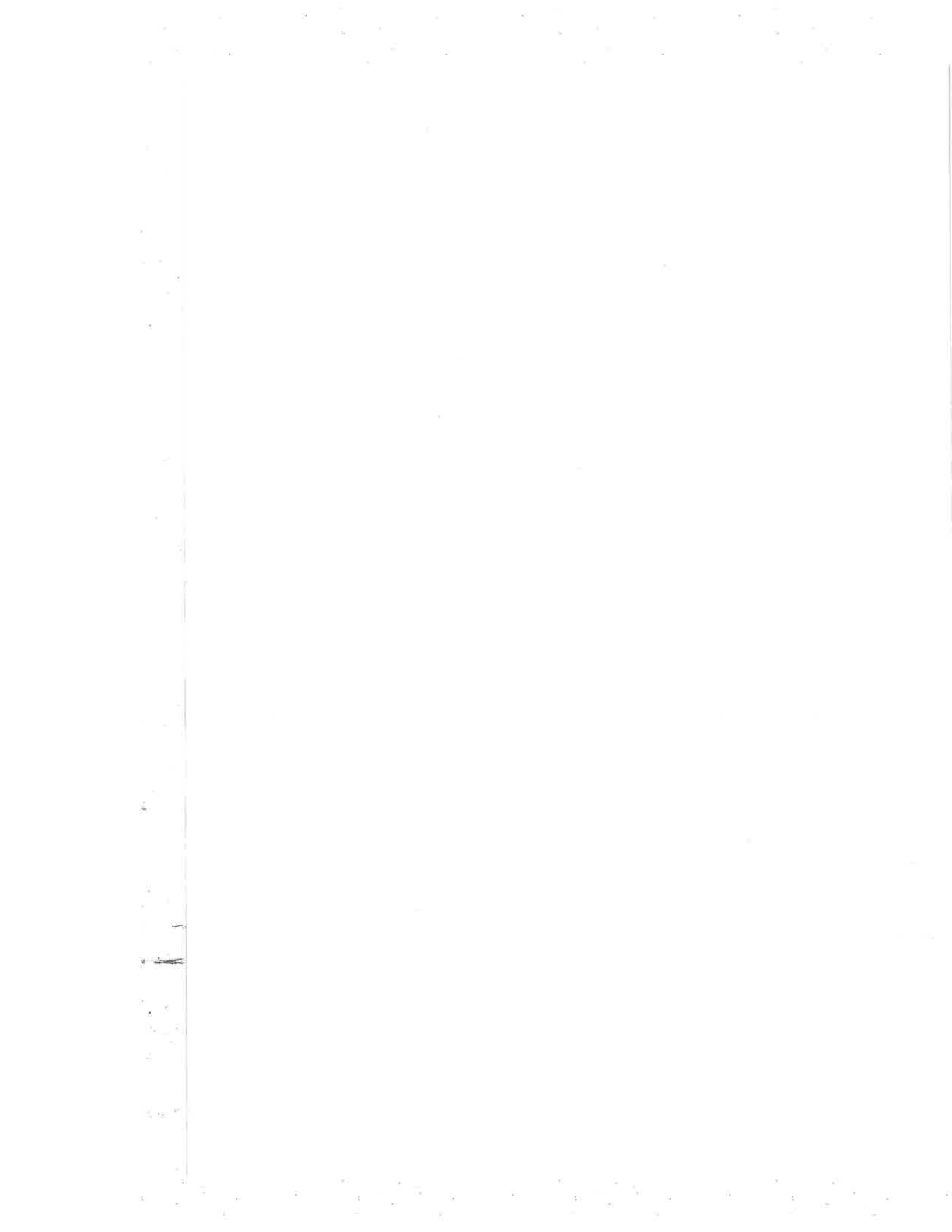


GURUKULAM



AUTUMN 2013



GURUKULAM

A Journal of Philosophy and the Arts

AUTUMN 2013

Published by the Narayana Gurukula

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EDITORIAL

It was afternoon and we sat in the shade of the large, overarching trees. John Spiers, a cat in his lap, and Guru Nitya were sitting in old rattan chairs, facing one another. The others—the two of us traveling with Nitya (myself and Jean-Pierre Rohart) and 3 or 4 young Europeans staying at John's—sat on the ground. Perhaps we were having tea. I don't remember what John and Nitya discussed, but as we all sat and listened—quiet words resting on the warm air—it felt like an eternal moment. This was at John's Gurukula in Kaggilapura, in the then-rural outskirts of Bangalore. Earlier that day we had walked to a nearby stream and waded in the cool water, no one else around.

Over the last nine years that I have been the editor of Gurukulam, I have often thought back to that afternoon and to John Spiers. It was John who initiated Values magazine, the progenitor to Gurukulam. As Nataraja Guru's disciple, John Spiers wanted a continuing forum for the Guru's writings and each month he organized, edited, typeset and printed Values from his humble home in Kaggalipura. Most of Nataraja Guru's books began their lives as articles and series in Values. Values eventually became Gurukulam, newsletter of the Narayana Gurukula, with both Guru Nitya and Vinaya Chaitanya serving as editors.

Then in 1981 the magazine moved to the United States, and Nancy Yeilding, Bob Tyson and Sraddha Durand spent many long weekends—months and years in fact—wrestling with an old German off-set press. For 17 years the magazine was printed and published on Bainbridge Island in Washington State, featuring Guru Nitya's articles, especially his translations and commentaries. In addition, Guru Nitya's revival of Gurukulam was based on the desire for a forum for the Gurukula community and each person's creative endeavors. Then in 2004 there was a shift of the magazine to the Portland Gurukula.

Now Gurukulam is set for another move, this time back to India, with Swami Vyasa Prasad as editor and Guru Muni Narayana Prasad overseeing the magazine. Many of us who have participated in the magazine's publishing will continue to do so. And, hopefully, many others will join in, on both sides of the globe.

I am going over this history because one of the most important experiences in these last years of being editor has been that of the history and web of relationships in the Gurukula. Working on the Gurukulam has allowed me to be at a center point in that. There have been the articles on people and historical events, yes, ones where important figures are remembered and presented to a new audience. There have been as well the forgotten or unknown connections that surface, reaching out at just the right moment and illuminating a darkened corner. Or a person

that I haven't seen or communicated with in decades reappears and an immediate interchange resumes. Or another person who spent time in India but who I hadn't met offers letters and journals of their time at the Gurukula and another aspect of that experience is revealed.

Apart from those connections, there has also been the joy of someone sharing a thoughtful article or a compelling art work. This issue has lovely reprises of earlier contributions: Susan Plum's art work graced the first issue in 2004 as it does this one; there is again a poem from Johnny Stallings; also a new translation of a poem to the goddess by Vinaya Chaitanya; and again photographs and an article about a happening at the Fernhill Gurukula by Swami Vyasa Prasad.

And I cannot neglect mentioning the thoughtful and touching articles by Thomas Palakeel, Gayathri Narayanan, Nancy Yeilding, and Emily Teitsworth—all very different yet linked by an inner sympathy, and all complemented by the delicate and beautiful art of Peggy Chun and Shashi Memuri.

Many times I have thought of themes for certain issues, but just as many times the theme coalesced of its own accord as various contributions arrived. This issue is certainly an example of that. Submissions came in but without much of a sense of relation between the individual pieces. Yet as I have read through this issue it's been impossible to ignore what is the inner theme of each work: the profundity and centrality of the deep core of identity between all of us. Or what we might call love. What comes to mind as I read through this issue is the first verse of Narayana Guru's *Atmopadesa Satakam*:

Permeating the knowledge which brilliantly shines
at once within and without the knower
is the *karu*; to that, with the five senses withheld,
prostrate again and again with devotion and chant.

Karu, the glowing core, beginning and end of manifestation, the source of our love as well as love's unspoken goal.

ATMOPADESA SATAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

VERSE 55

*netiya kinavitu nidra pole nityam
ketumitu pole kinavumiprakaram
ketumati kanukayilla kevalattil
petuvatinal anisam bhramiccitunnu.*

A long dream is this; like sleep, this perishes every day;
in the same way, dream also;
the perishing intelligence does not see
what belongs to aloneness, and hence is constantly confused.

In the previous verse the two alternatives expressed were the deep sleep and the wakeful states. There was no mention of the dream state. There is one common feature between the dream and wakeful states, that in both we are conscious of a conceiving and perceiving 'I'. The notion of 'I' is operating as the central reference in both of them. Both have a time sense and a space sense, as well as the identity of knower, doer and enjoyer. All these disappear only in the state of deep sleep. In this verse, by contrast, primacy is given to the dream. Where before the wakeful was contrasted with deep sleep, now dream is.

When wakeful experience and the dream state are taken together, the whole of life can be treated as a single dream of experience. In it, our intelligence operates intermittently, since deep sleep is not a continuous thing. We have no use of our intelligence in deep sleep. We cannot discern with it by using it as an instrument or a critical faculty, as we do in the wakeful state. The question is why are the wakeful and the dream state put together here as if there is no difference between them, while at the same time transactional life is given only a secondary importance.

The process we are undergoing in this work is a transference from *maya*, the seeming first cause of the transactional world, to an ultimate cause. If *maya* both is and is not, it has no proper basis. For anything to be, it should have a real basis. So an existential ground is to be established for any experience. An experience may be an illusion of something, but there still should be a ground for that illusion. When you say something is superimposed, the question arises, "Superimposed on what?"

Here *kevalattin* is given as the ground for the superimposition of whatever is experienced in the waking and the dream. We could still retain the wakeful experience, which is very prominent, instead of bringing in the dream, but Narayana Guru wants to point out one defect which affects them both and is important in the present context. There is an overall influence of an unknown entity which affects our mind when we are wakeful and think we are critically examining things. We assure ourselves of the certitude of what we are arriving at. In the dream state also we use the same kind of critical faculty: we assure ourselves that this is not a dream, it is really real. Even when we try to find out if it is true or not, we get every evidence that it is. We fool ourselves. After some time we wake up and contrast wakeful experience with what we have discovered in the dream state, and find out it is not true. Only then do we realize we have been fooled.

One difference between the wakeful and dream states is when we go from the dream to the wakeful there is some retention of the experience of the dream, and this can be deliberately recalled to be compared with the succeeding wakeful experience. But when we go from the wakeful to the dream, there is no retention of a memory cognized as a wakeful experience which can be kept at hand, ready for comparison. We do not decide that what we have experienced in the wakeful is after all not true. This is left unexamined.

The main conception of treating the wakeful as a dream originated with Gaudapada. Sankara then brought in one characteristic of wakefulness that is different from the dream: you can connect one wakeful experience with another, thus making a continuity out of it in your life. But you do not make a continuous linking of dream with dream. This is certainly true but it is somewhat beside the point, since here Narayana Guru is treating both as one long dream. This can be accepted because we are not going to use transactional experience in this particular verse; at this point we are moving away from the transactional to the absolute state.

Earlier Narayana Guru said that where the still voice of *aum* concludes is a place of self-luminosity. From the “a” state, the transactional world where there are thousands of names, forms and interests, we go to the “u” stage where the forms and names and interests are all generated by one’s own individual consciousness. Beyond this point the subject and object are left behind. In a sense everything perishes when there is no longer any ‘I’ or any ‘this’. In this, the “m” state, the *buddhi* or intelligence is extinguished, and everything dies away.

It is only after total extinguishment that we enter into the next state, that of the Aloneness. It is the Aloneness of that voice which has now lost all its dynamics of manifestation. There it is entering into the total realm of the unmanifest. We are confused when we come to this. We cannot remain there. We come back again and again to the familiar world of our experience. This final aspect could have been our realization, but we are conditioned to expect a thing to be known, and we are in an operational field of knowledge only when the individuated intelligence can be applied to definite things. There you definitely see a thing as a thing, and an ‘I’ as

an 'I'. If the distinctions of the 'I'-ness and the thing-ness are taken away, you don't know how to deal with it. Until you develop a new kind of appraisal of the situation this whole process is an impossibility. Only when one relative factor and another relative factor are both grounded on the Absolute, or at least on a normative notion of the Absolute, can the relative factor examine the other element and think of its existence, its awareness and its value, since these are all absolute notions.

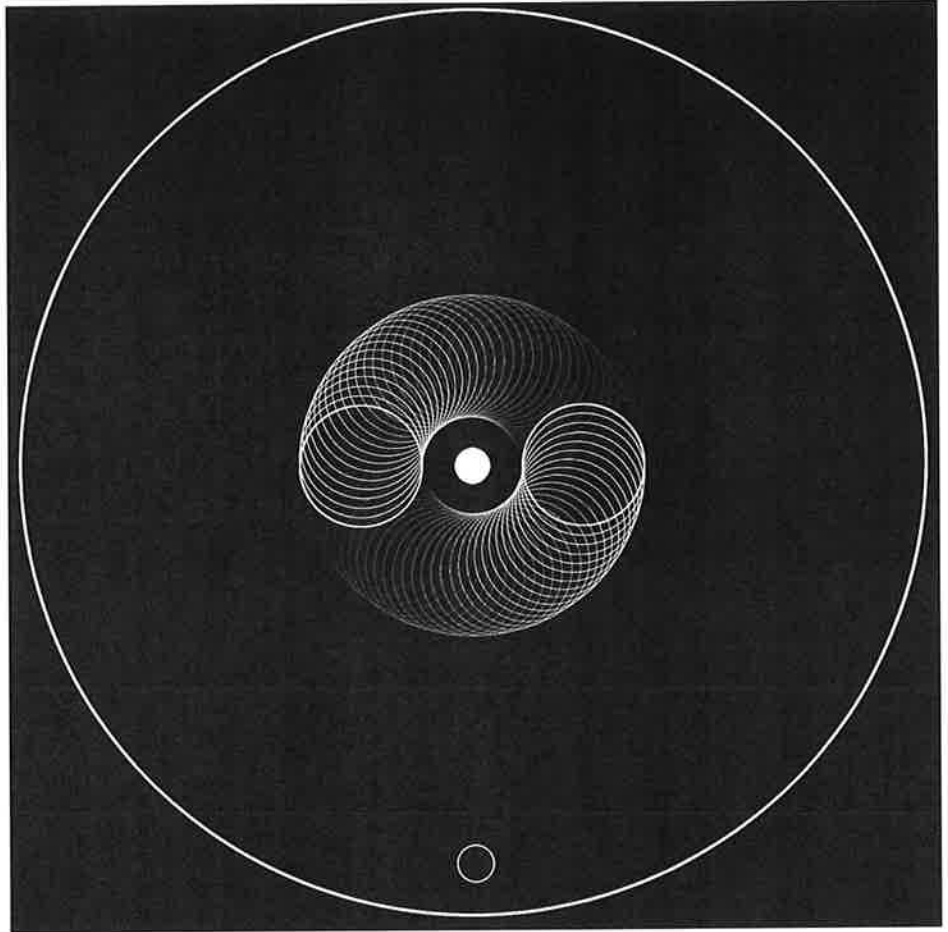
When these separated entities are not there, only the Absolute is. Nothing is compared. Nothing is made a subject of study. Very soon you are thrown back into your position of a relativistic 'I' looking at a relativistic 'this'. This happens repeatedly. You become again and again confused. This confusion takes away from your mind the value and worth of what you have lived transactionally.

However vigorous your experience of the transactional world may have been, when you experienced along with it purely subjective things with no continuity, and now you sit back and recall the things which have happened and the things of which you have only dreamt, how do you differentiate the memory content of these two?

A thing which actually happened and a thing which was only seen in the dream both become memories. Both can be recalled, both can be revived, but no trace of either experience is left. They have become a knowledge of the past. Memory is a knowledge of the past. The quality of it in its essence is pain-pleasure, good-bad. This means the wakeful transaction loses its vigor. It no longer holds good. It has become a thing of the past. The dream has also become a thing of the past. When you put together these two things of the past, the wakeful and the dream which have blended together in memory, you have what Narayana Guru calls *netiya kinavitu*, a prolonged dream. Your wakeful dream and your dream dream together make one big dream. The whole of life becomes like a dream.

Occasionally you fight with someone on some issue in wakeful life. Then after some time you make up, you once again agree and feel it was foolish for you to fight like that. The incident goes into the background of your mind as a discarded memory, and thereafter you treat each other as if nothing had ever happened. The phenomenologists call this a reduction. The reduction is that actual things and their values are reduced to an eidetic notion. The value or significance assigned to a thing at a particular moment is now considered only as a special feature of the reaction that was released in you because of your personality makeup. Or it may be that others were present in that situation and you were under the spell of a kind of mob mind or mass mind.

In the dream an unknown force influences your mind so that you behave in a certain way despite yourself, and yet you know that at that time it looked as if it were your decision. Like that, you can see that the wakeful experience is also not free of an overall dominating principle. This directing or dominating principle could be taken as the operation of a collective mind of which your individual mind is just a part. Or perhaps there were long stored up incipient memories which were looking for an opportunity to actualize.



What we are seeing as the here and now are the accumulated urges which were lying dormant for a long time finding opportunities to influence segments of your experience from within. Although it appears to be the individual's experience, the actual content belongs to many previously suppressed occasions in a temporal series; in other words, what you tried to accomplish on a subject four years ago, three years ago, one year ago, a few months ago, last week. The same thing has come up many times, but something in your ego repressed it. Finally it gets to a breaking point where that repression is no longer possible, because all the resistance is worn down. Then it comes out as an experience in the wakeful. In this way almost all our wakeful experience has an unconscious history behind it, which is impelling its operation.

The same thing happens in the dream state also: a subjective phenomenon desires to express itself in order to see how it looks, so to speak. Earlier, Narayana Guru said that knowledge, to know its own state, has become all this phenomenal world, so that through this intelligence it can see what it is. Human intelligence is considered an omega point into which knowledge has evolved, so that through it everything is seen. The alpha point of self-expression terminates with the omega of peak experience. This is what the first part of this verse describes: like the deep sleep which brings a daily ending to our lives, this discerning intelligence comes to a termination again and again.

Intelligence terminates like a wave. A wave is born where there is no wave, only water, as the product of several forces. After it arises it may travel for a long time as an invisible impulse in the ocean. Finally it reaches the place of its expression, where it comes to a peak, breaks into its full expression, and finally dissipates. After it has terminated there is once again no wave. Then it becomes another wave. The first wave has its own personality, and the second wave has another personality, but actually there is only water. In the water there is no duality. There is only aloneness. The aloneness of the water is called *kevalam*. The waves all happen within the aloneness of water.

Our problem is we become confused about the reality of the wave. Is it real or isn't it? When we saw it at its peak expression we thought it was very real, but where has it gone now? What is its status once it has merged with the water? Does the wave's essence remain preserved somewhere? No, it does not remain anywhere. Should we keep a record of it? We keep records of only the most powerful waves which wreak havoc along the shore. But that's all there is. The thingness of a thing is seen as a separate reality, but nothing really exists other than what we retain in the present.

Here, Husserl's phenomenological explanation becomes relevant. In it he examines the content of memory. Time is involved. For instance, with the wave rising and falling there is movement in space and duration in time. If the movement is happening to a thing by itself, without the human mind cognizing it, it is as good as not happening with regard to our world of values and considerations. It becomes relevant to a human only when it is a part of his experience.

When one experiences something, it is an experience of the present. As the present moves away into the past, although the clarity of what was experienced becomes diminished, there is a kind of frantic endearment of the experience. It is not allowed to perish. This means your retention of it is forced into the present. The retention that is lived in the present is the memory of the past. It is not only a memory of the past: it is the past. Actually, there is no past. The past is the present retaining its own experience. Thus, in the present you can have a retention of a retention of a retention, endlessly, never allowing anything to pass away. There is a snowballing of retentions in the present of what is called the past.

The process of retention transforms things into shadowy substances. Rather than the actuality of a substance, we emphasize its historical, mythical, legendary or fantastic aspects, which are all shades of appreciation of only the content of retention. Because we are focused on the shadow rather than the substance, we become confused. We may be outwardly confident in our beliefs, but we are nonetheless confused at the core of our understanding. We cannot make up our mind about the value of anything. This is what is meant in this verse by *anisam bhramiccitunnu*.

This verse next mentions a state where what is objectively experienced and what is subjectively experienced are both annulled. The subject/object aspects are gone, and what comes thereafter is a nonsubjective experience. There is no 'I'. As there is no 'I', you cannot say whether an experience is of the individual or the collective. Its universality cannot be determined and its individual relationship can never be stated because there is no center of reference. We can say something is of an individual only when there is a focal point of consciousness to which it can be related, the centralized orientation of an 'I'. Where this is not, there is only aloneness. The *kevalam* or aloneness here is to be treated the same as where the still voice of *aum* culminates.

The effect of this in your daily experience is that you come to use a new kind of criticism. While there is a retention of the content of the past, there is also a criticism of the qualitative validity of that particular experience. If you are angry, or in a state of grief, or in pain, you can look at it critically. How much of this is my real anger? How much of it is real pain? Or in a positive experience, how much of this is my real achievement? Then there comes a pause. The psychological inflow of an overpowering dynamic, which makes the whole thing very real to you, gets suspended. It's as if you suddenly become ashamed of your enthusiasm, ashamed of your exaggeration. A lot of the fervor with which you had been accomplishing an act, appreciating an incident, or making a claim on something, drops away.

When we thus critically examine an experience, it proves itself to have the same kind of content which dreams have. If you continue to experience the mediocrity of a thing once it is shorn of all exaggeration, it takes on the status of a mere dream. If such a critical assessment of the past holds good for what is now entering your consciousness, you cannot get excited about it. You still make yourself as efficient

as possible, as you did on a previous occasion, with all vigor and enthusiasm; you still perform the pertinent actions with great consciousness; but at the same time you know this is just a passing phenomenon. You do what is necessary because you belong to this system of embodied beings who are operated upon by natural impulses.

It is a little like a robot, a machine operating. Someone has switched it on, so it has to function, it has to perform its programs. You did not begin this machinery, it is just functioning by some natural propulsion. So you go on functioning, but personally you are disinterested in the whole business. When you lived it with interest and became very excited about everything, it did not persist as a matter of excitement. It proved to be of the same stuff as dreams.

According to this instruction, you come to a place where you are no longer excited about experiences. You do not treat them as good or bad even though previously that may have been very important to you. You no longer attach a moral tag that makes you feel guilty or benevolent. You don't treat things as bright or dull, or true or untrue in the relative sense. You just treat them as phases flowing past. And because you are no longer excited you are no longer terrified. There is no threat in anything. Insecurity could only be about the things that are passing away, so that ceases to eat at you. There is no gain you can retain. It is all just passing phenomena, to which you have a feeling of "Let it be."

This attitude brings you to live in the present, in this very moment, because that is all that is possible. There comes a kind of sameness. What once seemed very painful as well as what seemed very sweet become mere relative factors. The retention of the painful and the sweet are only two models. By themselves they are no longer sweet or painful when they are recalled to mind. The sameness that is in the recall of the retention is also experienced as it is taking place. That is how it should be. Narayana Guru says you fumble at the termination and do not realize it is all happening within the total oneness. You are still confused. He will examine it further in the next verse.

The meditation of this verse requires a very deep introspective analysis of one's personal experience, at a time when you are passing through a crisis. At the same time, the crisis can be seen as a phantom even while you are living it. This can be accomplished only when you can detach your mind in the thick of actual situations and can see how the exciting elements are passing into a retentive world even as you are living them in the here and now.

On certain occasions in my life when I had a physical or mental affliction, I took the opportunity for the meditative purpose of evaluating the actual pain, the actual agony to which the body or mind was subjected. I quietly watched the body's pain and wrote descriptions of exactly how I felt it to be painful. Immediately there came a psychological turnover of my interest from the pain itself to the norms of pain, intellectually conceived. That made the pain already a phantom.

The pain became less painful because my interest was of a critic making a critique of it. When you become a critic of your own pain, half of it goes away.

Then you question whether the other half is real, because the first half already left. This is even more poignant when you are in an angry state and you make a journal of your anger. The bulk of the anger immediately dies down and becomes even humorous. You pose as the angry person and make a caricature of your anger. It becomes so satirical of your own state of mind that you see yourself as a big fool to get angry like that. There is so little content in it. It is blown all out of proportion. Once you see this, the whole thing leaves you and you wonder, "What is this thing called my anger? What is this thing called my pain? What are these things called my excitement, my sense of fame, my sense of importance?" All of it is reduced to an evenness. Somehow, up to now you have not cultivated that acumen. You can try it and see what kind of difference it makes.

VERSE 56

*katalil ezum tira pole kayamoro-
nnutanutan reiyuyarnnamarnnitunnu;
mutivitinennitu hanta! mulasamvit-
katalil ajasravumulla karmmamatre!*

Like waves arising in the ocean,
bodies one by one suddenly arise, then merge again;
alas! Where is the end to this?
In the primal ocean of consciousness potent action is said to exist.

The analogy of the ocean and the wave is a poetic allegory and a very intriguing simile. Why doesn't the ocean remain without any waves? We can't see any reason why it should have waves, but somehow it is very restless. What makes it restless we don't know, but it is ceaselessly moving.

From all sides we see waves rising up. If you fly over the ocean in an airplane you can see so many waves appearing and disappearing for no apparent reason. You might ask yourself, "Is there anything really happening in the ocean?" You can answer yes. And what is it? New waves are coming all the time. But you can also say that nothing is happening. Whatever water is there remains the same. Waves may peak and subside, but nothing happens to the water itself; the ocean is essentially changeless.

Which perspective is true? They both are. The fact that waves arise and remerge is true, and the fact that the ocean never changes—that it is the eternal ocean—is also true. So what do we really have here? What is the whole question about if we lift the poetry out of it? It boils down to two logical terms: the universal and the particular. We exist here pondering over the many particulars that appear within the universal. What causes the particular to emerge from the universal? We do not know. Even shifting our attention from the visualizable example of the ocean and its waves to abstract calculables does not make the problem less difficult. Our inability to grasp how the universal is always changing into the particular, and how the particular cannot find its place anywhere other than the universal, persists.

Logically you can say "This seeming wave, when examined carefully—is it not only a change in the surface shape of the water?" Certainly. The surface could be flat, but it is undulating; the undulation of the surface is what we call waves. And how do we know this is happening? Our eyes see it. Undulation is an effect we see with our eyes, and we imbue it with a personality as if it is a separate entity. Its existence is merely appearance. So let us now at least get rid of one false notion. The wave is an appearance and the ocean alone is real; I think most of us will agree to that.

However, there is a far more interesting problem which affects all people: how can you be sure that the ocean is not an appearance also? It is certainly true that

the waves are only apparent, but does that make it true that the ocean is not an appearance? What constitutes water? Very tiny molecules which we cannot even see. If you look beyond water molecules, then none of the characteristics attributed to a specific form of matter can be found. So the very substance out of which water is created is imponderable. Only because of the massiveness of the ocean are you impressed. But what is that massiveness? Where does it come from? It is all built up out of something infinitesimal. The very finitude of it is beyond the grasp of our imagination. If that is the primary cause, the ocean that you see is a much greater hallucination than just seeing a wave there.

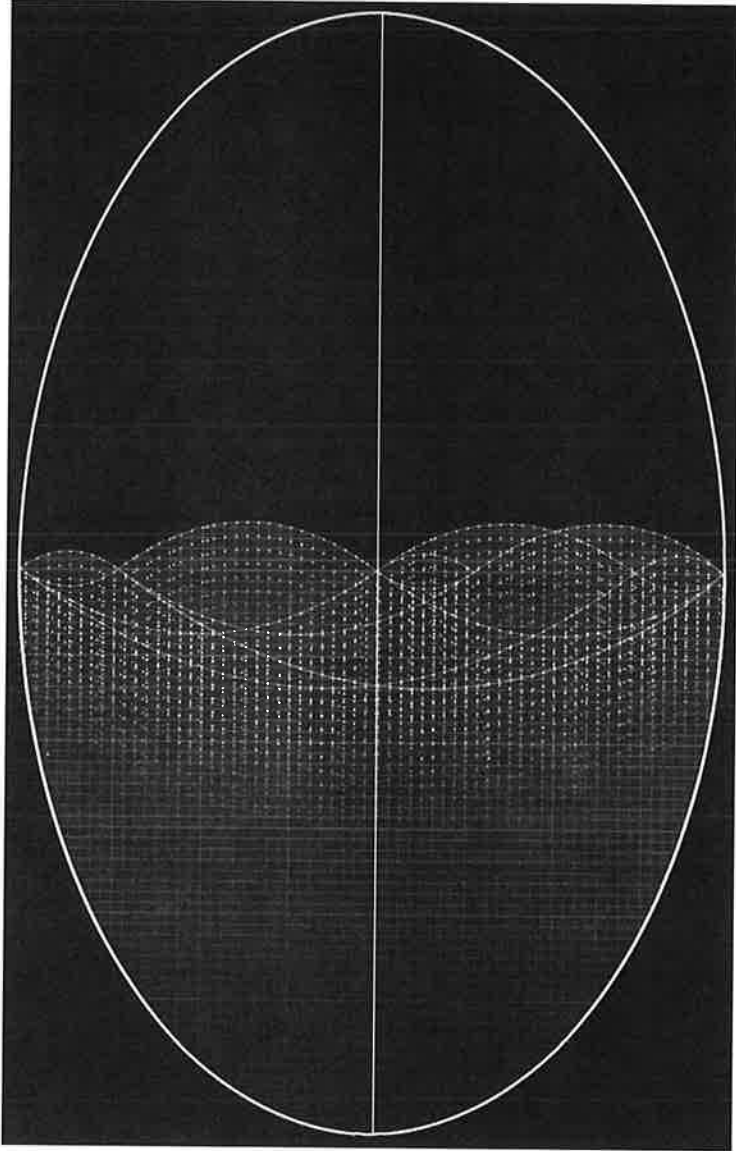
One is a causal fallacy and the other is a consequential fallacy. The consequential fallacy is seen in the causal fallacy. Which is better? Neither of these is good. If you are seeking to go beyond fallacies you should reject them both forthwith, but you find you cannot. Why is that? One of the reasons is that you are affected by them. You are part of the same game. It doesn't matter whether we are speaking of water or skin and bones. Ultimately the categories are simply the universal and the particular.

And why is all this happening? Because things exist. It is only in the world of existence that we have this problem. Buddhists say there is nothing called existence other than action, and nothing called action other than existence. Existence and action to them are interchangeable concepts. Vedantins here agree with the Buddhists in saying that all this is action. Something exists because it has a functional efficiency.

What is the functional efficiency of, say, this piece of tissue? It holds itself out as a thin, paperlike substance. Each molecule of it is trying hard to keep its cohesion with the next molecule. So it's not a dead substance: it's trying hard not to perish, to keep up its substantiality.

I am using the tissue because it is very soft. The softness is my idea of its quality. Moreover, it looks pretty clean, with no stains on it. It is again my idea that this is clean. But with another kind of eye, a physicist's eye perhaps, I might see that this is a gigantic colony of bacteria, with each one preparing to pounce upon me and cause all kinds of diseases. Then I should throw it away and wash my hands a hundred times with antiseptic, imagining that in the antiseptic are some sworn enemies of these disease biotics which will kill them. On the mouthwash bottle it is written: "Kills germs by millions on contact." Do we see the millions? Do we see the big fight going on, the murdering, and then all the corpses of the bacteria lying dead on the battlefield? No, we don't see any of these things. We pretend. And yet, it is all scientific truth.

In *The Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra said that when he sat by the edge of the sea and looked out over the water he saw cascades of energy showering down on him from outer space and everything on earth spewing its energy back into space. Subatomic particles were shattering each other and creating new ones. He saw all these things happening around him on all sides, even in his own body. He had been



lifted out of the mirage of seeing with his physical eye to seeing with the physicist's eye. He felt that he "saw" and he "heard." And what did he see and hear? He was not seeing what we normally see; he was seeing great sheets of energy coming from various cosmic bodies, bombarding the earth, and the earth transforming under the bombardment. Then he cried.

What made a poor physicist cry? Someone might think he was very sentimental. However, his sentiment is not born of any of the emotions we know in our social life, but by the enormity of this mysterious thing which he could not fix as being of matter or mind. He did not know where to say "this part is mind and this other part is matter."

I had the greatest revelation this morning—fantastic! We recently purchased a very big encyclopedia of science, so I decided to come to you well-informed about matter. I took down that big volume and looked for matter. That word has been removed from it. It is no longer a scientifically definable term. So that gave me great courage today to face all of you.

Narayana Guru says in this verse that from the ocean of *samvit* there arises body after body. You can look at it from outside and also from inside. Henri Bergson speaks of going around a thing and seeing it. When you do that, certainly one person is different from another. There are so many individual variations and differences between bodies. But you don't see your great great grandfather here with his characteristics. Where has he gone? And if we gather together again in a few years, instead of the baby who is with us now we might have some other friend's child. Where is that child now? Lying hidden here in the *samvit* ocean, looking for an opportunity to come up. The baby who is here now was not here last year. All these little waves are sitting in the *samvit* ocean, waiting for the proper conjunction of egg and sperm in the womb of some woman. Each child waits there for a long time as a possibility, a potentiality. But when it becomes an eight pound actuality it is no longer an idea. Now it has mass; or as we used to say, it is made up of matter. It has become tangible.

We have to combine these two elements: the world of ideas and the world of actuality. Some of our philosophers are responsible for perpetuating the nonsense that there are two separate things called matter and mind. We often put Descartes in the witness box, because he was partly responsible for this terrible misunderstanding.

Phenomenologists come and say that first you should suspend judgment on whatever is presented before you. What I see before me now is a complex of people, made up of various ideas plus names and forms. The next step is to look for the substantiality of it. I reduce all of you to a single category, that of the perceived object. When the perceived object is one confection, there are no separate persons. All become the object of my vision. Then I question the distinction between subject and object. How much of the object is in the subject, and how much of the subject is

in the object? Finally, once I reduce everything, I am forced to drop many things as inconsequential. Ultimately I arrive at the nondual entity, absolute being. Absolute being has no beard, no male or female differentiation, no inside or outside. It has no needs. It cannot be touched. It cannot be known. It is pure absolute.

To properly explicate this verse I would need at least seven or eight years. I would have to tell you all that Dignaya, Dharmakirti, Asanga and Vasabandhu thought about it. There are others too. Many wise men and women have broken their heads on this, but the Guru puts it in a very simple way.

We need a fire here in the morning. Without it we wouldn't be able to sit together during the cold winter season. That is a fact. The factual world should find a place in existence, but the possibility of arriving at an absolute should also be there. If you can combine these two into one total vision it is called *samvit*. Is *samvit* cosmic consciousness? Yes. Is *samvit* matter? Yes. Is *samvit* pure Absolute? Yes. Is it God? Yes. Is it the devil? Yes. What is it not? 'Is' and 'is not' are both *samvit*. It is dynamic, and in that dynamism innumerable possibilities are happening.

Out of the ocean of *samvit*, two possibilities emerge that are of general importance. One is the mind that perceives and the other is what is perceived. One is not the cause of the other: both are only consequential factors. It is not that the ocean is more real than the wave. The water and its agitations are both products of a total action situation.

We human beings have a number of prejudices. The questions that arise in our minds as to who is the actor and what is the action are only our prejudices. We think there needs to be an actor, who should have a purpose for action, a preparation for it and an instrument for carrying it out, who then performs the action. This is strictly anthropomorphism. Many of you think there is a God sitting in the heavens somewhere, complete with beard and arms and legs, who will gently touch your head and bestow his blessings upon you. Such images are born of your love for your grandfather. If you didn't have a benevolent grandfather you wouldn't think of a God-father who is sitting there patting you on the head. It is purely anthropomorphic—a very childish way of looking at it. At the same time it is very beautiful and sweet. But philosophically it is no more tenable than a cock-and-bull story.

Of course, cock-and-bull stories are very entertaining. They serve to keep us amused. Nobody stops you from imagining a fatherly God sitting on a throne who will give you manna when you ask for it. You can always rejoice when you get it. If you don't get it, it must be because you are a bad person, since God cannot be bad. It is only because of your demerit that you don't get it. All these are only tall tales, but people are afraid to call them stories because then religious people would lose all their patronage and the churches wouldn't get any money. So teachers, swamis, gurus, priests, everybody has to pretend to so many games.

Come out with the truth. Tear down all these stories. Then not only does the wave disappear, but the ocean also. We live in a world of make-believe, but does

that mean that make-believe is not life? No, no, no! It's all life. Make-believe is life. This is all quite confusing, but confusion is very good for giving us a sense of the enormity of the absolute possibility in which you and I are caught. Narayana Guru says *hanta!* Alas, alas! Where is the cessation of all this? It is not just one body arising and subsiding. There is an infinite body of knowledge coming, endless clusters of ideas coming.

Once you understand the Guru's perspective, a great freedom is bestowed on you. There are no longer any boundaries. Infinite are the possibilities of change. You are no more bound to create a functional program and then act it out. The big function, the great *karma*, is still going on endlessly, and you and I are part of it. Nothing else needs to be made to happen.

This is just like being put into a melting pot, where all our fixed notions are burned away. All our identifications are knocked off. We are at once the Absolute and our own particular self. After all, this personal self only has its identity until its bubble bursts. We are really very funny people. We not only become enraptured with our bubble, but when it bursts we make a graveyard for it. We put up a big, impressive stone with a name on it, saying "This bubble was born on such and such, and died on so and so. It was really a very impressive bubble!" All it does is perpetuate the memory of a bubble. And where is it perpetuated? On the next bubble in line!

When he speaks of bodies endlessly arising in this verse, Narayana Guru is referring to ideas as well as material objects. We make a common mistake in thinking that an idea can never be gross, but as soon as it becomes a body it is gross. We have an idea of the gross, and the grossness is an idea. In fact, both are wrong.

Certain ideas are in the mind, certain ideas are touchable, certain ideas won't move. If you can piece them all together it is called *sankata*, an aggregate. There are so many aggregates: forms, names, qualities, relationships, sensations. What you call a gestalt is only one aggregate of a living situation. If you can put all the possibilities of our experience into all the aggregates together, you have the *samvit*. Out of this ocean of possibilities all experiences emerge like waves.

To deny the wave and the ocean together, if you can, is wisdom. But if you then sit on what you have rejected, saying "I have realized; this is my realization," you have only made a new slab of ignorance called "my realization." I don't know if I am making sense to you. The very moment you realize that this is truth, you have falsified the whole thing. So where is the grace and where is the joy of the Absolute? It is all this. Don't be afraid: it's all still here.

Just suppose there is a possibility of your waking up and for a split second being aware of the state of deep sleep. Do you cry out, because at that time you have lost your body, you've lost your children, your parents, your possessions, everything? If you wake up only to know that much—that you are in the deep sleep state, which is a state of nothingness—have you thereby lost the possibility of picking up your child

the next day and kissing it? No, it's all still there. It's just not in the deep sleep state, it's in another phase of your life, the wakeful. So there is nothing to be afraid of.

This is just one of the many facets of the aggregate of which we are speaking. To my mind, the ice cream-like grace for which you crave is only one tiny little drop of the whole truth. The greatest grace is to have an insight into this great truth from inside, to know it as the wave, the ocean, the particle, the movement, the stillness, the ocean evaporating into the air, clouds forming, rain falling back onto the earth, forming rivulets, joining with other tributaries to form a stream, the big river flowing, the waterfall cascading, back to the ocean, the pure water merging with the saline of the ocean, losing identity.

What is this urgency about keeping yourself so pure, as if in a separate container? Doing this imprisons part of Beingness within what you call your identity. It's just like some childish people in India who go to the Ganges with a small bottle and fill it with water. They make it airtight, carry it home, and keep it for a hundred, two hundred years even. And what is the magic of this Ganga water? The Ganges' glory is because it flows from the Manasus River out of the highest peaks of the glorious Himalayas, down through thousands of miles of the world, nourishing and enriching everyone, only to pour back into the ocean, where it evaporates and returns to the mountains as snow. It is that endless cycle, the enormity of it, that makes the Ganges what it is. When part of it is put in a small bottle on a shelf somewhere, it no longer participates in the cycle of renewal. It is a pathetic mockery of its source.

Like that, you are breaking up the real grace and throwing it away into meaninglessness, when you lift yourself out of the whole. I'm not taking grace away from you. I am asking you to trade in your childish grace for the real grace. You attain a greater freedom when you give up your small freedoms. So intriguing is this verse. Ponder over it.

WAKE UP, HEART!

BY JOHNNY STALLINGS

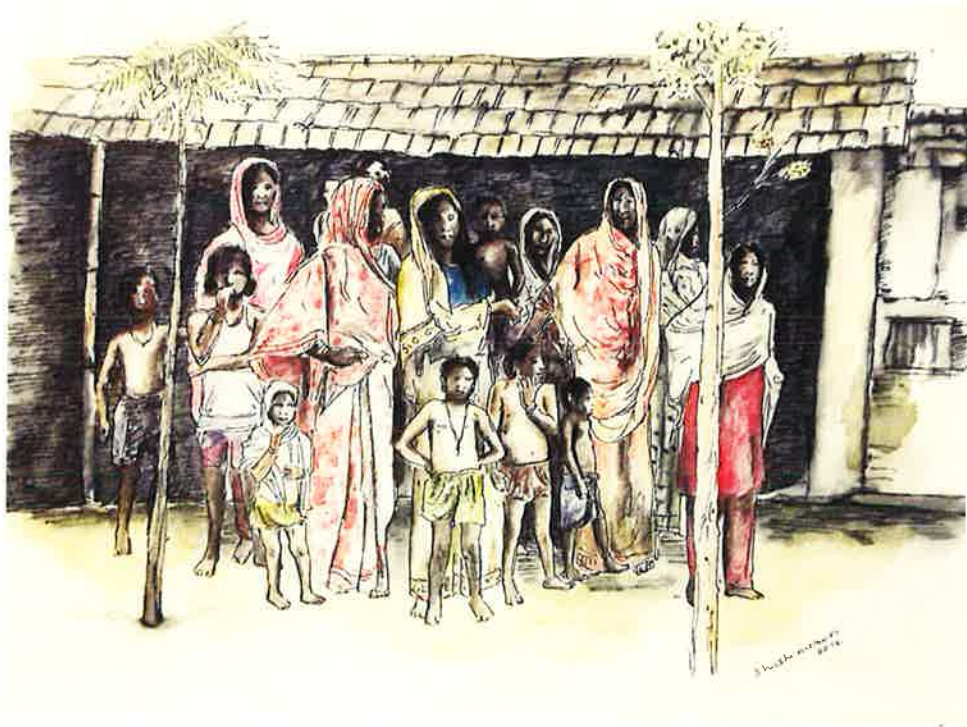
wake up, heart!
wake up and love every one and every thing
love the unlovable
the unhappy old men who start the wars
the geniuses who collapse the economy
the heads of the big corporations who ruin the earth
they need love, too
why else would they do stuff like that?
we all want to love and be loved
we all need to love and be loved
love everything that moves
and everything that won't budge
love the person who is reading or listening to this poem
you might start with the easy ones
passing dogs
laughing children
fluffy white clouds
all the spring flowers shouting "love me!"
practice on the easy ones
until you get so good at it that you accidentally love the weird and scary
homeless people, the criminals, the people whose views differ from yours—
before you have time to think about it
heart, you were born for love
mr. brain sometimes tells you not to
"don't love that one," he says, "that one doesn't deserve it"
"don't be a fool"
forgive mr. brain
he can't help it
he's always making distinctions between this and that
he needs a hug
you know better
you know that the thing to do is just to love
to wake up and love without limits

A TRIP THROUGH BIHAR AND BENGAL

BY
SHASHI MEMURI









NON-VIOLENCE IN PARENTING

BY

GAYATHRI NARAYANAN

When we think of *ahimsa* or non-violence, the famous movements for political and social change in India, United States, South Africa, Tibet and Burma come to mind. The leaders of these movements—Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi—were my inspiration for embarking on a journey to understand the principle of non-violence; to see the source of their courage, commitment and resolve in the face of so much adversity and hopelessness. The common thread I saw was a deep spiritual core in each of these leaders. At the heart of non-violence was something deeply spiritual—the understanding that “the other” and I are really one, that we share this planet as one humanity, and that we can consciously choose compassion, cooperation and kindness at every step.

Somewhere along this journey, I stumbled upon non-violent parenting. Nonviolence as a tool for social and political change was one thing, but what about non-violence at home? As a mother of two young children, I could think of no better spiritual practice. I studied the philosophy and practice of non-violent parenting and got certified as a parent educator from Echo Parenting and Education in Los Angeles (www.echoparenting.org). Since then, I’ve taught several classes on this subject to parents in my community. What started out as an abstract, academic, political philosophy to solve the world’s problems has now become a personal practice.

Below are some of the things I learned during my study with Echo Parenting and in my own practice with my children.

Why Non-violent Parenting?

When we look at our world today, we see all around us what we call the domination paradigm at play. This paradigm holds that in order to get what we want, we must control, manipulate and dominate others—that is, we need to have power over the other to control behavior and craft the life of our wanting. We do this in a variety of ways ranging from praise and rewards at one end of the continuum to threats, bribes, punishments and outright physical violence at the other. We see this paradigm at play in our governments, our corporations, our

schools and, sadly, our homes. Rewards range from a gold star in the classroom for “good behavior” to millions of dollars in subsidies for corporations who feed the coffers of elected politicians. Punishments range from time-outs and spankings in our classrooms and homes to cruise missiles devastating whole villages and towns. If you don’t do as I say or give me what I want, I will hurt you. If you do as I say, I will reward you. These are two sides of the same coin. They are both tools for manipulation and control.

The domination paradigm and the violence stemming from it are pervasive. In the United States, corporal punishment in schools is legal in 23 states. Spanking children in homes is commonplace. One out of four girls and one out of six boys will be sexually molested before they turn 18 years of age. These are just a few statistics showing the extent of violence that children suffer at the hands of adults, and in most cases, adults who are supposed to care for and love them. And what about yelling, ear-pinching, forced isolation (otherwise called “time-outs”), threatening and shaming? The hurting goes way beyond the body. Several parenting practices hurt the minds, hearts and spirits of our children.

Daisaku Ikeda, a Buddhist teacher and educator says, “Violence is born from a wounded spirit—a spirit burned and blistered by the fire of arrogance; a spirit splintered and frayed by the frustration of powerlessness; a spirit parched with an unquenched thirst for meaning in life; a spirit shriveled and shrunk by feelings of inferiority. The rage that results from injured self-respect, from humiliation, erupts as violence.”

What we see as violence “out there” is really stemming from violence so close to us—in our own psyches, in our homes, beginning with our relationship with our children. The current epidemic of depression, self-hate, suicide and self-mutilation we see among young people is not accidental. These are also a result of the rage stemming from victims of violence, but directed towards oneself instead of others around them.

In a world steeped in the domination paradigm, could we dare suggest an alternate paradigm—a non-violent paradigm for how we raise our children—a paradigm that honors the core dignity and value of the child; one that holds that children deserve to be raised with unconditional loving free from physical hurt, fear, shaming and manipulation; and one that believes that parenting is not something that is done to a child but rather a process of being in relationship together with empathy and understanding? And what if we said we could do this while honoring our own needs and feelings as parents, that we could use power with strategies instead of power over ones to resolve conflicts with our children? Can we model the kind of world we want “out there” in our homes, thereby reversing the cycle of violence we see “out there”?

When children are born only 25% of their brain is developed. 90% of brain development occurs between the ages of 0 and 5 years. Billions of neural pathways

are formed and solidified based on our experiences in these tender years and continue to be formed and re-formed over the course of our lives. They determine how we see and experience the world around us. Do we experience the world as a fearful or a friendly place? Do we reach out and share our joy, love and compassion with those around us or do we shrink and hide? Do we question and challenge authority when appropriate or do we fall in line? As parents, we are the “brain sculptors” for our children—not the only brain sculptors but a very significant and important one.

The good news is that the brain is also extremely plastic and “re-wireable”. Neuroplasticity is our friend! No matter what our relationship with our children has been previously, we can repair and create a new one based on the nonviolent paradigm—one based in love, connection and empathy. Neuroplasticity is also the basis for all our spiritual practices. When we meditate, contemplate, do yoga, *pranayama* and the like, we can break out of our old patterns of being that are not serving us. We are rewiring our brains, thereby creating a new possibility of being. The practice of nonviolent parenting falls very much in this category. By creating a new possibility of being for ourselves, we are allowing our children, the future adults of this world, a new possibility of being. One can look at it as a form of spiritual practice and also a form of social activism. I would say that’s killing two birds with one stone, but that’s a pretty violent metaphor!

Non-Violent Parenting in Practice

Non-violent parenting practice begins with presence. It begins with mindfulness. No matter what the parenting situation, we begin with observation and awareness. What is happening in this moment, right here and now—with me and with my child? Just observe without judgment or evaluation. How am I feeling right now in this moment? Where in my body am I feeling it? What are my needs? I wonder what my child is feeling right now? What does he or she need right now? We are not looking to solve the problem at this stage. Our entire focus is on remaining completely open and aware of whatever is. It may be your daughter kicking and screaming on the grocery store floor, or it may be your son resisting doing his math homework at the end of a long day at school. Whatever the situation, remain Curious, Open, Accepting and Loving (COAL, a handy acronym coined by Dr. Daniel Siegel).

Mindfulness helps us look beyond the outer manifestation of the behavior to what is really going on with the child. What is the child feeling and needing? The non-violent paradigm holds that all behavior is a strategy to meet a need. The strategies children use to meet a need may not be convenient or comfortable for us, the adults. Take the example of your five-year-old daughter kicking and screaming in the grocery store because you said she couldn’t have candy or a particular cereal. In this case, by need I don’t mean the cereal or candy you said she couldn’t have. By need, I mean universal needs such as understanding, attention, affection, choice, autonomy, rest or

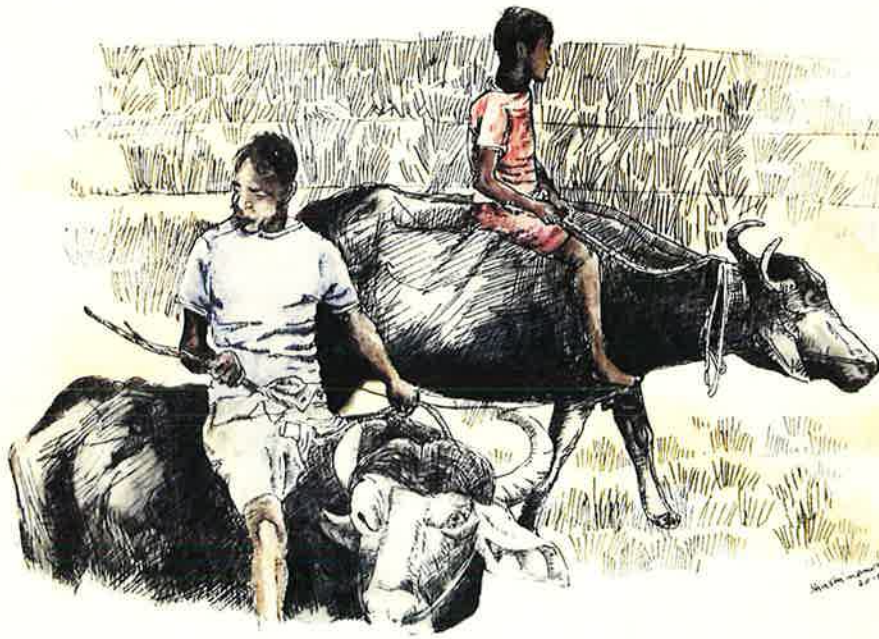
food. There could be a multitude of possible needs that are not being met for her in that moment. She could just be tired and hungry or it could be that she has a need for choice and autonomy. Then ask yourself what could she be feeling? You could make a silent guess. She's probably feeling sad, frustrated and angry.

In the meanwhile, you—the other party in this equation—also have several feelings and needs that are alive and needing attention. You may be feeling embarrassed, frustrated and angry. All your nerves are on edge and you just want to make the crying stop! You check in with yourself to see what your needs are. Again, by need I don't mean, "I need to get my grocery shopping done and go home!!" Try to identify your underlying universal need, which in this scenario may be for peace, ease and calm.

Just this process of checking in with yourself and observing what is happening within yourself and your child without judgment or evaluation creates a space. It is in this sacred space that the transforming and transmuting power of non-violence exists. Victor E. Frankl says, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom." Here, we can find the capacity to empathize and truly understand and connect with our child instead of resorting to yelling, shaming or physically hurting her. Sometimes, it helps to empathize out loud if she is ready to receive it. (With my kids, empathizing out loud doesn't work until they've calmed down.) Empathizing either in the moment or afterwards, depending on the situation, is a very powerful way to help your child feel that she is understood. It creates coherence and she is able to integrate that experience into her life in a healthy manner.

When the parent and child come together in that space of empathy and connection, the solution emerges naturally and organically. In most cases, just the act of being there for the child and staying open and empathetic is enough. No future action is necessary. In other cases, the parent and child will have to find a solution that works to satisfy the needs of both parties. If, in our example, the underlying need of the five-year-old was for choice, the parent could offer other opportunities for her to exercise choice. It may not be with the cereal or candy but could be on the pasta aisle (where there is less likelihood of the child picking an unhealthy pasta!) or the parent may offer something like, "When we get home, would you like to choose a game that we could play together?" This could satisfy her need for choice. In that space of connection, there exists many creative possibilities for resolving the situation which we may not see if we had gone down the path of yelling, shaming or threatening.

It is important to emphasize here that non-violent parenting does not mean giving in to every whim and fancy of your child. It does not mean that we have to try to meet every need of the child. It is not permissive parenting. Well thought out limits are absolutely necessary and should be held with firmness and compassion. These limits act as a support structure within which the child grows and learns.



Without limits, it can be extremely confusing for a child. The child should always see the parent as an able captain of the ship who she can rely on for support, safety and love. Limits are set with the view to educate, guide and protect and not as a means for control. We may have limits around safety (e.g. you may not run out on the street without holding my hand), around values you hold in your family (e.g. we try to eat healthy foods in our family) or around socialization (e.g. we do not run around in a restaurant). When limits are crossed, it is an opportunity for the parent to educate and explain the reason for the limit and its importance. When limits are held in this way, children naturally comply without the need for force in the form of “consequences” or punishments. There are times when the protective use of force is required. For example, if your child is running out on to the street, you pull them back with whatever force is required. This goes without saying. You can take the time to empathize later, but in that moment it is important to keep your child safe.

You may be saying to yourself, “But threats, bribes and punishments work! The kids do what you want them to do.” This is true. Fear is a great motivator. However, in non-violent parenting, the goal is not to get your child to do what you want by any means necessary. When children comply out of fear, they are not seeing the intrinsic value of why they are doing what they do. The goal is to build an intimate relationship based on trust and unconditional love, to raise children who understand the value of fairness, justice and kindness. By resorting to threats and punishments, we are teaching them the opposite lesson. We are teaching them that when you have a conflict, it is best to seek retribution and find a solution that hurts the other person.

Most importantly, when we model mindfulness and empathy as parents and take the time to identify feelings and needs, we are teaching our children that we value their feelings and needs. We get in touch with what is alive in them. We allow them to have the full range of feelings without judgment and help them see that they can cope and ride the waves of the most unpleasant feelings and come out the other side whole, even if their needs are not met. This process builds emotional intelligence and helps children tune in to what others are feeling and needing. Furthermore, it gives them the courage and confidence to stay open and cope with the ups and downs that their future lives will bring.

Other Tools in the Non-Violent Parenting Tool kit: Regulation

Sometimes, during high-intensity moments either parent or child or both can get dysregulated. Dysregulation is a state when we no longer have access to the higher parts of our brain, the parts that are responsible for functions such as logical thinking, problem solving and empathy. We are in a high emotional state and we are flooded with stress hormones. Our mid-brain (our emotional brain) and lower parts of our brain (our sympathetic nervous system responsible for our fight, flight or freeze response) are highly active. At such times, the first step is to find ways to regulate

ourselves and/or our child. There are many ways we can do this. In my practice, I often take a drink of water or take several deep breaths or splash some cold water on my face. Sucking on some ice helps my daughter. Some of us need to motor it out. Taking a brisk walk around the block may help. For children, we need to help them find a safe place where they can complete their physical experience. We have to find what works for each of us. During such times, talking or trying to reason with the child does not help. We first need to help them and ourselves calm down.

Our grocery store example is a perfect case. In that situation, the child is clearly dysregulated. So our first step would be to try to help her calm down by taking her outside the store, maybe giving her a drink of water or holding her while she flails her arms and legs. The important thing is to be there for her while she expends the emotional energy and regains access to her higher brain. Incidentally, these “tantrums” or outbursts are developmentally completely appropriate for children till they’re around six. The mid-brain is developing at a rapid pace in these early years and children can become overwhelmed with emotions they cannot regulate.

If I find that I am too emotional to handle the situation, I often reach out to my husband to help de-escalate a situation. This may not always be possible, but as long as we are aware of our emotional and physical state, we can make choices to help us deal with the situation without resorting to violence.

Self-Reflection and Healing

I have found that there are certain situations that trigger me easily. I can go from being a calm and loving mom to a monster mom in a matter of seconds! Most often it has to do with my son and school work. When he has an assignment to submit or a test to study for, I can immediately feel an intensity and urgency around it that borders on panic. It comes out in my voice, the tone I use to talk to him, the words I use, and has resulted in several instances of disconnection and tears. I have spent some time trying to observe the dynamics of this and have traced it back to my younger days as a student in India when a lot of emphasis was placed on high grades and there was intense pressure to excel academically. Somewhere in my brain, I go from, “He has an assignment due tomorrow” to “If he doesn’t do it well and on time, he’s going to be a total failure sitting on the side of the streets with a begging bowl when he grows up!” In these situations, I am responding from my conditioning and beliefs built up over the years that have nothing to do with the present day reality of my son who is a smart and capable child. The same dynamic is sometimes true in our relationships with our spouses, siblings, parents and others who are close to us.

Pay attention to these unconscious responses, especially the ones that have a certain intensity around them. They stem from old “stuff”. If they aren’t serving you, they offer great opportunities for honest self-reflection and correction. Using tools of contemplation, meditation and mindfulness, we can reevaluate the underlying assumptions and beliefs and heal from old pain. This is a long and hard

journey, but one that can lead to freedom and clarity. More importantly, we won't be inadvertently passing on these false beliefs to our children.

Repairing the Rupture

As is inevitable, there will be incidents when there are misunderstandings, arguments and other breakdowns in the relationship between parent and child. Perhaps you lost your temper and said things you didn't mean to say, or yelled at your child or maybe even hit them. There may be instances when your children lost their temper and even though you stayed calm and present for them, there is unresolved residue lingering from the experience. In these instances, it is important to go back and heal the moment when both parties are ready to have the conversation. As far as possible, for younger children, the reconnection attempt should be made in a timely manner, as close to the incident as possible. For older children, we can take up to two or three days after the incident.

The repairing process can take many forms. It could be a conversation or it could take the form of making empathy books with younger children (simple books written and drawn in collaboration with the child, relating the story of the incident in third person) or journal writing with older children. Whatever form it takes, the purpose is to reconnect and listen to each other with openness. It is not to say how right you were and how wrong they were!

The result is a new level of alignment where both parent and child feel understood and the child learns that reconnection after a rupture is possible.

Insights From my Own Practice

Staying present, mindful and empathetic is a difficult skill to cultivate. It is one that requires deep commitment and perseverance. You will fall many times along this path. Be compassionate with yourself and don't forget to give yourself empathy too! What is important is to always keep the core value in mind, which is: in order to build a just, loving and peaceful world, we must respect the core dignity and value of each human being, even our children (or especially our children).

Over time, you will find that it becomes easier to step on the brakes in those challenging parenting situations and keep golden silence if you have nothing helpful to say. You will find that you are able to maintain calm where you were not able to previously. You will deepen your awareness and understanding of yourself.

The parent-child dialectic is perhaps the easiest one to work with from a spiritual standpoint, because our children are an extension of ourselves. Experiencing that non-separation during our parenting moments, and holding both our children and ourselves simultaneously in that sacred space of oneness is what allows the magic of non-violence to manifest.

“In the presence of one firmly established in non-violence, all hostility ceases.”
Yoga Sutras, Patanjali

DEVYASTAKAM

BY NARAYANA GURU

TRANSLATED BY VINAYA CHAITANYA

Eight Verses to the Goddess

Ever concerned with protecting the devotees of your feet,
removing all fear of becoming,
worshipped by clear, bright-minded ancients like *Indra*,
You, the receptacle of true and rightful enjoyment,
honoured exemplar whom all traditions declare,
beloved counterpart of *Siva*, in whom all exist,
with a thin winter crescent for diadem
O Blessed One, may your grace give rise to happiness.

Rain-cloud dark, moon-clear face, ever-moving tender eyes,
forehead radiant with *bindu*, playfully
caressed by swaying pendant and curls,
flashing fish-eyes bearing
ever-beneficent beauty to followers of your feet,
so perfected in all arts as to cause desire in *Siva*,
the destroyer of time, may You protect us.

Your breasts, like elephant-head bulges, are smeared
with saffron paste, bringing well being to the auspicious *Siva*.
Your lotus feet are worshipped by *Indra* with trumpet sounds,
your lap shines with the children *Ganesa* and *Subrahmanya*,
free of impurity, You, destroyer of the vain demons
Nisumbha and *Sumbha*, O Mother, grant us blessings.

Immeasurable in might to the evil-hardened demon *Dārika*
who was cleaved apart, You who drive away the rows
of tragic hells, You are the measure of ultimate delight,
death to the desire god *Kāma*, dispeller of death,
Mother to *Subrahmanya*, the vanquisher of *Tāraka*,
who was the essence of all demons.
You are ever the joy of the king of kings, *Siva*,

You are measureless, having crossed to the other shore
You who illuminate that pure state, stainlessly bright.
May You protect us.

Having playfully drunk liquor, perplexed, forehead pale
with shame, anxious about compromised dignity,
with lustrous garlands, engaged in battle,
with the expanding universe for body, Maiden,
the root of well-being and skill, dark
like the water-giving rain cloud, with rosary,
may You protect us, through our repeated chants,
may You nurture us.

Beautiful, lovely even to adversaries,
all desires merged, of well balanced boundaries,
beyond the entirety of beings, the Supreme
dwelling in a thick grove of *kadamba* trees,
all sorrows driven away, terrible, brave in battle,
with necklaces of priceless jewels, beyond all effort,
with rosary, may You protect us,
through our repeated chants, may You nurture us.

Wearing flower garlands, bearing all, like clouds bearing waters,
all desires calmed, suffering removed, becoming the earth
and all through self-modification,
causing the false to tremble in fear,
You are the essence of all, the brave wife to *Siva*
with jewels jingling, worshipped by warriors,
with rosary, may You protect us,
through our repeated chants, may You nurture us.

Abiding in the fullness of Your own meaning,
with all attachments gone, noose in hand,
crescent-wearing, with all bindings weakened, loosened and
falling off, with breasts uncovered, bowed to by the Lord,
on whom the entire army depends for victory,
who has stolen *Siva's* heart and overcome destruction,
who playfully holds all as the great receptacle,
to be freed into the light of the Goddess, all hindrance gone,
with rosary, may You protect us, through our repeated chants,
may You nurture us.

A BOY'S GURU

BY THOMAS PALAKEEL

In 1976, a student in the ninth grade, I sent for a book of Zen stories and received a letter from the author himself. Those were the days everyone was sending and receiving long letters and I composed a letter to the revered author, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, confiding in him that all I wanted in my life was to write stories and that I had already published my work in children's magazines.

The reply came. In a tiny string of pearl cursives Guru applauded me for choosing the important calling of the story writer and said, "Story writers are people who absorb the dreams and terrors of contemporary experience. They connect themselves to the immutable truths about our lives. Just as laboratory experiments help advance the progress of science, stories provide the basis for a society's dreams. Haven't you noticed how the parables of Jesus and Buddha still lead us in our life journeys? Stories are essential for our survival."

Guru offered a reading list: Aesop's fables, Grimm's fairy tales, *The Little Prince*, Tagore, Gorky, Tolstoy, and Hugo. He asked me to learn everything about the language of stories. He mentioned that his philosophy students in America wrote stories and poems for him. Encouraging me to send him my stories, he added: "In separate mail, you will receive some of my other books and a copy of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, a book everyone is reading these days. If you are able to write letters in English, please write to my student Johnny Stallings. You can learn from each other."

Thus the teaching began. My command of the English language was so shamelessly poor I could not write to Guru's student or take full advantage of the books that started arriving in the mail, but I studied the words and the joinery of the sentences, picking at words, like a bird. In the story of the seagull, a blend of ethereal black and white photographs, lyrical prose and allegorical plot about seeking perfection, I found comfort, affirmation, and the value of a life devoted to words. It had come at the right moment when I was most vulnerable. After my initial successes publishing stories in children's magazines, I had begun to stumble. I was yet to find a firm academic footing at AKJM English School. My health was troubling me, and there were hardships at home—the future looked bleak. It was common among Catholic boys of my generation to think that as a last resort they could enter priesthood as an escape, but I was too much a rationalist to consider such an action, although inexplicably I was fascinated by the ubiquitous Indian image of the ascetic—*sannyasi*, *swami*, *bhikshu*, Guru—which, in fact, explains my interest in the book of Zen stories.

When Guru went abroad, the correspondence ceased, but I kept in touch through the essays he published in a wide range of periodicals. One of his essays, which ran as a series in Kalakaumudi Weekly, received much attention in Kerala as a critique of the present travesty of education, but for me it opened my eyes to the concept of East-West University that Guru was envisioning as a worldwide contemplative fraternity. I also took much delight in reading about his adventures in liberal arts education at the universities in America, where he was often a visiting professor at the time. What I liked the most was the boldly unorthodox and fearless thinking Guru brought to bear on every subject.

I started my own pursuit of educational fraternity, especially forging friendships with adults, seeking out professors who happened to sit with me in the bus in the mornings, the headmaster and the teachers at our school, not to mention our parish priest. My eldest brother's classmate Sebastian, a proof reader at the English language newspaper *The Indian Express*, once took me on a tour of the revered paper and sent me home with two autobiographies, *The Seven Storey Mountain* by the American monk Thomas Merton and *The Golden String* by the English monk Bede Griffiths, who had founded an ashram in Vagamon, the hill town near our home. I read the books in some depth, taking delight in the fact that I was now able to read substantial books in the English language. I noted the fact that the famed Christian monks were largely shaped by the Indian ascetic tradition. In my youthful conversations in the next few years, monks and ascetics came up as often as the names of movie stars, popular musicians, philosophers, and most importantly, novelists writing in Malayalam and English. I gave up all my efforts to improve my grades in mathematics and the sciences and proceeded with the understanding that I would specialize in Malayalam or English in college. I even had the audacity to start writing a novel in English, a foolhardy exercise I undertook after reading that one summer Thomas Merton and a group of his friends had raced against each other, writing novels. I decided to call my novel *Return to the Beginning*, imitating Bede Griffiths's book *Return to the Center*, which had just appeared in London, and I made a trip to the ashram just to read a couple of chapters in their library.

When I heard that Guru had returned from abroad, I wrote again, bragging giddily about my accomplishments, and, surprise, I received an invitation to visit him in Varkala. I reminded him that I had grown up in a Catholic household and that I was completely ignorant of Vedanta and Guru wrote back: "If you understand 'Love your neighbor,' that's Vedanta, the recognition that you are your neighbor." My family readily approved. Had it not been for my newfound academic confidence, it was unlikely my father would have allowed me to make the long trip.

It was my first train journey, the first long trip on my own, and I vividly remember arriving at the Gurukula, late at night, hungry. The taxi driver charged one rupee less than the rate agreed. When I entered the soft, sand-filled grounds, right away I found Guru reclining in a chair under a mango tree. Seated around the Guru was a large circle of men and women, lay people dressed in the traditional

Kerala whites. I detected a few *sannyasis* in saffron, and a couple of students from America. A blind man seated next to Guru was holding forth about what sounded like astrophysics. I sat down in a chair in the back, growing nervous. Unable to pick up the thread of the conversation, I wondered whether I had made a mistake. Lacking the courage to introduce myself to Guru, I considered slipping away.

In the night I slept on a wooden bench, and in the morning, I joined a group I saw marching toward a pond in a nearby coconut grove. While bathing in the pond, I struck up a conversation with two grown men who had also come from far away. After the bath, I accompanied them to the kitchen, where I ate breakfast with a growing crowd of men and women who had come from all over Kerala to attend the annual convention.

I spent my first day listening to the convention speakers with some bewilderment. Whenever Guru spoke I could relate completely. In my diary I copied down a passage that appealed to me immensely: "The feet of the farmer plowing in the field are the feet of God, the tired hands that weave and stitch, the hands that hammer iron into a plow, and that hands that carve wood and lay bricks are the hands of God. The love of those who love one another is God's love." My diary entry includes a rather bombastic summation: "Guru reversed my search for God." What I meant was that the skeptic in me had found an acceptable attitude toward the concept of God.

After the classes every morning, I considered introducing myself to Guru, but finding him besieged I decided to leave him alone. I was no longer nervous. Never once did I see him show impatience with anyone. Only on the day after New Year's, before leaving for home did I stop by the tiny cottage where Guru was staying. A crowd had formed at the door, people who had traveled long distances to attend the convention were bidding farewell, many had brought presents, fruits, a man handed over a book on economics he had just published; the man explained the theory which I thought was ridiculous, so, finally, when it was my turn, I handed over the 152 page manuscript of my English novel, which was no less ridiculous. Guru took a look at the handwritten stack and beckoned me to sit next to him on the edge of his daybed.

Smiling, Guru looked up and said, "I expected someone with a long beard.

"For me, the moment was resonant of the Gospel According to Matthew. When the disciples try to chase the children away, Jesus tells them: "Let the children come to me."

It was the beginning of a long association with Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati and with Guru's friends, conducted primarily through letters and books, although over the years I visited Guru at various locations, Cochin, Trivandrum, Coimbatore, Ooty, Chennai, and once in Crown Point, Indiana. In Chennai, my first day as a student at Loyola College coincided with Guru's arrival from Australia and it was on that occasion I was introduced to many of Guru's friends who would become

lifelong friends, especially Nancy Yeilding, Bob Tyson, and the late N. C. Kumaran, whose Chennai home was always open to me. I corresponded with Nancy Yeilding, who edited my novel and helped me develop as a writer. A few years later, when I started a nonfiction project on grassroots environmental activists in India, Peter Oppenheimer reached out to me.

Guru's books and periodical essays were the most crucial in my development. An early work, the little known *Intelligent Man's Guide to Hindu Religion*, which I bought on my very first visit, influenced me deeply in the sense that I started looking at religious iconography and the language itself with a new pair of eyes. Guru's commentary of the Bhagavad Gita remains one of the most important books in my life. When I heard that the book was about to be published by Vikas in New Delhi, as a college student I did not have two-hundred rupees. I approached a newspaper back home with a promise to write articles from Chennai, the editor advanced me the money, and, with one of the first copies fresh out of the press before me, I undertook a prolonged study. After the paper disintegrated I had to buy another copy, and I can claim that if I have acquired any clarity about the philosophical heritage of India and the West, epistemology and metaphysics especially, it all came from the probing Socratic dialogues I found in the commentary.



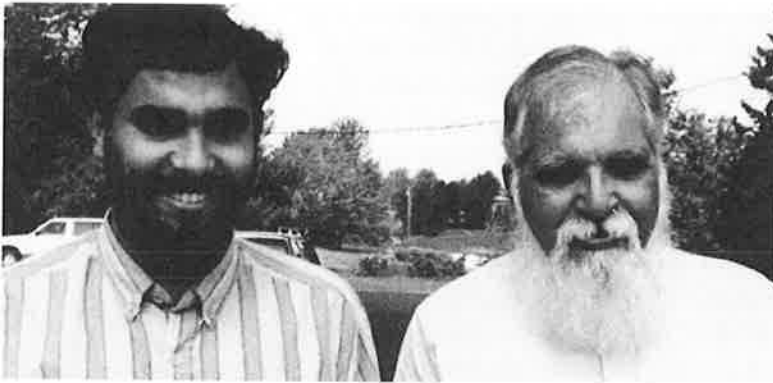
By the time I started college education, Guru's intellectual interests had become my interests.

Had it not been for that chance correspondence early in my boyhood, I doubt I would have taken higher education as seriously as I did. Three years later, as I was completing my BA in English, my fiction and non-fiction in English had begun to appear in journals in India and abroad. I set out on a grand tour of India to interview grassroots activists and public intellectuals. On my return from the three month trip, which took me as far north as Rishikesh, the Inlaks Foundation shortlisted me for a possible scholarship to study at Oxford. With some vanity I expected a brisk transition into a writing career. Unfortunately, I was awarded only a consolation prize and a generous grant, and I found myself with no other immediate plans. In order to stay in the metropolis, close to my friends, I enrolled in a language course in French, but within months, a severe illness forced me to return home.

While recovering, I was at a loss about my future. I could see that I would be swallowed by the responsibilities of what was then a large joint-family. In spite of my lifelong attraction to the ascetic path, I did not run to the Gurukulam. Having noticed that many Gurukula friends I had met in Varkala, Ooty and Chennai, had

formally accepted *sannyas*, I wrote to Guru apologizing for my failure to follow their example. Guru told me that he never thought of me as a contemplative and that what I needed was not contemplation but rest. In letter after letter Guru cautioned me about “burning the candle on both ends”; one such letter came intact with a red felt pen drawing of the spent candle, an image I have had to recall frequently over the years.

I rested, my health improved, and I enrolled in the MA English program at the local St. Thomas College. I did so reluctantly but the faculty turned out to be even better educated and more gifted than the professors at the prestigious Loyola



College. I kept writing and publishing again. Soon after I finished my degree, I was accepted into the creative writing program at Eastern Washington University. There were some bottlenecks with my transcripts, but the distinguished novelist John Keeble, who directed the writing program at Eastern Washington, looked out for me and kept my graduate assistantship open for another term, and finally, in late 1985, I flew out into the big world. Throughout the flight I kept thinking of the bird in Jonathan Livingston Seagull who wanted to be a better bird.

A few years ago, while preparing the verse-letters Guru wrote to my sister for press, I saw a line in one letter describing me as one of his “treasures.” I shuddered at the thought. He was the treasure and I was the one who failed to open the treasure. For instance, moved early on by Guru’s sublime literary style in Malayalam, I tried to imitate him. Convinced that Sanskrit was his secret I took it as my second language in college but I gave up the effort too soon.

When I joined Bradley University as a faculty member in 1993, the first new course I developed was largely made up of work by the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese writers Guru had introduced to a generation of Malayalam readers through his literary essays: Wang Wei, Li Po, Tu Fu, Matsuo Basho, Ihara Saikaku, Seami Motokiyo. My instruction of *The Bhagavad Gita* was based entirely on Guru’s commentary.

In 1999, in the months following Guru’s passing, my parents visited us in Illinois. All of us had many tender memories; my mother remembered Guru taking over her

kitchen on a visit to our home and my father recollected his own adventurous trip to visit Guru in Varkala—he had ended up at the larger Shivagiri ashram and a young sannyasi personally accompanied him to the proper destination! In honor of the memory, my mother read out to my father Guru's autobiography *Yathicharitham*.

As I write this in 2013, I am the father of a son who has just started ninth grade and a daughter studying at the college where I have been teaching English Renaissance literature and creative writing for the past twenty years. I know that I have failed to grow fully in the abundant sunlight into which Guru replanted me early on in my boyhood and I have squandered opportunities to study with Guru while he was living, but his books are here, in two languages, and I know the richness and the delight will last.

THAT I AM

BY EMILY TEITSWORTH

I was in the middle of writing a letter to him when I found out Guru Nitya had died. My letter sounded very much like what a confused and angsty 17-year-old might write, since that is exactly what I was. “What actually happens when we die? Is there any meaning in the universe?” That morning, I sobbed as I walked to class, disconsolate that I would never learn the truth. Thirteen years later, the absolute silence that answered my letter has turned out to be the best reply I could have hoped for.

For most of the “Gurukula kids,” Guru Nitya’s presence loomed large in our lives as we grew up. School vacations were planned around him. His philosophical musings informed our dinner conversations. He was clearly the reason that I was one of the only vegetarians in my grade, and certainly the only student who could chant in Sanskrit. In spite of this, like many of us second-generation American members of the Gurukula family, I don’t consider myself a disciple of any guru in particular.

Nitya died before I had a chance to approach him as a Guru, and in the years since, I have come to be thankful for that. In allowing me to love him as a grandchild does a grandparent, Guru Nitya taught me that philosophy should be the spark that ignites action, rather than its own all-consuming fire. I witnessed Guru Nitya’s kindness and his mischievous sense of humor. I also saw him complain and act imperious. And each day I spent at the Gurukula, I observed him counseling the desperate, resolving disputes, and inspiring brilliance in others. I understood him as profoundly human, but his actions embodied what I now think of as a life of service.

In college, I was a philosophy major, and even considered getting a Ph.D. I loved all of our discussions in class but I found myself frustrated that the philosophy department was among the least engaged on campus, ignoring the complex issues facing both our college and the town we lived in. Soon after graduating, I decided to leave academics behind completely and work as a wrangler on a ranch in Arizona. I was surprised by how fulfilling it was to feed the horses at 5:30 in the morning, and then work until dark herding cattle and teaching riding lessons.

The south fence of the ranch, nothing but barbed wire and slim metal posts, was also the border with Mexico. Every day, up to fifty migrant workers made their way across our desert pastures. I would greet them as they passed, and then wonder at what had brought them here and where they were going. One day, when I was out on a training ride, my horse spooked at some papers stuck in a cactus, snapping in the wind. I got down to investigate and soon realized I was holding four Mexican birth certificates in my hand.

As I read over the documents, I was struck with a feeling of dread. What horrible circumstance had caused someone to abandon the only proof of their identity in the middle of an inhospitable desert? Had they run from border patrol agents? Were they murdered by the drug smugglers who used our land as a staging ground? Did they die of thirst? They were painfully young, younger than I was, born between 1984 and 1992. Over the next few months of work, I never stopped imagining the lives represented by those birth certificates. I knew enough to realize that regardless of what had happened to these people, they had been driven into my country by poverty and desperation, and I bore a responsibility for that fact that I could not quite articulate.

I didn't suddenly become enlightened or decide that I could somehow fix things for these young men who I had never met, but the recognition of the essential humanity I shared with them pushed me into action. When we confront the fact that we are deeply responsible for each other's suffering and joy, we allow ourselves to engage with the principle of "*tat tvam asi*" or "That I Am." As Guru Nitya writes in his commentary on verse 16 of *Atmopadesa Sattakam*, "When I see everyone here as my own self, I become many times more responsible. My responsibility is an unlimited liability: I owe everything to everyone." I had engaged in armchair philosophy, and I tried physical labor with no thought behind it. Finding those birth certificates helped germinate the seed that Guru Nitya had first planted: I realized that that I needed to act with the urgency that comes from understanding that we are all responsible for one other.

I quit my job on the ranch, and moved to Boston, where I spent my days working with migrant laborers and their families, attempting to help them attend school and learn English. Since then, I've committed myself to my own definition of a life of service. I run a non-profit called Project Aruna (www.projectaruna.org), which helps minority high school students in the US and indigenous youth in Guatemala to address the problems facing our global community. On a trip to Guatemala this spring, I felt deep satisfaction as I watched a young man from Oakland learning the Mayan Mam language from a Guatemalan girl, and then teaching her a few words in English. They couldn't stop laughing, but neither of them forgot the words they memorized that day. They were hungry to communicate authentically with each other, in spite of the differences in gender, race, culture, and language that attempted to pull them apart.

Guru Nitya has been dead for over a decade, and the barbed wire fence at the border was replaced by a nine-foot-tall concrete and razor wire wall. In the intervening years, I have slowly shed the need to glean objective meaning from this vast universe we all share. Both Guru Nitya's influence while he was alive and his silence in death have pushed me to create my own answers to the many urgent questions that ask us to merge reflection and action in defense of our common humanity. I consider the example of how Nitya lived and the challenge of that artificial line in the desert sand to be the essential lessons that forced me to engage with the demands placed on all of us by one simple phrase: That I Am.

SELF AND MEMORY

BY PEGGY GRACE CHUN

As my mother's Alzheimer's disease slowly melded her brain
and melted her ability to orient via identity,
I suffered after each visit, sitting in my car weeping.
She suffered deeply also, grasping at flickers of fond memories,
panicking when she'd look in a mirror,
drawing maps of relationships, losing them.
We grasped and flailed together,
until one day I came for a visit and she said,
"I have no idea who you are but you're just lovely."
And I said, "Shall we walk in the garden?"
From that day forth, our suffering ceased,
no longer orienting via identity
but rather connecting via our deeper selves
in the present moment.
Of course, she could no longer safely or freely
interface in the broader world,
so I'm not recommending Alzheimer's disease
as a path to "Be Here Now."
But that remarkable shift we shared
remains my sacred foundational axis...
in life, in love, in art, in the grocery check out line...
in standing side by side
quietly peering at the garden's beauty
where only that delicate purple iris exists.



REFLECTIONS ON GURU: FINDING FREEDOM'S FIRM FOUNDATION

BY NANCY YEILDING

When I met Guru Nitya in the early 1970s I was, without knowing it, in the traditional state of a seeker of truth, described in India as being frighteningly tossed about by the waves of the ocean or being like a deer caught in the conflagration of a forest fire, not knowing which way to turn. My state was one that I shared with many young people of that time, and many people of all time. Although blessed with many good fortunes—loving care in my childhood, an excellent education, free from having to face the extreme deprivations of hunger, poverty, abuse, or slavery, or to live in the midst of war, which still afflict many millions of human beings—I was miserable. Every place I had looked for meaning and purpose in life had turned to ashes.

In high school I became happily involved with a local church, which offered good companionship, the opportunity to participate in good works, and the chance to sing beautiful music. However, as I learned more about the organization and the required set of beliefs, the first of which demonstrated some pettiness of spirit and the second of which began to affront my intellect and sense of reality, I slowly drew back, disappointed.

As I came to learn of the Civil Rights movement, of what made it necessary, and of the brutality that was often directed at the courageous people standing up for equal rights, the governmental and social institutions of this land I had been taught to regard as the world's "knight in shining armor" began to look suspect. Then US involvement in the Vietnam war—which led to the killing of civilians, the wholesale destruction of the land of Vietnam itself as well as of its neighbors, the death, wounding, and soul-torture of many young men forced to fight, to die, to kill, or to face prison or exile and being branded as cowards and traitors—shattered any sense of pride I'd had about the nation and undermined hope for the future. Along with many others I felt compelled to oppose these actions by letters and petitions, and by non-violent protests and demonstrations. Although these actions had more positive impact than is usually acknowledged, still the government continued to perpetrate violent crimes against humanity, such as through CIA support of the

coup to assassinate and overthrow the government of fairly elected Salvador Allende in Chile, which was replaced with a reign of terror, along with indications that this was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of immoral and heinous activities covertly conducted around the world.

At Stanford, students discovered that the grand university that had opened so many doors for us—to the bounty of human culture in art, music, literature, to deep insights offered by psychology, anthropology, sociology, the latest in scientific discovery, and so much more—was deeply implicated in the war “machine,” through research on campus and through links to the companies that were making the bombs and Agent Orange. We protested, we brought about some changes, but our hearts were sad as our eyes remained open to the links that expanded the “military-industrial complex” to the “military-industrial-educational complex.”

During university years I fell in love with a fellow student, who, like every other healthy young man at the time, lived with the threat of being drafted to fight in a war he felt was immoral, so upon graduation we took two steps to provide some protection: by marrying and joining the Teacher Corps, which offered its participants a degree in education and a teaching credential and the opportunity to contribute by working in underserved inner city schools (and a draft deferment!). We were posted to Kentucky, where I discovered that I was ill-suited to early childhood education (the program we were placed in) and that the social environment was like stepping back in time fifty years. Skills I had honed at Stanford—of thinking for myself, of speaking up and speaking out—served only to alienate me from most everyone, who wanted no rocking of the boat, especially by a woman. I left the program and began to flail about, trying out many different ways to contribute to alleviating injustice, poverty, discrimination, and violence, unsuccessfully seeking meaningful work and community. Under the weight of my increasing distress, our marriage disintegrated.

I often became aware that the refrain of a popular song at the time was singing within: “any day now, any day now, I shall be released.” It was one expression of my deep yearning for freedom, though at the time I would not have been able to articulate freedom from what or freedom for what. After returning to California I worked in various jobs, and explored many possible avenues to meaning and happiness, none of which proved lasting or deeply fulfilling. My life had the freedom of a will-o-the wisp: I went where the wind carried me. Although will-o-the wisps are delightful to see, sparkling in the sun as they waft through the air, and though living as one had many charms, real freedom was elusive, as I was also living on an emotional roller coaster and often felt adrift. Once or twice my path crossed that of an old Stanford friend, Peter Oppenheimer, who each time told me about the teacher he had met in India and his strong feelings that I should meet him too. Then, on a spring day in 1973, he invited me for lunch at the San Francisco apartment where he and Guru were staying, hosted by some friends.

In those days, teachers from India often passed through the Bay Area, where they typically appeared at huge gatherings, treated with a good deal of reverence and fanfare, rarely approachable by those not in the inner circle. So the first thing that struck me about Guru was that he was unassuming and available. He was even one of the cooks of the lunch! When we sat down he pleasantly engaged in conversation with everyone, all of whom made me feel welcome. He had a way of making everyone laugh often. The whole afternoon had a relaxed flow. It was so pleasant that when I was invited to return the next day I readily agreed.



That day the invitation also was extended to come along to hear a talk he was giving to a group at a friend's house. During the talk Guru began to speak about the universal Self that was also the most intimate core self of each of us:

“Inexhaustible qualities of consciousness can be experienced as “I” in me and as “I” in you. It is the same cosmic “I,” the Word, the Logos, that is expressed as the boundless universe—boundless both in time and in space. The transient “I” has the same substance as the eternal Self. What is here and what is yonder there cancel out in the silence of the unutterable and the unthinkable.”

It was like a bell ringing within as I resonated with what he described. Finally, here was someone saying what I had always sensed to be true and, importantly, doing so in a way that did not offend my intellect. I wanted to know more.

As I was being welcomed, I drove each day to spend time in the apartment on California Street, and to go along to whatever talks were happening. After some days Guru pointed out that his time in the US would soon be over and he invited me to stay with them for the rest of the time. I happily agreed. I made several new friends, some of whom are dear friends to this day. There were delicious meals, lovely outings to parks and beaches, deeply meaningful classes . . . and at the core of it all was this remarkable person who—besides being wise and brilliant and funny and creative and loving—was happy, happy in a way that was different from what I had ever encountered before.

He was happy and complete in himself, not looking to any thing or any one to meet some need, which would then make him happy. The image came to me of a fountain that continuously circulates. He was like a continuously circulating fountain of happiness, with plenty to share. That engendered a deep feeling of trust, trust that I need have no concerns about being manipulated or “used” in any way,

for here—amazingly—was a person who needed nothing from me! It gave me a freedom I had never experienced in a human relationship before. Unsought and unanticipated, a surety of dedication to the wisdom and love embodied by Guru arose within me right from those early days.

For the next eight years, to the extent possible given limited finances, I oriented my life around Guru's teaching visits to the United States. I increasingly traveled, lived, and studied with him whenever he was in the US, and eventually joined him in circumnavigating the world: with stays in California, Oregon, Hawaii, Australia, Singapore, India, and Europe. In order to have money to support myself, I worked at a graduate department of a university in San Francisco, I cared for an elderly woman in Palo Alto, I worked as a typesetter and printer in Portland, as



a landscape gardener in Hawaii, as a receptionist in an alternative health clinic in Australia, and as a secretary at Stanford's Learning Assistance Center.

Through those years a dynamic inner and outer process was taking place. Slowly, bit by bit, Guru exposed the falsity of the props that held up my faltering though intransigent ego, whether based on background, education, intellectual equipment and attainment, companions, appearance. At the same time, through his university classes (Portland State, UC Sonoma, Stanford, University of Hawaii, University of New South Wales), his public lectures, his books and articles, and informally and privately, he spread before all of us a vision of the vast panorama of the cultural, philosophical, and spiritual heritage of humanity, giving us maps and keys to find and unlock the treasures. He revealed the profound gifts of the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible, of the Upanishads and the Tao Te Ching, Heidegger and Sartres, the Buddha and Ramana Maharshi, Shakespeare and Kalidasa, Einstein and Eddington, Spinoza and Kant, Jayadeva and St. John of the Cross, Van Gogh and Beethoven, Basho and Rumi, and so much more, vividly helping us to see the links between wisdom-teaching and the creation of beauty and our own lives. Even more, his own living example of love for each moment, each being, and every aspect of life created an atmosphere in which we had the opportunity to attune ourselves to that vision and those possibilities.

His vision was vast and the spotlight of his teaching highlighted a myriad of insights. At the same time it was clear that the philosophical vision and life example of Narayana Guru, as profoundly manifested in his life through his relationship

with his Guru, Nataraja Guru, was central. The teaching stories he told of his experiences as a disciple of Nataraja Guru were heart-touching and deeply stirring, setting off inner reverberations that continue to echo with profound meaning. They inspired me to read everything of Nataraja Guru's that I could get my hands on: *The Word of the Guru (The Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru)*, *Autobiography of an Absolutist*, *One World Education*, *One World Economics*, his unparalleled commentary on the Gita, his commentary on *Saundaryalahari*, and even his magnum opus, *Integrated Science of the Absolute*. Each such encounter was like entering a new world and, at the same time, having the opportunity to examine my own past, my experiences, my assessment of them, my conditioning, my thought patterns, and to throw out superstition, prejudice, confusion, and replace it with clearer thinking and openness.

I soaked deep into Guru's own writing as well, especially once I started taking dictation of his books, articles, and letters, and beginning to edit his books. Most profound was the opportunity to devote a hundred days to an in-depth contemplation and application of Narayana Guru's *One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction (Atmopadesa Satakam)*, which took place in Portland in 1977-78. In the course of those classes, Guru spoke about freedom in ways that articulated not only my inner yearning, but the way I could feel my life blossoming. These following paragraphs are some excerpts from those classes.

The passing moments of our lives are to be made lively and rich. One thing I have learned in my life is that the moment that comes will not come again. It's gone. You can see the moment approaching. Receive it with open arms. Glorify it by enriching it with your joy, finding a new value, a new sense of direction in life. Have a renewed sense of wonder. Thus, that moment becomes eternalized in your life, it is a moment to be remembered and to be proud that you could live it so well.

The only thing is that you shouldn't drift into darkness. Don't look at the world as something horrid, but as beautiful, divine. Every bit of it. Then we know we are the creators of our own fate. Not through this individual ego with all its vagaries, but through a full affiliation with the eternal, supernatural light that enriches everything. Only then will we have the strength to become masters of the situation, the whole beauty of creation, the beauty that has painted the petals of the flowers, which has given shape to the butterflies and birds, which makes the mountains look awe-inspiring and the oceans look vast, which makes the clouds float so gracefully overhead. This is where we find our true freedom.

You belong to the same overmind of beauty. Not with your ego but with your spirit. Participation in it will reveal to you the divine artist in you, the divine musician in you, the divine intelligence, the divine creator, the divine

lover, the divine unifier, the divine peacemaker within you. It's such a blessing to be in this world, to be born here and to live here.

I can go from the physical world of experience to a dream experience to a deep sleep experience. If I go still farther I won't be able to make any distinction at all between the subject and object. The world of the seer and the world of the seen come together until both are canceled out and effaced. One comes to a neutral area of unity. Once we know that there is an aspect of knowledge which effaces or cancels out the physical world, the heaviness of phenomenality is not felt any more.

From this you gain a new freedom. The freedom is to relate yourself to the phenomenal world, with all the laws which operate in it, and yet to keep within a calm repose by which you can sit on your own seat of absolute certitude as a witness.

Guru made it very clear that certain kinds of freedom were dead ends for those seeking lasting happiness and meaning in life, such as the freedom of rejecting all that had come before, the freedom of nihilism, the freedom of pursuing lifestyles based on self-destructive behaviors, the freedom of amassing wealth and property. At the same time he was not encouraging a withdrawal from participation in life. His own life abundantly demonstrated the freedom of relating to the phenomenal world, with all the laws that operate in it, and yet keeping within the calm repose of a witness, resting on absolute certitude, even when the passage through that world presented inevitable bumps.

He inspired all who came to him to learn more about the phenomenal world, to uncover its secrets through science, history, anthropology, sociology, literature, art, music, and through paying close attention to and peering beneath the surface of what presented itself to us right where we were, wherever we were placed in life. At the same time, his classes, his instruction in meditation, his illumination of the mystical truths revealed by seers and poets, and, above all, his silence, glowing with serenity and fullness, led us inward to our own essential nature.

We all encounter, to greater and lesser degrees, the obstructions to freedom presented by concrete reality, ranging from natural forces to our own nature, from the behavior of others in our work places and families to economic constrictions, and especially the terrifying dynamics resulting from injustice, oppression, war, and natural catastrophe. The great wisdom of Guru's approach lay in not denying such dynamics, but in making it clear that we each play a significant role in either exaggerating or minimizing their impact, as well as revealing our capacity to understand them more deeply and deal with them more effectively.

His own life offered daily evidence, in the form of writing articles, convening meetings, and giving talks to expose and combat injustice and temper political and religious clashes, writing popular books that revealed the world's cultural treasures

as well as profound philosophical expositions, counseling thousands of people, with deep psychological acuity and profound spiritual guidance, taking action himself such as by sweeping a village road in need of cleaning or planting potatoes to provide needed employment as well as food or advocating for women's health care or sponsoring celebrations of art, music, drama, and poetry. At the same time, how he dealt with his own physical suffering and disability provided a living example of what is possible when our identity is with the witness and not the suffering body.

I learned that the firm foundation created by insightful participation in the transactional realm, paired with imperiencing our identity with the limitless light of consciousness, supports freedom of ever-expanding dimensions: the freedom to wholeheartedly commit to manifesting our highest values; the freedom to explore widely and deeply as a blessed lover of life; the freedom to create unhampered by internal and external messages of inadequacy; the freedom to give open-heartedly without being stifled by fears of being taken advantage of; the freedom to be aware of ourselves as part of the ocean of all-pervading love.

The gift of such freedom is a priceless treasure for which words are an inadequate expression of the gratitude that continually arises in response. Life itself becomes the manifestation of gratitude and the celebration of love.



A LETTER ON THE NARAYANA GURUKULA

BY GURU NITYA CHAITANYA YATI

Aurobindo Ashram
New Dehli, India
November 13, 1979

Dearest Debbie,

For the past several years we have been communicating on different levels, and most of the issues that came up for clarification were your personal problems of an intellectual or emotional nature. I remember also a few occasions when you hinted at your availability and readiness to render your service for doing works connected with the Gurukula. On those occasions I was consistent in not answering you directly. I did so, until recently, because it was not my intention to organize or stabilize Narayana Gurukula as an institution. Although Narayana Guru is, in my mind, a teacher without a parallel, I know that this is an attitude many people have about their own teachers. When I look at those teachers with my norms of evaluating wisdom, I see in all of them something wanting. So I naturally expect some imperfection in Narayana Guru which others clearly see and I do not see. For this reason I do not want to make any exclusive claim of his greatness. If you watch closely, you can notice that in a Christian circle, I keep myself within the Christian frame of reference, in the Ramakrishna mission the frame of reference of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and the Holy Mother, in the Aurobindo Ashram the familiar frame of reference of the concept of the Divine and the supramental descent. I am not doing this as an opportunist to please the people with whom I move, but out of my consistent adherence to the teaching of Narayana Guru of deciphering the norms of others in terms of an overall scheme of correlation and respecting the spiritual cliches of others by discerning the intentionality of the several adherents to various schools from the literal wordings of their claims. I cultivated this respect for my fellow-seekers' views over (the) years and decided that I should not put forward Narayana Guru's teaching as an alternative to any other teachers. To me he has become someone so precious and sacred that I treat him now almost as a secret. When I think of the wide spectrum of knowledge covered by various teachers and what I have gained from every such school by keeping myself open to all, I thought I will be doing a service to all those who come to me by not programming them for the rest of their life as an adherent to a single teacher.

It was sheer luck or a providential favor that Narayana Guru found in Nataraja Guru an unusual and able interpreter. If you know what Narayana Guru has written in Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil, and how his words and thoughts remain in a category of their own in Indian literature, which was equalled only by the Upanishadic rishis, you will appreciate that he was not a guru who could ever be substituted. The mandate that is passed on to me by Nataraja Guru, as a guru-representative, is only as a sentinel to guard the purity of the teaching that came from the great master. No one is more conscious than myself of my ignorance and inability to fathom the depth of many of Narayana Guru's works before which I am still standing in awe and admiration. My only prayer is that I understand all his works before this body is laid to rest.

There are certainly many Indians who are more scholarly than Narayana Guru. There are others who have excelled him as social reformers. People with mystical insights and psychic powers are also not rare. But Narayana Guru combines in him all these and many other qualities in such a way that his words are not to be taken merely in the letter. They can be interpreted only when we also become inwardly rich and mature enough to feel his feelings and act with the spontaneity with which he acted. His manner could be the best example of social justice and critically correct spiritual appreciation for all time.

Although I am a respecter of empirical sciences and pragmatic considerations in social planning, at heart I am willing to give due consideration to the benevolent operation of invisible forces which I attribute to the axiologic unity of an ever-evolving world order. This is something more than a religious belief or sheer faith. My expectation to be succeeded by someone equal or superior to me is as natural as a mathematician putting his faith in deriving riders and lemmas from an axiomatic formula. There is no guarantee that any Guru's immediate successor will be as wise as his predecessor. By the same logic, we can also expect that another one who comes in the hierarchy may even supercede all previous teachers. Therefore, I think that it does not profit anyone to speculate on the future of the Gurukula and what would happen after my death.

I never met Narayana Guru, but I accepted him as my guru and started learning his ideas and ideals much before coming in contact with Nataraja Guru. Afterwards when Nataraja Guru came into my life and enabled me to structure my world of philosophy in the light of Narayana Guru's teaching, I did not consider him as a new or separate guru. Who knows but that you will not become another efficient medium to interpret Guru without losing your identity as Deborah Buchanan. So these matters are to be taken as "eventual manifestation" that cannot be carefully planned.

Thank God that I have not yet felt the urge to become definitive and structured. There are no things to work out, as you seem to imagine, because my only function is to interact with another person of my kind who confronts me in the spiritual

path. I do not think in terms of numbers. If you or any other person who is now in the Gurukula circle and who sincerely puts his or her fraternal trust in me for guidance should find me sincerely responsive, I should not consider such incidents as anything other than a providential operation of one of the several random hits with which everything in the world is given its natural shape and meaning. It is likely there is something good in the set-up of the Gurukula, the Aurobindo Ashram, and the Farm you speak of. As I was not responsible for the organization of any of these institutions, I do not want to comment on the merit or demerit of them. In all these places people are happy or unhappy according to the consciousness that prevails in them, and I do not think that something so subjective as one's consciousness can be insured by structuring and programming institutions. So my intention is to follow the example of Narayana Guru as closely as possible and establish a bond of love and trust in each person's spiritual care and not to disturb a social adherence to their indigenous background.

I am not trying to stop you from having a Gurukula center in Oregon or anywhere, such as the one we are having in Ooty or Bangalore or Kanakamala. If you understand it as a place for daily or periodic gathering to share, study, discuss, play music or anything that has an ennobling effect on people, you are most welcome to have such a center. If you do not want to be caught in the ever-horizontalizing mesh of a structured institution, be a respecter of each person's freedom to be what they are, and do not expect more than what they can sincerely and spontaneously give without any demand from you.

The bipolarity between a teacher and disciple is a rare phenomena. It cannot be planned or programmed. All that you can say about it is that it happens when it happens. To save it from the catastrophe of disadoption is far more difficult than zealously guarding the love between a wedded couple. So leave it to Providence.

Certain types of guru-disciple models and spiritual insight are peculiar to India. When I say that non-Indians cannot copy them, I do not mean that there are no other models of teacher-taught relationship and spiritual modes that are superior to Indian models. In fact, all the three people whom you have mentioned by name—Edda, Peter, and Scott—are having unique kinds of bipolarity with me which I don't think I can ever establish with any Indian person. But I would not certainly encourage any one of them to imitate the attitude of any of the Indians who are also in intimate rapport with me. I endorse your statement, "Narayana Guru's teachings render negligible any cultural or national restrictions." 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.

The kind of activity that I suggested for Somanahalli Gurukula is of no relevance to anything that you can conceive in America. I do not think you should

have any small scale business, organic farming or alternative schools in the name of Narayana Gurukula. Personally you can relate yourself with any of this, as part of your own vocation.

I do not have in my mind any future planning for anyone present in the Gurukula, such as Peter, Nancy, Steve Bryson and others. I treat them all as free human adults who should plan and program their life as it suits their *swadharma*. My only responsibility with them is a free sharing of my views whenever they consider them valuable. I am not giving great attention to what you are doing, but I do pay attention to what you are and what you continue to be. On the whole I am pleased with your growth and the manner in which you are growing.

If you are not satisfied with your dedication and identification to the cause of the Gurukula, I have something terrible to tell you. That is given clearly and cryptically in the last verse of the ninth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. I am not suggesting a “must” for you but an option. My only warning is that you think twice, thrice, ten times, before you make such an absolute dedication, because any retreat from it after making such a commitment is worse than committing moral suicide.

Thank you for putting your ideas clearly and seeking my clear guidance. I value your friendship as something very precious. Let not your enthusiasm and sincerity overheat and boil over. Give a calm and composed consideration to everything I said in this letter.

My deep love, trust and Blessings, Nitya

THE CARAVAN OF LOVE

BY SWAMI VYASA PRASAD

French concert pianist Marc Vella and his entourage performed at the Narayana Gurukula in Fernhill while on a six week tour of South India. Marc was accompanied by a fifty member volunteer group ranging from age 8 to age 73. He was also, as he tours the world, transporting his personal Yamaha baby grand piano. It is quite apparent that he has a profound desire to genuinely meet people and offer performances wherever it is possible—streets, schools, hospitals, villages, deserts, any atypical place in his native France and abroad.

In the year 2004 Marc created “La Caravane Amoureuse” or the Caravan of Love, in response to people who wanted to join him in his travels. He compares his caravan to the expeditions of Captain Cousteau setting out on expeditions aboard the “Calypso” ship to explore the oceans and discover their secrets. Marc sets “sail” on buses to explore the depths of individual human experience and to honor the women and men who are committed to world peace, solidarity and environmental awareness. In other words, the The Caravan of Love aims at celebrating the Heart of Humanity which is our human heritage.

The group of fifty friends who volunteer to accompany Marc share their music, songs, love of life, or their humanity by simply being who they are. They “humbly try to embody the following attitude: give without being invasive, propose but not impose, be joyful but not excessively, be fully present to one another and gracefully tie links that untie.”

Marc Vella’s unique style extends the piano’s expression beyond the range known to western music. After striking the keys, he manipulates the piano wires with a set of ingenious devices such as a capo, a rubber ball, or a felt mallet creating the sound of a Kashmiri santoor or rolling thunder, among others. His musical generosity soon attracted the village children to participate and join him at the keyboard. A few volunteers danced gracefully while a couple of mime artists performed nearby. Two clowns amused the audience. By the end of the performance, the The Caravan of Love had united the entire audience into a collective dance of joy.

Marc Vella’s innovations with the piano remind us of the evolution of this remarkable instrument. The piano, first known as the pianoforte, evolved from the harpsichord around 1700 to 1720. The Italian inventor Bartolomeo Cristofori, the keeper of instruments in the court of Prince Ferdinand de Medici of Florence, invented the Gravicembalo col piano e forte, (roughly “soft and loud keyboard instrument”) which later came to be known as the pianoforte. An improvement in 1746 by Gottfried Silberman met the approval of Bach and his sons Philip,

Emanuel and Christian. Mozart and Clementi's appreciation of the advantage of the piano established its place as the preferred instrument for a number of brilliant composers.

The 20th century artist Wassily Kandinsky, creator of the theatre piece *Der Gelbe Klang* or *The Yellow Sound*, used the analogy of the palette and piano: "Color is a means of exerting influence on the soul. Color is a keyboard, the eye is the hammer that strikes it, the soul the instrument with a thousand strings."

The contemporary musical/mechanical artist Trimpin suspended a red-painted grand piano vertically beneath a tripod in the Portland Art Museum. It is both a sculptural object and a disembodied musical instrument. A number of motors and reconfigured strings produce a variety of sounds. Computers control the mechanism which produces music when activated by cameras which respond to a person's hand movements. The artist has created a participatory role for the audience in which viewers activate the sound-making mechanism, thereby becoming conductors.

Following the tradition of innovation and audience participation, Marc Vella is a world citizen, uniting people through the universal language of his music, dissolving social and political boundaries, and mending class divisions. He performs under the sky, surrounded by atypical spaces inhabited by common humanity, in the service of love.



NATURALEZA OCULTA

BY SUSAN PLUM

The Investigation:

Divining Nature and The Art of Search

Ancient cultures commonly revered the Earth by communicating with elemental energies and respecting their answers. It was the shaman or spiritual leader who divined nature on behalf of the people in order to bring about order and harmony. Today, the role of the shaman in society is carried out by artists, musicians, scientists, astronomers, and leaders of ancient spiritual traditions.

Divination is a bridge that has been used for centuries to open a conversation with nature. Divination is the discovery of that which is hidden. The pendulum is one of many tools of divination. I have been a dowser for many years; it has become part of my vocabulary.

Nature brings balance; humans bring free will. A human describes, defines and decides; nature balances by bringing order and organization. Geometry is the self-organizing principle of nature's intelligence.

The Process:

Everything is Connected/Everything is Evolving.

The drawings to me present the cosmic story, while the glass-mixed media is the three dimensional rendition of the story. The woven glass represents the infrastructure that connects us all. Glass is a mysterious and alchemical material that combines all of the elements; wind, water, air, earth (silica). For me, glass concretizes the invisible. In C.J. Jung's words, "glass is solidified water, signifying spirit."

There is a tremendous shift occurring from the iron core center of the Earth to the center of the Milky Way (Galactic Center). If we look at what has transpired both in the cosmos and on Earth in the last fifteen years, we can see that our universe is expanding exponentially. It is the persistent whisper of the hidden intelligence that is spinning us deeper into the well of heart-mind.

These are the exhibition notes that accompanied Susan Plum's show *Naturaleza Oculta* this Autumn, 2013. Two of her images from that show are on the back and front cover of this issue.

GURUKULA NEWS

Swami Charles Chaitanya was traveling in Europe and the United States this summer, staying both in Portland and Bainbridge and participating in the Island Aranya Guru Puja.

Swami Vyasa Prasad has also been traveling in the United States, including attending the Guru Puja at Bainbridge Island Aranya, September 2013. One of his projects is filming interviews with Gurukula friends about their relationships with both Nataraja Guru and Guru Nitya. This is an ongoing work, and he may be contacted at vyasaprasad@gmail.com

Vinaya Chaitanya has published a beautiful and clear new translation of the booklet *Dhyana Manjusa* or *A Bouquet of Meditations*. The first edition was published in Latvia. A second edition from India is in the works and is slated to be published in the spring of 2014. Information about it this second edition is available at vinaya@unitiveunderstanding.org.

Also being translated by Vinaya Chaitanya is a set of Narayana Guru's poems from both the Malayalam and Sanskrit into English. *Devyastakam*, printed in this issue, is one of them.

Scott Teitsworth's second book, *The Path to the Guru: The Science of Self-Realization According to the Bhagavad Gita*, is in production with Inner Traditions Press, and is due to be released in the summer of 2014.

The Gurukula website: www.narayanagurukula.org

Internet classes on *Atmopadesa Satakam* and *Patanjali's Yoga Shastra*:
islandaranya@toast.net

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

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GURUKULAM

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITION

GURUKULAM magazine is a publication of the Narayana Gurukula, a spiritual and educational organization dedicated to sharing the teachings of Narayana Guru and his successors, as well as to the exploration of the world's many philosophic and artistic traditions. Our attitude is best expressed by Narayana Guru: "Our purpose is not to argue and win, but to know and let know."

NARAYANA GURUKULA was founded by Nataraja Guru in 1923 as a world-wide contemplative community. His successor, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, continued the wisdom teaching from 1973 to 1999. The current Guru and Head is Guru Muni Narayana Prasad.

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

EDITOR: Deborah Buchanan

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION USA: Yearly, \$20.00 for two issues. Outside the U.S. add \$5.00 for surface mail. Contact: GURUKULAM, 11290 NW Skyline Blvd., Portland, Oregon, 97231.

Email address: tapovana@hevanet.com

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION INDIA: Yearly subscription price is Rs. 100. 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. Please send articles and art for consideration to:

11290 NW Skyline Blvd.,
Portland, Oregon, 97231, USA
tapovana@hevanet.com



PUBLISHED BY THE NARAYANA GURUKULA