

VII Jnana Darsana, Consciousness and its Modifications

Verse 6

By the mere presence of which alone everything is illuminated—that is characterized as knowledge of immediate perception, and also as inner perception.

5/29/7

Narayana Guru refers to the two primary ways of knowing the transactional world as *pratyaksha* and *aparoksha*, translated as immediate perception and inner perception. Nitya defined them for our purposes in the last verse:

Vedantins consider the immediate perception and the personal awareness arising during the perceptual experiences as both being aspects of the total perceptive action.

Immediate perception is called *pratyaksha*. *Aksha* means ‘eye’, and *prati* means ‘corresponding to’.

In the case of sight, the knowledge which corresponds to what is experienced by the eye is called *pratyaksha*. An object held in one’s hand, such as an apple, needs no further proof of its actual existence. When we say “I exist,” the evidence of our existence is equally certain. In this case we arrive at this knowledge not by looking at our physical body. The evidence for self-existence comes from within the person. This kind of inner perception in which the sensory organs play no part is called *aparoksha*. *Para* means ‘another’, and so *apara* means ‘not another’. Thus the word

means ‘a perception which does not come from another’. In other words, it is a self-evident perception. (343-4)

Unfortunately, much of our world is comprised of elements in which certitude is far less apparent. Much of the spiritual and scientific path is a struggle to arrive at apodictic, or incontrovertible, certitude. Anyone who has had an argument—intelligent or otherwise—with someone who disagrees with them about something “obvious” is well aware of how malleable truth becomes when not clearly delineated.

It is our further misfortune to be satisfied when the muddy waters begin to clear and we are able to perceive things more accurately. Nitya reminds us, “The apodictic certitude of the details of external objects stabilizes the conviction of the reality of a concrete world as a self-founded entity; such knowledge comes as the greatest stumbling block in the attempt to transcend the duality of subject and object.” We are so relieved to become clear-headed at last that we imagine that our experience of actuality accurately reflects reality. We may become comfortable with being a subject in tune with the objects of our perception, and so there is every likelihood that we will abandon our quest at the very moment in which we are finally able to take the first firm step.

In the spirit of synchronicity this came through just after the class, words attributed to Gurdjieff:

In ordinary thinking, people do not distinguish understanding from knowledge. Therefore they accumulate knowledge, or that which they call knowledge, but they do not know how to accumulate understanding and do not bother about it.

As a rule, when people realise they do not understand something they try to find a name for what they do not understand, and when they find a name they say they understand. Unfortunately, people are usually satisfied with

names. A man who knows a great many names, that is, a great many words, is deemed to understand a great deal - again excepting, of course, any sphere of practical activity wherein his ignorance very soon becomes apparent. PD Ouspensky: "In Search Of The Miraculous".

Gurdjieff is using 'understanding' the way we use unitive awareness or wisdom, and 'knowledge' in the sense of direct perception, or dual, transactional awareness. We talked about this same notion in the class, how scientists are too often satisfied with describing or classifying something, or building theories, but that such knowledge conceals rather than reveals the underlying reality. And we extrapolated this fault to all of us. How often I have correctly named something, and felt that small rush of satisfaction that comes with a correct identification. A holdover from getting A's in school, and even further back, from parental approval for simple name-form correspondences. The student of Vedanta will sooner or later realize naming is essentially meaningless. Maybe my pile of meaningless nametags is slightly larger than somebody else's, but that's an even more sordid reason to feel praiseworthy.

Anita brought up how we often don't listen to the other person in a conversation. We busy ourselves constructing arguments and rebuttals, and bide our time until we can fling them back at them. We seldom are brave enough to just listen, and trust that the "holy spirit" will speak through us at the appointed time. But it does. It works. Moreover, when we stop thinking in terms of battles or of self-ratification, we can move to enlightened sharing instead. It's a lot more fun, and even educational.

Deb mentioned a period in her life when she finished her housemates' sentences for them. Admittedly it started when she was living with some "stoners" who did take a rawther long time to finish some of their sentences. Then it became the bad habit of thinking she knew what the other person was about to say, and

cutting them off. It came across as contemptuous and hurt some feelings. Eventually she became more patient and found that if she waited, sometimes she heard things she *didn't* expect.

These are just three of the many ways we block the circulation of energy in our interaction with life. As we let go of the me-and-you duality we cling to, we can move to a more genuine participation with the presence of the present. Where dualism squelches meaningful exchanges, a unitive neutrality brings them to fruition. As we put this into practice, we see that we never should have stopped short and been content with the half-baked state of mind that passes for normalcy in our most abnormal society. Clearing away the rocks of superficial perceptions allows our inner light to shine, and encourages others to join us in this happy endeavor.

Part II

This came from Anne in response to last weeks' notes, but it is still germane, especially the rock part:

Two quotations occurred to me the other night. One is from Theodore Roethke's *The Awakening*: "We think by feeling, what is there to know?"

And the other is from the chapter in *The Prophet* which deals with words: "For thought is a bird of space which, in a cage of words, may spread its wings but cannot fly."

I find silence immensely important. Phish put it another way: "time in the forest to dig under rocks or float in the ocean asleep in a box." We seemed to have that time as kids but came to find it unimportant as adults when, in fact, we need it more.

Love. Shanti, Anne

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8/8/17

Jnana Darsana verse 6

By the mere presence of which alone
everything is illuminated –
that is characterized as knowledge of
immediate perception, and also as inner perception.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*By the very presence of which everything looms
In consciousness by itself,
That awareness is indicated as empirical awareness
And also as non-transcendental awareness.*

Verse 6 is deceptively simple, with an important corollary appended by Nitya, in case we don't arrive at that conclusion by ourselves. First the simple part: the one light of awareness is characterized in two ways, as outward and inward perception. Ordinarily these are not in balance, with people favoring one over the other. A yogi, on the other hand, sees them as poles of a unitive horizontal principle and treats them equally. No undue importance is accorded to either side of the coin. Yogis don't get a swelled head because they are "being spiritual." It's all "just life." But life is not minimized on this account. It is afforded its full value as a divine dance of pure joy. As Deb put it, both the inner and the outer are illuminated by the pure effulgence of the Self.

The corollary is unobtrusively added to a description of *saccidananda* late in the commentary:

When the Vedantic concept of perception is properly understood, it will come as no surprise to find intuitive cognition also cast as perception. For the Vedantin, existentiality is substantiated by awareness. The context of awareness is permeated with its affective value or meaning, which alone decides the difference of one perception from another. In spite of the directness of this experience, the spiritual value of it is negative. (348)

It's a bit of a shock to hear that our value or meaning assessments have no spiritual quality in and of themselves, even though they are directly experienced and critically important. This is aimed at the subtle egoism we may develop when pursuing a spiritual path, or for that matter a bluntly materialistic course: the unwarranted conviction that our way is the right choice in a sea of wrong ones. The ego is always tempted to believe its selections are better than the next person's, and they are therefore inferior. At times there may even be a pragmatic necessity to hold such a belief. But don't imagine it releases you from bondage. In fact, it's the essence of what repeatedly traps us. If your attitude is in favor of a binding way of relating to the world, that is in fact the opposite of spirituality, a true negative for a seeker of truth.

Ideally, living should be a natural flow, yet we have learned how to convert it into a mechanistic process that stifles our expression. In consequence, life seems inexplicably dull. Where we should be exalting in the joy of our brief blaze of living glory, we scheme and fret and lament what we don't have.

Religions and other belief systems enjoin people to a specific right way of behavior that is actually living bondage. Replacing our innate unfoldment with a template, no matter how well conceived, is the conversion symbolized as the fall of man in stories like the Biblical Genesis. The intuitive awareness that

because of this we are not fully alive is felt as various grades of depression.

Vedanta does not prescribe a “new, improved way of life” to solve our sadness. It recommends turning to the fountain source of our being and including it in our everyday experiences. The basics of existence are not to be somehow avoided. In Nitya’s classic line from *That Alone*, verse 20: “The passing moments of our lives are to be made lively and rich.” This is done not by following orders but by opening ourselves to what is already present in us but lying dormant.

Jan realized that this meant that what comes to us is somehow intimately involved with our being and our unfoldment. Our natural development is aimed and abetted by the things that happen to us. This should give us a more accepting attitude toward the challenges we face.

Nitya does an amazing job of summing up our predicament in one paragraph, which I will split in two. First:

The individuated consciousness suffers an enigmatic severance from the indivisible Self through wrong identification of itself as a separate person. This presumed severance of consciousness from its original state of indivisibility causes a further dichotomy of the same consciousness into subject and object. Although both subject and object are experienced as separate entities, neither one in reality can be separated from the one consciousness. When this dichotomy is established, the whole cyclic movement of becoming begins to operate.

This is not something that healthy, living beings can avoid, and Advaita Vedanta does not advocate fleeing from actuality to find refuge in some imaginary safe place so we can begin to live correctly. That’s more what religion does. We are to live right where we are: life *is* right where we are. Nitya continues the

paragraph with a glance at the wide world initiated by dichotomy, and he urges us to relate to it with expertise:

This in turn generates endless bifurcations of consciousness into names and forms, ideas of cause and effect, notions of time and space, and identifications with actors and actions. In this ontological world of empirical substantiality we find categorizations such as substance, quality, generality, specificity, time, space, action, relationship, inherence, and nonexistence. When placed in this situation an individual should have definite and precise knowledge of all the above categories to be able to effectively transact the business of everyday life. (347)

Narayana Guru combined mystical insight with a keen eye for practical matters. Early on, he did spend a significant stretch of time in secluded meditation, yet he was impelled by his subsequent realization to come out and help wherever he could. The as yet untitled book being translated from the Malayalam of some stories about him includes a humorous example of his pragmatic streak:

While the Guru was travelling around North Paravur, he happened to stay at the house of Kunjihikkoru Vaidyan. The old house was to be taken down and a new one built; there were stones and sand and other material collected there for the purpose. According to the plan, the shrine on the southern side was to be taken down. But some members of the family did not agree with this. It was at such a time that the Guru happened to go there. The Vaidyan informed Guru about these matters. Guru did not make any response. While getting ready to leave next morning, Guru asked a disciple, (who was with him), to collect the idol and sword and spear and other things that were in the shrine. The disciple collected all the things and placed it in the

country-boat they were travelling in. Some time into the journey Guru asked the idol to be dropped into the river. The sword and spear were given to a blacksmith nearby, with the instruction that some kitchen knives should be made and given to the Advaita Ashram. Thus the hindrance to building the new house was removed.

Though it's not exactly the point of the verse, much of the class time was focused on resolving duality into unity—a perennial predicament. This hoped-for resolution is a great example of how accessing core reality is impossible using horizontal measuring rods, keeping in mind that all our measuring rods are horizontal. Even our intuitive perception is horizontal, at least the part we are aware of, though we like to think of it as vertical. The resolution is actually made by taking time out from attending to transactional demands and settling into an unruffled state.

I read out a description by Evan Thompson of part of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, from his book *Waking, Dreaming, Being*, an excellent study of consciousness blending the insights of the ancient Indian rishis (including Buddhists) and modern neuroscientific discoveries. The Upanishad draws the student inward in progressive stages to the core light of consciousness, which registers its awareness without prejudice. The stages are all “out there” but progressively come closer, until arriving at the light of consciousness, known as the self. It is the one thing that is never out there, and is always here with us. Which is why if we treat the self as an object, as something “there” like everything else, we are not really seeing it at all, but rather admiring a reflection of our ego.

Nitya and Nataraja Guru between them define the same Sanskrit term as both ‘inner perception’ and ‘nontranscendental awareness’, which gets to the gist of this verse. Mistaking our inward attention for enlightenment is the universal derangement of

human beings, our ‘greatest stumbling block’. Imagining we have a direct line to God or any other version of the superego, we enact our programs with substantial disregard for their impact on the world, as though we were carrying out divine dictates rather than personal whims. Paradoxically this goes along with the conviction that the world is a simple, fixed reality created by others and already in place when we arrive. Instead of being co-creators of the universe, we are more or less at the mercy of a pre-existing juggernaut. While we are inevitably constrained to act in the light of our perceptions, unitive understanding includes the awareness of our limitations and the provisional value of our beliefs, which makes room for the enlargement of our awareness. As Nitya puts it:

The apodictic certitude of the details of external objects stabilizes the conviction of the reality of a concrete world as a self-founded entity; such knowledge comes as the greatest stumbling block in the attempt to transcend the duality of subject and object. It is in recognition of this fact that Nataraja Guru translates *aparokshajnana* as ‘nontranscendental awareness’. However valid such experiences are within the transactional frame of reference, they are only relativistic and conditional. (348)

So the question is how to get over this “greatest stumbling block” of irrefutable concreteness. Even scientists who know perfectly well from their calculations of the insubstantiality of the material world insist on its reality. It is a most solid stumbling block. If you ignore it, it will surely trip you.

This led to an amusing digression into how animals are unaware of things beyond their zone of awareness. We can easily see how they live in truncated worlds. Do we share a similar condition? You can bet on it. But our ego insists on us being (or

appearing to be) whole. Wholly aware. No wonder we get into trouble, imagining our small slice of reality is the whole enchilada.

Paul favored an attitude of being “lost in the onion fields” (an image from Bushra) as an antidote to egoism. Unfortunately, the ego can be as prideful over being lost as being found. Still, it’s a good way to withdraw from any fixed notions that are solidly lodged in our psyche. First get comfortable with being lost and then neutralize both lost and found in your oceanic state of being. Or as Jan put it, equalize attachment and nonattachment. We are certainly more open to new input if we are lost than if we believe we are found.

Bushra added a unique example from her own experience: attachment to health can be its own disease. Dealing with a serious illness can take over our entire psyche, adding to our woes and even shutting off the remaining joy of being alive. I thought of ultra rich Howard Hughes, who wound up living in a sterile hotel room with security guards standing by to catch flies and show him their squashed corpses, so terrified of catching a disease that he was already living as if in a tomb. And of how psychedelics are being used by a few lucky test subjects suffering from end of life anxiety, to restore their focus on the preciousness of being alive.

Deb laughingly recalled Andy’s phrase from an earlier class, “Our obsession with sublimity.” Many seekers make a compulsive effort to delve into the sublime. There’s nothing wrong with sublimity or sublimation—it’s the obsession that nails us. We secretly imagine we are becoming “more spiritual.” All such value assessments come from the ego wanting to validate itself. We need to pet the ego and give it gentle reassurances, and then tell it to shut up, already! We are not out to glorify it, only to use it wisely and with humility. Paul recognized that the ego gives birth to duality; it’s where duality resides. Again, we aren’t trying to do away with it, but to harmonize it and keep it the right size.

A rare, warm evening greeted us as we filed out to resume our interrupted flows of experience. It is no longer light out at the end of class, as sure sign that once again the Earth is carrying us on our annual free multi-million mile trip around the sun. Whoo-ee!

Part II

Swami Vidyananda's commentary:

One and the same right awareness about a certain thing can be gained in two different ways which are by inference or valid testimony as also by the relation of the object with its causes. The first way is non-immediate but is accomplished by obstructing mediating factors. Such indirect knowledge is designated as mediate. The second type of right awareness has two names which are perception (*pratyaksha*) and the non-transcendental or immediate (*aparoksha*). Here there are no obstructing elements. It is by this kind of awareness that we gain direct knowledge of things. Yet, even this is of a conditioned order.