

GURUKULAM



SPRING 2011



GURUKULAM

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EDITORIAL

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

How is that we learn? What, in fact, do we mean by learning? A conventional explanation is that society has a body of necessary information to be conveyed to its youth and that through memorizing this information a student learns. It is literally the taking of a collection of facts and putting it into yourself. This does work for certain areas (the woodstove is hot so don't touch it; the green street light means go) but mainly this type of learning skims the surface of our consciousness.

To truly learn means to understand what something is, how it works, its relation to the world around it, and then to make that knowledge a part of yourself. In China there is a saying that translates that only by doing something ourselves can we really learn. It is by interacting, both intellectually and physically, with the world that we become knowledgeable about it. In ancient India, the model was that students lived and studied with their teachers. They heard teachings, questioned them, and then slowly appropriated them as part of their own understanding. In both of these examples the surface introduction begins the process of learning, which culminates in an inner change within the learner.

A fascinating aspect of current neurobiological research centers on what are called mirror neurons. These are neurons which, aptly enough, are called mirrors because they reflect what we see. They, in fact, mimic what they observe. This holds true for both physical information and mental information. And it holds true for the times we see the event in the transactional world and actively repeat it and for the times when we simply think about it in our minds. In all of those, to different degrees, we are watching and listening, participating, and finally converting information into knowledge by making it our own.

We introduced this topic of learning in the last issue, Fall 2010, and are continuing its exploration here. Walter de Buck beautifully describes his method of sculpting, of having an intimate relation with his subject and material rather than following a pre-ordained pattern, calling it a direct cut method or stone language. Sandy Theurerkauf touches on the same topic when writing about his egg sculpture. There is a living, immediate relation to the situation, rather than a stereotyped idea, and it is that relationship that allows them to imbibe and learn from the world around them, and then to translate that into art.

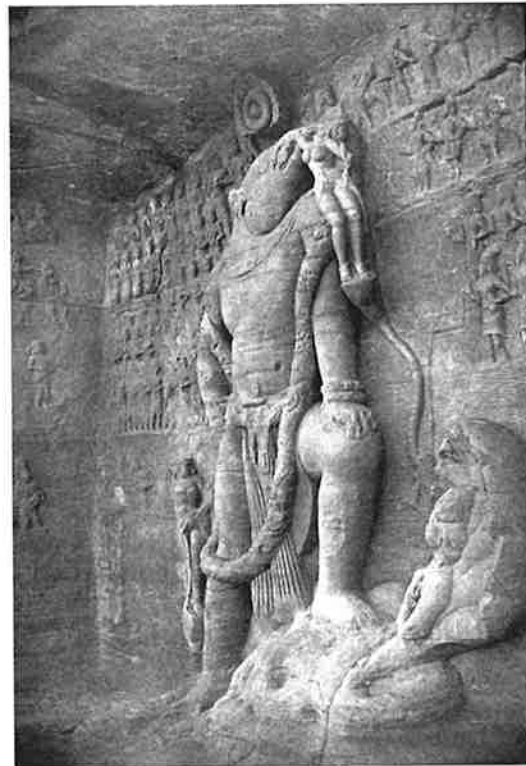
Beverly Hammon, in her computer images and the article about their creation, shows how a kind of "messing about" with materials and an openness to the process allows new learning to arise. We are personally involved, making careful decisions, and yet we also are ready to let our deeper consciousness reveal new understanding to us in the middle of our work.

In her article on chaos science, Jean Norrby explicates the arc of learning that various scientists have traced as they try to understand the world's patterns and behaviors. All the scientists have had a receptivity so as to clearly observe what is around them and a lively ability to see past surface discord to a deeper pattern of connection.

Continuing on from Nataraja Guru's excerpts on protolanguage in previous issues, we have articles on Indian artistic iconography and Greek mythology, both methods of teaching that employ not just rational appreciation but emotional and intuitive flights as well. Guru Nitya's small article on *aum* and *pranava* articulates the deep wells of proto-language that can touch our core consciousness.

I would also like to note Guru Nitya's commentaries on verses 45 and 46 of *Atmopadesa Satakam* that are in this issue. They are an inspired and illuminating exegesis of Narayana Guru's teachings, grounded in his own deep learning and in his identification with the larger wisdom tradition.

Throughout all of this issue's essays runs the thread of interconnectedness and reciprocity. We perceive the world around us and from those perceptions construct various concepts, which in their turn modify how and what we perceive. In the interaction between "us" and "them" or "that" a dialogue begins and a common identity is formed. It is this dialogue of identity and sharing that we call learning.



ATMOPADESA SATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

VERSE 45

*oru matamanyanu nindyamonnil otum-
karuwaparante kanakki nunamakum;
dharayil itinte rahasyamonnutan
ennarivalavum bhramamennarinnitenam.*

One faith is despicable to another;
the *karu* described in one is defective in another's estimation;
in the world the secret of this is one alone;
know that confusion prevails until it is known to be thus.

The consistent behavior of a person gives him his character. One of the main indicators of character is the predictability of a person's behavior. We say, "He is a good Christian, so he will keep his promise," or "He will never fight with his neighbor." People can make such predictions about others' behavior because they observe a consistency in their repeatedly choosing to act in a certain way in similar circumstances. If you know the situation, you can predict how a certain person is going to react.

A person's character becomes apparent through his habitual choices, and the habitual choices themselves come from our conviction of values. Conviction in values comes passively from an inner nonresistance, and actively through the exercise of our will, which selects out of many possibilities the one it wants to adopt.

Actions are actualizations of will. When you decide upon a certain desirable thing, that becomes your will. It is not easy to will. Sometimes you have to undergo a certain conflict. The conflict arises when there is more than one choice before you. When you consider the value of each choice, the advantages correspond to some of your latent urges. One urge may say you should have a good name. Another urge says somehow you should have the gratification of a secret desire. If gratifying the secret desire is going to be rated ignoble by society, you have to weigh it against how much you want to be respected by that society. If the social expectation and your individual gratification are at loggerheads, then sometimes, against your own

deeper desires, you may agree to stand by the social standard because in the long run you deem it more worthwhile. The question is to decide between a small joy which is momentary and long-term happiness. In both cases the basic element is happiness. The question is how long or how short? How secure or how insecure?

All desires are born of the pleasure principle. The fact that someone can have many desires shows we have universes of desires. Each desire has a nucleus, which is the joy factor. Constellations of such joy factors come to us in structured groups, which make a collective impact on our minds. If your wife or husband, parents or neighbors like what you like, then the collective agreement gives additional impetus to your acceptance of it because you are gaining two things, personal gratification plus the support of so many other people. If you have to choose between an event you experience all alone and another which you share with others, you will naturally tend to accept that which is also acceptable to other people.

These kinds of choices have to be made from childhood on. When you are a child, you belong to grownups who take it for granted that they know better than you just because they are grown up. Saint-Exupery speaks of this in his book *The Little Prince*. Grownups always think they know better, and that they have a right to impose what they consider better on you. The child does not see the good of something, but he has to accept it anyway because of his parents.

Fortunately or unfortunately, children belong to people with convictions. The parents say, "This should be your conviction too." If the child struggles and fights back, it generally cannot win because the parents can always smack. Most children take the course of least resistance. The less resistance the better for a child, so it learns to agree with the parents.

Thus, long before the child knows what values are for itself, a number of external values are laid in its mind. Of these, at least eighty percent are of the nature of Pavlovian conditioning. We pride ourselves on giving good teaching to children, but it is no better than what Pavlov did to his dogs. You push the button and give the food, and then they learn a reward will come every time the button is pushed.

Learning, especially in the West, is mainly conformity to socially accepted behavior. The child is taught not to ask why when he is told to do something, like not putting his elbow on the dinner table. I also do not understand why the elbow should not be on the table. It is very comfortable. But the mother or father decides that is not how it should be. It is nothing but conditioning. There is no rationale behind it.

The religion Narayana Guru is speaking of here is not necessarily Christianity or Islam. It can be Communism or Free-thinking. It can be anything. But nothing is free. Free thinking means the child is conditioned to have free thinking. Life is full of such paradoxes. By the time a person is seventeen or eighteen they have already become a bundle of prejudices, and it is with these prejudices that one comes to estimate another person's character, their behavioral pattern and value system.

The Guru says *oru matam anyanu nindyam*, "Your religion can never be good for me. I have decided already." "Why?" "Because it is not my religion. How can it be good for me when it is not mine?" Then he adds *onnil otum karuwoaparante kanakki nunam akum*, "Whatever is said in your scripture or your book of faith must be defective." The Caliph once said "Everything that is good for man is given in the Quran. Whatever is not given in it cannot be true. If the same teaching is given somewhere else, it is superfluous." The Emperor Theodosius burned the great Library of Alexandria, saying, "What is the use of all these books? One will do, the Bible."

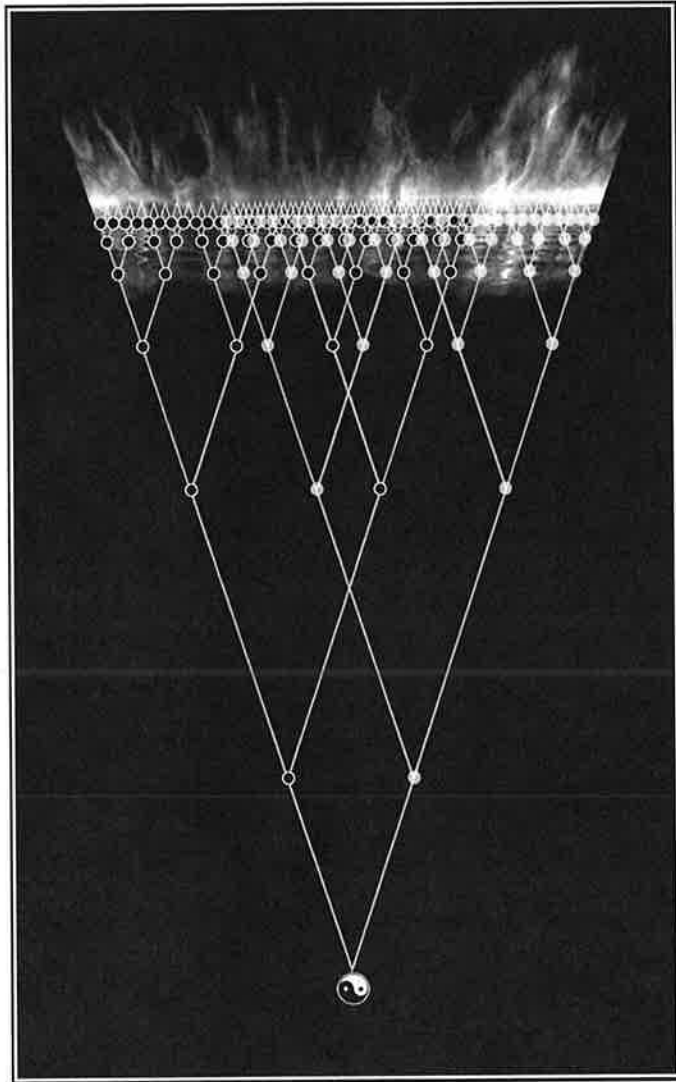
In a small way we all do the same thing all the time. The King James Bible is not acceptable to many American sects, because it is not an American version. Other people feel the American version is good for nothing because it is not the King James version. Yet it is the same book. Both kinds of people are Christians, dedicated to Jesus Christ, but still they argue over it.

Narayana Guru points out that we want to measure another's faith with our own measuring rod. Our measuring rod is our *mati*, our intellect. It is formed in childhood by the awards and punishments we received. So I have made a measuring rod out of the balance between my awards and punishments, and with that I want to measure your convictions. If they come under the category of those for which I was rewarded, fine. If I find in them something for which I was punished, bad. There is no universality in our measuring rods. They are all private ones, especially manufactured in the course of our life experiences, and based on our own understanding and interpretation of events. As a result, we fight. We have already decided to fight before we come together.

There is another possibility, another measuring rod which is not privately manufactured in one's individual mind. It belongs to *sat cit ananda*, the existential verity of knowledge. *Sat* means existence; *cit*, verity; and *ananda*, value; so it is the existential verity of a value that is enshrined in one's very heart. In all experiences these three aspects are bound to be there: an existential factor, a knowledge of that existence, and the essence of that existence, which is a value.

The key is to have an attitude of neutrality. If you have an overall scheme of correlation in your mind by which you can see and decipher everyone's values from a neutral point of view, you have no problem. Your discipline is to gain this way of thinking. Then if you encounter someone else's prayer, for instance, you can decipher it and understand it in a transcendental language that is no-man's-religion. This is also the religious language of all. When we hold this key in our hand we no longer mock the ways of others. Otherwise, we are all the time estimating others and inwardly laughing at them. We want to suggest to them what the right thing to do is.

This verse is mainly aimed at a deconditioning of our behavioral patterns. The Guru uses very special words, such as *mati*, *matam* and *dhara*, which have great implications. He says *dharayil itinte rahasyam*. *Dhara* means the earth. Since



the earth supports everyone there is a suggestion of universal support. Our basic foundation is the earth. When you know the secret of your basic *dharmā*, which supports all your individual preferences, you have no need to fight.

From your individual preferences, which belong to *visesa*, the 'pot', you are asked to move to *itu*, the 'this'. Usually you forget the *itu* because it is difficult to discern, but actually you should meditate on that and not on the pot. This helps bring about the attitude of neutrality you are directed to seek.

The religion you have been given has two distinct aspects. One is what Christ and the other masters experienced from within. That is the 'this'. The other aspect is what Peter noticed, the 'pot' aspect. You only know what Peter observed; the 'this' aspect you don't know. The 'pot' aspect is very evident; what was in the mind of the potter you don't know. You do know the pot he made, so you cling onto that.

After the death of every Guru there will be fights between at least five people, because each observed one particular aspect and the others do not conform to it especially. There are at least six or seven versions of Socratic teaching, since all the fellows around Socrates had their own versions of his teaching.

In one sense you should say "so many people, so many religions," because the specific factor of each individual is different. Or you should say there is only one religion. These are different from group religion, which is a political affiliation for the sake of social privileges and applying pressure tactics. When the Christians were not organized, the non-Christians rounded them up and killed them. So they had to make secret meetings in secret hideouts, and use the symbol of a fish to identify each other. Being acutely aware of the power of the Roman legions, they thought they could use the same pattern to bring about the kingdom of God on earth. So they said "Let us also get organized and be armed." But didn't Jesus say that those who took up the sword would perish by the sword? "That's okay, but for the sake of our Lord we can use the sword. Let us have crusades!"

Such is the stupidity in the name of religion that has been going on for ages. Not in just one religion, but in every one. In the name of the kindest, most loving masters, so much blood has been shed in this world. Narayana Guru is now making an appeal to the kind heart of everyone: Let us stop this bloodshed by recognizing the common ground on which we stand; for instance, this *dhara*, this earth. Just as this earth is our common place to stand, happiness is the common denominator of all religions.

VERSE 46

*porutu jayippatasaddhyamonninoto-
nnoru matavum porutal otunnuvila;
para matavadiyitorttitate paze
porutu polinnitumenna buddhi venam.*

By fighting it is impossible to win;
by fighting one another no faith is destroyed;
one who argues against another's faith, not recognizing this,
fights in vain and perishes; this should be understood.

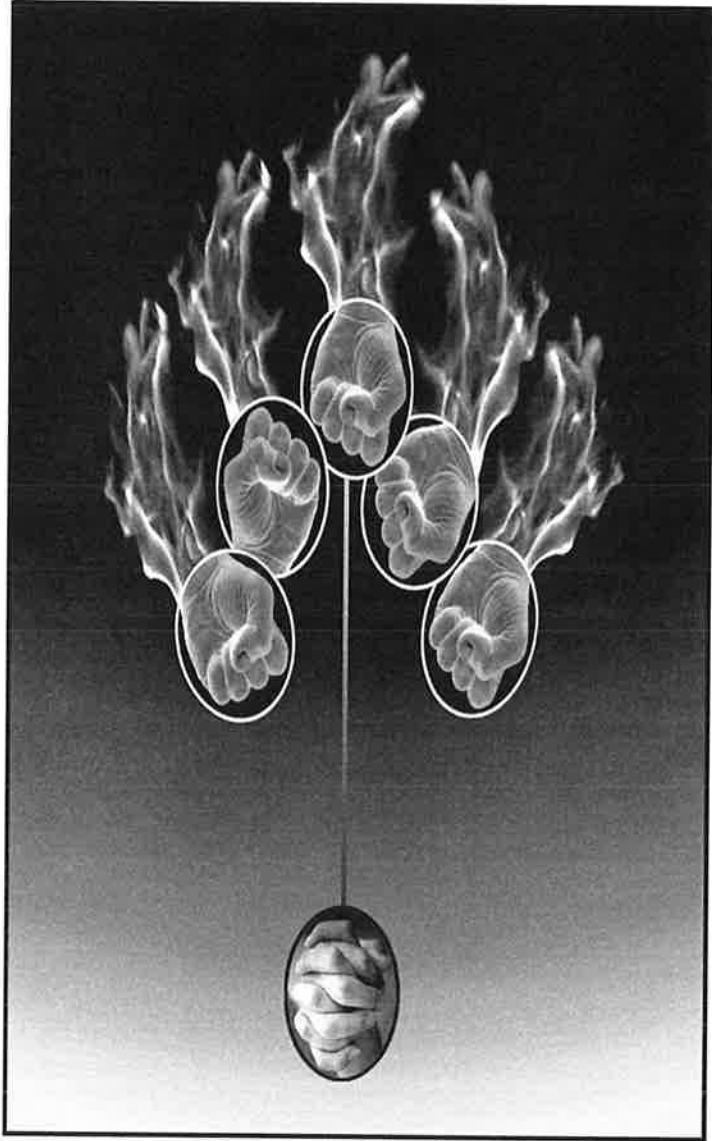
Although this verse at first glance seems very simple, it has great inner depth and detail. Its implications would not be exhausted even if we were to dwell on it for many months.

Two of the six *darsanas* of the philosophical visions of India are *Purva* and *Uttara Mimamsa*, the anterior critique developed by Jaimini and the posterior critique expounded by Badarayana. Jaimini's *darsana* is called the study of *dharma*, and Badarayana's is the study of *brahman*.

We have been speaking of *sama* and *anya*, sameness and the 'other'. The 'other' is where we encounter specific qualities. *Dharma* is one man's specific quality which distinguishes him from another. Salt is different from sugar because of their different specific qualities. You cannot take the saltiness out of salt or the sugariness from sugar, because those are their *dharma*. On the other hand, the very word *brahman* implies all-inclusiveness. It does not allow for any separation or differentiation.

One is the differentiating, the other is the uniting. Those who see only difference and do not see unity cannot agree with one another. Those who see only unity do not see another to agree or disagree with. The *Dharma Sutras* of Jaimini presented the development of the ritualistic aspect of life, while Badarayana's *darsana* gave rise to the doctrine of renunciation. Thus, these schools have two totally different outlooks on life. The householder stood by one and the *sannyasin* or renunciate stood by the other. In India they have been arguing over these ideas since the beginning, and their implications are pondered by people all over the world.

Religion is not merely one man's private opinion. A religion that rules a man's life consists of his total value matrix, which even he is not fully aware of. You do not know how deep the roots of your convictions are, how far they are going to take you, or with what other things they are entwined. The total matrix of life is lying unseen and often unimagined. It is very hard to discern its true or whole nature, which is shared collectively with our fellow beings, as most of our life urges are not only in the person but also in the collective unconscious or the collective wholeness of the society to which we belong.



Even in people who are not at all religious, or who are even anti-religious, there are subterranean currents of a religious pull. Two classic examples we can give are the thoughts and writings of Einstein and Freud, two of the most extraordinary people of our time. Neither of them had any leaning to the particular religious background in which they were born, Judaism. Yet the undercurrents of their thoughts contain powerful Jewish feelings. To some extent these were a form of reaction to being opposed as Jews by others, even though they did not think of themselves that way. The more someone attacks you, the more your dormant underlying traits become vigorous. Other traits were learned so early in life that they were not consciously perceived by them, or were so much a part of their culture as to be invisible.

This is a verse which we have to examine very closely. We will go step by step. First there is the statement of a general principle: *porutu jayppatasaddyam*, it is difficult to win by fighting. You can overpower another person, but you will not win anything. What is the difference between overpowering and winning? There is an expression "he won my heart." You cannot win another man's heart by fighting him, but you can by giving yourself to him. When you give yourself to another in love, you win. But when you use force, you don't win. You overpower.

This is the first distinction we need to understand: by fighting we don't win, we only concentrate the opposition to a fever pitch. When an animal is at bay, pushed into a corner where it cannot go any farther, it has only one choice. With all desperation it will pounce upon you and bite you. What is happening in this situation? The life meaning of the animal becomes so concentrated that its whole system becomes filled with it. Every atom vibrates with the meaning of its life. When a man becomes angry, his whole body shivers. You can see hatred for you concentrated in his eyes, in his look, in his word, posture, everything. He gains a certain absolutist dimension at this time. There is no compromising. A dog, a cat, a rat, anything will become an absolute, total whole if you try to strike at the very center or keynote of its life.

There is a story that when Mansur Hallaj was beaten, he became all the more convinced of his oneness with Allah. His hands and legs were chopped off, but he thought that it was only his hands and legs that were cut and not his love for Allah. Then he was hanged, beheaded and cut into pieces, and still every little piece chanted "an al Haq! I am Allah!" When he was burned, the flames said "an al Haq," and every particle of his ashes said "an al Haq." Finally his ashes were thrown in the ocean. Each wave came crashing back, murmuring "an al Haq, an al Haq." So by fighting you don't win.

The next point in the verse is that if one person with conviction fights another person with conviction, it is not to the advantage of either. The dialectics of this situation produces either double loss or double gain. If you fight you get double loss, but if you come together you get double gain.

We can see from history that fighting between religions has not eradicated any of them. Many times the Jews have been decimated by various forces in different parts

of the world, only to come back with renewed vigor. History recounts at least four or five thousand years of continuous tirade against the Jews, but the virility, inner strength, stamina, message and power of their religion could not be undermined.

The Roman Empire was at its height when poor Jesus of Nazareth came along. They thought he would be easy to crush, but instead the Roman Empire fell. The emperors converted to Christianity. The teaching of Christ could not be abolished. Luther and others tried to abolish Catholicism forever, but the Catholic Church still stands as strong as ever. And the Catholics thought they could defeat the protesters by hanging them and burning them, but that only increased the numbers of Protestants.

A recent example comes from a great superpower, America, deciding that communism is bad and democracy is good. Just what is communism? And just what is democracy? They could have discussed this in a university forum, but instead they sent a million young Americans to Vietnam to decide the issue. They thought that by fighting they could show that communism was wrong. They completely overlooked that they were going to an alien place where the people had ancient ties to the land. Above and beyond any issues of communism or democracy, the people there were fighting for their lives, their homes and their very dear land. On the other side the soldiers were conscripted, so they didn't have much zeal or zest for the war. So what happened? The Americans were not only defeated, but the Presidents and the architects of the war who were tied up with it are considered to have committed the one of the greatest evils in human history.

This is a recent example, but the same thing happened during the Medieval Christian Crusades. Did the crusaders finally do away with the Muslims and the Jews? The synagogue, the church and the mosque are still standing side by side in all those countries.

Let us look into the inner structure of this thing called religion in order to understand why it cannot be destroyed through fighting. Judaism has conceived a symbolic tree of life arranged with a top and bottom, two flanks and a center. On the top are wisdom, reason and knowledge. On the sides are greatness, strength, eternity and majesty. At the bottom is sovereignty, and in the center is beauty. The three words at the top look almost alike: wisdom, reason and knowledge. Yet we know they are not the same. Wisdom transcends reason. You do not know the depth from which wisdom comes. You do not know its scope of infinitude. You do not know its sublimity. It is so vast, so deep. When you say reason, there is movement. You move from one vision to another, correlating one to the other and showing its relevance. If knowledge is like the whole ocean, reason is like the waves moving across the surface, one after the other. There is precision and order, arrangement and logic. So you are not only wise but also reasonable. You have the knowledge to argue and establish your case.

What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? There is a saying, "He has the know-how." If wisdom is an eternal, continuous, never-failing fountain

which is ever supplying the fuel of your life, knowledge has reference to a situation. There is a structural compactness which enables the situation to have a function that can be protective and creative, and to make total sense to you. Then you can say you have a knowledge of it.

So Judaism says, "When you come to us, understand that we care for wisdom, we have reason and know-how." That makes the religion invulnerable. If you go still farther, they say, "It's not about me. I may be no one, but I belong to an inestimable greatness which I glorify. That puts strength into my veins and muscles. The strength of this body, this mind, this spirit, is derived from a greatness that belongs to the Absolute. And it is not a brute force, because beauty is its center." How can you fight that? Before beauty you become fully disarmed. If someone brings his might, his courage, his strength in the form of beauty, it doesn't just overpower you, it overwhelms you. You are filled with it, and the ecstasy of it makes you mad. You become drunk with it.

The Jews go on to say, "We belong to eternity and not to history. Only in history is there a beginning and an end. We belong to eternity. We see the majesty of it. This cannot be defeated because it's a law, a principle that rules our life, our sovereignty." When you see Judaism in this simple, yet intricate representation, it is overwhelming. You cannot fight it; you don't even want to fight it.

In any religion, similar principles are present one way or another. In the Vedic context, a world tree is represented in the fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. It says:

There is a tree. It has its roots above and its branches below. Those who know about it say it never expends. It is never destroyed. Its leaves are the songs of the Vedas. When a knower of wisdom becomes overjoyed and in exaltation, from him come the glorifying hymns; those are the leaves of this tree. A knower of this tree is the true knower.

Its branches, which ramify in different directions, are the *gunas*, the triple modalities of nature. They go on multiplying and multiplying. They are producing objects of interest. The mind branches off to different interests. The different interests are all implied by the different objects of desires.

Just as it has roots above from whence it is nourished by the unknown, it has roots below which make it firm. The roots below are *karma*, the action and interaction which bind all of us into a compact whole. When you touch me, you touch another hundred people, because I belong to another hundred. When I touch you, I touch many unknown people. Our *karmas* bind us. To what depth and darkness they have gone, we do not know. No one can break this. This is what is called *dharmā*.

Just as beauty can overwhelm you, there is only one thing that can transcend this tree. It is given in the Gita as *asanga*, the sword of nonattachment. Instead of

fighting you, I allow you to be. I do not merely allow you to be, I also include you. I accept you. When I accept you, I have already taken the zest to fight away from you. In the face of my calmness, you also become calm. So, if winning is your motive, win the heart. When you fight, not only does the other perish: you also perish.

There is an Indian myth that a certain demon came and challenged Balarama, the brother of Sri Krishna. Balarama accepted the challenge. He went, raising his fist to smash its head. Then the demon became twice the size of Balarama. Seeing this, Balarama, who had psychic powers, grew double the size of the demon. The demon doubled in size again, and started lifting hills to throw at him. Then Balarama realized he could not overpower the demon. He turned to Sri Krishna and asked for help. Krishna smiled and said, "Brother, leave him to me. I'll deal with him."

The demon turned to Krishna and found that in his hand there was no weapon. Krishna stood with his hands open and smiled. Then the demon became the size of an average human being. Krishna still stood there with his bewitching smile and said, "Come on friend." He came close and became smaller than Krishna. Krishna patted him. He became very small. Then Krishna took him in his hand and stroked him. He became so tiny.

Then Balarama came and said, "Brother, I don't understand this. How did he become so small? How did you tame him?" He replied, "Brother, don't you know this demon's name?" "No." "This demon's name is *krodha*, anger. When you become angry, you are only feeding him. He thrives on somebody else's anger. When you take away your anger, there is nothing to nourish him. He becomes less and less. So when I give him love, there is nothing on which he can feed himself and he becomes very small."

This is also the central teaching of Buddha: with hatred you never appease hatred, but with love you win all.

ALL POEMS ARE ABOUT TREES

BY THOMAS PALAKEEL

Starved Rock, Illinois

All poems are about trees, I tell myself, chewing a cedar cone,
on the edge of Starved Rock, overlooking Illinois River.

I do not wish to leave this congregation of oaks, elms, cedars,
but, who can stay? The quiet fellow who has been stalking me

since I turned fifty counters me: All poems are about wood,
dead wood, felled trees, mere alliterations of felling and milling,

nailing, scaffolding. At fifty a man is grateful even to ghostly
companions, wisdom in the air, reverie, revelations in lumber,

but I avoid my stalker, and treading softly on a mile of leaves
I exit the canyon and come home in the night to my pillows.

Sleepless, I contemplate my bed, the slab of wood at the head,
I hear the whisper of termites and tremble at the stir of worms.

I try counting sheep, but enumeration fails, I indulge
in optimistic green dreams, picturing myself under willows,

in Paradise with Eve, and no stalker in sight, no snake,
only the evergreens, an infinity of arborvitae, and no God.

INTERVIEW WITH WALTER DE BUCK

Interview with Walter de Buck by Swami Vyasa Prasad, February 2009, Fernhill Gurukula, Ooty, India.

Vyasa: It's really nice to meet you and to see you. Welcome, Walter. Can you share with us some of your experiences of Nataraja Guru?

Walter: Of course, I have a lot of memories. I stayed here for months in this space. Now fifty years later it's a very important experience to come back to this place. I still have a lot of memories of his behavior and his way of talking. I think many people who know me say when I came back from India that I was changed completely. I'm sure that was so because Guru had a very big influence on me, I think on everybody. He was a very strange man, a very special man. And when I was here I bought a book from him, I think it was *Word of the Guru* and he wrote a little text in the book, on the front page, to me that said I was a Belgian artist who came all the way on pilgrimage to look for some special horizontal-vertical influences for his art. Now the matter of fact was that I had a press or grant in Belgium from the government as a sculptor. It was to travel and study in a foreign country for one year. So at that moment Guru Natarajan was in Belgium with the Gaevart family. And I went there, to the Gaevart place, every Sunday to the speeches he made to the gathering. So I told him that (with this grant) I had chosen to come to India. He invited me to come here, to come to Fernhill, and I did. So for the government (grant support) I had to explain the meaning of the word Guru and what it means in India. And how important it was to me, a Western artist, to understand all these things, which are very strange to us. In Europe we compared it with a religious way, with the Catholic way, and that the Guru must be a kind of priest, a pagan priest or something, very vague and very special. I explained it was not so, that it (being a Guru) is a very important tradition.

Now when I met my wife, 30 or 32 years ago, no 35 years ago, I promised her that I would take her to this place. I was always telling people about Nataraja Guru and about this place. Now 35 years later it is time. It's time to keep my promise.

Vyasa: See, Walter, we've known about you, known you, because of this very wonderful sculpture you have made of Nataraja Guru. Can you tell us something of

how you got inspired? How you started, what inspired you, how long it took, things like that?

Walter: Yes, yes. It's not a portrait that's made like a photograph. It's not some kind of portrait like some sculptures made in clay, as natural as possible, and that look like a photograph. Not this at all. It is typical stone cut sculpture. We call it in France a "direct cut." There is no model made, like with a special compass. I didn't do that. I learned it at school but that isn't what I wanted to do. I find that the stone has its own language. And that's what I tried to put in it. And Guru was very much impressed by my ideas about stone language. And he was developing his theories on language. Stone language was one of the items he worked out in his book on universal language.

Vyasa: He called it proto-language.

Walter: Ah, yes, proto-language, it didn't come in my mind. I told him I wanted to make a sculpture but not a portrait in a traditional sense. I want to do it as a direct stone carving, without model, direct in the stone. And I did it here in front of the



place here. He wrote many times how he preferred this place of all places in the world, here in Fernhill, the climate of pure air.

Vyasa: I have ended up editing some of his works. Many of the books that were published I volunteered to do the proof reading and the layout and book cover, and I chose that photograph for the cover. So I got to learn a lot about what he was thinking about, talking about, a lot about how much he liked to be in Fernhill. And his descriptions of Fernhill are very poetic. We see the monsoons and we just see the rains and the mist. But Nataraja Guru, even in the monsoon rains he is seeing something poetic, something beautiful, some connection with nature, something philosophical even in the change of the weather. He is able to philosophize even about that.

Walter: I remember every morning I brought him his tea after his meditation. He was sitting in front of his bed and there was always something about the weather and the beauty of things, about his meditation. Yes, he was very fond of this place.

Vyasa: I think of him as a very stern person, isn't it? Very absolutist, very strict, very stern and uncompromising. So it was not very easy to be with him because of that, is that true?

Walter: Yes, I had some, not really quarrels, but discussions with him. John Spiers was more friendly, more open to me. It was also easier as he was also a Westerner and Guru was not. But once Guru was a bit tired of me because he said,



You are wasting your time here. You are not a philosopher. We are here doing horrible things with hair-splitting discussions about philosophy, boring theories. He was very negative. He said, You are not like that, you are an artist. You better go down to the village and make a festival with the people, make singing. That will be more useful to the truth than my hair-splitting.

But the beauty of this story is that I didn't do it here but I did it in Ghent, our town. I started a festival which became the biggest town festival of Europe. Very huge thing. Newspapers are always putting the question, Where did you get the idea for this? And I always tell people, I got the idea from Nataraja Guru. And I tell the same story. Most of the people don't believe it, they think I am telling fairy tales.

Walter's wife: Every year when the festival starts journalists come over to our house to meet Walter and have interviews about how the festival began. And he always tells the story of how the Guru sent him away and told him to start a festival.

Walter: First of all Ghent, it is a 10 day festival and became famous all over Europe. Not only music, though music has an important place in it. I am a musician myself, a singer, very much known by the people for my songs, but known especially for the Ghent festival. And this year there was a big exhibition in Ghent, a retrospective of my sculptures that I have made in the last 50 years. It's a pity that I don't have photographs of this.

Vyasa: Maybe they are on your website?

Walter's wife: Not yet. But they will be. (www.walterdebuck.be)

Vyasa: How did you first come to know about Nataraja Guru? When did you first hear the name and how did you first see him?

Walter: Well, of course, at the Gaevert family. Every Sunday there was a meeting. Father Gaevert started a movement, a philosophy movement, and he was supported by Garry Davis. He was a friend of Father Gaevert. And at a certain moment Father Gaevert invited Nataraja Guru to come to Latem [the village outside of Ghent where the Gaevert compound was]. Because Garry Davis knew Nataraja Guru. When he was sitting on the stairs in Paris, there were big conferences taking place about peace, and Garry was protesting and Nataraja Guru saw the newspaper articles and photos and went to see him. (Editor's note: in Garry's own writings, he says he first met Nataraja Guru on a boat going between Europe and India, and then later met with him in Latem.) Nataraja Guru supported Garry in his protest games against war. So Garry knew the Gaeverts and he made the contact between them and Nataraja Guru.

Vyasa: Do you have any first impressions? Sometimes when you meet someone you have a first impression....

Walter: Of Nataraja? Every Sunday we had a gathering in Latem. Then one Sunday we knew he was coming and everyone was sitting there. And he came in the back door, back side of the building. We thought there was an Indian man washing the dishes! (laughter). Special Natarajan. He dried his hands and asked me, "Are you the sculptor, the man Mark Gaevert was telling me about? Very glad to meet you. I just finished washing the dishes." Everyone was sitting there waiting. He was always finding something special to make people laugh and think at the same time. Also most inviting was the deeper sense of a message, there was always a message.

Vyasa: Yes, I think he was a full, complete teacher, in words and deeds. So another question about the sculpture is how long did it take you, how much time? In terms of days, or a few months?

Walter: A few weeks. You know, I was working in the garden, I arranged a garden. When I came here the garden was neglected. I went to Ooty to buy seeds. Nataraja Guru was always laughing with me, "Oh, you came all the way here to plant?" He was always making kinds of jokes. At that time I took this photograph of him, he was still joking, "Look at this man, this Belgian is going to plant vegetables here in Fernhill."

A story I was going to tell, he did a lot of the cooking himself. One time he came out of the kitchen and he said, "You come here, you don't have to work in the field, you must go on with your sculpture." So I was free of working in the field.

Vyasa: His vertical and horizontal, his idea of those, was extremely wonderful, very simple and very universal frame, and he gave it to us to apply in almost every situation.

Walter: A friend of ours came up from Shantinatikan. He said there was a big difference between Nitya and Nataraja. He said that Nitya is very complicated, very cerebral. And Nataraja Guru was very simple, simple like clear water. His explanations were always so simple. To me he had the same effect.

Vyasa: Yes, even for us, though we were first attracted to Guru Nitya now our reading is more of Nataraja Guru. To get to the meaning of it. we find we need Nataraja Guru's insight. It cuts through, goes straight to the heart. There is no extra use of words or no embellishment, no extra flourishing, nothing. He's very precise.

Walter: That's my impression and my friend said the same thing. Nataraja Guru gave me this same book you gave me...

Vyasa: *The Absolutist*.

Walter: ... and said, "You must have this to remember your stay." And I'm very glad I have two copies of this book because I have more children than two and I won't push it on them, but when they are interested they can read it.

SRI VASUDEVA ASTAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

6

*kamsasura-duivata-kesari-vira ghora-
vairakavamaya virodhaka-raja saure
hamsadi-ramya sarasivuha-pada-mula
sri bhupate hara hare sakalamayam me*

O the mighty lion that
Killed the demon-elephant Kamsa,
O the king who fights the enemies
Comprising all terrible afflictions,
O the one born in the clan of Surasena,
O the one whose lotus-like heel
Keeps Hamsa and others
Always supremely happy,
O the Lord of both Sri and Bhū,
O Hari, please take away
All my afflictions.

O Lord, the main aim of your incarnation as Sri Krishna, according to mythological legends, was to kill the demon Kamsa. Demons really are not actual living beings but merely characters symbolizing the demonic qualities in all of us. This is true for Kamsa. Each individual has in him some divine traits as well as demonic ones. These two always fight each other for dominance over us. The qualities that win can be seen standing out in the life of the person concerned. What the nature of these qualities is and how they affect our daily life is portrayed clearly in the Bhagavad Gita, chapter sixteen. Those with demonic traits live a life of unbridled sense gratification. Unending desire for wealth, renown and power is the force that drives these people's lives.

Gods (*devas*), the mythologically conceived inhabitants of heaven, are also known as *suras*. The word *sura* literally means "one who gives in plenty." The full

satisfaction of having possessed everything one desires to possess or achieve in life is felt only when one becomes devoid of any desire, not when all the desires are fulfilled one by one. The latter kind of satisfaction is not attainable in actual life, as one desire is always followed by another, this process going on endlessly. The former kind of satisfaction, the only possible and plausible one, is attained in the normal course of life by the wise alone. Then the real gods, *suras*, are those who live wisely, free of all tempting desires. The state of mind opposite to it is that of demons, *asuras*. The demon-hood, *asuratva*, in us is to be defeated by making use of wisdom and a sense of detachment as weapons. Indicative of the need of this spiritual discipline is the mythological story of killing the demon Kamsa.

Terrible afflictions, *amayās*, like becoming seriously ill, meeting with severe accidents, becoming mentally deranged, are disliked by all. Even when we make attempts to avoid such afflictions, you Vishnu, are the one who assuages us of such difficulties, because everything, good and bad, is really under your control. Thus you are the one king who fights such enemies and who protects us.

Hating unpleasant things is a habit with us only because in our minds we insist that all experiences in life should be pleasing. What we feel as ease and disease really are but part of the unforeseeable self-unfolding of nature. Really, without disease, ease would not be felt as ease. The one who is well aware that all such dual aspects are part of the onward creative progression of nature, and who thus faces all such dual facts with a sense of equanimity is a real yogi; others, even when apparently healthy, are really unwell. The best of remedies for all illnesses is the well-balanced state of mind natural to a yogi. Such a state is spontaneous with you, for you are *manapamana-sama-manasa-rajahamsa* (the royal swan equal toward both commendation and condemnation) as was seen earlier in verse four. It is when the same state becomes our very own state that your, Vishnu's, blessings in the true sense reach us. Being thus blessed by you is the ultimate goal of us who take refuge at your lotus feet. Those who are blessed by you thus sometimes are called *hamsas*, literally swans. Perhaps it is because of the sense of freedom they enjoy, always like swans that fly up in the sky. The word *hamsa* also means the sun, guru, Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer, Siva the Destroyer, *sannyasin* (renunciate), *jnanin* (person of wisdom), and king. Those who are blessed by you in the above-said manner could live as any of these, all of whom think of your lotus feet as the original source of their everlasting happiness.

*samsara-sankata-visankata-kankataya
sarvarthadaya sadayaya sanatanaya
saccinmayaya bhavate satatam nameste
sribhupate hara hare sakalamayam me*

To the one who serves as
The strong armor that withstands
The perils of all worldly becoming,
To the bestower of all values,
To the kindly one,
To the eternal being,
To the one who is *sat*
As well as *cit* in essence,
All my perpetual obeisance.
O the Lord of both Sri and Bhū,
O Hari, please take away
All my afflictions.

O Lord, the one basic cause of all worldly suffering in life is the lack of awareness concerning you, the one Reality that unfolds itself as everything in the world. As this awareness shines within oneself, all such sufferings simply disappear, as darkness disappears when bright light shines. No event would then be felt as miserable, but only as a part of your sportive self-unfolding. As long as one remains ignorant of you, suffering appears as daring soldiers in attack. The one powerful armor that enables us to boldly encounter them is you alone.

The values considered enriching to human life are known in Sanskrit as *purusarthas*, *purusa* meaning human and *arthas* meaning values. Classified into four sets, these are *dharma*, righteousness, *artha*, wealth, *kama*, desire, and *moksa*, liberation. These values become actualized in life because you are the value of all values.

Your disposition toward living beings is that of kindness. It is this kindness of yours that prepares the ground for us for the actualization of the above-said *purusarthas* in our lives. We devotees do not necessarily always feel this kindness in a favorable way. You in your kindness bring about both favorable and unfavorable things in life and thus enable us to keep to a well-balanced state between the two.

You are the one Reality that fills the being of everything, and in that sense you are thought of as *sat*, existence in essence, or *sanmaya*. This Reality or *sat* is not something material. On the other hand, it is pure consciousness, *cit*, and thus you are *cinmaya*, meaning the same. Your existence had no beginning nor will it cease to exist. You therefore are eternal, *sanatana*. To you, the timeless Existence, my perpetual obeisance. O Lord of Sri and Bhū, O Hari, kindly take away all my afflictions.

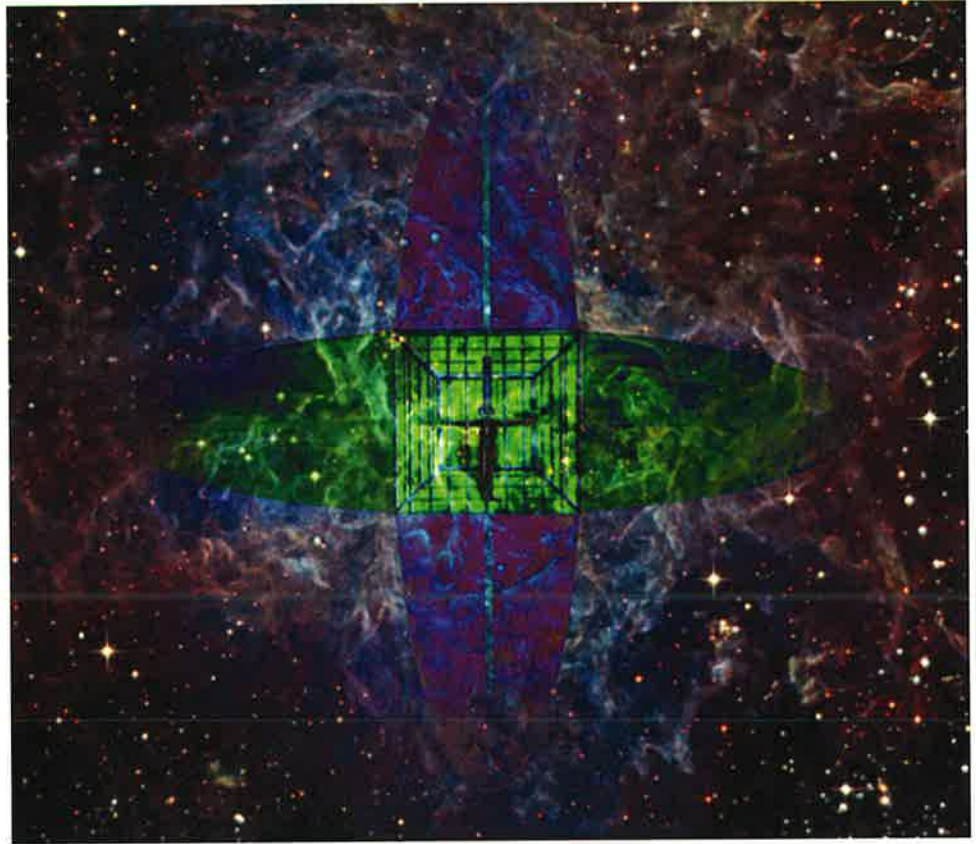
THE NUMINOUS ESSENCE

BY BEVERLY HAMMON

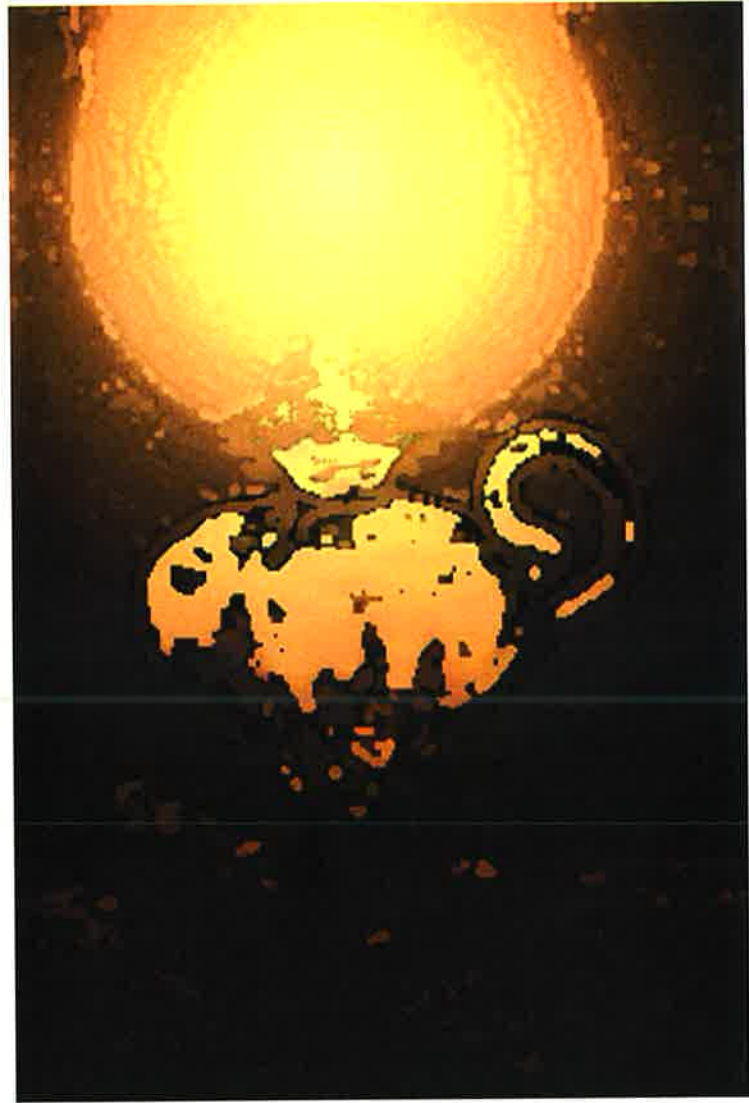
There are many names for That Alone. I think of this numinous essence as the Self or simply as God. Four years ago I joined a Gurukula online study group with Nancy Yeilding. Prior to this I had only a sketchy idea about Indian religion and philosophy. I have come to love reading everything that Guru Nitya has written and have read some of Nataraja Guru's writings. I have followed Nancy's study guides and read Scott Teitsworth's class notes. All of this has opened up a whole new way of understanding myself, my self, and the Self. However, I have been aware of the fact that all this knowledge is a "translation" of a completely foreign culture. It is all words and all interpreted by the left side of my brain, in other words, my rational and structural side. I understand it in terms of my life experience and education. In particular, I tend to graft it onto my knowledge of Jungian psychology. Right from the start I knew I needed to connect to the profound wisdom I was learning about in some non-verbal way.

Another area of interest for me has been learning to use my computer. I have discovered that it is a marvelous creative tool, and one of the skills I have learned over the last five years is how to use Adobe Photoshop as a spontaneous art form. I start with an image or bits of images. Over the years I have collected a great many images on my computer. I see something that seems to leap out at me because of a color, a form, a relationship, a frozen moment in time, anything really. It is not beauty exactly. It is just something that feels absolutely right and perfect for that moment as I look at it. With this initial "raw material" I use Photoshop to create a variety of pictures. I like doing portraits, for example, or I might try to capture a dream image just for the sake of experiencing it more fully. The verses of *Atmopadesa Satakam* have also been a wonderful source of creative inspiration. It was something of a surprise to discover that this apparently soul-less, mechanical medium was the one I could use to create images of the Divine.

I cannot explain exactly how I achieve the end result. It is something like an experience I had a long time ago, when I had the opportunity to use a wood carver's tools and equipment. I started with a log of yew wood. I kept on cutting off bits and to my astonishment I realized all of a sudden that there was the form of a woman buried in the wood. I had no idea about the technicalities of working in three dimensions, but once I "saw" the form I could see what to do. Working with Photoshop tools on the computer, I can manipulate the color pixels on the screen in endless ways. I play with them until the image emerges. Partly I know what effect I want to achieve, and partly I have no idea where the process is going. At some point the completed image is born. It has a life and meaning and somehow shines for me. Here are four images of the Self and four ways of relating to that numinous essence.









THE EIGHTH LABOR OF HERCULES

BY SCOTT TEITSWORTH

The Mares of Diomedes

There are a number of versions of the Eighth Labor, a rather grisly myth, but the general outline goes like this. King Diomedes, a son of Ares and a giant, owned four ferocious horses with a taste for human flesh. The horses were so wild they had to be secured with an iron chain to their brass cribs. When newcomers would appear in his land, Diomedes would invite them in and then feed them to his horses. Hercules was assigned by Eurystheus to capture the horses and deliver them to him. He first killed Diomedes and fed him to his own horses, who then became more tame, allowing Hercules to lead them home and complete his task.

To understand the inner story we have to imagine what those strange man-eating creatures represent. When we think of horses, they symbolize both power and an independent spirit that is explosively wild. While not the same, the two are quite compatible and often are found together. King Diomedes, then, is obsessed with both. That he is the son of the war god, Ares, gives us a further hint that he is a typical power-mad person in a position of leadership, who maintains at best very insubstantial reins on his willfulness. The myth, then, is about the hazards of power.

The horses are tied with unbreakable iron chains to cribs of brass. Brass—imitation gold—also has an association with military power, quite probably the most intractable form of human power there is.

Diomedes feeds newcomers to his power-horses, meaning that innocent bystanders are sacrificed to the appetites of power as a matter of course (pun intended). Those who are trusting and politically naïve in the presence of a monarch are destined for an unhappy end, as the powerful use them for their nefarious schemes without the slightest twinge of conscience. Machiavelli has written the final word about this practicality in *The Prince* and elsewhere, nearly 500 years ago. Here's a typical quote: "Men are so simple and so much inclined to obey immediate needs that a deceiver will never lack victims for his deceptions."

The Eighth Labor teaches us that unbridled power, while lethally dangerous for those who stray within its orbit, will sooner or later consume those who wield it. Being "hoisted with your own petard" doesn't require a heroic figure to bring it about; it's pretty much the natural order. "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," as Jesus put it. Hercules must represent the urge for justice that

hopefully can hasten the process, preferably without recourse to violence, though the Greeks were realists in that regard. Power does not need to abuse everyone, but the lust for vengeance that lurks within it enjoys meting out suffering. Even when the powerful maintain a veneer of civility, it very likely cloaks a seething hatred that may burst forth at any time. So while a violent denouement is not absolutely necessary, it is nearly always the outcome.

Once power consumes its purveyors it loses its force, because it is wholly dependent on them. As Dr. Mees puts it: "It generally has a salutary effect if brutality is given a dose of its own medicine." In war there is always a buildup of vicious power, like a violent thunderstorm, which then releases all its energy in a lethal paroxysm, followed by a period of calm. The alternation of tension and release underlies much of human endeavor, including art, sport, politics, and historical evolution. The longer the tension is sustained by the power elite, the greater the subsequent collapse. In art, at least, the alternation is a way to sustain interest, but in politics, minimizing its amplitude would be much less damaging.

The desire for power can be seen as a compensation for a childhood where the soul, which intuitively knows it is a spark of the Absolute, is compressed and made to feel tiny, insignificant, and even illegitimate. The developing psyche has various strategies to combat this monumental injustice, generally either becoming withdrawn and introverted or craving extroversion and power. The child's strategy is like Nataraja Guru's image of a small man trying to jump on the back of a horse: not enough effort and he falls back to the starting point, too much and he sails right over to the other side. A yogi controls the effort with expertise and so lands right on top. The trick is to start with a burst of energy, but then hold it in check just enough. Those untethered psyches that become drunk with power lose the ability to restrain themselves, and tend to run amok. If they can be said to be "in the saddle," they are riding a man-eating steed, not a noble pathfinder.

Overcompensation is more or less common for a standard crushing upbringing, where the ego is regularly thwarted. For kids raised with balance—respect without exaggeration—it's as if they have been offered a "leg up" on the horse of their destiny. For those reared as budding aristocrats, encouraged in their conceits of superiority, it is as if they are being catapulted onto their chosen horse. They need to find a way to hold back or they will soar far over their objective to land in a heap. Thus, dealing with power intelligently is everyone's problem, not just the military brass and politicians.

The Interpretation of Myths

Recent readings have indicated that the value of myths may be greater when they are not understood by the conscious mind so much as allowed to speak to our deeper selves. Conscious manipulation interferes to a greater or lesser extent with

the purity of the symbolic message, so at the very least we should acknowledge the supra-conscious impact of what we hear or read. As Karen Armstrong, the historical chronicler of God, puts it, “In order to work effectively, a symbol has to be experienced as a direct link to the more elusive and transcendent reality to which it directs our attention.”

Fred Haas was a disciple of John Spiers. He wrote a lengthy Foreword to Spiers’ as yet unpublished book, *Pagan Europe*, elaborating on this point:

Mythos is a dynamic flowing (itself rooted in “history”) of cosmic sacredness and spontaneous spiritual activity, proportionally representing and revealing the numinous presences and powers symbolized by gods and goddesses and lesser figures, frequently humanly represented. The *knowing* of a myth is in the meaningful experience of the individual. Myth is *read* like a work of art. It is a numinous structuring of reality with archetypal images which in turn are connected to the natural world as progression, but not as mere static progress.

Myth is not simply knowledge of some thing. It is much more. Its “rationale” is its pre-established trans-rationality. It is like a gigantic painting or symphony depicting a variety of elements which “reveal” their basic intentionality to each individual who does not willfully read *into* their mystic rubric, but gets *from*. (For instance, one does not listen *into* a symphony in a conceptual manner—unless, perhaps, if one is an academic musicologist; rather, one lets the symphony reveal itself, i.e. enter in.) One does not intellectually *think about* myth. Rather, one mythically thinks. A myth is a universal symbol, while a fact or a rationalized digested portion of a myth is but a note or notes in the mythic harmonic score.

One is not a myth maker, but a myth experiencer. Its “knowledge” is appreciation and deep felt experience, and because myth has no common ground with dogma, creed or catechism, its appeal is both sacred and profane, because it deals with the whole of life, itself being free from all sadomasochistic theological notions of sin and the accompanying “fear and trembling,” which belongs to dogmatic ecclesiasticism. (22)

Despite Haas’ passionate and insightful disquisition, I believe there is room for intelligent, educated listening, alongside the childlike openness that Haas champions. I believe it makes the meaning even more dynamic and enlightening, as long as the openness isn’t lost. Taking his example of listening to a symphony, I love that type of music partly because I’m familiar with it, while those who know little about it tend to shrug it off as of no value. While sophistication in the adult mind can block the appreciation that a child more readily brings to many forms of communication, it can also lead us past initial challenges to discover the riches

hidden behind them. Myths are like classical music in being “old fashioned” and not so readily appreciated as we might hope, so some encouragement is usually needed to give them a fair hearing.

My own technique for processing myths is very simple. I first read several versions of them and simply absorb them for awhile. Initially they often strike me as ordinary stories with no particular meaning. Later I’ll go for a long walk in the woods,



and at some point ideas will start boiling about the implications of the story. Each insight produces several more, in a kind of information cascade. Being old and moldering, I then have to repeat the best ones to myself once or twice before I can get back to the computer to record them. It’s very frustrating to be visited by an exciting idea and then have it vanish into the neuronal haze! My job is to safeguard the fragments until I can commit them to digital paper.

This is what we are supposed to do with myths: permit our unconscious data banks to pour out their understanding into our consciousness. By sharing what I’ve discovered—inescapably personal and different from the next person’s version—I hope to stimulate a similar “corpus of discovery” in whoever is interested in doing the same kind of mining. The last thing I want is to replace the adventure of digging with some fixed

platitudes that kills the whole business.

Esteemed child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, in comparing fairy tales and myths, initially makes a distinction I don’t think is wholly valid, but the conclusions he draws from the generalization are spot on. All the following quotes are found on page 45 of my edition of *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). He begins:

Myths and fairy tales both answer the eternal questions: What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be myself? The answers given by myths are definite, while the fairy tale is suggestive: its messages may imply solutions, but it never spells them out. Fairy tales leave to the child’s fantasizing whether and how to apply to himself what the story reveals about life and human nature.

I'm confident that my exegesis of the Labors of Hercules, whatever its faults, shows that these myths aren't spelling out anything definite; certainly they are little understood and seldom explicated. Bettelheim is writing about children and their needs, so perhaps a better distinction is that fairy tales are for children and myths are similar teaching tools for adults. I like to believe that for adults there is much that can be learned by looking beneath the surface of both myths and tales. I recap this part of Bettelheim's argument because it underlines the value of vagueness, which is often unappreciated, possibly because it is a major fault in other types of writing, like legal matters and social contracts. Spiritual insights bloom from suggestive teachings like analogies and parables, where the lack of specificity leaves plenty of room to apply them to a wide range of circumstances. What's more, the relatively unformed awareness of childhood thrives on imaginative tales and recoils from pedantry. Bettelheim continues:

The fairy tale proceeds in a manner which conforms to the way a child thinks and experiences the world; this is why the fairy tale is so convincing to him. He can gain much better solace from a fairy tale than he can from an effort to comfort him based on adult reasoning and viewpoints. A child trusts what the fairy story tells, because its world view accords with his own.

Whatever our age, only a story conforming to the principles underlying our thought processes carries conviction for us. If this is so for adults... it is exclusively true for the child.

Speaking of conviction, the oral presentation of a myth works best for children, if not adults, because saying it implies approval, while merely reading it out makes its message sound like it is coming from far away, and is therefore open to doubt. Children intuitively recognize the difference between a rote presentation and a spontaneous, living performance.

Recent brain imaging studies have begun to unveil some startling and exciting truths about who we are, which continue to bring science and religion closer together. Alison Gopnik, in her article *How Babies Think*, in *Scientific American* magazine of July 2010, relates an experiment that we can now read as an examination of Bettelheim's take on the value of permitting people to think for themselves:

In other recent research my group found that young children who think they are being instructed modify their statistical analysis and may become less creative as a result. The experimenter showed four-year-olds a toy that would play music if you performed the right sequence of actions on it, such as pulling a handle and then squeezing a bulb. For some children the experimenter said, "I don't know how this toy works—let's figure it out." She proceeded to try out various longer action sequences for the children, some that ended with the short sequence and made music and some that

did not. When she asked the children to make the toy work, many of them tried the correct short sequence, astutely omitting actions that were probably superfluous based on the statistics of what they had seen.

With other children, the experimenter said that she would teach them how the toy worked by showing them sequences that did and did not produce music, and then she acted on the toy in exactly the same way. When asked to make the toy work, these children never tried a shortcut. Instead they mimicked the entire sequence of actions. Were these children ignoring the statistics of what they saw? Perhaps not—their behavior is accurately



described by a Bayesian model in which the “teacher” is expected to choose the most instructive sequences. In simple terms: if she knew shorter sequences worked, she would not have shown them the unnecessary actions.

This tells us, among other things, that creative thinking does not have to be taught. It is our true nature. Much of what passes for teaching is actually the suppression of our innate genius in favor of conformity, a tragic sacrifice worthy of an ancient Greek myth.

The two prongs of Gopnik’s experiment are like the difference between myths and fairy tales on the one hand, and pedagogical rationality on the other. The former encourage creativity while the latter suppresses it. Ideally the yogi synthesizes both approaches into a wisdom that is at once creative and intelligent.

The mystery of the magical thinking of children stands in contrast to the straightforward rationality adults are supposed to operate under—even though they often don’t—and the changeover is an intriguing process. Spiritual evolution echoes the transformation, as is made clear by reading between the lines of Bettelheim’s assertion:

[A fairy tale] directs the child’s thinking about his own development without ever telling what it ought to be, permitting the child to draw his own conclusions. This process alone makes for true maturing, while telling the child what to do just replaces the bondage of his own immaturity with a bondage of servitude to the dicta of adults.

This is a key truth that should never be lost, but sadly we live in a world where it is often considered subversive to strive to escape from servitude. Moreover, it takes real expertise to offer just enough and not too much advice, so that the listener can draw their own conclusions. You might have noticed how it is mandatory in books and movies nowadays to point out the obvious, so that everyone can “get it.” To those who appreciate subtlety, such heavy handedness is at the minimum very unartistic, if not counterproductive. I sincerely hope I haven’t perpetrated a similar transgression with these articles.

I have been providing a rational interpretation of the Herakles myth, because it is territory that has been little explored. Bettelheim puts such myths on the side of rationality to begin with, but they really do speak to us in protolanguage. Some of their more prosaic pronouncements may have been added after the fact by pedagogues in the distant past. I am well aware of how didactic explanations run the risk of spoiling the inspirational value of a myth. My hope, beyond discovering the intricacies of these fascinating stories for myself, is to stimulate the interest of other readers for what is generally passed off as an archaic tale, and to offer some indication of their possible meanings. In any case, I’m quite sure that no one would accuse me of being a mouthpiece for the status quo. Have fun!

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF VISHNU

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

Eyelids half shut, Vishnu rests on the coiled snake *Ananta*, Endless Time, as they both float in the ocean. As Vishnu lies in dormancy between the great cycles of manifestation, a lotus sprouts from his navel and on the opened flower is Brahma, god of creation. It is Brahma who then wills each transient world into becoming. Vishnu, the great god of preservation, supports this creation just as he sustains the preservation of each world. In the triumvirate of the Indian gods, Vishnu is the middle deity who is both base and fulcrum for the world's becoming and its continuation each day, each eon.

Vishnu is the deity at the center of much of Indian worship. With that worship comes an intricate iconography, which visually explicates both the underlying ethos of Vishnu and the beautiful, complex world of Indian aesthetics. To complement Narayana Guru's *Sri Vasudeva Astakam* and *Vishnu Astakam* this article will explore some of that iconography and philosophy.

In this image, becoming rests on a world of silent eternity, and it is only with a half-awake stance that Vishnu supports the lotus, Brahma, and all the successive worlds. It is not with an active will but an accepting witnessing that creation happens. In the most famous of these images, at Deogarh Temple in Uttar Pradesh dated early 500s C.E., look at Vishnu's face, its enormous calm, and its sense of allowing rather than forcing. Then look at the face of the snake, where humor and mischief take hold (page 41). The entire scene feels timeless yet approachable. It is the moment of origin that we return to again and again. This is the great contradiction of Indian philosophy: creation is both specific, located in time, and eternal and non-differentiated. In the full image (in Fall 2010) notice also that Brahma rests on an opened lotus. The lotus is a symbol of awakened consciousness, and it is out of this that creation happens. This same idea is shown in the image of Vishnu's wife, Laksmi, the goddess of fortune, paying homage to his feet as he sleeps. Rather than being a delineation of female subservience to man, it portrays Laksmi as representative of earthly, individual existence, showing how that should be based on the eternal nature of the deity. She is also representative of the devotee who worships at the god's feet and through his devotion receives blessings.

But Vishnu does not only remain here in quiescence. He is the god who incarnates, who assumes various forms when the world is in need of rescue. When ignorance and duality have taken humankind into a self-destructive dead end, the luminous reality of Vishnu appears to guide people back to unity. The first image of

this comes from the story of Vishnu's other wife, Bhu, the goddess of the earth, who is captured by a demon and hidden deep in the ocean. The earth is suffering and bereft without its divinity, and finally Vishnu incarnates as the great boar Varaha to save Bhu. Numerous sculptures depict this scene. There is one from Eran in Madhya Pradesh, early 400s C.E. Here Vishnu is an enormous figure of power and strength with a simply carved human body and boar's head. He stands triumphant on a block of stone, his head held high, with rescued Bhu hanging delicately from one of his tusks. In another image, Vishnu is a boar, no human body, standing on the ground, again at Eran, late 500s C.E. Covering his body are rows of small human figures representing the sages who took refuge in Varaha's bristles in a *Purana* story. Again Bhu hangs gracefully from a tusk (both images, page 43). And, thirdly, one of the most beautiful depictions of this incarnation is at Cave 5, Udayagiri, Madhya Pradesh, early 400s C.E. Here Vishnu is an enormous figure against a background of the same sages.

He stands on the *naga* or snake demon, Bhu is her usual languid self, and the incarnate god triumphant against discord and evil (see page 7).



All of these sculptures were made to illustrate stories, both for worship and for non-literate devotees. The growth of devotion to a specific deity became an important factor in what was termed Hinduism around the beginning of the Gupta Empire (400 - 600 C.E.) It was with this growth of *bhakti*, the worship of a particular form of the god, that religious iconography developed and became fixed in meaning. This is mostly vividly portrayed in sculptures from both Mathura and Sarnath, centers for devotional worship and of the artistic world that expressed it. One of these sculptures in particular displays the suave simplicity of the early Sarnath images. Vishnu is a king with jewelry and royal crown. He has not renounced the world but is its ruling divinity. Delicate lines on his smooth body indicate both foliage and a thin wrap of cotton. His face, like all the images from this period, is calm and centered on an inner vision. He is a profound and sacred presence (see Fall 2010).

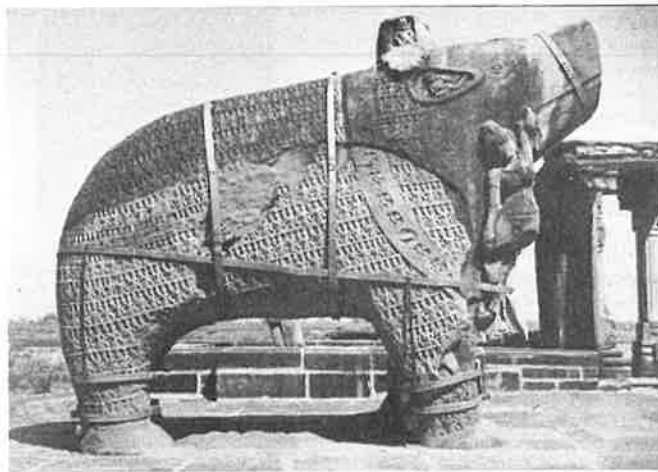
A later bronze sculpture, from the apex of the Chola dynasty (Tamil Nadu, 1000 C.E.) shows further development of Vishnu's iconography. Both he and his consorts (Lakshmi and Bhu) stand on opened lotuses. Vishnu's "crown" has grown taller and more elaborate, indicative not just of royalty but of a fully expanded consciousness. He has four arms, each of which hold objects that symbolize his

attributes: the conch shell that calls the devotee to his sacred presence; the mace which fights the demons of duality; the spinning *chakra* representing his energy and force, and often another lotus bud to emphasize the presence of his consciousness in the world. Again his facial expression is withdrawn and serene (see page 58).

But the need for intervention is frequent and so are Vishnu's incarnations. His two most important ones are as a man whose life then serves as a model for all his devotees. First there is Rama the king and the subject of India's great myth, the *Ramayana*. A question begins this epic: Who is a great man? In answer to that query, the author Valmiki recounts the story of Vishnu incarnating as Rama to defeat a world-terrorizing demon. (Always these pesky demons! They are symbols of our bifurcated and power-mad egos and are always at the center of the story which calls for corrective divine unity.) There are countless illustrated manuscripts of Vishnu as Rama, sculptured reliefs in temples and, in the modern era, a long video drama. Rama is loyal, honest, helpful, upright and, when pushed, a defender of the world order. Interestingly, however, he has a character fault, that of being tied to public opinion, and in the end of the *Ramayana* he must abandon his pure wife Sita because of public suspicion, even though she is proved virtuous by the earth itself. This seeming betrayal of Sita by Rama has troubled generations of readers. How is this the behavior of a god? But when we understand Vishnu's role as preserver of the world, it becomes clear. How would life go on if not for its duality and contradictions? And Vishnu is the sustainer of world order.

Vishnu's other overwhelming important incarnation is that of the god Krishna. Vishnu incarnated as the baby Krishna to defeat the *naga* demon who lived in Yamuna River. Demons and snakes were often denizens of the watery worlds, representing our being under the sway of personal emotional forces. It is only when these *nagas* become devotees of the divine force of Vishnu, of sacred unity, that they are accepted as beneficent. In this incarnation Krishna is a charming and mischievous young boy, then a great lover of all the young village women, finally the charioteer and guru of Arjuna in the Gita, and most spectacularly the revealer in the Gita, chapter eleven, of the world in all its frightening and mesmerizing reality.

Vishnu does not create and he does not destroy. He sustains and allows. He is the fragrance of life, its great beauty, its tragedy and its redemption. This is expressed in poetic terms by the name given to him when he lies on the snake floating in the ocean. He is *Narayana*: Moving on the Waters and The Abode of Man.





MAKING THE EGG SCULPTURE

BY SANDY THEURERKAUF

I love working with materials that come from the earth (stone, wood, leaves, soil) and like it more when the material is raw. By raw, I mean that the materials I am working with should be of the place where I am working. That gives me a sense that I am connecting or relating to that particular place. It is something I need and value.

The sculpture at Center for Learning (Bangalore, India) was not entirely built on these ideas, but many aspects of it were in the same line. Its shape is very natural and simple. This sculpture at the Center is a kind of culmination of my building skills.

The idea for the form came from the work of the artist Andy Goldsworthy. I've been always attracted to stone 'markers' that people build, especially in mountainous areas. I can't explain why, but building with stone is something I've always loved. I wanted a certain texture and for that I found waste material from stone cutting factories nearby. I don't really have any ideas about what the sculpture symbolizes. For me the shape is pleasing and what is important is the making of it. I enjoy the material.

The work took me ten days. I thought a week would do but soon after starting I realized that it was going to take longer than expected. I panicked a bit because the *puja* or worship at the Botanical Sanctuary was in ten days. So I had to work more than twelve hours a day for those ten days. That made the experience very intense. After the initial hardship I enjoyed the work, and after finishing it I realized that I would have done it in a similar pace even if I hadn't had a deadline to meet.

I was very thankful to the school for allowing me to make the sculpture there, and they supported me during the entire project. I had kids running around me all the time, some of them helping out. The little ones would count and recount the number of layers each day, and at the end when the whole school gathered for the laying of the last stone, one of the younger students informed me that the egg was one hundred layers.

AUM: PROTECTING THE BREATH AND WORD

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

When the mantra *aum* is articulated, it has in it the vital breath, *pranava*, as well as a spoken word, *vak*. The *pranava* is our whole life and our strength. The word represents our knowledge and wisdom. We should protect both our life and our wisdom. In return, they will protect us.

The secret of protecting the breath and the word lies in the meditation of *aum*. *Aum* includes everything seen and known in the world of our wakeful life, all the symbols that appear in the course of our dreams, the indistinct mass of consciousness in deep sleep and the all-witnessing consciousness of the transcendental state. Thus it is identical with the Absolute. For a person meditating on *aum* with that knowledge and attitude, the whole world will become his friend and he will become a friend of the whole world.

Aum is a mantra of consent. In our daily life, there arise many situations in which we have to give our consent to something. A generous person consents to many things while a greedy or poverty-stricken person is unable to give consent. *Aum* means "I agree," "You can have," "Let it be like that." Those who meditate on *aum* should be able to give as many consents as possible. Life is like a continuously flowing stream. Those who hoard or hold on to their wealth obstruct the flow of the stream and consequently become poor in their hearts. These people will not be able to say *aum* because it is the mantra of generosity. One who says *aum* and gives what he has will continuously receive so that he can continuously share with others. Never say "no." Instead, say "May God fulfill it." You can invoke grace by saying *aum*.

When the mantra *aum* is articulated, your word and breath become coupled in the heart. They rise in one embrace from the heart to the palate of the mouth. On striking the palate, the mantra causes millions of vibrations to pervade the body. That becomes a divine song for the inner Self. When the sound of *aum* falls on the ears, they hear what is most auspicious because there is nothing more auspicious than *aum*.

When *aum* is chanted loudly and musically, it becomes *udgitha* or "that which rises." *Gi* is "that which is sung" and *tham* is "that which is established." Life should have a firm foundation and it should be well established. Life should be a song that pleases everyone. It should be elevating and ennobling. All these instructions are

implied in the meditation of *aum*. Chant *aum* both musically and loudly. Listen to that sound. Merge the mind and the vibration of that sound. That is how *udgitha* is to be chanted.

Then there is the meditation called *angiras*. *Anga* means “a limb” and *rasa* means “essence.” We each have a personal body as well as a cosmic body. The meditation of *aum* has the essence of all our limbs. In our bodies it functions as *pranava* and knowledge. In the cosmos it functions as cosmic energy and creative intelligence. The beauty in what we see, the sweetness of what we hear, the fragrance of what we smell, the delight of what we taste, the tenderness of what we touch, the dexterity in action, the progress that is made when one walks in the path of truth, the life-maintaining power of *pranava*, the luminosity of the sun, the cool attractiveness of the moon, the raining of the clouds, the cleanliness of the sky, the retentive power of earth, the medicinal properties of herbs and the generous bounty of rivers: all these should be considered as the essence of the personal and cosmic limbs coming to you when you chant *aum*. At the same time, your essence flows back into all of them. Such meditation gives expansiveness to the mind and effaces all differences and distinctions.

The space in the mouth should be considered as the domain of *pranava*. The *aum* that comes from the heart to the mouth has no form or sound until it dissipates into a million vibrations in the mouth. As you chant *aum*, experience that vibration going to every atom of your body. Also direct it to your cosmic body, which includes the earth, the moon, the sun, other planets of the solar system and all the far-off galaxies. In the silence that comes at the termination of the chanting of *aum*, experience the merging of your self into the silent ground of the universe.

Next is the meditation on *aum* as *brhaspati*. *Brhadi* means “that which comes as a word” and *pati* is “lord.” Hence, *brhaspati* means “the lord of the word.” *Aum* is the lord of all articulated and unarticulated words. It is their essence and power. When you talk or read, you should listen to the echo of *aum* in all words. The presence of *aum* should be felt in every word. The reverence and respect and loving care that one has for his god, guru, and father or mother should be given to the presence of *aum* in every word. If you are conscientious in this way, your *pranava* will not allow you to say any word that is not appropriate. Demonic forces are always waiting to afflict a word with evil. Those who meditate on *aum* as *brhaspati* speak only pure words. Each word, before becoming a tonal modality, remains in the subconscious as an idea. The meditation of *aum* in the subconscious purifies ideas even before they become words, as ideas manifest from the unconscious. There is a deep silence before the articulation of *aum*, and *aum* is also followed by silence. By cultivating an intense reverence for the silence that comes before and after *aum* you can purify your unconscious. Thus a person who meditates on *aum* as *brhaspati* becomes pure in spirit, pure in mind, and pure in words. *Aum*.

THE SECRET LIFE OF CHAOS

BY JEAN NORRBY

The yogi's mastery extends from the finest atom to the greatest infinity.
(Sutra I:40, *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali, translated by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati)

With these words providing the tambura drone tone to the following article, I would like to review for you a stupendously fascinating program I saw on Swedish television in December of 2010. The BBC's *Secret Life of Chaos*, with Jim al-Khalili of the University of Surrey, tied things together in a way so beautiful, logical, and informative that I almost lost my breath. He draws us into his magic web thus:

- Beauty and structure in the natural world are an intrinsic part of the laws of physics.
- The mathematics of chaos can explain how and why the universe creates exquisite order and pattern.
- Infinitely complex systems can develop from the most simple rules and processes.

So begins the search for how the origins of intelligent life derive from the chaos theory, how four simple elements—air, water, coal, and chalk—organize themselves into thinking, breathing organisms.

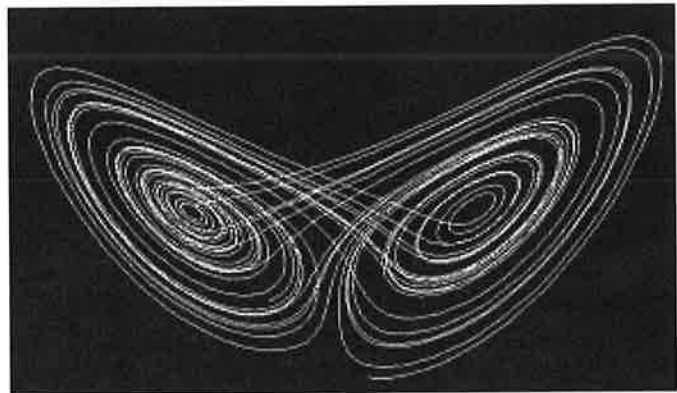
For starters, “chaos” is neither “random” nor “a state of disorder.” The concept was “stumbled upon” by Henri Poincaré in the 1880s. Over two hundred years had passed since Newton published his laws of planetary motion, when King Oscar II of Sweden and Norway sponsored an unusual competition that would lead to a whole new science.

As Anton Skorucka writes in scienceiq.com: “The competition promised a cash prize to a scientist who would answer this question: How stable is the solar system? Contestants would basically have to use Newton’s laws of gravitation to mathematically show the stability of our solar system. Applying Newton’s equations was easy for two bodies, say the Sun and Earth, however as soon as one added a third body, say the Moon, the problem would become so complicated that even the best physicists and mathematicians of the time were not able to compute anything. They were not even able to predict the three bodies’ trajectory of motion. This so-called “three-body problem” was therefore at the heart of this competition.

“The prize was awarded ultimately to Poincaré, one of France’s leading mathematical physicists, even though he did not completely solve the problem and furthermore he showed what everybody was expecting the least. With his elegant math he showed that the three-body system behaved in a complex and totally unpredictable way. The Solar System, or at least his three-body approximation, was not stable at all, it was chaotic! Small changes in the initial conditions (such as planets’ positions and initial velocities) produced huge and unpredictable outcomes. His findings were ground stones for what we today know as chaos theory.”

Two ideas underlie all chaos theory: systems, no matter how complex, rely upon an underlying order, and very simple and small events can cause very complex behaviours or events. Mark well: even an earthquake, followed by a tsunami, followed by a nuclear meltdown follows this pattern.

Alan Turing (1912-1954) was one of the first to study how simple processes and simple equations lead to complex systems and changes. Turing was an English mathematician, logician, and cryptanalyst who helped break German Enigma Codes during WWII (all top secret work and unknown until years later). He went on to work with computing machinery and intelligence, and became the founder of computer science. He did extensive work with morphogenesis, a sort of mathematical biology showing self-organization in plant structures. He predicted oscillating chemical reactions and could have gone much further on all fronts, except for a tragic turn of events. In 1952, he was charged with “gross indecency” for homosexual acts, not unlike Oscar Wilde 50 years earlier. He was given a choice of prison or treatment with female hormones (chemical castration), and he chose the latter. Two years later, he died of cyanide poisoning, a suicide committed by biting into a laced apple, like Snow White,



a favourite figure of his. Rather recently, the British government has made an apology to Turing’s memory, for gross unfairness.

Boris Belousov (1913-1970) was a Soviet chemist and biophysicist who discovered the Belousov-Zhabotinsky (BZ) reaction in the 1950s. This reaction shows how bodies extracting energy from sugar create a chemical metronome of oscillating chemicals (clear, colored, clear, colored, etc.). Thereby, one can observe complex patterns in space and time—chemical waves, scrolls, and concentric

spirals—also evidence of self-organization in nature, seen in leopards' spots, sand dunes, etc. Not much importance was given to Belousov's research at the time, so he became disappointed and did not pursue it.

Newton's "clockwork universe" that could predict the future was slowly being dismantled by the fact that unpredictability seemed to be hardwired into the universe. Though controlled by mathematical equations, the universe was still unpredictable. In nature's strange power to self-organize, order and chaos are seen to be deeply linked.

Edward Lorenz (1917-2008) was an American mathematician and meteorologist, and the first true experimenter in chaos.

Greg Rae of IMHO, In My Humble Opinion Blog, writes: "In 1960, he (Lorenz)



was working on the problem of weather prediction. He had a computer set-up, with a set of twelve equations to model the weather. It didn't predict the weather itself. However this computer program did theoretically predict what the weather might be. One day in 1961, he wanted to see a particular sequence again. To save time, he started in the middle of the sequence, instead of the beginning. He entered the number off his printout and left to let it run (while he went to get a cup of coffee).

"When he came back an hour later, the sequence had evolved differently. Instead of

the same pattern as before, it diverged from the pattern, ending up wildly different from the original. (At first he thought that a vacuum tube had gone bad in his computer, a very slow and crude machine by today's standards.) Eventually he figured out what happened. The computer stored the numbers to six decimal places in its memory. To save paper, he only had it print out three decimal places. In the original sequence, the number was .506127, and he had only typed the first three digits, 0.506.

"By all conventional ideas of the time, it should have worked. He should have gotten a sequence very close to the original sequence. A scientist considers himself lucky if he can get measurements with accuracy to three decimal places. Surely the fourth and fifth, impossible to measure using reasonable methods, can't have a huge effect on the outcome of the experiment. Lorenz proved this idea wrong."

Finding this "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" gave rise to the modern field of chaos theory. A small disturbance or change can lead to a new chain of events and induce enormous consequences, large scale alternations, and different evolutions of trajectories. In 1963, he published "Why Weather is Unpredictable," pointing out that perfect weather prediction is a fantasy. And in 1972 he presented a

paper with the title, “Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” After that, the notion of “the butterfly effect” was on everyone’s lips and appeared as a theme in many movies.

Robert May (1936-) works with theoretical ecology and studies disease and biodiversity in animal population dynamics. He studies the relationship between complexity and stability in natural communities. The same math creates chaos and order. Animal systems don’t follow equations, but even though nature is unpredictable, there is through feedback a spontaneous formation of pattern and structure. May is an atheist, but he recognizes that “the co-operational aspects of non-fundamental religions could help society deal with climate change.”

Benoit Mandelbrot (1924-2010) was Polish-born, into a Jewish family from Lithuania, and became a French-American mathematician. From an early age, he could see geometric figures in algebraic equations, and patterns in nature. But he also saw that clouds are not spheres, mountains are not triangles, coastlines are not straight lines. Like the fractal geometry that he made famous, neither his life nor the course of his work was linear or simplistic in shape or form. Even at age 28, after studies in aeronautics and a Ph.D. in mathematics, he spent over two years groping, exploring many fields without finding a connecting thread. Finally in 1958 he moved to the U.S. to work for IBM, where he stayed for over 30 years. His first job was to tackle the problem of line noise. He discovered that it was an inescapable natural feature of the system, and that the ratio of noise to silence remained constant, regardless of the scale of time used to plot the phenomenon (i.e. months, days, seconds).

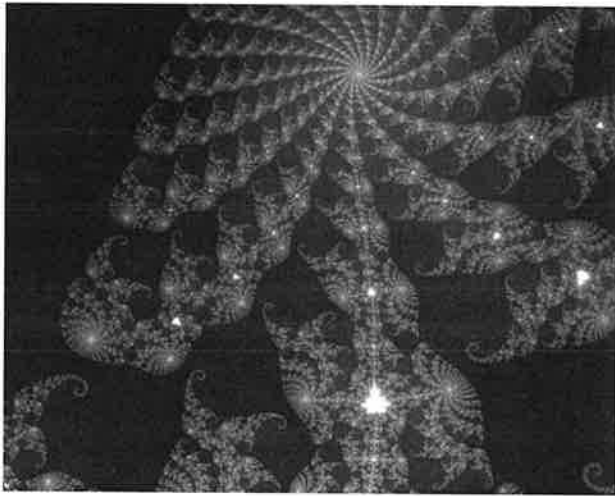
Mandelbrot also worked in economics and lectured occasionally at Harvard. In 1961, when he entered the lecture hall to talk about income distribution, he found that the professor who had invited him had already written the chart that Mandelbrot would use to illustrate his lecture on the chalkboard. The professor explained that the chart was actually from his own research into price changes in the cotton market. Mandelbrot went home and procured records of cotton prices dating back to 60 years. The astonishing pattern he found was the same as for line noise! It was both erratic and regular, and regardless of the scale of time, hourly, daily or monthly, the curve was the same.

Later that decade, Mandelbrot looked at the work of an aged English Nilologist and found that even the rise and fall of the Nile River could be modelled to show the rise and fall of stock market prices. Mandelbrot’s models generated graphed data whose visual patterns accurately mimicked the visual patterns created by real phenomena.

When a child, he could “see” geometry in algebra, but now Mandelbrot realized that there was something deeper, something mathematical, behind these strange patterns. From nndb.com, SoyLent Communications: “That something was self-similarity, or the repetition of self-similar structures from one level of scale to

another. Mandelbrot's ability to uncover this truth was greatly aided by his research position with IBM, where he had access to the tremendous number crunching and iteration power of IBM computers. Unlike mathematicians in earlier periods... he was not limited by the number of calculations he could churn out by human power alone. What's more, computers were fast advancing in their ability to render complex visual representations."

Now Mandelbrot began to pursue the problem of nature's irregularity and self-similarity in questions such as, "How long is the coastline of England?" The answer: "It depends on how closely you look. The nearer you get, the longer it becomes, unto infinity." (It's rather like "the more you know, the more there IS to know.) Building on the work of two predecessors (Swedish mathematician van Koch's "continuous snowflake curve" and French mathematician Gaston Julia's "simple formula," $f_c(z) = z^2 + c$ (where z and c are complex numbers) for "Julia sets"), Mandelbrot graphed his results and came up with a most beautiful "roadmap of all Julia sets," the Mandelbrot set. In 1975, he also hit upon a name for what he was seeing: fractals (derived from the Latin *fractus*, meaning to break). "To have a name is to be!" This provided another "dimension" for physical objects, beyond one, two, or three dimensions, and



four, if you consider time. With fractals, there is also the degree of roughness and irregularity.

Fractal geometry helps us find patterns in the irregularities of the natural world. It changes the way we look at natural processes and gives us mathematical tools for examining and understanding them better. Natural fractals are seen in mountains, coastlines, river basins, plant structures, blood vessels and lungs (compare bronchial systems and broccoli), clustering of galaxies, architecture, music, painting. Fractals are used in today's work with marine organisms, vegetative ecosystems, behaviour of density-dependent populations, and percolation and aggregation in oil research (and yes, in fractal mining). Fractals hold promise for building better roads, video compression, designing ships less likely to capsize, and medical imagery. They help explain which path lightning takes and the tectonic movements that cause earthquakes. The discovery of fractals has been likened to the discovery of the blueprint of life, or some kind of underlying principle upon

which it draws. Though inspiring such metaphysical thoughts, Mandelbrot, when asked if fractals don't point to a single rule underlying reality, simply stated, "There is no single rule that governs the use of geometry. I don't think one exists." He did add, "The beauty of geometry is that it is a language of extraordinary subtlety that serves many purposes." (nndb.com)

Mandelbrot was an eloquent spokesman for the "unity of knowing and feeling." He stimulated the field by making bold and crazy conjectures, then moving on, not by rigorously proving his insights. For this, he got a lot of criticism and scepticism. Yet his name may be mentioned in the same breath with Einstein's in years to come.

Torsten Reil is a biologist working out of England on evolution and adaptive systems, with his company NaturalMotion. After coding computer simulations with biologically modelled nervous systems, we can see simple bipeds learning to walk using artificial evolution. The creative power of systems is based on very simple rules. From 100 bodies randomly crawling and falling, the computer chooses the best movers and breeds them. After ten generations, figures could walk. After twenty generations, they were good walkers, even reacting realistically to unexpected events. The computers simulate evolution. They create the algorithms, but then the figures do their own thing. The computers choose the mutations that are best, then shape and refine the programs. In twenty generations, the figures "learn" to walk, but how? And why? Again, simple rules lead to complex systems.

The conclusion of this computer experiment is that "the unthinking process of evolutionary trial and error creates virtual creatures that move and react in real time." The organism must replicate, with a few random mutations now and then thrown in. This is one of the simple rules, based on coupling or feedback, that leads to complicated results. The feedback comes from the environment, which favors mutations best suited to it. Order and chaos are one and the same system, based on the simple rules of feedback. Pattern formation is an integral part of the universe.

Most people reading Gurukulam will not agree with the conclusions made in this nevertheless fascinating BBC program. The conclusions are hammered in so there to be no doubt about them, but it is sometimes good mental exercise to wrestle with ideas that one may not personally hold. It is helpful to confront and ponder opposites.

- Air, water, coal, and chalk organize themselves into thinking, breathing organisms.
- Inanimate matter with no purpose or design can spontaneously create exquisite beauty.
- Changes are an innate part of the universe, and no designer is needed.
- The math of chaos can explain how and why the universe creates exquisite order and pattern.
- Unthinking simple rules can create amazingly complex systems without any conscious thought.

- Design does not need an active designer. It's an inherent part of the universe.
- No creator needed, it's all just reaction to stimuli or response to inner needs.
- The ultimate lesson: all the complexity of the universe, all its infinite richness, emerges from mindless simple rules repeated over and over again—a powerful but inherently unpredictable process.

This is all very interesting. One is left, however, with many excited questions. Where did the rules come from? What is the purpose of our existence, if life is unconsciously created? Do we just make up our purpose to feel better? Is the only scientific certainty this, that the future will be uncertain? Are chaos and unpredictability just terms of our finite mind? What of intuition, which says that in the deeper level of reality, there is order in everything? What of changeless reality that does not come and go, “the knowledge in which the whole game takes place”?

Artists, scientists, philosophers, yoga students—we are all of us trying to find order and meaning in our lives, and simple rules to explain complex systems.

Einstein spent his last years looking for the one unifying law for all things in the universe.

The Yoga of Patanjali claims to have such a binary method, which implies both the unifying reduction (“finest atom”) and the power of methodological elaboration (“greatest infinity”).

Rod MacIver of Heron Dance writes: “Finding the transcendent truth that underlies the complexity of life—paint or write that!”

Stephen Wolfram, in trying to create a competitor to Google, is trying to organize all the knowledge in the world in a way finite enough to build a coherent system, a data base of facts that “talk” to each other and answer questions. In building up his Wolfram/Alpha search system, he is trying to make very simple rules produce great complexity (sort of the opposite of what Einstein was trying to do—reduce great complexity to a simple rule).

So, what do I think about all this? My thoughts come in small pictures.

I see a flock of blackbirds in the sky, all flying in formation, curving, rising, falling, as though listening to the same voice. They are probably each getting feedback from very similar winds, and each of their brains works in a similar way, so they move in harmony.

I see refugees leaving Libya, all fleeing in different directions from one point, Tripoli. Each person is getting similar feedback, producing hunger and fear in them, so each reacts in a similar way. There is order even in this chaos.

I think of an art video that Scott sent out, of a wind-machine that moves like a living being along the flat beaches of Holland. It is inanimate, but looks and moves as though it lives. Each small cupped wind-catcher reacts to the same stimulus, and the whole contraption is geared to move together.

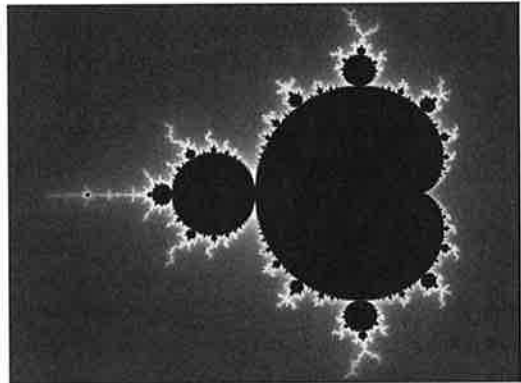
Julian Assange, speaking of Wikileaks, was quoted in The Guardian to say: “In each group or organization there might be direct instructions, but each individual

or group acts in a way that it feels maximizes its own interests. Many factors create an atmosphere.”

Isn't "self-similar symmetry" like DNA and genetics? And isn't "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" like epigenetics?

On a clear day, I sit on a jet heading east over North America. At 10,000 meters altitude, I look down on everything from Alberta to Hudson's Bay. In many places the cattle range has been ploughed and fenced into huge rectangles; rotational irrigation devices have left big green circles. All this speaks of man's intention and industry. But then come frozen fairy rings, undulating dunes, twisting rivers of all ages—young curves, switchback curves, cut-off shortcuts, and residual oxbows. Does not this speak of nature's intention and industry?

I look at all the beautiful fractals in nature and feel warm inside, seeing their beauty. I'll never understand it all, not I, in my all too brief life left on this earth. It is this warm feeling inside that gives my life meaning. It comes now and then, with certain combinations of input. I can call it love, or acceptance, or whatever. It is a feeling of order and harmony. I think of the words, "a yogi accepts that ignorance is an unavoidable part of our lives."



Returning to the television program that I started with, let me say that it truly engaged and enlivened my mind! For anyone interested, you might be able to find it by googling [AtheistPlanet2](#), where it is shown in six parts on YouTube. Jim al-Khalili may not agree, but in the secret life of chaos there seems to live an order based on conscious intention anyway.

To end, here are words by Arthur Koestler I'd like to consider and add to the Big Equation: "Einstein's space is no closer to reality than Van Gogh's sky. The glory of science is not in a truth more absolute than the truth of Bach or Tolstoy, but in the act of creation itself. The scientist's discoveries impose his own order on chaos, as the composer or painter imposes his: an order that always refers to limited aspects of reality, and is based on the observer's frame of reference, which differs from period to period as a Rembrandt nude differs from a nude by Manet." (*The Act of Creation*, 1970)

STUDY GROUP FOR 100 VERSES OF SELF INSTRUCTION

BY WENDY OAK

My study group started five years ago. I had been studying *One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction* on my own for some time, and came up with the idea of a Study Group where seekers of like mind could both study separately and come together and share their understandings.

I gave this idea to Nancy Yielding, who had been a close student and friend of Guru Nitya over many years, helping with many of his books, including *That Alone*, *The Core of Wisdom*. Additionally titled *100 Verses of Self-Instruction*, it is both a translation of Narayana Guru's work and a commentary by Guru Nitya and, indeed, a cornerstone of his life's work. Nancy liked the idea and so our Study Group was born, with her as group leader and coordinator. Two others and myself made up the first group. It was to be through email as we lived in England, the United States, and Sweden. (There are now eight more groups either working through or finished with *That Alone*, with new ones starting up as demand requires. Nancy is leading three groups through Nitya's commentary on Patanjali's Yoga Shastra as well.)

The format we use works well. We all read the same book. Nancy sends us an A4 sheet by email once a fortnight with the verse, its meanings and two exercises (which are optional) based on the commentary for each verse. We each study these in our own ways and at the end of a fortnight we send our responses to Nancy. These can be our response to the verse, the exercises if we did them, or else any other ways we practised the theme of the verse. Nancy will comment also.

Since in *That Alone* there are one hundred verses, it is a long-term commitment, and because of that it brings many gifts. Our group became very close, and we have remained good and loving friends.

I have found that over the nearly five years I have studied in this way that I have been greatly changed. I have become so much stronger and clearer as my understandings grow. It is a never-ending process, and when the 100 verses come to an end, something else will follow. It is like having a guiding light forever with me, yet one which gives me the freedom to make my own choices and discoveries.

Combining scientific rigour with mystical rapture, this book has the power to bring about a total transformation of consciousness by leading the reader to his or her own Core, wherein lies the essence of wisdom.

The power of *100 Verses of Self-Instruction* is summed up by Guru Nitya:
“There is no need to learn each verse and then rationally apply it in everyday life. You can even hear it and forget it. Forgetting means it only goes deeper into you. Once you have heard it, it will work its way by itself. The effect will be very subtle. It comes almost without you knowing that it is something you heard that is enabling you to see things in a new light or make resolutions in a certain more helpful way.”





NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE 2010

BY GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

Every New Year is an occasion for the surging up of new hopes and aspirations in life, both individually and collectively. Therefore, on the eve of every year we wish each other a Happy New Year.

When is life felt to be full of contentment? It is when our life and its continuance are fully in harmony with that of the total Nature. Do we live our lives thuswise? Are we not living while attempting to tamper with the way of Nature's creative existence and to exploit it simply to gratify our greed?

These days we notice various unfavorable climatic changes. We are well aware that the phenomenon of global warming is its cause, and we stand helpless before it. At the same time, we have to be aware that we ourselves are the culprits behind this looming catastrophe.

Recently in Tamil Nadu some wild elephants came out of their natural habitat and walked almost 35 kilometers into village areas. It created panic among the people. How did this happen? Because humans did not allow them to live freely and peacefully in the forest. This human intrusion into the forest frightens wild animals as well as destroying their habitat, and they sometimes helplessly leave.

Narayana Guru, as recorded by Nataraja Guru in *Word of the Guru*, once said, "Oh, this man! He knows not what he does. It would not have mattered so much if the effect of man's misdeeds struck its blow only on mankind. But the innocent monkeys and birds on the forest have to forfeit their peaceful life because of man. The rest of Nature would be thankful if, in the process of self-destruction, man would have the good sense to destroy himself alone if he must, leaving the rest of creation at least to the peace which is its birthright."

We human beings, our thinking capacity, our imaginations, our aspirations, are all nothing but part of the self-unfoldment of the creativity of Nature. Likewise is the emergence, the living in this world, and the final dissolution of every living being. Mankind thus has no special right over Nature that other living beings do not have. The fulfillment of our aspirations and the exercise of our free will, which are both granted to us by Nature, are meant to be achieved by making use of the sense of responsibility that Nature has endowed us with. Responsible to whom? Responsible to the Nature of which we are an integral part.

Nature's products and resources are not meant to be indiscriminately exploited by humans for gratifying their greed. Man's right is only to partake of the share rightful to him, as is the case with all other beings. Such partaking, such enjoyment, is also to be understood as part of the very same creativity of Nature.

The natural needs like hunger and thirst demand satisfaction. This is common to both humans and other beings. In the case of mankind, it is his other, self-made and exaggerated needs that make him exploiters of Nature. Thus what we need to keep our lives constantly happy is to have the natural desire for the fulfillment of our nature-given needs and to curtail to the maximum all man-made needs.

By exploiting Nature I exploit myself. The reason is that what is Real in Nature is the same as what is real in me. Seen thus, we take our stand on Reality. I am Nature and Nature is my self. How then can I become an exploiter of Nature, or even, for that matter, an enjoyer of it, in the normal sense of a subject enjoying an object?

We have hands to do work but we are becoming more and more used to having our work done by various machines. We possess legs to walk, but even half a kilometer of travel is often accomplished with vehicles. This trend in life results in our bodies having no activity that Nature intended it to have. This eventually ends up in our becoming ill with disease. Even at middle age, we are compelled to live depending on doctors and their medicines. Avoiding all such undesirable situations is possible if we properly make use of our Nature-given discriminative powers.

It is the *kṛti* (activity) aspect of *prakṛti* (nature) that finds expression in all of us as *karma*. What we need is the discriminative power to utilize *karma* in a way that agrees with the over all *karma* of Nature. Then alone will we have a life with the least amount of desire and the highest degree of contentment.

Everything we eat and drink, in one way or another, derives from the earth. To have contact with that earth and its soil has become more and more detestable in our lives. Therefore, instead of relying on the soil for survival, we prefer to rely on markets. The markets' existence, we should remember, depends on what the earth produces. Therefore, a life that does not touch the soil is not a real life. It transforms us into sort of bio-machines, and machines do not feel any contentment of existence.

A living contentment filling our lives is what we wish each and every one this New Year's Eve. Along with it we remind each of us that this is to be achieved by ourselves, by becoming well aware of the nature of human life.

TWINKLE STAR

BY SATYA VINOOTH

My dreams are full of flying butterflies.
My eyes are full of colors.
My heart is full of love.
Dreams became a twinkle star.
Eyes became a twinkle star.
Heart became a twinkle star.
Butterflies, colors, love are waiting
On the shores of Immortality
For my twinkle star.
All the candles of the altar are waiting
For my twinkle star.
Sorrows, pains, solitudes and dark shadows
Give a big farewell
To my twinkle star.
I am waiting in the lonely heaven
For my twinkle star.
Twinkle star comes to my lonely heaven
With roses and nectar.

GURUKULA NEWS

This June many Gurukula associates will gather in Simla, India, to participate in the All-India symposium on Narayana Guru and the contemporary relevance of his philosophy. The seminar will be convened by Guru Muni Narayana Prasad, depending on his health. There will be a report in the next Gurukulam issue.

More native trees have been planted at the Fernhill Gurukula in Ootacamund, where there is also an extensive renovation of the old kitchen building going on. In February, the Gurukula was the site for discussions and teachings by Scott Teitsworth followed by a *Sneha Samvada* led by Nancy Yeilding.

Ramakrishna and friends are continuing to work on a new Gurukula at Kilgappara in the Wyanad, including the building of a public space for meditation, classes and visitors.

Gurukula friend Gennadi Bedjanian from Vancouver, Canada, has been staying at both the Bainbridge, Fernhill, and Varkala Gurukulas and working on a dictionary of Sanskrit terms as defined in works by the Gurus of the Narayana Gurukula. He can be reached at gennadi@bdj.ca.

Peter Moras is updating Guru Nitya's Wikipedia page, including adding quotes and links to affiliated websites.

An informal online discussion group has formed at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Narayana_Gurukula/.



Online study groups on *Yoga Sutras* and *That Alone* are available at: islandaranya@toast.net.

Scott Teitsworth (<http://scotteitsworth.tripod.com>) has had his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita's Chapter XI accepted for publication with Inner Traditions Publishers, due in mid-2012, titled *Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds: The Bhagavad Gita as Psychedelic Guide*.

The Gurukula website:

<http://www.narayanagurukula.org/>

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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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 Guru Muni Narayana Prasad.

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