

GURUKULAM



AUTUMN 2009



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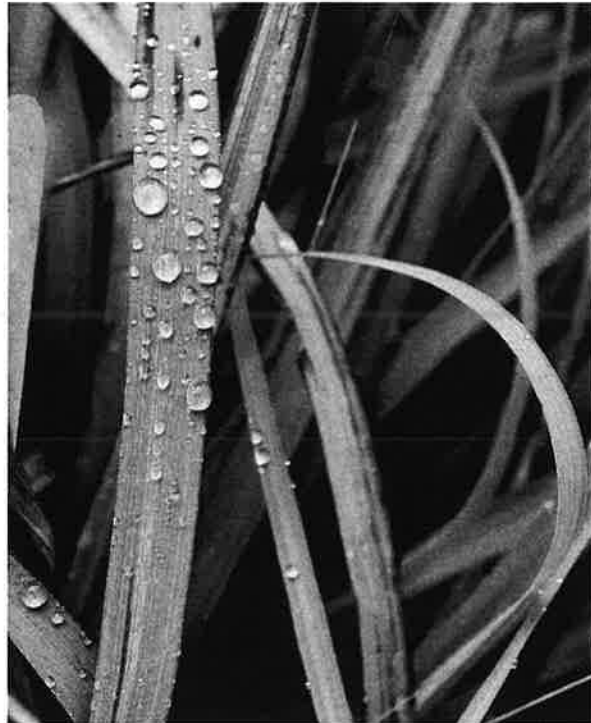
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EDITORIAL

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

When Guru Nitya was wandering through the Sivagiri Mutt many decades ago, it was the haunting sound of someone singing that caught his attention and drew him to the temple where Swami Mangalananda was chanting in ecstasy. How is singing different from simply speaking? Would Guru Nitya have had the same response if he had heard a lecture? Both talking and singing use words to convey meaning between people, but as the dictionary says, singing uses “words uttered in succession in a musical modulation of the voice.” Music is defined as a meaningful pattern of sound rather than random noise. So we have meaning and sound woven together in an aural framework where we hear both concepts and intonation. With singing we have an oral structure of knowledge and beauty, each one amplifying the other.

Praising someone or composing poetry are also given as definitions of singing. These can be done with a speaking voice, but there is a qualitative difference between song and conversation. When someone speaks so well as to draw us into the rhythm of what is being said, we say they are singing, that their speech has risen to another level of communication. The Bhagavad Gita, in fact, is said to be a song, not simply the speech of Krishna to Arjuna, because of the tenor of its expression. It is the sound of wisdom being uttered to instruct and to enchant, to draw the listener into the heart of the singer.

An intriguing, revelatory side note to this is that many stroke patients are unable to speak yet able to sing. Whereas speaking is focused in one area of the brain, the left side, singing is a comprehensive act, utilizing both brain hemispheres. It is, literally, a unified, global phenomenon.

Breath is an essential component of singing, for it is breath that rises up and vibrates our vocal chords, which allows us to sing. Breath, the manifestation of *prāṇa* and our tie to the inhalation and the exhalation of life’s force. Many of the words used to define singing are actually words of breath: murmur, whistle, croon or chirrup.

Humans are not alone in singing. Birds famously sing, as do insects. They are known to sing for a mate or for territory, but often what their meanings may be is a mystery to us. The meaning we feel comes from what is touched in our listening, what emotions and insights the singing evokes. It is like *rasa* in Indian aesthetic theory, where a *rasa*, the taste or essence of something, is evoked by art. It is not an object created by the artist but an emotional state activated in the viewer or listener by the work of art.

We find this *rasa* in diverse worlds, like the poetic insights of Indu Mallah, the critical analysis of Greek myth in the Heracles article, and in the understanding of nature and human interaction so lovingly written of by the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary members.

In Indian sculptural art, like the images of Vishnu in this issue, music and dance are, paradoxically, essential components. In the static object, both of these fluid arts are to be expressed: the inner breath of the body itself, the weight of the torso, the extension of the limbs, each of these gives voice to the rhythm of a divine state. The body of the god is an expression of the voice of inner unity, of transcendence. It is that voice which speaks through singing and chanting, our inner vibrations expressing a connection of breath. Through that breath we are all interwoven in a web of music and meaning.



ĀTMOPADEŚA ŚATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

VERSE 39

*aruḷiya śaktikalettutaṛnnu raṅṅām
pirivivayil samatan viśeśamēkam;
virati varā viśamā viśeśamonnī-
ttaramiva raṅṅu tarattil āyitunnu.*

To continue, of these forces just mentioned,
the second division, sameness, is of one quality,
while for the first, the difficult, there is no end to its qualities;
thus, these are of two kinds.

In Verse 33 it is said that knowledge, in order to know its own potential, changes into the many known things. It enters into various states of clarity and obscurity. Sometimes it forms a pronounced dichotomy of the knower and the known. At certain other times it becomes the passive witness, where the knower aspect is not emphasized, watching the ongoing procession of known items flashing through consciousness as objects of awareness. Sometimes it leaves the world of the known altogether and sits by itself, ruminating “I am, I am,” very much centered in the subject. Much of the time it alternates between the subject and the object: first clear, then vague. There are also moments when it withholds from the sphere of awareness entirely, where nothing is known. And lastly it is capable of effacing the duality of the subject and object, not negatively, but in a very positive way, by transcending the modalities.

When we examine this movement of knowledge, we can see that it always moves within itself. When you look at the flow of life horizontally, it passes sequentially from one thing to another. Each moment, or even less than a moment, the attention is fixed on one particular aspect; the very next moment the whole scene has changed and attention is with another interest. Narayana Guru uses the analogy of the spokes of a chariot wheel to describe the mind’s movement from interest to interest. Even though the wheel has many spokes, the whole weight of the chariot rests on just the one spoke which is vertically below the hub. As the

chariot moves the burden goes to the next spoke and the next. The image shows us that even though the shifting interests differ from moment to moment, the cumulative effect is constant.

Although we are drawn as though blindfolded by a negative or dark instinctive pull, we need not remain always in the state of negativity. There are two ways to deal with our lot in life. The lower animals, from viruses and bacteria up through most mammals, have a stream of development and a life plan that are fixed by nature's own devices. It is as if they have a set program to go by. To them, life is a continuous passing show and they don't look back with any sense of regret or remorse. They don't have any assigned duties for tomorrow; they don't sit down and scheme and plan. A bird which needs to build a nest and hatch its eggs does not figure out how it is going to do it tomorrow. In the morning when it gets up it instinctively picks up little pieces of cotton and thread, leaves and broken twigs. Then it makes a nest. Just when the nest is finished, the eggs come. It's all so very well adjusted by nature. If someone breaks the eggs or pulls apart the nest, it flutters around for a little while and then forgets it.

Although they look mechanical, the bird's actions have an absolutism in them. Similarly, a drop of water in a stream goes on dancing all the way from the mountaintop to the ocean. It merrily plunges ahead, unaware of what awaits it, whether there is a smooth bed or a plunging waterfall, whether it will always be pure and clear or contaminated by some city's effluents. It has no thought, it just goes.

We human beings have a different approach. Of course it's true that some of us are not so very different from animals or drops of water in a stream. We just go on, meeting contingencies as they appear in front of us. But in all of us there is one difference, present in varying degrees. The animal and the drop of water don't have any special obligation to anyone, but man makes promises and gets into obligations. When he drifts from one thing to another, there comes the constriction of previous commitments like the tug of a string wound about his limbs. Then he turns back. The alternative for him is to always be fully alive and wakeful to the whole situation. Then he does not allow any particular interest to infatuate him so much that he becomes blind to reality. The animal force which makes life mechanical is very strong. Most people cannot resist it. We just get into the mainstream and flow with it. Only here and there do we find the rare person in whom the whole meaning and significance of life has opened up, which brings a clarity like ten thousand suns shining all at once.

The Guru has said that our knowledge has innumerable powers, which can all be brought under the two headings of *sama* and *anya*, the same and the other. *Sama* is unitive consciousness. Even when you go from one thing to another, you know it is a continuation of the same interest, of the same consciousness, all within one ambit of existence. *Anyā* is when the unitive aspect is blindfolded so you don't see it. You only see one thing at a time, and you get caught up in it and it fills your

whole mind. For a time you are fully absorbed, not leaving even a little of your awareness on your transparency in time and space and the meaning of life.

Then he went further, saying that in our knowledge there is an indistinct aspect which calls for a clarity in every item of knowledge. This is called *viṣamā*, the difficult to discern, such as when you say “This is a pot,” or “This is a friend.” We do not really know what “this” is. We only know that it comes as a calling of attention to an awareness. When we specify “pot,” “my friend” or whatever, our interest is immediately shifted to what we have specified. We don’t bother about “this,” because our interest is caught up in the qualifying aspect, *viśeṣam*.

We are speaking here of two pairs of ideas: *sama* and *anya*, the unitive and the differentiating; and a subdivision of *anya*, the difficult to discern, *viṣamā*, and the specifying quality, *viśeṣam*. Narayana Guru defines *anya* as that which is known as variegated, while what shines forth as the one whole is *sama*. He then asks us to keep our mind open and vigilant so that we can release ourselves from being blindfolded by the infatuating source of the specifying thing which comes in the form of ‘other’.

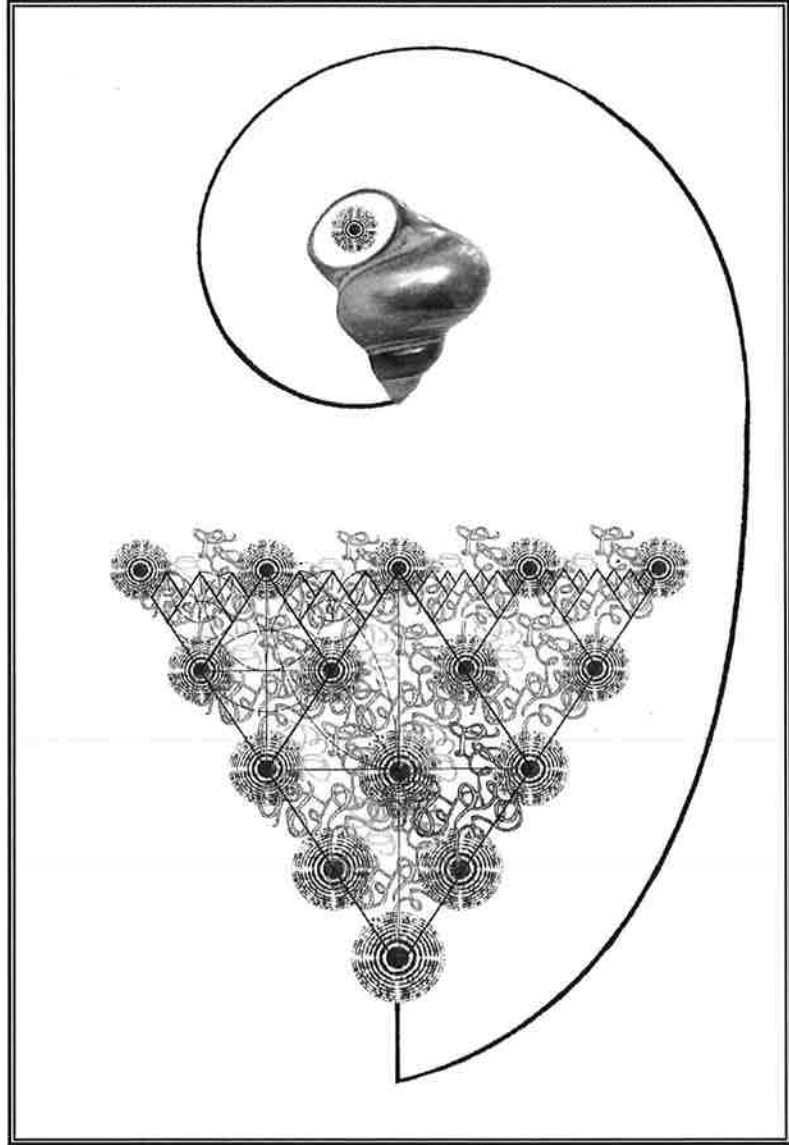
In the present verse, the Guru is taking us a little deeper into the differentiating aspects. From the day of your birth to today, there is a constant return of consciousness to its core or center. It always goes back and touches the center. Then from the center it goes to the periphery, where it deals with objects. No matter what the function is, the general nature of the experience is an illuminating awareness, a Self awareness. It is Self luminous. There is no other agent to throw light there.

Whether you sit with your eyes open or closed there is a consciousness that illuminates you, which brings awareness to you. It is always there, unbroken. Sometimes it takes the form of a wakeful consciousness. At other times it is like a dream consciousness. And sometimes it is a deep sleep. You are not wakefully aware or having dreams, but as soon as you wake up you remember it was a good time: “I had a good sleep.” There is an awareness there which was very passive, and yet it lends itself to be recalled.

If you are so favored to become a yogi who can transcend the three modalities and remain in a calm, serene state, where you are totally one with your Self, that transcendental state can also be related with the other three. Then the whole thing can be known as pure knowledge.

On some level, you have been experiencing pure knowledge all through until this moment. And what is its quality? It is just awareness, Self awareness. Within that state of awareness, two kinds of ‘this-ness’ are coming to you. One says, “This is me,” and the other, “This is what I know.” One ‘this’ pertains to the knower and the other pertains to the known.

When you said “I” when you were two, four, ten and twenty years old; and what you will mean when you are fifty, sixty and seventy; you will always recognize as the same “I.” You go on saying “I am this,” and “This is me,” and you have no doubt that



the “I” who said it yesterday is the same as the “I” who says it today. The ‘this’ does not have a varying connotation from moment to moment and time to time.

The ‘this’ of the knower always remains constant, whereas the ‘this’ of the known can never be the same. It always changes, even if it sometimes seems repetitive. Infinite are the possibilities of the structuring of consciousness. Narayana Guru says there is a ‘this’ which is always one, and there is another ‘this’ which is infinite. *Virati* means termination; *virativarā*, that which has no termination. So we get *virativarā viṣamā*, that which is difficult to discern and yet has no termination. This pertains to the whole world of knowledge. Another *viṣamā* pertains to the “I” itself. As we are flooded with the interminable interests of the passing objects to which our senses and mind are tuned, we are like children running to one toy after another.

If only we remembered that all of the passing show is an experience of our own consciousness. If we could sit back on the bank of the stream of consciousness, rather than drifting away like the water drops within it, we would have a different attitude towards life. Verse 39 requires us to be a constant witness of our own existence. This helps us not only spiritually, but on every level, in every way. When you are caught in an emotional situation, remember *virativarā viṣamā*, that difficult aspect which is interminable, which is taking you from one mood to another, one emotional state to another, one kind of appreciation to another; it has such a hold on you that you lose your power to restrain, to observe, and to be neutral and impartial in your observations. Instead you become identified with what happens to you each moment. Knowing this helps you to step back and free yourself from the entanglements of the situation.

When an actor is on the stage, appearing for all the world completely at home and alive in his role, deep down he knows that when the play is over he will no longer be that character. He doesn’t carry the ups and downs of his character home with him. Even a person who dies on the stage gets up and walks away when the curtain is dropped. This brings a kind of lightness and freedom that are otherwise quite difficult for those who are attached to their personas to achieve.

In fact, our life is a continuous play, with continuous action and continuous staging. We have to get up and walk away from our roles moment by moment, but we forget. We are very deeply affected by events in our lives. We become so involved. But if we can have this little detachment, to sit back and see that this is a passing show going on, it will give us all the great strength and patience on earth. You are always just who you are. Somebody says you are good, somebody says you are bad, that belongs to the passing moment. Their remarks do not make you more good or bad than you actually are.

Detachment enables you to have a better appraisal of the passing moment. This is not only for your final salvation, but also for your salvation here and now. Your consciousness is flashing quickly between the knower and what is known. That

which oscillates between them is the same consciousness, and it is you. So sit back firmly in your detachment, and yet also participate in the stream of life as it flows by you with its eternal rhythms.

Time has a mood. In springtime the mood is to dream, to plan, to make endless promises jubilantly and hopefully. You think it will always be spring. You are outgoing and optimistic. Then when fall comes, the mood changes. Your dreams change colors, going from bright to dry and brown. They break off from the main stem, flutter in the wind, and blow away into oblivion. The sweeper comes and they are all swept away. Your promises were of spring; in fall they are no longer valid. The mood changes again when winter comes. You withhold yourself from the periphery and sink into your own depths. You are one with yourself; you are now most important to yourself. It is very cold and still outside, snowing. Then once again when spring returns, you come out.

This is one possibility. It is good for the trees but not so good for us. The tree has no remorse about dropping its leaves, but we do. If you find a girlfriend or boyfriend in the spring and you drop them off in the fall, after six months when you see them again you will get a peculiar feeling about your fickleness. Man alone has this kind of funny feeling, not trees or slugs or birds. And as you have it, you have to be careful.

So cultivate this attitude. Once you've solidified a permanent mood and developed your ability to witness, then you can play around a little in your daily life. Always remember: we are aiming this study at our everyday life. It is not some far-off, exotic philosophy.

VERSE 40

*samayilumanyayilum sadāpi vanni-
ñnamaruvatunṭatatin viśeṣa śakti
amitayatākilumāke raṅṭivarṅin-
bhramakalayāl akhilam pramēyamākum.*

In sameness and in the other each one's
qualifying force always comes and becomes established;
by the fluctuating function of these two,
which comprises all, everything becomes the object of awareness.

"I want to give you a special instruction." "Let us meditate together." The first sentence centers around the idea of 'I'. The reference to 'I' is very specific. When I say "I want to give you..." I am differentiating you from me, and when I mention a special instruction the emphasis is on something very specific. So in the first sentence our minds are drawn again and again to specific notions.

When I said, "Let us meditate together," no-limitation was set. The word 'us' might be a reference to all the people in the room or all the people in the world. There is an all-inclusiveness, with no reference to an 'I'. It is a very extensive way of looking at things. Furthermore, the quality of meditative awareness is a uniting, synthesizing, pacifying one.

It is important to realize there is no contradiction between the first sentence, "I want to give you special instruction," and the second, "Let us meditate together." One is complementary to the other. Although one sentence refers to everything specific and the other to everything general, there is a perfect harmony and complementarity between the two. In this special context, the one is not opposed to the other.

There can be many other occasions when the notions around the 'I' are centralized and all else is excluded from it, and that becomes a selfish motivation where others are deprived of their proper integration in the situation. Similarly, if all-inclusiveness comes as a regimentation, such as "all people of the state should behave in a certain way," then we have a totalitarian dictatorship taking away individuals' inalienable rights to decide for themselves. So we have to be very careful with these concepts and understand them correctly, or they can very easily become evil.

The personal reference can be beneficial, since only when we turn inward and centralize ourselves do we get an orientation of knowledge. It is necessary to return again and again to the center. Knowledge should also be able to expand its horizon to include as much as possible. In this way it becomes a pulsation, in which consciousness moves from the center to the periphery and back again.

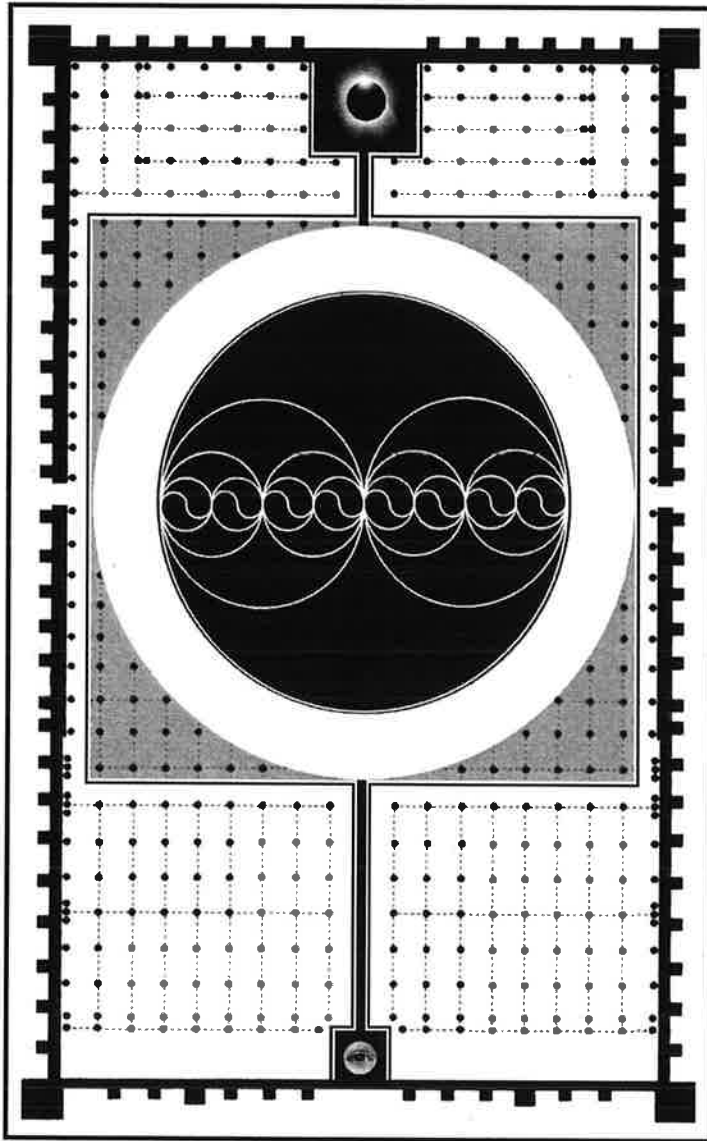
You can intensely think of yourself, gather your thoughts, your emotions and your sensations, and bring them all to the center of your consciousness. Then you can change the locus of that consciousness by shifting the center. For instance, you can bring it to the center of your eyebrows. With your mind you meditate on aum. You place that aum exactly in between your eyebrows, and mentally meditate: aum...aum...aum.... It gives a certain special effect. Then you can shift it to the throat center, making that source of sound the center of your whole consciousness. There you can repeat the mantra aum...aum...aum.... It's different from what you do between the eyebrows. You can bring the center of your consciousness to your heart. Your breathing, inhaling and exhaling, can be felt there. Having found the rhythmic movement of your respiration, if you centralize your consciousness there and say aum...aum...aum...it changes the tone of the experience, its texture and shading. You can then bring it to the navel, and experience your lower abdomen as the center of the system. Within the navel you can meditate aum...aum...aum.... It can be further shifted to the genitals, aum...aum..aum...and finally to the tip of the spine, aum...aum...aum....

You have been repeating the same thing, concentrating the mind in the center and saying the same mantra, but the effect is always different. Whatever we do, we alternate the unifying and differentiating effects of the mind.

Again, you can think of the several parts of your body separately, such as the head, trunk, hands, legs, the little finger as different from the thumb, sight as different from hearing, the experience of touch as different from taste. There is no end to such possible differentiations in the body. All these are united when you say "I am." In the knowledge of "I am" you don't experience the difference between taste and smell, body and mind, or whatever.

Individuals can be separately known, with the mind seeing each as a special person. Then you can forget names and peculiarities and generalize, along the lines of "those of us who gather here to meditate together." Then the names and features of each person vanish.

It is not advantageous to pay attention to only half of any dialectical situation. A harmoniously balanced life requires us to go from the specific to the generic and then back to the specific. Both have their own special dynamism and their own special perspectives to add. For instance, if I do not think of myself as a separate individual with an 'I' as the agent of my knowledge, enjoyment and action, I will not be able to motivate and carry out action with any efficiency. But if I become stuck in the notion of 'I', I will become alienated from the rest of society. I won't be able to rise up and identify myself as also belonging to that which is in all other bodies. I will become helplessly self-centered. I need to release myself from individualistic imprisonment within the body, to cooperate with all and receive cooperation from all. Sharing with all is mutually beneficial, as I become an integral part of a composite whole such as the society, the world or the universe.



If I expand my consciousness from my physical self to my family, I can see how every member of the family is so dear. This feeling can be further expanded to include other human beings and even pets who share our life; then broadened to the collective community of the environment, the country, the culture as a whole, its history and future possibilities. The entire universe can even be included, with its millennia of history and its macrocosmic and microcosmic aspects, such as the musical dance of the galaxies and the miracles going on within the depths of atoms. From subatomic particles to galactic supergroups, it can all be brought under one scheme of understanding.

Then time and space fade out. Our consciousness is no longer within the body. We can meditate on a world without us in it, without any of the consciousness we normally confine in the body. It is so refreshing, so releasing, not to be tied down to a heavy body on earth: to become one with the evanescent wind and the blue expanse of sky, to dissipate ourselves into the vibration of the sound that fills the whole universe, to become part of the thermodynamics of the universe, to become an electrical wave in the grand electromagnetic field. Think of these great varieties and wide possibilities of identification. What is there you cannot become through the sheer power of identity?

All the great meanings and purposes we thought we had can fade away to nothingness. We see the whole world as a myth: you are a myth, I am a myth. In the next moment we can be very definitive. We can fill our minds with a certain purpose, become charged with a great urge, feel that something is the mission of our whole lives, that we have to do it. Thus comes compulsion, stress, urgency. But we can also say “There is no such urgency. Never mind. It’s all OK. There is no such entity called ‘I’ anywhere. It’s all an imagination.”

Your consciousness can tighten up and make you feel like a bundle, a compact body. The same consciousness can also release you from that tightening up and make you feel as free as a passing wind. As Jesus said, “The wind bloweth whither it listeth.” Such is your freedom.

Narayana Guru says even though the possibilities of these two ways of thinking are endless—one centralizing in your ‘I’ and making everything specific and particular, and the other expanding you, identifying you with the cosmic whole, generalizing and liberating everything—it all can be gathered under two categories, the unifying and the specifying. Consciousness is an eternal fluctuation between these two fulcrums. It zips about, now rotating around the hub of specificity, now changing to rotate around the hub of generality. In this way it enables you to know everything.

If you go on reducing the differences in consciousness, taking away one after the other, ultimately there is no difference at all between the knower and the known in the state of total transcendence. Then you are in a state of absorption, of *samādhi*, with no modulations, no modification of consciousness. The other extreme is that

you become infatuated with a single idea. It captures your mind so much that you become blind to the rest of the world. It makes you idiotic, stupefied. We call someone stupid because they are stupefied with just one idea. They have lost their bearings and have no orientation to the bigger picture.

You should not get stuck in one single idea, nor get lost in generalities. In a healthy life there is a constant fluctuation between these two possibilities. Out of this fluctuating perspective arises our idea of the world. This doesn't come about through any effort on our part, it happens of its own accord.

In this verse we are not trying to do anything in particular. It is only a familiarization with our own self, a familiarization with the mechanism of how consciousness functions within us when it is left to itself.

Coming to the spiritual part of it, once you know that your mind is so engineered that it fluctuates between the specific and the generic, between a psychological and a cosmological orientation, and that all these are natural functionings, it is a great relief. It removes some of the load of responsibility you have saddled yourself with. Instead of forcing your mind to follow certain patterns, you can just think, "This is natural. It is my nature that my mind becomes centralized and the 'I' consciousness tightens up. And it is also my nature that I become sober and pacified." You become aware of consciousness as such getting involved in these twofold functions. One who can cultivate the neutral attitude where he or she becomes a witness to the twofold fluctuation of consciousness becomes a real contemplative.

JEWEL IN THE NET

BY INDU K. MALLAH

Buddha's Net of Indra
Was an abstract concept
Until I happened upon
A jewel at an intersection,
Reflecting, coruscating, connecting.
For every hurt, a smile,
For every pain, a sparkle,
For every fall, a cheer,
Affirming, encouraging, healing.
Star of Bethlehem,
Are you flower,
Are you star,
Or are you a gem
In the web of inter-connectivity,
Sparkling, soothing, nurturing?
The world too shallow, too hollow, too grasping,
Has desperate need of role models like you,
Enhancing, augmenting, evolving.

REMEMBERING SWAMI MANGALANANDA

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

TRANSLATION BY GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

The following article was first published as a small book, *Maṅgalabharati*, in 1967. Swami Mangalananda was an important figure in the Narayana Gurukula in the 1950s and 60s. He was born in 1910, first came to the Gurukula in 1951, and died from heart disease in 1967.

It was late in the evening, and I was walking aimlessly, lost in thought. Then suddenly I became conscious of my surroundings. I had reached the main entrance to the Sivagiri Mutt and had started to climb the steps that lead to the ashram. I began to hear a bewitching musical tone in the air. For awhile I stood there, dumbfounded by what I heard. A pause came in the singing I was listening to, and then the unworldly music began again. The song of the cuckoos, India's black singing birds, can easily be heard but the bird itself remains unseen within the tree foliage. Here it was like the music of a heavenly cuckoo. The song alone was heard but the source remained unseen. I felt that the source had to be found out. Now the voice began to be heard more clearly. It sang: "Oh, Mother, you appear as a fish. You appear as a deer as well."

Whose song could this be? I lent an ear to the voice and turned my attention in the direction it came from. Its source was the Sarada Mutt (Temple of the Goddess of Music and Wisdom). The temple's door was fully open and within shone the golden image of the goddess Sarada, glistening in the gentle light of the evening oil lamps. A shaven-headed sannyasin was sitting before the statue and was singing in a mood of offering himself as an altar flower. I did not know then that the song was *Jananī-nava-ratna-mañjari* (The Nine-Gemmed Bouquet to the Mother) composed by Narayana Guru, and that it was written on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of this very temple. A handful of devotees were standing listening to the sweet song in an attentive mood, and the sannyasin was singing forgetful of everything. One prayer alone filled my being at that moment: O God, don't let this blissful experience end! Still I felt in a hurry to directly see the face of the singer. Who could this rare bird be?

The singing ended. No one around the room was seen moving even a bit. Now the singer stood up and prostrated himself before the goddess. The temple priest,

who was so far standing there lost in an exultation of devotion, entered the inner sanctum, a platter filled with flowers in his hands, to perform the regular *puja*. I moved from my place in order to see the singer's face, on which more light was now falling. He was a youth, and an attractive luster was evident in his face and shaven head. As I stood holding my breath, he came out. My inner urge was not to fall at his feet and show how much I revered him, but was to embrace him and weep by leaning my face on his bosom. But shy by nature, I could not do so.

I followed this sannayasin as if I was his shadow. Only one sannayasin was known to me then at the Sivagiri Mutt and that was Swami Narayana Teertha. Just then he came to me with a smile on his face. He patted me lovingly and then asked the young sannayasin, "Don't you know him? He is the son of so-and-so." Then he turned to me to introduce the young singer, saying "Swami Mangalananda." Never before had I heard this name. My feeling at that moment was not that the name belonged to the man standing in front of me but that the name itself was the source of the sweet and heart-warming music I was still hearing in my mind. And this name had become a sort of synonym for sweetness and ineffable bliss. I felt within how delightful it would be to live in this ashram with this sannayasin, then I would be able to enjoy his music daily. I was not wrong. Every morning that sweet voiced cuckoo, just after having the usual early morning cold water bath, would come to the temple and sing some hymn from the complete works of Narayana Guru. *Jananī-nava-ratna-mañjari* seemed to be a must every evening. Likewise, the universal prayer *Daiva daśakam* was chanted in the mornings. Listening to them I would remain breathless and filled with certain hitherto unfamiliar feelings that softened my inner being.

One day a few important looking gentlemen came to the ashram. They sat together for a business meeting. Swami Narayana Teertha spread out before them a building plan blueprint that was already looking old and tattered, and described its details to those present. They were the original plans of the *Brahmavidyālaya* (School of the Science of the Absolute) prepared by Narayana Guru himself, and the meeting was actually the first one of the committees formed for its construction. In the meantime I learned that Swami Mangalananda was the committee's secretary. I was then given a new responsibility: helping the secretary in preparing the proceedings of the meeting and properly keeping the minutes book. A strong suggestion came up in the meeting: shouldn't someone go to Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka), where there was a possibility of collecting enough money for the building construction? Everyone looked at the face of Swami Mangalananda with much expectation. Reading their minds, Swamiji stood up and gave an extemporaneous yet profound speech of nearly fifteen minutes as if he was dedicating himself to that very purpose.

I was then seeing a new side of the handsome singer I adored, the face of a profound and prolific orator. I felt really proud of his self-confidence. Along with it

I was also feeling a new heartache, that of the possibility of his leaving for Ceylon. In that case, my living at the Sivagiri Ashram would come to its end. Sivagiri without Swami Mangalananda was unimaginable for me. Before long, Swamiji did leave and the vacuum created at the ashram was unbearable. I too left Sivagiri.



Swami Mangalananda, before joining the Sivagiri Mutt, had traveled all through India as a wandering monk. He used to talk to me often about his travel experiences. Perhaps because of the curiosity such travelogues aroused in me, I also began a wandering life after leaving the ashram.

Our next meeting was in 1950 during the annual Sivagiri Pilgrimage. That day an explosive scene developed in my relations with the other sannyasins of the ashram. As I came out of the dining hall, emotionally upset, Swamiji approached me and embraced me with all compassion. He consoled me by caressing my back. Saying, "Come," he led me onward to somewhere unknown. I obediently followed. Narayana Gurukula at Srinivasapuram, on the hill next to Sivagiri, was where we were going. There was only a small two-story building near

the entrance. No other buildings existed there in those days. Climbing up the steps of that one building, Swamiji and I reached the upper room where we saw Nataraja Guru sitting.

I had met Nataraja Guru before. He was then called Natarajan Master. There was no ochre clothing, no sign of a sannyasin to be seen on his person. My role model and most knowledgeable person in those days was Swami Mangalananda. That very same Swamiji was now seen sitting before this Natarajan Master with all humility as though he himself were someone very insignificant. Natarajan Master, while conversing, cracked many jokes and laughed with his entire body shaking. Swamiji was sitting before him like a small child, taking down some of the important words that dropped from the mouth of the Master. To my astonishment I heard the Master saying, "Why are you writing down my best ideas? Maybe your plan is to make use of them your speeches somewhere. It's like when a fish-vending woman carries a basket full of fish on her head, a crow may fly down from behind and grab a fish from the basket and escape. What you're doing now is something

similar. It won't work. One should be willing to sit nearby and learn properly for at least twelve years."

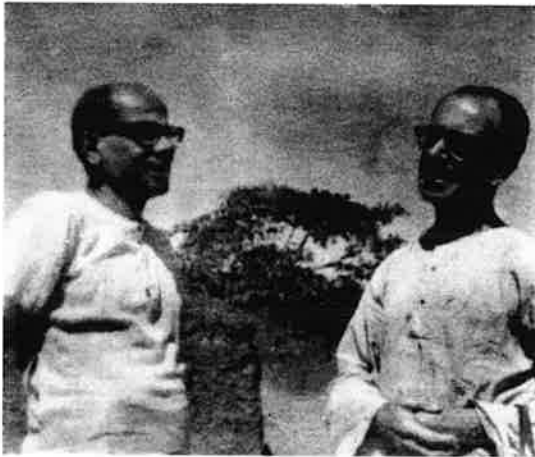
To myself, when I heard this, I thought, "My Swamiji knows everything. Why should he learn any more from anyone?" Swami Mangalananda, on the other hand, as I could notice, was offering himself to Natarajan Master as an obedient disciple. It was late at night when we took leave of Natarajan Master. Neither of us uttered even a word until we reached Sivagiri. The conversation I had been listening to passed through my mind many times afterwards. That night I had witnessed an ideal and true disciple, a *saceisya*.

Thereafter I went my own way. Later I was doing my Honors Course at University College, Trivandrum. One day I heard of a speech to be given by Swami Mangalananda at Multakkad Temple nearby. The speech was to be based on the story of Buddha, and I went to listen. Swamiji entered the room and went to the dais as a gentle soul in a mood of profound seriousness. His nobility was evident in the way he dressed, in the manner of his walking, in his posture as he sat on the dais. The introductory prayer he chanted brought all listeners to rapt attention, and they sat there as if figures in a drawing. By way of introducing the story of the Buddha, Swamiji portrayed the *bhikṣu* Ananda, Buddha's disciple, as pictured as a character in the poem *Caṇḍāla Bhikṣuki* (The Outcast Nun). This is a poem by the great poet Kumaran Asan, a disciple of Narayana Guru. The feeling I had then was not of merely listening to an enjoyable speech. The scenes of the midday sun, the pipal tree, the wayside well, the *bhikṣu* Ananda reaching the well weary and thirsty, the outcaste girl Matangi coming there for water, Ananda asking her for water, her refusing at first, then giving the water: all these became distinctly visible to me one by one. Swamiji was not simply singing the lines of Kumaran Asan, but was giving a new life to them and creating an inexplicable but blissful dream world and making the audience a part of it. As the girl Matangi reaches the monastery of the Buddha looking for Ananda, whom she loved, the Buddha himself welcomes her with the words, "O dear one, everything that happened is known to us." Swamiji's way of introducing the Buddha as the perfection of manly beauty created a visual experience of him in his listeners.

Only then did Swamiji take us with him to the shade of the tree where the Queen Mayadevi, the wife of King Suddhodana, is resting, and where she had given birth to Siddhartha. From there on, we listened to the familiar story with our breaths held. People laughed at certain scenes, at others they silently wept while holding back their temptation to cry out loud. One thing alone became meaningless in Swamiji's presence: time. The listeners who became viewers returned to their time sense only when they saw Swami Mangalananda withdrawing from the dais with folded hands and wishing the best, *maṅgala*, to everyone.

Thereafter the both of us became inmates of the Narayana Gurukula, as two students being taught by one guru. Sri Ramakrishna used to compare a true guru, a

sad-guru, to a loving mother. She takes care of each of her children individually by taking into account what is good for each of them. Likewise did Nataraja Guru teach his disciples. The instruction to each one was different from what the other ones received, the training he gave to each was different, and the personality he tried to develop in each was different. I am a person who is emotional and sentimental by nature and sometimes find myself in the throes of some inner pangs. Considerate of this nature, Nataraja Guru behaved gently and generously with me, using only well-chosen, peaceful words. At the same time I was often shocked at the way he



would use deeply wounding words in a merciless way with Swami Mangalananda.

Swamiji never knew what fear was. He never bowed his head before anyone, so strong was his self-respect. But he always accepted with folded hands the whiplash-like sharp words of Nataraja Guru as the nectar-filled blessings of the Guru. He made use of them for proper contemplative cogitation. Watching his absolute devotion and his faithful regard for Guru made me feel like glorifying his

attitude by falling at his feet and gently kissing them. He never uttered a single word criticizing his Guru, even slightly. He could not think of it, even in his dreams.

Totally opposite was the nature of John Spiers, whom the Guru chose as his first successor in the hierarchy of his disciples. The slightest criticism from Guru was enough to provoke John. He would explode just like a string of firecrackers. Then what followed would be a real battle between Guru and John. I used to become frightened to the core on such occasions. Mangalananda Swami would not tolerate even a single word uttered against his Guru. He saw it as *guru-ninda*, contempt of a guru. But he was the second in the hierarchy of the Gurukula, so he thus counted himself as a junior to John. He would behave with all obedience and humility towards his senior. This gave me a lesson on how a disciple should willingly respect his or her Guru's decision with obedience. Even after sitting in on many heated arguments between Guru and John, Swamiji uttered not a word critical of his senior co-disciple.

The Gurukula at Varkala in those days had no income at all. Despite that, Swamiji started publishing the Malayalam monthly *Gurukulam* magazine with himself as the editor. Thus Swamiji began to have two major responsibilities, being the breadwinner of the Gurukula and paying the monthly bill of the printing press. He also had to see that the printed magazine was folded, wrapped, stamped and

mailed on the due dates without fail. Only one source was available then to meet all of those demands. He himself traveled to unknown places across Kerala by bus and boat, carrying his brown leather bag with him and delivering speeches at night. In the mornings after the speeches, he would then start off for the next place and program with all the weariness due to lack of proper sleep. The money that people offered him as *dakṣiṇā* was what supported the Gurukula then. By keeping some margin of it, Swamiji managed to build a new small kitchen and a dormitory for the Gurukula residents, adjacent to the existing building.

Accomplishing all this might seem like something very easy now. It was not so then. The attempts he made to build up the Gurukula at that time were nearly impossible: continuous travel, daily programs of speeches, no rest at all, and never disclosing his own sufferings to anyone. He had a heart filled with poetic imaginations and too many problems to be mindful of, along with a willingness to take on the sufferings of the thousands that loved him and for whom he felt compassion. All these together impaired and finally ruined his physical health.

Those who loved him began to advise: “Don’t travel so much, don’t give continuous talks like this.” But he would reply, “I should collapse on a dais while giving a speech about Guru’s words. Until then I will continue to do this.”

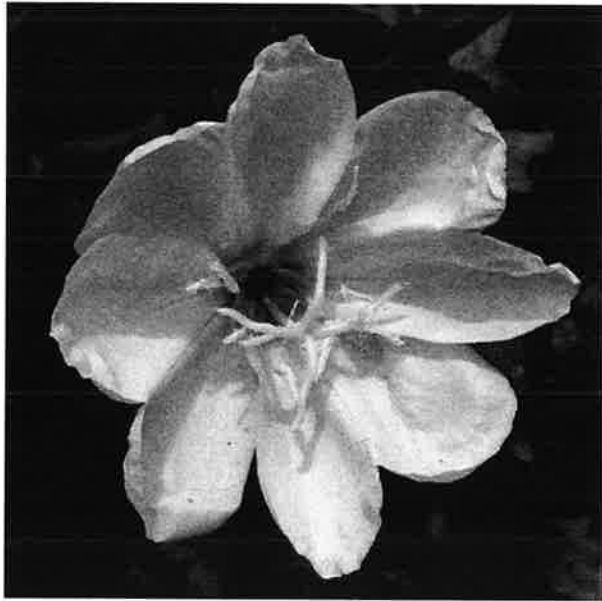
The bodily illness that Swamiji was until then keeping suppressed suddenly attacked him. He had to rest for a few days in Trivandrum. In the meanwhile, I moved to Delhi. He visited me there as if in blessing. I felt the need to record some of his heavenly songs and beautiful speeches, to be kept on permanent record. I set ready a tape recorder and a few tapes for this purpose. Swamiji sang, waking up early in the morning every day. But after all our recordings were played back, he felt sad about it. He found they were sung with a shivering voice from the extremely cold mornings in Delhi and were not good enough. In a sad mood he asked me, “Nityaji, please erase these.”

We got together once more at Varkala during the annual Gurukula convention. There were repeated indications in his talks then that this would be the last Gurukula convention in which he participated, and it was the one that he convened. Just after



the Convention, Swamiji went to Trivandrum once again. I felt that I should go there and take leave of him. Immediately after parting from him, I thought I should return and take his photograph. I did return and took a photograph of him sitting in a chair.

I then went back to Delhi and Nataraja Guru went to Kozhikode for eye surgery. As the Republic Day Parade was going on in Delhi, I received a telegram informing me that Swamiji had left his body. The same day's mail brought me a letter from him, asking me to erase his songs from the tapes. When I did that it was as if Swamiji himself was being erased. But nothing he left behind in the hearts of his disciples could ever be erased. I repeated in my own heart, with a sense of guilt, "Swamiji, I have erased nothing and it would not be possible to do so either."



ŚRĪ VĀSUDEVA AṢṬAKAM AND VIṢṆU AṢṬAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY

GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

INTRODUCTION

Narayana Guru's hymns are mostly in praise of the deities pertaining to Siva. Even in his purely philosophical poems, if there is a reference to any deity at all, it would be Siva, as in verse 13 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction). Furthermore, all the temple deities he installed across South India, in his lifelong mission as a revaluator of India's spiritual traditions, are in the same Siva group. Though he had a preference for the Saivite tradition there was no dislike or disaffiliation from any of India's other traditions, such as Vaisnavite.

Exemplifying this open mindedness of Narayana Guru, are the compositions *Śrī Vāsudeva Aṣṭakam* and *Viṣṇu Aṣṭakam*, both in Sanskrit, and the single verse entitled *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Darśanam* (Vision of Krishna). The latter is surcharged with the exhilaration of the festive vision of Krishna, one of Vishnu's incarnations. This is to be taken in the context of the prevalence of animosity between many of the Vaisnava and Saiva sects in South India. Narayana Guru's equal-mindedness in this socio-religious climate is also evident from his visits to some of the most famous Vishnu temples in the South, where he was received with full honor in recognition of his open, enlightened outlook. These incidents are written about in detail by Nataraja Guru in his book *The Word of the Guru*.

Irrespective of the deities praised, all of Narayana Guru's hymns can be seen to be grounded in a nondual vision. Along with the unitive outlook that underlies all of his work, there is as well the Guru's use of India's well-known mythological iconography. For example, he uses the symbols of the river Ganga, the crescent moon, third eye and serpent garland of Siva, as well as the philosophical concepts of *paśu* (souls), *pati* (the Lord) and *pāśam* (rope of bondage) that form part of *Śaiva siddhānta* or Saivite philosophy. All these symbols find their place in Narayana Guru's humns praising Siva and his family. Such symbols and concepts, when interwoven into poetic imagery, attain new sublimities. In his works there is a poetic sweetness and intuitive vision of the Real.

Likewise, when praising Vishnu, Narayana Guru makes use of such symbols as the conch *pāñcajanya*, the mace *kaumodakī*, the gem *kaustubha*, and the cowherd

girls. The Vaisnavite concepts such as Vishnu being the husband of both *Lakṣmi* or *Śrī* (the goddess of wealth) and *Bhū* (the Earth goddess) are accepted, as is the idea that liberation means the opportunity to do eternal service to Vishnu in his abode of Vaikuntha. These all find a place in the Guru's hymns on Vishnu in appropriate contexts. At the same time, the originality of the Guru's own vision of life and the one Reality can be seen all through his hymns, sometimes easily, sometimes hidden in poetic imagery. Such usages as *mānāpa-māna-sama-mānasa-rāja-hamsa* (the royal swan equal towards both commendation and condemnation) and *hamsādi-ramya-sarasīraha-pāda-mūla* (the one whose lotus-like heel keeps divine geese, the *hamsa*, and others always happy) deserve special mention here as examples of explicit expression of Vaishnavite philosophy and iconography.

The composition of *Sri Vāsudeva Aṣṭakam* is in the meter *Vasanta-tilakam* of the Sanskrit prosody. All of its eight verses end with the repetition of the line *śrī-bhūpate hara hare sakalāmayam me* (O Lord of both *Śrī* and *Bhū*, O *Hari*, please take away all my afflictions). The Guru's word "me" (my) need not necessarily be taken as a reference to his personal self. Every person who prays, who studies this work carefully and makes use of it for contemplation, can be that "I", and the prayer made here can well be conceived as the prayer of every person who thinks of the sufferings felt as "mine." This work must have been composed around 1884 but the circumstances that inspired the Guru to write it remain unknown.

Whereas *Śrī Vāsudeva Aṣṭakam* is a prayer for favors, *Viṣṇu Aṣṭakam* assumes the form of a meditation. The latter's composition is in a mixed meter, each of the four lines of every verse being, in sequence, *Indravajra*, *Upendravajra*, *Indravamśa* and *Vamśastha*. The "envoy" as the work concludes is in the meter *Anuṣṭuph*. Both the date of this work and its circumstances are unknown.

The Guru may have composed some other hymns on Vishnu but all of them are irrecoverably lost.

The Upanishadic teachings hold that the seeker has to realize his goal by passing through the stages of *śravaṇa* (listening to the words of wisdom), *manana* (cogitation of what is heard), and *nididhyāsana* (profound and repeated meditation). *Śravaṇa* here becomes fulfilled by reading with full attention these words of the Guru. The present commentary is intended to be an aid to the seeker in his *manana*. The Guru had a transparent vision within, attained through his *nididhyāsana*, when he penned these lines. Gaining the very same vision has to be the goal of seekers, and through them they can gain their own *nididhyāsana*. Such an attainment is symbolized in the "envoy" to *Viṣṇu Aṣṭakam* as "attaining the world of Vishnu." Reaching this goal is to be realized by the seeker by making use of these words and those of a similar nature for *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*, with, of course, the blessings of the Guru himself. It is with the prayer, "May such seekers have this blessing of the Guru" that this commentary is offered at the feet of the Guru as an altar flower.

Śrī Vāsu Devaṣṭakam

Verse One

O *Vāsudeva*,
O the One who holds in each hand
the lotus flower, the *pāñcajanya* conch,
The mace named *kaumodakī*,
And the disc that averts all fears.
O the One who has the black spot
Known as *Śrīvatsa* in the chest,
O the One who does away with
All manner of pain,
O the Lord of both *Śrī* and *Bhū*,
O *Hari*, please take away
All of my afflictions.

O Vishnu, you are also known as *Vāsudeva*. *Śrī*, used before your name and that of your wife *Lakṣmī*, denotes wealth, majesty, dignity, grace, luster, the virtues of excellence, intellect, understanding and superhuman powers. All of these qualities are thought of as part of your being. You are counted as the plenitude of all human excellence. I remember these when I address you, O *Śrī Vāsudeva*.

Your name Vishnu indicates your existence as being everywhere. You are the One substance that assumes the form of everything. Through this secret, we feel our own being has Vishnu as its substance. The enlightened ones also can be seen filled with the auspicious qualities signified by *Śrī*.

Let us think of your name *Vāsudeva*. According to legends, once you incarnated as the son of Vasudeva and were called Sri Krishna. The word *vāsudeva* means one who shines (*deva*) because of possessing wealth (*vāsu*). Your father's actual wealth is no longer relevant in the present but the wealth indicated, that still has value, is the wealth of wisdom. It is this wealth alone which assures the non-decaying sense of life fulfillment (*dhanayatā*). That wealth was handed down to us by you, the son of Vasudeva, in the form of Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. It is in this sense that your epithet of Vasudeva becomes meaningful. As the Bhagavad Gita itself underscores, one lives guided by the awareness, "Everything is but *vāsudeva*," and such a life alone is filled with undiminished fulfillment.

In your traditional representation you have four hands. In these you hold a lotus, a conch, a mace and a spinning disc. Of these four symbols, the lotus signifies purity and beauty. When seeing the lotus in your hand, we feel inspired to make our own lives as pure and beautiful as the lotus, as lively, as soft and gentle while being as vigorous. Above all, the lotus inspires us to find happiness within ourselves. It is our perception of life that makes us either happy or miserable. The lotus reminds

us to find the happiness that comes from a neutral, balanced attitude. It is our perception of life that makes it either happy or miserable. What this hymn will later remind us is that what makes our life truly happy is the patience to consistently maintain a neutral attitude towards both pleasure and pain.

Even as the lotus signifies purity and beauty, it grows from the impure and slushy mud. The purity and beauty of our life originates from the mud of innate tendencies, called *vāsanās*, accumulated in our genes through innumerable generations. The tree of life branches out endlessly. No one knows which tendency from which ancestor will become part of our being. None of us is aware of the nature of such vasanas. These, according to a belief that has become part of Indian culture, amass in the depth of each soul as it passes through countless rebirths. Perhaps their variety and nature are unknown even to you, the all-knowing controller of everything! These tendencies that emerge from the depths of something unknown and indistinct are to be made pure and beautiful like a lotus. All such mysterious factors are hinted at by the lotus symbol in your hand.

The Conch

O Vishnu, you habitually hold the conch known as *pāncajanya* in one of your hands. You, in your incarnation as Krishna, were living as a disciple, along with your brother in the ashram of the great sage Sandipani. The son of your guru went to the holy bathing ghat Prabhasa Tirtha to take a ritualistic bath, where he was kidnapped by the demon Pancajana, whose abode was a conch. Pancajana hid the boy in this conch. It was customary in those days that the disciples, on taking leave of their guru at the end of their education, give a gift known as *guru dakṣiṇā* as a sign of their gratitude. Vishnu, your guru's demand as *dakṣiṇā* was that you should bring back his son. Accordingly, you both went to the ocean and challenged Varuna, the presiding deity of the oceans. Varuna then came out of the sea and told you the boy had been stolen by Pancajana and was being hidden in his residence, the conch. Both of you then rescued the boy, killing the demon Pancajana. From then on you began to use Pancajana's conch. It was this conch that was blown by you, along with Arjuna's conch *devadatta*, just before the wisdom teaching of the Bhagavad Gita began.

A peculiarity of conch-blowing is that it sounds almost like the sound of Aum, known in Vedanta as the verbal version of Brahman, *śabda-brahman*, the one ultimate Reality. As the origin of all the worlds is from Brahman, so too the origin of the entire world of words is from the one word Aum. The world that originates from Brahman has a structural perfection of its own, as does the unfolding of *śabda-brahman* or the world of words. This unfoldment of the sound Aum is signified by the act of blowing a conch. And our own self-unfolding is symbolized by your conch.

The Mace

O Lord, some of the gods and heroes of the legends and epic poems can be seen carrying a mace as a weapon. You are no exception. Your club-weapon is known

as *kaumodakī*. It first was taken from Varuna, the water god, and given to Krishna by Agni, god of fire. A mace is always a sign of strength, physical as well as mental. Such a strength is a necessary factor in achieving any noble goal. And the noblest of all such goals to be achieved by humans is none other than *mukti* or ultimate liberation, which means attaining identity with you, the ultimate reality. Attaining this goal naturally requires the greatest of strengths. The Mundaka Upanishad rightly warns us, "The Self is unattainable to the feeble." Mental firmness, above all other strengths, is what enables one to achieve a goal, whatever it may be. It is at the moment of greatest necessity that a fighter resorts to club-fighting, as in ancient warfare, to achieve his goal.

The Discus

O Lord, you, in your human form you always carry in one of your hands, the well-known discus named *sudarśana-cakra*. *Cakra* means a wheel and *sudarsana* means good looking. You in your fight against evil make use of this weapon only when the rest of your weapons fail. The one emotion that always haunts human life is fear. We are willing to resort to any means to avoid fear, but all such efforts fail. There is one factor not under human control that will solve all our problems. That is Time, the great physician. There is no fear that time cannot remove, and our final solace is that time will solve all our problems. The onward movement of this time, we know is not in a straight line. Its course rather is cyclic in nature. For this reason, the progression of events in nature is often compared to the rolling on of a giant wheel. No one really knows what time hides in its future course. Such unpredictability is what your discus symbolizes and what makes it unique.

Śrī Vatsa

O Lord, the mark of spiral hair on your chest is known as *Śrī Vatsa*. A mythological story tells the origin of this formation, which literally means "that which is auspicious." Some rishis once argued with the sage Bhrigu about who was the most adorable god among the three deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Of these three, Brahma and Siva ignored Bhrigu. Annoyed, Bhrigu cursed Brahma for being unworthy of worship and Siva for becoming phallus-shaped. Then the sage approached you, Vishnu, as you slept. He grew angry at your drowsiness and kicked your chest with his left foot. You immediately woke up, gently massaged the sage's foot and then asked him with all humility, "Did you hurt your foot?" Then you expressed your wish to have the mark left on your chest forever as a sign of auspiciousness.

This incident shows how the rishis or seers are well above the Vedic and Puranic gods. Whereas these gods represent Vedism and the mythology that followed it, the seers and sages stand for pure wisdom capable even of evaluating the worth of gods.

As signifying the ideal relationship between God and his devout supplicants, the latter here represented by the sage Bhrigu, this incident shows the nature of affection and generosity God feels towards his devotees. Devotion, *bhakti*, is not merely a unilateral affair. God's grace towards a devotee depends mainly on the

nature of the devotion of the supplicant, and thus devotion is a bipolar affair. God sometimes is even considered the servant to the servant (*dasa-dasa*). This kind of bipolarity between God and his devotees is admittedly emotional, and the seat of all emotions is poetically imagined to be one's heart or chest. In this sense, you Vishnu have on your chest itself the auspicious mark that shows your emotional attachment to your devotee.

The One Who Roots Out All Pain

All the unpleasant feelings in life, like disease, pain and worry, are considered as sufferings by us because we are ignorant of the reality that you, as the one all-underlying Reality, are the one controller of everything in all the worlds. You are the one who causes all events in the world, and we should treat them all as having equal value, and regard both happiness and suffering as part of your self-unfoldment as the ever-changing world. Such a neutral attitude towards all events in life is the real and lasting happiness. Whatever happens that we don't want or that we don't anticipate worries us. But everything really happens as willed by you, the Absolute. Having this understanding roots out our sufferings. And in this sense, it could be said you are the one who destroys the root cause of all life's miseries.

Śrī Bhūpati

O Lord, you are the husband of *Śrī Lakṣmī*, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, and also of *Bhū*, the earth. Every being is always in search of happiness. And this happiness, in the usual course, is thought of as deriving from enjoyable objects. Such objects could be in the form of money, gold, silver, and precious stones or as products of the earth, such as fruits, vegetables and grains, all of use value. The former type of enjoyable objects is represented by the goddess *Śrī Lakṣmī*, and the latter by *Bhū*. But in respect of both, you are the Lord. The legends say that you, Vishnu, are the husband of both *Śrī* and *Bhū* and therefore I address you as *Śrī Bhūpate*, the word *pate* meaning "O husband."

Hari

O Lord, you are called *Hari*, a name derived from the verb root *hr̥* which means to destroy, to attract. You are *Hari* because you purify the mind by destroying all evils and sins. You being the one and only Reality, the emergence of the multitude of appearances has to be from you, and all these finally merge back in to you. Thus you attract everything towards yourself, and in this sense also you are called *Hari*. You being such a Reality, all living beings, especially human beings, the more they think about you, the more they become enchanted by you and attracted towards you, and in this sense also you are *Hari*.

O *Hari*, you being so, please destroy all my sufferings in life in the above said manner by enlightening me.

(This commentary is to be continued in further issues of the magazine.)



THE FIFTH LABOR OF HERCULES

BY SCOTT TEITSWORTH

The fifth task, the cleaning of the Augean Stables illustrates the paradox of the one and the many. It is by far the most famous of the twelve labors, but in a somewhat cursory search I have not found anyone who appreciates the humor or who has even take a stab at what it means. This is a shame, since it is downright funny as well as highly instructive.

Eurystheus was irked that Herakles had succeeded at every task he set him, since he really meant for him to fail. He wracked his brain to conceive of a truly impossible task, and came up with a good one. He demanded that Herakles clean out the vast Augean Stables in one day. King Augeas had owned 3000 oxen for 30 years, but had never had his stables cleaned. Thus the job would not only be impossible, due to the huge amount of filth, but wading in shit would degrade and humiliate Herakles too. Shoveling shit at close quarters, you can't help but get it on you, meaning that by fighting evil on its own terms and with its own tactics you become corrupted yourself, as history well demonstrates.

Refusing to wade into the muck, Herakles never got his feet dirty. Instead, he rerouted two nearby rivers to pass through the stables from one end to the other, and quickly scoured the place out. Afterward, Augeas refused to pay him the fee he had promised, and Eurystheus refused to count it as a legitimate task, claiming the river had done the work, not Herakles.

Decoding this labor is helped by visualizing it. Imagine looking down a corridor in a huge barn, with a line of the backsides of cattle on either side. The oxen are eating hay and defecating continuously, and the accumulated pile reaches to the rafters. The smell is almost visible it is so strong. You look down and see you are carrying a small manure rake; compared to the pile it is no more than a fart in a windstorm. You realize immediately that the stuff is being generated faster than you can possibly take it away. To address it one item at a time would be utterly futile. By the time you've cleaned up one pile, a hundred more are lying steaming on the deck. Obviously another strategy is required. Meditating on the problem, you decide to knock out the far door and divert two pristine streams toward the front. Voila! Rudimentary plumbing is invented, and all the crap is quickly swept away.

In English at least, bullshit is even today a common term for lies and falsehood, and the term is quite vivid protolanguage for communicating the loathing we feel when we have been deceived by charlatans. Apparently buttheads are buttheads, whether in 2000 BCE or 2000 CE. Even many animals use their feces as a form

of derogatory comment. Moreover, our own mind plays us false at times. Bullshit can be both internally and externally generated. We are full of shit, and the public arena is likewise full of shit. Oxen shit doesn't have quite the same ring, so we call it bullshit if only for the poetry of it. In any case, one of the most important tasks of a spiritual life is to get the bullshit out of your way.

Such vivid imagery! Like the braying pundits of propaganda television and radio, we can conjure up an endless line of assholes spewing toxic filth, their hairpieces resembling oxen tails swishing over their filthy, unwiped maws. The oxen are content to mindlessly consume and excrete the fodder they have been served by their master's lackeys. They don't care what havoc they wreak with their excretions, they just know they have to be faithful and obedient or their sustenance will stop being doled out to them.

A sincere person might spend a lifetime shoveling up the mess, refuting lie after lie, but then what is accomplished? As soon as one lie is nullified, ten more have been launched. Only an inner blast of light that neutralizes it all at once, that treats it as one single situation instead of millions of separate ones, can conquer this tenacious problem. The proper way, then, for us to overcome the challenge is to convert from a materialist view that treats each problem separately, to a unitive, spiritual vision that solves all dilemmas simultaneously. Dr. Mees offers us this:

The Labour teaches that the dirtiest work can be performed without losing face and in a dignified manner and that to the spiritual man no activity is degrading. Considered in its analogical implications the Labour shows that the Holy Ghost alone is able to effect a cleaning up of Ahankaric dirt within the soul. No amount of "psychological shuffling" (which is only "spadework") can bring the same result.

Falsehood in the form of bullshit or horseshit is endless and perennially renewed. It can't possibly be dealt with piecemeal—that would take forever. The only solution is to call up a spiritual flood that cleanses everything.

The Gita treats the same subject in a somewhat less colorful way. Horizontal life is described as a proliferating tree, in which "many branched and endless are the reasonings of them in whom reason is ill-founded." The solution is not to painstakingly cut off every leaf or twig, but to go to the root and sever the whole business in one fell swoop.

One requirement Eurystheus laid down was that if Herakles failed to complete the job in a single day, he would have to remain in the service of King Augeas and clean his stables for the rest of his life. This means that if one gets caught up in dealing with horizontal activities there is no end to them. They keep renewing themselves. You either dispense with them in toto, all at once, or you stay stuck.

When confronted with an endless series of lies, it is difficult to hold fast to truth. Without refuting them, they are likely to steer you (pun intended) away from

what you know into muddy waters. If we don't have a firm grasp of who we are, we can be led astray by the convictions of others, not realizing that these are likely to be self-serving propaganda masquerading as facts. As Machiavelli was well aware, most people have an innate sense of justice and fair play, and they assume others are observing the same parameters. It is easy for deceivers to take advantage of such people, because they will tend to give them the benefit of the doubt. If you dress up your selfish motives with high-sounding verbiage, and keep it coming, you can fool most of the people most of the time.

I well remember a bully in my high school who had a novel technique for beating people up. As he punched, slapped and smacked you, he would insist, "I'm not hitting you! I'm a nice guy. I'm not doing anything to you! What's the matter with you?" Where you might stand your ground against simple punches, the tirade



invariably threw you mentally off balance. There is a deep-seated urge in us to respond and correct the falseness of claims made against us. So, as your outrage rises up at the obvious lies, you get hit three more times before you take cover. Modern so-called conservatives have adopted this bully gambit very successfully. As they cheer on the raping and plundering of the public treasury, they insist they are the only patriots in the room. Anyone who tries to stand up to them is labeled unpatriotic, or worse. Civilized people are always tempted to refute the false claims, and as they waste time trying to establish truth in those who care nothing for it, these "patriots" make off with whatever they can grab. As long as multiplicity is the norm, with opinions supplanting facts, they will always be several steps ahead of the law. Absolutist vision is necessary before we can call a thief a thief.

Augeas' stables were so full of shit that the stench pervaded the entire region. Decoders of mythology in the Age of the American Empire can certainly get a picture of what this means. Influential leaders of a nation have either an inspiring or a poisoning influence on all their domain. They "set the tone" so to speak, for everyone far and wide, not just in their personal state of mind but in business relations, the arts, education, so many places. Bullshit at the center of the stables of power produces hostility among people, distrust in business, and bitterness and resentment in education and the arts. Such is the perfume we—like Herakles—are confronted with.

At present the United States, in company with most of the nations of our planet, has been nearly destroyed by thieves and thugs who use bullshit philosophies to

keep honest citizens at bay. We are now facing the dismaying task of repairing the damage and restoring some kind of functionality. If it is done bit by bit, as seems politically inevitable, it will take forever. However, that is the current strategy. The ancient Greeks are using Herakles to counsel us that a wholesale rejection of the evil ways is necessary. Without a change of heart, we are doomed to continue to replay the same degrading scenario over and over. Those of us who live here can watch the bullshitters torpedo every sensible program with hairsplitting protestations and diversionary tactics. Meeting their insatiable demands is as daunting as cleaning the Augean Stables with a pitchfork. We have to find a way to get to the root of the problem instead.

Of the numerous apt examples of this Herculean task from modern life, let's look at the worldwide drug war. Prohibition is a proven failure in combating drug abuse, and yet it is ineluctably appealing to law enforcement and politicians, who make very good livings off it. It promotes extreme violence in smugglers, and the artificially high prices drive users to commit additional crimes to pay for their habits. When military pressure is applied in one area, the business simply moves elsewhere. Yet even in a limited region the effort-to-result ratio is astronomical. The whole mess looks exactly like millions of steaming heaps of manure, and no amount of additional effort will sweep it under the rug.

The tragedy could be quickly ended by legalizing and regulating drugs, thus stripping out all the illegal profits. The legal profits could then be used to treat addicts and rehabilitate smugglers, not to mention helping make life in the world enjoyable enough so that recourse to drugs is not the only way to be happy. So severing the tree at the root causes all its pernicious ramifications to wither.

As usual, we don't want to necessarily view this labor solely as an external matter, or it will lose its spiritual efficacy. The teaching here is definitely about spiritual or mental life also. Most mundane tasks must still be accomplished one step at a time, and enlightenment does not give us a pass on taking care of ordinary business the old fashioned way.

Our own soul is polluted with similar filth as the halls of government. We deceive ourselves as much or more than the government or any corporation does. Renewing ourselves bit by bit could be accomplished in just about an infinite number of years. Advaita, and apparently Greek wisdom tradition also, directs us to an instantaneous or at least a very rapid transformation. We must open ourselves to the cleansing flood of spiritual connection, like Herakles digging trenches to the two rivers to direct them where they were needed. Letting in the flow then renews everything at once.

According to my arcane reference book, *Sacred Mythoi of Demigods and Heroes*, cited earlier, the two rivers, Alpheus and Peneus are named after sons of the god Oceanus, and they may be viewed as standing for involution and evolution, the twin aspects of a balanced spiritual life. It's a bit of a stretch to imagine the Greeks

knew of it, but Vedanta also has two parallel rivers of prana, vital energy, that are to be united into a single stream to overcome all obstacles and attain enlightenment. The fifth labor works well as a pictorial image of how this might look from inside the body. No matter how you frame it, our spiritual progress depends on not simply plodding ahead step by step, but on seeking and finding creative solutions.



The image of the accumulation of the garbage over a long period of time is also significant. King Augeas didn't take care of his effluvia for his whole life, believing it was his "royal prerogative" to ignore it. Spiritually, we have to be willing to deal with our own shit, meaning facing the stuff we'd

prefer to avoid, that we'd rather pretend was someone else's mess. We have to clean out all the samskaras, the wrong conditionings, we have piled up over the years, because they stink up the atmosphere. They plop out in front of us and we walk right into them, bogging us down and causing us to slip and fall into the muck. We could go into therapy and address them one by one, but that would take more than a lifetime. Alternatively, we can attune with the Absolute and vaporize them all at once, which leaves us some time yet to really live well.

Besides conquering the Hydra, this is the other labor for which Herakles did not get credit, because he had tried to get paid by King Augeas for it, and because he hadn't actually done any dirty work. Payment for spiritual services is at least unethical, if not downright deceptive, and it certainly corrupts anyone who imagines there is a connection between spiritual wisdom and remuneration. And it's true that we cannot do this job without the assistance of Fate or the Divine, the aspect of Oneness. Still, Herakles deserves full credit for discovering the only solution that could actually work. Spiritual seekers should be after results, not fame or fortune. The two Kings' denial of his achievement was little more than resentment that Herakles' progress could not be derailed

It's curious that the two labors that "don't count" are quite similar. Both the Hydra and the cattle produce an endless series of problems: either you cut off a head and it grows back, or you sweep up the mess and it falls right back on the floor. Both the shit and the Hydra's blood are toxic or noxious. With one you have to cauterize the root and with the other you have to call down a righteous river. Either way, the solution includes not getting caught up in details but invoking a Zen-like lightning bolt.

I've known people who could have used the veiled advice of this labor: those who put off doing something important until they got their life in order. Of course, life is never orderly, never certain, and they waited so long for the "right moment"

that the opportunity faded away. A couple of my friends thought they should delay having children until they were on an even keel, and wound up completely missing the joys and lessons of parenthood. Some people postpone their dream trip until after retirement, and by then they are too old, or dead. Most of us fritter away our life on petty necessities when we should be writing that great novel or spending time with friends or volunteering on a project. We put our life on hold just like King Augeas put off cleaning out the stables, and so the inertia builds up, making a breakthrough more and more daunting.

In one of those “divine coincidences” that happen from time to time, I ran across a passage from St. Theresa de Avila while I was editing Nataraja Guru’s *Integrated Science of the Absolute* (in Vol. III, p 25). Theresa compares four stages of spiritual progress in the form of prayer with different ways to water a garden plot, and her third stage will look familiar. While it is virtually certain that she knew nothing of Herakles, the parallel with the fifth labor is astonishing and instructive. Then she goes one step farther. Let’s close with this, since it is gentle and sweet, in contrast to the heavy-handedness of the Greek myth:

Next we read St. Theresa’s “Four Degrees (or Stages) of Prayer.” To follow the broad features of our own idea of structuralism, as we can easily recognize, we read:

“We may say that beginners in prayer are those who draw the water up out of the well; which is a great labour, as I have said. For they find it very tiring to keep the senses recollected, when they are used to a life of distraction....

Let us now turn to the second method of drawing it which the Owner of the plot has ordained. By means of a device with a windlass, the gardener draws more water with less labour, and so is able to take some rest instead of being continuously at work. I apply this description to the prayer of quiet....

Let us now speak of the third water that feeds this garden, which is flowing water from a stream or spring. This irrigates it with far less trouble, though some effort is required to direct it to the right channel.

But now the Lord is pleased to help the gardener in such a way [with rain] as to be, as it were, the gardener Himself.... The soul does not know what to do; it cannot tell whether to speak or be silent, whether to laugh or to weep. It is a glorious bewilderment, a heavenly madness, in which true wisdom is acquired, and to the soul a fulfillment most full of delight.

In this state (i.e. the fourth state) the soul still feels it is not altogether dead, as we may say, though it is entirely dead to the world. But, as I have said, it retains the sense to know that it is still here and to feel its solitude; and it makes use of outward manifestations to show its feelings at least by signs.

How what is called union takes place and what it is, I cannot tell. It is explained in mystical theology, but I cannot use the proper terms: I cannot understand what mind is, or how it differs from soul or spirit. They all seem one to me.”

(St. Theresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, tr. J. M. Cohen, Penguin edn., London.)



THE SOUND OF STARLIGHT

BY INDU K. MALLAH

“It takes two million years for the light of a star to reach the earth, and
the distance between two human beings is even greater.”

“Can we see that starlight before we die?”

“If at all there is a starlight, it must be within oneself.”

– dialogue from a play by Mahesh Elkunehwar

Rhythms of joy,
Lilt of laughter,
Rhapsody of love,
Cadence of security.

A shift in tenor. Darkness at high noon,
The sound of shattered hopes.
Jagged shards of broken dreams
Beneath bleeding, sensitive souls.

Search for meaning elsewhere, everywhere,
Emptiness. Despondency, futility.
And then a momentary memory:
A mystic voice from a far away realm.
Now I wait trembling, tremulous,
At the threshold of the tenuous twilight,
For the sound of the shimmering starlight,
To resonate from the well of my Self

SCHOOL IN THE FOREST

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE
GURUKULA BOTANICAL SANCTUARY

Every year around 3000 people walk up the three kilometers of dirt road, in rain and sun, to visit the gardens at the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary. About eighty percent of these are local and regional folk—families on an outing, schools, youth groups, nature clubs, botany students, seminarians, tribal people, farmers, women's groups, and so on. All are given a tour by one of the Sanctuary staff or residents. They are taken around the main garden areas which host an attractive and comprehensive collection of native and exotic plants, arranged in taxonomic order and landscaped under the natural forest canopy. For these casual visitors it is a chance to satisfy their curiosity and see something quite different. It is also an occasion to learn a little about plants, the importance of conservation, and regional efforts to maintain and protect biodiversity. Most are quite surprised and delighted even. Many fall under the spell of a colorful and bounteous tropical world, full of unusual and fascinating beings. Often these casual passersby return with other friends, colleagues or associates for a more detailed and slow exploration of the tropical microcosm that is the Sanctuary.

Then there are the individuals and groups that come out of more specific concerns or interests. They want to learn horticultural techniques, study the botany and taxonomy of the various groups of plants, see ecology in action, do bird watching, explore possibilities in restoration, conservation, and integrated land use. Some of them come several times over the years and become friends. They are from all over the south of India—scientists, environmentalists, educators and students. They bring with them wisdom, knowledge, techniques and insights, and their visits are a chance for us to explore issues of common concern with a very wide network of individuals.

Yet another category of day visitors comes as part of a workshop where a range of activities, tours and discussions are woven around the central theme of conservation and sustainable living. We provide tea and biscuits, they bring a picnic lunch and there is a lot of intense exchange. There are increasing numbers of organic farmers and groups working with farmers who visit us as farming and self-sufficiency are among the primary concerns at the Sanctuary. We try to farm in the “natural systems” way, where the forest is the model and our lessons from forest ecology and plant biology are applied to food crops. The goal is to maximize diversity and productivity using successional and seasonal dynamics.

Such workshops are very practical and involve detailed discussions on farming, agro-ecology, plant diseases and the economics of it all.

There are workshop type engagements with large school groups as well. A number of Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs are working regionally with environmental science for school kids. We collaborate with them and use the land, plants and animals to demonstrate and explore questions in ecology with the very young. Most of these children would have grown up in a similar landscape and have intuitive and experiential knowledge of different crop plants, soils, wildlife and the climate. However, for a large number of children it is still a first time contact with the primary ecosystem of the place. Our local kids are very comfortable with the outdoor environment and yet their eyes are conditioned to lemon grass hills, tea plantations, and, increasingly, few traditional home farms. Their familiarity with



local regional environmental issues brings a kind of schizophrenic element. They know very well the problems of soil erosion and water loss, the dangers of chemical intensive farming, the heating up of the environment, yet on the other hand they are vulnerable to the burgeoning mindset that values the so-called benefits of modern development and cash economies, which are intolerant of native cultures and ecosystems. To these children the forest looks messy, wild and dense, full of dangerous animals like leeches and elephants! They see it as something you could nicely replace with orderly tea slopes and areca nut plantations. Thus a great deal of time, during local school visits, is spent in looking at and discussing the forest world and exploring the feelings and impressions it arouses in their minds. And this is done through a playful exploration of plants, an excited and eager rediscovery of their native landscape and wild community. Common themes that come up include beauty, gardening with nature, uses of plants, and the role of wildlife.

The Sanctuary's intertwined relationship with the neighborhood allows for an exchange or flow at many levels constantly—labour, services and support. Virtually all the older people in the neighborhood have at some point or other worked at the Sanctuary over the last twenty years, and this makes the work very locally rooted. Most significantly, the main garden staff for over ten years has been directed and trained by two remarkable young women who have themselves grown into inspired conservationists and highly competent gardeners—and they are from the very immediate locality and are part of the core team that shares responsibility for the place. In addition, we hold annual festivities which involve the whole neighborhood that ritually honor the forest, the earth and the elements. This is followed by a feast for all, a kind of a remembrance and thank you to powers and forces that have sustained the human community.

Finally, we have our residential programs with regional schools, significantly one or two schools with whom we have jointly developed the whole concept of "School in the Forest." This term is in part derived from our own name—Gurukula—and is very much the original inspiration under which the place was founded. Gurukula means a forest retreat, an ashram and a place of learning. In ancient India students went to live in the homes of their teachers, which were usually in remote and quiet places, perhaps in the woods. In this peaceful and conducive natural setting, significant disciplines were explored, through the act of living and learning together. In our case the Gurukula or the "family of the Teacher" includes the forest, the garden with its colorful assemblage of plants and animals, the river, the monsoon climate, and also the community of humans in which children and adults live, participate, and share responsibilities for varying lengths of time. Thus, community life at the Sanctuary involves the daily care of other living beings and a consistent and playful enquiry about the wild, natural community of which people are a part. Children have come to the Sanctuary and made the place their home, and a very critical aspect of all this is that they learn to listen and look and take great interest in the various creatures with whom they share their daily space.

The main intent of the School in the Forest programs is to provide a diverse and challenging exposure to a way of life that is intimate with nature and natural processes. The stay at the Sanctuary involves a number of different and complementary aspects. Attention is given to the quality of the whole day, from dawn to dusk, rhythms of other living beings, chores and jobs around the garden and kitchen, quiet contemplative moments, health and physical activity (swimming, tree climbing, outdoor forest games), investigation and discussion. Usually, children join in with little or no resistance, especially on their second or third visits, by which time they have overcome their initial inhibitions with nature and also have established a rapport with the residents and the place itself.

One reason why we have welcomed these residential programs is that working, functioning and living in nature demands an alertness of the senses and the ability

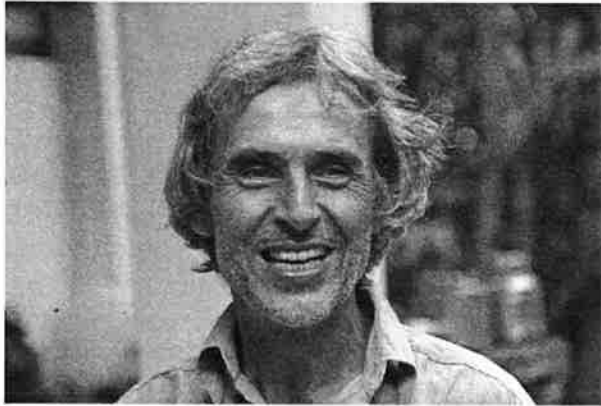
to look continually and afresh at what is going on around one. We feel it is of critical importance for youngsters to develop a different relationship with the natural world, and this process requires time. Nature moves in unpredictable ways, never static, always new, revealing deeper patterns and principles. To engage fully with this invites looking and listening, an agile body and a quiet, non-judgmental and yet intensely alert mind. This takes time to develop, and most kids, whatever their background, come upon this slowly if given time, some playful guidance, and space. All of this is of value wherever one is, in manual work, play, academic study, human relationship, or travel. And our thesis is that the loss of such qualities is part of the severance of the connection between humanity and wild nature.

We have been wondering, is it possible to draw out young people's inherent sensitivity and readiness to look and learn through observation of and participation in nature? Awakening the most primary mode of learning, direct experience—first hand awareness—is too often ignored in education, especially as the child grows older. Contact with primary experience becomes progressively shaded out as abstract learning takes over, too early in our opinion and often with detrimental results. This may be one factor leading to disconnected, disoriented and uprooted youngsters with no sympathy for their immediate environment, nor for things and people. We thus attempt to create a space for learning that allows for the discovery of something new and fresh, of spontaneous perception, engagement and enquiry as can indeed happen when immersed in nature and natural processes, even for short periods of time. We don't begin by giving them lots of knowledge and information, rather we take them out first and then let perception and understanding blossom into compassion, action, and applicable knowledge.

This back to nature form of learning has a second component to it that is of great relevance too. Making sense of the world around oneself, communication, raising questions, and articulating one's observations and concerns are all critical aspects of learning. Seeing connections and reflecting upon them, expanding the capacity of the brain by allowing its very different intelligences to flower, help to generate a rootedness to the earth. There are so many fascinating dimensions to explore with the children as their own windows open—heightened awareness, body-kinesthetic abilities, interpersonal skills, linguistic and intellectual abilities, as well as aesthetic and artistic sensibilities.

If direct experience is woven together with sharing and reflecting and enquiry, it brings about good science, which has really to do with being very close to your subject, so close that you suspend your own judgment and watch, free of ideation and preconceived assumptions, the subject—be it the river habitat, or the bird community, or the plants—until it tells you its story. This becomes extraordinarily intimate, if given time and space, and this intimacy with creation in its vaster aspects or its more minute details has the possibility to bring about a truer and more active compassion.

If you add to this the incentive that children feel as if they are active participants in research, that they are assisting and enabling the work of the Sanctuary by bringing in their observations and questions, then the zest for nature study doubles. They are not to be underestimated in their acuity of perception nor in their abilities. So, if you want to undertake a study of ants or birds or whatever, just invite a whole bunch of kids to help you widen and deepen the pool of knowledge of local natural history. The kids become your extended eyes and ears, assistants and junior scientists in a joint exploration and discovery of the natural world.



Thus, the understanding of nature needs a direct involvement, in whatever way, and it can happen in city parks, with a home garden, or trips out to the wilderness, but what is essential is the building up of care, involvement, curiosity, activity, and responsibility over time, which begins with a slow tuning in to the cycles and rhythms of the natural world.

Does observation really bring about learning? People differ in their opinions about this, especially about the usefulness of such learning and especially in a world that is dominated by the intellect and where individuals, even in rural areas, are subject to third hand, trickle-down bits of information, which bear no relevance to their immediate world. We believe we have not even touched upon the potential of direct observation—which we suspect is vast—especially for the very young. The trend is to fill them up with colourful books and hi-tech films on nature very quickly and the electronic, virtual or printed media becomes the only gateway to our vital, dynamic, rich and beautiful world. Rather, can the young mind be awakened to the muse of the forest, the incredible complexity of tropical life, the fragility of this ancient ecosystem and the fact that there is no separation between humans and nature? And once initiated, can this connectedness be sustained?

By observation so far we have been including the action and involvement of all the senses, as the senses are a fundamental component to our earthbound existence and to ourselves as physical beings. It is through the senses that we relate to the world at large. Looking, listening, touching, tasting, smelling—bringing these together through games, activities and explorations, opens the doorway into a different and more integrated mode of functioning. This seems to give children a degree of self confidence, self awareness, and also a boost to their natural liveliness and spontaneity.

Our residential programs grew slowly, bit by bit, over time and at an organic pace, as our main focus has always been on the local outreach programs. Also, we never had the idea that it could build into anything significant, since most schools are ready to send their kinds away on trips for a few days at most. As far as we have seen, this turns out to be an enjoyable experience.

Although it took one school to develop the whole program of nature education to such a comprehensive and sustained depth, the relevance of it has been picked up by other schools who are now ready to send their children for similar programs. And in the last years several other schools so far have participated in our residential School in the Forest programs. This year a school for disabled children has asked to come, an NGO working with village youth, as well as a rural school. Being small we can handle only certain numbers—and also as the programmes are so intensive they can only really happen with maximum of 10-15 kids at a time. But it's very encouraging that increasingly schools in South India are seeing the relevance of this kind of learning, particularly as they are able to use it back home in different ways. Especially schools that are really serious about the environmental crisis. The relevance they see is that in such a learning situation conservation is not an abstract idea, but rather a daily living reality through the care and interaction with other life forms and that this brings about a dynamic involvement with the environment.

Working with all these different individuals and groups, local and regional, young and old, on day visits or longer stays through all these years, has brought about an enthusiastic and creative spirit of learning, care, and common ownership of the Sanctuary. Children turn up on holidays with parents and friends in tow and introduce them to environmental issues. There is a slow but definite multiplier effect: young gardeners and budding ecologists, teachers, farmers, and travelers, who not only take away with them this sense of a marvelous, beautiful and vital world needing care and responsible participation from its human members, but also bring with them a joy and enthusiasm that nourish the place itself. In a world that is otherwise directed by the intellect and subjected to unnatural and unsustainable pressures of being, there are few opportunities to explore a more basic and spontaneous mode of living. This tragically and inexorably leads to separation from other people, the environment, society, and even oneself. It is this fragmentation and separation that we seek to address through the work with nature and young people at the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary.

BLENDING THE SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL IN THE SANSKRIT COMPOSITIONS OF NARAYANA GURU

BY SWAMI TANMAYA

Guru Narayana (1854-1928) inspired changes that brought into practice new social customs in conformity with the requirements of time. Guru's interest in seeing wisdom reflected in the day-to-day life of humanity, in its social and individual aspects, was active throughout his life, and his compositions may be seen to reflect this awareness of what was good for the people he lived among.

Narayana Guru, in the *Nārāyaṇa Smṛti*, defines and explains caste to show that the existing caste system has no basis when viewed scientifically; human beings are of one caste, species or kind. Guru made it clear that the imbalances of the relative realm of life are to be corrected with the Absolute Wisdom of consciousness. Using semantic analysis, Guru takes seekers through the features of the relative and absolute realms of knowledge. A wakeful person regarding gross experience identifies himself by: "This is a body." In the realm of belief, however, his identity is: "This is Knowledge."

There is an absolute truth behind the sameness of subjective knowing and the otherness of objective knowing, an unconditioned knowledge expressed as 'That'; everything originates from 'That', and 'That' inclusively transcends the paradoxes in life neutrally. It is this absolute knowledge that people have to use in critically evaluating and overcoming the problems of temporal life, such as the caste system.

Guru Narayana reevaluated myths, symbols and rituals associated with various aspects of life. He composed hymns that would reorder the values traditionally associated with the images and icons in temples, and these efforts came together in a unitive understanding of tradition and modernity. The life and teachings of Narayana Guru have their meaning in the context of seeking to live in the light of unitive wisdom, of bringing the neutrality of absolute wisdom into play in all aspects of life.

Human experience can be broadly divided into two realms, the cosmological, belonging to the phenomenal world, and the psychological, belonging to the numinous world of the psyche. The outer world of nature constitutes our environment; it is an objective reality. The inner world of experienced emotions and

private thoughts is essentially invisible to others. In addition to these two inner and outer worlds, humans conceive of a supernatural, sacred and spiritual realm. Humans have acknowledged and incorporated this third realm into every culture ever created. Sri Ramakrishna is talking from the third realm about the will of God.

The compositions of Narayana Guru are sixty-two in number, of which twenty are in Sanskrit, two in Tamil, and the rest in Malayalam. Sanskrit is a more universal, mother language compared with the derivative and regional Malayalam language spoken in Kerala. So the Guru built bridges between Malayalam and Sanskrit in order to share the revalued wisdom of India in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Sanskrit compositions of Narayana Guru can be categorized into three groups as well: works of moral import, hymns, and philosophical poems. His works of moral import address values which reside in our inner world. His hymns use images from the outer world to express the needs of human beings and their timeless aspirations. The Guru's philosophical works take us to the Absolute to become the Absolute.

A guru is to be understood in the context of contemplative wisdom. Wisdom refers to finalized knowledge. Such knowledge can result when our mind is properly focused. According to the discipline of Advaita Vedanta (unitive understanding), the mind is to be focused using a methodology, epistemology, and theory of values (axiology) with *sat-cit-ānanda* as the absolutist norm. *Māyā* is the static basis of all possible errors, whether physical or metaphysical. Experience by the senses brings knowledge, which is to be corrected by deductive inference. Such inferences are called a posteriori in philosophical terminology. The inductive inference corresponds more to the a priori, where experience comes after the process of thinking has taken place. Unitive understanding utilizes dialectical methodology (*yoga mīmāṃsā*) in which deductive and inductive reasoning have an equal role.

The contemplative way takes a unitive and neutral position between dualities like body and mind, thereby transcending both. We should not mix up cognitive thinking or discoursing with higher affiliation to wisdom, which leads to silence. A scheme of correlation was suggested by Nataraja Guru to serve as an aid for the guidance of seekers of wisdom. Knowledge must help us to gain more knowledge. We seek until we arrive at the term of knowledge and can see with pure awareness its absolute status.

Each Sanskrit composition of Narayana Guru uses a structural scheme to present the mystical experience without neglecting the rational aspect. The realm of the experience of the many, with all its problems, like the caste system, is corrected by Guru with objective and scientific reasoning based on the oneness of the Absolute. By the aid of the science of contemplation, Guru establishes the undoubted fact of human solidarity. Reason can penetrate into the domain of the necessary in order to regulate and rearrange it, after critical scrutiny in the light of common sense or contemplation. Contemplation is not a way to confuse factual

issues, but is rather a support and aid to common sense. Common sense and contemplation should be regarded properly as complementary parts of the same discipline. They should be conceived together under a strict, common methodology and epistemology of wisdom.

Narayana Guru utilizes a schematic representation in all his compositions to reveal the structure of the details of experience. This was the tradition of the Upanishads. The ascending dialectics takes us from the many to the one, while the descending dialectics returns us from one to many to live the wisdom of oneness in the world. Narayana Guru respects both the ordinary world of transaction and the absolute aspect of truth. Skepticism and belief get equal status in his philosophy. In this dialectical scheme, “caste” and “consciousness” are to be understood as poles of the same knowledge approached from two aspects; caste needs intellectual probing, while consciousness is to be understood both structurally and scientifically.

WORKS OF MORAL IMPORT

Nārāyaṇa Smṛti is a dependable guide for anyone who intends to live an individual and social life including consciousness of the one ultimate reality. It has ten cantos which contain reflections on one caste, one faith, and one god along with a description of right living (*dharma*) in general. This was composed by Swami Atmananda, as guided by Narayana Guru. In conformity with custom a guru does not write a *smṛti* himself, so Guru asked his disciple to write it while offering required ideas and guidelines.

Smṛti are a kind of scripture that give detailed instructions, prohibitions, and directives in life. They make provision for the exigencies of changing temporal and spatial conditions. Such scriptures are also called *dharma śāstras* (scriptures about righteousness). The *purāṇas* (mythical legends) and *itihāsas* (epics) are also classed under *smṛtis*. These texts give emphasis to moral lessons by telling stories. *Smṛtis* define *dharma* as “Proper activities suitable to the exigencies of time and clime.” The belief patterns and the behavior of people naturally undergo change. Humans at a particular time and place need to have something in common with respect to customary behavior and well-established views of life. The ideas dealt with in *Nārāyaṇa Smṛti* conform to such a requirement. Many find fault with the ancient texts like *Manusmṛti*. The oldest *smṛtis* were written long ago when temporal and social conditions were much different from what we have now. Narayana Guru has given us a new *smṛti* text befitting the new age.

The second canto of the book is on discriminating the righteous from the unrighteous, which includes reflections on oneness of caste (*jāti*), oneness of faith, and oneness of god or goal. *Jāti* is understood as “caste” in most Indian languages. More scientifically, *jāti* means “kind” or “species.” In verses 35 and 36 of the *Nārāyaṇa Smṛti*, Narayana Guru adopts a scientific view of caste by giving two definitions:

• Man's humanity marks out the human kind, as bovinity proclaims a cow. Brahminhood and the like do not do so. This would be understood when reflected upon, taking all the concerned factors into consideration.

• Male and female, loving each other, mate together and beget offspring, then they are of the same *jāti*; all other ideas (concerning *jāti*) are imaginations of deluded minds.

The temporal application of these definitions is also given:

• An individual entity's body natural to a particular species reveals clearly of which *jāti* one is. Those who are well-sighted and intelligent never ask, "To which *jāti* do you belong?" (verse 38)

The stupidity in the misunderstanding of the word *jāti* is also given:

• Names related to vocation, location, and language are there. Such are often asserted by stupid people as referring to *jāti*. The learned never do so. (verse 39)

Again Guru remarks:

• Thus it is confirmed that all humans are of one *jāti*. The differences existing with regard to the way one adorns oneself, language spoken, and the geographical region one inhabits, do not become deciding factors in respect of *jāti*. (verse 42)

How to translate this ideal in life with proper reflection on One Caste for humankind is given:

• Humans, therefore, are to live as the embodiments of one fraternity, with no antagonism among them, for the reason that they are of one *jāti*. (verse 43)

Reflection on oneness of faith stresses the universal content of religion:

• *Matam* means the well-conceived opinion of the great ones, the knowers of reality. Only the universal content of this *matam* finds verbal expression embellished picturesquely. (verse 47)

• Muslims, Christians, Jainas, Buddhists and others too all strive constantly to attain oneness alone. (verse 50)

• Everyone makes efforts for self happiness and this is agreed by all. This opinion (*matam*) is one alone; there is no doubt about it. (verse 55)

• It always and everywhere remains unchanged that people, with religions, follow their respective paths aiming at one goal alone. The oneness of religion (*matam*) thus is acceptable to all. (verse 59)

Reflecting on the oneness of God, Guru says:

• Adherents of different religions, as is well known, clearly state that their concerned religion firmly believes in one God alone. The oneness of God is thus accepted by everyone. (verse 64)

Canto Three of the *Nārāyaṇa Smṛiti* contains the description of righteousness in general. Five *dharmas* are mentioned in the beginning verse:

• Not hurting any living-being (*ahiṃsā*), being truthful (*satyam*), not stealing (*asteya*), giving up liquor (*madya varjanam*) and being chaste (*avyabhichāram*)—these in short are the five *dharmas*. (verse 67)

Great souls like Buddha did attain their Supreme goal by adhering to non-hurting. So it is the most important of all virtues. Regarding truth, Guru says:

• The one who relies constantly on truth, who finds himself existing in truth like a yogi—whatever he says doubtlessly becomes fruitful. (verse 73)

About non-stealing Guru adds:

• Stealing causes all kinds of perils, and not stealing ensures all kinds of prosperity. Stealing results in one's ill-repute. Therefore, always practice the value of non-stealing. (verse 75)

Following the Virtues, five purities are discussed. The five purities, as far as the human race is concerned, are summarily understood as of the body, speech, mind, sense organs and one's own residence. (verse 90)

In the Canto Four, childbirth, caring of the child, and initiation into formal education are discussed.

In the fifth Canto, duties related to each stage of life are given. *Āśramas* or varying stages of life were glorified by the ancient masters as four: the life of the student (*brahmacārya*), the life of householder (*gṛhastya*), the life of a hermit living in forests (*vana prasta*), and the life of a renunciate (*sannyāsin*). Guru makes a revaluation here and says: Yet, O the ones of attentive mind; three *āśramas* are enough in modern times. Even in the ancient Vedic times did these three alone practically exist. (verse 125)

The remaining cantos of *Nārāyaṇa Smṛti* contain: Studenthood, Duties of the householder, Five great sacrifices, Funeral rites, and Samnyasa or Renunciation. The fivefold sacrifices are Brahma Yajna (sacrifice related to the Absolute), Deva Yajna (sacrifice related to Gods), Pitru Yajna (sacrifice related to ancestors), Manushya Yajna (sacrifice related to human beings) and Bhoota Yajna (sacrifice related to living beings).

According to Guru Narayana: The one who does not perform the fivefold sacrifice surely has to face misfortunes. On the other hand, those who enjoy being sustained on the remainder of sacrifices remain ever untouched by sins.

What to do? is a question often asked by us when a life situation comes with a problem. We need a value orientation for working on it according to the cosmic order. The line of thinking of the Guru in this *Smṛti* will be of help for the modern person to live more intelligently.

PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS

Homa Mantram (Incantation for Fire Sacrifice)—complete revaluation of the ritualistic fire sacrifice, directed toward perceiving the significance of wisdom:

O Fire, the light which is yours, that pertains to the Absolute;
By this you are the Absolute perceived; you are the (five) senses, the mind,
the intelligence, making seven tongues.

I sacrifice unto you sense interests as offerings,
As ego, I sacrifice clarified butter. Propitiate us! Propitiate!
Bring us benefits both of here and hereafter! Swaha!

• *Niroṣitti Pañcakam* (Five Verses on Inward Release): Written at Tiruvannamalai on Guru's visit to Ramana Maharshi in 1914.

• *Śloka-trayi*: This composition is an answer to the philosophical question of why the all-underlying Reality is beyond the grasp of all valid means of knowledge and testimony (*pramana*).

• *Brahmavidyā Pañcakam* (Five Verses on the Science of the Absolute): A Sanskrit composition of five symmetrically conceived verses dealing with the Absolute-value in the terminology of Self-knowledge. It is the flowering and culmination of the Vedantic trend of thought on the Indian soil.

The requirements and qualifications on the part of the seeker for wisdom as well as the necessity of having a bipolar relationship which inevitably belongs to the dialectics of wisdom are given. The six initial conditions required of the *śiṣya* or disciple are calmness (*sama*), control (*dama*), breaking of other interests (*uparati*), endurance (*titikṣa*), earnest trust (*śraddha*), and steadfastness (*samadhāna*). These are found in the *Viveka Chudāmaṇi* of Sankaracharya (verses 22 to 26). Actual wisdom is imparted to a seeker only after practice of these conditions. Finally, it is mentioned in the last verse that karma is transcended by the seeker of the Absolute and even the duality between the worshipped and the worshipper is finally effaced.

• *Vedānta Sūtras*: This is a completely revised restatement of Vedanta in the sutra (aphorism) style.

• *Darśanamālā*: A composition which expounds the philosophical vision of Guru Narayana. Here the Guru looks at the one nondual Reality, the basic concept of Vedanta, from ten different philosophical perspectives.

HYMNS

• *Vināyaka Aṣṭakam* (Eight Verses on *Vināyaka*, a common name for Ganesha)

In last half of the last verse we read:

“We meditate on your broken tusk, the fragmentary chip from which the world has gained its great saga and epic. Singing hymns of righteousness over the tumult and din of vanquished evil.”

• *Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam* (Eight Verses on Vasudeva)

During his student period, Guru Narayana's personal deity was Sri Krishna. So, many myths from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can be seen in this composition.

• *Viṣṇu Aṣṭakam* (Eight Verses on Vishnu): This describes the mythological concepts of Vishnu.

- *Cidambarashtakam* (Eight Verses on Consciousness-Space): This composition is similar in many respects to the *Liṅgāṣṭakam* of Sankaracharya.
- *Saṅmukha-Stavan* (Hymn to the One Mothered by Six).
- *Guhashtakam* (Eight Verses on *Guha*): This work has much resemblance to the *Govindaṣṭakam* and *Bhimeswarāṣṭakam* of Sankaracharya.
- *Bāhuleyaṣṭakam* (Eight Verses on *Bāhuleya*), a testimony to Guru Narayana's familiarity with Tantrism.
- *Bhadra-kālī-aṣṭakam* (Eight Verses on *Kālī*). In literary flourish, it excels even the poetry of Kalidasa and Bhasa.

CASTE OR JĀTI

Caste is a state of mind with a long history. When examined objectively, or even subjectively, it dissolves into nothingness. Caste would taste bitter or sweet alternately depending on who was gaining or losing in the process.

All Homo sapiens fall within the human species. Racial distinctions, languages and customs may give an appearance of variety to the species, but they are only superficial factors, which are of no importance intrinsically to biology. Genuine Brahminhood is a subtle personal value revealed to nondual dialectics. It has nothing to do with social status.

Caste is a Brahmin versus Pariah dialectics. The false notion of caste has arisen out of the interaction between these two group identities. These two ideas are superimposed on the reality that is human nature, which is essentially one. A Brahmin exists because he is not a Pariah. Pariah is merely the existential counterpart of the existence of the Brahmin. The "Beater of Para" or large drum is proto-Dravidian and pre-Vedic. The Vedic visitors had no drum of their own, so they employed the indigenous drummers for the festivals. This linguistic derivation of Pariah made by Narayana Guru has transferred the source of the caste system to the prehistoric age, beyond Mohenjo Daro times.

Pariah thus represented a valid word-wisdom belonging to its own historical context, as in the Thirukkural of Thiruvalluvar. Vyasa and Vedanta are linked up inseparably forever. Parasara and Vyasa come from the much-abused, misunderstood Pariah line. Vyasa's own father, Parasara, was born of the lowest Pariah woman, but Vyasa is respected as superior to any Brahmana in his authority and status.

Narayana Guru was the first to take away the support of caste names. He constantly advised his followers not to ask the caste of others. Open and dynamic groups in society can be used intelligently to abolish the closed and static caste system. Thus preserving what was precious in the heritage of India and without offending orthodoxy, the Guru discovered a formula by which the evil of caste could be effectively countered.

The caste difference is thus doctrinal and not actual. Man should realize his true humanity, and unitive solidarity is the plea Narayana Guru is making

throughout his compositions. Like any scientific biologist, Guru Narayana relies on the law of inter-specific sterility for his determination. Only animals of one species can reproduce a fertile progeny. A horse and donkey interbreeding produce a mule, which cannot breed anymore. A mule is sterile. But the darkest Negro woman can have fecund progeny when mated with the whitest man. Because of this they belong to the same species, familiarly called human. The objective or scientific validity of the caste system from empirical standards is therefore null and void. In this way empirical certitude, dialectical reasoning, and historical fact are used by Guru Narayana to support one human kind.

ENLIGHTENMENT

Narayana Guru knew that enlightenment was possible for all human beings, since everyone carries the experience of the Self deep within, but he was aware that before exercising choice, the person has to be awakened. Only then can they choose the highest option and move towards enlightenment and a life based on absolute values. Guru paid attention to the problem of developing education so that individually people would overcome the caste system once they became aware of its evil. He also understood that the social system should support the initiative of creating proper educational facilities in the village itself. Guru Narayana took several steps in this regard: he urged people to stop animal sacrifice in the village temples, and he himself paid literate people to teach the illiterate in the villages. In course of time, literacy increased and there was slow social upward mobility in the next generation. The people themselves founded organizations where all, irrespective of caste or faith, were allowed to join.

Guru spent time with the people, teaching them through hymns and philosophical compositions to constantly look towards an absolutist way of life. The Sanskrit schools started by the Guru became important venues for the spread of this way of thinking and practice for everyday life. Guru was aware that principles, however good they may sound, become difficult to practice unless there are constant reminders and also a collective movement amongst the people. The Guru Narayana built ashrams for people to stay and understand these new thoughts because he knew that only by understanding and adopting unitive understanding would people be able to discard the old habits, tendencies and patterns. He lived and moved among the people because he knew the importance of a guru to seekers of absolutist wisdom.

The integrated science of the Absolute, as propounded by Guru Narayana, was further commented on by Guru Nataraja and Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, and Guru Muni Narayana Prasad continues to do the same. The compositions of Guru Narayana continue to tempt potential commentators with their tantalizing structure, semantic sensitivity, and the universal relevance of their doctrines.

Guru Narayana concludes the "Vision of Consciousness" in the *Darśanamālā* with the following two verses (verses 9 & 10):

As the eye which cannot see itself,
(so) the Self does not see itself;
Therefore indeed, the Self is not the object of consciousness,
That which the Self sees is the object of consciousness.

What is the object of consciousness, that is conditioned.
What is unconditioned, that is not the object of consciousness.
What is conditioned is nonexistent;
But what is unconditioned, itself—The Existant is That.

Consciousness has a conditioned aspect and a pure unconditioned aspect. Through contemplating on “I am Knowledge,” one can move from the conditioned to the unconditioned. The pure Absolute without a second, meant by “THAT” (*Tat*), is beyond the reach of word and mind. This pure consciousness is the truth we are; it is not affected by the actions of the individual. All actions arise from a factor which is negative and not different from the ultimate reality. Keeping this wisdom of the Absolute as the basis of the absolutist way of approach to problems like the caste system, it becomes possible to probe the validity of such a system through critical enquiry.

HYMNS AND SYMBOLS

Iconography in India is as important as theology in the West. Idols are eloquent presences. Revelation of ‘word-wisdom’ happened down through the ages and across the oceans through statues, idols, or other images. These holy presences or hierophants began to be discredited with the advent of doctrines, prophecies and rigid commandments. But in the Hymns of Guru Narayana we can see a synthesis of both doctrine and sacred presences. They contain a subtle popular image-language dialectics.

In prophetic religions, sacred presences tend to be discarded in favor of legalistic doctrines. They have often developed an iconoclastic turn. An icon treated as a symbol belongs to language, but when considered as an object it is stone, wood, metal, paper, etc.—just matter. For Indians the visible world is an expression of a function or event in consciousness. Mind and matter refer to consciousness phenomenologically. They use regimes of discipline to get rid of error and arrive at wisdom. Images are used for propitiation at the gross level using wild flowers. The mantras chanted along with and in between idol worship work in the subtle realms of consciousness. Both image and alphabet are used to the ultimate knowledge by meditating on *mahāvākyas* like That thou art (*tat tvam asi*).

Venerating a single god while acknowledging the existence of several godheads is the defining feature of henotheism; in India, this type of polytheism is common. The three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—are monotheistic. Guru

Narayana considers both these aspects: pagan religions with their hylozoism and hierophantic presences are revalued in the hymns to take them to a transcendental level, which is neutral, and the hypostatic ideals of prophetic religions are also represented. Thus, Narayana Guru turns devotional adoration (*upāsana*) into a superior art to uplift the illiterate masses to the path of right living (*dharma*) and dialectical adherence to nondual life (*yoga*). In the works of Guru Narayana, both perceptual image-worship and the conceptual aspect appearing in the hymns becomes neutralized to bring about an experience of nonduality.

From down-to-earth materialists like Charvakas to absolute idealists like Advaita Vedantins, all have their place in the Indian religious matrix. Some believe in a personal god. Each individual can have his or her own choice. Some choose Siva, others Vishnu, Devi, Ganapati or Subrahmanya. Many other forms of gods are worshiped by millions of people in India. The same god is also not always portrayed in the same way. The goddess Devi as Saraswati is pleasing and benevolent, but as Bhadrakali, she is terrible. Mythological and iconological aspects of Indian religion make sense to the common man. So Narayana Guru, in order to save this great tradition and to preserve its benefits, wrote hymns to rediscover the lost meaning of the symbols.



CONCLUSION

We live in an age of science; our minds are disciplined through logic, reasoning, and the principles of science; somewhere there is also the code of conduct for a peaceful life, outlined by our intuitive and imaginative ancestors. The mystical language of mythology and the hidden language of temple imagery interest modern persons as a source of practices to balance the mind, to free it from stress. Science seeks certitude, knowing that faith helps to go beyond to the unknowable Absolute. The subconscious mind molds symbols of both specific and universal character; the symbols in temple iconography are coupled with wisdom hymns in the light of absolutist vision to help us to become more harmonious. Contemplative reflection of philosophical works, it is hoped, will bring us closer to the certitude necessary for adopting a neutral stand between revalued traditional wisdoms and modern life. And here, the fruits of Narayana Guru's labors in clarifying the dross of the *dharma śāstras* into pure wisdom are ours to partake of.

WHITE ORCHID EARTH THE DOOR

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

white orchid

waxy petals unfurl slowly against the tropical earth pale insects burrow in
drawn by fragrance escaping molecule by molecule through soft loam
surrounding the tendril of whitened stem piercing soil branching off
a flower then another creeping underground this life unseen unheeded
above ground our life drawing sustenance from the dark explosion

earth the door Orpheus goes through

into the twining tree roots sent down for water
joined by hypha searching moisture and minerals
in the underground night with myzorrhium that link
tree and nematode anchoring the cacophony of underworld life
feeding giant trunks reaching upward to branches where
in cresting light the quaking chlorophyll sparks its own green drive



GURUKULA NEWS

The Annual Gurukula Convention will be held from December 23rd to the 29th. Each day will begin with a homam at the auditorium, followed by a talk by Guru Muni Narayana Prasad. Each day's presentations will begin by 10:30 a.m. The schedule is as follows.

Day 1

- What is art?
- Western aesthetics, a survey
- What is beauty? What is aesthetic beauty?

Day 2

- The place of aesthetics in social life
- Plato's philosophy of art
- Aristotle's imitation theory
- Realism and anti-realism in aesthetics

Day 3

- Indian science of aesthetics
- A comparative study of ancient and modern prose of India
- Music and literature as Saraswati's boon
- Art and morality in India

Day 4

- Aesthetics in the *Saundaryalahari* of Sankara
- Narayana Guru's *A Bouquet of Nine Gems on the Mother*
- Aesthetics in relation to life's actualities
- Narayana Guru's *Eight Verses to Kalī*

Day 5

- Narayana Guru's *Dance of Kalī* from the perspective of *Sabda Pradhanya Vada*
- Narayana Guru's *100 Verses to Siva* from the perspective of the *dhvani*

(suggestive sense)

- What is literary beauty? How is literature enjoyed?

Day 6

- Narayana Guru's aesthetics
- Nataraja Guru's aesthetics
- Guru Nitya's aesthetics

Day 7

- Morning Get Together and New Year's Message

Swami Tanmaya from the Ooty Gurukula will be visiting Wardha Ashrama in Uttar Pradesh to present a talk on Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi.

The Gurukula website has changed its address; it is now:
<http://www.narayanagurukula.org/>

Ongoing internet classes on *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* and Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras* can be accessed through:
islandaranya@toast.net.

For book introductions, articles, and class notes from the Portland Gurukula:
<http://scottteitsworth.tripod.com/>

The Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary has a website and blog:
<http://www.gbsanctuary.org/>
<http://www.bgci.org/garden.php?id=2015>



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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.

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