw in the trustful legions dissatisfied with their present lives. The only problem is that by working diligently for what someone else assures you is salvation, you have to put your own natural strengths on hold. You might well be on a treadmill with only an imaginary end in sight.

I recalled that this was why I spent ten years writing my own exegesis of the Gita. Almost everyone you ask says that the message of the Gita is doing your duty, your dharma. Yet, as the verse Nitya quoted plainly says, the Gita's message is to abandon all dharmas. It's about *liberating* ourselves from obligatory duties. Our only true duty is to overcome our limitations, which include armloads of physical and mental duties. A case can be made for stepwise enlightenment, but the Gita doesn't make it. Thinking it does is projection at its worst.

In case there is any lingering doubt, Narayana Guru states his position here without subterfuge, and Nitya amplifies it:

There exists a polemic between those who emphasise dharma as a prerequisite to know brahman and those who abandon that aspect, treating it as only incidental. The first group is called *parinamavadin*, evolutionists, and the second are those who suggest the view that the phenomenal world is only a superimposition. Here in the *Asatya Darsanam* Narayana Guru supports the theory of superimposition, describing it as *indrajalena vidyate*. (185)

Or course, we can plainly see evolution (or change) on every level of the manifested world. Applying those norms to spiritual exploration will trip us up, however. The misapprehension is that evolution is taking us to the Absolute. Asymptotically, perhaps it is, so in several trillion years creation will be almost fully realized. But why wait? Since the Absolute is complete in itself, all this evolution and change has no effect whatsoever on it. There has to be a different orientation to bring us into relation with whatever it is that never changes. All we have to do is abandon our dharmas, our confusions, our programs, and open ourselves directly to the totality that we are an integral and essential part of. It doesn't have to be perfect in our eyes, but it is built on a ground of perfection. That alone makes it effortlessly beautiful, admirable, and enjoyable.

This is one of the places where Narayana Guru is indeed in tune with Sankara, as he famously and modestly affirmed. Nitya adds Sankara's view to underline the validity of the Guru's ideal:

[Sankara] categorically announced that it is unnecessary to be disciplined in the *karma kanda* of the Vedas – that is, the ritual

portion – in order to become endowed with the realization of the Absolute as recorded in the history of Indian philosophy.

We may sense the presence of the Absolute as a benign background to our spectacular and effusive lives. Supported on its breast, so to speak, we toil and moil. Yogis believe that by opening themselves to its beingness they will be infused with harmony, but isn't that just another way we demote ourselves and defer our expertise until later? Might it be yet another ruse to excuse our staying asleep? We are *already* infused with harmony. We could be reassured by these ideas and realize that the Absolute cannot possibly act, because action implies change. Only created beings can act. So how are we going to optimize what we do? The Gurus are telling us that we don't have to do anything special, other than get on with our lives as the creative, dynamic instruments they are meant to be. That they can be. Trying to think of how to act just right is yet another inhibition to the free flow of our psyches.

We live in the very time with the most material wealth and comfort, the most information, access to endless varieties of people and places and their history, the most opportunities, that our corner of the universe has had in over 13 billion years. We've got to push on farther before we celebrate? It's not good enough yet? Come on!

So we dance our dances as actualizations of the potential latent in the Absolute. We don't need its permission—we already have it. Without us, it would be nothing. With us, it is everything. The Gita's Chapter XV takes this to the highest degree of understanding, proposing a triune Absolute: a manifested Absolute (the world of becoming), an unmanifested Absolute (the world of being), and an utterly transcendent Absolute beyond definition. All of these, of course, are present simultaneously. How else could it be?

Jan caught the spirit of the class, exulting that the many are expressions of the Absolute, the blossoming forth of it. Susan also recalled the idea of being co-creators with the Absolute, which is a most empowering concept. The Gita is especially valuable in making sure we are sensible enough to handle this perfect freedom with wisdom. History is filled with those who get the license without the wisdom, and so run riot over the earth. As always, a yogic balance of being and becoming is the key to living with expertise. We mustn't over-inhibit or under-inhibit our potential.

I'll append some more thoughts on this business from my Gita commentary in Part II. I think you'll find them quite germane in terms of practicality.

Sarah added a thoughtful note, that because of our differing cultural backgrounds we all frame things differently, but aren't we all seeking the same thing? There is a drive inside us to be what we already are, but we project it as different images, and so we imagine we are different from others. Yes, and that's why we sometimes fight over a truth that should bring us together in amity. If we can accept that other people have different ways of visualizing the same goal we have, we would readily accept them and tolerate their "strange" ways of seeing. We might even learn from them. Part of the fun of living in a wisdom context is decoding those varying images to bring them to a central notion of our own understanding. We can do this with ancient myths as well as the friend we are conversing with over the back fence.

A famous quote attributed (probably inaccurately) to Albert Einstein is "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is." In the Gurukula we much prefer the second option, in the sense that for anything to exist at all is a real miracle. We should never take anything for granted, and because we do, Narayana Guru is deconstructing our false sense of assurance that nothing matters. Nitya says:

We have already seen that the mind, which makes ensembles out of sensory data, can excel the performance of any magician.... The whole world is a continual effort of the ceaseless composition of the creative mind, like the performance of a magician.

Real magicians don't perform anything like the naïve idea of magic, getting something out of nothing, they are doing possible things that appear impossible due to their well-practiced cleverness. Being happy as well as wise and calm in mind often seem impossible when we are in distress, but they are magics we are capable of performing. We don't need any audience; we can practice in secret. The first step is to stop imagining we have to become something other than what we are in order to perform our magic tricks. We are already magical.

Nitya has one last piece of advice for us:

All this comes under the sway of dharma. Our performances vary when we adhere to dharma, because it has the blinding effect of veiling from us the innate oneness of the Self, or, in its totality, of what we call brahman. In his Advaita Dipika, Narayana Guru comments on the fact that the reality of the thread loses itself in the cloth, as does the water in the waves. Even so the reality of brahman is lost in the imaginary mirage of the phenomenal universe.

It is easy to dismiss something that is invisible and intangible and doesn't advocate for itself. Yet the unitive principle of the Absolute is a balancing, normalizing factor we need to incorporate into our outlook. Doing so is what frees us from our delusions and liberates our constructive energies to light a fire of delight in our life and share it with our fellow participants in this miraculous universe.

Nitya's last message, from beyond the grave as it were, was "celebrate, celebrate, celebrate!" (See Jyothi's séance, on the page <http://aranya.me/memories.html>.) We are meant to express the value-form of delight, to be a unique fire of ecstasy and love warming our world and our fellows. *All* of them, not simply a select group. How and why must you hide your light? It shines in all directions, naturally.

On leaving, Sarah brought up that not being yourself in a true sense was a kind of arrogance. We stubbornly defend our posture as small and shrunken beings, so we don't have to live up to the greatness we naturally embody. She noted we can easily recognize grandiose arrogance, but the opposite version is much more insidious. As she went out the door, she looked very much like a young woman eagerly discovering her own strengths. A warm night radiant with a full moon was waiting to welcome her.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

The Self is something that remains changeless and is without the states of birth, being, growth, transformation, decrease or destruction. Like milk that goes sour and changes over into curds or buttermilk the Self does not change taking the form of the world, because it is not possible for even an atom to be outside the Self. If one asks how this marvellous visible world originated and how it came about and on what basis it is established, the reply is that it exists in the Self in the form of an eidetic presentiment (*vivarta*). The things produced by the magician do not really exist. In the same way this world is really non-existent (i.e., it is false).

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In his *Integrated Science of the Absolute* (ISOA) Nataraja Guru describes the overall plan of Darsanamala. Since we are in the middle of the half dedicated to “reduction,” or what is now called deconstruction, I want to include this valuable assessment, given in his signature complex fashion. Keep in mind Nataraja Guru’s translation of sat-chit-ananda is methodology, epistemology and axiology, respectively; also, existence and subsistence and value:

The methodology and structuralism tacitly presupposed in the *Darsana-Màlà* implies both a reduction and a construction by which multiplicity is first reduced to negative unity in the first five chapters. Both plurality and duality get abolished by a method of elimination of what is doubtful and unessential. Having touched the rock bottom of ontology by this negative reduction, the last five chapters aim at a more positive construction implying the normalising of existence with its own rational subsistence. There is a construction implied in the method here by which ontology gets transformed into a value-world where teleological first and final causes gain gradual primacy. Even at this stage of reconstruction there are always the Self and the non-Self involved as irreducible counterparts related by complementarity, reciprocity and cancellability. We shall explain these later on. Here we have only to remember that the methodology of this work has to be treated together with its own epistemology and axiology. (Vol. I – 237; third ed. 229)

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The Gita’s ninth chapter, at the apex of the work, has much to offer us at this stage of the Darsanamala study. Interested readers can find my exegesis of the entire chapter on [my website](#). Here are

some excerpts from verse 2 that I think will be helpful in understanding where Narayana Guru is going at this stage of the game. As usual I addressed each of the adjectives in this verse one at a time:

2) Royal science, crowning secret, purificatory is this, superior, objectively verifiable, conforming to right living, very easy to live, and subject to no decrease.

Next, the wisdom is said to be superior. Of course, in many religions superior means above or better than something else, widening the discrepancy between the antinomies, and that can't be the sense here. A unitive system has no hierarchies. The Absolute pervades everything, and its precise (though incomprehensible) status in this regard has been meticulously presented in previous chapters, and is about to be stated with finality. Yet even here, very close to the moment of ultimate revelation, there are degrees mentioned of progressive attunement with the Absolute as opposed to dwelling in ignorance. Superior then refers to the closest possible merger with excellence. It is not used in comparison with other versions of perfection, since they are all one, only in contradistinction with closed mindedness.

Superior is never to be equated with exclusivity. Nataraja Guru says in this regard, "The teaching becomes royal in the sense that a public road may be said to be royal, or belonging to the kingdom, and thus open to all who choose to walk on it. It is not reserved for the chosen few."

The Gita's wisdom is also claimed to be objectively verifiable. Obviously there is no laboratory experiment possible to test metaphysical verities. Verification comes through the self-evidence of feeling mentally invigorated. Life becomes joyful when it is properly comprehended, when our actions are in

harmony with our inner dynamics. There is no requirement to accept any imaginary notions on faith; the joy of living springs from direct experience and understanding. That is the only objective verification possible. Since yoga works, and we can know it works, its efficacy does not have to be taken on faith.

“Conforming to right living,” tells us that this is not some strange, esoteric practice that has to be performed in cloistered surroundings. It unfolds right in the midst of everyday life. An understanding divorced from ordinary reality is useless and absurd, though oddly much academic philosophy is specifically based in an imaginary behavioral vacuum. Such irrelevance falls outside the Gita’s intent. Every aspect of life is embraced by its yoga. Nor are there “dirty” parts that have to be hidden away from an all-seeing god, while “holy” ones are paraded around like troops on a drill ground. Beliefs like these splinter the psyche and cause mental distress. If there were a god witnessing such antics, she would certainly be disdainful of them, and not at all impressed. Our own inner sensibility feels the same way.

The wisdom in question is “easy to live” not only since there are no strenuous practices involved, but simply because it is fun to be alive. The easiness is due to not having any complicated program to carry out, but thinking of life itself as the program. It is simply a matter of applying our best insights to each situation as it appears before us, dealing with it directly and not as a member of any defined sect, but solely as a uniquely talented human being: namely ourself....

Easiness has also an implicit contrast with ways that are hard, ways that abound in observances and rules that must be carefully followed. Very often in those systems, denying yourself things is seen as meritorious and “spiritual.” You do what you’re supposed to do, not what you’re inclined to do, and that will theoretically lead you to enlightenment. Surely many of our unexamined

inclinations are habitual and short-sighted, but the flip side is that by following a dogmatic spiritual program we are merely upgrading our subordination to social strictures. We should not underestimate the ego's ability to co-opt any endeavor without us even noticing. For instance, in following a strict regimen we may soon come to feel that the denial of pleasures is a very superior thing that "we" are "doing," and we're right back where we started. Worse, the spiritual ego, being more self-conscious than the social ego, is more deeply entrenched and harder to wrest contemplative distance from. We passionately identify with it, employing all our individually focused energy and defending it with all our wiles. The ego strives valiantly to remain in charge, even as it pretends to relinquish command to a higher power. After all, isn't spiritual perfection the best thing a human can attain, unassailably wonderful? In this way spirituality can become the ultimate defense policy for the ego. This is a virtually insoluble problem for a solitary seeker, striving without the aid of a guru to show them how to lighten up and let go.

Lastly, the insight gained is "subject to no decrease." Krishna reminds us that, unlike merit-based systems, direct contact with the Absolute does not lessen over time, and is not spoiled by mistakes. Wisdom is not something that can ever be taken away or forfeited. You don't stiffen up as you do when you take a break from Hatha Yoga. It's not like weakening your breath when you stop running every day. You don't have to start over from the beginning if you miss your meditation time, or forget how many prayer beads you have counted. Wisdom is permanent. What you truly realize, you realize for all time.