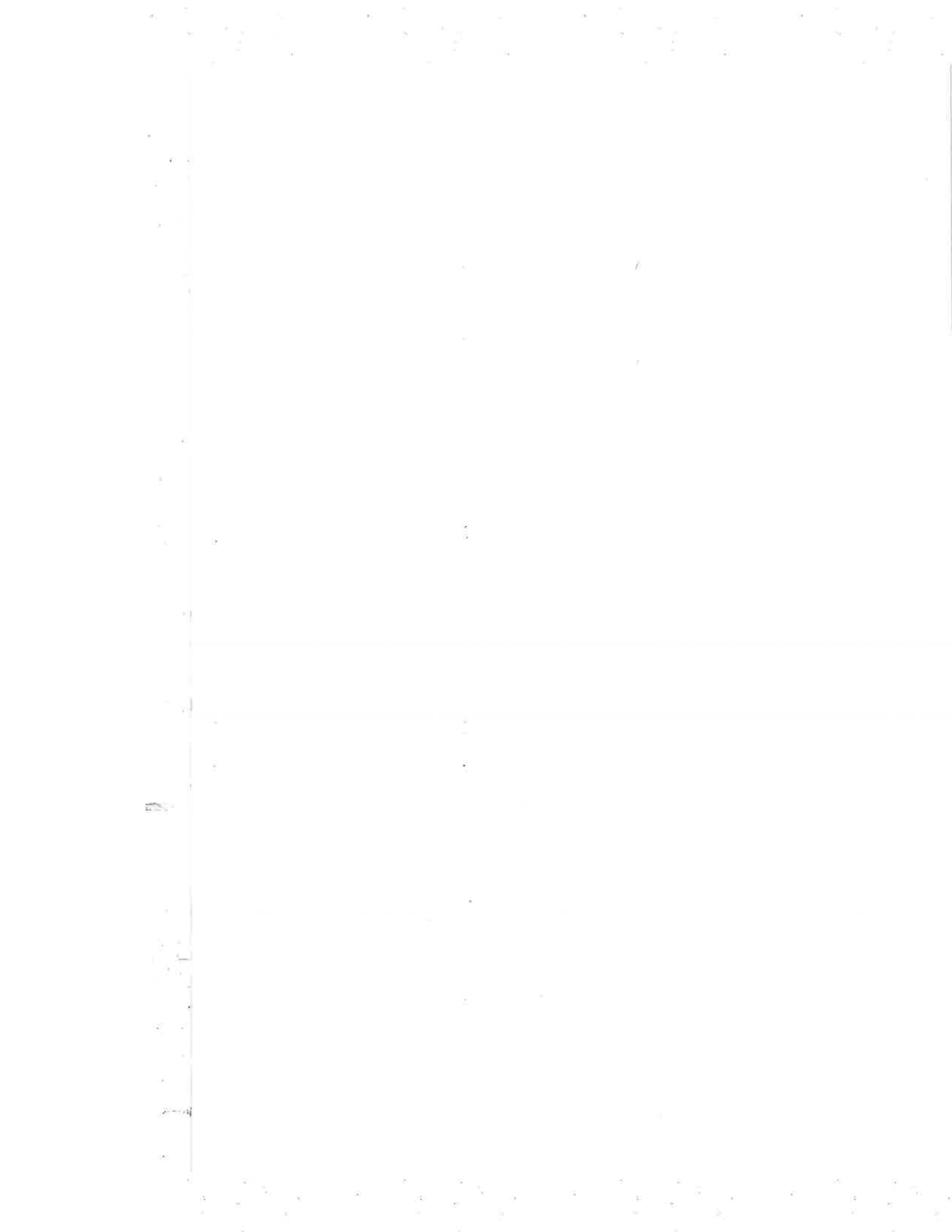


QURUKULAM



AUTUMN 2010



GURUKULAM

A Journal of Philosophy and the Arts

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EDITORIAL

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

Philosophy and art are intertwined in India, both working to express a numinous vision. Nataraja Guru called them metalanguage for philosophy, and protolanguage for all the various expressions that rely on image. In Nataraja Guru's structuralism metalanguage is a language which utilizes abstract signs. It is algebraic, highly rational and conceptual, and is a language that discusses structure and assigns relationship. Protolanguage, on the other hand, is the earliest and persisting substratum of communication that relies on image and symbolic reverberation rather than intellectual discourse. Protolanguage, geometric in orientation, is that archaic seedbed which is home to poetry, music and the variety of art forms.

Most *Gurukulam* issues present both philosophical exegeses and visual and poetic art. Each of these different languages seeks to describe an experience which can, in essence, be pointed to but must be sought and known independently by each individual. Philosophy and art complement one another, adding to the texture of our understanding.

In this issue there are a number of articles which directly address these two ways of communicating. First is the excerpt from Nataraja Guru's own "Ascending Dialectics of Stone Language." In it he discusses India's ancient use of images to express and transmit philosophical ideas.

There is the cover image by Emma Walker which is a mysterious, beautiful evocation of her exploration of death. What words cannot say, her paintings offer. Charles Erickson's article on Jean Leschert's art delves into the philosophy behind the images, explaining the theories and the experiences underneath their surfaces.

In each installment of Guru Muni Narayana Prasad's commentary on Narayana Guru's *Sri Vasudeva Astakam* and *Visnu Astakam*, we are immersed in an intermingling of poetic vision, philosophical insight and mythical legend. Legend again appears as instructor in the sections by Scott Teitsworth on Hercules, the old Greek hero teaching us anew about our inner conflicts.

Which brings us to the second theme of the articles in this issue of *Gurukulam*, that of teaching and learning. Josie Essay recounts the challenges of both student and teacher, and how they can be resolved through wisdom and humor. And in his journal about life at the Fernhill Gurukula following Nataraja Guru's death, Bailey Young touches on the transmission of knowledge: through words, images, humor, and finally silence. Knowledge and language are not quickly dismissed topics, easily categorized, and they will continue to be explored in following issues.

In conclusion I add a quote from Susan Huntington's thorough and remarkable book *The Art of Ancient India*.

“Religion was the major force stimulating the creation of art and architecture in ancient India. According to most systems of Indic thought, the phenomenal world is illusory, perceived and interpreted by the senses, which yield data of a personal rather than of universal nature. The primary illusion is the belief in a separate, egoic existence. Most Indic religions seek to eliminate this illusion and to foster the realization of universal unity and of the understanding that each seemingly separate entity is but a manifestation of the One. Ultimate Truth is considered transcendent, intrinsically beyond our limited means of acquiring knowledge. However, a number of symbolic devices (which indicate the Truth not by revealing it but by referring to it) may point toward the goal of realizing the undifferentiated state.”



ATMOPADESA SATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

VERSE 43

*prakṛti piticcu cuzarritum prakaram
sukrtikal polumaho cuzannitunnu!
vikṛti vitunnatinayi velaceyvi-
lakṛti phalagrahamarrarinnitenam.*

Even those of good action are caught by nature
and whirled around in vicious circles;
one should know that non-action does not bring release
from perverted action,
only the non-desire for the fruit of action.

The mainstream of the philosophic life of India is constituted of six systems of thought that are considered to be orthodox. These philosophies naturally fall into three pairs: Sankhya and Yoga, Nyaya and Vaisesika, and Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa.

The Sankhyan philosophy, whose principal exponent was Kapila, derives its name from the fact that its followers count and categorize. It is by no means a theistic religion; it is an out-and-out rational philosophy. There is no room for faith or dogma in Sankhyan philosophy. All its convictions are derived from a mathematically precise understanding. To begin with, they think of a binary function: intelligence along with a field where that intelligence can operate, or a field which operates in the light of that intelligence. Corresponding to this, St. John's Gospel in the Bible refers to God and the Word. Word is considered to be the substance out of which all creations have come. It has the capacity to become flesh. So the substance has a homogeneous link with God: the will of God and the intelligence in the Word are not different. Sankhyan philosophy has exactly the same idea, but does not present it in a legendary or myth-like manner, as the Bible does. The language of scientists is used.

Sankhyans speak of two primary realities, *purusa*, pure consciousness, and *prakṛti*, the field of creation. *Prakṛti* is comprised of the three modalities: *tamas*, *rajas*

and *sattva*, or inertia, kinetics and the sublime state. Of these, *tamas* and *sattva* are polar opposites. *Tamas* is the inertial state where things are held together; it is obdurate and does not easily yield. Being opaque, it has maximum opposition to spirit. *Sattva* completely resembles spirit, though it is not spirit. A mirror by itself is only matter. It is not luminous, but it can reflect light very clearly. If you reflect sunlight into a dark room with a mirror, that light can illuminate the room. The original quality of the sunlight can be conveyed by a mirror, which by itself is inert and non-luminous. This is precisely the nature of *sattva*. It can clearly convey the quality of pure intelligence into the world of manifestation, but is not itself pure intelligence.

So Sankhyan philosophy has this dichotomy of matter and spirit, *prakrti* and *purusa*. Within *prakrti*, the polarization between the pure, clear *sattva* and the dark, inertial *tamas* creates a lot of movement from one to the other. This kinetic aspect is called *rajas*. The science of physics mainly deals with the forces of inertia and kinetics. The states which come to prevail between the functions of inertia and kinetics can be understood in terms of intelligence.

Yogis apply this philosophy in their personal life. They look for an ideal state where *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are brought to an equilibrium. This automatically brings an equilibrium between spirit and matter also. Then, that duality is transcended and a unitive aspect comes. The whole system becomes quiescent. A beatitude springs forth from within. Inertia is not pronounced. Our normal idea of clarity, in the sense of a subject knowing an object, is absent. There is no longer any differentiation. In that differenceless state, in the absolute fusion of spirit and matter, one becomes the aloneness of the Supreme. Such aloneness is considered to be a very high state. It is a return from the world of activities to one's own original nature. This is the yogi's ideal.

There are many schools of Yoga, the most ancient of which is Patanjali's. His book, the *Yoga Sutras*, begins with *samadhipada*, the final goal. He states the final cause first, then goes into the material causes and the efficient causes afterwards. Yoga, union, is equated with *samadhi*, absorption. He wrote *yoga citta vrtti nirodha*, yoga is the complete cessation of all modifications of the mind. With this he aims at the vision which may be called "arriving at one's own real state and getting established in it." The epistemology or the philosophy of this vision is given by Sankhya, and the application of it, including the methodology of applying the Sankhyan wisdom, is given by Yoga. Thus, these two schools are a complementary set.

The second pair of complementary schools are Nyaya and Vaisesika. Between them all the logical aspects of the mind are dealt with. They provide a methodology for thinking. Such methodology is the testimony by which one arrives at right knowledge. For instance, perception is one testimony of knowledge. What I can directly perceive, I don't need proof of. This is called a *pramana*, that which brings certitude. The first *pramana* is direct perception. If I have an apple in my hand, I don't have to look into a book to know it. It is a direct experience, a *pratyaksa*. The second *pramana* is inference, where from partial knowledge one can infer the full

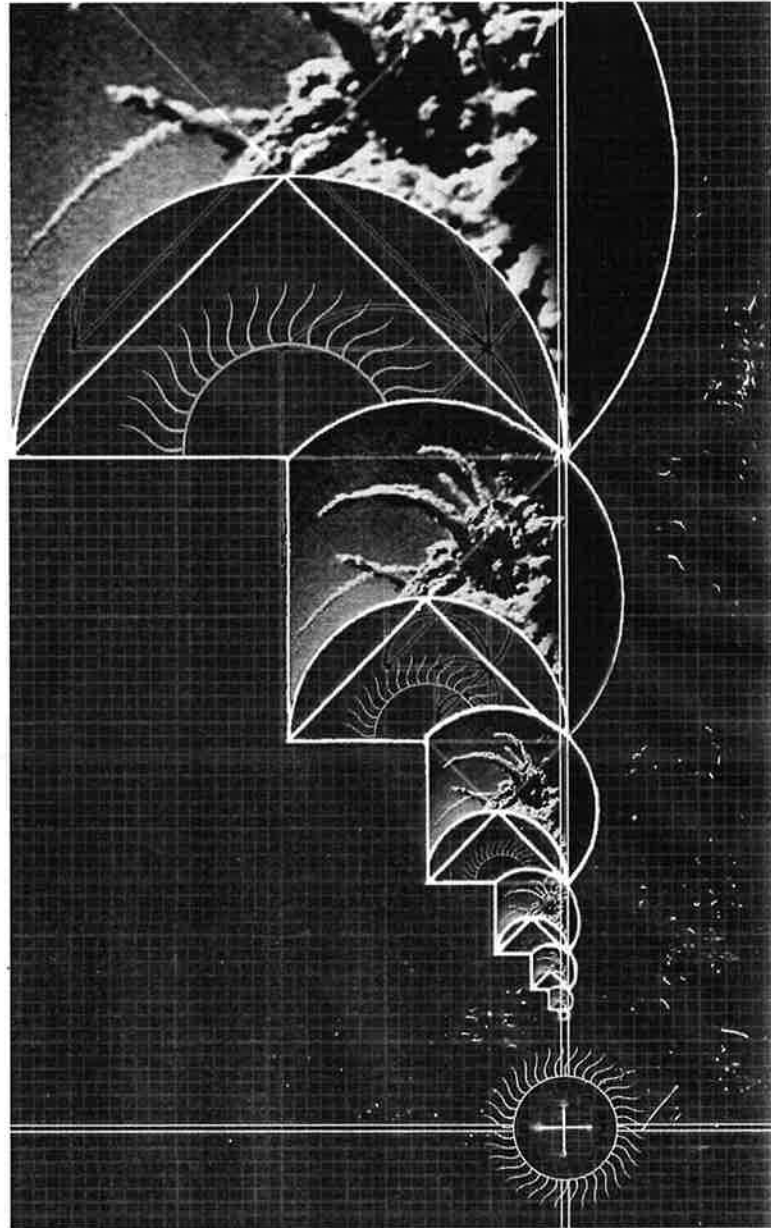
reality. The third is analogy and the fourth is knowing a thing through the principle of contradiction. There is also a principle of sufficient reason. The final one is *sabda*, something stated by a wise person, a Guru, or an authoritative book. This can tend to become dogmatic, but it is *a priori*. Some of their methodology is *a priori* and some is *a posteriori*.

The Nyayikas want to see how we relate a personal consciousness with the rest of the world. They consider that intelligence is that which deals with the objects of intelligence, and that our actions, non-actions, and life as a whole mainly depend on our knowledge. They study the logical relationship between things and ideas, and have come up with a set of categories. The first is *dravia*, things, which is usually translated into English as substance. The second category is *guna*, quality. A stone is *dravia*; its quality is heaviness. Water's quality is that it flows. Fire burns. Man is also a *dravia*: he has a concreteness. The world can easily be seen as a composite of concrete things with their qualities. A number of things can be gathered together under one category because of their homogeneous nature. When things are related by gathering them together it is called *sambandha*. For instance, all human beings can be brought under the heading of man. That is *samanya*. Also, each individual can be studied separately and analytically. That is *visesa*, the purview of the Vaisesikas. Of course there are many other categories, such as time, space, action and absence.

The other two schools are Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa, the anterior and posterior schools of critique. The anterior school assumes that absolutely dependable knowledge is *a priori*: that in order to have experience, there has to be within the person a certain revelation of an inner device by which things can be related. From the beginning of our knowledge of the world things have seemed as though they were spread out in space. No one needed to teach us that there is space. In the same way we see certain things as being above or below without being taught, and are also aware of the sequential passing of time as a part of experience. We are born with this knowledge. Therefore, these kinds of knowledge are not learned, but are part and parcel of an *a priori* revelation. Knowledge is being revealed to us. It is simply our nature, and we are realizing our nature.

When knowledge comes to us, we tend to express it; and in order to express it we tend to use words. We think in terms of words, which are basically conceptual. For their articulation we take energy from the bodily mechanism. We use the energy in us, directed in a certain way to become conceptualized. This conceptualized energy becomes verbalized and is then expressed. It becomes a communicative force. When people interact and communicate, they create many new possibilities. For this reason, the Purva Mimamsa school examines the process of semiosis in detail.

The potential possibility of consciousness in a person lies there like an ocean, out of which the waves of ideas emerge. Each emerging idea presents a vision to the person's own consciousness. So out of amorphous, unstructured consciousness arises a structured consciousness, which is described as *pasyanti* or vision. When the person wants to communicate his vision to someone else, he puts it in the



form of words. For instance, when an engineer wants to explain her drawing of a structure to her clients she verbally articulates what she has drawn on paper, and through her sounds they begin to share her vision as a living possibility rather than a static blueprint.

According to the anterior critics of the Purva Mimamsa school, the whole universe is nothing but a manifestation of the Word, which can be undone, redone and transformed through the application of words. The most important tool a man has is his word. The word is also himself. He is the tool. He makes the tool, and he and the tool can work together because of their homogeneity as consciousness.

The posterior school, known as Vedanta, accepts the two principles of Nature and Intelligence from the Sankhyan philosophy. From the Nyaya-Vaisesika schools they accept methodologies such as perception, inference, analogy, contradiction and word testimony. Narayana Guru belongs to this school, and he wants us to know how the knowledge which he has been describing operates in our daily life.

Your intention is to find ultimate release from all kinds of bondages that tie you down to the world of necessity, action and relativism, in order to attain absolute freedom. Absolute freedom means having no conditions. Your body itself is a limiting condition. There are physical, biological, psychological and chemical principles which limit you in various complex ways. For instance, your body is heavy and you cannot lift it into the air; it is tied to the earth by gravitational forces. From out of the domination of so many principles and laws you desire an autonomous status: to become the master of the situation.

In the present verse, Narayana Guru first mentions the person who has good intentions. The previous verse showed that our consciousness can be led in two directions, either to see ourselves as part of the whole or to focus on the particular. If you only look to the particular and feel strongly that you are the particular, you become a self-centered person, giving primacy to your body and its pleasures. You get involved in acquisition, grasping for the things of others, and gratifying your latent urges. There is a strong impulse for action, action which is monitored by your individual desires. When such attitudes prevail, *anya* or otherness is operating in your mind. The other possibility is to be dominated by a vision of the universal. You consider mankind as an organic whole. As long as your vision is that you epitomize the whole, and action moves you, your desire will not be self-centered but oriented to the well-being of the community, of Nature in its largest sense. You become an ecologist, a lover of the universe, one with the spirit of life. When you move in the direction of the welfare of all, *sama* or sameness is operating in your mind.

Between sameness and the other you can be pulled in different directions. If you commit yourself to the universal good, and your actions are all oriented in that direction, you become a *sukrti*. *Suk* means good; *krti* means actor. This is a fine ideal. However, although you may be universal in your outlook, when you begin to act in the world many things interfere. You cannot do things just as you want because *prakrti*, the separating tendency, is found throughout Nature. So even a

sukrti, the best of people, has to conform to social principles, government laws, and all the rest. Perhaps the country is going to war and all are expected to contribute to the war effort. You can dissent and protest, but in some way you will be dragged into it. It will shape your life to a greater or lesser extent. Certainly, *sukrta* is very good and you are going in the right direction, but limitations come from all sides and you also get caught by them. You may even find that your very goodness becomes an evil. In some situations, if you are too good people will kill you just for that. So your goodness has to be moderated, to be tailored to the situation.

The *sukrti*, the man with the best intentions who identifies with the universal, will at times be compelled to do actions against his wishes. We can see that happening all around us: even the most broad-minded and generous people are caught by the mesh of nature, and go round and round feeling helpless. What is the way out of this dilemma? The Guru says *phalagraham attarinnitenam*, even when you are good and you are turning towards the *sama*, there is an impact of *anya* which gets in your way. You may want to see the effect of your work immediately or within a certain time limit. In this, although you seem to be a wise person, fully identified with the universal, you have limited your action situation to a context of *anya*. Your desire for good and immediate results has tainted the purity of your actions. The Guru recommends, along with the Bhagavad Gita, giving up the desire for the fruits of your actions. If you think you have made your contribution to the stream of events and that this will bring results not particularly to you but to humanity in its course of operation, then you are not held in any obligatory system. You have become both a witness and a contributor.

Another possibility is intending to not do anything, saying "I am in trouble because I act. Only a man who acts makes mistakes and gets caught. So I'll avoid that by not doing any action." This is called *akrti*, nonaction. Will it help? If you do not act, will you become one with the Absolute? No. There are potentials in you which have their own dynamics to jump out and shape your behavior. They may make you act in very strange ways. Mere suppression or inaction is not an antidote. *Vikrti*, perverted action, comes out of you through reflex and instinctive urges. It spurts out and makes you act weird and crazy. This perverted action is sitting in all of us to some extent. We put on big cloaks of virtue and good action so it all looks very acceptable, but when we get hysterical we forget all that. Non-action is no guarantee against this: it can actually make it easier for such perverted action to surface.

So you are not an *akrti*, a non-actor, and you are not a *sukrti* in the sense that you want to have good effected immediately. You are certainly not a *vikrti*, because you do not allow perversion to take over. You see the good of all and intend the good of all. You contribute to the good of all to the extent you can, but don't hold on to it with a desire to realize it here and now. Thus, your release is to be worked out by taking away the desire for the fruit but retaining the desire for the actualization of good in a general way. You are still motivated, but your motivation is not bound to personal gratification. We will go more into the intricacies of this in the next verse.

VERSE 44

*pala mata saravumekamennu para-
tulakil oranayil andhar ennapole
pala vidha yukta parannu pamaranma-
ralavatu kantalayatomarnnitenam.*

The many faiths have but one essence;
not seeing this, in this world, like the blind men and the elephant,
many kinds of reasoning are used by the unenlightened
who become distressed;
having seen this, without being disturbed, remain steadfast.

This is a seemingly very simple verse, but it has a subtle relationship to previous verses. Verse forty-one said that in the statement “this is a pot,” that which comes first as *itu*, this, is difficult to discern. *Kutam*, pot, is its qualification, which is easily understood. The outgrowth of this situation is the magical phenomenal show of existence, which has its origination in the intellect.

Essentially, the intellect makes a decision about the nature of the total experience of what is presented to the mind. If it decides that a certain thing is very valuable, it is very valuable; and if it decides a certain thing has no value, it has no value.

At times we speak of certain people as being brainwashed. Some others we describe as exaggerating, and still others we say are under-rating because they have not understood. In all these, we are finding fault with *mati*, the intellectual faculty. We are questioning its veracity. When a more intelligent person makes some claim, those who consider themselves inferior to him try to see what he sees and conform to the arbitrary vision which is being passed on to them. In this way, without deciding for themselves, many people make a decision on the basis of pure dogma. Here also it is *matam*, that which is born of *mati*. A mere intellectual assertion is accepted as the common faith.

Verse forty-two says that when you say “this is knowledge,” ‘this’ is the unifying factor in all the items of knowledge, and ‘knowledge’ is the qualification of that factor. Intellect vivifies knowledge into small spheres; for that to lose its hold on you so you can have a total vision of enlightenment, you should meditate on ‘this’.

The very presentation of ‘this’ to consciousness tends to make two kinds of emphasis. One is on the side of sensory data, and the other is on the side of intellectual summation. You are receiving two lights into your organism. From the physical side you are stimulated, and from the psychic side you are stimulated. The first is a physical stimulation and the second is psychological. For the interpretation of both you need light, awareness. The source of this awareness is a common factor,

one that is not only common to both of these aspects in you, but common to all beings also.

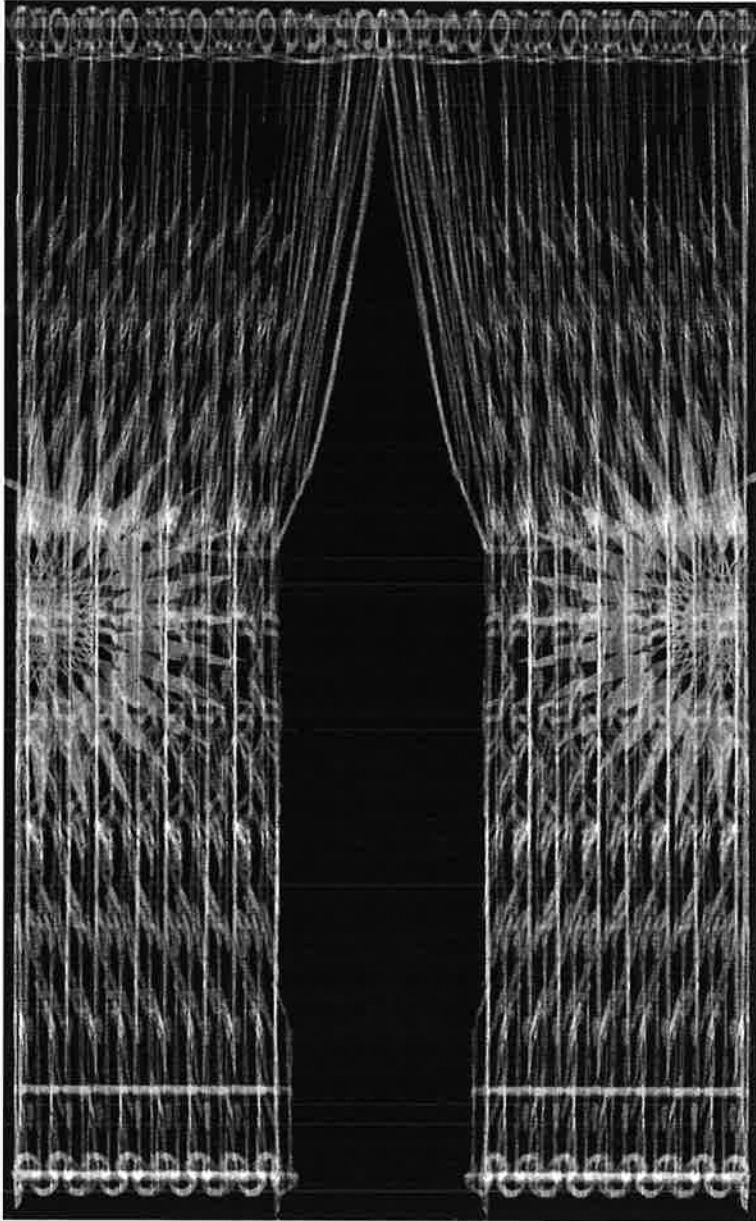
In all sentient beings, the illumination of the whole organism comes from one common source, but what it illuminates shifts from one focus to another. At one moment it may highlight physical data, then it will highlight psychic ideation, or again it will be the common source of all knowledge. In the first two, the function of interpretation is taken by the faculty called the intellect. We use our intellect for all expressions of judgment, and these have become more or less rigidly structured in the course of our development from childhood.

When the child asks questions and receives answers, he or she gets instructed not only in statements of fact but also in the nature of relation-relata complexes. Each answer actually teaches several things, most of them only implied. The child begins to think of cause and effect relationships, and to appreciate that there are general statements and particular instances; it learns it can arrive at particular or universal conclusions. Syllogistic and deductive reasoning become part of the intellectual functioning. When you become more inquisitive to find out why a certain general statement is accepted, you use inductive reasoning as well. By employing inductive and deductive reasoning, you make your intellect into an efficient tool to poke at the things which come from the external world as well as the ideations evoked by external events or memories. All too often, though, having used this tool and found it efficient for solving some of the riddles and problems of your personal life, you glorify it and make it your sole crutch for ever and ever.

Once you do this, you enter into another realm which is not directly related either to external stimuli or mere internal ideation. Now you are provoked by a basic need. When you think of your self-preservation, you begin to comprehend the hopeless situation in which you are placed. You see that beyond a couple of generations, none of your forebears is still alive. In fact, everyone who comes to this world eventually dies. So we see death all around us.

In your own case, when you look in the mirror you might see your hair turning white or new wrinkles on your face or colorations on your skin. Old age is inevitably coming, and the body will perish. You don't want to leave it, but then you are consoled by someone saying that only your body is mortal; your soul is eternal. But we don't know what that soul is. For our peace of mind we have to shift our camp from bodily feeling to this so-called soul or spirit, which is only conjectural. We can plainly see the body, but we have to imagine the soul.

The instrument with which we make our conjectures is the intellect. Admittedly it is very efficient when it comes to measuring the physical qualities of something. Whenever you can use a measuring rod or other gadget, you can be very accurate. But this is only on the material plane, and you have already found it to be without hope. It is always changing, deteriorating, falling apart. The only place where we can



find some promise is in the immortality of the soul which someone has spoken of to us. And since we have no direct experience of it, our intellect is vastly less useful to us in this area. Still, it is the faculty we are most familiar and comfortable with.

So you take this same instrument, the intellect, into the new sphere and say "OK, let's find out." In the Middle Ages, for instance, you might have asked your neighbor, "Who told you the soul is immortal?"

"I heard it at church. The Father said the soul is immortal."

"And everyone has one?"

"Yes, of course."

"Is it immortal for everyone?"

"Oh, no! He said only for those who believe in our savior."

"You miss the relevant connections. If the soul is immortal and everybody has one, they must all be immortal."

The response is "No. Everybody has a soul, but it is in great peril if you don't believe in our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Who said that?"

"Oh, our priest said it."

"Is it in some book?"

"Yes, he has a black, hide-bound book from which he reads."

"Let us look into it."

"But it is in Latin."

"Why can't it be translated so we can all read it?"

By now the questioner is considered to be an agent of the devil. "You doubt because the devil is in you. We are giving you the teaching to immortalize yourself, but now you want to see it with your own eyes? The devil is in you!" So all those who wanted the Bible translated from Latin in the Middle Ages were burned alive because they wanted to discern for themselves the immortality of the Self.

Someone else says "Yes, it is assured by Allah." Another says "The immortality of the Self is declared by the Vedas." There are so many groups who all vouch for the immortality of the soul, but it is all written in some strange language or kept in somebody's special box, and you have no way to find it. Then there comes a person like the Buddha. If you ask him "Is there any immortality of the Self?" he will say "First there should be Self. Then only can it have any immortality. There is only immortality of the Self if the Self is assured." You are again confused, so he adds "*Anatma*, there is no Self."

All this is the sphere of *mati* or intellect. Narayana Guru has chosen to express faith in this verse as *matam*, that which is born of your intellect. It also means religion. Religion has two important aspects. One is using your conjecture. What is the source of the major religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism? They all come through a revelation. Usually the revelation can be traced to a single person. For the whole of Christianity, for instance, the authority is the word of Christ.

Again and again Christ turns to his own disciples, saying things like "Ye of little faith. Ye of little understanding." He is seeing a total vision, devoid of *mati*. It is something which needs no intermediary, no interpretation for him. Then he shows it to other people, to whom it is only secondhand knowledge. They see it through the distortions of their own intellects. This is why Peter interpreted Christ's teachings in a way which was very different from Paul. Peter understood emotionally and Paul understood logically. They never could come to an agreement.

This is a dangerous area. To see as Christ, Krishna, Buddha and Mohammed did requires a total vision. Anything less than a total vision is fraught with great peril. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James makes the point that he is not discussing secondhand religion, but firsthand religion. That is, firsthand religion as Jesus or Ramakrishna experienced it. Someone coming and saying, "Sri Ramakrishna might have thought like this," is experiencing *matam*, an intellectualized version of the original. What is invariably handed over to us is this secondhand version of a religious vision.

Once you go from the spiritual vision to religious belief, you have already strayed far from the truth. When we fight, the discord is about religion and not any spiritual vision. In two people who have a spiritual vision there is no difference of opinion: they melt into each other. But when you have only heard something and then you or a priest interpret it for yourself, you take a stand. Your position is rigid to precisely the extent that your vision is limited. You have to think of your loyalty to the man from whom you heard. He can express only one millionth of his total experience through his words or example, and your sole authority is that one little fragment. As it is not in any way yours, you are always afraid to move a little this way or that way from what you have heard. You don't want to blaspheme. You want to hold onto it, but you do not know either its intention or extension. The result is that we become victims of narrow religious thinking. In order to support our religion we know only argument. We go on reasoning endlessly, but reason is absolutely useless and meaningless, if not destructive, in this matter.

This is the only tool we know. But what else can we do? The Guru here says *pala mata saravum ekum*, the essence of all those intellectualized versions of total reality or the Absolute is the same. Our mind can be turned towards the spirit, towards the source of our own inner light, or it can be turned towards the world illuminated by our senses. One concerns the source of illumination, and the other concerns the objects which are illuminated.

When your mind is focused on the illuminated world, you are naturally tempted to segregate things, vivify things, and specify them. In that world, when you hold an opinion it will be different from another person's opinion. Then you come to a state like that of the several blind people who went to see the elephant in the famous story. You hold different views because of outwardness. If you always look through the wrong end of a telescope you will have a distorted view of things. It will bring

much frustration. But in a sense this is exactly what we are doing in our daily life. We do not agree with each other, not only about the highest truth but even about simple truths.

We forget that in none of our mental functions are we in direct relationship with the original, we are always only interpreting sensory images received in the mind. When we intellectualize, our mind is giving its own version, its best estimate, not a total picture of facts or data. The data is only what we presume. 'Fact' is a fiction. There is no fact. There can be only a comparative range of fictions which are more or less useful or reliable. We make an approximation, even when we loudly swear our certitude.

Narayana Guru says "First of all, come to know that you are living in a world of approximation, where you arrive at conclusions derived by the intellect." From the previous verses, we already know that this intellect is capable of making great magic, and unless you transcend it you are never with the total, with the whole. In the next five verses, he is going to tell us how this affects our social life.

Up to verse 20, the Guru was speaking of that primordial light which comes to us in so many forms. From verse 20 onwards, he has been telling us more of the individuated mind which is the recipient of that great light, and how it functions. Now begins a section dealing with how individuated beings in their interpersonal relationships get a social mind, and how we come under the influence of that social mind, which can bring about bloodshed in the name of opinion. If you want to have a peaceful life on earth you should know your social mind, your individual mind, and also the source from which your mind derives its light.

Later, Narayana Guru summarized all this in his dictum: "Man is of one God, one kind and one religion." The essence of our social values is one. The essence of individuation is one. The light that illuminates all this is one. This is his philosophy of unitive understanding, which will be elaborated in the next five verses.

THE LANGUAGE OF JEAN LESCHERT'S ART

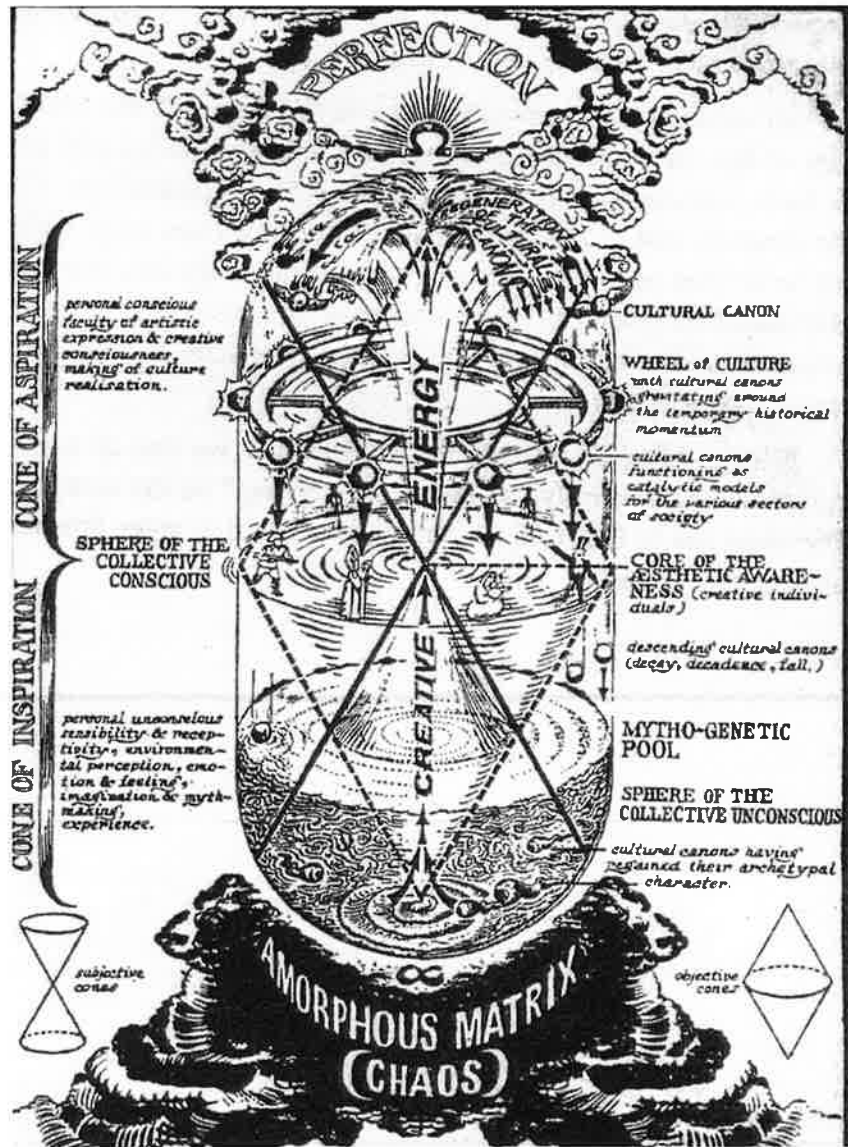
BY CHARLES ERICKSON

This drawing of the two cones within a cylinder is notable among the many two-cone drawings of Jean Letschert for the lettering, which is intricate and varied. It is finalized and perfected, intended for publication with an article amplifying on texts related to it.

There are many drawings preceding this one, variations on the theme of the two cones, most of them not preserved because they were done on the floor with colored chalk, at night by lamplight, and washed away next morning. These drawings were roughly done geometric illusions, always improvised along with widely ranging discourses. These followed a pattern of theme and variations, which owed a lot to the improvisation of jazz music in the 50s and 60s. Jean was a keen student of jazz and in such cities as Brussels and Paris he had opportunities to hear the best American jazz musicians of the day in live performances. He always left room for accidental effects upon which to improvise in his compositions. Certain things would be predetermined, usually geometrical shapes with symbolic associations, hieroglyphic themes or proto-linguistic themes, to use Nataraja Guru's term. The two cone theme is the example that comes to mind here.

Jean had in his psychological make-up a need for symmetry. He was obsessed with symmetry. He had his own signature method for making ambiguous symmetrical pictures upon which he improved, based on the psychological projective tests of Dr. Roarshach, the ink blot tests used by clinical psychologists for testing their patients. He would begin by folding the page in the middle, up and down, which formed the invisible vertical axis of symmetry. He would then lay down some ink or paint on one side of the divided page, and then he would press the half pages together. Pulling them apart, he would have a spontaneous, ambiguous symmetrical picture upon which he would work out a developed composition, often adorned with small precise Sanskrit letters drawn in luminous color. These touches of precision gave a look of intentionality to these ambiguous blots that was nothing less than magical. The magic lay in the power of suggestion. The Sanskrit language is, as Nataraja Guru liked to say, highly proto-linguistic. Jean was prepared at the drop of a hat to elaborate these subtle linguistic hints into explanatory flights of exegesis, given the right interlocutor.

The words I use to describe these works of artistic improvisation are the complementary terms, confused and distinct. Confused here does not mean



bewildered, but is to be etymologically understood as “flowing together” and distinct means “being clearly separated by a hard edge, one from the other.” (*Unitive Science of the Absolute*, vol. 1, page 141)

Jean’s initial ambiguous symmetrical blot picture would be, except for the structural symmetry, entirely confused. The mind confronting this confusion makes distinctions, such as seeing a part of the whole as a figure or figures and the rest as background. Jean would take the raw material of the symmetrical blots, and peering deeply into the confusion and ambiguity of it, find some visionary form or forms which he would develop, making distinct, minimal, subtle artfully placed brush strokes. It was a method in some ways reminiscent of Chinese ink brush landscape drawings.

Jean liked the technique because it quickly gave him raw material to work upon. Every blot painting was symmetrical while being unique and full of fresh surprises. Each was chaotic and meaningless, offering itself for projections of the artist’s inner life, to be discovered therein by him and brought out or made distinct by him as forms out of an amorphous matrix and God the demiurge who creates the world out of primordial chaos.

A more usual way to make symmetrical pictures is to base them on geometric forms, drawing a rectangular grid pattern on the page. For example, Nataraja Guru used his favorite double cone diagram as a set-up to display information: pairs of opposites, triads, quaternions. He drew the diagram on the blackboard as he discoursed, usually on a wide variety of topics at different levels simultaneously. He would label the initial two cone diagram, draw in additional geometrical distinctions, with vector arrows and figures of eight, both horizontal and vertical. The Guru’s blackboard drawings were fascinating and inspiring.

The two cones is a geometrical archetype going back to Greek geometry. We may think of it as a single mental object that takes many forms. If we try to see even a few of the forms simultaneously juxtaposed upon each other we encounter confusion at the intellectual level. One picture can’t contain even a fraction of the information. So we make many pictures which are facets of the picture, confused at the intellectual level, which can be directly experienced as intelligible through intuition. Nataraja Guru explains it like this:

“Intuition works best and gives the most convincing results only when one is able to take a view from inside the total situation instead of taking many photographs, as it were, of the object seen from outside. These photographic stills, as Bergson points out, even when put together in great number cannot reconstruct the total reality which living intuition alone can give from the inside. He refers to a man visiting Notre Dame and points out how the vest idea of the cathedral is given only to a man who enters into it and thus knows it intrinsically and integrally inside out.” (*Unitive Science of the Absolute*, vol. 1, page 110)

The two cones are only one specification of the universal archetypal solid. Why the Guru picked the two cones rather than some other solid is an unanswered question. But he was not the only thinker to use the figure of two cones intuitively.

During his evening talks Jean drew geometric figures on the floor with florescent chalk of various colors, lines (vertical, horizontal and diagonal) developing into plane figures (circles, ellipses and triangles) developing, in the dim light of fire and kerosene lantern, into magical illusions of solid figures (sphere, cones, cylinders, double cones). Drawings over drawings like a palimpsest until the effect was lost of a third dimension and the confused mess rubbed out with a cloth and a new drawing begun. Nataraja Guru's blackboard presentations would often end up with an enigmatic confusion of simple geometric figures almost lost beneath vectoral arrows, spiral helixes, letters, words, short phrases. Many of us felt that these were a kind of conceptualistic Abstract Expressionism. Jean himself, as a professional painter in the 50s and 60s of the last century, was completely aware that his evening chalk drawings were a kind of action painting like those of Jackson Pollack and Wilhelm DeKooning. Like their paintings, Jean's were really about the process of painting as an improvisory drama rather than the final outcome, the painting as finally exhibited in a gallery or museum.

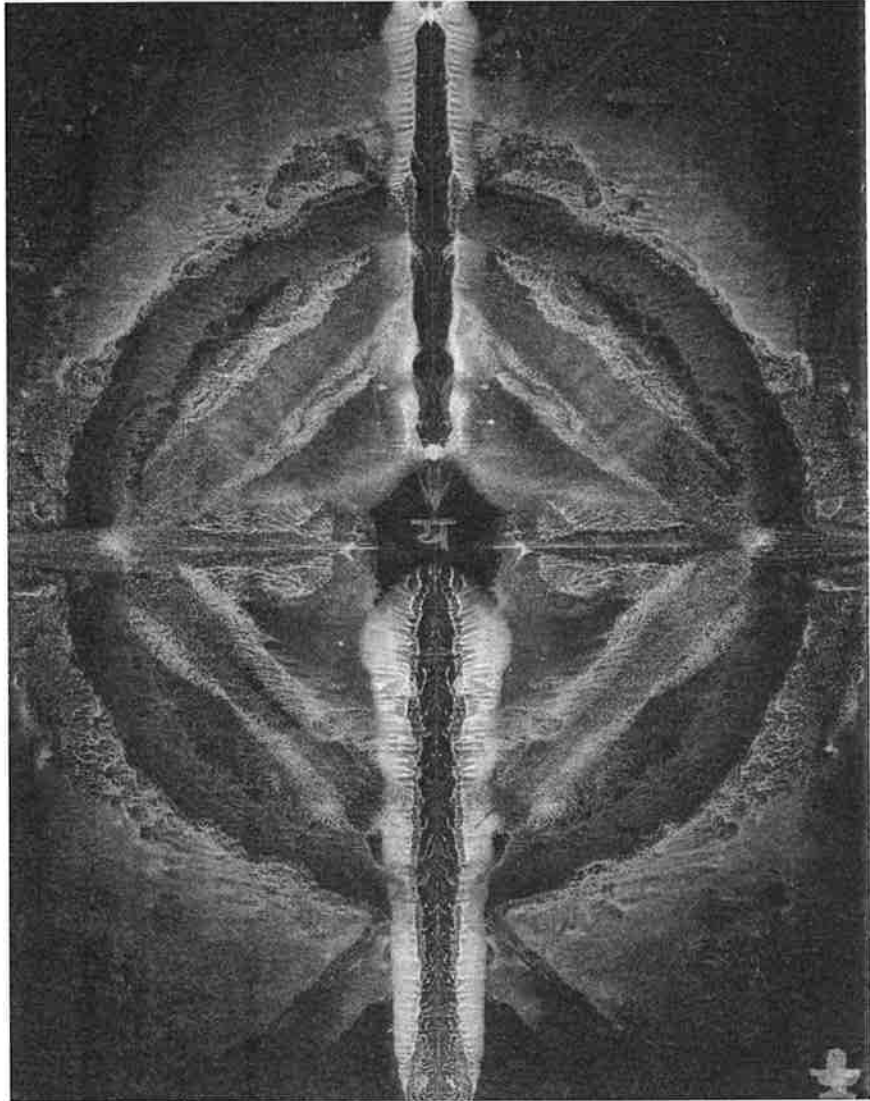
Like that, the drawing under discussion here is simply last in a series. Because it is loaded with carefully lettered text, it had to be laid out carefully beforehand and drawn as meticulously as an etching, very different in spirit from the previous drawings in the series that it finalizes. Hermeneutically speaking, it is a Gordian Knot of several strands, which are not all visible in the drawing. At some point in the interpretive process one may take up the sword of Alexander and analyze some of the strands, relying on one's memory. Jean brought in the ideas that he was constantly processing from books he was reading, essays he was writing, dialogues he was conducting, all of this he brought into the chalk talks he gave in the evenings after supper. This was his ongoing process of intellectual synthesis. Because of the roughness of the floor and the thickness of the chalk, it was not possible to label the drawings as it would have been had he been using a blackboard. At the end of a session one could gain little or no idea of what had been said. What remained was more like a painting than a drawing, the chalk laid on thick like paint, with an illusion of vigorous movement among vague cubistic solids. He often consulted the oracle of the Chinese *Book of Changes (I-Ching)*, where the movement among the lines of the hexagrams or the transformation of one hexagram into another, with regard to events and situations ongoing in the life of the community. These might be treated synchronistically with a verse of *Saundarya Lahari* or a section of "A Vision" by W. B. Yeats, or the stories of travelers passing through India and staying temporarily at the Gurukula.

Looking at the drawing to attempt a first approximation of interpretation, we notice a strong upward movement from the base of the cylinder, like a geyser, from

the alpha point to the omega point, from chaos to perfection, which is the central message of this particular presentation. Several kinetic ideas are blended. No doubt Jean had in mind the translation of *Saundarya Lahari*, in Nataraja Guru's words, "the billowing upsurge of beauty." A related idea is the raising of the *kundalini* serpent from the *muladhara chakra* up to the *sahasrara chakra*, the subject of one of Narayana Guru's most popular poems. Also Jean probably had in the back of his mind a reference to the trigram of thunder, the Arousing, in the *Book of Changes*. There is the notion of a shock traveling from the earth up to the sky, the opposite of our usual idea of thunder and lightening coming from the clouds to the earth.

The cylinder, which contains interlocking double cones, can be looked at simply as a capsule, a pill, such as might contain LSD. This was his intent, as he told me explicitly. It may be the time to bring this to light as Scott Teitsworth is preparing to publish a psychedelic interpretation of the *Vishvarupa Darshana* of the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Eleven.

We may represent the central movement hieroglyphically, pictographically, proto-linguistically, as a vectoral arrow pointed up. This is the central message of movement in consciousness, arising upward.



MOMENTS OF A LIFE DISPERSING

BY EMMA WALKER

“Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language.” Rainer Maria Rilke

There is a long distance of travel between the writing of a proposal and a completed body of work. So many changes occur when attempting to translate a series of fledgling ideas into something concrete and readable to external eyes. My initial idea for this exhibition was to use poetry, dreams, and the space of reverie as a pathway into meaningful material and imagery. I wanted to capture a sense of that space where the mind relaxed, and may dream and wander. The way a thought can meander circuitously through time and space and end up somewhere entirely different from the place where it set out.

Knowing that this exhibition was to be hung alongside Blake Prize, I also wanted to create work that responded to its themes of exploring the spiritual and religious in art. I started work in a slightly haphazard and random fashion, in a sense mimicking the process of dreaming. I worked intuitively and tried to follow whatever leads came my way, even if they seemed irrelevant. I also made a conscious effort not to judge this process, and to trust my impulses. I decided to give myself the liberty to work in many different ways. Using a variety of mediums and materials, I moved back and forth between working on large scale oil paintings and fiddling around with small doodles, jotting down notes, memories and lists, making collages and drawings and cutting out photos and other images. The act of writing down lists and memories inevitably brought me back to certain specific memories of events that are central to me, that have very much shaped who I am. Memories relating to the deaths of my father and mother.

And so the works in this exhibition began to coalesce into a very personal visual investigation into my notions and feelings about the afterlife and what remains after the body has died. I wanted to find a way of visually capturing the question. I would make lists like the following:

Life is a massive collection of moments, memories, energies, photons, electrons, atoms, multiplying cells, overseas travels, failed romances, laughter, tears,

business ventures, personal epiphanies, annoyances, housework, taste sensations, sleep, foibles, wasted time, procreation, relaxation, stress, generosity, selfishness, sensation, dinner parties, sexual explorations, fear, love, grief, expectation, joy, longing, work, solitude, stimulation, thoughtfulness, disappointment, hope, mindfulness, mindlessness, accidents, illnesses, recoveries, rejections, arguments, discussions, phobias, learning, struggle, obstinacy, creativity, acceptance and death as the grand finale.

In short, a can of worms.

Perhaps I should have allowed myself a decade in which to explore this material. The work in this show represents a mere scratch on the surface of what I can envisage. In the words of Robert Browning: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for?"

I now recognize that I need an entire lifetime to get to the bottom of this subject matter. With this thought in mind, I kindly ask the powers that be to grant me a long life and ever-reaching arms.

This is Emma Walker's gallery statement from the exhibition of her paintings in Australia in 2010. The painting of the same name, Moments of a Life Dispersing, is on the cover of this issue of the magazine.

SRI VASUDEVA ASTAKAM AND VISNU ASTAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY

GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

4

*ananda-rupa janakanaka purvadundu-
bhyananda sagara sudhakava saukumavya
manapaman-samamanasa-rajahamsa
sribhupate hava have sakalamayam me*

O the one who is *ananda*
In essential content,
O the ocean of happiness,
O the mine of the elixir of immortality,
O the one who is beauty itself,
O the royal swam (*raja-hamsa*),
Equal towards both
Commendation and condemnation,
O the Lord of both *Sri* and *Bhu*,
O *Hari*, please take away
All my afflictions.

The one who is *ananda* in essential content.

O Lord, you are often defined as *sat-cit-ananda* (existence-consciousness-value). Of these defining factors, I am now concerned with *ananda* or value experience. Although we devotees imagine you as having a tangible form, the *ananda* or value experience is something intangible. While being aspired to by all and experienced by all, *ananda* or happiness has no tangible form. Nor is it possible to clearly define it. Is it a state of having no suffering? Or is it something positively experienced? Is it purely an internal experience, or is it derived from something external? No philosopher has been able to answer such questions. Still, experiencing happiness is a universal phenomenon among living beings.

Along with experiencing or knowing happiness unconsciously, we experience the process of evaluating everything we know. This evaluation is always part of our actual life. For example, suppose we happen to see a pebble lying in our bedroom. Immediately we pick it up and throw it away. This is done after evaluating the use and logic of a pebble in our bedroom, finding it to be of no use, and thus throwing it away. But, if on picking up the pebble, we find it to be a precious stone, then we keep it in a safe place. Behind this action there is also an assessment of the value of the stone. This process happens in every experience of knowledge. All such assessments have a constant criterion that guides them, the happiness or suffering or something that is neither, that will come from the experience. In short, we do not try to understand anything without assessing the value of what is known.

While this pertains to your *ananda* (value sense) aspect, knowing is a function of your *cit* (consciousness) aspect, which is the nothing but the essential content of yourself, the ultimate Reality (*sat*). It is your self that unfolds as everything. Your *ananda* aspect is what unfolds in me as my experiences of happiness, suffering and indifference, and all such experiences happen in consciousness or *cit*. And *cit* is what ultimately exists, *sat*. Thus you are *sat-cit-ananda*. I am also the very same *sat-cit-ananda* that has fleetingly manifested as a temporal being.

Realizing this secret fills my being with the contentment of having known the ultimate secret of my own being and of your own being. This contentment is an experience that takes place in *cit*. Though differentiated as *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*, for the sake of easier conceptualization, these aspects remain inseparably one in all beings. Such is the way that your *ananda-rupa* (value experience in form) is intuitively perceived by me.

Ananda-sagara

Nevertheless, this *ananda* in actual life is experienced by every person in individual ways. For example, you in your incarnation as Sri Krishna, were fathered by Vasudeva, also known as *Anaka-dumdubhi*. According to legends, he had to suffer many tribulations just because he was the father of Sri Krishna. Still he felt a sort of bliss in this suffering, as is to be expected of all fathers. What is there greater in a father's life than witnessing his son growing into a person honored by all? Then what would be the bliss Vasudeva had on having Vishnu himself as his son! It can only be thought of as an ocean of bliss (*ananda-sagara*).

Sudhakara

Though now called Vasudeva or Vishnu, you in my perception are the Absolute or *Brahman* or *sat-cit-ananda*. You are the one birthless and deathless Reality that unfolds itself as everything, as has already been noticed. You thus are immortal. The aspiration of every human being is to somehow attain immortality, even though it is well known that death is inevitable. Thus the only way to attain immortality is for each person to find his or her identity with you while living as a fleeting, manifest

form. This experience of attaining and relishing identity with you is often conceived in mythological legends as drinking the elixir of immortality known as *amrita* and also *sudha*. You thus could be imagined as the unspent (*akara*) of the immortal elixir (*sudha*).

Perceiving oneself as immortal and unceasingly experiencing the ocean of bliss (*ananda-sagara*) is itself what makes life beautiful in the true sense. In fact, life becomes transformed into beauty itself (*saukumarya*). You are that beauty.

The Royal Swan Who is Equal toward Both Commendation and Condemnation

You really are the bliss experience that fills the being of those who intuitively perceive ultimate Reality. This *ananda* is not merely that of a father who is proud of his son. Neither is it a happiness with no suffering in life. As was seen earlier, to evaluate every object known is part of every act of knowing. This results in liking (*ista*), disliking (*anista*) or remaining indifferent toward (*udasina*) the object. To think of a rod as short or long requires a measuring rod. A similar measuring rod is applied unconsciously by each of us in liking or disliking some known object. This measuring rod that helps us evaluate some experience as happy and another as unhappy is what really is signified by *ananda* in this context. It necessarily has to be beyond the duality of happiness and suffering. In other words, it is this neutral *ananda* principle inherent in consciousness that assumes the forms of actual happiness and suffering in life. Only those who perceive thus are considered real seers of Reality. Such seers treat both happiness and suffering in actual life as the opposite modes of self-manifestations of the one *ananda* principle. Therefore they treat both favorable and unfavorable events in life equally. They consider commendation and condemnation as of equal importance. They live always in a state of neutrality unaffected by the vagaries of the course of life that touch two opposite sides alternatively. This neutrality could be imagined to be Manasarovar, the huge lake at the top of the Himalayas. Then the seers of Reality are the royal swans that swim happily in that lake. Just as a wave finds its oneness with the ocean, these seers find their oneness with Lake Manasarovar.

*manjira-manju-mani-sinjita-pada-padma
 kanjayataksa karunakara kanjanabha
 sanjivanausadha sudhamaya-sadhuramya
 sribhupate hara hare sakalamayam me*

O the one of lotus feet
 That give out jingling sounds
 Created by the charming
 Gems of the anklets,
 O the one of eyes
 Long like lotus petals,
 O the compassionate one,
 O the one with a lotus in the navel,
 O the life-restoring medicine,
 O the one who is in essence
 The elixir of immortality,
 O the one who keeps happy
 All the virtuous ones,
 O the Lord of both *Sri* and *Bhu*,
 O Hari, please take away
 All my afflictions.

O Lord, as is well acknowledged, it is from you that everything in all worlds, including all living beings, emerged. This demonstrates how each self and its unfoldment are part of an interwoven whole that cannot be tampered with. Our emergence into this world is part of an all-inclusive system. By understanding this, one's life gains a rhythm and beauty. It's depth and complexity are beyond human understanding. Even the mind that tries to comprehend it is merely a minute fragment of that rhythm and beauty. Those who intuitively perceive this nature of yours, if poetically minded, imagine that you wear golden anklets with precious stones inside, and that as you walk these anklets jingle.

Kanjayataksa

Life as a whole, as it emerged from you, has a beauty of its own and this beauty is enjoyed by you. Your eye that sees all eyes is the same as the eye written of in the Kena Upanisad, the eye of all eyes. It oversees the total life system. It is imagined that your eyes are lotus-like (*kanjayataksa*).

Karunakava

An ineffable tranquility would constantly be experienced by those who have the perception of life as your true nature. Looked at closely, the source of this peace



is also nowhere else than you. It is your compassion and grace that we experience as that peace, for you are the unspent mine (*akava*) of compassion (*karuna*), and thus you are *karunakava*.

Kanjanabha

From your navel, according to legends, grows a lotus and within that lotus is seated Brahma the Creator. Seated on the lotus rising from you, he creates the manifested world. This poetic image denotes that the creation and the existence of the world are centered on your intrinsic creativity. The lotus, as we know, is the most beautiful of all flowers, and the beauty of your lotus has its own special beauty. Only to appreciate it, a special eye is needed.

Sanjivanausadha

Everyone fears death. Resurrection, if at all possible, is thought by many to be the ultimate desire. Taking into account this human weakness, there has always existed in most cultures the idea of a medicine that effects revival of the dead. This medicine in India is known as *mṛta-sanjivani*, here termed *sanjivanausadha*, *sanjivana* meaning revival of the dead and *ausadha* meaning medicine. I consider that you are this very medicine. I understand that no physical revival from death is possible. But another type of revival exists by way of realizing, "I really am the one Reality, yourself, that was never born, that never dies." The happiness that this realization brings is not simply of physical resurrection after death. It is instead the direct experience of, "I was never born, I never die. I am the immortal Self." Such is the way you are the medicine of resurrection of the dead. This resurrection is assured by the wisdom that one is the immortal *atma* alone. That is what really exists, not our fleeting physical forms.

Sadhuramya

Those who understand you thus are to be understood as virtuous (*sadhu*). Life for them will always be full of contentment. Whatever the unexpected shifts in life, they perceive you alone, creatively existing in and through all of them. Such a perception is what makes their life meaningful and keeps them happy. The same perception makes you appear beautiful to them. You are thus *sadhuramya* (the one who keeps the virtuous happy).

O Hari, such being you, kindly keep away all my afflictions by giving me this enlightenment.

THE SEVENTH LABOR OF HERCULES

BY SCOTT TEITSWORTH

Heracles comes late to the story of the wild bull of Crete, with the primary spiritual lesson occurring before his arrival.

The tale begins with King Minos of Crete praying to the sea-god Poseidon for a special bull to sacrifice to Zeus, the highest of the Olympian gods. Poseidon acceded and sent forth a bull from his watery realm. When it emerged from the ocean it was so beautiful that Minos coveted it and didn't want to kill it. Instead he substituted an ordinary bull from his own flock for the sacrifice. Of course, gods can instantly tell the difference between a sacred object and a profane one. In revenge for the deception Poseidon made the Cretan Bull go mad, and it wreaked havoc all over the island. Eventually Hercules was called in to bring it back under control.

The story is deceptively simple and even appears somewhat trivial, unless we contemplatively dig into it. In the wisdom context, if we think of sacrifice not as the slaughtering of an animal to propitiate a deity but as freely chosen, non-obligatory activity, the myth can teach us something really valuable.

In myths and fables, we ourselves are what is meant by the protagonist king or queen, prince or princess, charged with administering the nation of our life, or with expectations of eventually being able to do so when we come of age. Mythical monsters are always said to be devastating the countryside or ravaging the king's domain. In the language of the unconscious the meaning is clear: when you give in to your "demonic" or disharmonized tendencies, it ruins your life, at least until you get it under control. Myths often imply that after the beast is killed or otherwise disposed of, the "countryside" once again becomes a Garden of Eden, letting us know that the outcome is in our own hands.

Like many of us, King Minos was initially inspired by a divine or wholesome vision, but instead of passing it along—allowing it to be processed through him to benefit something greater than himself—he held onto it, possessed it. By doing so the visionary impulse changed from one of transcendent beauty to a selfish one brimming with insanity and violence.

When we are granted a pure vision or blessing from the depths of spirit, it is so captivating that we want to catch it and hold onto it. Paradoxically, the more we try to possess it, the more what we try clinging to eludes us, symbolized here by the bull going wild and turning destructive.

Initially we aim for pure action as the expression of our *dharma* and the means to liberation. All too often, however, our actions are premeditated, and thus are vitiated by our prejudices and selfish interests. We are busy plotting and scheming, and our machinations dilute the purity of our original impulse, so much so that we may find our life in ruins or even go mad.

Needless to say, there is all the difference in the world between a generous, spiritually motivated impulse and a selfish one. And like Minos, we can easily convince ourselves that our selfish urges are really just fine, and there won't be any negative repercussions if we keep them secret. No one will even notice, will they?

The pictographic language of the Seventh Labor tells us a perennial psychological truth: While we often promise to deliver a "pure bull," we end up delivering bullshit instead. For some, manure delivery becomes a full time occupation. This is not a recipe for a happy life, only one based on expedience, whose fruit is unhappiness.

What we have here in the Seventh Labor is a depiction of the gap—a yawning chasm, really—between ideals and actualities. We begin our programs with noble conceptions, but when we try to make them manifest, we wind up constructing a feeble replica of the original vision. Selfish interests and material practicalities convert the optimistic aspirations of our life into something ordinary and even abased. But we cling to the original vision even when what we hold is a tattered simulation of it. Possibly we can fool our fellow fools, but Nature—the flow itself—is never fooled. And because Nature is perfectly reciprocal, bad karma rebounds on us in the exact measure of our fraudulent substitution.

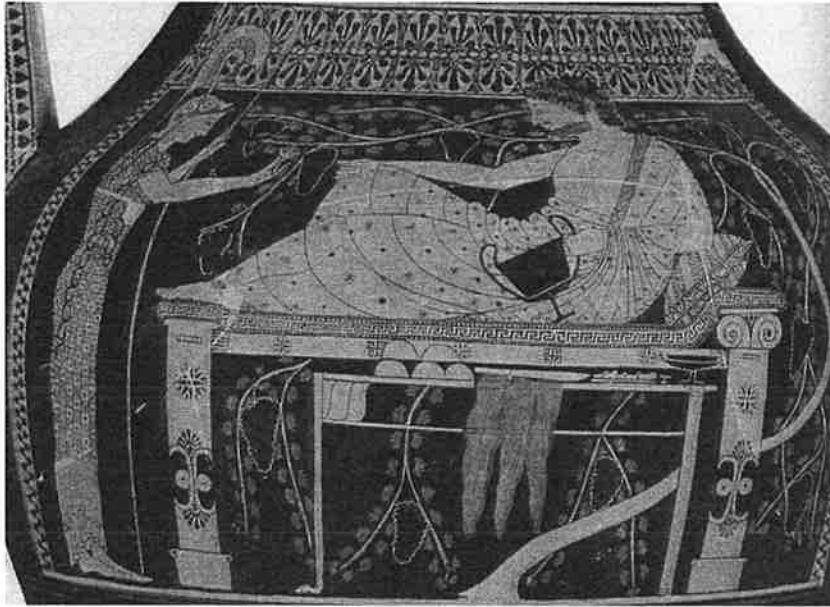
I know many people who have big ideas for how they want to live their lives, but when it comes down to it they can only sit and stew about it. They are trapped in the gap, unable to actualize their ideals. Their vision doesn't motivate them enough to get themselves mobilized, so they come up with some bull instead. We say they "talk a good game," meaning they don't play worth a damn, but they can tell you in no uncertain terms how it should be done.

When one of those gaps holds me in thrall I feel almost like I am in the clutches of some subterranean monster whose claws encircle my body. I have to consciously tear myself away with a mighty effort to get started. But I have found that once the task is begun, the energy required grows rapidly less. Like a hybrid gas-electric car, the forward momentum recharges the battery to make it almost self-perpetuating.

I wonder if having ideals that are too lofty doesn't paralyze us sometimes. The loftier they are, the harder it is to forge a link between the present and our vision of the future. We shouldn't sell ourselves short, but we shouldn't reach for the moon either, unless we are riding a rocket. Regardless of the course we choose, though, we have to determine our first step before we can anticipate the last, yet the very act of making a determination invites the bait-and-switch of an ordinary beast out of our stock supply that can masquerade as a divine gift.

The fact that King Minos prayed for a special bull to be given to him to perform the sacrifice tells us that what we hope and pray for is often unrealistic, and this

can be damaging when it sets expectations at a level that we are unable to live up to. Like that, prayers often express our hopes of being lifted out of our present state to a better one, but a forthright assessment and acceptance of who we are would actually make us more whole. Minos should have offered a bull from his own flock from the start, meaning something real, not something hypothetical. A regular sacrifice would be just fine, so long as he didn't try to pass it off as anything other than what it is. "Ordinary" is spectacular, in its own way.



So what are we to do about this paradoxical dilemma? How do we conquer the rampaging beast unleashed by our own inability to examine ourselves honestly and accept who we are? We are fortunate that life gives us many opportunities to improve our personal "product" and make it into something really beautiful. Doing so requires us to be humble about our stature and diligently strive to improve ourselves. We have to avoid being either unduly proud or unduly daunted by the difficulties we encounter. In social environments where we are ridiculed for not living up to other people's ideals—even if they themselves fall just as short of them as we do—it is easy to develop a self-deprecating, defeatist attitude. That will block a clear self-assessment as thoroughly as an inflated ego does. So there is definitely an aura of heroism involved with holding fast to honest ideals in a make-believe world.

The idea of the silent recluse is based in part on the idea that if you don't speak, then you won't suffer any conflict between what you say and what you do. Unfortunately, the disconnect between ideals and actualities can take place solely in the mind; in fact that is where it does take place, regardless of any outward posturing. We fool ourselves before we ever try to fool the world. The expertise aspired to by

a yogi is to bring deeds (*karma*) in line with thoughts (*jnana*). When we live with a mismatch between thoughts and deeds, it is corrosive to our well-being. If the gap is very pronounced, the person is described as “living a lie,” which leads to many unhappy consequences. So the silence must be an outgrowth of expert living, and not a technique for attaining it. It must be dynamic rather than suppressive.

The moralistic exhortation to always be honest is aimed at the same goal of inner harmony. This has been over-simplified to mean always telling the truth, which is a far different matter, truth being a very mysterious quality. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain demonstrated for all eternity that lying and telling the truth are tangential to the goal of honesty. In that magnificent book, the effects of lying are shown to range from the worst degradations to the highest nobility, and the truths told have a similar range of impacts. So factual truth telling is not the issue here, though it plays a part. The point is harmony between *karma* and *jnana*, actions and intelligence. Honesty is the measure of how closely the two sides match.

This is not a dilemma where you can just say okay, I’ll be honest with myself; it has to be wrestled with for a very long time. When he finally arrives in Crete, Hercules has to literally take the bull by the horns and ride it across the wide ocean in order to bring it home. Even then, Eurystheus doesn’t want it and lets it go again, to wreak yet more havoc. It is finally killed only much later by another hero, Theseus. Matching words and deeds is a lifetime project. When Nitya used to say there is no holiday in spiritual life, this is one of the main things he was referring to.

Where does this tragic tendency to dissemble come from? Early in life we lose faith in our own integrity. Most of us as children learned to say what we thought the authorities wanted to hear while abandoning our inner sense of truth and justice. Very often we were rewarded for abandoning our integrity. It takes bravery, strength and persistence to rectify this deeply lodged schism. Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, (Vintage, 1977), explains this very well in terms of our early life:

“If a child is told only stories “true to reality” (which means false to important parts of his inner reality), then he may conclude that much of his inner reality is unacceptable to his parents. Many a child thus estranges himself from his inner life, and this depletes him. As a consequence he may later, as an adolescent no longer under the emotional sway of his parents, come to hate the rational world and escape entirely into a fantasy world, as if to make up for what was lost in childhood. At an older age, on occasion this could imply a severe break with reality, with all the dangerous consequences for the individual and society. Or, less seriously, the person may continue this encapsulation of his inner self all through his life and never feel fully satisfied in the world because, alienated from the unconscious processes, he cannot use them to enrich his life in reality.... With such separation, whatever happens in reality fails to offer appropriate satisfaction of unconscious needs. The result is that the person always feels life to be incomplete.” (65)

So how do we apply the insight of the Seventh Labor to our everyday life? Let's take friendship as an example. Many relationships begin with great love and self sacrifice in favor of the beloved or admired other. After awhile, though, self-interest reasserts itself. In place of the naked soul that our love tempted us to reveal, we erect a plausible persona out of our "breeding stock" of familiar characters and hold it up to view. The beloved reciprocates accordingly, offering a persona in place of a soul, and soon the pure love begins to be parodied in a charade that becomes ever more tedious to maintain. The harder we have to work to meet the expectations we have loaded onto the friendship, the more likely it is to engender anger and resentment. Fighting may break out. Before long we begin to look for an escape route. Only an attitude that is brave enough to be honest about itself can arrest the downward spiral.

Another example is feeding the poor, as enjoined by many religions. The pure sacrificial act would be to meet a hungry person and give them food out of unalloyed compassion, but the reality is that people often have to be coaxed into doing it, because it doesn't appear to have any benefit for them. Incentives range from immediate social approval to future admission to heaven. But if we are motivated by self-interest rather than simple compassion, our ego will block any initial altruistic impulse and lobby instead for its own needs. Soon pride creeps in, and so the game has to be maintained by strenuous effort, often including prevarication. This is precisely what is meant by the image of the king substituting an ordinary bull for the special one bequeathed by the gods. Of course mayhem will ensue: only a pure act engenders no negative consequences. Our ordinary, selfish acts are disruptive on many fronts, commensurate with the degree and kind of deception perpetrated when passing them off as noble gestures.

Avoiding working in a soup kitchen or not making friends doesn't exempt us from this universal malaise that must be consciously overcome—whence the need for Herculean efforts. Lobbyists and politicians, and all propagandists and advertisers in general, are masters at dressing up their selfish interests in an appealing and persuasive package so they can be palmed off on the unsuspecting. Although most people are easily bamboozled, Zeus—the Greek Absolute and template for the Latin Deus—is not. For the most part, humans believe what they are told and strive to make the best of it, but the Absolute reflects things as they truly are. Therefore Zeus cannot be deceived, and the falsity rebounds onto the one who perpetrated the deception, ravaging all his domain.

The book *The Ecology of Fear*, by Mike Davis, (New York: Henry Holt, 1998) deals with the slow-motion disaster of Los Angeles, California, and attributes much of that city's demise to its false image, which has always trumped its actual circumstances. This fascinating book examines in detail how for more than a century city officials have advertised an idyllic image of paradise and taken pains to cover up everything that didn't accord with the image. This led them to fail to

address critical problems, which naturally became worse and worse, producing an avalanche of devastation throughout the city, which is rapidly sliding into financial and structural ruin. As of old, the Cretan Bull of false promises is freely trashing the entire domain, while the king and his court busy themselves with proclaiming their piousness.

At every point in the demise of Los Angeles the city fathers were free to act, and like Minos they chose to deceive and make inordinate profits. Where their “sacrifice” should have been for the overall good, they played instead for selfish ends. The result is widespread disaster, almost exactly like a monster run amok, out of control. Davis chronicles the sad decline of a once-great city, as the culture of deception desperately holds onto its illusions. The Los Angeles area basin was up until the twentieth century perhaps as close as the Earth ever came to perfection, resembling the divine bull given to Minos by Poseidon. But greed has pounded away at it until little remains but a bankrupt wasteland.

This pattern is a microcosm of Western (and World?) civilization as a whole, where ever-receding frontiers beckon to crowds seeking to escape the misery that selfishness and greed never fail to let loose. The problem is that we have run out of frontiers, and are coming up hard against the consequences of our species-wide folly. It looks like this time there is no great Hero who can save us, though many sustain desperate hopes in their favorite mythical character. Will it be Jesus, or Hitler? I’m afraid it is going to fall to those of us who are not taken in by false hopes to be heroic in whatever way we are able.

Our humble Seventh Labor thus proves itself to be a crucial lesson in sane living, with implications that go to the heart of our economy, our social stability, our well-being: even the survival of the very planet on which we live. It’s a sad testimony that even those who boast a knowledge of history have for the most part forgotten the absolutely essential messages bequeathed us by our ancient progenitors, knowledge that we ignore at our peril.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM IN PRISON

BY JOHNNY STALLINGS

"Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream."

Bottom

Nick Bottom wakes from an actor's nightmare: "When my cue comes, call me..." Then a vivid memory returns. "I have had a most rare vision!" he announces. He remembers having the head of an ass. The queen of the fairies was in love with him. He quickly concludes that it was a dream.

But we know better. It really happened. We saw it with our own eyes.

As improbable as Bottom's adventure may be, it feels just as unlikely to go inside a prison and see Shakespeare's 400-year-old romantic comedy being performed by an all-male cast of inmates, dressed in beautiful costumes. It's like some kind of strange dream. "Are you sure we are awake?" Demetrius asks. We know just how he feels.

A local TV station does a short piece about the play. A grouchy blogger opines: "I didn't know prison was supposed to be fun." He's right. It's not supposed to be. I can't think of anything more antithetical to prison culture than *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Perhaps the sheer incongruity of the whole venture awakened the magic that slumbers within the old play.

One of Shakespeare's innovations is to have a play-within-the-play. A group of tradesmen decide to perform the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. They are not really actors. This comic sub-plot seemed like a metaphor for our production. Snout, who plays the Wall, doesn't want anyone to kiss his hand. Francis Flute doesn't want to play a woman. Snug is slow of study. Starveling can't remember his lines. Quince has difficulty with punctuation. Bottom wants to play other people's parts. Their tragedy turns into a comedy. And yet, the death of Thisbe brings a tear to my eye.

We laughed a lot in rehearsal. It felt great! But I was often moved by the earnestness of an actor reciting his lines:

And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,

Or in the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport!

It's just not the way people usually talk in prison!

Bushra Azzouz added another dimension to our project by bringing along a film crew to record rehearsals, performances, dialogues and interviews. This gives the actors an opportunity to share their views and tell their stories to a much wider audience.

Dress rehearsal was exciting! The actors put on their beautiful doublets and dresses (!), thanks to Frances Britt of Portland Opera. Nancy Scharbach made costumes for Wall and Lion and a magnificent donkey head for Bottom.

Opening nights inmate audience fell in love with Aaron Gilbert, in the role of Helena. One audience member, who looked to be about 45 or 50, said: "I've spent most of my life in prison. Since the age of nine, I've only been on the streets for three years. This is the most I've ever laughed since coming to prison."

For the public performances, the actors were allowed to invite family and friends. Two guys had family members come to the play who had never before visited them in prison. They had each served eight years. Another had no visitors, but his fellow-actor's mom gave him a hug. He told us it was the first hug he had had in twelve years.

Many of our guests were delighted to see the joy which the actor-inmates were obviously feeling. The playgoers laughed, but they were touched as well. My brother-in-law's cheeks were soaked with tears. In addition to the standing ovations, which showed their appreciation for the outstanding performances, the audience members showered the actors with love. There could be no more precious gift for men in prison.

The performances were magical! I thought: "You can't get this experience in Ashland." It was something about where we were, and what they were doing, and who was doing it, and how well they did it, that made this evening in "the theater" so memorable.

A week after the show closed, we all sat around a table together and had a feast. It was early October, but it felt like Thanksgiving. The biggest guy broke down and cried. A lot of eyes were wet.

Now Bushra is busy editing the hours and hours of raw film footage. When the film is finished, those who were not among the lucky few who saw the play live will get a glimpse of the magic. And those who were there will get to know the actors better. I am confident that the film, like the play, will open many people's minds and hearts. I can hardly wait to see it!

LESSONS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

BY JOSIE ESSAY

I am a teacher in a school in California, nursery to eighth grade. My class is kindergarten to first grade, children ages five to six. Over the years I have found that my lessons from the students are certainly as numerous and profound as any I teach. Below are two incidents that stand out for their humor and their wisdom, which I would like to share.

One recent class of mine had four boys who were very energetic and full of their own ideas. The common thread of behavioral challenge was not following rules both inside our classroom and outside in our yard. Even after numerous class meetings were held to discuss and make these rules, they would not pay attention to them. They often gave four very thoughtful and individual reasons why the rules were not necessary.

One day two girls came running in to the classroom to say that their friends were crying. The doors under the large wooden boat in our school yard had been closed so they couldn't get out. I came out with visible patience and underlying frustration. We had just had a meeting a few days ago and had voted on a rule about keeping the boat doors open. Kids had expressed feelings of fear of being in the dark under the boat and a feeling of being trapped. Once outside, I reminded the children of the meeting and the vote. I said that if the doors didn't stay open, a certain four boys who were closing them would have a time-out inside for more discussions about the safety of certain rules and the problem of not paying attention to group decisions.

I came back inside to prepare for a project. Much later one of the four boys came in and asked me to come outside, because they had figured out how the doors under the boat could be closed! On the way out I saw all the kids standing around the boat. I was determined not to be flexible and to stay with our rule. One of the boys explained that they had dug a big hole under the boat from the inside to the outside. Every kid had tried climbing through the hole to make sure they would fit and be able to get out. Another boy said that they had to dig more of the hole out for one boy who was the biggest and for another who was the tallest. The boy who brought me out asked if it was okay now to close the boat doors and change the rule. Everyone was quiet and looking at me. I was speechless and looked back at

them. I thought that this was one of the most resourceful and cooperative and well planned ideas I had seen in my many years of teaching. "Yes," I said, "we can close the boat doors." Everyone cheered!

Another morning after each child had completed a drawing and story recalling our previous day's field trip, the students went outside to play. I was starting to prepare snack when one boy came in and said two other boys were chasing and hitting him.

I asked, "Have you tried to work it out? Did you ask them to stop?"

He replied, "Yes, but they won't listen."

I called the other two boys inside and we arranged four chairs in a small circle to talk about the situation. One boy in particular immediately complained, "Why do we have to talk again? I'm not saying a word. I just want to play."

I waited a moment and replied, "We might be sitting here for a long time if you aren't going to speak. I really want you to have the rest of your play time." He shook his head with an affirmative, if reluctant, nod.

The first boy who had come in for help started by saying that he didn't like being hit, especially because, "You guys are supposed to be my friends."

One of the other boys responded, "Well, I hit him because he doesn't believe in God!"

Momentarily I was completely unsure of how to proceed. I had certainly worked with kids hitting each other, but not for this reason. I decided to repeat back what I had heard. "Okay," I replied slowly, "your friend doesn't believe in God, so the two of you were chasing and hitting him. Is that right?"

"You have to believe in God, you know!" said the first boy.

"Yeah," confirmed his friend who had participated in the chasing and hitting.

I decided to invoke the class rules that we had all had so many discussions about. I asked the boys if they remembered our classroom agreements about not hitting each other.

"Of course we remember that we don't hit," the more outspoken boy said, looking at me as if I were missing something.

My reluctant-to-speak student jumped in to help. "This is different because THIS IS ABOUT GOD!" he said.

At that point I decided to take a step back and approach the conversation from another angle. I mentioned that many people have different beliefs. "There are kids and families who believe that God is Buddha, or God is Jesus, or God is Krishna, or God is Mohammed. There are some who do not believe there is a person God but they believe in the wonder of nature and science. Some people even believe that God is a woman and they call her a Goddess." There was a profound silence.

Now I really wasn't sure where to go from here, so we all sat in the silence together. One of the boys finally said, "Well, if everyone believed in God, there wouldn't be any wars!"

I answered as respectfully as I could, "Your idea is wonderful, and I wish it could be true. But sometimes when there is a war, everyone thinks that it is okay to fight because God is on their side."

But the boy who had been hit replied defensively, "You can't hit someone to make him believe in God because that would be like a war."

I was so impressed that five-year-old boys were able to begin this kind of a conversation when so many adults continue to struggle to find answers to these questions. We sat there quietly for a few more minutes. In that quietness an idea came to me. I said, "I am wondering if you boys can still be friends and play together even if you have different ideas about believing in God?"

The boy who had been chased and one of the other boys said together, "Yeah, we can do that!" His friend even apologized for hitting him. Those two boys went off to play. I asked the remaining boy if he could play with his friend while also having different beliefs about God.

"I'm not sure," came his quiet reply.

I told him I was going to finish making snack and he could think about the situation. After a few minutes he came into the kitchen and stood beside me. "Do some people *really* think that God is a woman?"

"Yes," I answered with a smile.

"I guess that's okay," he said thoughtfully. "Now I really want to go play with my friends." With that he took off outside to join his friends before the bell rang for snack.



JOURNAL FROM FERNHILL GURUKULA

BY BAILEY YOUNG

Tuesday, 20 March 1972

I was seated at my desk copying the final draft of this plague-y letter to Steve (Kopper) onto an aeogramme form when the bicycle went by my window. Now who? The carpenter's the only one I know with a bicycle, but this isn't the carpenter. Just as he knocks at the door, Wilhelm emerges: prayer time. It's a telegram addressed to Narayana Gurukula. I sign for it and thrust it in my pocket, remarking, It can't be so urgent that we should let it intrude in our minds before prayer.

Judy was reading from her transcription of Nataraja Guru's comments on the Maitri Upanishad, done last year in this very same puja hall. We were all grinning at the Guru's humorous dialectics: "The Brahmins have done something very cute, I think we must award them first prize. They will say there are things only God knows, or perhaps He doesn't, we can't say. Impossible to say, the Upanishad tells us! That is really very honest for a sacred scripture. Most of them will say: this comes directly from God, I saw him in front of Chelleram's store at ten past two. Oh, you saw God, did you? Was he standing in a jeep? Yes, he was standing in a jeep. What color hat was he wearing? Green. So he was wearing a green hat... There was a boy here who said these things, so there really are simple people in the world who believe."

Guru is so funny! "Bertrand Russell is a great man; you can read him in the Sunday Observer every week. He says: I'm a pragmatist! I don't believe what I can't see and he's written four volumes on *Principia Mathematica*, which no one reads anymore. After a period of respectability in the best libraries they come to the second-hand market in Ooty, to be sold for starting fires. Now why is that?"

I don't know, Guru. And I can't figure out why it was so hard for me to appreciate you last year, how I could fume impatiently that it wasn't fair that you would keep us so long from lunch. Just blows my mind when I hear your words now, when I realize....

I pulled out the telegram, grinning: Huh! Telegram is never good news! Wilhelm passed me his knife. I slit open the envelope and read: GURU ATTAINED SAMADHI INTERNMENT TOMORROW 10 AM. PRASAD. I read it aloud. The internment would be going on at just about that moment, though we didn't put it

together so fast. We thought: so fast! No one will have been able to reach Varkala in time. We thought: poor Mylle. She will have just missed seeing Guru, that will be very hard for her. But maybe Mark made it—it is just barely possible. Then Vijaya was at the door with the toilet-cleaning coolie who was proposing to clean out our stuffed cesspools and dig a new pit. Judy and I dealt with him calmly, agreeing if it could be done for 10 rupees but refusing to pay the 15 asked without Mylle's consent. He agreed to do it for 10. Down we went to the kitchen for our rice and sambar, a mild potato and turnip sambar prepared by Christine. We were all so calm, unshocked. "Too bad I never did get to meet him," Wilhelm said.

When Milarepa parted from his Guru Marpa the latter told him they would not meet again in this life, and despite the assurance of meeting on a higher plane everyone was overcome with weeping. Are we truly men (and women) of hardhearted, degenerate times? So coolly free from observances that we taste our food and clean our fingernails so usually?

THE GURU IS GONE. Aye, there's another one. (Flower petal fixed to page.) Why do you make a fuss about these things that are normal and even inevitable in the world of Necessity?

Are the cows being properly treated? YES, GURU.

At one point during a lesson Guru interrupts himself to ask, "Is the dear disciple sitting behind me?" (That's Bennington, adds Judy, unnecessarily.) "No, Guru, I think he's having a bath." "Yes, he's washing his hair, like the lady in the rich family when visitors come. She can't receive visitors because she's washing her hair this evening. Yes, washing the hair is most important because we are most important people."

YES, GURU, BUT...

How many times did Guru upbraid us because he went to all the trouble to make these jokes and no one would laugh? "All these serious faces. (Bennington screws his face up horribly, emits a ghastly high chortle.) Only Johnny will laugh, Johnny likes my jokes." Yes, Guru, and Mark will note them down, so that now they can still afford enjoyment to those of us who were just too uptight, too defensive, too whatever.

Well, I remark, you remember how he was always telling us he was getting ready to kick the bucket, a yogi should be prepared to kick the bucket at any moment.

C'mon Bailey, puts in Judy, he's probably having ice cream with some girlfriend from Hackensack—you know, that's what he used to say!

Should we drape his pictures in black? Should we make an announcement? Invite the neighbors? Something? Don't make so much fuss. Just be normal.

YES, GURU, NORMAL.

(Scattering of flower petals pasted on page)

Another cloudless day after lunch. I soak my blistered foot again, finish copying the letter. Christine goes to town doing errands. Wilhelm takes the cows out to graze. It is quiet, the train whistles by.

He's been an outcaste.
He's been a failure.

ALL HIS LIFE

He's been a solitary.

What do you say when a Guru kicks the bucket?
Why do you have to say anything? Is he a great man?
Yes, Guru. At least, for me, a great man.

Ah, for you, is it? And how do you know what a great man is? Have you looked him up in the dictionary? Does the encyclopedia tell you he's a great man? Does he always have his picture in the Sunday papers? Do the pretty girls run after him and quarrel about who is allowed to kiss him? Does he eat strawberry ice cream and go strolling in the Jardin de Luxembourg? What makes a great man?

He was devoted to the Absolute, Guru, and he gave his whole life to serving the general good of humanity, though not in any rigid or mechanistic sense. He taught us what it means to be "normal".

Then you can say: it's normal to die, even great gurus are not exempt. So live your life normally and make sure the cows are fed! If you must remember something, remember that he said: if Vedanta doesn't make you happy, then throw away Vedanta!

Am I allowed to cry?

There's no duality between death and life, so what is there to cry about? But if you have a heart, it too is subject to the laws of Necessity.

YES, GURU.

Life goes on normally,

with a slight asymmetry.

Wednesday, 21 March

Our response, finally, to yesterday's pink telegram was the celebration of an *agnihotra* at evening prayer time. "If Jean were here..." said Judy. "But, Judy, we can..." put in Christine, "a woman can do it, we have Guru's commentary in *Values*." "Well, Bailey can do it, it's not so complicated."

And so the mortal-coil-off-shuffling of one Nataraja Guru, born into the good family of Dr. Palpu but who ran away from home to the Nilgiris in his late twenties to become an Absolutist, such event was indeed duly commemorated with

the simple but not undignified pomp of the Fire Sacrifice as revalued for modern times by Narayana Guru. Acting as chief celebrant, pourer of ghee and scatterer of ceremonial water to the four directions, his very first appearance in such a solemn role was none other than B. K. Young. In the house Guru built, his familiar cushion just to my right. It went off quite well, I think. Assisting, besides Judy, Christine and Wilhelm, were two American girls (Judy and Lucy) and Ted, an Australian of many years' wandering, who arrived about 5:00 that afternoon. We got the fire lit in our half-sphere frying pan without too much hassle and I managed to pour the ghee at about the right moment, while everyone added the grain offerings thrice. Then the flame kept alive during the Daiva Mai prayer and the Isa Upanishad that followed, and we closed with three poems from the *Tao Te Ching* I had chosen that afternoon. It all seemed simple and natural, so I guess the Guru would not have been too displeased.

The change feels slight—this is hard to believe—but he prepared us well. I was sure we were taking leave for the last time back in Varkala, exactly three weeks ago yesterday. I vaguely supposed he would slip away sometime when we were far off in Europe, but now that it has come so quickly to pass I feel no surprise, I find. After all what does it mean except that the series of time-space events relative to the waking consciousness of P. Natarajan, of Bangalore, Trivandrum, Madras, Kandy, Always, Nilgiris, Geneva, Paris New Jersey, Varkala, Ezuhmalai and so many other places terminates? The Guru remains where he always is, as dialectical and as enigmatic as ever. What's important is that we're sitting around that prayer platform twice a day with a greater and greater sense of naturalness, even happiness. A pity, you say, that last year when Guru was among us you felt it so much as something to be gotten through before meals. Aye, and that the Guru did so much teaching in your presence while you, so full of your moods, dilemmas, suspicions, did so little attending. Say what you will! He has taught me not to heed regret-nostalgia but to face prospectively forward. All the clues I need are there—and never have I recognized it so clearly: he has given me enough, more than enough. Praise be to God and all Gurus!

Saturday, 24 March

Guru's *samadhi* was, according to Bennington, "very blissful." He had nearly died at the dark of the moon. He swelled and wouldn't eat. but he rallied with the waxing moon and directed his meditation more and more inward. When Bennington arrived, Guru patted him on the head, "So the Prodigal Son has returned." The signs of the coming event were sufficiently clear. Prasad seems to have ordered the big stone in advance, though he told no one. Bennington got Jean to come at once, and wrote to P.V. Anandan in Madras the same. Even Genard said, "He will go with the full moon," and railed at the doctors to stop the drugs, which they at length did. At the end Guru was not talking at all. A few days before he wrote

a declaration that Freddy, Curran, Mick and Patrick are his *sat-sishyas* but did not sign, after Prasad objected, an authorization giving Curran all publishing powers. The moon was full at about 5:10 a.m. on Monday. Around 9:00 the Guru had them sit him up and he drank two glasses of water, rinsed his mouth and gargled on the third, with salt, I believe, as did Narayana Guru, so the mouth would be pure when it falls open. By about 9:30, Bennington asserts, he had turned all his senses inward, totally focused, but he did not willfully take leave of the body, as yogis are supposed to have the power to do, but he let the Tao take its course. His heart stopped beating around noon.

Then they put him, seated in yogic posture in his sannyasin's robes, in the boys' classroom for the multitudes to visit (*rigor mortis* lasts only two hours in these climes, Bennington added). The Chief Minister of Kerala came. A shaft was dug in the hill front of the Giri, just below the *mandala*, and a pit lined with cemented rock prepared to receive the body, buried upright, facing west. Various correct things were done. All I remember is camphor bits, and Coomarswamy took the lead ("I'll never say anything against that man again, he behaved like a true *bhakta*"). Bennington was asked to make the final adjustment of the body before burial. So all was well done even if Freddy didn't stay. He was really acknowledged by everyone as a great Guru, Mylle writes. Later she remarked on the great quiet that prevailed, so unusual among crowds in India. There had been much crying and lamentation some years before when a beloved swami had died at Varkala, but the hush that fell upon these crowds was the surest recognition that a great guru was passing. (Note added November 2010.)

Nitya seems to have wired from London that there is no point in his returning just now.

An era in the Gurukula is over, one recognizes with this visit of Bennington. What we have lived, such richness so little suspected, such powerful contradictions held to the single focus of the last, surely strongest, phase of Nataraja Guru's embodiment. Now that center has dissolved back like salt into the sea, leaving the writings, the memories, the strongly-held convictions in hearts no one can ever challenge so deeply again. All of us will proceed now to reverence and embody the Guru as our tendencies permit and our understanding demands. The Centre is gone, long live the Centre! Stories will grow according to their own karmic propensities, subtle and gross.

Sunday, 25 March

"What is the use of yoga if you don't want to be a great yogi? It enables you to die a more dignified death. Otherwise you might start calling at the end, 'Oh where is my girlfriend? Oh, I want to see my dear grandson! Quickly, quickly! Send a telegram!' Old people are always doing this. There is so much anxious rushing about that someone falls by accident and you have two deaths instead of one. A yogi

is always prepared to die at any moment, on any day. His yoga is a kind of rehearsal for death: he becomes so used to it that he is no longer concerned.” This is from Nataraja Guru’s lessons on Maitri Upanishad, given here last Season, read in this morning’s prayer and quoted from memory.

“I wanted to come and tell you, because otherwise you will be hearing all these...stories.... Such a beautiful death! It was all done absolutely according to the *shastras*, to the scriptures, to the best traditions. Oh, oh, oh, such a beautiful death!”

Mylle turned up in a car as we were pouring after dinner chichory. Bennington and I exchanged glances: she can’t keep away a whole week. But we were not being fair, I later decided. She insisted several times she had felt no worries, but because a lift had brought her as far as Gudaloor she had decided to come up and tell us the story, just to see... just so that we would hear the true story. And if there were no objections she would go on to the Island early the next morning.

“I arrived on Sunday morning. I went to Vaythiri and from there directly to Varkala. Already Guru wasn’t saying anything but he would show what he wanted with his hand, he would go...” she gestures, opening and closing the right hand. “You know how he used to go like that to the children who would come in the afternoon? ‘Come on, come on,’ like that. At about 9 o’clock Monday morning he showed them—I don’t know how—he wanted to be sat up in his chair. I suppose Bennington has told you this but he didn’t come until about 15 to 20 minutes before the heart stopped—and, oh, man! All of a sudden there were thousands of people there, the whole yard was filled with schoolchildren and Guru, after he drank the water, his eyes were, oh man! They were fixed up, absolutely focused inwardly, he just sat in all that concentration, not one blink! Only from time to time there was a little tear that would fall out of one eye—but unblinking, man! He gestured as he went into it, ‘Come! come!’ then they had to hold his head up. After some time they laid him down and his eyes were closed but his breathing was still going. But sometimes with his right hand he would make that movement, ‘Come! come!’ right at the last. Oh it was absolutely perfect, absolutely correct.”

She didn’t say as much for the subsequent proceedings. So they prepared and dressed him. “So you didn’t much like ashes, eh? Here!” and they smeared him with ashes. They combed his beard to a point and set it. They wrapped a scarf around his head and painted him. “So he looked like a little black dwarf,” Mylle put it. The impression of the same sort of gaudy aesthetic horror as so many modern Indian memorials, as Guru himself once noted in “Art Reflections and Happy Hoboes.” So I guess you could say the dialectic continued over from life to death “normalement.” Guru set the perfect example (“But who is there to hear?”) and the surrounding interested groups and relativists twisted affairs their own way. Narayana Guru’s reported warning to the young Natarajan: “You’ll die alone” is to

be taken in no shallow sense. Almost always Guru has been surrounded by people and their problems. The decision to become a relinquisher meant, he wrote, that he no longer had the right to drive people off, but always, insofar as humanly possible, he has been alone. However, Mylle was there to hear and receive the transmission of this final teaching. She is uniquely qualified. Sharing Guru's own dislike of the inflated and the wonderous, she recounted with scorn how she heard a "European" gasping, "The skin, man, it's warm like life!" already launching "stories" of miraculous preservation, and so forth. "What does a man like Guru care about a miraculous undecayed body people can worship? I tell you, man, it was a corpse like any other! Storytelling had begun. I even made a picture because I thought people would say these things. One Indian man said to me: 'What an extraordinary death!' Oh no, man, oh no! Just normal, just the most normal death." She did point out, however, that his death came almost exactly nine months after the first stroke.

Not forgetting the tear.

Mylle was aglow as she spoke. She seems revitalised by this unique final teaching she was just on time to

receive. I'm sure she sees the hand of the Tao in the circumstances that let her get off Saturday and go first to Vaythiri despite the apparent illogicality of that move. She is convinced that now is the unique moment for the Gurukula. If we can remember what Guru kept saying around Convention time, "I have solved all the problems. The Gurukula is going fine." If we can believe that, then the only problems are people's personal difficulties and they can be fielded. She is determined to take no sides, but set about running the Gurukula here with the Guru as the normative reference. Though we may have less—she is going to reclaim the fields rented to the potato cultivators and turn it back to pasture for the cows—we are going to become more generous. Isn't this what Guru kept saying at the end? Be more generous! She glowed, and ate the bread I had cut for her. Then, early this morning, she left for a few days on the Island, walking into town with Bennington, who is also sailing into new waters.



ASCENDING DIALECTICS OF STONE LANGUAGE

BY NATARAJA GURU

In the East more than elsewhere perhaps, wisdom often enshrines itself in images. Iconography in India becomes as important as theology is in the West. In its own way it speaks the profound and secret language of dialectics. Although the simple Siva *lingam* (mark) is just a round upright stone which is decorated and anointed, it becomes an eloquent presence, and inspiring noumenal hierophany.

On the Indian soil one of the distinctive features of this Word-iconography is that it synthesizes both doctrine and sacred presence, both the teaching and the noumenous feeling. In the prophetic religions—Judaism, Islam and Calvinism—sacred presences tend to be discarded in favor of legalistic doctrine, and where this tendency has come about suddenly, encouraged by social circumstances (as in the case of the Reformation in Germany) it has often developed an iconoclastic turn. Yet in spite of this hatred of idols and idolatry, sacred objects still persist within the body of such protestant religions. Mecca has its Kabba, and the Bible, even in severely protestant Christian countries, is regarded with a kind of invested noumenal awe, and is regularly used in courts of justice as a silent powerful witness to the truthfulness of the participants.

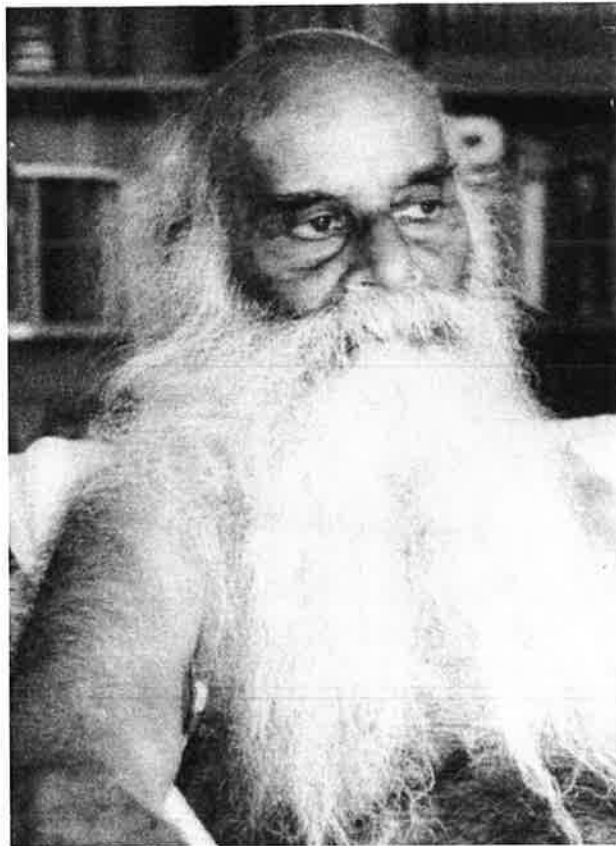
If we hope to follow the implicit dialectics of Indian iconography, there are some primary notions which must be borne in mind. We have to note the existence of an old order of values, then additions to the old order; crystallizations and constant revaluations as-hardening processes set in during the unraveling of the panorama of history; submergence almost; then resuscitation and fresh recognition under revaluation; each revaluation being for the general good; the fluid Word spreading like a benediction over the affected territory.

The dumb stones require a traditionally trained or dialectically contemplative ear attuned to the message of their secret sermons. The enigmatic Sphinx and the tranquil majesty of the Kamakura Buddha whisper the same secret to the initiates of each Word culture, whether they are dedicated Egyptian hierophants or Zen Buddhists.

If the tracing of the Word through history was like sailing in a fog, then our present task is like exploring in the Stygian gloom of the Catacombs. To follow the intricacies of the Word across the multi-textured entanglements of the forest of Indian icons and myths where the Word like some rare bird flitting from tree to tree

is forever moving from one revaluation to another, needs very special equipment, an inner sagacity to discover the evidence that what we seek is here and not there. Indeed, to use a simile common to Vedantic literature, it is like tracking the musk deer by its scent. Both a certain naïve simplicity and an innocent yogic eye of honesty must be our main guides, and we must abandon the leadership of both loud erudition and pontifical authority, even as simple jungle dwellers wearing a dress of leaves and bark can follow where uniformed and heavily equipped hunters have to be left behind. For the quest of the Word we require *simplicitas Dei*, the simplicity of God.

Excerpted from *Word of the Guru*, pages 155-158.



ONE HUNDERED VERSES OF REALIZATION

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

STEP FIFTEEN

Who is a blessed person?

In this phenomenal world of nature there are many invisible negative forces, many obstacles that thwart one's easy passage to the Spirit. Only a blessed person is spared from such anomalies, as if that person has been chosen by the Spirit to enjoy the benevolence of the Absolute.

What is the value vision of the wise person?

Being able to make a clear distinction between eternal values and peripheral, transient values.

How does a wise person distinguish the supreme values from the transient?

Transient and relative values are enumerated in the Mandukya Upanishad.

What are some of them?

The wise person ignores the inwardly as well as the outwardly cognitive factors, and gives no attention to the cognitive mass. He or she neither gives attention to cognitive mental images nor to non-cognitive mentation, keeping free of all transactional cognitions. Such wise ones do not look for any mark that necessitates compulsive behavior.

What distinctly marks the wise in their one pointed devotion to the essence of the Absolute Self?

It is as if they are not disturbed by the ever-proliferating characteristics of the cyclic repetition of recurrent nature. Their conviction is that they are fully identified with the pure Self, the *turiya*.

How do such wise ones clearly recognize their affiliation to the Absolute?

If they are overpowered by nature's relativistic snares, even a fleeting second will confuse their time consciousness. Time will appear to drag. Otherwise they will feel no sense of time at all.

STEP SIXTEEN.

When you think of yourself what picture do you maintain?

I think of an animated body continuously presided over by my 'I' consciousness and several operational functions which mostly consist of a mode of automation with areas or organs in which consciousness prevails. In it there can be conscious deliberations of sense organs and fundamental functions of storing and recalling memories. There are deliberations to program sensory and motor activities. 'I' consciousness creates schemes for short-term and long-term goal oriented plans that are holistically conceived. All the same, the unconscious areas of autonomous functions are like an arid desert land. Such parts of the body and their functions are more or less unfamiliar to me.

Are there occasions when you feel holistic and have total insights into the experiences happening to you?

Yes, indeed. Aesthetic, spiritual and moral implications of life come as a flood of conscious energy inflow.

To what phenomena can you compare such imperientially radical states of awareness?

It is like being exposed from inside to the unbounded flood of *nada*, which is a psychic manifestation of sound that can simultaneously become an optical vision of great clarity. This is often described by yogis as a yogic or spiritual vision. It is difficult to decide whether one is seeing a vision or hearing the boundless inflow of an all-filling sound. However, such occurrences are rare to manifest even in a sage of exquisite self-control. Such a yogi can help such a phenomenon of rare excellence to become a matter of course with his perfected attainment. Then he is called a *yati* par excellence.

STEP SEVENTEEN.

Do you enjoy the stimulation of your senses in listening to spoken voices and sounds of music? And do you similarly enjoy the stimulation of touch, the sight of visual forms and tangible objects, such as in fondling and seeing?

Yes to both of those questions.

For how long can you engage in the continuous function of tangibility, visibility, and olfactory function?

After a little while, I reach satiation. If I continue such activities for a long time, it strains my sense organs and I become physically fatigued.

Why is this so?

Because sensory stimulation is an electromagnetic conditioning which evokes electrical and magnetic forces latent in the sensory system. The latent volume of potential energy lying in the physiological materials of the nervous system is meager. It easily burns out, in the same manner in which batteries run out of charge. So periodic rest has to be given to the sense organs with rest and sleep.

Don't you enjoy listening to the vibrations of sound, feeling touch and seeing the fluorescence of light?

Such physiological enjoyments are all painful to begin with. The delicate fabrication of the sensory system is like the filaments of electric light bulbs. The seeming brightness of the filaments comes from the actual and literal burning of the device. Only by constant and repeated conditioning of the sense organs is a cultivated pleasure element derived by the organs through getting used to a certain quantum of energy. It is for that reason we presume that all five aesthetic sensations are the painful burning of energy changed into acquired pleasures. Thus, the pleasure sensation cannot last for a long time. In spite of the brevity of their duration, the periods of rest and activity in the wakeful, dream, and deep sleep states and are so adjusted that a living person can again and again return to his or her sensual stimulation and pleasure experiences.

How and why are the pleasures distributed pentagonally?

All sensations have matching degrees of complementarity. Touch is basic to all sensations. Sight and sound are complementary. Similarly there is complementarity of taste and smell. A constant shifting of attention can give rest to complementary functions. The sensory functions, for that reason, are often compared to a pentagonal device of five burning lights, which are in continuous motion; each one is giving out its glow in its turn. In this way the pentagonal device helps the sense organs to function continuously for a long time.

The function of the rotating lamps with two tiers is given by Narayana Guru to illustrate the complementary function of the sensory and motor systems. What we call here the sensory system is the afferent functioning of the sense organs that come easily under the sway of the cosmic arrangement of energy that flows into the individual body, such as sound, atmospheric touch, light etc. Corresponding to that there occurs the function of the efferent system which also includes the organs of action. In the psychophysical action or stimulation of acoustics and optics there is a greater role of phenomenality, which is in addition to the physical laws of cause and effect. Although people hear only sound produced by the disturbance of air, light can come from very far beyond the sky. Much more than the light itself, it is the darker aspect of the reflected rays that makes an impact on the sensory system, such as the color scheme of sunlight, which makes a great impact on the vision of

humans. Although the sunlight that affects the retina may last only a split second, the impact it makes can remain with a person as a vivid memory of enjoyable color patterns. To make the illustration more impressive, Narayana Guru presents the symbol of a rotating lamp just to show that the incidence of reflected and refracted rays of sunlight can have a lifelong impact on people. The alternation of day and night makes people go through altering states of consciousness. What human beings cherish is not the exact color pattern that comes from the retina, but the combined effect of the relationship of earth and sun, which goes on repeating day after day.

Sensory illuminations are figuratively compared to the flames of a burning wick in a lamp. In an oil lamp, for the wicks to burn there has to be a continuous feeding of oil into the wicks. When memories are revived to appreciate the past impressions of the conditioned memories in which color, for instance, is important, perception functions as more than perception because the optics of perception are supplemented by related memories of the past. As in a light bulb or a burning oil lamp where there has to be continuous feeding of energy to make a glow, the psychosomatic system is fed by the memory storage within. In Sanskrit this is called *vasana* or incipient memories.

MOVIE MUSE

BY PETER OPPENHEIMER

“My name is Salmon, like the fish. First name, Susie. I was 14 years old when I was murdered on December 6, 1973.” Thus begins the outrageously ambitious 2002 novel *The Lovely Bones*, by Alice Sebold. Sebold’s ambition is nothing less than to create a story, a vision, of life and death, of delicate beauty and indelible hope that looks squarely in the face of the ugliest aspects of human nature and the most crushing of tragic circumstances. The great critical acclaim heaped upon *The Lovely Bones*, as well as its commercial success, testifies to the degree to which those ambitions were achieved.

I was one of the millions of readers who were captivated by this story which, though often creepy and even briefly gruesome, remained infused with the intense light of an innocence just possibly incapable of degradation, corruption or extinction. Thus it was with great anticipation, and no small amount of skepticism, that I approached the movie version of *The Lovely Bones* directed by Oscar winner Peter Jackson, who also directed *Lord of the Rings*. After my third viewing, I am fully prepared to declare the film too as a stunning achievement.

The story is about the life and afterlife, the murder and aftermath, of a 14-year-old girl, who even in death remains its narrator and fulcrum. It is as if we are taken by the hand and led by this sweet, though initially perplexed, adolescent girl through the outer events and inner determinants surrounding this tragedy, as well as the attempts to come to grips with it on the part of the family and friends left behind, the murderer, and the victim herself, who finds herself in a sort of in-between zone connecting earth and heaven. Those left behind cannot truly go on living until they can accept and make some kind of peace with what has happened, and Susie too must somehow learn to let go of the world she is leaving behind before she can become free to experience whatever unknown wonders may lie ahead.

It is certainly one of the great spiritual challenges of our time to be able to hold onto the flame of love and faith in the power of love while at the same time acknowledging the persistence of death, tragedy and human evil. Then, too, perhaps there is no greater spiritual challenge than that of facing, accepting, even somehow embracing, one’s own death, the crowning “tragedy” awaiting each and every one of us. All of these issues are dealt with explicitly and implicitly in a film, which at the same time is, in the director’s own words, “a darkly comic, very fast-paced, crime thriller.”

At first, after the murder, Susie doesn’t know she is dead, because she is able to move around and observe the lives of her family, as well as her murderer.

Meanwhile, as the living try to solve the mystery of her murder and Susie tries to solve the mystery of the in-between where she finds herself, the living people remain vaguely aware of her presence and are still subtly affected by her ardent feelings. In this telling, what is spooky about the nearness of the dead to the living is not the presence of the dead, but that the living, for the most part, do not realize this proximity.

The film (as the book) has a very delicate way of posing the question: In what way do the living remain connected to the departed and vice versa? How can such connections remain healthy and conducive to life (and perhaps even an afterlife) rather than morbid and constricting? Heady and hearty stuff, but dealt with in a very suspenseful and entertaining way.

Ultimately, *The Lovely Bones* is a thoughtful and tender supernatural thriller with mystical overtones and comic undertones. The always-beguiling Susan Sarandon as a hard drinking, curler wearing, smoking-in-bed, kitchen fire starting, trash-talking grandmother, provides some needed comic relief. But there are numerous other comic aspects to what could rather have been a dark or demonic tale. Mention must also be made of Stanley Tucci's chilling and nuanced, Oscar-nominated performance as the murderer.

The actress Saoirse Ronan (15 years old), who already earned an Oscar nomination at the age of 13 for her supporting role in *Atonement*, deserves another one here, if even only for her expert voice-over. As Susie Salmon, she is the radiant heart of the film. During one moment of understandable weakness, seeing the torment her murder is causing her family, she cries out to us, "Look at what he's done to me (referring to her murderer). When I was alive I never hated anyone, but now hate is all I have." But when she sees that same hatred infect her father, debilitate, and lead him astray, she searches for some entirely different resolution, a kind of innocence restored and renewed.

Improbably bright and hopeful, *The Lovely Bones* has many profound things to teach us about dealing with tragedy and accepting the death of dear ones, but what is most profound is that both the book and the film of *The Lovely Bones* challenge us to face the inevitability of our own death with grace, the grace that enables us to still hold, behold and love the world without us in it.



REDWOOD YOGA

BY FRED CANTOR

Driving the Redwood Highway the first thing is the smell
Seeping through the windows into my soul.
I pull off and find a trail through the trees, to church.
I walk deeper into these woods and the sounds of the road recede
Until each passing vehicle is heard in the distance,
Like a knife ripping through the quiet.
How little we realize all the violence we do.
It is not a silence, but a stillness that pervades,
punctuated with bird song.
Imagine that your karma, your action for a lifetime,
Is to stay rooted in one place for centuries.
Unaffected by heat and cold
By snow or by fire, by rain or drought
But ever growing upward, lifting your spirit ever higher
Until you become the highest living being, the oldest living thing.
All the force and energy of this forest is directed upward
And I am lifted with it.
I lean against this tree, feeling the rough strength of its skin.
I can push against it with all my might for hours.
It will not notice.
And still, eventually, death will come,
It will transform into food for fungi, insects, the earth.
Maybe a small piece will break off
and be borne by a mountain stream to the ocean.
The tides will tumble it again and again,
Then spit it up onto the shore into a pile of driftwood.
Walking along the beach, something about its shape or texture
will catch my eye.
I pick it up and take it home, where it will find a place
and become in its own way an altar.
Something to remind me.

GURUKULA NEWS

The Institute of Advanced Studies in Simla, India, is sponsoring a national seminar on “Narayana Guru’s Philosophy and Visions Relevant in an Egalitarian Society” in June, 2011. The keynote address is to be given by Guru Muni Narayana Prasad. Papers will be presented by many Gurukula associates, including Swami Tanmaya, Swami Vyasa Prasad, Vinaya Chaitanya, Dr. S. Omana, Professor V. Ramachandran, Dr. P. K. Sabu, Dr. B. Sugeetha, Dr. Prabha Prasannakumar, and Sr. R. Subhash. Smt. Kala Krishnan Ramesh will be the program convener and editor. The first day of the seminar will focus on the originality of Narayana Guru’s philosophy. The second and third days will explore the application of his philosophy in the contemporary world. Further information about the Conference can be obtained through the Varkala Gurukula.

The Gurukula website has changed its address; the current one is:
<http://www.narayanagurukula.org/>

Ongoing internet classes on *Atmopadesa Satakam* and Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* can be accessed through: islandaranya@toast.net.

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

Emma Walker’s work can be viewed at www.emmawalker.com.au

Johnny Stalling’s prison work is available at openheartsopenminds.org



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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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