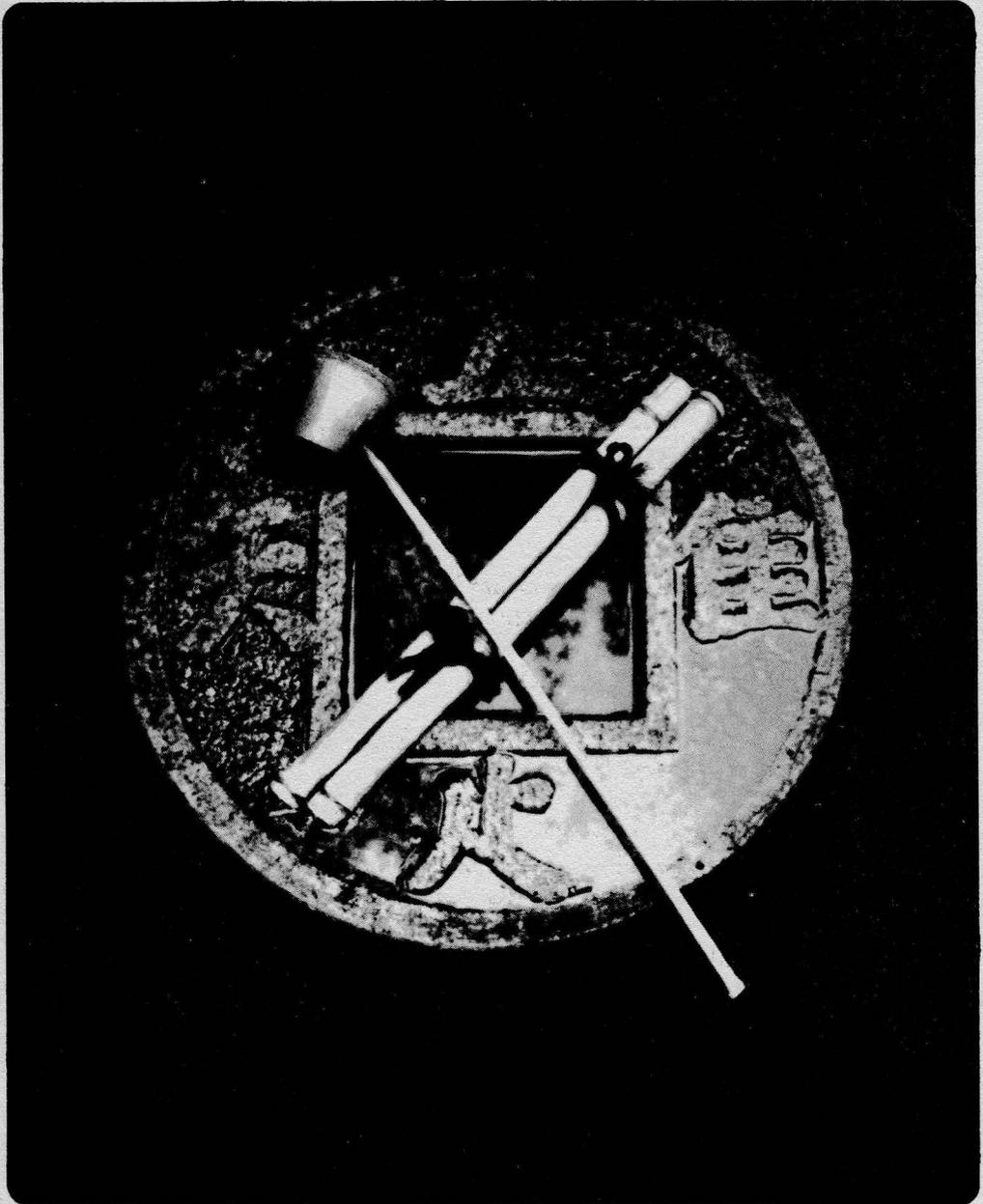


# GURUKULAM

VOLUME IV • 1988    THIRD • FOURTH QUARTER



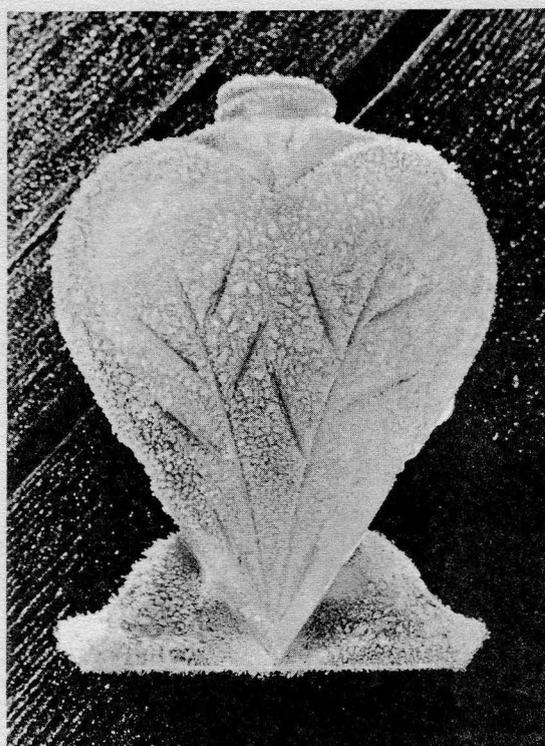
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# GURUKULAM

VOLUME IV • 1987



# GURUKULAM

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COVER: Tsukubai stone wash basin for tea room at Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto, photograph by Nancy Yeilding.

# Light From an Etched Window

I don't know when I first noticed it, or what my impressions of it were. It had always been part of our family belongings which gave a sense of comfortable familiarity to each new house when they were uncrated and placed on floors and walls, in cabinets and drawers, and on shelves and tables. They ranged from purely practical and well-used household items to exotic, finely crafted works of art which reflected the variety of cultures in which we had lived and traveled. There were many paintings, prints and textiles on the walls which for many years did not register distinctly - they were almost as accepted and unremarked as the walls themselves.

When the succession of houses reached its culmination in a permanent home, the family belongings were slowly moved about within it as rooms were repaired or redecorated and new acquisitions were given more prominent positions. Having made my own home in the Gurukula, I returned often to visit and would notice the changes and shifts over time. Along with other older possessions, this painting seemed to be slowly moving from the front of the house to the rear, from dining room to hall to the back bedroom where I was staying during one visit. I happened to walk into the room at dusk, just as soft rays of sunlight fell on the burnished gold leaves of the trees in the twilight scene.

I paused for some time, fully absorbed as my focus flickered from the glowing leaves in the foreground to the yellow of the distant sky behind them, then followed the reflection of the light on the river back to the foreground where just a hint of it enlivened small patches of the lush green grass and moss at the base of the trees, then up their dark gnarled trunks to the vibrant leaves once again. Though my eyes followed the light, at the same time they took in the deep

shadows under and around the trees, the purple mist of the distant woods along the river bank and the vague outlines of a few thatched roof cottages. Although I was aware of the movement of my eyes throughout the scene, I felt very still, merged with the serenity it depicted, of woods at twilight, of a smooth-flowing river, of human beings sheltered, at rest from their labors.

Although the light shining through and reflecting off the gold leaves of the trees had a shimmering quality and the yellow of the sky in one patch at the center top had a very pure quality of expansiveness, the prominence of the deep shadows and mists and the presence of a few bare branches created a subdued inner resonance; the joy of the brilliance was tinged by the closing in of night and approaching winter.

A faint aura of mystery was created by a path or dirt road cut through the green turf. Did it really just stop at the river's edge as it seemed to? Had a bridge connecting it to the other side been washed away? Did it turn and follow the bank of the river, hidden from my vantage point? The vagueness of the scene made an answer impossible, giving me a compelling sense of the unknown.

The moments that I stood there, gazing silently, were permeated with feelings. I was intimately in touch with many layers of awareness simultaneously enlivened, creating a complex experience of deep satisfaction. Interwoven with my immediate reactions to light and shadow, form and arrangement were many overlays of memory.

The scene called to mind my few but vivid recollections of the lush greens, soft curves and ancient trees of the English countryside I had known as a very young child. I also felt the impact of the painting having always been a part of my life, a part of the background suddenly coming

into focus, bringing with it glimpses of all the walls and houses, moments and years of which it had been a part.

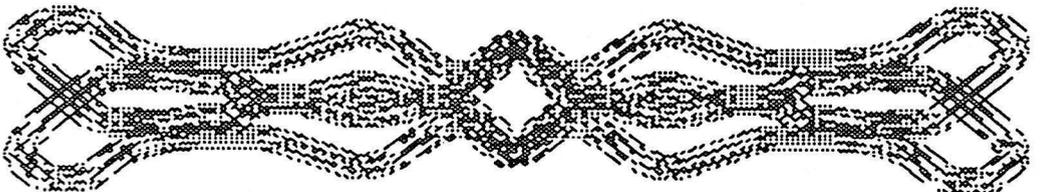
Another set of memories were deeply, though less consciously, intertwined with my appreciation of the painting, those of being touched by the brilliant yet soft colors and stillness of dusk. Even though most of the memorable sunset moments that now come to mind were set in very different scenery - an oasis in the California desert, a hill-top vineyard in Germany, a mountain village in Italy, houseboats on an Oregon river, Kerala coconut palms silhouetted against the Arabian Sea - they each added dimension to the painting. Those experiences were often enhanced by being shared with loved ones who were similarly affected, as the artist must have been when he stood on the bank of the river. His experience of the beauty of that particular scene was no doubt similarly enriched by his own treasure house of memories - of twilight colors, of peaceful rivers and woods, of nature's ever-changing moods and seasons. Settling into the scene and allowing it to soak into him, he opened inner doors of intuition that enabled him to resonate not only with his particular experiences but also with feelings shared by a human beings everywhere: the joy of the sun's brilliance reflected in many colors, the serenity of a quiet scene, the comfort of shelter, the sadness of impermanence. And as I stood, absorbed in what he had created, those same doors opened within me.

When, later in my visit, I mentioned my love for the painting to my mother, my parents gave it to me and offered to replace its bent and scraped frame with a new one. Taking it out of the old frame, I discovered that the luminous colors were

being conveyed not by a painting but by a lithograph. My experience as a printer enabled me to envision something of the processes that had gone into its making. In order to share his experience of the scene and the values it represented to him, the artist had given it expression in sensory qualities by breaking down the whole into its component parts of both form and color. He had printed the one sheet of paper which now lay before me several times by placing it in contact with several sheets of metal or stone, into each of which a portion of the total image had been etched. The application of the different layers had been carefully orchestrated with different colors of ink for each printing, so that the cumulative effect would create the objects and colors of the scene which I had found so beautiful. The technical skills of the artist had interwoven with his sensibilities to create a work in which color and shape were imbued with meaning and value which could be experienced in all their vitality decades later and thousands of miles away.

The print now hangs on a wall at the Gurukula where once more it has merged with its surroundings. But, occasionally I see it once again. Then it becomes a focal point in which beauty and serenity combine to efface all sense of duality between seer and seen. Like all acts of creation, when contemplated, it becomes a window to the source of creativity, the Value of all values which shines within each item or moment of experience and yet beyond them all. Though inexpressible, it continually inspires humanity to creative expression, to plumb the depths of meaning and soar to the heights of joy.

*Nancy Yeilding*

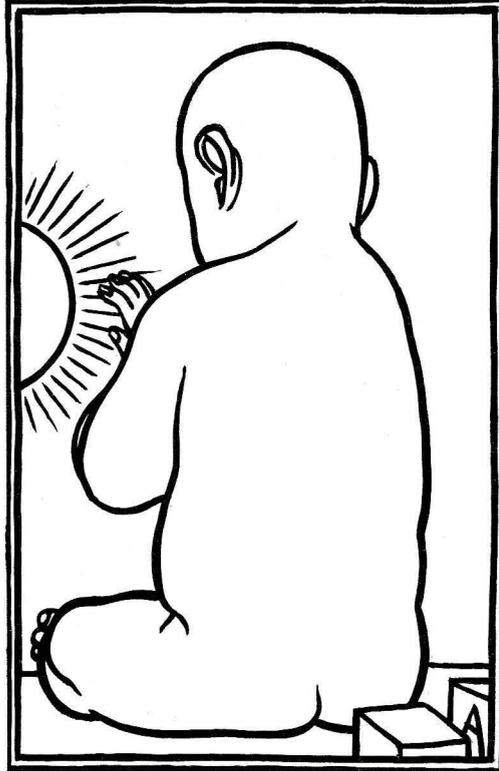


# *Svānubhavagīti Śatakam:*

## Experiential Aesthetics and Imperiential Transcendence

by Narayana Guru

Translation and Commentary by



*Verse 27*

Physical devices such as body, etc.,  
will be conceived like fire catching the fibres of cotton wool;  
like dew drops vanishing in the morning sun,  
clinging to such physical phenomena perishes  
in the fire of bright knowledge.

Life is like a duet in which the participants are an ever-growing ego and an unsatiated clinging to life, *asmita* (I-ness) and *abhiniveśa* (zest for life). Until the age of two or three a child does not feel that he has a social identity to proclaim himself as "I" or "I am." If people call him "Baby," he will also say, "Baby wants" or "Baby does not want." Then he stumbles on the inevitable poisoning of his consciousness called "social ego," and thenceforth goes on endlessly chanting "Me and mine, I am and I want." This is like becoming possessed. The possessed is hysterical in his or her indulgence in irrational pranks fired by volatile passions. Unbridled passion is the unsatiated fuel of an egoistic person.

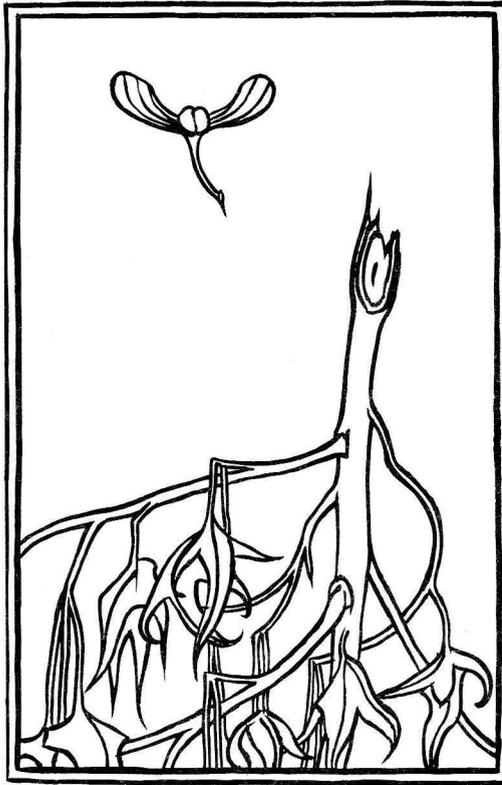
This personal drama is to be enacted on a stage of uncertainty as part of the ever-changing flux of time. Nothing is meant to be permanent there. The conflagration of life can be seen as a leaping flame of fire lighting the world around it, but its duration is programmed. Soon it will come to the dead end of a handful of cold ashes and the wisp of a little smoke rising in the sky and vanishing in the atmosphere.

The folly of life is not tolerated by the white-light of the spirit which leases its energy for the mind and senses to operate as part of a persona with which the individual is playing his/her role to the assembly of society. The blindman's bluff of going round and round in the world of birth and death will one day be arrested, and the person is bound to look into a mirror of right understanding with the loud question in his/her mind "Who am I?"

From there on the program is to ween oneself away from misconceptions and unprofitable passions. Such a person will inevitably become smokeless. Then in one's inner clarity one will understand that there is no need to push the flowing river of life. With that understanding, infatuation leaves the ego; transcending the barriers of name and form, the ego will discover its identity with the boundless, the Self of all.

*Verse 28*

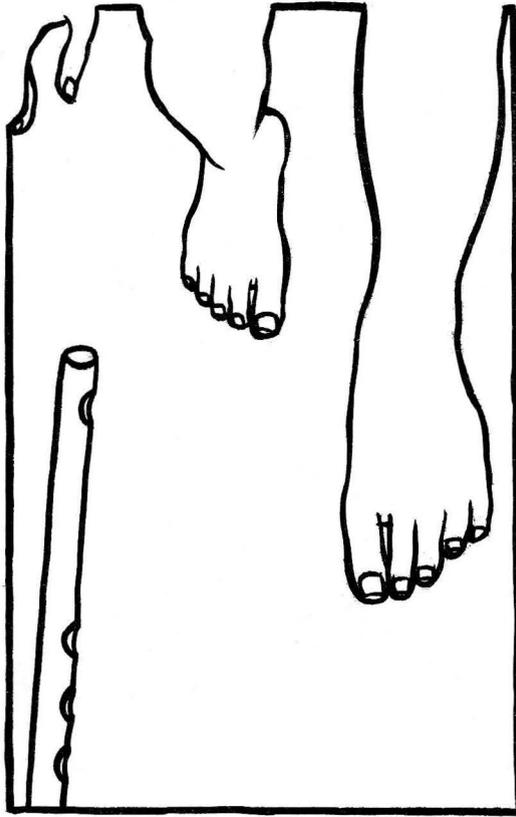
When the senses become inoperative,  
the relish for sensory experience fades out,  
and the objects outside also vanish into oblivion.  
When the roots are cut off,  
the tree comes crashing down to earth.  
Like that the bodily existence perishes.



Humans are perhaps the only animals who are tormented with regrets of the past and anxiety for the future. There is the old story of the silly cricket who was merrily singing and dancing all summer while the thoughtful ant was gathering grains to store in its hole to last through the winter. This story reflects a typical human concern.

We can read of one exception to this attitude in the Bible where Jesus says "Do not think what you will eat tomorrow or how you will be clothed" (Matthew 6:31). To ward off the anxiety of his disciples on that score, Jesus refers to the good God who is providing for the birds of the sky who do not sow seeds, harvest crops, nor store in granaries and also for the lillies of the field which are clothed in such fine raiments that even those of King Solomon cannot surpass them. In spite of such helpful advice given by great masters, people continue to be ever concerned about their security and are everywhere busy hoarding amenities for future sustenance.

The outward behavior in which a person indulges to secure hedonistic pleasures has an essential counterpart which continuously changes and colors the inner psyche. With ones thoughts, words and actions, one is ever engaged in cultivating ones personality. All ones physical acquisitions are part of a short term project which one has to quit when ones body withers and mind fades out. But the essence of the personality which is cultured in this short span of a life will persist with the ongoing mystery of life's continuity. A tree which comes from a seed and grows over the years into an enormous form will ultimately crash. But the essence of it will continue through another tree later. The present verse deals only with ontologic existence and the inevitable cessation of that existence.



Verse 29

When all this falls into disarray,  
instead of creating a vacuum,  
pure brilliance spreads everywhere.  
He who vertically fills the deep of the boundless  
exemplifies *kaivalyam* - aloneness of the highest order.

When Kṛṣṇa was moved from the prison house of his parents to be raised as a foster child of the Nandas of Brindāvan, Devaki and Vasudeva lamented the absence of Kṛṣṇa in Dwāraka. When Kṛṣṇa left Mathura to be the ruler of Dwāraka, the Gopis lamented the absence of Kṛṣṇa. When the soul has the prison house of ones body, the embodied person can be only in one place at one time. Personal existence has a local fixation in time and space.

After finishing his role as a great mediator between all contending forces of duality, Kṛṣṇa retired to the cool of a jungle where a gentle breeze was caressing the champaka flowers and birds were singing in unison with the soul-stirring flute of Kṛṣṇa the enchanter of all

time. Kṛṣṇa was sitting on the branch of a tree dangling one foot down with the other resting in his lap. The crimson rays of a setting sun were impressing their last kiss on the hind part of Kṛṣṇa's dangling foot. Mistaking it for a bird with bright plumage of crimson beauty, a hunter shot an arrow which was meant to be fatal. Kṛṣṇa shuddered, came crashing to the earth from the tree-top, and instantly left the body.

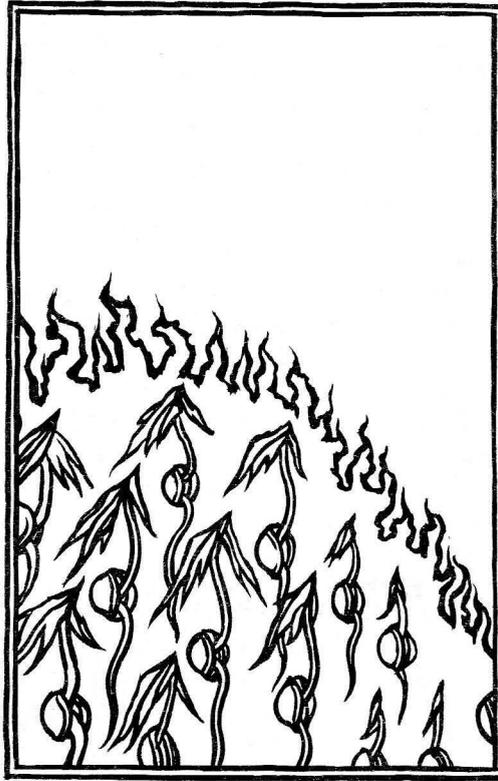
When the incident is taken as the event of a tragic evening, it can be looked upon as the creation of void. But was it so? Did not Kṛṣṇa at that very moment become omnipresent? He continues to be so even now. Wherever there is a Kṛṣṇa-lover, Kṛṣṇa is there with her or him. Like the Word becoming flesh, the thought becomes the lord. His aloneness is the aloneness that encompasses all.

In the dead of night when Prince Siddhartha stood shaking and then tip-toed out of the sleeping apartment of his beloved wife Yaśoda and son Rahula, only the body-dweller looked real to him. The next day the entire city of Kapilavastu lamented the disappearance of Siddhartha for he was not to be seen anywhere. After six years of hard penance the young prince became Buddha, the Blessed One. After his buddhahood he brought peace and enlightenment to many hearts, and people everywhere yearned to receive a loving glance from the corner of his eyes. For that the lord was to be in ones immediate presence. How could he be everywhere when his body was corporeal and could be only at one place at one time? In the sixty long years of his wanderings he made a million souls dear to him.

One evening, having become afflicted with a killer disease, he lay fully stretched out on a rock under a tree. The moon appeared on the horizon and all of nature stood ready for the final departure of the Blessed One. The Buddha gave his last sermon and breathed his last. Ananda wept unconsolated. All the elders took the pledge to carry the word of the lord wherever they went. People everywhere on the sub-continent of India felt the presence of the lord right where they were. More than a millenia has past. A business executive in the crowded city of Tokyo sits back in his chair wanting to have a moment of peaceful reflection. He chants his word of refuge (*saranam*) and he is in the presence of the Blessed One. Even so are millions around the world at any given time experiencing the one departed from the body but never departed from one at any time. That is the aloneness spoken of here. Like the celestial bird, the phoenix, a person is consumed by the fire of physical extinction. Then, out of the very ashes of destruction, the spirit spreads in all directions like a boundless ocean. Its fathomless depth is the measure of the silence which characterizes the supreme aloneness, *kaivalya*.

### Verse 30

The ocean of aloneness as a whole  
becoming rid of all blemish is one way.  
The extinction of the final spark of individuation  
marks the transcendence from the phenomenon  
to the noumenon.



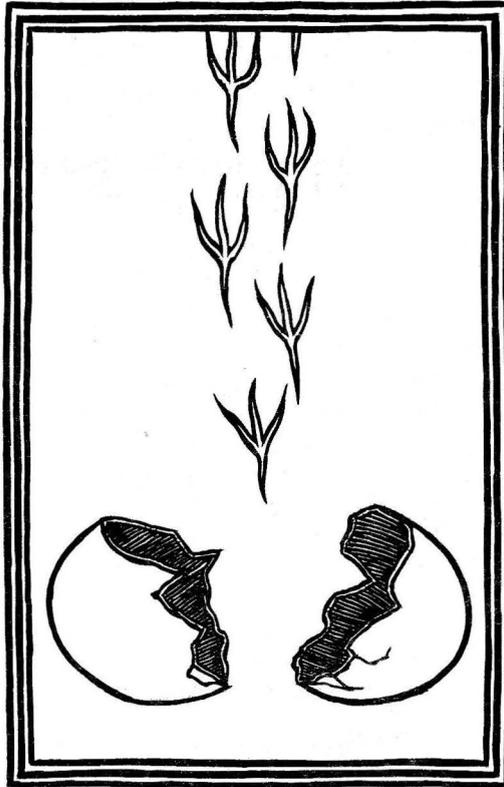
Where there is no other to conjoin with, there is no blemish. The recognition of the other is the re-creation of a memory. Memory is the refashioning of consciousness by altering or changing a pure state into an assumed state.

There are three scales of the fashioning of the pure into the transformed. One is whatever is happening to individual consciousness from the moment of waking to the reemergence of consciousness in deep sleep. The second scale is the psychosomatic states of evolution that a person undergoes from the time of conception to the withering away of the body/mind with the arrival of death. The third is the cosmic scale commencing from the time of the emergence of the universe to its final dissolution which happens after billions of years.

The subjective consciousness lived in the course of a day is lived as a short-term program within the span of a life-time. A life-time is marked as one in a series within a cyclic occurrence. A moment that is lived without the occurrence of the non-Self bringing the blemish of an extraneous memory can be a pure moment not afflicted with the affectivity of conditioning. But it is only like the non-turbulence on the surface of a lake when the atmospheric wind is not blowing. After a short while turbulence can set in again. Thus the aloneness that a person experiences is not the be-all and end-all of final attainment.

The conditioning that has gone into an organism is like seeds sown by a farmer in the field. When opportunities arise, the seeds will sprout and grow into their full measure. When the cause to transform is lying dormant, there is no escaping the consequences emerging. Therefore, in all religious disciplines the purging of blemishes and the reten-

tion of purity is stressed. Wherever there is an I-consciousness, it is immediately paired with its counterpart of being conscious of a thisness. Each "this" has a qualitative difference from the next one. There is no end to the elaboration of the qualitative detail of the other, the non-Self. So supreme transcendence comes only when there is no dormant cause awaiting a chance to elaborate into an effect. Life is a potential dynamics which is always elaborating a cause into an effect. Only when that sequential flow becomes inoperative does transcendence in its fullest measure become established. In other words aloneness gives the foretaste of the pure, and transcendence marks the final identity with the plenum. In still other words *kaivalyam* ultimately takes one to *para gati*.



*Verse 31*

You please show us the path beyond,  
 Oh Burner Of Cities; that is your responsibility.  
 Oh Hara, Hara, Supreme Lord Śiva,  
 you are the dazzling light and the intense darkness  
 of the night.

Jesus said, "I am the goal, the path and the light." What a perfect assurance.

When the seed bursts, does the sprout know what awaits it above the ground? Does the root know what it is looking for underground? The eye of the little plant is shielded from the blinding light

of a scorching sun with two thick cotyledons. Slowly the cotyledons open and the plant is exposed to the wonder of the panorama outside. The thirsty root is shown the path to the water veins and it is even told how to circumvent rocks or such obstructions to reach the nutrient energy sources. While both the root and the stem have many horizontalities, the plant also has an undeniable verticalization, marking the alpha and omega, each day, each hour, each moment. The growth is the plant's way of treading on the right path to its fulfilment.

A person not endowed with a unitive vision may separate the final goal from the space of ones origin. In that way one may expect the path to the goal to be a long and circuitous one. One cannot walk on the path if the path is not illuminated. But when the goal is the spiritual transcendence of a wise person, it is not far. The Kingdom of God is within oneself. The goal and the light are not two. That is why Jesus said that there is no separation of the goal and the path and the light.

Here the supplication is made to the Supreme who is at once the creator and the destroyer of the phenomenal world. If He does not come in the morning and push open the sepals of a flower, the petals will suffocate and die. If He does not come with a gentle hammer and break the shell of the chicken's egg from within when the chick is ready to emerge, the poor chicken will be choked to death. It is that kind of destroyer, Hara, who comes in His infinite compassion and gives a caesarian birth for us to enjoy the freedom of the spirit. However sentimental a mother is about her off-spring, she wouldn't hesitate to cut-off the umbilical cord of her new-born. The Tao of light and darkness is also called the Tao of transcendence. Lao-tzu calls it "Tao." Narayana Guru calls it *sivaperuman*.



Verse 32

Without the smearing of light and darkness,  
you are showering blossoms of pure light.  
Though not knowing in reality,  
for me to proclaim you, please bless me.

The brilliance of a burning candle contrasts with the darkness that surrounds it. The fascinating red color of a rose contrasts with its drab backdrop of unattractive foliage. Nothing is visible if some shade does not sit adjacent to light.

The pure light of the Self is an exception to this because it is the eye that sees both the light and the shadow. The secret of its brilliance is its power of unitive vision. Physical light is ever showering its quantum of photons but this is only a mechanical function of radiation. In the immense spaceless space and timeless time of the Self there is always the spontaneous showering of grace which is like the continuous rain of beautiful blossoms, not of withering petals but radiant beams that soak the soul in loving blessedness.

Having become familiar with phenomena, my senses and mind have lost their purity to reflect the unconditioned radiance of the Lord's pure being. However, nothing is impossible for the omnipresent. I seek the blessings of the Lord so that even such a dumb person as I can become eloquent in singing His true glory. (*Continued in next issue.*)

### *To A Lily*

*From where did you acquire  
that sweet fragrance,  
that sweeps into my nose with every passing breeze?  
Did Heaven give it to you  
to fill a cold mind with fresh thoughts?*

*From where did you pick up  
those marvelous snow-white petals  
that brighten my eye and bring a smile to my lips?  
Did Heaven give them to you  
to cool a throbbing heart?*

*From where did you learn  
to sway your dear head so,  
that makes me keep time to each turn you take?  
Did Heaven give it to you  
to make a man as curious as a child of three?*

*Swapna Balan*

# Katha Upaniṣad

Translation and Commentary by

Muni Narayana Prasad

XVI

*Truly this syllable is the  
Absolute.*

*Truly this syllable is the  
Supreme.*

*Having understood this,  
what one desires,  
truly it happens to him.*

It was stated in the last *mantra* that those who study scriptures, those who do penances and those who lead a well-disciplined life in search of *Brahman*, all have the esoteric meaning of the syllable *AUM* as their aim. The present *mantra* is a meditation on that meaning. It says: "This *akṣara* (syllable) is *Brahman* and this *akṣara* is the Supreme."

The *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* begins thus, "*AUM*- this syllable is everything that is here (*Aumityetaḍ akṣaram idaṁ saravam*)."  
The word *akṣara* has the same meaning in these two Upaniṣadic contexts. *Kṣara* means that which perishes. *Akṣara* means that which is indestructible and imperishable. It also means 'syllable'. *Aum* is the monosyllable which signifies the indestructible and eternal Truth which is one without a second. The word *brahman* is derived from the root *brih* which means 'to grow'. *Brahman* means that which is always in the process of growing. That means that which has no limit of expansiveness or that plenitude which has nothing out-

side it. If we assume any kind of limit to it, what is outside that limit should be something else, which state contradicts itself. That which is limitless, with no inside or outside, is consciousness (*cit*) which exists (*sat*) and is experienced as a value significance (*ānanda*).

This consciousness is actualized in life in the three states called *jagrat* (waking), *swapna* (dreaming) and *suṣupti* (sleeping). The enjoyers of these three states of the existence of consciousness are respectively called *vaiśvanara*, *taijasa* and *prajña*. The pure consciousness that pervades and regulates all these three states is called *turīya*. Narayana Guru says on this, "Without experiencing, one does not know this stuff of consciousness. It is the silence-filled ocean of immortal bliss." The syllable *AUM* symbolizes semantically this indivisible consciousness along with its three states. This syllable is called *pranava* and *śabdabrahman* (the Word-Absolute). In other words, *Brahman* is the metaphysical reality and *AUM* is the word aspect of the same reality. Both are aspects of the same awareness or both are awareness.

Our experience is that the objective world that we see, touch, smell, taste and hear has its own existence. When we see something, the reflected rays from the object falling on our eyes produce a kind of electrical energy at the nerve ends in the retina and it is passed on to the visual area of the brain through the synapses of the neurons. This flow of current causes certain movements in the particular brain cells. According to biologists this movement of the brain cells is what we call

visual experience. But modern science has never been able to explain how the electrical impulses in the brain cells change into the experience of the knowledge of an object. One and the same experience of visual perception and the consequent objectivization of knowledge can produce a world classic from a genius like Shakespeare and from another person an atom bomb that can destroy the earth. How does this happen?

The Vedantin visualizes the situation in another way. He sees the ultimate reality behind everything as the Absolute (*Brahman*) or the Self (*ātman*) which is pure and unmanifested (*avyākṛita*). If we distinguish this as the vertical, what is visible in the actual world is the horizontal, which is the manifested aspect (*vyākṛita*) of the same ultimate Reality. We see a beautiful flower in front of us. We feel its reality. But the reality of the existence of the flower is an experience which is only a particular manifestation of our consciousness. That is, the experience is a subjective one. But we are sure there is an object outside which corresponds to the subjective experience. That objectivity is another form of experience. In short, every experience, whether subjective or objective, is a configuration of the consciousness which in itself is formless. Even the words with which we express this truth are nothing but a peculiar manifestation of the same consciousness. Thus whatever we experience is some manifested aspect of consciousness. At the same time this consciousness, which is behind all experiences and which makes possible and probable all the manifestations, is never known. This consciousness is called the Self in Vedānta. It is referred to here as, "Truly this imperishable is the Absolute (*etad hi eva ākṣaram Brahma*)."

Consciousness functions and modulates in the wakeful and dreaming states. In deep sleep consciousness is functionless. Whenever it functions one aspect of it is extrapolated as the object of knowledge and another aspect intrapolated as the subject. The knower-aspect is affected by

the known aspect, either as being pleased, displeased or indifferent. The nature of this attitude varies depending on the latent characteristics of the knower-aspect. This affection that a knower feels is also another modulation of the functional consciousness. But in actual life we are not aware that all the experiences, whether subjective or objective, and all the likes and dislikes felt towards the objects of knowledge are only the unfurling of the potentialities of the same consciousness.

Once we are aware of it, whatever likes or dislikes are experienced do not continue to have a reality of their own; everything turns out to be nothing but knowledge or the Self. In that state of awareness all the desires and desired objects become non-different from the Self or the Absolute. In other words, the attainment of the Absolute means the attainment of all the desirables. This is the implicit sense of the words, "Knowing this syllable, indeed what one desires truly it happens to him (*etad evākṣaram jñatva yo yad icchati tasya tat*)."

XVII

*This basis is the most excellent one.*

*This basis is the all-transcending one.*

*On knowing this basis one is adored in the domain of the Absolute.*

We have to depend on sunlight to see things in the day time. At night we depend on oil lamps, candles or electric lights for the same purpose. Every living thing has to depend on something to make the living possible and easy-going. Some things or factors which we depend on are superior to some others in certain respects.

Those which are more permanent and more beneficial are more acceptable and

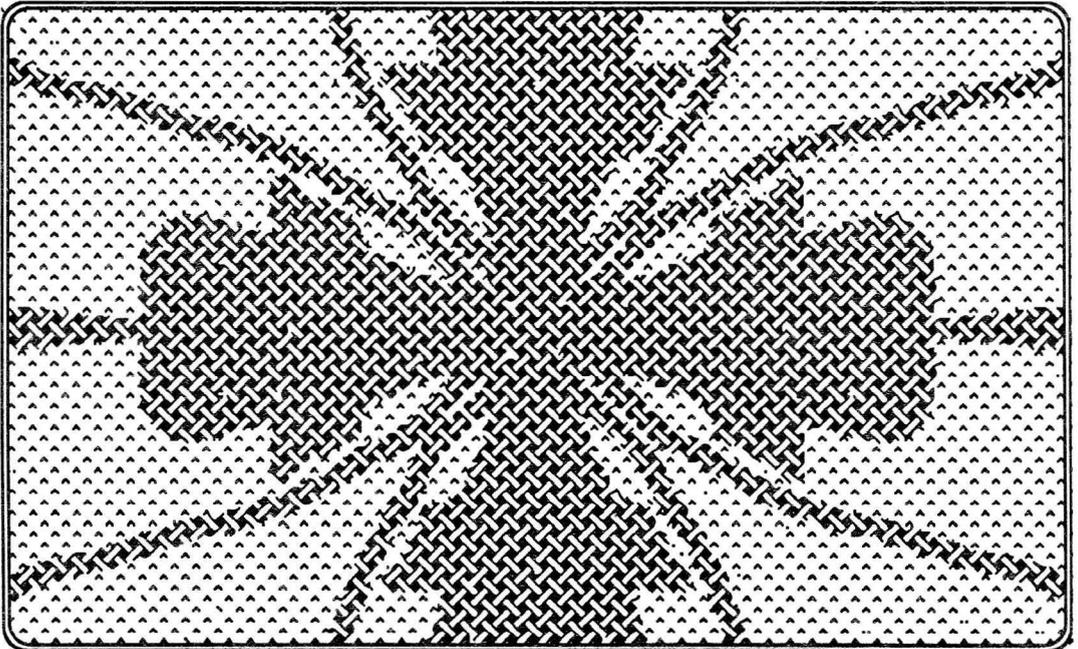
hence are thought to be superior in comparison with others. As this superiority depends on something else it is always relative. Even when everything that we can rely on fails, there is one basis which never fails. It is the Knowledge or the Self referred to in the last mantra. It is designated by the monosyllable *AUM* as we have seen. So it is said, "this basis is the most excellent one" (*etad ālambanam śreṣṭham*).

The fundamental difference between the dependence on the Absolute and on external objects is that the former is unconditional while the latter is conditional. The dependence on the Absolute or the Self is not a dependence at all. For there is nothing else to depend on. In all external dependences we know who depends and what is depended on. But in the case of the unconditional dependence referred to here it is the Self who depends and it is the very same Self which is depended on. So this dependence is referred to here as *param* (all-transcending). The statement that this dependence is the most superior one is tinged with the impression that this superiority is a comparable one,

while the dependence understood here is incomparable. That is why this additional epithet *param* is added to *śreṣṭham* (most superior).

This kind of Self-reliance in its widest meaning is possible only for a knower of the Absolute who sees only the Absolute as reality, or all realities as the Absolute. For him everything that is seen is not different from the Absolute. What is visualized is called *loka* in Sanskrit. For the knower of the Absolute everything that is visualized turns out to be the Absolute. The actual world when visualized as the Absolute is called the *brahma loka*. The man of wisdom lives in this *brahma loka*. As he sees only the eternal Truth in the visible world, he is not upset by any kind of misery including that caused by death. As his words are impregnated with the Truth he visualizes, everyone naturally respects his words and his life is always a concretization of the wisdom he represents. Such wise ones are always adored by one and all.

(Continued in next issue.)



# The Science of Harmonious Union

Commentary on Patañjali's *Yoga Śāstra*

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

**SūtraI: 34**

*pracchardana vidhāraṇābhyām  
vā prāṇasya*

*pracchardana*: by the ejection,  
expiration, expulsion  
*vidhāraṇābhyām*: retention  
*vā*: or, also  
*prāṇasya*: of breath

Or, by the expiration and retention of  
breath.

This sūtra is to be read along with the sūtras preceding and following it. In sūtra thirty three Patañjali gave us a method by which the mind can be stabilized in a higher state. Then alternative methods are described in sūtras thirty four through thirty nine, as is indicated by the use of *va* (or, also) in each sūtra. Throughout the epistemology of Sāṃkhya and Yoga we can see alternatives being brought together in this way to establish a discipline for the search for higher truth or values.

The eight limbs of Patañjali's Yoga are: restraints (*yama*), injunctions (*niyama*), posture (*āsana*), equalization of vital forces (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawal of the senses from external interests (*pratyāhāra*), contemplation (*dhyāna*), and absorption (*samādhi*). People who are impressed by the activities of *hatha yogi-s* have done two disservices to the study of yoga. First, they have interpret-

ed posture (*āsana*) as the practice of several physical exercises, when Patañjali simply said that one's posture should be comfortable and steady. Similarly, the regularization or equalization of the vital energies has also been misinterpreted as a kind of breathing exercises taught by the *hatha yogi-s*. However, Patañjali's own usage of "or" (*va*) clearly indicates that *prāṇāyāma* is permissible and not mandatory. The only aim of the practices (*kriya yoga*) outlined in sutras thirty three through thirty nine is explicitly stated in sutra thirty three: to clarify the mind. All that is aspired for is a steady and cheerful state of mind.

Continuous contemplation on friendliness, compassion, cheerfulness and indifference is recommended as a practice for those who are naturally disposed to a contemplative attitude. When a person wants to exemplify personal values like friendship or compassion, he may find that he cannot easily forgive someone who has been consistently unjust and aggressive towards him or show compassion to a person who has tortured him on a previous occasion. The negative conditioning already built in his system through previous experiences gets in the way of the actualization of his ideals of friendship and compassion. Knowing this limitation of the human mind, Patañjali offers an alternative which can be definitely carried out because it is in an area over which the aspirant has control: the outgoing and incoming breath.

Some of the vital functions in the body/mind complex are voluntary, while most are autonomous. Breathing is one function which can be done voluntarily or left to the autonomous system. Autonomous functions happen without one's conscious direction, while voluntary functions are deliberated. Here, an exercise is given whereby an autonomous function is temporarily transferred to a voluntary deliberation. Usually we breathe without any knowledge of it unless we have some disease like asthma or tuberculosis.

Breathing is an internal function in which an external organ is involved. Fresh air enters the system through the nostrils by the autonomous expansion and contraction of the lungs. But the vital breath (*prāṇa*) that goes into the lungs mixes itself with blood which carries oxygen to every cell of the body. Thus breathing is a holistic function which is alternating with a coordinated operation of lungs and heart. Oxygen is supplied to the cells, then carbon dioxide and other pollutions are seweraged from the cells to the lungs and exhaled. Of this complex process, we can voluntarily interfere with the preliminary stage, inhalation, and the final stage, expiration. Conscious and unconscious operations are so interlaced in respiration that, through it, we can observe the complementary nature of psychosomatic functioning.

It is a great device of Patañjali to assign to *prāṇa* such an important role in pacifying both the body and mind as the aspirant observes how the gross air which enters the nostrils helps the digestive system to oxidize the ingredients of the food that goes into the stomach and intestines and how that nourishment supplies energy to the central nervous system to become not only sensations and feelings, but also to develop a stream of consciousness by which the entire life is governed. At one level *prāṇa* is only gross air and at another level it is the subtlest thoughts with which one envisions the supreme truth. There is nothing more important than *prāṇa* to help us to have an all-embracing discipline which can affect

both the body and mind. Unfortunately, some people, not knowing the intention of Patañjali, do all kinds of breathing exercises. Seeing the grotesqueness of such exercises, Ramana Maharshi described them as the torturing of *prāṇa* (*prāṇa pīdanam*).

There is one area of uncertainty in the sutra. The first word is *pracchardana* which means ejection or expiration. It is followed by *vidhāraṇābhyāṃ*, retention. Different yogis take this in different ways. Some think that, after emptying all the breath from the lungs and breathing in, air should be retained for some time inside. This is called *kumbhaka*, potting the air (*kumbha* means pot). Breathing in is not mentioned, so another group of yogis say that it means not breathing in immediately after the expiration of breath. Holding the breath outside after exhaling has two virtues. One is a complete purging of the polluted air from the system. The other is cultivating a consciousness that you are breathing voluntarily, by which a discipline can be established of transferring the agency of breathing to your voluntary system. But this should not preclude again filling the lungs with air. The objection against holding the breath for a long time could have some reference to the cumulative effect of carbon dioxide which can not only affect the lungs but also can raise the threshold of the preconscious mind and generate enzymes that are directly responsible for hallucinative disturbances. This subject will be discussed further when we come sutras forty nine through fifty three of the second section.



**Sutra I: 35**

*viṣayavatī vā pravṛttir utpannā  
manasaḥ sthiti nibandhanī*

*viṣayavatī*: (absolute) interest  
shown to a sensory experience  
*vā*: or, also  
*pravṛtti*: engaged in an action  
*utpannā*: that will bring  
*manasaḥ*: the mind  
*sthiti nibandhanī*: in a steady  
state

When (absolute) interest is shown to a sensory experience or engaged in an action, that will also bring the mind to a steady state.

The function of the mind is divided between the sensory system and the motor system. In a crude way we can relate the function of the mind to the maneuvering of a machine by its operator such as the driver of an automobile. The driver of the vehicle trains himself to be in full cognizance of several matters which need to be coordinated for the safe driving of the car. When the individuated person is functioning in the body/mind system he or she also has to treat this body as a vehicle. There can be stumbling blocks in the path of the vehicle so the driver has to be cautious not to hit them. The path may ascend or descend. The fuel supply is to be limited on the descent and increased on the ascent. The brake is to be applied whenever appropriate. If the engine is overheated or the water has evaporated, the driver needs to check the condition of the engine and give immediate care to rectify the defect. In the driving of a car, two things take place simultaneously: the continuous cognizance of the path, the vehicle, and the driver's intention, and the details of the manipulation which are to be carefully attended to.

In our daily life we are either very much in an action program or in a contemplative situation. When a man is listening to music, for instance, he doesn't have to manipulate anything but only attune

himself to the melody and rhythm of the music. In this sutra we are told how the natural function of the mind on the sensory or motor side can conveniently be converted into a discipline (*sādhana*) to bring the mind to a high degree of efficiency and harmony. Irrespective of the kind of activity in which one is engaged, by giving ones full attention to it and doing it with dexterity, one can attain yoga which is defined in the Gita as "dexterity in action."

**Sutra I: 36**

*viśokā vā jyotiṣmatī*

*viśokā*: sorrowless state of inner joy  
*vā*: or, also  
*jyotiṣmatī*: luminosity of intelligence

Also by meditating on the sorrowless state of inner joy one can attain luminosity of intelligence.

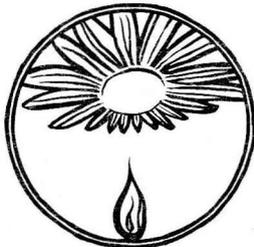
The human mind is very often compared to the moon. Mental diseases are often described as lunatic conditions. The phases of the moon are lunatic. From the new moon up to the full moon there is a steady waxing of the moon's brightness and dimension. The full moon looks like a perfect sphere and it has a very pleasing effulgence. Then it begins to wane until it becomes perfectly lost in the shadow of earth. These two phases are shared by the human mind. People become exuberant in their joy on full moon nights and many people go into states of depression when the new moon comes.

The moon cannot escape the tragedy of alternately becoming bright and dark because it is a satellite which has to orbit around the earth. As the earth and the moon are spinning and rotating with different speeds, the bright phase and the dark phase are bound to alternate in fixed periods. In the case of man, there is no permanent casting of shadow or flash of light, yet the human psyche, in some strange way, shares the cosmic

phenomena. Even the happiest man is sometimes seen in an unpleasant mood. Certain schizophrenics who are usually catatonic sometimes find themselves lifted out of the dark for a few days to behave normally or even become euphoric. The altering states coming from external circumstances can correspond to ones altering psychic states of consciousness. As human nature is not so fixed as the cyclic changes of the heavenly bodies, it is possible for a person to take therapeutic measures to redress oneself from his or her psychic mal-functions. Of the four inner organs, intellect is the brightest and can be used as a handle to rectify ones inner discordance.

Humans are very fickle. If for some days a person is exposed to a congenial environment and if, on a certain day, the expected symbol of love and acceptance is not there, he or she can suddenly feel perturbed and subject himself or herself to a lousy state of mind. Someone in the vicinity can be thought of as the cause for ones disturbance and a whole range of paranoia can be kicked up. When this happens, the hilarious laughter is gone and the muscles of the throat, face and lips go heavy with a strange atrophy so that one cannot even smile on seeing a friend.

The person is being tortured from within through no ones fault, yet feels so helpless to wriggle out of that state. Depression crushes the entire psyche in its steel claws. If one takes care to look at one bright spot such as a beautiful poem, a melodious music, a wonderful episode in ones own life or another's, and keeps attuned to it with the intention of purging away the blues and increasing the inner state of joy, the spark can turn into a glow, the glow into a flame, and the flame can ultimately become a conflagration of joy.



### Sūtra I: 37

*vītarāga viṣaya vā cittam*

*vītarāga viṣaya*: fixed on freedom from attachment

*vā*: or, also

*cittam*: the mind (acquires steadiness)

Also the mind fixed on freedom from attachment acquires steadiness.

The term *vītarāga* can be taken either as the ideal of transcending attachment or as a person who has transcended human passions such as attachment. An impersonal way of contemplating on an ideal is difficult for the beginner. Hence most interpreters put a positive stress on the example of a person who has transcended passions. In verse seven of his *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Narayana Guru describes the superior way of idealizing the state of transcendence as going beyond all relativistic cliches. Then, as second best, he recommends to those who cannot establish themselves in such an ideal that they engage themselves in the service of a contemplative who has understood the four-fold secrets of *AUM* and has thus transcended all relativistic affinities. In either case, the stress is on the ideal of transcending emotional attachment.

When we look at the lives of great people of mature wisdom we see that compassion wells up in them for matters that look insignificant to others, while they look unconcerned in matters of personal loss and on occasions when others would be agitated. In the personal life of Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed the Prophet and many others, we can see that they are in a solid state with regard to their personal integrity. All the same they are receptive of the pains and agitations of the people around them. As they are moved to compassion they dedicate all their time in the service of all sentient beings. At the same time, they remain unmoved in witnessing the transient ways of the world.

We cannot straight away discipline our minds. However, we have control over our physical bodies and the functions of our faculties of action. So it is easy to handle those areas. After controlling external behavior, we can go into the formations of our will, the nature of our desires and the source of our urges, and bring discipline there also. When we see the example in a living person we are encouraged to follow suit and achieve the same results in ourselves also.

As a person who lives constantly in transcendence, such as ones Guru, is also a human being, we become encouraged to watch how he overcomes situations that should agitate him. Although in the beginning it looks as if we are only imitating him, in the course of time, our choices become habitual. Then it is no longer imitation but a spontaneous adherence to higher ideals and we also become established in the tranquility of a yogi.

#### Sutra I: 38

*svapna nidrā jñānāmbanam vā*

*svapna*: dream state

*nidrā*: dreamless sleep state

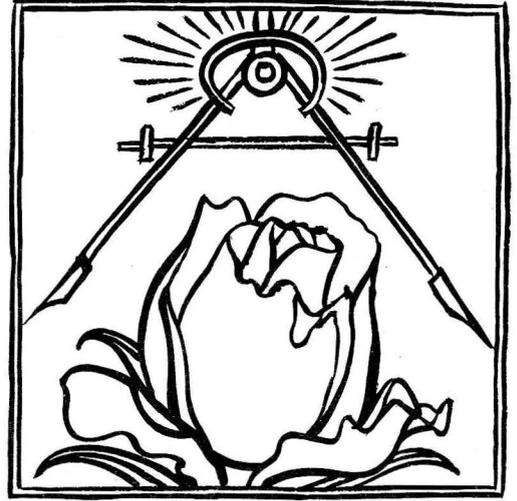
*jñāna*: knowledge

*āmbanam*: contemplating on

*vā*: or, also

Also (the mind) contemplating on the knowledge derived from the dream state and the dreamless sleep state (can acquire steadiness).

The nature of the Self is pure consciousness and it is within the ambit of this pure consciousness that the four-fold inner organs of the individuated mind manifest. The inquiring faculty, memory, intellect and the affective ego all derive their light from the pure light of the Self in order to function as the faculties of the individuated self (*jīva*). Just as the one light of consciousness, when received by the different organs, manifests as different functions such as doubting, judging, re-



membering, and becoming affected by pain and pleasure, the five senses are differently stimulated by external energy. Consequently, the ear hears, the skin feels, the eye sees, the tongue tastes and the nose smells. When the four inner organs, in conjunction with the five sense organs, become stimulated by external objects, perception takes place. This wakeful experience is the most gross and specific experience of the individual. The perceptual experiences derived through the senses are all reduced to their characteristic qualities and stored in the faculty of memory so they can be reproduced at any time. In wakeful consciousness the individual is relating himself or herself with the universe. The nature of that relationship is one of measuring and judging the qualities of the individual items that constitute the universe. Hence the wakeful state is said to belong to the physical perceiver of the universe (*viśvābhīmani*).

When we withdraw our senses from external objects and no longer depend on stimulation from outside, we are still conscious we exist. We can still bring in the ego to function as the central locus of consciousness. All impressions gathered from perception can be recalled with form, name, color and other perceptual qualities. These impressions, along with conceptual images, can be restructured and put into compositions of dreams which

can be as impressive as external perception. That means we are not completely in the dark when we are dreaming. There is a light within us (*tejas*). Therefore the consciousness prevailing during dream hours is called the perceiver of the inner light (*taijasābhimani*).

When we enter into deep sleep the flickering I-consciousness also vanishes. However, when we come out of that state, we do not experience any break or discontinuity with the past. Instead of thinking, "I did not exist for some time," we recognize that we had a very peaceful experience of an undisturbed state. As that state can be remembered, it is one of consciousness which does not undergo any specific modulation (*prajñā*).

These are the three cyclic transformations of consciousness, all happening on the ground of pure consciousness which is the fourth (*turīya*). Most people think of their wakeful life as the only important factor. But here Patañjali says that just as you can meditate in the wakeful state on an object of consciousness, you can also meditate on the inner light which makes compositions of dreams, the shining aspect of consciousness. He also says you can meditate on the unmodulated consciousness of deep sleep for the eradication of the haunting impressions which are continuously created through a process of culturing psycho-physical experiences.

### Sutra I: 39

*yathābhimata dhyānād vā*

*yatha:* as

*ābhimata:* desired by oneself

*dhyānāt:* contemplation

*vā:* also, or

Or by contemplation as desired by oneself.

Yoga is not to be imparted like a collective drill which is given to squadrons or battalions of soldiers. Each person has his or her own biological, sociological and cultural history, background and heritage, which makes Peter different from Paul. What is absolutely necessary to Peter can be quite superfluous to Paul. Recognizing the uniqueness of each individual, Patañjali states that the most suitable discipline for each person is that which he or she can wholeheartedly accept.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna thorough instruction in the Science of the Absolute and the unitive way of actualizing the essence of supreme wisdom. Every aspect of Yoga is graphically described. In the eighteenth chapter when Arjuna becomes mature enough even to be initiated into *mokṣa sannyasa yoga*, he rededicates himself at the feet



of the Lord and requests him to command what he should perform. In response to this request, Kṛṣṇa says, "After critically examining all my instructions, you choose to act exactly as you desire." Kṛṣṇa does not hold his beloved disciple at the leash of any obligation. The disciple is fully free to choose what is most appropriate to him. Here Patañjali also emphasizes this supreme teaching in Yoga which offers absolute freedom to its votary, making it clear that, ultimately, everyone has to help himself or herself. Thus this sūtra is very significant.

### Sūtra I: 40

*paramāṇu parama mahattvānto'sya  
vaśīkaraḥ*

*paramāṇu:* the finest, minutest atom  
*parama:* greatest  
*mahattva:* infinity  
*antaḥ:* extending  
*asya:* his (the yogi's)  
*vaśīkaraḥ:* mastery

His (the yogi's) mastery extends from the finest atom to the greatest infinity.

Yoga is the cancelling out of the pairs of opposites whereby the dualities in principles and the multiplicity in manifestation can all be reduced to one single unitive principle. No science is possible unless the scientist has a methodology of reduction by which the multitudinous factors implied in his study can all be reduced to a single primeval substance or entity. In the same manner, he should have a method by which the unified principle can be re-elaborated systematically into the manifoldness of manifestation. The Yoga of Patañjali claims to have such a binary method which implies both the unifying reduction and the power of methodic elaboration.

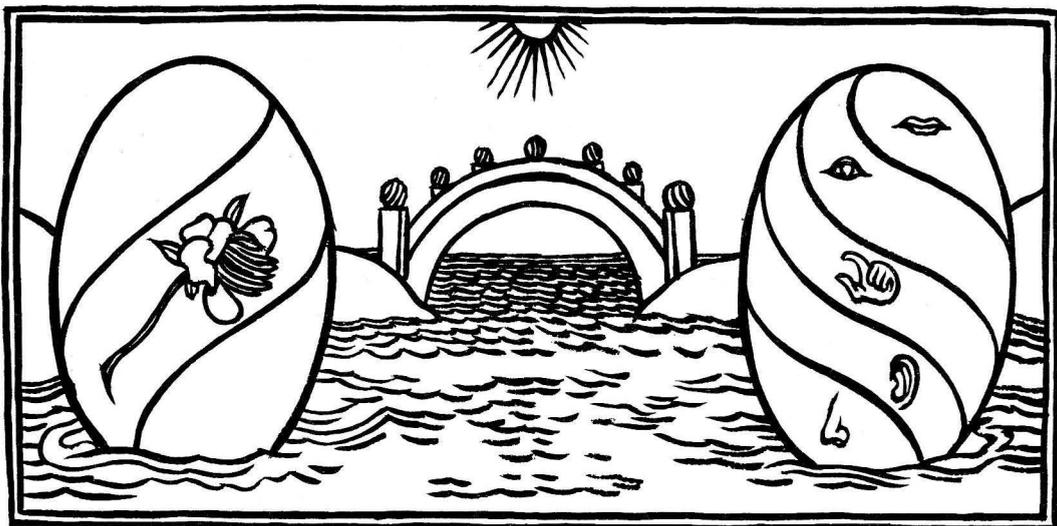
In one sense we are all sharing one physical universe with one set of physical, chemical, biological and psychologi-

cal laws. Yet when we individually look at that world of experience, my world is entirely mine and your world is entirely yours. Brick by brick and moment by moment we each build up our own world of experience. When you retire from your conscious life into the unconscious you have to fold the world of time and space and bury it in the oblivion of your unconscious. In one sense the world is created in this moment, then gives way to be modified, regenerated and lived in the next moment.

Our conscious creation is negligible compared to the multitudinous cause and effects that go into the making of the unified experience of each moment which are coming from the unknown and unconscious as a tremendous mystery. When something is being manipulated in you by the unconscious, you experience it only as an autonomous presentation. It is as if you are a baby, not taken into confidence by the supreme owner of your life.

Here, the expositor of the Science of Yoga is calling our attention to two separate entities. The first is the individuated consciousness which has a glow of awareness. Whatever is happening there is understood as the mentation of the individual. The other is the psychobiologic organism to which the person belongs which in its turn is part of a universal matrix of which most areas are hidden from the purview of the individual. This is recognized as the great principle, *mahattva*.

A third factor is not elaborated or spoken of here. It is the unifying principle of the conscious and the unconscious elements. They are interlaced in such a manner that what is presently experienced only as individuated consciousness can be brought to bear upon the entirety of the supreme principle, so that the individual can become a receptacle all through. Then no part is unfit to articulate what is otherwise monopolized only by the unconscious manipulator of life. This aspect has been elaborated by Śrī Aurobindo in his *Synthesis of Yoga*.



**Sutra I: 41**

*kṣīṇa vṛtter abhijātasyeva maṇer  
grahīṭṛ grahaṇa grāhyeṣu tatstha  
tadañjanatā samāpattiḥ*

*kṣīṇa vṛtteḥ:* in the case of one  
whose mental modulations have  
been attenuated

*abhijātasya:* of a transparent

*iva:* like

*maneh:* crystal

*grahitr:* cognizer

*grahaṇa:* act of cognition

*grāhyeṣu:* cognized

*tatstha:* remaining in

*tadañjanatā:* entire absorption,  
taking the form or color of that

*samāpatti:* fusion, thought  
transformation, concentration

In the case of one whose mental modulations have been attenuated, like a transparent crystal, entire absorption or fusion in one or the other of the cognizer, cognized and act of cognition is brought about.

We have an outward-going consciousness. Its windows are our five organs of perception. Through the five senses we do not come into contact with five objects or five thousand objects but countless objects of interest. The stimuli coming from external objects through the sense organs

are continuously causing disturbances in the inner organs. Those disturbances are mentioned in this sūtra as *vṛtti*. The main discipline of a yogi is that of withdrawing ones inner organs from the multitudinous impacts of the senses and turning them to the very source of ones inner illumination which is attuned to pure existence, pure subsistence and pure value.

During your whole lifetime you have been continuously conditioned with the impact of various energies coming from the outside world. Thus, you have only gained the training to know gross objects with name and form. To extricate the conditioned power of cognition from the impact of the external world is not easy. A discipline is needed so that turning in can be practiced and made a reality. For that, one can do certain exercises such as abstracting a value seen to be manifested in the outer world. Importance is given to the value that makes something attractive rather than to the physical place, object or event in which the value manifests. This is a process of turning in from the world of concrete objects to a pure form of knowledge. This turning in from the exterior to the interior is *pratyāhāra*. When this exercise is done several times, ones identity with the inner reality becomes more stable and more easily cognized.

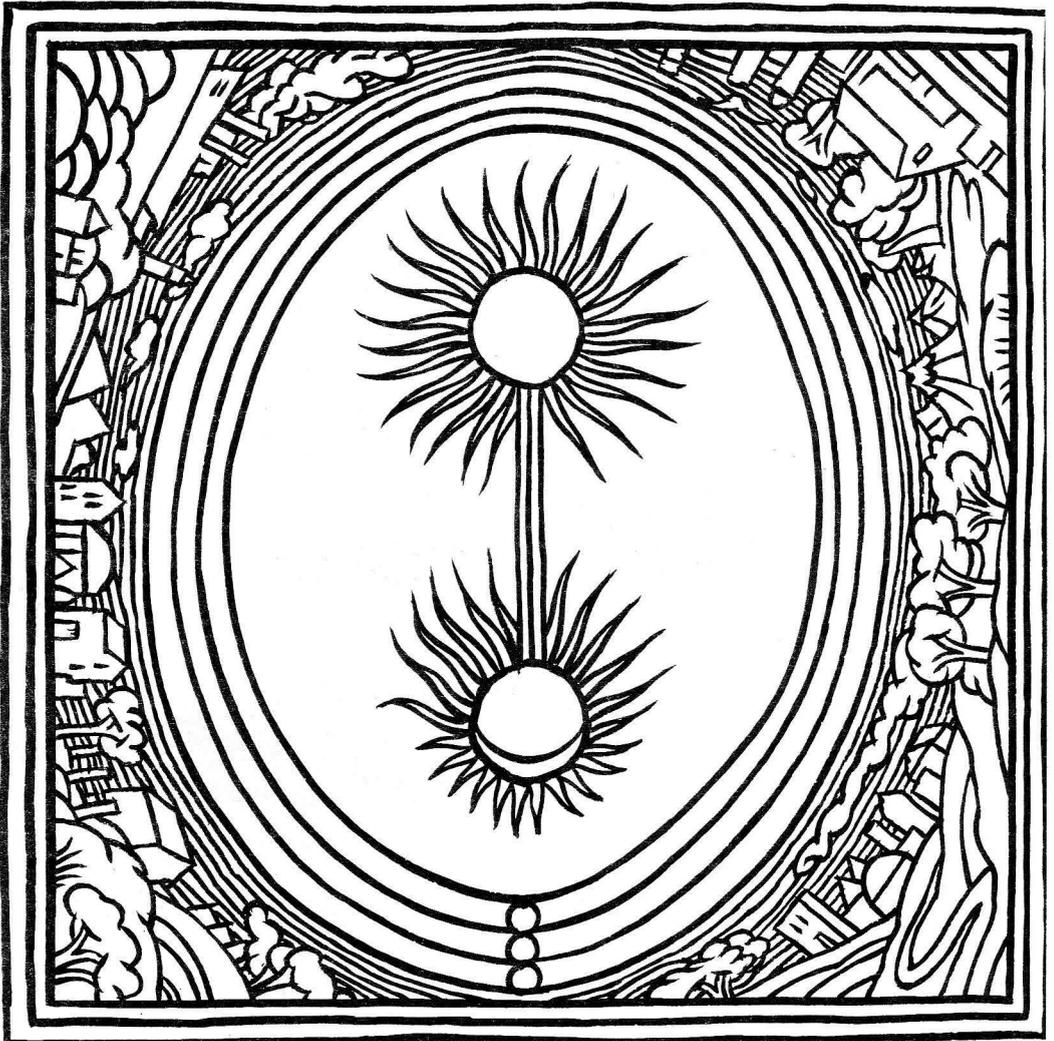
Let us take for example the discipline of cultivating friendship. Even when the

mind is provoked by external circumstances which go against maintaining friendship, the will to be disciplined by friendship is strengthened by the desire to be unitive. This helps a person to belittle the importance of provocation and hold onto friendship. That retention is *dhāra-na*. Maintaining that retention by reliving friendship again and again trains the mind to have a new habit which is opposed to old habits. Previous conditioning is weakened by the new conditioning. Ultimately, there shouldn't be any conditioning but one cannot arrive at that state immediately, so one applies a method of deconditioning.

When all conditionings are scraped

off, recall and association become less frequent and stability is established. The inner organs undergo a drastic change. The ego is no longer paranoid about the countless messages brought in by the sense organs. For instance, even if a person is shouting scandalous words at you, if you treat it only as noise, then you put up with some noise and you are not provoked. Thus the external world is nullified to the yogi. When the ego, the questioning mind and memory recall are all pacified, the intellect, like a transparent crystal, reflects only the pure light of the Self. That prepares one for ones emancipation from the bondage of the world.

(Continued in next issue.)



Something mysteriously formed,  
Born before heaven and earth.  
In the silence and the void,  
Standing alone and unchanging,  
Ever present and in motion.  
Perhaps it is the mother of  
ten thousand things.  
I do not know its name.

Call it Tao.

For lack of a better word,

I call it great.

Being great, it flows.

It flows far away.

Having gone far, it returns.

Therefore "Tao is great;  
Heaven is great;  
Earth is great;  
The king is also great."  
These are the four great  
powers of the universe,  
And the king is one of them.

Man follows the earth.  
Earth follows heaven.  
Heaven follows the Tao.  
Tao follows what is natural.

TAO TE CHING  
verse twenty five  
by LAO TSU

# The Altar of Narayana Gurukula

## Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

The several pieces which have been put together to make the altar of Narayana Gurukula can be considered incidental. But such incidental structuring can become more meaningful than something done deliberately.

There is a raised platform for the altar pieces and the disciples to sit on. Below that is the seat of the living representative of the Guru. The highest place is given to a picture of Narayana Guru in whose name the Gurukula was founded by his disciple, Nataraja Guru. The picture is not worshipped as an idol. It is there to remind us of a historical person who came to this world like others, whose life exemplified an ideal that enshrines compassion, love, and truth as the three gems of human virtue.

The picture of Narayana Guru is flanked on either side with pictures of Nataraja Guru. One shows the most characteristic expression of the Guru, especially when he was giving his consoling blessings to his disciples. The other shows the whole body, though in it the feet are prominent.

A guru's feet are reverentially touched by disciples, which is a silent communication the disciple makes to the guru, mentally saying: "O beloved guru, with these feet you have walked in the path of the Absolute (*brahman*). By touching your feet I make the solemn pledge that I will walk in the same path which you have tread." It is not a gesture of kowtowing. By becoming a disciple, a person does not become the slave of another, but offers to listen carefully to the word of the guru. It is like lighting ones candle from the guru's candle or lighting ones torch from the blazing torch of the

guru. Between guru and disciple there are no social obligations. There is no curtailment of social freedom. There is a great commitment to the truth which springs up as a flame of love and wisdom between them. The disciples sitting on the upper stage and the Guru sitting lower is suggestive of the great expectations with which a disciple is looked upon.

Below Narayana Guru's picture there is an altar piece which enshrines a geometrical symbol of five triangles interlocked with four triangles. The interlocked triangles are encircled with three concentric circles marked off from the infinity of space with a square showing four gates - left and right, and above and below. This miniature shrine is decorated with an image of Narayana Guru with the backdrop of *AUM*, the *pranava*. This is to be understood in the light of verse seven of the *Ātmopadeśa Śataka*:

Do not wake anymore,  
and without sleeping  
remain as knowledge;  
if you are unfit for this,  
then keep yourself in the service  
of those contemplatives  
who live free from birth,  
awakened to *AUM*.

*AUM* has four aspects to be comprehended. *A* is the wakeful, *U* is the dream, *M* is the deep sleep, and silence is the *turīya*. A contemplative like Narayana Guru is sought after because his life showed his grasp of the secret of the four limbs of the Absolute. At the ground level of the altar is *Vināyaka* or *Ganeśa*, who represents both the art and science of integration. The hallmark of Narayana

Guru's philosophy is integration.

The arrangement of musical instruments is suggestive of the coming together of the East and West, South and North. A *vina* is kept on the right side and a guitar on the left. Side by side are two drums, the *mridangam* of south India and the *tabala* of north India. The spiritual fervor of worship is kept alive with a *tamburu*, a soothing string instrument.

On the left of the altar is Kwanyin seated on a lotus. The lotus represents Buddhahood. Kwanyin shows the compassionate aspect of Lord Buddha as a nourishing mother carrying a child. This represents the Indian concept of *vārada*, the continuous showering of boons and blessings for one's spiritual nourishment. On the right side is Kwanyin in the form of a protectress, standing on a sea monster. In one hand she is holding a basket which has a fish in it and with the other hand she is gesturing to the fish. The fish symbolizes a *jīva* (individuated being) who has fallen into the sea of *samsara* (misery of the ever-changing realm of life and death). Kwanyin is saving the *jīva* and taking it to the ocean of *nirvāna* (freedom from misery).

Flowers are kept in beautiful vases. In front of the seat of the living Guru representative is a plate containing ashes. Hindus usually interpret it as "*Bhasmantam śarīram* (this body will be consumed to ashes)," while Christians are reminded of the Biblical maxim, "Dust thou art and to dust thou returneth." The Muslim understands it as "*La illah illalla* (there is no God but Allah)." The Taoist would say, "It is and it is not."

Behind the plate containing ashes is the conch shell. The conch shell stands for the Supreme Word, the articulation of the Absolute. Behind it is a bell to rouse the sleepy. Then there is an artifact which serves to preserve wicks and camphor for the future. We do not use incense sticks because they are made mostly of very harmful chemicals that can cause more damage than cigarette smoke. Also on the altar is a sprinkler vessel containing rose water, a symbol of welcome.

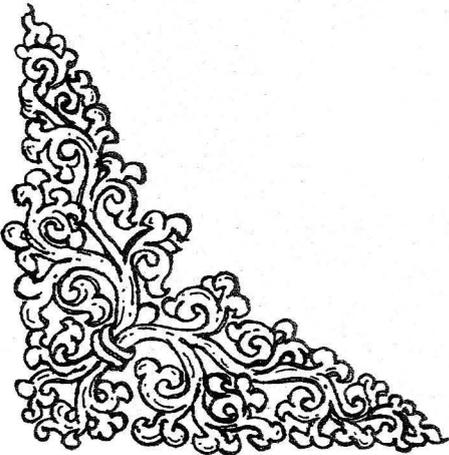
Other decorative pieces are placed around a burning lamp. The one flame is suggestive of the one source of both life and light. It is a living flame which gives a fresh aspect of itself each moment. ❖



# Moments of Adoration

*Oh auspicious Lord,  
I witness you  
in the Heart.  
I behold you  
as the glory  
enshrined within all;  
manifesting as This,  
but always That,  
the One,  
without a second.*

*Bliss is my foundation.  
Bliss is the superstructure of my being.  
Bliss is the atmosphere I breathe.  
Bliss is the sun that shines on me.  
Bliss is the water that  
comes from the clouds.  
  
Bliss is all around us.  
  
Bliss is me.*



# Peter Moras



*In the  
blue ethereal,  
underneath,  
the Atman  
upwells;  
auspiciously,  
mysteriously,  
generously,  
unpetitioned  
by any of us  
at any time.  
Its own nature  
only.*

*This gross body  
is transformed  
into light  
by sacred whispers,  
morning,  
noon,  
and night.*

# Structural Schemes in Contemplative Literature

Muni Narayana Prasad

To write a novel a novelist should have a plot in his mind in advance. He should also decide where it should begin and end, and present it in such a way that it will be appealing to the reader and capable of conveying the message intended. In other words, he gives the novel a shape by melting the plot in the cauldron of creative imagination and casting it in the mold of a structural scheme. Of course, it sometimes happens that one starts writing a novel with a scheme in mind and a better scheme takes shape by itself in the course of writing. In any case, having such a structural scheme is essential in all forms of literary writing. However, it is seldom recognized that the same is true in the field of contemplative literature. Structural schemes are also implied in the visions put into words by seers in order to help the future seekers attain the same vision of Truth. Not realizing this, we sometimes pull out a few words or a stanza from a specific context either to vindicate our standpoint or to reprimand the seer. This kind of quoting from a work with no respect for the structural context of the quoted words, does an injustice to the seer who uttered those words in that particular context with a specific intention. That is why Nataraja Guru always insisted that one should be very clear about the structural scheme of a contemplative work taken for detailed study, and that one should respect the structural implications of the particular context from which any quote is taken.

In Vedanta in general and in the major works of Narayana Guru, what we see

is the search for the Self and its vision in its different methods, modes and facets. Nataraja Guru insists that in order to unravel the secret of the Self with the help of the *Upaniṣads* and the works of Narayana Guru, we should trace out the structure of the Self or knowledge hidden in the expressed form of visions. Then the question arises "Does the Self have a structure? Is it not beyond all conditionings, like expansive space? Is it not the one Truth with no attributes?"

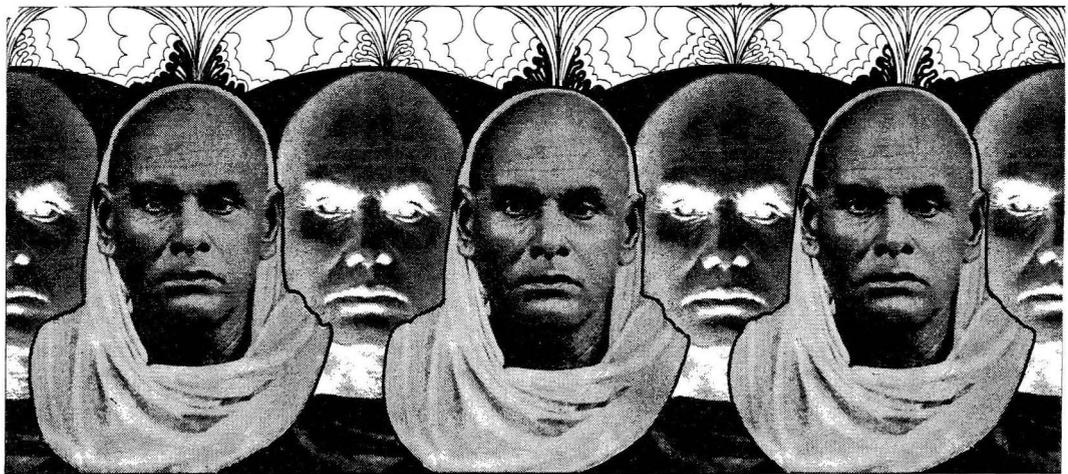
The Self as understood in Vedanta is not an inert something which pervades everything and everywhere. The Self is knowledge pure and simple. This is very explicit in the works of Narayana Guru and implicit in the *Upaniṣads*. How is this knowledge to be known? Knowledge is not something constant. It always flutters. During this process it might leap from the world of actualities to that of virtualities, or from the here and now to fantasy. Then it might merge into itself with no function at all. Though these vicissitudes are very indefinite and undefinable there are certain states which are definite and definable, such as the wakeful state (*jagrat*), dreaming state (*swapna*) and deep sleep (*susupti*). Though these are supposed to be the states of consciousness, the function of consciousness is not confined to these three distinct categories. These are only three definable cross sections which we can pick out from the vast expanse of the stream of consciousness. One extreme could be supposed to be the state in which consciousness is fully turned outwards, knowing everything other than itself,

and the other extreme the state in which it is fully merged in itself with no function at all. Consciousness could be supposed to be streaming in between these two extremes. Its complexity and multifariousness is endless and beyond comprehension. These functional variations occur to one and the same consciousness. It is that consciousness or knowledge that is called the Self. But such a knowledge which is behind all functional states has never been known by anyone. As this knowledge is the existent truth in all the states of consciousness, or as it is the same consciousness that functions with endless variations, the non-dual Self has to be realized as existing in and through these functional aspects. That is the standpoint of Vedanta.

The functioning of consciousness has a system of its own though all its aspects are not fully open to human understanding. When consciousness functions with an inherent structural coherence, it is called *bhanavritti* in Sanskrit. The Self is that which manifests as *bhanavrittis* or functional modes of consciousness. It is this Self that the great seers and Gurus express in works like the *Upaniṣads*. These word representations also innately contain the structural secret of the endless possible manifestations of the Self. A word representation of a living Self will have the same life only if it has as its core the structural pattern that is implicit in the throbbing of the Self. Only if

the representation is a living one will it serve its purpose of leading seekers to the attainment of the living vision of the Self which the seer had. This goal is the realization of the non-difference of the seeker's own individual functional consciousness with the cosmic functional consciousness. Any representation of the Self which does not respect this structural element will be a still and dead picture. What the seeker gains from such a representation will also be a dead picture of the Self. We know the difference between a living face and a lifeless still photograph of that face. The same difference will be there between the living experience of the Self and a lifeless representation of it. Behind the words rich with Self-knowledge, there must be hiding the structural secret of knowledge. Until this structural element is traced out and used as a tool for Self-knowledge, the vision of the Self revealed in such works as the *Upaniṣads* remains a closed book. It is like a gem kept in an unopenable casket. That is why Nataraja Guru always insisted on finding the structural secret behind the words of seers, to reveal their hidden secrets. The factors implied and involved in this structural feature will naturally be as diverse as the variegations in the function of consciousness.

Let us now examine one context where the non-duality of the Self becomes revealed by the unveiling of the hidden structural secret of a contemplative vision



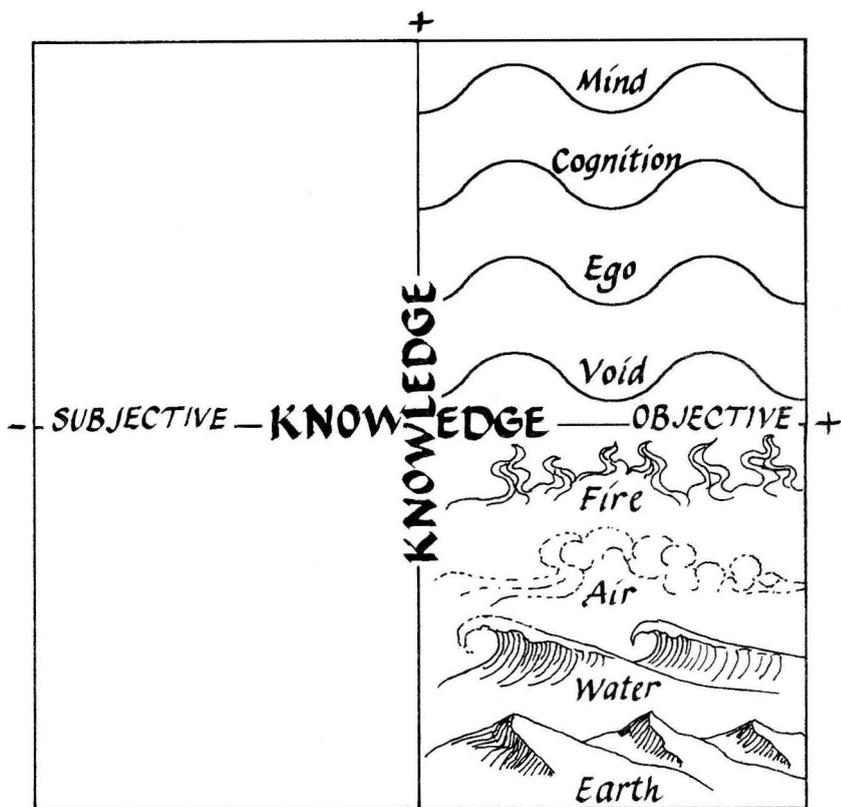
involving the Indian concept of the five elements: earth (*prthvi*), water (*jalam*), fire (*agni*), air (*vayu*) and space (*akāśa*). Of these earth is the grossest and space the subtlest. In fact these five elementals are not to be understood as five distinct and impenetrable material entities, but as five distinct stages imaginable in the vast expanse of the materiality of the universe, ranging from the grossest to the subtlest. The enumeration of the elemental factors begins with earth, the grossest state of materiality, and ends with space which is not a material at all. Beyond this, we reach the realm of the experience of the interior functions. The first experience of this kind is that of being the knower or the 'I'. Above that is the realm of knowledge which tries to transcend the subject-object duality. This aspect is called *vidya* in Sanskrit. Even above this has to be seen the mind which projects the subject-object duality. This mind can be conceived of in both the individual and cosmic senses. Here we see that the elements of experience, whether individuated or cosmic, can be arranged vertically beginning from the earth, the grossest, and ending with mind, the subtlest.

Now let us examine each stage of this ascending scale of experience. To become actualized an experience should have two aspects, the subject and the object; yet, experience happens in the absence of either. What makes consciousness manifest as a particular experience is an instantaneous unification of the subject and the object. At the instant of their unification we cannot think that that unified state is on the subjective side or the objective side. It has only a neutral status. That means, even in the case of the experience of the grossest of objects, for example earth, that experience or knowledge by itself is neither subjective nor objective, neither internal nor external. It has a neutral and non-dual status. This is the non-duality that could be realized in the experience of a gross object.

A doubt may arise here. How could unification happen between a gross object

which is inert matter and the subject which is only consciousness? 'I am the subject' is a form of experience or mode of knowledge. 'This is the object' is another experience or mode of knowledge. That means subject-hood and object-hood are both modes of the same knowledge. Each is only a differentiation in consciousness. In other words, knowledge is the homogeneous matrix in which both subsist. To put it in another way, the object and subject have a common ground in knowledge. This common ground or homogeneous matrix of knowledge is called *samanādhikāraṇa* in Vedantic parlance.

Let us go back to the analysis of the vertically serialized experiences. We have seen that even the grossest of experiences has a subjective aspect and an objective aspect, while being of a neutral non-dual status. This is true with each and every level of the graded realm of experience, even at the subtlest level. Thus viewed, a neutral and non-dual vertical axis takes shape by itself in and through the vast expanse of the realms of experience, beginning from the grossest and ending with the subtlest. It is easy to see that this vertical axis passes through the core of all the levels of experience or modes of knowledge unifying all of them in the same golden thread of Knowledge with a capital letter. It can also be seen to have two horizontal aspects at every level, i.e., the subjective and the objective, as well as a negative pole at the bottom and a positive pole at the top. As regards the horizontal aspects possible at all stages we could say that the subjective side stands for the negative pole and the objective side for the positive. These two axes could be considered as a structural device for locating each experience in the vast realm of knowledge just as the two axes in a graph are used to locate particular instances. Of these two axes the vertical one always helps us to find a place for a particular experience as a value. Such is the structural scheme of knowledge that Nataraja Guru brought to light, perhaps for the first time in the history of philosophy.



We have seen that all experiences can be arranged with a vertical order, and that each rung of this scale of values has a subjective and an objective side. The subjective side is the same at all levels of experience but the objective side always changes, giving specificity to experience. That is, the subjective side of the ascending scale is generic in nature and the objective side is specific in nature. Thus, the neutral non-dual axis could also be considered as passing through and in between the generic and specific aspects. If the generic is like an ocean the specific is like the waves appearing on the surface. One has no existence exclusive of the other. When we see the existential oneness of the wave and ocean we will be able to visualize how the same knowledge could contain within it both the generic and the specific modes of its functional manifestation. An intuitive visionary experiences the transcendence of all the specific and generic modes of conscious functioning in the unitiveness of the Self. All that we have said so far is an elaboration of the cryptic words of Narayana

Guru in the 50th stanza of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, which reads as follows:

With earth, water, air and fire likewise  
 Also the void, the ego, cognition and mind,  
 All worlds including the waves and ocean too,  
 Do all arise and into awareness change.

Read the stanza carefully a few times and then go through the above analysis once more. Being aware of the structural integrity of the stanza makes it more meaningful and fully living. The same graded picture of functional consciousness is presented by Narayana Guru in another context in his *Darśanamala*, in chapter V, namely *Bhāna Darśanam*. There the different grades are named as *sthūla bhānam* (gross experience), *sūkshma bhānam* (subtle experience), *karana bhānam* (causal experience) and *tūrīya bhānam* (the fourth or the transcendental experience). There also each grade of experience is presented as having two footings for manifestation, called *bhānaśrava*.

This in no way means that the Self has a top or a bottom, a left side or a

right side. It only means that the functional modes of the Self can be comprehended as having a structural integrity and correlation. Finding out these structural features helps us to intuitively know the reality of the non-dual Self, which itself is not an object of knowledge.

In other words, this structural schematization is only part of the method or discipline for the attainment of Self-realization. It is something to be thrown away, once the goal is attained, just like a raft used for crossing a river is left behind by a traveller.

The present writer once happened to read a humorous piece about a speech delivered by a local chief in a village gathering. The topic of the talk, as the speaker himself announced, was, 'the art value of kathakali dance and the cooperative movement'. Hearing the topic mentioned the audience began to laugh. What made them laugh? Two contexts which could never be conceived as having to any common ground were brought together. This lack of understanding of the consistency of a particular context is called *prakāranābheda* in Indian logic. Glaring instances of it, as mentioned in the humor above, are not difficult to find.

But it is very difficult to make out such differences in the realm of subtle speculative thinking. Unfortunately, such a lack of consistency has often vitiated commentaries on philosophical treatises which deal with the nature of intuitive Self-experience such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upaniṣads*.

When a scripture or a scriptural treatise, is presented in a methodic way with a system of its own, the writer tries his best to visualize and evaluate the problem or problems before him or her from different perspectives at different stages, thus to disentangle the complexity of the problem or situation as far as possible for the benefit of the seeker. A commentary on such a work will do full justice to it only when the commentator discovers how the original writer has given structural coherence to the work as a whole, how the factors that cling together in a particular context or topic of the work have been visualized as being structurally correlated, adding to the integrity of the entire work, and how such a structural correlation and integrity is reflected by the semantics and syntactics of the words and the idioms of the language. Just as a word used in a particular context or topic gets its meaning from the structural context of its usage, other factors involved in a context become meaningful only because of that context. When all the elements of a particular context or phase are fully correlated then we can say it has been placed in its proper frame of reference. The frame of reference of a particular context and the structural coherence of the work as a whole are organically related. Only when all these organic relations in a philosophic treatise are fully made out can we safely claim that the ground is properly prepared for a full commentary which will aid the understanding of the seeker. ❖

The purpose of all prayer is to uplift the words,  
to return them to their source above.

The world was created by the downward flow of letters:

The task of man is to form those letters into words  
and take them back to God.

If you come to know this dual process,

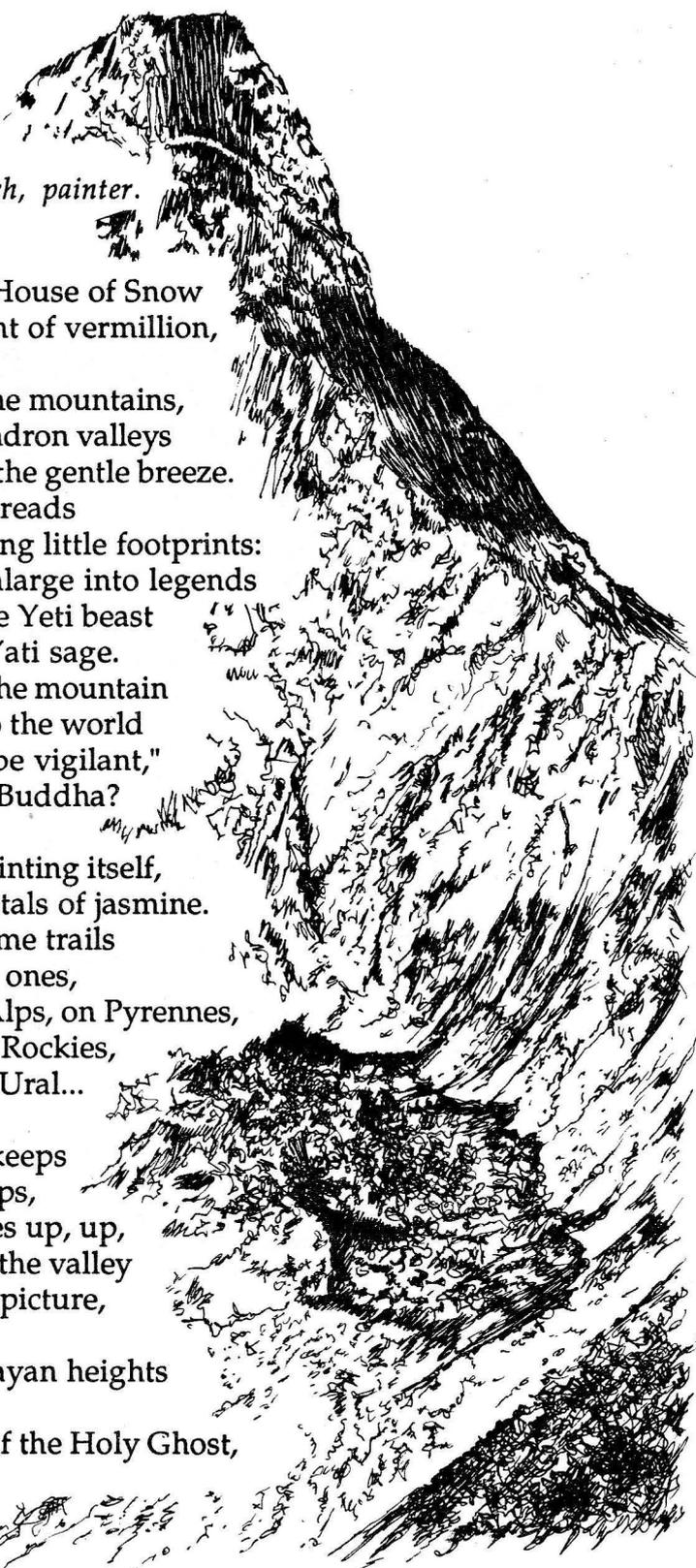
your prayer may be joined to the constant flow of Creation -  
word to word, voice to voice,

breath to breath, thought to thought.

Liqutim Yeqarim

# Steps

*For Nocolai Roerich, painter.*

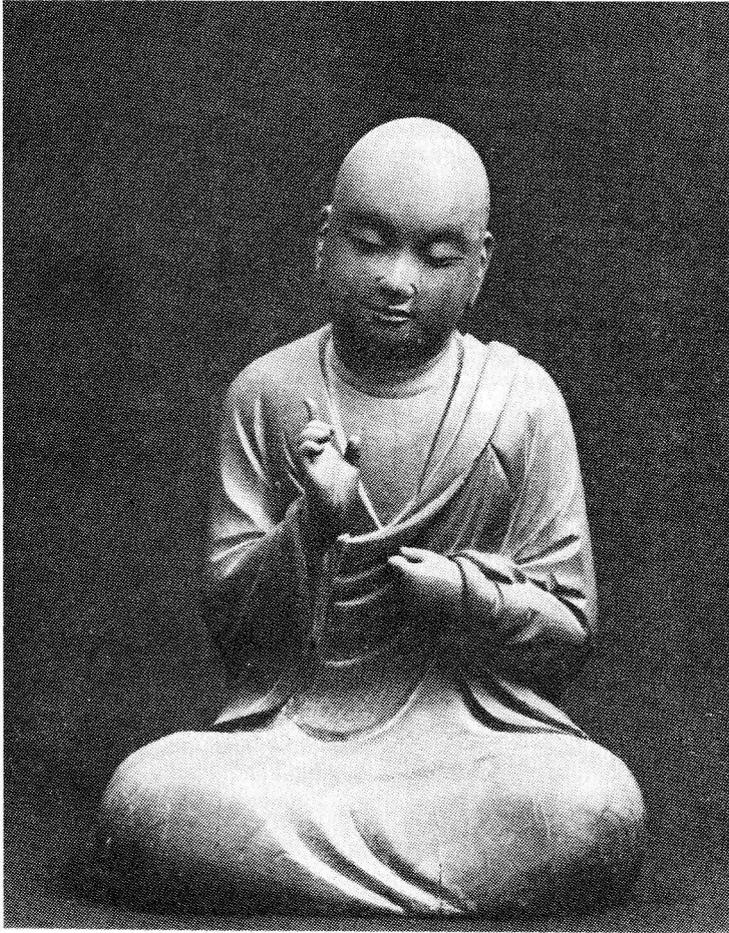


Himalayas. The House of Snow  
Emanates the scent of vermillion,  
Still lakes reflect  
The quietude of the mountains,  
And the rhododendron valleys  
Are dozing off in the gentle breeze.  
The lone Sherpa treads  
The heights, leaving little footprints:  
Footprints that enlarge into legends  
Of the abominable Yeti beast  
Or the adorable Yati sage.  
Who is going up the mountain  
To come back into the world  
Saying, "Awake, be vigilant,"  
Is it a Moses or a Buddha?

Blue sky keeps painting itself,  
Snow falls like petals of jasmine.  
Men go up the same trails  
And create newer ones,  
On the slopes of Alps, on Pyrennes,  
On the heights of Rockies,  
On the unknown Ural...

The lone Sherpa keeps  
Taking higher steps,  
Snow falls, he goes up, up,  
To look back into the valley  
To paint the final picture,  
He goes up.  
Out of the Himalayan heights  
Light is falling,  
Like the descent of the Holy Ghost,  
Peace on Earth.

*Thomas Palakeel*



# Moonlight

She is more than miles away  
in her own simple world, but  
today we greet the same sun  
rising, seductive and timid as  
the tears across her face.

I embrace  
those fragile crystals,  
sharing her  
tiniest hurt; and warm her  
porcelain face with  
the voice that  
speaks a language all creatures know.

Along the crenelated shoreline,  
cold vapors recede  
within a brittle moon.

Three huge Canadians beat their drums  
of spring ahead of this deafening  
light. I see her again, her small  
sad shoes pointing two directions -  
beacons for the watchman  
who knows the longing in  
that smile.

Each of our trembling hands  
reaches to grasp  
this lighthearted dawn.

Dedicated to Emily

South Center Lake, Minnesota, 1986

John Buchanan

# Goodies From Guru's Kitchen

Recorded by Sraddha Durand

## Mushroom-Potato Pie

Cook and mash 4 large potatoes.

Saute 2 cups chopped mushrooms and 1/2 cup cashews in 2 tablespoons butter, set aside.

Mix 1 tablespoon tamari and 2 tablespoons green chili sauce, set aside.

Butter pie pan and pat in half of the mashed potatoes to make a crust.

Make a ring of chopped spinach on the potato crust, place half of the sauteed mushrooms and cashews inside the ring and pour the tamari-chili sauce over them.

Cover with 1 cup grated cheese, then the rest of the mushroom-cashew mixture.

Use the rest of the mashed potatoes to make the top crust, sprinkle with 1 cup grated cheese and pour a beaten egg over the top.

Bake at 350° for 30 minutes, then brown under the broiler just before serving.

## Eggplant Thiele

Heat 2-3 tablespoons oil in a big pot and saute:

- 1 medium sized onion, minced
- 1 green chili, minced
- 1 large eggplant cut in half-inch cubes
- 1 teaspoon tumeric
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon white pepper

Cover and simmer, stirring occasionally. After some time add:

- 2 medium-sized tomatoes, chopped
- 1 cup of water

Continue simmering while you roast in a dry wok:

- 1 cup grated coconut
- 1 dried red chili
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon tumeric

Stir until coconut is brown and then grind to a fine paste in blender.

When eggplant is soft, add the paste and a little tamarind softened in water and continue simmering for a few minutes before serving.

## Rasam

Heat 3 tablespoons oil and add:

- 1 teaspoon cumin seed
- 3 tablespoons garlic
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- handful chopped onion
- 1 heaping teaspoon tumeric
- 1 heaping teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 heaping tablespoons coriander powder
- 1 teaspoon rasam powder or cayenne

After spices are heated, add:

- 2 cups tomatoes

Stir until soft, then add:

- 5 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt

Cook on high heat for 7 minutes and serve.

## Garden Curry

Heat 2-3 tablespoons of oil in wok and stir in:

- 1 tablespoon chopped ginger
- 1 tablespoon chopped garlic
- 1 green chili
- 1 chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Then add:

- 3 potatoes cut in 1/2 inch cubes
- 2-3 chopped carrots
- salt to taste
- 1-2 teaspoons curry powder
- 2 cups chopped green beans, leave on top

Add water for simmering.

Simmer 15 - 20 minutes: Then add a small amount of oil and stir. Simmer briefly and serve.



## **Browny**

Brown in a little oil, then grind to a paste in blender and set aside:

- 1 dried red chili
- 1 cup grated coconut
- 1 teaspoon cumin seed
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds

Heat 2-3 tablespoons of oil in wok or frying pan and add:

- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 16-20 boiled whole baby potatoes

Stir and after some time add:

- curry leaves (optional)
- chili paste (from blender)
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 1 tablespoon butter

Stir until well coated and serve.

## **Tomato Pullisherry**

Stir in wok:

- oil to cover bottom
- 1 split red chili
- 1 split green chili
- 1/2 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 sliced tomatoes

Grind in blender:

- 1/2 cup coconut
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin seed
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon tumeric
- 1 teaspoon chopped garlic

Mix together in wok with 2 cups yogurt. Remove from heat before boiling and serve.

## **Om Funky**

Grind to a fine paste in blender:

- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons coriander seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon tumeric
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne
- 1/2 cup cashews

Saute 2 cups chopped mushrooms in 2 tablespoons oil. Add paste from blender and 6 whole, peeled, hardboiled eggs. Stir until well coated and serve.

## **Columba**

Heat 2-3 tablespoons of oil in wok and saute:

- 1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
- 1 chopped onion
- 1 split green chili
- 1 eggplant quartered lengthwise
- 3 chopped potatoes

Make a space in the middle for:

- 3 cloves chopped garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon tumeric
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2-3 curry leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon coriander powder
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Mix in 1 cup of water:

- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne
- 1/2 teaspoon fenugreek powder
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

Add to vegetables, bring to a boil and simmer until done and serve.

# Record Reviews for Big Ears

## Fred Cantor

A lot has been going on in the realm of non-mainstream music lately - that is, recordings based on musical content rather than the ability to make a buck. A resurgence of small labels in all fields of music seems to be upon us, and it behooves us to open our ears and check it out.

One of the most interesting of recent releases is *Lenny Pickett with the Borneo Horns* (Carthage Records CGLP 7001). Lenny is best known for his work with the California funk band Tower of Power. He was largely responsible for the horn arrangements that gave Tower its unique and yet danceable sound. The music on this album, while it contains many of the elements found in Lenny's Tower of Power style, is a whole different approach. It tends more to "art music" than funk and although it is still thought of as dance music, the dances now belong to the Dance Theatre Workshop of New York.

I would love to see the works on this record in performance. The music is playful, imaginative, and definitely moving. With the exception of the percussion players (and an occasional dose of things like six-string banjo) all the music comes from the horns - no keyboards or synthesizers. And these guys can play! It all fits together so well that it sounds like there must have been dozens of overdubs and editing sessions, yet we're told that all recording was done direct and is all first generation. Incidentally, the sound on this disc is excellent; it's not easy to capture all the resonance of a B-flat Tuba, and that sound alone is worth the price of the record. If it doesn't make you smile, your face has atrophied. One of the nicest things about this recording is



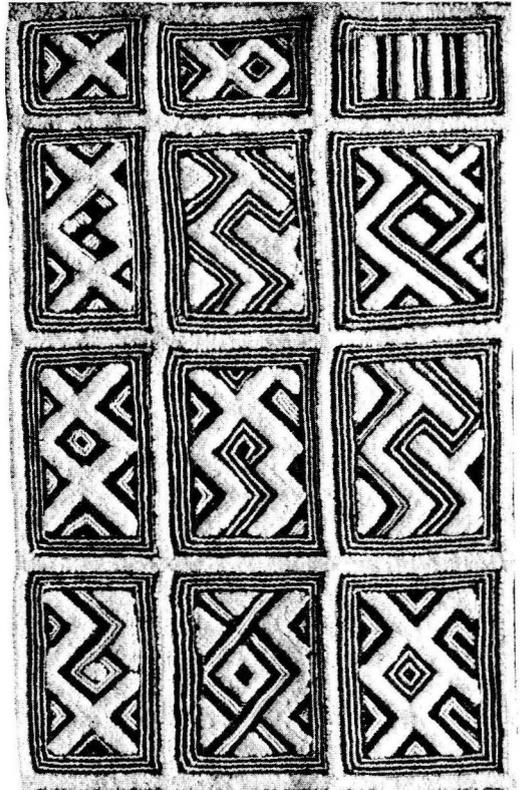
the balance between seriousness and fun. It's plain that a lot of effort went into writing and rehearsing these pieces, but you get the feeling these guys are just having a blast playing this stuff.

Panagea is a new label defining itself as "creative anarchy." Their first release to catch my ear is by Fareed Haque, entitled *Voices Rising* (PAN 42156). Fareed is a young guitarist based in the Chicago area who has been touring with Paquito d'Rivera. In the context of that Latin jazz ensemble he is a fiery player with a great range of feeling. On this album Fareed concentrates on his classical guitar, not playing electric at all. This is a mixed blessing, as it limits the dynamics and overall textures somewhat. There is no question that he is an accomplished and sensitive player. The most satisfying cuts on the album are *La Rose* which is a solo guitar piece, and *Dex* which is a duet with David Spinoza. The rest of the tracks include bass, drums, keyboards and electric guitars, and in spite of the label's pretenses, can't help but remind you of the commercial works of, say, Earl Klugh. The players are not up to the lofty levels of playing that happened in Paquito's band, and without anyone to really push him, Fareed seems content to just play through things. Part of this is the producer's fault. Rick Marotta is the album's producer and also the drummer on most tracks, but it doesn't really sound like he cared much about this record.

There are several places on the record that should have been fixed or re-taped, but he seems willing to settle for "close enough." It's too bad because the artistry of Fareed Haque deserves to be heard at its best. He really is an exceptional player and also a good writer. This is a good record, but if you want to hear how well he can really play, get one of Paquito's albums instead.

Shanachie Records has been in the forefront of the World Beat sound, bringing us a lot of the new musics from Africa and the Third World. They are always careful with the technical aspects of production and generally quite good musically as well. *Take Cover* (43045) is a collection of hits from Zimbabwe that covers a lot of ground, from traditional songs to "Afro-pop." Some of the "hits" may be misses outside their original context, but the record is still of enough musical interest to be worth buying for anyone interested in the breadth of the rich musical traditions of this part of Africa. A more muscular and coherent package of music from Zimbabwe can be found on *Tsvimbodzemoto* by the Bhundu Boys (Discafrique LP03). Recorded in Harare, Zimbabwe, this one contains the strong rhythms and close harmonies that will make you want to dance. It also has a great cover.

Also from Africa (and also from Shanachie) is the newest release from Alpha Blondy. Entitled *Jerusalem* (43054), it is a trans-Atlantic merging of African and reggae styles featuring Bob Marley's backup band and recorded in Kingston. The lyrics are a mix of English, French and African, and the politics are out front and "correct." However, the music itself lacks power and spark, and certainly doesn't support the contentions of those who see Alpha Blondy as the successor to Bob Marley. If that's what you're looking for, you should listen to Ziggy Marley. If you are intrigued by the way ideas and music get bounced around the globe these days, this album is a good example of the cross-pollination that is taking place. Maybe we can make it to one world through music after all. ♦



# Book Review

Deborah Buchanan



*Shallow Graves: Two Women and Vietnam*, Wendy Wilder Larsen and Tran Thi Nga, New York, Harper and Row, 1986.

The book *Shallow Graves* is the collaborative work of two women: an American, Wendy Larsen, who lived in Vietnam from 1970 to 1971, and a Vietnamese, Tran Thi Nga who grew up in the North, migrated to the South, and eventually to America. Larsen uses her poems to tell the story of her time in Vietnam, when she first met Nga and then to tell the story of Nga's life, both in Vietnam and the States.

Tran Thi Nga's life spans a time of intense conflict and change in Vietnam and she lived through epic political events as well as incredible personal ones. The recounting alone of her experiences is overwhelming.

Yet the images that remain most vivid in the reader's mind are those of Nga's childhood:

- Nga riding through the mountain jungles with her Confucian father, the Minister of Education, to oversee the province's schools, with monkeys chattering in the trees and pythons sunning themselves on rocks;
- an elder brother teaching her to play the forbidden guitar while hiding in the mangosteen trees, the "mountain" garden below them with its miniature caves and figures;
- her mother's careful dressing, formal and ordered, as she readied herself each day for social obligations - complete with the traditional black-stained teeth symbolic of wealth and beauty;
- and the family riding through the rice fields at harvest time as the villag-

ers sang to their work, chanting tender, clever songs of love.

It is these images that Tran Thi Nga attempts to leave behind when she burns the family's photographs on her balcony in Saigon, days before secretly escaping, as the Communist forces advanced in 1975. But they are memories impossible to erase and they remain indelible in Nga's life and our minds, and they form the vibrant core of the book *Shallow Graves*.

The second and larger part of the book is Nga's story, beginning in 1927 in Kunming Province in China, the third daughter of nine children of a Confucian scholar-administrator. The evocative poems of her life are written in an intimate first-person voice that draws the reader into a rhythm that allows us to experience that traditional, upper-class life in the north of Vietnam. It was a way of life that was authoritarian and hierarchical, family-oriented, and framed by Confucian values. Yet that life also breathed its own inner warmth and beauty, and as a child Nga was nourished by its wisdom.

But already in Nga's childhood that pattern of life was cracking at the edges - through its own inner stagnation and imbalance and through the intervention of French colonial forces. Nga's was an ordered universe in collision with the physical and intellectual forces of modern culture. There are poems which highlight the fragments of change ebbing through Vietnamese society. And short poems talk of the unspoken activities: the "uncles" and "aunties" who come at night to confer secretly with Nga's father; and the real aunt in Hanoi who was



tortured and eventually killed for her work with the Viet Mihn.

As the political currents of the time circled around Nga's family, enormous changes began. Told by a less adroit, sympathetic person, the story could easily have been rendered into a distorted adventure tale. But through Wendy Larsen's poems our identification with Nga is maintained, and we continue to participate in her life, seeing it as nei-

ther incredible or overwhelming. In coarse outline there is the Viet Mihn fight against the French, World War II with its successive occupations by the Japanese and the Chinese, the Civil War between the nationalists and the communists followed by a severe famine, and then the move to the South after the Geneva agreements in 1954.

It would be easy, perhaps too tempting, to fit the events of Nga's life into a

patterned political analysis. Yet the book *Shallow Graves* makes all too clear that great political and economic changes, that war, are not lived in the abstract. The book does not focus on sides, or even on political questions or decisions, but on the actual experience of living in the midst of a society wracked by immense changes. There are moments of fragility, subtlety, and insight. We are allowed to touch these experiences quietly and hear their speechless message.

In the midst of such stark realities, Nga had to make her choices, changing from the sheltered daughter who was once the forced bride of a Chinese general to her roles as an administrator in the welfare services of the Saigon government and a grant researcher in England. What speaks so strongly between the lines of Nga's life is the too-often ignored fact that what Americans call the War in Vietnam was, and remains, an essentially Vietnamese experience. For the Vietnamese people the Vietnam War was a segment in a succession of struggles. The Americans who came in the sixties and seventies, however involved they were in the activities of war, remained on the outside of the Vietnamese experience.

The story of the American in Vietnam is told by Wendy Larsen, an English professor at Saigon University and the wife of a journalist covering the war. The poems of the first part of the book, from Larsen's two years in Saigon, are haunting and ironic. She intersperses them with translations from personal letters, a military handbook and a collection of translated idioms and slang. Like the poems for Nga, the poems here are also in a first-person voice; but this time there is a kind of refraction. There is a startled, hurt, and puzzled aspect to them, as if the experience of being an American in Vietnam revealed unfathomable aspects of oneself, revealed parts of the world that were unacceptable.

Even the Americans who "went Vietnamese" - those who knew equally well the path to the opium den and the Buddhist temple - were still painfully outside

the core of life in Vietnam as seen through Nga. It is that distinction between an immediate and intimate pulse of life and the stance of an observer that so sharply separates the two sections of this book. The Americans in Vietnam remained perplexed not because Vietnam was perplexing (even though it was that) but because they could not let go of their own inner structuring of reality that was at such variance with Vietnamese culture and history. The open and sympathetic American, as Wendy Larsen certainly was, had to accept living on an edge of paradox and irony. To her credit she does not shy away from that, nor does she let it degenerate into self-pity. And in the midst of this nebulous situation she is also able to feel and communicate a sense of wonder, even delight, in many facets of life in Vietnam.

The sense of distance, often laced with anguish, that we read in Larsen's poems about her life in Vietnam begins to surface in the poems about Nga's life in America. Despite the chaotic times she lived in Vietnam, there was rarely confusion in her poems. Her voice spoke with acceptance. But when Nga moves to the States, a sense of poignancy, almost painful, arises. Her history displaced, she finds herself adrift in a new world where what was once evocative, even steadying, in her memories now becomes haunting. Her old ancestors - her values, her culture - have not been buried deep in their graves, and from those shallow graves they disturb rather than nourish.

In fact, both Wendy Larsen and Tran Thi Nga are women from cultures that have been forced from their traditional and parochial views of the world, where the old values were secure, grounding each person and stabilizing the future. Those secluded visions are broken and both women stand poised - as are most of us in the modern world - in a time of tremulous change and difficult decision. Their friendship acts as their guide to deciphering their past and to defining a new order of interrelationship. ❖

# East-West University Report and Narayana Gurukula News



From May 1st to May 31st of this year the East-West University Music Seminar filled Narayana Gurukula, Fernhill, with beautiful music. Musicians, both maestros and amateurs, came from North and South India, Singapore and the United States to give performances, to give and take lessons, to improvise together, to listen to Guru Nitya's lectures on music from around the world and to participate in the daily life of the Gurukula.

The seminar opened with the lighting of the oil lamp on the altar. Then Srimaty Padma Ponnampalam of Singapore played a composition in praise of Ganapaty on the vina. In India it is traditional to begin any new undertaking, from writing a book to starting a business, with a remembrance of Ganapaty, one of Hindu pantheon of deities. Like the Roman God Janus, who symbolized initiation into a new mode of life, Ganapaty represents the guiding principle at the crossroads of life, the light that shows the way to wisdom. Each of the Hindu deities has a stylized form of expression: they can be identified by their color, clothes, features, vehicles and objects they hold, each of which has a symbolic meaning. Ganapaty has the body of a

man and the head of an elephant. His big ears indicate a dedication to the pursuit of wisdom, listening attentively to truth. One of his tusks is broken which represents the tempering of the ego. Thus, beginning an activity with praise of Ganapaty is a way of tuning oneself to be open to truth, especially by restraining ones ego from getting in the way of hearing wisdom and practicing it.

After the invocation, Kumari Indira of Palghat and Srimaty Shailaja Asokan of Coimbatore played South Indian classical music on vina. The compositions followed the traditional vein of praising different symbolic aspects of the Divine.

Guru Nitya's classes began the next day with a focus on the music of Stockhausen and Paul Horn and a comparison of their music with Indian classical music. He noted that the goal of artistic expression should not be competition but the communication of ones own soul's deepest stir to the soul of another and that the purpose of the seminar was to share views and to help one another.

In the days that followed, many soul-stirring performances were offered by participants who ranged from the very young to the very old. Together they ex-

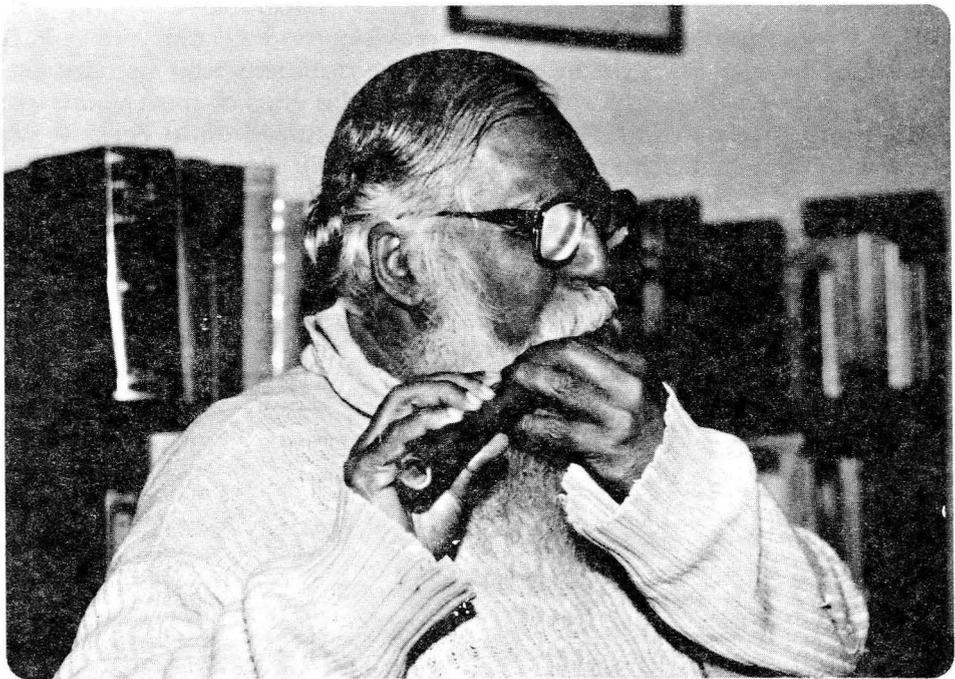
perienced that music can cross boundaries like those of age, language and culture, such as when the aged Sri Seshadri sang a hymn on Narayana Guru with so much love that he shed tears, carrying all his listeners with him in his high tide of emotion.

Throughout the course of the seminar, the skies were generous in giving enough rain to supply all the cooking and washing needs of the Gurukula, and many

friends cooperated to supply sufficient provisions to keep everyone fed. Several of the musicians who attended the seminar and a crop of fresh young students have continued on at Fernhill, learning traditional styles and experimenting with cross-overs between Western and Indian music and Northern and Southern styles of Indian music, continuing to enrich the days there with musical effusion. ❖



May 29, 1988  
Srimaty Shailajah Asokan



**Kṛṣṇa's Flute of Love and Joy  
Played by the Guru**



**May 17, 1988  
International Students Improvising Together**



May 29, 1988  
Sri S. Rajan and Party



May 22, 1988  
Indian Classical Dance Performance

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