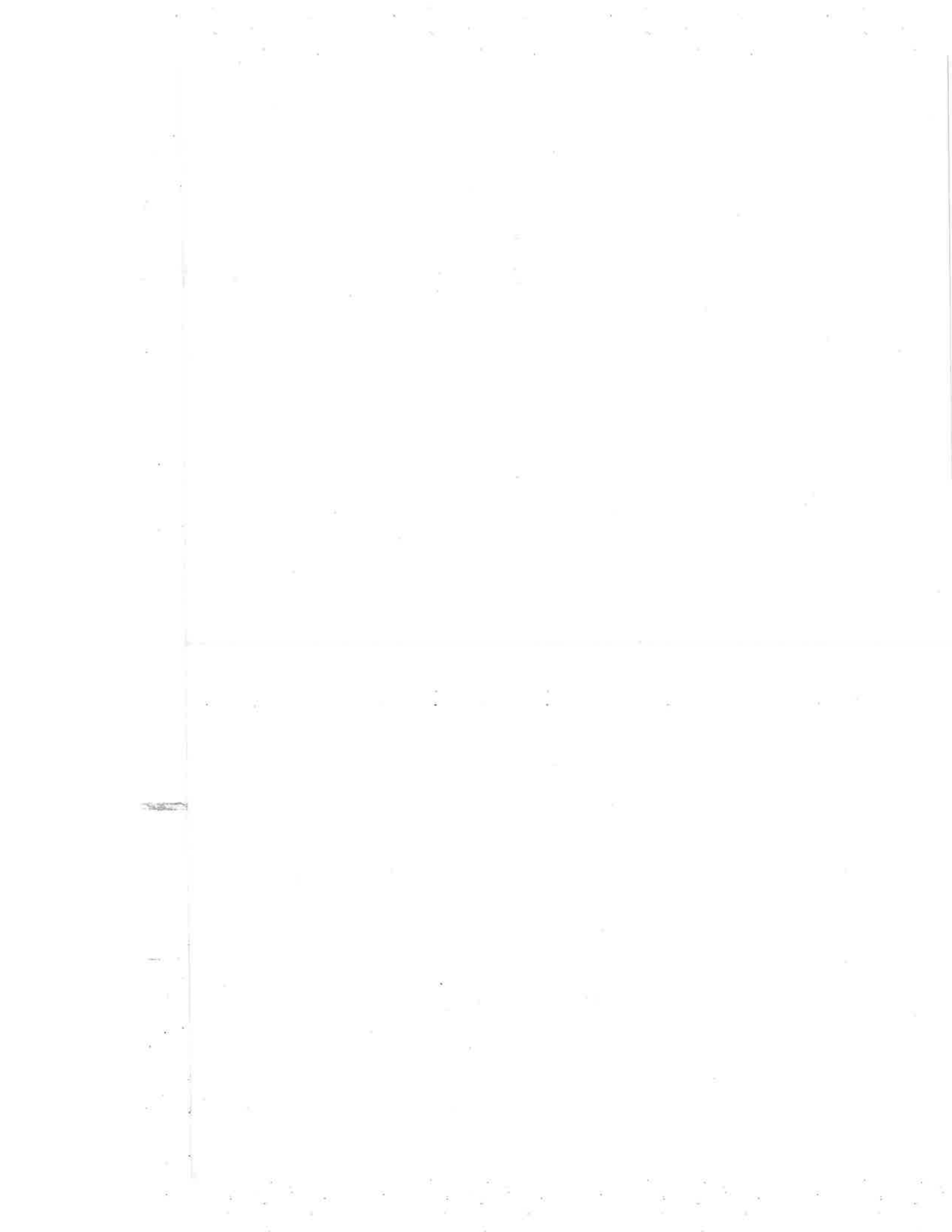


# QURUKULAM



AUTUMN 2008







# GURUKULAM

A Journal of Philosophy and the Arts

AUTUMN 2008

Published by the Narayana Gurukula

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# EDITORIAL

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

“The world situation is a disaster, I need to get out and help people who are suffering.”

“To contemplate I need to find a quiet place and be alone, only then will I be at peace.”

With such statements do we continue the basic divisions of our world—me and them, inside and outside, spirituality and politics. It would be hard to imagine a person whose thinking is not based, either consciously or unconsciously, on these oppositions. However, what they do is perpetuate the very problem in which we are all caught. This is the “razor’s edge” spoken of in the Upanisads, and what Guru Nitya refers to as “the paradox lurking at the heart of philosophy.”

When we wake up each morning, a world which is both beautiful and painful presents itself. We find ourselves responding with enthusiasm or distaste, we make choices, and follow only a few of many probable courses of action.

It is in this situation that we must realize what is called the Void, the Absolute, Salvation or simply peace. Though the idea may be simple, there is no end to the programs which claim to help us surmount our difficulties: do such and such activity, believe this idea, pledge this devotion.

Quietly Narayana Guru stepped into the fray and followed his own heart to realization. The key is that his heart was not solely his but the heart of all, the greater foundation for all beings. What does that mean? In *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, verses 21-22, Narayana Guru writes specifically of this conundrum:

Endearment is one kind; this is dear to me;  
your preference is for something else;  
thus, many objects of endearment are differentiated and confusion comes;  
what is dear to you is dear to another also; this should be known.

verse 21

The happiness of another—that is my happiness,  
one’s own joy is another’s joy—this is the guiding principle;  
that action which is good for one person  
should bring happiness to another.

verse 22



If we act on the basis of every person's benefit, not on selfish desire, the division between us is negated. It is not that you see a problem outside to fix, but you yourself are part of the whole situation, the problem and the solution. You don't help someone else—as an intimate factor in the pain or difficulty you work to aright it, to help your greater Self which includes you and all the others. If we see the deeper Self in each person, how is it possible to act against that?

In a new translation of the *Taoteching* by Red Pine, two ancient commentaries are reprinted that address these contradictions:

Commenting on chapter 1, Su Ch'e wrote: "The ways of kindness and justice change but not the way of the Tao. No name is its body. Name is its function. The sage embodies the Tao and uses it in the world. But while entering the myriad states of being, he remains in non-being."

Commenting on chapter 2, Lu Hsi-sheng wrote: "What we call beautiful or ugly depends on our feelings. Nothing is necessarily beautiful or ugly until feelings make it so. but while feelings differ, they all come from our nature, and we all have the same nature. Hence, the sage transforms his feelings and returns to his nature and thus becomes one again."

In the wild fluctuations of our current world, inner and outer, may these profound, direct words open that vast space of inclusion.



# ĀTMOPADEŚA ŚATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

VERSE 35

*oru patināyiramādiēyar onnāy  
varuvatu pōle varum vivēkaortti  
uṛivoine mūṭumanitya māyayāmī-  
yirulīneyīrnezumādi sūryyan atrē.*

Like ten thousand suns coming all at once,  
the modulation of discrimination arises;  
the veil of transience covering knowledge is *māyā*;  
tearing this away, the primal sun alone shines.

We experience an external world full of objects of interest. Our five senses are drawn towards the magical charm of objects outside, such as the world of forms to see, the world of sounds to hear, and the many sensations of touch, taste and smell. But no attraction keeps you glued to it forever. If you always hear the same sound, no matter how sweet it may be, it becomes monotonous. You tune it out or move on to something else. The most pleasant touch becomes irritating if it goes on too long, and the same is true of the other senses.

Each sense brings momentary interests to the mind. The mind is delighted. The same senses also bring painful experiences which agitate the mind. Thus the world outside is the source of all pains and pleasures. Both pain and pleasure come and pass away alike. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna asks Arjuna, “Why do you lament about things which come and pass away? Both pain and pleasure are only momentary.”

The senses relate to the external world. We also have an interior world we relate to with our mind, where we make ghosts of the objects of perception and experience nightmares of our own creation. Our fantasies help us to create a fool’s paradise and revel in it, and our own fears assume definite shapes, which then haunt us and make us paranoid. This inner world is as transient as the outer one.

Our life alternates between the external world of momentary pleasures and pains and the internal world of fantasy and nightmare. In order to experience

the external and fantasize the internal, you need consciousness. It is the same consciousness—the same knowledge—that is lending its light, ideation, meaning and value to be projected on the screen of the external and internal worlds. This is the same knowledge that is referred to in the first verse as the Knowledge that enters all other knowledge and that transcends all forms of fleeting awareness. The same knowledge is described as the supernal Sun that shines in the firmament of consciousness and becomes everything. The same was also shown to us as that limitless knowledge and the depth in which all untold values lie, and also as the light which was never lit and will never be extinguished. It shines and looks on. This is the one unchanging essence which is behind all the changing moods.

The wise one who knows the secret of *aum* knows this knowledge. He remains as That. It is considered to be the all-verticalizing knowledge which shoots down the birds of sense enjoyment. It is described as the witnessing consciousness that sits under the shade of the tree of life. This is the one light that links everything and brings homogeneity to the world of multiversal identity. This light is described as having no base or crown. It is infinite. When it prevails, it makes this world as dear as a garland made of fresh flowers. When one is open to it, the world outside ceases to have any differentiation such as here and there; or sky, atmosphere and earth. As well, the internal world no longer has any divisions like knower, knowledge and known.

Pure knowledge transcends the three modalities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. When it comes it is described as a flood of sound that transforms the desert land of our meaningless life into an oceanic treasury of the highest values, where every grain of the sand of our life is turned into a pearl of priceless worth. When one is tuned to it, it is as if he is suckled on the milk of the Absolute. To him, ten thousand years are just a passing moment.

This knowledge of all knowledge and light of all lights is described here as *vivekavṛtti*. Sankara's *Vivekachūḍāmaṇi* opens with the insistence that one should have the power to discriminate between truth and untruth, the Self and the non-Self, and the fleeting and the eternal. As we are torn between the world outside and the world inside we always miss this centerpiece, which is the only reality.

Once in a thousand years, one among millions stumbles upon his own reality. Then it takes not even a fraction of a second for him to wake up to his own light. Prince Siddhartha, seeing the woes of the world, saw evil in the pleasures which he was fed in his own palace, so he discarded everything and went in search of wisdom. Not knowing where it was to be found, he went from guru to guru and country to country. With all his wandering and searching and mortification of the body, he still could not find anything. At last, feeling it was completely hopeless, he decided to give up his life. He sat down under a tree and vowed to not get up until he either knew truth or left his body. Then, like a flash of a million suns rising all at once, illumination came to him. He became the Awakened One, the Blessed One, the Buddha. Until that happened the knowledge which had always been within him, which had never departed from him for even one second since his birth, was a

closed book to him. In fact, it was this very light which prompted him to begin his search, led him from one insightful occasion to another, and finally revealed itself to him. At once all his doubts were sundered and he was shown what reality is. Its reverberation remains today as a consolation for the world, the eternal *dharma*, the noble truth.

A long time ago there was a young man who felt very distraught. He was drawn to a man who was preaching on the banks of the river Jordan. That man was giving baptism with water. This young man from Nazareth, called Jesus, also went there. When he was baptized it was as if all the lights of heaven were thrown open to him. The eternal spirit within him revealed to him the highest possible truth. By gaining that light he became the light of the world. It all happened in a fraction of a second, yet even today, in millions of hearts, he brings the message of light and love.

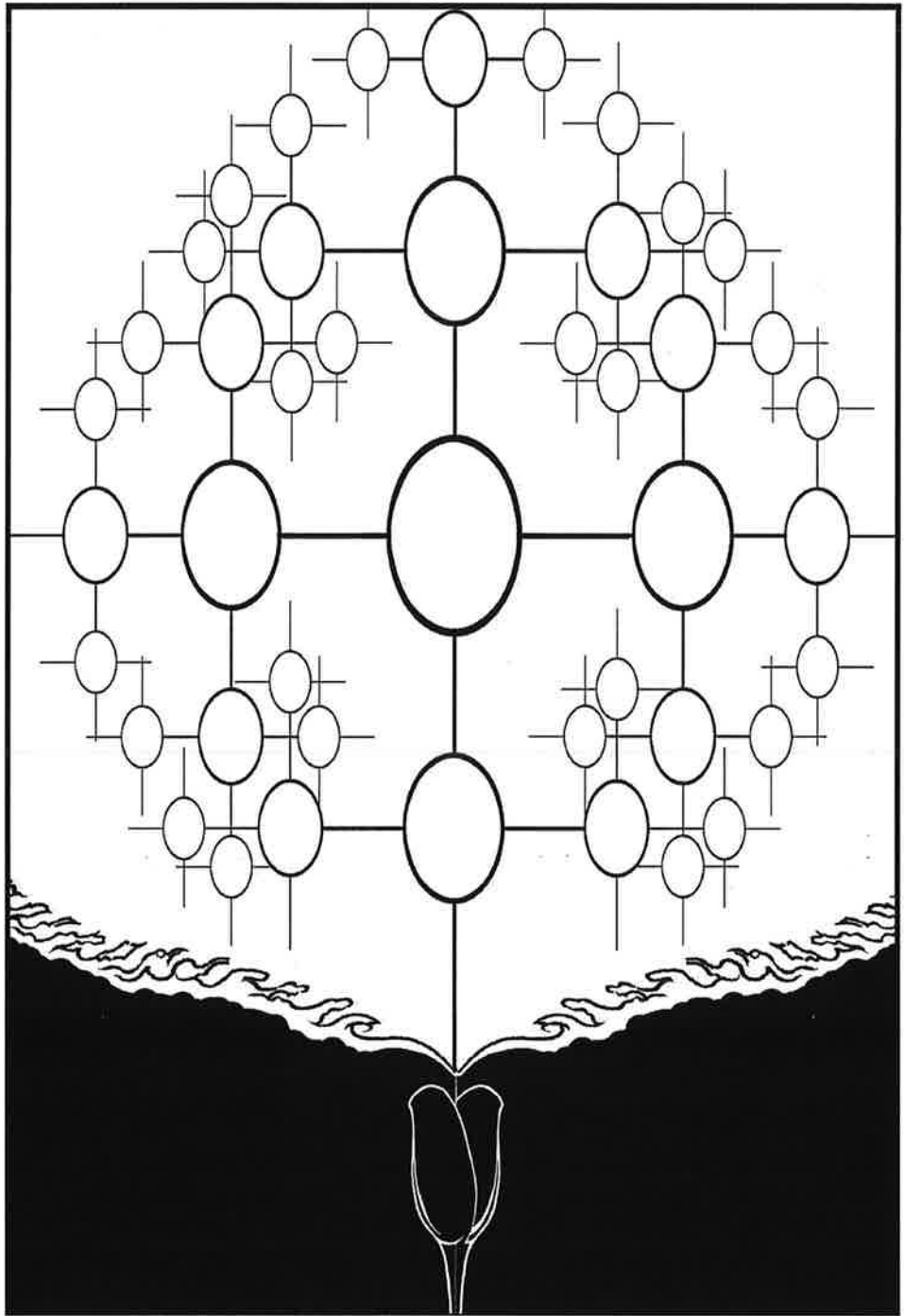
In the scorching desert land of Arabia a man was overwhelmed by the hot sun, so he took refuge in the coolness of a dark cave. He sat there withdrawn in reverie. Sleep overtook him. He was roused from that state by a strange vision. He saw before him a shining face asking him to read. He was about to plead that he was an illiterate who had never known how to read, but like a stroke of magic his eyes were opened to the secrets of the written word. He read books that had never been written, things that had never been recorded on any parchment.

Thus the Holy Quran came to Mohammed. He became the prophet of Truth, Love and Peace. How did it come to him? He did not go to any school or university. Nobody taught him. The whole fount of wisdom was within him all the time. Suddenly it blazed forth and he was filled with a light. From him, like a conflagration, it spread.

On the battlefield of *kuruksetra*, Arjuna stood dismayed, shedding tears in confusion. He did not know what he should do, or what he was doing with his life. He was a man confused about his own *dharma*. Then he had a cosmic vision. The world outside and the world inside all transformed into a series of values. He saw all values as emanating from one supreme source, Krishna, whom he had previously misunderstood to be only his friend and lifelong associate.

Like that, this knowledge is our own lifelong associate. We carry it around with us all day and sleep with it at night, not realizing that the whole cosmos is lying buried in the unknown reality within our own self. There is essentially no difference in how the light comes to any of us, masters or simple folk. When we finally do discover it, it comes all at once in a flash.

To Sri Ramakrishna it came as the love of the Mother, tender, caressing, chastising, illuminating, opening up new secrets, gently showing him the path, teaching him how to behave, how to relate himself to the rest of the world. It resided in his lips as the answer to every question, the solution to every problem. How did it come to him? No one knows. He was a simple, illiterate person, who had never had any training under any guru, but when divine grace opened up in him he



combined in himself the essence of all religions. His vision was that of a great seer, one of both the east and the west.

Narayana Guru describes the dawning of knowledge in this verse as the coming of ten thousand suns all at once. The intensely bright light puts a stop to the great sport of *māyā*, which is beginningless but not endless. It always lives only in half second increments. Half a second is converted into millennia, while the history of a millennium is squashed into a single moment in the form of memory. It is so strange that you can go back in your mind through the memory of generations and generations of people who you do not know, and think of what happened billions of years ago.

Even scientists, who are supposed to be factual and down-to-earth, speak of the Big Bang and things that happened over a period of fifteen billion years with an air of "objectivity." It is as if our mind can unroll itself like a ball of twine and find, somewhere at the other end, the very beginning of the world. Or we can stretch our mind into the future and see what will become of this universe, of a sun which is slowly burning out like a celestial candle and a day when there is no sun, no stars. All these imaginations are possible right now in the span of half a second.

Thus in half a second our imaginary world of eternity resides and is rolling on. This fantasy can be stopped in a fraction of a second if we suddenly wake up to the light, which is what has allowed us the occasion to fantasize in the first place. Those who woke up from their reverie and found this light not only came out of the blues of their own lives, but also became the torch bearers of truth for the whole world.

This is possible for us to achieve. If we can relieve ourselves for just a little while of both the outside world and the inside world, so that we come to know the source, then all the external and internal will be flooded with that one light. That is all that is required. Then we can share the grace which was the Awakening of the Buddha, the descending of the Holy Spirit on Christ, the Revelation of Mohammed, the cosmic vision of Arjuna, the integral vision of Ramakrishna, and the unitive understanding of Narayana Guru. It is our heritage. We are That. We can share it in our daily lives. *AUM*.

VERSE 36

*aṛivinu śaktiyanantamuṅṭitellā-  
maṛutiyaṭām 'sama' 'anya' yennivaṇṇam  
irupirivāy itil anya sāmīyamārnnu-  
ḷluruviḷ amārnnu teḷṇṇūṇārnniṭēṇam.*

The power of knowledge is endless;  
the end of all this can be marked as “sameness” and “the other”;  
thus, in this way, there are two divisions; merging the other with sameness,  
one should remain awake to that clear state of being.

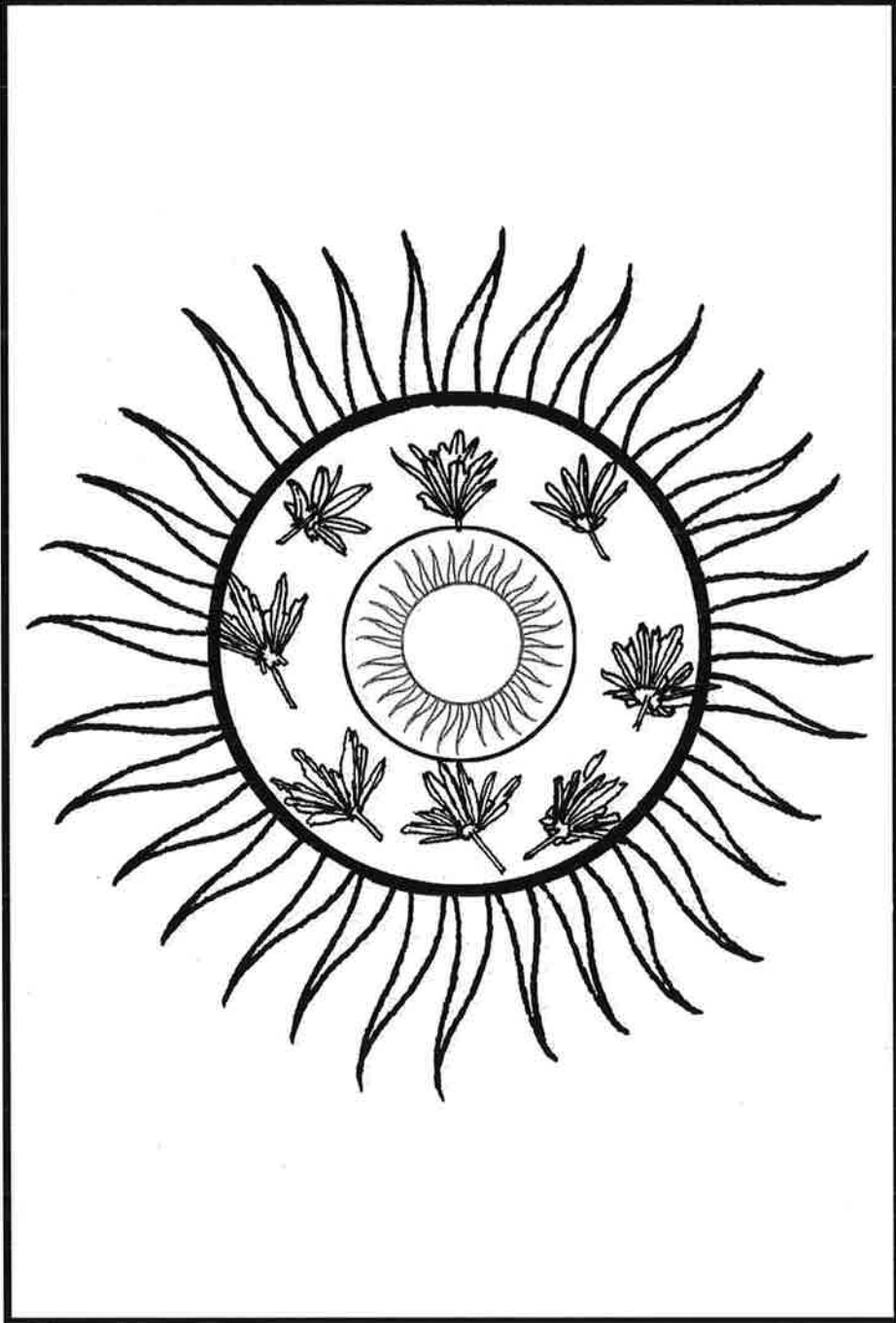
The word ‘knowledge’ in the English language is used in a passive sense, so by translating *aṛivu* into knowledge we minimize its meaning. The dynamic power implied in the word *aṛivu* is not in knowledge. When we hear the word ‘knowledge’ we think of some impression being presented to the mind as a state of awareness, but this is only one small aspect of the word we are translating here.

We have already defined the Self as that knowledge which shines by its own light, and by which alone all our experiences are produced. When we say ‘consciousness’ we also imply the unconscious, which is the substratum of consciousness. In fact, consciousness is only a very fragmentary part of the general unconscious. Similarly, when we speak of *aṛivu*, we also mean that which is prior to a thing that is being known, what the state is in which it is known, in which direction it moves, the reason for such movement, what it can affect, how it can affect, what motivation arises, and what causes that motivation itself. All these implications are to be taken in one sweep to understand the word *aṛivu*.

When we say infinite are the powers of knowledge, our reference is to the totality of existence. The word ‘existence’ brings another limitation. From the very first dawn of our search for knowledge, we are confronted by the limitation of language. As soon as we express a thing, that expression remains limited within the boundary of a concept. For the sake of communication we attempt to express aspects of what can never be conceptualized by defining and presenting them in the form of concepts. The limitation of any one concept makes it necessary to amend it by bringing in more and more concepts.

Henri Bergson describes this as the gold coin which you can never fully match, no matter how much copper change you have. You can go on shelling out pennies all day long, but you still have the feeling that they can never be adequate recompense for the gold coin.

Let us start with the primary notions of knowledge. The very first knowledge, and the consistent knowledge I have, is what I term as ‘I’. There is no other knowledge





more intimate, more clear, more consistent and thorough, than knowing that I am. When I look into the content of what I call 'I', it's an awareness. When I say "I know I am," what is the difference between the first 'I' and the second? The first 'I' seems to be undefined. When you say "I know," the status of the 'I' changes into a knower. You conceptually use the idea of knowing to understand 'I'. The clear awareness that shines exactly where you have presupposed 'I', is now identified with it. In fact you recognize an awareness, and you have now decided to call that awareness 'I'. It took an act of knowing to arrive at that decision. Furthermore, there is an act of awareness as well as a state of awareness. The act of awareness is in knowing the state of awareness. It is somewhat difficult to differentiate between these two.

Actually, the distinction is primarily a verbal one. 'I', the awareness of 'I', the state of being 'I', and the state of functioning as a knower, are all various ways of putting the same thing. In substance, only one thing is happening. There is an awareness of an awareness of an awareness. It can continue ad infinitum.

So much for the first part of the statement, "I know." The second part is "I am." A state of knowing and a state of being are combined into this second 'I', and you are underlining its beingness by saying "I am." It is an existential statement. Just what is it that pervades the whole through all the different states implied in it? There is no real difference between being, knowing and inquiring. When you say "Who am I? I am so and so," you are making a presentation and a judgment. The judgment brings you a comfortable feeling that you have solved the problem.

One's consciousness remains always the same, over and above all differences and distinctions. For convenience we call this transcendence. Within that transcendence we have established existence. Philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger and Jaspers saw these two aspects as inseparable yet different. They felt the need to speak of both. Kant made a general distinction between pure reason and practical reason. Transcendence is a major factor in pure reason, while practical reason has to touch the empirical level at every point.

It is impossible for me to see you, unless I consider myself to be one person and you as another. I must become the subject and you are put in the category of the object. Seeing means I direct my eyesight towards you and I specify your form, your color, and your distinction from others. I also have to separate you from your background. Thus, a number of empirical differentiations are to be made for me to know you. I not only decide that you are, but I also decide that you are not anything other than you. To arrive at this I use a process of elimination: I eliminate the other from you.

Even in a simple item of knowledge there are many differentiations. Still, we don't feel that it is a complicated task to know things; knowing is so simple. It only becomes difficult when I describe it. We look at the world and we immediately know it is there. We have no problem with it. Berkeley says that philosophers kick up dust and then complain of clouded vision. It is only because of the dust they have raised that they cannot see clearly.

Scientists do something similar. They look at a flower and are curious to know how one flower differs from another. They are never satisfied until they give the flower a family name. In order to do all this, they tear the flower open and take it apart. They compare the ovary, pistil and petals with those of other flowers. Only then can they classify and categorize it. And what have they added to knowledge by doing this? Nothing. But their curiosity is not satisfied unless they know all these things. So, we have taken upon ourselves the task of analyzing everything. Does it have any value? It is only useful when we have to apply something at an empirical level.

We started this discussion with the primary notion of 'I': "I know I am." The second thing is "I am experiencing the world." This implies a major division: I am the subject and the world is the object. In the Bhagavad Gita, chapter thirteen, the knower is called *kṣetrajñā*, the knower of the field. This is taken as a major principle for understanding our own Self as the knower of everything and the non-Self as the field of that knowledge.

This kind of usage can also be seen in the language of existential psychologists, who talk about the ego and its boundary. The ego boundary can be expanded or contracted. For instance, I sit here and look at one of you. I say to myself, "he's a very friendly person; I love him." I include him easily within my boundary as someone safe. Then I notice another person and think, "That man is a stranger; I don't know what he thinks of me. I'll bring my boundary inward a little so that he will be just outside the fence." So the ego boundary is not fixed; we are constantly adjusting it. It can be expanded or contracted, inclusive or exclusive.

This ego boundary is not the same as the difference between the Self as a knower and its field of knowledge, however. Everything coming within the ambit of knowledge is part of the field. It is in no way limited by the idea of mine and not mine. My lover and my enemy, what is strange, and even what I don't know are all within it.

Now let's go a step further. Can we imagine the existence of anything without knowing it? If I say I don't know Brezhnev or I have never seen Mao Tse Tung, I am speaking of my ignorance of two people. For me to do this, I have to postulate in my mind what I am ignorant of. So even ignorance is the knowledge of what we call ignorance. "I only know my knowledge" is a very misleading statement. I am again using the word 'knowledge' in a passive way. What is the 'I' but knowledge? It is knowledge knowing knowledge; it is knowledge that says "I do not know."

When we are seeking knowledge and finding it, who is it who seeks it, and just where does the seeker get knowledge from? These are really mysterious things. You presume that you do not know when you seek, and yet you seek in a certain direction. How do you decide this is the direction you have to move? Who motivates you, moves you? What intuition comes to you to say that there is a knowledge to be sought and found? Look at the millions of inventions we have made to make life so very comfortable. Look at all the technical devices, the artifacts. All these have sprung up from nowhere. They are all the creations of knowledge.

Knowledge can be just passive consciousness, a desire, a dynamic that makes you restless until you get up and seek and find and realize. Knowledge is a zest, a compulsion, a perseverance. It is the joy of recognition. It is fulfillment, accomplishment, effort. The whole of life and everything happening in it is nothing but that knowledge.

Knowledge is dynamic. Not one moment passes without the movement and transformation of it. And what transforms? There must be a substance that transforms. This substance cannot come from a fresh supply somewhere, since it already represents totality. A fresh supply would imply that it originated from somewhere and that it had been originated by something and that it gets expended somewhere else. It is not like that.

Physicists decided to say there is a conservation and a transformation of matter. The total mass is the same, yet within it many changes are taking place. 'A' changes into 'B', 'B' changes into 'C', and 'C' changes back into 'A' again, but on the whole it is the same. Indian philosophers consider the total substance the same as the conservation of matter. Within the total substance are countless possibilities for transformation.

We have to live both these aspects. I have to get up from my bed, look in the book and find the verse we will meditate on today. Then I read it, examining each letter separately, combining those letters into words and the words into sentences. I look into the logical structure of the sentence and get the meaning of it. All these are empirical activities, and I cannot neglect any of them in preparing for the class. I come and sit here. I recognize all of you and understand the situation of why I am here, why you are here, and what is expected of me. All these are again simple empirical matters. Irrespective of the great wisdom to which it may belong, there is action going on. I have to articulate meaningful things, and you have to listen and make meaning out of them by pondering over them. So we are all engaged in activities all the time. All these activities are happening with one consciousness.

We are always moving, shifting and changing our attention from the particular to the universal and from the universal back to the particular. The universal aspect is here called *sama*, sameness, and the particular aspect is called *anya*, the other. As you can see, *sama* is etymologically related to 'same' and *anya* to 'another'.

There is a likelihood of our making the mistake of getting caught in the particular. When this happens we stand always divided, treating 'me' as *sama* and 'you' as *anya*, and finding no way to come together in a common interest. The other possibility is to clasp our hands and sit together in silence, sharing the feelings of wonder. Then we forget that there are many. We also forget this 'I'. Then there comes a great peace, a great serenity, a joy that is not a form of excitement. In that joy everything merges. At least for some time there is no other. We need this, very deeply.

When we read the Bible, we always see Jesus walking away from the multitude. He goes to the mountain or he walks alone on the shores of Galilee. There he is

one with the sea, the sky, the clouds, all of nature. It is as if he does not exist. We can imagine that serene moonlit night, gentle waves with silver crests, musical rumblings of the ocean, and a lonely man standing there, looking into the vacant sky and feeling oneness with all. Even that very thought brings so much peace. Then we see him again with the multitude. There is a need for feeding people who are hungry. There is a need to heal people who are sick. There is a blind man who wants to see, a leper who wants to be cured, an unclean woman who wants to become clean and whole again. There are necessities and political controversies. There are people spitting on the face, reproaching; there is a trial, a heavy cross to be borne, the stark reality of a nail being struck, blood coming.

All this in the life of one person! Then it is as if it was all a dream. Like the passing of a nightmare or a sweet dream, it is all done with. It is all just phenomenality, yet within that phenomenality there is a numenon, a continuous breathing pulsation of reality. The unreal shadows are created by the real light. If you are contemplative, there comes an attitude of transcendence even in the thick of life.

Perhaps someone is getting into a heated argument with you, trying to start a fight. It can be any activity really, an encounter or a joyous relationship also. The empirical reality of the situation, which you term necessity, is very clear to you. You willingly offer yourself to play the game. In any case, a person of little wisdom forgets himself when he is fighting or relating positively. But for someone who is established in contemplative discipline there is an overriding resonance of an enveloping knowledge, which assures him of the general condition that is both the ground and the total environment of the specific game going on. Because of this, inwardly there is detachment and outwardly there is conformity to the demands of the situation. Yet there is no hypocrisy involved. You are not pretentious in your game and at the same time you are not affected by it in the way of a person who is fully infatuated with a situation.

When *sama* and *anya*, sameness and the other, interrelate in this harmonious way, it brings the quality of the highest kind of inner peace and calm to our life. When life is so protected with an integrated wisdom, there is no dissipation of your energy. It is all conserved. It is hard to even comprehend this state unless you are already established in it. But I assure you it can be attained. You can do this. You can be what you are, going on with all your games of life, and yet be detached from it. Deep within you is that aloneness which is not of the individual. It is the aloneness of the universal, the aloneness of God, the aloneness of substance, the aloneness of the real. Nothing happens to it. By retaining that aloneness, you can be the many.

When you touch, there is all the gentleness and care of the touch, but you are also not touching, because you know the beingness in which the touch and the touched are the same. The necessity to touch comes to assure you that you are already One. When you kiss, when you embrace, the urge comes because of a seeming forgetfulness saying, "Oh, what made us two?" We are not two, we are the same. It is as if your true beingness is broken into bits and pieces by the

empirical nature of your sensory motor functions and changing transactional situations. Again and again beingness has to assert itself. It operates as a great love, a great caring, a great sharing, a feeling of wonder, a going back into serenity and reestablishing yourself in peace.

A garland is made up of a number of flowers and thread. We can appreciate and enjoy each flower separately. As we examine the color, smell, texture and softness of each one we forget about the garland. If we treat it as a whole garland, the flowers blend together and lose their individual identities. It is also possible to think of it as both flowers and a garland: this is the integrated vision.

Narayana Guru is not asking us to run away from the particular to the universal, but to transcend the duality and live and accept both these games together. Then we will be living in our beingness and also allowing every little aspect of becoming to come to pass. In an earlier, very beautiful verse, the Guru said that knowledge, in order to see what it could be, becomes all this. This is what we are doing all the time. We don't relish eating the same food every day. The elements may be all the same: flour, sugar, rice, vegetables, but we make a new composition and serve it in a new way each time. So a new aspect of knowledge is revealed by the specific expression as it unfolds. It is placed as part of the universal, and the universal lives on through the particular we enjoy.

Although some have interpreted it this way, we are not advocating the negation of life and the running away from it. We do not say any of the luxuries of life are stumbling blocks to realization. Nothing is to be thrown away. Rather, everything is to be seen with a new attitude. That new attitude is the old attitude that you know everything is One. It is a very joyous way of accepting life and a wonderful way of living it richly and beautifully.

# TRUE EDUCATION: THE DREAM IS A REALITY

BY

PETER OPPENHEIMER

The woefully narrow concept of education which has prevailed in the European model of schooling since the so-called Enlightenment primarily focuses on the power to memorize and regurgitate information bits. That's what it cultivates, tests for and rewards. And, at its best then, that's what it can be said to produce.

Of course, the hidden curriculum is that of obedience to authority and cultivating the lifelong belief that there are others ("experts") who know what's best for you and can tell you what you need to be thinking about, how you should think about it, how you should behave and what you should do. The end product of such kind of schooling would, not to put too fine a point on it, be automatons. Though fortunately this endeavor cannot be said to be a complete success, still it's safe to say that all who pass through its rigors are wounded or stunted in some ways.

How so?

No less than a shrub or a tree, human life is capable of flowering and bearing fruit. Certainly academic competence and the ability to follow instructions have some value, but where do they fit in when a satisfying and well-lived life are considered as a whole?

The educational psychologist Howard Gardner speaks of multiple intelligences and personally identifies nine. There could be more, and some can be bracketed together, but it's very illuminating to contemplate the degree each of these intelligences contributes to your own thriving through life's ups and downs:

- Linguistic
- Logical/Mathematical
- Spatial
- Bodily/Kinesthetic
- Musical
- Interpersonal
- Naturalistic
- Intrapersonal (personal or whatever is "within the person")
- Existential

To these I would add a tenth: that of transpersonal or spiritual intelligence.

Each one of these intelligences can be cultivated and appreciated through training and practice. Each one has critical elements which contribute to the well-being of the individual as well as to that individual's harmonious and productive integration within larger social units of family, community and, ultimately, all beings. If we think about our lives in this way, memorization and obedience (or the ability to follow instructions) are seen to fall heartbreakingly short as means and ends in the arena of human development.

Look again at Gardner's list of multiple intelligences. What would an educational program look like that addressed and nurtured a full range of these human aptitudes and capabilities? Strange as it seems, I've seen just such an educational program. It's a school called Kanavu, which in the Malayalam language of South India means Dream.

I was first introduced to Kanavu through a documentary shown at an international film festival in Kerala. In it I saw a thriving, playful and obviously talented group of children of the most oppressed, depressed and neglected underclass of tribals, who predated even the arrival of the ancient Dravidian culture to southern India. Less than a century ago these tribal peoples were still slaves, and even today they tend to have the worst jobs and the highest levels of unemployment and associated alcoholism. Yet here in the documentary were their children singing and dancing and shining with joy. After seeing that film, I felt compelled to visit Kanavu and see for myself. That was in 2003, and I've been returning once or twice a year ever since.

What I found initially was a residential community of about forty children aged 4 to 18, with a handful of adults for whom teaching classes was just a small part of their contribution. Definitely, though, I was amazed by the extent to which the children were the engine, and in many ways the engineers, of the shape of their environment and their days. All except the very youngest were active at different periods throughout the day in the fundamental processes of food preparation, cleaning and other chores. This itself was very much a part of the curriculum, a part related to what I came to think of as survival skills, along with the students planting, nurturing and harvesting their own rice and vegetables.

One morning during my first visit, all but the youngest and the few older ones who stayed behind to care for the youngest and prepare lunch, went off into the surrounding bamboo forest to identify, harvest, strip and assemble bamboo poles into a livable hut, complete with a palm frond thatch roof, which had been woven previously. Farming, construction, cooking, hygiene—not a bad survival curriculum.

That was just the beginning. Next I learned that on school days all would get up in the morning and practice some form of physical discipline, either yoga, martial arts or dancing. Over time each of these practices was taught, and then the children would continue on with one of their own choosing, some children becoming quite accomplished in one or the other.







A third arena of learning at Kanavu has to do with personal and collective artistic expression. Many arts have been taught there. At one point the school helped support itself through the making of greeting cards, and even now their primary source of revenue is from their hosted and traveling performances of traditional and tribally inspired modern songs and dances. The types of artistic expressions engendered at Kanavu change over time and range from story-telling and drawing to the creation and production of a fascinating dramatic film (screened at various festivals) depicting the life of a teenage tribal girl in the midst of her first menstruation and the tribal rituals and rites of passage around that event.

A fourth important facet of the educational program at Kanavu is interpersonal relations and community building. There are daily group check-ins during which both the business of their living together as a community as well as the crucially important element of how each person is feeling about their own participation and relationships with each other are discussed. In addition to agreeing about what has to be done and who's going to do it (including the next day's class schedule), they have instituted a process called report, during which each child talks about their day, what went well and what didn't, as well as what they want to do and accomplish in the near future. Such discussions do require skillful facilitation, and if I was fluent in Malayalam, I know I could have picked up a lot of pointers from K.J. Baby and his wife Shirley, who founded Kanavu and for the first ten to twelve years of its existence were its directors.

Maybe most amazing of all was that on top of everything described above, the children at Kanavu still learn academics. Math, reading, science, history, even English are all taught there, with the older ones teaching small groups of the younger ones what they had learned so far. In spite of academics being relegated to perhaps fifth priority (after survival skills, physical discipline, creative self-expression, and community building), most of the children have become very proficient in these areas. Several of the students with whom I could not communicate when they were in their teens are now dazzling me with the ability to converse deeply and playfully in English.

It is said that you can know a tree by its fruit. And the sweetest fruit of Kanavu at present is this batch of twenty-somethings, who have come through a dozen years of education at Kanavu. Some things they, individually and communally, have already done as young adults: co-directed a film on the challenges of being deaf and dumb as part of a Women in Cinema workshop in Kerala's capital; worked at an ayurvedic health clinic; done research into indigenous medicines and medical practices; become proficient at motorcycle mechanics; apprenticed in pottery making and ceramic sculpture (with the idea of perhaps initiating a pottery unit at Kanavu); mastered the tabla (Indian drum); and pursued further studies in teaching, computer science, dance and martial arts. It's been a thrill for me to get to know these kids and see over time how their Kanavu school experience has helped to shape and guide them along

their own chosen paths, and how this experience has facilitated the connections out in the world for each to follow his or her own dreams.

Being a lifelong educator and student myself and having studied widely on the way to a doctorate in education, I have long had my eye out for a model that seems to address both the deepest needs of the individual and the increasingly urgent needs of society at large. In Kanavu I have seen the hints, seeds and outlines of just such a very promising model. In fact, about three years into my five year association with Kanavu, I approached K.J. Baby and Shirley for their blessing on a project to write a book about Kanavu which would have at its center both narrative and photographic portraits of the recent batch of Kanavu graduates, highlighting their current activities and reflecting back on their years at Kanavu.

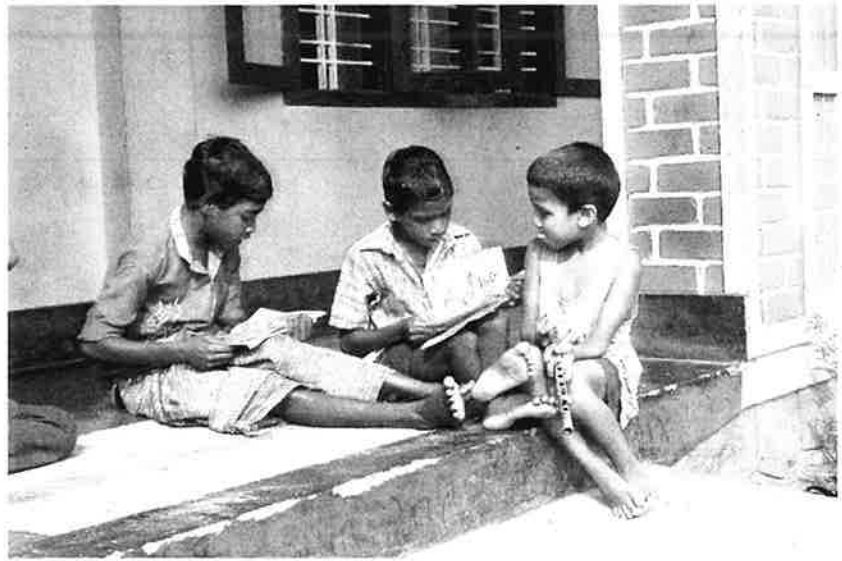
One of Baby and Shirley's most notable traits is how positive, supportive and encouraging they always tend to be. I had noticed on previous occasions whenever I had broached the subject of a possible book, they would either fall silent or change the subject. So this time I came right out and asked why the cool response to my project idea. In a kind and gentle way, they dissuaded me from proceeding. They explained that it was a very delicate and uncertain period in Kanavu's history. For years the two of them had been creating the program and calling the shots. Their plan now was to step into the background and hand over the direction, leadership and management of Kanavu to this older group of recent graduates, and there was no telling what Kanavu would become. Will they keep the school going? Will they continue to cultivate the land? Will they continue to perform? Or might they decide to take things in entirely new directions. Crystallizing Kanavu (the Dream) into a book might exert a subtle pressure on the group to keep doing something in a way they might not otherwise choose. Then, too, people reading such a book might come to Kanavu with certain expectations and be frustrated to find something very different at that time. Therefore, they said, better to hold off on such a project.

That conversation was two years ago. Baby and Shirley have since created a legal Trust to own and manage the property and program. The Trust initially consisted of seven of those senior students, who have since increased the number of trustees to twelve. Baby and Shirley are not even on the board of trustees, and they have withdrawn their physical presence at the school dramatically, sometimes being away for months at a time. During the past couple of years I have visited three times in which I was one of only two or three adults of thirty years or older staying there, but still the program was going on. Children (albeit fewer) are still being cared for, taught and amused. Guests are being fed and put up. Performances are still being scheduled. Nightly singing and dancing are still serving to bring the community together and keep spirits high. Teachers-in-training from certified degree programs are coming by the busload to learn about real education from this bunch of twenty-year-olds who never attended a day of "real" school in their lives. The cheerfulness with which every

chore is performed and each interaction is attended to is at once a testament to the program and a part of the curriculum itself.

It's still unknown how things will change and where it might lead, but the board may have struck on a method to prevent what seemed to me to be the most likely cause of the school's demise. That is, with such a curious, creative and motivated group of young adults, what's to prevent their lives from splintering into each one's own direction, leading away from the community's physical center, the land and the buildings? As of now, they've agreed that half of the group will devote two years to continuing to manage the program and furthering their collective dream, while the other half are pursuing their own personal interests and goals. After two years they will switch roles and the others will be free to travel, study or engage as they choose. Though it cannot be predicted where this will lead, the fruits growing from the seeds of sweet fruits cannot but be sweet themselves.

I offer up this article, not to pressure my friends at Kanavu to shackle themselves to any particular life choice, nor to send a rush of people to ascend on them with preconceived expectations. Rather, this is being written, first and foremost, out of gratitude for having been exposed to and embraced by a community which embodies the potential that schools have to truly educate, inspire, nurture and set children free in all their complexity and richness. And secondly, I write this in the hope that it can stimulate some thought, conversation and action intended to bring schooling out of its present dark ages and into a brighter, more hopeful, humane and wholesome future.







# ADVAITA DĪPIKĀ

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY

GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

Verse 17

Doubt coming from ignorance results in confoundedness.  
It arises in those who are still seekers of Self-Reality.  
It never occurs in those who are well stabilized in enlightenment.  
The doubt as to the apparent snake in a rope is because of confusion;  
On seeing the rope, it has no chance to arise at all.

Humans, in the wisdom context, can be classified into three groups: the ignorant, *ajñānin*, the seekers, *jijñāsu*, and the enlightened, *jñānin*. The simply ignorant person has no desire at all to know what is real in him, what is real in the world, and therefore the doubt as to whether this or that is real does not arise in him at all. Doubts arise only in the minds of those who have already entered the path of searching for Reality. Such seekers are called *jijñāsu*. The enlightened ones or *jñānin*, of course, have no doubt at all.

The non-dual perception of Reality, *advaita*, is unraveled in the present work as the solution to a specific issue: why do we continue to perceive the world with our senses even after becoming fully convinced that the world is unreal? The world, we saw in the last verse, is none other than *ātmā* become unfolded, induced by no I-sense. Then what is it that we perceive with our senses? Is it the world or is it *ātmā* become manifest? It is the latter which is true, yet we are completely unaware of it being so. This state is what is known as *ajñāna*, or ignorance. The Self-Reality, *ātmā-tattva*, remains Self-Reality by assuming the form of the world only, with all of us as the perceivers included. Therefore the enlightened, *dr̥ḍha-bodha*, perceives *ātmā*'s existence alone in all that appears as the manifest world, its perceiver and the act of perceiving.

Only in the one who is yet to realize the Self does there arise the perplexing question: Why do I continue to perceive the world after becoming convinced that it is unreal? Nevertheless he is a seeker, for he yearns to clarify his doubts.



*Ajñāna*, ignorance, is the state of not knowing the Real as the Real, of not knowing *ātmā* as the Real. Seeing *ātmā* and misjudging it as the world happens because of the *ajñāna* in the seeker. A *jñānin*, on the other hand, sees *ātmā* as *ātmā*, though appearing as the world, and hence the question raised here is of no relevance for him. the ultimate solution to the problem is thus not looking for a reasoned answer but it is attaining *jñāna* or Self-Realization. The Guru makes use of the rope and snake analogy to bring this telling point into high relief. Only those who are not certain that what lies in front of them is simply a piece of rope have the doubt whether it is rope or snake. No logical reasoning helps them to come to a decision. Seeing the rope and getting rid of confusion is the only solution. The same is true in the present case as well. What I see always everywhere is *ātmā* alone. This world is the form in which *ātmā* manifests itself. Once this understanding is realized, one becomes free of doubt.

The Guru suggests a sort of contemplative practice in the next verse in order to help the seeker rid himself of the confused state in which he finds himself.



Verse 18

The contemplative function of the mind,  
Advancing before every object of perception,  
Removes the veiling curtain in front;  
And then is seen the one Consciousness.  
Eyes do not see the illuminating principle  
that enables them to see;  
So too Consciousness does not see itself.

Our final goal, we saw in the last verse, is becoming enlightened, which means becoming fully convinced that one causal substance alone unfolds itself as everything in all the worlds and perceiving that substance alone in all that is apparent. That one causal substance is none other than pure, unconditioned consciousness, called *cit* in Sanskrit. Even the one who understands all these theoretically continues to perceive the unreal world as existing as multiple items, not as the one real consciousness. This seems to be a conundrum in the mind not of the enlightened one, but in the seeker who still is ignorant. Becoming enlightened saves him from this conundrum as well. The contemplative practice that helps the seeker already aware of the unreality of the world to attain this goal is what this present verse concentrates on.

We, on seeing a pile of gold ornaments, naturally may like to classify them as, “This is a chain, this is a bangle, this is a ring.” We are forgetful of the fact that all of them are but gold and thus one in essence. Seeing a chain as a chain, not as gold, happens because the form of the chain becomes a sort of veil put over the gold substance. And the potential to assume this self-veiling form is inherent in gold.

Likewise, it is the world-form that puts a veil over *ātmā*, keeping the latter hidden, unnoticed, and creating the impression that the former does exist. In order to see the gold essence one has to mentally eliminate the visible chain form. Similarly, the world form that obstructs a direct vision of *ātmā* has to be eliminated mentally in order to intuitively perceive it. Only by removing the front curtain is the drama revealed, and likewise the removal of the world curtain enables the seeker to perceive what is really within: *ātmā* playing the world drama.

The potential to assume the form of ornaments is inherent in gold; so too has *ātmā* inherent in it the boundless potential to unfold itself, beginningless and endless, as the world. This mysterious potential is known as *māyā*, and devoid of it *ātmā* it never exists either. Owing to this *māyā*, *ātmā* assumes the functional mode of knowing, necessitating the presence of objects to be known, called *viśaya*. *Ātmā* assumes the form of *viśaya* as well, again owing to *māyā*. The appearance

of the knower along with his act of knowing and of the object are like the front curtains of the theater stage. Remove them and what then is revealed is the pure and unconditioned consciousness, or *ātmā*. It is neither the knower's knowing nor the object known. It is the one substance that fills the being of both. That substance alone has real existence. I am That. Everything is That. One who realizes thus is the enlightened.

Does the enlightened one know clearly and distinctly what consciousness or *ātmā* is? No, for It never is an object of knowledge. As the knowing function goes on in consciousness, the consciousness which is its source or cause remains unknown to that function. And it is in this sense that Vedanta holds that ultimate Reality is unknowable. A familiar example that can shed light on this point is the case of our visual sense, of our eyes. Eyes because of their illuminating power, see other objects, but the very same illuminating power remains always invisible to the eyes themselves. Nevertheless, consciousness or *ātmā* remaining ultimately unknown is not a hindrance to one experiencing oneself as That in essence and existing as That.

No logical reasoning, no critical acumen, helps one transcend the above-mentioned veil. Opening one's own inner eye, the intuitive eye of wisdom, is what is necessary. That is what is underscored in the next verse.



# IMMIGRATION AND IMAGINATION

BY

EMILY TEITSWORTH

Even now, I can stare at a photograph of migrant workers bent over rows of cabbage, or see a picture of gaunt Guatemalan children begging for food, and not feel anything. After several years of working with migrant workers in Massachusetts, and six months living and working in migrant-sending communities in Guatemala and Mexico, my imagination routinely fails me. But when I close my eyes and lean my head back against the wall, the experience of the people whom I've met and who have taught me about their lives washes over me. I am again standing among coffee trees heavy with fruit, listening to a short, sturdy woman tell me about the torment she felt when she told her sixteen year old son that if he didn't go to work in El Norte--the USA--his brothers and sisters would not be able to eat.

Perhaps, ironically, those of us who consider ourselves liberal Americans are uniquely inured to the suffering of others. We are bombarded by news stories about famine in the horn of Africa, graphic appeals from non-profits warning about global climate change, and full color brochures illustrating the plight of Nicaraguan farming families under NAFTA. And yet, amidst all of this, there is no one challenging us to take the place of the sufferer, to experience the loneliness of the illegal immigrant or the nausea and exhaustion plaguing the malnourished child.

Towards the beginning of my time living in Guatemala, where I was working for a micro-finance non-profit, I spent several days in a remote mountain village called San Juan Bullaj. Here the majority of families live off a combination of income from coffee farming and money sent home by relatives working in the U.S. The farmers have formed a cooperative to sell organic coffee at higher prices on the international market, but most still live in tiny wooden shacks, without access to improved water and sanitation, and in many cases without electricity. Every family I met had sent at least one person to work in construction or industrial agriculture in the United States. They promise coyotes, or human traffickers, up to \$8,000 to smuggle them across Mexico's northern border, where they work first to pay off their debt, and then to send money home to help their families survive. In spite of this effort, San Juan Bullaj is a dying community. Almost no young men remain to pick coffee during the harvest, the closest hospital is over four hours away, and even the houses seem to sag downhill towards the faraway ocean.

It was a young indigenous coffee farmer who awakened me to that fundamental blindness in so many of us: the inability to truly imagine ourselves in the place of the other. On the day I left San Juan Bullaj, Vincente rented me his mule to make the trip back to the main road easier, and walked beside me on foot. Although we didn't speak the same native language, his being one of the Mayan dialects, we kept up a steady conversation as we went, pausing only to adjust the mule's saddle or to try and remember a word in Spanish. Vincente recounted what it was like growing up on a small coffee farm, and how when his father died a few years ago, his mother gave up farming and moved away to a larger town. Both of his older sisters work in the U.S., one in Florida and one in Kentucky, and he hasn't seen either of them in five years. He grows coffee alone on a few hectares of steep land, and makes about three dollars a day.

I told Vincente about living in the U.S., about what the weather was like in the places where his sisters were living, about my own family. He had a lot of questions, too, mostly about why it was so difficult to get a visa to come to the United States, and why I didn't have to pay to come to Guatemala. Eventually the talk turned back to coffee, and I told him some of his coffee probably ends up in my hometown. "Well," he said, "I don't know where my coffee goes." There was a long pause, broken only by the heaving breath of the mule. "What do they use the coffee for in the U.S. anyway?"

It took me a minute to realize that he really had no idea what happened to his coffee once it was sold for a pittance. The few years of school he must have attended taught him almost nothing about life outside of San Juan Bullaj, and no one bothered to tell him anything about the international system of trade and commerce and labor in which he participated without a choice. I explained to him that in the United States, we drink coffee just like in Guatemala, only there a single latte costs as much as he makes in one day. "Oh, I didn't realize," he whispered, and we climbed the rest of the way up to the road in silence.

Even after several years of working with coffee farmers and migrant workers, it had never crossed my mind that the farmers themselves might not have an understanding of what happened to their crop once it left their land. Just a simple conversation with someone who lived a life that was in many ways the opposite of mine helped me to more fully imagine the complexities of his existence and, I hope, allowed me to be a more effective practitioner of sustainable development while in Guatemala.

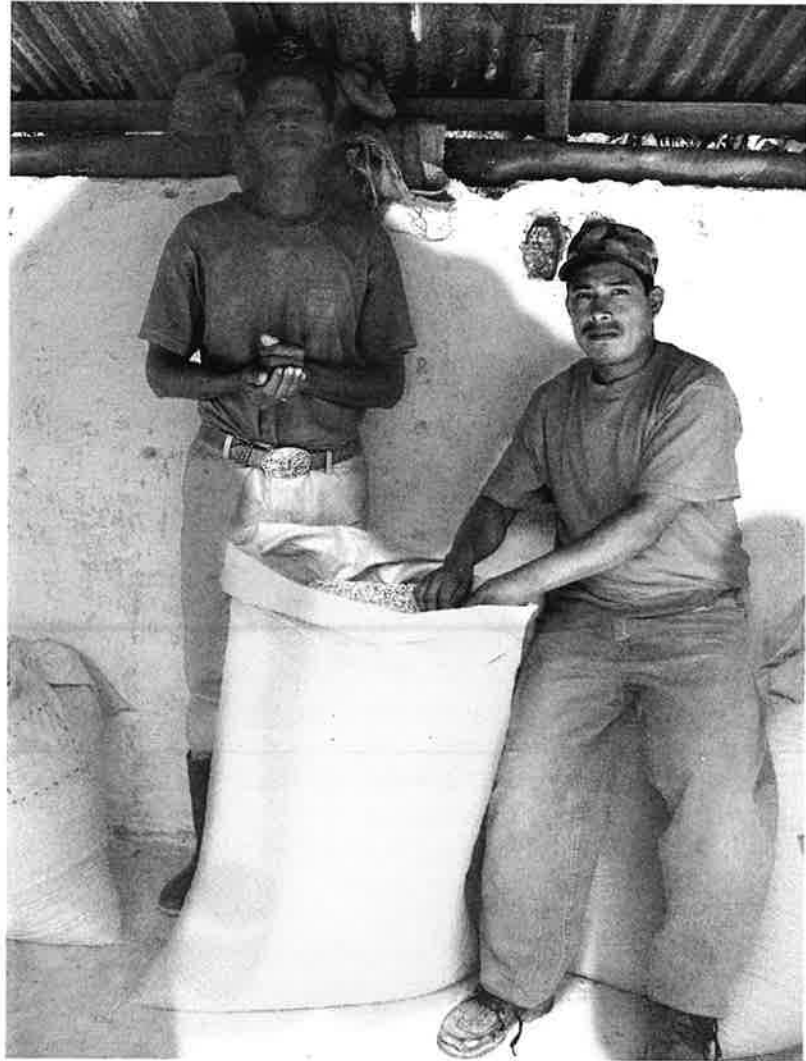
International development initiatives in places like rural Guatemala have repeatedly failed, often because the people in charge of these projects know little about where they are working and even less about the inner life of the people whom they hope to help. Even though Participatory Rural Appraisal, women's empowerment training, and a host of other technical attempts at equality have been implemented over the last thirty years, we are no closer to solving our global social and environmental crises. After puzzling over this both while I was in

Guatemala, and now that I am back in the U.S., I can come to no other conclusion than that all of these attempts fail because we do not make the effort to know others as we know ourselves.

I believe that our entire debate around immigration in the United States has been cruel, divisive, and ineffective for much the same reason. On one hand, millions of people think that Mexicans and Central Americans are crossing illegally into the U.S. because they are lazy, because they want to take advantage of our social services, and because they are born criminals. They are against clemency of any kind and insist that the rule of law must be respected, no matter what. From my own experiences with people like this, I know that very few of them have taken the opportunity to even imagine what life is like on the other side of the border, to experience the desperation that is the real force driving migration.

On the other hand, I think of Vincente and remember that it is crucial to imagine myself in the place of the other, whether it be an impoverished farmer in Guatemala, or an anti-immigration truck driver in Colorado who worries about losing his job and providing for his family. And I remind myself that the simple photograph in my hand can teach me that true compassion for others springs first from the imagination.





# GURU'S ABODE

BY

SWAMI TYAGI

Guru's abode  
As earth and sky,  
Unlimited vastness,  
Yet it is the living substance.  
Even though one does not see you  
When looking at you,  
You are the eye to see everything  
And what has been seen as well.  
I am not saying this  
By holding all this together.  
It is You who are the substance for all,  
As water in the waves.  
Not knowing you so far  
Even when you are the knowledge,  
In a steady state as the knowledge of the knowledge.  
Anybody is pointing to the sea  
While somebody asks for drinking water;  
If thought so, You become a mouthful of water.  
You are as vast as the earth.  
Likewise, as small as a dust particle.  
As fragrance in the flower,  
You are in everything, in all as their qualities,  
And now You are the sound  
In the tongue saying this.  
The sound then fills the sky beyond.  
Your form is now clear as it was before,  
Your loving care fills the heart.



# SELF LAMP

BY

SWAMI TYAGI

Can you have an eye to see  
The zero which is the middle of the syllable,  
That is the core of wisdom?  
That content is shining  
As the universal lamp,  
Blossoming in the Self as  
Sun-Lotus.  
Who could see this  
As lamp by the lamp?  
It shines in the Self  
As the Self Lamp!

# A STORY FROM A THAT ALONE STUDY GROUP

BY

WENDY OAK

The following response and story are part of my study of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* with one of the online study groups led by Nancy Yeilding.

I read the commentary on verse 76 every morning and liked the thought of ideas, “jostling for a place in my mind” and noticed how they come and are then elbowed out and how some return for another try, how some hang on like leeches and others slip away out of reach. I also liked the truth that a word isn’t the reality. The word fire doesn’t burn, but can alert us to how it is hot. How much we get ensnared in word concepts, which as Guru says can bring enchanting delight and precious insights, as well as the darkest negativity and wrong thinking.

After considering the Buddhist perspective and the Vedantic one and all their affects, it was a welcome relief when Guru said, “My advice is to let it be.” This is always so affirming, that wherever we are in life it is all alright. I loved the idea of a Maya Robe. Mine is a fairy one, all gossamer and pale shades. Then I change it into an Oak tree one and it becomes a rich green velvet.

I know our Maya Robes are not all so nice. They may seem nice on the surface but underneath they are tricky. There is so much to consider in this verse. And how beautifully the Maya Words adorn the robe and create false images. I thought of how many of these false images I had created and how easy it is to be seduced by them. I adore words so I can really resonate with all this, as well as how words of higher values bring such beauty and joy into our lives.

I like the comfort of knowing that Maya is not total untruth. “It is the real and the unreal put together. With the real aspect it catches you. With the unreal aspect it betrays you.” We do not need to get all tangled up in other lives and dress up in our Maya Robe, when we find “the real ground and the higher values of love, justice, compassion and truth in their most pristine and pure form.” I thought of Marshall Rosenberg and his organization Non-Violent Communication, which is based on all these values.

I could also imagine Maya Monsters. With slimy scales and rancid breath, leaving trails of destruction in their wake. I thought about when I had been a Maya Monster being fed by falsehoods in my wayside pool.

And so began my inner Two Exercises Journey:

I walked into a dark area of the beach. It felt unfriendly. There was an overhanging cliff with a deep cave. I swam into it and found myself in a huge cavern. I explored the cavern carefully. There were many smaller caverns, some were dusty from lack of use and others seemed brighter. As I moved from one cavern into the next, I noticed that each one was a part of myself.

The first one was piled up with refuse, old unneeded thoughts and actions which had impinged on other people's lives. Words I need never have spoken, said in anger and self-justification. There were shelves of books full of all the thoughts and words I had ever spoken. I opened a few of them and as I felt compassion for myself; they crumbled to dust at my feet. As I opened my Higher and Kinder Thoughts books a shower of precious stones fell at my feet. I gathered them up with wonder.

I stumbled through into my personality cavern. It had walls of distorting mirrors like at a fun fair. I passed in front of them all in recognition. All the different personalities I have thought it necessary to project into the world. I tried on several Maya Robes too. Some were heavy and dragging. Some were itchy and others were slippery and still others were clinging. I threw them into a pool of water and they dissolved. My Maya Robes became my uncertainties, lack of knowledge, vulnerability, fear, trying to fit in, becoming social personalities. Maya Robes for show, to impress, to be more than I was so that I belonged. I walked down a labyrinth of lost-ness, a little girl crying in the dark. Echoes of the past clamoring in the narrow rocky spaces. I so wanted to be found. I had put on these personalities for protection. As I knew this, I came out of this cavern and there lay a silver dish with an emerald for me to take.

My emotional cavern was the worst and had the Maya Monster in it. I wanted to run back out but knew the way was only forward. This was my Hero's journey. The monster lurched towards me and I nearly fainted (only I never faint). It leered at me and spoke silky words of deceit. It took me back into all my worst emotional excesses and made me cringe with remorse. It shouted at me and the whole cavern echoed with all the unkind words I had ever spoken. I wanted to cover my ears but had to listen. I felt so unclean and horrible. Yet I knew that I had to accept the monster, and after what seemed a nightmare I was able to thank it for showing me my debris. It came forward with kind eyes and took my hand. It was warm and firm. As I felt the good bits of my emotional motivations, it shed a tear which fell into my hand. Then it disappeared. I looked down. My hand held a large pearl, shining and translucent. The pearl I always hoped to find.

So it was that I explored all my caverns. Each one giving me a precious stone of understanding and forgiveness.

Eventually I felt a draught of cool air and as I walked towards it, I felt lighter and stronger. There was an opening out to a sparkling waterfall falling into a deep

pool. I was drawn into its depths. There was silence like a breathing emptiness. I was held by a great love and acceptance. I can't explain it. There was nothing, yet everything was fulfilled. I just knew I had at last truly been found.

I know I can find my way back to my home now, when I get lost, and that someday I need never leave it ever. I will become the real ground. One. And it will not need to be said. For who will say it?

This was a profound experience and I am grateful for being guided along this inner path with safety and clarity.

I thought back to the Jon and Vangelis song, which has long played in my heart and mind: Somehow I'll Find My Way Home (from Friends of Cairo).

You asked me where to begin.  
Am I so lost in my sin?  
You asked me where did I fall  
I'll say I can't tell you when.  
But if my spirit is lost  
How will I find what is near?  
Don't question I'm not alone.  
Somehow I'll find my way home.  
My sun shall rise in the East  
So shall my heart beat apiece.  
And if you're asking me when  
I'll say it starts at the end.  
You know your will to be free  
Is matched with love secretly  
And as you alter your prayer  
Somehow you'll find you are there.  
Your friend is close by your side  
And speaks in far ancient tongues.  
A season's wish will come true  
All seasons begin with you  
One world we all come from  
One world we melt into one  
Just hold the hand that we're there  
Somehow we're going somewhere.

End:

My spirit is strong  
It can't be wrong  
No question I'm not alone  
Somehow I'll find my way home.



# ONE HUNDRED STEPS TO REALIZATION

BY

GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

## STEP EIGHT

*What attracts your organ of hearing?*

Melodious sounds like music, children's laughter, birds' songs, whisperings of love of agonized friends, and instrumental music such as of veena, violin, sitar, tabla, mridangam, piano, symphonies and concertos.

*When you listen to your favorite sounds or voices, which of your faculties is most affected?*

My heart feels affected.

*In which way?*

My heartbeat rises, my diaphragm contracts, thought streams become vague, and sometimes my eyes become moist. Memories revisit with nostalgia.

*Is it merely the melody of the voice that affects you or the memory of the person from whom the voice or sounds come?*

If I listen to the ghazals of my dear friend Satnam Singh, his haunting memory grips my heart and I become choked in my throat. My heart is afflicted. If it is Balamurali Krishna, his moods of *bhakti* and *bhāva* of *śānti* and *anu rāga* affect my breath and I will be lifted to a high level of ecstasy. Mozart, Bach, Beethoven and Vivaldi carry me to romantic pleasures of elation.

*What kind of touch elates you?*

A gentle breeze on a sunny day, in which bright flowers like pink cosmos sway their heads, is very pleasurable.

*What sight overwhelms you?*

From gray sketches to colorful paintings, especially water colors of vast blue skies and smooth water surfaces reflecting trees, mountains and clouds.

*What is your reaction when you are affected by visual beauty?*

I feel sad that I cannot reproduce such beauty with my own hand.

*Do you know that body-based pleasures are impermanent, and sometimes indulgences in excess can make you sick? Have you ever indulged in any unworthy fantasies?*

I've mainly had subjective fascinations and was seldom erotic with sexual fantasies. Even when I was strongly drawn to poetry, novels and drama, my pleasures were mostly tied up with world classics.

*Do you know there are urges and tendencies in the unconscious or subconscious that prompt you to indulge in shady games which adversely affect your imagination and can drag you into daydreams?*

Yes, I do. After coming to know the evils of unhealthy impressions, I have relied only on philosophically ennobling impressions or concepts.

*Do you know the mind can make one deviate from an honest path to hypocritically have secret pleasures?*

Yes, I quite often note the malpractice of sophisticated and politically prone pretenders who live the life of double coats.

*So you know that honest people who aspire to have the spiritual discipline of the highest ideals have to walk on the razor's edge. Are there any radical steps to be taken?*

Both in the Vedanta discipline and Yoga discipline there are dos and don'ts to comply with. In Vedanta we are given some with the following disciplines.

- Perennial values should be consistently maintained and no preference should be given to superficial values.
- Do not aspire to get profits from this world and do not aspire for imaginary merits.
- Cultivate equanimity of mind (*sama, dama, titikṣa, uparati, śraddhā, samadhānam*).
- Do cultivate an intense desire to obtain deliverance from all prejudices.

In Yoga we are given these directions:

- Observe *yamas* and *niyamas*
- Maintain steadiness in one's discipline
- Harmonize the vital breath for equipoise of mind
- Abolish all superficial pursuits

- Cultivate wholesome attitudes (*samyama*)
- Retain high ideals (*dhāraṇa*)
- Contemplate incessantly
- Experience *samādhi*

Just as the blazing sun fills the whole sky with light, fill your life with ever-inspiring purposive vision and right understanding.

## STEP NINE

*Do you sometimes want to be alone, to sleep alone, to sit alone, to walk alone and even to work alone?*

Yes, I very much desire to leave the crowd and be alone to see what is around and observe what I am within.

*Where do you prefer to be alone? Do you prefer to be alone in a room with doors shut, or on a hilltop, or to sit alone in the shade of a tree? When you're alone, do you feel lonely?*

No. I think for instance of the tree, which is fully functioning without anybody to share its works.

*What functions do you see in the tree?*

My favorite tree has a creeper winding around it.

*When you sit under the tree what do you do?*

I watch the tree and its entwining creeper. The creeper is full of leaves. They cover the tree from bottom to top. The leaves first appear as tender shoots, then become dark green and big. After several months, the leaves turn pale and yellow. One by one they wither and fall off, and in their place come new ones. Also the creeper puts forth small bunches of buds, which mature and unfurl as flowers with colorful petals.

*How long do the blooms remain?*

The flowers remain fresh for three or four days, then they droop and wither away. After the falling of the flowers, fruit comes. The fruits have seeds within them.

*Do you see any similarity between you, the tree and its creeper? And what would that be?*

Yes, I do see a similarity, because of the foliage and flowers of the creeper the tree is not fully seen.



*Do you have a creeper on you?*

Yes, though it is in me not on me. From within my consciousness come ideas, thoughts, promptings and desires to act.

*What are the similarities between the creeper and your mental activities?*

Ideas come to me like buds of the creeper. They unfurl into colorful flowers of thoughts. My thoughts and the words I speak and write have fragrance and sweetness. All these eventually droop like flowers and fall off, leaving access for other thoughts and fascinations to sprout in their place. Just as the creepers spread from one branch of the tree to another, my ideas also spread, giving promptings from desires to act to the vicissitudes of engaging in action.

*Can you compare the changes in the creeper to the changes in the mind?*

Yes, I can. Each leaf or flower bud comes like the birth of a child. First of all it "is" (*asti*), it has physical projection, (*janma* or *sṛṣṭi*). After its projection, it grows (*vṛiddhi*). Then the projected physical substance undergoes change (*parinama*), after which it decays (*kṣaya*). Then it terminates (*naśa*). My mental promptings also have six states of becoming, just like the creeper.

*What lesson do you draw from the creeper?*

I think of the transience of becoming.

*So what do you do under the tree?*

I sit under the tree like a contemplative, without going into any compulsive act of *karma*.

*What is your contemplation?*

My contemplation is *tapas*.

*What is tapas?*

The burning away of psychological fascination so that I can be free of compulsive action.

*What is the result?*

I won't be tied down to fleeting promptings and obligatory actions and can free myself from the ensuing *naraka*.

*What is naraka?*

It is a state of mind which makes your horizon of interests narrow and vicious. By avoiding self-centered action I remain free, *mukta*.

# AND SO I SING

BY

EUGENE T. LEWIS

“Your natural voice is quite lovely. Be yourself. Sing yourself.”

This is what a visiting professor of voice wrote on my evaluation sheet following my very first committee singing before the entire voice and opera teaching staff at the Conservatory. I cried when I read that comment. I cried because I was horrified that this legend of a voice teacher and singer had discovered my secret.

I am pretty sure when I first started singing in front of others I sang with my own natural voice. I did not try to sound older or darker or “seasoned” or any other way. I simply loved to sing. As time went on, I subconsciously added affectations to my speaking and singing voice. I had no idea this was happening. I was praised for the “vocal drag”—the affectations, the quirks, the persona—that I knit. But after that teacher’s remark, I knew I had to get back to my true voice.

I tell people that Singing is my greatest teacher. It has been quite the journey getting back to the vocal core of my sound. I stopped singing full time for five years. I needed a break. At the time when I began considering teaching what I had learned in singing silence, I re-discovered the teachings of Vedanta. Guru Nitya’s commentary on *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, That Alone*, was a great find in my local library. I read the entire 100 verses’ commentaries three times before contacting the editor, Scott Teitsworth. As I began applying the teachings to my reality (as I knew it), including singing, life became very different than what I thought it to be. Singing became a revelation, and I became a different kind of voice teacher.

When students ask me what my teaching is all about, the answer changes slightly each time I answer. Today, I would say the following: I take on the role of a guide to help singers dismantle any obstructions to vocal freedom. Yes. That works today. My own vocal development is never-ending. Breathing, resonance, registers, and diction/language are the pillars of physical vocal freedom. Of course, our voices are connected to every other aspect of our lives. Singing is our birthright. All things vibrate with energy and inherently there is a form of sound energy. How sounds resonate with all things is a mystical experience. Of course, as in Vedanta philosophy, how we value certain aspects of singing is both personal and universal at the same time. To help students reach a place of peace vocally really means they have realized that what they possess vocally is enough—and beautiful on its own. Yes. Everyone can sing.

Singers must identify the hooks or the crutches they have relied on for so long and let that baggage pass through them. We do not want to fight the vocal hang-ups as if they have done us wrong. Vedanta philosophy advises us to observe everything until we realize that we are everything. Singers must do the same.

One woman, a student of mine, considered herself a “vocal schizophrenic” because she could sing with so many different colors in her voice. She never knew what would come out when she sang. Of course, much of her distress came from



the “not knowing” condition. When she began observing how everything works together to produce sound, she became at ease and accepting about what came out of her mouth. She began to understand that her voice did have many aspects to it. She began to embrace all of her sounds., and she is now well on her way to vocal freedom. In turn, this exploration acted as a microcosm of her reality. The two games became one: unitive vision, unitive life.

# WORLD GOVERNMENT IS 55

BY

GARRY DAVIS

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.”  
Article 21(3), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

On this date, September 4, since 1953, the founding year of our World Citizen Government, we have posted the above-quoted article 55 times, either in press release or “Letters to World Citizens.”

Given today’s international headlines describing the leaders of the United States and Russia once again glaring at each other over—over a tiny country, Georgia, fingers poised on upwards of 6,000 nuclear weapons apiece, many of them hair-triggered—this posting is the most important of any news item you, dear reader, can reflect on in our turbulent and potentially apocalyptic times.

Why? First of all, Nation States are political fictions. When we photograph our planet from space we see that these border lines don’t really exist; we or our forefathers have made them up. The leaders of these political fictions stay in power by protecting “us” against “them” in a condition of world anarchy. Thus the nation states perpetuate the condition of anarchy which breeds war:

“The real cause of wars has always been the same. They have occurred with a mathematical regularity of a natural law at clearly determined moments as a result of clearly definable conditions: 1. wars between groups of men forming social units always take place when these units—tribe, dynasties, churches, cities, nations—exercise unrestricted sovereign power; 2. wars between social units cease the moment sovereign power is transferred from them to a larger or higher unit. In other words, wars always ceased when a higher unit established its own sovereignty, absorbing the sovereignty of the conflicting smaller units.” (*The Anatomy of Peace*, Emery Reves, 1945)

Second, given the actual physical oneness of the world community, only a world government by definition can eliminate the anarchy between nations and divert us from our current path toward genocidal war and environmental disaster.

No candidate for national public office, including the two who today aspire to be the United States president, can even mention “world security” as the essential component of their political platforms, for they are on the wrong power level.

While the BOMB is virtually total in its destructive power, a national president's power and perception is, by definition, local, i.e., limited to its nation's "security".

And therein lies the danger. We have put in the hands of our political leaders absolute nuclear power, the very use of which is not only criminal in a legal sense but is socio-politically, morally and humanly insane.

If we are to prevent humanity's demise, it is essential that we, the people of the planet, recognize our sovereignty on the global level and thus acknowledge systems and institutions that not only reject the absolute power of national leaders like President Bush and Prime Minister Putin or their successors and all the other leaders of nuclear power states. We must fulfill the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary arrives on December 10, 2008.

The evolving citizenry of the World Government, in its 55 years of existence, by definition, transcends national boundaries. It represents both the whole community and the particular individual. Simply to declare oneself a "World Citizen" is to claim the world as one's immediate community to be recognized by world law and protected by its accepted legitimacy. In that public sovereign declaration, the individual effectively "outranks" the national leaders. As Thomas Jefferson wrote: "Every man...possesses the right of self-government. Individuals exercise it by their single will."

In my last blog entry, I contrasted the Olympic Games and one world principles with the presence of President Bush and Prime Minister Putin together in Beijing's Bird's Nest, applauding and encouraging the trusting, while competitive, athletes. Today, back in furtive, fear-driven national bunkers, they eye each other through the deadly illusion of their respective nuclear gun sights.

While, ironically, the Space Station continues silently circling the planet every 90 minutes at 17,000 mph, the mixed human crew gazing at the earth below in wonder and awe, at its majesty and cosmic role being played out against the indifferent heavens for the past 4.5 billion years.

Will we humans ever wake up to the reality of our human situation in time to avoid a final holocaust? But, more relevant, do our children, all 2.4 billion of them, deserve to die before reaching maturity because of our own immaturity?

And so, despite skepticism, humiliation, doubt, and daily fear of failure, we lovers of humanity carry on.

And so, I reiterate: our World Government is 55 years old today.

The happiest birthday for me is to continue carrying the torch, ignited in 1948, which illuminated humanity both to the dangerous course we are still on, and the incredible potential we human beings have to build the world of our dreams, a peaceful and sustainable world governed of, by and for all humanity, that nurtures and protects us on this beautiful blue planet floating majestically through the heavens.

# ALL DENMARK'S A PRISON

BY

DEBORAH BUCHANAN

We left purses, coats, anything extraneous in our cars and then, holding hair and scarves against the strong wind blowing from the fields, walked to the administration building. First we stopped at the front desk to give our names and be checked off the list of vetted guests. We were coming to see the Two Rivers Prison presentation of Hamlet, a theater production that was an outgrowth of Johnny Stallings' two years of discussion groups there. Two previous performances had been given for inmates; this was the first for "outsiders" or visitors. Following ours there would be one more in the evening for families and community residents. After signing in we all waited in a large reception room, availing ourselves of water, restrooms, and reading notices on the wall. One notice told employees that a code of silence, of not reporting guard-to-inmate violence, was against the law and against the better ideals of incarceration.

The prison employee who was overseeing this visit had Johnny read out a list of rules: we must follow instructions, nothing extra was to be brought inside, just picture identifications. And we were to recognize that prisons were a potentially dangerous place where we could be hurt or taken hostage and the Corrections Department was not responsible. After this we walked across the front grass lawn with flower beds to another building where we went through a code-locked door and into another waiting room. Here we got lockers for any prohibited items we had, surrendered our i.d.s for visitor passes, went through an x-ray gate, had our hands stamped with a black-light image and proceeded through another door to another desk. There we had our hands read by a black light machine, and gave our names again to be checked off another list.

In small groups we went outside to an inner courtyard, chaperoned as always by a guard. No flower beds here. We walked through a tunnel of wire fencing and tall walls of barbed wire and into another building. Each time a guard took us through a door he or she had to punch in a number code and then lay his hand on a special pad that would read fingerprints. Then the door would open.

We were led into a large reception room with an empty front area and chairs arranged in lines for an audience. As we sat down, I noticed a few men, with the top half of a costume on, standing in the back. Every one of them still had to wear the regulation blue jeans with the orange prison stamp on front and back. As we sat down and waited, I noticed two signs, both emphatically stating: Do Not Move the

Chairs, Inmates May Not Get Up Without Permission. I thought, even sitting in a chair or where the chair was placed is regulated—and I felt a small tightness in my chest. Our two guides, both women, three guards and the prison chaplain were in the room with us. In the end we numbered about sixty visitors—friends of Johnny, people from the theater, fellow India travelers, family.

And then the play began. Johnny did not give any introduction. One of the four Hamlet actors stood up, began with an elegant preamble, and we were in the play. Over the next hour and a half, the different inmates alternated as Hamlet. One actor, a transgender woman, played both Gertrude and Ophelia, and five other actors shared roles, moving in and out of characters and scenes. The pace was lively and crisp, and without noticing it we were in Denmark, pacing with the young prince, anguishing with Ophelia, his spurned love, laughing and holding our breath. Some actors, naturally, were more accomplished than others, yet everyone was fully in the play and moment. The costumes, top part only, lent by the Portland Opera Company, were the only real prop: no scenery, no thrones or battlements. It was a strange, split-second alternation that our brains did: the shiny floor, the painted beige walls, the stoic guards in back—prison—and then the rhythm of the language, the jokes, the beautiful evocations. Having four Hamlets was an inspired move: each added a different look into the character, another nuance to Hamlet's quandary. The older man playing the dead king's ghost, who in ponderous pace read out his lines to Hamlet, conveyed an eerie dignity. And Laertes, the Queen, the counselor—everyone kept the story's action and intrigue alive.

And then it was over. The audience stood and clapped and clapped. The actors seemed a little unsure or dazed, as if once out of the play they didn't quite know what to do up there or how to react to us. Johnny called us all to cookies and lemonade for intermission.

The second half of the program began when we all sat down again, the actors to chairs on the stage and we to our own seats. The conversation began immediately with people expressing admiration and gratitude, from both sides. There was a question to the actors about how they experienced Shakespeare, what they thought of the play. One of the Hamlets responded: "Shakespeare is like wheels within wheels. When I first heard him, I thought, this guy is like a gangster, only he uses words instead of guns."

Others talked of not understanding the language or the play at all at first. "Sometimes I would memorize a page and not know a single thing I was saying. Or I would come in thinking it meant one thing and when we talked about it, it was completely different."

A recurring theme was the fear they had all felt about performing in front of the other inmates. "We stay tough, we keep it cool between ourselves. This was letting our guard down and expressing our emotions. I didn't know how that would be,

for us or for them,” confessed one of the actors. They all concurred. They also all agreed that the response after the performances was unequivocally positive.

The dialogue went back and forth, with questions, responses, more questions, unexpected answers. There were three or four of the actors who seemed more at ease and talked the most. A few spoke only once or twice. One man recited a poem he had written about the experience, another a short excerpt from an article about morality and democracy.

Ophelia/Gertrude said she was so excited to have a female role to play and had asked in the beginning if she would have any competition for it. To which all the other inmates vigorously replied, Not at all! She was the only actor still in costume, happy to be in a dress.

One of the Hamlets talked about his fear that we, the outsiders, would view all of them only as we saw prisoners in movies, how he was anxious about how afraid we would be of them. But then he saw our involvement, heard our laughter and knew we weren't standing apart. He also said, "I have a very violent past and then I began doing this play, and there's everything here, anger and loss and passion and I knew that Shakespeare knew all of these things too, even 400 years ago."

A question about understudies came up and Johnny answered that many people knew multiple roles. At times they had not known who would be there to participate, some had been out for solitary confinement, others transferred or non-participatory. Johnny pointed out one of the younger, energetic actors: "We have 22 scenes in this play and he knows 20 of them, he's so involved." The inmate smiled shyly, in delight.

One actor said, "You know, one evening I looked around the circle and thought, This motley group is going to do Shakespeare? And we did."

Two of Johnny's good friends are well known actors. Towards the end of the discussion they each made a few succinct, professional comments to the actors, which you could see had all the more meaning because of who said them. Todd congratulated them on fulfilling the ultimate end of every play, to entertain the audience, and how they had done it with verve and commitment. Then Keith mentioned how he had seen Hamlet countless times, sometimes he was bored with the productions, but that this time he was easily drawn in to the story, how he so appreciated the fearlessness of braving the stage that each actor had shown. The actor who started off the play said, "I was so nervous at first but I would look at you and you would be nodding encouragement and I would realize, it's okay, it's okay, I can continue."

A theme repeated again and again was the sense of boredom and drudgery the inmates felt in prison, how the play helped counter that, how they were drawn into it despite fear and hesitation. Another of the Hamlets said, "I've been here twenty years. One of the reasons I did this was so I can now say to my children, my grandchildren, that I actually did something here, one time I acted in a Shakespeare play."



An older actor got up to read a statement of recognition and gratitude to the audience, and then he turned and he read out a touching piece to Johnny in thanks for his time and commitment. A woman from the back of the audience said, "My brother is in this play. I would like to thank you for the opportunities it's given him, how it's helped him change." A second inmate from the play added, "I've never done this, maybe I'll get in trouble, but I think we should all thank the staff here who helped make this possible. They took a lot of risks too." Then the oldest performer said his wife was in the audience and he would like her to stand up, which she did, and everyone applauded. There were not many dry eyes in the house.

Our hour was up, but no one wanted to leave. We had been in prison for the afternoon, the actors would remain there. We were in a room without windows, on the high plateau of eastern Oregon, yet in the preceding hour we had fallen into the cadence of Shakespearean England, we had been touched by some ungraspable union of past and present which we all understood to be both intimate and communal. We sat in that room of painted cement blocks, polished linoleum, and yet we knew that for the duration of the play we were suspended, together, in a world alive, profound, somber and unassailable.

# SPIRITUAL UPWELLINGS

BY

SCOTT TEITSWORTH

Around the globe, spiritual volcanoes rise out of the wilderness in many places. They mark the sites where seers have broken through the earth's crust to release the virtually infinite energy lingering not very far beneath the surface. Some are old and weathered and others are of a more recent origin. Some are active, some are dormant. Most are in fact extinct. The major religions and philosophical systems of history are the really huge volcanoes, full of the ridges and valleys of different denominations, while local sects and study groups comprise the smaller mountains. There are also many individual vents that are almost invisible, where lone seers discovered a unique way to open the floodgates but never shared their discovery. From the smallest and most obscure to the most imposing, all are inspirational and enjoyable to admire. They are all remarkably similar in essential features, though their unique patterns of eruption and subsequent weathering have given each one special features of distinctive beauty. Only a fanatic would lay claim that their favorite was the only "real" volcanic formation. From a distance, almost all volcanoes look alike.

Narayana Guru opened a vent to the center of the earth in the late nineteenth century, by digging down largely on his own as a solitary seeker of truth. When he burst through the last barrier, energy poured out and engulfed him, transforming both him and his regional environment.

His disciple Nataraja Guru was awed by the power of the eruption. Over a lifetime of deep contemplation he was able not only to harness the energy, but to bring up lots of magma and fashion it into a towering, conical volcano. He built what welled up into a soaring structure of sublime symmetry, though somewhat forbidding in its rocky crags and beetling cliffs of intellectual intensity.

It was a third generation disciple, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, who released the horizontal potential of the magma brimming inside the dome. He teased the magma out so it flowed in all directions, allowing it to spread far and wide and inundate a substantial area. In this way the vision could be applied to the real life situations of seekers in the east and west, north and south.

The Narayana Gurukula today consists of a scattering of encampments near the periphery of this magnificent volcano, mostly hidden from sight by the jungle undergrowth. From these solitary huts, sorties are made from time to time onto the

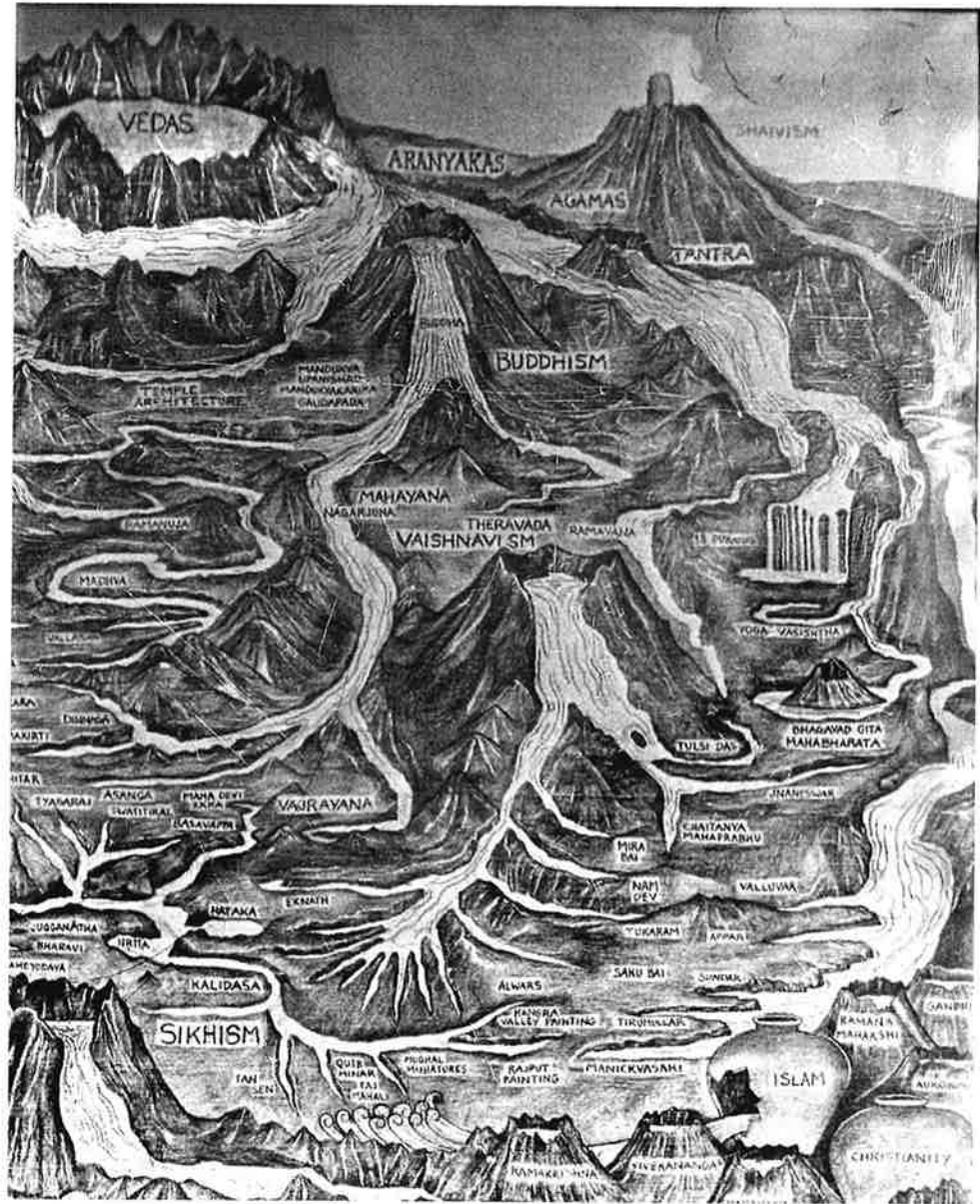
lower slopes. Some of the disciples lead expeditions onto the sides of the volcano, or advise about some of the better routes for those interested in exploring on their own. It can and does provide excellent mountaineering practice for those intent on climbing other peaks.

Most visitors are content to view Mt. Gurukula, which remains one of the youngest, gentlest and most beautiful of all the thousands of igneous outcroppings across the globe, from a distance. Occasionally, one of the inmates of the huts scales the peak, struggling up into the rarified air to catch a breathtaking vision of the surrounding terrain. But mostly the view is from the ground: the mountain is admired but climbed infrequently. Still, for those charmed by beauty far from the beaten path, who are turned off by the madding crowds and pestiferous hawkers that surround the more well-known mountains, the recondite Gurukula is a welcome discovery.





The landscape of Indian philosophy and religion envisioned as a volcanic world.



# REMEMBERING SHEILAH

BY

WENDY OAK

Born in Northern Ireland in 1921, Sheilah Johns moved with her mother, father and brother Coursey to live in the Isles of Scilly where her father was the Island doctor and had a small flower farm. I first met Sheilah there when I worked on his farm. Sheilah spoke with great love for the freedom and wildness of these tiny islands and how much she always felt a part of them.

Later she went to London and became an actress. She was briefly married to Charles, who had a tragic death.

As World War II progressed Sheilah trained as a nurse and after working in India, went out to a Hospital Ship, as a nursing sister, off Singapore.

The vibrancy of the East fired her spirit, and she met Nataraja Guru, who became her teacher, and thus began her lifelong studies of Vedanta and her deep connections with the Narayana Gurukula Community with its non-violent approach to life. Its slogan 'Our purpose is not to argue but to know and let know' stayed central to her life.

It was in Singapore that Sheilah met John, who was in the R.A.F., and they married, returning to England, to her mother's cottage in North Devon. Here she had a period of intensive reading and meditation, as she nursed her mother through the last stages of cancer to the end of her life. Her father by now had died and her brother Coursey was settled in Canada with his family. Sheilah and John with many cats stayed in Fremington in the peaceful cottage with the stream running through the garden. John became a thatcher.

It was from here in North Devon that Sheilah's long life of natural healing and alternative therapies took root and developed over the years. Sheilah played an active role in an alternative community ashram in Coombe Martin where she taught yoga and gave healing. She was at the hub of New Age ideas with Tony Crisp and Mike Tanner. Encounter Groups, Seed Groups and the like were all flooding in. Sheilah welcomed them with her lively mind and spacious outlook. I recall these were exciting times. Sheilah delighted in the blessings of this world and was a spiritual inspiration to many. She walked lightly, trusting the way ahead, and knowing that she was one with the eternal source, her needs were always met.

In 1974 Guru Nitya came over to North Devon to visit Sheilah. He had just taken on the mantle of Guru following Nataraja Guru's passing. He was keen for Sheilah to start her own ashram under his auspices. In the spirit of synchronicity

I just happened to come across the perfect house for this purpose, which she and John both found intriguing. They bought it and moved to Tiverton where she opened her own centre in a large unique Gothic house built by French monks with a most beautiful and spacious meditation room. Just right. Plenty of space for her healing work, for courses, for people to stay, for the cats, and some quality space for John to indulge his love of antiques. Guru Nitya visited and gave his blessing.

Sheilah freely opened her life to all who came to her. This was her prime time for practising the healing techniques of reflexology and massage; for seed groups and giving weekly yoga classes, as well as hosting many courses and talks. Sheilah was a source of guidance and inspiration with her keen intuition and sharp intelligence, always infused with humour.

'Life is a serious business', she would say, her eyes brimming with laughter. For her it was a *lila*. 'Be here NOW' was her life mantra.

The house overflowed with life, colour and chaos, teaching and learning. The smells of soda bread baking, tables of lovingly prepared food, her generosity knew no bounds, until eventually she became quite exhausted.

The continual flow of people through the Centre over the many years, and her selfless giving, took its toll and so activities were wound down and Sheilah found some time to explore crop circles and to paint again, taking her water colours out into the countryside.

Now it was time to move. Sion House was too big and a liability. So ever-practical John found a small house in East Looe. As his own health failed, he retired from thatching. And on visiting an old friend near Looe, he fell in love with a house close to the sea. Beachways. He knew how Sheilah loved being near the sea and the move would suit them both. And it did. Right to the end of her life she would say: 'How I love Looe.'

After John died, Sheilah became more involved in group work and spiritual courses. Guru Nitya and Jyothi both came over to stay in 1990 and Beachways became 'The Light Sea Centre', a Gurukula and a hive of activity.

I recall with joy, our day on Looe Island where Guru gave us a talk and a meditation. All sharing a picnic together on the small beach as the sea lapped close by.



These were golden times indeed. Later Swami Charles became a regular visitor and workshop facilitator, and many Looe residents were drawn to his classes and talks.

However without pragmatic John to ground her and attend to the practicalities, Sheilah, now in her late seventies, became vulnerable and her life became more and more fragmented as her mind gradually deserted her and her physical health declined, until she could no longer live alone. So we enabled her to choose her few favourite possessions [Guru's books and a small bookcase and John's portrait in oils in which he looks like an Old Testament prophet! And a few other paintings for all to enjoy.]

She moved into a Care Home overlooking the river on the edge of Looe with seagulls and boats to enjoy. It was perfect for her. Just right. In her last five years living here, Sheilah was a much loved presence. With her usual grace she gave healing to the staff and the other residents and became quite buoyant again. She filled their minds with fresh ideas, new ways of looking at life. Later she quietly slipped into The Now, and as her memory vanished, she became like a smiling Buddha. Many of us visited and enjoyed the peaceful times of 'Being with Sheilah'.

For the last 50 years my life threaded in and out of Sheilah's. Some years more than others. We were soul mates on many levels. I recall her always dressed in shades of blue, with eye shadow to match. Her hair swept up in a chignon, her nails immaculately manicured. A charismatic presence wherever she went, with her strong independence of spirit, her quick wit and inquiring mind. And at the same time being a source of deep compassion and wisdom, welcoming all who were drawn into her life with kindness and acceptance.

I last saw her just before Christmas. She was ready to go. As I leant over and kissed her goodbye, her eyes filled with laughter. 'Goodbye, lovely girl' she murmured. Our hearts and eyes met in a smile of all we shared, then and now and forever.

There was a beautiful funeral for Sheilah in February. Her coffin was wrapped in a blue silk sari, and decorated with Spring flowers. Many of us spoke loving words and shared memories together. In May when the weather was more clement,, after sharing lunch we scattered Sheilah's ashes at her request in the sea off Looe Island. It was an enveloping misty day, as the sea and the sky merged in a mantle of grey. We said prayers and cast flowers on the water.



# ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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Scott Johnson, 2008
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Scott Johnson writes of his painting, *If You Should Be Passing By*:

In the act of painting it is my intent to express a beauty my soul yearns to manifest through imagery. Images most often come out of waking or quiet moments when I am available in their presence and to their inspiration. And then the chase begins, often leading me into unexplored directions. There was such playfulness in the act of painting the cover painting, *If You Should Be Passing By*. The baubled trees in the background, observing clouds introjecting their insight, floating in a bath of color. Then all of a sudden on the stage, for all to behold, the majestic, four trees in their yogic posture, grounded and firm, dancing with the infinite!

# 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.

Email address: [tapovana@hevanet.com](mailto:tapovana@hevanet.com)

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

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11290 NW Skyline Blvd.,  
Portland, Oregon, 97231, USA  
[tapovana@hevanet.com](mailto:tapovana@hevanet.com)



PUBLISHED BY THE NARAYANA GURUKULA