

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

Verse 5

When things are known as they are, as in the knowledge of the truth of rope, that is factual knowledge, and fictitious when it is otherwise.

5/22/7

A great night where the class added many pounds of flesh to the bare bones of the verse, precisely the aim of the “wisdom sacrifice” of gathering to ponder together. Communion. Out of the many topics we covered, the most salient was precipitated by Nitya’s opening salvo:

In their search for truth, the tyranny of words can be a major hurdle for most people.... The basis of language is words, but in themselves words express no truths. A word is, so to speak, a frame which encloses a meaning which stems from collective agreement.... The relation between language and truth may be compared to that existing between a road map and actual places: “the map is not the territory.” (340)

The class noted how we are swimming in a sea of knowledge all the time, but we selectively recognize only what we have comfortably marked out by word concepts. Thus, the aliveness of reality is destroyed. Like Procrustes, we cut down reality to match our feeble dimensions of actuality. We relate to the map, and the territory is abandoned, potentially devastated.

Before going farther, this is the very verse where Nitya mentions his seminal differentiation between ‘real’ and ‘actual’, now used as a matter of course in the Narayana Gurukula: “We would very much like to use the English word ‘real’ to mean absolute truth, in contradistinction to the word ‘actual’. Such a concept is not attached to the word ‘real’ by lexicographers. However, in the present study we intend to attach that concept to the word so that the reader will always distinguish the real from the actual.” (341) Actual refers to the truth as in this verse, of seeing passing events as they truly are, whereas real penetrates to their essence. Actuality changes constantly, while reality persists. The territory is real, while the map is actual.

This distinction is especially important because our word frames do not really match the actuality, much less the reality, of what we experience. Connecting with reality is the overarching subject of Darsanamala, but for the nonce we are also trying to accurately connect with actuality. Improving the match between our frame of reference and the world as it is has a tremendous positive impact on our lives.

When we think of word frames, we tend to picture a gilded, rectangular frame of fine workmanship. If we were more honest with ourselves, we would see that our frames are bent and distorted, with jagged shards of glass and rusty nails sticking to them. In the corners cobwebs lie thick. The gilding is falling off, and whole pieces are missing or crushed beyond repair. Viewing the world through a damaged frame distorts everything. Much of Vedanta study is to repair the frame and throw away the broken parts that keep cutting us to the quick. To undervalue such an enterprise means we have gotten used to the pain of misconceptions ripping our flesh. To survive it, we pin the blame on others.

Disdaining the value of words instead of actively renormalizing their impact on us means we will have to be content

with all the handicaps we have accumulated over a lifetime. Anita shared a fabulous example. She recently examined a painful watershed experience in her past, and became aware that because of that experience she had internalized an extremely negative self-description. Without being consciously aware of it, for thirty years she had been repeating words that held her in a vise of pain. That secret mantra expanded to color and undermine her whole life. Now she can apply some yoga-dialectic and countermand those words with a positive antidote. When the words cancel each other out, she can stand poised in neutrality, free at last of a major impediment. The most difficult part of the process, by far, is recognizing the hidden and damaged frame. Once sighted, repair is relatively simple, and devoutly to be wished. We should all have healthy frames of reference, and the world would be a far happier place.

It is well and good to also keep in mind that fixing our frame of reference is only part of the process, that no matter how excellent the frame it can never fully replicate reality. Frames automatically convert reality to actuality. Philosophers and scientists strive to build a frame to encompass everything, so of course their frames are always being amended and stretched. It is better to recognize that reality cannot be reduced to any formula, however grand. We can and should expand and normalize our frames, but we should also bow our heads to the wonder and mystery of reality, ever ungraspable and transcendent. There is no *need* to squeeze reality into a frame—it should run wild and free. So fix the damage and then step outside all self-imposed limitations.

The emptiness and despair of modern life is closely related to accepting only what is framed in words, and disregarding what doesn't make the cut. The class noted how we are intuitively aware of a vast amount of input, but we don't pay it much attention until we convert it into words. We imagine it only becomes "true" when

we conceptualize it. Great thinkers dive into the subconscious realms to have oceanic experiences, but then they come back and try to describe what happened. In the process, a living event changes into a dead replica of an event. It is like visiting a morgue: we admire the exquisite corpse of this or that person's experience. We nod grimly and identify the body, in familiar terms. And we hope to some day bring out a corpse of our own, to show off in the great human mausoleum. It would be far better to be inspired to go out and imbibe life, and let the dead bury the dead.

Narayana Guru would very much have us come alive. Living, we communicate worlds without ever having to say a word. When we do speak, we can be aware that we are truncating reality and converting it to actuality. As Deb said, this should bring us a deep sense of humility. We will never imagine our version is the only right one, and try to push it on others. Most importantly, we won't push it on ourselves. We will use our repaired and beautified frames as a leaping off platform, to soar into the unknown.

Part II

Looking for the real in the actual,
I thought of effective research:

Seeking the needle of cause
in the haystack of correlation,
all the while missing the point:
the cause of the haystack itself
is none other than the seeker.

--Baird

Part III

Verse VII, 5 also contains the (locally) famous paragraph on the worthlessness of books, lamenting the conversion of so many living trees into dead pulp for no good purpose. Nitya insists, “Even the best of those books contain only information, bits of conditional perceptions or conceptual ideas. They cannot of themselves give us or engender in us that which he who seeks the Self is looking for.” It is certainly jarring to find these words in a book, especially one from which we are seeking to learn about the Self. But it does remind us that much of Nitya’s output was extemporaneous speaking that was captured on paper by those around him who wished to preserve his words to share with those who weren’t present. Those of us who had to be far away from him most of the time are eternally grateful for whatever faint shadow of those exquisite mornings and evenings has remained enshrined in his books.

Nitya loved books very much. He was surrounded by them and was always looking for more. He considered his own books his children, the only offspring he was going to have as a sexual renunciate. But the diatribe against them here in Darsanamala is well taken. All too often we read wise words and nod in agreement and move on to the next thing. It takes a special effort to bring them alive in the heart. We must read them and then go beyond them, just as we convert written music into a vital performance. The Gurukula classes are an excellent way to use the words to vault into direct confrontations with their meaning.

When we hold our classes, someone, usually me these days, as editor of the book we’re studying, reads out the verse commentary. Afterwards we sit quietly pondering for a while and then have a discussion. I consider it a little unfortunate that everybody reads along in their own copy, instead of just listening. In one way they “get more” from seeing the words as they are read out, but they also lose that word-transcending state of mind that comes from listening hard to try to grasp what is spilling out into

the air. This is closely connected to what was talked about above in Part I, that we don't fully accept or recognize things until we structure them verbally. Aural input has a different impact than visual input, even if both are in the form of words. It is more direct and goes much deeper into the psyche. Like the sense of smell, our ability to listen well as modern humans is vestigial. We should use every chance we get to recover that latent aptitude. If you try it, you'll see it adds an extra dimension to the experience.

* * *

8/1/17

Jnana Darsana verse 5

When things are known as they are,
as in the knowledge of the truth of rope,
that is factual knowledge,
and fictitious when it is otherwise.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*Knowing things as they really are
As when one attains to the truth of the rope
What makes for such, is true awareness
Wrong (awareness) is what is otherwise.*

Heat waves always remind me of long days dripping sweat and sizzling, my mind melted into a stuporous quasi-meditative state in stifling rooms at Nitya's talks in India. Chennai always comes to mind as the hottest of the hot. We barely touched that kind of sweat lodge intensity last night, though more heat is on the way today. I have already had two participants report amazing dreams, perhaps stimulated by the class and surely sparked by the

temperature. Warm nights are so sensual! And rare enough here in the very temperate Portland hills.

Once more Nitya takes a superficially simple verse and spins a profound lesson for us. This is one of those where the surface level acts additionally as a cover for a guru-impulsion to help us break free of our baggage, as we referred to it. I recommended the class not follow the reading in their books but see if they could use it as a launching pad to access the stable center of their being that transcends all modulations.

You may recall that the last verse ended: “Even in the case of knowledge of the non-Self there can be right knowledge and erroneous knowledge. Both are conditional. The guru will describe these in the next verse.” So, there are two distinctions to make: between accurate and erroneous interpretations, and between conditional and unconditional awareness. While the former is definitely important, the latter necessitates a quantum leap from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Bill and Deb opened the class musing on the many binding factors that influence our perception and keep us fixed in place. As Deb put it, perception is not only a physical fact, we superimpose our conditioning on it.

Darsanamala was written in the period when Nitya was keen on the distinction between the real and the actual. I remember him introducing it as a kind of revelation he had had, and I found it mind-blowing. He introduces his insight here:

The main and pressing question before us we find to be whether the actual is also the real. Usually we consider the word ‘real’ as being synonymous with the word ‘actual’.... We would very much like to use the English word ‘real’ to mean absolute truth, in contradistinction to the word ‘actual’. Such a concept is not attached to the word ‘real’ by lexicographers. However, in the present study we intend to attach that concept

to the word so that the reader will always distinguish the real from the actual. (341)

Actual refers to the ever-changing horizontal world of sensory perception, while *real* in the Vedantic sense is the stable or eternal ground that enables the transformations to take place. Ordinarily we conflate the two terms, and Western philosophy and science is aimed at finding reality by accurately pinning down actual events and objects. While there is nothing particularly wrong with this, it leaves out the most important element, the causal ground. Reality does not reside in actual items—they reside in it. There is a widespread attempt underway these days to achieve reality in the most detailed analysis of the actual, but as Bushra affirmed, there is no end to the potential analysis of the manifested world. There is always an opposite to whatever you pin your hopes on. So reality has to be accessed by a different sort of investigation. Since it abides in us, it's more about reducing our fascination with actuality and sinking into what's left over when the actual is stilled. We can use words unconventionally, working on our conditioning by looking closely at the hold they have over us. Nitya draws our attention to the importance of doing this by invoking a ferocious buzzword, tyranny:

In their search for truth, the tyranny of the meanings of words can be a major hurdle for most people. For most, mentation is verbalized – a kind of inner dialogue. (340)

Coincidentally, the current issue of *Scientific American* (August 2017) has a fairly rudimentary but promising article about brain imaging being newly employed to study the inner narrator: *What Self-Talk Reveals about the Brain*, by Charles Fernyhough. fMRI reveals that different parts of the brain are involved with varying types of self-talk, such as inner monologue, inner dialogue,

whether the stream was produced intentionally or arose naturally. Dialogues matched the brain patterns of speaking with other people—they really were like two different perspectives being processed. Moreover, “In terms of patterns of brain activation, naturally occurring inner speech contrasted dramatically with the kind that is produced on demand.” Not surprisingly, the naturally occurring ideas seemed to be more creative:

Inner speech can provide some clues about the origin of human creativity. Once people have the architecture for internal conversations, we can use it in all sorts of ways, from arguing with ourselves to conversing with an entity that is not there. Because we have internalized dialogues with others, we retain an “open slot” for the perspectives of other beings: whether or not they are present, are still alive or ever even existed. My dialogues with God, a deceased parent or an imaginary friend can be as richly creative as those I have with myself. Asking ourselves questions and then answering them may be a crucial bit of apparatus for taking our thoughts into new territories.

Although our present place in Darsanamala is about thoroughly transcending the dictatorial weight of words, in the overall picture words are still accorded their central role in our existence. That being the case, here’s one more excerpt from the article that can help us examine the flow of our thoughts in a critical way:

Much of the power of self-talk comes from the way it orchestrates a dialogue between different points of view. Like the collaboration my colleagues and I saw between the language system of the left hemisphere and the social cognition networks of the right, the inner speech network must be able to “plug in” to other neural systems as the situation demands—when we have verbal thoughts about the past and future, when

we use words to talk ourselves through demanding tasks or when our mind simply wanders, with no particular objective in mind. If researchers get the science right, verbal thought stands to elucidate all these features of our cognition.

We don't have to wait for more experiments to be run, these results simply confirm what we could easily observe for ourselves if we took the trouble to look.

Nitya reprises the well-known truth about how words relate to what they indicate:

The relation between language and truth may be compared to that existing between a road map and actual places: "the map is not the territory." (340)

Nitya's commentary also contains an infamous screed against books and book learning. Yet Nitya was one of the greatest book lovers of all time. My feeling is that he was intentionally shocking us about our obsession with words to impart the energy for a possible breakthrough. It isn't that we are meant to take his words as the Last Word, to believe in them religiously, but only to take a good look at how much we *are* tied to maps over territories. And to not do it in terms of more words, but more intuitively.

One of my current books (*Micro*, by Michael Crichton and finished posthumously by Richard Preston) muses on how, while environmental consciousness is rapidly expanding, contact with the natural world is even more rapidly diminishing, to the point where vast numbers of children have virtually no contact at all with nature absent human framing. They live their whole lives in cities and screens. Yes, there are programs here and there to give kids a week in the country, but the very fact that they exist at all says volumes about our disconnection from Mother Earth. It is a vivid

predicament that in the present terms of our study, we are wise to the actual world, but know little or nothing about the real one.

Certainly it is unfortunate that the actual world is routinely portrayed as reality incarnate. Why then should we look beyond the end of our noses? We can plainly see all there is. The scientific discoveries of the early twentieth century have yet to sink in: that what you see is *not* what you get. Reality is more concealed than revealed by what our senses and even our minds register.

“In the present darsana Narayana Guru makes a distinction between knowledge of the Self, and knowledge of things.” Despite the distinction, both are forms of mental modulation, and so belong to the actual as opposed to the real. Reality cannot be modulated. We aren’t meant to get a swelled head over looking to the Self instead of beautiful objects for our delight, or like some materialists, over ignoring the Self in favor of pure objectification. The idea is not to get a swelled head at all, because they are all forms of consciousness. We should see how they are the same:

Let us look at an object of perception such as an apple and an object of knowledge such as the self. What are these items of experience again? These are also modulations of consciousness – two kinds of impressions or ideations. They are both merely modulations of consciousness, different only in the quality of the properties that constitute the experiences. (344-5)

This reminded me of my apple experiment some of you may remember, that demonstrates how much projection we add to our engagement with actuality. You can read it [here](#).

So there is good reason to be aware of Narayana Guru’s distinction between objects and their essence. Nitya warns us we should go beyond this perfectly valid distinction, lest we get caught in quotidian entanglements:

Unfortunately we do not minimize the problem when we draw a line between a concept and an actual entity. Instead we find ourselves in a strange kind of confrontation with the actualities of life. (341)

Here we are definitely counseled not to seek the real in the actual, or—since the real is already in everything—as the sole propriety of the actual. Because the actual is continually changing, we can perceive its reality yet as soon as we say “This is it,” it is no longer quite so real. We can say “This *was* it, once,” yet even though true it is absurd. God is not limited to “my church,” no matter how uplifted you feel in it. Nitya expresses the distinction very clearly:

The scientific discipline given to us in schools is to observe, to weigh and measure, and to judge with precision the properties of things perceived. This is done so that our understanding of the transactional world may be as accurate as possible. When a person turns his mind to seek the truth of the Self, he enters a field where there is nothing to observe objectively and nothing which can be measured with any device whatsoever. The truth he is seeking is the truth of all things. The scientist has a method he can use to arrive at the truth he seeks, but the seeker of higher truth has to know what gives validity to any method, and why truth is truth. The latter’s questions are much more basic and fundamental. (341-2)

I have appended an old unfinished article of mine, What Is Truth? in Part II, which collects several definitions of reality to demonstrate their circularity. It’s long, but is amusing and informative regarding truth and its guises.

Nitya fine-tunes his point a couple of times here, on page 342, again coaxing us to hear his words and also let them go:

The certitude we arrive at in the world of transactions has reality only within the frame of reference of an actual transaction. The real or absolute knowledge is the *beingness* of knowledge. It is not the knowledge of any thing.

And another time:

It is not necessary for a great Guru to come and tell us that to see rope as rope is right knowledge and that to see rope as snake is wrong knowledge. Even a child knows this. The reference to certitude and actuality is to call our attention to what we miss in our endless pursuit of details and precision in the empirical world of our search. We seldom, if ever, notice the unbroken existence of pure knowledge, which is none other than the Self. This pure knowledge, when experienced, enables the individuated consciousness to transcend the fixations in which it is riveted, that is, to transcend the empirical and the transactional.

Nitya's last few pages are the kind of talk that can be taken to heart with enough diligence, but I see it more as one of his tricks. After introducing the subject, he unmoors our minds with a complex barrage of ideas, so we can intuit rather than intellectualize what he is getting at. It's a bit like covering the seed he just planted with dirt, tamping it down and sprinkling some water on it. One day it may grow. It isn't meant to come up immediately. Nitya does boil the complexity down to its essence in one well-crafted paragraph:

After thus presenting his case, the Vedantin introduces the principle of homogeneity. The subject 'I', and the evidence, knowledge, or perception of it; the apple as an object and the perception of it; and the evident knowledge of the self, all have one common factor. They are all aspects of consciousness.

What is this one consciousness that permeates the subject, the experience, and the objects of experience? It is this the Vedantin calls the Self. Without the presence of this Self neither the mind nor the senses can produce any effective modulation of consciousness. The Vedantin now draws the conclusion that the primary cause of knowledge, whether of immediate perception or of intuitive perception, is the self-luminous consciousness which is none other than the Self. (345)

He compares this to the Western perspective that external causes produce reflexive responses in us as their effects. I suggested that the external causation model subtly influences people to think of themselves as victims of fate and therefore helpless, whereas the Vedantic model invites us to join the dance. Deb quoted Nitya's familiar line that we are co-creators with the Absolute of our existence. Even if there is no truth anywhere, a model that encourages joyous participation seems a better choice than one that directs us to become docile victims. Andy astutely added that external causality also invites the victor mentality: victor and victim are two sides of the false coin minted by abandoning our central role in life. This model has produced the glaring gulf between the haves and the have-nots that plagues us even now.

There was so much more to the class, but that's enough for now, except for the additional material I've added to Part II because it didn't fit the flow. Portland may hit its all-time high temperature today or tomorrow, and my brain is starting to melt. We concluded the evening by honoring the consolation residing in the knowledge that the Self is not anything far off. We don't have to mount an expedition or tie our body in knots or anything complicated to achieve it. We just have to turn our attention to our Self. It sometimes requires sitting quietly apart from the madding crowd, the to-dos and all the stimulation, but it's always there, waiting for us to know it. We can't lose our soul, because we *are*

our soul. Likewise we are the Self. It can never be lost, yet we can go through a whole life ignorant of its existence, even as it guides our footsteps. That is a loss we don't care to suffer. Aum.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

It is possible to have a right or wrong awareness of rope. That awareness which is capable of recognising in the rope its own rope-character is right awareness. While that awareness which is capable of mistaking the same rope for a snake due to visual defects in contrary fashion is wrong awareness. Knowing things-as-they-are is distinguished as right awareness and cognising them as they are not is wrong awareness. These two forms of awareness are of a conditioned order.

* * *

A valuable subtheme didn't fit into the above narrative, so I'm adding it separately. Echoing Patanjali, we accorded mental modulations the role of actuality and the cessation of modulation as bringing us in harmony with the real. Paul got a laugh by saying how our modulations are scary, even terrifying at times. We can't live without them, yet we know they are heavy baggage. Do we have to always carry all of it? Modulations are useful in ensuring our survival, but they also dictate our responses, binding us tightly. Paul did admit that just knowing how we are labeling everything takes some of the intensity out of our more extreme reactions of either anger or happiness.

Andy has been confronting similar questions lately, and laughingly acknowledged that modulations are definitely scary. He is really realizing how this philosophy is meant to free us from

fear, since even the ‘I’—the playground of fear—is an object of knowledge. We have a sense of being the agent of our own experiences, and yet aren’t we a reflection of something more profound? The coherency of life is an utter marvel. The bottom line is that the Self is never the object of perception. It can’t be pigeonholed or reduced in any way. The truth of this as Andy has been experiencing it recently showed as a tangible reverence that touched everyone in the room.

Deb argued against Paul’s idea of casting off our baggage, maintaining that it is an essential part of who we are. The trick was (in her favorite Gurukula cliché) to maintain a transparency of vision. All that stuff is still there, but you don’t hold on as tightly to it. You see it and do what you have to do, but it doesn’t drive you to programmed responses. Or you don’t give in as much to the urge to respond in your typical fashion. Instead we keep attuned to the greater illumination within us. Andy agreed that our true reality never leaves; it is always available to us.

The exchange reminded Susan of the first verse of Atmopadesa Satakam:

Permeating the knowledge which brilliantly shines
at once within and without the knower
is the *karu*; to that, with the five senses withheld,
prostrate again and again with devotion and chant.

This time what stood out for her was withholding the five senses in order to focus on the central verity. There is a more radical note involved here than we usually admit. It’s much easier to just presume that we are part of reality and whistle a happy tune. But when the chips are down, that doesn’t always work so well. The gurus advocate practicing relinquishing the senses, against the day when they turn against us. (As they already have.) Susan reported that she has been practicing something similar in her guided

meditations: relaxing different parts of her body, letting go of sensations in order to encounter the Self.

I added that the Karu was another name for unmodulated consciousness, or perhaps even unmodulated unconsciousness. The term serves especially well because it hasn't always been in our repertoire of names for the unnamable, unless we hail from Kerala.

* * *

Here's my old research into truth from almost 10 years ago, which didn't progress too far, yet is interesting as far as it got. I especially like the circular definitions early on. I believe this came from the last Gita class, in 2008.

What is truth? – in progress

To anyone mulling over truth in depth for a while, it becomes clear that it cannot be a specific thing and has no fixed abode. But while nothing definite in itself, it can act as a lodestone or lodestar, as an inspiration for contemplation to flow ever onward, sweeping unquestioned assumptions and misapprehensions out of the way as the contemplative proceeds.

The Bible says, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”—but what is it? The search for meaning—the meaning of meaning—is an integral part of the spiritual quest.

from the Random House dikker:

actual – existing in act or fact; real.

be – to exist.

exist – to have actual being; be.

fact – the quality of existing or of being real; actuality; truth.

real – true; actual.

reality – that which is real.

true – in accordance with and not contrary to fact. Having a basis in fact.

truth – true or actual state of a matter. Conformity with fact or reality; verity.

verity – the state or quality of being true.

All the above definitions are circular, in other words they are defined in terms of each other. It boils down to truth = truth, or truth is what is true.

Even though a study of our organism casts doubt on the veracity of what we perceive, by common agreement perception is the basis of certitude. Clear-eyed seeing is indeed an accomplishment, since we tend to see what we believe. Part of any educational process aims to overcome our partisan beliefs to establish a universal norm of truth or validity. We can then compare our perceptions with the norm to arrive at a kind of truth. The issue becomes more difficult when we realize that what is considered a universal norm is usually already biased in favor of the established order.

Philosophical Encyclopedia

Coherence Theory of Truth:

In most systems of thought – “the criterion of truth is indeed the coherence of the statement under consideration with at least some other members of the system.”

After asserting that everything is thus a judgment – “Coherence of one judgment with another is accepted as a practical test of truth only because the second judgment is independently accepted as true.”

“What appears to be true might turn out to be false when its further connections become known.”

“Any attempt to change the meaning of ‘coherence’ from coherence with other statements to coherence with fact (or reality of experience) is to abandon the theory.” (II, 131-133)

After studying Western philosophy on the subject, it's pretty clear that most of the wrangling is about verifying the truth of propositions compared to actual things. It seeks to determine and describe isolated items that are known as facts. Modern science has basically put this whole line of thought out of business by demonstrating the continuous movement and inherent indeterminacy of everything, both physical and psychological (or metaphysical).

Indian philosophy, on the other hand, equates truth with the Absolute, with the reality that undergirds all those indeterminate things. This may sound like begging the question, but in fact it's getting exactly to the point. The Nothingness that is the Source and Substance of everything is overlain with layer after layer of matter, energy, thought, perception, imagination and so on. All these proceed from and are influenced by the Source, are intrinsically shaped by it, and so in a sense they are defined or verified by it. To truly know things one needs to know where they come from, their origin. The game of seeking truth consists of peeling away those layers, either deliberately and stepwise beginning with the most crude, or all at once in a lightning flash of insight. To spend an instant allied with truth is the consummation devoutly to be wished by the seeker. Then, as the seeker inevitably interprets the experience, layers are added back on top of the truth, but they are—potentially at least—fresh and less convoluted by multiple layers of misunderstanding, and thus more in line with relative or factual truth (whatever that may be!) as well.

from Nataraja Guru:

When one says that there are absolute and relative truths, one unconsciously creates in the mind two rival entities answering to the requirement of what is called truth. These two rival truths are two limiting instances of a more neutral and central notion which combines in its scope these two possible variations. Thus, we have in the context of the two antinomies referring to the absolute as plus or minus limiting notions, one which can be pluralistic while the other will not admit of any pluralism. What admits of pluralism can be placed subjectively, for purposes of linguistic clarity, at the bottom of the vertical axis. What does not admit of pluralism as a concept more positively understood finds its place as a limiting case on the plus side of the vertical axis. The normative Absolute will have its structural position at the very centre of the total knowledge-situation. This means we have a relative of an absolutist context and an Absolute of an absolutist context. They are positive and negative limiting cases of a normative Absolute which implies normalising and renormalising with reference to the two others. (ISOA Vol I p. 239)

We did discuss the elusiveness of truth while acknowledging our inner certitude about it. The difficulty of pinning truth down has left ample room for propagandists to try the experiment of seeing just how far truth can be stretched before it breaks. As Focksnooze says “The truth is what we say it is,” and a high Bush cabal figure admitted this summer “We make our own reality.” Actually, we all do this to some extent, so it is very difficult to refute. One would have to be able to define truth, which we’ve found to be impossible. I guess all we can say in the final analysis is it’s too bad the reality they want to make is so ugly and cruel, when they could just as easily make one that’s loving and fun. Decisions like

that are a form of “acid test” likely to determine where each person is headed in the long run.

Nature bats last. You manipulate truth at your own peril. Falsehood is both contagious and difficult to extricate ourselves from.

Jebra wondered about how dialectics related to truth, in other words whether truth is an absolute value or a relative one to be contrasted with untruth. A most interesting dilemma to ponder. Other than mentioning where Nitya is going in this excerpt—that absolute truth doesn’t require our ratification to exist but untruth does—we didn’t go too far into it. It’s something intriguing to ponder when you’re stuck in traffic or waiting for the bus this winter. A wisdom sacrifice: instead of imagining what you’re going to do when you get where you’re going, meditate on the significance of truth. Then when you arrive you can just take things as they come. That way no “time” will be “wasted”.

This offered a nice contrast with truth, which can be contentious and intellectually challenging to grasp. Although it’s also an ideal, no one has a problem with beauty. The state of mind that sees beauty everywhere is one that is properly attuned to the Absolute. The Absolute could as well be defined as the beauty within everything as the truth within everything.

Moreover, the dialectic state of the poem that views our lives as manifestations of the unmanifest divine—limbs for the Talking God to articulate through—is central to the Bhagavad Gita as well. This is a lovely concept, but not without its downside, as religious warriors clearly attest. It brings in the problem of how we discriminate between God’s will and our own.

Part III

The *Integrated Science of the Absolute* has a lot to offer our study (not surprisingly). Appearance and reality are exactly the same as

actuality and reality, as Nitya muses on in this verse. Nataraja Guru has this to say about them:

The Absolute is not a thing, nor is it a mere idea. When the philosopher has correctly located the paradox lurking between appearance and reality, the paradox itself tends to be abolished into the Absolute. The Absolute is a neutral notion in which all real things and all possible ideas about them can be comprised without contradiction or conflict. Thus it is both a thing and an idea at once. Truth, reality, fact or existence refer to aspects of this central neutral notion, named for convenience the Absolute.

All notions or entities, from the most gross or tangible to the most subtle, reside at the core of the Absolute without rivalry. They are absorbed unitively into its being and becoming. It is hard to give a definitely fixed status to this notion. Existence, subsistence, and value factors are inclusively comprised in it, and as for its own reality, the question itself should not arise once the perfect neutrality of its status is admitted. All dualities are to be dropped before the Absolute can be comprehended. In the context of the Absolute, even the faintest duality has to fade away into something which can even be said to be nothing. Whatever duality may still be suspected, it must be laid at the door of the limitations of human understanding, in its attempt to attain an ultimate notion of the Absolute. We have to admit this by the very validity of the general ideas based on human understanding which can be presupposed by us. (Vol I – 17)