

GURUKULAM



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GURUKULAM

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EDITORIAL

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

In one of Laurens Van der Post's books on Africa, there is an old San (Bushman) tribesman who is locked in jail. Alone, without others, he withers away. He is dying, he says, for want of a story. He listens to the wind, hoping for a story, one that will give him life and meaning. In a different configuration, this is another expression of the Indian myth of Siva, when as Rudra, the Howler, he speaks the creation of the world, his words giving life to animals, people, gods. The word is not just the initial, phenomenal articulation but is also the beginning of all the stories that create the world. I am: that very first, and elusive, story. Then all the others of place and home and endless mythology: the world both creating and explaining itself.

In this issue of Gurukulam, we begin our reports on the recent Conference on the Philosophy of Narayana Guru, sponsored by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, and held at Simla in the Himalayan mountains this past June. So much of Narayana Guru's life and teachings, his essential story, has been obscured over the past century by other people's stories, their images of who they think him to be, what they want and don't want. Ever since its founding by Nataraja Guru, the Narayana Gurukula has worked to extricate Narayana Guru's vital philosophic insights from relativistic frameworks. The power and relevance of those insights are as crucial now as they were when he traveled from village to village in the late nineteenth century in the State of Travancore.

In this light, a national conference on Narayana Guru's teachings and their application to current Indian problems and to modern societies, is an encouraging event. In this Autumn 2011 issue we are including Kala Ramesh's overview of the papers presented in Simla, as well as the first of three installments of Dr. Peter Oppenheimer's paper from the conference. In the next issue we will include the beginning sections of other conference papers. Most importantly, we are printing Guru Muni Narayana Prasad's introductory speech at the Conference on Narayana Guru and his philosophy, with its overall history of the Guru's life and teachings. This is the small booklet that accompanies this issue. With each of articles, we hope to clarify, to uncover, the bedrock story of Narayana Guru: that under the frail veil of multiplicity, we are all interconnected; in fact, we are one conjoined reality and in that lies our happiness.

Some of the illustrations in this issue are taken from an incredible German book, *The Wall Paintings of North Kerala* by A. Frenz and K.K. Marar, Stuttgart, Germany. Many of the wonderful, but little known, wall paintings of Kerala temples are reproduced in all their intricate beauty. They present in new guises the very old stories of Indian mythology.

Bringing the ancient stories up to date is just what Narayana Guru did in so many of his poems. An example of this revaluation is seen here in Vinaya Chaitanya's new translation of *Mannantalam Devistavam*, one of the Guru's hymns to the Devi and her powers of generation.

The continuation of Guru Nitya's translation and commentary on *Atmopadesa Satakam* reveals a profound and stunning degree of relevance with current problems, demonstrating how curative the ancient wisdom promises to be to a world caught up in anger and frustration.

Translation, as we know, can take many forms and we have both Lakshmi Eassey's poem *On Translation* and Scott Teitsworth's continuing exegesis of the Hercules myth.

Hand in hand with translation runs the theme of symbolic representation, given voice here in Nancy Yeilding's recounting of the plane tree in Greek life and art and Sunita Pillay's article on the monumental Picasso sculpture in the city of Chicago.

We invite you to take part in this community of storytelling, through city plazas as well as through the imaginative meanderings of mythology, philosophy and art. The most meaningful story, of course, is that inner thread unraveling itself throughout your life, that finds resonance with other people's stories, and that springs from the silent core we all share.



ATMOPADESA SATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

VERSE 47

*oru matamakuvatinnurappatella-
varumitu vadikal arumorkkuvila;
paramatavadamozinna panditanma-
rariyumitinte rahasyaminnesam.*

To become of one faith is what everyone speaks of;
this the proselytizers do not recognize;
wise men, freed of objections to another's faith,
know this secret in full.

The key word in this verse is 'secret'. The Guru says there is a secret which is known to wise men and not remembered by people who are enthusiastic about enforcing their religion. In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, ignorance is described as mistaking the non-Self for the Self. This can manifest in several ways: becoming identified with a morbid state of mind and losing flexibility; becoming infatuated with a certain idea of pleasure or gain and then hankering after it; becoming hateful of those who do not agree with you or who thwart your intentions in a situation of competition or rivalry; or by becoming subjected to passions that come as psychological compulsions.

We can see all these in force in someone who becomes fanatical about an ideology. The ideology can be religious or political, a personal idiosyncrasy, or even a fad. When hate enters you, it is like you are possessed by an evil demon. It brings such a terrible block to your mind that you cannot see another's point of view. You become glued to one single stand, so that you can't move a little to one side to see that there could be another possibility.

When I was in my mid-teens I saw Mahatma Gandhi, the founder and father of modern India. He was revered as a great saint. He believed fervently in the nonviolence of Christ, and he taught that India should be converted to a creed of pacifism. He taught that one should win another's heart by love.

At that time, Britain was ruling India with full military force. To fight the British forces, which were armed with guns and bayonets, the Indians were made to march

with slogans of nonviolence and peace. As a young man I thought this was very foolish. I had been extensively indoctrinated by the Marxist-Leninist groups, even somewhat brainwashed, to believe that the only possible redemption for India lay in a revolution organized exactly as the one in Russia had been. I had been made to believe that all of humanity could be divided into two groups: the exploiters and the exploited, the haves and the have-nots. However, it was difficult for me to decide whether my father was exploited or an exploiter.

This mythical division into two classes, two class interests, and class warfare all looked very reasonable to me. I thought that if only Mahatma Gandhi read a little of Marx and understood his true philosophy, India would be saved. Little did I know that he had lived in England and had every access to all the literature of Marx and Lenin, and that he knew all about revolution. I was so young and stupid, yet fanatically indoctrinated. So I found my way to the inner circle of the saint, and looked for an opportunity to present my gospel of class war to him.

When my chance came, I gave him a non-stop oratory on class warfare, as well as how useless his method of nonviolence was. He listened to me very carefully. That is my greatest surprise today. When I came to my final conclusion, he looked quite calm. Then he asked me, "Are you sincere?" That infuriated me: if I were not sincere, would I have gone out of my way to bring him this great message? I shouted that I was very sincere. He went on, "You are speaking with conviction?" "Of course!" "Do you think I have no conviction about what I say?" I had never thought of that before. I said, "Yes, you must have conviction." "Am I sincere?" "Maybe..." "Are you not saying something which is in total contradiction to what I say?" "Yes." "Don't you see the possibility of two people with contradictory views both having full conviction and sincerity?" "Yes." "You are asking me to stand in your footsteps and look. Have you ever considered the possibility of standing in my footsteps and looking? If I stand in your angle of vision, I will see what you see. That's what you want me to do. Suppose I invite you to stand in my angle of vision and look at the same thing. Are you prepared for that?"

I was certainly not prepared, but I didn't say so. He continued, "Young man, truth is many faceted. You can look at it from a number of points of view, and from each angle you will get a different perspective. All that you have said is known to me, but what I see you have no patience to consider." I thought that was right. Although I had been listening to him for a week, waiting for my opportunity to pontificate, I had never really listened to him. I was only listening to myself, to my objections to whatever he was saying.

This simple incident was a great turning point in my life. It completely silenced me. Thereafter, when I talked with another person it always occurred to me that there could be one more way of looking at truth. I learned to step down from my pedestal and walk over to the other person's, to sympathetically get into his way of seeing. To me, this was the beginning of a great discovery of what a wonderful world we live in and how rich our human heritage is.

Once you take a position with a closed mind, it is as if the treasures your forefathers have amassed in all parts of the world are brushed aside as being of no meaning to you. Then Christ becomes meaningless. Mohammed, Buddha and Lao-Tze become meaningless. All the great thinkers, poets and artists of other cultures and perspectives are only to be reviled.

It took many centuries for the Greeks to imbibe the art that was developed in Egypt. From that the Greek culture slowly rose up, until they were able to bequeath many beautiful treasures to their gods of the finest carvings ever made by man. Then along came the Turks with a great slogan: "Every image made with a resemblance to anything on earth is against Allah." So they went around smashing all the beautiful marble carved by the master artists. That culture, its artistic production, those most beautiful expressions of the human mind, were all mutilated in the name of a stupid idea.

Still, that was only the destruction of dead matter. How often is it expressed with the cutting of throats in the name of the all-beneficent, the all-compassionate? In India sometimes a Muslim kills a cow. That's terrible, isn't it, to kill a cow, to kill a gentle creature that gives us milk? So a Hindu becomes very annoyed and very angry, and he stabs the Muslim. Isn't a man better than a cow? Should you kill a man because he killed a cow? The plea of the Hindu is that "life is sacred," but only when it is a cow. Is not life sacred in a man? This is what is called the blindness that comes from *asmitta*, wrong identity.

When Narayana Guru came to the Sivagiri Mutt, there was already a small shrine there. In the shrine was a spear, representing Subramanya. Worship was offered to it by a priest. After a while another priest came who became very devoted to Narayana Guru. He said, "What are these stupid fools doing? They are worshipping a spear when our Guru is here? We should put something of Guru there instead of the spear." He threw the spear away and put a discarded pair of Narayana Guru's sandals on the altar and started worshipping them. The first man became extremely annoyed that his object of worship had been thrown away and replaced by a new thing. He went and complained to the Guru.

Narayana Guru called both of them and asked, "Why was this man worshipping a spear? Is the spear God?" "No, I know the spear is not God, but when I see it I think of God and become reverent." "So it stands for God?" "Yes." He turned to the other and said, "Why did you throw it away?" "Because it is superstition to think of a spear as God." "Why did you put the wooden sandals there?" "Because they are Guru's." "Am I God?" "There is the living God within you." "Am I those sandals?" "When I see them I think of you." "The other man is doing exactly the same thing." Then the Guru went on, "Do you think that I can only become wooden sandals? I can also become a spear."

The fetish is a psychological disease of the mind. In the twelfth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna asks, "How should I worship you? As the formless, nameless, transcendent reality, or as one with a form?" Krishna answers him, "The purest form of understanding is to know truth in principle, but for people with uninstructed

minds it becomes very difficult. They need some medium of presentation. But then people tend to forget that it is a representation and not the original.” No analogy to the Absolute can ever be complete; all analogies illustrate only a particular aspect of essential reality.

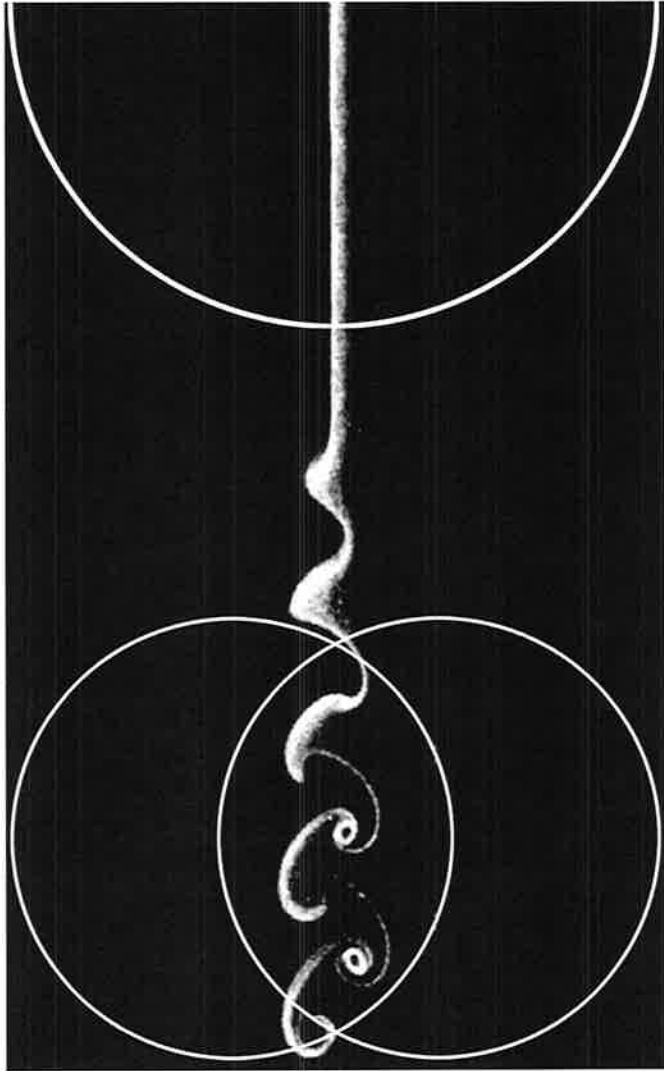
There is a wholesale difference between the Absolute and a relativistic version of it. That is why it is said that the Tao that can be spoken of is not the Tao. And yet it is spoken of in ten thousand and one words. So many words are needed because each one is only a partial expression. It can never be a total expression. This is the *rahasya*, the secret.

Henri Bergson puts this idea very beautifully using several examples. He speaks of the Absolute as the gold coin which can never be equaled by any number of copper pennies. Again, he discusses how a verse written in another language, which comes straight from a poet’s inspiration and vision, can be translated many times, but the translations can only approximate the original and never communicate its full sense. Then he continues, suppose you go to Paris and walk around Notre Dame cathedral and take hundreds of pictures from inside, outside and above. Then you bring them home and juxtapose them all and show them to someone. No matter how the photographs are presented, they can never convey the overwhelming experience of actually walking into Notre Dame and being there, because each one is only a partial view.

One who knows the inner secret won’t quarrel with anyone who is giving a partial view. Without exception, all the proselytizers are giving only partial views. Narayana Guru mentioned this in an earlier verse, when he brought in the idea of the blind men examining the elephant. Now he wants us to know one more secret. When I say, “Listen to me,” it means that I have a piece of truth to show you. When I show it to you, you and I will be knowers of that one truth and this will unite us.

Narayana Guru arranged for a Parliament of Religion which he called *sarva mata sammelanam*, a confluence of all religions. There he displayed a watchword: “It is not to argue and win, but to know and let know.” If you are arguing to win then you have already decided that the other person’s point of view is wrong and yours is right. When you say, “Let me know from you,” you have already admitted that there is a great treasure in the other person’s understanding and it is valuable to share it. Through the sharing you can become one with the other person. The ‘I’ will change into ‘we’. When you also offer, “I have something to let you know,” you are seeing what treasure is in your possession, and the joy of sharing it with another person makes it all the more worthwhile. Thus, you share yours with another and they share theirs with you. You open up a tremendous opportunity. This is the wise man’s secret.

Even when a Jehovah’s Witness comes with his enthusiastic talk, he is so hopeful of the good that might come out of it—that both will become good witnesses of Jehovah—that a unity will arise where there is currently only duality. His intention is that if all the people of the world are brought to his point of view, there will only



be one religion. Then the world would become very good and we would all become brothers, comrades, fellow men. So you can accept this from him, even though he may not accept anything from you.

When you walk into the lives of people of different faiths, and are not just watching them as members of some religion, but soaking into their minds, living the life they live and offering the prayers they give; when you really enter into the spirit of it, it enralls you. It brings the same truth with another quality, another kind of sweetness.

Sri Ramakrishna tried one religion after another for his realization. On each occasion the ecstasy he experienced had a special flavor of its own. When he wanted to know God the Christian way he constantly went to church, sat before the priest in all veneration, and read the Bible with earnestness. He fasted and prayed and thought of none but Jesus. When he wanted to experience the Absolute as Allah, he clothed himself as a Muslim, sat with their mullahs, listened endlessly to the Quran, and did the five kinds of veneration, *namas*, very strictly. He observed their fasts. He experienced the special quality of each religion in depth, but in spite of all the differences he could see the essence as the same.

Why should we give up such great treasures, when only superficial differences stand in our way? Nobody stops us except our own foolishness and fanaticism. In this there is double gain or double loss. Not only regarding religion. You can use this in your daily life, with your family, between husband and wife, among friends, neighbors, lovers, at the office, basically between you and any other person you come to transact with. You can see that there is another way of looking at things. Instead of a unilateral or linear way of thinking, there can be a dialectical coming together.

The key is being able to change positions to see the other person's point of view. You cannot have a vested interest in clinging to your own position. This approach was used quite well by Fritz Perls in his existential therapy, where he would have a person switch back and forth between two chairs representing two different sides of a conflict. It's really a wonderful way of teaching how identifying with two polemics can bring a new flexibility to the mind. A new lucidity can be achieved. It subtly brings you to a neutral zero. You are neither this nor that.

In the hundredth verse, Narayana Guru is going to tell us *atum itum allah*, it is neither that nor this. Try this in your own life, with your family and friends. You will make a wonderful world.

Nobody wants to have factionalism, but even as you are attempting to bring unity, you become part of a faction. It is in the name of unity that you are creating all these factions in the first place. Nataraja Guru gives the example of people making noise in a room. One man becomes very enthusiastic to bring silence, so he goes to the middle of the room and starts shouting, "Don't make noise! There is already so much sound here!" He is only adding to the hubbub going on there. Instead of contributing his own silence, he makes it worse by shouting.

So the true knower of this secret withholds from all disputes. The Guru made this so central to his teaching because it is in the name of this one dispute that we have been killing each other since the dawn of human history. There has been more blood shed in the name of religion than there is water in the seven oceans put together. It is such an important question for all mankind. If the dignity of man is to be enhanced, we need to find a solution to this eternal riddle of man killing man in the name of an opinion. There are two more verses before we reach the culmination of this line of thought.

VERSE 48

*tanuvil amarnna sariri, tante satta-
tanuvil "atente" "titente" tennu sarvam
tanutayozinnu dhariccitunnu; saksala-
lanubhavasalikalamitorkkil arum.*

The self encased in a body, in his eidetic consciousness, understands all such as, "That is mine" and "This is mine" bereft of body identity; on considering this it is evident that everyone has truly experienced.

We all have various affiliations. We belong to ideologies of a religious, political, social, moral and personal nature. It is very important for us to establish an ethical norm for our everyday relationships.

A law cannot be enforced if it cannot be lived. For any ethical norm to gain social validity it should be clear enough for those who have to live it, and should be within their capacity to do so. From the first verse to this forty-eighth verse, Narayana Guru has developed his argument in such a way to keep it as close as possible to our everyday experience.

We can live completely withdrawn from this world in a state of absorption, where there is no time and space, no name and form, no actor and action, and no duality of knower and known or enjoyer and enjoyed. That is a state of pure transcendental beingness. In it there is no problem of interpersonal relationships, no problem of the world, no problem of any transaction whatsoever. Hence, there is no need for law. Law, or a norm, is only necessary when you come out of that state. Emerging from the transcendental means becoming conscious of your body. Once you are aware of your body as a separate entity, all other differentiations follow. When you say "I," 'this' also comes.

The first thing we have to realize here is that we are in a peculiar position of belonging at once to a transcendental state and an immanent state. In the transcendental state we can think of ourselves without the body. In the immanent state you feel that you are an embodied being. The Guru always chooses very appropriate words for the occasion. There are many synonyms for 'body' in Sanskrit, such as *sariram*, *deham* and *tanu*, but *tanu* has a special significance. When you physically think of a body, the minimum requirements are its extension, mass and weight. Extension means it occupies space. Mass is its physical content, and this is in turn subject to gravitational attraction, which we call weight. Yet it is possible to abstract the body so that the extension of it is not a necessity. It is not that it has no extension, you are just not emphasizing that fact. Neither do you emphasize the fact of its having a mass, and you deduct from it its weight. If you do all this, it becomes

almost like a mono-mark, a certain idea you have in your mind which stands for your body. This is called *tanu*.

The Guru could have used a more gross word like *deham*, but he used *tanu* because it is more suitable to what he is trying to say. He means that when you sit in your body and think of yourself as 'I', the body becomes almost a negligible factor. You don't take into account your physical form, your color, your weight, your state of physical health, your flabbiness or thinness. All these are made minimal, and yet you have not forgotten that you are an embodied being.

In the *Saundarya Lahari*, Brahma gathers the finest dust from the feet of the Mother to create the world. There *taniyam*, related to *tanu*, refers to the very finite particles of the cosmic dust. Like that, when you consider your body as being almost akin to your mental state, you can easily pass from the mind into the body and from the body into the mind. Then you have a flexibility, a lucidity, a fluidity. The gross and the subtle become easily interchangeable.

Next the Guru uses the word *sariri*, which conveys the sense that you are not the body even though you have one. You have two body boundaries. One is your own physical body boundary, which falls within the law of impenetrability: you cannot occupy the same space I occupy. Even if two lovers try to get into each other, their bodies stop them from doing it. With all their fondness and affection, the body retains its impenetrability.

When you say, "This is my body, this is my mind, this is my intellect," you are seeing within the body itself an identity made out of things which can be placed within its circle. You say, "My mind." That exclusively refers to the ideations which are going on in this one particular body; feelings and sensations which are experienced only within this one unit.

It may look as though a person's experiences are within the limits of his body, but the same person says "my wife" or "my husband" or "my child" with the same ease that he says "my body." The relation established to another body is not of a physical nature. What does that "my" there stand for? At a value level, a level of affinity, you can forget the physical grossness of your body, as well as the bodies of your wife or husband, your child, your friend, or even of your car or your dog. Instead you establish a relationship, and in it you go beyond the body boundary.

There is an infinite range of what may be called the ego boundary. The state of the ego actually changes according to the expansion it attains. It becomes more a transcendental ego than an ordinary ego. A transcendental ego is not a social ego, it's only a center of consciousness. Here the center of consciousness is not just a passive witness, because the bond of affection is the one which makes the person go beyond his body limitations in saying "my child" "my friend," and so on. If you are a very altruistic person, like a mystic, you are so in love with everything that you can even say "my universe."

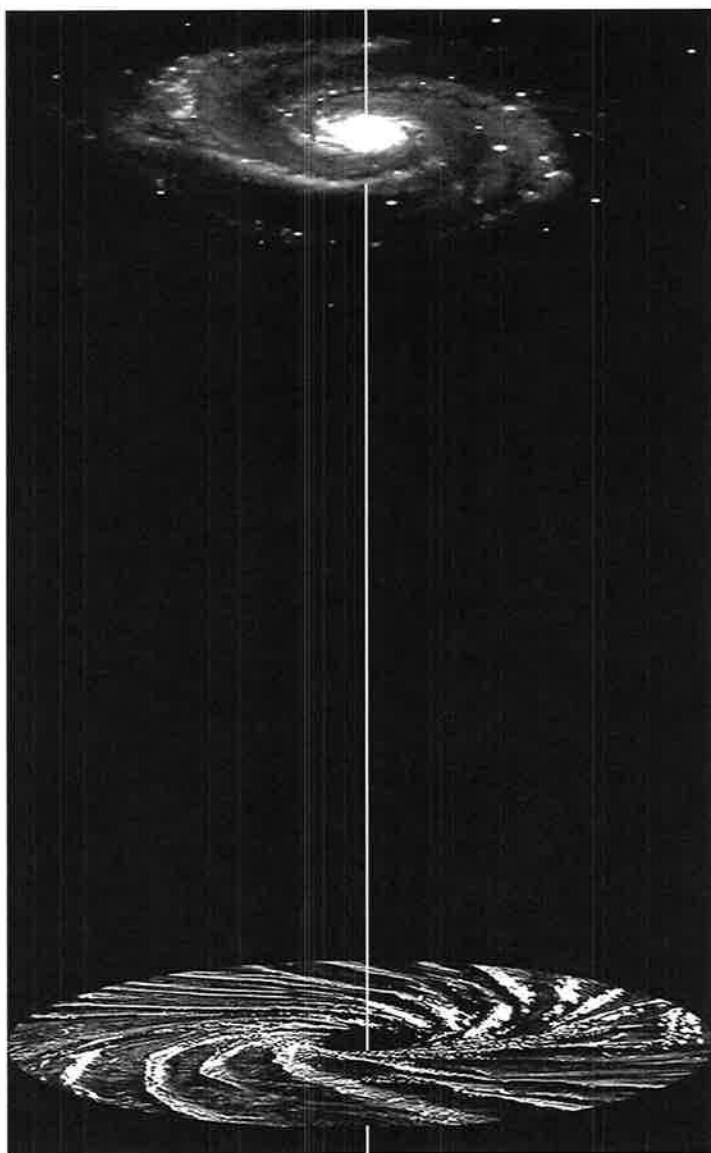
Examples of this attitude are plentiful. The French government plans to explode an atomic bomb in the Pacific Ocean, so Australians, New Zealanders and Japanese people have decided to go and stay where the test is planned to be. They are willing to die, saying “The nuclear bomb is bad for the world. Before you kill the world, kill us.” They are saying “We love the world and humanity. We do not want humanity to be killed. We are in love with it, so we are prepared to die for it.” What kind of identity is this? It is not like saying “This is my wife, I want to protect her,” or “This is my child, I will do anything for her.” They are identifying themselves with the future of life and the well-being of the whole world.

If you attach a body to your identity—the identity of your interest—it is called *satta tanu*, the body of your existentiality. Your existence becomes a meaningful factor by the incorporation of values that you want to live by. When you say “I am,” you are a living entity. In this there is a well-integrated, compact idea of beingness encapsulated as your existence. So your existence is your identity with values for which you live, for which you stand. Your freedom, your understanding, your validations of things—a number of these factors put together become your existential beingness.

Your existential beingness can be increased by including more and more values and items of value in it. It is within this body of interest that you say “he is mine,” “she is mine,” “this building is mine,” “the car is mine,” “this country is mine,” “the world is mine.” In this way, your body of interest enlarges. You don’t have to become a Socrates for that. You don’t have to become a Ramana Maharshi or a Yajnavalkya: you already experience it.

Narayana Guru says here, “I am not initiating a new law for you or an ethical norm for you that is not already known to you and experienced by you. If I am generalizing and giving you an ethical norm, I am only deriving it from your daily experience. You already experience transcending your body limit and identifying with others. That being the case, I am only asking you to extend it a little more, to recognize it more consciously.” People think realization is a very rare thing that only one in a million might achieve. The Guru wants to explode that idea, saying “Don’t give up your mind that way. You are as good as anyone. Don’t think of this as being a rare privilege of someone else. You already have some realization.” Otherwise why, when your husband or wife is sick, are you also affected?

I once heard a joke that a woman was in the hospital undergoing labor pains. Her husband was restlessly walking up and down. The doctor saw him and said, “Why are you so anxious? I have taken care of many deliveries in this hospital, and there has never been even one occasion of a husband dying. Relax, you have nothing to fear. Just go home.” The doctor does not realize that the man’s wife is part of his *satta tanu*, his body of interest. One has such an identity with his body of interest that this sort of thing is a common experience. And if you and your



husband or wife or dear friend can be of the same self, you and the whole world can also be of the same self. You just have to extend it, extrapolate it a little farther.

Clearly, *tanu* is the key word in this verse. One is realizing within the body of one's own interest, "this thing is mine," "that thing is mine," becoming oblivious to the bodily limitations of each thing. One neither thinks of his body nor of the impenetrability of the other body. They are all brought under one homogeneous reality.

This homogeneity is the integrating secret. When I talk to you and you listen to me, it is already with the realization that at a certain level you can leave your peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, forget my peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, and enter into a world of ideas where my conceptual visualization of an idea and your conceptual visualization can become so alike, so identified with each other, that the word can make sense to you. We have to go beyond our bodies to communicate.

Next the Guru uses the term *anubhavam*, becoming like the other. It is not a mere resemblance, it is a factual identity. One becomes the other one. You transfer yourself from your bodily system to the bodily system of another. Within that oneness the duality of the body is no longer an issue. That's why, when a mother hears that her child has met with an accident, she becomes panicky. When she sits with the child, it is hard to tell who had the accident. The mother's and the child's faces look so alike in their sadness and pain.

This is reestablished in our lives every day. When you pick up a cat and say "my dear kitty," you have already gone beyond your bodily limitations and your own body identity. People do not realize that this itself is part of your realization. Of course, it needs to be further perfected. When you say someone is a realized person, it is not that she hugs a cat. There's a bit more to it. But you make a beginning just by hugging the cat.

A big myth is now exploded with this verse. You have now come so close to the experience of the Absolute. It is within your reach, in the palm of your hand, so to speak. When Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is at hand, close to you, within your own heart," people still doubt it. They say "if it is so close, where are the signs? Why are the clouds not becoming all pink and red? Why aren't the trees bursting forth in light and the sound of God's own voice?" Jesus says, "Ye hypocrites! I give you no signs."

All the religious words have frightened and confused us. Narayana Guru wants to give us courage, telling us, "Don't be afraid. You are as good as anyone. The essence of realization is in your own daily experience." With this realization you come to establish a universal norm for living that experience with others, not just in a state of absorption. When you are alienated and isolated it is easy to remain always good. There is no chance for the Pope to smack another person, for instance, because everyone stands before him with great politeness and reverence. Nobody even says one offensive word to him, so why should he get angry? It is easy for him to be pious and good. But bring him to the marketplace and expose him to all the

troubles there. Then we will see his true tenor. There is no need for any ethics when you are in the state of a contemplative who is completely absorbed in the Absolute.

Your realization is to be lived here and now in society where you touch and are touched by other people. Let us bring our realization to the marketplace. But you think realization is so holy and sacred that it must be kept separate, kept apart. That means you cannot live it. If you want to live it, it should be lived everywhere, at all times. Your perfection is a perfection for all time, not just for the church on Sunday. If you are perfect now you should be perfect in everyday life, too.

After the next verse there is a major change. If the whole one hundred verses is viewed as a garland, the first forty-nine present a kind of descending dialectics. From verse fifty onwards, an ascending dialectics is used. It is easy to go down, difficult to go up.



TRANSLATE ME

BY LAKSHMI EASSEY

Translate me
and take me
into that other world of
your language and
cadence
the melody that
waits to create the pictures
of the impressions so gracefully
painted and captured by
blinks of memory
of roads obliterated
take me and let me wade my feet into
your stream
the water that empties into the
endlessness.

Create me
don't just take me word for word
allow me to see the way
your heart unfolds
the taste of fruit in the midday heat
cutting rice by the roadside
the gentle whittling away
at the center of the matter.

Transcend me
beyond
the dam
that has stopped the flow of water
and thoughts held stagnant for progress
too long
the rain that has caused landslides
of rock, water and emotion
flooded with what is lost and
can never be recovered.

(Tehri Valley, October 2010)

SRI VASUDEVA ASTAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

8

*bhakta-priyaya bhava-soka-vinayanaya
mukti-pradaya muni-vrnda-nisevitaya
naktam divam bhagavate natir asmadiya
sri-bhupate hara hare sakalamayam me*

To the one who has
Devotees as beloveds,
To the one who annihilates
All the becoming-related sufferings,
To the one who proffers liberation,
To the one who is always served
By hosts of silent sages (*munis*),
To you, my obeisance, O Bhagavan,
O the Lord of both Sri and Bhū,
O Hari, Please take away
All my afflictions.

O Lord, your devotees are very dear to you and you are very dear to them. Both these affections are implied in the usage of *bhakta-priya*, the one who has devotees as beloveds. A real devotee, *bhakta*, is the one who incessantly contemplates on you and your being, who feels that you are the essential content of himself and as well as being *sat* (existence), *cit* (consciousness), and *ananda* (value experience). Your devotee does not perceive you as a personal God who sits somewhere in another world controlling this world, but as the substance of his own being. He experiences your presence in himself not only as the Reality that is in him, is him, but as the undiminishing contentment that is directly experienced within. You are felt by him as the nearest of all realities and presences. He feels himself as one with you, just as the piece of jewelry is one with the gold. As each person is the dearest to himself,

you are the dearest to the devotee. And he is the dearest to you. Such is the intimacy between you and your devotees.

One who is endowed with this philosophically meaningful and profound devotion would not perceive painful experiences as disturbing. They would be seen as merely part of the sportive self-manifestation of God himself. Any playful activity is meant to be enjoyed and never to become a source of distress. One who finds his identity in you feels your enjoyment as his own. For such devotees, both the painful and the pleasurable experiences are part of your greatness. And they feel the sufferings of phenomenal becoming as having already been destroyed.

Putting an end to the sufferings of phenomenal becoming (*bhava soka vinasa*) and the proffering of liberation (*mukti prada*) are really not two goals. Negatively seen as something disliked and therefore to be avoided or destroyed, the goal appears to be disaffection. When something is seen in a positive light and seen as a goal to be attained, then it is understood as liberation. It is thus one and the same nondual value experience that is viewed from two opposite sides and named accordingly. There really is no word to give expression to this nondual value (*ananda*) experience. For this reason, I remain satisfied with simultaneously calling you the destroyer of worldly suffering and the provider of liberation.

A person lost in the wordless experience of self-absorption finds himself mute about the joy he feels within. Such silent sages are known as *munis*. Their joy is that of incessantly perceiving you as the one sacred form that plays within. The very same sacred form of yours is what I also constantly meditate on and pay obeisance to. I do so day and night. My goal is to attain the ineffable joy that the *munis* experience, and the way I intend to eradicate the miseries of life is with your blessings, O Lord of both Sri and Bhū.

THE PLANE TREE

BY NANCY YEILDING

Platanus Orientalis

On my very first evening in Greece, my friend and I were walking through the main square of the charming seaport town of Nafplio on the Peloponnesian peninsula, enjoying the soft air and the sights and sounds of children playing a makeshift soccer game, weaving around the benches where the town elders relaxed, laughing as they chased the ball, dodging the couples strolling arm in arm or pushing baby strollers. In the growing dusk the lights of the restaurants around the square glowed a welcome, which was extended by the banks of chairs and tables cozily arranged under canopies, conveying more of a feeling of a living room than a formal dining area.

I was soon to discover that this is a typical scene and feeling in the Peloponnese—life lived in the open and with a palpable sense of community. In all the towns and villages we visited, shopkeepers (in between serving their customers) sat outside their doors, in avid conversation with their neighbors or shopkeepers across the often-tiny lanes. Restaurant owners and waiters stood at the edge of their terrace or banks of tables, inviting us in as if to their own home. And, if we accepted, they then invited us in to the kitchen to see and choose from what had been freshly prepared. Or, at other times, we would enter a restaurant where there would be a convivial table, obviously of family members and friends, from which the waiter or owner would rise to serve us, confirming the sense that we had just been “welcomed home.” Children—groups of two or three or bands of them—roamed freely in the village squares, their parents knowing that they were being safely watched over by the whole town.

As we walked across the Nafplio square that first evening, soaking in all these sights and sounds, a lovely fragrance caught my attention. I paused, looking for its source, but saw nothing obvious, and so we continued on down to the waterfront. There, looking back, we could see the lights of the town rising up the steep hillside to the remains of the ancient castle at its crest. It told a story of earlier days, not so friendly, when Nafplio had been an embattled place, its pre-classical fortifications added to by the Byzantines, and later by occupying forces of the Franks, Venetians, and Ottomans. It became the first capital of modern Greece—and the scene of the assassination of the new head of state—before King Otto moved the capital to Athens in 1834. But each of the occupiers had also added some of their art and architecture to the town, contributing to the charm of the streets we wandered.

As we walked back toward our hilltop hotel, we crossed the square once again, and again the sweet fragrance caught my attention. I peered into the darkness,

trying to find its source. Finally I became aware that it was coming from the tree I stood beneath, though I could see no flowers. The next day I asked around about the tree and learned that it was a plane tree, *Platanus orientalis*. I also learned that in the nineteenth century the square had been named Platanos, because of this tree, one that is well loved by the Greek people.

As we visited one town square after another, throughout the Peloponnese we discovered that each was the center of community life, inevitably graced by one or two or several plane trees, generously sharing their redolent shade with the townspeople in the hot summer months. Over time, more facts emerged about this kindly tree. I discovered it has a long history in Greece. According to Pliny, the first century Roman naturalist, a plane tree on the grounds of the Athenian Academy founded by Plato had roots fifty feet long. It is thought to be the tree under which Hippocrates, known as the “Father of Medicine,” taught his students. That is apt, as *Platanus orientalis* has several medical uses: the leaves are astringent and vulnerary, and decoctions are used to treat dysentery and to heal wounds. The bark, too, is used in the treatment of diarrhea, dysentery, hernias, and toothaches.



Platanus orientalis loves water and often is found growing naturally alongside rivers. One reason plane trees are found in so many town squares is that they grew near what became the village spring, around which people naturally congregated, which grew into the center of the growing village. Many of the old springs have been captured, but their presence can still be discovered in a water tap or fountain. In the center of the village square of Mystras, just below the ruins of the ancient Byzantine town, stands a majestic old plane tree, bedecked with climbing roses that rise many feet up into its branches. And at its base, coming right out of its trunk, a small pipe continuously offers fresh water to passersby.

I also learned that human beings have valued this tree around the world for a long time—for its welcome shade, rejuvenating fragrance, graceful shape, fall color, and healing and cleansing properties. It is the famed tree of ancient Persian gardens, known as the chinar. And the beloved chinar trees of Srinagar in Kashmir

are the same *Platanus orientalis*. The chinar often has an inner hollow, making a shelter for a meditator, or even for a whole dinner party, according to one of Pliny's anecdotes. Well-rooted plane trees can be very long-lived. One in Chatargam, Kashmir, is reputed to have been planted in 1374 by a Sufi mystic. A five hundred year old *Platanus orientalis* stands in Kos, at the site where the Tree of Hippocrates grew, and may be its descendent.

In his opera *Xerxes*, Handel celebrates the plane tree in the beautiful aria, *Ombra mai fu*:

Frondi tenere e belle
del mio platano amato
per voi risplenda il fato.
Tuoni, lampi, e procelle
non v'oltraggino mai la cara pace,
nè giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.

Ombra mai fu
di vegetabile,
cara ed amabile,
soave più.

Tender lovely leaves
of my beloved plane tree,
may fate smile upon you.
May thunder, lightning, and storms
never disturb your precious peace
nor ruffling winds insult you.

Never was the shade
of any plant
sweeter, more loveable
or more gentle.

Platanus orientalis has a Western relative, *Platanus occidentalis*, native to North America, where it is known as a sycamore, plane, or buttonwood tree. The hybrid of the eastern and western plane trees is the London plane tree, which not only offers its shade to many streets of London (and many other large cities, such as Buenos Aires, New York, Paris, Madrid, Melbourne, Mannheim, Shanghai, Chicago, and Sydney), but also absorbs air pollution in its bark, which it then cleverly sheds!

The lovely spreading arms of the plane tree are like an embrace, reaching from village to village, continent to continent, from antiquity to today and on to

tomorrow, reminding us of our intimate connections with each other, in our towns and around the globe, and to the web of life of which we are a part, all sustained by earth, water, air, and light, and given space in which to be. These connections speak to us all the time, but we need to listen to their message, which can come to us from our heart's response to playing children and companionable adults, from the way our steps naturally gravitate toward shade and the sound of trickling water in midday heat, or from a simple fragrance that calls to us at twilight.



MANNANTALA DEVISTAVAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION BY VINAYA CHAITANYA

INTRODUCTION

by Kala Ramesh

Vinaya Chaitanya asked me to introduce his translation of the *Mannantala Devistavam* at the same time as I was preparing to teach a class in Bhakti poetry. As I was reading his work, I began to feel at home: this is home, I told myself, this is the world I feel empowered by and this is the world of Narayana Guru's poems. This assurance urged me to set aside the feeling of inadequacy I felt.

As for most of us engaged with the teachings and life of Narayana Guru, for me there is the constant, even if irregular, act of remembering the Guru and his words. And in the daily business of life, I often feel the Guru getting up and quietly slipping away, as it is said he was wont to do from houses where he stayed. Thankfully, we know where he lives, and so when we eventually do make the way to his verses, he's there, as always: the life of the poem, the author of the authority that spines each work.

Mannantala Devistavam was written for the re-consecration, in 1889, of the Devi temple at Mannantala, where Guru installed an idol of Sarasvati in place of the old one of Bhadrakali, which he had consigned to the temple pond. Here, as always, Guru uses his role as the Guru to speak a consciously inventive and deliberately absolutist way of imagining and worshipping god.

Vinaya Chaitanya, in translating, keeps this absolutist outlook in mind and he acknowledges the act of understanding required in translating this hymn, aided by his own experience of discipleship. He also attempts to bring to the word choices and sentence syntax the precise attentiveness required. Years of brooding are well aided by old and new dictionaries and cross-referencing and sounding out discerning listeners. The reader will find in this translation a lightness of touch that is somehow reassuring and charming at the same time.

In the reading, the attentive reader-worshipper will be directed towards an ordering principle in the structuring of the verses themselves. Guru begins at the time and place of the event of consecration, shaping his address so as to make it evident that it is he, the Guru, who will set the terms and the frames of reference of worship, and then moves through the verses of the poem so as to bring the worshipper to an understanding of the absolutist relationship between devotee and divinity.

When Guru opens his poem with the word *manikuda* (jeweled umbrella), he's using his position as the consecrator of the idol and the leader of the worship to turn the worshippers' attention upwards to the beautiful, delicate, shielding arch of the umbrella and the accompanying shower of flowers and to the need to step away from the enumerations of routine life and become oneself an offering that will eventually reach the feet of the Goddess.

As the poem continues, Guru takes us through familiar symbols associated with the gods, but always in the other half of the balance he places absolutist values, values that still, and at the same time stir, readers' minds.

For me, what shines in this poem, as with all Guru's words, is the incredibly well-crafted relationship of form and content: the sheer physical beauty of the poem and the sheer mystical, transformative power of the vision. It is significant that Guru paid as much attention to the form carrying the vision as he did to the vision. It is another sign of the immense compassion of the Guru that he did so, for the form is the bridge on which human beings may walk towards a glimpse of the vision. In this amazing attentiveness to the marriage of sense and sound into a form accessible to seeker-readers, Guru is so very closely in the line of the Tamil bhakti poets, whose voice and his often sound unmistakably like parts of the same symphony.

The *Mannantala Devistavam*, like all of Guru's writing, ought to remind readers and seekers not only that Guru was as great a poet as he was a mystic and teacher, but that he composed these poems as the Guru, that his guidance, his guidelines, as it were, are clearly stated in the poem.

It is to Vinaya's credit and to his continued laboring to find the right words that this translation reads well, but more, that it is able to hold and transmit the mystical charge of the original.



Opening up the be-jewelled umbrella/the jewel-canopy
showering flowers,
offering all smells to the sun as sacrifice
and making them the sun itself,
all the multiplied variety moving away
the multiplier too gone;
grant your grace, oh mother, that I come through
crossing the ocean of (the three) nature-modalities.

You of full-moon beautiful face,
luminous with your holy crest decorated/decked
with crescent-moon and the celestial river Ganga,
O Siva body, who shares in half
the graceful form of the space-clad one,
place your lotus-feet firmly in my heart's core,
bless and see that the ego doesn't sprout (up)
and make knowledge undone and gone, making all fruitless.



The light-filled form of yours, if remembered,
weighty sorrow will cease, for all,
By clarity of pleased heart,
each will be blessed by your grace
and all troubles run far away.
Oh mother, all shall be attained,
as you are seated as consciousness
within the heart, granting all the worlds
what is desirable.
Like rivers that come, mix and merge
in the ocean,
all the teachings, (all my complaints)
without remainder, attain to your feet,
rise up and change over.

O daughter of *Daksha*,
destroyer of evil ignorance
Oh supreme, divine light,
bless your follower
to subdue all senses, and
not drown in the ocean.
Pangs of hunger have grown
to this fiery pain,
to be overcome surely
if one spends the day
unswerving, within your womb.

With mind spinning
faster than a top,
this one here has no strength
to reach you in the sky,
do consider;
this refugee ,
with no path forward,
stands begging your mercy,
praising your feet,
grant the boon, ever,
to merge in your state
that brings on the true-path.
O auspicious lady.

Even the know-all (clever one)
falls prey to the treachery of the
eye and other senses;
surely, you take no side,
but, if he be/is intent on your lore, then,
that very moment, everything happens,
he lives on ever full of joy,
are you not the supreme absolute
Who knows all this?

This comely body,
food for carrion-birds
is dragging.
O perfection of art,
fullness of bits,
do grant peace of mind.
O my precious golden one,
Your beauteous body
ever caressed by
the moon-wearing Siva,
united, without gap
bestow grace that all
sorrows end.

The goddess who dwells here
at *Mannanthala* (Earth's Head),
herself dwells over all worlds (the whole earth)
with name appropriate, a wonder/marvel!
Everything will merge in the earth
(all on earth shall come to end {?}).
Aren't you the divinity that stands above it all,
counting and ordaining?



SIMLA CONFERENCE ON NARAYANA GURU

BY KALA RAMESH

When the Indian Institute of Advanced Study decided to convene a conference on the life, vision and work of Narayana Guru earlier this year, they approached Guru Muni Narayana Prasad for assistance. Guru, though initially reluctant, agreed to organize the putting together of the conference and the final editing of papers for a volume to be published by the IIAS.

What evolved after months of planning and discussion was a two-and-a-half day conference divided into four sections, with four distinct themes and papers for each theme. The four themes were:

- The Philosophy of Narayana Guru;
- Narayana Guru's Concept of One Faith & his Attitude Towards; Casteism: Impact on Kerala Society;
- Application of Narayana Guru's Philosophy in Politics and Economics;
- Application of Narayana Guru's Philosophy in the Realm of Education.

The excitement about a conference on Narayana Guru, in particular one organized by the country's premier research institution, is to be seen as a reflection of increasing interest in the Guru's work over the last decade. This interest covers an entire spectrum, including the Bahujan Samajwadi Party's using him as a mascot, along with other 'dalit' icons like Periyar and Ambedkar, to his increased presence in popular culture and academic discourses.

A national conference on Narayana Guru implied several things: that the conference wanted to draw out a pan-Indian perspective on Narayana Guru, placing his life and work alongside that of other national figures; that it was seeking to bring to the discussion of the Guru's life and work a more public, more varied grammar capable of accommodating the language of social transformation and egalitarianism, in addition to the traditional language of philosophical and spiritual transformation. Lastly, the conference suggested that the need of the times was to focus on the universal aspects in Narayana Guru's work, and to explore the possibility of replicating the energies he had drawn from to inspire thousands of people to work at changing their lives and the life of the society they lived in.

The conference's plenary session set an energetic, open and critical tone that made participants sit up and take note and to think, as both the formal and informal discussions over the following three days showed.

In his welcome address, Dr. Peter Ronald DeSouza, Director of the IAS, said that this conference was of key interest in the current political scenario, and added that the social sciences are interested in seeing where to locate the life and work of Narayana Guru in the larger debate, to see how his vision and work can be of service in the building of a modern, egalitarian society. Dr DeSouza also pointed out that the themes of the conference were significant since they are important at this crucial juncture in the making of the republic.

Introducing the conference, Dr. Mohan Gopal, member of the governing body of IAS and a key force in actualizing this conference, spoke about the significance of the philosophy of Narayana Guru to India, of its enormous generational responsibility in removing social injustice, poverty and suffering. He also said that the internal logic of Narayana Guru's philosophical thought was so great that it had changed the world around him, and what needed to be done was to turn inwards and at the same time look for the cause of the transformation.

In the keynote address, Guru Muni Narayana Prasad introduced the philosophy and work of Narayana Guru, through



an extended historical, biographical and philosophical contextualizing of the Guru's life, vision and work. He located Narayana Guru in the tradition of the rishis, as a seer, and said that it is important to remember that he had polished and re-presented this traditional wisdom. He also pointed out that Narayana Guru is quite often identified as a social reformer or the guru of a particular community, because enough attention is not given to his role as a seer, whose vision is inclusive and open, and that for the purpose of the conference we ought to try and find the timeless aspects of the Guru's wisdom and work. A detailed life-sketch and an introduction to the themes of the conference followed.

Theme One: The Philosophy of Narayana Guru

Swami Thanmaya, the session's opening speaker, in his "Methodological Innovations of Narayana Guru in Metaphysical Inquiry" looked at distinctive characteristics of Narayana Guru's dialectical/yogic methodology of metaphysical inquiry, unique in that both initial skepticism and later belief are equally represented,

and pointed out that it is significant that the Guru uses *arivu* or knowledge, instead of *brahman* for the unifying principle of truth.

Dr. Omana, in her paper “Epistemology of Sree Narayana Guru” pointed out that Narayana Guru’s epistemology is all-comprehensive and unitive and that the methods used by him combined traditional interiorised perception with scientific methods of experiment and analysis. She said that the Guru’s vision is a source of answers for the challenging problems of consciousness posed by modern inquiry.

In his paper “Gnosis and Ethics: Narayana Guru’s Critique of the Absolute Otherness” Satheese Chandra Bose made the important point that the idea of nonduality is the basis of Narayana Guru’s ethical philosophy as well, and that the correlation between epistemology and ethics is the most important trait of Guru’s philosophy. It is this correlation that bridges the gap between Guru’s spiritual and metaphysical thought and his considerations about the worldly life of humans.

Vinaya Chaitanya’s paper “Ethical and Aesthetic Values in the Works of Narayana Guru” reminded the audience of the significance of retaining the guru aspect of Narayana Guru. He said that the Guru had come down from his solitary life in the mountains to live among fellow-beings and assume the role of an educator and that this role was valuable in the present context of conflicts.

Nancy Yielding’s paper “The Passion and Compassion of Narayana Guru” stressed that Narayana Guru was passionate about many things, including kindness to all life, unlimited social equality, the right of all to their spiritual birthright and that what makes him a valuable example is that he manifested passion always as compassion, which included oppressor as well as oppressed because he saw all as his own dear Self.

The most interesting question raised in this section, by Father George Thadathil, and repeated through the conference was whether the stress on finding the Self was turning attention away from the world and its problems.

Theme Two: Narayana Guru’s Concept of One Faith and His Attitude Towards Casteism: Impact on Kerala Society

Dr Sugeetha Ajith’s “The Concept of One Faith of Narayana Guru” opened this session. Sugeetha said that the ‘One Faith’ of Narayana Guru is shaped from his unitive vision, which places the happiness of humankind at its core, along with a sense that all humankind is one. The Guru’s ideal world is one without caste and religious intolerance, where everyone is striving to realize true happiness and more than anything else, it is a world where each one realizes that the other is as oneself.

Sathyabai Sivadas’ “Casteism as Redefined by the Guru: Biological and Philosophic Implications” made the important point that Narayana Guru stressed the fact that caste is totally against the spirit of *advaita*. Through both actions and words, he was constantly reminding people of this. Narayana Guru’s attitude to caste was one of total negation, and through his compositions he has constantly turned attention to the oneness of humanity.

Dr. Mohan Gopal, in his paper “Annihilation of Caste as the Key Determinant in the Struggle for Justice in India” began rather provocatively by saying that though Narayana Guru is one of a handful of people in the history of humankind who have come to a realization of the totality of truth, he has, ironically been reduced to an interpreter and continuator of Vedanta. Dr Gopal asserted that Narayana Guru’s idea of social justice is reflected in the constitutional idea of justice, and suggested that if we are going to be bound by religion, we should accept Narayana Guru’s universal religion.

This session evoked some energetic discussions focusing on the need to deal with the current rise of caste in Kerala among followers of Narayana Guru and at the same time the need to spread the Guru’s message of “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humankind” and bridge the gap between the sage’s vision of the totality of all existence and the lesser vision of historical social justice. It was felt that there was a great need for the education of sensibility, something that Narayana Guru himself had attended to.

Theme 3: The Application of Narayana Guru’s Philosophy in Politics and Economics

This section of presentations dealt with the possibility of bringing Narayana Guru’s philosophy into the realms of economics and politics, to arrive at some kind of normalizing principles that could adjust the gross imbalances currently affecting those fields of activity.

Dr. B. Vanitha, in her paper “The Role of Economics in Human Life” looked at the relationship between human greed and the upsetting of balances in economic activity as well as in the relationship to nature. She suggested that the solution for righting these imbalances was to live by the all-inclusive philosophy of Narayana Guru, so that each one thinks of the total welfare of humans and nature.

R. Subhash’s “Economics Revisualised in the Light of the Philosophy of Narayana Guru” asserted that man’s greed has led to a skewing in all spheres of life, including economics, and that it was important to remember economics is for man and not man for economics. A dialectical approach could recognize the economy as a system inclusive of the eco-system, the family, and the society without neglecting individual well being.

S. Radhakrishnan’s paper, “Contemporary Indian Politics” was a broad look at politics and its role in human and Indian life.

Dr. Prabhavathy Prasannakumar’s “Politics Derived from the Philosophy of Narayana Guru” spoke about the significance of a world government as the political aspect of the *advaita* highlighted by Narayana Guru. She detailed the explorations done by Nataraja Guru on this topic and also spoke about the life and work of Garry Davis, the first World Citizen. She reminded the audience of the need to live ‘All for One and One for All’, in keeping with the Vedantic notion that all divisions are the creation of *avidya*.

Discussions for this session revolved around the understanding that a critical assessment of current discourse about economic and political conditions around the globe should precede the attempt to infuse Narayana Guru's philosophy into politics and economics, as anything less stood the risk of reducing the Guru's vision of a single humanity and a shared world to a fanciful level.

Theme 4: The Application of Narayana Guru's Philosophy in Education

Swami Rhitambarananda's "The Guru as an Educational Expert" opened this section. This paper was a solid introduction to the role that Narayana Guru played in educating those who came to him.



It examined the various kinds of educating that the Guru undertook: he not only set up schools, but also educated people out of ignorant and useless practices and into adopting holistic ways of living that would better the lot of individuals though right living as well as bring them economic, health and social benefits.

Swami Ramateertha's "The Goal of Education: Creating a Loyal Citizen or a Real Human Being" attempted to connect the philosophy of Narayana Guru to the

goals outlined in the title. The categories mentioned in the title—that of the 'loyal' citizen and of the 'real' human are themselves problematic in current discourses and the paper proved to be rather unfocussed.

Dr Peter Oppenheimer's paper "Education, Root and Fruit; Educational Psychology in the Light of Sri Narayana Guru" was read out next. The essay advanced the idea that at the root of the current global crisis is a failure of the educational system, which rests on a vision of humans as separate individuals, competing for limited resources. He said the *Atmopadesa Satakam* had a number of practical pointers in this context, and showed how by adopting the educational psychology implicit in the teachings of Narayana Guru, it is possible to refashion the education system.

Swami Vyasa Prasad's paper "Educational Perspectives: Inspirations From the Vision of Narayana Guru" looked at how the Guru emphasizes the need for compassion and of love for fellow beings, and reminded the audience that the understanding of self is the basis of transformation and that such an understanding ought to be the goal of education.

The last paper of the conference was Dr. Sabu's "Cultural Degradation Caused by Modern Educational Trends: An Overview and Remedial Measures." Dr. Sabu pointed out that the destiny of a nation is determined by the cultural and value-based life of its members, that current educational trends in India are biased towards the material side of life, leading to cultural degradation among the youth. Through examples, he showed how Narayana Guru, in word and deed, demonstrated that a balanced development of the human being is possible.

The two-and-a-half day long conference ended with the feeling that this was a good beginning, one that had started off a dialogue between those who had been studying and living by the philosophy of the Guru and those who wished to know more about and apply this philosophy to the work of creating an egalitarian society through academic and social engagement. It was also felt that Narayana Guru's vision of One World was more relevant today than ever, and that there was an urgent need for open discussion, intensive study, and accessible knowledge about the Guru's life and work.

The conference, it appeared to this writer, could also be an occasion for some soul-searching and reflection for all: for academics, activists and lay persons familiar only with the popular depiction of Narayana Guru as a social reformer, this could be an occasion to engage with the philosophy, the inward effort that had been an integral part of the total work that he had inspired, which led to sweeping social change and reform. For those engaged in understanding and teaching the philosophy and the inner discipline of integrating self and world as one, this could be an occasion to take stock of pressing current needs and to evaluate whether the methodology and language of teaching needs revision and renewal in the light of wider, heterogeneous interest in the Guru's vision, work and life.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF SRI NARAYANA GURU

BY PETER OPPENHEIMER, ED.D

Part One: Diagnosis

What do we mean by educational psychology? Just as human psychology purports to diagnose the health of an individual person and, if found lacking, prescribes therapeutic measures, so educational psychology must diagnose whether an educational system is healthy, and if not, then prescribe helpful measures to address those deficiencies.

As humanity enters the 21st century, we are facing a global crisis of biblical proportions. War, genocide, environmental degradation, climate collapse, poverty, corruption, despotism, exploitation, alienation, disenfranchisement and various kinds of structural and interpersonal abuse are threatening not only the health, well being, and progress of human society, but the very existence of the entire intricate web of life on earth. It is not too big a leap to proclaim that at the root of this global crisis is a failure of the current educational system. As a life-long educator and holder of a doctorate in education, I have come to the conclusion that the nature and scope of the world crisis is a mirror reflection of a disease at the very root of what passes for education in the so-called modern sophisticated world.

It is ironic that sophistication itself is held up as one of the goals and end products of the current approach to education around the globe. Few stop to ponder the fact that the very definition of to sophisticate is “to render artificial, to mislead or corrupt, to adulterate, to falsify by deceptive alterations.” By definition, one who is sophisticated is “deprived of natural simplicity, pretentiously wise, superficial, artificial, and corrupted.” Is it any wonder that a world that holds sophistication as a positive ideal would have lost its bearings, harmony and moral compass?

Whether made explicit or remaining implicit, at the root of any educational model has to be existential notions of reality: who we are; what is the reality of this world; what gives life meaning, purpose, direction and fulfillment; what is the nature of the person to be educated; and in what ways will that person, society and the earth be benefited by that education. These are the philosophical and metaphysical foundations of education, which quite frankly at present are rotten to the core.

At the very outset a strong distinction is to be drawn between education and schooling, similar to the distinctions that are too often overlooked between

spirituality and religion, sport and athletics, wealth and money. Sport is at once purposive and playful; athletics need not, but all too often, becomes a grimly serious source of aggression, malice and self-recrimination. True wealth includes such things as good health, rich soil, clean air, pure and plentiful water, companionable friends, an inspiring natural environment, etc. Money, when treated as an end in itself tends to actually destroy these sources of true wealth. Spirituality is an acknowledgement and celebration of that mysterious life force that courses as sap and blood through plants and animals, including humans, and which we experience as animation and illumination. The spirit is thus, in truth, the most universal, all-inclusive unitive factor in all beings. And yet, religions have come to be exclusive and divisive, sharply segregating believers from non-believers. Spirit is also the most fluid and spontaneous element in life, whereas in religions one often sees rigidity and insistent codes of acceptable behavior, many of which when viewed from outside appear rather arbitrary.

Education should have more to do with such things as wealth, sport and spirit, than money, competition and social codes of behavior, as is more the norm in the prevailing form of schooling. Education, in its deepest sense, is about how the spirit comes to know, direct, express and fulfill itself. Any educational psychology worth the name must ask not only about what we learn, but who we are, how we learn, and what is worth learning and why.

Before the current capitalistic global economy could be spread throughout the world, the factory model of education (which serves as its handmaiden) had to be globalized. The first thing industrial society required was a mechanization of the human being to serve on mind-numbing assembly lines or perform cookie cutter jobs within a for-profit business. Secondly, capitalistic societies in which meaning and success in life are attributed inexorably to financial status, require consumers with ever-expanding appetites.

The modern system of schooling as practiced in virtually every modern mercantile society is a perfect match for this system. Children are generally made to feel like cogs in a machine or rather as raw materials on an assembly line conveyor belt being assembled into cogs. The most important qualities to be imparted into these cogs, or kids, are obedience to authority, deference to a virtual tyranny of expertise, and rote memorization of facts and tasks. The underlying message seems to be, "We know what is best for you. Now sit quiet and take your medicine." As outlandish as this sounds, I know many people for whom it will ring all too true of their own journey through school.

I started visiting Kerala State in the south of India in 1971, before it became a capitalistic consumer culture. Back then people had not yet come to associate the accumulation of money as the highest purpose in life, and when they thought of their children's education, there were other values they wanted to see imparted and different aspects of their children's characters to be cultivated and exercised.

Now, when I listen to parents in Kerala talk about their child's education, all they seem to care about is how financially lucrative a job is that the children will qualify for when they come out the other end of this long twelve to fifteen year process. How much time of a child's life, and for how many years, is to be devoted to this one and only much-overrated pursuit? Early on children are branded as being one of the few winners or many losers in this long drawn campaign for the top paying jobs. When being average is considered "simply not good enough," we are condemning at least half of our children to a sense of disappointment and failure.

It wouldn't be so bad if children looked at such a pursuit as one of many possible games to play and accepted that it may not be their cup of tea. But no, this capitalist-serving educational model is pretty much the only game in town. If you're a loser in this game, you're pretty much a loser in life. Even marriage prospects here in India



have become intimately tied to one's marks on standardized tests, which if truth be told, primarily measure one's obedience, acquiescence and memorization skills.

For far too long educators have blindly accepted these unspoken assumptions about who we are and the nature and purpose of human life. It is high time to

question these assumptions and create a framework for learning that acknowledges and celebrates deeper strata of reality and a more promising vision of value and fulfillment.

In my two decades of schooling, leading ultimately to being conferred with a doctoral degree in education, and my nearly four decades of practice and observation in the field of education, I have found no better exemplar of a rock solid foundation and lofty aspiration for an entirely retooled approach to education than the South Indian mystic and visionary social reformer, Sri Narayana Guru. And nowhere is his vision of learning, from the fundamentals of basic education to the promising peaks of higher learning, more eloquently articulated than in his *Atmopadesa Satakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction).

The discerning seeker can detect a radical note struck in the title of this work itself. For unlike schooling as currently practiced around the globe, the subject matter and object matter of study are one and the same. Self-instruction is here to be understood as instruction which both illuminates the nature, dynamics and

fulfillment of the self as its object matter, while the process itself is encouraged to go on within the subjective nature of that same self.

Self-instruction implies a sort of “Do it Yourself” approach to learning whereby, although helpful hints may be given by outside instructors, the essential work of questioning, search and realization must of necessity happen within the student. At the same time, the prize to be gained at the end of one’s search is also recognized and glorified as Self-knowledge. As we will soon see upon taking up this challenge, self-inquiry in both the senses mentioned is by no means some solipsistic, socially irrelevant process of “navel gazing,” but as the self under question proves to be, in its deepest sense, the one and only all-inclusive Self of all, its realization and betterment at once implies the illumination, harmonization and uplift of society and the world at large as well.

In his *Atmopadesa Satakam*, as in all of his works, Narayana Guru presents an entirely different narrative of the nature and evolution of the self than the prevailing one. In the prevailing paradigm, each of us is an ultimately separate individual, competing for limited resources in a social darwinistic, dog-eat-dog world, which is alien, if not hostile, to our fundamental aspirations; a world in which if we are to learn how best to live, we must acquiesce to the whims and dictates of others who know better what is good for us.

Before going into the manner in which Narayana Guru both artfully and scientifically establishes the oneness in the absolute Self of all individual selves, I want to suggest how such a realization would dramatically and radically change our approach to education. Once such an ultimate unity at the deepest level of selfhood is established, the self-destructive nature of competition, which is the primary model that school both presents and encourages in human relations, becomes apparent. Competition as currently and almost universally practiced in schools sets up a mentality of “your loss can be my gain” approach to human relations. This attitude initially fostered through competitive grading of marks in school is, in the end, crucial to justify the exploitation of people as “markets” and “labor,” and the “everyone for himself” mentality of most corporate culture.

Let me share a story. A friend of mine wanted to do some good service to the “needy,” and so went to Arizona to teach on a “Red Indian” (more properly known as Native American) reservation where all government services, including the public schools, were substandard. For one year he taught in a classroom entirely made up of children of the Navajo Indian tribe.

When he returned to California I asked him what it had been like. One of the first things he remarked upon was how difficult it had been to keep the Navajo kids from “cheating” on exams. You see, for them, if their friend sitting next to them in the classroom during a test was struggling to come up with an answer to a test question and they themselves knew the answer, then it was most natural for them to share the right answer with the other. The white teachers were having the hardest

time convincing the kids that this was a kind of “cheating,” and that they would in fact be better off to let their friend fail. They just could not grasp the importance of competition over and above cooperation as the primary basis of human interaction. Which is the healthier approach to education and human relationship?

Competition need not be (and indeed once the oneness of all in the Self is established cannot be) the primary backdrop of education. For hundreds of years, without resorting to competitive modes, indigenous societies have taught farming, hunting, foraging, cooking, construction, and so on, a vast curriculum to be sure. Surely similar methods can be adopted for such subjects as math, writing and current events. Evaluating the breadth, depth and worth of one’s learning through competitions on standardized tests is not only a lazy way to accomplish such evaluation, it is actually often misleading and unnecessarily detrimental to the well being of its participants, a well being which should certainly be one of the primary concerns of any educative process.

In a profound analysis of the critical importance of reassessing the current approach to education, Joseph Natoli wrote the following:

The nature of critical thinking is not to pursue a logic which is impeccable and unimpeachable within the regime of being and knowing that has credentialed it. Rather critical thinking observes the dimensions of the reality frame we have constructed for ourselves, the box of being we are in, and seeks other and different framings within which other logics emerge. Other and different problems emerge, but the goal of critical thinking is to enable comparative weighing of consequences, so that less threatening problems emerge and less disastrous solutions are offered. There’s neither need nor time in the present to be less than direct about the lethal logic and politics of our regime of globalized techno-capitalism. It shapes what we perceive as problems as well as what we don’t.

We need to just look back and see what was meant by education before we went inside this big box of market values and collapsed our sense of a “good education” to the needs of our market regime.

“Our Market Regime and Public Education,” Truthout.org, 2/7/2011

With this backdrop in mind, let us examine some of the salient features of the Guru’s alternative narrative that spells out who we are (epistemology), how we learn (methodology), how best we can relate with and contribute to others (sociology) and what constitutes our ultimate fulfillment (axiology).

(This article to be continued in the next issue.)



THE NINTH LABOR OF HERCULES

BY SCOTT TEITSWORTH

The Girdle of Hippolyte

Like a number of Herakles' Labors, the ninth exists in several versions, which we will have to sort out. The King, Eurystheus, wanted to present the belt or girdle of the Amazon queen Hippolyte to his daughter, and sent Herakles to retrieve it. The belt was a gift from the God of War, Ares, and had magic powers. It held Hippolyte's sword and javelin and signified her high standing as a military leader.

The Amazons were an all-female tribe of warriors who hated men, so of course the task was impossible—like all the other Labors. There was no way for Herakles and his small band of supporters to defeat a whole nation of dedicated fighters. Plus, the belt projected a magical aura of protection around Hippolyte.

It would be easy to interpret this Labor as a cautionary tale about sexual relations and trust, but I'd like to go a little deeper than that. The crafters of the Greek myths had a high purpose, much beyond entertaining their patrons with a bedroom farce. They intended to intuitively convey spiritual truths.

Herakles succeeded in obtaining the belt not by force, but by love. He arrived in amity and was honest with the Queen about his needs. She responded in kind, and offered to give him the belt as a gift.

So love conquered all. But there is more to the story. In Greek myths the gods are ever intervening to confuse the situation. This is highly reminiscent of Nataraja Guru, who would interfere with Guru Nitya's arrangements whenever they promised to become permanent. In *Love and Blessings*, Nitya describes once such occasion, and sums up:

This wasn't the first time Guru had come into my life like a destroying Shiva to separate his disciple from the snare of karmic entanglements. Wherever I proved to be successful or was becoming admired, he had a knack for sabotaging the situation. Once I asked him why he was doing this, and he told me his name was Natarajan and he was only doing his duty, adding, "If Shiva doesn't demolish, Brahma won't get a chance to create again." I have to admit that whenever he intervened to get me to terminate a program it always led to another program of greater spiritual value.

In this case Hera, who is overseeing Herakles' development like a pesky guru, cultivated distrust and suspicion among the Queen's subjects by spreading false rumors that Herakles was planning to abduct Hippolyte. Alarmed, the citizens took up their weapons, mounted their horses, and swarmed down toward the docks. They had not met Herakles, and could only imagine what was taking place, so they were predisposed to react in the accustomed way. Societies always have that weakness, that lies are more palatable than truth if they meet habitual expectations.

Dr. Mees describes what happened this way:

Then Hera, the Mother-Goddess, representing the Power of Karma, who ever put difficulties in the way of him whose name signifies "renowned through Hera," went among the Amazons in the guise of one of them and spread the rumour that Herakles had come to carry off their Queen. The Power of Karma, forming an aspect of Maya, is clever at "disguises"... The Amazons demonstrated lack of patience and tolerance, and fickleness, for they immediately mounted their horses and attacked Herakles and his companions. (*Revelation in the Wilderness*, III, 194)

So Hera's interference introduces dramatic tension, if not divine guidance, into the tale. Otherwise, the Labor would be just too easy. In real life, it never is.

In the most likely rendering of the myth, then, Hippolyte freely gave the belt to Herakles before the conflict. Alternatively, when Herakles saw the Amazons riding down on him he imagined that Hippolyte herself had betrayed him, so he killed her and took the belt. In yet another version she was killed accidentally by her army. One way or another, Herakles secured the prized girdle and headed for home.

In a tragic turn typical of Greek myth, Hippolyte is killed after she removes her girdle. Possibly some spiritual death of the ego is implied, which would excuse Herakles as guru for administering the coup de grace. Otherwise, it would be utterly contrary to justice for the guru who coaxed her out of her defenses to then do her in, so the idea that Herakles is the assassin is not satisfactory. A crowd of angry people lured by false counsel—in other words, society—is the much more likely culprit. Social conditioning cannot abide freedom, and kills it whenever encountered, as history amply demonstrates.

Because of this, I prefer the version that the enraged citizens accidentally killed Hippolyte than that Herakles betrayed her and stole the belt. The latter version turns him into just another cad. But Herakles is a model of spiritual excellence. The Queen, also a highly evolved being, must have voluntarily surrendered her defensive shield to him, after which he completed his task by taking the belt back to the king, where its mixed blessing was conferred on his daughter Admete. Happily, that's Dr. Mees' take on it also, saying simply: "After Hippolyte had given her Girdle to Herakles, as she had promised, the Hero embarked for the return journey."

A couple of additional insights may be gleaned from this. Amazons are described as women who remove their right breast because it interferes with shooting arrows and launching javelins. Usually though, they were depicted in Greek art as having both breasts, though one was often covered. This suggests that the breast-removal is metaphorical. Breasts symbolize caring, nurturing, generosity, selflessness, and the like, so they naturally stand in opposition to warfare and bloodshed. Suppressing them—or half suppressing them—makes room for the hardheartedness of a warrior.



In concert with restraining our compassion, humans are raised to gird ourselves with a psychological magic belt or other protective garment, bristling with weapons, in order to guard our delicate inner being. As individuals we are defined to a large extent by the particular form of armor or weapon we habitually choose. Whenever we are approached in real or imagined hostility, we rise to the challenge and dig in our heels, ready to repulse the assailant.

Of course, what protects also binds; a fortress can be both a refuge and a prison. Hippolyte is spiritually mature enough to be ready to remove her binding defenses and turn them over to a guru such as Herakles. But for a younger person they do have value, so they are going to be passed on to the King's daughter. We need

a measure of defense during our formative years. Only when we have become “crowned and mitered” unto ourselves can we dare to stand unencumbered.

Because of the defenses symbolized by the belt, Herakles was wise enough to realize that an aggressive approach was doomed to fail. Instead he came in peace and supplication. The myth does not relate his cleverness at disarming Hippolyte, but he was a man, exactly what the Amazons hated most. He had to prove he was not what she expected.

This is the piece of the myth that would be most educational if it was spelled out for us, but it is not: we have to flesh it out for ourselves. We can catch a glimpse of what may have transpired from the venerable *Sacred Mythoi of Demigods and Heroes*:

In the vision and knowledge of Truth the Soul becomes free. When Truth is presented to the consciousness in such wise that it is readily perceptible, the mind willingly accepts it. Thus, Hippolyte—the lower mind—is willing to relinquish the symbol of her sovereignty and binding power—the Girdle—to Hercules, who, as the glory of the Soul, is a manifestation of the Divine Truth in the Image of which the Soul is said to be made. (38)

Dr. Mees agrees: Hippolyte “was much impressed by his beauty and character, and when she learned the object of his visit, she promised him her Girdle, a symbol of her sovereignty.” Our sovereignty is our “defended territory,” and spiritual awakening takes place when we give it up. The only territory we can legitimately claim as ours is that which accrues to us naturally, the Self or the Absolute in us. All else is superfluous, the ego’s turf, the clothing that binds or burns. Ironically, Herakles himself will eventually be killed by donning a poisoned cloak, which merits its own chapter at the end of these Labors. It is a warning that success can be even more encouraging to the spiritual ego than failure.

THE SUMMER OF LOVE: PICASSO'S GIFT TO THE PEOPLE OF CHICAGO

BY SUNITA PILLAY

It was the Summer of Love.
1967.

The music was groovy.

Youthful rebellion and idealism were bursting forth from the epicenter, San Francisco, vibrating outward to places like Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, Montreal, and cities across Europe. My father had recently arrived in Chicago from South India; he was a 33-year-old neurosurgery resident at Cook County Hospital. I wouldn't be born for another five years, but the fact that there was a time in our country's recent past dedicated simply to the idea of love is appealing to me in the 21st century. Looking back, it seems fitting that the Chicago Picasso was unveiled that summer.

In 1967, there was a feeling in the air that things were bad and getting worse. There was an ever-widening generation gap, a war that few supported, and an appalling lack of civil rights for African Americans. The Summer of Love was a giant collective pushback of peace and love, clad in flowers, LSD, strange dance moves, and long, flowing dresses. Regardless of what we associate with the word hippie, there is no denying that hippies felt a powerful sense of unity that summer.

It was a season rich with music and expression. The Monterey Pop Festival was held in California; it was the largest rock music festival ever produced up to that time. And in fact, the Beatles kicked off the summer of '67 with their first live worldwide televised broadcast of *All You Need is Love*. What better soundtrack could a Summer of Love ask for? They performed it on a television program called *Our World*, the first live global satellite program, which also happened to feature the genius of modern art, Pablo Picasso.

At the unveiling of the Chicago Picasso Sculpture on August 15, 1967, there were 50,000 ordinary Chicagoans waiting to see what had been for weeks kept under a giant cloth gown—ostensibly to dissuade naysayers such as one vocal alderman who, up to the moment of the sculpture's unveiling, proposed that the Picasso be “deported” and replaced with a statue of Chicago Cubs first baseman Ernie Banks. Also milling about the crowd with microphone and tape recorder

on hand was legendary historian, author, and broadcaster Studs Terkel, who was conducting interviews with “the man in the street.” I wish my dad could have met Studs. I think they would have gotten along.

And at the moment of its unveiling, the Mayor of Chicago, Richard J. Daley, declared, “We dedicate this celebrated work this morning with the belief that what is strange to us today will be familiar tomorrow.”

In the background, the Chicago Symphony played Beethoven and Bernstein, and the soon-to-be Poet Laureate of Illinois, Gwendolyn Brooks, read her poem “The Chicago Picasso.”

Does man love Art? Man visits Art, but squirms.

Art hurts. Art urges voyages—
and it is easier to stay at home,
the nice beer ready.

In commonrooms
we belch, or sniff, or scratch.
Are raw.

~

But we must cook ourselves and style ourselves for Art, who
is a requiring courtesan.

We squirm.

We do not hug the Mona Lisa.

We

may touch or tolerate
an astounding fountain, or a horse-and-rider.

At most, another Lion.

~

Observe the tall cold of a Flower
which is as innocent and as guilty,
as meaningful and as meaningless as any
other flower in the western field.

Pablo Picasso, however, was absent from the festivities. As was my dad, who was likely peering through a microscope somewhere a few miles away. He’s gone now, but I wish I had access to his thoughts from that time. I’m sure he did not have a free moment to ponder much beyond the human brain. But if he had had the time, I think he would have appreciated the Chicago Picasso very much. Contrary to my old man, Pablo Picasso never set foot in the United States during his lifetime; however, he did send a simple message from his home in the French Riviera for the occasion of the unveiling: My warmest friendship to Chicago.

But the following year was most certainly not about friendship.
It was 1968.

And the forces of division and darkness had retaken their hold; it was a time I'm sure the *I Ching* would have called Darkening of the Light.

The year opened with the Tet Offensive in January, escalating the Vietnam War. The Communist North Vietnamese forces, who had fallaciously agreed to a ceasefire on an important Vietnamese holiday, executed a multi-city attack that

took the South Vietnamese and American forces by surprise.

America's involvement in Vietnam was about to expand dramatically.

And by 1968 the black neighborhoods of Chicago were bursting at the seams. The majority of black people were ensconced in an area on the city's south side called Bronzeville, where Gwendolyn Brooks herself had grown up. However, in order to gain more economic opportunities and housing, black people ventured to move out of overcrowded areas and into nearby white neighborhoods. This seeming



encroachment was not welcome news for many white residents, who, ever since The Great Migration, had pushed hard against integration, often with the complicity of the city's police.

Then on April 5, 1968, one day after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in Memphis, chaos erupted in cities across America, with some of the worst violence happening on the west side of Chicago. The riots prompted President Lyndon B. Johnson to send in 5,000 National Guard troops to help the city's outnumbered police force. Mayor Daley issued a curfew and "shoot to kill" orders for any person caught with a Molotov cocktail, and "shoot to maim" orders for any person caught looting.

Later that year, in August, just months after the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles, Chicago was host to the Democratic National Convention. The mood in the city in 1968 reflected America's deep anxiety. Inside the convention hall, there were several skirmishes. Meanwhile, outside the hall

swarmed thousands of young Vietnam War protestors who clashed violently with (twice as many) police and national guardsmen armed with tear gas and billy-clubs.

Daley had once again stoked the flames of violence by not allowing protestors to rally anywhere near the convention hall—an edict they defied—thus polarizing the city further.

Bloodshed and pandemonium are apt words to describe the Chicago of 1968.

But it was 1967, when the city's top was still tenuously on, that the Mayor unveiled the Chicago Picasso. He had made a brilliant and unifying decision for all people of Chicago by listening to his trusted advisor, the architect William Hartmann, and green-lighting the Picasso project. Hartmann, along with other Civic Center architects, approached Pablo Picasso with a request to design the sculpture. The artist was well into his eighties but agreed to the project; it had been a long-cherished dream of his to design a monumental sculpture such as this.

A Time magazine article from August 1967 recounts how Hartmann had “persuaded the 85-year-old artist to design the sculpture (gratis) for Chicago.” It's true that Hartmann had gotten Picasso to agree to the sculpture, but Time's account does not capture a piece of critical information, which is that Picasso refused the \$100,000 check for his work. After he had completed the maquette (preliminary model) of the sculpture, the artist did not sign the Formal Acknowledgment and Receipt. Picasso instead examined the check and placed it back in Hartmann's pocket. Hartmann may have persuaded him to design the sculpture, but he certainly wasn't the one to convince him to do it for free, as Time implies.

Instead of accepting the payment, Picasso had the following “Deed of Gift” drawn up on August 21, 1966:

“The monumental sculpture portrayed by the maquette pictured above has been expressly created by me, Pablo Picasso, for installation on the plaza of the Civic Center in the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, United States of America. This sculpture was undertaken by me for the Public Building Commission of Chicago at the request of William E. Hartmann, acting on behalf of the Chicago Civic Center architects. I hereby give this work and the right to reproduce it to the Public Building Commission, and I give the maquette to the Art Institute of Chicago, desiring that these gifts shall, through them, belong to the people of Chicago.”

The sculpture was Pablo Picasso's gift to the people of Chicago.

I like to imagine that the artist had premonitions of dark times to come and thought Chicago, more than anything else, needed a strong dose of love. It did. Especially considering the chaos of the following year.

Picasso's beneficence makes me wonder about the Summer of Love's energetic vibration. It offered a brief window, like a force field—before the Vietnam War escalated, before the 1968 Democratic National Convention, and before the

Chicago riots—for Chicago to capture a bit of that love energy by receiving into its own center the Chicago Picasso, which, to me, is a kind of love creature.

It bothers me a little that the Time article implies that Hartmann persuaded Picasso to design the sculpture free of charge. It is as if the journalist covering the story for Time was trying to make the existence of this “provocative piece of public sculpture” (by an avowed Communist) palatable to the American public. Anti-Communism had been woven into the fabric of the status quo. For a pro-establishment mayor such as Richard J. Daley to approve a Communist artist’s design



of an abstract and bizarre sculpture that, at the time, was considered risky and unprecedented, was certainly a coup. In fact, the Chicago Picasso was the first piece of abstract sculpture to be placed in any city center in America. It has since become the defining piece of public art in this city, but in 1967 Chicagoans had no idea what to make of it. Thankfully Daley had been smart enough to know that he did not know about art, so he trusted William Hartmann implicitly in the matter.

And that’s how we got the Picasso.

But that’s not how I got the Picasso.

A friend took me there one night last November, and I gazed upon the 50-foot-tall steel sculpture as if for the first time. In fact, it was the first time I

had actually seen it. I have passed it countless times, sure, but never had I given it the appreciation it deserves.

Henry David Thoreau said that “books should be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.” And of course books are works of art, many of them, and thus shouldn’t his philosophy apply to all types of art? It’s what I think Gwendolyn Brooks is saying in her poem; we don’t need to feel any particular way about art, but simply allow ourselves to be in the presence of it—and that in itself is transformative.

I came back to the Picasso again last month, during the day this time. It was a weekday when all the buildings around Daley Plaza were abuzz with business transactions and occupied people. I thought it would be fun to not be occupied and instead just listen to my iPod from inside the sculpture.

So that’s what I did.

I wasn’t thinking about anything in particular; I had no agenda aside from absorbing the energy of the piece and listening to my music. Although the seed of

this article was planted back in November, the idea of writing it had not yet taken root. It was a wonderful feeling to be inside the love creature. I felt like one of the children who would pop up occasionally to climb and slide on it; they were my only companions, three and four-year-olds, specifically.

I contemplated my life, the world. I saw an old black man sitting on the concrete platform that holds the sculpture. He had a gray beard and looked utterly downtrodden. There were a few policemen around him, and one of them was issuing some kind of citation to the broken man. I didn't hear what they were talking about, but I stood around to ensure no harassment was taking place. I wanted to be the man's witness and tell the police, "Picasso is for the people!" But nothing happened, and I just stood there.

I walked around the sculpture because I remembered something my friend had told me that night back in November, which was that a sculpture should be art from all angles. So I took it in from the back and discovered something amazing. When I examined the love creature from the back, it occurred to me that I was looking at its thoracic cavity. Comparing images of the two, it is plain to see that the creature, whatever it is, protrudes forth from its own heart center! Picasso bestowed his very own heart upon Chicago, and this discovery thrills me to no end.



And when I think about 1967, I wonder how much has actually changed. Chicago is still a segregated city. America is fighting two insanely expensive wars. In Afghanistan right now, soldiers and civilians are getting their limbs and genitals blown off by IEDs. There are at once billionaires and starving people on the planet. Deforestation in the Amazon rainforest – the lungs of our earth – has risen sharply this year. And, and, and...it all seems so hopeless.

It makes me wonder if we can have another Summer of Love—one that isn't beaten back by the forces of darkness...one that lasts.

But I can't change anyone but me; and maybe, just maybe, that's enough.

At least there's still good music.

I stepped off the sculpture and gave it a last long look before I headed into the bowels of the subway. A police officer was coming up the stairs. I smiled and said, "Have a nice day."

I wished I had a flower.



ONE HUNDRED VERSES OF SELF REALIZATION

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

STEP EIGHTEEN

When you affirm your 'I' consciousness, what do you identify with?

I'm sometimes obliged to take a narrow circumscription of my own identity when monitoring my agency of doing an act or responding to an obligatory responsibility. In such a relativistic social situation my identity tends to coincide with my social ego. If any reference is made to the central focus of my philosophical point of orientation, it is like envisaging a bright spot of an appreciation of the personal self engulfed within the unbalanced evanescence of the only Self that is. This is at once personal as well as impersonal.

Does your consciousness and deliberate identification of your ego with the Self amount to an epistemological violation of attributing the Self to non-Self?

No, it does not.

Why?

Because the relative is relative only to the Absolute and the Absolute is Absolute with reference to the relative. Unitive oneness of the Absolute is held intact with the indivisibility of its homogeneity, as when the Isavasya Upanishad declares the divinity of "This" which is holistically immersed in the totality of all. The Upanishads uncompromisingly declare *isa avansyama idam sarvasna*. The validity of this thisness is further enhanced by declaring *yat jagalyam jagat*. Such being the epistemological position, "my" relative "me" is unhesitatingly absolved, as I am owning my deeds, and knowledge stands out with the conviction of my absolute certitude. Owning absolute certitude cannot be categorized as ignorance. Ignorance (spiritual darkness) cannot be highlighted with certitude.

Why is it that many people think they have little or no knowledge of the Self?

Because philosophers make so much fuss about the Self and they bemoan their belief that most people are ignorant about the Self. All are obsessed with their ego, and instead of having Self knowledge they have only darkness within. It is a tragedy caused by the sophistication of philosophers.

What should be done to eradicate this misconception?

Even when a child states that she is hungry or that he has a stomach ache, the child is speaking the truth. The Self is the source of all knowledge and therefore even a little child's sense of hunger or muscular pain should not be simply brushed aside. Egoistic fantasies sometimes come to most people either as their fanciful imagination or as curiosity born of lust, greed, or fear due to preconditioning or the experiencing of conditioned reflexes. Then there are true cases of ignorance manifesting in which the pure Self-born knowledge becomes overshadowed with ignorance.

Is there any reason for persistent ideas and obsessive or inhibitive thoughts to be called ignorance?

Yes. The common sense of man is a normal capacity in a healthy mind. If that is disregarded and people allow themselves to go for far-fetched theories and to make conjectures and surmises, then they are to be dismissed as untrue.

Is there any compulsion to accept axiomatic truth?

In an axiomatic conclusion no other alternative is possible. Even in scientific experimentation when relevant causes are postulated and observed, the relevance of logical possibility is clearly seen. It is valid knowledge and cannot be dismissed. Narayana Guru suggests that all exaggerations are associated with the light of the Self and should be examined on a case by case basis. People should be encouraged to hold on to their firm convictions as having practical bearing on the self-revealing quality of the inner core of their consciousness. Everybody is aware of the presence of their self. It is a matter of course.

What is certitude?

Many things in life do not have to look for an authority. On hearing truth we know that it is evident to our self. Such incidences are called self-evident truths. The truth comes from the luminosity of the Self.

STEP NINETEEN

Which limb of your body is the most superior?

I suppose that the head is superior because it controls and guides all parts.

Don't you think that's a partial preference? At the other extreme are your legs. If you cannot move how can your brain plan the vigorous life of a free, enterprising human?

That's true. To reach everything vertically, horizontally and diagonally we need our hands. What is important is the function of each organ in conjunction with the whole body.

Do you think that only the structure of the body is important?

No. An organism is mainly meant to function.

What are the chief functions for which the body is well structured?

The body is ingeniously structured for the intake of food and the expulsion of waste. All the organs of perception are assigned vital roles, such as hearing, touching, seeing, relishing food and drink and discriminating what is good through the faculties of smell and taste. An organ of perception can perceive only through itself. So the organs of perception are superior.

That is also a partial view. Consider, the organ of self-expression that comes through the faculty of articulation. Articulation is possible through the breath that has to manifest with the windpipe, parts of the mouth and the internal structure of the mouth and nose. Hands and legs and fingers and toes take a long time to assume their vital roles. Although the excretory faculty functions from the very birth of a child, its generative organs have to wait for maturation to be able to reproduce offspring. So to understand the full functioning of all organs we have to watch and study the steady and gradual growth of a child, to see the evolution of functions and faculties both of perception and of action.

What is all this functional sufficiency for?

Life is purpose. Some purposes can be achieved immediately, some over a span of time.

Please give examples.

If you are thirsty, you can quench your thirst by drinking a glass of water and if you are hungry, you can appease the hunger by eating some food.

Is there any ultimate purpose in life?

That depends on the goal orientation of each person.

What could some such purposes be?

For the farmer, it is growing and making available new produce and raw material for consumer processing. For those who are engaged in educational activities, they make themselves responsible educators for people, from infants to the continuing education of senior citizens. In all countries, the educational systems are run by both government and private institutions. The entire process is categorized and

facilitated to create an appropriate syllabus for the many different groups of people within a society. The ultimate purpose is to draw out of each growing individual the full development of their latent potentials.

Public health is as important as education. There are varieties of health care that can range from hairdressing and manicuring the fingernails to the seriousness of transplanting internal organs and heart or brain surgery. Whether a person is a chief physician or surgeon, the service in which they are engaged is both serious and sacred, as are the roles played by the nursing staff, paramedics, and those engaged to maintain the sanitation and hygiene of the clinics.

To facilitate and maintain appropriate surroundings of educational institutions and hospitals, there has to be engineering staff of all kinds to give their attention to every detail. This includes the structure of buildings as well as making provisions for sanitation, ventilation, electricity and water supply.

As water is the most important element of both private homes and public institutions, thousands of people are engaged full time in the creation of dams and reservoirs and the pipeline connections to transport water to its various destinations.

People who are engaged in the planning and construction of cities have to categorize a vast variety of offices and services to make public and civic life safe and cooperative. Many schemes are continually being developed and maintained.

Like the process of generating and supplying electricity and other needs to villages and cities, each human body is so devised that there are feeding supply and waste disposal systems.

What is the ultimate goal or purpose of human beings from a spiritual point of view?

Liberation.

Liberation from what?

Liberation from all kinds of ignorance that can weigh down a person, causing them to exist in uncomfortable situations and to endure obligatory bondage.

How can we achieve liberation from these states?

This paper is intended to help by providing people with useful hints so as to know themselves both individually and collectively, and to keep each other from being bound socially, morally or spiritually.

WITHOUT WORDS

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

Palm silhouettes rise above the dense, tropical thicket
casting shadows as the sun falls behind the ridge.
In dusky evening egrets silently follow the river
into deeper jungle, flying as one white being, brilliant.
Hovering over rocky torrents, skimming eddies,
creamy as if lit from within,
they return each night, making no sound
but the faint rush of wings.

GURUKULA NEWS

Garry Davis, World Citizen, has released a new publication, *Garry Davis Goes to Court*. Available both as a printed book and as a PDF, this document details Garry's ongoing petitions to the Supreme Court of the United States, Washington, D.C., the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, both in the Hague, Netherlands. These petitions are focused on the subjects of world citizenship, world law, nuclear war, nationalism, human rights, and humanity's legal right to survive the 21st century.

This publication can be obtained from the World Government House, P.O. box 9390, South Burlington, VT, 05307, USA, or on the web at www.worldgovernmenthouse.com. You can email Garry at worldlaw@globalnetisp.net

The Annual Convention of the Narayana Gurukula will be held from December 23rd—29th, 2011, in Varkala, Kerala. Dr. K.S.Radhadrishnan (Chairman of the Kerala Public Service Commission) will inaugurate the Convention. There will be six seminars on the general theme of “Mind-Science in the East and West and the Contributions of Narayana Guru, Nataraja Guru and Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati.”

Guru Muni Narayana Prasad is curtailing travels and remaining at the Varkala Gurukula due to health issues.



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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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