

GURUKULAM

VOLUME XV • 1999

FOURTH QUARTER





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GURUKULAM

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NARAYANA GURUKULA was founded by Nataraja Guru in 1923 as a world-wide contemplative community. His Successor, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, continued the wisdom teaching of unitive understanding from 1973 to 1999. The current Guru & Head is Muni Narayana Prasad.

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COVER: "Heralds of the Messiah," Chartres Cathedral, France, photo by Sraddha Durand.

Universal Fireworks

Our usually peaceful island was filled with the sound of fireworks as the year's end was celebrated with explosions of light around the world. Then I realized part of the noise was a friend knocking at the door. As she came in, she warmly greeted me: "Happy New Year, Happy New Century, Happy New Millennium," and laughed. As we sat down to sip a cup of tea, she said, "Actually, I'm really tired of the word 'new'." When I asked her what she meant, she said, "We are inundated with advertisements in which 'new' is constantly used to imply not only good but better or best. That makes us feel dissatisfied with what we have."

I replied: "New also can imply something which is fresh, such as a new perspective or expression. Then what is being promoted is flexibility and creativity."

"That is true, but the emphasis I see everywhere is on products and services and the drive to acquire them at a feverish pace. I want to stop that kind of compulsion, but it is hard not to get caught up in it. Then I have to laugh at myself because I feel like I need a new way to be content."

"Even in the context of glorification of that which did not even exist a month, year or decade ago, it may be that we will find the guidance we need to experience happiness in something very old. The *Upaniṣads* were written even before the millennium we are passing out of, yet they contain valuable guidance for our lives."

"Even though I was complaining about too much emphasis on 'new', I confess that I wonder whether something that old can really be relevant to my life."

"Something written long ago can still be new in the sense of offering us a new perspective."

"I can accept that in theory, but the few times I have seen books on the *Upaniṣads* they have seemed very arcane and inscrutable."

"They are full of mystical poetry, symbols and archetypal encounters. But

when they are clearly translated and commented upon, they are revealed to be vast treasure houses of living wisdom. Many of them take the form of a dialogue such as the one between Śaunaka and Angiras in the *Munḍaka Upaniṣad*. Śaunaka was a person in the thick of life's challenges, pleasures and responsibilities. Like you, he was looking for something lasting and deeply satisfying. He wanted to know that knowledge which would help him to face life's difficulties with stability."

"You are right that I am like him. I am tired of being so disturbed by all the trouble in the world around me and by my emotional turbulence within."

"Śaunaka went to Angiras who was known for his practical wisdom. He asked about the knowledge that would make everything known to him."

"But I don't even hope to know everything. Learning to live an untroubled and beneficial life is daunting enough."

"That was the *Upaniṣad's* author's way of characterizing wisdom that can sustain one through the ups and downs of life. Angiras answers by first distinguishing between two types of knowing: the lower, the faint light of the tradition of religion, and the higher, that by which the Imperishable is apprehended, which is vital spiritual knowledge."

"That reminds me of something which the Dalai Lama said recently: 'In calling for a spiritual revolution, am I advocating a religious solution to our problems after all? No. As someone nearing seventy years of age, I have accumulated enough experience to be completely confident that the teachings of Buddha are both relevant and useful to humanity. If a person put them into practice, it is certain that they and others will benefit. My meetings with many different sorts of people the world over have helped me realize that there are other faiths, and other cultures, no less capable than mine of enabling individuals to lead constructive and satisfying lives.'

What is more, I have come to the conclusion that whether or not a person is a religious believer does not matter much. Far more important is that they be good human beings."

"That echoes a line from Narayana Guru that whatever a man's religion, he should be good. He expressed it very poetically in his *Scriptures of Mercy*: 'Grace, Love, Mercy – all the three – stand for one same reality – Life's Star. He who loves is he who really lives.'"

"But it is not always easy to love, or to know the most compassionate way to respond to someone. The challenge of being good and happy in real life situations is with us every day. How does that relate to the knowledge of the Imperishable?"

"Angiras further describes the Imperishable as that which is invisible, ungraspable, without sight or hearing, without hands or feet, eternal, subtle, omnipresent, all-pervading and the source of all."

"Such poetic language brings a feeling of elevation, but I don't see the connection to being good."

"The language which inspires us also contains indications of a way of being in the world which we can make our own. Our unhappiness and inability to act with intelligence and compassion come from clinging to our separate and often alienated identities. Angiras is pointing to an all-pervading Reality, the source of all. As we come into more intimate relationship with that, we come closer to our universal identity. Then when we act, we manifest the love we aspire to."

"How do we enhance that relationship?"

"The wisdom teachers of the *Upaniṣads* understood human nature. They knew our need for simple aids, so they used familiar examples. Angiras gave the image of a spider which both emits and draws in its own thread as a symbol of the Imperishable, the source of all. He also used the image of sparks flying out of a fire. The same two images appear in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II:1:20): 'As a spider moves along the thread (it produces), or as from a fire little sparks scatter, just so from this

Self issue all organs, all worlds, all shining ones and all living beings. Its secret name is the truth of truth. The vital force is truth, and it is the truth of that.' A golden link of value is seen between the source of all, the imperishable Self, all existence, the truth of truth and the vital force within."

"Spiders are kind of creepy to me, but a fire with sparks flying out from it is a beautiful image, like all the fireworks displays around the world tonight. If I envision all those brilliant lights as coming from a single source, it is a great light that fills me with wonder and joy. Each person, each being, each moment is part of that light. In that I sense that there is nothing to fear, nothing to lose, nothing to strive for. Oh, if this vision would remain with me, life would be very luminous and harmonious. But I'm afraid it won't."

"Later in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the wisdom teacher Yājñavalkya advises his dear student Maitreyī that she can gain the knowledge she yearns for by listening carefully to his teaching and meditating upon it. He thus points the way to a deeper understanding than that provided by critical thinking alone. We experience the vital force moment after moment, day after day, in the beat of our hearts and the in and out flow of our breath. If we tune our meditation to that, we have an ever-present reminder of the truth of our existence as one with all existence, including that of spiders!

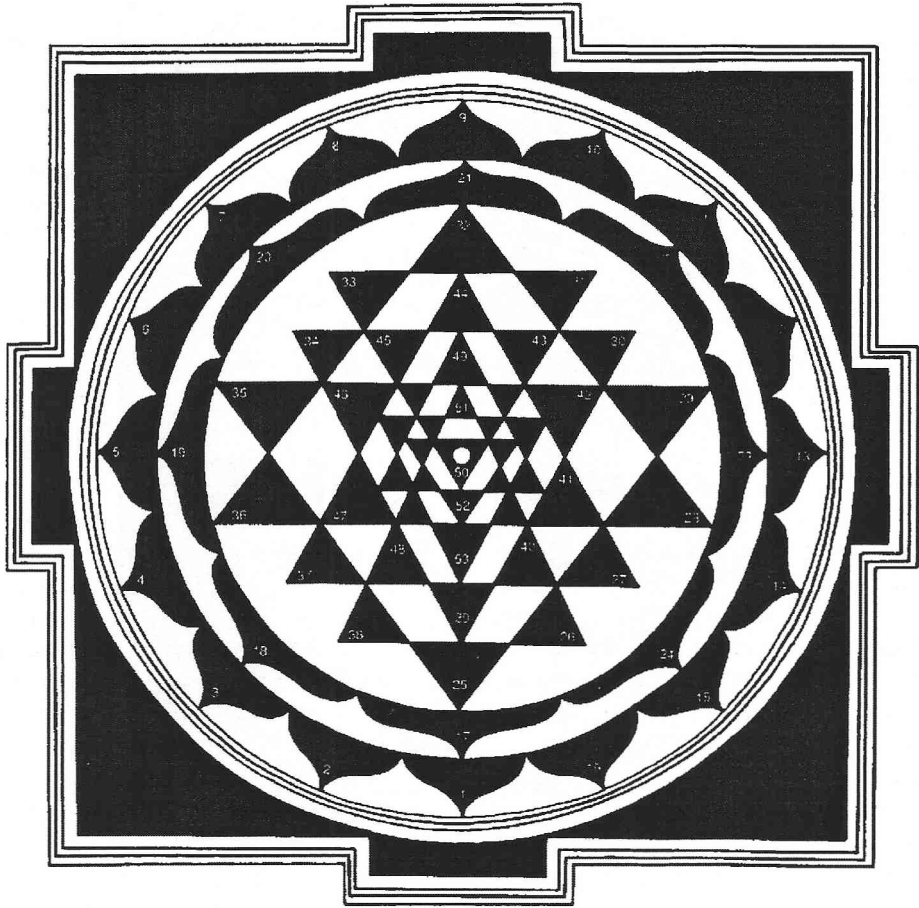
The very knowledge which makes the world real to us is that which illuminates our senses, our intelligence, our consciousness. The beat of our hearts, the flowing of our breaths, the pulse of consciousness within us are doors through which we can enter into the truth of what we have been told: that which is most intimate to us is not separate from all that surrounds us. Then our actions will be naturally wholesome and beneficial."

My friend sat quietly for some time, then smiled as she said, "So the old *Upaniṣads* give me fresh insight into how to make this a spiritually bright new year!"

Nancy Yeilding

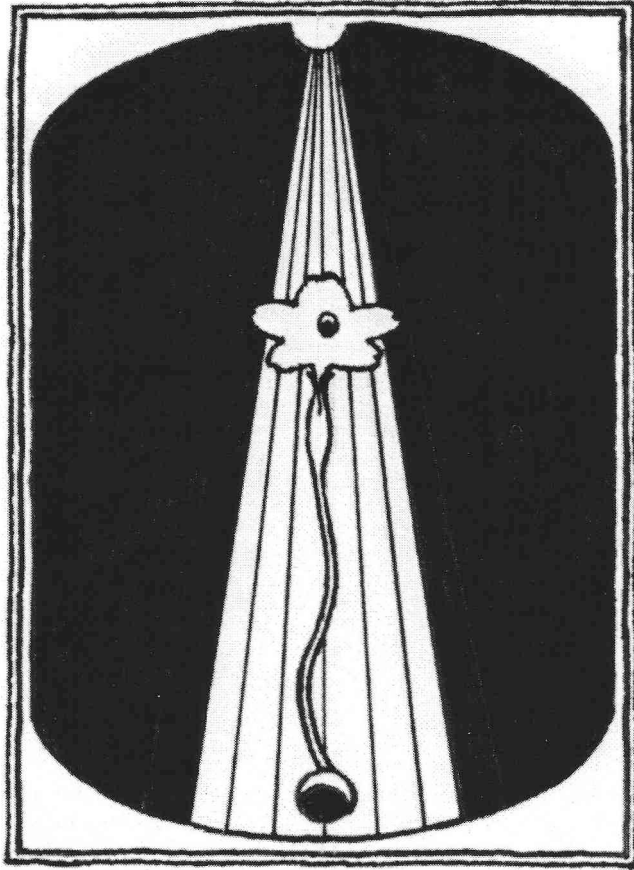
Meditations on Śrī Cakra

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati



In 1990, while staying at the Portland and Bainbridge Gurukulas, Guru Nitya gave a series of meditations on *Śrīcakra* (above), a proto-linguistic depiction of a person functioning within a cosmic system. In this diagram (*yantra*), the four upward-pointing triangles represent the supreme spirit or universal consciousness (*puruṣa*) and the five downward pointing triangles represent nature composed of the five elements (*prakṛti*). They are so interlaced that no aspect of reality can be seen as entirely physical or entirely spiritual. Each of the two rings of petals represents a fully opened lotus flower, indicating that both the microcosm and the macrocosm unfold like the blossoming of a flower.

Śrīcakra is an aid to meditation which is intended to become unnecessary as the mediator comes to recognize his or her functional and essential unity with All. Meditation begins with the petal at the alpha point of the diagram, proceeds clockwise around the outer petals, then around the inner petals. Then, beginning with the triangle placed at the alpha, it proceeds counter-clockwise around the exterior points of the triangles until the final four which are placed on a vertical axis. Each petal and point has a seed mantra associated with it, as well as an aspect of divinity envisioned as the Supreme Mother. Each meditation reflects the transcendent power of beauty to lead us to the oneness of Reality.



AUM kāmākarṣinī

Meditation One

O Creatress of affective endearment. O Mother, in you I see the perennial conjoining of the infinite, revealed through the law of harmony and attributed to *parameśvara*, and of the unceasing actualization of every mode of value. Each value is graced by your enchanting touch which beautifies the past, the present and the future.

O radiant effulgence, the supreme spirit that animates all the changing formations of nature, my obeisance to your lotus feet. I am both innocent and ignorant. Even then it is clear to me that I am a spark in the glowing fire of your affection for the supreme Lord.

In the garden of Kailāsa the Lord is likened to a tree which fulfills all desire, and you are described as a golden creeper that entwines the tree. I am a bud blossoming on that creeper of enchantment.

When I chant the *mantra*, *AUM kāmākarṣiṇī*, let my mind be filled with only desirable objects of value. Let those objects be in resonance with such *dharma* that will give covetable meaning to every one of my aspirations, which I am desiring to actualize with your grace. Let each such desire be a fresh flower of immaculate purity that I can offer to you with my deepest love and devotion.

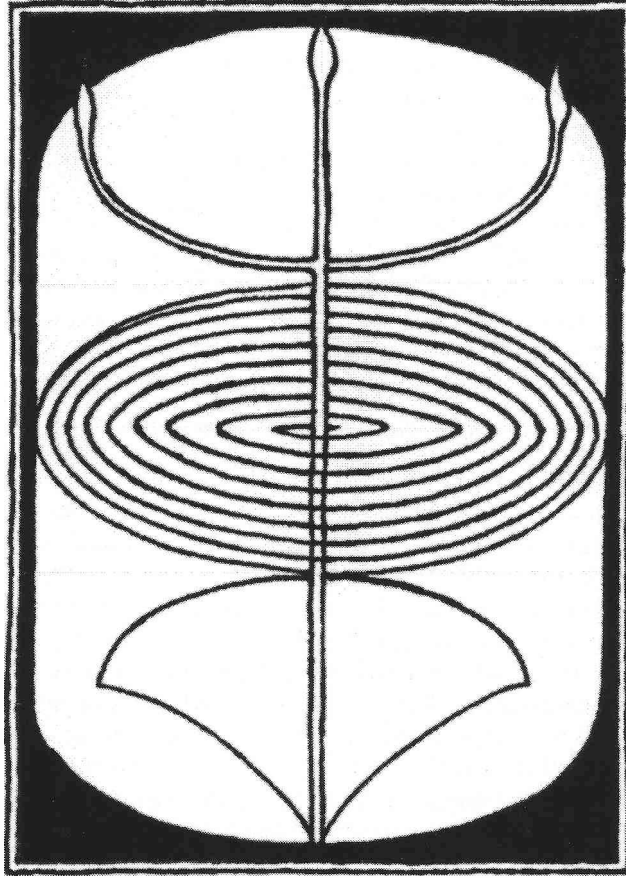
Each *dharma* in me is a seed of your intention that you have sown in my heart with a special love and care. Let not the sprouting and growth of those seeds of virtue be choked by the unwelcome proliferation of the thorny weeds of vices. Help me to prune out of my thoughts, words and actions anything that arises that might alienate me from you. May your intelligence ever guide me in exercising my moral and spiritual discrimination. Let every assignment given to me be a vehicle to ride in the right direction, so that I arrive at the blessed fulfillment of my life.

In my ignorance and selfishness I may desire that which you disapprove of. When such a failure comes, let me immediately recognize that my desire is not in resonance with your grace. Then only can I correct myself and be disciplined. When a spark of your effulgence gives a twinkle to my eye, when your prompting gives a truthful presentation to my words, and when a lease of energy that you channel into me makes my actions noble, only then will I consider myself a deserving receptacle to hold out your grace to all around me. Let the only desire in me be the desire to become forever and ever your worthy instrument.

May the conjoined love of Śiva and Śakti bless me, so that I recognize in my parents the physical manifestation of your union in spirit. May I ever be grateful to them.

It is from the finitude of the dust of your lotus feet that the Creator has fashioned this body of mine and this home of my worthy shelter, the good earth, that has become my haven in this life. May I live here as long as you wish in the certitude of the knowledge you give me and experiencing the refuge of fearlessness which you so easily grant.

AUM kāmākarṣiṇī



aḥ śarīrākarṣinī

Meditation Two

O beautifier of the triple cities! Assigning to each being a body, you have created this world, and you are preserving the mode of each one. I incline before you forever with gratitude. Great is your compassion. The sperm and the egg which remained as mere potentials in the core locus (*bindu*) of the union of Śiva and Śakti are specified and commissioned by you with your irresistible power of attraction. You created a nucleus that was to develop into a being endowed with an animated body equipped with the organs of sensory perception, the organs of action, and the four-fold mechanism of its inner organ. As desired and directed by you, this unicellular body grew and evolved into this being of mine with its several invaluable faculties.

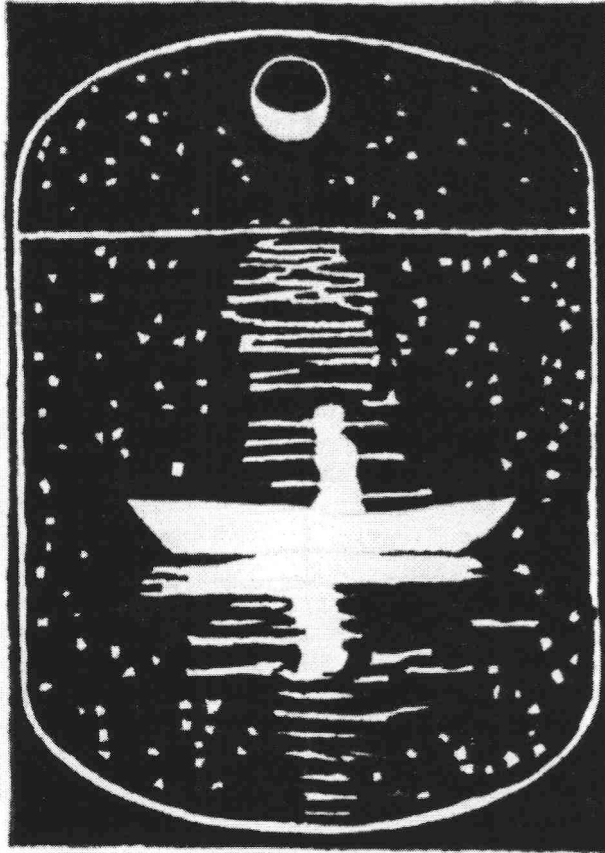
Just as Viriñci, the Creator, has taken the fine dust from your lotus feet and, through a process of elaboration, is ceaselessly creating the bodies of this universe, in his compassion he has included me also in his creation as a humble creature of the multitudes that have come to live upon the face of this earth. Without any motivation or any recognition of myself, I lay in the womb of my mother in the deep silence of the unconscious. In those days you fashioned within me the faculties of my senses and meticulously arranged for the coordination of my limbs. While assuming this body, I was all alone. It was in such a mysterious way that you made me a person and brought me to this world of time and space to share my smiles and tears with the innumerable other creatures with which you have festooned your museum of creation.

In the infinitude of space and the deep sleep of consciousness you caused a stir, and that stir has become the reverberating wave, the primordial mechanism of creation. The vibrations of space came with a melody with which the frequency of one became distinct from another. Thus I have come to a world of articulated sounds. Soon you gave me the intelligence to distinguish the tonality of one pitch from another and the implied meaning of every sound. The meaning of each sound came to stay with me as variegated concepts ready to impregnate percepts with an existential reality.

Thus I became a co-creator of Brahma. I am adding to the glory of this world with metaphors and similes. The world in which I live is assuming at each moment a poetic dimension and lyrical excellence. Through the proliferation of conceptualized gestalts my memory is enriched and I become instrumental in serving Viṣṇu, the lord of dynamic memory. A day will come when all the worthless, fragmentary thoughts and images that I have collected in my mind will be gathered by your Supreme Lord, Parameśvara, and he will change them into the indistinct ashes with which to smear his body. On that day of great dissolution when everything disappears, I will still remain as dust on the forehead of your Lord.

Thus from the unreal I will be transferred to the real, from the dark I will be transferred to the light, and from death I will be transferred to immortality. O Mother, my intimacy with you will never be lost. Even in the deluge of the cycle of creation, along with you I will be going into the deep unconscious which is the true state of your being.

aḥ śarīrākaraṣinī



āḥ amṛtākarsinī

Meditation Three

O eternal Mother, who is always showering the sweet elixir of immortality, you have ordained me to come to this world of your changing flux as a mere flicker. From where do I come? Into what am I disappearing? I do not know. You have given me this temporary habitation in a crumbling body. However transient life is here, there are many indications that you are changeless and that there is a continuity in the magical performance of your phenomenal drama.

In spite of my uninstructed senses and undisciplined mind, I know that what illuminates my senses and what enables me to decipher the mystery of your being are always coming to me from the benign shower of your mercy. Perhaps the limitations you have imposed on my being by providing a horizon of ignorance is to specify my identity with the individuation of an embodied being. That gives me a vantage point to stand apart as a person and adore you with words of praise, which well up in my heart as my irresistible love for you. This finitude, which is like a water molecule in the expanse of the ocean of your eternal reality, confers on me the special ability to associate with you as a lover, rather than being merged in the blissful unity of love.

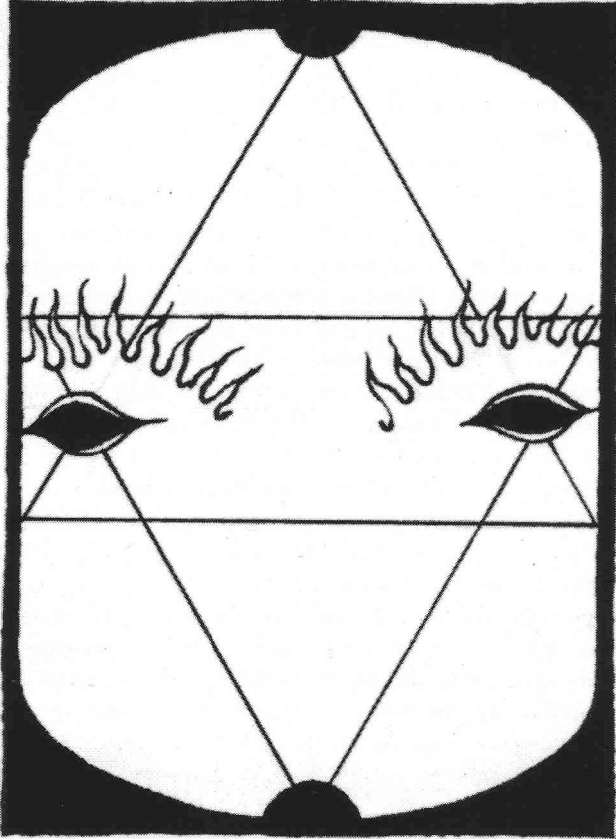
The ego, its constricting hell and demonic counterpart, are all the creation of nescience. Even in the darkest moment of my terrifying ignorance, I can feel under my feet the stable foundation of your support. I know that you will wake me from such a nightmare to enjoy the freedom of the vastness of your friendly home which is decorated with the sun and moon and the shimmering stars of the sky. Night after night you summon me to leave the humble dwelling of my body so that I can merge with you and remain in the incessant peace of your undisturbed quietude. You do not keep me waiting until the termination of a cycle of life to reach the shores of redemption. The deepest sleep into which I plunge, leaving the carcass of my ego hushed in an inertial body, does not cause me any concern or anxiety. However disturbing and uncomfortable the functional actualities of my body are, it is ever under your care and you take heed of it while I sleep.

When the golden sun rises in the east, you cause him to tickle and animate my body and bring me back to the program of the day's work. Thus night after night you cradle me in peaceful sleep, and day after day you fill my cup with the lust for life. When I wake up in the morning, it is as if I have come to own the reality of the phenomenal world. I take on one responsibility after another, and with the sequential events of life I weave the tapestry of my delight.

O my Mother, I do not ask for jewelry and riches, but I expect you to give me a transparency of vision and a certitude of truth. The crest jewel of wisdom (*cintāmaṇi*), with which you decorate your children to make them wise, is the most covetable boon that one can expect of you. Even when the ocean is vast and its depth is unfathomable, if I can safely crouch in a boat that floats on its surface, I do not have to worry about how far away the shore is or how deep the water is. With the oar of my hope, I shall paddle and reach my destination.

The problems of life are perennial and extremely intriguing. But simple are your ways to save the helpless, on whom you cast the glance of your preference. You have the right to push a wave back into the ocean's blue depth and raise another to be gold-crested in the beam of the morning sun. You are the sovereign, and your game is the game of sovereignty. How easy it is to love your truth, your wisdom, and your beauty and to inherit all that you have. You are rich by nature and rich with grace, so with confidence let me rest my head in your lap and once again go to my joyous peace.

āḥ amṛtākarṣiṇī



oṃ ātmākarṣiṇī

Meditation Four

O Mother of omniscience, whose presence illuminates the being of all, although stuck in nescience, may I be worthy to be the finite counterpart of your omnipresent knowledge. Your two feet are the ever-abiding serenity of the Supreme Lord Śiva and the ever-actualizing dynamics of the Universal Creatress. You have allowed the flame borrowed from the celestial fire of the Lord to burn in me as my mind, my intelligence and also my ego-affection. And, on your own, you have blessed me with the concreteness of my body, the sap of life circulating within it, and the burning flames of my psycho-spiritual urges. I am endowed with a space of freedom within which to enact the drama of my life. I have my restful habitation in the lap of your loving care.

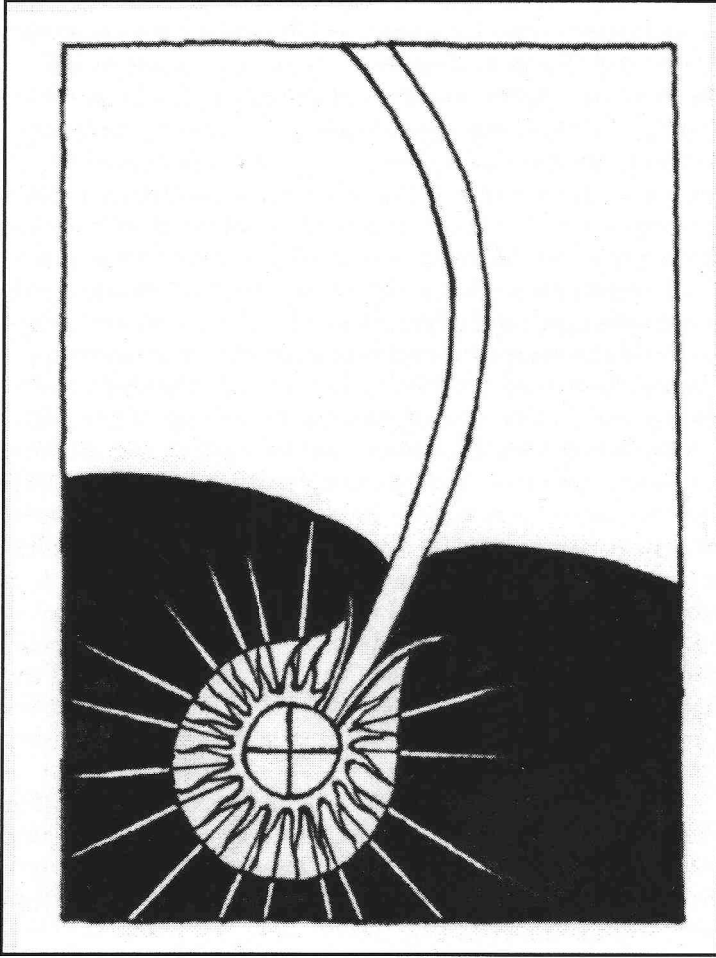
I know you are not watching my clumsy behavior to take me to task, but you are certainly interested in my one-pointed attention, *śraddha*, so that I always understand your intention correctly. A person is a personification of his knowledge, so, my Mother, when you enter within me, may you be the enlightening knowledge of my Self.

To propitiate gods, people make sacrifices and offerings of gifts and perform austerities. Hating someone is not your nature. You cannot love anyone more because you have bestowed on everyone more love than they can ever accept. So I do not have to satisfy conditions for us to relate to each other. If you are the lamp, I am its silver light. If you are the word, I am the meaning. Light cannot be wrapped and concealed within darkness. You are self-luminous by nature. If this body of mine is a temple in which you are enshrined as its eternal deity, even my deep unconscious is not a dungeon of darkness. I am filled with your intentions from my unconscious so that I can see the magic of your transformation, both in my dreams and in the actuality of life.

You are the embodiment of fearlessness. Finding refuge in you is to become absolutely liberated from fear. The Self is not afraid of the Self. Fear comes only from the non-Self (*anātma*). The impression of non-Self manifests only in ignorance. May you ward off from me the apprehension of the non-Self. The sun and moon are shining as your watchful eyes. They are not only luminaries which throw light on our paths and illuminate objects for us. They are also caretakers of our bodies and souls.

You rejoice in rewarding us for even the little we do on our own to improve the lot of this world. Where we plant one seed or a sapling you multiply it a thousand-fold. That is a magic which no farmer can ever perform without your connivance. When you share your sunlight, water and fresh air, you do not decree that it should be enjoyed only by the learned, the wise and the good. Anyone to whom you have granted the gift of life is also entitled to enjoy the entire bounty of your creation. Even before I came to know of my existence, you were thoughtful to equip me with all devices so that I can make every moment meaningful and perfect to its maximum approximation. Mother, I take refuge in your lotus feet which are none other than the feet of the Lord.

oṃ ātmākarṣinī



AUM bījākarṣinī

Meditation Five

You are the primeval seed of this entire universe. You are also the cosmic womb from which everything is projected. There is no single effect which has not come from you. Without any destruction whatsoever, they all merge back into you. O Mother, having condensed me into the seed of so many forms, into how many wombs have you deposited me and from how many mothers have you brought me forth like the blossoming of a new flower? At your behest, Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara are always engaged in creation, subsistence and dissolution. Even though Viṣṇu is the overlord of the past, present and future, in a split second you transformed him into a beautiful enchanting female. You changed the god of gods, Sarveśvara, who was never disturbed by erotics, into an infatuated lover. Thus there is nothing which you cannot bring about with your *yoga māyā*.

You retain the triple modes of nature, and you are ever the embellisher of the three worlds: the heavens, the atmosphere and the earth, as also the past, present and future. That which today lies dormant in my unconscious as a seed, tomorrow becomes my conscious idea, my working program and my accomplishment. When a seed germinates, no one can anticipate how many leaves will come from it in the course of its vertical growth and in the horizontal spreading out of its branches. Even more abundant are the conceptual sprouts you generate in my unconscious. From inside you instruct me in the assigning of concept to percept and how I should christen each form of your presentation.

When you dream from within me, a magical world of name and form which corresponds to the dream is spread out around me. Like the all-tasting tongue of my personified being, my senses reach out and taste every object of enjoyment. Thus, instead of being assailed by one joyous part of your love, I am blessed with a million varied forms of enjoyment. Great poets like Vālmiki and Vyāsa, infatuated with the beauty of your creation, have written epics of great magnitude to approximate their creative ability to yours. For thousands of years, connoisseurs of beauty have been reveling in their creations.

It is your great sport that after unfurling the bounty of your joyous beauty, you withdraw everything back into the power of your obscuration. The form returns to the word. The word merges in the sound. The sound is silenced in the mind. The mind is withdrawn into the vital breath (*prāṇa*) and the *prāṇa* becomes undifferentiated in the warmth of your thermal glow (*tejas*). Ultimately, everything goes back into your effulgence which is none other than *śiva caitanya*. O primeval Mother, cause of all causes, you punctuate your transformation with a pause of transcendence.

AUM bījākaraṣiṇī

(Continued in next issue.)

Tall Trees



Tall trees
at the top of
Jog Falls
look like toy
train set miniatures.
A half-hour ago
up the trail one
walked into the permanent
sound of roaring, floating,
flying, crashing water.
Like what Carmel Beach
or Moss Landing
sounds like in the
morning on an 8-10 foot day.
Pounding thunder.

Oh, Mother Earth,
You are tireless
in making ever-diverse forms.
Even the rock faces of
your waterfall cliffs
yield to the recurring touch
of water, spray, and falling sand
as a mother's breast
warmly yields to the caresses,
snuggles, and needs for nourishment,
comfort, and protection of a baby child.
Do not the
sheer cliffs
give nooks
and shelter to
birds
for nesting and rest?
And footholds for seeds
of ferns, mosses,
grasses, bushes, and trees?
They turn their hard selves into permeable,
moveable
soil and minerals
for new
plant life,
oxygen,
cloud beauty. Aum.

Descent

Walking down this trail
is like descending
into the origin of the
world.

It gets hotter. More humid.
The insects are louder. The
roar of the waterfall is intense.
Your heartbeat increases. Sweat
pours from your temples and the top
of your head. Passing whiffs of white
clouds are beyond beautiful.
Into sheer magic. All sizes and shapes
of leaves greet you. Narrow,
wide, serrated, smooth, rounded.
Plants for weaving useful things,
plants for making things to wear.
Plants for decorating the
places you live in,
the people you create with God
into the world of God.

Of green beauty.

Falling water.

Quiet heart and happy smiles.

Flowers.

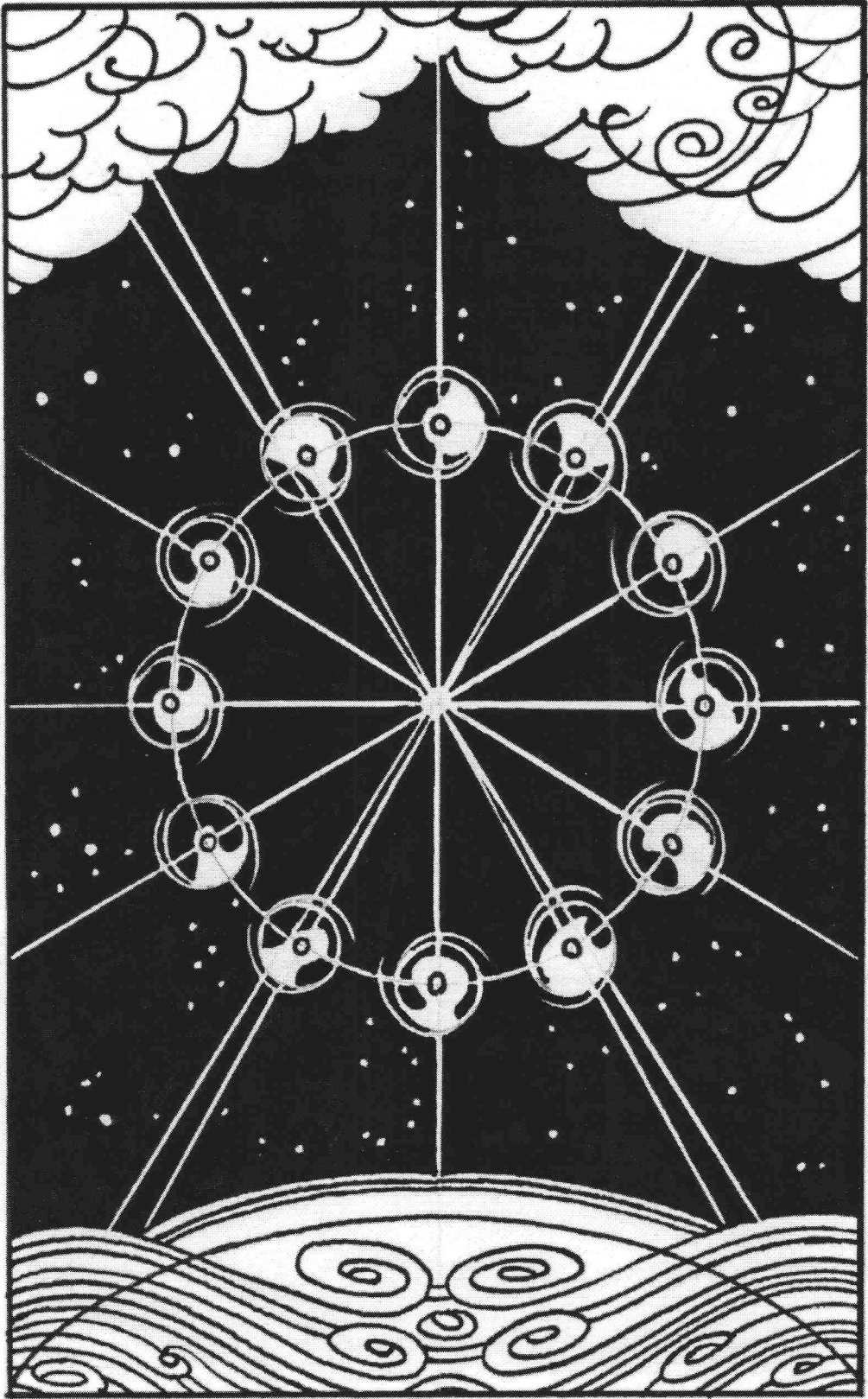
Water-smoothed
rocks. All variety of living, useful
vegetation. Some good for building
shelters with no down-payment,
no mortgage, no monthly bills.
Plants to eat. Plants to heal.
Some to rub on your skin. Flowers, purple and
white, with a fragrance
like wisteria, good for making
garlands for your lover for the
neck, wrists, and to wear around the ankles.

Butterflies dancing together.

Moving through both vertical and
horizontal levels of nectar, of
sun-lit space, of love, sweat, and forest.

Aum. Jog Falls, Karnataka,
10-13-99

Peter Moras



Ātmopadeśa Śatakam:

One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction by Narayana Guru

Translation and Commentary by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

Verse 10

*"irūḷirippavanāru? colka nī" ye-
nnoruvaṅ urappatu kēṭṭu tānumēvaṃ
arivatināyavanōṭu "nīyumār" e-
nnaruḷumitin prativākyaṃkāmākum*

"Who is sitting in the dark? Speak, you!"
In this manner one speaks;
having heard this, you also
to know, ask him, "And who are you?"
To this as well, the response is one.

If you close your eyes and try to visualize your existence from inside, it is hard to decide where the boundaries and limitations of your body actually are. You can feel certain vague sensations here and there, but from inside with your eyes closed you cannot see where the outer periphery of the skull is. In fact, everything merges into a kind of total darkness. Yet the clarity of your idea of existence is not the least affected. It remains the same. We are asked to imagine a situation where we can reduce the input of all our sensory data to just the voice that we hear. Touch, smell, taste and sight are to be removed from our mind.

In such a situation you are fully aware of your own existence, and you recognize it by saying "I". In this special state, suppose you sense that another person is also present. To make sure, you ask, "Who is there?" You get an answer, "I." Then the other person asks, "Who are you?" and

you also answer "I." How do you understand what you heard when you heard "I?" You understand it by turning to your own concept of 'I'. The other person understood your 'I' by comparing it to his experience of the term. With this understanding, have you gone beyond your own knowledge to any extent? Not at all.

There is a great demand on our consciousness all the time for it to transmute and transform into whatever conceptual idea is presented to us through the perception of the five senses. For instance I may say, "I have seen a blue lotus. It was very beautiful." On hearing this, you have to think of a lotus flower and also of the color blue. You have to recall an experience when you enjoyed something, possibly not even a flower at all, and transfer that enjoyment together with the other concepts. Then you make a composition of all of them in your mind before you can imagine how I experienced the blue lotus. Only then can you say, "Yes, I understand. It must have been very beautiful."

This process sounds a bit intellectual, but the inner perception involved is not entirely intellectual. It is to be approached from within, and not from outside in the academic manner. It can be fully understood only by silently absorbing oneself into the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-feeling greater psyche which belongs to everyone. This opens up the floodgates of love, and you become one with all. The counterpart of this is to close doors and create exclu-

sions and inclusions.

If a child comes to its mother and says, "Mom, my ear hurts," she understands. But how does she understand it? Her own ear is not hurting. Instead, she has had a previous experience of that kind of pain. When the child says "my," the mother sympathetically repeats in her mind "my." Then she introjects her own concept of a painful ear into this "my." Finally she projects the understanding thus gained back onto the child. So there are simultaneous functions of introjection and projection operating in the process of understanding, and both belong solely to our own 'I' consciousness. A series of memories are called up and structured around this 'I' consciousness. This is the only way the mother can have an idea of the particular kind of pain the child is actually experiencing. In fact, it is impossible for her to go outside of herself to know anything about what the child actually feels.

It is only a small step to realize that the child which the mother sees is itself a composition of her own perceptual data, to which are added other conceptual memories. In the transactional world we have every evidence that the mother and child are two separate entities: the child with its pain and the mother with her own sensibility; the mother attending to the child and the child appealing to the mother. All these are of course valid, but when we philosophically examine the situation, we have to reduce the seeming difference between the child and its mother to just one witnessing consciousness.

This is the same witnessing consciousness which was placed under the tree of life in the previous verse. It reappears in this verse as a homogeneous principle which contains within it all our seemingly divergent experiences. When you call me "you," I understand it as "I." When I call you "you," you understand it as "I." The 'you' and 'I' we speak of are only understood conceptually. This is a special kind of enigma, called *māyā*. Only one consciousness is operating, but it is capable of differentiating parts of itself from itself to structure personalities,

events, which then seem to stand apart from it and become a separate reality. It then interacts with what it generates.

Every mother thinks that she understands her child, while actually she understands an aspect of herself and imagines she is understanding the child. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, it is the true nature of things. If the consciousness which functions through our organisms were really different, there would be no homogeneity. Mutual understanding and interpersonal transactions would not be possible. The mere fact that we understand shows that we are actually the same, just as the mother and child are the same. Everything we experience is the same.

We are now seeing the witnessing self a little more closely. We need to also be looking at how it can become afflicted and non-afflicted. When the child says "I feel pain in my ear," the mother doesn't have the pain but she has the idea, "this is my child." My body, my hand, my eyes, my mind, my child—in each case the "my" becomes the center of a circle of awareness. What is inside the circle is of special importance to us because it is "ours," and what falls outside the circle becomes "the other." Thus we separate I and the other, mine and not mine, me and not me. This is purely arbitrary. You can contract or expand the circle; you can include or exclude anyone. When you include it is called love, and when you exclude it is not-love. Hatred is another kind of inclusion, as in "my enemy."

When her child has a pain, fear suddenly comes to the mother. "Is it serious? Should I consult a doctor?" Then she thinks of all the terrible diseases which can come to children. If she is fearful by nature she may even become hysterical about it, but if she is calm she will intuitively know the proper course of action to take. So on one hand, our identity in consciousness can have the liberating effect of seeing oneself in all. Knowing the witnessing consciousness as the same in all beings is an enlightening experience. But when we are obsessed with the circumlimitation of what is "mine," we are heading for ble.

That attachment brings all the bondages which are described in the previous verse as the twofold creeper of external and internal ramifications. Externally it may lead you to many actions which are not warranted, bringing unnecessary complications and even misery; internally it may lead to delusory fantasies and fearful thoughts, which can cause confusion or great unhappiness.

The Guru has now brought us to the very core of our consciousness, which can spread out in all dimensions and include everything in itself. We can see the whole of experience as an experience of total awareness, or we can have a highly colored experience of 'I' consciousness, afflicted and affected, with all the seeming variegations of conceptual knowledge produced by perceptual data. We should go back again and again to the pure witnessing consciousness, so that we can both remain undeluded by the superficial turmoil of manifestation and at the same time be completely available to participate in the necessary aspect of life.

It is quite difficult to maintain a balance of these two reciprocal functions, witnessing and activity, to remain detached while at the same time all the data are coming to you through your senses and being processed. It is like being split inside, with one personality sitting quiet and another doing all the activity. Psychologists call this schizophrenia, a disease. For the Vedantin it is not a disease; it is a very natural thing. We have to admit there is a twofold function in us. If we educate our psychologists a little better about the inner functionings of the psyche, at least they will no longer torture people by confirming them as schizophrenic patients. Later on we will go into this in greater depth, but for now we should not exceed the scope of the present verse. Narayana Guru had a sublime scheme in mind for *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* which we want to adhere to as closely as possible.

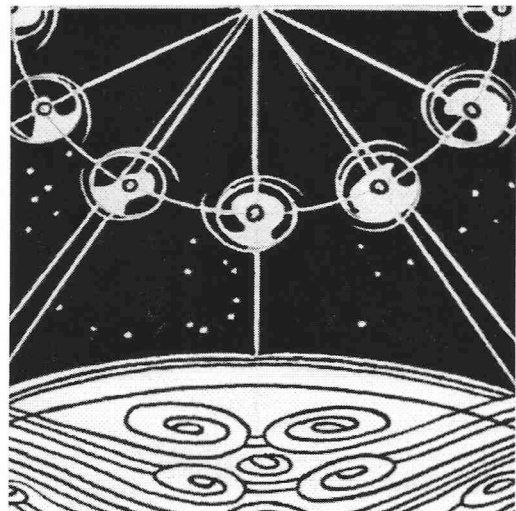
In the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*, we are asked to become familiar with the secret of ignorance, where we consider 'you' and 'I' as two. We are also asked to become familiar

with the secret of wisdom, that 'you' and 'I' are the same. If we do not know these secrets, we can be led into ridiculous situations. Unitive understanding does not mean you can jump out of the transactional world and become something else. The world does not evaporate away when you realize the one 'I' that pervades everything. It continues to be there, so you have to come to terms with it.

All the same, the truth is that there is no world other than the one you construct out of your own concepts. It is something like a novelist or playwright who makes characters out of his own imagination, and then discovers after a few chapters that he is bound by the limitations of his creations. He has become so committed to the characters that he can't make any changes. The members of the cast refuse to allow any enlargement of scope or vision by the author. It is his own creation, but the creator has become fully dominated by his creations. In the same way we create our own world and then we become afraid of it, or we get caught up in it and we don't know how to deal with it. It is an enigmatic situation.

The meditation that one should engage in with this verse is to see the oneness, which you know through the witnessing consciousness, and also the curious way in which the world created by you makes things difficult for you.

(Continued in next issue.)

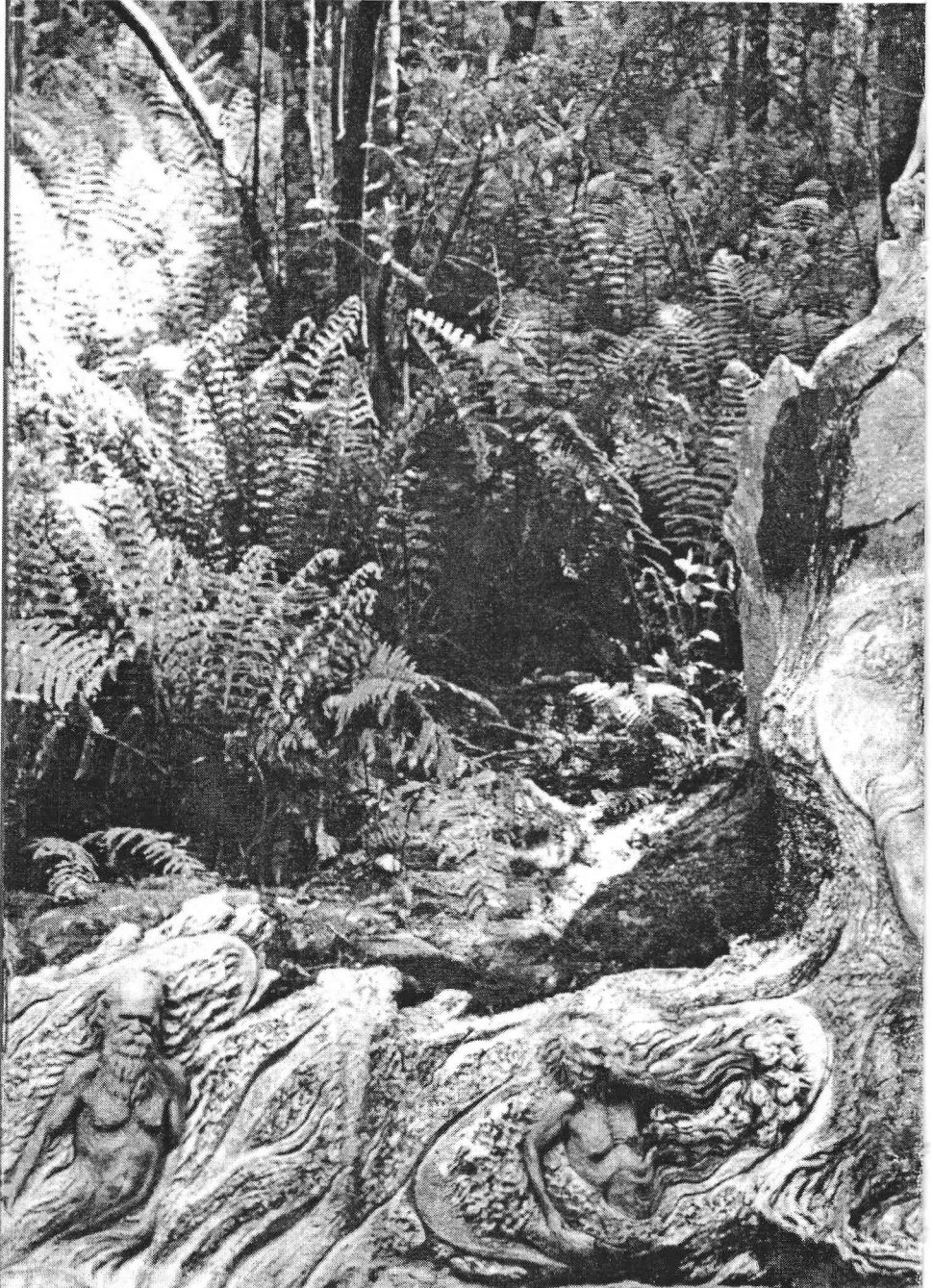


Pumara Kutara, Sacred earth-site . . . Everlasting home, a

In a spiritual completeness expressed through a sacred ceremony, the figures in this work are poised in an attitude of religious reverence towards the first creative spirit revealed in the central section of this group.

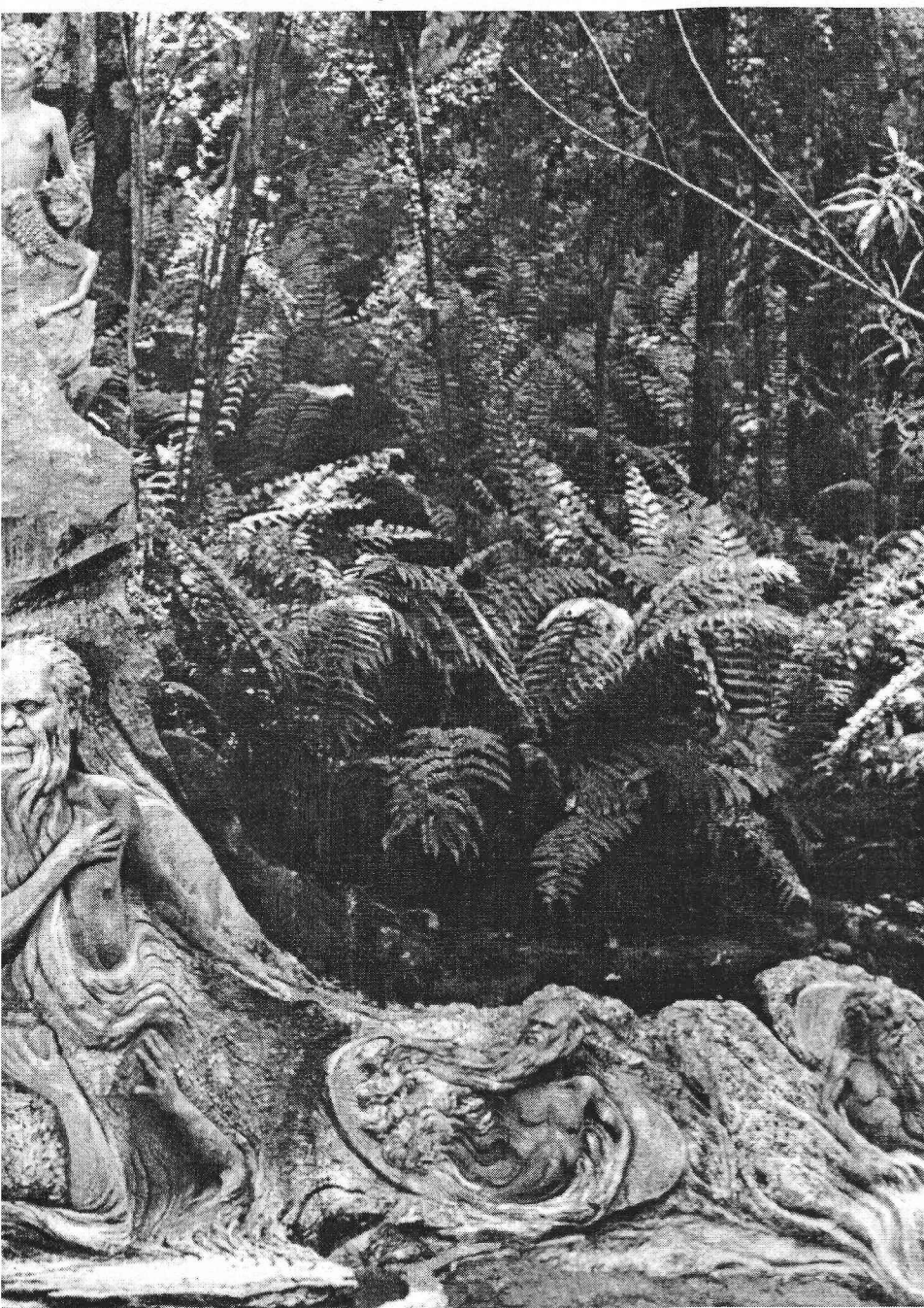
The spirit within the physical body represented by these figures, conscious of itself as a steady state within a vital flowing, a flowing that contained every form of phenomenal expression within his tribal country, reveals

Aboriginal man's deepest consciousness of the sacred soil in which his religious reverence has taken root.



It is a basic need to know and answer this question, because the myth enfold
and is therefore of u
Love, the wonderful mighty power in all its vastness and where all divisions a
can never be used for anything other than
You and I are asked to respond to this forest scene, not just as a human concept, b
of the spirit, thereby revealing the reality behind the material - Spiritual Uni

William Ricketts Sanctuary, Mount Dandenong, Australia



Thus do we see
aboriginal man
not as
primitive, but
rather as a
primal
expression go-
ing towards a
perfect fulfill-
ment of the
evolutionary
urge; for his
spiritual life is
in its principle a
growth into a
higher
consciousness
of being.
The child group
and totemic ani-
mal, the Thorny
Mountain Devil
[at the top]
expresses the
one spiritual
essence in the
whole work.
The myth in
this work and
the myths in all
aboriginal
groups, are a
framework
through which
aboriginal man
seeks to under-
stand the mys-
tery of himself
and of all life
upon earth.

within itself a truth which has arisen out of the depths of human experience,
versal significance.
d limitations cease to exist, is a holy state of being, and this wonderful power
e truth consciousness which is the Divine.
rather to see in the whole scene an attempt to translate all back into the language
rse. . . Unity in diversity realizing the truth of the Spirit; Love giving of itself.



The Earthly Mother crowns the peak of the Mountain of Remembrance





William Ricketts

Forty-two years ago I entered this forest and at that time I knew that it was not possible for one alone to ever know all there is to know in all fields of knowledge...it seemed to me that if I even attempted to do this I would end up carrying a heavy load of information. As I entered my forest scene, one thing only gently and silently came to rest before my wandering eyes and searching soul. It was the realisation that somehow I was related to the pure water gushing from a silent spring in the side of the mountain. The key to this compelling and beautiful mystery of life, entrusted into my hands, inspired my dream of creating this Mountain of Remembrance so other people can climb up and see and feel for themselves something of their own true place in the universe.



Autobiography of An Absolutist

Nataraja Guru

CHAPTER SEVEN The Tao and My Destiny

The days I was to spend in Madras as an undergraduate student were coming to an end by the year 1920. I remember the transition day at the beginning of the term of that year, when I went on a bicycle from the Victoria Hostel in Chepauk to the Saidapet Teachers' College.

My demonstratorship at the zoological laboratories had been artificially terminated by a favoritism exercised by the then officer in charge, in favor of his would-be son-in-law, and I could not return to my work there, being cut off from below, as it were.

This was my first foretaste of the stresses and strains that prevail in the world of jobs in the India of my time, into which nether world I had just occasion to peep. The whole story needs to be related with all its horrors and its skeleton closets in a section by itself. This, however, did not disconcert me. My career was just starting and the more the doors at which I knocked at this stage, the brighter and more varied would be the possibilities that opened themselves to me.

In such a spirit of open adventure I trusted to chance more than to any set plan of action. The chance of the Tao had to operate and lead me from one open door to another so that my true nature would have full opportunity to express itself. The doors of chance are open everywhere to man, especially at the inception of his career. Whether called fate or the will of God or the tide in the affairs of men, there is, to the keen observer of the unfolding of one's own life, a light that leads or a thread that guides, from event

to event, as chance flits by occasionalism as if from one tree to another. No button must be pressed before its time and no petal unfolded before the time of full blooming has come. No fruit should be plucked when still immature. Chance must work its delicate way through the maze of possibilities and probabilities. Providence must have a full chance for working out one's salvation without the intervention of one's own egotistic will which when it enters into the picture tampers with the natural and overt orientation of overall interests as they develop in a certain living order within. Such were the thoughts that vaguely worked within me when I set out from the courtyard of the Victoria Hostel, pressing my hands on the bicycle handle, to continue my studies as it happened, for one more year, to finish my education in India.

I must say that the Tao did work and decided for me without my initiating any action myself. I kept myself strictly neutral internally and said to myself that the bicycle itself was free to turn to the Teachers' College or to the Presidency College again. I remember how, on leaving the gate of the hostel it turned towards Triplicane, en route to Saidapet Teachers' College, six or seven miles off, without permitting me for a minute to exercise any preference for one career to dominate the other. A teacher's career was thus selected for me by the will of the Tao or the Absolute which is not other than the neutral point of life where possibilities and probabilities have full freedom to operate. The word "God" is going out of fashion in the modern scientific world, but means the same factor of chance in the context of transcendentalism. His will was thus

done.

My Philanthropic Interests Mature

Altruistic or philanthropic motives often take the form of works of benefaction ranging from localized charity to the high aim of wishing the true happiness of mankind as a whole. As in the case of the rise and development of the religious instinct in man, this parallel passion for doing good grows and matures in its own way in the life of individuals.

In my own case I have indicated how its first leaves were unfolded in the days when I was wandering among the forests and dyers of the up-country of Ceylon, distributing quinine and epsom-salts, as a student in the matriculation classes. By the time I had reached the graduate courses at Madras I had seen what the limitations were in the matter of large-scale feeding of fellow humans. The feedings at the birthdays of great saints like Swami Vivekananda, Narayana Guru or Sri Ramakrishna at which I participated, off and on, in my school and college career, must have also helped to mature and shape these deep instincts within me in the course of the years.

What I called to myself "poor feeding" was a sort of surrogate of religion with me when I was still an undergraduate at the Presidency College. From the mere doing good to others in the relativistic sense, to the love of fellow man in a more truly spiritual sense, is a far cry which, in the case of many persons, even educated and fully informed, remains still disjunct in the growth and development of general life-interests and connected activities, without any organic link between them.

It was again the personality of Narayana Guru that added to the situation, thus conceived mechanistically, and in a prosaic manner, that little touch which, as it were, leavened the whole lump, transmuting what was dull metal and giving to the tendency that noble luster which distinguishes true spirituality. I shall take a pace backwards to tell how it happened.

Love of God and God's Love of Man

Every schoolboy knows Leigh Hunt's poem of Abou Ben Adhem (whose tribe must have increased by now many-fold). His problem was to distinguish between the love of God and the love of fellow man. Dialectically understood they are equally valuable but, taken unilaterally, one works to the detriment of the other. Here again the question of double gain or total loss is involved.

It was in the year 1920 when I had not yet finished college that I used to go to teach, after eight in the night, in a certain poor area of the City of Madras which could be called a slum. What makes a slum by outwardly evident signs of poverty or over-crowding is often very misleading in India. Streamlined areas in the suburbs of New York that I have known have some essential slum qualifications. What these exactly are, it is very hard to put down, but when neighbors are so close to each other so as to have to speak of their domestic secrets in public when they happen to quarrel, especially in matters of sex, that to me determines whether a place is a slum or not, however affluent in other matters apparently. When people have to queue for bare necessities such as breakfast, or even run for change to put in a slot for opening a room of public convenience, they are competing with fellow man and thus proving themselves to have a very poor slum life indeed. This happens in the heart of very rich cities like London.

An Indian slum which might appear ramshackled might still preserve precious human values intact, and in a South Indian village of the poorest, lowliest and lost people, one often finds preserved the remains of a civilization five thousand years old, where the smell of the cattle refuse and the ashes that people wear on their foreheads in the name of the timeless Śiva, add a spiritual touch to life which is not in evidence in many mansions of the rich in other parts of the world. In such a holy slum it was that I found myself one night giving language lessons and sometimes writing petitions for the "Poor" who were occasionally beaten up by the police or re-

fused admission into hospitals.

Castes and Gandhi

It was late at night once while I sat in the anteroom of a neglected public building in Chintadripet. The regular students had gone and I was left with some social workers who were members of an association called the Advaita Bhakta Sabha, a socio-religious organization started by one Kalathoor Muniswami Pillay. This gentleman was supposed to be a member of the Adi-Dravida community which was a name given then to what the English social reformers of a previous generation would have called the "Depressed Classes of India." Elsewhere one refers to them as the "Fifth" caste or *pancamas*.

Actually, this stratum of society one day represented the topmost in India before the invading hordes who entered into the fertile Gangetic and other plains of India had added newer and newer strata above them, as it were, submerging this group which represented perhaps the old-

est of the proto-Aryan civilization, not far removed from the time of the Indus Valley civilizations now revealed in the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa excavations. Great names like that of Saint Thiruvalluvar, author of the *Tiru-Kural*, perhaps the wisest book of maxims ever written, about the beginning of the Christian era in South India, were associated with the same stratum. They represented an economically and politically defeated people who retained traditionally the best in the history of India. What corresponded to the dominant section that over-covered this ancient and precious stratum was that of the "Brahmins," which consisted of tribes who claimed Vedic orthodoxy which was to be traced to the Aryan invaders. The earlier however, though "depressed" were superior by true spiritual heritage, although due to domination and defeat they seemed to lack all outer social refinements.

The Āryanized group who dominated these ancient peoples, sometimes by better refinements, sometimes by shrewdness, as



Narayana Gurukula, Chintadripet, Madras

reflected in the stories such as that of Nala and Damayanti, or Harischandra, or even in the story of the Pandavas, were really inferior to them when true spiritual values were put on the balance. The Adi-Dravidas were thus custodians of proto-Aryan traditions of a more ancient stratum, but were defeated and derided although they conserved in their culture the highest of Indian spiritual values. The "Brahmin" was thus the rival of the "Pariah" and to this day this distinction and the dialectical challenges and responses involved between these two sections have vitiated the social, economic and political life of India and continue to present problems that are not soluble except by some sort of root and branch reform.

I was then acting as a secretary to this group who were later named "Harijans" by Mahatma Gandhi who came back to India after the Round Table Conference which Ramsay Macdonald, the then British Prime Minister, had called together in London, to consider the claims of Indians to rule themselves.

At the time I refer to, even Mahatma Gandhi was not sympathetic to the cause of the poor people, and only after his return from the Round Table Conference did he even consent to treat the problem as deserving any attention at all. During the visit of Gandhi about this time, around 1921, in Madras, I myself remember to have invited him to make a halt of a few minutes when passing through the Chintadripet area to receive a garland from these lowly people. But this request was not granted.

After returning from the London Conference, a sadder and wiser man went far in the opposite direction, and even changed the name of his weekly journal which was called *Young India* into *Harijan* which was to support the cause of the "Harijans" so that they would not prove an impediment to the attainment of independence for India.

Whether he was against the *varnāshrama* theory on which castes in India largely rested for their theoretical justification and nourishment is still an open

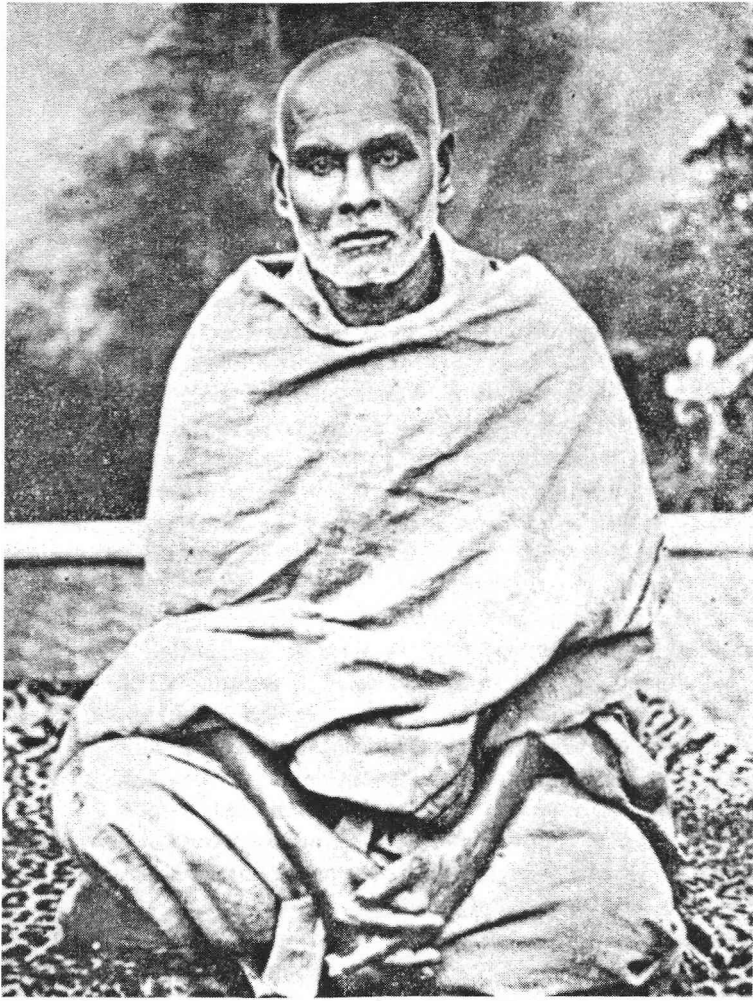
question. Subsequent pronouncements in connection with the Vaikom *satyāgraha*, and even the one in the Harijan itself during the very week of his tragic assassination would tend to make this sufficiently clear. I was myself torn between admiration for Gandhian ideologies, of which I tried very earnestly to understand the subtle logic, even with a certain fervor, and confusion about their intricacies. Some of his arguments seemed tortuous to me, but I could not offer any alternative to than myself at that time.

Nanda and Nanda's Own People

While these upheavals were taking place within, the social activities in which I was engaged during out-of-college hours had assumed a still more mature form. Instead of occasional poor feeding I thought in terms of night schools, and not content either with that kind of part-time institution I became connected with the founding of a hostel for so-called Harijan students in Chintadripet. A temporary shed had been put up with palm-leaf thatching and side partitions of the same material, on a piece of land which had been recently acquired at the instance of Narayana Guru who came into the scene in his own mysterious way, which I was on the point of describing a moment ago and from where I must continue now, as the incident by itself was a great turning-point in my life.

It happened roughly as follows.

As I said, I was one night lingering late after my night-school teaching work. The senior members of the group had just a fortnight before produced a play called *Nandanar* which referred to the life of a saint who is supposed to have belonged to the untouchable section of the community. The night school that had been started and the hostel students who were to be looked after needed funds. But I was still thinking in terms of feeding the poor. The play was staged in George Town, Madras, and brought us some surplus amount after the expenses were deducted. This was to be utilized for feeding as many of the poor of the locality as possible on the next Sunday.



While I was discussing these plans in the anteroom rather late, there arrived a tall and slender old man with a muffler round his shaven head and tucked below the chin. The man was about sixty and was not well, appearing to be suffering from some cold. He came straight into the room where I was engaged in the conversation with the social workers. He was the Guru Narayana whose contact I had made even from my childhood and who was destined to influence my life in that special way only known to the world to which Gurus and *Sis̄yas* belong, to the exclusion of all other considerations whatsoever.

The reason why he had made this late appearance and done me the honor of showing such interest in my work remains

a mystery to me to this day. He spoke to me very kindly and tried to understand what I was doing. He approved of it but seemed to want to add something more than what I could guess on the subject of doing good to others. I could only vaguely imagine at the time that he was not enthusiastic about me in any all-out sense as I myself happened to be, but kept some reserve thoughts to himself on this subject of doing good or being good in this world. More than this I was not able to gather. A few days later however, there was a poor feeding, as I called it, at the same place to which the Guru again took the trouble of doing me the honor of his presence.

A Guru Lesson

This time I felt a sense of elation and

goodness within me as the food was being distributed. I said to myself that the Guru would agree with me that I was a good man trying to do good to fellow man, but the Guru made no comments implying any praise for me or for the kind of work I was doing. He asked me what all that was going on was about and I replied that it was "feeding the poor." I had in my mind the *daridra Nārāyanās* (poor gods) that I had heard talked about in such a connection.

"Which poor?" he asked. "We are all poor in a certain sense," he added.

A new clarification about the very nature of altruism or philanthropy dawned on me when I looked at the silent and sedate face of the Guru who put me a simple question: "Which poor people?" He seemed to suggest that all of us were poor internally if not externally, or none was poorer than the other. By feeling sympathy for the so-called poor section of society the poverty becomes shared at once in principle at least and the division between the two sections becomes or ought to be automatically abolished. This was a subtle difference that one might dismiss as highly dialectical but all the same it did the trick for me for ever, because I began to realize that the real poverty resided in my heart and, when I came under the influence of a dualistic sense of pity and felt myself to be a benefactor, the very purpose of beneficence in a total or absolute sense was defeated. One who suffers from extreme pity, like Arjuna on the battlefield, contributes his share of suffering to the total situation of human general happiness, and if each person should follow this example, we have the picture of humanity multiplied by so many individuals, each of whom brought his suffering to bear on the general situation. The correct way would be for each to think of bringing his own happiness to bear on the total situation, so that total or general happiness would prevail.

A lesson was thus learnt by me which I was able to confirm and verify in the light of proper dialectics only many years later when I became familiar with the an-

cient classical dictum of *All for One and One for All* which gave the correct relational formula which would spell double gain in such a matter.

The Guru himself on another occasion clarified the matter when he put the delicate question in the form of an arithmetical problem. Supposing there were one hundred hungry people to be fed and ninety-nine had sat down for the meal, while one remained over to serve the others, remaining hungry when all were happily going through with the feast. The suffering of this last man would reflect on the total situation as a negative element which would detract from the general happiness and compromise it altogether. Philanthropy has thus its own dialectical laws which do not brook violation.

The Guru Collaborates with My Work

I looked at the problem of doing good still from the relativistic side, but the same question of doing good was viewed from another standpoint by the Guru. The work in itself might seem the same in content, but the context and approach to the same work were radically different.

In popular maxims such as "Charity begins at home" and the other that indicates the opposite: "Love thy neighbor as thyself," we have the two different attitudes represented which show two different approaches to doing good to fellow man. Both are true in the context of the over-all absolute Value, and how to reconcile one with the other is an art which the absolutist way of life alone could justify. It was the Guru Narayana who, in his own unobtrusive way, put me on the path of the Absolutist approach to this problem, and once the new approach was grasped in its spirit it could be made to apply to other and in fact every other department of thought or activity. There is always a relative and an absolutist approach to problems and the former spells tragedy while the latter solves all problems.

As the secretary of the Adi-Dravida Sabha I tried hard to get a plot of land for the use of the night school and for the purpose of a place of worship for which

the community badly felt the need. One of the office-bearers thought that Narayana Guru could help in the matter. He was staying as the guest of a *Dharma-karta* (Chief Trustee) of a temple which possessed certain lands in that area which were suitable for the purpose.

The Guru was approached the next day. When the question of the land was mentioned the Guru straight-away gave the assurance that if it was badly needed it would be obtained. "Which was the land required?" he asked, and before the next twenty-four hours were over, he stood on a piece of land adjoining the river at Chintadripet, pointing out to members of the Sabha the land they could get. All practical arrangements for its transfer were made at once, and I was myself struck with the speed and the spontaneity with which all this was done.

A hostel for four or five students was

put up on the plot and a corner of it was set apart for a Ganesh Temple which was put up only later. The funds for maintaining the hostel students, free of any charge to be paid by them, was partly obtained through Miss Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya who had come from Hyderabad in those days to settle down in Madras. She was the well-known daughter of Dr. Aghornath Chattopadhyaya who was a high official in Hyderabad and one of whose other daughters was Mrs. Sarojini Naidu who became famous both as a poet and a leader in the political life of India in later years. The ease and grace with which the Guru thus collaborated in my efforts to help my fellow man was another eye-opener for me. It was surely one of those events that influenced the course of my life activities for many years to come.

(Continued in next issue.)



Sarojini Naidu

Selected Poems of Sarojini Naidu

The Soul's Prayer

*In childhood's pride I said to Thee:
"O Thou, who mad'st me of Thy breath,
Speak, Master, and reveal to me
Thine inmost laws of life and death.*

*"Give me to drink each joy and pain
Which Thine eternal hand can mete,
For my insatiate soul would drain
Earth's utmost bitter, utmost sweet.*

*"Spare me no bliss, no pang of strife,
Withhold no gift or grief I crave,
The intricate lore of love and life
And mystic knowledge of the grave."*

*Lord, Thou didst answer stern and low:
"Child, I will hearken to thy prayer
And thy unconquered soul shall know
All passionate rapture and despair.*

*"Thou shalt drink deep of joy and fame,
And love shall burn thee like a fire,
And pain shall cleanse thee like a flame,
To purge the dross from thy desire.*

*"So shall thy chastened spirit yearn
To seek from its blind prayer release,
And spent and pardoned, sue to learn
The simple secret of My peace.*

*"I, bending from my sevenfold height
Will teach thee of My quickening grace,
Life is a prism of My light,
And Death the shadow of My face."*

The Lotus

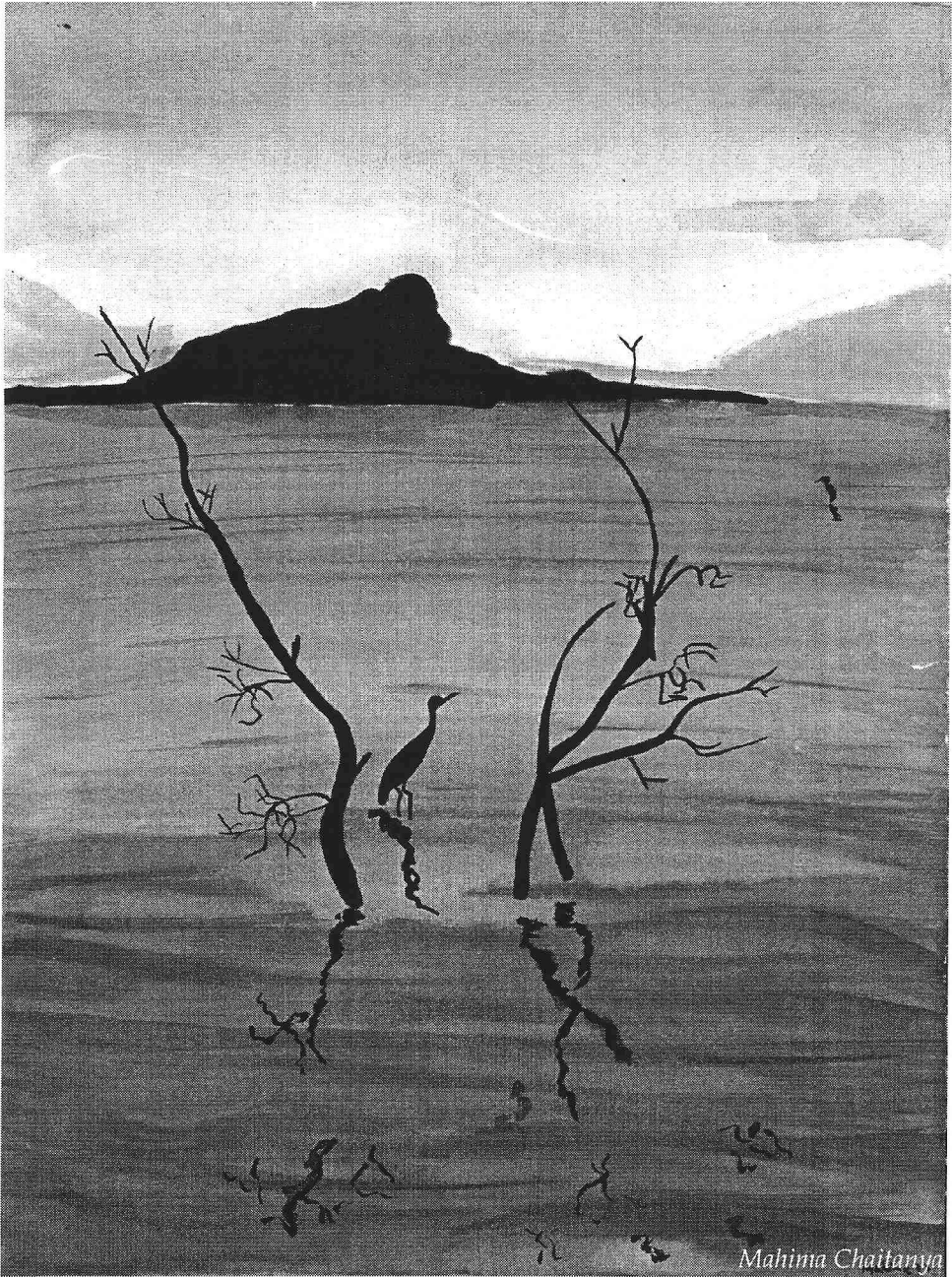
(To M. K. Gandhi)

*O mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,
In myriad-petalled grace inviolate
Supreme o'er transient storms of tragic Fate,
Deep-rooted in the waters of all Time,
What legions loosed from many a far-off clime
Of wild-bee hordes with lips insatiate,
And hungry winds with wings of hope or hate,
Have thronged and pressed round thy miraculous prime
To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart...
But who could win thy secret, who attain
Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma's breath,
Or pluck thine immortality, who art
Coeval with the Lords of Life and Death?*

Village Songs

*Full are my pitchers and far to carry,
Lone is the way and long,
Why, O why was I tempted to tarry
Lured by the boatmen's song?
Swiftly the shadows of night are falling,
Hear, O hear, is the white crane calling,
Is it the wild owl's cry?
There are no tender moonbeams to light me,
If in the darkness a serpent should bite me,
Or if an evil spirit should smite me,
Rām re Rām! I shall die.*

*My brother will murmur, "Why doth she linger?"
My mother will wait and weep,
Saying, "O safe may the great gods bring her,
The Jamuna's waters are deep."
The Jamuna's waters rush by so quickly,
The shadows of evening gather so thickly,
Like black birds in the sky...
O! if the storm breaks, what will betide me?
Safe from the lightning where shall I hide me?
Unless Thou succor my footsteps and guide me,
Rām re Rām! I shall die.*



Mahima Chattanya

An Intelligent Person's Guide to the Hindu Religion

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

SUBRAHMAṆYA

Brahmaṇya Revalued

In the revaluation of Indian spirituality Subrahmaṇya and Gaṇapati share equal importance. The very word Su-Brahmaṇya reveals the revaluation of Vedic Brāhmanism involved in the concept. Pre-Vedic Indian spirituality was essentially negative. The Āryan approach, on the other hand, was aggressively positive, and excessive in luxury and pleasure seeking. So, during the age of contemplation, a golden mean of the two ways of life was brought out in the concept of Subrahmaṇya who is both positive as well as idealistically negative.

Kumāra Sambhava or the Birth of Subrahmaṇya

Uma, the daughter of Himavan did *tapasya* to commune with Śiva, the silent contemplative who was lost in the sublimity of the *Sat-cit-ānanda*. Kāmadeva, the God of erotic passion, disturbed Śiva's tranquillity. Śiva's heart was drawn to Uma. Though Śiva gave the purest of his love to Uma, he burnt the God's passion with the rays emitted from his third eye of wisdom. The same rays entered the water of the lake of Śaravana and six children emerged from the lake. The group of stars known as Kārtika sucked these children and when they were shown to Uma she held them in a single sweet embrace which coalesced them into one. This child was known as Kumāra, the one who caused the tragic end of Māra or the Great Deluder.

The Enigma in the Personality of Subrahmaṇya

Subrahmaṇya is a shaven-headed *brahmacāri* as well as the loving husband of Valli and Devasena. Even these wives have their characteristic polarities. Valli is an 'outcast' of dark complexion, while Devasena is of superior Vedic status. Valli belongs to the *pitryāna* tradition, while Devasena, as her name indicates, represents the *devayāna*. Agastya praises Subrahmaṇya as a contemplative Guru while Indra recognizes him as the great General of the army of the Devas. His sacred ashes indicate *nirviśeṣata*, transcendence of quality; while his vehicle, the peacock, is a symbol of *saviśeṣa vaichitrya* – qualitative variations. These enigmas can be solved only by applying dialectical revaluation as the implied principle in the context of Subrahmaṇya.

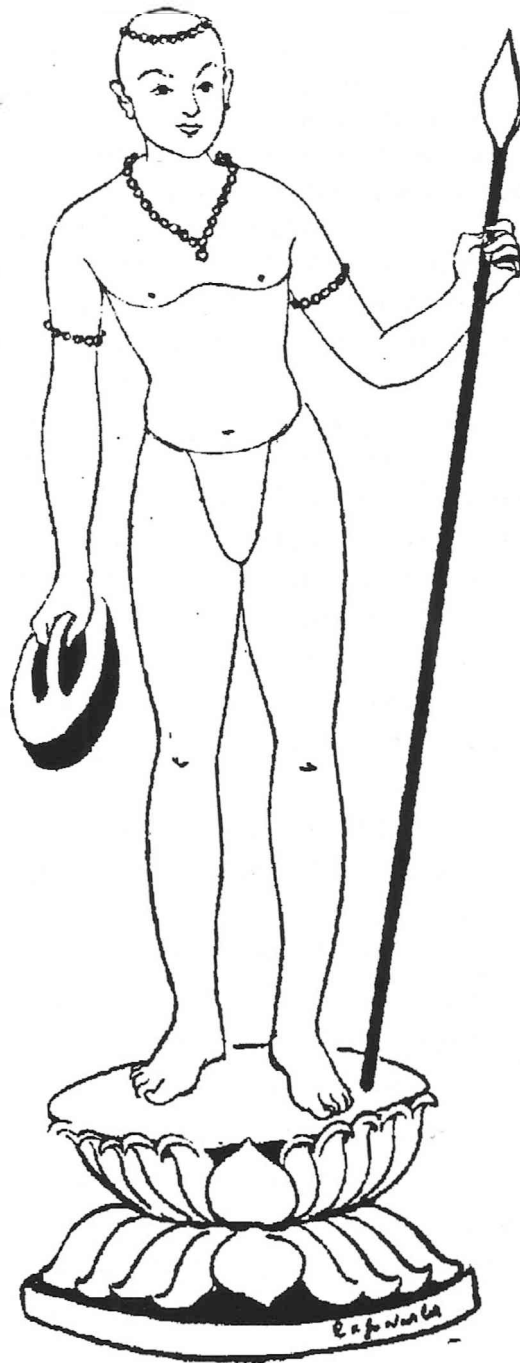
Palani (Tamil – Palam "fruit"; ni "you")

The most ancient and well-known temple dedicated to Subrahmaṇya is near the Palani Hills, west of Madurai. The myth about Palani is both interesting and instructive.

One day Śiva and Pārvaṭī wanted to test the spiritual insight of their two mind-born sons, Gaṇapati and Subrahmaṇya. They therefore asked them to make a *pradakṣiṇa* (a circumambulation of the universe). The reward for the swiftest would be a fruit. Subrahmaṇya, desirous of the fruit, got on his peacock in great haste and, like a modern artificial satellite, went round the world. But Gaṇapati, quite unconcerned about the fruit (the result of action) made a *pradakṣiṇa* of his parents. Seeing this great insight of Gaṇapati, though he was not desirous of any reward, Śiva

gave him the fruit. After some time Subrahmaṇya returned, certain of his victory. He was greatly shocked and disappointed at seeing his elder brother by the side of his parents with the prize in his hand. But no pain is without its reward too. Subrahmaṇya was intelligent enough to understand the root cause of his feeling of rivalry, envy and sorrow. Nevermore did he want to pin his desires on to the fleeting. A great dispassion came to his mind. So he retired to the lonely hills. He had his head shaved and he smeared his body with ashes. Śiva and Pārvatī were greatly touched by his *vairāgya*. They went to him and said: "Our darling, you wanted the fruit. But thou art the fruit (*Palam-ni*), the fruit of our spiritual union."

This story is very significant. Henri Bergson, the French philosopher, says there are two ways of knowing a thing. One is going round it and knowing many aspects relatively about it. The other is to become the very thing by entering into it absolutely. Of these two ways Subrahmaṇya by going around the world chose the relativistic method of induction and deduction. Gaṇapati, on the other hand, applied the dialectics of equating the parents (causal factor) and the universe (effect). Thus he entered into the very spirit of manifestation. Gaṇapati found inaction in his action and action in his inaction. Subrahmaṇya toiled after the laborious way of *karma*. As a result, he had to suffer. Suffering induced *vairāgya* or dispassion.



Dispassion brought realization. Realization came as the result or fruit of this *tapas*. The realization was that one's own Self is the fruit which was sought after, because it is of the nature of *Sat-Cit-Ānanda*.

Shaven-Headed

Until almost recently, one could judge a man's caste and āśrama in India by looking at his style of hair and mode of dress. So those who wanted to transcend these social limitations used to shave away their hair and wear only a *kaupina*. That is why sannyasins burn their sacred thread, shave their hair and only use a strip of cloth to cover their nakedness.

Sacred Ashes

The civilization of the sacred ashes is prehistoric. The really negative character of Pre-Vedic Indian contemplatives is still preserved, at least in South India, marked by the token symbolism of putting ashes on the Forehead. Usually, three lines are drawn. Our experience falls generally into many groups of threes. A man who puts three lines on his forehead with sacred ashes does not desire to possess anything in heaven, earth or in the under-world. He is not attached to anything in the three states of wakefulness, dreaming and deep sleep. He expresses no desires in his actions, words or thoughts. He is no more prompted by the impulses of *Sattva*, *Rajas* or *Tamas*. His mind is not torn with the triple factors of the known, knowledge and the knower. He is fully aware of his existence and value.

The Spear

Subrahmaṇya's weapon (*āyudha*) is a spear. It is one-pointed. As a yogi his mind is not bifurcated. He always applies his mind with a singled-out interest. He is *ekarasa* (of one flavor). His penetrating mind can pierce through all impediments. Those who aspire to have realization should likewise have one-pointed attention. Subrahmaṇya's spear is also a sign of his preparedness as a warrior. He is quite capable of adjusting himself to any warranted situation of actuality. He is alert.

The Kamaṇḍalu

The *kamaṇḍalu* or begging bowl-cum-waterpot which Subrahmaṇya carries in his hand is a sign of his homelessness. As Jesus said he has no place whereon to lay his head.

The Peacock

Māyā is defined as variegation of varieties which gives the illusion of being and not being with the aid of name and form in space and time. Look at the tail of the peacock. All the colors of the spectrum are there. There are the designs of a thousand eyes. Are they real? No. But are they non-existent? Again, no. They do exist. Thus the eyes of the peacock's tail are both *sat* (existing) as well as *asat* (non-existing). This verily represents *māyā*. Subrahmaṇya is one who has complete control over *māyā*. He rides over *māyā* and makes it his vehicle.

His Two Wives

A *brahmacāri* with two wives may seem very ridiculous. It is a long story how *brahmacarya* got associated with celibacy. It is something similar to the "bachelor" sound included in such academic degrees as "Bachelor of Arts". There is no bar in any university for a married man to take the B.A. degree. Originally, when colleges were attached to monasteries, the students who took degrees were also bachelor schoolmen. Later, when laymen were also allowed to take degrees the term bachelor remained unaltered. Similarly, in the Indian context, when boys were initiated into the path of Brahman or the Absolute, they were called *brahmacāris*. *Brahmacarya* does not mean anything more or less. Those who deviate from the path are called *vyabhicaris*. *Vyabhi* means deviation or perversion. In spiritual life there are only two alternatives, *brahmacarya* and *vyabhicarya*. All those who follow the path of the *śāstrās*, accepting a Guru with his heart set on the realization of the Absolute are *brahmacarins*, whether celibate or married. If *brahmacarya* is restricted to unmarried people we shall be indirectly discounting the *brahmacharya* of great ṛṣis like

Vāsiṣṭha, Yājñavalkya, Janaka and Sri Rāmakrishna. So the marriage of Subrahmaṇya does not make him any less qualified for the path of *Brahman* the Absolute.

Apart from the inapplication of marriage in the case of Subrahmaṇya, it is far more interesting to look into the symbolism thus involved. He married both Valli and Devasena and loved them both equally. Valli is an out-caste, a dark-skinned woman of the South belonging to the *pitryāna* (path of the ancestors) tradition of the prehistoric Indians. Devasena on the other hand was the fair daughter of Vedic excellence belonging to the *Devayāna* (path of the shining ones or gods) tradition as her name implies. So this marriage of Subrahmaṇya means nothing more than his acceptance of the two ancient traditions of India, giving recognition to the spiritual values involved in them both.

The Crowing Cock

The ensign on the banner of Subrahmaṇya is the crowing cock. It proclaims the dawn of wisdom to those whose eyes are still heavy with the sleep of ignorance. It represents a clarion-call to awake and witness the glory of the sun of wisdom

shining in the firmament of *Cit* or pure awareness.

A Warrior Guru

Subrahmaṇya is a warrior Guru. He was acclaimed to be the Guru of all Gurus by the South Indian ṛṣi Agastya, who by himself was a great reevaluator of the Vedic and pre-Vedic culture. Subrahmaṇya was also honored by Indra as the great General and Protector of the ascending path of the Devas (*Devayāna*). Just as the contemplative Socrates could turn himself to conform to the requirements of being a courageous warrior, and even as Arjuna shook off his dreamy idealism on the field of actuality, so Subrahmaṇya stands for *jñāna-karma-samanvaya* instead of falling into the error of *jñāna-karma-samucchaya*. The former is the dialectical way of treating wisdom and action as counterparts of wisdom; the latter way, on the other hand, means the erroneous mixing up of wisdom and action.

Subrahmaṇya gives us the Light of Eternity as the Supreme Guru, and he gives us the strength and courage to turn every moment of the fleeting present into a timelessness of Joy and Peace.

(Continued in next issue.)



Movie Muse

Peter Oppenheimer

Pretty much all of us are fans of life, but how many among us are fair-weather fans? It's easy to proclaim, "Life is beautiful" when things go our way, when our health is good, the sun is shining, our cash flow buoys us, that guy or gal we're attracted to returns our attentions and affections, our intentions are honored, and our actions bear fruit. Ah, then life is good. Yet who among us can proclaim the same in the midst of a debilitating toothache, sore-throat or life-threatening illness, when the skies are gray and nature seems frozen and barren, when our love is rejected, our desires thwarted, and around us we see coldness and cruelty? Does ugliness negate beauty, or does it merely obscure it?

One might think this too heavy a topic for a comedy. Well then, how about the holocaust? And I don't mean the sanitized, slap-stick version presented in Mel Brooks' *The Producers*, which painted a picture of the Third Reich as somewhat sinister but ultimately fun and games. Robert Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* attempts to make its affirmative proclamation even in the light of Nazi atrocities. To me this is nothing short of a miracle.

Life is Beautiful is far too profoundly dramatic to be called a comedy, and yet it is the heart-warmingly comic elements which consistently provide the wings that make this paean to the human spirit soar. Furthermore there is an unbreakable thread of romance that winds through the narrative. Perhaps the genre of *Life is Beautiful* can best be described as Romantic Dramedy.

Robert Benigni is Italy's most popular comedian, whose face has become ubiquitous on TV and in film over there. *Life is Beautiful* is his first attempt to write and direct a film as well as star in it. Set in Italy during the build-up, onset, and culmi-

nation of World War II, the story focuses a cheerful, resourceful and utterly charming man named Guido, who through chance, whim and determination, falls head over heels in love with a Nazi sympathizer's fiancée. Ultimately they marry and give birth to an equally charming and even cuter young son, only to be swept away on the child's fifth birthday onto a packed boxcar carrying them to a Nazi concentration camp.

The second half of the film documents Guido's touching and often rib-tickling attempts to keep his son's spirits up by pretending that the entire ordeal is an epic and intricate game being staged for the boy's benefit. This leads to such scenes as the father calling out, "Wait up! We've got reservations" while they are being herded at gun-point onto the train, and Guido's ingenious and hilarious supposed translation into Italian of a Nazi guard's barked instructions to the inmates who have recently arrived at the camp.

I've seen *Life is Beautiful* twice so far. The second time I took several family members and was able to pay less attention to the English subtitles and more attention to the marvelous acting on the part of the three principals (Husband, Wife, and Son). My mother, brother, sister-in-law, and her brother all loved it. My sister-in-law, Barb, remarked that whereas she has cried and laughed during different parts of a single movie before, this was the first time that she felt like she was crying and laughing simultaneously.

I give *Life is Beautiful* my highest recommendation (with the only caveat being that you have to be prepared to read the subtitles). The movie not only answers brain-teasing riddles such as, "If you say my name, I'm no longer there. Who am I?" but also soul-stirring riddles such as ,

"How is it possible to maintain one's joy and appreciation for life when all about appears ugly and grim?" Guido's pure heart is like a clear mirror which is somehow able to reflect the dirt of the world without ever being sullied by it. Through the force of his example he is able to keep his innocent and vulnerable son's eyes on the prize. And in so doing, ours too.

* * * * *

I admit I share some of the same "subtle phobia" that infests a great majority of North American filmgoers. I sometimes feel, "Hey, if I want to read a story, I'll stay home and curl up with a book." And yet limiting oneself to English language movies is the cinematic equivalent of a diet consisting entirely of peanut butter sandwiches. This past year in particular my runaway top two movies were Italian and Iranian.

My number two was *Life Is Beautiful*, a film at once sunny and dreadful in which a father's loving protection of his son attains to sublime heights. In my effort to have friends and family see this film, I've seen it three times. It takes an unusual film indeed that could edge out *Life Is Beautiful* for my "Best" Picture of 1998. That nod must go to *Children of Heaven*, in which the bittersweetness of the story/script/performance/soundtrack are capable of acting like a solvent to the heart, melting while it instructs.

The story (written by world class director Majid Majidi) presents a ten year old brother and his seven year old sister (Ali and Zahra) from an impoverished, though not destitute, family living in a crowded residential section of Tehran. Behind in their rent, the children see how poverty drives their beloved father across the boundaries of abusiveness. One day while out dutifully accomplishing numerous family errands, Ali misplaces his sister's only pair of shoes after picking them up at the repair shop. Afraid to incur their father's wrath and add to their family's burdens, Ali convinces Zahra that since she goes to school in the morning and he

in the afternoon, they can share his pair, until they can figure something out. The enchantment of this movie is watching closely as these two loyal and determined siblings deal with the complications, hardships, embarrassments, marathon dashes to each other through the city, unsympathetic school authorities, suspicious parents, and their own confection of sibling camaraderie, rivalry, protectiveness, suspicion, empathy, annoyance, and ultimately generosity. The twists and turns are sometimes breathtaking, for example at one point the shoes even temporarily turn up again, only this time on another foot. At another point Ali enters a race in which *third* prize is a pair of shoes. Enough said.

I was in a heightened state of delight throughout this entire film. The soundtrack is notable not just for its subtle moving music, but its almost mesmerizing use of ambient sounds to put you right inside a household or neighborhood or schoolyard. What tenderness and compassion to come from a country once and still often demonized as a hotbed of fanatical terrorism! This is a good example of how "fiction" can correct the distortions of promulgated "fact."

There is a common thread between declaring *Life Is Beautiful* amidst the ashes and bones of the holocaust and declaring children living in a state of deprivation to be *Children Of Heaven*. In *Children of Heaven* humor is not used to divert one's attention from the Unacceptable, as it sometimes is in *Life Is Beautiful*. The humor in *Children of Heaven* is of a warmth that can melt the defenses which keep us from feeling deeply enough to know the exquisite spiritual beauty that resides at the core and as the core of each living being. As the source of life, that spirit is One, yet as it radiates out, each ray becomes unrepeatably unique. In *Children of Heaven*, and particularly in the eyes and expressions of Ali and Zahra, I swear I could see not only their delightfully unique personalities, but our common spirit as well, the Great Mystery Itself. ❖

East-West University Report and Narayana Gurukula News

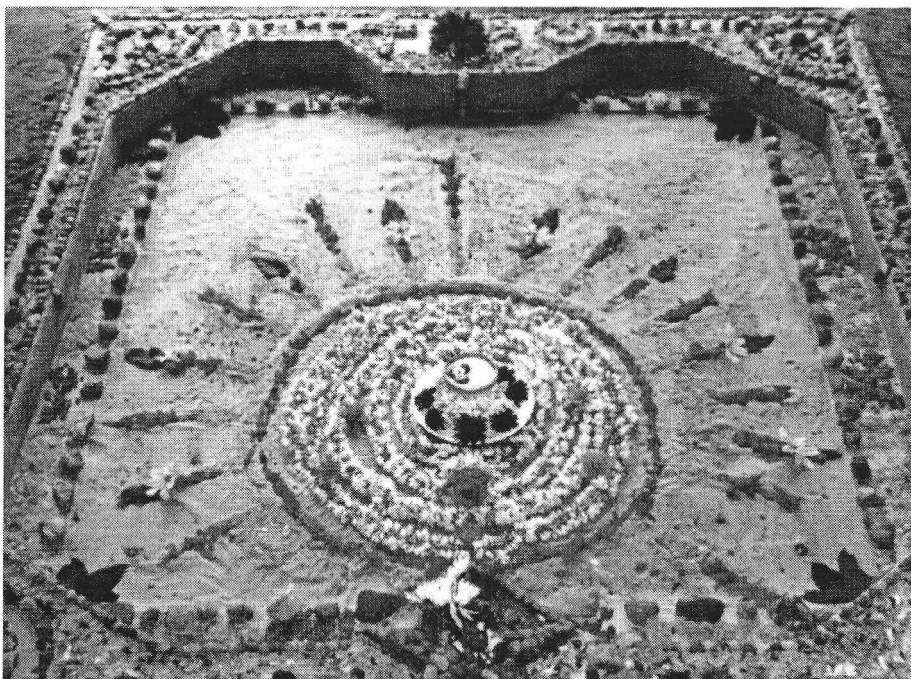


October 16-20 of 1999, Kanakamala Gurukula, near Thalassary, Kerala, held its first Convention focusing on the ways unitive understanding can solve problems in families and society.

November 2, Guru Nitya's birthday was honored with celebrations in many homes and Gurukulas, including Fernhill Gurukula, Vidyaniketan, Konni, and

Īśāvāsya, Palghat. The Fernhill Gurukula celebration was joined by Nancy Yeilding from Bainbridge Gurukula, Emma Walker from Sydney, Australia, and Roger Pole from Melbourne, Australia.

The annual convention at Varkala Gurukula will be held from December 23-29. It will open with flag hoisting by Peter Moras and an inaugural speech by M.P.



Guru Nitya's Samādhi, decorated with flowers, November 2, 1999.

Abdul Samad Samadani. Seminars and group discussions will be held on the following topics: The Source of *Brahmavidyā* (Prof. Vishnu Narayanan Nambudiri), The Eastern Concept of Science (Bodhitirtha and K.T. Soopi Master), The Western Concept of Science (Prof. V. Ramachandran and K.P. Ramakrishnan), the *Brahmavidyā Darśana* of Narayana Guru (R. Sudhan and Dr. T. Devarajan), The Philosophy of

Nataraja Guru (Dr. S. Omana and Dr. R. Thampan), *Brahmavidyā* in the Coming Century (Vinaya Chaitanya and Gurusaran Jyothi) and Guru Nitya's Contribution to the World of Philosophy, Poetry and Literature. Music and dance programs will be held nightly. Daily *Pravācanam* will be given on the Dialectical Methodology of Nataraja Guru by Muni Narayana Prasad. ❖

Gurukula Archives

The significance of time as an element of existence is heightened at the change to a new millennium, and reminds us of an important idea, that of preserving historical documents relating to the Gurukula and its Gurus. According to Guru Prasad, this idea was first advanced by Nataraja Guru, who proposed a separate underground room as part of the *Brahmavidyā* Mandir at Varkala. While this room does not yet exist, fine facilities suitable for just this purpose do currently exist at the Fernhill and Portland Narayana Gurukulas. A number of important materials are already gathered in Varkala, merely awaiting consolidation and cataloguing.

We propose to collect all important archival materials for India in Fernhill and for the Western Hemisphere in Portland. The Portland facility has a more stable atmosphere for the long-term preservation of fragile items, otherwise Fernhill is the more central location and takes precedence. The Fernhill address appears at the back of this magazine. The Portland address is:

Portland Gurukula
11290 NW Skyline Bl.
Portland, OR 97231 USA

tel. 1-503-286-3271
email: tapovana@hevanet.com

Only items of significant historical interest should be sent to the Archives, which will keep it to a manageable size. It is best to consult with the people on site prior to submission. As much detailed information as possible should be included, describing the circumstances and identifying participants. Important items can be almost anything, including photographs, letters, legal documents, tape recordings, books, magazines, and so on. We are particularly interested in locating any of Nataraja Guru's early writings for the Sufi Quarterly of Geneva as well as his first book, *The Way of the Guru*, published in Geneva in 1931 and India in 1942.

It is likely that many people will want to retain their personal possessions of interest to the Gurukula for their lifetimes, and sometimes even their children's lifetimes. Even so, preparing these materials with an eye to preservation and education of others is a valuable step to take now, and arrangements can be made to bequeath the materials at a later date. It would be a shame for important items to be lost due to a lack of instructions for their disbursement.

Materials will be available for study and research, based on their fragility, as soon as they are entered into the Archives. We welcome all to this exciting project!

Scott Teitsworth

Photo and Illustration Credits

Inside Front Cover: Blown Glass Vase,
Loetze. c. 1900

5-15: Graphics by Andy Larkin

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39: Kumāra/Subrahmaṇya on his peacock,
Bhuvaneśvara, 9th c.

42: Photograph by Nancy Yeilding

44: Stone carving, 15th cent., Hampi, Kar-
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