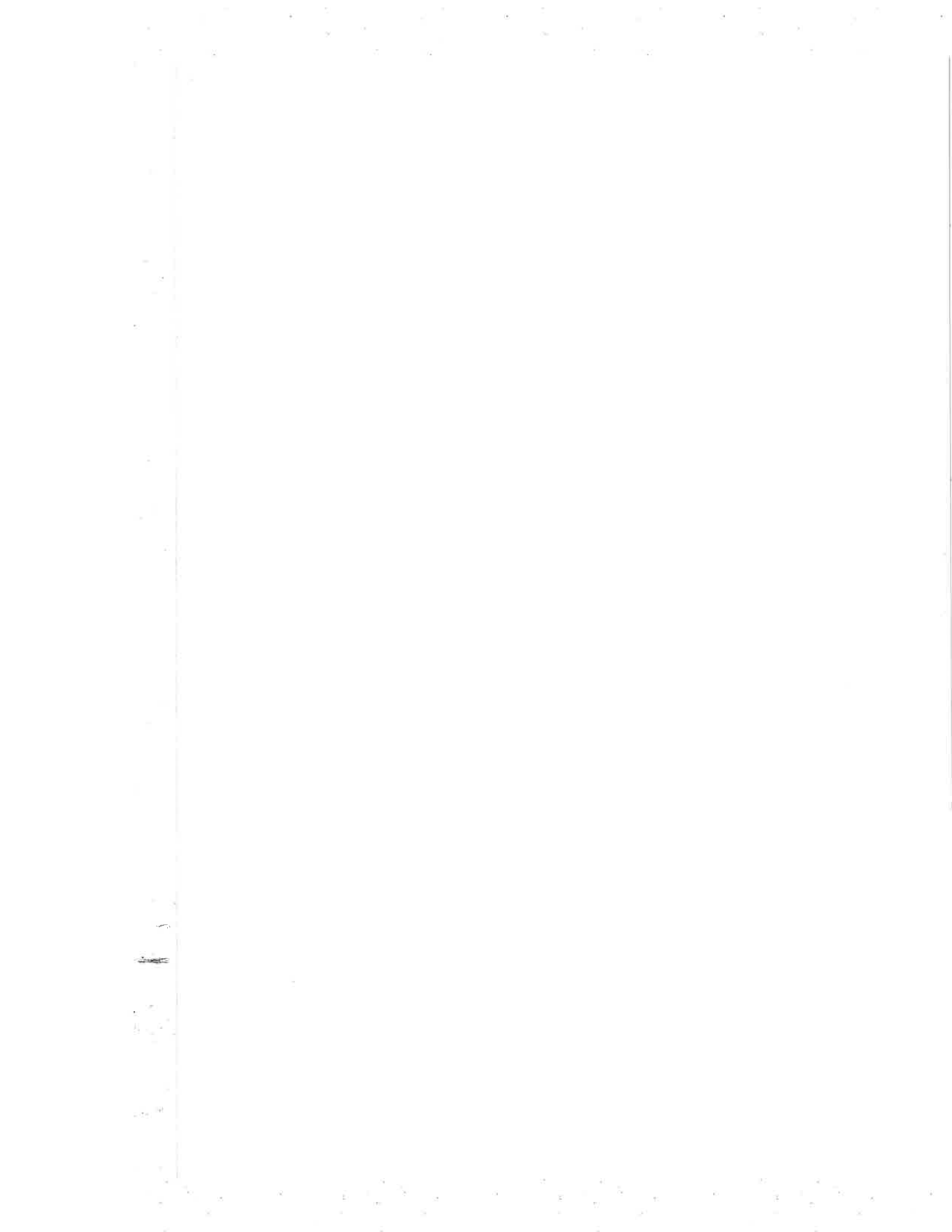


# GURUKULAM



SPRING 2013







# GURUKULAM

A Journal of Philosophy and the Arts

SPRING 2013

Published by the Narayana Gurukula

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 6 EDITORIAL
- 8 *ATMOPADESA SATAKAM* Verses 53 and 54  
by Narayana Guru  
translation and commentary by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati
- 20 *SRI VASUDEVA ASTAKAM*  
by Narayana Guru  
translation and commentary by Guru Muni Narayana Prasad
- 24 HAPPY SADNESS  
by Emma Walker
- 28 THE TWELFTH LABOR OF HERCULES  
by Scott Teitsworth
- 36 FOUR POEMS:  
by Thomas Palakeel
- 40 MEMORIES OF NATARAJA GURU  
by Patrick Misson
- 49 ICONOGRAPHY OF SIVA  
by Deborah Buchanan
- 52 LEARNING TO FLY  
by Gayatri Eassey Agnew
- 54 ONE HUNDRED STEPS TO SELF-REALIZATION  
by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati
- 59 NEW YEARS MESSAGE  
by Guru Muni Narayana Prasad
- 62 GURUKULA NEWS
- 64 ILLUSTRATION CREDITS



# EDITORIAL

Rummaging through old files, I found a long letter from Guru Nitya dated 1979, in which he replied to many questions about Narayana Guru and the Narayana Gurukula. I will be re-printing that letter in full in the next *Gurukulam*, Autumn 2013, but there is one small section I want to quote now as part of this editorial. In response to a question of mine about setting up a Gurukula, Guru Nitya wrote, “The model of the center you suggest can function well provided all the participants have had an occasion to strike their spiritual root in the mass of the unconscious psychological phenomena on which the foundation of Narayana Gurukula rests. By merely calling a place Narayana Gurukula, it does not become one.”

What stands out in this statement is the emphasis on the psychological depth in Narayana Guru’s teaching and the necessity for us as students to dive into this depth, to make a connection between his profound experiences and insights and our own lives. Guru Nitya is saying, one, that the depth is there and it is important. Narayana Guru is a teacher not because he is a social reformer or because he said certain things. We look to him because of what he understood in himself and how he expressed that in his life.

The other part of what Guru Nitya wrote is that the spiritual depth, not any outside structure, is what must be the foundation of a Gurukula. We cannot be content with the simple adulation of a person or ideals but need to turn around and face our own selves and find a living truth there. By “sinking our spiritual root” into the same source that Narayana Guru did, we can create a Gurukula. Each of the Narayana Gurukula gurus have become so by being intrinsically themselves. They did not imitate their predecessors, but instead imbibed their vision and dedication and then expressed them in their own unique way.

As perhaps we all know, the meaning of Gurukula comes from its two constituent words: *guru* meaning source of light and wisdom, and *kula* meaning home; in other words, the *gurukula* is the home of wisdom and light, the home of the guru. We make a home of the guru by inhabiting that same ground of wisdom, by living it together. Instead of constructing a house and calling it something, we together actualize our own deeper visions and that endeavor weaves a world of sustenance and welcome.





# ATMOPADESA SATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

Verse 53

*itil ezumadima saktiyinnu kanu-  
matiyatil akki marannitate maya-  
matiyaruwan mananam tutarnnitenam.*

The primal energy implied in this  
is the seed from which everything here proliferates;  
having understood that, without forgetting  
to clear the mind deluded by *maya*, meditation should continue.

*Maya* is described as *sadasad vilaksana*, in other words it is both real and unreal. *Maya* is not a thing, it is a situation. Whenever there is an event, an experience or a context that shows within it an enigmatic pull towards two opposites, it is an instance of *maya*.

For instance, when two people come together and feel attracted to each other, they experience something they have not had with anyone else. They find a tenderness, an easy flow between their minds, a mutual acceptance. Their hearts can communicate without words. At many levels of emotion they feel a sense of union. They marvel at the wonder of this, and think of it as a very special relationship that has never before occurred with the same beauty and joy.

Then, from somewhere, a small spark of doubt arises. The one having the doubt wants to dismiss it immediately. This causes a flicker of panic. In his frantic haste to disown the doubt he takes a step backward, and this is noticed by his friend, his beloved. This brings a note of dissonance. Misunderstanding comes. Soon it grows into a dark cloud, a fog that comes between them. As this increases it makes both of them aware of the separation. They become very apprehensive. The very love that was the source of all joy, all the sense of wonder, now has a new quality. It chokes them. It makes each other's company unbearable. Yet there is still the fear of separation. They want to cling to each other at the same time they want to push each other away. A terrible situation comes. Agony and pain suffuse every

passing moment. At last, with all sincerity they wish they had never met, that this would have never happened to them. The very word 'love' becomes a synonym for defeat. At its worst, everything done before in love, in confidence, with a sense of sacredness, now looks very vulgar and profane. Memories to be cherished become haunting corpses of deceitful acts and treachery.

If you bracket all this intrigue together it is a single situation with two sides, one of grace and beauty, warmth and joy, and the other full of darkness. Whenever an experience has such a duality you can say it is subject to *maya*. In your life you can find hundreds of such situations where with great love you move toward a certain value, and when you are about to possess it you see a hundred other possibilities drowning you in unanticipated problems. You cling to it; you cannot have it and yet you cannot let it go. When such a duality comes, you become like a person possessed by an evil spirit. You don't know what you are saying or how to behave. You are at a crossroads, where turning one way is wrong and turning the other way is also wrong. We come to such crossroads in life again and again, and they are all situations of *maya*.

Narayana Guru asks where this comes from. Is it right to say this is only an illusion and there is no substance to it? No, you cannot say that. This is what you are living, and if you are living it, it has substance. It affects you. You cannot just dismiss it from your mind as being of no consequence. You must go back to the source. It is not far. It is right inside you, right where your consciousness originates. Looking inside yourself you can see that from out of unconsciousness, like little bubbles of consciousness, awareness is coming to the surface. This awareness is the illumination of a name, a form, a meaning. It brings associated memories of the past, the present and even the future. New dreams come, expectations come. You make designs in your mind to act. Soon you find you are in the thick of action. There is compulsion about it: you cannot put it off. You act.

If you watch all this, it's like a fountain gushing up from a great depth with tremendous force. You cannot plug it or stop it. It's a continuous flow. Narayana Guru says, "Know this to be a *shakti*, a force." When did it start? No one knows. Even before you were born, someone else was undergoing the same kind of thing. You yourself have come from that person or those people. Before you were born, what is now in you was lying in someone else as a seed. The desire of your father and your mother to come together caused your appearance. The intertwining actions of millennia are behind you. The history of ideas is within you. It's a continuous flow of great force, of which you are now a passing effect. This is what the Guru calls *adi bijam*, the first seed of all this causation, of this great energy.

So what should you do to get rid of this kind of intellect, this kind of mind, that brings you to this terrible situation of duality? In the previous verses we were told that everything finally resolves in the still voice of *aum*. At the tail end of *aum* there comes a silence. It ends in silence. In that silence is everything and yet nothing.

Nothing is there because there are no names, no forms, no meanings, no situations, no events, no pluralities. Yet that which started out as 'a' and progressed through 'u' and 'm' culminated in it. Thus, everything is there.

When it begins at the level of 'a', that is, the wakeful, transactional level, there are thousands of names, forms, events and meanings. From this manifoldness the word tapers down in an unbroken continuum, passing through the dream state and the deep sleep state to end in silence. The step before coming to the great silence is deep sleep. The man who is sitting here and talking to you was in deep sleep at two o'clock this morning. At that time, did he have the philosophy, the ideas he is now explaining? Certainly. And what state were they in? At that time their state was purely potential. Everything was hushed into a potent state, so that when he waked up he was not newly creating all his words and ideas. They were all there even in the deep sleep, lying there like seeds in a granary or barn. When the wheat or rye is being stored it does not show any signs of life, but as soon as a little moisture is added the sprouts come out.

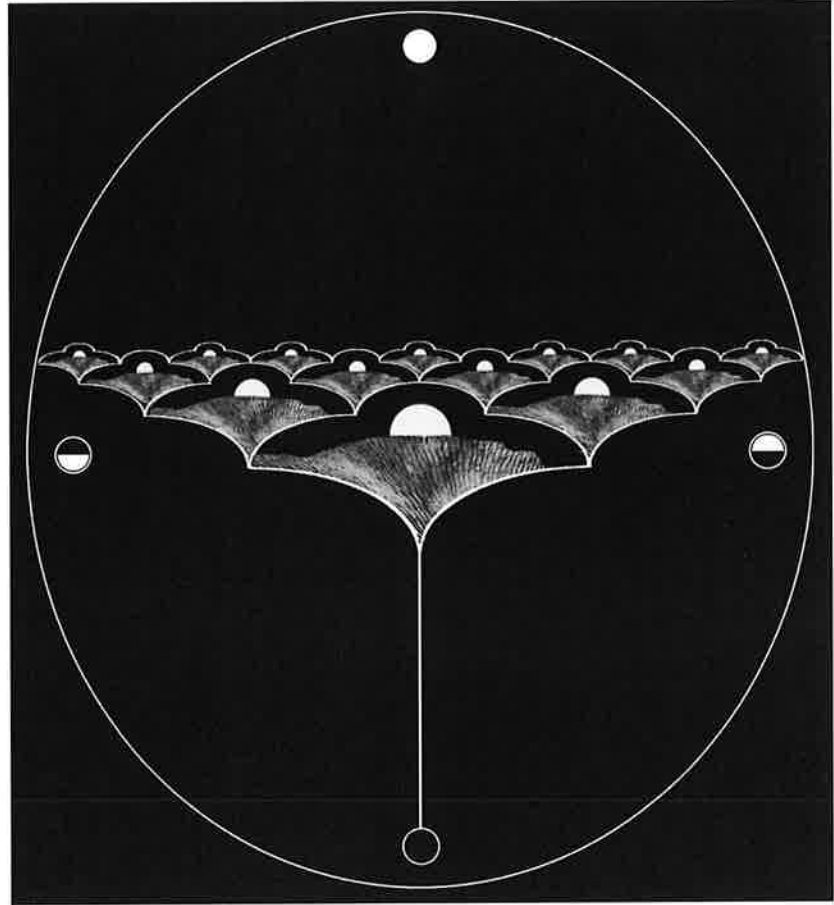
The stage before entering deep sleep is the dream state. All the ideation is there, but actions are not. That is, mentally actions are going on, but the physical organs are not moving. When this man we are speaking of dreamt he was walking, he was not walking with his actual legs. They were lying buried under the sheet. When he thought he was working with his hands, they were lying still. When he thought he was talking, his mouth was not moving. Still, everything seemed to take place just as if it were actually happening in the outside world.

When we come back all the way to the wakeful stage, finally action means physical action. Raising the hand means the actual hand raises. Talking means that a voice comes from the mouth. At this point, if I borrow ten dollars from you I become a debtor. Tomorrow when I wake up and you also wake up, you will ask me to pay you. But if I took a million dollars from you in my dream you wouldn't even know it, and I wouldn't have to pay it back.

So how can you say it is all *maya*? You cannot just brush it aside like that. At the transactional level it is a reality. But you forget all about your ten dollars as soon as you fall sleep. Then you excuse me because then I don't exist for you. We can go back and forth from the transactional to the dream, from the dream to the deep sleep, and from the deep sleep to what you cannot say at all. What really happens?

The One has this proliferating quality. It opens up and becomes transactional. It is like a pulsation. It opens up to the light, and then all this is laid out before you. Then it closes back down and nothing is there. By opening the eyes, the whole world comes. By closing them, it disappears. The pulsation of consciousness is like the eyes opening and closing. This is the beginningless and endless force, *sakti* or *adibijam*. You should meditate on this. But how?

There is a pure light in which all these actions are going on. Nataraja Guru, in his commentary on this work, gives the example of a stadium being illuminated with



bright lights. People are playing games on the field. The light is only illuminating the games, only looking on in a sense, but without it the games would not be visible. Like that, there is a consciousness that is illuminating everything, and within it there are so many games going on. We should be careful to take these aspects together, not separately. Even when I borrow ten dollars from you, I should also have the knowledge that this lender and I and the money all belong to one overriding whole.

When the One manifests into the many, it brings qualities that are not known to be in it. It is this issue that troubles us. When it is all one, it has no fault in it. A piece of cloth cannot be just one because it has two sides, but if you can efface that element it can be considered as one. When it is folded it has many new features—up and down, before and after, inside and out, big and small. All these pluralities come from one and the same thing. So which is more real, oneness or manifoldness? Even this very comparison is wrong. The one reality shows all these possibilities. When the cloth is folded you should treat it as folded, and when it is not folded you should treat it as not folded. There is no point in saying that when it is folded it is as if it is not folded. But you need to remember that it is the same as that which is unfolded, as that which has no qualities. To keep these two understandings together requires a dialectical method of looking. It is called *yoga mimamsa*, critically seeing a thing with a unitive understanding, the one and the many at the same time.

The original sound 'aum', including the entire continuum from the silence where you merge through the 'a' where you transact, are all seen as one organic whole. Then you are not surprised by the eventualities in life, as you are when you see only one side. When you stand on one side of a hill it is physically impossible to place yourself at the other side also. But the knowledge that there is another side and that the vision from another angle could be different takes away from you the big fear, the big hatred and the big confusion.

Along the same line, if you know that a certain person under certain pressure will behave in a certain way, then you have no animosity toward them for their behavior. They are not inherently good or bad, yet the situation has become drastic. If you can ease the situation somehow at the transactional level, do so. But even as you do that, think of the original state in which all these details are irrelevant. The relevancy and the irrelevancy are to be seen side by side. This creates a neutrality in your attitude.

The other person may be quite mad. Usually the immediate impact of this is you also go mad. But you can remain sane and save the situation, rather than proliferating madness by reacting to it. There is enough madness there already. Why should you add your own to it? Usually we are drawn towards it; there is every temptation to join in the confusion. This is called *maya*.

The intellect which is likely to be drawn into a dualistic situation is called *maya mati aruvan*. You should take this as a special opportunity to meditate on the oneness out of which all these dualities arise. This cannot be done in a lukewarm

manner. Contemplation must become the main current of life. It is a twenty-four hour business requiring great dedication and sincerity. You are also living your life as it comes, meeting all eventualities. This gives a new quality to life, an insight into things. It takes away the agony and helps you to have empathy with those who are not seeing it and thereby undergoing great pain. If we look at it properly, crime is a sickness. It is not a crime to fall sick. A sick person deserves sympathy. The problem is in seeing only one side of the coin. But you are seeing both sides.

When people brought a prostitute before Jesus and asked if she should be stoned, he could see both sides. He said, "Let him throw the first stone who has not sinned." He saw the implication of the law of the country. He also took into account the plight of the poor woman, and the animosity and wild nature of the people. And he could put the whole thing in a very simple way, with justice and fair play at the center. Ultimately he brought compassion to prevail. Another classic example is the bishop in *Les Miserables*, by Victor Hugo. He always saw both sides.

Such kind of insight is what is called here meditation on that primal seed which proliferates as all this. When meditating on *aum*, we should go from our own transactional world through our dreams, into our deep sleep and beyond to the very source. From that we return, and then repeat the process. Thus, it becomes a continuous pulsation in our life. If the continuous pulsation is made meaningful, dualities will continue to be there but you will have taken the edge off them. They won't make your heart bleed any more.

When your thoughts get caught in a vicious circle and you go round and round and cannot escape from them, it is called *cintam*. When you make logical arrangements of thoughts as in a chemistry or physics book or an engineering manual it is *vicaram*. Neither of these forms of mind will help you. What will help is *mananam*, going from the effect to the cause, bringing the many to the One, hushing the pluralities of things into their unitive nature, gathering your thoughts and getting into your center, going to the greatest depth. The mind goes again and again to new subjects, but it is to be brought back to where it originated. All this is *mananam*. The fourth aspect is *dhyanam*. You don't do *dhyanam*, it comes naturally when your *mananam* or contemplation becomes real.

Narayana Guru here recommends the continuous contemplation of the primal seed of all this. If the cause is real, as the effect has come from the cause it also belongs to the real. You dismiss the effect as unreal because you see one part of it and another part is hidden from you. This falsifies its unity. But if you look to the unity, it cannot be false. Seeing unity in and through all the diversities, always, through a process of meditation and not of analysis, not one of fragmentary observation but instead always living it as a whole, is the message of this meditation.

VERSE 54

*unarumavasthayurakkil illurakkam  
punar unarum pozutum sphurikkuvila;  
anudinaminne rantumadi maya-  
vanitayil ninnu purannu maritunnu.*

In sleep the wakeful state does not exist  
and when one wakes up no trace of sleep remains;  
day by day, in this way, these two, having emerged  
from the primal *maya* woman, arise and alternate.

In verse 5, Narayana Guru said that people who are conditioned by nature's stimulation wake, sleep and think many thoughts. There is a light within which is like a lamp shedding its radiance and also witnessing everything. It has no beginning or end. One should contemplate on it.

In verse 6 he speaks of a natural block in the human mind to contemplation of this pure state, arising out of the alternating modes of waking and sleeping. He points out that in the wakeful state desires for nourishment and enjoyment come. Natural instincts for the preservation of the body and the perpetuation of the species impel one to eat and mate. He sees it as almost impossible for most people to break these habits, so he asks, "Because of these modifications, who is there to know the pure state in which there is no waking or sleeping?"

In verse 7 he suggests a neutral state which is neither of waking or sleeping, and he asks us to remain in it. If one is not capable of remaining in that state, then the suggested alternative is to seek the help of a contemplative who has attained it.

Now in the second half of *Atmopadesa Satakam*, where the discipline is focused on actual experience, he hearkens back to these verses. In verse 54 he is highlighting the paradoxical counterparts which come one after another in our experience. In the wakeful state there is an awareness of a subjective self that marks the central focus of awareness, which we have designated as 'I'. A frame of reference is established with 'I' as the center, providing a spatial extension where bodies are placed. One body is close and another is far, something is above and something else is below. It gives a spatial picturization of the conscious world.

The dimensional partner of space is time. Time passes and there is no way of recovering it. There is a hopelessness about the way it keeps on running. Only the future is ahead, and what is lived is gone forever. This produces in consciousness a sense of urgency; thoughts like "I have to finish this before I go to sleep again."

The wakeful state is programmed and structured. There are places, things and events, as well as time. There are fixed identities such as "I do," "I know," or "I experience." Countless are the things we experience in the wakeful world, and



millions are the names that we can give to them. The world of consciousness is extremely vast. We could go on elaborating endlessly on time, on sound, on form.

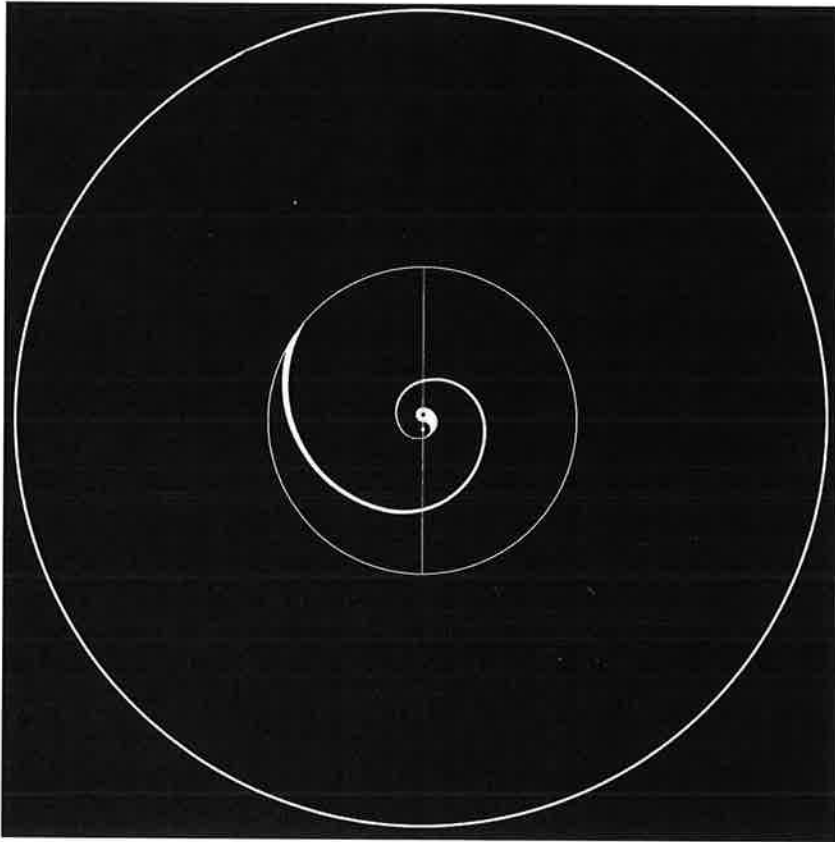
Think of this vast universe of all these properties and qualities. Then suddenly with a snap it all disappears. Is there something that sees it all disappear? No. It is simply a vacuity, absolute nothingness. Who is there to know it is absolute nothingness? No one. Then how do we know there was such a state? We don't know. All we know is there was a state when we were wakeful and now there is another state of wakefulness. In between something happened. And why do we presume that? Because we know we have gone to bed and then got up from it. Lying there, we have a remembrance of going to bed and a recognition when we wake up that we are in bed. If we look at the clock we see a difference in time, and when we look out the window we see snow that was not there previously. Putting all this together, we presume something must have happened and we were not there for a little while.

Thus, deep sleep is a presumption. In it there is no time or space, none of the identities. Is it also part of consciousness? Psychologists use the two terms, consciousness and unconsciousness, quite casually. If wakeful experience belongs to consciousness, its opposite is what is happening in deep sleep and so we call that unconsciousness. Do they both belong to the world of consciousness? If we take black and white, they are opposite in a sense but they are still both colors. Since they are within the same context they are not contradictory, they are only contrary.

Contrary and contradictory are not the same. Contrary means different but belonging to the same frame of reference, in the way that 'B' is different from 'A'. The contradictory of 'A', however, is 'not A'. Something that is contradictory is absolutely different. The states of wakeful consciousness and deep sleep are absolutely different. How can they both coexist in the same entity? We can semantically coin a word 'consciousness' and place within it awareness and nonawareness. Does that allow us to experience them together?

In the previous verse Narayana Guru asked us to meditate on the supreme principle in order to get over the duality of *maya*. Here he is focusing attention on what we should meditate on. This is not an easy thing to do because we have taken refuge in word concepts. In India, most people do not know Sanskrit. If a Sanskrit word is used, it gives a sense of authority to the speaker. A person can thereby tyrannize others with it. When they say "I am now quoting from the Upanishads," everybody bows their heads. It is a kind of slavery, linguistic servitude. The same is done in the West with Greek and Latin, since ordinary people do not know those languages either. In fact, when you don't understand something, you say it is Greek to you. Scientists decided to give all their terms in Latin or Greek, just like the Indian Brahmin uses Sanskrit. If you use a word that no one can pronounce, everybody bows before you.

We have become victimized by such fancy language. The words sound impressive, but do we actually experience their meaning? No. We only think we do.



It is just like saying “I believe in God.” “Oh, did you meet that fellow somewhere?” “No, but I know all about Him. I hear about Him all the time.” All this so-called familiarity with God is just having heard the word a hundred times, a million times even, from others. Is that God-experience? What do you mean by God-experience, anyway? Knowing the meaning of the word is only a dictionary experience.

Similarly, we have only a dictionary experience of consciousness and unconsciousness. If you want to go beyond that, try to place what you call consciousness and what you call unconsciousness together. If you can conceive them together and think of an all-embracing entity in which you can sit without contradiction, then you know what is being said.

This is difficult but not impossible. It’s not like thinking of a square circle; in fact, it’s not conceptual at all. When we try to contemplate, the main mistake we commit is in replacing direct understanding with intellectual understanding. We tend to imagine the unconscious in terms of consciousness, timelessness in terms of time, spacelessness in terms of space. This is an injustice, squeezing the unconscious into the mold of the conscious in order to try to understand it. It is also partisan: you are in favor of consciousness.

What is the faculty with which you contemplate, or, as the phenomenologists say, reflect? By the way, I agree with this term because you are most often thinking with your known tools of reasoning. You have to first suspend the mechanism of reasoning with ordinary logic. Then you allow the given—what is not conscious in deep sleep as well as what is conscious in the wakeful—both to prevail and be juxtaposed. You are therefore reflecting rather than manipulating.

The problem is one of getting over relativity. From the most unknown to the most known, there are shades of ignorance or shades of knowledge. Relative to something else you know this well or less well. To give this up and adopt an absolutist attitude is our main challenge.

When two opposites are brought together, validating both while not taking their contradiction into account, it is what the Vedantin calls *maya*. The problem we face here is *maya*. Time and timelessness, space and spacelessness, conscious ‘I’ and unconscious entity, things and no things, properties and no properties, are to be taken together. One cancels the other out. That which remains all through the cancellation is not *maya*, it is the Absolute. *Maya* and the Absolute are not two, and at the same time they are two. They are two when you are facing the duality, but where the duality is resolved *maya* changes into the Absolute. At this end of experience it is *maya*, while at the other end it is the Absolute.

We face a certain amount of helplessness here. The tools which we have are specially made to serve us only for the dual half of our experience, and they are inadequate for the other half. Is it not strange that this very mind is capable of having timelessness and spacelessness, and of being devoid of the feeling of ‘I’ or any differentiating factors? Just a few hours ago it was in that state. Now we cannot

imagine with our mind how it was accomplished, or how we have been doing it every night throughout our life and will be doing it in the future also.

We carry our body and mind with us everywhere, and yet we don't know anything about its secrets. Our greatest paradox is our own self. It is like a mobile box of ignorance with a candle placed on top of it. When blind men walk at night they carry a torch so that nobody will knock them over. We are just like that, a big unconscious with a little sign of consciousness riding on it. It's also like the big hill behind us here, that has a red light on top so planes won't crash into it. Does the light help the hill to know itself? Does our consciousness help us to know ourselves? No, it doesn't.

This brings us to the very crux of the situation. Hamlet's problem was to be or not to be. Ours is being and non-being. All that we have read and thought about and all that we philosophize becomes suddenly of no use to us. It is as if we are ignorant little toads who have wasted all our life till this moment, and now we cannot do anything. How terrible this is. Most people give up here. We have only come to the fourth verse in the second half of *Atmopadesa Satakam*. We have another forty-six to go. It is very important to persevere at this point.

In the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna, "Boy, you cannot see what I am going to show you with your eyes. I will give you another eye." This is exactly what we need. With our eyes of wakeful consciousness we cannot look at that which is neither non-wakeful nor wakeful. The Guru gave us a clue in the fifth verse when he said that there is an unlit lamp that is shining and will never cease. We wend our way looking only at the things which are illuminated by the light of the lamp. The light does not see itself.

The question here is not one of knowing. When we hear "reflect" or "meditate" we are under the impression that we are being asked to know something. Not at all. We are not asked to know anything, but only to be. That being is different from knowing is a very difficult distinction for many to make. We don't have to do anything, accomplish anything. In that sense it is just like dying. People are afraid to die. Dying means leaving the world of knowing, of putting down all the instruments of knowledge. Socrates tried his best to let people know that that is not all. Jesus said if you do not perish, you will never attain immortality. What is this immortality you gain by perishing? What is the knowledge you get by not knowing? This is the theme presented to us here.

All the talks we give, the discussions we have, the reflections we make, are only to prove the inefficiency or the inadequacy of names. The seeming insurmountability of *maya* is a methodological error where we are trying to interpret the whole in terms of a part. If we can just give up that approach and allow the whole to prevail, that's beingness. But all these words such as beingness, meditation, etc. are to be treated as if they are not said. Once you conceptualize them you are on the other side, merely playing with the tools of consciousness.

There once was a man who came to the hills of Arunacala when he was only thirteen or fourteen. He did not try to read and write or listen to discourses. He didn't try to make money, make a living, or perform any manipulations so that someone would take pity on him and give him food. He just gave up, feeling it was all over. He didn't do anything. Then after twenty years the whole world turned to him. Around him was an atmosphere of transcendent peace that radiated to all. At least eighty percent of the people who went there did not go to listen to him, because he wasn't saying anything. Occasionally someone forced him to talk, but most of the genuine people there weren't interested in any spoken words. There is another medium which transcends the spoken word, that prevails and is as positive or more positive than anything one could experience outwardly. Such was the hilltop retreat of Ramana Maharshi.

We are not in any way referring to a hopelessly difficult attainment. The mystical depth in question is in no way an intellectual exercise to be scientifically gauged. This is why at the very beginning, in the opening verse, we were asked to approach the whole subject with a sense of surrender, a deep devotion, with absolute reverence to the unnamable that shines by its own light both as the known and the unknown. The Guru recommends a greater acceptance of the sense of awe and wonder. We must stand before this seeming impossibility with wonder, allowing ourselves not to do, but to be done with.

# SRI VASUDEVA ASTAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

3

*pitambaram bhrngaanibham pitamaha-  
pramakhya-vandyam jagadi-devam  
kirita-keyura-mukhaih prasobhitam  
sri-kesavam santatam anato'smi*

This one who dons yellow apparel  
The one of blue-beetle luster,  
The one adored even by  
The chief gods like Brahma the Creator,  
The one effulgent cause  
Of the entire world,  
The one who looks graceful,  
Adorning crown, upper-arm bracelet,  
And similar ornaments,  
Sri Kesava—to Him  
I bow low always!

## ***Pitambaram***

O Lord, though the entire world forms your body, yellow is the color of the clothes in which it is attired. Any cloth totally yellow is not showy; it reveals, instead, one's reluctance to be showy and a desire for renunciation. In your own case, though all the worlds are yours, you do not appear to possess anything. This renouncing attitude is what man should cultivate in himself, in view of making his own life peaceful and happy. It is so because you who renounces everything are the one Reality that assumes the form of each man. So man is bound to live immersed in your very own attitude. This is the message your yellow clothes give us.

The significance of your blue color that is that of the blue beetle was examined in verse three of *Vasudeva Ashtakam*, and is not repeated here. And the reference to Brahma and the other gods paying obeisance was covered in verse one of the present work.

### ***Jagad-adi-deva***

O Lord, you are the one Reality causal to all creations, and that Reality, as testified by all the scriptures and all enlightened seers, is in essence pure consciousness. This consciousness in its turn is an experience of effulgence. The word *deva*, denoting god, also literally means, “that which is effulgence in essence.” Therefore I prefer to think of you as *jagad-adi-deva*, the one effulgent cause of the entire world.

### ***Kirita-keyura-mukhah prasobitam***

A crown and an upper arm bracelet are the royal insignia that always form part of your person. *Raja* or king literally means “the one who keeps the people contented.” As your being consciousness in essence makes you the causal source of the world, so too you become the *raja* of the entire world for the same reason. The beings, living and non-living, in this world are of innumerable variety in nature. Keeping all these together as belonging to a perfect system of existence is a difficult task indeed, and it is being accomplished with ease by the consciousness that you are. This is the reason you are the king of all kings, and the above-said insignia are always with you.

### ***Kesava***

You are named *kesava* as well. Many are the ways the word *kesava* is understood. According to one derivation, you are called *kesava* because you killed the demon *kesai*. Demonic traits are there in each and everyone. These are to be triumphed over by one’s own divine traits. Indicative of this need are all the stories related to the killings of many demons.

It is in another sense as well that you are often conceived of as *kesava*. At the great deluge in which all the worlds were submerged, according to the stories, you alone lay motionless like a dead body, *sava*, floating in the water, *ka*. Thus you became *kesava*. Seen philosophically, all the fleeting apparent forms become finally merged in the One all-underlying Reality, in you. This, in the mythological legends, is represented by the story of the entire world becoming submerged in the great flood. Motion is normal with all the apparent forms. Therefore, the one Reality that you are could be thought of only as lying motionless. This motionlessness in no way suggests any inertia on your part. On the other hand, yours is a motionlessness that overfills with the inner creative urge to give expression to the entire world from yourself. This is what the story of you lying like a dead body in the waters of the flood indicates.

Yet another meaning of the word *kesava* is “the one who possesses rays, *kesa*. Only an effulgent entity can shed rays. You could be called *kesava* in the sense that you as the one self-effulgent Reality emits from yourself both Brahma the Creator and Rudra the Destroyer as your rays. This becomes meaningful as we recall that all the creations and dissolutions take place in you, the ever-lasting Reality. I bow before such a Reality that you indeed are.

4

*bhujanga-talpam bhuvanaika-natham  
punah punah svikrta-kayam adyam  
purandaradyair api vanditam sada  
mukundam atyanta-manoharam bhaje*

The one for whom  
A snake forms the couch,  
The one protector of  
The entire world,  
The one who assumes  
New bodies again and again,  
The primordial one,  
The one adored perpetually even by  
Purandara, the chief of gods, and others  
The extremely charming one,  
Mukunda, Him I meditate on.

### ***Bhujanga-talpa***

O Lord, you are some times known as *ananta-sayin*, the one who reposes on the infinite. *Ananta* or the infinite is in fact the name of the serpent whom you made your royal couch. As a mythological symbol, this infinitely long serpent stands for the beginningless and endless time. The nature of its onward flow is so uncertain that no one can foresee what will happen in life. Each event that happens in time is to be seen as a unique face of that onward course of time itself, and such faces are countless. For this reason the serpent on which you repose is conceived as having one thousand faces. Your sleeping on such a couch signifies that your existence transcends all temporal limitations. So too there are no spatial limitations in your being.

One reality is what appears as all the worlds and that one reality is you. You need no external instrumental agency for this self-unfoldment and for the never ending continuity of this process. The control of all events in the world thus is fully in your Self. You are thus *bhuva naika-natha*, the one protector of the entire world.

Two are the ways you are understood as the one who assumes new bodies again and again. Mythologically conceived, you incarnate in this world again and again whenever there is a decline of righteousness, or *dharma*, with unrighteousness gaining an upper hand in human affairs. Such incarnations are popularly known as *avatars*. Each of these *avatars* is meant to fulfill a specific mission intended to protect *dharma* and to do away with *adharma*. Your well-known incarnations are as *Matsya* (fish), *Kurma* (turtle), *Varaha* (boar), *Narasimha* (half-lion and half-man),



*Vamana* (dwarf) *Parasurama*, *Sri Rama*, *Balarama*, *Sri Krishna* and *Kalki*. The last of these is yet to happen at the end of the *kaliyuga* or the age of strife that we are now passing through.

The concept of your repeated self-creation is philosophically meaningful for you are the one source or reality, *adyam*, that unceasingly assumes ever-new forms and thus assures the perpetual flow of the world. This process could be likened to one and the same gold material assuming innumerable ornamental forms one after the other. The emerging of a new form in your being is what we call birth and the disappearing of that form in your being is called death. Really no birth of any new reality takes place, only a fragment of your being assumes a new form. Neither is what we call death the destruction of something that really exists. You alone always exist, creating the illusion that the world exists and that birth and death are real on their own.

Humans, the inhabitants of the earth, by habit treat the gods, the inhabitants of the heaven, as adorable and the chief of those gods in Devendra, is known as Purandara. Given that all the worlds are the manifest forms of you, so are the gods and heaven.

You are also known as Mukunda, meaning you are extremely charming, as well as the one who frees all from various kinds of indigence. On having realized that oneself is in essence nothing other than you, the underlying Reality, it is in effect equal to owning everything. Then all the feeling of poverty within totally vanishes. Nothing is more beautiful to one than what is Real in oneself. You are felt by all knowers of you to be the most charming and you are truly Mukunda to me. I constantly meditate on you, the Mukunda of all.

# HAPPY SADNESS

BY EMMA WALKER

“That feeling of nearness to the shapeless ghost, Ambiguity, is what I want most, what I want to put inside a book, what I want the reader to sense. And because it is at once a thing and a nothing, the reader will have to find it, not only in what I have written, but also in what I have not written.”

Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*.

The tenuous link between one thing and another, one thought and that which follows, one sensation and the next: these spaces hold a quality that is indescribable, possibly because they are experienced so briefly. For the human mind that loves nothing better than to make sense of the world, the ambiguous is perhaps avoided and ignored. It is like an eccentric great-aunt that most of the family tolerate with humor but cannot really connect with.

To me ambiguity holds the essence of something transcendent, something beyond reason and rationality. It is pure abstraction and it defies categorization. For this reason I love it, and it is also one of the reasons that I love abstraction. I like not knowing what the story is, or the possibility that there is, in fact, no story at all, or a million stories captured in a micro-second. I like to be left with questions rather than definitive answers because questions are the stepping stones to learning and more questions. Abstraction allows me to feel before thinking. It allows me to experience something with my senses before my mind kicks in.

Recently, I have been experiencing a sensation that does not have an adequate adjective to call its own. It is the feeling of happy sadness. It is perhaps one of the most beautiful feelings that I know. I like the fact that it is nameless. It sits wafting between two emotions that are essentially in opposition to each other. It defies definition because really it does not make any sense and yet it certainly does exist. It is a feeling of joy that is delicately stained with a past grief or melancholia or an uncertainty. It reminds me of the twin genres of painting: the still life or *Vanitas* and the *Memento Mori*. Flip sides of the coin of life and death. One side depicting the glorious pleasures that are possible for the living and the other a reminder of the fleeting nature of such pleasure, the ever present imminence and possibility of death.

The inherent quality of happy sadness seems to invoke the spectrum of human emotion. Like the *Memento Mori*, it reminds us that one cannot hold on to emotional states. Happy sadness and other states of ambiguity are warm incubators of beautiful ideas, of metaphor, poetry, music and art. Happy sadness is the freest of birds, never meant to exist within the confines of a cage or a definition.







# THE TWELFTH LABOR OF HERCULES

BY SCOTT TEITSWORTH

The most surprising thing I have learned since I accidentally began this exegesis of Herakles is how little the ancient myths are understood—more, that humans have so lost touch with their traditional wisdom that the archetypal foundations of the psyche are by and large considered trivial and hardly worth a passing glance. The future is all about roaring ahead into a technological wonderland in search of salvation, or at least distraction. Rather than acknowledging the miraculous essence of existence and actualizing our innate potentials, we are hell-bent on abandoning ourselves and becoming something or someone else.

From the perspective of our wise elders, such brash escapism is nothing more than an old tragedy dressed up in modern garb. We would be better served to get to know the vast potential lying untapped in our unconscious. The Labors of Herakles are a teaching tool to show us how we might go about it.

To humans, the world is viewed backwards, as a reflection of our awareness, as if in a mirror. We are loving beings born into a more or less stressful and dangerous environment, terrified by the reflections into turning away from our core nature. Often a substitute self appears in the mirror before our eyes: a chimera or mirage, promising to lead us to safety. And so we reach out endlessly toward the insubstantial phantoms that play over the surface of our days. Few realize that what we are really seeking is already in us, and the reason we can never find it is that we are looking in the wrong direction, away from who we are.

The only two sources I found that understand this in relation to Herakles' Labors—both extremely obscure—have made up the bulk of my insight gathering, other than my own meditations. They are the three stupendous volumes of *The Revelation in the Wilderness* by Dr. G.H. Mees, and the slim tract *Sacred Mythoi of Demigods and Heroes*, by the editors of The Shrine of Wisdom, in England. I have quoted from both at some length because their tone is so different from my own. Dr. Mees points out that the absence of meaning is nothing new—it has been lost for millennia:

In classical Greece the meaning of Greek myth had been all but forgotten, so much so that Hesiod and others who are our sources of information on Greek myth, did not themselves know their meaning. Hence occasional inconsistencies are met with, as the entertainment value of the myths as

dramatic tales sometimes developed at the expense of symbolic meaning. But, nevertheless, at the hand of the symbolic keys, the meaning of the myths nearly always stands out sufficiently clear. (iii, 211-12)

The fact that the modern world has come to treat Herakles as an impudent strongman is a measure of the hubris that has supplanted the wisdom of our ancient forebears. Replacing swagger (or its flip side, inhibition) with the dynamic openness of a sincere seeker of truth allows us to convert the Labors of Herakles back from an amusing entertainment into a cosmic instruction very much worth taking to heart.

I am deeply indebted to those who have sought truer meanings in the depths of the dark interior regions of archetypal wisdom, who have given me tacit assurance that I was on the right track. Interestingly, the final Labor of Herakles paints a symbolic picture, vague though it may be, of how to direct our search into those very depths.

### **Retrieving the Dog Kerberos from the Gates of Hell**

For his final impossible task, Eusestheus demanded that Herakles bring him Kerberos (Cerberus), the monstrous three-headed dog who guards the entrance to the underworld, ruled over by the god Hades. Kerberos is a true hellhound: not only does he have three suspicious and vigilant heads armed with slavering jaws, but his tail is a dragon and hissing snakes line his spine. His job was to bar the living from entering, and let deceased souls in, but not out. There was to be no return from the afterlife.

Not only is the last labor the most terrifying, it is also the oldest, which tells us that at one time it was the only labor. It involves penetration into the underworld, or what we now call the unconscious, into territory normally off limits to living humans. The spiritual quest is to explore the unconscious and make it accessible to consciousness. When all is said and done, it is the only game in town, the essence of psychological evolution. As the philosopher Teilhard de Chardin so aptly put it, "The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen."

Those who dare to pass (or are thrust) beyond the gates of ordinary mentality are eternally changed, and not always for the better. Many do not return, or are ruined by the harrowing events they undergo. It's a deadly serious business. But those who succeed enjoy an expanded ambit for their lives, including a blissful sense of enhanced freedom and mental clarity.

Entering forbidden territory with impunity requires special training. To make himself equal to the task, Herakles went to Eleusis, home of the famous Mysteries. Initiation into the esoteric Mysteries was a prized plum of Greek life, and undoubtedly contributed to the region's extended period of intellectual excellence

and its experiments in democracy. The exact nature of the ritual, which lasted for more than two millennia, was a closely guarded secret. It is likely but not certain that a psychedelic substance was involved, but in any case the experience was claimed to elevate participants to the level of the gods and confer immortality on them. In the last labor we learned of the close kinship between heightened awareness and immortality, and of the highly prized substances that were ingested to bring it about. Whatever the ritual entailed, it was essential preparation for Herakles to enter the depths of the Unknown, so it must have been significantly more than an academic exercise.

Being a foreigner, Herakles was not qualified for the Greater Mysteries, but because he was the benefactor of all humanity, the Lesser Mysteries were created especially for him. Such an honor would not have been accorded him if he were merely a bumbling buffoon, as currently portrayed. Dr. Mees speaks eloquently of the meaning of the initiation:

In order to qualify for the most dreadful of his Labours Herakles went to the sacred place of Eleusis, where he was initiated by the wisest of the priests into the Mysteries. Those who have a glimpse of light in the modern world should take the hint. People aiming at mastering the underground world of the soul should first dive deep in the esotericism of the Tradition. It need not be said that this does not signify a mere “sticking of the nose” into, or “tasting with the tip of the tongue” of, the traditional teachings. On the contrary. Not only the nose, symbolizing the rational faculty, and the tongue, symbolizing the faculty of feeling, but the entire being of a person should be immersed in the life-giving and purifying Water of Life of the Tradition. (iii, 210)

His total immersion in the Eleusinian Mystery gave Herakles the certitude and insight to enter the realm of the Dead while still alive. Normally this territory is impenetrable to the living. One of the most interesting aspects of this labor is how to get past our unconscious defenses, symbolized by the nightmare dog. Little is said about Herakles' time in the unconscious regions, either because it has been lost or because such an experience is bound to be subjective, so an explicit description would deaden its allusive value. Each entrant will gain insights according to their needs, capabilities and expectations. But getting in is a universal conundrum.

So, what did Herakles glean from his time at Eleusis? Psychologist Leo Zeff, who used LSD as a therapeutic tool for many years, described the impact of a psychedelic trip in a similar way to Herakles' entry into the underworld:

Imagine a castle, a huge castle, very large. Many rooms, many turrets, many levels of it. There's only one way to get into this castle, and that's the



front door. The front door is solid steel. Impregnable. You can knock on that door all you want. You can do everything you can to tear it down. You can't get it down. Every now and then you might somehow or other move it a little bit to get a glimpse of what's behind it, but that's all. There's no way, and you've tried every way possible to get into that castle. Which is yourself.

What happens on a trip is by some mysterious magic means this door is dissolved, and you have the opportunity to go in and explore that castle. Any place you want. You go in and you look around, and you find many, many wonderful places, strange places maybe, scary places and all that. You can go to the top and you can go to the bottom and you get a sense of what the totality of yourself really is like. As you come down, what happens is that the door somehow or other gets back up there. But that's all right, because you have a memory of what possibilities are there and what you've experienced. The biggest experience that it brings to you is that it connects you with feelings that you've never been connected with before. They are now open to you. Not on the level or the intensity that you had in the experience but certainly much more than they ever were before.... You have really expanded your awareness.

Myron J. Stolaroff, *The Secret Chief: Conversations with a Pioneer of the Underground Psychedelic Therapy Movement*; Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), Charlotte, NC. 1997, p. 47.

Zeff's steel door analogy closely corresponds with Kerberos, though it fails to convey the terror that effortlessly turns us away from the gates and sends us back to make the best of our mundane but relatively comfortable existence. Terrifying or not, both are insurmountable barricades that must somehow be overcome to gain entry into the mysterious realms. Could it be that the heroic effort represented by Herakles to take the dog away and bring it back corresponds to the melting of the steel door and its equally mysterious reappearance at the end of a trip? Quite possibly. King Euryestheus, being a ruler in the world of waking consciousness, was confident that the task would prove impossible, but he was in for a surprise.

*Sacred Mythoi of Demigods and Heroes* agrees that the key is for Herakles to get past the defenses each individual faces at the borderline between the conscious and unconscious worlds, what it calls the gnostic powers of the soul: its opinionative, rational and intuitive forces. "The gnostic powers of the Soul, while subject to the limitations of the Objective World, are like Cerberus with his vigilance and discrimination, his servility and cunning, his suspicion and narrowness, but at the same time his subjection to the rule of Pluto." (Pluto is another name for Hades.) So long as we are "on guard" we remain isolated in wakeful consciousness. There has to be a kind of surrender of our defenses in order to enter the Beyond. This isn't

simply an act of will, the ego has to be healed and strengthened first. Only if it is no longer fearful can it completely relinquish its defenses.

It doesn't seem too farfetched to suppose that since this Labor was the original, Herakles himself may have been invented as a symbol of the Eleusinian Mysteries: a heroic substance or process which opens the door of the unconscious for a short time, after which it closes again.

There is no mention of the Dog being present when Herakles entered the Underworld. Because of his preparation in the Mysteries, it had already been overcome. There was literally nothing barring the way in anymore. As he strode into the gloomy caverns, the souls of the dead fled like evanescent dream images. A couple of shades came toward him, but his sword passed right through them. Most of them ran, because those who are spiritually dead cannot bear the sight of a vibrantly alive being.

Have you ever stopped to consider what 'shades' or 'souls of the dead' mean from a spiritual perspective? Shades are the anonymous people with no interest in spiritual reality, who pass the time "getting and spending and laying waste their powers." They flit and flicker through an endless procession of undistinguishable gray days. There is no color in their lives. What they do has no impact on themselves or others, except occasionally to generate fear or revulsion. They are the living dead, busily trying to not stand out. T.S. Eliot observes them in his poem *The Waste Land*:

#### The Burial of the Dead

##### Unreal City

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many.  
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,  
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Herakles was unable to impact the shades with his sword. Sword thrusts are flashes of insight, which of course are not understood by those with no "ears to hear," whose minds have not been attuned to interpret the messages. This is symbolized by Herakles' sword passing right through them.

While in the forbidden realm, Herakles was able to rescue Theseus and no one else. Theseus represents the individual will, consigned to hell for its improper use. It is well known that the will can lead us either to perdition or salvation, depending on how it is used. Herakles is the rectifying energy that brings the will back into the light of day, where it can be wielded intelligently. Other than Theseus all else was dreams and phantasms.

The hero made his way through the dream world to its ruler, the god Hades, and asked if he might take the Dog. It's as if he wants to remove the defenses that keep consciousness from entering the unconscious. In a heroic state we might wonder why the unconscious is shielded from consciousness; it is so fascinating and enchanting. But it is easy to lose yourself there. Consciousness needs its limitations for optimal functioning. Fierce as the Dog is, he has a benign role to play in protecting simple souls from becoming disoriented or overwhelmed.

Asking permission from Hades—the landlord, so to speak—indicates that we have to have a respectful and humble attitude in our spiritual quest. We don't just crash in and take what we want, we have to realize we are intruders in a sense, although the "intrusion" is into our own true nature. The unconscious is governed by forces far more powerful than the ego, and will not relinquish them to mere intention alone.

Hades agreed to let Herakles take the dog so long as he didn't use any weapons. This tells us that the way to overcome hostility is not with enmity, but by gaining understanding by directly grappling with it. As Dr. Mees puts it, "The Powers of Hell are not overcome by the Power of Hell; they are overcome by Charity, that is to say, Love and Giving." (iii, 185) If we treat the psyche as alien territory to invade, it presents unassailable ramparts; only if we learn to ease into it with unguarded acceptance does it open itself to us, because in the final analysis it is us.

Honoring this directive, Herakles overpowered the Dog with his bare hands, and took him firmly bound to Eusestheus. Amazed at the hero's success, the guru/king gave up challenging him with any more Labors, and released him.

It's only fitting to add an important passage from *Sacred Mythoi* here at the end. (The gnostic powers of the soul are defined above as opinion, reason and intuition):

This labour of Hercules may be defined as that of gaining the power to withdraw the gnostic powers of the Soul from the limiting regions of form and sense, and to elevate them to a consciousness of the supernal realms.

It is symbolical of that initiation which dispels the darkness of oblivion and the night of ignorance resulting from the Soul's attachment to the body, and introduces it to a vision of Reality.

It confers upon the hero-soul the power to pass into and out of the portals of objective life and death. As Prophyry affirms, there are two kinds of death—one according to which the body gradually dissolves and is separated from the Soul, but the other—called the Philosophical or Mystical Death—according to which the Soul voluntarily and consciously separates itself from the bondage and attachment of the body. This is signified by the ability of Hercules to descend into the domains of darkness and death and again to come forth into the abode of light and life....

The hero-soul, without the use of external or objective force, by the simple exertion of its own inherent prepotency, uplifts these [gnostic] powers into the Kingdom of Light, and simultaneously releases the personal Will (Theseus) from the consequences of its wrong use.

But since the Soul's mundane labors are not yet completed, the dog returns to its sentinel duty, which represents the normal emplacement of the objective consciousness. (35-6)

We have been led to think of Hades' realm as an afterlife, remote and unattainable, but then it has no significance for us; or else a place where all sense of purpose is lost, a tamasic region, static and oppressive. Herakles demonstrates that the unconscious can be positive and dynamic as well as static and negative. It all depends on the attitude we enter into it with.

### **The Death of Herakles**

In Greek mythology, Herakles was killed by a poisoned cloak, the Shirt of Nessus, which was accidentally presented to him by his wife. The cloak burned so painfully it caused Herakles to cast himself on a funeral pyre and die. Afterwards he was taken by Zeus to Mount Olympus and honored for his exploits.

There are a number of folktales from all over the globe in which a "robe of honor" presented to someone is actually a poisoned gift that cannot be removed and kills the one who puts it on. These stories symbolize the corrosive effect of being honored for what we do. What looks so attractive on the surface will actually destroy our spirit if we get wrapped up in it, because it converts direct, living experience into a static narrative. And it's very hard, if not impossible, to take it off again. This is also the shortcoming of religions: they offer an attractive, glittering promise but then kill the desire to explore and expand spiritually, because votaries believe they have already found what they need.

When we return from a deep penetration into the Unknown, we have to continue to stand naked even though society insists on our donning garments—outward distinguishing marks—once again. Any sense of accomplishment or honor, in fact any conceptual framing at all, will poison the purity of the state of openness arrived at. This titanic anticlimax to Herakles' life of heroic service was undoubtedly added to warn against hubris. Going into the depths and reemerging is merely to discover who we truly are. It is not meant to convert us into a god or a hero, and if that becomes our self-image we are doomed. The admiration of our dear ones is the most hazardous of all, because we don't suspect it of harboring any danger. So we wear it without thinking, and it can easily do us in. This is why the Bhagavad Gita advises us to keep our poise in fame as well as shame: both can fatally disrupt our equanimity.

We have been nurtured on heroic folk tales of overcoming great obstacles to arrive at a peak condition, which are then brought up short with a line like "and

they lived happily ever after.” The Greek gurus preferred to leave us with a note of caution. Our challenges never end. We are never fully finished, fully realized, and it would be the death of us if we ever were. Science seeks certitude, but it must never imagine it has found it, or there will be hell to pay. Climb your Olympus, but know it is not your permanent abode.

It is interesting that in his very first Labor Herakles obtained an invincible cloak of lion skin through his own efforts, and for his finale he is given another cloak to carry him off, to make him vulnerable once again. The importance of what we wear, in terms of psychology our personality, is a central motif. We are instructed to be very careful how we dress ourselves, since it is not at all easy to remove what we have once imprinted as our self-identity.



# CONSTELLATION

BY THOMAS PALAKEEL

That generation of the man-beast, the craven half-horses  
that stomped hard in the permanent night of antiquity,

which was destined to produce an outcast someday,  
and that one was Chiron, the first stander-apart, thinker,

loner about to swerve from his path; had he a mirror,  
he might have in disgust mutilated his equine nether-parts,

perhaps, he did have a mirror in the men he saw on the pastures,  
comely, and approved of them and readily betrayed his own kind,

by letting one man steal the secret of fire and move mankind  
from the raw to the cooked, and the immortal even sacrificed

his life by exchanging it with the Prometheus, whom the gods  
in retribution chained to a rock and appointed eagles to dine

on his liver, which grew back nightly, but shorn of immortality  
the outcast Centaur, the famed physician, would have died

on the head of an arrow if future men whose eyes opened  
to the spark of stars hadn't immortalized him in a constellation.

# AVIDYA

BY THOMAS PALAKEEL

A woman at the library greets me familiarly  
at the stacks; she takes my hand, presses gently  
my wrist. Her purple beret a match to her lips  
her smile lights a fire to the graying volumes,  
Sacred Books of the East our perfect backdrop,  
except that when I admit my memory's impediment  
her lips close, her downy chin taut, she unclasps  
my wrist and apologizes for the error thinking  
I was someone else and backs away, leaving me  
stilled, flushed, although I carry her touch all day  
without impediment, thinking of her, no one else.

# THE FIFTH VEDA

BY THOMAS PALAKEEL

Lord Brahma, cruising in the skies on his vehicle, the swan, decides to land, but the bird has a quibble: How come the Vedas cannot be heard by women and the lower castes, isn't it unfair? How do you expect them to learn morals, religion, and hygiene? Not to appear clueless, the four-handed god clutches tight the four masterpieces and blurts out: I better write a new one. Another book? No one reads these days, the swan informs. Annoyed, the Lord jumps off his bird and manages to land safe on the cosmic dance floor, but his four crowns come tumbling down and the swan slaps on the god's face a mask, and the god on cue, puts on a show that rivals Shiva's dance, bearing in mind his intended goal: for women pleasure, *sringara*, and for men, horror, heroism. Dying in suspense the swan asks: "What do you call your fifth Veda?" Brahma replies: "Drama!"



# IN THE BEGINNING

BY THOMAS PALAKEEL

In the face of the deep, an assembling begins,  
it is like a dissembling  
of goose down

released from the great pillow fight  
of stars, "Galaxy Cluster Abell";  
it was caught in the Hubble lens,  
in spite of the perfect grinding,  
but, thanks to gravitational lensing,  
we received tidings

from far out in the universe:  
beginnings have no end, "far" and "near" are only words,  
waves, vibrations, light, not that anything can be spoken of  
with certainty, unless some third rate poet dares to blunder  
into metaphor and metonymy;

easy enough to call the snapshot a fleet of rocks  
sailing in the unknown sea,  
in the un-water of the waters,  
who knows how to speak;

all we know is that somewhere a seed is sprouting,  
a tree is growing, ants are at work, bush, grass, somewhere a bride is being led  
down an aisle, leaves and fruits are holding steady against the wind, the bush is not  
burning yet, and in the great stony stillness of antiquity words are about to arrow  
into an utterance, ehth "In the beginning ..."

# MEMORIES OF NATARAJA GURU

BY PATRICK MISSON

I took a plane to Trivandrum and disembarked into a hot, humid tropical world covered entirely in coconut trees, which seemed as far from North India as North India was from Europe. I took a train north along the coast to Varkala, and a taxi to the ashram.

I first ran into the Guru as he was proceeding across the Gurukula grounds, talking continuously in a strange-sounding language (Malayalam), and surrounded by a group of Indians who seemed to be very amused by what he was saying, as they were grinning and laughing. I gathered after awhile that he was discussing improvements to the drainage system. He was a bit of a shock, because he neither looked nor acted like any of the Gurus and Holy Personages I had seen in Rishikesh and elsewhere in North India. He was short and round and his eyes sparkled merrily, and he seemed to have none of the self-important dignity of the others.

A bit later, I was formally introduced to the Guru and I touched his feet and said "Hari Aum" as I had been taught to do in North India. This was greeted by a roar of laughter by all present, and I felt very embarrassed. This was to be a fairly constant motif in my early relations with the Guru.

I hung around for a few weeks and attended the Guru's lessons. I could make nothing of what he was saying. I could understand the words and, as I had studied Philosophy at the University, I was familiar with quite a lot of his references (Spinoza, Kant etc.), but had no idea what he was going on about. There would be occasional phrases that hit home, such as, "If it makes you happy and kind, it is the truth; if it does not make you happy and kind, it is not the truth," but everything else was incomprehensible. This was because I could not grasp that the thread connecting what he said was structuralism.

Nevertheless, somehow I knew he was "The Guru," but I was afraid of making a commitment to him that I knew would change the direction of my life forever, so I left on some pretext. Something kept pressing me to return for many months, however, so I headed for the annual World Conference for Unitive Understanding which the Guru held in Kerala in November.

When the Guru arrived, he greeted me with a sort of grunt: "Hmm, you are back." And that was the last time he paid me any attention for weeks. I was somewhat miffed as I considered myself to be only a few steps away from enlightenment and

expected the Guru to acknowledge this and give me recognition as the great spiritual entity I was. This is what the prolonged use of LSD does to an already bloated ego. I say this without shame, as it is a long time since I came to terms with what a fool I was, and to an extent still am. Also I was not the only one around the Guru who suffered from these delusions, to which the subsequent careers of Curran, Freddy and how many, many others, bear witness.

After the Conference and the chaos surrounding it had subsided, I settled in to becoming my new self, the shining noble disciple. I abandoned my Afghan dress and Muslim skullcap and wore the white robes of a conventional Indian spiritual person and let my beard and hair grow long. I also became very holy and virtuous in my actions, meditating ostentatiously and going around with the constipated, supercilious smile of the spiritual aspirant. All this, of course, was intended to attract the attention of the Guru.

He, however, continued to ignore me. He would not even make eye contact with me as his gaze passed over his assembled disciples. This seriously annoyed me. I was like a puppy panting at his feet, tongue lolling and tail wagging, but all to no avail. When the attention from him came, it was in an unexpected and highly embarrassing form.

It must have been a month or more later. I had settled in nicely to the routine of the ashram. Up at 5:30, meditation, lessons with the Guru until 8; more lessons from 9 till 9:30; more lessons in the afternoon, meditation, bed and so on. This was doing me a world of good, the first self-discipline that I had ever known. The meditation was causing me problems, but was still giving me a good look at myself for the first time in my life. My hair and beard were also growing nicely, and I considered myself a model spiritual aspirant. Daily, I would take my place in the study hall, men and women on separate sides of the aisle, sitting cross-legged and dressed in immaculate white, in contemplative silence. (There follows a long tale in which the Guru alternately embarrasses and praises the author, causing profound confusion.)

I won't pretend that I immediately grasped what the Guru was trying to tell me with this episode, but I gradually began to get the point. As I mentioned earlier, at this time most of what he said I could not understand – I understood the words but had no idea what he was getting at. However, I would grasp certain phrases that would crop up often in his talk, and they began to fit together into some kind of meaning. He would say that "All action is a mistake." This made sense. All action takes place in the horizontal world, the world where every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Things can appear right or wrong, depending on your relativistic perspective. I also began to realize how foolish and fragile was my image of myself, my "persona", the picture I wanted to present to the world. As long as I kept my ego-pride, I could not learn anything new about myself, and that learning was why I was there.

He would also say that “Clear thinking tends to lead to correct action.” After saying, “All action is a mistake,” he would often add, “Make interesting mistakes and make them quickly.”

Despite the problems I had understanding most of what he said, there was something about his person—his manner, his way of talking and going about his affairs—that drew me to him. Almost every other “spiritual teacher” I had come across, in North India and elsewhere, took themselves very seriously and had a holier-than-thou attitude that infused their every action and speech. Not he. He had an immense dignity and presence, but he was also capable of self-mockery, and it was this lack of pretence that made me believe in him and in what he said.

Together with all this, and despite his small size and rotundity, he commanded immediate respect from everyone who came near him. Sometimes he would be sitting in silence and I would catch a look in his eyes that made me want to bow down in awe. Years later, in the Munich Zoo, I saw a gigantic male silverback gorilla sitting in splendid isolation on a rock, with all the other gorillas keeping a safe distance from him, and I caught a glance from him in my direction that conveyed immense power and something very ancient and dark—and I recognized that look.

Years later, I was staying at the Gurukula in Ootacamund, high in the Nilgiri Mountains of Tamil Nadu, where the green rolling hills and the chilly climate reminded me of England. One afternoon I came down to the main building to see if it was teatime and saw a bunch of small children come haring out of the door and off down the hillside. When I went in I saw that a lot of books had been pulled from the shelves and flower vases overturned etc. The Guru was standing there and he told me that he had woken up on hearing a noise and had come out and discovered some local kids trashing the place. He had told them off and had grabbed the cheekiest boy and given him a two-fingered slap on his hand to chastise him, and the kids had run off. The Guru then said that, although he had only smacked the boy’s hand lightly (he demonstrated—just enough to sting), he had done it because he had lost his temper, which was incorrect. We had our tea and then the Guru assembled the dozen or so disciples, put on his coat, took his walking-stick and we processed down the hillside to the nearby village.

Now you must understand that the Guru was 70-something years old; he was a very famous person and held in awe by the local people as a great holy man. Also, the neighboring village towards which we were heading was an untouchable settlement, these people were the lowest of the low in Hindu society and were forced to live in this filthy ghetto. Their touch and their very presence were polluting to even the lowest-caste Hindu. So when we started processing down the one sordid street, the entire population came out of their houses and stared in silence and apprehension. The Guru called someone and asked them if they knew where was the house of the little boy he had smacked. He went up the path to the house where

the parents of the boy were standing. They had their hands joined in namaste and were half-bowing to the Guru, obviously fearful of what would happen after their child had disturbed the great man. The little boy came out, cowering behind his parents. The Guru said that he, the Guru, had acted wrongly. Then he went down on his knees and performed the full prostration, the ultimate traditional Hindu gesture of debasement, that is, he lay flat on his face on the filthy ground and, with his hands joined in supplication, he touched the feet of the little boy and begged his forgiveness.

Why was he my Guru? Because when I saw this kind of thing I knew that this was a real man; this was what human beings were put on this earth to be— and if I could not become like him, I would at least serve him for the rest of my life.

After the embarrassing episode, the Guru paid me no further attention, for which I was not ungrateful, and I got more and more absorbed by the routine of study and meditation of Gurukula life. His lessons covered a wide range of subjects: the most difficult for me was the scientific side—structuralism—and it would be a long time before it burst into meaning in my brain. The most accessible was the traditional Vedantic teaching, the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, but the subject that fascinated me from the beginning was the *Saundaryā Laharī*, an extraordinary poem of erotic mysticism by Sankara, the founder of Vedanta philosophy. The very term “erotic mysticism” was a shock; my upbringing as a Catholic had led me to see eroticism as sinful and somehow dirty, and mysticism as its very opposite and denial. It was also this attitude of mine that the Guru was mocking when I was so embarrassed.

Many things that the Guru said on this subject perplexed me. Someone read him a quote from Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet-mystic, which went: “I love the jingling of women’s bangles as they draw water from the well too much to be a *sannyasi* (renouncer).” The Guru said that, on the contrary, he himself was a *sannyasi* just because he loved the sound of women’s bangles so much.

Just as a footnote to this: one day someone asked the Guru about the Buddha and his attainment of Nirvana or enlightenment. (The story goes that the Buddha sat beneath a tree and decided he was not going to move until he attained Nirvana. At this the gods became annoyed and sent apsaras or heavenly maidens to come and dance erotically in front of him and seduce him away from his spiritual endeavour. The Buddha opened his eyes, incinerated them with one glance, closed his eyes again and attained enlightenment.) The Guru’s remark on this subject was that if he had been in the Buddha’s place he would have sat the maidens on his knee and had them take dictation for his next book.

All of us who hung around Nataraja Guru for any length of time were there because we had problems in our lives that we were looking to him to help us solve. As he used to say, “If you have questions about where this world came from and what

is the meaning of your life, then wisdom can be of use to you. If you have no such problems, you don't need wisdom." Also, "If your typewriter is okay, leave it alone, but if it isn't working properly, take it to the repair shop. This is what Gurus are for."

Well, there was something very wrong with my typewriter. It was well known that I was mad. Anyway, correct or incorrect action is more the domain of religion and morality than of pure wisdom. For a student of Vedanta, there is only one qualification needed: *susruha* in Sanskrit, which translates as, "Being prepared to listen."

The Guru said that madness was not being true to yourself. Also that madness was being unhappy. One reason for my madness and unhappiness was that I could trust no one, and therefore would listen to no one. My father, who up till my early teens had shown me love, had rejected me as disgusting for no reason I could understand; so from then on I could never believe anyone really cared for me. The priests who had educated me and had told me to obey God showed me clearly that He was a cold, judgmental liar, just as they were. They pretended to be holy men but really they wanted power over others and to put their hands down little boys' trousers. I came to distrust everyone; to believe that everyone had an ulterior motive and was lying for their own purposes. So when I was confronted with the Guru, I looked at him carefully, full of cynical doubt, seeking always the chink in his persona that would show that he was just like all the others.

He was not easy to live with, as a disciple, for, however much I wanted to improve myself, as a general principle, the day-to-day battering that my ego was subjected to was not a pile of laughs. One of the textbook psychological definitions of the ego is, "That part of the personality which resists change." So, in the case of a Vedantic student, it is that part of the personality which resists wisdom, and its personification, the Guru. Just as I have always been deeply suspicious of chocolate box representations of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," so have I always been wary of gurus and teachers who were all rosewater and ecstatic prancing and sheepfaced joyful chanting. The Guru was many things, but meek and mild he was not. He did not tolerate fools gladly, and sometimes I would cringe inwardly as he would bait some pretentious swami, covered in holy markings, who had misrepresented the meaning of the Bhagavad Gita for his own purposes. At first, I would wonder why he did it, and then I realized that someone had to expose lies and distortions of the truth. Everyone else just let it slide, and it was up to the Guru to state the truth as it was, so it could shine and banish the darkness of ignorance which is the source of all human ills. Shiva Nataraja, while he dances, is trampling beneath his feet a squirming demon who is ignorance. Still, if it was yourself being chastised, it was not always easy to take.

He did not shout as such, but he had a deep, resonant voice and he could raise the volume slightly and lower the pitch so that it drowned out everything else and was as unstoppable as a panzer division. Also, of course, he was right—and also

motivated by nothing but kindness; for leaving someone in ignorance is not kind. What came out was perfectly reasoned and logical, scientifically valid and justified by unquestionable authorities and common sense.

Similarly, he would say that “The truth is always simple.” You could not argue with him, not because he would shout you down or disregard what you said, but because he was right and could prove it to you irrefutably. I would try and find



flaws in his arguments, or errors of fact, but I could not. This is why he was my Guru, not because I followed him blindly but because he spoke the truth. However, he encouraged us to question everything. The Bhagavad Gita is one of the three foundations upon which Vedanta is built; you cannot say the Gita is wrong and still call yourself a Vedantin—but he told us that if our experience contradicted the Gita, we should follow our experience and throw away the Gita.

It wasn't just because he was learned, completely logical and phenomenally intelligent that he was convincing, but because his motivation was absolutely pure. He had no axe to grind; he wasn't trying to boost his ego by being always right. He wanted the truth to prevail, the truth that sets you free. The truth is when you see

reality as it is: not change and becoming, endless action and reaction, terrible and void of content—but the reality that our reason can encompass when it is freed of its conditioning, a reality of great beauty and peace, where death has no dominion.

He wanted nothing, certainly not fame and recognition and people fawning at the feet of the Great Guru, the great trap into which so many fall. He hated it when I touched his feet in the traditional gesture of a disciple to his teacher. He hated it when I stood up when he came into the room and he told me not to (I did it anyway). He had no vanity in his great intellect or in his role as teacher of wisdom. He did say that he was the proudest man in the world, though, because he was proud of the patches in his clothes.

Vedanta is a philosophy and is not concerned with worship, but rather with understanding. When the question of the proof of the existence or non-existence of God came up, the Guru would treat it as a false problem. All religions have different names and attributes for what they call “God.” None of them, however, would disagree if you were to describe God as “The highest of all values.” Everyone has some things that they value in life, even the atheist. So if you go to the highest level of abstraction and generalization and talk of High Value, it does not really matter whether you label it “God” or not. High value exists because it is, by definition, that which you value most in all existence and it cannot be non-existent without an absurd contradiction.

I have already made it clear that he was not given to mystic, emotional outpourings and, compared to many so-called gurus with their soulful looks and long, poignant silences, he came across as very matter-of-fact and “très ordinaire,” as he described himself. He would say that Sri Ramakrishna would go into a trance as soon as the Devi was mentioned, and once even collapsed on the platform of Calcutta railway station when he was trying to board a train. The Guru dismissed this as typical Bengali over-emotionalism and also very disruptive of normal existence.

Most of the time he was fairly deadpan, but occasionally there would be an almost impish grin as he cracked a joke; he would glance at you sideways with half-closed eyes and chuckle. As I have already noted, when he was confronted with pretence, or ego-games or perversion of the truth, his eyes let loose a flash of his own formidable ego, otherwise always kept in check and verticalized— and all men’s knees turned to jelly. When he was in repose, sitting in his chair and for once not talking, then he would close his eyes, and you had the strange impression that there was no one there, that he was in another, motionless place. His eyes would open and you would catch a look older than humanity, the look of an elephant, distant and infinitely knowing.

A nine year-old boy asked: “What is a Gooroo?”

The Guru said you should reply, “Somebody you would like to imitate in his ideas and his ways, who is interesting and inspiring.”

“What do you and he do?”

“We emulate each other.”





# THE ICONOGRAPHY OF SIVA

BY DEBORAH BUCHANAN

Siva never reappears in an incarnation to save the world. He never needs to reappear, having never left. He is always here as the very busy god of the dual vortex, creation and destruction. Never static and certainly not a god to be pinned down to one image or description, Siva has—or is, we should say—a pantheon of personalities.

Siva first appears on the scene on some of the early Indus Valley seals, a precursor or ancestor to Siva the Lord of the Animals (2,000-1,500 BCE). The small, perfect seal image is of a male figure, sometimes under a tree, sitting cross-legged with a large horned headdress and with various animals arrayed around him. Or he is alone, with or without the headdress, seemingly in sitting meditation, yet with erect penis: the perfect symbol of latent, potent creation.

He then makes his first appearance in word when the Rg Veda is chanted by the early Ayrans (1,000 BCE) and he is Rudra the Howler, the god of sound and speech and intoxication. He is creation's primal scream, the sacred singer, and the originator of stories.

Later we find Siva residing high in the Himalayas on Mt Kailasa, sometimes alone, sometimes with his consort Parvati. While solitary he takes on the task of receiving the mighty torrent of the Ganges as it is poured on to the earth and thus saves the earth from destruction. In many images of Siva a small woman will be found in his dreadlocks, the goddess Ganga. Also in Siva's hair will be a crescent moon, one of his most persistent images. Is it because Siva is the mover of phenomenality with his endless cycles of birth and death? Is it because that as the god of destruction Siva dances in the moonlit charnel fields?

When he is dancing among the burning pyres, Siva is the wandering ascetic, covered in ashes with a tiger or leopard skin loin cloth, and he is a frightening figure of death. He carries a long trident, its triple tines indicative of his triumph over the triple gunas of manifestation. He is perhaps wearing a necklace of skulls or drinking from one—his way of laughing at death, just one phase of the cycle of life, a necessary step to the next phase of creation.

When we find Siva with Parvati seated on Mt. Kailasa, they are a formal, elegant couple. Their faces are calm and regal and they face south as teachers of the world. In a beautiful representation of this image at Ellora (circa 200-500 AD), we see the two deities sitting calmly in the center of the scene, while Siva's toe very quietly pushes down on the commotion below them. Ravana the 10-headed demon

is trying to disrupt the world above, but with that small movement Siva imprisons the demon and his chaos and Siva's tranquil court endures.

Sometimes Siva and Parvati are shown as the model family, perhaps seated outdoors, as if in a sylvan picnic, with their various children. There is Ganesha with his elephant head, given to him by Siva after he mistakenly, and in a rage, cut off his human head. There is Skanda with his beautiful body, ready for combat.

These domestic idylls should not delude us, however. Siva is foremost the god of creation and destruction. In his most primitive—and most abstract as well—iconography Siva is the lingam, the upright penis, often resting in and rising out of a yoni, the female genital. Again we are aligned with the very early appearance of Siva as the lone, powerful meditator, source of manifestation. In some of these representations the image of the god walks out of the lingam but most often the lingam is an abstract representation.

Another important abstract image of Siva is the great mandala the Siva Cakra, where Siva and his female consort (or female polarity), Sakti are represented by intersecting triangles, five downward-facing ones for Sakti's vital energy of manifestation and four upward-facing ones for Siva's absorption and transcendence. This arrangement is located within a geometric expression of the lotus petals of wisdom, which are themselves surrounded by a square opened to each of the four directions.

In one of Siva's well-known manifestations, he is Nataraja, the god of dance, who is portrayed in a moment of ecstasy. Here Siva is dancing life into being and then into dissolution and then into being, again and again. In one hand he holds the damaru, his drum to beat out the dancing rhythm. In his other hand the light of wisdom rises up. One foot is raised in dance and the other balances all this activity. Ganga is usually tucked into his wild hair locks, most of which are splayed out and joined to the great circle of flame around him. In the middle of all this is Siva's face, silent and beatific.

This fusion of all of Siva's characteristic personalities into one image is visible in the caves at Elephanta, on the island in the bay near Mumbai. Surrounding the main image are various personas of Siva, as the one androgynous being or the dancing Nataraja. The center image, huge and imposing, is a sculpture carved out of the stone wall itself, three heads which are about twelve feet high. To one side is *bhairavia*, the angry, furious Siva; to the other side is his happy countenance; and in the center, subsuming both of these manifestations, is the serene and transcendent, all-reconciling face of Siva.

It is this transcendence that is expressed in the beautiful statues from the Gupta era (600-900 CE) in North India. Created as part of the new devotional religious culture, they have a delicate and exquisite tenor. Here all of Siva's great power finds resolution in his limitless depth of contemplation. He is the source of all manifestation, yes, but even more profoundly he is that deep silence which sustains every aspect of life.





# LEARNING TO FLY

BY GAYATRI EASSEY AGNEW

The week following my dad's passing in Prague, my husband and I returned to India via Sri Lanka. As luck or fate would have it, we ended up extending our layover there and I spent two days walking the beaches of Sri Lanka missing my dad. I sat alone on the beach and was soon surrounded by crows. The crow holds a special place in Hinduism and is usually identified with departed souls or ancestors. I watched, camera in hand, as these graceful birds glided along the edges of the water. I cried. I cried a lot in the days that followed my dad's passing.

My dad's death has been helping me learn to live in a different way. His passing has helped me begin to learn not just how to live without him but how to thrive. A dear friend of mine back home in Seattle lost her husband, and after he died she would say many times, as she displayed pure grace and perseverance while raising her two young children, that she wanted her family not just to survive but to thrive. The sadness that creeps into your soul when you lose a loved one is not something which passes quickly; it is like the waves which wash up along the beach. Grief follows these same cycles. Sometimes it is gentle, almost calm, at other times it is fierce, raging, unexpected. And above all it is constant. The waves are in constant motion and nothing you do or say will stop this movement.

Another close friend lost his dad last year and he has said many times that it is something he never wants to get over. It is a loss which doesn't pass; it just sinks in and becomes a part of who you are, part of how you live. Grief is the process of giving yourself permission to let the sadness in but still get up in the morning, learning to see the presence of your loved one in the world around you and having this inspire instead of disturb. My dad is a part of the wind now; and I am learning to fly.

You Exist. Not in your old form, of course, but as your new self. As the air which kisses my face, the waves of water which touch my toes. The rays of sun which warm my body, the strong earth beneath my feet. You hold me up, You make me possible. You walk with me, laugh with me, care for me. You exist in me.



# ONE HUNDRED STEPS TO SELF-REALIZATION

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

## STEP TWENTY-THREE

*What is the work which you mainly engage yourself in as your daily routine?*

I keep myself available for four kinds of actions:

1. The body, senses and mind complex makes up my main psychophysical instrumentation. To keep them clean, efficient, and healthy I do whatever is necessary, including daily ablutions, physical exercises and mentally chanting hymns for my daily contemplative practice.

2. The most important work in which I engage daily is to perform my assigned duties as a spiritual teacher of the Narayana Gurukula. As a teacher my duty is to be a continuator of the courses of studies that are accepted as a syllabus for the contemplative students of the Narayana Gurukula. Narayana Guru was teaching the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. He wrote several important books like *Atmopadesa Satakam*, *Darsana Mala*, *Advaita Deepika*, *Arivu*, *Brahmavidya Panchakam*, *Shiva Satakam*, etc. Nataraja Guru wrote English translations of these works and also made commentaries on them. Nataraja Guru founded the Narayana Gurukula, and I am the present Head and Guru of it. So the present *karma* came to me as the assignment to write commentaries on the works of both the Gurus in English as well as in Malayalam. Such action as this is called *niyata karma*.

3. Narayana Gurukula is looked upon by thousands of people as a wisdom school. Many seek clarification of Advaita philosophy from the Gurukula to clear their confusion about topics of socioeconomic, moral and spiritual issues. Every day letters come from people, of whom many are strangers. Most of their questions are unexpected. But it is imperative to answer each question every day. I write answers to many inquisitive people. This aspect of *karma* comes incidentally. Therefore such *karma* is called *anushangika karma*.

4. The village where we live is inhabited by socially, intellectually and economically poor people. They have several needs, which often come up unexpectedly. The Gurukula is expected to be a community of kind and helpful people, so naturally the villagers come to us when they have to face dangerous diseases, death, emergency child delivery, and need to resolve criminal clashes.



We are expected to redress the grievances of our neighbors. This is not a daily occurrence, and therefore such works are called *naimittika karma*.

*Does this mean that you have to keep up your vigil day and night to attend to any one of the four karmas?*

Yes, of course. Every member of the Gurukula is expected to be a *kripalu*, a compassionate person.

*Do other people of the neighboring village attend to these four karmas?*

No. Most of them are householders who are bogged down by the immediate necessities of their family responsibilities. That makes them unhappy. Incidentally that makes them *kripanas*.

*Who is a kripana?*

A *kripana* is someone who is bound to material needs all the time.

*What distinguishes someone of a generous universal interest from a closed-minded person who is lost in niggardliness and failure in life?*

The generous person believes in an open life and in looking for the abundance of universal good in all people and all places. Just as bees crowd around a honey-filled flower, the generous man is sought after by open-hearted people, which makes his life a great success without him even thinking of his own success. He is not ambitious to become great, he only adores greatness. Naturally, greatness comes to him.

*What is the secret of being both generous and altruistic?*

The secret of a wise man is that he is in love with humanity. He sees his own counterpart in every person of the world who is willing to receive goodness from him.

*Is this not the same as the dictum "Love thy neighbor as thyself," the highest principle that was preached by Jesus Christ?*

Yes, indeed.

#### STEP TWENTY-FOUR

*When you see another man approaching you what is your reaction?*

It depends on whether that person is familiar to me, known only recently, or a total stranger.

*What is the nature of your reaction to each of these classes of people?*

If he or she is well known to me the first thing that comes to my mind is their name. Then what comes to my mind is whether they are a benevolent person or

of suspicious character. That prompts me to regulate my degree of intimacy or closeness. In any case, the approaching person is a human being, and I keep my mind cautiously open to listen to them before I decide to agree or disagree. The nature of my caution comes from my previous interactions with them. In any case that person is an other to me.

If he or she is a recent acquaintance, I'll wait to hear from them the purpose of their visit. I'll give full attention to the visitor's requests or suggestions. Also I will speak every word with attention and be very careful not to commit myself too quickly to the visitor's request. If the approaching person is altogether unfamiliar I will be very much on the defensive.

*That means your approach is purely from the external, giving primacy to the other's body and name.*

Yes, I treat him or her as another person.

*As a contemplative, can you not look upon the other as another version of yourself?*

Yes, I can do that when I have more confidence in the approaching person.

*If there is no confidence generated in you by the visitor, what happens?*

I become subject to anxiety.

*What is anxiety?*

Anxiety is a mental state stemming from focusing on the differences in the other. Consequently their differences create fear in me.

*What should you do to resume your peace and confidence?*

I should think of the universality of my Self and should increase my horizon to include the visitor also in the time, space and value representation of my Self.

*Then what will happen?*

The strange feeling of duality will leave me and compassion will open my doors of acceptance. I will get a universal perception of the Self.

*When the universal acceptance is manifested in you, how will you precede to maintain your newly found acceptance?*

All the time I am seeking the happiness of my Self. For that I will be pursuing one program or another to achieve Self happiness. I will include the other also in

the pursuit of my spiritual happiness. My attaining happiness will be to make the other also happy.

#### STEP TWENTY-FIVE

*What is justice?*

In the catering of common human needs every person has a right to share physically, emotionally, and biologically an equity of what is provided. Unequal sharing or omission of what is due to anyone is injustice.

*What causes unequal distribution?*

Favoritism.

*What is favoritism?*

The self of every person is equally sacred. Showing preference on the basis of birth, gender, color, nationality, race, or educational achievement amounts to the disregarding of the sacredness of one's self. Prejudices, sentiments of local fixed loyalties, and relativistic or tribal and social compulsions are a disregarding of pure human justice. Absolute justice is based on the universal recognition of the unity of Mankind. Any breach of justice can cause misery to an individual or a group or to a part of the whole.

*Who watches over the occurrence of injustice?*

Justice is safeguarded by law.

*What is law?*

The intrinsic principle that governs the integral existence of anything in the world to maintain its existential verity, substantial structure and function, and its natural right to seek and achieve its axiological fulfillment. It is unlawful to thwart, prevent, smother or destroy anyone's existence, subsistence and potential natural axiological power to actualize.

*Who implements the law?*

That which conceives creation or the purpose to manifest has also the power to protect the entire process of creation and manifestation and safeguard it with law.

*What is the consequence of a breach of law?*

The consequence is punishment.

*What is punishment?*

Punishment is the withdrawal of natural benevolence enjoyed by the culpable person.

*Who informs the culpable person that they have made a breach of law for which they will be punished?*

When the I-consciousness in a person is not identified with the supreme Self, it transforms itself into an ego. When it is indicated that the ego is culpable of something, it becomes stung by guilt consciousness. Some guilt consciousness is superficial, but then there are grievous kinds which can assume the intensity of sin or lifelong misery. It is like being bitten by a snake. That person will suffer great unhappiness for long periods of time.



# NEW YEARS MESSAGE

BY GURU MUNI NARAYANA PRASAD

May this New Year, as also the coming years, be peaceful and fulfilling for everyone.

Every year we welcome the New Year with new expectations. We did the same last year. Yet people in many parts of the world have had to suffer due to natural phenomena, which we refer to as natural calamities, and there is also much suffering due to manmade calamities. No one can stop the former. We have to endure them. The case of the other kind of calamities, those that are manmade, is not so. They are all avoidable, and it is man's responsibility to avoid them, and to allow everyone to live in this world peacefully.

Of such events, the latest one in November was the heinous air strike made by Israel against the innocent people living cramped in the small strip of land known as the Gaza Strip. The Palestine Territory, of which Gaza is a part, does not even have the status of an independent state. Even that status is denied them by Israel, who always enjoys the support of the mighty U.S.A. Nearly one hundred and fifty innocent people, including children and women, were brutally killed and residential areas, schools and hospitals were destroyed.

Against this crime, good-hearted humans throughout the entire world protested and showed their unity with the Palestinians. Israel thus had to withdraw themselves from this area and from its abominable action. And now, as a favor towards Palestine, the United Nations has recognized the territory as an "observer state" in that world organization. Such painful fates originating from human ignorance now go on causing similar events in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, many African countries and even in the mighty United States and England. The sympathy and unity of the human race is always with such victims. But no way out is found by anyone, other than all countries tightening their security systems.

The root cause of all such action is the mutual hatred of religious and secular ideologies and the illegitimate connection between religion and politics. The greed to possess natural resources available in certain geographical regions is yet another cause.

The origin of all the existing world religions happened many, many centuries ago, when the people of one part of the world had no opportunity to be aware of the existence of other areas or peoples. In those circumstances the various prophets and seers taught the people around them alone, in a way understandable to them and in their languages. They taught them what the ultimate Reality of life is and how to live in the light of that Reality. And thus the origin of different religions.

Now we are living in a different world. In fact, the entire world in the Age of Science has shrunk into a global village, owing to our fast-growing communication technologies. This phenomenon grows faster and faster every year. Everything that happens at every moment anywhere becomes known to everyone, and is a matter of concern for everyone. No person can live in the present world without taking into account the whole world and the human race that inhabits it.

Yet in the context of religion, the human mind everywhere is always tempted to go back to circumstances that prevailed many centuries before, and to live with such a narrow outlook. What religions basically teach mankind is how to be aware of one's inseparable oneness with the all-controlling and all-underlying Reality, and how one should live with this understanding. Why can't we have a modern and scientific outlook in our religious perception also?

Then, instead of our religiousness going back to the mental conditions and circumstances that prevailed millennia ago, it will progress forward along with the advancing of the Age of Science while not forgetting the role of religion in our lives. All would then be living in this world while holding dear a scientifically conceived religion. This would address the imminent need of the present age for the peaceful co-existence of all mankind. Not recognizing the need and still holding on to an archaic religious attitude is at the heart of the troubles that the human race faces now. Had a prophet or seer emerged in this age, he would only have helped mankind to have a religiousness that acknowledges God as one, and the human race as one. Narayana Guru was such a seer.

A political ideology and a governing system that treats the world as a single political unit is also needed. Even though many are aware of this imminent need, no one knows who can and will take the initiative. Admittedly, we live in an age when democracy is recognized as the best system of governance. In a democracy, the ultimate power rests with the people. Thus it is the people of the world who have to become aware of this urgent need and express their will fearlessly. This awakening of the people will awaken the leaders, or else new leaders of such a vision will emerge. This is the only way a World Government will come into existence. No political leader of the present day is to be expected to have such a vision. Their concern is more with power and money than with the well-being of the world, called in Sanskrit *lokasamgraha*.

Making the world into a single political unit does not require that the existing countries in the world become united. The world is already one. Some arbitrary lines drawn merely on maps divide the one world into various pieces. What we need is simply the erasing of these lines, drawn for the already mentioned reasons.

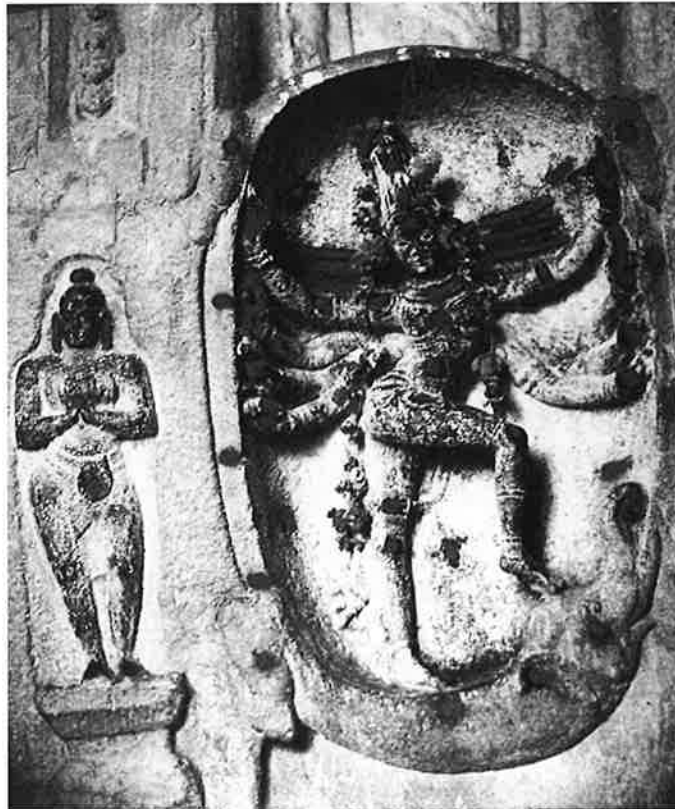
Such archaic attitudes and the thoughtlessness behind them are to be given up. The oneness of mankind is to be recognized, and also the oneness of the aspirations of mankind is to be acknowledged in our political as well as in our religious affairs.

The one common interest of mankind is to be happy in life. What the world needs at the moment is for mankind to recognize this, to correct ourselves, and to make life flow in its natural unity. Until this happens, the tragic events which occurred in Gaza and are happening in many other parts of the world are likely to continue.

Therefore our prayer now is this: May mankind awaken to such a need for sense of unity and to stand firmly by it.

May the year we are now welcoming lead mankind in significant measure towards this end.

May the New Year be peaceful to everyone in every respect.



# GURUKULA NEWS

Arrangements have been made between Guru Muni Narayana Prasad and the Zen Center of San Francisco (USA) for students of the Zen Center to use the Gurukula in Ootacamandala (Ooty) as a study and retreat center. Swami Vyasa Prasad will continue as the Gurukula representative there.

Gennadi, a friend of the Gurukula, has completed an in-depth compilation of Sanskrit terminology, using both standard sources as well as all of the works of the Narayana Gurukula gurus. This magnum opus can be accessed at:

[www.advaitadictionary.com](http://www.advaitadictionary.com)

Scott Teitsworth will be attending a philosophical conference in Kochi, Kerala, July 19—21. The conference is on Metaphysics and Politics and Scott will be presenting Narayana Guru's *Darsana Mala*. Also, Inner Traditions Press has contracted to print another book of Scott's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, chapters one and two, with a proposed publication date of 2014.

Patrick Misson has a website of Nataraja Guru's works with notes, including a thorough one just recently posted on the Saundarya Lahari:

at <http://www.advaita-vedanta.co.uk/>

After the Autumn 2013 issue, the publication of the English language *Gurukulam* will continue in India. We have been putting out the magazine here at the Portland Gurukula for nine years and are grateful to everyone who has participated, and we will continue to be part of the magazine. For information on *Gurukulam* after this year, please contact:

Guru Muni Narayana Prasad, Varkala Gurukula, Srinivasapuram P.O., Varkala 695-145, Kerala State, India or at [gurukulavarkala@gmail.com](mailto:gurukulavarkala@gmail.com)

The Gurukula website: [www.narayanagurukula.org](http://www.narayanagurukula.org)

Ongoing internet classes on *Atmopadesa Satakam* and *Yoga Sutras*:  
[islandaranya@toast.net](mailto:islandaranya@toast.net)

Book introductions, articles, class notes from the Portland Gurukula:  
[scottteitsworth.tripod.com](http://scottteitsworth.tripod.com)





# ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

- Front Cover    Siva as Mendicant, bronze, Cola, 900 CE
- Back Cover    Siva Emerging from Lingam, stone, Cola, 1048 CE
- 5    Siva and Holy Family, ink on paper, Kangra Hills, 1800s
- 7    Qualia, oil and mixed media on linen, Emma Walker, 2012
- 11 & 16    Computer graphics, Andrew Larkin, 2012
- 25    Remembering Forgetting I, oil and mixed media on linen,  
Emma Walker, 2012
- 26    Remembering Forgetting II, oil and mixed media on linen,  
Emma Walker, 2012
- 27    Hold That Thought, oil and mixed media on linen,  
Emma Walker, 2013
- 35    Heracles and Cerberus, painting, amphora vase, Greece, 520 BCE
- 45    Siva Nataraja, bronze, Cola, 1000 CE
- 46    Siva as *Mahasvara*, stone, Elephanta Caves, 600s CE
- 50    top: Siva with animals; bottom: Siva as yogi, carved steatite seals,  
Indus Valley, 1500 BCE
- 51    Siva with headress, carved steatite seal, Indus Valley, 1500 BCE
- 53    Bird along the Ocean, photograph, Gayatri Agnew, 2013
- 48    Hesperian dragon guarding the golden apples, 420-410 BCE
- 58    Siva as *Bhairava*, painting, Kangra Hills, 1820
- 61    Siva Nataraja and Shakti, stone temple carving, Chennai, 1000 CE
- 64    Siva and Shakti on Mt. Kailasa, stone, Ellora Caves, 600s CE

# 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.

PUBLICATIONS BOARD: Bushra Azzouz, Deborah Buchanan, Sraddha Durand, Andrew Larkin, Scott Teitsworth, Nancy Yeilding.

EDITOR: Deborah Buchanan

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION USA and INDIA: Contact Narayana Gurukula, Srinivasapuram P.O., Varkala, Kerala, 695-145, South India.

SUBMISSIONS are made in the spirit of free sharing and cross-pollination. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and space.



PUBLISHED BY THE NARAYANA GURUKULA