

GURUKULAM

VOLUME VI • 1990

FOURTH QUARTER



MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA



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GURUKULAM

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITION

GURUKULAM is published by Narayana Gurukula and the East-West University of Unitive Sciences. Its policy is that enunciated by Narayana Guru when he convened the Conference of World Religions at Alwaye, South India, in 1924: "Our purpose is not to argue and win, but to know and let know."

NARAYANA GURUKULA is a non-profit organization and all contributions are tax-deductible.

FOUNDER: Nataraja Guru
GURU and HEAD: Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati
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PUBLICATIONS BOARD: Deborah Buchanan, Sraddha Durand, Peter Oppenheimer, Scott Teitsworth, Robert Tyson, Nancy Yeilding.

PRODUCTION STAFF: Deborah Buchanan, Darlene Dehlin, Sraddha Durand, Desiree Hunter, Bill Hughes, Calder Richmond Hughes, Andy Larkin, Suellen Larkin, Nancy Richmond, Fred Simpson, Scott Teitsworth, Robert Tyson, Stella Tyson, Indra Vas, Steve Weckel, Nancy Yeilding.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION: Yearly: \$16.00 for four issues. For outside USA add \$4.00 for surface mail, \$12.00 for air mail. Write to: GURUKULAM, 8311 Quail Hill Road, Bainbridge Island, WA, 98110, USA. In India write to: Narayana Gurukula, Srinivasapuram P.O., Varkala, Kerala, 695145, India.

PRINTED at Island Gurukula Āranya, Bainbridge Island, Washington, USA.

COVER: Graphic by Andy Larkin

Printed on Recycled Paper

Dialogues With Narayana Guru

Since "meeting" Narayana Guru in the mid-1970's, I have been in almost constant dialogue with him. During the first few years, I was researching and writing his biography, a process that educated me about him as a person. I interviewed people who were well-versed in his writings and significant events in his life, others whose families had been profoundly influenced by his visits to their homes, and a rare few who had been his students. I read every book and article I could find about his life, teachings and impact on Kerala society. During the same period Guru Nitya recalled for me stories about Narayana Guru, especially those that demonstrated the Guru's sense of humor which resolved conflicts by breaking through bonds of convention with an unlimited compassion.

Through these experiences I came to know Narayana Guru as a person who lived his life with great integrity, never swerving from his youthful intention to act on behalf of the welfare of the world. Having been led by that intention to an intense inner search, he became a living example of the sublime words of the Isa Upanisad and the Gita - seeing one's Self as the Self of all and the Self of all as one's own Self. He was a soft-spoken, gentle man, often silent, yet because he lived the reality of identity with all, he had the impact of a whirling dynamo. One Self obviates all divisions of human beings, whether by caste, color, class, education or creed. His living and teaching of that truth inspired widespread changes in Kerala society.

Through studying his works, I came to know Narayana Guru as one of the precious few in the world's mystical tradition capable of giving beautiful and clear expression to the experience of ultimate union with reality. His philosophical writings synthesize the spiritual traditions of India, especially those of Vedanta, Yoga and the contemplative

Saivite teachings. The most sublime concepts of the Upanisads, Gita and Yoga Sutras are restated in his comprehensive vision with great clarity.

The process of learning about Narayana Guru was very encouraging. Although he was a remarkable and wonderful human being, he was a human being. His story, like stories of Buddha and other great teachers, reminds us that one life lived in simplicity and compassion can have a profound impact on many other lives. Paradoxically, learning about the lives of such great ones makes us feel both humble and heartened at the same time. We are reminded that human life everywhere is composed of the same basic elements and the inherent challenges are universal. Details of their lives show how the very fabric of life can be transformed when one walks steadily forward, holding on to one's dearest values like the hand of a friend. The inner meaning of simple incidents is very compelling, like a powerful magnet of hope.

Despite these initial experiences which impressed me with Narayana Guru's reality as a person, our on-going dialogue is not like conversation between two people. The most profound truth about Narayana Guru or any guru as *guru* is transcendence of the limits of individuality and identity with the limitless -- when brilliant light shines everywhere in all directions; all distinguishing boundaries and shadows disappear and there is only light. At the point where we connect, he is so powerfully not an individuated ego that my ego also melts. Sometimes it is like a soft breeze gently caressing a delicate flower, sometimes like moonshen on sparkling snow, like shafts of sunlight playing on the surface of a pond. At other times it is like powerful ocean waves crashing on the sand or like the nothingness of a black hole swallowing every bit of beingness.

Although our dialogues are not

conversational, they are not always wordless. Narayana Guru's words, from his mystical effusions, his philosophical texts and his jokes are often in my consciousness. But they are not like messages or communications from outside. Rather, they are like the sweet whispers of my inner voice or like my voice merging with all voices in the grand chorus of the music of the spheres - Reality being given words to express itself.

As the years go by, I become more and more aware of Narayana Guru as an unmoved mover in my life. As our dialogues are not transactional communications, they have no give and take; he never asks anything of me or acknowledges any action. But I am finding that the absence of external demands strangely means that there is no limit to what is called forth, generating what is described by Nataraja Guru as unlimited liability for all.

One aspect of Nataraja Guru's *Autobiography of an Absolutist* vividly portrays his sufferings both in trying to live the meaning of Narayana Guru's teaching and in attempting to found Narayana Gurukula - a wisdom school where teacher and taught could live a common life in the intimacy of a family. Narayana Guru had not requested anything of him, but the impact of coming close to the model the Guru represented joined forces with the compulsion of his inner ideals to become a powerful life-long dynamic.

As he unfolds his own story, Nataraja Guru makes a very clear distinction between imitating the outer trappings of a wisdom teacher's life and living the inner meaning of such a model in ways appropriate to one's own life circumstances. No one was more dedicated to actualizing the values Narayana Guru represented and to sharing his wisdom with all, yet Nataraja Guru's history and temperament were very different. In the many years of their intimate contact, Narayana Guru offered hints, not commands, maps of the territory, but no demands to travel the path, helping Nataraja Guru again and again "to dis-

tinguish between a pattern of life that had its reference to the world outside, which is social, and the true inner world, which remains ever pure and transparent." (*Autobiography of an Absolutist*, p. 165).

His teachings, translations and commentaries of Narayana Guru's writings, together with those of Guru Nitya, have given us a legacy which enables each of us to be in dialogue with the light of the Guru. He movingly remembers Narayana Guru's last wisdom lesson for him -- the lesson of pure silence. That culminating silence was a well-spring of inspiration which nourished him throughout his long life of devoted service to humanity and filled him with hope even in the last days of his life when he wrote:

"Free contingence" refers to the world of intelligent light, while necessity refers to matter, darkness and ignorance. Is it humanly possible to bridge the gap between the two rival worlds of necessity and contingence? That is, in short, the problem which each man is called upon to face each day in his life, if he is to escape worry at all. I am glad to say that the answer happens to be in the affirmative. Each man really belongs to the world of bright light and wisdom, of great beauty and value. To be conscious of this every minute of one's life is the solution, and there seems to be no other alternative. Textbooks such as the Saundarya Laharī (of Śankara) and the Kali Natakam of Narayana Guru contain precious indications in this direction. This is why Narayana Guru's works deserve our special scrutiny and critical study. I have been engaged in just this kind of study while still confined to a hospital bed these last months, and hopes are not lost. On the contrary, hopes are becoming brighter every day for me.

(*Autobiography of an Absolutist*, p. 684)

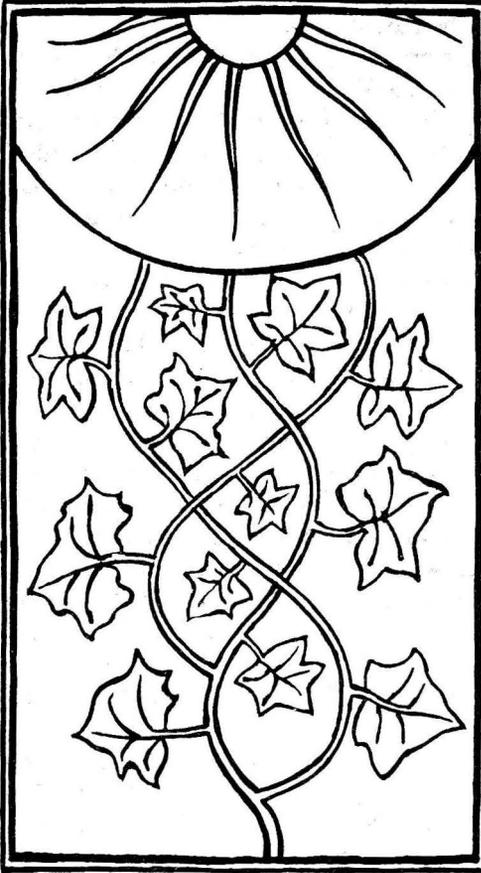
Nancy Yeilding

Svānubhavagīti Satakam:

Experiential Aesthetics and Imperialial Transcendence

by Narayana Guru

Translation and Commentary by
Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati



Verse 51

At last, nothing is known so far.
The magnitude of your sportive *līla* is great.
On one side is the golden creeper which entwines,
and on the other is the tree of aloneness.

To those who have gone beyond death there is no hunger and thirst. Such a one does not need a house for shelter. No spouse is required for company. There is no need for a child to fondle. Such a person has no need to articulate. Before him the procreative nature of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* has already been turned to ashes. It is in that world in which all dualities are gone that Śiva is dancing the eternal dance of dissolution. All those who enter into his world become like him, with the ultimate aloneness of Śiva-consciousness. There you do not need any information about this world. You do not require insights into systems of philosophy. You do not need the singing of "Hallelujah."

In that beyond, if Śiva had remained established in the mystic silence of a supreme yogi, how could this world have come to be? That is why gods entered into collusion. The world was transformed into a vernal garden, and trees and creepers became over-laden with flowers out of season. It is into this garden the Malaya winds blew, spreading everywhere the enticing fragrance of jasmine and rose. The Lord of Aloneness, who had gone beyond attraction and repulsion, became the one object of Parvati's adoration. She forgot herself and the consequences of rousing passion in the passionless.

He was the very embodiment of eternal silence. Who could break his silence? Yet, Kama, the God of Love, fixed five flowery arrows to the string of his bow. With unfailing marksmanship he shot the arrows. The unexpected happened. Śiva came out of his deep meditation. The very god of peaceful serenity and auspiciousness transformed into the great annihilator. He opened his third eye. In the fire emitted from it, Eros was turned into ashes.

Eros is co-eternal with existence. When he is wounded, he is like a deadly cobra. No one can predict who he will offend or how. Love has no eyes. Blinded with love the most handsome man may choose to love a woman with a grotesque form. The most beautiful woman may fall in love with an ass or a monkey.

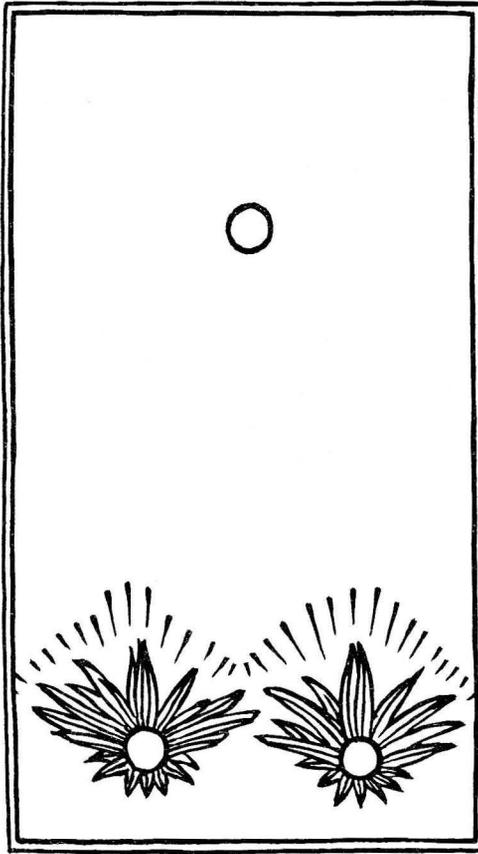
Śiva was one who had no compunction to deny the love offerings of Parvati. When she was rejected, she could not bear the insult. She fell down in a faint. At that time Himavan, her father, picked her up and brought her home to nurse her back to life. Parvati was resolute. No one could shake her will. It was so fated that Śiva had to accept her. Śiva stands always as a changeless parameter between earth and heaven; there are stories about the mystery of Śiva as a column of brilliant fire. But when he is sportive he makes himself amenable to all and Parvati ultimately won him. She clung around him like a creeper entwining a great tree. Such are his sportive games that the very enemy of erotics accepts defeat at the hand of Eros. In the unshaken mystery of his yoga, he entertains the loveful antics of Mother Nature.

Considering this paradox we come to the realization that all that we thought we knew was after all only an illusion. Then we can only sing "All this is your mysterious sportive antics." If we do not understand the mystery of the Lord's *lila*, we will experience this world as a veritable hell. It will make us cry. Everywhere we will see only deception. The person who does not understand the sportive game of life will consider even his best friend a deceptive enemy.

Children gather to amuse themselves. They pretend to play a

game of king and his minister, the police and his bandit. When they are on the stage presenting their play, one boy identifies himself as king and another as minister. The king commands, the minister obeys. The police prosecutes the thief and throws him into prison. When the play is over, the king throws away his crown, and the policeman is again friendly with the thief. They all leave the theater laughing in loveful comradeship.

Like that, from many homes we have come to play our role on the stage of a social drama. But we are not told what the next scene to be enacted is. The choice for the day can be a comedy. Tomorrow's assignment may be to stage a tragedy. Like Alice in Wonderland we may have to swim in a pool of our own tears. In the hour of confusion when we take this game too seriously, a wise man comes to us in compassion and whispers in our ears, "Be of good cheer, children, the drama is over." Then we also feel blessed that we are accepted to play with the Lord in his own sportive game, *lila*.



Verse 52

Oh Tree of Aloneness, your fruits will be my shade hereafter,
and your twin lotus feet will crown my head as two pretty flowers.
The adoration in which you are held by the golden creeper
will be the lone mountain of your repose.
Ludicrous analogies. What illusion is this?

The weaver has a loom. Arranging warp and woof, day after day he weaves his fabrics on it, each time in a different color and in varying designs. But all through his life he has only one loom. The potter sits by his wheel. He heaps clay on it. He fashions it into a pot today. Tomorrow his choice is a pan and after that a vase. Endless are his creations, but the same potter is wielding the same wheel and always using clay as the material to be fashioned. The farmer raises a crop of wheat one season. In the next he brings forth a crop of barley or corn. All through his life he sows and reaps, always a different kind of crop. But the farmer is the same; his farm is the same; the water that irrigates is the same; the sun that nourishes is the same.

The snow-caps of the mountains melt. From the dripping of water a rivulet is formed that goes into the valley, swells into a river, flows across the country and finally comes to the ocean. The water from the ocean evaporates. Clouds are formed. They are lifted into the sky, and, air-borne, they go to mountain peaks and fall as snow. This cycle of snow changing into river, river changing into cloud, cloud changing into snow is an eternal theme. It is always the same sea, the same sun and the same wind involved.

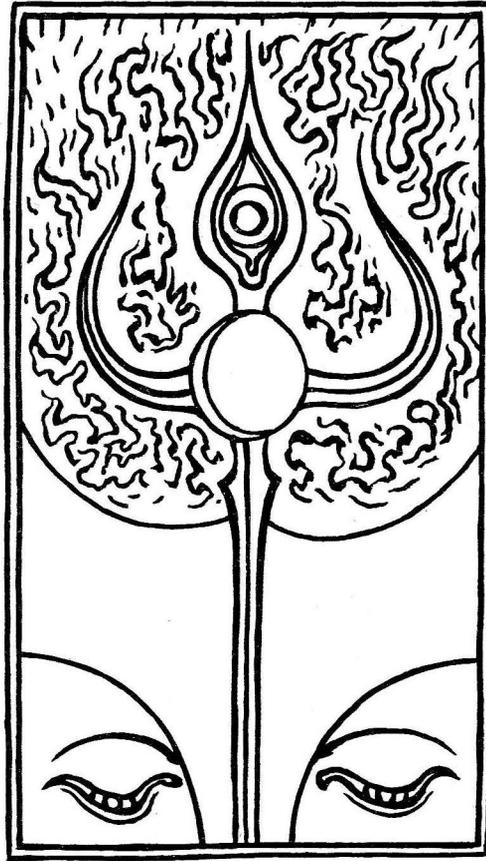
A woman receives sperms from her husband one after another, nurtures them into babies in her womb, raises them as sons and daughters. Children in their turn become adults. They bring forth grandchildren and great grandchildren. Over decades the mind of the mother never changes. She is always loving; she is always caring. Behind this world scene there is always a single principle sustaining everything as an eternal law. It is compared here to a lone tree. All the changing principles come from the creeper of manifestation that is ever blossoming and propagating several species of several orders of life. The benign tree is sustaining the changing world with nourishment which is praised here as the ripened sweet fruits of sustenance. The poet compares the fruit of sustenance to the shade in which all beings take their shelter and live their respective lives.

In adoration the poet looks upon the tender feet of the Lord as two beautiful flowers which he wants to place on his own head. Those feet shall be the decoration of his crown. If Lord Śiva had sat forever lost in meditation, there would not have been any world. But that was not to be. The Supreme Mother, overwhelmed with her love for the Lord, is giving him irresistible adoration. And the Lord's abode is no longer on the cold peak of a snowy mountain. He lives in the warmth of her love. Therefore this Mother principle, which is looked upon as a golden creeper, should be venerated by the entire world. Her love is the very foundation of this world.

At this point the poet wonders how he could weave such ludicrous allegories and compare one thing with another when there is no comparison or poetic justice. But he consoles himself, saying that in the illusion that is created in the Lord's sportive game, nothing can be accounted for. Filled with the ecstasy of such a mystery, he can only sing:

*You are Māyā
The Agent thereof and its Enjoyer too;
You are that Good One who removes Māyā too
To grant the unitive state.*

--*Daivadaśakam*, verse 6



Verse 53

All this is visual illusion. Don't you see it
even with your three eyes?
Oh Darling, with the full moon in your tresses,
prostration to your flower-like tender feet.

All have two eyes. That is enough to see. But, according to knowledgeable people, these two physical eyes are not enough. There should also be an interpreter in the mind to assign meaning and significance to every image that is brought in by the organs of perception. This inner device is called the "third eye."

All have two eyes to see the external and a third eye to witness the world within. In spite of this we still do not see anything correctly. Always we fall short of understanding. We accuse each other of saying the wrong word, doing the wrong thing. Man judges others harshly. So Jesus said "Judge ye not, lest ye shall be judged." To restore understanding and correct judgement, people argue for hours. With all the waste of such words, understanding still does not come. While speaking in defense, one becomes tearful. The voice cracks. One becomes overwhelmed with emotion. Losing all restraint, the angry or frustrated person raises his or her voice. It surprises even the speaker that the most unkind

words escape ones lips. No one wants to admit that he does not see properly nor understand rightly.

We have no patience to listen to our adversary. While one person speaks, the "listener's" mind is busy to present a counter-defense. "I'm always OK. Only you are not OK." Even when we get away with shouting and false arguments, our minds know that we are in the wrong. Most people keep their image correct in their portraits hung in the public, but inside their soul they are like the portrait of Dorian Grey.

We want to speak conciliatory words. Instead angry words are blurted out. We expect to hear words of love and consolation. Instead we hear only angry shouts of allegation and reproach. We try to bear our hearts naked so that another may see exactly how we feel. But the world is blind. Nobody understands how sincere we are. A poet says that God has not given human beings any words to reveal their hearts to another. Human language is inadequate.

People are imperfect, so it does not matter if they do not understand us. Is not God perfect? Has he not three eyes? The third eye of Śiva is the eye of wisdom. But even then it seems he does not see the turmoil in which we live. He does not seem to hear all the prayers and supplications we make. This common allegation which people make against God is because they entertain the most vile and stupid concept about God. The third eye of Śiva does not symbolize a mind. It is a symbol of the Absolute, absolute truth. In the Absolute there are no dualities, no good and evil, no phenomenal truth and untruth, no pain and pleasure.

How can the unreal ever reflect in the real? According to Vedanta the individuated self is the reflection of a falsely concocted ego in the unreal phenomena of *māyā*. The real is pure transcendence. Those who pray to the Absolute can make their prayer effective only by shedding their relativism and transcending all dualities. Instead of turning to a real God in whose light everything exists, human beings create god in their own image and try to make that puppet-god carry out their will.

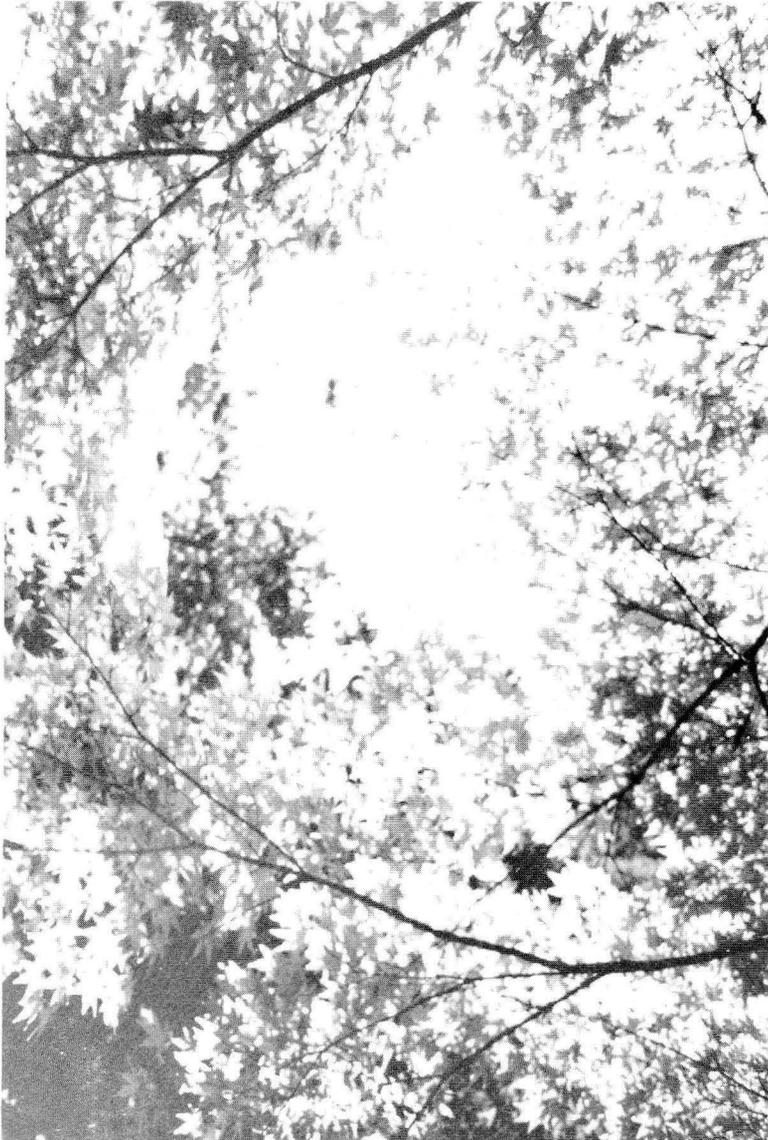
The ignorance that is spoken of here is not of the individual but a generic error which affects all members of the same species. The moon is also a clod of mud. It has no light of its own. What the moon reflects is only sunlight. But we on earth adore it as the moon's own sheen. The lover compares the beloved's face to the beauty of the full-moon. Lips have no sweetness, yet we call them sweet. We can give any number of similar examples to show how ones own inner conditioning is projected on other things. One lover sees his beloved as an angel, while another who suspects his or her spouse will see only a devil in the other person. When you suspect another, even that person's most sincere and loving behavior will be seen as pretentious make believe.

On Sundays one mechanically prays, "Thy will be done." At all other times God is called upon to carry out the will of man. Thus people caught in their own ignorance, like boats without rudders or navigators, will be endlessly drifting to the mid-ocean of chaos. Those who want to escape this peril have to break through their relativistic blindfolds and look at the true light from which phenomenality derives both light and shadow which mix together and delude us.

Even an ordinary person has a natural gift to revise a falsified

vision. For example, when a common man looks at a mirror, he can easily distinguish the right side of his face from the left even though in the mirror the right side is seen as the left. It is this simple exercise which Vedanta recommends for making a breakthrough and arriving at the transcendental. Even when phenomenal misery clouds ones vision, instead of looking at the mist and becoming perplexed, one can look at the clear light of ones own self and say, "*soham* - I am Śiva." That is why the poet here says "I have two flowers to decorate the crown of my head. They are my Lord's feet."

(Continued in next issue.)



Katha Upaniṣad

Translation and Commentary by

Muni Narayana Prasad

III · 12

This Self, which is mysteriously hidden in everything that has become, is not visibly evident. But by those who are capable of seeing the subtle, it is seen with comprehensive, pointed and subtle thought.

In this chapter so far, the search for Truth was compared to a charioting expedition and the essential elements of the expedition were marked out. Then the different stages to be transcended in reaching the final goal were indicated using the terminology of the Samkhyan system. Presenting the search for Truth as a charioting expedition may give the impression that the Truth is something to be searched out from somewhere else. Here it is made clear that the goal can never be reached like that. This *mantra* corrects the erroneous impression created by the analogy of the chariot, that the Truth is somewhere else. The seeker who seeks the Truth as if it is "another" is called *paravasa*, one obsessed by the "other", by Narayana Guru.

The present *mantra* categorically states that the Truth never reveals itself to such seekers, because the Truth searched for can only be realized by the seeker as the existential content of the seeker himself or herself. The seeker is also a spark in the ever-present process of becoming in-

herent in Being or Truth. Everything that manifests here, the "I" and "the other", is a manifested aspect of the Being which in itself is unmanifested. The unmanifested is never seen anywhere. It only inheres secretly in everything manifested. It knows no distinction of the knower and the known. The attainment of it needs a yogic or dialectical intuition or vision which transcends the duality of the knower and the known. Such an intuitive vision is not to be found in everyone. Only a few with a penetrating vision realize the Truth as the meaning content of one's own conscious existence. To such a visionary the Truth is not anywhere else, but it is with him, in him, himself.

III · 13

The wise one should merge the speech in the mind (concept), that mind (concept) in the understanding, the understanding in the Great Self; and that Great Self in the Peace-self.

The previous *mantra* showed that the Truth is One Being in everything that is manifested as the visible world, and that a contemplative outlook is needed to attain it. The present *mantra* shows how that search is to be transformed into a contemplative and intuitive one. The di-

rection given is that the speech should be merged in concept, the concept in understanding, the understanding in the Great Self, and the Great Self in the Peace Self.

The *mantra* specifies that the understanding, the Great and the Peace are not apart from the Self. The entire range of human experience can be arranged serially beginning with speech, which stands for the expressed macrocosmic aspect, to the innermost Peace of the Self, which is beyond words. Nothing experienced is outside the scope of the Self, as mentioned in the previous *mantra*. Thus, each item or aspect in the series mentioned can be equated to the Self. The merging of one in the next can be understood with the help of the analogy of concentric circles. There can be any number of circles with the same point as center. The next larger circle holds in it the smaller one. All circles are held within the infinite circle. Thus viewed, seeing, speech, concept, understanding, the Great Self, and the Peace Self are all seen as the Self, and at the same time they are seen as merging from one preceeding self into the succeeding one.

III. 14

*Stand up and be awake!
Having approached
teachers of the top rank
know (the Truth). Like the
sharp edge of a razor is
that path; difficult to
cross and hard to tread,
thus say the wise.*

While the Self is the only Truth, why is it that the Truth is not revealed to us? Why do we take the world consisting of phenomenal appearance superimposed on the Self to be real? It is because our knowledge is not fully awake to the Truth or to the plenitude of knowledge. Our knowledge is still in a drowsy state. In that drowsy state it brings out of itself

numerous chimeric visions and enjoys them as if in a dream. That is what we call the world. Only when one leaves behind the drowsy state and awakens to the plenitude of knowledge will it be realized that the visions so far being enjoyed were merely a dream and that the knowledge which is always there as the substratum for the fabrication of all the appearances is the only Truth. Therefore the seeker has to have a new awakening. So Yama is calling to Nachiketas, "Stand up and be awake!" This call is not only to Nachiketas but to all of us who are seekers of wisdom.

The awakening called for here has a definite aim. But the nature of that aim is not yet very clear to the seeker. If he should see it clearly, one who has already seen it as real as a fruit in hand has to show him. Such great seers who are capable of showing are also called *gurus*. The *guru* reveals the Truth to the seeker who approaches him with proper questions, and the seeker sees the Truth as the plenitude of knowledge which is nothing but himself. Nachiketas got such a *guru*. He was the god of death himself. We, the seekers, also have to find out a *guru*. Mere reading of scriptures and their commentaries won't do.

All this is very easy to say. But the Upaniṣad warns us that this is not an easy path to tread on. This path is of such a nature that all our conceptions regarding ourselves, the world, our capability to know the Truth, the method of seeking Truth, and the validity of the means of knowledge, are turned upside down. Narayana Guru also asks, "Where will the means of knowledge work?" This subtlest of the subtle way of approach, which no means of knowledge can validate, is compared to a walk on the sharp edge of a razor. A walk along the sharp edge of a razor is liable to tilt to either side at any movement. Even if a balance is maintained with such difficulty, there is the possibility of the foot being cut. So difficult is the path of the seeker. Those who do not come across this test will never attain the goal.

III · 15

*That which is soundless,
touchless, formless,
imperishable, and
without taste or smell,
eternal, without beginning
and end, ever beyond the
mahat (the Great)
immutable — knowing it
one is released from the
mouth of death.*

This *mantra*, along with the next two, could be considered as the epilogue to the third chapter and to the first part of the Upaniṣad. The main theme of the third chapter is how the search for the Truth should be properly conducted. One who pursues the search as directed here will come to an understanding of the death principle, the main theme of the Upaniṣad, and will be saved from the jaw of death by the same understanding. The nature of the Truth that the seeker will come to be aware of, indicated here, will be elaborated in the next chapter. Hence, we need not go into its details at this point.

III · 16

*This everlasting teaching
given by Death for the
sake of Nachiketas —
by relating it and
hearing it, the intelligent
one is glorified in the
world of Brahman.*

It is indicated here that the secret of death that Nachiketas learned from Death himself persists here by being kept alive through a hierarchy of intelligent seekers. As death is unavoidable in life, the secret of death is ever-new. By knowing the secret of death, the secret

of birth also becomes understood. In other words, knowing the secret of death means attaining the Absolute, *brahman*, which is beyond birth and death. The intelligent seekers have to hear of it from proper *gurus*, just as Nachiketas heard it from Yama. Such *gurus* and their disciples see this world as not apart from the Absolute but only as the world of the Absolute, *brahmaloka*. Those who see thus are always honored and glorified.

III · 17

*Who imparts this supreme
secret in the assembly of
brahman-knowers or
occasion of the *śraddha*
(ceremonial worship of the
departed) — he thereby
attains endless gains, he
attains endless gains.*

Humankind can be divided into two sets, the wise ones and the ignorant ones. The wise ones live in the world of the Absolute, *brahmaloka*, which knows no birth and death. To the ignorant ones birth and death are real. They perform propitiary worships to honor the departed. To both these sets, hearing of the secret of death gives joy. In the assembly of the wise ones, hearing this secret would give the joy of confirming their wisdom, and in the case of the seekers it will help to know the truth. The ignorant ones, who are engaged in worshipping the departed, will have the gain of awakening to a new desire to know the Truth. To the imparters, the joy will be the satisfaction of sharing the secret wisdom known to him or her with others who are in reality not different from him-Self or her-Self. Thus the benefit of imparting this secret is endless.

(Continued in next issue.)

The Science of Harmonious Union

Commentary on Patañjali's *Yoga Śāstra*

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

Sutra II:14

*te hlāda paritāpa phalāḥ
punyāpunya hetuvāt*

te: they (the seeded carriers
of action propensities)

hlāda: joy

paritāpa: sorrow

phalāḥ: fruit

punya: virtue

apunya: vice

hetu: in accordance with

They (the seeded carriers of action propensities) have joy or sorrow for their fruit in accordance with the virtue or vice of their causes.

Modern commentators have done a great disservice to the study of karma by oversimplifying the course of action, conceiving of it in a linear manner and restricting the cause and effect relationship to be of one-to-one correspondence. Karma is not linear. It propagates its energies in different directions. It has a vertical implication as well as horizontal modifications. It is also naive to believe that one person's action boomerangs only on that person. When Jesus Christ stood before Pilate as innocent as a lamb, a crowd of unthinking religious fanatics shouted, "Crucify him!" Being overwhelmed by numbers, Pilate ordered him to be killed. Thereafter Pilate washed his hands, openly declaring that he did not want

the sin of murdering an innocent man to be on his hands. Thus, there were a number of people on the causal side of the crucifixion and the bitter fruit of the plurality of causes was experienced in anguish only by Jesus. Mahatma Gandhi, loved universally by all those who care for human virtue, was shot in his chest by a single man. On the side of the cause there is only one man and his action was the simple pulling of the trigger of a gun. The effect of that murder was to throw a nation of millions of people into tears. Unable to bear the pain of the injustice done to Gandhi, many Indians committed suicide.

This is a case of one cause and several side effects. Thus several causes can culminate in a single effect and one cause can lead to many chains of events.

The yoga aspirant should see *puruṣa* on one side and *prakṛti*, its counterpart, on the other. Where *prakṛti*, provoked or stimulated by the presence of *puruṣa*, becomes transmuted, the triple qualities of nature (the sublime, the kinetic and the inertial) are operative. Quintiplicated elements operate in nature as subtle *tanmatras* or energy forms. In each element only one half of its pure energy is maintained. The rest is supplemented evenly with the energy quantum of the other four elements. Thus, each element is to be understood both in its purest form and as a compound with the other four forms.

For a psycho-physical organism to evolve and function as an individual, there has to be the bonding together of

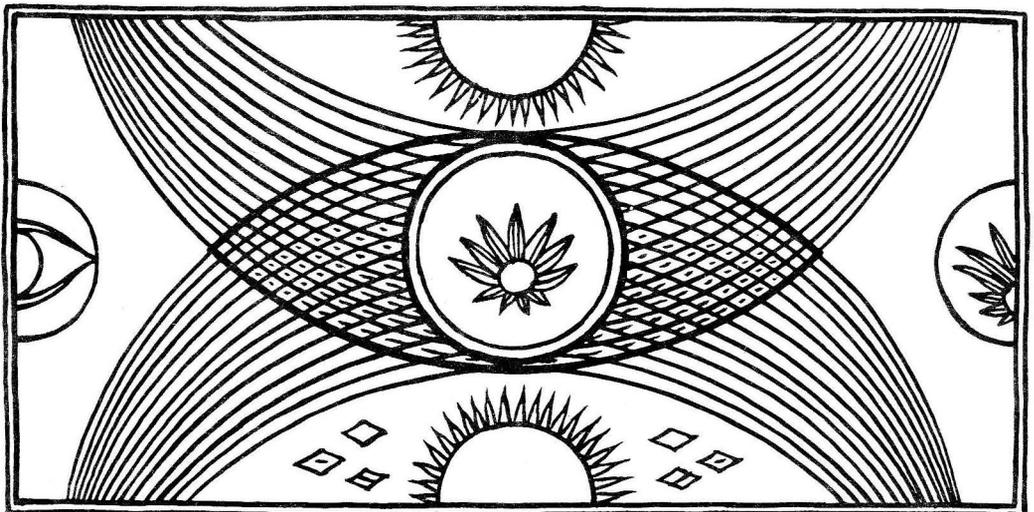
the gross elements (compound) and the pure elements. It is in such a constellation of gross and subtle elemental structure that the *puruṣa* or spirit finds its inseparability. At the various levels of the spirit's impact on the elemental body, organs of perception and action manifest. They are all coordinated by a binary principle of consciousness called *manas* which plays the double role of consciousness and unconsciousness. The one energy that comes to all these as animation is a quantum that is pulsating from the spirit. It is called *cittiśakti*.

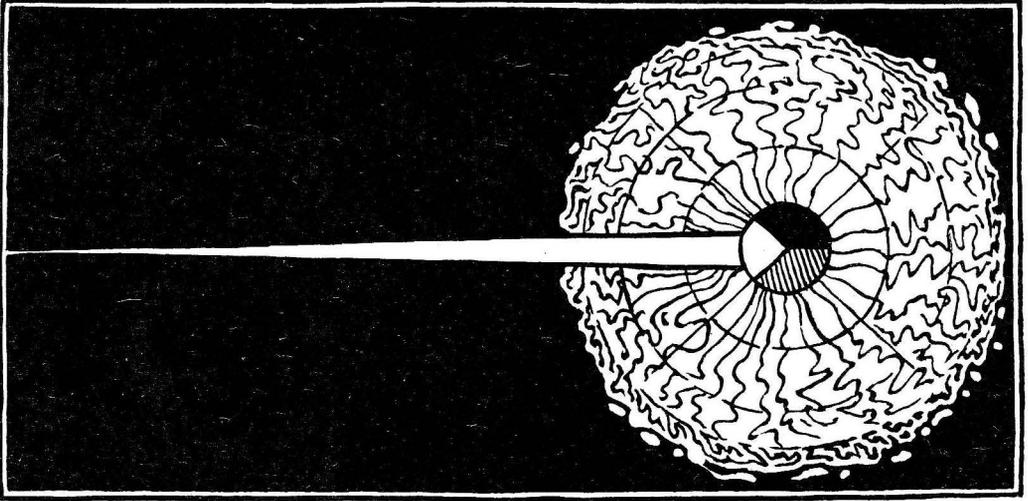
In this complex organism a two-fold projection is happening. Inertial matter appears to be conscient and the conscient principle of the spirit appears as if it has physical limbs. Where these two projections overlap, one experiences ego-identity. This ego-identity takes upon itself the agency to perceive, conceive, judge and react. The interrogating aspect of mind is like a specially deputed watchman and caretaker of the individuated house of consciousness. Even before the senses and the mind come into a full encounter with an externally present object, the questioning aspect of the mind (*manas*) signals the indication of an object to be verified.

Identifying a certain object as something being presented in the here and now holds out two challenges: how to react to that object in the present and how to

know what the significance of that object will be in the near or far future. The present and the future are manifesting out of the past. Hence, all scrutiny for identification comes from a comparison with the past. The recall of memory is assigned to a special faculty or inner organ called *cittam*.

While the sensory system is bringing in stimuli from the outer world, the motor system that controls the organs of action has to carry out the response to the stimulus even when the stimulus is partial. The five-fold actions are: articulation, manipulation, mobility, excretion, and procreation. For each of the five faculties to function the relevant areas of action are to be roused and a lot of energy is to be channelized into the organs of action. The response given to every stimulus can have the special quality of being virtuous or vicious. If we take, for example, the faculty of articulation, a single word that escapes from one's mouth can sometimes cause something so disastrous as a world war. Similarly, a word uttered in sympathy can pacify a nation. In the same manner we can see the importance of the other four faculties. Our actions are rendered painful or joyful through wrong or right identification in which the five obstructions in the path of yoga - nescience, egoism, attachment, hatred, and infatuation with life - operate in various combinations.





Sutra II:15

*pariṇāma tāpa saṃskāra
duḥkhaiḥ guṇa vṛtti virodhāc ca
duḥkham eva sarvaṃ vivekinaḥ*

pariṇāma: resulting from change
tāpa: anxiety
saṃskāra: formation of
incipient memories
duḥkhaiḥ: on account of the pains
guṇa: triple qualities of nature
vṛttiḥ: the modification of
individuated consciousness
virodhāt: on account of conflict
ca: and
duḥkham: misery
eva: only
sarvaṃ: all
vivekinaḥ: to the people who have
developed unitive discrimination

To the people who have developed unitive discrimination all is misery on account of the pains resulting from change, anxiety, and the formation of incipient memories, as also on account of the conflict between the functioning of the triple qualities of nature and the modification of individuated consciousness.

This sutra is given with special reference to the attaining of absolute aloneness which is considered to be the final goal of Patañjali's Eight-limbed discipline of

Yoga. The dialectical situation in which an aspiring yogi is placed is between the ever-increasing plurality of nature and the unitiveness of the spirit. When one comprehends the unitiveness of the entire system, his discrimination is also said to be unitive, *akhānda viveka*. What is subject to change is the projected picture of existence, modulated consciousness and the transient form of interest specified by names and forms within the frame of the time-space continuum in which subtle causes manifest into gross effects and the agent of action is incessantly identified as the knower, doer and experienter.

In pure spirit, there is nothing specific. The projected specificity of each gestalt that is presented to consciousness not only hides the unitive reality of ones Self but also alienates one from ones absolute nature and brings one into encounter after encounter in which the time sequence is very pronounced. As Plato puts it very succinctly, the pure light of the Absolute is hidden away and the individuated person has access only to the images cast by reflected light.

This indirect illumination of the Self which we experience as a conscious awareness of mentation is further vitiated by the triple qualities of nature. Even in the most grotesque projection of a shadow there will be a one-to-one correspondence between the original and the image because the very act of reflection comes

from the sublime quality of nature, *sattva*. But in actual or empirical experience, this correspondence is so distorted by the ever-moving and ever-changing mechanism of the world phenomena that the object and the subject are made to flicker in such a way that when one is seen, the other is hidden. Also, all previous conditionings are focused on each image so that it becomes highly exaggerated as either very dear or very hateful. The subtle veil that hides reality is magical - it operates without giving any glimpse of its interception. As a result, we are almost oblivious of the numinous that shines forth as value in everything.

When the same light is focused on two different bodies of biochemical structure, the light that falls is immediately affected so that the reflected rays are considerably different in their radiating frequency and amplitude. Consequently, the eye that receives the reflected light from the two objects will see them as considerably different in their colors. The old proverb says that there is many a slip between the cup and the lip. Between the changing structure of the external world and the reciprocal disturbance happening in the human brain, many truths are annulled, many lies are added and the poor organism has to contend with what is allotted to it by the niggardly provision of a step-mother-like nature.

Taking cognizance of the sad fate to which we creatures are subjected, the Gita describes this world as a home of suffering, *duḥkhalāyam*. The Buddhists, as if in one voice, register their protest and, in a sweeping manner, they say: "*sarvaṃ duḥkham* - everything is painful." The Christians call this world a world of crosses. Thus, there is a universal depreciation of the world of names and forms.

This world is a flux. Heraclitus said, "no one can step in the same river twice." Everything is subjected to change and evolution. The playful fawn has green meadows to run about and graze in, pure water to drink, sunlight and moonshine to illuminate its pretty world. But no one can say when there might be a brushfire

which will burn the fawn alive in a conflagration. In the fishpond there is crystal clear water and beautiful lotus flowers. The fish that play hide and seek in the water have enough larvae to feed on. When Spring is gone, summer comes. In the hot sun, water evaporates away. Finally a day comes when the bottom of the pond cracks and the fish die without a drop to drink.

When we are children our mothers rock us to sleep singing lullabies. They feed us with bread and butter, milk and porridge. Not knowing any care of this world, we run around with our playmates. But as we grow up we become strangers to this world. There is no one to believe, no one to love. For an ounce of love which one receives, a pound of freedom is to be bartered. Thus every change in life ultimately brings us to an uncompromising doomsday. This world is full of contradictions. The housewife forgets to hide away a piece of cheese. The smell goes to the far-off field and brings the bright-eyed mouse to the kitchen. Seeing the cheese he rejoices. To the tomcat of the family, the mouse smells more inviting than the cheese. Before reaching the cheese the poor mouse is gobbled up by the cat. There is deception everywhere.

Although Indians see only the negative side of life, actually the plus and minus, yin and yang, are well balanced. The most exhaustive and penetrating study of change in time was made by the ancient Chinese people. We have the best testimony of this study in the *I-Ching*, a book which has never been rivaled any time anywhere in the world. Nobody knows who the author of this book was. But everywhere in the world the *I-Ching* is revered as a flawless book which explains the relationship of the individual both to the elements of the changing social matrix and to the cosmic flux of time. This book has no local, fixed emphasis and it is of perennial importance.

Eight symbols are accepted to form the basis of the *I-Ching*, Book of Changes. As in the Jewish tradition, in the Chi-

nese tradition also, the family is the model for all relationships. A family unit is considered to be constituted of eight persons: Father, Mother, First Son, Second Son, Third Son, First Daughter, Second Daughter, and Third Daughter. These eight family members are represented by eight trigrams, each with a name, attribute and image, as seen in the figure below. Sixty-four hexagrams are formed from various combinations of these eight trigrams. A numerator trigram is given and complemented with a denominator trigram.

In the Western world, the law of causation is considered very important and therefore the main relationship that is reckoned is that of the effect relating to cause. Psychologist Jung calls our attention to the fact that the Chinese way of looking at the relationship of things in this world is different. A one-to-one correspondence between cause and effect is not acceptable to the Chinese people. The wise men of China were humble enough to accept that both the structure and function of truth are beyond the comprehension of a rational mind. Truth is to be approached with an open mind to

have a general notion of the particular manner in which heaven and earth come into conjunction.

Thus, there are three main approaches to truth. One is the pragmatic approach of the West regarding the actualization of certain events for which one cause is considered a premier cause and a certain effect is considered consequential to that cause. The Indians, who are more concerned with the realization of truth than the actualization of pragmatic events, refer the multitudinous effects to a primal cause and their method is, as already mentioned, one of regressive remergence. The Chinese people are not afraid to face the enormity of the challenge of life and they are therefore willing to accept each situation as a paradoxical coming together of two opposites which they call the *yang* and the *yin*. The model given in the aphorisms of Patañjali goes very much with the Vedantic notion of treating this world as illusion and therefore the resolution sought is one of transcendence rather than living the given life in the here and now.

(Continued in next issue.)

	NAME	ATTRIBUTE	IMAGE	FAMILY POSITION
☰	Ch'ien, the Creative	Strong	Heaven	Father
☷	K'un, the Receptive	Devoted, Yielding	Earth	Mother
☳	Chen, the Arousing	Inciting Movement	Thunder	1st Son
☵	K'an, the Abysmal	Dangerous	Water	2nd Son
☶	Ken, Keeping Still	Resting	Mountain	3rd Son
☴	Sun, the Gentle	Penetrating	Wind/Wood	1st Daughter
☲	Li, the Clinging	Light-Giving	Fire	2nd Daughter
☱	Tui, the Joyous	Joyful	Lake	3rd Daughter

The Principle of the Guru

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

Physical perception is a perception in contrast; a contrast of light and shadow. All objects of perception are finite bodies, illuminated by light. The shape and form are comprehended with the aid of the shades of light and darkness. Where there is only pure light, and nothing illuminated by it, there is no physical perception. The Guru is pure light and not an illuminated object. Consequently, the Guru is invisible, although self-luminous.

For the physical eye to see, objects need to be illuminated with light, and there also has to be a light within that animates the eye and which is transfigured into the shape of the illuminated object. Thus, what actually sees is an eye behind the eye, which is also the ear behind the ear, the mind behind the mind, and the value that evaluates everything. This is the Self.

Guru is none other than this Self which resides in the heart of all. Thus he is nearer than anything else and yet he seems to be far, difficult to be approached and hardly known to anyone. We are so excited by what is seen that we even forget to ask who sees. Socrates rightly said "life" is entering into a deep sleep and then forgetting the reality of the Self. Only one who has awakened from the hypnosis of sensuous life can recall the original and eternal verity of the ever-luminous Self. He will be also able to arouse others from their intoxication of ignorance. One who can play this noble role among individuated beings is called a guru for the simple reason that he is a Knower of the Guru.

The search for such a teacher is ex-

horted by the Scriptures. In fact the closing exhortation given in the last mantra of the *Chandogya Upaniṣad* is to this effect. Brahma told Prajāpati, Prajāpati told Manu and Manu told mankind to learn wisdom from a teacher according to rule, and, after having learned, to teach the same in turn to their own virtuous children.

According to Śankara the Guru is like a burning coal lying buried in the ashes. To a casual on-looker, he is like ashes of no worth. Little does one know that buried in the ashes there lies a source of energy that can blow up into a conflagration and burn away all dross of ignorance. Śankara further describes the Guru as a peaceful person with such sympathy that he embraces all in his loving compassion for no reason whatsoever. Such a wise and kind Guru who goes from place to place like a rain cloud, showering his compassion on all and greening the spiritual vitality of people yearning for wisdom, is compared to the spring season that gently and silently spreads its beneficence around the globe, bringing rejoicement to all those who have the refined sensibility to appreciate higher values.

According to Guru Nanak, the Guru is one who, having crossed over the ocean of *samsāra* (the cycle of birth and death), is also helping others to cross over. According to Narayana Guru, every word of the Guru is resplendent with the pure light of the highest certitude of wisdom. By nature, he is in constant meditation. The Guru's generosity knows no bound. His judgment is always tempered with love

and compassion. His vision is always the best example of the attitude of sameness. His inward calm gives to his mind the dimension of dignity, just as the sense of awe is created by the vast expanse of a deep ocean. His transparent vision cuts across the scaffolds of phenomenality and he sees nothing but the blissful beatitude of the Self in everything.

All the same, the Guru behaves and reacts as a person at the transactional level, and there he lays his emphasis on being fully committed to his unlimited liability for the welfare of all. In that context, service is his watchword. He is a friend of the lone, the lost and the rejected. In his love, even the most heinous sinner can easily find a haven of care and protection. He lives and symbolizes truth

by being silent and when he articulates, the truth of every word that he utters bursts into a world of magnificent meaning that always inspires and elevates the heart of his listener. He sets before others an example by living his beautiful thoughts in a beautiful way. In spite of his peaceful disposition and calm nature, it takes no time for him to comprehend unitively the inner structure of even the most complicated situations, and his decision comes with the swiftness of a thunderbolt. He urges action with the spirit of inaction and his seeming inaction can achieve in no time what action of drudgery cannot accomplish in a million lives.

Such is the glory of a true Guru. May the eternal Guru that luminous Self of all, be ever victorious. ❖



Ode to Viṣṇu

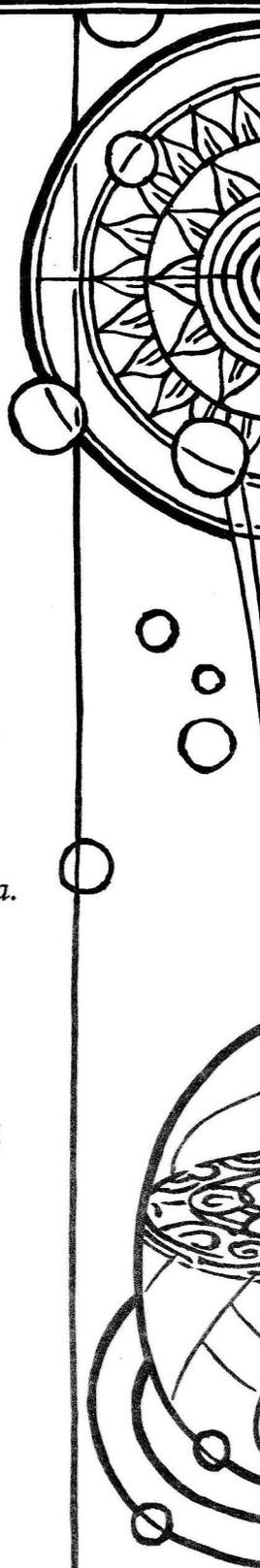
O Viṣṇu, Surya Narayana, Āditya!
Son of Aditi, the principle of unbroken continuity!
You are the registry of my senses,
whose impressions are cognized with unsatiated interest,
processed with connative scrutiny and kept always
available to recall as smṛiti,
with the memory tag of pleasure infatuation (sukha)
or the negative conditioning of pain apprehension (duḥkha).

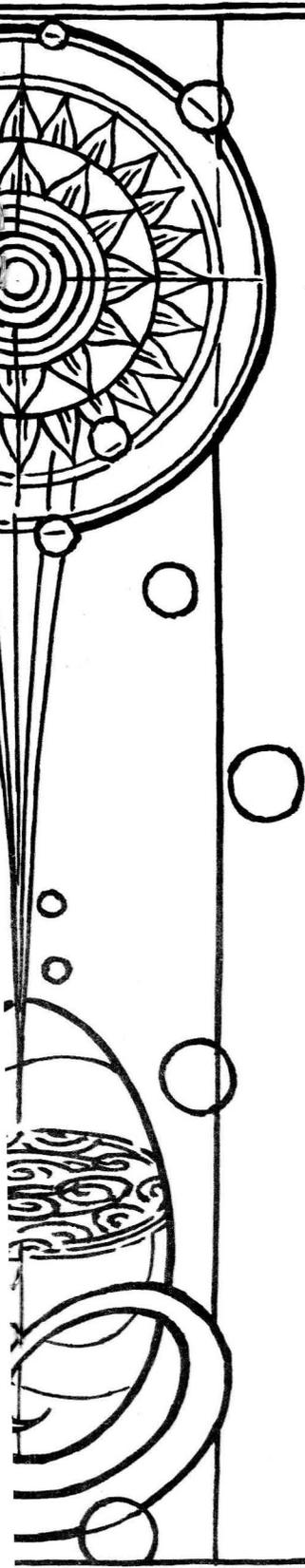
How aptly you are described as the god who always
lies in a siesta on the coiled snake Vāsuki,
perennially dreaming the cyclic sustenance of several worlds.
Your divine abode is said to be the Vaikuntha,
the restorative ocean of seminal milk where life throbs.

Being surrounded by water (naram) you are called Narayana.
You use the sap of life conveniently for your flotation
from the parental reservoir to the channeled nursery
where the fertilized egg is left for incubation
to transform itself into a fetus and ultimately into a person.

What else can be your base than the libidinal serpent Vāsuki
who symbolizes both life and death
and who is also the co-eternal principle
of the phenomenal maya of existential appearance
and cyclic withdrawal into the unknown?

You are the biologic memory of all sentient beings;
you alternate their program of action and rest
according to their conformity with their heliotropic
or geotropic distinctiveness.





By Nitya

Another of your collective recall can be seen manifesting in the vegetative world which remembers to shed leaves in winter and go into hibernation and return again in spring. You remind them to be abundantly assertive and distribute their propagative energy to continue each species.

Your command is not only listened to by sentient beings but also by the planet, the good earth, which remembers to shower its rain to automatically waken the memory of the farmhands to cultivate their lands and store water for irrigation.

In autumn you remind all to share their riches with a timely harvest of their bumper crops.

It is no wonder your consort is Lakṣmi, the goddess of grace, charm, beauty and riches, and your winsome son is none other than Kama or Smara, the enchanting demiurge of love and infatuation.

The poets of India are clever to hide your sexual display with the metaphor of a lotus which conceals your genital in style

and to personify your built-in urge to create as Brahma.

From your member you spew in all four directions your fecund power of endless creation.

O Viṣṇu, your vehicle, the divine eagle, can soar high in the heavens touching the blue canopy of the vast sky.

Even then the golden Garuda is watchfully busy, reconnoitering the globe from all sides.

My unending adoration to you Viṣṇu, the sustainer of every cell in me that pulsates with life.

At The Heart of Paradox

Deborah Buchanan

There is a faded photograph on the wall in my meditation loft. When I look at this old photograph of Narayana Guru, I see a simple, almost severe face looking back at me. I see a Hindu renunciate, a man from the particular world of South Indian villages at the turn of the century. Then I turn and look at myself. Many categories could fit: a middle-class WASP, a midwestern American from mid-century, a resident of the land of neon, videos and granola. Where is the connection between the face on the wall and the person who brought the photo back home rolled up under her arm?

Sitting in meditation, I hear the rhythmic beating of my heart, the muted high hum of the *anāhata*, and I feel the quiet coherence of being. In this stillness I wear neither a sari nor tennis shoes: social labels, identification markers to a world of particular forms and actions, no longer apply. It is in this vibrant solitude that Narayana Guru and I meet.

Narayana Guru lives at the heart of paradox. That paradox is the interplay between the individual, small moments of my life and the vast, neutral expanse of wisdom that is the essence of Narayana Guru's teaching. He lived a life I can only imagine - wandering the jungles of Kerala, learning Sanskrit letters by writing in the sand outside his family's thatch hut - yet from that individual life emerged a unitive understanding that broke through the barriers of historical moment. Narayana Guru's vision extended outward, past his own milieu, to reach into the luminous core of being that sustains us all. I can listen to his words of poetry and hear their resonance with my own experience. The great beau-

ty of his philosophy lies in its neutrality. He does not demand adherence to particular social codes or to certain cultural ideas. His vision is of the one unmanifested Reality, the *karu*, that lives quietly and surely in each one of us. With us he sings: "With five senses withheld, prostrate again and again with devotion and chant" (*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, verse 1) and with us he says, "discarding attachment to being and non-being, one should gently, gently merge in SAT-AUM" (*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, verse 100).

When we emerge from that deep state of contemplation, we are again in the actual, everyday world of a certain place and time. Narayana Guru recognized the significance of this movement into transactional reality. He treated each person's individuality as only a facet of the one Reality, but as something worthy of respect and having a dignity of its own. He did not lay down regulations that demand adherence to a certain cultural vision. Rather he sought to cultivate an encompassing understanding in each person and then allow them their own decisions and directions. His stable grounding in the universal *karu* is coupled with a fostering of fluidity within each of life's particular situations. As I live my own life on a hill in the Pacific Northwest of America, I do not feel that I need to conform to the social behaviors of another world. My focus is on the inner restraint and clarity that the Guru, the active principle of knowledge, has touched within. From that knowledge, which spans the border between inner and outer experience, arise words of encouragement, of correction, and of guidance.

When I look into the eyes of the old photograph, I do not feel I am looking into a strange face, but into a lucidity which mirrors my own understanding.

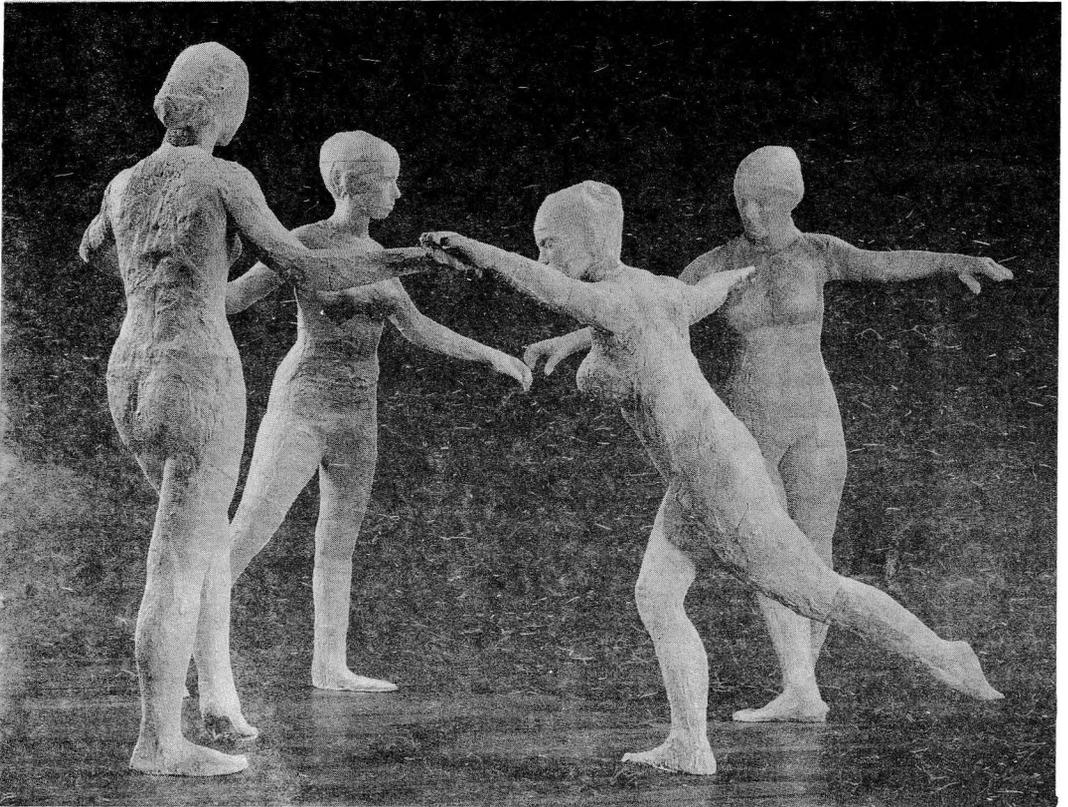
I turn to this lucidity on a regular basis. The Portland Gurukula meets once a week to study different works of Narayana Guru, which are approached through communal reading, meditation and discussion. This periodic return in daily life to a study of philosophy and to an immersion in contemplation provides a continuing vision for me. The study of Narayana Guru's teachings acts as a thread of remembrance and commitment. His sparse, succinct words are edges of insight into the polarities of my usual activities.

This is especially true in that most intimate relationship of parent and child. There are so many demands of passion - love, anger, impatience, expectation, adulation and identification - that accompany the role of parent. Narayana Guru's cool words of philosophical even-

ness help harmonize these intensities. He does not give explicit parenting advice, but his teachings provide me with a base from which to perceive and evaluate, with a more tempered eye, on my own. What is applicable to the parent-child relationship is certainly true for other personal relations as well. Philosophical balance provides the kind of neutrality that can cut through the ego's demands.

For many years I have taught classes in Asian Studies in which I have introduced students to the history and culture of the regions's countries. My intent has not been to provide a quick, intriguing glance at something exotic or to present other people as strange specimens. Instead, I try to open a door for my students through which they can glimpse other ways of being. Walking into another culture, both figuratively and literally, is to open oneself up to new visions and to a new understanding.

In my work, I have focused on sub-



jects that make the student ask questions about himself and his world. This kind of educational approach requires the teacher to construct a framework where a situation can be explored and understood by the student as part of his or her own experience; knowledge is not delivered as a preconceived idea. Here, as a teacher, you are acknowledging the inner intelligence of each child. This is the same kind of respect and openness with which Narayana Guru nurtured his own students, though, of course, the context and topics are different.

In class we examine the demands of a certain historical situation, we see what common human problem a culture has faced, and we see what its particular response has been. Our culture is one solution within the framework of a certain place and time. What are other solutions, other historical contexts? Here we face the interplay between universal problems or questions and the varied individual answers that each culture has given. This approach is another modification of the neutral meeting point, the *bindu*, extrapolating out to multiple manifestations.

I try to work at the boundaries people have created; I want to expose the shadows where people harbor their assumptions and prejudices about one another. In loosening people's limitations, a sense of kinship can be touched and a feeling of interrelationship awakened.

On a more personal level for students, I try to immerse them in the activities and objects of the daily life of a child from another culture. We make Indian chai, eat Chinese stir-fry vegetables, play with a Chinese jump rope, make Japanese toys and Indian clay figures, study Indian school books, set up a Chinese after-school Children's Palace, write Chinese poems with characters, recite haiku, and count with Hindi numbers - all of these within their own larger and more complete context. In doing this the student becomes personally acquainted with the patterns of another child's world. And from this perspective, the

student can begin to understand both the uniqueness and the commonality of all cultures.

It is not that we are all alike - this is true neither in behavior nor in thought. Deep and difficult differences do exist. To deny these is to deny the ceaselessly creative manifestations of Śakti. But neither are we irremediably separate, little capsules of language and history that are unable to bridge the variations of culture. Both these worlds exist - the general and the specific - and learning their proper relationship is one of the dynamic tenets of Narayana Guru's philosophy. With a steady eye he presents the web of relationship within which we "sleep, wake and think many thoughts," (*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, verse 5).

This flux is given coherence through the blissful affectivity of *ananda*. We learn to see beyond our own prejudices, we learn to understand the connection between our experience and others, we learn to feel our communal identity, and finally we come to know the truth of Narayana Guru's words: "Only he lives who loves."❖



Lao-Tzu

Biography of Narayana Guru

Nancy Yeilding

Beyond Convention

Around 1881 Nāṇu's relatives wanted him to leave his studies with Raman Pillai Āśan and return home. At this time he suffered a severe attack of dysentery which was likely a psychosomatic reaction to having to leave his teacher and return to his family and their relativistic way of life. After his recovery, he resumed his old habit of leaving home and wandering for days at a time. His wanderings covered a fifty mile radius around Trivandrum. He started teaching Sanskrit and sacred texts like the *Bhagavad Gita* to a group of young students from the area around Chempazhanty. They began to call him Nāṇu Āśan. As he entered into the role of a teacher, his own inner search illuminated the ancient texts and revealed their wisdom to his students.

Nāṇu Āśan's inner and outer life were knitted together in a harmony and an integrity which belied any desire for the typical pattern of marriage and householding. The members of his family, presumably acting with good intentions and basing their judgement on the usual pattern of life in the society of that time, were unable or unwilling to understand his desire to follow the solitary path of a seeker. Blinded by their half-hidden desire to justify their own way of life by perpetuating it, and motivated by the powerful dynamic of preservation of the species, specifically manifested as their caste with its part in the social order, they were determined to create a traditional family pattern for Nāṇu Āśan.

At that time, it was a common practice for marriages to be arranged and performed without the consent of the bride or groom. Narayana Guru's family arranged

a marriage for him with a young woman whose mother was a niece of his father. He protested, saying, "Properly, that child is a daughter." 19 But his objection was not heeded. He was not present at the ceremony but, according to another custom of the time, one of his sisters stood in for him and presented the bride with the clothes and gold necklace signifying the finalizing of the marriage bond. When Nāṇu Āśan next returned, his wife was presented to him. Giving her a banana he said: "Now people here must be very happy. All the rooms of the house are full. So I can leave." He left and resumed his wandering.

There are differing accounts of their lives following the ceremony. There is no indication that Nāṇu Āśan ever regarded himself as married. It is also clear that he treated the young woman kindly, not adding further grief to her misfortune in being treated as an object to be given, taken and moved around at the bidding of the two families. In the *Word of the Guru*, Nataraja Guru explains how the issue subsided into the silence at the core of Narayana Guru's life:

With the ever-widening path of guruhood that our hero began to tread as more and more years went by, the question of his married life and family relations receded more and more into the background. It was thus naturally and normally transcended. She died, and no children of the marriage are known to have seen the light of day. Subjects such as celibacy, immaculate conception or virginity, etc., were points which were never raised in connection with either of them. The relation was as neutral and mysterious as the zero that we have spoken of. 20

Nataraja Guru also gives an account

of Nānu Āsan's return home, without being notified, just in time to see his father before he passed away in 1884:

He entered the room where the father lay, with other village neighbours sitting by the bedside. The father referred to the son as "a well-instructed teacher (vidvan)" and alluded also to a significant circumstance, saying: "He eats food from many hands" and added a request that his son should hand him some nourishment with his own sanctified hands, which, as he put it "themselves were nourished at the hands of many." Nanu Asan had thus attained a pattern of life of a Bhikka or Sanyāsin who supported himself by Madhukāra Bhiksha (i.e., a honey-bee-like livelihood) and this was already recognized by his father on his deathbed, and by his accepting the presence of his son as a last blessing. 21

After the death of his father, Nānu Āsan completed the break with his family. He is reported to have said: "We are all born for different purposes. You have to achieve something and I have to achieve some other thing. You can try to achieve what you wish; let me look to my work."22 His wife returned to her family home. He left the following note for his relatives as he left home at the age of 28:

Let me search and find if there is any spiritual truth greater than domestic services and familial obligation. My life is dedicated for that search so I should carefully and critically examine everything. Ultimately if I do not see anything worthwhile in such a pursuit I can disclose that to the world and help many from wasting their time in such a futile search. 23

Thus, before he reached thirty, Nānu had grown into a respected teacher, a solitary wanderer and a dedicated seeker for the truth of human existence which could bring meaning and beauty to the chaos and brutality of the social life around him. He felt a need to penetrate beneath the mundane patterns of daily life and distance himself from the usual patterns of social obligation.

Chattampi Swami

After the death of his father, Nānu Āsan fully identified himself with the life of a wanderer, completely separate from any role in relation to his family. He often lived in remote forest areas, eating only what he found growing there. Sometimes he frequented the Trivandrum area, sleeping on the beach and surviving on what was given him by chance. At times he would stay with old classmates and friends. He spent sometime with one classmate, Perunnelli Krishnan Vaidyar who, like many of the students of Raman Pilai Āsan, was well-learned in Sanskrit and a literary figure of the time. His library was full of classics and his house was frequented by scholars, writers, critics and musicians. In 1882, during his stay there, Nānu Āsan spent many hours in the library, referring to Sanskrit and Malayalam books on philosophy.

One of the other visitors to Krishnan Vaidyar's house during that time was a remarkable person called Kunjan Pillai, as well as Śanmukhadāsan, the name with which he had been initiated into *sannyasa*. 24 As his family was poor, he was given no formal education. He learned Malayalam from his father and started to pick up Tamil and Sanskrit from his friends who were studying with local teachers. His earnest attempts to learn came to the attention of a Sanskrit teacher who invited him to attend his classes. This early thirst for learning branched out into many fields and, as a young man, Kuñjan was a musical genius as well as very learned in the *Vedas* and other Sanskrit literature. His physical adeptness extended to many activities, including the very demanding and complicated art of Kathakali dance. Outgoing and friendly, Kuñjan enjoyed giving performances of his various skills such as chanting the *Rāmāyaṇa* with extraordinary beauty or demonstrating many types of drumming.

But his interests were not merely at the level of enjoyment. His yearning to know took him to the depths of his own



Kathakali Dancer

psyche and prompted him to search for a teacher to guide him. Like the young Nanu, he disregarded all conventions of caste and openly questioned such divisions of humankind.

Studying in Trivandrum with Pettayil Raman Pillai Āsan, Kuñjan's aptitude and desire to learn earned him the position of Monitor (*chattampi*) and thus the name which was to stick with him thereafter, Chhattampi. His poverty and a sick mother led him to work as a laborer, and then as a government servant, a *kanakka-pillai* (clerk). But a person with a spirit yearning to soar in freedom and without any need to gain fame and fortune or to

live up to society's expectations will not long remain in the box of a small clerk's office with the tiny horizon government service has to offer.

Soon his search led him to roam again. He spent some time as a disciple of an unusual man, Suberaya Panniker, the Manager of the Residency of Travancore State, and a yogi who lived a life of restraint, devoting his free time to teaching Vedanta and Yoga. He was known as Thaikattu Ayyavu. It is from this teacher, a Saivite, that Kuñjan Pillai received the name Śanmukhadāsan, indicating that he was a devotee of Subramanya (son of Śiva and Parvati).

Soul Mates

It was at a similar point in each of their lives that Kuñjan and Nāṇu Āśan met in the house of Krishnan Vaidyar. Each had dedicated himself to a pattern of life to benefit all, not seeking personal pleasures or reward. Each was fully absorbed in a search for fundamental reality and had left behind the usual social patterns, especially those relating to a false consciousness of caste differences. Each felt and expressed a deep sense of devotion in his own way. When they met, they were immediately drawn to each other as fellow companions on the same path. If we listen to our own heart's quiet yearning for true communion, we can understand the solace they must have found in one another.

Śanmukhadāśan shared what he had been learning from Thaikkāttu Ayyāvu and took Nāṇu to him. A year after Śanmukhadāśan had been initiated, Nāṇu Āśan was initiated by Ayyāvu on Cithra Pūrṇama, the full moon of April, and given the name Śanmukhabhakta. An account written by Thaikkāttu Ayyāvu's son, who was present at the initiation, says that ghee, water, flowers and betel leaves were all poured over Nāṇu Āśan's head and that he received a *mantra* from the guru. The son also reports that Nāṇu composed a Tamil work on this Guru which he read to the son after his father's Samādhi. This and other accounts indicate that Thaikkāttu Ayyāvu evoked love and respect from both the young men later to be known as Narayana Guru and Chattampi Swami.

Unfortunately, any account of the relationship of Chattampi Swami and Narayana Guru has to address a controversy which has been raging between the less informed followers of both of them about who might have been whose Guru. This is especially saddening because the seeds of this conflict lie in the die-hard caste prejudices completely belied by their lives and teachings. Two segments of society, each seeing themselves as being a caste, sought to expand their own

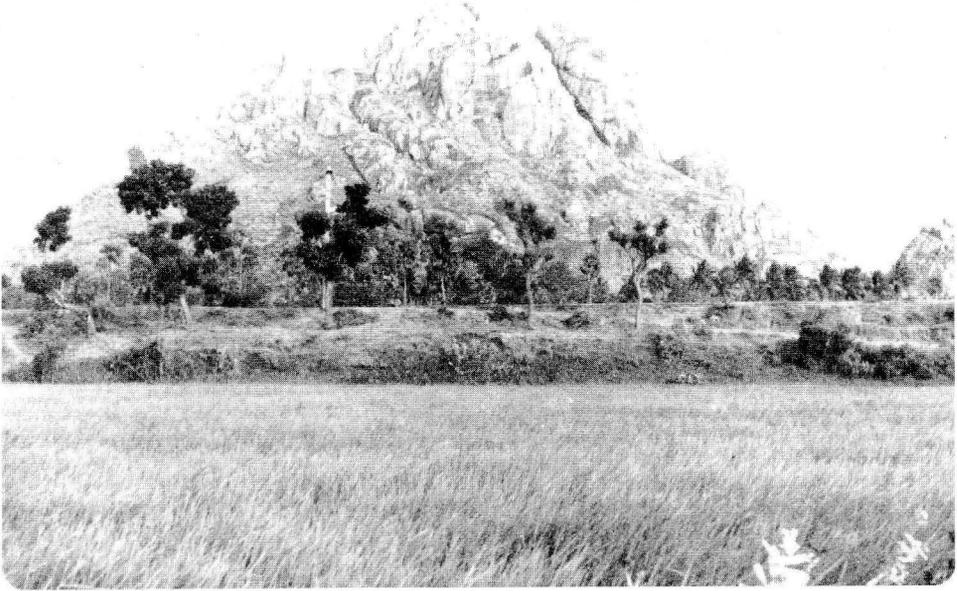
sense of self-worth by identifying with and adopting a teacher who had incidentally been born of a family of their community. The vying of these groups for social supremacy over each other led to arguments over which Guru was greater and who was Guru to whom. Such arguments only reveal the sheer folly and ignorance of both sides in the light of the unitive wisdom coming from both Narayana Guru and Chattampi Swami.

Each lived a life beyond all artificial divisions of humankind, devoted to helping others shed all such prejudices. Neither cared to establish supremacy over the other or over any being. They shared deep reverence for and communion with all forms of life, seeing the one Self in all. And each regarded the other with highest esteem and deepest affection. They called each other "Chattampi" and "Nāṇan". The controversy is put to rest when we hear their own words: Narayana Guru, when asked if Chattampi Swami was his guru, replied, "We don't see any objection in it." Chattampi Swami, when asked if he were Narayana Guru's guru, said, "I am everybody's disciple and not anybody's guru." 25

Their temperaments were very different; Narayana Guru generally silent and restrained, and Chattampi Swami outgoing and lively. But such differences have their reality only at a social level and fade away as two seekers become one with their path and thus with each other and all existence.

After spending some time with their teacher, Thaikkāttu Ayyāvu, they began to wander together in the mountains and forests, leaving behind the towns and villages to find quiet, isolated spots where they could devote themselves to meditation. Living in caves, they ate leaves and berries, drank from streams and lived in harmony with the animals around them. They spent some time in the hills near the southern tip of India, Kanyakumāri.

Chattampi Swami returned to Tri-vandrum and Narayana Guru continued his solitary *tapas* (spiritual discipline). Although they loved and respected each



*Marutva-malai, near Kañyakumari,
where Narayana Guru lived in a hillside cave*

other as fellow seekers, the spiritual search is necessarily a solitary one beyond a certain point.

Life Without Limits

Whenever he wasn't wandering or taking trips in search of rare manuscripts, Chattampi Swami resided with a relative, Kesava Pillai, in his house, *Kallu Veedu*. The family regarded this as a great blessing, especially since Chattampi Swami had cured Kesava Pillai's wife of a disease then thought to be incurable. Thereafter he made his home with the family wherever Kesava Pillai was transferred in his job. He continued his studies and research in many areas such as *Ayurveda* (traditional Indian medicine), astrology, *Tantra Śāstra* (an esoteric philosophy without caste bias), folk legends and music. There are many stories of his stunning performances on various musical instruments, his displays of yogic powers and physical strength, and his control of animals.

In his other travels to various areas

of Kerala he and Narayana Guru would now and then meet and spend time together, sometimes wandering the beautiful coastline or inland areas, sometimes in the houses of friends which served as gathering places for poets, philosophers or Ayurvedic physicians.

Chattampi Swami's talks and writings reflected the wide range of his interests and research including a critical study of Christianity, and studies of *tantra*, linguistics, anthropology, geography, comparative religion, women's roles in society and of course, the Six Systems of Philosophy, especially Yoga and Vedanta. He wrote as he traveled, leaving his penciled manuscripts behind in the homes where he stayed. As a result, many of his articles and large sections of his books have been lost. However, his *Nijānanda Vilāsam* has been recently recovered and published for the first time by Narayana Gurukula (Varkala, 1981). It is a unique appraisal of the precepts of Vedanta which challenges the reader to penetrate to the depth of Chattampi Swami's vision and experience. Perhaps

his most famous work is *Vedānikāra Nirūpanam*. In that he exposes the absurdity of the centuries-old tradition of caste placement as a pre-requisite for study of the Vedas and firmly establishes that such study is appropriate for all who wish it. He supports this position with detailed studies of the original sources which pre-date the distortions by the brahminical sects in support of their rise to an ascendent place in society. Other known works are *Advaitacintāpadhat*, *Pracina Malayalam* and *Adhibhāsa*.

Chattampi Swami's life of simplicity, renunciation, study, *ahimsa* (non-hurting), compassion and abundant love inspired a number of disciples to find in him a true Guru to guide them on their path to wisdom. He encouraged many who came into contact with him, enabling them to break out of encrusted prohibitions and superstitions to give their lives and those of others more meaning, hope; and self-determination.

Merging

As he turned seventy, the effects of old age on his body showed up as various ailments and physical suffering, but his equanimity remained undisturbed and he continued in his devotion to the well-being of all. About a month before his *samādhi* (absorption) in 1924, he was visited by Narayana Guru who was also in his early seventies. Hearing of Chattampi Swami's illness while visiting near Quilon, Narayana Guru and a number of his followers crossed the inland waterway in canoes to reach the house where Chattampi Swami lay ill. Guru went straight to Chattampi Swami's bedside.

Chattampi Swami asked: "Do you have the duties of a tax collector?" (*Ippol pravarthiyar udyogam undo?*)

Guru replied, making a pun on the word *pravarthiyar* which means tax collector and thorn: "There is work but there are no thorns." (*Pravarthi undu arilla.*)

Narayana Guru sat on the Swami's bed, took his hand with great tenderness

and stroked it gently, saying: "How thin this hand has become. This body has become very weak. It was not like this before. He used to leap from rocks. Sometimes he had itches. He never did anything to cure them. They should accept defeat and retreat. It is not in his nature to accept defeat." Chattampi Swami asked that a musician/swami who had accompanied Guru sing for the group gathered there and tapped out the rhythm with his fingers. The day passed with their talks soaring in the realms of poetry and philosophy, and subsiding in the silence of the One where the true meaning of their lives and teaching could be found.

Such a meeting can bring profound inspiration to all who witness or hear about it. This beauty was sadly marred by an unfortunate flare-up of rivalry in some of the followers of Chattampi Swami in regards to Narayana Guru. Wishing to record the event, they persuaded the two gurus to sit for a photograph together, although they both were famous for their usual refusal to be photographed. After both gurus were seated and the photographer had set up his camera, Chattampi Swami's followers quickly placed a chair on his other side for one of his foremost disciples, Tirthapāda Pārāmahāmsa Swami; the picture was thus posed in such a way as to give the appearance of Chattampi Swami as Guru, flanked by two disciples. The followers of Narayana Guru objected, realizing the intent of those arranging the picture. Narayana Guru never asserted his ego even in such a provoking situation; he simply sat for the photo in silence.

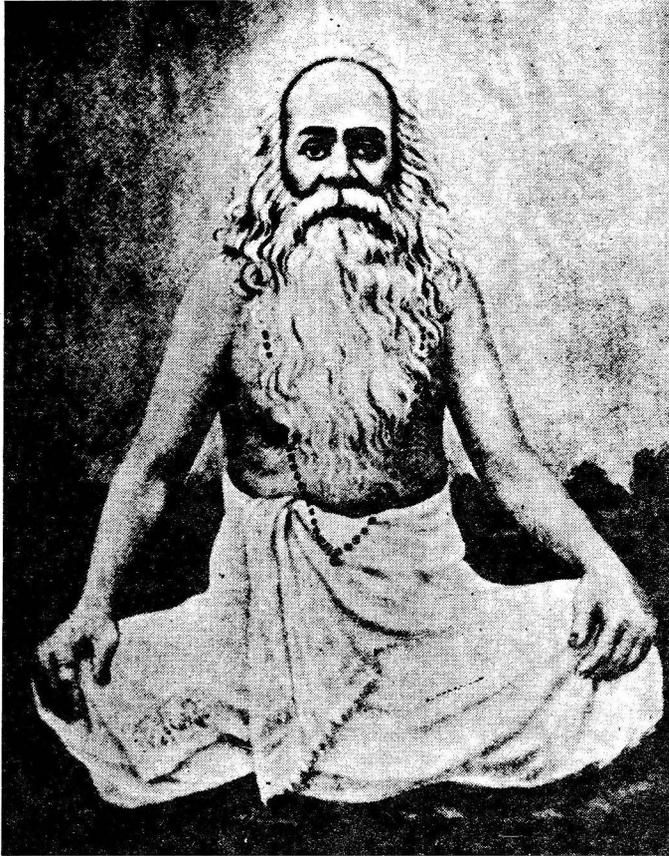
That such a maneuver took place in the uplifting context of such an outpouring of love, joy and intellectual excellence is a disheartening comment on the pitfalls in the path of wisdom which can create such pettiness and foolishness in the presence of such greatness and truth.

In his last days Chattampi Swamikal devoted himself to quiet contemplation and receiving visitors. He followed the progress of the Vaikom Satyagraha

(a mass action of civil disobedience attempting to make Kerala temples open to members of all castes) with great interest, seeing it as an important struggle in the progress towards the elimination of caste discrimination.

In 1924, on a day characterized by his tender concern for all around him and his love of music, he entered his *māhā-samādhi*.

(Continued in next issue.)



Chattampi Swami

NOTES

19. Kottukoyikkal Velayudhan, *Biography of Sree Narayana Guru*, (Quilon: S.N. Press, 1975).

20. Nataraja Guru, *Word of the Guru*, (India: Paico Publishing, 1952).

21. Ibid.

22. *Sri Narayana Yoga Prabhāvam*.

23. *Gurukulam* (Malayalam) (India: Narayana Gurukula, 1979).

24. At birth (1853, Kollur) he had been named Ayyappan by his parents, Vasudeva Sarma and Nankadevi, but Kuñjan was a nickname from childhood.

25. Notes from Guru Nitya.

Divine Garbage

Let this be one more reminder that when we save a can, a newspaper, a bottle, or a branch, we are respecting the good Earth from which we came, by which we are sustained, and into which our bodies will dissolve. This planet, whose ecology and economy we are trying to normalize, is a visible manifestation of the Supreme Being. We are That, and not the passing show of images and sounds our senses would have us believe. The Bible teaches us that,

*The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof;
the world, and they that dwell therein.*

In the fifth verse of the Daiva Daśakam, by Narayana Guru, who was a contemporary of Mohandas Gandhi, from South India, it is said:

*You are that act of creation, the creator
and the myriad variety of what is created;
oh God, are you not the very stuff
of which everything is created?*

It is to this reality that we should turn our minds when we recycle materials in our cities and towns across the land. What a nice reminder garbage is of our relatedness to our ecosystem. We see it at every turn, and personally produce it all the time. When viewed mindfully, garbage can be an object of devotion that can lift our minds to a unitive awareness of the adorable wonder that is at the essence of our life on earth, as well as imbue us with a heightened sense of personal responsibility to husband our natural resources more intelligently. Proper and timely disposition of our daily wastes can eliminate blight and potential sources of pollution to our environment.

As a little child I remember being instructed that "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." It is along this road, in this way, that I would like to walk with you. A Sacred Place this is. May we see God's daily magic more and more, with Consciousness and Presence. ❖

Peter Moras

Especially For Children



Letter to My Special Tree

Dear Tree,
Shed your leaves so you can have a fur coat. Grow and grow. Entwine your branches together so that you have entwined a secret world. Do not grow too tall or the wood cutter will want you for wood. Dig your roots into the soil. Store water in your roots - then you will be ready for winter.

Sometimes

Sometimes I imagine
what my mind is like,
I have many moods like:
I'm not going to bed mood.
I don't want to get up mood.
Boring mood.
Please, may I have that? mood.
I hate you mood.
I don't want to clean my room mood.
I'm not brushing my hair and teeth mood.
Tired mood.
Stop it! mood.
Quiet mood.
Reading mood.
Leave me alone mood.
And the thinking and working mood.
The End Mood.

Night

Shadows creep silently over the grass.
Wolves relentlessly howl. All night long, in the dark and wet, men go riding by while people sleep and dream.

Day

People wake up. People play. People play where the wolf howled nights. And the wolf sleeps on.

Rain

The rain drips quietly from the eaves, then on to the porch, forming puddles that then drip silently to the ground.

My Magic Spot

My magic spot is on a steep hill in a forest that ends in a ravine. It is a tree with roots on one side and a tree with four leaning trunks that shield me from the ravine. I always sit on one of the roots. I feel as if I am in the company of many, yet I also feel alone. I listen to the sound of the woods. And a thing that is special about my magic spot is that there are many living things.

The Sun

Yellow is the sun.
It smells fresh,
like the desert that
was just blanketed with dew.
It is languid, lazy.

Start a Beginning

Sound the flute,
Start a beginning.
Run through meadows
heavy with butterflies.
Now put down your pen and pencil,
Leave your school books on your desk,
And sing, sing, sing for Spring!

Earth Day Gratitude 1990

Gratitude to the soil for bringing food to us. Gratitude to the sun for bringing us warmth. Gratitude to plants for giving us shade. Gratitude to the air for letting us breathe. Gratitude to wild beings for giving us nature. Gratitude to the great sky for carrying sounds. Gratitude to Mother Earth. Gratitude to all.

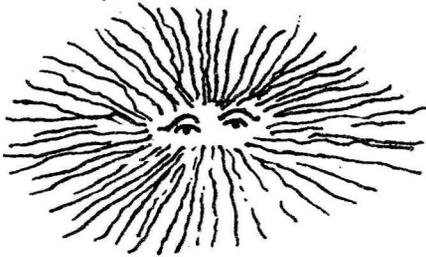
Emily Teitsworth

Dearest Baby-mol,

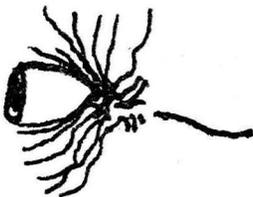
I am writing this from Eugene, a city two hours away from Portland, Oregon. Nancy and I came here with Anupama. Here is the story.

Peggy came. This time not as a small book by post with its pages filled with poems and squibbles indicating the passage from poem to poem. She came as a meager person, with almost real hands and legs and shimmering fireflies for her eyes. For her lips she had a fluttering bee. When she came close, her body shrank and she became an inaudible whisper. A sweet breath hovered around me. My eyelids became heavy. My body was no longer heavy to keep me glued to the terra firma.

It was a sunny day but not hot. A breeze came. My beard spread itself out in all directions and instantly I changed into an apoopanthadi (dandelion).



Peggy changed into a will-o-the-wisp.



We both took off from the Portland Gurukula. I got into the front seat of a dream which Peggy was entertaining in her fluffy mind. She doused me with the pure essence of her jasmine dream. When I woke up I found myself sleeping on a water bed. A water bed is quite close to Viṣṇu's Vāsuki. This bed was in a Deer Park.

As I tried to get up from my bed, a little deer that was gently sniffing my hair got startled and it made a leap into Mona's fairy tale book. I presume the deer came out of my breath when I was dreaming. Mona is Peggy's sweet daughter, who, for the time being, is like the effect of vanishing cream. I fell in love with the deer even at the very first sight. To pursue it, I opened Mona's book. For one flickering moment I thought I saw the deer. Like the magic deer of the Rāmāyaṇa, it was also a Maricika. It changed into a lion.

The lion's face was familiar. It had graying hair and snow-white mane and whiskers. Its eyes were soft and looked like the compassionate eyes of a great lover. I took courage and held out my hand. The lion raised its paw and shook my hand. Then the lion said in a low voice, 'Good morning, Nitya, welcome to our Deer Park. I am a lion only in a certain sense. My name is Leo, of course, as every lion is called. To be more precise, I am Leo Tolstoy. Once

I was also like others, stupidly living in the three-dimensional world, eating chewable food and drinking beverages. Ultimately, I became exposed to the cruelty of changing shadows and my love was treated as a vanishing rainbow. That led me to untold pains and shameful situations. So I got rid of my animal body and took this dream image to manifest in between the sleep and wakefulness of people. The Deer Wood is also the secret home of Winnie the Pooh, who has a close resemblance to you. It is, of course, the phantom home of Peggy where she mirrors herself in so many forms. Her husband is Jeffrey, a Kinnara, a half man and half shadow. Her son, Kavi, was hatched out of a crystal egg, which Peggy found underneath a velvet pillow on which she was laying her head while sleeping in a god-forsaken jungle in California. When she met Jeff, she probably said a lot of sweet nothings, which have all gone into his listening ear, I mean his right ear. From his left ear the musical sweetness of what she said came out as a little phantom girl. As her sweetness was close to the honey of silence, she was named Mona. Seeing this wonder, Peggy spoke in the left ear of her husband some more words, I mean sweet something. That came rolling out of Jeff's right ear as Vicky.

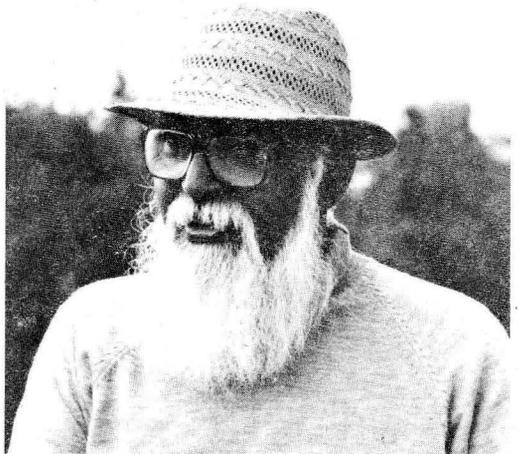
Peggy is actually not a person. She is a big eye, the eye that envi-

sions the likes and dislikes of colors. She lives in the heart of a needle. She is like God who is described in the Upanisads as no bigger than a thumb, but her creations are like the panorama of the green earth, the dreams of a poet, and the vast heavens where the shining ones dwell.

In this house you can, however, see many more real folks. They look like bunnies, monkeys, elephants, and all kinds of plastic dolls. They are also not what they seem to be. They are short stories, ballads and nursery rhymes which are dreamt by poets who also sleep in the nightly hours in the cool petals of flowers.

Finally, Tolstoy, the kindly-disposed magical lion, gave me an advice: "Nitya, escape from this place unless you want to become a novel, a play, or sonnet." Such was my odyssey into the Deer Wood dream of Peggy the Pooh-Pooh.

*Love as ever,
Guru*



Seventh Heaven

When I was seven,
after experiencing the Montreal Ballet,
I dream-danced at night
and secretly danced by day.
Since I hadn't a lock on my bedroom door,
I gathered large books in a pile.
Once the door was secure, I felt the allure,
and I danced my untrained feet awhile.

I'd watch in the mirror my every move,
each twirl, leap, and expression.
I didn't think I was very good
and wanted not to create bad impressions.

For the friends I had then could be quite a tease
and I doubted I could risk their laughter.
So tucked in my room I'd recreate The Ballet,
this day, that day, and day after.

I begged my parents to buy me the songs,
the music, the pictures, the shoes,
and soon my entire world seemed absorbed
during waking, deep sleep, or a snooze.

I knew when I twirled
I should stare at a dot.
This I did for awhile, like it or not.
But who'd want to stare
at a dot on the wall?
So instead I used a photo of the Taj Mahal!

As my skills improved I wanted to share
the joy of this new Ballet dance,
so I gathered my courage, moved the pile of books,
and emerged to take this chance.

My family sat in the living room
and I asked if they might be free
to listen to some music
about a recent discovery.

They sat with quiet curiosity
as I rearranged the room,
and then I played the music
as my cold fingers shook with doom!

But the moment that the music
caught my ear my feet took flight!
I danced the Montreal Ballet
that warm ecstatic night.

My family cheered and cried with glee,
all gathered around and hugged me.
I knew right then that this was bliss --
if only the planet could feel like this!

Well, I've guided my life with this intention
and am now a grown woman of forty.
Though I no longer dance on a stage or in theater,
I still maintain my share of sporty!

And that feeling of bliss I still feel when this
magnificent world creates magic.
The magic that shows at the core of a rose,
or in life whether soaring or tragic.

And believe it or not,
just last week this I felt
when poets and friends came to play.
I felt so much bliss that I wondered if this
would be a new Bainbridge Ballet!

Peggy Grace Luke
Bainbridge Guru Puja 1990

Electric Dreams

Scott Teitsworth

Serge Prokofiev was born in rural Russia in 1891, just in time to become a champion of the new music about to burst upon the western world. To know that he was a genius from the start, one has only to look at the photograph of him at age one that can be found in the biographies. The brilliance and intensity of expression with which he glares at the camera are unrivaled in the history of child photography, and the sight of a baby's body appended to such a penetrating expression is well worth a trip to the local library, believe me. One can clearly perceive that no amount of obstacles were going to slow this kid down!

As soon as he could reach the keyboard of his piano, around age five, Serge was composing music. Of course, since he was too young to know how to write, his mother wrote the pieces down for him. By the time he was nine, he had composed a pile of piano music and a full-fledged opera. For many years he conscripted all the neighboring children to perform original plays and operas for a weekly presentation to the local citizenry, which were held on a makeshift stage in his home. During the lulls in this burgeoning career, he loved nothing better than to trounce his adult opponents in a quiet game of chess.

Fortunately, his mother suspected that this was not totally typical behavior for a young child. She did an exemplary job of tutoring Serge herself, and when her resources began to fall behind, of bringing teachers to their country home. As a parent she encouraged and cultivated her son's originality, rather than attempting to stifle it, as is so often the case.

And Serge was nothing if not original.

Perhaps living far from the centers of civilization was a blessing, for throughout his life he bravely took his own course and faithfully followed his own inclinations. Later, his years at the musical conservatories are a classic study of the wild, untamed ideologue pitted against dogmatic formalism and timid conservatism. The musical establishment was unable to redirect his outpouring of thoroughly original creative energy, although it did provide a useful amount of refining and polishing.

The early Twentieth Century was, however, a time of unprecedented musical excitement and upheaval. Everywhere in Europe, young musicians were searching for new styles and sounds. And there was considerable support for those who were able to bring coherence to this welter of novel ideas. Prokofiev found enough encouragement to compensate him for the inevitable setbacks at the hands of critics who, as always, favored the tried and true musical formulas to daring innovations.

Being blasted by critics and many audiences, while retaining a certainty of the validity of his musical expression, proved to be important training for that most difficult period of his life, under Stalin. Stalin, in addition to believing that music was just another industry to further the designs of the state, considered himself privy to the highest artistic sensibility. Privy is right. He was one of the most unlikely people to have a grasp of modern music on the entire planet, along with Henry Ford, who was fond of playing *Turkey in the Straw* on his Stradivarius. But to offend Stalin's taste was very often a literal death sentence, and dozens of Prokofiev's associates--

thousands throughout the musical "industry"-- were indeed done away with during the late Thirties. He himself came within a hair's breadth of annihilation. Despite the unimaginable pressures of such a situation, a number of Prokofiev's greatest pieces were composed at this time.

Prokofiev lived until 1953, but the pressures of the political world in the Thirties and Forties, as well as a blow to the head from falling down a flight of stairs, made his post-World War II compositions an anticlimax to an exciting and productive career.

Prokofiev produced the largest portfolio of top quality piano music in the Twentieth Century. Among his equally impressive lists of works for various instruments, symphonies, and ballets, are a number of truly great works, as well as quite a few which are either difficult to listen to or just plain poor. He is not among the tiny handful of composers who wrote nothing but the best. My guess is that his extreme intelligence dominated even his considerable musical sense, sometimes overpowering it and leaving the work dry and uninteresting to most of us.

When the musicality and the intellect were properly integrated, however, the result was often spectacular. Prokofiev delighted in powerful and exciting effects. His music contains some of the most electric episodes that acoustic instruments have ever produced. An exuberant forward rush is impelled by percussive dynamism into raw explosions of dervish-spinning energy. The music grips you by the collar, daring you to take a breath. Just when you must go mad with the intensity of it, there comes an interlude of enlightened tranquility that can move you to tears with its beauty. And then back into the swirling headlong dash to the climax. At other times the mystical and somewhat barbaric Russian spirit is presented in its finest guises: one can occasionally visualize the house on chicken legs dancing grotesquely, or gnomes, ryls and fairies peering from behind the gnarled roots of great trees. The success of the ballets *Cinderella* and *Romeo and Juliet* attests to the fact that Prokofiev's fairy tale music is perfect to dance to. All his music moves and flows, and makes you want to move with it.

The music is, in truth, highly dissonant. But no other composer uses dissonance with such expertise. It is always fully in character, and furthers the intent of the motive perfectly. And with the evolution of our musical ears in the last century, all those allegedly "harsh" dissonances sound quite harmonious nowadays. We should remember that Beethoven was also accused of using radical dissonance. But consonance, while beautiful, is actually a powerfully limiting factor. Prokofiev shows us as no one else how many worlds are waiting to be explored in the much wider arena of dissonance.

So how does someone interested in hearing this music



know which pieces are most worth the effort? I'm glad you asked that question, because the purpose of this article is to provide my highly opinionated opinion on that very subject.

Being fond of piano music, I have always loved Prokofiev's sonatas. Prokofiev was a virtuoso pianist who often composed for his own performances. Unfortunately for us amateur pianists, much of the literature is therefore far too difficult for us to play, though we keep trying.

It is not heard as much as it should be, partly for this reason. The first eight of the nine sonatas are truly great works, covering virtually the whole range of his ideas. The sixth is probably considered the greatest of them all, with numbers two, seven and eight close behind. The second, written at the age of 21, is quite probably the greatest composition by anyone so early in life. The lot of them would form a cornerstone in any serious classical record library.

Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto is a tremendous work that is easily accessible to the listener. It just might be the one to check out if you're trying only one piece. Its got all the Prokofievian elements: electricity, percussive rhythms, grotesquery, bittersweet meditations, and some catchy tunes that you would really hurt yourself trying to whistle, but you might be tempted to try.

Of the symphonies, the Fifth is the most outstanding, a kind of combination of Paris in the Twenties, *Peter and the Wolf*, and the Russian steppes. I am also partial to the second Violin Sonata, Op. 94a, which is full of lyricism and good humor.

If you get the chance, *never* pass up an opportunity to hear Prokofiev's music live. This is particularly so for the wonderful ballets, where the visual element and just plain danceability of the music are perfectly brought out. (Others have composed music for *Cinderella* and *Romeo and Juliet*, so double-check before you invest in a ticket). Prokofiev also composed much of the music for master filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's incredible

movies. Again, there is an archetypal wedding of visual element and music that should not be missed. Eisenstein considered Prokofiev's music to be perfectly expressive of the essence of film action, and could never praise him highly enough for his contributions to his films.

I must confess that Serge Prokofiev has a special place in my life. In 1960, when I was nine years old and living in suburban New York, the great Soviet pianist Sviatoslav Richter gave a series of historic concerts at Carnegie Hall. Being an intimate of Prokofiev's, Richter's second performance was an all-Prokofiev concert. The effect it had was stupendous: America's most cosmopolitan audience was driven to an ecstatic frenzy that made a Beatles concert sound quiet and restrained. Those who were there, even those who only heard the subsequent recordings and reviews, were instantly hip to Prokofiev. (My record has deep, deep grooves from playing it so much.) I can still recall the bemused and resigned expression of the piano teacher of my youth when I enthusiastically brought in the Sixth Piano Sonata for study: it was logarithmically more difficult than anything I had yet attempted. Her doubt was well-founded; but I was swept away in the excitement many of us felt in those days, when America finally "discovered" Serge Prokofiev. Yet even thirty years later, he could by no means be considered a well-known composer. Possibly it was the explosion of pop music that immediately followed Prokofiev's momentous re-introduction that distracted the collective attention from his glorious music. At least in this 100th anniversary of his birth year there are more performances than average, though they are still uncommon. So I thought I would close with a few of the rave reviews from that watershed event, when for a short time at least New York was ecstatic over Prokofiev and his brilliant interpreter, Sviatoslav Richter:

...New Yorkers snapped up tickets for his five Carnegie Hall recitals even before Richter had landed here.

Swarms of VIPs in the music world--pianists and other instrumentalists, conductors, teachers, critics, impresarios, record-company officials--were on hand for his debut. No one was at all disappointed. (The Reporter)

So let it be said at once that Richter's recital of last evening was the most uncanny display of piano playing it has ever been my pleasure to hear, and I am quite satisfied that if I never encounter its likes again I shall have in my memory an interpretation of Prokofiev as must have been in the composer's mind as he wrote the works. First off, despite the percussiveness of Prokofiev's music, Richter produced not one ugly, brutal or glassy sound, even though, in the Sixth Sonata, a closed fist is called upon to strike the keys....Not that he turned Prokofiev into a maker of mild perfumes. All of the stinging savor and bite and acidity that is tooled into the notes Richter released on his audience. It is strong stuff and it smarts. But the unmusical assaults that some take to be Prokofiev's vision of music were absent in their entirety. Instead, Richter, with Prokofiev as his lever, propelled renditions that were bold, vital, and of a flame-like intensity that all but consumed the piano even while the sound was coming from it.... I suggest--no, I insist--it has to be heard to be believed. And when you have heard it you will come to grips with a piano force whose power has the capacity to stun, dazzle, astound. Myself, I am blinded by its brilliance. (Herald Tribune)

In the Sixth and Eighth sonatas (Richter) unleashed forces that were seemingly powered by atomic energy, yet never did he pound or otherwise antagonize his instrument. In the *Vivace* of the Eighth Sonata, for example, there was a tumultuous cascading vibrancy but the sound was always sweet thunder.

Celebrated as being especially close to the music of Prokofiev and Schubert, his playing of the more intimate pieces, like the *Sonatine Pastorale*, evoked wonder as well as tenderness. His combination of heart, mind and touch brought radiance to the music. The contours of Prokofiev melody were magically mesmerized into a Schubertian sweetness.

The *Allegretto* of the Sixth Sonata, on the other hand, was jaunty enough to have been whistled by a carefree Paris *garçon* walking along the quay of the Seine. (Post)

The latest Soviet bombshell--Sviatoslav Richter-- brought another Carnegie Hall audience to a state of shouting, whistling frenzy last night.

Everything was pretty much the way it was last Wednesday when the legendary pianist made his spectacular Carnegie debut--everything but the composer. Then it was Beethoven; last night it was Prokofiev.

And what a Prokofiev! It made almost all other piano music of our time sound tame and trivial by comparison. Mr. Richter seemed possessed by the very spirit of the late Russian composer. The effect was electrifying.

Step by step, the creative power of Prokofiev materialized in the playing of his countryman. When it was over, nobody could doubt the genius of the creator--or of the re-creator.

As if what had gone before hadn't proved this conclusively, Mr. Richter crowned the evening with a hair-raising performance of Prokofiev's Eighth Sonata. Ten fingers seemed to do the work of a hundred.

Even that was topped by what followed. Having left everybody and everything limp by the Sonata--including, one feared, the piano and himself--Mr. Richter took a few bows and repeated the entire finale! (World Telegram and Sun) ❖



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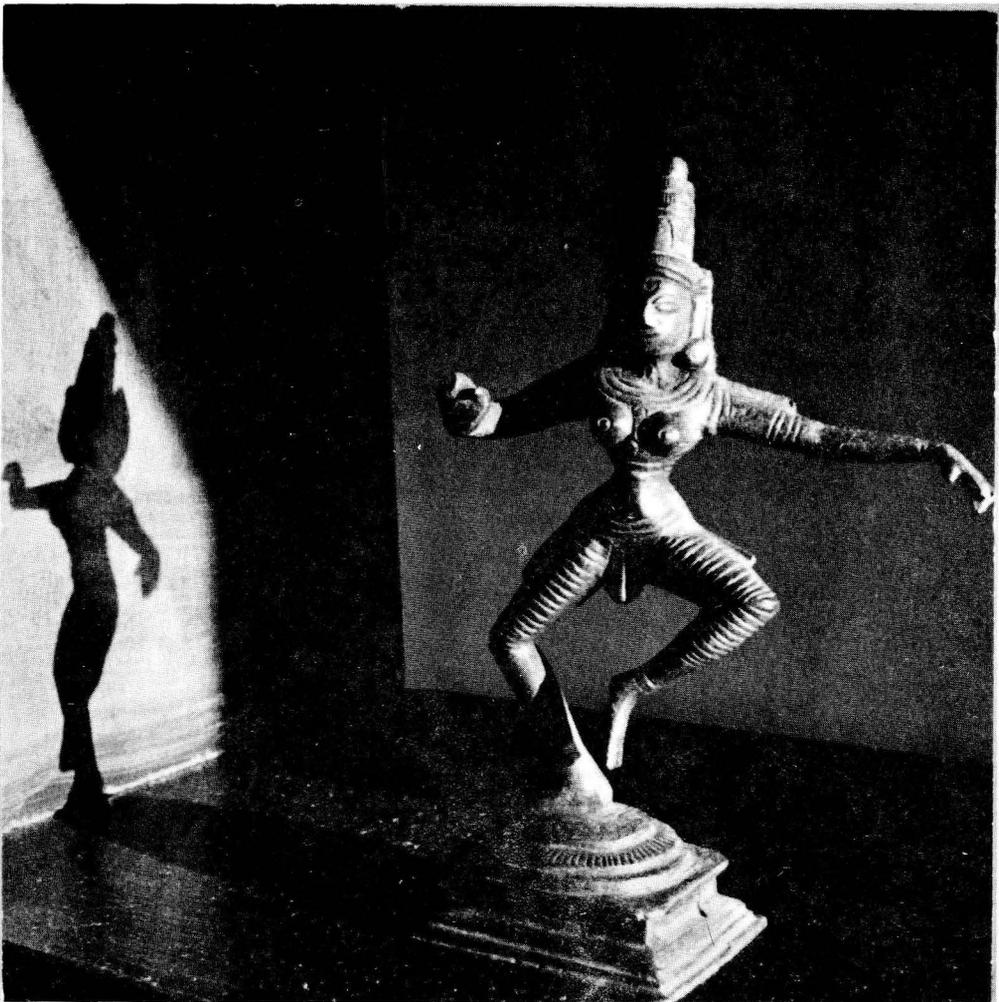
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