

Categories of Indian Thought

NAMARŪPA

ISSUE N°6

HENOtheISM & HIVE-MINDS

DR. ROBERT E. SVOBODA

MY STUDIES WITH SRI KRISHNAMACHARYA

SRIVATSA RAMASWAMI

SRI NISARGADATTA

A TRIBUTE

UNDERSTANDING ISVARA

SWAMI TATTVAVIDANANDA
SARASWATI

INTERVIEWS

NAGA BABA RAMPURI
FRANCESCO CLEMENTE
ALEXIS KERSEY

SIMHA GANAPATI
GAJA LAKSHMI
DRAWINGS BY NARA ALLSOP

TAMIL NIGHT
PHOTOS BY ROBERT MOSES

Brahmamuhūrta—the hour of the gods—on January 14, 2007. This day was Thai Pongal—the Tamil harvest festival—and Makara Saṅkrānti, the day the sun moves to its northern course. The sacred mountain Aruṇācala can be seen rising behind the Ammani Ammal Gopuram (large northern gateway) with the Sinna Kattai Gopuram (small northern gateway) to its left. The brightly lit Vallala Gopuram (eastern gateway) at left looks toward the illuminated Kodistaampam Mandapam (central shrine flagpole). Barely peeping above the treetops light can be seen emanating from the kalashams over the Garbhagrham (central shrine)—the supreme inner sanctum of the swayambha, or self-born, lingam of Sri Arunachaleswarar Siva. Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, South India.



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NĀMARŪPA, *Categories of Indian Thought* is a journal that seeks to record, illustrate, and honor, as well as comment on, the many systems of knowledge, practical and theoretical, that have originated in India. Passed down through the ages, these systems have left tracks, paths already traveled that can guide us back to the Self—the source of all names [NĀMA] and forms [RŪPA].

NĀMARŪPA seeks to present articles that shed light on the incredible array of DARŚANAS, YOGAS, and VIDYĀS that have evolved over thousands of years in India's creatively spiritual minds and hearts. The publishers have created this journal out of a love for the knowledge that it reflects, and desire that its content be presented clearly and inspirationally, but without any particular agenda or sectarian bias. The aim is to permit contributors to present offerings that accurately represent their own traditions, without endorsement or condemnation. Each traditional perspective on reality is like a different branch on a vast tree of knowledge, offering diverse fruits to the discerning reader.

Though NĀMARŪPA begins life as a tender sprout, it will, as it grows, offer shade, shelter and sustenance to its readers and contributors alike, it is hoped. Now, though, it needs nurturing with articles, images, ideas and contributions. We invite you to support us in any way that you can. www.namarupa.org

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अ	•	a
आ	•	ā
इ	•	i
ई	•	ī
उ	•	u
ऊ	•	ū
ऋ	•	r̥
ॠ	•	r̄
ऌ	•	l̥
ॡ	•	l̄
ए	•	e
ऐ	•	ai
ओ	•	o
औ	•	au
अं	•	aṁ
अः	•	aḥ
क	•	ka
ख	•	kha
ग	•	ga
घ	•	gha
ङ	•	ṅa
च	•	ca
छ	•	cha
ज	•	ja
झ	•	jha
ञ	•	ña
ट	•	ṭa
ठ	•	ṭha
ड	•	ḍa
ढ	•	ḍha
ण	•	ṇa
त	•	ta
थ	•	tha
द	•	da
ध	•	dha
न	•	na
प	•	pa
फ	•	pha
ब	•	ba
भ	•	bha
म	•	ma
य	•	ya
र	•	ra
ल	•	la
व	•	va
श	•	śa
ष	•	ṣa
स	•	sa
ह	•	ha
क्ष	•	kṣa
त्र	•	tra
ज्ञ	•	jña

NĀMARŪPA

SIXTH ISSUE

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Cover photo

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Srivatsa Ramaswami

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S. K. Mullarpattan

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Raphael

Edwin Bryant

Joshua M. Greene

Claudia Turnbull

Swami Sivananda

Giant Durgā near Maḍurai, Tamil Nadu, South India.

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Temple tank, Kapaleśwar Temple, Mylapore, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, South India. January 10, 2007.

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Devotees bathing in the ocean at Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu, South India. This is the place where Śrī Rāma worshipped Lord Śiva in the form of a līṅgam made from sand by Sītā in order to expiate his sin of slaying a brahmin. Rāvaṇa, the demon king of Lanka, a grandson of Brahmā, was a brahmin in a previous incarnation. January 24, 2007.



AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCESCO CLEMENTE

by EDDIE STERN

In *Death and Fame*, one of Allen Ginsberg's final poems, he wrote: "When I die/ I don't care what happens to my body/ throw the ashes in the air, scatter'em in East River/ bury an urn in Elizabeth, New Jersey, B'Nai Israel Cemetery/ But I want a big funeral ..." He imagines a funeral of epic, anthemic proportions, listing each mourner. From family and friends, Rinpoches and lovers he conjures, "Super-fans, poetasters, ageing Beatniks & Deadheads, autograph-hunters, distinguished paparazzi, intelligent gawkers." Among the assembled and aggrieved sit the "artist Italian romantic realists schooled in mystic sixties India," a perfect description of his friend, the artist Francesco Clemente. Having released himself from the bonds of the rigid architectural schools of Italy, he became a self-taught painter, fleeing to India in 1973, and later traveling by land across Afghanistan. Creating an entirely visionary method of communicating archetypes and language through his paintings and drawings, Clemente has become one of the most well regarded iconoclast painters of his generation. India, indeed, played a large part in giving a voice, or perhaps an eye, to his expression of illusion and reality. Francesco Clemente's family and mine have lived next to each other in Greenwich Village, in New York City, for many years, and see each other on occasion. Although familiar with his work and the time he spent in India, I was unaware of the extraordinary teachers under whom he studied. On Halloween of 2005 we first began to speak of Krishnamacharya and his lineage. This interview, conducted a year later, is the follow up to our initial conversation.

ES: I was quite surprised when you told me last Halloween that when you lived in Madras, in the seventies, Krishnamacharya was your next-door neighbor. I'm very interested to hear about your early travels and life in India, and especially about your teachers.

FC: My earliest encounter was at age nineteen with a gentleman who lived in Delhi, past Kashmiri Gate, by the river. His name was R. P. Kaushic. Have you ever heard of him?

ES: I have heard the name, perhaps it was from you.



FC: Yes, he was a very innovative, very original teacher of the same generation as Rajneesh; they both were influenced by the hippie influx into India. I lived with him for a few months. We ate a simple meal once a day. There was no bathroom in the house; we had to use the public toilet in the slum and bathe at a friend's house every other day. That was my first trip to India and my first encounter with that world.

ES: I don't think many people have heard of Kaushic in the West.

FC: He taught what he called *darśan*

yoga and *darśan* means the yoga of perception, the yoga of witnessing. His ideas were as iconoclastic as those of Krishnamurti. He was close to that kind of approach. A very concise and open-ended approach to the contemplative practice.

ES: A fairly non-dualistic approach?

FC: Yes. But I was very lucky because I really didn't know anything back then. As an artist, you can only be interested in what truly matters to you. You can only desire to know what you feel is worth knowing. Being as unprepared as

Francesco Clemente, New York City, February 8, 2007.
Photograph by Stephan Crasneanski.

I was, the impact of those experiences was stronger, I imagine, than if I'd had any preconceived ideas of what I was going to encounter.

ES: It's like building a new vocabulary to express some feeling that you already have inside.

FC: Yes, I belong to that generation, the psychedelic generation. I did, you know, take LSD when I was nineteen years old. I was so unprepared to see what today would be called the deconstruction of the self and I didn't know there was a whole civilization

based on the deconstruction of the self. So to me it was very comforting to encounter, with the Hindu tradition, a key to explain all those experiences that I found hard to accept. Being an artist, I had an interest in the development of a vocabulary, a self-sustaining vocabulary of signs, of images. Somehow getting to know the oral traditions of India gave me more confidence in building such a vocabulary. To see that a process had been in place for endless time and that I could develop an appendix to that type of process was a very comforting element in my life.

ES: Do you feel that you slipped into the stream of oral tradition in India?

FC: I started to believe it was possible to build a vocabulary for contemplation that would have an effect on my mundane life.

ES: And you later spent time at the Ramana Maharishi Ashram, didn't you?

FC: I've always been fond of Ramana Maharishi, his silent teaching and patient gaze. But then in India if you just walk down the street there are always those who look into your eyes to find out if you "know." [Laughter] I think those are the real teachers. In the Hindu tradition the teacher is only going to talk if he cannot tell you everything just through the eyes. It's an idea that is very appealing to me as a painter: You can teach and be taught just through the eyes.

ES: That's something I recall from Elizabeth Avedon's small book *Francesco Clemente*. You spoke about the eye and then the single I also. Do those two relate at all?

FC: Yes ... it's a very seductive Hindu idea—the idea of a witness that we carry inside us, who can be a place of repose. It's a very economical and elegant idea: The *I* is the eye is the witness is the refuge.

ES: So where did you go from Delhi?

FC: Well then if we want to follow the trail of the teachers, then...

ES: We can follow any trail. We can follow a philosophical trail, it doesn't need to be linear.

FC: The part of India that I settled in was in the south, in Madras. I lived at the Theosophical Society, which had this wonderful compound in the middle

of the city with a banyan tree so old it had already been written about in the fifteenth century by a great Chinese traveler of that time. Back then the Theosophical Society was a place of transit for a lot of truly eccentric people who had an interest in the occult and in the acquisition of occult powers. In Madras I also met Desikachar; Krishnamacharya was also teaching there then, but not to foreigners.

ES: He wasn't seeing foreign students then?

FC: No.

ES: So it must have been early seventies.

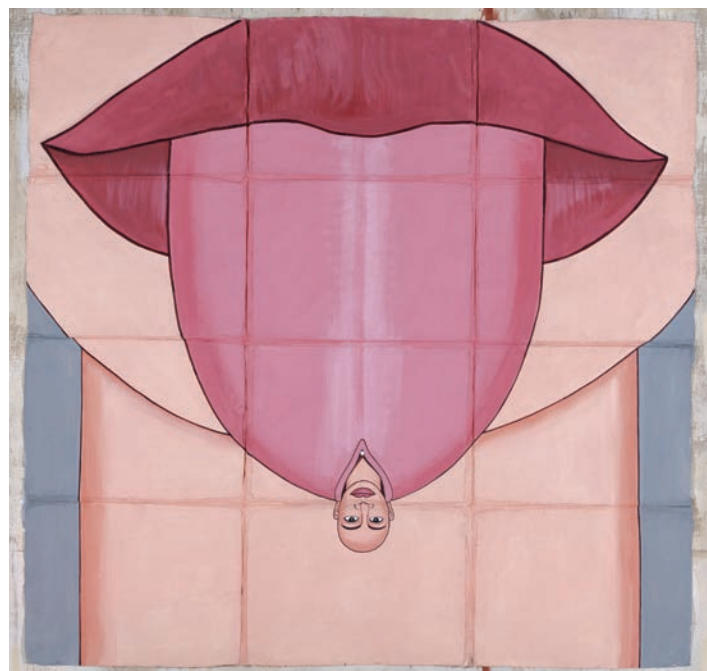
FC: Early seventies, yes. Well from Desikachar I received the ultimate yoga lesson. We had scheduled an hour one day and that day his mother passed away unexpectedly. And the hour was not rescheduled. He spent an hour with me and he said, "Francesco we have to adapt." That really is the ability to look at one's practice as an integral part of one's life. That ability is really what counts. He showed me that no part of his life was going to disrupt or be disrupted by any other. It was a silent, gentle lesson.

ES: Those are precious teachings, and indicative of so many experiences in India. Sometimes action is the true embodiment of teaching, of a learning experience, rather than advice dispensed through words.

FC: Ultimately I always felt an affinity for the idea that knowledge is a given, that knowledge is not the arrival point but the origin of everything we do. My favorite story in Hindu storytelling is the one about the ascetic who, after years and years of practice, gets the *darśan* of his god—Viṣṇu, in this case. The devotee asks Viṣṇu what he can do for him, and Viṣṇu says, "Just go and get me a glass of water." Do you remember this story?

ES: Yes, but tell it anyway. Some readers may not know it, and it's a great story.

FC: The ascetic goes to the well to get the water, and he meets a beautiful girl who has difficulty carrying her water home. He helps her out and meets the father of the girl, who is a very erudite scholar. They start talking about spiritual matters and become friends. A younger



Five Senses, 1990.

daughter shows up and falls in love with the ascetic; they get married, build a house, have children, and live happily for many years. One year, when the monsoon comes, everything gets washed away, and everyone gets lost in different directions. The ascetic finds himself again at the feet of the old tree where he had met Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu says, “It really took you a while to get me a simple glass of water!” I always felt an affinity for the idea that there is nothing to learn, that you already “know” and that all that you can do is to walk away from knowledge.

ES: Walk away from collecting knowledge?

FC: Walk away from this original knowledge that generates all of our endeavors. Walk away, and hopefully, from time to time, walk back to it.

ES: Yes, it’s a paradox.

FC: It’s a good antidote to what you are trained for in our society, which is to acquire more. There is nothing to gain here; there is one spot on the game board that says, “Nothing to be gained here.” There is a beautiful Sufi story about an ascetic who spent his entire life in terrible hardship, sleeping naked on bare rock. At the end of his life he receives a gift from God. The gift—to him who has been naked all his life—is a suit made with just bits and pieces of worn cloth, just like a harlequin. The ascetic says, “After a lifetime of devotion, this is what I get?!” [Laughter] The narrator of the story says, “So it happens to many ascetics that the gift they receive is never quite what they expected.”

ES: No. It’s very funny that, even with all the yoga and meditation practices and performing *pūjā*, that little subtle idea remains that you are actually going to get something at the end of it, that you’re going to get knowledge, that you’re going to get devotion, even transformation into something better, more pure. It is very subtle. I also wonder what happens in the West, because we’re entirely unconditioned for some of the basic ideas, the basic assumptions that the Indian philosophies rest upon ...

FC: But this is not a question of West or East, it’s a question of human nature. The human need to make everything tangible, solid. A contemplative practice is meant to make everything fluid again, fragile, immaterial.

ES: Is painting a contemplative practice for you?

FC: I believe it is, yes. I believe it does share a lot of the characteristics of a contemplative

practice. It implies a great deal of focusing and concentrating. It also implies a great deal of letting go and opening. A detachment and impartiality towards the discreet elements that come into the making of an object that you don’t control. It implies a sober lifestyle. You have to have a moderate lifestyle if you want to work properly in a clear-minded way. And the work does have an effect on your mundane self. This other reality somehow affects what you are. All these are the characteristics of a contemplative practice. And, like a contemplative practice, it does give you, once a day, the fear that you went through life without properly living it. [Laughter] That you missed the real life. This may be a particularly Western issue: how unique we are. And how one’s duty and opportunity is to express one’s own character, one’s own unique view. There is ground for conflict here, for doubts, for fears. But, then again, when you get too close to so-called real life, you find

that is even more fictional than art or contemplation. You find out you didn’t miss anything.

ES: All you have to do is look to politics or media to see that.

FC: Oh, well, let’s not even go there.

ES: What do you think about the individual expressing his own character?

FC: One of my favorite quotes from the *Bhagavad Gītā* is, “It’s better to die following your own nature than to live in fear trying to fulfill someone else’s nature.” So it’s not really East or West, it’s really part of the human experience that you are given a certain conditioning and a certain character and you have to live with that, and make the best you can of it. This is why we love the Hindu tradition, because of all of these paradoxes we are confronted with—on the one hand this image of immobility and original knowledge and original uncontaminated being that we carry within ourselves, and on the

other hand the deepest human desire: the desire for a narrative—we all want a narrative. And interesting narratives imply conflict. A narrative without conflict is boring—this is why I get very diffident about presentations of yoga or other contemplative practices as “conflict free.” When I hear about peace I get mad, because there is no such thing as peace; there is always war. There is always war. It’s either war with the other, or it is war within. If you are wise, it’s war within.

ES: The world does seem to exist in a constant state of tension, but if there wasn’t the tension, then what need of the world to exist? And how would we even begin to think about a contemplative life without that tension. One thing about the Indian tradition, or the Hindu tradition, going back to what you said about the *Gītā*, that I find encouraging is that if you look to the saints, like Nityananda, Ramana Maharshi, or Neem Karoli Baba, all of



Early Morning Raga, 1996-7.

their realizations are unique. They all came to their realizations by expressing their own natures. There is no cookie cutter formula and so I find that encouraging, we all have an individual nature.

FC: It's very encouraging, it's very fascinating. There is a commonplace view of oral traditions or contemplative traditions or art in a traditional society as static and unchanging and it's just not like that at all. There is constant change and development. Just think of your teacher [Pattabhi Jois], and Iyengar and Desikachar. They all come from the same lineage and how radically and uniquely different they are, that's how it is. I mean, in a way the contemplative path is the only dynamic path, it's the path where there is real change. In the mundane life there is just a limited number of plots that you can be part of. They say there are only thirty-two possible plots in the movies. In life, there may be fewer than that.

ES: I don't know if you saw an article by William Dalrymple in *The New Yorker* a while back, about the oral traditions in Rajasthan.

FC: No, I didn't see it.

ES: He did some research about a particular group of people who pass on a story of 100,000 verses orally. The people who recite the story become possessed by the deity Papuji. Now the tradition is starting to fade a little bit. Maybe ten or fifteen years ago, one man who was concerned about preserving the poem sent one of the storytellers to an adult education class to learn how to read, so that he could record the story. As the storyteller became literate, he quickly began losing the power of his memory. He had to consult his diary in order to remember the tale. The very fact of literacy decreased the power of memory.

FC: That is so interesting.

ES: I felt that I interrupted the direction you were going in earlier when I asked where you went after Delhi. I'd be interested to know if there was anything more you wanted to say about the vocabulary and the mundane life and the contemplative life.

FC: Well, what is interesting about all these traditions is how mild and yet how effective they are. To engage in a

contemplative practice is a humbling experience because you find out how a tiny movement within yourself can create a huge effect because there's really not that much of yourself there. It's a very irritating experience to find out how little is there, and how little it takes to change it around. When we are engaged in creating a great narrative of conflict and adventure for ourselves, to find out that nothing is really a big deal can be a very shocking experience.

ES: Can you give me a small example?

FC: I thought about this while reading Thich Nhat Hahn, who proposes these ridiculously minimal techniques—but they all work! He is the most irritating teacher to me! In India you encounter disconcerting simplicity all the time. Beautiful gestures really, ways of talking about breathing that are so simple, so beautiful. I know it doesn't explain anything to say beautiful. But I remember Desikachar and I remember the Mahant of the Vishvanath temple in Benaras talking about breathing, making a vague gesture with the hand and telling what one is supposed to do, just waving the hand in the air. These

images really will stay with me forever; they are so elegant ... I can't find another word ...

ES: They're elegant, evocative ...

FC: There is nothing romantic about them; they are real, but so subtle, so subtle, you know. And so mild, if you want, but this mildness can really move mountains. That's another thing I always loved about India, which has to do with my activity as a painter; everything really seems to come out of a sense of exhaustion. [Laughter] The human experience is exhausting, and when you are exhausted, maybe you come out with a reasonable conclusion or a reasonable impulse.

ES: Like you just give up.

FC: Yes. Then there are teachers I regret not seeing. The main one is Nisargadatta Maharaj, I love those teachings. I did meet Krishnamurti. He used to come to Madras every Christmas for a week and sit on the other side of the river from the Theosophical Society, where he had grown up, and give teachings. All the original people who had taken him to England in the thirties and who were all now in their nineties would come and

hear him and tell each other how they didn't understand a word he was saying. It was all very touching. I was always attracted to the iconoclastic teachers. But they can be misleading if you come from the West, because they generally assume that you do already have a contemplative practice and that you are trapped in it and that you have to throw it away to actually "get it." But none of us has been trained that traditional way and so we are always one step behind. I think a lot of misunderstanding can arise from that.

ES: I hadn't thought about that, but it's a very good point. Often, when foreigners come, all the talk of the guru tradition means nothing to them. Their truth seeking is of a different type, coming from a different side of the street.

FC: The lineage of Nisargadatta continues in Bombay. You may have met Ramesh Balsekar?

ES: I haven't met him. Have you?

FC: Yes, I did go recently, the last time I was in India, and saw what he does. Again I witnessed a very moving situation. These are miraculous situations. There is a gentleman who opens the door of

his apartment in upper-class Bombay at nine in the morning; a few people gather and listen. And the web of coincidences that I remember from my youth in India is still in place. All you have to do is make room and time for this web to activate itself and then there you are. I remember coming out of my hotel in Bombay one morning—and Bombay is how many million people? Twelve million people?—a taxi driver stopped by and asked, "Ramesh Baba?" And I go, "Yeah." "I know where he lives." What are the odds? I'm not going to a stadium with a million people; there are twenty people in the room. So what are the odds for something like that to happen?

ES: Only in India ...

FC: There are twenty people in the room. Today is even better than thirty years ago when you had one particular kind of person, wearing the same uniform, going round India on these trails. Today it's like an episode of Star Trek when creatures from different planets materialize in one room. I mean each person comes from a vastly different background. It goes from the comical to the enlightening. You have a





Francesco Clemente and his wife, Alba, in Varanasi, 1974.

inspired by the little Ramakrishna ashram booklets, but I found out that in the twenties there were a lot of books made in that format. One of my closest friends in New York, Raymond Foye had access to the poets, the beat poets whom I admired, and when I lived in Madras he came and tutored my daughter. And I had a friend in Madras with a press who was making all my art books in Kalakshetra, a dance school started by Theosophists in the 1920s. So we decided to make this publishing house. Our titles were all the beat poets and then somehow secular mystics from the 1930s in Europe, people like Rene Daumal and Simone Weil. So it was a nice dialogue between the beats, American contemporary mystics, and the 1930 European ones.

ES: All while living in India.

FC: All typeset by a typesetter who didn't know English. Each time there was a mistake to correct, he would make another one that wasn't there before. We published many New York poets, and we even published the collected writings of William De Kooning.

ES: New York also has attracted many teachers over the years. Are there any here that are dear to you?

FC: Kyabje Rimpoché Gelek is an incarnate Lama in the Ganden Kargyu (Gelukpa) tradition. He is a teacher of great erudition and great modesty. He has a heart. He also has a sense of humor. Once, as I was complaining about my skills at always finding new excuses to delay a serious commitment to a contemplative practice, he smiled, "Don't worry," he said. "After all, Francesco, what's the rush?" 🌸

bit of everything ...

ES: Did you say at one point you had spent time with a Sufi teacher also?

FC: No.

ES: A Sikh or a Sufi?

FC: No. I love that literature, the Sufi literature. They are the craziest teachers, they definitely look the part, the Sufi teachers—they have the wildest look!

The closest I got to that view was when I met a *baul sādhu*—the most handsome man I ever saw—who, shaking his hips lightly, pointed at them and declared, "Maximum spirituality with minimum movement."

ES: Could you tell me a little about the Hanuman Books* series?

FC: Yes. The Hanuman Books were

*The Hanuman Books series is a collection of forty-eight miniature handmade books featuring American and European poets and philosophers, created by Francesco FC and Raymond Foye, edited by George Scrivani and printed in Madras.

MY STUDIES WITH ŚRĪ KRISHNAMACHARYA

SRIVATSA RAMASWAMI



Śrī Krishnamacharya during class at his residence in R.K. Puram. Photograph by Dr. Radhakrishnan.



WHENEVER ŚRĪ KRISHNAMACHARYA taught me, prayer came first. Classes started with a meditative prayer (*dhyāna śloka*) to Lord Viṣṇu for the success of the session, followed by prayers to Lord Hayagrīva, the repository of all Vedic knowledge, and to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Next would be a prayer appropriate to the topic at hand—to Patañjali if it was a yoga program, to Bādarāyaṇa for a program on *Brahma Sūtras*, to Kapila for a *Sāṃkhya* class, or the appropriate peace chant (*śānti pāṭha*) for *upaniṣadic vidyās* and Vedic chanting programs. There would always be a *Pūrva-śānti* (beginning peace invocation), and following tradition, class would always end with a peace chant called *Uttara-śānti*, normally the surrender śloka to Lord Nārāyaṇa found in *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*, and the forgiveness or *kṣamāpāna-stotra*, if it was Vedic chanting class. The way my guru maintained *añjali-mudrā* while saying the prayer was a point of study. He said that in this *mudrā* the palms should be slightly cupped while keeping the hands together. There should be a hollow between the palms sufficient to hold an imaginary lotus or your heart in a gesture of loving offering to the *dhyeya*, the object of your meditation.

The arms should be close to the body but not touching the body, and the folded hands, inclined by about thirty degrees, should be held in front of the heart or the sternum. With a straight back and head slightly bowed, Śrī Krishnamacharya would be a dignified picture of peace and devotion.

In this article I would like to focus on what I studied with my guru, Śrī Krishnamacharya, rather than writing a historical account of him. Enough articles and books have been written about his greatness; I think it is important to know what he taught. It is clear that he taught different subjects to different people differently at different times. Here is an account of what I learned from him.

I studied with Pandit Krishnamacharya (as he was known in Madras at that time) from 1955 to 1988. Of course there were a few breaks, many times brief, sometimes longer, but on the whole my study with him was nearly continuous for that entire time. After every break I would go back to him and, without hesitation, he would give me time to continue with the studies. Normally, I had two to three sessions per week, but there were occasions when I had the privilege of going to him twice a day—

for *āsana* practice in the morning and for chanting or the study of texts in the evening. I never got bored. Every class was unique; there was always something interesting, something profound.

My studies with Krishnamacharya can be broadly classified into three groups. There was a longish study of Haṭha Yoga, following his now famous *Vinyāsa Krama*, including individual and specific therapeutic applications. I learned several hundred vinyāsas built around very important classic poses. There were preparatory vinyāsas, then movements within the *āsana* itself, and *pratikriyās* or counter poses. My first few years of study were focused on general *āsana* practice. I studied in a small group made up of the members of my family gathered in a large room in our house. Śrī Krishnamacharya came to our house in the morning almost daily to teach. He taught different *āsanas* to different members of our family, depending upon the age and condition of each individual. There was my eight-year-old kid sister, energetic and supple. I was about sixteen. My brother was around twenty and, at that time, in need of particular attention. Śrī Krishnamacharya gave him special assistance. Then there were my thirty-five-year-old mother and my forty-five-year-old father to complete the group. While there were some *āsanas* and movements that all of us practiced, there were many that were different—particular and appropriate to each individual. Śrī Krishnamacharya had great skills of observation. He had a booming voice and a certain firmness and authority in his instructions. It was always fascinating to see him teach so many people differently at the same time, a feat in itself.

My father had my *upanāyanam*, a ceremony for initiation into Vedic studies, performed when I was ten. At that age, I learned some *āsanas* at school, well-known postures such as *sarvāṅgāsana*, *padmāsana*, *matsyāsana*, and a few others. But on the very first day of my study with Śrī Krishnamacharya, I learned a yoga practice so different from what I had been taught and how I had seen others in India do yoga. He asked us to stand in *tadāsana*—standing with

both feet together. After some wait in the pose, he asked us to keep our heads down and slowly raise our arms, inhaling slowly with a “rubbing sensation” in the throat. “Inhaaaaaaaaaaale,” he said, “raise your arms slowly overhead; interlock your fingers and turn them outward.” To this day, that is how I start my *āsana* practice and how I teach a class. It was the first time I had ever heard someone instructing to move the limbs with the breath. “Exhaaaaaaaaaale,” he said, “lower the arms with a hissing sound in the throat. The hands should touch the sides as you complete your exhalation.” It was so new and exciting. The seeds of Vinyāsa Krama were sown in me on that day with that movement.

Learning the various vinyāsas was a lot of fun. Because I had done *āsana* practice when I was even younger, the learning was smooth. Integrating the breath with movements and keeping the mind closely following the breath made a profound impact on the practice. If yoga meant union, then the union of mind and body was easily achieved by using the breath as the harness to unite them. In addition, this initial training got one comfortable with the breath in preparation for more involved *prāṇāyāma* and sowed the seeds of *dhāraṇā*, or meditation, with the breath spot (*prāṇa-sthāna*) as the focus of attention.

In the summer of 1958 or so, I went with my parents to Śrī Krishnamacharya’s house in Gopalapuram. My guru’s family had just moved to Madras from Mysore. We met his gracious wife, his eldest son, Srinivasan, his younger son Sribhashyam, and the last daughter, Shobha. His second son, Śrī Desikachar, had come for summer holidays from Mysore, where he was doing undergraduate study in engineering. His father introduced me to him.

My father developed a particular liking for Srinivasan. One day, in his father’s presence and at his request, Srinivasan showed us *śīrṣāsana*. He stood in the pose for well over fifteen minutes, absolutely motionless, with exceptionally slow breathing. It was perhaps two breaths per minute for the entire duration, instead of the

normal fifteen to sixteen breaths per minute. My father used to like talking to Srinivasan; one day, after conversing with him, my father mentioned that he was a worthy son of the great yogi Śrī Krishnamacharya.

I COMPLETED MY UNDERGRADUATE work in electrical engineering in 1960. By then I had been Śrī Krishnamacharya’s student for about five years. I had learned many of the important poses such as *sarvāṅgāsana*, *padmāsana*, *vajrāsana*, and *dhanurāsana* plus several *prāṇāyāma* methods. But it was time to take a job. As an electrical engineer, I got offers to work as a trainee in a government-owned, lignite-based electric-generation company about 150 miles from Madras or in a hydroelectric plant in the hilly regions of Nilgiris, about 350 miles from where I lived. One day as my teacher was leaving for home after teaching classes in our house, I told him that I was leaving Madras to take a job. He immediately turned to my father and asked if he would find a job for me in Madras itself. He indicated that his son Desikachar had also graduated in engineering and would probably find a job in Madras. My father, who was a founding partner in a leading stock brokerage firm, talked to some of his friends and arranged a few interviews for me. I took a job in a motorcycle company. But for my guru’s timely intervention, I would have missed a lifetime opportunity of studying with a great soul.

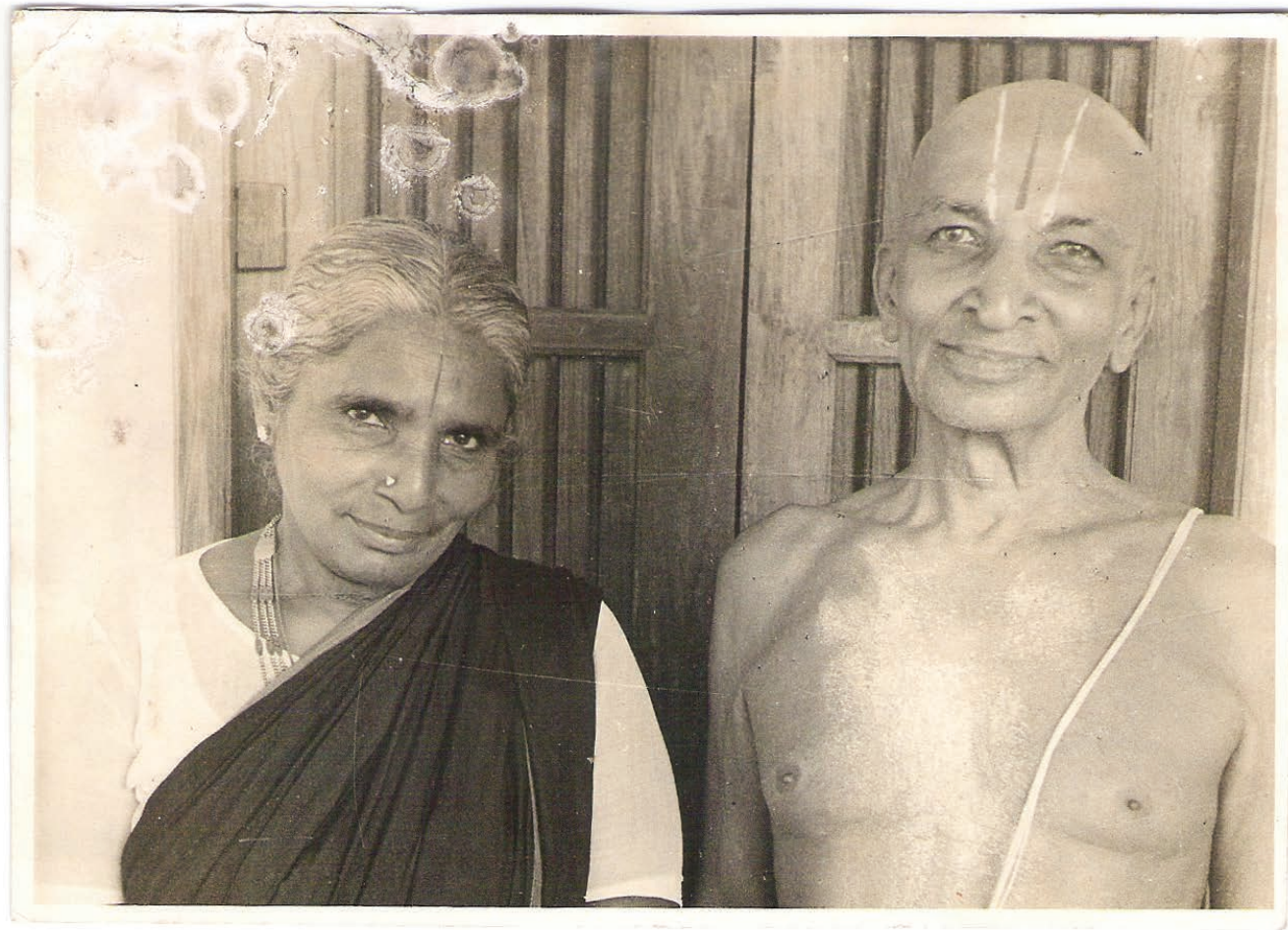
Śrī Desikachar’s arrival in Madras brought about a few momentous changes. He soon started teaching, still working as an engineer in his outside job. One day, in a dramatic development, Śrī Krishnamacharya told my father and me that he was stopping teaching (he was in his mid-seventies at that time) and that we could study with his sons. I was sent to Desikachar and my father became Sribhashyam’s student. It was a different experience studying with Desikachar, who was more or less my own age. It soon became apparent that he was going to become an extraordinary teacher. Even as he stuck to the basics of Krishnamacharya’s



Śrī Krishnamacharya.
Photograph by Srivatsa Ramaswami.

teaching—the vinyāsas, the breathing, the counter poses, and rest pauses—he was more accessible and communicative. It was a great experience studying *āsanas* with him. Soon he added several *āsanas* and vinyāsas and *prāṇāyāmas* to my practice.

After a while, another dramatic change took place. Desikachar asked me if I was interested in learning Vedic chanting from his father, as he was going to start studying with him. Before meeting Śrī Krishnamacharya, I had studied Sanskrit and Vedic chanting for almost four years with a Vedic scholar in my house. With this scholar I used to learn chanting with my father almost every morning before dawn. We learned to chant the entire *Sūrya-namaskāra*, taking about an hour, and the *Rudram Camakam*, the Vedic prayer to Śiva. And there were the *Sūrya-namaskāra*, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, and *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*. Yes, I was interested in chanting with my guru, but I was surprised. How could a yoga teacher teach Vedic chanting? I had always found that Haṭha Yoga teachers had no background at all in chanting or old texts, but had expertise only in the physical aspects of yoga. Anyway, I said that I was interested, and the next day Desikachar told me I could join him on an auspicious day chosen by his father. Desikachar also said that henceforth I would study both chanting and yoga with his father, as Śrī Krishnamacharya said that he did not want me to have two teachers. He himself would teach me both *āsanas* and Vedic chanting. Desikachar and I learned chanting together for several years, but my *āsana* classes with my guru were one-on-one.



Śrī Krishnamacharya and his wife after class at his Mandavelli residence in the late 1960s. Photograph by Srivatsa Ramaswami.

THE CHANTING EXPERIENCE WITH MY guru was extraordinary, even though previously I had had considerable chanting practice. The clarity and depth he brought to his chanting were unique. We learned chanting the traditional way. He would teach one phrase that was then repeated twice by the student. Then on to the next phrase, and so on. This process would go on for an hour or so. Any correction required by way of pronunciation or *svaras* (notes) would be given right away. The same material was repeated for several days, maybe fifteen to twenty times. Then the teacher and the student would chant the entire portion several times. The next portion was then taken up for study. It normally took about one hundred hours of learning and practicing to complete one hour of chanting. If the student then wanted to memorize the portion, he would chant it another hundred times; this is how chanting is taught in Veda *pāṭhaśālas*, or Vedic chanting schools. I do not now remember the chronology of the chants I learned from my guru.

One of the first chants was *Sūrya-namaskāra*, or *Sun Salutation*. It is the first chapter in the *Āraṇyaka* (forest) portion of *Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda*. Both my teacher's and our family tradition was the same—*Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda*—and that certainly helped.

Svādhyāya, or, according to my guru, study of one's own Veda, is an important ingredient of yoga. The word *svādhyāya* itself is a Vedic term. There is a chapter called *Svādhyāya-prakarana* in *Yajur Veda* that tells about the efficacy of study and chanting of the Vedas, including the chanting of the great *Gāyatrī-mantra*. Reference to *svādhyāya* as a duty can be found in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*—“*svādhyāyāt mā pramādaḥ*” and “... *ca svādhyāya-pravacane ca*”—indicating that one should chant and study the Vedas and also teach how to chant the Vedas. The most important chant that Krishnamacharya taught was the famous *Sūrya-namaskāra*, also known as *Aruṇa Prapāṭhaka*. It consists of 132 paragraphs in thirty-two sections and is said to be the longest chapter

(paragraph wise) in the Vedas. It is chanted mostly on Sundays, early in the morning around dawn and takes about one hour to chant. I had the privilege of studying and chanting with my guru on innumerable Sundays at his house. In my last class with him, in 1988, we chanted *Sūrya-namaskāra* together. He was in bed, incapacitated after a fall, but with a booming voice he chanted the entire chapter from memory. That day he blessed me and wished me well. Since that time I have chanted these mantras almost regularly.

I have chanted this Vedic portion in several Hindu temples in the U.S. and at public places in Austin and Houston, Texas. I would chant one section, at the end of which many participants would physically do one *sūrya-namaskāra*, as they had learned it. One by one every section is chanted, followed by a *namaskāra*. In all there are thirty-two *namaskāras* interspersed with the mantras. For health it is recommended to turn toward the sun deity (*ārogyam bhāskarāt icchet*) while doing the *sūrya-*

Śrī Krishnamacharya chanting.



namaskāra. These mantras, when chanted aloud and with understanding, cleanse the body and the mind internally. There are some beautiful passages—poetic and profound—in this *prakaraṇa*. The famous *Gāyatrī* and the declaration of the immortality of the soul (*amṛtam puruṣa*) are some of the mantras found in it.

MY GURU TAUGHT SEVERAL OTHER sections of Vedic chanting: *Svādhyāya-prakaraṇa*, also known as *Kuṣmāṇḍa-homa*, extols the efficacy of Vedic mantras; *Citti-sruk*, a chapter containing a beautiful meditation on “the light,” *tattva*; *Pravargya-brāhmaṇa*, the three chapters of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, followed by *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*. He also taught three chapters of the *Taittirīya Kāthaka*, the source of the famous *Kaṭhopaniṣad*. It would take about ten hours to chant it all. I think I have spent more than 1,500 hours learning and chanting these mantras with Śrī Krishnamacharya.

I also learned to chant the *Yoga Sūtras*; I like to chant the *Sūtras*. One day I was chanting the *Sūtras* and also a Vedic Śiva chant when a Sanskrit scholar told me that my chanting was very good. I then bought my first tape recorder and taped the *Sūtras*; I used the recordings to make improvements. Then I had a final version. A friend of mine suggested that, since yoga was becoming popular, I should explore the possibilities of making an audiocassette, and then took me to a leading recording company. They heard the tape and appeared impressed, but the marketing department poured cold water on our enthusiasm, saying that because I was an unknown entity, marketing was going to be a problem. They then suggested that I might try to do some programs over the national radio station so that people would get to know about me. I got the opportunity to give a talk in the Sanskrit program slot on *Yoga Sūtras*. I mentioned this to my guru and sought his blessings. He asked me to close the door of his room, listened to my tape of the *Sūtras*, and blessed me, saying that it was very good. The program, broadcast over the national radio station

in Madras at prime time, went well. The station then offered me more programs. In the course of the next ten years I did almost thirty programs in Sanskrit. I would consult my guru before several programs, and he was always enthusiastic and encouraging. For some talks he would dictate a lot of material. For a program on *Upaniṣad Kāvya*s he dictated an entire talk in Sanskrit. Other programs I did included *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*, Sun Salutation, wedding vows, *prāṇāyāma*, meditation, and *Sad-vidyā* from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.

After all these efforts, a fledgling record company offered to produce an audiocassette on the *Yoga Sūtras*—which did not do well in the market. The company, however, offered to do another recording, as they liked my chanting. They asked me to recite *Lalitā Sahasranāma*, a very popular purāṇic prayer. There are thousands of devotees who recite this prayer every day in South India. Since I was not familiar with the text, I took a few months to study it and record it. The recording had a very good response, and from then on, for the next twenty years, I recorded all the chants I had learned from my guru, such as *Sūrya-namaskāra*, *Svādhyāya Prakaraṇa*, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* and other prayers, including the *sahasranāmas* of different deities like Viṣṇu, Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Subrahmaṇya, Durgā, Gāyatrī, Añjaneya, Rāghavendra, and Hariharaputra. I also recorded the complete *Sundara Kāṇḍa* (in ten volumes!) of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, running close to about 3,000 śloka. In all I made about forty recordings, several of them still selling about twenty years after they were produced. This was all possible because of the excellent grounding and encouragement given to me by my guru, Śrī Krishnamacharya.

Mantra yoga was a very important and integral part of Śrī Krishnamacharya’s yoga. Chanting, or *mantra parāyaṇa*, especially of Vedic and other purāṇic mantras, is practiced by hundreds of thousands of Bhakti Yogis. When Sanskrit mantra portions are recited with an understanding of their meaning, the mind achieves an excellent one-pointedness, called *ekāgratā*, an

important goal of Rāja Yoga. *Mantra Japa*, or repetition of the same short mantra such as the *Gāyatrī* or *Praṇava*, the Śiva or Nārāyaṇa mantras, over and over again, helps to reinforce devotional fervor and the *ekāgratā* in the yogī. *Mantra Dhyāna* has similar effects. Mantra Yoga and Bhakti Yoga were very important ingredients in Krishnamacharya’s yoga; every yoga school would do well to add this dimension to the yogic topics they teach. Vedic chanting or *svādhyāya* continues to be an important part of yoga practice.

DURING THE LONG, LONG YEARS OF MY study with my guru, he seldom made any mention of his past, his family, his studies, his experiences, or his former students. Except for a rare mention of his brother-in-law, he did not refer to any earlier students. Hence, I was completely unaware of his background. There is a saying in India, “Never investigate the origin of a sage (*ṛṣi*) or a river.” I was happy simply to attend his classes, listen to him, and learn. I did not know for a very long time what his credentials were. But when, soon after the chanting classes started, he indicated that we should study the texts of yoga and related subjects, I immediately grabbed the opportunity, not even wondering what he was going to teach.

Coming from a *smārta* brahmin family, I had a rudimentary familiarity with the *Upaniṣads* and the advaitic approach to Vedānta. So when Krishnamacharya started teaching some of the *Upaniṣad vidyās* he thought I should know, I was thrilled. He started with *Sad-Vidyā* (*Study of the Reality*), a chapter from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* of *Sāma Veda*, and navigated through the entire text. It is about the source of everything, knowing which everything becomes known. It is Brahman, the ultimate, non-changing principle and hence the only reality. The *vidyā* also emphasizes that the individual Self and the Brahman are one and the same (*Tat Tvam Asi*). Of course, being an exponent of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, his interpretation of the *Mahāvākya*—the Great Saying—was

somewhat different from the advaitic interpretation, but that there is one and only one ultimate reality is an assertion common to both interpretations, in contrast to the dualism of Yoga and Sāṃkhya.

Subsequently, other *Upaniṣads* were taught. *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* of the *Atharva Veda* was taught in detail. The four stages of individual consciousness as the manifestations of the only Self was emphasized, and the four aspects of Praṇava—the ‘a,’ ‘u,’ ‘m’ and finally the fourth stage, the stage of immortality represented symbolically by the mantra *Om*—were explained. The terms used in the text—*vaiśvānara*, *taijasa*, *prājña* and the *turiya*—were considered identical with *Aniruddha*, *Pradyumna*, *San̄karṣaṇa* and finally *Paravāsudeva*, the ultimate reality, following the *Bhāgavata* or *Vaiṣṇavite* approach. I learned a lot comparing the *Advaitic* and *Viśiṣṭādvaitic* interpretations, seeing their similarities and the differences between them.

Similarly, when he taught the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, the difference in interpretation of *ānandamaya* was very interesting.

He also taught me the first eight *sūtras* of *Brahma Sūtra*. One day he mentioned that he would teach the whole Vedānta from the advaitic point of view if I wanted, but added that, while the advaitic view might be intellectually challenging, it could never be satisfying. He taught *Praśna Upaniṣad*, *Mundaka Upaniṣad*, *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad*, and certain important *vidyās* from *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads*, such as *Pañcāgni Vidyā*, *Prāṇa Vidyā*, *Bhūma Vidyā*, *Dahara Vidyā*, *Śaṇḍilya Vidyā*, *Pratardana Vidyā* and several others. He covered several chapters from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, and *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad*. All these studies took several years. My guru said that to understand Vedānta, one should study several of the *Upaniṣad vidyās*, as they answer different questions that arise about the same ultimate reality.

ŚRĪ KRISHNAMACHARYA WANTED SOME of us to study yoga texts in considerable depth as well. The *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali was the centerpiece of our yoga studies. Anything said or practiced that is inconsistent with the teachings of the *Yoga Sūtras* should be rejected, he said. He first taught us to chant the *Sūtras* correctly and then went on to teach them, word by word, giving the meaning and nuance of each word, its derivation, the generic and the contextual meaning, and then the concept behind each of the *sūtras*. This took a considerable amount of time. He said that the *Yoga Sūtras* address three different levels of yogis: the highest, the mid-level, and the beginner.

The first chapter is for the most evolved yogi, someone on the level of a *Yogārūḍha* of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a yogī who can get into *samādhi* by dint of the yoga *sādhana*s of his previous birth. Such a yogī is in the final stages of his yogic journey, riding on the back



Śrī Krishnamacharya being honored by Srivatsa Ramaswami’s father at his house on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.

of the yogic horse on the royal path to ultimate salvation.

The beginning-level yogi, the *manda adhikārī*, would do well to start with Patañjali’s Kriyā Yoga as explained in the beginning of the second chapter. This Kriyā Yoga by itself does not lead to *kaivalya*—true freedom—but prepares the yogi to be able to get into samādhi, the condition necessary for yogic achievement. He can be compared to a beginning rider who wants to mount a horse—here the horse of yoga. Such a person is described as “*yogāsurukṣu*,” one who is desirous of doing yoga.

The intermediate-level yogi does the more involved Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, the more comprehensive eight-limbed yoga. Aṣṭāṅga Yoga not only prepares the yogi but also leads him through the various *siddhis*, up to and including up to the understanding of the Self, the mother of all siddhis.

Śrī Krishnamacharya would point out that, in Kali Yuga, the main or the only means of spiritual salvation is surrender to the Lord, or *Īśvarapraṇidhāna*. He remarked that Īśvarapraṇidhāna is mentioned in all the three levels of yoga, viz., *Nirodha* Yoga of the first chapter; and Kriyā Yoga and Aṣṭāṅga Yoga of the second and the third chapters. Surrender to the Lord, or the appropriate *Īśvarārādhana* (worship of the Lord), such as *pūjā* in Kriyā Yoga, doing Aṣṭāṅga Yoga with a sense of total surrender to the Lord, or constant meditation on Īśvara with a sense of devotion for the highest level—each forms a complete Īśvarapraṇidhāna practice in yoga.

As a Bhakti Yogī, my guru was not particularly in favor of some of the samādhis, such as *asamprajñātasamādhi* (samādhi without qualities). “What is there in asamprajñātasamādhi?” he would ask. He implied that the idea of salvation during one’s lifetime, like the advaita vedāntin’s *jīvanmukta* stage or the similar asamprajñāta stage of the yogī, were not goals that would interest a yogī like himself. Rather what was meaningful was to meditate on the Lord (*Bhagavad-dhyāna*) all one’s life, so that the yogī, when he passes away, reaches *Vaikunṭha*, the abode of the Lord, and transcends the cycle of *saṁsāra*.

It was his opinion that in Kali Yuga the most important *yama* was *brahmacārya*. However, here the interpretation of brahmacārya is not complete celibacy, but sex within the bounds of marriage, as propounded in several texts like *Sūta Saṁhitā* of *Skanda Mahā-Purāṇa*. For a *brahmacārī*, or one in the student stage of life, complete celibacy should be practiced. But there are many yoga practitioners who wish to be celibate all their lives, but it is just that—a wish. They are attracted by the ultimate goal of yoga like Kaivalya and, following the yoga theory of Patañjali, would like to be total celibates all their lives. But a mere wish is not sufficient grounds to remain without marriage, according to my guru, quoting the *Dharma Śāstras*. Everyone should marry after the student life. Only one who is spiritually evolved and is a *naiṣṭhika* brahmacārī—a complete celibate—can take to *sannyāsa*, the celibate life of a renunciate. A naiṣṭhika brahmacārī is one who is a celibate in “thought, speech, and deed.” Thus mere abstinence is not sufficient cause to remain unmarried. Several religions induct many youngsters into celibate orders. Even though, through strict practice and discipline, many manage to practice abstinence all their lives, they cannot be called naiṣṭhika brahmacāris, a prerequisite for sannyāsa—lifelong celibacy. Only a person who does not even dream of sex can qualify for a celibate life. According to my guru, this is almost impossible in Kali Yuga, so all *yogābhyāsīs*—yoga practitioners—should get married and live within the bounds of a wedded life.

There is an interesting story about naiṣṭhika brahmacārya. Sage Śuka, the son of Vyāsa and a Brahmajñānin, was walking along the banks of a river. At a bathing ghat, several women were in the river. Śuka passed by. A few moments later Vyāsa was passing by and immediately all the women rushed to grab their clothes to cover themselves. Vyāsa stopped and asked them why they were unconcerned when the young man Śuka passed by, but not so when the older man passed. The women replied that they knew Śuka was an absolute naiṣṭhika brahmacārī and never had any thought of sex.

My guru thought that the practice of inducting young men into the celibate orders in monasteries and *mutts* was fraught with dangers and is unworkable in Kali Yuga. According to *Dharma Śāstras*, only the *kramasannyāsa* progression—brahmacārya; then *gṛhastha* (family life), then *vānaprastha* (retired life), and finally sannyāsa, if one is really evolved—is practical in this Kali Yuga.

After completing the Sūtra study, Śrī Krishnamacharya began it again, covering the entire text of the *Yoga Sūtras* along with the commentary of Vyāsa, which took over two years to complete. *Yoga Sūtra* is a profound text, logically composed, dense with information. Every yoga student, and especially every yoga teacher, should study the *Sūtras*. There now seems to be more interest among yogīs in studying it.

AS READERS MAY KNOW, MY GURU’S range of studies and scholarship was not confined to yoga. He wanted to equip his student with adequate knowledge of other sibling philosophies. He taught *Sāṁkhya Kārikā*, said to be one of the best-composed philosophical texts. Its author, Īśvarakṛṣṇa, is considered to have been an incarnation of the famous Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa. Profound and succinct, this text has become the standard work on Sāṁkhya (one of the six schools of classical Hindu philosophy). My teacher taught the entire *Sāṁkhya Kārikā*, along with the commentary of Gauḍapāda and also occasionally that of Vācaspati Miśra. Actually, the theoretical basis of yoga is Sāṁkhya. The *Bhagavad Gītā* starts with the discussion of the Sāṁkhya philosophy. It is the first Vedic philosophy that talked about the Self as the observer and hence distinct from everything experienced. It is the constant observer, non-changing, hence eternal and immortal.

Another philosophy he was keen to teach was *Nyāya* and the later version, *Tarka*. He started teaching *Tarka Saṁgraha*, a compact text on Vedic logic. With Tarka/Nyāya, Sāṁkhya, Yoga and Vedānta, Śrī Krishnamacharya gave his student a well-rounded education in different Vedic *darśanas*.

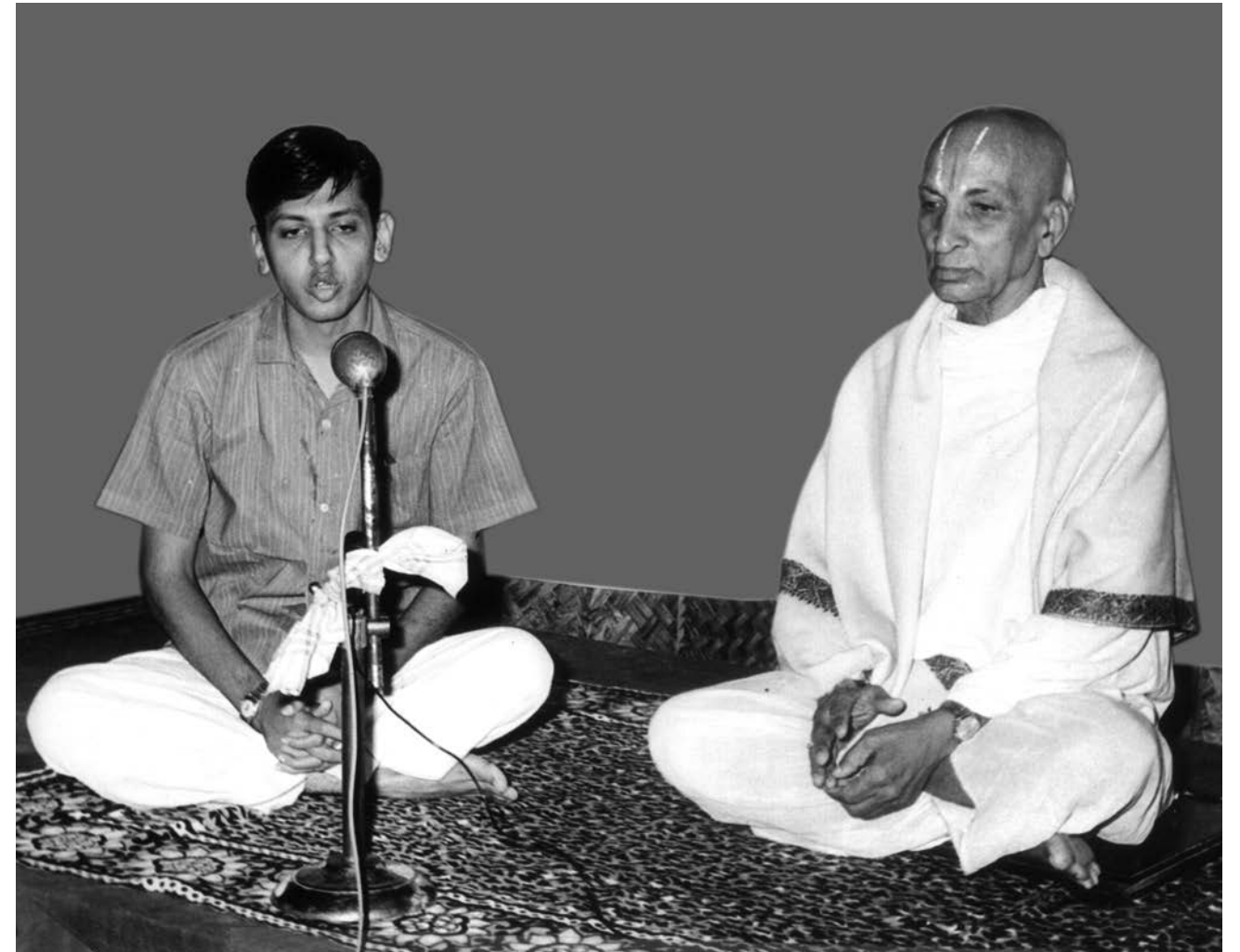
He was keen to impart knowledge contained in Haṭha Yoga texts. He taught *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* in detail, except portions of the last chapter and some of the third, which he said contained obnoxious practices inconsistent with the teachings of *sāttvika* yoga and the *Yoga Sūtras*. He said this text contained considerable technical detail but very little *tattva*, or philosophical consideration. I thought he indicated that some claims of this text were exaggerated. For a particular procedure, the author Svātmārāma claimed immortality (*chirāñjīvitva*) as the benefit. My guru then asked, “Where is Svātmārāma now?” indicating that some of these claims should be taken with a grain of salt. He also taught *Yoga Yājñavalkya* in detail. It contains some wonderful insights into the practice of Haṭha Yoga and gives the definition of yoga as the union of the individual soul (*jīvātmā*) and the Supreme Being

(*paramātmā*). Some of the other texts that he referred to and taught in portions included *Gherāṇḍa Saṁhitā* and *Śiva Saṁhitā*. When I was studying with him, Nāṭhamuni’s *Yoga Rahasya* was not published, but he frequently quoted from the text and after a while taught a few chapters from it. He quoted portions about āsanās that are helpful during pregnancy and yogic procedures helpful for contraception and family planning (*mitha santana*). Several of these ślokas were found in the version of *Yoga Rahasya* published later, but many of the ślokas he quoted in class were missing from the final published version.

I thought that, since yoga is an ancient subject, the nuances of the system could be understood by studying the old texts. Nowadays yoga students seem to spend very little time studying the texts; they appear to be reinventing yoga by drawing inspiration from other physical training

systems, such as gymnastics, martial arts, or even performing arts. Some of the basic tenets, like slow breathing and mind focus, are being put aside. People breathe heavily, sweat profusely, do no breath work at all, and call it modern yoga, sometimes even under the banner of Krishnamacharya’s yoga.

SOMETIME IN THE 1960S OR 70S, Maharshi Mahesh Yogī came to Madras, before his TM became popular in the West, and gave a talk about TM. There was a large gathering, and I attended the program with my father. My guru came to know of my attendance. When I went to his class the next day, Śrī Krishnamacharya told me at the outset that he believed he had enough resources to teach me and take care of me. He said that I needed to cooperate with him. If I went out and listened to different versions and interpretations of the śāstras, I was more likely to be confused



Śrī Krishnamacharya being introduced by a young Srivatsa Ramaswami at a public lecture.

and perplexed than better informed. And it would then be more difficult for him to remove my doubts. I stopped shopping around then and there.

Śrī Desikachar founded the now famous Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram sometime in the 1970s, I think, with the blessings of his father. Since it was founded as a charitable trust, it required three trustees. A close friend of Desikachar’s and I joined as trustees, with Desikachar taking the chair as the managing trustee. After few months, once the organization was in place, I left the trust. During my short tenure, there was a request from a hundred-year-old English magazine called *India Review* to write a series of articles on yoga. The magazine was struggling financially, and some philanthropists were trying to revive it in consideration of its great role during the Independence movement. I was asked to write articles for it, so I began writing one article a month, as a trustee of the Mandiram. I wrote on one sequence of āsanās every month based on my studies with my teacher. I would write the article, then get photographs of me doing the poses. I would give the articles and the photographs to my guru for approval. With Desikachar he would go through the article and approve it. It was then forwarded to the magazine.

Even after I left the Mandiram, I continued to write for the magazine, submitting about forty articles in all. Several sequences were covered, with the correct breathing for each and every vinyāsa.

By that time—after twenty years of studying with my guru—I was teaching yoga at Kalakshetra, a well-known Indian arts college, teaching South Indian Bharatanatyam dance and Carnatic music, boutique painting, dance, drama, etc. The students were young, in their teens and early twenties. They were highly talented, and a challenging group to teach. Each student was required to study yoga twice a week for two years. In about six months I realized that I had taught them virtually everything I had learned, some 200 to 300 vinyāsas and several breathing exercises! I turned to my teacher and explained my predicament to him. Is there anything more I can teach? I had read in his book *Yoga Makaraṇḍa* that he had learned

about 700 āsanās. With infectious enthusiasm he started teaching me more vinyāsas and āsanās. “Have you taught this āsana, this vinyāsa?” he would ask. Over a long period thereafter, he taught me more and more vinyāsas. I would practice them, then go and teach them in the class. It was wonderful to learn and teach at the same time. In the course of the next few years I learned about 700 vinyāsas in about ten major sequences. This formed the basis of my teaching Vinyāsa Krama.

My personal life required that I stay in Madras, so it was convenient for me to do my work, study with my guru, and teach at Kalakshetra. I taught at other places in Madras, the public health center, the yoga brotherhood, and so on, teaching patients and medical personnel, middle-aged and older people. By teaching different populations, I was able to adapt the Vinyāsa Krama to meet the requirements of people of different ages and conditions. But I had no idea what was happening in the outside yoga world.

I stopped teaching at Kalakshetra by 1995. I had started coming to the U.S. for brief periods to visit my sons, who were working here. I did a few workshops here and there, teaching Vinyāsa Krama. Many liked it, but since they were short-term programs without an established procedure to follow, it did not stick. By 2000 I submitted a manuscript titled, “Yoga: An Art, A Therapy, A Philosophy” to give as much coverage as possible to what I had studied with my guru. I followed the thought process contained in Patañjala *Yoga Sūtra*, explaining the *Samādhi Pāda*, then the Aṣṭāṅga Yoga. In the āsana section, I included about 200 vinyāsas very similar to what I had published through *India Review*. It contained considerable information about yoga as therapy as well. When the book was published with the title *Yoga for the Three Stages of Life*, many felt it was rather dense and heavy, and since many were not familiar with vinyāsa as I portrayed it in the book, there were not many buyers. I also found that people were not interested in my vinyāsa program of Krishnamacharya because the system was well known through other famous students of my guru. But I found that

there were significant differences between what I had learned from him and other established teachings. I thought I might never get the Vinyāsa Krama across, even though my teacher had become a legend in the yoga world. I decided to write another book, giving all the vinyāsas I had learned from my guru and their sequencing, along with the equally important breathing aspect of each and every vinyāsa. Once I had the book ready, with about 1,100 color pictures, it was difficult to find a publisher. My agent told me that there was a general perception that there were enough of Śrī Krishnamacharya’s well-known students teaching his complete system. He asked me to write a page about how what I taught was different, why it was unique, and how it might be a better system. So I wrote a page explaining the unique features of the Vinyāsa Krama system as I had learned it from my guru. The book was published by Marlowe and Company, titled *The Complete Book of Vinyāsa Yoga*.

SO WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIALS OF VINYĀSA Krama that I teach, based on the teachings of my guru?

1. Do āsanās with a number of vinyāsas, or variations, in succession. It is the art form of yoga practice. Vinyāsa means art, and it involves aesthetic variations within the specified parameters.
2. The basic parameters used in Vinyāsa Krama are steadiness of the posture, a calm mind, synchronizing the breath with slow movements of the limbs, and, while in the postures, having the mind closely following the breath.

BUT YOU MAY ASK, “IF YOU SAY THIS is an ancient system, where are the references to these ideas in the old texts? Where did Śrī Krishnamacharya find these methods? Don’t say *Yoga Kurunta*; we know about it. Where else can you find references to these concepts?”

Vinyāsa Krama was the mainstay of Krishnamacharya’s teaching of Haṭha Yoga. The word vinyāsa is used to indicate an art form of practice. This word is used in several arts, especially in South Indian Carnatic music, a fully evolved classical music system. Vinyāsa

Krama indicates doing āsana with multiple aesthetic variations within the prescribed parameters. Yoga was considered one of sixty-four ancient arts. Hence if you approach yoga āsana practice as an art, that methodology is Vinyāsa Krama. The beauty and efficacy of yoga is eloquently brought out by Vinyāsa Krama.

What about breath synchronization, another important ingredient of Krishnamacharya’s Vinyāsa Krama? What about mental focus on the breath while doing āsana practice, central to vinyāsa yoga? None of the yoga schools teaches yoga in this manner and no classic Haṭha Yoga texts mention breath synchronization in āsana practice. Where can one find references to these?

This was one of the few questions I asked my guru: Is Vinyāsa Krama an old, traditional practice? Śrī Krishnamacharya quoted a verse indicating that reference to this practice can be found in a text called *Vṛddha Sātāpata* and also in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali. There was no point in looking for an obscure text like *Vṛddha Sātāpata*, but *Yoga Sūtra* was at hand. But where is the reference? There are hardly two Sūtras explaining āsana, and there is no reference to breath in them—or is there?

Going back to my notes on *Yoga Sūtra* classes with my guru, I found a very interesting interpretation of the sūtra, *Prayatna-saithilya anantasamāpattibhyām*. The word *prayatna*, very commonly used in India, basically means “effort.” *Saithilya* indicates “softness.” So *Prayatna-saithilya* could mean “mild effort”; hence you find that many writers on the *Yoga Sūtras* declare that the way to achieve perfection in a yoga posture is to “ease into the posture effortlessly.” This is easier said than done. There are hundreds of practitioners who cannot relax enough to be able to easily get into a posture like the Lotus, for example. So we have to investigate the meaning of the word prayatna as used by the *darśanakāras* in those days. Prayatna according to Nyāya, a sibling philosophy to yoga, is a bit involved. Nyāya explains prayatna of three kinds (*prayatnam trividham proktam*). Two of them are the effort put

in for happiness (*pravṛtti*) and the effort to remove unhappiness (*nivṛtti*). Every being does this all the time. One set of our efforts is always directed toward achieving happiness and the other toward eradicating unhappiness. But the third type of effort relevant here is the effort of life (*jivana-prayatna*). What is effort of life? It is the breath or breathing. Now we can say that prayatna-saithilya is to make the breath smooth. Thus in āsana practice according to Vinyāsa Krama, the breath should be smooth and by implication long (*dīrgha*).

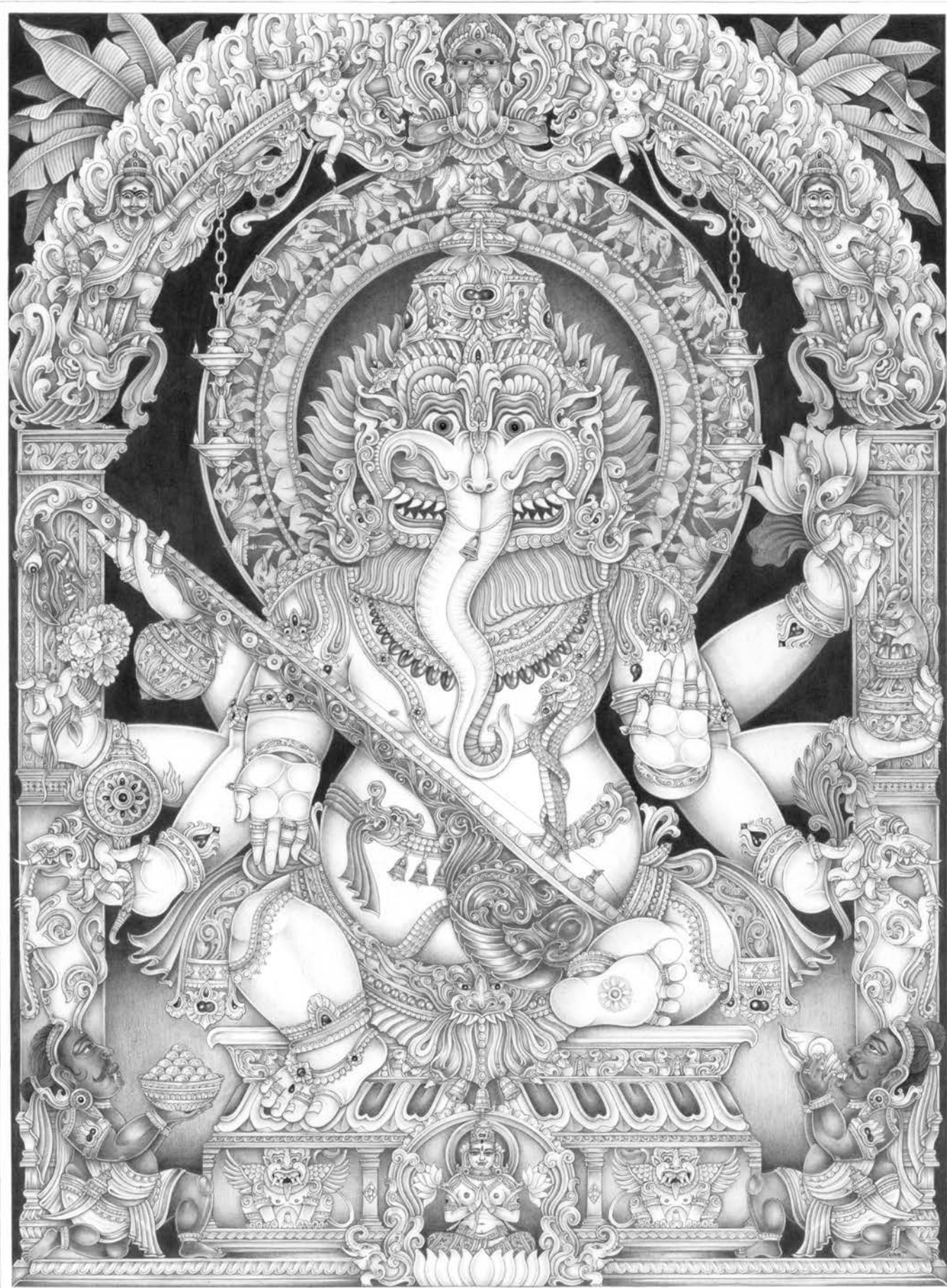
The other part of the sūtra refers to *samāpatti*, or mental focus. Where or on what should the mental focus be? It is to be on *ananta* (*ananta-samāpatti*). Now we have to investigate the contextual meaning of the word *ananta*, translated as “endless” or “limitless,” which many writers equate with infinity. So some schools tend to say that while practicing āsanās, one should focus the attention on infinity, which is inappropriate—and impossible, at least for the vast majority of yogis. Ananta also refers to the serpent, Ādiśeṣa, whose incarnation Patañjali is believed to be. So some schools suggest that one should focus on a mental image of Ādiśeṣa or Patañjali. It may be possible, but it is uncomfortable to think that Patañjali would write that one should focus on his form for the success of āsana practice. So what might ananta symbolically signify? The word *ananta* can be considered to be derived from the root, “*ana*”—to breathe (*ana svāse*). We are all familiar with the group of words prāṇa, *apāna*, *vyāna*, etc., names of the five prāṇas derived from the root “ana.” So in the sūtra, ananta could mean “breath”; ananta-samāpatti is then translated as “focusing the mind on the breath.” In fact Ananta, or the serpent king, is associated with air. Mythologically the cobra is associated with air; there is a common mythological belief that cobras live on air. If you look at the icon of Naṭarāja (the dancing Śiva), you will find all five elements of the universe (earth, water, air, fire, and space) represented symbolically in Śiva. The matted red hair represents fire, the Gaṅgā in his tresses, the water element; the air element is said to be represented

by the snake around the lord’s neck. So ananta-samāpatti would mean focusing the attention on the breath or prāṇa.

Thus this sūtra means that while practicing āsana, one should do smooth inhalations and exhalations and focus the attention on the breath. Since Vinyāsa Krama involves several aesthetic movements into and within yoga postures, to achieve the coordination of movement, breath, and mind, one should synchronize the breath with the movement with the help of the focused mind. By such practice, slowly but surely, the union of mind and body takes place, with the breath acting as the harness.

But why don’t other texts talk about it? There is a saying, “*Anuktaṁ anyato grāhyam*.” If some details are missing from one text, they should be gathered from other complementary texts. *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā* explains a number of āsanās but does not mention breath synchronization and other basic parameters. But *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā* proclaims that its instructions are like a prerequisite for the Rāja Yoga practice of Patañjali. These two texts are therefore compatible. Thus we can conclude that Patañjali gives the basic parameters of āsana practice (and also of the other *aṅgas* like Prāṇāyāma), but for details we have to refer to compatible texts like *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā*, *Yoga-Yājñavalkya* and others.

MY GURU ŚRĪ KRISHNAMACHARYA WAS like a many-faceted diamond, each side brilliant in its way. Different individuals saw different sides of him in different ways and took whatever appealed to him or her. I was fascinated by whatever he thought I should know and therefore taught me, and I found that in āsana practice, the Vinyāsa Krama method was most beneficial and satisfying. I am sure a few others also find it so. With his deep scholarship, immense wisdom, and abundant compassion, Śrī Krishnamacharya reveled in making the ancient benevolent teachings accessible to ordinary mortals like us. 🌸



SIMHA GAṆAPATI

THE LIONLIKE GAṆEŚA

Artwork and text by NARA ALLSOP

ŚRĪTATTVANIDHI (*TREASURE OF REALITIES*) IS AN ICONOGRAPHIC MANUAL OF the late eighteenth century. It was commissioned by the Maharaja of Mysore State, Krishnaraja Wodeyar, to preserve and protect the traditional knowledge of iconography in the southern Indian subcontinent. Within the text thirty-two icons of Gaṇapati are described, including Simha Gaṇapati. Simha Gaṇapati is often shown riding a lion. However, in the remarkable form described in this text, Gaṇeśa's face has merged with that of a lion. His huge bulging eyes, his ears and sharp fangs are all depicted in the Indian tradition of the mood of that ferocious beast. Simha Gaṇapati is rarely depicted in this manner. I know of only one temple at Nanjangud in Karnataka that houses His *mūrti*. There are also a few representations in the Kalamkari painted-cloth tradition from Kalahasti in Andhra Pradesh. However, the distribution of their attributes differs from that of the *Śrītattvanidhi* which I have used as the source reference for this drawing. In His upper right hand, Gaṇapati holds a *vinā*, signifying His mastery of arts and music. He plucks the string from which the primordial sound *Om* and all creation emanates. The *vinā* is carved with a graceful swan, emblem of the Goddess Sarasvatī and symbol of the *Sahaj* state (effortlessly abiding in higher consciousness). In the hand beneath, a bunch of fragrant flowers is held, representing beauty and showing that Gaṇapati readily accepts a humble offering—even a few wildflowers offered with love are said to be immensely pleasing to Him. In fact, simple fresh grass is often given as *prasāda* to Him. Simha Gaṇapati holds one *āyudha* (weapon): the regal jeweled discus or *cakra* usually associated with Viṣṇu. Very briefly, it represents eternal *dharma*, the severing of egoic attachment, and solar might. His lower right hand is displayed in *Varada mudrā* offering divine boons and favors.

Simha Gaṇapati's upper left hand holds a fresh day-blooming lotus—the universal image of the purified heart. Beneath is the *Ratnakumbha*—the pot of jewels. Gaṇeśa is described as an inexhaustible treasure trove—the possessor of all wealth, internal and external, without whose blessing no wealth can be possessed for long. It is His association with riches that brings Him into intimate relationship with the very embodiment of wealth, the Goddess Lakṣmī, depicted in a small shrine of her own at the bottom of the image. Under the Ratnakumbha, Gaṇeśa holds a sprig from the *Kalpataru* (wish-fulfilling) tree. This divine foliage from the paradisiacal realm of the Gods indicates His association with all that is miraculous, magical, and natural. The bottom left hand is in *Abhaya mudrā*, the gesture of granting faith and dispelling fear, doubt and darkness.

From all these implements, which taken as a whole inform us of any deity's unique divine function, we can see that, although wrathful in visage, Simha Gaṇapati is a rather peaceful and refined form of Gaṇeśa. Again, this is emphasized by His white body color described as shining with the softness of the full moon. Portly *Gaṇas* (dwarf attendants and troops in Gaṇapati's celestial army) blow the sacred conch and make offerings of *modakas*—His favorite sweet, made of roasted sesame seeds, ghee, jaggery, and rice flour. Overhead at both sides, stepping out of the gaping mouths of *makaras* (fantastic aquatic creatures), heroic warriors hold aloft burning temple lamps. *Surasundarīs* (pleasing divine maidens), resting on the tongues of further makaras, blow trumpets, heralding Gaṇapati's awesome presence. ▲



GAJA LAKṢMĪ

LAKṢMĪ WITH ELEPHANTS

Artwork and text by NARA ALLSOP

LIKE ALL THOSE WE COULD CONVENIENTLY CALL HINDU DEITIES, LAKṢMĪ has more than one identity. In the Lakṣmī tantra of the Vaiṣṇava Pañcarātra sect, she is simply “everything.” In chapter fifty-one she states, “With myself as the substratum, I voluntarily evolve this entire universe.” As the inseparable consort of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa, she is known as Śrī and ever resides upon his holy chest.

In this classical image of Lakṣmī lustrated by elephants (*gaja*), her regal splendor is emphasized. She is the granter of great wealth, nurturance, beauty and fertility. In India the elephant is long associated with the heavy, blue-grey clouds of the monsoon season and hence the bountiful harvest of nature, giving sustenance and material wealth. The act of *abhiṣeka* (bathing with auspicious substances and nectars) is an important and principal mode of venerating the divine within Indian modes of worship. Historically, Gaja Lakṣmī was invoked during the consecration of Indian kings, as she herself is the source of all royal power. This queenly aspect is stressed by her residing on the lion throne.

Abundant lotus flowers surround her—another name for Lakṣmī as Mahāvidyā is Kamalā, lotus. In common with the solar divinity, Sūrya, she holds aloft two mighty lotus blooms. A popular expression referring to her great sensual luster describes Lakṣmī as “lotus-eyed, lotus-sighed, and lotus-thighed.” In the *Śrīsūkta* she is given the epithet of Padmasambhavā, “born from a lotus.” In her aura we see bizarre composite animals known as *ramagaytris*, in this instance, elephant-headed geese. They offer still more open lotus flowers.

In short, Lakṣmī is the nourishing essence of existence, the pleasant milk of the mother’s breast. A lush canopy of mangoes above her symbolizes her bountiful fulfillment of wishes. The ripe mango she holds in her left hand is again demonstrative of her supreme, natural generosity, the mango being the sweetest and most delicious of all fruits. Nearly all Hindus maintain shrines to Lakṣmī in their places of business and in their homes, for domestic harmony. At work, that shrine may be no more than a sticker on the cash box. Business does not commence until she has been invoked with incense and light, as she also protects from *Alakṣmī*, misfortune and strife. ❖



TULASĪ DEVĪ

AND HER MANIFESTATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

JESSE GORDON

IT IS NOT EVERYONE WHO CLAIMS SPIDER mites as an active ingredient in their daily *sādhana*, but most days—this winter, anyway—will find Ishanah Devī Dasi inspecting the leaves of her Tulsi plants with a large magnifying glass. She is checking for spider mite eggs. If she finds them, she will dust them off with a tiny paintbrush, one by one. Every day, using a sterilized spray bottle, she individually bathes the more than sixty plants in her greenhouse. Every hour or two she checks the temperature and humidity in the room and adjusts vents, exhaust and mist systems accordingly. She also constantly monitors the soil for water levels and signs of disease. This

*Trailokya-vyāpinī gaṅgā,
yathā śāstreṣu gīyate
Tathaiiva tulasī devī
dṛṣyate sa-carācare.*

As the Ganges, which flows through the three worlds, is glorified in the śāstras, So Tulasī Devī is seen by all creatures, moving and unmoving.

-Verse 13, Tulasī-devī Māhātmya of the *Padma Purāṇa*

winter her plants have been devastated by a root fungus, called Pythium, which usually attacks citrus trees. “I’m not very spiritually advanced, but I know how dear Tulasī Devī is to Kṛṣṇa,” she says, her soft Texas accent vibrating harmoniously with her pale green sari. “You hear all these fabulous stories about how she relates with Kṛṣṇa in the spiritual world, and it really makes you want to get in here every day and wash all the leaves off, even if takes you four hours. You want to do things for her.” Other aspects of Ishana’s service include picking *mañjarīs* (the flowers of the Tulsi plant and also the name of the maidservants of Rādhā) and making

Tulsi garlands; supplying the Tulsi leaves that will be placed on top of the six daily food offerings made to Lord Kṛṣṇa (he will not accept food unaccompanied by Her); and rotating the Tulsi plants that are always at the feet of the deities in Los Angeles’s ISKCON¹ Temple. Here Tulsi is worshipped daily as an expansion of Vṛndā Devī, Kṛṣṇa’s purest and most intimate devotee in the spiritual world.

I WAS GIVEN MY FIRST TULSI SEEDS BY Kamalakshi, my landlady in Mysore, India. Her Tulsis grew in a kind of bushy hedge around the front of her house. They were treated with great respect and, without hesitation, credited with bringing “health, wealth, and happiness” to her house and family. Indeed, for these or similar reasons, Tulsi can be found growing near the entrance of the majority of Hindu homes in India. She can also be found growing wild in vacant lots, ditches, and almost anywhere else in that country. Here in America, cultivating her is a different story, as I quickly found out when I planted the seeds I had been given. The word *delicate* does not quite cover it, even in temperate Southern California. Too much light, she turns purple and dies; too little water, she wilts and dies; too much water, she wilts and dies; too cold, she dies; too dry, she dies; and sometimes, for no apparent reason at all, she just dies. “I know of countless people who had a beautiful Tulsi in their house, then they went away for a week and somebody looked after her. They did exactly the same thing as the owner of the Tulsi, the same water, everything—but Tulsi just left her body,” reports Ishanah, whose handbook² on growing Tulsi I purchased after my first set of mortalities. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the

ISKCON movement—and also the man usually credited with “bringing Tulsi to the West”—dubbed her the “spiritual barometer” of a household, and indeed, there is something about her physical intangibility and fragility that reminds one of the intangibility and fragility of spiritual endeavor. Eager for a higher barometric score—not to mention “health, wealth, and happiness”—I soon found myself acquiring grow lights, special heaters, humidifiers, and other paraphernalia usually reserved for hydroponic harvesters of marijuana. Every morning for about a year, I would take my pots outside so Tulsi could have her prescribed amount of sun (two to three hours). Every evening, I would bring her in so she wouldn’t get too cold (below 50 degrees). Then one winter’s day, I worked late, and forgot ...

BOTANICALLY, TULSI IS A MEMBER OF the Lamiaceae or mint family and is known by her Latin name *Ocimum Santum*. *L. Ocimum* means “fragrant lips” and relates her to the herb basil, and *Sanctum* means “holy” or “sacred.” Hence she is also known as “Holy Basil.” She has small heart-shaped leaves, sometimes green, sometimes purple, depending on the variety³. She can grow to about four feet and live about eight years. In Ayurveda she is considered a “premiere adaptogen”—a rare substance that can balance and tone various systems within the body—and has been employed for thousands of years as a cure for everything from heart disease to hair loss⁴. In strict Vaiṣṇava traditions, however—and it is within these traditions that worship of Tulasī Devī is most fervent and institutionalized—consumption of the plant for medicinal purposes is strictly forbidden⁵.

Although she was almost certainly brought to the United States earlier by Indian families, the first documented Tulsi plant to be grown here was in 1969 by the hand of Govinda Dasi, a devotee of Srila Prabhupada. “The first set of seeds did not grow,” she writes in an article for *Back to Godhead* magazine⁶. “I daily worshipped a thin green sprout until it became painfully evident that it was a blade of grass.” But on only her second attempt, she found success. She recalls Srila Prabhupada’s joy when she first presented two small plants to him in Los Angeles. “He held one of the small pots in his hand for a long time, gazing at the seven-inch seedling, noting that she was indeed Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī.” Like most great teachers, Srila Prabhupada followed the lead of his student and by 1970 was recommending that Tulsi be grown in all ISKCON temples. “So you should induce other centers to cultivate Tulsi,” he writes in a letter⁷ congratulating Indira Dasi, in the St. Louis temple, on his Tulsis. “One circular should be sent to every center that they should import Tulasī Devī from either St. Louis or Hawaii, and as soon as possible each center should arrange to care for Tulasī Devī nicely....” His instructions for proper care and worship of Tulasī Devī were precise and rigorous⁸, as were his exaltations of their benefits. In his book *Nectar of Devotion*, he quotes from the *Skanda Purāṇa*:

Tulsi is auspicious in all respects. Simply by seeing, simply by touching, simply by remembering, simply by praying to, simply by bowing before, simply by hearing about, or simply by sowing this tree, there is always auspiciousness. Anyone

¹International Society for Krishna Consciousness, also known as the “Hare Krishna movement.”
²Intimidatingly, the longest section in *The Art of Caring for Srīmatī Tulasī Devī* by Ishanah Devī Dasi is titled “Diseases and Pests.”
³These are the “Rama” and “Krishna” varieties respectively. Orthodox traditions stipulate that these tropical varieties of Tulsi are the “authentic” Tulsi, as opposed to the more robust “Vana” Tulsi that grows in the Himalayas and plains of India and has also been found in Africa.
⁴Tulsi, *The Mother Medicine of Nature*, by Dr. Narendra Singh and Dr. Yamuna Hoette with Dr. Ralph Miller.
⁵The only sanctioned intake of Tulsi is in temple *caraṇāmṛta*, which is made by soaking Tulsi leaves in water and consumed a few drops at a time.
⁶From Govinda Dasi’s article “Tulasī Devī, Beloved of Krishna” in *Back to Godhead* magazine.
⁷Reprinted from the “Vedabase” in *The Life of Tulasī Devī, Her Care and Worship* by Amala-bhakta Dasa, published by Nadia Productions.
⁸With regard to the care of the plant, two of Prabhupada’s most extreme stipulations are that She must never be clipped or pruned and that no chemicals or chemical by-products may be used to stimulate Her growth or clean Her. With regard to Her worship, the instructions are complex and lengthy but not hard to find.



who comes in touch with the Tulsi tree in the above-mentioned ways lives eternally in the Vaikuṇṭha world.⁹

PRABHUPADA’S CAMPAIGN HAS HAD widespread and, in some cases, spectacular results. A cover story in the March/April 2006 issue of *Back to Godhead* magazine celebrates the “miracle growth” of the Tulsis in the Vancouver temple. The plants, which are remarkable in their mass—they are the size of ponies—and incredible density, were grown in two state-of-the-art greenhouses equipped with automated heat and humidity systems costing \$20,000. Rudrani Devī Dasi

and her husband, Sananda Kumara Dasa, who run the greenhouses, take other special measures as well. About once a week “We put one part organic cow dung in three parts water, soak it overnight, break it down with our hands, and make it into a tea,” Rudrani told me by phone. “We pour a cup or two onto each Tulsi the day after she’s been watered. And she loves it.”¹⁰ She also described a “shaking method” in which, several times a week, her husband vigorously shakes the trunks of the trees to strengthen them.

“Devotion will manifest a beautiful Tulsi if you always make sure she’s comfortable, she’s got what she needs,

she’s got beautiful music playing, prayers being sung to her, and you watch her very carefully for disease,” Rudrani explains. “So both things need to be there: the practical side and the devotional side. The care is a manifestation of your devotion—if you don’t care, then you will not take care.” What is interesting about this statement is that it was made in the context of caring for a tropical plant in a part of the world where the annual average temperature is about 57° Fahrenheit. This begs the question of whether—just as it undergoes a radical physical transformation—the very meaning of an Eastern practice alters when it is transported to a Western land. It isn’t the first time, after all, we’ve seen an

ancient tradition morph into something the *ṛṣis* could never have quite dreamed of. Or could they? For answers, I turned to the scriptures themselves.

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, IT SEEMS, Tulasi Devī has straddled the gap between two worlds. As detailed in the *Brahma-vaivarta* Purāṇa¹¹, the trouble begins when Tulasi’s great-grandfather King Vṛṣadhvaja turns his back on Lord Viṣṇu and begins to worship Lord Śiva. Though this situation took a couple of celestial generations and plenty of “harsh asceticism” to resolve, it is patched up, by Purāṇic standards, with relative ease. The real trouble is left to come. Tulasi is born as a partial expansion of Goddess Lakṣmī and her name,¹² meaning “incomparable form,” is chosen based on her mesmerizing beauty (which is described at dazzling length in this Purāṇa). She becomes a cowherd girl in Goloka, in the service of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa’s consort and feminine aspect. But one day, after a dance, Kṛṣṇa, tempted by her beauty, “becomes intimate” with her. In a rare jealous rage, Rādhā curses her and sends her to live on earth as a human being. In spite of the tremendous love for Kṛṣṇa still burning deep in her heart, Tulasi tries hard to be a good human being. She might have done so if the king she marries, Śaṅkhācūḍa, hadn’t turned out to be one of the most powerful demons of all time. Armed with a boon that makes him invincible, Śaṅkhācūḍa takes up arms against the demigods. The battle

quickly escalates to massive, and truly psychedelic, proportions. Kālī can’t beat him, nor can Śiva. Because Śaṅkhācūḍa is a Vaiṣṇava, Lord Viṣṇu himself must step in to put him out of his misery. But in order to deactivate Śaṅkhācūḍa’s invincibility boon, Lord Viṣṇu must sneak into his private chambers and, disguised as Śaṅkhācūḍa himself, sleep with his wife, Tulasi Devī. Her husband now dead and her honor tarnished, Tulasi curses Lord Viṣṇu to become a stone. Lord Viṣṇu accepts the curse and expands as the famous Śālagrāma stone. Because he both respects and pities Tulasi Devī, he releases her from her bondage as a human being and allows her to return to the spiritual world. In addition, to make sure that they are always together, he turns her body into the Gaṇḍakī River—on the banks of which the Śālagrāma stones are found—and her hairs into the Tulsī tree. He mandates that the tree must always, and exclusively, be used in his worship. He must always have garlands made of her flowers, and he must always have her leaves at his feet. So the original curse of Tulasi Devī transforms into the sweetest of boons: she will always be with her Beloved—flowing about him and at his very feet—but in a form that no other woman can ever envy¹³.

Back in the spiritual world, where she is known as Vṛndā Devī, Tulasi Devī’s privileged “All Access” status with the Lord translates into a position as the most intimate companion of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and the organizer

and enabler of all their private affairs. She is the embodiment of the *līlā-śakti* (pastime potency) and “delivers to Śrī Kṛṣṇa Rādhārāṇī’s love notes and her gifts of flower garlands and earrings. She arranges all the items employed in Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes. She supplies all the swings, musical instruments, clothing, adornments, food, beverages, and water syringes with colors for squirting. Vṛndā Devī creates a party atmosphere for Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to engage in divine līlās with Their Intimate friends.”¹⁴ And, as is often found in Indian thought, an entity that has great influence on a Great Power often has more cachet than the Great Power itself.¹⁵ In the case of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, Ishanah observes, “Śrīla Prabhupad always told us that you don’t worship the demigods, you just worship Kṛṣṇa because he’s the center of everything, and it says in the *Bhagavad Gītā* if you worship the demigods, all the benedictions are actually coming from Kṛṣṇa through the demigods but that they are the wrong source He hammered that in over and over and over, but yet for the morning program at every temple all over the world he has us worshipping Tulasi Devī and it is because she is so important to Kṛṣṇa.” Indeed, the closeness between Tulasi Devī and the Godhead seems to be almost universally accepted in Indian mythology. When Goddess Sitā was separated from Lord Rāma, she meditated on Tulasi. Hanumān prayed to her before jumping to Sri Lanka.

¹¹From the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* as retold in *The Life of Tulasi Devī, Her Care and Worship* by Amala-bhakta Dasa, published by Nadia Productions.

¹²The other seven names of Tulasi Devī are as follows:

Vṛndāvanī one who first manifested in and never leaves Vrndavana

Vṛndā the goddess of all plants and trees

Viśvanpūjītā one whom the whole world worships

Puṣpasāra the topmost of all flowers, without whom Kṛṣṇa does not like to look upon other flowers

Nandinī she who gives happiness to everyone

Kṛṣṇa Jivani the life and soul of Kṛṣṇa

Viśva-pāvanī one who purifies the whole world

¹³This is an idea that often comes up with regard to Tulasi Devī. In his commentary on a chapter of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, for example, he speaks about her sometimes strained relationship with Lakṣmī: “The goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī, is sometimes envious of the Tulsi leaves which are placed at the lotus feet of the Lord, for they remain fixed there and do not move, whereas Lakṣmījī, although stationed by the chest of the Lord, sometimes has to please other devotees who pray for her favor.” (Canto 3, Chapter 16, Text 20-21).

¹⁴As in Note 11, above.

¹⁵Robert Svoboda, in these pages (“Mantras, Ritual, and Their Efficacy” *Nāmārūpa* Issue N° 1, Spring 2003) articulates this nicely with regard to Śiva: “... if you are planning to worship Lord Śiva, you will want to make Gaṇeśa happy. Because you know how parents are: If you come to visit the parent and the first thing you do is give something to one of the children, the parent automatically feels very good—better, if he or she is a good parent, than if you give something to the parent. If you bribe the children first, the parents immediately become more pliable.”

Pārvatī planted her on the Himalayan mountains to help her obtain Lord Śiva as her husband. In the Padma Purāṇa, Śiva himself tells: “In the Kali Yuga, when one worships Tulasī Devī ... she burns one’s sins, takes one to higher regions, and gives one salvation.”¹⁶

But all her high-level connections in the celestial world do not change the fact, after all, that her expansion in the physical world is, and always will be, that of a humble shrub. This totally accessible, non-threatening “gate-keeper”¹⁷ aspect of her energy is one that Srila Prabhupada frequently alludes to. His favorite adjectives for her are “very kind” and “merciful.” And it is understandable how (mostly) Western devotees (and first-generation Hindus), living a radically alternative lifestyle in major Western metropolises, should be attracted to and empowered by this energy. “She doesn’t require that anyone be a pure devotee to serve her,” says Rudrani. “She will allow even the most fallen to serve her ... She is very tolerant and kind.”

“She’s merciful in that if you want to take care of her, somehow or other, she’ll find a way,” says Ishanah. “She chooses who she wants to grow for.” And Govinda Dasi, in her article, writes: “Tulasī Devī has come to the West to give us the opportunity to serve her for our benefit. If we care for her nicely, she can grant us love for Kṛṣṇa.” In this kind of context, a grove of Tulsis flourishing in a high-tech pocket of tropical air in the middle of a Canadian winter seems, though improbable, somehow accounted for.

As an almost logical, though possibly even less probable, extension of the Western manifestation of Tulasī Devī, it has come to pass that her very birthplace has fallen into Western hands. The small temple at Vṛndā Kuṇḍa, near Vṛndavan, is scripturally designated as the place of the appearance and eternal residence of Vṛndā Devī. In 1989 a

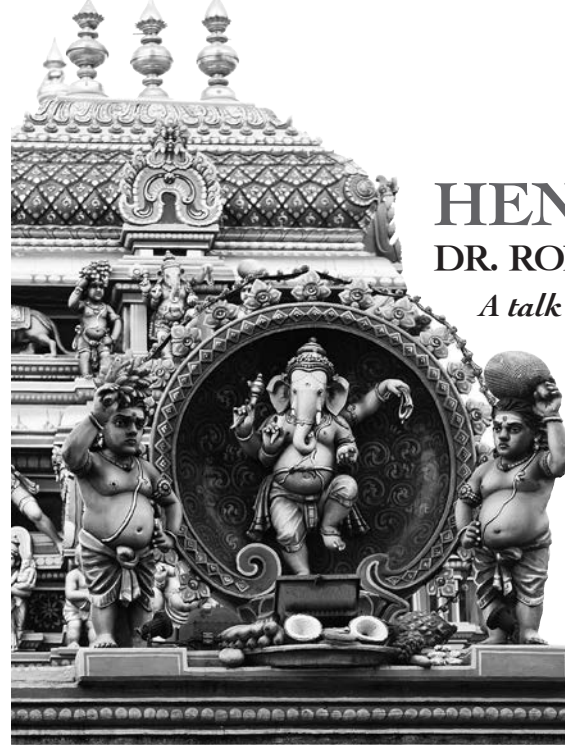
sādhū called Madhava Dasa, known affectionately as “Baba,” was caring for this temple. It was falling into disrepair, and Baba, who had cancer and was very old, was looking for someone to take over for him—and not having any luck. He knew about ISKCON, and their devotion to Tulasī, but had never even been to the organization’s Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma temple in nearby Nandagram, the fabled birthplace of Kṛṣṇa. The legend is that on the day he turned up, two cobras were playing on the steps of the temple—a highly auspicious sign. Whether or not this is true, ISKCON acquired the temple that very day. There were protests by people who thought the rights to the temple should remain in Indian hands, but Babaji stuck by his choice, and ISKCON mounted a campaign to rebuild the temple and temple grounds. Today, surrounded by sugar cane fields, within direct view of the peak of Nandagram, a small sandstone temple containing a beautiful murti of Tulasī Devī stands as a remarkable testament to Her latest, most state-of-the-art manifestation on this planet.¹⁸

MEANWHILE, BACK IN TOPANGA Canyon, my two Tulsī plants are clearly suffering. Her leaves are wilting and colorless, spider mites spin their tiny webs between her fingers, aphids jump around in her soil, and below them some kind of root fungus has almost certainly set in. Ishanah’s book recommends spraying them with a solution containing neem oil, and I rush down to a garden center to purchase some. I describe my situation to the man at the counter. When I ask about root fungus, he shakes his head, puts his hands together, and says, “Root fungus? Dude, all you can do is get on your knees and pray.” At this moment a voice next to me asks, “What is the plant?” I turn to see an Indian lady, wearing a bright blue sari. When I tell her it is Tulsī, her

face fills with compassion. She gives me her name—Kailash Singh—and phone number and tells me to call her. She says she might have something for me—she has an “amazing Tulsī tree” growing in her backyard. Because of the success of this tree, she has, I find out later, become a “Tulsī dealer” to many Indian families in the area, supplying them with seeds and sprouts when they become available. Her “bhakti barometer” is clearly up there. “I cannot say I do not have anything, but Tulsī Mā gave me everything and that’s why we really pray to her,” she tells me. “To have her in my home and in my family and in my heart—it is a wealth to my house and my family.”

IN A COUPLE OF DAYS MY TULSIS LEAVE their sad, withered bodies. It is, in the strangest way, one of the saddest things I have ever experienced. Months later, when Kailash Singh calls to tell me she has a seedling for me, I am not sure I have the courage to try again. But, of course, I have to—in order to honor the auspiciousness of our chance encounter. And now a beautiful Tulsī plant graces our front terrace.

When I tell this story to Ishanah, she is not surprised. She tells me the story of how she found her first Tulsī seeds, just moments after praying to Tulsī for the opportunity to serve her, in a discarded *mala* (strand of prayer beads) wedged in a crack in the spotless floor of an Indian temple. “Stories like that are always popping up,” she says. “She’ll do things like that. She’s there when you need her.” ❀



HENOTHEISM & HIVE-MINDS

DR. ROBERT E. SVOBODA®

A talk given in May 2006 in New Hampshire.

in many forms, in their fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, children and friends, pets, trees, and all those other beings, living, dead, and astral, who have demands on their attention, and who received less of that attention during the Gaṇeśa festival than they might have otherwise deserved.

The Gaṇeśa festival is one in a series of festivals celebrated in India during the year’s latter half. Before the lunar month of Bhādrapada comes the lunar month of Śrāvaṇa, during which Śiva is worshipped with fasting and meditation, all month long. Before the focus on Śiva comes *Guru Pūrṇimā*, when the Guru is worshipped as God. The day after the full moon that follows the Gaṇeśa festival’s end marks the start of the two weeks of the *Pitṛ Pakṣa*, the ancestor fortnight. During this period, while the moon wanes, God is revered in the form of ancestors, progenitors. Immediately after the ancestor fortnight comes *Nava Rātri*, the “Nine Nights,” at the beginning of the lunar month of Ashvin, during which the Great Goddess is worshipped. Nava Rātri is a good time to accumulate *śakti*; anything we achieve in the world we achieve through *śakti*. Finally, at Ashvin’s end, comes *Dīpāvalī*, the Festival of Lights (better known to most as *Diwālī*); the day after Dīpāvalī is one of India’s many New Year’s Days.

This chain of festivals provides a progression: if, beginning with Guru Pūrṇimā, you properly adore first your guru, then Śiva, then Gaṇeśa, your ancestors, and the Goddess, you should, by Dīpāvalī, be able to ignite the “lamps of awareness” within yourself, which will “enlighten” you, just in time for the new year. Then, when spring rolls around again, it’s time for another New Year’s Day, and another deity festival cycle.

THIS SYSTEM, IN WHICH THE ONE True Reality is venerated in many different forms—each form being acknowledged as supreme while it is being venerated—is sometimes termed *henotheism*, a word coined by Indologist Max Müller, who intended for it to mean “monotheism in principal and polytheism in fact.” Though a great scholar, Professor Müller got it backwards; the Indian system actually represents “polytheism in principal and monotheism in fact.” The fact that many people in India do actively believe in the individual deity-hood of gods and goddesses (easy to do when each temple is dedicated to a specific deity) may have induced Professor Müller to describe the surface of this particular Indian reality rather than its underlying organism.

Most likely Max Müller did not think of deities as astral personalities whose roots are securely embedded in absolute reality, through whom the radiance of one aspect of the Absolute shines. India’s countless gods and goddesses are ultimately creations of the *ṛṣis*, the Vedic Seers who spent their lives in forests drinking *soma*, an intoxicant that made them extraordinarily enthused. The word “enthuse” is actually “*en* + *theos*,” which means filled with *theos*, with God, with divinity. As the *ṛṣis* drank their soma they became filled with the divinity of infinity, which excited them utterly. On their return to mundane awareness the wine of divinity filling them would overflow into spontaneously visualized forms (*rūpa*)—the Vedic deities—and spontaneously formulated mantras (*nāma*)—the Vedic hymns. These *ṛṣis* possessed such prodigious *śakti* that what they spoke created in the space of our world images of what they had seen in that other world. Those images gradually strengthened, densified, and took on lives of their own, as images tend to do once they gain names.

¹⁶Reprinted from the “Vedabase” in *The Life of Tulasī Devī, Her Care and Worship* by Amala-bhakta Dasa, published by Nadia Productions.

¹⁷This brings to mind another gatekeeper very popular in the West, Lord Gaṇeśa. It is interesting that Gaṇeśa’s physical form, and mythology, also involves a hybrid combination of the material (represented by his elephant head) and the spiritual. Taking this idea yet further, even the practice of yoga, so popular in the hereabouts, can be seen as a “gateway” phenomenon, leading students from their Western realities into other ones.

¹⁸Go to www.vrindavan-dham.com/vrinda for images, more information, and the status of the “Vṛndā Kuṇḍa Project.”

Not long ago my nephew—also named Max—and his friend Alex suggested a book to me that I now suggest to you: *Science and the Akashic Field*, by Ervin Laszlo, a piano prodigy-turned-philosopher. In this book Professor Laszlo correlates in detail the ancient Indian concept of *ākāśa* with the quantum mechanical concept of space. Deep space may be extraordinarily empty in terms of materialized particles, but the power contained within the fabric of that space is many orders of magnitude—many millions of times—greater than all the energy in the entire manifested universe of hundreds of billions of galaxies. The vast majority of energy in our cosmos is securely tied up in the fabric of space—of *ākāśa*.

Even matter, which we generally think of as solid, is amazingly empty. Atoms are mostly nuclei (electrons are much less massive), which are composed of protons and neutrons, each in turn composed of three quarks. But the quarks themselves make up less than two percent of the mass of the protons and neutrons they create. The remaining ninety-eight comes from innumerable “virtual particles” that surround the quarks, “virtual particles” that continually emerge from and almost instantly return to the vacuum of space—the *ākāśa*.

India’s centuries-old Sāṃkhya philosophy assures us that space is “full,” not empty; that, though itself immaterial, *ākāśa* is the matrix, the womb, of all matter, all that is material. Western thinkers long denied an independent reality to space; Leibnitz and Kant, for example, regarded space as a mere concept, a notion that humans use to order objects. Though this opinion has now been conclusively proved wrong, it will take at the least decades for this new (to the West) view to become generally accepted, for it to become part of our “consensus reality.” Profound ideas take time to take root in human awareness; “weedy” ideas, conceptions that will eventually need to be “weeded out,” sprout more easily in the collective human consciousness than do perceptions which more closely represent “unrepresentable” realities, like that of *ākāśa*.

Consider the recent *International Herald Tribune* piece on a firm called Akashic Books, in which the author helpfully defined *ākāśa* as Sanskrit for “giant library.” Bold dim-wittedness, to publish something so ludicrously wrong! Staggering, the likelihood that this wrongness will now widely be taken to be right! Decades back some Westerner coined the phrase “akashic record” to signify the Indian idea that every event that has ever taken place in the universe has left its impression on the fabric of *ākāśa*. The Western mind being conditioned to associate “records” with “books,” this name (*nāma*) gave birth to a collective image (*rūpa*) of a vast storehouse of annals—a “giant library”—somewhere in the sky. Though Professor Laszlo’s book presents a far more accurate image of the “akashic record” than this, the *International Herald Tribune* will likely be read—and believed—by far more folks.

For good or ill, any long-lasting human notion or trend—beneficial or detrimental, in individuals or societies—eventually takes on a life of its own. Occasionally the results are constructive, as with Indian deities and their festivals; most often, as with the “giant library” mistranslation for *ākāśa*, they are not. The more the attention provided to any hallucination or vision, the stronger it will become, for attention and *prāṇa*, the life force, always work together; where one goes, there goes the other. One widespread current misconception is that life can exist only in association with protoplasm. But why should this be the case? Why shouldn’t life be able to exist in non-embodied, material-poor but attention-rich form? If *prāṇa* can bring things to life here on earth, why not elsewhere as well—even within the fabric of the matter that makes up the mind?

RECENTLY I HAVE GAINED A FONDNESS for the word *egregore*, a word that, though now archaic in English, is still active in other languages, including Spanish and Italian. An *egregore* is the “spirit” of a person, place, or thing that has taken on a life of its own. Egregores appear at every level of human society, top to bottom. Every deeply-held

idea we humans have is ultimately an egregore. Though the nature of the Creator of the external universe may be inscrutable, there is no question that we ourselves create our internal universes, using genetic material passed down to us by our forebears. This is why we regularly need to thank our predecessors for giving us the means to construct our bodies, and to request them not to pay too much attention to us, lest they be tempted to try to act in the world through us. Ancestors need to relinquish the living-human-egregore and join the ancestor-egregore; this is why all ancient societies emphasized the importance of ancestor veneration and why India still observes its “forebears’ fortnight.”

Each species has its own egregore, but in non-human species embodied consciousness is almost wholly subject to the ecological niches, eating and mating habits, and other instincts that each species has developed as it has evolved. Because no other species enjoys as much self-awareness as do humans, no other species has sufficient imagination to generate independent egregores that are not directly related to their own physical reality—or, in some manner, to human reality.

All established organizations have egregores. There’s an egregore for the New York Yankees, and one for the Chicago Cubs. Everyone expects the Yankees to get to the World Series; no one expects the Cubs to get there. The Cubs are “loveable losers,” that is a big part of their egregore; and the more that people believe this, the more that aspect of their reality will be reinforced—and the less likely a World Series berth will become.

Egregores do change: Until a couple of years ago, the Boston Red Sox had gone so many decades without a championship that they were said to have been cursed by Babe Ruth. Having watched, during my own lifetime, the Sox snatch defeat so frequently from the jaws of victory—with the Sox one out away from final success against the eventual-champion Mets, how vividly I recall the ball slipping through Buckner’s legs—even I, who have no particular interest in the Red Sox, began to suspect a curse. Widely-shared belief in that curse reinforced

the pessimism in the Red Sox egregore until the team somehow overcame that negativity (maybe Babe Ruth withdrew his imprecation?)—and actually took a Series. Now the Boston Red Sox egregore is no longer tarnished; in fact, it has become bright and shiny. Now Red Sox fans, far cheerier, no longer have to hide their heads under paper bags; change has come to the awareness of the entire group.

Cities have egregores; so do countries. Nations are egregores that are nourished by nationalism. The World Cup is fundamentally a quadrennial egregore tournament, during which we see various national traits displayed on the playing field. One curiosity of the 2006 final played between the French and the Italians, which I raptly watched in Barcelona, was that the Italian team is called “*I Azzuri*,” which means “The Blues,” and the French team is called “*Les Bleus*,” which also means “The Blues.” So the final was actually blueness against blueness. No wonder Zizou ended up head butting Materazzi—Saturn, the planet that specializes in humbling the haughty and tripping the mighty to encourage them to fall, rules blue. Though fall the French did, in a crushing defeat, the Italian triumph was tempered by a betting scandal—when Saturn gives you an attainment he will always make it somehow unsatisfying.

Some countries institutionalize their national egregores. In France, the *Academy Française* determines which words belong in the French language, a shared tongue being a fundamental building block of national identity. Another emblem of French identity is “Marianne,” the beautiful woman who personifies the French republic just as John Bull personifies Great Britain and Uncle Sam, the U.S.A. Yet another countrywide badge is the national motto, which encapsulates for its users the essence of their egregore. Compare Canada’s motto—“Peace, Order, and Good Government”—with that of the United States—“Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”—to obtain an immediate perspective on how those two countries will generally seek to play out their destinies on the world stage.

Sometimes a motto drives positive developments in a society, as did the very British idea of “fair play” when it inspired William Wilberforce to crusade for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, decades before it was ended in the U.S.A. To have a national motto is, however, no guarantee that its spirit will be followed in practice; such mottoes are often perverted for twisted ends. France’s motto—“Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood”—appeared during the French Revolution, and was constantly on the lips of those who directed the Reign of Terror. Revolutions often devour their host states; whatever may have been the conjectural value in their ideals, communism and fascism were catastrophic when put into action. All too often revolutions merely replace tired old egregores with blood-spattered new ones that devour their children.

The American Revolution was, for a while, a relative exception—relative, because it did displace and destroy large numbers of Native Americans. Carefully crafted by our Founding Fathers, and tended by sincere patriots, the ideals of “liberty and justice for all” kept the American egregore vital for nearly two centuries, appearing to us in the person of Abraham Lincoln during our greatest national crisis. Unfortunately, now that we have become the world’s sole superpower, many of us have come to think of our country as being indispensable and infallible.

Whenever we as a nation act to reinforce our national egregore, by sincerely encouraging life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in other nations, we as a nation prosper; but when we fall back on earlier egregores like that of “empire,” and convince ourselves that our pursuit of happiness justifies our taking life and liberty from others, then we are asking for big trouble. And when, in the pursuit of monopolizing the world’s resources by denying them to others, our leaders invoke the egregore of Jesus Christ to justify using preemptive war, those leaders lead us directly into perdition. As my mentor, the Aghori Vimalananda, was fond of saying, “The Golden Rule says, “Do unto others as you would have them do

unto you,” not, “Do unto others *before* they do unto you!”

THE ROAD TO HELL, IT HAS BEEN WISELY observed, is paved with good intentions. If individual Christians have often been able to do great things in God’s name, Christianity as an egregore has all too often done the opposite, via the Crusades, the Inquisition, the wars between Catholics and Protestants. Islam is no better, having slaughtered millions in search of peace. All organized religions have at some time or other tried to suppress the religious or spiritual practices of those outside their fold, those who shoulder different egregores.

All established organizations, including corporations, have egregores, which is why we can talk of differing “corporate cultures.” The older the organization, the older the egregore. Should the initial fervor that led to its nascence cool, the “light” at the heart of the organization will fade, and the group deteriorate. Until recently the Freemasons were a vital bunch; Masonic temples of striking architecture still persist in locales like Toronto, New York City, and Guthrie, Oklahoma, all built by people who had faith in the idea of Masonry. The *prāṇa* within the faith of the Masons’ founders’ engendered something separate from them that was then nourished by the attention their organization received from later generations of Masons. The vim, the vigor, the śakti of the Masons has now substantially shrunk; they’ve pretty much lost their grout.

Fervor alone is not necessarily sufficient. The Knights Templar, it is said, had an egregore called *Baphomet*. Those people who didn’t like the Knights Templar accused them of idolatry and testified that Baphomet was some manner of goat with horns and a forked tail, very much a devilish sort of image. (Curiously, the Freemasons were also, wrongly, accused of worshiping this Baphomet.) Other people claimed that Baphomet was a human head with long hair; the point is that the Templars appear to have focused a certain amount of energy on this entity, whatever it was. This active, aware egregore worked with



Śrī Kṛṣṇa shows Arjuna his Cosmic Form. Illustration by Satya Moses.

the Templars for a substantial length of time, facilitating the continuity of the Templar tradition for as long as it continued to exist—which it did until its enemies eliminated its physical presence, and the Knights Templar was eradicated as an organization.

Egregores can wax and wane, inflating as humans adopt them, collapsing when they are discarded. The recent fin-de-millennium stock market “tech bubble” was merely one of the more recent in a long line of financial fantasies that for a brief period seemed so real that they drove otherwise sane individuals to behave insanely. If you have any interest in history, do yourself a favor and read *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, by John Mackay, first published in about 1850. Its first hundred pages alone contain accounts

of the Mississippi Land Scheme of John Law, an experiment in paper currency that bankrupted France and helped to precipitate the French Revolution; the South Sea Bubble, that almost bankrupted England; and tulipomania, during which the otherwise sensible Dutch went absolutely gaga over tulips.

The Dutch got so excited about tulips that at one point a single bulb of an extraordinary variety could buy a large house on one of the most prominent canals in Amsterdam. How bizarre that a one tulip bulb and one house could become equal in value. You cannot live inside a tulip bulb, or dress yourself in tulip leaves or petals; and tulip bulbs are not much of a food. Whence then this imagined equivalence? A few years earlier, and a seller would have thought you mad if you had approached him,

bulb in hand, and offered to exchange your tuber for his residence. Then, amazingly, house and bulb reached parity, and the same man who might have thrown you out on your ear before would now beg you to consider accepting his home in exchange for your bulb. Finally, even more suddenly, the tulip lost its gilded gleam and returned to its realistic value, leaving speculators holding their bulbs.

Crazes like tulipomania generate egregores that feed on human awareness until they can no longer sustain themselves. Fortunately for you and me, the ṛṣis, India’s ancient scientists, understood ordinary humans better than we understand ourselves, and dedicated themselves to creating truly excellent egregores, to help counter the not-so-excellent egregores that we humans are always creating. The ṛṣis understood that embodied life is itself a giant egregore, comprising the universe’s dream of manifesting consciousness through matter. Humanity currently forms the driving force of this “embodied life egregore”; our ability to project our awareness conditions the ākāśa that we inhabit, directly influencing the evolution of the entire cosmos.

THE ṚṢIS, WHO SAW NO BENEFIT in bothering to develop external scientific instruments when they had developed exceptional internal instruments, carefully studied the nature of space so that they might generate useful egregores from the stupendous energy of ākāśa. What a ṛṣi in his passion saw and heard immediately appeared and took on a life of its own. In Sanskrit we call a ṛṣi-egregore a *devatā*, from the root *div*, which means both “the sky” and “to shine.” The self-luminous devatās shine within that “sky” that is the ākāśa, ākāśa coming from a root that means “to shine, to be brilliant, to become visible, to see clearly.” Humans feed devatās with their attention, and devatās feed humans with theirs. Given that “you are what you eat,” we humans who worship devatās move in the direction of becoming divine, and the devatās thus worshipped take on some mortal traits.

One example of this process at work can be found in the story of how Gaṇeśa became half-human and half-elephant. Here is one version: Long ago Pārvati, the Supreme Queen of all, wife of Lord Śiva, decided to take a bath. In this the gods and goddesses are like you and me, they love to bathe, to wash from their egregores the “dirt” that accretes due to their association with humans. Wishing to luxuriate in her tub Pārvati, the mother of all-that-is, fashioned from the dirt of her body a manikin, who immediately came to life. She told the boy, “Guard the door! Let no one disturb my ablutions!”

Pārvati was still deep in her bath when Śiva reached her gate, intoxicated with the prāṇa of all the people he had slain to redeem, ready to share his latest experiences with his spouse by means of an intimate embrace. But here was some small individual, unknown to him, at the door, barring his way.

Here we must interrupt the story briefly to ask ourselves how it is that Śiva, who embodies the Supreme Reality of unlimited awareness, could fail to identify his wife’s creation. And how could Pārvati have failed to teach her son how to identify his father? And how was it that Pārvati, no matter how engrossed she may have been in her soak, did not notice that her husband and her newly-originated son were about to come to blows on her very threshold? Our answer: some karmas must have come due—karmas of the Śiva-egregore and the Pārvati-egregore that we humans have co-created. Lord Saturn, the potentate of inexorability, must have activated these karmas to overshadow clarity of perception on all sides.

When Śiva demanded, “Who are you?” the impertinent child replied, “Who are *you*?” Saturn, who promotes *taṃas*, facilitated this sudden moment of mutual ignorance, which promptly escalated into a violent feud and soon ended with Gaṇeśa’s decapitation. For whatever reason, only after her son’s head had been severed did Pārvati appear at the door to cry, “You call yourself a husband, when you have just murdered our child? Bring him back to life instantly, or I shall destroy the

universe!” Śiva went immediately out into the forest, and severed the head of an elephant who was sleeping with his head into the north. When he joined that head to Gaṇeśa’s body and the boy stood up, Pārvati was satisfied, which satisfied Śiva—and, we hope, Gaṇeśa.

This brings up yet another question: why shouldn’t Śiva, who is clearly an expert at attaching heads to bodies, have simply reconnected the boy’s recently disconnected head? Why create a chimera, a montage of two different species? The answer lies underneath the story’s surface. Śiva represents the supreme reality of unmanifested awareness, who takes on form just sufficient to permit it and us to interact. Pārvati is the supreme reality of manifested awareness. Their contact, the play of un-manifest and manifest, engenders the universe. The name *Pārvati* derives from the word *parvata*, or mountain, because she is said to be the daughter of the Himalaya. Internally, Pārvati is the daughter of the spine, the range of mountains that runs up and down the back. Since Śiva lives in and above the head, Śiva and Pārvati together represent the head and the body. Without a body the head would fly about pretending to act but never actually getting anything done; without a head the body would run around unable to think, acting out of instinct alone. Unite head and body and you have a functional microcosm, a living human being.

Pārvati bathes in her own private cavern, at the base of the spine, at its *mūla*, or root. While down there she links up with autochthonous reality, with everything that is inaccessible to conscious thought. There she will be in her cocoon, undergoing self-transformation, the dynamism of her renovation protected by the stability of the earth element, which resides at the *mūla*. She brings the earth element, the “dirt of her body,” to life to guard her while she undergoes her makeover.

Śiva leaves behind the “earth” of individual manifestation when he wishes to experiment with other realities and returns to that individuality anxious to awaken it by uniting with it

intimately. Individuals are by definition partial; their boundaries permit them to withstand the supreme reality by experiencing only a small fragment of its entirety. Aroused by his communion with the infinite, Śiva refuses to take no for an answer, and in the fight the earth element is cleaved in twain, opening the individual to the full force of reality. But neither body nor mind can withstand such power for very long, and Pārvati, in her now awakened manifestation as the *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*, tells Śiva, “Lord, see what you have done! Unless you figure out how to regenerate my connection to the earth element, I will be forced to immediately reunite with you, which will prevent me from continuing to identify with the body, which will destroy this microcosm.” Acknowledging the value in preserving individuality so long as residual karmas remain to be tackled, Śiva goes out to look for an elephant.

NOW, HUMANS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHING relationships with other species for eons. Though inviting other mammals—our domestic animals and pets—to share our lives is a recent development, our very cells have long been acquisitive. For example, mitochondria, our cellular “energy factories,” were not always human; they were once single-celled bacteria that gave up their independence in return for secure homes. Evidence exists to suggest that all organelles in human cells were once independent—which makes us all chimeras. Even today, the cells in a human body that are actually “human” are far outnumbered by others that are not: microbes in our digestive tracts, bacteria and viruses in our tissues, eyelash mites.

Who *are* we, we who congratulate ourselves for gaining dominion over “every thing that creepeth upon the earth,” despite being minorities within our own bodies? How incredible is it that eight percent of the human genome consists of remnants of ancient viruses, and that such “endogenous retroviruses”—packets of invasive alien DNA—are necessary for such activities as the growth of the placenta in all placental mammals. And what of the fact that often our parasites do our thinking for us? The cat parasite



Dr. Robert E. Svoboda and *ṣaṇṇyāsini* feeding an elephant palm leaves and strawberries. *Agastya Siddha Ashram, Vaypeen Island, Kerala, South India. January 28, 2007.*

Toxoplasma gondii infects (in addition to vast numbers of cats and mice) nearly half the world's human population, triggering personality changes in infected mice and humans alike. More bizarrely, this parasite appears to be causing infected women to give birth to nearly three times as many boys as girls. *T. gondii* may even be found to influence the human willingness to host cats in their homes. Could that microorganism have co-evolved with felines just for the purpose of gaining influence over us?

More than ten thousand years ago dogs did deliberately develop their eyesight—quite undeveloped in the dog's forebear, the wolf—in order to more effectively communicate with us very visual humans (and so prey upon our emotions). Our crops convince us to plant them; our domesticate animals, to breed them. Carpet grass manipulates tens of millions of otherwise rational American men to plant it everywhere and to spend their every spare moment weeding, feeding, and generally nurturing it, inducing lawns to grow just to be mowed again.

The *ṣis*, well aware of the immense influence that other species have on the blinded-with-self-importance human, invested much time and energy pairing devatā-egregores with other animals to establish symbiotic inter-species relationships. Each devatā has thus been assigned a *vāhana*, or vehicle. Viṣṇu's is an eagle; Brahmā's, a swan. Śiva and Pārvatī ride on Nandi the bull; their sons Gaṇeśa and Subrahmaṇya employ respectively a mouse and a peacock. When we say that the deity “rides” on the vehicle, we mean that the animal serves as a terrestrial conduit for its devatā-egregore, a channel for that egregore's action in the world, a means of expression, a mouthpiece. In return, that animal is (in theory) revered by the humans who revere its rider.

“Riding” on a beast, however, is much less intimate than actually uniting with it, Gaṇeśa-fashion. It's a quantum leap, a paradigm shift, to go from bacteria-into-mitochondria conversions to entering into a “chimerical” alliance between the human race and one of the most intelligent races of non-humans. Other chimera-egregores have appeared in our world—most of the Egyptian gods and goddesses are “humanized” creatures, like Thoth, Isis, and Sekhmet—but the majority of them now live in the assisted-living facility for deities. Egyptologists pay a bit of attention to them, New Agers play with their images, and one man has sought to resurrect the cult of Sekhmet; but the ancient Egyptian deity-chimeras have by and large faded as their nourishment—the focused, sincere attention of the rank and file of the ancient Egyptian nation via the ancient-Egyptian-egregore—has dwindled.

The majority of the Vedic devatās have likewise dwindled, two salient exceptions being Viṣṇu, who went from being a relatively minor solar deity to becoming India's most lavishly adulated divinity, and Śiva, whose egregore began life as the storm god Rūdra. Two of the most popular deities in India today are Gaṇeśa and Hanumān, neither of whom appears as such in the Vedas. Hanumān is a divinized monkey, of the species known in India as *langur*, which makes elephant and langur the two species that more than ten percent of humans alive today

work with for facilitating their spiritual development. We humans get the benefit of their egregores; what benefit do these two species receive from us?

DOGS AND CATS, RICE AND CORN AND wheat, hogs and cows, all serve humans, many by sacrificing their lives, in exchange for getting humans to assist them to extend their populations, range, and varieties. According to the “*nara kunjara vanara*” tradition, elephants and monkeys are the two animals most likely to be directly reborn as humans. This intimate association ought to provide them material-world benefits as well, but day by day their numbers and habitat shrink, thanks to human transgressions. For centuries elephants have been massacred for their ivory by poachers like Veerappan. Veerappan ended his life last year as a smuggler of South Indian sandalwood, before which he had been an elephant ivory smuggler. Over a decades-long career he killed at least 120 people, and at least twice as many elephants. He lasted so long only because of protection from someone influential who was making so much money that people and elephants became expendable.

Slaughtering elephants for their tusks is a direct road to hell in human-pachyderm relations. South Africa's park service took a more indirect road, paved with the best of intentions, when some years ago they began to cull elephants from overstocked herds. This so disrupted the intricate structure of elephant society that adolescent males have in some regions begun murdering other large mammals, including rhinos. Mature bulls are now being imported into those neighborhoods to teach these young punks how to behave.

As wild African elephants have begun to kill other animals, wild Asian elephants are killing more humans than ever before, humans who encroach on their turf. Their “domesticated” kin are, in turn, now killing humans with far less provocation than before; and once a five-ton behemoth realizes how easy it is to kill a biped that is but two percent of its size, blood-lust for killing more of the oppressors can set in.

Thus far langurs are not yet infuriated with us, certainly not as incensed as Rhesus monkeys have become. In India langurs are generally considered to be moving up the evolutionary ladder, and Rhesus monkeys (called in Hindi *lal bandar*, or simply *bandar*) are often deemed to be descending it. The holy village of Vrindavana, which is Kṛṣṇa's turf, is overrun with bandars, said to be devotees of Kṛṣṇa who, having made some mistakes in their *sādhana* while human, had to return to life as near-humans. This developmental demotion naturally annoys them and provokes them to annoy in return those who are currently human, in inventive ways. For example, bandars rule certain of Vrindavana's street corners, and all sensible glasses-wearers remove their spectacles before reaching these intersections. Those who fail to do so will find a monkey swooping down to filch their eye wear; I have seen this happen. Victims then have but a minute or two to ransom their specs, with a banana, a piece of some other fruit, or something else sweet. Those who are not speedy enough with the ransom will watch the kidnapper sneer and cackle as it twists the frames in its powerful hands before loping off to toss them on some dung heap.

Langurs, who are vegetarians, generally ignore humans, save for the occasional food snatch. Though few Indians respect terrorist bandars, most Indians do respect langurs, if for no other reason than where there are langurs there are rarely bandars. In fact, Delhi's city administration recently hired a man with a pet langur to ride around on its new subway chasing off the bandars that had been intimidating riders. Why this behavioral difference—one simian species tolerating humans, the other bullying them? One reason could be variation in instinct, another, variation in how we treat them. For decades, Bandars have been trapped, tortured, and vivisected for medical research; langurs have for centuries been revered by humans who worship Hanumān.

Another reason: the Hanumān egregore, borne by the langur, has promoted respect and harmony between the children of men and the children

of monkey. The Indian pantheon sees Hanumān as the son of the wind, which in the context of the microcosm—the “internal cosmos” of the living human—means that Hanumān represents *prāṇa*. Just as Hanumān was instrumental to Rāma's retrieval of his spouse Sītā from her prison in Lanka, successful worship of Hanumān will bring the Air Element under the worshipper's control, which will make it more likely that he or she will become able to awaken Kuṇḍalinī (Sītā), and assist her to rise to reconnect with her spouse (Rāma), the supreme reality of What Is.

ALL FIVE ELEMENTS MUST BE TRANSFORMED for Kuṇḍalinī, the spiritualizing energy, to fulfill her destiny, but Air is essential for her movement, and Earth is essential to stabilize the organism while she is moving. We must no doubt escape the bonds of earth to enter the realm of spirit, but the route to the Kuṇḍalinī Śakti goes via the Earth Element. Respect for Gaṇeśa is an excellent way to induce the Earth Element to cooperate; denigrating Gaṇeśa opens the door to instability.

Periodically I visit a little corner of Sri Lanka where about 6,000 wild elephants still roam—only half as many today as were there a hundred years ago. These elephants seem a bit smaller than those in India, and when you see them in their natural habitat, surrounded by greenery, as big and gray as the boulders they enjoy hiding behind, it becomes obvious why these “animated rocks” represent the Earth Element come to life. The *ṣis* patiently toiled for God alone knows how long to negotiate an equitable accord with a species that personifies density and stability, an agreement whose fruit was the Gaṇeśa-egregore, a being who is willing to activate the Earth Element for us. That Śiva goes out to look for an elephant sleeping with his head to the north, north being the direction of disconnection from the body, implies that elephants were called upon to sacrifice their flesh, symbolically, for human benefit. And now, instead of respecting their sacrifice, we wantonly distress them.

The angrier elephants become with humans, the further the human-Earth

Element relationship will worsen. Try to raise Kuṇḍalinī before you and the Earth Element are well aligned to learn what “instability” really means. As Vimalananda used to say, “Try to open your awareness directly to this supreme totality of all the universes and you will probably achieve nothing more for yourself than a terrible headache; cosmic reality is vast, far too vast for a puny human to encompass it.” For us the sun is enormous, but compared to the star Sirius, the sun is puny. Sirius is far smaller than Arcturus, which is tiny compared to Betelgeuse, which is a midget when compared with Antares. But even Antares shrinks into insignificance when viewed from the perspective of the thirteen billion light years of our universe, which is but one among many universes in the metaverse. Each star, each galaxy, each cosmos supports its own egregore; how can you or I ever dream of comprehending even a tiny fraction of the totality of this reality?

WE HAVE THAT DREAM, OF COURSE, which is why we extend our minds to the limits of our manifested universe, contemplating the nature of existence. Humanity craves correlation between microcosm and macrocosm, individual and universe. Ultimate reality can be accessed via each of India’s myriad deity-egregores, each a “step-down transformer” in the ākāśa-matrix to keep that ultimate reality from overloading an individual. “Polytheism in principal, monotheism in fact” in practice here, each deity serving as the “queen bee” of whatever “hive” space her devotee-family creates and holds, each devotee “worker bee” serving as a representative of the entire hive.

Steadiness, welcome in any vehicle, is all the more welcome in a devatā’s human vehicle. Steadiness is a gift of the Earth Element, but that very quality of stability that makes Earth so valuable to us makes it hard for us to obtain, for what wavers not changes very slowly, and humans are always in a hurry. Worship of Gaṇeśa facilitates alignment with the Earth Element; so does establishing and maintaining a healthy

relationship with one piece of earth over several generations. Cling long enough to your soil and the space—ākāśa—that encompasses that terrain will become so impregnated with your vibrations that you will become “bound” to it; you and it will begin to co-evolve. Traditional peoples across the globe have followed such practices for ages.

During a recent trip to Argentina my niece and nephew and I visited Iguacu Falls, one of the world’s wonders. While there we had a chance to visit a band of Guaraní, the local natives; Roberto, their chief, was our tour guide. Roberto has clearly thought long and hard about how best to inspire the 800 members of his band as they attempt to maintain their traditions, preserve what remains of their forest, and obtain nourishment on a little over 500 acres. Knowing that their space is not large enough to grow sufficient crops or trap sufficient animals for living off that land, they have had to explore non-traditional pursuits that minimally impact their way of life to provide them with the necessities of living. They have elected to sell traditional handicrafts and recordings of traditional songs to tourists who visit them to see how they used to live. People come from all over the world to visit Iguacu, and our group—Mexicans, Venezuelans, Germans, Brits, and we three Americans—witnessed Roberto and his people trying to find a path into the future that will permit them to preserve their shared reality.

The reality that Roberto and his people share consists of a small bio-reserve, a lengthy tradition, and the field of communal awareness that makes them an extended “family,” a “people.” This is their “hive,” each tribes person an extension of the collective consciousness that is the tribe’s egregore. Much as beehives embody, in one time and place, the bee-egregore, Roberto’s band defines itself primarily in terms of its band-egregore, tethering that egregore to their territory to keep it secure.

The queen bee is the corporeal mother of each of her swarm. A tribe’s chief, though usually not the actual progenitor of each tribe member, usually does serve a parental function, the tribe’s egregore

working through him or her to instill purpose and direction in the clan. The misalignments that will always arise will resolve, spontaneously or via a purposeful tribal ritual, if group members remain mutually well affiliated. A tribal chief who has to order his people around is not doing his job very well.

Humans have since prehistory gravitated into clans and tribes, each binding a clan-egregore to a locale. Many of Australia’s Aborigines still use “Dreamtime” awareness to maintain direct connections between specific sites and perceptions of reality held since ancient days. Shared awareness is no guarantee of benevolence—history is littered with tribes that have run amok—but far more malevolence has been perpetrated in the name of “hives” whose members have lost both their individuality and their common consciousness.

Nationhood is a less reliable egregore than is tribe-hood, especially when the nation as a whole loses its “mystical” connection to terra firma. Whenever the “state” gains paramouncy, and individuality becomes a sin or crime, that disconnect can unleash surreally detrimental behavior by leaders who become divorced from earthy reality, like Chairman Mao with his Great Leap Forward, his Cultural Revolution, and his diktat to eliminate all of China’s birds (this last nearly destroyed China’s ecology and caused untold numbers of Chinese to perish from starvation).

Chairman Mao was the agent of the unholy egregore spawned when revolutionary communism mated with traditional Chinese authoritarianism to generate a “consensus reality” based on nothing “real.” Today’s world is riddled with consensus realities that have no bases. Our currencies, for example, are now all “fiat currencies.” Once backed by gold or silver, the U.S. dollar is now backed solely by the Federal Reserve; a dollar possesses only that exchange value that everyone agrees it ought to possess.

WE TODAY ARE WITNESSES TO A colossal experiment in shared awareness, in the form of the multinational consensus reality that is the

Internet. Jaron Lanier is that unusual computer scientist who both ponders the implications of tech innovations and articulates his findings intelligibly. In “Digital Maoism,” his recent article on Edge.org, he opined that the so-called “hive-mind”—a term that is gaining traction on the net—is not necessarily the benign development that many netizens believe it to be. The net version of the “hive-mind” proposes that when individuals get together and contribute opinions or activities under certain protocols, that the sum of all those opinions or activities represents a higher form of awareness than the opinion or action of any member of the “hive” acting as an individual. This sounds something like the tribal mind, except of course that “hive-minders” on the net share nothing that is actually “real”—not acreage, language, or usage—with one another. Almost none of them have ever met one another in person. Whatever they do have in common is virtual—deliberately disconnected from external reality.

It is for this reason that I find Ray Kurzweil so alarming. Mr. Kurzweil, who takes 250 supplements a day (thereby altering his perception massively), is convinced that within a short few decades a *singularity* will occur, after which people will no longer have to live in “wet wear,” i.e. their physical bodies, but will instead be able to ascend into an “advanced” kind of awareness which will be maintained with machines.

Leaving aside the inevitable glitches (like a virus that corrupts the system irreversibly), how will we maintain any sort of alignment with Earth if we no longer employ earthy bodies? And what is to keep the hive-mind from going utterly insane when no one is able any longer to keep his or her feet on the ground—because no one any longer has feet? Lanier cites a simple example of the madness of contemporary crowds in his March 2007 *Discover* magazine column: the series of “Scarlet Letter” postings in China that “incited online throngs to hunt down accused adulterers, to the point that some individuals have had to barricade themselves in their homes.” Lanier’s point: Via the Internet

“massive, fascist-style mobs could rise up suddenly.”

As humans experiment with virtual reality and disembodied states of being, the potential for the “net-hive” to become infected with virulent *memes*, or mind viruses, increases dramatically—just as beehives around the world are now being decimated by mites, fungi and other parasites. Communism, fascism, nationalism, laissez-faire capitalism, and jihadism are all memes whose propagation the laissez-faire Internet facilitates indiscriminately, for the net treats all packetized information, deserving and undeserving, equally. Given that the naïve notion that the “collective wisdom” of the hive-mind will somehow filter out “anomalies” has not yet filtered out either spam or child pornography, the potential for a future gargantuan disarticulation of awareness from reality seems all too real. At the end of “Digital Maoism” Lanier speaks with alarm of the rise of the fallacy of the infallible collective, and proposes that the best guiding principle is always to put individuals first. He believes, as do I, that the hive-mind works reliably when it is being directed by someone, in the same way that a hive of bees survives because of its focus on the queen. The net offers the potential for each of us either to become “queens” in our own domains, or to enslave ourselves as worker bees in the service of the latest despot.

Enlisting in a collective with no director offers no direction either for self-actuation or spiritual development. Every human, belonging to however many collectives, is still first and foremost an individual. It has never been and will never be feasible for humans to live wholly as individuals; everybody has to rely on others for something, be it growing food, constructing shelter, or treating disease. Everyone can’t do everything, but everyone can be responsible for his or her own personal reality.

Vimalananda repeatedly emphasized that the Vedic tradition encourages all individuals to carve out their own niches, to follow their own paths through life as they elaborate their own ties to reality. Carving out your own niche usually happens, however, in association with some community

of other like-minded seekers, joining your awareness to theirs, to whatever degree, to reinforce the egregore you take on the responsibility of tending. It is accordingly wise to ensure that the egregore you serve is worthy of being served, and likely to endure.

In this regard it is wise to keep up to date on what mind viruses are circulating in the e-environment, that we may immunize ourselves against them. Teenagers, who habitually look to their peers for guidance, and are ever engaged in creating cliques, posses, and temporary clans, are prime sources of information about memes, the net, and new “hive-minds” in general. Teens have, for example, introduced me to Sponge Bob Square Pants, Samurai Jack, Inu Yasha, and Aqua Teen Hunger Force.

Aqua Teen’s (animated) cast includes Frylock, a bag of French fries that has come to life; Master Shake, an enlivened milk shake; Meatwad, a talking lump of raw meat; and Carl, this fast food gang’s hirsute, long-suffering human neighbor. While the show (which has nothing per se to do with water) does not seem overly malefic, it does dismay that the very junk food that is ruining the health of our young has now “come to life,” and that this animated junk food is actually smarter (and more photogenic) than the average human (Carl). One can only speculate with dread where this particular egregore might be heading.

EACH OF US DURING OUR LIFETIMES meets only a small fraction of the billions of humans that we could meet. We meet those that we do meet only because we share some mutual karmic affinity. We can use our affinities to create fan clubs for the famous, to build Internet chat rooms, or to work with devatās. The astute ṛṣis, who knew well the many pluses and minuses of shared awareness, established the *gotra* system to encourage deity-egregores. Gotras, which are clans that are connected by common ancestors, are used nowadays exclusively to ensure exogamy in marriage, to avoid inbreeding. Originally, though, gotras were also used to maintain genetic patterns in

bloodlines to make it easy for those born into those bloodlines to achieve success at sādha of that gotra's devatā. Each gotra originated with a certain ṛṣi, who by matching the proclivities of that bloodline with the characteristics of one aspect of reality would create an appropriate devatā-egregore for that family to work with.

The gotra system worked well over dozens of generations, until people began to lose their alignment with the Vedas. As the Vedic religion aged and withered, the new shoots that sprouted from its roots included Vedānta, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, the Purāṇas and Epics, and the Tantras. The Tantric tradition transformed the gotra concept into the concept of *kula*, a word which also means “family.” The Tantric kula is however a “family” that has everything to do with karmic affinity, and nothing (necessarily) to do with bloodlines.

Members of a kula come together to create a kula-egregore that will first mirror, then eventually (if they are diligent and patient) unite with its devatā-egregore, which will act as an aperture to the Ultimate. A group of Gaṇeśa devotees who possess the proper affinity could thus create their own hive, or tribe, that would work together to create “Gaṇeśaness” in themselves and their surroundings. As individuals, each will still possess and cultivate his or her own individual relationship with the supreme reality as expressed through Gaṇeśa; working together as a group, the personal spiritual development of each group member may be substantially enhanced.

Aligning with Gaṇeśa becomes easier when one activates the affinities that have over the centuries accreted to the Gaṇeśa-egregore. Gaṇeśa is, for example, very fond of Bermuda grass, which when used in his worship will attract his attention. Those who consume the juice of Bermuda grass, particularly after it has been offered to Gaṇeśa, may find their awareness becoming more “Gaṇeśa-like.” Viṣṇu loves *tulasī* (*Ocimum sanctum*), a plant which has become an indispensable connector between human reality and Viṣṇu reality. For Śiva it is *Aegle marmelos*, the *bilva* tree, a small evergreen whose

fruit is used as food and medicine and offered ritually. The tree's leaves, which are triune, resemble Śiva's three eyes. Consume appropriately prepared bilva leaves, and your awareness will move in the direction of Śiva's awareness, which will make you a better vehicle for Śiva.

ONE KEY PRACTICE IN THE Amazonian religion known as *vegetalismo* is the *dieta*, during which you spend time in the jungle with chosen plants, focusing on them, eating them almost exclusively, living with them until they begin to communicate with you. If you are successful in establishing a healthy relationship with one such plant, then thereafter, when you meet someone who is ill, the plant might tell you, “I can be used to heal this person.” By helping a human the plant does a favor for the human egregore, a favor which humanity, one day or other, will inevitably repay; such is the mandate of karma. When we repay such favors equitably, by for example expanding that plant's habitat, then that plant will often respond by helping us even more. The plant benefits, humanity benefits, the cosmos benefits, benefit all around.

When we forget however that the Golden Rule applies even to plants, and instead bulldoze the forest to collect all the plants we can find, extract their active principles, and sell them for giant profits—then the situation is not so equitable anymore. Then we should not be surprised when plants stop wanting to cooperate with humans. Fortunately there are still shamans in the Amazon who follow the practices of vegetalismo, and interested people can still do dietas in the Amazon. Anyone can establish such a relationship with any plant, but since the Amazon is where the vegetalismo-egregore lives, it makes sense to go there to perform the practice. Such practices were once performed in India, but for centuries now most herbalists there have focused on medicinal plants chiefly as items of commerce, which has caused that sort of relationship to gain precedence. Even those who sincerely respect the plants associated with their deity-egregore usually don't know how to use those plants to their best effect,

because they have not been taught how to communicate with them.

IT IS OFTEN BEST TO WORK WITH plants and their devatā-egregores in their own locales. If you want to worship Kṛṣṇa you should spend time in Vrindavana, where everyone worships Kṛṣṇa. The Narasimha-egregore is most activated in Andhra Pradesh, and the Gaṇeśa-egregore in Maharashtra. For the Śiva-egregore you can consider Mount Kailasa, or Benares.

Benares, or Varanasi, is also known as Kashi, the name I prefer because “Kashi” sounds like “ākāśa”—for the good reason that both arise from the same root. Kashi means “the City of Light”; not sunlight (though there is more than enough of that there during the summer), but the light of enlightenment, which draws saints, students, and musicians to the city. Ordinary people flock to Kashi to wait to die, or if they have already died, to be cremated there. The combined influence of hundreds of millions of people over millennia—Kashi being the oldest continually-inhabited city on earth—focusing on the presence of Śiva there means that Kashi has become an unparalleled location for alignment with Śiva. Kashi is meant for intensity and transformation, not for relaxing vacations (particularly since the weather is harsh, and the city full of bandars). The Kashi-egregore draws to it those who wish to sample its intensity and experience its transformative potential, and visitors who are interested in neither will do well to depart promptly, lest shortly thereafter they come to wish that they had.

We can of course worship Śiva anywhere, not just in Kashi, by any method, even without bull or bilva. It's just that these render escape from the overpowering power of the human egregore more feasible, which makes it easier for us who are so completely overcome by humanness to shift our awareness into non-human directions. We separate ourselves from the natural environment in our climate-controlled boxes, surrounding ourselves with cars and freeways and office buildings that insulate us from the natural world. We

produce so much artificial light that night is no longer black; two-thirds of the world's inhabitants can no longer see the Milky Way. We have intruded into and stamped our imprint upon all regions of the earth, tolerating only those species that appear to be doing our bidding (even while those seemingly subjugated dogs, cats, carpet grass, food grains, and intoxicating plants use us to propagate themselves).

We forget to extend the Golden Rule to other humans, much less other species, which explains why we as a species have so suppressed the natural behavior of the natural world that we no longer know how to behave as members of the collective of all species. And now many of the species we once took for granted as happy little helpers are no longer willing, or able, to cooperate with us. India has lost almost all its vultures, its carrion-consuming scavengers; honeybees around the world

are suddenly dying mysteriously, in droves, probably from overwork.

There are, thankfully, a few signs of progress. Have you ever seen *The Dog Whisperer*, on the National Geographic TV channel? It focuses on Cesar Millan, who grew up on a farm in Mexico and now lives in Los Angeles, where he rehabilitates dogs and re-trains their humans. Cesar says that the main problem with dogs is that we treat them like they were humans instead of relating to them like dogs. In a human-dog relationship the human is the pack leader, and when the human fails to act like the pack leader, the dog becomes neurotic, and acts up. Change the human's awareness, and you improve the relationship.

HERE WE ARE TODAY DURING THE Gaṇeśa festival, just before the auspicious moment when India will immerse its Gaṇeśas. It is the perfect

time for us to turn our attention to Gaṇeśa, and to elephants, and to how naughty we have been to elephants, and to so many other species, whose egregores are so fed-up with us that they are now beginning to refuse to cooperate with us. We humans have attempted to manage the entire world without having any idea of how to run it properly, behaving all the while as if we did. As humans, you and I each share in all the karmas that humans have ever performed, for each of us carries within a portion of the very, very wayward human egregore. Unless we change our ways dramatically, and soon, we shall soon have to pay through our noses; if we do begin to do things differently, our situation may still be salvageable.

Now is a fine time for each one of us to say a little prayer that all sentient beings be happy, healthy, and well-integrated. May Gaṇeśa remove all obstacles from our paths!❧ Om Gaṇ Gaṇapataye Namaḥ!



Elephant ambling south along National Highway 47, Kerala, South India. January 27, 2007.

UNDERSTANDING ĪŚVARA

SWAMI TATTVAIDANANDA SARASWATI

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VISION OF ĪŚVARA

THE VEDIC VISION OF THE WORLD (*jagat*) and the Godhead (*Īśvara*) has no parallel in the history of mankind. In this vision, Īśvara is understood to be *nirguṇa* (without any attributes), and the world is seen to be a manifest form of Īśvara. While the word *nirguṇa* is used to indicate that the attributes ascribed to Īśvara are not intrinsic, this *nirguṇatvam*, or the status of being nirguṇa itself, is not an attribute of Īśvara. Īśvara is essentially neither *saguṇa* (with attributes) nor nirguṇa. However, as Īśvara is worshipped in the saguṇa form, it becomes necessary to mention that Īśvara is nirguṇa.

Īśvara is referred to as *satyam jñānam anantam Brahma* (*Brahman* is Infinite Existence-Awareness) according to the *Śruti*. *Satyam* means *sattā* or existence. We are only aware of existence limited in terms of space, time, and form (*deśa-kāla-vastu-paricchinna*). For example, when you say that there “is” a pot or that there “is” some object, you imply a particular type of existence which is bound by “here” and not obtaining elsewhere (*deśa-paricchinna*), bound by “now” and not obtaining at some other time (*kāla-paricchinna*), and bound by a specific form and no other form (*vastu-paricchinna*). It does not occur to us that there could be Existence (*Sat*) that transcends these three limitations. The time, space, name, and form rise together and set together. They resolve into us when we fall asleep and resurface when we emerge from sleep. Even theologians take these limitations for granted, as do scientists. According to Einstein, the entire universe is seen against the fabric of time-space. There can be no universe, there can be no world of objects, without the background of time-space. It is a package deal in which one exists because of the other.

The world, as we know it, is nothing but Existence, seen as some object or

the other. To understand this better, let us take the example of a golden necklace or a golden bangle. Is the necklace or bangle an attribute of gold, or gold the attribute of the ornament? The suffix *en* in ‘golden’ seems to indicate that gold is an attribute of the necklace and the bangle. This is a wrong understanding. In reality, the ornaments are attributes of the gold. It is essentially gold you are looking at in the form of necklace, and it is also gold you are looking at in the form of bangle. An ornament is none other than gold in one form or another. In the same way, when you say that there “is” a pot (*ghaṭaḥ asti*), you have understood *sattā* in terms of an attribute called pot. As in the case of gold and ornaments, we imagine that existence is an attribute of the pot (*san ghaṭaḥ*), while in truth, it is the pot that is an attribute of existence. We are unable to visualize the pure Existence.

The mind always relates to things in terms of their *nāma-rūpa* (form with a given name) alone. Our minds build a prison cell in which we all live. It is a cell with three walls: time, space, and causation. That is the reason why we look at existence in terms of time and space. That is how the mind understands existence; it cannot look at it in any other way.

The mind also has the property of imputing the attributes of one thing to another. We have seen how we can appreciate existence only in terms of name and form of a perceived object, which by nature is limited in space and time. Thus the name and form become an *upādhi*, a limiting adjunct, to the Supreme Reality. The pot, which is but a shape that exists here and now, was not always there. It did not exist before it was made, and at some point of time it will also cease to exist. We should understand that the limitations of time and space are incidental (*aupādhika*) and belong

to the *upādhi*, or the limiting adjunct, alone. The existence that is known to us, experienced by us, and called by us as the *jagat*, is saguṇa Sat. Saguṇa implies that the *guṇas* of the *upādhi* seem to limit the Reality. In other words, they are superimpositions alone.

The *sattā* that we appreciate in *upādhis* is nothing but Īśvara, or Existence-Absolute, when properly understood. This is the most fundamental way of looking at Īśvara. This *sattā*, which we call the world, the world of names and forms, is in reality the Existence-Absolute, the Brahman. When all the attributes of names and forms with which we identify Existence, as in pot-existence or cloth-existence, are totally negated, what remains is the Existence-Absolute; that is Īśvara, which is above and beyond every existence and its counterpart non-existence.

The world and “I” are not two separate or independent entities. The saguṇa *sattā* that we perceive implies a separation from Brahman. In perceiving the “Being” in terms of *nāma-rūpa*, we disconnect the person, the individual, from the *jagat*. This apparent separation of “I,” the *draṣṭā* (subject), from the *jagat*, as the *dṛśya* (object) is an error in our understanding. You cannot have an object without a subject. Nor can you have a subject without an object. Therefore, the moment you have the *dṛśya-jagat*, you also have the limited being, the *draṣṭā*. You cannot have *jagat* without *draṣṭā*, the limited being. Thus both *jagat* and *draṣṭā* are superimpositions on One nondual Existence-Awareness Absolute that is Īśvara; the separation is unreal. But we do not understand it in this way.

Do you want a proof of Īśvara’s existence? Yes, I want a proof. When we say that there “is” a pot, it is the proof of Īśvara’s existence. The idea is that whenever and wherever we recognize “something” as “is” or existent, that “is-ness” or existence is indeed Brahman. That “something” is a name and form, and hence it is unreal. A discriminating devotee sees the clouds and rains, and thereby understands that Īśvara exists. He sees a peacock dancing and understands that Īśvara exists. What an

artist Īśvara must be! There are infinite aspects of the glory of Īśvara present before us that can readily signify Īśvara to an observant mind. And for a saint all existence is Īśvara. In fact, a saint (*sant*) is one who recognizes Īśvara in all the existence (*sat*).

A verse from the *Kaṭhōpaniṣat* reflects this vision of Īśvara:

अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धव्यस्तत्त्वभावेन
चोभयोः ।

अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धस्य तत्त्वभावः
प्रसीदति ॥ (२-३-१३)

*Astītyevopalabdhavyastattvabhāvena
cobhayoḥ ।*

*Astītyevopalabdhasya tattvabhāvaḥ
prasīdati ॥ (2-3-13)*

One has to cognize that the *Ātman*, which is Brahman, alone manifests as the “being” [of the objects of the world]. Brahman is the “is-ness” from the point of view of a given name and form, while in Itself, It is the Being-Absolute. To the one who focuses his attention on the “is-ness” of the world-objects, the Being reveals Itself.

ĪŚVARA AS THE EFFICIENT-CUM-MATERIAL CAUSE OF THE UNIVERSE

FROM THE ABOVE, WE CONCLUDE THAT Īśvara is the *abhinna nimitta upādāna kāraṇa*, the efficient-cum-material cause of this universe. This vision of Īśvara is unique and marvellous. Understanding Īśvara as the *nimitta-kāraṇa*, the efficient cause, the One who has created this universe, does not require much insight. All order presupposes a sentient maker (*cetana puruṣa*). Even the child who plays with a toy can infer from its limited knowledge that there must be a maker of the toy. You look at the universe and infer that Īśvara must have created it. There is such a symmetry and order everywhere that one can only conclude it to be the handiwork of a *cetana puruṣa*. Science does not create anything new. It is a study of the order and the symmetry of this universe, which are already in place. If there were no order, there would be no science. Thus science itself is but a proof of Īśvara’s glory.

You can look at any aspect of the universe and say, “This is Īśvara’s glory.” When it rains you can say, “Oh! Īśvara sent these clouds.” You could then imagine Īśvara as sitting somewhere and giving an order to the clouds to go ahead and rain. This is one way of looking at it. Another way is to say that Īśvara did not order the clouds to rain, but He came in the form of clouds and rained. An even better view is the understanding that Īśvara came first in the form of the clouds, then he came successively in the forms of the rains, crops, food, hunger, and enjoyment. Every aspect and every facet of this universe is the manifestation of Īśvara. This is how *abhinna nimitta upādāna kāraṇa* is to be understood.

What is to be known, however, is that Īśvara is not just the maker of the universe or even the power behind that maker. He is the universe Himself. To understand this better, let us take the example of a moving car. What is the power behind the movement of the car and where does it come from? The power comes from the petrol or gas that is in the car. It is not as if the gas directly supplies the power that moves the car. The gas becomes the power, which drives the car. Not only does it become the power that drives the car, but it becomes the power that is the very motion of the car. We have three ideas here: gas, power, and the motion of the car. These are not really three, but a single phenomenon manifesting in three different forms. One particular manifestation is gas, the other manifestation is power and the third manifestation is mechanical motion. It is the tendency of the mind to create division or distinction where none exists.

Let us look at yet another example. At one time, among the scientific community, nobody had even dreamt about the equivalence of mass and energy. In fact, they were cocksure that mass and energy were two different facets of the universe. There was mass and there was energy, neither created nor destroyed. In 1896, when Swami Vivekananda visited the United States, he met Professor Tesla, who was the greatest physicist of that time. On being asked about the possibility of a relationship between

mass and energy, Tesla said that he had a few calculations that indicated that the potential energy of a body is related to its mass. After listening to Professor Tesla, Swami Vivekananda said, “In that case, the Vedāntic cosmology will be placed on the surest of foundations. I am working a good deal now upon the cosmology and eschatology of the Vedānta. I clearly see their perfect unison with modern science, and the elucidation of the one will be followed by that of the other” (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.5, p.101). This was in the year 1896 when physics had not grown to the level of *Vedānta*. We had to wait a few more years for Einstein to work out that mass and energy are two facets of the same *vastu*, the Reality. The *abhinna nimitta upādāna kāraṇa* is such a profound vision of Vedānta.

RELATIVITY OF SPACE AND TIME

IN THE ŚRĪ DAKṢIṆĀMŪRTI STOTRAM, Śrī Śaṅkara says that the entire universe is nothing but the Reality differentiated in the framework of space (*deśa*) and time (*kāla*), (*deśakālakalanā-vaicitryacitrikṛtam*). Are space and time absolute? Sir Isaac Newton formulated his Laws of Motion by assuming that time and space are absolute. He was a scientist who knew that he could not dissociate objects from time and space; he was not a theologian to conveniently forget about time and space and talk only about the world. Newton says that motion of objects takes place in absolute space and in absolute time and it follows certain laws. It is to the glory of Śrī Śaṅkara who said that time and space are not absolute; they are movements in the Universal Consciousness; they are categories of the human mind (*māyā-kalpita deśakālakalanā*).

Time and space are nothing but superimpositions on the Awareness that is Brahman or Īśvara. Time is the awareness of the motion of an object in space. In the absence of the cognition of motion, there is no time. Time is not an entity; it is a notion. Time exists in the mind of the subject. There is no time without the observer. Newton thought that time is absolute. Einstein pointed out that time is relative; it depends upon the observer.

Śrī Śaṅkara knew this all the time! When we look at the world and interact with the world, we are really looking at Īśvara and interacting with Īśvara. God is not external to the world; God is intrinsic to the world. This universe is the glorious manifestation of Īśvara. This is the vision of the Vedic seers.

RELATING TO ĪŚVARA IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS

THIS UNIVERSE SEEMS TO BE INSENTIENT. Did it originate from an insentient source? In fact, the division into sentience and insentience, or into life and non-life is not a result of any rigorous investigation and hence it is superficial. If you explore the origins of the universe, the division you perceive at the gross level will not exist. In quantum physics, there is no such division as “living” and “non-living.” This division exists only at the intermediate level, in the manifest or gross form. The entire universe has originated from Consciousness that is Brahman. Modern cosmology says that the universe has originated from an insentient primordial ylem. Vedic vision goes one more step forward and declares that the entire universe is the manifestation of the sentient Brahman. This means that every aspect of this universe is a superimposition on the sentient Brahman or Īśvara alone.

In the *Rgveda* (1-164-46), it is said :

इन्द्रं मित्रं वरुणमग्निमाहुरथो
दिव्यस्स सुपर्णो गरुत्मान् ।
एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्त्यग्निं यमं
मातरिश्वानमाहुः ॥

*Indraṁ mitraṁ
varuṇamagnimāhuratho
divyassa suparṇo garutmān,
Ekaṁ sadviprā bahudhā
vadantyagninṁ yamaṁ
mātariśvānamāhuh.*

This Infinite Ātman, the Supreme Reality, the Existence-Absolute is One-without-a-second. But the seers call it by different names such as Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Suparṇa, [the divine eagle] Garutmān, Agni, Yama, and Mātariśvā.

There is only one Sat, Existence. Being one indivisible, undivided Sat, it has neither beginning nor end. That is Brahman. When we say One (*ekam*), it is not the number one, which is half of two, one-third of three, etc. This One is non-dual, the One without a second. However, this One is described with various names and forms. Why should the *ṛṣis* (sages) describe it in different names and forms? It is to facilitate relating to that Sat, that Īśvara, by the devotee, through His different aspects of manifestation. Every aspect of the universe is a manifestation of Īśvara. If you do not understand its connection with Īśvara, that manifestation becomes *samsāra* (bondage) and it binds you.

मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं
बन्धमोक्षयोः (पञ्चदशी, ६-६८)

*Mana eva manuṣyāṇām kāraṇaṁ
bandhamokṣayoḥ (Pañcadaśī, 6-68).*

The mind alone is the cause of
both bondage and liberation
of human beings.

A correct understanding of the mind liberates you. On the other hand, wrong ideas in the mind bind you. Every glory of this universe and even any aspect of this universe can help you to relate to Īśvara. There is no aspect of the universe that cannot signal Īśvara to you.

When you want to relate to Īśvara as the ultimate cause of the universe, you can do so through any one of His many facets. We are familiar with the saying that there are many paths to the same destination. Whichever aspect of the universe you concentrate upon, it finally leads to Īśvara alone. Nothing in this universe is different from Īśvara. The Lord has not borrowed the raw material for the creation of the universe from somewhere else. There is no raw material other than the Lord Himself. The *Taittirīyopaniṣat* (2-6) describes the manifestation of the Lord as the universe as follows :

सोऽकामयत । बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति ।

So’kāmayata, Bahu syāṁ prajāyeyeti.

That Brahman desired: May I
become many. May I be born.

According to the model of creation presented in Vedānta, Īśvara manifests as this creation. So the apparent plurality is but a superimposition on Īśvara. If you want to see gold in a jeweler’s shop, you can see it in any ornament that you look at because the underlying reality of all ornaments is gold alone. Similarly, every aspect of this universe reflects Īśvara and whichever way you relate to it, you are really relating to Īśvara.

THE CONCEPT OF DEVATĀ

WHATEVER ASPECT OF THIS UNIVERSE you may look at, the underlying reality is Brahman. This is an important proposition and is to be known and understood well. The entire universe is a superimposition on the Consciousness, the Brahman. Suppose a child pulls at my finger; is he not pulling me? Should he hug all of me to attract my attention? That is not necessary. Similarly, whatever may be the aspect of Īśvara you relate to, whatever may be the name of Īśvara that you utter, whether Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, or Gaṇeśa, and whatever may be the form you worship, it leads to One non-dual Brahman.

Whatever you are looking at is an aspect of Brahman and therefore it is not different from Consciousness. Therefore, it can be termed a *devatā*, since the word *devatā* means the illumination of the consciousness. A lifeless insentient thing can never be termed devatā. We revere each of the infinite aspects of Īśvara’s manifestation as a devatā (deity) and you can relate to Īśvara through any devatā that appeals to you.

Take the case of a rupee coin. It is just a piece of metal and looks insentient. The underlying reality of the coin, however, is its purchasing power, which in abundance can help a sentient being lead a comfortable life. So this piece of metal is not so insentient after all. Wealth is an aspect through which you can appreciate the glory of Īśvara. Wealth is invariably associated with beauty. The beauty in nature and the beauty in wealth are both glories of the Lord. Both these aspects, wealth and beauty, are combined in the name *Śrī Devatā*. Any aspect of Īśvara’s manifestation can never be separate from Him. Therefore,

we say that the Goddess of wealth, *Śrī Devatā*, is never away from the God. In this manner, every aspect of the universe is a devatā.

You can relate to Īśvara through any aspect of His manifestation. For instance, if it is a river or a mountain, Īśvara then becomes a river-devatā or a mountain-devatā. Look at the river Gaṅgā or any river for that matter. To an undiscerning eye, it may appear as a lifeless body of flowing water. In the vision of Vedānta, the river is but a nāma and a rūpa (name and form) which are superimpositions on the *Parabrahma caitanya* (Supreme Existence-Awareness). The underlying reality of the river is its power and influence on life, which are aspects of manifestation of Parabrahman. If you are able to understand that truth, the river Gaṅgā is no more an insentient river. It is a devatā. Therefore we call it Gaṅgā Devi.

Think of the splendor of the Himalayan range. What a beautiful range it is! It is the mountain range from which the Gaṅgā and many other rivers originate. In the very first verse of the immortal poem *Kumārasambhava*, the poet Kālidāsa says :

अस्त्युत्तरस्यामं दिशि देवतात्मा
हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः ।

*Astyuttarasyaṁ diśi devatātmā
himālayo nāma nagādhirājaḥ.*

There, in the north, is the king of mountains, called Himālaya. He is essentially a devatā [manifestation of the Awareness-Absolute].

In the Vedic vision, the Himalayas are not a lifeless mountain range but truly a manifestation of Īśvara. They are a devatā. All natural phenomena are devatās.

IN LIFE, THERE ARE ALWAYS SOME hidden parameters that are not within our control. We take these unknown factors into account when we relate to Īśvara as One who takes care of them and helps us succeed in our endeavor. Īśvara then becomes Gaṇeśa or Vijaya Gaṇapati. Knowledge is another aspect of manifestation through which you

can appreciate Īśvara. Knowledge then becomes another devatā. The name of that devatā is Sarasvatī.

The human body itself is called a temple, *devālaya*. It is the abode of Īśvara. There are many devatās in the body. For example, the hands are a sentient faculty; they possess the faculty of holding objects. Therefore there is a devatā representing this faculty; the name of that devatā is Indra. The eyes have the faculty of vision, grasping forms and colors of various objects; there is a devatā for the eyes, Sūrya (the Sun God). The nose has the faculty of discerning smell; there are twin devatās for the nose, the Aśvinī Kumāras. Agni is the devatā for the faculty of speech. The devatā for the mind, the faculty of thinking, is Candra, the moon. There are counterparts of these *adhyātma* devatās (belonging to the body-mind-sense complex) in the cosmos created from the five elements (*adhibhūta*). Thus we can extrapolate this microcosm to the macrocosm and vice versa. In this context, Īśvara is called the *Virāṭ Puruṣa*, the Cosmic Person. Every aspect of the cosmos is like His limb. He has various limbs and each limb is a devatā. All these are manifestations of that Īśvara alone. Thus, any aspect of life or the universe can be a signal for understanding Īśvara. This is the significance of the apparent plurality of the devatās.

ĪŚVARA TRANSCENDS GENDER

ĪŚVARA HAS NO GENDER AND IS BEYOND gender, even though the words that are used to describe Īśvara have a gender associated with them. Gender is the property of the body alone. Beyond the body, there is no gender. In fact, sense organs, mind, intellect, ego (*ahamkāra*), the witnessing Awareness (*sākṣī*), and Ātman, the Brahman, all of them transcend gender.

What sets the language of Sanskrit apart from most other languages is that the gender of a word is not always connected to its meaning. There are words that have the same meaning but are different in gender. There are many words like *dārāḥ* (wife, neuter gender) that illustrate that linguistic gender and biological gender can be different. In

many instances like Rāmaḥ (the Lord Rāma), both the genders coincide, and in some words like *mitram* (friend, neuter gender) they do not. There are words with the same meaning in all the three genders, for example, *taṭaḥ*, *taṭī*, *taṭam* (bank of a river). The term *awareness (caitanyam)* has three synonyms, *daivam*, *devaḥ* and *devatā*. Daivam is neuter, devaḥ is masculine and devatā is feminine. From the view-point of *vyākaraṇa* (Sanskrit grammar), you can use any one of these words. For example, you can say, “*Rāmo mama daivam*” to mean “Lord Rāma is my (personal) God.” Here *daivam* is neuter. You can also say, “Rāma mama devaḥ,” or “Rāma mama devatā.” Therefore, we can use any one of the three words, even though the gender differs.

The Upaniṣads always present Brahman as Ātman, the innermost reality of the individual. Brahman is really beyond words. The description can never be the same as the described. Yet, words are used to indicate the Ineffable Brahman; while using words, the grammatical gender cannot be avoided. Thus, for example, consider the *mahāvākya* (great statement) of the *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣat* (2):

अयमात्मा ब्रह्म ।

Ayamātmā Brahma.

This Ātman is Brahman.

In this statement, *ayam* (this) and *Ātmā* are both masculine in gender. However, this Supreme Reality is described in feminine terms in the *Chāndogyopaniṣat* (6-3-2):

सेयं देवतैक्षत...नामरूपे
व्याकरवाणीति ।

*Seyaṁ devataikṣata...nāmarūpe
vyākaravāṇīti.*

That this Brahman visualized
...that I would manifest
[as] names and forms.

Here the words *seyaṁ (that this)* and *devatā* (the *Brahman*) are in feminine gender. Brahman is also described in the neuter gender in the mahāvākya of the

Chāndogyopaniṣat (6-9-4):

तत्सत्यं स आत्मा तत्त्वमसि ।

Tat satyaṁ sa ātmā tattvamasi.
That is the Truth. That is the Ātman.
That art thou.

Here the words *tat* (*that*) and *satyam* (*truth*) are in neuter gender. The fact is that Brahman transcends gender. Only the physical body can have gender.

HINDUISM IS NOT POLYTHEISTIC

THERE COULD BE A NUMBER OF deities and shrines in a temple, representing Rāma *parivār*, Śiva *parivār*, Viṣṇu *parivār*, or Devī *parivār*, *parivār* meaning the family. The temple seems to represent many gods. Do we worship a multitude of gods? Not at all. Unless it is properly understood, this form of worship will be misinterpreted as being polytheism or paganism. Someone looks at the myriad names presented in the literature and labels Hinduism as polytheistic. Some Hindus are themselves confused and are not able to explain this properly to others. You must have heard of *advaita*. Advaita is not monotheism. People translate *dvaita* as dualism (polytheism) and *advaita* as monotheism. This kind of translation is simplistic and misleading. Abrahamic faiths are monotheistic. They maintain that there is One God, who is external to this world. They say that there are many gods in Hinduism. But this is not what Hinduism really is all about. In fact, in Hindu philosophy (*advaita*), there is no “one” God; there is “only” the Godhead. This is the highest truth. It is thus declared in the *Chāndogyopaniṣat* (3-14-1):

सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म तज्जलान्

Sarvam khalvidam brahma tajjalān.
All this originated from Brahman,
all this exists in Brahman,
and all this resolves in Brahman.
Therefore all this indeed is Brahman.

This being so, where is this plurality of gods? How can the Vedic seers deny the plurality of the entire universe and at the same time maintain the plurality

of gods as a reality? We can relate to the glory of Īśvara through any of the aspects of His manifestation. When you look at a child, you are looking at Brahman. When you look at fire, you are looking at Brahman. When you look at water in the ocean, you are looking at Brahman. When you look at the Himalayas or the Poconos (U.S.A.), you are looking at Brahman. We see each of these aspects as being a *devatā*. In doing so, we adore the glory of Īśvara through that aspect of manifestation. We also have a mantra (sacred utterance of the Veda) for each aspect of Īśvara praising His glory through that aspect.

Notwithstanding apparent plurality, One Parabrahman—without-a-second is the Reality of the universe and it is this meaning that is conveyed by the upan-ṣadic declaration “*sarvam khalvidam brahma*.” The Brahman has manifested in the form of this vast universe, including you and me. How many facets could be there in the manifestation of Īśvara? Infinite! Therefore we have infinite modes of relating to Īśvara. In Hindu culture, it is indeed said that each seeker has his or her own personal God, which is that form or aspect of the Godhead most appealing to his or her mind for worship and contemplation. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa declared in the *Gītā* (10-20) as follows:

अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः ।
अहमादिश्च मध्यं च भूतानामंत एव च ॥

*Ahamātmā guḍākeśa
sarvabhūtāśaya-sthitah,
Ahamādiśca madhyam ca
bhūtānāmanta eva ca.*

O Arjuna! I am the innermost Reality abiding in the hearts of all living beings. I am the beginning [origin], middle [substratum of existence], and end [the substratum of resolution] of all the things of the universe.

THE VEDA IS A PRAMĀṆA TO UNDERSTAND ĪŚVARA

THE HUMAN BEING IS FUNDAMENTALLY a *pramātā*, a knower. To know or understand anything, one needs a means of knowledge. Such a means is called *pramāṇa* (*pramāyāḥ karaṇam*).

Pramā means truthful knowledge and *karaṇam* is the means thereof. We are intrinsically endowed with two means of knowledge. The first one is called *pratyakṣa*, or perception. We have five sense organs: the eyes to know form and color, the nose to pick up smells, the ears to hear sounds, the tongue to discern taste, and the skin to sense heat, cold, and texture. All these five sense organs put together constitute the means of knowledge called *pratyakṣa*. Perception and observation lead to understanding. It is through observation right from childhood that every human being knows things one after the other, and sheds his or her ignorance gradually.

We have another *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) called *anumāna*, or inference. This is the work of the intellect. For instance, wherever we see smoke we conclude that there is fire as well, even though we do not directly see the fire, because it is our common experience that there is no smoke without the presence of fire. Such a means of knowledge is called inference. We constantly observe this kind of invariable concomitance or constant coming together of one thing with another. Thus, we all have the ability to know things not only through our sense organs, but also through intellect by inference or association.

Pratyakṣa and *anumāna* are the two fundamental *pramāṇas* that we are all endowed with from birth. These two *pramāṇas* are fundamentally related because all inferential knowledge depends on the observation through the sense organs. For instance, to conclude that there is a fire, you would first have to see or smell the presence of smoke. Thus *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* are the basic means by which we gain knowledge. However, both *pramāṇas* are subject to various limitations. This is because the mind and sense organs are not infallible in their functioning. Also, there are times when the mind superimposes something else on what the eyes perceive. For example, if the eyes cannot recognize a rope for what it is due to poor light, we might see a snake instead. Quite often, the *pramātā*, the knower, is misled and he may continue to make mistakes with

regard to *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*.

There exists a body of knowledge that is not available to us through either of these two *pramāṇas*. We call it the external *pramāṇa*. This helps us where *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* fail. As a simple example, take the human eye, which can probe microbes and other minutiae through a microscope as well as it can peer through space and examine stars and entire galaxies through a telescope. However, this eye has to depend upon external scrutiny when a mere speck of dust falls on its own surface. Thus, there are times when you come to know only when another person tells you so. Often, you can never gain such knowledge through your own senses or intellect. This shows that not all knowledge is acquired through perception and inference. That body of knowledge, which is beyond the pale of both perception and inference, is called the Veda.

The word *Veda* comes from the verbal root *vida*, which stands for knowledge. The etymology of the word is *vedayati iti vedah*, meaning “that which helps us to know is the Veda.” The Veda, therefore, is a body of knowledge. This is how the Veda is defined:

प्रत्यक्षेणानुमित्या वा यस्तूपायो न बुध्यते ।
एनं विदन्ति वेदेन तस्माद्वेदस्य वेदता ॥

*Pratyakṣeṇānumityā vā
yastūpāyo na budhyate,
Enaṁ vidanti vedena
tasmād vedasya vedatā.*

The means [to the ultimate good], that cannot be ascertained by perception and inference, can be readily understood by the study of the Veda. Thus, the word Veda [a body of knowledge] is indeed significant.

Therefore, the Veda is an independent *pramāṇa*. It is called the *śabda* *pramāṇa* (verbal testimony). *Śabda* means a trustworthy statement or teaching (*āptavākyaṁ śabdaḥ*). Thus, the Veda, and the Vedānta (the concluding portion of the Veda) in particular, gives us the knowledge of Īśvara. ❖

*Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti waiting to be installed.
Shuddhananda Ashram, Uttandbi,
Tamil Nadu, South India. January 5, 2007.*





ALEXIS KERSEY

INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST BY NICK EVANS

BORN IN MYSORE, SOUTH INDIA, AND EDUCATED IN THE UK, Alexis Kersey chose to study and practice art by working with signboard painters in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Nick Evans met Alexis in Mysore in 2001 where they were both studying Ashtanga Yoga. A friendship developed, largely due to their shared interest in yoga philosophy.

Nick: I should explain that my friendship with Alexis developed through our mutual connection to Mysore. Despite different lifestyles and reasons that keep us coming here, we both find it to be a very inspiring and nourishing place. I'd like to ask some questions about your paintings. I hope the

dialogue will bring up the kind of discussion we often find ourselves in. Although your canvases are not religious art, they have a spiritual undertone. For you how does yoga relate to being an artist?

Alexis: One key similarity is the awareness of the viewing eye. I interpreted the real purpose of yogic practice as being the nurturing of a universal awareness over that of the subjective individual. The artist shares this task of creating a clarity of vision. I had earlier been traveling in Asia, painting hallucinogenic versions of Orientalist drawings and engravings—landscape paintings that attempted to describe the eeriness that pervaded many Western renderings of Eastern scenery.

The main thing was to record the fundamental discomfort I felt with the landscapes I found myself in and to give myself a private world that more honestly reflected my inner state of raw experience. I made the subjectivity of my perspective the source of my creativity, and it has remained that way since. A recurrent discomfort with the environment or outer circumstances in this context links to yoga in that familiarity with feeling isolated theoretically helps us dismantle our feeling of separateness. For me, yoga was a formalized practice that extended this inquiry. Anyway, being placed in all manner of temporary physical, physiological, and emotional states has always seemed like a good idea.

Nick: What was the reason you started Ashtanga Yoga? I know you were Sharath's first private student. Did you seek it out?

Alexis: No, I was not particularly interested in the practice itself to start with. The thing it gave me was a routine, something

to order the rest of my life by after an extended period of excess. This was a way to give myself an endeavor that seemed manageable and subject to my own control, rather than the fickle hand of fate. However, the journey of awakening self-knowledge—the way I approached it—also turned out to be an arduous business.

Nick: The art that I saw you making when we first met and you were doing yoga was very influenced by the Indian art that you see on trucks and in advertising. It included *devanāgarī* script and lots of patterns and icons superimposed that emphasized texture. All the early works evoke certain feelings. In my perception, they're a lot more dreamlike, a lot less focused, leaving more up to the imagination. I'd be interested in understanding what led (prior to the yoga) to these quite individually distinct and texturally evocative images evolving into the tightly conceived works that came later. After the



yoga it felt as though it was clear that the job was to express your creative, subjective viewpoints concisely, because there's a story that needs to be told.

Alexis: I was excited with signboard painting as I was looking for a mode of expression. Having found a style that I felt connected to through my own history, I felt that a personalized reinterpretation of this signboard medium would be interesting and valid.

Nick: So you turned it into a personalized High Art rendering of itself ...

Alexis: What is signboard painting anyway, other than the contemporary rendering of an entire civilization? It's the modern way in which those textures, letters, characters, have been reinterpreted on every street sign sheet of metal, every surface, all over the country. So I thought ... well, I'd stumbled upon a lifetime of visual possibilities.

Nick: The fact that the paintings are so innocent gives them their charm, and what it seems to me you've done is—even

with the very complicated, major works—you've maintained and retained the innocence. So even though they're beautifully executed and very manicured, there is this childlike innocence. How does that come into the progress of your work?

Alexis: I'm interested in keeping the naïve spirit and aesthetic alive in these alternative visions. It seems that the strongest way to highlight the very adult content of the real world is to offer an alternative rendered in a softer style. Why not occasionally be innocent, or not even be innocent, but describe innocence innocently? I'm offering alternative forms of globalization so, you know, if you were to offer an alternative, what would it be? It would include the good news, as well as the bad news. And I'm not saying it's all bad because obviously economic progress and economic development is positive as well, but it's ...

Nick: It's a hell of a price. Humanity seems to be paying an enormous price for the good stuff.

Alexis: Yes, but we all want the good stuff. That is the bottom

line. I guess we all want the good stuff? The odd thing is that we don't know what we want, really. Anyway, fuck it; it's the function of art to discuss all of this. So the point is not whether it's good or it isn't, but with your current information and with as large a canvas as you can bring to the undertaking, you've got to try to address all this stuff. The danger is, with the New Company School ...

Nick: But you need to explain a little bit about what the New Company School is, the whole thing.

Alexis: Well, it's a modern version of the Company School, a highly subjective painting genre representing commissions done by Indian studios for the colonizing British. Local work that had a local character but which had a colonial agenda because it reflected the taste of the buyers. So there is the question of it being reworked ... for the agenda of the colonizer.

Nick: So it looked like one thing ...

Alexis: They looked like a product affected by the British. In a

peculiar way, they were as insightful a reflection of the times as a lot of things that were being painted. They were also a form of a record, specifically, of the natural and sociological world. So they were not only ordered to take home to England and have on a wall as a memento of times in the colonies, but they were also a form, having an almost scientific function for analyzing and recording bird species, plants, all these kinds of things. So in a sense, there is also a practical integrity and an application for it. Now, I've done a bizarre contemporary rendering of this school using altered states of mind as an ingredient of subjectivity and bias, to understand and record the world that we are living in, retaining a not dissimilar sense of awe. They were trying to understand the natural world around them (only with a more mercantile bent of mind). Also I've tried to lampoon the colonial bias and use the Company paintings as a metaphor to describe the emphasis of the globalized world that we're living in now. So what I'm doing is trying to produce an arena where these suppositions about things are deconstructed.



Nick: So can we get a little bit more specific with regard to a couple of the paintings, because I would say that these initial ones were observations about the archetypes within Indian culture. Some people would argue that India is a sort of spiritual bank to the whole world. The paintings address so many layers of how things Indian combine with the outside world. They use so many cultural signifiers. The first work that really speaks to me and sets the agenda is this *Rebirth* that shows a 1950s mustachioed slick scientist in a white laboratory smock. He is holding a key, observing a fetus with tattoos and a mohawk being grown in a test tube; he's creating a sort of modern hybrid Indo-mall-rat that we recognize as being the archetype for India's metamorphosis from an ancient civilization into a modern, technological, forward-looking economic powerhouse. This new Indian is going to take all of his ancient wisdom, values, and technological know-how, walk into the world and guide it with the kind of knowledge that no other civilization on earth really possesses.

Another work, *The Fort*, depicts a very traditional Indian mother sitting behind the walls of a colonial fort, telling her two mohawked, tattooed children to go off carrying this secret wisdom with them. There was a whole series where this hybrid next-generation being sits on a Louis Vuitton yoga mat in *padmāsana*, projecting a whole new future vision with India's history and future interconnectedness tattooed on his body. This is all rendered in a very polished but naïve way. **Alexis:** It's like you always say: In the future the premium will be on innocence, authenticity, and decency. An exported spirituality along with the enabling economics will form a huge new force in the world. My paintings imagine an exported superconsciousness created from a scientifically invented superhuman. This knowledge teasingly finds itself woven into the global consciousness and is paramount to the evolution of the global human entity. In the West, spirituality is becoming a commodity, as it places one healthily beyond the realm of worldly concerns, and anything that aids in

developing a tuned-in approach to life comes at a premium. I am interested in the concept of a neutrality that is not disinterested but simply unaligned—agendaless presence and all that essentially Indian yogic wisdom. Acknowledging that every player plays his part. It's the knowledge that, though you may have personal preferences, it's the entirety of the cast that makes the movie work. **Nick:** It seems to me that how yoga contributes to this is also key. It is a tool for individuals to tear themselves from the conditions that they find themselves in and root themselves in a more solid foundation so that the external world can be viewed from a position of equilibrium. The increasingly complex conditions of human life can be dealt with artfully. As yoga deals with the basics for a healthy life, and we, as a society, are obsessed with the unchecked feeding of the senses, these practices are a panacea for the illness of overproduction and consumption and make our inner environments more pleasurable to be in. Going back to your work, do you feel

that having this focus on the global environment limits your creativity? Now it is very polished and conceived through a very clear framework. Is this difficult or limiting creatively? **Alexis:** To create a mythological realm that imagines weird and humorous possibilities for the world doesn't feel limiting. This idea of interpreting the Company paintings for the present age as a metaphor for the strange ways in which different cultures might interact is one way of doing it. It feels important to acknowledge these paintings so I've offered a body of work that stylistically assimilates them. It feels great to have my hallucinogenic vision of the world taken seriously, but in order for me to have achieved that, the vision had to be carefully constructed and the goal precisely set. Any madness on the journey can be enjoyed if the goal is kept in mind. Put another way, it seems prudent to have a solid external structure in place for when the internal craziness kicks in. ♣



TAMIL NIGHT
PHOTOS BY ROBERT MOSES

*Evening vegetable market in the street near
Kapaleeswar Temple, Mylapore, Chennai,
Tamil Nadu, South India, January 10, 2007.*



Getting ready for Mottu Pongol (the day after Thai Pongol), an elder woman outside a small Hanumān Temple faces some stiff competition down the street from the younger glitter set outside their fancygoods store. Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, South India, January 14, 2007.



Nighttime yoga demonstration at Neyvelli Lignite Corporation Yoga School, Neyvelli, Tamil Nadu, South India, January 16, 2007.



Brahmamuhūrta (between 4 and 6 A.M.) in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, South India. Side streets wending their way toward the Meenakshi Sundareswar Temple at the heart of the city, January 21, 2007.



TEMPLE	अश्वत्थामि	रामनाथस्वामी मन्दिर
YED	अमरव्य वरकम के किये पूजा	
THY	सुबह 4.50	संजी मु 1.00
REGAM	सुबह 5.00	संजीरवाह 1.00
	हायवा 1.00	हायारवाह 1.00
	वागसे 8.45	पुनर्वाह 1.00
	पुनर्वाह के किये पूजा	
	सुबह 6.00	सिखन का

After a very early morning bath in the ocean, soaking wet pilgrims dash through the corridors of Rameshwaram Temple en route to being doused with waters from the twenty-two wells within the temple compound. Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu, South India, January 24, 2007.



An image of Hanumān tearing open his heart to reveal Rāma and Sītā dwelling there, showing his steadfast devotion and unwavering loyalty. Satyanarayana Maurya Studio, Mumbai. (Courtesy of Eddie Stern)

Parbhing Gaṇeśa. This image has been revealing itself on the outer wall of a cave in Parbhing, Nepal. A seated Tārā is also visible. (Courtesy of Robert Beer)



Gāyatrī (detail), a modern Newar oil painting by master painter Uday Charan Shrestha, displays realistic elements in contemporary sacred art. (Courtesy of Robert Beer)



IN DEFENSE OF BEAUTY AND THE SACRED:

ON THE REPRESENTATION OF GODS AND GODDESSES, IN PRACTICE AND IN ART

SIDDARTHA SHAH

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I FOUND MYSELF sitting outside, looking up at the most brilliant night sky and contemplating the fact that the “stuff” composing the stars and all the magic of the cosmos is the very “stuff” that composes my body and every living thing. From a nondual perspective, we humans are the same as the stars, the sun, and every individual existent thing, visible and invisible. In *Vedānta* it is understood that consciousness imbues all, and in all of its chaos and inexplicable wonder, consciousness expresses itself both in the gruesome and, of course, in beauty.

For most Hindus, there is an active relationship between religion and aesthetics or, more appropriately, between religion and an expression of devotion through the power of the senses. Our rites and rituals are filled with offerings of sweet food and incense, chanting, lavish fabrics, and precious jewels. There is a sensory indulgence through which one’s being is overpowered and overcome by the beauty and awe of the realm of the gods and goddesses. In this process of honoring the deities through the most refined sensory offerings, one peers into the glory and omniscience of that which is beyond even sight, sound, and touch. One gazes into the hidden chambers of the heart and experiences Reality.

But it is not only the implements of worship and particular offerings that reveal the solid link between devotion

and aesthetics. The deities themselves found in temples and homes throughout the Hindu world also express the important relationship between beauty and the world of the gods. It is not uncommon to see someone preparing garments from silk for the deity in her shrine. In popular temple towns throughout India, one finds countless vendors with complete outfits and costume jewelry to adorn images of personal worship. All of this points to the fact that, for Hindus, the image of a deity is considered an existent being who takes pleasure in being dressed and adorned. In beholding the bejeweled form of a deity, the devout seeker is filled with a certain longing and adoration for his or her Beloved.

THE ACT OF SEEING HOLDS IMMENSE potency in the Hindu tradition and is perhaps at the core of most Hindus’ spiritual practice. As Diana Eck writes, “In the Indian context, seeing is a kind of touching.”¹ The process that takes place between the viewer and the divine image is loaded with significance, and this principle, *darśan*, is often underestimated by scholars and those who come to Hinduism from other faiths. For the Hindu layperson, spiritual practice does not always involve formal meditation or the study of esoteric scripture. It is often enough simply to look upon the image of a deity in a temple and to be in relationship with it, even for a few seconds; this feeds the fires of devotion and practice. This process of seeing and being seen is loaded with significance and divine potential.

Darśan can be loosely translated as “auspicious seeing” or “auspicious sight,” but in many ways this definition falls short without further explanation.² As expressed in many texts and stories, “God” exists in form and outside form. There is no separation whatsoever. The form of the deity is the deity, and this is something iconoclasts find difficult to comprehend. When an artist or craftsman creates an image of a deity, he is not molding something to “represent God,” but is rather offering himself as a channel through which God can

manifest itself in form. In other words, an image of Kṛṣṇa could never really be called a false image since every image of Kṛṣṇa is Kṛṣṇa Himself. Moreover, even a stone or a tree stump might be worshipped as Kṛṣṇa; the devotee who communes with her beloved lord through this object would see no difference when seeing with the eyes of her heart.

With this in mind, one can begin to appreciate that seeing the divine image is an extremely potent process. It is a tangible spiritual practice that brings the individual in tune with the Infinite. It is to experience, for a moment, deep and direct relationship with the deity. Through this seeing, a transmission takes place that is itself laced with humility and mystery. When approached with sincerity, the mere image of a deity can instill in the viewer a wonderment and sense of devotion that brings the seeker closer to the essential teachings. Images of deities can be used as tools for authentic spiritual transformation and grant us access to a world that is far more real than the world in which we find ourselves every day.

There are countless stories of mystics who fell so madly in love with the image of their beloved god that the image itself came to life for them. By appearing as living beings, the images brought their devotees into a living relationship with them. The story of Vallabhācārya and his beloved Śrīnāthjī is a well-known tale in which a holy man lives in relationship with the image he worships. Śrīnāthjī spoke to him, touched him, and lived with him as a child lives with his father. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, one of India’s most well respected and venerated saints, was a devotee of Kālī; in countless ecstasies, the statue he worshipped in Bhubaneswar became infused with life and appeared as an active form in his reality. There is also the story of a little-known saint from Gujarat, Padmāvati Mā, who offered worship to a painting of Viṣṇu which she adored with great devotion. One day, while making offerings to her lord, he began to dance for her within the picture frame. His legs moved and he held her gaze as he danced, to be seen

only by his dearest devotee. Through her love and integrity, one could say that she brought Viṣṇu to life and that his movements signaled to her that he was, indeed, accepting her offerings. It is said that at the moment of her passing, in 1981, she entered into a blissful state as she saw this very image coming to take her away from her body and guide her to the next realm.

The further back we go in history, the more evidence we find of humans honoring the divine through aspects of nature and natural phenomena, and this is certainly true within Hinduism. In India, the Ganges and the various other important rivers have been venerated for thousands of years. They are considered goddesses with healing powers, and the offering of light (*ārati*) is still made to these rivers, just as one offers the flame to images in temples. Mount Kailas, believed to be the abode of Lord Śiva, has also received pilgrims for thousands of years. From mountains and rivers to smooth river stones worshipped as Śiva lingams and prehistoric fossils (*śaligrāmas*) worshipped as Viṣṇu, Hindus have treated nature as specific expressions of the divine. Indeed, there has been an evolution of what is worshipped as “God,” and historically it seems to develop from earth-based worship into veneration of forms, some of which are said to have directly emerged from the earth (*svayambhu* or self-arisen).

ONE OF THE MOST SACRED IMAGES IN India, particularly for Vaiṣṇava Hindus of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* sect (“Path of Grace”), is the self-arisen image of Śrīnāthjī, housed in a medieval fort-like structure in Nathdwara, Rajasthan. Within the context of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, one cannot say that the statue is in a “temple” since he is not a mere image for the devotees. Rather, Śrīnāthjī is a living being who lives in his magnificent *haveli* (mansion).³

According to a popular legend, the image of Śrīnāthjī emerged slowly from Mount Govardhan over a period of almost ninety years. His left hand became visible in 1410 and his face emerged sometime in the late 1470s.⁴ It

is said that in 1493 Vallabhācārya, who is attributed with founding the Puṣṭi Mārga sect, was divinely guided to Mount Govardhan while on pilgrimage. When he spoke with a local cowherd about the image embedded in the mountain, the man recounted to him that there had been a cow in the village that had stopped producing milk for no apparent reason. Someone noticed this very cow up near the summit of the mountain, with milk pouring out of her udders and flowing into a gap in the stones. Some of the villagers went to this area and moved the stones, where they discovered a beautiful seven-year-old child. He was Kṛṣṇa—the very form of Kṛṣṇa who had previously lifted up Mount Govardhan to save his people.⁵

Vallabhācārya was moved to climb to the summit of the mountain. There the young boy from the rocks came running toward him and the two embraced. As instructed by the boy, Vallabhācārya took the self-materialized image of Śrīnāthji with him and created a shrine so that daily worship could be performed. After being displaced several times, Śrīnāthji finally made the town of Nathdwara his home in 1672, and it is here that he is venerated as the child-king, Kṛṣṇa, by thousands of devotees. He is awakened each morning; he is fed, clothed, and covered in jewels; he has a collection of toys with which he plays; each night he is wrapped in a warm blanket and put to rest. He is a living image who emerged from the earth to be worshipped and adored and to offer his blessings to all who come before him simply by giving them darśan.

Śrīnāthji is only one of many important self-arisen images throughout the Hindu world, and such phenomena exist in many other traditions, as well. Furthermore, this is not a relic of the past that does not happen in our present time, for even now the force of the divine is expressing itself through the miraculous surfacing of images from the earth. In the town of Parphing in Nepal, a representation of Gaṇeśa has been slowly coming out of the side of a cave, surrounded by small images of Tārā. Over the years, more and more of this manifestation is becoming visible,

and people come to view this image to be reminded that something great and beyond comprehension indeed exists. Having understood the power of images to influence mankind, one could say the divine uses images as a vehicle through which the hearts of devotees can become immersed in faith and practice.

BEYOND THE REALM OF THESE miraculous manifestations of the divine there is, of course, a significant and extensive history of art that conveys mankind’s heroic efforts to honor the deities in images crafted by hand. All over the world there are structures, monumental idols, and masterpieces of painting that venerate the divine, often in works that took hundreds of years to complete. From the pyramids of Egypt and the gothic cathedrals of Europe to the caves of Elephanta and temple friezes at Khajuraho, some of the greatest works of art in human history have been both an offering to and a reminder of the divine.

As humans we often envision the deities to be like us. To have a deity expressed in anthropomorphic form, even with multiple heads or animal limbs, allows for a relationship between human viewer and object. The darśan of a deity with strong eyes and beautiful limbs can have a stronger effect than the “auspicious sight” of a holy tree or lump of stone because the viewer will necessarily be able to relate better to a human form. In the Hindu tradition the deities often have superpowers expressed through the color of their skin, the number of their arms, their fierce or lucid expressions, and the various implements they hold.

WHEN INDIAN PAINTER RAJA RAVI Varma (1848-1906) created the Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press in Bombay at the end of the nineteenth century, the tradition of painting gods and goddesses entered the world of commerce and mass production. His press was devoted entirely to the production of thousands of pictures of gods and mythological themes. Quite suddenly, a new industry emerged that still thrives in India. His own paintings

showed a heavy European influence, signaling a new emerging style in “traditional” Indian art. By the time of his death, there were already millions of his prints circulating throughout India, and his success in mass-marketing the gods and goddesses inspired the movement known today as “calendar art” of India.

Indian calendar art has become a source of curiosity and fascination for scholars and art historians, while in India it is rare to find a Hindu house without some colorful image of a deity depicted in this style. It could be the Goddess Lakṣmī, standing in a hot-pink sari with glowing earrings and an immense crown, with elephants splashing about behind her. There is Kṛṣṇa as a baby, studded with jewels and sucking on his right toe. Very popular is the image of a muscular Hanumān, the monkey god, strong and proud, kneeling, tearing open his chest to show Rāma and Sītā sitting in his heart. Many in the East look upon these images with great devotion and respect. The art brings the deities to life and makes the legends and stories all the more exciting and real. In the West, however, these same images adorn lunch boxes and purses; one can only assume that many Westerners have no idea just how important and sacred these images are to Hindus.

THE MASS DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS images has undoubtedly made devotional imagery more accessible to the public. There are certain qualities that distinguish this particular mode of deity representation from earlier paintings depicting the gods and goddesses. Whereas Ravi Varma’s own works incorporated European techniques of realism in color, composition, and perspective, the mass distribution of his work led to a general commercialization in the style of deity painting. Gone are the complexities of light and form found in Varma’s oil paintings that made the mythological themes appear so real. They have been replaced by bold, eye-catching colors and comic book-like depictions.

The realistic qualities of Varma’s paintings permitted viewers to relate

more fully to the subjects portrayed. Not only were they physical representations of mythological tales, but their realistic portrayal brought them to life for the viewer through the use of European artistic advancements in rendering the human form. While contemporary Indian calendar art carries on the tradition of representing the stories of the gods and goddesses, the objective is not to present realistic figures through sophisticated techniques of working with paint. Rather, these images are colorful, whimsical, fantastic interpretations of Hindu stories. In other words, the focus is not on bringing the deities down into our reality, but rather to show their superhuman qualities that set them apart from us.

YEARS AFTER RAVI VARMA ESTABLISHED his particular style influenced by European art, an artist in Nepal also began to experiment with elements of European painting, specifically based on principles developed during the Italian Renaissance. Anandamuni Shakya (1903-1944) had been a painter under the patronage of both His Holiness the XIIIth Dalai Lama of Tibet and the King of Nepal. When he saw an image of Botticelli’s masterpiece, *The Birth of Venus*, Anandamuni was quite taken by the refined manner in which Botticelli expressed beauty, depth, perspective, and movement. Inspired by what he saw, he executed two paintings of Buddhist figures done in the style of Botticelli’s Venus—the figures each stood atop a

half shell riding across the ocean, with their legs positioned like Venus’ and their clothing billowing in the wind. These paintings signaled another new style, bringing to traditional art more realistic elements of the West, much as Varma did some fifty years earlier.

In Nepal, as in India, the painted deities became more three-dimensional and realistic. The flat, statueque forms of the deities became infused with life and vitality. There was an almost photographic quality to Anandamuni’s work, complete with astonishing detail. After his death in 1944, his son, Siddhimuni Shakya (1933-2001), carried on the tradition started by his father and made even stronger advancements in technique



Padmāvatī Mā, a saint for whom a painting of Viṣṇu came to life.

and style. Inspired by Siddhimuni and Anandamuni’s work, a number of other artists began painting in this new style, and today the movement continues and is thriving.

In this tradition, deities assume more innovative postures and realistic expressions. In some cases they appear as actual individuals one could pass on the street. The flat and formal forms worshipped for thousands of years are now filled with life and realism; when one looks upon a painting in this style, one has the sense of looking into the eyes of a Beloved who is not so distant, who walks among us. Working in both gouache and oil paints, the artists bring the ancient deities into a modern context so that they appear as existent beings imbued with great spiritual power. They are figures and forms from our time who, through this realistic medium, reveal divine perfection and potential in human form.

If we consider the modern Newar (Kathmandu Valley) movement from the perspective of darśan and the experience of being in relationship with the deities, there is immense potential in working with these images as transformational tools. As humans, we relate naturally to the human form. For most, looking into the face of a suffering child is more painful than viewing a diseased tree or a polluted lake, for the simple reason that there is a quality of shared human experience. We recognize the expression of rage on another person’s face and can sense connection when we look into the eyes of another. When there is a style, such as this modern Newar movement, that depicts deities in realistic human forms, it is perhaps easier to use these images as symbolic mirrors. By looking into the face of a god or goddess whose expression, posture, and implements embody specific teachings, we can begin to see these divine qualities within ourselves. The deities represent an individual’s highest potential, and when the actual form of the deity is so realistic that it seems photographic,

on a subtle level the viewer shares the experience more fully than when looking on a primitive statue or comic book-like illustration. Depicting deities in a realistic, contemporary aesthetic that the modern viewing public can readily relate to brings us closer to the realm of the gods and goddesses and, in turn, brings them closer to us.

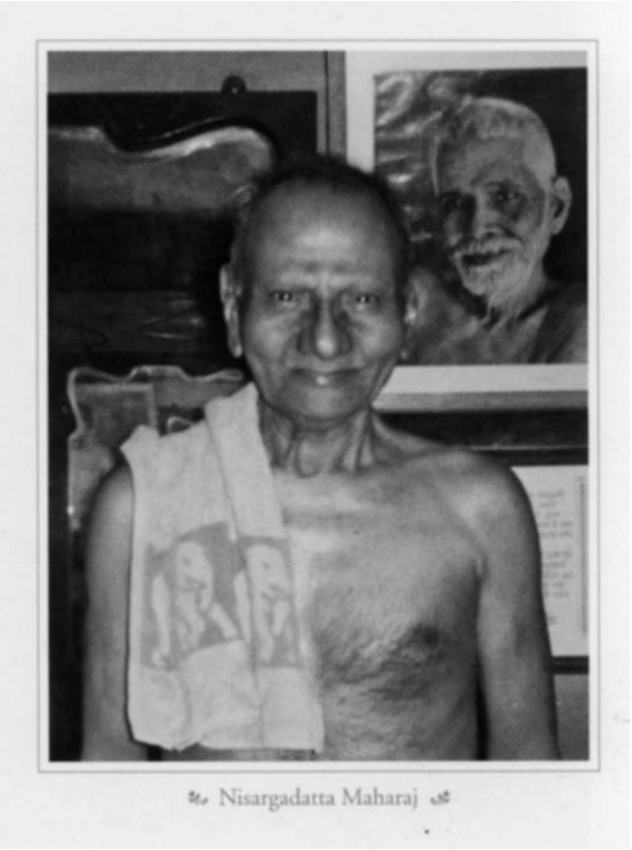
INDIAN CALENDAR ART HOLDS GREAT importance in Hindu culture because it has allowed for the images to permeate virtually every aspect of modern society. The same images found in temples and home altars also appear in rickshaws and on bags of basmati rice. These images have made the divinities available to the general public and have actually served to educate the masses of humanity in the stories and legends of the gods. They serve as a constant reminder of the existence of something mythic and immense.

While these images show a certain positive aspect of commercialization and the arts, there is also a need for greater and more substantial artistic development so that a living tradition can continue to survive. In whatever form it takes, art must find a way to progress, evolve, and improve upon itself. As cultures change, the art that emerges from these cultures must necessarily change since, from an art-history perspective, the art of a given period communicates an immense amount of information about every aspect of the life of the time. Undoubtedly one of the aspects of culture that is communicated through art is man’s relationship to God. The more that we create and support art that awakens consciousness, the stronger an individual’s relationship and understanding of the divine becomes.

The poet Khalil Gibran wrote, “... beauty is not a need but an ecstasy ... a heart inflamed and a soul enchanted.”⁶ Reverence for beauty is, indeed, a powerful spiritual practice. To ignite and then fuel the fires of devotion and practice, one must let oneself fall in love with the deity—the essence of the Being

and, yes, even its very form. For many Hindus, the path is filled with adoration of the image itself, and through this relationship, one begins to know more intimately the miraculous realm in which the deities live. What their forms embody is beyond imagination and comprehension, and yet, through beauty, we catch a glimpse of what all the scriptures and ancient images attempt to show us—that beauty and compassion exist both outside us and within us. We are, indeed, the stuff of the cosmos, the stuff of nature, and the stuff of the most refined, beautiful, and captivating deities. That very perfection found in the fantastic portrayal of the gods and goddesses is exactly what we should strive to find within ourselves.❧

Śrīnāthjī—Kṛṣṇa as a seven-year-old boy, lifting up Mount Govardhan. This is a late-eighteenth century painting depicting the living statue housed in Nathdwara, Rajasthan, sacred to Vaiṣṇava Hindus of the Puṣṭi Mārga.



ŚRĪ NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

ABDI ASSADI

Nothing you do will change you, for you need no change. You may change your mind or your body, but it is always something external to you that has changed, not yourself. Why bother at all to change? Realize once and for all that neither your body nor your mind, nor even your consciousness is yourself and stand alone in your true nature beyond consciousness and unconsciousness. No effort can take you there, only the clarity of understanding. Trace your misunderstandings and abandon them, that is all. There is nothing to seek and find, for there is nothing lost. Relax and watch the “I Am.” Reality is just behind it. Keep quiet, keep silent; it will emerge, or rather, it will take you in.

Nisargadatta Maharaj

ŚRĪ NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ WAS BORN IN a village south of Mumbai (Bombay) in 1897 on Hanumān’s birthday. In honor of this Hindu monkey deity of strength and power, he was given the name Maruti. His father was a servant who with time purchased some land and became a farmer. Maruti lived and worked on this land until 1915 when, upon the death of his father, he followed his oldest brother to Mumbai to help support his siblings and mother. He spent his early years in the city as an office clerk, but soon opened a *beedi* (cigarette) shop. This enterprise became prosperous and he eventually operated six such shops. In 1924 he married Sumatibai; they had three daughters and a son.

He was a deeply religious man and kept the company of fellow truth seekers. One such man was Yashwantrao Bagkar, a friend who introduced Maruti,

when he was thirty-four years old, to Śrī Siddharameshwar Maharaj (1888-1936). This realized master, a contemporary of Śrī Ramana Maharshi and a disciple of Bhausaheb Maharaj, was an adherent of the Advaitic (non-dual) school. His specific teaching for the realization of Reality was *Vihāṅgam Mārg*, or the Bird’s Way. The basic premise of this path is that ignorance of one’s true nature comes from the constant repetition of falsehood throughout life. This hypnosis can be reversed by constant practice of contemplation of truth as heard from the master. This constant mulling over—like a bird that repeatedly flies from branch to branch—is a fast route to remembrance.

Maruti took Śrī Siddharameshwar as his teacher and was given a mantra and some teachings. Maruti devoted himself to serious and deep practice. After the death of his teacher not long after they

¹Diana Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 9. ²Eck, *Darśan*, 3.

³Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Srinathji: Rajasthani Paintings from Nathdwara*, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 1987.

⁴Ambalal, *Krishna as Srinathji*, 50. ⁵Ambalal, *Krishna as Srinathji*, 51.

⁶Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923.

met, Maruti abandoned his family and business to wander the Himalayas as a *sādhū*. He had a chance encounter with a fellow aspirant who emphasized the importance of going back to his family life and practicing within that structure as opposed to being a wandering seeker. He took this to heart and returned to Mumbai to find only one of his beedi shops still thriving. This was sufficient for his and his family's meager needs; he built a tiny room on top of his apartment in the slums of Mumbai and spent all his spare time in contemplation.

HE ATTAINED REALIZATION just three years after he met his teacher; he was thirty-seven years old. He said, "My guru told me: 'You are not what you take yourself to be. Find out what you are. Watch the sense 'I Am.' Find your real self.' I obeyed him because I trusted him. I did as he told me. All my spare time I would spend looking at myself in silence and what a difference it made. It took me only three years to realize my true nature. My guru died soon after I met him, but it made no difference."

Maruti took the name Nisargadatta Maharaj—"One who dwells in the natural state beyond manifestation."

He held *satsaṅgs*, giving spiritual instruction from his tenement apartment. With the publication in English of his book *I Am That*, he became known to a generation of foreigners, who streamed into his presence seeking enlightenment. *I Am That*, translated from Marathi tape recordings by Maurice Frydman, a devotee of Ramana Maharshi, is a gold mine of pointers for the spiritual aspirant, a beacon of remembrance in a tomb of worldly forgetfulness. Every page contains a nugget of truth that shakes one's anesthetized sense of Self awake from its worldly slumber. The

book retains the question and answer format of Nisargadatta's talks; all seekers' questions from the worldly to the esoteric are squarely answered.

NISARGADATTA'S TEACHINGS ARE classic Advaita Vedānta since he constantly emphasizes that there is nothing to seek, that we already are the Self. "You cannot find what you have not lost" and "You are not a person" summarize this viewpoint. Because our attention is skewed, we feel disconnected



Nisargadatta Maharaj

from reality: "We miss the real by lack of attention and create the unreal by excess of imagination." He does not quote scripture or holy books. His literacy was modest at best and he never read the Vedas. And yet the explosive force, simplicity, and clarity of his words are astounding.

He said, "Cease being fascinated by the content of your consciousness" and "Whatever pleases you holds you back."

On the state of the world in troubled times he commented, "Callous selfishness is the root of evil" and "It is

selfishness, due to self-identification with the body, that is the main problem and the cause of all other problems." He taught that "The world is the abode of desires and fears; you can not find peace in it. For peace you must go beyond the world." Be "passionately dispassionate," since "it is through desire that you have created the world, with its pains and pleasures."

"When the mind is quiet, you can go beyond it. Do not keep it busy all the time. Stop it—and just be. A quiet mind is all you need. All else will happen rightly, once your mind is quiet."

It is from this place of quiet mind that one can grasp the "I Am," the awareness beyond the mind and its limitations, the field in which all things happen. "Beyond the real experience is not the mind, but the Self, the light in which everything appears ... the awareness in which everything happens."

This "I Am" which is the state prior to body and mind and contains both is not the final state. The Absolute or pure Awareness and its attainment is the final state which transcends the "I Am" state. This indescribable "state" is the place from which the great masters like Nisargadatta Maharaj reach into the phenomenal dream world and nudge us awake.

On a final note I would like to turn our attention to an observation that he had for Westerners: "It is very often so with Americans and Europeans. After a stretch of *sādhana*, they become teachers of Yoga, marry, write books—anything except keeping quiet and turning their energies within to find the source of the inexhaustible power and learn the art of keeping it under control."

ŚRĪ NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ ABANDONED the physical body in 1981 at eighty-four years of age. ❧

THE LAST DAYS OF NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

A TRIBUTE BY S. K. MULLARPATTAN

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ON SEPTEMBER 8TH, 1981, AT 7:32 P.M., Śrī Nisargadatta Maharaj, the sage of 10th Lane, Khetwadi, Mumbai, entered Mahasamadhi. Thirteen days after their Maharaj's death, his devotees held the Bhavanjali (offering emotion and devotion) at Laxmi Baug to honor Śrī Nisargadatta.

Under the Chairmanship of Mr. P. O. Kasbekar, many devotees paid reverential tribute to their guru by speaking about him, the times they spent with him, and what they learned from him.

Maharaj spoke only in his mother tongue, Marathi. He knew only a few words of English. S. K. Mullarpattan was one of Maharaj's principal devotees and the English interpreter who translated Maharaj's words for foreign visitors who attended his talks. What follows is the speech S. K. Mullarpattan gave that evening.

FRIENDS, You have just heard a very moving speech and a touching poem recited by Mrs. Doongajibai. Her recitation has raised us all to sublime heights of devotion. Therefore my talk, probably, may bring you down to the level of gross earth on which we are firmly placed, as I want to start my talk from this level.

Now, to say that I shall talk on Śrī Maharaj would sound precocious on my part. Because to talk on Maharaj, I must know Maharaj, and to know Maharaj, I must first know Myself. This was his fundamental teaching. Therefore, my attempt at this speech would be something like an earthworm trying to explain space and the cosmos. Nevertheless, the talk must go on and I must talk about that personality through

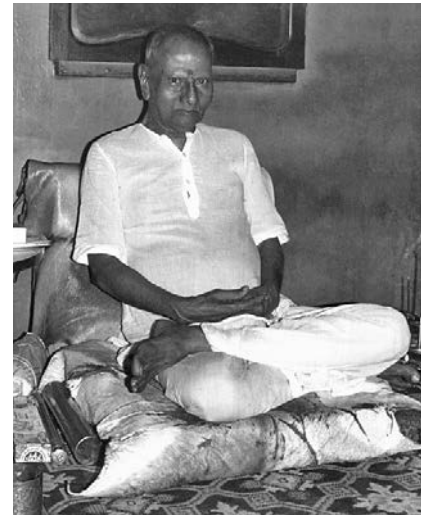
which the very *parabrahma* (Supreme Absolute) spoke and expressed Itself. So, when I say I am talking about Maharaj, it is about that body—that instrument—through which the veritable parabrahma spoke and guided us so lovingly all these years, by coming down to our gross level and leading us spiritually upwards.

Friends, Maharaj was nearing eighty years of age when I had his *darshan* (blessed presence) for the first time. Even at this ripe old age, he was active and energetic. His daily talks were highly impressive and penetrating. Many a time, just prior to his talk, even though he may not have been feeling well, we found him becoming energized as the discussions proceeded and finally he would appear as the very personification of energy. This was the state of his health, over the last five years.

After morning sessions, he preferred to take a short walk accompanied by two or three devotees, among whom I was usually present. During these morning walks, we would stop at some wayside restaurants for a cup of tea or a glass of *lassi* (yogurt drink).

In those days, the morning sessions were held from 10 A.M. to 12 NOON, and the evening sessions from 5 to 6:30 P.M. So you can just imagine that, at the age of over eighty, he was conducting talks and discussions every day for over three to three-and-a-half hours. His health was excellent, and I was told by his son, Mr. Babiseth, that he suffered no serious illness of any kind except minor ailments like cough and cold, and that he had never been confined to bed.

IN 1978, DR. RAJGOPAL OF JASLOK Hospital visited Maharaj to pay his respects. During the talks, the doctor detected a kind of hoarseness in



Maharaj's voice and expressed his desire to examine Maharaj's throat. He took Maharaj to Jaslok Hospital and, after examining him, said that he suspected throat cancer. He wanted to conduct further tests, but Maharaj did not agree to it. Meanwhile, Maharaj carried on with his talks as usual without any break until 1980. Then in April 1980 his voice became more hoarse. Maharaj's family physician, Dr. Kale, upon examining him, discovered some constriction in the throat and sounded a note of caution. He insisted that Maharaj must be re-examined thoroughly. With the special efforts and strong persuasion of Mr. S. V. Sapre, Maharaj agreed to the necessary tests. The results indicated that the cancer had developed considerably.

However, this announcement had little effect on Maharaj. He remarked nonchalantly, "What is cancer after all! I am not afraid of death. This 'I AM-NESS'—the birth itself, is the beginning of cancer, the beginning of suffering, and 'I am' not all that. So, if at all any doctor treats me, it will actually be my body and not me—the Absolute."

Later on, since Maharaj was not prepared to get himself treated, Mr. Ghia Seth—an industrialist—insisted that Maharaj should be shown to Dr. Paymaster, who was the best cancer specialist in Bombay. So he was taken to Dr. Paymaster, who told Maharaj about the seriousness of the disease, describing in detail the unbearable suffering of a cancer patient, if proper treatment was not given in time. But this did

not dissuade Maharaj and he declined to undergo chemotherapy or radiation treatment and would not even agree to be hospitalized.

Meanwhile, a close disciple of Maharaj, Mr. Shrikant Gogate, suggested homeopathic treatment and recommended a homeopath from Malvan—the native town of Maharaj. He was Dr. Suvarna, who specialized in the treatment of cancer. Dr. Suvarna's treatment, we felt, produced some good results as his throat showed no further ravaging effects of the disease. He was taking normal food. His daily talks went on uninterrupted, as energetically as ever, and everything went on smoothly.

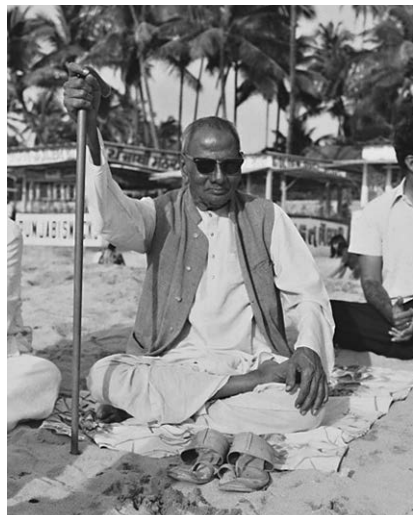
Meanwhile, a host of experts such as Ayurvedic Vaidyas, Nadi (pulse) Vaidyas, and Acupuncture specialists visited him from time to time. An acupuncturist treated him for four days, but Maharaj was not inclined to continue with the treatment. A Nadi Vaidya gave some oil to be used as nasal drops. These treatments gave some temporary relief, but none of the experts gave any hope of a cure. They only expressed their fears that the end would come in about two to three months. But, as feared by them, the worst did not happen even after about eight months. This hopeful sign, they credited to the spiritual attainments of Maharaj.

Ominously, however, it was noticed that from July 1981 the dreaded disease gained the upper hand. As a result of this, the duration and frequency of the talks came down considerably. From two hours, the talks came down to one-and-a-half hours and later they lasted for just thirty minutes. Many a time, out of sheer weakness, he was not able to come up to the mezzanine floor where the talks were given. During such times, we played cassette tapes of his recorded earlier talks.

ON AUGUST 18TH, 1981, MAHARAJ had an attack of pneumonia. He developed some cough and congestion of the lungs. Dr. Kale started antibiotic treatment and his temperature came down to normal. Everything appeared to be under control. But, being very weak, Maharaj could not continue his talks.

Then, on September 6th, 1981, Maharaj gave the final signal. From his bed, he said in a low whisper, “Within the next three days I shall go.” We were aghast, the end was near! Nevertheless, we were not inclined to take his words seriously. Earlier, whenever we inquired about his health, he had replied, “What health—the very next moment I may not be here.” So in a similar vein, we did not take the “three days’ notice” in all its seriousness.

Then, the ominous September 8th dawned. We found him rather better—much better than how he had been on the previous two days. Since he was not able to walk due to weakness, he was lying and resting on his bed. That morning, as usual, he had his tea, and



after some time also sipped a little milk. Then he had a shave. Around 11 A.M., he also took porridge. Normally, whenever the porridge was brought to him by his daughter-in-law, Maya Vahini, he would protest and refuse to take it. But then Maya Vahini, with a lot of persuasion, would force him and coax him to take it. But surprisingly, there were no protests at all this time, and he readily partook of it. This dispelled our gloom and we thought that Maharaj was improving... least suspecting that this could be the last stage!

Then as usual at around 11:30 A.M., when I sought Maharaj's permission to go home for lunch and return in the afternoon—he appeared disturbed. He looked straight at me and said with

gestures, “Do you want to leave me in this fashion and go?” I felt quite sad and undecided and waited around for some time. After half an hour, when Maharaj slept, his son Babiseth asked me to go home for lunch.

Earlier in the day, Dr. Kale, after examining Maharaj, had suggested that oxygen should be given to Maharaj in case he had difficulty in breathing. So Babiseth had asked me to find out the availability and the shop from where an oxygen cylinder could be obtained.

On my way back later in the afternoon, I made inquiries about the availability of oxygen. Luckily, I found a shop that was dealing in oxygen cylinders. I reached the house at about 5:30 P.M. On my arrival, Babiseth told me that Maharaj's condition was serious. He said that for the last three hours, Maharaj was breathing very tensely. Babiseth and Maya Vahini were very worried. They were alone in the ashram and did not know what to do.

When I arrived, Maharaj was sleeping. I immediately checked his palms and feet. They were rather cold. To make them warm, we applied hot-water bottles and massaged them. His breathing was not normal; it was quite shallow. I suggested that we should immediately get an oxygen cylinder and administer the oxygen. I rushed to the shop and arrived just before it closed for the day. I collected the cylinder and rushed back to the ashram. I reached there at 6:45 P.M.

LOOKING AT MAHARAJ, I THOUGHT THAT this time around he might actually be serious about quitting, about shedding his body.

“If I could only make him stay on with us,” I thought. I kneeled next to his body, lowered my head, and put my lips close to his ears.

I said, “Maharaj, the new apartment will be ready next month. It is our earnest desire that you should bless it with your presence.”

In reply, Maharaj folded his palms together and firmly shook his head. He pointed silently towards his body and indicated with hand gestures that this was not meant to be. At this point, we

were still not inclined to take his body language seriously. I interpreted his body language as just another sign of his usual disinterest in worldly matters. After this exchange, I started giving oxygen to Maharaj.

After some time, probably around 7 P.M. or so, I asked him loudly, “Maharaj, are you feeling better?” He shook his head indicating a clear “No.” This was the last communication that occurred between us and him. There was no response from him when, a little while later, his granddaughter Savi loudly called out, “Jiji, Jiji!”

I was standing near his head; further down were the devotees Mr. Veermole, Miss Vanaja, and my brother, Gurunath. They were massaging and pressing his hands, legs, and feet, trying to generate heat in them; a hot-water bottle was applied. All his family members, including his son Babiseth, were present in the room. All along I was watching Maharaj's breathing closely. While I kept touching and massaging him, I could feel his palms getting colder and colder. At the same time, his breathing got shallower until it finally came to a halt. It had stopped forever. I felt his pulse. There was no pulse anymore. I looked at Babiseth and said, “It is all over.” The watch showed the time. It was 7:32 P.M..

It was both amazing and strange to me that I did not feel any sadness at any stage of Maharaj's departure—whether while standing close to him, massaging him, or checking his pulse. It never occurred to me that Maharaj was actually an old man. Rather, I felt as if I was putting a baby to sleep for the night. But sadly, it was the eternal sleep.

Shortly after Maharaj had gone into Mahasamadhi (shed the body), messages were sent to the people concerned, who started pouring into 10th Lane till late in the night to pay their last respects to their guru.

THE NEXT DAY, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9th, the Śrī Nisargadatta Maharaj Kendra took over Maharaj's *gurubandhu* (community of devotees). It was decided that the cremation would take place at the Walkeshwar burning *ghat* (open-

fire cremation ground). The setting was appropriate. It was located near the ancient Banaganga temple complex that stands edged along the Arabian Sea. In 1936, the mortal remains of Maharaj's guru, Śrī Siddharameshwar Maharaj, were cremated there. A *samadhi* shrine in his memory was later erected at this place.

The Śrī Nisargadatta Maharaj Kendra proclaimed that Maharaj's death was not an occasion for sorrow and sadness, but a time for festivities. After all, the event signifies *maha yoga*, the ultimate yoga, in which the individual Self merges with the Absolute. To emphasize the spirit of celebration, the Kendra organized a magnificent procession.

At 12:30 P.M., the procession to the burning ghat started from Maharaj's



house at 10th Lane, Khetwadi. His sacred body was placed on a richly decorated truck. The procession was accompanied by a colorful band of musicians. At intervals, fireworks went off. Nearly 300 people, including family members and devotees, escorted the body of Maharaj.

HERE, I WOULD LIKE TO NARRATE A remarkable incident that occurred during the procession. A couple of months before Maharaj's demise, a devotee from abroad, Jozef Nauwelaerts, imported a specially designed reclining chair from Brussels for his guru. Jozef's gift was to provide comfort for Maharaj's suffering body. On July 5th, 1981, Maharaj used the chair for the first time. He liked it and found it comfortable to

sit on. He often used to sit in the chair while giving talks and attending *aarti* (sacred flame ritual).

Now, on the occasion of Maharaj's Mahasamadhi, the chair was put to good use for the last time. Maharaj's body was placed in the chair in a sitting posture. The chair, with Maharaj's body seated in it, was set on the decorated truck and carried in the procession. On his last journey, Maharaj sat “throned” in the chair, giving his last talk—in silence. Thus, the chair that Jozef had brought with such devotion and love for Maharaj served his guru well.

The procession reached the cremation ground at around 3 P.M.. After performing the appropriate rituals for a guru's Mahasamadhi, *bhajans* (songs of devotion) and aarti, Maharaj's body was consigned to the flames at 3:30 P.M.. The day was Wednesday, September 9th, 1981.

NOW, FRIENDS, I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS gratitude to various persons who looked after Maharaj's comfort and well-being during the past few years.

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Suvarna from Malvan and Dr. Kale. For our sakes, they both worked very hard to keep Maharaj's disease under control during the last sixteen months.

Thanks are also due to Maharaj's *sevakaries* (persons doing spiritually-oriented service) who served him so well over several years by massaging him and doing various kinds of work for him and the ashram.

Thank you, Mr. Pundlik. You looked after Maharaj's general well-being for well over forty years. Mr. Pundlik is present with us in the hall right now.

Thanks to Mr. Irranna who is known to us all as Anna. He served our guru for nearly twenty-five years. He visited Maharaj twice a day, mornings and evenings, in order to massage his body and press his head.

My thanks go to Mr. Korgaokar and Mr. Veermole, both of whom looked after Maharaj for a number of years.

During the last two to two-and-a-half years, another devotee, Mr. Ramachandra joined the group. Before going to his office, he would serve Maharaj every morning for three to four

hours. He used to be the last person to leave Maharaj after the morning session.

I would like to express my gratitude to Miss Vanaja. She has a doctorate in mathematics and gives lectures to postgraduate students at the Bombay University. She is Dr. Vanaja. Before going to her work at the university, she visited Maharaj first thing in the morning and attended to him.

I would like to express gratitude to another young lady. Holly is a Canadian national whose profession is acting. Within a few months in Canada, she would make enough money to enable her to visit India. She would make a beeline for Maharaj in Bombay, to serve and attend him for six to eight months every year.

Our grateful thanks go to another young lady from abroad. Mai, who is about twenty-five years old, is of Vietnamese origin but holds French citizenship. She hails from Paris and is a nurse by profession. Every time she earned and saved enough money in Paris, she would come to Bombay for a few months to serve Maharaj and listen to his teaching. Mai was here for almost a year before she left for Paris just a few days ago. She left only ten days prior to Maharaj's Mahasamadhi. Before parting, she offered her respects and devotion at her guru's feet while he was lying sick on his bed. She took leave by saying, "I am going ..." She could not continue; tears overwhelmed her. Still crying, she left the room.

All of a sudden, Maharaj sat up in his bed and gestured to call her back. When she came back, Maharaj took her hands and held them warmly. Then, despite his weakness, he shook hands with her. Looking into her eyes, he said ever so lovingly to her, "Okay, now you can go."

Last but not least, our thanks go to his family members. To witness Maharaj interacting in his last days with his son Babiseth and his daughter-in-law Maya Vahini, his daughter Prabhati, and his grandchildren, Savi and Niju, was very touching. Because of the loving care given by his family, Maharaj remained in the family-fold at Khetwadi and was thus accessible to us for our benefit. Had

it not been for their affection, care, and devotion, Maharaj would probably have lived in the Himalayas or somewhere else and would have been out of our reach. Because of their love, Maharaj continued to stay in Vanamali building until he left his body a few days ago.

Regarding Maya Vahini, some misunderstanding may have occurred. Because she is rather blunt and outspoken, some of us may not have understood her correctly and the important role she played in regard to Maharaj's well-being. Behind her apparent harshness, there was great love and affection for Maharaj. Only she could coax and persuade him to take a little nourishment, by way of porridge or milk, during his illness. When it came to food, Maharaj did not listen to anybody but her. Our heartfelt thanks go out to her.

I would like to express heartfelt thanks to Babiseth, too. For a long time, he may have appeared inactive and not too involved with Maharaj. But when he was needed, he always rose to the occasion. During the last few months of Maharaj's illness, he gave charge of the *beedi* (local cigarette) shop to the servants. He made himself fully available to serve Maharaj at home. When we wanted to hire a full-time employee, such as a nurse or a ward boy, to attend to Maharaj's needs, Babiseth refused to have outsiders as care-givers in his house. He said, "When I, my wife, and my sister are here to nurse Maharaj, why should we employ outsiders? Such people will not look after him as affectionately as we do."

FRIENDS, AS WE ALL KNOW, MAHARAJ LED a family life; he was a householder. During his lifetime he ran a successful business; at other times, he lost some money. He may not have died rich, but more importantly, he had reached the highest peak of spirituality almost half a century ago. He had the blessings of his guru and followed his instructions and guidance. He did *sādhana* (spiritual practice) at 10th Lane, and his Self-realization occurred there. Finally, he entered into Mahasamadhi at the very same place.

I am certain you will agree that his

residence-cum-ashram in the Vanamali building has acquired a special significance. It has gained in sanctity and holy ambience since Maharaj went into his Mahasamadhi.

A few months ago, when we knew that sooner or later Maharaj would leave us, I asked him during a question-and-answer session whether his home should be retained as an ashram. In response, Maharaj immediately replied, "Yes. It can be kept up as an ashram." After a little while he added, "But once he has shifted to the new apartment, how can my son look after two establishments, both the ashram and his own new house?"

We requested that he should not worry about this, but bless the proposed scheme. Satisfied with our arguments, Maharaj gave his blessings for the plan. Over the last few days, Babiseth has agreed that the 10th Lane property will be retained as an ashram, where the tradition of performing customary rituals like bhajans and aarti, etc., would be continued and Maharaj's recorded talks will be played regularly.

On this occasion, I requested the Kendra to offer all the necessary help and cooperation to Babiseth so as to support him in maintaining the place as an ashram, after he and his family have shifted into the new apartment.

NOW, FRIENDS, AFTER HAVING SPOKEN at length about the people who have looked after Maharaj during his days on earth, I would like to express my gratitude to those great devotees who were contributing to, and were instrumental in spreading, Maharaj's popularity and renown as a spiritual teacher the world over.

First, I must thank Mr. Sapre for initiating Maharaj's morning talks and turning them into a regular feature. It was on his insistence that Maharaj started the morning sessions in the first place.

Among the seekers from foreign lands to whom I would like to particularly express my heartfelt thanks is Maurice Frydman. He was responsible for recording, editing, and writing the talks of Maharaj, which were complied in the English publication *I Am That*.

Frydman sent copies of the book to many places and people around the world. After reading this book, loads of earnest seekers came to visit Maharaj. Amongst those who came were Russians, Yugoslavians, Poles, Dutch, Belgians, Italians, Swiss, French, Swedes, British, Spanish, Germans, Canadians, Americans, Japanese, Mexicans, Brazilians; some seekers even came from Africa and Afghanistan.

Our heartfelt thanks also go to Mr. Sudhakar Dikshit, proprietor of Chetana Publications. He was not only a stout devotee of Maharaj but also the publisher of his book. Then we must thank Jean Dunn for writing an article about Maharaj in *The Mountain Path*, a periodical that is published monthly by Śrī Ramanasramam (Śrī Ramana Maharshi's ashram). Many people discovered Maharaj through her article.

Amongst others who helped make Maharaj famous were Mr. Ramesh S. Balsekar, Mr. Ramchandran, and Miss Vanaja.

LET ME NOW SHARE WITH YOU A FEW thoughts that come to my mind about Maharaj's spiritual attainment. Quite often, I wondered how an ordinary man like Maharaj could thrive spiritually in a poor neighborhood like Khetwadi? How could a sage of his grandeur bloom in a by-lane of old Bombay? Visiting him, I would always come to a crossing of two particular roads that meet near Maharaj's house. One road leads to the notorious red-light district of Bombay, while the other heads for Maharaj's residence in 10th Lane, Khetwadi.

Reflecting on these roads, it dawned on me that their unique directions and destinations signify two basic paths that a human being can travel. A person can choose between the two. According to his or her inclination and intention, one person may follow the path that leads to spiritual elevation; another person may choose the second way and follow his baser instincts: the desire and fulfillment of physical pleasures and happiness.

We must remember that both persons start off from the same basic stage. Let me illustrate what I mean to say. A flower

and its fragrance arise from a seed that is nurtured by smelly, dirty manure. I will give another example: Rooted in the mud and muck of a stagnant pond, the lotus blooms and thrives untouched to rise above it.

Similarly, the human being is rooted in his body—the mud—without which spiritual sublimity cannot be attained. Man can blossom into the Ultimate while being in his earthly body, but staying aloof from the latter. In contrast, another person may remain at the level of basic survival instincts and body-identification all his life and pursue the route of pleasure gratification. These examples may help explain how Śrī Nisargadatta Maharaj was able to bloom into the very lotus of spiritual knowledge and ultimate attainment, in a place like Khetwadi's red-light district.

Because Maharaj spoke and taught here, his residence at Vanamali building has become something akin to a Spiritual University. Maharaj taught all levels of spirituality, right from the basic KG (kindergarten) up to the Ph.D. level. Most of us seekers attended the UG (undergraduate) class, and by sheer faith many of us attained great spiritual heights.

Over the years, Maharaj expounded subtler teachings and a higher philosophy. Maharaj had mentioned many times that his talks, given in the last two or three years of his life, were more advanced than those (given before 1975) that were transcribed for his book *I Am That*. He added that those who could listen to his later talks could consider themselves very lucky. Long before his departure, Maharaj suggested that the audiocassettes containing his talks and teachings should be preserved carefully and made available for posterity.

Friends, I do not want to dwell on the teachings of Maharaj much longer because most of you are familiar with them. But I would like to mention one very relevant point. Maharaj provided spiritual optimism for all kinds of earnest seekers. He said that a certain type, namely those who were intelligent enough and who had done their spiritual homework, could instantly understand his talks and teaching and establish

themselves in the Absolute, right there and then.

To others, he suggested that they should pick out at least one single sentence from his teachings and remember it as often as possible. From the mere remembrance of it, his teaching would blossom in them in due course.

He further said, "You should remember your visit with me. Remembering our meeting, you will remember me, and remembering me means truly remembering your own Self to the exclusion of all other thoughts."

And to those who could not understand his teachings at all, he said, "You don't need to worry. My teachings are already planted in your heart. They will sprout in due course. Simply have faith. There is no need to worry."

Friends—Mrs. Doongajibai in her talk has stated that with the departure of Śrī Maharaj, we have been rendered orphans. But with due respect, I beg to differ with her statement. With his *Nirvana* (liberation), we are certainly not orphaned. And to say thus would be a disservice to him. Because I know for sure that by planting his teachings in our hearts he has initiated the process of delivering us from our present "body-mind" state, into our True Selves. This process of liberation has already begun.

Therefore, let us now abide and stabilize

In our own Beingness

Prior to Words,

Prior to Concepts,

Prior to Mind,

And,

Prior to 'I Am-ness'

And—

The rest shall follow with His Grace. ❀

Banaganga temple tank, Mumbai.
Photo Sharmila Desai.



A FEW EXCERPTS FROM CONSCIOUSNESS & THE ABSOLUTE THE FINAL TALKS OF ŚRĪ NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ ©1994 *The Acorn Press*

MAY 14, 1980

Maharaj: Doctors have diagnosed that this body has cancer. Would anyone else be as joyful as I am, with such a serious diagnosis? The world is your direct experience, your own observation. All that is happening is happening at this level, but I am not at this level. I have dissociated myself from *Sattva Guna*, beingness.

The Ultimate state in spirituality is that state where no needs are felt at any time, where nothing is useful for anything. That state is called *Nirvana*, *Nirguna*, that which is the Eternal and Ultimate Truth. The essence and sum total of this whole talk is called *Sat-guru Parabrahman*, that state in which there are no requirements.

After the dissolution of the universe, when no further vestige of creation was apparent, what remained is my perfect state. All through the creation and dissolution of the universe, I remain ever untouched. I have not expounded this part: my state never felt the creation and dissolution of the universe. I am the principle which survives all the creations, all the dissolutions. This is my state, and yours, too, but you don't realize it because you are embracing your beingness. Realizing it is only possible when one gets support from invincible faith, from that eternal Sat-guru Parabrahman. This state, this Parabrahman principle, is eternal and is also the Sat-guru. It is the eternal property of any devotee of a Guru.

JULY 29, 1980

Questioner: Why did this consciousness arise?

Maharaj: You are both the question and

the answer. All your questions come from your identification with the body. How can any questions relating to that which was prior to the body and consciousness be answered? There are yogis who have sat in meditation for many, many years seeking answers to this question, but even they haven't understood it. And yet you are complaining.

Q: It is a great mystery.

M: It's a mystery only to the ignorant. To the one not identified with the body, it is no longer a mystery.

Q: Maharaj cannot convey it to us?

M: I keep telling you but you don't listen.

Q: Does Maharaj see us as individuals?

M: There are no individuals; there are only food bodies with the knowledge "I Am." There is no difference between an ant, a human being, and Isvara; they are of the same quality. The body of an ant is small, an elephant's is large. The strength is different, because of size, but the life force is the same. For knowledge the body is necessary.

Q: How did Maharaj get the name Nisargadatta?

M: At one time I was composing poems. Poems used to flow out of me and, in this flow, I just added Nisargadatta. I was reveling in composing poems until my Guru cautioned me, "You are enjoying composing these poems too much; give them up!"

What was he driving at? His objective was for me to merge in the Absolute state instead of reveling in my beingness.

This was the way I realized knowledge, not through mental manipulation. My Guru said, "This is so," and for me, it was

finished! If you continue in the realm of intellect you will become entangled and lost in more and more concepts.

Consciousness is time flowing continuously. But I, the Absolute, will not have its company eternally because consciousness is time bound. When this beingness goes, the Absolute will not know "I Am." Appearance and disappearance, birth and death, these are the qualities of beingness; they are not your qualities. You have urinated and odor is coming from that—are you that odor?

Q: No, I am not.

M: You require no more *sadhana*. For you, the words of the Guru are final.

OCTOBER 5, 1980

Maharaj: I have no individuality. I have assumed no pose as a person. Whatever happens in the manifest consciousness happens.

People identify me with their concepts and they do what their concepts tell them. It is consciousness that is manifest, nothing else. Who is talking, who is walking, who is sitting? These are the expressions of that chemical "I Am." Are you that chemical? You talk about heaven and hell, this Mahatma or that one, but how about you? Who are you?

In meditation, one sees a lot of visions. They are in the chemical, the realm of your consciousness, are they not? All these things are connected only to that birth-chemical. You are not this chemical "I Am"!

Spiritual knowledge should not be studied; it is knowledge derived from listening. When the listener hears it, and accepts it, something clicks in him.

This "I Am-ness" is otherness; it is an expression of duality.

NOVEMBER 8, 1980

Questioner: Why is it that we naturally seem to think of ourselves as separate individuals?

Maharaj: Your thoughts about individuality are really not your own thoughts; they are all collective thoughts. You think that you are the one who has the thoughts; in fact thoughts arise in consciousness.

As our spiritual knowledge grows, our identification with an individual body-mind diminishes, and our consciousness expands into universal consciousness. The life force continues to act, but its thoughts and actions are no longer limited to an individual. They become the total manifestation. It is like the action of the wind—the wind doesn't blow for any particular individual, but for the total manifestation.

Q: As an individual can we go back to the source?

M: Not as an individual; the knowledge "I Am" must go back to its own source.

Now consciousness has identified with a form. Later it understands that it is not that form and goes further. In a few cases it may reach the space, and very often, there it stops. In a very few cases, it reaches its real source, beyond all conditioning.

It is difficult to give up that inclination of identifying the body as the self. I am not talking to an individual, I am talking to the consciousness. It is consciousness which must seek its source.

Out of that no-being state comes the beingness. It comes as quietly as twilight, with just a feel of "I Am" and then suddenly the space is there. In the space, movement starts with the air, the fire, the water, and the earth. All these five elements are you only. Out of your consciousness all this has happened. There is no individual. There is only you, the total functioning is you, the consciousness is you.

You are the consciousness, all the titles of the Gods are your names, but by clinging to the body, you hand yourself over to time and death—you are imposing it on yourself.

I am the total universe. When I am the total universe, I am in need of nothing

because I am everything. But I cramped myself into a small thing, a body; I made myself a fragment and became needful. I need so many things as a body.

In the absence of a body, do you, and did you, exist? Are you, and were you, there or not? Attain that state which is and was prior to the body. Your true nature is open and free, but you cover it up, you give it various designs.

NOVEMBER 9, 1980

Questioner: Should the type of dispassion which Maharaj is teaching us be taught to children?

Maharaj: No. If that's done, they'll have no ambition to grow further; they must have certain ambitions, certain desires, for their proper growth.

The one who has fully investigated himself, the one who has come to understand, will never try to interfere in the play of consciousness. There is no creator with a vast intellect as such; all this play is going on spontaneously. There's no intellect behind it, so don't try to impose yours to bring about any change; leave it alone. Your intellect is a subsequent product of this process, so how can your intellect take charge of, or even evaluate, the whole creation? Investigate your self; this is the purpose of your being.

Spirituality is nothing more than understanding this play of consciousness—try to find out what this fraud is by seeking its source.

NOVEMBER 12, 1980

Maharaj: The "I Am-ness," the manifest *Brahman*, and the Isvara are all only one; ponder over this and realize it. This is a rare opportunity, one where all has been explained in great detail, so take full advantage of it.

You are the manifest Brahman. I have told you many times what your true state is, but through force of habit, you again descend into body identification. A stage has now arrived at which you must give up this bodily identification. The bodily activities will continue until the body drops off, but you should not identify with them.

Questioner: How are we to do this?

Maharaj: You can watch the body, so you are not the body. You can watch the breath, so you are not the vital breath. In the same way, you are not the consciousness; but you have to become one with the consciousness. As you stabilize in the consciousness, dispassion for the body and for the expressions through the body occurs spontaneously. It is a natural renunciation, not a deliberate one.

It does not mean that you should neglect your worldly duties; carry these out with full zest.

Q: Shouldn't we rediscover the freedom of the little baby?

M: Understand the source of the child. The child is a product of the sperm of the father and the ovum of the mother. Consciousness is there in the child as it is in the parents; it is always the same consciousness whether in the child or the adult. There is only one consciousness. You must become one with and stabilize in that consciousness, then you transcend it. That consciousness is your only capital. Understand it.

To what extent do you know yourself?

Q: I have held the feet of Sat-guru, beyond that I don't know anything.

M: You must do that, but you should understand the meaning of "feet of Sat-guru." Understand that, as movement begins with the feet, so movement begins from no-knowingness to knowingness. When the knowingness occurs, that is Sat-guru movement. Go to the source for the movement where the "I Am-ness" begins. The effort of the one who has arrested that movement will not go to waste. Holding the feet of the Sat-guru is the borderline between knowingness and no-knowingness.✦



SELF AND NON-SELF:

INTRODUCTION TO THE DR̥GDR̥ŚYAVIVEKA

from Śrī Saṅkarācārya's *Dr̥gdr̥śyaviveka*, *Discerning between Ātman and Anātman*.
TRANSLATION FROM THE SANSKRIT & COMMENTARY BY RAPHAEL
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IF WE TAKE A PIECE OF CLAY AND MAKE A jar from it and this jar one day becomes aware of itself, it will say: I am a jar.

If we break down the jar and reknead the clay and make a statue and one day the statue becomes conscious of itself, it will say: I am a statue.

If we break down the statue and reknead what gave origin to the jar and to the statue and make a pyramid of it and this becomes aware of itself, it will say: I am a pyramid.

But if the jar, the statue, and the pyramid, spatial-temporal constructions qualified by certain forms, could really become aware of their primordial and existential unconscious substratum they would say: I am formless, homogeneous clay that takes form now as a jar, now as a statue, now as a pyramid.

Beyond every form-structure “modification,” beyond all ego-form-quality, the substratum that is pure Existence (*Sat*) lives eternally.

Sat is that undivided essence always identical to itself that gives life appearance to all that exists or, better still, to all that is perceived. There is no “empirical ego,” whatever condition it may belong to, that does not feel within itself, in an innate way, this eternally pulsing presence. This existence does not need proof or philosophical or scientific arguments. The very existence of the ego-man (as an entity separated from the context of life) is the reflection of Sat: life that is not born and does not die. Sat is *Brahman*, the substratum of all, in that it is real Existence without

change or alteration; Absolute Life, pure Being from which motion-change-cause derives.

What does not exist cannot be brought into existence; what exists cannot cease to exist. This ultimate truth was revealed by those who saw the essence of all things.

Know that That, from which all this [manifestation and changing] radiated, is indestructible. No one can cause the destruction of the imperishable Being.

It was never born nor does it ever die. Having always been, it cannot cease to be. Unborn, permanent, imperishable, ancient, it is not killed even when the body is killed.¹

ŚANKARA ASKS HIMSELF: WHAT IS BEING? What is nonbeing? In his commentary on the aforementioned *sūtra*, he states that *abhāva* (nonbeing) is that which does not really exist, that which has no intrinsic life of its own, and no sufficient reason. This definition includes all the expressions of existence upon the perceptible plane. If we analyze every experience, we note a chain of effects that, in turn, are mere modifications or alterations; from this we can deduce that the objective-empirical world has only a changeable and phenomenal value.

The universe is only an “uninterrupted flow of images-forms.” A modification is just an aspect more or less different from its cause; that is, it is the cause that

presents itself in a new event-framework. We are unable to take in cause and effect at a single glance. We are able to see only one or the other. Empirical experience is based upon this conception of cause and effect; the perceptible shows itself as a hierarchy of these two terms, but what is now effect later may appear as cause, and a cause may prove to be an effect. Fundamentally, these two terms can be equaled; they belong to the same denominator; they are simple categories that change constantly and therefore they cannot have any absolute Reality. Beyond cause-effect-cause and so on, there is Sat: absolute Life-Existence without cause and without effect; we might say uncaused.

According to *Vedānta*, the universal basis of Being is the *ātman* or *Brahman-nirguṇa* (without qualities). Nonbeing or becoming is the phenomenon *māyā*, which is not “illusion” in the Western sense of the word but a word that etymologically means “that which flows, changes every moment, which appears and disappears.”

For *Advaita* (non dualistic) Vedānta, the universe of names and forms (cause-effect-cause and so on) is a production of *māyā*. As long as we remain within the realm of causes and effects, we are prisoners of *māyā*, the principle of causality. There is only one means by which to eliminate the veil of *māyā*: by considering cause-effect as a simple superimposition upon Brahman. When all the superimpositions disappear, then Reality will reveal itself as Sat, Existence

¹ *Bhagavad Gītā*, II, 16-27-20. Translation from the Sanskrit and commentary by Raphael. Edizioni Ashram Vidya, Roma (Italian edition).

without change and without any transformation, and therefore without conflict. Where there is becoming, there is time-space; where there is time-space, there is imprisonment and limitation; and where these are, there is conflict and bewilderment.

The manifestation of māyā can be seen in two different lights. From the point of view of the absolute Brahman, it is devoid of any degree of reality. From the empirical point of view, it can be considered, as it is stated by the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, as a homogeneous unity divided into three parts, with a fourth part remaining always as transcendent and uncaused:

I. The gross state is the totality of living beings having a name and a form; it is the totality of all physical bodies as the expression of one Being: the universal entity. It corresponds to *vaiśvānara*.

II. The subtle state is the cosmic mental state, the psychic life of universal existence. The gross state emerges from the subtle one. Man’s mind itself is an infinitesimal fraction of the cosmic Mind. There is no manifested form, at any level or in any state whatever, which does not possess a portion of the cosmic Mind. This state corresponds to *taijasa* (the luminous).

III. The causal state contains within itself, at a virtual level, all the infinite expressions of universal Life. Here, everything is in the potential state. It corresponds to *prājña*.

These three states are also compared to the conditions of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, which is the state where awareness retires into the potential state.

The fourth part can be described only by the use of negatives: Unborn, Nonbeing in that pure Being, Unmanifest, Unconditioned, Uncaused; also Infinite and Absolute. It is not the “known,” nor is it what the mind imagines as the unknown; it is not a “state” either. It corresponds to *turiya* and can be reached by *nirvikalpa-samādhi* (when the mind dissolves itself in the cosmic consciousness). From the

point of view of the Absolute, as we have already said, manifestation has no reality.

Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad says:

The first quarter (pāda) is vaiśvānara, whose sphere [of action] is the waking state; it is conscious of external objects, has seven limbs and nineteen mouths; it experiences gross (material) objects.

The second pāda is taijasa (the luminous), whose sphere of action is the dream state; consciousness here is interiorized. It has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and experiences the subtle objects.

[The third pāda] is the state of deep sleep where the sleeper no longer enjoys any object or dreams any dream. The third pāda is prājña, whose sphere of action is, in fact, deep sleep; here all things remain undifferentiated; in truth it is a unity of pure consciousness. [In prājña] there is fullness of happiness and [the sleeper] truly tastes this happiness. It is the cognitive condition [of the other two states].

The Sages believe that the fourth pāda—which has no knowledge of either the internal (subjective) world or the external (objective) world, nor of both of them at the same time, and which ultimately is not (even) a unity of integral consciousness, as it is neither conscious nor unconscious—is *adṛṣṭa* (invisible), *avyāvahārya* (nonacting), *agrāhya* (incomprehensible), *alakṣaṇa* (undefinable), *acintya* (unthinkable), *avyāpadeśya* (indescribable); it is the only *pratyayasāra*, the essence of self-knowledge without any trace of manifestation, the fullness of peace, and bliss without duality. It is the ātman and as such it must be known.²

“WITH THREE-QUARTERS OF MYSELF I manifest Myself,” state the sacred Indian scriptures, “but if all these things proceed from Me, I am not these things”—they are simply

shadows and lights projected upon the screen of the Infinite. Beyond all chemical compounds—nitrogen, water, hydrogen, iron, and so on—shadows thrown upon a fragment of time-space—there exists only undifferentiated electrical substance always equal to itself. Thus, if a plane is composed of lines, these are composed of points, and the point, although without dimensions, is the basic aspect of all manifested forms. Sat is Reality, the ultimate Reality; it is pure, uncontaminated Life, in the unqualified, unformed state.

Śaṅkara, in all his teachings, invites us to discern (*viveka*) between Real and unReal, between ātman (Self) and anātman³ (non-Self), between Infinite and finite, between Life and death. Man’s greatest conflicts stem from his attachment to and his identification with the anātman, with the finite, with the unreal, in other words, with death. Knowledge leads to the recognition of a-Sat (false existence) and the discovery of Sat (True Existence).

Sat includes *Cit*, absolute intelligence. As Sat is not just a quality but the very essence of all that is, thus *Cit*, more than being a quality, is a consubstantiality of Sat.

This intelligence, with existence, constitutes the sole basis of every life form; it is the support of all relative knowledge, and it is by it that we can acquire consciousness of the objective world, of the subjective world, and of the entity in itself. If this intelligible light were to fail, perception itself would cease to function. This light, which reveals everything, is not revealed because it cannot be considered an object of knowledge. The Absolute can never be considered an object of perception because this would imply duality. The Absolute simply is. Light-Consciousness-Intelligence is, we can say, an *a priori* principle of our very existence (as a phenomenal aspect), because the mind does not produce it, but it is in fact revealed through what men call mind. How can thought-mind, which is cause-time-space, grasp what is without cause, time or space?

We should remember that the human mind is not the only medium of “the Light that reveals all”; every atom of the Universe reveals Intelligence as principle, at different levels.

It is above all through *Cit* that the Vedānta pursues Brahmanic Realization. Advaita is practical metaphysics that must be experimented with in the world of becoming. This metaphysical pathway, utilizing the reflection of *Cit* in man, namely *viveka* (discernment), realizes brahmanic Identity in a concrete way. The life substratum, which never undergoes change, is Sat; the mode through which Sat manifests itself is *Cit*; the intrinsic vibration that permeates Sat and *Cit* is Ānanda—absolute completeness, Bliss.

Taittirīya Upaniṣad tells us (III, vī, 1):

In truth these living creatures were born of Bliss, it is through Bliss that, having come into existence, they stay alive, it is to Bliss that they will all return.

THE IRRESISTIBLE MOTION THAT GIVES rise to, sustains, and, in time and space, transcends all forms of manifested life, is constituted of Ānanda. This cannot be revealed totally until differentiation is transcended.

The reflections of Ānanda in the incarnated *jīva* are those sensorial pleasures that include sex and the refined pleasure of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic things. There is no manifest atom that does not move and tend toward the state of happiness. By an act of love man is born to life, by an act of love he sacrifices himself, by an act of love the sun and the other stars move. The individual acts, urged by the universal force of “pleasure.” Passions are an altered form of this innate beatific nature. Passion is enjoyment, sentiment is gratification of pleasure; even intellectual research is the fruit of pleasure, of satisfaction. However, sensory enjoyment, of any dimension whatever, is not Ānanda but a simple distorted reflection. Thus, intelligence-instinct, whether mineral, vegetable, animal, or human, is not brahmanic *Cit*, just as the weak lunar gleam is not the blinding light of the sun. The entire

world of names and forms emerges from the urge of Ānanda, is preserved by Ānanda, is transformed and destroyed by a pure act of fulfillment. Realization itself is born of Ānanda. For love of the beloved, the mystic-*bhakta* transcends the relative; for love of truth, the *jñānī* finds Sat within himself; for love of the one Life, the incarnated *jīva* abandons the forms by dying to itself. Death (of the ego), therefore, is the effect of an act of love toward great homogeneous Life. Death is Liberation.

The more we tend toward egoistic and material enjoyment, the more Ānanda is obscured and remains latent; the more we reach up to attain the supra-individual condition, sublimating sensory desire, the source of all conflict, the more commanding Ānanda becomes. We can say that Sat and *Cit* are expressed more than Ānanda. According to the classical Vedānta, reality has five characteristics: Sat, *Cit*, Ānanda, *Nāma* (name), and *Rūpa* (form). We perceive names and forms by means of the *vṛttis* (thought waves) of the mind vehicle, or *antahkarāṇa*. Of the presence of Sat and *Cit* we have intuitive certainty, while Ānanda is accessible only to those whose minds are permeated by pure *sattva*. Therefore, happiness cannot manifest itself except in pure thinking, and can be obscured more easily than Sat and *Cit*; we can discover it only after strict spiritual practice (*sādhana*). Realization, which is the ultimate aim of manifested life, is achieved by eliminating all traces of *rajas* and *tamas* (extroverted desire and material inertia). When the mental state, free from *rajas* and *tamas*, is raised up to its *sattvic* vibratory state, it produces thought in harmony with the Ānanda sheath. Reality thus presents itself under an enormously dilated perspective; this state of being finally identifies with supreme happiness. Let us remember that Sat, *Cit*, and Ānanda belong to the sphere of the absolute Brahman and therefore cannot be considered as qualifications, attributes, conditions, or causes except from the empirical point of view.

Ānanda represents an innate, natural modality of pure bliss and absolute fullness of Brahman. Pleasure-pain, good-evil, anxiety and anguish are qualities belonging to becoming, to the jar-ego, the statue-ego, the pyramid-ego—the man-ego. Cause-effect-cause and so on, mean birth-death-birth, endless and full of conflict. Where can we find *pax profunda*? Where the placid serenity of the peaceful heart? It is not to be found in the ebb and flow of the world of names and forms, certainly not in the continual modification of consciousness, nor in continuous research, nor in gratifying the egoistic phantom, but simply in the substratum that is always identical to Itself and which is Ānanda-Brahman. Peaceful are those who have recovered their formless “original” condition; they unveil Ānanda: absolute bliss and serenity. To say absolute Sat-Existence means to say Ānanda-Bliss. These terms are not separate, they are two expressions of a sole essence. On the other hand, Absolute Existence cannot but contain within itself Bliss-Fullness. Sensory happiness is the qualification of a state of momentary experience, participation, approval, and so on. But Ānanda is not a state of mind or consciousness, just as Life is not a state of mind or of perception. Life is. Ānanda is. We can grasp only a mere reflection of such a possibility if we think of a being devoid of all desire because totally gratified. This being, we can say, is pacified; no desire-thought-wave disturbs him, he remains in his fullness and in his blissful condition of being: wanting nothing, possessing all. In the *Pañcadaśī* we read: “The nature of the indivisible being is represented by supreme Bliss.”

If sensory happiness is the outcome of satisfaction through objects, gross or subtle, Ānanda is the bliss that is born of its own existence, of its intrinsic nature. In the former case there is duality, in the latter, unity and completeness.▲

I am Sat-Cit-Ānanda, independent, self-resplendent, free from duality...
(Dṛgḍṣyaviveka: 25)

²*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* with the *kārikā* of Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara’s Commentary: I, III, IV, v, VII. Edizioni Ashram Vidya, Roma (Italian edition). See also, Gauḍapāda, *Māṇḍūkyakārikā*: I, III, IV, v, VII. Translation from the Sanskrit and Commentary by Raphael. Aurea Vidya, New York.

³ *Ahamkāra*, the sense of ego.

YOGA SŪTRA OF PATAÑJALI & ITS COMMENTARIES

Edwin Bryant's translation of Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras with commentaries contributes to the growing body of literature on classical yoga by providing insights from all traditional Sanskrit commentators on the text.

EDWIN BRYANT

वृत्तयः पञ्चतय्यः क्लिष्टाक्लिष्टाः।

1.5 *Vṛttayaḥ pañcatayyāḥ klišṭāklišṭāḥ.*

Vṛttayaḥ, the changing states of mind; *pañcatayyāḥ*, five-fold; *klišṭa*, detrimental, harmful, damaging, afflicted; *aklišṭāḥ*, nondetrimental, unafflicted.

There are five kinds of changing states of the mind, and they are either detrimental or nondetrimental [to the practice of yoga].

PATAÑJALI HAS GIVEN HIS DEFINITION OF *yoga* in I.2. As has been noted, the term *vṛtti* is used frequently throughout the *Yoga Sūtras* to essentially refer to any sensual impression, thought, idea, or mental cognition, activity, or state whatsoever. Since the mind is never static but always active and changing, *vṛttis* are constantly being produced, and thus constantly absorb the consciousness of *puruṣa* away from its own pure nature, directing it out into the realm of subtle or gross *prakṛti*. In I.2, Patañjali defined yoga as the complete cessation of all *vṛttis* whatsoever. Here Patañjali turns his attention to what these *vṛttis* that must be eliminated are. There are five categories of *vṛttis*, which will be discussed in the following verses, and Patañjali indicates that these can be either conducive (at least initially) to the ultimate goal of yoga, or detrimental.

Vyāsa states that the detrimental *vṛttis* are caused by the five *kleśas*, the impediments to the practice of yoga that will be discussed in II.3—the term

for detrimental here is *klišṭa*, which comes from the same verbal root as *kleśa* (*kliś*). These types of mental states are detrimental to the goals of yoga because they are the fertile soil from which the seeds of *karma* sprout. When under the influence of the detrimental *vṛttis*, the mind becomes attracted or repelled by sense objects drawing its attention. In its attempt to attain that which attracts it and avoid that which repels it, the mind provokes action, karma, which initiates a vicious cycle that will be discussed below.

Karma, from the root *kṛ*, to ‘do’ or ‘make,’ literally means ‘work,’ but inherent in the Indic concept of work, or any type of activity, is the notion that every action breeds a reaction. Thus karma refers not only to an initial act, whether benevolent or malicious, but also to the reaction it produces (pleasant or unpleasant in accordance with the original act), which ripens for the actor either in this life or a future one. (Hence, people are born into different socioeconomic situations, and pleasant or unpleasant things happen to them throughout life in accordance with their own previous actions.)

This cycle of action and reaction, or *saṁsāra*, is potentially eternal and unlimited since not only does any one single act breed a reaction, but the actor must then react to this reaction causing a re-reaction, which in term fructifies and provokes re-re-reactions, and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus, since the vicious cycle of action and reaction for just one solitary momentary act is potentially unlimited, and since one has to act at

every moment of one’s life (even blinking or breathing is an act), the storehouse of karma is literally unlimited. Since these reactions and re-reactions, etc., cannot possibly be fitted into one life, they spill over from one lifetime into the next. It is in an attempt to portray the sheer unlimited and eternal productive power of karma that Indic thinkers, both Hindu and Buddhist, use such metaphors as ‘the ocean’ of birth and death. Thus karma, which keeps consciousness bound to the external world and forgetful of its own nature, is generated by the detrimental *vṛttis*, and the *vṛttis*, in turn, are produced by the *kleśas*, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The nondetrimental mental *vṛttis*, on the other hand, are produced by the sattvic faculty of discrimination that seeks to control the influence of *rajas* and *tamas* and thereby the detrimental *vṛttis* that they produce. Vyāsa notes that this type of *vṛtti* is beneficial even if situated in a stream of detrimental *vṛttis*.¹ In other words, for the novice struggling to control his or her mind, even if the emergence of *sattva* occurs only periodically, it is always a beneficial occurrence, and it can be gradually increased and strengthened by a yogic lifestyle. The reverse also holds true, adds Vyāsa: detrimental *vṛttis* can also surface periodically in a predominantly sattvic citta (hence the *Gītā*’s statement in II.60 that the senses can carry away the mind even of a man of discrimination).

Vācaspatimiśra mentions activities such as the practice of yoga and the cultivation of desirelessness born from

the study of scripture as non-detrimental, that is, mental activities beneficial to the goal of yoga. These actions, like any actions, produce seeds of reactions, *saṁskāras* (discussed further below), but these seeds are sattvic and beneficial to the path of yoga and the ultimate goal of samādhi. In time, and with practice, these seeds accumulate such that they eventually transform the nature of the mind. The mind then becomes more and more sattvic, or illuminated and contemplative, such that the beneficial *vṛttis* eventually suppress any stirrings of *rajas* and *tamas*—the detrimental *vṛttis*—automatically, until the later remain only as inactive potencies. When the citta manifests its pure sattva potential, it becomes “like” the *ātman*, says Vyāsa. By this he intends that it no longer binds the *puruṣa* to *prakṛti*, the world of *saṁsāra*, but reflects *puruṣa* in an undistorted fashion, allowing it to contemplate its true nature as per the mirror analogy outlined in the previous commentary. Rāmānanda Sarasvatī notes here that essentially, the citta mind is nothing but *saṁskāras*, mental imprints or impressions (not to be confused with *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death). *Saṁskāras* are a very important feature of yoga psychology: every sensual experience or mental thought that has ever been experienced forms a *saṁskāra*, an imprint, in the citta mind. The mind is thus a storehouse of these recorded *saṁskāras*, deposited and accumulated in the citta over countless lifetimes. Vyāsa notes that there is thus a cycle of *vṛttis* and *saṁskāras*: *vṛttis*, that is sense experiences and thoughts, etc. (and their consequent actions) are recorded in the citta as *saṁskāras*, and these *saṁskāras* eventually activate consciously or subliminally producing further *vṛttis*. These *vṛttis* then provoke the action and reaction noted above, which in turn are recorded as *saṁskāras*, and the cycle continues.

Memories, in Hindu psychology, are considered to be vivid *saṁskāras* from this lifetime, which are retrievable, while the notion of the subconscious in Western psychology corresponds to other, less retrievable *saṁskāras*, perhaps from previous lives, which

remain latent as subliminal impressions. *Saṁskāras* also account for such things as personality traits, habits, compulsive and addictive behaviors, etc. For example, a particular type of experience, say smoking a cigarette, is imprinted in the citta as a *saṁskāra*, which then activates as a desirable memory or impulse provoking a repetition of this activity which is likewise recorded, and so on, until a cluster or grove of *saṁskāras* of an identical or similar sort is produced in the citta, gaining strength with each repetition. The stronger or more dominant such a cluster of *saṁskāras* becomes, the more it activates and imposes itself upon the consciousness of the individual, demanding indulgence and perpetuating a vicious cycle that can be very hard to break. The *kleśas*, *vṛttis*, *saṁskāras*, and karma are thus all interconnected links in the chain of *saṁsāra*.

Through the practice of yoga, the yogī attempts to supplant all the rajasic and tamasic *saṁskāras* with sattvic ones until these, too, are restricted in the higher states of trance. This is because while sattvic *saṁskāras*, the nondetrimental *vṛttis* mentioned by Patañjali in this verse, are conducive to liberation, they nonetheless are still *vṛttis* and thus an external distraction to the pure consciousness of the *ātman*. Of course, as Vijñānabhikṣu points out, all *vṛttis*, including sattvic ones, are ultimately detrimental from the absolute perspective of the *puruṣa*, as they bind consciousness to the world of matter. So the notions of detrimental and non-detrimental are from the perspective of *saṁsāra*; the detrimental (rajasic and tamasic) *vṛttis* cause pain, and the non-detrimental (sattvic) ones at least lead in the direction of liberation, even though they too must eventually be given up. The phenomenon of non-detrimental *vṛttis* eventually undertaking their own elimination will be discussed more fully later on, but Vijñānabhikṣu quotes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* here to make the point: “Other things [i.e., the obstacles to yoga] must be eliminated by sattva, and sattva is eliminated by sattva” (XI.25.20).

प्रमाणविपर्ययविकल्पनिद्रास्मृतयः।

1.6 *Pramāṇaviparyayavikalpanidrā-smṛtayaḥ.*

Pramāṇa, epistemology, source of valid proof, right knowledge; *viparyaya*, error; *vikalpa*, imagination, fancy; *nidrā*, sleep; *smṛtayaḥ*, memory.

The five changing states of the mind are right knowledge, error, imagination, sleep, and memory.

PATAÑJALI HERE BEGINS HIS DEFINITION of what these *vṛttis*, which bind the *puruṣa* to the world of *saṁsāra*, are. He lists five distinct types of *vṛttis*. What this means, then, is that, in essence, the human mind finds itself in one of these five states at any given moment. In other words, all possible mental states that can be experienced are categorized by the yoga tradition as manifestations of one of these five types of *vṛttis*. The commentators reserve their comments for the ensuing verses, which explain each of these items in turn.

प्रत्यक्षानुमानागमाः प्रमाणानि।

1.7 *Pratyakṣānumānāgamāḥ pramāṇāni.*

Pratyakṣa, sense perception; *anumāna*, inference, logic; *āgamāḥ*, testimony, verbal communication; *pramāṇāni*.

Right knowledge consists of sense perception, logic, and verbal testimony.

THE FIRST OF THE FIVE *VṚTTIS* TO be discussed is *pramāṇa*, viz, epistemology, that is, what constitutes valid knowledge of an object. Philosophy and, of course, science—*sāṁkhya*, after all, sees itself as dealing with physical reality—have as their goals the attainment of knowledge about reality, so it is standard in Hindu philosophical discourse for thinkers to state what methods of attaining such knowledge of reality they accept as valid. The Yoga School accepts three sources of receiving knowledge as valid, as does the Sāṁkhya tradition (*Sāṁkhya Kārikā* IV; but other

[†]Edwin Bryant’s treatment of Sūtras 1-4 can be found in Issues 1 and 2 of *Nāmarūpa* magazine.

¹Just as a *brāhmaṇa* living in the village of Śāla, which is full of Kīrāṭas, says Vācaspatimiśra, does not become a Kīrāṭa. Kīrāṭa were a tribe living in the east of India.

² The extra *pramāṇas* posited by other schools are considered by the Yoga school to be variants of the *pramāṇas* mentioned here.

philosophical schools accept differing numbers from one to six²). The first method of attaining knowledge listed by Patañjali is sense perception: we can know something to be true or valid if we experience it through one or more of our senses—if we see it, smell it, touch it, hear it, or taste it. Śaṅkara notes that sense perception is placed first on the list of pramāṇas because the other pramāṇas are dependent on it, as will be seen below (indeed, some philosophical schools such as that stemming from the materialist Carvāka accept sense perception as the only pramāṇa, arguing that the other means of knowledge are derived from it).

Vyāsa explains sense perception as being the state or condition of the mind, vṛtti, which apprehends both the specific and generic nature of an external object through the channels of the five senses.³ The “generic” and “specific” nature of objects are categories especially associated with one of the other six schools of Hindu philosophy noted earlier, the Vaiśeṣika School, and are technical ways of attempting to analyze physical reality. The generic nature of a dog that one might happen to come upon, for example, is that it belongs to the canine species; the specific nature is that which demarcates it from other members of this generic category, that it is, say, a ginger Irish terrier (technically speaking, *viśeṣa* is what differentiates ultimate entities such as the smallest particles of matter from each other, but Vyāsa is using the term in a looser sense⁴). When one sees a particular dog, the mind typically apprehends both its generic and specific natures. This apprehension is accomplished by the senses encountering a sense object and relaying an impression of the object to the citta mind, which forms a vṛtti, or impression, of the object. The puruṣa soul then becomes conscious of this

mental impression, as if it were taking place within itself, indistinguishable from itself. In actual fact, the impression is imprinted on the citta mind.

Vācaspatimiśra raises a question here. If the impression is imprinted on the mind, which, according to the metaphysics of yoga, is a totally separate entity from the puruṣa soul, then how is it that the latter is aware of it? (Or, as he puts it, if an axe cuts a *khadira* tree, it is not a *plakṣa* tree that is thereby cut). In other words, if an impression is something that is made on the mind, then how does it end up being made on the puruṣa? Here again, Vācaspatimiśra introduces the analogy of the mirror. It is the mind and intelligence that take the form of the object as a result of sense perception, not the soul. According to the “reflection” model of awareness, consciousness is reflected in the intelligence due to proximity and then misidentifies itself with the reflection. This reflection, in turn, is altered according to the form assumed by the intelligence—just as a reflection appears dirty if the mirror is dirty. Thus, since the mind and intelligence have taken the form of the object in question, consciousness sees its own reflection as containing that form. This corresponds to the analogy of the moon appearing rippled when reflected in rippling water. According to the “non-reflection” model, awareness simply pervades the citta just as it pervades the body, misidentifying with the forms of citta in the same way it misidentifies with the form of the body. According to either understanding, it is this misidentification of the awareness of puruṣa with the forms of the intellect that is the essence of ignorance.

Moving on to the second pramāṇa, source of receiving valid knowledge, mentioned by Patañjali in this verse, Vyāsa defines logic (inference) as the assumption that an object of a

particular category shares the same qualities as other objects in the same category—qualities that are not shared by objects in different categories. He gives the example of the moon and stars, which belong to the category of moving objects because they are seen to move, but mountains belong to a category of immobile objects, because they have never been seen to move. Thus, if one sees an unfamiliar mountain or hill, one can infer that it will not move, because other known objects in this category, that is, all mountains and hills with which one is familiar, do not move.

The more classic example of inference among Hindu logicians is that fire can be inferred from the presence of smoke. Since wherever there is smoke, there is invariably fire causing it, the presence of fire can be inferred upon the perception of smoke even if the actual fire itself is not perceived. So one can say with assurance that there must be fire on a distant mountain, even if one cannot actually see the blaze itself, if one sees clouds of smoke billowing forth from it. It is in this regard that inference, *anumāna*, differs from the first source of knowledge, *pratyakṣa*, sense perception. Pratyakṣa requires that one actually see the fire. In anumāna the fire itself is not actually seen, its presence is inferred from something else that is perceived, viz, smoke.⁵ The principle here is that there must always be an absolute and invariable relationship (concomitant), between the thing inferred, viz, the fire, and the reason upon which the inference is made, viz, the presence of smoke—in other words, wherever there is or has ever been smoke, there must at all places and at all times always be or have been fire present as its cause with no exceptions. If these conditions are met, the inference is accepted as a valid source of knowledge (if exceptions to the rule can be found, i.e., instances

of smoke that do not have fire as their cause, then the inference is invalid).

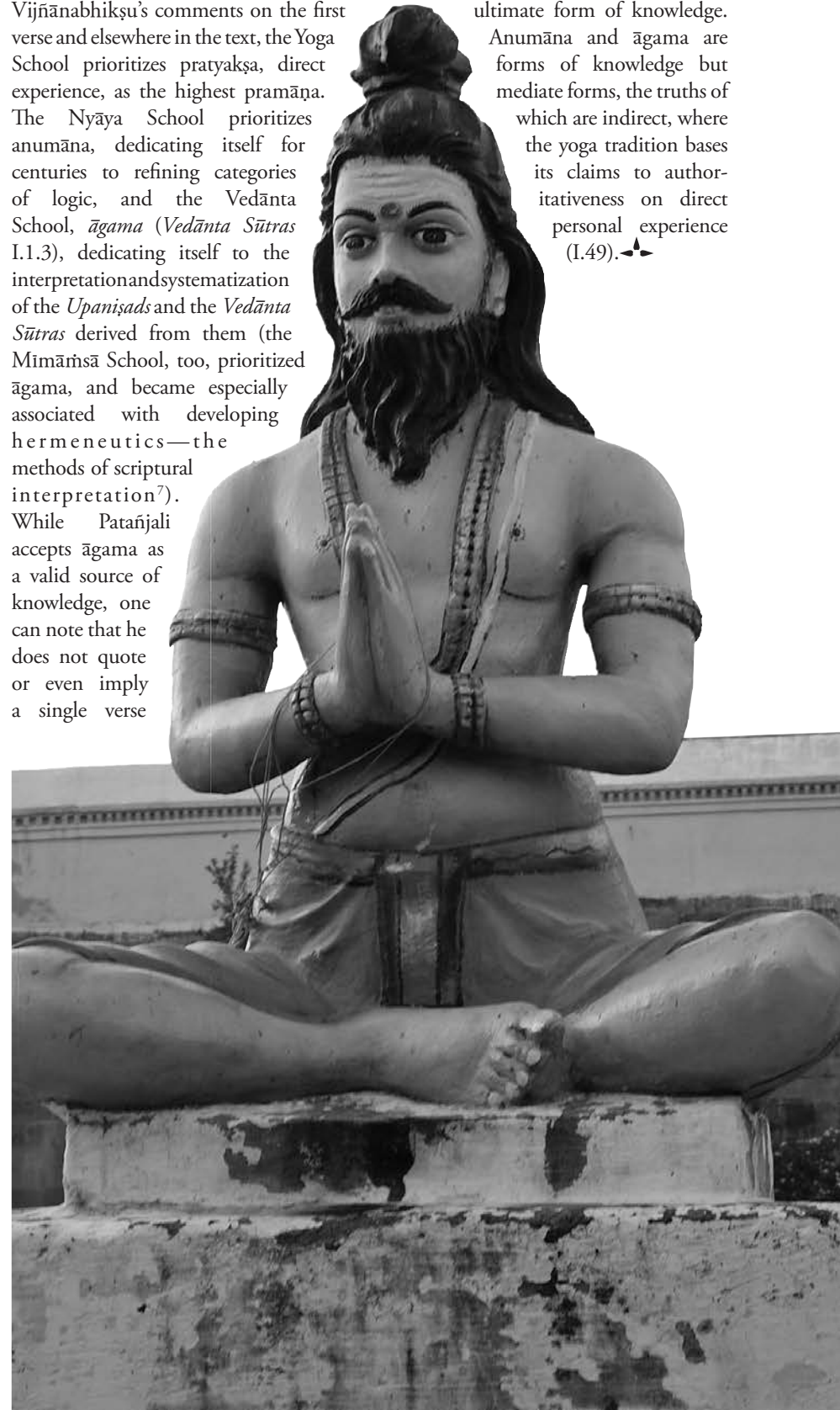
Finally, “verbal testimony,” the third source of valid knowledge accepted by Patañjali, is the relaying of accurate information through the medium of words by a “trustworthy” person who has perceived or inferred the existence of an object, to someone who has not. The words of such a reliable authority enter the ear and produce an image, vṛtti, in the mind of the hearer that corresponds to the object experienced by the trustworthy person. The person receiving the information in this manner has neither personally experienced nor inferred the existence of the object of knowledge, but valid knowledge of the object is nonetheless achieved, which distinguishes this source of knowledge from the two discussed previously. Vyāsa describes a “trustworthy” person as someone whose statements cannot be contradicted. Vijñānabhikṣu adds to this that a reliable or trustworthy person is one who is free from defects such as illusion, laziness, deceit, dullwittedness, and so forth.

The most important category of this source of valid knowledge in the form of verbal testimony is divine scripture. Since scriptures are uttered by trustworthy persons in the form of enlightened sages and divine beings, their status as trustworthy sources of knowledge are especially valuable. In order to elaborate on this, Vācaspatimiśra raises the issue as to how sacred scriptures can be considered valid given that all accurate verbal knowledge must itself originally come either from perception or inference (hence other schools do not even consider them separate sources of knowledge, as mentioned above); but scriptures deal with certain subjects that no human being has either seen or inferred (such as the existence of heavenly realms, etc.).

In response to this, he argues that the truths of scripture have been perceived by God, Īśvara; thus divine scripture, too, is based on perception.⁶ And God, quips Rāmānanda Sarasvatī, is surely a trustworthy person!

Different schools of thought prioritized different pramāṇas. As we have seen with Vijñānabhikṣu’s comments on the first verse and elsewhere in the text, the Yoga School prioritizes pratyakṣa, direct experience, as the highest pramāṇa. The Nyāya School prioritizes anumāna, dedicating itself for centuries to refining categories of logic, and the Vedānta School, *āgama* (*Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.3), dedicating itself to the interpretation and systematization of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedānta Sūtras* derived from them (the Mīmāṃsā School, too, prioritized āgama, and became especially associated with developing hermeneutics—the methods of scriptural interpretation⁷). While Patañjali accepts āgama as a valid source of knowledge, one can note that he does not quote or even imply a single verse

from scripture in his treatise (in contrast with the *Vedānta Sūtras*, which are almost entirely composed of references from the *Upaniṣads*). While he uses anumāna on occasion, such as in his arguments against certain Buddhist views (IV.14-24), clearly almost his entire thrust throughout the *Sūtras* is on pratyakṣa as the ultimate form of knowledge. Anumāna and āgama are forms of knowledge but mediate forms, the truths of which are indirect, where the yoga tradition bases its claims to authoritativeness on direct personal experience (I.49).✦



³ The five senses are hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch.

⁴ In Vaiśeṣika, all manifest reality can be broken down into seven basic categories, one of which is “substance.” There are nine different types of substances, the minutest particles of earth, water, fire, gas, and ether (matter, liquids, energy, gas, space), the mind, the soul, time, and space. The “specific” aspect of one of these substances (viśeṣa, from which the school gets its name) is that which distinguishes one substance from another, which keeps particles, for example, separate and individual such that one can differentiate between one molecule of earth and another, or between one soul and another.

⁵ Some schools of thought, however, hold that anumāna is not a separate source of knowledge because it is predicated on sense perception—the smoke is seen, even if the fire is not—and thus it is a variant of pratyakṣa rather than an independent source of knowledge.

⁶ It is for this reason that some schools also reject scripture as a valid source of knowledge. Along the same lines as indicated in the previous footnote, such schools hold that scripture, too, is simply an extension or subcategory of pratyakṣa, sense perception.

⁷ The focus of the Mīmāṃsā, however, was on the scriptures pertaining to ritual, the Brāhmaṇa texts, as opposed to the mystico-philosophical Upaniṣad texts, that were of interest to the Vedānta.

RESURRECTING YOGA

JOSHUA M. GREENE

Author Steven Rosen is on a mission to free yoga traditions from academic bias.

EVER SINCE ORIENTALIST CHARLES WILKINS first translated the *Bhagavad Gītā* into English in 1785, India has been under siege by people with agendas: European philosophers touting the superiority of Enlightenment thinking, economic theorists citing Brahminism as the root cause of India's poverty, Christian missionaries evangelizing Hindus into embracing the True Light, and Western scholars exercising an intellectual version of the land-grab colonialism that made British officials so popular with the natives. In broad-minded post-Modernity, it may no longer be politically correct to take over someone's property; their religion, however, is another matter.

For thirty years, author Steve Rosen has been shaking his head over academia's feint praise of India. Since 1977, after emerging from a decade of study and meditation in Kṛṣṇa āśrams, he has worked to free yogic practices from the constraints of academic agendas. "I aim my writing at people like myself," he says, "someone who is seeking an experience of India beyond textual analysis." Judging by comments from leading voices in the field, he's done a *pukka* (authentic, first-class) job. He has authored more than twenty books on devotional (*bhakti*) practices, and his semi-annual *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, now in its fifteenth year of publication, is heralded as a major resource in the field of Indic studies.

"[The journal's] true measure will not be taken, perhaps, for years," says John Stratton Hawley (Jack Hawley), Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Religion at Barnard College and chair of the Religion Department, "but this [journal] is a job well done." University of Manitoba's Klaus Klostermaier, an elder statesman of contemporary Indology, concurs, "The quality and diversity [of articles] are amazing—[they cover] aspects of this

important tradition which have never been explored before in such depth."

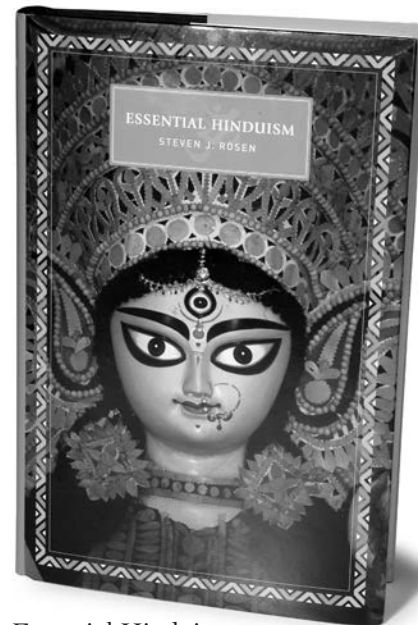
Such comments are cherished by Rosen, who from the outset doubted if he could succeed at balancing his devotional bias with respectable scholarship. "I remember sending one of my early books to Tony Stewart, an important scholar on the life of Caitanya, the sixteenth-century saint who inaugurated the public chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. Stewart knew I'd spent years as a devotee and sent the book back with a note saying he wanted nothing to do with the Hare Kṛṣṇas. Eventually we established a rapport, and he had nice things to say about the book. That sort of thing happens often. I think my function is to serve as a bridge between scholarship and devotion."

As the song says, it is a bridge over troubled waters. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars—mostly white British male Christians—looked down on yoga in general and devotional practices in particular as remnants of a naïve and less civilized time. For them, the study of Sanskrit texts had one primary purpose, namely to disprove their validity. In recent years, a new crop of scholars has emerged exercising greater sensitivity to wisdom traditions and better control over academic hubris. "Still," Rosen says, "a lot of the damage done by first-generation Indologists remains. I don't think it's possible to understand *Bhagavad Gītā* or the *Yoga Sūtras* or the *bhakti* literature merely by applying linguistic analysis. These are living, breathing works that are meant to be practiced. That's the focus of my books."

Rosen's published works address specific topics. These works include: *Food for the Spirit: Vegetarianism and the World Religions* (Torchlight Publishing); *Holy War: Violence & the Bhagavad Gita* (Deepak Heritage Books); *The Reincarnation Controversy:*



Steven Rosen



Essential Hinduism
(Praeger, 2006).

Uncovering the Truth in the World Religions (Torchlight Publishing); *Holy Cow: The Hare Krishna Contribution to Vegetarianism and Animal Rights* (Lantern); and *The Hidden Glories of India* (BBT International), the first book on India's spiritual heritage to be published in China. Most of his books are now translated into numerous languages and are used as required texts in universities around the world.

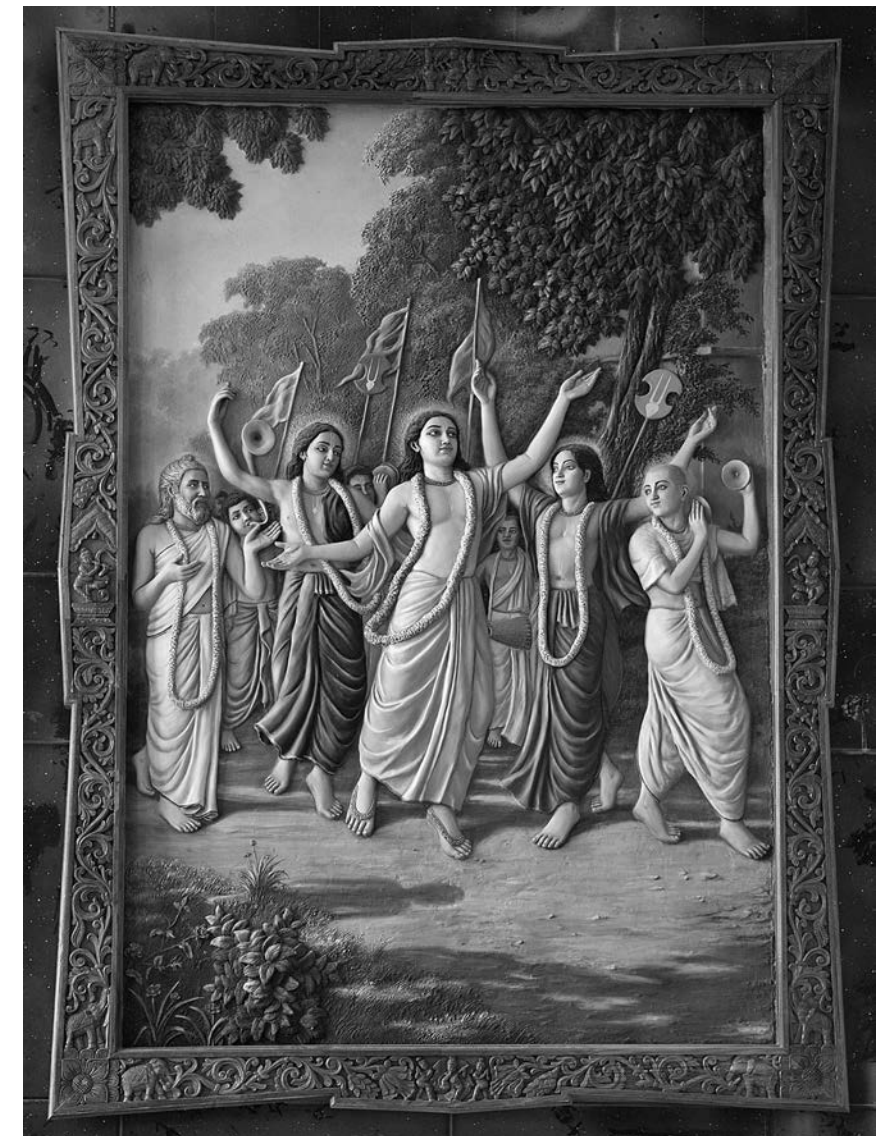
IN HIS BOOKS AND ESSAYS, ROSEN addresses long-standing inaccurate assumptions about India's spiritual culture. His recent book *Essential Hinduism* (Praeger, 2006), for example, points out that Hinduism is not the monolithic tradition depicted in most classroom textbooks but rather an umbrella term for numerous paths such as *Vaiṣṇavism*, *Śaivism*, and *Śaktism*, with *Vaiṣṇavism* claiming the largest number of adherents. The "caste system," as the term is generally understood, also suffers from misuse. The original concept *varṇāśrama* refers to a social system based on skill sets and vocational aptitudes, not birthright. "It's surprising how many mistaken ideas are still out there," says Rosen. "Deity worship, for example, is a valid form of meditation and has nothing to do with idolatry. Or polytheism—many educators still think that Hinduism is polytheistic. Although some Hindu traditions do embrace a polytheistic world view, the majority of Hindus do not. Most *Vaiṣṇava*, *Śaiva*, and *Śakta* traditions are highly monotheistic. Many people also believe that *Vaiṣṇava* devotional practices are a recent invention. Well, they're not. If you know where to look, you'll find worship of Viṣṇu in some of the oldest Sanskrit texts." Because *Essential Hinduism* explains these subjects with clarity and precision, it is considered a breakthrough work in the study of India's spiritual traditions.

Just before writing this work, Rosen authored a classroom text on Hinduism for Greenwood Publishing's six-volume series, *Introduction to the World's Major Religions*. His timing could not have been better. The book

launched just as the California Board of Education handed down a ruling against Hindu organizations that had raised objections to the way Hinduism is taught in American schools. Rosen's text provided explanations approved by both the scholars and the practitioners. The book is now a preferred classroom reference in U.S. and U.K. schools. "This is all, in a sense, the work of one person," says John Carman, Professor Emeritus at Harvard. "Rosen's love for the subject and his intensity of purpose can be felt on every page."

TRUE TO FORM, ROSEN CONTINUES to write for general readers as

well as for students and educators. His recent book, *Gita on the Green: The Mystical Tradition Behind Bagger Vance* (Continuum International) explains the wisdom text *Bhagavad Gītā* by way of a golf metaphor. He bases his work on Steven Pressfield's novel, which was made into a movie, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. It's a long way from Wilkins's nineteenth-century translation to a *Gītā*-inspired film directed by Robert Redford. But for Rosen, the journey has just begun. "There's such depth to the yoga traditions," he says, "but there are also several hundred years of misinterpretation to rectify. I'll continue doing my bit, one book at a time." ❧



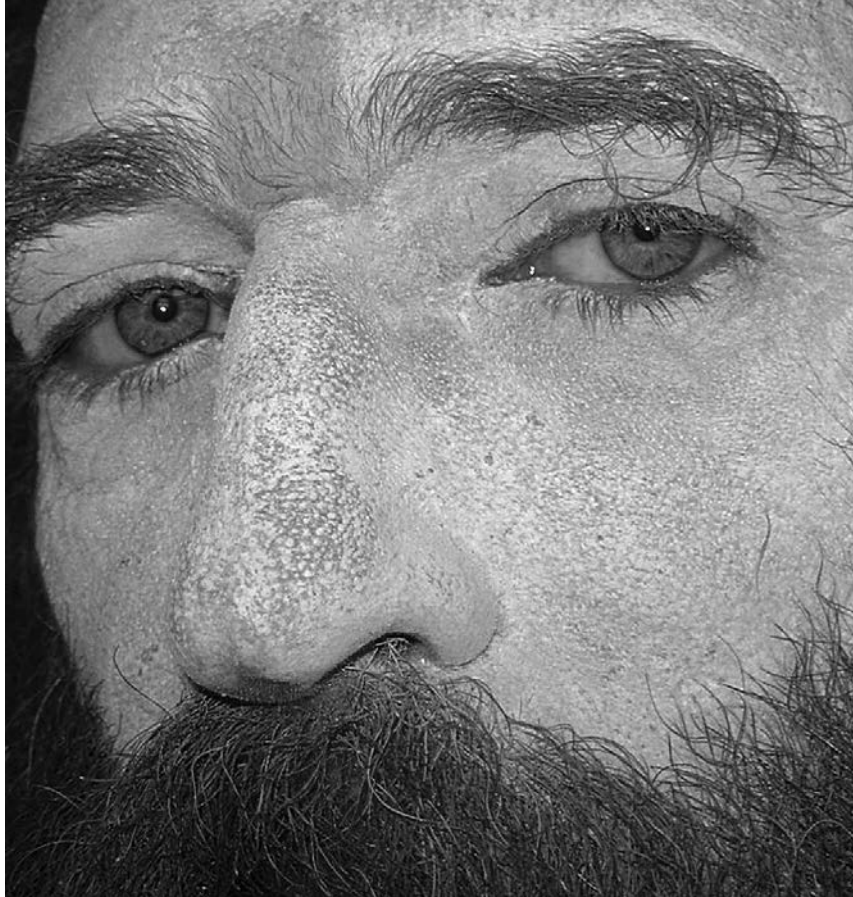
Bas-relief of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu on the wall of the newly constructed Śrī Śrī Rādhā Govinda Temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, South India. January 15, 2007.

AN INTERVIEW WITH NĀGA BĀBA RAMPURI CLAUDIA TURNBULL

IN THE SIXTIES, WHEN MANY OF US were searching for a more meaningful backdrop to our lives at home here in America, Rampuri headed to India, driven by his ambition to find answers to questions regarding absolute truth. He stands out among Western seekers who have journeyed to India on their spiritual search by the uncompromising nature of the path he chose and by the perseverance that became evident in a way that only the passage of time can demonstrate. He could be categorized as a spiritual rebel. Having rejected both the life he was born into in Beverly Hills and some of the more popular, easily followed spiritual paths, he joined what he referred to as the “Hells Angels of *bābas*,” the Nāga Bābas. His enthusiasm in his search for truth caused reckless abandonment of all material comforts and securities. His book, *Baba: Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Yogi* gives Westerners an engaging view of the day-to-day lives of some of the deeply ascetic yogis of India.

Rampuri traveled through India to a variety of *āśrams** before his wanderings led him to the teachings of Hari Puri Baba, a bāba he describes as dignified and well groomed with a commanding presence. Hari Puri Baba had started his spiritual education at a young age, having left home with his guru Sandhya Puri Maharaj at ten years old. He wandered with him barefoot and often found himself being left in caves for a year at a time with other *sādhus* who, he reports, practiced *siddhis*, or supernormal powers. In time he is said to have achieved siddhis himself. He spoke many languages and even seemed to communicate with crows, using a language called *kā bhāṣā*.

When questioned by Hari Puri Baba at their first meeting, Rampuri told the revered sādhu that he came for *darśan*, but that his real quest in India was to find a teacher so he could “know himself.” The response was, “OK, that’s easy; sit with your back straight and breathe.



Photograph courtesy of Rampuri.

Yes, breathe in and out. That’s it.” This simple initial teaching was to grow into a mystical path that has formed the core of Rampuri’s spiritual journey. He was later able to takes his vows as a *sannyāsin* (renunciate) into an order of naked ash-covered sādhus previously inaccessible to non-Indians.

His is a life not described by romanticized notions of India. Rather he gives an honest account of his quest, which has led him beyond the cultural constructs associated with either his original American or his adopted Indian patterns of thought. He now lives at an āśram he founded, the Hari Puri Ashram, in the foothills of the Himalayas, Hardwar, India.

This interview was conducted via the telephone with Rampuri, who was on a speaking tour throughout Europe. At the time of the interview I was able to catch up with him in Riga, Latvia, where he was lecturing at a yoga studio.

CT: I read your book *Baba: Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Yogi* perhaps a year and a half ago. I really enjoyed it for several reasons.

R: Thank you.

CT: It provided a picture of teaching

within the tradition of the Nāga Bāba order, which we rarely get a glimpse of. It was particularly interesting seeing that tradition through someone who grew up in the West because the communication could be that much more thoroughly understood by those of us who are Westerners. I felt the account of your life was very honest; it didn’t seem to paint a picture different from the one that you actually experienced. So I am pleased to have this chance to ask you about your experiences and the ways that they have helped you find answers to the questions that brought you to India. I have many of the same questions and so do others; I hope we can benefit from sharing in your experience.

R: OK, well, thank you for all those things you said.

CT: After many years of being an outsider to an Indian knowledge system, you have not only been integrated into the Nāga Bāba order, but you have founded the Hari Puri Baba Ashram in Hardwar. Could you give a glimpse of the daily rhythms in your āśram?

R: Well, you wake up and take your bath, do your morning *pūjā*—whatever that may be—and then on different days of the week, different things might be

happening. First, actually, what I should say to you is that, first and ultimately, we are all anarchists. So anything is possible and likely at any given time, although we have very general kinds of things such as morning baths and lunch, and most of us take an afternoon nap, not all of us do. At 4 or 5 o’clock in the afternoon, we take another bath; bathing is very important. Then when the sun goes down, most of us do some sort of a sunset or post-sunset *pūjā*. Many of us keep a sacred fire; as you know from reading the book, it is called the *dhuni*. This is one of the times when we feed the fire with tree resins, called *guggul*, and light incense and lamps and some of us chant with what is called *ārti*, or the waving of lights for evening worship. I think that if you visited more modern standard Indian middle-class āśrams, you would find a much more rigid structure and many more normal sorts of activities going on. But we are naked *yogīs*, as I told *Newsweek*, sort of the Hell’s Angels of Indian spirituality. So there are a lot of possibilities.

CT: You state in your autobiography that you were driven to find truth at an early age, having left your childhood home for that purpose. What caused you to believe that you would find the answers you were seeking in India?

R: Well, actually what I was looking for was a handle. Truth is a big word. It is really hard to get your hands around it. I think that looking back on it, I was really looking for a handle on things. I felt that my little culture in America at that time was just too small in a funny sort of way. I wanted to find a big, big culture to hold on to, to explore; I wanted to see within the context of culture what man’s possibility actually is. Not necessarily in a make-believe world or a science-fiction world, but in a real, cultural world. I had made a trip; I had been to Europe. In fact as part of this exploration, I returned to Europe, and I saw that in Europe, even back then, the culture was being reduced. I anticipated perhaps an even greater reduction where Europeans would start wearing blue jeans and baseball caps and eating hamburgers at MacDonalds. I had in my mind three basic cultures that were possibilities for me: Egypt, going back to the pharaohs; China, going back

thousands and thousands of years; and India. Egypt at the time was in the end period of this Pan-Arab nationalism of Nassar’s, very different from what we are experiencing today, but still something that obscured the ancient Egypt that would have tickled my fancy. China was going through the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards were basically rampaging through the country, destroying all vestiges of old China. So that didn’t really work for me. And then there was India. CT: And this was 1960?

R: 1968 and 1969. ‘69 was the year that I came to India. India was basically a very big unknown to me. I was fascinated with some of the philosophies of India and some mysticism of India. I was acquainted with the Vedānta Society in Los Angeles. I had read some Vedānta. I was very interested in the Theosophical Society, C. W. Leadbeater, Annie Besant, those sorts of people. I was interested in Madame Blavatsky and the Order of the Golden Dawn. Then there was Alice Bailey from San Diego, Brotherhood of White Light or something like that. I was certainly interested in the mystical. I thought I would just love to go to some place to find wizards and witches and shamans and all sorts of strange magical mystical and, I might add, psychedelic things. India was definitely the place to go looking for that sort of stuff.

CT: And now in retrospect, to what extent do you think you found what you set out for?

R: I found all that I set out for and much, much more. But it is not exactly how I pictured it, how I thought it would be. I had no idea back then that this was like a very temporary opening into another dimension. There have been a couple of films or *Twilight Zone* episodes in the past where there is a little hole that leads to another dimension, and then it closes. And indeed it has closed. The India I arrived in at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies is not the India of today. What I walked into then just doesn’t exist anymore. That doorway has unfortunately been shut and sealed forever, as far as I can tell.

CT: Has what you were seeking changed in some ways?

R: The whole world has changed. I

don’t think that anyone has been able to escape this change. The world of Los Angeles where I grew up in the sixties was certainly not the same place that it is today.

I was driving on the road today with my hosts here in Riga. We were driving out to the countryside. I noticed all sorts of young people hitchhiking on the road; I said to my host, “To me, this is a sign that things are relatively safe and perhaps even a touch naive in Latvia.” The fact that young people, they looked like teenagers, some of them—in fact all of them looked like teenagers—would be hitchhiking on the road. They said, “Why is that?” I said, “I don’t think that people do that in America anymore.” Yet I remember when I was kid in the sixties that we did this all the time, and there were all sorts of hitchhikers, and I remember meeting all sorts of people from hitchhiking. So our society, the world, has changed in such a big way.

Everything has become an item of consumption, purchase and consumption. In the sixties, yes, this was certainly in the works and coming about, but it was far from having arrived in the sense that it has arrived today. India really didn’t know consumption in the sixties. Even if you had lots of money in the sixties in India and in the seventies, there was nothing to buy. It didn’t really mean anything; the difference between rich and poor was very inconsequential back then because there was no way to demonstrate your wealth. If you had a car, there were eight people in the car wherever it went—not a single driver or two people in the car. The car was always stuffed to the gills because there weren’t many cars. There was very little to buy and to consume, so it was a different place. Today India has caught up with most of the rest of the world in terms of its consumption, at least in its desire to consume.

CT: Has that changed the Nāga Bāba order? How have the Nāga Bābas reacted to that consumerism?

R: Well, let me describe it like this: There was a time, not very long ago, when we would walk into a village and we would go to a fire, we would go to the temple, we would be invited to someone’s house veranda, and everybody would gather

*Throughout this article we have retained the Hindi forms of some words rather than their Sanskrit equivalents.

around, especially the children. We would sit around and talk, mainly with the men, because that is the way society works in India. Eventually stories would start coming out about people or places or mythology or what have you. I was always hyper-aware that every child from the age of three to nineteen would be there, all squeezed together straining to hear every word that was being said. Then came a day not so long ago when we walked into a village and there were no more children. The men were there, very often the older men would be there, and they were the only people that would be there to listen to what we had to say, where we were coming from, our stories, and so forth. I remember that, one of the first times this happened, I asked somebody, “Where are all the kids?” The answer was that they were inside watching television. It actually got even worse. The answer became, “They are inside watching cartoons on television.” American cartoons on television with Hindi voice-over. This is the mother of consumption—television. This is where it all begins because this is where people are informed about who they are, what they are missing, and what they need in their lives.

Suddenly the role of a bāba was dramatically changed, in one twist of the wrist turning on the television. I am familiar with my order, the Nāga Bābas, but we can talk in terms of a generic bāba. In one moment, the bāba lost his authority. The authority as the storyteller and the authority for knowledge, information, and in fact, entertainment, went from the human storyteller to this magic box that you could turn on and off at will. So this is one of the major shifts in time and tradition that has had a devastating effect on the sources of knowledge, entertainment, and storytelling in India and everywhere else in the world.

CT: So it really brings Western world views and values and customs right to the individuals in the villages. For you, it must reflect things you felt you had to leave, things from your original Western upbringing.

R: You are very right about that. It’s this idea of consumption. The television is right at the source; this is where we are informed about a great many things and

about a great number of our needs that we hadn’t been aware of before we started watching the television. A lot of people were not aware that they were poor before they started watching television; it was the television that informed them of their poverty and the ways of covering up their poverty—poverty that I don’t really believe existed before they started watching the television.

Television also started to inform the public about bābas and about religion and about spirituality in general. A new style took a while to be born, but now, if we jump a good twenty years or so from the inception of television in India to the present day, we find that in the same way that you have television evangelists in the West, especially in America, a similar kind of thing has happened in India. You have a new kind of religious authority that is modeled after the bāba and in most circumstances looks identical to the bāba. Here is a new personality who reaches the middle class in a medium that is very comfortable to the middle class and has changed the way that the middle-class Indian looks at the institution of asceticism.

Now you find a preponderance of well-heeled gurus who have a more modern kind of āsram with large followings. This guru is slowly replacing the traditional bāba who was known in maybe a few villages or small towns and had a relatively small following in a number of places. Perhaps we should get into this. The other difference is that the small bāba was traditionally there to give blessings. The larger televangelist has something to market, has something to sell, because television is intimately connected with consumption. So with the inception of television you have the inception of *chochkies* (trinkets), all the things that one might buy in order to make one’s life better. All the things one might consume that give the promise of making one’s life better. This was not the case before. Before it was a very simple equation of simple people having difficulties in life, as everybody has, coming to a bāba and asking for blessings. And the bāba, being simple and rural himself, would make an attempt to connect this simple person with earth and with nature; making himself like a conduit, he would attempt

to bestow those blessings in the name of the Mother Goddess, so that a little magic would happen in that person’s life, making that person’s individual or family life a little bit better.

CT: How do you feel about the effectiveness of this? You are explaining value in a very personal sense, having direct contact and receiving blessings from a bāba, versus these large, almost institutional methods of spirituality that have come out of India.

R: I think I know where you are headed with that. The difference is this. You start on one extreme with religion, which is a very large impersonal thing. When you have religion, religion being politics in another package, it is another form of marketing. Now you move a step down from religion, and you have these individuals with large followings. I guess you can call them modern, television-driven or consumption-driven sects. You have another exercise in marketing and consumption. This is basically the marketing and consumption of what one might call “feel good.” Either feel good from the point of view of reading something that makes you feel good, or hearing something that makes you feel good. Or going somewhere and feeling one’s guilt somehow assuaged. In any case, it’s all a form of marketing and consumption.

In the old system, very often a villager might not even know the name of the bāba. Here is a bāba who maybe has been coming for twenty years, whom the village people have been seeing for twenty years, and nobody knows his name. The first thing that marketing tells you: You have to have name recognition. That’s called branding. You have to know that it’s not just a brownish liquid in a funny bottle; it’s called Coca-Cola. That’s the important thing; everybody has to know the name before they know the thing. Here you had a thing that in many cases was totally nameless—sort of anti-marketing and anti-consumption. Then you had another funny phenomenon. You had people who all they really wanted to do was come and serve a bāba. That didn’t mean sending a check, or making a donation, although donations were never refused. People realized that in order to

really feel something that some might call merit, they must actually come and do service to a bāba—even if the service was making tea or washing out the teapot and teacups.

There was one very famous gangster or bandit highwayman of North India, a man who was called “Laluji” in the Punjab. One night he had a dream that the god Śiva came to him and said, “You’ve been this horrible man your entire life. You’ve murdered people, you’ve kidnapped people, you’ve stolen from people. Now here is an opportunity to turn it all around and become my devotee. What I want you to do is go to this cave in the Himalayas; I want you to serve each person that comes to my cave making pilgrimage.” He did this. He took his tremendous wealth—this is a true story—and he built a *dharamsala*, like a free hotel, about a half-kilometer from this cave high in the Himalayas. He forced every pilgrim going to that cave—and every summer thousands go there—to stop in this dharamsala, take food, and receive a gift of a blanket or shoes or whatever. Especially the bābas that would come, he would give them money, food, and everything they would need for their pilgrimage.

So one year, many years ago in the early seventies, I was up in this cave during the summer. I told the bāba I was staying with, “You know I have heard of this Laluji for several years, but I have never seen him, and I would really like to meet this man.” The bāba said to me, “But you see him every day, you know him quite well.” I said, “Well, who is he?” It turns out he was the guy who washed all our dishes, washed the dirty teacups, and cleaned up the fire. I always thought he was just the servant. This was one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the Punjab for many years, one of the most feared outlaws in North India. Yet he had become meek and mild and wonderful and caring, and basically he just wanted to look after everybody. This is giving.

Today it is all about taking. This is what consumption is all about. Consumption is not about giving. It is about taking. Now it is about going to the supermarket of gurus, or whatever, and you take the box off the shelf and look at the ingredients in the box

and make sure that all the ingredients are organic, no chemicals or preservatives, and you see which box seems to have the best ingredients, and you buy that one. Having bought it, you consume it. If you like it you buy more. If you don’t, you buy a different one, you try another brand. This is marketing and consumption, and this is very much the modern world, to a large degree coming off the television. At least it is being grown by television. This stands in contrast to the oral tradition of Nāga Bābas and other bābas, that I came into quite by chance, accidentally, as it were, in my early life in India.

CT: I wanted to ask you about your guru Hari Puri Baba. After your initiation at the Kumba Mela, he fell ill and went into a coma that the doctors thought would be irreversible. He did regain consciousness and imparted some esoteric teachings on the role of sound within the body and the universe.

R: Yes.

CT: He spoke of a pure language that was more perfect than Sanskrit and said, “I am not speaking of what they call Sanskrit but a great grammar that reflects the creation, maintenance, and destruction of the Universe. He who knows that grammar is a yogi.” Can you elaborate on this for us?

R: What we are really talking about is the language of the world and the Book of the World, as it were; reading the world as a text. The grammar is the way the things of the world connect.

The word in Sanskrit for connection is *yoga*. So what we could say is that the yogi is the connected one. Connected with what? Connected with the world, with the earth, with nature—the yogi is someone who is literate not in the sense of reading the scribbles and writings of man, but in reading the signatures of the world. Things can resemble, relate, and connect to each other in different sorts of ways. This is what I would call the grammar of the world.

He or she who knows that grammar has the ability to read the world to some lesser or greater degree. The way that—and now this is getting more specific to Hari Puri and your question—we human beings seem to know things, or at least know things in our conscious

mind, is by the use of sound. Our use of language seems to be a parameter that encloses our knowledge. We don’t seem to know things or have a knowledge that exists outside of our language, which is composed of sounds. So one approach, and very much an approach of an oral tradition, or at least my oral tradition in India, and certainly the Tantric tradition in India, is to find those sounds in the body, as geography, rather than as a process of approximation or mimicking. Rather than trying to mimic the sounds, as a baby would do learning language from his or her mother, we identify sound with place in the body, and we do Haṭha Yoga of the mouth. Locating sacred geography within our vocal system and using that sacred geography to connect with, or resemble, the world.

Our vocal apparatus or the vocal geography of the mouth has been described as a dome for obvious reasons. If you look from the back of your throat to your lips, going across the top of your mouth, it is in the shape of a dome. And, by chance, when we look at the sky, the sky is also a dome. So there is a first resemblance for us in the way that things resemble each other. The dome of the vocal apparatus resembles the dome of the sky. When we look up at the sky at night there is a sacred geography in the sky, a geography of stars. In the same way we have sacred geography within the dome of the mouth. Here’s the next resemblance, the next connection, the next yoga; in both places, there is recognizable sacred geography. Then we find that the way the sacred geography is arranged, in terms of the sky, tells a story. Within storytelling we have the way that humans impart knowledge to each other. These are the parameters of our human knowledge. Then from the sky (as above, so below) the sky relates to the earth and the earth relates to the sky. Then the resemblances and the connections just multiply infinitely. A cooling plant on the earth has a resemblance to the moon; they are both cooling. I go into this a little bit in my book, but basically what we are talking about is the myriad of forms, connection and resemblance that I would describe as the text of the world.

CT: Which brings me to another question about sacred landscapes. Do you feel that there is something about the landscape in India that enriches Vedic practices? Is there something key in being in the landscape of India rather than somewhere else?

R: The sacred landscape is what I would describe as signatures of nature, and this is extremely significant. In India it is very much part of reading the text of the world and it is very much part of the tradition there. Now, curiously enough, this also makes things very, very local as opposed to universal. What we would love to do, especially in the West, especially in what I might describe as the Christian West, although there could be the Christian, the Jewish, the Muslim, or even the Buddhist, West; they would love to universalize things. They love to work with universal principals, which I don't relate to at all. I relate to local things and local geography and local knowledge and local deities and local spirits and local people and local language. Everything local. Sacred landscape or signatures of nature are really localized.

OK, now that having been said, does that mean that in order to have knowledge and understand these things you have to go to India? If you take that question a step or two further, you might ask the question, does that mean that if I want to know what you know, speaking to me, I have to renounce the world and go live in India for thirty-seven years, be a bāba, live in a cave, and all that other stuff? Obviously the answer is no; that is all ridiculous. Then you might ask the question, what is the value of your spending your thirty-seven years in India and living in an order of Nāga Bābas, an ancient oral tradition? What connection does that have with the rest of the world? Why are we even having this interview, why are you writing books? What is the connection there? It comes back to some of these ideas of reading the world as a text and using the sacred landscape.

What I have found is that I come to Europe and go to some of these cities and places; I look around and I see all sorts of sacred landscape. I say to people, “My god, you live in a sacred place.” How do I know? Look at all these signs, look at

these marks, and look at these flags on your world, on your earth, in this place. And look at what that must indicate. Look what it marks just under the surface, just below the concrete. Look at this mirror.

I find the value of my experience is to take it like a giant mirror bring it into your space and hold it up to you to look into and see the sacred landscape in your own location. Understand how your own location is sacred and what there is to connect with, how to use that to make your life and other lives more prosperous and more wonderful.

I find sacred rivers here and I find sacred marks on the landscape that are extremely significant and wonderful, as significant and wonderful as sacred rivers and signatures in India. Yet here they are more covered up, because we have had certain things happen. We have had the Christians overrun all of Europe and most of the world, hiding many of these things. We've had the abolition of the sacred feminine in the world. To make things worse, we have put cement and concrete over all the earth spirits. We have buried the earth spirits underneath millions of tons of cement and concrete. If all that isn't bad enough, what has really happened is we have forgotten the spirits of the earth and the deities of our local places. That is the worst thing. If we can use this mirror of India, not to go to India, and not to look at India, and not necessarily to follow Indian philosophy or Indian thinking, but just strictly as a mirror to look at our own world, our own location, and our own lives and find the sacred, and the sacred feminine as well, there, then I would say that my pilgrimage has brought some fruit. But not that people must go to India, or become Indians, or learn Indian philosophy or Sanskrit or any of that stuff. I don't think that is the case; I don't feel that is the case.

CT: So pilgrimage then would extend to any country in a variety of locations?

R: Well, of course it would. In fact the strongest pilgrimage is to find those genuinely sacred places in your own town or city. Go to those genuinely sacred places, not because people tell you that they're sacred, or you read it in a book,

or because that is where the American Indians went, but because you see the signs and the marks. Fortunately one of the gifts that I have been given from my tradition is the ability to recognize some of those signs and marks; they are sort of obvious to me, but I am sure that other people can see them as well. Go to those signatures of the Mother Goddess and offer respect and communicate with those spirits.

You don't have to go to the mountains and you don't have to go to the seashore. In most cities it's there and it is obvious, because if it weren't there, there wouldn't be a city there. Cities are because of prosperity. Every city is built on prosperity. Every place where there is a city there is a Mother Goddess that is just below the surface who makes her presence known. We can go to that Mother Goddess and offer our respect and see her reflection in people and awaken the spirits that are buried under the concrete and connect with them.

CT: Taking it more specifically . . .

R: How specific do you want to get?

CT: Say, for instance, New York City. How would you recognize the sacred beneath those mammoth structures?

R: Well, the Brooklyn Bridge, what's that, the East River that it goes over?

CT: Right.

R: Without the East River, there wouldn't be a New York City because it is the fresh waters that created the original agriculture and the ability for a civilization or a culture to exist there. The meeting of the East River with the ocean, which gave rise to commerce and immigration, is a great *saṅgam* (confluence). That is like the saṅgam where the Jumna (Yamunā), the Gaṅgā and the Sarasvati rivers meet in India. Or where the Gaṅgā meets the Bay of Bengal in Eastern India.

I would look at the East River as a goddess; the goddess of prosperity. Not the water of the East River, but the spirit of the East River that we recognize by seeing the water. Then the next thing that I would look at, or think about, is all these huge phallic buildings that house banks because New York is the banking capital of the universe. Those banks in New York are housed in these huge Śiva *liṅgams*, and wherever there are Śiva *liṅgams* that are hiding wealth,

you know that the Mother Goddess is just below the surface, because the name of the Mother Goddess is prosperity. Whether that prosperity is mango trees laden with ripe fruit or fields of wheat or fluorescent green rice patties or treasure chests of gold coins, the name of the Mother Goddess is prosperity. She gives life and nourishment and sustenance as her nature. In those places where life, nourishment, and sustenance are concentrated, that is where the signatures of the Mother Goddess lie, and that's where great prosperity is possible.

Does that mean that great prosperity is easily available to you and me? No, because there are also very greedy people on this planet who do their level best to control, manipulate, hide, and maintain those places. It is the same way in India; you go to temples of the Mother Goddess that are being coveted by the high priests of that temple. If you are a nice person and give a little donation, then those priests that are coveting that sacred ground will allow you access to the Mother Goddess, or at least her mark or her flag, to make one's prayers. In this way New York City is probably one of the most sacred places on earth! That doesn't make it a good place, that doesn't make it a nice place, that doesn't mean that you go there and get rich. You can die of starvation on the street. But that doesn't take away from the fact that this is a very, very powerful place of abundance and prosperity, which is the nature of the Mother Goddess.

One other thing that I might mention is that in India all the deities have an animal, sort of a totemic animal, as their vehicle or as their companion. Gaṇeśa is the elephant god who has got this big belly, who is the lord of obstacles because he is the lord of all those earth spirits that hide the wealth of the earth. Gaṇeśa, who is also connected with prosperity and success, has as his companion vehicle the rat. What does the rat mark? The rat always marks abundance and prosperity. Why? Because wherever you have food and especially lots of food or abundance of food you have rats and mice to come and eat that food. So if you have rats and mice around, you know that there is abundant food because otherwise they



Photograph of Rampuri by Thomas Kelly.

wouldn't be there. Does that mean you have to like rats and mice because they mark abundance? No, you abhor rats and mice because they are dirty, they steal, they cause disease and all these other things. But that doesn't take away from the fact that they mark abundance, wealth, and prosperity. So that is why New York is a holy place.

CT: I like it.

R: Quite contrarian. I may be the only person on the planet who is saying that.

CT: Let's back up to something I found very fascinating in your book, when you were talking about Hari Puri Baba. He was talking with you about Śiva's dance of pure movement, a play of consciousness from which the mantra *Om Namaḥ Śivāya* emerges. Could you comment on this?

R: This is a little bit technical. What we were talking about was Śiva's dance of consciousness, the *Śiva Naṭarāj*, the dancing Śiva. The dance is called *Śiva Tāṇḍava*, the mad, wild dance of Śiva that's coming from Śiva's *ḍamaru*, the double-headed drum.

In our tradition of sound we have a way of offering our respect to the syllables that come out of the mouth. First you could look at the fifty-one syllables that are often depicted as the skulls around the neck of Mahā-Kālī, the goddess of destruction—destruction in the sense of the destruction of illusion. Both Śiva and

Kālī are associated with destruction, not a sort of Christian missionary concept of fire and brimstone; in the oral esoteric tradition of India, the destruction involved is the destruction of illusion. The way that illusion is destroyed is through knowledge. Knowledge is there by means of sound, which are the fifty-one syllables. When we start breaking down these syllables, we can break them down in a certain way in order to get to what we think of as the root of language.

We rearrange the fifty-one syllables into what is called *Maheśvara Sūtra*, a sūtra in which we can hear how those syllables come off each head of the double-headed drum, the ḍamaru, and repeat those syllables. When we reduce those syllables of the *Maheśvara Sūtra* even more, we reduce them to five syllables. A syllable is called an *aḥṣara*, and *pañc* is five, so a *pañcāḥṣara*. The five syllables in the pañc aḥṣara mantra are Na-maḥ Śi-vā-ya. Om is what we use as an invocation, but the five-syllable mantra is Namaḥ Śivāya, and that, in our tradition, is taken as a mark of language that is about to expand, a metaphor of language or even a metaphor of meta-language. You might say that it's a metaphor or an analogy for language in its most basic form.

If we say *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*, Om (or *Aum*) is an invocation that tells us about the beginning, the middle, and the end. The “a,” is unformed, unmanifest, from the throat/chest. Then comes the “u,” which is from the lips, which is the manifestation. Then the “m,” when we close our lips, that is the ending, the sealing of the sound. So Om invokes the beginning, the middle, and the end, and then the five syllables give us the basis for all of language. Then from *Om Namaḥ Śivāya* comes the *Maheśvara Sūtra*, which we hear on the ḍamaru, the two-headed drum, from which we can extract the fifty-one syllables; from the fifty-one syllables comes human speech, which is knowledge, which is the boundaries of knowledge. The sounds of the mouth create the boundaries of human knowledge.

CT: In your book you mention Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* as an important text to the Nāga Bābas. You describe the yogic practice derived from the *Yoga Sūtras* that involved

using a guru mantra while counting fifty-one rotations through a string of a hundred *rudrākṣa* beads. You were to keep your back straight and not let your mind wander. Can you elaborate on what knowledge or practices of your tradition are specific to the *Yoga Sūtras*?

R: The *Yog Sūtra* of Patañjali is one of these great exclamations of a yogi that was pretty spontaneous. It is said in the tradition that he came out with the *Yog Sūtra* in a spontaneous way. The significant thing that I mention there in the book is his definition of yoga, which would be *yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*. *Citta* is the mind; the *vṛtti* is the movements, the chatter of the mind; *nirodhaḥ* comes from the root *rudh*, which means to stop. What Patañjali is saying there is that yoga is stopping the chatter of the mind. Now, he is not saying stopping the mind—he’s not saying *citta-nirodhaḥ*—which a lot of modern Western spiritual sects would have us believe. He is saying, stopping the chatter, the vṛtti, of the mind. So if I were to give that commentary, I would say that he was saying that if you can stop all the little bullshit, then that is the state of yoga. If you stop all the little things, all the little banalities of life, all the distractions, then that is the state of yoga. That’s what he is saying. That is also what I would call the state of renunciation.

What is curious about Patañjali is that the *Yog Sūtra*, which he is very well known for in the West, was almost spontaneous in creation. However, he spent eighty years composing a text called *Mahābhāṣya*, which is almost unknown in the West outside of academia. In the academic West it is well known because it is one of the greatest pieces of linguistics ever written. In the introduction to the *Mahābhāṣya* Patañjali asks this really astounding question; “What is the meaning of a word?” I mean, sound is the basis of our language, which is made up of words. Our language is that which gives the parameters to all our knowledge. Yet we are not sure what the meaning of a word is. If we don’t know what the meaning of a word is, then how do we think about knowledge, our human knowledge? To make things perhaps even worse for the uninitiated, he concludes this argument with the statement, “The

meaning of a word is its sound.”

So we’re back to square one. It’s these sounds, which are put together in all possible ways, that form the boundaries of our knowledge. And this to me is what makes Patañjali the great yogi, even more than his definition of yoga—*citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*—or his description of what constitutes yoga—*Yam - niyam - āsan - prāṇāyāma - pratyāhār - dhāraṇa - dhyāna - samādhi*. I also talk about this in the book.

In the West, what most people do is take people like Patañjali or even Śaṅkara and make them almost Christian figures and their texts biblical types of texts, to be taken in a fundamental sense, number one. Number two, taken as in the sense of both a primary and a secondary text. In all these cases, these texts, whether we are talking about the *Vedas* or we are talking about the commentaries of Śaṅkara or Patañjali, all of these are only primary texts in the sense that they require a commentary and they require not just any commentary, but the commentary of the tradition of that lineage.

What’s curious about the Bible is that you can interpret it in any way you want to, basically. And people do. There isn’t a lineage unless you want to call the seat of Rome the lineage. There isn’t a lineage that offers a commentary to a text like that. And yet, I have heard the most ridiculous explanations and interpretations of Advaita Vedānta from people in the West, interpreting Śaṅkara in ways that are completely foreign to the traditions of Śaṅkara, or at least the traditions of Śaṅkara that I am familiar with, and certainly the Nāga Sannyāsīs, the Nāga Bābas, are a living tradition of Śaṅkara.

CT: Can you give an example?

R: Yes, I can give an example. I remember an American scholar whom I was sitting with in India either last year or the year before. He was explaining to me how Advaita Vedānta was the best of all the systems. He explained to me why it was better than Buddhism and why it was better than Jainism and Christianity and all of this stuff, giving me a monotheistic approach to Advaita Vedānta. I said to him that sounds great, but it sounds like the combination of Christianity and the Hare Krishnas to me. I said to him

that I had never ever heard that kind of explanation in the actual tradition of Śaṅkara, that this is very foreign to the oral tradition of Śaṅkara. In fact it stands Śaṅkara on his head. His interpretation was monotheistic “my God is better than your God” stuff, which is not really the tradition of Śaṅkara at all, at least not in my experience of the tradition of Śaṅkara, my life in India. “My God is better than your God” is monotheistic drivel. The only thing it really serves to do is to create “us and them” and more conflict in the world.

This is not the case, I believe, in Śaṅkara or the tradition that followed him. So here you have an example of somebody purporting to be in Śaṅkara’s tradition who was as hundred and eighty-degree opposite as you could ever be.

CT: I have a few more questions that are on a little more personal level. How do you envision the next stages of your life now that you’ve done the European and world tour? Do you anticipate doing more tours, having more exposure to the West?

R: Yes, especially in Europe. I find that there are some really wonderful things and wonderful people in Eastern and Northern Europe. I find it very exciting and I enjoy being with people and working with people here. I expect to be doing more of this in the future.

CT: Good. I also hope you will find your way to the States more often.

R: Thank you.

CT: How do you envision the next stages of your life?

R: I can’t really. It’s too hard. I mean, I have been wrong about all the rest of my life, so I don’t know. I find it enough of a challenge to take it a day or a couple of days or a couple of weeks at a time. Look how hard it was for us to connect for this interview. It’s not an accident. I don’t claim to have a perfectly organized, well-categorized, planned-out life. I’m basically an anarchist. I just sort of try to manage to eat and sleep during the day, and if I can accomplish both in a single day, then I am very happy.

CT: I want to thank you again. Is there anything you would like to add?

R: To be joyful because that is your true nature. Anything other than being joyful is wasting your time and your life. 🌺

EXCERPTS FROM IDOL WORSHIP SWAMI SIVANANDA

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WORSHIP IS THE EFFORT ON THE PART of the *upasaka*, he who does *upasana*, or worship, to reach the proximity or presence of God. Upasana literally means “sitting near” God. Upasana is approaching the chosen object of worship by meditating on it in accordance with the teachings of the *Sastras* and the guru. It consists of all those observances and practices—physical and mental—by which the aspirant makes steady progress in the realm of spirituality and eventually realizes in himself, in his own heart, the presence of Godhead.

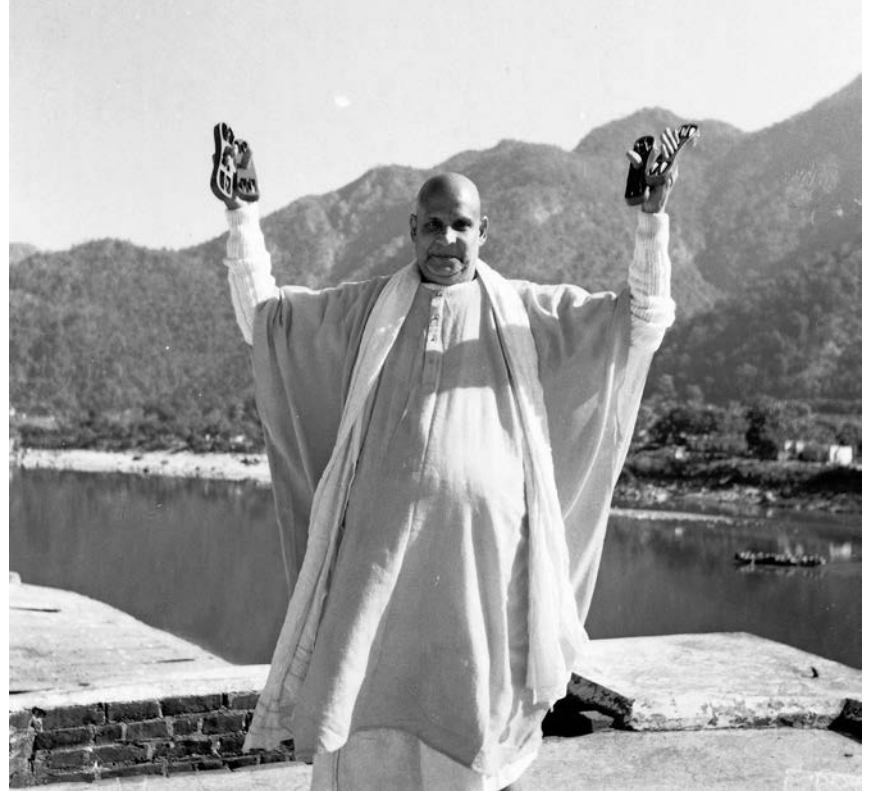
Upasana purifies the heart and steadies the mind, filling it with pure love for the Lord. Upasana changes the mental substance and fills the mind with *sattva*, purity. It destroys egoism, lust, hatred, anger, etc. It turns the mind inward and eventually brings the devotee face to face with the Lord, frees him from the wheel of births and deaths, and confers on him immortality and freedom.

The mind becomes that on which it meditates. Just as you think, so you become. This is the immutable psychological law. There is a mysterious or inscrutable power in upasana that makes the meditator and the meditated identical.

Of all those things that are conducive to spiritual advancement, upasana is not only indispensable, but eminently beneficial to all people. It is easy, too.

Upasana is of two kinds, viz., *Pratika* Upasana and *Ahamgraha* Upasana. *Pratika* means a symbol. *Pratika* Upasana is *Saguna* Upasana, concrete meditation. Meditation on idols is *Pratika* upasana. *Ahamgraha* Upasana is *Nirguna* Upasana, abstract meditation, or meditation on the formless and attributeless transcendental Brahman.

Saguna Upasana is Bhakti Yoga, the



H. H. Sri Swami Sivananda chanting kirtan on the banks of the Ganga in Rishikesh.

Yoga of Devotion. Nirguna Upasana is Jnana Yoga or the Yoga of Knowledge. Worshipers of Saguna (the qualified) and Nirguna (the unqualified) Brahman reach the same goal. But the latter path is very hard because the aspirant has to give up attachment to the body from the very beginning of his spiritual practice. The *Akshara*, the Imperishable, is very hard for those who are attached to their bodies to reach. Further, it is extremely difficult to fix the mind on the formless and attributeless Brahman; this demands a very sharp, one-pointed and subtle intellect.

ABHAKTI YOGI ESTABLISHES A NEAR AND dear relationship with the Lord. He cultivates his devotion according to his temperament, taste, and capacity.

The object of worship is the *Ishta Devata*, the particular form of the Deity whom the devotee worships. While all things may be objects of worship, choice is naturally made of those objects which, by reason of their effect on the mind, are more fitted for devotion. The object of worship must be pure. The objects that are capable of exciting lust and dislike must be avoided. Symbols of God help aspirants to attain one-pointedness of mind and purity of heart.

Everybody has got a predilection for a particular symbol, emblem, or image. These are personal inclinations in the worshipper due to his belief in their special efficacy for him. Psychologically, a particular mind finds that it moves best in the direction desired by means of particular instruments, emblems, or images.

God reveals Himself to His devotees in a variety of ways. He assumes the very form which the devotee has chosen for his worship. If you worship Him as Lord Hari with four hands, He will come to you as Hari. If you adore Him as Siva, He will give you *darsan* as Siva. If you worship Him as Mother Durga or Kali, He will come to you as Durga or Kali. If you worship Him as Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, or Lord Dattatreya, He will come to you as Rama, Krishna, or Dattatreya. If you worship Him as Christ or Allah, He will come to you as Christ or Allah.

Under whatever name and form, it is Isvara who is adored. Worship goes to the Indweller, the Lord in the form. It is ignorance to think that one form is superior to another. All forms are one and the same. All are adoring the same Isvara. The differences are only differences of names due to differences in the worshippers, but not in the object of

adoration. It is only out of ignorance that different religionists and different sects fight and quarrel amongst themselves.

Steadiness of mind is obtained by image worship. The worshipper will associate the ideas of infinity, omnipotence, omniscience, purity, perfection, freedom, holiness, truth, omnipresence with the object of his worship. It is not possible for all to fix their minds on the Absolute. A concrete form is necessary for the vast majority to practice concentration. To behold God everywhere and to practice the presence of God is not possible for the ordinary man. Idol worship is the easiest form of worship for the modern man.

There is no reference to worship of idols in the *Vedas*. The *Puranas* and the *Agamas* give descriptions of idol worship both in houses and in temples. Idol worship is not peculiar to Hinduism. Christians worship the Cross; they have the image of the Cross in their mind. The Mohammedans keep the image of *Kaaba* stone when they kneel and do prayers. The people of the whole world, save a few Yogis and Vedantins, are all worshippers of idols. They keep some image or the other in the mind.

The mental image also is a form of idol. The difference is not one of kind, but only one of degree. All worshippers, however intellectual they may be, generate a form in the mind and make the mind dwell on that image.

EVERYONE IS AN IDOL WORSHIPPER. A gross mind needs a concrete symbol as a prop; a subtle mind requires an abstract symbol. Even a Vedantin has the symbol *Om* for fixing the wandering mind. It is not only the pictures or images in stone and wood that are idols. Dialectics and leaders also become idols. So why condemn idolatry?

Idols are not the idle fancies of sculptors, but shining channels through which the heart of the devotee is attracted to and flows toward God. Though the image is worshipped, the devotee feels the presence of the Lord in it and pours out his devotion onto it. It is the appalling ignorance of the modern sensual man that clouds his vision and prevents him from seeing

divinity in lovely and enchanting idols of His form.

The very scientific advances of this century ought to convince you of the glory of idol worship. How are the songsters and orators confined to a small box-like thing called a radio? It is a mere mechanical lifeless structure which breaks into a thousand pieces if you throw it away violently; and yet, if you know how to handle it, through it you can hear music that is being played several thousands of miles away, or the discourse that is being delivered in the remotest part of the globe. Even as you can catch the sound waves of people all over the world through the radio receiving set, it is possible to commune with the all-pervading Lord through the medium of an idol. The divinity of the all-pervading God is vibrant in every atom of creation. There is not a speck of space where He is not. Why do you then say that He is not in the idols?

There are others who would glibly say, “Oh, God is all-pervading formless being. How can He be confined to this idol?” Are these people everconscious of His omnipresence? Do they always see Him and Him alone in everything? No. It is their ego that prevents them from bowing to the idols of God. An intellectual and learned person, on account of his pride and vanity says, “I do not like a *murti* (idol). I do not wish to concentrate on a form.” He thinks that people will laugh at him when they come to know that he is meditating on a form. Yet he cannot concentrate on the formless one; he never does any meditation. He simply talks, argues, and poses. He wastes his life in unnecessary discussions. An ounce of practice is better than tons of theories.

When you worship an image, you do not say, “This image has come from Jaipur, brought by Prabhu Singh. It weighs fifty pounds. It is made of white marble. It has cost me 500 rupees.” You superimpose all the attributes of the Lord on the image and pray, “O *Antaryamin* (Inner Ruler)! You are all-pervading. You are omnipotent, omniscient, all-merciful. You are the source for everything. You are self-existent. You are *Sat-Cit-Ananda*. You

are eternal, unchanging. You are the Life of my life, Soul of my soul! Give me light and knowledge! Let me dwell in Thee for ever.” When your devotion and meditation become intense and deep, you do not see the stone image. You behold the Lord only. The idol is made up of the five elements. The five elements constitute the body of the Lord. The idol remains an idol, but the worship goes to the Lord.

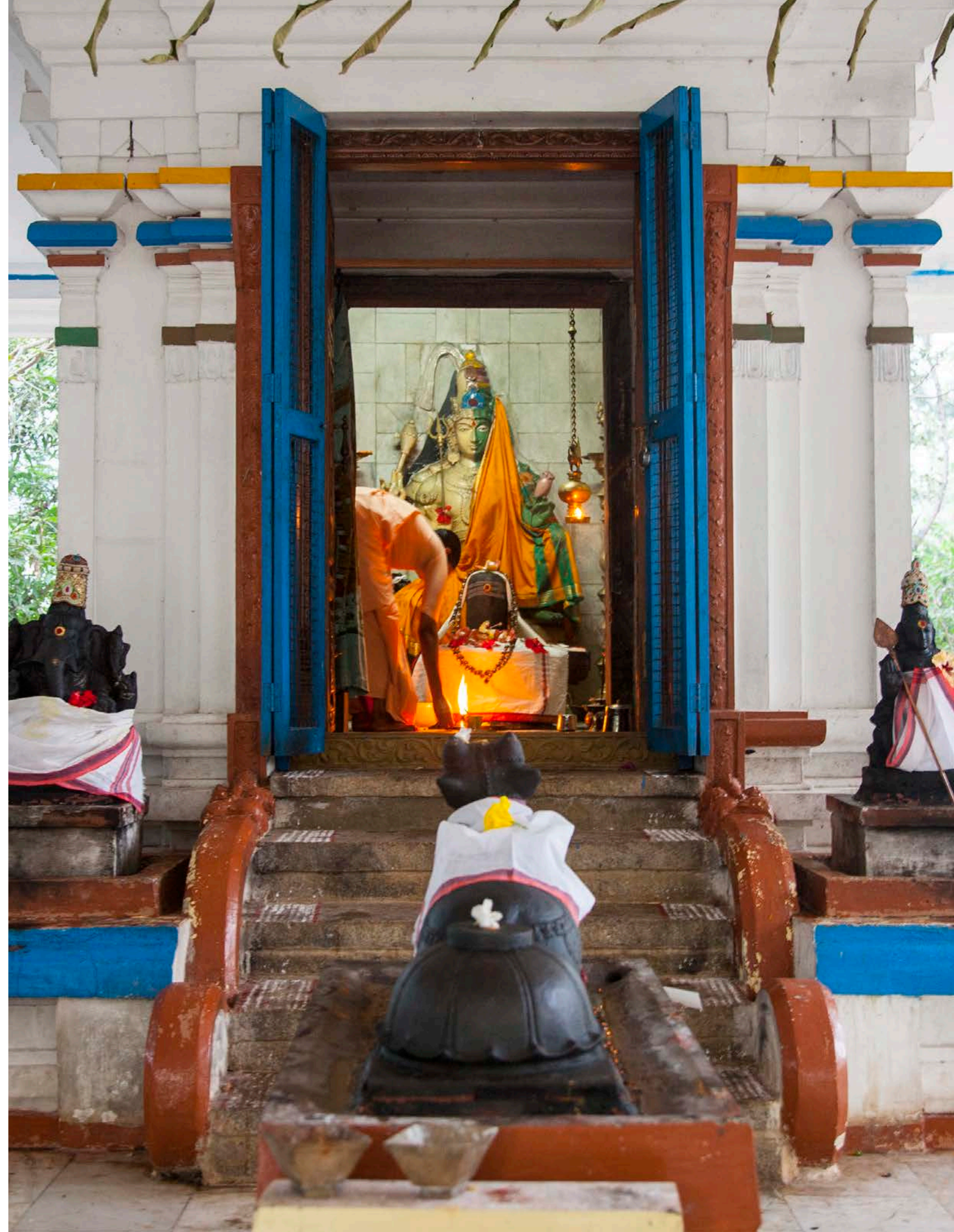
If you shake hands with a man, he is highly pleased, yet you have touched only a small part of his body. He smiles and welcomes you. Even so, the Lord is highly pleased when a small portion of His *Virat* (cosmic body) is worshipped. An idol is a part of the body of the Lord. The whole world is His Body, His Virat form.

Such worship can never be idolatry. All matter is a manifestation of God. God is present in everything which exists. Everything is an object of worship, for all is a manifestation of God. For a *bhakta* or a sage, there is no such thing as *jada*, insentient matter. The devotee actually beholds the Lord in the idol.

HINDU PHILOSOPHY AND WORSHIP DO not end with the worship of the idol. The upasaka is taken to higher stages of devotion through his worship; he has to keep before his mental eye the all-pervading Lord. He has to feel His Presence in his heart and all objects also.

Other religions lay certain fixed dogmas and attempt to force people to follow them. It has only one kind of drug to treat several diseases. It gives only one kind of food to all and for all conditions. It places before the followers only one coat, it must fit Albert, Atkinson, Ahluwallia, Antony, Abdul Rahman. The Hindus know that the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols to fix the mind, so many concrete pegs to hang their spiritual ideas and convictions on. The symbol is not necessary for everyone. It is not compulsory in Hinduism. Those who are not in need of it have no right to say that it is wrong. If they say that it is wrong, they only betray their ignorance. ❖

Siva lingam worship. Shuddhananda Ashram, Uttandbi, Tamil Nadu, South India, January 4, 2007.
Back Cover: Hand-powered Merry-Go-Round. Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, South India, January 17, 2007.





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