

## Darsanamala Combined Class Notes 2023

### **IV Maya Darsana, A Vision of Non-being Beingness**

#### **Introduction**

9/20/16

Maya Darsana Introduction and Maya Summary

After major introductions in the previous three darsanas, the rest from here on are much more modest in scope. The present one is especially brief, so I've added the summary I wrote for my paper on Darsanamala presented to the Kochi Backwaters Conference in 2013. Maya, like yoga, is understood in a wide variety of ways, so it will be helpful to focus on the version promulgated by the Narayana Gurukula gurus. Some of the definitions we have already met are compiled in Part II.

Defining maya as illusion is another instance supporting my claim in the last notes that "the answer is meaningless without mulling over the question." A glib answer allows us to dismiss the issue and ignore it, but that's not what we're here for. We want more understanding. Just exactly what is illusion anyway? As we dig into the concepts surrounding maya, our ideas about it will almost certainly be greatly enlarged. With any luck, they'll also be less illusory.

The short version is that maya is not considered an evil to be swept away, though that's such a powerful truism it still appears here and there even in our philosophy, and it does have its place. But maya is the whole game, and we are essential players in the game. From this perspective, illusion is a fabulous thing. A bit of a loose cannon, sure, but fabulous nonetheless.

Any time something arises out of nothing, it can no longer exactly represent the Nothing. The greatest miracle of all is that an ocean of infinite potential can somehow spit out definite examples of its potency. Whenever the potential becomes actualized, it will necessarily be limited. Has to be. No finite expression, no matter how beautiful, grand and universal it might seem to us, can ever exactly equate with the undifferentiated ground of being. There is no world anywhere that could be eternal, which is the Vedantic definition of the real. Temporary items are unreal, because they aren't always there. Only the unmanifested is real in that ultimate sense. But don't cry. Just get busy expressing the wonder of your uniquely limited place in the ocean of becoming, and make how you do it really, really terrific.

What we are invited to do is strip away the garbage we have more or less accidentally put in place to impede the natural upwelling of our potentials into actuality. Without fully realizing it, we have become stuck in what we already created, much of which was ferociously determined long before we were born. In such a bound state there is little room left for the power of the quantum vacuum or the ground of being or what have you to influence our life in a dynamic fashion.

Nataraja Guru got to the crux of the matter when he said, "If you are brave enough to create a vacuum, nature abhors it, and the vacuum will immediately be filled." A sweet account of this from Love and Blessings is reprinted in Part II.

So what is this vacuum we should create? We have to dispense with our burdensome thoughts and obligations about who we are and what the world is. We sit in meditation and think "I am such and such." Then we rule that out. "No, that's not true. I am much more than that." All our thoughts are limiting, so when they pop up, we send them to nowheresville. I use the mantra "self-description is stultifying." Am I what I think? No. Am I what others think? No. Not that either. Before long you get a bit

uncomfortable that you aren't anything definable, but that doesn't make you disappear. You're still there, and in fact more streamlined, more flexible, more alert. Keep it up, and keep your eyes open for what nature is going to fill your emptiness with. If you try to direct Nature, she will balk. So just extend a noncommittal invitation and carry on.

This is such a nurturing attitude! We are sailing on the sea of bliss and infinite potency. Once we stop flailing and learn how to float, the outpouring of positive energy easily buoys us up. We still have to guide our life, but our milieu is no longer treated as our enemy, something we are pitted against. And we don't have to fight over crumbs; we can share the wealth.

Nitya calls the Maya Darsana a vision of non-being beingness, highlighting the paradoxical nature of what we're dealing with. Our being emerges out of non-being, and may even be said to consist of non-being. How can that even be possible?

Bill in particular was fascinated by the three less familiar terms Nitya brings in here: *sadasiva*, *sudhajnanam*, and *mayasakti*, which run roughly parallel with sat, chit and ananda. The first of these refers to the ground of being itself:

The main theme of the genesis of cosmic consciousness... is personified as *sadasiva*. In Sanskrit, *sada* means "always," while *siva* is synonymous with a state of equipoise or perfect harmony. Thus, this state exists when no distinction is drawn between awareness and nonawareness, or between the conscious and the unconscious. In other words, the primeval state is indistinct and passive. Yet all manifestations in consciousness are attributable to the intelligence and purposiveness that remain hidden and dormant in this indistinct, original Being.

Nitya continues:

When we examine the miraculous operations of our own psychophysical systems, we might well be wonderstruck by the evidence of such ingenuity shown by the unknown functional intelligence that manages the affairs of our everyday life.... Automatic functions which are totally unknown to most of us maintain the smooth working of our organism and keep it in a condition which allows us to cope with all the demands of life.... The hidden knowledge concerning factors which maintain our organism, lying at the very substratum of the world order, is called *sudhajnanam*, or pure knowledge.

Deb was fascinated that the pure knowledge or logos, “while retaining the homogeneity of all things, also expresses itself through heterogeneous functions.” Is it the interface between everything and nothing? How can we learn to trust it, to give ourselves to it? Regardless, once this hidden knowledge percolates into manifestation, Nitya tells us:

We are confronted by the obvious phenomenality of things. This last aspect is called *mayasakti*, which can be translated as “the force which gives rise to and sustains the nescience or ignorance that perpetuates the affectivity of the mind by attaching to it the seeming reality of names and forms.”

So “the obvious phenomenality of things” is a fiction padded out by all specific forms and the names we give them. What appears solid and irrefutable to us is anything but. We are entranced by an endless series of beguiling appearances, which soon fade out.

We have learned to lend weight to these fictions by vehemently asserting their reality, but is that really our best option? Narayana Guru, among others, thinks not. One of those others is Daniel Pinchbeck, author of *Breaking Open the Head*. He writes:

Carl Jung wrote: “People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls.” Is it possible that our society has built up a vast edifice of technology and propaganda in order to avoid that inner confrontation? Enveloped by media and technology, we have come to prefer secondhand images to inner experience—what Jung called “the adventure of the spirit.” The self-knowledge achieved through personal discovery and visionary states seems alien, even repellent, compared to the voyeuristic gaze, the virtual entertainments and hypnotic distractions of contemporary culture. Perhaps we are due—even overdue—for a change. (5)

Fortunately for us, we can live in total ignorance of these shaky underpinnings of our world view, so we can get away with not paying attention. The *sadasiva* supports all forms, no matter how absurd, up to a point. But if we are going to have any meaningful influence on our own lives, we have to first become acquainted with how the world tree emerges from its seed. Vedanta often includes a radical note of roasting all seeds to remain in the undifferentiated state, but Narayana Guru also encourages the intelligent expression of the potency latent in the ground of being. Our world can be and is shaped by us, so why should we accept a mediocre version of the Possible? He has some much better ideas he is happy to share with us as we go along.

## **Part II**

Jan sent a heartwarming reaction to the overview of the Maya Darsana I had shared, including copying a few of the bits relating to nurturing our seeds:

Scott, I really liked your summary here! These parts really spoke to my life now:

*A balanced yogic approach means we should stay poised midway between leading and following, open to the next possibility. We need to plan and strive and set up programs in order for anything to happen, but at the same time too much planning and programming makes serendipity impossible, makes new directions impossible.*

I like the idea of the seed too. As the seed blossoms, naturally it releases parts, old shells that are not vital to the essence that needs to come forth from within. I see that you actually mentioned seeds in a couple of places:

*But basically it's inscrutable: the possibilities are indeterminate. As the seed grows into a tree, good and bad things happen to give it its shape and dimensions. We can retrospect and notice a lot of coherence in our unfoldment, but we can only guess and hope as to its future course. In the present we have a severely limited but important role to play.*

And

*Each of us has many innate tendencies, called vasanas in Sanskrit. They are like seeds buried in the manure of our psyches, waiting for opportunities to grow and actualize their potentials. There is a mysterious mating of opportunities and potentials that has made us what we are, and which makes the world what it is.*

Tonight I'm really struck by the paradox of the seed idea! How we want to open ourselves to the deep vital source within us that wants

to come forth, and to pay attention to that familiar self that seems to be an innate tendency or potential. But at the same time, we pause to question if those awakened parts are really vital to our essence and unity with everything or not, or if what we really need to do is let go, stop doing and trying, and let the world happen around us. Of course we need to try and find the balance but it's not an easy thing to do.

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This leads seamlessly to a paragraph from a New York Times Magazine article on photography, where “The more you try to control the world, the less magic you get.” In context:

“There is nothing as mysterious as a fact clearly described.” The fact that versions of this observation have been attributed to two very different street photographers, Garry Winogrand and Lisette Model, underlines its wisdom and its mystery. It helps explain why attempts to stage photographs — to create fictions — only rarely work as powerfully as the kind of quotations from reality that we get in documentary photographs. Larry Sultan once said he “always thought of a great photograph as if some creature walked into my room; it’s like, how did you get here? ... The more you try to control the world, the less magic you get.” Winogrand had no objection to staging things; it was just that he could never come up with anything as interesting as what was out there in the streets. But when does the staging start?

from **The Mystery at the Heart of Great Photographs**

[On Photography](#)

By GEOFF DYER AUG. 30, 2016

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Here's a longer excerpt from *Love and Blessings* about creating a vacuum:

Also at that time Nataraja Guru's *Word of the Guru*, the first readable book in English on Narayana Guru, was printed in Bangalore. I went all over Kerala with bags full of books to sell, since the printer had to be paid and the kitchen pot was to be kept boiling. Afterwards I felt sorry that I sold most of the books to people who never bothered to read them. But Guru didn't want to discourage me.

After I managed to get a little profit out of the book, I went to Quilon and bought a couple of tins of good varnish and paint. The small Gurukula building was whitewashed and painted, and the doors and windows were varnished. When Guru revisited Varkala after a three months stay in Ooty, I thought he would be pleased with the excellent work I had done. After the first few minutes of greetings and pleasantries, he looked into the kitchen store. There was no rice, no dahl, no oil, and no vegetables. Then he asked me, "Can you distinguish the essentials from the non-essentials?" Prudence being the better part of valor, I didn't dare answer. Then he continued, "Which is better, to sit in an unwhitewashed building with the doors and windows unpainted and take some hot kanji, or to have a well-decorated room with nothing to eat?" It may sound trivial, but that simple incident caused me to change my normative notion for evaluating the hierarchy of values.

In the evening I thought I should borrow money from someone to buy rice and provisions, but Guru didn't allow me to go. The only thing available was a little wheat flour for making paste to glue the wrappers of the magazines. With it I made one chapatti. After the evening meditation, I placed the chapatti before Guru and offered him a cup of *jira*, cumin water. I thought he



would be annoyed, but he looked pleased. He tore the chapatti into four bits and took one quarter. The other three quarters were given to the three of us who were staying there. “It’s good to have an empty stomach for a change,” he said.

All night I sat on my bed wondering how we would eat the next day, since Guru didn’t like the idea of borrowing money from anyone. At five in the morning I heard a commotion at the gate, and coming out saw it was a bullock cart. Someone was bringing green bananas, coconuts, half a bag of rice, and all kinds of vegetables. This surprise gift from some good Samaritan made me see the validity of the economics on which Nataraja Guru based the superstructure of the future Gurukula. I became absolutely convinced that without any manipulation the natural benevolence hiding obscurely in public life can come like a miracle and fill any vacuum.

Next day when I brought this subject to Guru’s attention, he said, “If you are brave enough to create a vacuum, nature abhors it, and the vacuum will immediately be filled.” My life for the last thirty years testifies to the truth of this. I have witnessed it again and again. Those who think they can understand the Guru just by reading his books are as fanciful as someone who takes a bottle of water from the ocean thinking that they can experience the ocean in the bottle. (165-6)

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Deb suggested we take a look at the references to maya in the book. I’ve compiled them up to where we are now, and will add more as we come to them. Because there is (no surprise!) a lot of confusion about the meaning of maya, this will help ground us as we go forward.

Maya in Darsanamala

What stimulates the interest of the philosopher and the scientist in questioning the phenomena of their experience is the element of mystery that transforms one form or one quality into another. This mysterious and veiling process is called *maya* in Sanskrit. What is a mystery to the human mind can cause a variety of responses: wonder, delight, and fear or dread, among others. When the mysterious cause of leprosy was discovered and an antidote invented, there was universal rejoicing in those countries where leprosy had been a scourge. On the other hand, the mystery enshrouding the dreadful disease of cancer provokes a response of a more sinister and fearful kind. Thus *maya* is a field where joy and sorrow, affection and fear can all operate side by side. All scientific effort since the time of seers such as Atreya in India and Democritus in ancient Greece, up to and including the present-day study of outer space, has been directed towards unveiling the mystery of *maya*.

It may seem to us as if *maya* functions in a magical way, yet one who understands how to perform magic is no stranger to its secrets. The magician is the master of his mysterious world. As there is a secret to be mastered in the practice of magic, so also there is one to be penetrated if we are to understand the mystery and power of *maya*. (I.2)

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Every unit of individuation in the world has its own unique distinguishing marks. The variation that occurs in the uniqueness of individuals, who are parts of an uncountable plurality, is the main characteristic of nature. Sankara defines *maya*, in his *Vivekacudamani*, as that which projects various and variegated impressions which are beginningless and of the form of ignorance. (I.5)

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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.

Man has not discovered any way of jumping out of his psychological outfit and rational speculation to find any means to solve this mystery. What he experiences is at once real and unreal, hence it is called *sat-asat*. The Absolute is *sat*, “that which exists.” But *maya* is indefinable in that it is impossible for the mind to conceptualize “it is” and “it is not” at one and the same time.

In this chapter the Guru is not asking us to add to the already very many perceptual and conceptual patterns we have created. Instead, he is asking us to get rid of them so that we can go back to our primal consciousness. In his “Universal Prayer” Narayana Guru says:

Are you not *maya*, the wielder of *maya*,  
and also the rejoice in *maya*?  
Are you not the True One who,  
having removed *maya*, grants the Supreme Union?

Here the dispenser of *maya* is not postulated as an outside factor. The mind which can structure a gestalt can also unstructure it.  
(II.3)

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\* Perception, according to Vedanta, is a temporary transference of the circumlimitation of the ego consciousness to become identified with the modulations of any unit which becomes an

object of perception. So close is this identification of the knower with the known that it is not possible to say whether we manifest ourselves as a “pot-identity,” or whether the pot is formulating itself where we experience the I-identity. Thus perception in Vedanta is an indiscernible confection of the observer and the observed happening within the realm of the Absolute. It is an experience of an apparent duality within the ambit of the nondual Absolute. This is why the Guru says a close scrutiny of the apparent reality of things restores all individuated objects to their primeval status as the Absolute. When viewed from this standpoint, *maya* becomes irrelevant. (II.7)

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*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.

[Nitya likens *maya* to the index of refraction in physics]

Here there are two factors to be noticed: the first is the effect produced by refraction and the other is the refraction itself. Refraction is a universal principle which can affect the optical vision of all people. 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.

It was by one such scrutiny that scientists arrived at the notion of refraction. 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. (III.8)

### Part III

Jay enjoyed the notes, I'm happy to report. Let's hear it for evolution:

Dear Scott,

Thanks for a wonderful narration on MAYA dershana in this email. I am reading it and try to assimilate. While doing so I had few thoughts which I would share with you:

To me the existence of MAYA is essential in order for us to experience it and then learn to avoid or overpower it. It is like in order to be fire proof one has to play with fire. MAYA is woven in life like the darkness and the light. It is the darkness that allows our appreciation of light. In other way of my thinking I consider MAYA as a test which one has to pass in order to graduate. It is obvious that this test is about evolving from Jiva to Shiva.