

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

Verse 8

Maya alone is the primal cause of the world; by that which is none other than the wielder of maya all this is created, like the unreal effects of psychic powers.

6/26/6

After nearly three full darsanas examining the ways the mind springs into existence and leads us astray, we arrive naturally at a summation of our dilemma, the cause of which is generically named maya. We have been inching forward incrementally, and suddenly we have achieved a collective “great leap forward.” From here on Narayana Guru won’t be busy convincing us of the reality of the underlying Substance. He has turned our attention fully on it. At last we can look at the implications of Life unfettered by our confusion. This is a really exciting moment in the study.

For all its broad sweep, Darsanamala consists of very tiny steps. In other words the flowers are strung close together on the garland. So Narayana Guru is going to spend the next two verses and most of the Maya Darsana consolidating this realization. We will have plenty of time to let it sink in.

Nitya compares maya with the index of refraction of light, describing the familiar experiment where a rod or pencil is placed in a glass of water and appears bent. The rod is not bent, but it convincingly appears to be bent right at the interface of the two mediums. Refraction in different mediums alters our perception of objects in well understood ways, and a physicist can infer the

shape of the original by compensating for the distortions using the scientifically determined index. Like that, a contemplative can subtract all the distortions we have studied so far, the fears, biases, likes and dislikes, partial and colored awarenences, organic weaknesses, and so on, and discover his or her own core in the “neutral zero” of unfettered consciousness. This is the Gurukula’s famous “Normative Notion,” the value to which all things and ideas must be related in order for them to have sensible meaning. It is the vertical golden thread running through all our horizontal activities. History exalts the few who have achieved this insight by accident, by an “act of God,” and we never want to leave Chance out of our reckoning. Yet the idea here is that you can actually learn this, you can work on it and make it more and more real in your life, if you are humble and careful and awake. So open yourself to divine intervention, but in the meantime correct whatever you can. As Swami Beyondananda pointed out, Jesus never said “Don’t do anything until I get back!”

The question arose, “How does realization fit into this image of maya or refraction?” My response—one of many possible ones—is that we spend a lifetime trying to grasp the rod in the glass of water, and we keep missing it because we aren’t taking refraction (maya) into account. A realized person is one who makes the adjustments, reaches into the glass, and grasps the rod where it actually is, not where it appears to be.

Special guest Emily pointed out that each interpretation of maya was “right” for the experiencer. This reminded us that maya isn’t “wrong” at all, it’s just how the world is encountered by an inevitably partial being. There is a ton of negative baggage heaped on maya’s head, as the great deluder, master of illusion and blindness, and all. Such a very common attitude implies there is a right version somewhere as an antidote—and all too often, the person’s ego presumes to know what that right version is. No,

maya is just the fig tree that emerged from the seed in the first darsana. It just is. It has all the dualities in it, but it is not them.

Emily may have also meant that ultimately the rod itself is as unreal as the observation of it's being bent. Maya is both real and unreal. It's the only game in town, and the Gurus invite us to play it to the hilt. But play well and play smart. Don't just reach for the obvious, because we're in a fun house of mirrors. Taking the simplistic course of sneering at maya merely drives the sneerer into a personal cave of negativity. Maya isn't affected at all.

We talked about times we had observed mayavic distortions in our own life or experience. This is of course an important exercise to do outside of class, and hard to share. Ann gave us a beautiful example. Both her boys screwed off heavily during high school. She felt a powerful urge to pressure them to achieve and succeed, since she and her husband were chronic overachievers (impressively so, I should add). Early on, though, she asked herself how she would like to be remembered in ten years, as a nag or as something else. Further, she wondered what she could truly offer the situation. Her decision was to love. She decided to give unjudging love, and leave the boys to figure out their own dharma. For one of them at least, this strategy was a magna cum laude success.

In connection with this I mentioned the myth of Sisyphus, who was condemned by the gods to roll a great stone uphill, where near the top it would always escape him and roll back to the bottom. This depicts the course of those who want to manipulate events (or people) toward their own goal. When a person is motivated from within, their nearly infinite energy infuses their actions. But when they don't share the vision they become dead weight, always ready to seek the lowest point as determined by gravity. Consciously or unconsciously they resist the pressure being put on them. So as Ann determined, it is better to let people decide their own direction, and give love and encouragement

wherever possible. The maya-drenched ego forever perverts the unfoldment of people's natural abilities, so pushing is merely hard work with little or no reward.

This is true even when your motivation is for the benefit of another person. Most of us are not Kissingers or Cheneys, sending waves of soldiers to their deaths for our secret financial benefit. Very often we do what we do to help others, not out of any selfish scheme. But hidden in our "help" is a subtle negativity, a mistrust in the course of events, or even a blindness that makes our help less than efficacious. In our Darsanamala study we want to uncover the universal ground that links all aspects of maya together. The belief is that with this knowledge our actions will be no more or less than what they should be, and we will be allowing room for the dynamism of the Absolute to be involved.

As several participants noted, love is how the Absolute manifests in life. Our contact with the Absolute teaches us love, and fills us with love until it spills over to wash our friends and associates. It is not only a feeling, but expertise in action. There is nothing better that we could share with those around us.

Anita asked about the psychic powers mentioned in the verse, and how they are unreal. Here they are likened to all the rest of maya. In other words, they are nothing special. Or better yet, everything is special, as special as lurid siddhis. A gathering of loving friends is the most special thing in the universe, if we pause to appreciate it. And, while some saints may be able to heal the sick and so on, none of them set out to accomplish that. If they strove for powers, the very striving would take them out of participation with their life. Instead, they just opened themselves to the All, and the powers were the side effect of their realization, which they were then free to share.

Our class took place outside. The temperature had reached 104 degrees earlier, and we sat in the shade behind the house. By class time there was a very warm breeze (an Oregon rarity) rustling

and susurrating in the leaves. As darkness grew, the sense of individual people and objects merged into an undifferentiated sea of beingness. Purple highlights suffused the air. We sank into a spell of unity. It took an arbitrary act to break the spell and send everyone on their way.

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8/23/16

Asatya Darsana verse 8

Maya alone is the primal cause of the world;
by that which is none other than the
wielder of *maya* all this is created,
like the unreal effects of psychic powers.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Maya itself is the prime (material) cause
Of the world; what is no other
Than the maya-maker, everything indeed
Created itself as various unreal magical effects.*

Last night was a special gathering, honored by the attendance of Tyagi Swami, next in line of the Gurukula *parampara* to succeed Muni Narayana Prasad as Guru. Tyagi, who some of us knew as Giri before his promotion to Swami-hood, has always been a cosmic giggle incarnate. As a younger fellow his response to many a question was to laugh and leap straight up as high as he could, hands held prayerfully together over his head. Now he keeps his feet on the ground while making invisible leaps of spirit, which are most definitely contagious.

There is a stroke of genius in Nitya's analogy here of maya as a kind of refractive index, producing a distortion that can be decoded by scientific examination. He begins by describing the pencil in the water glass experiment that every schoolchild knows, adding "There are certain fallacies which can persist at the optical level, and these can only be detected through a process of deduction." The pencil looks bent every time it is slid into the water, and it continues to look bent even when we have an accurate theory of why that is. Our knowledge does not make the maya—the refraction—disappear, but it does allow us to get over believing the pencil is bent when it isn't. If we don't apply the principle, we will remain deluded. You may even know some people who dogmatically cling to their illusions and refuse any suggestion that there might be a simple explanation leading to an alternative conclusion. That can happen.

But we in our study are willing and even eager to reduce the burden of illusions we lug about with us. As Deb said at the beginning of the class, each situation is presented to us with its own twist or bend, so Narayana Guru is reminding us that within every situation is an abiding being, a stable truth, that can be accessed by employing our intelligence. The pitfall, I added, is that we often unintentionally substitute a new refractive index for the old one due to half-baked beliefs. The problem is by no means as simple as it sounds.

Of course, we are using an optical illusion as a symbol for all of our illusions. Nitya bridges the gap to put our task in plain terms:

At the time of experiencing the illusion it looks real. Being an illusion it cannot remain the same way all the time, so that one soon discovers the fallacy of it. On discovering the fallacy, the impression of reality vanishes.

My only quibble here is the word ‘soon’. The more important fallacies are rather more complicated than pulling a pencil in and out of water. In the case of the pencil, we can see the before and after states and compare them. With mental refraction it is very hard to attain the “unbent” state. It is not noted in any physics textbook, and the claims of scripture often contain their own twists and turns while professing perfect straightness. A stretch of contemplation is in order.

Tyagi noted that maya is the primal cause of all this confusion. It is our old perspective of bentness, and in the individual it is known as ignorance. I added that maya is the way we understand the world, and that’s how we “create” it. Jay sent in a very nice meditation on maya that you can read in Part II.

Nitya moves to the general point of his analogy in this way:

The principle of refraction is one of the many laws of nature. What we call “nature” here is nothing but the sum total of several such causal factors which produce similar effects on the minds of people, and even on the people themselves. These various effects can produce the joint effect of an apparently stable state of things, and we are impressed by this “factual” consistency. As a result it gains a transactional verity. But, as in the case of the optical illusion, apparent actuality can prove to be fictitious when a careful scrutiny is made.

So the world holds up just fine. It all “works.” There isn’t much of any incentive to resolve the confusion unless it pinches us. Nonetheless the universe is pretty clever to pinch us in stimulating ways that should impel a search for truth, yet we have learned any number of compensatory strategies to make our uncomfortable position tolerable.

Michael summed up the best of these imprisoning strategies as “the world is wrong, not me!” Deb took Michael’s phrase a step

farther: “You’re wrong; I’m right.” The problem is in the pencil—it is clearly bent—and not in my understanding of what’s going on. In other words, we don’t take the trouble to examine our role in refraction, because the problem is so obviously “out there.” And we can easily find an affinity group that will agree with us, proving we are right. This does sound like the ego’s default position, doesn’t it? When will we dare to stand up to it?

This stimulated Deb and Tyagi to note that we are the very wielder of *maya* mentioned in the verse. Peter defined wield as to use effectively, as in wielding weapons. We wield our *maya* effectively, sort of: we use it to forge a distorted path through the tangled jungle of our impressions. If it works, as it often does, we may wrongly conclude we have found ultimate truth.

All through this section the words of Nan Shin, the Zen nun quoted a couple of classes back, ring true: “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.” She is preaching acceptance. Not of acquiescence, as Jan worried, where we simply capitulate to what is going on, but rather by being willing to face up to our challenges instead of trying to escape to an imaginary oasis.

Nitya’s analogy continues to speak to our spiritual search:

Physicists have now compiled an index of refraction, so that they can understand and deduce from that index what medium is causing a certain refraction. In the same manner, *maya* is to be treated as a refractive index of the degree of deviation in the erroneous transactions of life. In this way a realized person can deduce from the collective effect of the world consciousness the only reality, which is that of the Self. Then the transactional world loses its power of compulsion, and one can attain freedom from what appears to be the empirical world. In such a state one knows that there is no world other than the Self.

I invited the class to give examples of how the “refractive index” of maya might be used to rectify a problem. Not necessarily to achieve the Absolute but to throw understanding onto what we are confronting. I gave an example from my experience. I went to visit an old friend who invited me to come to his new place. I was looking forward to a nice reacquaintance, but when I got there, he was strangely cold and distant. I couldn’t figure out what was the matter. I wondered if I’d offended him. Was it something I said? Was there some history he was upset about I couldn’t remember? I tried a few gambits but the atmosphere remained leaden, even on a walk through lovely countryside. Then it dawned on me: he was high on some drug, probably pot. Aha! Pot naturally makes you cautious if not suspicious with people who are not sharing your mental state. Once I realized that, everything fell into place. Plus, I knew from experience how to handle it better. I stopped trying to come on as an old friend and allowed for more distance. After a while he relaxed some, and likely came down as well. Later on our visit became decent anyway. It was a good lesson for me not to jump to conclusions and to start slowly in such cases. I had another “law of nature” to add to my pile of refractive indexes for decoding unexpected behavior.

Jan was struck by the importance of the phrase that if we can penetrate the veils of maya, “the transactional world loses its power of compulsion.” We are being compelled to do unfortunate things—and fortunate things as well, let’s admit—by our misunderstandings. If maya only caused mistakes, we would be in a terrible pickle. But it works and it doesn’t work, so we bumble and stumble forward at its prodding. As Andy reminded us, maya is sat-asat, both true and untrue. That is its secret power. Jan mused that we need to find a balanced mental state so the compulsion doesn’t blindly drive us. That balance would be found somewhere in the neutral ground between sat and asat. After all, the pencil is

both bent and straight at the same time. It would be wrong to say it isn't bent, but that's not the whole story.

Michael wondered if there was any distinction between this compulsion and our legitimate inner drive, which is something we've been advocating for all along. He's right: these are two entirely different things. We have certain potential abilities that are our best contribution to the whole of creation, and we languish when these are not given opportunities for expression. Nitya called this our primary drive, and encouraged us to free it from the impediments that hold it in chains. We learn to bottle it up, and there it remains, like a mythical genie. By contrast, the compulsions of a distorted view of the world are not in accord with our inner genius, they are foisted on us by tradition and social pressure. In a way, they are the bottle. In our analogy here, we are surrounded by a chorus of beliefs that the pencil is definitely bent. Can't you see that it is? Traditional sexual roles that diminish a woman's power to act freely are a perfect example (men suffer similar diminution but less obviously). "You really *shouldn't* do those things, only men are capable." "Can't you see? That's the way it is." Several friends in the class are busily stripping away some of those sex-role impediments thanks in part to the encouragement of Narayana Guru and Nitya.

So there is an outer pressure to avoid our innate talents ("transactional compulsion"), and an inner drive to bring them out despite the opposition. Mental health and happiness are dependent not so much on ignoring social dictates willy-nilly, but rather reducing our responses to their compulsion in favor of discovering our true identity with the Self. The Self is us, what we truly are. The beauty of the Gurukula message, and Vedanta in general, is that the truth does not lie elsewhere. It is our very nature.

Some class members are suspicious of Vedanta, and of directed effort in general. One asked Tyagi if Nataraja Guru even was a Vedantin. Tyagi responded with definitiveness that Nataraja

Guru was an absolute Vedantin, that by defining himself as an absolutist he was affirming his agreement with Vedanta. Another wondered if Vedanta was a comprehensible belief system, and I responded that it was not so much a fixed system as a tool for deconstructing false beliefs. Vedanta emerged in response to the ossification of Vedic beliefs into a imprisoning hierarchy that benefitted only those at the top. It reintroduced the Absolute Self as common to all, and critiqued the myriad ways the psyche is caught and dampened. Human history contains a repeated motif of bright ideas becoming fixed and dead, and needing fresh insight to break free again. Vedanta is one of those tools for regaining freedom. Where it has become an outmoded set of beliefs it no longer serves its purpose, but at least the version espoused by Narayana Guru is vividly transformative, if one takes it seriously. Vedanta is certainly the closest philosophic system to what the Gurukula is supposed to be sharing, though of course even such a liberating institution is never free of tamasic tendencies that try to nudge it back into a stupor.

Deb asked Tyagi how we are to find connection beyond maya, and he responded that all transactions are within maya. They *are* maya. The very Self is the subject here. The gurus are not rejecting, not denying the world.

Bill wondered about the line “the unreal effects of psychic powers.” What exactly does that mean? I reminded him that he often retold a story of Nitya’s about that very concept. Ah, yes! He knew what I meant, and recounted the tale, helped by Peter, of the yogi who spent 20 years beside a river learning to walk on water. His dedication eventually paid off, and one day his old guru came along, looking for a ferry across the wide expanse. The yogi boasted that he had learned to walk on water and could carry him across himself. He picked up his guru and strode on top of the waves to the other shore. He put him down and looked at the guru

with prideful expectations. The guru gave him a dime, the price of a ferry ride, thanked him and went on his way.

There must be better ways to employ our precious time than to endlessly struggle for an unattainable end that in the long run is virtually useless anyway.

Someone asked the Swami if Narayana Guru had psychic powers. He said it was never about that. The Guru was down-to-earth, proclaiming that the Self was all there was, and not titillating people with promises of rare abilities. We already have everything, so bring your life to that awareness.

I talked about an ashram up north of us, run by a “star being” 40,000 years old. Something like that. They spend their days learning to levitate. You could spend your whole life learning to do something impossible, and check out without contributing a single iota to the welfare of the world. But why? Of course it would feel great to float up in the air. The bliss might last an hour. What are you going to do, float forever? B-o-r-i-n-g. The real reason is the ego’s endless search for attention and admiration. Poof. Narayana Guru suggests we get over it and do something worthwhile.

It might be a good idea to have a brief review of some of Darsanamala’s key points, because we never seem to get them anyway. First, we should note that Narayana Guru is talking about the unreal effects of psychic powers. Not that there aren’t psychic powers, only that the effects are suspect, and don’t meet the Vedantic definition of real anyway. I mean, playing the piano in top form is an incredible psychic power, but we don’t make a religion about it. At least not these days. Anyway, let’s look at our history in Darsanamala to date:

Like potential yogic power,
in the beginning this was nature indeed;
thereafter, like a yogi, the Lord of the World
unfolded his magical powers. (I.6)

The Lord is the magician who as maya creates the entire world. The whole thing is a magic. This stage of evolution marks the distinction between pure unconscious nature and sentience.

He from whom this world manifested,
as a fig tree from a seed—
he is Brahma, he is Shiva and Vishnu,
he is the Absolute, he alone is all. (I.10)

In the present verse we have “Maya alone is the primal cause of the world.” That’s the same as the “He” in the above verse. Maya is how the Absolute comes into being. There is no piecemeal way to transition from nothing to something. It has to happen all at once, like magic.

That which has no origin or dissolution
is none other than the supreme Absolute;
through *maya* the confusion arises that there is
origin and dissolution in the Self. (II.3)

This which is unreal, being an effect,
has a cause; it is not the world,
but the Absolute alone that is real,
which a dull mind wrongly imagines to be unreal. (II.5)

Now in the second darsana, these two verses are a step removed from the pure creation of the first darsana, and address how we project unreality onto reality. We are still the wielders of maya, the Self as multiple selves, broadcasting our confusion. Doesn’t that make us identical with the Lord?

When all parts are separated

one by one, then one sees
everything as consciousness alone—
far from *maya*—and not any other. (II.7)

Consciousness alone, not another, shines;
therefore, there is nothing other than consciousness;
what does not shine—that is unreal;
and what is unreal—that does not shine. (II.8)

The reduction continues, as appearances are resolved into nothing more than consciousness. Remember, Nataraja Guru's overall picture of the structure of Darsanamala is five darsanas at first deconstructing our false orientation to arrive at the "pendant jewel" in the very middle of the work: That alone is real. Then five more darsanas build a positive edifice back up on top of this real-ized ground.

The gist is that we already have a false structure in place, so if we just play games and ignore it, it doesn't go away. We have to pull down the old before rebuilding a better outlook. Sure, cosmic inspiration can break through at any point, but the ego is clever to use that idea to ensure that its comfy nest is never disturbed.

This leads us nicely to a poem that Susan contributed in absentia, as she is now on leave for several months. This is from Oregon's best-known poet, William Stafford, and demonstrates his affinity with what we're bathing in here:

åYou Reading This, Be Ready

Starting here, what do you want to remember?
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened
sound from outside fills the air?
Will you ever bring a better gift for the world

than the breathing respect that you carry
wherever you go right now? Are you waiting
for time to show you some better thoughts?
When you turn around, starting here, lift this
new glimpse that you found; carry into evening
all that you want from this day. The interval you spent
reading or hearing this, keep it for life—
What can anyone give you greater than now,
starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?

What a perfect poem, and a fitting close to our evening musings! The key to the poem is that to fully experience the present we have to “turn around,” which is mentioned twice so we don’t miss it. What could the poet mean?

Ordinary thought patterns are grounded in what Stafford refers to as “waiting for time to show you some better thoughts.” There is an expectation that the future will exceed the present. This cannot help but make the present seem less than perfect. Unreal. We have given our hearts away—a sordid boon, as some dead white guy once said.

Earlier we showed that ideas like “you are wrong and I’m right,” or “the world is at fault, not me,” are the self-binding beliefs we are asked to turn around from. We are the very wielders of maya. Only if we focus on our own shortcomings, then, will we be able to fully realize our dire condition, and begin to access the ecstatic alternative of being fully alive in the present.

The Guru and the poet both insist that there is intelligent effort involved in bringing ourselves back to full aliveness in the present. Not so much academic intelligence as intuitive, inspired intelligence. We hardly realize the degree to which we have sacrificed our presence to wishful thinking. In place of the poet’s rhetorical plea: “What can anyone give you greater than now...?” we make promises for what we hope to have or what we will

become in the future. Over time this has settled into a state reminiscent of “making futile gestures somewhere next door to reality.” Being bold enough to enter the present frightens us mainly because it is so real, so brimming over with ananda.

Narayana Guru is taking his time to carefully instruct us, so we can cut to the chase and dedicate ourselves to gifting the world our “breathing respect.” We can honor everything we encounter for what it is, not what we’d prefer it to be. We can respire the truth of our environment, breathing it in and slowly letting it out so we can breathe it in again. There is a subtle extra implication here that we should do this while we are alive and breathing. We may not be of much interest to our fellow beings when we’re dead and no longer exchanging air. So let’s live like this now, giving everything our best no matter what. When we do, it begins to look like what comes along is always an essential teaching and an extraordinary blessing. And we’ve been unintentionally turning our backs to it. Let us swivel around and greet it with open arms. Aum.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda’s commentary:

Maya is what does not exist at all. When we say that the non-existent *maya* is the prime material cause of the world it goes without saying that the world is not real. *Maya* is not other than the Self and the resulting world which is its effect is not different from the *maya*-maker which is the Self. The various unreal magical effects are none other than their Author. Even, thus, they are unreal. In the same way the world is none other than the Lord, although it is non-existent.

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After reading the text, Jay sent this:

Interesting analogy of Maya (asatya) with the refraction. The refraction is produced because of the difference in the composition (density) of the media through which the light passes. Similarly Maya is also the medium which Jivatma experiences. When the difference disappears the refraction ceases. This also is true of Atma and Paramatma (or of Maya and its creator). Thus the journey of this life is to eliminate the difference between Atma and Paramatma.

—Or if not eliminate, at least compensate for the disparity – ed.

Sharing some more thoughts about Maya, Jay later wrote:

Maya as such is not bad. How can it be bad when it is created by the creator (Shiva). As a matter of fact she is the other half of Him.

So why Maya becomes illusion? In Gita Krishna has said, Ch2, verse47 = Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana. He says your duty is to do your Karma, don't get attached to it. It is this attachment, is the pollution which changes the nature of Atma. This we may call the change in refractive index. The very fact that we all go through the cycles of birth and death is this karma principle.

Now let us look at the benevolent aspect of Maya. Maya is also Shakti, the same creative force of Shiva. This is the fundamental vibrating principle of life. It is present in each and every one, and in all the living and not living in the universe. It is the unifying principle in this universe. In human beings this Shakti allows us to express and experience everything. We in physical or biological sense generate Shakti (energy) by assimilating and metabolizing

the food we consume. The energy coinage in our body is ATP. This is produced in subcellular organelles called MITOCHONDRIA. In humans mitochondria are inherited from mother only. Father does not contribute them. Also as we know mitochondria have their own DNA. Hinduism is the only living religion that worships God in the form of woman. Thus this Shakti worship has philosophical as well as scientific sense. For someone like me every day is Mother's Day.

Part III

I've been thinking more about the index of refraction in psychological terms, as it strikes me as a very useful analogy. Today I recalled a political version that I have found very helpful in understanding the machinations of the US government at home and around the world, and thought I might as well share it. It may be applied to other entities around the world as well.

As Machiavelli well knew, most humans have a trusting attitude about those around them, especially their "superiors," and this can readily be exploited. Most of us presume that the motivation of everyone is just like ours: toward peace and calm, sure that war and cruelty are terrible things that should be avoided whenever possible. This natural mindset is reinforced on all levels of our education by parents, schools, and places of worship. So why is it that the policies our country undertakes so often clash with those ideals? Why is it that so many efforts backfire so badly? The pencil dipped in political waters is radically bent, to the point it makes no sense.

Decoding the index of refraction in this case is quite simple, but it goes against our deepest convictions, and so we have a hard time considering it is even possible. Briefly stated, in some circles conflict is seen as either a good thing or a necessary evil. Our economy is based on war, so war is the goal. Peace doesn't

generate income, but war makes it pour from the heavens. So the policy is to generate enmity and then combat it, while being careful not to extinguish it. It may be disguised with democratic and religious terminology, but once you see through the disguise, once you accept that the direction of policy is to develop moneymaking opportunities on a vast scale through creating enemies that must be fought with expensive weaponry, the pencil becomes straight once again.

I well remember the sickly green faces of the US Establishment in the early 1990s, after the Soviet Union resigned from the Cold War and turned its attention to privatizing the wealth that its idealistic citizens had contributed to their commonweal for three quarters of a century. You could clearly see their perplexity: how can we keep the economy burning red hot without an enemy? It wasn't long before a new one was conscripted, and they could relax. Muslims would be the new face of evil internationally, while black people could continue to fill the role at home. The threat of peace and justice was averted yet again, and everyone's job was secure.

Sadly, seeing these workings doesn't do much to bring them to a halt. At least a person can stop supporting shark-in-sheep's-clothing types of political candidates, stop praying that they really are sheep after all. Most yogis like to comprehend how things work, if only to avoid becoming further entangled in samsara, and sometimes there are opportunities to actually support true peace and justice initiatives. I am very fond of two quotes especially from Nitya's Patanjali book, *Living the Science of Harmonious Union*:

The yogi makes every effort not to be a howler telling untruth or a simpleton believing in something because somebody said it or it is written somewhere. (243)

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

I suppose this implies that a moral conscience is not absolutely necessary, but many of us are cursed to have one. Anyway, each of us is entrusted with one soul to try to keep from causing more harm than is inevitable: ourselves. The Portland Gurukula is dedicated to that ideal.