

Nataraja Guru and the Meaning of Samadhi by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

This day, March 19th, is marked on the calendar of the Narayana Gurukula as the Samadhi day of Nataraja Guru. Samadhi refers to *samadhana*, which means coming to peace, or making peace with life. We can say that when a person comes to the close of his life and there is nothing more to worry about, he is entering samadhi. It is like a drop of water merging with the vast waters of a large lake or ocean—a specific functional aspect of life merges with the totality of being.

Nataraja Guru was my Guru, and he was a disciple of Narayana Guru. By a certain conspiracy of the heavens, Narayana Guru's birth day happened on a day sacred to the people of Kerala. They have been observing the sacredness of a certain four days as Onam from time immemorial. The Guru's birthday is the third day of Onam, under the star Chatayam. As this is according to the lunar calendar, the date of Narayana Guru's birth is observed sometimes in August and sometimes in September. His Samadhi date is fixed as the fifth of Kanni, in Virgo. It is significant that Narayana Guru was born under the sign of Leo and passed away under the sign of Virgo.

Historically, Narayana Guru had a mission in life. He was born in a country where there was marked social stratification. Some people were considered sacred, some had more prerogatives than others, there were yet others who sustained the main flow of life, and there were some who were treated like domestic animals to serve the purposes of the rest. From early in life Narayana Guru wanted to restructure society. He found that the roots of these problems weren't just in the social conventions, they were hidden in the psyches of everyone. A person's psyche is like an iceberg, most of which is hidden under water. Only depth psychology can unravel the mystery of its unconscious motivations.

Guided by circumstances, Narayana Guru made a very intense probe. He was not primarily a student of sociology or the

social sciences, he was a student of himself. When asked who his guru was, he answered “Our guru is God,” and then he added “...and also man.” What did he mean by that? The teaching came from the depth of his own unconscious along with what he learned from his interpersonal relationships.

His study of interpersonal value formation helped him to change his relationships with people. His explorations showed that changing oneself and changing the fate of others go hand in hand. He found that the most crystallized aspect of the social psyche was based on how a person rated himself in relation to others and how others rated him. In each encounter he had with another person, he asked himself these questions: Does he know who he is? What does he think of himself? Does it have parity with what he truly is? and Do I know him as he truly is?

Most people in his own group were shouted at, used by others, taken for granted. In the Bible, Jesus said that if someone asks you to go a mile, you should go two miles. In those days the Romans were treating the Jews almost like slaves. Jesus was telling the people around him that they should be kind even in the face of injustice. This is also how Narayana Guru sought to remove the great burden of bondage from the shoulders of his fellow humans. He wanted to make them free. Human freedom was Narayana Guru’s main mission.

All values may be centripetally reduced to one prime value, the value of values so to speak, which for Narayana Guru was freedom. Any person can be deprived of freedom in relation to their bodily senses, mind, intellect or emotions. A proper perspective is needed to diagnose what causes permanent distortion in one’s personality and what can give sustaining stamina all through life.

One should know what causes defects in the personality, defects in seeing truth, defects in conforming to moral norms. According to Narayana Guru, seeing truth requires a lot of vigilance. Being awake and attentive is a sign of energetic

existence in which a value is nurtured as the quality of life, the excellence of life. The other possibility is to become more and more sloppy, lazy and wayward. Such a person will cling onto the wrong supports. We can lean on God, truth, duty or integrity for instance, or we can lean on Fate, inactivity, lack of discrimination, or even succumb to fear. A person can tend to be irresponsible on the plea that he has no integrity.

Narayana Guru knew that if you wanted peoples' sloppiness to be corrected you should first make them active in their assigned works. He showed by his own example how work can be done perfectly. More recently, in the field of education John Dewey has suggested that a child should not be allowed to do anything halfway and give up. The child should be made to go to the logical end and put perfection into finishing what it has begun. This was the modus operandi in Narayana Guru's life and teachings also.

In the core of human consciousness the Guru observed an oscillation of awareness between the periphery and the center, and between the center and an unknown depth. He was well aware that most people would find this difficult to grasp. He first visualized a vertical parameter going from the birth of a person to their death. He saw how a newborn child gets into encounters with all the incidents of life from the moment it wakes up until it goes to sleep. It's like a lump of clay sitting on the wheel of life on which social consciousness is acting like a potter. The horizontal occurrences of each day make impressions on the child which ultimately fashion it into a finished product. Each touch of contact registered in the five senses leaves an ineradicable impact on the growing psyche. Some touches are painful, some are pleasurable, and some are even boring. But through it all the person is vertically changing, not only growing physically but also in consciousness.

The person begins to see some things as favorable to him and some as against him. Over time he may learn to associate the favorable with a benevolent God and the painful with Fate or even the Devil. It is as if there are now two potters, one harsh, one benevolent, and between them the person is formed. One is lucky

if the harassment of one is canceled out by the kindness of the other. But the usual situation is that many distortions enter into one's personality. Narayana Guru was profoundly moved by the distortions that are impressed on the mind of a child. He took note of the variations in those distortions between people brought up in different circumstances, from very wealthy to very poor. He came to realize that a person is mostly shaped by the education he gets. So he knew that to change society you needed to reeducate the public, and for that you needed a value science.

In his search for people who could undertake the very difficult job of reeducating people, Narayana Guru came across Dr. Palpu's son, Natarajan. When Natarajan was about four years old, Dr. Palpu brought all his children to the Guru and asked them to touch his feet. Only Natarajan refused. Immediately Narayana Guru recognized that there was something different in him. He said, "He knows he is a doctor's son and he doesn't want to kowtow before anyone. Good. That means he won't bend before others and he'll have his own way of life." That was the first recognition. The next time Natarajan met Narayana Guru was when he was in junior school. Narayana Guru came to his home and asked him about the kind of science he was studying in school. Natarajan talked about how, when a candle is lit, it transforms into flame and gas until the wick and fat are all burned out. To Narayana Guru this was only a matter of observation and not a great study. He asked Natarajan a question with a mystical ambiguity. That gave the boy the idea that Narayana Guru had a depth which he had not seen in his own father or anybody else. He saw that the Guru was visualizing truths which cannot easily be put into words. The enigmatic puzzlement he experienced remained with him for many years.

Natarajan's education was providentially so arranged that his first serious studies were in geology—this earth, the soil under our feet. His second field of study was zoology and biology. Then his attention was drawn to many subjects of psychological and

epistemological purport by Narayana Guru. His interest in the psyche led him to educational psychology. Thus, from the physical earth he went on to life on earth, then to the mind or origin of consciousness in living forms and its evolution into social patterns of behavior.

Natarajan, who became Nataraja Guru, wanted to further Narayana Guru's quest and to help in his mission. He perceived that Narayana Guru had a scheme in mind. It had a vertical parameter that starts from the alpha point of a germinating seed and goes to the flowering tree which produces a fruit that contains a seed from which the same kind of tree can come. In that vision the verticality links the first seed with the final seed. In between are the occurrences of horizontal impact from the environment that take place in space and time. He considered these horizontal encounters as affecting the growth in vertical movement. The horizontal encounters are more or less like the rings of waves that arise in a pond when a pebble is thrown into it. Each day is like pebbles being thrown or showered into the psyche of a developing person.

In his *Atmopadesa Satakam*, Narayana Guru gives the example of a pond in the middle of a desert. When the wind blows, grains of sand are strewn onto the surface of the water. As they settle to the bottom they affect the whole pond. First its surface is disturbed, then the transparency of the water becomes clouded, and finally the contour of the bottom is changed. The lake is like a child, the sand represents social events, and the wind stands for the dynamics of life. The nucleus of a child's mind changes and grows somewhat like a snowball. Each child's mind is fashioned by events and assumes a dimension that is unique to them. Because of this, education needs a unique vision coupled with a universal vision—universality that is administered uniquely.

Nataraja Guru understood this lesson, but he didn't have much luck to compare notes with Narayana Guru, because when he went to Europe to study and teach the Guru passed away. Still, Narayana Guru's impact on him was never-ending. He found that

in spite of all the unification you want to bring, all the unity you strive for, the consciousness of a child is at a certain level and the consciousness of a dying person is at a different level. There is a certain lack of clarity in the child's mind, but the child will have profuse eidetic projections which come to it like lyrics, while the elderly are often afflicted by senility. The peculiarity of the child's mind is that it's full of idempotency, for example thinking a doll is a real child and taking care of it. The old man is sitting with a vacant mind, thoroughly disillusioned, with no hope that his children or the world can save him. Somewhere in the middle age group, people are very clear-headed. That's when we can change our consciousness. At that stage we are energetic, active, having adventures. But mostly from seventeen to fifty-five people are busily fidgeting in the thick of their social obligations.

The study of human nature by Narayana Guru was elaborated as a detailed examination of the mind in his *Darsana Mala*. There is no mind as such, yet everything is attributed to the mind. He found that there is an alternation of consciousness with triple modalities. Wakefulness is different from dream; dream is different from deep sleep. This vision needs a common epistemology and a methodology by which alone one can come to a purposeful conclusion.

Realizing this, Nataraja Guru gave primacy to epistemology, axiology and methodology to relate the episteme to the final conclusion of the search. This took him many years of study and research to accomplish. He was well versed in physics and the psychology of his day, but he favored Indian sources of psychology, especially the Upanishads and Narayana Guru's works. Each word of Narayana Guru was very suggestive for him. They were like aphorisms to be expanded.

In *Darsana Mala* Narayana Guru had developed a scheme of ten philosophical visions to go from untruth to ultimate truth. The first phase is that of superimposition (*adhyaropa*). The child is taken care of by its mother. It imitates her and gathers from its

childhood experiences the material from which to form its imaginations. When it cares for its doll its imagery is mostly unreal, yet some basis of homogeneity allows the elders to be sympathetic with the child. Still, the child's inferences are bound to be prejudicial, not judicial. As it grows into adulthood, it has to give up several already formed concepts and gain new concepts to match with percepts as well as memories. Growth means substituting false concepts with more approximately true concepts.

Narayana Guru showed Nataraja Guru that one should reject untruth, but in one's zest for change, one should not tamper with the fundamental basis of truth. First of all, a norm of truth is necessary to scrutinize a given situation. Only on the basis of it can one arrive at a conclusion to reject what is found untrue (*apavada*). When a criterion to distinguish truth is applied to a false projection, it will show the untruth (*asatya*) to be given up.

Our equipment in the search for truth and untruth is our senses, mind, practical experiences and hearsay, along with books. In all our experiences, something is going on outside that generates the data to be examined. It can be called *maya*. The conveyor of external data is operating as an oscillating principle of cognition (*bhana*), which is bound to come to a homeostasis if the organs are healthy. *Bhana* is the psychic power that transforms into various ontological projections of knowledge.

For twenty-four years I was Nataraja Guru's disciple, and each day with him was of a special significance. When I remember what life was like with him during those years, I think more of the transcendent quality of each day than of any particular day.

Only a small bit of Nataraja Guru was ever relating with the world, and a great amount of him was always relating with the Unknown, with the mystery of the uncertain, the chance factor, the Tao, or the never-exhausting wonder of life. He found mystery in every field—music, theater, and even in cooking. To him, mythology was as valid as science. Thus he had a continuous search that arrived at conclusions in the great uncharted waters of

consciousness, the oceans of the numinous. From this I conclude that he was always in a state of samadhi as far as this outer world is concerned. It was as if samadhi was the backdrop of his whole life.

In my earliest days at Fernhill I used to stay in the present meditation hut and Nataraja Guru slept in the room where I now retire. Every day at three a.m. I would come and stand by his door. Guru would sense me and say, "Open." He would be lying on his bed in the *matsyasana* (legs crossed, arms overhead, shaped something like a fish). Before I could even get seated, he would start telling me the theory he had been ruminating on in the night. I always brought pen and paper to take notes. Guru never relied on my notes, but would start typing up his version in the three hours between my leaving his room and class. At class time I would read his notes and correct mine. Nataraja Guru encouraged me to be critical. He was not annoyed by me being critical, but tried to open my mind to see things as he did. He would lead me slowly and calmly, using examples. He did not want me to admit anything outright when he presented a theory to me. He had the patience to leave it for me to ponder over. Usually by the next day we were in agreement.

As I said, Nataraja Guru was not in the world in which most people live, he lived at a central core where he was vertically oscillating between height and depth. It is this depth I call his samadhi, not the particular day he died. In those days I was usually oscillating between inside and outside, encountering my emotions. Nataraja Guru said to me, "The world is not that true that you should cry for it. You are like a lamp with a mixture of kerosene and water that burns with a lot of smoke. But one day, when the fuel is purified, the smoke will go and you will burn with a clear light." With these words he gave me great hope.

Being with him was not like meeting just another person but like getting a window opened onto the mysterious psyches of many people, like Rousseau, Hugo, Darwin, Schrodinger, Heisenberg,

Ramakrishna and the rishis of the Upanishads. He led me into a vast arena of wisdom.

It was my great fortune that Nataraja Guru used me as a touchstone to test his theories on. He worked for several years on *Darsana Mala* to formulate his thoughts systematically for *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*. Even the best of his friends at that time couldn't sink their teeth into it. Perhaps they didn't take it seriously enough. He did, however, share its secrets with me, exhibiting supreme patience, and I was very much benefited by it. I was quite gratified that he even wrote in the preface that the three volumes had in a sense been written to benefit his disciple.

While he was staying with me in Madras one time, someone questioned him about the Bhagavad Gita. In formulating his answers he wanted to show that the Gita is not a religious book but a science of consciousness. The writing of his commentary was another great experience in which I was a participant with him. Later he wrote the wonderful Scheme for Unified Language. He thought there should be a single language for science, poetry, fiction and essays. He went into all aspects of human thought—logic, grammar, language. He made a great study of semantics, probing deep into the writings of Wittgenstein, Carnap, A.J. Ayer and Bertrand Russell. He thought about literature and science and how to blend their different outlooks without mystification.

Whenever Nataraja Guru was going deep into his philosophical writings it was a difficult time for me, but he wouldn't leave me in the lurch. He would repeatedly ask me searching questions, and he would go over an idea with me threadbare until we both came to the same conclusion. I couldn't get away from him. Sometimes I would seek refuge in the toilet, but even that wouldn't deter him. He would follow me and stand outside the restroom door and continue his explanations. He could flout normal social behavior and etiquette for the sake of truth. He was not a Guru only in name to me, he was truly my Guru in every sense. He didn't teach me just academically, he was always holding a mirror before me to show me what I lacked.

Since he was always in a state of samadhi he was never indulgent of any of my difficulties, whether I was hungry or ill. He would tend me very benevolently if I had a fever, cover me with blankets, give me hot coffee or tea to drink. But even when I was in a semiconscious state he would sit by me and go on talking about philosophy.

Even rapt in philosophical samadhi he was always sensitive to the beauty of a dewdrop or even a humble blade of grass. In my life I don't think of a date when Nataraja Guru finished with this world. He is still here with us, always around. I don't know about Narayana Guru's samadhi, as I only know of him from Nataraja Guru. But I can't extricate the one from the other, they are two faces of the same truth.

In closing, all I can say about samadhi is AUM TAT SAT.