

GURUKULAM



AUTUMN 2012

GURUKULAM

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EDITORIAL

It's wonderful how hidden writings can be lost and then found! Our great example for this issue is the birthday address that John Spiers wrote over fifty years ago, "Nataraja the Absolutist." This had been in quiet retirement when Swami Vyasa Prasad unearthed it at the Ooty Gurukula and sent it on. John Spiers' evocation of how Nataraja Guru's absolutist philosophy manifested in his everyday life is still vivid and inspiring.

One of the goals of *Gurukulam* has been to record and publish articles on people and events in the Gurukula so that there will be a kind of historical record. Like the more formal writings, these occurrences and words still convey their teachings to us. They remind us of our circle of connection and provide a base for our own searches. We may not have known all of the Gurus in person, or know all of the students and participants now at Gurukula functions, but we are part of a living net of inquiry and compassion. This magazine is one concrete expression of that.

Art exhibits, books, musical performances, online classes and exchanges—all of these are other ways our interconnectedness manifests. As are the remembrances in the earlier *Gurukulams* published from Bainbridge: conversations with Guru Nitya during walks along Ooty roads; stories told to Nancy Yeilding about Narayana Guru's life; and various summaries of class exchanges, stories of seminars and dictations. And these in turn are the descendents of the articles in *Values*, the magazine John Spiers started in 1955 as a means to prompt Nataraja Guru to write something every month.

Again we invite all of you to share your experiences and reflections. What John Spiers so cogently expresses about Nataraja Guru is not a frozen philosophy but an understanding, an illumination, that continues to spring each moment from every one of us. It is ageless and constant. And its configuration is new at every moment.



ATMOPADESA SATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

VERSE 51

*arivil irunnorahantayadyamuntay-
varumitinotoridanta vamayayum
varumivarantulapannal pole maya-
maramakhilam marayeppatarnnitunnu.*

Having existed in knowledge, an I-ness, in the beginning, emerges;
coming as a counterpart to this is a this-ness;
like two vines, these spread over the tree of *maya*,
completely concealing it.

Our most distinct and undeniable experience is that of an 'I' consciousness. The experiencing of "I am" is universal. When it comes, it is placed between two other entities: the world "out there" and the inestimable stretch of consciousness of which the 'I' is only a part. We are not very clear about the delimitation that is made of our 'I' consciousness, yet when we say "I am" we know it is not the whole of consciousness.

Thus, on one side is the physical world and on the other is consciousness. The individuality of our own self that we feel as our personality seems to be a confection of both the world and consciousness. This body can be touched; it is physical, like any other body. To that extent we belong to the world. Yet the nonphysical consciousness of "I," "mine," "not mine," and so on is also part of us. How much of us is physical and how much is mental or spiritual? We cannot say, but we do know that both aspects are integral parts of us.

It is evident that before we started recognizing ourselves as conscious entities, we must have been part of something very similar to the stuff of our consciousness. Narayana Guru presents this idea here as a basic substance out of which an 'I' consciousness manifests. Then the individuated 'I' simultaneously presents itself and what is other than the 'I'—the 'I' and the 'this'—to itself.

Next the Guru brings in the imagery, which he already introduced in verse 9, of a tree entirely covered with two vines, one called 'I' and the other called 'this'.

This is one of the most important images of *Atmopadesa Satakam*, one for us to return to again and again in our contemplation. Many times we have pondered how that person sitting under the tree can remain unaffected by all the intrigues of the vines growing all around him. But this time there is no person under the tree; he has become one of the vines itself, the 'I' vine, although the tree remains the same.

What is your main search? It is "Who am I?" or "What is this?" If you were to go to Ramana Maharshi, he would direct you to find out "Who am I?" If you went to Narayana Guru, he would ask you to find out "What is this?" Both 'I' as well as 'this' belong to one total reality. If you want to discover truth, you have to find out both. So if you are experiencing all this, what is the problem? The trouble is that your experience is not always correct. There is a possibility of error. If you do not avoid error, you can get into great difficulties.

For instance, right now when we look out the window we can see a magical world of our city through a swirl of snowflakes. It is so beautiful. There is every temptation to rush out into that beauty, but it is a snare. If we were not properly prepared, we would be frozen to death in no time. I remember being in Canada when I first experienced snow. There was a very bright sun outside. I thought it would be wonderful to walk up to the post office and back, so I set out. Then I thought all the water in my eyes was turning to ice, that my eyes were crystallizing. I did not know how to save my eyes. I covered them with my hands and ran back as fast as possible to my room. I had never thought that the sun and snow could be so deadly. So like that there are many dangerous errors we can make when we don't fully understand the situation.

How do we avoid these errors? Narayana Guru presents us with a picture of a tree, which is to be looked at schematically. It has a base, or root, and it has fruit. The root and the fruit mark two poles. One is the basis, the alpha, and the other is the omega, the culmination or fulfillment. The origin in the root and the fulfillment in the fruit mark the vertical parameter. The horizontal component is the two sides. One is "I see the external world," and the other is "I have a mental image of the world." In other words, the objective and subjective aspects. For the most part the analogy of the tree stops here; don't press it any further.

We have pointed out four aspects of truth: its foundation, its meaning, its subjective appraisal and the objective experience of it. Of these, two belong intimately to 'I' and two belong to 'this'. The external world and the fruit we are looking for belong to 'this'. "I am" and my knowledge belong to 'I'. Thus, the four possibilities of error can be further classified under two headings, 'I' and 'this'.

When the fundamental truth of what I am is misunderstood, it is an epistemological error. When the meaning of life is misunderstood, it is an axiological error that is also called a teleological one, in other words an error in value assessment stemming from the misunderstanding of the natural design and end of life. Teleos means out there, in the future, what is yet to come, so teleology

is an error regarding the future. We ask ourselves, “What should I become?” “What should I aim for?” and “What should I gain from my life?” If you are mistaken about these issues you might go on a wrong tangent, which is very serious. It is very important to know who you are and what you want to become. This marks the vertical parameter of life.

In order to know how to discern truth—what is true and what is untrue—you should have a normative notion about it. You need a measuring rod by which you can measure truth and decide, “This I accept as true, while this is untruth.” This should be in your possession all day and all night, since at every moment you have to decide if things are true or not. If you make a mistake at this point, it is called a methodological error. If something actual is taken as not actual or if something which is not actual is taken for actual, you are making a mistake at an ontological level. These are the purview of the horizontal parameter of life. So again we have the possibility of epistemological errors, teleological errors, methodological errors and ontological errors, and you need to be corrected of all four types of errors.

In the Upanishads we are given four great dictums. One is *aham brahma asmi*, “I am Brahma.” This is to correct the epistemological error, or the fundamental error by which a person thinks “I am the body.” So much attention is given to a child’s body, its clothes, its looks and its actions, that the feeling “I am this body,” comes to stay. We do not give equal attention to making the child understand it is also something other than the body. By the time we are adults, our body consciousness is disproportionate to our idea of the spirit animating the body. This is an epistemological error in our understanding. The main question to address this is “Who am I?”

Narayana Guru says that phenomenal existence is totally covered over with ‘I’ and ‘this’. The first dictum corrects this by answering the basic question, “Who am I?” with “I am the Absolute.” To say “I am the body,” is relativistically true, of course. We can see there are other bodies and that we are not pulsating within them as we are within this one. Our own body does have something special in a relative sense, but in the greater search this conception is an error to be corrected.

Before we consider the other two aspects, concerning the meaning of life and the actual world, we have to develop criteria to know truth. The only discerning instrument we have is our own mind and intellect. Yet we do not know how to differentiate between mind and intellect. We experience it all as part of our own totality of consciousness. It is within this consciousness that we experience a certain faculty which decides things for us, known as the intellect.

How does the intellect decide whether something is right or wrong? It certainly should not be by imitating others’ opinions, though the fact is that we can be very much influenced by public opinion. Most of the things which we take for granted are not verified or critically examined. We just copy somebody else. But as Socrates said, an unverified life is not worth living. If you want to live a truthful life it must

be verified, and for verification the evidence should come from your own self and not from someone else. This means the basic criterion you can adopt is the certitude of your own self, self-evidence. Ultimately it should be evident to your own self.

Gaining that kind of evidence means obtaining a normative notion. Norm means a measure; normative, pertaining to measurement. A notion is an idea. So a normative notion is an idea you can measure by. Furthermore, you can measure something only with that which truly exists. You are most convinced of your own existence. Therefore your own existence is to be made the basis for measurement. Even if a thing is true to all people, until it actually becomes your own experience the truth of it is only an a priori intellectual acceptance. It has not yet become part of your life. However, what is tested and found to be true in the lives of so many other people who have gone before you is certainly very helpful for you to accept as a working hypothesis. It's a fine place to start. So you don't have to say that you will not accept anything until it becomes your own experience. First you accept the universal truths that were found to be true by many before you. Then you try to integrate and experience them in your own life.

For this correction another great dictum was given by the Upanishads: *ayam atma brahman*, "this Self of mine is the Absolute." Narayana Guru has already defined the Self as "that which remains in darkness and makes things known to us, that is the Self." Now we say that Self is the Absolute. The light which is within us, which is Self-founded, which makes it known to us that we exist and also makes it known to us that other things exist, that is the Self. It is not contaminated with any relativistic notion such as "I am the body," or "I am in pain," "I am happy," "I am unhappy." These are colorations. If the colorations are removed and you understand the Absolute, the pure notion, then you have a very infallible measuring rod to discern what is true and what is not.

This does not happen in a single day, because your mind is already colored with many preconditioned prejudices. To experience *ayam atma brahman*, this Self is the Absolute, many accretions of the mind have to be rubbed off and removed, many prejudices have to fall. You have developed many likes and dislikes because of your physical sense of pain and pleasure, the kind of food you have been given since childhood, the manners you were taught and the social values on which you were nurtured. Hundreds and hundreds of colorations have come into your life, constraining it and directing it in so many arbitrary ways, that to remove all these and know what the pure Self is is not an easy thing. But it is a great necessity if you want to adopt a correct methodology for the rest of your life, to make correct appraisals, and to not mistake the right for the wrong. Once you have that correct method, you have a testimony to measure the truth of things.

You have an immediate world to discern. There is snow outside, and it makes it difficult for you to drive your car. You cannot safely belittle that fact. It's an existence of a thing out there that has an ontological validity. In our transactional

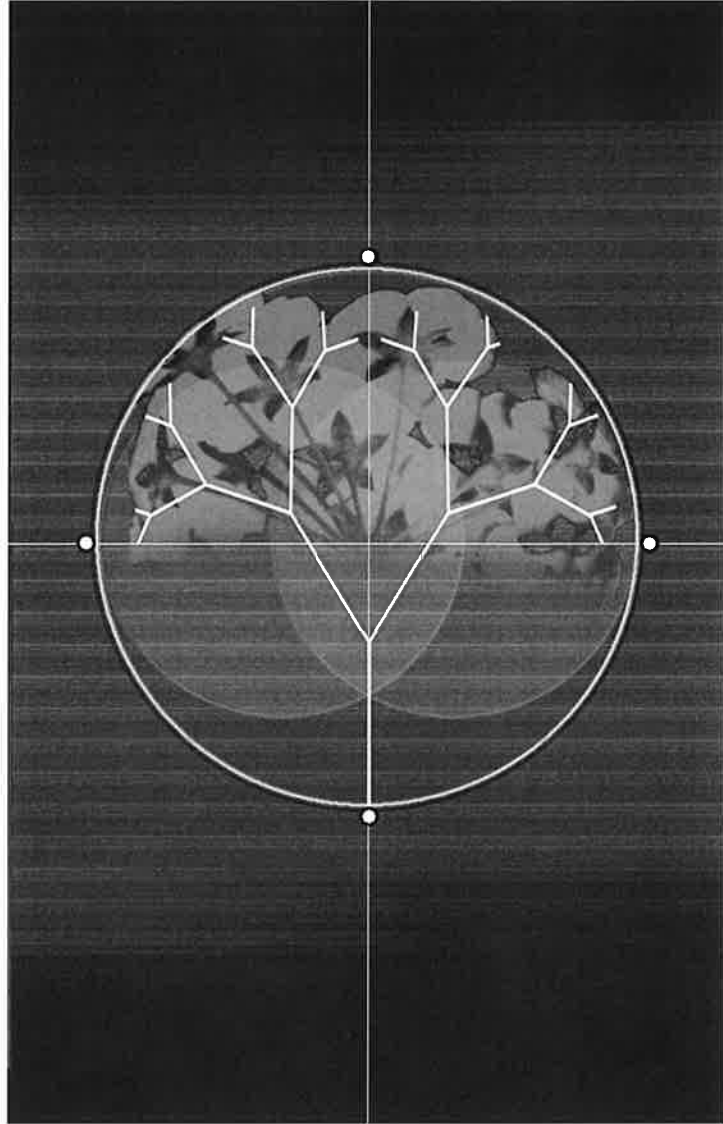
world there are a number of things which have this existential quality, and they should be properly discerned. The discernment comes from your own Self. There is an interaction between the Self and the non-Self. In that interaction you are always deciding the quality of the non-Self. If you fail here it can be disastrous.

The Upanishads give us another dictum to meditate upon: *prajnanam brahma*, “The external world is presented to you as your knowledge of it.” To you, you have no other way of apprehending it; the external world and your knowledge of it are the same. Its existence is in the existence of your knowledge. Now, if there is not a one-to-one correspondence between what is out there and what is in your knowledge, you are bound to make mistakes. So, if the snow is cold you should know what that means. If the road becomes slippery when it is icy, you should know that. The truth that is in you is also the truth that has become manifest out there.

Don’t just call it *maya* and dismiss it. Of course the whole thing can be an error, but it is not a piecemeal one. If it is an error it is wholesale. You are within that wholesale error now. Do not mistake something wholesale for something piecemeal. As long as you are within the frame of reference called the transactional, you have to give full validation to every item in it. It is here that the spiritual life of some people fails, because in the name of spirituality, in the name of philosophy, or in the name of realization, they belittle the validity of transactions. This ontological error is a big problem. To correct it, *prajnanam brahma* is given, to remind you that what is out there as your experience is born of the same reality that has produced you and your mind. Not until you realize this can you be at ease with the external world.

All this is in preparation for a final search, a search for the meaning of your own life. If you do not know the goal of your life, you might walk into many snares. If someone compassionate who has found out what can be most beneficial to a human being tells you, “Go this way, my child,” a lot of trouble can be saved. People run after so many things in their lives, and by the time they realize those things are all meaningless they are too feeble in their bodies and shaky in their minds to make much of an effort. The intellect is no longer clear, and the memory is failing. Only when they are good for nothing do they realize that they didn’t get anywhere. Since it is better to know this early, we are given a teleological pointer, *tat tvam asi*, “That thou art.” This is the fourth great dictum.

“What is That?” and “How can I experience it?” To answer these questions you have to lift your mind from everything to which it is riveted. You are tied down to this body, this mind, to things. You need to loosen your hold to all those particulars to which you are now tied. This transcendence, this elevation, the sublimity to which you can rise, can be attempted day after day. By itself, this gives direction to your life. You may be an artist or a poet, an actor, a craftsman, a technician or a person doing service to other people. Your vocation can be anything. All paths lead to Rome. In other words, all paths lead to salvation, to your final emancipation. If



the path is not leading you to this, then it is a snare and you should give it up. So with a little insight you can make any path lead to your salvation and emancipation.

Let's say you are an artist. What do you seek through your art? Call it beauty. How do you decide what is beautiful? You go to that normative notion of which we spoke. The artist says, "It is not by measuring anything with an external ruler, or weighing it, or using any other kind of brass gadget or electronic device that I come to know whether this is beautiful or not. When I look at it, my heart is filled. I get into a state of ecstasy. Then I know it is beautiful." Within you there is beauty. Only when a thing resonates with your true being, which itself is beautiful, do you know it is also beautiful. Every creation of beauty is a search to know more of you, more of your own self as the beautiful.

Suppose you care for children, not necessarily your own. The central value here is compassion. Compassion is your passion. The passion of you and the child become commingled and flow in a single direction. For this to happen, what is most dear to you and what is most dear to the child have to be brought together as one unitive meaning, in one common center. That is the Self. It is the same Self in you and the child. One's happiness is the other's happiness. Every time you relate this way, you discover the greater secret of your own Self. So even though the meaning of life is given as teleological, that teleos is not very far off. It is in this very moment that you come to realize it. Then you go on to the next moment, and the next.

From the two aspects of *ahanta* and *idanta*, 'I'-ness and 'this'-ness, you come to the core of both. What is in both 'I' and 'this' is called 'That'. When you experience That in the Self as well as the non-Self, then the Self and the non-Self do not exist separately. This is a discipline which we need in order to go farther, the fourfold correction with four great dictums: a fundamental correction, a methodological correction, a correction of meaning, and a correction of your apprehension of actuality.

VERSE 52

dhvani mayamay gaganam jvalikkumannan-
lanayumatinkal asesya drsya jalam;
punar avite tripitikku purttinalkum-
svanavumatannumitam svayam prakasam.

The sky will glow as radiant sound—on that day, all visible configurations will become extinct in that; thereafter, the sound that completes the three-petaled awareness becomes silent and self-luminous.

We come to know our world by seeing the many things of which it is constituted. Everything we have seen from childhood to this day is put together to formulate the world for us. Whatever we have seen has also been named. We have heard the names of things as well as explanations of them in so many words from other people. A thing may seem simple when we look at it, but hundreds of words are needed to explain just one entity.

The experiences of people who have gone before us are passed on to us through words, either written or spoken. Thus, the great universe we think of geographically and historically, or spatially and temporally, is mostly made up of word content. If we dismiss from our minds all that we have heard so far, all the ideas formulated with the help of words, almost nothing is left. Such is the enormity of the world we have created out of words.

The word that is now coming to you from me is transmitted by a certain vibration I am producing in the atmosphere. There is truth in what the physicists say, that sound is transmitted to you through air. But it is not air itself that is creating the sound. It is a very mysterious force indeed. In the case of sunlight we are at least familiar with photons, but when it comes to sound it is far more mysterious. As the pitch and frequency vary, the sound gains many qualities, and what we call the psychodynamics of sound arises.

The psychic expansion of space, or the extensiveness of the psyche if you prefer, is called *akasa*. Everything has its place in *akasa*. Its intrinsic quality, or *dharmā*, is sound. For this reason, sound can affect everything. It can influence, alter, build up or destroy. According to Jaimini's school of Purva Mimamsa, this world is constituted of sound. They believe that since this world is created out of sound, you can change or modify it to your liking by using sound. They have made many sound structures called *mantras*. Mantras have a dynamic called *mantra chaitanya*, the psychodynamics of *mantra*, which can bring about such changes.

We know that sound is very powerful. We can produce certain sounds that will hurt or please another person. With sound we command, lead, instruct, excite,

express our grief, console, pacify, inspire. We can enchant with so many subtle varieties of music. Gentle sound can make you soar high into sublime heights. It can lead you to the depth of your own Self. Innumerable are the possibilities of sound.

Sound as such is called *sabda*, and a modification of *sabda* is called *dhvani*. In Sanskrit, the entire world of literature is called *dhvanya loka*, a world that is seen through sound. A poet weaves an entire tapestry of a colorful universe using only words. The vowels and consonants used in language are called *varna*, colorations, in this case meaning the color of the sounds. With the colors of the sounds we paint pictures of ideas.

What one person articulates, another visualizes. This is one of the greatest wonders of life. An idea comes into my mind and I can convey it to you by breathing and moving my tongue and mouth in a certain way. I direct my *prana*, my vital breath, in such a way that it causes vibrations of sounds, and these vibrations convey meaning. The *prana* rises from my heart or the depth of my psyche to become meaningful. Here I am combining two things, *prana* and the word. If I shorten or lengthen my *prana*, it changes the sound I am articulating. I can say *aum*, or I can say *A.....U.....M.....*. That way it becomes musical. Either way it is the same word and the meaning does not change, but the effect is different. The meaning part is called *rk*, and the musical quality produced by prolonging the breath is called *sama*. When *rk* and *sama* are coupled, it produces a psychic phenomenon. This world itself is a psychic phenomenon created out of sound.

Nobody knows what magnetism is. We do know that when a magnetized piece of iron is brought near another piece of iron there is a great pull, a great attraction. However much we carefully examine it, though, we don't see what's actually going on. When we pass on from magnetism to electricity, we speak of an electromagnetic field. Electricity has such a variety of qualities. It can emit fire, it can make something very cold, it can power the world, and it can even stop your heart from beating. We see what it can do, but do we understand electricity any more than we do magnetism? In the same way, we know something of the propensities and potentials of sound, but we are very much ignorant of its essential nature.

Sound in its purest form is called *para*, which is on a par with the Absolute. It is unmodified, unmodulated sound. In it we can see a certain possibility of visualizing an idea and transforming the sound in such a way that the vision can be conveyed to another person. There needs to be a homogeneity of the visualization and the unmodified sound for the visualization to be communicated through sound. The homogeneity of the sound and the visualization is called *pasyanti*, seeing; in other words the capacity to see in a medium which is essentially auditory.

Once a visualization is expressed it undergoes some transformation. I have to wait for my idea to be expressed. If I want to express it in English I have to structure the sounds in a certain way, while if it is to be given in Sanskrit it should be structured in another way. If I know the language well I don't have to belabor

myself. It comes of its own; the sounds get structured automatically. I don't have to think which sounds are dental and which are labial. I just decide to speak and all the sounds come. It's a great wonder.

The sound you have just expressed and articulated is called *vaikhari*. When you articulate a sound it is just like when a person bangs a drum once: *dhun*. When the drum is hit in rhythm, it makes a modulation, and when modulations come the *dhun* becomes a *dhvani*, which starts making sense to you. If a beat is given in a certain way, at once you can see a pattern in it. Then you can anticipate. Before the next beat comes, your mind is already there. If it goes wrong with you, it causes dissonance, but if it goes right it resonates with you because your spirit is already in tune with it. The *dhvani* out there and the *dhvani* within us resonate with each other. The mathematics of music is already within us because we are sound.

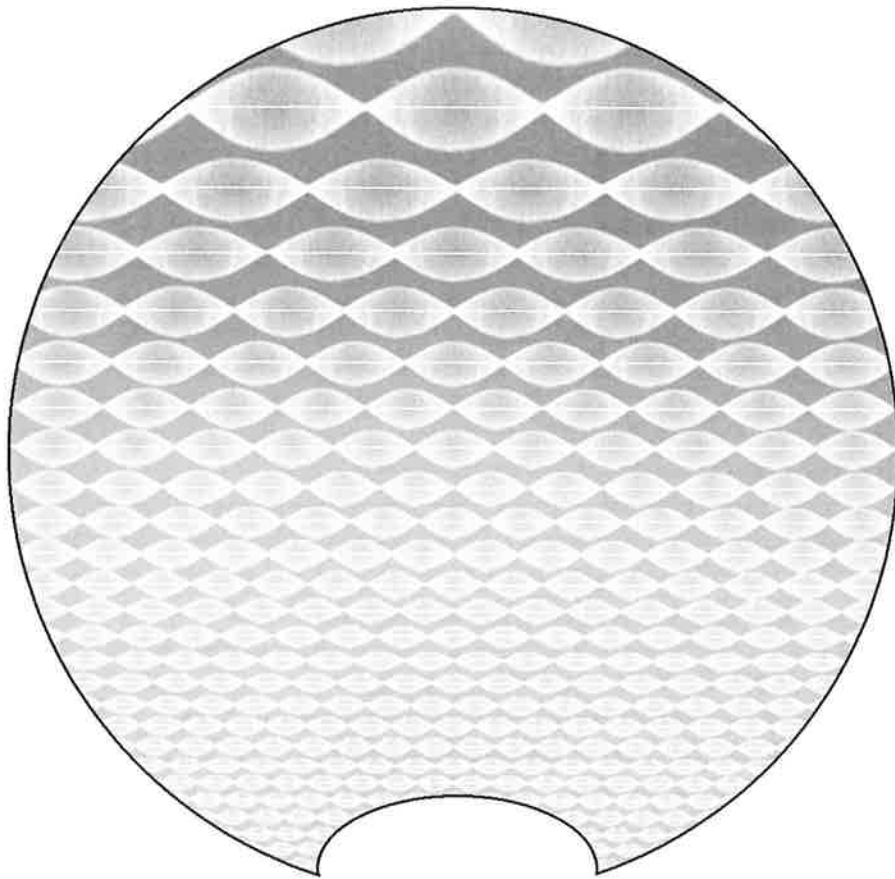
Dhvani is the whole world of sound, with all its richness. The artist's palette creates all the colors out of a few basic ones. Like that, we can combine a few basic sounds to make all the sounds and all their meanings. How many words are there articulated in the multitude of human languages with which our world abounds? Truly endless are the possibilities of sound combinations.

I sit here speaking plainly with you. But some other things which I might want only a certain person to understand I do not say explicitly. Thus a word has both a literal and an implied meaning. When I put an implied meaning into my words it is also called *dhvani*. As the implied meaning becomes more and more prominent, it becomes poetic. As long as it is a straightforward, square sound, like explanations in a physics textbook, there is no scope for any poetry in it. Two grams means two grams. But poetry is full of *dhvani*. There is a vibration, an echo of a vibration, in your soul. Creating that echo in your soul is another aspect of *dhvani*.

In this verse Narayana Guru is speaking of the possibility of the vast space of your consciousness becoming vibrant with one great sound, which will dissolve away in it all separate visions. I spoke of *vaikhari*, the articulated sounds, the word pictures you paint. You see all of these in your mind as separate entities. Such separations are totally effaced when the great sound becomes so vibrant.

Knowledge or consciousness may be compared to light. Light can vary from the most feeble ray to the brilliance of a million suns shining all at once. If there is no light, you don't see anything. If there is a little light, it makes a contrast between light and shadow. With more light there is a sharper contrast with the darker shadow. But if the light is coming from everywhere and there is no shadow left, you can't see anything. The most intense light effaces the distinction between the source of the light and the illuminated object. If you take the analogy still further, it also takes away the difference between the seer and the seen. The seer, the seen and the seeing are all just one light.

The Guru here says *gaganam jvalikkum*, the sky of your consciousness is blazing forth in such brilliance. He began with the sound. Now he says the sound is blazing forth, leaping into flames. The very sky of your consciousness is on fire.



It is radiant. Within that radiance it is so bright that you do not see any difference between things. The Guru says all those details of vision are effaced in this one radiance, this great splendor of light.

In another work describing his own experience, as well as elsewhere in this one, Narayana Guru says *orupatinayiram aditeyaronnai varuvatu pole varun viveka vrtti*, the highest discrimination of the Self comes like ten thousand suns shining all at once. Or, like a million suns rising all at once, thus comes the great experience of realization. When such an experience comes, the individuations and differentiations of things are all effaced by it. After that the tri-basic consciousness (the knower, knowledge, and the known) becomes complemented and as one, so there is no distinction.

What causes this? A certain *svanam*, a certain sound. In the Mandukya, Chandogya and Katha Upanishads it is said that all we experience in the present, the past and the future is only modifications of *aum*. What we experience as the gross in the wakeful, the subtle in the dream, and the causal in deep sleep are all variations of the one sound, *aum*. If the secret of *aum* is open to us, then the gross, the subtle and the causal all merge into the pure silence that follows it. This is called *turiya*, the fourth state. When everything existing merges into that fourth state there is no longer the knower, the known and knowledge. They have all been completed and merged into the sound of *aum*. That place shines by itself as a pure light, *atangum itam svayam prakasam*.

This is an experience, or the experience, which is on a par with what we hear of the Buddha getting his enlightenment under the Bo tree, the angel calling to Mohammad in the cave, or the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus to confer on him the grace whereby he becomes the Son of God. It is equivalent to these—the highest possible experience one can have. The person becomes the all-embracing consciousness, which bursts out in a flame of such brilliance that it effaces everything. Thereafter, there is no sound. Or, the only sound is that which at one level is the wakeful world, at another level the dream world, and at still another level the deep sleep world. They are all now merged into the fourth state of pure transcendence. In that transcendence, nothing is left behind. It just shines by itself. This is the state to which a person comes at the height of their illumination.

SRI VASUDEVA ASTAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

2

*kalyanadam kama-phala-pradayakam
karunya-rupam kali-kalmasaghnam
kalanidhim kama-tanujam-adyam
namami laksmisam aham mahantam*

The one who proffers auspiciousness,
The fulfiller of all desires
The one who is kindness in form
The annihilator of all blemishes
That go with *kaliyuga*,
The treasure house of *kalas*,
The one who has Kamadeva as son,
The primal cause of everything,
The glorious one,
The Lord of Laksmi—
To Him I pay obeisance!

O Lord, one of the cardinal concepts of Vaisnavism is that you have an auspicious body (*kalyana-kalebara*) and that body then is considered composed of all the material bodies (*jada*) and all the souls (*agada*) in all the worlds. We, thus, being part of your auspicious body share in your auspiciousness. Our experiences as part of yours are auspicious, whether these experiences are pleasant or painful.

Most supplicants pray to you for the fulfillment of their personal desires. They pray for values of worldly significance, such as accumulation of wealth, for disease being cured, and for fame and positions of power. They are ignorant of your reality and the nature of their own lives. Such prayers from them are often readily heeded by you, who often grants their wishes. But you also create those very situations in which supplicants are caught, and in which they often realize how difficult unrestrained desires are. Many do not discern the truth you convey to them. They again and again pray to you for the alleviation of new and dangerous situations.

Many stories of demons (*asuras*) are in the myths of India. Their desires are endless and often unreasonable. They perform penance by meditating on you, their goal being the fulfillment of their desires. You grant them their wishes but those very boons finally prove to be instrumental to their perishing.

Those endowed with discriminative power never pray to you for the fulfillment of their own desires. Instead they pray that "Thy will be done." They remain content in your will being actualized, whether it is favorable to them or not. In short, your blessings reach each of us in accordance with our attitudes and desires, as fulfillment of desires for the worldly-minded and as the constant self contentment in discriminate ones. Such is the way you are felt to be the fulfiller of all desires (*kama-phala-pradayin*) by everyone of your supplicants, irrespective of their value sense, for you are kind towards everyone. In fact you are kindness embodied.

We, as held by the mythological concepts of India, are living at present in the Age of Kali, or the age of strife. It is an age in which three-fourths of human life is dominated by unrighteousness (*adharmā*), leaving only one fourth of humans to be open to righteous *dharma*. For this reason, the leading role in human life is now taken up by *kalmāsa*, the Sanskrit word for sin and its related defects. The one remedy for this predicament prescribed in the Indian legends is muttering God's name, in the ritual known as *nama-japa*, *nama* meaning name and *japa* meaning "to insure clarity both with uttered words and their conceived meaning." As long as a clear idea of you, Vishnu, is in one's mind and one utters words related to you, no chance is there for blemishes of strife to appear. How can darkness be where there is a brightly shining lamp?

O Lord, you are the treasure house of *kalas*, or minute particles. The world, as we know, is the aggregate of very minute particles reducible even to sub-atomic levels, about which there is much "uncertainty." And this world, as admitted by all Vaishnavites, or devotees of you, Vishnu, is your body. You, thus, are the treasure house of *kalas*.

Kala also means arts, such as dance, music, drawing, painting or sculpting. Indian culture has traditionally fixed the number of such arts as sixty-four. All these arts, in one way or another, are some captivating alteration effected either grossly or subtly in your body, the world. There is no existence apart from your body for any of these arts, and you are thus *kalanidhi*.

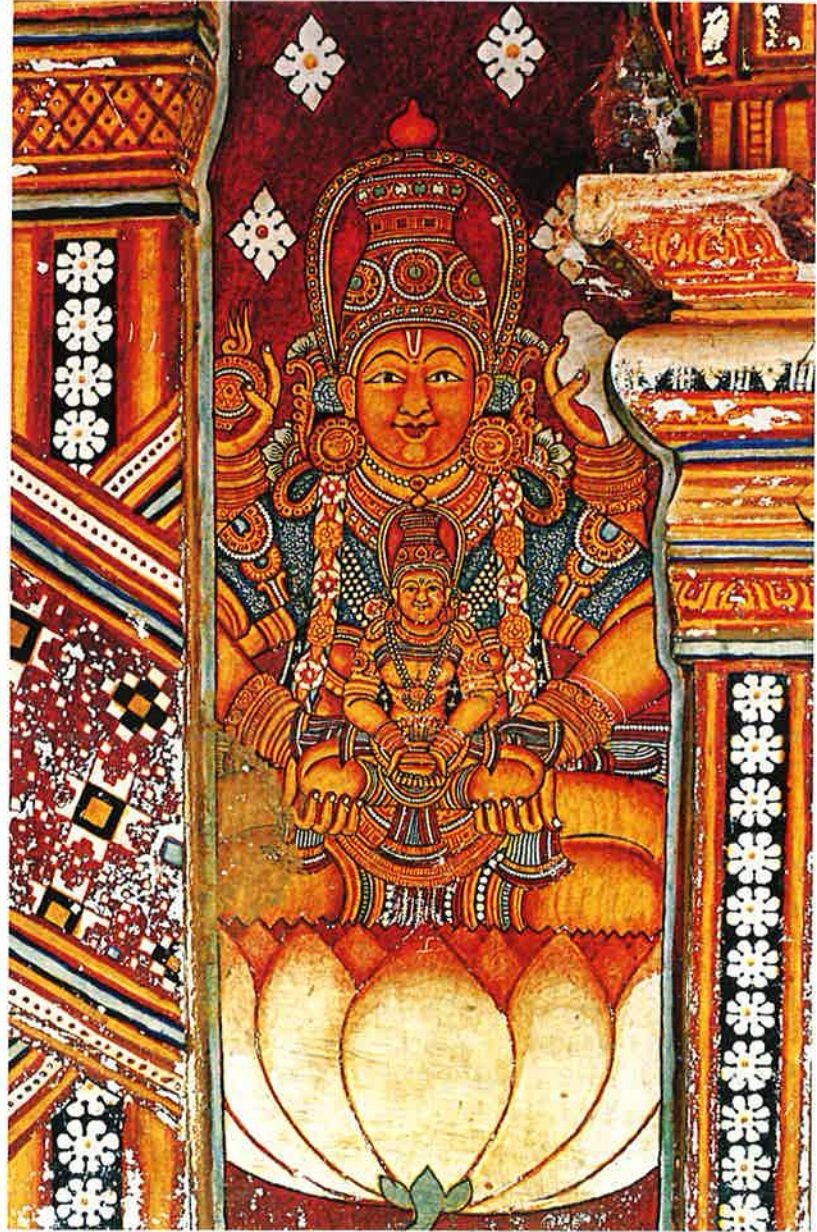
Kamadeva is the Indian equivalent of the Eros of Western culture. According to mythology he was born to Sri Krishna, one of your incarnations, and his wife Rukmini. No new creation is possible in this world without desire arising between males and females to come together and mate. Arousing this sexual desire in living beings and so insuring the unbroken continuity of the flow of life is the function of Kamadeva, as part of an overall life system devised by you. Therefore, he is imagined to be your own son. Creation always happens in every aspect of the apparent world. All such creations are the outcome of the fulfillment of a desire in your own being to

see for yourself what is the nature of the infinite potentials hidden within yourself. You thus enjoy your own self-expression, and self-enjoyment pervades the being of your entire body, the world. This is like the sensual desire that fills the entire being of an individual, and Kamadeva is the archetypal symbol of this universal desire.

Lakshmi

You are Lakshmi as well. She is well known as the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The word Lakshmi literally means “one who distinguishes people who know *maryada* or the bounds of morality.” This world, your own body, always is in a state of change. It still remains perfectly coherent in its overall functional system. No human effort can topple it or overcome it. What is then best for man is to respect that overall system and to abide by it. Such a way of life could be counted as respecting the bounds of morality. Within the range of this overall *maryada* come all the moral behaviors of man. How far this *maryada* is respected by each individual is constantly being watched by Lakshmi, and you are her Lord. You and Lakshmi together, like the yin and yang of Chinese philosophy, comprise everything.

You being such, who is there more worthy of being worshipped? You are thought of as *mahan*, the great, who is to be worshipped. To such a Lord, I pay my obeisance.



NATARAJAN THE ABSOLUTIST

BY JOHN SPIERS

The following is a speech delivered by John Spiers, a longtime disciple of Nataraja Guru, on the occasion of Nataraja Guru's birthday, sometime between 1955 and 1965.

In the personality of Natarajan at least three human types come together, namely, the primeval South Indian, the European or French romantic, and the Indian Guru-figure of Sanskrit literature. But overriding this unique combination of types there is Natarajan's own contribution as an absolutist, drawing necessary willfulness from the South Indian stock, sensitivity from Europe, and justification from the revalued guruhood and philosophy of Narayana Guru.

First then, the physical heritage: this comes from the archaic, pre-Aryan people of South India, full-blooded and earthy. It is a remote, ancient lineage. You can see the same physical type in images found in the river valleys of the Indus, Tigris and Euphrates. Civilizations at Ur of the Chaldees and at Harappa and Mohenjodaro in modern Pakistan were once collateral with those on the far southwest coast of India. The typical human being of this stock has broadly the same features as Natarajan, including the tendency to corpulence. There is no trace of ascetic emaciation, nor any slim aristocratic graces, except perhaps a delicacy of hands and feet.

Natarajan accepts this background as a very necessary and precious value. He believes the crudeness to be in harmony with the true nature of mankind, a kind of peasant simplicity. He emphasizes it partly because he is conscious of an injustice done to this Indian stock by the group calling themselves Aryans. It is a protest to the Vedic, Mogul, and European overlay of cultures which have submerged and deprived many millions of human beings of their due place in civilization and society.

It was Ernest Wood, the Theosophist, who introduced me to Natarajan in Ootacamund in 1939. At that time Natarajan had a fairly good head of hair, always fluffy and wind-blown. By now the wind of time has blown most of it away. Even then I noted that he made only the slightest concession to fashion. The prehistoric man was protesting. That is one of the reasons why he is not at all at ease or what the public expects on a public platform, although he has had to appear often for speeches.

Simple prehistoric man carries around with him a great deal of the spontaneity of childhood, and Natarajan with children is a delight. Children respond instinctively to his conscious sympathy with them against the injustice and pressures of the adult world. This must be the reason why he is a naturally successful teacher, quite apart from his academic and practical training. In the same way, Natarajan is on the side of the common man against all the invasions by city folk with their interfering and disturbing ideologies.

Hereditarily, Natarajan has a certain toughness, so that he is able to endure the discomforts which inevitably attend on anyone with the idealism of an absolutist. He can be jostled around and be half-starved and can take it. It has also given him an obstinacy or a persistence which never lets go and refuses to surrender when he feels some high principle is involved. This quality makes for the businessman in the West, but it is rather rare in India. From the same ancient source, Natarajan inherits a certain aggressiveness, which can blaze up and be quite devastating in argument. That too is necessary with some of the impossible people who cluster round a philosopher.

On his first visit to Europe in 1928, Natarajan was drawn to Geneva in Switzerland. There he found a culture or an atmosphere which won over his reason and his feelings, something of the core of European civilization, an intellectuality of a clear brightness, delicate like a spring morning in the Alps. There was nothing reminiscent of the Victorian stuffiness of his college days, nothing of pukka sahib or impersonalism. The neat French atmosphere of the town, the pure air of the mountains, the crystalline lake with its swans and the trim poplars of the little island, were all appealing and satisfying.

And the spirit of Jean-Jacques Rousseau brooded like a benediction over Geneva. Rousseau the challenge, the man both loved and hated, the educator of young and old, of Europe itself, a philosopher who defended the honesty and nobility of the simple humanity whom Natarajan understood; it was not surprising that every chord of sentiment and affinity vibrated with joy at the recognition of his European counterpart. He had found one European who was also representative of a global humanity. Here was one who stood for primitive values, for goodness without frills and embellishments or anything artificial, and whose sensitivity contributed to the best in world cultures.

So Rousseau, maligned as insane, as a profligate, shocking to the conventional and the timid, when he declared that human beings were basically good as they came from the hands of the Maker, who said that men were born free but were chained, distorted, corrupted and crushed by society, became another ideal in the character formation of Natarajan. It was Rousseau, too, who saw the need for a dialectical relationship or yogic understanding between the individual and society, and made it the theme of his famous work *The Social Contract*. Natarajan surrendered to the spell of Rousseau and managed to throw off all vestiges of Anglo-Indian cultural conditionings. Incidentally, he revised his notions of the India which he had hitherto seen through the interpretations of Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi, not to speak of his own talented father, Dr. Palpu. Natarajan was really set off on his own line of *dharma*.

He also arrived at a greater understanding of the place of the Guru in his life. I have left this third formative factor last because it seems to me that Natarajan only began to plumb the full depths of the meaning of the Guru Narayana when he was seeing the Guru from the open world viewpoint of Rousseau, rather than

from the closed-in world of India, and the Malabar Coast in particular. Perhaps this long distance view brought out the colossal magnitude of the Guru Narayana more distinctly and showed the Guru's giant stature in its proper proportion side by side with his relativist contemporaries.

Natarajan had known the Guru from his childhood. He would be puzzled about the fuss made when this simple holy man appeared, and would wonder why respected elders attended to the Guru's least word with grave and close attention. In his half joking, half serious way, the Guru Narayana had approached Dr. Palpu and "asked for" the clever Natarajan, perhaps with that clear insight which contemplation and a free mind bestows, knowing that Natarajan would be his spiritual successor and interpreter to the world. The Guru Narayana encouraged the father to give Natarajan an all-round scientific education. So the lad was brought up with a peculiar sense of dedication, studying in Bangalore, in Kandy, Ceylon, and finally in Madras, where he graduated and was for some time a lecturer in zoology.

Natarajan sailed through exams, with a last-minute ease, as I have been told, grasping essentials, adding a ton of originality, and aided by a prodigious memory. Many of his old fellow-students are still in Madras [now Chennai]. Their affectionate respect for him is perhaps puzzled by the brilliance or erratic nonchalant lack of a careerist mentality. It is bewildering for those whose careers come to a safe terminus by the age of sixty, and whose engines just usually cool down thereafter, to see Natarajan's engine still puffing and steaming along a new line into the unknown.

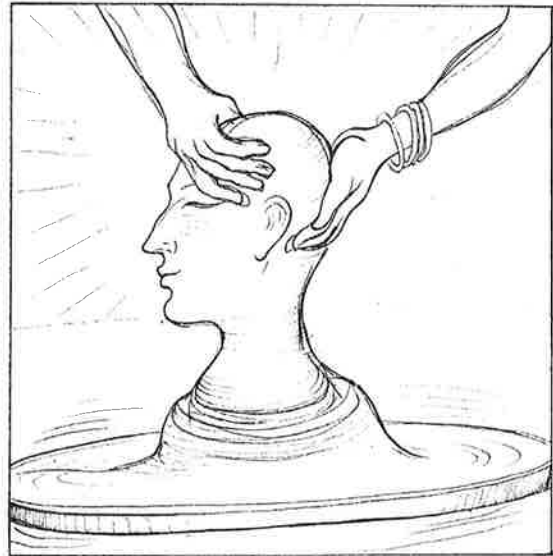
If the Guru Narayana consciously "selected" Natarajan as his representative in Guruhood, he would also appear to have anticipated the quarter of a century of stagnation and friction amongst other disciples which followed his passing, for before his last illness he sent Natarajan abroad, paying for the journey from his own purse. During that first period abroad, Natarajan took his doctorate in literature at the University of the Sorbonne at Paris. His thesis was "The Personal Factor in the Educative Process (Le Facteur Personnel dans la Proces Educatif)." Here he made a contribution to education which for the first time clarified the position between the teacher and the pupil. He introduced his discovery of correlation between the absolute and relative principles in human life, whose adjustment, to be made by the help of a true teacher, determines the unity or conflict of the individual.

While Natarajan was abroad the Guru Narayana passed away. Dr. Natarajan, as he now was, returned to India in 1933. He began to develop the Gurukula movement, whose basis he had determined even prior to his stay in Europe. On the advice of the Guru Narayana he had kept the two institutions at Varkala, Travancore, and at Fernhill, Nilgiris, as independent *advaita ashramas* or gurukulas on modern lines. But twenty years ago the full implications were still to be worked out. He has told of the amusing though bitter mistake he made when he tried to bring up two dozen orphans, whom the public forgot about as soon as he took them over, and how he tried to raise money for food and clothing and how finally he and the orphans were all reduced to the most grinding form of poverty and destitution, for which

the public, far from coming conscientiously to the rescue, blamed him instead for starving the children!

Even then, twenty years ago, he had the basic principles clear of a globally oriented foundation, lifted even above the finest spiritual relativism that India might provide, lifted into an absolutist world. He had planned an organic structure and any mechanical offshoots or experiments had constantly to be trimmed. He had a fear of the dangers resulting to the spiritual or absolutist life of merely mechanistic or quantitative success.

By now, the guruhood of Dr. Natarajan is well enough known. There are several contradictory notions current of what a guru is: how he must behave, what he should say, even what he should look like. There is a Vedic pattern, or an *acharya* pattern, someone who lives like a Christian abbot with elaborate sacerdotal paraphernalia about him, like a kind of super Brahmin. There is also the Hollywood pattern, the guru of fiction, a magical figure whose presence and touch brings about miracles. The latter is maybe nearer to what guruhood is in

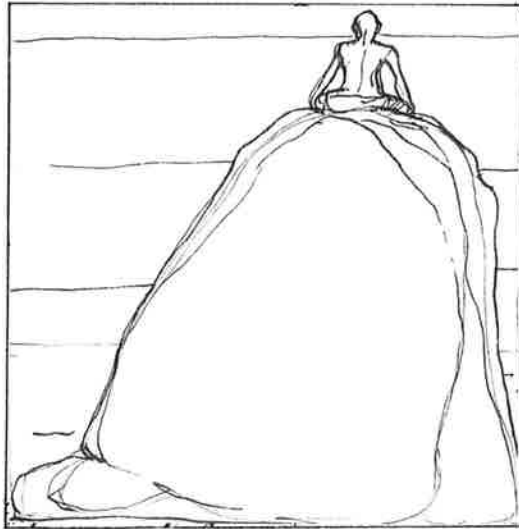


fact than the former, although both are relativist projections. Actually a guru, as a representative free man, must at least be emancipated from exaggerated notions of religiosity, holiness, the miraculous, and much else.

Neither by temperament nor conviction is Dr. Natarajan religiously inclined. In India this is perhaps something of a misfortune in playing the role of a guru—at least according to popular conceptions. The very minimal requirement is to have some sort of a holy presence, to be surrounded by some vestige of orthodoxy, to keep somewhat aloof, to wear ochre-colored clothes, to be shaven-headed, to sit as much as possible in the time-honored cross-legged posture, to talk vaguely in general terms of peace and love ad nauseum, and never, never, never to upset anybody by anything like a reasoned query. That is what people want, and they get it from quite a number of holy characters already on the scene. But they will never get it from Dr. Natarajan. He refuses to be “holy” in this special sense, of dividing life into good or bad.

On this he is just following the teachings of the Guru Narayana. The Guru Narayana dealt with the pure principles of religion. He avoided discussion of the merits of particular faiths. With all due respect, I should also say that he conformed

much more to the hierophany of the traditional guru than does Dr. Natarajan. That was perhaps because the Guru Narayana adjusted himself strictly to the Indian scene and did not step beyond the Orient physically. Guruhood, as far as Dr. Natarajan is concerned, is an historical obligation to his Guru, something to which he submits in free choice because a number of loyal supporters and disciples want it. But all the same it is a role which he can abandon at any time, if the proper response is lacking, as or soon as he feels that the freely-held obligation is fulfilled, or again if for any other reason his absolutism insists on its rejection. But can people ever see that it



is only absolutism which gives depth and wonder to the fixed concept of the guru figure or the yogi image?

It is manifestly unlikely that Dr. Natarajan will allow guruhood to solidify round him like a mess of settling concrete. His restlessness in undertakings, his misunderstood reputation for making beginnings of projects which never get “completed,” for showing initial enthusiasms and displaying later a “lack of interest,”—all these may be explained by his inward refusal to get hardened in deadening relativist concrete. It is not indifference. For the young in spirit it

is not a fault at all—though it is perhaps too great a risk for any relativist looking for a safe investment! “No safety” and “no comfort” are Natarajan’s mottos, and along with these, “all for truth and freedom.” For, no matter how destitute Natarajan may seem to be, no matter the shabbiness of clothes, the hard life of third-class travel, the roughness of food and so forth, Natarajan as a man who strives to be faithful to what is true, who is every moment dedicating himself to wisdom and thus to philosophy, as he does in the sight of all, continually in the limelight, under the watching scrutiny of his disciples, has a nobility which is godlike. Forty years of unremitting dedication to truth has given him at least the rare gift of being—like Socrates (to whose figure he is very much comparable by the way)—hypersensitive to falsehood and error. He can pick out the slightest deviation from truth in a statement. Nobody else I have ever met has this gift. It is this which is the mark of a guru. This capacity to keep the needle registering the true—and not all the action in the world, not all the social labors of prominent leaders, etc.—is the mark of the guru. Nobody can deny that Natarajan has this supreme power.

Consistent with this gift is the one and only liberty that Natarajan takes: the divine liberty to speak out or to ask questions which touch the very quick of

consciousness. With a fearless disregard of what people think about him, he will say what he wants to say. At some time or other he has upset most of his close associates, either intentionally or unconsciously, with the neutral word—but always in their own interest. Most people will not or cannot argue with him, because he holds on to principles so willfully or so obstinately. He might be charged with being too logically consistent, too lacking in relativistic affection. Truth certainly has other forms of knowledge than intellection, and all dissolve in final contemplation. His logic is directed to that end. His circle of logic always closes with simplicity in which general affection is restated. In a world of irrational thoughtlessness the place of logic is necessary. It is the clear water which flushes out the sediment and dross from the mind.

On the issue of whether the Guru Narayana has a teaching to which the whole world can turn to advantage or to happiness, or whether the Guru Narayana must continue to be merely represented or misrepresented as a tribal reformer, Dr. Natarajan has been having a lonely struggle among the Malayalam-speaking followers of the Guru. This way of regarding the Guru Narayana as a kind of Mosaic savior for a chosen people calling themselves Ezhavas or Thiyas (the tribal names) began in the Guru's own lifetime and has taken two forms, one secular, the other religious. The secular organization known as the S.N.D.P. Union is a clan organization, which has done admirable work for social ends amongst its members, while the religious body, known as the Dharma Sangham fulfills the demands for an orthodoxy, traditionally conjectural, of the sannyasin type. This is not the occasion to discuss their merits or failings, except to say that Dr. Natarajan is undoubtedly right in pointing out that between them, the Guru's teaching is limited and lost, while they have at the same time the habitual loyalty of the mass of the followers of the Guru. But now at least every follower of the Guru Narayana is aware that Dr. Natarajan, as an absolutist standing boldly for the pure wisdom of the Guru Narayana, has come among them, as a voice crying in the jungle of West Coast life, as one who speaks authoritatively and without fear of challenge or opposition, in the sacred name of Guruhood and of the Guru Narayana in particular.

I have said little or nothing about Natarajan's family background, because others will be able to do that with greater detail and historical accuracy. I would however add to whatever may be said my opinion that one of the reasons why the rich, original personality of Natarajan has not yet been fully recognized in Travancore, and to some extent throughout the West Coast, is because of having two dominant overshadowing presences, one ancestral, the other global and spiritual. The value of a successor guru is obscured because of the close proximity in time with the father guru, plus the relativistic father who was himself an outstanding character in the social world.

Dr. Natarajan stands in relation to the Guru Narayana much as Plato stands for Socrates. As we know, much of the philosophical greatness of Socrates historically

depends upon the presentation of Plato. It is obvious that Plato had not only attained the Socratic level to understand Socrates, he had also to have the skill to present Socrates and his ideas. West Coast people may hold to Sri Narayana as their special leader socially or in the light of relativistic religion, but the rest of the world knows Narayana Guru as a world teacher of the status of a world philosopher and teacher almost entirely through Dr. Natarajan the disciple and also through Dr. Natarajan as the living Guru.

To make this clear I should perhaps mention my own case. For some years during a stay in Ootacamund before the [Second World] war, I was a fairly frequent visitor to the Gurukula at Fernhill, Nilgiris. At that time I did not realize the full implication or Dr. Natarajan's role. Nor, in fact, did I grasp this until I actually entered into close association with him as a *sisya* in 1946. Before I entered into that spiritual intimacy, for ten years or so we had met in various places and cooperated in several ways. I had always felt a strange attraction towards his ideals. His sincerely I never doubted, but sometimes as I remember, there was something that puzzled me about his originality. Indeed, it was only after long dialectical talks during the few months prior to his departure for the USA in 1948, when he left me in charge of Fernhill, that the full weight of what he represented as a guru became clear to me, and that was also clear because of the certainty regarding the absolutist attitude which I had myself arrived at by that time. I believe he himself did not mature as a guru until about ten years ago for the full blast of guruhood, or perhaps I should say absolutism was certainly not present to me at least till then. Nor did it appear so constant as it has done since his return from his last overseas visit. During my own travels in India I had seen too many religious people and many posers and freaks to be taken in by mere appearances and holy presences. I have always been able to feel the numinous without the usual appurtenances, and my own natural religious feelings have always been independent of special religions or fixed creeds. The general and generous Indian attitude of eclecticism approaches my attitude there. Dr. Natarajan was able to give me a vision of religion beyond both orthodoxy and heterodoxy, which was just what I was looking for; and this of course was the neutrality of the *advaitic* standpoint beyond particularized visions.

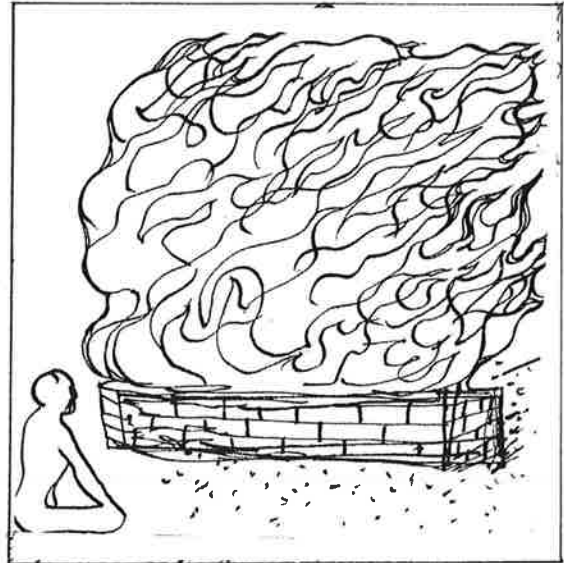
Since his return from abroad Dr. Natarajan was able to give final expression to what was previously somewhat undefined, perhaps for lack of the right word or phrase. Only those who have tried to express guruhood, the *advaita* outlook, or *brahmavidya* (science of the Absolute) in familiar scientific terms, can understand what a feat it is to have sought and found the exact terminology. A lifetime of intense meditation on such works as the Bhagavad Gita and the works of the Guru Narayana was crowned by Dr. Natarajan's discovery, while overseas and in close rapport with all the literary resources of libraries in places like Paris and New York, of a terminology drawn from Western philosophy and science, exactly in keeping with the meanings of the science of the Absolute as found in Sanskrit and

Malayalam. To have found their equivalents was itself an achievement which future students of *brahmavidya* will always remember with gratitude.

It was also possible for Natarajan to come to the inescapable conclusion by the most diligent research, self-examination, and evidence, that he did have an understanding strangely denied to others, of the whole subject of Brahavidya and Indian philosophical wisdom. This was a difficult discovery, but it gave him the confidence to plunge ahead with certainty in his role as a guru. In this—as in his full statement of guruhood in the *Word of the Guru*—to date he has never been challenged, either lightly or seriously, which is evidence enough that he is right.

Thus to have witnessed, as I think I have done, one amongst many, the full emergence of a guru, has been for me a wonderful privilege. It is only to make this clear in this biographical statement, that I trouble the reader by entering my own personality into the account.

I would like to add a few of the varied cross-sections which constitute the organic personality of the subject. There is Natarajan the teacher, for example, who dissected frogs in Presidency College, Madras; who successfully undertook the headmastership of a notoriously difficult school in a

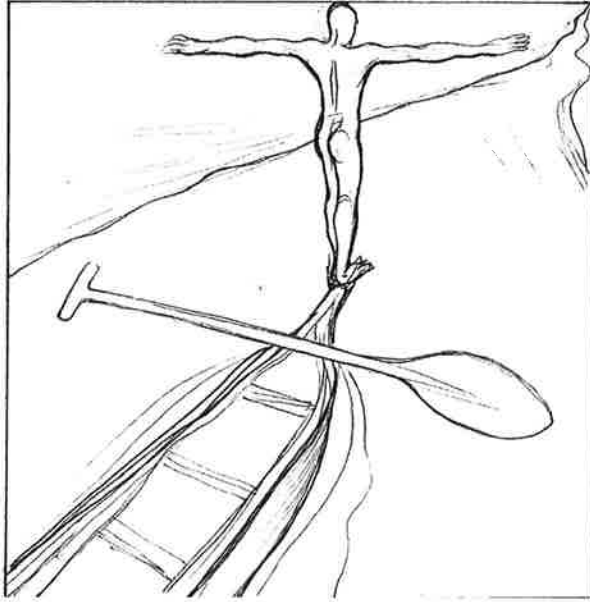


tough part of Travancore; and who was equally successful and popular as “Pitar Natty” in teaching science at a school of varied nationalities in Switzerland in 1929. To American children, twenty years later, he was just “Pete,” and to one young lady who is not married he still remains “Uncle Natty.” In various places he has met his old pupils of the school in Switzerland. He is never forgotten by anyone who has met him. That applies to the common people. He has told me of a Swiss peasant who welcomed him after twenty years as if time had not passed like water under the bridge, whose children who had never seen Natarajan, knew his name and welcomed him even more than their father.

Natarajan has a strong sense of art, which unfortunately rarely gets a chance of expression. He once wrote a play, and thirty years ago with a group of boys, took it round to the villages of the Nilgiris, acting in it and accompanying himself on the violin. While in Italy at very short notice he had to prepare an improvised Indian dance and provide—alone—the musical score, which was picked up by professionals and orchestrated as they do in Europe. That was during an international festival at a vast open air theatre packed with many thousands of people. When we were in

Poona listening to the *abhangas* of Tukaram he recalled the air he had chosen, which was one of that famous Maratha saint's songs.

Natarajan has a whimsical dream of wearing an old suit and a wide-brimmed



hat and living a bohemian life somewhere on the coast of France, and writing poems about the Absolute. Another of his gifts is that kind of imagination which can make a projected dream seem real enough to become actual. He has done this with himself in his adventurous way and a few people get the infection and succeed where before there was just pessimism and failure. That is an artistic insight which is rare and part of his genius.

He likes building, and is naturally proud of what he did with severely limited means in constructing the main

Gurukula at Fernhill, Nilgiris, and with the Gurukulas themselves at Varkala and elsewhere—built organically, with room to grow up—“contingently” would be perhaps the word he would choose.

His later writing, as I have mentioned in my foreword to *Word of the Guru*, is distinct from his first style. His early literary style of twenty-five years ago is charged with stately emotion. The intellectual austerity of his present mode of writing is in keeping with the traditions of Advaita Vedanta. The emotions are sunk out of sight. English, unfortunately, is notoriously defective for the philosophical or academic style. Here again, Natarajan in his absolutist way will make only the least concessions to current mannerisms or idiom. He is well aware of the existence of current idiom but prefers to pass it by.

He has an exceptional ability to fit into the mental climate as a good mixer in any company. In forceful assertion he exceeds the Malayalee, but equally he is able to adjust himself to the graver Kannada people, and again he can adapt himself to the negative-natured Tamils. He is quite at ease with French and German people, but the English and the non-Dravidian peoples of India are a bit wearing or trying to his contemplative and “prehistoric” temperament. Something in the South Indian nature revolts against the harsh outlook of the average North Indian, and particularly to their prevailing syrupy religious tendencies and practices. The rigid national conceits of the English, their intolerances, and the vulgarity and slum-smeared morality of

many Americans are also distasteful to him. He recoils sharply from sight-seeing, but that is general among most people of any intellectual integrity.

When it comes his way, natural beauty and beauty of character always affect him. So do places associated with philosophic history. He tries to look at what he sees with the eye of philosophy rather than with the measuring eye of temporal history. Thus the remains of the Etruscans in north Italy and of the Greeks in Sicily both appeal to him. He found affinities with the American "Indian" place names and those of the Dravidians of South India. He was also immensely alive to the philosophic significance of the 35-foot high statue of the naked Gomatesvara Jaina at Karkal in South Kanara which we saw recently.

Natarajan also likes good libraries. One of the few things he enjoyed and appreciated in Europe and America was the fine libraries, even in small towns of a few thousands population. His method of reading a book is either snappy or desultory. He won't touch many books, especially many that are popular today, and most magazines he wants to throw away. But a good book attracts him again and again. Books as literature just don't seem to attract him. He appreciates sound and disinterested scholarship, and has strong praise for the exact learning of professors and students in such institutions as the Sorbonne. He compares this with the slovenly situation in India where orthodoxy and often meaningless tradition submerge not only originality but also plain intelligent research.

He likes the French mode of life, beginning with the buttered roll and coffee. He likes the clean sanitation of the West. He considers India has much to learn about clean kitchens, privies and sewage, and restraint in preparing and serving food. He enjoys wild, romantic and scenic nature, the sublime in mountains especially, but not entirely empty of humanity. The latter provides the dialectics or the contemplative interest.

At Geneva, Paris and New York, Dr. Natarajan has met many front-page personalities. He met Bertrand Russell in a gentleman's dressing room and Garry Davis in a ship's lounge in mid-Atlantic. He discussed Indian philosophy with Romain Rolland in a little boat on Lake Geneva. He heard Dean Inge talk of mediocre things, and listened to Bernard Shaw's lectures. By this time Natarajan could have been well-known had he courted publicity. He has gone out of his way to avoid it. He has said that the Guru Narayana told him to be bolder, and showed him how to demand his legitimate philosophic rights. But there is in Natarajan an aversion to isolation from basic plain humanity. To have your name on the front page even for a "good cause" savors of the kind of egotism he despises. And it generally does no proper service to the "cause" since one is invariably misrepresented.

That is why, perhaps, as a guru, Natarajan does not have the full recognition which his wisdom and genius certainly deserves at the public level. Most gurus have made some concessions to the public. Wearing only a G-string, Ramana Maharishi sat for a lifetime in the shadow of a holy hill; Aurobindo retreated behind a kind of purdah, making himself rare by occasional special appearances; Gandhi

harrowed the feelings of the masses by willful fasts; Tagore appeared prophetically and poetically with beard and special robes; and there are others today who have devised spectacular methods or transformed themselves into holy presences with mass appeal. But all of them are not gurus in the sense in which Narayana Guru or Dr. Natarajan are gurus.

Natarajan's guruhood is pure and philosophically correct, making as few concessions as possible to relativistic or social notions. He is a guru of absolutist truth. It is too rare to be popularly understood, in India at any rate. It is not the popular conception of the Upanishadic pattern or of the ashram. It is a new form of guruhood, made for a world beyond the Indian frontiers, for a really global world. Even the Vivekananda guruhood conception was tinged with the Indian nationalist limitations. The Guru Narayana did the initial spadework here in breaking through the fixed Indian orthodox patterns, as far as he was able in his own lifetime to do so, without entirely destroying the background. His work was experimental, and his success showed the way to the one disciple, Natarajan, to plunge ahead on a wider and entirely universal scale. Natarajan therefore has grafted guruhood on to a global background. For this work the absolutism of guruhood has to be stressed more than the religious or even the conventional yogi aspect as known to India.

Dr. Natarajan has never wanted a following, least of all of blind believers. He only asks for reasonable understanding of the pure principles for which he stands, and not in any cloud-soaring sense either, but in immediately applicable relationship with any or every given actual situation; nor in works but in understanding alone.

His discoveries in the field of philosophy open up a new age in human understanding. Through his genius, for the first time clear sense emerges out of the hitherto baffling expressions of Indian thought, while the ways of Indian spirituality cease to be a mystery. So at one stroke minds are cleared and much delusion and superstitious trickery in the philosophic-religious field is destroyed. How bold and wonderful is his genius in restating yoga as a modern perennial science of dialectics applicable in all fields!

All this sheer original creative labor is of lasting benefit to humanity. As an explorer and conqueror of the high Himalayan peaks of religious psychology and philosophy only vaguely and awfully beheld from below, but never climbed before—with the notable exception of preliminary surveys by the Guru Narayana—the name of Natarajan as a guru will be forever gratefully remembered, either alone or coupled with the Guru Narayana, as the greatest Guru-philosopher or Absolutist of our time.

On this special occasion we cherish the hope that he will live long enough, not only to complete his literary projects, but to see, even if he has no personal desire for it, the realization of some of his absolutist visions of applied wisdom. Along with all others in a unitive company, I join in happy gratitude before the Light of the Absolute which shines with a clear and steady brilliance through all the bewildering facets of his rich personality, whether as a man, friend or guru. Here

I greet him, as befits his name, Natarajan, Auspicious Dancer in the pure realm of the Absolute, with all the deep reverence that one may reasonably offer to another, on this joyful birthday anniversary!



EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF SRI NARAYANA GURU

BY PETER OPPENHEIMER, EdD.

Part Three: Prognosis

This final section of my essay will focus on the sociological and axiological implications of Narayana Guru's teachings in the educational field. Sociology deals with interpersonal relations and ways in which groups and communities are organized and relate within themselves and between themselves and others. No doubt the goal is the maximum fulfillment of the individuals making up a society with the maximum possible harmony between its members. All ethics and morality have this same end in mind of vouchsafing the good of each and the good of all. In spite of numerous ennobling exceptions, there can be little doubt that most societies today are riven with disharmony and discord both within their own boundaries and between themselves and other societies, often seen as rivals if not adversaries and often referred to as "alien."

Education should provide individuals with a worldview and moral compass that can mitigate these existing rivalries and hostilities between people. As mentioned above, the currently prevailing views of what it means to be an individual and the definitions of success in life can be seen to contribute to the sense of rivalry, competition, exploitation and hostility threatening to tear the world apart. In fact, the biggest destroyers of harmony, the environment and human dignity are themselves the "success stories" of our current educational model. These are the captains of industry and masters of finance who have excelled in this competition for resources, exploiting both nature and their fellow men and women as providers of cheap resources and labor on the one hand and malleable markets on the other.

It is no wonder then that the environment, the life-support system on which we all depend, has been seriously exploited, degraded and even threatened with extinction, while at the same time millions if not billions of people around the world are feeling held down, abused, disempowered and disenfranchised. The resultant epidemic of ill health, poverty and strife proclaim the ultimate judgment on the assumptions and systems which have produced it.

And it is here, as much as anywhere, that the alternative assumptions and suggestions of a sage and visionary such as Narayana Guru provide us with a promising antidote. The declaration of the unitive nature of the Self and its

resultant appeal to “see one’s Self in all others and all others in one’s own Self” holds the promise of an entirely more peaceful and harmonious society. From the universally approved posture of “non-harming” to pro-active engagement in compassionate action, there is a whole spectrum of interpersonal values to be explored and navigated. Once we re-orient our idea of “basic education,” we can make this universal value scale a part of the curriculum based on an understanding of and appreciation for the unitive nature of Self.

One outgrowth of understanding that the Self is far greater than we’ve presumed is that the Self has more potential to live creatively, harmoniously and joyously. The vision of Self, illuminated by Narayana Guru, abolishes the age-old tension between selfishness and altruism. Once you see your neighbor in your own self and your own self in your neighbor, there can be no question of exploiting him or her for your own happiness, as you would literally be “bringing yourself down.”

This must be the reason that Jesus made the backbone of his approach to morality to “love your neighbor as yourself,” which is very different from saying something like “love your neighbor as if he were yourself.” The former is a far more potent statement than it has been reduced to in the so-called “Golden Rule,” treating others as you would like to be treated. Perhaps the reason most of us often break this Golden Rule is that it is already pretentious. That is, it implies a separation and then asks us to pretend there were no separation. With Narayana Guru the call is to love one’s neighbor as if he or she were one’s self. In order to wholeheartedly “love your neighbor as yourself,” you must first come to the realization that your neighbor is in truth yourself. This sets up an entirely different basis for morality and ethics than what we see in the diametrically opposed dog-eat-dog, social-darwinistic, scarcity-ridden, competitive model of ultimately separate selves.

We therefore only falsely assume that one man can be made truly happy (or successful) at the expense of another’s suffering (or failure). It is in light of this deeper vision of the nature of the self, that it has been correctly stated that an injustice foisted upon a single person anywhere in the world is, in fact, an injustice visited upon the whole of humanity, and that when the dignity of even a few is trampled, the dignity of all is thereby diminished. Thus the basis of empathy does not become the ability to extend one’s concern beyond oneself but rather the cultivation of an utterly natural concern for oneself, arising from a more profound realization of the depth and breadth of oneself.

In his *One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction*, Narayana Guru has several verses that underscore this revelatory and promising basis for social harmony, which could and should become the basis for teaching and learning about morality. The following mini-section of five verses is emblematic:

Endearment is one kind; this is dear to me;
your preference is for something else;
Thus, many objects of endearment are differentiated and confusion comes;

what is dear to you is dear to another also;
this should be known. (v. 21)

The happiness of another—that is my happiness;
one's own joy is another's joy—this is the guiding principle;
that action which is good for one person
should bring happiness to another. (v. 22)

For the sake of fellow-man, unceasing, day and night
unstintingly strives the kindly man;
The self-centered man, what frustration's toil undertakes,
that is for his own sake alone. (v. 23)

“That man,” “this man”—thus, all that is known
in this world, if contemplated, is the being of the one primordial Self;
What each performs for the happiness of the self
should be conducive to the happiness of another. (v. 24)

What spells benefit to one, while to another distress brings,
such conduct is one that violates Self; Beware!
That spark of pain intense to another given
into inferno's ocean it falls, there to burn its flames. (v. 25)

In her masterly *One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction* Study Guide, Nancy Yeilding makes the following clarifying observations about verse 21, which then sets the stage for the following verses as well:

“This verse begins a short section of verses that focus on ethical living, not from the standpoint of moral “shoulds,” but from the perspective of essence: knowing, as the Gita and the Isa Upanishad say, that one's Self is the Self of all and the Self of all is one's own Self. These verses offer us guidance in how to make our daily living our spiritual path, so that each instance of endearment can be a window into that. Guru Nitya often made the distinction between unitive and unified. Unified implies a number of disparate things brought together, whereas unitive acknowledges their intrinsic oneness. This verse notes both the fabric of our daily experience—in which we continuously are aware of and motivated by our preferences (both positive and negative), and the clashes with others that we experience as a result—and the universal context of our shared basic needs, shared primordial value, and shared essential identity.”

And in his commentary on verse 25, in which the obverse of the previous verses is given and one acts in such a way which cuts against the grain of the identity of

all in one Self, thereby disrupting the natural harmony of society, Nataraja Guru makes the dynamics at work very clear:

“Violation of the unitive Selfhood on the one side is equated here with its dialectical counterpart of a general fire of inferno for which the spark of pain given to a single individual could be the partial stimulus to create a wholesale reaction. Just as intense pain in the tip of one’s toe would suffice to upset the balance of the whole person in suffering, so is the subtle reciprocity implied here. The slightest discrimination between favorites or enemies brings unforeseen quantitative or qualitative effects. Consequences flare up into a general conflagration. The sum total of human suffering consists of small sparks of partiality shown by men somewhere or other, at one time or another. The general cause of war should be thought of in this way. Like one spark setting fire to the neighboring faggot, the continuity of the process of evil effects is to be imagined as operating ceaselessly in the world of human relations. Clashes of clan with clan, time-old feuds, racial, national or other rivalries, and preferential pacts, all work together to keep the flames of inferno constantly fed with fuel and burning incessantly.

When the dualistic attitude has once been abolished, and generosity spreads evenly like sunlight without distinction, on all humans beings, even to the publican and sinner, that kind of generosity belongs to the context of the absolutist way of life and is one that, in the context of Self-realization, is very important to keep in mind. The self can itself become the worst enemy of the Self. This has been brought out with the full force of delicate dialectics in the Bhagavad Gita (VI. 6).”

Nataraja Guru, *Commentary on One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction*, Narayana Gurukula, 2006, pp. 115-6

This principle implied here is by no means empty philosophizing nor simply some kind of mind game. One only has to look at one’s own life and relations to confirm the sense in which our own happiness impacts those around us, as their suffering or joy impacts on the state of our own well being. Furthermore, there is the law of “instant karma” in relation to that other law of “what goes around comes around.” When we treat people with tenderness and affection, we immediately feel ourselves more at ease, whereas when we alienate another through cruelty or hostility, we ourselves become disturbed, even without or before that other person’s reaction. This principle can be taught at an early age and reinforced throughout one’s education, as surely as can the currently prevailing presumption that we are all ultimately separate and competing individuals, who can “get ahead” or somehow enhance our own well being by triumphing over or exploiting others.

Axiology is the theory and study of the nature of value, and that is what I will focus on now in its relation to education. The two primary goals of education,

in its broadest sense, can be stated as Self-Realization and Self-Actualization. It should by now have become clear that the Self under reference also has two basic aspects, one vertical and the other horizontal. In the vertical sense, we are all one, sharing a common essence of being/consciousness/affection. At the horizontal level, each individual is a totally unique expression of this universal Self, with its own unrepeatable bundle of gifts and goals, talents and perspectives, dreams and offerings. It is the realization of the former that at once confirms both the freedom and the courage to develop the latter. Self knowledge therefore implies becoming familiar both with one's universality and one's uniqueness. Education, at its best, provides the opportunity to accomplish these joyous and adventurous tasks.

Just as in nature every bird has its own special song to sing and each flower its own unique shape, coloration and fragrance, each child should be seen to have her own inner structure and dynamics whereby at one and the same time she can fulfill her own aspirations and in that very process contribute her own unique "song" and "fragrance" to the general well being of all.

If education is pictured as a great out-spreading tree, its root can be said to be the assumptions discussed above at length about the nature of the Self and the world, the overall goals of education, and an understanding of how best we learn.

The trunk can be said to be what I would call Basic Education.

Basic Education would include such items as

1. Self/Other Awareness (how am I feeling now, as well as an awareness of other people, their feelings, and the environment too);
2. Self-Knowledge (who am I as a unique individual and what do I want to become);
3. Self-Actualization (cultivating creative ways to express or manifest one's self);
4. Self-Realization (what is the real and unchanging foundation of who we are that connects us to all others).

The branches and foliage of this tree could be called Social Education.

Social Education would include such items as:

1. Personal Hygiene;
2. Interpersonal Relations;
3. Community Engagement;
4. Eco-Consciousness or Global Consciousness.

And in this metaphor the ultimate flowering of that tree would be what could be called Higher Education.

Higher Education would deal with:

1. Transpersonal/Spiritual Realms of Experience;
2. Disciplines and Practices for Attainment of the above Experiences;
3. Expressions of Mystical and Visionary Experience.

The metaphor of a tree breaks down in the sense that in this construct of education, the fruits are not simply some byproduct to be enjoyed at the end of some long process, but rather can actually be tasted, enjoyed and felt as nourishing at each and every step along the way. The joy of search and discovery, of effort and accomplishment, of caring and sharing are constant factors, turning the process of learning, when intrinsically motivated, into its own reward. This is why Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, when asked about what degrees were going to be conferred by his East West University, said “The only degree we are interested in at the East West University is the degree of satisfaction each student finds in his search and study.”

Although the vision laid out here focuses on the psychological import of education, it is not meant to imply a limitation of curriculum itself to the field of psychology. There is room in this approach to education for every possible subject to be taught and studied. It is simply that every subject should in some sense contribute to the enhancement of the dignity, integrity, clarity, capability and fulfillment of the students concerned and of mankind in general. There is an aphorism in Zen Buddhism which says, “The self goes forth and confirms all things. This is delusion. All things come forth and confirm the self. This is enlightenment.”

In fact, the current emphasis on the cultivation of the intellectual capacity of students is to be supplemented by addressing other types of intelligence such as those identified by Herb Gardner, which include such aspects of our character as linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, bodily/kinetic, musical, interpersonal, naturalistic, intrapersonal, and existential. A well-rounded curriculum would address and cultivate each of these different types of “intelligence,” and not sacrifice them all on the altar of memorization and standardized testing, as is the prevailing practice.

At the very center of the *One Hundred Verses Of Self-Instruction*, verse 49, Narayana Guru puts his finger on the one single value that can be seen to be the master motive of all human endeavor and at all times and climes, the happiness of the Self:

Every man at every time makes effort in every way
aiming at his self-happiness; therefore in this world
know faith as one; understanding thus,
shunning evil, the inner self into calmness merge.

It is this underlying and over-arching goal, which Narayana Guru goes so far as to elevate to the position of the one universal “faith” of mankind, that should also be the guiding star of all education as well. Here it is very important to distinguish between what the Guru is referring to as Happiness (*atmananda*—the joy of the Self) and mere pleasure. Pleasure and pain are both relative factors, fleeting and alternating one after the other. Both are agitations of the nervous system. Happiness, on the other hand, can be discovered to be a constant, unconditional and unconditioned factor or fact of life, that is not dependent on circumstances.

In verse 34, Narayana Guru introduces the concept and construct of life as a divine sport.

Mounted on the rotating wheels of a chariot which have half-moments
and such for spokes, the world rolls on;
know this to be the beginningless divine sport
that is ever going on in knowledge.

There are many possible analogies and metaphors to suggest a framework through which to understand life. Perhaps the most common in the modern world are to see life as a struggle for existence or a battle for survival. How different would be both our attitude and behavior, if instead we saw life as a dance, or, as is suggested here, as a divine sport. Sport is playful, not nearly as grimly serious as war. In play, ends and means are connected, and the goal is not something to be attained as a result of playing, but rather is discovered in the joy of playing itself

In the preceding verse (v. 33), in a similar vein, Narayana Guru posits, “Knowledge to know its own nature here has become the earth and the other elements [all this].” In such a spirit of lightness and sense of curiosity and adventure, education can become more joyful and easily adopted as a life-long pursuit, seen as an end in itself. In the very next verse, Narayana Guru compares the attainment of true knowledge, or wisdom, as like “the dawn all together of ten thousand suns.” Such should be the experience of students both in and outside of the classroom throughout the process of education.

The promise that Narayana Guru holds out for education, regardless of the subject, when the process is intrinsically motivated as related to one’s own value vision, is proclaimed in the following verse, which once again refers to the universal and eternal pole star, the Happiness residing at the core of the Self.

The effort that is made in view of something dear to one
as ordained too, remaining always constant and same;
That is a dear value, unborn, unspent, unpredictable,
One and secondless, which ever endures as one’s happiness. (v. 91)

As we approach the conclusion of *One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction*, Narayana Guru strikes a radical note of humility as at the same time he reaffirms the absolute nature of the Self as existence/consciousness/bliss:

We have not known anything here so far,
having spoken of great happiness; even if intellect and such disappear,
the reality of the Self, without becoming disintegrated,
will continue as knowledge. (v. 98)

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati's commentary on this verse includes the following clarification:

“In this verse Narayana Guru says you have not known anything so far. We are in verse 98, and he is saying we don't know anything yet! By saying “we” he includes himself in this state of affairs. Until now, we have not known a thing properly. Why? Because we have been saying “Oh, that was excellent. It was wonderful, superb!” All these implied comparisons are there because you have never known your true state, in which there is no good and bad. There are no superlatives and nothing to compare anything to. It's just bliss through and through. Only if something has aspects could you say, “In the morning it was like that, and after noon it became like this.” There are no high and low tides in the joy of the Self. It's always the same. So we have to confess this is something we have not known.”

Nitya Chaitanya Yati, *That Alone, The Core of Wisdom*, (DK Printworld, New Delhi, 2003), pp. 697-8.

In the educational psychology implied in the works of Sri Narayana Guru, one can see an alternative epistemology, methodology, sociology and axiology to the present approach to education, which has become nearly universal and surreptitiously serves as the handmaiden for globalized capitalism. The approach suggested through his teachings is radically new, in that it differs in both essentials and practicalities from what currently exists. Yet, at the same time, it has behind it the sanction of ancient wisdom from the Upanishadic texts of India to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Buddha, the poetic mystical insights of a Jalalludin Rumi, and the philosophical insights of a Socrates. It is fully in line with what Aldous Huxley termed the Perennial Philosophy of mankind's greatest thinkers and benefactors.

As I hope to have shown, this orientation has direct implications for both content and approach from the earliest grades through primary, secondary and graduate level education. But perhaps nowhere does it shine more luminously than when we reach to the lofty peaks of what one could justly call higher education, in which ultimate reality breaks through the veils of appearance and the timeless reveals its universal face within the very confines of the temporal and specific. It is of this final achievement of the phenomenological reduction of all into pure consciousness that Narayana Guru sings in the final verses of his *One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction*:

The atom will disappear in the vastness of knowledge,
leaving no trace of its parts; on that day the indivisible will attain perfection;
Without experiencing, one does not know this unbroken consciousness;
It is the silence-filled ocean of immortal bliss. (v. 97)

As far back as the first quarter of the twentieth century, Narayana Guru was already able to sense the crisis and crying need of mankind. He made reference even then to environmental devastation, to the commercialization of human relationships, of man's greed and man's inhumanity to man. Narayana Guru made both his life and his teachings a response to this crisis and, in effect, his words can now be understood to be a clarion call and a wholesale rejoinder to this crying need.

Nowhere is that need greater than in the field of education, and nowhere can the Guru's teaching be found to be more of a balm and a bomb, a balm to soothe the fevered heart of mankind and a bomb to destroy the ignorance and greed that are at the root of the very many problems with which we today find ourselves faced. Our current system of education is very much at the root of many of our problems and a fresh approach to education based on a deeper understanding of the true nature and unparalleled potential of each and every human being can go a long way toward resolving those same problems, leading us, both individually and collectively, to a bright and long-lived future.

Conclusion

Life is really very precious. Our life support system, justly capitalized as Nature, is so bounteous that each day witnesses the ripening of billions of fruits (not to mention vegetables, grains, cereals, etc.), enough to feed every man, woman and child alive on the planet (as well as the countless other species, similarly provided for). Nature's provisions are lavish, but owing to human ignorance and greed, many people are not getting their minimal fair share. Each person has his or her own dignity. Dignity need not and cannot be granted by another. But in many cases, through injustice and humiliation, it can be threatened by others. In fact, humanity could live in harmony, with people pursuing their own self interests (enlarged by true Self-knowledge) and thereby also contributing to the well being of those with whom they live—family, neighborhood, community, bio-region and up to and through state, nation, global, and ultimately the universal and absolute Self and Source of All.

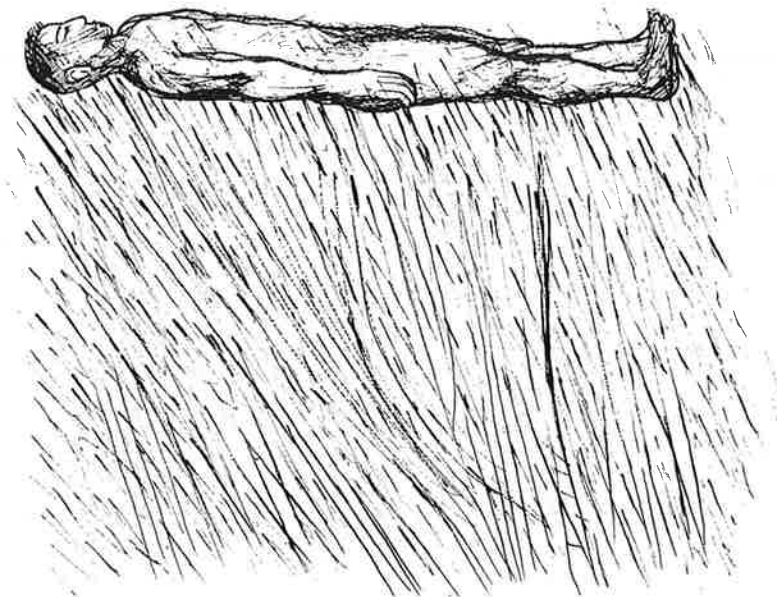
The primary stumbling block to such a salubrious future is the severely alienated self-concept that has been warped by sophisticated society, schooling, similarly misinformed parents, advertising, salesmen and politicians. The supposedly separate self is necessarily crippled by a fundamental alienation whereby we do not see our own self in others and others in our own self.

The way forward has been taught and modeled not only by sages like Narayana Guru, but spiritual luminaries of all time such as Jesus Christ, the Buddha, the Sufi mystic poet Jalaludin Rumi, social reformers such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King and countless "street saints" known only in their own communities as people who act from this universal identity and enlarged sense of what lies within their own self interest. Our prevailing educational system is ill at its very root. This

paper has attempted to present a diagnosis, prescription and prognosis, which can address the disease and initiate a program to promote health and well being.

One cannot reasonably have hyper-competitive assembly line education and standardized testing for students, each one of whom is utterly unique with an almost unlimited potential to express their uniqueness in unforeseen ways that can contribute to the greater good. The root problem at the heart of education is that we are trying to pound round pegs into square holes and are coming out at the end with some badly splintered and misshapen pegs, in turn leading to a warped and ultimately self-destructive culture of exploitation and abuse of various kinds.

The obvious remedy in such a case is to make the holes round. By understanding and adopting the educational psychology implicit in the teachings of Sri Narayana Guru we will be undertaking just such a process of cleansing and refashioning the system of education to more closely reflect the inner reality and higher potentials of the individuals and societies which that education is ultimately intended to serve. Such education will be both reflective of and a furtherance to the truth, beauty and goodness which resides as both root and fruit at the core of our Self.



THE ELEVENTH LABOR OF HERCULES

BY SCOTT TEITSWORTH

Since the last installment of these exegeses on Herakles, I have come across one more example of how the ancient pearls have been trampled in the mud of the Age of Hubris. Bestselling author Agatha Christie, in *The Labors of Hercules* (NY: Dell, 1968, p. 9), ridicules the romantic attraction to the classics that prevailed in the West not too long ago. At the behest of a priggish academic type enamored of the age-old romances, ace detective Hercule Poirot—himself named after Hercules—is perusing the Greek myths and thinks:

“Take this Hercules—this hero! Hero indeed? What was he but a large muscular creature of low intelligence and criminal tendencies! This ancient Hercules probably suffered from grand mal. No, Poirot shook his head, if that was the Greeks’ idea of a hero, then measured by modern standards it certainly would not do. The whole classical pattern shocked him. These gods and goddesses—they seemed to have as many different aliases as a modern criminal. Indeed they seemed to be definitely criminal types. Drink, debauchery, incest, rape, loot, homicide and chicanery—enough to keep a juge d’Instruction constantly busy. No decent family life. No order, no method. Even in their crimes, no order or method!

‘Hercules indeed!’ said Hercule Poirot, rising to his feet, disillusioned.”

To a materialist, virtually all the wisdom of the ancients is nothing more than tedious superstition and unscientific speculation. But, as we have rediscovered in scrutinizing Herakles, myths are like the Absolute itself: hiding in plain sight, waiting patiently to be noticed for the treasures they safeguard.

The Golden Apples of the Hesperides

The last two labors are “extra,” making twelve instead of the original ten. King Eurestheus discounted two earlier ones, because Herakles had had some help. Knowing how myths evolve over time, this means some clever philosopher thought up two really great new tasks for Herakles to perform, and had to alter the back story to make room for them. They certainly add a new dimension to the tale.

Herakles’ Eleventh Labor is close kin to a universally-known myth at the very foundation of Western civilization, as we shall see. Eurestheus ordered him to

fetch three Golden Apples from the paradisiacal Garden of the Hesperides, whose streams flow with ambrosia, the food of the gods said to confer immortality. The tree the Apples grew on was a gift of Gaia, the Earth goddess, on the occasion of the marriage of Zeus and Hera, the primeval male and female. Three nymphs known as the Hesperides were assigned to care for the tree, but because they sometimes pilfered the apples themselves, Hera brought in a monstrous serpent to guard it. This was no ordinary snake: it was a hundred-headed dragon, each of whose heads spoke a different language.

Something about the apples made them highly covetable. Although it isn't specified, I will share my ideas about that in due course.

Herakles underwent many adventures en route, a couple of which are well worth recounting. At first he had no idea where the Garden was, so he sought out Nereus, a god of the sea who was reputed to know. Like the sea itself, Nereus was a shape shifter, but Herakles held him tight as he swiftly changed from one creature to another (or in one version, back and forth between fire and water), not letting go until Nereus revealed the location. This is reminiscent of the ego, which shields us from the dissonance of realization in order to maintain its precarious perch in the driver's seat. It doesn't want us to know where Paradise may be found, out of fears it would then be superseded by a superior intelligence.

As recent neurological observations have shown, our surface consciousness has a minimal role in directing our life, despite its all-wise pretensions. David Eagleman likens it to a stowaway on an ocean liner, though it probably has a wee bit more influence than that. In any case we have a very limited influence in a life that only appears to be ours to control.

The sea symbolizes our ever-changing emotional state, which can easily deflect us from accomplishing our goals, impelling us into alluring sidetracks. We have to be firm in whatever path of growth we choose if we want to want to make something of it. Our ego would just as soon pay lip service to admirable aims, without actually doing anything significant.

In intense experiences like dying or psychedelic traveling, the first stage is evasion, where the ego tries to shut out the threatening truth by denial. As soon as you catch on to the deception, it shape shifts into another, and another. A spiritual aspirant must remain steadfast and not be thrown off, and only then can they penetrate to the boundless lands beyond. Herakles' encounter with Nereus demonstrates how we must hold on heroically when evasive maneuvers try to divert our attention.

One other adventure is of preeminent importance: Herakles' freeing of Prometheus. In it there is a curious convergence of Indian and Greek myths. In Indian mythology the divine eagle Garuda brought the nectar of the gods, soma, from heaven to earth. According to the Greeks, in a parallel move, Prometheus smuggled the divine fire to earth. His punishment ordained by a furious Zeus was

to be chained to a rock and have his liver regularly consumed by... an eagle. We can certainly interpolate a connection between these stories in the remote past. The eagle was considered a divine messenger able to fly between the high and low realms, and heavenly nectar and divine fire sound like they might refer to the same substance, which has often been called a gift of the gods by those who partake in it. Toxic alkaloids present in the nectar could have a ferocious impact on the liver, too. The pain they cause might well feel like being gnawed by a raptor's beak.



What is this divine fire? I had never given it much thought before, but a substance that conveys the intelligence of the gods is more than simple flames of oxidation on a stick. Fire symbolizes the principle of illumination. The effect of even a single spark of the divine fire was to stimulate creative thinking and activity in mortals, along with spiritual vision. The Greek version of soma, perhaps. It's hard to imagine the gods getting upset about humans obtaining ordinary fire, which is the common claim, but expanded consciousness is another matter entirely.

On his way to the ambrosia-filled Garden of the Hesperides, Herakles shot the eagle and freed Prometheus from his chains. Though this is more or less tangential to the official labor, the spiritual meaning is readily apparent. Being freed from whatever is gnawing at your vitals while breaking the chains of your bondage is the whole purpose of a spiritual enterprise.

As a side note, this is supposedly where the olive wreath originated, which Herakles later made the prize of the Olympic Games. Since Zeus had decreed eternal

punishment for Prometheus, Herakles had to devise a symbolic continuation of it, and the wreath symbolizes Prometheus' chains of bondage.

There is an undercurrent of divine elixir in the symbolism of the Golden Apples too, stressed even more in the Genesis version known as the Garden of Eden, as we shall see. Just as the divine fire is more than plain fire, the Apples are more than ordinary fruits. Eating of them confers immortality. Immortality is not about living forever, it means seeing the unity underlying multiplicity, which confers Blake's "eternity in an hour." If I might quote my own Gita commentary, (IV, 31):

"The joy of living is associated with freely chosen activity, and if you don't have any, and just live your life out as a slave to the dictates of others or to the patterns laid down in musty tomes, you are squandering your birthright.

Our true birthright is the *amrita*, the immortal nectar of pure existence. *Mrita* is death, *a-mrita* is the opposite of death. Interestingly, *amrita* is associated with the soma plant that will be mentioned later as a "food of the gods," food that allows you to truly see."

Assuming our hypothesis is correct, Dr. Mees throws light on why the Golden Apple tree was a gift for the mystic marriage Zeus and Hera, as well as its importance in conferring higher consciousness:

"These fruits correspond to the Apples of Immortality of Idunn and to the Ambrosia and *Amrita*, and symbolize the Treasure of God-realization."(iii, 207)

"*Amrita* is the mythical Elixir of Immortality.

Soma was said to be born "between the two sacred stones that were used to press it out," symbolism referring to the union of Father and Mother, or God and his Creative Power, resulting in Enlightenment, and reflected in the preparation of the unfermented wine that was used in rituals. It is the *Jnanavari*, "the Water of Gnosis" of the Hindu tradition dealing with Knowledge. It is the Elixir of Life, the production of which was the aim and end of the Great Work of the Alchemist. It is further the *Rasa* of the Hindu tradition dealing with Bliss. In the Rig-veda (IX, 63.13; 65.15) the *Rasa* is the juice of the Soma-plant. The *Rasa* is the blissful essence of life. In the Taittiriya Upanishad (II, 7.1) and the Maitri Upanishad (V.2) it is self-luminous consciousness, ecstasy, and the perfect taste or realization of life." (i, 189)

"Indra is the helper of the poor, a deliverer and comforter, the bringer of benefits and wealth, the thresher of foes. He is the most faithful of friends, but he grants his friendship only to those who drink *Soma*. He "will have nothing to do with the wretch who does not press the *Soma*", that is to say, with the man

who has no Culture and does not know the inspiration of the Tradition and the ecstasy of its fulfillment. Indra can also 'bless with treasure.' The greatest Treasure is Self-realization." (III, 52-53)

When Herakles arrived at the fringe of the Garden of the Hesperides, he met Atlas, who was holding the sky on his shoulders. In the two main versions of the myth, either Herakles got the Apples himself or he took over the sky burden while Atlas did the deed. The serpent was killed and three apples obtained. The Nymphs were nowhere in sight.

The hundred-headed serpent is reminiscent of the Tower of Babel, as each head speaks a different language. The unity represented by the Apples is defended from intrusion by multiplicity, which can be quite ferocious. Outward appearances forever divert us from the subtle beauty at life's core. Multiplicity stands for perfect selfishness, or the orientation toward materialism, which has to be overcome for the goal to be achieved.



Anyone making a serious attempt to realize their spiritual self has very likely been accosted by all sorts of hostile comments by nay-sayers, cynics, and doubters of all stripes, not to mention their own doubts. Scornful thoughts and opinions have a corrosive effect on a person's determination that does its work mainly in the subconscious, and a seeker will often find themselves losing their resolution without knowing why. It's curious that so many humans not only do not support idealism, but are downright subversive of those who aim for lofty goals.

The Bhagavad Gita offers instruction on the same issue, although from a more contemplative perspective: "the well-founded reasoning is unitive, but many branched and endless are the reasonings of them in whom reason is ill-founded." (II, 41) The serpent's heads are certainly many branched.

Being a heroic type, Herakles was able to overcome this last defense of Immortality and retrieve the Apples. We are encouraged to stick to our ideals, even as we are assailed by doubts, so that we can complete our task, whatever it might be. Doubts are important at the beginning, to make sure the task is worthwhile, but after that they must be swept aside, or "killed." The diversions of sensory appearances must also be subdued before the light they are guarding can shine forth.

Successful at last, Herakles presented the Apples to Eurythoeus, who simply gave them back to him. Herakles then placed them on the altar of Athene. As Dr. Mees puts it, "The Treasure of Immortality, once obtained, is only for giving away." He continues:

"As likely he had enough wisdom not to dare taking them for his own, Herakles wisely offered them to the Virgin Goddess of Wisdom, who acted in accordance with the Tradition she represents, in taking them back where they belonged. Immortality belongs to all. It is for the taking of all who will strive sincerely, one-pointedly and perseveringly, to obtain it. Having obtained it, they will give it for the benefit of others. The Supreme Treasure of God is obtained by renunciation... and is held only by ever-renewed renunciation. When people advance on their spiritual path and experience "a flash of Illumination" or "a glimpse of Reality," or "taste Bliss," they make the mistake of wanting to hold it, that is to say, hold it for their own. And then they are miserable when they lose it again. When they learn that "the only way to hold is by letting go," they will have learned the secret of the renunciation connected with the Ultimate.... When the soul manages to give everything, it obtains the All." (iii, 207-8)



We have a modern day cautionary tale that verifies Mees' insights. Many who have taken psychedelics and experienced an intensely liberating state of mind have wanted nothing more than to hold on to it, to remain in that state. There has been a tendency to keep getting high with the drug, and it has led to some dire consequences. The ancients knew that the safest approach was to garner the vision, and then strive to bring it to life without drinking the ambrosia. Of course you want to share the divine vision with the world, but you must pass it on, and not simply hold it. Giving away what you have gotten is the nature of a true gift, which the Apples were from the very beginning.

Clearly the Biblical Garden of Eden is the same tale as the Garden of the Hesperides, separated in time and space. There are significant differences, too, especially that the serpent protected the Apples in the Greek version, while it invited humans to partake of them in Eden. There is a common thread, shared

with many traditions, that the gods are jealous of humans obtaining enlightenment or knowledge that raises them up to their level. Wisdom is a serious, nontrivial affair. Like the red pill in the movie *The Matrix*, wisdom irreversibly changes the trajectory of life. That's what God meant in Genesis, too, when he counseled Adam that he would surely die if he ate the divine fruit. He didn't mean literally die; as we know, Adam lived to be 930 years old. But Adam and Eve died to their *innocence*, their naïveté. As the serpent expressed it, "in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." When our eyes are opened, it never quite works to shut them again. The genie has been let out of the bottle. We may well try to forget, but at least an inkling remains. And for the brave heroes among us, living with eyes wide open becomes their natural state, which they would never surrender no matter what pressures they faced.

India has a lesser-known myth of the three Ribhus, recounted by the estimable Dr. Mees. They were pupils of Tvashtri, the divine craftsman who shapes beings in the womb, and whose Amrita confers immortality. The three Ribhus were told by the fire god Agni to make four cups of *soma* out of the one he gave them, and if they could they would be honored as gods. They succeeded, and then drove straight to heaven, where they were granted immortality, along with the right to drink the heavenly *soma*. Tvashtri was angered by their boldness, and urged the gods to kill them before they could drink the *amrita*. But the Ribhus were allowed to live because they had fulfilled their task of making four *soma* cups out of one. Mees points out that the soma cup is the moon vessel, the Holy Grail. Multiplying the soma cup in all four directions means making it widely available, similar to Jesus feeding the multitude with five loaves. There may well be an echo of this in the Eden myth also, in the verse "And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads." [Gen. 2.10] In all these cases there is a single unitive source that is transformed into something that ordinary people can partake of, and thus be nourished in the depths of their soul. Herakles has shown us the way to it.

THE PASSION AND COMPASSION OF NARAYANA GURU

BY NANCY YEILDING

The very nature of Narayana Guru's life and teachings and the lives and teachings of his successors in the Narayana Gurukula set the example to all who are inspired and guided by them: an example founded on the truth that we (all human beings) are what we seek. They have all discouraged over-adulation of a single representative of that truth, whether a person or an institution. At the same time it is natural and appropriate for those who have come to know Narayana Guru's stirring example and benefitted by the profound transformative quality of his wisdom teachings to wish to share them. A balance is thus necessary between enthusiasm and restraint.

In my personal experience of living this balance I have encountered many individuals seeking happiness, who were ready to listen with sincere attention and to actualize the guidance offered by Narayana Guru's life and teachings. It is far more rare to encounter a whole association of open-minded people who are interested to learn. It is an invitation that naturally evokes enthusiasm to share.

Narayana Guru is a rare example of a complete human being. He was a brilliant philosopher, who could express subtle philosophical truths in beautiful poetry. He was a mystic who could sing of transcendent reality in hymns that could lift even an ignorant person to the sublime heights of nonduality. He had a deep understanding of the physical sciences as well as of human nature. He had a keen sense of humor and wit as well as an ability to penetrate to the core of social dis-ease.

Narayana Guru was passionate about many things: kindness to all life and to Earth herself, true and unlimited social equality, the right of all humans to connect with and express their spiritual birthright without restraint, the clearing away of the darkness of superstition and stifling social mores, the release of humans from strangling addictions, greed, and hunger for power. But what makes him an eternally precious example for us—wherever we are in the world and whatever the conditions of our lives—is that day by day, struggle by struggle, action by action, and composition by composition, he manifested passion always as compassion. His compassion was never one-dimensional: it was vast enough to include oppressor as well as oppressed. What made this possible is that he saw all as his own dear Self.

Narayana Guru's life work as a whole bears testimony to these things, as do copious examples and anecdotes, but here there is time and space only to share a few glimpses. Through Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, a small book came into my hands late in the 1970s, called *An Anthology of the Poems of Narayana Guru*, translated by Nataraja Guru. At that time I had not visited India and knew of Narayana Guru only through Guru Nitya. Although the English sounded somewhat formal and antique to my "modern American ears," I found that certain verses stayed with me and continued to reverberate over time. For example, those from *Municharya Panchakam (The Way of the Recluse)*:

For the hermit whose attachments are gone
His arm, makes it not for him a pillow?
The earth whereon his footsteps fall
Gaining sin-dispelling power,
Makes it not for him a couch?
For such as he, what use of goods here?
Ever merged as his mind in the verity of "That thou art,"
His bliss transcends inclusively all forms of joy.

Desireless, as he is for nothing ever asking,
Partaking of food brought to him by chance
The body just to sustain;
From all cares free, sleeping on the thoroughfare,
Ever immersed in the vision of the Self,
The hermit, attaining to the unity of Life and Self-supreme,
He comes to his own state, radiant-everlasting, Of Being-Knowing-Joy.

In discourse the recluse excels,
But often restrained in words, he is seen here as one ignorant.
Wandering, sitting, or standing still
Having once come to this changing body, sanctioned by time,
He ever contemplates the state
Of Selfhood's uncut Consciousness Supreme.

Outside the scope of what is spoken of as existing or non-existing
As unthinkable, ungraspable, minute, non-short, stainless or supreme.
Immobile, erect, or most exalted,
He seeks to attain that all-fourth (Turiya) state,
Turning away both from this and that
As one who aims properly
To reach beyond both being and non-being.

Let him live in his own home, or in the forest,
Or at the water's edge—no matter;
With mind ever fixed in the Absolute
The Yogi ever dwells seeing all here in terms of Selfhood.
Like a mirage in a desert land,
He enjoys bliss, that Silent one,
Contemplating That Absolute supreme
which is beyond all compare.

Of course I wasn't about to become a hermit, but I found that certain phrases went deep into my psyche: "for the hermit whose attachments are gone, his arm, makes it not for him a pillow?" "His bliss transcends inclusively all forms of joy;" "Desireless, as he is for nothing ever asking;" "He comes to his own state, radiant-everlasting, of Being-Knowing-Joy." "Let him live in his own home, or in the forest, or at the water's edge, no matter..." These words revealed something my heart intuitively knew was true: that happiness in life has a deeper source than we are usually aware of and that it is not defined by outer circumstances.

As I came to know more of Narayana Guru's life, I realized that these verses aptly described how he lived. Except during his last illness (when he was carried from place to place on stretchers) he continuously traveled throughout South India, often on foot, living simply on what was spontaneously given to him, dressing in two plain pieces of cloth, preferring the ground or a bench to a soft chair or bed, walking among people in silence or with simple, compassionate words, completely free of social convention, finding and sharing contentment everywhere because he carried it always within. At the same time, Narayana Guru advocated for all people to share equally in Earth's natural blessings.

An anecdote from his life shows how absolutist wisdom connects to social life. Narayana Guru had written a Malayalam translation of the Isavasya Upanishad. In the first verse it says, "Do not covet wealth." This irritated one of Guru's ardent devotees who was an enthusiastic social worker, eager to do good to the poor by raising funds from the rich. The Guru's advice not to covet anybody's wealth seemed impractical to him. So he went to Guru to straighten out his contradictory view.

In the original Sanskrit the mantra poses a rhetorical question, "Whose is wealth?" Guru asked the social worker the same question, "Whose is wealth?" Then as an elucidation, Guru said, "The entire wealth belongs to God." In other words, whatever we are provided with belongs to the whole of humanity. If it is now monopolized by a few, it is through theft, robbery, manipulations, and confidence tricks. It is every person's right to have what naturally belongs to them. This radical economic view demonstrates the vast perspective that arises from a person who sees only One.

At first reading, some of the allusions in *The Way of the Recluse* were mysterious to me, such as “Outside the scope of what is spoken of as existing or non-existing, as unthinkable, ungraspable, minute, non-short, stainless or supreme,” or “To reach beyond both being and non-being.” But they were also intriguing. They beckoned me to learn more. Through Guru Nitya, I discovered that seers and mystics from all traditions, from all over the world, have used this kind of language to try to express the inexpressible. Particularly, I came to know of the whole Upanishadic tradition, which is threaded through with such teachings. For example, when (in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad) the sage Yajñavalkya responds to the searching questions of the sage Gargi and his disciple Maitreyi about the ultimate reality:

“Verily, O Gargi, that Imperishable, is never seen but is the seer, is never heard but is the hearer, is never thought of but is the thinker, is never known but is the knower. There is no other seer than this; there is no other hearer than this; there is no other knower than this. Across this Imperishable, O Gargi, is space woven, warp and woof. (v. III.8.11)

This is the Self which has been described as ‘Not this, not this’. It is imperceptible, for it is never perceived; undecaying, for it never decays; unattached, for it is never attached; unfettered, for it never suffers and it does not perish. . . . Through what, my dear, should one know the knower? Thus you have been given the instruction, Maitreyi. This much is indeed the means of immortality.” (v. IV.5.18)

We hear similar seemingly contradictory language used to reveal truth in Narayana Guru’s deeply compassionate and insightful work, *One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction (Atmopadesa Satakam)*, (translated by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, in *That Alone, the Core of Wisdom*):

At the time of birth there is no existence; the one who is born
is not in another moment; how can such a state be?
Death is also like this, and there is no birth;
everything is of the power of pure consciousness. (79)

The body and all similar things have no being in one another,
and become untrue for that reason; another part
remaining without setting from day to day,
once again, as the true form, attains perfection. (86)

Taking each kind alone, it exists;
mutually each excludes the other;
when this is remembered, body and all such
are neither real nor unreal; that is indescribable. (87)

Such verses are just a few of many, found in copious compositions of the Guru, which make it clear that his works of poetry were informed by the clear light of the intellect tuned to the highest philosophical understanding. Those same works also express the height of mystical experience, such as in the verses below, also from *Atmopadesa Satakam*:

A very vast wasteland suddenly
flooded by a river in spate—thus comes the sound
that fills the ears and opens the eyes of the one who is never distracted;
such should be the experience of the seer par excellence. (16)

Like ten thousand suns coming all at once,
The modulation of discrimination arises;
The veil of transience covering knowledge is *maya*;
Tearing this away, the primal sun alone shines. (35)

The sky will glow as radiant sound—
on that day, all visible configurations will become extinct in that;
thereafter, the sound that completes the three-petaled awareness
becomes silent and self-luminous. (52)

The atom and the indivisible, both as being and non-being
shine from either side;
thereafter being fades away
and the experience of non-being, having no foundation, will also cease. (96)

The atom will disappear in the vastness of knowledge,
leaving no trace of its parts; on that day the indivisible will attain perfection;
without experiencing, one does not know this unbroken consciousness;
it is the silence-filled ocean of immortal bliss. (97)

Neither that, nor this, nor the meaning of existence am I,
but existence, consciousness, joy immortal; thus attaining clarity, emboldened,
discarding attachment to being and nonbeing,
one should gently, gently merge in *SAT-AUM*. (100)

Narayana Guru's example is so compelling because he clearly demonstrated the connection between the mystical realization of oneness and a life lived with bountiful compassion.

In another of his poems in the little anthology, *Critique of Caste (Jati Mimamsa)*, he wrote:

Man's humanity marks out
the human kind
Even as bovinity proclaims a cow.
Brahminhood and such are not thus-wise;
None do see this truth, alas!
One of kind, one of faith
and one in God is man,
Of one womb, of one form,
difference herein none.

“Man's humanity marks out the human kind, even as bovinity proclaims a cow. . . . Of one womb, of one form, difference herein none”—a great truth, so simply (and scientifically!) stated. Early stories from Narayana Guru's childhood show us how he reacted to the complex web of social and religious strictures that dictated behavior in his village and surrounding area, based on closed-minded and prejudicial attitudes, and the often vicious conventions of untouchability. Nanu (as he was affectionately called then) delighted in showing the ridiculousness of such attitudes.

At about the age of four or five, Nanu had become very fond of one worker who was considered an untouchable by Nanu's family. Nanu was told that he would go blind if he touched him. He went running to hug the man, immediately proving the falsehood of such superstitions. He simply laughed at his relatives' shocked insistence that he perform the ritual of purification that they considered necessary to ward off blindness and other such dire effects of “caste pollution.” His life-long capacity to strike directly at the core of a prejudice, yet to do so with gentleness and humor thus started very early in his life.

Narayana Guru made no distinction between human beings on the basis of any hereditary factors, placement in society, or occupation. He said:

“Authors of caste may say that it will prevent unhealthy competition. Those who get all the benefit of the system may say so. Probably their happiness is built on the sufferings of others. Man is not made for castes, for the world or any such thing. All these are for men. If men are degenerating, what is the good of talking about less competition and so forth? Caste degenerates man and so it is not wanted. There is no caste; it is foolishness to think there is.”

The guidance implied in his words and his example is pertinent at all times and in all locales of this world, for the human tendency to discriminate based on external factors, to use those discriminations as the basis for economic exploitation and social repression is widespread. It is a disease that afflicts humans everywhere, overtly and insidiously. It encourages us to demonize those who are different so that

they can be regarded as an enemy or less than human, which then gives permission to torture and kill. We all have need of seeing such tendencies in ourselves and correcting them. But in the midst of the fast pace of life and global events, we need insightful and steady guidance. *One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction* alone is a steadfast and worthy guide to realizing the height of human possibilities, attested to by the many lives around the world that have blossomed in the light of its teachings.

Narayana Guru's teachings about the nature of happiness and living the fullness of happiness in our own lives permeate his work. A few of the verses focused specifically on happiness make his teaching clear:

The happiness of another—that is my happiness;
one's own joy is another's joy—this is the guiding principle;
that action which is good for one person
should bring happiness to another. (22)

For the sake of another, day and night performing action,
having given up self-centered interests, the compassionate person acts;
the self-centered man is wholly immersed in necessity,
performing unsuccessful actions for himself alone. (23)

“That man,” “this man”—thus, all that is known in this world,
if contemplated, is the being of the one primordial self;
what each performs for the happiness of the self
should be conducive to the happiness of another. (24)

What is good for one person and brings misery to another
Such actions are opposed to the self, remember!
Those who give great grief to another
Will fall into the fiery sea of hell and burn. (25)

All beings are making effort in every way,
all the time, for the happiness of the Self;
in the world, this is the one faith;
pondering on this, without becoming subjected to sin, be controlled. (49)

These verses illuminate the direct connection between our transactional life and the core of our being, which is the core and source of all being. Usually, and quite naturally, given our conditioning, we relate to a situation in terms of various transactions done or not done or needing to be done. And certainly we do have to function in those ways. But here we are reminded that we need to act from our core outward. We can understand that as taking some time to be silent or to meditate

and calm our psyche so that we can see the situation with as much clarity as possible and then act from the widest and deepest perspective we are capable of. We can also understand it as reminding us that we need to focus on that which transcends “I” and “you” and “they” and “it.”

We are also blessed with experiences of transcendence, when our heart melts into that of another, moments or relationships that reveal the naturalness of experiencing the happiness of another as our own happiness. In a way, this understanding is at the core of our being, the Self. But we also know the sorrow of how many of our conditionings, petty and momentous, can interfere with living it. At the same time, many things can also reorient us. Calling the words of these verses to mind or remembering the life example of the great lovers of humanity in the midst of a difficult situation can turn us in the direction of greater peace and love, in any and all aspects of life. They support our growth toward becoming agents of peace in a world sorely in need of it.

When we open our hearts to the suffering of human beings, of other beings, and even the Earth herself, it is easy to become discouraged and sad. Even Narayana Guru himself experienced the pure sorrow that comes to a true lover of life. Once Rabindranath Tagore, the well-known poet, visited Narayana Guru in Kerala. The followers of the Guru arranged a great procession including elephants and music. The Guru had the best carpets of the hermitage spread on the ashram verandah where the visitor would sit. The crowd thronged around to hear what the two leaders would say to each other. When silence finally came, Tagore congratulated the Guru on the great work he was doing for the people. Guru replied with great earnestness, “Neither have we done anything in the past nor is it possible to do anything in the future. Powerlessness fills us with sorrow.”

Such feelings so often lead either to a retreat—into hopelessness, hedonism, or faint hopes for divine intervention—or to fighting, which can turn into hatred and even aggression against those seen as the perpetrators of oppression. Narayana Guru enlivened another possibility that exists for us all: that of passionately upholding justice and kindness at the same time; not blaming, but demonstrating better ways. And the world around him changed.

This possibility is poetically presented in verses 11 and 12 of his *Subrahmanya Kirtanam*, in a free English translation by Guru Nitya:

“All discernible forms disappear where light is not paired with shadows,
and all imaginations cease where beatitude reigns supreme. Such is the
resplendence of your supreme state. It is as if your brilliance has swallowed the
sun and the moon. Your lotus feet rest in the brilliant fire of the wisdom of the
third eye. Oh Lord, reposed on the colorful wings of the phenomenal peacock,
my supplication to you is not to disappear.

“The moon has gone beyond the horizon. With it also have gone the fantasizing dreams of the night. The sun has risen in the firmament. The moon and the shimmering stars are no more to be seen. It is a good time to immerse deeply into the depth of beatitude. Alas! That does not befit the occasion. It is not the time to be lost in spiritual absorption. Look, here is the world drowning in the dark ocean of misery. In body and mind millions are diseased. By drinking they have increased their torpor. These unfortunate wretches are to be roused from their drunken madness. Oh ye people, wake up now! It is time for you to enter into the cleansing river of eternal wisdom and perennial joy.”

Narayana Guru was very aware of the power of education. As Sanskrit was the language of temple ritual, the traditional mark of a learned person, and the great treasure chest of Indian philosophy and literature dating from the most ancient Vedas, Narayana Guru encouraged its study. He established a number of Sanskrit schools along with his installation of temples. In addition to the importance of education in our own grass roots, the Guru stressed the value of education that would prepare a person to participate in and contribute to the modern world. In Varkala he established the first of many model English schools, and started night schools for fishermen and field workers in a number of villages. He also encouraged pride and excellence in local industries such as weaving and other crafts as a way to foster self-sufficiency and self-determination. The graduates of these schools soon undermined the traditional argument in favor of preserving hereditary professions in the cause of excellence. In an atmosphere of encouragement and freedom, self-confidence and intelligence bloomed and came to fruition in a whole generation of newly awakened minds, which transformed the fields of education, literature, business, and government.

One of the rituals popular at the time was that of *talikettu*. In a Hindu wedding a tali (necklace or cord with a gold charm) is tied around the neck of the bride by the groom, analogous to the placing of a ring on the bride's finger in a Christian ceremony. *Talikettu* was a ceremony involving young girls in which a number of them were brought together to have talis tied around their necks by men who would not, in fact, later become their husbands. The ceremony reflected the uncertain nature of marital status for women who were often expected to receive a number of men without any commitment from them. They, and any children that resulted from such unions, remained in the family home. For the girls involved, the ceremony was humiliating, and for their families it was terribly expensive.

Narayana Guru often spoke against the observance of such outmoded customs, which were degrading to the persons involved and caused needless expense. Once he visited a home on the day that *talikettu* was to be celebrated there with girls from a number of related families. He spoke to the head of the family, urging him to drop the custom for their own good. Guru's follower readily agreed to have no more such

observances in the future but he was afraid of incurring the wrath of the other girls' families by canceling at the last minute. Guru asked him for his agreement and then went to the others and obtained theirs. The women were relieved and grateful. The Guru's quiet and sensible words soon spread and such practices faded away.

In example after example, from the large scale to the small, Narayana Guru manifested a supremely effective and thoroughly gentle way of life that each individual can practice, in any circumstance. In *Scriptures of Mercy (Anukampa Dasakam)*, the Guru gives beautiful expression to the core of that way of life:

Grace yields blessedness; a heart Love-empty
Disaster spells of every kind.
Darkness as love's effacer and as suffering's core,
Is seed to everything.

Grace, Love, Mercy – all the three –
Stand for one same reality – Life's Star.
“He who loves is he who really lives.”

One who loves is one who really lives: these few words—compassionately given to us by Narayana Guru—invite us all to embrace a life of passion and compassion.



GURUKULA NEWS

The 62nd annual Gurukula Convention will be held from December 23rd to December 29th at the Gurukula headquarters in Varkala, Kerala, India. This year's main topic will be the philosophical and practical aspects of the major world religions. Six seminars will be conducted as part of the Convention, and scholars from all the concerned religions will be presenting papers. A daily *homam*, or fire ceremony, and discourse will be given by Guru Muni Narayana Prasad each morning. In the evening, discourses by various sannyasins will be given in the prayer sessions, followed by light entertainments.

In June of this year, there was a murder attempt on Swami Tanmaya at the Ooty Gurukula. The police are still conducting an investigation into this, as both the assailant and the reason behind the attack are unknown. After time in hospitals in Coimbatore and Trivandrum, Swami Tanmayan is now receiving Ayurvedic treatment, is recovering, and is expected back at the Ooty Gurukula in January of 2013. Swami Vyasa Prasad has been taking care of the Gurukula during this time.

Guru Muni Narayana Prasad is currently writing an English commentary on Narayana Guru's *Atmopadesa Satakam*. His commentary will be from a Vedantic perspective, augmenting the ones by Nataraja Guru and Guru Nitya.

The annual Guru Puja of the Bolare Gurukula in Bangalore will be held on February 17th, 2013, and Guru Muni Narayana Prasad will be camping there from February 15th-25th and giving classes.

The Gurukula website: www.narayanagurukula.org

Ongoing internet classes on *Atmopadesa Satakam* and *Yoga Sutras*:
islandaranya@toast.net

Book introductions, articles, class notes from the Portland Gurukula:
scotteitsworth.tripod.com

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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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