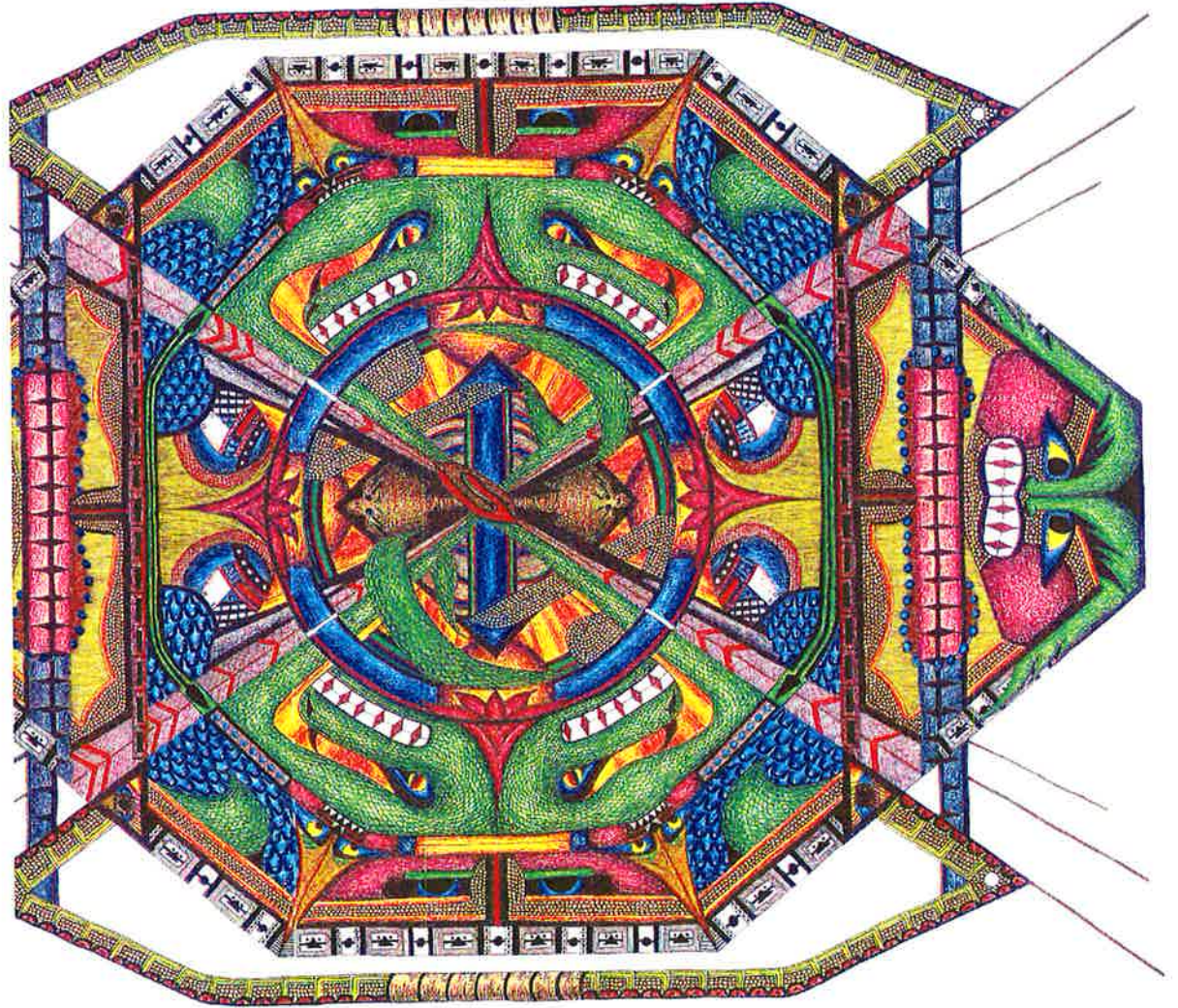


GURUKULAM



AUTUMN 2005



GURUKULAM

A Journal of Philosophy and the Arts

Autumn 2005

Published by the Narayana Gurukula

TABLE OF CONTENTS

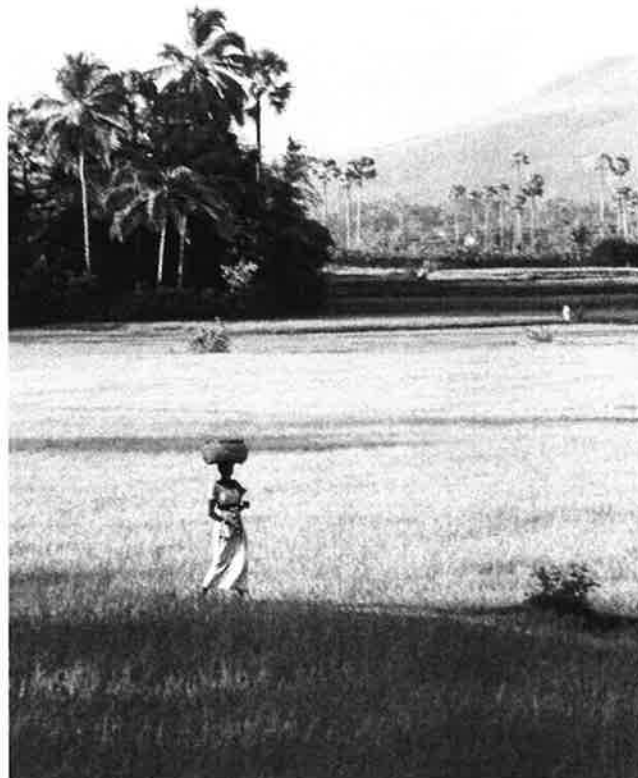
- 6 EDITORIAL
- 8 THE THREE CATEGORIES OF REALITY
by Nataraja Guru
- 18 *ĀTMOPADEŚA ŚATAKAM, Verse 24*
by Narayana Guru
translation and commentary by Guru Nitya
- 24 *ADVAITA DĪPIKA*
by Narayana Guru
translation and commentary by Guru Muni Narayana Prasad
- 29 THE INFINITE, A SUDDEN GUEST
by Emily Dickenson
- 30 A DANCE OF LIFE, DEATH AND TRANSFORMATION
by Peggy Grace Luke
- 38 LAST DAYS WITH GURU
by Bonnie Lee
- 44 WOVEN HEAVEN, TANGLED EARTH
by Susan Plum
- 46 SPEAKING OF THE SACRED
by Katie Radditz
- 48 JOURNEY TO LANDFALL
by Paul Merchant
- 50 VACANAS (SONGS FOR SIVA)
by Akka Mahadevi
translation by Swami Vinaya Chaitanya
introduction by H.S. Shiva Prakash

57 MEDITATION ON ŚRI CAKRA
by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

60 MUSIC FOR BIG EARS
by Fred Cantor

62 GURUKULA NEWS

63 ILLUSTRATION CREDITS



EDITORIAL

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

In the dictionary loss is described as “the detriment or disadvantage to keep, have or get,” and grief is defined as “keen mental suffering or distress.” In this issue of *Gurukulam*, the authors and artists explore the all-too-human experience of loss, and from loss, sorrow. What Nataraja Guru termed metalanguage (abstract and rational) and protolanguage (imagistic and allusive) are both employed here. With written word and visual line our contributors delve into that common but mysterious experience we call grief.

When we feel grief, when something is felt as gone, what is it we are feeling? What is missing that was previously there? Where did it go? What are we left with? These are some of the questions explored in this issue’s articles, poems, drawings and sculptures.

Though all of us find ourselves, at certain points in our lives, in grief and despair, we rarely remain there. What experience is it that moves us out of the state of sorrow? What do we learn about ourselves and our world when we are in anguish? These pieces also speak to the instructive and altering power of loss. How, in the depths of sorrow, we can be called up sharply, made to see our own preconceptions, our attachments, in a new light. Grief holds up a mirror, illuminating both our vision and our shadows. If we remain open and alert, it has a redemptive power.



In all these explorations, we should be attentive to the subtle assumptions behind presence and loss. We are given a chance to clearly look at who we are and what it is that we feel we are losing. Through understanding that, we come to an immediate, intimate experience of each moment's startling vivacity.

Also in this issue we are printing excerpts from two recently published books. The first is *Unitive Philosophy* by Nataraja Guru (D.K. Printworld), which is a collection of his essays. The second is from *Songs for Siva*, poems or *vacanas* of Akka Mahadevi, the twelfth century Kannada poet-saint, which have been translated by Swami Vinaya Chaitanya. Nataraja Guru approaches Reality with a focused intelligence and the ability to decipher and interrelate the various components of our experience. The *vacanas* of Akka Mahadevi, on the other hand, sing out from the poetic heart of union with the Beloved.



THE THREE CATEGORIES OF REALITY

BY NATARAJA GURU

All philosophy and science stand for certitude through thinking. Logic and mathematics lay down the methods by which certitudes are reached when mere thought, unsupported by methods or calculations, involves varying degrees of doubt about the steps of thinking or research.

Vedanta philosophy, or *brahmavidyā* (Science of the Absolute) as it is more correctly named, is no exception to the rule. It seeks certitude about absolute Existence, Subsistence, or Value, comprised in one notion called *brahman*. (*Brahman* should not be confused with Brahma, the four-headed god of the Hindu pantheon. It represents the Absolute when used as a neuter and not as a masculine.)

Texts and the Great Dicta

To reveal the nature of the Absolute in poetic, figurative, or other convincingly authorized or valid language, is what the Upanishads, the most important body of literature of canonical status for Vedanta, has as its principal task.

The Absolute, being by nature a mystery and a wonder, means that the teaching of the Upanishads refers to a kind of philosophy that tends to be esoteric; but when it has been subjected to more critical, rational and intuitive treatment in the *Brahmā Sūtras* of Badarayana (which is universally recognized as the second canonical text of Vedanta), and in the third similar canonical text called the Bhagavad Gita (which, though, is sometimes referred to as a *smṛiti*, a code of obligatory duties of secondary importance), the subject matter of these three authoritative texts attains to a fully philosophical status both from esoteric and exoteric norms of thought.

Both a priori and a posteriori means of valid reasonings are employed in Vedanta to arrive at the four great dicta (or *mahāvākyas*) which define the finalized finds (or *lakshya*) of the Vedantic research or inquiry. Expressed in the first, second or third personal or impersonal pronouns as referring to the Self or ultimate Reality, they read: "Pure consciousness is the Absolute," "That existent is the Absolute," "This Self is Absolute," and "That thou art." In whatever grammatical or syntactical form they may be put, they represent an equation between two aspects of the Absolute, one which is visible and the other which is intelligible whether in the context of the cosmological, the psychological or the theological orders of reality.

The great dicta may be said to be answers to the two most generalized problems of all philosophical inquiry; two grand questions arising ever and everywhere in the

human understanding: Who am I? And how came this world? These two questions are fundamental and basic to all philosophical inquiry on the part of anyone endowed with natural curiosity to know about his environment and himself as together making a sensible whole in the Absolute.

Vedanta follows such wholesale lines of inquiry and boldly claims to hold the answer to these questions, which is more than the most intrepid of modern analytic philosophers dare to claim.

There are modern philosophers who tend to believe that wholesale answers to globally or totally conceived problems are no longer justified, and that the scientific spirit pertains to piecemeal annexation of one fact after another to the total store of human knowledge by demonstrable steps of trial and error. They are thus skeptical empiricists or pragmatists, confined to the instrumental or the operational world of probabilities with a partial epistemology, methodology and axiology.

Vedanta, on the other hand, is rather a bold, wholesale, frontal and a priori approach to ultimate realities of the most generalized order; and its natural starting point is belief rather than scepticism.

Valid Means of Certitude

The other valid means of certitude such as what is demonstrable and given to the senses, such as the eyes (*pratyaksha*), are not omitted, but given a revised epistemological and subjective status in Vedanta. They are fitted into an overall scheme with a transparency or homogeneity in the common medium of participation, which is neither mind or matter, but something with a neutral status in the Absolute.

Vedanta is thus a complete philosophy of the Absolute, with a rather subjectively biased epistemological status, with a methodology which admits of all valid means of certitude, from empiricism through rationalism, criticism and intuitionism, with an importance also attached to semantic considerations, and referring to a high human value or goal to be reached for all mankind.

Although often mistaken for pantheism, pessimism, solipsism, eclecticism, idealism or syncretism, none of these terms can be considered sufficient to cover the character of Vedanta, which is an integrated philosophy, a psychology, a cosmology, and a theology by its own right at one and the same time. It is often legitimately or illegitimately used as a surrogate of religion.

Although some aspects of Vedanta stand in need of revision or clarification in the light of modern norms and standards in philosophy, there is no gainsaying the verity that it represents a monument of the heights to which speculation in the human mind can attain. Progress in modern times tends rather to confirm Vedanta rather than discredit it or put it into cold storage. When properly restated, it can even offer the basis for a one world philosophy or a unified science of tomorrow.

The much misunderstood *Purva Mīmāṃsā* will be seen, on closer study, to be nothing but semantics, offering the frame of reference for a language of unified science. Schematicism, structuralism, subjectivism and a selective epistemology all

lie at the basis of Vedanta, in which not only the Vedas but the six systems of Indian philosophy, all of which have gone into disuse and mistrust at the present day, have been successfully integrated already into one body of unified wisdom. The normative notion of the Absolute is the factor giving unity and organic coherence to the various elements of philosophy or science, logic or mathematical discipline that have contributed, or should legitimately be taken to have contributed to this body of unitive wisdom called *Advaita Vedānta*, of which the other varieties, such as *Dvaita* (duality) and *Vishishtadvaita* (non-duality with Value), are only as corollaries to axioms.

Vedanta and Modern Thought

There are both points of contact and difference between Vedanta and modern Western philosophy. Having reviewed some of the significant aspects of such thought in another study, we have here to keep in mind the matter again, to enable us to see Vedanta in its revised perspective, noticing agreements and disagreements between the two, widely separated as they are, between the extremes of Eastern and Western ways of thinking.

We have already seen how the official or academic philosophers of Europe, even up to the time of Hegel, treated Eastern philosophy and Indian speculation generally as unworthy of any notice. Exceptions to the rule, such as Schopenhauer, Schelling, Schlegel and others, besides Max Mueller and Paul Deussen, as we have seen, admired it almost as partisans in its favour.

It is the mean between the two attitudes of disadoption and adoption that we have to strike, to arrive at the normal view in this matter. The skeptical, empirical standpoint is at present having great credit in modern Western thought. This is due partly to the reaction against the extreme dogmatism of the Middle Ages and the rise of the scientific spirit after the Dark Ages passed into the Age of Enlightenment and Reason.

From the paradoxes of the Eleatic philosophers and the hylozoism of the pre-Socratic animists and nature philosophers who speculated about the reality of the elements of water or fire in a scheme of existent realities, to the extreme idealism of a Hegel, we have one sweep of the story of human speculation in the West, which we can keep in mind in order to see the highlights and contributions of each new development insofar as these are likely to be of interest to us in placing Vedantic thought and the lines of its speculation in its proper perspective in the context of human understanding, as natural to man any time and anywhere.

A perennial and world background in which normal human speculation naturally thrives, when once properly visualized, will help us to rid ourselves of parochial or mental barriers of language or customs of different regions or times. We can then seek that central scientific notion common to both philosophy and science and clarify it for the thought of the one world of tomorrow, in which the idea of one language too would have full relevancy, as helping to avoid confusion of

tongues, which a scientific language alone can be expected to solve, as it has to some extent already done. A Russian and an American scientist can now communicate in the language of formulae and equations, with letters of the Greek alphabet, and so it becomes punishable to pass on any information in such a language from within one frontier to another.

Philosophy too, when rid of linguistic or cultural frontiers, will tend to bring humanity together in a more real sense than in the case of the Tower of Babel, which left the question of a common language outside its scope.

Integrated wisdom must accommodate existential laws, logical rules, critical methods, and give full scope to intuition. Modern phenomenology and existentialism too, have their contributions, which we have to notice so that we get a total or global view of speculation as a whole, as normal to man anywhere and at any time.



What is often referred to as perennial philosophy at present tends to come nearer to mysticism rather than to the philosophies of the present time, which are referred to as analytic. This distinction itself will be seen to be arbitrary, when we have examined the whole field of speculation and understanding in the light of a normative notion of the Absolute. We cannot here attempt a thorough or systematic study of these aspects, but only a summary review of the whole position in a sweeping and general way.

Three Broad Divisions of Philosophy

Vedanta examines absolute reality under the three categories of *sat* (Existence) which is philosophically the domain of ontology; *cit* (Subsistence) which results from abstract reasoning, and which is the domain of the ratiocinative or rational

aspect of philosophical inquiry; and *ānanda* (which refers to the world of Value, whether moral, aesthetic or of higher contemplation), with the good and the beautiful coming under this division, which has recently been named axiology.

Ontology, epistemology and axiology may be said to cover roughly these three zones or degrees of speculation. Often these divisions overlap or presuppose each other till they become merged into the one central, neutral, normative notion, called the Absolute. The actual, the logically true and the beautiful or the good as summum bonum, may be said, in a more popular way, to cover the same divisions.

The cosmological, psychological and theological versions of the same have been recognized in Vedanta as the *ādhibhautika*, the *adhidaivika* and the *adhyātma* aspects of the Absolute, which is yet another way of dividing up the total field of speculation, based on the subject matter or object matter to which it refers. Sometimes too, both subject and object matters are treated together, more unitively, as in keeping with the nonduality of approach.

Although, strictly speaking, Vedanta adheres to *ajata-veda* (theory of non-creation) yet there is, in popular Vedantic works, under a chapter known as *utpatti prakarana* (chapter on genesis), some reference to how, in the beginning, the world originated. Thus some aspects of genesis are included in Vedanta as also its inevitable counterpart, eschatology, which treats of matters pertaining to the soul after its departure from here, or refers to the end as *pralaya* (general finality). Theories of reincarnation and the survival of the soul in various regions have occasionally been worked out in Vedantic texts. When the story of creation and the survival of the soul, with its progress in the spiritual world are brought into the scope of philosophy it begins to resemble theology or religion.

A total subjective and absolutist way of approach, giving primacy to the mind rather than to matter, which is of the essence of spirituality, as against mere one-sided materialism, characterizes Vedanta on the whole, although the rejection of the materialist standpoint from its scope is not altogether intended. Mind and matter in Vedanta may be said to be treated as counterparts, with equal claims, as in the standpoint of neutral monism postulated by William James and approved by Bertrand Russell. As a result, empirical evidence (*pratyaksha*) occupies a respectable position side by side with *śabda* (a priori validity based on authoritative texts) in Vedantic methodology.

Religion and Philosophy

Indians have had no reason to divorce religion from philosophy to the extent Europeans had to due to the extremes and excesses of the dogmatism of the Middle Ages. The horrors of the Inquisition were a nightmare that haunted the conscience of the West, which can vie only with the cruelty and injustice of the caste system that has persisted in India. Both have tended to drive a wedge between aspects of spiritual life which, without them, should have belonged together as one discipline

or expression of aspiration for Truth or Freedom. As a perennial philosophy, Vedanta tries to steer clear of historical and other considerations, and thus has a global, integral and unitively comprehensive character of its own, though with its own necessary methodological, axiological and epistemological peculiarities.

Though coloured somewhat by Vedism, it is not to be thought of in terms of any genetic fallacy stemming from its origin and growth on the Indian soil. Advaita Vedanta or more simply Advaita philosophy, when revalued and restated, can give us the norm and reference, both theoretical and practical, of a way of life and certitude that can claim a fully scientific status, while being a complete philosophy in its own right.

Partial philosophical growths or expressions which have gained the foreground in various epochs in the history of the world, can all be given their proper places as aspects of such a philosophy of philosophies, or science, that Vedanta has claimed to represent, even from the Upanishadic times.

How far the various philosophies of the Western world can, by their light, confirm and not discredit some of Vedanta's primary methodological, epistemological or axiological postulates in yielding more certitude to it as a complete philosophy in itself, is what we shall try to show in the pages that follow. For purposes of orderliness, we shall adopt the Vedantic categories of *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* (Existence, Subsistence and Value) as aspects of the Absolute, to establish points of contact or contrast between Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy as represented by the Advaita philosophy of India.

The Absolute as Existent

We have the experience of existing things. This experience is the natural starting point of all inquiry of truth, whether scientific or philosophical. The mysterious universe of Jeans, or the "all things wonderful" that the Lord God made, of the children's hymn book, refer to the existential order of things.

What is observed by the naked eye, or even the eye aided by instruments like the microscope or the telescope, refers to this aspect of reality. Particle physics or bacteriology reveal one side of the existing universe, while the galaxies of the expanding universe represent the other pole. These are known as the microcosm and macrocosm.

We have to distinguish, however, the metaphysically existent from the ontologically existent. There is existence as opposed to essence in Scholastic philosophy, which has also to be noted. Brute actuality based on sensation is called the *sensum*, and when removed one degree subjectively or secondarily, has more of the status of a percept, rather than that of a *sensum*. Conceptual and nominal abstractions of the existent are also possible to abstract from the given actuality of a situation.

Significant existences have to be separated, as coloured by degrees of interest in things that exist. Epistemological realism and idealism are both possible in modern philosophy. Materialism itself has no definite meaning, especially in modern days where matter and energy are becoming interchangeable terms.

All-encompassing Character of *Sat*

Sat (ontological reality) as understood in Vedanta has no metaphysical limits put on it as in the West, where ontology is excluded from the purview of epistemology. Physical *sat*, ontological *sat*, axiological *sat* are all comprised in Vedanta within an overall epistemology. All these have metaphysical presuppositions implicit in them, so that, when Vedanta speaks of something as *sat*, it is to be a significant aspect of reality, rationally, critically or intuitively understood, and also good, morally and aesthetically too, in the context of the Absolute, which is the highest of significant values in the Self.

An actuality that exists in the most primary sense has to be accorded to the senses, especially to the senses of sight and touch. Lightning and thunder, though related as cause and effect, are not as actual as a stone that we can see and touch,



although the former, too, enter our consciousness directly though separately through hearing and sight. Weight is a reality that is not so directly given to the senses as colour. The outside colour of the room in which we might be sitting at night, as it was seen during the day, is not an actuality, to the extent that memory has to support perception. Thus, when closely examined, empirical ontology referring to material existence, which is treated as if it had apodictic certitude, has no such simple status. The position of neutral monism, which treats of reality as consisting of neither mind nor matter, comes very near to the concept of *sat* as used in Vedanta.

Sat is one of the three possible categories under which the Absolute can be viewed. It comprises the truth of the dictum *cogito ergo sum* of Cartesianism and the *esse est percipi* of Berkeley, and holds them both together by means of the

ultimate notion of the Absolute, which is the basis of them both, and which could not be conceived by the human understanding if it did not exist in the pure sense of *sat* as used in Vedanta.

A verse in the Bhagavad Gita stresses this all-encompassing philosophical character of the notion of *sat* sufficiently to bring out the three grades in which existence is to be understood:

“This (term) *sat* (the real) is used in the sense of existence and also of goodness, and likewise O Partha (Arjuna), to all laudable actions, the expression *sat* is usually applied.” (XVII.26)

Immanent, empirical, transcendental, and even value aspects are comprised in the notion of *sat* in Vedanta. How this is made possible will become clearer as we proceed. It is an inter-subjective and trans-physical value factor in the Absolute Self.

Western Philosophical Affinities

When we look for support in the history of Western thought in fixing the connotation of what exists, we have to hearken back to the pre-Socratic hylozoists to find any firm philosophically valid ground. It is here that we find anything near to the notion of *sat* in Western philosophy.

Thales of Miletus gave to water the status of the source of all things; and Anaximander spoke of the original material substance as the “principle” of all things. He is said to have described the soul as aeriform.

Heraclitus assumes ethereal fire as the substantial principle of all things, which he at once identifies with the divine spirit that knows and directs all things. The process with him is twofold, involving the transformation of all things into fire and then of fire into all things. This latter movement is styled the “way downward” which leads from fire (identical with the finest air), to water, earth, and so to death. The former movement is the “way upward” from earth and water to fire and life. Both movements are everywhere intertwined with each other, all identical and not identical. We step down a second time into the same stream and yet not into the same stream, for example.

Indian philosophy must have been influenced by Egyptian thought and Egypt might have had affinities with India. Whichever might have been the earlier, it is here in the hylozoist absolutism which speaks in terms of flux and of ascent and descent of the substance treated as a pure principle, that we must establish, if at all, a point of contact between existential aspects of the Absolute in Eastern or Western philosophy.

Modern phenomenology has borrowed this way of looking at the world of things or elementals from the pre-Socratics. The Phenomenological Epoche, which as an entity, non-theoretical in status but still referring to no single predicable thing in the world, arrived at by a “bracketing” and “disconnecting” from the natural “world about one” which Husserl tries to distinguish, comes near to the notion

of *sat* of the Vedanta. In Bergson the flux or process of becoming of matter that is non-mechanically conceived, under a *schema moteur*, as a cross-section of fluid reality, also has points of similarity with the notion of *sat* in Vedanta.

The quantum mechanics of modern physics, which tends to make matter a mere wrinkle in space, vectorially conceived, would also suggest the pure notion of *sat* as understood in Indian philosophy. Plato's reference to "the mobile image of eternity" and Aristotle's idea of the mind that "becomes all things" touch the same entity of notion that *sat* represents.

In Vedanta *sat* is an extreme philosophical abstraction, and we shall not enter more elaborately into its epistemological validity here. For the present, we must content ourselves by indicating where the points of contact lie in the Western world of speculation for the notion of *sat* to be understood in its proper philosophical perspective.

Value Gives Stable Content to Existence and Vice Versa

Brahman or the Absolute is the highest of human values in Vedanta, and if existence is to be thought of as belonging to the context of the Absolute, the notion of existence must, by implication, indirectly at least, have reference to this high value. Anything non-significant and inconsistent with the highest aims of man, having no reference to the Absolute, becomes ipso facto nonexistent in principle, although it might be an actuality in the merely empirical context.

This way of interpreting the meaning of existence is supported by the theory of indirect meaning that Shankara accepts and adopts, when explaining the three attributes of *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam brahmā* (the Absolute is existent, knowing and infinite). The connotation of any one of these is to be looked upon as modifying the others, till they refer to the Absolute in a total meaning-content. This semantic principle of indirect meanings (*lakṣhaṇārtha*) applied to one Absolute, without any contradiction between component terms, is one of the secrets of Vedantic exegesis. This same way of giving significance of reality of *sat* (existence) is seen employed and explained, in the Bhagavad Gita:

"Whatever is sacrificed, given or done, and whatever austerity is gone through, without faith, it is called *asat* (non-existent, no good) O Partha (Arjuna): it is not (of value) here or hereafter." (XVII, 28)

All truth, reality, or fact must satisfy the three tests of: (1) being a significant value in human life here or hereafter; (2) being valid according to reason; and (3) being conceivable as existent, at one and the same time. This will apply equally to actions, gifts, things or properties dealt with in transactions between man and man. Vedantic methodology, epistemology and axiology have thus to be treated together in order to yield the integrated unitive wisdom which it is meant to represent.

This article is an excerpt from *Unitive Philosophy*.



ĀTMOPADEŚA ŚATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY GURU NITYA

VERSE 24

*avan ivan ennarīyunnatokkeyōrttā-
lavaniyil ādimamāy orātmārūpam;
avan avan ātma sukhattinācarikku-
nnavayaparannu sukhattināy varēṇam.*

“That man,” “this man”—thus, all that is known in this world, if contemplated, is the being of the one primordial self; what each performs for the happiness of the self should be conducive to the happiness of another.

When we look around, we see other human beings just like us. We also see other kinds of living beings with some of the traits of humans. For instance, they all want to eat, drink, sleep and reproduce. In these categories, man is not an exception. He is conforming to some laws of nature.

Now we have access to know a little more of these natural laws with regard to the control of things which have physical existence. If for some reason the whole universe is blasted apart and it goes back to its original state, then scientists believe there will be only hydrogen left. Hydrogen is considered to be the basic element because it has only one proton and one neutron. These are held together, and their electron is held in orbit, by an inherent law. Even when two of these hydrogen atoms combine with one of oxygen to make a molecule of water, the hydrogen and oxygen retain their distinct qualities, their characteristics that make them what they are. Basically nature restricts the qualities of a thing through the operation of innate laws.

From a materialistic point of view, as we pass through all the stages of evolution from the primordial substance to man, we see the operation of physical laws. As we approach man on the evolutionary scale we see there is a greater freedom in choosing between options. A monkey, for instance, has a much greater range of choices than a snail.

In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle takes up the question of the meaning of life. He begins his study by putting the question, “What is it that distinguishes man from the rest of beings, and that determines the meaning of his life?” One thing

that separates us from the rest is that we are the only animal that writes poetry, that builds schools and colleges, writes books and stores them, and has developed a vocabulary consisting of thousands of words covering all shades of meaning and embodying a large number of concepts. In short, we can say that man excels in his knowledge. In a sense we can say he is knowledge.

Next, Aristotle puts forward a very beautiful idea. He says although we are all aware of what is good, the word 'good' by itself does not have any special meaning. It is a word like 'is'. What is the meaning of 'is'? The meaning of 'is' is, you are judging something to be or not to be. It is or it is not. To say something is, there has to be a light within you which discerns the existence of something. Essentially, it is the power to discern an existence. If you cannot discern that by yourself, you cannot live that truth. Aristotle quotes the substance of a verse from Hesiod, which says a man is excellent who can perform all his activities with no confusion in his mind, making his own judgments always right. Those who cannot do that should at least turn to others who are wise enough to counsel them. Those who do not even turn to the wise are good for nothing.

Thus, you are good for yourself only when you can discern. Discerning means gaining a certitude of the Self. It becomes evident to your self. When it is self-evident, then alone can you say 'is'. This evidence of the Self that comes to us operates in the hydrogen atom as a principle of determination. If I am a hydrogen atom, I should only have one electron and one proton. I should have only the correct atomic weight and my characteristics should be such and such. And if I am a man I should have awareness, a discerning power.

After establishing this much, Aristotle goes a step further. He says if a man decides to be a flautist or a harpist, will he not set for himself the highest possible standard in that particular art? If a man chooses to be a carpenter, will he not put before himself the highest standards of carpentry? Unfortunately, this idea is an unwarranted extension to a specious conclusion. The main reality is the knowledge of the Self. If you choose to be a fully developed person, you should naturally put before yourself the highest possible standard of the attainment of pure knowledge. The highest possible truth is continuous and contiguous from the very first form of reality to you. It is whole, without part, and without any possible division. This makes one not only a brother to all fellow humans, but also in kinship with all of existence.

If everything manifested is our own Self, and we are considering the happiness of the self, such happiness lies in being harmonious with our own nature. If we are dislodged from the harmony of our physical well-being we become sick. If we are jolted out of our moral integrity, we become morally sick. If we are pushed away from the proper functioning of our minds, we become either retarded or sub-normal. If our understanding is clouded, we become stupid.

From the most minute atom to the foremost philosophy, there is a natural harmony that maintains its beingness. Each has a harmony within itself and a

harmony in its relationships with other things. Nature maintains its harmony, and we are by no means foreigners to it. The most beautiful part of it is that nature reveals itself in its own unfoldment of consciousness, which manifests as our consciousness. We who are the knowers of nature are really nature knowing nature.

Because we are the knowers of nature, we know how an atom is constituted. We also know how to fission an atom, blast it apart. Knowledge can be good to maintain and appreciate harmony, and also to destroy it. If I have knowledge of an actual event, I can then distort it or conceal it in such a way that no one will be able to detect it. Knowing the whole truth enables me to distort it. For instance when a man kills someone, he knows the circumstances under which that person was killed, the weapon used, the place the body was disposed of, and where the weapon was thrown away. Because of his full knowledge, he can then distort the evidence to conceal his crime, and if he does it well he will never be detected. So knowledge for a wise man is a great tool for being good, but for an evil man it is a tool which makes possible tremendous destruction.

Thus, knowledge by itself is amoral. There has to be more involved than factual, rational knowledge. The truth that you are seeking to discover is not only a rational truth, it should be a truth which is rich in its content of love. You love your Self. You have not only a knowledge of the Self, but also a great love for it. If your Self is the Self of all, there has to be an extrapolation of the same principle of love going to everyone. You cannot say "I know that you are my Self, but I cannot love you."

Protagoras put forward the claim that knowledge need not necessarily be a virtue. Socrates said knowledge is virtue. Protagoras replied, "No. A man who knows truth can also distort it." Socrates said, "In that case he does not know truth. If he really knows, he has to be virtuous. A man who says he knows and is not virtuous knows only one part of it." In the Upanishads this is called knowledge that walks on only one leg. For the Self to walk on two legs it must have knowledge and also love. Love for what? For itself. Nature reveals itself in a human self so that it knows it is all, or that it belongs to all. If you are concerned with the happiness of the Self, that binds you to commit yourself to live always for the happiness of all.

This verse introduces the concept of *svadharma*, performance in accordance with your true nature. In deciding this nature, the Guru wants us to know there are two aspects. One is our specific nature, and the other is our general nature. As humans, you and I should have the same general nature, while our specific nature is to function in society in certain different ways. For instance, my specific nature is of a teacher, and my general nature is of a man. As a teacher I teach and as a student you learn. So there is a complementarity in our interpersonal relationships, while from inside you and I are just beings, human beings. If this is extended to all biological manifestations our general nature is life itself, while our specific nature is exemplified by the species to which we belong.



Aristotle also thinks this is very important. You are not just an individual, you are a political and social being. As a social being you have to live with groups. You cannot say if an isolated person is good or bad because he has no occasion to interact with anyone else. Only when he expresses himself in relation to others can we decide whether he is good or bad. The way Aristotle puts it is the self has not only to be but also to activate. It is not a knowledge which you are storing up, but a knowledge you put into operation. And the knowledge you should put into operation is that you are everyone, that other people's happiness is your concern. Whatever you do, it should be to assure others' happiness as well as yours. To whichever society you conform, if your everyday life is not bringing out the best in you and promoting the happiness of those around you, you are not functioning at all.

That's very beautiful. Aristotle continues with an example of a musician who sings very well. Everyone is very pleased and says he is a great musician. After some time he develops an ailment in his larynx and loses his voice. Now it is horrible to sit and listen to him even when he speaks, but he is still honored as a great musician. 'Is' really means 'was' but out of consideration for the person we don't take away his musicianship, although it is not presently factual. As a kind of past testimony we honor him. Aristotle says the greatness of that man is not in himself, it is in the donor. Someone who says he is great gives that honor to him. For it to be truly justifiable he should still be able to sing.

A person may be a very good poet at the age of fifty or sixty. Then at seventy he becomes senile and goes mad, but he is still called a great poet by virtue of what he once did. But, as Aristotle goes on to say, we won't give this kind of honor to someone when it comes to the matter of being good. If a man is bad today, we do not say he is a good man because he was once good. A single swallow or one sunny day do not make a spring. If it is spring there should be a songbird singing every morning. Like that, good means being consistently good.

So how do you become consistently good? By being fully aware of yourself all the time. There is no vacation permitted here. If you are concerned with the highest happiness of the Self, it has to be inclusive of all selves without exception. All the time, whatever you do should be governed by the principle of aiming for the total good of all with whom you interrelate. That's the minimum requirement. Ultimately you should relate yourself to the whole universe, where there is nothing outside you. But the minimum is to show this recognition toward the group in which you are moving around, and to which you are committed.

If a child is sick, the mother cannot sleep. She could say, "I am not sick, only the child is sick. So why should I keep on waking?" But this is not possible. The mother instinctively keeps a vigil all through the night to see that the child is as comfortable as she can make it. Until this is attended to, she won't be able to sleep at all. In a small sense, mothers have the self-realization that their self is greater than their body. Their self includes the child, and if the child is sick it is as if they themselves

are sick. There is an extension of the self beyond the body—to that extent a mother is a realized person. It is only a small step in realizing the fullness of the universe, but at least it is a step.

It is the same with lovers. Total strangers meet, become fascinated with each other, and fall in love. After that, what one of them experiences the other also feels. There is a Japanese story in the book *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, by Paul Reys, about a man who was a good musician. He had a harp which he would play, and his best friend would say things like, “Oh, I understand what you are playing. This is a butterfly flying.” Then he would play something else and his friend would say, “Oh yes! I know. This is a fountain,” or “this is spring.” The musician was playing, and his friend was always appreciating and enjoying it. Then one day the friend caught pneumonia and died. The musician took up his harp and smashed it to pieces, saying “I cannot play any more. My best friend is not here to appreciate it. Without my friend, what joy is there for me in playing?”

The legend is such that even now in Japan when a good friend dies someone breaks a musical instrument. Whether that is important or not, the essence of the story is very beautiful. You want to share happiness with those whom you love. The one you love most is your own Self. If you truly know your own Self, it is not confined to your body, it permeates all beings. Your life should be a consecrated life, dedicated to the happiness of all. That’s why the previous verses said that such a person, whether he is healthy or not, all day, all night, whatever he does is motivated to make life a little brighter for others, to bring a little more light on things which are concealed, to make a little more harmony where there is chaos and disorder. This is Narayana Guru’s very basic fundamental of social ethics, which is based on Self-realization. Realization and doing good are not two separate things. They are one and the same.

ADVAITA DĪPIKA

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY GURU PRASAD

VERSE FIVE

Closely examined, this world is found nonexistent,
it being mere *avidya*.
To those who are ignorant of Being as such,
It simply looms as world because of delusion.
When lamp lit nearby, no devil appears to be,
But for those afraid of darkness,
the very same darkness looms as devil.

Why are humans roused to think of the meaning of life? Everyone intends to live happily, but the happiness they dream of is never enjoyed to its full. Dreaming of a happy state, at times one plunges into the depth of unimagined miseries. By no means, at no price, is it possible to keep off the sufferings of life absolutely. For this reason human beings live in fear of suffering. With unavoidable difficulties and distresses admitted, how can we live free of fear? This is a fundamental problem in life that everyone is in search of a solution to, knowingly or unknowingly. Some are fully aware of the seriousness of the problem, some are not. Either way, they need a solution, and the only possible solution is what the present verse suggests.

What is ultimately real, *sat*, was brought to light in the first four verses, and that reality is consciousness, *cit*, alone. Fear and suffering are caused by events that happen in the world. We too were born as part of the world, as part of the beginningless and endless flow of events that take place in what really exists. Every event or the outcome of every event, reacts with other events or the outcomes of other events. That is the way the unfoldment of events takes place in Reality. Consciousness in essence, this Reality can never remain inert and inactive. Always alive and active, it manifests itself as newer and newer apparent forms, one leading to the next, and Reality—consciousness in essence—must also be knowing what takes place in itself. This reality, while being *sat* and *cit*, is also *ānanda*, value experience, in content, and hence evaluating every event as desirable, undesirable or indifferent is but natural with its self-unfolding and self-knowing function. Desirable events cause happiness, undesirable events unhappiness or suffering, and how to avoid the latter is the problem before us.

Reality (*sat*) being consciousness (*cit*) in essence, that gross and subtle phenomena appear and disappear in it is but natural. We form part of it. The

aggregate of this flow of events is what we call the world. The Sanskrit word for world is *loka*, meaning that which can be looked at. What is ultimately real in all such perceptibles, we have already seen, is *cit* alone. The real cause of all sufferings and fears in life, in short, is our habit of treating the perceptible world as real in itself. Realizing consciousness alone as really existing transforms the world and all events in it. We, the individual beings who actually experience the feelings of happiness and suffering, must know them all to be mere ripples that appear and disappear on the surface of the boundless ocean. Knowing what is ultimately real—in other words *sat, cit, ānanda*—is the one and only way that saves us finally from all miseries and fears of life.

Every wave is inseparably one with the ocean, it having no existence apart from the ocean. So, too, we the individuals, the world, events in the world, the happiness and suffering they cause, which are all mere waves that emerge and remerge in the ocean of consciousness, do not exist apart from that Reality. Whatever the transformations that take place in it, they are all really one Substance in essence. Yet we remain completely oblivious of being that Substance, even as we remain so. Why is it so? Because *avidya* veils from us the reality that we are all essentially one consciousness even now. The result is that we perceive the apparent phenomenal manifestations of consciousness or *ātma*—what we call the world that has no existence of its own—as real, and remain ignorant of what we really are in essence. So mysteriously self-concealing is the functional dynamism of *ātma*. Knowing is one of its many functions. This function may result in right knowledge or wrong knowledge. The possibility of the latter type of knowing, particularly concerning what is real, is what is to be understood as *avidya*.

To get rid of suffering and fear in life, first we have to become aware of the fact that we are being misguided by *avidya*. How is this possible while we are already under the spell of *avidya*? There are Masters who have already transcended the bewitching spell of *avidya*; they will guide you. Narayana Guru was one such. Hence his assuring words: “closely examined, this world is found nonexistent, it being mere *avidya*.”

Once the truth that the world is not real is heard from a guru, what we need is to make a search for what is really real. Needless to say, only an ardent seeker meets a real guru, and only a real guru can lead the seeker to the Real. What is thereby attained is called *tattvam* here. *Tat* means ‘that’, standing for the reality we are searching for. *Tvam* is a suffix meaning “the state of something being itself.” *Tattvam* thus means the state in which That or Reality is itself pure and unconditioned, rendered here as “being as such.” Knowing *tattvam* thus means becoming aware that one Consciousness alone exists underlying all appearances. Unless and until one knows *tattvam*, one continues to count the world as real. Once *tattvam* is realized, one becomes enlightened that everything is nothing but one Reality or Consciousness unfolding itself incessantly, as all ornaments are different forms that the one gold substance assumes. Wrongly understanding the

apparent forms as real is what is known as *bhramā*, delusion. It happens only when reality and unreality are not properly discriminated. In such an indiscriminate way of knowing, one may be taken for another, and it is called *bhramā*. This delusion simply vanishes just on knowing what the Real is.

The certainty we come to thus is known as *pramā*. Getting rid of *bhramā* and attaining *pramā* is what we need. As bringing in light is the way to dispel darkness, so too getting rid of *bhramā* is to be attained by dispelling the darkness of *avidya* by bringing in the light of wisdom, *jñāna*.

What is wisdom? It is when I the individual realize that what is real in me is the ultimate Reality alone. That Reality is Consciousness; thus I am conscious. It then becomes revealed that the one Consciousness that I am unfolds itself as everything everywhere as well, and that is what we call the world. The grossest aspect of that manifestation is what we call matter, and the subtlest aspect, mind.

Becoming afraid of devils in the darkness is very common among human beings. No one thinks patiently whether such a being called devil exists or not. Yes, it does exist: it is none other than the devil of ignorance in each of us. What is perceived as a devil in ordinary darkness is nothing other than darkness itself. Hence the way of freeing one from the fear of the devil is not arguing with him to convince him that devils don't exist, but is simply bringing forth light. Likewise, freeing human beings from the fiendish fears and sufferings is to be accomplished by bringing forth the lit lamp of wisdom, or the lamp getting lit on its own.

VERSE SIX

The real and the unreal, each appears
in turn as though existing and not existing;
such appearances are but the beginningless darkness manifesting itself;
closely looked at, both have no being, are unreal;
As no snake has being in a piece of rope,
what exists is rope alone.

We live in this world, we perceive and experience everything around us. That we do exist, that everything we encounter exists as such—the idea we usually have—is experienced by consciousness. And the being of all experiences is in consciousness alone, as functional modes of consciousness alone.

Going deeper to the level of subtleties, we see that what is directly perceived with our senses is not the real, but what underlies it is the real. It was in that sense it was stated in the last verse, “closely examined, the world is found nonexistent.” That too is a kind of knowledge. In other words, that the world exists is an experience, that the world does not exist is an experience too, and as experiences both have their being in consciousness. This consciousness, underlying both, is the ultimate Reality and

it is beginninglessly and endlessly functional. As a result, the experience “this world exists” emerges. And more, consciousness unfolds itself as the world it experiences as well. At the other side of this comes the experience “this world is unreal.” The all-underlying consciousness has in it the inherent potential to unfold as ourselves and create in us the impressions “the world is real” and “the world is not real.”



As these impressions alternate, we get confused as to what is real and what is unreal. In order to avoid this, the Guru warns us, “Both are phenomenal appearances.” The original word for phenomenal appearance is *pratiti*, which means that which has no existence of its own but makes the impression of existing. “The world is real” and “the world is unreal” in other words, are both phenomenal appearances. Then ultimately what is real? The one consciousness in which the two phenomena appear alone is real.

How do such appearances, and that too opposite in nature, emerge in the one reality? Reality is effulgence in essence, though inherent in it there is an element of darkness that conceals from itself its own true nature and content. What happens when darkness prevails was seen in the last verse: ultimately what is real will not be perceived; we will perceive nonexistent devils and get scared. Likewise the one beginningless and endless Reality—consciousness—is not perceived. What is perceived are the alternating phenomenal appearances. The darkness that causes this concealment is called *avidya*. The all-underlying Reality is beginningless and

endless. The *avidya* inherent in it too is beginningless, but it is not endless, for it ends with knowing its nature and what it does, with intuitively perceiving the one Consciousness that alone exists, oneself becoming merged in It.

All appearances are the darkness of *avidya* manifesting itself. The original word for this is *svabhāva*. *Bhāva* means manifest form, and *svabhāva*, self-manifestation. The word also means “characteristic with,” implying that manifesting itself as the world of dualities is characteristic of the *avidya*-darkness. All appearances, in this sense, are just darkness manifesting itself. Nothing, we know, is visible when light radiates in pure space. Whatever is distinctly seen is some form that obstructs the free radiation of light rays. Such forms, in principle at least, are the opposite of light—darkness—in essence. All visible forms are thus darkness materialized. In the place of ordinary light, what is real is Consciousness. The darkness inherent in it, materialized, assumes the form of appearance of the real/unreal opposites.

Surprisingly enough, nothing is said in this verse about the one Reality, for all that is to be said was stated as early as the end of verse three. It needs no further clarification. Therefore, instead of repeating it, an analogy that helps one intuitively perceive the Reality is given here: the well known rope-snake analogy. No matter how many times, how many people, mistake a piece of rope for a snake and become scared, it never really becomes a snake. It continues to be the rope. Likewise, despite the various theories and hypotheses scientists and philosophers formulate concerning what is real, they never affect what really exists. Such theories are nothing but ideas that took shape in the ever-existing consciousness. The very same consciousness appears as the world theorized about as well as the theorizing mind. This certainty attained, one merges back gently into Reality, also represented by the syllable *Aum*, wherein no preference for the ideas of the real and the unreal has any role to play.

*The Infinite, a Sudden Guest,
Has been assumed to Be.
But how could that Stupendous come
Which never went away?*

EMILY DICKENSON

A DANCE OF LIFE, DEATH AND TRANSFORMATION

BY PEGGY GRACE LUKE

In the mornings I usually begin
With a big yummy breakfast of fresh air and joy,
Topped with ripe strawberries and tea.
Since I was a child,
I greet each day with hopeful exuberance,
Welcoming the adventures ahead.
Often, at night, I'd have to use all the discipline
My tiny little self could muster
Just to lie down for a regenerative sleep...
Didn't want to miss anything!

I love life and everything in it,
The adventures, the challenges,
The great times, the tough;
Always eager to learn and create,
Always deeply involved
With both feet splashing in the water.
Give me a challenge and I'd show you an opportunity.
Give me a dilemma and I'd show you the possibilities.
Give me a dead-end and I'd show you
Fifty creative ways around it.
No surprise, I suppose, that one of my favorite
Childhood stories was "The Little Engine that Could".

Good thing, too, for life has generously given me
Ample opportunity to practice this perspective!
Things have not always been "Easy Street".
I have been both drenched in beauty and soaked in pain,
Slathered with love and desperately alone,
And both laughing and sobbing till I ache.

For most of my life, I've walked with
A hard-earned peaceful confidence,
An intuitive security that the uncomfortable unknowns

Would eventually become familiar knowns,
That the problems would ease, the confusions would clear.
Confident, secure, generous, compassionate...
This way was familiar and the path well worn
Until I was slammed squarely between the eyes
With two successive experiences
That simply knocked me to my knees.
Suddenly all of my talents, skills, lessons and experiences
Seemed small, paltry and pale.

How could this be?
How could I feel so utterly inadequate
When I most needed to feel adept?
How could all of my practice and training
Fly out the window and suddenly feel about
As useful as a Superman comic book?
My pockets felt empty and my shoes worn out.
I could barely speak, let alone breathe.
The security and knowledge from years of study
In graduate school and then private practice
Evaporated into nothing,
And some silly part of me wanted a refund.
There I sat, faced with two
Desperate frantic precious lives,
And I quietly realized that I knew nothing.

I awkwardly faked an appearance of adequacy,
Desperately wishing I wasn't acting,
Yet secretly knowing I was foolishly bumbling
Around instead of truly being the helpful guide
These two precious souls needed and deserved.
What to do? How to be? Oh, what to do?

This art series is the visual recording of my journey
Through the labyrinth of profound transformation,
Of death and dying, of grief and loss,
Of desperation, of holding on and letting go,
Of resistance and acceptance,
From emergency to emergence.
This series was created in the trenches,
Right in the thick of it all.
I am an artist and practicing counseling psychologist.





This visual series began when one of my clients
Came for help because her precious sister
Had just been brutally murdered, the assailant still at large.
As she spoke, the enormity of her situation flooded me
And I felt terrified and lost.
I could not wrap my mind around what had happened.
I struggled to stay present, to be there for her,
Not lost in my own panic.
I listened. I held her. I shuddered and cried with her.
Perhaps this was useful for she felt loved and not so alone.
But after she left my office, I could not rise from my chair.

My usual first response to incredibly challenging situations
Is to gather information, study, and research the wisdom of others.
I gobbled up every bit of relevant professional literature
On violent crime, homicide and family support,
Reading books like "When Your Loved One Is Murdered".
Yet I still came up far short. I could not grasp this.
I could not find that point of saturation
Where the uncomfortable unknown becomes a familiar known.
Nothing made sense. It was beyond reason.
How could I possibly be helpful to her
When right then I too felt terrified, frozen and empty?

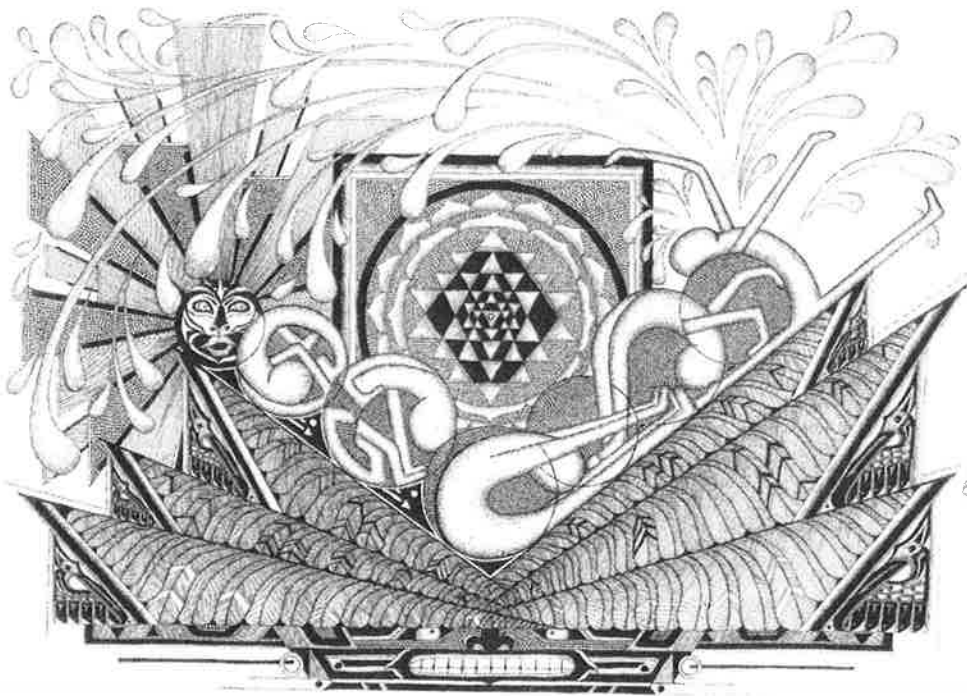
This is the point in life, when all else fails,
That I bow my head and thank God for art.
This is when I must leave the realm of the cognitive,
Leave the intellectual domain of graduate school and logic.
To enter the world of the illogical, the nonsensical, the chaotic—
Where sometimes bad things do happen to good people,
Where sometimes just plain bad timing and bad luck do exist,
Where one's usual thinking, reasoning and skills
Simply do not apply—
This is when I move to pure visual expression.

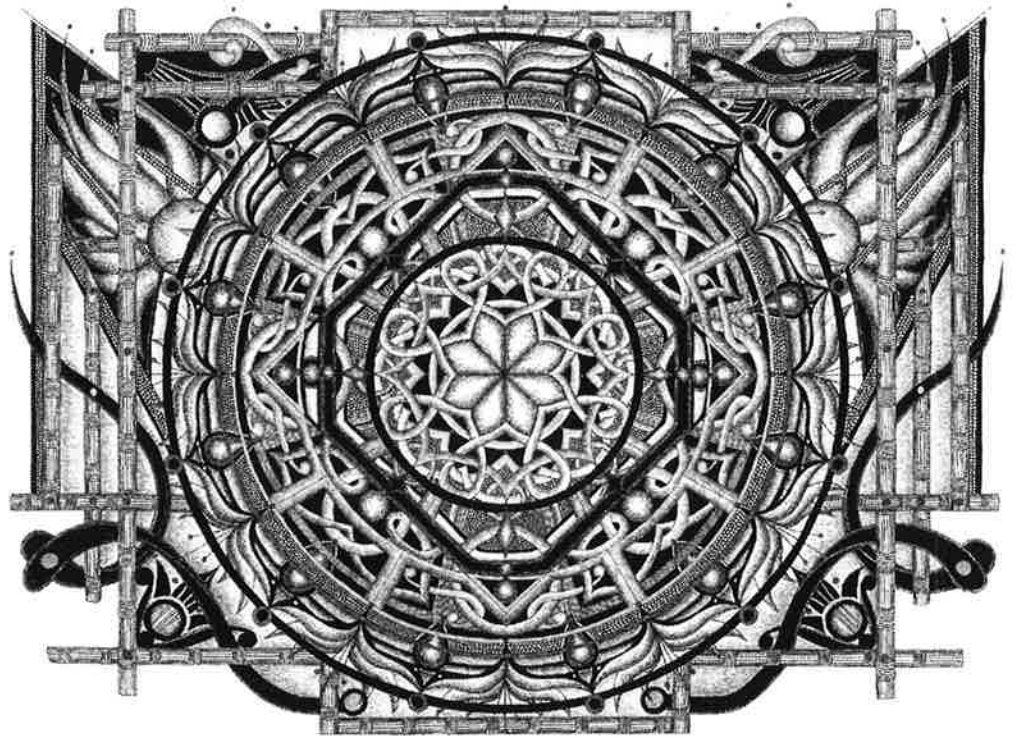
The first drawing is titled "Beyond Reason".
It emerged as a free-hand free-form contemplation
As I sat paralyzed, trying to cope and understand such horror.
This first piece took about two hundred hours to complete,
And half way into it, I was slammed by the second devastation...
Jeff, the father of my three beautiful children,
Kavi Chaitanya, Mona Crystal and Victoria Allison...

Jeff, who was my best friend and husband,
Was diagnosed with inoperable advanced lung cancer
With six months to live at best.
Whoa. I already felt knocked down for the count
And now felt kicked out of the ring.

How will we cope? How can I muster? How do I even think?
My clients, my children, my husband, my full complicated life.
I usually found writing helpful, yet no words.
I had to function and find strength as soon as I could,
Yet these emergencies nearly stopped my breath.
Again, thank God for art.
Our family's struggle with dying and death
Merged with the visual process
Developing through "Beyond Reason",
And thus began the voyage through the labyrinth
Of radical change and transformation,
With on-the-spot recording through this art series.
The title of each art piece—"Beyond Reason",
"Healing Shield", "Exhaustion", "Detachment",
"Transformation", "Unmistakably Alive"—
Is meant as a summary
Of each aspect of the journey
And is titled when one phase is completed
And the next phase is about to begin...
Except for the last one,
Which we are currently continuing to experience
And actually has no end.

This series is art. This is coping. This is flailing and neurotic.
This is hope. This is nervousness. This is determination and strength.
This is an attempt to find order and understanding
Amidst overwhelming chaos and despair.
This is sadness, exhaustion and healing.
This is our journey of discovering
A natural order to things underneath it all,
A soothing underbelly of solitude, comfort and solace.
Ultimately, this is a celebration of a deeper understanding
Of life, death and transformation,
And a reconnection with my innocent
Exuberant trusting joy.





LAST DAYS WITH GURU

BY BONNIE LEE

Every trip I have made to India has been unique and unpredictable. Just before leaving my house for the airport, I have a habit of selecting small oracle cards that have one word per card. I don't know what the word meanings will reveal until sometime after the trip but they never fail to be uncannily descriptive. This time I had drawn Truth, Joy, and Healing. I enter these words on the front page of my journal that over the course of the trip is filled with my experiences and reflections.

After two and a half days of travel my partner Jake and I finally arrived mid-afternoon at Anandan's house, where Guru Nitya usually stayed when in Tellichery. This modest but beautiful 60-year old building was designed in the traditional Kerala style, using thick plaster walls, terracotta roof tiles and rosewood beams. Large coconut palms provided shade from the intense Indian sun and served as home to black crows and an occasional monkey. The dirt yard was swept clean and potted tropical plants bordered the front porch, and a array of sandals nearly blocked the entry way.

This time the usual full-blown greeting that we were accustomed to receiving had a distinctly muted quality, all the smiles and embraces carrying a mixed message. We quickly understood what was going on as Jyothi ushered us upstairs and explained that Guru had not left as planned to go to Kannakamala Gurukula. She explained that only two hours before our arrival he had suffered a stroke in the upstairs bathroom and was now in a state of partial paralysis, resting in the upstairs bedroom. She said he was very weak but was eagerly awaiting our arrival, having asked over and over, "Are they here yet?"

For some reason I have always cried when being reunited physically with Guru. The crying was really weeping for joy, for on some very deep level I was at last home. This visit, when we entered the small room upstairs, the flow of love was so intense. Guru looked very pale and tired, his robustness replaced with a weary physical vulnerability. Although I could see how the stroke had affected Guru physically, on a deeper level nothing seemed truly wrong. I smiled my bravest smile as the tears streamed down in greater abundance than usual, and we retired to our small room just across the hallway. The sense I had then of everything being perfect would remain as a constant through all the illness and drama that was to unfold in the two months that we stayed in the house.

Nitya's health had been an issue for his students ever since I had met him nearly thirty years ago. In my younger years that had worried me enough to put me on tilt whenever the illnesses or diseases, that appeared and disappeared, became acute.

For me these episodes had the powerful effect of showing me just how attached I was to his physical form and personality, how grasping I was toward the experience of being physically with him. This was not only basic fear of my personal loss, but also a glaring example of how I still did not get the fundamental teaching. Didn't he keep telling me that in the most real sense there was no one to lose and that nothing was as it appeared? As my relationship with Nitya deepened, my concepts changed and it began to seem to me a great sacrifice that he actually remained stuck in this radiant but troublesome body, physical pain and inconvenience being a constant companion. He appeared to take all the illness and pain as something to be interested in, providing an ever-changing flow of material for his spontaneous style of teaching.

The two weeks before arriving at the house of Palal, Guru had undergone a traditional course of treatment at the Ayurvedic center called Vaidyamadham. This center is run by a famous Ashtavaidya family that is believed to have been practicing this healing art for over 1700 years, the skill being passed down from generation to generation. The original practitioners were also great rishis and this present-day physician was well known to be gifted in far more than book learning and medical science. Consultations with the Vidyan, as these physicians are called, does not involve any kind of direct physical contact, elaborate data collecting or tests. The process by which diagnosis is determined and treatments prescribed, must truly seem weird to most western-trained healers. The Vidyan simply listens to the patient's complaints, feels his pulse, reads the face and his mind goes to the place where the ancient Ayurvedic scrolls are kept. Somehow, the proper scroll is selected and then, as a result of years of training and observation, the physician knows what to prescribe as treatment.

The treatments are holistic, involving herbs and carefully formulated medicines. Also dietary rules and restriction, instructions about sleeping and waking, and often a massage regime with medicated oils and heat are included. The goal is to correct whatever condition has made the patient susceptible to the disease. The fact that there is relief from the disease symptoms is only a side effect of the deeper healing that is the intention of this form of medicine. Nitya's course of treatment appeared to be very successful and for the first time in many years he was walking briskly without a cane.

Part of the prescribed treatment for Nitya was a period of complete rest during the two weeks following the stay at Ayurvedic center. Although this sounds simple, Nitya was not one to think of his own well being, nor one to take orders. The world was always asking something of him and he was there to serve, his compassion for others guiding him to grant their requests. In this situation, a very old friend, who was soon to die, lived in a neighboring town and wanted the Guru to stay a night at his house. In addition, a municipal official wanted him to be present for the opening of a new road. In retrospect, these requests seem symbolic of the dual

nature that his role as a Guru required. Anyway, true to his nature, Nitya said yes and by the time he had reached his friend's house, via the horrible Kerala roads, he was exhausted. The Vidyan later chastised him for not following the instructions to take complete rest and explained that his current predicament, the stroke, was the result of interrupting the treatment with too much travel and stress.

By the beginning of December, we had only been at Anandan's house for a few days but it felt as if we had been there much longer. Time had already become moot except for the coming and going of daylight and the activity around meal preparation and eating. Eating is a central activity in Indian homes and the largest meal of the day being a major event that is served around one in the afternoon. Preparations begin soon after the morning meal is completed, and one can spend all day in the kitchen taking time out only for a nap that comes traditionally in mid-afternoon. I spent a lot of time in the kitchen those first days. It provided both grounding into the energy of the house and an easy way to commune with the other women of the household. Doing the mindless work of chopping vegetables and washing pots is a good meditation and it afforded me an immersion into the sensory delights of being in a place so different from my home in Oregon.

Journal entry from December 1, 1998: "I just finished cutting a huge pile of some strange red-stalked vegetable in the kitchen. There was no shared conversation but a lot of eye contact and some smiling. I like to be in a place where there is a language barrier. It feels peaceful to be to not be involved in a lot of chatting. There's an easy sense of comfort among the women in the kitchen and I imagine that I'm just another pair of hands. It's good not feeling like a guest.

"I love the sounds in this place and since we live essentially out of doors, one can hear just about everything. At this moment clothes are being slapped on a washing stone, children are playing and their mothers gossiping, car horns honking, and crows fighting over some food scraps. The kitchen offers a rhythm section of pressure cookers and chopping knives, the sound of running water. Temple chants blare in the distance from giant speakers, Hindi film scores are blasted from a neighbor's house, and political propaganda can be heard coming from a slow moving car on the main road. Here my nose finds interest in the rich combined scents of coconut oil and spices, mildew and compost, wood smoke, jasmine and diesel. The sights are my favorite however. The sun-dappled landscape of coconut palms, banana trees, and exotic growing things in all shades of green. Hibiscus flowers in red and yellow, ochre earth and rocks, terracotta pots with plants in surreal shapes. Cloudless blue sky and thick shining black hair that is rarely cut. And of course the glorious fabrics of saris, citidars, lungis and dhotis, and peach-dyed swami wear. but best of all these delights are the deep dark eyes and generous smiles that seem to be on every face I meet."

Then on December 2nd I wrote: "It seems that I have been give the job of head therapist for Guru. He calls me to his room to manipulate his damaged arm and

hand and to apply the heat and medicated oil that the Vidyan has prescribed. It is a sweet and perfect job for me. I cherish the time together, silent and meditative. This morning he fell asleep while I manipulated and massaged his arm and hand. Time passed blissfully. I am so glad to be able to share my gentleness, focus, creativity and quietness with him in this way. It is a somewhat personal experience but mostly not. Here is a universal dilemma and it calls for a response. My service is that response and the beauty of the moment is the only real benefit or result. His physical body seems to be responding and improving and I trust that this will continue. To provide some comfort to him is a blessing, after all that I have received from him over the years.”



Very soon I found myself more involved with the activities around Nitya than with meal preparations and social interactions. Nitya liked to have me around him and this was just fine by me. Jake was keeping his distance, since in his perspective too many people were fluttering around Guru, offering advice or trying to be of help. So many people were visiting or calling with all kinds of opinions and advice about what would be the best way to take care of a stroke victim. Guru was being visited by an allopathic doctor, a naturopath, and a trained physical therapist. His Ayurvedic physician attended to him over the telephone and by letters. It became very interesting to watch how he allowed each and every one to have their say, to do what they thought best, and then how he would direct his own program of healing. The only instructions that he followed to the letter were the Vidyan’s, but then all the others had come uninvited. As time went on, I could see how offering their services was healing the healers themselves. Nitya used his time with each doctor

to break through rigid thought patterns about healing that often result from too much schooling and not enough creativity.

Being a prolific writer and scholar, and on strict orders from the Vidyan to avoid all strenuous mental projects, Guru designed a program as to how he would use his time in convalescence. He began to painstakingly draw every day, most often with his untrained left hand, but sometimes with his left hand moving his more adept, though useless, right hand. I would often help to hold the paper at the correct angle or try to keep his felt pen from falling out of his paralyzed hand. The drawings were crude but wonderful, and they showed me that the essence of art is in the ideas conveyed, in the looking deeply into things, not in technical expertise. From a lifetime of looking at the manifest world from the outside in and the inside out, he was able in the simplest way to draw the essence of a person, place or thing. For me, assisting with the daily drawings was more like an observational art class, and indeed a small group of us would eagerly crowd around his chair for the daily session.

Occasionally he would ask me to draw something for him and he later told me that he derived as much pleasure from watching the act of drawing as in doing the drawing himself. This simple statement kept knocking at the door of my mind and fortunately I know by now to stand close to the door until it opens. When the realization came, I saw that for him there was no duality between artist and observer, simply the creative act of drawing occurring and the experience of being joyful. For me, being habitually focused on myself as an individual, this lesson cut deeply into my heart and embodied the Grace that came from being with an individual who was not living in a world of individuals or individual interest.

The walls of Guru's room became covered with dated drawings, like a visual diary of his healing process. Occasionally the drawings were dark, with images of ghost-like goblins, which I found fascinating. Jyothi was very upset by these drawings and saw in them a resurgence of childhood trauma troubling Nitya's subconscious mind, the incidence of his sister's accidental death. To me, there was something both wonderful and horrible about these phenomena. Horrible to have old memories return to haunt him when already the debilitating effects of the stroke created a feeling of physical vulnerability, but wonderful that Nitya had intuitively provided a creative outlet for these memories through his artwork. The drawings that emerged on these days came from a deep inner urging and were not about external observations of line, light or shadow. He never appeared to stop and think before putting a marker to paper. Instead he unselfconsciously would begin the movements that led to a completed drawing. The day's artwork seemed as much a mystery for him as for the small group of us who loved to crowd around and watch. I began to understand how art and the healing process interface, and to be even more interested in how Nitya was using his time and directing the choices for his convalescence.

All the art that came through his hand was an expression of freedom and spontaneity. None of the pieces seemed to have anything to do with his current physical predicament, where he was trapped in a small room on the second floor of a house, unable to walk, write or even go to the bathroom on his own. Rolling over in bed required the help of two strong men and eating was now either being fed like a child or using his relatively unskilled left hand. But none of this affected his art or his freedom.

It is hard to explain why it felt so good to be in service to someone like Nitya, although serving is often the human activity that brings the most joy. But there was an added dimension to the reciprocal love that could be felt around Guru, especially when attending upon him. I had never considered myself a serving or helping type. As a child there were no dreams of being a nurse or a teacher. I was more into the idea of becoming a dancer or an artist. Maybe the perceivable and constant flow of love coming through him elevated the joy of giving. The only experience I know that was vaguely familiar was caring for my children, especially in the early days when one doesn't feel any separation from the infant. Even so, serving Guru had a unique and wondrous quality that was both new and yet strangely familiar.

Still in grief some months after the news of Guru's *samādhi*, I began a series of paintings and a writing project drawing on the experiences and feelings that I had recorded while with Nitya. The projects were a purely personal endeavor, an aid to going deeper into the gift of loving and being loved in such a way. Seven paintings were made and the writing project was left three-quarters done. But the work served its purpose, and I found the peace and healing I had sought. The paintings and excerpts of the writing project were exhibited to a small audience in Portland, Oregon, in late 2000. From this larger piece of work, unfinished at this date, these remembrances and reflections are humbly shared.

WOVEN HEAVEN, TANGLED EARTH

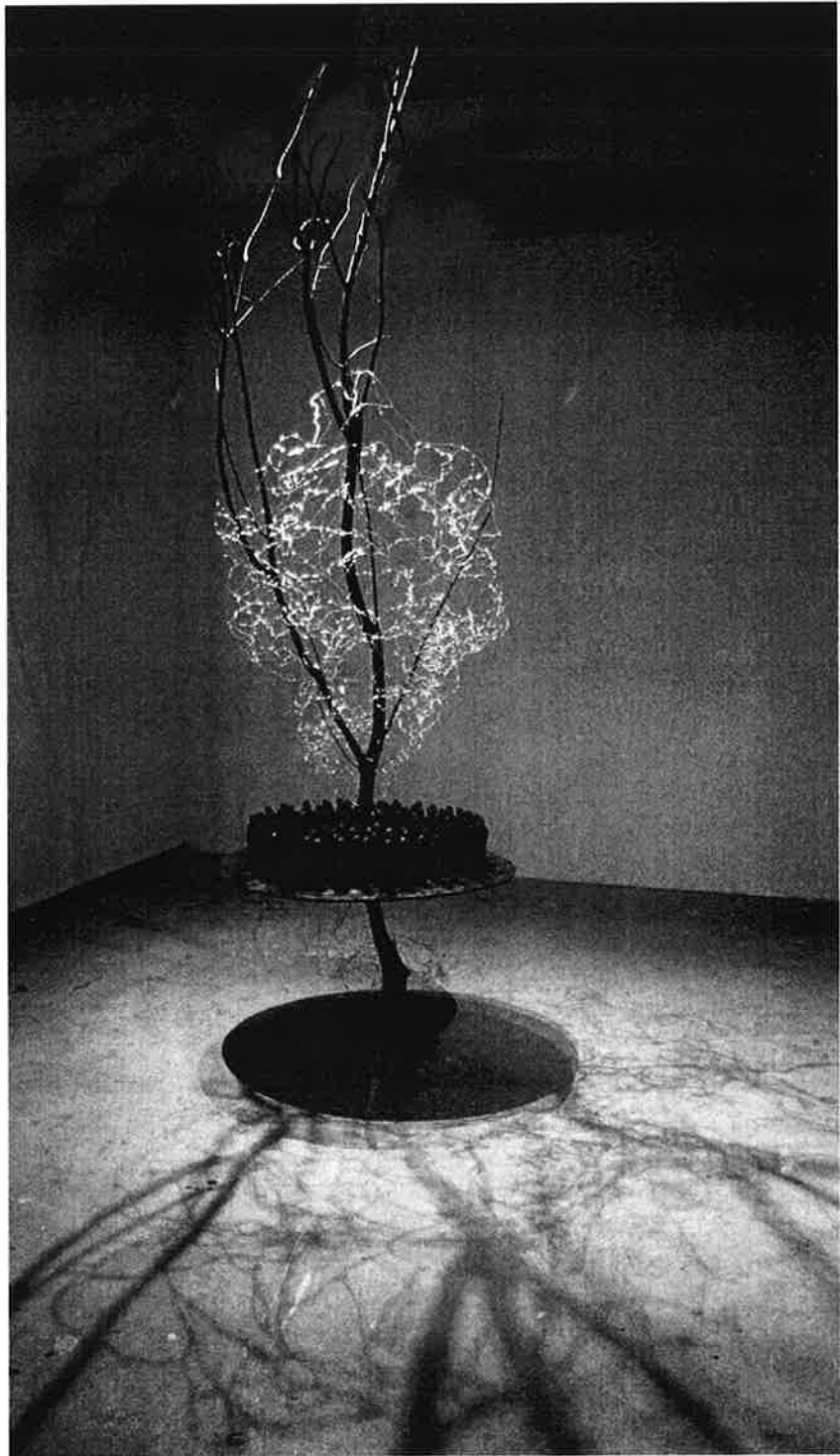
BY SUSAN PLUM

These photographs are from the installation Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth and were created by the Mexican-American artist Susan Plum and originally exhibited at the Robert Lehman Gallery in Brooklyn, New York.

In one of the gallery rooms there was a glass sphere constructed of interwoven, transparent pieces. It sat by itself, illuminated from above, seeming almost to float. Nearby was a tree around whose base were 144 cast-wax figures of women. Each of the women was wearing a cloak of tears as they all circled the upright tree. The women were chanting and spinning a new world, which began deep under the surface of the earth on which they stood. A web, also of glass, continued above the earth, tracing a simple heart shape onto the *Axis Mundi* or Tree of Life.

Weaving filaments of light, in this case glass, is an ancient Meso-American shamanic practice for healing the earth. The women promote healing by holding the grief without victimization. Grief here is transmuted into strength and resolution. In many of the myths, Woman stands at the crossroads—between the Old World and the New World, alone and exiled. Children are her seeds and they bare the imprint of the mother's experience.





SPEAKING OF THE SACRED

BY KATIE RADDITZ

When asked to write about my experience of the sacred, I had mixed feelings on how to do it. The old paradox arose: how to name the unnamable, how to speak what the mystics say is beyond words. But the reason we know and are inspired by the mystics is that they do try to express the sacred, in song, dance, paintings, and even poetry. To talk of our own sacred experience which we hold inside like a jewel, stumbling over the inexpressible might diminish and tarnish it. What if it seems silly or boring when revealed in plain language?

Yet there's a yearning to tell these stories and a value in hearing the possible. The articulation can lead to spiritual awakening. I tried to think of a whirlwind story, something perhaps buried but longing to be told. I thought about the seeking years of my youth, about the gifts of light when Indian yogis traveled in the West, about the secrets of the body revealed in first lovemaking. But some stories are too intimate, and like jewels, are to share with your beloved. Only a poet can tell them slant and get away with it.

Then I remembered instances of shimmering oneness with the world. Small dust devils quickly passing through. For me these usually arrive through reading or when I am alone in the woods. I remembered the snake who, like the Cheshire cat, stopped me in my tracks for reconsideration on my first camping trip alone. I remembered times at the bookstore when a customer called for a book and I was holding it in my hand. I remembered watching the light change on the Nehalem River, momentarily catching spider webs shining through the woods, a revelation of the web of all life. I remember how profoundly I felt this knowing of the sacred through my whole body each of those times. I remember wanting to tell the ineffable and finally finding an entry through writing memoir.

There are some times that actually define or inform a shift in our lives because of their spiritual power. I do have a personal story to tell. One brush with the whirlwind which swooped me up and set me down on a new path.

One day while working at Looking Glass Bookstore, Ani Paldron, a Tibetan Buddhism teacher in Portland, asked me if I would invite Thich Naht Hanh to come to town. Ani is not shy. I said, "He's not going to come to Portland. First of all, he lives in exile in France, and then, Tich Naht Hanh is the equivalent in Zen Buddhism to the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism." But, she said, "Just ask the publisher what we could do to bring him here." So I finally called Parallax Press and asked. To my surprise, they said he would be in California in a few weeks and I should come there. I tried to explain that I was only calling on behalf of

the Buddhist teachers in Oregon, but I would pass on the information. Within a few days all the Buddhist teachers were calling to ask me about my plans to go on retreat with Thich Naht Hanh.

Now, I knew about Thich Naht Hanh. Historically he had been a large presence in negotiating peace during the Vietnam War. And *The Miracle of Mindfulness* was one of our best-selling books in the bookstore for years. So I took home one of his books that had caught my eye because of its title, *The Sun My Heart*. I had first read it as *The Son My Heart*. My six year old son, Will, had been having some problems with anxiety after being stung by a bee caught in his jacket. He had trouble falling asleep at night if I was not sleeping with him.

The whirlwind night, Will and I agreed that he would lie in bed not trying to sleep but just being cozy and not talking. I would sit where he could see me through the hall door near the end of my bed. Then I could meditate and read to myself. We got settled and I opened Thich Naht Hanh's book which starts out, "Than Thuy, the child of boat people, is not yet four and a half years old. Every night at Thuy's bedtime, I sit in meditation. I let her sleep in the same room, near where I am sitting. We have agreed that while I am sitting, she will go to bed without talking. In that peaceful atmosphere, rest comes easily to her, and she is usually asleep within five or ten minutes. When I finish sitting, I cover her with a blanket."

I can hardly read this now without my hair standing on end and my eyes filling with tears, and the sense I had of Thich Naht Hanh being right in the room with me, speaking directly to me. It was a wake up call. I was really awake. And I did go on the retreat. Zen meditation has been an integral part of my life ever since.

How do we tell our stories of the sacred, how do we bear witness to our experience, without belittling its awesome nature? A group of friends writing about this decided we would tell our own particular stories and listen to each other without judgment. I told not of the whirlwind but of the common breeze that every once in awhile lifts the curtain of awareness, the everyday sacred that takes my breath away. Fall is a good time for that. Have you ever noticed the imprints left on the sidewalks by wet fallen leaves, drying in the sunshine? It's like seeing a collage made by the creator just for the beauty of it. As if the leaves are speaking a forgotten language, leaving clues in a forest alphabet. These prints catch my attention, fill me with unreasonable joy, and make me feel the wonder of nature.

One thing we realized in telling our stories of awe is that the sacred entered in a realm beyond thinking. This sense of grace embodied—music, good food, unexpected visions, the earth and its leaves—is known through the senses, so we can all relate. This is our common ground.

Bearing witness to beauty and the sacred takes courage and trust and a willingness to be vulnerable. These are wonderful antidotes to the grief and despair that can grip us like a bad habit. By listening to each other with caring and open hearts we create a sacred community.

JOURNEY TO LANDFALL

BY PAUL MERCHANT

Imagine an island severed from the main
a new-year's gift to the cartographer's wife
a fragment sheared from the ghost continent
that fading memory

Now imagine this argosy's stately voyage
this ark, freighted with ferns and dinosaurs
its unperceived millennial progress
journey to landfall

At harbor imagine a chaotic docking
the great bulk driven into and under Asia
birthing a mountain range into air
like crumpled paper

Imagine an island of monkeys and mango trees
 guarded by a palisade of rocks and glaciers
preserving a luxuriant kingdom, a Xanadu
 and beyond it sand

A conversation repeated across aeons
 separation of continents, metamorphosis
upheaval, erosion, ancient cousins, mountain and plain
 poetry and prose

High peaks, the tribesmen call
 their only friend
Marshland between two rivers
 the first paradise
 Every hill and valley
 its own dialect

VACANAS

BY AKKA MAHADEVI

TRANSLATION BY SWAMI VINAYA CHAITANYA

The *vacanas* of Akka Mahadevi constitute the greatest treasure hidden in the earth of Karnataka. Late A.K. Ramanujan made this treasure available to English readers the world over for the first time through his translations in *Speaking of Siva*. Though there had been translations of these *vacanas* earlier, they were not able to convey the tough lyricism of Akka to non-Kannada audiences. Ramanujan was able to capture successfully some aspects of the source text, which could easily translate into Anglo-American poetic diction fashionable in those days. In spite of the shortcomings of Ramanujan's translations, the unmistakable power of the source text was able to strike a chord in the hearts of the English-reading public in India and in the West. Decades after the Ramanujan translations appeared, the time is now ripe for other translations of Akka's *vacanas*, for they have in them so many riches that no single translation can do justice to them.

The existing translations of Akka's *vacanas* have two major problems with them. The pre-Ramanujan translations hurt the body of *vacanas* in their enthusiasm to communicate the spirit. The hero of the *vacanas* who emerges from these translations is a faceless, featureless, bodyless god devoid of all beauty and power. On the other hand, the hero who emerges from Ramanujan's translations is a spiritless body who resembles a smart athlete more than Akka's actual hero who can transmit physical warmth to the spirit. These problems have occurred because of the way previous translators grasped the nature of Akka's *vacanas*. They saw them either as scriptural texts or poetic texts. In fact Akka's *vacanas* are neither of these two. The twelfth century saint poets of Karnataka considered both scriptures and poetry rubbish. Adayya, a prolific poet of the period, considers both of these to be similes. Those who believe in and live through these similes, says Adayya, are born of similes and die into similes. In short, *vacana* poets of Karnataka wanted their compositions to be different from both secular and religious expressions of their times. Because *vacana* poets believed deed (*nade*) to be the meaning of word (*nudi*), they mercilessly attacked scriptures and poetic compositions, which spoke of the imagined and idealized, and not of the felt, experienced and lived truth. "How can those experience agony who have experienced no agony?" asks Akka in one of her *vacanas*.

The present translator of *vacanas*, Vinaya Chaitanya, deserves our congratulations for he is, unlike previous translators, open to the experiential dimensions of Akka's *vacanas*. First and foremost, his connection with the *vacanas* is spiritual though he is alive to their sociopolitical nuances. He has the open-

minded humility of genuine *sadhak* of the tradition of Sri Narayana Guru of Kerala, who shared many of the socio-philosophical concerns of 12th century saints of Karnataka like opposition to caste hierarchies and bigotry of all kinds. His non-Kannada background has given him the advantage of objectivity. At the same time, his engagement with and personal experience of *sādhana* has given him the ability to resonate with the overpowering vibrations of Akka's *vacanas*. Neither has he ignored the body of *vacanas*. He has shown an acute awareness of textual problems involved in translation, which never bothered earlier translators. Most important of all he has understood the many-faceted character of the source texts. For Akka's compositions are poetic without being poetry, spiritual without being religious or scriptural. This very important awareness informs his translations even when there is a failure to the exact nuance or feel of the word. For example, every time the word Channamallikarjuna appears in these translations, it does so as prefix of "jasmine-tender" However, this tenderness is only one part of Akka's hero. He also has the other tough part—that of Arjuna, the indefatigable archer. Akka describes herself as "a women only in name." In her longing for and union with her Cosmic Hero, Channamallikarjuna, beautiful like jasmines, but hard and pointed like a bow, she has lost her sexual identity, the basis of all dualisms. Though the translator does not bring this out in his translation of the word, he overall perception and selection of *vacanas* is informed by deep understanding of this cardinal point.

Let me conclude my brief introduction by sharing with you what I consider to be unique about Akka's *vacanas*. Says Akka: "One has the here, another the hereafter/ One has no here, another has no hereafter/ Another has neither here nor hereafter/ Those who have taken refuge in Channamallikarjuna, jasmine-tender,/ Have both the here and hereafter." These words sum up the essence of Akka's *vacanas*. She offers to the world what the world has found and lost again and again and again—and the awful daring of a lifetime's surrender, something that has eluded both materialists and spiritualists, theists, atheists and agnostics. Her expressions embody and act out an unquenchable kind of love that finds itself only by effacing itself. It is very precise and pointed, unlike different versions of vague universal love, which seeks to love all while not being able to love anyone. Neither is it limited like different forms of individual and collective selfish love that are now devouring the world today. It is an intense vision and experience of the source of all love and all longing that alone can quench the thirst for all forms of thirst. It is something that is not like *dukkha* of Buddhism or *māyā* of Vedanta or sin of Christianity. It is that naked primeval desire which mothers all desires. It burns and pines with love and throbs with irrepressible expectation. It is Channamallikarjuna, the name Akka gave to her path of Shiva where heaven and hell become one in the clear understanding of continuous awareness, turning nectar and poison into each other. For, in the true path of Shiva, as Acharya Utpaladeva said, even poison turns into the immortal drink of gods and misery into joy.

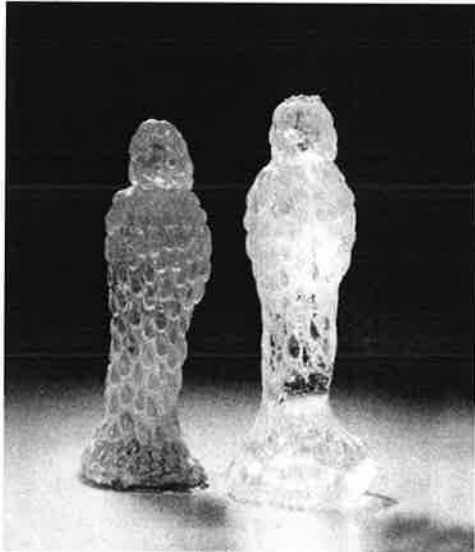
The image that has emerged of Akka through existing translations is that of a radical woman poet presaging several of the anxieties of present-day feminism. This is the image of our own age as reflected in Akka's *vacanas*. The image is all right as far it goes. But the differences are no less important. The experience of the sacred is the very breath of Akka's *vacanas*. This is precisely what is lost sight of in our age. I am happy to note that Vinaya Chaitanya's translations have foregrounded this aspect of Akka.

I am sure that Vinaya Chaitanya's labour of love will be appreciated by widely different sections of readers. For, in Akka's *vacana* is Shiva's plenty. Students and practitioners of literature, history, sociology, women's studies, philosophy and religion are sure to find Akka's *vacanas* fascinating in different ways. At the same time, these *vacanas* have great significance to genuine spiritual seekers everywhere. In an age teeming with half-baked and imperfect gurus, the authentic and time-tested voice of Akka the great Shivaguru can bring greater light and *śaktipāt*, energy transmission, to a world devoid of light and energy.

H.S. SHIVA PRAKASH

Chaitra Pournima, Vasantha Masa, Swabhanu Samvatsara.

(H.S. Shiva Prakash is Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and a highly reputed Kannada poet and playwright, and translator of *vacanas*.)



Like treasure hidden by the earth
Like taste hidden by the fruit
Like gold hidden by the stone
Like oil hidden by the sesame seed
Like fire hidden by the wood,
Channamallikarjuna, jasmine-tender
Hides as the being behind becoming;
No one knows Him.

When I did not know myself
Where were you, tell me?
Like the color in gold, you were in me.
Though you were in me
I saw you as different,
Oh, Channamallikarjuna, jasmine-tender!

Māyā has troubled the body as shadow,
Troubled breath as the mind,
Troubled mind as memory,
Troubled memory as awareness,
Troubled awareness as forgetfulness.
With a firm sceptre
Māyā rules the many worlds.
Oh! Channamallikarjuna, jasmine-tender,
Who will overcome your *māyā*?

If I say I have left *māyā*,
Māyā won't leave,
If I don't leave *māyā*,
It will ride on my back;
To the yogi *māyā* became a yogini,
To the ascetic *māyā* became
A female ascetic,
To the one of self-control,
Māyā became a flatterer;
I won't be scared of your *māyā*,
Channamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender,
I swear by you.

When I say I have seen,
Seeing becomes a veil,
If I say I am united,

The mood becomes a veil,
What shall I say and how?
If I say I know
Forgetfulness becomes a veil.
How can I overcome your *māyā*?
Save me!

If breath itself is fragrant, who needs flowers?
If one has patience, calmness, peace and forbearance
What need is there for the final peace?
If one becomes the world itself
What need for solitude
Channamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender.

If you can pull out the fangs
And make it dance,
It is all right to play with the snake.
Free yourself from the bonds of the body
It is all right to have a body,
Lust is frightening, like one's mother
Turning into a demoness
Channamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender,
Do not say those you are pleased with
Have taken bodies.

The body cannot be without senses,
Nor senses without body,
How can I say I am without desire, without fault,
If you are pleased, I will be happy,
If you are not, I will be sad,
Channamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender.

With the two measures of sunrise and sunset,
The grain-heap of life is being measured.
Before it is all over, remember, remember Siva;
This life will not come again.
Remembering Channamallikarjuna,
Jasmine-tender god of gods,
Even the worst of sinners
Were freed of yore.
Within the eight-petalled lotus
Creation was born;

The tortoise swallowed the eight elephants
Which support the universe,
And the horizon:
Became real emptiness itself.
Can divisive efforts attain
The true state of self-knowing?
In the sight of my eyes,
In the pleasure of my mind,
I am away from the
Attack of the limbless god of desire;
Can an animal seen in a mirage
Be caught in a hunter's net?
Men other than my god
Channamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender,
Are not for me, Oh brother.

What of your renouncing wealth
You should not take anything from the senses;
What of your renouncing taste
The tongue should not know sweetness.
What good renouncing woman
One should be free of desire—
In waking, dreaming and deep sleep.
What good is being sky-clad?
The mind should be naked.
Not knowing this fourfold path
They perished in vain,
Channamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender.

The coward has no happiness, whatever he does.
The brave has no fear, wherever he goes.
The calm has no evil to lower him.
The kind will not be cursed.
Those taking refuge in you,
Leaving what is not theirs,
Have nothing more to fear,
Oh! Channamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender.



MEDITATIONS ON ŚRI CAKRA

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

Meditation Fifty-two

O Mother, the giver of ultimate deliverance. Birth and death mark the two extreme points of the drama of life. The opening scene commences with the rising of the curtain when the child is presented to the world as the most glorious event of manifestation. What initial preparations were made by your creative genius to bring a fully formed person with countless potentials into a world of time and space, cognitive perception, value judgment and the resolution to act? It is the greatest of all secrets which the most intelligent of beings have been trying to unravel for thousands of years.

The closing scene of life is so silent and gentle. There the person is laid on the ground with energy depleted, all incentive for action gone, and all that is expected is the giving up of the final breath. The last wisp of air is a mysterious bolt with which all the limbs of the living organism have been held in position and riveted to a life-long program.

Considering the magnitude and complexity of this greatest of all dramas ever staged in the phenomenal context, one is awed by the seriousness of both its phenomenal purposiveness and its noumenal defeat, which are bracketed as two sides of the same drama of life and deliverance. There is no subject equal in dignity or more difficult to comprehend than the building up of such a magnificent structure on a well-laid foundation that culminates in a crowning achievement which is ultimately meant to be abandoned, disorganized and cast into an all devouring flame of cremation. Both in its creation and its demolition you are present, first as an accomplisher and then as a sympathetic witness.

When the child is within the green room of preparation, before being presented on the stage to act its role, it apparently has no motivation. However, motivation is instantaneously developed in a fully formed organism thrust out of the environment of a mother's womb into a physiological, psychological and sociological environment within the confines of the biosphere of Mother Earth. The first response is the primal cry which symbolizes the terror which the individual experiences on its first entry into this world. The child announces itself to be heard by the parents and all dear relatives. There is a proximity of listening ears and seeing eyes. Nowhere are the subject and object more emphatically underlined as on the occasion of the primal cry of the child and the immediate attention given

to it. The cry is a demand directed towards all who hold themselves responsible to provide care for the child. The call for help comes as a piercing shaft to the ears of the parents which are set within a frame of reference that is replete with a sense of duty and a fully saturated sentimental affection.

The first step in meeting the demand is to turn the eyes to the source from which the primal cry is arising like a volcanic eruption. Not only is the child spotted as the source of demand but the very sight initiates in the parent an inquiry into the nature of the child's problem. Here, the intrinsic connection between the ear and eye is poignantly expressed as an inseparable continuity. Child and parent are of equal dialectical importance in this situation. The primal cry and the first nourishment given to the child in response to its demand mark the fulfillment of a duty on the part of the mother and bring to the child a conviction that benevolence is available in the world in which it has been brought to live for a hundred years.

To begin with, the interplay of the ear and eye, name and form, marks two vital links in the theme of life. The recognition of the relationship between the numerator and denominator factors of the value situation is immediately followed by direct action. Lifting the crying child in the parental hands and plugging into its mouth the nipple of the mother's breast symbolically chokes the mouth of demand. The same mouth is used both for the primal cry and for the intake of nourishment. One cannot both cry and eat food. An alternation is implied. Hunger is suffering and the intake of food is enjoyment. These are put in juxtaposition. It is with such a paradox life commences. Ultimately, when a person is dying, all entrances to the system are blocked from within. No food is required; edible goods cannot be taken. Finally the life breath is also rejected. The organism makes no demand. The respondents accept their deliverance from duties by cremating the corpse.

In between the primal cry and the final silence various other hungers and thirsts are experienced by the growing individual at several stages of maturation. Although the first act after the child's birth is the severing of the child from the mother by cutting the umbilical cord, a far stronger bond is established between the mother and child. However soft and delicate the nipple of a mother's breast is, the child's acceptance of it to suck and the mother's admission of her duty to suckle create a forceful bond of unity which is maintained even when the mother and child are physically separate. A similar kind of hard and fast relationship is established between the concept-forming faculty of the child and the perceptual objects presented to the child's interest. Thus a child delivered from the confinement of the mother's womb consciously and unconsciously holds on to this world with a million hands of relationship.

This is not only for one lifetime. Even in the tiniest child a futuristic program is hiding. If it is a male, it has the potential to impregnate a future woman, and if it is a female, she can bring forth fully formed individuals to continue the drama of life. The most vital and dynamic instinct is to procreate. Hence, the incentive for

that comes through the relationship of the eye and the ear. The relationship between the eye and ear is very much of the psyche and the soma. What is heard with the ear is the subtle word which evokes a configuration of meaning in the very deep layers of the listener's consciousness. This incoming stimulus is reversed by the subject through an act of looking and making a correct appraisal of the object from which the stimulation arises. This kind of reciprocal sending and receiving of demands and supplies goes on all through life. It is characterized by an intense form of love which prompts an affective relationship between a person and the world and an equally strong aversion and fear of the source of demand and attachment. There is an intense feeling of wanting to be delivered of such ties. Thus the zest for life and the determination to quit it are always counter-balancing and canceling each other out.

It is in this context that sex is to be seen as the most dynamic prompting and stimulating principle that makes a very simple glance through the corner of a lover's eye strategically more powerful than the marching in of a terrifying militant force. It is counter-balanced by a peace that surpasseth understanding which comes from a transcendence of all value relationships. This is the neutral zero in which we presently see you, O Mother, equating yourself with your Lord, who supremely transcends all the relativistic demands of life. May peace prevail. *AUM HRIM.*

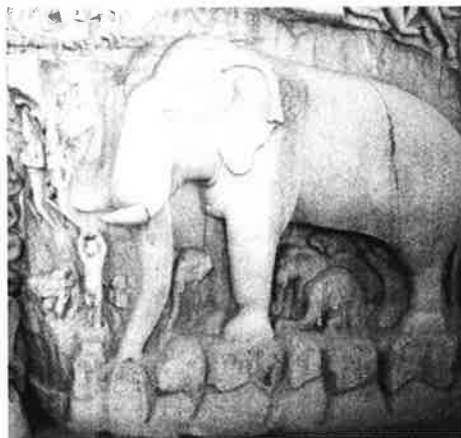
MUSIC FOR BIG EARS

BY FRED CANTOR

I like to sleep with the window open. I like the fresh air, but even more I like to listen to the sounds of the night, especially the frogs. It is soothing and reassuring to know that the other creatures we share the earth with are still around – no thanks to us humans – and that they still have something to sing about. As it happens, the little croakers in our neighborhood do pretty much just that – they croak in a sort of nasty sounding exhibit of sexual prowess and territorial bravado. The frogs on *Echoes of Nature – Frog Chorus* (Laserlight Digital #12 152) are by contrast extremely mellifluous. Listening to their choral endeavors is a great way to relieve stress. Listening to this CD I find myself wondering if they are conscious of the interleaved patterns of sound, or if each is just sounding out his/her own song, perhaps in response to another frog but not aware of the whole pattern. I wonder how much awareness we humans have of the overall patterns of our interrelated lives. I think mostly we are busy tooting our own horns, so to speak, trying to attract a mate or defend our territories or send out alarms. Certainly much of what passes for public dialog has the harsh, croaking sound of my backyard frogs. I would like to think that if we spent a bit more time listening to the bigger symphony of human noise, we could tune it to a more natural and harmonious note, like the frog chorus rendered on this disc.

The questions about the nature of music and whether other species make music or noise are also posed on the CD *Elephonic Rhapsodies* featuring the Thai Elephant Orchestra (Mulatta Records MUL 009). There are 48 elephants at the Thai Elephant Conservation Center. Twelve of them have been given specially made instruments, mostly xylophone/marimba type devices called angalungs, but also gongs, Thai drums and tubular bells. They are given some basic training in how to strike the instruments and have apparently developed some technique over time (and with practice—music students take note!). This disc has several tracks of the elephants playing by themselves, some of which are kind of interesting musically and some of which seem pretty random. Then there is a section of the elephants with humans—a flute player, a Thai string band, a cello (electric, no less), violins, and vocals. It seems these performances are designed mainly to show off for the tourists and of course raise funds for the Center. They are kind of fun to listen to as novelty tunes but I don't think they'll stand up to repeated listening as far as the musical content. Still, a fun and different CD to have in your collection, and supporting the conservation of the Asian elephant is a good thing.

Much attention has centered recently on the city of New Orleans and the losses and suffering inflicted by Hurricane Katrina. Hopefully, we will not count the music of this unique place as a storm casualty. One of the great practitioners of this music is Dr. John, aka Mac Rebennac. His 2004 CD release *N'awlinz Dis Dat or D'udda* (Blue Note Records 7243 5 78602 2 2) captures the heart and soul of his beloved city. It includes stellar arrangements of old traditional tunes like "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" (trust me, you haven't heard it played like this before) or "St. James Infirmary" and has guest appearances from (among others) Randy Newman, BB King, Mavis Staples, Cyril Neville and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band – oh yeah, Willie Nelson shows up too! It is a fervent hope that the destruction of the city will not mean the death of its music. But if the music, like the city itself, comes out changed and gentrified, this album will stand as a living testament to the rollicking, funky, swampy soul of N'awlinz.



A new recording from Van Morrison is like a letter from an old friend. It is always welcome and you are happy to hear that your friend is still around and carrying on. Unfortunately *Magic Time* (Exile Records B0004662-02) is a letter that doesn't have a lot to say. It certainly won't rank up there with any of his classics, and the titles of the tunes say a lot about where Van is at right now: he feels "Stranded", trying to "Keep Mediocrity at Bay". He's kind of "Lonely and Blue" and wants to be alone "Just Like Greta" (Garbo, of course). He apparently has had some business setbacks involving his own people. He feels that "They Sold Me Out". But this CD is an attempt to "Carry on Regardless". One of Van's great strengths as a songwriter has been his ability to embrace the mundane and wrap it in Absolute Truth and express the result in stunning poetry. On this CD however he seems to be mostly crying in his beer, or maybe pissing in the wind. If Van is an old friend of yours and you have most of his recordings in your collection, you'll be happy to have this new piece of his persona. If you want to see him at his best, skip this one and go get Beautiful Vision or Moondance or even Astral Weeks.

GURUKULA NEWS

Guru Muni Narayana Prasad's book, *Life's Pilgrimage Through the Gita*, has been published by DK Printworld, as has the reissue of Nataraja Guru's essays in the book *Unitive Philosophy*.

The permanent prayer hall at the Varkala Gurukula is nearing completion. Guru Prasad is resting at Varkala while undergoing homeopathic treatments for his health.

In October, 2005, the convention sponsored by Kannakamala was held there for five days, with numerous papers and talks presented. In December the annual Gurukula Convention will be held in Varkala.

Swami Vinaya Chaitanya attended a seminar on Narayana Guru's philosophy at Sankara University in Kerala.

The yearly Guru Puja took place at the Bainbridge Gurukula in the U.S., with a homam and a focus on our gratitude for the blessings of the world's many wisdom traditions.

We would like to remind everyone to send us your remembrances of Gurukula history, either in English or Malayalam, particularly those centered on Nataraja Guru, Guru Nitya, Swami Mangalananda and Swami John Spiers.

For online classes contact Nancy Yeilding at islandarayana@foxinternet.net and Scott Teitsworth at tapovana@hevanet.com.

Web Addresses:

<http://www.geocities.com/islandgurukula>

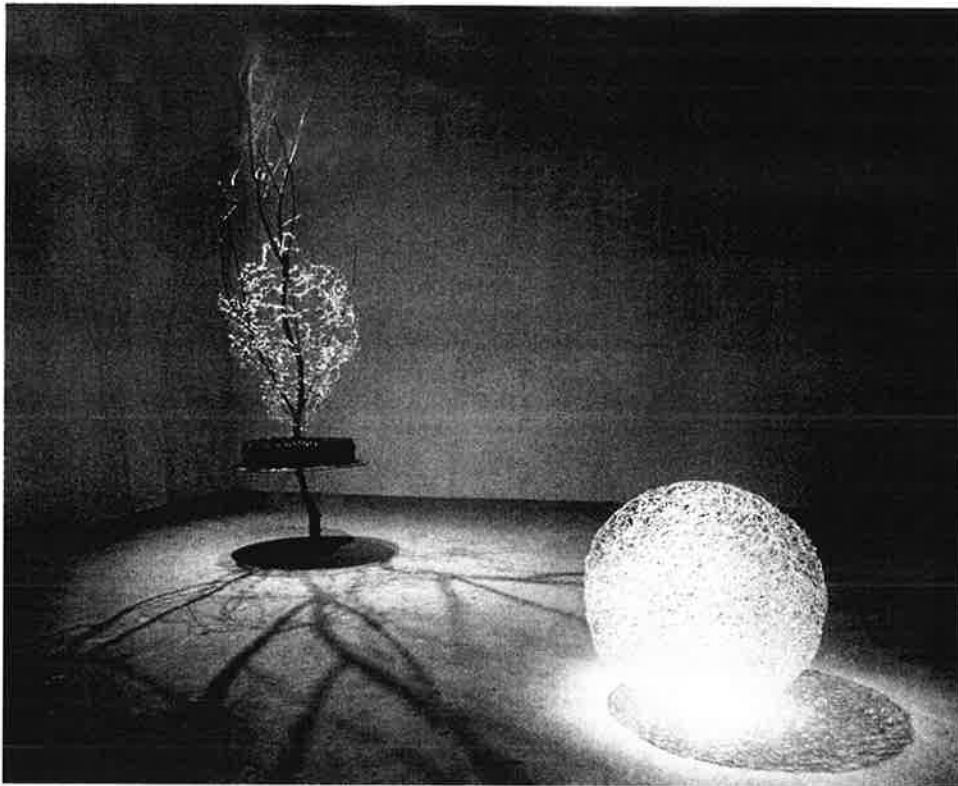
<http://www.homepage.mac.com/sraddha/gurukula>

<http://homepage.mac.com/vyasa>

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

- Front Cover Mandala: "Healing Shield", ink and colored pencil on paper,
Peggy Grace Luke, 1997
- Back Cover Mandala: "Healing Shield", ink and colored pencil on paper,
Peggy Grace, 1997
- 5 Photograph, Kerala, India, Scott Teitsworth, 1979
- 6 Photograph, Kerala, India, Deborah Buchanan, 1979
- 7 Photograph, Kerala, India, Scott Teitsworth, 1979
- 11 Photograph, Kerala, India, Scott Teitsworth, 1979
- 14 Photograph, Kerala, India, Deborah Buchanan, 1979
- 17 Photograph, Kerala, India, Scott Teitsworth, 1979
- 21 Photograph, frost on window, Deborah Buchanan, 1972
- 27 Photograph, Kerala, India, Scott Teitsworth, 1979.
- 29 Calligraphy by Suellen Cupp, 2005
- 32 Mandala: "Exhaustion", ink and colored pencil on paper, Peggy
Grace Luke, 1997
- 33 Mandala: "Beyond Reason", ink and colored pencil on paper,
Peggy Grace Luke, 1996
- 36 Mandala: "Transformation", ink and colored pencil on paper,
Peggy Grace Luke, 1998
- 37 Mandala: "Unmistakably Alive", ink and colored pencil on paper,
Peggy Grace Luke, 2000

- 41 Photograph, Guru Nitya with students, Varkala, India, Deborah Buchanan, 1980
- 44 Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth installation, Susan Plum, 1999
- 45 Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth installation, Susan Plum, 1999
- 52 Glass figures, Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth, Susan Plum. 1999
- 56 Photograph, Oregon marsh, Deborah Buchanan, 1980
- 61 Photograph, Mahaballapuram, India, Deborah Buchanan, 1980
- 64 Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth installation, Susan Plum. 1999



GURUKULAM

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITION

GURUKULAM magazine is a publication of the Narayana Gurukula, a spiritual and educational organization dedicated to sharing the teachings of Narayana Guru and his successors, as well as to the exploration of the world's many philosophic and artistic traditions. Our attitude is best expressed by Narayana Guru: "Our purpose is not to argue and win, but to know and let know."

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

PUBLICATIONS BOARD: Bushra Azzouz, Deborah Buchanan, Sraddha Durand, Andrew Larkin, Scott Teitsworth, Nancy Yeilding.

EDITOR: Deborah Buchanan

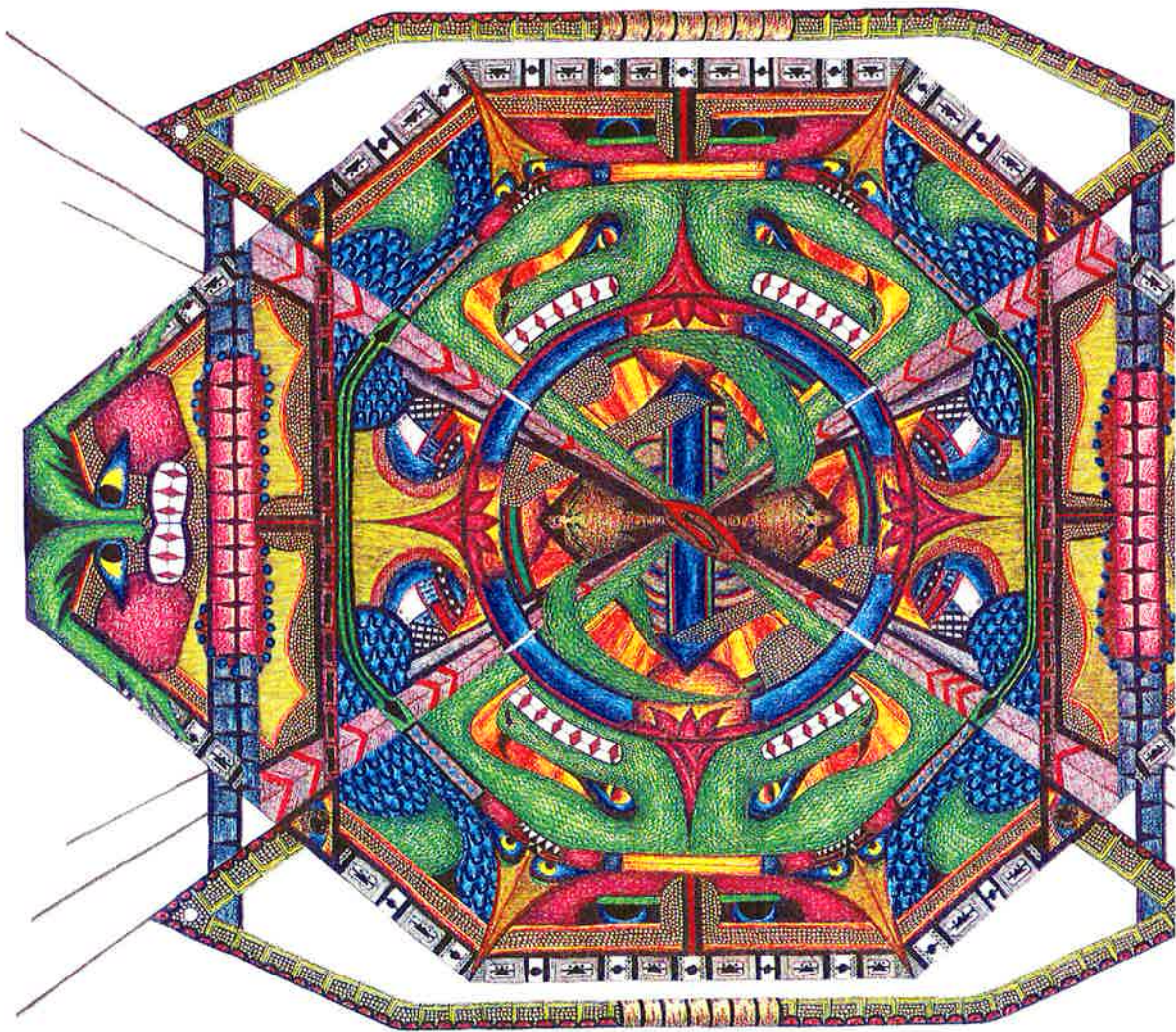
SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION USA: Yearly, \$20.00 for two issues. Outside the U.S. add \$5.00 for surface mail. Contact: GURUKULAM, 11290 NW Skyline Blvd., Portland, Oregon, 97231.

E-mail address: tapovana@hevanet.com

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION INDIA: Yearly subscription price is Rs. 100. Contact: Narayana Gurukula, Srinivasapuram P.O., Varkala, Kerala, 695-145, South India.

SUBMISSIONS are made in the spirit of free sharing and cross-pollination. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and space. Please send articles and art for consideration to:

11290 NW Skyline Blvd.,
Portland, Oregon, 97231, USA
tapovana@hevanet.com



PUBLISHED BY THE NARAYANA GURUKULA