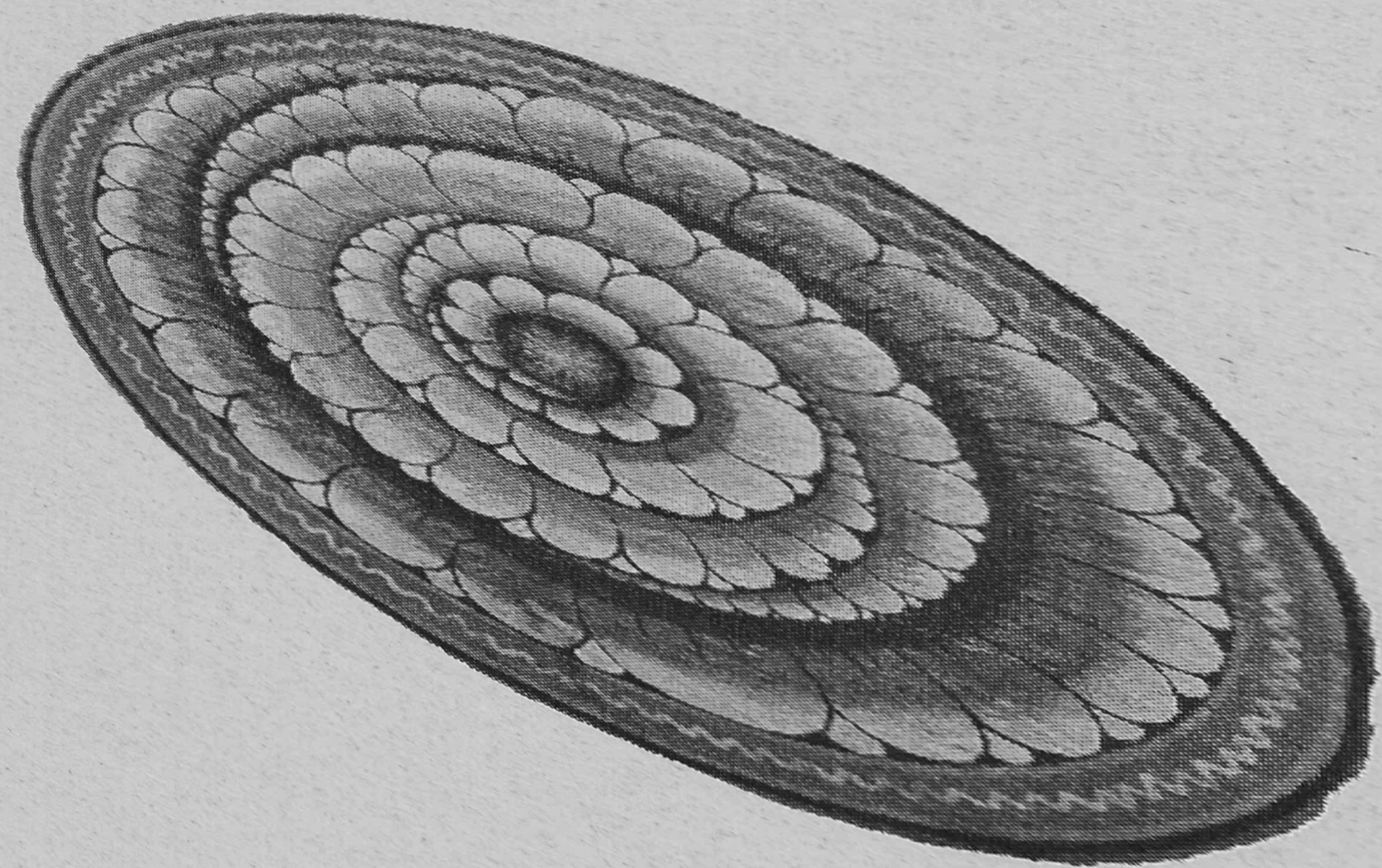


GURUKULAM

VOLUME XVIII • 2002

FIRST QUARTER





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- 3 THE SECRET OF HONEY by Nancy Yeilding
- 5 MEDITATIONS ON ŚRĪCAKRA by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati
- 16 ONE HUNDRED VERSES OF SELF-INSTRUCTION:
Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, verse 17
Translation and Commentary by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati
- 22 SONG OF A GRASS BLADE by Vidyadhiran
- 24 MOTHER SRI SHARADADEVI: IN HER OWN WORDS
Excerpts from the Presentation by Jnanamayi Indiradevi
- 32 WHAT INDIA MEANS TO ME (Excerpt) by John Spiers
- 38 PEACE LETTERS TO MY DAUGHTER by Scott Teitsworth
- 41 EAST-WEST UNIVERSITY REPORT AND
NARAYANA GURUKULA NEWS
- 42 NEW YEAR MESSAGE by Swami Muni Narayana Prasad
- 44 PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

GURUKULAM

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COVER: Pillar at Ajanta Cave Temple,
Photograph by Nancy Yeilding

Inside Cover: Ceiling Decoration, Meenakshi Temple, Madurai

The Secret of Honey

As I was raking leaves in the crisp air of a brilliant autumn afternoon, a friend dropped by, tired but cheerful and glowing.

That would go a lot faster if you used a leaf blower, you know.

Yes, but I don't like the noise and the pollution. I would miss the chance to breathe the pure air and hear the crackle of leaves. And I am sure our neighbors would rather hear the birds than a noisy motor.

Yeah, I know what you mean. I just came back from a trip to the forest. A group of us were helping to cut ivy off trees so it wouldn't kill them. We were also enjoying the pure air when a couple came by on all terrain vehicles. The noise and exhaust was really a drag.

I can see why that bothered you.

But you know what was really cool? They stopped to ask us what we were doing. While we were telling them about our work party, I think they noticed what a good time we were having with each other. They parked their ATVs and spread out their food with ours when we took our lunch break. We joked and told stories and talked about the beauty of the mountains and the forest. When we went back to work, they joined in too.

No wonder you look so vibrant. That sounds like a wonderful experience.

It was. I haven't done anything like that before. Usually on the weekend I feel so tired from work that I end up being a couch potato. Or I go cruise the mall to check out the latest tech stuff I wish I could buy. But I've been feeling pretty bored and dull, so when one of my buddies suggested this trip I decided to give it a try. I didn't realize it would be so much fun to work.

What made it fun?

Hmmm. You always ask me those kinds of questions. It was fun because we could talk and joke while we worked. I found that everyone was there because they appreciated the beauty of nature and liked being close to the trees and streams,

and wanted to make a contribution.

There were some things that made me sad, though, like when a few people started talking about the destruction of the rain forests in the Amazon and how that is destroying so many forms of life—and is part of the reason earth's climate is changing, creating future threats to life around the world. I was feeling really bad about it and kind of wished I was at the mall buying some neat new shoes instead. But then someone pointed out that it hurt us because deep in our hearts we know all life is interconnected. And that there were a lot of ways to honor that knowing, like what we were doing—working together to save the trees.

I'll bet that lifted your spirits.

Yes it did. I was thinking about it the rest of the day. Sharing really helps so many things. But it also made me think about something else. That's why I came by. I remembered that you mentioned some Indian books that talk about the connection of everything in one reality.

Yes, that wisdom is found throughout Indian and many other philosophies.

Well, I had an experience at the end of the day that made me want to find out more.

What happened?

We finished our work and I decided to walk upstream for a while. It was rough hiking because it wasn't on a trail, but I came to a rock-lined pool formed by a natural dam in the stream. It was so beautiful and peaceful that I decided to sit there and rest for awhile. I was watching the sunlight on the water when I became aware of some other presence. My skin prickled and I looked carefully around. A wolf was sitting in the shade on the far bank looking right at me. As I stared back, I felt a sense that we weren't just looking at each other; it was almost like we were talking to each other. I don't mean the wolf was saying words. I just felt a deep connection. That's what made me remem-

ber what you had said. And I want to know more.

The mystics around the world say it like this: the essence of all being is one. The Upaniṣads, philosophical texts of ancient India, are full of poetic analogies that express that truth, like when the *Bṛhadārāṇyaka Upaniṣad* says: "The Self has penetrated into all these bodies up to the nail-ends—just as a razor lies in its case, or as fire lies in its source." Or "The earth is honey to all beings and all beings are honey to this earth. This shining immortal person who is in this earth is honey to all beings and all beings are honey to this person. This shining and immortal person who dwells as spirit in the body is honey to all beings and all beings are honey to this person. The Self is none other than this. This is the immortal. This is brahman. This is All."

Whoa...that means it was much more than a feeling of empathy between the wolf and I. Our spirits have a single essence. I like thinking of that essence as like honey that comes from many flowers.

Many aspects of modern science also talk about the universal reality of which we and all we experience are a part, such as living systems theory that has discerned four simple principles that are constant throughout the observable universe. They describe the properties of open systems which permit the variety and intelligence of life forms to arise from interactive currents of matter and energy.

What are those principles?

The first is that each system, from an atom to a galaxy, is a whole; it can't be reduced to its components because its very nature derives from the interactive relationships between its parts.

The second is that in the midst of constant flux, systems self-stabilize, such as how our bodies maintain body temperature. The same thing happens for an ecosystem or the entire planet.

The third is that open systems also evolve in complexity. When challenges come from their environment, they can fall apart or adapt, reorganizing around new norms. This is how learning and evolution take place.

Finally, every system is a whole in its own right, composed of subsystems, and is simultaneously an integral part of a larger system,

from atom to molecule, cell to organ, person to family, planet to galaxy...order tends to arise from the bottom up; the system self-generates from spontaneous cooperation between the parts, in mutual benefit. There are systems within systems in which differentiation and unity go hand in hand.

Mystics and philosophers often use different language than science, but they talk about the same truths, such as these verses of Narayana Guru's from his *One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction*. You will hear how similar they sound to the living systems theory.

In one substance there are many,
and in many things there is one meaning;
reasoning thus, everything becomes
inseparably inclusive in knowledge;
not all know this great secret.(73)

Innumerable particles of dust inhere in
earth, and there is no difference in the earth
that constitutes the particles;
just as inert matter exists in consciousness,
consciousness finds its expression here in
the body; therefore, when contemplated,
this is one.(74)

And that is just what I experienced: the longer I sat there, the more connected I felt, not just to the wolf but to the sand at the edge of the water, to the moss on the rocks, to the tree I was leaning against, to the warm earth I was sitting on. I felt like I melted it into it all. And even though it may sound strange, I felt like everything there was sacred, holy. I don't know how long I sat there. Finally I realized I was getting cold and the sun was going down. I hiked back down to meet my buddy and I was so happy. I felt like I was in love—with everything. But I didn't think my buddy would quite understand, even though he was happy about the day, too, and we enjoyed our ride home together. I knew you would understand though, and I want to hear more of those verses.

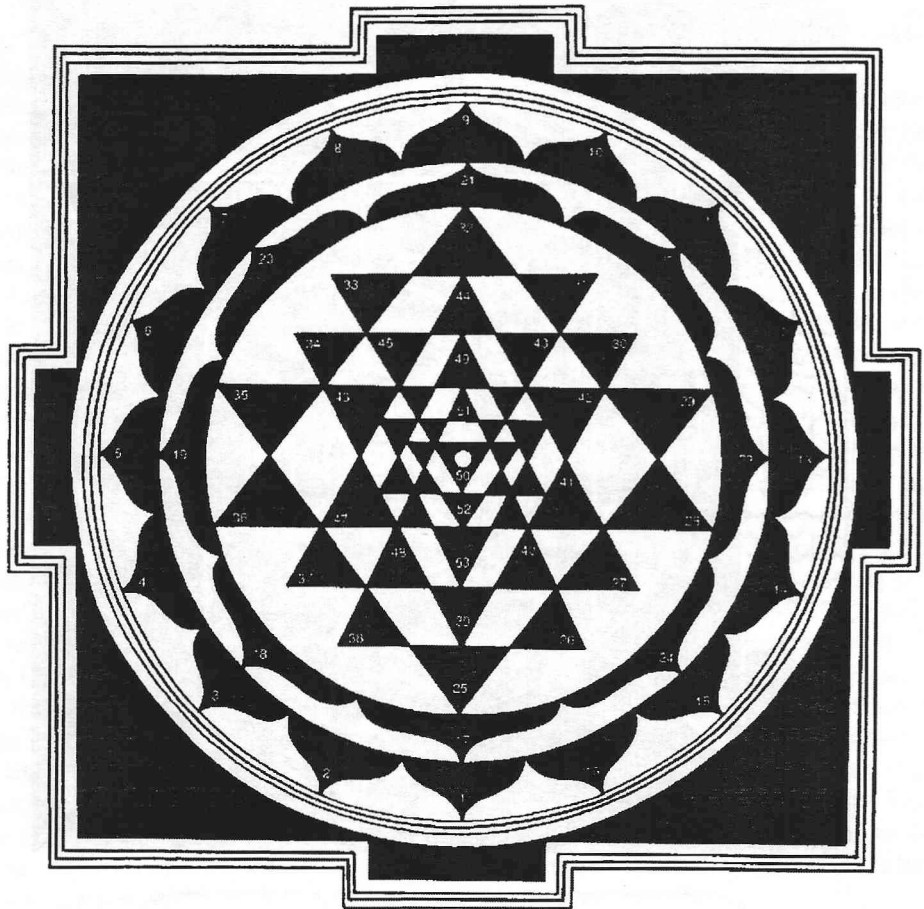
Here is one from a different work of Narayana Guru's, part of his vision of action:

The one Self alone
burns as fire, blows as wind,
showers as rain, supports
as earth, and flows as river.

Nancy Yeilding

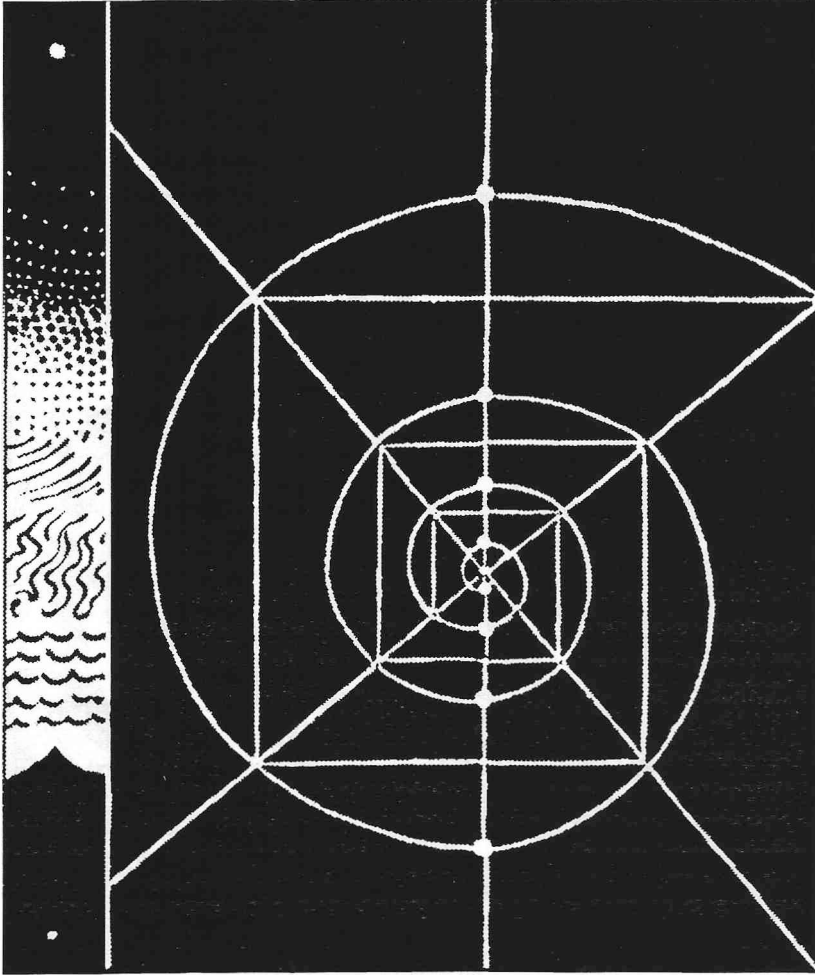
Meditations on Śrī Cakra

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 meditator 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.



tṃ sarvārthasādhinī

Meditation Thirty-five

O Mother, actualizer of all ideals, when I meditate on the central locus of your establishment (*bindusthāna*), I become stabilized in the *ājñā*, the center of my eyebrows. Mind is said to be bubbling from there as interrogations followed by streams of thoughts. By nature, you are musical vibrations (*nādarūpiṇī*). Although you are said to originate in the sky beyond (*parākāśa*), you pass through the entire universe and formulate artistic creation out of each element, bringing forth their most adorable beauty such as the ranges of mountains scraping the sky with their snow peaks, the billowy sea swelling up at high

tide and receding at low tide, the cool fire glowing in the fireflies and the scorching fire blazing in the sun, the gentle breeze caressing the petals of flowers and the tornado uprooting an entire city. You hold the whole earth to your bosom in a universal embrace.

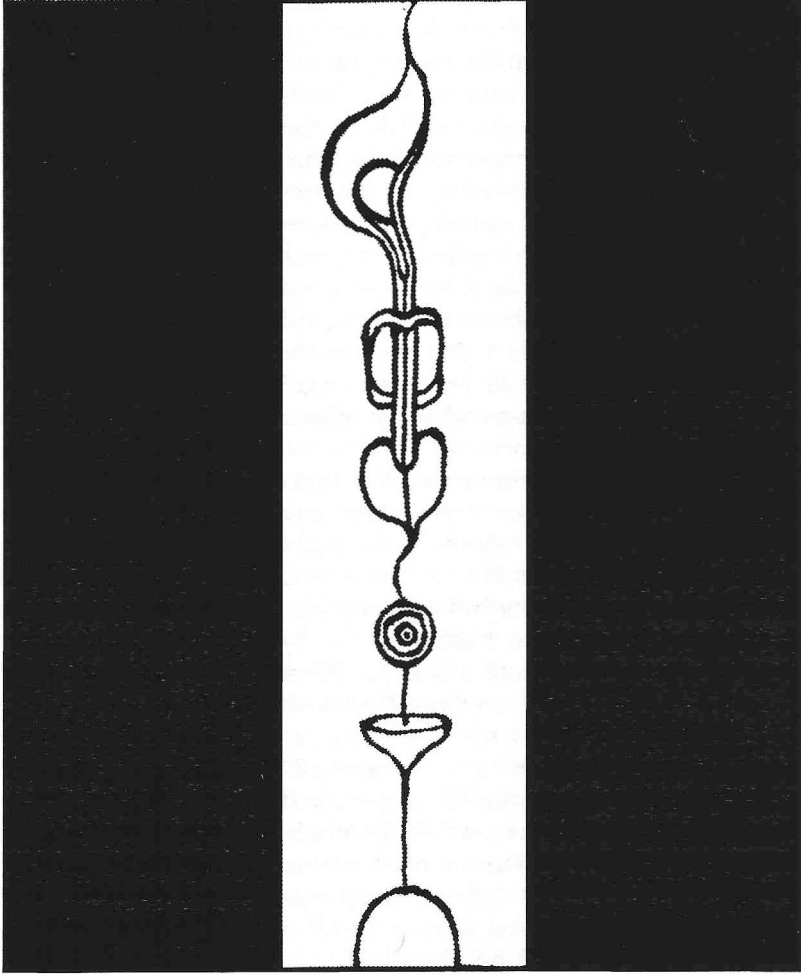
It is this sport of yours that makes you Kalāvati, the goddess of art. You are so merciful that you have shared with me the power to change my mind into all the elaborations of your creation and to form the most appropriate words to describe you in the sagas I sing and in the mantras I meditate. Like a lark that flies to the heights of the blue sky, sings its songs to the mountains and valleys, then perches on a familiar tree and sits in silence, I'll also stretch my wings, soar into your several heavens and come back to roost in my heart center. After gathering my thoughts to the core of myself, after having found the secret of your silence, I once again come out to sing to the world the many delights of knowledge. Pleased with my devotion, you have cleansed my thoughts and purified my words so that I can now confidently sing my praise of truth.

Many are the embodied beings in this world but all are animated with one and the same vital breath. As Prāṇeśvarī, you are both the breath we are breathing in and the breath we are breathing out. When we breathe in, the fragrance of the entire universe comes to the core of our own being and every culture imbibed by all and sundry is fused with our own inner light. Similarly, when we breathe out, all that we have obtained through a million lives radiates from us like the rays of the sun and carries the essence of our being to all the known and unknown expansion of your being. In the rhythmic alternation of the *anāhata* of my heart, there is never any break. Considering the vigilance with which you keep the life-giving breath continuously transpired, you seem to be more devoted to your children than any one of us are capable of remembering and caring for you.

The growth of a crystal is hardly noticed by anyone. Even mothers do not see how their children are growing into maturity. When the oak rises into the sky from an acorn, when does it bring forth a new sprout, a new limb and new leaves? We do not see. Even so, you have invested in us a secret nucleus (*maṇipūra*), around which, like a snowball, our perfection grows moment after moment. Thus it is your delight to make each one a pearl of priceless worth. After having made the same kind of body for an entire species, you put at the root of our genitals the mark of our uniqueness. Thereafter even when I am surrounded by a million, I think my thoughts separately, I feel my likes and dislikes separately, I take my resolutions all by myself. Now, what is true in me – my universality or my uniqueness? You have given all of us this rare skill to dance together and also to withdraw and sit back and be all alone. You have made this exclusiveness of our bodies and the inclusiveness of our minds.

After we were born with bodies, you granted each of us a space that is to be occupied by our body. After each body carries out its purpose, whether it is buried or burned, you reabsorb it into the five elements. The spirit with which we have been thinking and feeling, meditating and intuiting, that spark of spirit is reabsorbed into you. Thus you are born into all this and we all die into you. Life and death have become the dual aspects of the same pulsation. You are the universal pulsation (*viśvaspanda*). May I meditate on you as the pulsation and be absorbed in the non-pulsating being. I take refuge in your equipoise, *AUM niṣpandam*.

tṃ sarvārthasādhinī



thm sarvasampattipūraṇī

Meditation Thirty-six

O graceful Mother, mystics and philosophers who have been looking for a model of creation have come to three general visions. Some of them think of God as the universal father who, having decided that there should be worlds inhabited by beings of several orders, conceived the archetypal model of manifestation and invested it in the universal womb of nature. From it arose distinguishable bodies of several kinds, each representing a species, each of which has propagated its kind. With a continuous change of cause and effect, all these creations continue their functions. Each one has a distinguishable form and name and natural disposition to act according to its integral nature. This is one view. In that view, both the cause and the effect belong to this world. Therefore, its relevancy is in the here and now.

There is another vision which is mystically more subtle and profound. According to that view, the kingdom of God is within one's heart. The Supreme is existence, subsistence and bliss and it is enshrined in every heart as the immortal indweller. When we take it in that sense, God is the Supreme Self and the individual person is a dweller in this body as its animating spirit. The third view is that everything is created by the Word of God. This vision of creation is supported by St. John and the *Upaniṣads – Māṇḍūkya, Chāndogya and Maitri*.

When these three world views are looked into, they are the vision of superimposition, the vision of evolution and a combined theory of both superimposition and evolution. When we look at the several worlds within us in a graded manner, we come to our conscious self arising from the *ājñā* which is located in the center of the eyebrows. If you go to the origin of a river and watch how it gushes forth from a fountain, it looks as if it has no beginning. There is a continuous flow of water. When we turn our minds to the spot between our eyebrows, we see a continuous flow of thoughts as if the stream of consciousness is a hidden river.

There is a belief in India that apart from the two great rivers, Indus and Ganges, there is also a third river, Sarasvatī, running underground. The *ājñā cakra* is equated to Sarasvatī. There is always a new thought coming. In no other part of our bodies do we find a sensitivity equal to that of the spot between the two eyebrows. At the *ājñā* all the ideas are presenting themselves as thoughts and feelings. Orders are given from this center for intrapersonal reaction and interpersonal encounter. *Ājñā* means "giving command." In a way we can say our lives are being monitored from the *ājñā*. Like the hidden river of Sarasvatī, our thoughts are also hidden from others.

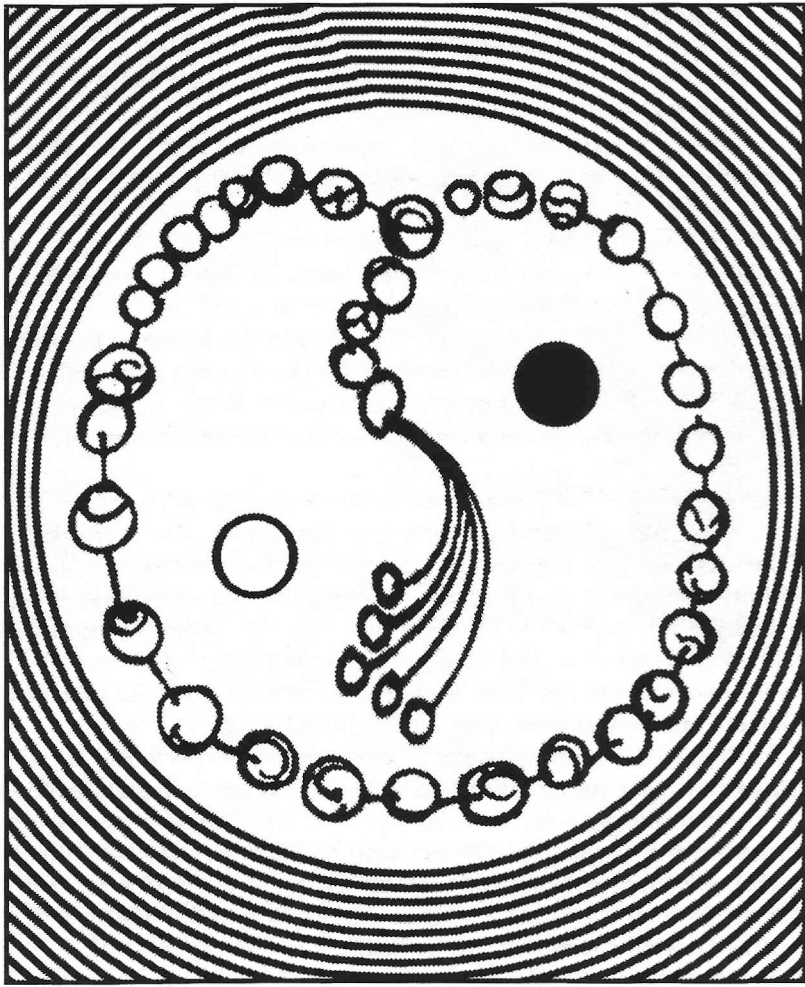
As we live in a society and our expressions are expected to be disciplined, we sort out our words and thoughts. Words which are likely to be beneficial to the world are chosen to be spoken. We get a continuous supply of words to express our finest thoughts through our organ of speech. This *cakra* is called *viśuddhi*. To maintain life's purity and to have a peaceful environmental security, we are expected to speak only truthful words in a sweet manner. Both the thoughts that arise in the *ājñā* and the words which originate in the *viśuddhi* are of course controlled by our hearts.

Although thoughts are meant to be regulated by our brains, our ethical concerns come from our hearts. The heart is the seat of love and the continuing persuasion that comes from it has to be ever-present. That region is called *anāhata*, the unbroken. The heart keeps watch over the reasoning faculty and over the faculty of speech. Both are regulated, restrained and expressed, always with the consent of the heart. These three major faculties – thoughts, speech and appreciation – will always have an impact on our growth and perfection. The control area for our growth is called *maṇipūra*. It is like a pearl of perfection.

We have two more areas to look into. We have a conscious mind, prompted by urges and motivations. It comes in part as a manifestation of nature's scheme in us, as continuators of our species and also as the agents of nature. It is in this area we find the foundation of our personality. It is called *svādhiṣṭhāna*. The word literally means "one's own foundation." The last area is the repository of all our biological needs and the secret home of our unconscious. It is called the base foundation (*mūlādhāra*). Only a very small percentage of our activities are coming from our conscious minds.

We find a graded hierarchical arrangement from *mūlādhāra* to the *ājñā* given in this world vision. In spite of separate regions and separate functions you have made us whole so that we can remain unbroken in our selves and in our realization. The entire world is like our own self and we do not see anything outside it. Our prayer is that you keep us whole and thinking of the whole world as one. We always seek your grace. Salutations.

thm sarvasampattipūrāṇī



dm̐ sarvamantramayī

Meditation Thirty-seven

○ Mother of wisdom, from here and now we look into the yonder and the all-embracing. We feel like comparing you to the infinitude of the clear sky in which whatever is has been granted space both for a location to exist and freedom to move. The sky and its vacuity bring us also to the notion of the all-illuminating light and its transparency when it is pure. It is only natural that we think of the pure light of the sun whenever we have to conceive of pure illumination and pure transparency. For that reason, knowledge is equated with light and ignorance with darkness. As such analogies are common, it is normal to think of gradations of light ranging from the opaque to the translucent and the translucent to the transparent as representing considerations such as that of absolute certitude, the idea of the probable, and confusions of various sorts.

All these references are implied in knowledge. Knowledge opens up the doors of conception and intuitive illumination which present themselves as pure visions of truth. For consideration of the amplitude of the epistemological field that covers the known and the unknown, the conscious and the unconscious, we think of the Absolute. If the Absolute is equivalent to the numenon, its counterpart is the phenomenon. In the case of ordi-

nary folk, the gateway to knowledge is the spoken or written word. The word as a symbol has the disadvantage of projecting a preconditioned conceptual picture or gestaltation. The relationship between sound and meaning is a color or shade that interferes with the clarity of both the mirrored numenon and the relativistic factors of the phenomenon. In either case, we are exposed to the tyranny or grace of words impressed with fixed notions of meaning. As all words are articulated from the throat-plex (*viśuddhi*), we see it as a sportive field where the mother of language conducts her delightful *lāsya* (gentle dance), introducing us to several shades of meaning and nuances of appreciation.

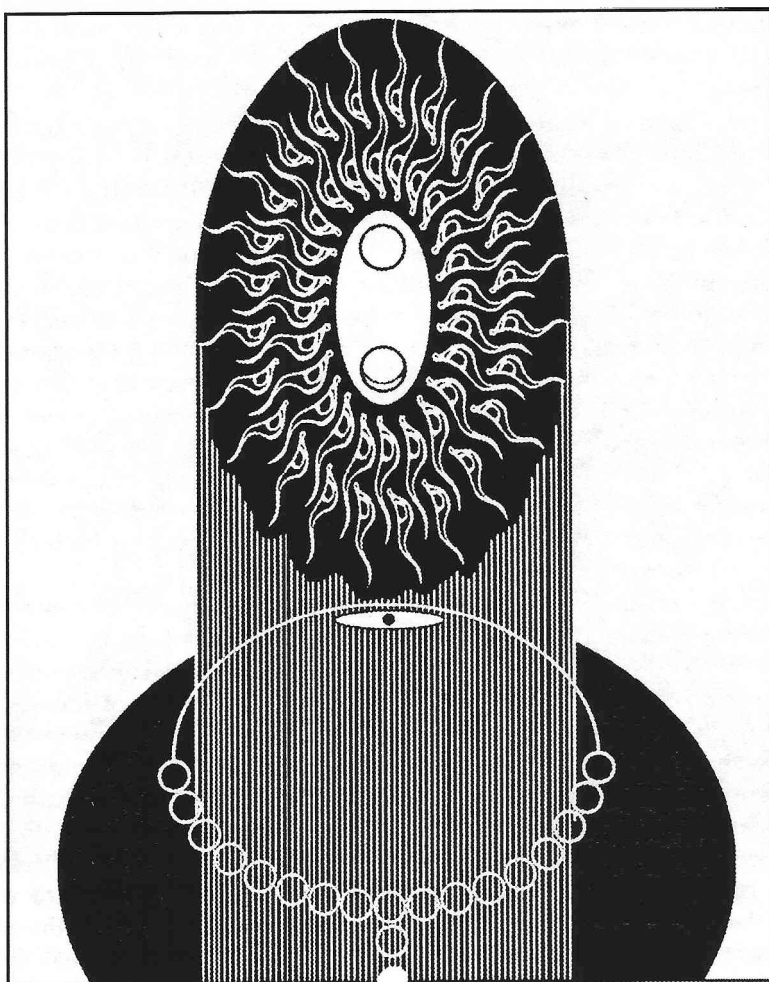
It is well-known that your Lord is occupying the whole of the space of consciousness (*cidambara* or *cidākāśa*). The numenon and the sky which Śiva occupies are inseparable. If the vision of the Lord eludes our comprehension it is because of the transparency of pure consciousness and its all-filling serenity. The rosary, often considered as a symbol of the mother of wisdom, is said to be made of all the characters of the alphabet. Each consonant and vowel is transparent like a pure crystal with no color of its own. But when light rays fall on a many-faceted crystal, its transparency is replaced by a bewitching flash of color which fills the on-looker with a sense of wonder. However enjoyable is the colorful world of the refracted rays, it transports us from the pure-clear vision of the Self to a colored illusion of phenomenality. Thus the *viśuddhi* brings us to the magical world where the musicality of the sound, the conceptual flourish of meaning, and its poetic or lyrical suggestibility create complex inner experiencing which can either be entertaining or confusing.

To steer past the fantasia of experience to our truth-seeking minds, we have to meditate again and again on the crystalline quality of each sound in which you manifest as Sarvamantramayī. What is spoken as word and heard as the conceptual key that opens up a vast world of meaning can lead us to the concretization of ideas which become available to us in the world of time and space as objects of value interest that we recognize as the actualities of phenomenal existence. The descent from hypostatic concepts to the hierophany of actuals has its counterpart in an ascent from the luring effect of the sensory world to the pure space of transcendence where there is no distinction between Śiva and Śakti. Thus the word is both a binding principle and the key to deliverance.

All individuated beings are endowed with distinctive ways of relating themselves with the basic nature of the Self (*ānanda*). In the gross world it is the enjoyment of a pleasure object. In the subjective world only the essence of conceptual visions and the sense of fulfillment are available for enjoyment. When one transcends words and thoughts, both transactions and subjective visions cease to function; one goes into the pure nature of the Self, attaining *svarūpānanda*, one's own pure blissful nature. The mythical Cakora bird is said to be satisfying its thirst and hunger by licking the beauty of the moonbeams. The moon has no light of its own; it only reflects the light of the sun. Thus the representative character of the symbol of *ānanda* is very well portrayed in such an example. Both in the wakeful and in the dream, the phenomena that are enjoyed are of the nature of superimposition. However, the qualitative satisfaction of participating in one's own pure value-basis is fulfilled at least for the time being.

When one brings one's meditation from the *ājñā* to the *viśuddhi*, there also one can soar high into pure enjoyment, making a breakthrough from the conceptual world of meanings by tuning oneself to the cosmic symphony (*nādabrahma*). This is accomplished by acquiring the highly discriminative power of attuning oneself to the pure vibrancy of the *cidākāśa* or *parākāśa*. The swan (*hamsa*) symbolizes wisdom discrimination in its purest form. Hence, Śiva and Śakti are seen here as two heavenly swans. Thus, it is in the arena of worldly jubilation that one also attains the supreme bliss of total transcendence. To achieve that blessed state we seek your grace, Mother, to reveal to us that every *mantra* is ultimately leading us to your own transparency. Our obeisance to you.

dm sarvamantramayī



dhṃ sarvadvandvākṣayamkarī

Meditation Thirty-eight

O Mother, the unifying symphony of the manifold, the wise one is often compared to a bumble bee that feeds itself on the pollen, sips the honey and lives within the petals of a lotus flower. You and your Lord have chosen the thousand-petaled lotus for your union. The lotus is known to bloom in dirt-filled pools. However, it is glorified as the purest of all manifestations. Similarly, in this world of filth, ignorance and distress, the flower of wisdom blossoms like a great miracle, like Śiva and Śakti reveling in the heavenly lake of contemplation.

From the transcendental *sahasrāra* you descend into the musical world of thoughts and poetry and rejoice in the hymns that are constantly chanted. From the *viśuddhi* you come to the heart center (*anāhata*). The heart is another secret symbol described in wisdom texts as a lotus flower (*punḍarīka*) which has within it a small space that holds in it everything in this world and what is not even here. Entering that world and knowing the matchless is described as attaining the *bhūma*, the highest excellence in the world of wisdom. Compared to that attainment, everything people aspire for is looked upon as meager (*tucham*). Bringing the excellence of transcendence from the thousand-petaled lotus to the lotus in the heart is like experiencing transcendence in the immanent.

On seeing the heavenly Gangā trickling from the matted hair of Śiva, I wonder whether it is the tears of joy that are trickling from the *ājñā* of Mother. As you are the unifier of all diversity in the unitive wisdom that sparks off from your *ājñā*, it is no wonder that the unbroken melody which we now hear in the heart-plex (*anāhata*) is only a counterpoint that is resonating from your imperiential ecstasy.

It is from the *viśuddhi* that the psychodynamics of mantra fills all consonants and vowels with word power and makes the spoken word so powerful as to unite all speakers and listeners in their collective consciousness. Therefore it is only appropriate to think of the awareness of Śiva-consciousness (*śivājñānabodham*) as identical with the sheen of the crescent which the Lord is wearing in his matted hair. It is that moonlight which the female partridge, *cakorika*, is enjoying in the throat-plex as the mother of all muses, Vāgeśvarī.

In the throat-plex (*viśuddhi*) where word (*vāk*) and vital breath (*prāṇa*) are coupled to produce sound (*śabda*) and meaning (*artha*), the revelation of truth happens like a great wonder. It comes to the seekers of the world as the eighteen sciences that you and your Lord are gracefully sharing with us: the four *vedas*, the six philosophical visions, the three groups of legends (*purāṇās*), the ethical scriptures (*dharma śāstrās*), the science of life (*āyurveda*), the science of defense (dhanurveda), the science of subtleties (gandharvaveda) and the exegeses (arthavadā śāstrās). When those are understood, the wise ones are symbolized by *cakorika*, and the wisdom revelation coming from you and your Lord is to be looked upon as the moonsheen of wisdom. Our adoration to you, O Supreme Benevolence.

dhṃ sarvadvandvākṣayamkarī



nṃ sarvasiddhipradā

Meditation Thirty-nine

O Supreme Mother of this world! We hear that our world was a ball of fire with leaping flames for several millennia. Perhaps all the sister planets of Earth were of like nature after the solar catastrophe. How many thousands of years each of these burning cinders of sun had to endure before thick clouds of water enveloped and drained off to cool each heavenly body to its present state! You have chosen Earth not only to cool down but also to become inhabited with life forms. It seems nature copies art. According to poetic versions, your Lord was steadfast in ascetic meditation when the shining ones were conspiring to get a seed of the Supreme God to grow in your blessed womb. With that intention they created a Spring out of season to give environmental encouragement to an irrational stir of erotic passion in the *svādhiṣṭhāna* of the Lord himself.

Your austere meditation and the worship with which you dedicated yourself to the Lord was of no less intensity than that of Īśvara himself. It was like the all-generating fire of passion. Even in that moment of romantic expectation, anxiety was growing in the

minds of the hosts of heaven about how your Lord would react when Eros struck him with the arrows of flower buds. As expected, your Lord opened his third eye with intense anger and, in his fire of indignation, the god of love was burned to ashes.

Subsequently, after a millennium, when the hour of consummation came, once again fate was not in favor of his seed being laid in your womb. Instead it had to be reverentially protected by fire for thousands of years. When fire became exhausted, the all-cooling water of mother Gangā received the seed for another millennium. Ultimately, when the fire of the all-consuming Lord was too much for Gangā, the heavenly lake, Mānasasarovaram, received it for a millennium. Then six golden beams that sprang from the seed manifested out of it as six babies, your great fortune. Knowing that the tragedy was averted, you visited the Śaravaṇa Lake and saw the babies being fed by the six Kārtika stars (Pleiades). In your cool embrace, the son of Śiva became the six-faced Śaṅmukha. As he was born of Śaravaṇa he came to be known as Śaravaṇabhava. As he was fed by the Kārtika stars, he was also called Kārtikeya. As he was an aggregate of six separate babies, he came to be known as Skanda. As he is treasured in the cave of the Lord's heart he is called Guha. As he came to be the revaluator of Absolutist wisdom he is known as Subrahmaṇya.

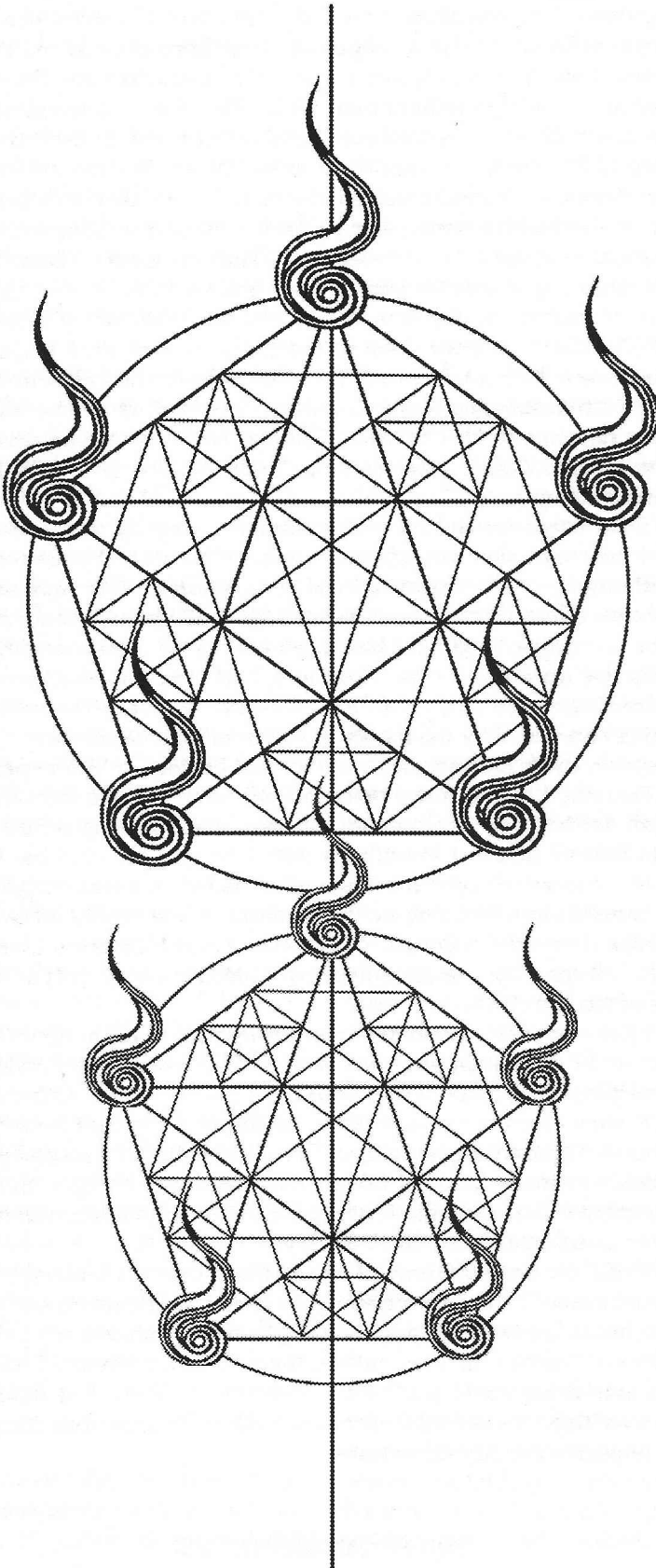
Thus what raged for several millennium as a tragedy that issued forth from the libidinal fire of the creator became a beneficent boon because of your compassionate maneuvering. Although you are always a loyal companion to your annihilating Lord, preserving the essence of each cosmic manifestation so it will pass through the gates of death and destruction to become re-established in another cycle of manifestation, it is by your compassion that we do not retrospectively look back and see how many gates of death and burning fire we have crossed. If we look forward, what else do we see other than the prospect of being consumed by the flames of our imminent cremation?

As a sperm I was sleeping with millions of brother or sister sperms in the testes of my father. Then the fire of erotic passion dislodged us and we were thrown out of our father's scrotum. In that mad hour we took to our heels, seeking refuge in our mother's ovum. Hard to believe that out of millions only I escaped. Behind me I heard the loud cries of all those who were hopefully rushing as fugitives. I was helpless. The door behind me was banged shut. Oh! The mother's ovum! It was verily an oven, such was its heat. I wriggled and became fragmented. But how could I leave my own parts? Holding on to each with all tenacity, I maintained my collective unity in that hellfire to which came all kinds of terrible chemicals.

Soon I lost my spherical shape--many projections and hollows and appendages grew out of me and I was given this wide mouth. The first function assigned to it was to cry as loudly as possible. Thank God you did not give me teeth. Otherwise, like a baby spider, I would have eaten my own mother. Living in the prison house of my mother's womb itself was like graduating in hellfire. Then I came into the second prison of what is called social life. How many kinds of fire are burning there? Hunger, thirst, environmental discomfort, competition, struggle for existence, breeding children to continue the species, facing some emotional upheaval every day.

In spite of these untold flames of fire, O Mother, you are always there to comfort me, to console me, to feed me with delicious food and cradle me to sleep. I am sure you will never leave me. I know I have a million explosives planted in my genitals which can cause the greatest disturbances. But Mother, the *maṇipūra* is an antidote to *svādhiṣṭhāna*. Your intention is to bring me to perfection, as perfect as a pearl of wisdom (*cintāmaṇi*). You are always waiting for me in the *maṇipūra*. I take refuge in your compassion. Accept me, O Mother of perfection. My salutations.

nṃ sarvasiddhipradā



Ātmopadeśa Śatakam:

One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction by Narayana Guru

Translation and Commentary by

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

Verse 17

*azalezumañcitalārnnu rañtu tattāy
cuḥalumanādi viḷakku tūkkiyātmā
niḥaluruḁāyeriyunnu neyyatō, mun-
paḥakiya vāsana, varṭti vṛṭṭiyatrē.*

Having two tiers of five petals,
whence pain arises,
rotating, beginningless,
hangs the lamp of the self,
burning as the shadow (of true being),
with the oil of latent urges
and mental modifications as the wicks.

Here a picture is given of our individuated self. It also holds true for the universe in general. In fact, one is interlaced in the other. So the verse can be understood cosmologically as well as psychologically.

Light and darkness are two counterparts which make a total reality. In the last verse the emphasis was on the bright side, but there is also a down-to-earth aspect which we should notice to have a well-balanced view of life. Narayana Guru does not want to be unrealistic in appreciating the whole situation, so now he is calling our attention to the background of whatever we see and experience here.

When we look at a beautiful form it is very pleasing to us. One way of putting it is the form is visible because it is highlighted. On the other hand, we may say that the figure is projected on a background of darkness and it is in contrast to the shadow that it stands out.

When we say we are seeing some-

thing, it is the dark shadows that provide us with the figure. If we remove all the shadows from a painting or a photograph, nothing is left. Similarly, when we are watching a film projected on a screen, the screen itself is white and the film is casting shadows on it. These shadows are where the bright light of the bulb in the projector is screened off. So what we look at is not the light so much as the shadows. They are what create all the meaning for us. This is not only true for the eyes, but for the other senses also. When we consider this, the world is a shadow play.

Sense experience is described in this verse as being pain-filled. Sensation in Sanskrit is called *samvedana*. This has two implications. *Vit* means to know; *veda* is that which is known; *veditam* is that which makes you know. In this sense, *samveditam* or *samvedana* mean that which enables you to know properly. At the same time, *vedana* means a pain; *samvedana*, a pain which you have become reconciled with. When you tickle a child, the child laughs, but if you tickle it too much, it cries. When two lovers meet and unite, they consider love's consummation as the greatest bliss. Yet a rapist's assault brings the most terrible pain. In both cases it is essentially a man and a woman having intercourse, but in one case the experience is wonderful and in the other it is horrible. Exactly where the joy of life resides, there pain also resides.

When you want to meditate and not to read, you turn off the light. Then you feel more comfortable. When you want to

appreciate something through visible contact, you turn on the light. But if you turn on too much light, the object loses its charm. To properly appreciate a painting you have to put it at a certain distance and have the light properly balanced. Then alone does it have beauty. In old age, when the eyes are becoming weak and the light seems to grow dim, you can no longer see things properly. It is as if the soul itself is going blind. You feel so sad. Or perhaps you have an eye disease and the bright light is painful to you, so you need to wear dark glasses to filter the light. In so many ways, the light which is a great joy to us can equally be a source of pain.

All the five senses contain a mixture of pain and pleasure. If there is too much noise you want to shut it off, but if it's good music you want to listen. Real music comes only rarely. Most of the time you have to put up with the many terrible noises of the world. At times we exalt in the fragrances wafted to us by gentle breezes, but we are often breathing in the pollution of smoke, exhaust and carbon monoxide. A gentle caress is delightful, but it quickly becomes irritating when carried on for more than a short while. This is why the Guru began this verse with the word *azalezum*, pain-filled.

Next, our five senses are compared to the five petals of a lamp. Nowadays we have only electric lights and we don't have a feel for the image. In ancient India they used to hang an oil lamp, with tiers of petal-shaped wick holders, in the middle of the room. With the wicks lit it resembled a simple candelabra, which would swing gently and rotate with the movement of air in the room, casting fantastic shadows over the walls and furniture. Our life is here compared to such a rotating light with five burning petals of the senses. The burning brings a kind of pain, but our attention is focused more on the play of light and shadows on the walls.

The pain and shadows are the important things to examine. The biophysical and biochemical aspects of sensation are agitations in the nervous system, which

put the molecular system of the brain in a quandary each time a stimulation comes in. Every item of knowledge has an agitation behind it. All the sensations we have are agitations in our system. On the other hand, when we don't have any sensations and our system is peaceful, we don't know anything. Literally our experience is based on agitation: nervous agitation from chemical stimulation and electrical impulses, and electrical vibrations and reverberations. We are aware only when these disturbances are taking place, so no one was there to know when the process first started; the Guru therefore calls it *anādi*, beginningless.

In the cosmological view we have five elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. Each of these corresponds to a form of sensory stimulation: sound travels through the *ākāśa*, touch is of the air, visual forms are illuminated by fire, taste is produced by water and smells come from the earth. A physical sense organ is especially attuned to each of these sensations: the ear, skin, eye, tongue and nose. Thus, in us there is a physical reality and also a psychic reality. We may say there are two tiers. The physical tier translates incoming data into the electrochemical language of the brain, while the psychic tier is concerned with interpreting the significance of each sensation.

According to Western physiologists, we have a physical system that is generating a psychic condition. Indian psychologists, on the other hand, say we have a psychic condition which animates the physical system. If you are lying unconscious or fast asleep, you won't have any taste of honey, you won't feel what touches you. All the pleasures of the senses cannot be stimulated if consciousness is not present, even though the physiological system is intact. When a person is asleep and you speak to them, their ears still remain open and the sound still falls on their ears, vibrations still beat on the tympanum. It is a physical thing, and the vibrations necessarily act on the eardrum. Yet the person doesn't hear a thing. What is the block between his consciousness

and the external stimulus? The coordination has to come from inside. This is why the Indian psychologist points the arrow from the side of the psyche to the physiological system.

The Western psychologist nonetheless puts the arrow from the entry of the stimulus into the system, and afterwards from inside comes the response. Instead of this, Narayana Guru thinks in terms of a selective structural response, where deep down in you are incipient memories or latent potentials and urges. You can only make sense of a stimulus from outside in correspondence with what is already within you. For you to understandably recognize everything you see, touch, taste, smell and hear, there should be a corresponding concept within you. That concept is lying latent within you as a *vāsanā*. Here the study of physiological psychology, which governs the entire field of memory and learning, experience and education, is to be examined to get a proper picture of what the Guru wants to convey to us.

The whole thing is summarized here in a very simple way: you can look at the universe as being constituted of the five elements, which are just matter. Then why do we call it a cosmos? Because of the great wonder that we see definite laws operating. The sun stands in the center of the solar system, and the planets are moving in the same kinds of orbits around it at constant speeds. From our perspective they are always crisscrossing, and yet their separations are maintained so that they never collide. They are all lying in vacant space, but they don't fall down or go running off. We have so much water on the Earth and the Earth is rotating and revolving, and yet the water never falls off. Even though it is not held in any receptacle, the water just sticks on despite all this movement. What keeps everything in its proper place? It is amazing. An Australian does not know at all that he is walking upside down. When a Russian or a Northern European is standing on his feet, a New Zealander is actually hanging with his head down and feet up, and the people

in India are walking sideways. Isn't it a tremendous joke? When you really consider all the cosmic laws, how everything is regulated without our even being aware of it, it is such a wonder.

So there is a certain cosmic law operating in everything. On the bright side is this law, while on the dark side are the inertial masses of things. Recently, we were very hopeful of finding some kind of intelligent life on Mars. A lot of money was spent to send instruments there to send back the information. And what did we find there? Nothing. Just huge piles of inert dirt. So, cosmologically there is a two-tiered system. The bright side is the subtle mathematical laws which are so precise we can land an instrument package on a distant planet, while the other side is all this dark, heavy matter.

We also have these two tiers individually. We are made up of masses of dirt, yet how much do we love that dirt when a little love is generated in us! Then we don't say we are dirt. We hug the other person and press harder and harder, because our bodies are preventing the soul of one from merging into the soul of the other. We feel like, "I want to become one with you, but this body is between us. Let us merge." The bright aspect, the light aspect, is wanting to merge, but the body is in between. Our two tiers are our body and soul, matter and spirit.

There is an afferent aspect and an efferent aspect; there is stimulus and there is response; there is a sensory system and a motor system. We have all these dualities and ambivalences within our system. Narayana Guru summarizes all this by just saying "two tiers," leaving us to discover for ourselves its many ramifications. We can find any number of pairs of tiers operating in us, such as the external and the internal, motor and sensory, material and spiritual, physical and psychic, and so on.

The tragic note in all this is that the present is a product of the past and its tentacles are stretching into the future and we are caught within this web. Before the development of modern science we were threatened only with the religious super-

stition—some call it religious belief—of sin, that we were all carrying the sins of our fathers. Adam erred and sinned against God, and that original sin is shared by all humanity. The divinity of man and original sin are what we are asked to believe by religion. From the first man to the present there is a continuation of the darkness as well as the divinity that was in Adam.

Previously we were believers, back when the apocalyptic threat of the world crashing one day was enough to make everyone believe in Christ. The message was "believe soon, because tomorrow the world is going to end." Now we are no longer influenced by theology. Its place has been taken by science fiction. It's the scientists who are now afraid that the whole thing is going to burn out.

When we pushed religion away, science came in to fill the vacuum. Are its fairy tales any improvement? I read somewhere that in every one of us are at least seventy-eight atoms that were once in Julius Caesar. Everything that has happened is so intermixed in us! Who can compute next how many of Judas' atoms and how many of Christ's atoms are in us?

Christians have carefully calculated that man was created on October 22, 4004 BC. Now we have Carl Sagan saying that bacteria are three billion years old and viruses are another two billion years older than that. Man is about ten million years old, although they have yet to fix the exact date. Then he says in every chromosome there is DNA, and in every DNA are twenty billion pairs of nucleotides. So we have twenty billion pairs of nucleotides, carrying the information accumulated over five billion years, sitting inside us to cause trouble whenever we do anything. This is far worse than religion, which only threatened us with original sin.

In any case, Narayana Guru does not want to go into these kinds of fabulous theories. He just wants us to know there are ancient *vāsanās* which serve as the oil feeding the lamp which is burning in us. The principle itself is very simple. And what is a *vāsanā*? I am holding two theo-

ries in my hand, one for the consumers of the theory of reincarnation and the other for those who do not believe in it. For disbelievers, the theory of genetic inheritance expresses the gist of it. I shall tell the theory for those who do believe.

Our friend comes here and gives us very good music on the piano. I lie in my room listening to it. It gives me such wonderful sensations of delight! I melt into it and I sleep; I wake and still enjoy it; I drift in and out of pleasant states all the while listening. This is a new thing. Last year I did not have this luxury, but now he comes quite often. The next time I go to bed he is not here, so I feel "Oh, not a good sleep today. There is no musical background for it."

Another friend goes and gets me a special kind of cookie. At the very sight of it my soul wakes up. "Ah! There it comes." If you have them twice or thrice you cannot give them up. On the Japanese sesame cookie it is written "Warning. Habit forming." Then they say, "But what of that? It's good for you."

These are called *samskāra*, when an experience is received by the sense organs, and the quality of that experience is condensed and kept in the system as a memory bit. *Samskāra* in Sanskrit means cultured, that something is cultured within you. A raw experience is made into a culture and kept there. If I want to have a full experience of a piano, there should be such a big thing, occupying so much space; but when it is cultured and put on a magnetic tape I can carry it in my pocket. If it is further condensed, it can be received as a radio wave by small crystals, which can produce the whole effect of an orchestra. This economy of space is one of the most wonderful things.

When what was sung by someone is sent from the radio station through the atmosphere, it is not transmitted as music. It goes as a radio wave. Similarly, whatever I have experienced in this life is kept in a condensed form in me as my *samskāra*. When I take the essence of all those to my next life, they are further condensed. First the physical was made subtle, now it be-

comes causal. This causal element is called *vāsanā*.

Whatever has come to me from my previous lives is my present *vāsanā*, and my present *samskāra* is added to it. My *samskāra* in its turn will someday become *vāsanā* when I am passing to the next life. The *vāsanā* of previous lives and the *samskāra* of this life are the past which is bearing on the present. That present is aspiring to experience the future. I look into the future with desire, and also with anxiety because of the painful experiences I previously had. Even as I get into the car to go to the dentist, I am already anticipating all those terrible things going on. Ouch! It's in the future, but the pain and the unpleasantness of it start from just going out the door. Past, present and future are all filled with the impact of *vāsanā*. The present is actually a manifestation of this *vāsanā* as it is being burned through the five senses. The *varti*, the wicks of the lamp, are the five senses; while the *vrtti*, the flames, are the modifications that come as our experiences.

In this verse, we are brought back from the high state of spiritual ecstasy to where we fit in to this world. It is from all these actual, necessary aspects of existence that we have to rise to that higher state. We are not to forget that we have a body that can give us pain, a mind which can give us pain, sensations which, when exaggerated or stimulated too much, can cause us pain, and that we are carrying all the garbage of the past with us all the time. These are all real.

It is on this we have to build our own joy and understanding of the Absolute. The lamp is hanging in the Self, in total knowledge. Within the total knowledge situation we have both our physical and psychic selves. What we call experience is shadow, so it is darkness; and the real is the Self. As we are so tuned in to this shadow, we never know the light of the Self at all. We just go from one shadow to another shadow.

Those of you who want to have further illumination on this subject should read Plato's cave allegory. He speaks of a

cave in which some people are living. They are watching their shadows being cast on the wall on the opposite side of the cave. By long association with these shadows they have come to identify themselves with them. When a shadow moves its head, they think they have moved their head. They have created a whole theory centered around their shadows. When one of them wants to turn around and look at the light source that is casting the shadows, he finds that he is riveted in place, he is bound in such a way that he cannot turn. He starts howling, "I am bound, I am bound!" Everyone else laughs at him, "What a stupid fellow! He says he is bound. He claims he's not a shadow." They think they are sane and he is mad.

He continues to try to turn around, and the more he struggles, the more he feels the bondage. But finally he frees himself from the shackles and sees there is a light behind everyone that is casting the shadows they were watching. As he walks towards the light he notices it is a fire burning. He goes past the fire and out of the mouth of the cave. There he sees the real sun shining in the firmament.

When he looks at the sun, he becomes dazed and can not keep on looking. He has never seen such a bright light before. It's too much for him. He is blinded. But finally his eyes get used to seeing in the sunlight, and he can see the actual world with actual beings all around him. He thinks, "My God! I was seeing only the shadows of these things before. My poor brothers and sisters are still in the dungeon, suffering. I should go back and tell them." And so he reenters the cave.

This is exactly what a Guru does. First he goes and finds the real light, then he takes pity on those who are still caught in the shadow world and comes back to teach them. Usually he is met with hostility when he tells them there is another world more real than what they are seeing. He may even be crucified. But it is essential for us to somehow come to the understanding presented in this verse of exactly where we are now and what true possibilities lie before us. ❖

Song of a Grass Blade

*Sky adorned with blue.
Infinity came and smiled.
A cluster of golden clouds
formed ripples within me.
As they moved through the forest,
their thundering music
beat fiery rhythms upon
the drum of the sky.*

*The mountain forest danced.
Peacocks and antelopes hopped
through the fields and meadows.
The gentle breeze holds the colors
of the earth and sprinkles them
like the caress of fingers
playing the strings of a lute.*

*I was born a blade of grass.
How can I for even one moment
play music upon those strings?
He who has colored my soul
is truly the great musician.
Even as I am rooted in this earth,
I can still witness the movement
and dance of the clouds above me.*

Vidyadharan

*As I watch an approaching herd of cattle
that slowly come in search of me,
I feel complete fulfillment to offer myself
for their grazing delight.*

*Born as a blade of grass,
I was composed as a lyric
like an endless, upsurging, melodious ocean.
Where is the creator who formed me?
Inside I am gently weeping
in my longing to see your face.
Wherever in this world
your melodies are playing,
all outbursts of longing
are instantly dissolved.*

*My purpose for being
is to impart the eternal song.
The blood of this life
is ever flowing within me.
The only way to describe my life
is to say that it is a poem
made only of love.*

*I am a blade of grass.
As I blossom, my smile emerges.*

Mother Sri Sharadadevi: In Her Own Words

Excerpts from the Presentation by

Jnanamayi Indiradevi

Preface

We can see many symbols of Indian womanhood in the ancient mythological stories of India such as Kuntidevi, Panchali, Sita, Savitri, Dhamayanti, and in the Upanishads—Maitreyi and Gargi—and as Bhakthas like Meerabai and Akka Mahadevi. Now here in the 20th century, stands before us an extraordinary Mother, Sri Sharadadevi. She claimed to be an ordinary woman, but was as great as these women of the past. Though poor, she was born in a cultured and refined family of a farmer, and later on lived as the wife of a divine and godly soul. She is a wonderful woman, who being the wife of a divine soul, lived as an eternal virgin, who evolved to hold the status of Mathredevi of the Indian people. She lived as a Brahmacharini even in the role of a housewife, and not being a formal Sanyasini, led the life of a real sanyasini. Such a noble gem of womanhood was she. Mother Nature herself has created 'Woman' in such a way as to be suitable for procreation. According to nature, woman's heart and soul is filled with the longing to be a mother and to have her own family. Therefore, in a woman's birth itself there is an inborn instinct to be a wife and thereafter a mother. It is very trying to go beyond these basic urges. To transcend all these basic instincts one has to be under the circumstances that provide the most noble and highest value vision. An Indian woman knows very well how to care for and understand the needs of her husband. She considers it as a form of worship, seeing God himself in front of her as her hus-

band. But her utmost desire will be to become a mother. It is that desire that this great Mother could overcome! How could she do that? Forgetting the duality between herself and her husband, she became a part of him. And who was he? He was an ascetic whose only thirst was to become one with God and he himself became an image of God. Being the wife of such a husband, she was able to cooperate to fulfill his wishes sincerely with her mind, word and deed, and that was the secret of her success. She understood that her mission was not to create any blocks on his path, but to clear the blocks.

It is amazing to see a village girl of an orthodox family, have her own views on each and every aspect of life, with clear cut ideas of her duties and responsibilities. The sacrifices that she underwent to prepare herself suitably to fulfill the responsibilities entrusted on her by her God-like husband, the services that she rendered by expanding the motherhood in her to an all embracing state, and her magnanimity, show us how she could be an idol of eternal motherhood. She was not only an idol of womanhood, but of mankind as a whole. The moral support that Mother gave Swami Vivekananda, in introducing a reevaluated life style of sanyasis, that can be useful to the world, throws light on her clear and broad minded vision. She was capable of giving direct and precise guidance and advice for the education of women and the ideal life style of women in general. Without holding on tight to the established conventions, while giving *mantra deeksha*, she carried it out in her own competent way, keeping in mind

only the welfare of the person concerned. She rose to the position of a spiritual Guru by giving spiritual teachings and character guidelines for life in general.

Ignoring all kinds of physical discomforts and strain and inconveniences, she took upon herself the task of taking care of Sri Ramakrishnaparamahansa and his mother. Along with that, she undertook the responsibilities of taking care of her relatives. There was no limit to the stress and strain that she had to go through, caused by her mentally ill sister-in-law, and her niece, and her own brothers. Knowing that none of them were living independently, she protected them till the last days of her life, with a sense of responsibility. She also had to face harsh criticism. Sri Ramakrishnaparamahansa was a renunciate, sanyasi and a great soul with only godly thoughts. How come such a great soul's wife had relativistic attachments? To this, she gave a suitable reply – "A person with a sensitive mind, has keen attention and awareness in all his actions, so with my motherly heart, how could I reject anybody who is entirely dependent upon me? As I have no kind of selfishness or any expectations of getting anything in return, I can easily withdraw my mind as and when I wish. However, people will pass remarks. That doesn't matter. They will even talk on the reverse: 'Can't you see, leaving her siblings in difficulties, she is going after spiritual life and all.' It is common for people to talk either way. If we do not have clarity in our own actions and principles, we would only stagger and stumble."

What could she do as a mother? She cared equally for the sick and the unhappy, poor and down trodden, seeing no difference between Hindu or Parsi, Christian or Muslim, Native or Foreign, she warmly accepted and gave love to all with her maximum possible capacity making them believe that they were her own and she their own in heart and soul. She would say, "Can a mother differentiate her children? Or is it possible for her to reject her own children? If a child comes rolled in dust and dirt, shouldn't she clean him up,

pat him on the lap, and fondle him lovingly? Can she abandon a person with a fatal disease without treating or caring for him?" This wide vision and magnanimity is what lifted her up to the status of math-redevi even though she did not give birth to a child in the literal sense.

Gurudeva was in the role of a father in the place of *Išvara*, but his spiritual splendence was like the self-radiant effulgence of the sun. Narayana Guru says, "*oru pathinayiram athitheyaronnayi varuvathupolai*," (like ten thousand suns uniting and coming together). His spiritual radiance was one such. Hence all and sundry could not go near him. He too could not withstand worldliness in the least. So he was unable to mingle with ordinary people and hence lived in temples and holy places, staying aloof. The only pull towards this world was his interest to interact with devotees and disciples. To convince Mother that the motherhood in her could be of service to the world and with the same intention Bhagvan prevented her from giving up her life after his demise. Gurudeva knew that a mother's heart has the cool tingling sensations that comes from the rays of the gentle moon, and the serenity that can absorb, bear and forgive anything.

There will be no end if we praise and appreciate the magnanimity and sacrifice she showed throughout her life, to fulfil this goal set by Gurudeva. Particularly, the endless sufferings that she underwent after his *mahasamadhi*. Due to physical ailments she did not keep good health. Overcoming all these adversities, she successfully carried through the responsibilities of motherhood that was entrusted to her. She never went after name and fame. Nor did she desire it. She had the humbleness to see herself as just an instrument in the hands of Gurudeva and the Supreme Mother, Jagadamba, and by doing good to the world, she led her life fruitfully, and attained her goal.

Everyone believed that she was an incarnation of Jagadamba, So, without doing any actions, she could have survived, but to set an example to the world, she did

maximum work and toiled day and night. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Sri Krishna says: "Arjuna, since everything is in me, I need not do any Karma, if I do so, the people will imitate me and become lazy. To set an example to the world, I have to involve myself in actions." Such is also the state of the Mother. Through her own words, we shall now hear the life story of The Holy Mother—Sri Sharadadevi—an idol of selflessness and humility, and let ourselves into a rapturous mood.

Jnanamayi Indiradevi

Under Guru Deva's Teachings

Shodashi puja and his surrender in connection with that brought an end to all the spiritual practices and *sadhana* of Gurudeva. He accepted me as a part and parcel of his spiritual treasures. How can I explain my mental frame of that time? Haven't you heard that an Indian woman is capable of obtaining anything in the world with her chastity? In the Puranas, we come across examples of women who have lived serving their husbands wholeheartedly and attending to them with one pointed devotion and thereby gaining inner strength within themselves. Gurudeva was such a divine being, and he himself worshipped his wife as the Supreme Mother, surrendering everything to her. Is there any need for further elaboration about the strength of such a woman? I looked into myself. Is there any trace of self-pride or ego in me? No! Not in the least. Instead, there was a very great feeling of responsibility of motherhood. Is not the position of a mother that of great responsibility? I prayed—"Oh! Mother, never give a chance for ego or pride to enter into me." From that day onwards, I took him as my Gurudeva. We are two human bodies, born into this world to fulfill the will of the Supreme Mother, to do good to mankind—two humble servants of Devi.

Attending to mother's and Gurudeva's needs and cooking food for them during the daytime and spending nights in his room, I spent my days. I used to enjoy seeing his divine acts of ecstasy, like cry-

ing at times, laughing at times, dancing and merging into samadhi. Not knowing when he would go into samadhi and come out of it, I used to stay awake all night. Sometimes, when he was still in samadhi even after dawn, I used to call Hridayan to whisper mantras into his ears, and then slowly he would come out of it. Later on he taught me the mantra to be whispered into his ears. Sometimes I was scared. When he came to know that I was spending sleepless nights, he allowed me to sleep with his mother at Nahabath. He began to teach me spiritual austerities like japa and dhyana and I made up my mind to sincerely practice it.

On the spiritual path, bhakti (devotion) and jñāna (knowledge) have equal importance. From the knowledge that leads life to ultimate freedom (moksha), to maintaining a home efficiently, cooking good food, even how to interact with people, to keep things in order, doing things then and there, every little thing I learnt from him. Whenever we traveled to places, I was always the first to get into the vehicle and last to get out. It was to check if all things and all people were in and out. Even though all human beings are alike with flesh, bones and blood in their bodies, they are totally different inwardly. He cautioned me to be careful in choosing friends and comrades, because only a few could be associated with closely. To some people, just a waving of the hand and nodding the head would do, and there are some others who should be kept at a distance and any connection with them should be avoided. Like this, besides teaching me the basic principles to lead a smooth and successful worldly life, he also guided me to be intimate with God. The full moon that shines on a night sky is everybody's dearest and closest uncle (*ambili ammaman*). God too is everyone's dearest and nearest uncle. If you wholeheartedly yearn and cry for him you can make him your own, like when a child throws a tantrum and throws away all his toys and cries adamantly for the mother, and the mother leaves aside all her work, no matter how busy she is, to attend to the child.



Mother Sri Sharada Devi

Since I was a pure village girl, he was always conscious of my actions while mingling with people, to see if I may falter and commit small blunders. Once a very interesting incident happened. On seeing a water tap for the first time, I turned it open, and when I heard a kind of hissing sound of the air gushing out before the water could come, I got scared and screamed, "Snake! Snake!" It was only when the ladies around rushed up and found that there was no snake and that it was only the sound of the air, everybody

burst into peals of laughter. Thinking that I might make such blunders, I rarely went out. I used to spend most of my time at Nahabath. Nahabath is about seventy-five yards away from Gurudeva's room, by the banks of the Ganges. It is a small building, made out of stone. Without any convenience, it was just like a prison. Gurudeva's mother also lived there in a small room. There was no separate kitchen, bedroom or storeroom. There was only one room, which served all purposes. Just watching the Ganges flow by brought so much of

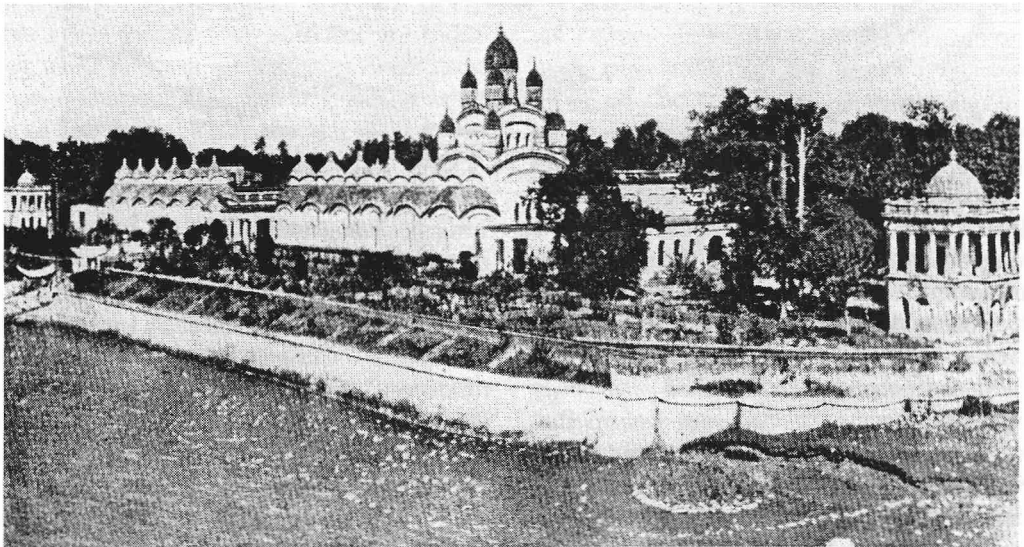
happiness. As taking care of Gurudeva was my sole aim, I overlooked all other hardships. I was so eager to see him dance and sing ecstatically, that I made a hole on the matted bamboo screen of my hut. Peering through that I watched his ecstatic actions. I have heard that he used to tease me by saying, "What Hridhu, your aunt's window hole seems to be widening each day." It was only to serve food that I went into his room. Sometimes, he would come to Nahabath and ask me to go out saying, "Why do you sit here like a bird in the nest?" It was only when there was no big crowd of people, that he asked me to go out, so that I can go around and chat with the ladies of the village, for some time.

Usually as a routine, I get up before four o'clock and take bath in the Ganges. Once I was about to step over a crocodile. When Gurudeva came to know of this, he stopped me from going for bath while still dark. Like this, for every little thing, he showed great care and concern. He always desired to give me the happiness I needed as a wife, the love, care and protection that a wife looks for in her husband. He always tried his best to make me happy and he used to create situations to bring out my abilities in front of others.

He taught me how to give initiations—*mantradeeksha*. He made me give *mantradeeksha* to disciple Prasannan. Later,

Prasannan was known as Swami Trigunanda. For around thirteen to fourteen years I lived with Gurudeva in Dhakshineswar with full happiness and contentment. He introduced me to all his Grihastha and Sanyasi disciples. To introduce in the sense, to consider as one's own and then to interact with full freedom. They were the first few disciples and formed the base for the Sree Ramakrishna Mission in the future. May be he could foresee that I would be both father and mother of those disciples in the days to come.

One day, when I went to his room, I noticed that he was looking at me hopefully. I asked, "Gurudeva, you need something?" In a soft serene voice he replied, "Should I shoulder everything all by myself? Will you not do anything?" I said, "Am I not a feeble woman? What can I do?" He said, "You can do many things." Pointing to his body, he said, "There is not much time, for this body to fall. What I am unable to fulfill now, Bhavathy should continue and fulfill. Are you not like the embodiment of the Supreme Mother? The Shakti of this one (pointing to himself). We should string all our children together, and motivate them to be of great use to the world. Narendran, Rakhai, Sharat, Mahendranath, Baburam and others are as precious as pearls. Narendran is born to carry my message to the whole world. He



Dhakshineswar Temple

At the extreme left is the Nahabath; just to its right is Sri Ramakrishna's room.

is a born saint." He began to give hints to say that his days are numbered. When people begin to worship his picture, and when he would start to eat anything and everything from anybody, he wanted me to understand that these would be the indications to say that his last days were nearing. On hearing all this, those words itself brought deep fear into me.

Gurudeva's Samadhi

In the year 1885, Gurudeva developed throat disease. Disciples took him to Shyampukkur for diagnosis and treatment. I was all alone at Dhakshineswar. I could not bear the sorrow and felt a kind of fearful loneliness. I used to weep and pray. I was in a dilemma. I did not know what to do. To add fuel to the fire, Golapma brought news of a rumor among the people that Gurudeva has gone to Shyampukkur because he was unhappy with me. That put me in great distress. By God's grace, I got a chance to go to Gurudeva immediately. The disciples found it difficult to look into Gurudeva's regulated diet. They realized that I was the right person to look into that. They were reluctant to take me to Shyampukkur, as the house was inconvenient for ladies to stay. They could not help but call me. With Gurudeva's permission, they took me to Shyampukkur. I willingly agreed to go. My life itself is to do *seva* for Gurudeva. Even previously, when he fell ill, they had taken me there. My external spiritual austerity was just that. When the husband is sick and suffering, to care for him, the difficulty and sacrifice that a woman undergoes can never be considered a strain. How can all that be a difficulty for a woman? When Sree Rama went on Vanavas, did Sita not compel Rama to permit her to accompany him? Did she not say that wherever Sree Rama lives is like Heaven for her? Was it not after so much persuasion, that she went with him into the jungles? Such is the culture and tradition of Indian women.

Anyway, I reached Shyampukkur house and went straight into his room and asked, "Is it because Bhavan felt unhappy

with me, that the residence was changed to Shyampukkur?" Gurudeva said, "Who told you all these lies? Have I ever been displeased with Bhavathy?" When I took Golapma's name, he was very annoyed with her. Later on, he called and questioned her and said, "If Mother is hurt or pained, the result can be severe. Go to her and do apologize." She regretfully begged my pardon. I already felt consoled after knowing Gurudeva's mind. I had no anger or hard feelings against anyone. I had the same love for Golapma, just as before.

A small room on the upstairs of the building where Gurudeva stayed was arranged for my stay. Cooking food that Gurudeva could take and caring for his controlled diet, I spent most of my time in that little room. Only if Gurudeva required something or wanted me to feed him, I used to come down. People used to leave the place for my convenience during his food time. One day, while taking food for Gurudeva, I slipped and fell down and sprained my leg. Hence, I was unable to take food for Gurudeva for about two or three days. Humorously, he enquired from his disciples, "How is that woman with the big nose ring? Is she all right? Can she be brought here in a basket?" There was only one bathroom cum toilet for everybody's use. Before anyone could wake up, I used to take bath at early dawn at three o'clock. Even though life there was physically strenuous, I lived there in peace, praying for Gurudeva's recovery.

It was diagnosed and confirmed that Gurudeva had throat cancer. For further treatment, he was taken to a rented house at Cossipur, a little away from town. I also accompanied him. This was the place where Gurudeva spent the last eight months of his life. The *Sri Ramakrishna sangham* took shape from here. Duly, I was given charge as the first responsible person of the sangham. Gurudeva's illness worsened. I felt heartbroken to see him struggle to even swallow water. A very helpless state, where nothing could be done. However, there was no change in his spontaneous jovial mood. It continued as ever before. He would say that it was

by taking on the burdens of others that his body was affected with the disease and asked everyone not to worry.

Once I had a dream vision that the head of the Kali-devi in the temple was tilted. On inquiring, Devi said that Gurudeva's illness had affected her also. It was to such an extent that Gurudeva had communion with the Supreme Mother. Even in that state, he used to go into ecstatic trance. Everybody began to sense that his last days were nearing. When every possible human effort failed, I had the urge to go and take full refuge in the Lord and do fasting at Tarakeshwar temple. I took permission and went there for undertaking the fast. At night, while in meditation, I had a revelation, "Who is related to whom? Whose husband? Whose wife? Is not everything non-existential? Is there any death for the blissful state of ultimate truth?" Suddenly I came back to this worldliness. All my mental agony vanished and I was serene and peaceful. I washed my eyes and face with holy water and returned to Cossipur. Jokingly Gurudeva inquired, "What happened? Did you get anything? Everything is unreal, isn't it?"

If Gurudeva so desires, he can pray to Jagadamba and get cured or in accordance to his own will, he can leave his body at anytime. But, he chose neither of the two. Because, he knew that if he did so, it would be against the will of Jagadamba. He was ever ready to obey the will of the Supreme Mother.

Gurudeva was very anxious of the future of his disciples. So he called each one of them individually by his side, and gave advice and blessings. To hold together all the young disciples, a Tyagi Sangha was formed. How sanctified that place became by the sincere and constant dhyana, tapas and samadhi of so many sanyasis. The Mahasamadhi of Gurudeva was also from there. Even now, if one sits there in deep contemplation, he can absorb sensitive currents.

Gurudeva knew that he was being pulled totally into merging with that supreme radiance. He called me by his side.

It is said that before calling for me he stated, "This present state of mine can be understood only by her because she is the only enlightened one at the moment and nobody else is capable of comprehending my plight." When I came by his side, he turned towards me and said, "It has become impossible for me to pull my consciousness from the higher realms. I know that I am being pulled towards some unknown plane. I see nothing but the Absolute Brahman. If I leave this body, you should not grieve and weep for me. Narendran and others will take care of you like they did for me. You will never lack anything. You should take care of Lakshmimani." She was his niece.

In the year 1886 on 15th of August, Gurudeva seemed to be in great silence. He frequently went into samadhi calling out, "Kali! Kali! Kali!" in a faint and feeble voice. It seemed that his body was going through a kind of seizure, a rapturous shuddering. His face filled with a divine glow. His eyes centered towards the tip of his nose. Everybody knew that he was leaving his body. He remained in that state till noon the next day. At last that moment arrived. Gurudeva attained mahasamadhi. He merged into the Absolute Brahman, creating a void in our hearts. No matter what I knew or talked in principle, at that moment, every thing came to a stand still. Like the earth having slipped away from under the feet, like drowning in the depths of the sea, I could not hold back the tears that rolled down continuously.

After Gurudeva's samadhi, the disciples decided to move out of the Cossipur house. Narendran suggested an immediate shifting from there would affect me badly, as I was very much grief-stricken. He said, "Even if I have to beg, I shall take care of Mother." Then I recollected the words that Gurudeva had said about Narendran. This Narendran later on turned out to be the world famous Vivekananda. Anyway, we stayed there for two more weeks. According to the wish of Balrambasu, who wanted me to stay at his home, Lakshmimani and I shifted to his place. I

took along with me a portion of Gurudeva's ashes in a small box and a photograph of Gurudeva for my daily prayers. The *grihastha sishyas* and *sanyasi sishyas* began to argue for the right to keep Gurudeva's mortal remains. Finally the *sanyasi sishyas* managed to get a portion of the remains. Rest of it was kept in the Udyan garden of a *grihastha sishya* named Ramachandradutta. I felt sympathy for these ignorant people who were fighting for the ashes of such a great and blessed soul who had just left the body. What can be done? It is but natural to the human mind.

On seeing my endless grief and sorrow, the disciples suggested that we should go on a pilgrimage. I too felt that it was a good idea, since Gurudeva had once mentioned that I should visit all the places that he could not visit. Few of us decided to go to Brindavan and started on our journey. Golap-Ma, Lakshmimani and a few other ladies were with us. Once while I was immersed in *kirtan* and *japa* Gurudeva entered my being and then I was in a trance, and began to behave and talk just like Gurudeva. I sat in *samadhi* like him. Even when I came out of it, I asked for the same sweetmeats that Gurudeva specially liked. It is said that I even talked like him and that every action was similar to that of Gurudeva. So, everyone felt like Gurudeva himself was sitting there.

During this time, I had a revelation that Gurudeva wanted me to give *mantradeeksha* to Yogendran because he was unable to do so during his life time. He even directed which mantra was to be given. I felt very hesitant because I had never even spoken to Yogendran previously. How could I give *mantradeeksha* to such a person? So Gurudeva suggested that I could do so through Yogin-Ma. Even Yogendran had a similar vision of Gurudeva directing him to take *mantradeeksha* from me. He was also reluctant to approach me.

One day I sat for puja, keeping Gurudeva's photo and box containing his mortal remains before me. Worshipping with great intensity, I merged into *samadhi* and began to chant loudly the mantra that was to be given to Yogendran. Yogin-Ma who

was in the next room heard the mantra and it was conveyed to Yogendran. In this manner, I gave *mantradeeksha* to Yogendran, who was known as Yoganandaswamy in later days. *Mantradeeksha* means initiation given for a seeker, to enter into spiritual discipline. The responsibility of the spiritual life of one who has received *deeksha* is taken on entirely by the Guru who gives the mantra. Gurudeva does not just limit himself only in giving the *deeksha*. He frequently inquires and gives continuous guidance and corrections to the disciple in need for his spiritual growth. He had taught me also all these ways, but after giving *mantradeeksha*, I would pray, "Gurudeva, as an instrument in your hands I have given *mantradeeksha*, now please take care of the disciple's progress."

After spending a year at Vrindavan, we went to Haridwar. I immersed a part of Gurudeva's ashes in the Bhrama Kund at Haridwar. We visited Triveni Sangamam. I took a part of Gurudeva's ashes in my palms to be immersed in Triveni and just as I was praying, a big wave lashed against my hands and swept away the ashes. Even the rivers eagerly seek union with such great souls.

We returned to Calcutta after the pilgrimage. Gurudeva had instructed me to live at Kamarpukkur, his native village, after his demise. Even if only rice and greens were available, he advised that I should be content with that and live there chanting the names of God. He particularly advised me not to stay on for more than three days in the house of any devotee, no matter how much they tried to influence me with their devotion. Keeping that in mind I stayed at Balrambasu's house for some days and then left for Kamarpukkur. Before leaving, I took *darshan* from all the temples in Dhakshineswar.

I also visited Panchvati, which was Gurudeva's most favorite place, and walked around there, bidding farewell to the place. Every gram of sand in that place was blessed by the touch of his blessed feet and every blade of grass was purified by his living presence. ❖

What India Means To Me

Excerpt from *Adhyatma Saroj* (1966)

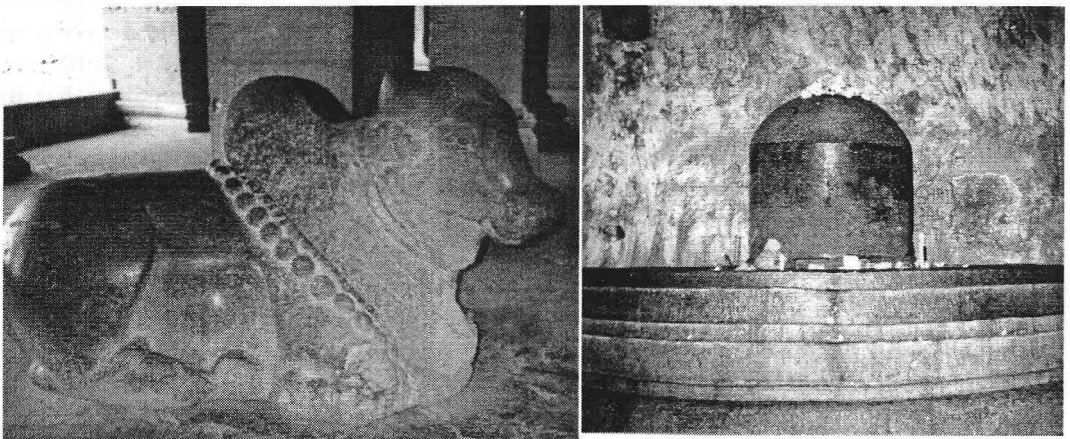
John Spiers

The Pre-Aryan Origins of Yoga

Here I must refer to a most important factor in relation to South India; the concept of yoga, with which India is forever associated. Yoga is indigenous to India. It was here long before the coming of Aryans. Chance brought me to Karachi three years ago when I returned to India on a cargo vessel. There I had the opportunity of visiting the famous museum which Sir Mortimer Wheeler the archaeologist was largely responsible for setting up. The main collection there is from the cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, cities belonging to what is known as the Indus Valley civilization. It was fascinating and important to the understanding of India, because I was clearly seeing visible evidence of the existence of the yogi and of the early Śiva worship long before the arrival of the Aryans. Not only that, I saw also the prototype of South Indian life, of proto-Dravidian culture. The plan of the cities and of the houses corresponds exactly with those in South India, the houses with their inner porticos and courtyard and the

temples with the bathing pool, very stupidly called "the great bath" by archaeologists who see things through the European angle rather than from the oriental. As for the evidence of early Śiva worship, it is self-evident, with Śiva *lingams* and the many carvings of Nandi, the bull, and then the sacred fig tree and as for yoga, there is the famous seal and many others, showing Paśupati Śiva.

This clearly proves that yoga—and that contemplative and ecstatic type of religion which is quite apart from the worship of the Vedic sky gods—belonged to this indigenous Indian people who have so many affinities with the Dravidian that for all intents and purpose they can be considered one and the same. Only Aryan zealots would evade this conclusion. All the evidence shows that the invading Aryans swooped down from the North and destroyed the cities, and even the date is known to be, by the use of radio-carbon 14, around 1500 B.C. And if you read what the late Father Heras has written on the decipherment of the Indus Valley script



Nandi the Bull Facing Śiva Linga at Ellora Cave Temple, circa 700 C.E.

found on the soapstone seals, you will be inclined to accept that the language also was of Dravidian origin, while archaeologists like Piggott and Wheeler give plenty of supporting evidence from other sources which suggest the same conclusion. The Aryans had never been city dwellers, but they won a victory everywhere—not only in India, but in Iran and Syria and in Greece—because they had tamed the horse and invented the fast horse-drawn chariot. All this of course is a long time ago but the importance of this confrontation lies in the fact that while the Aryans could impose their politics, and introduce caste and be severe as in *Manu-smriti*, they, in turn, through the Dravidian kings (now called *kṣatriyas*) learnt something of the wisdom of India, and also the notion of contemplation and yoga, from the contemplatives and the Gurus of the indigenous people who lived in the forests, surrounded by the animals, as we know from these Mohenjodaro seals. Instead of the often asserted claim that Indian wisdom was brought to India by the Aryans, I am inclined to believe the opposite to be true and that the inoffensive conquered indigenous Indians, disliked because of their dark skins, tamed and taught these warrior bands of meat-eating Aryans and introduced them to philosophy and a superior set of spiritual values, hence the growth of the *śrutih* literature which invariably revalues and often even condemns the Vedas upon which it stands. At any rate the notion of the contemplative yogi

figure remains and South India's way of life remains as alive today as it was when the *Yavanas* or Indian Greeks and so many other long-forgotten traders and visitors came to these shores. It is all part of the wonder that is the India that I discovered.

The Importance of Idolatry and Paganism

And now I begin to touch on what really interests me most in India and the central theme of this article. We leave for the moment the politics and the adventure of history with their everlasting problems and enter into the domain of the eternal. But I would preface what follows by saying that all the conditions favorable for the spiritual quest happen to be present here in India, and especially in South India.

You must all be aware of a very strange fact which is that South India hardly ever comes into what is called world news. How is it that about one hundred million people do not make for what is called "news" in the world? By "news" is meant political excitements and disturbances. Peace and contentment are not news. And the only bit of world news which was thought worthwhile in recent years in South India was the language flare-up, a typically South Indian reaction connected with something quite intangible and invisible. This only shows that the South Indian, and those Indians who think like them in this respect while indifferent on the whole to external affairs, are not indifferent to internal matters, to issues that are vital to the soul. To interfere



Meditative Goddesses, Ellora Cave Temple, circa 700 C.E.



Buddha Panel, Ajanta Cave Temple, circa 200 B.C.E.

with language is to meddle with spiritual high-explosives. I think that lesson has been well and truly learned by language changers.

Language is as good a point to begin any discussion on spirituality, as any other, for India has evolved its own philosophical languages. I am not here referring mainly to the unique specialized language of the pandits, but to the language of stone and wood, the language of the idol, the sacred image. These are all absolutist images, which thousands of years ago arose full fledged out of the matrix of the Absolute in the consciousness of highly gifted contemplatives. Those whose vision is limited to the lower ranges of life, to the relative rationalizing mind and even those whose religion remains at that systematic and flat level, whether

they are atheistic moderns or whether they are missionaries for some religion or ideology at that level—they will always fail to understand idols and condemn at once all idols, because they have shut themselves off willfully or have been sealed off by their conditioning from the deepest intuitional insights. But it is not so with the great masses of the common people, who easily recognize this stone and wood language of the spirit. They are never at a loss to get the eternal message of the grand symbols.

That yogi image, of the contemplative figure seated cross legged beneath a tree, which is first seen in pre-Aryan India, has now spread far and wide, across the continents and the oceans. Its appeal is universal. It conveys in principle what whole volumes of philosophy are sometimes



Contemporary Dakṣiṇāmūrti: The Being of Knowledge

needed to say. Once, when I was footsore and weary with the hooting rushing din of the streets of Paris, I found my way to the Musee Guimet, that famous center of oriental art. It so happened that I was the only visitor, and after I had bought my ticket from the sleepy caretaker, I wandered round and finally collapsed on a seat in one of the galleries. This large room had a magnificent collection of beautiful carvings and figures from Cambodia. Cambodia is called after Kambu who was a Śiva *bhakta* and yogi who found himself in this Far-Eastern land, and taught the Naga people there the wisdom of South India. In the last century or so, over six hundred temples have been found there, the most famous being at Angkor. The French archaeologists brought some of the Śiva statues to Paris,

and so there I was, tired and far away physically from India, but at last in a room full of these tranquil images. I had found a seat in front of one of them with its enigmatic smile, and as I gazed at this contemplative figure I sloughed off my weariness like a snake discards its old skin. It was a transporting experience, without any need for Aldous Huxley's drugs, peyote or lysergic acid.

Śankara knew the power of such symbols when he composed his *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra*, in praise of the Southward-Facing Form or Guru:

Picture it! At sacred fig-tree's roots,
aged disciples, youthful the Guru;
the Guru by silence explains,
disciples' doubts are Sundered!



Reclining Buddha Entering *Nirvāna*, Ajanta Cave Temple, circa 200 B.C.E.

We can imagine man to have a dynamic pole outside and a still center within. In India the image of the wheel is used to indicate this. Too much activity at the rim disturbs the mind and it is only when one settles down in the center that relief is found, where one is beyond the mental activities of speech and thought, as the *Kena Upaniṣad* explains. And then the intuitive or *turiya* of the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* is found.

It is because of these images, idols and symbols that I hold India to be of the greatest importance in the world today. Because it is through these images which belong to the *turiya* or true state, that truth can be found. It is wonderful to discover a land where these images are still flourishing openly and unashamed. The missionaries will condemn the idols. That is because they fear them. Don't listen to these missionaries. They have driven out or submerged the primordial wisdom images from Pagan Europe, and that is a tragic misfortune and the European is to be pitied thereby. The Western world has been

cowed by church bishops, priests and theologians into abandoning the image in favor of intellectual concepts, creeds and systems. Everything has been intellectualized, conceptualized, from sex to food. People eat vitamin pills and are carried away by the concept that they are getting the equivalent of good fruits and vegetables. It is all a mess. The direct contacts with life at both poles of here-and-nowness in the form of real humans, real food at one end, and of direct intuitive awareness at the other, have been lost, a double tragedy. And it is all due to the church and the state and science which are entirely intellectual.

So the Western peoples are suffering, and they don't know what's wrong with them. They are really starved of the great primordial images, and they need real numinous idols. And so there is revolt in the psyche and it bursts out into the violence of wars. And they have nightmares and dreadful dreams because deep down the *Ātman* or Absolute which is never absent, insists on being noticed somehow. So

it sends forth its impulses and these take on the form of strange dreams which the psychologists like the late Prof. Carl Jung have recognized to be of a universal nature, calling it the Collective Unconscious. Jung in private life as we know from his autobiography was less compromising and more forthright in his assertions, and this unconditioned so-called Unconscious, was clearly as the *cit* aspect of the Absolute as known to Indian philosophical investigation.

We can take it, then, that beneath the crust of Christianized conditioning, the European is just as idolatrous and just as rich in idols or images of a numinous character, as any Indian. These images are among the most precious parts of life. Not only are they perfectly valid, but they are even more necessary, because they are

closer to the Self of man than speeches and writings, systems and doctrines can ever be.

I am sure many people who have never been to India find such figures powerfully effective in inducing the contemplative state of mind which banishes mental fatigue. I know of many Western friends who keep such images, usually of the Buddha. These idols bring peace and the numinous mood—that Indian state of mind—which liberates them, temporarily at least, from the world of laws and rules and noise and frantic haste, and brings them into the calm transparent world of freedom and peace. The ultimate truth, the shining Absolute or the *Ātman* is beyond all names, concepts and argument, and is expressed by *that*, the silent language of symbol. ❖



Peace Letters to My Daughter

Scott Teitsworth

22 Sep 2001

Aum Emily,

Peace is something that begins in the heart and works its way outwards into the world as it grows by a kind of natural progression. Too often humans feel peace is something that can be imposed, as in the aftermath of war or other conflict. That kind of peace is the dialectical twin of war. What is often glibly called "true peace" is the synthesis of these into something much greater; occasionally, nay often, noted in saints and the wise. As you struggle with human nature laid bare before you, try to separate these two kinds of peace, the partial and the total. Partial peace leads to the emotional equivalent of war: bitterness, disillusion, misery, sadness. It doesn't cure any ills, at least for very long. Total peace, the one that comes from looking deep within yourself and discovering the meaning patiently sitting there waiting for you, transforms you and everything around you, for a ways. It can maintain its balance and fullness even in the face of apparent disasters.

I'm very proud that you want to uphold mankind's highest values with your great strength. But think of the philosophy of the I Ching, where everything is accorded its proper time. Meeting the war juggernaut head on will tend to push you into the peace vs. war dichotomy. When the nation turns rabid (and this is the most dangerous place on earth right now), perhaps it is time to use that energy to penetrate the mystery of yourself. Let the Tao provide you with the proper time for action. You acknowledge our leaders are deaf or even metaphorically dead. Loud shouts for peace will not raise the dead; hostile actions are what they feed on. The zombie analogy is exact. And such people will never know peace. Rather, remember

you are speaking and dealing with the part of the world that cares about the whole, that thirsts for peace and justice. Those are the people who will listen to you and others like you. No need to exhort them, lecture them, or try to drive them. You're all on the same side. Remember especially Nataraja Guru's advice to your mother when she was about to address the World Conference on Religion: don't plan your words, just lower your ego and the words will flow out naturally.

We love you soooooooooo much!
Dad

PS Here's a bit from Nitya's Autobiography:

We started publishing an English newsletter called The Gurukula Bulletin. Its tone was very critical of the other major organizations bearing Narayana Guru's name. Being young and egoistic, I took the criticism to another degree of exaggeration, and in all my speeches I was vehement in denouncing the lifestyle of the people connected with those organizations. When Guru saw that I was transgressing all limits of dignified criticism, he corrected me. He told me whenever I was facing people, rather than hurling angry shouts at them I should see only the Guru or God in my heart, and all my speech should be like a supplication directed to this image within. In public I had always spoken like an angry Marxist. Now that style of speech was to be substituted with a more contemplative and lyrical one. This new attitude led to a wholesale change in my behavior, and before long brought me more friends and fewer enemies.

And by the way, patriotism is ALWAYS used as a synonym for blind conformity.

Oct 7, 2001

Hi Em,

Now I'm really back [from a weeklong bike ride]! What a great trip we had down the coast: perfect weather, just-right length days, excellent beer. The waves were huge! Some of the biggest I'd ever seen outside Hawaii. And they started working their magic right away.

Initially I was still full of the bitterness and evil propaganda that seems to be washing over America in a full flood these days. The rhythm of the bike and the inevitability of the waves kept reminding me "You humans are temporary blips on a magnificent planet. You can screw everything up in your own domain, but the profound essence remains unaffected. The only solution is to find your way back to the essence again and again, and to try to share this truth with your fellow creatures." Each time my scattered thinking tried to reassert itself, it was washed away in the tide of nature's immensity.

That evening, while the rest hung out in a smoky bar pulsed by images of TV "pundits" loudly proclaiming their allegiance to hatred and racism, I stood as close as I dared to the raging sea exploding on the rocks and let it teach me as much as I was able to understand. In my room I left all the windows wide open and slept in a roaring womb of white noise.

The first day runs for about 20 miles along the cliff side before swinging back inland, so I found plenty of places to look down on the lines of surf rolling in. The water was full of sea lions, otters and gannets casually frolicking in the blasting waves. They dive under just as the next wave reaches them, and surface in the calmer waters behind. How could they be so unconcerned? Are they teaching us a great secret?

On the way home your mother and I visited the redwood trees. Holdovers from the Age of Dinosaurs, a few have been saved from the axe. Like ocean waves, they tug you immediately out of your mundane preoccupations to soar into the heights of bliss. Because they're so easily destroyed—unlike waves—they remind us

we have to care for the fragile web of life that forms the skin of our planet. Infinitely precious, and infinitely able to be thrown away by thoughtless humans. Those cathedral-like forests were cut to make patio furniture! Folks who try to prevent their complete elimination from the face of the earth are called "eco-terrorists." So I guess it's no surprise we bomb the world and get outraged if anyone objects.

The Gita says: "Even a little practice of [wisdom] saves one from the Great Fear." Before we can learn to live with the Great Fear, we have to know what it is. I suppose that's what we've been shown this Fall, how fragile and unpredictable is our hold on this world, how illusory is the solidity and permanence of objects. At the very moment of certainty comes collapse.

If we could quickly learn to deal with it, it would only be called a little fear; but it's the Great Fear, so it takes a long time. We can eventually become numb to it, but "getting over it" in that way is the wrong goal. If we just put it out of our mind it keeps coming back, and has all its power to terrify once again. Only by looking it straight on and seeing it for what it is can it be gentled. We have to know our connection with our source, which takes wisdom or yoga or connectedness or knowing God or whatever you want to call it. Make-believe doesn't work, so it's knowledge that's recommended. It has to be as real as the berry in the palm of your hand.

Tons of love, Dad

Oct 15, 2001

Dear Emily,

Most people, I suspect, think of peace as *the absence of conflict*. This truly misses the mark. While resolution of conflict accompanies peace, peace itself is dynamic and real, not a mere negation. This misunderstanding is why we never really achieve peace: as soon as conflict ends we return to a state of indifference and indulgence, and make no effort to evolve more refined modes of interaction. Our reliance on fantastic weaponry to ensure "peace" stems from this orientation, since once we destroy the "enemy" we are left with the

absence of conflict. We think we can then safely return to our indifference. We quickly forget that we have to bring peace alive within ourselves through intentional efforts, and our forgetfulness brings us back to the disaster of war again and again.

If this were a game of cops and robbers where the enemy could actually be eradicated, viewing things in black and white might have some merit. But by now we must realize that there is more to this picture than meets the eye. The world is us, and we are the world. We're in the midst of a psychic battle where the good and the bad are within. Pushing "evil" away just stretches us out in that direction, and the more we push the larger that aspect becomes. Our dark side can become terrifyingly huge! This is why the wise recommend befriending all aspects of our self, not just the good parts, and gathering them in and embracing them.

Smug self-indulgence is a characteristic attitude virtually everywhere. Outwardly it looks like peace, but when some event occurs to test it, we can see it's poised on a hair trigger to explode into violence. The rage comes in part from perceiving the surface of activities as isolated events, which can take dramatic and horrifying shape, as recently witnessed on our telescreens. Life is very good at providing terrible provocations to yank us out of our self-constructed padded cells and give us a good look at who we really are. True peace is not much disturbed by such momentary events because it is aware of their root, understands their cause and interrelatedness, and realizes they are essentially unending. Moreover, they can't be manipulated by direct confrontation. This hints at the secret of where to seek peace, and why understanding is so often advocated as the antidote to evil. It's much more than a cliché once you look into it, though I admit it certainly is mouthed as one often enough.

The very idea of civilization is to sub-

stitute the persuasive power of intelligence for the law of the jungle, represented by the time honored "might makes right," and "an eye for an eye." (Usually it's five eyes for each eye, of course.) When examined, these latter are simply formulas for unending conflict; there's no room for progress, no way that leads to peace. If we're to evolve we must find ways to give ourselves surcease from those tragic cycles of violence. History is full of tales of the courageous men and women who found ways to advance this agenda, so you have to wonder why as a species we never seem to get much past Square One. I like to think of it as God's bad joke (once you figure it out, you die), but I suppose in truth it's a challenge to us. We must figure out how to derail our meanness or risk destruction, not just once but over and over again.

Religions represent large-scale movement in this direction, and most of them have this intention right at their core. Unfortunately, some of them have failure built in as well: someone else tells you what to think and what to do. In the name of "God" of course. So pious followers can check their intelligence at the door. There's a fine line between learning from someone else and letting them do your thinking for you. Our schools unconsciously play into this self-defeating game as well, by demanding obedience rather than independence from students. Since religion is essentially school for adults, it's no surprise that the program is similar. It should be obvious by now this opens the door wide to fascism.

So keep digging deep into yourself. As Mees said, we need an army of prophets. In any case, every circle of friends needs at least one. As Einstein said over 50 years ago, if we don't find a new way of thinking by the end of the 20th century, the human species is doomed. I'd like to add that that "new" way of thinking is really very ancient. It's just lying there waiting for us to try it on. Aum. ❖



East-West University Report and Narayana Gurukula News



Guru Puja was celebrated by the Portland and Bainbridge Island Gurukulas on September 2, 2001 with friends from throughout the western US as well as India. Wisdom teachings of the Gurus were shared with joy and everyone participated in remembering the sacredness of the earth that supports, the fire that burns, the water that showers and flows, and the food that sustains.

On November 16, the Narayana Gurukula Study Circle, Thalassery, hosted a *Sneha Samvādam*, a Love Dialogue, on Living Wisdom. Participants shared their experiences and imperiences of pondering and being guided not only by the answers Gurus give but also the questions Gurus ask.

On November 17-18, the East-West University of Brahmavidya and Kanakamala Narayana Gurukula hosted a *Spiritual Ecology Workshop*. Participants came from all walks of life, including teachers of environmental education, environmental activists, organic farmers, doctors, advocates, students and Gurukula members, with ages ranging from ten to eighty plus. The workshop provided an opportunity to experience one's identity as a world citizen not only with fellow human beings, but with all beings, as a preparation and

encouragement to join in healing the world, as well as to connect with one's true reality as an integral part of the world one seeks to heal, guided by the Gita verses: "Earth, water, fire, air, sky, mind, reason also, and consciousness of individuality, thus here is divided My eight-fold nature. As the great expanse of air filling all space has its basis in pure extension, thus you should understand all existences as having their basis in Me."

The newest Gurukula, *Narayana Gurukula Chaitanya Dhamam* (Seat of Consciousness), was inaugurated in Palghat on December 2, concluding several months of work led by Jnanamayi Indira-devi.

Also on December 2, Narayana Gurukula Singapore sponsored a talk on *Meditation and Life* by Nancy Yeilding at Sree Narayana Mission, Singapore, followed by *satsangs* hosted by the Ulagathan family at Marine Terrace.

Narayana Gurukula held its annual Conventions at Kanakamala Gurukula, Thalassery, in October and Varkala Gurukula in December. Both were well attended and evoked enthusiastic appreciation from the participants for the insight of the philosophical presentations and the loving atmosphere of cooperation and dialogue.

New Year Message

Swami Muni Narayana Prasad

I wish to all a meaningful new year that is bright with the luster of the wisdom imparted by the world teachers like Narayana Guru. The wisdom of these masters has a peculiarity of its own: It is of eternal value, while shedding light on contemporary issues, suggesting solutions based on the eternal value of the wisdom.

Let us look at certain problems we face now. The rate of suicide in Kerala, reports say, increases rapidly. Suicidal tendency in children is almost nil; the reason might be that no serious thinking about the meaning of life is normal at that age level. Suicidal tendency apparently increases during adolescence. The impelling force behind almost all such cases is not scoring the expected mark or having failed in school examinations. Such expectations are nurtured in these growing adolescents not by themselves, but by parents. Ignorant of the meaning of life, they create the wrong impression in their children that scoring high marks is what makes life successful. The adolescents, fully believing what their parents inculcate in them, choose suicide when they find themselves having failed in meeting the expectations of their parents. The real meaning of life is never taught in our schools; it is taught only by great Masters like Narayana Guru. The solution to the problem is both parents and children relying on the wisdom taught by our Masters.

Among the youth, despairing love affairs are the main cause of suicide. At an age level when sex and the related urge for love is very strong, one may feel that urge is what makes life meaningful. The discernment that this urge is simply a biological one, that it is not long lasting, and that something much higher is the real meaning of life, does not ordinarily dawn on such youth. Sexuality being a very strong urge, an equally strong discrimination is required to save those who are

caught in such tragic situations. Seeking the advice of knowledgeable elders helps a lot in such cases. The required discriminative awareness is forcefully present in the gentle words of our Gurus and is to be taken full advantage of.

The increase in the suicidal tendency among householders mainly is caused now by the financial traps they are caught in, particularly created by the modern economic policy of globalization. Financial stability is a prerequisite for a worldly life, yet it is not the factor that determines the meaning of life. Unaware of this reality, many are engrossed in activities of financial interest alone, and thus become tempted to commit suicide in situations of difficulties. The advisability of being moderate in all matters including financial ones has always been underscored by our great Masters. But nowadays one is tempted to heed the alluring advertisements of business tycoons rather than the teaching of Gurus.

The situation becomes all the worse when one finds oneself in debt and unable to repay it. "Debt is the worst poverty"—such is the adage. It is always advisable not to depend on loans; but if one decides to do so, one has also to be willing to boldly face the difficult situation it might create in future. Of course, when such crises caused by no fault of the debtors become widespread, governments often come to their rescue. Anyway suicide is no solution to the problem. Crises arising and disappearing are natural in the course of life—every uphill is followed by a downhill. It is all part of the creative self-expression (*karma*) of the ocean of life, of the ocean of Absolute Reality. This understanding enables one to face all problems, including those of debt, with a sense of equanimity. The light of wisdom that enables one to attain such a state in life is what all the Gurus shed through their

gentle words.

Globally too mankind faces many crises; the most exceptional one of the present is that of terrorism. Terrorist activism is always politically motivated and is often reinforced by religious interests. This phenomenon in the political scenario of the world as a whole has become a psychological malady of immense dimension. What is its root cause? Terrorism, we are compelled to acknowledge, is an illegitimate child of democracy, the most lauded political ideology of the modern age. Democracy traditionally is defined as "the government of the people, by the people, for the people." How is "the people" to be defined? What are the boundary limits that identify a "people"—geographical regions, religious following, racial identity, ethnic affiliation, cultural similarity, or what else? Until this is clearly defined in a universally acceptable way, "the people" will be defined by different power mongers in different ways and they will always be fighting for political dominance, taking a large chunk of society along with them. Such ignorant and unthinking people may become willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of the identity they are taught is of the highest value in life.

Narayana Guru's words concerning religions—"One's conviction appears repugnant to another; and what is taught as a great ideal in one might look freakish to yet another"—hold good in this case as well. This sows the seeds of conflict. Such conflicts, when remaining unresolved, tempt some people to take to terrorism. This is likely to continue to be so until "the people" is defined properly in terms of its identifying boundaries. Though possibly good enough for a temporary suppression, no military action is a final solution. Any such attempt is only like trying to stop the growth of hair through shaving. All the factors we are familiar with that define a people in the political arena are man-made, artificial, imaginary and opposed to a proper vision of life. The true and natural limiting factors are only two—an individual human being and the human race as a whole. All the groupings

in between these two are arbitrary. A geopolitics that acknowledges these two poles as determining factors and an art of democratic governance based on it are yet to emerge. Until it happens, the present conflict between national democracy and terrorism will necessarily continue.

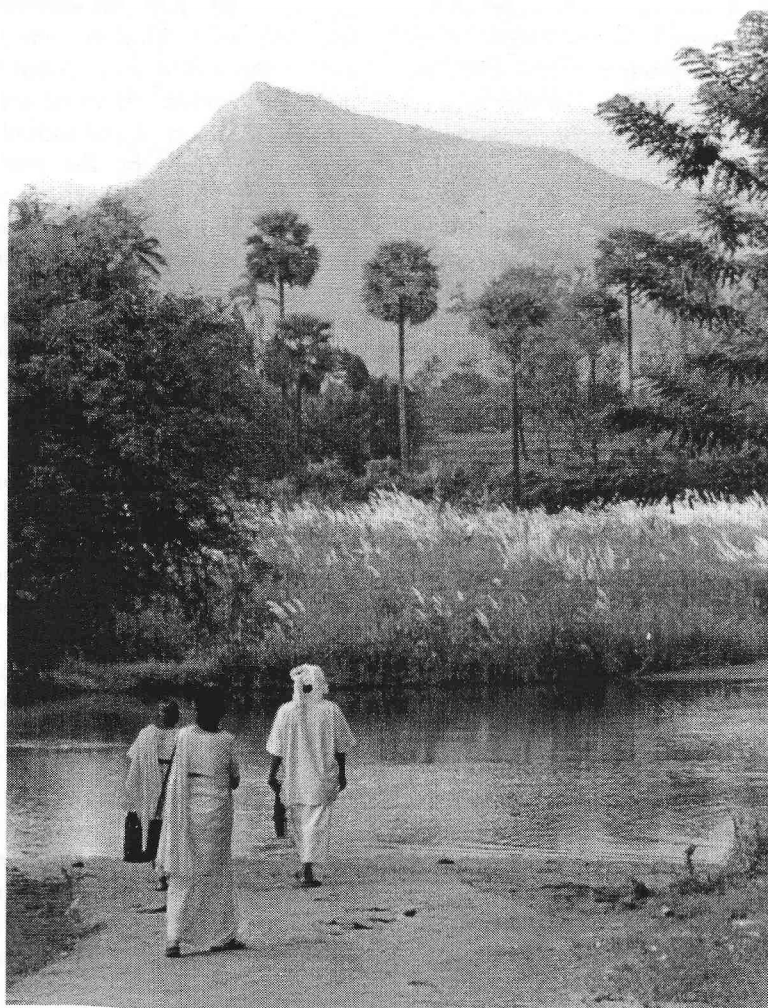
All the modern nation-states virtually are nothing more than some revised and enlarged version of the most primitive tribal territorialism. When religion-based, this state identity looks for an ideal from some alien culture, as ancient as more than a millennium. In the days of origin of world-religions, a culture prevailing in one corner of the world was quite unknown to another. The situation now is totally different. Modern science demands seeing the world as a global village. This latest perception has to be accommodated into the domain of state-identities and religious identities by the modern leaders concerned. Then will arise a new political science that treats the entire earth as one political unit. Only such a political science can be considered as based on a sound and holistic philosophy of life. Religious identity and state identity being separate domains of human interest, they should not be promiscuously mixed up in governance. All loop holes luring religious outfits to sneak into the political arena should be fully sealed. A religious identity that recognizes and respects all other religions should be the order then.

A discriminative awareness that leads mankind to such a state of existence is what the human race should imbibe from the words of great Masters like Narayana Guru. We are not sure how long we will have to wait to achieve this. Till then all we can safely do is make constant effort to achieve this laudable goal, while remaining quiet, withdrawn within ourselves, and unperturbed by the various, often contradictory arguments of proponents of misleading "isms." The discriminative awareness for this is to dawn within us by our own personal effort. I wish the dawning of discrimination in each of us, and may the new year be a more meaningful, hopeful and peaceful year in this sense. ❖

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Near the new Narayana Gurukula Chaitanya Dhamam in Palghat.

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