

## **VII Jnana Darsana, Consciousness and its Modifications**

### **Verse 1**

Knowledge is one indeed—unconditioned and conditioned; that, devoid of I-consciousness and so on, is the knowledge which is unconditioned.

4/24/7

Not much can be said about unconditioned knowledge. Okay, nothing really. The minute it is conceptualized it becomes conditioned. It is possible, however, to sit quietly, and when the quiet is total the unconditioned state can be ever-so-gently intuited. Moments like these can be said to be the aim of meditation at its best. Lots of meditations have goals and reasons and levels of achievement, but that's a different business altogether. In the spirit of the Bhagavad Gita, Narayana Guru devalues all forms of meditation with specific objectives as being subtle forms of transaction. Merger with the unconditioned Absolute is the only transcendental objective. If you are going to bother spending time sitting still, why not go for the best?

When we gently, gently merge into the unconditioned state, it has the effect of normalizing our consciousness. If we imagine ourselves to be disconnected individuals, we tend to reinforce certain aspects of our life and downplay others, becoming more and more lopsided over time. Dipping into the unconditioned state is like a healing bath in a hot spring or a cool swim in a mountain stream. Extraneous factors melt away, and the sense of “Ah!” permeates our being. As Nitya reminds us, “The unconditioned

state of awareness is our reality and it is always present.” If we can be brave enough to not need to egocentrize everything we encounter, an inner sense of our unity with all will fill us with the “Ah!” which is the first glyph of the “Aum.” We say “Ahhhh... Oooooo... Mmmmm...” Silence.... All four are forms of ecstatic expression.

Since describing the indescribable has a certain illogical cachet, we spent much of the class on other matters. We did have fine moments at the beginning and end where we availed ourselves of the group energies to settle into a penetrating quietude that was quite lovely. In between we shared personal experiences and tipped our hats to the section of Nitya’s commentary on the ubiquity of awareness. One of the most important, even essential, corollaries of realizing our unity with creation is to have reverence for other forms of life. Humankind’s swollen sense of importance is endangering our glorious planet, and needs to be tempered by greater inclusivity. Our awareness could ever so easily be expanded to embrace the importance of the rest of creation as well. Extending the definition of life to all matter is a further implication of knowing that spirit and matter coevolve, and one is not by any means the product of the other. All of this is readily self-evident to anyone who can let go of the desperate clinging of the ego.

Several class members noted that thoughts and words emerge from a far deeper level than our conscious awareness. If we had to deliberate everything we said or thought, our output would be paltry indeed. Luckily, we are blessed to be mere witnesses to a vast geyser of awareness and interpretation emerging from the darkness. The ego pretending it is in charge is like the harebrained leader rushing out to place himself at the front of the parade, as in the quote attributed to Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin: “Ah well! I am their leader, I really ought to follow them!” Trusting our inner voice to be a teacher and wise helpmate goes against our inculcation as “born sinners.” We’ll have to discard all such

poisonous baggage if we are going to travel light enough to keep up with the Guru from here on. We can realize we are identified with the tip of an iceberg, and humble ourselves by admitting we only know the tiniest piece of the whole. When we stop insisting the tip is all, awareness of the rest will begin to percolate into us.

Deb mentioned the beauty of life as the warp and woof of the cosmos. Nitya liked the less common ‘woof’ instead of the more proper ‘weft’, and we like to promote its use also, since it acknowledges one of the highest species on earth, and their characteristic barks of delight. There’s a little bit of divine mockery in ‘woof’ too, perhaps because it sounds so much like ‘spooof’.

The loom reference recalled a citation in the third volume of Nitya’s Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary, from Sir Charles Sherrington (1857-1952), one of the early founders of the science of neurophysiology and co-winner of the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1932. The internet (<http://www.whonamedit.com/doctor.cfm/2266.html>) drops some of his fascinating highlights right in my lap(top). He wrote:

“It is as if the Milky Way entered upon some cosmic dance. Swiftly the brain becomes an enchanted loom, where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern, always a meaningful pattern though never an abiding one; a shifting harmony of subpatterns.”

—The Integrative Action of the Nervous System

I can’t help but offer a couple more quotes from Sherrington to demonstrate that our stodgy view of scientists as arch-materialists is very far out of date, even if some scientists still buy into it:

“If as you say thoughts are an outcome of the brain we as students using the energy-concept know nothing of it; as followers of natural science we know nothing of any relation

between thoughts and the brain, except as a gross correlation in time and space. In some ways this is embarrassing for biology.”  
—Man On His Nature, page 229

“We have to regard the relation of mind to brain as not merely unresolved but still devoid of a basis for its very beginning.”  
—Man On His Nature

This is in reference to the tip of the iceberg analogy, showing that icebergs below the tip are far more visible than our mentation:

“The eye sends, as we saw, into the cell-and-fibre forest of the brain, throughout the waking day continual rhythmic streams of tiny, individually evanescent, electrical potentials. This throbbing streaming crowd of electrically shifting points in the spongework of the brain bears no obvious semblance in space-pattern, and even in temporal relation resembles but a little remotely the tiny two-dimensional upside-down picture of the outside world which the eyeball paints on the beginnings of its nerve-fibres to the brain. But that little picture sets up an electrical storm .... A shower of little electrical leaks conjures up for me, when I look at him approaching, my friend's face, and how distant he is from me they tell me. Taking their word for it, I go forward and my other senses confirm that he is there.”

—Man On His Nature, page 128-129

Sir Charles would certainly be welcome in any Gurukula! Science can be just as great a source of wonder as religion. The greatest wonder of all may be the matter-of-fact attitudes both sides adopt, which kills the sense of awe and substitutes banality. Why, why, why?

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6/27/17

Jnana Darsana verse 1

Knowledge is one indeed – unconditioned  
and conditioned; that, devoid of  
I-consciousness and so on,  
is the knowledge which is unconditioned.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Awareness is one and unconditioned, indeed.  
That is also the conditioned.  
Awareness without egoism, etc.  
That is the unconditioned.*

Lovely class last night, but unfortunately my brain is scrambled more than usual today, so you had to be there to enjoy the full impact. Fortunately I have several paste ins to do some of the work for me. So for today let's have scrambled class notes!

Nitya addresses several important issues, and only gets to the gist of the verse in his closing paragraph: "The unconditioned state of awareness is our true reality, and it is always present." The idea the verse expresses is that both conditioned and unconditioned states are included in the one knowledge that undergirds our existence. We tend to think of conditioned as bad and unconditioned as good, or if we're pragmatists the other way round, but both are complementary aspects of a sane outlook. One without the other is not complete. Reuniting them is the aim of this darsana on knowledge, as well as of Darsanamala as a whole. Nitya describes how the ego deflects our intrinsic balance:

In order to arrive at the notion of unconditioned consciousness we should think of the immanence of a consciousness that has the quality also of transcendence. When that pure consciousness becomes circumlimited, it produces a central locus and a boundary. The central locus produces the notion of individuation, and that notion is recognized as 'I' in the case of human beings. Repeated recourse to circumlimitation and the recurrence of the idea of 'I' makes one egotistically oriented. Thereafter the ego alone becomes real and experience is considered valid only when it is an affectation and expression of the ego. In short, one becomes a person of conditioned consciousness and a stranger to the unconditioned consciousness from which his individuation is derived. In fact the unconditioned state of awareness is our true reality, and it is always present. (329-30)

The image that came to my mind from this as I prepared for the class was of the ocean. Not the surface, as in the typical Vedantic metaphor, with its waves and riptides, but deep down in it, where there is water, water everywhere. Each individual being is like a body shaped out of water, within the water. Water is pressed into a rabbit shape, an ostrich shape, a human shape, but the boundary is, well, water. Whatever force is enlisted in holding it together soon gives out and there is nothing but undifferentiated water again.

This is meant to be a consoling image. Our ego identity is with the imaginary outline that is soon to dissolve, so we fret. But if we could identify with the essence that is eternal and surrounding us on all sides, our individuality becomes just a momentary miracle within a never-ending miracle. By relinquishing control, we aren't losing our self, but rather regaining everything we have unintentionally left out. Sure, we have to do whatever it takes to preserve the outlines of who we are for a

lifetime, but we can see how our destiny is not nearly as set in stone as we had tried to imagine.

The paradox is that when we cling to our temporary image, we risk losing the fluidity of our innate genius. Susan had just been reading in the Sunday Times about a jazz musician talking about improvisation, how he forgets himself utterly and then this amazing music flows forth. That's exactly what we are trying to do in our own life. We already have our own life skills, as the jazz musician has his musical skills, but then we have to let go of conscious control so our unconditioned self can sing forth with beautiful music. I cautioned that we often think of great artists and scientists and so forth as doing something we are incapable of ourselves, but Narayana Guru wants us to know that, humble as we are, we exemplify the same basic structure. We are almost infinitely capable, but we think of ourselves as ordinary and mediocre, nothing like those people who make the headlines. But we are! And our simplest act could be an enthralling improvisation. We should accept that making dinner, driving to the store, talking with a friend, cursing politicians, taking a bath, and so on, are our unique version of incredibleness. The less stuck we are, the better, but all of us have tremendous capabilities. We embody the proclivities of the Absolute. Nitya sings this tune yet again here:

The pure existence of the Self is seen manifested in and as the existence of individual entities. Such entities come and go, differentiations of the Undifferentiated; they occur in time and space, then pass away again into that unknown or nothingness from which they originated. (327)

Then he adds:

In terms of pure duration, the existence of things is to be treated as a relativistic factor. Only the Self has absolute existence. In

other words, the Self is to be seen as none other than Absolute Existence. The Self is the source of all awareness, and nothing can illuminate the Self that is not its own pure awareness. (327)

The word Self is chosen precisely so we don't deflect it elsewhere—it has to be us. And this state of affairs applies to all creatures great and small, and not just humans. Nitya uses the opportunity to emphasize an important corollary idea:

Pure awareness animates all individuated beings as well as animating the cosmos. This is true of all sentient beings. There are those among us who believe that only humans can be said to have a soul or an indwelling divinity. Certain sections of the Christian community attempt to justify the killing of animals and birds for food on the grounds that they have no souls. Many scientists believe that only man has intelligence, that the so-called lower forms of life are motivated by instinct only. Such outmoded beliefs are seen today to be untenable, not only so far as animals are concerned but also in regard to the vegetable kingdom. (329)

He then cites Sir Chandra Bose's *The Secret Life of Plants*, and John Lilly's work with whales and dolphins. In the forty years since Darsanamala was first drafted, much more has been appreciated about nonhuman intelligence, which is a subject that has exploded in recent years. For instance, the July 2017 issue of *Scientific American* has an article on "hearing" in plants. While noting that Bose's experiments have not often been reliably reproduced, a number of other abilities have been discovered in plants. The report includes roots growing toward the mere sound of water, and a phenomenon called "buzz pollination" where a certain frequency of buzzing has caused plants to release pollen in anticipation of their favorite bees dropping in. In an earlier



experiment another type of plant distinguished between recordings of a caterpillar chewing and wind sounds, producing protective chemicals in response to the chewing noises. Deb was reminded of hearing from a basket maker in Botswana that acacia trees make a bitter tasting chemical when their neighbors are being eaten by elephants. The chemical changes the color of the tree fibers, paving the way for her multicolored basketry. The plants can also “smell” these chemicals, and other types appear to “talk” together through their roots.

We have reported in past notes on the many recent studies of animal intelligence. It seems that once scientists started looking for it, it was all over the place. Only willful ignorance supported the longstanding belief in “dumb animals.” Narayana Guru noted that even insects try to escape death, revealing an acute awareness of their surroundings and an urge to survive. The perspective of mystics ancient and modern is that universal consciousness is the basis of existence. Some scientists now insist that consciousness is an emergent property of matter. Narayana Guru is among the integrationists, who suggest that consciousness and matter arise and subside together, dual aspects of a ubiquitous will to exist, which is the “one knowledge” cited in the verse.

Other than recognizing the intelligence involved in every aspect of existence, Nitya once again touches on the impact of pain and pleasure on conditioning our responses and preventing us from playing our jazz with abandon:

In our daily life we continually experience items of affectivity which very much influence our response and outlook. We are affected by pain and pleasure and many other shades of value. Although we may not be aware of doing so, we measure the affective quality of every experience against that absolute norm of happiness which is the very nature of the Self. Except in the case of Self-realization, this value of sublime happiness is

experienced only as a momentary flash. Our ordinary value-sense remains on an individual, relativistic level. (328)

E.E. Cummings, with little or no direct knowledge of Eastern thought but living in the lovely afterglow of the Transcendentalist movement, wrote a sonnet (reproduced in Part II) that includes this very Vedantic verse:

pleasure and pain are merely surfaces  
(one itself showing, itself hiding one)  
life's only and true value neither is  
love makes the little thickness of the coin

So well put! The true value of life transcends considerations of pain and pleasure. If they are all we value, we are living at a truncated level of expression. Narayana Guru and Nitya keep beckoning us to let go of our tawdry obsessions and discover the transcendental value variously known as Love, Self, Nature, Absolute, or simply Life.

Since we opened with the last paragraph, let us close with an introductory idea:

Now we have come to the darsana on “vision by knowledge.” This introduces us to the holistic vision of the total awareness of the Self. A clear understanding of this teaching will enable us to discover the relevancy of all individualized forms of existence. These forms come to us as the result of individual notions which imply a number of specific values. Such values range from the highest possible joy, satisfaction, sense of fulfillment, or peace, to the most disturbing, agonizing and painful misery. (328)

Following the plan of the darsana, we have begun with relative knowledge and will wind up at absolute knowledge by the tenth verse. Stay tuned.

## Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

By awareness we mean that which is in the form of mental consciousness inside the bodies of animals. This enables mental consciousness to have the awareness of all things within the intelligence. This awareness which is an attribute of the Self remains as one in its true state without any activities or conditionings of the intelligence. In spite of this, when, in practical life, it is connected with egoism and other operations of mind it becomes conditioned. When it is unconnected with such factors as egoism it remains unconditioned.

\* \* \*

The complete E.E. Cummings sonnet:

hate blows a bubble of despair into  
hugeness world system universe and bang  
—fear buries a tomorrow under woe  
and up comes yesterday most green and young

pleasure and pain are merely surfaces  
(one itself showing, itself hiding one)  
life's only and true value neither is  
love makes the little thickness of the coin

comes here a man would have from madame death

nevertheless now and without winter spring?  
she'll spin that spirit her own fingers with  
and give him nothing (if he should not sing)

how much more than enough for both of us  
darling. And if i sing you are my voice

\* \* \*

From ISOA, an idea applicable to the whole of our study, from the third chapter titled Phenomenology. It opens with a revelation about dialectic/yoga wisdom, that the resulting synthesis doesn't erase existence but *encloses* it:

Antinomies such as science and nescience, truth and error, are not treated by Narayana Guru as capable of being strictly cancelled out leaving no remainder of content. There is a subtle bracketing principle as in Husserl's fundamental phenomenology where the bottom of a receptacle and its lid are put together in such a way that the content still remains existent and real. Paradox when resolved does not abolish all content into nothingness. On the contrary, by a reasoning involving both a double assertion and a double negation, the full absolute existence is reaffirmed rather than emptied into nothingness. (388-9)

The next section of the same chapter also features some important ideas relevant to our study:

### 1. The Epistemological Status of This Chapter

It is necessary to clarify here the epistemological and methodological status of this chapter and the factors

constituting the relationship between other chapters as well as the inner relationships as between the ten verses. This is important because it is the way integration is accomplished. Integration is always more important than a mere detailed examination of contents. There is already plenty of literature discussing in almost hair-splitting fashion the various implications of the Science of the Absolute. The numerous commentaries on Brahmasutras are examples of this.

While it is easy to take the elements that constitute brahma-vidya (the Science of the Absolute) apart and minutely and separately examine each component element, the reverse process is not at all an easy one. Even an amateur watchmaker can take a watch apart but to put it correctly together again requires the skill of an expert. The structural vision of the mechanism as a totality must be understood by anyone attempting to fit the fractional aspects together. This is all the more true in the present case where Narayana Guru has made a garland of visions, where each jewel is meant to be correctly interpreted and related to the overall resultant product. Minute workmanship is there in each unit-piece, but how they are linked together with cardinal and ordinal elements respected throughout is the very factor which alone gives a scientific status to the whole subject.

We have seen how even within the sphere of modern phenomenology there are differing standpoints where emphasis is placed on one or another of its features, which between them offer a variety. We have tried to link together and review this variety in a certain methodic order. The same is true in respect of each of the verses of the present chapter, as also of the content of this chapter as a whole when related to the chapters immediately preceding and following it.

What is the *raison d'être* of this chapter, especially when there is another, the next chapter, which is also devoted to

appearance and illusion treated as an overall category of error (maya)? In the present chapter the gross and the subtle aspects of a similar world of phenomenological realities have been reduced to unity by a methodology proper to such reduction. We pointed out how it was in terms of an *elan vital* of a more positive order than the present that the reduction was accomplished. In the succeeding chapter on maya not only is ontological and phenomenological reality reconciled or cancelled out with its corresponding counterparts, but it features having a more thoroughgoing epistemological status. We find elements admitted belonging to a purer abstraction than what phenomenology admits. Phenomenology belongs precisely to that sphere where the visible meets the intelligible on neutral ground. We are more directly concerned here with the world of appearances. No doubt this world of appearances is an effect of a more deeply seated cause which is the mind, but for the purposes of this chapter it is the equation of effect with its cause that we are primarily concerned about.

We have also to note that Narayana Guru departs somewhat from the usual Vedantic tradition by introducing herein what amounts to a new darsana. Much confusion is seen in Vedantic literature on the question of making matter and mind and the pure and the practical participate together with material aspects correctly inserted into mental aspects, so that a proper articulation results in a mutual relationship without cleavage between them. Arguments admitting of contradiction have to be used in the world of cause and effect, where material considerations prevail over mental ones. In the pure domain of thought, however, it is possible to use a higher form of dialectical reasoning where the principle of contradiction can be bypassed without difficulty.

How could a good God create an evil world? How can gross and subtle life expressions exist together? These are problems

which require a neutral ground between mind and matter which alone can explain the two-sided relationship. When Vedanta speaks of the living Self (jivatma) caught in the cyclic process of being and becoming (samsara) and at the same time speaks of souls entering into Brahman (the Absolute), two kinds of logic have to be used. This precise kind of difficulty has vitiated much of the hair-splitting polemics of Brahmasutras. The commentaries on this work have some very unconvincing arguments and conclusions clothed in confusing verbosity. This chapter is meant to dispel the difficulties arising from this lack of equality of status between matter and mind. We find that once and for all, by introducing an unusual darsana of his own, Narayana Guru succeeds in meeting many of the issues which crop up ad nauseam in the form of vain sophistry.

This is particularly true in the scholastic developments of Vedanta after Sankara. (389-91)